

Editors' Introduction

Queering Archives: Intimate Tracings

In the longer introduction of *Radical History Review's* two thematic issues "Queering Archives," we frame the archive as an evasive and dynamic space animated by the tensions of knowledge production, absence, and presence. As Jeffrey Weeks argued in *RHR* in 1979, "The evolution of sexual meanings and identities that we have traced over the past hundred years or so are by no means complete."¹ Fragments of information float unfixed—historically unraveled—and we form archives when we pull the fragments into the orbit of efforts to know. Yet the business of knowing is unsteady, as scholars of sexuality and gender have amply demonstrated. Between the fraught and necessary practices of historicization, anachronism, interpretation, bias, and partial readings that propel historical scholarship, archival fragments fall in and out of the frame of an easily perceptible knowledge. Queer historical knowledge thus is evasive—like a coin dropped in the ocean and for which one grasps, reaching it only for it to slip away again, rolling deeper into the beyond. To say that the knowledge work of animating queer historical fragments is marked by such slipperiness is to underline how the archive negotiates the decomposition and recomposition of knowledge's materials. We pull and push at the fading paper, the fraying fabric, the photographs bleaching into their backgrounds, and manipulate technologies on their way to obsolescence, all as part of some suturing effort of one kind or another.

While archives are stages for the appearance of life, this life is always reconstituted, and the efforts of reconstitution that give the archive distinguishable form are always dramatized by the fragility not only of the documented life but of both the materials themselves and the investigative desire giving rise to their discovery.

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It is this compounding of fragility, of contingent expression, that yields “the labile real of the archive.”² Under the pressure of the investigator’s desire, fragments are drawn together to sing of such—or point to this desire’s misgivings. This tension of knowledge production in the archive—this dialectical drama of intimate tracing and historical unraveling—is what produces the archive as a compelling time and space for witnessing the mechanics of queer knowledge production.

This second issue represents an elaboration on the meditation on historical unravelings in the first issue of “Queering Archives.” Through the optics of *intimate tracings*—visualized both figuratively and metaphorically through the fragmented bodies in Mundo Meza’s 1979 pen-and-ink sketch, reproduced here on the cover—this issue provides a sustained engagement with notions of the intimate, with practices that constitute a tracing of the body, and with the amalgamation of these notions and practices in the joined context of sexuality, gender, and the archive. Insofar as the archive sponsors contests over historical meaning, interpretive and signifying practices of tracing and unraveling characterize the push and pull of knowledge work in the archive: the detective’s pursuit and the concomitant assembly, the loose threads and the exposed moments revealing that the whole does not hold together. Understanding “intimacy” as denoting the personal, the proximate, and the sexual, we mobilize *intimate tracings* here to draw together and triangulate a set of practices: experiences of being *in* the archive, methodological reflections on using archival materials, and efforts to map the contours of sexual life through archival sources. Our notion of “intimate tracings” alludes partly to “the very processes through which the bodies and desires of others [and of ourselves] come to be archived in the first place and thereby enter historicity.”³

The contributors to this issue reflect on archival knowledges by tracing their own scholarly narratives through archives. In various ways, the contributions delineate how archives have been mobilized to perform intimate labors and evince how intimacy itself has been naturalized as an affective relation with the archive. Indeed, the sentimental figuration of the archive as an exemplary intimate site—a space and time for secrets of the most personal and sexual kind—is necessarily inverted by the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community archives, which were partly founded on the premise of making private sexual histories public knowledge. With these histories in mind, this issue, taken as a whole, invites critical reflection on the twinned disciplining relationship between the intimate and the archival, fostering a frank tracing of the affordances and excesses of intimate knowledge and of the notion that the histories of sexuality and gender might be apprehended by recourse to the intimate knowledges of the archive.

This issue’s first section, “On Being in the Archive,” brings together critical reflections on the political, methodological, and theoretical significance of being *in* the archive, as both archival subject and visitor. In the opening essay, “Minor Threats,” Mimi Thi Nguyen, drawing on the queer experience of unexpectedly

confronting her own zines in the archive, grapples with the stakes of incorporating queer knowledge in mainstream archives. Through her reflections on being archived, and being invited into the institutional desire to archive “minor threats,” Nguyen fashions a queer archival politics of refusal, one that resists the imperative “to discipline objects or signs to perceive what is being lost in conventional fantasies of progress or perfectibility” (21).

Picking up this thread, Jack Jen Gieseeking reflects on being in the archive in an ethnographic sense in “Useful In/stability: The Dialectical Production of the Social and Spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives.” In one of this issue’s several pieces on the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA)—in many ways an exemplary queer archiving case study for contemporary theory and practice—Gieseeking meditates on refusal, disorder, and intelligibility through her fieldwork observations of the LHA as an archive that commits to “flux *in place*, creating a stable space from which to remain in that state of flux” (34). Gieseeking calls this “useful in/stability.” Self-consciously seeing herself in the archive within her ethnographic view—“the dyke detective at the dining room table” (35)—Gieseeking offers a useful segue into Jeanne Vaccaro’s essay, “‘Look More at the Camera than at Me’: Susan and the Transgender Archive,” which offers a critical discussion of how subjects are produced through archival documents. Studying documentary efforts to bestow archival legibility on a queer subject, Vaccaro examines documentary archival film’s reliance on “an aesthetics of intimacy [as a] manipulation of the proximate” (39). Closing this section, Robert Summers traces similar concerns through recollected field notes of visiting archives of a different order, in “Queer Archives, Queer Movements: The Visual and Bodily Archives of Vaginal Davis.” Here Summers reflects on the fragmented and queer archival styling of Vaginal Davis’s studios, performative arts, and body.

The essays in the issue’s second section, “Piecing Together Historical Traces,” explore different approaches to the renarration of queer historical life via the archival. As recollections of the sometimes illicit and offensive aspects of sexual history, these pieces raise a range of questions: What can one do with archival knowledge when that knowledge is gained in questionable ways? How is one to engage with a queer archive that prompts unease, disgust, or ethical uncertainties?

Kwame Holmes, focusing on the collecting practices of archivists and oral historians of the “black LGBT” subject in twentieth-century Washington, DC, exposes the archive as an architecture of state power that both collects and produces political realities. To this end, he asks how an act of gossip—an archive that resists recognition and institutionalization—might encourage us to reexamine projects that purport to recover and give voice to those “lost,” “hidden,” or “closeted” historical subjects? By juxtaposing the Frank Kameny papers housed in the Library of Congress, a CD-ROM with scanned PDFs of *Blacklight* (a Washington, DC, “publication for the Black gay community” that ran from 1979 to 1983), and largely unarchivable pieces of gossip, Holmes explores and critiques the pathways

through which black queer sexuality enters the public record. Robb Hernández's contribution, "Drawn from the Scraps: The Finding AIDS of Mundo Meza," pursues these concerns regarding the estranged relationship between archival practices and queer knowledge by offering a "queer detrital analysis" (71) of the legacy of Meza, a Tijuana-born, Los Angeles-based artist. Playing on "the double meaning of finding aids as both a technology for (re)search, retrieval, and description and a navigational system of AIDS cultural memory" (72), Hernández argues that queer history demands archival methods and practice that are attentive to this history's reliance on residue, fragments, and debris.

Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay examines nation building and the politics of historiography in Turkey through the archival practice of popular historian Reşad Ekrem Koçu, who dedicated much of his life to authoring the *İstanbul ansiklopedisi* (*The Encyclopedia of Istanbul*), a massive project he started in 1944 and continued until his death in 1975. Koçu's melancholic and eroticized relation with the Ottoman past is partly evidenced and retraced through his focus on the many "queer" subjects of empire: the male "lovers of facial beauty," same-sex prostitutes, androgynous boys, and transgender belly dancers, among others. Altınay notes, "In all these stories that Koçu loved to read, collect, and retell, there was an element of pleasure that informed (and was informed by) the history he constructed through his archival practice," but it is an archival practice that is ambiguous and can be put to conflicting nationalist, historiographical, and queer archival ends (98). Barry Reay's "Sex in the Archives: David Louis Bowie's New York Diaries, 1978–1993" also examines the archival practice of one individual, whose collection is housed at the New York Public Library. This contribution points to the fetishistic and ritualistic nature of archiving and collecting. At the level of archival description of the description of racialized and sexualized bodies within the diaries themselves, the stakes of representation become clear. Bowie's regular use of racialized terminology to describe his sex partners, for example, points to the problematics of archival representation and the essentializations used to classify bodies and desires. For Bowie, it seems, writing, documenting, and archiving came to be inextricable from sex. In this sense, archiving and sex become one and the same.

The section "Doing Archives" explicitly draws our attention to questions confronting contemporary queer archival practice. In "Body, Sex, Interface: Reckoning with Images at the Lesbian Herstory Archives," Cait McKinney returns us to the LHA through a meditation on the dilemmas for digitization and classification posed by an "unprocessed 'porn' box" and "vernacular photographs of nonfamous lesbians engaged in everyday contexts" in the archive's collection (117). Echoing Gieseke's analysis of the LHA as a site of "useful in/stability," McKinney provides an account of the archives as a "mediated space in transition," characterized by "its willfully provisional, improvisational, and self-critical approach to digitization" (126). As grassroots LGBT archives established in the 1970s age, they are confronted

by shifting technological contexts as well as by changing expectations and circumstances with regards to who can access things that have been preserved. Elaborating McKinney's reflections on digitization through a discussion of open access to oral histories, Elise Chenier, in her essay "Privacy Anxieties: Ethics versus Activism in Archiving Lesbian Oral History Online," navigates the ethical and political challenges—and opportunities—prompted by new technologies and the inheritance of queer archival materials collected in times so markedly different from the contemporary moment. Proposing emerging practices for archiving oral histories online, Chenier elucidates how "as collections shift to online environments, the politics of the personal must be rethought anew" (139).

Digitization, open access, and the ethical treatment of queer archival materials are, as our contributors make clear, concerns that go beyond narrow questions regarding good records management. Practices of preservation, circulation, exhibition, and access explicitly raise questions about archival confidence. Insofar as every instance of archival donation is an expression of faith in the archive, every moment of archival reception is a moment in which the archive puts its bona fides on the line: What does it mean to keep the faith in a queer archive? What faith is being kept, and what is queer archiving endeavoring to be faithful to? Recalling the a priori or natural significance routinely accorded to the intimate in the queer archive—personal sexual ephemera is gathered together in faith that its accumulation adds up to something—questions about the character of that faith seem inevitable. When tomorrow's archives collect our contemporary queer residue, what will their efforts need to look like in order for us to regard them as faithful? Can we even imagine that anything approaching a consensus could be assembled around such a question? Is faithfulness a virtue? Taking up this line in "Faithful Histories" and running it in a divergent direction, K. Mohrman and Anthony M. Petro raise some of the contestable theoretical, methodological, and political implications for identifying queer archives within Mormon and Catholic traditions. Observing the charged historical and signifying relationship between sexuality and religion, Mohrman, in "Queering the LDS Archive," maps out ways in which the intimate traces within the already queer Mormon archive reveal how "queerness was, and is, contingent on and complicit with dominant formations" (147). Petro, in "Beyond Accountability: The Queer Archive of Catholic Sexual Abuse," argues that BishopAccountability.org—a website that documents and publishes material related to sexual abuse in the United States—evokes queer readings that "augment the rhetorical and political power of exposé by moving from the scandal of cover-up toward the difficult stories beneath" (161). Together, these essays argue that queer histories and the fragmented histories of the Mormon and the Catholic Churches overlap in irrevocable ways.

The section "Queer Archival Generations" comprises interview-style encounters and conversations—between archivists, scholars, activists, and artists—who reflect on techniques and practices of queer archiving over time. K. J. Rawson inter-

views Ben Power Alwin, curator of the Sexual Minorities Archives (founded in Chicago and now maintained in Alwin's home in western Massachusetts) since 1977. The SMA's method of grassroots archiving, fund-raising, and open access contrasts with many institutional archives of LGBT sexuality and gender that universities and historical societies maintain. The interview explores the 1992 decision to shift the archive's early focus from "the history and literature that was being collected by lesbians, for lesbians" to a diverse array of *sexual minorities*, marking a radical departure very much informed by Alwin's transition from female to male (179). As Rawson points out, "as Ben lives in the collection, his transgender body has become an everyday part of the archive and the archive has become an everyday part of his body" (178–79).

The intersections of the body and the archive are enacted in ways that are simultaneously modeled on and resist the modes of archiving put forth by previous generations of queer collectors, archivists, activists, and scholars. In "'Queering the Trans* Family Album,'" Elspeth H. Brown and Sara Davidmann share their experiences researching, writing, documenting, and photographing queer and trans* communities (including cis and trans* partners of trans* men) in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. Their conversation stages some of the ethical issues at stake in the photographing and archiving of queer subjects, and both Brown and Davidmann pay close attention to how the subjects of their research and photography can maintain control over the ways that they come to be represented textually, visually, and aurally.

Riffing on the material histories of aging that now structure LGBT community archives in many parts of the world, this section draws attention to generational perspectives on the queer archiving project. The importance of archival engagements across generations for the generation of knowledge about sexuality, gender, life, and history is discussed in Peter Edelberg's interview with Karl Peder Pedersen, an archive activist involved with the Danish Gay and Lesbian Archive. As a reflection on the foundational relationship between the queer archive and the "source deficit" of queer history, this interview closes this section with a cautionary reflection on the historical fragility of the transfer of "archival material from generation to generation" (208). Archives, suggests Pedersen, are queers' children: in lieu of offspring, archives have been fashioned as agentic sites for passing on and handing down queer history.

Queer archives, thus rendered, not only reproduce memories of past queer life but stand in for hitherto impossible queer children. As an unruly set of progeny, what might the future hold for contemporary queer archives? "Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion"—the penultimate section of this issue—picks up this query in a broader conversation about the career of the queer archival, as both intellectual project and political practice. In particular, this discussion focuses on developments and limits within North American queer studies of the archive, which emerges as

a central object of analysis and is itself archived in a way within the terms of the discussion.

The roundtable discussion provides a sustained critical engagement with the profile of the queer archive as a site for the repetitive, radical defamiliarization of knowledge: "I have never really deviated from the formative impression Foucault gave," writes Tavia Nyong'o, "that what I should expect from the archive is the estrangement of myself and others and that I could call that estrangement queer" (216). As Regina Kunzel makes clear in her contribution, the queer estrangement offered by archival knowledge exposes the ways in which histories of sexuality and gender residing in archives exceed the interests of historical projects that are legibly "LGBT" in orientation. Bringing subjects who are "reluctant," "unpalatable," and "unheroic" to the front of the stage, queer views of the archive bring into focus what Kunzel calls "a history of disavowal—a kind of strategic disaffiliation that might result from the promptings of gay activists to conceive of homosexuality beyond the mental hospital and psychiatrist's office and by historians who often followed suit" (230).

In a similar vein, Anjali Arondekar maps out the enduring efficacy of a queer approach to archives that "reaches beyond the grammar of failure and loss." Arondekar reflects on "how the absence and/or presence of archives secures historical futurity, and what proceeds from an unsettling of that attachment, from a movement away from the recursive historical dialectic of fulfillment and impoverishment" (216). These reflections suggest that queer archiving as a project is marked by routine, habituated reflections on its own limitations. Christina B. Hanhardt in her contribution reflects on related concerns, asking "how the idealization of recovery in LGBT social movements and archival projects functions not only as a bringing into visibility but also as a normalizing aspiration to the healthy and self-realized self" (230). Hanhardt continues: "What analytics and methods, then, might the logic of nonrecovery offer?" (231).

The relations between the archive and lived experience are developed in Susan Stryker's remarks. Thinking queerly beside pathologized models of knowledge, Stryker, following feminist and postcolonial critics and activists, explores how the queer archival fuses together "the archives and the body . . . as commensurable material expressions of assembled knowledges" (212). Through this focus on particular instances of knowledge being put together—certain bodies and archives at specific points in time and place—queer engagements with the archive incessantly recall the limits of these endeavors as well as those of their orienting institution or collection. This self-consciousness triggers a reflection on the politics of memory work and preservation so crucial to discussions of the queer archive. Ann Cvetkovich, for example, asserts that "indigenous frameworks that question notions of open access or the paper document and how the archive is embedded in property, ownership, and land claims have important implications for queer archives. The archival

turn ultimately requires the thorough rethinking of what counts as knowledge and method. Approaching the land as living archive, transforming schools, and embracing the digital, indigenous resurgence is actively creating new cultures from the archive rather than mourning past violence or lost traditions.”

By foregrounding, carrying, or conveying people’s gendered, desiring bodies, queer archival projects pulse, as bodies do. They cruise and seduce and are caressed and taken. They are evidentiary traces of queer desire and life, and they mark a determination—a rubbery one that changes from time to time and case to case—at that moment to give up something intimate that is somehow traceable. And the moment of archival revelation is always a risk, though the endurance of queer archiving endeavors speaks to risk’s rewards. As Juana María Rodríguez suggests, this risk is especially apparent to communities of color, “so often under attack, marked as a collective hot mess of excessive, irrational, unorganized bodies and behavior.” Despite this, Rodríguez demonstrates how the queer archiving project has assembled knowledges that exceed and evade these disciplinary injunctions. Recalling the “queers and queens” she wrote about in her first book, Rodríguez reflects on their desire “to leave a beautiful trace” and the success of such which is monumentalized in their archival legacy.

Given the inspirational role that Joan Nestle has played for queer archivists and scholars, it is fitting that the closing contribution comes from her. This collection opened with “a queer love song” by Nguyen to queer archival fragments “that render the past in the present as a wish or a wanting for a *something more*” (12). In her coda, Nestle traces back and forth an intimate public history of being in the archives, from living with the LHA in her Upper West Side apartment in the 1970s to becoming one of what she calls “the archived”:

We asked no permissions to announce our desires for change; we had no training except the lessons of life based on racial, gender, and class hierarchies, but living on the borders of the acceptable had shown me the richness of difference, the comradeship of the obscene. It was always the primacy of the endangered body and then the question, how do you imagine a grassroots site of appreciation for the shamed and the derided, for the defiant and the lustful? (236)

Four decades after cofounding the LHA, Nestle, along with her contemporaries, now surveys a field in which queer, LGBT, and feminist archiving has become an expanded enterprise, reaching deep into new social technologies and hitherto hostile institutional settings. As Cvetkovich argues in this issue, in scholarship and in practice, there is now “a queer archives movement with tremendous vitality” (219). Is this the future Nestle and her peers imagined when they launched endeavors like the LHA in the early 1970s? Do they see their efforts then in the face of things that have since come to pass? Are words like *legacy* and *inheritance*

useful to account for these queer labors—or might the histories of queer archives suggest that we need some other vocabulary or model of relation? As a valentine to queer archives of the future, Nestle offers counsel, noting that “queer archives of the future perhaps will give evidence that it is harder to live with a history than without one” and calling for the ongoing vitality of “the archiving of dissent,” an endeavor that, among other things, promises “to keep alive the markings of the disappeared” (241–42).

Dim markings, ravelings of history, intimate tracings: these are collateral relations within the shared heritage of queer history. The futures they are fashioning, as intimated by this issue’s contributors, are reworking how we think of the queer and the archive and it is this situation of “estrangement,” as Nyong’o argues, that continues to recommend the queer archive as a generative perspective for politics, practice, and scholarship.

The contributions to this volume, and its predecessor (“Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings”), provide a wide range of diverse perspectives on archives, occasionally making contentious claims which question the limits of queer archives and illustrate the paradoxical and contested ways that “evidence” itself functions and is made to function. Whether we are looking at art, photography, cultural ephemera, criminal allegations, diaries, eroticized (and exoticized) textual depictions of racialized bodies, or other forms of representation, contributions to this issue illustrate some of the precarious ways in which the archival is mobilized to generate knowledge. They are offered here as efforts that underline how evidence in all its forms is open to interpretation and how archival knowledge is framed by the specific interrogative contexts that produce and interpret evidence in the first place. Aspects of these contributions challenge our own recognition of the queer and the archival. They are not offered as a portrait for what a prescriptive queer or queering of the archive might look like but, instead, as a set of provocations designed to nourish the field by sponsoring debate and stimulating alternate readings.

The queer relationships between evidence, imagination, and estrangement are central to any queer archival endeavor. As María Elena Martínez wrote in the first issue of “Queering Archives,” when doing queer archival and historical work, “The imagination can be explicitly summoned, recognized, and valued as a source and resource, and in performance the body can function as a kind of archive such as when acting, singing, or dancing serves to access and transmit knowledge.”⁴ Bodies write, read, act, feel, and produce queer archival knowledges, and María Elena Martínez’s creative and smart work is evidence of the processes of queering archives that we envision here. We miss her and the queer archival scholarship and methodologies she embodies. Queering archives would not have been the same without her. We dedicate this issue to her.

—Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici

Notes

We are very grateful for all of the work done by our reviewers and those at *Radical History Review* and Duke University Press who contributed to the production of the two volumes of *Queering Archives*.

1. Jeffrey Weeks, "Movements of Affirmation: Sexual Meanings and Homosexual Identities," *Radical History Review*, no. 20 (1979): 178.
2. Daniel Marshall, "Queer Breeding: Historicising Popular Culture, Homosexuality, and Informal Sex Education," *Sex Education* 13, no. 5 (2013): 601.
3. Zeb Tortorici, "Visceral Archives of the Body: Consuming the Dead, Digesting the Divine," *GLQ* 20, no. 4 (2014): 408.
4. María Elena Martínez, "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics," *Radical History Review* 168 (2014): 168.