

# QUEERING PUBLIC SPACES

Exploring New Design Methodologies to Liberate Queer  
Experiences in Public Buildings and Community Spaces

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**Spring 2023 Innovation Incubator  
Perkins&Will**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to give a special mention and thank you to Yann Trégoat for his initial involvement with this project.

We would also like to thank our colleagues at Perkins&Will, specifically those at the Vancouver / Calgary Studio, and the Incubator Committee for awarding us this opportunity. Finally, a special thank you to Rufina Wu, Yehia Madkour, Jason Leblanc, Sebastien Sarrazin, and Babak Manavi for their support, knowledge, and insights, throughout this research endeavour.

Our initial interests in this research project stemmed from both of our own personal connections to the architecture community as well as the queer community. Both heavily contribute to our sense of identity but for the majority of the time we subconsciously have kept separate. Our explorations in queer space became a venture into our own needs and desires for architecture, as theory and practice, to make us feel safe, to feel at home, or to design in a way that can promote this for others. In many ways this was our attempt at bridging together seemingly disparate parts of ourselves into one. Although we have only begun to scratch the surface of queer and queered space, we hope our findings and explorations will inspire further studies at Perkins&Will and may, in some way, shape, or form, contribute to the discourse at large.

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**“‘Queer space’ as a concept is messy, and it is this messiness that makes it so productive in its constantly evolving shape...at its core is a desire to create a more inclusive built environment, or at least to challenge the status quo of a still very conservative discipline rooted in heteronormative frameworks.”**

**Olivier Vallerand<sup>1</sup>**





**Introduction**

# Introduction

Queer and queered spaces have long been discussed by pioneer thinkers such as Aaron Betsky, Beatriz Colomina and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who built upon the works of gender and queer theorists like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. *Queer space* is regarded as a place that is created for, or is predominantly used, by queer-identifying individuals. Historically, these have been establishments such as nightclubs or bars. *Queered space* thus are places that are typically considered heteronormative by default, and are then re-appropriated for use by the queer community over time. Both queer and queered spaces, however, are places where those within the queer community feel welcomed, included, and part of a visibly present community.

Within the discourse of architectural theory and design, these so-called queer and queered spaces historically have not had much recognition, let alone methodologies or design strategies that could be implemented in professional

practice, that is until the 1990s. The most seminal studies and practical use of these theories emerged from a look at the closet as a reference to queerness<sup>2</sup> to more recent proliferation of gender-neutral bathrooms.

The closet and the bathroom became representations of non-heterosexual identity and are direct links to architectural space both physical and intangible. The sentiment of “being in the closet” was meant to reference someone of non-heterosexual identity that found comfort, or at least privacy, by hiding oneself and the act of “coming out of the closet” was to express oneself as they saw themselves outwardly and freely. The bathroom in contemporary architectural discourse was more physical in the representation of queer space, as the evolution of public bathrooms were designed to be inclusive spaces and gender neutral, offering again a level of comfort and privacy. In many regards, the architectural discourse around these two rooms and in the design



community at-large are centered around cis-gendered and heterosexual norms and representation, whereby a revision of design to 'queer up' these spaces is required to diversify the array of demographics that architecture and design are built for and by. The proliferation of gender-neutral bathrooms in many cities around North America, which can be seen as a method of 'queering up the space', prove the benefit and need of this shift.

This Innovation Incubator research project began as a curiosity for the spaces that we defined as allowing us to feel safe, comfortable, and free to do and be who we want to be beyond the safety of our homes. Moving away from the private spaces of the closet and bathroom, this proposal seeks to examine the 'queering up' of public spaces. What design methodologies and sensitivities, like those used for gender-neutral bathrooms, can be used? How can revisiting queer theory be utilized and revamped into contemporary

architectural practice? How in turn does this challenge the inherent norms of spaces and buildings being designed for a heterosexual population? These are just some of the many questions we sought to shine some light on.

## **Booklet Organization**

The booklet is organized into two main sections. The first presents an overview of gender and queer theories, of which we have pulled out key ideas to set up the framework for our design exploration. The second part defines our chosen case study building typology and then highlights emergent design strategies as an exploration of how these theories can be applied within an architectural framework and practice.

Within queer theory review, we wanted to understand the foundations, terminologies, and ways of thinking that emerged predominantly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as

POLITICAL  
EVENTS

**1952**  
The American Psychiatric Association lists being a "homosexual" as a sociopathic personality disorder

**1868**  
Writer Karl Maria Kertbeny coins the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual"

**1969**  
Raiding of the Stonewall Inn in New York City leads to riots and is considered the catalyst for the LGBT civil rights movement

**1970**  
A one-year commemorative march for the Stonewall Inn raid takes place. This is considered one of the first pride parades

**1973**  
The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality as a mental disorder

**1978**  
The Rainbow flag was created  
Gilbert Baker

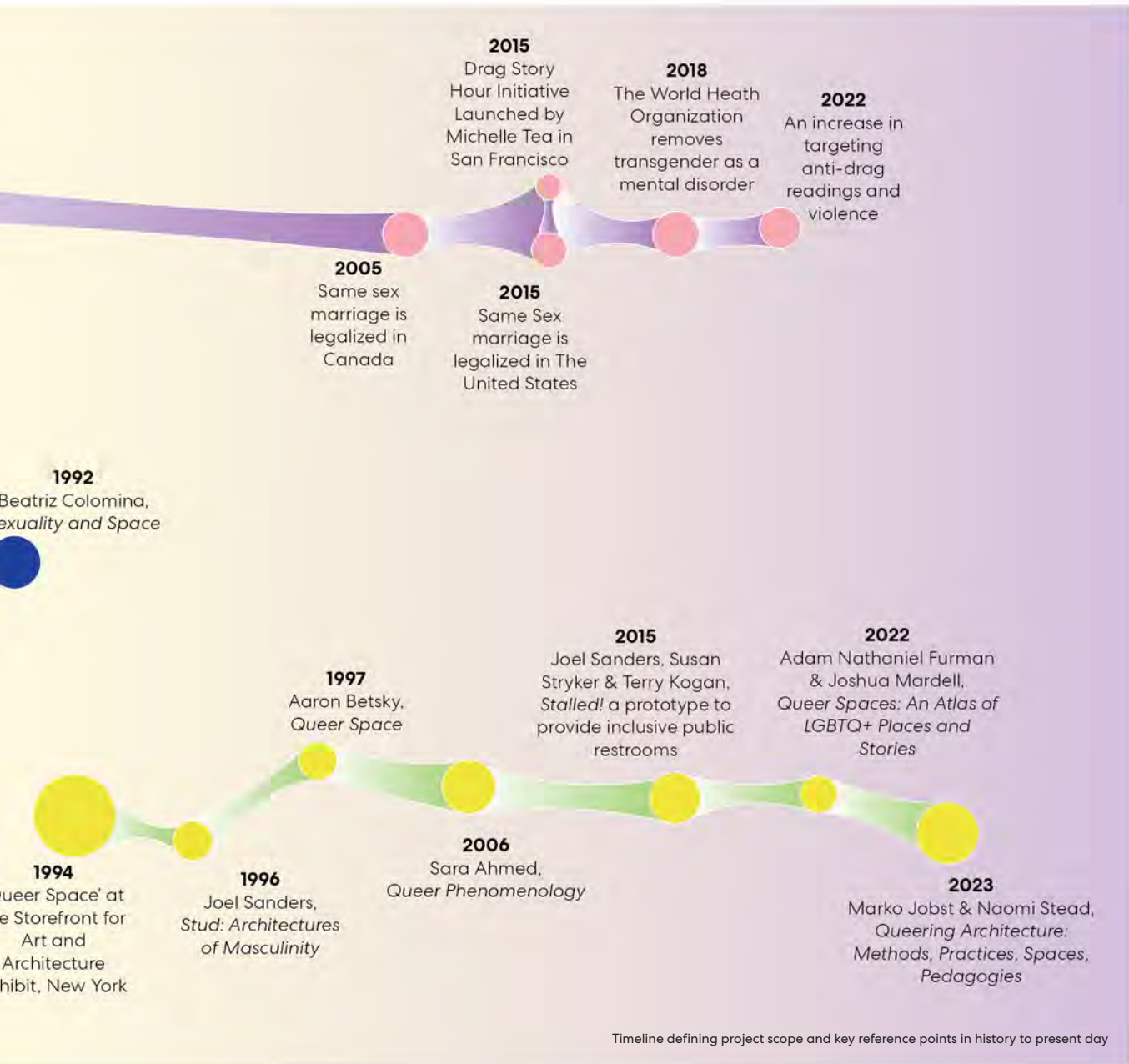
GENDER & QUEER  
THEORY

**1976**  
Michel Foucault,  
*The History of Sexuality*

**1990**  
Judith Butler,  
*Gender Trouble*

**1990**  
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,  
*Epistemology of the Closet*

QUEER SPACE  
THEORY



Timeline defining project scope and key reference points in history to present day

an extrapolation of gender studies. From the late 1990s to today, we see an influx of writers, theorists, and design practitioners blending queer theory with architecture and design.

In the second section of this booklet, we explore via a queer lens the nature of public spaces and private spaces. Queered spaces have predominantly been attributed to that which is private or hidden. We wanted to challenge this and instead make queerness visible, as an outward expression of space and via a building typology that is well established within heteronormative space. To 'queer up' a public space and have both subtle and non-subtle expressions that could promote inclusivity was something we wanted to explore. In our initial discussions on this research project, we expressed a lot of angst and trepidation against the state of current political news surrounding queer stories and the queer community. The protests against - or even banning by law in some cases - of drag (queen) readings in libraries in parts of the United States and Canada become a topic of interest. The library then emerged as an important starting point to study what does it mean for a public place to be queer, to be inclusive, to be safe? What kinds or preconceived connotations associated with the library are challenged with

the outward support for the queer community? And how can this be done through architecture and design? Our 'kit-of-parts' approach looks at various components of the library and the ways in which it can be queered up. This is via an understanding of gender and queer theory, queer theory applied to architectural practice, as well these strategies against the background of changing social, cultural and political events that either came to define, or is currently being defined, by the queer community today.

# Notes

- 1 Olivier Vallerand, "On the uses of queer space thinking," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 27.
- 2 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 16.



**2/**

**Gender & Queer Theory  
within Architectural  
Discourse**

# Gender Theory

In 1976, French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault released the first of four volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. In many ways, it is regarded as an extension of the ideas he presented in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), that is, the influence of changing roles of society since the Victorian age, the emergence of authoritative power within this society, and how it is promoted and enforced via discipline. Thus, *The History of Sexuality* explores the way individual and collective sexualities are linked to these emerging and changing power dynamics.<sup>1</sup> He points out that 'sexuality' as a scientific term emerged first in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and was heavily associated to the development of fields of knowledge, establishment of societal rules and norms, and the ways in which individuals could "assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams."<sup>2</sup> He posits that there are three axes of sexuality: the first is the role of sciences that refer to it as a term, the second as the systems of power that

regulate it, and the third as the ways in which individuals can attribute characteristics to themselves to acknowledge themselves as sexual beings.<sup>3</sup> As the emergence of body and sexuality studies proliferated, and admittedly even until today, it was met with distaste and regarded as a taboo and crude subject as well as one that "is imagined to be over-determined by nature and the supposed biological difference between men and women. There is nothing to say about sexuality precisely because it is thought to be a biological given."<sup>4</sup> As such, much of its history in the Western world saw sexuality being controlled and policed, via confessions to the Church, descriptions of their symptoms (i.e. desires) to a doctor, or punishment by the Law.<sup>5</sup> As a critique against all of this, Foucault wanted to dispel that sexuality is a given fact, rather, to analyze the way individuals were able to recognize their own desires and how through this consciousness they could discover "the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen."<sup>6</sup> And that much of this process of



discovery was and is heavily impacted, and, as later queer theorists would defend, impinged upon by historical, social, cultural, and political institutions and discourses.<sup>7</sup>

When previously questioned on his understanding of same-sex desires in relation to his writings he insisted that they were less about what sexuality is and its manifestations, but how it is considered by each individual and how it operates within the boundaries of society. So, while *The History of Sexuality* is not directly a study on same-sex relations, Foucault's writings did pave the way for many queer theorists that emerged within the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**If the hearth is the heart of the home, where the family gathers to affirm itself as a unit in the glow of a fire, the closet contains both the secret recesses of the soul and the masks you wear. Being in the closet means that you surround yourself with the emblems of your past and with the clothes you can wear, while covering yourself in darkness.**

**Aaron Betsky<sup>8</sup>**

# Queer Theory

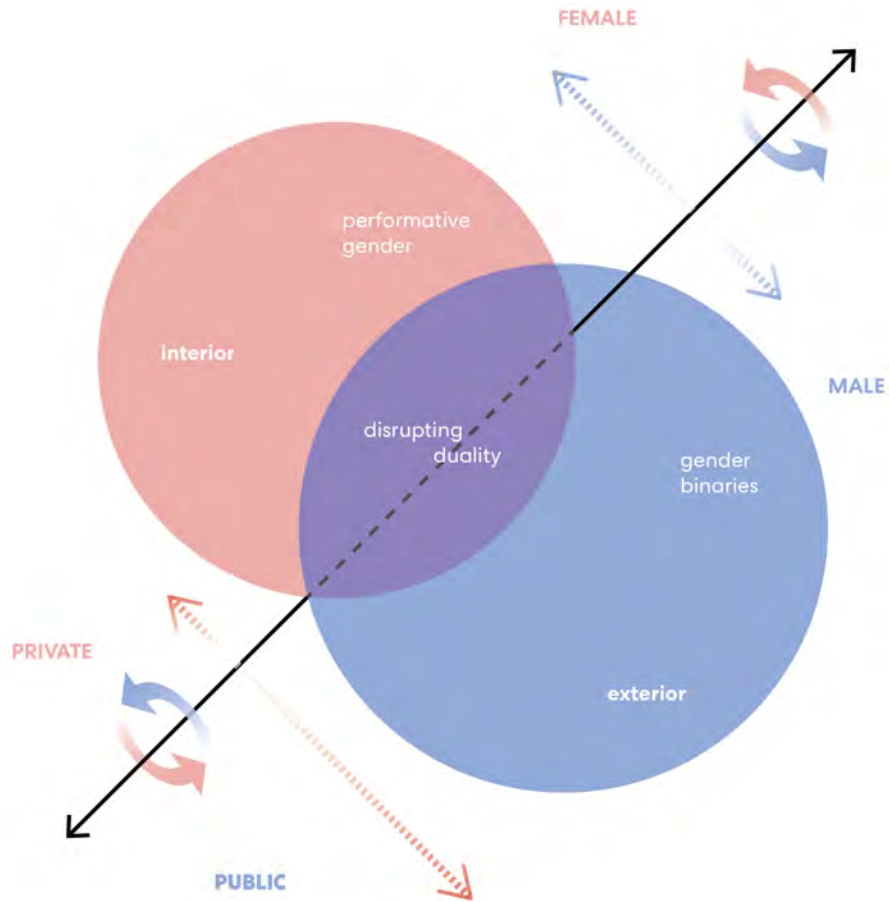
In 1990, Judith Butler released *Gender Trouble*, relating the notion of sexuality, sex, and gender as both performed and performative ways of being.<sup>9</sup> Taking precedents from the analyses performed by Foucault, Butler refocuses the discussions of sexuality and power within the lens of gender and feminist theory.<sup>10, 11</sup> To Butler, the emergence of new sexual identities is born not as a given rule of nature, but from the “effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin”<sup>12</sup> and the wide extent to which these are normative frameworks that are embed in Western society.<sup>13</sup> To break from them, it was necessary to “center on—and decenter—such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality”.<sup>14</sup> Foucault's institutions of power, or rather as “regimes of power/discourse”<sup>15</sup> became for Butler a departure point for re-analysis of gender and sexuality. In society, compulsory heterosexuality emerges as rules that which is considered ‘typical’ or ‘normal’. This is the norm that is expected of everyone but is entirely

“invisibly constructed” and subconsciously performed and reiterated.<sup>16</sup> It is through this mainstream heteronormativity that binaries are strictly enforced throughout many, if not all, facets of society, which becomes problematic.<sup>17</sup> Masculinity and femininity, as dual and opposing predominant gender identities within heteronormativity, are assumed ‘natural’ due to the continued, and inadvertent, effects of performativity.<sup>18, 19, 20</sup>

Preceding Butler and continuing in the vein of Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, via some of her works like *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), similarly sought to explore the duality of sexual identities in relation to knowledge (i.e.. an understanding of oneself and one's desires) and power (i.e.. institutions). She asserted that society tended to favour those that identified as heterosexual. In effect, homosexuality then stood in opposition to heterosexuality

and was stigmatized due to this relation, often resulting in violence or hostility.<sup>21</sup> In her latter work mentioned, regarded as a foundational text for queer theory, she regarded 'the closet' as a space associated with secrecy and privacy from the outside world via the repression of one's sexual identity while also as a performative rejection of societal norms through the act of coming out of it.<sup>22, 23</sup> For feminist queer theorists such as Butler and Kosofsky Sedgwick, the private sphere of the home was heavily associated with the feminine, against the backdrop of a very male-dominated public sphere. These binaries, within the heteronormative worldview, has shaped the construction, functions, and understandings of space and remains "omnipresent in architectural discourses".<sup>24</sup> It is by re-evaluating the role of architecture, the role of design, and the role of the designer, that may pave the way for new processes and outcomes.

Dualities in gender and queer theory (e.g. male vs. female, homosexual vs. heterosexual) begin to mirror that of dualities in architecture, such as private vs. public spaces, interior vs. exterior. What then is the relationship between the two that is activated by their intersection? What is the relation between the creation of architectural space for the performativity of a different 'self'? How is this relation affected by contemporary political, social, and cultural institutions? To this, we look at the recent influx of writers and practitioners in the field of design and architecture in the development of 'queer space theory' and how revisiting and re-evaluating gender and queer theory can assist us in creating an architectural methodology for practical application.



Diagramming Gender Theory and Intersection with Architecture / Space Theory

# Queer Space Theory

In *Queer Space* (1997) by Aaron Betsky, he attributes the rise in Western queer spaces to the emergence of a new middle-class during the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> It was typically considered at this time that one was to be part of a nuclear family (considered the private sphere) and that one's outwardly appearance and behaviour was aligned to the notion of 'correct' or 'normal' (what one expressed themselves as to the public). Evidently, queer-identifying people did not openly have families as the core aspect of their lives and in public sought to hide their true desires. The creation of an invisible network of queer people became their family and whose relationship with each other, sexualized or not, often happened out of sight. The places these interactions would take place were both private and public. At home, it was often seen that interiors portrayed their secret lives and was grandiose in appearance – often mimicking a set stage. It was at home where a queer person could both be who they wanted to be while also often challenging their own sense

of self. While in public, certain spaces became appropriated for queer use and desire. Via these rooms and spaces in the public sphere, people were able to make a place for themselves.<sup>26</sup>

However in *Queer Space*, Betsky writes of queer space from the perspective and experiences of queer white men, not unlike the typically male-dominated world of architectural practice in and of itself. Perhaps another facet of considering design for queer spaces is to critically re-evaluate the discipline itself, and seek to include other worldviews from different genders, social class and race, into design processes and discourse<sup>27</sup> as applied to both architect/designer and client. The question about what makes a space queer, and who navigates these spaces began to surface between the 1980s and 1990s. For this we can look to Beatriz Colomina and Sara Ahmed.

**If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with.**

**Sara Ahmed<sup>56</sup>**

Beatriz Colomina is an architectural historian and editor/contributor of *Sexuality and Space* (1993). An important text to both gender, queer, and architectural theory, it marked one of the first instances where the term 'sexuality' was so heavily applied to architectural history.<sup>28</sup> Her perspective on the intersection of architecture and queerness is that historically, architecture has, in practice, found ways to subvert the inherent queerness that underlies the discipline. Her definition of queer is more attune to anything and everything that is beyond the norm or inherent gender expectations. It is through a critical look at architectural works that one can subvert their elements and our understanding and expectations of their meaning via a process she calls *intra-canonical*. Intra-canonical therefore is similar to the history tied to queerness, that is, subverting dominant (gender) norms and making blurry its boundaries. Her involvement in the 1994 New York exhibition titled 'Queer Space' at the Storefront for Art and Architecture would continue this questioning of the role of architecture to queer space. Born out of the intention to bring to light gay and lesbian contribution to the built environment, it explored manifestos and written proposals as tools to reformulate the traditional design process as a way of making visible how "(queer) personal and communal identities are hidden

throughout ordinary landscapes, as layers within symbolic understandings of urban, suburban and non-urban environments that blur how private and public are often understood”.<sup>29</sup>

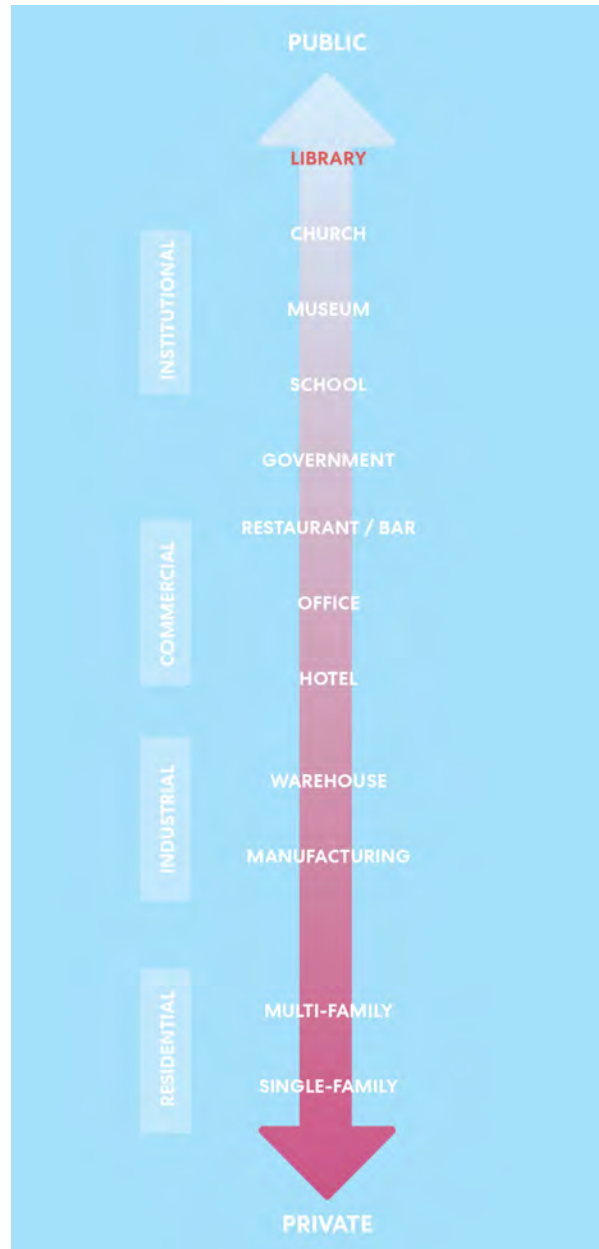
How might we understand the multi-layered approach of queer space within a typically heteronormative world? Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) draws together queer and critical race studies and intersects them with phenomenology, situating her writing around the concept of *orientation*.<sup>30</sup> Orientation being one’s direction towards objects, direction within space, and directional relation to other bodies as a process/way of relating to the outside world. This internal process however “orients certain bodies (i.e. white, male, upper-class, able)...in the world safer than others”.<sup>31</sup> That the experience of a space can be different for some, whereby other bodies can be in fact “‘dis-oriented’, as they cannot fit and find themselves in the ‘designed’ world”<sup>32</sup> that has been molded for them. However, she also notes that it is in disorientation that the queer community have often found the means and directions to which they would like to orient themselves. Disorientation can become “a place of imagination and creativity, since it entails a continuous redirection, experimentation and rearrangement of material

and socio-spatial conditions.”<sup>33</sup> If we recall Butler’s concept of gender identity as the outcome of performativity, perhaps we can reconsider queer spaces as a revisiting of performativity but within contemporary, inclusive, social and cultural institutions/norms. That queer space is and does exist in the physical defined space of architecture but also in the continued interactions within oneself while simultaneously against others that also occupy that space through verbal and non-verbal means.<sup>34</sup>

Drawing from Colomina, Betsky, and Ahmed, among many others, we tried to extrapolate how design could be re-imagined if the queer community were directly our clients. As we begin to understand the qualities of a queer/ed space, as both physical design and as an intangible quality, we can focus strategies based more on the relations that are formed via use of the space, as “a network of relations between designers, clients, and permanent and temporary users”<sup>35</sup> in conjunction with architectural theory and design practice.

Our interests for this Innovation Incubator stemmed from an idea of bringing to the forefront queer-based design strategies and so public buildings emerged as a starting point for us. What public building typology could be re-

imagined within the lens of what we know of queer space theory? What impacts do current political, social, and cultural institutions have on this building type? How could that typology's preconceived connotations, in terms of function and design, be challenged? How could their existing connotations be re-activated to further promote them in a new way? Our theoretical methodology serves to further explore these questions by means of identifying a building typology for further study.



Spectrum of public/private building typologies



# Theoretical Methodology



Situating the Innovation Incubator proposal on the Queer and Queered Spaces Spectrum

If we were to put queer and queered spaces on either ends of a spectrum this Innovation Incubator project strives towards a methodology that sits somewhere in between. There is a certain unspoken character of the public places that queer people repeatedly circulate, that is not always defined as something tangible, as the practice of architecture may

entail. By using a 'kit-of-parts' design strategy, we explore the ways, from large to small scale, how a building typology, and the spaces/rooms that define them can be enhanced to promote safety, inclusion, and comfort to achieve queer-positivity. The library, as a building typology, emerges as an important starting point to examine the topic of queer/

queered spaces. **As one of the more public civic institutions as well as a community amenity, it remains one of few establishments that have little barrier to entry.** It is a place that requires no money to use its spaces and services, provides entertainment through events and lectures, and can provide a quiet refuge away from home and the city.

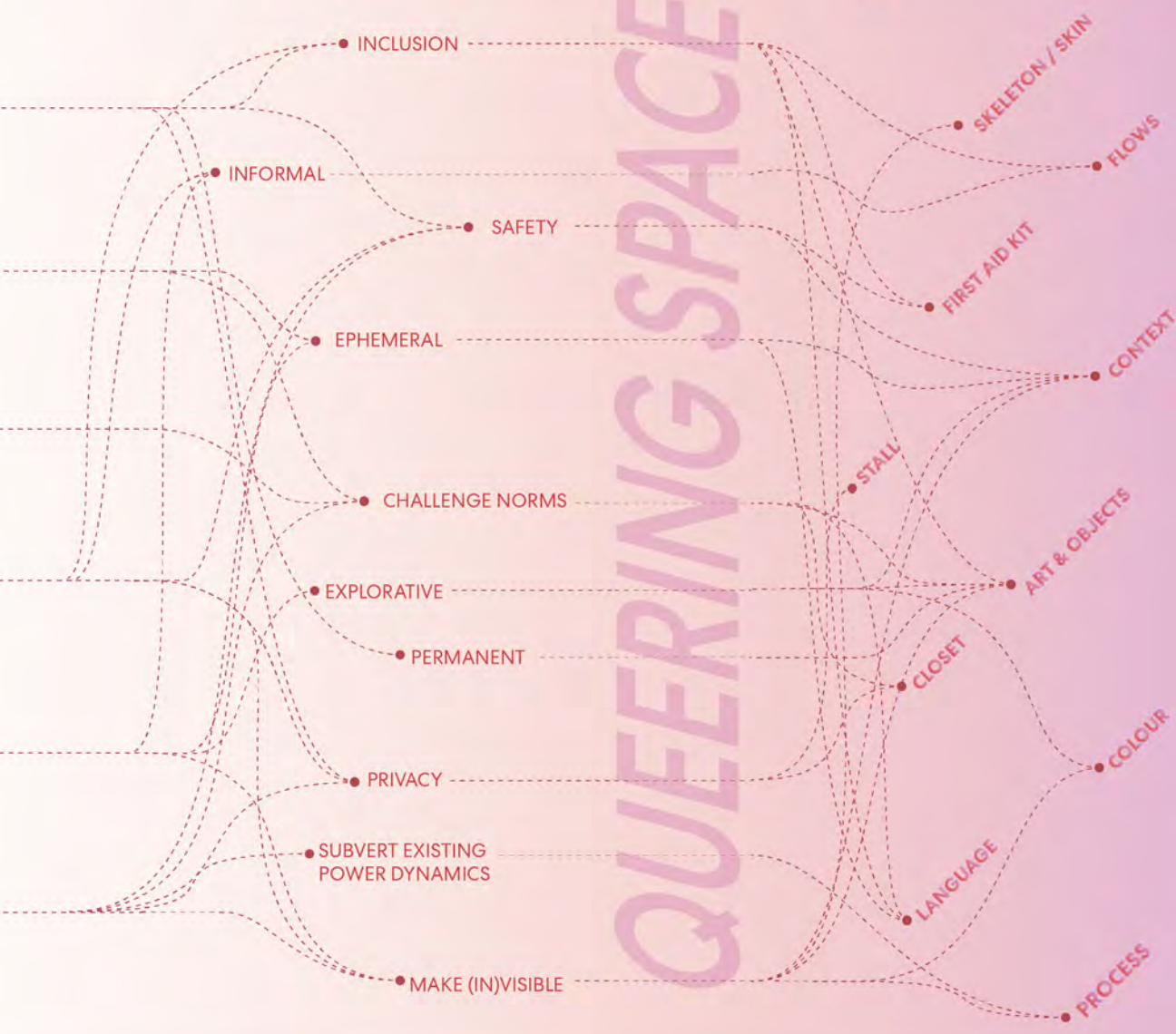
The library as a programmatic space connotes inclusion for all ages to have access to learning via books and spaces for studying. As a place, it is an indoor extension of the community, whereby people can gather for events or to meet people with similar hobbies. **However, in the current political, social, and cultural state, at least in some parts of North America, the library has become a contentious and highly politicized place.** As a space for education and learning for both young and old, there is an underlying message that is being infringed upon. To be able to recognize yourself in someone as a child (representations of non-heteronormative people), or to find connection later in life, these are the kinds of interactions we hope to maintain to create an inclusive community while also evolving to meet the needs of contemporary culture. We want to use the library as a case study to examine the role and place of queer people in the public realm and the impacts of inclusivity for all ages and identities. These design strategies seek to address the issues of diversity, inclusivity, and safety as well as the spirit of intellectual curiosity and freedom that it embodies via the queer lens.



DESIGN INTENT

INNOVATION INCUBATOR  
DESIGN STRATEGIES

QUEERING SPACE



# Notes

- 1 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 10-11.
- 2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: First Vintage Books, 1990), 4.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: First Vintage Books, 1990), 4.
- 4 Sheila L. Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 27.
- 5 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 15.
- 6 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: First Vintage Books, 1990), 5.
- 7 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 10-13
- 8 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 17.
- 9 Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead, eds., "Introduction," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 4.
- 10 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxi-xxxii.
- 11 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 52.
- 12 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxi.
- 13 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 52.
- 14 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*(New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxi.
- 15 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxii.
- 16 Olivier Vallerand, "On the uses of queer space thinking," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 17-18.
- 17 Joel Sanders "From *STUD* to Stalled!," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 146.
- 18 Sheila L. Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 8.
- 19 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 52-54.
- 20 Joel Sanders "From *STUD* to Stalled!," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 146.

- 21 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory*(Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 47-49.
- 22 Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead, eds., "Introduction," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 5.
- 23 Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999), 48.
- 24 Vallerand, Olivier. "Queer Looks on Architecture: From Challenging Identity-Based Approaches to Spatial Thinking." Translated by Victor Delaqua. ArchDaily, June 18, 2021. <https://www.archdaily.com/963534/queer-looks-on-architecture-from-challenging-identity-based-approaches-to-spatial-thinking>.
- 25 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 8.
- 26 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 9.
- 27 Olivier Vallerand, "On the uses of queer space thinking," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 21.
- 28 Marko Jobst, ed., "Queering architectural history," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 51.
- 29 Olivier Vallerand, "On the uses of queer space thinking," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 17.
- 30 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.
- 31 Ece Canli. "Notes from transient spaces," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 79.
- 32 Ece Canli. "Notes from transient spaces," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 78-79.
- 33 Ece Canli. "Notes from transient spaces," essay, in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 79.
- 34 Vallerand, Olivier. "Queer Looks on Architecture: From Challenging Identity-Based Approaches to Spatial Thinking." Translated by Victor Delaqua. ArchDaily, June 18, 2021. <https://www.archdaily.com/963534/queer-looks-on-architecture-from-challenging-identity-based-approaches-to-spatial-thinking>.
- 35 Vallerand, Olivier. "Queer Looks on Architecture: From Challenging Identity-Based Approaches to Spatial Thinking." Translated by Victor Delaqua. ArchDaily, June 18, 2021. <https://www.archdaily.com/963534/queer-looks-on-architecture-from-challenging-identity-based-approaches-to-spatial-thinking>.
- 36 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.



**3/**

**Queering the  
Library**

# The Library as a Framework

Contemporary understanding of the library typology, as a public standalone building, differs to what may be the origins of this building type. The terms *bibliotheca*, *liberaria*, *libraria* or *liberey* found in literature from the Middle Ages was used interchangeably to refer to an entire building, a room or even a shelf for storing books. Within this also the differentiation of a private collection of rare books that were kept in a room adjacent to the husband's bedroom or were only accessible to those with the proper education and background to read and write. The typology of the public library then slowly emerged from a completely private collection to a semi-private type (i.e. academic libraries open to students or members). It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a completely public library, as a standalone building within the urban sphere, came about.<sup>1</sup>

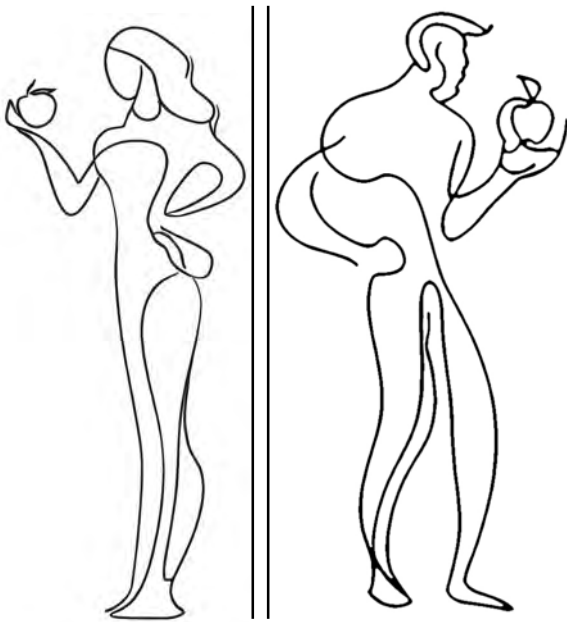
Primary functions of the library include circulation space, book and reference collections, seating area (for private

meetings as well as larger public meetings), and both a front-of-house (service desks) and back-of-house (storage) for staff to perform daily functions.<sup>2</sup> Auxiliary functions emerge depending on location and size of these libraries. In smaller branch locations, one can observe gatherings for local community events. In larger central branch locations, a lecture hall can be included to host large scale events, new technologies can be incorporated into the services offered to the public as well the inclusion of adjacent cafes or food establishments.

**The library, in its essence, represents a space of intellectual and political liberation through knowledge and discourse.**

It is the place where ideas are presented, exchanged, investigated, discussed, and celebrated. It has been said that the library is where we lose our innocence. It is no coincidence that architect Gunnar Asplund designed the door handles of the Stockholm Public Library as Adam and Eve, each holding





Door handles of the Stockholm Public Library by Gunnar Asplund as Adam and Eve, each holding an apple.

Combined images created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt 1: Adam holding apple, line art. Prompt 2: Eve holding apple, line art.

an apple as they are about to discover the carnal truth of the world.<sup>3</sup> The modern library does not only house books but also offers activities and services to all people such as hosting events, meetings, classes, exhibitions, art performances, playhouse, children's book readings, manga clubs, as well as washing and resting area for unhoused people. It provides people from different backgrounds with a space to gather and exchange knowledge, information, and interactions. It is a perfect place to hold uncomfortable conversions and discussions on subjects no matter how controversial.

While the origins, functions, and scales of the library as a place within the city are of importance to the inquiry of queering space, our interests in choosing it as a case study comes from it being at the juncture of a political space and a community space, especially in light of current events. Our strategies for queering the library in turn are strategies to either fight against backlash to the evolving role of this

public institution or to promote the inclusivity of its core functions. It is entirely for the public, and so to re-evaluate it within the queer lens may be part of the process of this typology evolution.

## **The Library as Political Space**

Recently, the library has become a space of political contention. Despite the progress North America has made in the queer space discourse since the first anti-trans bathroom bill in the United States was passed in 2016, queer presence in the built environment in the United States and Canada is still under relentless attack from anti-queer politics. From queer book bans to gender-affirming care bans, queer identities have seen their spatial needs rapidly reduced over the last few years. Since 2019, the “drag panic” has turned out anti-queer activists and rightwing politicians protesting queer presence in community spaces such as libraries in cities and towns across North America, which often turns violent.<sup>4,5</sup> This has pushed many legislative bodies to ban drag performances from public spaces because of negatively preconceived notions regarding drag shows, transgender people, and the queer community on the younger demographics. While libraries were often safe havens for the queer community, in many ways, this challenges the ability to be a queer person in public, relegating queer individuals to go back into hiding.

If we recall the importance of access to knowledge and books we can look back to book bans and burnings seen throughout history and across the globe. From 213 B.C. when

Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang targeted books of poetry, philosophy and history for burning as a means to consolidate and control power over the masses.<sup>6</sup> A more specific example are the ceremonial book burnings in 1933 in Nazi Germany, in which many publications documenting queer art and culture were lost forever. These events were happening together with the closure of the Institute of Sexual Research in Berlin, a safe space for queer knowledge, and the persecution of queer Germans into Concentration Camps.<sup>7</sup> The erasure of both public knowledge and enlightenment, and specifically in some instances of queer history, have had many negative impacts on how the queer community relate to one another and to their immediate surroundings today.

Because of its nature as a place of innocence lost, it is only fitting for the library to challenge preconceived notions about queerness and expose its users to queer ideas. In a free society, the library should be one of the first spaces to be queered. That has been true as librarians in North American have been quietly putting up queer books on front desks comes every June and inviting drag queens to read to children. Libraries have reaffirmed their ideals of forwardness and rebelliousness. What is queerer than that?

## The Library as Community / Queer Space

The public library in many places around the world acts as a community hub within the larger urban sphere. An important aspect of the typology from this is the concept of an education space, especially for the younger generation.<sup>8</sup> Dedicated book collections and breakout rooms/spaces for teens and young adults plays a key role in socialization and learning for those that partake. The designs of these spaces, with the introduction of evolving technologies that promotes different methods of learning, emphasizes physical space as another way a child can learn. Multi-use and interactive spatial design can allow one to utilize the space as they see best fit to fulfill their own learning needs, sensory requirements and curiosity for exploration. **What this might also mean for a queer child is access to knowledge and socialization they might not have otherwise.** Dedicated spaces for children and young adults to explore these topics and histories can act as “methods of productive self-expression and the cultivation of pride and self-esteem.”<sup>9</sup>

**Growing up queer means experiencing the destabilising absence of a broad and accessible queer history, most notably, in our case, in relation to spatial design. The many generations who came before us have given proof and examples of our right to inhabit, create, design and transform spaces.**

**Adam Nathaniel Furman & Joshua Mardell<sup>11</sup>**

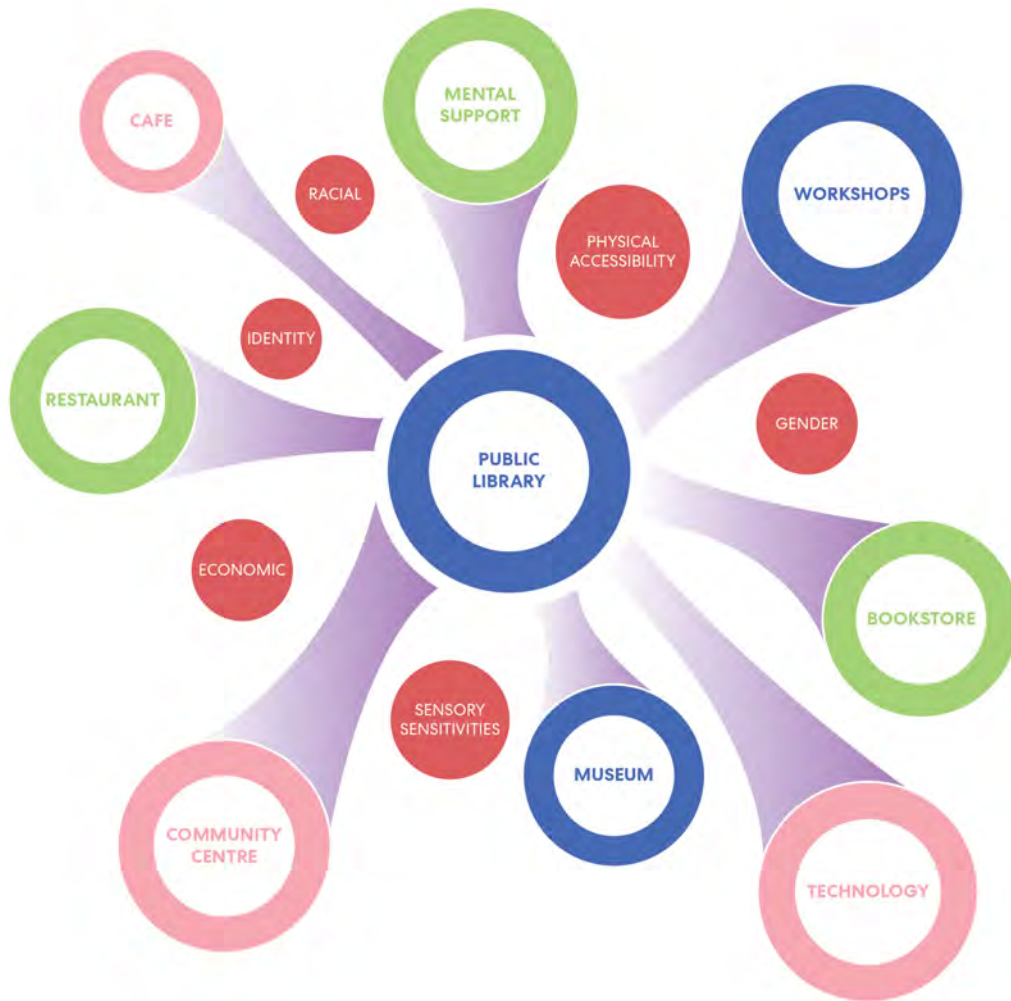


Diagram understanding the public library as a hybrid of programs, functions, and user demographics. The queering up of these spaces allow for explorative use of space and interactions which promote learning, of oneself and one another, and inclusivity.

The feelings of inclusion within a community, and the feelings of validity to exist in a space created for them, may also foster conversations with old and new friends to better understand gender identity and to foster self-acceptance.

What does it mean to queer the library? First, we must distinguish a queer library from a queered one. Elio Choquette contends that a queer space is one “occupied by queer and marginalized people” while a queered space is one “in reaction to the status quo, to society’s normative standards—a chapter of the queer movement targeted at architecture specifically.” Choquette observes that queering architecture is “a resistance to architecture as a tool of oppression and a reappropriation of space as a tool of transformation.”<sup>10</sup> **Queering the library, in this sense, involves subverting the norms of its typology and liberating its form as well as its function.** It also involves creating a permanent and safe space for queer and marginalized users to be themselves and do the things they love in a public setting.

How do architects and designers physically and genuinely queer the library? The Pride Flag has been a staple in the queer placemaking in many cities around the world. A prominent example is the giant Pride Flag flying over the Castro district of San Francisco. However, the flag along with generic slogans have been appropriated by corporations and organizations in attempts of performative allyship and “pink washing” comes every Pride Month. Rainbow stripes with images of queer couples are plastered over storefronts

and websites of banks, grocery stores, gadget retailers, etc. The temporary and generic queering of these spaces poses questions about corporate sincerity. **Meaningful queering requires genuine, timely, specific, and permanent transformation of the space.**

Queering a building such as the library goes beyond virtue signalling and superficial application of symbols, to issues of use, programming, and organization. It cannot be a temporary gesture but must be thought and applied on all scales and elements, from the urban scale to the detail, from the front desk to the back-of-house. Our ‘kit-of-parts’ approach seeks to address how queering public space be achieved at different scales, varying levels of permanency, and privacy.

# Queering the Process

Whether it is an existing queer space or a space that is poised to be queered, the process of queering space must first start within itself. Like any other design process, it involves learning, analyzing, and engaging.

**Learning** the history of queer space, queer stories of local and global scales, queer theory and discourse, and contemporary queer issues will not only aid designers in understanding the need for queer space but also equip them with the knowledge to address problems of queer and non-

queer spaces and consciously design for queer occupants. The process of learning requires sympathy, humility, and advocacy, which is not unlike learning about any other marginalized groups.

**Analyzing** the use of queer space or non-queer space, the interaction of queer users with it, the success and shortcomings of the current design, the physical and psychological attributes or effects of the space, its non-design queer elements, the sense of safety and belonging



Learning, analyzing, and engaging can ensure the success of the queering design process.

Images created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 24, 2023. Prompt 1: learning LGBT history, colorful line art. Prompt 2: architects analyzing a plan, colorful outline illustration. Prompt 3: engaging with local residents about architecture, colorful outline illustration 1

for queer users, etc. will reveal insights of the space and how the design can amplify its positives and mitigate its negatives. Environmental and spatial analysis in the queer lens prepares designers to see through the eyes of the queer users and empathize with their experience, which paves the way for a successful collaboration with the queer community and an inclusive design that is unique and specific to them.

**Engaging** queer users and the queer community for input and feedback on the issues, the vision, and the design of the

space will allow diverse ideas from users and designers to be exchanged, foster trust and common goals amongst all parties, and yield unexpected learning experience. Queer community members can provide designers with their personal concerns, demands, and relationship with the space. Designers can educate them about design practices and help bring their vision to life. Queering the engagement humanizes the design and allows everyone to take ownership of their environment.

# Queering Language

The queer community has unique vocabulary that is historically borne out of the defense mechanism in an intolerant world. Recent years have seen parts of the vocabulary becoming mainstream and even appropriated by non-queer individuals. Due to the wide reach of mass media, the general public have been made aware of such terms as “twink,” “butch,” “slay,” “sashay,” “vogue,” etc.

Double standards exist for derogatory terms for the right reason, and designers should be conscious about incorporating queer language. Some terms despite having derogatory origin have been reclaimed by certain groups

of queers as an act of affirmation and empowerment. Language exclusivity still exists in the queer community to protect themselves from the hostility of the outside world. Therefore, carelessly embracing queer language by non-queer designers can have a negative effect.

Designers are, nonetheless, encouraged to use correct language when speaking and writing about queer people and space. For example, using the affirmed pronouns with transgender and nonbinary people not only shows meaningful allyship with them but also acknowledges a baseline understanding of their human rights.





Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: colorful abstract curve lines with text "sashay."

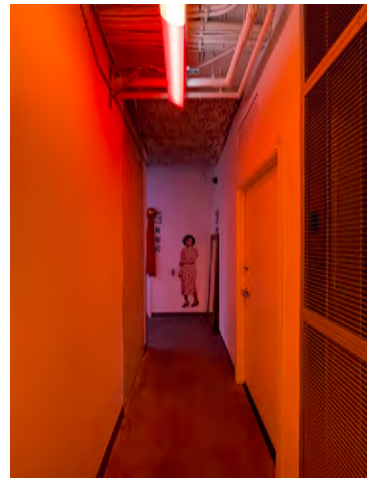
# Queering with Art & Objects

Art has historically been a key motif in queer space, from subtle gay romance novels circumventing censorship such as those of Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde, erotic art in explicit magazines such as the work of Tom of Finland, to protest art in public spaces such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt of 1987, as well as the Ballroom scene pioneered by Black and Latino American queers since the 1980's.

Art of, by, and for queer people is an effective tool for queering space. Art of queer subjects features themes, stories, characters, or hints of queer people, feelings, actions, etc. whereas art by queer artists allow unique queer voices to express themselves and interpret the world through queer

perspectives. Art for a queer audience caters to the taste and demands of specific queer communities and often has no censorship nor is influenced by opinions of the general public. Queering space by varying degrees may involve one or more of these art types.

Art can act as visual cues and/or objects of familiarity when in a public space where by seeing it, one can find comfort in the visual connection with one's sense of self in private.<sup>12</sup> Images, art, and/or objects can in this way ground a person while also making "new identities possible in the 'textures' of the everyday".<sup>13</sup>



These publicly displayed artworks have varying degrees of queerness. Photos taken by author at various locations in Vancouver and Seattle, April - September, 2023.

Contemporary artists such as Mickalene Thomas and Alma López have also attempted to bring in intersectionality such as race and class into their work, further challenging the heteronormativity of the world around us. Meanwhile, many members of the queer community are also confronting themselves on racism, sexism, classism, and so on. In this sense, queering involves fighting any kind of injustice.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 18, 2023. Prompt: Mickalene Thomas painting of three women sitting on the ground with floral background.

For this project, we have commissioned as well as purchased works of art by queer artists featuring queer themes and subject matters. We imagine them being exhibited in various spaces in libraries around the world. Some of the works may appeal to the queer eyes while others may be more easily appreciated by a non-queer audience.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 18, 2023. Prompt: Alma López painting of latina lesbians with floral religious background.



*No Binaries No Boxes* by Brettley Mason  
imagined to be displayed at Cuypers  
Library of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Photo taken, July 2019, and edited,  
September 2023, by author.



## Brettley Mason

Canadian, born 1986

### No Binaries No Boxes 2023

Lino cut, ink, and mica on archival quality paper

This series of prints is about the ways that research (and society at large) often ask participants for information about their genders without involving them in deciding how those questions are asked or what the answers are. The depicted leopard slugs, in their natural habitat with mushrooms and ferns, are very queer creatures. Their intertwined iridescent phalluses are locked in an embrace of mutual pleasure and genetic information exchange.

Brettley Mason is a multi-media artist working on issues of gender, desire, the body, and the sacred. They see their art as interlinked with their activism as a "fat, disabled, queer and trans white person" – wanting to see the representation they did not see in the world when they were growing up and through their realization of their queerness and transness. They have lived in Calgary and the Canadian West Coast. Their roots trace to France, Ireland, England, and Germany.

Explore Brettley Mason's work on [@tealpansyjewelry](#).

Originally created for the CBRC & HIM Summit in 2021. Purchased by Long Dinh & Melissa Nguyen, Perkins&Will for the Innovation Incubator project "Queering Public Space."





*Reclaiming Vines* by Jean Baptiste imagined to be displayed at Maison de la Littérature, Quebec City.

Photo taken, August 2023, and edited, September 2023, by author.

## Jean Baptiste

Wet'suwet'en, born 1992

### **Reclaiming Vines** 2020

Acrylic and seed beads on canvas

The severance between self, identity, community, and health has intimate familiarity that ties directly to experiences of colonialism, genocide, and the remnants felt by residential schools.

Jean Baptiste, or Kihew Mahihkan Atayohkan Iskwew, is a trans, nonbinary Two-Spirit member of the Wet'suwet'en nation in the Laksilyu clan. Since they were a child, they have been on a journey of exploring their passion of storytelling through various mediums. Primarily they utilize their beadwork to communicate story but have also published poetry, spoken word performances, draglesque and other embodied forms of expression to explore Indigeneity, gender identity, queerness and share Northern stories. Each piece of art they produce is grounded out of their experiences consciously delving into their relationship with their body, community, history, and self-identity.

Explore Jean Baptiste's work on [@kihewdesigns](#) and [www.kihewdesigns.net](http://www.kihewdesigns.net).

Purchased by Long Dinh & Melissa Nguyen, Perkins&Will for the Innovation Incubator project "Queering Public Space."





*Ice & Fire Floggers* by Jean Baptiste  
imagined to be displayed at Maison de  
la Littérature, Quebec City.

Photo taken, August 2023, and edited,  
September 2023, by author.



Photo courtesy of Jean Baptiste / KIHEDDESIGNS.

## Jean Baptiste

Wet'suwet'en, born 1992

### **Ice and Fire Floggers** 2021

Glass beads, leather, and wood

Water is sacred in both ceremony and play. The Ice Flogger brings water ceremonies to places where sensation and sense of self can be explored. It disassembles disassociations brought about by oppressions intended to keep our own self shattered. The Fire Flogger is the Ice Flogger's partner and juxtaposition. Fire is sacred in many similar ways to water, but its utility is extremely different. Even though they are contrasting, both Floggers facilitate the same path of healing and alignment.

Jean Baptiste, or Kihew Mahihkan Atayohkan Iskwek, is a trans, nonbinary Two-Spirit member of the Wet'suwet'en nation in the Laksilyu clan. Since they were a child, they have been on a journey of exploring their passion of storytelling through various mediums. Primarily they utilize their beadwork to communicate story but have also published poetry, spoken word performances, draglesque and other embodied forms of expression to explore Indigeneity, gender identity, queerness and share Northern stories. Each piece of art they produce is grounded out of their experiences consciously delving into their relationship with their body, community, history, and self-identity.

Explore Jean Baptiste's work on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/kihewdesigns) @kihewdesigns and [www.kihewdesigns.net](http://www.kihewdesigns.net).

Purchased by Long Dinh & Melissa Nguyen, Perkins&Will for the Innovation Incubator project "Queering Public Space."



*Office Romance 1 & 2* by Shannon Lester  
imagined to be displayed at Vancouver  
Central Library.

Photo taken and edited by author,  
September 2023.



## Shannon Lester

Canadian, born 1981

### **Office Romance 1 & 2** 2023

Acrylic on canvas

The pair of paintings depict two office people in love and their indescribable feeling. Perhaps they are separated. Perhaps they are dating and thinking of each other. Perhaps they have never met. Their energy slowly coming together and merging.

Shannon Lester aka Sasha Zamolodchikova is an interdisciplinary artist with a focus on painting and drag performance based in Kelowna, BC. They received their Master of Fine Arts degree at UBC Okanagan in September 2013. They are the co-founder of international drag-based performance art collective, KKBB, which formed in Osaka, Japan, in 2010 and the co-creator of Embodiment Drag & Burlesque. They have performed and exhibited extensively in Japan, the United States and Canada. Shannon's work is at once whimsical and deeply spiritual. Fantasy and personal narrative are woven together to create works that are dreamlike, colourful and engaging.

Find out more about Shannon Lester on [@shannonlesterart](https://www.instagram.com/shannonlesterart) and [www.shannonlester.com](http://www.shannonlester.com).

Commissioned by Long Dinh & Melissa Nguyen, Perkins&Will for the Innovation Incubator project "Queering Public Space."





*Cheer Legs* by Lucien Durey imagined to be displayed at Seattle Central Library.

Photo taken, April 2023 and edited, September 2023, by author.

## Lucien Durey

Canadian, born 1984

### **Cheer Legs** 2023

C-prints and silver gelatin prints

The photos in this collage are a mix of strangers, family, and friends of Durey as well as of his younger self. The work severs "non-art" photographs from their original, private function, making them available to a range of readings wider than those associated with their conception. Framing the found photographs in the oval shapes further alters their readings, pulling even incongruous imagery toward more heteronormative, familial, scholastic, and religious associations. The photographs imposed a restriction on the work that was less about their material and more about their immaterial concerns, about the personal and sentimental energies surrounding them.

This work is a continuation of Durey's earlier works titled "Phenomenal Hosts" that was inspired by the rejection of societal pressure to project an image of self-sufficiency. Durey likes to announce his dependence on the people in his life with more stable lives. For him, this in itself is tied to queerness, in that queer people reclaim and champion elements of their identities that are actively or formerly sources of shame.

Lucien Durey is an artist, writer and singer based in Vancouver. His mixed media and performance-based practice engages with found objects, photographs, sounds, and place.

Explore Lucien Durey's work at [lucierendurey.com](http://lucierendurey.com).

Commissioned by Long Dinh & Melissa Nguyen, Perkins&Will for the Innovation Incubator project "Queering Public Space."

# Queering with Colour

Like other visual arts, architecture employs colours to enhance the experience of the users and to express its unique character. Colours, whether they are natural or artificial, have certain meanings in the human experience throughout history. Experimenting with colours while being conscious of their historical and contemporary connotation can convey a profound meaning in the design. For example, the Transgender Pride Flag takes the colours pink and blue, historically associated with male and female genders, and fuse them in a spectrum that is fluid and has no opposites, implying the social construct of the use of these colours and how they can transform into one another.



City Centre Artist Lodge, Vancouver, BC. Photo taken by author, September 02, 2023.



Karin Daan's Homomonument in Amsterdam is not subtle in its use of colour. A composition of three pink granite triangles symbolizing the infamous Pink Triangle by the Nazi regime, it commemorates the persecution and loss of queer people during that time. Because the Pink Triangle has become a symbol of positive identity among the queer community since the end of World War II, the monument also conveys a sense of pride and resilience of the community.

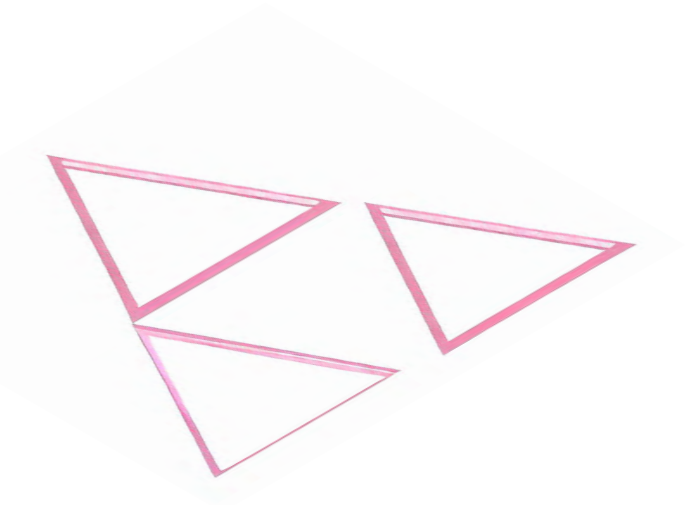


Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: three pink triangles aligned, line art.

The Los Angeles LGBT Center, Anita May Rosenstein Campus at first glance is a minimalist building with white surfaces and glazing panels. However, at night is when it is washed in pink lights like a drag queen in a ball gown.<sup>14</sup> The building distinguishes itself as a unique place for queer Angelenos among the surrounding “normative” buildings.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: abstract curvy glazing shining pink light.

The works of designer and artist Adam Nathaniel Furman such as Boudoir Babylon, Babs Baldachino, and Proud Little Pyramid, push the boundaries of colours in space.<sup>15</sup> The flamboyant sculptures and interiors of Furman create an attraction to itself, prompting spectators to explore and get comfortable with the odd designs. Despite the resemblance to the colours of the Pride Flag, Furman's designs are more than just that as they generate a joyful environment that liberates its inhabitants from rules and restrictions.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: abstract colorful curve line portal.

# Queering Context

To f\*\*k context or not to f\*\*k context, that is the wrong question. The age-old debate about whether the design of the building should take context into account leaves out deeper discourse about what we can do with the context. Queering a building's relationship to its context offers a new approach.

There are many historic gaybourhoods in cities around the world, where queer residents and businesses build a unique culture and livelihood. But that does not mean there are no queers in other neighbourhoods. Queers exist in every corner of the city and established queer space in diverse places. Recognizing queer existence architecturally in seemingly non-queer neighbourhood can be impactful.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: city street with buildings, colorful line art.

Queering in context involves taking historically queer elements of the surrounding to incorporate into a building's or a space's design, or introducing surprising and strange moment in that space to challenge the normativity of the neighbourhood. Whether you are renovating a historical queer bar or designing a brand-new library in the suburb, local queer elements can inspire that process.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: queer city with buildings, colorful line art.

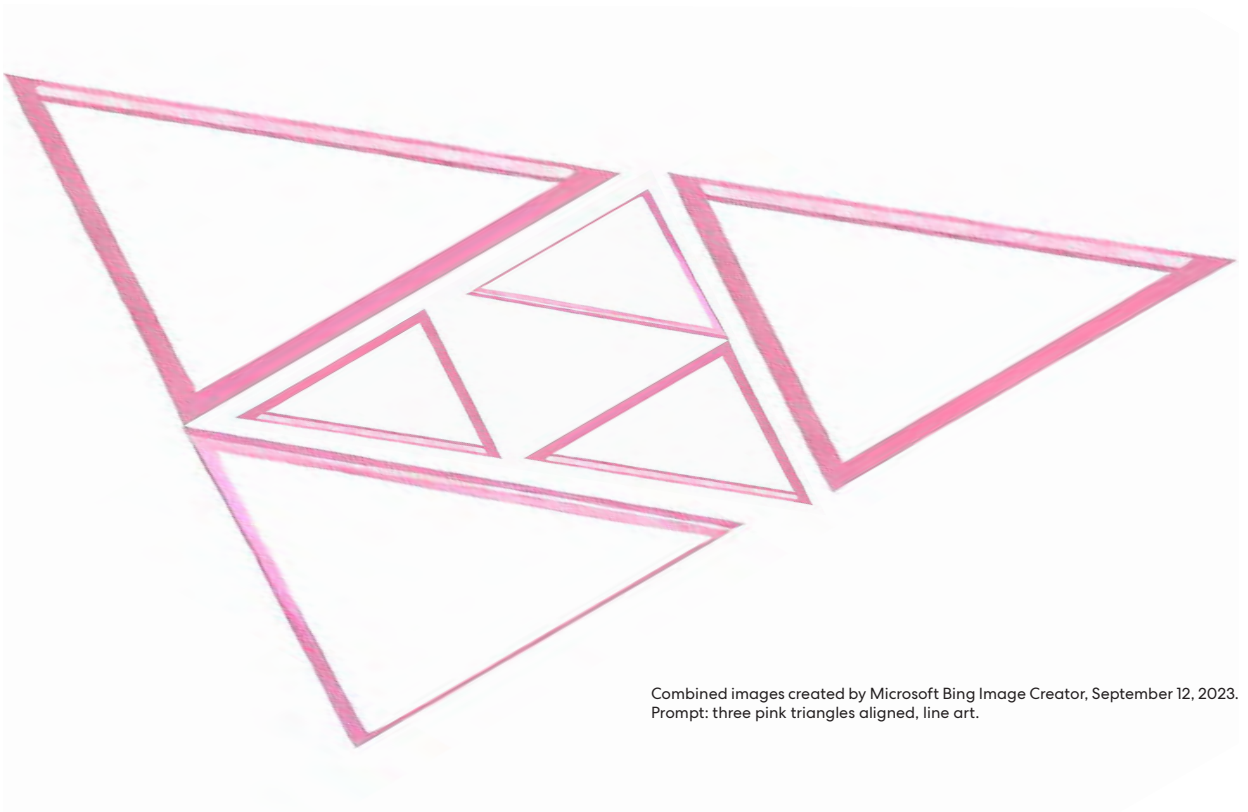


Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: curvy city street, colorful line art.

Because safety, or lack thereof, is one of the greatest concerns of queer experience in the built environment, queering in context can also mean creating an urban experience that is safe and inclusive for everyone, especially those who do not seem to fit in the dominant culture. Queering the sidewalks, the storefronts, the lamp posts, the benches, the manholes, the steps, the little libraries – each requiring a unique strategy – can have an immense impact on the inhabitants of the neighbourhood as well as of the city.

Queer urban spaces such as cruising grounds, dark alleys, sidewalks in front of queer bars, public bathrooms, nude beaches, etc. have profound meanings to the queer communities. Designing or redesigning these spaces in consideration of safety and exposure can allow queer urban inhabitants to express themselves without shame and celebrate the uniqueness of queer culture. The benefits of queering urban spaces to the public are the breaking down of sexual taboos and the normalization of sex positivity and body positivity.

The Homomonument demonstrates the importance of queer urbanism as it has put Amsterdam and the Netherlands on the world map as one of the most tolerant cities and countries. Its placemaking success continues today as it has become a place not only to commemorate the tragedies of the past but also to host rallies and exhibitions educating the current and future generations about the discrimination and violence queer people are still facing today.



Combined images created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023.  
Prompt: three pink triangles aligned, line art.

# Queering the Skeleton / Queering the Skin

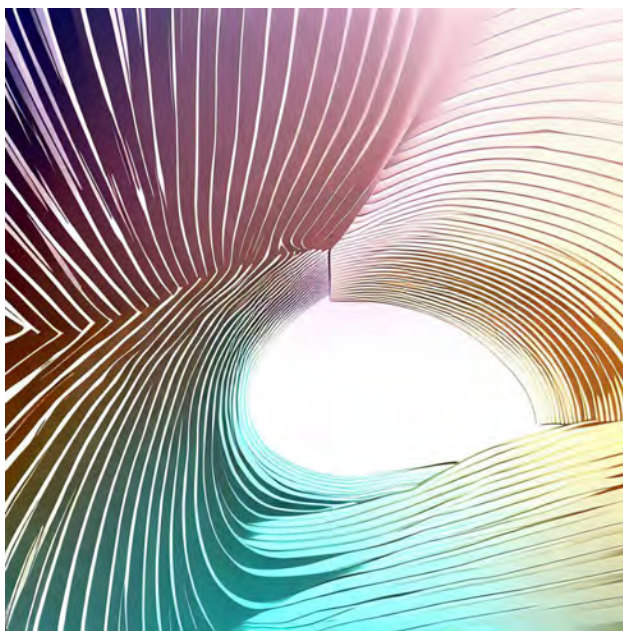


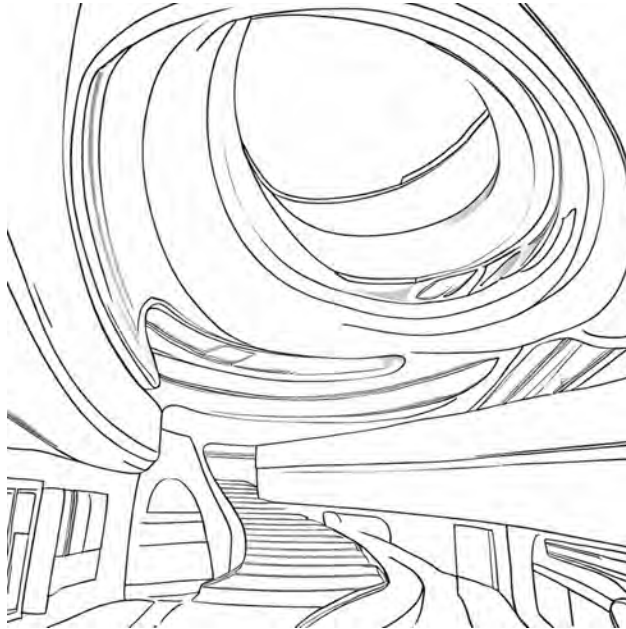
Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: colorful line curvy building interior.



Modern architecture, for a century, has celebrated simple structure and taut façade. Queering them, naturally, involves breaking the normative approach and embracing unexpectedness in their regulated systems. Postmodern architectural movements such as Deconstructivism and Neoclassicism have attempted to challenge the rationality and high functionalism of Modernism but often end up compromising with the existing rules and limitations.

Postmodern art movements, especially Pop Art, which have been spearheaded by queer artists such as Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, are enjoying a lasting legacy in the art scene as of late whereas Postmodern architecture has fallen out of favour in the contemporary architectural appetite. Postmodern works by queer architects like Philip Johnson are often overlooked by architectural practice and academia alike. Recent attempts to “modernize” Johnson’s AT&T Building was saved by backlash from historians and preservationists.<sup>16</sup> Though the radical overhaul plan was revised later, the result is undeniably more modernist than before. It seems almost like de-queering a queer architect’s work.

The Victorian Pride Centre in Melbourne by Brearley Architects and Urbanists and Grant Amon Architects is an admirable example as it unabashedly embraces Postmodernism.<sup>17</sup> Its windows reject the normative rectangular form while its façade's textures and patterns change one side to another. Its main atrium offers a moment of wonder as a fluid piece of concrete falls from the skylight down to the ground. The building itself is tucked into the diverse architectural styles of the neighbourhood, weaving into the queer history of the place.



The central atrium of the Victorian Pride Centre, Melbourne.

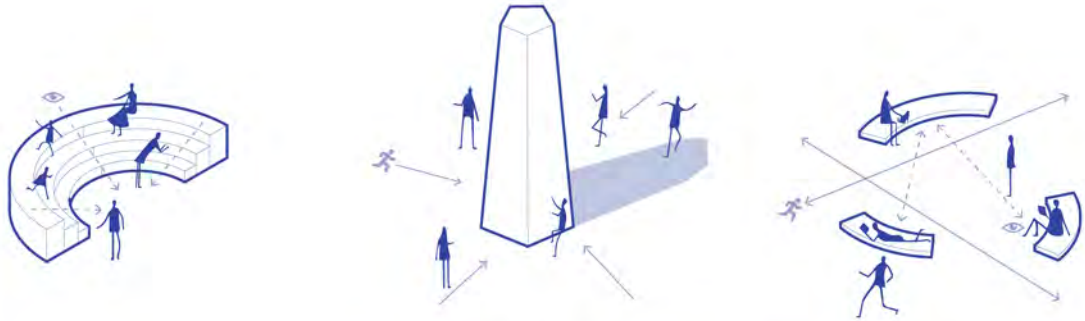
Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 18, 2023. Prompt: modern atrium with one large oval skylight and curvy openings and a spiral staircase, line art.

# Queering Flows

*How can circulation from the urban sphere to the building act to promote inclusivity?* Perhaps we can understand the library as a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city. The inclusion of an urban square to mark this transition from city to building creates a place where people can take pause. Various types of seating allow pedestrians as well as library go-ers to enjoy the outdoors and people watch or a place to have a meal. The high volume of traffic of people from all walks of life brings for chance encounters, while also creating a sense of safety and community. If we again look to Karin Daan's Homomonument in Amsterdam as a precedent, the use of a symbolic or representative sculpture or image within this urban square can act as a place to ground or represent a community, and to educate those that are not familiar. The inclusion of a queer iconic sculpture in a place like this can make visible queer issues that are often hidden or veiled away in the public sphere. It serves as a marker or a designated space that subtly, or not, demarcates a place to

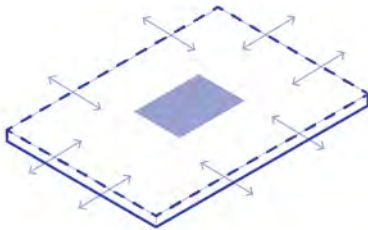
welcome that community as well as promotes inclusivity for many other communities and demographics.

*How can circulation within the building promote safety and productive encounters?* As one moves into the building, the urban square can become an extension of the immediate entrance, drawing community as well as visibility from outside in. One way to do this is to design the building for more public activities to take place around the perimeter. As one moves into the building and around, sightlines can keep those inside connected to what is happening outside while allowing those to see and be seen, and creates a sense of connection, community, and security. Corner conditions, whereby key functions occur within the central space, creates places of refuge. Smaller, more intimate spaces that open onto the central space maintains visibility to outside while allowing more private functions to take place.

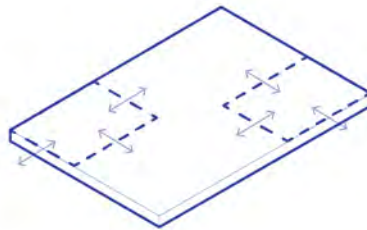


**URBAN FLOWS (EYES ON THE STREET)**

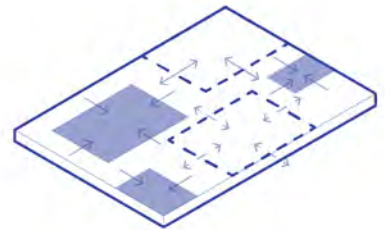
Porosity to Exterior



Porous Adjacencies



Porous vs. Inward



**CIRCULATION**



**SPATIAL SCALES OF INTIMACY + PRIVACY**

Another possible configuration is to have a variety of different types of spaces (from small to large), to allow different levels of visibility and connection while also have places to go for individual comfort or retreat. Further, some of these spaces can be less defined by walls and have softer partitions or none, to leave room for makeshift and/or temporary spaces for pop-up events or as needed by the user.

Looking at circulation with a queer lens, architecture and spatial design can be less restrictive and more open to temporary and ephemeral activities such as drag readings, to larger presentations or lecture style events.

# Queering the Stalls

Space and place have long been gendered. From post-war feminine space theory, the public realm has long been considered a male space, while the private was relegated to the female space as personalized space for them “within a structure set by men”.<sup>18</sup> Even while cities modernize and gender-neutral spaces catch on, vestiges of distinct male vs. female spaces still have a strong presence in contemporary life.

The public bathroom debate can historically be linked to the shift of women from the domestic, interior, realm to their introduction into the workplace in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> From then, it became the fight against racial segregated bathrooms by the Civil Rights Movement, fear of contamination during the AIDS crisis to the inclusion of accessible public bathrooms. More recently, as the visibility of the transgender community has increased over the last few years, the public bathroom again is sparking debates

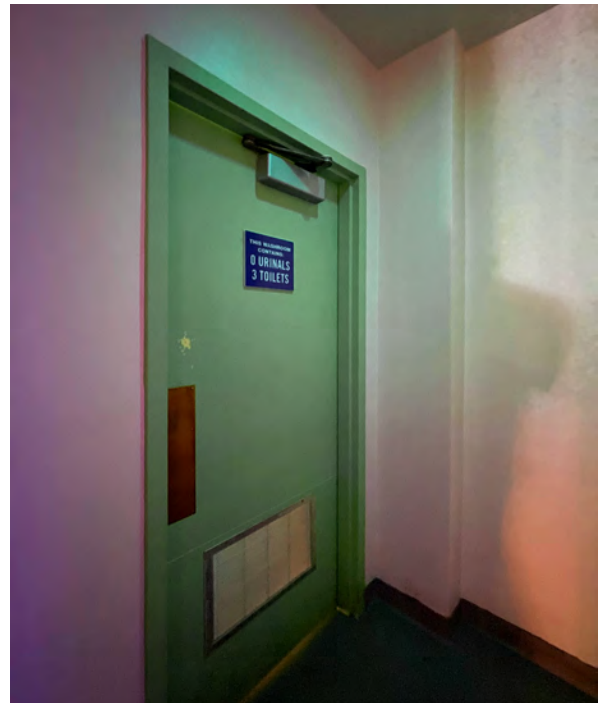
around the need (or not) for providing spaces to cater to an unrepresented, as well as misunderstood, community.

The bathroom is still perhaps one of the most gendered spaces in the built environment today. Because most buildings in the world have been built before the beginning of the gender-neutral bathroom movement, the vast majority of society are still experiencing a binary understanding of genders through their interaction with the built environment. However, the bathroom can be an effective teaching device on gender and sexuality.

*Stalled!* is a design research project by architecture professor Joel Sanders, gender studies professor Susan Stryker, and law professor Terry Kogan. The debate around a gender-neutral bathroom, is an example of a social justice issue with a very tangible architectural ‘solution’. The project itself is a prototype with multiple components to address the needs

for inclusivity of use to all walks of life and the functions they may need to perform in this space while also de-stigmatizing certain perceptions some may have about 'normal' bodies.<sup>20</sup> The case study turns the public bathroom into a singular space that is divided into different processes. As one moves through the process, technology, lights, materials, multi-level counters/furniture, and different-sized rooms are achieved via privacy screens that allow a multitude of ways the bathroom can be used by an endless variety of people.

Other references we can look to are contemporary restaurants and cafes. Pizza Coming Soon, an experimental Japanese snack bar in Vancouver's Chinatown, scrapped the traditional gendered signs of their existing bathrooms and, instead, cheekily labeled them as "This bathroom has X urinals and Y toilets." This small gesture in the design of the restaurant can have a profound meaning to all customers of all genders and sexualities.



A bathroom door at Pizza Coming Soon restaurant, Chinatown, Vancouver, BC. Photo taken by author, September 30, 2023.



Opting for genderless bathroom is not the only way to queer this space. Unexpected and quirky designs can open users up to acceptance of foreign ideas and alternative ways of life. L'Avenue, a restaurant in the Plateau – Mont Royal neighbourhood of Montreal, has a surprise for patrons in their bathrooms as they are greeted with full mirror walls and an artfully peculiar vanity.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: pink blue bathroom mural, curvy line art.

# Queering the Closet

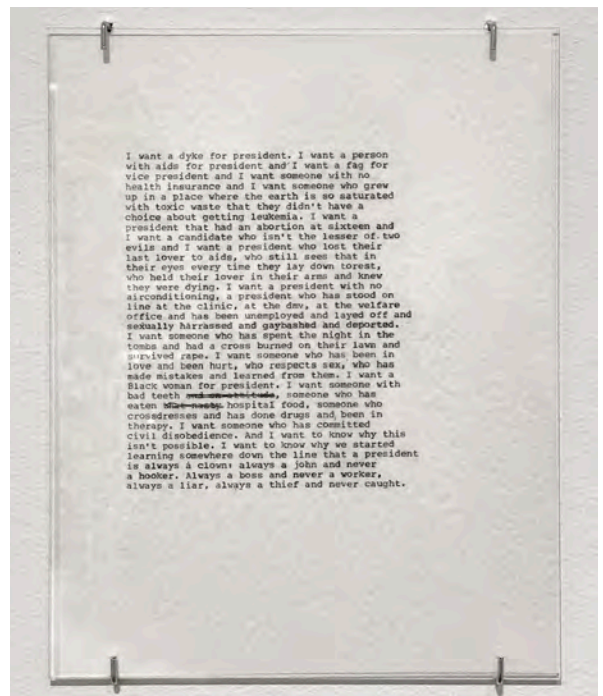
This irony is intentional. The closet is where many queers feel most comfortable being themselves. Being openly queer and publicly proud of their identities do not mean that queers are comfortable doing the things they love and express their true feelings about certain things in public.

Spaces that are more private within the library and other buildings such as private reading rooms and storage can enjoy higher degree of queering. That means more provocative features and specific queer identities can be employed to define the character of these spaces.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: closet of pink shoes, line art.

Queering the closet can also be an act of political activism. The choice of art and storytelling in the space can have a deep impact. Radical work of poetry such as “I want a president” by Zoe Leonard and photography of protests for queer rights can give the space the attitude that many queer users appreciate.



# Queering the First Aid Kit

Queering beyond the physical attributes of the space can have meaningful impact on the occupants. Queering space requires the designers to understand not only comfort and safety of queer occupants but also their collective trauma, mental health issues, and medical needs.

People in queer communities are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance use challenges, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, and non-suicidal self-injury. Especially, transgender youth are significantly more likely than their non-transgender peers to experience depression and suicidality due to stigma and discrimination. Substance use in queer communities is also greater than in the general population. The risks of overdose on substances, sexually transmitted infections, and being unhoused are likewise high in these communities.<sup>21</sup>



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: abstract colorful healthcare, line art.

Queering the First Aid Kit requires designers to think deeply about what health resources the building or space need to aid queer occupants during usual occupancy and in time of crisis. This approach to design will benefit not only queers but also all residents, employees, neighbours, and visitors of any given space.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 12, 2023. Prompt: colorful queer first aid kit, line art.



Image created by Microsoft Bing Image Creator, September 18, 2023.  
Prompt: abstract various queer flags, water color.

# Queering this Booklet

In the spirit of queering design, we also attempted to queer this booklet in its structure and aesthetics. By queering the convention of a research project, we opted for a booklet that offers discussions and prompts. Loose and liberated contents are weaved in a relatively conventional structure. Each chapter takes a main colour that was inspired by various Pride Flags including Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual, Pansexual, Nonbinary, Gay Men, Intersex, and Asexual flags. In this way, the colours are both subtle and non-subtle reflections of queer icons that serve to make visible and give validation to a queer presence in the public sphere.

# Notes

- 1 Ursula Kleefisch-Jobst, "On the Typology of the Library," essay, in *Libraries: A Design Manual*, ed. Nolan Lushington, Wolfgang Rudolf, and Liliane Wong (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 22–23.
- 2 Liliane Wong, "Plan Configuration and Layout," essay, in *Libraries: A Design Manual*, ed. Nolan Lushington, Wolfgang Rudolf, and Liliane Wong (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 49–50.
- 3 Klaus Frahm, "Interior View of Sculpted Door Handles Representing Adam and Eve, Stockholm Public Library, 51–55 Odengatan, Stockholm, Sweden," *Canadian Centre for Architecture*, 1986, <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/search/details/collection/object/1744>.
- 4 Silvia Naranjo and Alejandro Melgar, "Calgary Library Drag Event Interrupted, Sparks Continued Concerns," *CityNews*, February 28, 2023, <https://calgary.citynews.ca/2023/02/28/calgary-library-drag-event>.
- 5 Jade Markus and Tom Ross, "Derek Reimer Arrested near Drag Storytime Event at Calgary Library," *CBC News*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-drag-protest-arrest-1.6780251>.
- 6 Lorraine Boissoneault, "A Brief History of Book Burning, From the Printing Press to Internet Archives," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/brief-history-book-burning-printing-press-internet-archives-180964697/>.
- 7 Brandy Schillace, "The Forgotten History of the World's First Trans Clinic," *Scientific American*, May 10, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-forgotten-history-of-the-worlds-first-trans-clinic>.
- 8 Liliane Wong, "Plan Configuration and Layout," essay, in *Libraries: A Design Manual*, ed. Nolan Lushington, Wolfgang Rudolf, and Liliane Wong (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 58–59.
- 9 Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell, eds., *Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places & Stories* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2023), X.
- 10 Elio Choquette, "Queering Architecture: (Un)Making Places," *The Site Magazine*, September 23, 2021, <https://www.thesitemagazine.com/read/queering-architecture>.
- 11 Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell, eds., *Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places & Stories* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2023), X.
- 12 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 149.
- 13 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 150.
- 14 Carolyn Horwitz, "The Stunning – and Statement-Making – LGBT Center in Los Angeles," *Azure Magazine*, July 21, 2019, <https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/stunning-and-statement-making-lgbt-center-in-los-angeles>.
- 15 Port Magazine, "Boudoir Babylon," *Port Magazine*, December 7, 2020, <https://www.port-magazine.com/design/boudoir-babylon>.
- 16 Amanda Kolson Hurley, "Will a Postmodern Icon Be 'Glasswashed'?", *Bloomberg*, November 1, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-11-01/a-controversy-over-new-york-s-chippendale-building>.



- 17 James Norman, "'We're Back Baby': How This Australian-First Pride Centre Is Restoring the Hope of a Neighbourhood," *The Guardian*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jul/29/were-back-baby-how-this-australian-first-pride-centre-is-restoring-the-hope-of-a-neighbourhood>.
- 18 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 102.
- 19 Mental Health First Aid USA, "Providing Mental Health First Aid to LGBTQ+ Communities," *Mental Health First Aid*, June 23, 2021, <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2021/06/providing-mental-health-first-aid-to-lgbtq-plus-communities>.
- 20 Joel Sanders Architect, "Stalled! Transforming Public Restrooms", September 24, 2019, <http://jsamixdesign.com/stalled-transforming-public-restrooms/>.
- 21 Joel Sanders Architect, "Stalled! Transforming Public Restrooms", September 24, 2019, <http://jsamixdesign.com/stalled-transforming-public-restrooms/>.



4/

Conclusion

**In a beautiful and recent evolution of our urban environments, more and more instances of overt public expression have been manifested, where queerness has been able to flourish in full public view. Unabashedly taking over spaces where once shame and violence would have greeted any queer body brave enough to proudly exist in the open, archives have been created that are uplifting queer visibility in history, and in our collective memory. Similarly, new institutions with budgets and a degree of permanence are beginning to emerge, which for the first time provide queer communities with officially recognised anchors in cities that had heretofore contained queerness in a perpetual state of precarity.**

**Adam Nathaniel Furman & Joshua Mardell<sup>1</sup>**

# Conclusion

To return to the differentiation between *queer space* and *queered space*, that is, the former to be considered a space in existence that has been appropriated by the queer community for their specific needs and use, and the latter being a space created from a top-down approach, whereby an architect or designer designs a space for the queer community with input and participation during initial design phases. The nature of this research project, and evidently, the prescribed way in which architecture has been typically practiced, would lean towards creating queered space. Our use of the term 'queering' in our booklet title becomes a way that architectural practice can, in and of itself, become queerer as expressed in Chapter 3. We have singled out different design components and then re-evaluated them from a queer perspective. From the booklet to circulation/flows, to colour, art, and process, our proposed 'kit-of-parts' is intended to be used loosely, that any establishment can utilize as many of these design aspects as is required of that

program to create a space within the building for the queer community/occupants. It is also important to note that these design strategies are not all encompassing, and only seek to draw out from our literature review of gender and queer theory the aspects and components we have tied to our experience within architecture. For example: for Butler, gender identity is the output of constant performativity of gender affirming actions. We chose the idea of performance as a way of making visible queer identity via process, and language. For Ahmed, orientation/disorientation is a theory relating to space. For us, this tied into both the ephemeral and informal qualities of a space, to be flexible and user-oriented, and how the circulation/flows of a space could be designed in a way to promote this. Again, our methodology for relating theory to design strategy to the creation of queered space is still early, and served for us an initial way of rethinking how architectural practice can be more inclusive for queer occupants with their participation in the design

process. It would also be interesting to study how overtime a queered space can remain queer, or for other buildings not designed within this framework, what are the inherent qualities of a space that attracts the queer community to appropriate it? Perhaps safety? Proximity to urban centers? Size? Discretion? Visibility? The scope of this research does not cover this aspect of evaluating queer space, however it would be an interesting aspect of the continuation of this research project and of the topic within the discourse of architecture and design at large.

So, *what about the library as a case study typology?* Our interest in choosing the library as a case study is multi-fold. As a political space, access to books and knowledge have historically been a topic of contention. Today, how the space is being used and by whom are again being challenged. It is hard to argue that the library remains one of few public institutions that have embedded in its function a sense

of freedom (i.e. freedom to access knowledge), physical inclusivity (no monetary fee for entry), and non-discriminate use (events for people of all ages, genders, and identities). These aspects manifest into designed space with specific functions (e.g.. meeting rooms, lecture halls) as well as free space, the space between these functions that allow for the unexpected to occur. Beyond just being a library to house books, these institutions have the capacity to provide adjacent programs such as lectures, continuing education classes, gathering spaces for community events, rooms for smaller more intimate conversations, quiet spaces for studying or reading, exhibitions for displays (e.g.. Pride or Black History Month), a cafe, to host book sales, and so on. The library becomes a public community place that houses a multitude of people, events and, interactions all at the same time. This level of inclusion, safety, and comfort gives visibility and validity to occupy a space to otherwise invisible and/or marginalized populations and people.

For us the library, as one of the more public institutions, become a foundational typology for employing queering strategies. In essence, these strategies are not limited to the library and can be applied at varying scales and intensities to different building and place/space typologies.

### **What does the Future Hold for Queer/ed Space?**

While this research examines the context surrounding queer theory as applied to architecture and architectural practice, it remains a small part of the much larger discussion that this has been, is, and should take place. The study of the history of queer theory and then of its applications to architecture, in our eyes, is an attempt to make visible and valid the place of the queer community in public. Its application to architecture aims to change the way architecture is practiced and, more personally, how we work and what impacts we can make on both the queer community as well as the architecture

community. As open-ended as our conclusions from this research are, evidently the problem we are addressing is universal, in that everyone of all walks of life benefit from having places and spaces that they can claim as their own. To feel comfort, safe, and validated in public while also recognizing that they exist within a community - whatever that community may be.

If we now return to gender, queer and queer space theory, we can re-evaluate how our understanding and relation to what has been proposed can and does evolve over time and within contemporary political, social, and cultural discourse. To design outside of the heteronormative and typically white-cis gendered framework, would be to consider the short and long term impacts for accessibility, gender and sexual identity, racial, economic, lifestyle, and personal needs for a multitude of people. This would require the practice of architecture to include new demographics of people as

well as different disciplines into the design stages.<sup>2</sup> It would also mean to design within a new framework that implies a foundational level of inclusion, comfort, and safety that is continually being reiterated in the more minute details of design and space creation. We believe that to 'queer up' any place would in many ways mean a safer and more inclusive space for all.



# Notes

- 1 Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell, eds., *Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places & Stories* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2023), 155.
- 2 Olivier Vallerand, "On the uses of queer space thinking," in *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practice, Spaces, Pedagogies*, ed. Marko Jobst and Naomi Stead (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023), 20.

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