



# Window Space

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Jackson Klie  
*Gather Grasping*  
February 9 - April 6, 2024

My grandmother loves to collect things. When she downsized years ago, we found a gathering of deteriorated cardboard boxes stacked high in her musty basement. We assumed the boxes were junk, like the knickknacks amassed throughout her home. However, hundreds of photographs poured out as we ripped into the containers: late-nineteenth-century portraits, tintypes, unremembered trips, bygone celebrations, and unfamiliar faces. “What are you doing?!” she hollered as the images spilled onto the floor. “That’s my family archive!” I had just finished my undergraduate thesis, which essentially found its legs in climate-controlled vaults and special reading rooms. I thought it was funny to have my understanding of collections suddenly flipped on its head. I realized no archive is an island. A grandmother’s stockpile is not much different from a university’s historical keepings. We gather our feelings and document our histories in community, creating a vast indexical network.

Wolfgang Ernst argues that the archive is a metaphor for all forms of memory and storage—it is a state of classifying, sorting, and storing human data.<sup>1</sup> Yet, we so easily project our mundane compulsions onto archival collections. Personal journals, political documents, love letters, photo albums, commercial advertisements. These objects can't inherently hold memory, but they feel alive because we use them to mediate our world. We gather our experiences through vernacular records and images. So, it becomes easy to find ourselves in archival collections because their stories are external—they come from within the reader, not the object itself. A problem arises, however, because this means we can also encounter our absences. We find tension in things that are lost, inadequately represented, or missing.

Jackson Klie and I spoke about fragments during a studio visit earlier this year. He explained how *Gather Grasping*, an exhibition in Xpace Cultural Centre's Window Space, partly found its origins at the Toronto Reference Library. He described a process of sifting through the Picture Collection.<sup>2</sup> Archivists allow researchers to loan out part of these holdings. Visitors can gather its materials, take them home, and meditate on its fragments. Klie described how he thinks about historical patterns and ponders the value of objects through this contemplative process. "It is almost like the materials want to be touched again—it's a new form of intimacy between the past and present," he exclaimed.<sup>3</sup> In a strange way, the objects blend the boundary between their natural environment—the real world where photographs are continually handled, drawn upon, recirculated, exchanged—and the performative reverence of their new archival houses.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor: From Archival Space to Archival Time", *Open* 7, 2004, 46. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/542865/8b32821fe0174156942ede0cf145d55c.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The Toronto Reference Library's Picture Collection is a robust archive of magazine clippings and other printed ephemera compiled in a vast selection of folders publicly available to view and borrow.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson Klie (exhibiting artist) in discussion with the author, January 2024.

The Reference Library's Picture Collection is not pristine. It becomes damaged and worn as the images transfer between different hands. Klie intends to capture these imperfections and build upon them. He collages photographic excerpts against the installation's back wall in *Gather Grasping*. These scattered images are fragments from archival condition reports, and each image gestures toward the physical condition of the artist's collected records. Klie obscures the markings. He positions a harsh reflective light over the initial prints and reimages them. We can find abrasions, tears, wrinkles and losses layered within the new textures created under Klie's light. Generally, these markings signal damage, but they are also touch points. From this perspective, a condition report not only documents damage but also records physical touch over time. It uncovers moments of contact and human connection.

Klie's image-based practice addresses similar emotive yearnings for connection. Five inkjet prints on organza are suspended in front of the viewer. These images document mass gatherings, people uniting together, reaching hands that come to touch. The subjects want to be physical with us. However, they are obstructed by a shifting moiré pattern. This fluid visual effect creates a misaligned grid that masks the characters underneath, morphing the subjects into obscure shapes. Klie's intentional error resists the archive's inherent order. It rebels against the didactic nature of historical images—teasing the viewer with moments of familiarity and connection before suddenly disturbing them. He intentionally queers our gaze, creating fluid and ineffable gestures through misalignment and error.

Photography collections are fluid beasts within themselves. They are valued because they quite literally allow us to suspend time and capture impressive historical moments or deeply personal memories. Yet, like memories, photography is unstable and fleeting. Some exposures easily deteriorate. Others more simply feel incomplete—like shards that are impossible to put back together again or mend without input from larger bodies of images or communities. These fragments accumulate. They build like sediment that Klie can examine and sift through. Perhaps his gridded modifications shield us from these losses. Or maybe they protect us from more painful tensions between sentimental analogue experiences and mediated recordings.

In other ways, I think Klie's images and archival investigations are a resistance. Dominant political and social forces inevitably shape archives. As a Queer researcher, it can be difficult to find myself reflected in Canada's historical collections. Our local histories are rich and vibrant, but in the best case, our stories are masked behind the archive's historical boundaries, taxonomic codes, and heteronormative frameworks. In the worst cases, the archive is outright hostile.

For example: I recall Steven Maynard's early investigation into the Toronto Police Museum—exposing unsettling trends related to the Toronto Police Service's (TPS) historic misuse of community surveillance to suppress and persecute significant portions of the city's Queer community before the 2010s.<sup>4</sup> Maynard's investigations revealed a troubling lack of accountability and little documentation of the city's infamous Morality Department, which spearheaded many of these investigations. He noted extensive censorship within the existing records, erasures and taxonomic imprecisions that could

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Maynard. "Police/Archives". *Archivaria* 68 (1), 159-182, 2009,. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13236>.

otherwise uncover wrongdoing. Evidently, there are widespread access issues regarding Queer histories alongside generally fragmented or otherwise limited collections. Klie's work dances among these tensions— activating a compulsion to gather and preserve archival materials while pushing to reconstruct dominant political, social, and commercial narratives from the record.

I am continually reminded of José Esteban Muñoz's inspiring cultural theories while I explore archival images. The late Cuban-American academic postulates, "Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing... it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future."<sup>5</sup> He continues, "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."<sup>6</sup> We can continually revisit the archive, gather its collections, and activate its materials to challenge our world. Like Klie, we can use its materials to question and re-envision our histories.

In gathering the past, may we grasp upon new and hopeful futures.

- Megan Kammerer

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<sup>5</sup> José Esteban Muñoz. "Introduction: Feeling Utopia." in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. 1-18. NYU Press, 2009. 1. [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/literaturetheoryandtime/lit-cruising\\_utopia.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/literaturetheoryandtime/lit-cruising_utopia.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Muñoz, 1.