
Education, GIS Mapping and Portals of Knowledge: Archival Strategies and Perspectives from ONE Archives

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Abstract:

Following recent occurrences in world politics, archiving queer content has become fraught with concerns. Just when the future of the queer past was looking more bright, agencies that provide grants for processing, Internet freedoms, and greater political protections have altered their foci creating challenges. This presentation speaks of efforts by ONE Archives at the University of Southern California to create a global GIS Mapping Project, an International Internet Portal, educational resources for teachers of LGBTQ history and other strategies to protect and disseminate queer content to communities in need in a time of strife.

*Over the past years ONE created *Queer Terrains*, a GIS mapping project whose goal is to populate spaces and historical times that suffered erasure of queer presences. *Queer Terrains* also provides alternative points of entry into archives around the world. Now there are over fifteen hundred pins on the site, more than thirty on a Tokyo site and plans to extend that terrain to a global context with the cooperation of individuals and institutions worldwide, as the participants in this panel show. ONE does not seek to own this platform but become a content aggregator. The international Internet portal is a joint project with a major national archive to produce a portal into archival content, for smaller archives, which have limited resources for an online presence, to increase visibility and accessibility. ONE's educational panel project has already produced a series of panels on LGBTQ American History, AIDS History and Legendary Lesbians, that are currently on loan to affinity groups at corporations, in high schools and through resource aggregators for LGBTQ education. Continuing to protect the future of the queer past will take new strategies and greater cooperation in this new world order, using PowerPoint slides and content from the archive itself this presentation seeks to share possible strategies for the future.*

For those who are unfamiliar with ONE Archives at the University of Southern California, it is the largest LGBTQ Archive in the world, with between three and four million items. ONE Inc. (the early closeted name for the institution) began in 1952 in Los Angeles as one of the first independent homophile organizations in the United States. A few months later in January 1953 ONE Inc. began publishing the first national gay magazine in the United States called ONE Magazine. ONE's members included Bailey Whitaker, aka Guy Rousseau, and Marvin Edwards, aka Merton Byrd, both African-American men, Stella Rush aka Sten Russell a self-avowed *kai kai*, that is, a lesbian who wanted to be neither butch nor femme, and Joan Corbin aka Eve Ellory who was the illustrator for many of the early ONE Magazine covers. Bailey Whitaker gave the organization its name, "ONE," which comes from a Thomas Carlyle essay that reads, "A mystic bond of brotherhood makes all men [sic] one." Each member had an aka, also known as, monikers as they had day jobs and did not want to expose themselves to arrest and criminalization. After the 1950s ONE's mission steadily shifted under the guidance of James L. Kepner, a leftist sometimes socialist and former Christian, and Dorr Legg, a Republican landscape architect/accountant. By the 1960s they had moved to an emphasis on collecting archival and cultural objects to document the queer past.

Today we at ONE are the inheritors of that legacy and are striving to make our mission—that of preserving LGBTQ materials, and educating others about the queer past—a reality. We also strive to expand our mission to helping other queer institutions around the world to thrive as we all strive for greater global gendered equality. I met most of the members in the Roundtable presented here through the Archives Libraries and Museums (ALMS) conference held in Amsterdam some years ago. I have tried to open channels of communication by inviting them to speak and participate with us at our archive. I invited three of the participants here today to come to ONE during our internal University Program called Visions and Voices, which underwrites performances and exhibitions. That particular event, entitled *Queer in the Other Europe* showcased Anna Borgos's film about Hungarian lesbians and a panel discussion with Pawel Leszkowicz, and Ira Roldugina. The idea at the time was to shed light on the difficulties facing Eastern European gays, a topic that in retrospect was predictive not only of conditions in Eastern Europe but perhaps the U.S. as well. Later, Leszkowicz came to ONE for a year long Fulbright Research Fellowship, which remains a great moment for us.

What follows, however, is an examination of efforts by ONE to expand its mission to international scope. Furthermore to look to projects and programs at ONE in their current iteration with specific emphasis on recent projects that worked for us, and analysis of those that have not. This will include some new projects that are still being developed.

When I arrived in 2002, the ONE Institute—as it was called then—had just moved into its current building on the campus of the University of Southern California, a private research university in Los Angeles. The materials were in a terrible state. There were boxes, objects, and filing cabinets everywhere. It was a collection that had suffered neglect, but was valued by a small group of community leaders and loyal overseers. Nothing was processed, nothing was in proper storage environments, and nothing was accessible online, but the collection was beloved by the community that had created it.

Almost immediately, we began to apply for grants through Federal and California State Institutions. To our surprise we soon received Federal grants even under the George W. Bush administration, which at that time seemed radically conservative. Our first grant allowed us to hire two full-time archivists for the first time. We began to process the collections and house them in acid-free environments. Twelve years and some fifteen million dollars later, we are now almost 95% processed and are well on our way to digitizing our materials.

Our early efforts were focused exclusively on processing our collections. This was exhilarating but daunting work. Much of the material in the archive dates from the early 1950s and is foundational to any understanding of the development of the homophile movement in the United States. However the processing was paramount to us as we wanted to have intellectual control over what we had, prioritizing access before digitization. While processing occurred we had to fend off well-meaning members of the activist community around us. These were great folks, who were not archivists and had no idea about what to do with an archive. This should bring you up to date on our history. For the remainder of this paper I want to speak of our recent projects: Our PST LALA exhibitions, our educational offerings in the form of our Panel Project to be used by educators, the Queer Terrains GIS Mapping Project, and A Digital Hub for Queer Archives worldwide.

Strangely enough, the next step in ONE's history was the opening of the first LGBTQ Gallery & Museum in Los Angeles in what had been a loading dock in the City of West Hollywood. This decision proved essential as it became increasingly apparent that potential donors and non-academics had very little idea what an archive was or what its value was to them. By opening boxes as we often did on tours of our space and unpacking the contents in abbreviated descriptions, community leaders, potential donors, and educators began to understand what we were and what we had, perhaps most importantly, why we are of value. The ONE Gallery & Museum was a slow success. The first two years we cast about presenting one-person shows and trying to be as diverse and inclusive as possible. Then, we wrote to the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, which was then in development of its first Pacific Standard Time initiative. That initiative's goal was to show the world the importance of Los Angeles and its artists in the period from 1945-1980. The Getty accepted our application but did not fund us, as the funding round was already completed by the time we had applied. Over the next three months we raised \$107,000 to fund our first PST show. We mounted that first professional exhibit with the help of David Evans-Frantz our current Curator and Mia Locks, his co-curator who has recently completed the Whitney Biennial. Our first PST show was called *Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles 1945-1980* and it was a huge success. The exhibition raised our profile and gave us incredible confidence as the collaboration with the Getty allowed us to claim a higher profile and increased visibility than we had previously been able to achieve alone.

The next aspect of our new project offerings was a series of educational panels; essentially these are foam core posters that tell abbreviated histories of the LGBTQ struggle for social equality. They can be mounted on easels in the atriums of corporations who pay for the loan of these materials. Currently we have thirty-six such panels on the topic of American LGBTQ history that we loan out to high schools and teachers nationwide for a lesser rate than we do to the corporations. Each panel has a different theme. So far we have completed LGBTQ American

History, Legendary Lesbians, and A Chronicle of HIV/AIDS History. Currently we are working on Queer Leaders of Color, and Gays in Hollywood.

In 2012 in California Senator Mark Leno passed the F.A.I.R. Education Act. The Idea of the Act was to compel K-12 educational institutions to teach LGBTQ and disability histories. When I attended an early conference on the implementation of the F.A.I.R. Act I presented a PowerPoint that reviewed queer history. At the end of my presentation a young black woman stood up and said, "Wow, that was great! I didn't know any of that stuff. My question is when the fuck will I get to learn this?" And that is in part how the Panels Project started. When I got back to ONE I remembered that we had done a series of posters in the upstairs gallery of the archives that reviewed the careers of famous gay folks including Bailey Whitaker (mentioned earlier), our early founders: Jim Kepner and Dorr Legg. Additionally, Dorothy Putnam the first American woman to receive a chauffeur's license in the 1920s, and drive trucks in WWII was included. We also included Reid Erickson, America's first female to male "transsexual" whose generosity saved ONE Institute in the early 1960s. These very simple panels began our Panels Project. We began designing the panels with all volunteer labor and thus sparked the beginning of the Panel Project.

The idea for Queer Terrains GIS Mapping Project sprang from a statement that then Iranian President Ahmadinejad made at Columbia University on September 24th 2007, "In Iran," he said, "we don't have homosexuals like in your country." This prompted us to think that it was time to queer the entire globe. Thus, we began a small scale mapping project, confined to the city of Los Angeles incorporating the *Bob Damron Gay Guides* that were used by queer folks to navigate the fraught landscape of the United States beginning in the 1960s. By receiving some small start up grants we began to populate Queer Terrains with places from the guides. From there, we partnered with an individual from the community who had created his own map, using volumes like *Gay L. A.* by Stuart Timmons and Lillian Faderman, which cited LGBTQ locations in Los Angeles going back to the 1860s. We merged the two maps and ended up with almost 2,000 entries. It was clear from the beginning that just having these pins on the map with a name of venues, addresses, and location codes for longitude and latitude was not enough. We wanted to create depth by using materials in our archives. We wanted users to come back again and again to look behind the locations on the map to see the content that the archives provided.

Here are some examples of that content: We have very rare interior footage of a lesbian bar in Studio City, California, called Joani Presents. Joani's hosted such gay luminaries as the famed female impersonator Jim Bailey, and there were frequent drag shows and costume contests for the patrons of Joani's as well. We have many pieces of ephemera from Joani's including, matchbooks, advertisements and flyers. Joani's also helped begin the career of Beverly Shaw, Sir, a lesbian chanteuse and mistress of ceremonies, who later produced her own album, which included a lullaby that bid her patrons good night. Shaw opened the Club Laurel, which was renowned in lesbian circles of the time. Included in the ephemera ONE owns from the Club Laurel is a star that hung outside featuring a three quarter profile of Shaw in the center. We also have Shaw's silver jacket. All these things produce a connection to the space and time that is inaccessible without them.

We also have ephemera, photography, and other materials from Griff's, a bar on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles across from Paramount Studios. Griff's namesake Richard Griffin was a successful bar owner for many years. His bar was among the first to cater to gay bikers, BDSM enthusiasts and leather boys. Then there is the infamous Studio One and the Backlot. These venues were created out of an old film studio space as its name implies that was retooled to be the preeminent disco of 70s Los Angeles. The Backlot hosted such celebrities as the Broadway tap dancing musical star Tommy Tune, comedienne Phyllis Diller, the cast of *Designing Women* and many others. With these additional exciting images, video clips and ephemera added to the content of each pin on the map, Queer Terrains comes alive. It is an innovative entry point to the archives. Instead of static lists and endless pages of text, researchers can see the landscape of queer history replete with photographs, videos, audio and ephemera that help it come alive. Queer Terrains will go live in August 2017. It is my hope that soon we can begin to create a shared platform where many archives around the world can post their own maps as well and join us in queering their own cities. But this site like so many others is an experiment. How does the content get created? ONE does not have staff that can devote themselves to the task of writing and collating data for the site. We have thus far relied on volunteers and unpaid interns, but this does not move as quickly as we'd like. Still, the site has promise and could indeed lead to truly incredible innovation in the ways that the archive is accessed and contextualized. The map also produces a new kind of discoverability that leads users into the archive not through lists, but through landscapes that are rich with visual culture.

This desire to have a shared platform for discoverability has also led us to the idea for a new Digital Hub that will also be coming soon. The hub (no official name has been chosen yet) will be designed to lead researchers to queer archives all over the world at a central portal where we can all link together. By partnering with a national leader in the U.S. we will host the site in a location that will make it stable and hopefully produce a level of permanence. It is our hope that many smaller archives will be discoverable and will learn from the example of larger and more developed archives how to organize and eventually digitize their collections. We hope to provide grants in the future to support small collections development. In the initial phase the hub will provide finding aids alone. But in the final phase we hope to be able to provide access to digital materials so that many smaller collections can be visible to the community of researchers worldwide. This project too is fraught with difficulties. What sorts of vocabularies will we use to describe folks? Words for transgender statuses are developing as we speak. How will we care for the smaller collections and simultaneously make sure we are not becoming elitist around larger richer institutions, or in the weeds of training amateur archivists? These and a myriad of other questions and concerns make the task daunting.

This year we are also producing our second offering for the Getty's second PST initiative called PST LALA, or Pacific Standard Time Los Angeles and Latin America. This time instead of having to raise funds, we made it into the grants round and the Getty has generously funded our exhibition: *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* This exhibition will exhume the career of Mundo Meza a gay Chicano from East Los Angeles. The exhibit recontextualizes Mundo's network of friends, artists and activists. This effort has spanned over four years and is the most ambitious single project we have ever produced. Among the topics examined in the exhibition will be HIV/AIDS, which cut Mundo's life tragically short. We'll examine the Latina/o community's valor in its struggles against the dual repression of gender discrimination

and racial prejudices. The exhibit housed in our West Hollywood Gallery & Museum and in the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) space in West Hollywood will be championed and marketed by the Getty's enormous branding and communications machine.

These are three of the projects we are working on at ONE, in addition to researchers visits, tours of the collections, and robust events and exhibitions schedules, we also host classes and community groups in our facility for half day visits. In 2016, we received 596 researchers from all over the world including 23 states in the U.S. and 7 countries from around the world. Our collections now contain over 48 languages, and we are especially diverse in the areas of serials, our subject files and our archival collections. Anecdotally I'd say we are on track to outdo our previous numbers.

All of the aforementioned is to say that in many ways ONE is a great success. This year alone we have an embarrassment of riches having received both a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant, and a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) grant. However, that is not my point in this essay. Indeed, my point is to say that even with all this great success we feel exposed, tenuous and often impoverished. This is in part due to the election in the United States, which has seen the possible evisceration of federal granting agencies like the NEH, NHPRC, NEA and CLIR all of whom have funded us. We also have seen added interest in our collections from outside entities in the LGBTQ community who sometimes see us as a potential cash cow for drawing income. Despite all the successes mentioned above, we still struggle and are in a fight for our lives. Our building, which ironically is a former fraternity house, is in desperate need of remodeling. We have no heating ventilation and air conditioning. Our staff is skeletal and is a bare minimum of what we need, and we struggle to get community members to fund us. Their response is often: "Well, you are a part of a rich university, why are they not supporting you and why should we in the community give our funds to you?" The university does indeed offer generous support. They have hired four new positions for our archive; they underwrite our IT services, maintenance of our building and help us with grant writing and a myriad of other support activities.

Recently I was invited by the Museu da Diversidad Sexual in Sao Paulo, Brazil to come and speak at a Gay Pride event there. I was asked because one of their members had come to visit ONE and was deeply impressed with what we had achieved and wanted guidance on how to move ahead with their museum. I was unable to attend because the U.S. State Department would not fund the travel. This was a small thing, and in the scope of what happens at the archive, not truly something that I would have expected would happen. However, our government's refusal to fund the travel and our inability to help another archive and museum to develop saddened me.

My point here is that although we are have made great strides, are the largest archive of our kind, and are housed in a strong university setting, we still struggle with the same sorts of problems that all archives struggle with: funding, staffing and stability. Because of our scale we could arguably not survive on our own. Because of the university setting we struggle with the idea that we will be treated as many archives are with "benign neglect." We ask ourselves daily, where does the next funding come from? How will the current political climate affect us? Can we sustain our rate of growth and production? Can we raise the funds for a new building from our community?

There are many days in which we are happy to remind myself about the university's kindness, and without it we fear we'd be in storage. However, what I have noticed that is most important is the collaborations, institutional or otherwise, that we enter into. Without these we would soon be irrelevant, isolated and alone. We as queer archives cannot stand alone. We must support each other and help in whatever ways we can. As I look around the world I fear for folks in other places where the legal freedoms we have in the U.S. still privilege us in ways that are astounding. Not long ago marriage to my partner would not have been possible. Not long ago queer archiving in and of itself would have been a struggle that could have resulted in incarceration. Not long ago the problems that seem so daunting to me today would have seemed preferable to what we faced. At the risk of seeming too dramatic I also remember a time when I felt strong men and right wing insurgencies happened in other countries and not in the U.S. I have recently been encouraged to think twice about my smugness about this. In closing I want to say, it the partnerships, collaborations and involvement we have with other institutions such as the Getty, the University of Southern California, UCLA, The Leslie Lohman Museum in New York, MOCA in Los Angeles and many other granting and funding institutions that keeps us alive. But it is our collaborations with the LGBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the June L. Mazer archive in Los Angeles the Los Angeles LGBT Center, the Schwules Museum, La Berkana bookstore in Madrid, Les Mots de la Bouche bookstore in Paris, and others that we remain relevant and a part of a larger community of archives locally and globally. Without the support, cooperation and exchange of ideas we get from these institutions our mission would be impossible. This is especially true in this time when right wing insurgencies, fascism, and terror hog the media spotlight.