

We are living in what, from some points of view, could be considered a golden age of queer culture. Protection under the law, equity legislation, as well as recognition of our relationships in the workplace and in the public sphere are all markers of improved lives for glbtqi+/queer/gender fluid people. These improvements are, of course, still tempered by the fact that we are still gender policed out of washrooms when we are simply trying to relieve ourselves or targeted and attacked in spaces we assumed were safe. In any liberation discourse, there is the impulse to have a moment of repose and look back over the terrain that has been covered. One way of doing this is to honor/ remember or at least illuminate the lives of people who lived before us. We can call them antecedents or predecessors...those of us working on *69: Legislating Love & The Everett Klippert Story* have begun to call Queer Elders.

A plethora of research groups, projects and artistic interventions—an exciting bumper crop of initiatives—have emerged that train their gaze on the past with an eye to celebrating what was admittedly queer and also in queering what might have been so. It is exciting to be part of what we could term this moment of history that we could call Queer Archive Fever to deploy Derrida's notion that archivation produces as much as it records an event. (17)

What are we doing when we get lost in the stacks? Derrida states:

It is to burn with a passion. It is to never rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, right where it slips away. It is run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to most archaic place of absolute commencement. (91)

We are fascinatedly looking back over where we have been. And it feels good... except when it hurts. The need for visibility, role models and queer antecedents is real. Young people, strike that, all people need to see some aspects of themselves reflected in society and culture. A lack of this reflection can have real world consequences. Especially in lonely outposts such as the Nova Scotian fishing port that I grew up in. I was lucky to have two uncles and one aunt whose intimate relations were same-sex. We come from an enormous family (my mother is one of 14 children) so the numbers are likely on par with the general population. Yet despite feeling lucky to have had them "break ground" I was also policed and hazed by some of the things that I saw befall them. Due to their same sex desire... one can never be sure, but it seemed so at times.

None of them have ever "come out" lived in any of the gay villages, made pilgrimages to Provincetown... nor had lives where a pride parade figured largely. My Uncles worked in fishing and law enforcement and found places for their same sex desire in the nooks and corners of our hometown. My Aunt died alone with a needle in her arm in Vancouver's Downtown East side the people with the most knowledge of her relationship with her long time female companion

The three types of history (Monumental, Antiquarian & Critical) From Nietzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*

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were the Vancouver Police. I have always been irresistibly drawn to their stories as I am to George Everett Klippert's with the passion of queer archive fever.

Klippert was the last person to be tried, convicted, and jailed for homosexuality in Canada before the historic announcement by Trudeau Sr. that "the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." Klippert hailed from Saskatchewan but lived in Calgary and was a beloved bus driver on the downtown route. Unlike many of his contemporaries he was open about his homosexuality, confessing to having relations with men when questioned by police. In many ways his honesty was his downfall. Having committed no crime other than what was then termed "gross indecency" he spent a good portion of his adult life in jail. His case was the one that sparked public outrage and the subsequent decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969. His plight was written about in new papers where public sympathy was stirred up for "Gentle Klippert" and yet he remained in jail for several years after the law was struck down. By the time he was finally released laws were changing and so was public opinion. It was the heyday of gay liberation. Klippert, however, wanted nothing to do with public life, declining to be interviewed and even going by his other name to avoid scrutiny.

So personally and artistically we are possessed, seduced, terrified, intimidated, or haunted by our gay antecedents in our art, politics and lives. Which brings me to some of the key questions I would like to investigate with all of you. What are the boons and the attendant dangers of reanimating our gay uncles, our butch dyke mamas, (related by blood or found in life) our trans cousins or our gender fluid comrades from yesteryear? In what spirit or with what right do we reanimate figures from queer(ish) history... and does it matter whether they, themselves would have endorsed such use of their real life tracings? How do we avoid the seemly conservative thrust of nostalgia when we gaze back?

One question we grappled with is how to render Everett Klippert as a character for a stage play. An advantage of live theatre, as Diana Taylor and others have pointed out, is the perhaps unique ability for the archive and the repertoire to work together in an *embodied* fashion make political claims, transmit memory and forge cultural identity. Particular important for someone like Klippert who was policed for a profoundly embodied act: public sex. How can a queer artist/historian tell the truth, but *tell it slant* as the inimitable Emily Dickenson put it? What if one person's version of him differs from another as it is bound to? And so how can some of the more compelling methodologies for history making be queried. Or rather queer-ied?

In order to make the process part of the product we made one of the characters in the play is a history professor who is working on Canadian social policy when she discovers and becomes fascinated by Klippert's case. In the mean time she meets and falls in love with Tonya, a woman of Métis heritage who is an aspiring comedian.

As part of the character study for the play, I have been hounding my colleagues in the history department with the (perhaps insouciant but well intentioned) question: what do you think you

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are doing, actually? I am indebted to my colleague Joe Anderson for the idea that the historian is animated by primal fear, nostalgia and addiction in equal parts:

From 69/

TONYA: I see your point but I know for a fact that your fascination with special collections and old things is more than a job, it's your passion too.

MAX: Of course-

TONYA: You have a thing for those white gloves you get to wear in special collections.

MAX: Actually those are no longer used. It seems the bleach in the cotton was more harmful than human hands-

TONYA: Or with the librarians who wear them.

MAX: I might have, in the past, had a penchant for librarians—

TONYA: Fetish! Call it what it is.

MAX: Technically, a fetish would be for the object... whereas a fascination with a whole person or activity-

Tonya grabs her, playfully.

MAX: In the past, the distant the past. Pre- you!! But that's not why I keep going back to the archive.

TONYA: Why, then?

MAX: Take for example, the fellow I have been writing about. Everett Klippert. Five new boxes have just emerged and donated to the archives about gay culture in the early sixties. Every single scrap of it—posters, announcements, newspaper clippings, ticket stubs, ... most of it is irrelevant but every single scrap has the potential to entirely change the truth as we know it. To re-route the torrent of information that we know so far? What if I miss it?

TONYA: So you do what you do because you are afraid?

MAX: Yes, Historians on the whole are a very fearful people. We spend all our time looking backward sifting through the boxes and stacks. You can never consume enough but eventually you have to draw a conclusion. Shape everything you have soaked up into a series of conclusions for people to read. Which seems-- Not just distasteful, it seems violent. And risky

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because there is still the possibility that one fact will emerge... a box in someone's attic... the one incontrovertible fact that fall across your neck like an ax. (*she gestures*) Completely obliterate everything you have done

TONYA: When I come into the room sometimes and you are sitting in darkness...

MAX: Your eyes adjust...

TONYA: You forget to eat or drink. You are... happy isn't the word, but you are... glowing. You have a fire around you.

MAX: When you are in the flow of all of it, the possibility of finding the one glowing fact exists. You can feel it slipping physically, like a pulse or a warmth amongst the papers. That seemingly irrelevant date or ticket stub or scrap of paper that can change everything... to be able to actually touch it... you almost merge with it... you

TONYA: Lose yourself.

MAX: Yes, for a moment.

TONYA: That I can understand. That is the most human of all desires. And we never stop searching for ways to do it. You're addicted.

There is something about the possibility of getting close to... or as close as possible to some telling moment of the queer past that is both invigorating and terrifying. What does it mean to want to tell the stories of those, like Klippert, like my own Uncles and Aunt who actively tried to efface their public footprint?

These queer spectres and heroes haunt us in our life as in our art. Their reclamation or reanimation is needful due to the fact that deep narrative ruts that run in heteronormative and hegemonic culture that, left without intervention, work to efface our lives and loves from written and oral histories. This is especially true once we venture outside of the monumental sites of gay culture and begin to explore the critical histories of queer people in the more marginal sites.

What does it mean that the research of the Calgary Gay History Project has prompted the Trudeau Government to announce a forthcoming pardon to Klippert and thousands of others who were convicted of "gross indecency" before the decriminalization of homosexuality? The pardon has been announced, but not completed... It has been suggested that a monument be erected in Klippert's name. The possibility for reparation and healing here is immense... and yet the pardon has been announced but not completed. We are, right now poised in the throes of queer of queer archive fever and are trying to build this into the project as things roll forward.

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