

Introduction

Antoinette Burton has noted that many of us have archive stories.¹ Significantly, this author's initial real archival meeting involved dust, both figuratively in the sense that it was in the old Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, an archetypal traditional archive, described by one commentator as church-like, an 'archival temple', and literally in that I became covered in dirt from the old (and rather large) bundles of tithe files that I was grappling with, somewhat innovatively it turned out, for my work on the seventeenth-century radical religious sect, the Quakers.² Consequently I had frequently to resort to the bathroom to wash the dirt of centuries off my hands and arms. Fortunately, this was before Carolyn Steedman's *Dust* (2001), with its invocation of the spectre of anthrax.³

So the physicality of inquiry is significant, especially, one might predict, in research dealing with sex. My book *Watching Hannah* (2002) drew on photographs, sketches, diaries, and journals in Trinity College, Cambridge, the collection of Arthur Munby, a Victorian lawyer, civil servant, and poet who married a servant called Hannah Cullwick and who was obsessed with working women and female bodily deformity (the two were connected in his mind).⁴ One of his preoccupations was with women's hands, and although common archival practice for handling photographic material, it seemed bizarre to be made to wear white gloves to examine the photographs in the collection: an almost fetishistic confirmation of Munby's fetish. Carol Mavor, who consulted the same repository and donned similar gloves, described her archival research as an erotic encounter: 'the photographs (and the diaries), for me, are overflowing with sexuality, flesh, desire'. 'I am drawn to this missing picture: it represents Hannah's invisible flesh. I want to touch it. I caress the place of her absence with gloved fingers.'⁵ She began and ended her essay with reference to the white gloves. In retrospect, it was a significant moment, for critics have described the historian's relationship to the archive and the primary source

document as fetishistic or fantastical in their obsession with actually touching the past.⁶

What I have been calling the archives vary in nature, and I have visited many of them – not all represented in this book – in the twenty years since my research and writing took a sexual turn. They range, in my own more recent experience, from the grandeur of the New York Public Library, Beaux-Arts landmark building on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, to the modern architectural beauty of the Beinecke Library, or the more understated Main Library of the San Francisco Public Library, temporary daytime home to so many of that city’s homeless who share its space with researchers. The archive can consist of a mural in a hotel, or drawings and paintings in the collection of a wealthy patron. When researching Chapter 2 on the artist Edward Melcarth, Erin Griffey and I travelled to the Forbes Gallery’s warehouse, The Fortress, in Queens in New York, which indeed looked like and was as secure as a citadel, where our hosts set out a whole room of Melcarth’s work (see Figure 4). (Malcolm Forbes, the billionaire owner of *Forbes* magazine, had patronised both hustlers – male sex workers – and the always-struggling Melcarth.) The following day, we went to the newly refurbished and rather exclusive Pierre Hotel in Manhattan, where in the

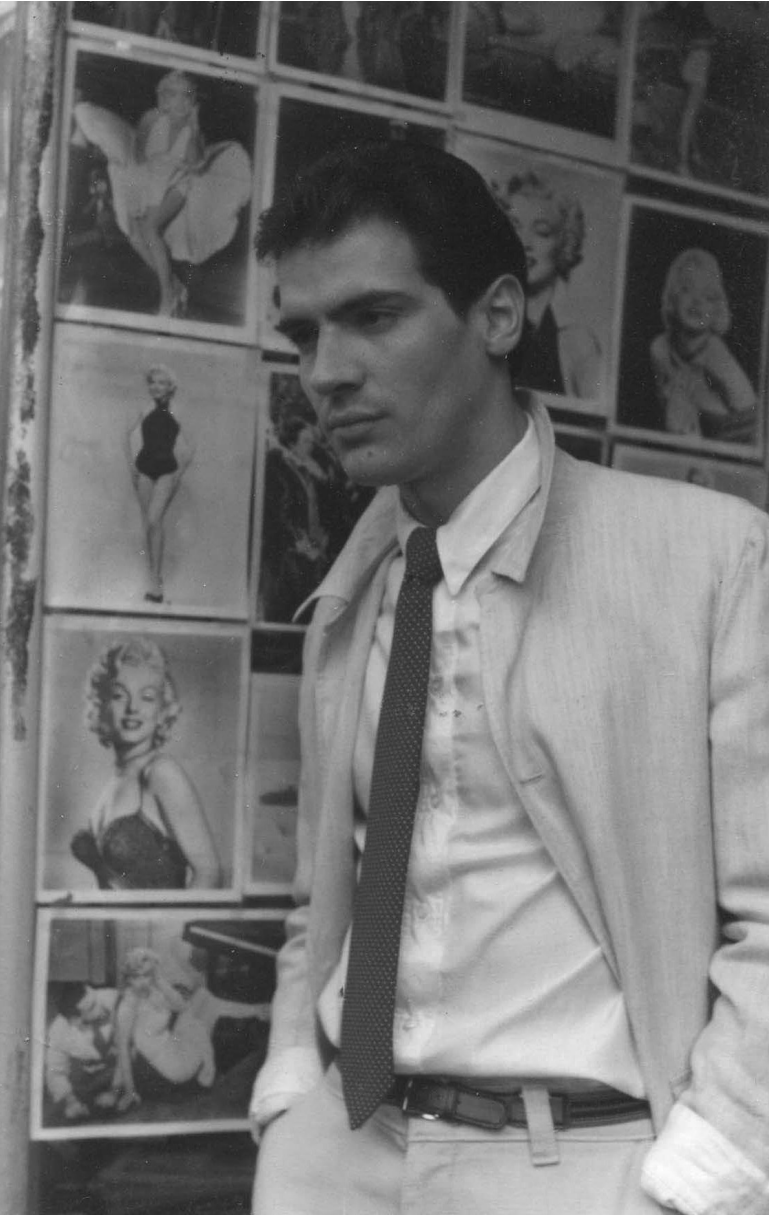


4 At the Fortress (with Erin Griffey). Photographed by author, 2010.

1960s Melcarth had painted a mural using hustlers as models and to carry out the actual labour. (There are photographs in Chapter 2.)

Or the archive can be in a room in an apartment, the product of one person's private obsession. In 2007, while working on *New York Hustlers* (2010), I contacted an artist called Richard Taddei, who had known the aforementioned Melcarth. It transpired that Taddei also painted and photographed hustlers, but those of another generation – Melcarth in the 1950s and 1960s, and Taddei in the 1980s and 1990s (see Figure 5).⁷ His apartment was then on West 47th Street, deliberately located to be near male prostitution, and he had stacks of photographic albums, a scanner, and digital copies of both his and Melcarth's photographs. I spent the morning there with him, took him to lunch, and then in the afternoon and evening we selected what I wanted while he scanned them and copied the files on to disk for me, emailing others later. It was a remarkable archive of Melcarth's photography, much of which Taddei has moved to the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington DC, where many of the images now reside.⁸

The title of this book is not entirely original, although I did not think about this when I wrote Chapter 6. Bonnie Smith used the phrase 'sex in the archives' to describe a type of nineteenth-century male fetishism of archival research where a collection was like a 'virgin' ('I long for the moment I have access to her . . . whether she is pretty or not') and a rare book was caressed because it was 'enveloped in skin, like a woman'.⁹ But the sex in the archives here is of an entirely different order to that possessive, masculine, empirical quest for a history of politics, diplomacy, and . . . well, anything other than the history of sex. The subject topics covered in this book are wide ranging: rethinking the art history of homoeroticism; casual sex before casual sex; early trans history; New York queer sex; masturbation; pornography; Baltimore's sexual cultures. The duality indicated by the book's title reflects its two principal themes: it deals with archival form and archival content, the archives of the histories of sex and the sexual histories contained in those archives. It is an experiment in writing an American sexual history that refuses the confines of identity sexuality studies, spanning the spectrum of queer, trans, and the allegedly 'normal'; and it includes masturbation, perhaps the queerest sex of all. What unites this project is a fascination with sex at the margins, sex that refuses the classificatory frameworks of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and that demonstrates gender and sexual indecision and flexibility. It is sex that also conceptually challenges the supposed demarcations of pre and post gay liberation, for the pre-Stonewall



5 Richard Taddei, photograph of New York hustler, 1980s. Collection of Richard Taddei.

years as they are usually called, the time before the gay identity politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, were ones of immense sexual richness and variability, as we will see in Chapters 2 and 3.

But the book, as will be discussed in Chapter 1, is also an exploration of the role of the archive in such histories. The sex discussed is located both in the margins of the archives, what has been termed the counterarchive, but also, importantly, in the pockets of recorded desire located in the most traditional and respectable repositories. Hence we will encounter the erotic art of the Kinsey Institute (Chapter 2); Thomas Painter's hustler dossiers and Samuel Steward's very personal and extensive visual and written record of casual sex (Chapter 3); the University of Chicago Library's holdings of the work of 1920s sociologists, mapping the sexual opportunities to be found in the anonymity and freedom of the furnished rooms' district of Chicago (Chapter 4); the New York Public Library's collection of the investigators' reports for the moral reformers of New York's Committee of Fourteen that chart sex in dance halls, massage parlours, hotels, and restaurants in the early twentieth century (Chapter 4); the San Francisco History Center's life course diaries of Lou Sullivan, transitioning from heterosexual woman to gay man (Chapter 5); gay masturbatory journals in the New York Public Library that are of such a sexually explicit nature, and name so many people, that they were embargoed for seventy-five years until I gained special permission to read them (Chapter 6); the private archive of the amateur pornographer known as ANONYMOUS who, with a team of straight women, wrote gay male erotic fiction for publication in the 1990s (Chapter 7); the scattered archive of masturbation, not located in any specific institution or private holding but generated through evidentiary remains from recent US history (Chapter 8); and Amos Badertscher's intensely intimate, lifetime photographic dossier on Baltimore's sexual cultures, ranging from the 1960s to the 2000s (Chapter 9). The sexual histories in this book are those where pornography and sexual research are indistinguishable; where art and pornography intersect; and where today's personal obsession becomes tomorrow's archive.

Notes

- 1 A. Burton, 'Introduction: archive fever, archive stories', in A. Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC, 2005), pp. 1–24.
- 2 For the Public Record Office as archival temple, see E. Ketelaar, 'The panoptical archive', in F. X. Blouin and W. G. Rosenburg (eds), *Archives, Documentation,*

- and *Institutions of Social Memory* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006), pp. 144–50, at pp. 146–7; and for the Quakers and tithes, B. Reay, ‘Quaker opposition to tithes, 1652–1660’, *Past and Present*, 86 (1980), 98–120.
- 3 C. Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 23–5, 28–9.
 - 4 B. Reay, *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror, and Bodily De-Formation in Victorian England* (London, 2002).
 - 5 C. Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham, NC, 1995), pp. 78, 84.
 - 6 See J. Tollebeek, ‘“Turned to dust and tears”: revisiting the archive’, *History and Theory*, 43:2 (2004), 237–48; A. Buchanan, ‘Strangely unfamiliar: ideas of the archive from outside the discipline’, in J. Hill (ed.), *The Future of Archives and Recordkeeping: A Reader* (London, 2011), ch. 3.
 - 7 B. Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester, 2010).
 - 8 See www.aaa.si.edu/collections/edward-melcarth-papers-7865 (last accessed 26 April 2018).
 - 9 B. G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 119, 124.