Quilting the Lesbian Archive: Quilt Making as an Affective Methodology for Re-visioning the Lesbian Archive

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PHD 2022

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Design

Manchester Metropolitan University

2022

Abstract

There is no lesbian archive in the UK; lesbian materials are clustered and dispersed in vastly divergent kinds of archives. In this context of fragmentation and loss this thesis uses practice-based research to establish quilt making as an affective methodology for re-visioning the lesbian archive materials in Britain.

Through the embodied methodology of auto-ethnography this thesis pays close attention to the material, and the affective resonances of the lesbian archive; making my own queer desires and longings explicit. Rather than a chronological or topographical ordering of archive materials, I present three kinds of archival encounter: *the institutional* (Vera Holme Collection: The Women's Library at London School of Economics), *the domestic* (the private collection of photographer Phyllis Christopher, and *the community* (The Lesbian Archive and Information Centre Collection at Glasgow Women's Library). Lastly, the thesis coins the concept of '*the archival loop'* used to examine the archive of the Rebel Dykes that shifts between categories, defiantly in motion.

The project presents a new body of quilted artworks that identify the under-researched imagery, symbolism, and visual cultures of lesbian communities in the 20th century. Through this specifically lesbian vernacular and a technical focus on digital embroidery, the works expand on traditional and feminist quilting practices. I offer a critique of the dominance of access and visibility as the primary tactics for liberating the lesbian archive (Castle, 1993; Jagose, 1994; Traub, 2016). Instead presenting quilt making as an affective strategy for piecing together fragments of the archive, whilst leaving space for the unknown and unseen. The quilt is established as both an act of 're-visioning' and 'femmage' both of which are feminist strategies that turn towards the historical, in order to re-assemble the contemporary strategies for survival in a patriarchal world. Through a femme-ethical methodology that prioritises embellished aesthetics, emotional vulnerability, and an ethics of reciprocity the quilt not only re-visions the lesbian archive, but becomes an active contributor to the archive. Through this act of becoming the archive: I establish the archive as an active/activist site for intergenerational intimacy and collaboration that has the potential for new lesbian imaginaries and communities to form.

Acknowledgments

This PhD has been a labour of loves, my own and so many others.

It is dedicated to the rebel dykes who came before me.

I have had the privilege of having the most generous and supportive supervisory team; Alice Kettle, Fionna Barber and Hannah Singleton. They have helped me through endless embroideries, edits and tears over the last four years and I will be forever grateful. I have loved our conversations, and felt thoroughly challenged, cared for, and valued throughout.

Alice supported me right from my masters to the PhD. She has been such an inspiration in the development of my embroidery practice, giving me exactly the critical push that I needed, whilst helping me grow my faith in my own work. Sending me back to my drawings changed my embroidery forever. I am so grateful for her endless, generous support – it has been a privilege, and a truly transformative experience to get to know her.

Sue Prestbury has also been here for me over the last five years, challenging me to slow down, and to take care with my materials – and to take the time to specialise in digital embroidery. I have learnt so many skills, and some patience from Sue, and especially enjoyed the quiet summer afternoons chatting by the quilter.

I was lucky enough to attend the Sexuality Summer School at Manchester University several times. Thank you to Jackie Stacey, Monica Pearl, and Sabine Sharp for putting together such wonderful programs over the years, which have sustained me in my queer thinking.

It was here I met Lois Stone in that first year, where we were inspired to create Queer Research Network Manchester (QRNM). Later we were joined by Jack Warren and James Slattery. Co-directing QRNM has been such a wonderful experience, organising some great events, connecting with other early career queer researchers, and making three wonderful friends.

I have also been lucky enough to have been a part of Proximity Collective with Anne-Marie Atkinson, Ann Carragher, Antony Hall, Jackie Haynes and Rebecca Howard. Our conviviality and residencies gave me a space to find new connections and think differently about art and research. In particular, our Wednesday morning meetings kept me connected and inspired throughout the height of the pandemic. Each person has brought me unexpected insight and joy.

Thank you to Phyllis Christopher, for being such a wonderful and generous friend – sharing your incredible work, and opening your home to me. It has been such a joy to see your exhibitions and book come to light. Thank you to Janina Sabaliauskaite for introducing me to Phyllis, *On Our Backs* magazine, Annie Sprinkle and for leading the way with *On Our Backs: An Archive* exhibition with Jade Sweeting. You are such an inspiration to me, and I am proud to have you as a friend.

Thank you to Susie Bright for the feedback and kind words, and to Annie Sprinkle for letting me play with her images. Thank you to Alison Oram for inspiring me with her writing, traveling all over to give talks and for making me feel like my work is worthwhile.

I was lucky to be undertaking my PhD at a time when the Rebel Dykes were creating an archive, film, exhibition, and spaces for intergeneration dyke community building. Thank you to Siobhan Fahey, Sian Williams and Harri Shanahan for creating such an inspiring film, important project, and introducing me to so many wonderful dykes who changed my life; and thank you to Atalanta Kernick and Kat Hudson for curating such a raucous exhibition, and for including me. Thank you so much to Siobhan Fahey and Sophie Moorcock for helping me connect with so many people, and facilitating important conversations. Thank you to Bernard and June Boffin for their blessing to work with Tessa Boffin's image archive. Thank you to Maj (Jane Campbell) for being so beautiful, generous, and writing such moving poetry. I am looking forward to spending more time together. I am enormously, endlessly grateful to Fisch for being so generous and vulnerable in sharing with me her huge personal collection of materials, that provided me with so much inspiration. I loved stitching you, it was an honour.

Thank you to Greg Thorpe for creating so many empowering opportunities and pockets of queer joy for LGBTQ artists in Manchester, for commissioning my work, and most of all for being such a loving and generous friend. Queer Artist talking circle provided me (and so many others) with a crucial space for finding inspiration and unexpected connections. Thank you to Thomas Dukes for many long conversations about artists in archives, the opportunity to rummage around in the Castlefield Gallery office and curating my final exhibition of the project. I am also grateful to HOME Manchester who supported my work through development funding, my first institutional solo show and generally being one of my favourite places to spend time.

The project was enabled by funding and support from the North West Consortium Doctoral Training centre. Their support also allowed me to spend time in so many amazing archives, attend career-altering conferences and undertake two placement projects that transformed and extended my PhD method to new places. Thank you to Carly Davies and Paul Evans for the absolute privilege of having a studio and exhibition within the beautifully carved walls of Plas Newydd. Thank you to Alexis Bard Johnson, and all the wonderful staff at The ONE Archives for welcoming me into the collection and creating the *Looking for Lesbians* exhibition with me.

The biggest thank you is to my extraordinary and inspirational partner Talin Aghanian who uprooted her life to move to Manchester so I could undertake this PhD. She has sewn thousands of beads and sequins, hand made too many tassels to count, packaged and sent quilts to so many places, undertaken endless editing, taken care of our home while I worked, listened to constant lesbian quilt talk, encouraging, and supporting me through everything. I would never be able to make the work that I do without her.

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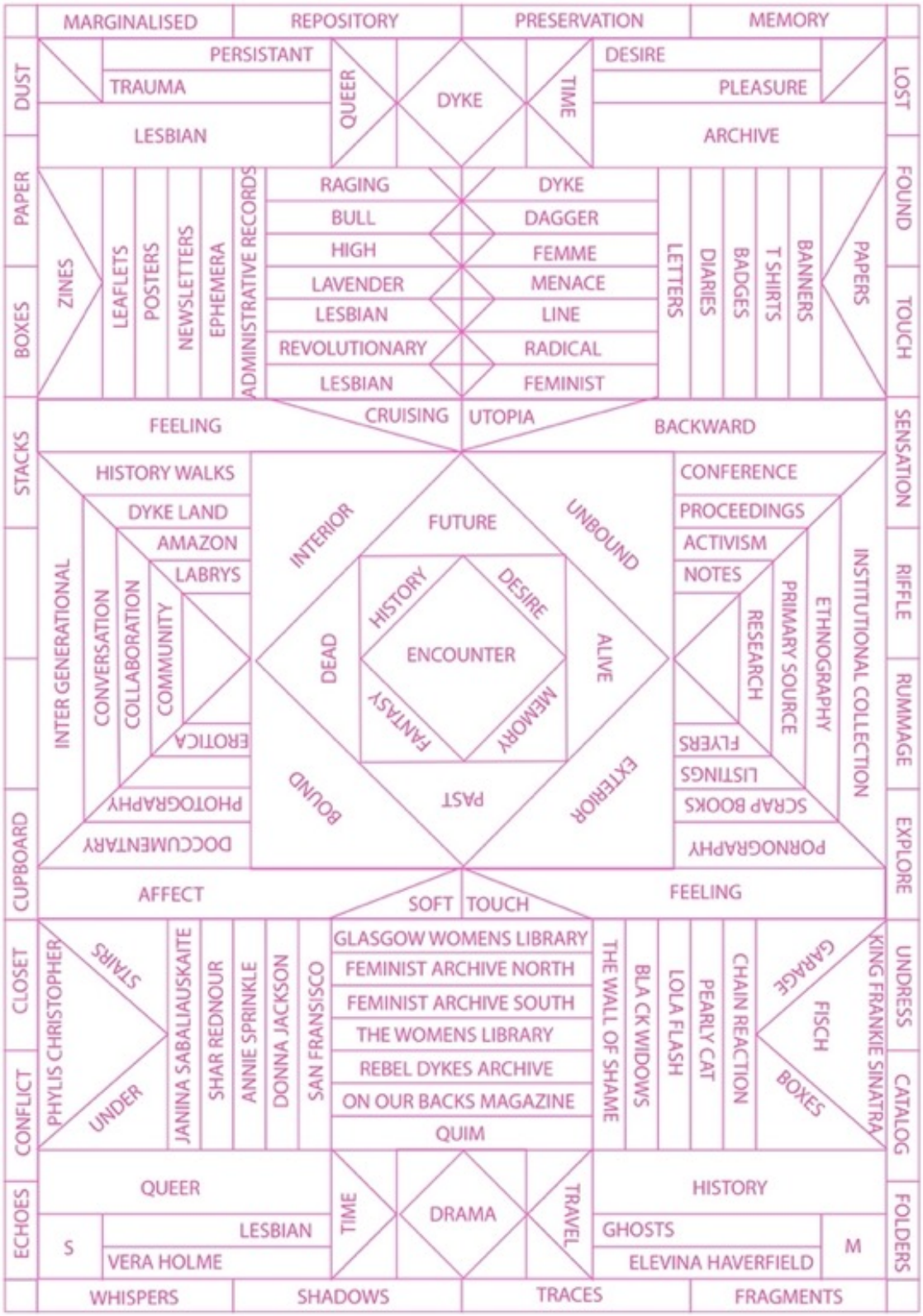

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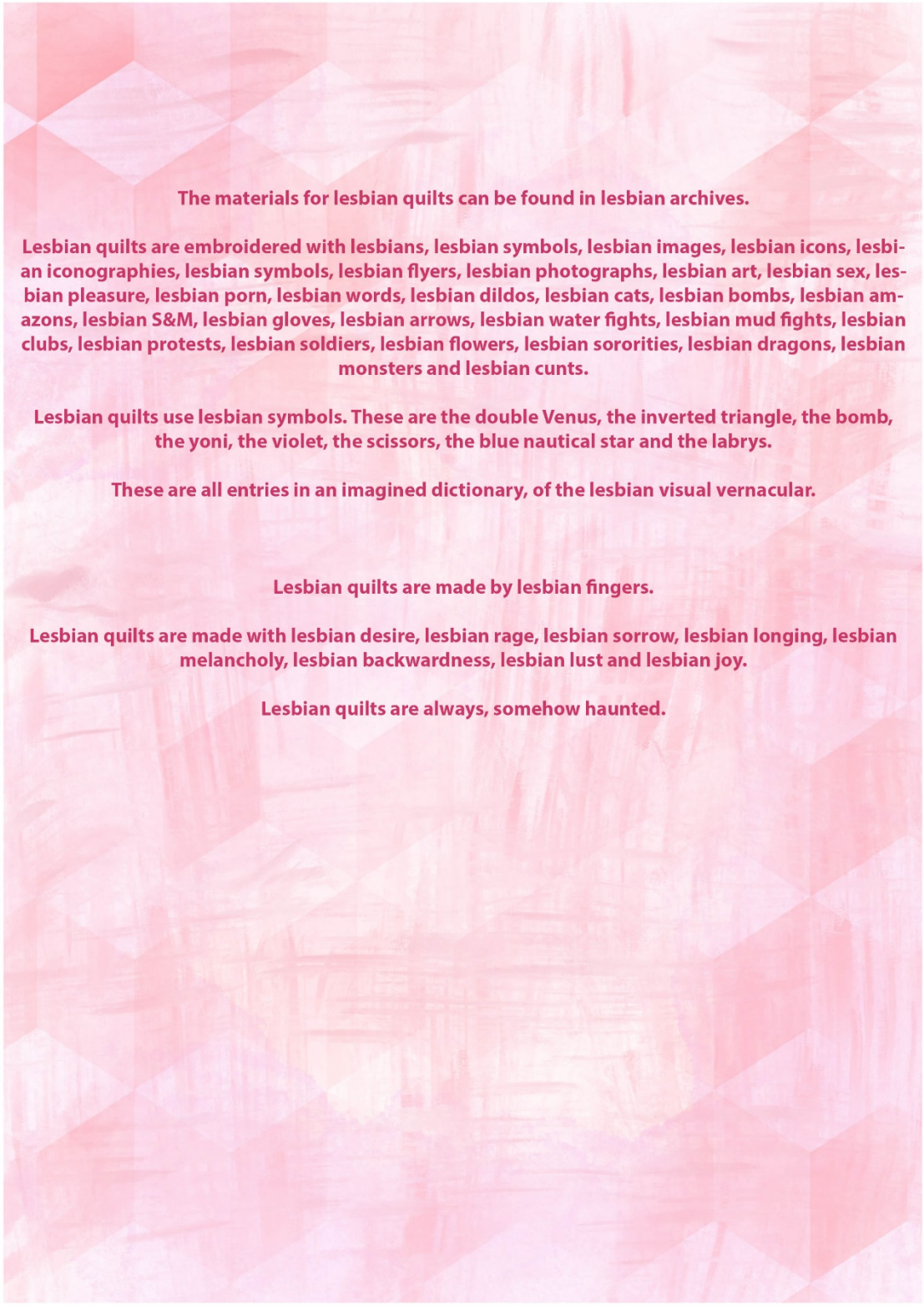

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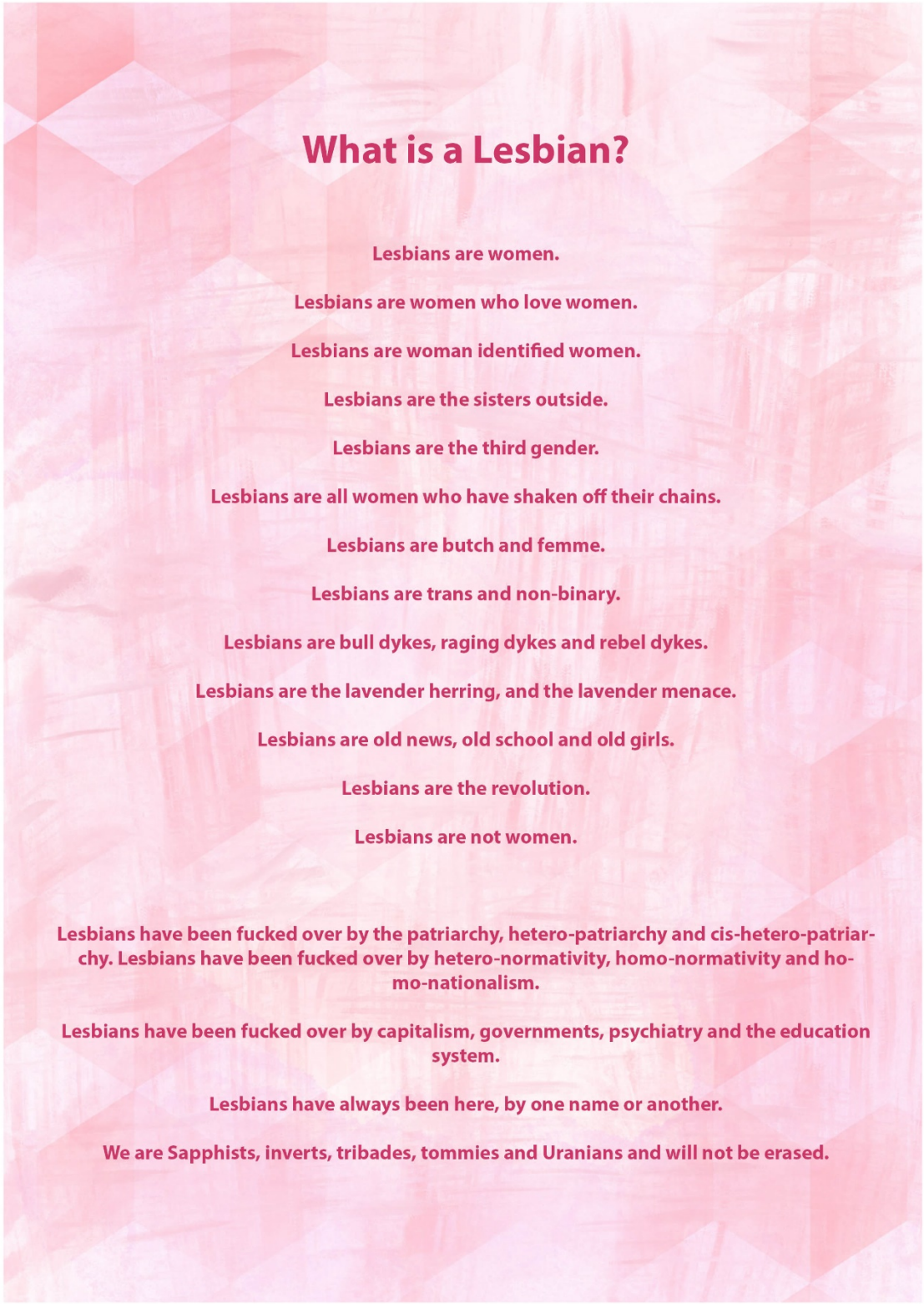

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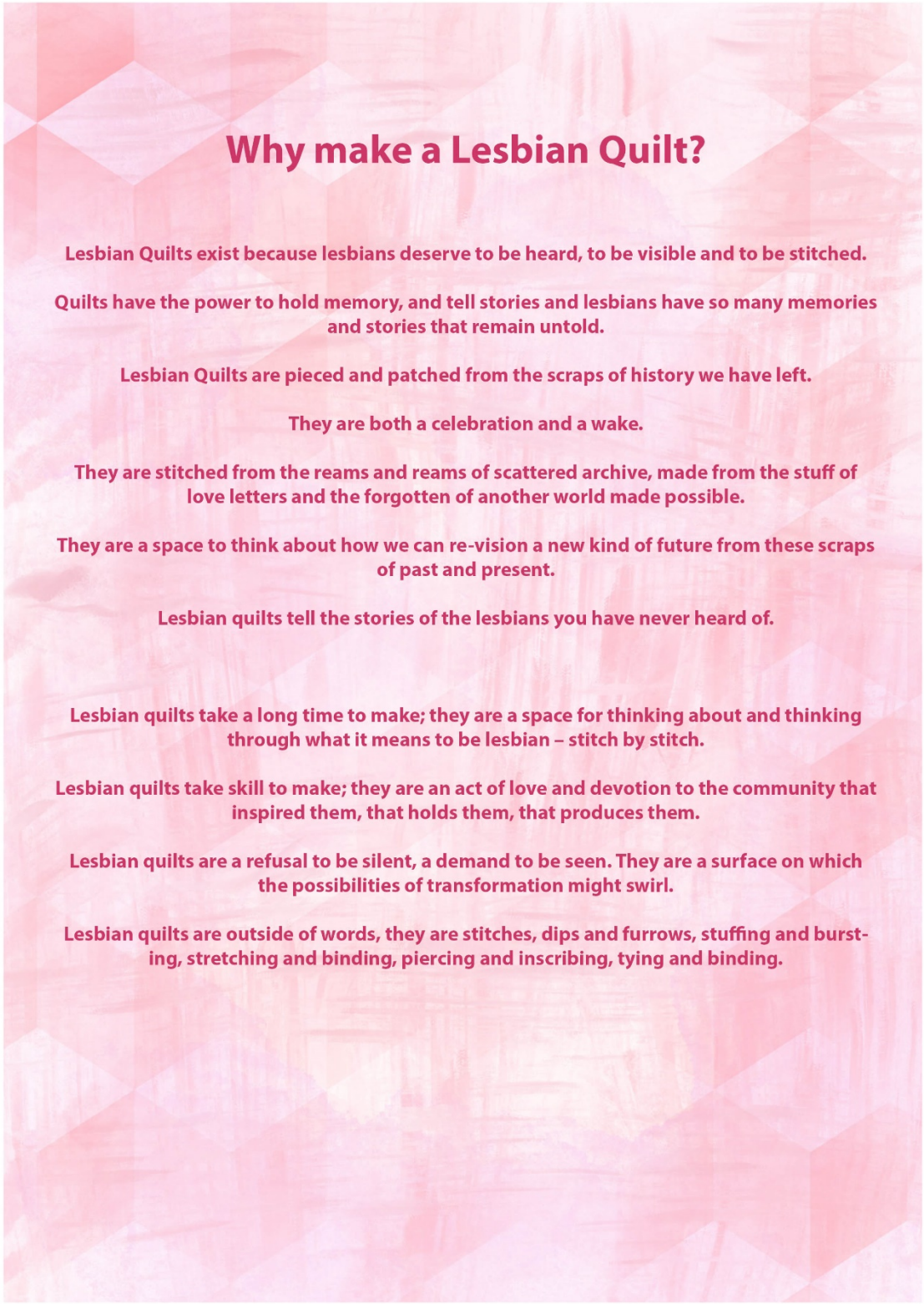

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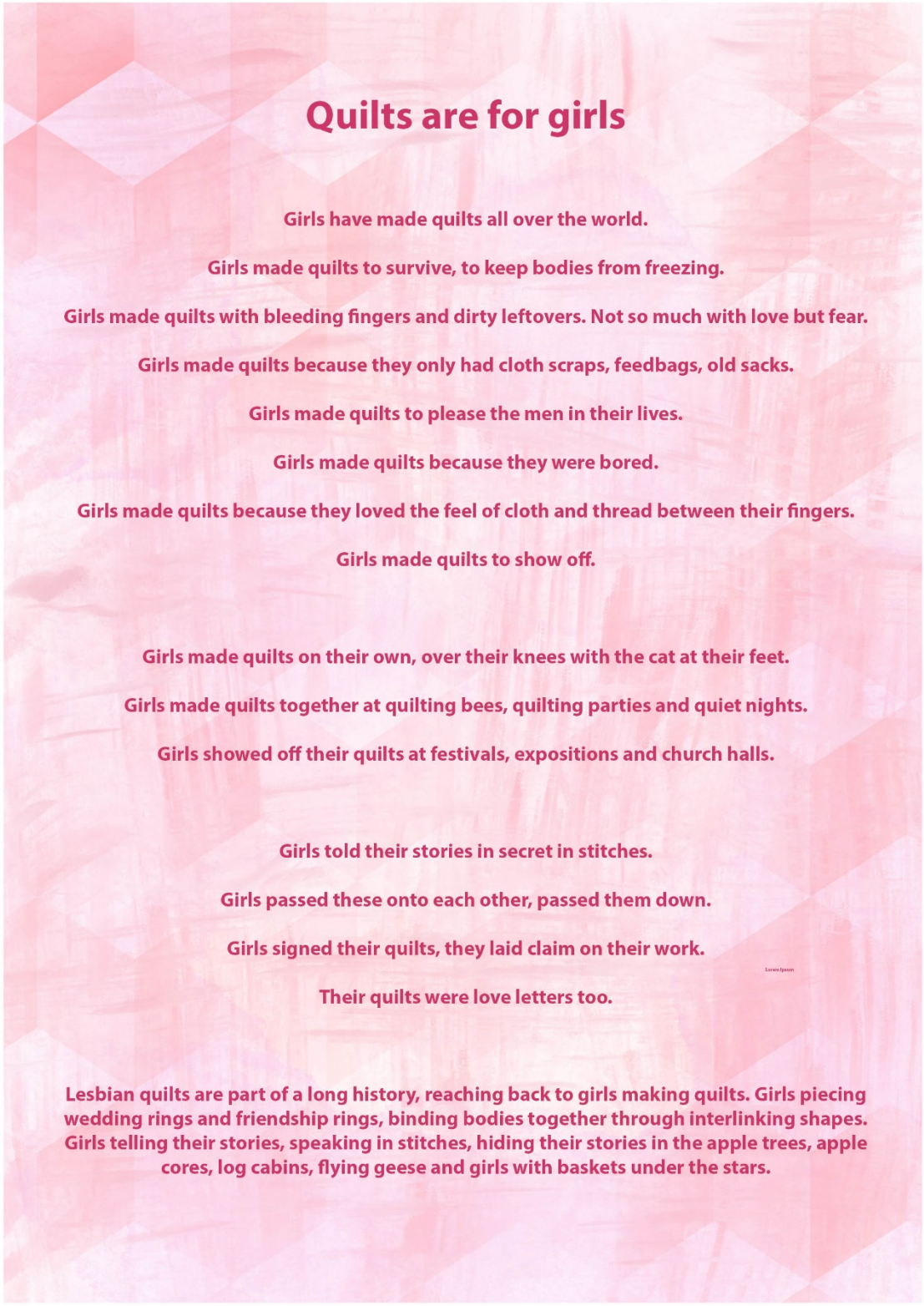

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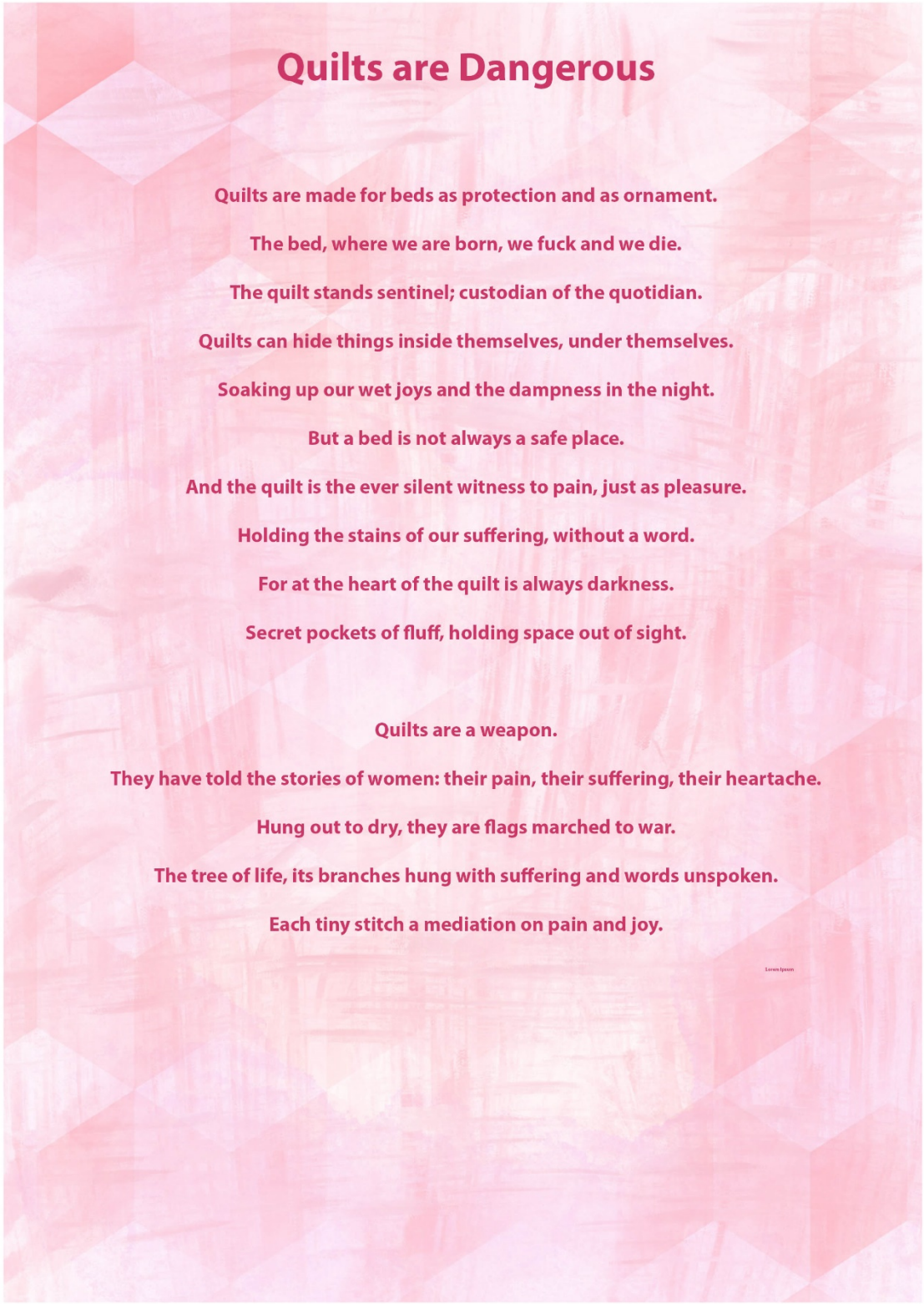

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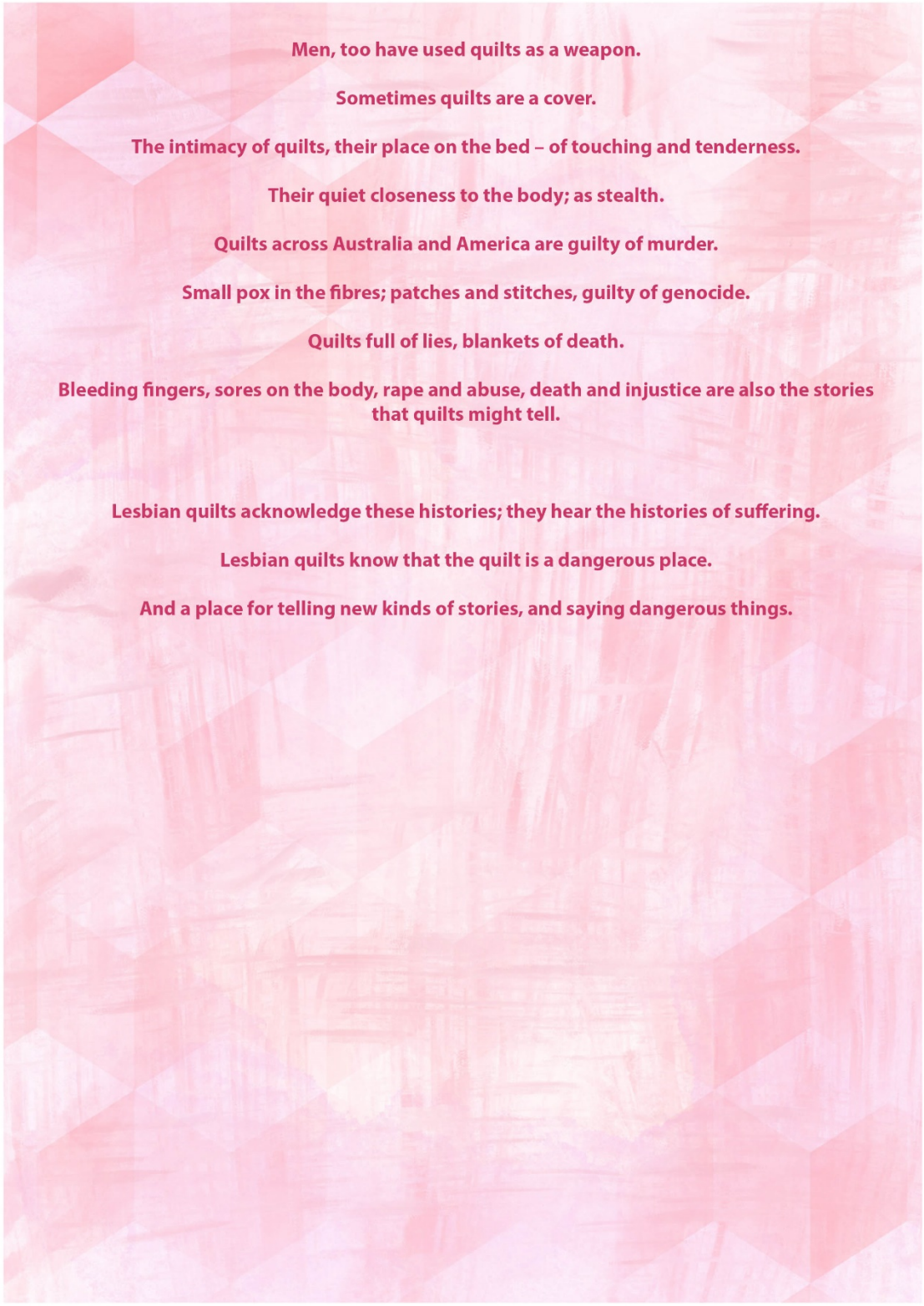

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Quilt Making in the Lesbian Archive: An Introduction

This thesis is prefaced by *The Lesbian Quilt Manifesto* as a textual artwork that lays out the core threads of what motivates my material practice. It is a statement on the use of quilt making as a specifically lesbian, and deliberately femme practice. *The Lesbian Archive: A Quilt Map* visually represents the key archives, materials and themes that are significant to this thesis, tessellated together in relation to one another – which speaks to the interlocking interdependency of each of the studies. Beginning with the creative practice sets the tone for this thesis, which prioritises material practice as an affective methodology for re-visioning the materials of the lesbian archive in Britain. Constructed from my curiosity, my longing for a lesbian lineage and my artistic pursuit of a lesbian visual vernacular this project is a deeply personal engagement with the lesbian archive.

There is no lesbian archive in the UK therefore this project turns to archival collections that have been identified as lesbian. In the context of loss and fragmentation the archival studies are not structured around time-periods or locations, instead it proposes three kinds of archival encounters: *the institutional, the domestic, the community,* and *the archival loop,* which represents an archive that moves between all three. Through practice-based research, this thesis demonstrates quilt making as an affective methodology for re-visioning lesbian archive materials in Britain. The research offers both a body of quilted artworks made in response and in relation to collections of lesbian archival material. Through digital embroidery, embellishment and quilt making I take up, and expand on Adrienne Rich's notion of re-visioning as 'of looking back and seeing with fresh eyes' as an 'act of survival' (Rich, 1972:18). The fragments of the archive are picked up, and re-assembled from 'a new critical direction', informed by my own embodied experiences and emotional entanglements as a lesbian (Rich, 1972:18). Through the embodied methodology of auto-ethnography, this thesis pays close attention to the material and affective resonances of the lesbian archive by making my own desires and longings explicit (Newton, 1993; Adams and Jones, 2014). It engages with my own desire to look backwards, to encounter lesbian history and be in touch with queer materials outside of my own time (Love, 2007; Enszer, 2015; Doan, 2017). The thesis explicitly examines my desire not only for 'the archive' but for 'the

idea of what the archive might have to offer' (Singh, 2018b:19). The materiality of the archive is established as the site for enacting these longings.

Contributions to Knowledge

The project presents a new body of quilted artworks that identify the under-researched imagery, symbolism, and visual cultures of lesbian communities in the 20th century. Through this specifically lesbian vernacular and a technical focus on digital embroidery, the works expand on traditional and feminist quilting practices. I offer a critique of the dominance of access and visibility as the primary tactics for liberating the lesbian archive (Castle, 1993; Jagose, 1994; Traub, 2016). Instead, presenting quilt making as an affective strategy for piecing together fragments of the archive, whilst leaving space for the unknown and unseen. The quilt is established as both an act of 're-visioning' and 'femmage' both of which are feminist strategies that turn toward the historical, in order to re-assemble the contemporary as a literal strategy for survival in a patriarchal world.

Through auto-ethnography, these quilts are situated as archives of my own affective, inter-temporal and intergenerational encounters with the archive. This establishes that although fragmented, lesbian archive collections in Britain function as active sites for interaction across temporalities, intergenerational collaboration and the formation of new cultures and communities. This new body of work is situated as a contribution to knowledge, and to contemporary lesbian culture through a series of relationships, exhibitions and eventually through the institutional acquisition of the project archive. Throughout the project the quilts moved beyond the original objective to 're-vision' the lesbian archive, and became active contributions to the lesbian archive.

Unlike the USA, there is no dedicated lesbian archive in the UK and therefore the materials of the lesbian archive are fragmented; and there is no significant study on the distribution, politics or significance of existing lesbian archival collections. The project contributes a specifically British lesbian engagement to the wider discourses of queer archives that has mostly been US based. This thesis contributes important new knowledge on under-

researched lesbian archival collections specifically in British culture, which maps the ways in which material is being kept and accessed.

The thesis establishes a femme-ethical methodology for working with lesbian archives which draws on femme theory and identity to prioritise the qualities of the queer femme: embellished aesthetics, emotional vulnerability, and an ethics of reciprocity (Blair and Hoskin, 2015; Brightwell and Taylor, 2019). This femme-ethical methodology has led not only to the re-visioning of the lesbian archive but also to becoming an active contributor to the archive through my quilt making practice. The lesbian archive is established as an active/activist site for inter-generational intimacy and collaboration that has the potential for new lesbian imaginaries and communities to form. This femme-ethical methodology is extended through the stylistic choices made in the written thesis, resulting in an autoethnography written from a femme body, prioritising the emotional and taking pleasure in the embellishment of language.

Chapter Outline

Throughout the process of this project I have developed a written voice that is more closely bound with my creative practice, through the embodied use of auto-ethnography. The first two chapters, the *Glossary* and *Quilting as Methodology* function as a preliminary literature review contextualising the study historically, and clearly establishing the field of research. My emotional, femme embodiment does not come into the writing until this theoretical field is established in *Femme Ethics for the Lesbian Archive,* and is developed further in the case study chapters.

I begin with a *Glossary* of terms that are key to the thesis, clarifying how I will use capacious or historically specific terminologies. I define the field of study within queer theories by setting out my particular use of the interlocking terms: lesbian, queer and femme, which are established as underutilised bodies of theory, crucial to this thesis. Then setting out a definition for the 'archive' which establishes it as a capacious term, and a site to produce new knowledge. I further specify the archive as the lesbian archive and contextualise my study within the lack of lesbian archive in the UK and some of the reasons for lesbian

archives to be so often lacking. I establish my own particular use of two important feminist concepts that are key to the articulation of this research; re-visioning and femmage (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977; Rich, 1972).

In the *Quilting as Methodology* chapter my quilted practice is situated in relationship to marginalised, historical quilt making practices, imbuing it with meaning deeply rooted in gendered histories of production (Parker, 1984; Jefferies, 2020). I conceptualise this project as an extension of textile theories that analyse the stitch as connecting, restoring and repairing, and therefore a strategy well suited to addressing lesbian and queer histories of erasure, violence and injury (Butler, 2008; Roberts, 2012; Chaich and Oldham, 2016). I establish the quilt not only as a material practice but as a structure for thinking about research. The integrated process of practice as research is conceptualised through the stages of quilting: piecing, patchworking, quilting and binding. These offer a pathway to alternative strategies for doing research, and encountering new knowledge and new ways of knowing outside of dominant academic forms (Piercy, 1982; Lippard, 1983; Donnell, 1990; Showalter, 2012).

Femme Ethics for the Lesbian Archive formally presents an additional, alternative narrative to institutional ethical procedure, by appropriating, embellishing and femme-inising the dispassionate questions used on the Manchester Metropolitan ethos system. Through this playful re-appropriation I establish the parameters of the collections, and maps the framework for engaging with the lesbian archive, that centres softness, desire and the auto-ethnographic approach. It sets out the queer-feminist rejection of impartiality and objectivity, committing to an 'ethic of care, a politics of recognition', as a lesbian, and a member of the community I am studying within (Panfil and Miller, 2015: 36). Instead, I propose the quilt as a sensuous method for approaching these complex archival encounters; and an affective site to work through the sticky sensations of doing lesbian history (Sedgwick, 2013; Dolan and Holloway, 2016; Ayling-Smith, 2019).

I begin the archival case studies with the most conventional conception of the archive, *The Institution: Longing in the Vera Holme Collection,* and my quilted artwork *V is for Vera* made for the *Hard Craft* exhibition 2018 (appendix 1). The chapter presents an auto-ethnographic

analysis of my femme body in the institutional space of the Women's Library at London School of Economics, researching the lesbian suffragette Vera Holme and her relationship with Evelina Haverfield. I introduce notions of the reparative drive in queer history, and how the quilt lends itself to this process for repair in its cumulative materiality which is imbued with the 'potential for ongoing patching, piecing and re-cycling' (Dormor, 2014:2). This is a brief chapter as the majority of my research on this topic has been published elsewhere (see *Bibliography of Published Writing*), and the chapter marks my departure from the Archive with a capital A, to engage further with *the domestic* and *community* archives and the women that keep them (Ford, 2021).

I move to *The Domestic: On Our Backs in the Cupboard Under the Stairs* considering a very different archive in the home of Phyllis Christopher; a photographer and photo editor of *On Our Backs: entertainment for adventurous lesbians* magazine (*On Our Backs*) (1984-2006). This chapter establishes the domestic archive as a highly significant site for queer communities, and a deeply erotic encounter not only in the materials, but in the intimacy of being welcomed into Phyllis' home. I develop my proposal of the quilt as an act of femme-femmage through the presentation of a series of quilts that re-vision Phyllis' photographs of femme identifying lesbians. Through the re-visioning of Phyllis' photography the quilts become 'an active celebration of her work', and a self-conscious stitching of an intergenerational artistic lineage for myself (Barber, 2018:4). I shift then to an engagement with the impossibilities, failures, and silences in the lesbian archive, through my unfinished quilted engagement with the *On Our Backs* cover girl, Donna Jackson.

In *The Community Archive: Archival Rummaging and Amazonian Iconographies* I turn to the Glasgow Women's Library, which holds the remnants of the now disbanded Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC) (1894-1995) as part of its Lesbian Archive Collection. This chapter offers a critical analysis of loss – and mourning in the context of that loss – and fragmentation of a dedicated lesbian archive in Britain, along with the political disputes between lesbian feminism and the sex positive lesbians during the lesbian sex wars. Through a series of quilts created for the *Archives and Amazons* exhibition (appendix 4) I propose the amazon as a slippery signifier, open to re-visioning as a symbol of lesbian strength and the possibility of a world without men. I begin with the amazon as the symbol

of the lesbian feminist, and explicitly anti Sadism and Masochism (S&M) LAIC organisation, and follow with another series re-visioning Tessa Boffin's Amazonian photography series: *Wet and Wild* for *Quim* magazine (1989-1994). In a site of fragmentation and loss, I propose the quilt as an evocative methodology for patchworking, and re-visioning across the complex fractures of the lesbian sex wars.

In the final chapter, I present *The Archival Loop: Fisch, The Rebel Dykes and The Bishopsgate Institute.* The study cuts across all three kinds of archives, establishing the inter-dependant nature of the different kinds of archival encounter. I begin with my encounter with Fisch's (Drag King, Producer and Rebel Dyke) domestic archive, with particular attention to the reciprocal nature of this intergenerational relationship, through the framing of the quilt as a devotional object. The quilts created are discussed in relationship to the wider Rebel Dykes project, the film and *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive* show which are proposed as a site for archival activism through intergenerational collaboration (Alexandra, 2006). This is an archive in motion, which is currently being acquisitioned by the Bishopsgate Institute, which will include materials related to this PhD project (a copy of this thesis, embroidery samples, sketches, ephemera etc.). Through becoming part of the archive, my quilt making practice is established as not only re-visioning the lesbian archive but as being an active contributor to the lesbian archive.

In the final chapter *Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding,* I expand on the importance of this active reciprocal relationship with the archive. I examine the difficulty of binding, and finishing such an expansive project. Rather than solely a textual re-iterating of the findings of each chapter, I introduce an example of returning and reworking of an existing artwork for each of the chapters that extend and illuminate the analysis in the main body of the thesis. The artworks themselves are offered as concluding remarks; and a re-iteration of the importance of leaving room for re-working, patching over and re-visioning.

I have produced a huge body of work, and this thesis does not, and cannot address all the works produced, but presents a selection of quilts from each archival engagement; interlinking and supporting texts and artworks can be found in the *Appendices*. Similarly

there are important strands of thinking that are touched upon here, where full analysis falls outside the scope of the thesis. These themes are important areas for future study, including a deeper analysis of trans-lesbian solidarity (*Glossary* and *Epilogue*), analysis of racial politics and black lesbian archives (*the community* chapter) and post-colonial critiques of lesbian lands and utopias (*the community* chapter *and Postdoctoral Post-script*).

Chapter 1: Glossary

This brief chapter presents the key terminologies, establishing and clarifying how these are used in the thesis. This disorderly glossary rejects conventional alphabetisation in favour of mapping a literature review of connecting terminologies. I begin with a set of historically situated working definitions of the key terms of identity (and theory) that frame the research as well as my own identity; lesbian, dyke, queer and femme. Then I move onto an establishment of the archive as a site for the production of knowledge and power, and its use as a capacious category in both academia and art (Merewether, 2006). I then establish the parameters of what I mean specifically by the 'lesbian archive', whilst contextualising the lack of dedicated lesbian archive in the UK. I then turn to the two key theoretical terms used in the title of the thesis: affect and re-visioning. I situate my own use of the term 'affect' within a lineage of queer feminist scholars embracing the entanglements of affect and emotion, rather than their rigid separation of sensations (Ahmed, 2014). Finally, I contextualise my use of Adrienne Rich's term 're-visioning' to describe the relationship between the archive and my practice.

Lesbian

I favour Terry Castle's definition of her own lesbian identity: 'a woman whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to my own sex' (Castle, 1993:15). The root of the word lesbian is derived from Lesbos, the home of the posthumously claimed lesbian ancient Greek poet Sappho (c.610 – c.570 BCE). The term is however, a contested site and the complexities encountered when trying to establish a definition highlight lesbian identity as a site of unresolved tensions. The thorny problem of definition has pre-occupied lesbian authors as a personal and political enquiry, and as a kind of preliminary requirement in writing about lesbians (Vicinus, 1994, 2012; Bennett, 2000; Castle, 2003; Doan and Garrity, 2006). Over the years lesbian identity has been situated as a perversity, a gendered inversion, as a form of insanity as well as an identity, a continuum, as a political choice and even a separate category of not women (Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1992; Wilton, 1995; Oram and Turnbull, 2001). Women who love women have used a variety of terms to identify

themselves, as lesbians, homosexuals, inverts, the third sex and later the reclaimed term dyke (Garber, 2001; Halperin, 2003; Litterer, 2018).

The group The Radical Lesbians declared that 'the lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion' arguing that the categories of lesbian (and gay) were only made possible by the restrictive sex roles that utilised them as an insult when women step outside of societally sanctioned gender roles (Radicalesbians, 2020:41). Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' included not just women who consciously desire sexual contact with other women but also other 'forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support' (Rich, 1980:27). In the UK the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group asked whether 'all feminists should be lesbians' (the answer was yes), making the case for 'political lesbianism' and the abandonment of heterosexuality in order to live outside of patriarchal oppression (Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 1981:5). Monique Wittig's collective work *The Straight Mind* attributed the creation of sex categories to heterosexual society, and argued that lesbian sexualities shattered the construction of women as a natural group and by living outside of heterosexual phallogocentric economy of power they become something else entirely (Wittig, 1992). These categories and constructions are always complex, and identifications and language are constantly shifting and changing and therefore caution must be taken to guard against stabilising the meaning of lesbian, particularly when traversing across time (Traub, 2010).

The boundaries of 'lesbian' are continually contested, including through the exclusion and marginalisation of trans women in women only spaces historically at Michigan Women's Festival, Olivia Records and in the contemporary through conflicts around bathrooms, prisons and crisis services in the UK (Raymond, 1994; Enszer, 2014; Moore, 2015; Trigilio, 2016; Stock, 2021). The contestations around lesbians and trans rights have become increasingly reported in mainstream media, with clashes around issues of censorship, healthcare and free speech which has resulted in the whipping up of suspicion and hatred toward trans people (Jacques, 2016; Trigilio, 2016; Chu, 2018; Williams, 2019; Faye, 2021). In the UK, several groups including A Woman's Place were formed in opposition to the changes proposed by the 2018 Gender Recognition Act consultation (allowing for gender

self-identification). Subsequently the formation of the LGB alliance in 2019 and the group 'Get the L Out' have demonstrated at the front of Pride marches to protest 'transgenderism' and the erasure of lesbians (McQueen, 2016; Braidwood, 2019; GOV.UK, 2020; LGB Alliance, 2021). Concerns have been expressed that lesbians are losing their identity, and that butch lesbians are being lost to male gender transition (Bindel, 2015; Bellos, 2018; Robertson, 2018). Although active and passive erasure of lesbians has taken place, butch identities remain often obscured and threatened and many lesbians feel like the use of the term is declining but these are not the result of an increasingly resilient and visible trans community (Beemyn and Eliason, 2016; McNaron, 2007). In her contribution to the lesbian studies triple special issue on 'Is Lesbian Identity Obsolete?' Julie Enszer highlights the impossibility of constructing a comprehensive data set on which terms queer women identify themselves with comparatively in the past and present (Enszer, 2022). She further troubles the attribution of 'lesbian erasure' to other queer people, and calls instead to embrace the myriad of lesbian solidarities, and focus on lesbian vibrancy and the places in which 'lesbian communities continue to be vibrant spaces of mutual care, concern, and activism' (Enszer, 2022:117). In particular the permeable boundaries, and explicit overlap between trans and lesbian identities are a powerful site for working through the complexities and pleasures of gender and identity (Weiss, 2007; Halberstam, 2013; Gailey and Brown, 2016; Preciado, 2018). Returning to the question 'Is Lesbian Identity Obsolete?' – the answer is a resounding no. Despite continued stigma and attacks, lesbian remains an important identity to many women; that non essentialist constructions of lesbian identity can offer a powerful political tool and a reminder that some of the most interesting developments in lesbian politics are happening outside the US (Ben Hagai and Seymour, 2022).

My definition of lesbian as a woman who loves women, has necessarily permeable boundaries and condemns the exclusion of trans people who do not fall into an essential, biological category of woman (Raymond, 1994; Jeffreys, 2004). Less preoccupied with the epistemological limits of the term lesbian, I draw on theories that conceive lesbian as a space, a position, a set of practices or a general occupation rather than an essential and stable identity (Wilton, 1995). Lesbianism is the orientation of women toward other women; it is a way of moving about in the world (Ahmed 2006). In occupying a more capacious and joyful definition of lesbian, more concerned with inclusions than exclusions,

alliances can be built allowing us to join together in 'an affinity of hammers' all 'chip, chip, chip'[ping] away at the oppressive forces of heteropatriarchy (Ahmed, 2016: 33; Cauterucci, 2016).

Dyke

I also use the word Dyke throughout the thesis, interchangeably with lesbian. Dyke was used as an insult, particularly throughout the 1950s, also by upper class lesbians in their dismissal and derision of working class lesbians, and their butch and femme bar culture (Spears, 1985; Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis, 2014). The word has been reclaimed by some, including blatantly in Lesbian Avenger's 1992 *Dyke Manifesto*, whilst met with ambivalence or active revulsion from others, similar to the trajectory of the reclaiming of 'queer' (Garber, 2001; Lesbian Avengers, 2020). Dyke has been used by lesbian feminist separatists and sex positive activists alike. However its use is still contentious today, demonstrated by the Rebel Dykes first attempt to register as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2018 when requested to change the name of the organisation as it 'is not suitable for registration as it may be considered offensive'; after their campaigning the decision was repealed (Fahey, 2018: no pagination). Informed by my entanglement with the Rebel Dykes, I claim the term dyke as a marker of strength and defiance.

Queer

I use the term queer alongside, in relation and addition to lesbian. Previously used as a slur, ACT UP (AIDS coalition to unleash power) reclaimed queer as an identity in their 1990 Manifesto as a radical strategy to unite gays and lesbians, articulating the rage, anger and calling them to action in the fight against AIDS (ACTUP, 2020). It has been utilised as an inclusive umbrella term for people living outside of heterosexuality, and outside of binary understandings (Warner, 1993; Barker and Scheele, 2016).

The institutional origins of Queer theory can be traced back to Teresa de Lauretis' *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay sexualities* (1991, and her prior conference paper), but its current incarnation is a patchwork of literary theory, psychology, history and activism drawing on

the homophile movement, lesbian feminism and gay liberation, Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, Havelock Ellis and the sexologists, Michel Foucault, David Halperin, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (de Lauretis, 1991; Halperin, 2003). The birth of queer theory highlights the division between essentialists believing that homosexuality has existed across time 'as a universal phenomenon which has a marginalised, but continuous and coherent history of its own'; and the constructionists who believe 'same-sex sex acts have different cultural meanings in different historical contexts, they are not identical across time and space' (Jagose, 1996:9). Queer is a site for interrogating identity, as something that is never stable and always in the process of becoming (Jagose, 1996). This destabilisation of discrete identity categories caused friction between queer theorists and gay and lesbian historians (Duggan, 1995; Munt, 1998a). Queer theoretical approaches that fetishizes fluidity and universality, without acknowledging the pleasures of fixity in lesbian identity construction, have also played their part in constructing lesbian feminisms as redundant essentialism and allowed the amplification of the voices of white men (Walters, 1996; Rudy, 2001; Downing, 2017). However within queer there is an exciting space for the specificity of experience, as a strategic essentialism and a pleasurable practice; this is the way my research is both lesbian and queer (Danius et al., 1993; Cohen, 1997; Barker and Scheele, 2016).

Femme

'We are femme-not (just) feminine—Femme. We are femininity's rebellious sibling' (Hoskin, 2018:85).

Femme is a queer term that signifies the hyper femininity which is claimed, or exaggerated as part of an identity. The term originates from lesbian bar cultures of the 1950s, historically within a butch/femme relationship (Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis, 2014). The *femme lesbian* must be recognised as the origin of the identity and theoretical position of the femme, Hoskin argues, 'whilst allowing for queer outgrowth' which might allow 'contemporary *femme identities*' to expand and proliferate (Hoskin, 2019:7).

The term femme is deeply tied to the politics of sexuality in lesbian communities. In the 1960s and 1970s many lesbians rejected the femme/butch culture as restrictive, and as a reproduction of heterosexual relationships, replicating patriarchal power structures (Jeffreys, 1989a; Lapore, 1992; Vicinus, 1994; Faderman, 2018). In the 1980s and 1990s femme/butch identities were reclaimed as 'a debased identity, and reconstructing the new self as a survivor'; like the reclamation of queer this was a 'movement of struggle, re-appropriation, and triumph' (Munt, 1998b:4; Faderman, 2018). I too have reclaimed femme as an identity for myself that opens up space for me to take pleasure in my lesbian identity as well as my reclamation of embodied hyper femininity

Femme Theory

Femme is also a theory, concerned with issues of femme erasure and visibility; challenging femme-phobia in heteronormative and queer cultures by centring the femme-lesbian and femme bodies whilst paying academic attention to the femme qualities including femininity, vulnerability, emotionality and relationality (Blair and Hoskin, 2015; Brightwell and Taylor, 2019).

Femme theory is rooted in 'deeply personal, subjugated and community driven knowledge' as a 'critical framework', which is 'comprised of femme experiences and theorisations of the world, straddling both invisibility and hypervisibility, hetero/queer worlds, sometimes passing but always "failing"' (Hoskin, 2019:11). Schwartz describes 'soft femme theory' as understanding 'femininity as more than an oppressive set of aesthetics', and turning to the figure of the femme claims 'emotionality, vulnerability, and other so-called "weaknesses" (like disability, neurodivergence, or being a survivor of sexual violence) as points of pride' (Schwartz, 2020:8). This reclaiming offers a useful tool for thinking about femininity differently, outside of notions of restriction and reproduction, as well as rethinking value systems that exclude the soft, the fluffy and the feminine.

Femmes have received less visual and theoretical attention compared to female masculinities, although work has been done, particularly the work of Joan Nestle and Ulrika Dahl, and two anthologies published: *Brazen Femmes* and *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and*

Bad Girls. The lack of engagement in femme scholarship is rooted within sexism and femmephobia but also can be attributed to femme theory's entanglement in personal narrative, emotional oversharing and life writing, 'which is at odds with academia's valuing of masculinist, objective science that necessitates an omission of the self' (Hoskin, 2019:6). My work contributes an explicitly femme methodology for creating queer quilted artworks, addressing the real lack of femme scholarship (Dahl, 2012).

Femmage

> Femmage: a word invented by us to include all of the above activities as they were practiced by women using traditional women's techniques to achieve their art-sewing, piecing, hooking, cutting, appliqueing, cooking and the like—activities also engaged in by men but assigned in history to women (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977:67).

Femmage is a term coined by Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer that draws on women's creative ancestor through techniques and practices that privileges practices of collecting and saving things, 'because the leftovers yielded nourishment in new forms' (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977:68). This re-working of women's political and creative histories remains essential to women's spiritual survival, which had previously 'depended on the harbouring of memories', the material scraps of a feminine life, collected, which tell personal stories 'similar to an entry to a journal or a diary…' (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977:68). The term femmage was developed further by Fionna Barber to indicate affinity and influence across generations of women artists, as a means of challenging the patriarchal structures of the art historical canon (Barber, 2018). My quilts are acts of femmage, in the sense of re-cycling the creative form of the quilt that has been associated with women, in my acts of collecting and saving objects from the archive, which are collaged in the material space of the quilt and in the explicit visual affinities, I build with older lesbians artists including Phyllis Christopher.

The Archive

Generically the archive is characterised as a repository of informational records or historical documents, usually held by an institution or organisation. The archive functions as a site for collecting, classifying and chronologising. It is 'a privileged region' where the walls, shelves

and stacks mark a 'border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates its otherness' (Foucault, 1972:130). This institutional archive and its processes of inclusion and exclusion have been established as a site for the production and repetition of narratives that support dominant mechanisms of power (Steedman, 2001; Derrida and Prenowitz, 2006; Merewether, 2006). The classification systems used reproduce these mechanisms of power, and 'particular ways of knowing'; repeated across culture and all ways of finding information; notions of normal /abnormal reproduced, evident in the difficulties locating 'queer' materials, and the conflation of paedophilia, rape, kink in many classification systems (Adler, 2017:118). People of colour, postcolonial or subaltern subjects are so often silenced; 'caught in the cracks between the production of the archives, and indigenous patriarchy' (Spivak, 1985:271; Costantino, 2016).

This thesis draws on the work of feminist scholars and activists who have expanded traditional static definitions of archives through an unravelling of 'tired assumption that the archive is simply an immutable, neutral, and a historical place in which historical records are preserved' (Chaudhuri et al., 2010:1). This is part of a wider turn away from the fixity of history, that allows the archive to become a site for the production of new meanings and practices rather than a static repository for the past (Eichhorn, 2013).

My archival study began in the institutional collection, and expanded over the course of the research to include other, more quotidian mechanisms of memory including communities, homes, conversations, websites or the cupboard under the stairs (Autumn White, 2014; Manalansan, 2014; Groeneveld, 2015; Summers, 2015). These unofficial archives are often the home of marginalised histories; of queers, migrants and messy lives excluded from or actively erased from hegemonic institutional archival memory (Manalansan, 2014; Ekrem Kocu, 2015). My focus on materiality, affect and sensation as a practice-based researcher, led me to a definition of archive that encompasses not only the objects, but the materiality of archival space, the textures of encounters, and the sensational desires of wanting, and working in the archive (Steedman, 2001; Valoma, 2010; Dever, 2015; Enszer, 2015). In this expansive definition the quilt is also an archive documenting encounters with a lesbian past (Birkin, 2015).

These expansions in the meaning of archive have led to a productive blurring of the roles of archivist and activist, researcher and artist, as the importance of archives to marginalised groups is increasingly recognised (Wakimoto et al., 2013). Activists and artists are increasingly making interventions into archives that reveal hidden histories, through a process of contextualising archival fragments, couching them in layers of meaning in order to fill in the absences, silences and gaps (Chaudhuri et al., 2010; Digital Women's Archive North [DWAN], 2017). Artists have experienced a particular kind of 'archival impulse', seeking out 'lost or displaced' historical objects and making them present through artworks, drawing curatorially on the methodologies of the archive, its processes and its allure (Foster, 2006:143). It is this academic, artistic and activist re-visioning of the archive as a productive site, which structures my understanding of the archive as a compelling place for practice as research to navigate the pleasures and challenges of encountering history**.**

The Lesbian Archive

Lesbian archival material is often difficult to find due to exclusions, erasure and invisibility as the result of homophobic and sexist practices (Wilton, 1995). Historically lesbians have been invisible in archives partly because lesbian sex has never been legislated against in the UK, consciously excluded from the sodomy laws of 1533 and the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 1921 (acts of indecency by females); therefore, there are few cases of 'lesbianism' on record (Donoghue, 1993; Jennings, 2007; Oram and Turnbull, 2001). These exclusions were a calculated denial to stop the possibility of 'introducing into the minds of perfectly innocent people the most revolting thoughts' (Oram and Turnbull, 2001:168-9). The lesbian is transformed 'into a sort of judicial phantasm' (Castle, 1993:6). Instead charged with 'generic indecency and public morality legalisation and with indecent assault', or committed to asylums; unwritten in the halls of records, lesbian persecution goes unspoken (Hamer, 1996:4). In modern history lesbians have been key in the development of the Women's movement, Gay Liberation and ACT UP, however their commitments are often side-lined in archival memory due to sexism and homophobia (Wilton, 1995; Cvetkovich, 2003). Lesbian studies began in literature departments rather than history departments, and was deprived of resources and networks of support, academic isolation treated more as 'gossip than politics'; leaving for a time a paucity of historical and archival studies (Duggan, 1995:180).

My definition of lesbian archive aligns with the mission statement of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York which includes all materials 'by and about all Lesbians, acknowledging changing concepts of Lesbian identities' (Lesbian Herstory Archives, 2019: no pagination). The UK, unlike the USA (which also has the Mazer Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles) has no dedicated lesbian archive. Although there are documents relating to lesbians across archives in the UK, this thesis is concerned with collections already identified as lesbian in some way. Collections of lesbian materials are scattered across archives with LGBT or feminist themes, as well as domestic and community collections. Often institutional collections started life as part of grassroots feminist and lesbian organisations, which were subsequently donated or acquisitioned by institutional feminist special collections including The Women's Library (London School of Economics), Feminist Archive North (University of Leeds) and Feminist Archive South (University of Bristol).

The largest collection of lesbian materials is The Lesbian Archive collection held at Glasgow Women's Library – a community centred lending library, archive and museum (Glasgow Womens Library, 2020). The collection includes The Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC) collection, which began life as a London based organisation founded in 1984 originally under the name London Lesbian Archive. Other collections take further seeking out, in people's homes, garages and under-stairs cupboards – uncatalogued and unruly. Although this thesis differentiates these three kinds of archival encounters (*the institutional, the community* and *the domestic*) these are interwoven and interconnected; there is no institutional archive without first, the personal or the community (Wakimoto et al., 2013; Ekrem Kocu, 2015).

Affect

There is a long and complex history of debate surrounding the emotion and affect across disciplines, and no real consensus on how to define or differentiate between them (Gorton, 2007; Stewart, 2007; Flatley, 2008; Watkins, 2010). Loosely, emotion might suggest 'something happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative' meaning that 'one *has* emotions; one is affected

by people or things' (Flatley, 2008:12). Affect has been theorised as 'intensities that pass' between bodies, as 'resonances that circulate' and as something 'other than the conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion' (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010:1). The inbetweenness of affects situates them as 'neither in the mind or the body but in an assemblage, network or system that is not comprehensible in terms of its corporeal or cognitive component parts' (Flatley, 2008:14). Contemporary feminist theories of affect draw on the Black feminists who theorised the significance and politics of women's emotions (Lorde, 1984; hooks, 2001). Deliberately drawing together and enmeshing discussions of the affective and the emotional resists notions of affect 'as a preliminal, preconscious phenomenon' (Brennan, 2004; Ngai, 2005; Watkins, 2010:269; Ahmed, 2014).

This research is concerned with the affects and emotions that occur and circulate around encounters between lesbian archival materials and the lesbian body, as well as those that flow around quilts invoking deep emotional responses and bodily resonances when encountered (Dolan and Holloway, 2016; Golda, 2016). I explicitly draw on queer theorists who have centred feelings, affects and emotions in their work (Cvetkovich, 2003; Love, 2007; Munoz, 2009; Freeman, 2010; Ahmed, 2014). In particular, Ann Cvetkovich's powerful work *An Archive of Feeling* advocates critical attention toward archives of sensation, whose objects included testimony, memory, feelings and trauma that create 'linkages between affective and social experience', whilst leaving spaces for the unspoken and unspeakable (Cvetkovich, 2003:285).

Re-visioning

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival (Rich, 1972:18).

Adrienne Rich's definition of re-visioning is key to understanding my own quilted art practice and its relationship to the lesbian archive. I enter old texts through my process of rummaging in the archive, taking up the materials to be re-visioned in my lesbian quilted practice. For lesbians, our histories are often forgotten or intentionally obscured and

lesbians are still faced with homophobia, sexism and lesphobia making this process of re-visioning an urgent act of survival.

‘And this drive to self knowledge , for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of a refusal of the self destructiveness of male-dominated society’ (Rich, 1972:18).

This process of re-visioning is driven by my desire for self-knowledge, my search for identity and community. It is also a political refusal of male centric histories, patriarchal institutional structures and universalising politics of progression and homonormativity. The act of re-visioning the lesbian archive is the pleasurable pursuit for the tools for the next lesbian and queer revolution.

Chapter 2: Quilting as Methodology

This methodology establishes and contextualises quilting as an affective methodology for working with, and re-visioning lesbian archival materials expanding upon *The Lesbian Quilt Manifesto* and *The Lesbian Archive: A Quilt Map*. This section sets out the material qualities, cultural histories and metaphorical properties that make quilt making such an appropriately evocative and affective methodology for making and thinking with lesbian archival material. The stages of quilt making are then mapped onto my own quilted practice, establishing the quilt's potentiality for repair and re-assembly, which are so crucial to working with the marginalised materials of the lesbian archive. This methodology grounds the thesis in materiality; centralising the process of making, the materiality of the quilt and the physicality of spatial and social encounters with the archive. The chapter also functions as a literature review for the quilt practice by contextualising the methodology through weaving together strands of textile theory with queer theoretical approaches to archives, affects and temporalities. This enmeshed approach to the methodology establishes my femme-quilted approach as a contribution to knowledge in the fields of textile studies, archival studies and queer theory.

The Quilt as Practice-Based Methodology

The quilt is my strategy for doing practice-based research: an artistic medium, and a tool for thinking through (Carter, 2004). My quilts are a form of 'tacit knowledge' production that 'provides a very specific way of understanding the world, one that is grounded in material practice' (Bolt, 2010:29).

Textiles have long functioned as a tool for thinking and cloth metaphors are ubiquitous in political and philosophical strategies. From Plato's use of weaving as a political metaphor, Michel Foucault's utilising of interweaving, Spivak's talk of fraying edges, Barthes's illustration of braiding to Deleuze and Guattari's invocation of the crazy patchwork quilt in the smooth and striated (Guattari and Deleuze, 1980; Danto, 2012). Textiles are 'a kind of speaking and for language a kind of making', utilised as metaphorical tools for meaning making in writing (Mitchell, 2012:7).

The quilt is not only my medium of artistic expression but also my tool for analysis; the selection of the images and texts, rearranging and patchworking, are all part of an analytic re-visioning of the archive. Through the artist's process of 'collecting, dissembling, and recollecting', archival objects that were once 'immobilized for preservation' are unhinged, and set into motion accumulating new relationships and meanings in the space of the artwork (Levin and Perreault, 2006:144). The quilt breaks 'open archival documents'; reworking and transforming in the pursuit of a lesbian 'existing otherwise' (Kokoli, 2016; Hartman, 2019:xiv). Through this method I am able to bring together unexpected objects and intertemporal strands outside of the concerns or constraints of academic writing (Barrett, 2010; Ward, 2016). Through making I gather observations on the affects, knowledges and new meanings encountered in the intimate process of quilt making in the lesbian archive (Skains, 2018)**.**

The Quilt

The quilt is broadly defined as a 'sandwich' of fabric, three layers stitched together, which include a stuffing, wadding or filling, so that when stitched together a relief is created on the surface (Osler, 1987:23). The first examples of quilting were in clothing, for example in Wales 'quilted undergarments worn beneath armour afforded both warmth and protection' from the 17th century (Jones, 2016:11). The wadding and air trapped between the layers of cloth make quilts warm and functional as bed coverings and protective wrappings. Quilts are a global phenomenon, with distinctive local practices including Ralli quilts in Pakistan, Japanese Kakebuton quilts and the Kantha quilts of Bengal distinctive with their white backgrounds and intricate embroideries and wide spaced running stitches (Mason, 2010). Quilts are both functional and fragile, they were made to be used and as such were 'frequently re-used and then discarded' rather than preserved as cultural artefacts which often makes the writing of quilt histories a challenge (Osler, 2011:7). As domestic objects, created and used by women, often working class women, there has been comparatively little documentation, historical study, and academic work dedicated to the study of quilts (Osler, 2011).

Similar to the lesbian archive, much of the study and exhibition of quilts takes place in the USA as they are bound up with American national cultural identity, which is sustained through the International Quilt Museum alongside multiple national and local collections and museums, as well as huge scale conventions and organisations such as The Quilt and The American Quilt Study Group. In the UK there is less in comparison, with the Quilter's Guild Quilt Museum in York closing in 2015; although Jen Jones's Welsh quilt centre established in 2009 remains (Rae, 1987; Osler, 2011; Jones, 2016). This lack of attention has been challenged by The British Quilt Study Group through the running of seminars, events and the publishing of a Quilt Studies journal alongside; The Victoria and Albert Museum through the exhibition *Quilts 1700-2010 Hidden Histories, Untold Stories,* which was accompanied by a rich catalogue edited by Sue Prichard.

Material Methods of the Quilt

My quilted art practice is influenced by a variety of traditional quilting techniques and styles including album quilts, friendship quilts and the appliqued panels of North America which inspire my drive toward the figurative, symbolic and narrative in my own work (Otto Lispet, 1985). I also draw heavily on whole cloth traditions, which are complete pieces of cloth stitched over in a running stitch pattern, often in Britain made with cotton sateen, a favoured fabric of mine (Osler, 1987). Although the narrative is not as obvious, these quilts have stories of their own to tell. In their simplicity, they can hide in plain sight. My own quilted stitches are often in a similar colour to the fabric (similar to whitework), sinking in creating relief but requiring the viewer to look closer to decipher the images and symbols. The shapes and geometries of both Welsh and Amish Quilts, their borders, centres, stars and stripes have significantly influenced the composition of my quilts, particularly those designed in Photoshop during lockdown (Jones, 2016). My own works slip, and spill about these borders, overlapping and playing with tradition.

The materials selected for my quilts; satins, cotton sateen, slippery fabrics in pastel pinks and lilacs directly reference the more contemporary tradition of Eiderdown quilts. Often machine made, synthetic and slippery they were popular in the 1970s; factory produced they were accused of pushing traditional quilt making further to the side. These 'lesser',

often anonymous quilts, have informed the development of my out-of-time hyper femme aesthetic of flounced edges, ruffles, and satins.

Another 'lesser' quilt that informs my work is the 'faux patchwork' or 'poor man's patchwork' quilts, made possible by more accessible fabric printing – a whole cloth quilt masquerading as a carefully pieced patchwork quilt (Jones, 2016:54). Sometimes I piece quilts, but more often than not, I generate my own pattern designs and faux patchwork prints using Photoshop, which are then stitched into. In this research, the patchwork process takes place in the archive, gathering images, symbols and texts that appear in the embroidery.

In my practice, I use my own form of patchworking through ethos software, and digital embroidery on both Brother digital embroidery machines and the Handi Quilter. The possibilities for pattern, accumulation, repetition, and the speed of a thousand stitches a minute has allowed me to create large scale works, as well as repeating and continually developing my own archive of embroidery designs. When it comes to making, I am most excited by creating large-scale works, intricate embroideries, patterns, and textures that reference traditional quilting, without being physically bound and slowed down by it.

The Quilt and Affect

Quilts are soft and malleable, they wrap and warm. My use of quilting resists patriarchal derisions of softness as weakness; as a feminine vulnerability to penetration/invasion by external forces, such as nationalist, or isolationist rhetorical critiques of 'soft touch' borders (Ahmed, 2014:2). They are an explicitly femme reclamation of the feminine qualities of softness, vulnerability and the decorative. Through compulsive acts of stitching and embellishing I embrace the 'touchy-feely', taking pleasure (like Sedgwick) in my own 'craft mania', as a sensual indulgence in 'luscious materials' (Sedgwick, 2000:205). She troubles hierarchies of knowledge, verbal/written over tactile/touch. Between my fingers and the cloth a 'transaction(s) of texture', an exchange of tenderness is taking place (Sedgwick, 2013:22).

I draw on the materially driven power of textiles to facilitate deep emotional and pleasure responses which is rooted in its ubiquity, its ability to access our everyday memories, of soft blankets, mothers' skirts and the feel of cloth against skin (Ayling-Smith, 2019). This pleasurable familiarity is enriched by our bodily memories, and infused by our own historical encounters (Golda, 2016). Cloth is the mediator between the body, and the external world – soft and permeable cloth is a porous container, the substances and stains held in the fibres can keep memories and tell stories (Rosalind Jones, 2012; Sorkin, 2012; Barnett, 2015). This magical power of cloth to 'receive us: receive our smells, our sweat, our shape' makes it a deeply evocative conduit between the living and the dead (Stallybrass, 2012:69). It is this closeness to the body, the role as witness to lived experience which bestows textiles with the ability to bring sensations of comfort and protection in what Jennifer Harris calls the 'potential of cloth' (Harris, 2015:8).

Through the use of slippery satins, soft cottons, the fluffy stuffing trapped between I have drawn on these affective qualities and soft poetics of cloth in order to tug on the bodily, and sensory memories of the viewer. Cloth additionally invokes the anticipation and immediacy of touch which can function as 'a powerful force for opening pastness onto futurity' (Golda, 2016:405). Embroidered with lesbian archival fragments, the quilt can become a surface for specifically queer and lesbian feelings to gather, slide and stick (Ahmed, 2006). These material encounters, powerfully situated within bodily memory and political histories of marginalisation, might open up the possibility for lesbians to touch across, and even collapse time (Dinshaw, 1999).

Although the quilt invokes the desire to touch, memories of touching, and the making 'is a touch-intensive work process', the viewer may not always 'touch' the quilt (Donnell, 1990:67). Although making the quilt is a tactile experience for me as the artist, 'haptic' might better describe the audience's relationship with the quilt, as 'it does not establish any opposition between the two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this non optical function' (Guattari and Deleuze, 1980:543). The quilt, then can offer a haptic encounter without the risks and damage of allowing audiences to physically touch the works. The space between the viewer and the quilt could act instead as

a transformative site for the imagination of touch, the ghosts of memories and affects to circulate (Pollock, 2013).

Women's Work: Women's Quilts

Historically quilting has been a gendered, domestic pursuit, (often) a non-economic activity that women have taken on as part of the labour of caring, gifting and preserving family traditions (Stalp, 2007). Quilts are a container for memory, in its construction from meaningful fabrics, and the stories told in the stitches, it can become 'a precious reliquary of past treasures' (Annette [pseud.], 1994:11). Quilts have documented births and deaths, marriages and friendship, bearing witness to the passage of time in women's lives (Otto Lispet, 1985; Cornell, 2006). Women have literally stitched their experiences, politics and kinships into quilts; through the reparative acts of scavenging, reassembling, stitching and repairing (Ferrero et al., 1987). My own quilts extend this tradition of bearing witness, chronicling untold stories of lesbian communities and documenting my own encounters and experiences with the lesbian archive.

As women's work, quilting (alongside other needlecrafts) has been marginalised as an art form, dismissed as an amateur pastime, a thoughtless material gesture to keep idle hands busy in the home rather than a professional or artistic output (Arther, 2012; Fyre, 2013). After the industrial revolution, embroidery, sewing and textile crafts became increasingly associated with femininity, docility and the domestic realm (Bratich and Brush, 2011). Needlework came to signify 'both self-containment and submission'; although it was also 'a source of pleasure' and an outlet for creativity (Parker, 1984:11). Women have drawn on this complex history of marginalisation, regulation and small pleasures to utilise textiles as a political tool and resisting the masculinist dismissal of women's artistic output. During the campaign for British Suffrage the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) formed the Artists' Suffrage League in 1907 to produce striking banners that utilised women's ecclesiastic and domestic needlework skills; hand stitched and painted in stark contrast to Tuthill's mass produced banners of the Trade Unions (Tickner, 1988). This was a deploying of feminine crafts, dress and countering the anti-suffrage propaganda that characterised them as unfeminine, failed women (Parker, 1984). During the 1960s and 70s

artists including Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, Harmony Hammond and Miriam Schapiro continued to utilise the complex histories of textiles, and challenge their exclusion from art institutions. The perceived negative connotations of conflations of craft and femininity were 'recast as distinctive and culturally valuable features of an artistic heritage specific to women'[1] (Arther, 2012:221). Art historians including Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker, Linda Nochlin and Lucy Lippard wrote about how women were inscribing in quilts and stitch, banners and samplers, the stories of their lives as a source of pleasure and painful recollection; using this as a weapon against the constraints of femininity and as a potential means of radically challenging masculine meanings and dominance in the visual arts and society (Jefferies, 2020).

In her catalogue essay for *The Artist and the Quilt* Lucy Lippard proposed the quilt as 'the prime visual metaphor for women's lives, for women's culture', operating not only as a 'diary of touch' but an echo of the 'uniformity and disjunction, the diversity within monotony' that characterised women's lives and routines (Lippard, 1983:32). This was a landmark collaborative project between female artists and quilters. Over seven years twenty collaborative quilts were produced; the project was conceived in response to the lack of representation of quilts in art institutions and the lack of interest in contemporary quilt practices even after the hugely successful exhibition *Abstract Designs in American Quilts* curated by Jonathan Holstein at The Whitney Museum in New York (Robinson, 1983). Artists featured included Faith Ringgold who collaborated with her mother Willie Posey, whose story quilts drew on the heritage of African American quilts, and her skill as a painter to tell rich stories of black lives (Dunn Margaret and Morris, 1992). Miriam Schapiro's collaboration with Marilyn Price drew on her femmage strategies for building complex artistic assemblages in paper and paint (figure 1). In her collaboration for this project lesbian artist Harmony Hammond worked with quilter Bob Douglas, drawing on her significant body of work concerned with processes of wrapping and coiling, in her famous floor pieces. This process of wrapping she attributes to the shapes and gaps of motherhood, 'wrapping with

[1]However in contemporary culture, textiles, and craft more broadly have the potential to become a 'problematic ally' to feminism; particularly in the context of the 'conservative revival of the cult of domesticity through amateur craft and DIY' which uncritically re-inscribes and monetarises traditional association of women and textiles (Kokoli, 2017:156).

cloth you can work in fragmented' moments in order to use every available 'scrap of time' Hammond quoted in Robinson (1983:77). Contemporary feminist artists continue to draw on the power of the quilt, including Tracey Emin's use of patchwork and beds as a tool for talking about female lives, sexuality and what goes on in bed (Harper, 2004). My quilted practice draws deeply on these subversive histories of feminist stitching, whilst developing distinctively femme-lesbian iconographies and materialities.

Figure 1: Miriam Schapiro and Marilyn Price, *The Phoenix Heart,* 1982. Photograph: courtesy of the International Quilt Museum, Lincoln: Nebraska. (Source: online, https://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/crazyquiltstory/node/6453).

Queer Quilts

The quilt has also offered a powerful tool for LGBTQ communities' activism and mourning, most notably in *The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (figure 2). Beginning in 1987 the quilt is now made up of more than 27,000 panels and has chapters across the globe (Krouse 1994). These panels were made to commemorate those who lost their lives to AIDS, piecing together photographs, letters, signatures, articles of clothing, hair and even cremation ashes of loved ones. Each stitched panel is an act of love and serves as a haptic metaphor for the labours of love that surrounded those commemorated by the quilt, in their illness – a final act of care made powerfully visible.

The quilt enacted a deliberate reversal of pathologising narratives of 'the gay plague', otherness and danger peddled in the media, instead 'associating gay men and their relationships with soft, warm, consoling, loving, gift-giving, familial, and patriotic images' (Krouse, 1994:78). This was a powerful psychic shift; particularly in America where quilts are part of traditional folk art, national identity and heritage. As a patriotic material form, displayed close to national monuments which included the stories of AIDS victims outside of the gay community the project re-located the queer body within the ideological home of America (Pearl, 2008a). However, this making palatable was not welcomed by all; members of ACT UP rejected the quilt as an assimilationist 'Death Tarp'; a passive object de-radicalising queer rage in its soft folds (Bryan-Wilson, 2017:213). Still a contentious and unruly project, now facing huge problems in terms of archive and storage, the quilt is a monumental example of the powerful potential of quilts. This PhD project draws on this therapeutic legacy of textiles, as well as its potentiality for queer community building and mobilisation, tackling stains and stigma as well as providing comfort and care (McGuinness, 2016).

My quilt practice also sits in relation to a lineage of LGBTQ artists who have reclaimed and reappropriated the stigma and stereotypes of craft as an act of 'queering', shifting it from 'its own marginal position into a place of empowerment' (Roberts, 2012:247). Laden with 'gender connotations, feminist herstories and tactile experiences' craft makes an evocative ally for articulating queerness in the practices of artists including Liz Collins, Sheila Hicks, Harmony Hammond, Sheila Pepe, LJ Roberts and Jesse Harrod (Chaich and Oldham, 2016:i). Craft's amateur associations have offered artists like Josh Faught a methodology for

indulging in the sentimental, enthusiastic and overly invested impulses of a collector or fan in the gallery space. His scrappy artworks are 'cumulative in feeling, even excessive', urgently materialising autobiographical, and queer cultural objects and references – they are fragile houses for protecting ephemeral, marginalised histories (Auther and Elyse, 2015:50). Aaron McIntosh's work more explicitly references traditional quilts. Inspired by his memories of his grandmother quilting, he compares the fragmented process of crafting identity to the way quilts are made from scraps (Chaich and Oldham, 2016). Traditionally feminine crafts have also provided a space for male artists including Grayson Perry and Matt Smith to subvert and reappropriate femininity, undermining gendered constructions, associations, and binaries. This theme was also explored in the 2005 Crafts Council exhibition *Boys Who Sew* curated by Janis Jefferies, that challenged the continued association of textile crafts 'with women rather than men, the personal rather than the political, decoration rather than subversion' (Hemmings, 2005:49). As often happens, the specificity of lesbian can sometimes get lost in queer, and white gay male voices are prioritised as more important and more subversive. Textile artists Allyson Mitchell and Jesse Harrod have both invoked the pleasures and painful complexities of lesbian identities, and grappled with notions of longing, lust and backwardness through their maximalist aesthetics and sculptural, Sapphic stitchery (Freeman, 2010; Harrod, 2017). This practice-based research extends and expands the lineage of female and queer artists critically reclaiming the tools of craft by establishing quilting as a tool for reassembling a specifically lesbian, high femme visual and material vernacular for the lesbian archive.

Figure 2: *The Names AIDS Memorial Quilt,* 1987, Washington DC. Photograph: courtesy of The NAMES Project.

Quilt Kinships

Quilts and the skills to make them have been passed down as family heirlooms through lineages of mothers, daughters and grandmothers, transferring knowledge and narrative between generations: creating a heritage established in stitch (Dobson, 2018). Even in Wales where itinerant professional quilters roamed for work, this matrilineal passage of traditions was also documented between professional quilting mother-daughter pairings such as Hannah Davies and Elizabeth Simon (Osler, 2011; Jones, 2016). I use the quilt as a tool for seeking out lesbian histories, images, and community; forging intergenerational connections outside of the bonds of the maternal or biological constructions of lineage.

Quilts also offered communities of women social spaces to connect in through quilting bees, quiltings and quilting circles where women could quilt together as well as sharing

conversation, meals and teaching younger girls how to stitch (Cornell, 2006). These gendered spaces allowed women to communicate as well as politically mobilise. Particularly in America the Abolitionist and Temperance movements mobilised quilt making as a strategy for encouraging solidarity, raising political consciousness and raising funds (through sales); 'an instrument' for both 'bonding' and 'emancipation' (Ferrero et al., 1987:97). Popular in the 1800s, women made signature and album quilts to sustain relationships, document their ties of friendship and bonds of love (Otto Lispet, 1985). Signature quilts in particular are unusual and powerful documents, as quilts were not normally signed and there is little record of women in official records – the quilts are a way of following the threads of women's lives and relationships (Otto Lispet, 1985). These quilts were often gifted at times of transition, goings away, marriages or migrations as an act of love and a gesture toward sustaining important relationships over distance and time through the power of stitch. This practice continues today as quilting remains a popular hobby – women use the gift of a quilt to work through change and loss, and as a method for sustaining friendships across distance (Seward, 2007; Stalp, 2007; King, 2011).

My quilts draw on the history of the quilt as a vehicle for creating, sustaining and documenting intimacy between women. This practice is also a method for socialising, sustaining relationships and creating lineages between generations of lesbians, rather than biological or geographic proximity. Circumventing the chronological lineage of maternal heritage, my quilts function as a site of contact between generations of lesbians connected through a shared pain, pleasure, and identity. As proposed in the final chapter, the quilt itself becomes an archive of these intimate encounters and part of a wider lineage of lesbian creative practices and world building.

Patchwork Temporalities

Although quilts have traditionally celebrated the milestones of a heteronormative life – birth, marriage, children, death – this project subverts that tradition and proposes the quilt as a space collapsing linear time and encountering the unexpected affects of the lesbian archive (Prichard, 2010). Quilts have been used as cot blankets for babies, part of dowries, keepsakes between friends, mementos for those moving away ('Liberty Quilts' for

men) and as shrouds for the dead (Bell-kite, 2016; Andrä et al., 2019; Balasubramaniam, 2019). In the 1800s, girls quilted in anticipation of marriage, creating quilt tops kept in their hope chests until just before the wedding when there would be 'great quiltings' to quilt and transform the tops into functional quilts (Otto Lispet, 1985:75). The 'Double Wedding Ring' pattern with its complex and interlocking circles is hugely popular and the ritual production of marriage quilts that mark a woman's shift out of the family, but also sustain and embed the bonds between women (*How to Make an American Quilt*, 1995; Chouard, 2003). These transitional quilts have played a role in constructing domestic femininities through the construction, regulation and commemoration of heterosexual temporalities.

Bringing the quilt into contact with queer theories of temporalities offers a possibility for subverting and restructuring the quilt as a temporally unruly tool for re-visioning lesbian archival material. Queerness can be understood as a temporality in itself, as 'a force; or rather a crossing of temporality with force' – queer subjects disrupt the temporalities of regulatory domesticity, living outside of logics of heterosexual reproduction and capital accumulation (Halberstam, 2005:11). Queers might stay up late, refuse to grow up, refuse marriage and reproduction, have second puberties and in the shadow of the AIDS crisis they might risk or lose their lives early (Sedgwick, 1985; Halberstam, 2005; Ahmed, 2006). These are all kinds of disorientations, different ways of being in time that subvert the chronologies of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980).

However there is some straightening out going on and depoliticising of queer temporalities through participation in the institutions of marriage, incarceration and war alongside the neo-liberal co-option and commercialisation of gay identity; in what Lisa Dugan calls the 'new homo-normativity' (Boellstorff, 2007; Conrad, 2014; Duggan, 2002). This includes the irony of queer histories being celebrated through a series of anniversaries of legislation changes (e.g. Section 28, 1988 and Sexual Offences Act, 1967) that are the 'the stuff of normative timelines and of events that mark the legible contours of a life sanctioned as such' (Freeman, 2007: 91).

Quilts are cumulative by nature, often with no central motif (although often mine do), defying conventional rules for formal, painterly arrangements; instead they can offer a

democratic whole, a visual field outside of hierarchies (Donnell, 1990; Showalter, 2012). This non-linear, materially driven form can offer a site for exploring the unruly experiences of the queer bodies, temporalities and affects. Thinking through the quilt has enabled me to structure my research outside of institutionalised chronologies and arbitrarily progressive narratives. My method has no arbitrary parameters of geography or period, and refuses to replicate, or reconstruct the annals of lesbian history. Like the obsessive quilter, compulsively buying stashes of fabrics and hoarding scraps, I bend to my whim what catches my eye and what feels good under my fingers (Stalp, 2007). This is a refusal to build a narrative of progression and acceptance; instead opting for chaotic intergenerational intimacies that sit beyond the notions of 'before' and 'after'.

The Quilt on the Bed: Sex and Death

Quilts not only mark the passage of time and its milestones, they are a material witness to its lived-ness. Quilts are spectators to the ubiquitous and transitional experiences of birth, sex and death. A quilt is a used thing, soiled, its gathered stains telling stories – spills, bodily fluids, the dog giving birth and the damp shadows of family histories (Harper, 2005; Sorkin, 2012). It lives on the bed, where 'the body' is knitted 'to self and other and the dark wool of dreams' (Piercy, 1994:20). The quilt is companion to the pleasures, traumas, and mundanity of the quotidian. The bed is normatively read as a place of rest, sanctuary, and security. However my reading of the quilt aligns more with Atwood's portrait of the bed (in her novel *Alias Grace*) as a dangerous place for women where 'many dangerous things' take place: childbirth, sex and rape – a quilt can also be read as a warning, or a war flag (Atwood, 1996:186). The home too, is not always a safe place for women, or queer people for whom the domestic is a site of trauma, rejection and loss rather than comfort and shelter (Pearl, 2008b). The quilt is a powerfully ambiguous, corporeal site for working through both pleasure and trauma, pride and rage (Jefferies, 2020).

The bed in its intimate relationship with bodies, sex and sexuality can function as 'a politically astute symbol in feminist and queer art' as well as a symbolic site through which to 'navigate questions of identity and trauma' (Przybylo, 2019:78). The bed again is a political site for working out how to love, make love and do life differently outside of

heterosexual paradigms, wrestling with the complexities of power, penetration, pornography, S&M and butch and femme identity (Duggan and Hunter, 1995; Echols, 2016). The symbolic space of the bed, inferred by the quilt gives me a potent site for exploring the complexities of the sexual politics and sensuality of the lesbian archive.

The bed is also a site for sickness, death and mourning. Quilts keep the 'dark stains', 'left by the night medicines, taken in silence and darkness', they rise and fall with the dreams of departed youth and the heaving of a last breath (Annette [pseud.], 1994:15). Mourning quilts have been made from pieces of the deceased's clothing, with 'braided lives, precious scraps: women were buried but their clothing wore on' (Piercy, 1994:21). Between the 1940s-70s in Southern America Funeral Ribbon Quilts were common, made from the ribbons attached to graveside bouquets and offerings creating a unique memorial (Bell-Kite, 2016). AA Bronson's powerful photograph *Felix Partz* shows his partner after his death from HIV in bed, surrounded by a patchwork of patterns and fabrics. This photograph made present what the AIDS memorial quilt project did not – death, and the queer male body; fleshy and painful, bringing into focus the realities of the crisis (Bryan-Wilson, 2017). This project draws on the quilts' powerful ability to destabilise the boundaries between the living and the dead, summoning the unruly ghosts of lesbian pasts. In the soft space of the quilt I am seeking to build a 'tactile relationship to a collective past', driven with the desire to literally touch, and feel historical (Freeman, 2010:93). I am dragging backward in time, forging retrospective lineages across generations and temporalities, between the living and the dead.

Guilty Quilts: Violence and Colonialism

Not all quilts are innocent, and not all blankets bring comfort and warmth. Carocci brings attention to this in their reflections on the Native American Quilt AIDS memorial which highlights histories of colonialism abuse in the form of small pox infected blankets given to Native Americans by colonial settlers (Carocci, 2010). In this collaborative artwork a community is not only dealing with the trauma of the AIDS crisis, but the legacy of trauma from colonial violence and the ghost of the soft blanket as a tool of chemical warfare and racial genocide.

This research seeks to heed Catherine Harper's warning against the blind romanticism of quilts; and acknowledge the brutal realities and desperation of sewing together what was possible, warding off death (Harper, 2004, 2005). Quilts were not all hand pieced from unused scraps. Much quilting in Britain and America was a middle class leisure pursuit, which included buying new and specialty fabrics – and later kits – rather than a thrifty strategy for survival. There are many examples of 1800s quilts due to the rise in popularity of quilt making after the boom in affordable roller printed cottons in the late 1790s as a result of colonial labour abuses in India and America (Quilts 1700-2010) (Ferrero et al., 1987). American Quilt history is bound up in the history of slavery. Enslaved women were forced to piece quilts after long days worked in the field and their handiwork was often claimed by the white wife (Gladys-Marie, 2002; Brackman, 2006). Harriet Power's (born 1837) quilts are an exception to this. Her Asafo flag-like narrative appliques told stories from black life and their survival as a result of economic hardship, compelling her to sell them to the white collector Jennie Smith who preserved them alongside Power's own descriptions (Ferrero et al., 1987). Tales of quilts being used as a secret language, as maps and directives to guide the Underground Railroad, have been critiqued by some as an attempt to soften or sanitise dark and painful histories (Tobin and Dobard, 2000; Gladys-Marie, 2002). My project intends to sit with these uncomfortable histories and the darkness at the heart of the quilt.

Methods of Making: Conceptualising Research as Patchwork

The following describes my holistic research methodology for re-visioning lesbian archive materials through quilt making. This section frames the techniques of quilting as not only material methods, but also tools for thinking through the lesbian archive and for structuring research in relation to the material, bodily and affective registers.

Figure 3: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Research Mapping,* 2018. Photograph: authors own.

Stage 1: Piecing: Fragments

Piecing involves gathering the fabric fragments that will eventually become the whole quilt. Cut to shape and kept in piles; they wait. Sometimes the fabric is sourced, sometimes thrifted.

Piecing in this research begins in the archive. Without strict parameters in terms of timelines or geographies, I follow my desires in the archive. This method of rummaging in the archive leaves space in the encounter for the unexpected, or unnoticed to float to the surface (Bracey and Maier, 2018). I gather images, texts, visual fragments as well as feelings and sensations, which are recorded in sketches and auto-ethnographic writing. These images are stored, printed out, cut up, re-arranged and re-assembled through digital and analogue collaging. Through a re-visioning process the iconographies, symbolisms and visual language of lesbian identity and culture begins to become visible. These visuals are my 'stash' of materials continuously growing. Like an obsessive quilter, I keep returning to the

archive in order to indulge in the pleasurable accumulation of lesbian materials (Stalp, 2007; Herring, 2012).

Piecing invokes notions of pious frugality, of using what you already have to create something new. For example, American settler quilts circa 1800, which were often made from discarded flour sacks (Colby, 1958; Field, 1974). When working with lesbian histories (particularly pre 1970), piecing can offer a thrifty strategy for working with scarce and fragmented archival traces (Wilton, 1995). My project uses a 'scavenger methodology' that pieces together fragments from multiple archives, in order to 'collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidently excluded from traditional studies' (Halberstam, 1998:13).

However, not all quilts are thrifty. When making my quilts I do not use recycled scraps, but carefully chosen fabrics often selected in pastels and satins or digitally printed with my own paintings, patterns and iconography. These expensive purchases run against the grain of humble thrift and 'the best use of materials available' (Field, 1974:13). My fabrics are a decadent choice demonstrating a lack of restraint, feminine fussiness and pleasure in excess (Skelly, 2017). This shift into plenitude is political. I am claiming femme visibility and intentionally shifting the discourse of lesbian history onto 'presence instead of absence, plenitude instead of scarcity' (Castle, 1993:19)**.**

Stage 2: Patchworking: Repair

Patchworking is the stitching together of the fragments to create the 'top sheet' traditionally in geometric patterns such as log cabin, flying geese, or 'crazy style', haphazard piecing and overlapping; or there may be no patchwork at all, for example whole cloth quilts (Field, 1974).

I use patchwork as a metaphorical tool to frame my research processes, although I do not tend to use it as a technique when making my quilts (in the traditional sense). The archival fragments that I collect are re-assembled and re-visioned through the processes of painting, digitising, stitching, embellishing and binding (figure 4).

Patchwork was firstly an ancient method for repair, as 'the application of any available material to strengthen the worn place or to cover a hole', only later would it become a decorative technique (Colby, 1958:19). My practice sits within a lineage of artists including Louise Bourgeois, who have drawn on the reparative power of the needle and its ability to both pierce and join together materially, and symbolically (Morris, 2003; Hodge, 2007; Pajaczkowska, 2010). This historically reparative medium can offer a strategy for 'working with and through' the discarded, forgotten or problematic objects in the lesbian archive (Singh, 2018a:53). The practice of patchwork draws on the 'restorative powers of the needle and the act of sewing' as the possibility for connecting, constructing and creating (Hodge, 2007:266).

The process of patchworking is 'an act of investigation' into the lesbian archive, an experiment in re-assembling and re-visioning (Robertson, K. 2016:197). It is a system for 'relational re-ordering' and the possibility of 'staying with the complexities and mess' of the lesbian archive (Lindstrom and Stahl, 2016:65). The moveable and interchanging elements allow room for the instability, and unfixing of lesbian identities across temporalities (Coviello, 2007; Doan, 2017). Stitching together is a powerful and transformative gesture; binding, connecting and forming new patterns (Fyre, 2013).

Patchwork quilts have no presupposed, defined boundaries or borders through processes of expansion and accumulation. In its 'piece-by-piece construction' it holds the possibility for 'infinite successive additions of fabric' (Guattari and Deleuze, 1980:525). The quilt and research are both unruly undertakings where the desires to continually deviate and expand are always present.

Figure 4: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Patchworking research,* 2019, *Proximity* residency at Islington Mill: Salford, October 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Stage 3: Quilting: Survival

Quilting is the connection of the three layers of fabric through quilting points and trapping the air and creating the warmth (Cooper and Bradley Buferd, 1978). Once the top sheet is pieced and embroidered, I cut the backing and wadding to size. I connect the layers through stitch, creating quilting points. This process gives the quilt its puffy objecthood; thick with potential for the function of protection. Often made for beds, quilts can be large and cumbersome and the process of quilting difficult creating the need for quilting frames. Historically quiltings or quilting bees were organised to collectively quilt another woman's top sheet, or a professional employed (Cornell, 2006). The Handi-quilter is a contemporary

quilting frame with the capacity for computerised quilting where my illustrations can become quilted embroideries (figure 5).

The centre of the quilt is always unseen; its positive hidden interior is a potential space for occupying, obscuring and protecting (Winnicott, 1971 and Ayling-Smith, 2019). Quilts have been found where 'wool had mingled with thistles and twigs and, horrors, pellets of sheep dung' and paper pieced quilts often contain invaluable newspaper cuttings and ephemera (Jones, 2016:25). This stuffing imbues the quilt with its ability to keep out the cold. Laid on beds, but also hung on walls women have used quilts to keep cold winds at bay in order to ensure the survival of family members (Cooper and Bradley Buferd, 1978; Cornell, 2006). The quilt is a tool for survival from the elements, as well as an emotional solace through the act of making (Donnell, 1990; Leslie, 1999).

Re-visioning through lesbian quilts is also literally 'an act of survival' as an attempt to critically care for the wounded, neglected and vastly complex lesbian histories and feelings that haunt the lesbian archive (Castle, 1993; Rich, 1972:18). The quilt is a space for forging cross-generational memory making, preservation and an intimate space for sharing fragile histories.

Figure 5: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Quilting in the Embroidery Studio,* 2019. Photograph: courtesy of MMU Technical Services.

The Quilting Circle: Collaboration and Collective

As previously discussed, quilts are social spaces used to build and sustain communities, creativity, friendships, and support networks (Cornell, 2006; Otto Lispet, 1985). Essential to the PhD process is a quilting circle of support that has included my supervisors, my lesbian community and Proximity collective: a practice-based research collective interested in the socio-spatial elements of research. We have completed a series of residencies, exhibitions and projects together as well as campaigning for better provision of support for practice-based researchers within the university (figure 6). Since the first lockdown, we have met every week to talk, reflect and organise on Zoom creating a space for collective professional and personal support during challenging times.

The conversations we have had around methodologies have been invaluable to my practice. Through the ongoing (and never resolved) project of manifesto writing, I came to understand the transformative potential of mapping and manifesto writing for my own

research (see preface). The residencies pushed me to consider the detritus of my practice as an archive, and to challenge myself to exhibit work that I considered to be unfinished scraps or auxiliary samples. Through the convivial aesthetics of Proximity, I continue to push my practice beyond the comfortable and encounter new ways of thinking and strategies for practice-based research.

Figure 6: Antony Hall, Rebecca Howard, Anne-Marie Atkinson, Ann Carragher, *Proximity,* 2021, *Proximity* residency and exhibition at Abingdon Studios: Blackpool*,* August 2021*.* Photograph: courtesy of Matt Wilkinson.

To Conclude

This methodology has situated my practice in relation to the gendered cultural histories of quilt making, as well as the emotional; properties that make quilt making such a powerfully evocative medium for working with the complex politics and sensual properties of the lesbian archive. Each stage of making the quilt is established as a material method for gathering 'tacit embodied knowledge' and functions as a metaphorical framework structuring and supporting this research (Goett, 2012:124).

Through its warmth and reparative qualities, the quilt offers me a tool for re-assembling the fragments of the lesbian archive. Through patchwork: protecting and preserving the pieces of a fragile and fractured archive of a marginalised community. The quilt is my way into the lesbian archive: my way of navigating, processing and sharing my encounters with desire, pleasure and pain. It is simultaneously a response to the archive, and my contribution to it. Each quilt is a 'diary of touch'[ing] the lesbian archive; a survivalist re-visioning of the fragments of history (Lippard, 1983:32; Rich, 1972). It is an act of femmage, a reclamation and explicitly femme-lesbian repurposing of a gendered materiality.

Chapter 3: Femme Ethics for the Lesbian Archive

Femme ethics proposes an ethical framework for working with the lesbian archive by appropriating Manchester Metropolitan's institutional Ethos online form for ethical approval in an attempt to create space for the complicated entanglements, emotions and desires encountered in the lesbian archive. This is done through an appropriation and embellishment of the dispassionate questions asked in the Ethos form creating an additional, alternative and femme-inised form for me to work through the ethical, and emotional complexities of researching with lesbian archives. This is a femme strategy, working with a femme ethics through a deliberate repositioning of feminised qualities 'like softness, vulnerability, and emotionality'; and my own femme subjectivity as critically valuable (Dahl, 2016; Hoskin, 2019; Schwartz, 2020: 5).

A vibrant and fragmented archive calls for a disciplinary patchwork approach to ethics that draws on frameworks of care from ethnographic, archival, community and artistic practices. The femme-ethical framework does this by drawing on a bricolage of theories, methods and strategies; quilt making, auto-ethnographic making and the centralisation of my own emotional subjectivity as a lesbian artist and desiring subject. Centring this emotional femme-lesbian subjectivity is a tool for navigating the 'entanglements and attachments of a living research project', the complexities of a living archive, and the cross-generational encounters of seeking permissions/approval, asking questions and building friendship through house visits, emails and conversations over drinks (Detamore, 2016:169). The femme ethics of the lesbian archive is a proposal for an intimate methodology that re-works institutional processes and makes space for messy, emotional encounters that can lead to multiplicities and sensational new ways of knowing and lesbian world making.

This questioning of conventional methodology attempts to resist the colonial, heterocentric paradigms present in academic research models that prioritise the authority of the researcher and do not allow the subject to speak (Spivak, 1988; Biermann, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Berryman et al., 2013). It is part of a lineage of feminist and queer methodologies that seek to challenge the privilege and authority of the researcher as a subjective source of knowledge (Berryman et al., 2013; Freire, 2001). Instead, I as the

researcher am situated in the position of someone seeking knowledge, connection and the possibility of contributing to my community. This co-creative and curious position refuses the arbitrary split between emotions and research, while seeking to acknowledge the vulnerability of bodies in the space of research, and the intimate interactions taking place (Bondi, 2005; Povinelli, 2006). Through a commitment to addressing intimacy, materiality and constant conversation this ethical proposal works toward 'an ethically entangled network of dynamic and negotiated relations' between the artist and the archive and between generations of lesbians (Detamore, 2016:178).

A Form for Femme Ethics: a Queering of the Ethos Ethics Form

What Archives will you be using?

Due to the lack of dedicated lesbian archive and the scattered nature of lesbian archive material in Britain, I have patchworked together research from multiple sites. This thesis organises these archival collections into the following kinds of encounters:

The Institutional **Encounter:**
The Vera Holme Collection within The Women's Library Collection at London School of Economics.

The Domestic **Encounter:**
The Personal Collection of Phyllis Christopher (photographer and previous photo editor of *On Our Backs* magazine).

The Community **Encounter:**
The Lesbian Archive and Information Centre Collection at Glasgow Women's Library.

The Archival Loop **Encounter (*the domestic, the community* and *the institutional*):**
The Personal Collection of Karen Fisch (Drag King, Rebel Dyke, club organiser and previous member of The Black Widows).

The Rebel Dykes Archive (Google Drive/Art and Archive Exhibition)
The Bishopsgate Institute.

Although the project focuses on under researched 'British Archives', it proved impossible to focus solely on material relating to British contexts. Lesbian culture breaks borders, and materials leak across continents. For example, the *On Our Backs* magazine which became part of a British lesbian lexicon, as well as part of my project through the photographer and photo editor Phyllis Christopher coming to live in Newcastle with her partner.

Will you be using personal or sensitive data?

Y

Further info:

Yes, my project works with a marginalised group of people with a protected characteristic. I am only working with collections and custodians that are already identified as lesbian. The archives are full of sensitive data; records of love, loss and rage, and the visceral bodily memories of homophobia, sexism and trauma. The materials of the archives remain tangled up with the lives of the women who have created and sustained lesbian histories. There are feelings at stake here.

I will be accessing two particular kinds of sensitive data: *sexual data* and *raging data*. These sets of sensitivities are inevitably intertwined.

Sexual Data:

I will be accessing explicitly sexual material in the archives across the personal, community and institutional. This includes Phyllis Christopher's photography portfolio, lesbian erotica, porn and publications as well as private and community collections of photographs from member's only club nights. Working with this kind of material opens up to all kinds of difficulties in terms of permissions, representation and consent, particularly with intimate

images of nudity and sexual acts. Part of the creative process of quilt making involves perusing and obtaining consent from the photographers and models. This process is discussed in depth in the section on archival permissions and in the chapters on the *domestic archive*, *archival loop* and *Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding.*

Raging Data:

This project will also deal with what I am terming 'raging data', defined as sensitive data that is raging, angry or difficult. In particular materials relating to radical/revolutionary/separatist lesbians which document their pain and fury, but also their joy in creating their own spaces and finding different ways of being outside the patriarchy (Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 1981; Enszer, 2014).

This data must be considered carefully, for example the *Raging Dyke Network* archive held at GWL, which boldly declares in felt pen that it is for LESBIANS ONLY: these boundaries need recognising and respecting. Working with separatist materials also brings the research into contact with the painful aspects of lesbian history, the censorship imposed by lesbian feminists in the sex wars as well as the forcible exclusion of trans women that is still causing pain in contemporary LGBTQ communities (Duggan and Hunter, 1995; Gailey and Brown, 2016). These entanglements with raging dykes and angry Amazons will be explored more deeply in *the community* chapter.

Do you have permission from the archive holders?

Permissions and the ethics of art working with archival materials are a key concern for the project, particularly around raging and sexual data (McKee and Porter, 2012). The project involves a process of re-using, re-assembling and patchworking archival images, texts and artworks into quilted artworks, bringing up concerns around reproduction, copyright and fair usage in the art practice (Benjamin, 1969; College Art Association, 2014). The archival objects reworked in the quilts are painted, stitched, manipulated and quilted; they are not a re-production, but a deviation from the derivative: a patchwork re-visioning. Femme ethics

emphasises seeking permission even when I am not obliged to by law, as each request for permission is a gesture toward connection and conversation.

Will you be bringing your feelings to the Archive?

Y

I will be approaching the archive with a femme methodology, bringing my lesbian subjectivity and my femme feelings with me into the archive – denying the superiority of objectivity in research (Dahl, 2016). I will be in touch with my feelings at all times in order to be alert to the sensational realities 'of research, which are messy, emotional, complicated and embodied' (Tweedy, 2016:215). The archival ethics of this project seek to foreground the feelings, emotions, and affects often missing from academic approaches to the archive (Ahmed, 2014). After all, it is the 'affective power of a useful archive' to 'preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling'; these feelings will be both my method and my research data (Cvetkovich, 2003:241).

I will engage with the following feelings throughout my research:

Longing: for a Lesbian Past

I am looking for companions and collaborators in the archive. In a 21st century where homophobia, sexism, lesphobia and femmephobia are very real and daily experiences, I am seeking consolation and connection with past struggles and past triumphs. I want to meet women in the archive.

The archive is a 'place, that is to do with longings and appropriation', a site for working out our desire to name, collect and collate the forgotten and the erased, and to imagine a different kind of social order (Steedman, 2001:81)**.** Lesbians want a past, a history to be part of, be connected to. The denial of lesbians historically has kept 'us invisible, isolated and powerless' (Lesbian History Group, 1989:2). We want not just to find examples of lesbians,

but find ourselves 'a heroic aesthetic, one that provoked a 'pride' response in order to rebut the shame of homophobia' (Munt, 1998a:7).

I am shamelessly searching for lesbian histories and connection for my own personal gratification, pleasure and healing. I want to feel close, and touch up, and rub up against Sapphic pasts, lesbian utopias and the dyke drama of the past, present and future (Doan and Waters, 2000). The quilt satisfies this urge for touching and connection, I am literally able to get hold of and rework archival fragments in the transformative site of the quilt. My quilts are my contribution to this history; literally stitching myself into the fabric of the community (see further details in *Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding*).

I acknowledge this desire for emotional rescue and the restorative drives of the femme-lesbian in the archive. The use of auto-ethnography, affect and emotion in my soft archival method is part of a theoretical shift away from 'effective' histories of 'emotional rescue' toward analysis of the desires and longings that mobilise queer people toward the past, foregrounding the affects of coming into contact with queer histories (Dinshaw, 1999; Love, 2007:31; Nealon, 2001). My own archival desire for recognition, attachments and emotional entanglements are both the driving force and the subject of this research on the affects of the lesbian archive. Focusing on my own desires avoids sweeping generalisations of a universal lesbian experience.

Joy

I will bring my delight in my closeness to lesbian archive materials, and my pleasure in feeling connected to the history of a community that I belong to. I will relish the sensations of touching paper, gently splitting and opening the leaves of folders, of powdery latex gloves clinging to my hands or the softness of cotton (Dever, 2015). I will line up my pencils on the desk, my notebook, sketch books and take a deep breath before I open the box. I will savour each soft curl of a handwritten note, the angry swipe of a felt pen, each crumpled fold of a program once stuffed in a back pocket before being stowed away for safekeeping. I will acknowledge when my heart skips a beat as I make connections, and the rush of joy as I become deeper entangled in the annals of the lesbian archive. I will bring my revelry about

feeling a part of a history of women loving women that came before me. All these delights of the archive will be my materials: touching, returning and becoming. I will stitch in a state of ecstasy as the intersection of past and present.

Sadness, Shame and Rage

I will bring my experiences of isolation, confusion and shame inherent in growing up under the shadow of Section 28 (1988-2003) through which the British government mandated a representational void that made love between women seem impossible (Section 28, 1988; Lesser, 2015). In its banning of the promotion of homosexuality (positive images of) this legislation compounded already existing homophobia and contributed specifically to what Heather Love has called the 'trauma of queer spectatorship – most often articulated as an isolated and uninformed viewing of negative images of homosexuality' (Love, 2007:15). I will bring my sadness and my rage against the sexism, homophobia, lesphobia and femme-phobia I have experienced throughout my life.

This method responds to Ann Cvetkovich's call on activists and scholars to utilise different kinds of archives; those of loss, grief and trauma in order to craft collective memory and 'mobilizes queer communities' (Cvetkovich, 2003; Stein, 2005:116). By sitting with these uncomfortable feelings I will refuse lesbian pride as the antidote to lesbian shame; and the queer aversion to 'unhappy endings' (Ahmed, 2009:3). I will embrace the ugly, or useless feelings of the archive such as 'envy, irritation, paranoia and anxiety', negotiating unhappy histories of transphobia, separatism and the sex wars (Love, 2007:13, 2019).

Desire

I refuse the silence of sexuality in the institution, where the centrality of white male subjectivities go unchallenged in the construction of critical lenses of enquiry (Rooke, 2012). I will instead, be inhabiting the subjectivities and corporeality of the femme lesbian body as a critical lens for research. I will take up the position of the 'lusting queer archivalist': hungry and desiring (Freeman, 2010:19). The centrality and awareness of the 'pleasurable and

embodied' experiences in the archive will allow me to 'ethically respond to challenges and opportunities within research' (Tweedy, 2016:215).

I acknowledge the role of my desire, my fantasies and desperation for lesbian images outside of the male gaze (Paasonen, 2007, 2014; Hanson, 2016). I will bring my lust for dykes on bikes and butches with their trousers round their ankles. I acknowledge my deep love and solidarity with the femmes who are so often forgotten (Dahl, 2016). Acknowledging and working with flirtations, anxiety and arousal in archival encounters allows the personhood of the researcher, and the researched to be present and to allow curiosity and openness as a 'path to understanding' (Newton, 1993; Fields, 2016:48). Through auto-ethnographic writing and creative practice I centre the 'performances and entanglements' that I am 'embedded in as a result of conducting research' (Detamore, 2016:170).

I acknowledge the intimacies that have formed during the research, and my 'queer attachment to the bonds created through research', and their centrality to a femme-ethical methodology of making quilts in collaboration with the lesbian community, rather than about the lesbian community (Detamore, 2016:178).

Please describe the methods of data collection

In the archive I will bricolage methods, patchworking strategies promiscuously and utilising the 'intersectional and interdisciplinary tools' of 'the Dyke's analytical lens' (Ward, 2016:83). I will act as a researcher, artist, lesbian, fan, historian, archivist and community member; defying the boundaries between 'queer and straight, rationality and emotions, intellect and embodiment' (Stone and Cantrell, 2015:9). My archival visits will be driven by the quilting practice: taking photos, writing and drawing (Dever, 2015).

I will use the process of rummaging where possible, initially without a specific time period/theme/geography allowing for the possibility of encountering the unexpected (Bracey and Maier, 2018). I will follow my feelings and pause when my body hums with affective resonances (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). I will make repeat visits to the archive in

allowance for the queer nature of the research that is '*necessarily* emergent and subject to repeated adjustment, rather than remaining fixed throughout the process of enquiry' (Barrett, 2010:6).

I will approach the archive as a 'phenomenological space'; through my own embodied experiences I will consider the ways in which bodies move toward and inside the archive as a site for assembling and constructing identity (Oram, 2011, 2012; Beins, 2015; Scicluna, 2015:174). I will record and analyse my own subjectivities in relation to the archive through auto-ethnographic free writing during the visit or as quickly as possible afterward. Auto-ethnography has been accused of being too much in terms of its overly subjective and emotional tone, or of being too little in its lack of academic rigour and references. I adopt it here as an academically impractical and femme-ethical methodology (Adams and Jones, 2014; Denshire, 2013).

Will you be conducting interviews?

N

In the original proposal and application for ethical approval, I planned to conduct interviews with custodians of the archives I was researching. Interviews have been a crucial method for both feminist and queer projects as a strategy for gathering the stories and histories of marginalised, and silenced communities (Smith, 1990; Kong et al., 2001; Panfil and Miller, 2015). However I removed interviews from my femme-ethical methodology out of concern that the formalisation might become a barrier to intimacy by highlighting or establishing an unhelpful hierarchy between researcher and researched – stunting my emotional entanglements with my community (Jackman, 2016; Love, 2016). Instead, through auto-ethnographic writing I am able to reflect and record the fleeting connections, conversations and relationships that form around archival encounters. Those affective bodily sensations that sit outside of language are wound up and bound into the material art practice, acknowledging the impossibility of fully capturing what it means to experience the affect of the archive (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010; Massumi, 2015; Dolan and Holloway, 2016; Ayling-Smith, 2019).

Conclusion: Archiving the Data

The data (images, texts and experiences) will be archived in the quilts, re-worked and re-visioned in stitch. The quilts will be returned to cultural circulation through Instagram, exhibitions as well as being donated to archives (Bishopsgate Institute) and acquisitioned by museums (Pitt Rivers Museum).

As Rose Collis warns: 'our histories are not being served by being viewed mainly through an academic prison or gaze' (Collis, 2020:xxiii). We need alternative strategies for researching, sharing and communicating lesbian histories, particularly when working with living communities. The cost of scholarship must be held in mind; which 'always involves the betrayal of the communities whose experience we claim to represent' (Love, 2016:348). Lesbians have been misheard, misrepresented, and mistreated by institutions, and often do not engage in, or benefit from stabilising forms of academic writing. The quilted practice is a femme-ethical methodology that will be 'part of, not outside of, social movements, and seeing the research process itself as something that works toward the formulation of community' (Dahl, 2016:165). It is an act of devotion to the women who came before. In its laboured creativity, it is my material contribution to the archive and the community that created it.

Chapter 4: *The Institutional* Archive: Longing in The Vera Holme Collection

Key Quilt theme: patchworking and repair

Introduction

This short chapter addresses the archetypal archive: *the institutional* archive as the resting place of official records. Through a femme-ethical approach, I consider the feelings and sensations encountered in my initial archival fieldwork at LSE Women's Library when looking at *The Papers of Vera Holme*, a lesbian suffragette, chauffeuse and activist. The archive is a highly formalised and ritualised space, it is a space for 'wanting things that are put together, collected, collated, named in lists and indices' (Steedman, 2001:81). It is also a site for 'longing and appropriation', to discover, reclaim or recuperate lesbians from the silences and gaps of heterosexualised historical narratives (Steedman, 2001:81).

In this, most disciplined of spaces, I consider the embodied sensations of my femme excesses, unruly emotions and queer desires for touching across time as they spill out into the regulated silence of the reading room. Through the quilted artwork *V is for Vera,* the quilt is contextualised as a reparative tool for patchworking in the gaps of sparse records of historical lesbianism and their wounded histories. This is a short chapter, partly due to the findings being published elsewhere in a journal article and the findings from this initial archival encounter were used to formulate the *Quilting as Methodology* chapter that precedes this one.

I conclude with my departure from *the institutional* archive, and turn toward the domestic and community archives that preoccupy the rest of the thesis. This shift is situated in the wider turn in feminist and queer studies toward radical and unusual archives, and my own desire to connect with living lesbian communities.

Figure 7: Sarah-Joy Ford, *V is for Vera,* (pots collaboration with Juliet Flemming), 2018, *Hard Craft* exhibition at Vane Gallery: Newcastle, 15th November – 15th December 2018. Photograph: courtesy of Judith Fieldhouse.

The Lesbian Archive: Institutionalised

I began my research thinking about Archives with a capital A: *the institutional* archive proper, which led to initially framing my research around explicitly feminist archival collections in Britain, which also included The Women's Library at London School of Economics and Feminist Archive South at Bristol University. These encounters were fuelled by curiosity in how the materials activists came to be housed in institutions, and the relationship between communities and institutions and feminist strategies for positioning the archives as a site for the production of new knowledge and practices (Shayne et al., 2016; Cifor and Wood, 2017; Digital Women's Archive North [DWAN, 2017).

In 2019, I was delivering an Arts Council funded project called *Hard Craft*, at Vane Gallery, Newcastle, exploring the relationship between craft and the women's suffrage movement (figure 7). Although this project was not intended to be a part of the PhD research, my lack of an established time period of study allowed one project to leak into another. This temporal refusal to narrow the field of study to a singular time period was an active

resistance to the linear narratives of sequential progress that have become attached to LGBTQ histories; increasingly constructed and celebrated through a series of anniversaries of legislation changes (e.g. Section 28, 1988 and Sexual Offences Act, 1967) that are 'the stuff of normative timelines and of events that mark the legible contours of a life sanctioned as such' (Duggan, 2002; Boellstorff, 2007; Conrad, 2014; Freeman, 2007:91). As part of my femme-ethical methodology I wanted to be able to respond to my emotions and desires throughout the research process and leave the research open to unexpected encounters, overlaps and temporal shiftiness.

When I came across the figure of Vera Holme, the Sapphic suffragette, chauffeuse and aid worker, I felt compelled to allow the two projects to collide and begin my archival research with the Papers of Vera (Jack) Holme held at The Women's Library Archives at The London School of Economics. The artworks created in response to this archive functioned as a test case for my strategy of quilting the archive, from which I was able to draw out and structure my methodology whilst exploring notions of silence, erasure and questions of visibility for the lesbian archive.

The lesbian archive is fragmented and fractured across Britain and it holds, like queerness, the weight of a history of injury, erasure and trauma (Butler, 2008). The work of documenting lesbian lives, of creating archives and tangible histories has been hindered by the dual barriers of sexism and homophobia (Lesbian History Group, 1989; Wilton, 1995). Deliberately excluded from sodomy laws and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 out of 'the fear of mentioning it, they might spread such unspeakable "filthiness" even further', the lesbian became a kind of 'juridical phantom', prosecuted, penalised and incarcerated through other laws (Castle, 1993:6). Here the 'rhetoric of incredulity' also functioned as a 'as a mechanism of prohibition': lesbianism was the unspeakable, and the unimaginable (Traub, 2010:34). This leaves lesbians with a much sparser archival trail than the gay men explicitly prosecuted for homosexual acts. In the past demands have been put on lesbian historians to provide 'proof of genital contact between women' in order to claim a historical figure as lesbian – the practice of bed sharing, joint households, lifelong primary relationships and love letters failing to count (Jeffreys, 1989b:22). In a phallogocentric society that sees the penis and penetration as primary, in both legal and psychoanalytic discourses, 'female

homosexuality is somehow less recognisable' than male homosexuality – as an impossibility (Jagose, 2002:35).

I already knew what I was looking for in the archive: an inventory of the items Vera wanted returned to her after her partner Evelina's death, which includes a bed with their initials carved on the sides (and a wood carving set, suggesting to me that they carved the initials themselves). The carving of names is an act of devotion, inscribing their love literally on the bed that they shared was the inspiration for my quilt *V is for Vera*. Through stitching with this tantalising archival fragment, I established quilting as a patchwork methodology for re-visioning the fragments of the lesbian archive. It is a sensitive tool: both a femme and feminist methodology that offers me a tool for 'reading documents against the grain', 'finding new meanings' in the archive and reconstructing the historical lives of lesbians from the fragments of the past (Chaudhuri et al., 2010:xiii). In its sensuality, and its ties to the most intimate of spaces: the bed, the quilt is a powerful site to examine the historical erasure of love and sex between women and the de-sexualisation of women's histories. My journal article *Queering Suffrage: embroidering the lesbian life of Vera Holme* explores in depth the significance of the use of the quilt in the context of suffrage historiography. Contextualising its material reference to the bed as an insistence 'on the importance of the intimate domestic spaces and collective living situations in which women of the suffrage movement loved, collaborated and fought for equality' and refusing to leave what lesbians do in bed as the unimaginable (Ford, 2021:22).

With the specifics of the *V is for Vera* quilt published elsewhere, I will return to the space of the archive with an auto-ethnographic analysis of a femme-lesbian positionality within the institutional archive (figures 8 &9).

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Figure 8: Sarah-Joy Ford, *V is for Vera,* 2018, *Hard Craft* exhibition at Vane Gallery: Newcastle, 15th November – 15th December 2018. Photograph: courtesy of Judith Fieldhouse.

Into the Archive: A Femme Body in the Archive

My first visit to LSE was chaotic despite having processed the necessary paperwork well in advance. I get lost on the way to the library. I was sweaty when collecting my researcher ID card and hot traveling up in the great glass lift to the fourth floor to the 'Women's Library Reading Room'.

I arrived at a rather complicated looking circular desk. The woman behind stared at me and explained that this is an archive, not a library study room. I explained that I am booked into the reading room and have meetings with archive staff, one of which I am very late for already. She stared at me with a confused pause and declared 'sorry, you are just so unusual'. It hung in the air awkwardly. I am all in pink and absolutely a femme. This is not what a researcher looks like, I am out of place – or made to feel out of place. I am too pink, too much. I also had too much stuff, which was explained to me as my suitcase was wheeled away. I tried to shove my massive handbag into a tiny locker, removing only my phone, laptop, notebook and pencil, as instructed.

The institution is typically 'a persistent structure or mechanism of social order governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given community'; often when we are describing the institution we are describing white, straight men – as such I don't fit easily (Ahmed, 2017:153). I feel queer in this space, which after all is 'a spatial term […] a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a "straight line," a sexuality that is bent or crooked' (Cleto in Ahmed, 2006:67). Queerness is an orientation, towards some things, and away from others (Ahmed, 2006). My sexuality, my femme-ness and my queerness is crucial to how I am 'inhabiting and being inhabited by space' in the archive, it drives my presence here as a lesbian searching for lesbian materials (Ahmed, 2006:67). Sexuality is a not only a matter of 'which objects we are orientated toward, but also how we extend through our bodies in the world' (Ahmed, 2006:68). As a femme I am hyper visible, bright pink in a glass box of grey; but I am also at times invisible through the conflation of cis-femininity and heterosexuality. At times I am met with incredulity, a refusal of my sexuality and orientation. Much like the femmes of the 1970s and 1980s I am 'charged with the crime of passing' through my disassociation from the figure of the androgynous lesbian (Nestle, 1992:142).

My ID card was handed over in exchange for a small key for the corresponding glass locker inside the reading room, which contains my ordered archive materials. The glass cabinets act as a partition wall between the back office from the reading room, boxes slid in from one side and out from the other. I am only allowed to remove one box at a time. All my materials were ordered in advance, curbing my fantasies somewhat, of rummaging through boxes of dusty materials, opening bundles of letters in the 'counting house of dreams' (although this would come true later in my visits to Glasgow Women's Library) (Steedman, 2001:80; Bracey and Maier, 2018). Instead, I retrieved my pre-ordered, pre-approved box of materials.

Once settled at my allocated desk, with my allocated box I could breathe a little more and allow the excitement wash over me. I am looking for something and I am expectant. The archive has always been a mythical place for me, representing the possibilities for touching, and connecting with queer histories and lesbian pasts (Doan and Waters, 2000; Nealon, 2001; Freeman, 2010).

Feeling Historical

This desire for pastness, and for belonging to a collective past, sits within a well-established field of queer study. The queer desire for a collective past was first explored significantly by Bravmann who examined the particular drive in lesbians and gays to discover and claim ancestors who looked and felt like them, which led to the construction of gay and lesbian into a kind of peoplehood or tribe (Bravmann, 1995; Nealon, 2001). Christopher Nealon has proposed that this 'overwhelming desire to *feel historical'* finds its roots in the impulse 'to convert the harrowing privacy of the inversion model into some more encompassing narrative of collective life' (Nealon, 2001:8). Queerness itself has been theorised as temporal in nature, as a phase, an arrested development, as being out of time, outside of the normative temporal structures of a heterosexual life (grow up, marry, children, work, retire, die) – lives lived differently, or cut short (Sedgwick, 1985; Halberstam, 2005; Dinshaw, 2012; Freeman, 2007; Rao, 2020). Queerness can be understood as 'a reclaiming of abject subject positions, and identity as a fashioned, reiterative performance gathering

together the flotsam of history' (Campbell, 2020:152). This flotsam of history is often found in the archives, which have long been understood as a place to search for meanings, origins and threads of continuity (Derrida and Prenowitz, 2006; Dinshaw, 2012). The drive toward the construction of queer historical origin stories has been subject to theoretical scepticism, however remains stubbornly vital to queer culture, 'personal affirmation, homo life support' (Traub, 2010:27).

The Sensational Archive

Rummaging through the boxes donated by Holmes' family in 2006, I was delighted to find arrest records for 'obstructing a police man in his duty' alongside an astrological birth chart and letters referring to her as a bad boy – perhaps a typical butch consulting the stars (Cohen, 2018). She cuts a striking figure in photographs, riding horses, driving around the Pankhursts or posing for photos in her Scottish Women's Hospital unit uniform (which is also part of the collection).

The boxes are full of letters, but none of them are between Jack and her long term partner Evelina Haverfield. Their absence is a tangible presence in the archive: a silence perhaps forged by the women themselves deliberately covering their tracks of affection, to avoid detection by destroying letters and censoring diaries (Castle, 1993). Or a result of a 'distaste for lesbianism' from the custodians of the papers which has often resulted in the history of lesbian affection 'an inalienable aspect of [your] life, being destroyed' (Hamer, 1996:5). Archives of queerness are inherently bound to histories of injury, damage as well as the possibilities for repair and restoration (Butler, 2008). Communal histories of experiencing homophobia, negative affects and painful feelings 'produce psychic bonds and collective energies' that can motivate practices of collective 'queer worlding' (Waters-Lynch and Duff, 2017:491). My soft, femme approach to the archive is part of a lineage of queers in the archive: participating in collective mourning and melancholy, whilst refusing to disentangle pleasure from pain (Barad, 2010; Crimp, 1989; Fisher, 2014; Freccaro, 2006; Traub, 2010).

The archive becomes a space where I can gather and cobble 'together historical understandings of sexuality and gender through an appraisal of absences and presences', and where I might start to put myself back together as a historical subject 'even if done in the context of archival lack' (Gomez, 2014:2). This compulsion to recuperate is part of a legacy of lesbian questions for origins in 'the effort to discover/recover/reclaim lesbians in the past, and the desire to invest those women with identities *like our own*' through a process of 'mimetic identification' that is just 'as much psychic as historical' (Traub, 2010:355). Although as Traub points out the impossibility of this through a Foucauldian lens[2], 'we will not find any contemporary *lesbians* in early modern England, neither will we find any contemporary heterosexuals' (Foucault, 1978; Traub, 2010:27).

The quilt is bound to histories of repair, of resourcefulness and survival. Through these material associations the quilt can offer a recuperative strategy for piecing together the fragments of the lesbian archive. So often any evidence of women's love for each other is destroyed after their death, like the letters (Castle, 1993). Though we have the description of the engraved bed, which leaves no doubt for the intimacy that existed between these two women. In the space of the quilt I am able to speculatively stitch around this declaration of love, expanding and filling out the archival silencing of lesbian desire. In the form of the quilt, the relationship between the two suffragettes is located firmly on the bed: the site of pleasure, danger and intimacy. Although the lesbian archive has been defined by lack, and invisibility – it is in these spaces of silence creative methodologies including quilting can offer tools for speculative imaginings and world queer building practices from the fragments (Kokoli, 2016; Hartman, 2019; Campbell, 2020).

[2]The Foucauldian lens being the perspective that sexuality is an identity category, e.g. Gay and Lesbian are modern, western developments making them impossible to map easily onto the past.

Figure 9: Sarah-Joy Ford, *V is for Vera (detail),* 2018, *Hard Craft* exhibition at Vane Gallery: Newcastle, 15th November – 15th December 2018. Photograph: courtesy of Judith Fieldhouse.

Conclusions: Out of the Institution

Although I began my fieldwork in the silent glass box of The Women's Library Reading Room, I gradually moved away from the institutional archive and shifted toward domestic and community based archives, which is reflected in the brevity of this chapter. My archive expanded to include an extraordinarily erotic under stairs cupboard, snatched conversations, plastic boxes stacked up in a garage, a google drive belonging to the Rebel Dykes as well as a return to the acid free boxes hidden in stacks.

The shift is situated within the archival turn in feminist, queer and post-colonial studies that grapple 'with the power of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor' (Eichhorn, 2013; Hartman, 2019:xiii). Increased understandings of archive have gone beyond what has been institutionally sanctioned and recorded in response to the tendency for minority lives to be documented in different forms outside of the institution, as such 'oral

history, cultural memory, social ritual, communal folklore, and local performance' has been increasingly acknowledged and foregrounded (Rankin, 2000:351). Queer, feminist and people of colour focused projects have 'questioned the authority of the institution and made archives more inclusive by expanding upon what could potentially be considered an archive – often done by connecting the 'stuff' of particular archives to embodied knowledges of activism, pleasure, and the somatic sensorium of the body' (Campbell, 2020:13). These sensory methods and embodied approaches to the queer archive are indebted to Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings* which called for a turning of attention to 'an unusual archive, whose materials, in pointing to trauma's ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral', which might give rise to 'new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals and performances that call into being collective witnesses and publics' (Cvetkovich, 2003:7). This thesis, and its tendency toward personal and community based collections, also responds to Cvetkovich's caution not to forget grass roots archives 'as more institutional archives develop gay and lesbian collections' (Cvetkovich, 2003:245). Through the embodied experience of quilt making the following two chapters on *the domestic* and *community archive* do just this; whilst the final two chapters on *the archival loop* and *Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding* begin to unpick and reconcile the complex relationship between grass roots and institutional queer archives.

Chapter 5: *The Domestic* Archive: *On Our Backs* in the Cupboard under the Stairs

Key Quilt Theme: the femme and femmage

Introduction

In this chapter I examine my encounter with *the domestic* archive, discussing quilts that were made in relationship to the personal collection of the photographer Phyllis Christopher. The archive is a cupboard under the stairs full of photographs, videos and magazines and copies of *On Our Backs: entertainment for the adventurous lesbian* (*On Our Backs*) (1984-2006). I weave together an auto-ethnography tapestry from archival visits, conversational recollections, Zoom calls, email conversations and the creative process of making the quilts. The cupboard under the stairs is established as an invaluable archive, mapping Phyllis's prolific and profound body of work, the politics of pleasure in lesbian communities in San Francisco in the 80s and 90s and as a site for intergenerational connection and collaboration far beyond my own brief encounter.

I discuss a series of quilted artworks created through re-working and re-assembling images of femme indulgence and soft butch tenderness represented in *On Our Backs*. The first trio of white quilts examine femme decadence through Phyllis's photo series *Sex Magic*, depicting two femmes playing together – dripping in jewellery and tattoos. Following this *Pearls that Bind,* re-visioning another erotic photograph series playing with the sensuality of pearls. Finally I shift to a butch outlier (not photographed by Phyllis) *Honourable Discharge*, an enormous quilted negotiation of a Donna Jackson cover girl appearance after being discharged from the US army in 1991.

The chapter deepens my material analysis of the quilt as femme-femmage, as a reclamation of a medium associated with women's domesticity, and explicitly lesbian-femme methodology that embraces a fussy-femme aesthetics as well as the foregrounding of softness. Femme-femmage is also established as a strategy for intergenerational artistic acknowledgement; through the acts of re-assembling and re-working the images of a generation of lesbian artists that came before.

Encounters and Entanglements: *On Our Backs*

Phyllis Christopher is an American photographer and photo journalist who's photographs were published in *On Our Backs* and became photo editor from 1991-1993. Phyllis was born in Buffalo, studied at the state university of New York, later moving to San Francisco where she became involved in *On Our Backs* and later moved to Newcastle (UK) for love (Christopher et al., 2017). This proximity is how my research (which intended to focus solely on British lesbian archival materials) ended up centring a San Francisco lesbian photographer and publication. Queer things often leak and spread. With a paucity of lesbian materials, publications and ephemera trickle across borders, cross-pollinating cultures and communities.

On Our Backs was the first woman run lesbian erotica magazine in San Francisco by editors Myrna Elana and Debi Sundahl, both of whom were involved with Samois collective[3], and with Susie Bright[4] as contributing editor. The erotic content represented a relative split from previous lesbian publications in America, e.g. *The Ladder* (1956-1970), *Amazon Quarterly* (1970s), *Lesbian Tide* (1971-1980) and *Sinister Wisdom* (1976–). The pages contained a huge range of artists, authors and activists who went on to be hugely influential including Gayle Rubin, Jack Halberstam, Susie Bright, Annie Sprinkle, Patrick Califia, Jill Posener, Del LaGrace Volcano, Honey Lee Cottrell, Tee Courine and Sarah Shulman. The magazine was invested in photography as a format to 'address the paucity of representations of lesbian experience in mainstream culture' as well as challenging 'the elision of sexuality in lesbian feminist politics' (Guy, 2019:320).

My generous introduction to Phyllis and her archive came from my friend, photographer and curator Janina Sabaliauskaite who curated, with Jade Sweeting *On Our Backs: An*

[3]SAMOIS was a lesbian-feminist support group in San Francisco that published two books: *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, 1981 and *The Second Coming: A Leather Dyke Reader,* 1996.

[4]Susie Bright was running the Good Vibrations store, and went on to edit *On Our Backs* from 1984-1991 and have a successful career as Susie Sexpert, publishing many books, performing and hosting the podcast: In Bed with Susie Bright.

Archive: Entertainment for the Adventurous Lesbian, Featuring Phyllis Christopher at NewBridge Projects in January 2017. The exhibition was an urgent and profound love letter to the longest running lesbian erotica magazine in the world, as well as to Phyllis and asked important questions about representation, censorship, and queer desire.

Figure 10: Phyllis Christopher, *Girls with Glasses,* 1993, feature in *On Our Backs* magazine. Photograph: authors own.

Home and Away: Doing Fieldwork

I was late again. But Phyllis and Kate welcome me into their home with biscuits, coffee and warm conversation. I begin this account with snacks, echoing Agatha Bien's account of the pleasures of researching in the Lesbian Herstory Archives New York, with warm bagels, cookies and 'Special Lesbo Blend coffee' (Beins, 2015:25). I recognised many of the posters, books and DVDs on the walls. It is homely and I am made to feel at home. I am far from the institutional archive now.

I was taken to the archive which is the cupboard under the stairs. The shelves are full of the records of her career as a photographer, books she has shot covers for, porn films she has co-produced, and in a plastic bag is her collection of *On Our Back's* magazine (figure 11).

Phyllis is an auto-archivist, keeping the records of her lesbian life and career. Queer people have had to become diligent auto-archivists and community archivists playing an important role as 'record keepers within their communities, assuming the responsibilities of archivists in official or unofficial capacities' (Kumbier in Groeneveld, 2018a: 157). Private homes have offered an important site for archiving queer histories giving communities the ability 'to control the histories of gender and sexual minorities' as a response to 'the systematic misrepresentation and omission of queer histories in traditional archives' whilst creating 'a domestic, anti-institutional environment for queer researchers', particularly those queers working outside of institutional academic frameworks (Rawson, 2015:178).

In a conventional research structure, the academy is 'home' and fieldwork is 'away' (from the institution): an othered space. But here in Phyllis's domestic archive I feel at home, connected to a community, which gives me the 'sense of being 'at home', in the sense of being amidst that which is familiar, comfortable and affirming' (Dahl, 2016:152). It makes sense then that this research take place 'close to home', in 'both the location of the home and the ontological home of comfort and belonging' as well as problematising the distinctions between researcher and informant that is constructed through the spatial/temporal bounding of fieldwork as separate from writing and research (Rooke, 2012:30).

Home, like the bed is not always a safe place for queer people; it can be a dangerous place of rejection, violence and trauma (Pearl, 2008b; Baydar, 2012; Dahl, 2016). Lesbian identity and culture is not inherited through biological kinship structures 'passed down in the blood, across the dinner table', instead many queer people are rejected by their families and ejected from the family home; unlike with most 'disenfranchised identities' home is not a safe place (Pearl, 2008b:290). In the wake of the historical trauma queers often experience in the home, queer domestic archives can offer a tangible, material un-doing of these

traumas, a re-framing of intergenerational legacies and indemnity unhinged from the nuclear family.

Figure 11: Bag *of On Our Backs* magazines in Phyllis Christopher's living room, 2018. Photograph: authors own.

Reading *On Our Backs* Magazine

Flipping through the magazines I encountered femmes and butches, bulldaggers, dykes on bikes, dildos, bondage, chains and nature fucking; as well as Susie Sexpert's cultural column *Toys for Us*, reviews by Jack Halberstam, interviews with artists including Alison Bechdel. The images in this magazine were created by 'an army of lovers' who were fighting for the

right to express, share and celebrate their erotic lives, sexual cultures and experiences of intimacy (Bright, 1996:6). Skimming, stopping and gazing – looking for images to become materials for my quilt making: visual matter to be re-visioned.

There is the edition from the month and year of my birth. It contains a central spread of photo series by Phyllis: *Girls with Glasses: I don't care if they are not your prescription just put them on* (figure 10). Some of the playful high contrast images are bound within a black border, over laid like applique, jauntily splayed across larger images beneath, creating a patchwork of pleasure – in glasses; all tongues, fingers and bright eyes.

I am a girl with glasses, born the year these photographs were published, by the woman whose house I am currently in: I experienced a strange moment of pleasure and recognition; as well as mourning and loss.

I feel a dislocation, so vast between the joyful lesbians claiming pleasure in the pages, when I was just coming into a world where I would not see women like myself. Growing up in a village, I had no idea I was living in the same world as *On Our Backs*. I grew up without representation; isolated from the possibilities of understanding ways of loving different people, and loving differently. Going to school during, and in the aftermath of Section 28 meant that we were not existent, or derided; and I could not be what I could not see. It felt like a false fantasy, as 'a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist' (Castle, 1993:30). It took me nearly 20 years to realise loving women was a possibility for me, and that love would look nothing like the compulsory heterosexuality and the disciplinary shame that had shaped my world. All the while, this magazine (and others like it) existed to 'give testimony to not a lack of images but instead to abundance' (Guy, 2019:339). I was living in lack, but abundance existed, I just needed to know where to look.

On Our Backs **in the Sex Wars**

As Phyllis recounted to me, there were often problems with the printers due to issues around sexually explicit material. Many places would not stock the magazine or it was kept in the back, or handed over in a paper bag. *On Our Backs* was established at the height of

the feminist Sex Wars/Porn Wars during which anti-pornography groups – including Media and Women Against Pornography, Women Against Violence in Pornography in the USA and the Campaign Against Pornography in the UK – were crusading 'for increased legal sanctions on the production and circulation of pornographic material'; whilst 'pro-sex feminists' including those involved with *On Our Backs* 'sought new languages for female desire' (Guy, 2017b: no pagination). These 'battles were bitter, often personal and vituperative', not limited to pornography and erotica produced by men but persecuting pro-sex lesbians and feminists: and as Lisa Duggan reflects it was not just 'about sharp words' but the active 'sponsorship of state suppression of our livelihoods, our publications, our artwork, our political/sexual expression' (Duggan and Hunter, 1995:6).

The name: *On Our Backs* is a riff off the established radical feminist publication *Off Our Backs*, which had in the 1980s 'provided coverage of the debates about the sex wars; however, many sex radicals felt that the coverage in off our backs was biased against pornography'; this pun 'implicitly represents *off our backs* [sic] as anti-sex' (Groeneveld, 2018a:155). The subtitle too, was a tongue in cheek critique, *entertainment for the adventurous lesbian* playing on Playboy's *entertainment for men*.

On Our Backs played an important role in the sex wars 'in helping cultivate sex-positive lesbian public cultures' as well as 'destigmatising sexual practices, such as S/M, sex work, and pornography; promoting the importance of sexual consent; and valuing pleasure as a significant part of sexuality' (Groeneveld, 2018a:153). Pornography and erotica gave lesbians a 'space where the pathologisation of lesbian sexuality could be resisted' in its unique qualities of being both ubiquitous and obscene; 'both arch realism and pure fantasy' (Guy, 2017b). The magazine broke ground in its representation of trans people, as actively seeking to positively represent racial diversity, diverse bodies and sexual orientations within the lesbian spectrum.

Issues of censorship and erotic suppression within carceral feminisms continue to be urgent issues for feminist and LGBTQ communities, cultural producers and sex workers in the UK. (Mac and Smith, 2018; Bronstein, 2020). In 2014 the British Government announced new Audio Visual Media Services Regulations, which brought online porn in line with DVD porn

regulations, banning mainly ‘female-orientated ‘kinky’ pleasure such as ‘face-sitting’ and female ejaculation’, as well as BSM practices that leave a mark and ‘degrading’ acts such as water sports (Willson, 2018:246). Feminists, Sex Workers and the Kinky community protested this censorious moralising with a visually ‘bawdy’ and provocative ‘FACE sitting’ protest involving costumes and performance (Willson, 2018). The London Feminist Porn festival was also set up as a creative protest against these draconian media measures; but in 2017, it had to move to a secret location due to council complaints and threats of pickets by anti-pornography feminist groups including Object. Janina and Jade have also discussed their *On Our Backs: An Archive* exhibition as partially a response to increased erotic censorship as well as the lack of lesbian sexual education in the hope of opening up these discussions to wider audiences through art (Christopher et al., 2017).

Figure 12: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Sex Magic Tryptic*, 2020. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

***Sex Magic*: Femme Decadence and Abjection**

When led by my own erotic desires I am drawn to images that depict butch women in well-cut trousers, with strong arms. As a masculine woman, the butch has been subjected to gendered violence that seeks to correct a woman exceeding the boundaries of her womanhood by taking up the timings and trappings of manhood (Halberstam, 1998). But she is also powerful in her transgression, a heroic figure and a privileged subject within lesbian and queer studies (Munt, 1998a). The butch signifies the ‘’visible’, ‘public’, and

hence ‘political’ face of same-sex desire, the femme was implicitly conflated with weakness, passivity and even complicity in the face of oppression’ (Faderman, 1985; Galewski, 2005:186).

I am also seeking femme solidarity with/in the archive which led me to Phyllis’ *Sex Magic* series depicting two femmes, Aimee and Ariel that ‘treat fucking like a religious experience’ – these photographs are a eulogy to femme desire (Anon, 2002:32). The femme has been constructed as passive, vulnerable, invisible, – and worse of all straight passing – receiving less theoretical attention (Dahl, 2016). In these images the femme is highly visible and in abundance; both figures are adorned in jewellery, chains dripping, crowns in black hair, ‘Aimee’s glorious ample body’ entwined with ‘Ariel’s lithe form’ (Anon, 2002:32). These images locate the femme outside of the butch/femme paradigm. There is difference here, but also the excessive ‘monstrosity of sameness’, the femme has exceeded her boundedness to the butch and has taken up with herself (Stacey, 2003:251). As Phyllis explained, it was unusual to shoot two explicitly femme women together, rather than the usual relational pairing of butch and femme together.

Figure 13: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Sex Magic Tryptic Digital Embroidery Sample detail* (1), 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 14: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Sex Magic Tryptic Digital Embroidery Sample detail* (2), 2019. Photograph: authors own.

The Quilt as Femme-Femmage

Ariel and Amie are in the boudoir, surrounded by drapes, pillows, feathers, candles and roses. It is a trove of textures and sensations assembled to hold space for their erotic exchange (figure 12). My quilts echo this domestic sensuality. I choose fabrics that invoke notions of the boudoir and femme feelings: satins that catch the light, demanding attention. The pastel satins of the quilt materially reference eiderdown quilts popular in the 1970s, often featuring feminine fripperies of shiny synthetics and flounces (figures 12-16).

As established in the methodology, I have reclaimed the feminised medium of quilting as a deliberate act of femmage (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977). Through my practice I am extending this to claim it as a explicitly femme methodology that sits within a wider tradition of femme 'flaunting outdated feminine norms' as 'one important way to signal femme identity' (Freeman, 2010:70). My femme quilts celebrate surface and adornment, whilst simultaneously rejecting understandings of femininity solely as an obstacle to subjecthood; as superficial and problematic, as that which makes us vulnerable (Ahmed, 2009; Dahl 2012). These kinds of understandings have led to academic interest in femininity as 'politically suspect' and a distraction from 'serious' matters' (Dahl, 2012:61). Queer reclamation and re-visioning of femininity are serious matters and can offer tools for thinking about queer futures that re-value the reviled qualities of the femme: 'emotionality, vulnerability, relationality and hyper femininity' (Schwartz, 2020:2).

The lesbian has often been constructed as fleeing from naturalised femininity, as an imposed regulatory system of discipline and adornment in line with male dominated societal ideals (Young, 1980). In this flight she often abandons, rejects or feels incapable of the docile crafts of domestic womanhood: sewing, quilting and embroidery. The fictional butch often narratively distance themselves from the 'feminine' crafts of needlework, and by extension traditionally restrictive femininities. Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) expresses her revulsion for domestic crafts, instead aligning herself with masculine outdoors activities, emulating her father. Sophia, the Sapphic protagonist in Sylvia Townsend Warner's revolutionary novel *Summer Will Show* (1936), offers a more complex and ambivalent relationship with needlework and the feminine,

musing on her ‘desire to leave a mark’ through needlework and quilting (Townsend Warner, 1987:52). But her own attempts were always scuppered by ‘her hands, so strong and shapely’ that ‘could not manage a needle, bungled and grew weak before their natural employment’ (Townsend Warner, 1987:54).

The femme however, might take up the needle, dismissed as a frippery of femininity, and reclaim it. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein writes of Alice’s tapestries of Picasso’s paintings which she then upholstered into chairs, the designs for which were traced onto canvas by Picasso himself (Stein, 1993). Through traditionally feminine needlework, Alice made a femmaged intervention into the paintings, re-working and re-visioning the painted material into the tapestried stitches on the seat of the chair.

Figure 15: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Sex Magic Fragments*, 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

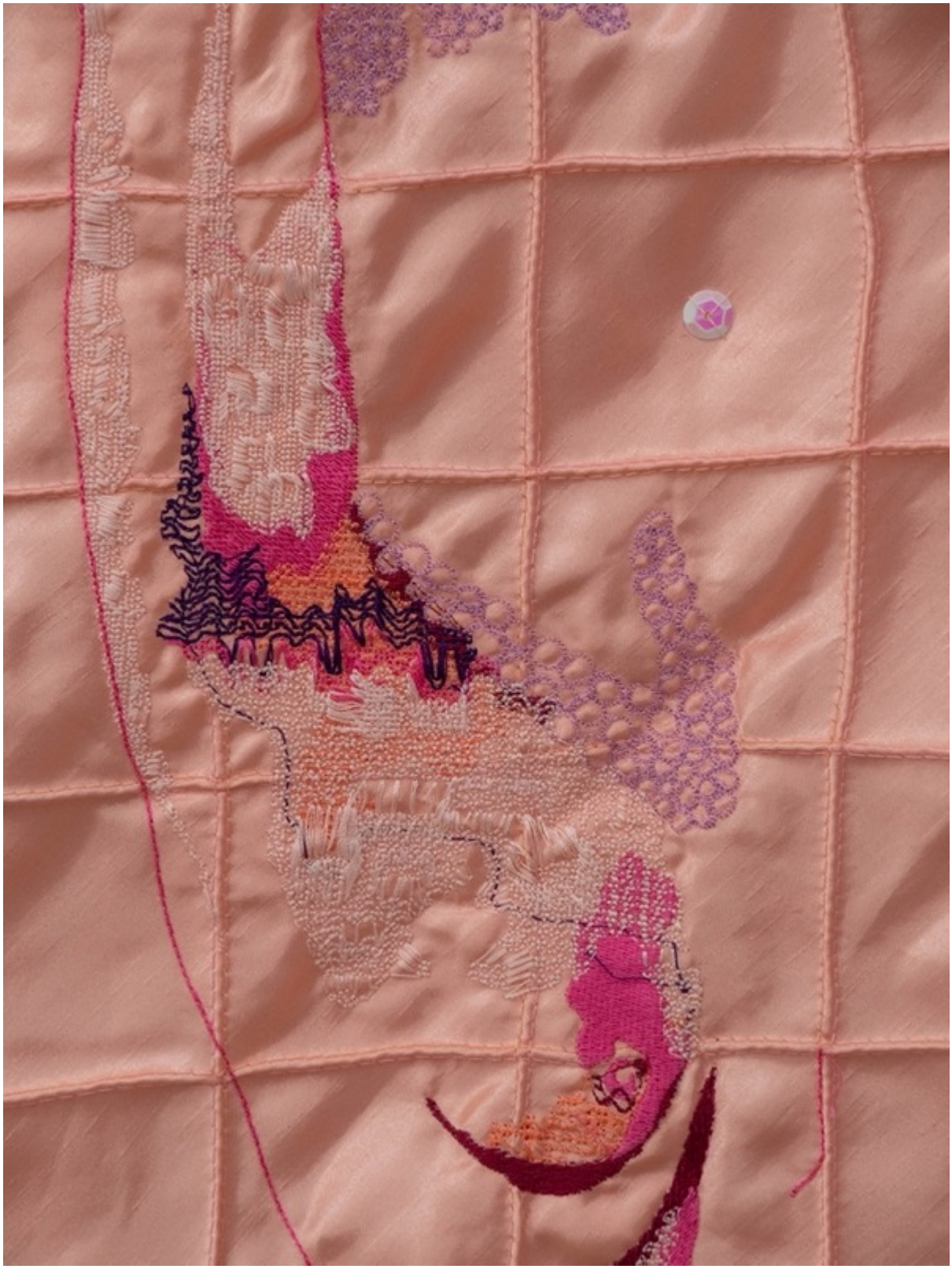

Figure 16: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Sex Magic Fragments (detail)*, 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

Intergenerational Femmage

My quilts are also an act of intergenerational artistic femmage, as an explicitly femme re-visioning of another artist's work. This expansion of the term femmage has been established by Fionna Barber as both an 'acknowledgement of precedent, and active celebration of the work of one woman artist by another' (Barber, 2018:4). By taking up Phyllis' images in stitch, my quilts are 'an active celebration of her work', paying femmage rather than homage to her trailblazing photography (Barber, 2018:4). Her images are re-assembled through the processes of painting, stitching and quilting; each gesture of replication and transformation is also 'an act of devotion' performed for the lesbian archive and the women who built it (Schapiro and Meyer, 1977:66). We are connected through a shared identity, which is threaded through with shared iconographies, images and imaginaries. In my wider work 'acknowledgement of precedent' is central as I utilise the quilt as my medium for literally and metaphorically stitching a material lineage between generations of lesbians (Barber, 2018:4). Reclaiming the quilt as a femme lesbian methodology for reworking archival materials pushes 'back against masculinist norms of subjectivity to radically value feminine knowledge', as well as the failure of art history to fully recognise the cultural contributions of lesbian artists (Hoskin, 2019:7).

No Femmes No Fats: Excess and Pleasure

The *Sex Magic* series depicts wilfully decorative bodies, the taking of pleasure from the excesses of femininity, as well as excesses of the flesh. Images of fat-femme pleasure remain political, as a sensual rebuff to the 'no fats, no femmes', common to contemporary queer dating communities, which rejects the 'desirability of fat and femme queers', and re-iterates a queer culture that 'tends to glorify thinness and masculinity', not unlike heteronormative culture (Taylor, 2018:459).

Embroidery as a surface level pursuit, is sometimes dismissed 'as 'mere' decoration and characterised as superficial, meaningless and lacking in intellectual rigour' (Vincentelli, 2000:77). Without the sophisticated materiality of weaving it reduces the woven cloth to 'raw materials on which images and signs are imposed', rendering them as 'backcloths,

passive matrices' (Plant, 1998:67). In both *Sex Magic Tryptic* (figures 12, 13 & 14) and *Sex Magic Fragments* (figures 15 & 16) I chose high shine synthetics, fluffy faux feathers and plastic sequins as a self-conscious claiming of surface adornment as a femme lesbian strategy.

This use of kitschy, artificial or excessive materials including glitter, beads and sequins 'speaks to a deliberate dance with ornamental, crafty excess', which also threads into 'camp theatricality and glamour' (Skelly, 2017:93). This is the 'fat art' where the work shifts beyond 'the linguistic and even pictorial, overpacking the 'language' of high art with other sensations' (Freeman, 2010:93).

Framing my quilts as femme also situates my work within a wider femme project to shift notions of the femme as passive, instead, framing being sexually receptive as an active position, emphasising 'openness and vulnerability as central sites of femme sexuality' and power (Brightwell and Taylor, 2019:30). The characterisation of femme receptivity as passivity can also extend to challenge the framing of vulnerability and passivity as shameful or negative more broadly (Cvetkovich, 2003). In my quilts, in the way I dress, and the way that I relate to the archive, I want to 'insist on softness, earnestness, and vulnerability', in order to challenge femme invisibility, femmephobia, claiming my own space 'to be more emotional, to wear more pink, and to further resist masculinist ideals' (Schwartz, 2020:8). Through the femme-femmage of the quilt, I offer my devotion to the femmes that came before who have acted as 'the astronomers of the feminine galaxy, ever expanding the universe of femininities and what it means to be feminine' (Hoskin, 2018:85).

Figure 17: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Pearls that Bind (detail 1)*, 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 18: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Pearls that Bind (detail 2),* 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Digital Threads: *Pearls that Bind*

Months later, I talked to Phyllis over Zoom about her photography, in particular capturing femme bodies and desires. We were at the beginning of the pandemic, we were worried, but still thinking things would be back to normal by the summer. I can't rifle amongst

papers, so Phyllis held up prints to the camera. I am lucky, in that Phyllis was in the process of going through her portfolio of photos for her forthcoming book: *Dark Room: San Francisco Sex and Protest, 1988–2003* which features essays from Susie Bright, Laura Guy, Michelle Tea and an interview with Shar Rednour. The crowdfunded book showcases her desire to 'make women who love women beautiful', and create images that 'make our passion for each other and for sex, stark, strong and gorgeous', at a time when lesbians were subject to homophobia, as well as internal political divides (Christopher, 2021).

The pandemic has shifted my archive visit into the digital space, which however convenient still feels distinctly lacking in tactility and softness. More broadly in my research, online spaces have made possible otherwise impossible connections with lesbians globally, allowing me to reach out for advice, permissions and approval across geographic and generational boundaries. Although I am deeply attached to the materiality of the physical archive, I am also pleasurably entangled in digital networks and spaces. My quilts too, are resolutely material, as well as decisively digital: using techniques of digital printing, embroidery and quilting.

Phyllis showed me a photo series featuring two models, Huckleberry and Midori, embracing and entwined in pearls. Draping across their bodies, creating connecting threads, contrasting bright against Phyllis' signature deep shadows. Iconic of the femme, the pearls bind them together, harness-like; they are tied up in each other. This is another luxurious set of images that centre the decadent pleasures of women loving women. Encountering these rich images, with swathes of skin, heavy eyelashes and blatant pleasure in adornment I could feel the pull from photograph to stitch, into the quilt, *Pearls that Bind* (figures 17, 18 &19).

Figure 19: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Pearls that Bind (detail 3),* 2019. Photograph: authors own.

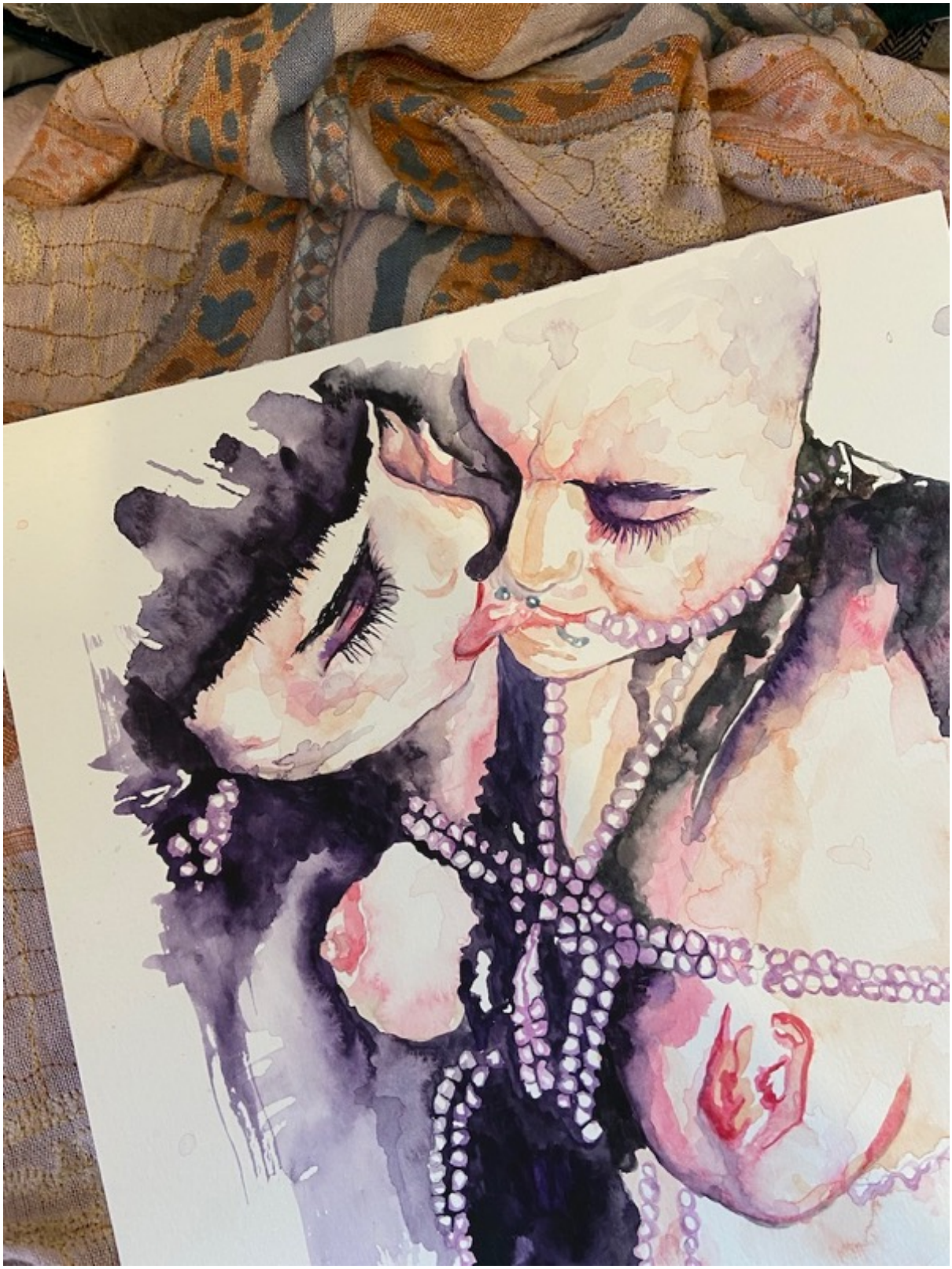

Figure 20: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Pearls that Bind (watercolour sketch for embroidery design),* 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Sunday Painting and Digital Embroidery

My quilted art practice begins with the physicality of drawing and painting and shifts to the immaterial of the screen where I collage together and re-assemble my hand gestures into digital print and embroidery designs. Finally, the work is shifted back into the material through stitching, embroidering and quilting. During the lockdown, I turned toward digital print even more and creating longer and lengthier digital embroidery designs. I also played a lot with pattern design inspired by Welsh Quilt designs and the typically (although not exclusively) American log cabin, creating digital files for faux patchwork quilts; the seams printed rather than butted up and painfully handstitched.

The process of transforming archive material into a quilt is a complex and multi-layered one. *Pearls that Bind* uses my typical process; to begin I re-interpret the archival objects through watercolour painting, re-imagining the black and white images into my own world of colour which are imported into ethos software for me to work on top of with digital stitches. Watercolours are another crafty medium associated with amateurs, Sunday painters and ladies of leisure – a 'figurative idiom' rather than a serious medium (Vilalta, 2019:106). Like embroidery its associations with the mindless, idle dabbling of women, rather than the intellectual pursuit of fine art, which favours heavy sticky oils. The looseness of the water leaking, soaking and the blushing of the paint allows me to create embroidery designs that are neither static nor predictable. This has been an important shift in my work, as previously I had created designs mostly with graphic markers, holding the restrictions of the software in mind. Once I let go of my own notions of what digital embroidery looked like, and what it could do, I was able to paint freely with stitches. Watercolour in its fluidity and bleeding tendencies stops the digitisation process becoming a straightforward translation, and encourages me to use stitches in a more complex, fluid and gestural way. Over the course of the PhD, my manipulation of stitches has become more complex in symbiosis with the development of my painting practice and deepening theoretical engagements.

Pleasure, Vibrations and Digital Stitching

I scanned in the painting of Huckleberry and Midori, dropping it into Ethos software to punch the stitches out on top, making small repetitive hand movements slowly creating a web of stitches on the screen until my hand aches (McCullough, 2010; Plant, 1998). I stitch out on a brother PR70E digital embroidery machine with six needles of colour and speeds of 1000 stitches per minute[5], piercing and embellishing the top sheet, patchworking together stitched illustrations. The pattern designs are my own, a spider hovering over a triangle, referencing the symbols of broader queer culture and rebellion; the pink triangle and the black widow spider – the symbol of Arachne, the proud weaver of Greek mythology, but also the Black Widows lesbian biker gang in 1980s London. It is not just the paint that bleeds but iconographies and symbols bleed from one quilt to another.

In the *Pearls that Bind* I take pleasure in the image, and pleasure in the process of transforming it into digital stitch. After years of working with a domestic sewing machine, digital embroidery has revolutionized my practice. It has enabled me to explore scale, pattern, repetition and accumulation; strategies that resonate so deeply with the imperatives of making lesbian histories visible. Working in digital stitch has significantly made me draw and paint more. Some stitches are still always done by hand – tricky edges, hidden seams, beads and sequins; my methodology is a 'contemporary patchworking' of 'old and new, digital and physical technologies' (Lindstrom and Stahl, 2016:65).

Digital embroidery is quick, but not that quick. Even when the machine is programmed and set I perform the labour of maintenance; vigilant, caring, attentive. I check the tension, the bobbin, the maze of threads twisting and running down the face of the machine. I listen to the sound. If I don't listen the hoop can jump out unnoticed, threads can twist and snap, thread fluff and fibre can build up[6]. Jamming, breaking, juddering and slipping all happen within the seemingly, seamless process of digital embroidery. The machine vibrates, while the little computer screen jerks gently back and forth and the needle thuds through the fabric bound in the gyrating plastic embroidery hoop. There is a pleasure in watching my

[5]This machine was loaned to me by GS-UK during the pandemic until I was able to purchase my own machine, an upgraded 10-needle version.

[6]This vigilance is more necessary when working on the MMU embroidery studio machines, which are old and overused and set to a generic tension. Working on my own machine is a much smoother process.

work stitch all by itself, automated. Hands free; it feels so good to stitch snatches of lesbian desire; playing with machines as a site of pleasure; automated; vibrating and steeped in the material enchantments of technology.

Figure 21: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge (sample 1),* 2020. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

Figure 22: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge (sample 2),* 2020. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

Soft Butch Sensations

The quilts already presented in this chapter are all inspired by Phyllis' photographs of femme lesbians, discussed in relation to my own pleasurable identification as femme. Lastly, I attend to images of a butch in *On Our Back's* magazine, not taken by Phyllis, but by a lover. Donna Jackson was the *On Our Backs* cover girl for March/April 1991. She grins on the cover, kneeling defiantly in a sandy landscape. She wears a military uniform, jacket falling open at her breast. Inside she is spread across the pages in black and white. Smiling in various stages of undress, her belt flopped next to her open fly and her hand slipping inside. Her thighs spread, trousers caught round her ankles. These are deeply tender images, articulating the sensuality and softness of butch pleasure. I had 'gut reactions' to this image, a bodily encounter with desire for the soft butch so tenderly splayed out in black and white (Paasonen, 2007:55). I am constantly negotiating my sensual relationship with the archive, navigating 'the historians erotic desire for her archived object', but these images invoke a

specifically bodily, sexual reaction (Singh, 2018b:111). This magazine, after all, was assembled to invoke bodily sensation and pleasure through visual material – a powerful intervention into the lack of lesbian-made lesbian erotica. As one reader pointed out, it was 'about time dykes had something completely appropriate to masturbate over' (Valerie, 1985:3).

Honourable Discharge: Memoirs of an Army Dyke

Donna Jackson came out as a lesbian and was honourably discharged from the US Army in 1991 under chapter 15 (stating homosexuality is incompatible with the military) nearly twenty years before the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act (LaBia, 1991). She recalls always wanting to feature in *On Our Backs* magazine, which had a culture of community sourcing models… so when they offered her the cover she said yes. Immediately after being discharged, Donna and her lover Christie were driving past the beaches in the Monterey area when Christie 'insisted' that they had to 'take the pictures now at the beach' before she changed out of her uniform for the last time (Jackson, 1993:179). Taken by Christie the images carry the emotional immediacy of the day – the proximity of trauma to pleasure. She is coming, at the cusp of two worlds, catching her breath between eras in her life: before and after the army, in the closet and out of the closet. Laying down in this liminal space of sea and sand, the softness of her belly and thighs exposed, her tenderness cuts a stark contrast with the brutality of the trauma, sexual assault and silences she faced in the army. She is splayed and vulnerable, and at once heroic, in her reclamation of her sexuality.

Camouflage and Quilting

The quilt is made of a thick pale pink satin fabric with seven large-scale embroideries re-visioning three images of Donna, a tender act for a tender butch. The quilt is appliqued with large white camouflage shapes, with different images of Donna repeated in digital embroidery all in rich pinks, reds and purples. Around her figure are more tiny, camouflage shapes – extending her body out further into the quilt (figures 21 & 22). Camouflage patterns are typically used in military contexts to obscure the body, protecting through a lack of visibility. In these images however, Donna is made hyper visible by her camouflage,

the identifying badges on her uniform juxtaposed with her exposed flesh. She is made vulnerable by this politically particular state of partial undress and her pursuit of pleasure. This queer re-claiming of the camouflage pattern is particularly poignant in relation to the tension of what is hidden/and revealed in these images and in the context of the damaging practice of Don't Ask, Don't Tell: revealing the absurdity and impossibility of camouflaging sexuality.

The quilt extends her wilful act of dangerous visibility, and precarious pleasure. As proposed in both *The Lesbian Quilt Manifesto* and *The Methodology* the quilt is not only the signifier of domestic bliss but can also be dangerous, bearing the traces of trauma, carrying warnings or subversive messages. A quilt can also be a warning, hung out on washing lines they might be the flags of an army marching to war, or the banners at a protest (Atwood, 1996). The quilt can also be armour, as in some of the first instances recorded 'quilted undergarments worn beneath armour afforded both warmth and protection' (Jones, 2016:11). This quilt draws on these subversive material potentialities in a retrospective act of reparation into the histories of military and gendered violence.

Figure 23: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge (in the workshop),* 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 24: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge (Sue Prestbury stitching the panels together on an industrial sewing machine),* 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Queer Failures and Threads Unravelled

Although Donna Jackson received some small media attention for her challenge of chapter 15, her story was suppressed not only by the heterosexualised military establishment, but also by gay and lesbian army personnel who objected to her outing herself, accusing her of attention seeking, avoiding deployment and putting others working on the inside at risk (Jackson, 1993). Outside of the canonical narratives of gay and lesbian progress, premature in her demands for dyke visibility and equality, part of my attraction to Donna's story is in

her queer failure. Her lesbianism was already 'irrevocably tied to failure in all kinds of ways', her butchness representing the failure of femininity – she is couched in the histories of same sex desire, bound to failure, death, impossibility and lack (Halberstam, 2011:94-95). Her disruptions to timely, institutional and state sponsored progress, her confidence, and pursuit of pleasure as an out dyke, were all queerly out of sync.

The process of making the quilt was also couched in failure, spanning the breadth of the PhD research it has had several iterations and has remained unfinished. This materiality of disappointments and failure resonates deeply with my frustration of not being able to make direct contact with Donna and Christie (as per my femme-ethical methodology). Although she did change her name to Stefin Collins, she also wrote an autobiography *The Donna Jackson Story,* published by herself and Christie as *The Christie and Stefin Company,* and recorded an oral history with Lee Jenkins, hosted by the GLBT Historical Society. Somehow her story felt unfinished, but my attempts to find her failed. I managed to contact the article author and editor of *On Our Backs* at the time, Susie Bright – she helped me by reaching out through US lesbian networks, but no one knew where she had gone. Susie remembered her as 'sweet and earnest', and as brave to be so bold with her sexuality, in the face of such a hostile world (Bright, 2019: no pagination). She was strong but also vulnerable, having experienced significant traumas and abuse; and like so many queer women without the support of their families, or wealth to fall back on (Bright, 2019). In space of this silence, I felt an imperative to make the quilt as an act of devotional tenderness for a dyke who fought for equality and shared their sensuality with their community, but did not make it into the narrative of gay and lesbian history.

I made the quilt as an outsized enormity, with 15 metres of appliqued and digitally embroidered satin constructed in three awkward sections. The scale transgresses domestic conventions of quilted scale (as useful objects), its excessive materiality speaking to Donna's own transgressions in the conventions of private and public. While embroidering, the great weight of the satin had to be supported on various stools and tables around the machine to stop it tugging or dragging in the dirt on the floor. When quilting, the bars of the Handi quilter were stuffed so full I had to physically push the fabric out of the way of the digitally programmed sewing arm as it chuntered and jerked out the embroidery design. Once off

the quilter, the pieces needed to be stitched together, which I could not manage on my own. Luckily Sue Prestbury, the Head of the embroidery workshop heaved them through the industrial sewing machine for me (see figure 24). It took three people to carry the quilt to a table and roll it up, wrapping the parcel up in calico to protect it from dirt. I then had to stagger with it to my car – back bent and heaving (see figure 25). The quilt is awkward and cumbersome, difficult to handle, too large and too much – and it has resisted completion, and neat endings. An archival lump of my own, waiting to be uncovered and returned to as discussed in depth in the final chapter *Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding.*

The inconvenience of the quilt speaks materially to my unsatisfied attempts to find Donna and connect with her. However, as Jack Halberstam prompts us, there are rewards to be found in turning toward failure and different kinds of feelings (Halberstam, 2011). My queer failure, the missed connections, draw attention to the losses, the nonfulfillment and the pain inherent in the processes of doing queer history, that refuses a neat and tidy assimilationist liberation narrative (Duggan, 2002; Love, 2007). Unlike me, and many other queers, Donna was not critical of the military industrial complex; she wanted inclusion, rather than a dismantling of a system that is 'one of the main vehicles in the expansion and enforcement of U.S imperialism, heterosexuality, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and repression against political dissent' (Nopper, 2014:127). She didn't want to die for her country in the closet. Quilting Donna Jackson is my attempt to refuse 'triumphalist accounts of gay, lesbian and transgender history', instead turning to the 'bleak territory of failure' and an acknowledgement of our murkier histories and unfinished business (Halberstam, 2011:23). The quilt is an outsized love letter in stitch; a femme extending care to a butch across the generations, gaps and silence that part us.

Figure 25: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge (rolled up for transport in the workshop),* 2021. Photograph: authors own.

The Rogue Archive: the Tyranny of Access

These quilts were all made in the spirit of desiring access and connection to lesbian culture but the further entangled I became in the lesbian archive, the more I realised that gaps and silences are also necessary to the lesbian archive.

In particular, digital technologies have completely transformed relationships and expectations of what an archive is, and should be. The archive is no longer necessarily a physical space, facilitating the creation of the 'rogue archivist, with everyone their own

collector and assessor, providing both quantity and democratisation, though not necessarily permanency, to archival practice' (Reay, 2019:9). *On Our Backs* poses particular difficulties as an erotic magazine as the original models in many of the shoots were not professionals but members of the community responding to open calls or writing in. Physical copies of the magazine are now held in various collections around the world, although the only full run, (partial) administrative records and model releases are held in Susie Bright's papers at Cornell's Rare books and manuscripts collection (Groeneveld, 2018b). Some of these agreements do not include reprints and the contract forms don't reference digitisation therefore concerns were raised when *On Our Backs* was digitised by Reveal (a digitisation company working with university collections) (Robertson. T, 2016). However Elizabeth Groeneveld takes issue up with this approach as it actually prioritises legality over community autonomy and consent – she calls instead for a queer feminist ethics for making this archive available (Groeneveld, 2018b). *On Our Backs* was not produced in the time of the internet, it functioned as a paper magazine, circulated amongst a very specific lesbian audience as Phyllis reflected in her interview with Janina and Jade:

> If the internet existed at the time of *On Our Backs* I would never have made that kind of work. I made the work for the audience I knew and who wanted to see it. I don't want my images used in ways I have so little control over – the internet makes you think about the consequent platforms of the work (Christopher et al., 2017).

I wanted to ensure that Phyllis had control of her images in my own work, and discussed everything I made with her beforehand. Through quilting the images of *On Our Backs*, I worked through my own femme-ethical methodology for working with archives, centring conversation, consent and cross-generational discussion in order to mediate these complexities and sensitivities. I tried my best to get in contact with as many people involved in the images as possible: photographers, models and editors mostly via email, online groups supported relentlessly and generously by a network of older lesbian activists and artists. Just as Ulrika Dahl found in her own femme-methodology, conversations that started over email often spilled into 'virtual communities and collaborations in queer subcultural spaces long after our first encounter' (Dahl, 2016:157). These archives are precious and intimate and they must be taken care of; the quilt is my way of doing this. Each quilt is a

femmage, a devotional act, my gift back to the women that were, and are pioneers of lesbian culture, sexuality and erotic cultures.

Conclusion: Femme Entanglements

This chapter has centred the femme not only as my research subject but as my method, by establishing the quilt as a specifically femme methodology for working with the most intimate of lesbian archives: *the domestic* archive. Through stitching, embroidering, and embellishing Phyllis' renderings of the femme body my quilts are doing the work of femme theory: increasing femme visibility and challenging femmephobia (Blair and Hoskin, 2015; Brightwell and Taylor, 2019). The explicitly femme quilt claims the excesses of the feminine and the decorative surface as a powerful intervention into the gendered hierarchies that have obscured and dismissed femme lesbians from history. Within my femme-ethical methodology, I have interwoven my own femme identity and subjectivity as a driving force behind my choices, engagements and methods for working with the domestic archive. By auto-ethnographically situating my femme body in the archive, I was able to acknowledge my desires in the archive, both for recognition and for pleasure.

This chapter has established *the domestic* archive as a powerful site for intergenerational conversation and connection. Sat on the floor surrounded by lesbian erotica, chatting away, I became emotionally entangled not only with the objects of the archive, but with their custodian: Phyllis. From this encounter, other threads of connection with the wider lesbian community have also been woven with other lesbians including Shar Rednour, Annie Sprinkle and Susie Bright.

My quilts are an act of femmage that reclaims a medium ascribed to women in history, but also intergenerational lesbian femmage, picking up and stitching with the images and icons produced by Phyllis as an intergenerational act of recognition and acknowledgement between artists. Through re-visioning I am stitching myself into the cultural lineage and material heritage of lesbian visual culture that I always felt I was missing. The quilt is a devotional object; it is my offering to the generation of older lesbians who fought for

equality and erotic freedom. I will finish with something Susie wrote to me in an email, that made me feel that my quilts are, in some small way important:

> I burst into tears. It is so beautiful! I wish I'd known you all the time. All of us at *On Our Backs* never dreamed we would have young people paying attention to us all these years later. We were so reviled and isolated at the time! (Bright, 2019: no pagination).

Chapter 6: *The Community* Archive: Archival Rummaging and Amazonian Iconographies.

Key Quilt Theme: negotiating the unruly archives

Introduction

This chapter delves into my archival encounters in *the community* archive: Glasgow Women's Library (GWL), which holds the remnants of the now disbanded Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (1894-1995) (LAIC) as part of its Lesbian Archive Collection. Threaded through this engagement is a sense of mourning for the loss of dedicated lesbian spaces, in particular the lesbian archive. I explore the vibrant messiness of Glasgow Women's Library's lively archive; that is also a community centre, museum, library and an invaluable recourse for women. The encounter is mapped through the making of a series of inter-related, quilted artworks that were exhibited at HOME in Manchester in the Granada Gallery in a show titled: *Archives and Amazons: A Quilters Guide to the Lesbian Archive* in 2021.

This chapter addresses the lesbian longing for tangible, touchable connections to a lesbian past: imagined or otherwise. This desire for a collective history is born out of the violent erasures of sexism and homophobia that have obscured lesbians from history, from antiquity to ACT UP (Nealon, 2001; Traub, 2010; Gomez, 2014). Out of the archive I pull the symbols of lesbian strength; sacred yonis, the labrys, Sappho, lesbian organisational logos, pulling into particular focus the figure of the Amazon or Warrior Woman. Through quilting, I re-claim and re-vision these acts of symbolic resistance.

The quilts navigate an explicit intergenerational longing for the 'vitality in radicalism in the 1970s' that generated so much lesbian culture: including lesbian history courses, conferences, retreats, rape crisis centres, women's shelters, the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, The Lesbian History Group, Lesbian Line, lesbian walks and lesbian lands; 'which is hard to reflect upon now without nostalgia or cynicism' (Munt, 1998a:146). The quilt is an object for storing memories and telling secret stories in the language of stitch. Passed down through the generations, a quilt might open up a space for touching

across time. The symbolic properties of the quilt offer warmth and protection, as well as resilience in the face of misuse, often a powerful tool for touching across temporalities and for revisiting the lost lesbian utopias of lesbian feminism (Stalp, 2007). Although my nostalgia is not without criticality, when my needle tip is dipping beneath the surface I attempt to hold these utopian fragments in a state of tension in the ambiguous space of the quilt.

Figure 26: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Archives and Amazons* and *Wet and Wild (veiled) Series 1, 2 & 3,* 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 27: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia,* 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Lesbian Genealogies and the Quilt

Quilts have acted as a creative outlet for women as well as a record-keeping device for telling women's stories and passing these stories down the generations. The quilt is a form of 'women's work'; it can be an act of domestic maintenance and affection, 'caring for others in making gifts, and preserving family traditions' (Stalp, 2007:5). They have functioned as textile keepsakes, holding 'sensory and emotional triggers' kept as 'tactile tokens' that preserve 'tangible family links, passing them on to the next generation as material evidence of where and who we have come from' (Hunter, 2019:85). The quilt is a memory keeping device, a precursor to the family photo album (King, 2011). Particularly in American pioneer culture the quilt acted as 'a chronicle of the family that used them' and sometimes were the only place births, marriages and deaths were recorded (Fox in King, 2011:27). The cultural practice of friendship quilts also allowed women to document their important kinship structures outside of the biological family, allowing them to show their

love and devotion for one another and to sustain connections when women moved away from an area (Otto Lispet, 1985).

These anniversaries marked so diligently by quilt makers (marriages, births, deaths), have been interrogated by queer theorists of temporalities as 'the stuff of normative timelines and of events that mark the legible contours of a life sanctioned as such' (Freeman, 2007:91). A twisting and shifting extension of women's traditional memory keeping practices; my lesbian quilts perform a different kind of temporal marking in order to recognise the queer genealogies of lesbian lineage.

The imperative for this practice lies in the historical difficulty of locating lesbians archivally, due to omissions and obscuring cataloguing practices. The study of LGBT history has 'only recently emerged as a legitimate academic field, […] because homosexuality has historically been associated with shame, scandal, and prurience' and most archives don't have cataloguing systems that highlight LGBT aspects or documents in their collections (Loftin, 2010:51). Although fractured and at times failing, the archive remains a space where I can cobble 'together historical understandings of sexuality and gender through an appraisal of absences and presences', and where I might start to put myself back together as a historical subject 'even if done in the context of archival lack' (Gomez, 2014:2). In these conditions of sporadic lack, the quilt offers a tool for constructing lesbian lineages and remembering otherwise. In its femme-inised form the quilt can be understood as an explicitly lesbian form of queer monumentality as 'alternative form(s) of queer rhetorical worldmaking' (Dunn, 2017:212). As a resolutely non-linear material assemblage, quilts can offer a particularly resonant materiality for the creation of disorderly lesbian lineages outside of biological genealogies and linear narratives of temporality (Donnell, 1990; Freeman, 2010).

Lineage building has been an important identity building tool for LGBTQ people, which can 'be found in the simple but enduring lesbian and gay practice of listing famous homosexuals from history' as a 'gesture of genealogical claiming' (Nealon, 2001:5). This genealogical leaning litters the lesbian archive: for example, in a draft for the never published *Lesbian Birthday Book*, and the booklet *Some Twentieth Century Lesbians* (Lesbian History Group Archives). The booklet folds out along the table like a long quilted panel of Sapphic faces,

the notes carefully preserved alongside it. Its stretching length is a gesture toward lesbian lineage and longevity; continuity and connection between the generations. A generation on, the quilt continues this lesbian inter-temporal impulse toward lineage that I too, can claim for myself:

> Do you know your lineage? You know, lineage. The people who preceded you in history. Not your bloodline, nor your family tree. Nothing so flimsy as biology or genetics. Lineage, rather, is made up of the people who, in their lifetimes, fought the battles we are fighting now, struggled towards the same goals, tried to carve out similar lives against similar backdrops (Payne, 2010:47).

Figure 28: *Lesbian Birthday Book*, created by the Lesbian History Group, photograph taken in the Glasgow Women's Library research mezzanine, archive material at Glasgow Women's Library: Glasgow. Photograph: authors own.

Rummaging in the Archive

I made my first trip to Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) before my PhD began, driven by a mournful curiosity about the remnants of the UK's only, and short-lived lesbian archive. I

began exploring the uncatalogued collection of textiles which included Lesbian Avengers t-shirts, a bed sheet with K.D Lang's silhouette daubed in black paint and Lesbian Feminist Sappho Banner crafted in multiple materials and techniques. I found an archive like no other: a living community space, filled with women reading and talking, with a hive of intersecting rooms leading off from the main library. GWL is an accredited museum, with a recognised nationally significant collection and a program that aims to improve women's lives and literacy as well as preserving women's histories (Glasgow Womens Library, 2020). This encounter with a vibrant archive very much informed my PhD research proposal's preoccupation with the loss of The Lesbian Archive and Information Centre and how its remnants ended up at GWL.

On my return to the archive, I navigated my way through the now familiar library and event space to the archival store. Shut behind heavy doors, the grey metal stacks rise up filled with powder mint boxes – all lined up in cold silence. Left alone in 'the counting house of dreams' I could feel the hum of long untouched materials and the weight of possibility (Steedman, 2001:80). My experiences of GWL have been those of archival free-fall where I have been able to 'rummage' amongst the materials, delving into the unknown and the uncatalogued which has opened up encounters with the unexpected (Bracey and Maier, 2018). It is in this archive, unleashed from the catalogue that I have felt most able to follow my curiosity, dipping in and out of boxes in my search for visual materials for my quilts (Weaver, 2008). I have been tender and gloveless, brushing up against the very texture of memory, of paper: 'alive in its history and in its signifying potential' (Dever, 2015:82). These silent and disorganised encounters are an unfamiliar delight in relation to the orderly summoning processes of institutional archives, or the specificity of the domestic archive. Through the work of the historian, or quilter as historian: the archive becomes 'potential space' at once a 'hard-won and carefully constructed place' and in its vastness, a site for the returning 'to boundless, limitless space' (Steedman, 2001:83).

Figure 29: *The Archival Store at Glasgow Women's Library*, 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 30: (unknown), *Sappho Lesbian Feminist Banner,* archive material at Glasgow Women's Library: Glasgow. Photograph: authors own.

A Tale of Two Community Archives

In previous chapters, the categorisation of the archives was fairly self-explanatory. The community archive is a more complex and shifty category. Community itself is a capacious term, one which has the capacity to be used in a homogenising or reductive manner to group people together; but here I am using it to signify the collective of people who identify with the term lesbian (Crooke, 2007). By community archive I mean one that has formed outside of the institution (at least initially), as a grass roots effort to collect, preserve and share materials relating to a particular community (Bastian, 2009). These grass roots archiving practices 'can aid the creation of a revitalized collective memory that validates experiences, provides a sense of self, and supports community survival', particularly for marginalised or misremembered communities such as lesbians (Pratt, 2018:229).

The London Lesbian Archive was an example of this kind of explicitly community archiving. Founded in 1984 by a collective of radical and revolutionary lesbian feminists, the London was later dropped, and the Information Centre added in order to 'improve chances of attracting grants' (Green, 1997:34). The archive received funding in 1986 from the Greater London Council (GLC) and was able to hire two archive workers and move into Wesley House (also called The Women's Centre), which was the most used venue for lesbian feminist events in London in the 80s (Green, 1997). The building housed multiple other women's and lesbian organisations including Only Women's Press, founded by Lilian Mohin and The Lesbian Policing Project. It was a community archive in that it was created explicitly by and for lesbians 'as a means of reclaiming our Lesbian history, celebrating our Lesbian lives, and ensuring that our stories are recorded for the future' (Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, 1988:1). The collections functioned as a reference library, resource centre, working space with photocopying and tape recording facilities and the collections were vast, including 'books, periodicals, conference papers, photographs, manuscripts, press cuttings and oral histories, as well as badges, posters, music and souvenirs' (Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, 1988:1). I was told by one of the original archivists that materials were often donated by individuals hoping to contribute to the creation of a shared lesbian history and lineage, and these were always kept together. From these conversations the archive emerged as a labour of love, and love lost – which only furthered my desire to pull at the threads of this historical unravelling.

Like so many grass roots organisations, LAIC experienced challenges and disputes that eventually led to the break up and fragmentation of the archive. The archive was founded on the fundamentals of political lesbianism including commitments to separatism, anti-pornography and anti S&M politics, leading to a central role in the British lesbian sex wars in conflicts arising around sexuality, censorship and the boundaries of the lesbian community.

The Lesbian Summer School was a key event organised by LAIC as a fundraiser in July 22-25 1988, whereby serious conflicts arose around the screening of Sheila McLaughlin's *She Must be Seeing Things*, and Sheila Jeffreys' talk on lesbian sexuality[7].

These disputes around race and sexuality caused significant disruption, but ultimately the closure of the archive can be attributed to a wide range of factors including Thatcher era policies, which resulted in the abolishment of the GLC and the passing of Section 28 in 1988. By 1994 the archive was really struggling after the loss of funding and its venue and by 1995 a new home was sought for the collection (1994 LAIC newsletter). In 1995 Adele Patrick[8], found an article in the *Pink Paper* stating the danger of LAIC being broken up, and offered for the materials to be housed at Glasgow Women's Library where they would remain in a woman's space; she remembers the significance of the materials arriving with a lesbian truck company (Goh, 2018). Although there remains a transient time period between official locations where the archive changed hands and shuffled between domestic homes – unhinged from the community and the institution – it unintentionally became a kind of troubled, precarious domestic archive.

Fragments: Mourning the Lesbian Archive

The archive is not only a material repository, but a gathering of 'things and emotions'; this includes the sensations of nostalgia and mourning surrounding the loss of the lesbian archive (Hok-Sze Leung, 2013:400). The making of quilts gives me an active site through which to mourn the loss of the lesbian archive. The quilt has long offered women a site for articulating loss, in the act of gathering pieces of cloth that bear 'the traces of (her) history; and in its use, the quilt comes to bare traces of others', of becomings and endings, of lives

[7]There were also severe tensions around race, including over the mixed use of space in Wesley House, where white lesbians ascribed fault to black women's groups who 'expressed their allegiance to black men not white women' (Faraday, 1988: 1). The archive continued to negotiate conflicts around race and sexuality when in 1988, a new role was advertised by the archive workers, which explicitly welcomed black applicants. The management committee felt that this was conceding to the equal opportunities policy of the GLC, and preference should be given to a candidate who represented 'the radical feminist politics of the archive' and became a very polarising issue (Jeffreys, 2018:210).

[8]The Lifelong Learning and Creative Development manager at Glasgow Women's Library.

and deaths (Stallybrass, 2012:74). Each stitch toward materialising the lesbian archive is an act of reappropriating 'the tradition of homoerotic elegy and lament'; through the active mourning of the 'losses of *lesbian* history', recognising this desire for historical representation as an object of the archive in itself (Traub, 2010:354). In my orientation toward lesbian loss and reparation, the politically fraught histories of a lesbian-separatist archive were irresistible. I am stuck on the past, fascinated by 'the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless': lesbian culture, lesbian separatism and the lesbian archive (Freeman, 2010:xiii).

In following the curious threads of the archive, I discovered through informal conversations that the archive had prioritised developing skills in the community to enable lesbians to be the custodians of their own history. Volunteers and workers were trained in archival acquisitions, cataloguing and care; each acquisition numbered and described in the acquisitions book. However, this book of acquisitions is now missing, seemingly without a trace. Currently there is no catalogue of the LAIC collection that is held at GWL – the shape and edges of the collection are unknown. According to the archivist, there are no written custodial instructions from LAIC about how the materials should be kept, accessed and ordered; which seems so strange in the historical context of such strictly politicised acquisitions policies. There are also several 'closed' boxes which I was not able to access despite requests, containing the administrative records of the LAIC. There is also no detail or specific embargo to this closure (which is a capacious term archivally). The boxes remain unexamined even by the archivist – perhaps the book of acquisitions, or custodial instructions are trapped in this space of archival limbo. Despite two funded projects at GWL to research the collection, the gaps and silences yawn wide and make it impossible to even estimate the shape of an archival collection that was so lovingly built, and fiercely protected.

Figure 31: *Feminist Symbol illustrations,* 2019, feature in *Raging Dyke Zine*, archive material at Glasgow Women's Library: Glasgow. Photograph: authors own.

Lesbian Iconographies: Raging Dykes and Angry Amazons

Lesbian research has tended toward a focus on literary representations, illustrated neatly by my tinge of disappointment in Jane Rule's book *Lesbian Images* which traces textual rather than visual lesbian representations in fiction (Rule, 1989). Inside the archive, I am always looking for the visual language of lesbians representing themselves, in order to establish a lesbian vernacular through quilt making. The lesbian archive is rich with symbols of lesbian strength, power and separation from the patriarchy including yonic and vulvic symbols, the interlocking double Venus, the triangle, the Amazon, the labrys and the lesbian line logo (figure 31). Lesbian symbols are political tools, important for communication outside of language. In my process of re-visioning the symbols are drawn, painted, photographed then manipulated in Photoshop, creating a tessellating pattern tile. These unique lesbian pattern designs are then used to create the digital quilts, including the following image inspired by Lesbian Line: a lesbian information and helpline service, with branches across the UK that catered specifically for lesbians whose archive is part of the LAIC collection (figure 32). The pink triangle in a telephone signified a literal lifeline for lesbians to connect and seek support, although it was also used in some places as a kind of informal lesbian listing resource.

Figure 32: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Lesbian Line pattern design sample*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 33: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Watercolour illustrations based on the LAIC collection*, 2019. Photograph: authors own.

Archival Amazons

Amazon women, or amazon warriors were, according to Homer, the fierce daughters of Aries who lived in an exclusively female society in the city state of Themiskyra in the area of the Black Sea (Homer, 1865). These 'fierce warrior women of exotic Eastern lands' were 'courageous and skilled in battle' acting as adversaries to Achilles, Theseus and Hercules (Mayor, 2014:10). The Amazon has become a feminist signifier of the ferocious capability of women, and the possibility for societies without men in popular culture through protagonists including Wonder Woman and Xena: Warrior Princess. The Amazon has become a kind of floating signifier; simultaneously relegated to the status of a curious, impossible myth by male historians and reclaimed and revitalised repeatedly in women's culture (Weinbaum, 1993). During the 1990s burial sites of warrior women were discovered in the Soviet union; radio carbon dated, these 'suggested that Amazons were not merely mythic figures', solidifying and strengthening the reclamations of the Amazons as tangible matriarchal ancestors, and in feminist and lesbian cultures (Weinbaum, 1993; Millward, 2014:139). The history of the Amazons shifts myth and history, obscurity, and visibility.

Lesbians are among those who have glimpsed 'themselves in the history books only in the margins and as absences', and who 'can and do identify them-selves among history's lost tribes—the colonized, the terrorized, the out-cast, the dispossessed' (Jones, 2000:405). But it is in these gaps of 'history's omissions and erasure' through the patriarchal 'master narrative' that lesbians have taken up the 'tactics of seizure and salvage, appropriation and revision' in order to claim the Amazon as both a heritage and a world to come (Jones, 2000:406). The Amazon represents the dreaming of a world without men, a dream that spoke deeply, and still does to lesbians seeking spaces outside of patriarchy for living life differently (Rudy, 2001).

The Amazon and her weapon of choice, the labrys, were particularly iconic in lesbian feminist culture in the 1980s and 1990s repeatedly appearing in the archive: on the cover of

the *Raging Dyke's* zine, *Amazon Quarterly*[9], *Harpies and Quines* magazine[10], *Flirt* magazine, in the regular Amazon column in *Sappho* magazine. Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig described the Amazon as the origin for their lesbian utopia, 'living together, loving, celebrating one another, playing in a time when work was still a game, the companion lovers in the terrestrial garden' (Wittig and Zeig, 1980:5). For the radical lesbian feminist, Mary Daly the Amazon is a 'Wild Woman Warrior who fights for her Self and other women; Woman-Loving Woman; Terrible Woman; Lesbian' (Daly and Caputi, 1987:103).

It is this wild warrior woman of the lesbian imaginary who rides in digital stitch in repeat across the quilt, *Archives and Amazons* which was shown in the exhibition of the same title at HOME in Manchester (figure 35). The quilt is digitally printed in a subtle faux pinwheel patchwork design created from different pattern designs in response to the archive collection, with a tree spreading out from the base disrupting the geometric neatness of the print. Pulled from the cover of an edition of *Raging Dyke* zine the ridges and furrows of the tree act as quilting points, spreading depressed into the surface. Set in motion by my needle, the Amazons are stampeding out of the archive.

The Amazon in figure 34 is based on the illustration that appears on newsletter covers for the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, as well as appearing on two of the covers of *Amazon Quarterly*, an American Lesbian Arts publication issued in America in the 1970s, whose editors included Audre Lorde. Lorde, whom Millward (2014) has claimed as a warrior poet, stated that 'the poets are our modern amazons – riders defenders explorers of the loneliest outposts of our kingdoms' (Lorde in Millward, 2014:139). Poets have been essential in the histories of lesbian culture as it 'had to be largely reimagined and reconstructed from scraps of knowledge, rather than recovered', making creative practice an apt method for its re-assembly (Millward, 2014:139). Quilts too, offer a method for reconstructing these myths, poetic fragments and archaeological remnants that inspired the warrior poets; as well as through popular culture and the archival retellings of the poets and activists who claimed the Amazon (and the Amazon nation) as a lesbian tool of strength.

[9]An early American Lesbian Feminist publication.
[10]A Scottish feminist magazine, the collection at GWL includes a promotional t-shirt showing an Amazon with a spear.

From another generation on, the quilt produces 'a new myth altogether, conceived along new lines', for it is only through re-visioning and re-imagining that we 'can reclaim the world which is lost (or that which never existed but should have)' (Carruthers, 1983:295).

The Amazon is also part of broader lesbian mythologies of 'women together and separate from men', including Sappho and Yoruba Vodun of Dahomey, who were also claimed and popularised through the work of the lesbian myth making poets such as: Monique Wittig, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich and Judy Grahn (Carruthers, 1983:294; Millward, 2014). The fascination with myths of the Amazon lie in the 'possibility of pre-patriarchal woman-centred power' (Millward, 2014:139). These poets took up the raw materials of lesbian persecution and resilience across time in order to forge their own linguistics and iconographies of 'apocalypse, exile, fragmentation, recognition, familiarity, and bonding' that outside of patriarchy could become the 'ingredients of a vision of personal wholeness' (Carruthers, 1983:321). The notion of separation (and separatism) draws on the transformative power of women being together, and in the necessity 'to recover their power women need to move physically and through metaphor to a place beyond patriarchy and all its institutions' (Carruthers, 1983:294). The Amazon charging in repeat across the quilt invokes this lineage of power and possibility in living a life at a disjuncture to patriarchal power systems. My use of the Amazon as a repeat motif throughout my work adds another, contemporary layer to the mythology of the warrior woman.

My claiming of the Amazon as a lesbian symbol is also an identification that is part of the broader Sapphic impulse to anchor lesbian identity within tangible histories or geographies (however precarious). For example Jill Johnson's recovery of the Amazon in her polemic treaty defining *The Lesbian Nation* 'as an imagined community, it was a metaphor of movement, of aggression, of transit and progress to a *state* of belonging', exemplifying this psychic practice in counteracting cultural displacement (Munt, 1998a:133). Nations are always, after all imagined things constructed from 'imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign', always fabricated, invented and unstable and inevitably tied to feelings of belonging (Anderson, 2006:14). Like hegemonic notions of the home discussed in *the domestic* chapter, the nation is an ambivalent and sometimes unsafe site for queers. It is a notion that has been queerly disturbed and

reclaimed, perhaps most famously by Queer Nation in their utopic 'capitalizing on notions of queer homelessness, sought to carve out queer nations within the larger fabrics of heteronormative nation-states', in a similar vein to black nationalisms (Braziel, 2008:107).

This historical desire of 'lesbians [to] hold fast to the dream of commonality and unification' has also been manifested through the construction of lesbian lands and the production of 'homogeneity through nostalgia, naturalised truth claims and a heroic utopianism' (Munt, 1998a:143). In the US in particular white women claimed separatist lesbian lands, actively seeking 'a new identity and lifestyle' that often drew upon, or appropriated Native American mythologies and practices (Schweighofer, 2018:494). However many of these communities failed to acknowledge their implication in colonial, settler violence and instead 'created a third category for themselves, one critical of the settler capitalist approach to land ownership and destruction, and bent on adapting indigenous philosophies as part of resisting patriarchy' but failed to advocate for reparations and returning of land to indigenous communities (Schweighofer, 2018:494). Notions of lesbian nations and lesbian lands are in dangerous proximity to nationalism, which 'implies the construction of a bounded space, a place which has borders and frontiers, which contains a centre and margins' (Munt, 1998a:136). It was attempts such as these to fix and police rigid identity boundaries that has led to the erosion and disappearance of lesbian feminism and lesbian lands (Munt, 1998a). In re-visioning the iconographies of separatist cultures, and addressing my own blurry-nostalgic longing for lesbian spaces, I am holding in mind who is included/excluded and displaced from these heartlands. The Amazon becomes a slippery signifier for me to play in the space between myth and history. It is a reclamation of the iconography of lesbian strength which, when situated within my lesbian quilting practice might become another re-visioning, in a long line of re-visioning, as a signifier of a more capacious contemporary lesbian nation of belonging.

Figure 34: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Archives and Amazons (detail),* 2021*, Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 35: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Archives and Amazons,* 2021*, Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

The Labrys and the Needle

The Amazon is not a peaceful figure; her world is one of passion, jealousy and rage. In lesbian feminist mythology, violence is necessary 'for the destruction of internalised patriarchal perspectives, and their replacement with a woman-centered prospect' (Millward, 2014:145). Her weapon is the Labrys, the double-headed axe that appears repeatedly in the archive slashing through the cover of zines, decorating the edges of newsletters and clasped in the hands of powerful women (figure 31). The bilateral symbolism of the labrys is affiliated with notions of equality and balance and associated with Cretan legends of the Minotaur, the Mother Goddess and as the tool of the Amazons (Cirlot, 1962; Mayor, 2014). Mary Daly defined the labrys as a tool for lesbians to 'cut through the mazes of man-made mystification' – as a transforming action rather than a static symbol (Daly and Caputi, 1987:142). Bound to a history of injury and injustice, as lesbians it is vital that we claim symbolic weapons for gathering psychological strength in order to keep fighting the heteropatriarchy that sought to discipline us. I have used the labrys symbol in my work for years, and in the pattern design for this body of work, fascinated by its profusion in lesbian archival materials; although there is very little written on the relationship between the symbol and lesbianism (figure 36).

The labrys is sharp, it is a tool for 'cutting through the layers of lies' constructed through 'phallic deception' (Daly and Caputi, 1987:104). The quilt invokes sensations of comfort and care, but is created from small acts of symbolic violence and repair. The 'violence of the cut is essential to the quilt' through the action of dividing, 'potential for new folds and connections made possible by snips and slices' (Ford, 2022:128). Only through cutting up can the pieces of the quilt be re-assembled and re-visioned into something new. My materials are caught in a moment of 'joining and separating' caught – 'between the blades' of the scissors; the fabric 'always bears witness' to both the trauma, and transformative potential of the cut (Maddock, 2018:30). The needle is a tool, but it is also a weapon capable of piercing and disrupting. The act of stitching 'pierces, punctuates, penetrates, as it unites the separate edges, and within a single gesture it combines both aspects of the paradox of destruction and creation' (Pajaczkowska, 2010:144). In this work, I pick up the symbolic tool

of the labrys, alongside my needle: its tip holding both the possibility for destruction and repair, power and vulnerability.

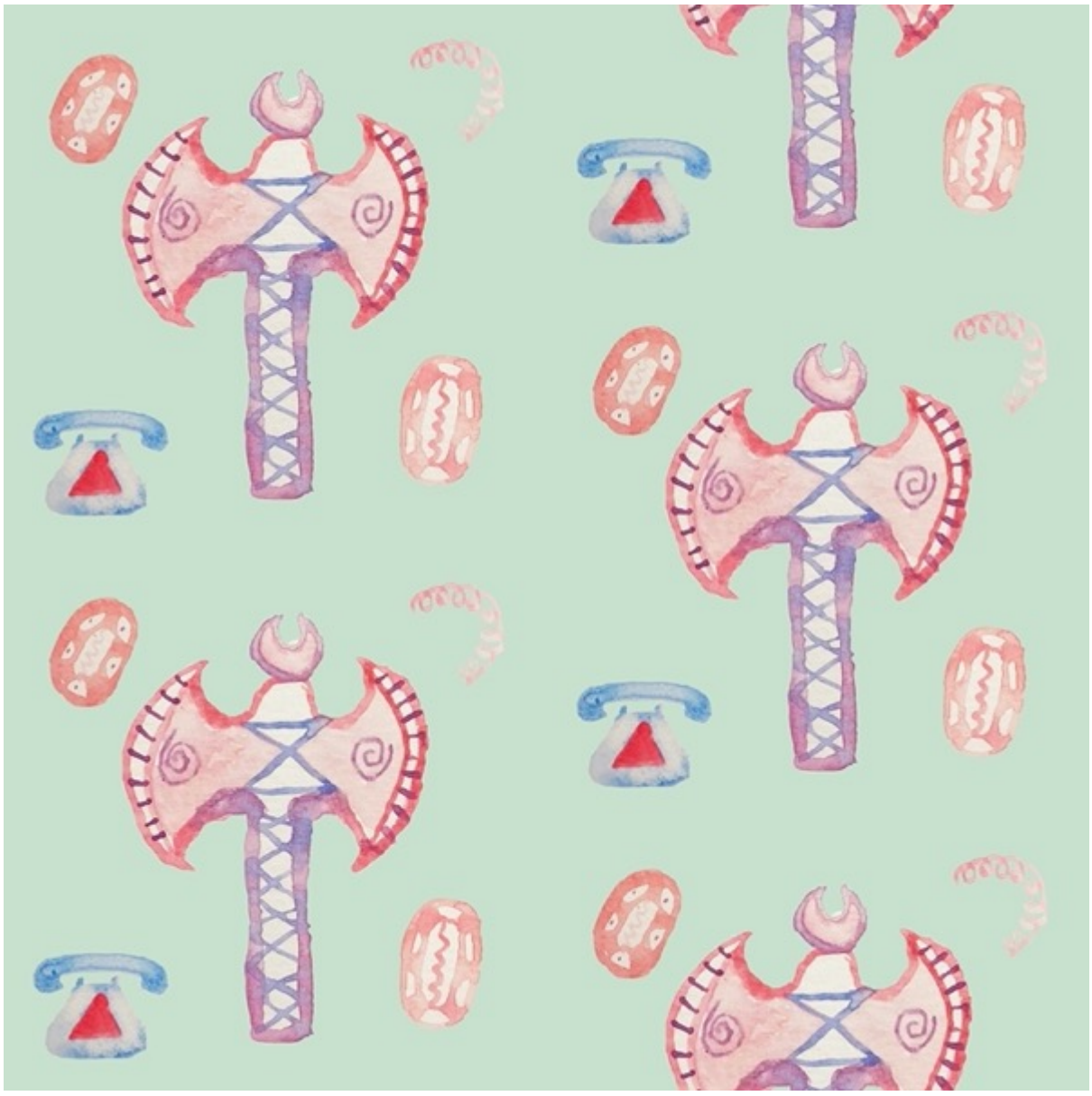

Figure 36: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Labrys pattern design*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Digital Quilts: Repetitions, Serialisation and the Politics of Abundance

Across these works, repetition is an important act: as in all quilt making, smaller parts make up a whole through the processes of laborious accumulation. Each series, serialisation and repetition is an emphasis of the power and importance of the archival objects that I am working with. In serialisation I refuse the scarcity model that so much of lesbian culture has

been predicated upon; instead focusing on ‘presence instead of absence, plenitude instead of scarcity’ (Castle, 1993:19). Each stitch is an emphasis, an insistence on abundance.

Utilising digital print design and embroidery has allowed me to play with repetition, scale and work at a pace that reflects my endless desire to produce new works. All the works in this chapter were produced in 2020 and 2021 during the period of COVID-19 lockdown, which has shaped their development. Initially I had no access to materials, workshops, or equipment – my tools were watercolours and Photoshop, resulting in a lot of paintings which were then assembled into digital print designs (figures 32, 36). These were then shifted back into the material realm through digital printing, embroidery, and quilting.

Digital methods have opened up the potential for flexibility, patterns and repeats that can be ‘endlessly copied without fading into inferiority’; they can be returned to the screen manipulated, distorted and fragmented into endless possibilities (Plant, 1998:189). My digital embroidery is part of a ‘haptic visuality, a tactile epistemology’ that is invested in the ‘similarities between grain, pixel and weave’, between clicked stitches and hand stitches and the space of play, interplay and reciprocity between them (Blackwell and Jefferies, 2006:260). My mixed method is part of an ancient alliance in which textiles ‘themselves are very literally the software linings of all technology’ (Plant, 1998:61).

[redacted] Figure 37: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild Series: 1*, 2021. Photograph: authors own.

[redacted] Figure 38: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild Series: 1 (detail)*, 2021. Photograph: authors own.

[redacted]Figure 39: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild Series: 2*, 2021. Photograph: authors own.

[redacted] Figure 40: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild Series: 3*, 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Wet and Wild Series (1, 2 & 3): **Tessa Boffin, *Quim* and the Sex Wars**

On my final trip to Glasgow Women's Library, I encountered another set of Amazon images in a box labelled 'Sex Mags'; a photographic series titled *Wet and Wild Women of the Cleaxe age* created by the ground-breaking lesbian artist and academic, Tessa Boffin (1960-1992). Working in the context of the 'harsh clashes' of the sex wars, her photography advocated 'for sex-positive lesbian imagery and BDSM culture' as well as addressing 'the exclusion of lesbians from safe sex campaigns' during the AIDS crisis (Soboleva, 2019: no pagination).

In a series of three miniature quilts, the beautifully crafted black and white images of warrior women are re-visioned in full colour, with dense textures through the process of digital embroidery (figures 37-40). Two women feature, situated in nature (the original images were taken on Hampstead Heath), dressed in leathers and feathers[11], their breasts are bare. The images set their bodies in motion, strong arms pulling back, knocking arrows to their bows decorated with tiny puffs of fur at the tips. Underlying the digital embroidery is a pinwheel design, mirroring the Archival Amazons quilt, emphasising the importance of movement in the action of re-visioning mythology and history. Apparently undisturbed on the land, these Amazons are located within the tradition of the lesbian utopian imaginary, drawing on the same set of woman-centric mythologies as the warrior poets, and the separatist lesbian feminists of Raging Dykes and lesbian lands.

However, in contrast to the illustrations of *Raging Dyke* magazine and LAIC newsletters these images are profoundly erotic; in the sensitivity paid to the supple bodies, bared flesh and gentle touch. The images were published in the first edition of *Quim* magazine (1989-1994), a British lesbian erotic publication. It was described by the editors of the first issue as a direct response to the censorship, debates and extreme reactions to lesbian erotic cultures, including the *The Lesbian Archive Summer School* and the sadomasochism debates that followed, as well as Joan Nestle's British book tour for the publication of *A Restricted Country* (Quim, 1989). Described as a magazine for the 'lesbian 'bad girl'' who had 'been around for some time, but she had kept herself to the wicked world of clubs like Chain

Reaction and the Clit Club', it also mirrored elements from *On Our Backs* magazine (Healey, 1996:142).

Quim magazine was in direct violation of the original lesbian archive collections policy, which specifically excluded materials 'which are pornographic or sado-masochistic' alongside materials 'which are racist or anti-Semitic, ableist or ageist' (Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, 1988:1). Materials relating to the 'pro-sex' side of the sex wars were kept in the interests of 'authenticity', but they were not 'promoted or displayed'; materials such as *On Our Backs* magazine were instead kept in closed archive boxes not easily accessible (Jeffreys, 2018:208). The Lesbian Archive was one of the significant battle grounds of the lesbian sex wars in Britain: the debate between pro-sex lesbians who were creating public cultures around their sexuality, and the lesbian feminists who argued that all sadomasochism, sex work and pornography emulated and perpetuated male violence (Linden et al., 1982; Daly, 1990). Sarah Green, a volunteer and ethnographer working with the archive reflected that her research within 'radical, and particularly revolutionary, feminist circles' meant that she had to avoid S/M venues and she did not 'get to know any women who identified themselves as S/M dykes' (Green, 1997:15). The aversion runs deep enough for Sheila Jeffreys to blame the 'development of a lesbian sadomasochist (S/M) movement in the 1980s' for 'defeating the lesbian feminist attempt to transform the construction of sexuality' (Jeffreys, 2018:151).

It is unclear when the box of magazines came to the archive, but in its new home the *Lesbian Archive and Information Centre* collection is part of the wider Lesbian Archive Collection, which includes all materials relating to lesbian lives. This allows for materials like *Quim* to be encountered alongside *Raging Dyke* Zine: something that might not have been possible in the same way within the original archive. It is this context of trouble and strife between lesbians that make the *Wet and Wild* images such a powerful iconographic intersection between the lesbian-feminist warrior women and the Rebel Dykes, and lesbian bad girls. In my search in the archive I was looking for ways to reconcile my fascination with lesbian feminism and separatism – with my pro-sex/rebel dyke sensibilities and allegiances – looking for a way for the quilt to re-assemble the fragmented political landscape of lesbian culture. Through Boffin's lens, and now my own needle, the lesbian iconographies from

both sides of the sex wars are entangled; and the Amazon is reclaimed, re-sexualised and re-visioned.

Throughout this project I have been drawn explicitly on the work of lesbian photographers (Phyllis Christopher, Tessa Boffin and Lola Flash in the next chapter) as there is something particularly pleasurable, and particularly femme in re-materialising the past from black and white into thick piled up stitches and vivid colour. This quilted series is another act of femme-femmage: a self-conscious honouring of the lesbian artists who came before me. These works are also a material acknowledgement of the significance of photography as a lesbian medium beyond simply a mechanism for representation, but as a theoretical, practical and political intervention where fantasy might play a role 'in shaping lesbian identities against the essentialising logic of anti-pornography radical feminist groups' (Guy, 2017a:5). It is my own fantasy at play, perhaps in situating myself within this lineage of artists.

However, this was a very different kind of encounter as a result of Tessa Boffin's tragic passing in 1993. Her archive is held at the University for the Creative Arts, UK, where she taught. The archivist kindly put me in contact with her parents who hold the copyright for her estate. I wrote to them, by letter, as they don't have access to email, and asked their permission to re-vision these beautiful images in my quilted artworks and they generously gave their permission. This is the unexplored archive that haunts this PhD; a limitation of the capacity of such a sprawling project. Instead, this archive, and the unanswered questions brought to light through my engagement with Boffin's utopic photographic practice are being channelled into a proposal for postdoctoral research.

This is another encounter with loss, the impossible and the unfinished in the lesbian archive; as with Donna Jackson, I picked up the threads that wove around her absence. The process of painting and digitising the fluid stitches was full of these feelings of loss: the gathering and pulling of digital stitches pregnant with feeling. The spiralling angles of the printed pinwheel design are framed in tiny glass beads, painstakingly hand stitched alongside the swift and decisive gestures of the digital embroidery. Each quilt holds these different temporalities of stitch – the digital, the machine and the hand. These shifting

temporalities in the making process reflect my desire to transgress static notions of temporalities, to touching across time and create relationships across death, and loss. The build-up of stitches construct a cumulative gesture of love and remembrance for a fearless lesbian artist – unafraid to face both the pleasure and the darkness of lesbian history and culture.

Boffin's own work a was a conscious historical re-visioning, drawing on the tropes of history's great narratives of heterosexual romanticism and re-constructing them within a queer-lesbian imaginary (Smyth, 1996). She rejected reflecting reality as the pinnacle of creative endeavour, in particular photography's 'supposedly intimate connection with reality', instead looking at 'how our dyke identities are constructed through historical role models, both in fact *and* fantasy' (Boffin, 1991:49). Her staged photographic assemblages patchworked together bodies, objects, landscapes; butting up the seams of past and present, reality and fantasy against one another. This is explicit in her series *The Nights Move* (figure 41) published in *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs,* co-edited by Boffin. It directly references the history of lesbian photographers as well as posing studio portraits of lesbians as archetypal characters from fantasy fiction evoking the notion that 'history might return, or be returned, to us in the political present' (Guy, 2017a:4). This series was also exhibited alongside my own work in *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* (discussed in the next chapter), which added another pleasurable thread of connection in my claiming of a lesbian art historical lineage.

Boffin believed that the 'discovery of hidden images and histories restores to us an imaginary fullness or plenitude which we can set against the broken kaleidoscope of our past' (Boffin, 1991:49). My quilts take up this call, looking back to her time, from my present: the lesbian future that she did not live to see. Quilting gives me the material space to patchwork together the broken pieces and lost utopias scattered across the 70s, 80s and 90s. Not as an act of simple repair, but a complex re-organisation of fragments through the critical lens of my own contemporary lesbian experience.

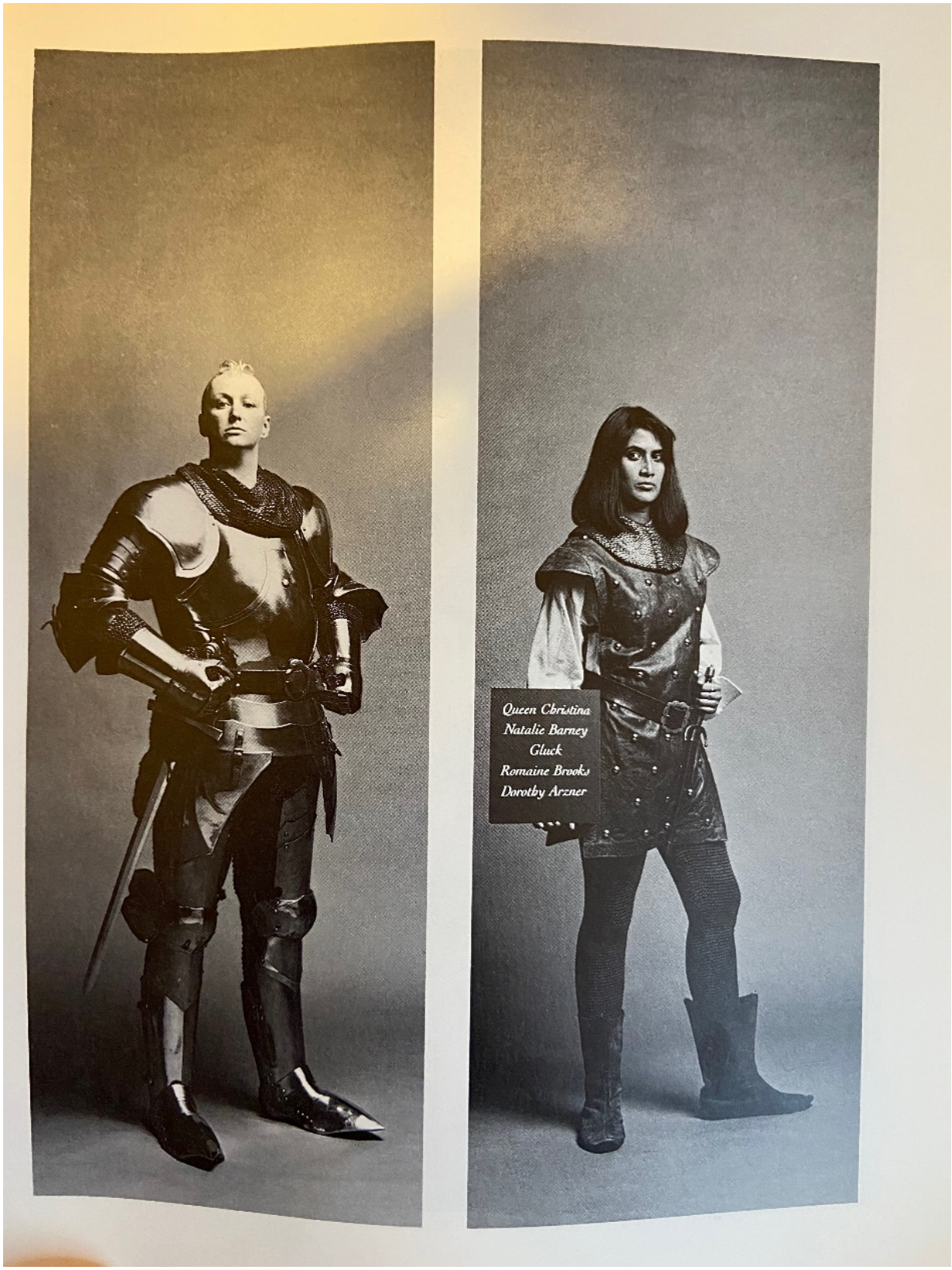

Figure 41: Tessa Boffin, *The Knight's Move*, 1991 (Source: Boffin, T. (1991) 'The Knights Move.' *In* Boffin, T. and Fraser, J. (eds.) *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photogrpahs*. London: Pandora Press, p. 45). Photograph: authors own.

Lesbian Library

One of my favourite things about researching at Glasgow Women's Library is working on the Mezzanine, with the shelves of the lesbian library behind me (figure 42). Huge amounts of books were donated to LAIC, reflecting the boom of lesbian and feminist publishing in the 1980s and 1990s, including OnlyWomensPress (1974-2010) founded by out lesbians Lilian Mohin, Sheila Shulman and Deborah Hart, and The Women's Press (1978-20013). Books published by The Women's Press are easily identifiable by their logo: an iron, and the stripes of the iron cord that runs down the book spines (figure 43). These iconic stripes fill the shelves at GWL, their abundance is referenced in the pattern design that fills the border space of each quilt in the collection – diagonal stripes rendered in the same mint green as the archive storage boxes (figures 37, 39, 40 & 43). The Amazon iconographies of the archive are literally framed by the practical textures of the archival encounter in the space of the quilt.

Books have always been a way to find ourselves, just as 'the archive is an object constructed by the people who create and preserve it'; so too, is lesbian identity 'constructed by people and books' (Enszer, 2015:163). Surrounded by the sheer abundance of lesbian books, I experienced a deep pleasure but nostalgia for the era of women's presses and bookshops, almost all of which have now closed. Not only this, but GWL is currently in the process of dismantling the LAIC book collection (which also remains uncatalogued), dispersing books into the lending library and de-acquisitioning duplications, further fragmenting the LAIC collection.

Figure 42: *The Lesbian Library at Glasgow Women's Library,* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 43: *The Lesbian Library at Glasgow Women's Library (details of Women's Press book spines)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Thread Breaks: Navigating the Unspeakable

> I tremble sometimes
> When I remember
> What that quilt knows. (Wilson Joyce, 1994:193)

Quilts are well versed in remembering (as discussed in the methodology). Laid out on the bed the quilt is the sentinel of the intimate; it absorbs the wetness of our desire and our pain. Quilts also harbour an unknowable space, caught between the layers – there is a hidden place stuffed with what can be felt, but cannot be seen. This makes the quilt a powerful site for exploring the difficult, the painful and the unspeakable held in our lesbian archives; this includes records of the disputes at LAIC (Lesbian Summer School Participants Comments p 15, RA Box, GWL). Cherry Smyth and Campbell X's (known as Inge Blackman at the time) screening of Sheila McLaughlin's film *She Must be Seeing Things* was boycotted and disrupted by revolutionary/radical lesbian-feminists, who demanded an apology from the LAIC[12] (Lesbian Summer School, final follow up meeting minutes). In Bradford a screening of the film was disrupted by cement being poured down the toilet, and at Manchester's Corner House a fake bomb was planted in the toilets (Healey, 1996). In response to these events, a debate was organised around lesbian S&M. The panel included Linda Bellos and Sheila Jeffreys who arrived, saw the women in leathers and promptly left, following which some anti-S&M women set the fire alarm off in order to curtail discussion.[13]

Difference, in this moment of LAIC's history was unbearable, and the disputes irreconcilable. The pain of this period is still present, and in conversations with women who were involved in the archive I have sensed the reluctance to dredge up old wounds and encountered the admission that the memories are just too painful to talk about. Sometimes touching up against history is not a smooth sensation and this 'abrasiveness is important, because part

[12]The letter was signed by several women, including members of the Revolutionary Radical Feminist group based in Leeds, who later became involved with Feminist Archive North.

[13]There is a video recording of this debate held in the Rebel Dykes digital archive although it was not possible to gain the full rights to use the footage so it remains archivally obscured. Linda Bellos OBE is an important gay rights activist, radical feminist, former leader of Lambeth Labour Council and was the first black woman in Spare Rib Collective.

of our history is a very unpalatable history, and that needs to be recorded' (Ajamu et al., 2009:293).

Within my femme-ethical methodology, these conversations are informal and unrecorded, allowing space for softness and for things to slip through the cracks. This is a turn away from methods of lesbian history that have been 'excessively concerned with knowing for-sure', instead embracing a wilful 'not knowing' (Vicinus, 1994:57). The quilts are my space for thinking through uncomfortable sensations and difficult silences, as well as the pleasures of recognition. In its reparative form, the gesture of patchworking offers an appropriate tool for re-visioning an archive that is itself broken and fragmented as a result of irreconcilable political differences and the erosion of government funding. The creative, subjective and emotional space of the quilt sits outside of language, where I can stitch the unspeakable and make space for acknowledging and accepting the unknowable, stuffed in its dark and warm heart.

Conclusion: Lesbian Haunting

> Taking care of the past without attempting to fix it means living with bad attachments, identifying through loss, allowing ourselves to be haunted (Love, 2007:43)**.**

This turning backward toward difficult lesbian pasts, failed utopias and the Amazon is informed by a lineage of lesbian literature that situate lesbian haunting as necessary to address uncomfortable histories, engaging with 'the past without being destroyed by it' (Castle, 1993; Love, 2007:1; McKinney and Mitchell, 2020). The Lesbian feminism of the 70s and 80s was undeniably prolific; producing literature, archives, summer schools, women's shelters, Lesbian Line, networks, magazines, dyke lands and its own curriculums; but it is also haunted by the ghosts of racism, femmephobia, whorephobia, transphobia and intolerance.

The quilt might offer 'better methods, different methods, speculative, imaginative, and artful methods for enlivening queer pasts' in order to build our own contemporary queer and lesbian cultures (McKinney and Mitchell, 2020:12). It is my space for touching up

against lesbian histories, taking strength from failed utopias, defunct organisations and awkward histories that refuse 'to be silenced, invisible, buried' (Grant, 2019:191).

In my last visit to the archive, I encountered the unexpected: Tessa Boffin's *Wet and Wild Women,* who were powerful, erotic and straddled the imaginaries of lesbians on either side of the sex wars. Encountering her work in the archive broke open both mourning and desire within me. The soft space of the quilt allowed me to explore 'the possibility of touching across time', and in re-visioning her photographs in stitch, a method for attempting to collapse 'time through affective contact', perhaps even forming 'communities across time' (Dinshaw et al., 2007:178). Through stitch the figure of the Amazon is re-visioned and reclaimed as a signifier of lesbian strength and for thinking through how re-visioning the past might inform the kinds of lesbian utopias we might dream for ourselves in this moment. I will finish again with a quote from Tessa Boffin (1991:49), that articulates the imperative that drives my quilt making practice; not only to repeat, but to re-invent ourselves through the fragments of our lesbian past:

> We must not be content solely with delving into the past in order to find consoling elements to counteract the harm and under-representation, or mis-representation, we have suffered as a marginalised community. We cannot just innocently rediscover a lesbian Golden Age because our readings of history are always a history of the present. We also have to re-invent; we have to produce ourselves through representation in the present, here and now.

Chapter 7: *The Archival Loop*: Fisch, The Rebel Dykes and The Bishopsgate Institute

Key Quilt Theme: the devotional object and stitching myself into the community

Introduction

This thesis has mapped three kinds of archival encounter: *the institutional* archive, *the domestic* archive and *the community* archive. This chapter includes encounters across all these kinds of archives, demonstrating the entangled, un-ruly and ever changing nature of lesbian archives. I begin with a domestic archive belonging to Fisch, which she shared with me after our meeting on a dyke walk in Brixton. Later our intergenerational exchange would take a reciprocal turn as I helped Fisch organise her vast collection within our own 'dyke archiving methodology' – which remains unwritten. Fisch is a performer, a drag king by the name of King Frankie Sinatra, host of King of Clubs – a drag king night at The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, twice headliner at the Drag Olympics and a Rebel Dyke. She is a partner in The Rebel Dykes project, which is a multidisciplinary collective telling the untold stories of the London Lesbian Punk Dykes who partied and protested throughout the 1980s. Her archive is a part of the wider Rebel Dykes archive that has grown around the processes of making the film, now including a Google drive of shared material, which acts as a kind of private community archive.

The encounter is navigated through the process of making a large scale log cabin quilt for *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* (June – September 2021). Through the crafting of the quilt I was able to experience the deep pleasures of intergenerational connection and collaboration and the experience of becoming part of the lesbian archive that I have been so invested in. Finally, I turn toward the future care of the archive and its final destination as its own collection at The Bishopsgate Institute, completing the archival loop from the domestic, to community and the institutional. This is an archive in motion: the conversations about what happens to these important materials, who can access them, how they can be accessed, are live and ongoing. I am no longer solely re-visioning the archive, but becoming part of the archive through my lesbian quilting practice.

The Rebel Dykes Walking Tour

Right at the beginning of the PhD I attended a Rebel Dykes walking tour with my mother. Fisch arrived dressed in a worn black leather jacket heavy with patches and badges, her short silver hair framing her angular features. She cut a striking figure commanding the space around her: claiming Brixton as her own archive of queer, dyke history. As we wind through the streets, she shares memories of her personal and political 1980s: Greenham Common, squatting, living on the dole, co-operative living, lesbian biker gangs, race riots, the first Pride marches and 'stop the clause' campaigns.

As she marched around the streets with us in tow, she stopped to pull out magazines from her tote bag, and then the front of her trousers, handing them round for us to look at. There are copies of the squatters zine *Crow Bar*, *She Bang* magazine, and flyers for *Chain Reaction* club nights. Paused on the pavement, literally touching history: the paper feels magical under my fingers. In the glare of the September sun and the damp heavy breeze, it felt like a transgressive act to be holding such a fragile history in my hands.

Fisch explains that she has a garage full of stuff and my heart skips a beat. Could this be the 'right stash of materials' – the collection that might validate my research (Singh, 2018b:22). The tour finished with a cup of tea at *The Temple to Oscar Wilde* installed at Studio Voltaire, with me gazing longingly at Fisch across the room in anxious liminality. There was a swirling mixture of academic fascination and the erotic draw of a distinguished butch. With great effort to get over my eroto-intellectual paralysis, I managed to introduce myself to her, and I am so glad I did. Fisch was so warm and generous, inviting me to her house to look through her collection. We swapped information and our archival intergenerational entanglement began.

An Intergenerational Entanglement: Fisch

Several ethics forms and months later I turned up at Fisch's house, soaked from the rain. Fisch is another diligent auto-archivist collecting the ephemera of her extraordinary life (Reay, 2019). Although, publicly she has identified herself as a hoarder rather than an

archivist. Her collection is kept in big blue plastic storage tubs, the tops smeared with dirt and grime from being stored in a garage (figures 45&46). Cross-legged on her living room floor, we rummaged through the boxes together, looking always for images, iconographies, and textures of lesbian life to piece together into a quilt.

The boxes were filled with a life of love, sex and activism, as a member of the punk band The Romantic Bones, in Amsterdam and the infamous Black Widows lesbian biker gang. Piles of photographs, flyers and clippings from the nights she was involved with in London – and still is – including Chain Reaction, the UK's first SM Dyke club, 1987-1990. Amongst the stories of her dyke life she also reflected on how lucky she is to have been able to keep hold of her collection despite experiencing challenging and nomadic living conditions, including being forced to leave home at a young age, experiencing homelessness, and living between Greenham Common in the warmer months and squatting in Brixton in the winter (she does not like the cold). But eventually she was lucky enough to get a council house, which offered her stability and a place to keep her archive/hoard.

Figure 44: Rebel Dykes*, Rebel Dykes Film Poster*, 2020, poster illustration by Harri Shanahan and Whitney Bluzma and poster design by the British Film Institute (BFI). (Source: online, https://www.rebeldykes1980s.com/).

The Rebel Dykes

Not all dykes were lucky enough to find stable housing, and the domestic archives that might have been haunt the existing lesbian archives. The project archives a community of post-punk dykes, brought together by Greenham Common, who protested, partied, squatted, and explored their sexuality, a 'rabble-rousing' history that has been left out of the grand narratives of LGBTQ British history (Rebel Dykes History Project, 2020: no pagination). Central to the project is the Rebel Dykes film that documents the lives of dyke communities in London in the 80s and 90s, directed by Harri Shanahan and Sian Williams; which after five years in production was launched at the BFI in February 2021. The journey has been difficult; as mentioned in the *Glossary* their first application to become a CIC was rejected as the project name (dyke) 'may be considered offensive' (Fahey, 2018: no pagination). A successful community petition challenged this stating how communities have reclaimed a word that was previously an insult into a word of belonging, inclusivity, and pleasure. The Rebel Dykes have made a literal intervention into the asterisked space of Dyke, undoing erasure, reclaiming lost worlds and stitching together untold stories, connecting marginalised communities across temporalities and generations. I met Siobhan for the first time at the Edgy: 16th LGBTQ+ History and Archives Conference (2018) at the London Metropolitan Archives, which cemented my desire to offer my needle up as another story-telling device to this network of dykes determined to tell their own histories, including Fisch.

Figure 45: *Fisch's Archive in her Van*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 46: *Fisch's Archive in her living room*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 47: *Dyke Archiving File System*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Dyke Archiving Tactics

By my third visit to her home Fisch asked me to help her organise her un-wieldy collection. We drive to her garage and then fill the living room and kitchen with dusty blue tubs, huge chunks of history (figures 46&47). This rebellious, dyke archive 'demands to be taken on its own terms' and like all archives, it insists on 'a set of methodological tools' as unique as its materials (Campbell, 2020:12). So over three days we came up with our own dyke archiving system. After a visit to the stationary shop to buy folders, I sat on the floor at Fisch's knee. I pulled thing after thing out of the boxes as Fisch explained what they are, and we negotiate together where they could go: creating folders for Romantic Bones, Camping Trips, Chain Reaction, Drag career as well as a whole box of Patti Smith themed photos, scrap books and memorabilia. The boxes are filled with old loves and new loves; triumphs and struggles, pleasure and pain. This is an intimate archive. It is an archive of a life: the personal and the political. Dyke archiving is both a physical and emotional labour; it is an intimate act. So much of what passed between us will remain between us.

This is a domestic archive, but it is also part of the larger community archive of the Rebel Dykes with much of Fisch's ephemera archive providing visual material to the film. Her collection will also eventually become a part of the institutional *Rebel Dykes Archive* at *The Bishopsgate Institute*. Therefore our dyke archiving method considered how to categorise materials into what would remain private to her, and public to the community and the institution. This is an almost impossible task as the threads of a queer life intermingle the personal and political – there is a box for holiday photos, which will be kept private, but also a folder for Pride marches – which begged the question where do photos of Pride marches on holidays go?

As an excellent auto-archivist, Fisch has already done much of the work, photograph packets already labelled with the year and things from specific club nights already grouped together. However, through this process the importance of relationships in mapping the temporality of a queer life emerges. We instinctively gathered materials from different partners together, creating smaller individual archives of feelings. Each relationship marks an era of

Fisch's life. The boxes are a life told in love notes, and snap shots. We are creating our own taxonomy through intimacy, a careful catalogue of love and loss.

Emotional Entanglements in the Living Archive

Fisch narrates as she goes – I pick up objects and ask questions, we drink tea and we chat. Like crafting, our dyke archiving is 'a mode of socializing', we are able 'to talk or listen while the hands do the work' (Cvetkovich, 2020:176). This archive of night life, sex and pleasure moves beyond 'staid notions of archives, visibility and representation' and opens up the possibility of a 'promiscuous' encounter that 'brings in the archive's sensuousness, its dirt, its grit' (Ajamu et al., 2020:587). It is these painful and pleasurable archival encounters, particularly in grass roots and personal archives that have 'the potential to become a space for intimate communication' and for opening up the possibility of touch across time and collaboration across generations (Cvetkovich, 2003:79).

Through my femme-ethical approach I hope that this archival relationship is not one of removal and extraction: but instead an entangled enmeshment of reciprocity, sharing and taking care for this intimate and precious archive. Rather than extracting obscured information, making visible and ascribing a fixed narrative to the material, my quilted method seeks to embrace the archive as a conversational and collaborative space. Dyke archiving intergenerationally feels significant in extending the kind of queer artistic interactions with archives that Alexandra Juhasz's calls *queer archive activism.* Quilting that uses 'archival media to remember, to feel anew, analyze, and educate, ungluing the past from its melancholic grip' and like the wider Rebel Dyke project, shares 'it as a gift with others in the here and now' (Alexandra, 2006:326).

Fisch has been so generous and vulnerable in sharing her intimate collection with me. Through dyke archiving tactics and femme-ethical quilting, I hoped to return her generosity and foster an intimate intergenerational exchange. I wanted to be useful. After I left I found a thank you card hidden in my handbag.

***The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show*: Intergenerational Motions**

My intergenerational encounter with Fisch was couched in the wider intergenerational entanglements of the Rebel Dykes project and in 2020, I was delighted to be asked to make a quilt for *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show*, held at Space Station Sixty Five in London June 2021 (figure 48). The exhibition was curated by Atalanta Kernick, an artist, curator, librarian and original Rebel Dyke; along with Kat Hudson, an artist, curator, DJ and editor of *Lesley* magazine. This intergenerational curatorial team are in keeping with the temporal shiftiness of the exhibition which showed original archival material alongside the Rebel Dyke artists including Del LaGrace Volcano, Ingrid Pollard, Tessa Boffin and Phyllis Christopher, with a younger generation of artists who have been inspired by the disobedient dykes who came before them including Hannah McLennan, Joy Yamusangie and Max Disgrace.

The creation of the film too, was a deeply intergenerational project: produced by Siobhan Fahey, an original Rebel Dyke, and directed by two younger, talented, creative queer people, Harri Shanahan and Sian Williams (who all met in Manchester). It is this commitment to intergenerational exchange and community that makes the Rebel Dykes project a deeply affective and transformational site for sharing dyke histories. Not as a static legacy to be protected in stasis, but as resource to be shared to inform and inspire new dyke art, culture and community. It is an archive always in motion.

Figure 48: Rebel Dykes, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show Poster*, 2021, poster design by Kat Hudson. (Source: online, https://www.rebeldykes1980s.com/).

A Log Cabin for Rebel Dykes

I was lucky enough that my second visit to Fisch was only a couple of weeks before the pandemic and the first lock down in 2020 – the sensations and conversations still lingering fresh in my body. Whilst attempting to organise the collection at speed I had been searching, and snapping shots, gathering the materials for my Rebel Dykes quilt. The lock down demanded that I slow down and linger with the images that I had so hastily gathered from Fisch's home. As discussed in previous chapters a lack of access to equipment shifted my practice toward my paintbrush and laptop. This led to the creation of digital quilts playing with traditional quilt geometrics: *Tokens From a King 1: Waterfight (figure 49), Tokens From a King 2: Lesbian Avengers (figure 50)* and *Tokens From a King 3: Pearly Cat (figure 51)* each with their own central motifs and repeat pattern. These were displayed as digital quilts in Short Supply's *Queer Contemporaries* online gallery and then digitally printed as silk scarves for *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show*. Through a process of repeating, re-using and digital patchworking these motifs and patterns were then recycled in the *Chain Reactions* quilts.

Working from home I thought a lot about quilt patterns and constructions and became fascinated with the Log Cabin patchwork construction which plays with strips of light and dark fabric surrounding a red centre, symbolising hearth and home (explored in depth in my digital log cabin project: appendix 6[14]). In Photoshop I created a log cabin pattern that was printed as a faux patchwork which was later digitally embroidered and quilted; first as a smaller sample quilt (figures 52&53) then for the large scale final quilt. The log cabin print references the origins of its embroidered fragments: Fisch's home, her private domesticity. Like the diagonal stripes of the Women's Press that bound the *Archives and Amazons* quilts to the literal space of the archive, the log cabin materially references spatial origins of Fisch's home where I encountered the materials. Rather than a red heart, I used white, leaving an open space, a gap – a possibility. The digital log cabin can be built up and up,

[14]During lockdown, I further explored these notions of the log cabin, digital quilting and crafting in isolation through the collaborative project: *Log Cabin*, created with Jordan Taylor. The *Log Cabin* is a tool for artistic development as well as a platform for thinking through what it means to craft in digital space, and make queer kinships when we are apart. The project was commissioned by Superbia (Manchester Pride). Source: online, https://log-cabin.org/.

expanded in space without limits: it is unbound. In a time of restriction, reduction and lack of access I returned home, and found opportunity and space for expansion through digital pattern design and print.

Figure 49: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Tokens from a King: Waterfight,* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 50: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Tokens from a King: Lesbian Avengers,* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 51: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Tokens from a King: Pearly Cat,* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 52: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions sample quilt*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 53: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions sample quilt (detail of Pearly cat on the quilter),* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

The Personal is the Political

The *Chain Reactions* quilt took a long time to materialise and began as several smaller quilts (figures 52, 53 & 55-58); the final large-scale work was exhibited at *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* (figures 61&62). Central to the quilt is a striking portrait of Fisch taken by the photographer Lola Flash, her head titled to the side, clad in a leather jacket and a t-shirt emblazoned with the word DYKE. This outfit is a declaration of allegiance to the leather, S&M, sex positive lesbian culture, as well as with the biker culture of the Black Widows women only motorbike community (1988-1995). Elsewhere on the quilt is an embroidered motorbike acting as an explicitly queer symbol for defiance, freedom and liberated sexuality; which has also been explored by artists including Jade Sweeting and Nina Wakefield in her exhibition *Maximum Overdrive* at Focal Point Gallery, which included a ride between galleries and Fisch performing as King Frankie Sinatra (Focal Point Gallery, 2017; Miyake, 2018). During dyke archiving we created a Black Widows folder that includes correspondence as well as photographs of Fisch in full leathers lounging across a motorbike in a warehouse. A queer love scene between woman and machine. This erotic display resonated deeply with my own sensual relationship with my digital embroidery machine: my pleasure and pride. Running at a thousand stitches per minute, she has brought the possibilities of creative freedom and expansion to my practice. She has opened up the road before me for new works and horizons after this PhD project.

The leather jacket was an evocative symbol of the punk dykes of the 1980s, a flag of visibility. But this visibly led to conflict, particularly with the anti-porn and anti-S/M lesbian feminists who formed the groups including Lesbians Against Sadomasochism who campaigned against having 'SM' lesbians in the London Gay and Lesbian Centre in order to avoid being 'confronted by the stigmata of eroticised cruelty', and the possibility of children seeing handcuffs (Jeffreys, 2021: no pagination). At the Lesbian Archive and Information Summer School 'S/M gear' was banned which included 'black leather, chains, jack boots, dog collars with steel studs, Nazi badges and so on' (Green, 1997:36). The leather jacket was part of the panic around S/M as an eroticisation of fascism that was whipped up by anti-S/M lesbian feminists (Linden et al., 1982; Saxe, 1992). Although as Emma Healy notes, 'lesbian feminists seemed to be seeing swastikas as American tourists were seeing the Loch Ness

Monster' (Healey, 1996:100). Stitching Fisch in her leather jacket and dyke t-shirt in the centre of the quilt foregrounds the politics of fashion, dress, and textiles in the history of the Rebel Dykes, which is not the focus of this study but is an important area for future research.

The printed photograph found in Fisch's collection unexpectedly connected me with another pioneering lesbian photographer: Lola Flash. Again, I took up a black and white image by an older artist and re-visioned the image in colour and thread as an act of femme-femmage that situates my work within a longer lineage of Sapphic production.

Club Nights, *Chain Reactions* and Copyrights

Fisch's collection holds flyers and ephemera from lesbian club nights that she was involved with. From her night *COME* (Royal Oak Tavern in Stoke Newington 1993-96) there are photographs of a water fight night – women with buzz cuts wearing white vests and goggles dance against a stage light background of blue swirls with bright coloured water guns: biro marks the year. COME posters featuring a yonic spiral with a labia obscured beneath and banner bound in black gaffa tape both designed by Lola Flash. A *lucky bitches* card. Images of pleasure kept in blue packets.

From *Kiss* (Royal Oak Tavern 1995-2003), a plastic wallet full of neon stars spills out and then a holographic multi pointed star with 'wall of shame 98-99' scrawled on it. I asked Fisch about it – she used to take photos of everyone and then display them on the 'wall of shame' the following night (at KISS) creating an unintentional archive of lesbian debauchery. A radical gesture toward visibility; and a document of the desire for recognition and continuity for a marginalised community. The stars litter one of the prints hidden in the tessellating bars of the log cabin.

The quilt takes its name from the iconic club night Chain Reaction, the UKs first lesbian S&M club that was ran by a loose collective of women between 1987 and 1990, which features prominently in the Rebel Dykes film. In the Rebel Dykes archive there are more ephemera

and photographs that capture snapshots of snatched pleasures within a difficult period for queer people as Debbie Smith recalls in the Rebel Dykes film:

> Life in the 1980s? Well… it was exciting, it was scary, it was fun, it was poor, it was a great time and a terrible time to be young and queer in London (Smith, 2020: no pagination).

Chain Reaction, COME and Kiss all operated under the shadow of Section 28, a piece of legislation brought in in 1988 that prevented local authorities from promoting homosexuality (Section 28, 1988). 'Operation Spanner' (1989 – 1990) was also taking place at the time, which attempted to criminalise sadomasochistic practices and achieved the prosecution of 16 gay men for practicing S&M. These cases set a legal precedent for prosecuting participants in consensual S&M in the UK, which particularly and significantly affected queer communities, criminalising intimacies outside of vanilla heterosexuality (Thompson, 1994; White, 2006). The Rebel Dykes partied, but they were also political. Many of them (including Fisch) meeting at Greenham Common, protesting together whilst exploring lesbian desire and community (a helpful illustrated map in the film shows the different camps at Greenham Common including the lesbian camp positioned strategically closest to the pub) (*Rebel Dykes, 2021*). The same dykes were integral in ACT UP and protesting the poll tax and Section 28.

The Chain Reaction collective also faced significant difficulties from within the feminist and lesbian communities during the ongoing lesbian/feminist sex wars debating the limits/borders of sexuality, identity and censorship (Thompson, 1994; Duggan and Hunter, 1995; Healey, 1996). Chain Reaction cut to the heart of these matters and was targeted by anti-S&M and anti-pornography feminists including an 'infamous assault' (possibly from the group Lesbians Against Sadomasochism) who threatened and hit club goers with crow bars (Healey, 1996:129; *Rebel Dykes, 2021*). Censorship under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 was another piece of legislation to target queer communities, which was used in conjunction with the archaic Customs Consolidation Act to seize and impound books from Gay's the Word and subsequently charge them with 'intent to import indecent books' (Kassir, 2018: no pagination). But censorship often came from within the community; following in the footsteps of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, Bristol MP Dawn

Primarolo campaigning for anti-pornography legislation which would require shops to have a licence for selling pornographic materials (Assiter and Avendon, 1993).

One of my favourite things in Fisch's collection is the original flyers for Chain Reaction, in particular an original design for 'Two Much' at Chain Reaction with an original drawing of handcuffs and penned details (figure 54). Some of the text is cut up and collaged, patchworking together a new narrative from existing texts; like so much of lesbian culture, and my quilts – it is a creative reworking. It is kept safe in a plastic wallet but the 'N' is missing. These original flyers were then copied with a Xerox machine. Multiplied, like a chain reaction they drew people to the space. The possibility for repetition and reproduction are essential to my work as well: the power in reproducing the iconographies, images and mythologies of the lesbians that came before. And in the possibility of repetition that stitching digitally brings, for more, and for many – shifting toward a model of abundance rather than scarcity (Castle, 1993).

Surrounding the portrait of Fisch are three arrows placed centrally with illustrations hidden in the textured stitches – each one based on an original Chain Reaction flyer from Fisch's collection. Before stitching them directly onto the quilt I made a series of three pinwheel baby quilts – the first thing stitched on my loaned digital embroidery machine (figures 55-58). Drawing on my previous commissioned Rebel Dykes quilt, each arrow is based on one from the Pitt Rivers collection, a broken fragment of a history embroidered with pleasure and power (Ford, 2022) (appendix 2)[15]. This draws a thread between these two very different Rebel Dykes related commissions.

The arrow has been a significant symbol throughout this project linking to imaginaries of Amazon warriors with bows and arrows, as in Tessa Boffin's *Wet and Wild* series re-visioned in the previous chapter. In addition, the arrows that featured on the *V is for Vera* quilt as

[15]The first quilt that I made with Fisch's Rebel Dykes materials was a response to a commission from the Pitt Rivers Museum for their *Beyond the Binary* project that aimed to address gaps in the collection, collaborating with community curators to co-create an exhibition as well as acquisitioning and commissioning new objects. This project is not discussed in detail in this thesis, as it has been published in the journal article: *In the Mud: quilting the Rebel Dykes in the Pitt Rivers Museum.*

part of the suffragette symbol of the arrowhead, reclaimed from prison uniforms and instead mounted on pikes, made into pin badges and worn as a symbol of resistance (Ford, 2021). The arrows I saw in the museum had been literally inscribed, the pen markings binding them to a moment in time. I re-visioned the flyers as stitched arrows; using the information of dates, times and location for each night to create a code inscribed in the embroidery. This shifting of Xeroxed flyers into the form of an arrowhead historicises the Chain Reaction flyers, and situates them within an order of objects that have been deemed important enough to collect. The museum is often the site for showcasing the archive; and is equally never a stable repository of objective truth, but a site for the constant re-inscribing and re-visioning of history (Horn et al., 2010).

Figure 54: *Chain Reaction Original Flyer from Fisch's Archive*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 55: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions: Pinwheels miniatures*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 56: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions: Pinwheels miniatures (2)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 57: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions: Pinwheels miniatures (3)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 58: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions: Pinwheels miniatures (4)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 59: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions (detail), embroidery of Corrine Keys photographed by Jamie Lee Griffiths,* 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 60: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions (detail), embroidery of Bea Erler photographed by Laney Shimm*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Sex in the Archives, Sex under the Quilt

Siobhan has been so generous in allowing me access to the network of dykes involved in the project through the Google drive archive for the film, email contacts and by adding me to the closed Facebook group. The Facebook group is a private space where people share memories, photographs and re-connect with old friends and lovers: access to it is an intimate privilege. The group has also functioned as a tool for the film team to track down contacts, community sourcing information and opinions as well as consent and permissions for images/footage. One post asked what symbols people felt represented the Rebel Dykes, to guide the project's illustrator Hannah Mclennan-Jones in her designs: the answers included handcuffs, motorbikes, military boots and cassette tapes, which I took up and included in the Rebel Dykes Quilt. Access to these immaterial archives and networks has allowed me to locate Fisch's narrative within the wider community of Rebel Dykes and for the quilt to expand.

This is how the two figures in SM gear (not Fisch) became part of the quilt. The original images are part of the Rebel Dykes Google drive; the first depicts Corinne Keys wearing a chest harness taken by Jamie Griffiths (figure 59) and Bea Erler, who appears in the Rebel Dykes film taken by Laney Shimmin (figure 60). These powerful images ooze sex, pleasure and defiance. Taken in the club, where the 'mess, sweat, [and] dirt takes place', their placement in the quilt takes part in a deliberate refusal to be 'locked into talking about sexuality, but not talking about sex', leaving sex as the 'unspoken' in the archive (Ajamu et al., 2020:588). The silver of the studs and the light shining off the leather is taken up, and rematerialised in glittering metallic threads.

I was intrigued first by the striking images and the defiant leather clad stances, but also by the deliberate over exposure of one face in one of the images. The other image shows only bare back and wild hair – they are anonymous glimpses of a moment. I asked Siobhan about the image, and it was an early experiment in anonymising images for the film. Although in this case I connected with photographers and models who were happy to be included in the quilt; and these joyous, erotic stories need telling, not everyone wants to be, or can be visible. This is particularly poignant in the context of Chain Reactions, which was a private

club space where people were exploring their sexuality long before social media and all-encompassing online access. This is something that Del LaGrace Volcano, the hugely significant queer photographer who was also part of the Chain Reactions collective, has reflected on their own choice not to bring their camera 'into the club, a sacred and profane space' but instead to create constructed public spectacles of dyke intimacy which eventually resulted in the publication *Love Bites* (which features many Rebel Dykes including Jane Campbell and Siobhan Fahey) (Grace, 1991; LaGrace Volcano, 2021: no pagination)[16]. In the years that it took to make the film, alongside interviews, the team worked tirelessly to track down photographers and models for consent, which was not always given and sometimes withdrawn later.

In order to represent these simultaneously fierce and fragile images the Rebel Dykes patchworked together an incredible archive of images, footage, interviews, recreations, illustrations, animation, text and testimony. Where footage could be found, but not used due to financial or ethical reasons Harri and Sian recreated entire scenes in a gloriously DIY punk aesthetic including the infamous lesbian invasion of BBC news night and abseil into parliament on washing lines, both taking place in 1988 to protest Section 28 (*Rebel Dykes, 2021*). Harri Shanahan undertook a Masters in animation, creating beautiful punky moving illustrations that tied together the threads of the archive with those moments that were lost, or inaccessible.

In another series of photographs found in Fisch's collection a fire dancer slides toward the edge of the stage on her knees, back bent backward, blowing flames; her brightly coloured pubic tattoo spreads flames out around her vulva. A striking portrait of the strength and power of lesbian public erotic cultures and community, the same flames form a ring around the edge of the homely log cabin print. Like animation, the quilt opens up the possibility to tell stories without revealing identities and faces – the flames from this performance

[16]The book was subject to censorship, eventually published by Gay Mens Press and subsequently was refused at several feminist book shops, as well as Gay's the Word (*Rebel Dykes, 2021*). The independent bookshops themselves, rather than the authorities enacted this form of censorship due to a series of images depicting penetration causing concern in particular for Gay's the Word – fearing another police raid – although it was stocked in Waterstones (Salaman, 1995).

remain. Within ethical practices, important moments of the archive can never be accessible to the public in its totality. These are gaps and silences of history that can be strengthened by intergenerational communication and collaboration, through careful, creative patchwork practices; animation, recreation and quilting can offer methodologies for re-visioning the lesbian archive.

Stitching through Loss

To encounter these ephemeral pleasures as material, archival residue is a privilege and a gift. These club nights were a little tended to, but radically important part of lesbian history which provided access 'to a collective community and an experience of the body that is erotic even if you're not having sex' (Cvetkovich, 2020:60). Although I was not there, with my body in Fisch's living room, I am able to brush up against the past and come into pleasurable friction with a collective moment, and a collective history – touching across time. Like many other queers working with archives, 'yearning that motivates my work is not simply for a lost person: but more so for a lost, shared collective time and place' (Alexandra, 2006:322). In the making of the quilt I am literally stitching through my sense of loss for this collective past – threading myself into the narrative of the Rebel Dykes and embellishing a place for myself within the lesbian community.

The *Chain Reactions* quilt twists away from LGBTQ narratives 'locked into rights-based narrative, an oppression-based narrative, a deficit narrative' and stitches toward the histories of 'aspiration, celebration, and what we have been producing' (Ajamu et al., 2020:600). As femme-femmage, I am claiming the quilt as a specifically lesbian memory-making tool, outside of institutional narratives of remembrance. In a little printed 'thank you' card from Fisch to attendees of COME she states 'living as we do in a 'community' dominated by entertainment by and for gay men I will endeavour to provide innovative and alternative nights out for us dykes' (Fisch's archive collection, 2021: no pagination). She continues to do this with her night King of Clubs, which showcases drag kings and dyke cabaret at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. My quilt takes up this call, continuing the commitment to creating dyke culture: it is a devotional object, an offering back to my community. The emotional and physical labour of the making dynamizes the quilt, imbuing it with the value

that comes with labour. As a femme-ethical methodology, I have re-visioned the hard edges of the S&M and punk aesthetics of the Rebel Dykes through my undeniably femme pallet of pink and pastels, soft undulations and fabric and intricate stitches and patterns. This tender process of re-visioning through my own artistic practice is a refusal of extractive methods of making static queer histories, instead offering a glimpse into intergenerational dyke intimacies in motion.

Quilts have long been made as gifts for family members: making important relationships, events and the passage of time. Pleasurably subverting this genealogical kin making practice, the quilt centres Fisch as the focal point, embroidering moments from her extraordinary life, whilst honouring her generosity and vulnerability. Outside of biological constructions of family and kinship, archives can function as ‘‘queers’ children: in lieu of offspring, archives have been fashioned as agenetic sites for passing on and handling queer history’ (Marshall et al., 2015:6). In handling the precious objects of the intergenerational archive I stitched in abundance, creating a final quilt 170cm x 270cm (figure 61), drawing on the quilt’s historic power to make ‘women themselves appear totally visible and monumental’ (Donnell, 1990:3).

Figure 61: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions*, 2020, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show,* exhibition at Spacestation65: London, 24th June – 17th September 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 62: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions quilt and with Fisch on opening night,* 2021, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show,* exhibition at Spacestation65: London, 24th June – 17th September 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 63: *Sarah-Joy Ford photographed with Sadie Lee's painting on opening night,* 2021, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show,* exhibition at Spacestation65: London, 24th June – 17th September 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Stitching myself into the Community: Exhibition Opening 24th June 2021

Nowhere was this queer intergenerational collaboration and pleasure more palpable, than at the *Rebel Dykes: Art and Archive Exhibition* opening night. Artworks, objects and ephemera from artists across the generations nestled up against one another – the walls of the old Fire Station at *Space Station 65* were crammed, but not overcrowded. There was some disappointment with delayed lifting of COVID-19 restrictions that the 400 guests were not able to attend – strictly artists only. However, in some ways, this lack of audience opened up the space for more intimate encounters and conversations between the artists. The sensation of seeing my work in pleasurable proximity to so many other dyke artworks was a collective, affective experience; you could feel it spreading like ripples. Crowded around with glasses in hand, chatting away, the collective joy was palpable. We had been brought together 'with those able to share the same delight', our creative practices stitched

together in a chaotic dyke patchwork on the walls, and the possibility for things to become 'larger, better and more exciting than we are individually' hung in the air (Segal, 2018:59).

The joys, pleasures and possibilities for radical change brought forth through processes of collective stitching are well documented (Archer, 2004; Robertson, 2011; Shercliff, 2015). The quilt lends itself to the possibilities of collaboration and collectivist, as well as solitary pursuit. The quilt's capacity for holding both the private and public has made projects like the *Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* so powerful and evocative. The quilt was never an attempt to tell a coherent narrative about Fisch's life, or the Rebel Dykes. The quilt instead offers a soft repository for the images, textures, sensations and affects that have surfaced in my archival encounter. Driven by my desire for community and my intergenerational longings, I have literally stitched myself into the history of the Rebel Dykes. Forged in desire, the quilt was an act of devotional love for the women that inspired me. My offering, my contribution to a long line of dykes who have refused, rebelled, and demanded pleasures beyond visibility and equality.

The *Chain Reactions* quilt stitches into an archive of erotic pleasure: of nightclubs, fucking and lost loves. The quilt is also a vessel for the erotic beyond the sexual as Audre Lorde defined it as the 'power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person' (Lorde, 1984:56). The wider Rebel Dykes project is also deeply erotic through the sharing of dyke joy, which forms 'a bridge' between generations, and in a difficult and divisive time for queer communities 'lessens the threat of their difference' across significant age divides (Lorde, 1984:56). The quilt of course, is never just about the 'finished cultural' object; its power lies in the complex processes of 'the creation, reception, and use of these complex cultural objects' (Stalp, 2007:4). After binding, the quilt is still in the process of meaning making, absorbing emotions and affects from the space. Standing pressed up against the soft surface of the quilt, with Fisch's arm flung around my waist, huge smiles on our faces; the quilt absorbs our queer joy as we touch up against it (figure 62).

Resisting Nostalgia: An Archive in Motion

The Rebel Dykes Exhibition takes up the archive as an active site for community building, rather than a static repository. Rather than a lesson in history, it is a riotous explosion of the past into the present. Threaded through the project is a refusal of stasis, nostalgia or inaction, as producer Siobhan reflected to me in an email: 'I'm actually not that interested in history as nostalgia, only as a way to create conversation and debate about today' (Fahey, 2021: no pagination). Instead the project tends toward what Alexandra has termed 'queer archive activism' (Alexandra, 2006:320). The exhibition is a testament to this, as one 'generation's yearning' fuels 'another's learning'; it is an escape map 'from the melancholia through productive, communal nostalgia' (Alexandra, 2006:323). Together we can refuse the discontinuities and disconnection between generations, as well as the cultural amnesia and institutional forgetfulness that plagues lesbian history[17]. We are threading ourselves together with the joys and pleasures of a shared history, creativity and future. Through these intergenerational erotics we might be empowered, and 'begin to demand from ourselves and from our life pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of' (Lorde, 1984:57).

Becoming the Institution: The Rebel Dykes in The Bishopsgate Archives

The materials of the archive are also in motion towards where this thesis began: *the institutiona*l archive. The Rebel Dykes archive was created to document, share and remember the dyke materials that have been left out of institutional narratives of LGBTQ history, going 'un accessioned, un accessed, and/or remain unprocessed', as a result of sexism, lesphobia and 'sustained and systemic financial precarity' (Campbell, 2020:14). The project has actively called for material donations: 'we want your ephemera' (Rebel Dykes History Project, 2020: no pagination). This reflects the common construction of Gay and Lesbian archives which are 'often built on the donations of private collectors who have

[17]The Rebel Dykes are the antithesis of a static repository: these were the lesbians who fought against nuclear arms, Section 28, ACT(ed) UP and took care of the sick and the dying during the AIDS crisis. Around the exhibition were 'DYKES FOR TRANS RIGHTS' flyers with an invite to attend the Trans Pride march the following Saturday. They marched with Rebel Dykes t-shirts, a rainbow banner 'LwiththeT' and 'Dykes for Trans Rights'. The Rebel Dykes have created chain reactions, threads of connection and intergenerational intimacies whilst continuing to stand up and fight in the contemporary struggles facing the queer community: setting an archive in motion (Tate and Pearson, 2016).

saved ephemeral evidence of gay and lesbian life-both personal and public-because otherwise it might disappear' (Cvetkovich, 2003:243).

It is a chaotic and unfinished archive in a state of useful instability (Jack Gieseking, 2015). However, without financial security and a permanent location, the materials, like those of the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, could be at risk. Even online community spaces, like the Google drive are not necessarily secure. Attested to by Andy Campbell's mourning of the loss of the Colours of Leather website, which was an indispensable 'hodge-podge of information' that relied on 'unpaid and unthanked' archival labour, and was eventually taken down as a result of burn out from the 'onerous demands of the archival labor' (Campbell, 2020:17).

This issue of sustainability has been at the forefront of Rebel Dykes, and has resulted in a partnership with The Bishopsgate Institute in London where the materials from the project will be acquisitioned. This includes my own Rebel Dyke materials, alongside a full collection of materials relating to this PhD project, which are being acquisitioned; becoming part of the archive. Our materials will be in good company as *The Bishopsgate Institute* holds a huge array of LGBT collections including ACT UP London, Justin Campaign, Transfabulous, Museum of Transology and the UK Leather and Fetish Archive. I went to visit, curious to see the final resting place of our collective dyke materials, and hesitant about what it would mean to close the archival loop, from domestic, to community and finally the institutional archive. Under the dark wood panels and balconies of books I sat tucked between piles of unsorted boxes leafing through both the *Campaign Against Pornography* collection alongside Nettie Pollard's archive which documents the adversarial *Feminists Against Censorship*. The materials highlight, through ironically similar materials, the stark divides of the lesbian sex wars. In this archive they wait alongside one another – the materials are able speak to one another in the quiet of the reading room under curious fingers. Rimming the upper balcony of the reading room hangs almost all the LGBTIQIA+* flags you can think of: a symphony of coloured cloth speaks to queer researchers – this space is for you.

The institution with its facilities, tools and paid staff can offer conservation, preservation as well as public accessibility to vulnerable materials in need of sustained care (Darms, 2015).

In addition, as an adult learning centre, opposed to a university collection, there are fewer barriers to access as well as more interactive programming and events. A similar decision was made by the Rukus archive collective to house and protect the black, queer, sensual materials of their archives at The London Metropolitan Archives. This made it possible for black gay and lesbian history to become more 'instituted', more visible, gaining resources and funding whilst still not becoming subsumed by the institution or becoming an institution in itself (Ajamu et al., 2009:289). The Rebel Dykes archive shifts between the physical and the digital, the domestic and the community – and now flirts with the institution. It is an archive in motion, in a state of constant becoming. Although not a space of our own, The Bishopsgate Institute can hopefully offer an accessible site for our unruly materials, 'a stable place from which to remain in that state of flux' (Jack Gieseking, 2015:34).

Conclusion: Towards becoming the Archive

When I started the PhD, like so many others, I was searching for an archive of materials to define my research career. I was hoping to 'stumble upon the right archive, the secrets that no one else had yet discovered' in the hope that I might be one of the 'chosen ones', whose research really mattered (Singh, 2018b:22). In the process of working with Fisch and the Rebel Dykes*,* this fantasy of unique archival discovery and the solitary pursuit of secrets hidden in dusty stacks has been dismantled. Sat in Fisch's living room, pawing over her collection – she shared secrets with me, and others, whilst keeping some for herself. In navigating the images of dark sweaty clubs, harness strapped chests and performances on fire I learnt that some secrets belong in the archive. They are not mine to tell. The process of making the *Chain Reactions* quilt was one of hesitations and doubt, re-stitching and re-inscribing, undoing and remaking. For within a femme-ethical methodology there needs to be space for questions, silences and the possibility to reconsider and re-vision, always. Rather than the pleasure of discovery, uncovering and mastery of my materials, the pleasure came from the eroticism of being part of something bigger. I am one of many dykes claiming, writing and re-visioning our own histories through intergenerational exchange and creative methodologies. Our politics are shaped by love, and we find joy in our collective (hooks, 2001; Segal, 2018).

As I have re-iterated in each of the chapters, the quilt is a devotional object. *Chain Reactions* is a love letter written in digital threads and stitched furrows. It is addressed to Fisch, borne out of our emotional exchange in the domestic archive. It is a tender act of femmage; evidence of a femme's adoration for a butch king; a shameless expression of intergenerational desire.

The quilt is also stuffed with my longing for a queer time and place that I never experienced. Rather than tipping into an inert nostalgia, the quilt offers an active site for re-negotiating and re-visioning dyke histories for a dyke contemporary. Crafting the quilt was a 'form of self-transformation', and a 'way of being in the world that required not just knowledge but practice' (Cvetkovich, 2020:168). Hung in *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* the quilt becomes part of this history, and part of the archive. With my needle, I have literally stitched myself into the history and the archive which I so longed to be a part of.

Chapter 8: Conclusions: On Becoming the Archive, Notes on Binding

I have thought a lot about quilts: how to make them, and what it means to make them.

I love to plot my quilts – assembling and reassembling the iconographies, images, geometries, colours, patterns, histories and sensations into new forms. I crave the sensations of stitching, embroidering, embellishing, and quilting – the accumulation and manipulation of thread into new worlds. The process is always pregnant with my next project: when the fabric runs through my fingers, the machine whirrs in my ears and the needle is rhythmically piercing – vanishing and reappearing. It is in this space, with my hands at work, that new potential patchworks and possibilities begin to form in the back of my mind. My quilts spill into one another, symbols, images, patterns, and colours repeat and re-appear bleeding across the temporality of my practice.

However, it is the final stage, the binding of the edges – closing the gaps and finishing the work – that I am hesitant to undertake. I often bind with satin ribbon or handmade bias binding, and sometimes with the pillowcase method (finishing by stitching the quilt inside out and flipping it back to form a seamless edge). The edge can also be a site for embellishment and decadence, a place for ribbons, feathers or handmade ruffles.

The binding of a quilt and the concluding of a thesis are both conventions of necessity, in gathering up and drawing to a close. This conclusion performs the necessary retracing of the key points of the thesis, mapping the contributions to knowledge. It also deviates in the presentation and discussion of new artworks as conclusions: each one a re-working of existing quilts already discussed in previous chapters. Each of the artworks is a return to an idea, a re-iteration and concluding remarks on the original work as well as a reminder of importance of archives, histories and art practices that remain unfixed and unbound (figures 64&65). The presentation of these instances of transformative returns offers a way of thinking through the impossibilities of endings and the importance of possibilities for edges to come unbound.

Figures 64: Sarah-Joy Ford, *On Binding (detail), 2021, Proximity* residency and exhibition at Abingdon Studios: Blackpool, August 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Matt Wilkinson.

Figures 65: Sarah-Joy Ford, *On Binding, 2021, Proximity* residency and exhibition at Abingdon Studios: Blackpool, August 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Matt Wilkinson.

Contributions to Knowledge

In the context of the lack of lesbian archive in the UK and the focus in queer archival studies on US based collections, this thesis has analysed a rich range of lesbian archival collections and materials distinct to the UK. Through the auto-ethnographic research methodology, I have used my embodied experience to offer a complex understanding of the affective resonances, emotional complexities and desires that circulate around lesbian archival collections in Britain. The quilts, and this thesis, have become archives of these affects, emotions and sensations encountered in the lesbian archive.

I have established a femme-ethical methodology for my research, informed by the qualities of the queer femme: embellished aesthetics, emotional vulnerability, and an ethics of reciprocity. This has allowed me to open up and navigate the complex space of the lesbian archive, when encountering materials created by, or depicting still living lesbians. This method can be picked up and utilised for further research.

I have created a significant body of new work that establishes the quilt as an affective methodology for re-visioning lesbian archives: drawing on the powerful material and metaphorical properties of the quilt in its politicised closeness to cloth, the bed and the body. I have established the quilt as an act of femme-femmage; a devotional object through which I am able to re-visit, re-vision and stitch myself into a lineage of lesbian artists.

This thesis captures an important moment for lesbian archives, art and culture in Britain with a queer intervention into suffrage centenary narratives: Phyllis Christopher's exhibitions at *The Baltic* and *Grand Union*, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* and Film premier as well as Ingrid Pollard's exhibition based on the LAIC collection at Glasgow Women's Library[18]. My quilts have become a part of the legacy of lesbian creative culture in Britain by collaborating intergenerationally, exhibiting my work at exhibitions and

[18]Further afield the *Radical Desire: Making On Our Backs Magazine* exhibition was curated by Kate Addleman-Frankel at the Hirshland Gallery at Cornell University in 2022. This is where *Susie Bright's papers and On Our Backs records 1978-2013* are held in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

eventually by contributing to the Rebel Dykes archive collection at *The Bishopsgate Institute.* Through quilt making, I have not only presented new knowledge about lesbian archival collections but I have been able to make significant contributions to the lesbian archive, culture and community. The quilts have been exhibited at significant exhibitions including *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show* in London and at Golden Thread Gallery in Belfast, as well as *Archives and Amazons* at HOME; all of which were accessible to the wider lesbian community rather than solely presented through the thesis and academic publishing. It is through these spaces that the transformative power of the lesbian archive shifts into view as an unstable site for intergenerational encounters, intimacies and conversations that can lead to the re-visioning of lesbian history and the formation of new contemporary lesbian cultures.

This thesis has offered a significant extension and embellishment of the critiques of visibility as the sole strategy for lesbian liberation made by Castle, Traub and Jagose. The quilt de-centralises visibility, instead prioritising methods of embellishing, patching over and re-visioning through the emotionally evocative and reparative potential of quilt making that always necessarily leaves a space for silence in the warm darkness of its unseen heart.

Re-Visiting the Archives: *Institutional, Domestic, Community* and the *Archival Loop*

I move now to drawing to a close the threads of the different archives toward a conclusion, returning to each of the chapters to draw out the key thematic concerns, making clear the contribution to knowledge.

I return to *Quilting as Methodology*, to deepen and establish the significance of the material resonance between the quilt and the archive by considering how my quilted artworks function as archives of my own encounters with the archive. I re-iterate how my femme-ethical methodology has enabled me to draw out visual materials from the archive, whilst prioritise making connections and contributing my femme skills of embroidery and embellishment to a lineage of lesbian art.

I think through my return to *the institutional* archive with the installation *Time Binds* in which I drew on the formal properties of the archive (the boxes, labelling practice and gloves) creating an installation based archive of the material detritus of my PhD practice. This installation emphasises how the archive has influenced not only the subject matter of my artworks, but the materiality, formal qualities and curation of my practice: exceeding, extending and embellishing upon the traditional form of the quilt.

In returning to the *domestic archive,* I establish my challenge to the parameters of the archive, shifting toward an un-ruly and un-bounded understanding of history through my reworking in the *Honourable Discharge: Archival Folds* quilt. In returning to the unfinished quilt, I propose folding, concealing and binding as a useful way for thinking about the impossibilities of stability and accessibility in the archive – emphasising the importance of the unseen.

Extending this critique, I return to the complexity of *the community* archive to establish how, although often associated with lesbian history and activism, visibility is not always the sharpest tool for carving out equality, survival or pleasure for lesbian communities. This is established through the reworking of the *Wet and Wild* series of quilts in response to discussions with the community that led to a veiling intervention in the original works to protect the identity of one of the models. My discussion of the material and emotional navigation of this ethical dilemma attests to the desire for lesbian visibility and the acceptance that it is not always possible. I establish quilting and patchworking as a powerful femme-ethical methodology for undoing simplistic notions of visible/invisible, accessible/inaccessible; through the material predisposed to flexibility, reworking and repair.

Through *the archival loop*, I establish the ways in which my quilted practice has become part of the archives that I set out to re-vision. I establish the importance of the British lesbian archive not as a static repository, but a site of intergenerational exchange and cross-generational transformation and activism. Through *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show,* I establish the quilt as a femme-ethical methodology not only for re-visioning lesbian archive materials, but as a radical intervention and active object in creating a new lesbian archive

forged through the transformative possibilities of intergenerational intimacy and collaboration.

Figure 66: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Quilting Archives and Amazons on the Handi-Quilter in the embroidery studio at Manchester Metropolitan University,* 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Methodology: The Quilt as Archive of Touch

The Quilt as an Archive of Touch

The methodology extended the work of the *Lesbian Quilt Manifesto* by situating the affective potential of the quilt as methodology within the material, social and political histories of women's quilt production. I emphasised the intimate relationship between the quilt and the bed, and therefore with notions of covering, concealing, and intimacy: proposing the quilt as the witness on the bed. This makes the quilt a powerful and 'apt metaphor for the tactile meaning of the body and desire', as well as a conduit for holding stains, smells and bodily memories in the fibres (Freeman, 2010:56 Harper, 2016; Sorkin, 2012). The symbolic entanglement of the quilt with the bed means that it is intimately bound up with 'sex but also to a host of other life events and day to day practices' therefore offering a complex 'symbolic site through which to navigate questions of identity and trauma' (Przybylo, 2019:78).

This is an expansion of Lucy Lippard's positioning of the quilt as a 'diary of touch' (Lippard, 1983:32). The quilt has become my own diary of touching the archive: each stitch holding the memory of an affective encounter with the materiality and affective resonances of the lesbian archive. My quilts are an expressive site, outside of traditional archival and academic tools where I can mediate the 'profoundly affective power' of the archives of lesbian life, which has the capacity to hold and acknowledge 'not just knowledge but feeling' (Cvetkovich, 2003:241). The finished quilts 'are *themselves* archival efforts' documenting my own encounters, affects and entanglements with lesbian archives through auto-ethnographic analytics (Hok-Sze Leung, 2013:401).

Quilts are always in reference to the body. These quilts are explicitly in reference to the 'embodied experiences' of being in the archive (Ajamu et al., 2020:593). My body is also 'an impossible, deteriorating archive' that holds the memory of making – from the feel of the cloth under my fingers, the pain down my left shoulder blade that creeps after long periods hunched, the slight bruising in the base of my palms from framing hoops or needles piercing flesh (Singh, 2018b:27). Through the quilt's material and metaphorical entanglement with

the body, it functions as a deeply powerful tool for an unconventional analytics of the embodied archive of lesbian lives.

Figure 67: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Time Binds (1), 2019, Proximity* exhibition at Paradise Works: Manchester, December 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

Figure 68: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Time Binds (2),* 2019, *Proximity* exhibition at Paradise Works: Manchester, December 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Anya Stewart Maggs.

The Institutional Encounter: Institutional Conventions, and Archival Lusts in *Time Binds*

The first encounter in this thesis was with *the institutional* archive, The Vera Holme collection at The Women's Library (LSE): an archive with a capital A. Through this short chapter, I analysed my relationship with the institutional archive. Through an embodied analysis of my movements through the space of the archive I presented new knowledge on the particularities of how the femme body is orientated in the space of institutional archives, and how this lesbian femme bodily orientation affects my experience of accessing archival materials. Through my own motivations and desires I situated the archive as a site for queer longing: a place in which lesbian desires to belong to a collective past can be somehow reconciled through reparative practices of recognition. Even in acknowledging the critiques of *search and rescue* approaches to queer history, the archive remains to me, a somewhat mythical place to search for origins, meaning and continuity (Traub, 2010). It remains a site for touching up against history, and for feeling historical (Nealon, 2001).

The chapter ends with my shift out of the institution, toward the domestic and community archives and entanglements with communities of dykes with whom I was able to connect and collaborate. However, the thread of the institutional archive runs throughout the thesis, its significance demonstrated through the return to the institution in the chapter on *The Archival Loop* (Rebel Dykes). The domestic, the community and the institutional archive are always in relationship to one another as intersecting spatio-political encounters with the objects of histories. The institutional archive both haunts and informs the domestic and community archive. It is both the gold standard in terms of preservation and security, and the cautionary tale in terms of its shortcomings on accessibility, flexibility, and community. For lesbian archives in Britain a relationship with the institutional archive is a necessity as, unlike the USA, there are no dedicated queer or lesbian archives. The physical space of the archive is undeniably a necessity for protecting the precious materialities of the past. It is also an important moment to think about what kinds of institutions have the conceptual space for bringing archival objects into play with the contemporary in order to inform and enrich queer politics, communities and activism. There must be space for archives to be in motion, and opened up to intervention and interpretation. For LAIC this was the women's

only space of Glasgow Women's Library and for the Rebel Dykes this is The Bishopsgate Institute – both of which I return to later in the chapter.

I further explored the institutional archival conventions of collecting, cataloguing, and storing history, which has influenced my quilt making practice through a series of residencies undertaken with the practice-based research collective Proximity (discussed in *Quilting as Methodology*). We created our own proximal spaces through residencies to be together, in critical conversation and convivial relationality to one another. For our residencies I placed the constraint on my practice to only work with, and exhibit objects and materials that I did not usually consider as completed 'artworks' – so to never show a 'finished' quilt in the space of Proximity.

Being a part of the Proximity collective challenged me to think about the boundaries and edges of my practice, and ask deeper questions of my notions of what constitutes a 'finished artwork'. I was able to understand the value of the flotsam of my practice as valuable materials in my own archive, which could offer materials for re-visioning into new compositions with the potential to shed new light and perspective on the archive, and my own practice as an artist. This would not have been possible without the fleeting temporality of the residency space, or without the critical conviviality of my quilting circle of artists: *Proximity*.

I re-visited my fascination with institutional archival mechanisms through my installation *Time Binds* at the Proximity residency and exhibition at Paradise works in 2019. I presented the usually unseen detritus of my practice and personal life curated as an archive. The title is taken from Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities and Queer Histories*, as an acknowledgement of the significance of this text to my project through the ideas, tactile relationships to the past, feeling historical and the very relatable figure of the 'lusting queer archivalist' (Freeman, 2010:19). The installation consisted of a desk with watercolour paintings installed on the wall behind – the ones usually created in my design process but never exhibited as art objects (figures 67&68). On the table was a series of books I had, as well as a collection of DVDs given to me as a gift from Annie Sprinkle, via Janina

Sabaliauskaite (*the domestic* chapter). There were two archival boxes filled with acid free tissue paper containing objects that I had gathered during the research including gifts, flyers, letters, photographs, postcards, badges, some of my own embroidered patches and a packet of Love Heart sweets from a lesbian wedding. There were folders containing images that had previously formed the visual map of lesbian images on my studio wall, as well as records of conversations and emails (figure 3).

In these boxes I offered up an archive of my own bodily entanglements with the archive. In my journey into the 'field' of archives, contextualising the leftovers of my research as 'a spatial, temporal and sensory capsule, which is constantly revisited through notes, transcripts and memory' (Rooke, 2012:30). Beside the box lay a pair of white gloves, inviting the audience to interact with the objects within the formal conventions of archival preservation and institutional protection (figure 67).

It was through *Time Binds* that I began to play with physical binding in my quilting practice by taking unfinished quilter samples and binding them with archival ribbon into tight bundled parcels. This process is a kind of exaggerated form of quilting, the ribbon biting into the stuffed fabric creating an exaggerated relief. These bound forms were my first in a series of re-working through binding that gave me an intellectual tool for thinking through the always-unfinished nature of an artwork, the archive and lesbian identity. This material and theoretical development has informed subsequent work (figures 64-65 & 69-71), and will be influential in the curation of my final exhibition of artworks.

Time Binds, and my wider practice contributes a highly specific British lesbian, femme perspective to a small field of queer art practices, with an interest in the conventions of collecting, critical confabulations and creating archives as artworks. Examples include Cheryl Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman* which includes Fae Richards' imagined archive with photography by Zoe Leonard*;* Allyson Mitchell's drawn books from the Lesbian Herstory Archives; and Tammy Rae Carland's exhibition *An Archive of Feelings* (Dunye and Leonard, 1997; Mitchell, 2010; Rae Carland and Cvetkovich, 2014). All of which are proposed by Ann Cvetkovich as providing queer methods that open up the unusual and intangible objects of

the archive such as pain, joy and sex, and are capable of acknowledging objects that have escaped the archive (lecture Artist curation as queer archival practice EMPAC).

Institutional Entanglements and Site-Specific Interventions: Extending beyond the PhD Thesis

During my final year I undertook two NWCDTP funded partnership placement projects[19] that allowed me to extend and develop these methodologies for femme-lesbian archival interventions further through collaborations with the heritage sector, and the largest LGBTQ repository of materials in the world. Both these projects allowed me to deepen my engagement with the spatiality, emotionality and affects that circulate around the archive and integrate this more deeply into the materiality of my art practice.

During my placement at Plas Newydd Historic House and Gardens, I undertook an artist residency that resulted in the production of the exhibition *Beloved: Crafting Intimacies with the Ladies of Llangollen* (*Appendices 11, 12 & 13*). The site-specific installation was created in direct relationship to the house through a re-designing of the soft furnishings of the two bedrooms and was the first time an artist has exhibited inside the historic house itself. The period of artist residency allowed me to deepen and strengthen my relationship to place, and produce artworks that spoke meaningfully to the complex material and political histories of such an important historic house for lesbian and queer history. Through a sensitive stitched intervention, I was able to challenge the existing and longstanding heritage narrative being delivered at the house that has avoided, minimised and obscured lesbian history – and stitch back in the love, desire and intimacy of three women who lived and loved at the house.

In my second placement, I undertook another artist residency with the ONE Archives at University of Southern California libraries where I created an exhibition in response to the lesbian pulp fiction collection and titled *Looking for Lesbians* (*Appendices 14 & 15*). I began

[19]These projects were funded through the NWCDTP as separate projects funded in addition to the PhD that offer the opportunity to utilise the research undertaken during the PhD and develop skills for working collaboratively with industry partners.

creating work based on two early pulp novels written by women: *Spring Fire* by Vin Packer (1952) and *Odd Girl Out* by Ann Bannon (1957). I became increasingly interested in the lesbian response to these novels, and the scarcity of representation that produced them; in the form of book reviews, bibliographies, finding aids and eventually feminist-lesbian publishing, writing groups and bookshops. I produced two new patchwork artworks that mapped my encounter with the archive, illustrating the always-embodied experience of the archive; consisting of not only materials, but also conversations, fleeting glances, feelings and the forging of new intergenerational connections. This map was created through the production of handmade paper from the recycling waste bin at the archive – literally pulping the unwanted materials of the archive into new objects for navigating the collection. The exhibition space included an interactive, un-institutional re-imagining of the archival reading room by creating an intimate reading nook where visitors might get cosy with the archival materials on display. These kinds of playful interventions and thinking through how we might open up archival spaces through a femme-ethical methodology that prioritises softness, feelings and decorative pleasure is something that I want to continue to build on through future institutional collaborations. Both placements have allowed me to carve out areas for future research, which engages more deeply in site-specific interventions and collaborative as discussed further in *Appendices 13 & 15.*

Figure 69: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge: Archival Folds (detail 1*), 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Rebecca Howard.

Figure 70: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge: Archival Folds (detail 2),* 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Rebecca Howard.

Figure 71: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Honourable Discharge: Archival Folds*, 2019. Photograph: courtesy of Rebecca Howard.

The Domestic Encounter: Archival Folds and the Vastness of the Archive

In the *domestic* chapter I presented my intimate encounter and emotional entanglements with Phyllis Christopher's personal archive of her work. Through auto-ethnographic analysis, the lesbian domestic archive was established as a site where affects, emotion and eroticism circulate explicitly through the interactions with creators and custodians. My conversations with Phyllis opened up the possibility of speaking with the archive, and for the intergenerational encounter to affect and inform the creation of the new quilted artworks. Phyllis had already opened up her home and archive to Janina and Jade for the *On Our Backs: An Archive* exhibition at New Bridge Projects in 2016. My quilted artworks are situated in this lineage of creative re-visioning. The chapter offers a significant contribution to knowledge through the establishment of domestic lesbian archives as a site for intergenerational exchange and transformation; leading to new projects, exhibitions, as well as new connections between lesbians.

The chapter also established the quilt as an explicitly femme methodology through the notion of femme-femmage, through a series of quilts that re-vision Phyllis' photography of femme presenting lesbians. The quilt is already a femme object, associated with the docile domesticities of the feminine realm: a mindless decorative craft rather than an object of intellectual high art. Using the quilt is already a self-conscious act of femmage, as a feminist reclaiming of a previously denigrated craft associated with women.

However, under my femme fingers this reclamation becomes a specifically lesbian act of femme-femmage. My quilts flaunt their femme-inity taking deep pleasure from frippery, adornment and surface embellishment in a deliberate act of 'flaunting outdated feminine norms' that signal my own femme identity (Freeman, 2010:70). My quilted practice rejects understandings of femininity solely as 'an obstacle to subjecthood, as superficial and problematic, as that which makes us vulnerable' (Ahmed, 2009; Dahl, 2012: 61). The quilt takes up the call of femme theorists to reclaim those femme qualities, which have been derided and dismissed within academia, including femininity, vulnerability, emotionality and relationality. These are the qualities that I have brought into my self-consciously femme-ethical methodology for working with the lesbian archive, as well as paying attention to the

pleasures of aesthetic femininities in the space of the quilt. My scholarship is rooted within both feminine coded material pleasures of domestic crafting and emotional vulnerability of the femme within the space of the archive. As a femme I claim the ornamental excesses of fussy craft as a materially resonant strategy for thinking through the affects and emotional excesses of the encounters between the femme body and the lesbian archive.

I extended this use of femmage further, toward the notion of the intergenerational act of artistic femmage, through the acknowledging and re-citing of Phyllis's work and my own, creating a self-conscious lineage between us. The quilt is a labour of feminised love. It is an act of devotion through the hours of sketching, stitching and quilting, imbued with my care for under-acknowledged histories and desire for lesbian images. The femme-quilt refuses 'masculinist norms of subjectivity', instead shifting 'to radically value feminine knowledge' that circulates between generations of lesbians who are supporting and celebrating one another, and recognising the contributions each of us has made to art and culture, even when art history has not (Hoskin, 2019:7).

***Honourable Discharge:* Archival Folds**

In *the domestic* archive I also presented the satin quilt: *Honourable Discharge* that re-visioned Donna Jackson's cover story for *On Our Backs* magazine which acknowledged her erotic butch heroism. The quilt remained unfinished, its enormous scale making it difficult to manoeuvre, let alone bind – speaking martially to the resistance of archives to tidy closures. It sat under the stairs until I wanted to submit it for the Janome Fine Art Textile Award at the Festival of Quilts in 2021. I began to bind the edges with a satin flounce, an enormous task. I then realised the quilt exceeded, by far, the competition size limitations for 'flat work' (a quilt is of course, never really flat). The *Honourable Discharge* quilt had again exceeded its bounds and proved unruly.

I thought back to the sculptural parcels I created from abandoned quilt samples bound in archival ribbon for the *Time Binds* installation and planned to create a sculpture within the restrictions (figures 67&68). This is after all the way queer histories are told – twisting and contorting to our limitations. The archival binding was much more difficult at such a great

scale, partially unrolled on the living room floor, with me and my partner working together to wrestle it into shape. I then heaved into the back of the car to an empty unit in Stretford Mall where photographer and Proximity member Rebecca Howard was currently in residence to photograph it (figures 69-71). Although giving the illusion of lightness in its shimmering surface and fluffy demeanour, it is surprisingly heavy duchess wedding dress satin. Sweating and straining, scared to drop my precious bundle on the floor, afraid of scuffs and stains.

Bound and unfurling, lounging on the floor, portions of the 500x500cm embroidery are visible, others hidden. In the soft folds of the sculptural quilt, are embroideries hidden in the folds, unknowable to the viewer – their absence is signalled by the folded form. The eroticism of the embroidered image is heightened by this act of revealing and concealing, its quilted secrets tucked in folds. The resolute partiality of the bound quilt and its invocation of the tantalising possibility of the unseen and the unfinished speaks materially to the 'always indeterminate' nature of the archive 'consisting of the absent as well as the present' (Reay, 2019:15)**.** Although only I know the unfinished and unbound edges of the quilt are tucked surreptitiously inside the folds creating the veneer of a finished object, but in reality this reflects the partial nature of the archive which holds nothing 'but stories caught half way through: the middle of things; discontinuities' (Steedman, 2001:45). Like the archive that inspired it, the quilt is vast, full of feeling and in its entirety: always, inevitably unknowable.

On the way back to the car I deposited the quilt into a shopping trolley to wheel it back safely to my car. Archival encounters are sometimes more cumbersome and difficult than we imagined, and sometimes quilts are not everything they seem. They can hide things, like unbearable weight and darkness between the surfaces. The bound quilt is an admission of the only ever partial view of the archive, and the impossibility of a static, finished or fully knowable lesbian archive.

Figure 72: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild: Veiled Series. 1, 2 & 3*, 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 73: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild: Veiled Series 2 (detail),* 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 74: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild: Veiled Series. 1 (detail)*, 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 75: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Wet and Wild: Veiled Series 3 (detail)*, 2021, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Community Encounter: The Tyranny of Visibility and the Ethics of Embellishment

The community chapter examined my long-term engagement with the *Lesbian Archive and Information Centre* collection held at Glasgow Women's Library. I deepened the contextual ties of the quilt as the custodian of memory as a method for preserving familial narratives, a conduit for connection across generations and temporalities. The quilt becomes a tool for lesbian lineage, sidestepping understandings of lineage based on flimsy 'biology or genetics' but rather the 'people who, in their lifetimes, fought the battles we are fighting now, struggled towards the same goals' (Payne, 2010:47).

I situated myself within the visual vernacular of lesbian strength and claimed a lineage through the LAIC collection, which was shared through the *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the lesbian archive* exhibition at HOME in 2021 (appendix 4). A contribution to knowledge was made through gathering and re-visioning the symbols, iconographies and images of lesbian-feminist cultures used to symbolise lesbian strength in the LAIC collection. The Amazon is established as a significant symbol of lesbian feminist activism in the 1980s and 1990s, as the symbol used on the cover of LAIC newsletters and reproduced in my quilt Archives and Amazons. The labrys as the tool of the Amazon is also established as a potent symbol for lesbian strength through its repetition in the archive, and the writings of Monique Wittig and Mary Daly as a tool for lesbians to 'cut through the mazes of man-made mystification' – as a transforming action rather than a static symbol (Daly and Caputi, 1987:142). I took up the iconography of the Amazon as a symbol for the ferocious capacities of women, and the possibility of living without men. Often used by lesbian feminist separatists re-visioned from Greek myths, I re-visioned the Amazon again through embroidery as a slippery signifier for contemporary lesbian culture.

Through auto-ethnography I offered new knowledge around the intergenerational affective resonances of the politically fraught histories of the LAIC collection. The quilts were a site for working through melancholia around the lack of dedicated lesbian archive in Britain. It was a mournful return to a highly specific British example of the tendency in lesbian cultures toward turning backward, lamenting the losses of lesbian history and a decidedly queer fascination with 'the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever

has been declared useless' archive (Love, 2007; Freeman, 2010:xiii; Traub, 2010). The needle is situated as my tool for holding onto and working through these complexities of identification and loss: like the labrys it can be a bilateral symbol, a weapon for both piercing and joining, which 'unites the separate edges, and within a single gesture it combines both aspects of the paradox of destruction and creation' (Pajaczkowska, 2010:144).

***Wet and Wild: (Veiled Series):* The Tyranny of Lesbian Visibility**

The chapter also discussed a series of baby quilts that re-visioned Tessa Boffin's Amazonian photographic series *Wet and Wild Women of the Cleaxe Age* from the first edition *Quim* magazine (1989-1994). I proposed the series as a historically significant intersection between lesbian-feminist iconographies and the eroticism and S&M aesthetics of the Rebel Dykes. In the context of LAIC's explicit no 'pornographic or sado-masochistic' materials rule, it was a result of the chaotic history of the archive that I was able to encounter images that represent a point of intersection between the iconographies of the opposing sides of the lesbian sex wars (Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, 1988:1). The series was also another enactment of intergenerational, artistic femmage; which continues to think through 'how our identities as dykes are constructed through historical role models, both in fact *and* fantasy'; like the shaven headed Amazons on Hampstead Heath re-visioned in digital embroidery (Boffin, 1991:49).

Since writing the chapter, the works have changed significantly through community conversations facilitated by the Rebel Dykes network. I was put in contact with one of the editors of *Quim* magazine who generously reached out to the models, who were only identified by first names, to discuss the quilts and their exhibition. One of the models, Jane Campbell (who features heavily in the Rebel Dykes film) was happy to hear about the quilts; however, the other model expressed concerns about her anonymity. Although she gave consent for the quilts to be exhibited, she did not want images of the quilts to be available online.

I turned back to my femme-ethical methodology and my commitment to take care with my quilts as devotional objects that recognise and honour the cultural and political work undertaken by previous generations of lesbians. Re-visioning through creative practice and embroidering has offered a methodology for representing and commemorating lesbian imaginaries without reproducing original images and in many cases maintaining anonymity for photographic images. My quilted art practice means that I am able to discuss, present and work through the images of the lesbian archive without the need to share original images in my thesis or my exhibitions. However, in this case the images cut too close to home, and with the logistical impossibility of exhibiting the quilts without any images being circulated online, it was clear from my commitment to femme-ethics that the embroidered images of the *Wet and Wild* series could never be seen.

This encounter brought into even sharper relief the complex, ethical considerations at play when working with an archive of pre-digital erotic materials produced by a marginalised community. As discussed in *the domestic* chapter in relation to *On Our Backs*, visibility and online accessibility are often blunt tools with which to take care of lesbian archives of intimate, sexual and tender images. In the case of both magazines, they were created for paper-based circulation between lesbian communities – a visual language that those outside of the community are not entitled to. This refusal to be visible, is also a refusal of the privileging of visibility, as the sole lesbian strategy for survival (Castle, 1993). Within the femme-ethical methodology and in a direct disavowal of the dominant narrative in queer archiving projects as 'resisting silences' – and lesbian visibility as the sole tool for lesbian liberation – I set about reworking the quilts outside of the tyranny of lesbian visibility by creating new spaces of silence through stitch (Arondekar in Rao, 2020:20).

The processes of patchworking and quilting lend themselves to the processes of addition and revision. I experimented with methods of concealing, veiling and patching as an act of femme care. The intervention needed to be beautiful, thoughtful and reverential, the materiality of the intervention speaking to the painstakingly delicate approach that must be taken when working with the erotics of the lesbian archive.

I digitally embroidered three lesbian symbols of strength from GWL archive onto painfully thin, translucent voile fabric, the labrys, the yoni and the symbol for Demeter. These were hand-beaded painstakingly over two weeks, stitching day and night until my hands cramped and stabbing pains ran down my back. I experimented with different layerings of fabric, until only the smudged shadow of the original embroideries were visible under the voile. The eventual three layers of voile were then hand stitched over the centre of the quilts, leaving the *Wet and Wild* Amazons veiled and protected under hours of digital stitches, glass beads and glinting sequins. Through this self-consciously femme embellishment, the images were protected by the symbols of lesbian strength and by my own loving attention to the detail, the labour of my fingers wrapping and protecting the images. This patchwork intervention steps beyond simplistic notions of how 'pride and visibility offer antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet' and acknowledges that the quilt can be a place for forgetting as well as remembering, obscuring as well as revealing (Love, 2007:3). Perhaps too, embellishment can offer a form of femme ethics for the lesbian archive.

The veil also functions as a repair, like the first instances of patchwork – piecing over the damage, the repair emphasised through the addition. This reparative act also draws on the histories of stitching as a form of both material and psychological repair, particularly in the work of Louise Bourgeois (Hodge, 2007; Nixon, 2007). Quilting in particular has long been used as a method for emotional repair of individuals and communities (Burt and Atkinson, 2012; Strohmayer, 2021). Through the piercing of the needle through cloth something is at once, pierced and joined together. These qualities make the quilt an affective site for navigating the complexities of the lesbian archive, that both acknowledges histories of damage and 'the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence' (Love, 2007:3). Adopting a patchwork approach – one that is radically and responsively open to re-assembly – has offered me a reparative strategy for the lesbian archive. One that refuses to disassemble and disassociate from the difficulties of lesbian history, but picks up the fragments and re-visions, even if it hurts sometimes.

Once the veiled quilts have been exhibited for the final PhD exhibition, they will be un-veiled and sent to each of the models, as a gift for their domestic archives and an acknowledgment that they never really belonged to me anyway.

Figure 76: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Chain Reactions quilt and with Fisch on opening night,* 2021, *The Rebel Dykes Art and Archive Show,* exhibition at Spacestation65: London, 24th June – 17th September 2021. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 77: *The Reading Room at The Bishopsgate Institute (1)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 78: *The Reading Room at The Bishopsgate Institute (2)*, 2020. Photograph: authors own.

The Final Archival Loop: Rebel Dykes

The final chapter presented the notion of *the archival loop*; an encounter with the archive of the Rebel Dykes project that spanned all the three kinds of lesbian archive I had identified previously in the thesis: *the institutional, the domestic, the community*.

I began with a fortuitous encounter with Fisch, a drag king, organiser and member of the Rebel Dykes project, and followed my subsequent visits to her home. Rather than a passive

viewing or extractive research method, the archival encounter was an intergenerational exchange. Together we formed our own 'dyke archiving tactics' for the collection which included creating a box of personal materials that Fisch didn't want to be part of her public archive, collating an entire folder relating to Pearly the cat and a filing system based on her chronologies of ex-girlfriends. Much of what was shared with me in that intimate space does not belong in a published thesis and within a femme-ethical methodology must remain as knowledge held in our intergenerational relationship. This withholding is a thread that runs across this thesis and far beyond the bounds of this project as my own femme-ethics that I will utilise in future work. With only three partial days for this mammoth task, the process was swift and although I was only able to glance at many of the materials, my desires to know more were lingering unsatisfied with some questions left unanswered. But this entangled encounter offered a much deeper understanding of 'what archives *do* rather than simply what they *have*' and the importance of allowing spaces of silence in the lesbian archive (Rao, 2020:20).

The discussion then shifted to the wider Rebel Dykes project which includes the Rebel Dykes film project, situating it as an activist site; not a static recording of history but an active instigator in creating new cultures through a process of re-visioning the histories of punk dykes in 1980s London.

The intergenerational structure of both the film and curatorial teams enacted active collaboration between the past and the present and generations of dykes. In the exhibition the walls were hung high and heavy with archival materials, and artworks by dykes across the generations nestled up against one another. The exhibition itself functioned as a kind of archive; one that is becoming in the moment, acknowledging that 'we are always already in the process of archiving' (Ajamu et al., 2020:593)**.** The special opening for the artists only was an opportunity for generations to learn from one another, through new threads of connection. The air was thick with feeling, pride and solidarity, the pleasures of recognition and shared community in pure dyke joy.

The Rebel Dykes Project can be understood as an important example of what Juhasz Alexandra calls 'queer archive activism' where the domestic, community and institutional come together making it possible to not just 'visit the past', but to re-animate it in a contemporary context (Alexandra, 2006:320). This shifts the lesbian archival space away from singular narratives of visibility as reparation, and situates the archive as a site for transformative intergenerational intimacies: where we can think things through together. Just as the Rebel Dykes were Rebels with a cause: making their presence known at Pride and Section 28 marches in their leather jackets and chained banners. The Rebel Dykes Project handed out flyers at the exhibition with 'Dykes for Trans Rights' and an invitation to join The Rebel Dykes at Trans Pride the week after. The Rebel Dykes archive is a site for 'transforming desire into transformative action', in the desire of Rebel Dykes to be remembered, the desire of younger lesbians to feel connected to a lineage of dykes and desires for intergenerational intimacies capable of transforming contemporary lesbian art, culture and politics (Page, 2019:39).

The chapter offered a significant contribution to knowledge around the importance of the Rebel Dykes project to lesbian history and contemporary culture in Britain, and a detailed analysis of its status as simultaneously a constellation of personal collections, a community archive and an institutional collection at the Bishopsgate Institute. This detailed auto-ethnographic analysis was only made possible by my artistic involvement as an artist producing new works. Through my quilt making practice I was able to not only observe, but contribute to the project. Within an understanding of the archive 'as a form of note taking', the quilt can offer an affective methodology for 'literally writing oneself into different histories where we have not seen ourselves before' (Ajamu et al., 2020:591). The *Chain Reactions* quilt exhibited in the exhibition was an act of love and devotion, each stitch a powerful meditation on the deeply vulnerable and powerful act of Fisch sharing her intimate archive with me (figure 76). The quilt is my contribution, my 'thank you' to a community that has supported me and raised up my work and it is an attempt at a femme-ethical methodology for working with a lesbian archive that is both resilient and fragile.

I conclude this thesis as the Rebel Dykes project, and my own work is becoming an institutional archive collection. The institutional archive had first worked its way into my archival encounter with the Rebel Dykes through a conversation with Fisch about where her archival materials would go once she was no longer looking after them. We talked through where they might be safe, and where other dykes might be comfortable accessing them. The institutional archive offers a level of security and protection long-term that domestic archives – and often community archives – cannot offer without seeking a permanent building. Such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, or becoming affiliated with a university like The ONE Archives at University Southern California in Los Angeles, where I undertook my placement with the NWCDTP focusing on their lesbian pulp fiction collection.

Fisch's collection, alongside the other collected materials of the Rebel Dykes Project will become a collection within the Bishopsgate Institute, which holds many other LGBT collections including ACT UP London, Museum of Transology and the UK Leather and Fetish Archive (figures 77-78). This is one resolution to the difficult question of how to take care of our lesbian archive materials in Britain, and the possibility that the lesbian archive can simultaneously occupy the sites of the domestic, community and institutional.

These questions about the complex relationships between individuals, communities and institutions prompted me to consider my own project as becoming an archive, and where this archive could be kept. Through my exploration of the conventions of collecting in the *Time Binds* installation, I was already building my own archive of my research and practice. The quilted practice has allowed me to stitch myself into the histories of lesbian cultures in Britain and literally become part of the archives that inspired me. The acquisition of the PhD project archive was discussed with Glasgow Women's Library, but when I was invited to contribute my work to the Bishopsgate Institute as part of the Rebel Dykes collection, I knew that is where I wanted it to be. Nestled in boxes alongside the dykes who have been so generous with their time and memories, and supported and championed my work as an artist. This will be my act of becoming history and leaving traces in the archive for others to find, in perhaps future affective encounters. The archive is after all, always caught half way through – in a state of becoming.

I began this research thinking of the archive as a static repository of historical materials that could inspire and inform my art practice. But now, throughout the project and in my ongoing plans to create my own archival collections, I understand how my own practice can contribute to, and become part of the archive. I am not just feeling historical, but becoming historical. The archive is a site for contribution and intervention, a transformational meeting place, which when made active through intertemporal and intergenerational encounters, might build new kinds of lesbian culture and politics. These quilts are love letters to my lesbian community; they are my armour against trauma and fear; and each one is a flag hung out for war – my promise to keep fighting.

Epilogue

The conclusion began with an acknowledgement of the difficulty of endings and the impossibilities of binding this project to a thesis. So I will finish with one last quilt as my epilogue. The work was made after the completed draft of the thesis, for an exhibition called *Change Everything* at *The Depot* that explored the relationship between protest and art. It is my final thoughts in quilted form on this body of work, which has forever changed me, and my practice as an artist.

However, it represents a crucial example of returning and re-visioning in my practice. It is a return to my encounter with the LAIC collection at Glasgow Women's Library and my encounter with the lesbian feminist Sappho banner (figure 30) which had been used in the Stop the Clause protests. I had wanted to re-vision this banner, so rich with lesbian feminist iconography and imagery for a contemporary moment in lesbian culture, relevant to the issues that currently face the community. I began to make it when working towards the Archives and Amazons exhibition, but something was missing. It was at the opening night of the Rebel Dykes exhibition that I decided how I would re-vision it, seeing the *Dykes for Trans Rights* flyers designed by the Rebel Dykes curator Kat Hudson.

This quilt explicitly draws together the iconographies of LAIC and the lesbian feminists, and the Rebel Dykes who represented two divided sides of the sex wars. I have been fascinated with the iconographies and cultures of both, but have fallen in love with Rebel Dykes. It felt politically necessary to re-vision the symbols of lesbian strength and historical imaginaries through the symbols of Sappho, Lesbos, the labrys, the yoni all surrounded by violets; into explicit contact with the intersections and solidarity with the trans rights movement. Although a visual vernacular of lesbian symbolism has run through this project, this quilt feels like the most explicit act of re-visioning that patchworks together the two fractured sides of the lesbian sex wars.

It is both a banner and a quilt. In turning to the archive, we might find the language to keep fighting for what is important. It is an unambiguous declaration of solidarity with my trans siblings. It is a gesture of love and hope for a lesbian feminist future.

Figure 79: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Dykes for Trans Rights,* 2021, *Change Everything* exhibition at The Depot: Shoreditch, 4th November 2021 – 30th January 2022. Photograph: courtesy of Ray Okudzeto.

Figure 80: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Dykes for Trans Rights (detail 1)*, 2021, *Change Everything* exhibition at The Depot: Shoreditch, 4th November 2021 – 30th January 2022. Photograph: courtesy of Ray Okudzeto.

Figure 81: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Dykes for Trans Rights (detail 2)*, 2021, *Change Everything* exhibition at The Depot: Shoreditch, 4th November 2021 – 30th January 2022. Photograph: courtesy of Ray Okudzeto.

Figure 82: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Dykes for Trans Rights photographed with Sarah-Joy Ford*, 2021, *Change Everything* exhibition at The Depot: Shoreditch, 4th November 2021 – 30th January 2022. Photograph: courtesy of Ray Okudzeto.

Postdoctoral Post-script

My encounter with Tessa Boffin's Wet and Wild series felt like the beginning of something rather than a resolution. As an extension of the works, I am developing a proposal for the Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellowship on lesbian longing. The project would extend my PhD research by utilising my femme-ethical methodology to offer a critical-material analysis of Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's utopian taxonomy *Lesbian People: Materials for a Dictionary,* alongside Tessa Boffin's archive at UCAL. The femme-ethical methodology would shift focus from re-visioning images, to re-appropriating elements of Tessa Boffin's artistic methodology explicitly in my own work, referencing her own creative speculations on a lesbian world. The project would result in a concurrent and relational practice-based study of Wittig and Boffin, exploring the significance of the interplay between text-image-material in lesbian cultural production, and specifically lesbian creative methodologies.

Similarly, I created a series of digitally printed silk scarves titled *Maps to Lesbian Utopia: Lesbos, Lambeth Women's Walk and Lesbian Land* depicting maps to specifically lesbian feminist geographies found in the LAIC collection. I made the decision not to include these works in the thesis as they were silk scarves rather than quilts, and there was not sufficient space in this short thesis to fully engage with the complex politics of lesbian utopias. The work began in this series will contribute to my exploration of Boffin and Wittig's utopian creative practices.

Figure 83: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia: Lesbos*, 2020, digital design created on Ethos. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 84: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia: Lesbian Land*, 2020, digital design created on Ethos. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 85: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia: Lambeth Women's Walk*, 2020, digital design created on Ethos. Photograph: authors own.

Figure 86: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia Series,* 2020, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

Figure 87: Sarah-Joy Ford, *Maps to Lesbian Utopia Series (detail)*, 2020, *Archives and Amazons: a Quilter's guide to the Lesbian Archive* exhibition at HOME: Manchester, 17th May – 11th July 2021. Photograph: courtesy of Elle Brotherhood.

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Appendices

1. Hard Craft Exhibition, Vane Gallery 2019
2. In the Mud (quilt), Commissioned and acquired by the Pitt Rivers Museum in 2020 for the Beyond the Binary Exhibition on display 2021-2022
3. Femmes Guide to the Universe, exhibited at The Quilt Festival 2021
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7. Making in the Pandemic Diary, commissioned by Decorating Dissidence, 2021
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9. Beloved: crafting intimacies with the Ladies of Llangollen Exhibition (Sarah & Eleanor's Bedroom), Plas Newydd Historic House and Gardens, 2022
10. Beloved: crafting intimacies with the Ladies of Llangollen Exhibition (Mary's Bedroom), Plas Newydd Historic House and Gardens, 2022
11. **Reflective Text for NWCDTP Partnership Placement with Plas Newydd Historic House and Gardens, Beloved: Crafting Intimacies with the Ladies of Llangollen**

For my NWCDTP placement I partnered with Plas Newydd Historic House and Gardens in North Wales to undertake an artist residency, where I would produce new artworks for a site-specific installation in the house itself. The exhibition was the first of its kind to take place inside the house, making a queer intervention into the bedrooms of the house through textile practice and quilting.

Plas Newydd was home to Lady Eleanor Butler (1739–1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755–1831), who captured the imagination of Regency society when they eloped from their families in Ireland to begin a life of exquisite retirement together, escaping the confines of their gendered fates of marriage and the convent. After undertaking a tour of Wales they chose to settle on the outskirts of Llangollen, in the small cottage they christened Plas

Newydd in 1780. Here they lived together as life partners, with their maid and friend Mary Caryl who helped them escape from Ireland and create their extraordinary rural domesticity, including caring for a kitchen garden and a myriad of animals, among them a dog called Sapho.

Over the years, they transformed Plas Newydd into a Gothic fantasy of patchworked stained glass windows and elaborately carved oak panels reclaimed from dilapidated churches, and gifted by visitors. This beloved example of a cottage orne, situated within the picturesque landscape of North Wales attracted a stream of visitors including Ann Seward, Caroline Princess of Wales, Dorothy and William Wordsworth and the lesbian industrialist Anne Lister.

The exhibition is the first of its kind to make an intervention into the house through a radical re-designing of the domestic textiles of the home including quilts, cushions and curtains. The techniques used to create the new artworks directly reference Sarah Ponsonby's own creative practice which included sketching, watercolour painting and embroidery. My research included working with the curator to uncover another of Sarah's embroideries in storage with the Denbighshire council, and putting it back on display in the house. I also visited the National Library of Wales, which holds two of Sarah's sketchbooks – used to inspire the embroidery design for the quilt I created on the bed. The collection includes a book of heraldry hand painted in watercolour and gold leaf by Sarah, which inspired me to create a heraldic shield bringing together their two houses of Ponsonby and Butler for the centre of the quilt. Through a combination of handcraft and digital techniques, Sarah's artistic legacy was woven back into the fabric of the house.

The new works are a loving intervention, and embroidered embellishment of this extraordinary tale of women who lived, and loved, differently despite enormous societal restrictions.

One of the highlights of the project was working with Father Lee Taylor who is the vicar of the Llangollen group of churches that includes St Collen's church, where the three Ladies of Llangollen are buried under a three-sided memorial that Sarah and Eleanor built after

Mary's death. Father Lee has been doing amazing work to highlight and celebrate the love stories of the Ladies and welcome LGBTQ people to St Collen's, and Llangollen. I worked with Father Lee to put on an LGBTQ crafting workshop in the St Collen's community hall, where we created mini banners inspired by the Ladies of Llangollen and their importance to LGBTQ history and identity. The workshop had a fantastic turn out, with people from age 8-93 joining in and creating their own textile artworks.

To launch the exhibition, a symposium was held at the historic Hand Hotel where the Ladies and their guests stayed. There were talks from Professor Alison Oram on the relationship between LGBTQ visitors and the house; Dr Freya Gowlrey on the importance of gift giving economies for the ladies; as well as performances from Jane Hoy from Queer Tales from Wales theatre project who brought to life characters from the Ladies' lives including Mary Caryl, Ann Seward and Anne Lister. Jane even produced invitation cards for audience members to attend the private view at the house later in the evening. As part of the day, we also visited St Collen's church for a tour from local archaeologist Sue Evans, who showed us the gravesite as well as the carving inside the church, commissioned by the Sapphic suffragist Mary Gordon – who was beautifully performed by Jane Hoy. To finish the day we had tours of the newly opened exhibition and a chance to discuss and celebrate the new work.

Working on this project has been so meaningful for developing my practice as a researcher and artist. My PhD thesis focused on using quilt making as a methodology for re-visioning lesbian archival collections, where my interest was really focused on the political, emotional and affective qualities of the sites at which we encounter archives. Working with a historic house really allowed me to extend and develop this methodology specifically for working with queer and lesbian narratives in the heritage sector.

The period of residency gave me the opportunity to make artworks that were intimately entangled with the space of the house. It allowed me to make work that was sensitive to the aesthetics of the house, whilst also challenging the heterocentrism present in ways that the story of the house has been told. Through textiles I was able to tenderly examine, pulling at

the threads of the love between two women beloved to one another and centre their intimacy in the house once more.

It was such a profound experience being able to make work in direct relationship to a historic house that has played such an important role in lesbian history. This project has allowed me to expand and extend the work undertaken through the PhD, establishing a methodology for a professional quilting and artistic practice that is deeply site-specific, enmeshed in archival research and extended through community engagement. This new area for practice-based research has challenged and inspired me whilst re-invigorated my practice, and I hope to undertake further work in collaboration with the heritage sector.

12. Looking for Lesbians Exhibition curated by Alexis Bard Johnson, ONE Foundation Gallery, West Hollywood, 2022
13. **Reflective Text for NWCDTP Partnership Placement with ONE Archives at University of Southern California Libraries.**

In summer 2022, I undertook a NWCDTP researcher led placement at the ONE Archives, USC Libraries in Los Angeles, which is the largest collection of LGBTQ archive materials in the world. I worked alongside curator Alexis Bard Johnson to undertake research into the lesbian pulp fiction novels in the collection and produce a new body of artworks resulting in a public exhibition titled: *Looking for Lesbians*.

The project aimed to draw attention to the lesbian pulp fiction collection, which is significantly smaller than the collection of gay male pulps – reflecting the wider trend within the archive of the under representation of lesbians.

Lesbian pulp fiction novels were produced mainly during the 1950s and 60s, cheaply made slim volumes often containing predatory older women, illicit Sapphic sex and necessarily tragic endings. Often written by authors under pseudonyms these books were made to be picked up lightly, and tossed aside after reading. These books were subversive windows into the illicit world of same sex desire, advertised by the now iconic gaudy covers of women in various states of undress. Their clandestine nature communicated through their titles often

including descriptors like secret, strange, odd, desperate, and queer – love between women always taking place under twilight or shadows.

At the heart of the exhibition is a series of artworks that examine the sorority as a site of same sex intimacies and lesbian desire as well as brutal regulation of acceptable femininities. The project was delayed several times due to the pandemic but in those two years of planning, I was able to peruse the catalogue and find my own copies of lesbian pulp novels, including two of the earliest written by women – Vin Packer's 1952 novel, *Spring Fire*, and Ann Bannon's slightly later 1957 novel, *Odd Girl Out* – which set their stories of Sapphic love and loss in a sorority. The quilt, and the tracksuit, act as an imaginary archive for Vin Packer's fictional *Tri Epsilon* sorority, re-imagined as a femme utopia where lesbian desire might flourish. At the heart of the works is a crest, with iconography inspired by a range of lesbian symbols from Anne Lister's funerary hatchment to the labrys of Monique Wittig's Amazons. This kind of imaginative re-working of tragic endings is an extension of a long held lesbian practice of finding pockets of pleasure and community within a paucity of positive cultural representation.

Whilst undertaking the residency at ONE Archives I was really challenged by being separated from the embroidery and quilting machines that usually define my art practice. This prompted me to find new ways of creating work that spoke to my place and specific experience of the archive. Pulp novels were named after the cheap paper processes used to manufacture them, that signalled their status as disposable. This material ephemerality inspired me to create new artworks from literal waste of the archive, through the processes of pulping and hand making paper. The handmade paper then became a visual catalogue of the lesbian pulp collection at ONE, each book additionally categorised according to Barbara Grier's rating system used in her three editions of *Lesbians in Literature: a Bibliography.* Made from the unwanted materials of the archive, embossed with plants from the curator's garden and line dried in the hot L.A. sun, these artworks are deeply embedded in place.

One of the highlights of the project was challenging and extending my existing methodologies for working with archives developed during my PhD research. Throughout my PhD I have been thinking about archives, not just what is in them but the sensations,

feelings, affects and encounters also part of the archive. This placement gave me the opportunity to create artworks deeply informed by a period of artist residency in the ONE Archives, not only by the materials held in the archive but by the experience, emotions and affects that circulate around an encounter with the archive. This included making a large scale wall drawing that mapped my encounter with the archive, and the communities who built the collections that were exhibited above the display of archive materials tracing lesbian literary cultures in Los Angeles. It highlights some of the significant collections held at ONE Archives including Clothespin Fever Press (1985-1986), which was a lesbian feminist publishing company run by Carolyn Weathers and the artist Jenny Wren. Jenny additionally published *Lesbian Line* newspaper, which acted as a catalogue for Clothespin Fever Press and as a national newsletter and finding aid for lesbian publishing across the USA. This shifted my usually unseen research process of thinking through archival materials, as well as the relationships and encounters that inform my work, and making them visible to audiences.

Although the exhibition was at The ONE Gallery in West Hollywood, we brought the archive into the space through a series of photographs created in collaboration with the photographer Phoenix Neri. I am wearing the *Tri Epsilon* tracksuit inside the stacks of the archive, reading the pulp novels that inspired the exhibition. These images blurred the lines of the real and imagined archive and made playful reference to the buildings' previous use as a USC fraternity house. Situated in the window of the gallery along a busy street in West Hollywood the artworks shifted the archive into public view, encouraging unexpecting audiences to visit the exhibition, and perhaps have their own encounter with the archive.

Undertaking a project about pulp novels and lesbian literature called for long periods of reading. Although the archive is a safe home for books, it lacks the domestic intimacy that invites long drawn out afternoons of reading. So, within the exhibition I created *Bookworms Burrow*, with wallpaper, stools, a giant floor cushion and a selection of books and copies of archival materials. The reading nook is a little heterotopia, a soft reimagining of the One Archive, in which audiences were invited to sit amongst the artworks, read, talk and enjoy an intimate encounter with the archive. This felt like an important shift in my practice-based research, toward increasingly collaborative and site-specific methods. This was made

possible through the period of residency within the archive and the full support of the curator and staff at the ONE Archives. I hope to undertake further collaborative projects with archives, to help them, through creative practice to highlight under-researched collections and encourage more people, particularly outside of academia, to access and engage with archives.

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