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Theory and Politics of Collecting
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Making Collective Memories: Critical Nostalgia and the Search for Community

Drawing on a long tradition within the study of collecting, my work focuses on the collection and practices of an individual collector, Kendell Harbin, an independent archivist and artist working out of Kansas City, Missouri. The primary source of my research is a series of three lengthy phone interviews with Harbin. In addition, I draw from my personal experience as a frequent user of the Cry Now Video Library, which she ran out of her bedroom, and as an early collaborator in the formation of the Roaming Center for Magnetic Alternatives (RCMA), which is the primary focus of my study. For the sake of full disclosure and transparency, I should also mention that Harbin is a personal friend of mine. Finally, my last caveat is that this project, the RCMA, is less than a year old and still evolving, and due to unforeseen circumstances, it may take on a radically new form in the future. Thus, my paper is somewhat speculative and should be considered a snapshot case study of a DIY queer moving image archive in its early stages of conceptualization and development.

My research draws from traditions within archival studies, queer studies, media studies, and feminist theory. Broadly, I frame my study within a tradition stemming from Walter Benjamin's work on collecting. I use Benjamin to guide a discussion on time, and the way in which collecting the material remnants of the past can be revitalized and utilized in the present. Within this framework, I engage with scholarship on nostalgia and longing. I build an understanding of archives around recent scholarship within queer theory, particularly Ann

Cvetkovich's conception of the queer archive as an "archive of feeling." Finally, my argument relies heavily on Marika Cifor's conception of "critical nostalgia," as explicated in her 2017 dissertation "'Your Nostalgia is Killing me': Activism, Affect and the Archives of HIV/AIDS". Cifor defines critical nostalgia as "an ethical mode of critique grounded in the bittersweet longing for a past time or space" (pg. 17). She compares this conception of nostalgia to the more commonly explored phenomena of "reflective nostalgia," arguing that "critical nostalgia reaches beyond reflective nostalgia in the extent to which it is both deeply political and socially engaged; it is a mode of coherent critique that demonstrates more self-consciousness in its awareness and holds more strategic potential for action than reflective nostalgia allowed for." (pg. 17) I use this concept to guide my exploration of Harbin's project. After a discussion of the origin of the RCMA out of the Cry Now Free Video Library, I will describe the project by looking at three vital aspects of it: the archive as art, the role of video and videotape technologies, and the "queer archive" as an affective "archive of feelings." Finally, I will briefly look at two case studies of recent RCMA digitization projects.

In his 2007 dissertation, Jae Emerling offers a concise articulation of Walter Benjamin's conception of collecting: "through a critical philology of the material world, there appears potentiality, another narration of experience, another re-collection of redemption or happiness: the 'as-yet unlived' that remains immanent in the present" (viii). In applying this thought to a contemporary DIY collecting institution, I contest that the RCMA offers an example of the redemptive, and liberating potential of collecting for an historically marginalized community. More specifically, by creating an "affective archive" the RCMA creates "another narration of experience" and helps reimagine a new, more just future. Through a lens of "critical nostalgia," the RCMA reassembles, reimagines and utilizes the scattered pieces of a community's material

history to build and engage with that community's identity in the present, strengthening affective bonds and fostering a new "collective memory" with eyes toward future action.

In the writings on her website, and in an informational tri-fold pamphlet, Harbin describes the Roaming Center for Magnetic Alternatives as follows:

> The Roaming Center for Magnetic Alternative (RCMA) is a lending library of over 1000 vhs tapes and video technologies traveling Mid-America to connect with outlying LGBTQ+ populations. It is an ad hoc media and research center exploring the correlation between queer culture, video history, and a medium on the edge of obsolescence. Providing free screenings, videography workshops, and equipment access, we transform parking lots, strip malls, private venues, and public squares into classrooms for communities who wish to uncover and tell their own stories. Taking a wider view, our research examines the role of archives, sharing economies, and self-made media throughout queer history. [1]

Thus, the RCMA has three main goals, 1) to educate – providing videography workshops, and sharing technologies and videotapes, 2) to archive – "uncovering" stories and "self-made media" and 3) to build community by "connect[ing] with LGBTQ+ populations" throughout Mid-America. More specifically and practically, the RCMA consists of a large GMC Safari Van modified to fit custom-built, folding VHS shelving units and videography equipment, which can be unloaded and displayed as a pop-up, makeshift library, archive and media center. To date, the RCMA has held one major public event, which I will explore in the last section of this paper. First, to understand the evolution of this project and its place within a larger historical context of collecting and queer archives, one must return to its roots in Harbin's prior project, the *Cry Now Free Video Library*.

In this section, to lay the groundwork for a discussion of "critical nostalgia," I will offer a brief history of the origin of the RCMA and its roots in Harbin's prior project, the *Cry Now Free*

[1] "ABOUT." RCMA. Accessed March 23, 2018. https://www.roamingcenter.org/about/.

Video Library. In late 2016, Harbin converted her small bedroom into a fully operational VHS rental library. She lined her walls with shelving and built a large, chest-high counter across the entire length of her room. She installed display lighting, pegboard wall mounts, and vinyl letter signage. She strung together four old televisions and hooked them up to her VCR. She placed a hand painted sign in her second-floor window, and on Christmas Day, 2016, *The Cry Now Free Video Library* opened to the public. Located in a large communal house with an open-door policy, visitors were welcome to rent from the collection of VHS tapes completely free of charge, on an honor-based system. With custom designed plastic clamshell cases, and all the trappings of a mid-90's independent video rental store, word quickly spread within the Kansas City artist community[2]. As more people flowed through the space, hundreds of new tapes were donated and added to the collection. A collection that began as mostly a standard set of commercial Hollywood releases from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, slowly expanded to include more home videos, pornography, and rare, obscure videotapes. Through the opening-up of the space, a "collective collection" began to emerge.

Before one can understand the larger intention behind the RCMA project, a deeper understanding of Harbin's videotape collecting practices is necessary. Harbin expresses that despite owning a rather large collection of movies (she guesses roughly 2000), her interest was never quite the same as that of the typical "fan" or a cult film collector. As she explains, "I have bad taste in movies. What I have is an addictive personality that ran rampant when I finally had the space to collect as many videos as I wanted."[3] While the "addiction" Harbin expresses is a common trope within collection studies, unlike most of the collectors featured in the

[2] artskc. "Cry Now Free Video Library – ArtsKC." Accessed March 21, 2018. https://artskc.org/cry-now-free-video-library/.

[3] Telephone Interview March 18, 2018

ethnographies by Bartok and Joseph (2016) or Bjarkman (2004), for Harbin, the value of each individual tape is of little importance. She explains, "an individual tape means nothing to me." Rather, her project, from its very early stages, was about the cultivation and formation of the space around the tapes, the social relations the tapes might foster and the affective resonance of the collection itself. Again, she explains, "I don't think the VHS era, as a format is superior or great…I mostly just like that it forced people to occupy space together"[4]. Here, Harbin expresses one of the key qualities of a collector, as described by Benjamin: a collector has "a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness, but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate" (pg. 60). For Harbin, the "scene" of the videotape library is more important than the moving image content contained on the tapes.

While *Cry Now* still served the practical purpose of providing free take-home entertainment to its patrons, the deeper purpose was the impact of the library as a scene, or a space. In *On Longing* Susan Stewart claims "the collection represents the total asestheticization of use value" (pg. 151). In the example of *Cry Now*, the tapes, by becoming part of the collection, are transformed and aestheticized. Within this new context, the aesthetic of the collection, as a whole, overpowers the function of each individual tape. As Stewart explains, "the collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life" (pg 152). If the *Cry Now* collection presented a metaphorical relation to the world, what did that metaphor say? We can answer first by noting

[4] Telephone Interview March 18, 2018

that the metaphor relied on the nostalgic representation of a mythical video rental store. In an exhaustive study of the history of commercial videotapes, Joshua Greenberg (2008) articulates how video stores, despite their commercial, transactional purpose, often served a more meaningful social function as well. He describes the independent video store of the 90s as a "unique type of consumption junction—one where social interactions were at least part of the attraction for customers," (pg. 114) and he goes on to explain that "this social space can take on added layers of meaning and importance. Just as the users of a technology may create alternate uses and meanings for a given artifact, the inhabitants of a consumption junction are able to use it for other purposes in addition to simple consumption" (pg. 114*).* *Cry Now* obviously sought to refence this history in its aesthetic, and thus to mirror the lost social, community building function of the video rental store in practice. Harbin explains this phenomenon on her website: "it is in this somewhat anachronistic setting where an odd sort of currency emerges; both people and media circulate according to chance and desire, rather than industry trends or conventional standards of organization[5]". Harbin's organizational structure for the tapes also helped cultivate this free-flowing, serendipitous exchange of objects and people. Movies were grouped in sections such as "Iconic White Dudes," "Monsters, Zombies and Dead People" or "Femmes Shaving Their Heads." There was a funny unpredictability, and an odd logic to the flow of items, but more importantly, the descriptive categories helped create a sense of community and offered an invitation to the visitor based on a personal ethic of care for the collection.

As her project evolved, Harbin explains, she began seeking a deeper personal connection to the video material and to the identity of a community mediated through it. The practice of building and expressing identity through collecting lead Harbin to certain questions about the

[5] www.roamingcenter.org/about

items in her surroundings: “What did it look like to be gay in the 90’s, living within the margins of the margins, far removed from the coastal spotlight and unconcerned with the hype of major metropolitan cities? As a queer and gender nonconforming person living in Kansas City, I wanted to connect with others exploring this vast invisible network.[6]” To answer this set of questions, Harbin knew she would have to expand beyond her bedroom walls, to reach out into the unknown spaces where the material remnants of that history lay hidden. In short, she needed to go mobile. In a recent interview, Harbin recounts an important and influential conversation, in which she expressed to a friend her inexplicable desire to take her collection on tour, to which her friend replied, “you are a lonely queer person and you wanna tour cause you wanna meet people, and that’s what this is all about, duh.[7]” Harbin took this as revelatory and it helped in conceptualizing her larger project. Here, the role of building community is a clear motivation in the formation of the larger archival project. Hence, Harbin designed a way to connect a disconnected present-day community (rural queer youth in the Midwest) through an imagined, as-yet unknown material history (the videotape documentation of queer life in the pre-digital media era).

The RCMA falls within a diverse and connected set of traditions within archival practice, art, librarianship and collecting in general. Harbin was able to secure funding for her project through an appeal to various arts organizations around the United States, including the Mid-America Arts Alliance, the National Endowment for The Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation, and The Gallucci Creative Fund. The RCMA is part of a larger trend of increasing overlap between archival and artistic practice. In a chapter summarizing the merging of these two worlds,

[6] www.roamingcenter.org/about “ABOUT.” RCMA. Accessed March 23, 2018.
[7] Kendell Harbin Interview March 15, 2018

Gabriella Giannachi (2016) argues that "since the time of the Second World War, an increasing number of artists have used a whole variety of archival methods to curate, store, exhibit, and even sell their works" and states that many artists "have produced archives as part of their creative practice" (pg. 132-3). As a part of this tradition, within the context of the art world, the RCMA is able to shed the "neutral" and "objective" demands of many larger, institutional moving image archives. As the work of an artist, the RCMA is imbued with a creative spirit and energy, and thus the collected materials are liberated from their static role as mere "evidence." Collecting as an artform has a long history dating back to ancient times and evolving up through the wildly creative craftwork of early modern cabinets of curiosity. As collecting practices have evolved with the invention of archival science, library science and museology, artists have adapted these strategies to serve their projects, as well. The artistic power of the RCMA stems from its ability to recontextualize and re-present the material it collects for a present-day observer, and likewise, the archival power of the RCMA stems from its ability to make documentary and historical materials accessible and available within the present.

In addition to the tradition of archives as art, the RCMA builds on a rapidly growing engagement with the concept of "queer archives." While "queer archives" certainly refers to community archives that collect LGBTQIA+ materials, like the ONE Archive at the University of Southern California or the Lesbian Herstory Archive in New York City, in recent years, cultural theorists have begun to broaden the concept to expand beyond the relatively scarce collected body of explicitly queer material culture. As Ann Cvetkovich (2002) explains, "a useful archive, especially an archive of sexuality and gay and lesbian life, … must preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling. Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism, all areas of experience that

are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive" (pg. 109). The RCMA, seeks to create this "radical archive of emotion" in multiple ways: first, Harbin's digitization process is a deeply personal and emotional experience. Rather than simply taking custody of a tape, transferring its contents in private, and delivering the tape back to its owner (like most digitization operations), Harbin sits down with the tape's owner (or the chosen contributor)[8] and watches the entirety of the tape, as the transfer occurs. Moreover, Harbin asks the contributor to record a voiceover narration while watching the playback of the tape. As will become clear in a later example, this can often have profoundly affective and emotional relevance. Cvetkovich also states that queer archives "assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect" (pg. 109). The RCMA in its various instantiations, is radically dedicated to showing the power of memory and affect.

Additionally, Harbin's position outside of traditional archives and institutions is a powerful part of the RCMA's ability to express a queer experience. Judith (now Jack) Halberstam (2003) explains, "the [queer] archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory and a complex record of queer activity. In order for the archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making" (pg. 326). This "theory of cultural relevance" can appear in many different forms and can be collected in various ways. For the RCMA, creating a platform to explore the link between magnetic media and queer history identifies a missing piece to the "jigsaw puzzle of queer history." Moreover, the "bottom-up" or DIY nature of the RCMA means that it is especially powerful site of community investment and affective relations. Or, as Sarah Baker explains, "DIY archives and museums can be thought of

[8] Promotional material states "Bring your tape(s) and any person(s) with knowledge about the footage"

'as places in which affect is produced and made possible through community and the process of remembering, and made again through encounters with objects [and people] that inspire both these thing' (2013, 525)" (pg. 48) Thus, unlike a major institutional or traditional archive the RCMA, as a Queer, DIY archive is positioned especially well to serve as a site of affective resonance and collective remembering.

Moreover, Harbin's commitment to collecting videotape, a technologically obsolete media format, lays bare the ways in which archives and thus historiography, are shaped by the methods and materials used in the transmission of information. But more than that, it shows the ways in which identity itself is shaped by the available technologies of representation and documentation. In other words, she shows that the invention and widespread availability of home video recording technology did not lead to the formation of queer communities, but rather, it allowed for a more widespread visibility of a media-marginalized, and "under-documented" existent community, which, in turn, began to shape that community's identity. And while the community, the people, may have been present long before videotape (or film, or printing), much of today's "queer identity," and certainly the mainstream perception of queer people as a community, is tied to the rise of this increased visibility. As Harbin explains, the RCMA is "about piecing together an immediate history of 'queer identity', which is something—that phrase "queer identity", is a very new concept – 'cause for a long time you weren't allowed to claim an identity that revolved around being queer. And that changed with home videos"[9]. Harbin sees a major link between the formation of queer identity and the rise of videotape technologies.

By highlighting the importance of the videotape format, the RCMA also points to the period prior to the arrival of videotape, and to the relative scarcity of queer experience reflected

[9] Interview March 15, 2018

on celluloid film. In “Collective Effort: Archiving LGBT Moving Images” Lynne Kirste contests that “since mainstream cinema and television have consistently marginalized LGBT people, a large percentage of all queer moving images are found in independent and amateur works” (pg. 135). And because videotape drastically decreased the economic and technical barriers to produce independent and amateur works, obviously, one can reason that a large percentage of all pre-digital queer-related moving images are found on videotape. As the thousands of hours of queer related video on youtube can attest, the availability of the means of documentation heavily shapes what types of lives, identities and feelings will be reflected in those documents. Cifor (2017) makes this same point in relation to the creation of video records of the ACT UP movement in the early 1990’s: “Shifts in video technology opened new and broader possibilities for who and what was being documented” (pg. 66). Furthermore, the availability of those new documents then helps to shape the community who views the documents. This cyclical process of media creation and representation is a major aspect of Harbin’s project.

The collection of moving image and video materials has a unique role in the preservation of historical memory, in general. In their 2004 study of videotape collectors, Kim Bjarkman argues that “while museums turn history into spectacle, video archives turn spectacle into history…video collecting is an act of cultural curating—a system for containing the past to recover and revivify it” (pg. 235). While Bjarkman is particularly concerned with television video collectors, the same argument may be applied to amateur and home video collections of marginalized communities. By containing the history of queer life and feeling in video, collectors are able recover and revivify those feelings in the present. Video, perhaps more than any other medium, is an attempt to collect and store the passage of time itself. Further, the origin of videotape and magnetic media, is rooted not in making moving image films more

commercially available, but rather in the act of "time-shifting" television. A brief look at the early history of VHS (or Betamax) shows that, years before Hollywood productions were released on videotape, the format was used and marketed primarily as a "time-shifting" device for television broadcast (Newman, 2014). While Harbin is not directly concerned with this history of the format, the overlap of its original purpose with her current uses for videotape, cannot be ignored.

This connection between video and time leads to the final and most vital aspect of the RCMA: nostalgia. Both the faux early-90's video store presented in Cry Now and the wandering quest for queer-related videotape of the RCMA clearly express a nostalgic longing for the past captured or expressed in those tapes. Boym (2008) points to some of the negative, anti-social aspects of nostalgia: "Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy…Nostalgia in this sense is an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure" (pg. xiv). But unlike this more traditional, backwards-oriented nostalgia of other types of collecting, the RCMA critically engages and challenges a vision of the past to reshape the consideration of that history in the present. By uncovering and repurposing the video of this longed for past the RCMA is focused on creating community in the present. But, if "quests for community are always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity," (Halberstam, pg. 315) what makes the RCMA's nostalgia and more "critical" than say the nostalgia of 80's VHS Horror Tape collectors or the recent trend of television series reboots? Cifor (2017) suggests that critical nostalgia "emphasizes the value of a temporal relation of longing for past times and spaces while also remaining attentive to the dangers, ambivalences, and complexities of that past" (pg. 264) and that it is "a mode of critique focused on a past that inserts itself continually into the present

with critical implications for the future" (pg. 263). Applying these definitions, we can see how RCMA's focus on the materiality of videotape and the affect/emotion contained within, engages with the complexities and ambivalences of that past. In the act of collectively watching and recording a voiceover for these documents of sometimes painful traumatic experiences, participants allow the past to "insert itself into the present." Moreover, by placing an immediate value on an outdated, obsolete medium, the RCMA offers a "queer temporality" that challenges a tradition, linear conception of progress and time, and allows its participants "to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction and death" (Halberstam, 314).

Both video and nostalgia play an important role in the way history is preserved, perceived and experienced. They are both an attempt to hold onto an experience in the face of the passage of time. In "Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism", Alexandra Juhasz explores the relationship between nostalgia and video as it relates to the Queer Archive. Juhasz describes her experimental documentary of the same name, *Video Remains (55 mins., 2005),* in which a group of four lesbian video activists narrate over an interview of their friend, James Robert Lamb, recorded in 1992, a year before he died of AIDS. Juhasz explains, "we watch and listen to Jim in 1992 mixed with today's characters caught in 2004. The intrusion of present-day AIDS…enlivens my old tape and recommits to a contemporary conversation about AIDS, its representations, feelings, activism, and history" (While the RCMA has not yet dealt with this level of traumatic experience, one can see how the same logic may be applied. How are the found home videos in the RCMA "enlivened" by the context of a queer DIY artist-archive in the present-day Midwest, and how is a present-day queer Midwest community affected by the collective watching of these tapes? Juhsaz argues that video can play a unique role in the

preservation and creation of memory: “Video is collective and objective in that it is unchanging while also being a mutually verifiable record of things that once were, are no longer, but remain present through the form of its mechanical reproduction. Video is what is left over of what visibly and audibly was in space and time” (323). While certainly one could challenge the assertion that video is objective and unchanging, nevertheless, its ability to document affect and feeling is especially valuable and perhaps unique among media. Returning to Ann Cvetkovch’s conception of an “archive of feeling,” the vital link between nostalgia and video might be expressed as their shared ability to temporally link affects or feelings. Thus, film and video play a major role in Cvetkovich’s conception of the archive as expressed in her work on this subject, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture.” Finally, Juhasz asks “What if the nostalgic romance is not with a fantasy? What if the past is videotaped and so you can prove that it was there? What does video do to or with nostalgia?” (pg. 323) And to this question, the RCMA answers: video turns nostalgia into critical nostalgia and more specifically, video*tape* turns nostalgia into a critical nostalgia grounded in the materiality of a present-day community.

In this final section I will look at a recent RCMA event, and a video digitization project to highlight how these projects reflect the potential value of critical nostalgia. The RCMA’s first official public event was a week-long residency at Open House “an experimental and collaborative neighborhood arts project located inside a single-family house in Kansas City”[10]. Harbin states that when she first saw the space, she immediately knew it was perfect for the RCMA. The domestic space, and the home are an essential part of both of Harbin’s projects to date. As Cifor explains, the home offers a powerful framing device for archival practice: “Home

[10] http://openhouse.space/about

is a lens that offers productive and affective ethical orientations grounded in a feminist ethics of care towards records creators, records subjects, and larger communities implicated in the archives and its records to both archivists and activists" (pg. 94). Harbin's use of the home as archive clearly utilized some of this same thinking. Converting the home into a temporary VHS library and media center, Harbin held daily open hours and publicized her free videotape digitization services both online and to the surrounding community. The week culminated in a public event, titled Boundaries, at which seven local artists and writers "read to a silent screening of early 90's television recordings found on tape in one Woman's basement."[11] These tapes had been donated to the RCMA a few months earlier, and consisted of about 400 meticulously labeled and organized 8-hr VHS recordings of early 90's television. Reaching out to local writers and artists, Harbin spent about a month going through the collection and watching many of the tapes, with potential collaborators. Harbin was unaware of (and mostly uninterested in) the exact programs on the tapes, rather, she asked her collaborators to tap into the affect, and the emotional weight of the images, in order to imagine a new audio track that would resonate within the community in the present. While video documentation of the event is not yet available, I spoke to several attendees who were deeply emotionally moved by the night's performances. A public screening of found 25-year-old videotapes of recorded cable television is not necessarily a "critical" act, but through the affective and collective power of the queer archive, this cast-off refuse was transformed into a site of communal power and identity formation.

Harbin's collaborative digitization process utilizes this same critical nostalgia to preserve endangered historical LGBTQ-related material, while creating a new document of collective memory for the present-day Mid-western queer community. Utilizing the popular technique of

[11] http://openhouse.space/thercma

audio commentary tracks as seen in recent DVD, Blu-ray and streaming cinema packages, Harbin invites all contributors to record their reactions while watching their home videos or other submissions. In one such case, recorded during the RCMA's week-long residency at the Open House space, one person, had a moving experience while watching, and digitizing a home video of their teenage years in the mid-1990s. As Harbin explains:

> I basically watched her go through puberty and graduate and turn 18 and leave…It was super cool…and I don't think she knew what she was getting into and neither did I and we ended up watching two hours of home video of her and at the end of it she said, 'well since you basically just watched me go through puberty, do want to hang out? Or like get coffee sometime?' I knew all this stuff about her life but she didn't know anything about me…
>
> …I remember this one shot of her at her graduation and she was hugging this fence and she said 'oh that's so-and-so, she was my best friend, but looking back at it now, I realize I was just in love with her'[12]

Here, Harbin offers a stark example of the way critical nostalgia can function to build new bonds, new collective memories and new futures. Through the nostalgic act of watching old home videos on outdated equipment, the RCMA activates those memories in service of the queer experience in the present-day. A home video of an 18-year-old at their high school graduation typically has little evidentiary, monetary, or historical value for the larger society, but by placing it within the context of a queer DIY archive, the affective power is transferred into the present day. As an "archive of feeling" the RCMA offers a way to recover the potentiality locked in community's material history.

Both the Cry Now Library and the RCMA offer a creative and promising vision of the social power of collecting. Without becoming lost in the solipsism of melancholia or embracing

[12] Telephone interview March 15, 2018.

the sometimes regressive politics of nostalgia, these projects engage in a longing for the past that is both affective (building community bonds) and effective (preserving material that would otherwise be lost). Building on a growing tradition of archival art, queer archives and moving image archives, Harbin's critical nostalgia offers a "philology of the material world," that highlights the immanent potentiality of the present moment.

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