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The Archive is Full! On the Queer Life of Adam Gawron¹ in the Twentieth Century

TEKSTY DRUGIE 2025, NR 1, S. 91–117

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I dedicate this text to Maciek, Ewa, and Anna in gratitude for our joint search for “war-relatives” along the Radom Główny-Dęblin train route.

Life itself, while it continues, can be that same oval, or after death, the thread of life running through the tale of what has been. The meek contents of her apartment, feeling themselves to be redundant, immediately began to lose their human qualities and, in doing so, ceased to remember or to mean anything.²

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- 1 For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to use assumed names for all the individuals described. This practice provides my protagonist and his family with anonymity, but this also directs the readers’ attention to the narrative rather than personal information. I use found photographs in a similar fashion. The published photos have been “exaggerated” (edited) in such a way, as to emphasize the potentiality of the story I am telling and to draw attention to my involvement as a researcher in the biography in question. All drawings were made by Andrzej Lasocki.
 - 2 Maria Stiepanowa, *Pamięci, pamięci* [Memory, memory], trans. Agnieszka Sowińska (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2020), part 1, chap.1. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this article.

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In mid-November 2021, a stranger reached out to me seeking contact with a historian, who specializes in biographies of non-heteronormative people during Second World War. She wrote a direct message on one of the social media platforms, but first attached a photograph. When I opened the file, I was stunned. The image was of another photo, black and white, in a format indicating an amateur print, the framing was small. Clearly it was not the final print, but one of many samples created during the development of the shot. Additionally, someone was holding the photo in such a way that it did not reflect light, so that its content could be clearly visible, it showed two men kissing outside, in the light of day. I also saw a bunch of other photographs in the background, but at the time this was not important to me. I also knew that what I was looking at was a photo from the first half of the twentieth century.

Photographs as well as other graphic documents of queer life in Poland, before 1945, are rare. Queer³ archives collected by Polish LGBTQIA+ organizations are dominated by materials going back to the 1960s, but not earlier.⁴ The same is true regarding private collections,⁵ or archives outside Poland. In the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., I found a male couple from Poznan standing beside a bicycle, but during a second query, it turned out that the *de facto* origin of this photo, where it came from, and when it was actually taken, is unknown.⁶ Looking at

3 I use the queer category and the terms non-heteronormative/non-normative person also in relation to the biographies of people who most likely used other terms to identify themselves. I consider these categories to be the most inclusive, also in a historical sense. With them, in a symbolic way, I do not determine the gender identity and sexual orientation of the characters. Cf., e.g., Anna Hájková, "Den Holocaust queer erzählen," in *Jahrbuch Sexualitäten*, ed. Janin Afken, Jan Feddersen, Benno Gammerl, Rainer Nicolayson and Benedikt Wolf (Göttingen: Wallstein Publishing House, 2018), 87; Susan Stryker, *Transgender History. The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 30-31; Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni. Homoseksualści w czasie II wojny światowej* [They. Homosexuals during Second World War] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2021), 51-56.

4 I based this on the collections of the Lambda Warszawa's Archive, Polish LGBTQIA Museum - Foundation Q and QAI (Queer Archives Institute). See <https://old.lambdawarszawa.org/lambdawarszawa/co-robimy/biblioteka/>, <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/foundation-q>, <http://queerarchivesinstitute.org/>, accessed February 1, 2023.

5 A remarkable collection of photos of queer/non-heteronormative people, including from Central and Eastern Europe, can be found in a collection owned by Jacek Dehnel, available online. Cf. <https://awers-rewers.pl/> - keyword: Gender/LGBT, accessed February 1, 2023.

6 The photograph is still available on the USHMM website. A query at the Schwules Museum (SMU) in Berlin, revealed that it should be in the Sternweiler Collection. Unfortunately, the archivists have not been able to locate it and verify its history. Email correspondence



Fig. 1. The first photo sent by Anna in November 2021.

the photograph sent to me via Instagram, I knew I was dealing with a unique graphic document.

Joanna Ostrowska, Das Schwule Museum (January – February 2021), accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.usmmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/shwimages.php?id=01663&width=248&pic=media/01663.jpg>.

At the beginning of January 2022, I traveled from Krakow to Radom, and then to a tiny village along the Radom-Deblin train line.⁷ There I met with a woman – let’s call her Anna – who claimed that one of the men in the photograph was her neighbor. No one lived in the old, abandoned, wooden house next to her property. Previously, for a while, a man in a homelessness crisis had resided there, to whom Anna sometimes brought hot meals or hot water. In gratitude, he gave her a collection of photographs, and other documents, left behind in the crumbling house. The woman was aware of online forums for people interested in antiques and historical documents, so she decided to try her luck. While posting the photographs, she asked for help and contacts to specialists. One subscriber advised her to try to communicate with the author of the book *They. Homosexuals in Second World War*. This is how we came into contact.

After a few hours at Anna’s house, I returned to Krakow with two bags of papers and photos, which I then spread out on a large table in an apartment. I realized that the initial image was a fragment of Adam Gawron’s life archive that became my research basis in the context of his biography and potential queer storylines, which I am trying to record, using family archival materials, in comparison with other documentation and fragments of conversations with his relatives, that is, oral history.

The appendix to the story of the “non-normative” transfer of Adam’s archive is Anna’s story, who later contacted me several times in order to “complete” the transfer of the collection. After arranging and unraveling all the donated artifacts, I realized that this primary Instagram photo never made it to me. I only received the film from which the prints were created. I have an irresistible feeling that a part of this collection ended up in someone else’s hands. However, this matter will remain in the realm of speculation. According to Anna’s account, every now and then local “history buffs” would show up at her house, allegedly in possession of more documents relating to Adam and his family. I was scheduled to see them and Anna in July 2022. But already on the way to Adam’s village, Anna sent me a text message that she had changed her plans, and would not be in the area. The contact broke off. She never answered my messages again.

7 I decided not to give the name of the village from which Adam came, so as not to encroach on the local history of the community. I visited the place twice, and each time my arrival provoked curiosity, but also questions as to “why him?” I would not want Adam’s story to become a local sensation (inside as well as outside the village) and for his experiences to be used to fuel controversy between the neighbors. It is worth mentioning that Second World War is still very much a living memory in this village and strongly influences relations between the various families. The political divide between “one of our own” and “a traitor” (collaborator) continues to exist. Adam’s non-heteronormativity is not a topic used in these disputes. I would not want my research to influence this state of affairs.

Closets, Chests, and Boxes

Analyzing the very process of finding Adam's archive, it is hard to get rid of the impression that in the study of queer life, access to new sources is very often determined by chance. Lost, hidden, often forgotten artifacts of non-normative biographies are found in quite unexpected circumstances.

An online forum is where, in 2002, Ralf Dose found archival materials belonging to Li Shiu Tong – the last life partner and associate of Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneering sexologist and founder of the Institute of Sexology (Institut für Sexualwissenschaft) in Berlin. Eight years earlier, a man named Adam Smith had posted an online inquiry about the families of the two men. It turned out that he lived in the same building where Li Shiu Tong had died. He came across his belongings by accident in the residential dumpster. Someone had simply cleaned out the apartment after the death of the tenant, and Mr. Smith took custody of what he managed to salvage. The purchased materials became part of a collection in the archives of The Magnus Hirschfeld Society.⁸

However, strangers are less likely to “save” queer heritage. Those “guarding” artifacts, detailing the experiences of our protagonists, are often their loved ones, family members, who either block access to their queer stories or have a dissenting view of how the story should be recounted.⁹ From my point of view, only home/family archives, the archives of their loved ones¹⁰ are today's last remaining opportunities to contribute to the story of queer life in the

8 I reconstruct the history of the collection of documents, belonging to Li Shiu Tong, on the basis of the text by Ralf Dose also cited by Heike Bauer. Cf. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Testament. Heft II*, ed. Ralf Dose (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013), 4–6; Heike Bauer, *The Hirschfeld Archives. Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017), 3–4.

9 One of the most glaring examples of the family's influence on queerstory research is the story of Anna Hájková, accused by the daughter of the late witness of “violating her postmortem personality rights.” Cf. David Batty, “Holocaust Survivor's Daughter in Legal Battle with Historian over Claim of Lesbian Liaison with Nazi Guard,” *The Guardian*, October 8, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/08/survivors-daughter-sues-historian-claim-lesbian-liaison-nazi-guard>; David Batty, “Court Fines Historian over Claims of Holocaust Survivor's Lesbian Affair,” *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/dec/21/court-fines-historian-over-claims-holocaust-survivor-lesbian-affair>.

10 I use the term “loved ones” in a very inclusive sense – those who have remembered, but also those, who at some stage of the protagonist's life were alongside, were significant (a reference to “kinship” in counterpoint to family, also non-biological relations). Cf. Anna Hájková, *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub. Homophobie und Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 30–33.

twentieth century, apart from those recorded on the pages of criminal and medical records. There is no denying that had it not been for Wilhelm Kröpfl, Klaus Müller would not have found the artifacts to complete the testimony of Heinz Heger, a.k.a. Josef Kohout, whose *The Men with the Pink Triangle*¹¹ was a milestone work in the study of homosexual, as well as non-heteronormative victims of the Third Reich.

In 1994, two months after Josef's death, Kröpfl met with historian Klaus Müller to tell him his partner's story. The wartime period in Josef's biography was encased in two shoeboxes that Kröpfl kept in his apartment. Müller spent more than two hours at Wilhelm's house, listening to recollections on Josef and looking through the documents that had survived the war. He tried to convince Wilhelm that there were some serious treasures in his closet. Among the boxes lay Kohout's concentration camp number – 1896, and the only pink triangle found up to that time. In addition to that, there were letters from his parents, Josef's unique diary with notes from the April 1945 death march to Dachau concentration camp, and many other pieces of evidence of the persecution of this prison group.¹² Were it not for this collection, the key biography of the "pink triangle" would have remained grossly incomplete.¹³

In addition to new storylines and biographies, the symbolic closet, which in fact consisted of chests, shoeboxes, gray envelopes and folders containing documents,¹⁴ offers a chance to clarify the mysteries regarding those biographies that in queerstory we already consider "told," that is, ostensibly closed.¹⁵ I probably would have reacted differently to Anna's message had

11 Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True, Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*, trans. David Fernbach (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1994).

12 Footage of the Josef Kohout and Wilhelm Kröpfl collection (USHMM) – Documenting Nazi Persecution of Gays: Josef Kohout/Wilhelm Kroepfl Collection (Curators Corner #13), accessed January 12, 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj-wGkcyTL8.

13 For a more extensive history of the biographies of the first witnesses persecuted under Paragraph 175, who left their accounts: Klaus Müller, "Totgeschlagen, totgeschwiegen? Das autobiographische Zeugnis homosexueller Überlebender," in *Nationalsozialistischer Terror gegen Homosexuelle. Verdrängt und ungesühnt*, ed. Burkhard Jellonnek and Rüdiger Lautmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 397–418.

14 The chest full of artifacts relating to the biography of her grandmother and her partner is also mentioned by Sylvie Bianchi, the protagonist of the film *Nelly and Nadine*, which tells the story of a lesbian relationship between the women who met in December, 1944 at the Ravensbrück women's camp. *Nelly and Nadine*, dir. Magnus Gertten, 2022, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.berlinale.de/en/2022/programme/202209157.html>.

15 A good example of an "ostensibly closed biography" is the story of Karl Gorath (a former inmate of Neuengamme concentration camp, Auschwitz I and Mauthausen concen-

it not been for my experience with the family of Teofil Kosiński. Historian Lutz van Dijk recorded the wartime and postwar biography of Stefan K., a.k.a. Teofil, or Teo, in two books: *Damned Strong Love*¹⁶ and »Endlich den Mut ...«¹⁷ published between 1991 and 2015. In which case, the cooperation with the witness lasted over a decade. He was informed of Teofil's death in 2003 by Kosinski's nephew's daughter. After receiving this information, the contact broke off. Fourteen years later, just before the publication of the Polish version of *Damned Strong Love*, I managed to get in touch with Teofil's relatives, who had cared for him until his death. The family had no idea that Kosinski had co-written a book based on his own biography, which had been translated into several languages, and that his testimony was part of the oral history collection at the USHMM and the USC Shoah Foundation. The witness had also never mentioned to them anything about his psychosexual orientation. And they had no idea that the reason for Teo's arrest, during the war, was a love affair with an Austrian Wehrmacht soldier. In the course of meetings and conversations I had with Mr. Leszek and Ms. Anna, I was able not only to fill in the gaps in Kosinski's biography, especially in the period between 1945 and 1990, but most importantly, I received from them all the personal documents – letters, postcards, tickets, brochures, leaflets,¹⁸ as well as photographs left behind by Teofil, which relate to the storylines that were not mentioned in the conversations with van Dijk. These materials are all the more valuable, because three years before his death, Kosinski burned all the “evidence of his

tration camp), who was persecuted under paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code penalizing intimate relations between men. At Auschwitz, Gorath had two Polish lovers, Zbigniew and Tadeusz. In July 1989, during a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, he was informed that Zbigniew and Tadeusz had not survived the war. Gorath died in 2003. Seventeen years later, in the course of my research, it turned out that Zbigniew and Tadeusz had survived the war, and that Zbigniew was in contact with the Museum in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Karl Gorath was denied the opportunity to ever see Zbigniew again. See <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/karl-gorath>, accessed February 3, 2023; Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni*, 257–260.

16 Lutz van Dijk, *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stefan K.*, trans. Elizabeth D. Crawford (New York: Holt, 1995).

17 »Endlich den Mut ...«: *Briefe von Stefan T. Kosinski (1925–2003)*, ed. Lutz van Dijk (Berlin: Querverlag, 2015).

18 Such materials are traditionally considered “superfluous,” “unnecessary,” “of no benefit – failing to enrich knowledge.” In the case of Teofil and Adam, there was no hierarchy in the materials collected. Each collected what he himself considered appropriate and important. Municipal bus tickets from the early 1990s, train package delivery receipts were as important as photographs of loved ones. Cf. Judith (Jack) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 33–43.

second/non-normative life,” including letters from readers from all over the world, his correspondence with Lutz, articles about him and his life, foreign language versions of a book based on his biography. The pieces he saved must have been of real value to him. I suppose he did not know how to part with them. In the talks with the historian, he claimed that everything was lost.¹⁹ Today, thanks to these materials, the process of rewriting the biography of Teofil Kosinski – Teo – Stefan K. is no longer just about filling in the facts and gaps, rather, it focuses on changing the optics. Kosinski’s biography is still untold, it is not closed, it requires a new version supplemented by new sources. The baseline for a revised version of the biography should be both the archival base left to the family and the relationship he had with Lutz van Dijk, the “chronicler” of this queer story. This biography will thus become a tale of two protagonists.

Describing the aforementioned Magnus Hirschfeld collection, Heike Bauer rightly points out that all queer archives “live” – they develop, recording their own history – not only of documentation, but also of those who are archiving:

The complex history of Hirschfeld’s material legacy furthermore indicates that archives are subject to circumstance, the keeper of strange knowledges, which can be shaped by serendipity and unexplained events as much as by traceable personal and financial investments or the agendas of the institutions that make it their task to select materials to keep or destroy.²⁰

Thus, the archive is both a metaphor and a method, as well as a material space that connects biographies – subjects, to discourses. The “lack of documentation” that we associate with historical accounts regarding queer Central and Eastern Europe from the twentieth century may be misleading.²¹ Paradoxically,

19 Teofil wrote Lutz about this event in one of his letters, available in the book »Endlich den Mut...«, 173-176.

20 Bauer, *The Hirschfeld Archives*, 4.

21 I experienced a shift in my understanding of the queer archive during my own research work. Those specializing in the research of Second World War history in Poland convinced me that the archival sources on non-heteronormativity were scarce. This lack of sources was supposed to preclude me from researching and writing a monograph. I was urged to change my research topic. During my initial queries in Polish state archives, it became apparent that the number of sources was, and still is, simply overwhelming, both in the context of the systemic persecution of queer people, queer day-to-day life, as well as the study of the microhistories of individual protagonists throughout the twentieth century. Cf. Raimund Wolfert, “*Damals habe ich mich entschlossen, meinen Teil dazu beizutragen, dieses symbolische Regal zu füllen*. Interview mit Joanna Ostrowska,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft* 69/70 (2022): 10–24.

cally, as the aforementioned examples show, the available research material is “extremely abundant,”²² the storylines keep multiplying, building up, although they do not always form a cohesive sum. In the sense of cause and effect, they can seem deficient, fractured, filled with inadequacies, or “outside the norm.” All the better, we just can’t let them slip out of our grasp.

Adam’s collection, given to me by Anna, is predominated by photographs. My protagonist collected both professional photos taken in studios, as well as amateur developed photos. Some of the latter were most taken and developed by him. The entire collection largely comes from the pre-war and wartime periods. Some shots have more than a dozen prints each, differing only in the exposure of the film. The person developing them tried to make a perfect print.²³

In the process of arranging the collection, I was able to distinguish four main series. The first consists of photographs of a celebratory family reunion, before the start of Second World War,²⁴ which took place at the back of Mr. and Mrs. Gawron’s farmhouse. It is from this series that the photographs of the men kissing each other comes from, which started my adventure with Adam. This series is incomplete. It most likely contained some thirty photographs numbered on the corners of the light-sensitive film, of which I received only three fragments of film plus one additional print. The two other series were funeral photographs. The first is from July/August 1942, and includes photos of the family in mourning after the death of one of Adam’s sisters, Aniela. The second is a farewell ceremony for Emil, Aniela’s son, who died on February 25, 1943 as a child. The fourth and final series contains photographs scattered in time, but professionally developed. Among them, the predominant images are document photos from different time periods, in which Adam, and members of his family, can be recognized. Some portraits of men remain anonymous,

22 Cf. Anjali Arondekar, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong’o, Juana María Rodríguez and Susan Stryker, “Queer Archives: A Roundtable Discussion,” comp. Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy and Zeb Tortorici, *Radical History Review* 122 (May 2015): 211–231.

23 Among Adam’s post-war photos are also those belonging to his brother Stefan, Stefan’s wife, as well as his adopted daughter Helena. I have the impression that the collection acquired from Anna also includes the family collection (the documents have been mislaid).

24 I dated this series of photos by comparing Adam’s appearance and age based on the entire collection of surviving photos. Adam was forty years old when the war started. The comparative images were the war photos signed on the backs – 1942, 1943.

but there is a high probability that they belonged to Adam's relatives/partners/lovers. This collection also includes photos of Adam in a concentration camp prisoner uniform and hat, from the 1980s, which I have delineated as a link to a separate collection of wartime artifacts.

When Anna handed me Adam's collection, she claimed that he was sent to a concentration camp under paragraph 175 of the German statute criminalizing sexual relations between men.²⁵ She had no proof of this, but repeated the belief that he had been turned in by one of the locals. I verified this part of Adam's biography first. Strictly speaking, had it not been for the association of my research on those persecuted under paragraphs 175 and 175a, I probably would not have gotten to know the story of this protagonist. I was aided by Adam himself, who collected documents relating to his time in the concentration camp – certificates from the municipality office, confirmation letters from ITS Bad Arolsen, correspondence with newspapers describing partisan activity in the areas, his Auschwitz Cross certificate, and so on, in the course of my research queries, I was able to compare the surviving documentation with archival materials. It became apparent, almost immediately, that the lead on paragraph 175 turned out to be false. Adam was a political prisoner detained for fighting the occupying German forces. His non-normativity was not the reason for his persecution, which made this biography seem all the more significant to me in the context of the narratives dominating my research archive.

Additionally, Adam's collection includes surviving pre-war railroad documentation, the family's court and inheritance records, his parents' ID cards, and the ID cards of relatives, as well as the rich correspondence of Adam's niece, Stefan's daughter – Helena, who was a stenographer by profession.²⁶ From a certain point in time, it was thanks to her that Adam was able to send any letter, private or official. In fact, her correspondence became part of her uncle's collection. Adam dictated the necessary letters to Helena, which she then typed and stored. I found the handwritten originals in Adam's collection.

There is no denying that in the story of Adam Gawron, the motivation for my research work was not the testimony. In the collected materials, both those received from Anna as well as in the archival documentation, there is no trace of a queer account recorded by my protagonist. The starting point is an image – a kiss captured in a photograph preserved among hundreds of others. The

25 The wording of paragraph 175 changed over the period between 1871 and 1994. All changes in German legislation regarding this article of the Criminal Code can be traced here: <https://lexetius.com/StGB/175/>, accessed February 20, 2023.

26 For the purposes of the text, I have omitted footnotes to the documentation from Adam's collection. I describe the type of surviving source in the main text without a reference – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

print shows two men standing in the middle of a field. Behind them, along the horizon, we recognize several trees, clumps of bushes, perhaps haystacks. Right next to the kissing couple grows a tiny tree. The shot is part of a series. The photographer only catches only one moment in time.



Fig. 2. Adam kissing his anonymous friends.

Adam, the man with short hair, with a lower shave, is a tad older. He is wearing a black suit and fairly wide-legged pants. Sticking out from under his jacket is a stiff white shirt collar and a dark tie. With his left hand, he tenderly embraces the other man's neck, touching his ear with his thumb and holding his face with his whole hand, and kisses him. The man being kissed is younger and remains anonymous. He has longer, slightly curly

hair and a gray suit. Just before the kiss, he took a puff from his cigarette. The cigarette can be seen in his right hand. The men are standing very close together, their eyes are closed. In the upper right corner, the film was labeled with a number, which now remains indistinct. It is definitely a shot from the twenty-something series.



Fig. 3. Adam with his anonymous friend.

A further shot with the number twenty-nine was taken from a different perspective. It is as if the photographer has moved a little to the left. The men are still standing close together. The younger is resting his left arm on Adam's shoulder, fixing his bangs. Adam holds him by the edge of his jacket. A cigarette is still visible in the kissed man's hand. They smile at each other. It might

as well be the moment just after the kiss or just before. The missing shots in between are a record of a longer situation, which is somehow summed up by the print numbered thirty-four.



Fig. 4. Adam and his two friend.

Adam and his anonymous friend are standing side by side along with a third man, who also remains anonymous. The photo was taken against the backdrop of a farm building, but in the same location. Again the photographer turned to the left, trying this time to capture his models in a slightly different setting. Two of them are looking uninhibitedly into the lens. Adam smiles, posing. The third man captured in the photograph is looking at the “couple.” He seems as if he is just an accessory. In the background, a woman and a girl

can be seen entering an outbuilding. Like the men they too are dressed up. Thanks to them, we know that these three prints, plucked from a larger set, were created during a family celebration. Perhaps it was a wedding, a christening, or a village hoedown. The photos were not taken in hiding, were not destroyed, and had several prints each. The photographer remains unknown, but it is known who made the prints from the surviving film, who numbered and stored them. The collector of the traces of this visual tale was Adam. They must have been precious to him.

Two basic pitfalls that arise at the beginning of the process of reconstructing this story are, first – whether to show the faces of the protagonists, as well as photographs of anonymous authors, without their consent? Second – by showing these photographs in a queer context, do we not categorize, brand, or out them? To put it another way, first, is it permissible for me as a researcher to bring to light the intimate images of Adam, who did not openly testify about his non-normativity. This argument is often used by families of witnesses, reluctant to queer their relative's past, or by some archivists for whom talking about someone's gender identity and psychosexual orientation is too sensitive data or even a violation of their dignity. Secondly, how do you tell Adam's story without the awareness of how he defined himself, how he talked about himself, whether he wanted to talk about non-normativity or preferred to remain silent.

In both cases we are faced with certain manipulation. It is worth addressing using the example of the exhibition composed of Sébastien Lifshitz's collection of photographs *Under Cover. A Secret History of Cross-Dressers*, shown in Berlin.²⁷ Lifshitz, a film director and screenwriter, has been collecting photographs of cross-dressers and non-heteronormative people since he was a teenager. Purchased at flea markets and antique stores, he assembled the images into a private collection of thousands of photos of anonymous people. All of Lifshitz's subjects remain anonymous. For the collector, the impetus for his work was not to look for traces of their biographies, but to try to arrange the collection into a certain narrative sequence. His approach is to tell the story of a queer community without deciphering the biographies. Here, the viewer has full freedom of interpretation: "[...] many of these pictures will remain forever a mystery, an enigma – and it doesn't bother me. On the contrary, I like that there is a part of resistance. I would like the audience to be in the same position as I was when I first discovered them. Everybody

27 The exhibition *Under Cover: A Secret History of Cross-Dressers* was shown at C/O Berlin (September 17, 2022 – January 18, 2023) and at The Photographers' Gallery in London (February 23, 2018 – June 2, 2018).

is free to project whatever they want. There are different levels of interpretation [emphasis – J. O.].”²⁸

From this perspective, the issue of consent to show anonymous photos in a queer context is non-existent. As does the issue of categorization and outing. Each of these stories, intermediated through photographs, can be interpreted in radically different ways, there is no single, defined scenario for the story. The potentiality of the stories is the baseline here, and at the same time is the most appropriate solution to the dilemmas of non-testimony – consent. I do not know if the protagonists would like to be called queer, outed, and viewed, but the key point is that there is such a possibility:

If you belonged to the queer community in the nineteenth century or early twentieth century, you had to be very careful and smart to create an environment where you could be safe and meet like-minded people. [...] They had to be cautious. It’s a miracle that some of these pictures still exist because most of them were destroyed. [...] I think we should see these cross-dressers as pioneers: they are heroes from the past – we have to pay tribute to them and try to tell what we know about them as much as we can. They were anonymous people just trying to be themselves at a time when it was almost impossible.²⁹

Therefore, I view Adam’s photographs as pioneer photos, which he decided to archive. Of this I can be sure. I also suppose that in his case “being himself” was not necessarily “nearly impossible.” For the first time I had thought about the fact that Adam “was not hiding,” when I saw the number of prints of shots of the men kissing. In the photo sent by Anna, I saw the one selected plus a stack of others in the background. Attempts to develop further prints of the shots included all the frames, both funeral and non-funeral. In this story, we are not dealing with a single image meticulously hidden in household nooks and crannies, so that it never falls into the wrong hands. This kiss was meant to be visible, as later interviews with witnesses would confirm. In the local Radom outskirts village community, everyone knew. They did not need to gossip, because Adam did not deny it. In the case of his biography, “outside the norm” is also beyond what we would expect from a queer biography of a person living in Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. Therefore, in interpreting Adam’s biography, it’s worth risking, and attempting to contextualize the story according to Ariella Aisha Azoulay’s formula:

²⁸ Magnus Pölcher, “They Are Heroes from the Past – We Have to Pay Tribute to Them. Interview with Sébastien Lifshitz,” *C/O Berlin* 32 (2022): 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Given that history itself is one such tool that provides its “users” with a neutral point of view from which violent realities are perceived as “historical objects” to be put in a certain plausible order [emphasis– J. O.] potential history rejects the impulse to relate to these tools as objects with their own history that should be narrated. [...] Imperial history is potentialized when the radical differentiation between imperially and racially formed groups such as “blacks” and “whites” [queer and straight – J. O.] is undermined, and other options of sharing the world are enlivened as reparations.³⁰

From this standpoint, the two questions posed at the beginning of this section come from a different operational order, based on the belief that the protagonist “didn’t want to.” In the “plausible” (dominant), version of the queer biography, the non-normative person wished, at all costs, and even after death, to remain in the shadows. If there is no testimony confirming his readiness to speak/witness/show, then Adam certainly did not want to speak. To challenge this *status quo*, erroneously referred to as the “neutral point of view,” it is not enough just to listen to the witnesses, but also to look at the artifacts.³¹ What is emblematic in Adam’s microhistory is not just that he recorded a non-heteronormative episode in the form of photographs. His biography does not include either an episode of fleeing his home village or a story of a local homophobic community or persecution, based on criminal documents, such as pre-war and wartime police, court, and prison records. It forces a paradigm shift – thinking in contrast to the historical praxis, concerning not only the survival and hiding strategies of queer people, but also the concept of forced migration from small towns to the city as anonymous space – enabling survival.³²

30 Ariella Aisha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019), chap. “Potential History: Not with the Master’s Tools, Not with Tools at All,” Kindle.

31 During my two visits to the village where Adam lived, I conducted several interviews with his relatives and with witnesses. I did not ask about his psychosexual orientation – sooner or later each interviewee informed me that Adam was “different,” and everyone knew about it.

32 Kamil Karczewski writes about transgressing the phantasm of the “urban queer Mecca” in Poland of the interwar period in his text “Call Me by My Name.” Snippets of similar thoughts also appear in the works of Raimund Wolfert and Mathias Foit. Cf. Kamil Karczewski, “Call Me by My Name: A ‘Strange and Incomprehensible Passion’ in the Polish Kresy of the 1920s,” *Slavic Review* 81 (3) (2022): 631–652; M. Foit, “Of Towns and Villages: Non-Metropolitan Queer Urbanism of Weimar Germany” (Phd diss., Free University of Berlin, 2023), Raimund Wolfert, “Lila Klub,” *Replika* 102 (2023): 48–50; Joanna Ostrowska, “Häftlinge nach Paragraf 175a im Lagerkomplex Mauthausen-Gusen. Verschwiegene Biografien von Polen aus dem Reichsgau Wartheland,” *coMMents* Heft 1 (2022): 88–91.

However, I would not want an “outsider” paradigm to dominate my attempt to record Adam’s story. After all, I am the person recording and preserving the protagonist’s archive, a non-Western researcher, a Pole, a woman, researching the queer history of Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe, a person who can back herself up using the categories that have been put forward by her co-researchers. For in Adam’s story, I see not only Sarah Ahmed’s³³ queer moments and Jack Halberstam’s³⁴ subjugated knowledge, but above all the glitches that Aleksandra Szczepan discusses when examining the visual evidence of the Holocaust. This category seems pertinent, in that it applies to the image – video testimonies – just as it does to my protagonist’s photographs. And at the same time, it situates itself in Holocaust/Second World War research, which was part of Adam’s biographical experience: “glitch in testimony [...] denotes various affective disruptions: shifts, incongruities, or infelicitous encounters that challenge us to confront our cultural expectations about the testimony, the memory and representation of the Holocaust, trauma and identity [emphasis – J. O.]”³⁵

“Oval-View” of the Biography

In Adam’s story, the primary “incongruity” is, of course, the series of photographs with which I began my analysis of his biography, but “queer faults” also appear in the statements of the village’s residents.³⁶ This includes both family members I managed to talk to as well as neighbors. I therefore treat

33 Queer moments in biography are points of disorientation, forcing a change of perspective, in counterpoint to the dominant narrative in the text. Cf. Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 65–68.

34 Subjugated knowledge, that is, forms of knowledge that were not simply forgotten, but were disqualified, considered ridiculous, lacking, “insufficiently elaborated.” Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 27.

35 Aleksandra Szczepan, “Przeczulone słowa i drgające obrazy. O potencjalnych metodach badań nad Zagładą” [Sensitive words and quivering images. About potential methods of research on the Holocaust], *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2021): 32 (trans. A. Szczepan).

36 In January and July 2022, I was able to talk to six people from Adam’s village. Three of them were nearby neighbors, the other two were family (the grandchildren of one of Adam’s brothers). One man lived in a neighboring village. In each of the cases, I respected the wishes of my interviewees that they remain anonymous. I have interwoven their statements into the body of Adam’s biography. I started each interview with the information that the conversation about Adam’s biography was related to his camp experience. I was never the first to mention any queer related storylines. Notes from the interviews (January 4, 2022 and July 22, 2022) – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

this first attempt of writing down his biography as a preliminary “outlining” of the story created from a compilation consisting of Adam’s collection, and other collected materials. This “outlining” will henceforth be used by me as an inventory note for further research, becoming part of this peculiar collection.

Adam was born in 1899, and died in 1989. His biographical story covers practically the entire twentieth century, hence I take the liberty of approaching it emblematically. Regardless of the historical moment, the first element that binds Adam’s biography together, in this case, will be the place – the family village with a population of six hundred to seven hundred residents, spanning the century. This local community, functioning in a network of familial dependencies, has remained somewhat unchanged throughout the twentieth century up to the present day. The knowledge regarding the members of the community is symbolically inherited, transferred from one generation to the next, a fact that is very evident when talking to the villagers today. [They are all related in some way]. In their stories, Adam is portrayed as a non-heteronormative person functioning in the group on equal terms. For both them and their ancestors, his non-heteronormativity was not a reason for rejection/persecution, not only in the context of personal relationships during peacetime, but also in life-threatening situations during wartime.

Adam’s childhood and teenage years remain a *terra incognita* in the narrative so far, but his family tree can be successfully reconstructed on the basis of surviving documents. His parents, Bronisława and Franciszek, were born in the village as well. They owned one farm and had six children. Adam was their oldest son. Three other offspring were Stefan, Andrzej and Feliks. Aniela had been born in between them, and the youngest daughter’s name was Matylida. Adam’s father farmed the land, as did his mother, her ID states her occupation as “wife.” Thanks to her surviving pre-war ID card, we know that she was illiterate. She came from one of the more significant local families.

Mr. and Mrs. Gawron’s eldest son worked on the railroad. However, it is difficult to say in what position. It is also unclear what kind of education he received. We can only assume that, because of his profession, firstly, he helped his parents maintain the farm, and secondly, he left his family village. Before the war in Poland, the profession of railroader was a highly regarded and well-paid occupation. Adam’s military ID survived in the preserved documentation, which was issued to him in the town of Równe, in the Polish province of Volhynia (currently Рівне in Ukraine). His registration of residence was in Bereżne (today Березне, Ukraine), almost four hundred kilometers from his hometown. This is another indication that his interwar years require further analysis. The existing photographs also necessitate this. Based on one of the previously mentioned photo collections, it is clear that Adam gathered photographs of young men. He may have had intimate relations with some of

them, while others could have been simply his friends. And although most of them will remain anonymous, it can be safely said that until the end of his life, for Adam, his graphic archive was something of a diary, in which images of men predominated.

In the surviving photo collection, the mentioned funeral series stands out. During the war, Adam lost his sister, Aniela and nephew, Emil. Józef Łata was Aniela's husband and Emil's father, who had been raising their second, surviving son Tycjan, by himself since February 1943. Presumably, Adam had already been friends with Józef before the war. Locals say that Adam had returned to his parents house after September 17, 1939, confirming the story that he had previously lived in Bereźne. During the occupation, the two men were active in the partisan forces together. Most likely, it was Łata, along with another member of Adam's mother's family, who drew him into the resistance. They were all members of the SOB (Socialist Combat Organization), which cooperated with the ZWZ (Union of Armed Struggle) and later with the Home Army.³⁷ Adam's house served as a secret dispatch, information and organizational point for the resistance. Most likely, he did not fight armed, unlike Łata who organized combat training, but he covertly stored weapons.

Józef Łata was arrested by the Germans in late 1943.³⁸ He was taken to a prison in Radom, and in the second half of January 1944, he was incarcerated in AL Dyhernfurth, a subcamp of Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp. On July 26, Józef was executed in Gross-Rosen by a sentence from the Summary Court in Radom.³⁹ Thus, orphaning his son. A month earlier, the Germans had arrested Adam. Little is known about the circumstances of his arrest. He was first sent to a prison in Radom, later, in July, to Gross-Rosen.⁴⁰ After the war,

37 Cf. Wojciech Borzobohaty, »Jodła«. Okręg Radomsko-Kielecki ZWZ-AK 1939-1945 [”Fir.” Radomsko-Kielecki District ZWZ-AK 1939–1945] (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1988), 135-150.

38 Archives of the Gross-Rosen Museum (AMGR), 21/87/MF (materials of the GKBZpNP concerning the executions at the Gross-Rosen concentration camp); correspondence with the AMGR in January 2022 – Joanna Ostrowska archive.

39 A query at the Arolsen Archives concerning Józef Łata only identified documentation concerning a person with the same name and surname, but a different date of birth. Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN), GK 165/87, 281–285 (materials relating to executions in the camp 1942–1944).

40 This version of events is confirmed through numerous documents preserved in Adam's collection (including confirmations from the municipality from the late 1940s). Arolsen Archies (AA), 1.1.11.1 / 141567 (Prisoner registry of KL Gross-Rosen – 1940–1945); 6.3.3.2/110693486 (Korrespondenz T/D 1042786); AMGR, 6723a/30/DP; 2524 (Księga Bólu i Pamięci, Radom 1993), 9576/34/Dps.154 (Transporty do KL Gross-Rosen, opr. A. Konieczny).

Adam claimed that, while in the camp, he learned of his friend's execution. After a few weeks, Gawron was sent to the Niesky satellite concentration camp, in Saxony.⁴¹ Władysław Zyśk was brought there at the same time:

The campgrounds were much smaller than those used by the Gross-Rosen camp and had only 5 barracks. [...]. However, as it later turned out, the conditions were not so easy, as the hard 10-hour work day in the factory exhausted the body, and the food was no different from that in Gross-Rosen. At the factory, I worked as a carpenter, adapting train cars to anti-aircraft defense possibilities, they were equipped with machine guns and anti-aircraft guns, and the manned cars were protected by armor. We were led to and from work under SS escort and monitored at all times while working.⁴²

Whether Adam had the same occupation is not yet known, but his job assignment may have been influenced by his profession. In a 1977 letter to ITS Bad Arolsen, he stated very clearly: "I was liberated from this camp [Aussenlager Niesky – J. O.] by the Polish Second Army, on April 18, 1945."⁴³ Another former prisoner, Edward Tomala, recalls the liberation:

At about 9 a.m., 3 tanks drove onto the main road with white eagles on them, they did not drive but rushed towards the town [Niesky – J. O.]. [...] shells began to fall on the barracks where the *krank-sztuba* [infirmary – J. O.] was located. We hid in the dead room which was below ground, after coming out we noticed that the barrack was partially destroyed, but there wasn't a trace of the sick. Meanwhile, at the entrance gate, by the barrack of the SS, and the kitchen building we saw the Polish Army. This is how I was liberated from the Niesky subcamp, part of the concentration camp of Gross-Rosen, along with 15 other prisoners who took refuge in the dead house. They included: 8 Poles, 5 Russians, and 3 Yugoslavs.⁴⁴

Adam must have been among those eight Poles, although Tomala does not mention his name. Perhaps like the others, he immediately returned to Poland,

41 Cf. Danuta Sawicka, "Niesky," in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager Band 6: Natzweiler, Groß-Rosen, Stutthof*, ed. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 403–405.

42 Władysław Zyśk, "W Gross-Rosen i Niesky," in *Przeżyliśmy Gross-Rosen*, Tom 2 – "Filie obozu koncentracyjnego Gross-Rosen," Zeszyt 6 – "Komando Niesky" (Warszawa: ZBoWiD, 1987), 55–56.

43 AA, 6.3.3.2 / 110693489 (Korrespondenz T/D 1042786).

44 Edward Tomala, "Pamiętnik z Niesky," in *Przeżyliśmy Gross-Rosen*, Tom 2, 52.

to his home village, breaking off all camp contacts. Certainly his health was in serious condition. In the winter of 1944, the prisoner mortality rate in the Niesky camp was very high. The liberated handful in Tomala's story, represent those who were left behind in the camp, despite an earlier evacuation due to poor health conditions. Adam's relatives recall that he returned home with a broken collarbone. His face was massacred, and he practically lost sight in one eye. He survived typhoid fever in the camp. He was no longer able to work the land. He also never returned to work on the railroad. He was the only survivor of his tiny village. From then on, Adam became a living monument to the martyrdom of the local community. In his closet hung an ironed striped camp prisoner uniform, with a four-digit camp number from Gross-Rosen, along with his camp hat.

But war had resurfaced in February, 1977. That was when an article appeared in a Catholic weekly on the history of the resistance and combat of one of the local Home Army outposts, in the Radom district of the General Government (GG).⁴⁵ The writers mentioned local heroes by name. Among them were Adam and Józef. Gawron responded immediately by sending a letter to the editor thanking them: "I am already 78 years old. For a long time I thought that all trace of me and my friends who died would be lost, yet it turns out that not everything we did was in vain." Along with Adam's, a separate letter was sent by Tycjan Łata: "I don't remember my father, because I am 38 years old, and my father was arrested by the Germans when I was 4 years old. There were people who remembered my father and his work. I, personally, owe a lot of gratitude to the editorial staff [...]." Both letters were typed and sent by Adam's niece, Helena. It is only because she kept the handwritten copies that I know of their existence.

The newspaper article set Gawron in motion. As early as June of that year, he sent a letter to ITS Bad Arolsen, asking for confirmation of his stay in the camps. He received all the documentation. Most likely, at the same time, he began visiting the local elementary school giving lectures about his experiences in the concentration camps. Some of the locals I spoke with remembered the meetings with Adam and the stories of camp brutality. During these visits, he always proudly wore his striped prisoner's uniform and hat, as he did during the May Day marches.

One other storyline draws attention, namely the relationship between Adam and Tycjan. The youngest son of Józef Łata and Aniela Gawron was most likely born in 1939. At the age of three he lost his mother, a year later, his brother. When he was four, his father was arrested. It is difficult to say who

45 Edward Stec and Julian Szczuka, "Z dziejów jednej placówki" [From the history of one institution], *Wrocławski Tygodnik Katolicki*, February 6, 1977, 38.

raised him until the end of the war. Later, Adam took over custody of him, as is confirmed by Tycjan's 1954 railroad ID card, entitling him to a discount on fares. From the ID photo, a teenage boy gazes at us. Below his name is a note about his relationship to a railroad employee: "raised by Gawron Adam a PKP [Polish State Railways – J. O.] pensioner."

The post-war period in Gawron's life included more than his return to the family village, and a speedy pension from the State Railroad, due to his poor health. Adam decided to take custody of his nephew, whom he raised, most likely alone, possibly with the help of relatives and neighbors. The Gawron family home was divided in half, Stefan with his wife and adopted daughter Helena lived in one part, Adam and his nephew lived in the other. The former home of Józef Łata stood empty. Tycjan took over his father's farm only after he came of age. During my interviews with the villagers, I asked about the matter of Adam's guardianship of a minor boy, after his return from the camp. It came as no surprise to anyone, and did not cause a scandal, although, according to my interviewees, everyone knew that Adam "didn't like women."⁴⁶ This phrase was repeated like a mantra during all the conversations I had in that village outside of Radom. No one mentioned a word about pedophilia. So a non-heteronormative man, a former prisoner of concentration camps, after returning home began a new life, taking care of his six-year-old nephew. Their relationship must have been very strong for they were buried in the same grave, at the local cemetery. Tycjan died ten years after Adam.

This abridged camp biography is worth piecing together with other personal accounts of his relatives and neighbors. Just like Adam was considered a hero, at the same time he played the role of the local weirdo, also in the light of his non-heteronormativity. Locals called him "Benek." He would wear drill pants and jacket, and in his later years he never parted with his rubber boots. He always rode a bicycle. He would make his own wine at home, although he never drank alcohol or smoked. Sometimes he would sell the wine to locals. He collected radios, sewing machines and other equipment, such as an enlarger for developing photos. He practiced palmistry, and read books on magic. He would buy fabric and experiment with sewing. Since the 1960s, local kids would come to his house to listen to all sorts of stories and try alcohol. He had several lovers, some of whom were married, which did not stop these relationships from lasting up to a dozen or so years. When I asked about the camp period in Adam's biography, one of the interviewees told me straightforwardly, "He survived the camps because he was

⁴⁶ Other terms for Adam's non-heteronormativity appearing in interviews include: "he didn't love women."

a prison bitch. After all, it is known what the Germans did to those kinds of people.”⁴⁷ Thanks to this sentiment, I came to understand how Anna had associated me, Adam’s story, and paragraph 175, altogether. However, it could have been that Adam mentioned the experiences of sexual violence in a concentration camps, or talked about consensual relations that later became encoded in local memory in this particular way. It could also have been the other way around, a combination of the figure of a non-heteronormative person and the camp experience in postwar Poland reality, would have been seen exclusively through the prism of sexual violence experiences. After all, for years, Polish post-war discourse was dominated by a phantasm linking non-heteronormative persons’ persecutions, due to their gender identity and psychosexual orientation, with a leading narrative of sexual predators, exploiting their power and position within the camp’s community.⁴⁸ To this day, for many people, these experiences are synonymous, also within historical and research terms.⁴⁹

47 My interviewee used this term, but before that he clearly had trouble finding the right words. This statement was not meant to be pejorative. I suppose it resulted from his helplessness in choosing other terms. A similar phenomenon can be found in the transcripts of interviews with residents of several villages where, in the 1970s, there were child abuse scandals linked to the clergy of the Catholic Church: “[He – J. O.]: That was the gossip. They suspected he had deviances, that he was bisexual. Or what do they call it? Not bisexual! He only liked young boys. What do they call it now? [He turns to his wife – J. O.]. [Wife – J. O.]: Well I think it’s fag. [He – J. O.]: Well not a fag, but.... [Wife – J. O.]: Bisexual. [He – J. O.]: Not bisexual. Well, that he has needs... What do the teens call it? [Author – J. O.]: A pedophile. [He – J. O.]: That’s right, a pedophile! That he was a pedophile. Well, he hassled many of those altar boys.” Ekke Overbeek, *Maxima Culpa. Co Kościół ukrywa o Janie Pawle II* [Maxima Culpa. What the Church hides about John Paul II] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2023), chap. 8, Kindle.

48 The described phenomenon is part of the post-war homophobia experienced by survivors. Cf. Insa Eschebach, “Homophobie, Devianz und weibliche Homosexualität im Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück,” in *Homophobie und Devianz. Weibliche und männliche Homosexualität im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Insa Eschebach (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2012), 65–78, Joanna Ostrowska, *Oni*, 233–310; Uta Rautenberg, “Homophobia in Nazi camps” (PhD diss., University of Warwick 2021).

49 In Poland, the best example of this type of thinking is Bogdan Piętka’s text on the paragraph-175-prisoners at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp complex. The response to this homophobic text was written by his would-be translator, Georg Gostomczyk. Cf. Bohdan Piętka, “Więźniowie z różowym trójkątem w KL Auschwitz” [Prisoners with a pink triangle in KL Auschwitz], *Dzieje Najnowsze. Kwartalnik poświęcony historii XX wieku* 46 (2) (2014): 25–53; Georg Gostomczyk, “Den homosexuellen Opfern des Nationalsozialismus nicht angemessen. Ein Lesebericht zu Bohdan Piętkas Aufsatz über Häftlinge mit dem rosa Winkel im KZ Auschwitz,” *Invertito – Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 19 (2017): 155–175.

Before his death, Adam suffered an accident. One of his family members said that “he was always on the go.” He was unable to stop, “deals, local business and small trade” was his forte. One day he rode his bicycle to a local farmer’s market and got into an accident. A cart drove into him. With a broken pelvis, he ended up bed-ridden, he lay immobile, leading to his death. His niece Helena, the stenographer, wrote in one of her letters to her cousin: “Bożenka, first of all, thank you for your name-day wishes for Uncle Adam, and at the same time I want to inform you that Uncle Adam is no longer alive. He died on May 19, 1989 in the hospital [...]. He fell ill with heart and kidney problems. The funeral was held on May 20 [...].” Adam passed away at the age of ninety.

Coda

The story of Adam and his archive cannot be separated from my experience/microhistory of how I obtained this collection. When I think about the turning points in the process of reconstructing this biography, the moment that comes to mind is when I received the first photograph, sent by Anna via Instagram, but also the moment when I learned that Adam had not been persecuted under paragraph 175. Thirteen years ago, my queerhistorical archival research began with a search for the names of those convicted under this paragraph of the German Criminal Code. Sources, recorded by the convicted, in their own language, have accompanied my research on the queer history of Central and Eastern Europe since the beginning. I encounter court, police and camp documentation, as well as medical reports, including psychiatric reports. This “branded” documentation has always been the impulse driving me in my search for new protagonists. That is how the structure for the monograph *Them. The Second World War History of Non-Heteronormative People* was created, which clearly, in terms of the nature of the sources, lacked a story similar to that of Adam’s biography.

Thus, my queer archive is dominated by stories brought to light through the persecutors’ documentation, to which I made and continue to make efforts finding a counterpoint in the form of personal/family/neighborhood sources. This course of research, at some point, became something of a curse for me, even though Polish state archives are full of files on those persecuted under paragraph 175, as well as others.⁵⁰ I remain convinced that they must

50 Other paragraphs under which non-heteronormative persons were persecuted on the territory of today’s Poland in the pre-war and wartime periods were paragraph 175a of the German Criminal Code (since 1935), paragraph 129Ib of the Austrian Criminal Code, article 516 of the Russian Criminal Code, and article 207 of the Polish Criminal Code

be researched. I strongly believe that in Poland, not enough such narratives have seen the light of day, and for that reason they should further be researched.⁵¹ There is no doubt that Adam's collection became an inspiration for me. It forced me to revise my long-held patterns and seemingly „neutral” research habits. It unsealed the script, forcing me to repeatedly collate available sources. Over time it sparked the discovery of other micro-histories full of queer episodes, in which the non-heteronormativity of the protagonists in question is attested to by others – strangers recalling the episodes, individuals rescued during the war,⁵² or an unaware family who even today does not remember the protagonist in question. Criminal and

(since 1932). In the case of the Polish Code, this was only to criminalize so-called professional same-sex prostitution, but as preliminary research of criminal cases from the period 1933–1969 has already shown, this paragraph was used simply to prosecute people accused of “pederasty” or “lesbian love.” There is a lack of systematic research on the criminal cases that took place in today's Poland between 1900 and 1969 for each of those paragraphs. Cf. Joanna Ostrowska, “Publiczne pudrowanie nosa” [Powdering your nose in public], *Dwutygodnik*, accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/10059-publiczne-pudrowanie-nosa.html>.

- 51 So far in Poland, research based on criminal records related to paragraphs 175 and 175a has been conducted by a handful of people, verbatim. Cf. Piotr Chruścielski, “Paragraf 175 w świetle zachowanej dokumentacji KL Stutthof. Zarys zagadnienia” [Paragraph 175 in the light of the preserved documentation of KL Stutthof. Outline of the issue], *Zeszyty Muzeum Stutthof* 5 (2017): 11–32; Piotr Chruścielski, “Między świadectwem a wspomnieniem. Niemieccy więźniowie KL Stutthof w pamięci ich bliskich” [Between testimony and memory. German prisoners of KL Stutthof in memory of their loved ones], in *Świadkowie między ofiarą a sprawcą zbrodni*, ed. Alicja Bartuś (Oświęcim: PMA-B, Fundacja na rzecz MDSM, 2017), 63–76; Katarzyna Woniak, “Homosexuelle Zwangsarbeiter. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis zwischen Sexualität und Rassenideologie während des Zweiten Weltkrieges,” in *Justiz und Homosexualität. Juristische Zeitgeschichte Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Band 24 (Recklinghausen, 2020), 74–82.
- 52 The queer biographies I came across, after finding Adam's collection, are based primarily on the testimonies of male and female Jewish survivors, who, in their Holocaust testimonies, speak of the non-heteronormativity of their rescuers. The best example of this practice is the story of Stanisław Chmielewski, who's memory survived only through the testimony of Janina Bauman. There are more such examples – homosexual/non-heteronormative male couples are also mentioned by Janina Forbert and Zofia Trembska. Cf. Janina Wierzbicki – USC Shoah Foundation, 33926; Janina Bauman – USC Shoah Foundation, 43589; Zuzanna Schnepf – Kołacz, “Na ciechańskiej plebanii. Historia ocalenia Zofii Trembskiej. Studium przypadku” [At the Ciechan rectory. The story of Zofia Trembska's survival. Case study], *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 6 (2010): 232–252; Joanna Ostrowska, “Stanisław Chmielewski ratował Żydów w czasie niemieckiej okupacji – obiecał to swojemu ukochanemu” [Stanisław Chmielewski saved Jews during the German occupation – he promised it to his beloved], *Replika* 96 (2022).

medical evidence still exists in the background, but the vector of investigation has been reversed.

Queer archives are full, they are often a fragment of other surviving ones. Narratives multiply and overlap. Queer survival strategies in Central and Eastern Europe, together with the war experience in the background, have been testified to by the “relatives” of queer people, whom we have not taken into account so far. They were often their “loved ones,” but not in the heteronormative/familial sense. Their accounts often lack details. It was not possible for them to memorize everything. Often only a rumor, a guess or a hunch was recorded. At first glance, such stories may seem incongruous, devoid of personal, geographical data, tainted by post-war experience. But that is okay. As Jack Halberstam wrote: “memory is itself a disciplinary mechanism that Foucault calls ‘a ritual of power’; it selects for what is important (the histories of triumph), it reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures and contradictions, and it sets precedents for other ‘memorializations.’”⁵³ For Halberstam, “forgetting becomes a way of resisting the heroic and grand logics of recall and unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription.”⁵⁴ Recordings can be made repeatedly, erasing previous versions or piecing together seemingly irrelevant queer microhistories. In my queer archive, the impulse to erase past experiences came from Adam, *de facto* Jan, although, in this perspective, his real name longer matters.

Translated by Maciej Mahler

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their help in recovering the biographies of Alex and his relatives: Andrzej Lasocki, Elfi Pohlmann (Arolsen Archives), Natalia Szumna (Ossolineum), Leokadia Lewandowska and Dorota Sula (Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica), Monika Schnell (Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück), Leszek and Anna Kamyszek, Raimund Wolfert, Mathias Foit, Kamil Karczewski, Michał Pecko, Joanna Bociąg and Michał Rusinek (The Wisława Szymborska Foundation), as well as Anna, Antoni, Tadeusz, Kazimierz, Ryszard and Jadwiga.

⁵³ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Abstract

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The Archive is Full! On the Queer Life of Adam Gawron in the Twentieth Century

The article analyzes the queer private archive of Adam Gawron, a person born in 1899 in one of the towns on the Radom–Dęblin railroad line. Gawron passed away at the age of ninety, leaving behind a collection of photographs and family documents. In 2021, the collections were handed over to the author, who began the search to recover the protagonist's biography. The starting point for the research was a series of photographs and several preserved negatives depicting men kissing. The author tries to outline a map of queer archives originating from private collections: the collections of those nearest and dearest, understood more broadly than just family. At the same time, the recorded biography of the protagonist is treated as one of the variants of a multi-faceted story, with the important role of the local community. In her biographical investigation, the author utilizes the protagonist's collection, war archives, and the interviews she conducted with people who remember Adam Gawron.

Keywords

queer, archive, biography, nearest and dearest, glitch, twentieth century