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What matters in the queer archive? Technologies of memory and *Queering the Map*

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Abstract

Queering the Map (queeringthemap.com) is a novel digital platform: a storymap, an anonymous collaborative record, an archive of queer experiences. To contribute to the platform, visitors make their own mark by clicking on an empty space on the map. As to what visitors contribute, the platform's *About* section suggests, simply, 'If it counts for you, then it counts for *Queering the Map*'. In this article, we probe this guiding principle. What does count in this context? What matters in the queer archive? Drawing on interviews with 14 site users and an analysis of nearly 2000 stories pinned to Australia on the map, we consider what platform practices reveal about queer collective memory-making, to illuminate the how and why of a queer archive. We see that *relatability* matters because of the affective, affirming and community-building seeds it can generate; *situation* matters because it is through participatory practices that recognition, visibility and community place-*making* are enacted; and, the *everyday* matters as the archive's visitors

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collectively claim and gift their varied personal experiences. Through these themes we explore queer contributions or how site visitors are oriented towards giving something of themselves to the archive. We discuss how archival properties of the platform are key to (queer) participation, and to meaning-making – as distinct, as queer, as a valued record. *Queering the Map*, we argue, is significant in how space is made for queer representation, carving new contours for archival 'evidence' and community histories.

Keywords
archive, belonging, digital, mapping, memory, queer, storytelling, technologies

Introduction: If it counts for you, then it counts

Queering the Map is a novel digital platform: a stylised version of Google Maps to which any visitor can pin a memory. Land on the map is pastel pink, streets are white and highways orange, parks green and water purplish-blue. This landscape is punctuated by black location pins, more than 100,000 of them across the flattened globe. Clicking on a pin reveals a brief record of experience submitted by another unknown, unidentifiable visitor. These stories vary from a couple of words simply claiming *I was here* to detailed paragraphs of longing dedicated to another. They mark streets of first kisses, parks of trauma, addresses of unrequited love, the spots of friendships forging, and places with people no longer around. Zooming out and scrolling around gives an immediate sense of the queerness of the platform: as an anonymous storymap, an archive not organised by time, and a collaborative recording of life in place.

Visitors can make their own mark by clicking on an empty space. A plus sign in the upper right corner of the screen triggers simple submission instructions: 'share your story in the text box below'. Little other guidance is offered. The platform's brief *About* section suggests, simply, 'If it counts for you, then it counts for *Queering the Map*' (queeringthemap.com). In this article, we probe this guiding principle. What does count in this context? What matters in the queer archive?

Drawing on interviews with 14 site users and an analysis of nearly 2000 stories pinned to Australia on the map, we consider what platform practices reveal about queer collective memory-making to illuminate the how and why of a queer archive. We explore what matters within posts and for users through three thematic domains: *relatability*, which users identify or empathise with; *situation*, where people and spaces together come into queer being; and *everyday details*, which capture an affective slice of mundane (queer) life. Drawing across these themes to consider their collective implications, our conclusion reflects on *queer contributions*, or how site visitors are oriented towards giving something of themselves to the archive.

Background: Connection, collection, witness and memory

There are, at once, very many and very few digital projects forming the landscape in which we situate *Queering the Map*. Part of the many are the diverse collection of social or otherwise interactive media such as Facebook, Reddit and Tumblr, which enable and

harvest the coalescence of like communities. These have been widely studied by social researchers through lenses of identity, intimacy and belonging (Andreassen et al., 2017; Chambers, 2013; Dobson et al., 2018). Such work has revealed the ways users creatively negotiate their self-presentation, their support seeking and giving, and the 'rules of engagement' of platform technologies (Hanckel et al., 2019; van Dijck, 2018). Also part of the many are map-based platforms, from primary application programming interfaces such as Google Maps to participatory storymapping offshoots like the Egyptian feminist activist site HarrassMap (harrassmap.org). Such sites have been used and studied for their potential to address issues of awareness and representation as linked to space or location (Abdelmonem & Galán, 2017; Fileborn, 2023). This scholarship sustains critical attention on the emancipatory potential of place-based memorialising and mobilisations of polyvocality (Dodge & Kitchin, 2013; Marshall et al., 2022). This broad terrain gives us a useful blueprint for making sociological sense of digital modalities, of the queer archive as a counter-archive, and directs us toward questions of orientation, connection and collectivity.

The smaller few projects which crystallise our focus are less literally similar and more affectively akin to *Queering the Map*. One is PostSecret (postsecret.com), a public art project created in 2005 by Frank Warren which collates hundreds of thousands of anonymous hand-made postcards, each sharing a brief personal secret that their sender has never shared before. A notable body of research has built around the project: drawing on the now extensive PostSecret collection, scholars have probed the social meanings of confession (McNeill, 2014), the intimacies of anonymity (Poletti, 2011), the curation of authenticity (Smirnova, 2016), and the remediation of the physical artefact online (Poletti, 2020; Prutzer, 2016). Drawing on Berlant's (1997) notion of the intimate public in analysing the collection, Poletti (2011, pp. 26–27) argues that 'members of the intimate public of PostSecret "hear" each others' [*sic*] confessions, and confess themselves, to gain access to an experience of belonging and to confirm their emotional literacy in the keeping of secrets'. Poletti also considers the style of Warren's invitation to contribute – his 'instructions for coaxing the secrets' – namely, to 'Reveal *anything* – as long as it is true and you have never shared it with anyone before' (2011, p. 33). This invitation resonates strongly with the brief direction given on *Queering the Map*. As such, we find great utility in the conceptual work of PostSecret scholarship, for how it approaches the complexities of micro narratives, the aesthetics of authenticity, and dynamic networks of confession and witness.

Another analogous example is the Queer Zine Archive Project (qzap.org). QZAP is run by a small volunteer collective who digitally preserve and archive queer zines – small do-it-yourself publications of writing and/or visual art that circulate cheaply or for free through a 'gift economy' (Piepmeier, 2008). Operating since 2003, QZAP has collected over 1300 zines printed since 1973, in 15 different languages, of which more than 500 have thus far been digitised (Latham & Cooke, 2000, p. 246). A body of research has also built up around this project, and around zines and zine archives more broadly that considers how the material intimacy and participatory ethos of the medium binds diverse counter-cultural zine communities in generative ways (see Watson & Bennett, 2021). Kumbier (2009), for example, examines how projects like QZAP work 'to educate and to encourage queer communities to document, preserve and archive records of their

experiences' (2009, p. 195), and 'create conditions for producing a diverse, inclusive historical record' (2009, p. 196). Others illuminate how zines in the archive challenge dominant and harmful narratives, such as homophobia and transphobia in medicine (Latham & Cooke, 2000). Similar to QZAP, *Queering the Map*'s architecture rests on community input, collection, and a grassroots commitment to sharing material on intimate and everyday queer experiences. Scholarship on zine communities highlights how politics of belonging and participation are tied to materiality and aesthetic form, and we bring these considerations to our reading of how and why people engage with *Queering the Map*.

As we draw conceptually from the scholarship circling these projects, we are guided by the rich literature theorising the queer archive. Archives offer insight into diverse and complex LGBTQIA+ experiences and lives, as well as representations of diverse community histories. Core to the archive is ensuring such histories are remembered, or not forgotten (Cvetkovich, 2003; see also Garde-Hansen, 2011, pp. 42, 76). The workings and political significance of these records are widely acknowledged. As Halberstam (2005, p. 169) emphasises, 'The archive is not simply a repository'. Greater importance surfaces through collectivity in memory-*making* (see Halberstam, 2005, p. 170). Morris (2006, pp. 147–148), foregrounding the histories, discourse and rhetoric (both comforting and challenging) within contemporary queer activism, argues that an archive's activist promise may only be realised if we recognise the related significance of 'queer movement'. We read this in its double sense, as (a) political movement and the 'traversal of time and space, mobilisation and circulation of meanings that trouble sexual normalcy and its discriminations' (Morris, 2006, p. 148). For Cvetkovich (2003, p. 242), theorising the queer archive requires thinking about an archive of feelings, of being 'affectively motivated by the passionate desire to claim the fact of history'. This claiming, in context, is 'a form of counter-knowledge production' (Springgay & Truman, 2017, p. 860) or counter-memory work (Foucault, 1997; Tello, 2022), a response to official archives that exclude LGBTQIA+ histories. We see movement and feeling as key to the queerness of our archive of focus; with these ideas we consider why certain archival elements meaningfully come to the fore. We also consider the difficulties of how to read silences, especially those imposed by trauma (Cvetkovich, 2003) and the closet (Sedgwick, 2008).

Finally, we draw from work on digitality and technologies of memory. Contemporary scholars researching the kinds of social/communication platforms and archival projects we discuss above productively disrupt and problematise psychological and biological understandings of memory to bring a focus on sociality, materiality and mediation (Blustein, 2022; Garde-Hansen, 2011; MacDonald et al., 2015; Van House & Churchill, 2008). Blustein (2022), for example, explores how collective remembering and collective memories are sustained through relational bonds of 'participatory intentions', while Van House and Churchill (2008, p. 296) stress, 'what is remembered individually and collectively depends in part on technologies of memory and the associated socio-technical practices'. MacDonald et al. (2015) consider what is altered and may be newly materialised through digitising practices, drawing on Halbwachs (1924/1992) and the idea that 'all collective memory requires a material social framework' (MacDonald et al., 2015, p. 102). Cover (2019) too offers a comprehensive exploration of the queer digital archive through an analysis of the Lost Gay # sites, social networking pages and groups

set up (for instance, through Facebook) to interactively share, collate and record local stories, images and other materials. As with Cover's focus case, *Queering the Map*'s form allows us to examine complex temporal articulations 'through the archive's inherent interactivity as a technology of both individual and collective memory' (Cover, 2019, p. 132). From this work we gain insight into the technical and contextual significance of *Queering the Map* – as affording particular ways of collective memory-making through its novel design, and its relative position as a kind of *counter*-archive that seeds a liberatory reimagining of what and who the (queer) archive is for (Springgay & Truman, 2017, p. 860).

Methods: Pinned posts and platform interviews

We were drawn to *Queering the Map* as a site for sociological exploration because it works to disrupt, to vandalise, to disorganise: to *queer*. Leaning into the queer resistance of *evidence* (Muñoz, 1996), the typical object of the archive, posts on the platform are not fact-checked or time-stamped, user data are not collected, nor is demographic information beyond what is provided within the text and position of a post itself (e.g. age, race, religion, gendered pronouns). The result is an uncommon sense 'mess' of queer moments, spatially specified and temporally uncalibrated – recorded in a way that resists the common temporal order of heteronormativity (Freeman, 2010, pp. xxii, 58). On the map, the only discernible patterns are saturations of dropped pins, unsurprisingly largely correspondent with population density (in Australia at least). With these design choices, the platform resists cartographic, archival and social media norms in content and form. Like the creative work that draws Muñoz's (1996, p. 6) attention, *Queering the Map* is 'polyvalent . . . a queer worldmaking project', and an 'object whose ontology . . . is profoundly queer' in how it performatively engages with traces and ephemera. Such attention in design makes the platform a fertile ground for 'a queer sociology', for research which centres critical questions of subjectivity and expands how we go about understanding the non-normative (Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020, pp. 1273, 1281).

To study *Queering the Map*, following University ethics approval, we collated posts pinned to Australia (1941 posts) from the platform, then undertook qualitative interviews with platform users (those who had read others' stories or posted their own). We advertised the study via social media and through key local and national LGBTQIA+ networks in early 2020, and in the same year conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 participants, the majority of whom were aged in their twenties or thirties, lived in metropolitan and regional areas, and spoke of their gender and sexual orientations in diverse multiple ways (e.g. lesbian/queer and non-binary). All interviews were conducted via video-call on Zoom, lasted for approximately one hour, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. After an introductory discussion about their experiences of living where they do as an LGBTQIA+ person, participants were asked about their impressions, feelings and interactions with/on the platform. When a stable internet connection allowed, participants explored the platform in real time. Screen sharing allowed us to observe how participants navigated the map, and was useful for eliciting participants' perceptions, emotions and meaning-making as they traced familiar and novel paths.

To facilitate analysis of pinned stories, posts were imported into QSR NVivo 11, which we used for data organisation and thematic coding. Using an inductive and collaborative approach, our coding identified the different ways that posts were styled and written, such as being addressed to a specific audience, and the key details included in a story, such as coming out experiences, sites of significant relationships, sexual encounters and personal realisations. We undertook a similar inductive approach to interview transcripts. Supported by qualitative analysis software Dovetail, each transcript was coded by at least two members of the research team, and in team meetings we discussed our coding and our understanding of themes as they were developed. Within the frame of *what mattered* for participants, in terms of how they understood the *Queering the Map* project and how they personally interacted with/on the platform, through our coding we identified three distinct themes, on which our analysis below is focused.

Throughout our analysis, we were conscious of issues of anonymity, particularly related to how we treat and display users' posts as 'data' (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; see also Kirby et al., 2021), both those scraped from the platform and those read aloud by participants in interviews. Given ongoing debates around the ethics of social media data as 'public' and/or 'private', and particularly given the openness and vulnerabilities articulated within posts for an LGBTQIA+ platform, we carefully considered the potential harms of including verbatim posts vis-a-vis honouring the voices of post authors. No identifying information is collected by the platform on its users; however, we believe that the combination of detailed geolocation and story content has the potential to be identifiable. As such, below we reproduce a limited number of posts, verbatim with identifiable information removed (such as locations, names, initials). We note that the platform prevents users from searching for posts in the map, a feature that adds another layer of protection for the authors whose stories we reproduce here. We also use numeric codes rather than pseudonyms for our interview participants and do not include identifiers tied to their gender or sexuality.

Findings: What matters?

The brief *About* section on the platform explains that *Queering the Map* 'functions as a living archive of queer life' and is 'for digitally archiving LGBTQ2IA+ experience in relation to physical space'. Through the three themes that follow – relatability matters, situation matters and everyday matters – we explore how stories and participants engage with the platform as an archive. We also consider what participants' experiences and the stories themselves reveal about the meaning of *Queering the Map*'s archival properties.

Relatability matters

We asked participants about how they use the platform and what they look for; one participant succinctly responded: 'I am looking for things that I can relate to. I think that's pretty obvious, you know?' [interview participant #02]. All participants described using the platform to visit places they *knew* – where they grew up, live now, lived once, and had travelled to. This was general – visiting 'places I've been' [08] – and in much more specific terms:

> . . . when I first started, I went immediately to all of my favourite places, and then to every place I've ever been and I've ever loved or I've ever hated. [11]

'Going home' emerged as a somewhat unsurprising anchor for interview participants as they began moving around the map. We saw this reflected in stories pinned to the site too. Many reference home, or locate the places of childhood memories. For example:

> When I was a kid, a gay couple lived here (next door to us, at [house number]). They were antique dealers, with a shop nearby. I was fascinated by them and always wanted to know what their lives were like, and whether I could be like them when I grew up. [Residential address, city suburb]

> Finally realized I was transgender at home here. I cried a lot that night. [Residential address, outer city suburbs]

Many posts described moments of youthfulness, moments of formative queer experiences, queer becomings (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011, p. 11), realisations made 'at home'. Such posts perform a looking back; they reminisce about moments with little detail yet deep feeling, and anchor in the archive with affect (Muñoz, 1996, pp. 10–11). When participants explored the space and stories of the map, often from their home towns or familiar addresses, moments such as those in the posts above were relatable in their familiarity, in their capacity to be imagined by the reader as in-the-world. For example:

> If I can zoom it a little bit, there was one somewhere along here . . . '*We'd been laughing all day. We were sunburned and tired and hungry. So, we got burgers and sat and talked and talked art and talked about life. I could've sat there forever with you.*' I just think that's really sweet because that's really close to where I used to work, so I can visualise that very easily. I know exactly the space and I know that there's a comic book store just a little bit around the corner here. So, I can visualise that day for whoever this person was quite clearly. I just think it's interesting how like that's something I would do and that's, you know, somebody else has had that similar experience. [05]

For this participant, and across the interviews, relatability was a knit of familiarity of *experience* and familiarity in *place.* We heard several accounts of relatable posts that stemmed from affinities in humour, through self-deprecation or embarrassment, or in a shared understanding of a time in life. These stories were endearing, and shared in:

> There is pretty much not a time that I don't look at this map and kind of laugh along with somebody, sometimes in that like, '*Oh, yeah. I've had that similar kind of experience, you know. Wasn't that a time?*' sort of way, in a sort of fondness. [10]

Participants quickly shifted from initial map explorations based on place-based recognition, towards searches for the relatable in content. This did involve navigating around places they knew, however it was notable to us that participants tended to orientate themselves with the notion of relatability; for example:

> I tended to use [the platform] in terms of how I could relate to places, and then I was kind of interested in having a quick look about whether there was any kind of representation of my experiences. [09]

> I'm drawn to it because [pause] it's like there's things that I can definitely relate to on the coast. [12]

In these excerpts we see the significance of representation, of shared experience or sameness in space: occasions or experiences so familiar that a user can place themselves in amongst others. This atemporal belonging evoked nostalgia for some participants, where touchpoints of relatability grow into a broader resonance, blooming affective engagements with the platform, their own memories and their (queer) sense of self:

> It kind of, yeah, made me feel a bit nostalgic about the past and also about who I was at this earlier point in my life, to be honest. So, these were the times when I was first kind of experimenting with my identity, coming to terms with it myself, and first meeting people in quite fleeting ways . . . I can recall reading some comments about young people meeting at university and another couple meeting at a residential college, some women who met through there and stuff, and I was kind of, okay, I can relate to that. [09]

Above we see what relatability *does* (Muñoz, 1996, p. 12) for the reader, creating opportunity for reflection, for identifying with other queer people and experiences, for thinking about how they (and you) navigated 'this earlier point' in queer becoming. Moreover, as well as engendering a reflective practice, participants spoke to the affective attributes this relatability produces for individuals and for the site's broader queer community, such as intimacy and recognition:

> I just really like the ones that are like, '*This was my first kiss*', you know, or '*My first heartbreak*' . . . I really connect to the emotion of them. You can kind of remember those moments for yourself, you know. So, you recognise them in other people and I guess that produces like a feeling of intimacy across space with other people. [06]

Recognition and intimacy here ripple from relatability, as they do in the digital cultural phenomena of PostSecret and zine archives that we discuss above (see Poletti, 2011; Watson & Bennett, 2021). The affect of spending time on *Queering the Map* – of being and feeling queer amongst thousands of other queer('s) moments – encourages an experiential, participatory kind of belonging. It takes shared and sharing forms of queerness and queer expression, only *felt* by having the knowledge and sociality to understand it, to make it congruous with your own experiences, to 'get it'. And in this way, relatable content afforded a sense of validation, an evidencing in support of participants' own experiences:

> . . . it's validating in that I look at these spaces and know that there are people exactly like me, or not exactly like me, but people who are like me who have been there and have had similar experiences to me, and it's a concrete way of proving that. It's having this like actual evidence

> that if people go like, '*Oh, no, you know, experience didn't really happen*', it's like, well, I can point to this site and go, '*No, there they are*'. [05]

Accounts of validation were frequent; the visibilising of 'invisible evidence' (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6) revealed the importance of solidarity and collectivity in/across queer experiences. These shared social imaginaries, often of unfolding queerness, threaded through participants' own stories and the ones they (and we) were drawn to on the map. The visibility of relatable 'private' or hidden experiences of trauma, loneliness and misrecognition seem central to understanding queerness *in place*, as emplaced – material, embodied, lived (Muñoz, 1996, p. 10). Some posts, for example, read:

> I came out to my Dad as bisexual, and it didn't go very well. I felt frustrated and alone, but it's a few years later now and I am neither. [City]

> I was so fucking lonely, it felt like I couldn't breathe. [Outer city suburb]

Several interview participants drew on posts like those above to relay and relate their own vulnerabilities, particularly those of trauma that punctuate many queer stories. For example:

> . . . the ones that are trauma, they made me feel relief, I guess, just knowing that I'm not the only one and that it's, you know, it's fine to feel this still, even though it happened like over 10 years ago now [laughs] . . . when I was looking through the maps and then I had all of these other stories of trauma that made me realise, hey, actually I'm not the only person that experienced this kind of thing, and then there were like moments of joy where I was like, hey, this is something that I could actually have. [11]

What struck us about the excerpt above was their connection of suffering and flourishing, of pain and trauma with joy and hope. While the mass collection of everyday stories of suffering might evoke a sombre sense of defeat or disappointment, in a context of visibility and witness (see Muñoz, 2009, pp. 98–99; Poletti, 2020, p. 82) they offered a sense of community. Indeed, the 'bigger meaning' of platform posts was articulated by one participant, who underlined a commonality and communality of queer experience:

> . . . in the posts that I relate to the most, they're almost, you could almost attach any meaning on to them. They're quite vague and . . . when it sits in that space that seems so normal, I think that becomes really powerful or when it isn't perceived as something that could be different, I feel like that's what this site sits within, and it all kind of makes it feel as if it's there and it's like a bigger meaning for everyone where they can understand their experiences through the experiences of others. [07]

This excerpt highlights how relatability is complexly produced. Relatable material – and intimacy, recognition – is made, augmented and cultivated through multiple design elements of *Queering the Map*. This includes its atemporality and anonymity, and its 'drag and click' interactivity that moves visitors to manually explore stories across the map, searching for things they might share in and relate to.

Situation matters

We play on the double meaning of *situation* here, as the circumstances of an event and as the process of locating something in place, to encompass the breadth of stories *in situ*. One participant, in locating their own pinned story, honed in on this generative connection between memory and place:

> So, here is my post, or the first one that I did . . . that's talking about when I was in like year 12 and there was this boy that I started like hanging out with, that was in the grade below me and he was a boarder at school. So, I lived about, maybe about here where the mouse is . . . and I would run all the way to this park and he would come from like a bit further up . . . and I remember thinking about that park as like our special like safe queer place kind of thing. I think one thing that the map does really well, and just kind of favourite of it being a map, is that it locates things in space . . . [recently] I passed the street where that park is and I definitely, like it was making me reflect on that whole experience. So, for me, I'd say memory and like experience in queerness is definitely rooted in like my space, like in particular spaces where significant experiences have happened . . . [01]

We were interested in how pinned stories offer both a rich quality of situatedness, and insight into the situations that make up people's queer memories. Spaces like the park above afford queer experiences, and are made queer via such experiences, as people become queer in and through spaces like these. In exploring why *situation matters*, here we tease out how queer subjectivity and queer places are brought and formed together on *Queering the Map*. All contributions to the platform are situated – they (must) take the form of pins on the map. Beyond visibility in a general (or non-located) sense, the specific cartographic form was significant for participants; for example, one participant reflected:

> . . . just the fact that I could see what other people's experiences were in the exact places where I was, that was the important thing. So, yeah, I don't think it would be the same if it didn't have the actual map in it. I don't think I would have engaged with it to the same extent. [11]

Indeed, many stories on the map emphasise the spatiality of experiences, and we find this significant given their brevity. For example:

> Brought some friends from my new city to my hometown in preparation for top surgery, swam here at my old local beach with them in the gentle, warm rain. It was my last time swimming in a binder. [Regional coastal town]

Other posts, as well as being brief, were particularly ephemeral. One participant recounted how some stories were about things that *did not happen* in those places – inactions, hesitations, longing (see Kirby et al., 2021) – yet were still resonantly queer:

> . . . like, '*Here, wanted to walk here with you*'. It's not even about an experience, but about a desire that maybe was never fulfilled, or '*Fell in love with a girl here. Why didn't I act on it?*' and like, queer lust and failure and desire. [01]

Such memories, and the way they are recounted for the archive, evoke the 'glimmers' and 'residues' of Muñoz's (1996, p. 10) ephemera-as-evidence. The map-based design of *Queering the Map* is central to the glimmering and affective residue such posts induce. While visitors explore the map, they come across the sites of others' experiences. One participant, navigating the platform during their interview, narrated:

> . . . it's so cool to like look at a map like this and then you see in an area where you think, 'Hey, that's not a very queer area', but then there's postings, and you're like, 'Okay, not everything is as it seems on the surface'. [08]

This excerpt marks a recognition and (re-)discovering of a place *as queer*, through the experiences of others. On a kind of memory tour (Garde-Hansen, 2011, p. 99), visitors like the above participant may re-experience sites – queer voids in their own memories – as actually queer, as perhaps queer all along. It was clear from the interviews that having to navigate a map heightens this rediscovery, this seeing anew or seeing queerly of familiar places. *Where* others contributed held meaning, on local levels and in a wider frame. This became tangible for participants through the user processes required on the platform:

> . . . you can kind of expand and zoom out and see all of the points where everyone has contributed . . . and so because you have to go on that journey, so zooming out and then trying to find wherever you want to land, it asks you to look across and think about what all those points mean and where all those stories lie for other people as well without even really realising it. [07]

This engagement, in terms of where stories lie, and the broader (in)visibility work of the platform, was core to several participant accounts:

> We talk a lot about visibility as like representation in media, but I think the site has this kind of, I guess, politics of visibility. We can sort of see all the queerness in the space and that's really meaningful. [06]

How pins populate the map, in their spread and saturation, surfaces a politics of visibility that may be particularly Australian. The majority of the 26 million residents of Australia are concentrated in the south-east of the country, with density in coastal areas. As such, stark distinctions, and distances, emerge between urban and rural areas. Such visual distribution of pins provokes reflection on how to decentre 'metronormativity' in thinking about queer experience (cf. Halberstam, 2005), to consider what absences or voids on the map might generate (see Kirby et al., 2021). Several pinned posts to the map similarly resonate; through their content and location, a number of stories engage with the aggregation and absence of pins across space. For example:

> A bisexual trans guy lives around here! We exist, even in the countryside [Rural town] not alone. [Remote town]

Participants also explained their contributions as shaped by the presence (or absence) of mapped pins, where less-populated spaces held personal and political attraction:

> I wanted to contribute basically and I thought, you know, there's a lot of different things obviously from across my life that would be interesting posts, but I wanted to sort of, I think, just to try to like lock that down as a spot . . . for a country town, it just felt like that was where I should put something kind of as a bit more of a point and a statement that there are queer people in country towns. [03]

In their work on work on collective memory, Garde-Hansen (2011, pp. 42–43) unpacks how 'Individuals do things to and with media so as to remember, not simply for the sake of personal memory or to contribute to a community's history, but rather to project the multiple and multiplying layers of complex connections between people, places, pasts and possibilities.' We see this complexity enacted in the participant's words above. Their practice of pinning their own story/ies to the map is not done to simply expand the record of queer history as another line in a ledger but to enliven the situated context of heteronormativity and metronormativity in their personal experience, against which they locate their queer life in place as already existing, to show that 'there *are* queer people in country towns'. With a committed present tense, they make that place a possibility for others. Other participants discussed resonant sentiments, for example on suburban living:

> I love that expression, *Queering the Map*, too because one of the things that doesn't get talked about is suburban queer life. People often think about queer lives as venues . . . but what's often forgotten is queer life happens right across the community in all sorts of places. [13]

And for the participant below, engaging with a queer archive in a way that was performative, that involved queering the map, was a powerful possibility:

> I think there's something exciting and maybe a bit empowering about making the point that queer people have lived experiences in the same spaces as everybody does. [13]

The cartography of *Queering the Map* helps lend visibility to the occurrence of queer experiences in many different places; further, it enables a mode of queer place-*making*. Situation comes to matter in the queer archive as an activity, a lively dynamic of experience and emplacement.

Everyday matters

While relatable stories and familiar situations were central in participants' accounts of what mattered, so too did *everyday* matters stand out. These stories, encapsulating commonplace or minor occurrences of personal significance, resonated with all interview participants. For example:

> . . . the ones that I've looked at were very like small moments . . . it's someone describing that one second and, you know, how perfect that one second was. They're not so over-arching narratives. They're more like, you know, 'This was one night and I met this person here and,

> you know, that defined my queer experience', and it's very much [pause] it's kind of like ephemeral in a way. [05]

Our analysis of pinned stories also revealed the magnitude of meaning in the seemingly mundane:

> I was 12 and sitting at the bus stop. Across the road, I saw two men exit a car and hold hands as they walked down the street, living a normal day and in love. It was the first time I realized that I wasn't alone and as closed off as I thought I was. [Regional city]

Here we see how ordinariness matters; the ordinariness of (and against, and alongside) heteronormativity, the significance of a couple holding hands, 'living a normal day' undoes representations of queerness as exceptional while prompting us to think about what constitutes 'normal' or 'ordinary' in/for queer lives (see Moussawi, 2020). Participants drew on these 'small' moments to contrast the micro of personal life to the macro of collectively-experienced events, and emphasised the fleeting and ephemeral. They also gestured to the fragmentary form these micro stories take on the site, stripped of context and distilled only into an essential or defining glimpse. Participants enjoyed and valued these qualities as part of the novel landscape of *Queering the Map*. As one participant articulated:

> . . . the minutiae of it is kind of the whole point . . . to collect all of these little tiny moments which are like not particularly significant to anyone else, but they're significant to the person who posted it. [01]

As well as holding space for experiences and contributions that may not be valued in other archives, as the above participant discusses, another highlighted how some posts articulate alternative visions of what everyday queerness is or can be:

> . . . it's just nice to see these like sort of quiet moments where it's like just two people hanging out and, you know, there happened to be a moment of connection. It's really understated and quiet, you know. It's not fitting with this like loud, Mardi Gras, crazy, idea of what, you know, gay people are all the time. It's like, no, it's just, you know, having coffee somewhere, just sitting down and just having a nice coffee and that's it. [05]

This everydayness shaped how participants engaged with the site, and how they understood their own experience in the world more broadly:

> . . . as time wore on, as I thought about myself differently, as I thought about the map differently, I started to pin different sorts of things that, [pause] I don't know how to describe this, [pause] that are not about coming out, about sex, about some of those kind of experiences, but it's just about the fact that, okay, I'm a queer person all the time. When I go and buy a coffee, that is a queer experience even if there is nothing particular about it, right? [10]

We also found that stories which did recount events of collective or historical significance, such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras or protests and votes for equal rights, often illustrated the normalcy in where and how days of collective significance are experienced:

> Did my first mardi gras fairday here in 2017
>
> Went with friends got very sunburnt, met people from high school I hadn't seen in over 5 years. [Inner city park] came here with a guy i met after the YES vote announcement; we kissed by the fountains and then under the trees, lay there for what felt like hours. [Inner city park]

Here, the everyday matters and every day matters. Discussing the voluntary national postal survey ('the Plebiscite') and the consequent introduction of Marriage Equality legislation in Australia (late 2017), one participant said:

> . . . it was interesting within the Australian context that there is a lot of posts around the Plebiscite and when all that information came through, that it became almost a landing point for people to recall their memories from and I guess, all the different places that people were in . . . it makes you think because it's one of those things that people ask, you know, where were you when this happened? [07]

In the above posts and participant reflections on everyday moments and the everyday experience of days of significance, we see the counter-memory work (cf. Foucault, 1977) done by and in this queer archive. A fragmentary, non-linear, polyvocal narrative of queerness (see LaRochelle, 2020) collects across space, countering both the substantiated official archive (see Muñoz, 1996) and normative visions of LGBTQIA+ identity (see Moussawi & Vidal-Ortiz, 2020), and becomes most affective and experiential in the ways it celebrates the queer everyday and claims every day as queer.

What *Queering the Map* achieves, in connecting the everyday with the collective and political through its participatory invitation and cartographic visibilisation, is an emphasis on the personal. As the participant above reflects, in conversations about nationally significant events people do often ask 'where were you when this happened?' This polyvocality and emphasis on the personally-experienced details of everyday life, taken in the broader context of curated institutional archives and the cementing of selected dominant stories, buoys the political memory-work of this as an archival project. Participants see the platform as:

> . . . a place where things can be documented and not erased, an archive of existence and experience and, I guess, a place to, whether it's to work out how they understand themselves or to document at that time their understanding of themselves. [07]

Archiving – as recording for preservation and, importantly, for collective access – the everydayness of queer life matters. As a participant reflected:

> . . . it's just everyday things that people go about living their lives, having relationships, having thoughts, having whatever . . . Even though it's boring, it's like significant enough to record . . . it's like recorded as history that, '*No, I was here. It was pretty fucking boring, but it existed*', [laughs] and it's important because there's a, you know, the world shouldn't be heteronormative. [08]

Through the aggregation of stories of everyday queer life across place, the platform makes visible another world: a queer world, where the heteronorm is resisted and

forgotten on a local and global scale. We contend that, through the dynamics we have explored above, the archive encourages the work of counter-memory against the erasure of LGBTQIA+ histories while enabling a politics of forgetting (see Cvetkovich, 2003; Garde-Hansen, 2011). Performatively embracing ephemera as evidence, the platform affects queerness and, offering itself up as a queer worldmaking project (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6), archives the world as a queer place of recognition, a place of queer possibility.

Discussion: Queer contribution

Above we have plumbed the thematic findings from our analysis of what matters in this queer archive. From relatability, situation and the everyday on *Queering the Map*, we now discuss what these findings and themes reorient us towards in queer/archival studies and the sociology of (technologies of) memory. First, we share two calls from Ann Cvetkovich: that a 'useful archive . . . must preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling' (2003, p. 241) and, from a roundtable discussion on queering archives, that

> We want a queer archive, not just an LGBT archive – not just inclusion but transformation of what counts as an archive and innovative approaches to an engaged public history that connects the past with the present to create a history of the present. (Arondekar et al., 2015, p. 222)

Elements of *Queering the Map*, which are not limited to the platform but are engaged in creative ways in its design and by visitors, make this an affective and queer kind of archive. One element which stands out in our analysis is the platform's lively participatory design. Many, if not most, archives involve material contributed by or crowdsourced from non-archivist members of a given community. However, this archive's radical openness in terms of contribution and the resistance of curation (beyond screening for hate speech) queers the work of the archivist and moves its visitors towards being 'archival queers' (Morris, 2006; Morris & Rawson, 2013). Here, an unfolding character and enforced anonymity distributes the archival work; visitors consider their own contributions in relation to existing representations and, importantly, silences of experience, identity, place and feeling. Queer(ing) archival practices through collective memory-making can carve new contours for archival 'evidence' and community histories (see Garde-Hansen, 2011; Muñoz, 1996). Such a distribution of custody and care is arguably made more effective in digital community archives (Flinn, 2007, p. 168). We argue that liveliness and anonymity also, connectedly, generate an acknowledgement and celebration of personal, ordinary memories made public and extraordinary. Memories are contributed, given, gifted to the archive (Blakely & Moles, 2019) for and as queer heritage. As Cvetkovich calls for above (in Arondekar et al., 2015), we see these elements here affording not (only) an archive inclusive of LGBTQIA+ histories but a collective and collectivising refutation of heteronormativity, a response to historic and contemporary vilifications of sexual and gender diversity.

Another element vital in our analysis is the map of *Queering the Map*. Contribution is a space-claiming exercise and through this map-based design the archive and its visitors make space for queer representation. Morris and Rawson (2013, pp. 79–80) – in discussing 'the significance of being archival queers' (2013, p. 79) via the work of Ramírez (2005),

Hallas (2010) and Muñoz (2009) – craft a conceptual trajectory from physical feeling to space struggles to how a queer futurity may emerge in the material pasts and presents we record to remember. On queer archiving as testimony and an imperative, they argue this significance deepens 'when we acknowledge the stakes in recognising, engaging, accumulating, and speaking these traces, these holdings, these embodiments of queer pasts for selves and communities, for transformation' (Morris & Rawson, 2013, p. 79). We also see possibility for transformation, particularly in how the centrality of place is tied to and augmented by *Queering the Map*'s atemporality. When contributing to the archive, there is no prompt for visitors to historicise their memories. While many posts tell of experiences that read as occurring years or decades ago, only a small minority of pinned stories contain reference to dates or years. The result, affectively, is of timeliness and timelessness. Queerness is (potentially) everywhere and all the time, as areas of the map without pins may be seen as awaiting-ascription rather than void of queerness (Kirby et al., 2021). Time is essential to memory and temporality is key in how we conceptualise memory-work (see Degnen, 2005; Freeman, 2010; Urry, 1995), as well as in conceptualisations of belonging (see May, 2017) and what Cover (2019, p. 133) calls 'an affective attachment to community'. Atemporality and a spatial configuration (re)make the archive, queerly orienting visitors' experiences with the archived materials and the contributions they collectively make, making possible a transformative resettling of space/place for the future. The move from chronology to cartography opens up new planes of collective memory.

Conclusion: Collective memory-work

In this article, we have responded to calls to consider what interactive archiving practices reveal for and about marginalised communities (see e.g. Cover, 2019). Through considering the accounts and practices of our participants alongside the anonymous stories pinned to *Queering the Map*, we have worked to surface what matters in, for and because of the (queer) archive. Archives like *Queering the Map* offer avenues for the formation of collective narratives and cultivation of memory-work that challenge heteronormativity in/of space, place, community, gender and sexuality. The multiplicity in/of these collective narratives are significant; we see in this case what Cvetkovich (2003) calls an archive of feeling, a collection of experiences that are 'affective, sensory, often highly specific, and personal . . . [that] produce an unusual archive, one that frequently resists the coherence of narrative or that is fragmented and ostensibly arbitrary' (2003, p. 242). Participants made sense of *Queering the Map* by using 'the archive' as a frame of reference. Their own and others' stories, memories and fleeting queer moments are rich 'evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities' (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6). Indeed, as we have explored here, *Queering the Map*'s archival properties were key to how participants made meaning from and with the platform – as distinct, as queer, as a different kind of archive, as a record they valued and wanted to contribute to.

We have taken up this focus in a time when alternative and participatory digital cultures abound and the archival turn has firmly been recognised. As this space, of queer archives and queer digital archives and queer archival theorising, seems to exponentially expand, we know, against the imperatives of many such projects, that things become lost or missed. Our approach has been to examine what it is within a sea of stories,

experiences, affects and artefacts that comes to surface, to matter. So, what matters in the archive? We see that relatability matters because of the affective, affirming and community-building seeds it can generate. Situation matters because it is through this participatory practice that recognition, visibility and community place-*making* are enacted. The everyday, and every day, matter as the archive's visitors collectively claim and gift their varied personal experiences.

The archive reveals certain forms of Australian-ness, of experiences of (non-)belonging and identity reflective of cultural and political histories – short and long – of colonisation and colonialism, forms of privileged Whiteness, a (mythical) 'classless' society, coastal living, and more. We see the importance of reflecting on such specificities, and the difficulties in unpacking these amidst thousands of demographically and temporally unidentifiable moments. Through this difficulty, we observe unifying experiences that striate local and (likely) national boundaries, of everyday, mundane occurrences, of seemingly insignificant interactions between people, place and space, that signify queer belonging. We also acknowledge a politics of difference, as posts pinned across the world map are dissected, interpreted, embraced and critiqued by queer users looking for relatability, in search of diversities that come to signify queer solidarity and possibility. *Queering the Map*, as a contemporary yet a-historicising, global and emergent multilingual project, offers scope for representation across culture and place. Further research on *Queering the Map* and other queer archival projects, across continents and smaller settings, will reveal important insights into various contextual and non-Western forms of queer archiving practice. Our focus on so-called Australia, in terms of stories pinned and participants' locales, offers just one lens amongst a kaleidoscope of perspectives.

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