Life on the Outskirts Symposium: inspiration and interventions in small creative archives

Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University

Friday 9th February 2018, 11am - 5pm
Image Credit: Polaroids of running order for Edith’s Sisters, AW 1995 catwalk show (Courtesy of the Helen Storey Foundation).

Cover Image Credits: ‘No Stitches Wedding Dress’ from BA Fashion, Kingston Polytechnic, 1981 (Illustration by Helen Storey); Design for Lancetti, Rome, 1982-3 (Illustration by Helen Storey); Saffron Aldridge wearing hat from Oil collection, AW 1985 (Photo by Clive Warwick); Helen Storey wearing a top from Wise Warrior Woman for Vogue, May 1990 (Photo by Lord Snowdon); ‘Kensington and Chelsea Bin Bag Ball Skirt’ from Present Times Collection, AW 1993 (Photo by Platon for 10 Year Catalogue, 1994); Front Cover of Fighting Fashion (Faber and Faber, 1996); ‘Closing Neural Tube Dress’ from Primitive Streak, 1997 (Photo by Justine); ‘Death dress - Last Ride’ from Mental at Øksnehallen, Copenhagen, 2001 (Photo by Mads Armgaard); Still from Eye & I (2005, dir. Pinny Grylls, Invisible Films); ‘Dissolving Dress’ from Wonderland at London College of Fashion, 2008 (Photo by Alex McGuire); ‘Herself’ from Catalytic Clothing, 2010 (Illustration by Helen Storey); Dress of Glass and Flame, 2013 (Photo by Francesco Allegretto, courtesy of Berengo Studio); Dress For Our Time, 2015 (Photo by David Betteridge); ‘No Stitches Wedding Dress’, 1981 (Photo by Ezzidin Alwan for HSF/ Kingston University, 2016).

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Welcome

Life on the Outskirts is an AHRC-funded project between University of Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan University and Helen Storey Foundation. It seeks to find fresh creativity by revisiting past practice and uses the Helen Storey Foundation archive as both case study and inspiration, highlighting a pathway through the creative opportunities that archives can offer.

This symposium, hosted at Manchester School of Art, brings together academics who are interested in, inspired by and/or working with small creative archives to explore the multiple challenges and opportunities faced by small creative archive collections and those working with them.

Today’s papers explore how the archives of small creative organisations (and small creative collections within archive settings) offer multiple potential applications and challenges, including: artistic interventions in creative archives; using creative archives for teaching purposes; developing digital access in creative archives; engaging members of the public with creative archives; and the potential commercial mobilisation of creative archives.

A Special Edition Journal is planned following today’s symposium to develop these ideas.

This booklet provides a Symposium Schedule (pp. 4-5) and Speaker Abstracts and Biographies (pp. 6-15).

For more information after this event, please visit our website or email the team.

Dr Rob Knifton and Dr Alison Slater
on behalf of the ‘Life on the Outskirts’ Team

www.lifeontheoutskirts.org
lotohsf@gmail.com
Symposium Schedule

10.30-11.00: Arrival and Registration

11.00-12.15: Session 1

**Creative Archives and Higher Education**

Introduction and Film: ‘Life on the Outskirts: inspiration and interventions in the Helen Storey Foundation Archive’ (Dr Rob Knifton, University of Leeds and Dr Alison Slater, Manchester Metropolitan University)

Paper 1: “‘Resource explorers”: How we mobilised the University of Westminster Menswear Archive collection to address educational needs’ (Dr Danielle Sprecher and Eleri Kyffin, University of Westminster)

Paper 2: ‘Object Lessons: the value of encountering the physical object in design education using the “Material & Process Innovation Collection”, at MMU Special Collections’ (Steph Boydell and David Grimshaw, Manchester Metropolitan University)

12.15-13.15: Lunch and drop-in to ‘Collecting: Malcolm Garrett’

13.15-14.20: Session 2

**Archives and Contemporary Creative Practice**

Paper 3: ‘The Writing Room: a public intervention using archives as re-enactment’ (Susanna Edwards, London Metropolitan University)
Paper 4: ‘Activating the Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space’ (Lucia Farinati, Kingston University London)

Paper 5: ‘Quilting the Archive: Patch-working lesbian lives through textile practice’ (Sarah-Joy Ford, Artist and Curator)

14.20-14.40pm: Break

14.40-15.45pm: Session 3

Creative Archives, Heritage and Memory

Paper 6: ‘Feminist Digital Heritage Practice: motivations and methods’ (Dr Jenna Ashton, Researcher, Curator and Artist)

Paper 7: ‘The Powerful Whispers Project: A box of family photographs as archival site of post-memory and the ‘trace’’ (Rob Burton, Teesside University)

Paper 8: ‘Hospitalfield: Seeing Below the Water Line’ (Lucy Byatt, Hospitalfield)

15.45-16.00: Break

16.00-17.00: Keynote and Discussion

‘Connecting subjectivities: archives and creative practice’ (Sue Breakell, Archivist and Senior Research Fellow, University of Brighton Design Archives)

17.15: Close
Speaker Abstracts and Biographies

Keynote:

‘Connecting subjectivities: archives and creative practice’ (Sue Breakell, Archivist and Senior Research Fellow, University of Brighton Design Archives)

Recent years have seen an emphasis on subjectivity in the archival encounter, in popular culture and contemporary art practice, echoed by the ‘subjective turn’ in humanities research. Archives are widely used for projects which encourage other artists and designers to respond to objects and documents in a way that harnesses the subjectivities of their own practice, and engages with individual and collective memory. Focussing on visual arts archives, this paper will consider aspects of subjectivity in relation to the archive, the user and the creator, in both analogue and digital contexts. It will reflect on the frames of selection through which subjectivities are exercised, including the practices of heritage professionals, particularly the archivist, whose mediations, though largely invisible, nevertheless influence the user’s experience.

In accounting for the particular value contributed by the theories and principles that underpin the work of archivists, the paper will conclude by looking at the blurring of roles around the archive, in the “information management society” (Parrika) where we are all “miniarchivists”. It will propose that these positions sit on a continuum, on which enhanced awareness of archival practices empowers users to place themselves.

Biography:

Sue Breakell is Archivist and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Brighton Design Archives. Her research engages the nature, meaning and practice of archives and their creative uses in art and design contexts. She is interested in the diversity of perspectives on archives, at the intersection between stewardship, research and creative activities, as well as the new iterations of the archive these produce.
Session 1: Creative Archives and Higher Education

Introduction and Film: ‘Life on the Outskirts: inspiration and interventions in the Helen Storey Foundation Archive’ (Dr Rob Knifton and Dr Alison Slater)

Professor Helen Storey MBE is an award winning and critically acclaimed former fashion designer and now London based social artist, designer and academic. In 1999, Helen and her business partner Caroline Coates set up the Helen Storey Foundation (HSF) a not-for-profit, project-funded arts organisation. The custodian of Helen Storey’s works, HSF aims to inspire new ways of thinking across art, science, design and technology.

‘Life on the Outskirts: Making Sense of a Creative Life’, is an AHRC-funded research project between Dr Rob Knifton (University of Leeds), Dr Alison Slater (Manchester Metropolitan University) and the Helen Storey Foundation, supported by Project Assistant Abigail Balkitis.

The introduction to the symposium will include a private view of a new Helen Storey Foundation archive film made by David Betteridge as part of the project. For more information and to see more images from the digitised Helen Storey Foundation archive, see: www.lifeontheoutskirts.org.

Biographies:

Dr Robert Knifton is an academic and curator at the University of Leeds who works via collaborative practice around museum and heritage sites. Robert’s previous research includes the HLF-funded ‘Histories in the Making’ (Kingston School of Art), and the AHRC Beyond Text project ‘Collecting and Curating Popular Music Histories’ (University of Liverpool). Robert has been working with the Helen Storey Foundation since 2015 and is Principle Investigator for the AHRC-funded ‘Life on the Outskirts’ project.

Dr Alison Slater is a lecturer and researcher at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. Her doctoral research into working-class women’s memories of dress has featured in ‘Fashion on the Ration’ (Imperial War Museum North, 2015-16) and in the Radio 4 documentary ‘From Rags to Riches’ (by Amber Butchart, 2017). Alison has been working with the Helen Storey Foundation since 2016 and is Co-Investigator for ‘Life on the Outskirts’.
Paper 1: “Resource explorers”: How we mobilised the University of Westminster Menswear Archive collection to address educational needs’ (Dr Danielle Sprecher and Eleri Kyffin, University of Westminster)

The newly established University of Westminster MA Menswear brings research, design, specialist abilities and thinking to a postgraduate level course. There are no academic written components so, as often happens with other studio based courses in disciplines such as fashion, library instruction sits on the fringes and it is difficult to engage in traditional models of library research and information literacy models. However, the recently established Westminster Menswear Archive, a research resource for the course, provided opportunities to develop sessions around the archive and the process of research.

This paper discusses how, by working together, the library and archive promoted the idea of deeper research as the foundation of the creative design process by both handling and exploring pieces of clothing and texts and resources in the library collection. Hybridised academic library and Archives and Museum information literacy models and programmes were used to create a new approach to the research process for studio disciplines. The “hook” of the physical archival object encouraged students to explore a piece of archive clothing or library material in depth and to develop and creatively explore their research ideas.

Biographies:

Dr Danielle Sprecher is the Curator of the University of Westminster Menswear Archive. Her doctoral thesis, ‘Fashion for the High Street: The Design and Making of Menswear in Leeds 1945-1980’, was awarded by the University of Leeds in 2016. Before beginning her PhD, Danielle worked in the museum sector, most recently as the costume curator for Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service, as well as in the Exhibitions Department at the V&A.

Eleri Kyffin is a Senior Academic Liaison Librarian at the University of Westminster. She manages the professional librarian team who work with the media arts and design students at the Harrow Campus. Eleri takes a lead role in ensuring effective links between academic staff and the Library, and designs and delivers information skills programmes for all levels of learning, from basic induction to research.
Paper 2: ‘Object Lessons: the value of encountering the physical object in design education using the “Material & Process Innovation Collection”, at MMU Special Collections’ (Steph Boydell and David Grimshaw, Manchester Metropolitan University)

Throughout the history of design teaching in Higher Education there has been an acknowledged need for students to physically encounter the designed object. However, this has been superceded by the myriad detailed images and information that is readily available on-line and in print in the digital age. This concern drew together a museum curator and a 3D Design educator. One was concerned that traditional lectures lacked the impact of engaging with objects, but also had difficulty finding and accessing meaningful, contemporary, objects. The other, whose largely historic collections were seen to be “irrelevant” to contemporary design practice, understood that materiality and its role in teaching and research was fundamental to a museum’s existence.

The “Material & Process Innovation Collection” was established in 2013, as a museum quality collection, driven not only by curatorial concerns, but by teaching and research. Comprised of objects that are cutting-edge in terms of their material and process-led approaches to making, manufacture and distribution, the collection challenges the conservatism of museum collecting. It hands the responsibility of collections development to non-curators and brings the physical objects back into the classroom.

Biographies:

Stephanie Boydell is Curator at Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections. After working in the museum sector for nearly 20 years, her main focus is now exhibitions and collections management, and ensuring that the collections are used to support teaching and research in the university, as well as being open to the wider public. Stephanie has a background in art and design history, particularly 19th century British art and design, as well as contemporary crafts and design.

David Grimshaw is Programme Leader for MA/MSc Product Design at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. He previously worked as a freelance design consultant for contract furniture, designing ranges for top end UK manufacturers. David’s research investigates the relationship of digital design to material making, challenging the perceived perfection of the virtual and the digital, to inform the current debate on the sustainability of materially led craft and design practices.
Session 2: Archives and Contemporary Creative Practice

Paper 3: ‘The Writing Room: a public intervention using archives as re-enactment’ (Susanna Edwards, London Metropolitan University)

Using archive material from the City of Southampton archive collection, this paper focuses on the use of archives in creative research that strives to use the past to create participatory interventions and useable new creative visual archives.

The paper discusses the Writing Room, a collaboration with ‘Culture Southampton’, that recreates the 1950s public ‘Writing Room’ from the old Ocean Terminal Building, Southampton, where travellers sat and wrote postcards about their journeys. The Writing Room will house a series of workshops exploring the art of postcard writing to reach and target different groups of participants from gallery visitors, to travellers on cruise liners to different cultural and local community groups for their personal descriptions and stories about the city of Southampton.

The paper considers how this creative practice-led research enables one narrative perspective (a history of a place) to meet another (people in that place now) where the insights of one have a playful engagement with the subject area of another (place making). Through the transformation and presentation of archives in new forms and collaborative thinking through making and interacting, the paper explores future potentials for designing and presenting archives as publicly accessible and experiential.

Biography:

Susanna Edwards is a researcher, illustrator, and educator. She is currently Head of Cass Visual Communications with The Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design, London Metropolitan University. Susanna’s work with archives uses illustration and action research as a tool for communication and engagement and field techniques for collecting and organising data through storytelling. She works on self-initiated, collaborative projects that take various forms from exhibitions, workshops, events, installations and artists’ publications.
This paper discusses research on The Audio Arts Archive of artists’ voices and sound art. It includes both original and published recordings, but also material relating to the inception, creation and production of the audio magazine from 1973 to 2007, yet does not include the whole body of sound works created by the artist William Furlong and collaborators under the collective name of Audio Arts.

Audio Arts was never set up as a (sound) archive. Prior to the acquisition by Tate in 2004, it was simply considered by Furlong as the result of his editorial and artistic activity. Furlong presented Audio Arts as a living archive: a body of works imagined as a sonic organism that can be shaped and reshaped into new artistic forms.

This paper investigates the tension between inventory space and imagined space, by examining the relationship between the re-organisation of Audio Arts archive and the way it was used creatively by Furlong in the production of new sound works. It explores how listening to (and within) the archive could be considered a form of engagement between the two spaces, acting as both an archival methodology and a creative tool for the active participation of an audience.

Biography:

Lucia Farinati is a researcher, curator and activist. In 2007, she established Sound Threshold, an interdisciplinary curatorial project exploring the relationships between site, sound and text. Lucia is currently working on a research project on Audio Arts in collaboration with Tate Archive as part of her PhD at Kingston University London. She previously studied on the Curatorial Programme at Goldsmiths College, London and History of Art and Aesthetics at the University of Trento.
Paper 5: ‘Quilting the Archive: Patch-working lesbian lives through textile practice’ (Sarah-Joy Ford, Artist and Curator)

This paper presents quilting practice as an affective methodology for reading and interpreting lesbian history in archive. It considers one quilt, from a larger body of work in response to audio-visual archive material found in the Lesbian Herstory Archives (New York) and The Gay History Podcast, that incorporates a variety of techniques including embroidery, printing, appliqué and quilting drawing upon historical traditions of needlework, quilt making and banner making. This multiplicity of material references to the domestic, the public and protest articulate the de-stabilisation singular narratives of history, archive and lesbian identity. Patching and piecing elements together these strategies function as a material metaphor for the gathering and arranging of scarce resources available to lesbians seeking a connection with their queer heritage.

It is this hidden, fragmented nature of the lesbian identity and archive that makes quilting such an apt, emotive material language in which to offer a speculative reading of the pieces that are left. The paper proposes textile practice as an affective methodology for queering the archive, patch-working together marginalized histories, emotion, fiction and collective memory. These material interventions will open up archives to new interpretations and readings through a refusal of fixed meanings.

Biography:

Sarah-Joy Ford is an artist and curator working with textiles, feminist and queer theory. Her practice is situated within an alternative history of art and objects; one that incorporates quilting, banner making, knitting, folk art and disobedient objects. Sarah-Joy is a graduate of The School of the Damned, and The University of Leeds, and co-directs Seize Projects, an artist led organisation that co-ordinates an itinerant program of exhibitions and events.
Session 3: Creative Archives, Heritage and Memory

Paper 6: ‘Feminist Digital Heritage Practice: motivations and methods’ (Dr Jenna Ashton, Researcher, Curator and Artist)

This paper outlines the motivations and methods behind the evolving feminist digital heritage practice of creative enterprise, Digital Women’s Archive North CIC (DWAN). DWAN is an intersectional feminist arts and heritage organization delivering a programme of events, projects and research that supports women and girls to identify, collect, disseminate and celebrate their cultural heritage through creative and digital interventions.

DWAN is co-creating a digital space that will function as an archive, educational resource and alternative media outlet, supporting the connectivity, campaigns and creative cultural resistance of feminist practitioners and organisations. This work takes place in the context of a material feminist archiving and heritage practice, which sits within broader framework of activism and organising around women’s and girls’ rights. The space will act as a location of “stories-so-far” (to quote Doreen Massey); a living archive of contemporary collecting and historical evidencing.

The paper examines the current lack of articulation of a feminist politics in discussions of digital space governance, and especially digital heritage practice. It considers how DWAN's aims to move us a step closer towards informing how digital spaces can be participatory and not defined by existing patriarchal models of spatial governance.

Biography:

Dr. Jenna C Ashton is a researcher, curator and artist working in the areas of heritage, archives and visual culture. Her work concerns feminist methodologies in material and digital heritage, and activism and spatial practice. Jenna is Founder and Creative Director of Digital Women’s Archive North CIC (DWAN) and Global Cultural Fellow with the Institute for International Cultural Relations, Edinburgh University.
Paper 7: ‘The Powerful Whispers Project: A box of family photographs as archival site of post-memory and the ‘trace” (Rob Burton, Teesside University)

This paper presents the artefacts, responses, analysis and critical debate created and explored as responses to a personal archive: a box of family photographs documenting my family from the Victorian era to the 1980s. The paper discusses Memorybox, a fibre based art installation that explores the trace of memory, post-memory and the representation of post-memory through photographic archival materials and family remembrance.

Memorybox establishes the concept of the material as fabric and the material as representation exploring the integration of the family in image, material and object. This paper positions this work within the field of post memory in making and culture, appropriating images and the sensual in fibre and fabric, to expand the exploration of the fragmentary and the half remembered of folded time and space.

The paper considers the remembered object and the remembered image of post-memory in relation to discourse on the concept of the surreal object and the phantasmagoria of memory, informed by Freud’s concept of the psychoanalytic object and literature on memory and post-memory by Tracey Emin, Jo Spence, Paul Riceour, Annette Kuhn, Marianne Hirsch, Uriel Orlow, Jan Verwoert and Joan Gibbons.

Biography:

Rob Burton is a visual artist and Head of Design at Teesside University who explores themes of memory, loss and transformation through fibre, fabric making, print techniques, drawing and broad approaches to image making. His artworks cross the threshold of disciplines in a conceptual dialogue between the innovative use of analogue, contemporary and emerging techniques. Rob has recently exhibited internationally in group exhibitions, biennials and triennials in the USA, Eastern Europe and the UK.
Hospitalfield is a contemporary arts organisation in Arbroath, Scotland, based in an Arts & Crafts house left in trust by the artist Patrick Allan-Fraser upon his death in 1890 to support artists and education in the arts for the future.

This paper focuses on an archive of around 1000 letters from the artists who were part of Allan-Fraser’s network, which has been separated from the rest of the Hospitalfield archives. In 1972, William Payne, a young historian who later became Director of Hospitalfield and remained in post until 2012, was appointed to work with the archive of artists letters. He read its contents from ‘cover to cover’ and the archive includes a layer of his hand-written notes and analysis. However, Payne preferred to keep Hospitalfield private; the artists letters were not made public, so their contents are unknown and unconnected to other associated material.

The paper will discuss plans to develop the archive of artists letters, which have inspired a new study centre building as a reception area to create an institution that is entered through the archive and alongside the store; aspects that are all too frequently below the water line of the 19th century museum model.

Biography:

Lucy Byatt has been Director of Hospitalfield since 2012, where she is working to establish a new institution within the history of this heritage setting. She has developed the programme of artist residencies and commissions and in 2015 curated Scotland + Venice, Scotland’s contribution to the Venice Biennale with a commission by artist Graham Fagen. Lucy was previously Head of National Programmes at the Contemporary Art Society and Director of Spike Island, Bristol.
‘Life on the Outskirts’ is a collaborative research project between:

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS  
Helen Storey Foundation  
Manchester Metropolitan University

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Cover: ‘Helen Storey/Helen Storey Foundation Timeline, 1981-2016’ designed by DED (2016) with support from Derived Knowledge (see p. 2 for Image Credits).