

STONE HELLESUND

Skeivt Arkiv

The Establishment of a Queer Historical Archive
in Norway 2012–2015

For many, remembering is an act of will, a conscious battle against ordained emptiness. (Nestle 1998, 226)

THIS ESSAY WILL tell the story of the establishment of a queer archive in Norway. This chronicle also hopes to be an empirical contribution to the more theoretical discussions on queer archives *per se*. The construction of a new archive raises a wealth of dilemmas, particularly for those of us who have been academically raised under a deconstructivist paradigm. In his doctoral thesis about queer archiving, art historian and queer theorist Mathias Danbolt (2013, 60–3) explores the complicated landscape between (what he calls) archophilia and archophobia. How are we, in a poststructuralist academic world, to deal with the phenomena of the archive? How are we to reconcile our deconstructivist inclinations with an archive logic that is exactly about naming and categorizing? With the obvious problems of representation, categorization, normalization, marginalization/mainstreaming, et cetera, Danbolt (2013) states:

A queer theoretical understanding of the heterogeneous and fundamentally indeterminate characteristics of sexuality challenges gay and lesbian archival logics that categorize historical material according to sexual identities. A “queer” archive may in this sense come across as a contradiction in terms. (Danbolt 2013, 77)

Danbolt performs nuanced and important discussions throughout the text and examines queer theorist J. Halberstam's (2005) writing on queer history and queer archives. In his interpretation of Halberstam's work, Danbolt (2013, 81) states, "queering the archive is a means to make 'future histories' possible."

I like to think of the newly established Norwegian *Skeivt arkiv* as exactly such an initiative: a way to make future histories possible. While Halberstam might be mainly concerned with the possibility of creating stories for a queer future, I am less sure of what purpose these stories should have. Two of my favorite writers in queer history, Joan Nestle and Gayle Rubin, have both written personal and moving accounts of their concerns about the preservation of traces of queer history: Nestle (1998) in her work on the Lesbian Herstory Archives and Rubin (2011) in her summing up of her many academic projects on different parts of queer life throughout the years. Although we certainly come from different times and places, there are still recognizable elements to be found for me in Nestle and Rubin's accounts of the importance of finding and collecting traces of queer pasts. I recognize that the opening of a queer archive in Norway in 2015 is a part of this genealogy and this form of personal and academic activism. I also recognize that every such effort to dig into the past is also a reflection of the contemporary context.

This essay will be an attempt to anchor the establishment of the Norwegian queer archive in its time and place, and record the context for future generations. I will tell about the work we have done that has led us to the official opening of *Skeivt arkiv* at the University of Bergen Library in April 2015 and to receive 5 million NOK in annual support through the national budget in November 2015.

"We" in this context includes me, the author, who launched the idea for a queer archive when I started working at the University of Bergen Library in January 2012. Already from the start, historian Runar Jordåen has been my fellow conspirator and main moral support. His knowledge of queer history and his enthusiasm for the archive have been crucial and we have developed many of the ideas for the archive together.

From late 2013, academic librarian Simon Mitternacht has also been heavily involved in the project. As I received a new position as professor of cultural studies in the fall of 2014, Runar Jordäen took over as project leader for the archive in August 2014. Hannah Gillow Kloster (with a background in digital humanities) and Heidi Rhode Rafto (an anthropologist) started working on the project in the following months. Academic librarian Jan Olav Gatland has also contributed with his knowledge of gay cultural history. In addition to this queer archive group, we have also received practical help from many fantastic colleagues at the library and in the early days from a small group of volunteers.

Background

Both sex between persons of the same sex/gender and transgression of gender norms have been important taboos in Norwegian history, at least as far back as the Viking era.¹ I see queer history as a) the history of these transgressions, b) the history of the people who “committed” them, and 3) the history of the various societal reactions to these transgressions. Another way of expressing this would be to say that queer history is about exploring the construction of deviance as well as normalcy in terms of sex/gender. It is about studying the individual and collective negotiations around these borders and about being sensitive to the major as well as subtle shifts in the content of deviance as well as to the subtle shifts in the content of normalcy and respectability. A queer archive should obviously not be a tool to impose contemporary labels, identities, and practices on the past, but a way of exploring the different logics of understanding genders and sexual practices in different historical contexts and to explore the different ways the borders of genders and sexualities have both been challenged and policed. I would like to think that my own definition of “queer” in this historical context resembles that of the professor of English Elizabeth Freeman (2007), who in her introduction to *GLQ*'s special issue on temporalities writes:

If we reimagine “queer” as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see the manipulation of time as a way to

produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality), we encounter a more productively porous queer studies. (Freeman 2007, 159)

The word “queer” approximately translates to the word *skeiv* in Norwegian, for example, “queer” theory is translated to “*skeiv*” theory. *Skeiv* literally means “bent” in Norwegian. The concept currently seems to be a) associated exclusively with queer theory and queer activism (and for that reason has often been seen as rather controversial in the LGBT community), or b) a synonym/umbrella term for LGBT. The latter seems to be the increasingly common understanding and especially younger LGB(T) persons seem to be replacing the LGB(T) terms with the term *skeiv*.²

In the context of *Skeivt arkiv* we use *skeiv* both as an umbrella term for sexual actions, expressions or identities transgressing the norms of heterosexuality (including gender transgression) and as a concept that allows us to transgress contemporary categories. While categories like LGBTIAQ, et cetera, are currently in use in this landscape, historically there have been a wide range of concepts, identities, and frameworks for understanding genders and sexual acts.³ The term *skeiv*, I believe, allows us to document and explore these elements.

Traditionally museums, archives, the relatives of queer persons, and queer persons themselves, have not thought that traces of queer history are something that should be collected, preserved and kept for the future. The exclusion of material on non-normative genders and sexualities from the archives and museums is partly rooted in the fact that homosexuality and other “perversions” have been criminalized and/or pathologized until fairly recently, resulting in traces of a queer past being seen as something better forgotten. In institutional archives, traces of non-normative genders and sexualities are therefore often found in the registers of the criminal and the sick, for example in the journals of physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists as well as in the records of prisons or mental institutions.⁴ Queer history is hence a fragile and unstable history marked by crime and shame. However, empirical research on queer history has also discovered a rich queer past outside prison

and medical records. Transgression of gender norms, sex between persons of the same gender, queer communities, friendship networks, relationships, language and literature have existed alongside repressive discourses. Folklore material, private diaries, letters, biographies, organizational history, oral histories, photographs and other memorabilia are some of the crucial sources for uncovering queer lives. This kind of material is particularly important for documenting the lives of marginalized groups, whose histories are not mentioned in mainstream history. As communication and rhetoric scholars Charles E. Morris III and K.J. Rawson (2013) point out,

LGBT materials have always, often unwittingly, appeared in public collections, but without official sanction or mainstream acknowledgement, and they may have been deliberately excluded if they were deemed too “pornographic” or “immoral.” (Morris III and Rawson 2013, 76)

In addition to collecting material and archives that are still privately owned, *Skeivt arkiv* will map and direct people to potentially interesting material already existing in other public archives.

Despite rapidly changing attitudes toward queers and an increasing focus on minority history, queer history has been almost totally absent, even up to recent years, both in the governmental committees working on minority issues as well as in the cultural heritage sector. While the indigenous population, the national minorities and, more recently, also the “new minorities” have been given a lot of attention in archives and museums during the last decades, traces of queer history are still surprisingly absent in the cultural heritage institutions of Norway. While queer history recently has become in demand in libraries, archives, museums and research in many places of the world, this has not yet been the case in Norway.⁵ We hope, however, that the establishment of *Skeivt arkiv* is the start of such a wave in Norway as well. Presently we have very little knowledge of how queer transgressions of genders and sexualities have been lived, experienced and viewed in Norwegian history. However, it seems that the history of (queer) genders and sexualities is now seen as

an important and interesting part of cultural history and the timing of our archive project has been perfect. We have met (almost) nothing but goodwill when we have promoted the idea and it has been relatively easy to argue the case for the need of a queer archive (with some exceptions, see next section).

Why a Queer Archive in Norway?

When *Skeivt arkiv* was officially opened in April 2015, we found out that the Norwegian embassy in Tokyo surprisingly wrote about the opening on their web pages. At that time, we were still having major financial struggles and the Ministry of Culture was ignoring and/or denying our requests for a meeting to present our project. At the time it felt “odd” (to put it politely) that the Norwegian authorities were celebrating and promoting the Norwegian effort to preserve queer history to a foreign public while the government back home had not made any effort in this preservation work and was even refusing to have a dialogue with those of us who were actually doing this work.

The recent transformation in the Nordic countries, where “the homosexual” has gone from deviant criminal to valued citizen (Gressgård and Jacobsen 2003; Mühleisen et al. 2009; Rydström 2011) seems to encourage a “revisionist” approach to history. “Sensitivity to LGBT issues,” can be promoted as part of a national identity at the same time as authorities conduct a policy where traces of queer history risk being erased from social and historical consciousness

Another example is that so far there has been very little research done on Norwegian queer history. Only a few doctoral theses have such an approach and only a few other works discuss material and cases relevant to the field (e.g., Aarset 2000; Solli 2002; Hellesund 2003; Stenvoll 2003; Kristiansen 2004; 2008; Riisøy 2006; Halsos 2007; Waage 2009; Jordåen 2010; Manum 2010; Rydström 2011; Wolfert and Jordåen 2015; see also Jordåen 2015 and forthcoming for an overview of research on Norwegian queer history). It was then somewhat surprising when Runar Jordåen got a request from a master’s student at another university who wanted to write about queer history. The student had

been warned by her supervisor that the supervisor in question thought that “everything had already been done” in this field. Just in case, the supervisor still recommended that the student contact Jordåen. This shows that there is a lack of understanding of the dearth of research on Norwegian queer history within academia. We are also getting subtle signals that although people are supportive and “gay-friendly” in their approach to *Skeivt arkiv*, our commitment to a queer archive is seen as overly ambitious for what is considered as an incredibly marginal, exotic, and non-universal field of interest. From a non-queer perspective, it seems like there has been plenty said about LGBT, queer, and related issues. From a queer perspective, the conversation and research here has hardly begun.

I see at least three different reasons for establishing a queer archive:

- **Minority history:** The realization in the archive and museum sector during the last decades that minority history is dramatically neglected in the national histories and that special effort is necessary to find and preserve sources for this history.
- **Emancipatory history:** Traces and stories of queer lives in the past can inspire contemporary queer individuals and groups.
- **History of genders and sexualities:** The need to have sources for the academic analysis of gender and sexuality systems of the past.

Although my personal interest lies primarily in the last bullet point, I see each of these three reasons as legitimate and we have used all three as strategic arguments for establishing *Skeivt arkiv*.

Establishing *Skeivt arkiv*

Talk of a need for a gay/lesbian archive has been present in the gay/lesbian community in Norway for several decades. Although never a “hot” issue in the LGBT movements, activists with an interest in history have discussed such an idea for a long time. There has also been a voluntary LGB archive group in Oslo that has collected some material and encouraged lesbians and gays to systemize and donate their material to established public archives. Only a few have done so.⁶

Internationally, it seems like most queer archives are run by activists, or at least have started out as activist archives. In the contemporary Norwegian context, I believe that the only possibility of starting a functioning queer archive would be through existing institutions such as an established archive, a museum or a university library.⁷ All these institutions collect private archives and could potentially also house a queer archive. These institutions have the infrastructure, stability, and governmental support that are needed. An activist archive did not seem realistic because Norwegian society does not have a strong tradition of private funding for such initiatives, and because it would be hard to provide stability and continuity to such a project without any institutional support. I believe that in the Norwegian context, potential owners of relevant material would have more trust in a project embedded in a public institution than in an activist/NGO initiative. Another reason why I was interested in establishing a public/institutional archive, rather than an activist archive, is that I do not see queer history as belonging to any particular activist or identity group. To me, the history of transgressions of norms regarding genders and sexualities, the history of the people who “committed” them, and the history of the various societal reactions to these transgressions are crucial parts of general history and should be treated as such. It seems impossible to establish a clear “we” that could represent a collective “queer” identity in the present as well as in the past, and an archive resting on identities or particular activist groups would exclude important aspects of history. We want our archive to include queer lives lived long before the existence of – or far removed from – different forms of LGBT activism, and we also want to include material that reflects societal construction of normalcy and deviance throughout time that might not be directly linked to queer lives at all.⁸

I started working at the University of Bergen Library as an academic librarian in 2012. Already at the job interview, I mentioned the idea of a queer archive and was met with a positive response.

In October 2012 a two-day-seminar focusing mostly on queer history was held in Bergen and for the first time we made our plans for a queer archive public.⁹ The most well known LGBT-person in Norway,

celebrating her 50th anniversary as an activist in 2013, Karen-Christine (Kim) Friele, was one of the invited speakers. At the seminar, she surprisingly announced that she intends to donate her large private archive to the queer archive. Her contribution became an important foundation for *Skeivt arkiv*.

Initially it was crucial to establish the idea of the archive in our own organization. The management of the library as well as of the university as a whole was informed about our plans and progress. In addition to the support of the governmental agency, the LGBT Knowledge Centre, it was also crucial to gain support from the Norwegian LGBT Association (LLH),¹⁰ the main LGBT organization in Norway, and from the voluntary (and in 2012 mainly dormant) archive group in Oslo. Without support from these avenues our dream of a national historical queer archive could not have been pursued. The leader of the LGBT Knowledge Centre at the time, Hanne Grasmø, the leader of LLH, Bård Ny-lund, and the leader of the archive group, Leif Pareli, have been nothing but supportive. We have also been in touch with several other activist groups and organizations, such as the trans organization FTPN, the Organization for Transpersons in Norway.

In addition to these important areas of support and cooperation, it was important to anchor the project in the archive sector. *Skeivt arkiv* has received invaluable advice and economic and moral support from the archive section at Arts Council Norway. Through the Arts Council, we were also introduced to networks and conferences in the archive sector. The county archivist of Hordaland, where Bergen is situated, Anne Aune, has also been an important support for us in this field.

The university library allowed me and others to use a varying percentage of our time on the archive and provided the necessary infrastructure, such as scanners, computers, appropriate storage, et cetera. In addition to this, we received some funding from the University of Bergen and from the organization Fritt Ord. Our main financial support during the first years came from Arts Council Norway and the National Library of Norway. It was this funding that allowed us to hire Runar Jordåen and Hannah Gillow Kloster as (temporary) full-time employees in the fall of 2014.

Another important aspect in the establishment of the queer archive has been to convince politicians about the need for such an archive. Already in 2012, we instigated a few important political pushes. In 2013 Norway got a conservative minority government consisting of the conservative party, Høyre, and the right wing populist party, Fremskrittspartiet (FrP). This government was kept in office through a coalition with the liberal party, Venstre, and the Christian party, Kristelig Folkeparti (KrF). We did not have any luck in setting up meetings with representatives from Høyre, which held the position of Minister of Culture, or with FrP. However, all the other political parties were supportive, including the two other coalition parties, Venstre and KrF. All the parties in opposition to the sitting government were very supportive of *Skeivt arkiv*. Both of the socialist parties, Rødt and Sosialistisk Venstreparti (SV), have been explicitly supportive of the archive, as has Arbeiderpartiet (AP) (the Labor Party), particularly the very influential GLBT group in AP, which has been pushing for the archive in several contexts. In March 2015, we had a meeting with parliamentarian Kjersti Toppe from the agrarian centrist party, Senterpartiet (SP). Toppe started to work on a delegate proposal [*representantforslag*] to the Parliament. She worked together with the SV and AP parties and presented the proposal, asking for financial support for *Skeivt arkiv* in the Parliament on June 19, 2015 (Storting 2015). This was an extremely important and useful proposal for us and we used it in our further contact with parliamentarians from KrF and Venstre (both of which were in the government coalition). Venstre did not want to support a proposal from the opposition, but assured us that they wanted to work to support *Skeivt arkiv*. As expected, there was no money for *Skeivt arkiv* in the national budget presented by Høyre in October 2015. During the budget negotiations among the coalition partners, however, something happened. On November 23, 2015 we received the fantastic news that parliamentarian Terje Breivik from Venstre had managed to establish an annual grant of 5 million NOK to *Skeivt arkiv* in the national budget. In the parliamentary debate about *Skeivt arkiv* on January 21, 2016, all political parties expressed their support (Storting 2016).

Another important strategy for gaining political support has been to promote the archive and queer history through the media. *Skeivt arkiv* has received a lot of press attention and there seems to be a lot of interest in queer history from the general public. Both mainstream newspapers, the two LGBT magazines, Norwegian TV and Norwegian radio have featured different stories from *Skeivt arkiv*.

What is the lesson from this? One is that Norway is a small country and that it is possible to influence politics even by doing low key and very non-professional lobbying. Another lesson is obviously that the timing for the promotion of a queer archive was perfect. I believe that even five years earlier this would have been a much harder task. Now, with a few important exceptions, everyone seems ready to acknowledge this history.

What Is in the Archive, and what Do We Wish to Collect?

What kind of a queer archive is *Skeivt arkiv*, then? Freeman argued (2007, 162) that many of the new queer academics focusing on history “have championed eclectic, idiosyncratic, and transient archives including performances, gossip, found objects, and methods (or anti-methods) that rely on counterintuitive juxtapositions of events or materials.” A few central examples of this focus on queer archives as “archives of feelings” is the work of Ann Cvetovich (2003) and J. Halberstam (2005).

Historian Sara Edenheim (2014) discusses both this desire for a specific “queer archive of feelings” and the notion that such an archive could be something inherently different and better than a public research archive in her critical article, “Lost and Never Found: The Queer Archive of Feelings and Its Historical Propriety.” Although much of Edenheim’s critique of “the dream of a queer archive” certainly can be applied to the establishment of *Skeivt arkiv*, her point about the potentially false opposition between these two types of archives is highly relevant about our acquisition strategy. According to Edenheim (2014), the “queer archive of feelings” is made out to be characterized by ephemera and fragments. It is open, unlimited and arbitrary, it includes marginalized and condemned memories and feelings, and it has “magical” or fictional value. It includes material practices and digital “non-places” and fulfills

a psychic/emotional need, there is a sense of urgency, especially within a specific type of “queer archive literature” (Edenheim particularly analyzes the ideas in Cvetkovich 2003 and 2009, and Halberstam 2005 and 2006). The public research archive, on the other hand, is made out to be characterized by written documents and linear structures around canonical events. It is closed, limited, normative, and deviancy is excluded, value is determined according to historical or research interests. The narratives are coherent and the literal is valued. It fulfills a scientific need, and it is stagnant (Edenheim 2014, 40, table 1). Edenheim argues that this description misrepresents what a public research archive is and should be and that it somewhat romanticizes “the queer archive of affects.” Edenheim (2014, 42) also mentions a third category of archive, which is the folklore archive that acts as a museum of “ordinary people and their everyday objects.” As I see it, there are no clear boundaries between these three types of archive and *Skeivt arkiv* (as with probably most other contemporary archives) certainly contains elements from all three categories.

At the moment *Skeivt arkiv* consists of:

1. **A range of private archives.** It includes the archive of the Norwegian key figure of gay politics, Kim Friele. She started her activist work in 1964, and is still going strong today (at the age of 81). Her archive contains a wide range of material, mainly from her more than twenty years as head of the main LGB organization, DNF-48. We also have archives from several of her “opponents” during those years, ensuring that many different stories can be told from this era.¹¹ Other private archives document radical lesbian activism during the 1970s and 1980s, drag queening and queer entertainment from the 1980s and 1990s, as well as some longer autobiographies written for the archive, for example about radical gay politics during the 1970s and transvestite communities from the 1970s and 1980s. We have been promised intimate material like love letters and private photo albums, but have so far received mostly public or semi-public material (if e.g., material from lesbian radical feminists from the 1970s can ever be interpreted as “public”). In the material

we have received thus far, are also objects like buttons, T-shirts, posters, videos, cassettes, banners, and a box of dental dams. We are eager to continue to collect all kinds of material that can tell us something about queer lives and living. We are currently registering our material through the national archive system Asta, as well as in the University of Bergen Library's system, Marcus. While Asta gives us the opportunity to share our catalogues with the archive world, Marcus is an excellent tool for registering as well as scanning and exhibiting our documents online.

2. **Skeivopedia.** This online encyclopedia is still very much in the early stages, but stems from a discovery of how fragile much of the knowledge of queer lives is. For example, who knows what "Soperligaen" or "Flammefronten" were? The knowledge of this anarchist, feminist faggot group (Soperligaen) and the lesbian car repair group at the Women's House (Flammefronten) would have soon disappeared forever if it had not been written down now. We have started writing down information we stumble upon in our work in the archives. The editor of the articles for Skeivopedia is the project leader, Runar Jordæen, but we have had contributions from several people to this work.
3. **Books and journals.** In addition to the general book collection on queer history in our university library (which we are a part of), *Skeivt arkiv* is also building its own book and journal collection. The journal collection is especially exciting and extremely important to collect, since most of the queer journals and fanzines cannot be found in other libraries. The reason for this is probably partly that many of them were quite amateurish and were produced and distributed outside conventional channels, and partly because libraries have not seen the value in those magazines. One element also seems to have been some active censorship concerning magazines containing erotic images. After making an inventory of the existing journals/fanzines, we have so far discovered around fifty Norwegian ones. That is an impressive number and we see the potential for many master's theses on this material alone.

4. **Interviews.** One of the most urgent tasks facing the archive is to collect oral histories. Because the activists who established the first lesbian and gay organization around 1950 are now getting old (or are already dead), it feels like a race against time. We primarily want to do video interviews, from which we wish to edit out short three to five minute sections that describe some of the central themes of the interviews and publish them on our website. While we started out thinking that we might want to publish the interviews in their entirety (like e.g., <http://chicagogayhistory.org> does), we reconsidered this after we started to do the interviews. We want long and deep interviews and during several hours of autobiographic story telling there is bound to appear sensitive information or the description of third persons that should not be made accessible to everyone. The full-length interviews can be watched in our reading room after signing a declaration of confidentiality. With the new funding situation, starting a large interview project is a priority. We will interview activists as well as more “ordinary” queers and hopefully get a good collection of oral histories that tell about the experiences, emotions, and practicalities of different queer lives in our recent past.
5. **Queer stories.** During a former research project, I started collecting anonymous “queer stories” and already then planned that these might later be included in a future queer archive. The research project was on LGB living conditions (Anderssen and Malterud 2013) and in addition to a quantitative study with standardized categories, we wanted to give people the opportunity to decide for themselves what they saw as a queer life and what they saw as relevant information in a queer story. These anonymous self-defined queer stories seem to us to be an important addition to the more traditional archive material and we will keep the possibility open for people to continue to add their stories. It ensures a way for anyone to participate in the knowledge production of what queer lives can be, as well as in the ongoing work of defining what a queer life is. This material is well suited for teaching as well as for research

now and in the future. To see what participants emphasized in these stories in 2014 compared to for example in 2034 might be quite interesting.

6. **Our website** (<http://skeivtarkiv.no>). Receiving a small amount of funding for a website was one of the first things that happened in the building of the archive. As important as collecting and preserving queer history is, communicating and disseminating this history is equally important. We want to inspire students, researchers, journalists, activists, artists, and everyone to dig deeper into this field, which in turn will help us to produce more knowledge. An external firm set up the skeleton of our website after which Simon Mitternacht and Hannah Gillow-Kloster have done a lot of work on the site. We have also received massive help from our colleagues in the digital section at the University of Bergen Library.

How much of the collection should – and can – be digitalized is still an open question. Some of the material is already digitalized and available for anyone, some of it is digitalized but will only be accessible in our reading room due to copyright/privacy issues. Surprisingly much of the material we have received so far could be digitalized and made accessible if we had the resources to do so and if we find that, it would be a good use of our time. Another solution would be to digitalize on demand.

When we opened our webpages, we had already had a *Skeivt arkiv* Facebook page for some time. We find Facebook an excellent channel for dissemination and will continue to post small snippets of queer history there.

7. **Links to sources already existing in other archives or museums.** In addition to collecting our own material, we want *Skeivt arkiv* to be a resource pointing to potential sources of queer history that already exist in other archives and museums. While some obvious sources, such as police and court records and material concerning Norwegian psychiatry and homosexuality, is known and has been in part researched (e.g., Halsos 1999; Jordåen 2003; 2010), so little research is done on Norwegian queer history that we expect

much more material to turn up in the years to come. On a request from Jordæen, the National Library recently digitalized and made public the private archive of former university professor and later National Archivist, Ebbe Hertzberg (1847–1912). Hertzberg was involved in a homosexual scandal in the 1880s and his recently released (and now digitalized) correspondence reveals information about the bonds between Scandinavia and the budding gay subculture in Berlin around 1900 that had previously been unknown. Another example comes from some interesting cases discovered by historian Ola Teige. Teige is working on quite different issues, but has been very helpful in discovering fantastic new material on queer history. One of his cases is about the whipping and branding of the sawmill worker Aron Åsulsen in 1693. The material on this case contains interesting discussions around the nature of illicit desire and societal silence in these matters.¹² The other case is about a person who was living as a “working man,” happily married to a woman. The marriage took place in 1801. Not until s/he (i.e. the husband) was dead, however, was it discovered that s/he had a female body. We expect that a lot more interesting material will turn up in the years to come as the existence of the queer archive will become better known and the research interest in queer history will hopefully increase. Our goal is that anyone interested in queer history should find an overview of existing sources on Norwegian queer history on our webpages.

Skeivt arkiv is a hybrid archive. It is partly a typical archive in a mainstream institution, and partly an activist archive, a GLBTQ identity archive, a museum, a queer archive, and an archive of feelings.

Two notes on the material must be added at this point. The first concerns what can be called “discomforting and unpleasant archival encounters” (Morris III and Rawson 2013, 83). Professor of English Heather K. Love (2007, 32) draws our attention to the wish to ignore “the sad old queens and long suffering dykes who haunt the historical records,” to disregard the dreary and shameful aspects of queer history.

Even more problematic issues within the archive that might cause uneasiness relate to sexual abuse and pedophilia within the queer community. One example is the existence of a small, but relatively strong, group within the main LGB organization in the late 1970s and early 1980s working for cultural (and legal) acceptance of sexual relationships between adults and children. This is not the part of Norwegian queer history we promoted during our lobbying efforts. Nevertheless, the archive has the magazine published by this group, and we hope that someone will conduct research on it.

So far, we have not had to make the decision to refuse accepting material. Discussions on acquisition policy are sure to follow in the years to come. It is impossible for an archive to reflect all aspects and elements of a society. Choices will have to be made and, as archivist Rodney G.S. Carter (2006) points out:

This can be the result of passive or unconscious decisions on the part of the archivist, decisions based upon rationalization and reorientation of archival activities due to fiscal constraints and increasing demands. These decisions, combined with the active exclusion of certain dissenting voices and non-conforming records, have a drastic impact on the form of the archives and have great implications for the state of societal memory. (Carter 2006, 219)

Archive theorist Terry Cook (2011) underlines how appraisal is a critical and unavoidable part of archive work. Through the appraisal of different records, archivists “are determining what the future will know about its past: who will have a continuing voice and who will be silenced” (Cook 2011, 606). The contemporary archivist will try to capture a multitude of voices and stories in the archive while all along knowing that the archive can never be complete or perfect. As Carter (2006, 221) remarks, “[t]he records in the archives tell a very small part of a much larger and infinitely more complex story.” In his article on archive history and the current archival landscape, Cook ends his text with a vision for a contemporary archive and for the contemporary archivist. This includes

sensitivity to the whole range of citizens and their archival needs, openness to a wide range of sources and formats, and open reflections on the archivist's own subjective, mediational role (Cook 2011, 629–31). According to Cook (2011, 629–31), it is not merely a vision of the future, “but part of a growing professional agenda for archivists.”

Conclusion

Historical sociologist Harriet Bradley (1999, 108–9) defines an archive by saying that “the archive is the repository of memories: individual and collective, official and unofficial, licit and illicit, legitimating and subversive.” She continues: “on the basis of such memories we strive, however ineffectively and partially, to reconstruct, restore, recover the past, to present and re-present stories of the past within our narrative” (Bradley 1999, 108–9). Class, race, gender, location, et cetera are some of the factors that influence queer histories as well as other histories. *Skeivt arkiv* will look for nuances in practices, categories, and identities and will look for historical similarities, as well as differences. We want to create a queer archive that includes as many traces as possible of queer history. We will focus on queer practices and affects (through bodies, language and other representations), but also pay close attention to the articulation and construction of cultural perceptions, categories and identities. We need to archive material that can show as many varieties and nuances as possible. Queer history – with its complex tangle of various practices and identities, its self-identifications versus societal stigmatizations, its activist as well as its individual and solitary traces, its internal alliances as well as major conflicts – is certainly not a straight story!

Cvetovich (2003) and Love (2003; 2007) are among those who want “less celebration and more trauma” in the telling of lesbian history. Their way of reading the past exemplifies how re-readings can give new insights about both the past and the present, but also exemplifies how having archive material to consult, re-read, and re-understand is crucial. I welcome both trauma oriented and celebratory approaches to queer history, but see both as only a few of the many possible approaches. We can be quite certain that future “turns” in both academic and activist

contexts will draw attention to yet more aspects of queer history in all its multiplicity. Without source material however, these types of readings and re-readings would not be possible.

In working on a queer archive, there is no clear “us” and “them.” There are no stable categories of “queer,” “LGBT,” and “straight.” There are no clear borders between queer archives of feelings and traditional institutional archives. The existence of an archive such as *Skeivt arkiv*, however, makes it possible to constantly explore, question, rewrite, challenge, discover, feel and think through material that would no longer exist without *Skeivt arkiv*, or would be hard to find and access.

The national funding together with the resources we get from our own institution, have made the permanent establishment of a queer archive in Norway possible. We see a great need for someone to track down, collect, preserve, and disseminate traces of queer history still stored in peoples’ attics, drawers, and basements, and to identify and guide people to material, both old and new, that potentially already exists in other archives.

There are thousands of questions, considerations and decisions to raise and to make in the establishment of any archive and certainly not any less so in the establishment of an archive of queer history. We have solved some of the issues while we are still considering others, all of which can be criticized, challenged and debated in the years to come. To rephrase the quote from Nestle (1998) at the beginning of this essay, the building of *Skeivt arkiv* “has been an act of will, a conscious battle against ordained emptiness” in the field of Norwegian queer history. For me history is the primary tool to relativize and destabilize contemporary categories and frameworks of understanding. Particularly in the fields of gender and sexuality, this seems like a useful exercise. Hopefully the material in *Skeivt arkiv* will be used extensively in the years to come in order to relativize and destabilize and to inspire a multitude of work and interpretations on queer history.

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NOTES

1. Sex between men is treated in the Old Norse law of Gulating (one of the first Norwegian legislative assemblies (*ting* = assembly) 900–1300 CE. The following was included in the law in 1164: "And if two men enjoy the pleasures of the flesh and are accused and convicted of it, they shall both suffer permanent outlawry." (Gade 1986, 124)
2. The concept *skeiv* literally means bent, crooked, slanting or lopsided, and does not have negative connotations in itself. As a concept describing homosexuality or sexual/gendered difference, it did not arrive in Norway through queer theory/activism, but at least has a slightly longer history. It was e.g., the title of the Norwegian translation of Martin Sherman's play *Bent* in 1980, and the gay actor Arne Bang Hansen (1911–1990) used the term in the title of his autobiography from 1985, *Fra mitt skjeve hjørne* [*From My Queer Corner*].
3. The etymology of *skeiv* and other concepts of queerness remain to be explored (we have made a long list of Norwegian concepts used throughout history). I would also like to stress the importance of paying close attention to the meanings embedded in national languages, dialects and sociolects. Forcing the translation of everything

into English risks hiding important nuances and differences in our understandings of genders and sexualities.

4. The plentiful existence of deviants in these kinds of records underlines the Foucaultian point that queers have not necessarily become invisible, but rather highly visible because of the cultural focus on deviance (Foucault 1976). “It is rather ironic that it is through the records created in the acts of repression that the voices of the oppressed remain” (Carter 2006, 224; see also Edenheim 2014, 41). This being the case, it is still true that the public archives have mainly been concerned with documenting crimes and pathologies and thereby have certainly neglected to document the vast complexity of other queers and other aspects of queer lives.
5. However, a few efforts have been made. In addition to some explicit LGB archives existing in the national archive system, a few museums have also had exhibitions where LGB history has been included. Norsk Folkemuseum, a museum of cultural history, included a gay wedding in their wedding exhibition in 2008. Kvinnemuseet, the Women’s Museum, at Kongsvinger had an exhibition about homosexuality in 2008, called *En annen dans: En kjærlighetshistorie om homofili* [An Other Dance: A Love Story about Homosexuality]. In the summer of 2014, Kulturhistorisk museum, the Museum of Cultural History, in Oslo set up the exhibition *Pride Revisited* as a part of a larger exhibition called *Ja vi elsker* [Yes, We Love] (which expresses a double meaning, since it is also the title and the first words of the Norwegian national anthem). We also know of a few other museums that have brought in queer elements in more general exhibitions and there might also be initiatives that we do not know of. We also want to mention the very exciting project, *Queering Sámpí* that collected queer life-stories from Sámpí during the years 2011–2015.
6. Some have also given their private archives to the leader of the voluntary archive group, curator Leif Pareli. He has now donated these archives to *Skeivt arkiv*.
7. These are very different considerations and a very different context from that of Nestle and others in the USA in the 1970s: “We take no money from the government, believing that such an action would be an exercise in neocolonialism, believing that the society that ruled us out of history should never be relied upon to make it possible for us to exist. All the technology the archives has – the computer, the xeroxing machine – comes from lesbian, gay, feminist, and radical funding sources.” (Nestle 1998, 232) See also Cvetkovich (2003, chapter 7), for a further discussion of this.
8. “Queer activism” might be said to have emerged from the 1890s onward, then mainly in a few metropolises (see e.g., Chauncey 1994; Cook 2003; Beachy 2015). Most places in the western world, however, have only been markedly influenced by the queer activist waves of the 1950s, 1970s or even as late as the 1990s. Queer history and queer lives are a far older and far wider history than what can be related to modern LGBTQ identity movements. Material that reflect the construction of normalcy/deviance is not always linked directly to queer lives; it can be things like

- textbooks for school, women's magazines or etiquette books, indicating normal and proper sexual and gendered behavior.
9. We held the seminar in cooperation with the LGBT Knowledge Centre: National Centre for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, which is a center run by the Norwegian government with the aim of increasing knowledge about the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender persons.
 10. LLH changed name to FRI, in April 2016.
 11. The main, competing ideological positions at the time were a) DNF-48, a national organization with a strong leader (Kim Friele) with roots in the 1950s homophile movement; b) AHF (Working Groups for Homophile Liberation). AHF consisted of more politically radical groups with a strong connection to the new left as well as with the Maoist party (AKP-ml). There were strong conflicts between DNF-48 and AHF and many members and persons affiliated with AHF were excluded from DNF-48 in 1978. c) Lesbisk bevegelse, the lesbian radical feminists, with strong connections to the new women's movement.
 12. <http://skeivtarkiv.no/skeivopedia/rettssaken-mot-aron-asulsen-i-1693>.

SAMMENFATNING

Essayet beskriver prosessen med å etablere et nasjonalt skeivt historisk arkiv i Norge 2012–2015. Arkivet er etablert ved Universitetsbiblioteket i Bergen, og teksten diskuterer noen av problemstillingene og utfordringene dette arbeidet har bydd på. I tillegg til å dokumentere den faktiske etableringsprosessen, synliggjør teksten også noen av dilemmaene knytt til utvelgelsen, kategoriseringen og formidlingen som er en integrert del av arkivarbeidet. Forfatteren argumenterer for at det til tross for disse utfordringene og dilemmaene har en verdi å samle inn og ta vare på spor etter skeiv historie. Disse sporene er grunnlaget for at ulike versjoner av skeiv historie skal kunne skrives i fremtiden.

Keywords: queer archive, archive studies, establishing an archive, activism, politics, memory