

## **Critical Engagements With 2SLGBTQ+ Archives**

**Tuesday, October 19th, 2021, 6:30pm – 8:30pm EST, via Zoom  
Roundtable Transcript**

<https://buildingthearchive.hamont.org>

**Featuring: Syrus Marcus Ware, Pamela Matharu, Sheri Osden  
Nault, and Rebecka Taves Sheffield**

AMBER DEAN: Hello, everyone! Welcome! Thank you so much for joining us tonight. We are so delighted to have such a wonderful audience for this conversation.

I don't know about all of you, but as the pandemic winds on, it can be harder and harder to find the energy for Zoom, but we're going to have such a lively discussion tonight that I think, um, by the end you'll agree with me it was all well worth being here. My name is Amber Dean, I'm an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster and I'm really delighted to be co-hosting this week's Taylor Conference Events tonight and Thursday night on building the Hamilton 2SLGBTQ+ Community Archive with my longtime friend and co-conspirator Cole Gately, who we'll hear from in a minute. Um, among his many other hats, which you'll hear a lot more about if you're able to tune back in with us on Thursday night, Cole's also one of two community stewards of the Michael Johnstone 2S LGBTQ+ Community Archive that's forming at Hamilton Public Library along with Bill MacKinnon. And before we turn to our panelists, we're going to say a little bit more about that archive, but just a couple of housekeeping things as well for you, our participants, we have, um, a number

of wonderful chat monitors, I'll thank them all at the end of the night, um, and they have already started making posts in the chats and reminding people of our community participation guidelines, and they will be able to respond to questions, um, or comments in the chat. You can, um, message them by using the option to 'message host and panelists', or you can send messages to everyone using the chat feature. We do have, uh, CART live captioning available tonight, thanks very much from the wonderful people at the Canadian Hearing Services, and so if you would benefit from watching captions you can just, um, if you're on a computer hit the 'live transcript' button on your menu bar and that will start captions for you if you're on a mobile device. I think you're probably already seeing the captions happening and if you have any difficulties with that just send us a message in the chat and we will try and fix it. Um, and finally, uh, if you have questions for any of our panelists tonight, please just hit the 'Q and A' button in your menu at the bottom of your screen and put your question in, that way and that will help Cole and I work through the questions as they are received. We realize that our audience is joining us from all over tonight we were just talking about how grateful we are for the real wide interest in tonight's panel, but it's important for us to acknowledge that our work here in Hamilton, Ontario happens on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas, and on lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Agreement. Our shared work building this archive needs to deepen this acknowledgement, which in our view commits us to decolonizing struggles. We're also committed to anti-racism

and anti-oppression as core values for building the Hamilton 2SLGBTQ+ Community Archive because we are keenly aware, having done this work for a while, that mainstream queer spaces are not always centering the work of challenging racism, colonialism, imperialism, ableism, sexism, biphobia, and transphobia, among other forms of oppression. In this moment that we're in right now, where some places in Canada are trying to diminish the power of land acknowledgements by removing reference to the fact that Indigenous land is stolen and in many places unseated, you might have seen that in the news this week, kind of shocking but yet not shocking because of the way that these acknowledgments have started to slip off the tongue too easily in political and corporate spheres and so on, but because that's the moment we're in, it's urgent for us not just to acknowledge the land we're on but to actively work together to challenge ongoing set for colonialism and land theft. And of course we're here tonight to talk about archives, and archives are colonial institutions, so we begin this work together by asking whether and how an archive could be decolonized.

So it was about two years ago that Cole and I started talking about queer and trans histories and how they get passed on. Partly this was prompted by the death of Michael Johnstone and his donation of a very large collection of materials that he had, uh, unofficially archived, um over what? About 25 years I think? Um, of predominantly gay and lesbian history in Hamilton. While Cole and I recognized the importance of archiving these histories, we recognized a lot of

our history actually doesn't get passed on at all and so archives can be an important tool in that passing on process. We also were tuned into the ways that gay and lesbian archiving has been a site of struggle. There's been a lot of pushback over the years for a tendency to archive histories and materials relevant to predominantly white gay men and to a lesser extent white lesbian lives and for a lack of representation of the lives of more marginalized members of our communities including BIPOC, Black, Indigenous and people of colour community members, trans and gender non-conforming non-binary community members, members who identify as mad or disabled, or those more recently added to the longer versions of the LGBTQ+ acronym. So at this founding moment for the Hamilton Two-Spirit LGBTQ+ Community Archive, we wanted to ask what can be learned from the histories of lesbian and gay archiving and also from the critical engagements, the activist work, the counter archives that have been generated by those whose lives have not been sexually centrally represented in these histories. Tonight and Thursday night, it's our plan to start some very initial critical conversations in response to this question and we want to emphasize that we're really just at a starting point here, Uh, the archive that Hamilton Public Library has not even opened, uh yet, um, and is still in the process of forming its acquisition policy and all those details. So this is a conversation that we think will keep coming up over several years and we kept delaying this event for so long because we really wanted to have it in person. Uh, we really wanted to join people together and be able to feed you, and have a day-long workshop, but um, you know the pandemic kept going and the

fourth wave seemed on the upswing, and at some point we just had to call it and put ourselves on Zoom but our plan is to have an in-person workshop at Hamilton Public Library hopefully next June. Uh, so I'm going to, uh, turn things over to Cole for a minute just to say a little bit about Michael Johnstone and the donation that he's made to Hamilton Public Library.

COLE GATELY: Thank you so much Amber, uh, I'm very, very, I feel very privileged to be here and I'm very excited to be you know uh you know helping to you know bring forward the history that has happened over the or the course of the last 40 or so years. He actually, Michael Johnstone, has been collecting um you know everything newspaper articles, meetings minutes, uh t-shirts uh, posters from the early 1970s, so that's about 40 years or even 50 years. So Michael was very very you know he was quite inimical to uh, the queer community in Hamilton, and he was there at the very beginning of - not queer people in Hamilton, but the recognition of queer people in Hamilton, um, and uh, there are people here tonight or and people here who are going to be here on Thursday night, who are, who were also members of that community who were really the pioneers of queerness and queer, eh, you know, presence in Hamilton. So Michael, uh, was a United Church, uh, member, he was also a member - he was very very proud of when he died in 2018 he died with his kefiyyeh on, he was a a a very big supporter of uh Palestinian human rights as well, so he was, uh, he's been to Palestine as well. So he's a person who um was very very interested in history, he collected our history, he was involved in HUGS, Hamilton United Gay Societies, he was involved in the

Homophile Society of McMaster, which was you know back in the 70s and um he started cataloging the archives around you know the mid 70s and you know, true enough as Amber said, he had uh, we were, we were friends for many years, you know, since I came out but also in the, in the later years of his life we were actually hanging out quite regularly and he decided that he wanted to donate his uh collection to Hamilton Public Library. So we're very very pleased to have that he had about 30 to 35 boxes of uh you know clips you know of you know newspaper clippings and meetings minutes and posters and all sorts of other things. So they are now held by the Hamilton Public Library. Um, he - and it's called the Michael Johnstone uh, LGBTQIA+ Archives et cetera, so we're just very very pleased to be able to talk about queer history in general and also queer history in Hamilton because we have a long history and um I think it's very important to find out how we, where we came from and how we got here to where we are, and also in the general, in the larger, um, idea of um queer history that has often been erased in Canada and, uh, North America. So this is a very very exciting issue and I'm so glad that we're here. Thank you.

AMBER DEAN: Thanks, Cole. Our partners at uh Hamilton Public Library uh have have sent in just some really brief videos to tell you a little bit about um, the collection and their excitement. So we're just going to play those, they're, they're very short, and then we are going to introduce our panelists for tonight.

PAUL TAKALA: I'm Paul Takala, the Chief Librarian of the Hamilton Public Library. On behalf of the library I want to thank you for the opportunity for us to partner on these important roundtable events. We want to ensure that all of Hamilton Public Library locations and spaces are safe welcoming spaces where people can come together be respected and learn from each other. We're very pleased to host the Michael Johnstone Archive. This archive will preserve the documents that Michael carefully and meticulously collected over many many years to ensure that that history is preserved, remembered, and learned from. We look forward to working together, to listening more, and learning about each other. Thank you.

KAREN MILLIGAN: Hi, my name is Karen Milligan and I'm the Manager of Local History and Archives with the Hamilton Public Library. Hamilton Public Library's Local History and Archives preserves and shares stories of the people and activities that make up this great city. We are working to be inclusive and diverse when preserving these voices. The Michael Johnstone Archive was donated in 2018. Since then we've worked with Michael's family and friends and the greater 2SLGBTQ+ community to launch the archive. We're now working on cataloging and digitizing key pieces. We're also proud to work with McMaster University to talk, learn, and share ideas and actions, how to ensure every voice in this community is heard and preserved for future research and understanding.

Thank you for coming together to have these critical conversations. I look forward to working with you to build and sustain this important archive.

AMBER DEAN: Great. So um, that's a little bit about the Hamilton uh 2SLGBTQ+ Community Archive and we will be talking more about it and its development on Thursday night as well. Um, Lyla has already asked a great question in the chat. Hi Lyla. Um, in the Q and A box about um if people can currently requite things to the archive or start making donations and so the answer, the short answer, is not yet. Um because local history and archives has actually been closed for most of the duration of the pandemic and they have not yet reopened, they're reopening in January and so they are just finishing um working out how they're going to accept more donations. But they will be, and part of what we want to start talking about uh tonight and Thursday night and then in our June workshop is is how do we make that as um as diverse a collection and a collection that kind of lives outside the library as well as in the files as possible. So, so that's where we're headed. Um, and now I'm happy to ask Linzey Corridon, one of the co-organizers of tonight's event and a poet, teacher, activist and PhD student studying queer Caribbean literature at McMaster to introduce tonight's panelists. Thanks Linzey.

LINZEY CORRIDON: Thank you Amber, and thank you to Cole as well and everyone else who's been involved in this project so far, like, as someone who's new to the city, recently new, and a queer man like it's very important that I learned to find my way



by myself but also in community with the people who have been doing that work before me so this is one of those pieces in which I get to do that in which other people like me get to do that so, thank you again. Now to briefly introduce our four panelists, our first panelist this this evening is Syrus Marcus Ware, who is a Vanier scholar, a visual artist, activist, curator and educator. Syrus is an assistant professor at the School of the Arts at McMaster University. He uses drawing, installation, and performance to explore social justice frameworks and Black activist culture. Syrus is a core team member of Black Lives Matter Toronto and a member of the Marvellous Grounds Collective, a book and web-based project that seeks to document and create space to vision the ways that QTBIPOC create communities, innovate projects, and foster connections with Toronto and the Tree Fire Territories and beyond. Our second panelist is Pamila Matharu who is a settler of northwest Punjabi Indian descent born in Birmingham, England, and based in Toronto. A graduate of the Visual Arts and Fine arts Specialism Education programs at York University, she works primarily in visual arts, alternative education and cultural production. A recipient of the Toronto, Ontario and Canada Arts Council's Creations and Production Grants, she has screened and exhibited her work locally, regionally and nationally. Her art practice is often focused on archives beginning with the basic premise that archives are manifested in living bodies and repeated stories and unfinished conversations sparked by the events of the past that persist into the present and importantly in the healing practices of connectivity. Panelist number three is Sheri Ozden Nault, who is a Michif, Nehiyaw, and mixed-

European visual artist, community activist and educator. Work across mediums including sculpture feed work basket weaving traditional tattooing performance and video. Their practice is shaped by tactile ways of learning and sharing knowledges while grounded inheritance-like experiences and a commitment to social and ecological justice. Finally we have Rebecka Taves Sheffield joining us who is an information professional, archivist and recovering academic based in Hamilton, Ontario. She researches and advises on queer history, digital policy, record keeping and archives. Rebecca is the author of Documented Rebellions of four lesbians and gay archives and queer times with Litwin in 2020, and she was also part of the award-winning editorial team that produced Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer by Coach House Books in 2017. So that's it, that's our four panelists for this afternoon and I hope the audience enjoys.

AMBER DEAN: Thanks so much Linzey. I appreciate those introductions and uh we have a bit more information about all of our panelists as well as the bios that you just heard on our website um and you can link out to their websites for those who have them from there as well.

So Cole and I have some questions to start things off tonight and then we encourage you as questions occur to you to pop them into the Q and A button or post them in the chat, um, and if we don't get to everyone's questions tonight we promise that we will save them and return to them either through our website on social media or during that in-person workshop in June uh but we'll do our best to get to people's questions.

Um, so our panelists are welcome to turn on cameras if you haven't yet done that and I think Cole, you've got the first question right?

COLE GATELY: Yeah I do, I just wanted to uh there is one question in the chat which I just want to ask: when is the archive going to be available to the public? And you know we don't quite know when that's going to happen but Amber do you have any -

AMBER DEAN: Well they hope by June um if we are able to do an in-person workshop there by June, then we hope that we'll actually be working with what's in the collection currently and that they'll be accepting more donations by then or before that. But yeah that it's, a it's all a bit pandemic-dependent.

COLE GATELY: Yeah absolutely. Okay thank you, so what I want to ask is - I don't have anyone particular to ask this, of this - so what was your first encounter with an archive and how did that impact you? So speaking to the panelists and you know why archiving? And how did that impact you and why did you want to get involved in this?

REBECKA SHEFFIELD: Who wants to start?

AMBER DEAN: Yeah we should, we should throw it out because that's what it's worth -

COLE GATELY: You got that, you're the one who unmuted first so go ahead.

REBECKA SHEFFIELD: Alright, um well um I think my first encounter with an archival record was was kind of a big encounter. It was actually as a child, I got to see the Magna Carta on display at the Diefenbaker Centre in Saskatoon and I, I remember that and I remember what it was like: the protocols, the specialization, the people with white gloves the, the lights were off until you entered the room and it was quite this magical experience but also very formal. So I think my real first experience with archives was actually deciding to go volunteer at what was the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, is now the ArQuives with the q, and it was with a friend and we we met, uh, with one of the older volunteers there and sat down and talked to him and I remember walking through the space and thinking like I've arrived somewhere really important and the tactile or the kinetic feeling of being in that space is something that that well Joan Nestle would call it being seduced by the archives, and so I think I've been seduced ever since so that's my first experience and it happened to be a very queer one.

SHERI OSDEN NAULT: I, um, I find I wasn't really sure like what I was going to talk about and then it kind of thank you for talking first because it gave me like a second to let things coalesce and really think about it and um there's so many different I guess ways archives can come up like outside of maybe the formal institutional version and you know like I saw a sort of tomb of a

book that had my family tree in it recorded by a cousin of my father um and you know museums with sort of settler artifacts and then I think of in particular talking with my father about getting my Métis status when I was a teen and this sort of file folder out of which come the different documents he handed in: a family tree and uh really horribly um like gradated sort of um pixelated you could tell it was done a long time ago photocopy of our family's script um and I feel like those documents were sort of my first connection to a more formal archive because the scrip is in this archived document that really ties to my family history and that I was seeking so that I could find some more of my own connection.

SYRUS MARCUS WARE: In in my community um you know sort of working within Black queer and trans communities here in Tkaronto, I've been so drawn to this idea of counter -archiving. So this idea that we archive in every gesture, we archive in every story that's retold on the corner, we counter archive through um shared memories every time we gather. So my first exposure into that kind of community-based counter-archiving would have been as a child just being in community and people telling and retelling stories about - you know I was born in the 70s and they were telling stories about maybe 10 years earlier and what had gone on and what had happened and um then growing up in this Black queer community you know being able to hear about um the White House that happened in the in which was this queer house in the 1970s here in Tkaronto, we're hearing about you know AYA Men and Zami and these Black queer groups that would go en masse to uh white queer

clubs that wouldn't let Black people come in or were were making problems for Black people, this is in the 80s, in the 90s, uh and they would go en masse and take up space in these environments.

So hearing these stories told and retold are a big part of it. But in terms of like uh, so counter archiving is what I'm most passionate about and that's what has really um I guess that's always been my understanding of an archive is the counter-archive, but I will say that I'm from Memphis, Tennessee, and there is a store - so speaking of archives not always being formal spaces - there's a store on the main Black street, uh Beale Street, that is called A. Schwab's and it sells like uh it's like an everything store it sells clothes and brick like magnets and glasses and all sorts of everything but what they have is they have a forever display of what the store was set up like in the pre-civil rights era on the second floor with separate water fountains and with separate with all these sort of separate um resources and they keep that out uh as a display in this in this otherwise just sort of everything store and so it's placement outside of an archive, it's placement in a public space, its placement in this commercial space, is fascinating and as a kid we would always go there and it was a conversation starter for sure, my dad allowed you know helped him to talk to us about what his experience had been, but anyways that's the first one that sort of stands out as more of a formal archive, but again not the white gloves in the closed air-conditioned room but more in a hot sweaty store in the South.

COLE GATELY: Excellent, Syrus, I just want to ask so there was a question in the chat about uh please they've never heard the the word, I think 'Tkaronto' before, so just wondering if you can help spell Tkaronto and and learn and and help people learn about this um

SYRUS MARCUS WARE: Yeah I'm just going to um type in the chat the spelling yeah and um

PAMILA MATHARU: The person just said not not Tkaronto, the organizations, you mentioned Zami?

SYRUS MARCUS WARE: I did, I mentioned Zami, AYA Men, A-Y-A, or AYA, which it eventually uh was called, I mentioned the White House which was the queer house um in Scarborough that was here in this place um and these are early Black queer groups you know these are groups that were doing uh organizing on the ground that led to the building of things like the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention and Blockarama and all of these amazing spaces grew out of this early queer and trans organizing so I always love a chance - and this is it, when we call names, when we repeat the names of these groups that have gone before, we're counter-archiving, we're remembering we're we're saying this is inherently valuable. So zaya, Zami, Aya Men, World Majority Lesbians these are all groups that have come and have gone and have laid such great groundwork

COLE GATELY: You think you could put some of that stuff in the chat?

SYRUS MARCUS WARE: I will, I will.

COLE GATELY: Etc, yeah yeah yeah.

AMBER DEAN: Yeah, some people have and um we are building a list of um links to resources on our website too and one of those links will be to Marvellous Grounds, the project that Syrus is involved in um queer of color counter-archiving in Toronto, which which has uh the book the fantastic book has has lots of information about some of these organizations and groups and and stories. Great. Um Pamila, we should give you a chance to answer that question about your first encounter with an archive though before we move on.

PAMILA MATHARU: Yeah I, I would say like hi everyone uh I wanna also just uh shout out to Katrina Selinger who um asked me to participate on this panel and uh thank you very much for uh offering the space to share um some of my narrative and stories. I'm based here in Tkaranto as well, Treaty 13 lands, um and I uh I'm just jumping right into um the question. I just posted a link uh to the Alkazi uh collection of photography and um that was my first official kind of uh experience of - not kind of- first official experience of archiving, I was uh I basically got a job at Alkazi Collection of Photography uh prior to 9/11, and it's important to note that 9/11 happened in New York of course and and I was living there um on two occasions: summer of '99 and then win- uh late winter fall of um late fall winter of 2000-2001 and ilwas on hiatus from working, this is my life before



public school teaching and uh more or less artist-led teaching in the arts, but I was working at NFB with a director named Nisha Pahuja who made a fantastic film called Bollywood Bound and she was mentored by Ali Kazmi as well, and Ali is probably a very prominent um South Asian Canadian filmmaker and uh documentarian who looks at archive work so I've been following and watching kind of learning through just honestly just uh you know um zone of proximal distance and um which is you know a strategy that a lot of BIPOC uh communities use, right? Like we don't necessarily go to school for a lot of our arts-led things and um I when I was at Alkazi I was actually um basically an imaging person and I would document um 19th century albums uh that were shot by the British empire. So wherever the British went they sent photographers with them it was you know obviously it was the birth of photography and Mr. Alkazi, he's now passed on, but Ibrahim Alkazi was one of the first people to uh collect more or less all of the um not all, but majority of albums from Asia, Burma, India, Pakistan, like you know wherever the British left their imprint and and documented he would find these um go to auctions around the world practically and uh send um his associates to purchase them. And then uh created a wonderful archive in New York City and that's where I was working as well as a commercial gallery so I didn't work on the commercial gallery side but um I worked in the archive and I got to work directly with Lala Deen Dayal albums and you name it, Bourne & Shepherd, and I and I ended up recently kind of uh alluding back to that history that history for me because it was also like translating a desire of collecting. Uh as an artist I've spent uh again like I'm going back

into my of the field of contemporary art but I've spent uh you know a good 12 years on five different non-profit art uh arts organization boards, I have labored quite a bit in the arts and when I decided to work with archived material, it wasn't actually something that I always did but I ended up doing because I just started to connect the dots that oh I actually do have this historical knowledge of working with albums and um archiving but then also as a form of cultural resistance. For me, much like what Syrus was saying around counter-archiving, it's a form of cultural resistance because we are not in official archives right? So um I'm going to probably um expand on that in the other questions but for now, uh Alkazi was yeah pretty much the start of my archiving experience in a totally unofficial and unlearned capacity I actually just learned by doing and um yeah and then I'll continue onwards, and of course collecting coins and stamps as a child like you know those things matter.

AMBER DEAN: Yeah

They shape our feelings I think about (Pamila: Totally!) archives, yeah definitely yeah um and uh kids don't do that as much anymore, I'm gonna get us off track, but I I used to have those kinds of collections too, my kids have have no interest in something like well that wouldn't be something - I mean Pokemon cards maybe um but that actually uh what you were saying there at the end, Pamila, kind of segues into our next question which is about whose memories and lives and histories have not been well reflected in gay and lesbian archives in your experience and I know that

this is something that all of our panelists have spent some time thinking about and so if you want to just speak to that question about when you um when and where you've encountered these caption erasures in gay and lesbian archives and then could a newly forming archive try to account for those kinds of gaps and erasures from the outset or can an archive actually do that and that is for us an open question we're not convinced either way so we're we're really eager to hear your thoughts about it.

PAMILA: Do you want me to start or?

AMBER: If you'd like yeah give it a thumbs up, Rebecka's given a nod so I think people would like that.

PAMILA: Very enlisting Syrus. Um I think like again uh this is something that is uh very, it's the elephant in the room, we're all aware that we are not in official archives because you know at the end of the day human rights is what? Like 50 over 50 years old and in terms of queer and trans rights like you know it's still quite young for us, so we weren't even accepted as people for a very long time by the status quo, right? So that's that's fairly new, right? So of course capitalism has to jump in there and put the uh same-sex couples in the Bell advertising or Rogers ads or whatever so they they jump on it quick quicker than society's minds changing right and of course we can definitely throw down a wonderful Pride party. But what the general public tends to forget is that Pride in itself is uh was and still is for many of us

um a radical act, right? Uh it was a form of resistance and this this uh feeling and this kind of uh mis-education of cultural resistance is something that's alive and well in BIPOC communities in the queer uh trans world you know and we see this because there's still a lot of nations around the world who uh do not accept queer trans lives in their own um countries and in terms of the law and whatnot and you know their fight - folks are fighting for their lives out there. Their livelihoods out there, right? So they are hidden. So I think um in terms of and I just want to kind of frame that in a big picture because you know this is a charmed life what we're doing right now they're people who are like trying to just survive period and we see this because you know when you have the odd uh a-hole who's like well why can't all lives matter well no black lives matter you know Indigenous lives matter or you know hashtag land back, and folks have a total like lack of understanding they don't want to do the work, right? So this is why our archiving is going to be a legacy project, right? From Indigenous, Black and racialized queer trans communities and I think um uh just reflecting on the fact that when I was asked to come to the ArQuives with the 'q' archives uh in Toronto and to look at the South Asian material there was very little material there. I was shocked, I was like oh my gosh you've done an absolutely bad job but what I also realized is that uh you know something that Adrienne Marie Brown talks about as moving moving at the pace of trust there is no trust within the members, the margins and the the main community, right? Or I don't even want to frame it with marginality and and whatnot but the point being is that if we just obliterate the center then and make it into a

level playing field it's it's it's basically growing pains for a lot of us right in terms of like all of all of the panelists today we have all this very important materiality that we do not want to part with because there's a lack of trust with the official archive, with capital 'A' archive. That's why I would also uh stand with Syrus around counter archiving, that is what we do best and that is in some ways how mainstream archives cannot mimic what we do, right? They as we are all aware in the queer trans communities that you know uh mainstream anything, whether you go from a commercial angle or an academic angle they try to replicate queerness in a lot and queering quite often and it just fails because it's like but you're missing the queer folks, the queer trans folks, right? When you're not including us well of course you're gonna have boring material or boring projects and uh Syrus you're smiling, but you know what I'm saying, right? Is that give us space, right? Give us access. Right? I'm just going to go straight to the you know I'm going to go straight for the jugular is that you know it's like that's why we are talking about and bought I am going to continuously talk about embodied archives you know much like what Syrus's work is, I'm sorry sorry I'm just uh keep alluding to your work but it's very similar and we're not that far off in age so when when Syrus talks about Zami, I come from i'm a member of a racialized community that has been in close proximity with Black queer trans uh thinkers and activists right? So Sharona Hall was someone that was very active in my life, you know, Sister Vision Press and Stephanie Martin and and um and Makita Silvera I worked as an intern and then I got into my first my first job in the arts was at Sister Vision Press, it wasn't in the

visual arts sector, but that's where I started to understand the impact uh around uh being um a producer of queer cultural production right the mainstream's never ever gonna emulate it to the way we work with each other as members of our communities but also how we actually activate and uh um the agency in our communities right we we all know that there's you know at the end of the day this world is not designed for introversion it's designed for extroversion so then we are we become the conduits for other people's success. Right? Just like Toni Morrison often says is that you got the job okay now your job's to lift, right? Extend that arm out and lift. So my work is not necessarily shown on my history in the community, it's more about like how I've collectively figured out how to fight the power with uh Indigenous, Black and uh you know uh other racialized members of the um left. You know, I'm gonna I'm gonna say the 'L' word because that's also very troubling to the mainstream is left thinking right so the culture of the left is also being diminished right and we see this through the political system right? I'm going to end it there because I, I don't want to take up more space than I already have, I'm sorry but I had to just get that off the you know I was like I, I don't want to wait 40 minutes to say something that is very pressing for me right now.

AMBER DEAN: No that's great that's definitely the conversation we want to have so now we're in it so that's perfect and uh Syrus I think you unmuted and maybe it's a good segue to you next and carry on. Thanks Pamila.

SYRUS: Yeah I mean I think one of the things that sort of stands out for me right away is or that is evident for me right away is you know we're talking about gay and lesbian archives, I mean how long did it take for the ArQuives with the 'q' to change their name after literally a couple of decades of people saying hey could you please you know get on this so I think that archives often um especially queer like these lesbian and gay archives are are literally lesbian and gay archives, so what's missing is of course all of the trans content, all of the intersex content, all of the racialized content, there's very very little information out there and then if you want to actually you know cut through and get at some intersections, like if I wanted to look up something about my community as a Black trans disabled person well good luck right good luck finding myself in the archive right? So I think that -

COLE: Can I just ask, because somebody's people are asking what counter archives mean? So I think you're you're speaking about that but could you be uh explicit about that?

SYRUS: Yeah so counter counter-archiving is a practice of reimagining um who re-centering around who we consider to be inherently valuable because archives do that work of saying this is who we're deciding is worthy of being remembered so counter-archiving already necessarily interrupts the sort of white hegemonic sort of dominant narrative of who is important enough to be remembered and it is a practice of collecting and gathering stories and data in alternative formats so it could be sharing stories with each other, it could be the

rap that you heard on the street corner on your way to the Loblaws that told you about you know the history of that neighborhood because somebody was spitting rhymes about their day or about their community so the archive you know could be a song, the archive could be um you know it could be so much more than just an avid collection of queer pins or you know a bunch of uh you know i don't know hankies from a different time like the archive could be oral the archive could be rooted in some of our traditional knowledges and our ways of sharing and recording data which wasn't always uh written you know so the archive could be a lot counter-archived could be a lot of different things um and then also Diana Taylor gets at this idea of how do you archive the unarchivable? So how do you archive the things that are like a performance? How do you archive the experience of being in a live performance or dancing a particular movement or being an activism and holding a smoke bomb and and and marching down the street, or how do you actually really capture that because the video doesn't quite do it justice and audio recordings quite don't do it justice, and how do you remember the smell of the tear gas and how do you like how do you actually capture these things that are more experiences and how do you archive that? And so counter archiving can be a way of doing that because it's embodied, as Pamila was talking about it's it's it's remembered in our bodies, it's told in and retold in the stories that we share with each other, in the movements that we do with each other, we are counter-archiving, so it is a radical revolutionary process that centers our remembering into a broader section of the population and that allows us to remember in different kinds of



ways. So I mean I think like a newly forming archive could learn a lot from these counter-archiving practices and say you know maybe we don't need to have a giant air-conditioned building where we just keep a whole bunch of stuff maybe the archive could look uh different you know maybe if we all had our hands on the archives if we all were actively engaged in shaping it and it was a living space uh not a quiet uh uh dying space or I don't know what the what the counter to that is but where it was an alive space you know so much radical stuff can happen but so much of this comes down to trust because uh you know there's a reason why there's not a lot of Black content at the ArQuives with the 'q', there's a reason why, uh you know because it's it's not as if there hasn't been a discussion for the last 15 years about what to do with the banners from Blockarama and what to do with the archives from Zami everybody's been talking about it and and and there isn't a trust that bringing the stuff to that particular archive or to an archive where there aren't curators of color where there aren't connections to communities of color that they're going to even know how to interpret and assess and display and explore the content like are they even going to be able to do this in a way that is respectful for the credit and so one of the solutions has been is that now there's this development of a Black queer archive in the city so there's actually a creation of a specific new Black queer archive that is trying to grow and build into something different so um I hope that we can create archives that are new that uh offer different ways of remembering and that center around a different narrative of who's valuable enough to be remembered.

SHERI OSDEN NAULT: There's something that I've um been uh really wanting to speak back to that's come up um and like thank you Pamila and Syrus both so much for what you've said but there's something that I think is really pressing in my mind when we're talking about this and we're meeting um you know as something that's putting like the two asked at the beginning of the uh acronym to describe queerness and what's missing is like who is archived and I think that's something that is present in what Pamila was talking about with um like having worked with different photographic collections from colonial Britain who's archived is who was called birdash, right? Which is the trans and queer Indigenous people that colonizers and fur traders and settlers interacted with and I think that something that came up in what Syrus was saying is like talking about oral histories and the different ways that we tell our histories and when it comes to the archive whose voice is it going to be in because if the archive has information on South Asian or on Black or on Indigenous queers but it doesn't come from their perspective then it almost is better that it's not there because it's likely just going to reenact violence um it's so easy for so many trans people especially white trans people is really what I meant to say um to feel represented as someone who has always existed by looking to the one image they can find of an Indigenous Two-Spirit person that's like a historic tin type you know gray blurry image but what does that really mean for a Two-Spirit Indigenous person to be reduced to that and so how do we bring into presence - particularly, I'm also currently into Tkaronto although I don't live here at the moment um people

whose land we're living on and how do we bring queer indigeneity into presence when it's been both exploited as representation of how queerness has always been around which is really important and I think it's so important to acknowledge that we've always been here but um to do so without it being exploitative, without it just being sort of a figurative representation of what that means, when violence has been enacted to try to erase it, to try to eradicate it from our communities and to try to take away our stories and it becomes the responsibility of an archive that's trying to bring a decolonial or a land back and any kind of BIPOC positive perspective to engage with those challenges and there isn't really an easy answer of how to do it, but those things have to be present in our mind, in that work.

AMBER: Yeah great thanks so much Sheri. I was uh listening to Syrus talk about the formation of the Black queer archive and then my class virtually went to the Two-Spirit archive in Winnipeg uh last week and so that's there it's a separate Two-Spirit archive and just thinking about um how important sometimes uh the relationships are and when the relationships aren't there and as Syrus was saying when the trust isn't there then it's it sometimes makes more sense to build these separate organizations but resources becomes a question too which, yeah I don't know um Rebecka you haven't had a chance to weigh in on this question yet but I can imagine that's something that you might be thinking about as well.

REBECKA: Yeah um for about 10 years I took a very deep dive into the history and culture of what is now the ArQuives with the 'q' and so I'm familiar with with um all of the issues that have been raised here tonight and and quite thankful that they're being raised and continue to be raised I think any archives represents the people who found it who champion it to work with it every day and in my work I've I've toyed with this idea of homophily, like birds of a feather flock together and I think at some point it is rather benign, we we seek out people who like the same things we do, do the same things we do and i think in some ways that's how the the early founders of um the ArQuives came together, they were people who uh were friendly they were animated you know Syrus is talking about the lively experiences that counter archiving can be - the ArQuives was a counter-archive, you know, and it's really interesting to think about how it's now being looked at as part of the official archival landscape of Canada um it was a counter archive and it was quite a lively space for a long time um but there's this um there's this thing in archival science and archival studies, Elizabeth Kaplan talks about it, it's we are what we collect and we collect what we are. So if our group, if our community is homogenous and we're never encountering um or we never think to encounter outside of what we know, what we like, what we're comfortable with, we end up collecting along a path of least resistance you know, I go out to the bar and I collect the matchbook covers, I go to a pride event and I bring back a t-shirt, my community is dealing with an AIDS crisis, I collect the records of AIDS, what if I never and this is this is an unfortunate truth, but what if I never go beyond the

boundaries and go visit the White House in Scarborough not that there is not opportunity - but what if I never encounter that? So I'm not excusing us, but I'm suggesting that if we go back to the histories of lesbian and gay archives they were started um in a spirit of counter-archiving, they were actually answering the silence of a public archive um or a special collection that didn't represent lesbian and gay people and at some point they have sort of moved beyond what was counter archiving into becoming this very mainstream collection and that's such an interesting turn because I'm not quite convinced that the founders of the archive would consider what they do to be mainstream right so there's a lot of conflict there um. I will end on this though, that to go back to this quote, it's on the website for this uh registration for this event - it's Stuart Hall who says, "No archive arises out of thin air, each archive has a pre-history in the sense of prior conditions of existence." So this constitution of an archives, the founding of an archives can be a really exciting moment, counter-archiving through storytelling can be such an exciting moment, um making art from archives can be an exciting moment, what my work is is figuring out how to maintain those archives after the excitement has dwindled, how do you keep them enacted, how do you keep them animated, and that's through continuously engaging with materials, if you don't have engagement you are a gay hoarder, you are not a queer archivist. So you do need to have that engagement and enactment and that's that's why I'm so grateful to be on a panel with three artists who do exactly this. Um you know Syrus, I actually talk about Marvellous Grounds in your work in the end of my own book because it

struck me that as I'm writing the history of the archives I'm having these moments where I'm thinking, what what is going to be better accessed? A box, a hollinger box stored in an archives? Or the book of Marvellous Grounds that's read by thousands of people and used and cited and worked on, and so there's a really interesting struggle or tension that I have even in my own work around um as an archivist what is my job, to collect and preserve things? Or to make sure that those things are accessible and used and used in different ways right? So what can we do to go back to the question about um ensuring that a Hamilton uh queer archives can be accessible and welcoming for people within the city and and within this space? It's to include those people from the very beginning um and to keep that open from the very beginning and that that BIPOC or QTBIPOC experience is not an afterthought, that it is something that starts now.

AMBER: That's great thanks, and I often think about um or I tend to end up thinking about, a bit of a bold fan here, like I think about, Syrus, in the in your article that you published about Black trans archiving and then in Marvellous Grounds you do a conversation with Monica Forrester um and you think about like what would it mean to archive um the lives of Black trans women who weren't uh my students were always really struck by this quote who when Monica talks about like not um not always uh thinking about saving things to be put in an archive right because she was too busy surviving um and that story circulates so widely now through Marvellous Grounds, through your article, but then Monica has also donated a bunch

of her stuff now to the ArQuives with a 'q', right? So I find that a really interesting moment of like okay so there's there there is stuff it would be good to have um people with the skills and resources to preserve some of that stuff and then how do we make the material live outside of that those spaces and so when we have our June workshop we're hoping to actually be working with the materials um that are at Hamilton Public Library. But now we're right into the thick of it and so um Rebecka you just mentioned about being on a panel with all these wonderful artists and we wanted to ask um about the relationship between the arts and artists and archives um since we have three artists on our panel we were wondering about how you think art contributes to passing on memories of collectives or communities and whether it functions differently than like an archival object. What I guess you've kind of taken this up a little bit already but how do you see your artistic engagements with archives working differently than taking an object and kind of preserving it in an archive I guess, and um Pamila or Syrus, yeah let's go ahead.

SYRUS: Yeah I did uh um, I got to spend, anyways I did a commission, I was given a commission from Grunt Gallery in Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh territory in Vancouver and they're a gallery that is known for doing um a lot of trans uh programming a lot of racialized programming but also um a lot of work with archives and I was really interested in going and working with the trans archive in Victoria and so um I said you know for this commission I said I'd love to do this project but I want to work in the archive and I want to go and

do a residency there, so I went and spent um a month in 2017 uh deeply immersed in the archive in Victoria, but also looking at Black um sort of trying to be on the trail of Black uh history in Salt Spring Island and in this particular part of uh British Columbia and uh working with both the um sort of following the stories and then also literally working in a white glove archive uh to try to to to present uh Black people and also trans people in this particular place was really amazing and what I got to do with it was then go away and work with what I studied. So I took photographs, I did documentation, I did all of this research while I was at the archive, uh gave a research talk and then went away and worked with the material for a year and then ended up creating a series of portraits um that were exhibited in this gallery space in Vancouver and accompanying it was the speculative fiction story about a future where Black uh trans people survive, where the revolution had happened where climate change had been solved, where there was land back, and where we were so much freer and the speculative fiction story was drawn in pencil uh the text uh as a script that ran along the wall of the gallery and it was also part of this broad sheet that accompanied some of the portraits. It was so amazing to get to work with this archive in that way because one of the things that I got to do was to draw directly on the wall a 10 foot portrait of this Black trans woman that I had seen in the archive, uh she was sitting on the ground with a picket sign and she was taking a break at a protest, and again how do you archive the unarchivable? I felt in that moment, I've been that activist sitting down on the curb thinking I gotta rest my feet for a minute before we keep marching or whatever it is, I, I



felt so synergistic with this character and I, this person and so I drew her large and in a celebratory way and as a result literally thousands of people got to experience her image and got to experience her story because it was in this exhibition in this gallery and people were coming in and out of the gallery - this was pre-pandemic times um you know and it just you know when artists are able to touch the archives, put our hands on the archive, shape you know engage with the content and disseminate it in a different way it allows us, what you were saying Rebecka, you want people to be engaged with the content and you want them to be living it in their in their everyday life and that you know getting artists involved helps to translate what's in the fond you know into something that's happening in their community, in their neighborhood, in their real life, so working with the trans archives, shout outs to them, and Aaron Devorah, and all of his incredible work out there, and also just being able to be on the trail of these sort of informal archives that were set up in Salt Springs, trying to trace the history of Black people there, was really beautiful, so I think every archive should have resident artists uh based in there and we should have arts grants that support uh work and archives in the way that we have uh artists in the library and artists in the parks and stuff like that.

REBECKA: Can I, can I jump in on that Syrus? That's really great, um increasingly more I run into archives particularly some on the the west coast of the US, that do have artists in residence that are animating the archives in these ways, in the UK they call this archive intervention you can actually do a graduate

degree in it um it's really fantastic, but I also think one of the things that the artist engagement with the archives can do is uh much like someone like Saidiya Hartman, where you can you can draw attention to what's not in the archives and actually use what you know about the contextual clues um to revisit missing moments so it's it's kind of making the silences loud in that way and and I think that's something that archivists ourselves we cannot do we we rely on people who use the collections and people who um engage with those collections and make new things to tell those stories, um it kind of raises an interesting question about what is the role of the archivist in this versus an activist archivist or or an artist who engages in archival material. I'm, I'm a professionally trained archivist but I don't even know what that means anymore um you know what what does that mean? I have a graduate degree but what does that mean in terms of being able to archive and be able to go beyond what is our traditional Western colonial version of what archives are meant to do. I'll pass it to another artist, though I'm really excited about that.

AMBER: Go ahead, Sheri, yeah jump on in.

SHERI: That was my do you want to talk, Pamila, Jessica? Not to worry, um, gosh I had so many thoughts and then now because it's me I'm struggling to pull them together. I was thinking of a lot of different sort of Indigenous artists whose work I really admire and I think one of the things that can be challenging is feeling like there's a lot of representation of yourself if you're in a marginalized community or often not the most represented in

the mainstream um one of the challenges can be can I find queer representation, can I find Indigenous representation, and where can I sort of find both? Um certain work that I'm doing that involves researching archiving right now speaks to healing and speaks to police violence but speaks to you know a diversity of Indigenous folks who experience police violence without necessarily being specifically queer, specifically trans in any way. I um do think however that there is like certain kind of crossings in the way that we keep track of that information that are like really relevant, for example, like missing and murdered Indigenous women we also now um find it very important to say like missing and murdered Indigenous women in Two-Spirit um because that so often is like a broader version of the term and i think that uh as artists what we can do and how we can kind of expand on that is to also be visible ourselves um even when I'm making, you - sounds cheesy, but we are all like visible as those things, right, so when ilm making work and it's looking at the experience of Indigenous people in so-called Canada who are dealing with police violence, I'm also being visible as a Two-Spirit person who's making that work and so if it's archived, if that story goes on then even though the work doesn't necessarily only speak to a Two-Spirit experience, my presence there does, and that can I hope be the foundation of those things when it's almost harder to kind of have something that tunes in so specifically just based on trying to tell stories that haven't been told and what the breadth of those stories needing to be told might be.

AMBER: Pamila, are you set to jump in on this one?

PAMILA: Yeah yeah I think um as I said before like in terms of my art practice to to date and whatnot um particularly the last uh the my first first and last major solo in Toronto was in 2019, and just to give you some context um I have been working, laboring in the arts, in the visual arts sector in Toronto for 27 years, and at the time of my solo I was 25 years, I don't think anyone should have to wait 25 years to have a solo show in the city, particularly Toronto, and a city that also seems to call me, 'oh Pamila, you're everywhere' and I'm like really? My labor is everywhere. So I commented on the fact that you know in this whole trend of looking at care aesthetics and care labor and the labor of care in uh particularly visual art curating and curating and caring and whatnot um again um I I didn't get into this program but I was gonna do a master's and I I pitched OISE, um they asked me to apply after after they rejected me and I was like, I'm good, but um I I pitched to them uh looking at um I guess I wanted to particularly look at the crossroads of critical pedagogy and contemporary art and um I was looking at a model from that was um the kids of Survival Collective, which the story goes is that you know they were all like uh special education kids in an after-school program in uh alternate program in New York City and um the artist the who was also a pedagogue um turned it into a collective but for some reason you would never really get to hear from the Latinx and and Black uh youth in the program and it was always like the master artist and the and then the the youth that um uh were in the uh chaos uh program,. so I wanted to kind of flip the script, and then there were some models here that I was like why is it that

it's always like this uh you know canonical white uh social practitioner or at the time it was community engaged or socially engaged art you know you can kind of follow the trajectory now it's so social practice but it's always with the you know disenfranchised um high priority needs uh kids and I really wanted to flip the script on that so I proposed a project and then um I didn't get into the program, I don't know, I have some f's on my undergrad but like I think they make me fabulous, but you know according to U of T that's not good, but um but then my project took off uh which was a after school girls program which we turned into a collective called Boner Kill and then that manifested into um a Sister Co-Resistor which is still active now and some of the research I found was that there is a majority of BIPOC uh cis women and non-binary folks in that end up from their uh undergraduate degrees, masters, perhaps even PhDs, but mostly if I'm talking about practitioners, they end up mostly in community engaged art and teaching, whether it's K to 12 teaching or higher ed and why is that? I wanted to really investigate that and then I was like you know because I was one of the numbers right? And um I thought well this is weird because when we talk about the lay of the land whether it's Guerilla Girls or any other study recent studies around looking at who gets representation and visibility in the visual arts sector and what I'm talking about strictly is exhibiting, right? Not being behind - I've done it all, gallery assistant, gallerina, um I'm not a trust fund baby or anything but like you know I did that in like two different cities and then I at some point I had to stop and think and it was the turning point was 9/11 for me because I started

to uh experience a lot of racism in the visual arts sector and I was getting just like you know what I'm I'm done, I'm done, this sector you could you - it's like being in a uh emotionally abusive relationship, there's only so much love you can have for an industry and then they keep treating you like shit, you're like what the hell am I doing in this relationship, right? So they're you know uh fast forward to all of this uh labor of care and whatnot so in the show that I did at A Space I found some material that was thrown out from the AGO library and archives and I found it in a refuse place called Arts Junction and I took that material and I took - not the entire, they happened to be labeled 'Identity in a Foreign Place' and it was a uh auxiliary program that was um produced by Gupta Institute and the AGO together in the fall of 1993 and it was one year after uh the Yonge Street uprising so identity of course was uh it was the birth of identity uh politics and and cultural um the cultural politics, kind of, or cultural arts, culture politics, kind of uh uh theme and or, sorry, um field, and I found these tapes I I went to the AGO library in archives and I'm like I you know what happened on this day, they told me that, you know yeah you're right there was a program, why are you asking? Well I said well I kind of had an hour with library and archives Amy Furnace and Marilyn Nazar and then I just you know slowly uh pushed these two tapes in front of them and they're like what's this? And I'm like that's the missing piece, and they're like, what do you mean? They're like, we can't find the material you're looking for, I'm like yeah I have them.

And Identity in a Foreign Place, so like MG Bassanji's on that and um Lakshmi Gill is a Vancouver-based writer, she's still alive and well uh who is a Filipino and uh Punjabi descent, and I couldn't believe it but it was like diversity programming of the early 90s -they didn't really call it, they called it auxiliary auxiliary event, they didn't really call it public programs, so they threw out these tapes and I find them and then I do my background work and my investigative inquiry and um it turns out that there was a a show called Perspectives, it was a series that they ran in the 90s at the AGO, and um Michelle Churro Wasterio was the assistant curator at the time and she was writing, she was curating that, and I think Philip Monk was there, it was during his tenure but um uh the um the perspective show was two artists, one - they both went to NSCAD, they were five years apart in age and it was Micah Lexier, who's a well-known white uh queer uh born in Winnipeg and based in Toronto artist and he was around 30 at the time and uh the other artist was um Lani Maestro. Now they both went to NSCAD and they're five years apart in age. Lani Maestro is like a name in the East Asian biennial world, she's represented, I don't know, a variety of different countries at Venice Biennale. she lives in France, she does not want to come back to Toronto for the very fact because the Canadian art world did not know how to even address her work, and in when I presented these two tapes to the archivist and the librarian they were like, you know what, can you come back on Thursday, and we'll give you a longer appointment? I go sure, and Marilyn Nazar pulled out the 1993 file and she showed me all the documentation in which Lani Maestro was an artist in

in this two-person show and I'm going to get to the point - there's four reviews that came out and one review was just none of the white reviewers, art art writers, didn't did not understand anything that Lani was doing and it was about her uh experiences being a a person of Filipino descent, the history of uh imperial um and colonizers who were uh pretty much everyone's invaded the Philippines, and um she's talking about the grief and the trauma of being a survivor, and John Bentley Mays wrote this most scathing review of that show and I think that was the review that basically, from what I heard from someone who's her peer in the Toronto art community, that review pretty much she stopped doing, she stopped doing uh interviews with uh white art critics. And when I started to put the pieces together, like I went and I thought, well here I am looking at two artist files and one was like this thick for Micah and Lani's is this thin and I thought this there's something wrong with this very like you know, even though this were all the facts I was just like something's got to give right? And I was obviously with the artist's file, if anybody knows the artist's files at the AGO library and archives, one has to obviously self um direct it in terms of like, you know you're you are part of, part and parcel of the active archiving that's happening about your artist file, so when people want to come and research you and they know that there's a file at the AGO library and archives, like you know if I want to go and see Syrus's art life in uh documentation in an archive, I go and I ask for the file on Syrus Marcus Ware, and then I get that, or Sheri Nault and I I get that and I go through their you know paraphernalia, postcards, uh any flaw - anything they've done, right, is there, and I knew that



Lani was more uh well uh adjusted as an artist and in terms of her experience she's gotten, I thought, there's, something's really wrong here right? She should be a household name just like Micah is. But then I read this review and I basically took my found material, because I did find it and it is mine, but I will eventually give back the tapes to the Asian library and archives and then I - I basically - Lakshmi Gill is a someone of Filipino descent, I thought oh my god it's 1993. So of course they have a Filipino artist exhibiting, let's go find a Filipino writer! Right? And this is often the case when I'm asked to do South Asian public programming or whatever, the case is and and this is how we pretty much do diversity programming in Canada right? There's - and I feel like I have sat actively on like Harborfront, ROM, several organizations where they they have a committee where artists can offer their obviously impart their knowledge around like who to ask and what not to to invite to do public programming, and I think that's because also there's been such a interesting trajectory of such like fuck-ups around diversity programming um in Canada, particularly in Toronto, and so people had to obviously correct those wrongs so these committees started to happen and anyway so I put together a film because I knew that the chattering classes of the art world and for my show, they'll come in, okay fine you found this review, John Bentley Mays has died of cancer, and he's not alive anymore but I pretty much thought, okay I have this evidence now that we do you know at the time and that uh the institutions did not know how to program us really, so where are we? Where are we in the world, where are the BIPOC people? So I took a snapshot of what was happening and and

I'm I'm just shy of 20 at the time and I was present for the demonstration that Black Action Defense Committee um uh put on that earlier that day, and then later that day there was a uprising on Yonge Street. Now it was like two days shy of Rodney King's uh verdict coming out, where the five police officers were acquitted so there's you know mayhem and uh obviously social unrest happening in um sorry I don't mean mayhem, but social unrest happening in LA, and then there's social unrest happening on Yonge Street and people thought it was connected, but what happened was a young man named Raymond Lawrence was shot in broad daylight by a plainclothes officer. So this current work that I'm doing now is like basically investigating that these institutions, state funded institutions, they don't change they don't they don't really know how to change because of course it's not - these institutions weren't really founded with me in mind, or Sheri in mind, or Syrus in mind, so when Syrus says like yeah we have to build these uh projects and these institutions by ourselves that's that's the very case is that you know I I look at something like Aga Khan and I'm like, um we need like a hundred Aga Khans, we need like a hundred uh Ken, uh Dr. Kenneth Montagues, like you know that's this is going to take time, this is going to take time. I have the benefit of working with the Urban Indigenous Education Center in the TDSB and thank you know the universe for that because I as a as a racialized non-Indigenous educator I you know uh I'm human, I make mistakes too but we have uh knowledge um leaders who help us, guide us around um Indigenous education and decolonizing our pedagogy.

COLE: That's great, Pamila, thank you so much for for talking about that, that's really important and what I wanted to get on to is um uh I just want to ask a question of everyone including you of course. Uh when building archives or doing community memory work, how can we remain accountable? Like how can we remain accountable to the communities that we're working with rather than just like you know putting them on display? And uh you know what do people think about that?

AMBER: And that's our last question, right Cole, and then we'll open up to the audience so people who have been saving, we've got a few queued up in the Q and A, but if people have been saving questions please feel free to start popping them in and we'll try and get in a couple before we have to end tonight.

COLE: Yeah absolutely.

SYRUS: I think we need to have um, you know I work on a lot of, I mean as artists we work in community and we you know you you have to be accountable to the communities that you're working with, it doesn't work to pile it in, uh do a project and pile it out. I mean lots of people do it of course but it's a really bad idea and it's not rec - you know you if you're doing work with community, you want to be rooted in community, you want to be, you know building the time that it takes to build relationships with community, you want to be doing things that are most uh relevant to the community, and that are going to benefit them the most, the the people who are most affected. I

don't know that it's that different in an archive. Why aren't there more community accountability circles or like ways of thinking about not piloting in, grabbing the stuff, and going or doing that one exhibition a year on South Asian art, but rather building a long-term relationship with these communities, and so I think that archives have a lot to learn from artists and the way that we run our projects you know because if you want to do community engaged practice, you can only pile it in and pile it out a couple of times before the community is going to talk to each other and say don't work with this guy! This, you know, like, they're not they're not actually connected to us, so you know you can get it right from the from the start, so I think that you know it would be wonderful if there was an advisory council that was made up, that was rotating, that was made up of communities who were most affected, who are going to be most affected by the content that's being put out by the archives, you know that are most affected by by the things that are facing the community in that moment, and that those folks give advice and be able to be compensated to for their time, to give feedback to the archive, to make sure that they're you know doing things in a just way. Just because you can do it, doesn't mean you should do it. So making sure that you don't have a white a queer man who is little connection to Black queer communities you know using first person content language describing work you know you don't do that because you've got accountability people around you who are making sure that you're doing it in a careful way. I worked at the Art Gallery of Ontario for 14 years and ran a lot of programs and for particular programs we had community that didn't always do it

well, but we had community accountability circles. So for the Black um at the African Galleries when they were first being assembled, um pretty controversial stuff why is this stuff from Cameroon going to the AGO, why is it being put into this particular place and out of the, you know, so the only way to even consider doing this was to engage with community and to have an African community advisory that said don't do this and yes do that, um and you know when we did the Basquiat exhibition we also had a community advisory of Black artists, Black contemporary artists from Canada, you know because of course having you know, the reality for Black artists often is that that it's just artists from the States or from the UK that get profiled, so it's really important to have a community advisory that was rooted in the community here. So I think archives should do that, they should have accountability circles, it's like an abolitionist strategy.

COLE: Excellent.

REBECCA: If I can add to that too, I think that's um I think that's that's accurate, I think that there's another layer beyond that which is actually involving those communities in the description and organization of those collections. So rather than having the archivist pen the description, it's done collaboratively to ensure that the right language is there. that the artifacts or the collections are described accurately or appropriately. responsibly and ethically. so it's it's actually pushing up against some of the um traditional archival methods and practices that we think about, archives are organized by provenance so

challenging even what that means. So provenance is a single person, entity or company or organization who creates the records, what does that say about records that are created by a colonist about the colonized? So it's really interesting to to embed those advisory circles not just in the peripheral of archival work, but actually seek out their advice when you're building the archives from the ground up so that you can challenge some of those things that we as archivists just take as, this is the way archives are done, and we need to constantly be re-imagining and re-answering that question: how are archives done?

SHERI: There's something um that really came to mind for me that ties into sort of the last question as well. Um when Pamila was speaking about like reviews written by white folks, um a friend of mine who's an amazing artist, a playwright and a performer, Yolanda Bonnell, who is both Indigenous and South Asian, who's Two-Spirit, based in to Tkaronto, made a lot of waves last year for specifically asking that um only racialized folks review uh this very powerful play that they had put forward, that spoke very directly and in ways that i felt I hadn't seen before to certain aspects of Indigenous life and like the the certain pains um that we go through and it was it was really incredible um you know and uh to see that Yolanda put themselves out there in that way, but also really difficult too, the kind of backlash that they dealt with and I think that there's something um to be said for ways that community or archives or institutions can not only ensure, for example, if they're funding someone to say, write about a person's work, organize

work, anything like that, that they're bringing someone into that who is appropriate to be doing it, but also I mean there's grounds for if there is such a controversy and say a queer um. Two-Spirit queer LGBT+ archive is um aware of such uh conflict then they could also like, I mean I'm not saying that anything involved in this panel would have been aware, but that's like a point where an institution could also come out with a solidarity message or talking about why that's necessary or even using archival information to prop up conversations about why that really makes sense and why that could be needed and that's sort of a roundabout way of saying how an archive could do that but it's something that came to mind, but I think that creators who are in the process of building archives are also asking for that.

PAMILA: Yeah, I also wanted to add that or in terms of art history or the archive like at least in my role as an artist and I truly believe this that artists make art history. It's our making and doing that creates the history. It's not the curator or the writers, they'll write about it after, but it's us making and the imprint we leave, right? This is culture, this is the basics of culture, anthropocultural anthropology right, it's our making and doing, so whether uh, as Syrus mentioned earlier, the the if it's the form of dance or theatre or even a gathering or a potluck, right um someone's gonna scribe like you know this is what we ate on this day together and we had some really awesome radical conversations or we had some very loving moments you know and it's our role, that's

that is something that is inherent of our role as artists, to create that art history, so never forget the artist in the audience, like you know this is your this is your making and you're doing right, so whether a capital 'A' archive is watching or or not, your living is a form right? Uh just as your making and your being is also of a form, so these are the signs of change.

AMBER: Those are all incredible and very some really like helpful and practical suggestions in there too for how to build accountability into an on on archive, a community archive kind of right from the start, um, people have been posting some questions in the Q and A box and um before we say our thank yous tonight I would love to get the panelists' thought on at least a couple of these. Um so someone was reflecting on the power of oral history and how oral history made it imperative to care for our elders um just quoting the question here, "even after they've told their stories rather than letting them struggle alone after their work has been written and consumed." So this person's thinking of the very few Black Indigenous and people of colour Two-Spirit queer trans elders they know in Hamilton whose stories young Two-Spirit queer trans BIPOC people would crave so desperately um and I think the core of the question here is, how do you share those stories while honouring the people who lived the stories? And and I don't know if this is underneath the question, but um I know something that uh Cole and I are struggling with is, for example, there's a lot of wonderful uh photographs of Hamilton queer trans history in the Ham - what the materials that Michael donated at the Hamilton Public Library, but we have no idea if



the people who are in those photographs knew that their photographs were going to end up in this archive at some point in time right, um let alone want them publicly available and shared. So I wonder if under this question about oral history too is like how do you pass on these stories that are so central and so important to pass on um but sometimes people may have already passed away and so we don't we can't necessarily ask their consent to pass on these stories whether through oral history or through photography, if any of you have any thoughts about the the kind of ethics that come up with materials like that that can find their way into archives um.

REBECCA: I, I can jump in there just a little bit, um so so one of the biggest tensions in archives is between sort of balancing privacy, of of not just your donors but all those third parties that are documented in the records, and access, and I would say that's also a significant difference between say archives and libraries, where libraries privilege access to information, archives approach things a little bit more nuanced. Um community archives are not necessarily confined or obligated by privacy law but we certainly have ethics around how we treat material and I think the the question of queer photographs has come up time and time again: do you err on the side of caution and never digitize or make those public because you are afraid of outing someone, for example, who does not want to be out or sort of anachronistically placing an identity on someone and the the flip side, erring on the side of openness and putting those up on a website and saying, here are photographs that we have in our collection and

crowdsourcing information and contextual data about those photographs and I've always been on the latter, put it up make it available, with the caveat that you have to be prepared with the protocol to understand when and how you should remove it if there is an issue. In some ways those records belong to the archives and in some ways they belong to the community. And so if the community can never access them, why are you keeping them? So I always err on the side of access I think. But there is there is an ethics there that you have to grapple with at some point.

AMBER: That makes sense, sorry go ahead Sheri.

SHERI: Thank you. Um, that makes me think of a couple of different experiences that I've had. One is um in developing a work contacting grunt gallery, who we spoke about a bit earlier, Syrus did a project with them, and they have a really incredible archive of performance art that they hosted over many decades and at the time the artist whose work I wanted to view wasn't online and the process for that was sort of really straightforward, really simple, and I essentially identified myself and my interest in seeing the work and was given access to videos that were private um with controlled access on Vimeo and I'm also thinking of archives like the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and I'm not um historically from Tkaronto so it's harder for me to speak to institutions that are from there, but with the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, I have many dear friends and like kin whose families have been recorded in those archives and who want to access not only like images of their families but

sometimes artifacts which they would like to have back, which is a whole other thing that um I don't think is exactly what I'm going to get into here, but it's about their getting to access and even necessarily sometimes care for those archives is about identifying themselves and the institution having an understanding that not every item is for everybody but making sure that the people who do, deserve is maybe a weird word, but the people whose item it is and whose history it is have access to it is really important.

AMBER: Yeah that's for sure and that we should we could have a whole other round table on the question of yeah um returning objects from archives and museums but I didn't want to lose the spirit of the question which was about oral history too and Syrus, I know that you have done some work with oral history -

SYRUS: Worked a lot with this idea of oral history and collection and I uh I I just what I would offer to this is this you know reality that our elders, our OGs, they're tired. They've told the story a lot of times you know, so I think about when we were working on Marvellous Grounds, I can remember approaching an elder, Black queer elder, who has done some incredible work in in the community and was the go-to person to ask these questions and he was like, yeah yeah yeah but you have to get that because there's such an interest right now in our stories and in the past and in archives, I'm being asked over and over and over um to talk about the 1970s or to talk about 1987 or to talk about whatever so thinking about ways to do this

sharing and this cultural exchange in a way that doesn't deplete our elders, that doesn't deplete the folks who were who have been in the struggle already for a couple of decades and who have been telling, who lived the story and then have been telling and retelling the story probably to to few listeners at first, and now to a prolific body of listeners um so just thinking about um how to like, a part of honouring the people who are sharing the stories is remembering that you're probably not the only person who's asked them to talk about it so thinking about ways of of doing this in a careful way, in a way that that um, anyways we did it, we did end up getting this person to write something, because we were like, listen if you write the story of it also uh you know people can read that and then it it maybe gets the story out there in a different way, so through a counter-archive process, the story now gets to be retold in a different way and that person doesn't have to keep saying it. So just thinking about um these people as being humans, like alive, with with with needs and body needs and wants and and fatigue and all of the things that go with just aging on this planet and that we need to be able to um honor these people and honor their stories and do it in a way that isn't extractive uh all the time.

AMBER: Great thanks, Syrus. I'm thinking about um uh the Two-Spirit Archive, I learned in our virtual visit last week, they have a really great and growing collection of oral histories that are available and that were kind of created in conversation with the members of the Two-Spirit advisory board of that archive, and then members of the Two-spirit Community in Winnipeg, so

that's a great example of an oral history project that's really doing something, I think, really fascinating and it's also open um to public so you can go and listen to those and then um there's the Archive of Lesbian Oral Testimony at Simon Fraser University too which it also has some a lot of oral history that you can just access through the website and some some of which you need permission to access and some not. So some good examples out there I think. Um lots happening in the chat and then we do have one more question, but Cole I think I interrupted you earlier too, did you want to jump in?

COLE: I'm just really, I'm just like you know I'm quite enamoured with the chat and the people talking, I mean my friend Mary Cahill is here who is like you know from a long long time ago and uh I mean she's obviously still alive and uh but she was a good friend of Michael's back in the days and so you know she's just you know if people could look in the chat and just like see what they're doing out there in the chat and um did we have like you know what how can we be remain accountable? When we're doing community uh work and doing archive work, I know we only have a few minutes left, but when we're doing archives or community memory work, how can people, those who are doing, who are involved in that, how can we remain accountable to the intersections of community of which we are apart, rather than just like okay just going along with the whole like white middle class you know mainstream uh you know stuff that is put on television or whatever, how can we remain accountable to our intersectional communities?

AMBER: As our last question I think and and can I build in part of the yeah the last question that's in the Q and A box too, which is about passing on stories organically and caringly regardless of whether it's within our beyond archives and this this person is asking the question out of concern for the ways that sometimes organizations like for example our LGBTQ advisory council in Hamilton gets ignored. So when when you're in that kind of situation, how do how do we, do you have any tips for passing on stories organically and caringly and with accountability and um and and any kind of last reflections I think our panelists want to make would be wonderful to hear at this point, and then we'll say some thank yous.

SHERI: I was just thinking about how we do it person to person all the time and that kind of ties back into what Syrus was saying at the very beginning of all of this uh, but the counter archive like um, you know that is uh both, as the question in the chat says, like the non-white glove non-state curated archive, and it is a way that we can have a continuation as well as possibly an accountability because it's in constant flow and conversation.

COLE: And can I just mention that somebody mentioned in the chat that like you know coming out as queer when you are an immigrant isn't always all that safe right? So how do we sort of deal with that?

SYRUS: Yeah it's interesting this um, I mean I guess fundamentally what we what we've been talking about is that

we we want um we want to, I guess, return to a way of remembering that is outside of colonial structures and so if that means thinking of an archive in a different way, you know that's that's one of the strategies you know of of remembering in a different way, of re-centering who we're remembering, of re-centering how we're remembering, and making sure that people are engaged and their their hands are on the archive and that they're sort of you know shaping it. Um I think that we always are going to need to create opportunities to come together like this, to tell and retell stories and I think that the best thing that could have come from this awful pandemic that we're living through is this embracing of disability justice and online content which disabled people have been saying forever, hey it's really easy just put a Zoom on, we can do this, we can come and share stories together!

So I hope that it's something that continues past the pandemic, this idea that we can have digital engagements where we can gather from far distances and share and retell stories uh and I think that there's always going to be a need for this kind of organic flow of what it is when you're in community with each other and I think like you know this is a taste of it, being with um with you all tonight has felt like we were sitting on the steps at Church and Wellesley in 1982 for a moment you know, we told stories, called the names of Zami and talked about you know all of this work, so I think that there's always going to be a need for this kind of gathering uh as opposed to just the individual venture of a solo person going to an archive and researching alone, it's in these coming together, so um I guess I would offer that you know as we start to think about what a

new archive could be, thinking about animation from the from day one, thinking about the public engagements, thinking about the talks, thinking about the connections with the with the people and the storytellers from the beginning.

COLE: Thank you so much, uh is anyone else from our panelists want to say anything before we go? But I just want to thank you but like, is there anything else?

AMBER: Yeah, let's see if Pamila and Rebecka want to weigh in and just before we - please.

PAMILA: Um no I think uh just um my experience with the archive or counter archiving more or less um I I don't have a didactic strategy so and I don't suggest that if you if you're thinking of archiving or doing something with your fonds uh or with your memorabilia um, there's no right way or wrong way, you just start, just start from where you're at and something will come out of it you know, the stories will find you again because of course, you do carry your stories with you as you move through time.

COLE: Yeah, great thank you so much, Sheri, Rebecka.

PAMILA: Thank you.

COLE: Thank you Pamila.



REBECKA: I think what the chat is exposing here is just how complicated archival work is.

AMBER: Oh yeah.

REBECKA: And I think that one of the the greatest challenges for me in archives is that there is no right answer but there are better answers sometimes, if that makes sense? And that some of the traditional methods and practices of archives have been developed over you know hundreds of years and I and I don't just mean Western archives, I mean there are there are traditions in every corner of the world that are archival traditions and there's something in those traditions right? There's a reason why they have sustained themselves over time um. Forever is a really long time in archives, so I like to also think and challenge everyone here to think of archives not as forever things, but as things that we keep for as long as we need them and if we no longer need archival structures in the way that um Canada has created them, or in the way that Western cultures have created them, then let's challenge whether or not those need to be persisted for the future and when you're creating the Hamilton queer archives, you can do it however you want to do it and that's the glory of it, there's no right way to do it but there are better ways, and so I think this just coming together is is one of those better ways, seeking divergent interests and passion about it. I said the archives are things that seduce you, I think I've been trying to break up with archives for like four years now and I still can't, um because you all suck me back in, um but yes the archives are are sexy places

and we just have to be comfortable with um exploring the boundaries of what that means. COLE: Absolutely, thank you so much Rebecka, and I mean we have to say, I just have to say, on behalf of Hamilton like Rebecka and Syrus both are Hamiltonians I mean, you know they are now Hamiltonians so that's great, I'm not sure about Sheri, but Sheri? No.

SHERI: No, I'm currently living in um on Anishinaabeg territory, um Three Fires Confederacy territory, home of the Delaware nation, also known as Chatham-Kent region of Ontario.

COLE: Okay okay, yeah thank you for for that, and Pamila are you in Hamilton? No, you're abroad. PAMILA: No I'm not. I I did grow, I did uh grow up visiting family in Hamilton, I still have some family and friends in Hamilton but uh it's been a while, mostly Stoney Creek actually is where I used to go, the gurdwara, the Sikh gurdwara and the community there, uh this Punjabi Sikh community there, but in terms of uh social uh cultural friends outside of my um ethnic community, um yeah, folks who went to Mac and stuff but yeah. Now now it's all the rage to move to Hamilton, apparently so yeah. COLE: Oh it is, it is, it's like trying you know trying to be you know you know just don't try and buy a house for like 100 you know 100 million dollars just trying to - thank you all for coming -

AMBER: Oh sorry Cole, a lot of people are saying good thanks in the chat to our panelists, but someone earlier invited the pa - all the panelists if you have a link to your website or a current project online, if you want to post that while I say the uh some

of the remaining thank yous and call some more names including some of the many people who helped us organize tonight's event that would be great, pop that in the chat. I want to thank Nancy Taylor and the Taylor family, for the financial support of the Department of English and Cultural Studies that makes tonight's event possible through the John Douglas Taylor Conference Fund, thanks to our partners at Hamilton Public Library, especially Karen Milligan who you saw in the video, and Shelley McKay, a huge thanks to our technical wizard extraordinaire uh Simon Lebrun, who's been behind the scenes all night and everything has worked smoothly and um that doesn't usually happen for me. Yeah huge thanks Simon, and for the amazing website work. Also huge thanks to the Canadian Hearing Services for making CART live transcription possible this evening and uh finally last but definitely not least, to all the McMaster students who helped to organize this week's events, uh Linzey Corridon who you met earlier, Emma Croll-Baehre and Martia Croll-Baehre who've been busy in the chat, Aseja Dava who's been out there live tweeting and updating our social media sites, Theresa Kenney, Adrianna Michell, who's also been helping in the chat, Laurel Richardson, Emma Rockwood and Katrina Sellinger, who mentioned earlier that she was super glad, Pamila, that you could make it and sent out that invite for us, as well as all the students in my Queerness in the Archives course, and some people are asking about Thursday night's event, um if you registered for tonight you'll get a link for Thursday night's event, there's more info available on our website, it will feature Cole telling more stories about um Hamilton's queer and trans history as well as Richard

Douglass-Chin, Pauline Kajiura and uh NaWalka Geeshy Meegwun, also known as Lyndon George, so it's going to be a great night.

COLE: And uh thank you to Vilma, did you mention Vilma?

AMBER: Oh yeah, Vilma Rossi for helping in the chat as well!

COLE: Thank you to everyone, it was just like amazing tonight, uh excellent discussion, and uh please join us on Thursday. It'll be great, and uh yeah. And then we're going to talk about some uh much work that's going to happen in 2022, okay? Thanks.