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I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is
Queer Paths through Museums and Libraries

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay

PhD Design
Edinburgh College of Art
The University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis; that the following thesis is entirely my own work; and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for another degree or qualification.

Signed
Abstract

This dissertation charts the research and creation of a body of artistic work that dialogues with the domestic spaces, private libraries, and kinship bonds of a group of loosely-connected gay cultural and intellectual figures based in Amsterdam, London, Montreal and Paris. The artistic output, which takes form chiefly through the scripting and production of audio guides, is accompanied by floral, epistolary, and participatory works that aim to accentuate the epistemological potential of affect. The creative process is followed and accompanied by an examination of the museum audio guide as a media form, turning to queer theory as well as contemporary museum mediation practice to expand and critically reimagine its potential. Both the artistic research and dissertation are driven by two separate yet intertwined questions: How might queer social and cultural practices influence a repurposing of the museum audio guide? How can museum mediation practice be used in the service of encountering, animating and recirculating queer historical material? These questions are traversed through an exploration of phenomenological and musicological concerns, as well as artistic research concerned with queering, participation, and cruising.
If there is a paradise on earth,
It is this, it is this, it is this!

— Ab'ul Hasan Yāmīn ud-Dīn Khusrwā (1253-1325)
inscribed in Urdu on the chhatris at Diwan-i-Khas, Delhi

paraphrased or misremembered by Thomas Waugh
and recited on the roof terrace of Bain Coloniale, Montreal
surrounded by fellow bathers, myself among them, as

I don’t know where paradise is,
It is here, it is here, it is here!
Prelude

Crying in the Library
I am sitting on a pale blue stepladder in a quiet corner of the library, the threshold between Gert and Mattias’s book collection and their balcony garden, and I am crying. I had been flipping through a copy of *The Young and the Evil*, a story from 1933 written by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, which Gert had pulled out for me from a bookshelf in the bedroom. I hadn’t found it myself because the Ds, Es and Fs on the gay fiction shelves are arranged in a second row hidden behind the As, Bs and Cs. I had never heard of Ford, but was enchanted by an interview with him in *Gay Sunshine Interviews Vol. 1*, which I found in a cabinet devoted to anthologies above Gert and Mattias’s toilet. Ford chats casually about his enviable Paris set: about meeting surrealist René Crevel at one of Gertude Stein’s salons; about Edith Sitwell introducing him to the great love of his life, the painter Pavel Tchelitchew. He conjures an image of Djuna Barnes in a Tangier of yesteryear:

She had finished *Nightwood* and I was typing it for her. I found a home in the Casbah, and Djuna came down from Paris and lived with me there and our daily routine was that I would go to the beach in the morning, come back and have lunch, type in the afternoon. I don’t know if I finished the book before she went back to Paris or not.1

The anthology was published by the author and pioneering gay publisher Winston Leyland, whose name has surfaced repeatedly in my peregrinations through the library. His influence seems extensive and diverse: he appears as the publisher of a book about consent in sadomasochism called *The Kiss of the Whip*; he is credited as the editor of a book of gay Latin American fiction entitled *My Deep Dark Pain Is Love*; he is thanked in the translator’s notes of a collection of homoerotic poetry by the 8th-century Persian poet Abu Nuwas. Opening another book, a typed letter addressed to Gert falls out, written by Leyland himself in 1994: he is searching for an apartment in Amsterdam; he is working on a Dutch translation of Paul Verlaine; he signs off “yours in affectionate comradeship in gay liberation, Winston”.

My hand drifts from the anthology to a book of photographs by Rotimi Fani-Kayode that opens to an image of a young Black man against a saffron-coloured background. His face and torso are enveloped and partly concealed by delicate branches dense with gypsophila flowers, which veil the expression in his eyes, making his gaze inscrutable and opaque. The image is printed as a small square on the bottom corner of an otherwise large

1 Ford, 40.
blank page, like photographic marginalia, as though marginalised by design. The title of the artwork takes up more page space than the image itself: *Nothing to Lose X (Bodies of Experience)*. The photograph is from 1989, the year of Fani-Kayode’s death from AIDS.

I open a book entitled *Oceanic Homosexualities* to a chapter about a shaman from an indigenous Siberian community — a “woman transformed into a man” — who fastens the gastrocnemius from the leg of a deer to himself with a leather belt, using it as a strap-on dildo with which to penetrate his wife. He represents but one of a number of indigenous, pre-colonial sexual and gender identities the book documents: identities and practices that did not conform to a binary, heteronormative organisation of relations without necessarily being understood as non-normative by the societies in which they appeared. I do not remember why I have selected this particular book, or what has led me here. I was simply browsing the library, cruising around and getting close to whatever sparked my curiosity. I was likely attracted to the title, believing the word “oceanic” to be meant poetically to signify “expansive” or “capacious,” rather than to indicate the geographic region of Oceania. Flipping backwards through the pages of this book, my eyes settle on a passage about the Hawaiian concept of *aikāne*, which the ethnologist Robert J. Morris describes as denoting same-sex identities, relationships, and cultural presences in pre-colonial Hawai’i. Morris explains that there is no English equivalent for the concept of *aikāne*, and that,

> [a]rriving at an understanding is all the more difficult because the word is part of a past that no longer exists. There is no one to interview, no pristine chief or his aikāne to render a definition; no context; no Hiʻiaka and company to describe lesbian life; there is only the text — a text, incidentally, originally meant only to be listened to. So one understands the prayer: “O ko mākou mau kūpuna keia lā, pehea iho la ia lā.” O Ancestors, what was that time like?

It is the words of this prayer that trigger my tears. For despite having no direct connection to the worlds and experiences of the Siberian shaman or the other figures documented in this book, I feel an ancestral link to them, a stream of longing that connects my twenty-first century gay body to theirs, to Winston’s, Rotimi’s, Charles’s, Djuna’s. My tears are for the extinction and erasure of these and so many other identities and practices that might be classified as *queer* in contemporary parlance; for all the beautiful expressions of sexuality that have been suppressed over time by religious, patriarchal, and colonial forces; for the impossibility of retrieving the affects of these other queer moments in time and space.

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2 Murray, 306.
3 Morris, 75.
A book of photographs by Rotimi Fani-Kayode found in Gert and Mattias’s library.
As is often the nature of crying, one grief grabs hold of another, and I am soon crying for many other things, for everything that is worthy of tears. I cry for the magnificent labyrinth that is Gert and Mattias’s library, for the sensation of being lost in its infinite dimensions, experiencing Jorge Luís Borges’s “ancient problem: The Library is unlimited and cyclical”. I cry for my wish for histories and identities of the queer kin who dwell within the library to circulate, for modern-day queer identity to be firmly grounded in a long lineage of dissonant practices, subverted norms and an inexhaustible array of expressions of sexuality. I cry tears of exasperation at the impossible scale of the task I have set out for myself: an audio guide mediation of Gert and Mattias’s library, a tour that somehow documents and shares the treasures of queerness their collection houses; an artwork that acts as an agent of the kind of queer consciousness I wish to foster. It is my seventh research visit to the library in two years, yet I have never felt further from my goal. I expected myself capable of creating a tour that told some kind of documentary truth, that spoke from a position of knowing, assuming the “expert position” audio guides traditionally take, transmitting knowledge as a didactic gesture. But the fact is that I do not know, and the more time I spend in the library, the less I seem to know, or the less stable my knowledge becomes. For every time I take a turn in the library, each time I open a book, someone is waiting for me. The library is full of ancestors too vast to compile, too oceanic to grasp. I feel like an imposter: a searcher posing as a guide.

**SOURCES**

Even though my research into the library had begun two years earlier, my tears in the library represent a starting point for my project, although not the only one. My research does not have a clear, decisive starting point, rather it seems to be an amalgam of parallel streams of artistic and scholarly activity, each starting at different times over the course of a three-year period.

Another starting point was my first encounter with the library in 2014, when Gert Hekma and Mattias Duyves invited me to their home for tea. They had encountered my video *I am a Boyband* (2002) while doing research for a course they were co-teaching at the University of Amsterdam on the history of masculinity. Through a network of shared friends and contacts, they learned I was visiting Amsterdam, and asked our mutual friend Koenraad Vermey to bring me to their home for a meeting. As chance would have it, on the day of our scheduled visit, Gert received by post *Rosa Radikale: Die Schwulenbewegung der* 4

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But the defining moment of the visit was when my eyes drifted from our tea and conversation to the walls of books that dominated their living room. From where I was sitting, I could make out rows of hundreds of biographies of gay literary, political, and cultural figures. I said something that prompted the couple to take me on a tour of their home, revealing a vast library of over seven thousand books that reflected decades of passionate scholarship and collecting of publications on queer history, sexology, art and activism. I was amazed and intrigued, and felt a strong desire to spend extended time in their library, to respond to it in some artistic way. My chiefly sound- and video-centric art practice had recently evolved to include interventions in the audio guides of a handful of European museums. I proposed an audio guide of their library, a concept to which they agreed, and soon after I began making regular research visits to Amsterdam.

The project also starts in the autumn of 2016, when I began a practice-led PhD at the Edinburgh College of Art as a member of the Cruising the Seventies: Unearthing Pre-HIV/AIDS Queer Sexual Cultures (CRUSEV) research project. I applied for the studentship with an expanded vision of my audio guide project, acknowledging the fact that it needed more time than originally anticipated. My doctoral reformulation of the project proposed a link between Gert and Mattias’s library and other significant private libraries of elder queer scholars, notably the library of Montreal film scholar Thomas Waugh. Being selected for the studentship imposed a new, three-year time frame on my research, and offered me a different set of stimuli and resources with which to nourish and imagine the project’s scale and potential. The emphasis that CRUSEV’s activities placed on gay cruising and the queer 1970s refocused the lens through which I understood my research, and its relevance to contemporary discussions of queer historiography, artistic methods, and gay social practice. Furthermore, three projects that contribute to my doctoral research — You, Dear Doctor, Are My Only Rescue!; À Propos Unmarked, Brown Paper Packaging; and Cruising Adrian’s Library — were produced as part of CRUSEV’s cultural programme, and responded to the subjects and methodological concerns of the research project.

One year into my doctoral studies, I staged a test audio guide of the library as part of a conference celebrating Gert Hekma at the time of his retirement from the University of Amsterdam. Entitled The World Will Always Welcome Lovers, the thirty-minute audio guide toured the rooms, garden, and book collection of Gert and Mattias’ home, recounting
details from the couple’s activist history, reading passages of selected texts, and encouraging the visitor to have a sexual encounter with a book in the toilet. Approximately sixty-five people — many of them Gert’s friends, colleagues and former students — experienced the tour one at a time over three days in the summer of 2017. While most audience members expressed enthusiasm after experiencing The World Will Always Welcome Lovers, and Gert and Mattias were so enchanted by it that they now force everyone who visits their home to take the tour, I felt my approach to the audio guide had failed to do justice to the histories and affective dimensions of their home that I wished to animate. The style of narration I had used, transposed from my prior work with museum audio guides, did not serve the library. The voice was too directive, the pace too quick, the thoughts and feelings of the listener too marginalised. I left the experience feeling that all aspects of my aesthetics and methods needed serious review, an attitude that catalysed the scholarly research and artistic experimentation that became the focus of my doctoral research. So this moment serves as yet another starting point.

And while this dissertation is the culmination of over two years of artistic and academic research, I feel quite certain that for the foreseeable future, my project is far from coming to a definitive end. Indeed, at the very moment I am writing this introduction, I receive an e-mail from Mattias sent to me, the English filmmaker Sam Ashby, and the American social scientist Robby Davidson, alerting us to a conference in Brighton entitled Gayness in Queer Times. In addition to the conference announcement, Mattias includes a JPEG of a painting, with the following note: “Here is a painting I saw yesterday, Die Quelle/The Source, Ludwig Hoffmann 1861-1945. It comes from the study room of Thomas Mann, the discreet, private, inhibited gay author who envied his son Klaus and his queer friends for their explicit sex lives.” Like Gert, Mattias has a seemingly infinite amount of knowledge and information about queer lives and practices that he wishes to impart, and he does so using the same oblique lines of logic as the library: addressing and thus linking three disparate scholars; circulating news of a gathering of queer thinkers; elaborating the message with a gently homoerotic image and invoking the private world of a gay ancestor; conjuring Mann’s home, his feelings, and his queer kin.

ASPIRATIONS

In this dissertation I attempt to develop and articulate the new aesthetics and methodologies for the turn in my artistic practice that emerged in reaction to the failings of my 2017 test audio guide of Gert and Mattias’s library. I chart a sequence of practical
experiments undertaken during my doctoral studies that aimed at deepening and diversifying my artistic work with the audio guide, not only in the service of my project specific to the library, but as an artistic medium more generally. This research began in Gert and Mattias’s library, but grew to include the libraries of Hervé Guibert (Paris), Matthias Herrmann (Vienna), Adrian Rifkin (London), René Schérer (Paris), Thomas Waugh (Montréal), the RoSa Library for Gender Equality and Feminism (Brussels); as well as artistic projects not located in libraries that nevertheless referenced or invoked the organisational systems of libraries and archives: Thielska Galleriet (Stockholm), Hampstead Heath (London), and the Schwules Museum (Berlin). The libraries of Hélène Hazera, Elisabeth Lebovici and Abdellah Taïa (all Paris) also figure in my artistic research, although I was never able to gain direct access to any of them. I review different strategies pursued over the course of my studies while referring to impulses from earlier works from my oeuvre where hints at the research that constitutes this project appeared in inchoate form. The dissertation is accompanied by a portfolio of works produced and artistic research undertaken since the start of my doctoral studies in September 2016, as well as a solo exhibition at the Playfair Library at the University of Edinburgh, which took place on September 23, 2019.

The first chapter, An Audio Guide, Reimagined, investigates the museum audio guide as a media form, reflecting on the power and ethics of its unique “speech of display”. I review examples of traditional and less traditional approaches used by institutional audio guides, as well as a few interventions into museum mediation by artists, including The Muránow Lily (2015), a piece I produced for the audio guide of the POLIN Museum for the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. I develop a critique of how audio guides intervene into acts of museum spectatorship, contributing to the disciplinary apparatus of the museum. This critique leads to a reimagining of its potential that will inform both the practical experiments of my artistic research, as well as my vision of museum mediation practices generally.

The second chapter, Queering, turns to queer ideas and practices that might be used methodologically for artistic interventions into the audio guide. I reflect on a variety of possible definitions of querness, as well as queer’s “definitional indeterminacy”, to develop my understanding of what a queer aesthetic might signify, and how it can materially influence my artistic practice. I review recent initiatives to “queer” museum collections, examining different ways that queer aesthetics and queer content enter the domain of museum mediation, developing a critique with which to inform my own approach. I explore Sara Ahmed’s queer reading of phenomenology as a way of thinking
through the importance of alignment and orientation to acts of museum spectatorship, and to develop imagery and language applicable to the reimagining of the audio guide.

The considerations on queerness and queering raised in the second chapter spill into the third, entitled *Cruising the Museum*, which investigates the affects, alignments, and choreographies of gay sex cruising as a practice of specific interest to the evolution of my artistic practice. The parallels between the ambulatory forms of spectatorship shared by the museum visitor and the cruiser are explored, looking to media projects by Isaac Julien, Arnoud Holleman, and Jean-Daniel Cadinot. I reflect on cruising’s methodological potential, using queer theoretical writing as a guide to thinking about queer temporalities, the sociality of cruising, and the possible queerness of museum space. A selection of artistic works and practical experiments produced as part of my doctoral research accompany and illustrate my evolving attitudes towards the relevance of cruising in the reimagining of the audio guide.

The fourth chapter, *The Aura of Participation*, considers ways of expanding the participatory and relational aspects of my artistic work with the audio guide. Polyphony as a musical texture serves as a model for thinking about an aesthetics of participation most suited to my practice, and I examine the polyphonic qualities of a number of my artistic projects undertaken as part of my doctoral research. I explore the relationship between the emerging participatory impulses in my work and recent trends in participatory museum practice, questioning the degree to which they share goals. Finally, I reflect on the limits of participation, both for museum practice, and for my own evolving artistic aesthetic, asking to what degree I wish my work to be participatory, proposing an “aura of participation” as a more realistic artistic aspiration.

These four chapters explore a number of philosophical and methodological questions raised by my research, but as I neared the completion of the final artwork that issues from my PhD, a more fundamental question as to my project’s aims made itself known: is my project to portray the libraries I encountered over the course of my studies, or to document the kinship bonds I established and nurtured with my hosts? This question leads the concluding chapter of this dissertation, *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, in which I review academic writing on the nature of queer archives, and reflect on the way my research has led to the creation of my final artistic work. I return to the initial affects and anxieties that triggered my tears in Gert and Mattias’s library, reflecting on how these feeling might be used methodologically, to serve both the project and my artistic practice generally. Details and documentation of the exhibition that accompanied this research form *An Exhibition in a Library*, a postlude to the dissertation.
Academic writing has been a rich and revelatory experience for me, for it has facilitated new ways of thinking about my practice and my place in the world. It has also brought me closer to the worlds of my research subjects, all of whom are scholars, professors, and writers in addition to being proud bibliophiles. The at once thrilling and exasperating experience of navigating seemingly infinite amounts of material and ideas in their libraries was meaningfully reflected in the process of developing my ideas and expressing them in my own academic writing. I have never read more theoretical writing in my life, yet I am quite certain my research has only gently pressed against the very surface of what might be possible to consider on themes of queer aesthetics, cruising, the power of the voice, museum mediation practices, and participatory art. I have experienced feelings of being a dilettante in my hosts’ libraries and throughout the process of writing this dissertation, and in both contexts have struggled with the rather queer subjective position of “imposter”. Reminding myself — or being reminded by others — that I am an artist rather than an academic has at times relieved these feelings, and at other times confounded them. I discuss the generative potential of this imposter subjectivity in more detail in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Much of the most meaningful activity I undertook during the course of the last few years was framed as artistic research, a mode of creation I had never really imagined for my practice before embarking on doctoral study. Research gestures for private groups — like *Queer Phenomenology As Practice* with the Reading Talking Performing group in Edinburgh, and *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is* at the Montreal home of Thomas Waugh — as well as public-facing events for small audiences in academic settings — like the epistolary performance *You, Dear Doctor Are My Only Rescue!* as well as book-wrapping actions at a CRUSEV symposium in Glasgow and Gert Hekma’s retirement conference in Amsterdam — allowed me to try things without the pressures of formal exhibition, and often without even really knowing what I was doing. The value of this shift towards methodological experiments is expressed by Henk Slager in his examination of artistic research in the context of practice-led PhDs:

> … the practice of art shows that art and method can connect in a novel and constructive way. In such a connection, the emphasis will shift from an art practice focused on final products to a practice directed towards an experimental, laboratory-style environment, exploring *novel forms of knowledge and experience*.5

5 Slager, 50. Emphasis added.
I have come to understand that my artistic research creates circumstances from which new thinking and feeling can emerge, intervening into the meaning-making experiences of my audiences and museum audio guide users. Reframing my activity as artistic research has helped me to understand that knowledge can be produced — *is* being produced — in a variety of ways, and that artistic research, creation, and exhibition are all modes of knowledge production. And while I have struggled to articulate or even concern myself with what exactly is new or “novel” about the knowledge my artistic research has generated, I am grateful for the role it has played in expanding my thinking about creation, audience and exhibition.

I suspect my resistance to the idea of producing new knowledge is not due to a refusal to believe that what I assert in this dissertation or in my artistic research contributes to knowledge, but rather a sign of my inability to grasp or even imagine the effect my work might have on readers, listeners, and viewers. Throughout this dissertation, I share feedback I received from individuals who experienced my work or participated in my research. These precious, unsolicited notes are often intimate and highly personal, and the information they transmit usually come to me as a surprise: evidence of entirely unanticipated feelings, reflections, *knowledge* produced by the conditions my work creates.

Tim Etchells makes an interesting warning to artists as to how closely they should involve themselves with academic writing, suggesting:

> [t]hat in giving way to documents (and analysis) artists are losing hold of their work — that the voices of academia posit readings over which artists have no control, readings which claim a single authority and readings which distance viewers from the work itself.\(^6\)

I wonder about the relevance of this assertion to the academic writing an artist does about their own work: does it bring me closer to the heart and soul of my practice — which is naturally my hope, and the attitude I bring to the task — or does it alienate and distance me from the mysteries of creation that propel my practice? I wonder about the pitfalls of assuming a stance of *knowing*, when *not-knowing* has become one of the defining features of my research process: not knowing what I am doing, not knowing what might happen, and not even knowing or being able to articulate what has happened afterwards. This unstable, fugitive mode of knowledge production has felt important to me, and seems at odds with the academy’s privileging of *new knowledge*, a paradigm James Elkins argues is an

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\(^6\) Etchells, 71.
“artificial import from UK administrative terminology” poorly suited to artistic activity. I am wary of the idea that the ideas and methods that propel my artistic practice should be articulated in a form that somehow contributes new knowledge to the field, when my impulse has been to rub up against and read alongside other thinkers, rather than offer something that adds to, or moves beyond their scholarship. I honestly don’t know if I am able, as an artist, to understand the value of this. Slager notes that, “[a]fter all art does not strive for generalisation, repeatability, and quantification. Rather, art is directed towards unique, qualitative, particular, and local knowledge.” Indeed, I have often wondered what relevance the knowledge I have gained through my artistic research might have beyond the framework of my individual practice; and if it does have external value, what is the best way to share it with fellow artists?

While I sense that my evolving artistic approaches to the audio guide feature flash moments of innovation and originality, I do not believe my practice has ever been, or has ever strived to be, characterised by conceptual or technological innovation. In fact, the more aware I become of the practices of artists whose work resonates with mine (past and present), the more I find my work to be derivative, that little of what I create contributes new ideas or aesthetics to media art, queer art, art with archives, or other artistic traditions my work touches. Rather than propose the outcome of my artistic research and methodologies as contributing new knowledge to the field, this dissertation aims to chart the idiosyncratic, “particular”, and “local” ways my individual practice and thinking has evolved.

Finally, the process of academic writing has revealed to me not only how expansive and profound the themes of my research are — as seemingly infinite as my hosts’ libraries — but also how dynamic, unstable and ungraspable. Rather than verse myself on the most contemporary queer ideas, I have found myself attracted to works published over fifteen years ago, like Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* and Heather Love’s *Feeling Backwards*. Meanwhile, museum mediation practices have continuously transformed and proliferated over the course of my doctoral research — from audio guide technologies, to queering initiatives, to the participatory engagement my research is most concerned with — and I have not been able to properly keep up. Some of my early hunches about the direction of these developments — like my prediction that museums might start to design their audio guides like Pinterest pages — have come true while I was putting my speculations into words.

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7 Elkins, 2009: 112. The essay in which this statement is made is part of a collection of writings, edited by Elkins, that reflects at length on the advantages and disadvantages of the then still relatively new phenomenon of the Artist PhD.

8 Slager, 52.
My growing awareness of the speed at which these things change has prompted incompatible and unsustainable impulses in me: to avoid aspiring to or asserting any semblance of an “expert” subject position; to abandon the many tangential streams of my inquiry in favour of ardently following a single trend in a specialised practice or media form; and to turn the gaze of my academic writing more pointedly towards my individual artistic practice, deciding for myself what I believe in and envision as an artist working at the intersection of a multiplicity of tendencies. Besides, the opportunity to take a deep look at one’s own practice as a source of knowledge production is the great luxury built in to the practice-led PhD. But from the outset, I have resisted producing a dissertation that concentrates too much on the specifics of my practice. I feared it risked being self-important, too obscure and solipsistic.9

What I hope has emerged from these realisations and hesitations is a dissertation that constantly slides between questions about my beliefs, my aesthetics and my methods, documenting a moment in my artistic development when a project demanded expansive reflection and experimentation. In Chapter 1, I discuss Edouard Glissant’s critique of grasping as an epistemological mode; a colonial impulse to understand that which is opaque about the (racialised) Other by expecting a transparency that renders difference classifiable in dominant taxonomies. Glissant offers as alternative giving-on-and-with, an evocative neologism that imagines a different relational possibility: one that neither grasps nor expects graspability. Giving-on-and-with seems to me an important methodological model for my approach to this dissertation, in which certain ideas, practices, and rapidly changing technologies remain opaque or ungraspable to me. The openness implied in Glissant’s proposition resonates with an attitude towards artistic research put forth by Slager:

The most important methodological paradigm of artistic research could be best described as an awareness of divergence without a hierarchy of discourses... Awareness of divergence implies the capacity to mobilize an open attitude and an intrinsic tolerance for a multitude of interpretations that, if necessary, could be transformed into a revolt against the danger of any one-dimensional contextualization.10

Glissant’s image seems especially useful to the unique structure of a practice-led PhD, which allows me to take my observations, questions, and reflections to my artistic work, to develop a polyphonic dialogue between thinking and feeling and writing and creating that need never be conclusive.

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9 My concerns about a solipsistic approach to knowledge production are further explored in Chapter 2, where I examine the limits of using my lived experience as a queer man to develop a usable definition of “queer”.

10 Slager, 53.
An Audio Guide, Reimagined
I begin to feel ill at ease while listening to the voice of the audio guide impart vague information about the provenance of Inuit artefacts in a display case at the McManus Art Gallery and Museum in Dundee, Scotland. The narrator tells me the following:

As whaling ships travelled north in their pursuit of whales, they came into contact with the native peoples of the Arctic. Most of the Inuit objects in this display were acquired at the height of the Dundee whaling industry. By the 1860s, around 150 Dundee men were fishing in Arctic waters. The sailors traded with the Inuit. They would barter for everyday items, including tools used for hunting and fishing, as well as implements used for preparing food, which they brought back to Scotland.11

His voice is bright and friendly; I am reminded of the voice I hear while on hold when ordering a taxi by telephone, telling me with syrupy enthusiasm that, “the choice is yours”; or the chirping voices that encourage me to go shopping via the overhead announcement system at the Edinburgh airport, telling me that prices are “less that the UK High Street”. The narrator goes on to encourage me to look at two among the thirty artefacts in the display case: the remains of a kayak made of driftwood and three hand-sewn dolls that document the traditional dress of the Inuit.

I don’t know this particular history, but am sensitive to the language being used, and of what stories are hidden behind words like “came into contact with” and “acquired”. I am skeptical of the neutrality of the trade relationships being mentioned, and the relatively benign artefacts the audio guide has selected to mediate, ignoring objects in the display case that evidence the imposition of Christianity onto the Inuit, which seem rather beyond the scope of trade relationships: prayer books in the Inuktitut language and whale bone rosary beads. The displayed didactic text next to these artefacts uses the same obfuscatory language as the audio guide: “These objects demonstrate the adoption of Christianity, introduced by missionaries. The traditional animist practices have largely been replaced.” Adoption. Introduced. Replaced. The information these artefacts provide about the Dundonian whale trade’s role in the historical and enduring violence of cultural imperialism is what requires mention and interpretation here, a responsibility the museum’s mediation apparatus has chosen to shirk.

I am peeved listening to the audio guide entry on Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s 1880 painting, *Dante’s Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice*, which is exhibited as part of the salon style hanging of European paintings in the McManus’s grand, light-filled Victoria Gallery. The image is of Rossetti’s namesake, Dante Alighieri, visiting the blue-skinned corpse of his lover, Beatrice Pontinari, who lies propped up in bed. Their bodies are connected by an ambiguous winged figure, shrouded in a crimson red cloak; the figure clasps Dante’s hand lovingly while reaching down to kiss Beatrice with tenderness and sensuality. Everything is red and orange, enveloped in flowers and voluptuously draped fabrics. The audio guide introduces the painting as one of the McManus’s “star objects”, and explains that,

The red-winged figure of Love leads Dante by the hand as he walks in a state somewhere between consciousness and sleep. Love bends over Beatrice with the farewell kiss Dante was not able to give her. In his hand, Love holds his arrow, pointed at Dante’s heart.\(^1\)

I wonder to myself how it was determined that the winged individual is a *he*, for there is nothing definitive about the figure’s gender in the painting, neither from its hairstyle, its face, its musculature, or its dress, and the sex of angels has always been a matter of debate. The audio guide’s assertion of the angel’s maleness permits the homoeroticism of its fingers interlaced with Dante’s, while denying the lesboeroticism of its kiss with Beatrice. I feel cheated out of a more complex and nuanced interpretative engagement with the gender presentation of this exquisitely non-binary dream figure.

By the time I read the didactic panel accompanying Thomas Faed’s 1851 genre painting, *The Visit of the Patron and Patroness to the Village School*, I have lost my patience with the museum’s mediation offering. The image depicts a scene of approximately fifteen white children involved in a variety of activities and relations in a quaint, sun-filled room. The painting has not been selected for audio guide mediation, but has caught my eye because of the presence of a Black child who appears behind the seated patron and patroness. He stands erect in an elaborate uniform, and unlike every other figure in the painting, he is alone, in social exchange with no one. His face is serene, his expression impassive and inscrutable. His eyes gaze off into the distance, in the direction of a window beyond the boundaries of the painting. I am captivated by the boy’s countenance, and draw nearer to investigate. That is when I see what is going on behind him: a schoolboy stands behind the child’s back, grimacing and sticking out his tongue, raising his fists as though to

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\(^1\) Audio guide entry no.16, “*Dante’s Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice*”, McManus Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Scotland.
provoke a fight; another sniggering schoolboy draws the child’s profile in chalk on the wooden door: a simian caricature with exaggerated, outsized lips, flared nostrils, and woolly hair. The didactic panel reads:

Faed never painted anything better than this — his masterpiece, full of humour and incident. This genre scene would have been a nostalgic image even to a Victorian audience dealing with the consequences of industrialisation. The figure of the young black pageboy has aroused much curiosity. We don’t know who the model for him was.\textsuperscript{13}

I am angry and disappointed by this mediation offering, which I feel not only reneges on its responsibility to unpack a difficult image, but also directs the audience’s attention away from what the painting seems be trying to urgently portray. Who the model might have been is perhaps the very least important piece of information with which to engage the museum visitor. I wonder about the curiosity the Black pageboy has aroused, and if the questions the museum has received are truly about who the model was. I want interpretive material about the worlds inside the pageboy’s elsewhere gaze, which seem to me a portal across time into the affective realities of nineteenth-century people of colour. I want mediation on the relationship between the racist bullying depicted in this painting and the racist bullying and violence that has increased exponentially since the United Kingdom’s 2016 referendum to leave the European Union.\textsuperscript{14} How are these two moments connected? Instead the mediation glibly concentrates on a series of unrelated “fun facts” that amount to little more than what one might find in a Wikipedia entry. The obfuscation feels violent, a denial of the interpretive potential of this painting, working counter to even what the painter seems to be attempting to transmit. How dare the museum speak to me this way.

\textit{I NEVER LISTEN TO AUDIO GUIDES}

As enraged as I am by the McManus Art Gallery’s mediation offering, I am far from being surprised, for I rarely have experiences with audio guides or didactic texts that I feel truly address and interpret the themes that art and artefacts signify in adequate ways. And I know that I am not alone in my frustrations with the voice of the museum audio guide. “I never listen to museum audio guides” is the response I invariably receive when I explain to friends and colleagues that my artistic research has evolved to use the audio guide as its

\textsuperscript{13} Didactic panel for Thomas Faed’s \textit{The Visit of the Patron and Patroness to the Village School}, oil on panel, 1851. The McManus Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Scotland.

Detail from Thomas Faed’s *The Visit of the Patron and Patroness to the Village School*, oil on panel, 1851. The McManus Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee, Scotland.
chief expressive form. They profess a general aversion not only to audio guides, but to museum mediation practices generally, and share among them a belief that the information transmitted via audio guides is too superficial, designed to provide entertainment to an imagined mass public who lacks significant knowledge of art or history, or the capacity to look at culture critically. I admit to my friends that I also rarely rent an audio guide when I visit museums, and that the voice of the audio guide never seems to be speaking to me.

In her video *Little Frank and His Carp* (2001), artist Andrea Fraser responds to the patronising, gendered, and manipulative speech of the official audioguide of the Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa. The video features Fraser listening and responding to the audio guide’s narrated tour of the museum atrium (which also serves as the video’s soundtrack), feigning interest in the banal and intelligence-insulting narration with mock enthusiasm. The male voice of the audio guide patronises the listener by suggesting that,

> This building recognizes that modern art is demanding, complicated, bewildering … Contemporary art is big. In fact, some of it is enormous, and this gallery was designed to accommodate the huge pieces that artists have begun to create.15

The voice begins to emphasise the sensuality of the architecture, encouraging the listener to feel the smooth surface of a limestone pillar, stating,

> As you look around you’ll see that every surface in this space curves. Only the floor is straight. These curves are gentle, but in their huge scale powerfully sensual. You’ll see people going up to the walls and stroking them. You might feel the desire to do so yourself.16

At this point, Fraser’s enthusiasm appears to turn to arousal: she elaborates on the audio guide’s instructions and strokes not only the pillar but also her own body, hitching up her short dress and exposing and caressing her naked thighs and buttocks. Fraser’s action is filmed from various heights and distances, which gives the impression that her masturbation is seen by hidden cameras, a reminder of how museum visitors’ bodies and sexualities are disciplined through constant security intervention. *Little Frank and His Carp* is part of an extensive body of work that makes up Fraser’s on-going project of institutional critique, concerned with what Meredith Malone describes as, “the disclosure and demystification of how the artistic subject as well as the art object are staged and reified by the art institution.”17

15 Audio track to Andrea Fraser’s video, *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001, transcribed in Fraser, 136.
16 ibid, 142.
17 Malone, 3.
Artist Fred Wilson’s critique of museums also takes the form of interventions into the institution’s educational and mediation apparatus, re-curating exhibitions by manipulating artefacts on display, or intervening into the didactic texts and wall labels that accompany artworks. In his 2012 exhibition, *Life’s Link* at the Savannah Museum of Art and Design, Wilson changed the label that accompanies a Zairean mask on display to read: “stolen from the Zonge tribe, 1899. Private collection.” This small artistic gesture enacts a powerful intervention into, and disruption of, the obfuscating language of museums, which Wilson asserts, “anaesthetises the historic reality for these objects and makes you not even think about how these things got there … museums have a whole host of euphemisms to cover up the mess of history.”

Through my artistic work with museums and their audio guides, I have become intimately aware of the rather limited ways they are employed, and have begun to develop a vision of an expanded approach to their use, one that finds resonance with Wilson’s assertion that “museologically, I can bring out some of these ideas using the language of the museum.” Traditional museum audio guides are shutting down the kinds of conversations I want to have with art, spectatorship, and museum practice, but I am committed to the form for a number of reasons: its capacity to reach and engage broad museum audiences on critical and difficult questions raised by art and history; to work with sound and the voice in intimate and didactic ways; and to contribute to the affective and critical meaning-making processes of museum visitors. My artistic research proposes the audio guide as a unique media form whose aesthetic particularities and contextual specificity have the potential to be used as an ekphrastic art form, an artwork that responds to, and is therefore secondary to another artwork; what David Zwirner defines as,

... one art form, whether it be writing, visual art, music, or film, being used to define and describe another art form, in order to bring to the audience the experiential and visceral impact of the subject.

In so doing, I believe the audio guide can play a transformative role in the mediation of artworks, histories, and perhaps even interpersonal relations.

When thinking and writing about the audio guide, I have an instinct to use the words *museum* and *gallery* interchangeably, because my interest in exhibition spaces is broad, and my individual artistic practice has involved exhibitions in a variety of venues: museums; galleries (commercial, public, university, and artist-run); festivals; temporarily transformed

18 Wilson, 2015.
19 ibid.
20 Zwirner, 58.
Still from Andrea Fraser’s *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001.
spaces; private homes; and the public realm. I therefore understand the exhibition space — and thus the mediation of exhibited artworks and other artefacts — in broad terms, and think of my research as applicable in a general sense to all of them, while keeping an awareness of the site-specific concerns of these varied contexts. Furthermore, my considerations of the audio guide undertaken in this dissertation are aimed at both my work with museums and their audio guides, and the specific artistic project of inserting an audio guide tour into Gert and Mattias’s library. These simultaneous sites of inquiry share many concerns, but also diverge in significant ways, and my research slides back and forth between them, allowing their points of conflicts to nourish my evolving attitudes and approaches.

But my research begins with the assumption that the audio guide is decidedly a museum tool, for its use in extramuseal contexts is, in my experience, always an artistic proposal, something that is seen as special and not expected by visitors. Audio guides are traditionally created to lead and narrate encounters with artworks in the permanent collection of a museum — themselves part of the collection’s “permanence” — or created for special temporary exhibitions hosted by a museum. Audio guides are also increasingly part of the mediation apparatus of historical buildings or heritage sites, for example the Mezquita-Catedral Mosque in Córdoba, Spain; the Philologische Bibliothek at the Frei-Universität Berlin, Germany; or the Cheung Ek Genocide Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, many of which also refer to themselves as museums.

The audio guide is a mediation tool that serves as a companion to acts of spectatorship, impelling audiences to look and feel and think in particular ways, contributing to the meaning made from cultural artefacts; speaking for and alongside them. Its affective and persuasive power comes first and foremost from being a technology for the transmission of the human voice. The use of the voice distinguishes the audio guide from other museal approaches to the transmission of historical or interpretive information because, as Mladen Dolar argues, meaning is intrinsically embedded in the experience of perceiving the sound of a human voice:

What singles out the voice against the vast ocean of sounds and noises, what defines the voice as special among the infinite array of acoustic phenomena is its inner relationship with meaning. The voice is something which points toward meaning, it is as if there is an arrow in it which raises the expectation of meaning, the voice is an opening toward meaning.21

21 Dolar, 14.
The voice is a relational material that connects bodies in haptic, affective and social ways. The act of listening to the voice emphasises the body’s permeability and the fragile boundaries of Self and Other, issuing from one body and entering others through vibrational waves of sound that touch the surface of skin, ringing through acoustic tunnels and across tympanic membranes. The audio guide employs the voice’s relational character by maintaining an intimate, one-way discourse directly into the ear of the auditor, intervening into their encounter with the museum. The form of address the audio guide employs is intimate, too, often speaking to auditors in the imperative grammatical mood, calling us you. It is friendly, entertaining, directive. Its transmission is designed to feel personable, not just accompaniment but rather a kind of companionship to acts of spectatorship, even though it is not personalised nor does it permit dialogue. The audio guide forms a social bond with the museum visitor through its voice, implicating them relationally. As Dolar, asserts:

We are social beings by the voice and through the voice; it seems that the voice stands at the axis of our social bonds, and that voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity.

But the companionship offered by audio guides is ultimately an agent of an institution’s culture, serving as part of the museum’s pedagogical and ideological apparatus. The experiences the audio guide mediates assist the exhibition in telling the stories the museum wishes to animate and, as Wilson asserts, to hide others, for a variety of cultural, political and funding reasons. Audio guides act as the voice of authority on the histories and interpretations of the artworks they mediate, most of the time going about their task unironically, confidently disseminating information that centres, reproduces, and reifies received truths and hegemonic modes of spectatorship. In her critique of the way hegemonic museum practices shape knowledge, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill points out that,

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22 The audio guide at the McManus Art Gallery and Museum, for example, intersperses factual information about artworks, artefacts, and the building’s architecture with statements that address the spectator in the second grammatical person and imperative mood, offering cues on where to look, what to think about, and where to move. Entry no. 16, about Rossetti’s aforementioned Dante’s Dream on the Day of the Death of Beatrice, directs the auditor’s eyes to details in the painting: “Along with [Love’s] arrow, you can see a branch of apple blossoms, which may represent love consummated in death.”(0’58”). Entry no. 17, about William McTaggart’s 1902 painting, And All the Coral Waters Sang, directs auditors to “[l]ook at the broad loose brushwork on this painting”(0’53”), and “[i]magine seeing McTaggart, painting this outdoors at the beach at Machrihanish.”(0’25”). The audio guide to the Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa used in Fraser’s video describes the architecture of the atrium while addressing and instructing not only the auditor’s gaze, but also their feelings in the second grammatical person: “If you haven’t already done so, walk away from the desk where you picked up this guide and out into the great high space of the atrium. Isn’t this a wonderful place? It’s uplifting; it’s like a Gothic cathedral. You can feel your soul rise up to the building around you,” as well as the aforementioned invocation of the auditor’s desires: “You’ll see people going up to the walls and stroking them. You might feel the desire to do so yourself.” (Fraser, 136).

23 ibid, 14.
[t]he construction of material things as ‘objects’ of a particular character is not perceived [by museums] as problematic. Things are what they are. There is little idea that material things can be understood in a multitude of different ways, that many meanings can be read from things, and that this meaning can be manipulated as required.

These reductive modes of producing knowledge ignore the pluralism of the meaning-making practices of museum visitors, and are maintained and reproduced by the audio guide. Its entertaining approach masks the museum’s ideological function and discourages significant critical thought on the part of the spectator. Audio guides do little to invoke the non-linearity of time, or multiple readings of historical material, nor do they attend to the way feelings, the senses, memories and past experiences of looking influence how a spectator beholds the artwork in question. This authoritative, disciplining narrative mode denies the vast differences of perspective and perception each spectator brings to an artwork.

SPEECHES OF DISPLAY

The audio guide is part of what Jennifer Fisher calls the “performative present” of an exhibition experience, alongside other elements of a museum’s mediation apparatus: labels, catalogues, signage, and live guided tours. Fisher invokes epideixis, or the “speech of display”, one of Aristotle’s three categories of rhetoric, to describe the kind of speech acts engaged by the voice of the audio guide. Epideictic speech concerns itself with amplifying something that is present or “on display” to auditors through praise or blame, and has as its major intention ceremony, commemoration, declamation, demonstration, entertainment, and display. Fisher’s term “performative present” pinpoints a defining feature of epideictic speech — and thus of the voice of the audio guide — in acknowledging that the auditor is assumed to be in the presence of the display object being spoken about: the audience is therefore at once auditor and spectator. As Fisher confirms, “[w]hen oriented to a work of art, [epideictic rhetoric] plays a role in legitimizing, or otherwise contextualizing it, at the very moment it is being experienced.”

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24 Hooper-Greenhill, 6.
25 Fisher, 24
26 ibid.
27 ibid.
The concept of an auditor who is also a spectator may not in and of itself seem special. Indeed, for sentient beings, the simultaneous engagement of listening and looking is a commonplace event, and guiding these two sensorial acts is a central concern for most time-based media forms, in particular film, video art, and live arts. Michel Chion refers to this as cinema’s “audiovisual contract”, manipulating listening through a synthesis of sound and image. But unlike the synchronised looking and listening of cinema, the audio guide proposes both an acousmatic situation — defined by Chion as, “a situation wherein one hears the sound without seeing its cause”, in this case the recorded voice of a narrator/guide — and narration that enacts the epideixis of Fisher’s speech of display. In other words, the sound accompanies and animates the artwork, but is ultimately extrinsic to it, and unfolds at its own tempo.

What further differentiates the audio guide from other time-based audio-visual media forms is the individual nature of art spectatorship. It is not possible for the narration of the audio guide to be synchronised to the spectator’s visual experience in the way a sound track can be edited to match specific visual events in a film. Even though the audio guide directs the eye from sight to sight, its instructions are interpreted and activated independently by the listener. This difference invites — and I would argue, demands — a different kind of authorship, one that takes into account the individual ways visual materials and epideictic speech are interpreted.

Amplification, which Fisher asserts is a key technique of the epideictic rhetoric at work in the audio guide’s speech of display, is a sonic and conceptual strategy that has characterised my artistic practice since it began. One might argue that artistic production is always a matter of amplification: taking ideas, images, feelings or gestures and giving them expressive form, concretising and augmenting their presence in the world as works of art. In the case of my own artistic work, emotions from the interior are often externalised and broadcast through a variety of means, with the human voice as a chief artistic medium. And while artistic engagement with epideictic speech has only emerged in my practice through working with the contextual-specificity of the audio guide, my oeuvre is filled with works that aim to resuscitate, recirculate and thus amplify ideas and affects from what I understand as predominantly queer lived experience and cultural and intellectual history.

28 Chion, 28.

29 I acknowledge that many film and video artists have experimented significantly with images and sounds that are not synchronised, as well as the many cultures of film dubbing, whose imperfect synchronisation of speech and moving lips creates an array of queer effects. Still, for the sake of my argument, I believe a distinction can be made between the “audiovisual contract” generally proposed by cinema and the relationship between looking and listening that occurs when experiencing a museum audio guide.

Beyond this conceptual reading of amplification, the formal qualities of these artworks often rely on relatively loud volumes, and are transmitted through modified megaphones and horn speakers, which not only serve to broadcast voices across long distances, but whose physical form are designed to signify and suggest amplification in the sense of increasing the decibel level of a sound. What gets amplified — and by what means — is an important artistic impulse to review in the context of my research, both as I reimagine the museum audio guide, and as I approach artistic research into the libraries of my hosts.

The power of the voice, and the intimacy of being addressed by a voice transmitted directly into one’s ear, distinguishes the audio guide from other didactic tools used within the museum. Fisher points out the determining effect of the epideictic voice of the audio guide, and the extent to which it intervenes into the thought processes of the auditor-spectator:

Indeed the aural affect of audio guides can be profoundly determining, even to the extent of displacing the viewer’s own inner dialogue and intuitive responses. On another level, audio guides involve the senses in ways distinct from the labels or didactic panels found in exhibitions. The sonic choreographies of audio guides engage the audio, tactile and haptic senses in a performative mediation.

This intervention into the auditor-spectator’s thinking, feeling, and embodiment is significant, and while life in the digital age is filled with myriad forms of sonic accompaniment transmitted through headphones, — from music to podcasts to mobile app alerts to voice response phone bots — the persuasive and determining role the voice of the audio guide plays on the auditor-spectator’s perceptions, feelings, and meaning-making process is worthy of reflection and critique.

**THE DISCIPLINARY MUSEUM**

The museum is already designed to determine and discipline specific habits of spectatorship and visitorship. Helen Rees Leahy, writing about the determining effect of the interior of the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall asserts, “[t]he directional, ambulatory, ocular-centric experience that is countenanced by the galleries is reinforced by the paucity of seating, as well as conventional prohibitions on eating, drinking, the use of mobile phones and

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31 For works concerned with the resuscitation of queer ideas, see Legacy (2010), The Rosa Song (2011), and Grande Audrelisque (2016). For works that use amplification as a strategy, see The Return (2010), Nightbird (2013), and The Lovers (2015).

While Rees Leahy’s observations are specific to the Turbine Hall, and the availability of seating differs from institution to institution, her argument identifies the disciplinary effect of museum architecture and interior design more generally.

This observation echoes Michel Foucault’s extensive exploration of the disciplinary character of the built environment. In his 1980 essay, “On the Museum’s Ruins”, Douglas Crimp identifies the disciplinary nature of museums, and the relevance of Foucault’s theories of disciplinary structures to the study of museums and museum practice. He writes,

Foucault has analyzed the modern institutions of confinement — the asylum, the clinic and the prison — and their respective discursive formations — madness, illness and criminality. There is another institution of confinement ripe for analysis in Foucault’s terms — the museum — and another discipline — art history.34

Hooper-Greenhill takes up this project in her essay “The Disciplinary Museum”, echoing Crimp’s statement that Foucault’s investigation of the disciplinary technologies operating in schools and prisons might be applied to the history of the museum, which she understands as another discursive apparatus that contributes to the creation of “docile bodies”.35 For Hooper-Greenhill, the curatorial gaze emerges parallel to the medical gaze in post-revolutionary France, and the curator is positioned as a “knowing subject with specialist expertise (who enables the knowing of others)”.36 Hooper-Greenhill asserts that the disciplinary role of the museum emerges out of, and was modelled after, the military deployment of resources,37 bringing with it all the apparatuses of discipline that the military represents:

A division was drawn, therefore, between knowing subjects, between the producers and the consumers of knowledge, between expert and layman. This division held within it relations of advantage and disadvantage. In the public museum the producing subject ‘works’ in the hidden spaces of the museum, while the consuming subject ‘works’ in the public spaces. Relations within the institution are skewed to privilege and enable the hidden, productive ‘work’ of the museum, the production of knowledge through the compilation of catalogues, inventories, and installations. The

33 Rees Leahy, 166. The reference to a prohibition on photography reflects the essay’s date, which was published in 2010, the same year that the Instagram photo sharing mobile app was launched. Like most museums, the Tate’s ability — or desire — to discipline visitors’ impulses to photograph has been significantly diminished and transformed by the dramatic cultural shift brought about by Instagram and other social media platforms.

34 Crimp, 41.

35 Hooper-Greenhill, 168.

36 ibid, 167-8.

37 ibid, 167.
seriated public spaces, surveyed and controlled, where knowledge is offered for passive consumption, are emblematic of the museum as one of the apparatuses that created ‘docile bodies’ through disciplinary technologies.\(^{38}\)

If used merely as an extension of the museum’s greater ideological project, the audio guide might therefore be understood as a technology of its disciplining power. The determining effect of the audio guide’s authoritative speech of display identified by Fisher is importantly therefore also a disciplining voice, instructing visitors on not only the appropriate way to interpret art and artefacts, but how to use, arrange, and move their bodies through museum space. Its speech speaks to a docility already instilled in the bodies of museum visitors, who are often already well-versed in the conventions of spectatorship and orientation expected of them by museums. Rees Leahy describes this docile “attunement”:

The viewing body of the visitor is attuned to the requirements of the object on display; each exists in a relationship of dynamic symbiosis with each other, as well as with the space they occupy and everything within it, both human and non-human.\(^{39}\)

The audio guide’s instruction abides by — and thus produces abidance to — what Rees Leahy calls, “[t]he museum’s explicit regulations (rules and bylaws) and implicit codes (spatial and visual) [which are] combined to instruct visitors in the acquisition of a repertoire of appropriate ‘bodily techniques’”.\(^{40}\) The “performative present” of the audio guide’s speech of display might therefore also qualify as what J. L. Austin calls a “performative”, a form of authoritative speech defined as “statements, that, in utterance, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power”.\(^{41}\) The audio guide’s performative present can thus be understood as acting upon the body and spectatorship of museum visitors in a disciplining way.

One of the ways the speech of the audio guide disciplines bodily techniques is through a limited and limiting understanding of the diversity of acts of spectatorship that occur in a museum, privileging and substantiating the primacy of a one-way relationship between spectator and artwork. The art encounter is, in fact, made up of a dynamic mesh of intersecting lines of spectatorship composed of myriad acts of looking and relating. James

\(^{38}\) ibid, 190.

\(^{39}\) Rees Leahy, 164.


\(^{41}\) Austin, 64.
Elkins enumerates this vast web of spectatorships active in museum spectatorship by proposing that:

[†]here may be up to ten different kinds of looking involved: (1) you, looking at the painting, (2) figures in the painting who look out at you (3) figures in the painting who look at one another (4) figures in the painting who look at objects or stare off into space or have their eyes closed. In addition there is often (5) the museum guard, who may be looking at the back of your head, and (6) the other people in the gallery, who may be looking at you or at the painting. There are imaginary observers, too: (7) the artist, who was once looking at this painting, (8) the models for the figures in the painting, who may once have seen themselves there, and (9) all the other people who have seen the painting — the buyers, the museum officials, and so forth. And finally, there are also (10) people who have never seen the painting: they may know it only from reproductions ... or from descriptions.42

Elkins’ complex network of interpenetrating spectatorship de-centres the subjectivity of the spectator from what is taking place in and around the act of spectatorship. The assertion of plural beholders and multiple lines of spectatorship illuminates the polyphonic aspect of vision, the many forms of spectatorship that are taking place at once, and the importance of this multiplicity in the potentially transformative effects of art experience.

Museum mediation might help tease out that polyphony, it might speak to the multiple beholders it is addressing when it speaks to you, as a way of enriching the individual experience of spectatorships, to emphasise the diversity of perspectives, to encourage empathy among dissonant perspectives and experiences within the beholder. In doing so, the museum audio guide might cultivate a more complex ecology of spectatorship.

DISPLAY AND TRANSPARENCY

I have turned to Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, in particular his 1990 essay *For Opacity*, as I seek alternative models of museum spectatorship the audio guide might foster, ones that dismantle rather than reproduce the hegemonic power relations embedded in dominant modes of spectatorship. In this text, Glissant critiques Western culture’s insistence that racialised Others make themselves transparent, to define and reveal themselves in terms that are legible to dominant ways of classifying and understanding.43 He reflects on the French word *saisir* — to grasp — which he critiques as a mode of

43 Glissant, 189.
understanding that invokes the possessive quality of hands that “grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves”. This social, cultural and political requirement of transparency, this obligation to make oneself legible within an epistemological system based on grasping Glissant sees as reductive, and a limiting and damaging reproduction of colonial power.

As a counterproposal, Glissant offers the neologism “donner avec”, which translator Betty Wing puts forward as “giving-on-and-with”, proposing a gesture that eschews the possessive relational grip suggested by grasping, and the transparency it demands. Giving-on-and-with reconfigures the act of understanding from being a grasp to a gesture of letting go, of an extended hand that “open[s] finally on totality”. It is a call for an expanded mode of understanding the Other that does not measure difference against a dominant — or even personal — norm, but instead proposes opacity, the right to opacity for everyone. Glissant asserts that, “opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components.” The image of a tapestry of opacities seems to me both a beguiling and productive model to apply not only to social relations, but to the complex and dynamic relational field that vibrates between spectators and art objects.

The audio guide, and other mediation practices that make up a museum’s “performative present”, might be understood as part of an apparatus of transparency, interpreting and rendering legible artworks and artefacts that might for a number of reasons appear initially opaque to the auditor-spectator. Rather than work with the feelings of confusion, discomfort, or uncertainty experienced by the auditor-spectator when faced with an artwork that they do not understand or cannot grasp, asking critical questions that might contribute to the auditor-spectator’s individual processes of meaning-making, the audio guide hands over facts and trivia for the auditor-spectator’s passive reception. The valorisation of grasping as a mode of encounter and understanding is therefore reproduced.

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44 ibid, 192.

45 In her essay, “Affective Translation: Empathy and The Memory of Love”, Carolyn Pedwell comments on colonial legacies of translation practices, noting that, “postcolonial approaches have explored the political implications of ‘foreignising’ translation.” In this approach, which Pedwell calls foreignisation, that which appears foreign in language is “deliberately not erased, so as to compel the target readers to acknowledge the otherness of the source”. My sense as an English and French reader is that “giving-on-and-with” feels even more foreign in English than it does as “donner avec” in French, so that Wing appears to almost emphasise the untranslatability of the neologism, in a way contributing to Glissant’s call for a right to opacity. Pedwell, 129-130.

46 Glissant, 192.

47 ibid, 190.
and maintained, training the auditor-spectator in modes of spectatorship for future acts of looking and relating that reproduce hegemonic, colonial relational structures.48

Fisher’s observation that *epideixis* assumes that listeners are in the presence of the object being discussed prompts imaginings of an audio guide whose acousmatic speech of display mediates encounters with artworks or artefacts that are, in fact, not in view; whose ungraspability is caused by their physical absence.

Narrating an encounter with an artwork not on display was the approach to one of my first artistic engagements with the museum audio guide, *The Muranów Lily* (2015), commissioned by the POLIN Museum for the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. The museum invited me to visit their Core Exhibition — a permanent exhibition that traces one thousand years of Polish Jewish life and culture — to select an artwork or artefact for audio guide mediation. To my surprise, despite spanning eight galleries totalling four thousand square metres, the Core Exhibition contained less than eighty artefacts.49 Instead, the displays are made up of reconstructions, video projections, touch screen tablets, scenographies of mannequins, and copious digitally printed reproductions of photographs. Furthermore, sound effects were transmitted into the exhibition’s acoustic space through speakers mounted to the ceilings: the sounds of chickens clucking and women chatting in a room devoted to nineteenth-century shtetl life, the sounds of canons firing in a room detailing various wars in which Polish Jews fought, and so on. The lack of non-digitally-reproduced historical artefacts, combined with a visually and sonically cluttered exhibition atmosphere, presented a significant obstacle for the artistic engagement with the audio guide I was tasked with. My solution was to conjure a fictitious artefact — a painting of a mythological flower painted by either Roman Kramsztyk or Tamara de Lempicka — and to produce an audio guide that claims that the painting is missing from the museum. In the absence of the physical artwork, *The Muranów Lily* quickly abandons the audio guide’s normal tasks of mediation, instead leading auditor-spectators outside the museum on a narrated walk that recounts a fictitious history of the painting, combining fragments from a story by Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, Polish botanical history, and a nineteenth-century mapping of the neighbourhood that surrounds the museum.

There was something queer about this approach, and while my objective was to cope with an impossible artistic situation as opposed to intentionally disrupting and subverting

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48 I recognise the importance of differentiating between the opacity extended to the Other — be it an individual, artwork, or cultural artefact — and the obfuscation in the language I identified in the mediation tools of the McManus Art Gallery: an opacity that denies the information required for meaningful interpretation. Opacity might only be appropriate methodologically in critical artistic interventions with mediation practices, however I believe official museum audio guides can still contribute to the work of diversifying acts of spectatorship and expectations of grasping. This question is explored further in Chapter 3 through practical research.


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spectatorship and mediation practice, the resulting artwork produced a number of “queer effects” that significantly changed my understanding of what artistic engagement with the audio guide might involve. I will explore these queer effects in more detail later in this dissertation.

Whereas The Muranów Lily renounced its epideictic task in the face of an artwork not on display, essentially becoming a kind of audio walk largely unconcerned with what is in view, the audio guide of Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, in Phnom Penh, uses epideictic speech as a strategy to conjure those things that once existed but are no longer visible to spectators. Choeung Ek is situated on the ruins of one of Cambodia’s numerous “Killing Fields”, which saw the systematic murder of three million Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975-79, and serves as an interpretive centre that tells the history of the country’s civil war and memorialises its atrocities. Choeung Ek was destroyed in 1979, leaving few physical traces of the site’s built environment. The Center’s audio guide, offered as part of the admission price, begins by acknowledging the significant absence of display:

Maybe you’re wondering why you’re reading signs instead of looking at buildings. Well, the structures that stood here did not last long after the Khmer Rouge were driven out in 1979 by their own defectors and by the Vietnamese. Soon after, this place was discovered. By that time, we were all starving, desperate for food and shelter. And people were angry. So those who lived nearby tore apart everything here and used whatever they could.

Rather than mediate encounters with artefacts and a visible world on display, the audio guide is scripted to conjure “what was”, combining historical information about the events that took place on the site with first-person accounts from survivors, guards, executioners, and teenage soldiers. Because there is little for the auditor to see, the audio guide departs from the ocular focus of traditional guided encounters to also invoke the entire sensory world of Cheoung Ek, describing the revolutionary songs that “blared at night … to cover up the screams of prisoners being killed”, the smell of chemical substances spread onto corpses to accelerate decomposition and to “disguise the stench of decay”, and even conjuring the sweet flavour of sugar palm leaves, plants used to silently murder inmates:

A few steps away is a sugar palm tree with large spiky leaves. You see many such trees here in Cambodia. The sugar palm has many uses — for sweetening, for example, for thatching, or to make palm wine. Today, even for biofuel. But take a close look at the

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50 Choeung Ek Genocidal Center The Killing Fields Audio Tour ASR Script, Narrowcasters, 2011, 2. Downloaded from http://www.cambodiatribunal.org

51 ibid, 9.
stems that support those big fan-like leaves. Along them, you’ll find dark jagged ridges, like the teeth of a shark or a saw.... Those ridges are so hard and sharp that at Choeung Ek, they were sometimes used to slit prisoners' throats. When a person’s throat is cut, he or she cannot shout or make a sound.\textsuperscript{52}

The tree, which serves as the only part of the story that is on display, is animated through a series of multi-sensory associations that combine the pleasant, evocative sounds and flavours of Cambodia’s natural world and cultural practices with the gruesome haptics of its weaponisation.

Other entries in the audio guide describe affective aspects of the culture of Choeung Ek that were once experienced and perceptible to inmates but that leave no physical trace: the pain of beatings, the shame of being raped, the enduring grief of losing a child to starvation. Like the sugar palm tree, these first-person narratives based on survivor testimony are heard while the auditor is looking at Choeung Ek’s lush and tranquil landscape, conjuring events, actions and affects that have no non-textual representational form, transferring them onto the auditor’s experiences of the otherwise sensorially benign space.

Choeung Ek uses the audio guide and its speech of display to conjure sites, artefacts, events and experiences that are lost and no longer on display with the purpose of earnestly documenting and educating about the genocide that took place on its site. As such, its recalibration of the speech of display cannot be understood as a \textit{détournement} of mediation practice, as may have been the case for \textit{The Muranów Lily}. Yet while based on historical record and first person accounts, the audio guide inevitably maintains a kind of speculative quality: its speech of display relies unambiguously on the participation of the auditor-spectator to imagine the places and acts it describes. This approach offers a clue to how the task of the audio guide might be expanded and employed critically and artistically, using the speech of display to conjure and animate not only that which is not physically on display, but also that which is concealed from view because it is not perceptible through museum practices defined by display: that which is lost or destroyed; the cultural context in which an artwork comes into being; or the affective material of culture and history, those things that are invisible and perhaps \textit{ungraspable} to a mode of encounter that depends on looking. This becomes of special importance for the mediation of so-called “minority” histories: those events, identities and practices not adequately represented in artworks or artefacts, or

\textsuperscript{52} ibid, 11.
artefacts that tell such histories but remain outside the art historical canon and are not curated into museum collections.  

Both *The Muranów Lily* and the audio guide for Cheoung Ek use the speech of display for something that is concealed as a strategy to manage specific causes, namely, the absence of the displayable material required to recount the history in question. What emerges is an audio guide aesthetics with a fascinating potential for artistic consideration, a “speech of concealment” that up-ends the transparency of display and instead mediates that which is invisible, ungraspable, and opaque.

**REIMAGINING THE AUDIO GUIDE**

For his project *Gaps in Archaeology* (2008), artist Alexander Stevenson recreated artefacts in Leicester’s Jewry Wall Museum, interviewing a group of people from different cultural backgrounds and with different realms of professional expertise about their interpretations of his recreations. Stevenson then scripted and recorded an audio guide to the original artefacts based on the interviewees’ multiple subjective interpretations. In his essay on the creative process of producing this piece, Stevenson notes how the participatory aspect of his project produced new forms of meaning-making on the part of museum spectators.

> I use ‘interpretation’ not to connote the analysis of data, evidence, etc., or to infer a honing of research or the establishment of accredited meaning in relation to data; rather I suggest that interpretation exists as a tool with which to explore how knowledge and associations are applied (especially in relation to artefacts with little or no known provenance), and I aim to create new ways for audiences to relate to art objects and archeological artefacts.  

Stevenson’s artist statement hints at the possibility for the museum audio guide to approach its task with a different set of goals, asserting modes of knowledge production influenced by participatory approaches. This approach de-emphasises the relevance of undepicted “minority” histories was part of the approach to my first piece for museum audio guide, *Mille Regretz* (2013), which documents Emperor Charles I’s battle with Ottoman forces at the conquest of Tunis. In a section that reflects on what the commissioned painter, Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, was or was not permitted to portray, the audio guide asks, “Did the Ottomans also commission a tapestry to depict their defeat? Paintings to represent their side of the story? And the Tunisians: where might we find an artwork that weaves together their experiences as one ruler after another claimed their land?” This small acknowledgement of history being written by the victors raised the question of how to encounter and learn from histories not depicted in artworks or documented artefacts.

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53 Addressing undepicted “minority” histories was part of the approach to my first piece for museum audio guide, *Mille Regretz* (2013), which documents Emperor Charles I’s battle with Ottoman forces at the conquest of Tunis. In a section that reflects on what the commissioned painter, Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, was or was not permitted to portray, the audio guide asks, “Did the Ottomans also commission a tapestry to depict their defeat? Paintings to represent their side of the story? And the Tunisians: where might we find an artwork that weaves together their experiences as one ruler after another claimed their land?” This small acknowledgement of history being written by the victors raised the question of how to encounter and learn from histories not depicted in artworks or documented artefacts.

54 Stevenson, 103.
producing official, institutionalised interpretive material in favour of a polyphonic, contradictory ensemble of information:

By opening up the process of interpretation, then … this project enabled the construction of a non-hierarchical assemblage of associations and knowledge. Within this assemblage, the roles of artist, expert, and audience become diffused and intertwined.55

This intertwinement is an attractive image for the more complex work a reimagined audio guide might achieve. My own artistic research seeks to expand the potential of the audio guide by working with its unique aesthetic and relational particularities in critical ways. I imagine an audio guide that uses its relational character in the service of relation — between spectators and display objects, between spectators and space, between spectators and spectators — making relation as much the subject of its narration and the histories, aesthetics, and material qualities of the artworks and artefacts it mediates.

Over the course of a number of artworks and practical experiments undertaken as part of my doctoral research, I have sought to actively develop strategies that complicate or otherwise disrupt the determining, disciplinary voice of the audio guide, and the temporal modes and norms of spectatorship it traditionally emphasises. These strategies include presenting multiple interpretations and possible histories of artworks, inserting fiction in the telling of an artwork’s history, and fostering participatory, embodied, critical spectatorship by using open-ended navigational and gestural cues concerned with the affective dimensions of display objects and exhibition environments. These strategies attempt to expand the texture of museum experience, guiding forms of engagement that encourage empathic viewing, asking the spectator to be responsible for their gaze and extending subjectivity to the display object. These experiments will be reviewed in detail throughout the following chapters, and synthesised in the discussion of my approach to my final artistic engagement with Gert and Mattias’s library.

While I am developing my critique of the audio guide to specifically inform my work as an artist, I am curious whether my evolving methods might be applicable to the redesign of museum mediation more generally. Rather than produce pieces for audio guides that are exhibited as special interventions into, or alternative readings of, museum collections, I would like my approaches be used as guiding principles for what an institution’s official mediation offering seeks to achieve, and how it goes about achieving it. Put another way, I believe artists should be more directly involved in the design and authoring of museum

55 ibid, 104.
mediation, and my initial interest in refining my individual artistic methods has grown into a vision for the transformation of the museum audio guide on a larger scale.
2

Queering
Gert and Mattias’s library spreads across approximately forty bookshelves, ranging from little glass cabinets to massive wall installations that fill their spacious, fourth floor apartment, hidden high above the Red Light District’s culture of display. Its topics are as broad as they are specific: the Marquis de Sade and his legacy; sexual liberation movements; masturbation; male prostitution; the intersections between sex and crime. There are a few books on werewolves. There is a shelf devoted to child sexuality and intergenerational love. A section on urinals and the culture of gay sex in public toilets. First edition copies of the earliest German sexology books. Every issue of BUTT magazine.

And while books make up the main collection that dominates the visual experience of their home, the library co-exists with other objects and artefacts that have been collected, preserved, and organised in similar ways. I have counted sixty-two vases and decorative pitchers, some displayed on tables and window sills filled with flowers, the rest stored among and alongside books on shelves. Gert wears almost exclusively Adidas jackets and track pants, which he keeps either stacked in an enormous closet beside shelves of Dutch literature, or carefully and aesthetically draped on hooks affixed to shelves of gay English-language fiction in the bedroom. Potted plants appear throughout the apartment, including a giant Ficus drupacea pubescens that Mattias acquired in 1979, and a spider plant whose multiple limbs cascade their way down the shelves devoted to de Sade, its spiderettes resting on books as though curating their own, individual reading lists. The plants form constellations that cluster and accumulate as they approach the garden on the balcony, where they are joined by over a hundred potted flowers, herbs, and a fig tree that bears fruit.

These companion collections, and their overlapping occupancy of the same space as Gert and Mattias’s books, complicate the task of determining what exactly constitutes “the library”. The process of cataloging these materials yields a strange and idiosyncratic taxonomy that recalls the improbable list of animals in Borges’s short story, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”. Entitled The Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge, the list divides animals into fourteen poetic yet arbitrary categories, a taxonomy in such sharp contrast to Linnaean systems of classification that it seems impossible to take seriously, with categories like, “(i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher,” among others.56 Foucault credits his reaction to this list as the initial prompt to write The

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Order of Things, acknowledging how it represented a system of knowledge that deviated from, and thus shattered, the “familiar landmarks” of his thought:

In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that. 57

Foucault’s observation traces the genealogy of his study of the origins of the human sciences, but also articulates what I believe queerness’s generative and transformative potential to be: to illuminate the limits of normative systems of knowledge and classification, to invite an opening up of the terms at play.

Detailing her own investment in the usefulness of Borges’ magical taxonomy, Hooper-Greenhill points out, “[t]o be able to make sense of such a list would be mind-expanding and would offer new possibilities of classifying the world, and even new ways of living it.” 58 For Hooper-Greenhill, The Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge prompts a series of questions about how museum practice in particular acts upon and produces systems of knowledge while excluding others:

Do the existing systems of classification enable some ways of knowing, but prevent others? Are the exclusions, inclusions and priorities that determine whether objects become part of collections, also creating systems of knowledge? 59

These questions are asked rhetorically as a prelude to the investigation of museum practice Hooper-Greenhill’s book undertakes, yet they serve as a useful resource to help calibrate the goals of my artistic work with museums and their audio guides, and as a framework for my specific engagement with the libraries and collections of my hosts.

The queerness of Gert and Mattias’s library is not merely a question of content, but also of their methods of collecting, styling, and arranging their books and other artefacts. The power of strange and queer taxonomies, as Foucault and Hooper-Greenhill elucidate, is the challenge they present to established ways of ordering the world, and to the methods used to classify, encounter and imagine. Navigating the idiosyncratic taxonomies of Gert and Mattias’s collection prompted me to reflect not only on how queerness might influence the aesthetics of my artistic engagement with their library, and the research methods that I

58 Hooper-Greenhill, 5.
59 ibid, 5.
Gert’s Adidas jackets and track pants hanging from bookshelves in the bedroom. Amsterdam, 2019.
use, but also the queer ways I understand the objects, images, and ephemera through which I imagine and make sense of my own personal history.

“QUEER”

My artistic and political investment in queerness is fuelled by its potential for proposing new — or at least different — ways of imagining, feeling, and living. My engagement with historical material from what I understand as “the queer past” has been consistently motivated by a desire for radical ideas about queer modes of existence to be in more robust circulation. My work has been especially concerned with queer ideas, practices, and identities — like the Siberian transformed shaman who prompted my tears in the library, or the unique sexual sociality of gay men before AIDS — that risk being or have already been lost through the persistent process of cultural erasure that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls, “the profligate way this culture has of denying and despoiling queer energies and lives”.60 Sedgwick goes on to articulate motivations for her work that resonate with my own, keeping a promise made to herself in childhood,

> to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged.61

This concern for the transmission of queer ideas, practices and identities from one generation to another, and a desire to trace and illuminate lines of kinship that connect queer bodies, sexualities, and feelings has actively motivated my artistic practice since 2010. Emerging out of a decade of work centred around the singing voice as a vehicle of meaning and emotion, this artistic impulse aimed to unearth and recirculate speech acts that carried information that might enrich and render more complex the texture of contemporary queer lives, weaving a more intergenerational, more historically-rooted sense of queer cultural identity. In this way, the body of artistic work that emerged during this phase of my practice sought to counter what Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed call “de-generational unremembering”: the cutting off of continuities between present-day queer

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60 Sedgwick, 1. “This” culture that Sedgwick refers to is ostensibly American, but I believe resonates in a wider global context.

61 ibid, 3.
realities and the complexity of the queer past, invoking, “process[es] of citation and re-
creation … to serve the needs of the present.”\textsuperscript{62}

Despite a history of working with artistic subject matter easily identifiable as queer, articulating what exactly about my \textit{practice} is queer is a less obvious task. The investigation of queer theory that has accompanied my doctoral research has unfolded with a kind of guarded distance, welcoming new ideas of what queerness can mean for the methods and philosophical underpinnings of my practice while simultaneously trying to protect the enigmatic and ineffable artistic impulses — queer or otherwise — that propel my creative activity.

In some private corner of my thoughts and feelings, I in many ways subscribe to an old-fashioned, essentialist idea that homosexual men have certain advanced artistic and aesthetic sensibilities and aptitudes, and that I am connected to a long lineage of aesthetically sophisticated homosexual men. Matt Cook acknowledges the persistence of this particular attitude across time, asserting that the essentialism of this notion has its origins in the sexual sciences: “[t]he invert’s apparently intrinsic stylish flair was described by late nineteenth century sexologists and has been repeated frequently since”, Cook writes, further noting that this “flair” has been used to “signal a certain queer cultural superiority…”\textsuperscript{63} This is a position I would be hesitant to argue in any kind of political or scientific context, and I am the first to acknowledge the great numbers of gay men who exhibit no outwards signs or sensibilities of this kind. But feelings have always been the primary generative force of my artistic practice — even those artworks with explicitly intellectual or political intentions start with a feeling from my personal affective repertoire. So I cannot help but wonder if affects produced in reaction to the specific lived experiences of homosexually-oriented men — among them emotional responses to the psychic wounds inflicted by homophobic societies, among them disenfranchisement, isolation, self-

\textsuperscript{62} Castiglia and Reed, 57.

\textsuperscript{63} Cook, 2.
loathing, questioning, dissociation, longing, fantasy — have the potential to create a
different kind of aesthetic and affective attunement to the world.64

Put another way, I might think of queerness as part of what Donna Haraway calls the
“situated and embodied knowledges” that inform the way I see the world, and therefore
propel my artistic practice.65 This subject position may be informed by the above-
mentioned affects — what Haraway might consider a “subjugated standpoint” — but
would also incorporate modes of relating to the world developed through participation in
queer political, social and sexual cultures: activist organising; sex cruising and frequenting
gay bars and dark rooms; HIV testing and antiretroviral therapy; attending queer art
events, Radical Faerie heart circles, and queer reading groups, among others. Might this
situated knowledge contribute to the production of a specific set of artistic, aesthetic, and
philosophical positions that are classifiable as queer?

I attribute much of my artistic impulses and aesthetic sensibilities to my queer
orientation, while at the same time feeling ambivalent as to what about my artistic self is or
is not queer. For the emergence of my artistic and aesthetic orientations and aptitudes
precede the emergence of my sexual and erotic ones. These ambiguities prevent me from
unequivocally asserting what I am willing to call queer aesthetics. I wish to avoid assuming
a solipsistic definition of queerness, in which my own experiences are used to design a
general understanding of what queerness can be: “[s]elf-identity is a bad visual system,”
Haraway warns.66 Rather, she asserts, “[t]he split and contradictory self is the one who can
interrogate positions and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational
conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history.”67 Haraway’s critique of
objectivity is part of her assertion of a feminist epistemology of scientific knowledge, but
feels fundamentally relevant to approaches to other forms of knowledge production,

64 The idea of a generative attunement specific to gay men is explored in journalist Mark Thompson’s 1994 book
Gay Soul, in which he interviews sixteen gay men who have “the relatively unique vantage of experiencing soul
through a queer prism,” — in this case, scholars, writers, sex workers, spiritual leaders and community elders —
asking them about the possibility of a distinctively gay spiritual or energetic profile. The collection emerges in the
context of the polarised “nature or nurture” debates that accompanied the ascent of North American gay and
lesbian social and political visibility in the 1990s. While the interviews make many essentialist and ethnocentric
claims about who gay men are, Thompson’s inquiry is guided by a curiosity for what roles gay men might play in
modern society, a question he explores through his interviewees’ cross-cultural knowledge of non-
heteronormative identities and practices across time. I have never forgotten a statement made by activist and
author of The Zuni Man-Woman (1991), Will Roscoe: “Until we reach the day when someone like Rudolf Nureyev
can say, “My gayness is intrinsically part of my greatness and the art that I give to the world,” then we’ve not
reached that point.”(122) The context in which Roscoe makes this statement does not provide a theoretical
framework to support my argument, but does reflect a shared belief in the artistically generative disposition of gay
men I am referring to.

66 ibid, 585.
67 ibid, 586.
including artistic research: proposing a subjective position in which one’s situated knowledge can dialogue with the knowledge of others in a collective project of imagining.

There is therefore something heartening about the diversity of definitions of “queer” in circulation, proposals that emerge from, yet extend beyond, the individual and collective identities, practices and political struggles of marginalised sexual subjects; like Sedgwick’s assertion:

That’s one of the things that “queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.68

or Moe Meyer’s proposal that,

[w]hat ‘queer’ signals is an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous, while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processually constituted by repetitive and stylized acts.69

Both these descriptions of queer are part of larger arguments in specific theoretical contexts — Meyer situating queer in post-Butler opposition to fixed identity categories of gay and lesbian; Sedgwick responding to the vast misalignments that occur in reaction to a normative, heterosexist definition of “sexual identity”. Both are asserted as non-authoritative, one among other possible ways of understanding and applying the term. Furthermore, both formulate their vision of queer through lists of materialities and processes, asserting queerness as a dynamic synthesis of multiple phenomena. An image of queer emerges in the unstable, frictive space between different definitions — what Matt Cook refers to as its “slipperiness”70 and Sedgwick a “criss-crossing of definitional lines”71 — keeping queerness open, ungraspable, characterised by what Annamarie Jagose asserts is its “definitional indeterminacy [and] elasticity.”72 Indeed, it seems that engaging queerness requires a Glissantian “giving-on-and-with” approach that neither attempts to grasp its meaning, nor expects it to be graspable.

68 Sedgwick, 8.
69 Meyer, 2.
70 Cook, 8.
71 Sedgwick, 8.
72 Jagose, 1.
The materiality of the language used by Cook, Jagose, Meyer, and Sedgwick seems to me of special interest to queer artistic practice, offering a vocabulary through which to reimagine the material world (which includes sound), as well as practices that are performative or improvisational in nature. Not only do the definitions proposed by these authors prompt consideration of the elasticity of queerness, but also the potential queerness of elasticity, and in turn the queerness of a range of materials, gestures and processes that possess elasticity. To refer to queerness as a mesh is to pose a question of the queerness of porous materials more generally: is it queer for a material to let things pass through its body, to not hold something fixed, to be a yielding filter for light, water, and other matter? Might there be a queerness to materials and practices that disguise, veil, hide, and render things otherwise opaque? These are questions to be taken up through artistic practice concerned with queer materials and the materiality of queerness, and they nourish my practice-led mode of reading queer theory.\footnote{The materiality of queerness was explored in the exhibition {\textit{Haptic Tactics}} (Leslie Lohman Museum, New York, February 18 to May 20, 2018). The curators, Noam Parness, Risa Puleo, and Daniel Sander, outline the exhibition’s goal as “seek[ing] to expand the conceptions of queerness beyond same-sex object choice to the eroticism and sensuous qualities of materials, animate and inanimate.” https://www.leslielohman.org/project/haptic-tactics.}

As my artistic practice has expanded to include engagement with museum mediation practices, the challenge to asserting the queerness of my aesthetics is to find a way to harness what I believe to be the generative power of my individual lived experience as a queer subject while keeping queerness an open, unresolved concept, one that is informed by experiences and imaginings of queerness that are not my own. As Haraway notes, “[s]ituated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular.”\footnote{Haraway, 590.} Queerness can be and do whatever I choose as a solo art practitioner, but it must be approached differently as I invoke and apply it to practice increasingly concerned with participation and museum mediation.

I sense these unstable vacillations — between the personal and the collective, between the affective, the material and the theoretical — offer a model to work from; that the very point is that queerness’s definitional problem is core to its generative potential. What seems important as I reflect on how queerness is part of the aesthetics of my practice — and of relevance to my research into the role queerness might play in reimagining the museum audio guide — is to take a position that constantly poses queerness as a question, a problematic, never abandoning the disruptive, troubling, or opaque character queer embodies. Sara Ahmed favours “sliding” between “at least two” different but intertwined
definitions of queer, using it to describe both gay and lesbian sexual practices and that which is “oblique or off-line or even plain wonky”. By working with “at least two” meanings simultaneously, queerness’s definitional elasticity can be used generatively, keeping it dynamic and polysemantic: “we can see that the word itself “twists,” with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line.” The dynamism offered by sliding and twisting keeps queer unstable and problematic, an approach of relevance to both lived experience and artistic methodology.

Furthermore, the history of queerness offers substantial evidence of the generative potential of problems, and is a veritable catalogue of the ingenious and fabulous ways queers have navigated the innumerable challenges we encounter day after day, generation after generation. “A problem is the noise the future makes as it is folded into the present,” Martin Savransky writes. “Problems are, literally, com-pli-cations,” — here invoking the French word plier, to fold — “relational foldings of tension and transition, of entangled incompossibles, that the radical novelties of events introduce into the world as they demand to be implicated in it.” The context in which Savransky is writing is a sociological essay on the problematic nature of the social, but his language feels especially germane to a discussion of the generative potential of the problems that arise through the definitional indeterminacy of queerness, and contributes to a lexicon of materials and processes (entanglements, folds) with which to illustrate it.

The notion that queerness’s potential to productively resist and disrupt easy categorisation is part of what makes it methodologically useful, both politically and artistically, recurs throughout queer art criticism and historiography. Writing about the “broad coalition of disturbance” that emerged in the cultural and political response to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, Mark Turner acknowledges that the power of queer as a signifier comes through remaining productively ambivalent: “…what ‘queer’ actually means

78 Savransky, 5. Emphasis in original.
79 Savransky’s isolation of the pli in complication might be an acknowledgement of the presence of folds in Gilles Deleuze’s writing on the Baroque. Deleuze’s language is full of material images, centred around “pleats of matter” and “folds of the soul,” also containing images of porosity and elasticity. To read theory from a practice-led position involves tuning into the aesthetic and material possibilities of theory’s language, and perhaps accounts for the number of artists — for example, Thomas Hirschhorn, Eva Rothschild, Cathy Wilkes — whose material practices take inspiration from, dialogue with, or otherwise mobilise “cues” that appear in Deleuze (and Guattari)’s language.
can still appear ambivalent, and purposefully, helpfully so.”

David J. Getsy, writing about what the inscrutability of queer abstraction in contemporary art achieves, asserts:

… the inability to make “queer” a stable noun — that is, to settle on a singular, immediately recognizable definition — is not the deficiency but rather the strength that comes with its deployment as a tactic of resistance.

By keeping my understanding of the queerness of my artistic practice undetermined, ungraspable, and rooted in problems, its generative capacity remains open, dynamic and energised by potentiality. This approach echoes José Esteban Muñoz’s vision of queerness as a possibility, an ideality rather than something that has manifested in a complete and knowable form:

We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain.

The problems caused by queerness might very well be a “noisy” signal to help us recognise the forward-dawning futurity of which Muñoz writes, as it folds itself into the present.

**QUEERING**

Clues as to how queerness might influence my artistic reimagining of the museum audio guide might be found in the recent emergence of “queering” initiatives in museum mediation practice, a trend that evokes and applies the elusive and disruptive potential of queerness methodologically. Alongside the growing number of exhibitions with curatorial strategies focused distinctly on queer art and history (*Queer British Art 1861–1967*, Tate Britain, 2017; *Queer California: Untold Stories*, the Oakland Museum of California, 2019; *Slash: In Between The Normative And The Fantasy*, Contemporary Art Centre Riga, 2015; and the embattled *Queermuseu* exhibition, Santander Cultural, Porte Alegre, 2018, to

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80 Turner, 44
81 Getsy, 65.
82 Muñoz, 1.
83 Christian evangelical protestors accused the *Queermuseu* exhibition of blasphemy and launched a campaign for it to be shut down. Despite counter-demonstrations and petitions led by the Brazilian LGBTQ+ community, the exhibition was closed one month ahead of schedule. After what is said to have been one of the country’s largest ever crowdfunding campaigns, the exhibition reopened in Rio de Janeiro’s School of Visual Arts of Parque Lage later that year. Oleson, 2018.
name a few), gestures aimed at queering museum collections have begun to proliferate as part of the mediation and engagement practices of a number of European and North American museums. These projects, which often involve the participation of artists, aim to broaden interpretations of an institution’s collection by offering queer readings of artworks; uncovering and revealing hidden histories of queer individuals and communities; and in some cases providing rudimentary information about who queers are to museum visitors.

Riksutställningar, Sweden’s government-funded exhibition agency, published a study on such initiatives in 2015, referring to the work they accomplish as, “implementing”, “highlighting” and “including LGBTQ+ perspectives”:

Highlighting LGBTQ+ perspectives in exhibitions and museums is not about enhancing the already established picture. It is a matter of showing more pieces of the patchwork and allowing more colours to shine. It is about challenging the norms until they expand and include.84

These inclusionary efforts play an important role in the larger project of countering heterosexism in museology and society at large by offering alternative readings of art history, rendering queer lives and desires visible and legible. While I have not yet found examples of audio guides used expressly to queer collections, many initiatives do employ tours, trails, and guides as a common approach to the work of implementing LGBTQ+ perspectives.

Historiska Museet (Stockholm) organised a temporary intervention into their collection of historical artefacts entitled Hidden Histories (2015), in which members of the local LGBTQ+ community were invited to share their thoughts and reflections on the exhibits. Their commentaries were shared as a trail of special didactic texts designed to look like rainbow coloured fireworks exploding near objects on display. For example, a reproduction of Carl-Gustav Hellquist’s painting Valdemar Atterdag brandskattar Visby (1882), which represents a war legend from the Middle Ages, was accompanied by a didactic panel that read:

*Image of an Old Maid:* Behind every face portrayed, there is a life. Are these people the artist saw on the street, or people that modelled for him in private? Are any of the men his lover? Are any of the women the old maid who was the subject of so many rumours? The one who approached other women with groping hands and pounding heart? The one who managed to eke out an existence among the dirty streets and

mean gazes of the city before ending up immortalised in oil on canvas? I can always dream. - Hanna, 24, lesbian

The form this queer reading takes is a series of critical questions about Hellquist’s sexuality, as well as the sexuality of the painting’s medieval characters, inserting the community member’s feelings of longing for identification and a connection to history into the material considered worthy of a didactic panel.

Tate Britain (London) took a similar approach with *A Queer Walk Through British Art* (2016), initially a pamphlet that became a webpage offering queer readings and poetic reflections on works on display selected and interpreted by queer curators and cultural producers, among them celebrated British artists Isaac Julien and Sadie Lee. *A Queer Walk* includes an interpretation of Glyn Warren Philpot’s 1922 painting *Repose on the Flight from Egypt* by film and theatre director Topher Campbell:

Philpot’s desire for Black men is obvious here. That the demons and large reclining figure are Black both offends and intrigues because it places the Black body in the white male gaze as fetishised and forbidden. This is something that plays out in today’s world. The idea that Black sexuality is dangerous and the Black body is desired, used, abused, and depersonalised is something that Black Queer men experience.

Campbell’s reading interrogates the fetishistic impulse of the artist, while foregrounding the experience of modern-day Black queer men. His statement also potentially implicates the contemporary museum visitor in the problematics of the gaze the painting fosters.

Another pamphlet-led tour, the *Rainbow Thread* project produced for the National Museum of Iceland (2019), offers extensive queer historical information through readings of artefacts in the museum’s permanent exhibition, *Making of a Nation*. The tour also engages the visitor on large philosophical questions about queerness and the way the museum represents history: asking what constitutes a queer artefact; challenging the heterosexism of certain official readings of historical materials; and pointing out the absences of queerness in both the permanent exhibition and in historical research generally in an entry entitled *Silence*:

The history of queer people in Iceland and elsewhere is characterised by silence. Little has been done in terms of research, and sources are hard to come by ... When researching queer history in Iceland, it is important to work with the silences and

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Colourful wall labels displayed as part of the *Hidden Histories* initiative at Historiska Museet, 2015.
interpret them. Why does the exhibition *Making of a Nation* make no reference to sexuality? How can we interpret this silence?87

The *Silence* entry is intended to be read at the threshold of the second floor of the exhibition, an interstitial space between the stairwell and the large hall filled with artefacts on display. Like the audio guide at Cheoung Ek, *Silence*’s “speech of concealment” interrogates what is not on display, inviting the auditor-spectator to imagine invisible things in a museum display otherwise replete with visible artefacts. The question posed by *Silence* is disruptive, challenging and accusing the museum’s neglect of sexuality in its approach to telling national history, while at the same time asking the auditor-spectator to take part in the interpretation of this neglect. Here, addressing what is not on display moves beyond queer readings of art and artefacts to directly critiquing museum practice.

This approach to queering is favoured by Pia Laskar, director of *Unstraight Museum*, a wide-ranging queering project based in Stockholm that is not anchored to a specific museum. The project conducts what Laskar refers to as “unstraight research into museums”, which involves “studying queerness itself, and how sexual norms are produced in different contexts and knowledge systems, rather than merely offering queer perspectives on heterosexist museum displays”. Laskar asserts that for *Unstraight Museum*,

[t]he most important queer intervention is to question the heteronormative narrative that prevails in museums ... Adding queers of different sorts to an always already heterosexual or gender anachronistic past is not enough ... [and is] counter-productive. Instead museums and collectors need to describe and contextualize how sexuality and gender ideals and norms have been established and how ruptures of these ideals have looked and been described. To collect traces of ruptures is about collecting traces of queerness and frictions to show how people in all kinds of contexts have strived to move through or around regulations of sexual behaviours and gender ideals.88

Overall, I support the variety of approaches to queering initiated by artists and institutions reviewed above, and am fundamentally in favour of museum practices that aim to repair the historical suppression and erasure of queerness by actively writing queers and queerness into national and art history. But like Laskar, I wonder about the limits of these gestures, and am concerned that they neither adequately disrupt hegemonic practices of looking, nor harness the generative and transformative powers of queerness. It seems to me the success of these diverse approaches to queering is not necessarily a matter of whether they

87 Jónasdóttir et al., 4.
88 Laskar, 2019. In an e-mail from July 10, 2019, Laskar sent me her notes for the conference paper from which this statement was made, and gave me permission to make corrections to English spelling and grammatical errors. The cited text therefore includes edits to her original phrasing.
adequately “contextualize how sexuality and gender ideals and norms have been established”, but rather the degree to which queerness’s disruptive potential is used methodologically. I would argue that by merely inserting or revealing LGBT material into existing systems of exhibition and historiography, many queering initiatives not only fail to materially change the way museum visitors encounter and understand history and the sensory world, but risk working against the greater project queer readings promise. Laskar hints at a similar concern through her warning that inclusionary initiatives are potentially “counter-productive.”

My criticism might be a recognition of the limitations of wall texts or accompanying print materials to intervene into acts of museum spectatorship in meaningful ways. Fisher acknowledges the restricted power wall texts have to make demands on the spectator, noting that, “textual forms enable spectators to “keep their distance,” [whereas] audio guides demand participation and interaction with both the technology and with the proximal space of other beholders.”89 Perhaps there is only so far that queering initiatives in print formats can go. My goal is not to discourage or point an accusing finger at these queering initiatives, but rather to identify trends and their limits with the hope that my own artistic work with museum mediation practice might take the act of queering further, harnessing more of what I believe queerness can offer.90

**QUEER ART HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Jennifer Doyle asserts that one of the principal themes of queer criticism is its, “investment not in the articulation and production of concrete categories of sexuality and gender, but in the very real ways that queer art (be it a novel, a photograph, a film, a performance) can cut across and dismantle the attempt to produce sexual subjects as inevitable members of a ‘type’”, an argument that conjures Meyer’s image of queerness’s challenge to the notion of

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89 Fisher, 124.

90 I recognise that the success of these initiatives to materially intervene into the experiences of visitors relies not only on their design and conception, but also the degree to which host institutions are willing to co-operate with the initiatives’ producers. While some of the projects discussed were conceived and designed by museum staff — *A Queer Walk Through British Art*, for example — others were produced by outside individuals or collectives, invited in by the museum. Discussing *A Rainbow Thread* at the 2019 ALMS conference in Berlin, project manager Iris Ellenberger pointed out that the lack of a museum staff member in the conception of their project had a negative impact on their ability to create what they had envisioned, and that the collective’s ideas were met with either resistance or indifference. Ellenberger noted the importance of having the participation of museum staff members actively invested in the project’s success. (Ellenberger, 2019). My critique is therefore aware of the various bureaucratic filters that queering initiatives pass through before reaching the public.
a continuous, abiding self in methodological terms. Rather than merely inserting LGBTQ+ perspectives into models of museum mediation that rely on fixed ideas of the subject/object relation, I am seeking approaches to queering that reimagine the art encounter in queer ways, that turn to queer practices, affects and lived experience not only as subject matter, but as a provocative methodology for navigating, encountering and processing visual culture.

A broader vision of what queerness can bring to the art encounter, what queering might do, is outlined in Doyle’s reflection on what constitutes queer art historiography:

Thinking about queer visual culture … is more than thinking about art by gay men and lesbians. To pursue this line of inquiry is to ask questions about where and how that art happens, about who that art addresses, how that art is visible in some contexts and invisible in others, about what kinds of things art makes possible. It is also to look differently at art in general — at the sexual politics of all art, at what art can tell us about the world, and at how the lines around the category “Art” are drawn.

This proposal of what queerness might do to the work of art historiography is expansive, framing it as a tool for questioning and challenging all aspects of the art encounter, considering the queerness of how artworks come into being, the effects they produce, and the queerness that is required in order to engage them. And while Doyle’s vision is, in fact, put forth through the consideration of artworks created by queers that also depict queer desire — in this case a print from Andy Warhol’s *Sex Parts* series (1977) — her list of ways to do queer art historiography serves as a useful rubric for the queering of exhibited artworks more generally. Furthermore, I would argue that Doyle’s list could easily be applied to mediation practices concerned with feminist readings of art and history, decolonising initiatives, and a diversity of other critical engagements with works on display.

Indeed, it is difficult to determine where to draw the limits of what qualifies as a queering gesture. Reading Doyle’s reflections on queer art criticism, I wonder if my entire vision of a re-purposed audio guide, and the kinds of encounters and relationships my practice seeks to nurture, are somehow fundamentally queer:

To approach the subject of sexuality and art from questions like these is to re-imagine the subject/object relation that structures much art historical scholarship. It is to push art historical writing beyond the rhetoric of connoisseurship and expertise. It is

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91 Doyle, 347. Doyle’s remark follows an assertion by Douglas Crimp that the importance of the queerness of Jack Smith and Andy Warhol’s work is that it “disdains and defies the coherence and stability of all sexual identity,” and that this is how he understands the meaning of *queer*. Crimp, Douglas. “Getting the Warhol We Deserve.” *Social Text*, 0, 1999, 49.

92 Doyle, 347.
to place special emphasis on the character of the relationship between ourselves and
our objects, photographs, paintings and films — to ask what it is that we get out of
our love for art. In paying attention to these artists we discover that their “queerness”
resides not only in the domain of the sexual, but in how they make art, in the kinds of
relationships between people and art they foster.93

Doyle’s writing reveals to me the extent to which my artistic interventions into mediation
practice are, or might aspire to be, a form of criticism and art historiography, with a shared
set of goals. Reimagining the subject/object relations of art spectatorship is core to my
vision of what museum mediation, and audio guides in particular, should attend to. There is
something exciting about imagining a limitless definition of queering, and in thinking of
the radical re-ordering of how encounters with art are imagined as a potentially queer
practice. I am, however, wary of the free application of the word “queer” to represent any
thing or practice out of the ordinary or non-normative. Ariel Goldberg writes about the
increasing overuse of the word in art contexts, and how the dispersion of its meaning risks
draining it of its power:

When wall texts, press releases, and artist statements are littered with the word
“queer”, I start to grow suspicious of what the word is trying to say, as if temporarily
fooled into the word functioning as a measuring tool. The word “queer” easily loses
its gun power when used effusively. In what ways can language persist as “radical”
when the language is being used in a predictable routine?94

Goldberg’s critique articulates the risks of accepting too casual a definition of what
qualifies as queering in exhibition — and in turn mediation — practices. Goldberg sees the
proliferation of the word to represent different things and serve different agendas as not a
harnessing of queerness’s definitional indeterminacy and polysemantic potency, but rather
a sanitising act that diminishes queerness’s power and relevance.

Doyle helps anchor and focus the purpose of queer readings by calling attention to
their political importance, not merely as inclusionary acts of representing LGBTQ+
perspectives, but as producing crucial material with which meaning can be made.
Positioning herself as one among those whose lives are in misalignment with the
“monolithic structures” identified by Sedgwick’s queer critique, Doyle asserts that “[q]ueer
readings of books, novels, films, paintings, and performances give us our maps, our user’s
manuals for finding pleasure in a world more often than not organized around that

93 ibid.
94 Goldberg, 41.
pleasure’s annihilation.” The user’s manual is an image Muñoz also invokes, asserting that art offers clues to a queer future beyond the stifling limitations of the heteronormative present:

> Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of the utopia that is queerness.

Like Doyle, Muñoz recognises and values the potential for encounters with art to serve as survival tools for queers, nourishing practices of queer imagining and meaning-making.

What is useful about Doyle and Muñoz’s invocations of blueprints and user’s manuals is the emphasis on what queer readings and aesthetics do, emphasising the methodological potency of queerness. It therefore feels important to reframe and distinguish my artistic research with the museum audio guide from one of merely queering history or collections, for if there is anything I aim to queer, it is mediation practice, to queer the relational space between spectator and display object that is mediation’s concern. It is this energetic and discursive field, rather than merely the artworks the audio guide mediates, that has become my artistic material, and it is this material that my work aims to queer, exploring what is perhaps already queer about it. Formulated another way: I want to use the audio guide not merely as an instrument of queering, but for the audio guide itself to become queer. I want to imagine museum spectatorship and mediation practice in the way that Ahmed approaches the queering of phenomenology, not projecting queerness onto spectatorship and mediation, but rather to reveal and work with the intrinsically queer potential that is already present:

> To queer phenomenology is also to offer a queer phenomenology. In other words, queer does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact. A queer phenomenology might find what is queer within phenomenology and use that queerness to make some rather different points.

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95 Doyle, 348. Importantly, Doyle’s vision of the *we* for whom queer readings offer such maps is not limited to those who embody LGBTQ+ identity positions, rather she refers to “those of us (who is probably most of us) who find ourselves at odds with these monolithic structures (because we are, for example, black, gay, working-class, an immigrant, etc.)” (348). This expansive vision of who is served by queer readings supports my belief that queering practices might also contribute to the work of feminist and decolonising mediation practices. I will take up this question of who is served by practices of queering later in this dissertation, when considering whether queer mediation methods are only appropriate for queer spaces, and whether the museum qualifies as such a space.

96 Muñoz, 1.

Designing a form of mediation that magnifies the queer potential of museum spectatorship by revealing what is already queer about it is a strategy at work in designer Olle Lundin and sociologist Alice Venir’s collaborative project *Qwearing the Collection Tool* (2014), commissioned for the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. The Tool consisted of a series of garments visitors are invited to wear while touring the museum’s collection. Among them is a scarf designed to inform and influence the wearer’s encounter with the museum by offering a screen printed glossary of terms that might enable queer readings of works on display, with entries ranging from *Cisgender* to *Gaze* to *Pansexuality.*

By providing basic information and language about queerness, the tool might in some ways be understood as merely contributing to initiatives aimed at “implementing LGBTQ+ perspectives”. But the garments also actively implicate the wearer’s body, staging a kind of self-reflexive, tactile, and embodied performativity that expands how queerness might be present in, or emerge from, acts of museum spectatorship. This performative potential is articulated on the Van Abbe website:

> Accessing the information on the garments involves reading text and imagery from one’s own body as well as the surrounding bodys [sic] partaking in the experience. This alters the performativity of the exhibition space and renegotiates the relation between the wearing and the non-wearing visitors, and already through the design itself introduces the user to concepts such as drag and performed identity.

Lundin refers to this approach as a “corpoliteracy” that the Van Abbemuseum aims to foster, a mode of art encounter that centres the reading of bodies: bodies depicted in artworks; the bodies of spectators; and even the bodies of spectators who encountered the artwork in the historical context in which it was first produced and exhibited.

This renegotiation of relations seems to me the most energising aspect of what the *Qwearing the Collection Tool* achieves, and is an inspiring example of an approach to queering that combines queer content, aesthetics, and methods in a holistic way. The use of the word “tool” to describe the garments also feels important here, for it places emphasis on both the question of what queerness might do, while framing spectatorship as active and agential. *The Qwearing the Collection Tool* is, in fact, one of five mediation “tools” made available to Van Abbemuseum visitors to accompany, intervene into, or otherwise augment

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98 Importantly, the Van Abbemuseum’s *Qwearing the Collection Tool* is not an isolated queering initiative, but rather part of a multi-faceted pedagogical and cultural programme that included “Queering Sessions” in which queer themes were explored through performances, workshops and conversations, and an artist-led Queer Reading Group and Media Club. This pluralistic approach offered a variety of ways for queering to be imagined, and in turn diversified what might be achieved through the implementation of LGBTQ+ perspectives.

99 [vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/queering/archive/](vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/queering/archive/) The website does not specify if Lundin and/or Venir authored this text.

100 Lundin, 2018.
their experiences of art spectatorship. Produced for an initiative called Toolshop, which ran from 2013-2017, a variety of physical objects and devices were created by artists and designers that concentrate on different aspects of the museum or different modes of encounter, including spatial sound ("This is Not a Space"), olfaction ("Inhaling Art"), the perspective of children ("No Kiddin"”), architectural space ("Punt.Point"), and queerness. The museum presents its curatorial motivation for Toolshop as the expansion of interpretative possibilities through the inclusion of a diversity of situated knowledges: “This way we want to ensure that a wider range of stories and memories, recounted in a variety of voices, emerges from the collections”\textsuperscript{101}

I would argue that by creating novel and experimental ways for the transmission of different perspectives, each with its own physical “tool” through which to implicate and engage the spectator’s body and sensorium, the Toolshop effectively rejects a model of mediation in which outside perspectives are simply assimilated into traditional forms of art encounter. Rather than highlighting different perspectives in the service of upholding hegemonic practices of spectatorship, Toolshop creates space for the generative potential of different perspectives to experiment with form, and imagine modes of encounter in their own vernacular.

\textit{OBLIQUE ORIENTATIONS}

Echoing Doyle’s claim of the pedagogical power of queer readings, Ahmed’s reading of phenomenology provides its own user’s manual to the ways bodies are aligned and the “queer effects” produced by bodies, identities, and practices that do not conform to the normalising lines of heterosexuality.\textsuperscript{102} Her discourse pivots around questions of what is being faced, what is in or out of view, what is foregrounded or in the background, what is visible or invisible, and how heteronormative culture orients bodies towards certain objects and bodies and away from others. Although not writing specifically about aesthetics or orientations to works of art, Ahmed’s investigation of orientation feels pertinent to practices of art spectatorship, which are grounded in a series of alignments, both of the body and of the transmission, reception, and processing of information. The work of queering art spectatorship might begin by rearranging or subverting any number of these alignments to see what effects they produce. Furthermore, Ahmed’s investigation of what is and is not in view recalls the list of questions Doyle lays out for the work of queer

\textsuperscript{101} https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/toolshop/

\textsuperscript{102} Ahmed, 2008: 174.
Lundin and Venir’s *Qwearing the Collection Tool*, Van Abbemuseum, 2014.
criticism, questions about how artworks come into being and how some art is visible in some contexts and invisible in others. These resonances encourage a meeting point for considerations of the orientations of artworks and those of the bodies encountering them.

As is demonstrated by the *Qwearing the Collection Tool*, queering the relational space between museum visitors and artworks on display starts by drawing attention to the museum visitor’s body. Fostering this awareness might happen through mediation practices that render perceptible the orientations of bodies, how the artworks on display are oriented, and the myriad lines of spectatorship that are traced within the exhibition space. The visitor’s awareness of the role they play in acts of spectatorship and the cultural processes of meaning-making are emphasised by pointing out what and who they look out towards, where they place themselves spatially and temporally, and to offer and encourage a variety of queerings of these positions. Thematising these alignments and misalignments might be part of the “offering of queer phenomenology” Ahmed refers to, and the imagery that emerges from Ahmed’s exploration of a queer phenomenology — replete with obliques, slants, and frictions — adds to an aesthetic and material repertoire through which to nourish artistic dialogue with queer theory.

As part of my research into the way Ahmed’s queering of phenomenology might influence the kinds of embodied encounters audio guides foster, I led a workshop for dancers and artists that turned language from Ahmed’s 2006 essay *Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology* into a movement score. The score, entitled *Queer Phenomenology As Practice* (2018), was developed in response to an invitation from Edinburgh’s *Reading Talking Performing* group to select a theoretical text for group members to read in advance of their monthly gathering. Participants moved through the Georgian Gallery of the Talbot Rice Art Gallery, responding to a series of cues I read into a microphone, accompanied by music. Divided into three “positions” and three “movements”, the cues took inspiration from images and ideas in Ahmed’s essay, emphasising what was in and out of view, foregrounds and backgrounds, as well as oblique and slanted ways of extending and retreating one’s body in space. For example:

Take a position in space.

What you see depends on which way you are facing.

What bodies and objects and forms are in front of you?

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103 Foucault also notes that the oblique lines produced by homosexuality are key to its generative and transformative power, and to the alternative model of sociality it offers: “It’s not at all the idea of a great community fusion. Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the “slantwise” position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.” Foucault, 1997: 136.
What is of importance from this vantage point?

What most draws your gaze?

What would you rather not look at?

Without moving your head, look at what is behind you.

Although the focus of the session was Ahmed’s writing, I read a passage from the introduction to Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* as a kind of prelude, and used his image of queerness as the “warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” as the basis for the final “movement”:

Take a position.

Imagine a form that does not yet exist.

Imagine it is coming, on the horizon, out of view, but clearly there, somewhere.

Shift your position to face this horizon in an oblique way.

Face it in a way that feels queer.

Offer a gesture to greet its coming.

This experiment served as research for the expansion of my gestural and navigational vocabulary for use in future audio guide works.

Another way Ahmed’s writing has tangibly influenced the evolution of my aesthetics is through her insistence on grounding discourse on orientations in the lived sexual experience of queer subjects, and emphasising the sexuality of space:

If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with … If we foreground the concept of “orientation”, then we can retheorize this sexualization of space as well as the spatiality of sexual desire.  

How to get in touch with the sexuality of space and how to harness one’s own sexual subjectivity in the service of the art encounter are questions I have foregrounded throughout my doctoral artistic research. Tuning into one’s sexual subjectivity, as well as the sexuality of a space and objects on display, anchors the instructions of *Cruising Adrian’s*

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Participants follow the instructions of *Queer Phenomenology As Practice*, Talbot Rice Gallery, 2018.
Library (2018), a score in booklet form that instructs participants through the private library of London writer Adrian Rifkin and his partner Denis Echard.

Cruising Adrian’s Library was prompted by an invitation to be guest curator of the Naked Boys Reading literary salon in May 2018. Guest curators of the salon are tasked with selecting a programme of short texts — usually organised around a theme — which are then distributed to a group of performers who recite the texts naked on stage at the monthly event. I reimagined the role of curator as an opportunity to activate my research into Rifkin’s library and to experiment with the power relations embedded in the event’s curatorial process, designing a score that participants would interpret and enact in Rifkin’s home.

A garden party was held in Rifkin and Echard’s backyard for the four readers selected for this edition of Naked Boys Reading, all queer-identified men. I distributed the scores in the form of a screen-printed, hand-bound booklet, which readers were invited to follow at their own pace. In keeping with the audio guide aesthetics of my research, the score began much like a tour of a historical site, introducing the reader to Rifkin and Echard’s home and providing basic information about the library’s contents and systems of classification. From there, the reader was instructed to tune into the library’s affective dimensions and unstable temporalities; to focus on a specific bookshelf devoted to queer and sexual literature; to select a book based on the title’s erotic promise; and to seek out and transcribe a short passage from within its pages that delivers on that promise. Drawing the participant’s attention to the sexuality of the space and empowering them to use their sexual subjectivity as a navigational tool occurs in the third of six instructions:

Scan the titles of the books with your eyes. You can read the titles of the whole bookshelf systematically, or cruise around following irregular lines and pathways, picking and choosing. Tune into the sexual energy that accumulates as your eyes move from title to title. You may find it easier to connect with the bookshelf’s sexual registers by mouthing or whispering the titles, or select words from the titles. Seek out a title that makes you curious, one that elicits a sexual charge, one that holds some erotic promise.

Proposing a cruisy mode of spectatorship, encouraging oblique movements, and activating the participant’s mouth were parts of a strategy to incite sexual embodiment. The instruction that follows takes inspiration from another Ahmedian reading of phenomenology: the suggestion that orientations are encounters between two or more entities, and that touch always happens both ways. Ahmed writes:

105 https://nakedboysreading.com/portfolio/naked-boys-reading-cruising-adrians-library/
Orientations are tactile and they involve more than one skin surface: in approaching this or that table, we are also approached by the table, which touches us when we touch it... Bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the co-habitation or sharing of space.  

The score attempts to draw the participant’s awareness to this cohabitation of space, and for the object that is encountered — a book or other print material — to be imagined as a fellow participant. Because the encounter has already been framed as issuing from the participant’s erotic attunement to a book’s title, foregrounding the sexuality of this touch seemed an obvious choice.

Touch this book and let it touch you. Press a finger against its spine. If you feel the book is willing — if the book appears to be as interested in you as you are in it — pull it down from the shelf and into your hands. Finger its pages. Before skimming its words, get into its contours and textures. Stroke its skin. Get to know its form with your hands, or some other parts of its body. Stay aware of how the book touches you as you touch it.

The book thus became one of two entities in a sexually charged encounter, in which desire, consent and a kind of foreplay-before-reading are invoked. Sexual subjectivity was emphasised here, as well as how sexuality determines one’s orientation, towards objects, ideas, and other bodies. After completing their transcriptions, the men reconvened outside, where they enjoyed the sensory pleasures of the garden and casual conversation with Rifkin, who had withdrawn to his study during the action.

Although *Cruising Adrian’s Library* did not take place in a museum, the experiments the score undertook served to advance the language and aesthetics of navigation I wish to apply to exhibition spaces, especially contexts in which physical touch of the objects of encounter — namely artworks on display — may not be permitted. Of importance was developing a mode of navigation that encouraged the use of the participant’s erotic situated knowledge in the meaning-making process, regardless of the kind of cultural text in question.

The score was designed to not only empower the readers to select the texts they would perform themselves, but also to encourage an experience in Rifkin and Echard’s home that left affective traces in the readers’ minds and bodies. My hope was that the atmosphere of hospitality, the multi-sensory stimuli of the garden, and instructions that emphasised listening, touching, and eroticism would be embedded in the meaning each reader made of their selected texts, and that this meaning might influence the experience

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Theo Gordon transcribes a passage of text found in Adrian and Denis’s library as part of *Cruising Adrian’s Library*, 2018.
of, and level of investment in reciting their texts at the literary salon. Naked Boys Reading took place two days later in the form of a durational performance installation at LUX Moving Image, and involved each reader reciting his selected text in various spots throughout the venue, which itself included a garden and a library.

Proposing this score as the form my curatorial work took served not only as a way to experiment with different modes of mediating encounters with Rifkin’s library, but also handed over the curation of the texts to the participants themselves, creating conditions that encouraged more individual encounters with texts. Which texts appeared to hold erotic promise was determined by each individual participant instead of by me; their own desires and curiosities were given importance, used as tools for the selection of their texts.

Applying this approach to the art encounter might yield effects that are not necessarily queer, for I can imagine participants following these instructions on a path very much aligned with heteronormativity. In fact, one could argue that a mode of navigation that emphasises the body and sexual subjectivity does not necessarily constitute a queering of the art encounter, although it does create space for queer sexual subjectivities to extend themselves into the space of the museum. Queering the relational space of the art encounter might begin by drawing attention to the spectator’s body and tuning into sexual subjectivity, but it might also require the active overlay of queer orientations onto this relational space. This attitude works counter to Ahmed’s position that “queer does not have a relation of exteriority to that with which it comes into contact”, but might be necessary in developing an approach to queering that sufficiently disrupts the normalising relationships to artworks and spectatorship that museums traditionally foster.

If, as Hooper-Greenhill asserts, knowledge is the commodity that museums offer, and the construction of rationality its project, could queerness’s definitional indeterminacy be used methodologically as a way of reimagining the knowledge transmission tasked of the audio guide? Ahmed asserts that a queer phenomenology “would function as a disorientation device,” offering a hint at what a queer reimagining of the audio guide might be, the kinds of queer affects it might encourage. Indeed, reimagining the audio guide as a “disorientation device” feels like a perfectly queer practice. The deviant directionalities of queerness cause problems: for the lives of queers as well as for those more normatively aligned. But following the sideways paths of queer desires can also illuminate new

108 Hooper-Greenhill, 2.
109 Ahmed, 2008: 172. Later in the text, Ahmed returns to the idea of a “disorientation device”, describing the impulse for queers to follow heteronormative lines as “a way to experience the pleasures of deviation” (177). Seeking pleasure through deviation, actively striving for it, feels like a cue of particular relevance to the design of a tour of Hekma and Duyves’ library, which is concerned with the history of perversion more than any other theme.
The audience of Naked Boys Reading listens to Dan de la Motte read the passage he selected from a book in Adrian and Denis’s library at LUX Moving Image, 2018.
horizons. As Ahmed asserts:

Lesbian desires move us sideways: one object might put another in reach, as we come into contact with different bodies and worlds. This contact involves following rather different lines of connection, association, and even exchange, as these lines are often invisible to others. It is not surprising that becoming a lesbian can feel like a whole world gets opened up.110

This world that opens up through a queer orientation might face the warm illumination of Muñoz’s horizon, imbued with potentiality; or perhaps be made up of a constantly shifting sequence of gestures and directions that never line up, that never coalesce into a stable horizon. Ahmed asserts that of importance to phenomenology is establishing what is “here” and what is “there”, with “here” figuring as the “zero point” of orientation, “[t]he point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling.”111 Grounding orientation in a “here” and “there” opens up the possibility for all sorts of misalignments, disorientations, and re-arrangements of bodies and relations. What if, as Muñoz claims, we “strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there,” switching the “here” of orientation to “there”, replacing the “now” with “then”?112 If queerness is an ideality on the horizon, then which way must we orient our bodies to face it? Is the zero point here or there?

112 Muñoz, 1.
Cruising the Museum
Cruising presents itself as an evocative embodiment of so many of the queer alignments, orientations, and “traces of desire” Sara Ahmed describes, and seems a generative practice around which to imagine deviations and transgressions of the disciplined body of the museum visitor.

My primary attraction to cruising are the particularities of its practices of viewing and the ways cruising bodies align themselves to objects of desire and to each other (which in the case of a sex hunt are, in fact, the same thing). It is the cruiser’s fundamental awareness of simultaneously seeing and being seen, a democratising of the spectator-display object relationship, that feels productive for the work of art mediation; and the modes of looking and moving through space enacted by cruisers provide a fertile gestural vocabulary to transpose onto the choreography of art spectatorship: idling, waiting, looping, circling back, glancing sideways and backwards, staring, following and eluding, taking up a variety of positions at proximities and distances, concealing and revealing.114

Beyond these externalised body movements and alignments are the embodied states of desire, excitement, and play that guide a cruiser’s actions. One is required, even on some basic level, to tune into feelings and impulses that come from within the body in order to cruise. And while it is possible to engage in sex cruising with the same superficial criteria used while shopping, making flash judgements based on surfaces — like scanning for a product or “clocking” artworks in an exhibition — cruising’s drive towards sexual encounter encourages and necessitates a unique and powerful awareness of one’s body and its relation to other bodies. Can the cruiser’s erotic, embodied mode of encounter be of use to the art encounter? Does encouraging embodied encounters inspired by the affective registers of cruising serve anything more than to add an additional layer of titillation to the

114 I acknowledge that I am using cruising here as a general term to describe a vast series of acts, choreographies, and affects that change across space and time, different cultural and geographical settings, the impacts of criminalisation, de-criminalisation, cruising pre-, during, and since the first wave of the AIDS crisis, cruising before and after the emergence of the Internet or mobile apps that rely on geopositioning software, as well as the varying degrees of public and private, indoor and outdoor, day-lit, twilit or midnight lighting environments, that all influence how individuals and communities engage in cruising. I want to avoid an ethnocentric or chronocentric understanding of what cruising is and how it works.
gallery experience, or can it lead to a different, more profound kind of encounter with art and history? My artistic research has explored how cruising’s queer values might be applied methodologically to inform the reimagining of museum mediation.

CRUISING AS METHOD

*Trees Are Fags* is the first artistic work I produced within the context of my doctoral research that actively put into practice my evolving conceptual concerns regarding a more critical, individualised, and embodied audio guide experience and my curiosity about the ways the aesthetics of cruising might contribute to this task.

The piece is primarily an ode to cruising, singing the praises of this unique embodied practice full of sexual pleasure and trans-historical touches. The affects and gestural vocabulary of cruising inspired both the subject and the aesthetic framework of *Trees Are Fags*, which mediates an encounter with the erotic history of an arboreal setting of the listener’s choosing. The twenty-minute audio piece, transmitted to listeners through headphones on mobile devices via a dedicated web page, narrates a history of cruising in city parks, framing the trees as witnesses and participants in generations of gay sex. In the work, an unpacking of the etymology of the word *faggot* becomes an argument that fags are trees, trees are fags, and that the bassoon is the voice of arboreal homosexuality. To honour this bond, the listener is guided through a series of movements and physical orientations based on the gestural and affective dimensions of cruising — many of them initially developed in the *Queer Phenomenology As Practice* score — leading them on a hunt not for another human, but for a tree that might be their lover.

These cues attempt to move the listener’s body in a way that invokes the movements and ways of occupying space enacted when cruising for sex, and represent the most significant aspect of the project’s conceptual and technical experimentation, designed to create more individualised, embodied experiences based on the listener’s feelings, memories, and erotic impulses. Listeners hear eight cues from a collection of twenty-five, which are selected randomly by a custom-designed program. Not only is the content of the cues designed to be open to individual interpretation — for example, *keep track of a tree that appeals to you* or *circle a tree whose bark elicits the most exciting memory of touch* — but the shuffling and random selection of cues are intended to keep the narrative unstable, avoiding the imposition of a determining or authoritative way for the listener to move through space.
*Trees Are Fags* was not designed as an experience specific to a museum setting. And while the audio walk and podcast media forms are increasingly a part of the texture of all aspects of contemporary life making a narrated walk among trees not seem especially unusual, I approached the scripting of *Trees Are Fags* with the didactic voice of the audio guide and evolving audio guide aesthetics in mind. I wonder if this approach allows for aspects of the museum experience to extend beyond its walls and into the woods, for the cruising area to be seen museally, by focusing on telling history and acts of looking.

While *Trees Are Fags* aimed to foreground and aestheticise many facets of the cruising experience — from programming the narrated material to shuffle randomly to arranging a composition for bassoon that emphasises dissonant and oblique melodies — cruising is ultimately the piece’s style, without being clearly assumed as its method. The methodological potential of cruising is explored in Fiona Anderson’s essay “Cruising as Method and Its Limits”, in which she outlines a variety of approaches to artistic and scholarly activity that evoke and employ the affective and conceptual modes of cruising:

What does it mean to see the action of cruising as a method for something that is not sexual? Or to draw inspiration from the motion of cruising when making eroticised work? Thinking of cruising in this methodological way suggests a furtive mode of undertaking artistic research and practice, of looking eagerly through photographic documentation and archival ephemera, or looking closely for ideas or motivation in the words and images of others.\(^{115}\)

Anderson examines writing, research and artistic methods used by author Neil Bartlett, scholar Elizabeth Freeman, filmmaker William E. Jones, and artist Rosalind Nashashibi to identify and compile a variety of methodological devices that invoke and take their cue from cruising. These include the privileging of corporeality in the writing of history; the importance of tuning in to and being guided by sexual desire; and the abandoning of a linear, teleological mode of creation in favour of a serpentine path with no clear outcome. Anderson asserts that the sideways glances of cruising can also be employed as a technique for imagining and uncovering the suppressed or invisible narratives of queer lives.\(^{116}\)

This array of cruisy methodological approaches seems of direct relevance to my doctoral research, and almost a “solution” to the creative blocks I have experienced in the libraries of my hosts. Just as Ahmed’s theories of queer alignments and orientations opened up new ways of thinking of the navigational cues core to my work with the museum audio guide, Anderson’s methodological applications of cruising offers a new lens.

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\(^{115}\) Anderson, 2017.

\(^{116}\) ibid.
Susanne Okulitch and Łukasz Szulec head into London’s Waterlow Park to experience *Trees Are Fags*, 2018.
through which to approach my present artistic research, and even to understanding the artistic processes of earlier projects.

The closest my practice has come to using cruising as a method occurred unwittingly when producing Interludes No. 4 (2016), an audio encounter for Thielska Galleriet, and this method clearly and concretely informed the character of the final artistic work. Interludes No. 4 takes as its subject Nocturne, a 1901 painting by the celebrated Swedish artist Eugène Jansson, whose homosexuality is now widely acknowledged. The audio guide traces the history and symbolism of a specific blue Jansson painted with, proposing links between this colour and the twilit cruising areas the artist frequented in turn-of-the-century Stockholm. Designing the form of encounter for Interlude No. 4 and writing it into a script was a process that began with my own acts of spectatorship through spending time with Jansson’s paintings and searching for what stories they might tell. My movements through the gallery from painting to painting, and the process of tracing the history of Jansson’s use of blue, were not only informed by my past experiences of looking, but also my experiences of the sexual world Nocturne depicts, and the ways the colour — a code for the erotic shadows of a nineteenth-century Stockholm cruising zone — appears as a memory of sex in my lived experience as a gay man. It is as though Jansson’s paintings, their hanging across different rooms of the gallery, and even Jansson himself orchestrated a cruisy mode of spectatorship, one to which I eventually gave voice in designing the form of encounter Interlude No. 4 seeks to mediate.

Jansson’s blue becomes a mnemonic device not only for the artist in his discrete temporality, but also for me as a twenty-first century gay subject. This embodied experience of kinship, awakened through the cruisy method of my research, is transmitted in the choreographic cues that Interlude No. 4 offers to the auditor-spectator: asking them to move from one painting to another in search of this particular blue; encouraging a mobile spectatorship that recalls the glances exchanged by cruising men as their paths circle and cross each other; instructing them to stand in front of a painting of naked swimmers encircled in crepuscular blue (The Navy Bathhouse, 1907); and to gaze upon the bodies long enough that an afterimage emerges: a memory which can be brought back to the painting of Nocturne, thus mixing the explicit sensuality of one painting with the implicit sensuality of another. While Interludes No. 4 never uses the word cruising in its discourse, it does speak directly about sexual encounters that took place in the dark, hidden from the

117 http://www.nemerofsky.ca/interludes

public and from the law. An excerpt from an interview with Thielska Galleriet Director and Jansson scholar Patrik Steorn is included in the audio’s narrative, addressing the historical context in which the painting was created:

[Jansson’s blue] holds a promise of a meeting, an encounter, a sensual and a sexual encounter possibly, and it has an allure of that. I think it had that for European urban audiences at large, but especially for homosexuals, because homosexual acts were forbidden by the law in Sweden in this period. So by necessity, the meetings had to happen in the dark, shielded by the dark, in the shadows.\footnote{Patrik Steorn speaking in Interludes No. 4, www.nemerofsky.ca/interludes, 4:21-4:49}

I would argue that cruising is, in fact, methodologically present in Trees Are Fags insofar as the piece offers cues to the listener on how to move, look, and connect with feelings based specifically on cruising’s gestural and affective vocabulary. In this way, the listener is presented with a “method” with which to encounter the world around them. The participatory aspects of the navigational cues in Trees Are Fags, which extend a kind of agency to the auditor-spectator that shapes the outcome of their experience of the artwork, might also be understood as using cruising as a method. Again, I believe cruising is employed here more as a style than as a research method, but in a participatory context, method might be understood as part of the very material of the artwork. The co-creation inherent in participatory aesthetics corresponds directly to Anderson’s assertion that, “[t]o see cruising as a method for art making evokes a … sense of resistance to the projection of a predetermined outcome or product for one’s work in advance, working in an open-ended or non-linear mode, without a delineated narrative.”\footnote{Anderson, 2017.} This seems a defining feature of participatory artworks in general, where participants are asked to be co-creators, and in the case of Trees Are Fags, the method offered to them invokes exactly the open-ended characteristics of cruising Anderson identifies. Anderson’s survey of methods thus becomes important to both my artistic working methods and to the navigational methods my work offers to audiences.

Anderson hints at the importance of not cruising too far from the subject of cruising itself, questioning whether the use of cruising as a method can truly be applied to materials, histories, or practices that are not deemed queer: “engaging with cruising as a method is most effective when it is used to trace and share the history of cruising itself, when it is not a metaphor but a way of thinking queerly about the practice of looking for something that is not immediately visible.”\footnote{ibid.} Might a free application of cruising as method risk being a
form of cultural appropriation, part of a long history of queer sexual and cultural practices being co-opted, re-purposed, and in some cases sanitised to maintain rather than subvert hegemonic social and cultural forms? By using cruising as a method through which to explore the theme of cruising, *Trees Are Fags* and *Interlude No.4* both serve as examples of the kind of application of these methods Anderson favours. However, my interest in the application of cruising methodologically in these works is part of a larger project of exploring to what degree this approach might influence a more general aesthetics of art mediation, and in particular an artistic approach to re-purposing the museum audio guide.

Applying cruising as a method to the libraries of my hosts, filled with queer and sexually charged materials, might seem like an appropriate, obvious and productive artistic approach. But is it appropriate to apply cruising as a method to my work with museum audio guides, which take as their subject matter a variety of individual artworks that address and portray a diversity of themes, queer and otherwise? Does offering a method to acts of art spectatorship inspired by cruising make sense, or does it risk the dispersal of queer’s power warned against by Goldberg? Where, and to whom, does cruising belong? The question, then, becomes one of designating what spaces qualify as cruisy or queer, and whether using cruising as a method in spaces that are not unequivocally queer is useful or even productive. Does an audio guide that uses cruising as an aesthetics and method effectively queer the museum? Is the use of cruising as a method a tuning into the potentially inherent queerness of the museum?

Anderson notes that cruising spaces — and all spaces designated as queer — are by their nature contested spaces, occupied but not ever owned by the queers who inhabit or use them. The parks, piers, and public toilets that have been historically used for anonymous gay sex were not built for this purpose, and their appropriation by queers always remains precarious, contingent, and unofficial. This conception of the instability inherent to queer space invites the museum to also be imagined as part of a greater cartography of desire occupied by queers, rendered queer through its use as a cruising area like any other.

**Cruising the Museum**

How is the experience of the gallery different from the experience of the bar, why should it be so? After all, men cruise men in National Galleries the world over, though institutions probably never have a darkroom or at least one intended for that purpose. And men cruise men in bars. But, of course, they seldom look at art there. So how do you feel in bars and

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122 Anderson, 2019: v.
galleries, how do these feelings intertwine?123

The museum’s rules and codes combine with the lived practices of museum visitors to form what Rees Leahy calls the “body politics of the museum”:

at the same time as the regulatory injunctions of the museum act upon the bodies of its visitors, so too visitors orientate their bodies to construct new relationships with each other and with the institution.124

Gay men have used and claimed museum space throughout history as refuges for their desires, constructing a rich and complex web of “new relationships” to the museum by drawing queerness from, and bringing queerness to, these temples of culture and display. While my investigation is concerned with the aesthetics of cruising, cruising is not the only way a museum might become, temporarily, a queer space. The museum can be a site for other practices of queerness that depend on intersections between queer affect and an exhibiting institution’s individual social, gestural, and architectural norms, providing unique conditions not only for queer erotic exchange, but also for a fragile sensation of protection from the homophobic world.

Speaking about the research involved in creating the Qwearing the Collection Tool for the Van Abbemuseum, Lundin reflects on the importance museum displays might have had on the nineteenth-century homosexual, as a rare and permissive site to encounter, “ethnographic pictures, Roman nude sculptures, Greek vases with naked men figures painted on them, and to be able to indulge in homoerotic feelings in a socially acceptable way.”125 This consideration proposes the museum as a site that has enabled trans-historical contact for generations of gay men, affirming an erotic lineage. For the protagonist of Neil Bartlett’s book Who Was That Man? (1998), the museum also serves as a nexus for both his teenage understanding of the city and his gay sexuality:

Well, first... you know I haven’t always lived in London. I moved here in the early summer of 1981, but I suppose I always assumed that I’d live here. When I was sixteen I used to come up here on the train to go to the museums, to stand and look at the pictures, and always to be looked at, picked up, and then when I was twenty I would come up here to meet someone. It was always the place to be. I used to get an erection just waiting for the train.126

123 Rifkin, 59.
124 Rees Leahy, 164.
125 Lundin, 2018.
126 Bartlett, xix.
In addition to offering erotic affirmation, the museum provides Bartlett’s protagonist a space of temporal liminality: a gay past represented in the historical expressions of male beauty; a gay present in the cruising eyes of fellow spectators; and even a portal into a gay future, serving to connect him to a queer world that makes his eventual move to London possible.

The acts of criss-crossing spectatorship that occur in exhibition spaces create the perfect conditions for cruising eyes to meet. An admiring glance at a fellow gallery visitor can easily be mistaken for an admiring glance at a nearby artwork, an experience gallery visitors of all sexual orientations are likely familiar with, whether intentionally or accidentally. The museum’s emphasis on ambulatory looking lends itself to a blurring between artwork and spectator, one that can be used to the cruiser’s advantage, using acts of art spectatorship as an alibi for furtive, sexy glances. The museum’s relative silence; the dim lighting of a room where paintings are protected from light damage; the slow pace at which gallery visitors move through an exhibition space; reflections of eyes and bodies in the glass of framed artworks, and most importantly the museum’s permission to look provide conditions ideal to both incite and support practices of cruising. And while Rifkin’s invocation of the museum as a cruising space acknowledges their lack of darkrooms, cruising need not always end with a physical encounter in order to be erotically fulfilling. As Mark Turner attests,

> It is important to emphasize … that cruising is a process of walking, gazing, and engaging another (or others), and it is not necessarily about sexual contact… Reciprocal gazes may hold their own pleasures for some, and the dynamics of the gaze may be erotic and stimulating precisely because it does not end in sex. There are many levels of erotic investment and fantasy that exist in the idea of the possible, the potential, but the wholly unrealized encounter.\(^{127}\)

Turner’s characterisation of cruising’s modes of spectatorship makes a case for its application to the art encounter. Encouraging a cruisy way of looking at art can only go so far: I can think of very few instances where an encounter with an artwork might end in sex. I might propose a category of spectatorship to add to Elkins’ list of the different kinds of looking that take place at any given moment in a museum setting: the cruising gaze that emerges in response to the erotic charge of artworks, fellow museum visitors, or other atmospheric elements of the space.

The cruising potential of the art gallery is peripherally imagined in Isaac Julien’s short film *The Attendant* (1993), in which a nineteenth-century painting depicting a scene of colonial violence comes to life in the mind of the gallery’s elderly Black male security

\(^{127}\) Turner, 60-61. Emphasis original.
guard. While the circuitous, intersecting paths of gallery visitors are stylised through a choreography of purposeful criss-crossing walking paths, the gallery as a site for cruising is largely downplayed: the gallery visitors wander the exhibition space seemingly oblivious to each other, their gazes fixed exclusively on the paintings on the gallery walls. The exception is a flirtatious exchange of knowing glances between a leather-clad gallery visitor and the security guard: the latter checks the contents of the former’s bag, where he discovers the accoutrements of S/M and bondage play. Their wordless exchange becomes an incitement to sexual play after the museum has closed, eroticising and subverting the racialised power relations depicted in the painting, triggering a series of phantasmagorical visions and memories experienced by the security guard. Julian’s film explores the erotic potential of the museum less through practices of spectatorship and more through the psychosexuality of the individuals who spend their entire days working in the politically (and sexually) charged atmosphere of spectatorship and display, and the influence and perhaps burden of the colonial painting’s troubled sexuality in the experience of the security guard. As Rinaldo Walcott notes,

Its difficult terrain of representation — and the struggle over representation — restages the afterlife of slavery not on the plantation but in the space of the museum. Bridging the pleasures of S and M that recalls the brutal realities of plantation violence, The Attendant complicates desire, history, pleasure, and pain.\textsuperscript{128}

*The Attendant* acts as a reminder of the gaze of the museum guard as one of the anchoring practices of spectatorship Elkins identifies, and in one scene, figures from a painting come to life as a group of men in leather harnesses gaze out from the frame at the guard pacing nearby. Julian’s film centres the security guard’s subjectivity, a gaze traditionally ignored and marginalised within the hierarchy of museum spectatorship — as Fred Wilson asserts: “guards are on display but invisible”\textsuperscript{129} — as is the internal sexual world of an elderly Black gay man, enabling the centering of another traditionally marginalised subject position.

A representation of the interplay of the glances of cruising and art spectatorship appears in exaggerated yet recognisable form in Jean-Daniel Cadinot’s pornographic film *Musée HOM* (1994). The film builds its narrative around a range of fantasies specific to museum spectatorship: sculptures of nude men come to life; art students sketch Ancient Greek torsos; bored security guards flirt with gallery visitors; oversized penis artefacts arouse visitors and are used as sex toys. Interestingly, not only are women gallery visitors present in the non-hardcore sex scenes of *Musée HOM*, but their desires and arousal are

\textsuperscript{128} Walcott, 2018.

\textsuperscript{129} Wilson, 2015.
also represented, with a scene in which a middle-aged woman reaches behind a sculpture of a male nude to run her hand along its buttocks, looking around furtively to see if anyone is watching. But the emphasis in Musée HOM, and to a limited degree The Attendant, is a playful, camp acknowledgement of the erotic potential of the practices of looking that occur in exhibition spaces. The qualities that make cruising in an art gallery unique — the furtive uncertainty of sexual glances in public space; the slow, wandering gait of the gallery visitor; the moments of friction between intersecting gazes with divergent purposes — are exaggerated and accelerated, instrumentalised to serve as a prelude to fantastical, far-fetched sex scenes rather than be the focus of inquiry.

Homage (2015), a film installation by Dutch artist Arnould Holleman, restages the scenes of gallery cruising that appear in Cadinot’s Musée HOM, which the artist filmed in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem. The film is Holleman’s second reworking of Cadinot’s film, the first being an editing project from 1997 in which the artist adapted the original film material by cutting out all of Cadinot’s sex scenes, leaving an extended scene of art gallery cruising. Holleman explains that he produced Homage in response to Cadinot’s opposition to the re-use of his material in the 1997 project. Although initially a compromise born from this copyright impasse, re-envisioning the project as a remake rather than a remix allowed Holleman to more sensitively explore the complex interplay of simultaneous acts of cruising and art spectatorship, playing with the tempo of his actors’ performances, and reducing the exaggerated quality present in the glances of the original Cadinot film. Sex never erupts on screen between Holleman’s performers; instead a sustained, undulating erotic charge is able to develop, drawing the audience into the affective intersections of art spectatorship and cruising. No other story is told in Homage, and this mode of spectatorship does not serve a greater narrative: it alone is the subject of the film. Holleman thus captures a quality of erotic imminence while also exploring the sexual charge of cruising-that-does-not-end-in-sex that Turner describes.

CRUISING ACROSS TIME

Not only do Musée HOM and Homage’s stagings of the museum as a kind of cruising paradise assert the gallery as a space of queer erotic potential, but by re-enacting the performances of Cadinot’s 1994 cast, Holleman’s film activates the overlapping

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\[\text{130} \text{http://www.arnoudholleman.nl/works/93/homage/}\]

\[\text{131} \text{Holleman picks up on the aforementioned sexual subjectivity of women in Cadinot’s Musée HOM, reimagining the encounter depicted in the original as one between a female museum visitor and a sculpture of a nude woman. In this way, Holleman asserts lesbian sexual subjectivity into the erotics of museum spectatorship.}\]
Video still from Arnoud Holleman’s *Homage*, 2015.
temporalities at work in all cruising zones. Holleman’s actors engage in what Carolyn Dinshaw calls “affective connection” with the Cadinot’s actors, “touch[ing] across time” by re-embodying their gestures and perhaps even their feelings of desire.\textsuperscript{132} Beyond the unique situation of trans-historical potential produced for the actors, \textit{Homage} offers a way of asserting art gallery cruising as a queer temporal practice more generally. Cruising is an active interaction with time, a relational mode that not only builds temporary community with the other bodies who congregate at any given moment, but also a kind of engagement with a temporally fragile, unstable zone through which the bodies and actions of past cruisers can be accessed, connecting cruising bodies with the legacies of decades, even centuries, of sexual communing. Indeed, many sites of cruising have hosted gay male sex for generations. Anderson poetically describes the exchange between bodies past and present that took place at New York City’s Chelsea piers as:

\begin{quote}
\ldots a cross-temporal collaboration with its former inhabitants made possible by the cumulative architectural memory of the piers and warehouses… alternative times were accessible through cruising, through physical contact, however fleeting, with the phantasmic or spectral body of another… an entirely phantasmic co-mingling of poets and artists, dead and alive, outside of time or dead to it. Multiple temporalities coexisted there idiorrhythmically, living together but apart…\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

For Anderson, it is the space that houses acts of cruising — rather than the choreography of cruising itself — that serves as a portal for affective connection. The museum is already a site where multiple temporalities co-exist and are on display, making it an evocative home for the temporal overlaps possible through cruising.\textsuperscript{134}

The queer temporal modes of cruising and the notion of alternative times being accessible through the act of cruising are invoked in my epistolary action, \textit{A Letter to the Man Who} (2018). Presented in London as a corollary event to Naked Boys Reading at LUX, the action took the form of an invitation to the audience to meet me in the cruising area of nearby Hampstead Heath for an intimate letter exchange. A screen printed A4 poster was exhibited throughout the LUX building and its surrounding neighbourhood with the following explanation/invitation:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} Dinshaw, 1999: 21.

\textsuperscript{133} Anderson, 2015: 143.

\textsuperscript{134} An amusing anecdote that reflects the constantly shifting architectures of cruising, and that identifies the museum as one such potential site: when a friend posted an article from dazeddigital.com on Facebook with the title \textit{Olafur Eliasson will install a tunnel of dense fog at Tate Modern} (February 2, 2019), in reference to Eliasson’s work \textit{Your Blind Passenger} (2010), another friend commented, “I was wondering where the next new cottage was gonna pop-up;” cottage being a British English euphemism for a public lavatory used for anonymous gay sex.
The letter is written to the man who first taught me to experience sexual pleasure twenty-five years ago. It tells of how memories of our affair shape who I am today: sexually, amorous, artistically. I want to send it to him, but don’t know where to find him. His whereabouts elude me. I would like to give the letter to you instead. I shall wait for you in Hampstead Heath on Friday, May 11, behind Jack Straw’s Castle, shortly before midnight. If our cruising paths bring us together, I will hand you the letter.

The action in Hampstead Heath revisited a similar action performed in Riga in 2015, where the location of encounter was set in a park behind the Rainis Monument, which once served as the city’s cruising area but is no longer actively in use. The impulse in the Riga iteration was therefore to also resuscitate the queer history of a space, a re-enactment of the gestures of cruising and queer sociality from another time, thus re-enchanting, or re-queering the space. Notably, the screen printed poster for this iteration was A1, taking up more visual space that its London equivalent, and in addition to being posted all over Riga’s downtown, was mounted on a gallery wall as part of an exhibition at kim? Contemporary Art Center that lasted two months. The invitation to join me in the park’s re-queering therefore entered the affective environment of the exhibition space, intervening into the experience of spectatorship of exhibition visitors. How its presence in the exhibition acted upon visitors was never documented, but my hope is that it prompted a number of potential thoughts and feelings: memories of cruising the Rainis Monument; imagining participating in my cruising action; or, if the action was in the past by the time the poster was encountered, imagining what had taken place, wondering what cruising is, et cetera. In this way, regardless of whether visitors joined in the action I proposed, the poster served as an affective prompt that transported them in time and space, perhaps even contributing to, or enhancing a cruisy atmosphere already at work in the gallery.

The posters for the London staging of A Letter to the Man Who were not exhibited in a gallery space, and therefore did not act upon the experiences of museum visitors or invoke or augment the queer potential of a museum. But because it was part of a queer art event at which I was in attendance, participants of the action could potentially identify me in Hampstead Heath. One participant was therefore able to find my contact details afterwards and write to me about his experience of the action:

135 “Slash: in between the normative and the fantasy”, kim? Contemporary Art Center, June 19 to August 26, 2015, curated by Kaspars Vanags.

136 In 2019, I received a message from a gallery staff member telling me that some of the posters still remain around the city four years later, including one on the outside wall of a gay-friendly café and social space. The poster therefore might still be doing the work of prompting feelings and curiosities about different queer times and places.
What happened from the moment you handed me the letter was really interesting... for some reason I had assumed that you would have sex with the person you would meet there, so there was this funny new turn of events... I wasn’t a stranger you had just met but [someone who] knew the whole background story. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoyed the sex we had ;), but it was no longer just us having sex but in my head the third person, the guy you had met back then and written the letter to, was there with us, or we had sex to honour the encounter the two of you had. I guess it was some form of ritual for me, that I enjoyed.

The participant’s experience of the action speaks directly to the embodied, “cross-temporal collaboration” that Anderson asserts is activated through cruising; accessing alternative times not only through the cumulative memory of Hampstead Heath, but also by making physical contact with the spectre of my past lover resuscitated through the art action. *Trees Are Fags* makes a similar assertion, invoking the “cumulative architectural memory” of trees while imagining and tracing connections between trees and other architectures of desire:

Do you remember when trees were the only refuge for our desires? Trees have provided the architecture for gay sex since time immemorial, beyond the reach of memory or record. They have cast shadows, created walls and shelters, formed chambers among their labyrinthine branches for lovers to climb, to conceal, to reveal. Long before geo-positioning software, before dating sites and personal ads, before gay bars and saunas and dark rooms, before truck stops and basement parties and public toilets, before penal colonies and prison cells, scriptoria and stables and wine cellars, before bedrooms, before beds. Before all of that, there were trees. We may not remember those times and places, but the trees do, and they tell each other about the vast scope of erotic activity they have witnessed and sheltered and participated in over the years. They have seen it all.

*Trees Are Fags* invokes queer temporalities by imparting to trees a certain ancestral power, refocusing the auditor-spectator’s optic on their role in queer history, and the corporeal links between “human fags and arboreal fags”.

The role of the botanical world in imagining queer history’s fragile temporalities was also a device in *The Five Ages*, a piece commissioned for the *Odarodle* exhibition at the Schwules Museum, Berlin, in 2017.\(^1\) I produced a ceramic vase with five openings, each one designed to hold an individual flower. The five flowers were selected to symbolise five distinct moments in the history of *El Dorado*, referencing its incarnation as legendary Weimar-era Berlin cabaret, a 1980s exhibition on the history of German gay and lesbian life at the Berlin Museum, and its general application as a site of utopian longing. A thirty-minute audio tour was provided as a guide to the artwork, which was played over speakers

as accompaniment to a live performance, recounting the history of the so-called “five ages” while I prepared and arranged the flowers in the vase. The vase provided each flower with its own distinct opening, while arranging the flowers to interact contrapuntally, creating a bouquet of colliding and overlapping temporalities. *The Five Ages* is my first artist work whose queerness stems not only from its content, but its aesthetic and methodological approach, actively experimenting with what might constitute a queer historiography. On a material level, the piece embodies a queer kind of definitional indeterminacy, for it is at once artwork and art mediation: a vase, a flower arrangement, an audio tour, and a flower-arranging performance, making it difficult to describe in clear and accurate terms.

The work of *The Five Ages*’ historiography is undertaken through the telling of a confusing, serpentine web of disparate and tangential stories, tracing histories by connecting flowers to other questionable artefacts: a postcard, a lesbian community magazine from the 1980s, gossip about sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, a painting by Otto Dix, and a fictional story about a queer botany collective that is said to have produced designer drugs in a future ten years hence:

In the flickering 2020s, a queer botany collective bred a new, hybrid *passiflora* in their laboratory in Berlin-Lichtenberg. The collective’s focus was the production and sale of cannabis and other botanical hallucinogens, responding to the evolving tastes of the city’s party and chemsex scenes. They wanted to make a botanical substance that simultaneously inspired euphoric hallucination while quieting anxiety and panic, so were splicing *passiflora* with various floral stimulants. It was their experiment crossing the *passiflora* with the opium poppy, the *Papaver somniferum*, that was the most successful.

The hybrid flower that this cross-breeding experiment produced — the so-called *Passiflora montinémus*, which when taken as a drug produced, “floro-genital transformations” — is presented to the audience and exhibited in the vase as a fantastical flower produced by disassembling and re-assembling elements from a variety of artificial flowers.

The narration of the audio tours mixes the language of art history with the language of botany, and periodically changes language from English to German without providing translation. Its pedagogical tone slips between the recounting of “facts” and poetic and personal reflections, not in response to the absence of an artwork for mediation, as was the case in *The Muranów Lily*, but in order to actively queer its approach to historiography.

While *The Five Ages* did not directly engage or invoke the interpenetrating sight lines of cruising and art spectatorship, cruising is invoked in its meandering approach to historiography, which I hope encouraged an unstable mapping of time and temporalities for audience members. In addition to setting one of the five ages in the near future, and thus
contributing to a utopian imagining of queer futures, The Five Ages asks about the role of flowers as witnesses and agents of history, in a way not unsimilar to the trees in Trees Are Fags:

Can history be told through flowers? Are flowers participants in history? We may instrumentalise flowers for our own purposes, for good or for evil, but ultimately, flowers don’t care about the progress of the human story. With lifetimes so terribly brief, flowers have better things to concern themselves with than the dramas and caprices of humans. If they witness our histories at all, they do so with indifference and non-attachment. What happens to a flower’s memories when it fades and withers? Are there ferns in Berlin who carry epigenetic memories of the fires that burned their ancestors at the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in 1933? Do the Weißbierstube vases remember the names of all the flowers they held within their bodies week after week?138

The Schwules Museum is already a museum devoted to LGBTQ+ history and art — one of only two museums worldwide designated as “unstraight” by the Unstraight Museum project139 — so the critical impact that The Five Ages’ queer approach to history had on the culture of the museum is different from queering interventions made into other exhibiting institutions. But the piece serves as an important evolutionary stage in my artistic research, embodying a number of concerns about how far I believe queering might be taken, how to aestheticise a queer disruption of traditional approaches to historiography, and how artworks, bodies, and art mediation can contribute to the assertion of the museum and the language of museum mediation as sites of potential queer temporal instability, as a portal into temporal modes beyond linear measurements or experiences of history.

Serendipitously, a parallel performance by Daniel Bernhard Cremer grounded in the aesthetics of cruising took place in the exhibition space during one of my performances of The Five Ages. Reconnective Cruising™ (2018) presented Cremer — also known as “Gaiaboî” — as a live, roaming exhibit whose gestural vocabulary aimed to, “demonstrate cultural techniques of ‘gay cruising’ whilst offering the possibility of intimate encounter to any and all visitors of Odarodle.”140 The piece actively engaged the diverse lines of spectatorship and interpersonal relations that take place in an exhibition setting, emphasising the relationships between cruising and the kind of museum spectatorship specifically enabled by ethnographic displays:

138 Translations: Institut for Sexualwissenschaft = The Institute for Sexual Science; Weißbierstube = wheat beer brasserie.

139 See Unstraight Museum’s video about the lack of institutions worldwide devoted to queer history on their website at: www.unstraightmuseum.org.

By emphasising the set of fictions that maintain the ethnological gaze and using the dynamics of “seeing and being seen” playfully, GaiaBoi will not only reproduce “gay cruising” as a sexually ambiguous performance, but also attempt to redefine what intimate exchange between strangers can be and mean …

While I believe Cremer was scheduled to temporarily suspend his action while *The Five Ages* was being performed, the dénouement of his performance overlapped with the beginning of mine. It is difficult to assess or articulate how *Reconnective Cruising™* intervened in the sexual charge of *The Five Ages*, although I remember the erotic affect produced by a chance moment during my performance when I witnessed Cremer edging towards kissing a visitor across the gallery in the corner of my eye. The two stood breathing into each others’ mouths but not touching while I arranged flowers in the vase.

**Cruising and Sublimation**

Cruising’s erotic embodiment and potential for touches across time are not the only characteristics of relevance to my art practice and the evolving aesthetics and methods of my work with the museum audio guide. I am interested in the extent to which cruising is also part of the history of queer abjection, a mode of sexual relations queers were at different times in history obligated to enact because no other options for intimacy or sexual expression were possible. To apply cruising as an artistic method while omitting the feelings of shame, disgust, fear, and the pain of marginalisation inherent to its queerness risks being a revisionist denial of the entire spectrum of cruising’s affect. And while my impulse to use cruising as an affective mode for artistic research is based on the “erotic scenes, utopias, [and] memories of touch” that constitute the “positive affect” Elisabeth Freeman favours as part of the project of queer erotohistoriography, I recognise that this repertoire of feelings is only part of cruising’s story.

I make this assertion in alignment with Heather Love’s thesis in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, which concerns itself with the importance of negative feelings in queer experience. Love places focus on literary texts and figures from the pre-liberation past marked by queer suffering, in an attempt to trace a tradition of queer experience and representation which she calls “feeling backward”. She pays close attention to feelings such as “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, ressentiment, passivity, escapism, self-

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141 ibid.

142 Freeman, 66.
hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism and loneliness” in her investigation of a “history of damage” that contemporary queer politics might rather distance itself from and ignore. I am particularly interested in withdrawal as one of the backwards feelings Love identifies within her lexicon of negative queer affects. Withdrawal is both a feeling that can be experienced internally, and an action that can be made physically and relationally. I am interested in envisioning the potential of acts of withdrawal as a contribution to the evolving aesthetics of my practice, and a way for withdrawal’s queerness to be mobilised.

While Love is interested in allowing these backwards feelings to remain indifferent or at least impassive to the progress of history, like Benjamin’s “angel of history … [who] refuses to turn the losses of the past … into the material of progress,” I am interested in pursuing the possibility of an aesthetics of sublimation and withdrawal as part of a continuum of queer strategies of resistance, subversion, defiance, and opacity that might ultimately contribute to a future more viable for queer existence. Understanding retreat as agential corresponds to critical writing on the role of opacity in Nicolas de Villier’s critical re-reading of closetedness. Responding to the impulse to accuse apparently closeted queers of being complicit with “a homophobic logic of erasure and absence”, de Villiers asks if, in fact, the opposite might be the case: “what if we were to take seriously these ‘intolerable’ and ‘suspect’ behaviours and consider them distinctly queer strategies, strategies of opacity, not necessarily of silence or invisibility?” De Villiers looks to cultural figures — Barthes, Foucault, Warhol — whose ambiguous public personae refused the transparency required for easy classification within binaries of gay/straight or closeted/out, refusals he conceptualises as modes of opacity. Through de Villiers’ critique — which seems noticeably aligned with Glissant’s, these individuals were,

…responding critically to the discursive formation of the closet, and all found ways to vitalize its critique through creative self-enactments by which they relocated themselves against the massively overdetermined rhetoric of truth, of secrets revealed, of bringing into the light, of clarity, of transparency, hence of confessional self-inspection, of self-rectification.

In their introduction to What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?, David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz reflect on humility as a potentially queer epistemological practice, a relational mode that respects the opacity of others: “An ethical attachment to others insists that we cannot be the center of the world or act unilaterally on

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143 Love, 4.
144 ibid, 148.
145 deVilliers, 3.
146 ibid, 4.
its behalf. It demands a world in which we must sometimes relinquish not only our epistemological but also our political certitude.”147 Through this lens, mobilising withdrawal as a queer practice might be an action less of centering queerness, but rather of using queerness as a tool to dismantle centering as a practice altogether: a practice of de-centering of direct relevance to queering initiatives in museums, for example. Moving from individual acts of queer opacity to the collective, the proposal of queer epistemologies of humility also contributes to a vision of relational modes not based on asserting queer subjectivity into space, but rather ones that employ queer experience as a tool to trouble the standards by which subjectivity is expected to be asserted.

Leo Bersani bridges the distance between a more general consideration of the queerness of withdrawal and sublimation and the specific relational modes of gay sex cruising in his essay Sociability and Cruising. Bersani describes a lessening of the self that cruising necessitates:

...in cruising — at least in ideal cruising — we leave our selves behind. The gay bathhouse is especially favourable to ideal cruising because, in addition to the opportunity anonymous sex offers its practitioners of shedding much of the personality that individuates them psychologically, the common bathhouse uniform — a towel — communicates very little (although there are of course ways of wearing a towel...) about our social personality (economic privilege, class status, taste, and so on.).”148

Bersani conceives of the anonymous sexual encounter of cruising not as intersubjective, but rather as a potential abandonment of subjectivity all together — one’s own and that of the bodies into whose contact one comes. It is this withdrawal from a subjective position wherein the power of cruising sex lies: “Otherness, unlocatable within differences that can be known and enumerated, is made concrete in the eroticized touching of a body without attributes ... intersubjectivity as a category of exchange is erased.”149

This description of an encounter dependent on self-subtraction seems to me a kind of sexuality of interpenetrating opacities, echoing the “weave” Glissant envisions, in his suggestion that, “opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these

147 Eng et al., 15. The authors’ reflections on humility are made in response to the presence of the word ‘humility’ in the discourses of fellow queer theorists, primarily Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler.
148 Bersani, 21.
149 ibid. There is an echo of the flâneur in the psychosociability Bersani describes, whose relationship to the crowd is one of a compulsion to “be not only in the crowd but also of the crowd” (Turner, 29).
truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components”. For Bersani, the texture that results from permitting and participating in the opaque relations of cruising is not only a non-hierarchical poetics of relation, but also a potent sexual mode for the encounter of another body:

[a] nameless, identity-free contact — contact with an object I do not know and certainly do not love, and which has, unknowingly, agreed to be momentarily the incarnated shock of otherness. In that moment we relate to that which transcends all relations.

The respectful distance Glissant imagines in opaque relations — a space of not trying to understand or classify the Other in one’s own terms, allowing the Other’s inscrutability — is here configured as the antithesis of relationship, and in turn becomes the very material of desire. As Bersani asserts, “in cruising I am proposing another sexual model — one in which a deliberate avoidance of relationships might be crucial in initiating, or at least clearing the ground for, a new relationality.” Not only does the form of withdrawal and sublimation Bersani describes resolutely arise from queer experience, but it is a sublimation that is described as joyful, sexy, and productive in creating and maintaining a new world. Bersani describes this as, “an ecological ethics, one in which the subjective, having willed its own lessness, can live less invasively in the world.”

The invocation of an ecological ethics enabled by cruising’s sociality points to the reparative potential of cruising as a relational mode, and resonates with a question posed by Foucault in “Friendship As A Way of Life”, his 1981 interview with the editors of the French periodical Gai Pied:

Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, “What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated? The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.

Foucault discourages an emphasis on extending gay identity into space, instead proposing a homosexuality that is used as a method, a tool through which to envision a new, more expansive relationality.

150 Glissant, 192. Emphasis added.
151 Bersani, 21.
152 ibid, 20.
153 ibid, 22.
My developing interest in addressing consent as it relates to acts of spectatorship is one of the ways a queer aesthetics of withdrawal has appeared in my artistic work. This began in Interlude No. 5 (2016), another piece for the audio guide of Thielska Galleriet, which mediates an encounter with a bronze bust of an African man, sculpted by the Swedish artist Johannes Collin in 1919 entitled Neger, which is translated into English as Negro. Interlude No. 5 unpacks the problematics of the artwork’s title by questioning the relationship Collin might have had with his model, reflecting on the fact that he titled all his other sculptures with first names like Billy from Lund or Marie-Claire, but named this sculpture with a racialised category. The piece shares what is known about other Swedish artists of the era who depicted people of colour, and ponders the influence the Swedish eugenics movement and travelling ethnographic exhibitions of the time might have had on Collin’s representation of his African subject, positing that the bust may not be the result of contact with a live model at all, but rather an expression of Collin’s personal fantasy of African masculinity, asking, “...is it possible Collin conjured this man from his imagination? Is this representation true to life, or true to myth? The myth called Neger.” The piece ends with listeners being instructed to kneel in front of the sculpture, to relinquish spectatorship, and to extend subjectivity to the artwork, turning themselves into objects:

Now stop being a spectator. Stop observing and surveying and considering this image. Stop asking questions about Collin’s intentions, about who this man was, about what he should be called. Instead, offer yourself over to his gaze. Let him be the subject now. Become the object. He might not look back at you. With his pupilless eyes, drained of subjectivity, he might choose to look past you, to look through you. To look beyond your questions and musings and fears. Do not try to make sense of his far-away inscrutable gaze. It is not up to you, it is up to him. Sit in the fire of these questions. Sit in the opacity of his gaze. Offer yourself to him.

I continued my experimentation with the aesthetics of withdrawal in Trees Are Fags, whose final scene — and narrative climax — asks the listener to find a way to negotiate consent for their sexual encounter with a tree:

Now that you have found your arboreal lover, how do you approach it? How do you establish consent for the sexual contact you seek? It might seem absurd to ask a tree for permission to touch it; we were made to touch trees, to live among them in profound, connected relationship. But given how deeply an unnatural separation between us and trees has been cleaved in this chapter of the Anthropocene; given the entitlement with which humans touch, grasp, claim and use whatever we want; given how the language between us is broken; perhaps a gesture of respect, a gesture of repair, a request for consent might be in order. Perhaps there is something we might
learn from asking for a tree’s consent; to not assume our touch is welcome. We could try it, and see what happens when we ask the tree: “May I?”

Despite the didactic, directive nature of the argument made by *Trees Are Fags*, the auditor-spectator is invited to envision their own way of withdrawing from a position of entitlement and of negotiating consent. The final instruction the auditor-spectator hears maintains the individualised, open-ended approach to the choreographic cues given throughout the piece, and the agency they aim to extend to the participant:

Now find a way — with words, with breath, a gesture, with carefully directed energy, with the transmission of a thought — find a way to ask. Then wait, wait for as long as it takes.

Like *Interludes No. 5*, my own authorship as artist and narrator is suspended at the end of *Trees Are Fags*, leaving an opening for the story to continue between the auditor-spectator and the artwork/tree they are encountering. Waiting, immobile yet imminent, is the final gestural and affective mode the auditor-spectator is left to experience.

In these ways, withdrawal, sublimation, and self-subtraction are part of the affective and gestural vocabulary of cruising that have emerged aesthetically in my artistic research, and contribute to the navigational “method” offered to auditor-spectators. Bersani’s image of cruising’s lessening of the self seems an important addition to the repertoire of what cruising as a method might involve, and helps me to frame my role as artist and researcher as I consider the participatory aspects of my practice and of the museum audio guide. This quality, alongside Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz’s discussion of queer practices of humility, inform my experiments with a loosening of authorial control I examine in the following chapter.
The Aura of Participation
POLYPHONY

The problems that surfaced in *The World Will Always Welcome Lovers*, my test audio guide of Gert and Mattias’s library, were mostly concerned with questions of the directive nature of its script, and the absence of non-narrated opportunities for the auditor-spectator to make their own meaning of the space and the material they encountered. This prompted artistic research into a more participatory aesthetic to my audio guide scripts, evolving my artistic goals from the diversification of didactic material to a diversification of the form of encounter offered to the auditor-spectator.

Developing scores became one strategy I explored for dispersing authorial control and augmenting individual meaning-making possibilities. The body of artistic research that emerged from this experimentation approached the use of scores with a variety of aims and questions, including offering open-ended choreographic cues; encouraging embodied, affective encounters with exhibition spaces and display objects; and proposing and activating polyphony as an aesthetic and epistemological approach. While instructions and scores already appear in less explicit ways in some of my earlier artworks, this research specifically aimed to design instructions for participants that were less strict, open to individual interpretation, following a tradition of open scores from dance and music history — Laura Hicks, Cornelius Cardew, and Pauline Oliveros for example — that do not predetermine their outcome. My experiments took inspiration from this tradition while staying anchored in the kinds of actions and interactions specific to museums and libraries, keeping acts of spectatorship, reading, and writing the focus of the instructed activity.

My initial impulse to counter the authoritative, disciplining grasp of the museum audio guide was to diversify the material that it transmits, multiplying the voices that speak. I see this multiplication of voices operating both on the level of content — by multiplying the readings and interpretations of art and history — but also on a sonic level, using a multiplicity of human voices to narrate the stories and mediate encounters. My hope was that this latter approach would de-centre any one vocal signature by including a range of characters, timbres, and accents. Diversifications of who the voice of museum authority might be and what it might say are intersectional practices that employ

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155 For example, *À Fleurer* (Saskatoon, 2016; Athens, 2017), a floral and epistolary piece produced at the beginning of my doctoral research. The project involved a weekly action in which I shared personal letters with a local florist, who responded by interpreting the contents of the writing in flowers. In addition to the instruction to the florist to interpret my letters, the epistolary material served as ‘scores’ with affective cues to prompt the florist’s artistic decisions. www.nemerofsky.ca/fleur
polyphony as a technique while simultaneously proposing polyphony as a model for experiencing the images and information museums seek to mediate. My belief in the effectiveness of this approach is emboldened by Rokus de Groot’s assertion that, “[i]f any musical texture had to be chosen as the epitome of defying a single authoritative listening, polyphony would be a convincing candidate.”

The interplay of multiple voices that characterises polyphony is attractive to me as both a sonic texture and as a kind of empathic, pluralistic social and political ideal, and I have produced a large body of media artwork over the course of my career in which polyphony is present in one way or another, either musically or conceptually. I see polyphony as having myriad relevances to my artistic research, specifically with museum audio guides: as an aesthetic grounded in difference and pluralism; as a method of empowering individual participation; and as an organising principle that imagines individual acts of art spectatorship as contributing to an ensemble, creating an “ecology” of spectatorships and interpretations.

In a musicological context, polyphony is defined as “the simultaneous unfolding of two or more different voices, each with its own identity, and at the same time each with a “responsibility” to the other and for the ensemble of voices.” Polyphony is one of four fundamental compositional textures — the others being monophony, homophony and heterophony — that indicate how rhythmic, melodic and harmonic elements are combined in music.

My experience of listening to polyphonic music has changed over the course of my doctoral research, and I have started to imagine my acts of audition as a kind of “aural cruising” that responds to its musical structures: a multiplicity of voices each on its own meandering path, aware of each other, interdependent, whose beauty is formed of difference. I cannot deny that my homosexual ear is especially drawn to polyphonic compositions sung by exclusively male voices; I delight in the erotic charge produced by the frottage of male voices sliding over and across each other, dancing and flirting, joining and separating in a vibrating choreography of open, singing mouths. Even the notation of a polyphonic composition seems to document voices on their individual, wandering paths, meeting and overlapping and deviating like the traces of desire left by the perambulations of cruisers. It is through this eroticised, queer listening to “same-sex” polyphonic music that polyphony’s resemblances to cruising are revealed, prompting a fantasy in which polyphony and cruising share attributes and somehow belong to each other. I am not

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156 de Groot, 230.


158 de Groot, 221. Emphasis original.
A passage from the notation of *Missa sobre las voces*, Cristóbal de Morales, 1544.
inclined to theorise polyphony’s potential queerness — especially given the vast amounts of compositions in the Western musical canon that employ polyphony — but for the purposes of my research, I am curious about the affective experience of listening, and how feelings prompted by polyphonic sound — erotic, queer, or otherwise — might serve the greater project of diversifying and reimagining the voice of the audio guide, and its influence on the meaning-making processes of auditor-spectators.

Polyphony is not tethered to its musicological origins, nor even its etymological roots from the Greek *polyphonia*, which translates as “a variety of sounds”, for it is used to describe textures and aesthetics beyond the sonic domain. It appears in literary analysis to denote narratives told through the voices of multiple characters,159 and can be applied to a diversity of artistic and relational forms that span a spectrum of imaginings of what a “multiplicity of voices” might represent. Edward Said uses polyphony as an image through which to ponder his own conception of self:

> I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one’s life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing.160

Describing the polyphonic character of artist Slava Mogutin’s multimedia installations, Octavio Zaya traces a broad and far-reaching definition of what polyphony might signify, with language that echoes Slager’s proposal of a methodological paradigm to artistic research that embodies “an awareness of divergence without a hierarchy of discourses”161:

This concept of polyphony points out to the coexistence of a plurality of voices — whether in a text or in an extra-textual situation — that do not fuse into a single consciousness but exist on different registers, generating a dynamism among themselves. It is not heterogeneity as such but some other angle at which voices are juxtaposed and counter-posed so as to generate something beyond themselves. Each one of these voices exists in dialogue with other voices, but not in some kind of “tolerance” — allowing another voice to add itself to a preexisting entity — but a

159 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel* (1981)

160 Said, 295. Said’s reflection recalls a similar statement made by Glissant, in which he acknowledges and embraces those parts of himself that remain opaque: “As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence; I shall also pay attention to not mixing it into any amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it. Human behaviours are fractal in nature. If we become conscious of this and give up trying to reduce such behaviours to the obviousness of a transparency, this will, perhaps, contribute to lightening their load, as every individual begins not grasping his own motivations, taking himself apart in this manner.” (Glissant, 193). The resonances between Said and Glissant’s statements hint at the shared generative potential of polyphony and opacity, prompting questions as to whether polyphony might be an aesthetic through which to imagine and engage Glissant’s tapestry of opacities.

161 Slager, 53.
polyphony of reciprocal, celebratory, and displacing voices, an exchange that leaves all
the parties or interlocutors changed. It is not pluralism either, but a multiplication of
mutually enriching discourses… It is a constantly shifting cultural field for the
contradictions that constitute the subject as the site of conflicting and competing
discourses, where the realities of class, gender, and nationality get more complex.\footnote{Zaya, 9.}

Zaya asserts that the polyphonic effect of Mogutin’s work is the result of a simultaneous
exhibition of “photography and video, drawings and murals, graffiti and stencils, sculptures
and found objects”, however the multiplicity of voices that constitutes polyphony need not
be so explicitly elaborated. This texture can be embodied by spaces, situations and actions
that do not make polyphony their reason for being. Mathieu Copeland proposes the
exhibition as itself inherently polyphonic, or at least charged with polyphonic potential,
and the work of curating one of choreography:

A proposition for a definition: Exhibition. /ˌek.sɪˈbɪʃən/, noun—a material, textual,
textural, visceral, visual…choreographed polyphony.\footnote{Copeland, 19.}

One of the aims of my research into reimagining the audio guide is to elucidate this
polyphonic character by being polyphonic in style and content, and by encouraging a
polyphony of approaches to reading, encountering and making meaning. But does the
active production or “choreography” of polyphony serve or diminish the inherent
polyphony of a space, situation or artwork? My artistic goal is for polyphony to appear as
more than merely an aesthetic orientation in my work, but for it to be used as a strategy to
reveal the multiply interpretable, polyphonic character of many things — most notably the
libraries of my hosts.

**YOU, DEAR DOCTOR, ARE MY ONLY RESCUE!**

My curiosity about the potential of polyphonic structures applies to both the telling of
narratives from multiple perspectives and the production of multiple, interpenetrating
sounds. The simultaneous application of these two approaches of polyphony was core to
the conceptual and aesthetic design of *You, Dear Doctor, Are My Only Rescue!*, a
performance installation that represents the first artistic work where my interest in

\footnote{Zaya, 9.}
\footnote{Copeland, 19.}
polyphony and my research into the use of scores intersect. Letters written to sexologists in socialist Poland — collected by Warsaw-based anthropologist and historian Agnieszka Kościńska — served as source material for an epistolary action in which an ensemble of performers reviewed, transcribed, and read aloud passages in Polish and in English translation. The letters in Kościńska’s collection span a period of over thirty years, from the late 1950s to the first years of the 1990s, and document the shifting, overlapping, and dissonant personal attitudes and lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and “questioning” individuals in Poland struggling to define their identities, build communities, and take control of their destinies.

The ensemble of performers, made up of a mix of Polish and English speakers, sat at an arrangement of tables with writing paper, writing utensils, decorated envelopes, and five folded A4 pages, each one with a text taken from letters in Kościńska’s collection. The audience was invited to place themselves anywhere in the space: seated on stools, pillows or on the floor, standing, or moving around. Performers were instructed to unfold one letter at a time and transcribe its entire contents onto their writing paper, as though they themselves were the authors. Once their act of transcription was complete, they were instructed to read the letter aloud, fold and seal it in an envelope, and re-circulate it among members of the audience however they wished: handing it directly to someone; placing it on a stool; or some other gesture that “sends” the letter on a path beyond the body of the performer.

It was often the case that a performer would be ready to read their transcribed letter while another performer was already in the process of reading one of their own. Performers were instructed to not let the voice of another performer prevent them from proceeding with their own vocalisation. Rather, they were encouraged to read with awareness of the other voice(s), to not compete or overpower the voices of their fellow performers. This instruction invoked the “responsibility” de Groot asserts is at the core of polyphony’s nature, in turn consciously contributing to the “dynamism” generated by the juxtaposing registers of voices and textual material Zaya describes.

The dramaturgy and artistic motivations of You, Dear Doctor may differ from those that propel my investigation into the museum audio guide, but the use of both narrative and sonic polyphony in the mediation of historical material — in this case epistolary material rather than an exhibited artwork — anchored the project’s aims and aesthetics. Audience members who understood both Polish and English expressed to me afterwards

164 You, Dear Doctor, Are My Only Rescue! was first staged at Basic Mountain, Edinburgh on August 8, 2017. Subsequent iterations were presented during the course of my doctoral study in Exeter, Warsaw, Sheffield (2018), and Brno (2019), mostly as part of the cultural programming of academic conferences. The Brno iteration also involved Czech translations of the Polish letters, which contributed to the multilingual polyphony of the piece.
that the polyphonic character of *You, Dear Doctor* was magnified in the chance moments when a Polish letter and an English letter were read aloud at the same time, triggering unique affective responses. After one staging of *You, Dear Doctor*, audience members informed me that there had even been a moment when the readings of a one particular letter in its Polish original had overlapped with the simultaneous reading of its English translation, the effect of which they found strange and powerful.

The sonic — and in this case, “gestural” — polyphony of *You, Dear Doctor* was not composed, but rather achieved in part by empowering each performer to enact the assigned choreography of transcribing, reciting, and recirculating the material at their own pace. Each letter had a different word count ranging from fifty to one thousand words, which orchestrated a naturally overlapping, unsynchronised quality to the actions and vocalisations. Nevertheless, each performer enacted the score in their own time, and while the performers did not generate the epistolary material themselves, nor choose the letters they were assigned to transcribe, they were allowed to skip letters that they did not wish to work with. In this way, *You, Dear Doctor* is based on an open score structure, empowering each performer with choices as to how they interpret and enact the instructions and engage with the epistolary material.

Furthermore, while I conceived of the conditions and was responsible for all the aesthetic and scenographic decisions, the use of a score that performers could interpret and enact at their own pace shifted the locus of power from me as an artist to a more dispersed, almost participatory format. This gentle relinquishing of artistic control offered an insight into how my attraction to the aesthetics of polyphony might expand my methods for designing audio guide encounters more materially aligned with my critique of their homogenising, disciplinary style. I suspect this approach not only ceded power to participants, but also to the epistolary material itself, allowing the content of the letters to be the score, and for my work as an artist to create conditions that allowed for their activation. This approach addresses my question about whether employing a polyphonic aesthetic works to reveal or diminish the inherent polyphony of the epistolary material. In this case, my sense is that the polyphonic character of *You, Dear Doctor* contributed to painting a complex portrait of the evolving and at times contradictory sexual consciousness of the era, activating multiple registers of feeling, thinking, remembering, and identifying that served both the material as well as the audience and performers’ understandings of the histories and affective moments they represent.

*You, Dear Doctor* served as an evolutionary stage in my artistic practice, taking a step away from authorial control towards an artwork with open variables controlled by performers. My research into the integration of a participatory approach to the museum
audio guide was advanced in a series of other projects anchored by the use of navigational scores, including the aforementioned *Cruising Adrian’s Library* at the home of Adrian Rifkin and Denis Echard; *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, an action in the Montreal home of Tom Waugh; and *Regards*, produced for the RoSa Library for Feminism and Gender Studies in Brussels.¹⁶⁵

The score for *Cruising Adrian’s Library* was designed to not only empower the readers to select the texts they would perform themselves at the *Naked Boys Reading* salon, but also to encourage an experience in Rifkin and Echard’s home that left affective traces in the readers’ minds and bodies. My hope was that the atmosphere of hospitality, the multisensory stimuli of the garden, and instructions that emphasised listening, touching and eroticism would be embedded in the meaning each reader made of their selected texts, and that this meaning might influence the experience of, and level of investment in reciting their texts at the literary salon.

Although I approached *Cruising Adrian’s Library* as an expression of my greater artistic research towards a future audio guide project, my role was framed by salon organisers and participants as that of a curator, a title rarely extended to my artistic identity. This became an opportunity for the inherently curatorial aspects of working with museum audio guides to be considered. And while I already understood my previous work with audio guides to be the mediation of other artworks, assuming a kind of secondary, elaborative role, the use of an open score that leads each reader to a different book emphasised the extent to which my artistic role involved creating conditions for individualised and heterogeneous encounters. Not only was there no definitive way for readers to follow the score’s instructions, there was no definitive object of encounter. This observation revealed the degree to which my practice had shifted towards the relational as artistic material.

Creating conditions — or as Claire Bishop calls it, “producing situations” — is a core feature of Participatory Art and Social Practice, which she summarises as,

>*a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience … the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or longterm project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.*¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ The score produced for *Regards* combines approaches in other works discussed in this chapter, and appears in the portfolio of artistic research that follows this dissertation.

¹⁶⁶ Bishop, 4. Emphasis added.
While I am not invested in classifying my work in alignment with, or counter to Social Practice, Bishop’s definition helps alert me to how relationality has emerged as the material of my research into audio guides. Mediating the relational space between auditor-spectators and art and artefacts — rather than the art and artefacts themselves — has become my artistic task.

The printed score might therefore be understood as only one element of the situation produced by Cruising Adrian’s Library — which also included the atmosphere of hospitality created by the garden party, the encounter with Rifkin, the literary salon, and importantly, the library itself. The question remains whether or not my navigational score helped reveal the extent to which a library of books is already a score, and if the situation I created succeeded in giving agency both to the participants and to the library.

**I DON’T KNOW WHERE PARADISE IS**

The use of a score as part of the production of a situation was further developed in I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is, an action that took place in the Montreal home of film scholar Tom Waugh. The action served as a companion piece to Cruising Adrian’s Library, both in its goals of encouraging an embodied, affect-led mode of meaning-making, and also as an expansion of my artistic research into the homes, gardens, and libraries of my hosts. The action concentrated attention on the library — a combination of publications and a vast collection of over ten thousand films and artist videos on VHS and DVD — while also exploring the library’s relationship to the nearby Bain Coloniale bathhouse, where Waugh hosts weekly bathhouse gatherings with a community of friends, colleagues, and former students. The group meets at his home for tea and conversation before walking together to Bain Coloniale to partake in a communal bathing experience, something Waugh understands as a pedagogical experience based on relationships of trust, sharing, and exchange. Through these weekly gatherings, Tom actively cultivates an idealised world of erotic exchange, embedding the utopian potential of the bathhouse and locker room into his quotidian life and the way he creates and engages his community.

Approximately thirty members of Montreal’s queer community, representing a diversity of ages, sexual orientations, and gender identities, were invited to a gathering at Waugh’s home to enact a score based on reading, transcribing, and exchange. The style and

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167 Disambiguation alert: I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is is the title of my final PhD art project and its exhibition, although this title also served for this discrete research action.

Participants of *Cruising Adrian’s Library* converse with Adrian in his garden after completing the navigational score of his library, May, 2018.
content of the hand-written, photocopied score was modelled after the one used for *Cruising Adrian’s Library*, beginning with a tour of Waugh’s library and a description of Bain Coloniale and the role the bathhouse plays in Waugh’s methods of creating and fostering community. This was followed by instructions to select a book based on the erotic promise of its title and to transcribe a passage that delivers on this promise. Rather than recite these passages at a later, public event, like Naked Boys Reading, participants were asked to seek out a fellow participant, establish their consent, and share the passage with them.

The atmosphere of hospitality fostered in the garden party of *Cruising Adrian’s Library* was augmented in Waugh’s home through a scenography and dramaturgy designed to evoke the sensory and affective dimensions of Bain Coloniale. Participants gained access to Waugh’s home one at a time, and were brought into a small room where they were provided with a white towel and a space to change out of their street clothes into something appropriate for a bathhouse: a bathing suit, the towel, nudity. A fog machine released a vapour into the rooms that house Waugh’s book and film collections, evoking the wafts of steam that fill a bathhouse. A down tempo soundtrack played throughout the house, a buffet of food and drink was provided, and participants were invited and encouraged to take showers in the house’s two bathrooms. As a final overlap between library and bathhouse, participants were asked to gather on the roof terrace of Waugh’s house once the action was over, where the roof terrace of Bain Coloniale — the very site of Waugh’s proclamation, “I don’t know where paradise is: it is here! It is here! It is here!” — was in view. An impromptu reading of text passages selected from Waugh’s library were recited by a number of participants at the roof terrace gathering, which I interpreted as an expression of the group’s sense of shared ownership and authorship of the action.

In both *Cruising Adrian’s Library* and *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, the scores asked participants to take inspiration from the spaces they were navigating, instructing them to *tune in* not only to their own desires and impulses, but also the erotic and affective charges already present in the libraries or gardens. These instructions aimed to render more palpable the energetic and relational space between the participants, the homes, and the objects that occupy that space, whether books, artworks, plant life, or other bodies. By putting more conscious attention into the scenography of *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, the action further questioned what constitutes a score. Although the booklet with instructions was presented to participants as the action’s official score, the conditions I created acted upon participants’ experiences and actions in a way not unsimilar to the instructions of a score: the steam, the music, the food, the view from the terrace.
Suzanne Schmitt, Jamie Ross, and other participants follow the navigational score, read books, and shower at Tom’s home as part of *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, Montreal, 2018.
Mathieu Copeland asserts that spaces, and in particular exhibitions, already have scores embedded within them: “To curate an exhibition encompasses the score that enables its realisation, the bodies that make it be, the location it inhabits, the time taken for its experience, and the memory that remains once its course is run.”

This expanded vision of a score, and the role the curator (or artist) plays in its design and activation, nourishes my understanding of what my research in Rifkin and Waugh’s libraries achieved, and provides a framework for reimagining my work with audio guides generally. By drawing the auditor-spectator’s awareness to the space — and the feelings, memories, and impulses that exhibited objects elicit within them — an audio guide might reveal the ways in which exhibition spaces are already scores. This approach to instruction might be used to draw attention to the disciplinary effect of architecture and interior design, in particular the ways an exhibition space or library is designed to control and perhaps limit the forms of spectatorship, transmission of knowledge, and encounter that are possible or even imaginable. Furthermore, by placing emphasis on the performative aspect of spectatorship and navigation, scores — and in turn pieces for audio guides — have the potential to shift the focus of the art experience towards the form of encounter and the materiality of relation.

PARTICIPATORY MUSEUM PRACTICE

Artistic engagement with the audio guide as a media form straddles a border zone where participatory art aesthetics and museum mediation overlap, a fragile interstice of shared investment between artists and museum staff, different from the relationship more traditionally nurtured between an exhibiting artist and an exhibition curator. This shared investment does not necessarily represent shared goals, although it would be naïve to neatly cleave artists’ intentions as exclusively grounded in institutional critique, in contradistinction to an institution’s desire to dramatise the museum experience. Still, while the impulses that motivate participatory aesthetics and the goals of museum mediation practices have significant similarities, it is where they differ that seems most important when reflecting on the border zone in which my artistic work operates.

One notable difference is the unsynchronised timelines spanned by participatory art and participatory museum practice. Interactive, relational, and participatory art practices might, like all historicised art movements, transform and disperse over time, but the participatory turn has clearly installed itself as a permanent feature of the design,
management and curatorial approach of museums. Museums that offer a diversity of opportunities for participation — what Nina Simon calls “participatory museums”, that respond to a changing audience who now expects to “discuss, share, and remix what they consume” — appear to the standard form for the museum of the early twenty-first century, and the guiding vision of the museum of the future. This is reflected both in the proliferation of museum posts dedicated exclusively to a museum’s mediation apparatus — with titles like Curator of Mediation, Curator of Engagement, Curator of Audiovisual and Interactive Learning, Curator of Inclusion, among others — as well as vast and growing literature theorising, promoting and providing how-to style instruction on participatory art mediation practice.

A notable example of this participatory, audience-centred turn in museum design is the 2019 renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In addition to creating new exhibition spaces that place more attention on “women, Latinos, Asians, African-Americans and other overlooked artists”, the second floor of the museum is being transformed into a space called The Platform, “a place for visitors to make art and join conversations.” Museum director Glenn D. Lowry describes the goal of The Platform space as the museum’s attempt to “make a visit to the museum a comfortable, enjoyable experience that lets you move back and forth from looking at art to talking about art to thinking about art.” This shift not only in museum practice but in the architectural conception of a museum towards experience and participation suggests that a new age in museology has emerged, governed by what might be called a new “participatory” episteme.

On one hand, one might argue that museum practice is finally catching up to a long history of participatory impulses and aesthetics in artistic practice. On the other hand, the institutionalisation of participation might make certain demands on what forms participation is permitted to take, ensuring that engagement practices are aligned with institutional goals, oblivious to future evolutions in artistic practice away from or otherwise beyond participation as understood or sanctioned by institutions. This is of

171 Simon, ii.
172 These job titles represent positions at the VanAbbe Museum (Eindhoven, NL), the National Galleries of Scotland (Edinburgh, UK), the Moderna Museet (Stockholm), and the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto, CA), respectively.
175 ibid.
176 My idea here comes from Hooper-Greenhill’s reading of the relationship of Foucault’s three major epistemes — Renaissance, classical, modern — to the evolution of museology. (Hooper-Greenhill: 10)
particular importance to participatory initiatives by artists commissioned by museums as part of their greater engagement programme.

Still, I find significant resonance between the goals of my own artistic engagement with the museum audio guide and those raised in conversations with museum staff responsible for engagement and detailed in literature about the participatory turn in museum practice. Simon outlines techniques for cultural institutions to encourage participation as a remedy to commonly expressed forms of public dissatisfaction. Among the attitudes Simon’s research is developed around is a complaint that, “[t]he authoritative voice of the institution doesn’t include my view or give me context for understanding what’s presented,” a statement that reflects a guiding concern of my own goals in an artistic reimagining of the audio guide. These similarities and resonances are at once encouraging and confusing, and have presented a distinct and meaningful challenge to my understanding of what it is I am trying to achieve in this area of artistic work, as well as my self-conception as an artist.

PAUSING AND SHUFFLING

Applying a polyphonic aesthetic to the museum audio guide might operate in a number of ways, not only in the multiplicity of histories and interpretations of a display object it transmits, and the multiplicity of voices that are used to narrate these histories, but also in the audio guide’s conception of its audience. While my artistic and conceptual goals in applying polyphony to the audio guide are motivated by a desire to better address the diversity of its users, this polyphony has its limitations unless it actively invites the listener’s perspective into the narrative. As Simon asserts, “[r]ather than delivering the same content to everyone, a participatory institution collects and shares diverse, personalized, and changing content co-produced with visitors.” Invitations for co-creation and opportunities to contribute to content is core to many participatory artworks and museum practices, directly reflecting and responding to the forms which audiences in the social media age expect participation take.

Can I employ polyphony not only as an aesthetic but also as a method, and pursue an artistic and technological inquiry into an audio guide in which the user’s voice becomes part of both its sonic and narrative polyphony? If the voices of polyphony have, as de

177 Simon, iii. Emphasis original.
178 ibid.
179 ibid, iv.
Groot outlines, “a mutually elaborative effect on each other”, is it fair for the voice of the
listener to be excluded from this multiplicity, to be absent from the narrative’s
elaboration? Polyphony’s elaborative power seems of significant relevance to the project
of dismantling and diversifying the authoritative voice of the museum. Katherine Fry
asserts that, “musical elaboration functions as a critical model for challenging the
objectivity and permanence of historical knowledge, interpretation, and identity.” How
“open” am I willing to make the scores at the heart of my audio guide scripts, and how far
am I willing to allow the individual experiences of meaning-making these scores generate to
contribute to its content? This might be one of the places where the aesthetics of my work
as an artist diverge from the ideals and methods used in museum practice.

My artistic research into the use of scores, driven by an interest in how far
participation might be integrated into the reimagining of the museum audio guide, has
yielded two distinct and contrasting results: the evolution of my attitudes towards museum
mediation practice generally and a refining of my specific goals with the audio guide as an
artistic tool. The questions raised above illuminate new aesthetic and technological
considerations for the museum audio guide that apply emerging digital technologies to the
expansion of what museum engagement might involve. I am not yet aware of museum
mediation practices that integrate voice-response, augmented reality, or artificial
intelligence technologies into the design of audio guides, however I suspect it is only a
matter of time before their ascendancy and proliferation impacts all digitally mediated
platforms. Fisher notes that an imagining of the audio guide’s dialogic potential is present
in Janet Cardiff’s 1997 audio walk *Chiaroscuro*, a museum tour that focuses on the
affective space of the museum rather than on individual artworks. Cardiff plays with the
audio guide’s intimate, imperative grammatical mode to speak to the auditor-spectator as
an interlocutor, imagining and creating space for potential responses:

Cardiff addresses the beholder as a “known” companion … [she] seems to chat with
the beholder, asking questions and leaving spaces for response. The effect is one of
conversant space. In the museum’s economy of connoisseurship — being “in the
know” — gives way to the sense of “being known” by the artist.

This mode of address diversifies the “knowing subject with specialist expertise (who
enables the knowing of others)” that Hooper-Greenhill asserts characterises the voice of

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180 de Groot, 230.
181 Fry, 276.
183 ibid.
the curator, democratising it and rendering it more inclusive. And while the dialogic styling of Cardiff’s speech has objective limits, for the auditor-spectator’s response — which is more likely a thought process than an actually uttered statement — does not materially effect the course of the tour, it points to a possible direction for imagining more participatory audio guide aesthetics.

I believe these pauses in narration can, in fact, be quite powerful in altering the meaning-making mode. A common critique of my 2017 test audio tour of Gert and Mattias’s library was that there were no significant pauses in the narration, preventing auditor-spectators the opportunity to simply look around, for unstructured, unmediated encounter. This is therefore not merely a question of pacing, but also of extending subjectivity to the auditor-spectator. Indeed, allowing pauses for thought — whether in response to a question posed by the narrator, or simply unexplained silent gaps or instrumental interludes between narrated segments — serves to diminish the audio guide’s authoritative, disciplining voice, giving room for and encouraging the auditor-spectator’s subjectivity to extend into the encounter.

The shuffling of material in Trees Are Fags is another device I have explored in the development of a more participatory audio guide aesthetics. This twofold experiment aimed at expanding the kind of experience my pieces foster through both scripting and technical experimentation. The content of Trees Are Fags designed to shuffle was the series of navigational cues based on the choreography of cruising and the orientations of queer phenomenology. These instructions are open to interpretation based on the feelings, desires, and memories of the auditor-spectator, inviting the activation of personal “material” that influences the directions of their movements and orientations of their bodies. Secondly, this randomised shuffling, while not participatory per se, still relinquishes a certain amount of authorial control, offering sequences unique to each auditor-spectator, loosening the definitiveness of any one telling of the story. I believe this approach inserted a kind of queer definitional indeterminacy into the narrative authority of Trees Are Fags, inviting different meaning-making possibilities through a more open field of interpretation. Pausing and shuffling seems to me important and elegant aesthetic and conceptual considerations that seek a middle ground between the determining authority of traditional audio guides and the participatory museum’s impulse to adapt to the changing expectations of visitors.

Bradley L. Taylor asserts that the new habits formed through the evolution of mobile device and social media technology have changed the expectations museum visitors have of

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184 Hooper-Greenhill, 167.
their museum experience, and that these changes signal a dismantling of museum authority in favour of individualised, subjective meaning-making:

Individuals will be less interested in the agenda of authority of the museum and will demand the ability to craft an experience of their own using the museum's collections, research, and expertise as a large database of information/experience which they can control/edit/customize.185

This is part of what Taylor posits is part of the emergence of the “visitor/consumer” as the identity now centred by museums. I do not believe the museum audio guide can be reimagined as an entirely participatory device, for while the audio guide might empower users to shape the form of their encounter with display objects, and even “curate” for themselves a selection of works to encounter from among those on display, users are ultimately not co-creators of the exhibition.

Or are they? Another example of an engagement initiative that reimagines the potential role of the museum visitor is found in the Van Abbe Museum’s Werksalon, in which one hundred framed artworks — mostly prints — are made available for arrangement and rearrangement by visitors. This participatory mediation initiative, which hands exhibition curation over to visitors, is accorded its own gallery in the museum, separate from the official exhibitions, and has a game-like quality. The museum describes Werksalon as, “a place dedicated to re-configuring, repositioning, negotiating, commenting and discussing the artworks on display, but also the societal topics that they relate to.”186

As museum audio guides increasingly shift from institutional-specific devices to mobile apps, the possibility increases of integrating them with software that allows for the selecting, collecting, and arranging of digital images of artworks, treating the contents of a museum as a kind of personal Pinterest page, complete with its own audio-guided tour.187 Smartify, a mobile app launched in 2017 that collaborates with museums including the National Gallery (London), the Louvre (Paris) and the State Hermitage Museum (Saint Petersburg), combines features now familiar to app users from other platforms: scanning artworks to identify and read historical or interpretive information about them;188 pressing a heart-shaped symbol to save the artwork to a collection of “favourites”; using geo-

185 Taylor, 182.

186 https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/queering/about/

187 Pinterest is a member-based web software in which users upload, save, sort, and manage images and other media content through collections known as “pinboards”.

188 Although in some cases, a Wikipedia text substitutes for didactic and interpretive material provided by the exhibiting institution. For example, the Smartify entry for Edvard Munch’s The Scream (1893) is described only through a selection of Wikipedia literature focusing mainly on the artwork’s price and history of sales.
Museum visitors select framed artworks to be displayed in the Werksalon, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.
positioning software to identify museums nearby; perusing a list of artworks and artists that are currently “trending”; and purchasing special content. In some cases, audio accompaniment is also available for an artwork, produced and provided by the exhibiting institution.

There is something about Smartify’s format that I find troubling. On one hand, Smartify is attempting to make art more widely accessible and legible through codes, language, and systems of classification and engagement that have become recognisable to a broad cross-section of society. On the other hand, I fear that its User Experience design flattens out the vast diversities of possible art encounters through a homogenising, consumer styling. Furthermore, I wonder about the longterm impact of applying “liking” and “trending” features to an official institution’s mediation tool, functionalities that not only offer individual curatorial agency to users, but also encourage a sense of being part of a global community of curator-influencers. The artists “trending” on Smartify on June 20, 2019, included, in order: Vincent Van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, Claude Monet, Caravaggio and Rembrandt van Rijn. The sixty-sixth “trending” artist was Frida Kahlo, the first woman to appear in the list. Only two years old, and Smartify is already ripe for a feminist, anti-colonial edit-a-thon.

Hal Foster offers an important warning about the proliferation of participatory initiatives in museum practice, and questions whether they truly serve to enrich the experience of visitors:

Activation of the viewer has become an end, not a means, and not enough attention is given to the quality of subjectivity and sociality thus affected. Today museums cannot seem to leave us alone; they prompt and program us as many of us do our children. As in the culture at large, communication and connectivity are promoted, almost enforced, for their own sake. This activation helps to validate the museum, to overseers and onlookers alike, as relevant, vital, or simply busy, yet, more than the viewer, it is the museum that the museum seeks to activate.

Time will tell if initiatives that extend the sensation of curatorial agency to users serve to diversify and transform museum experience, or instead simply reinforce and reify hegemonic practices of museum spectatorship and consumer behaviour, achieving the “activation” and “validation” of the museum that Foster describes. My observations of trends and evolutions in museum mediation practice and technology have raised questions for me as to the context in which my artistic research belongs. Am I developing practices that can be truly proposed to a museum as part of their official mediation programme, or

189 https://smartify.org
190 Foster, 134-135.
can my research and reflections only truly serve my individual artistic practice? My sense is that my artistic work with mediation practice will always take the form of intervention, or be relegated to an “alternative” to the official mediation offering of the museums with whom I co-operate.

**THE AURA OF PARTICIPATION**

More immediately relevant to my doctoral research — and perhaps in contradiction to the vision and ideals I hold for the evolution of museum mediation practice — is an acknowledgement of the limits of my own artistic investment in participation. While my research has revealed to me the lengths to which participatory mediation practice can be imagined, I feel unwilling to entirely surrender authorship to the auditor-spectators my artworks seek to address. The score-driven artistic research I have undertaken in libraries has been invested in giving participants many choices as to which materials they wish to engage, as well as personal and private forms of self-expression; however I am not prepared to abandon my role as guide. Still, I believe my research into participatory aesthetics has resulted in a significant loosening of authorial control in line with my critique of the museum audio guide, expanding the goals of my pieces beyond my initial critical storytelling impulses, becoming more concerned with and motivated by the feelings, memories, and meaning-making processes of individual auditor-spectators.

I wish to borrow de Groot’s phrase “aura of polyphony” to better understand the degree to which participatory aesthetics have a place in my approach to audio guides. De Groot argues that polyphony produces a kind of excess of sonic and cognitive material, an elaboration that emerges through the interplay of contrapuntal voices that,

... modify each other in endless and unexpected ways. This is due to (psycho-)acoustic and syntactical interferences between the perceived simultaneous voices ... This elaboration could be called the ‘aura of polyphony.'

I wonder if there is a similar elaborative, relational material produced by participatory aesthetics, not merely the thoughts and feelings an artwork might trigger in the audience, but a kind of investment the audience experiences in the act of creation. One example might be the effect produced by the design of a situation whereby performers of *Naked Boys Reading* selected for themselves the texts they would read. I did not hand over total control of the curation of texts to the performers, for I designed and controlled the setting

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191 de Groot, 229.
in which the texts were found; but the participatory, score-based styling of my curatorial gesture might have produced a different register of investment in the performers, an “aura of participation” that might have been absent had I simply selected the texts for them to read myself. This aura is an affective and relational material produced as a kind of excess of the curation itself. Producing this aura of participation might very well be the goal of my individual participatory style. For if I want auditor-spectators to feel included, involved, and invested in the encounters my audio guides mediate, but am not willing to surrender total control of the meaning-making process, then the fostering of this elaborative, relational “aura” might serve to trace the boundary within which I wish to work.

*Chiaroscuro*, like many of Cardiff’s audio walks, is characterised by a directive and determining narration style. Auditors are instructed to unerringly follow Cardiff’s instructions, and even keep up with the pace of her audible footsteps. However, by imagining the auditor-spectator as an interlocutor, and offering silent space for responses — be they uttered or unuttered — I believe *Chiaroscuro* might also produce its own aura of participation, a sensation of involvement and subjectivity on the part of the auditor-spectator, who is, in truth, experiencing the exact same audio track as everyone else.

*Trees Are Fags* is not interactive, however the feelings, memories, and impulses of auditor-spectators are given value and agency through choices offered as to how to orient and move their bodies in space, and even where they begin and end their walk. And while auditor-spectators might not be aware that the navigational instructions are randomly shuffling, the artwork’s programming is designed to bring about unique, individualised experiences. I hope that *Trees Are Fags* causes auditor-spectators to think and feel many things, chiefly through the series of observations and arguments about the history of queer sexual practices that I make in the fixed, non-shuffling main narrative. But I also hope the piece’s aesthetics produce an additional aura of participation that, like de Groot’s aura of polyphony, “eludes cognitive grip”,192 interpellating auditor-spectators in a way that makes them feel that their experiences of *Trees Are Fags* are somehow their own.

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192 ibid.
I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is
Describing the use of memoirs and biographies as source material in his study of interior spaces of British gay men from 1885-1957, John Potvin articulates the limits of historical documents produced from an outsider position: “[b]iographies are only partial glimpses … perceptions based solely on a position as outsider, a sort of interloper within the spatial culture of the home.”\textsuperscript{193} Biographies make up only a portion of the materials Potvin worked from, which also included photographs and diaries, however he acknowledges that reliable representation of some of the interiors in question were not always available, requiring him to modify his methods depending on the nature of his materials.

My artistic research into the libraries and interior spaces of a more contemporary group of gay men did not take the expressive form of biography, however Potvin’s warning that the outsider’s perspective can only ever offer a partial glance is of relevance to both my methods and my vision of the final artistic outcome of my research. I have for the most part been invited into these homes to conduct my weird research by the homeowners themselves, so I am not an interloper, but rather a kind of benevolent acquaintance: a reader, a student, a guest, with all the attendant affects and relations of these identities. Yet something about an interloper positionality resonates for me, and I sense some generative potential in acknowledging and exploring the positions of both outsider and interloper, a subjectivity that seems decidedly queer, echoing David Halperin’s assertion of queerness being, “at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.”\textsuperscript{194}

To assume an interloper positionality might be to recognise the limits of what about these spaces I can ever expect to understand or portray, and might also serve as an embodied methodological position that informs the content and aesthetics of my artistic work. There is a link here to my interest in the care and stewardship of queer historical materials, for as much as my research is driven by a strong desire to share what I have found in the libraries of my hosts, I also feel a protective impulse, a concern that not everything should be revealed or made public, that the amplification that is the raison d’être of Fisher’s epideictic speech of display is, perhaps, not appropriate here. Some encounters in the library belong in an artwork, others belong in my diary, and others are opaque to me, and are only for my hosts to know and feel. Furthermore, there are some libraries to which I never gained access, despite significant correspondence and arrangements with their

\textsuperscript{193} Potvin, 7.
\textsuperscript{194} Halperin, 62. Emphasis added.
keepers. Besides, I often felt I did not belong in the scholarly setting of these libraries, not only because of my ignorance of the histories and ideas they contained, but because of the feelings of confusion and despair over how to navigate my research that often overcame me. Beyond being an interloper, I felt like an imposter, performing the role of reader, performing the role of scholar, even performing my role as artist.

I often attempted to mitigate these imposterish feelings by offering my hosts bouquets, distracting attention away from my inability to articulate the goals of my research by focusing on the sensory pleasures of flowers. Floral gifts acted as a kind of social lubricant, bringing me closer to my hosts by discussing the arrangement or selecting vases from their collections. A bouquet of dahlias prompted Adrian Rifkin to invite me to see his garden during my first research visit, where his description of designing a “child-unfriendly” garden became the basis of our first conversation of substance. Green chrysanthemums provided an initial topic of conversation when arriving at the home of Christine Seemüller — the devisee of Hervé Guibert’s estate — offering a subject of discussion in which I felt more fluent than Guibert’s biography and literary oeuvre. René Schérer was initially overwhelmed by my gift of purple and white spotted orchids, explaining that he did not have anywhere to put them. But once a vase was found, the act of arranging the flowers together become one of our few moments of connection and shared embodiment — at least in my experience.

As my research into the relational aspects of the audio guide and museum mediation deepened, I came to understand these floral gifts, and the social and relational exchange they fostered, as central to my artistic research. This observation crystallised through the realisation that Gert and Mattias had kept many of the arrangements I had offered them over the years, displaying them as a kind of permanent exhibition — or perhaps mausoleum — of the relational gifts that had punctuated my research visits. Seeing my encounters with them and their home immortalised and integrated into the culture and holdings of their collection had a profound effect on me, and deepened my awareness of the importance of the relationships I had cultivated with my hosts, not just to my personal life, but to the research at hand. Themes of kinship have always fuelled this project, although mostly I sought out kinship bonds with the authors and figures who appeared in the books I found, like the Siberian transformed shaman in Oceanic Homosexualities. I was more invested in Heather Love’s “backwards glances” into the queer past, instrumentalising my present-tense relationships with my hosts in order to do my research.

In this way, feeling like an imposter had a generative effect on my research, a source of action that Maddie Breeze asserts as part of a feminist reimagining of existing modes of knowledge production:
Unwrapping a floral gift for Gert and Mattias, Amsterdam, 2018.
I want to move away from understanding ‘imposter syndrome’ as a personal problem of faulty self-esteem inviting individualized coping solutions, and see what happens when we situate feelings of imposterism in socio-political context … and think of feeling like an imposter as a potential source of action and site of agency.195

Feelings of imposterism are likely less acute in the socio-political context of artistic research than for feminist scholars in neo-liberal universities — the context in which Breeze makes this assertion — making the problem I faced in the libraries perhaps less structural. But it was the “individualized coping solutions” I developed to mask my own imposter syndrome — namely the introduction of floral gifts — that became such a rich and integral part of my research.

Over time, I was increasingly folded into the lives of my hosts, spending more social time with them while conducting research, and participating in domestic tasks like yard work and hanging framed artworks on their walls. During my research visits to his home, Adrian Rifkin would jokingly tell visitors that I was his gardener. I joined Tom Waugh and his friends at their weekly bathhouse outings, and slept in his guest room when conducting research in Montreal. I also periodically slept at Adrian and Denis’ home during research visits to London, notably on a daybed in the library. I took cuttings from my hosts’ plant collections, and am now nurturing a Ficus drupacea pubescens from Amsterdam, a spider plant from Montréal, and an Anthurium from London in my own home.

This increasing intimacy with my hosts at once confused and enriched my working methods, and my feelings as interloper and imposter subsided and transformed as I began to feel like a friend doing research rather than a researcher being friendly. Momentary feelings of exasperation in the libraries still sometimes surfaced, but by allowing affective, relational positions to more actively lead my research, my thinking regarding my methods of knowledge production shifted the goals of my project, and what aspect of the libraries, homes, and my encounters with the hosts felt most important to portray. I still do not know all the answers, but believe I am developing what Trinh T. Minh-ha refers to as a “critical not-knowingness” that feels generative not only for my specific research into these homes and collections, but also the greater project of reimagining the museum audio guide, of diminishing and dispersing its authoritative voice.196

My artistic work has been consistently concerned with interstitial spaces, in particular my work with the human voice, generating a body of work concerned with voices that traverse the boundaries between adult and child, human and machine, feminine and

195 Breeze, 201.
196 Minh-ha, 234.
The daybed in Adrian and Denis’s library prepared for a sleepover. London, 2018.
masculine. The audio guide, along with the entire museum mediation apparatus, is a kind of interstitial media form, animating the relational space between museum visitors, artworks, and museum architecture. Sound, too, is an interstice, what Profanter, Andersen and Eckhardt call a “middle matter” that is always positioned, “between spaces: between walls, between the ‘external’ room and the ‘internal’ ear, between languages, across divisions between producer and listener, artist and audience.”¹⁹⁷ But until now, my attraction to the interstitial has not quite been assumed methodologically. Just as I produced significant work about cruising without imagining its methodological potential, I have used the interstitial materially, but not epistemologically.

Yet my doctoral research has presented me with many moments of methodological confusion that stem from occupying such interstitial spaces, moments when I cannot settle on a stable subject position from which to face my research. I remind myself and others that I approach the libraries neither as an archivist, ethnographer, anthropologist or historian, but rather as an artist, a statement that never serves to clarify or stabilise who I am or what it is that I am doing. Minh-ha asserts that,

[i]n a world of reification, of fixed disciplines and refined compartmentalizations, to affirm that, “I am a critic, not an artist,” or vice-versa, is to resort to a classification and a professional standard that ultimately serve to preserve the status quo. It is to reproduce a discourse that states little more than the site it comes from, as it tends to gloss over the field of struggle, the mesh of established relations within which positions and postures are defined (even when the latter are taken up precisely to transform it.)¹⁹⁸

Minh-ha’s challenge to the artist and critic has special resonance to my artistic research and the unstable, interstitial subject positions I occupy, either as an artist researcher in the homes of my hosts, an artist intervening into the work of historiography, or an artist working with the technologies of museum mediation practice. Minh-ha writes about the generative potential of this interstitial space, emphasising the interval as a site of tension:

Recast in a critical light, the relation between art and theory does not lead to a simple equation and collapse of the fundamental assumptions of the two. Rather, it maintains the tension between them through a notion of the interval that neither separates nor assimilates.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Profanter et al., 5. Emphasis in original.
¹⁹⁸ Minh-ha, 226. Emphasis in original.
¹⁹⁹ ibid, 226. Emphasis in original.
Minh-ha’s depiction of the established relations from which a subjective position is assumed as a *mesh* recalls the materiality of Sedgwick’s image of queerness as, “an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances” that initially activated my curiosities about the materialities of queerness. This resonance with Sedgwick’s imagery casts Minh-ha’s interval as a potentially queer subject position, and asks if mobilising the tension I experience by dwelling in the conflicted interstices between artist, ethnographer, historian, and imposter could be approached as part of a generative queer methodology.

I believe there is also a clue here for how to understand the interstitial position my artistic work with museum audio guides straddles, an image that invites me to imagine its potential queerness. My audio guide pieces present themselves as works of art or at least “artistic interventions” into museum mediation, and do not claim to be works of criticism or art history. But by employing the epideictic speech of display, and inserting themselves into the didactic apparatus of museum mediation, I believe these works articulate and transmit philosophical ideas in a mode more recognisable as those used by critics and historians than the forms of expression expected of artists. This interstitial position, whose definitional indeterminacy might confuse the auditor-spectator, feels potent in a queer way.

**TRACES, GLIMMERS, RESIDUES AND SPECKS OF THINGS**

Queer archives are often characterised as being by their nature incomplete: a document of the persistent suppression and erasure of queer lives. Ann Cvetkovich traces an ontological link between queer archives and archives of trauma, based on the ephemerality of the affective material — the “vast archive of feelings” — that constitutes queer lives and cultures:

> In its unorthodox archives, trauma resembles gay and lesbian cultures, which have had to struggle to preserve their histories ... Forged around sexuality and intimacy, and hence forms of privacy and invisibility that are both chosen and enforced, gay and lesbian cultures often leave ephemeral and unusual traces. In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of

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200 Sedgwick, 8.

201 I recognise that there are a number of artists — among them Hito Steyerl, and the aforementioned Andrea Fraser and Fred Wilson — whose practices rely on employing the language and mode of address used by theorists, historians, and museums, and whose institutional critique contributes directly to theory and historiography. What I am trying to reflect on here is the generative potential of occupying the “interval” position between polarities of what is traditionally expected of art/artists and mediation/mediators.
objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge.\footnote{Cvetkovitch, 8.}

The ephemeral traces left by queer lives is also articulated by Turner, who asserts that, “[q]ueer experiences have always been remembered, if remembered, as fragments and traces”\footnote{Turner, 43.} and by Potvin: “[a]s is often the case with histories exploring marginalized groups, archival, pictorial and textual resources are scarce, fragmentary and opaque at best. The task of rebuilding is not an easy one.”\footnote{Potvin, 8.}

For Freeman, the fragmentary materials studied by queer scholars produce corresponding research methods that are themselves fragmentary in nature: “…we gather and combine eclectically, dragging a bunch of cultural debris around us and stacking it in idiosyncratic piles…”\footnote{Freeman, xiii.}

In the case of my research, there is no absence of material with which to construct my artistic narrative. Unlike Potvin, I am not rebuilding a history, but rather curating an experience from material that exists in dizzying excess. But I wonder if Cvetkovitch, Turner, Potvin, and Freeman’s evocations of the nature of queer archival research can contribute to the design of a queer aesthetics of artistic engagement with the audio guide: not to merely describe the condition of a fragmented queer archive, but to instead employ fragmentation as a queer approach to telling history. This approach would learn from the kind of compromises often forced upon researchers to connect dots between the lacunae, silences, and voids of the archive in order to construct a complete picture, by resisting completeness as an ideal. This might become an approach to mediating spaces, artworks, and artefacts that builds narratives around that which is marginal, discarded, and fragmentary; a variation on the “speech of concealment” explored in Chapter 1 for which completeness, authoritativeness, and definitiveness are devalourised. As an example: even if Gert and Mattias have a comprehensive collection of books on the history of perversion, it is the marginalisation of this history that would be of value to my project, not the comprehensiveness of their collection.

Articulated another way, I wish to pick up on Potvin’s use of the word \textit{opaque} as a reminder of the importance of opacity in the telling of marginalised histories, and for opacity — like the range of porous and elastic queer materialities discussed earlier — to serve as artistic material and method, both as a way of accepting and aestheticising the impossibility of “grasping” the scope of the libraries, and also as a queer form of care and

\footnote{Cvetkovitch, 8.}
\footnote{Turner, 43.}
\footnote{Potvin, 8.}
\footnote{Freeman, xiii.}
stewardship, aiming to narrate what Muñoz calls the “traces, glimmers, residues and specks of things” of queer ephemerality, rather than making everything transparent.\footnote{Muñoz, 1996: 10.}

Commenting on Bartlett’s approach to writing *Who Was That Man?*, Turner points out the importance of assuming a “willingness to embrace the tentative and the plausible, but also the disparate” to the project of depicting queer experience. Turner invokes Walter Benjamin’s approach to writing *The Arcades Project*, one that takes form through incomplete accumulations of fragments, glimmers; and traces, rather than a historiography concerned with establishing a cohesive, resolved whole:

As Benjamin suggests, the ‘trace’ brings the past nearer to us and so makes more immediate the connections between the past and present, perhaps especially those connections we have hitherto neglected. What Bartlett does in his London story, past and present, is bring together illicit assignations, sexual transgressions, masquerade and men passing on the streets; he locates himself on a hitherto little-known map of the city. Anyone of us might look for other clues and traces and map an altogether different ‘London’, and that map would suggest altogether different ways of locating yourself in the present.\footnote{Turner, 49. This approach is echoed in artist Conny Karlsson Lundgren’s description of his artistic research with 1970s archival material on the Copenhagen gay activist group Bøsseaktivisterna. He asserts, “[m]y engagement with history is not driven by an interest in the idea of the “truth.” Rather, it is this urge to follow traces of desire, in how we as queers organise our bodies and lives.” (Karlsson Lundgren, 2019.)}

Here Turner privileges not only a fragmentary, incomplete telling of history, but also a historiography that invites a polyphonic, participatory approach in which the acknowledgement of individual cartographies of a space — a city, a library, a cruising area — is key to the meaning-making process.

Like the shuffling material in *Trees Are Fags*, the inclusion of gaps, lacunae, fragmented text, and instrumental passages into the narrative structure of an audio guide are strategies that contribute to a queer aesthetics of “definitional indeterminacy”. On a less conceptual level, pauses in narration contribute to the pace at which information is transmitted, allowing auditor-spectators to both process the narrated material while making their own observations of artworks and artefacts, allowing the encounter to be a shared endeavour. This, too, might be part of the importance of fostering an aura of participation, through a fragmentary scripting style and pacing of narration.

In the specific case of *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, the final audio guide to the libraries of my hosts created as part of my doctoral research, the inclusion and emphasis on gaps in the narration seem to me a clue not only as to how to soften the authoritative voice of the audio guide, and to draw attention to lost and suppressed materials, identities, and...
affects of queer history, but also as a way to guide the auditor-spectator through the immeasurable, ungraspable scale of a library. In this way, my project has learned from what might be considered the queerness of Benjamin’s approach to the writing of The Arcades Project, allowing the acknowledgement of the library’s infinities to inform methodological and aesthetic approaches. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, the English translators of The Arcades Project, portray Benjamin’s approach as a “montage form — with its philosophic play of distances, transitions, and intersections, its perpetually shifting contexts and ironic juxtapositions…” This language seems to be a description of the nature of the arcades themselves, a further clue to how the subject of research can act as a score that offers methodological cues. This idea echoes Anderson’s assertion of the potential benefit of using cruising methodologically when cruising is the subject of research or artistic creation. Eiland and McLaughlin argue that Benjamin’s research method reflects not only the nature of the arcades, but also the practices of key figures of the nineteenth century, approaching his project less as an historian, and more like a collector or ragpicker:

…it was not the great men and celebrated events of traditional historiography but rather the “refuse” and “detritus” of history, the half-concealed, variegated traces of the daily life of “the collective”, that was to be the object of study, and with the aid of methods more akin — above all, in their dependence on chance — to the methods of the nineteenth-century collector of antiquities and curiosities, or indeed to the methods of the nineteenth-century ragpicker, than to those of the modern historian.

Eiland and McLaughlin’s description of the ragpicker shares characteristics with Freeman’s queer scholar, whose task is one of gathering and dragging cultural debris, providing another hint at what might be understood as queer about Benjamin’s approach, and its relevance to my artistic research.

Can I follow this logic, and approach the libraries not only as subject matter, but as a score, a method that ponders the nature of the library, and asks it to lead the both process of my research and the aesthetics of the artwork? Can my subjective position straddle the interval between artist and historian, imposter and ragpicker? These methods and positions resonate with the process of research and creation I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is has taken — at first as a matter of instinct, but then more purposefully as the project unfolded. Freeman provides a queer lens through which to understand my fragmented methodology, and the idiosyncratic assemblage of dubiously connected artefacts that have become the

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208 Benjamin, xi.
209 ibid, ix.
signposts around which the final audio guide is organised: an octagonal mirror, a feather
duster, a potted plant, a nineteenth-century sexology pamphlet, the public urinal outside
Gert and Mattias’ home, among others. In some way, this artistic method might, in fact,
simulate the processes of finding, gathering, and collecting of my hosts: at times acquiring
things of obvious importance to their research and scholarship, at other times following
affective or erotic impulses, seeking out materials that embody or affirm their queerness, so
that they might accrete and coalesce into solid queer forms. I have never asked my hosts
why they collected so many books over their lifetimes, although Mattias once mentioned in
conversation that he treats ideas and academic texts as “co-ordinates” to nourish and
navigate his thinking, an echo of Muñoz and Doyle’s maps and blueprints provided by
queer cultural material.210

While it might be too simplistic to suggest that perversion is present in the design,
aesthetics and affect of Gert and Mattias’s library, whose contents themselves reflect
sustained and passionate study of perversion, “perversion” seems an appropriate approach
for the styling of the home’s navigation, a guiding principle for an audio guide that takes
inspiration from the perversions of the home itself. In this way, it is the library and its
contents that act as a score, providing cues on how the sexuality of space can be asserted,
accessed, and privileged. Tom Waugh agreed that I could undertake artistic research into his
home and collection on the condition that the final product be infused with sexuality. This
also feels like a way in which both definitions of queerness can be employed in the
aesthetics and methods of the artwork, a perversion that takes form on one hand through
disorienting, fragmented, oblique navigation, and through a perverted sexual subjectivity
on the other.

OBJECTS AS CONDUCTORS OF FEELING

Just as the subject of my research has constantly been questioned through my research
process — shifting between my hosts’ spaces and my relationships with my hosts — my
original focus on their libraries soon shifted to include all the other objects that exist
alongside the books: plants, artworks, vases, clothes, furniture, and other trappings of my

210 Bonnie Gabel, discussing her artistic research on the history of lesbian bars in New Orleans, notes that, “queers
and artists often become historians accidentally, prompted by a curiosity, ache, or longing for the spaces from the
queer past, and the feelings that go with them.” (Gabel, 2019) Gabel’s statements about her roles as artist who
simultaneously occupy acts as historian resonate with Cvetkovitch’s assertion that, “[q]ueers have long been
collectors because they are not the subject of official histories and thus have to make it themselves, collecting
materials that others might see as marginal,” which serves as a clue as to how my own research mimics the history-
making practices of my hosts. (Cvetkovitch, 2009: 54.)
hosts’ domestic existence that dialogue and share space with the libraries. At first, these other objects became important reminders of the differences between private and institutional libraries. But as my relationship with my hosts deepened, and the relationality of these spaces became foregrounded as key to my artistic research, these non-bibliographic materials began to feel more important than the books themselves. This was especially the case when I would find objects inserted between the pages of a book: a pressed flower, a private letter, a scrap of paper with scribbled notes, tickets to events, and other signs of life.

Describing the heterogeneity of objects he has kept as a part of his domestic space over the years — among them a flowery black and pink vase that belonged to his mother, a papier-mâché flamingo, and artworks produced by his sister — Matt Cook acknowledges the special affect produced by “eclectic accumulations” of seemingly disparate personal belongings: “These things touch overlapping components of my life — where what is camp, queer, homely, and familial are not easily separated out.”²¹¹ Although my hosts’ libraries are filled with incredible publications of important queer historical value, their charge would be neutralised if separated from the many other objects that overlap in their physical and energetic space. My research focus shifted to acknowledge and accommodate this realisation, placing the focus less on individual books in the collection, and more on Gert and Mattias’ vases and Adidas track pants, the bells of the nearby clock tower, and the aforementioned public urinal outside their window; the ticking of Adrian and Denis’ clocks and their decorative wallpaper; the picture postcards that hide the titles of half of Hervé Guibert’s books; the images of bathers that cover Tom’s walls; as well as the plants and gardens in all of my hosts’ homes. These objects enter the frame of my artistic research not merely to help conjure the sensory world of their homes, but also as part of the dramatis personae of the libraries; as symbols for the lives and relationships of my hosts.

There is something counterintuitive about portraying the infinite vastness of a library or a domestic space through discrete, individual objects. But throughout the research process, I found myself longing for the relative simplicity provided by earlier audio guide projects that built their narratives around an individual artwork or artefact, using a single object as an anchor around which each story is moored. Potvin articulates how individual objects are flash-points that embody, and have the potential to connect us to, the greater spaces they inhabit:

By offering ‘cognitive maps’ phenomenology advocates we move, act and perceive the world through the objects that occupy spaces: these are the very objects that help

²¹¹ Cook, 18.
situate our own embodied experiences of being-in-the-designed-world. The design of space powerfully evokes sensate recollections and enlivens inchoate sexual formations.212

Objects are conductors of feelings that help us to feel, make sense of, and navigate our way through spaces, serving as landmarks in a landscape, domestic or otherwise. The sheer volume of books, plants, textiles, vessels, artworks, bric à brac objects I have studied has a disorienting, dizzying effect, especially for the visitor. Might invoking a queer phenomenological approach frame this disorientation as generative, in order to not impose a stabilising system for the sake of a comprehensible, transparent, and “graspable” encounter with such a space? Indeed, it seems clear that disorientation, opacity and perhaps even dizziness need to be part of the queer aesthetics of my project, like Ahmed’s “disorientation device.” I aim to encourage such feelings through the shuffling of material, as well as a script writing style that vacillates between fully developed didactic passages, poetic fragments, and impressionistic images. Still, my goal is to ground the guide by focusing on objects in the libraries, using them as navigational anchors for the auditor-spectator’s movements, and as touchstones for the histories, ideas, and feelings my artistic work seeks to explore. In this way, I endeavour to produce an experience in line with Potvin’s assertion that,

… to best achieve a more holistic portrayal of these men’s practices of design, aesthetics and sexuality, the complete human sensorium is taken into account where possible and plausible to invoke the sounds, sights, smells, touches and tastes of dwelling; one could refer to these as the sensory landscape of identity.213

Potvin is writing about his approach to writing the history of the interior spaces of important homosexual figures in British history, among them Oscar Wilde, Noël Coward, and Cecil Beaton, however the methodology he describes seems germane to my artistic work. I suspect that an artistic audio guide is better equipped to achieve these goals than a piece of scholarly writing.

Can we ever see or hear a thing’s essence or life story without decrypting it through our own individual sign systems, be they linguistic or affective, without understanding it through its interaction with humans? Jane Bennett describes encounters with inanimate objects, and assemblages of objects, which “issue a call” that — while unintelligible to

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213 Potvin, 6.
humans — nevertheless produced affects in her, affects that facilitate the meaning she makes of their vibrancy:

In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics. In my encounter ... I glimpsed a culture of things irreducible to the culture of objects.\textsuperscript{214}

For Bennett, matter is vibrant; she asserts the subjectivities of things, and argues that the shared materiality of sentient beings and so-called inanimate objects provides a way of challenging the ontological division of humans and objects: “[i]f matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated.”\textsuperscript{215} The books that to me seemed most vibrant as I moved through the libraries were those that bore traces of human relation: the printed pages augmented by Gert’s underlinings and marginalia; the newspaper clippings and handwritten letters that fell from between book pages. When I found Guy Hocquenghem’s inscription and convoluted signature on the frontispiece of a book in Mattias’ collection, the book almost seemed to vibrate between my fingers, as though Hocquenghem’s touch, and the touch of his friendship with Mattias, was still present within its pages. Could this vibrancy have come from anything but my own desire for contact with Hocquenghem and the relational world of the 1980s that the inscription represents, from my own personal \textit{O-Ancestors-what-was-it-like-then} feelings? A similar inscription from a writer I had not heard of, or in a language I did not understand, might have triggered no such embodied experience.

I used similar criteria when seeking the meaning and vibrancy of Hervé Guibert’s library. I was disappointed to discover that Guibert did not mark up his own books: they bear no traces of his acts of reading. Although I drew meaning from the idea that he had once handled these books, that there were perhaps invisible fingerprints carrying traces of his body, the lack of physical evidence of his touch intensified my awareness of his death, and became part of the morbidity I ascribed to the posthumous maintenance of his book collection. Here, too, it was the dedications at the beginning of books given to Guibert as gifts, books that evidenced human relations, that held a vibrancy and affective charge for me. In particular, a book inscribed and elaborately marked up by the artist Duane Michals, who went so far as to draw the cover of Guibert’s \textit{Le Seul Visage} (1984) atop the cover of Michals’ \textit{Homage to Cavafy} (1978), creating a palimpsest that conflated one book for the

\textsuperscript{214} Bennett, 5.

\textsuperscript{215} ibid, 13.
other. These traces of human relation, of friendship, of conceptual mischief, acted as an affective portal into the library, and became the discovery around which I defined my encounter.

Still, by placing the narrative focus of *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is* on objects, and using objects to guide the encounter with these spaces, I am seeking a way of emphasising the vibrancy of matter, enabling the libraries and the objects they house to serve as scores for navigation. I hope that using books as objects to cue the auditor-spectator’s movements will insert a bibliomantic quality to the project, in which the power and vibrancy of individual books serve as a kind of divining rod.

Despite my enthusiasm for and subscription to the idea of cruising as a method — and my practical applications of these principles in works that foregrounded the participant’s desire and feeling as navigational tools — allowing my own desires and feelings to lead my production of knowledge has been a more challenging method to assume. I do not want my artistic work to serve my feelings alone, but rather for my personal experiences and feelings to generate artworks that serve the feelings and meaning-making processes of others. And while my greater oeuvre is full of artworks in which my feelings create conditions for audiences to access their own, I fear my work with the decidedly didactic, meaning-making task of the audio guide risks being ethnocentric if guided by my own feelings, in a way not unlike my concern about solipsistically defining queerness based on my personal experiences.

Cook writes with candour about the extent to which his personal identifications and feelings — what he calls his “human subjective” — are active as he researches and writes the history of gay men and their domestic spaces in a seemingly unconflicted way, allowing his position as a gay man with his own domestic impulses and styles to be visible and of value to the historian’s task:

> As I have written about different men from across the twentieth century, I have found myself positioning myself in relation to them — shuttling between their stories and my own, their pasts and mine, and finding muted echoes, distorted reflections, familiarity and distinct moments of alienation… It is, I want to suggest, the play of such stories and histories that does significant work in shaping and bringing into focus our individual and cultural sense of home and family as a place and as an idea — whatever the direction of our desires.217

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216 My early videos are the works in which my own emotions are used to prompt affective experiences in the audience, most notably *Je Changerais D’Avis* (2000), *I am a Boyband* (2002), *Live to Tell* (2002) and *Lyric* (2004).

217 Cook, 20.
For Cook, the relational and affective space between the individual and the subject of study is the very material of meaning-making. So instead of feeling overwhelmed by the ways I am perhaps ill-equipped to do a historical survey, archival indexing, or documentary portrait of the libraries, my approach as an artist can be led by my own personal investment in the materials, and all the histories, feelings, and experiences that intersect with them. Turner identifies finding one’s own investment in cultural material, and laying ones claim to them, as a queer methodology. Speaking about the autobiographical notes interleaved between chapters of his book *Backwards Glances*, Turner notes,

> The interludes which go between the chapters are all seen through an autobiographical lens. The first one is a riff on *The Wasteland*, actually. I’m not sure if anyone gets that. But it tries this allusive thing, in conversation with T. S. Eliot, in a way. It’s this idea that very personal conversations are taking place and it did seem important, to be in conversation. Again, that’s queer methodology, to find your own investment and lay claim to that. I think it might not have worked if I hadn’t been in it.  

One of the ways I am seeking a balance between the diversity of histories and affects I wish my final artistic output to narrate is through the expansion of the final form in which my artistic research takes. The audio guide component of *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is* will mediate encounters with the libraries of my hosts using the aesthetics of a re-imagined audio guide developed through my doctoral research, maintaining a didactic approach concerned with the navigation and affective experience of the auditor-spectator. Parallel to the audio guide, I am producing a body of work more concerned with my individual human *subjective*, reflecting my own investments and feelings and “laying claim to them” through floral, epistolary, and photographic works. These corollary works will serve as an exhibitable scenography around which the audio guide will be experienced off-site. My hope is that the final exhibition, in which visitors will listen to an audio guide tour of the libraries of my hosts while encountering sculptural objects and photographic works of a more personal, diaristic nature, will produce queer effects of sliding between histories and feelings, real places and imagined ones, allowing my own kinship bonds to extend to and remap their own.

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218 Turner, 2019.

219 My hope is for the final audio guide to also be installed in the homes of my hosts, available to visitors, or perhaps for future events where members of the public are given access, as was the case of my action in Gert and Mattias’s home in 2017.
When Tom Waugh, surrounded by fellow bathers on the roof terrace of Bain Coloniale, proclaimed, “I don’t know where paradise is: it is here! It is here! It is here!”, I knew that this statement should be the title of my research, for it articulated two ideas already present in my initial encounters in the libraries I was studying. First was the statement of not knowing where paradise is, even though what immediately follows is an acknowledgement that paradise is, in fact, right here. This admission of not knowing, of something being simultaneously clear and opaque, spoke to my own feelings of bewilderment at seeking a method for the navigation of the chosen sites of my artistic research.

Second was the invocation of paradise, a place that figures abstractly in my secular worldview, but that had been growing in importance through my encounters with writing and art concerned with queer utopias. The word paradise gave voice to the affects of my encounters with my hosts’ homes: an ineffable feeling of entering a kind of dream world that embodied decades of gay living and loving, treasuries of queer ideas, images, and other artefacts. My research has been motivated by a desire to learn about and portray what might be different about the homes and libraries of my hosts, nourishing my curiosities about how to build different models of cohabitation, how to design a domestic queer refuge, and importantly, how to grow old, a curiosity articulated in Foucault’s question:

How is it possible for men to be together? To live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their grief, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be naked among men, outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie?

The answer to these questions seemed to be reflected in my hosts’ libraries, their gardens, their interiors, and their social and relational practices, answers I wish to render into artworks, and to use as clues for the design of my own life.

I wonder if in this way, the final work produced as I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is has the potential to be an act of “worlding”, a concept I have come into contact with through Haraway’s writings on interactions between different species, technologies, and forms of knowledge. I am attracted to the labyrinthine play of words Haraway uses to describe the ethics and methods of worlding practices:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think

thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.\textsuperscript{221}

Haraway provides a crucial ethical question with which to guide my approach, encouraging me to keep sight of the ideas, images, and methods I use to tell the libraries’ stories, and the worlds these stories conjure and create.

When I asked Gert and Mattias to show me around their apartment during my first social visit, my initial instinct was not to produce an artwork that engaged their collection, but rather a desire to spend an extended period of time simply dwelling in their home and reading from their library. It has taken me a long time to return to and acknowledge the affects of this original moment in Gert and Mattias’s library, and to figure out how to use these feelings — which have persisted ever since — to guide both the research methods and the aesthetics of my artistic production. The process of qualifying and legitimising my artistic research for funding bodies and other institutions by emphasising my (albeit very sincere) concern for the preservation and transmission of LGBTQ histories served in some way to obscure the feelings that initially motivated my artistic inquiry. But my research has consistently re-activated these feelings, and over time I have found ways to honour and center the generative power of the inarticulable affective dimensions of my encounters with these spaces.

That the phrase about paradise was, in fact, misquoted by Tom — either because he was paraphrasing or couldn’t quite remember the exact words — adds a poignant dimension to its use as my project’s title, serving as a guide and reminder of the generative power of that which is opaque. Tom’s reformulation of the line of Urdu verse that appears on the chhatris at Diwan-i-Khas, this new statement of knowing-yet-not-knowing where paradise is, acted upon the project in generative ways, in ways that working titles often do. After staging the bathhouse action at Tom’s house that was also titled, \textit{I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is}, one of the participants sent me feedback about the event in an e-mail:

I just wanted to share some thoughts with you about the title. As a former Jehovah’s Witness, "Paradise" has a very specific meaning for me. We were taught — and we taught others — that Jehovah’s Witnesses will live forever in a paradise on earth. It’s a message that we brought door-to-door distributing \textit{The Watchtower} magazine and other literature. So it was not uncommon for the Witnesses to encounter householders who admitted to not knowing where paradise was or would be, when we asked them. It certainly never occurred to me that paradise might be behind the door I was knocking on. It turns out that in this case, it was.

\textsuperscript{221} Haraway, 2016: 12.
The participant’s story of developing his initial image of paradise through a Jehovah’s Witness education represents a subjective position so far from my own lived experience as to be almost unrelatable for me. But something about the situation my artistic research produced formed an affective bond of kinship between the two of us, in which Tom’s home provoked an experience of utopian queer space in the participant, similar perhaps to the affects that triggered my initial tears in Gert and Mattias’s library. One year after the action at Tom’s, the participant’s words still trigger strong, ineffable emotions in me, for they demonstrate the potential power of the conditions my artistic research attempts to produce.
Postlude

An Exhibition in a Library
The final expression of my doctoral artistic research was presented as a solo exhibition at the University of Edinburgh’s Playfair Library, which took place from September 23-24, 2019. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Playfair ceased to be an active library in 1960, but still contains many books locked behind decorative grilles. The space features a vast central area approximately fifty-five metres long surrounded by sixteen alcoves with large windows through which daylight from the Old College quadrangle pours in. The library is two storeys high, with a neoclassical barrel-vaulted ceiling, classical columns, and two rows of marble busts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century university rectors and professors. These imposing architectural and aesthetic features give the library a feeling of lofty, almost celestial veneration of study and scholarship. The exhibited artworks acted in counterpoint to the institutional gravitas of the Playfair, while benefitting from and entering into dialogue with the sense of the library as an eternal, sacred space for the reverence of books.

The exhibition, entitled I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is, consisted of five main elements:

**AN AUDIOGUIDE**

The core artwork was an audio guide made up of twelve narrated chapters, each between six and eleven minutes, that mediate encounters with different aspects of the libraries and homes of my hosts, with an emphasis on the home of Gert Hekma and Mattias Duyves. The audio guide’s style and content endeavour to embody as many of the ideals and experiments discussed in my dissertation. In keeping with my ongoing investment into polyphony as a way of eschewing the sense of an authoritative truth or vocal signature, the audio guide is narrated by an ensemble of voice artists: Adeniyi Adelakun, Adrian Rifkin, Alberta Whittle, Oskar Kirk Hansen, Tomi Paasonen, Will Stringer, and myself. The voices of Mattias Duyves, Gert Hekma, and Tom Waugh also briefly appear in the audio guide in the form of excerpts from interview material recorded during my research visits to their homes. The chapters take as their starting point objects found in and around the homes of my hosts, building on the idea of objects as conductors of feeling explored in my dissertation. These included a feather duster, a urinal, a Ficus drupacea pubescens, a shelf of biographies, two clocks, and a pamphlet, among other items.
The script approached the act of mediation through a variety of narration styles: describing what is on view; recounting histories; posing philosophical questions; reading poems and excerpts from books; interviewing the hosts; describing art and photographic images; and addressing the auditor’s acts of spectatorship, qualities of movement, feelings, and sexual desires. An atmospheric soundtrack composed in collaboration with Johannes Malfatti envelops and colours the narration, which is characterised by many silent pauses for reflection and unstructured movement and observation. Furthermore, the first chapter of the audio guide introduces the sound of a hum emanating from the library. The auditor is invited to contribute to this hum with their own voice:

A vibration comes from the library: a hum. Is it the hum of the books? The murmur of characters and diagrams and photographs pressed tightly between pages, rubbing up against each other? Is it the hum of all the things that for one reason or another did not find their ways into the library, humming, calling out for a reader?

It is the hum that staves off the ache of loneliness —
The hum that soothes the smarting pain of rejection —
The hum of wondering when you’ll see him again —
The low hum in your pelvis —
The hum after —

We’ll be humming, too, as the tour unfolds. You are invited to hum along as you listen to this audio guide, to help you feel your way through the labyrinth of books and characters and ideas that beckon and await you. Hum if you are lost. Hum if you are aroused. If something feels right or feels wrong. You can hum now to see how it feels.

This hum, made up of recordings of participating narrators, appears throughout the audio guide, serving as a connective tissue between chapters, and as an invitation for the auditors to maintain an embodied connection to the art experience.

The audio guide is housed on a custom designed mobile app, programmed by Nikita Gaidakov, which can be downloaded to mobile devices. The app offers basic information about the project, and, like Trees Are Fags, shuffles the audio material so that each auditor experiences a difference combination of material in a different order. Each experience lasts between fifty and seventy minutes, beginning and ending with the same introductory and concluding chapters, in between which six chapters are selected randomly by the app.

Approximately thirty five friends, colleagues, and members of Scotland’s queer community attended a private reception to experience I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is at the Playfair Library on Monday, September 23, 2019 from 17:00-19:00. Each guest was
instructed to download the audio guide app to their mobile devices; media players installed with the audio guide were also made available.

Three other elements of the exhibition space served as a kind of scenography for the auditor’s experiences of the audio guide, abstractly or peripherally referencing the objects, histories, or kinship bonds mentioned in its narration. They were:

**EPISTOLARY COLLAGES**

Seven framed artworks measuring 73 x 50 centimetres that document and aestheticise written correspondence that took place throughout my doctoral research with my hosts, as well as with individuals whose libraries I never managed to gain access to. The collages take inspiration from seventeenth century *quodlibet* paintings, a “[f]anciful type of trompe l’œil of oddments, often showing letters, paper-knives, playing-cards, ribbons, and scissors, in apparently accidental array, painted on walls, etc...” The works on display mimic this style to create three-dimensional arrangements of paper ephemera from the epistolary life of my research: handwritten letters, envelopes, photographs, bookmarks, e-mails, postcards, and book pages, to stage my correspondence with Tom Waugh, Elizabeth Lebovici, Matthias Herrmann, Abdellah Taïa, and Christine Guibert.

Two additional pieces borrow the same format without specifically documenting correspondence; rather they relate to audio guide chapters: one that involves book pages from the novels mentioned in the chapter “Two Novels”; one that serves as a mount for a copy of the anthology *Orgasms of Light* (Gay Sunshine Press, 1977) that auditors are directed to leaf through in the chapter entitled “An Ex-Libris Label”, which serves as the climactic, *aura-of-participation*-fostering ending of the audio guide:

Now turn to the inside cover, where you will see Gert’s ex libris label. It was a gift from Mattias, commissioned to celebrate the completion of his PhD at the University of Utrecht in 1987. It features a wood cut by the illustrator Pam Rueter of two naked youths holding hands, encircled by the phrase *the world will always welcome lovers*. Or as Gert says it: “The World Will Always Welcome Lovers”. Or as Mattias says it: “The World Will Always Welcome Lovers.”

Kiss the book. Yes, bring it to your mouth. Press the ex libris label to your lips. Don’t be shy. It’s natural that you should feel aroused in the library, among all its sexy words and images. Besides, there is surely no environment more permissive

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223 The narrators’ voices are intercut with the voices of Gert and Mattias in this section.
than this one. You are in the company of all the perverts in history. You are in a world that welcomes lovers. No one here would ever think to judge your act of bibliosexuality. If your desire is less oral, you can hold the book to your face, or tuck it under your armpit, or press it between your thighs. Or simply hum. Who are we to decide how you express your desire? You can choose. Take your time. Get into it.

Kiss the book, and through this kiss, kiss everyone who has ever touched its pages. Kiss Gert, kiss Mattias, kiss Adrian, kiss Tom. Kiss their students, their lovers. Kiss us, for we, too have leafed our perverted fingers through its pages. Kiss the authors, the photographer, the editor, the bookbinder. Kiss the publisher, the distributor, the bookshop keeper, the delivery boy. Through this kiss, kiss the books whose covers rub against each side of this book, who in turn touch the next books, and so on and so on, in an orgy of book-binding frottage. By kissing this one book you are kissing the entire library, and all of the characters and names and stories that dwell within its paper walls.

Don’t stop kissing.

The collages were distributed throughout the Playfair Library, hung on the brass grilles that shielded bookshelves in the alcoves.

**FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS**

Five floral arrangements distributed throughout the central corridor of the Playfair Library abstractly referenced objects or spaces referred to in chapters of the audio guide: “A Bathhouse”; “A Feather Duster”; “A Portrait of Mattias as a Young Faggot”; “A Urinal”; and “A Still Life”. The arrangements were composed of botanical and non-botanical elements, and emerge from formal experimentations with oblique lines and the queer effects initially inspired by Sara Ahmed’s book *Queer Phenomenology*. Although the importance of offering floral gifts to my hosts mentioned in my dissertation influenced the inclusion of floral arrangements in the scenography of the exhibition, this link was not made clear to the audience in any direct or concrete way. But because plants, flowers, and gardens appear throughout the audio guide, the inclusion of floral arrangements contributed to staging aspects of the domestic sphere into the institutional library space. For example, in the chapter entitled, “A Ficus drupacea pubescens”, which mediates an encounter with a forty-year-old potted plant that Mattias Duyves propagates by offering cuttings to friends, a fundamental link between libraries and gardens is proposed:
Asked about the relationship between the library and the garden, Mattias responds that books are flowers and flowers are books; but what exactly does what mean? That each flower tells a story? That the pages of a book are as precious as the fragile petals of a peony? Adrian and Denis’ library is wall-papered with a pattern of branches, acorns, birds and butterflies, giving readers the impression of sitting in an enchanted forest. And it is a short walk through an arch of white clematis to their garden, which itself is filled with flowers, branches and a variety of birds. Plants with long histories climb the bookshelves and hang from the staircases of Tom’s library, and his roof terrace is surrounded by box elder trees. And this Ficus is but one of many plants that share space with the books in Gert and Mattias’ library. They form constellations that cluster and accumulate as they approach the long, narrow balcony, where they are joined by over a hundred potted flowers, herbs and a fig tree bearing fruit.

So maybe there is some relationship between flowers and books, some kinship or simultaneity that our hosts understand. Ancient Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote in a letter, Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, deerit nihil, which is often paraphrased as If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need. But it translates literally as if you have a garden in your library, nothing will fail which seems to be an ancient clue to the question at hand, to the importance of overlapping gardens and libraries.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Six framed colour photographs measuring 46 x 32 centimetres, the majority co-created with Bastien Pourtout, were distributed through alcoves in the Playfair Library, in counterpoint to the epistolary collages. The photographs stage gestures or feelings from my research into the libraries of my hosts and my personal book collection that couldn’t find adequate expressive form in the audio guides, collages, or floral arrangements. I began my research taking a strong position against exhibiting photographs that document the library spaces, challenging myself to seek out other ways of conjuring the sights and sensations of my research. However, my process involved taking thousands of documentary photographs over the course of my many visits. And while these images were meant to assist me in writing the audio guide script, many of them capture moments untranslatable in other artistic forms, so I decided to either include or re-stage them as this small suite of photographs.

All the photographs feature hands enacting gestures connected to my research: transcribing a handwritten text from an artwork by photographer Duane Michals; handling a book of poems by James Merrill; reenacting a photograph by Claude Cahun that appears in the epistolary collage for Elizabeth Lebovici; casting a spell over books by Abdellah Taïa, Allen Ginsberg, Yukio Mishima, and Eikoh Hosoe; leafing through pages of Emil
Schaeffer’s 1931 book, *Der Männliche Körper*; as well as an image of Adrian Rifkin’s hand pointing to images in a photo album in his library.

**SCORES**

Three scores from artistic research undertaken during my doctoral studies were also exhibited in the Playfair Library, namely the scores from *Cruising Adrian’s Library* in the home of Adrian Rifkin and Denis Echard; the score from *I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is*, the action in Tom Waugh’s home; and the score from * Regards*, an action in the RoSa library for Feminism and Gender Studies in Brussels. While these projects do not correspond directly to the audio guide, the scores were styled in a way to contribute to the overall scenography of the exhibition, adding a domestic quality to the institutional space. Each score was reproduced on A0 sized paper that was folded and painted in a way that took on an undulating, sculptural form. The scores were laid out on the floor, almost like rugs, and were accompanied by pillows, books, writing paper, and writing utensils, at once inviting exhibition guests to sit down and follow the scores’ instructions with the materials provided, while reproducing some of the aesthetic qualities of the *quodlibet*-inspired epistolary collages. The scores were placed in alcoves of the library where photographs and collages were not on display, transforming them into little rooms for reading, writing, and repose.

A series of photographs and short descriptions documenting the artworks and the private reception on Monday, September 23 follows. At the time of printing, a selection of audio guide chapters from the mobile app can be heard at www.nemerofsky.ca/paradise with the password *paradise*. Should this web page be no longer active at the time of reading, please contact me directly.
I Don’t Know Where Paradise Is

An exhibition at the Playfair Library, Old College, University of Edinburgh, September 23-24, 2019. A private reception on the evening of Monday, September 23 was attended by Mark, Rebecca, Glyn, Fiona, Aleksandra, Elsa, Laura, Nazia, Bastien, Iain, Eoin, Geerten, Éaodaín, Ed, Alberta, Mystika, Nikita, Jasmeen, Nat, Josep, Cynthia, Jilly, Daniela, Ryan, Chase, Roberto, Jack, Kirsten, Lotte, Elise, Matt, Krystof, Izzy, Jamie, Carolyn, Christopher, and one uninvited guest whose name I did not learn. Photographs of the exhibition and event were taken by Bastien Pourtout.
Guests toured the exhibition while listening to the audio guide, either having downloaded the app to their mobile devices, or borrowed media players and headphones made available at the entrance to the Playfair Library. The atmosphere was therefore very quiet, each guest moving silently through space following the audio guide’s instructions and their own impulses for the duration of the approximately sixty-minute-long tour.
Guests commented on how the audio guide, the exhibition, and the number of bodies in the space choreographed movement in specific ways. People noted certain poses, pathways, and gestures that the exhibition produced in bodies. One guest commented that he found himself actively cruising other participants, something that the exhibition awakened, permitted, or otherwise fostered in him.
An epistolary collage in shades of dark blue, made up of materials related to a letter written to the Paris-based Moroccan author Abdellah Taïa in 2017, asking if I could visit his library. The artwork is made of leather, acrylic painted craft paper, metal pins, transcribed letter pages, an envelope, a bookmark from Les Mots à la Bouche bookstore in Paris, and a reproduction of a photograph from the 1970s of a Moroccan adolescent and Yves Saint Laurent in Marrakech.
An epistolary collage in shades of grey, made up of materials related to a letter written to the Paris-based art critic Elizabeth Lebovici in 2018, asking if I could visit her library. The art work is made of leather, acrylic painted craft paper, metal pins, a transcribed letter page, a printed out page of Lebovici’s blog *Le Beau Vice*, about the collaboration between Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, photographs of Lebovici’s Paris window in which books from her library are visible, and a reproduction of a photograph by Cahun and Moore.
An epistolary collage in shades of pink, made up of materials related to a letter written to Tom Waugh in 2019, about the links between Bain Coloniale in Montreal and the Firuzaga hammam in Istanbul. The art work is made of leather, acrylic painted craft paper, metal pins, a transcribed letter page, an envelope, a printed e-mail invitation to Tom’s weekly community bath house outings, and a photograph of a marble hammam decoration at an Istanbul market.
An epistolary collage in shades of grey, made up of materials related to correspondence between the Vienna-based artist Matthias Herrmann and myself. The art work is made of leather, acrylic painted craft paper, metal pins, letter pages, envelopes, exhibition invitations, postcards, photographs, and a bookmark featuring Herrmann’s erect penis, which is the subject of the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Still Life”.
An epistolary collage in shades of pink, made up of materials related to my research into the Paris library of the late writer and photographer Hervé Guibert (1955-1991). The art work is made of leather, acrylic painted craft paper, metal pins, a torn out page from Guibert’s diaries, published under the title *La Mausolée des Amants*, a postcard of Jean-Antoine Watteau’s 1718-1719 painting of Pierrot, a postcard of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and a reproduction of Guibert’s 1987 photograph of his private library, in which similar postcards of the Watteau painting and Pisa tower appear.
A collage to accompany a chapter of the audio guide entitled “Two Novels”, which reflects on uncanny similarities between two books found in the library of Adrian Rifkin and Denis Échard. The piece borrows the aesthetic characteristics of the epistolary collages, and is made of two sheets of wallpaper from Rifkin and Échard’s library, leather, metal pins, the epigraph pages of William Carney’s *The Real Thing* (1968) and Joël Hespey’s *S.M.* (1969), and a handwritten note from the Ebay seller of Hespey’s novel that reads “bonne reception”. This wallpaper is also referenced in the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Ficus drupacea pubescens.”
An artwork to accompany the final chapter of the audio guide, entitled “An Ex Libris Label”. The narrators invite auditors to take the 1977 anthology *Orgasms of Light* out of a glass cabinet in the home of Gert Hekma and Mattias Duyves, to leaf through it, and to kiss it. The artwork, made of silk, ribbon, and metal pins, borrows the aesthetics of the epistolary collages to create a mount for a copy of the book. The artwork does not have a glass frame, allowing exhibition guests to enact the gesture instructed by the audio guide.
A photograph of Adrian Rifkin pointing to a cut-out image in an album in his library during one of my early research visits.
A photograph of my hand transcribing a handwritten text from a book of photographs by Duane Michals that reads: *It is no accident that you are reading this. I am making black marks on white paper. These marks are my thoughts, and although I do not know who you are reading this...the lines of our lives have somehow intersected. We touch here —*
A photograph of my hand touching Emil Schaeffer’s 1931 book, *Der Männliche Körper* in Adrian Rifkin and Denis Échard’s library.
A photograph of Bastien Pourtout handling a book of poetry by James Merrill, whose cover design includes a close up of Merrill’s face. The image is supposed to produce the effect of a reader looking into the author’s eyes.
A photograph that stages a recreation of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’s *Mains et Table*, 1936. The image corresponds to the epistolary collage of a letter addressed to Elizabeth Lebovici, in which a zoom photograph of her library seen through the window revealed a book of Cahun's writing. In this way, the library — as well as Lebovici’s writing on lesbian collaboration in the work of Cahun and Moore — offered an artistic cue that inspired this remake. The photograph was hung in the same alcove as the epistolary collage.
A photograph of my hand touching, or perhaps casting a spell over pages from three books: Abdellah Taïa’s *Celui qui est digne d’être aimer* (2017); Allen Ginsberg’s *Photographs* (1991); and Yukio Mishima and Eikoh Hosoe’s *Ordeal by Roses* (1961).
Three alcoves of the Playfair Library were dedicated to displaying large scale versions of navigational scores created for the libraries of Adrian Rifkin and Denis Échard in London, Tom Waugh in Montréal, and the RoSa Library of Feminism and Gender Studies in Brussels. The scores were printed on A0 format paper, folded and acrylic painted. The scores, whose instructions involve acts of reading and transcribing, were accompanied by pillows, books, and writing materials.
A floral arrangement to accompany the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Urinal”. It is composed of an ivy branch, a Hesperantha coccinea flower, leather, an octagonal mirror, and a perforated metal structure designed to resemble the Amsterdam urinoir described in the audio guide: *The urinal is outside, on the other side of the canal, approximately two hundred metres from the library. It is actively in use, but mostly as a spectacle that is gawked at by tourists and passersby, treated as part of the neighbourhood’s sexual culture of display. It is dark green, and made of steel, perforated with a quatrefoil pattern that abstracts and conceals the bodies of its users...This particular model is called a krul in local vernacular, which means curl, named for its curved form that recalls the shell of a snail when viewed from above.*
A floral arrangement to accompany the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Feather Duster”. It is composed of an ivy branch, a gladiolus, leather straps, acrylic painted fabric, and branches of an unidentified plant found on the Warriston Path in Edinburgh.
A floral arrangement to accompany the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Still Life”, which takes inspiration from a postcard by the artist Matthias Herrmann. A vase-like support structure was assembled using books of Herrmann’s photographs, including *Cum Pieces* and *Toscana Dance*. The arrangement was in view of the epistolary collage dedicated to written correspondence with Herrmann. The exhibition arrangement was composed of blackberry and ivy branches. The studio arrangement is composed of an ivy branch and carnations.
A floral arrangement to accompany the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Portrait of Mattias as a Young Faggot”, which takes inspiration from a photograph of Mattias Duyves circa 1975 by Erick de Keijser:
The photo was taken in the gay and lesbian commune initiated by Marianne Sachs where they lived at the time. Mattias is staring directly at the camera, lightly seductive, with what he calls the “look of the young attractive man of the day, you know, curly hair, and a little bit non-chalant.” A vase cover was produced with a reproduction of the photograph using plasticised paper. The exhibition arrangement was composed of Kniphofia and Asparagus aethiopicus.
A floral arrangement to accompany the audio guide chapter entitled, “A Bathhouse”, which describes Tom Waugh’s bathhouse outings at Montreal’s Bain Colonia. The non-floral elements include the marble hammam decoration that appears in the epistolary collage dedicated to written correspondence with Waugh, ribbed plastic tubing, a brass rod, and leather. The exhibition arrangement was composed of Gypsophila. The studio arrangement is composed of Viburnum.


Lundin, Olle. “(Un)learning to read the body,” filmed May 30, 2018, Eindhoven. TEDx video, 15:01, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zWkH2yrJBU


Wilson, Fred. “Scholl Lecture Series: Fred Wilson.” Lecture given at Pérez Art Museum Miami, June 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-v2as0pNkog&list=PL3r_c5CbNTM5HhhPWB1vm1BwVLV0g2dtW&index=10&t=0s


Portfolio of Artistic Research

This portfolio documents artistic research and completed works produced during the course of my doctoral study. Some are discussed in my dissertation, others are not; however the ensemble of works all contribute to and engage the aesthetic and methodological concerns my academic writing explores. I have arranged them in chronological order, organised by year, as a way of charting the development of the artistic impulses and strategies that culminated in my final PhD exhibition.
INTERLUDES / MELLANSPEL
I used seven songs composed by Hugo Alfvén in 1908 — based on poems written by art collector Ernest Thiel — as the artistic and historical starting point for a suite of narrated pieces integrated into the audio guide of Thielska Galleriet. *Interludes* proposes lyrical and critical encounters between poems, songs and artworks from the museum’s permanent collection, reflecting on the aesthetics of gay cruising in the paintings of Eugène Jansson; the problematic titling of Johannes Collin’s 1915 bronze sculpture, *Neger*; and the juxtaposition of women and flowers in the work of Carl Larsson, among other themes.
GRANDE AUDRELISQUE
A frustrated, self-objectifying young man channels the voice of lesbian poet and activist Audre Lorde, reciting her 1981 text *Uses of the Erotic.*
The erotic has been misnamed and used against us
À FLEURER
A weekly action in which I shared private letters from my own collection with local florist Jill Wirges, who interpreted the contents of the writing in flowers. When each new floral arrangement was unveiled, I telephoned the gallery and read the letter through speakers in the exhibition space. An edition of screen-printed copies of the original handwritten letters were exhibited and available for viewers to take with them. À Fleurer reverses the legendary 1948 correspondence between the French novelist Colette and her Swiss publisher Henri-Louis Mermod, which involved Mermod sending weekly bouquets to Colette to which she responded with writing. The resulting collection of essays on floral themes was published in 1949 under the title Pour Un Herbier.
NOYADES
18 November 2016
Audio, music stands, gouache and ink on paper, neoprene
Tiroler Kunstpavillon, Innsbruck

A narrated audio track that ponders the mysterious sound of the water where someone has recently drowned, turning to fragments from music by Claude Debussy and Albern Berg and examining the shapes of musical ornamentation. A scenography of paintings, music stands, and suspended textile sculptures offered a suggestive environment for the listener’s reflections.
GENET AND FASSBINDER AT THE STUTTGARTER FILMWINTER, 1956 AND 1982
Genet und Fassbinder beim Stuttgart Filmwinter, 1956 und 1982
Commissioned as part of the Stuttgarter Filmwinter’s thirtieth anniversary celebrations, and in response to the festival alternative-facts thematic Mut zur Lüge (Courage to Lie), my lecture told of a fictional history of the festival: a screening of Jean Genet’s Un Chant d’Amour in 1956 catalyses a mass migration of European queers to Stuttgart, making it the de facto gay cultural centre of Western Europe through the 1960s and 70s. Stuttgart’s gay golden years culminate in an orgy that erupts at the première of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s Genet-inspired film Querelle in 1982. The lecture was delivered in German with a slide show of 50 images to the festival’s opening night audience.
À PROPOS UNMARKED, BROWN PAPER PACKAGING
This action, created with artist Mark Clintberg or CRUSEV’s *Between the Sheets: Radical Print Before the Queer Bookstore* symposium, responded to the history of sexually explicit print material being wrapped in paper that conceals its contents when purchased in shops or sent by post. Symposium participants were invited to bring us books or other printed matter, which we wrapped using screen-printed paper of our own design, created to increase the visibility of the wrapped material, rather than to conceal it. We also wrapped and displayed a selection of books from the Glasgow Women’s Library, chosen by *Lesbian Archive Project* archivist Alice Andrews.
ΣΕ ΑΝΘΏ
I wrote a personal letter, five pages long, and sent it to Athens-based composer and writer Kiriakos Spirou. The letter pondered inherited gardens, the non-linearity of time, and the poetry of Constantin Cavafy as tools for accessing overlapping temporalities. Spirou responded to themes addressed on each individual page with a single flower picked on one of Athens’ ten hills. The flower was replaced each day, and was exhibited with its corresponding letter page. A second iteration of À Fleurer.
THE WORLD WILL ALWAYS WELCOME LOVERS
15 June 2017
Audio guide
The home of Gert Hekma and Mattias Duyves, Amsterdam

A thirty-minute audio tour of Gert and Mattias’ home, created to coincide with the *Perils and Pleasures* conference in honour of Gert’s retirement from the University of Amsterdam. The guide toured their books and garden, and encouraged a sexual encounter with Gert’s *ex-libris* label in a book in the toilet. My contribution to the conference’s cultural programme also included participation in a public conversation with activist Koenraad Vermey at the nearby Huis de Pinto, where I enacted a performative wrapping of books in de Pinto’s library. Books were given new, screen-printed covers with titles of books from Gert and Mattias’s library written on the spines, ‘migrating’ one library into another. The audience was invited to remove the covers and transfer them into their own private libraries after the talk.
THE FIVE AGES
I selected five flowers to symbolize five distinct moments from the history of Berlin’s El Dorado, referencing its incarnation as Weimer-Era cabaret, a 1980s historical exhibition on gay and lesbian life, and its general application to the city as a site of utopian longing. The flowers stood in a ceramic vase that I created, providing each flower with its own distinct opening. The flowers were arranged to interact contrapuntally, creating a bouquet of colliding and overlapping temporalities. An audio tour accompanied the artwork, in which I recount the history of the five ages while preparing and arranging the flowers in the vase.
YOU, DEAR DOCTOR, ARE MY ONLY RESCUE!
Letters written to sexologists in socialist Poland — collected by anthropologist and historian Agnieszka Kosciánská — served as source material for a performance installation in which an ensemble of performers reviewed, transcribed and read aloud passages in Polish and English translation.
FOR THE LAST GUEST
An arrangement of flowers stands in a vase by the entrance of the gallery, wrapped in screen-printed floral paper. The last visitor to leave the gallery is invited by staff to take the arrangement with them. Each day, a new arrangement appears in the vase, waiting for the last guest. Created in collaboration with Mark Clintberg.
QUEER PHENOMENOLOGY AS PRACTICE
I produced a movement score for the Reading/Talking/Performing group as accompaniment to a discussion of Sara Ahmed’s text *Orientations: Towards a Queer Phenomenology*. The score took inspiration from Ahmed’s imagery and ideas, instructing participants to move obliquely in relation to the gallery and other bodies in the space. The emphasis was on an awareness of what was out of view, movements that caused feelings of disorientation, and physical states that produced what Ahmed calls “queer effects”.
CRUISING ADRIAN’S LIBRARY
In response to an invitation to curate the *Naked Boys Reading* literary salon, I designed a navigational score that led participants through a series of sensory and affective encounters with the private library of London-based writer and art historian Adrian Rifkin and his partner Denis Echard. The score asked participants to tune into the erotic energy of the library, seeking out books whose titles held some kind of erotic promise. Short passages of text were isolated, transcribed by hand, and then recited naked at the public event later that week by each participant.
TREES ARE FAGS
An audio walk designed to be listened to in an arboreal setting. The piece makes a number of arguments about the links between gay men and trees, unpacking the etymology of the word *faggot*, dismissing the heteronormative instrumentalisation of family trees, and asking the listener to tune in to the temporal modes of arboreal life. Throughout the piece there are a number of choreographic cues, based on the gestural and affective dimensions of cruising, asking the listener to search not for another human, but rather to find a tree to be their lover. The cues are programmed to shuffle from a collection of potential instructions, so that each user has a different experience of the piece, and is led on a different path.
A LETTER TO THE MAN WHO
I transcribed a love letter from my personal collection, which was distributed to men I encountered while cruising in London’s Hampstead Heath at an appointed hour. A screen-printed poster detailed the history of the letter and its intended recipient, and advertised the time and location of the cruising action.
REGARDS
The score led participants through a series of sensory and affective encounters with the RoSa library for the study of feminism and gender in Brussels. The score asked participants to imagine being accompanied by someone in the library, to seek out a passage of text to share with that person, to speak the text aloud in the library, and to transcribe the text in the form of a personal letter addressed to that person. The score was produced in English, Dutch and French.
This library is part of a collection of books, periodicals, press clippings, political pamphlets, posters and other archived material related to feminism and gender issues that RoSa has collected since 1978. The material is organised based on a system designed by RoSa in the 1990s, and is catalogued following keywords from the women's thesaurus. These words can be used to search the online catalog and appear written in pencil on the frontispiece of many of the books.

Think of someone to accompany you in the library. It can be a friend or a relative, someone living or dead, someone who you would like to know or even a stranger. It can be someone with whom you share a feminist identification, or someone you feel has a blocked concept of what feminism promises. Bring this person along with you as you navigate the library.

Take some time to wander the library to get an idea of the different materials it contains. Don't pull anything from the shelf just yet. Instead, walk around the entire space and familiarise yourself with its themes and the systems of classification it uses.

Once you have established a basic idea of the library's contours, go in search of a book. You can use any criteria to find it: you might look for a book that seems especially old, whose title or typography feels entirely out-dated, it might be a book whose title you are suspicious of, something you do not feel politically aligned with, a book whose title speaks of an earlier vision of the world, or that proposes a future you had never imagined. Keep your companion in mind.
Touch the book and let it touch you. When you feel certain that the book is ready to be pulled off the shelf, take it into your hands. Feel the book's weight. Observe how old or new it is, how many times it has been handled by other visitors to the library. Smell it. Imagine the community of readers who have shared the experience of holding this book in their hands.

Look for a passage in the book that you would like to share with the person who accompanies you in the library. It might be an idea you feel this person might benefit from, the answer to a question that person once asked, a lyric to a song you would like to sing to that person. The passage can be as brief or as long as you like, a single word or an entire page. If this book does not hold within it the text you are looking for, seek out another book. Keep searching until you find it.

Once you have found the right passage of text, speak it out loud into the library. You can speak it loud enough that other people can hear you, you can whisper it, or silently mouth the words. Either way, bring your body and your breath to the text, give it life through speech. If you hear someone else reading in the library, you can stop and listen, or read at the same time as them, or do something else.

Now, transcribe this passage into a letter to the person who accompanied you through the library. Paper, envelopes and postage stamps are available on the work tables throughout the library. The letter can be as simple and brief or long and involved. Write the real or imagined address on the envelope. You can put the letter in a nearby postbox with me now, take it with you and mail it another time, or keep it for yourself.
I DON’T KNOW WHERE PARADISE IS
Members of Montreal’s queer community were invited to follow a navigational score that guided them through acts of reading, transcribing, and reciting material found in Tom’s library. The event was designed to reproduce the sensorium of the nearby Bain Coloniale, a men’s bathhouse that serves as the site of regular outings for Tom and his community, by providing participants with towels, showers, and changing rooms, and by filling his home with steam. Participants gathered on Tom’s roof terrace at the end of the event for an impromptu reading of selected text passages.
A LETTER CONDONING THIS EXHIBITION,
A LETTER CONDEMNING THIS EXHIBITION
I wrote two letters when I learned that my aesthetics and identity had been used by artist Josh Schwebel as part of his solo exhibitions at the Fonderie Darling (Montreal) and the Tadeusz Kantor House (Hucisko). The letters – one condoning, the other condemning Schwebel’s actions – were framed and locked within a sculptural work designed to resemble a *quodlibet* painting, and displayed within Schwebel’s Montreal exhibition. Close to the end of the exhibition’s run, I staged the unlocking and live reading of the two letters, returning one letter to the frame, disposing of the other.
THERE IS NO KEY NOTE
A participatory performance action offered in lieu of a keynote address at the *Imagine Queer* conference. The action aimed to orchestrate and aestheticise a polyphonic situation that shared the power of the keynote among participants. Participants were invited to arrange flowers, recite texts of their choice, and to leave the performance space whenever they wanted, thus co-authoring the conclusion of the conference, whose aim was to explore “the radical potential of queerness now”. Central to the action’s conceptualisation was staging a way for myself to withdraw from the position of power afforded to me as closing keynote speaker. The gesture employed a polyphonic, participatory aesthetics through which to redistribute power more equitably, while proposing a strategy informed by queer histories of withdrawal and sublimation for my retreat.
PROLOGUE AND VARIATIONS
Sixteen short, diaristic videos that chart the serpentine path a writer takes towards completing a manuscript. A liminal space of longing and desire is portrayed, filled with acts of thinking, reading, reflecting, writing, rewriting, transcribing, editing, singing, and seeking counsel from friends, flowers, photographs, and the books of admired authors, including Jean Genet, M. Agayev, Joris-Karl Huysman, and Sarah Schulman. Handwritten translations of the dialogue into German were made available in front of each viewing station.
Throughout 2018 and 2019
Floral and non-floral materials

A series of ephemeral sculptural works that emerged from a quotidian practice of arranging flowers for personal pleasure. Initially an exclusively personal, diaristic gesture, the arrangements evolved through Ikebana study and experimentation with non-floral materials. While the exhibition life of these arrangements has primarily been limited to photo-documentation circulated via social media, an arrangement was composed as a live performance at the Fruitmarket Gallery (Edinburgh) in 2018, and an arrangement was displayed for an exhibition at LifeSpaces (Dundee) in 2019, with the living floral elements refreshed weekly.
GARDE ROSE
A performative party staged in collaboration with Mark Clintberg, to which guests were invited to arrive with a single flower. Each flower was recorded into a ledger, pruned and conditioned, and placed in a vase from a vast selection of exhibited vessels. Guests watched the growing volume of flowers, enjoyed poetry and video art on floral themes, and refreshments made from distilled flowers. Each guest was presented with a new flower when they left — different from the one they arrived with — wrapped in screen-printed wrapping paper. The Edinburgh edition of *Garde Rose* followed smaller-scale stagings in Berlin and New York City.
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Edinburgh’s Twelve Triangles Kitchen Table served as a remote office throughout the process of writing this dissertation, and the entire staff of the café grew increasingly invested in its success. The first book I borrowed from the Edinburgh College of Art library was Heather Love’s *Feeling Backwards*, in whose pages I found a turquoise and pink postcard for Twelve Triangles. It was perhaps the first navigational cue given to me by a book, and it led me to the one place in Edinburgh where I now feel like a ‘regular’.
Li Kolker provided me materials from Historiska Museet’s *Hidden Histories* exhibition. Anna Robertson from the McManus Art Gallery and Museum provided me with an image of Thomas Faed’s *The Visit of the Patron and Patroness to the Village School*.

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Portions of the Prelude that describe the encounters with Gert and Mattias’s library that led to crying were published in substantially different form as a research text entitled *Artefact: The World Will Always Welcome Lovers* in Issue 126 of *C Magazine* (2015).