

THE WANDERING ARCHIVE: Ruth Reid and Kent Hyde, a Memoir

Presentation by Karen Charman and E.G. Crichton

(E.G.)

A love letter on a red napkin; a pair of sequin gloves; a government security clearance; a photograph of Dining Hall #3 in Topaz, Utah, an unpublished memoir: these are a few of the objects that first lured me to the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Historical Society of northern California. It was an easy seduction; I am a sucker for mystery and have always found the visual evidence of a person's life uniquely compelling.

It seems I am not alone. ***LINEAGE: Matchmaking in the Archive*** is a project I have developed over the past 2 years as the Historical Society's first resident artist. One by one I match the archives of the dead to living individuals, asking each person to invent a response. The resulting encounter resembles a blind date: I think about chemistry, about demographics and mutual interests, about what might emerge from the vault. There are a few rules - no one is matched to someone they knew, most pairings cross generations, and the collections I select have not yet been in the public eye. Mostly, I use intuition to match creative individuals with an archive that might turn them on. The intense dyadic relationships forming in this process are becoming a kind of lineage, one that resides outside bloodlines and marriage contracts and often outside of identity boundaries.

The creative work to come out of this process has been displayed in 3 exhibitions, performed in several public events, and - as of right now - presented on 3 continents. It is a model for reclaiming historical memory through individual lives, and for bringing archives off the shelf in unexpected ways.

I met my co-presenter Karen Charman at a conference in Brisbane, Australia last summer. She heard me speak about the Lineage project; I heard her speak about the "Narratives Across Cultures" project at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. The idea of framing queer lineage through the archives of individual lives dovetailed with her writing on biography and personal narrative. And her work in the Immigration Museum made me think about who wanders where and how, and under what circumstances.

Out of this came an exchange that has led to both matchmaking and immigration. In my first long distance match, I brought Karen into my project by matching her to a woman named Ruth Reid who wrote an unpublished memoir called "Wife of a Lesbian." In over 400 carefully typed pages, Ruth narrates her life story, the life story of her lover Kent Hyde, and the story of their 28 years together. This archive, a modest 3.5 linear inches on a shelf at the Historical Society, wandered to Australia and to Karen. A couple of years previously, unbeknownst to me, Karen had wandered to the campus where I teach in California as a graduate student, pursuing her work on biography. And now we have both wandered here to Evora, bringing Ruth Reid's story with us, allowing Ruth and Kent to wander once again post mortem.

It seems to me that GLBT people wander in particular ways, and find each other often (and still) through underground

routes of site and recognition. Because of the nature of the closet, GLBT lives are frequently invisible, both in life and in death. This is why many cities across the world have opened archives devoted to collecting, remembering and preserving the evidence of the diverse cultures of this population. For people whose collective and individual traces have so often been erased, the archive is a way of taking charge of collective memory and passing it on to future generations. It is also true that immigration and emigration patterns world-wide have affected this population in particular ways. Repression has led to wandering, while government prejudices often put up barriers to entry and exit when identity is visible. It also seems significant that we bring Ruth and Kent to Portugal at this time, where they now would have the opportunity to get legally married - something still not possible in either of our countries and definitely not on the horizon during their time together in the 1940's, 50's and 60's.

We were sitting in a booth in a coffee shop at the corner of Telegraph and Bancroft, Kent and I. I had seen her several times since that first evening but there had always been other people. This was the first time we had been alone. (page 227)

(Karen)

Lineage is a line—wandering takes that line and makes it interesting.

I am sitting on my towel at the swimming pool. It is summer and the concrete is blistering. Heather Sloan is here. She looks good. I am 13 and half years old, an age when halves matter. It is 1978. Heather is sitting on the other side of the grass section that divides the big pool from the junior one; she has a book for me. I have my board shorts and brown golden bread t-shirt on. Next to me dressed the same is my best friend Vanna. Her golden bread t-shirt is stripped. All the girls at the pool wear bikinis except for us. Heather stands up and comes toward me. I nudge Vanna and we sit up a little straighter leaning back on our elbows. I look across at her as she walks. The book is about Elvis Presley, I'm not a fan, he is never played at my house, Frank Sinatra is who my Mum coos too. But it's not about the book. "Can I come to your place over the holidays?" "Yeah", I say.

When I look back I can see myself as a young butch but then we just were. At the pool, on our skateboards, riding our bikes, rolling drum tobacco, listening to music from California, Fleetwood Mac and the Eagles even though we lived miles from the bay and even further from the ocean—Vanna and I thinking about girls like Heather.

Mother Walker had been a widow for a long time but she kept her husband's pipe on the top shelf of the cupboard and used to let Kent smoke it when she came to visit. "Come in", Mother Walker said when Kent knocked. And she went straight for her husband's pipe which she packed with fresh tobacco. She brought the pipe to Kent. "Things get difficult sometimes", she said "But pay no attention to them—the ones that set themselves up to judge are not so perfect themselves." When Kent left the cabin she felt secure again. The next day she went to Portland, which had been her mother's way of shutting off the gossip." (page 183)

I have heard about a book, Young Gay and Proud. It is in our school library and you have to ask the principle if you can borrow it. I'm on it. I am not afraid. The interrogation done I am given the book. There is a young gay group that meets once a month in Fitzroy, a good hours bike ride away. I am fourteen and a half and Vanna and I are going. Afterwards when we ride away I say, "They weren't young."

Vanna and I were the youngest. The group didn't know how to respond to us. Homosexuality was illegal. How dangerous our presence was because they were adults and we were not. But I can see now we gave them heart we

were a part of their lineage. I can get that feeling now when I see the possibility of homosexuality in a young woman or man—I take heart.

I have to leave my school. The teachers have had a meeting. I am a disruptive influence. Heather's mum found out about us and complained. One teacher comes to my house to speak to my mum. I am going to an alternative school. At this school a kid flips out and paces back and forth on the roof while hippy looking teachers try and talk him down. Looking like a boy is nothing compared to that.

...Kent and I both got formal letters from a man in the police department, asking us to appear at his office on a certain date...when we arrived at the police department the official in charge said that there had been complaints about us from the people next door. We also learnt that we had been under surveillance for some time and that the other people in the apartment house where we lived had been interviewed. The policeman in charge said that they had given really good reports of our conduct but because of the complaints of the people next door he felt it would be wise for us to move. There was a moment during the conversation when the policeman turned to say something to me but Kent brushed it aside saying, "Leave her out of this. She is only the woman in the case". After that the policeman ignored me. (page 239-240)

I realize now that I was considered the protagonist in initiating a sexual relationship with Heather. It must have been me right because I was the 'masculine' one. I was the predator. I was the one that might try something on someone at sometime. A girl as feminine as Heather could not be seen as having sexual agency—palpable the need to see feminine innocence. I really should have told them about the Elvis Presley book. I had a lot of trouble surviving this public shaming.

An older woman takes an interest in me. She explains why there are rich people and poor people. What this has to do with who goes to University and who doesn't. She gives me Marx for Beginners. Tells me why women want to reclaim the night. Her house is a refuge, a place of rest. Once we were at some ones house and she got asked whether I was her son? She laughed and I blushed. I am sixteen and a half and cannot use a public toilet. "Love this is the ladies." "Son you are in the wrong toilet." I feel angry toward rich people. I look down a lot.

Emily had unpacked the boxes she had left in Berkeley when she went to stay with Auntie Whitcomb. She had found a large framed picture of Kent which she had – I thought rather ostentatiously – placed on her bedside table. One day when the doctor, Dr Thompson, was visiting her and I was in the room, he picked it up and said, "Who is this young man?" "She's not a man," Emily replied, "she's a woman." (233) One day, without telling me, Kent made an appointment with Dr. Thompson. She told me about it later. When she came into his office he said, "I have been expecting for some time that you would come." She started to explain her concern over my health but he interrupted her, "I know," he said. "How soon can you get her out of that situation?" Kent was never surprised when people accepted her for what she knew herself to be..." (page 236)

Averting my gaze is a habit I will now never break. Difference can become tiring at times. I wish I could have been more like Kent who could hold her own and demand to be seen on her own terms.

I am going to a gay bar for women. I have my denim jacket on with my collar up. I ride my bike there but leave it a block away. I meet Vanna out the front. If anyone hits on us we are going to say we are together. I am 17 and half years old and my hand is shaking as I give over my money. I need to look eighteen. I am in. I am free to look if I am game, at times, to fight. The bar is divided into sections, the feminists and us. The state women's boxing champion looks after me. I am tall enough to seem like a challenge but innocent enough to be a pushover.

I was in the middle of a culture within a culture. I was exposed to ideas that feminism was bringing to bare on everything but I was more comfortable with the women from my own class who resented the feminist critique of their identity. A simplistic reading of the subjectivity of butch and femmes, an appropriation of a butch 'look' that was, for feminists, a rejection of aspects of femininity.

Kent knocked at a door and the woman who answered not only bought several rugs but-evidently recognizing Kent for what she was-asked if we like to come over for cocktails the following evening. She had some friends she would like to have us meet. Of course we accepted eagerly. The friends turned out to be lesbian doctors, a fact which was obvious to me and to their friend who had invited us- and just as obviously not known to others in the town. One of them had been Mr. Chambers' doctor. This was 1941 and such a thing would not have been suspected and certainly not tolerated in that town. It was a very pleasant evening although the doctors, who must have been in their fifties and had been together since their college days, did not approve of Kent's somewhat belligerently masculine attitude. She was more open about it that evening than it seemed they thought wise. (page 252)

(E.G.)

When I first came out, I thought real lesbians were butch. For about a year I never entered a lesbian bar without my thrift store boys jacket and tie, hair slicked back like a greaser. It was 1971. There was, by then, a budding lesbian liberation movement in Boston, a scene I had nervously hovered around the year before - prior to consummating my first real lesbian sex. Only then, fueled by sexual passion, did I embrace this new dyke identity with the ferocity and speed of the recent convert.

But along with empowerment came the need for authenticity: I started to scan my childhood memories for proof to legitimize my new identity. I was sure that my youthful skill at riding a boy's bicycle with no hands down two blocks and around the corner was significant evidence. I would pore over the childhood photo album my mother had lovingly put together, searching for early clues to transgressions she never anticipated, thrilled to find one picture of me at three wearing rolled up jeans and a boys shirt. There I stand, 36 inches tall with my hands in my pockets, looking crossly at the camera. My weight is equal on each foot, a sturdy little stance, a future dyke of America. I did not focus on the photo of me with equally cross expression in Easter Bonnet and ruffled dress that was glued to the opposite page.

My efforts to become an authentic lesbian, in the context of early lesbian feminism, were far more taxing than my sexual activity with women. The revision of childhood memory became a preoccupation, a kind of deterministic narrative that could have meshed beautifully in any psychoanalytical case history from the 1950's. Some of the same memories I had desperately gathered to prove my normalcy *before* Stonewall faded into the background in the context of this strange new sense of female gender shame. The ones I remembered (and the way I remembered them) went something like this: I would remember my obsession over Lynne Montgomery, but forget about my fourth grade crush on Jono Marvel. I remembered getting aroused by airbrushed Playboy bunny pictures in junior high, but never distinguished whether it was having *their* bodies I fantasized, or my skinny body being *like* theirs. In my mind, this distinction could have been critical evidence for or against my authenticity as a lesbian. Needless to say, I never discussed the fact that compulsory team sports were a major source of terror, that I never got close to Miss O'Neil and Miss Richardson the way popular girls did. And I certainly didn't dwell on my previous advice to good friends Laura and

Marian, who pulled one mattress into the other's tiny dorm room and were inseparable: I told them with great authority "You guys are choosing a verrry difficult life."

Don't you think perhaps yours (happiness) comes from being – I hesitated and then rushed on – from being homosexual? I've known quite a few, especially in Germany, here too, and they usually ended in suicide or compromise....I didn't say that I, too, had loved women. I am not sure why. Probably because I thought of it as a part of my past that it might be wiser not to tell her."

I found tonight that first scene of us, together, the way Kent remembered it, or the way she chose to write it. I have never been sure whether she decided to make things different from the way they really were because she wanted to hide from the truth or because she thought that was the way she should write. I am almost sure she never finished her novel – despite the obvious reason of illness – because she could never really face the exposure of herself as a woman and the fact that she was a homosexual, at least so long as her mother was alive."

I think we never argued the question of homosexuality again. Perhaps because by then I was already too much in love with her.

(Karen)

When I turn my head and look behind me I don't want to be met with an empty space. I want to see the plurality of my singular existence stretching behind me. What can enable this? What frames of lineage can I place myself within? To achieve plurality requires only one other. Continuity can happen when two are connected, lineage means two who are not contemporaneous.

In the chapter 'On the Outskirts of Milan' the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero writes about an Italian women's consciousness raising group. Cavarero's project is a re-working of Hanah Arendt's work on what constitutes a political space. Her work is an examination of the narration and relationship to the political. In this chapter Cavarero examines the action of another's story being publically related as a part of these consciousness raising groups. It is in this same period of time that a space is opened for women to come together in California and write. Ruth's memoir is a result.

Cavarero writes:

*In the practice of 'consciousness-raising,' the feminine custom of self-narration thus finds a political scene—that is in the Arendtian sense, a shared and interactive one. The thesis 'of an intrinsic authenticity of the personally lived,' which has always sustained the female friendship-relation, can finally make itself explicit and come to an interactive significance that assumes the exhibitivistic characteristics of action. Nothing, in fact, is lacking, because this experience can, in Arendt's sense, define itself as political: a shared contextual, and relational space by some women who exhibit *who* they are to one another. (59)*

In working with this memoir we are bringing it into a further shared contextual and relational space. Through E.G.'s *Lineage* project this memoir is moved from personal narration to political. We are now linked across distance, linked to Ruth and Kent across time, and in some more abstract way the bio/autobiographies of them. To create lineage we connect our own subjectivity to Ruth and Kent.

(E.G.)

In the Mafia-owned lesbian bars where I searched for love, sex, and adventure, several little wars transpired. One was of course with the police. If a local election was imminent or the appropriate payoffs a little late, it was not uncommon for the cops to descend upon us, rounding up everyone in sight with absolutely no concern for who was a real lesbian. I remember several narrow escapes, darting between parked cars, through alleys, adrenaline pumping wildly. To those of us new to the scene, us leftist feminist college dropouts, this was high drama. But another kind of drama was

unfolding inside. Local working class lesbians, dressed impeccably in their clearly demarcated butch and femme drag, were eyeing us with suspicion. We were, after all, hippies and danced in wide circles, dressed alike in our androgynous drag, no doubt conveying a certain degree of proselytizing arrogance.

The polarization was never that simple, though. I envied these local bar dykes, women I perceived as experienced and tough. The butches scared me because they were street wise and terribly attractive. The femmes in their dresses and makeup were a total mystery. They were tough, and in any drunken fight could just as easily end up holding the broken bottle. I felt torn between my new lesbian ideals and this smoldering underground outlaw culture, a culture I sensed had a history. When a working class butch-femme couple walked down the street together, they were perceived as lovers, sexual, a visible stance that was recognized by straights and gays alike, not always with safe results. Something about this courage intrigued me, but my feminism didn't honor this style of being out of the closet.

I myself felt totally inadequate as butch, a fraud, inept at both stance and initiative. The butch women I was attracted to were the authentic lesbians, and I had no way to fit in another image, one closer to myself, someone who wanted to be pursued, courted, and desired.

(Karen)

Archival fragments of another's life in letters, photos and memoirs are inert objects. Interpreted by the archivist these objects become narrative moments. Pieced together, they offer the possibility of cohesion—a life—biography. Phillip Lejeune questions, "How can a text resemble a life?" In answering he remarks, "biographers rarely ask this because they assume it is resolved implicitly." (Lejeune: 1989 p.23) Holding Ruth Reid's typed manuscript with corrections made in pen represents more than just text; it is life. If language is limited in its capacity to account for such a statement it is the fault of language not experience. Flipping through this particular instance of memoir—Ruth Reid's biography—I can't know if this text is assembled from notes. I only know that what I hold pre-dates computers; its pen marks are evidence. I can locate this writing at an even more precise historical point because a woman named Jacquelyn Marie recognised the importance of Ruth's story in a writer's group in 1975...She wrote: "and we all encouraged her to write more about her interesting and unconventional life." Marie published extracts of this memoir. This manuscript is in a box with letters, photos and tapes. This box, an archive of a life, its objects are a testimony. Walter Benjamin writes, "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."(Benjamin: 1968, p.221) An aura surrounds this memoir—it is authentic. Do we as lesbians, as queers, have a particular need for the "authentic" in relation to lineage and history that is not structured by biology? What is this authenticity about? In our everyday lives we can often "pass" but at what price to constantly hold ourselves in silence or to speak our existence only to be met by silence? There is another and there is nothing to connect me to that other except for our shared homosexuality which at certain moments is everything. A manuscript that exists over time is testimony to someone who went before me.

Ruth wrote the story of herself and Kent, as separate and together. Ruth sat down and attempted to make narrative of a life and it is read as a memoir. An extract from July 4, 1968, Ruth calls it *Fragments from a Diary*:

Kent died this morning. Her pain has been so very great for so long that I should really feel a sense of relief, even joy, perhaps that the suffering is over. But after twenty-eight years of life with her, how do I feel? Not relief, certainly. Rather a numbing, selfish sense of aloneness.

What was it like to live as a lesbian in the 1930s, after the Second World War and before the 1960s? What were lesbians like then? In Ruth's memoir we get a sense of the 'who' not the what. The intricacy of a lived life, determined by religion, the great depression, communism and of course sexuality.

(E.G.)

Less than a year after coming out marked the classic closure of one sort of double life, I embarked on a new one. This was the beginning of Lesbian Liberation, that ground swell of advanced feminism that passionately embraced lesbianism as the solution to woman's oppression everywhere. As with any subculture in conflict with mainstream America, we proudly developed tightly defined codes of behavior and dress, ways of identifying each other, means of determining authentic membership in the group. It was in this context that I got my first job as a topless dancer in the "Combat Zone" of Boston.

Work nights, my roommate Pat and I would get ready for combat: false eyelashes, thick makeup, wigs, high heel dance pumps, sequined panties, pasties to cover our nipples. It was a total transformation, this female drag, and we were virtually unrecognizable. The first dancer I met, Holly, had a husky voice and flirted with me outrageously. Before the end of the night I found out she strapped her penis between her legs, seduced straight men, and made lots of money on the side.

In my short career in the sex industry, what intrigued me most was my new bad-girl status. Here I was, nice middle class college drop-out lesbian feminist politico, working in a field that was taboo to both my parents and my community for not such different reasons. It was an adventure that allowed me to play out my anger at men from a position of relative power. Here I was in total disguise, playing to men who slunk in to escape both family and job. It never ceased to amaze me that they fell for our phony attention, that they assumed I was a straight girl with a heart of gold, that they could be so dense. I enjoyed being part of a working class culture, I enjoyed the theater of it, and I also took pleasure in defying the principles of lesbian feminism. I was bad, to some of my friends not a good feminist. It was a double transgression, but really I felt more like an underground agent than a bad feminist - a spy in the house of the enemy. My brief stint as topless dancer and petty hustler gave me a sense of empowerment that neither feminism nor coming out by itself had accomplished. It gave me a way to be a femme.

(Karen)

Words that were not available to Ruth such as transgender and queer are not present either in the later work on her memoir by Jacquelyn Marie. Instead “passing” is used, “to represent a Lesbian who looked like a man to the straight world”. (Joan Nestle, *Restricted Country*) This term in itself is limiting but it suggests the only way to realise a particular form of sexual subjectivity, of active desire is to fully transgress and to do so in such a way as to not suggest any gender ambiguity. The result is to appear gender normative—to take up a position on one side of the binary of male and female. I hesitate to say male but externally that is what the hetero normative world reflects back. An element of strength of self is perversely mistakenly reinforced. So when Kent speaks to another man she is addressed within gendered conventions as male, at times she demands to be spoken to thus. However, it is never quite that, which constitutes identity it only approximates. It is Kent’s way of being that stands in for biological lineage and connects me to Kent and Ruth.

What becomes difficult in Ruth’s memoir is her voice, her re-construction of Kent. Ruth comments that Kent was reluctant to analyse her appearance but in Ruth’s recording of Kent’s life before they met the opening sentence reads, “She had always known she was a boy (172)” To always know that you are a boy speaks to reflection—a looking back over time. Through what terms would Ruth have liked to discuss Kent’s gendered identity and to what end? Return for a moment to the Ruth’s writing group and the framing of an enquiry informed by 1970s feminism and we can get a sense of the way Kent’s gender might have been understood in 1975. In ‘Queer Spectrality’ Carla Freccero suggests theory, where it pertains to history or an historical subject, can mask a melancholic relation to the subject (in the Freudian sense), further that theory can result in effacement. Kent’s subjectivity is in danger of being effaced if an analysis is employed that questions subjectivity at the level of gender. So although some critiques of Kent might assume the necessity of appearing male is to be with another woman as historically specific, a prior position to the libratory feminist project, it is not a reading this paper takes. Perhaps Kent’s subjectivity would have been informed by feminism, perhaps not.

In her introduction to excerpts from Ruth’s memoir, published as a small booklet, Jacquelyn Marie introduces the term ‘passing’ to account for Kent’s ‘look’ but this leads to passing as something Kent is not, that exists once again at the level of the sexed body a ‘truth.’ In an analysis of “Brandon Teena”, Freccero notes an effect of the writing about Brandon has been to unveil the truth of his/her subjectivity answered at the level of a sexed body and therefore to categorise, to master the ambiguity of this subjectivity which I think of as a form of containment in an effort to stop the haunting. *Lineage* is not about truth residing at the level of the sexed body. *Lineage* is instead about continuity between the past and the present, a way to represent the past but in a way that does not seek mastery. It is not a form of representation that seeks to know the other in an absolute way; rather, *Lineage* makes a space for the other to be present in relationship to us and like any relationship the contours of connection shift.

(E.G.)

I don't know when I became aware that I was a girl. My father had three sons by an earlier marriage....He was fifty at the time and delighted to have a daughter at last. His pet name for me was Dahdy girl. I have no idea where the name came from but his tone when he called me that increased my feeling that being a girl was something very special. (page 18)

She had always known she was a boy. As far back as she could remember....Her father seemed to understand. Her name was Lois Bettina; she didn't change it to Kent until she went away to college and began having poetry published.....But her father called her Louie. Sometimes, when they met his friends on the dirt sidewalk in Clatskanie, he would take off his big Stetson hat and say, with an ironic bow, "Meet my son, Louie." (page 172)

It seems to me that both Ruth and Kent were secure in their respective gender identities, yet oddly conflicted about their relationship to homosexuality. Ruth's lesbian identity at times was bold and assertive, yet other times hovered on the edge of effacement. I link this to her feminine identity, to lingering Victorian attitudes about sexuality that had a direct impact on me in the late 1960's when I first struggled to come out. In **From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female Deviance**, George Chaucey writes:

In the earliest accounts of this form of sexual deviance, those concerning women who dressed and passed as men, for instance, the women's "wives" received virtually no attention. In the nineteenth century accounts of passing women who married other women collected by Allan Berube and Jonathan Katz, the wives usually play only a minor role, and (when they are considered at all) are not labeled deviant in the same manner as their husbands. Many accounts simply treated them as normal wives, playing their proper feminine roles, as if it did not matter that their "husbands" were biologically female.

. . . In the Victorian system, therefore, a complete inversion (or reversal) of a woman's sexual character was required for her to act as a lesbian; she had literally to become man-like in her sexual desire.

In a 1993 oral interview with Amber Hollibaugh, author of **My Dangerous Desires, a Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home**, she says:

I want women who, in the spectrum of femininity, don't pass. I want women who because of that gender inappropriateness have had to pay a certain kind of price. I come in as the real woman, the femme, the one that can pass, the kind of woman they thought they could never have, and I want them. That is an extraordinarily erotic fantasy - to want the women who've never had the right to want a woman. And to be wanted as a woman who's never seen as lesbian, by a woman who's not seen as female.

(Ruth) "Don't you think perhaps yours (experience) comes from being," I hesitated and then rushed on – "from being a homosexual? I've known quite a few especially in Germany, here too, and they usually ended in suicide or compromise." I didn't say that I, too, had loved women. I am not sure why. Probably because I thought of it as a part of my past that it might be wiser not to tell her.

(Kent) "I really can't see what that has to do with happiness. Being unhappy is common to most humans." (page 225)

(Ruth) I am almost sure she never finished her novel – despite the obvious reason of illness – because she could never really face the exposure of herself as a woman and the fact that she was a homosexual, at least so long as her mother was alive. (page 228)

(Ruth) I think we never argued the question of homosexuality again. Perhaps because by then I was already too much in love with her. ...There were other things about which we did argue in great detail which bordered on the same question – such as minorities and majorities. ...Kent admitted quite frankly that she was a member of a minority.

(Ruth) I asked if she had told her mother about our relationship. Her reaction was partly embarrassment and partly horror. "How could I?" she said. There was a long silence. I finally said "How could you not? Are you ashamed of it?" Kent got up and moved around the room. "Mother would never understand that," she said finally. (page 241)

My own family, Peter and Margaret that is, knew I was a lesbian. I think they had suspected for a very long time but Emily had made sure of that, writing in explicit detail to them and everyone else she could find in my address book."

(Karen)

Mum and I are sitting in the lounge on the couch. I am fifteen years old and I want to tell her that I am gay. I am

nervous. She says "not all men are like your father." Inside I think, it has nothing to do with men but I say "I know." I have read *Young, Gay and Proud* and I know people will tell me it is stage. "It isn't something I will grow out of." "We'll see," she replies and adds "don't tell your Nanna."

(E.G.)

California beckoned me as well, in 1973, from my East Coast roots – I was drawn by the lure of counter culture and gay Mecca. It was while driving a taxi cab in San Francisco in 1973 that I met Rusty and Terry, two older women I picked up one day at the bus terminal taxi line. "We're sisters," they informed me. They had just come into town on a Trailways bus, and needed a ride to their new apartment. I couldn't see any resemblance. Terry was big and fat, extremely charming with bleached blond hair, a flirtatious laugh, and a kind of liquid way about her. Rusty, more compact, dressed like a man in trousers, tweed jacket, button down white shirt. She walked with the awkward swagger of a teenage boy, despite appearing to be over 50. I dropped them off and arranged to return the next day so they could pick up the rest of their luggage.

At our appointed time, I spotted them waving merrily. Rusty immediately went off to get the second batch of suitcases, at which point Terry leaned close and instructed me in a stage whisper "When she comes back, say 'Hi, Butch'." I was not surprised by this charming admission of what I had quickly suspected was the true nature of their relationship, and I was happily relieved that they recognized me. In retrospect, this seems silly, given the non-traditional nature of my job, but at the time I was still caught up in seeing myself as somewhere between a fraudulent butch and an inadequate femme, not entirely authentic in my lesbian identity. We quickly bonded, me with these vagabond "old gay" women, and moved our acquaintance outside the taxi cab to periodic home visits. I learned about their 17-year relationship, their many homes all over the country. They told hilarious and repetitive stories about jobs as nurses, hotel clerks, and in Terry's case, as an "exotic dancer" in New York - in "Show Biz," as she called it. I knew this meant she'd been a stripper. But the stories she told with elan as she flipped her extremely blond hair cavalierly behind her shoulders, were fascinating, and I didn't mind at all their embellished status.

It wasn't long before Rusty and Terry became my lesbian aunts. I'm not sure who started it, but it pleased all of us. I would give them money, drive them places, and ask about their lives. What I got out of the deal were two authentic lesbian aunties, working class old gay survivors who I could call family. I had been disowned by my biological family and never had real aunts in my childhood, so this familial relationship filled an ancient need. But it also filled a very current need, my need for lesbian antecedents, for tangible evidence of a culture and history I could claim as my own. Rusty and Terry became my connection to an underground and invisible culture of the past.

(Karen)

Kent and Ruth existed before me. Standing behind the voice of Ruth is Kent emerging in moments. They walked ahead of me. That very fact, the fact of their existence holds me. There is a stillness that exists between subjectivity and connectedness. In her chapter 'Queer Spectrality' Carla Freccero writes, about "...how spectral being and doing opens us up to porous, permeable pasts and futures—suffused with affect and its ethical implications—that enable us to mourn and also to hope."(69) This is the possibility offered by acknowledging rather than explaining the past. Sitting within a space where the boundaries between past, present and future become permeable. Am I projecting myself into their narrative? Centrality is subjective. I am central to my own story. I see myself in them and I become a later character in their narrative so this experience is permeable moving me between the past and the present. If this piece could claim a story of biology then my connectedness would be based on an accepted fact. What is the relationship between my lived experience and two American women who have lived and died?

Partly the answer is place. In Ruth's memoir California stands as a marker of hope for Kent and as phantasmagorical site of possibility it travels across the Pacific Ocean and across time. Phantasy can omit spaces in between giving a sense that the whole of California is a homeland for lesbians, gays, those that are transgender and queer. Ruth and Kent's existence serves as reinforcement of that. And they are not the only ones. Casting those of us afloat in the wider world as a Diaspora of sorts. A wandering Diaspora with no centre but traces left behind in "wandering archives" reflecting queers when they wander they find each other, recognize each other. But perhaps the best place to wander is San Francisco as being a kind of queer Mecca or a "phantasmagorical site of possibility".

(E.G.)

What happens to the history of a community defined wholly outside of family genealogies? What kind of kinship succession operates? How do we function both within and outside of blood, bloodlines, descent, extraction, family genealogy, line, origin, parentage, pedigree, seed, stock, lineage? Whose archive do we inherit? What happens to our own life archive? Who protects our precious artifacts and pictures and letters and creative works after we die? This is an anxious context!

Spending time with the archive of someone who has died is an intense and intimate process. There is an ineffable sadness in looking through the archive that is directly autobiographical. Someone else's artifacts make us think of our own, and we weave a narrative to cement the link. Adrianna Cavarero writes: "*Between identity and narration....there is a tenacious relation of desire.*" The eroticism of touching the artifacts of a life, of entering a narrative that feels secretive. Would this person have been comfortable with my take on their life, on who they were? Or would they be insulted or offended? Am I prying too much?

I am interested in blurring the boundary between oneself and a life that has passed, represented as a physical presence in the archive. What does that relationship look like? What fuels it? It seems that with this project giving participants one archive to focus on, one person, has a unique kind of power. Is it our most accessible way into

history? Not through grand narratives, or even through the identity politics of oppression, but through a simple one to one connection that we partially "read" and partially invent?

In my role as matchmaker, there is plenty to get off on. In the age old tradition of middle aged women who engage in this service, as a lesbian in my promiscuous late middle age, I help launch relationships and then get to see and hear every detail of how they evolve. It is a kind of archive mid-wifery, a highly voyeuristic, undoubtedly manipulative and totally magical experience.

As the ***Lineage*** project unfolds, new people come to me with a desire to be matched. The process is bringing unexpected questions to my attention. I wonder "What does it mean in the era of gay marriage, of being this close to attaining a significant marker of normalcy, assimilation and respect, to enter into a relationship with someone who is dead? Why are people eager to do so? As matchmaker, I already have become aware of my own historical promiscuity...but how does that work in these one-to-one relationships with the other side? Is the timing an accident? Do we still need a non-normative and de-stabilized approach to the erotic? Something outside our "normal" queer life and loves?

In her book *Ghosts of Futures Past*, Molly McGarry asks "How can the dead speak through the living as something other than the haunting, seething presence of absence?" In writing about the relationship of writers like Walt Whitman and Radclyffe Hall to Spiritualism, she says that "...these subjects made sense of their own queer time through spiritual theories of embodiment that offered forms of meaning that secular science refused...In offering new forms of embodiment, Spiritualism held enormous appeal for women and men who inhabited gender and sexuality in transgressive ways...Temporality functions here as the difference most difficult to bridge, the ultimate otherness....Queer theorists are not alone in using the figure of the ghost as a way to explain the apparitional social status of marginalized subjects; indeed, the ghost is a powerful way of understanding memory and identity.

These authors and others address history through the lens of queer theory as a kind of haunting that comes back and informs the present. The specter of becoming familiar with ghosts opens one up to possession, a haunted, enchanted even erotic state. The process of opening an archive box, allowing what is inside and what you imagine to haunt you, brings back a person's life queerly. Like any romance, it is marked by mystery, the lure of the unknown, secrets, the STUFF of fantasy. A neat linear sequence of time becomes disordered as you relate to the person at all stages of their life.

LINEAGE: Matchmaking in the Archive provides one model for how to bring archives, our history, off the archive shelf into creative visibility. In this process, desire crosses time, crosses into and out from the archive, lurks in liminal spaces between life and death, between beginnings and endings. Personal archives arouse all kinds of prurient curiosities, inappropriate speculations and impossible longings - perfect provocation for art that inscribes LGBT history in new ways.

(Karen)

Most of my academic work has been about models of inclusion. When I met E.G. I was presenting on work about inclusive museum pedagogy. I am also finishing a PhD and it is about strategies of literary resistance to eugenics by two women writers from the 1930s. For me all of this is important work. Inclusive museum pedagogy speaks to my working-class background and so my lived experience of cultural capital deficit. My PhD is the belief of Art to be transformative and an interest in models of thinking that challenge hetero-normative and in the case of eugenics failed biological determinism. But I recognised in E.G.'s *Lineage Project* and being matched to Ruth and Kent that my work also operates as a form of displacement, a way of warding off but partially satisfying the full implications of my gender and sexuality. In recognising Ruth and Kent I acknowledge myself.

(E.G.)

Once again I have lesbian Aunties. Not in life as before, but through the stories in the archive told by Ruth Reid about her life with Kent Hyde. If my former adopted Aunt Terry had written a memoir, she, too, might have called it *Wife of a Lesbian*. And Rusty, like Kent, thought of herself as a boy, then a man. Before she died, already in her 80's, she told me that had she been of a younger generation, and had the resources, she would have gotten a sex change. We can only speculate how Kent who died in 1968 and Ruth, who died in 1980 might have related to these new terms.

Kent got out the map and found where we had taken the wrong road, but before she turned the car around we sat there in the valley – Valley of the Moon we found it said on the map – she kissed me and then took a package from her pocket. "This is for you." She slipped a small gold wedding ring from a box and put it on my third left hand finger. "I have had it for some time," she said, "but I didn't think I should give it to you earlier." She made me read the inscription on the inside, "K to R, March 28, 1939 – Forever." Then as she put it on my finger, she said, in truly Kentian fashion, "with this ring I thee wed." I look down on the ring tonight. Over the twenty eight years it has worn very thin. It is almost impossible to read the inscription any more but I do hear the echo of the words. (page 238)

(Karen and E.G.)

Lineage is a line—wandering takes that line and makes it interesting.