
University–Community Digitization Partnerships: Accessing Trans Collections in LGBT Community Archives

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This paper explores university and community partnerships to preserve and provide online access to LGBTQ cultural heritage materials, focusing in particular on projects that improve the accessibility and profile of transgender materials in traditional gay and lesbian organizations. The paper reflects on the promises and challenges of pursuing trans-positive, activist digital humanities projects within the context of a historically cis gay and lesbian analogue archive. How have anxieties surrounding digital transformations in the archive become enmeshed in concerns about changing understandings of sexual and gender embodiment within the LGBTQ community? How has the queer archive's shift to the digital engendered not only "privacy anxieties" (Chenier 2015) but also identity anxieties, as a new generation of non-binary and trans volunteers, scholars, and activists reshape the meanings of "LGBTQ" within the community archive?

The paper reports on the first three years of the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory (<http://lgbtqdigitalcollaboratory.org/>), a five-year SSHRC-funded project directed by Elspeth Brown at the University of Toronto. The Collaboratory works in partnership with the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (<http://clga.ca/>), a volunteer-run, community archives, to design and implement in-house digitization programs. This project has invested significant labour and technology into the acquisition and digitization of transgender materials under-represented in the CLGA's collection, and in

historically "Gay and Lesbian" community archives more broadly (Rawson 2009; Morris and Rawson, 2013).

This paper will outline the technical and political concerns behind two Collaboratory/CLGA partnership projects aimed at improving access to trans materials: 1) The development of an audio digitization station for oral history cassette tapes; and 2) the processing and digitization of transsexual artist and activist Mirha-Soleil Ross' personal papers. We argue that the planning and implementation of digitization initiatives is a significant catalyst for broader, mandate-driven shifts within LGBTQ cultural heritage organizations. We argue that this is particularly the case when these partnerships drawn on humanities-based approaches that understand the archive as a worlding technology (Stoler 2010, Eichhorn 2013) caught up within broader conflicts that challenge and divide LGBT spaces. More specifically, the paper outlines how university partners can support the development of digital infrastructures in community-based, volunteer-engaged contexts. We suggest that this labour can be understood as part of a broader politics of digitization that must be approached with care when forming community partnerships. We understand digitization as a wide-ranging process that transcends the conversion of "analog" materials into digital formats: digitization has the potential to shift economies of attention in social movement organizations undergoing transition (McKinney 2015).

Theoretically, the paper engages with queer, trans, and feminist approaches to digital archives (Chenier 2009; McLeod et al, 2014; Matte 2015). In particular, we draw on scholarship that has considered how trans materials have the potential to confound, challenge, and ultimately re-formulate archival systems (Brown 2015; Roberto 2011). Here, digital spaces and technologies provide historical "worldmaking" opportunities often denied to trans histories within "LGBT" spaces (Rawson 2014). Emphasizing the relationship between "trans" and movement (Stryker, Currah, Moore 2008), we consider the moments where digitization meets trans as potentially productive but also acrimonious challenges for LGBT archives primarily concerned, in practice, with GayandLesbian (Noble 2006) cultural memory.

The paper covers two case studies from the Collaboratory/CLGA project, and will explain the technical questions and organizational concerns behind the design and roll-out of both projects in order to support the argument outlined above.

Audio Digitization Station

Begun in year one (2014), this station sought to develop a technologically accessible digitization solution for audio-cassette tapes, most of which contain oral histories produced in the 1980s and 90s. We will outline the accessibility concerns at the heart of this project, including how the audio digitization protocol the project established sought to build organizational comfort with digitization practices by integrating the system with existing database infrastructures and ways of organizing volunteer labour at the archives. This part of the paper will also address how the Collaboratory identified trans audio collections within the archives, and will touch on some of the challenges in locating these materials. This material will be useful for humanities scholars in sexuality and gender studies who are concerned about creating digital preservation plans for audio-based primary source materials they might collect or create.

Mirha-Soleil Ross Papers

Begun in year three (2016), this project is working to process, digitize, and improve access to the personal papers of Mirha-Soleil Ross, one of the most significant figures in transgender activism and cultural production in Canada. Donated to the archives in 2008, this large collection had not yet been processed by archives volunteers and as result, was mostly inaccessible to researchers. We are working in collaboration with Ms. Ross, and several members of the trans community, to organize these materials, determine access restrictions for sensitive content, create an online finding aid, and an online digital collection using the Omeka platform, which will sample from the larger volume of material. This part of the paper asks how digitization might provide an opportunity to repair damaged relationships between LGBT organizations and trans communities. It also considers some of the unique privacy concerns scholars must consider when providing online access to materials that document trans lives.

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