

## Introduction

In early 2009, Jenna Freedman, one of the activist librarians I met during the course of researching this book, invited me to attend a conference at Columbia University on the subject of “archiving women.”<sup>1</sup> Freedman, the founder of the Barnard Zine Library and a speaker at the conference, used the opportunity to discuss the development of the collection she established in 2003 and to explore some challenges she has since faced while collecting, cataloging, and preserving highly ephemeral, self-published feminist and queer documents for both an open stacks collection and an archive. Regularly asked to deliver talks at academic conferences and activist forums, Freedman spoke as she always does, from her standpoint as a reference librarian and “accidental archivist.”<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that she is well known among feminist and queer librarians, archivists, and academics for founding and overseeing a major collection of contemporary feminist documents and for her related activism and scholarship, Freedman seemed surprisingly out of place at this gathering in the Faculty Room at Columbia University’s Low Library. In addition to being the only frontline librarian invited to speak, she was one of the only presenters who also chose to foreground her direct connection to community-based and

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activist collections. Freedman's seemingly token presence at the conference was especially notable, however, because the event had been promoted as a "conference bringing together scholars and archivists" and exploring questions directly related to activist archiving, including "How have feminist archival practices engendered new historical narratives and new political agents?"

Some participants at the conference shared the perception that the structure of the panels and the prevailing discussions had inadvertently reinforced the idea that archives and special collections exist simply to *serve* scholars' research mandates or to house scholars' own papers but not necessarily to generate and promote the circulation of ideas, cultural interventions, and activism in the present. Following a report about the symposium on her Lower East Side Librarian blog, where Freedman admitted, "I'm not saying that the conveners deliberately dissed practitioners, but I did feel like an afterthought . . .,"<sup>3</sup> the debate about the conference continued. Kelly Wooten, a collections development librarian at Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, remarked, "Not that we're the only people qualified to talk about these things, but I think we (women's history archivists) should have been part of the conversation."<sup>4</sup> Emily Drabinski, an instructional librarian at Long Island University and librarian-scholar, agreed, emphasizing that the exclusion of frontline librarians and archivists placed practitioners' contributions to theorizing on the archive under erasure.<sup>5</sup>

Many years after the "archival turn" in the humanities and social sciences has made it commonplace to understand the archive as something that is by no means bound by its traditional definition as a repository for documents,<sup>6</sup> I was surprised to discover that for most of the presenters, "archiving women" appeared to have less to do with women archiving than with women being archived. In other words, the emphasis appeared to be on understanding women as potential subjects rather than as central agents of the archive. As someone who carries out research in and on the subject of archives and special collections, however, the Archiving Women symposium and its

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fallout also clarified several things I had been observing about feminist archives over the past decade, and these observations form the basis of this book.<sup>7</sup>

For a younger generation of feminists, the archive is not necessarily either a destination or an impenetrable barrier to be breached, but rather a site and practice integral to knowledge making, cultural production, and activism. The archive is where academic and activist work frequently converge. Indeed, the creation of archives has become integral to how knowledges are produced and legitimized and how feminist activists, artists, and scholars make their voices audible. Rather than a destination for knowledges already produced or a place to recover histories and ideas placed under erasure, the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins. The archive, however, is also where a younger generation of feminists have most visibly come to terms with their resentment toward second wave feminists—an effect of feeling, as Astrid Henry observes, that “the second wave already lived through all the big battles, making us merely the beneficiaries of their efforts.”<sup>8</sup> It is where they often appear to be more preoccupied with preserving a previous generation’s achievements than running roughshod over their histories of struggle. Throughout this book, I emphasize that archives and archiving hold specific significance for feminists born since the late 1960s because their knowledge and cultural production have become—by necessity—deeply entangled in the archive.

*The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* explores the centrality of the archive and practices of archiving in the activism, cultural production, and scholarship of feminists born during and after the rise of the second wave feminist movement. While the book builds on other queer and feminist readings of the archive,<sup>9</sup> it is unique in both its specific focus on feminist archives and its emphasis on understanding these spaces as repositories of not only *affect* but also *order*. For this reason, although I pay considerable attention to the history and influence of eclectic community-based collections,<sup>10</sup> the

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case studies at the center of this book examine three institutionally based archives and special collections: the zine collections housed in the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University's David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library; the Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University's Fales Library and Special Collections; and the Barnard Zine Library at the Barnard College Library.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, I examine how these collections, each established by activist archivists and librarians since 2000, *resituate* feminist knowledges and cultural production in ways that directly respond to contemporary internal and external struggles. As this book emphasizes, rather than approach the archive as a site of preservation (a place to house traces of the *past*), feminist scholars, cultural workers, librarians, and archivists born during and after the rise of the second wave feminist movement are seizing the archive as an apparatus to legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious *present*.

### Activist Archives in a Neoliberal Era

By now, we can say with some certainty that the archival turn has proven to be a much longer preoccupation than many other recent "turns" in cultural theory. Long after the Foucault effect in the late 1980s to early 1990s, which offered a theoretical basis for rethinking both history and the archive, and the subsequent publication of Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive* and *Archive Fever* in 1995, which inspired countless publications, conferences, and debates about archives and archiving across disciplines, the archive continues to attract the attention of scholars, artists, and activists. Variouslly adopted as a theory, curatorial trope, poetic form, subject of inquiry, and site of research, the archive's appeal shows few signs of waning. But what has been and continues to be the archive's draw as a subject of inquiry, site of research, and critical practice? More important, to what extent might the archival turn be relevant to understanding the contemporary terrain of politics and identity?

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Contemporary theorizing on the archive and even much of the recent research carried out in archives suggests that the archival turn has been motivated by anything but a desire to unequivocally recover the past. Derrida's *Archive Fever* is a book about time, memory, and technology but not necessarily a book about history. As historian Carolyn Steedman wryly observes, "In Derrida's description, the *arkhe*—the archive—appears to represent the *now* of whatever kind of power is being exercised, anywhere, in any place or time."<sup>12</sup> Ann Stoler's theorizing on archives is about the "grids of intelligibility" or systems of knowledge that produced particular regimes of truth under colonial rule. In this respect, her turn to the archive is as much a turn to philosophy and, more specifically, epistemology as it is a turn to history. Ann Cvetkovich's theorizing on the archive is first and foremost about trauma and desire and, by extension, survival; moreover, she admits, where the archive is thus deconstructed, the quest for history can at best be understood as "a psychic need."<sup>13</sup> The archive appears in all three of these remarkably different texts not as a place to recover the past but rather as a way to engage with some of the legacies, epistemes, and traumas pressing down on the present. To understand the archive's appeal to cultural theorists, artists, and activists at this particular historical moment, we must first consider what sort of *present* we occupy.

While one might speculate, as I have done elsewhere, that the timing of the archival turn is primarily related to the digital turn (a technological and epistemological shift that brought the concept and experience of archives into our everyday lives<sup>14</sup>), here I suggest that the archival turn in the mid 1990s may also be understood as an effective response to the far-reaching economic and political impacts of another turn—the turn to neoliberalism. Following David Harvey, I maintain that neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that propose "human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty,

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unencumbered markets, and free trade” and which thereby place the state itself in a position where its primary function becomes protecting such assumed freedoms and rights.<sup>15</sup> My argument regarding the archival turn and neoliberalism runs along two lines. First, I maintain that neoliberal restructuring profoundly eroded our sense of political agency, which compelled us to look for new ways of manipulating the present through a turn to the past. Second, I argue that, as neoliberal restructuring rendered anti-economic endeavors increasingly untenable, the archive was adopted as a viable and even necessary means to legitimize forms of knowledge and cultural production in the present. Thus, the turn to neoliberalism and the turn to the archive can be understood as connected along both conceptual and material grounds, and, as I demonstrate in this chapter and throughout this book, this connection may be especially apparent in the context of contemporary feminist scholarship, cultural production, and activism.

Although it is always difficult to attempt to define one’s own era from within, it may be at least as difficult to ignore the fact that since the 1980s, our *present* has been deeply and irreparably shaped by neoliberalism. If neoliberalism is difficult to ignore, it is because its reach is irrefutably expansive. Little has been left untouched by neoliberalism, which has not only affected our economic and political conditions and consequently the structure of our everyday lives but has also altered our conceptions and experiences of time, history, and, most critically, social agency. On this basis, however, we can also begin to trace the relationship between the neoliberal and the archival turn. If we have become more interested in the archive both as subject of inquiry and creative locus for activism and art during the past two decades, then such interest is owing in part to the archive’s ability to restore to us what is routinely taken away under neoliberalism—not history itself but rather the ability to understand the conditions of our everyday lives longitudinally and, more important, the conviction that we might, once again, be *agents* of change in time and history. Most disturbing

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about neoliberalism, after all, is not what it makes possible but rather what it apparently makes impossible. As Henry Giroux observes, “Within the discourse of neoliberalism that has taken hold of the public imagination, there is no way of talking about what is fundamental to civic life, critical citizenship, and a substantive democracy. Neoliberalism offers no critical vocabulary for speaking about political or social transformation as a democratic project. Nor is there a language for either the ideal of public commitment or the notion of a social agency capable of challenging the basic assumptions of corporate ideology as well as its social consequences.”<sup>16</sup>

As contemporary theorizing on the archive demonstrates, archives do many things, but they do *not* necessarily stage encounters with the past. Following Foucault’s premise that the archive not be understood as something that “safeguards” or “preserves” past statements—not be understood as something that “collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more”<sup>17</sup>—contemporary theorizing on the archive has emphasized the archive’s status as a historiographic rather than a preservationist technology. Indeed, precisely such a premise prepared us for Derrida’s claim that “archivization produces as much as it records the event.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than simply reflecting a desire to understand the past, the current archival turn reflects a desire to take control of the present through a reorientation to the past, and in this sense the archival turn under neoliberalism may be understood as a realization of what Wendy Brown describes as “genealogical politics.”

Brown summarizes Foucault’s reformulation of Nietzsche’s genealogy as follows: “Through its inquiry into the ‘past of the present,’ in which the categories constitutive of the present are themselves rendered historical, genealogy exposes the power of the terms by which we live; it does violence to their ordinary ordering and situation, and hence to their givenness.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, genealogy first and foremost defamiliarizes the very assumed order of things. For example, to the extent that categories (for example, identity categories) and conditions

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(for example, the assumed necessity of a forty-hour work week or the assumed normalcy of the two-parent heterosexual family) become naturalized over time, genealogy reveals that such things are by no means historical norms and thereby not uncontested features of our everyday lives. In this way, genealogy is not only a historical methodology but also a powerful political intervention into the present. With a deep commitment to defamiliarizing all we have come to take for granted, genealogy is a way to change the present through a turn to the past. Genealogy, after all, is *not* about the quest for origins but rather about the tracing of accidents, disparities, conflicts, and haphazard conditions, and this, Brown emphasizes, is how possibilities are pried open by genealogy: “If everything about us is the effect of historical accident rather than will or design, then we are paradoxically, both more severely historical and also more plastic than we might otherwise seem. We are more sedimented by history, but also more capable of intervening in our histories.”<sup>20</sup> In short, genealogy “opens possibilities through which various futures might be pursued” and thereby crucially “*reduces the political need for progressive history as the only source of movement away from the present.*”<sup>21</sup> And this is one of the notable recurring themes of this book. What appears to make archives and archiving compelling to so many feminist activists who came of age after the crest of the second wave feminist movement is the fact that the archive, in a myriad of ways, opens up the possibility of being in time and in history differently.

That such a reorientation to history might be especially appealing to the displaced and disenchanting neoliberal subject is not surprising. Where history has been pushed into the past and the future supplanted by the sheer demands of the present, what could be more hopeful than the realization that time is not simply marching forward and that we might imagine a way outside our oppressive present *through* a radical repudiation of “progress”? This, I maintain, may also account for the archival turn in cultural theory, art, and activism since the early 1990s.



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Despite their alleged purpose, archives are notoriously difficult, disorderly, impenetrable spaces, prone to produce multiple and conflicting narratives. “Gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary,”<sup>22</sup> the archive is where genealogy is arguably most visible and most frequently enacted. A turn toward the archive is not a turn toward the past but rather an essential way of understanding and imagining other ways to live in the present. In short, to the extent that archives render visible the “past of the present,” they represent an integral step toward realizing a genealogical politics. As I emphasize throughout this book, this step may hold specific relevance for imagining a queer feminist politic at this particular political moment. As Elizabeth Freeman observes, women born during and after the rise of the second wave feminist movement came of age in the “afterlife of sixties” and are thereby “the successors to mass movements whose most radical elements were often tamed, crushed, or detoured into individualistic projects as they were disseminated through the mainstream media.”<sup>23</sup> It follows that our “cultural debris” includes these “incomplete, partial or otherwise failed transformations of the social field.”<sup>24</sup> Insofar as these failed transformations of the social field, however, can be reconfigured as spaces where political possibilities are made visible, even palpable, we affirm Brown’s belief in the efficacy of a politics that turns to the past to unfix the terms of the present political situation. The archival turn under neoliberalism should not be primarily read as a desire to escape the present but rather as an attempt to regain agency in an era when the ability to collectively imagine and enact other ways of being in the world has become deeply eroded.

### Feminist Cultural Production since 1990

As neoliberalism altered our relationship to time and history, the archive alternatively presented itself as a space of possibility—a way to think beyond the constraints of “progress” imposed by the neoliberal mindset. Indeed, although this study focuses primarily on feminist archives, archives have been taken up by

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a wide range of activist groups. Exemplary interventions range from the well-funded and high-profile ACT UP/NY Archives at the New York Public Library (and related ACT UP Oral History Project)<sup>25</sup> to far more DIY (do it yourself) initiatives, such as the Lower East Side Squatter and Homesteaders Archives that was started by a group of squatters and housing activists in a longstanding squat and with the support of a very modest grant of \$1,845 from the Documentary Heritage Program.<sup>26</sup> As I maintain throughout this book, at least in the context of contemporary feminism, the relationship between neoliberalism and the archival turn may, however, also be accounted for on a more material level. Since the mid 1990s, the archive has presented itself not only as a conceptual space in which to rethink time, history, and progress against the grain of dominant ideologies but also as an apparatus through which to continue making and *legitimizing* forms of knowledge and cultural production that neoliberal restructuring otherwise renders untenable.

Above all, neoliberalism is committed to “liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms” and upholding “the quality and integrity of money.”<sup>27</sup> In a state where such objectives trump all other social and political goals, initiatives driven by anti-economic mandates (for example, collective projects privileging the production and dissemination of goods over profit-making) are naturally vulnerable. For this reason, it is by no means surprising that the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s was accompanied by a sharp decline in feminist cultural production in the 1990s. As Barbara Godard observes, the explicitly anti-economic mandate of feminist cultural initiatives made such initiatives especially vulnerable to neoliberalism’s strategy of “accumulation through dispossession.”<sup>28</sup> Godard explains: “disavowal of profit also poses a potential for recuperation since, performed ever at a loss, women’s altruistic labour is open to exploitation and further devaluation.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, already committed to giving it away for free, the feminist culture sector was an easy target as the impact of neoliberal restructuring began to take its toll. Here, feminist publishing offers an especially illustrative example of

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neoliberalism's impact on both cultural and knowledge production. With neither overdetermining the impact of neoliberalism on the second wave feminist culture sector nor falsely implying that second wave feminist publishing necessarily disappeared in the early to mid 1990s, there is little doubt that from the late 1980s to mid 1990s, the feminist publishing industry,<sup>30</sup> which had been growing since the late 1960s, went through a sudden and sharp decline from which it has never recovered. Indeed, in 1989, Barbara Grier, in a letter announcing that there would be no Women in Print Conference that year, was still optimistic enough to send out a letter to her "Sister Publishers" predicting that "in five years we can probably plug the drain and make it financially, morally, spiritually, and logistically foolish beyond our comprehension for any woman writing in all our fields to go to other than a woman-owned publishing company or, at the very least, a small press rather than the trade press."<sup>31</sup> What Grier and her "sister publishers" could not have predicted in 1989 was that within five years most of the feminist publishers on the Women in Print mailing list would no longer exist, no longer exist as stand-alone publishers, or be struggling to survive in a radically transformed print economy. Despite the decline of the second wave feminist publishing industry in the 1990s, feminist cultural workers, scholars, and activists continued to publish, distribute, and legitimize their work throughout the decade and into the new millennium. The paradoxical "revival" of feminist publishing during its decline, I maintain, was at least partially carried out in and through the archive. To understand how the archive was used to revive feminist publishing in the 1990s, it is first necessary to consider the conditions underlying the second wave feminist publishing industry's decline in more detail.

In *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, Simone Murray presents feminist publishing as "the most consistently successful of women's interventions into media production since the 1960s."<sup>32</sup> Since 1990, however, most feminist publishing houses in North America and around the world have either collapsed or become imprints

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of larger, mainstream (that is, not “women owned”) publishing houses.<sup>33</sup> It is ironic that the industry’s initial grounds for expansion in the 1970s and 1980s also proved to be the primary reason for its rapid demise. The proliferation of feminist publishing houses during the early years of the women’s liberation movement was largely driven by “a deeply ingrained suspicion of the multinational corporate publishing sector,” which assumed that “women, carrying little policy-making weight in the managerial echelons of corporate publishing, risked having their writing co-opted and subsequently, dismissed as commercially passé as soon as the feminist ‘trend’ was deemed to have peaked.”<sup>34</sup> To this end, “radical women’s presses were characterized by non-hierarchical, collectivist structures, an emphasis on political engagement over profit generation, and a heightened self-consciousness of their position *vis-à-vis* the corporate mainstream.”<sup>35</sup> The feminist publishing movement was not only committed to controlling who was involved in the production and distribution of texts; at least in the case of radical feminist publishing, there was a strong belief that cultural production must transform both the *process* and the *product*. As Trysh Travis’s research on the “women in print” movement emphasizes, “The movement’s largest goals were nothing short of revolutionary: it aimed to capture women’s experiences and insights in durable—even beautiful—printed forms through a communications network free from patriarchal and capitalist control.”<sup>36</sup> Describing second wave feminist printers and publishers as “book historians of the present,” Travis further emphasizes the extent to which “women in print” activists took it upon themselves to analyze “late twentieth-century publishing institutions, the political economy that supported them, and the identitarian norms—in this case, norms of gender and sexuality—that inflected their workings.”<sup>37</sup> The ability to understand the capitalist and patriarchal underpinnings of the book trade were integral to the feminist publishing industry’s success in establishing, however briefly, an alternative print culture in the name of the

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women's movement. Such analysis, however, would ultimately prove inadequate in the face of neoliberal restructuring in the 1990s and beyond.

While at least some of the presses, publications, and distribution networks that were established in the 1970s to 1980s had understandably outgrown their mandates by the 1990s, many others were unable to survive the massive reorganization of the publishing industry and book trade that neoliberal restructuring put into motion. With specific reference to the United Kingdom, Murray observes, "throughout the 1980s and 1990s, British feminist publishers suffered under the economic rationalist cuts to public spending of the Thatcher, Major, and later, Blair, governments and were forced to seek alternative sources of funding in the wake of these governments' abolition or restructuring of grants-awarding bodies."<sup>38</sup> While public funding declined or entirely disappeared in most nations with extensive feminist publishing networks, including the UK, United States, Canada, and Australia, new obstacles also appeared in the book industry. Independent feminist bookstores—the primary distribution hub for feminist publishers—struggled to compete with the rise of "big box" book retailers, many with surprisingly large but not necessarily diverse Women's Studies, Queer Theory, and LGBT sections. At the same time, many small presses struggled to keep up with the demands these large retailers notoriously place on small presses to produce large print runs in order to fill orders for books that they often have little interest in either promoting or selling.<sup>39</sup> In this climate, the core mandates of feminist presses grew evermore out of touch with the reality of cultural production. Murray concludes that "the feminist priorities of political engagement, staff consciousness-raising, skills-sharing and the development of theoretical analysis pulled in the opposite direction from the quick decision-making, editorial individualism and financial opportunism that constitute prerequisites for survival in the competitive publishing realm."<sup>40</sup>

Surveying what remains of the feminist book industry today, there is little doubt that the industry was one of the many

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casualties of neoliberal restructuring. In short, as the space for imagining viable alternatives to profit-driven endeavors narrowed, cultural enterprises run on sweat equity and often at a deficit, such as feminist presses, became increasingly unimaginable. Yet, throughout the 1990s, as established venues to circulate feminist work were continuously slipping away, a new generation of feminist cultural workers and scholars *continued* to find ways to publish, disseminate, and even authorize their writing. The existence of feminist zine collections at Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture and the Barnard College Library (two of the three archives and special collections featured in this book) reveal the scope and range of the feminist publishing movement that emerged as the second wave "women in print" movement went into decline. If publishing itself served as the central authorizing mechanism for second wave feminists, however, for a new generation of feminists, publishing, which would primarily take the form of "self-publishing," proved inadequate on its own. Thus, despite the fact that feminist zine producers, for example, shared much in common with their second wave counterparts<sup>41</sup>—most notably, an anti-economic mandate and commitment to revolutionizing cultural production at the level of process and product—their writing initially eluded recognition both outside and inside the feminist movement.<sup>42</sup> What is now apparent is that neither the decline of the small press and the broader feminist culture sector in the early 1990s nor the initial lack of recognition from their feminist elders prevented these women from finding ways to legitimize their voices and gain symbolic currency. In fact, in the long run, their strategy may prove even more enduring than their feminist foremothers' deployment of print-based economies.

If feminist zines and other self-published and self-produced forms of feminist cultural production from the 1990s have not only survived but also gained legitimacy as works of literature, art, and knowledge, it is to the extent that these works, produced outside the framework of an established culture industry,

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rapidly migrated to archives and special collections. The inception of Riot Grrrl is most often dated to 1990. By the late 1990s, Sarah Dyer was in negotiations with archivists at Duke University about the possibility of donating thousands of zines, many directly linked to the Riot Grrrl movement, to the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, a center housed in their rare book and manuscript library. Dyer's subsequent donation in 2000 represented only the first of many donations to Duke University. As this book explores, however, in the early years of the new millennium, major collections of feminist documents and self-published materials were established at university libraries across North America.

Although professional archivists understandably worry about the increasingly hazy distinction between the terms "collection," "library," and "archive,"<sup>43</sup> to label a personal collection an "archive" and, more significantly, to place a personal collection in an established archive remains a powerful authorizing act and *not* because either act is necessarily committed to preservation. When Foucault refers to the archive in *The Order of Things*, it is first and foremost as a "system" invested with the power to "establish statements as events . . . and things."<sup>44</sup> For Foucault, the archive is an authorizing apparatus—a structure that determines which statements can and do *act* in and upon the world. As emphasized throughout this book, precisely the recognition of the archive as discursive structure has driven the archival turn in contemporary feminist activism, scholarship, and cultural production. For a generation or two of women born during and following the rise of the second wave feminist movement, inaugurating private and semipublic collections as archives and donating them to established public and university archives and special collections is central to how they legitimize their voices in the public sphere. In this sense, archives serve the same function served by a previous generation's alternative print economy. The archive, in this respect, arguably strengthens contemporary feminism not only as a space of possibility to the extent that it is a scene for the realization of a genealogical

politics but also, more practically, as a necessary and effective authorizing apparatus in an economy that is hostile to the production and circulation of works produced quite literally at the cost of profit.

### Archival Order, Dirty Methods

As emphasized above, the archival turn in contemporary feminism is neither simply part of a larger turn to the archive in cultural theorizing and art nor simply the result of a longing for the past. Thus, understanding the archival turn in contemporary feminism demands an analysis that is as attentive to history as it is to the present economic and political terrain. As a result, this book is informed by empirical research (both archival and ethnographic) and by theoretical interrogations of these research traditions. Before further elaborating on my research methodology, however, it is important to at least briefly consider how my relationship to the communities and materials at the center of this book also shaped its development.

*The Archival Turn in Feminism* did not begin as the result of a research decision but rather as the result of an accident. Because I have been at least peripherally linked to the communities at the center of this book and, more important, because somewhere along the line I chose to collect the debris of these communities, I was eventually forced to do something with the ephemera accumulating around me. The ephemera in question, which included Riot Grrrl zines and LPs, lesbian feminist porn magazines, radical feminist books and newspapers, and a nearly complete print run of the *Lesbian Ladder* (items variously acquired through my research, as “donations” from older colleagues, or through successful bids on eBay), had become a burden. Too copious to move from place to place but too valuable to toss away, I turned to the archive for a practical solution. When I began to look for an appropriate institutional home for my personal collection I discovered that my desire to collect the material traces of my own generation of feminists alongside an earlier generation’s ephemeral legacies, as well as



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my desire to resituate my personal archive in an institutional context, was by no means unique. In essence, this book began with a desire to off-load the history accumulating around me (or at least to off-load its material traces), but, in my bid to do away with history, I found myself reoriented to the past.

What I have produced here, of course, is not a history. If it is anything that resembles history, then at best it is what Brown describes as “dirty history”—a history that will never be at home among “histories of reason, meaning, or higher purposes” but only among “histories of varied and protean orders of subjection.”<sup>45</sup> In short, this book’s only stake in history is in exposing how it is made and to what ends. For all these reasons, my approach is anything but orthodox. Although this book is primarily comprised of three “case studies” on archives, my work in these archives was approached not as a historian but, more precisely, as an ethnographer and cultural theorist with an interest in the production, circulation, and use of texts as well as the production and writing of histories. Like my history, then, my methodology is also a bit “dirty” or perhaps simply queer. As Judith Halberstam observes, this is by no means unique in the realm of queer methodology. Queer researchers, after all, have a tendency to display “a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods.”<sup>46</sup> Whether dirty or queer, “methodological disloyalty” is an apt way to summarize my approach here. Among other methods, this book is informed by participant observations carried out in archives and special collections where I was simultaneously engaged in archival research. This book is also informed by interviews with some of the archivists, librarians, researchers, and donors I met or discovered as a result of my archival research. Finally, and more important, this book is informed by overlapping and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of history that take as their starting points a deep skepticism about history’s claim to truth and transcendence. Yet, however impure or dirty my methods may be here, this book does build on at least two established research traditions. *The Archival Turn in Feminism* extends a tradition of feminist book

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and publishing history research, most often associated with the groundbreaking work of Janice Radway in the early 1980s, which brings ethnographic approaches to bear on the study of texts and textual communities.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, this study is part of a more recent and growing tendency among historians, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars to bring ethnographic methods to bear on the study of archives to “denaturalize the presumptive boundaries of official archive space.”<sup>48</sup>

If I am guilty of deploying dirty or queer methods in the creation of this book, however, then I am equally guilty of approaching the subject of archives and special collections as a cultural theorist. As my archivist and librarian colleagues are quick to point out, under the archival turn, the concept of the archive has all but lost its specificity. Like many cultural theorists interested in archives, I admit that I am partially responsible for the archive’s semantic drift. Throughout the past decade, I have published articles and presented papers that apply the term archive to collections as varied as recipe boxes and databases. As someone who is also frequently called upon to review articles on the subject of archives, I have assessed articles that apply the concept of the archive to even more varied subjects—the most absurd of which was recycled laundromat water. As John Ridener rightly observes, for archivists, “A mixed response to postmodern criticism is logical since much of postmodernism’s viability as an overarching philosophy is debatable.”<sup>49</sup> Although my own approach to the subject of archives is deeply informed by cultural theory, it is also deeply informed by my dialogues and collaborations with feminist archivists and special collections librarians, many of whom feature in this book. On this account, *The Archival Turn in Feminism* departs from many other books on the archive originating in Cultural Studies and its related fields. In *An Archive of Feelings*, for example, Cvetkovich uses the term “archive” in reference to community-based collections, such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives, but primarily uses the term more loosely in reference to an entire spectrum of broadly conceived collections, including those found in films

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(for example, Cheryl Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman*) and even describes her own book as one structured as "an archive."<sup>50</sup> In *In A Queer Time & Place*, Halberstam calls on queer activists and scholars to reimagine the archive as a sort of "floating signifier" and in the process casts the archive's net wide enough to include just about any form of accumulation. At the same time, Halberstam maintains that the archive must exceed its current definition as a repository of documents and be understood as "a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record."<sup>51</sup> In Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*, the archive is recast as something that is by no means more enduring or permanent than the repertoire of lived experience and thereby as something no longer bound by its status as a repository of concrete materials. On many levels, my own theorizing on archives is informed by and supports the approach exemplified by Cvetkovich, Halberstam, Taylor, and other cultural theorists who have taken up the archive as a subject of inquiry over the past decade. Indeed, to the extent that queer and feminist archives have by necessity so often developed outside or on the edges of established archival spaces, including those associated with the state and the university, and frequently developed in response to emotional rather than strictly intellectual needs,<sup>52</sup> to limit my discussion of archives to those that meet the strictest archival standards would be to foreclose the possibility of fully investigating how feminist archives have taken shape. That said, I maintain that, if cultural theorists wish to investigate the archive, it is by no means fruitful to simply ignore professional definitions and standards concerning the archive.

Thus, while my approach is by no means entirely uncontaminated by cultural theory's "loose" nomenclature, which has at times implied that the archive refers simply to "traces of the past collected either intentionally or haphazardly as 'evidence,'"<sup>53</sup> I have attempted to use the terms "archive" and "special collection" as faithfully as possible. My audience, after all, includes cultural theorists, specifically those working in and across the

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fields of Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Book and Publishing History, and Gender and Sexuality Studies, as well as professional archivists and librarians. Therefore, while I do not pretend to offer practical advice to those charged with the extraordinary challenge of collecting and preserving documents in established archives and special collections, I am committed to offering insights that may be at least relevant to these frontline workers in their attempt to think through the broader political and cultural implications of their day-to-day labor. Although scholars frequently depict libraries, special collections, and archives as arbitrary and aleatory spaces where materials simply surface, such dismissive assumptions erase the complex work of professional librarians and archivists. Indeed, as Freedman argues, materials don't "simply 'surface'—it's not random or chaotic—librarians and archivists work really hard to help that stuff get out there," and this is precisely where activism enters their profession. As such, it is also my hope that this book might prompt my own colleagues, who are invariably reliant on the work of professional archivists and librarians but more often than not know little about the intellectual and practical challenges they face on the job, to also take more seriously the theoretical insights of information professionals.

*The Archival Turn in Feminism* is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1, "The 'Scrap Heap' Reconsidered: Selected Archives of Feminist Archiving," builds on the discussion advanced in this introduction, which understands the archival turn as a realization of genealogical politics. In addition to offering a partial history of feminist archiving (a history that begins during the decline of first wave feminist activism), this chapter examines how a younger generation's apparent nostalgia for the ideologies, practices, and cultural artifacts of a previous generation's "women's liberation" movement has structured the development of many contemporary collections of feminist texts, artifacts, and papers. Following Elizabeth Freeman, however, I do not necessarily posit this turn back to 1970s feminism as "pure nostalgia for another revolutionary moment" but rather as an

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attempt to mine “the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, in sharp contrast to many feminist commentaries, such as Susan Faludi’s theory of “feminism’s ritual matricide,” which reinforces the perception that contemporary feminism is irreparably marked by intergenerational conflict, I maintain that what continues to make feminism relevant to women born during and after the rise of the second wave feminist movement is precisely their preoccupation with an earlier generation’s histories of struggles—a dynamic that is most visibly being enacted in and through the archive.

The following three chapters each take the form of a “case study” of a specific archive or special collection. Each case study is concerned with the various ways in which the development of these archives and special collections opens up the possibility to tell different types of stories about feminism’s recent history while simultaneously rendering visible previously obscured narratives about feminism. Building on the analysis advanced in the introductory chapters, chapter 2, “Archival Regeneration,” examines how the zine collections at Duke University’s Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture provide a context in which to explore the continuities—in content, design, and form—between second wave feminist and Riot Grrrl and third wave feminist publications. Drawing on interviews with Collections Development Librarian Kelly Wooten and donors, most notably Sarah Dyer (who donated the first and largest of the zine collections housed at Duke University), this chapter pays specific attention to how archival collections, which create intentional and sometimes unintentional proximities between the cultural and intellectual products of different generations, open up opportunities to reimagine the possibilities of feminist storytelling. Following Clare Hemmings’s call for feminists to learn how to “tell stories differently” in order to avoid repeating false claims to truth about feminism and some of the political pitfalls that have hampered Western feminism over the past four decades, chapter 2 explores the role of archives and archiving in this urgent work.

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Remaining focused on the relationship between archives, archiving, and storytelling, chapter 3, “Redefining a Movement,” examines the more recent development of the Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU’s Fales Library and Special Collections. Based on interviews with the collection’s senior archivist, Lisa Darms, and several donors, including Kathleen Hanna and Johanna Fateman, this chapter examines how the archivization of Riot Grrrl materials holds the potential to rewrite the history of Riot Grrrl. Specifically, chapter 3 advances two connected arguments about contemporary feminism and archives. First, this chapter examines how—two decades after Riot Grrrl’s development—the women most synonymous with Riot Grrrl are using the archive to resituate the movement as one more deeply aligned with second wave feminist theory, continental philosophy, and avant-garde literary and art traditions than youth subcultures. Second, with specific reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizing on the field of cultural production and to feminist critiques of his theorizing, this chapter further examines the archive’s role in “position-takings.” Chapter 3 specifically explores how the Riot Grrrl Collection demonstrates the archive’s potential to be deployed as an apparatus through which one might retroactively *take a position* in the field of cultural production that was hitherto denied.

In chapter 4’s final case study, “Radical Catalogers and Accidental Archivists,” I turn my attention to the Barnard Zine Library and to the activist librarianship of the collection’s founder, Jenna Freedman. Although Freedman is engaged in the development of a special collection and parallel archival collection, it is notable that her primary site of activism is not the collection itself but rather the library catalog where she creates points of access for the subjects and perspectives found in the zines at the center of her collection. With reference to the history of radical librarianship, collecting, and cataloging by which Freedman is deeply influenced, chapter 4 demonstrates how contemporary activist librarians, through their tactical interventions at the level of the library catalog, are altering the visibility of otherwise marginal

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knowers and knowledges. None of the collections featured in this book has an explicit mandate to collect born-digital materials or to digitize printed materials. In fact, all of the archives and special collections featured in the following chapters have, at different points, adopted mandates to focus on the collection and preservation of material documents and artifacts rather than born-digital materials and further concluded that digitization is not an immediate priority. In this third case study, I further argue that this may reflect a recognition that item-level cataloging of marginal materials holds more potential for subversion than simply digitizing the same materials.

Throughout *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, I examine how the structure and mandate of the collections in question are effectively resituating contemporary feminist cultural production and knowledge. I also explore the specific political, cultural, and intellectual mandates of the archivists and librarians responsible for the collections. In the concluding chapter 5, I further grapple with the seemingly contradictory movement of activist collections to archives and libraries at private universities. I consider specifically whether this movement simply reflects a cooptation of radical histories, or rather is consistent with the contradictions that have always structured the development of feminist activist collections.

Above all else, *The Archival Turn in Feminism* seeks to locate archiving and librarianship as forms of applied theorizing with far-reaching implications for activism and scholarship in the twenty-first century and to take seriously the possibility of the archive and special collection as central rather than peripheral sites of resistance.