

Archiving Absence: A Queer Feminist Framework

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ABSTRACT

Archiving Absence: A Queer Feminist Framework

Mél Hogan

Using a queer feminist framework, this research combines interviews with archivists and activists, theoretical texts and artists' intervention to explore the paradoxical nature of archiving absence. Specifically, the first chapter surveys and documents three Canadian archives mandated in part to collect, record and preserve lesbians' and queer women's histories: *The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* in Toronto, *The Canadian Women's Movement Archives* in Ottawa, and the *Archives gaies du Québec* in Montréal. Focusing on the absence of women within archival holdings and as community archivists, the second chapter proposes a philosophical "queering of the archive" which both expands and complicates the pervading critiques about the totality and neutrality of archives and exposes the theoretical (if not utopian) potential of challenging the archive, operationally and conceptually, to answer this absence. Ultimately, this queering puts into question the very foundation of community that privileges gender and sexuality within its identity politics, while reinforcing their presence and position within gay and lesbian history and queer discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I suggest that lesbian and queer women's lives are not prioritized within any memory institution in Canada; as such, I propose that archives are limited in their function as historical repositories. Do archives privilege a certain kind of historical "trace"? Can a queering of the archives answer this absence?

My research is located at the intersection of archival studies, history, and queer/feminist theory. Contributions by queer/feminist scholars, artists and activists in Canada generally belong to one of two categories, those dealing with equality rights and those exploring lesbian culture from within. In terms of rights, the most popular topic is the debate about same-sex marriage (Chenier, 2006; Smith and Grundy, 2005; Nichol, 2006), while other issues include questions of discrimination, violence, racism and homophobia (Morrison, 2005), citizenship and nationhood (Smith, 1999; Rankin, 2000; Nadeau, 2001), and activism for human rights (Demczuk, 1998). Lesbian culture is explored in lesbian oral history projects (Ross, 1995; Chamberland, 1998), by looking at specific matters such as "pride" (Probyn, 2000; Davidson, 2006), lesbian culture, community, space, and representation (Krug, 1991; Podmore, 2001; Waugh, 2006; Freeman, 2006; Pourtavaf, 2006; Salah, 2007), gender/sexuality theory and identity politics (Krug, 1991; Namaste, 2000; Nadeau, 2006) and queer media (Bryson, 2004). Despite the broad range of research conducted by and on lesbians/queer women, there has been little work done, academically or in terms of policy, to specifically assess their position within Canadian history, particularly in archives (Millward, 2005; Grundy & Smith, 2005; Chenier, 2006; Freeman, 2006).

Often divided between the Gay Liberation Movement and the Women's Movement, or the current pan-Canadian gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender/transsexual (GLBT) movement, or interpreted from an American perspective, research dealing with lesbian history in its own right in Canada is long overdue. This kind of research would greatly enrich the field of Communication Studies, especially as it pertains to queer/feminist theory and cultural studies (Terry, 1991; Ross, 1995; Chamberland, 1996; Burton, 2003; Arondekar, 2005). My intervention and contribution to these fields is to explore lesbian and queer women's history—as well as the discursive shift from lesbian to queer—within memory institutions by challenging current conceptions of the archive, both theoretically (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1996; Steedman 2002) and through artist intervention (Smith, 2003; Menick, 2005; Lesbians on Ecstasy, 2007).

This thesis looks to three well-known Canadian gay and lesbian archives in order to formulate a theoretical framework around *archiving absence*. Based on the (now) widespread critique of the archives as a neutral and total project, I propose that “looking at absence” from a queer feminist framework allows us to conceive of lesbian history as something that is both excluded and exclusive—defined by the Canadian Oxford dictionary as “unable to exist or be true if something else exists or is true”—thereby asking us to reconsider its position within its two main narratives—the women's movement and the gay liberation movement—and within their corresponding memory institutions in particular. I explore the paradoxical nature of *archiving absence*, by first critically engaging with the various processes of archiving, including a historical analysis of how the archives were founded, how they were named, how they are funded and what they are mandated to collect, where they are located and what the significance of that

location is, and finally, how absence forms in large part the *raison d'être* of the archives—that is, the need to endlessly collect and preserve for all time.

As a way to situate my work within academic debates engaging with archives and identity—as each of these topics is incredibly rich in its own right—I have tried to create a dialogue between these two fields, because the theory linking archives and queer identity in a Canadian context is fairly sparse. Based on the seminal work of Michel Foucault (1970, 1972, 1990), Jacques Derrida (1996) and Antoinette Burton (2003, 2005) (among many others) I was able to conceive of the importance of archival research that is self-reflexive. Foucault's work on discursive formations, knowledge and power, and systems of representation (Foucault, 1972, 1990) informed directly his critique of archives, bringing together notions of identity and power—both of which are communicated and/or exercised rather than possessed. Focusing on process over content, Foucault (2006) suggests that looking at how the archives are produced and who is invested in their production reveals much about the politics of archiving: the archive is (re)defined as “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.”¹ In Foucauldian terms, this system creates “absence” and can only exist in relation to the a priori “presence”; presence consists of the archives, archival holdings and, most importantly, archival process and discourse.

Similarly, in *Archive Fever* (1996), Derrida frames the archives in terms of what counts as (rather than what is) historical evidence, who counts as a historical subject, and who has the power and right to interpret the documents in the archive. The documents in the archive gain status because of their privileged location and subjection to authoritative

¹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/arch/themes.html>

processes. Derrida argues that political power lies in the control of the archive; in collecting, unifying, identifying and classifying documents based on hegemonic ideological presupposition, while simultaneously, and necessarily, refusing the possibility of heterogeneity.

Burton (2003), writing foremost within a British-Indian context, adopts a very similar approach but contributes to it a feminist spin, arguing that much of the filtering that occurs in archives is along gendered lines. Burton also puts into question what counts as an archive, or history for that matter, and queries the enthusiasm with which historical “rejects” have expanded the notion of who counts as a historical subject. In so doing, Burton fragments the dichotomy of public and private, a point of entry that has been taken up by queer theorists and writers like Ann Cvetkovich (2003), Judith Jack Halberstam (1998, 2005), Anjali Arondekar (2005) and Joan Nestle (1987, 1998), among others, who begin their inquiry into archival absences through a feminist lens. What is the relationship of women to the archives? (And of queer women to the queer archives?) Who counts as a historian or archivist and how is “history” created? How do race and ethnicity, as suggested by Emma Pérez and José Esteban Muñoz (Muñoz in Pérez 2003; Muñoz 1999, 2001), further complicate the archive? Read together, these great works both obscure and expand the possibilities for historicizing sexuality; is sexuality experienced-based, and as such, constituted through action (acts)? Or is it a way to organize communities based on sexual preference, and if so, how is preference determined, read or implied? Or is sexuality a tool for ‘marking’ bodies, situating them within social hierarchies? These questions remain at the crux of queer theory, taken up by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) and Julian Carter (2005), linked herein to the theorizing

of absence within the gay and lesbian archives in Canada. Who is absent from this history (which is said to itself be born of absence)? The core of my research revolves around theorizing this necessary contradiction: *archiving absence*.

The theorists I mention above—despite writing in large part from outside the Canadian context—complement the interviews I conducted, to tighten my theoretical grasp as well as enrich my analysis of the politics of gay and lesbian archives. Their contributions are found throughout my writings, as I felt them better heard placed within the overall text than in a separate section dedicated to a literature review. That said, however, what much of the theory cannot account for is the perspective of the archivist, the archivist's role of appraisal, especially considering the overwhelmingly ephemeral nature of queer artifacts and documents. For this reason, I supplemented my research with community archivists' accounts and placed their voices centrally within my research, in conversation with the theorists mentioned above.

Furthermore, much of the theorizing about archives occurs in a vacuum, rarely looking to the arts, for example, to potentially push the idea of the archive, which is at the nexus of all critiques. As such, archival critique tends to reinforce what counts as an archive, with the rare exceptions of Ann Cvetkovich (2003), Judith J. Halberstam (2005), and in some ways, Bobby J. Noble (2006), Jay Prosser (1998), and Allan Sekula (1986). Cvetkovich and Halberstam look to popular culture and the arts and frame their examples in queer contexts to begin a conversation that actually takes into account some of the ways queer communities go about recording their histories. Noble and Sekula offer the body as archive, and Prosser, skin as memory, a point I do not focus on here but consider an important contribution and consider worthy of further exploration especially given the

marked bodies of queer history.

A Note on Methodology

My research, in addition to being an academic endeavour, draws from my work in queer community media, in particular, CKUT Radio's *Dykes on Mykes*, and *Nomorepotlucks.org*, a "portal of proclivities" for queer women in Montréal, that I founded in 2003. Half of the interviews I conducted for my thesis were done through these community-based media outlets,² while the other half were done more formally, in-person, at the various archives³. This is an important methodological approach for two reasons: it combines my work within the community with my work within academia; and serves in and of itself as a recording device of my process (through radio, the Web, podcasts, content management systems, email correspondence and minidisks, etc). Combining community with academia is important to me since it offers, I think, the dual role of producing and disseminating knowledge about, and for, the people who are represented within my research; queer women. It is also an opportunity to have broader input, and to overlap the often rigid divide between participant (interviewee) and researcher, and between subject and object of inquiry. Documenting my process and using a pragmatic approach to research are also central to my project. I am aiming to uncover archival stories, or, in other words, to critically engage with the processes and

² Sarah Shulman (of the ACT UP Oral History project) co-interviewed with M-C MacPhee for *Dykes on Mykes*, Christopher Wilde who I interviewed on *Dykes on Mykes* and for whom we hosted a panel on queer zines with Leila Pourtavaf and Viviane Namaste; Nancy Nichol interviewed for *Dykes on Mykes* and in text format for *nomorepotlucks.org*. M-C MacPhee and I also interviewed Daniel McKay and Lynn Murphy in Nova Scotia while doing research for a sound documentary on "rural lesbians", to be played on DoM.

³ Lucie Desjardins of the CWMA, Allan Miller and Harold Averill of the CLGA, and Iain Blair of the AGQ, with two anonymous participants. I corresponded by email, over a few months, with Ron Dutton, community archivist in B.C., and Scott Goodine in Alberta.

politics of the archives. Ultimately, this project is a historical analysis of the production of a history within the gay and lesbian community in Canada, and within three institutions in particular.

For the purpose of this research, I visited three archives: The *Canadian Women's Movement Archives* (CWMA) in Ottawa, *les Archives gaies du Québec* (AGQ) in Montréal, and The *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* (CLGA), in Toronto. While I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview long-standing archivists at each of these institutions, I was not able to interview women in any of these archives except the CWMA, which is staffed by women only. Both the CLGA and the AGQ are staffed by men, with women working either on specific, finite, projects within the organization, as members of various committees, or as volunteers, rendering them less available and accessible for the purposes of my research. I limited my case study to these three institutions—frequently cited as the major repositories of gay and lesbian history in Canada⁴—because of the limited resources and time constraints for this project, and because, ultimately, all research is always merely *in-progress*, I had to draw the line here. That said, I was able to communicate regularly (by email and in person) with other archivists, academics, and activists who enriched the scope of my project.

The point of visiting these archives was to approach this research project as a participant—immersing myself in the environments I was writing about—a process inspired by the works of Arlette Farge (1997) and Carolyn Steedman (2002) in particular. Both of these writers integrate first-hand accounts of their experiences conducting research at the archives with self-reflexive analysis, an approach I thought best suited for

⁴ See: McLeod, Donald W. *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964-1975* Toronto: ECW Press/Homewood Books, 1996.

my project, as I could not imagine writing about these archives without visiting them myself, especially considering that very little is written about them in the first place. Most of the documentation about the archives is found at the archives, and was for me a very rich resource despite what little was there. I chose to dedicate a lot of “space” in the first chapter to these interviews with archivists—with long quotes and very little editing or interpreting of their words.

I have broken down my research into two sections. The first section, *Chapter One: 3 Archives, 1 Case Study*, serves to contextualize archives, and it is descriptive and analytical, serving as fodder for the second section in which I engage with each topic theoretically and critically. The subdivisions I have chosen in the first section reflect the major themes that arose out of my interviews with archivists as well as the topics that reflect some of the current areas of interest and debate within archival theory. I begin my chapter by outlining the context in which the archives were formed by focusing on their founders, the very people I interviewed in many cases. I discuss the “home”, as it is in many ways the pre-archive, allowing me to introduce the issue of private and public as it pertains to the gay and lesbian (GL) archives. This discussion of the home leads to a broader exploration of location and locus of the archives, important in contextualizing the archives as political and activist based. The naming of the archives is another important issue as labels factor greatly in identity politics—does it describe or prescribe content? I continue with questions of mandate, funding, and access, as they are key topics in the discussion of community-based organizing, especially in relation to the institutionalization of many independent archives. The role of the donor and the archivists’ appraisal take us into the specifics of archival processes and operations. I

finish off with questioning the role of archivists as activists—also the topic of this year’s *Taking a Stand Conference* at Library and Archives Canada⁵—a perspective that points to the power of historical documents, and that positions archivists as part archives, part document.

My exploration of these archives provides the following section with material from which to draw an analysis. Specifically, in my second chapter, *Finding Absence* looks at the absence of women archivists and women’s involvement in GL archives, as well as the relatively little amount of lesbian content within the GL archives’ holdings. Based on the idea of the counter-archives—which I explain in some detail in *Chapter Two* as an archives situated within the margins in response to exclusion from traditional archives—I explore how archival processes predispose the category of ‘lesbian’ to inclusion/assimilation into the broader GLBT community, for example, and how race and class (among other identity category markers) become problematic in a system that privileges sexuality in defining identity. Sexuality, in the context of the archives, is understood within very specific parameters, as they are intended to delineate and demarcate categories of same-sex desire, to make sense of them, and to historicize them.

In an attempt to answer absence, I propose, in *Answering Absence*, queering the archive through a reassessment of the three terms that constitute the traditional archive addressed in *Chapter One*: location, materiality and process, as well as through artists’ intervention.

Queering Absence engages with the issue of sexuality more profoundly by suggesting that lesbian identities, which form the basis of the GL archival project, are

⁵ Taking a Stand: A Conference on Activism in Canadian Cultural Archives. June 12-14, 2007, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

neither entirely arbitrary nor comprehensive. One part etymological, one part discourse, this fourth chapter looks at particular examples of the way in which absence is created within a framework that looks at the specificity of lesbian and queer women's identities.

**CHAPTER ONE:
3 ARCHIVES, 1 CASE STUDY (of ABSENCE)**

Our emphasis on the need for archive stories—narratives about how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them to write history—follows in the first instance from a move in Western academy (and also beyond it) to recognize that all archives are “figured”. That is, they all have dynamic relationships, not just to the past and the present, but to the fate of regimes, the physical environment, the serendipity of bureaucrats, and the care and neglect of archivists as well.
– Antoinette Burton (2005)

One fundamental truth of the archives, surely, is that they are not to be trusted.
- Natalie Zemon Davis (1988)

Archives are political bodies⁶. The word ‘archives’ is a contested term, whether it is meant to represent an institution or a process—though as I will outline here—one informs the other⁷. Broadly defined, the traditional archive is an on-going intellectual categorization, classification, and organization effort to store and preserve certain historical narratives, based on principles of acquisition and appraisal processes by archivists. The physical location, the layout of the room or rooms, and the geographical location, partner up to give shape to the very possibility of housing historical ‘traces’,

⁶ Here “bodies” is meant to intentionally refer to identity-based politics—queer bodies—and suggest that the archives function as a political repository, though self-reflexive and functioning as a counter-archives.

⁷ Archives in the digital realm is a topic worthy of its own research project, but should be noted here as it has been a major factor for making the archives popular as well as redefining them as more fluid.

which can be collected and preserved for future reference. While the Internet has transformed our conceptual relationship to the archive, the physicality of the traditional repository is an important distinguishing factor—one that can be entered, visited, perused, and one where objects (evidence) can be touched and seen (experienced). And, the location of the archive positions the site of inquiry into socio-geographical terms, of particular importance considering the amount of research dedicated to looking at the negotiations of space within a gay and lesbian context (Podmore, 2001; Binnie and Valentine; 1999, Rothenberg, 1995). Similarly, important work has been done around the perception of space—in particular the notion of ‘safe space’—by feminist and queer scholars. Geographical context and socio-political context function in tangential ways to inform the location/space of GL archives, as a site which is itself always understood in relation to the ground on which it stands, the visibility that is afforded by it, and the ways in which it can become, finally, accessible to a community. As such, when the archive is discussed in my research it is always part location (or what Derrida calls ‘domicile’ (1996, 2) —even in its most abstract and creative conceptions—and part connection to history and memory, often in these three archives through the materiality of documents and objects.

Traditionally, archival objects are defined in one of three ways: records, manuscript, or documents. ‘Records’ normally refer to formal, institutional or origination-based documents, while ‘manuscripts’ refer to informal, or private/personal ephemera.⁸ ‘Documents’ comes from “the Latin for *official paper* or *that which teaches*. Essentially, documents provide evidence or support of an action, condition, or entity”

⁸ The personal vs. public debate is central to archival theory, and a point I will revisit later on when discussing memory and history.

(Maher). As such, an archive is at once a repository and process, both of which function on the basis of storage. To recap then, the archive is thus far defined as *location* and *materiality*, and of equal importance, I add here, *process*. This process is based on principles and practices of storage, which in archival terms range from temperature control, transfer processes to ‘arrangement’. Arrangement is used by archivists to group records, “in such a way as to reflect the manner in which they were held and used by the office or person creating the records. It involves the fundamental principles of *respect des fonds*, *provenance*, and *sanctity of original order*” (Maher). Respect des fonds is a principle that deems important maintaining the integrity of the ‘fonds’ as it was brought into the archives, rather than classifying particular objects or documents according to subject matter. Similarly, *provenance* prioritizes the donor over content; the principle is to maintain an order according to the donor in relation to their other donations (or from the same administrative body). Sanctity of original order, again, is a principle that respects the system for classification of the donor, within the deposit. Each of these principles, despite their focus on the donor, reflects an awareness about the trajectory—through ownership—of objects as they come to be part of the archives, as equally significant to the objects themselves. While I have defined archives and archival processes and principles in very simple and traditional terms, I do so only to provide a reference point against which to contrast the “queer archive.”⁹

⁹ I use the term “queer archive” differently than gay and lesbian (GL) archives. While GL archives refer to existing archives, such as the three I have visited for my project, the queer archive is a conceptual tool which refers to the possibility of conceptualizing the archives differently, that is, in ways which are afforded by the archives’ focus on preserving and historicizing sexuality as a category for analysis, without being limited to the ways in which they have been effected. In other words, using queer archives as a concept—dissected further in the last chapter—allows me to play with the current reality of GL archives in Canada and extend the notion of archives to be more inclusive of lesbian as a distinct and important unit of classification, while also problematizing it, and including into the conversation creative conceptions of the

The following section looks at The *Canadian Women's Movement Archives* (CWMA), *les archives gaies du Québec* (AGQ), and the *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* (CLGA). I have drawn out the brief historical context for each of the archives, extracting from them particular narratives that outline the ways in which lesbian lives are archived within the broader GLBT and feminist movements, leading us into a discussion in the second chapter about how lesbians have been relegated to a secondary role, despite the active and overt efforts made by archivists at these institutions. Absence is found by looking first at what is collected and preserved.

Founders of the Archives

The *Canadian Gay Liberation Archives*, the *Women's Movement Archives* and the *Archives gaies du Québec* all came into existence in the early 1970s—a time when these archives were at once contested, but also possible for the first time. While overt homophobia was still rampant in the early days of the archives, there was also a community forming in most large cities across Canada, and gays and lesbians were becoming more visible and organized as a community. Nudged between the social progresses of the women's movement, liberal and leftist forces questioning the social order, and the AIDS pandemic beginning in the 1980s, the gay liberation movement was both inspired and shaped by the many political cross-currents of the era. According to Tom Warner, in his book *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*, the expansion of visible community occurred between 1970 and 1974;

archives which may or may not always rely on the interlocking features of the traditional archives: location, materiality and process.

although they did not have a concept of community as we know it today, gays, bisexuals, or lesbians living in what we now call the pre-gay liberation era recall that distinctive, though underground, subcultures thrived in many urban centres. [...] These subcultures provided the foundation for a community with a common sexual orientation; it was born, and given political meaning, in the 1970s (Warner, 49).

During the 70s, gays and lesbians in urban centres had access to a few seedy bars, and often found creative ways to get together. Lesbians had fewer options than men—lucky to find one another and often being reclusive in order to maintain a relationship. Today it may be difficult to imagine (though not really) the extent to which gays and lesbians were oppressed, forced to live secret double lives, but Warner explains:

restaurants or other businesses where gays and lesbians could go, be comfortable and be themselves, generally did not exist, even in these more advanced cities [*Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver*]. Walking down the street wearing something that signified a gay or lesbian identity, let alone expressing openly gay or lesbian behaviour, was dangerous and rarely done. There was a genuine and well-grounded fear of being seen entering or leaving a queer bar, and thereby losing a job or experiencing harassment. Most bars catering to a gay or lesbian crowd did not publicize the nature of their clientele and had backdoor entrances away from bright lights and passing traffic (Warner, 53).

It is important to have a grounded understanding of the political climate in Canada, and the attitude toward gays and lesbians, in order to understand the ways in which these community archives were formed, as counter-archives. Today, there are various gay and lesbian archives (herein referred to as GL archives), with many of these affiliated to universities or city/provincial archives. There are also a number of individually-run projects, functioning as community repositories. Public (and accessible) GL archives in Canada have all been founded by gay men, and while independent lesbian archives have existed, they are not accessible in the same ways.¹⁰ Lesbian history is also widely

¹⁰ Examples include: Nova Scotia's *Women's History Club* spearheaded by Diane Graham, Debbie

recorded through the women's movement, however not always in an explicit manner.

There are various other archives aiming to preserve GL history in Canada, as well as a new-found interest on behalf of universities, provincial and national archives, to be more inclusive of GL content—these same institutions that would have rejected such content, in some cases, a mere 10 years prior:

the important thing is the period (*early 1970s*). There were no archives or libraries willing to take the material, because a lot of people thought it was pornographic—there was no reason to save it—but in fact we knew just the opposite (Miller, *personal interview*).

It is interesting to note the foresight and knowledge to not only archive one's own life (or one's community life) but also recognize oneself as a distinct but valuable sub-culture.

This recognition is particularly striking considering the homophobic climate at the time these counter-archives were formed. While being treated as second-class citizens, denied work and housing, beaten and insulted in the everyday, some people had the prescience to record and collect stories, albeit often within a small network of people, of their lives.

Journals, newspapers and newsletters were sprouting up, rendering visible gay and lesbian lives and struggles into the mainstream.

It makes sense then, because of this call to visibility, that GL archives are born of, or associated with, a publication in the form of a newsletter or periodical. On October 28, 1971, *The Body Politic* (TBP), a Gay Liberation Journal, became the third Canadian gay newspaper after the short-lived success of *Gay International* and *Two*, all out of Toronto. To give an idea of the size and reach, the TBP had 80 regular correspondents (from 21

Mathers, Janice Acton; the *Calgary Lesbian History Project* which was Carolyn Anderson's Ph.D dissertation¹⁰, or *Traces* in the Lesbian and Gay Community Centre in Montréal.

Canadian cities) and covered issues of gay liberation, leisure, business and arts¹¹. Due to the increased number of records being generated through the production of the newspaper, one of the collective members proposed that a newspaper “archive”¹² be created. As a result, the importance of these records as historical artifacts became part and process of the newspaper’s organization, and the collective established the *Gay Liberation Movement Archives*:

in 1973 Jerald Moldenhauer of *The Body Politic Collective* proposed that an archives be formed to house and arrange the wide variety of material arriving at the office of the newspaper. It was at that time an unorganized but clearly important collection of documents. During the first year of operation contact was made with gay and lesbian groups advising them of the formation of the Archives and soliciting material from them (Fraser, 159).

Like many gay archives, this one’s original home was at the only staff member’s apartment until it moved, a year later, to the TBP offices at 193, Carlton Street (Toronto). Small and intimate beginnings are common for GL archives¹³. In Montréal, the two founders (of what would become the AGQ), Ross Higgins and Jacques Prince, initially housed much of “archives” holdings in their own apartments:

well, they [*Ross Higgins and Jacques Prince*] apparently just met in a bar when all the gay bars were downtown and they started talking and Ross was kind of an anthropologist and historian and Jacques was a librarian and they were thinking wouldn’t it be a good idea to consolidate all this formally? A lot of this stuff started as just stuff—in Ross’s house and under his bed and apparently he had boxes up to his ceiling. That’s how a

¹¹ For more information, look at: Today’s *Xtra!* is a replacement of *TBP*, both run by the Pink Triangle Press. "Introducing The Body Politic". The CBC Digital Archives Website. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Last updated: 21 Dec. 2004. <http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-69-599-3228/life_society/gay_lesbian/clip1>. [Accessed 16 Jan. 2007.]

¹² See: The Archives Collective *Organizing an Archives: Canadian Gay Archives Experience* Canadian Gay Archives Publication no. 8 January 1983.

¹³ This is also true of GL archives in the US, and possibly more broadly as well. For example, both the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Historical Society of Northern California (GLBTHS) started off in home: Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel (LHA) and Bill Walker (GLBTHS).

lot of these archives started, initially (Blair, *personal interview*).

Similarly, prior to 1992, and as far back as 1977, the *Women's Movement Archives* existed in a small locale in Toronto. There were four members of the Women's Movement Archives collective in Toronto—named by their first names (Anne, Miriam, Nancy and Luanne) in an interview by Aisla Thomson in the 1986 Winter edition of *Women's Education des femmes*, where Pat Leslie is said to have been the founding mother of the archives. Leslie was very active with the Toronto women's newspaper in the mid-1970s, called *The Other Women*. When it ceased publication in 1977, “she took all their material, moved it into her house, and decided to make it the start of the *Canadian Women's Movement Archives*” (Thompson, 20). In the 1970s, Leslie wrote about the importance of the archives and the consequences of its disappearance, for lesbians in particular:

specifically lesbian Herstory will be forever buried. What little exists now consists of hopeful conjuncture. It is the fear of oppression and the shyness of self-expression which makes that invisible veil so heavy. If need be, the *Women's Movement Archives* would go underground, file by file, to protect records of the growing movement. Access to everything donated by lesbians is strictly limited (Leslie, 11).

The CWMA did not go underground, but rather found its way to the *Morisset Library* at the University of Ottawa, where it currently resides (since 1999).¹⁴

Across Canada, there are obviously other pockets of GL history preserved in archives, though none which define themselves strictly as GL archives, or function as public venues. In British Columbia, I located Ron Dutton,¹⁵ a Vancouver-based GLBT

¹⁴ The CWMA archives donated their collection to the University of Ottawa, in 1992, because they “could provide (a) bilingual service and communication among the feminist community from coast to coast”, (b) the content was already organized into groups.

¹⁵ Thanks to Elise Chenier and Byron Lee for putting me in touch with Ron Dutton.

community archivist. Through email correspondence, Dutton explained that the *BC Gay and Lesbian Archives Collective* was founded in 1976, inspired by librarian James Fraser who arrived from Toronto was “heavily involved in work on the Canadian Gay Archives.” (Dutton) Material gathered, the collective organized the contents and deposited the holdings to the *Special Collections* in the library at University of British Columbia, at the *Vancouver City Archives*, and at the Canadian Gay Archives. But the (all-male) collective became defunct, except for two members (Ron Dutton and Jim Thomas), who in 1979, reactivated the collection efforts. Soon after, it was down to just one man, Dutton, who continues to this day to collect and archive the materials:

since then I have worked alone: collecting, subject organizing and storing every piece of gay material that comes to hand and meets the profile; making materials available for study by the gay community, students and the media; giving talks, writing occasional articles and mounting public exhibitions to publicize the Archives [...]. I devote as much of my free time to this project as is possible, but there is much work necessarily left undone. I retire from the workforce this August and intend to then work fulltime writing and doing research to fill in under-represented subject areas; create an Archives website; organize oral history sessions to capture personal histories; and write a book (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

Similarly, in Saskatchewan, Neil Richards, a former University of Saskatchewan library employee (last working in Special Collections), “almost single-handedly collected and then donated papers from the Saskatchewan gay activist groups, newspaper clippings, male mags, posters, etc. to the Saskatchewan Archives Board Office in Saskatoon” (Korinek). According to Valerie Korinek at University of Saskatchewan, there may have been a push from local gay centres to archive material, but to date those initiatives have not borne fruit. I was also able to locate—what Michael Phair claims is the largest gay and lesbian archives west of Toronto—the City of Edmonton Archives, which has integrated GL content into its city archives, as is probably also true for various other

cities across Canada. There are also new initiatives sprouting up today, such as online initiatives like Daniel McKay's *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia* project and the *Queer Zine Archive Project* (QZAP) (which tend to cross national identity borders more fluidly), or forum-based sites like *SuperDyke*¹⁶ out of Vancouver. Despite the virtual nature of these sites, there is a strong correlation between them and the individual efforts in creating GL archives, all of which are premised on the notion of the "home" as the place of inception.

At Home at the Archives

According to Derrida (1996), the meaning of 'archive' comes from the Greek *arkheion*: "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the super magistrate, the *archons*, those who commanded"; the archive is home to official documents, "where they dwell permanently" (2). Contrastingly, in Bennett et al.'s *New Keywords*, "home" is "a place of belonging, involving a sense of family, intimacy, or affinity among those who live close to each other, surrounded by movement" (162). In a sense, the inception of GL archives share these attributes to their benefit and detriment, but also with special consideration; "family" and "home" are both ambiguous (if not resisted) terms within (much) feminist, gay and lesbian literature (Haraway, 1985; Weston, 1993). Furthermore, the definition of "home" has acquired "marked gendered characteristics as a private, largely feminized domestic sphere separated off from the male-dominated worlds of work and public life" (Bennett et al., 163). So what do I make of GL archives, which are deemed better positioned as public archives? Arguably, the public and private spheres

¹⁶ <http://superdyke.com/>

engender different rules of conduct; allow varying degrees of comfort, and different levels of access. According to Cvetkovich, using the example of the New York-based *Lesbian Herstory Archives*, the feminist notion of safe space and the collusion of private and public spaces in the debate of the archives, offers insight into ways in which gay archives function, that may be antithetical to the lesbian-feminist standpoint:

especially influential in the planning and maintenance of LHA is the notion of safe space that has been so central to lesbian feminist communities. A mistrust of public institutions runs deep in the mission of the LHA. LHA is more interested in fostering a lesbian public sphere than in appealing to a general public sphere... (250).

Antoinette Burton (2003), who writes about women's memory in the history of late colonial India and the emergent nationalist movement argues against this position and suggests that women's lives (and other historically absent subjects) are excluded from the traditional archive because of the structurally gendered configuration of private and public spaces, information, and memory (Burton, 2003). Ultimately, Burton suggests that the scope of the archive should be broadened (rather than segregated along gender lines) to include traditionally excluded sources, which the GL archive does, and on which it is actually founded according to Cvetkovich, since most of the material in the archives relates to sexuality. Burton and Cvetkovich, however, both remain skeptical of the archive itself as they acknowledge its complicity in consistently inscribing power regardless of how antagonistic it might be. While the perspective of the archivist is different, as we will see in detail throughout this chapter, the position of the researcher in relation to the public/private location of the archives is one that offers a unique take on the matter.

I had the opportunity to interview a woman who had conducted a considerable

amount of research in several archives across the world and she spoke to me about the *feeling* of doing research in home archives—this one in the early days of the AGQ:

that's part of accessing archives anyway—you know, 'sussing' out the archivists, figuring out what you want and it can be difficult when you don't arrive with a project. Some archivists won't let you in, right? It was kind of really cool and exciting but I also had reservations. Because you're in someone's home, you also feel like you don't want to be, you know... (Anonymous, *personal interview*).

We can finish this thought and say that we know, indeed, how careful we are being in someone's home: "to take things home is to make them safe" (Bennett et al., 163). Safety has been a key issue in feminist, and gay and lesbian history, and for their archives. In the passage above, it is interesting to frame the archives as a place where you may or may not be "let in", this, under the guise of security, presumably of the archivists and materials at hand. Like so many bars and other gay venues, police raids on GL archives led organizers to ask serious questions pertaining to access rights and community accountability.¹⁷ Conversely, for some, conducting research in a place that feels like home is something to strive for. Doing research at the original CWMA (1970s and 1980s) was akin to "browsing through someone's apartment" where, as Dubinsky puts it, "no lab-coated archivist disappears into the bowels of the building to retrieve material for you (leaving you alone to wonder, as I always do in "mainstream" archives, what *else* is down there)" (Dubinsky, 119), the current CWMA does require researchers to request files from the archivist. Located on the 6th floor of the library at the University of Ottawa, the new CWMA is housed in a small, nondescript room, which it shares with two other archives—it is as I imagined an archive would look (as it was my first time stepping into an archives). The walls are beige, and windowless, and adorned with feminist artwork.

¹⁷ The TBP was raided by police in 1977, for example.

Instructions to leave bags and jackets in the lockers at the entrance are clearly posted, and should you miss the sign, the archival technician, Jacqueline, will send you a gentle reminder. Anticipating my request, Jacqueline pulled out a few binders (findings aids) to get me started. She reminds me of the researching procedure by using several examples of possible research topics; she shows me that what I find in one binder, (which is organized by topic) must then be located in another binder—this one allowing me to note down the file name and box number. Sheets are exchanged as I put in a request for photocopying. I also select, with the archivist, file by file of my request. I imagine that these request forms allows them to keep statistics of what information goes out into the world, more than they function as a mediator between technician and researcher. It also means that the procedure, while somewhat bureaucratic (I had to hand over my driver's license to get photocopies made), is also very personable in reality. I cannot help but think that this is also true of many of the documents I am perusing as well—that the texts, policies, and guidelines, while recording history, can never be more than a mere sliver of lived accounts—a fictionalization of sorts.

In contrast to the LHA, the CWMA does not function as a domestic space, but rather as a hybrid—I connected on a fairly intimate level with the content, but was subjected to traditional archival guidelines of research. In particular, it was interesting for me, as a queer researcher, to be interacting with the CWMA staff, who, out of respect for me, were discreet with my requests—in a GL archives, even though not all researchers are queer—there is no sense of discretion (no lowering of the voice) around issues of sexuality. For example, at the AGQ I perused the lesbian-themed tabloids that Prince (one of the founders, and a volunteer that night) pulled off the shelf a box of tabloids

papers from the 70s and 80s in Québec, and dutifully extracted the “lesbian” tabloids, or what appeared to be, in some shape or form, representing two, if not more, women (including transsexual women, and men, in some cases) in precarious positions together. The accompanying text was similar throughout the different tabloids: scandalous stories of women becoming lesbians and leaving their husbands or rants on butches acting as “fake men”. Not only are these tabloids long out of print, but these kinds of images do not appear on even the riskier/radical queer/lesbian magazines of today like *On our Backs*, *DIVA*, etc. Prince pulled each of the lesbian-themed (in his opinion) tabloids and places them into a pile for me—he seemed to be smiling when we came across a woman’s photo, as though it was confirmation of queer women’s existence both in terms of history and within the archives. While I appreciated that there was something (rather than nothing), browsing through the tabloids carefully, it became apparent that most of them, if not all, were in no way for and by lesbians (nor in fact *about* lesbians), though I cannot precisely conceive of the intended audience. I am aware that tabloids function as a genre of pop literature, and if my expectations were in finding anything legitimate or empowering, I was searching in the wrong place. It occurred to me that the worth of these materials was not only shifting in terms of the mainstream’s acceptance, but also from the position of an insider. It was odd to be in a small room, looking at images of lesbians having hardcore sex—it was *normal* and OK to do this kind of research in (a queer) public; it was understood in this context, that this counted as research, and Prince was not the least bit awkward about it.

While it felt far more comfortable to openly state my interest in lesbian history with the GL archives than it did at the CWMA, even though—and I want to be very

clear—the women at the CWMA knew more about lesbian history than most of my dyke friends (and could in fact be lesbians, I don't know), there was something of an unspoken understanding in my interactions at the GL archives—one of the rare places where the assumption is that you are queer. To me this was a bit of revelation about the role of identity politics invested in the writing of this thesis, putting in check my own location as a 'very out academic, but not so out individual'. That said, those spaces felt incredibly gendered, and my hesitation fell on issues of inclusion of women, both within the holdings and within the archives, which were at times difficult to voice. I felt I had to take a strategic approach to broaching the question—where are all the women archivists?

The process of conducting research is, in one sense, much more relaxed at the CLGA and, even more so at the AGQ. However, in each of these institutions, I had to rely on archivists to access the documents. The CLGA does have a maximum number of files to be let out at a time, whereas in the AGQ, because of the small size of the room and area for perusal, has no set number of files which can be accessed at one time, but rather an unrefined (organic?) exchange of files between researcher and archivist. In both GL archives, the researcher sits in a shared space to peruse the contents openly. The nature of the research is, as such, itself quite open, as staff, archivists, and library are all within this space. In this arrangement of space I begin to see how identity-politics are reflected in the archives; the public nature of the archives and the emphasis on access and openness go hand in hand. It also means, that lesbians are then necessarily less likely to contribute to archives, or even consider archives to be the best means to preserve history, especially within a broader GLBT movement. The *masculinization* of the archives, if I can really call it that, is reflected in the processes and operations of the archives and is

further reflected in the history of the socio-geographical locations and names of these organizations, located less and less in people's home, more and more in central, public and urban locations.

Location

The CWMA is located, as mentioned before, in a University Library. In the early days, when it was housed in Toronto, the *Women's Movement Archives* could only be consulted by appointment, while at their current location, the archives hold regular hours of operation. The AGQ and the CLGA continue to be located in independent locales, making them community-based rather than tied to an institution. Both the AGQ and the CLGA have plans to move in the next year, however. The AGQ has secured a spot in the new *Complexe arc-en-ciel* in the Gay Village, which would place them in a building with various other GLBT organizations, also at the heart of gay-owned businesses and tourism. They are currently on St-Laurent Street, in a rather nondescript building that requires a buzzer to be let in. The room is small, and has already reached maximum capacity for holding boxes.

The CLGA is located on the second floor of a building, in Toronto's Gay Village. The letters "CLGA" are clearly visible from the outside, inviting people to stop in. What is interesting is that the CLGA has never been on the ground level, which, as mentioned earlier, was a great comfort in the early days to the workers as it reduced opportunities for vandalism or other forms of gay bashings. However, about three years ago, Alan Miller tells me, they were approached by the *Children's Aid Society* with a possible heritage house to be donated to the archives:

and because of its designation they had to give it to a charitable organization—because of the area, they decided that we would be a good fit. So we have a building, it was given to us. We haven't taken possession of it, but we will and that will solve a fair bit of problems (Miller, *personal interview*).

The CLGA volunteers are delighted about this chance. Harold Averill reminisces:

to be in a building where we were sort of out of sight—and anyone who was thinking they might do something wouldn't find it that easy to find us—that was certainly a consideration in the early years. It's going to be different; we're going to be right out in the community as a stand-alone structure. It's right in the Village (Averill, *personal interview*).

Location—a move towards the Village—is quite fascinating given the broader assimilating trend of the GLBT movement. While community archives purport to move towards the Village, or remain in it, to be more accessible to the gay and lesbian community, it is commonly known that the Gay Village is predominantly frequented, habited and occupied in terms of businesses, by (white) men. I find this to be one of the most telling signs of the priorities of the archives, which situates itself within a visible, out and (perhaps even) safe location. While I can think of no better place for the GL archives to be, and in fact agree that they are better positioned in the Village than anywhere else, I do think it points to the significant differences between the cultures of gay men and lesbians, as Julie Podmore explores in *Gone 'underground'? Lesbian visibility and the consolidation of queer space in Montréal*. In this article, Podmore suggests that:

While gay men have often produced highly visible territorial enclaves in inner-city areas, lesbian forms of territoriality at the urban scale have been relatively 'invisible' since their communities are constituted through social networks rather than commercial sites (Podmore, 2006, 2).

The relationship between sexuality and space is one that has been addressed by urban

researchers in the past two decades, and is important here, in understanding the formation of GL archives. Some of the thoughts expressed by the various archivists I interviewed—namely, the “secret” or “underground” nature of lesbian archives—stands in contrast to the public (Village-oriented) and accessible gay-run archives.

If we consider that this is how space and sexuality play out in the day-to-day, we can then better understand the ways in which lesbian and gay history gets recorded, collected and preserved. In other words, the archives are a reflection of the community, with the ever-present question of lesbian visibility (as well as diversity of class and race). However, I argue that the issue of visibility is in part, a matter of who is looking, and how, and where they are looking. I believe that these questions are necessary for understanding the paradoxical nature of the GL archives—especially if we consider the overwhelming lack of lesbians within the organizations (at least in any long-term committed way) and that the archives hold a much smaller percentage of lesbian holdings overall. This “underground” nature of lesbians is one that is normally justified, as Podmore points out, through looking at lesbian communities through/as the formation of social networks rather than by way of social-commercial venues.¹⁸ The lack of territorially based lesbian enclaves, or the constant and rapid turnover, is one of the reasons for which lesbian lives are harder to track, leaving behind a faint trail, especially in contrast to the booming Gay Village. And, lesbian visibility is by no means the only identity category to go awash in the context of the Village:

some of these concerns revolved around ‘ghettoization’, while others emphasized internal inequalities created by the ‘territorialization’ of queer

¹⁸ It is important to note, however, that there have been very important commercial institutions, especially bars and nightclubs, which impacted women’s lives and identities in very formative ways, and these continue to appear, and disappear.

communities. As a result, class, language, 'race' and gender are among the many other controversies of identity that continue to surround the Village (Podmore, 2006, 5).

While the Village provides some insight into what constitutes community, and who has power to shape the community through large commercial ventures, it can only provide part of the answer to lesbian invisibility within the GL archives and lesbian history. All GL archives have a relationship to the Village, either finding their home there presently or with the hopes of doing so in the near future. Either way, there is a general understanding that the archives belong within "the community", and that the community is constituted in large part by the Village.

I agree with Podmore that lesbians continue to organize through social networks; "advertised through networks using word-of-mouth and e-mail list-serves, these are alternative events that are not listed in the city's official 'queer' guides" (Podmore, 2006, 9). Another part of the answer to lesbian invisibility is the nature of the historical traces they leave behind. Word-of-mouth, and even email, is less likely to find its way into an archives in any form, than something in print, for example. This is not to suggest that lesbians do not also leave a paper trail behind, but rather to point to the ways in which the archives comes to favour certain—and if not favour—accommodate that which is tangible, and within the rather limited context of GL history, highly visible.

This question of lesbian visibility/absence is the crux of the next chapter where I will explore in detail the absence of lesbian history in Canada, particularly as made (im)possible through the current archive formations.

What's in a Name?

Most archives in Canada, which hold lesbian and gay content, have a long history of naming and renaming themselves, and arguably, are anticipating further debates over the appropriate reach of the archives.

In 1993, we changed the name to the (*Canadian*) Lesbian and Gay Archives and we said “that is it!”. Now, that does not stop us from using shorter names if we want to brand ourselves in a particular way in the future... how do we present ourselves in the next ten years? (Averill, *personal interview*).

Questions of inclusion, representation and membership resurface each decade, as the definition of community changes through available language with/against which to define itself. A conversation about how the community has transformed itself discursively is nicely facilitated through an exploration of the decisions to change, expand, or retain their original archives titles.

In 1974, the name, *the Gay Liberation Movement Archives*, was deemed too cumbersome a title and not reflective of the Archives' (now the CLGA) broader mission. It was shortened to *Canadian Gay Archives* (CGA). While there was some concern about the use of the word “gay” to describe both lesbian and gay Archives, the collective resorted to simply adding a subtitle reading “for lesbians and gay men”, as it was already incorporated and widely listed as such (and would remain so for approximately another ten years). According to Harold Averill, archivist at the CLGA since 1978:

the primary reason [*that we didn't switch to lesbian and gay archives when we got charitable status*] was because of the *Women's Movement Archives* was in Toronto and we didn't feel that we should try and compete with what they were doing, but that archives closed 15 years ago and their material is now at the Morisset library at the University of Ottawa [...] But after that we felt we were free to put “lesbian” in our name (Averill, *personal interview*).

While there was a push to include “lesbian” in the title of the CLGA, it does not hold true for all archives invested in preserving gay history. Iain Blair, president of the AGQ echoes Averill’s (CLGA) notion of competition with lesbian archives, but offers a different perspective:

the Archives was named in a rather different era when things were much more separated, and it was started by gay men speaking for gay men. Over the years (decades....) the community has changed a bit, but we are still largely a gay male group, called "Gay" Archives, and there is still a "Lesbian" archives which we have to be sensitive of. For example, if we become the GL archives, what does that say about *Traces*? We have debated this a few times in meetings, and I think we know that things will change eventually (like when we move to the new CCGLM in the Village). Our clientele seems to be largely female even, although not necessarily lesbian.

[...] I should say too that a lot of gay men like to work with gay men (for social or political reasons, or sometimes for basic narrowmindedness) and don't want to change the name (Blair, *personal interview*).

Both the AGQ and the CLGA factored in lesbian archives (*Traces* being the elusive Montreal-based archives)¹⁹ or the potential of their separate existence, or their inclusion into the women’s movement archives, when choosing their name. While the CLGA opted to expand its mandate, and make it more obvious within its title, the AGQ is still debating the pros and cons of this move, and also assessing if the inclusion of lesbians is really their goal as a predominantly gay male archives.

According to Alan Miller, also a long-time volunteer and archivist at the CLGA, there was no debate as to whether or not we should do it (*add “lesbian” in the title*), we were just dragging our feet! Plus cost! I don’t remember how much it cost, we didn’t have a lawyer, so it was a little onerous on us because we are all volunteers. But, it had to be done and we did it. The funny thing is that the same debate goes on now in including bisexual and

¹⁹ According to Diane Hefferman of the *Réseau des lesbiennes du Québec*, *Traces* may ‘become’ an archives at the new complexe arc-en-ciel, but for now they are in boxes at the *Centre communautaire des gais et lesbiennes de Montréal*.

transgender. A lot of that has to do with content—we know that about 30% of our content is lesbian material. The transgender stuff—we are just starting to build up in that area and the bisexual stuff too. We are constantly debating inclusion (Miller, *personal interview*).

When I asked Miller if the push to add lesbian in the title came from lesbians, he tells me it did not. It was a decision they knew was right. I also asked him about the “Canadian” in the title, as I was not sure how it differed from other local/provincial repositories. He explained to me that it was a matter of historicity:

at the beginning there was no other archives, or lesbian and gay history group in the country although there were a few in the States. So, basically we played on experience of people in New York, Los Angeles, California and San Francisco. Our basic mandate was Canadian content, but we realized that the amount of material being published in the country was pretty slight, so we had to broaden our mandate and also the concept about what we collected. With the gay liberation material—there was so much of it—but we were ignoring so many other things... movement within the churches, and various caucuses of other lesbian and gay organizations, it was time to look at our mandate again. That’s when we became the Canadian Gay Archives (Miller, *personal interview*).

As a project born out of TBP, the CGA (now CLGA) was defined in nationalist terms from its beginning. The belief of the CGA was that every country should establish a National Archives. Miller states:

we want to be, and be seen as, a national organization. If successful, we will increase acquisitions from across the country, and thus increase the value and relevance of our collection. Recognition as a national organization will also allow us to go after funding from the federal government (Ryan).

While the CLGA is not the sole archive specializing in lesbian and gay content in Canada today, the “Canadian” in the title also raises questions about the relationship between nation and sexuality.

According to Becki Ross “sex and nation are profoundly imbricated,” and that to deny this “fact” would “serve to postpone indubitably illuminating inquiry into the

shifting, historically contingent relationship between sex and citizenship” (Ross in Vacante, 32). As pointed out in Mary Louise Adams’ *Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (1997), in the last 30 years, not only was homosexuality deemed a sad fate for individuals, homosexuality was a force “so menacing it carried the potential to undermine the strength of the nation” (Adams, 24). While this may no longer be true, at least in any overt way, the relationship between National identity and sexuality is undeniably creating a wider gap between the mainstream GLBT community and more subversive (to radical) queers. The archives, which began as a heavily politicized entity may not be able to sustain this strain, and may be rejected altogether by a queer community which, in effect, looks to history to define itself as having a distinct culture, which must be preserved.

The *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia* project, which actually appears as *Gay Halifax* (as does its URL)²⁰ on the website, is another example in which the naming of the archives has been problematic, this one an online archives from Nova Scotia. Said to collect “all things queer” from the Halifax GL and drag communities, Daniel McKay, the founder, states that the name of the project must be one that remains significant over many years, is intuitive in terms of ‘searchability’, and is inclusive without being unrealistic: “if there is no trans or bi content in the encyclopedia, it’s crazy for me to call it a GLBT encyclopedia.”²¹ While it seems acceptable to divide bi and trans from gay and lesbian, it seems that the last two have become co-dependent despite the reality of their separate communities. Furthermore, McKay’s conflation of queer as strictly male re-

²⁰ See: <http://gay.hfxns.org/>

²¹ I am not sure how why on the one hand the *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia* is to include all things queer, but according to McKay, GLBT is not accurate. Email from Daniel McKay, Feb 12, 2007.

inscribes, in my opinion, the problem with the interpretability, fluidity and appropriation of identity politics. The naming of these archives, and their changes (or resistance to change), is one of particular significance to an identity-based community, which is founded in part on a celebration of difference and diversity, yet obviously unable to fulfill the utopian queer vision of total equality.

Mandate

Most of the archives mentioned have more or less the same mandate; to preserve all forms of gay and lesbian (and sometimes BT) history. What is interesting to me—keeping in line the private/public divide mentioned earlier—is how preservation and access can sometimes function in antithetical ways. While, in theory, the lesbian-feminist viewpoint, in very simplified terms, privileges access by the community it represents (i.e. lesbians), the CWMA (since being at the University) is very clear about being open to the larger public, and on not restricting access or censoring the kinds of research conducted through these archives. Similarly, the GL archives pertain to serve and represent the broader LGBT communities, and to be accessible to the public at large. Each of these archives came to develop a mandate, which much like the naming of the archives, was subject to political shifts as well as their connections to other media outlets, journals and newspapers.

In 1975, due to the growth of TBP, the *Pink Triangle Press* became incorporated as a non-profit corporation with the dual function of running the newspaper and Archives. The Archives volunteers were organized as a collective—a model that had served TPB well—and came up with the following mandate:

the collection, preservation, and arrangement of information and materials in any medium by and about gay people, with emphasis on Canada: and the encouragement of and assistance in the use of this material, as well as assistance in the search for new sources (Archives Collective, 3).

According to Iain Blair of the AGQ:

Our mandate is to the community and to the people we serve although, obviously, what is the community? I mean, that's—I suppose—very subjective at that level.

We're a registered charitable organization and that certainly means we have to have a mandate and a mission and we have to for example [...] roughly ¾ of our income has to be spent upon our mission, which is the conservation, preservation and diffusion, if you like, of gay and lesbian history in Montréal and Québec. In terms of whom we are responsible to, we are responsible to the federal revenue and provincial agencies, which give that charitable status because we can give out tax receipts. So that's, I suppose, our primary responsibility if you like, in the sense of who we have to fill out forms to...(Blair, *personal interview*).

The archives' mandates are closely linked to issues of funding, which again, reveal some of the different stakes invested in developing a public (vs. private) archives. Arguably, in the early days of the archives, when the survival and preservation of the queer subculture was at stake, funding played no role in the mandate, if there was even a formal mandate to speak of. As the archives became more established, they became reliant on donations and other funding to exist in any permanent manner.

Funding

Scott Goodine, President of the Association of Canadian Archivists from the Provincial Archives of Alberta was quick to answer my query about what constitutes an "archives", officially and legally, in Canada.²² Since most gay and lesbian archives in Canada are

²² The Association of Archivist lists: Business/Corporate archives; Ethnic/Cultural archives; National,

charitable organizations, I wondered if they were subjected to the same regulations as the *National Archives*, for example, or whether all archives were free to delineate and develop their own policies. And what about archives like the *Canadian Women's Movement Archive* (Ottawa), which is affiliated to a university—does the university become accountable? And what does accountability entail? Goodine responded that:

there is no global or national definition of what constitutes an Archives. Larger repositories such as provincial archives or Library and Archives Canada have legislated mandates for what they collect, but this primarily covers the records of the corporate sponsor (ie. their government records). Collecting of private documents are usually mentioned but in relatively vague terms. Smaller archives, such as [*the ones*] you are interested in, have no legal compulsion to exist- thus they are free to create and control their policies and procedures as they see fit. This is the case whether they are charitable organizations or private entities. Archives like the Canadian Women's Movement Archives are accountable to their funder (the University) but not to society at large. They are able to collect or discard according to their mandate. There is no legal compulsion for any of their actions (Goodine, *personal correspondence*).

I found this statement to be quite powerful in that it created a potential dichotomy between archives with legislated mandates and archives free to be managed as deemed advantageous to the community by it claims to represent. It also implies that the CLGA, the CWMA, the AGQ, and any number of other Canadian lesbian and gay archives, have their own ways of determining the value of what they collect, how it is to be organized, shared, showcased, transferred, preserved or destroyed. Ultimately, GL archives are responsible to their funders, which as a charitable organization can be a significant shaping factor.

In an interview conducted by Aisla Thompson in 1986, when the *Women's*

Provincial, Territorial and Municipal archives; Medical archives; Regional/Community archives; Religious archives; University/College archives. According to the ACA, in order to have a "Special Interest Section for Gay/Lesbian Archivists", these have to be created by the members and "need seven participants to start", as stated by Goodine in an email.

Movement Archives was still in Toronto, the CWMA did not “receive any operational funding from the government”, so they had to fundraise “all the basic costs for the archives: rent, phone, any kind of supplies that we need, typewriters, equipment, filing cabinets, etc” (22). Currently, the CWMA is housed at the University of Ottawa, which bares all costs for the archives, while the CLGA and the AGQ are at the mercy of small private donations for their existence. Iain Blair from the AGQ speaks to this effect:

the gay archives has existed now for close to 25 years [...] We are a registered charitable organization and so we have succeeded in surviving on very limited revenue, I mean, we are almost entirely dependent on donations from community members. And we’re talking about small donations... we’re talking 20, 30 or 40 dollars [...] we’re very community-based (Blair, *personal interview*).

Similarly, 1998 saw the CLGA 25th anniversary and a renewed push to be recognized locally and nationally: “recognition as a national organization will allow us to pursue federal funding” (Ryan), states the Newsletter of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives. Local recognition would “in turn increase our donor base [and] establish CLGA's importance to the city and thereby increase our influence at City Hall” (Ryan). The link between funding, activism and visibility are mentioned here in plain terms, but a pause on this raises for me certain questions about the ways in which funding, especially from governmental organizations, risks shaping (limiting) the ways in which the archives run.

If we consider that the GL Archives grew out of the need to collect and preserve a history of oppression and activism, it becomes a point of contention to then be funded by that which it, in some ways, identified against in its original conception. On the other hand, the archives has also been a force and form of activism for the GL community “moving us ever closer to a society built on justice and acceptance” (Hughes) whereby

governmental funding or institutional support can be understood as a victory for the broader community, a recognition of the importance of preserving the history of lesbians and gays while accepting these changes as progress. This issue remains at the crux of gay and lesbian politics today: “in addition to transforming notions of public and private space, gay and lesbian archives are an intriguing locus of debates about the institutionalization and the tensions around assimilation in gay and lesbian politics”(Cvetkovich, 2003, 245). Much like the development of the Gay Village the increasing visibility of gay and lesbian characters on popular television shows,²³ openly gay politicians in the media, etc., GL archives are morphing into the mainstream. This inclusion means more access to funding, and as such, the potential to survive as an organization—a trade-off nonetheless.

An example is the CLGA’s recent hiring of a full-time office manager funded by the Ontario Trillium grant. They were unable to access funding as a community-based charitable organization, a process that was a struggle:

in the 80s we had to apply to Ottawa for charitable status but were refused because we were an archives that wasn’t affiliated with an institution, like a church or government body. So they said, “No, sorry, you can’t get charitable status”, but they forgot to tell us that there is an appeal procedures, so we discovered this late into the appeal period but we managed to convince the government that we weren’t just an archives for the lesbian and gay community but for the straight community too... Anyone with a serious interest in lesbian and gay studies (Miller, *personal interview*).

Having to justify its existence by stating its pertinence to the broader, non GLBT community, in order to get access to federal money is also an interesting, if not problematic, part of the GL archives history. I can say without hesitation that funding

²³ Such as *Queer Eye for a Straight Guy*, *Will and Grace*, *the L Word*, *Queer as Folk*, etc.

from corporate or government bodies shapes to a large extent the ways in which the archives presents itself, markets itself and invariably, who it comes to “belong” to.

Governmental and corporate funding then, allows for the archives to measure itself materially, or as Cvetkovich puts it, the “foundation of the archive’s power and visibility as form of public culture” (2003, 245). While these archives were initially deemed crass and trivial, today the GL archives hold an undisputed value:

it’s important to keep in mind—maybe we have achieved legal equality now but it wasn’t so long ago that we didn’t have it—a lot of this stuff that we have and that’s of interest was forbidden a short time ago, like only the 1970s, major libraries wouldn’t collect it, it was considered degrading, disgusting stuff... and we’re just talking about lesbian magazines or newsletters of gay groups—people have to come here to find it. It’s not in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, it’s not in the *McGill Library* (Blair, *personal interview*).

The debate of cultural value, access as well as the relationship between funding and mandate point once again to the shifting nature of public and private divide. Feminist critiques (Rubin, 1975; Burton, 2003) of the divide describe it as, simply put, a separation between domestic and public or between family and economy, which we see in some formation being reinstated here. Cvetkovich, using the example of the *Lesbian Herstory Archives*,²⁴ suggests that the LHA is defined as more of a ritual space than an institution by its volunteers: “organized as a domestic space in which all lesbians will feel welcome to see and touch a lesbian legacy, LHA aims to provide an emotional rather than narrowly intellectual experience” (2003, 241). Cvetkovich links the ‘domestic’ with ‘feeling welcome’, and with the realm of the emotional in order to show how the lesbian archives (or the LHA in particular) have an affective power—that is, the potential (and need) to

²⁴ The LHA is the longest-running lesbian archives in the United States, founded by Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel in 1974.

produce both knowledge and feeling. Access then—in relation to the visitor's connection to the material is more personal within a feminist lesbian environment, which does not measure its success on funding and mainstreaming—becomes one of the key ingredients to understanding the way in which the public/private sphere is always being negotiated within the context of GL archives, especially as they attempt to reinforce the relationship between lesbian and gay historical narratives.

Access

Issues of funding affect all archives, especially community-based archives that do not have access to federal money or grants. Each of these archives is open to governmental support and funding, but always with the condition (on behalf of the archivists) that the community aspect of the archives is retained—as much the content making its way to the archives relies on first being within a community, and secondly—managed as a community archives. Members of the early CWMA discuss the importance of community:

there's also the question of how the groups whose material it is feel about the depositing it. They're often simply more comfortable about having it with a group not unlike their own; with a group who shares, frequently, their group's politics. For example, we have some very important collections from lesbian groups, that probably just wouldn't have been saved if we didn't exist. And I'm sure there are probably other examples around. Groups working in the earlier years on abortion questions. Files where there are names of women. [...] Yes, we would welcome government funding, but only when the control remains with the feminist movement, with feminists. That's very important (Thompson, 23).

Funding and control seem to be key factors, for both archives: the feminist archive which wants to be able to retain the right to restrict access to protect privacy, and this despite

donor requests,²⁵ and the GL archive which strives to make information accessible and readily available while limiting the restrictions imposed by donors on certain materials.

On their webpage, the CWMA states:

the fonds and collections of the Archives and Special Collections (ARCS) can be consulted by the members of the University community and the general public. However, access and reproduction of some documents may be restricted for reasons relating to the Privacy Act, Copyright Act, conservation or at the request of the donor.

According to Desjardins, the archives is responsible for allowing access to certain sensitive or private information, and as such, the archives imposes certain limitations even if it means going against the donor's wish in certain cases, in which they would not put any limitations on the access to content. The archives takes seriously issues of privacy and disclosure, and places itself as a mediator, in some sense, between the documents and the public as they are better situated to make judgments on the kinds of information that should be made available, and which—with the people's best interest in mind—be restricted.

At the CWMA, more than half the content on lesbians appears to be “restricted” in access. This doesn't mean that you cannot access the file at all, but it does mean that the sensitive information—anything disclosing personal details—is potentially removed from the dossier. At the CLGA and the AGQ, the rules are slightly different:

because we're an archives we make certain that people use us, they can't just browse the collection. [...] what we do is pull these things together and give them to the user a little bit at the time so there is no mixing up of material and whatnot. People can copy for their own purposes but we don't have much in the way of media that we can transfer... and nothing

²⁵ I was told at the CWMA that restrictions were placed automatically following the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. Sometimes people donate things and are not familiar with these laws, and as such make no request to restrict information. The CWMA restricts a lot of lesbian content that is hand-written, such as diaries and correspondence letters, etc.

leaves the archives. No restrictions (Miller, *personal interview*).

Researchers are free to copy what they wish in any manner they want, though (ironically) the means to transfer certain media is not available and thus impossible—and all copyright restrictions are considered to be the responsibility of the researcher, not the archives. Alan Miller feels strongly that restrictions should not normally be placed, other than in very specific circumstances:

we try to make certain that there are no restrictions. When people give us stuff, it's better to actually have people use it while people are still alive, but there are some materials—not many—where people have closed files. It might be some personal correspondence or something... might be a file on a lesbian who her partner might not want anyone to know about their relationship let alone that they were a couple and that's fairly common...well, in older people. [...] this is one of the reasons our archives accessions aren't online, there might be... because of privacy issues we're trying to be careful about naming names although I'm one of the believers in naming everybody's name! (Blair, *personal interview*).

Iain Blair echoes some of these thoughts, comparing lesbian archives with the public

AGQ:

it's interesting because with the women's movement archive... and I think the women at *Traces* are very much like that too—or were, I don't want to say a “culture of secrecy”, but they are much more guarded about who should have access and who should look at it... [...] I mean if things were given to them with very much “no, you can't”... because, people can give that and say “I don't want anyone to consult this for so many years”. [...] We're a public organization, we are a charitable organization, maybe there are organizations obviously where... let's say we take the documents from the association des pères gais, now that I think about it, I don't think that just anyone should be able to come in here and then just quote individuals left right and centre who just said things in their meetings... I guess because, like I said, [...] we put the onus on the individual rather than on us.

There were these women who came here from Québec, and they were like “oh you know, you have MainMise!” There is one copy in Laval and you have to put on these little white gloves to look at it, here they can just look at stuff. Maybe because it's so small, they can... we don't have thousands of people trampling through... There is stuff we don't let people look at—

the Alan B. Stone collection—we have 1000s of prints and you can't have people going through negatives and photos so we have to find ways of making those more accessible (Blair, *personal interview*).

It is difficult to tell whether or not it is the fact that the AGQ and the CLGA are community-based that their philosophy towards access and privacy differs from the university-based feminist archives. One could argue that, yes, on the one hand, a university is bound to be more careful, more conservative than an archives which is its own entity, but I do think that there is also a gendered divide, with men in the public realm, and women relegated to the private, as mentioned before. I do think that much could be written about the privilege of being open and “out”, and the experiences, which would lead women, conversely, to hide or conflate their identities within feminist politics, perhaps even to this day.

The CLGA and the AGQ do concern themselves with their materials in terms of its content, especially when it comes to erotica or sexually explicit materials, which may be perceived to portray underage models:

we make sure we keep our nose clean, our porn collection is a perfect example even though most of it came from corner stores, we keep it separate, so that if someone is going through a box of periodicals and was to stumble upon some porn, gay male porn, might get upset so at least it's isolated, you can't stumble upon it unless you really ask for it. Our Board, legally, they are the people who would have to fight the court battles so they are fairly conservative. We haven't actually had problems with the materials so far (Miller, *personal interview*).

However, both Blair and Miller, along with many queer academics, believe that this kind of material constitutes part of gay history and is valuable—and belongs—to a gay archive. In *Hard to Imagine*, a book based on archival film and photographs to explore gay male eroticism, Thomas Waugh writes: “earlier eras were—and other cultures are—

much less timorous than our own about adolescent bodies and desires” (Waugh, XV).

Waugh is referring to male subjects here, but the issue of sexuality, and porn or erotica in particular, is one that has been widely debated within the feminist movement, and continues to impact, if not delineate, what forms of same-sex desires are acceptable, and which are obscene. Porn/erotica, or an intense engagement with the body and sex, is what Waugh suggests, “might be described as the essential, intrinsic carnality of a minority defined by sexuality itself” (Waugh, 6). An archives based on sexual identity is bound to always be tied into issues of censorship (the forbidden), especially as Waugh points out, sexual codes are read and experiences differently across time, across cultures, and arguably across gender and sexual orientation too.

According to Miller (CLGA), the same collection that was once denied its value is now sought after by the University of Toronto, who “would love to have it and have approached us several times, but we want to keep it in the community’s hands. People feel comfortable coming to a community-based organization rather than say go to the University of Toronto and gain access the materials” (Miller, *personal interview*). The idea of comfort resonates in my earlier passage on “home” and the feeling of safety and, I could add here, of being understood. Funding for community archives, however, is one that puts these notions of safety and comfort at risk, with the always real threat of going under.

Access to archives is, as Blair pointed out, a matter of first being able to physically enter the space, and secondly, having the privilege of requesting certain materials. Some collections are deemed too precious for general perusal, though most of the content in GL archives is there to be used, perused, read, inspected and made sense

of. Research, or creating narratives, is an essential part of the archival process, possibly at the other end of the process of donation, or linking donations/donor to a broader context.

The Role of the Donor

When I visited the CLGA, I brought two publications created by a local (Montréal) queer initiative for which I was the organizer in 2003. There were only 500 or so copies made of each, and already, from browsing the contents of the publication which was mainly short stories, poems and photos, I could see that it had already recorded various changes in the community: with people who had since transitioned (changed sex), become parents, or gone on to publish work. I donated these publications to the CLGA, unsure initially, of their worth. Alan Miller was very excited to receive them, and took the opportunity to explain to me the broader process of donation:

we open an accession, 2007, and describe what it is. Anything over 25\$, you'd get a tax credit. We'd separate it—say here are the posters, here are the periodicals, here are the files, here are the correspondence, photographs, diaries, that sort of thing. If we think it's worth more than 1000\$, we try to keep it all together so that the outside evaluator who comes once a year, can say “yeah, yeah”, this is a really good collection, it's worth 1500\$, and he signs off and the forms are sent to Ottawa. Then we remove the posters—the accession number would still be attached to the posters—the information about the poster would go in our poster database, periodicals in the periodicals database [...] then we have case files that we put it into, how the material came to us, what's in it, and we have some donor agreement forms, and then whether or not you had collected for tax purposes and then the date. If you came back next year, it would always be yours—what's called a *fonds*—and the material is always about you. Over time, we might have your fonds, your papers, and they would be broken down into various accessions, by year. Then what we try to do is describe the collection, and biographical material about who you are, your involvement, how your materials were produced, etc. It's mostly about the donor. It's about the individual, about your life, what you were reading, etc. (Miller, *personal interview*).

My role as a donor is interesting for various reasons. For one, it elucidates certain questions around value, ownership and privacy. Archives place an incredible amount of importance on the donor, and the donor become an important component of the archives. Archivists collect biographical information on the people who donate materials, and reward them with tax credits in certain cases. As a donor, I also became the person to determine the restrictions on the materials. Since the publication was already publicly distributed, I did not hesitate to place “no restriction”, but it did occur to me that in other situations, this could place the donor in an interesting bind, or position of power. As a donor, you are automatically responsible for the materials. If I were to place restrictions on a collection I had donated, and then someone came in with duplicate materials, but made no restrictions, each would stand as per the request of the donor. As a donor, you do not have ultimate control over your collection in the sense that the archives cannot make special promises as to how the collection is to be handled.

When I asked Blair at the AGQ what the sorting process looked like, he responded candidly:

any librarian or archivist will tell you that you have to tell people—you have to be flat out with people and say we might not keep all of this—if they then don't want to give it to you, that's their right to not give you their donation. You don't accept tied donations in the sense like ‘I promise that I will never ever, ever, ever get rid of this’ unless, of course you think it's something you never want to get rid of. [...] Something will be a great treasure to them but to other people, it's like, why are you giving me this?

It has to be things we don't have. A lot of people bring in boxes of magazines and most of them don't assume that we are going to keep them forever. We generally keep 3 copies—one for consultation, one on reserve and one, a final copy. Initially 10, 15, 20 years ago they tried to collect everything. In 1974 there probably weren't a lot of gay and lesbian magazines; now there are (Blair, *personal interview*).

In my research, I interviewed archivists in an attempt to determine the ways in which

they come to play a huge role in politicizing the archives, and how they are themselves, both artifact and resource.

Archivists' Appraisal

The archivist is responsible for appraisal, which means determining what should be kept and what is deemed of no value to the community:

we are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not. In this act of creation, therefore, we must remain extraordinarily sensitive to the political and philosophical nature of documents individually, of archives collectively, of archival functions, of archivists' personal bias, and most especially of archival appraisal, for that process defines which documents become archives and thus enjoy all subsequent archival processes (description, conservation, exhibition, reference, etc.) and which are destroyed. Part of that sensitivity means being aware of the history and evolution of appraisal thinking and practice, and the lessons it teaches us for today (Cook).

For archivists, appraisal is understood as a huge social responsibility and becomes an act of (political and philosophical) creation, “deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not.” (Cook) It reveals, subsequently, the power of appraisal in shaping memory, suggesting that the artifact holds within them a key to the history of appraisal, in and of itself. This is all the more relevant when situated within the context of censorship in Canada,²⁶ of materials deemed obscene and illicit—significant constituents of GL archives.

Appraisal, conceptually, implies that a filtering process must occur. It implies, also, to a certain degree that archivists are impartial in this selection process, preoccupied

²⁶ Just recently, the Little Sister's Bookstore and Emporium lost its court case to Customs Canada, for example.

solely with the preservation of “authentic evidence”. While the idea of “authentic evidence” is widely scrutinized now, it is rooted in early archival theory that conceived of the archives as an institution that is mandated to collect everything and in turn, believed archivists to be ‘keepers’ of archives (not creators, not using their judgment to select). Today, “authentic evidence” has come to mean something quite different, but it must invariably be assumed for an archive to exist at all. In their original conceptions (1890s–1920s), archives were free of the task of selection and destruction, left rather in the hands of the individual (administrator) to handle documents as they saw fit. While concerns over the ways in which individuals managed their records—by what they kept, destroyed, wanted to push forward historically as *important* or deemed too personal or unfavourable to them—caused archival dilemmas for early archivists, the major criticism of this approach came much later in the history of archival theory and practice (Cook, 1995). While most of these ideas—preserving everything and “authenticity”—now seem archaic, they do find renewed relevance in today’s age of electronic records. Many questions arise out of the sheer number and nature of virtual and ephemeral documents. Ultimately, the burden or privilege of appraisal rests in the hands of archivists, who often within the GL context consider archiving to be a potential form of activism.

Archivists as Activists?

The CWMA had organized their collection according to groups, rather than individuals, which became one of the claims to fame of feminist approaches to archiving in the late 70s: “a new model of organization that rejected the idea of individual leadership” (Curnoe, 4), which “challenged deeply held and thoroughly gendered notions about the

importance of great men and the formal institutions of power they historically dominated.” (Rosenberg, 6) This approach also implied equal responsibility, the rotation of administrative tasks, a philosophy of ‘learning by doing’, and a constant rotation of roles as to discourage a leadership position within the movement. To better contextualize, the birth of the *Women’s Movement Archives* followed a simple but impassioned philosophy as stated by Anne Molgat: “archives are political entities and preserving archival material is a political act” (Curnoe, 5).

It strikes me, however, that no text, academic or otherwise, reflects the changeover from community-run to university-based. The only trace of the transaction is in the form of CWMA Administrative Files. While these files reveal the process of exchange, there is no document engaging with the question of how the Toronto-based archives came to the decision of the transfer, or at least not in terms of the effect it had on the movement, its founders and contributors. While many feminist organizations crumble due to lack of funding, there seems to be a significant part of the CWMA story that is missing here: why and how the CWMA, which stood so firmly against institutional assimilation, became a part of a university archive, especially considering Pat Leslie’s plea in 1979:

the archives must stay in the community of women activists. It is ours. To ask the patriarchy to preserve our lives for us is a suicidal act. We do not need to be researched by patriarchal/ academic institutions; we do not need to be financially supported by governments, capitalist or otherwise. [What] we do need is a link to future generations of feminists and lesbians who will have access to our lives. Opposed groups are only kept in that position by denial of a sense of history, whether it is political or cultural (Leslie, 11).

Perhaps it seems all too normal to the average reader that such an archive would

eventually hand itself over to a better established, funded body—to, in fact, ensure its long preservation and wide access. The case of the CWMA is one that allows us to look closely at the implied activism in the feminist movement, at least in terms of the contrast between one which is a community-based grassroots initiative versus one which is affiliated and funded by an institution or a university.

The founder of the CWMA was part of a very active and influential women's movement, one which deemed that its contents—the preservation of women's lives within the women's movement—were political in nature, making the act of preserving them (and the forethought to do so) a political one. Similarly, Allan Miller from the CLGA says, pointing to the title on my consent form that reads “archiving as activism”:

it is for all of us [*a form of activism*]. Our very existence was political, a lot of people would prefer we weren't here, we weren't collecting lesbian and gay material. A) There's no need, B) Why push your pride in front of everyone else's face? And there are things that we have that other organizations would stay far away from... (Miller, *personal interview*).

Miller suggests that the history of gay and lesbian activism is only preserved via our own initiatives, and that one of the only ways to remember our history is to refer back to what we have in the archives. Sarah Shulman explained once in an interview with Dykes on Mykes that there is a general consensus in the mainstream conception of gay and lesbian history that people (straight people) just eventually ‘came around’ to accepting diversity and difference. Shulman, along with many other activists (and AIDS activist in particular) have launched various historical projects to debunk this myth²⁷—a statement that gay and lesbian history is one of many hard won struggles, and few but important victories. Similarly, Cvetkovich writes:

²⁷ Act Up Oral History Project <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/>

that gay and lesbian history even exists has been a contested fact, and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality. Even the relatively short history (roughly “one hundred years”) of homosexuality as an identity category has created the historiographic challenge not only of documenting the wide varieties of homosexual experience, but of examining documents of homophobia and of earlier histories of homoeroticism and same-sex relations (Cvetkovich, 2002, 111).

While Shulman is quite adamant that she does not see archiving (or oral history projects) as a form of activism per se, her work which started in the 80s during the AIDS pandemic in the US continues to this day in the form of a collecting and sharing this shared history, in part to counter the dismissive discourse circulating among those who have forgotten, or were never aware in the first place, of the incredible community-based force emanating from the inside, working actively to bring about social and political change. Again, this social and political transformation did not just happen, and people did not just come around using their own good judgment. If we take activism to be commonly defined by intentional actions that bring about change, then we can conceive of archives as activist tools. The archivists play one role in this, but it is the collective effort of donors and community groups, those making history, those recording it, those preserving it, and those documenting the process—as one unit—which become a form of activism. I asked Ron Dutton of the BCG+LA if he considered his work as a community archivist to be a form of activism:

YES: work on the archives is my way of giving back to my community. I am passionate in the belief that we must preserve our heritage, remember our pioneers, celebrate our victories, expose our enemies, protect our young, but above all never ever again allow vicious assholes to reassert control over our lives. The archives is a record of all this struggle, and hence a weapon (or tool) for us to understand our past and realize our future.

NO: as described in the question above, I take great pains to avoid

imposing my personal beliefs on the material. What the community most needs is the fullest possible record of events, personalities and debate over ideas, not some edited version that satisfies my private worldview. So, while my motive for working on the archives is activist, the archives itself reflects the totality of the gay community including its less admirable traits (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

The relationship between activism and archives extends beyond the collective and individual efforts, however. The nature of gay and lesbian history, as mentioned before, is one that is deeply invested in recording activist efforts of the GLBT community. In a quote that sums up well the paradoxical nature of the public GL archives, in 1983, the Archives Collective (of the CGA, now CLGA) wrote:

many gay/lesbian organizations are primarily political; others are not. The political position of the archives will affect both what the archives collects through its own initiative and what people will donate. If a definite political stand is taken then it should be spelled out clearly. If records are to be collected from the widest spectrum of the community then perhaps a neutral position should be adopted" (Archives Collective, 12).

This quote suggests that GL archives are not inherently political by virtue of holding gay and lesbian content, which according to the history of these archives seems to be a false statement. However, given the huge changes in gay and lesbian rights over the last 40 years in Canada, the archives has been placed in a paradoxical situation where it must at once retain the history it has captured, and, at the same time, adapt to the political climate towards the GLBT community, which is more open, less political, and perhaps, asking us to reconsider the purpose of the archives in the present-day context.

In "AIDS Activism and the Oral History Archive", Ann Cvetkovich writes about her project involving interviews with 24 women (mostly lesbians) involved in the early years of ACT UP/NY and other forms of AIDS activism:

my oral history project was inspired by the conviction that it is important

to remember activism in order to plan for the future, and I was concerned by how quickly the record of AIDS activism was being lost only a decade later, despite an impressive amount of documentation left by the rich forms of cultural activism that have been central to ACT UP. If the AIDS activist movement that I had been a part of could be so ephemeral, I wondered what I didn't know about previous generations of activism. How might the effects of activism continue even when more visible movements end? (Cvetkovich, 2003, 2)

The question of visibility of social movements, as Cvetkovich suggests, is one that occurs through remembering. While history is the linear unraveling of time, where one can locate a past, archives function as memory triggers along this line. Memory is the bridge between history and archives. Archives, in a sense, provide interpretable evidence, concrete reference points and a public repository of visible, if not tangible, pieces of collective GL memory of activism.

This chapter has outlined brief historical narratives of three archives in particular in an attempt to frame the GL archive project as one that relies on absence—through negligence and intentional omission from traditional/national archives—for its creation as well as the construction of a collective identity around that absence, namely sexual deviance in a heterosexist conception of (nationalist) history. Absence, here, has become object; that is, the GL archives has become constitutive of the overall project of preserving Canadian narratives. That said, the archives—to be an archives—is part location, materiality and process, and as such, an always incomplete project. This leads us well into a discussion about the paradoxical nature of archiving absence.

CHAPTER TWO: QUEERING THE ARCHIVES

When conceptualized in certain ways, the naming of things already leaves something out, leaves something unsaid, leaves silences and gaps that must be uncovered.
– Emma Pérez (2003)

We cannot entirely discard the notion of identity or, more specifically, lesbian identity, we are still bound within a system in which identity questions pop up everywhere in our daily lives. The labels we rely on to describe/define ourselves in these situations each contain a multiplicity of meanings which are themselves determined by the context in which they are used.
- Kate Krug (1991)

Discourse is framed in the Foucauldian sense when bodies of knowledge are policed, protected, managed, and authorized. It is in this sense that these artists adopt the role of interventionists. They move fluidly between discourses. Trespassing between borders, they are able to provide criticality while demonstrating the mutability of borders
-Paglen (2004)

Chapter Two is divided in three parts. *Finding Absence* contextualizes and concretizes the absence of lesbians and queer women within GL archives in Canada. By relating absence to community politics and collective identities, I examine some of the possible explanations for this absence. *Answering Absence* dissects the archives—re-introducing the triadic relationship between location, materiality and process—I propose a queering of the archives. I also use the example of artist intervention to deepen my argument about

alternatives conceptions of the archive. *Queering Absence*, I delve into absence as it is made manifest in identity politics discourse. Using three examples of nonlesbian/female-bodied sexualities, I explore the ways in which same-sex desire complicate the archival project as well as archival research that aims to find, reclaim, and/or identify queer narratives historically.

Finding Absence

I begin by addressing the complex and contradictory idea of finding absence. As I established in the first chapter, GL archives in Canada were born out a political climate that led to the absence of GLBT/queer representation within traditional archives; the *National Archives of Canada*, and various provincial and university-based archives. Rejected on the basis of obscenity, for the most part, GL archives formed to become visible within a culture that silenced them, spoke for them, and in the long run, rendered them absent from Canadian history.

While I documented the issue of lesbian invisibility in the GL archives in Chapter One, I want to engage with this issue in a more in-depth way here by outlining the various implications and consequences of absence within the context of memory institutions and collective identities; by “memory institutions” I refer to archives, museums, libraries and galleries, and also monuments, video, and personal ephemera made public. While I was able to show that archives—as location, materiality and process—all play a part in determining the function of the archives, or, its purpose within a specific context, I will look here at the ways in which “being archived” is simultaneously a matter of membership and inclusion and a matter of conceptual

framework. This chapter explores the absence of women in GL history's memory institutions and in relation to 'community' formation.

The traditional archives has been subjected to much criticism for creating a system that imposes binaries such as private/public and truth/fiction, as well as for its position as a repository for cultural memory—a project which is partial, fragmented, political, and always in progress and thus incomplete—but that functions nonetheless on the basis of a shared notion that it is important (and possible) to preserve history, especially for communities which bare the burden or responsibility (or opportunity) of recording their own stories which would otherwise, eventually, be forgotten, at least in any form of collective identity and shared history.

One of the most widespread considerations of the archive is Derrida's observation and claim that the structure of the archive determines what can be archived, and as such, history and memory are shaped by the technologies of archiving ("archivization") (Manoff, 12). Derrida's work suggests that the mode(s) of communication or of transmission of information inform the kinds of knowledge produced, and as such, archive technologies limit what can be studied and/or remembered: "archivization produces as much as it records the event" (Manoff, 12). However, as mentioned throughout my research, knowledge is also found/produced through absence, ruptures and the renegotiation of these terms, a point that Derrida, and Foucault also consider. While Derrida's (1996) focus is on what is revealed by what is missing from the Freudian archive, Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) explores the notion of rupture, or in his words, discontinuities: "the archaeological description of a discursive formation is not necessarily an attempt to interpret its meaning but is concerned with

discovering the rules which define its specificity” (Scott). To archive, in Foucauldian terms, is “to suggest a discursive field and a structure of thinking” (Halberstam, 32-33) where the archive is an “immaterial repository.”

According to Foucault the *lack*, the *unsaid*, determines and defines the very existence of what is said, of the enunciative field. In the archives there is what might be called an absent-presence. What is present in the archives is defined by what is not. And the archival silences are delimited by the archival voices. (Foucault in Carter, 2006, 223)

The Foucauldian viewpoint suggests, in other words, that as absence implies presence: it is the naming of such an absence that highlights what is there, making both the visible and the invisible more present. The GL archives exploits this idea in two ways. First, in a straight society, the absence (of gay and lesbian history has been filled by the space of the GL archives)²⁸ be it of its own initiative); secondly, within the GL archives and for GL communities, new layers of presence/absence exist and need to be addressed.

To overlook the ways in which women are under-represented in the GL Archives in Canada would suggest that it is not important, or worse, that women’s under-representation, or the lack of women involved in the organizations, is simply the matter of a lack of interest on their part. Inclusion, it turns out, is about more than the opportunity to partake in a process, about more than an invitation to feed into an already established structure, and more than about an over-generalized conception of identity politics and community formation. For example, in *Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence* (2006), Rodney G.S. Carter states that “archives

²⁸ While speaking with Sarah Shulman for a *Dykes on Mykes* interview, she told me the story of how she overheard a radio announcer say once that people “came around” to gay rights, and in particular, to the AIDS crisis. This inspired her to create the *Act Up Oral History Project* to counter the idea that people just came around, and rather aims to show the long history of struggle for acceptance and the long quest to be heard.

are spaces of power” (216)—a fact that can no longer be denied even within the GL context—and that this power stems, at least partially, of voices being heard. Inclusion (and exclusion) is central to understanding the politics of the archives, especially if you consider, as Carter does, that being in the archives means “making history”. While Carter’s article supposes that omissions, distortions and erasures—or silences and absences—are intentional, or resulting from a lack of understanding, I would argue that in the case of GL archives, issues of power and absence are further complicated by the assumption that archives function as counter-archives, that is, is positioned from within the margins.

If we take this notion of the counter-archive, we start from a point that assumes that certain people’s lives are not recorded in traditional archives, and as such, not valued in the same ways in pop culture and mainstream historical narratives, and as such, not ‘making history’ as part of the collective conscience. Simply stated, the repercussions are that these lives—a community of people—is not recognized historically, and that individuals within the community cannot be imparted with a sense of their history (of struggle and accomplishments), or collective memory and identity (which is constantly shifting), and so on. According to Carter, group identity serves an important function for marginal groups who use their collective identities as a form of resistance and “it can incorporate the lack, and the pressure of the absence shapes and informs the group’s knowledge of itself” (Carter, 2006, 221-222). Carter suggests two things: that identity formation happens largely through community, and that absence or lack of representation impacts the ways in which a community comes to understand itself.

Group identity is interesting, as is the idea of ‘community’ is often used to talk

about the GLBT people as a whole within society/culture, but ‘community’ has other implications. By unpacking ‘community’, I believe we can start to understand the interlocking nature of subjective experience, discursive formations, and the archives. In other words, ‘community’ is a catchall word which tends to oversimplify the connections between people, what they have in common and the basis for their coming together, yet also reveals the ways in which groups are understood, and organized discursively.

I would argue that despite the joint effort of GLBT activism, and years of political struggle for equality rights, which has united gay men and lesbians, they remain, in many ways, two separate communities. This assertion ties in well with anthropologist Anthony Cohen’s description of the principle uses of community as the two following things:

a group of people who a) have something in common with each other, which b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. ‘Community’ seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference (Moore, 164).

The archives then serve this dual purpose—to trace the history of gay and lesbian activism against discrimination based on same-sex/human rights, and, to trace the history of various community groups and individuals, which may or may not be involved in any form of overt political struggle, united in a symbolic or imagined community. Within each of these categories, subdivisions appear.

If we look at the early history of GLBT activism in Canada, the early days (late 70s) show that lesbian/queer activists were often torn between the mission of the women’s movement and that of gay liberation. When I asked one of my interviewees who had conducted research using these archives (but who preferred to remain anonymous) whether she thought that lesbian and gay archives should be stored under the same roof, she responded:

as I would see it—women would be much better positioned in the *Women's Movement Archives*—get some grants to flush out the sexuality stuff, really move that. I would see that as a much more interesting option. In fact, particularly historically, maybe less now, the articulation of lesbian identities within the women's movement is central. And certainly feminism was central to lesbian identities, and communities and cultures. So it is a bit of a contradiction, even if they are volunteers and well-meaning and everything, these gays boys—who don't have any understanding of feminism—are archiving...(Anonymous, *personal interview*).

The positioning of lesbians within the feminist movement is echoed by Lynn Murphy (GALA activist in the 80s, in Halifax), who suggested through an example that much of what happened for lesbians happened under the guise of feminism:

well because women were generally off in women's organizations where if you weren't too loud about it, they didn't mind that you were a lesbian... women did tend to do more work in the feminist movement [...] For example there was an organization here called the Women's Calendar Collective (WCC) and it worked out of Forest Hill, which was a women's centre on Barrington Street and the WCC listed every month—listed the women's events going on around the city and there were an awful lot of women involved in the WCC, but the events were listed as women's events rather than lesbian events [...] a lot of lesbians were putting it together, the calendar, but mostly there wasn't a need to make a point of it. [...] In general things were cordial and we worked together without knowing who was who ...well OK, the lesbians knew who was who! (Murphy, *personal interview*).

Many of my interviewees suggested that lesbian lives are best archived through the women's movement, but it is crucial to note that lesbian visibility was often repressed in order to push forward a broader—said to be more inclusive—feminist agenda, a point I will revisit shortly.

The argument in favour of lesbians being included in the gay liberation movement is that it allowed for a broader definition of one's sexuality, or a less defined one (a greater continuum), which was not always the case for 'lesbian-only' events by lesbian separatists in the early 80s. Dutton writes in an email:

it is sometimes difficult to access lesbian information. Frequently, especially in the past, lesbian organizations did not advertise their events or distribute their newsletters in the larger gay community (eg Little Sisters Bookstore, the Gay and Lesbian Centre), but only within their societies or among acquaintances or through women's commercial outlets (eg bookstores). Frequently, these were "women-only" spaces where even their best gay buddies would, out of respect, never go (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

This also suggests that bisexual women, women who were closeted, or simply in support of broader lesbian and gay rights were welcomed into the gay liberation struggle for diversity and equality, while the creation of safe-spaces (for lesbians who identified as such) risked exclusion of those who, even if purely in semantic terms, did not self-identify in those terms.

Another example of subdivision within GLBT activist history is the more recent debate over radical queer politics and the GLBT movement. While the GLBT movement lobbies the government for equality with their heterosexual counterparts, in terms of marriage and adoption rights for example, the radical queer contingent argues for a distinct queer culture, which aims not to be more like straight culture, but rather more inclusive or aware of broader issues of identity and discrimination, including poverty rights, anti-racist politics and a strong emphasis on the arts and performance, usually with an emphasis on urban living. Queer culture is also said to stand in opposition to commercial ventures, at least in so far as they come to measure the worth of the GL community, especially in relation to the Gay Village and gay tourism.

While I am drawing clear distinctions between the two, these two factions influence one another to shape the lived-experience of gays and lesbians in Canada, and, in one sense, generate discussion around the notion of 'community', as many would make the case that community is no longer a necessity given the recent legal rights

attributed to gays and lesbians in Canada.²⁹ The main point I want to make about a community based in activism is that it unites lesbians and gay men on the basis of ‘otherness’ (or sexual orientation).

In this sense, gays and lesbians are seen to be fighting together—as a community—and the archives have done well to record and to collect much of what constitutes GLBT activism. For this reason, I am very skeptical of imposing a contemporary lens that critiques the GL archives as though it were a project built to represent the community broadly rather than an effort to preserve and maintain what it could of the GL movements given the political climate at the time, which first inspired and necessitated the archives to exist. In other words, it is important to understand the circumstances under which the archives were created and to extract what we can from the lack of representation in the earlier days of the movement. Were women invisible within the gay liberation struggle? Were they part of the women’s movement instead? And were they ‘out’ in either context?

This is why assessing how community is played out outside of the activist circle is a bigger endeavor, and possibly one of the reasons lesbians are underrepresented both within contents of the archives and as archivists. Put simply, the GL archives in Canada started as a political project pushing forward and preserving an activist agenda, as they were all tied to publications and/or newsletters, as seen in *Chapter One*, which were created to fight oppression and improve GL representation and increase visibility. In many cases, in the joint struggle against homophobia, lesbians are rendered invisible. A

²⁹ In a research project I conducted with M-C MacPhee (2007) on rural lesbians in Nova Scotia, every interviewee (out of 15) claimed that community was no longer necessary, at least not sexuality-based communities.

simple case and point is the *CBC's Gay and Lesbian Emergence: Out in Canada*, which functions as an online archive based on a timeline of events. The site defines GL activism as starting in the 60s:

it was a time of protests, legal fights and backlash. With a growing sense of solidarity, gays and lesbians became more visible in Canadian society in the 1960s, '70s and early '80s. Homosexuality gradually became more accepted as more Canadians came out of the closet to demand equality under the law (CBC Gay and Lesbian Emergence).

Yet when we look at the examples along the timeline, almost every examples addresses gay men only—from *The Body Politic*, a (male) teacher fired because of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, bathhouse and bar raids, etc.—with very few particular moments in history being specific to lesbians.³⁰ While this is just one example of popular representation of the GL community's struggle, it is one that factors in to the archives I visited as well.

The first time it occurred to me to ask how much of the content pertained to lesbians was in an email exchange with Dutton—something I found difficult to ask if only because I worried that the question itself implied criticism. It was the feeling of unease—my hesitation to ask about lesbians—that was my first realization of the ways in which the role of researching archives was more interactive or reciprocal (are the archives reading me?). While I felt that there had to be a way to assess the presence or absence of lesbians in the archives, even if just in a general way, I found (lost?) myself in a quagmire of identity politics, which effaced the possibility of 'lesbian' as a standalone category for analysis. Dutton responded to my inquiry:

it is impossible to estimate accurately the amount of material that is about

³⁰ Radio-Canada, CBC's counterpart, had more clips addressing lesbians in its archives: http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDCC-0-10-623/vie_societe/gais_lesbiennes/

lesbians, and this is partly a matter of definition. Are you excluding bisexual and transgendered women? How about subjects that include both men and women, such as unions, civil rights, religions, sports, festivals? Or materials written by women but not exclusively about them? We have a lot more women poets, novelists and other writers here than men [...] Really, I have no idea (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

Dutton's questions are pertinent: mandated to collect all things relating to "all those communities now subsumed under the neologism "queer"" (Dutton, *personal correspondence*), (yet perhaps not always aware of the ways in which these communities document themselves differently), I found myself caught in a liminal space as a researcher whereby lesbians simultaneously were, and were not, classifiable as such. This is a point which will constitute much of *Part 3* in the second chapter.

Similarly, in one of my early emails with Daniel McKay of the *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia*, the issue of women's invisibility came up right away, initiated by McKay himself due to his perceived resistance by women to participate in the preservation of lesbian history—a history he deems very important especially given the influence of feminism on the gay liberation movement. McKay feels that despite his efforts to get women involved in documenting history (even "making it easy for them") there are no women jumping at the opportunity. The opportunity I am speaking of is the *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia*, in Wikiformat,³¹ "focusing on people, places, things, and events of relevance to the rainbow community" in Halifax, and comprises of three main sections: "history told both formally and anecdotally; a catalog of current and past drag queens and their biographies, and; an Events page which tells you what's coming up in the city" (McKay, *personal correspondence*). The women in the community whom I had

³¹ Defined as "a website or similar online resource which allows users to add and edit content collectively" from: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/sarc/E-Democracy/Final_Report/Glossary.htm.

the opportunity to speak with (during a separate research project on rural lesbians in Nova Scotia) seemed to feel that McKay's notion of 'inviting women to participate' is problematic, and remains unresolved to this day.

In the same way(s) that queer geographers have long deemed lesbians invisible because they look to the Gay Village for evidence, the basic assumption of lesbian (in)visibility points to two things that apply to the situation of lesbians and queer women in archives in Canada. The basic premise in this case is that the *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia* portal exists, and as such, women should feel compelled to add content because it exists (and because it is 'important'). While both traditional archives and online archives are structures 'in place', women have had no role in building up this structure, have had no input in the way things are organized or managed. While women have been, in some ways, invited to partake in the *Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia* project, they do not control the way the site functions, presents itself, or is sectioned, for example.

Iain Blair is the current President of the AGQ and has been an amazing collaborator in this project, both in terms of engaging seriously with the questions I presented to him, and by encouraging me to take part in the AGQ's volunteering efforts, particularly addressing issues of lesbian visibility. I had initially hoped to speak with a woman volunteer for my research purposes, but no women were available. Blair made it clear to me that the AGQ welcomes many lesbian researchers, and that lesbians are often a topic for research, but that the content held at the AGQ is mostly by and about gay men:

I would think that lesbian content must be somewhere between 15-25%, if I think of just my personal travels through the collections. Even if you consider now, in Mtl, the gay publications compared to the lesbian publications! (Blair, *personal interview*).

While there is no reproach to make, it does make me wonder about the ways in which we

assume the community is constituted. Blair explains this, though indirectly, by saying that the content—the growth of the archive—is a network, more or less, of friends' collections:

it does depend upon personal relationships...it's who we know as well as people coming to us. It'd be easy to get into a hermetically sealed universe in the sense that it's just like chatter among people who already know each other. We try to avoid that and get the word out there but obviously that's a problem [...] I think it's true of every community, you know, who decides who a community is and who speaks for it? (Blair, *personal interview*).

But, who does speak for it? And if there is so little lesbian content here, and with nobody actively seeking it out, "where" is lesbian history? Blair suggests that lesbians have their own pockets of history and repositories:

our group [AGQ] currently is pretty largely male, I mean, there are one or two women, but it's largely male. At the same time there is *Traces, les archives lesbiennes*, which kind of operates separately, but even them, I can't speak for them, but they represent a certain segment of the women's community. They started in the 70s and they are very—so I am told—they were started out of a lesbian separatist dynamic and they don't want anything to do with men or males organizations. Men aren't allowed to consult their materials. Still, and... who are we to say we're the gay and lesbian archives—what about these lesbians...

We have had some women working with the AGQ over the years, and I think we have to admit it is a difficult fit. There is one woman working with a group of men, and I can imagine that her feeling of isolation is natural. Our two principal women members slowly became less active. Although it must be said that the same thing has happened to lots of men who have worked with the Archives too.

While there is information on lesbians in the AGQ, Prince (co-founder) is quick to say that other archives, Toronto's *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* and the *National Archives* hold more.³²

Two things are revealed here. One is that lesbian history is, for the most part,

³² Prince mentioned this to me in casual conversation when I visited the archives for a second time.

assumed to be part of the broader GLBT activist struggle; the other is that within the context of the archives, men and women do not work together—there are no instances of long-standing gay and lesbian archivists working alongside one another. The GL archives, in this sense, appears to be more a reflection of how it is perceived by mainstream society, and less about the lived experience of GL communities. For people living in these communities, GL history concurrently represents the struggle for same-sex rights and covers up the divisive politics of the movement—privileging this representation of the movement as it strives, in the case of the CLGA anyway, to be more inclusive. The AGQ, conversely, at once recognizes its limitations, makes no apologies about it, and suggests that lesbian repositories are best placed within a community in which politics and content are harmonized. The CWMA, a case that highlights the failure of a lesbian-headed feminist community archives to sustain itself, asks us to question why they felt better positioned within a university setting, than within the GL archives, who often collaborated on projects together. Because archives rely on the visible trace left behind by organizations, the reason there is less lesbian content in the GL archives is all too obvious according to Dutton of the *British-Columbia Gay and Lesbian Archives* (BCG+LA):

lesbian organizations, services and entertainment venues were often short-lived. there are various reasons for this: women's disposable income was on average lower than men's, hence their time got monopolized by work and childcare; organizations that attempted to work through universal consensus sometimes found decision-making paralyzed, so the groups foundered; activist lesbians often were drawn away to larger women's movement issues (union organizing, immigration issues, anti-war movements, etc); burnout from too many commitments and too little time to volunteer. When these organizations disappeared, any files they may have had also disappeared (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

Dutton associates lived experience to the historical mark certain community formations

leave behind, to be archived. Linked to Podmore's (2006) earlier idea of how lesbian communities come to be formed differently from men's (i.e. through informal social networks rather than commercial venues), the GL archive is situated at the crossroads of these two.

To recap then, when the issue of lesbian visibility in the archives came up, there were four types of responses: that women have their own archives (often understood and framed as a "culture of secrecy" by gay men in the GL archives); that women have the opportunity to partake in various projects but chose not to; that women leave a different historical trace behind as they meet through informal networks (rather than commercial ventures); or, and finally, that women failed to record and collect their own stories;

Dutton suggests:

women's organizations frequently did not keep very detailed institutional files. there are several reasons for this: often groups met informally, with no premises to store ongoing records; groups formed to address specific contentious issues such as legal defense, child custody, spousal abuse, and did not wish to record memberships or the contents of discussions; the lesbians involved were sometimes heavily committed to various women's movement causes, so archiving records was a low priority. In general, people--gays and lesbians included--do not recognize the historic value of retaining organizational records (its a librarian thing) so keeping files and archiving them is not on the radar (Dutton, *personal correspondence*).

The quest for inclusion or recognition—especially as an institution that bares a certain name and mandate, is, according to Kelly Oliver, in and of itself a “symptom of the pathology of oppression” (78). If a marginal group is seeking inclusion or making demands for recognition, and if the dominant group is seen to grant recognition to the marginal group, the power dynamics of privilege and domination are repeated and maintained: “this is to say that if the operations of recognition require a recognizer and a recognizee then we have done no more than replicate the master-slave, subject-

other/object hierarchy in this new form” (Oliver, 78). Oliver’s analysis can be applied directly to the GL archives, which angles gay men as “oppressors” of lesbians/women with the GLBT context, or the function of “whiteness” on defining sexualities, both in language and categorization, “because recognition requires the assimilation of difference into something familiar.” (Oliver, 80) However, both of these statements require further unpacking.

As outlined in Anjali Arondekar’s *Border/Line Sex: Queer Postcolonialities, or How Race Matters Outside the United States* (2005a), “conflations of race and sex produce gross misrepresentations of historical and geopolitical subjects and issues” (245). Gay men preserving GL(BT) histories shape the nature of the archives, the writing of history and the cultural manifestations of sexuality. That said, these archives function more as a mirror of those who have the most influence and power to shape the community—as is made visible through representation of gay subjects in publications, on websites, in bars and other gay-run venues; each of these leaving a visible trace, each of these part of history.

Race, class and religion (among other category markers) are made second to sexual orientation despite the actual (real) impossibility of separating the two. The concerted effort to be more inclusive of lesbians and “cultural” and “ethnic” groups by archivists is one that necessarily suggests that identity is at once unified and compartmentalized, not naturally encompassed by the GL archives project. So, while the GL archives is inclusive (as in actively seeking out diverse collections), an exploration of the politics of the archives reveals that they are a manifestation of the divisions within the community as well as a revelation of their commitment to vaster (Canadian multicultural)

representation.

Answering Absence

Based on the interlocking concepts of *location*, *materiality* and *process* presented in my first chapter—concepts on which GL archives in Canada are based and from which they do not very much deviate—I propose a queering of the archives which challenges, defies, rejects and/or re-conceptualizes our attachment to the past, our need for collective narratives, and our reliance on original (as in authentic) and valuable (as in monetary) artifacts as evidence of historical trajectories. This offers an alternative that allows us to consider both the importance and limitations of archives in the preservation of GL history and, in particular, lesbian and queer women’s pasts.

Queering the archives is a theoretical framework—it implies movement and action, it is dynamic, shifting and self-reflexive. For this section, you, the reader, must allow yourself to conceive of an archive as something that is at times both theoretically unattainable, yet indispensable; always in flux and necessarily incomplete.

To queer the archives, I explore various discursive threads, which are at the core of the current dialogue between archivists concerned with or invested in the changing nature of activist-based archives, counter-archives and community archives, as well as artist intervention.³³ Using these threads, I propose three ways to answer absence that pertain to *location*, *materiality* and *process*, as promised in my first chapter. Answering absence is not locating what is missing, but rather proposing new, if not utopian, ways of looking: “queer memories of and longings for utopias are potentially transformative, as

³³ These themes were at the heart of the discussion at the *Taking a Stand Conference* in Ottawa, June 2007, at the Libraries and Archives Canada.

they help us reimagine the social [...] nostalgic visions of the past need not serve a reactionary end. They may also offer new possibilities for reshaping the future” (Hankin, 61).

Kerry Mogg, co-founder of the *Anarchist Archives* at the University of Victoria, stated during her presentation at the *Taking a Stand Conference* at the Libraries and Archives Canada (2007), that “challenges to the archives are also its saving grace,” as the archives hold documents of both power and empowerment. By outlining some of the ways in which the traditional conception of the archive is contested, I can suggest several ways in which a queer conceptualization of the archive provides a potentially new and necessary framework for understanding a project as paradoxical as archiving absence, whatever politic or form they may inspire.

As I have shown, the GL archive has originated out of a very specific political context and community, shaped by the archivists who have dedicated their lives to the project. As such, the queer archive exists and does not exist as we consider that the complexity of human sexuality cannot be conceived of in simple self-assigned terms, nor easily traced back and tracked throughout history. While I believe the GL archives I have visited to be part of the broader “queer archive”, I argue that the absences that stem from these archives point to other ways lesbian and women’s lives need to be preserved, and if not preserved, understood as a powerful, and present, absence.

Location

The definition of *location* within an archival context—from positionality to geographical place—is one that allows me to play with the idea of the archive as both discursive and

structural, imagined and experienced. Answering absence by queering location is thus complicated by having to toggle between these two options, yet it is this tension that, in my opinion, reveals the most about the ways in which the naming of the archive as an “archive”, turns a room into a historical repository, and its holdings into precious artifacts. By imagining the queer archive as uncontainable, dynamic and always being produced, we can begin to understand that certain objects never make it home, so to speak. It is this archiving of absence—to return to the original theme—that serves best to queer the notion of the archive as a physical repository.

Archiving absence is akin to an act of compensation, or as Irit Rogoff (2002) puts it, "moving beyond the supposition that absences need to be compensated for by the constitution of symbolic presences," as are archival holdings, especially on display. In addition, in the case of gay and lesbian history (as well as other marginal groups), the archive itself becomes an artifact—a reminder of community and political struggle, as well as violence, homophobia and discrimination: “with displayed objects documenting an absent history and a provocative architecture which insists on the void remaining just that” (Rogoff).

GL archives are expanding and becoming more visible, but are introverting towards their respective Gay Village. Perhaps this is where the GL archives and the imagined queer archive split: Rogoff proposes a shift from these “compensatory projects of atoning for absences and replacing voids, to a performative one in which loss is not only enacted, but is made manifest from within the culture that has remained a seemingly invulnerable dominant”.

A queering of the archive, in my opinion, would not only counter the necessity (or

desire) of the GL archives to move to the Gay Village (or remain there), but questions the trajectory of certain documents to these repositories. While the GL archives are best situated within the Gay Village because of their political course, I would argue that certain objects become displaced in that context. Of course, this is a highly controversial statement to make; however, the *location* of the archive is not, as I've shown in my research, neutral territory. Best summarized by Randolph Starn (2002),

archives are not more—or less—than historical, which is to say, subject to or, more exactly, products of the vagaries of circumstance, accident, and interest. This truth is one of the most obvious and paradoxical about archives (393).

Paradox inside paradox, archiving absence compels us to consider the imagined lesbian/queer women's archive as excluded and exclusive; I am able to write about absence because the GL archive exists and attests to distinct queer identities, and yet it is this very structure that produces the context for this exclusion, material or imagined.

Materiality

Materiality has been used throughout my work to refer to, and challenge, the nature of archival artifacts. *Materiality* implies that the object is central to triggering memory, rather than the affective response activated by the object; this affective response is in no way preserved in GL archives. *Materiality* also raises issues of ownership, value and originality (or the "original"), which are queered here by proposing a shift in emphasis: from the goal of a centralized repository to a reconnection of the object with community.

Let me begin this discussion with the "living archive," a term that Christopher

Wilde of the *Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP)*³⁴ uses to describe his project, by which, he argues, the process of archiving is always renegotiated. The “living archive” usually refers to administrative documents that are in use by an organization. Only once they have lost their immediate relevance, and become inactive, are they transferred from the “living archive” to the so-called “historical archive” (van den Hout, 2002).

Taking the example of the QZAP whereby duplicating zines is the point of the archives; to encourage distribution in do-it-yourself (DIY) fashion. QZAP is an online repository that functions on the basis of free membership whereby people (anyone) can upload and download queer zines. These zines are thus distributed, copied, and shared which, according to Wilde, is the best way to preserve a culture, create dialogue around certain objects, and keep them alive and in the hands of the community.

While the Internet facilitates this, it is limited in some ways to things that can be transmitted over the World Wide Web. Another example is the *Act Up Oral History Project*, which features interviews—sound clips and transcriptions—which are not only accessible and have many entry points (authors), but copy-able as well. While Web-based content has been deemed ephemeral in terms of format and longevity of access (Sterling, 2004), it can nonetheless provide an alternative to the traditional archive. Counter-archives, or archives taken up by groups who believe their histories to be devalued or illegitimated, and as such, previously unwritten, rely on the Internet, “as their storage space represents a tremendous challenge to the basic assumptions of archival fixity and materiality, as well as to the historian’s craft itself” (Burton, 2005, 2).

³⁴ Wilde appeared on CKUT Radio, *Dykes on Mykes*, November 27th, 2006.

Using the Internet as a vehicle for dissemination,³⁵ Wilde suggests that the more there are copies made, the more likely it is that zine culture will survive and remain in the queer imaginary. Arguably, this queering of the archives encourages multiples (copies, duplicates, versions)—a quicker and more efficient way to share knowledge, to spread accountability and custody—and this at the expense of an adherence to the mythical qualities of an ‘original’. This also challenges the privileging of *materiality* over the affective qualities of documents.

Institutions like archives, museums and galleries are part of what Dorion Swade (2003) calls “an object centred culture” (273). For reasons that are not always easy to put into words, the value of the original in the traditional archive is valued in ways that its replica, imitation or copy, is not (at least not until digital ‘artifacts’ asked us to seriously question the worth, utility or primacy of the “original” as a concept). The original is valued, above all, for its mythical qualities (Said, 1985). Originals are ‘original’ in that they point back to one specific moment in time, with conditions that pertain to one unique event in a linear history of human existence:

the fact that the relics have been handed down from the past, being passed from century to century like a baton, as it were, means they have the power to create the illusion of entering a different time [...] such a historical sensation cannot be planned; it is sudden and coincidental, just as it is volatile and ephemeral. It is “an intoxication of an instant,” quickly dispelled again by the present (Tollebeck, 241).

Originals, then, transcend time, place and context and, as Swade argues, they are also objective artifacts, in contrast to their replicas, which can offer up a mere version of the

³⁵ The three archives I explored in my case study do not generally take advantage of the Internet as do other initiatives, and as such, they remain predominantly an offline source. The CWMA website serves only as a pointer to the physical archives, while the CLGA and the AGQ have recently had their sites revamped. Due to costs and specific skills required to build an online presence, both sites remain limited to a brief description of their holdings, with some basic information about the archives. The CLGA site is growing rapidly and does contain some interesting information, such as the archive’s newsletters.

story: “replicas only embody physical predicates seen to be meaningful at the time of replication” (274). Swade’s statement implies that artifacts have a purpose beyond conservation, that is, of human inquiry into the past. He suggests that the value of the original artefact is underpinned by the fact that “understanding is never complete, that knowledge is never total, and that the original artefact embodies evidence the meanings of which may not be accessible by other means” (274). As such, original artifacts emphasize the material importance and content (of history), over cultural memory and oral history, for example. I would argue however, that this focus on the object does not consider the researcher’s location, the context in which objects are created and, later on, interpreted. Most importantly however, Swade’s argument in no way accounts for what is not preserved, what resists preservation and ultimately, what absence reveals.

While the mythical quality of archival holdings is true to an extent (as anyone conducting archive-based research will attest), I would argue that it is in part a product of their being “archival” which renders them historical artifacts. On the other hand, a queering of the archive asks us to reconsider the very foundation of concepts like ‘originals’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘primary sources’ (Antliff & Mogg, 2007). Perhaps this tension is the pulsing heart of the archival project—which must always contend with the notion that knowledge is partial and its traces fragmented. Nevertheless, the existence of the archives also allows an ongoing critique of its shortcomings, which produces an incredible array of alternative modes of historicizing and preserving community or collective identities, as well as various modes of resistance to these processes.

These two examples, in my opinion, link queer histories with something other than identity, that is, simply being gay or lesbian-identified. The QZAP links community

through zines, bringing together a fan subculture that is also rooted in a certain DIY queer-punk philosophy. The online *Act UP* project also proposes an archives based around a community for a particular struggle, an activist cause. While the GL archives I explored in the first chapter were born out of political struggle (against homophobia), the changing relationship of queers to the mainstream meant that they eventually became identity-based (instead or remaining activist based). And, in some cases, with an ever-expanding, if not watered-down, mandate.

QZAP and *Act Up* queer the archives in that they link cause to object to community, which, I argue, retains some of the affective qualities of the archives. Similarly, Terry Reilly (2005), conducting research within First Nations communities,³⁶ emphasizes the importance of having people (elders) write about archival artifacts and documents. He argues that all participants in the creation of the archives need to be recognized as creators, authors and source of provenance. This perspective, according to Reilly, demands the acknowledgment of “the multiple points of origins” (11) of collections. In his opinion, archives already exist in different places and formats (material/virtual), and while archival theory considers the importance of documenting these in their respective ways, the challenge is now “to locate an enriched archival *provenance* in the local context and the embedded tradition” (Reilly, 11). What is important about Reilly’s archival framework is the attention he brings to the concept of *provenance*, on which Canadian and European archival practice is based—or more precisely—his critique of it, which I explore next.

³⁶ Terry Reilly does not specify which First Nations he is referring to in “From Provenance to Practice: archival theory and “return to community”” (2005)

Process

Archival operations and processes, as described in the first chapter, are the foundational principles of the organization of documents. Queering *process* means putting into question these principles, as well as archival research, and in particular, research that tracks women's sexuality across time and discursive contexts.

Provenance is, in archival terms, the way in which collections are kept together and retained within the archive, in a manner that respects the donor/owner as the provider of artifacts. The idea is that *provenance* serves to maintain context, and that context is essential to the integrity of records (Reilly). Reilly proposes a system of self-determination "where the creators (or more precisely their descendants in situ) assume a more prominent role in the context-creating process."³⁷ In other words, rather than relying on the donor—the person who has inherited or taken on the project of collecting—archives may be better served by investigating more deeply who the artifacts represent, privileging the protection of cultural memory over ownership of the holdings. Likewise, Jeanette Allis Bastien (2001) urges archivists to look beyond Western concepts of law:

while physical and legal custody, judiciously applied, may be sufficient to protect the evidential values of records, such protection of the records satisfies only part of the archival obligation. An additional and equally compelling obligation is surely to enable these records to fulfill their function as the building blocks of personal history and collective memory (6).

What Bastien and Reilly are pointing to is the ways in which the structure of the archive is shaping the politics of inclusion and omission, while retaining claims to order, loyalty and law. As pointed out, *provenance* falls short of providing the flexibility and necessary

³⁷ p 5 Reilly, Terry. "From Provenance to Practice: archival theory and "return to community" (2005)

participatory elements to preservation of cultural memory; it also likens archiving to a transaction, privileging a capitalist model of property and ownership, as I outlined in my case study.

Conversely, in Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feeling* (2003), the author talks about the place of the archive in the lesbian popular imaginary. While traditional archives encompass a vast array of document types—from legal documents, and newspapers, to personal photographs and so on, smaller, marginalized groups rely on ephemera and personal materials, in addition to traditional records, to tell their stories. Selecting and including documents in these archives, then, is not defined solely by the value of the artifacts only in terms of their historical/research potential. Rather, it is defined by the collective and participatory effort to represent fragmented and diverse voices, as each contributor judges for herself what has been a critical marker of her experience. Cvetkovich (2003) uses the example of the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* in New York to make this point. The LHA policy states that donations that lesbians consider critical can never be refused to “actively encourage ordinary lesbians to collect and donate the archival evidence of the everyday lives” (243). Meaning-making, then, is as much the result of the structure of the archive, if not more, than the value of the documents it holds. And, as much of the ephemera is embedded with nostalgia, trauma and sentimentality, the significance of the archive's holdings is in the tensions between what is deemed (too) personal and what is open to the public, an issue with which many archival researchers are faced.

Archival and historical research is fraught with issues of representation, interpretation and description. Considering the absence of queer women within archives,

the researcher must learn to read and make sense of absence, be they in the form of code, silence, or secrets. The “open secret” is a concept I came across twice; once in Sedgwick’s article *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and once in Anjali Arondekar’s (2005) work assessing Robert Aldrich’s reliance on “narratives of recovery” (16) to identify queer (male) moments/subjects in colonial history. The logic of the “open secret”, according to Arondekar, is that queer subjects emerge “as the structural secret of the archive, without whose concealment the archive ceases to exist.” (2005b, 16). The recovery, or finding absence, reinstates the queer subjects’ archival liminality; we are most queer when we are secret and absent from writing, yet most (only) convincing (or legitimized) when located historically.

Similarly, retracing queer moments in women’s lives reasserts that “decoding” journal entries, for example, or uncovering secrets which were never meant to be uncovered give the archive its unique role as gatekeeper and mediator of tensions between the personal and public, shelving “proof” of these intimacies, but also relegating same-sex desire as something which must remain restricted in terms of public knowledge and access. In one sense, these private artifacts are made public, shifting the boundaries of gender in relation to “public” and “private” lives. Arondekar (2005b), therefore, without being explicit as to how, pushes for a critical understanding of research methods into sexual pasts. Similarly, Sally Newman’s (2005) frustration in locating ‘lesbians’ in sentimental correspondence letters in archive-based research, brings her to the conclusion that “the core methodological problem confronting lesbian history may not be the recovery of lost or suppressed evidence as much as the expectation that researchers will know how to recognize the “ambiguous textual traces of desire” that are right in front of

them” (Carter, 2005b, 3). I would argue that beyond locating these traces, as Arondekar suggests, queer research needs to anticipate the ways in which these so-called recoveries run the risks of duplicating “political and epistemological hierarchies embedded in identity categories” (Carter, 2005b, 4). One can recognize sexual *acts* as separate from sexual *identities*, but it follows that sexual acts, in and of themselves, do not reveal a straightforward intent or meaning. A good example of this is found in Lillian Faderman’s *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) in which she uses the case of two Scottish women—mistresses of a girls’ boarding school—to illustrate the ways in which notions of (respectable) femininity shaped the way these women were understood in terms of their sexuality. What would today be read as a straightforward confession of love between the two women was then held as evidence against any speculation of intimate or erotic relationship, used in court to acquit them.

Perhaps Sedgwick’s (1990) use of the “open secret” fits best here as it addresses the necessary tension between visibility and absence in the GL archive project. In applying Sedgwick’s approach to GL archives, I can make the argument that archives necessitate that disclosure be at once “compulsory and forbidden”, or rather, that the balance between being “out” enough to trace a history be weighed against a mainstream society which forbids it and thus makes it worth collecting. The status of gays and lesbians as a minority population has stood the test of time, endured various political and ideological changes, and failed to fragment, yet Sedgwick proposes that this durability is not a testament to an essential culture but rather an indispensable category to those who define themselves against it.³⁸

³⁸ Sedgwick’s writing became one of the foundational texts of queer theory, and when read alongside

Artist Intervention

Artist's intervention is useful in grappling with the archives as a contested site for historical analysis. I use various examples of interventionist art to complement and supplement academic writings on the topic, which attributes special importance to challenging 'history' and its preservation in a queer context. In questioning the legitimacy of the archive, interventionist's work highlights performance and affect as counterpoints.

Given the long history of gays and lesbians in camp performance and having a bent for pastiche artwork, which both creates a distinct subculture proper to gays and lesbians and subverts stereotypes, re-appropriates derogatory labels (such as "queer") and empowers queers in their difference and diversity, it makes sense that artist intervention is born out of subversion of the archives and historical discourses around homosexuality.

Camp is a queer archival 'strategy' in that it references a shared past and culture, or as Susan Sontag puts it in *Notes on "Camp"* (1961): "Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques". While camp is not a product of queer, queers have appropriated the form to respond to and deal with homophobia as well as create, document and—much like oral history—preserve a culture and genre by reinterpretation and performance. According to Sontag, camp is linked to an appreciation of the old-fashioned and outdated rather than a taste for things past. Rather, she suggests that the process of deterioration and the wear that comes with it provides the

Foucault, we can begin to understand the way lesbian identity is both historical and individual, a point I will now explore in my final section (*Part Four*) on the intricacies of historical sexual subjects and identity politics.

necessary detachment; that “time liberates the work of art from moral relevance, delivering it over to the camp sensibility” (Sontag).

Likewise, Linda Hutcheon (1989) suggests that “through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference” (Hutcheon). Parody and camp become insightful tools in understanding the tension between the process of historicizing and queer identities. Hutcheon’s viewpoint is that ironic representation is a form of activism, in that it illustrates the embedded ideological concerns and “de-doxifies” or unsettles them (Felluga).

In reading through Hutcheon’s usage of parody as analytical tool—I see an uncanny resemblance to the ways in which the archival project is resisted. She suggests, among many other things, that parody puts into question originality (or original source), the stability and coherence of the/a ‘self’, capitalist questions of ownership and property, the belief in knowing history “as it really happened”, and finally, the belief in ideological neutrality.

Many of these counterpoints are used by non-queer artists (or in non-queer contexts) such as *The Atlas Group Archive* (1999)—part real/part mock project documenting the contemporary history of Lebanon in a tone that ranges from “satirical to elegiac” (Kaplan). Raad’s simplifies this explanation of what he describes is “missing”, which he deems a play on poststructuralism’s “presence”. At the core of Raad’s work are these questions: “at the intersections of past and present, where does one look for the evidence that becomes history? Which stories are told, and who gets to tell them? What authority do photographs and archives carry?” (Kaplan) *The Atlas Group Archive*

problematizes evidence, and how evidence comes to stand in for history:

to be sure, the Lebanese wars gave rise to the Atlas Group's various projects but we're also meant to see the wars as somehow participants in the constantly expanding collective of the Atlas Group. To take its foundations down to the real (politics, war, violence) or to the imaginary (Conceptual art, literature) seems just another way of asking, Who's really responsible for the Atlas Group? Another, maybe more useful question is, Who is the Atlas Group responsible to? (Smith).

Coming from a history which has been mostly recorded from a non-Arabic perspective, Raad's work queries notions of authenticity and authority (by mixing fiction and documentary) and pushes the audience to consider the necessary link between documentation and whom the documentation documents, the context in which it is presented and how it is read (and often misunderstood), and finally, its role in cultural production. With a similarly-styled website, *The Speculative Archive* (1999-2003) showcases various 'speculative' documents collected from 'historical research', as a critique of the traditional archival process:

[*The Speculative Archive*] describe their work as "speculative" as a way to foreground the temporal complexities of archival and documentary practices. Their "archive" is not a physical site where a kind of static retention occurs or where historical truth is fixed, but rather exists as a set of socio-political and cultural practices in which documents, objects, and memories are taken up in ongoing processes of transformation (Ultra Red).

In their repertory, *The Speculative Archives* have a video entitled "It's not My Memory of It", a tale about the unraveling of three classified documents, in which the artist, interested in uncovering the processes of institutional and political memory, conduct a series of interviews with US intelligence representatives. Similar to Raad, *The Speculative Archive* bridges fiction and truth, testimony and narrative—always in relation to memory. Using photography, installation projects and video to showcase their work to

the public, *The Speculative Archive* asks us to consider how certain format/media, which challenge the archives, also reveal a lot about the intrinsic archival qualities of recording devices.

In less cryptic terms, Gregg Bordowitz (1987) a video artist and activist for *Act Up*, declared the video camera an armed propaganda tool, and equated video footage to “community archives” (Hubbard). A member of *Testing the Limits Collective*, Bordowitz sought to strike a balance between the desires to reach a mass audience, remain true to his art-school training, and to his commitment to the movement.³⁹ To this effect, documenting the movement occurred however it could, which most typically meant gathering “down and dirty footage” shot by whomever had a camera: “we wanted to listen to what people had to say about themselves and their situations” (Bordowitz, 188). In this case, if we take video documentary to be rare (or in this case, that which would otherwise remain undocumented), we see that absence is answered, by a process that allows for self-documentation through an opportunity to demystify the tools of documentation as well as empower people living with AIDS. This is people making history.

Video, in this sense, has been one of the major activist tools for self-documentation, a medium adopted by many lesbians, in particular, for this purpose. Canada has approximately ten GL video distribution outlets, such as *Video Femme* in Québec City, *V-Tape* in Toronto, *Video Pool* in Winnipeg, *Video Out* in Vancouver, and *Groupe Intervention Video* (GIV) in Montréal. I spoke with Anne Golden (from GIV), a queer video maker in Montréal who deems that these outlets are “unofficial archives” in

³⁹ *Testing the Limits Pilot* (1987); *Testing the Limits Safer Sex Video* (1987); *Egg Lipids* (1987); *Testing the Limits: NYC* (1987); and *Voices From The Front* (1992)

that they are incredibly rich collections of independent films and videos, but do not, for the most part, meet archival requirements of format upkeep and transfer or room temperature control. I would suggest that, as there is no official archives in Canada, there are also no unofficial archives (bringing us back to Goodine's assertion in *Chapter One*), but rather that the definition of archives is necessarily broadened within a queer context to include objects or documents which would not necessarily make it into institutions which call themselves archives. While these video distribution outlets are "medium" archives, that is, organized and collected by format rather than by cultural identity markers, they have played a key role in archiving lesbian culture in Canada.

Cvetkovich uses similar examples, in a US context to "point to the vital role of archives within lesbian cultures and to their innovative and unusual forms of appearance" as a way "of exploring the cultural and especially the emotional power of archives" (Cvetkovich, 2002, 109). Cvetkovich investigates recent films and videos—documentary genre in particular—in order to show how these works are inherently constitutive of an archive. Documentary film, however defined, demonstrates the affective quality and the power of visual media through the display of the archive. Film and video can extend the reach of the traditional archive; collating and making accessible documents that might otherwise remain obscure except to those doing specialized research (Cvetkovich, 2002). Cvetkovich (who comes from a trauma theory background) argues that gay and lesbian archives, like other histories of trauma (war, slavery and the Holocaust are her points of comparison) must address the painful past, which is always simultaneously personal and collective. Addressing the past, however painful, is often subverted through humour (camp, parody) as a tribute, within a queer context. One

example which links the idea of the lesbian archives with camp humour is local talent *Lesbians on Ecstasy* (LOE). LOE's appeal is in their remixing of famous lesbian folk song genre into politically/feminist charged techno beats, constantly referencing a tradition that is familiar to lesbians, and specifically, drawing from the 1973 *Olivia Records* collection which was created out of a radical lesbian-separatist collective in Washington DC. Bernie Bankrupt of the band explains:

we took a lot from an Olivia Records compilation album called *Lesbian Concentrate*. It was the first album ever put out with the word "lesbian" in the title, and it came out exactly 30 years ago. It was a fundraiser to promote lesbian community groups as a response to Anita Bryant, who spearheaded a major anti-homosexual campaign called *Save Our Children*. The songs have titles like "Leaping Lesbians" and "Ode to a Gym Teacher" (Zanin).

Artists like LOE make history an integral part of their identity as a band, and travel with that knowledge as they tour, imparting bits of lesbian history to their fans who may otherwise not access the information nor deem it important to do so. Remixing lesbian history while addressing issues of homophobia and sexism, queers the archive by linking humour with history of trauma, as well as by pointing to the important influences, namely from the United States, on lesbian culture in Canada. While this influence is undeniable, it has cast a large shadow, which Nairne Holtz of the *Canadian Lesbian Literature* critiques:

that Americans might be unaware of our quiet presence is unfortunate; that we are ourselves unaware of the richness and diversity of our own cultural heritage is unacceptable. Our sense of identity is imperfectly formed, based as it is on the occasional and limited reflections of our own images on the surface of American culture.

Holtz has put together an annotated bibliography of Canadian lesbian and bisexual women authors, which functions as an online archive of sorts, but which, more

importantly, addresses the relationship between national identity and sexual identity, and of classification in general. Holtz includes in her archive only works by authors whose writing reflects lesbianism (the by and for kind), excluding lesbian and bisexual authors who do not write about lesbians, but including heterosexual women who do, and, interestingly, Holtz excludes authors who have not made their career in Canada. While my intent is not to assess Holtz decisions about what gets included and what does not, I think it becomes a good example of the ways in which the filtering occurs—pointing back to Raad’s project—especially in trying to answer to absence. In addition to this, Holtz’s efforts in creating this archive, like LOE, is from the position of a fan and artist; Holtz is invested first and foremost in the medium—lesbian culture formed around literary works.

Artists’ intervention is, in my opinion, one of the areas that offer the most insight into alternatives to the archives, especially in relation to marginalized voices. Initiated from outside an academic historical context, these works focus less on the implications for the researcher and more on the impact history has on members of a community. Because community is so difficult to define, the queer context asks us to consider the way it is understood both as an insider and as an outsider. If we recall Sedgwick’s earlier passage calling into question the ways in which community can become something *against* which to define oneself, a deeper exploration into the makeup of this so-called queer community is necessary.

I have saved the discussion about identity politics for the end, as I believe queer academic texts too easily become relegated to this topic. I recognize the importance of identity politics by placing it at the end of my thesis, leaving you with a discussion about

the complexities on which this entire project is built.

Queering Absence

Throughout this project, I use “lesbian” and “queer woman” as categories for analysis, in relation to absence in archives without ever taking care to explain the theoretical arc. Perhaps it is because I find both of these words—“lesbian” and “queer”—unsatisfactory in terms of their theoretical scope; this part explores the power and limitations of identity categories as they pertain to both history and the archives. The exploration of identity politics is a necessary inclusion in this research in so far as the entire gay and lesbian archival project is premised on a shared history—a commonality between and among men and women, and across class, race and ethnic differences, on the basis of an identity that is not only predicated on same-sex desire, attraction or love, but defined and regulated by it.

While I admit feeling incredibly comforted and excited by the idea of a common queer history, I am skeptical of the ways in which “history” leaves out more people than it could ever dream of accounting for, and by the ways that “sexuality” is far more complex and political than a project like the GL archives can include or physically contain. In this way identity categories and the archives function in parallel manner: “identity may be regarded as a fiction, intended to put an orderly pattern and narrative on the actual complexity and multitudinous nature of both psychological and social worlds” (Bennett, 172).

As we saw in the first two chapters, the link between sexuality and identity is necessarily oversimplified in the GL archives—a larger fiction. It imposes further

limitations by virtue of its physicality, that is, it becomes impossible to grasp materially the entirety of what one conceives theoretically. Despite the broad mandate, what actually gets collected remains very limited to both the types of historical traces and the types of identities that are most visible and overtly “lesbian”.

While I would not endeavour, nor imagine it useful, to outline all the possible meanings for “lesbian” and “queer”, I will go over some of the current controversies involving identity-based research, especially within historical and archival research. While the focus of this chapter is not to simply untangle “queer” from “lesbian”, it is essential to clarify these terms, as they become both tool and boundary in my theorizing of absence in the archive.

“Lesbian” and “queer” are words that I use and encounter on a daily basis in my research on queer archives, as a radio technician for *Dykes on Mykes*, and as community organizer through *Nomorepotlucks.org*. I am continually shuffling identity categories around in my head, careful of the context in which I use one or the other, as though to use them interchangeably might imply ignorance on my part. It seems to have become my duty as an activist to keep up with the latest definitions. All identity categories are loaded with meaning, implications, and ultimately, reveal much about me to my readers, community, friends and colleagues. While I am continually in pursuit of making sense of identity politics, it is no longer a topic about which I very much like to write or make assertions. What I propose to do here, then, is not so much tell you what “lesbian” and “queer” mean, but rather talk about what they come to mean through the archive. Absence, as we will see here, is a great lens through which to look at Western constructions of sexuality, without backing oneself into a corner.

While in the context of this section I tend to use “queer” to be inclusive all “other” forms of representations of the erotic, romantic, or “lesbian-like” relationships between women, it is important to note that “queer” (and all its implications) is not better suited for all research and is not the term I prefer to use in all situations. In fact, much of what is found in the archives predates the usage of “queer” in a generalized (positive/empowering) way. I think that it is important to include “lesbian” as a specific category within, or in contrast, to “queer”. It is often still the only term that connotes a distinctively woman-centered sexuality. Queer lesbianism and queer feminism are also central to the continued evolution of the usage of queer in community-based activism and academia and should be attributed with much of the openness and progressiveness of the overall queer movement, especially within an academic context. Because part of me feels relegated to using “queer” due of the lack of better options, I am a bit weary of the ways in which queer theory has “won out” over lesbian studies. Despite the strong female voices of Sedgwick and Judith Butler, there is a sense that male-dominated “high theory” engulfed years of activist-based female-dominated⁴⁰, or lesbian work (Ross, 1995; Chamberland, 1995; etc.) But, I am also uneasy about my affinities to “lesbian” as the main motivator and focus of my research, as it carries with it many connotations associated with a derogatory self-identification⁴¹, or, at best, white separatist feminist politics (that may or may not always apply).

Since my work refers in large part to archives in Québec and Ontario, I must

⁴⁰ For more on this topic, see Huffer, Lynne “There is no Gomorrah”: Narrative Ethics in Feminist and Queer Theory In: 12.3 (2001) *d-i-f-f-e-r-e-n-c-e-s: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*

⁴¹ See Warner, Tom. P.55-56. Warner suggests that “lesbian” was label that even lesbians feared (60s-and some still do). The word lesbian was taboo, and as such meant that women preferred to identify as being “that way” than having a label imposed on them.

comment on its local usage. First, the term “lesbian”: it can be safely said that it (re)became popular out a predominantly white feminist movement in the late 70s and 80s, while earlier conceptions of lesbianism were associated with a lower-class, “criminal”, “deviant” or “invert” sexuality (Terry and Urla, 1995). “Queer”, on the other hand, (re)emerged out of a radical gay liberation movement from the US, mainly white and male and centered around AIDS activism. “Lesbian” refers to women who identify through their identity as shaped by sexual orientation, and arguably, feminist lifestyle. “Queer” refers neither to a specific sexual orientation nor to one political framework—though it can imply both. “Queer”, in other words, can include heterosexual people who define themselves as “queer” because of their political affiliations with a leftist, anti-establishment, feminist movement. Conversely, “queer” can be a catchall phrase, a replacement for the now tired (and sometimes mocked) GLBT acronym, which has grown to include everyone, under the banner of sexual oppression. “Queer”, however, can also stand in direct opposition to the GLBT movement, as it opposes the mainstreaming of a distinct radical queer culture. Today, “queer” is the preferred academic term used to address issues of gender and sexual orientation as a subaltern or marginal position from which to conduct research (queer theory). In the context of my research on women, “queer” overrides certain stereotypes of the popular conception of lesbians as singularly butch or masculine women, and makes room for transmen (as transmen, not lesbians) and feminine queer women (as queer, not straight) in this conversation. Still, “queer” is an attempt to bridge the political and the personal, to include men, women, transgendered folk, transsexual men and women as political identities; it allows for gender essentialism, role-playing, as well as the blurring and

subverting of gender norms and body ideals. The advancements of the queer movement have been to recognize race, religious and ethnic-based differences, and to include and reshape the movement accordingly. “Queer” is also about women’s inclusion and visibility, despite the earlier conceptions of “queer” as equivalent to ‘white gay male’. “Queer” is about recognizing different ways of having sex, of forming relationships and partnerships and developing a sex-positive attitude. It’s also about re-conceptualizing the family and parenthood, beyond the nuclear family dynamic and beyond traditional kinship ties. “Queer” means *political*—against the mainstream.

“Queer” in Québec is divided—the francophone population uses it less; (older) lesbians either have never heard of the term or reject it; or, it has no purpose (what’s wrong with just admitting you’re a lesbian?); and/or it has no French sounding or conceptual equivalent. And, for some, it is difficult to pronounce, which means its use is neither desirable nor overly useful as a means of self-identification or as a categorical tool for research.

I use “queer” then, because it is impossible to outline all the variations of women’s sexualities and sexual representations, and I propose, though hesitantly, that queer—and used as verb, “to queer” or “queering”—as a conceptual tool, acknowledges these absences. I prefer using queer to defining subjects as non-normative, and it is a word that is reclaiming itself as powerful and positive, especially within the academic context.⁴² I will use the term “queer”, here, to also define relationships between women who *did not* fall into the realm of self-awareness, and as a result, women who never defined themselves (nor were defined by others) based on their sexual attractions to, or

⁴² Though some writers like Viviane Namaste, for example, working from a more “essentialist” standpoint, write about the problems with “queer”.

encounters with, other women. While this might seem an odd statement, it is actually not so difficult to imagine some of the ways archival absence reveals the limitations of all identity categories. How would there be any traces of these “absent” lives in a queer archive? Should there be? I realize these questions are somewhat problematic and controversial, if not a little bit difficult to conceptualize, but I do think these questions can initiate conversation about the nature of “queer” in relation to inclusion and absence of subjects in the archive.

Historically, there have been many conceptions and understandings of same-sex desire between women, all of who would never be defined as “queer” (nor necessarily “lesbian”). This (hopefully) pushes queer researchers to reconsider how location (rural/urban), race, ethnicity, age, religion, ability, as well as gender (but not *only* gender!), attach meaning to the definitions of sexual orientation. While it would be impossible to identify all of the ways in which these can be woven into distinct experiential categories of sexual orientation, the risk of imposing a “queer” label on non-queer/lesbian-identified subjects needs to be seriously accounted for. That said, the only conceivable way to speak about non-normative, subversive, and non-heterosexual identities without using “non” as a precursor becomes impossible without resorting to the (imperfect) usage of “queer”.

Three topics that have emerged, in part, through a renegotiation of queer women’s inclusion or absence from queer history, and can serve as examples of the ways in which identities complicate the presence/absence binary: feminine and fem-identified queer women’s narratives (Harris, 2006; Halberstam, 2005; and Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Carter, 2005a); transmen’s narratives (Rubin, 2003; Halberstam, 2005; Valerio, 2006;

Noble, 2006) and queer women of colour's narratives (Muñoz, 1995; Fusco and Wallis, 2003; Pérez, 2003). My interest in these categories—though also problematic in their oversimplification of identity/politics—is that they reflect some of the ways in which social movements and discourse shape the politics of membership. While that is in itself quite straightforward, what becomes interesting is the ways in which the archive is a static repository, while its constituents are constantly being redefined/redefining themselves and not/locating themselves within certain histories as quasi-palimpsestic identities. And while the archive's content is resurrected through interpretation, through researchers and community activists' reading and engagement with the holdings, the archive is invariably limited by the identity categories of the time at which such movements were most aware of their political and historical importance.

Lesbian history, then, is more about the visible markers of sexual orientation—of one's presentation, style, demeanor, attitude, and self-declaration as “lesbian”—and less about the ways in which sex, eroticism and/or attraction play out. It stands to reason, that many women throughout history engaged in same-sex sex (or attraction, desire, lust or love) from a female but “nonlesbian subject position” (Carter, 2005a, 111). Examples of same-sex nonlesbian relationships include women who engage in same-sex sex/desire/eroticism, but lead otherwise *straight* lives (not to be confounded with bisexuality either), or women who feel attraction to women but who, without necessarily denying their attraction, do not indulge their desires (thus, not ‘closeted’).

While I cannot delineate every variation in which same-sex desire plays out—suffice it to say that it becomes quite easy to conceive of ways in which queer lives are simultaneously part of queer history and left out from the archives which relies on

tangible traces, and in some ways, a willingness to identify with the GL movement. Conversely, women who passed as heterosexual *unwillingly*, those who were ‘out’, but slipped under the radar because of their seemingly normative (geo-social-economic) gender display has been a common thread throughout lesbian history. Despite the oft-referred to ‘fem’ of the butch/fem couple, I would argue the fem is read this way predominantly in relation to her butch counterpart, and otherwise risks become invisible from lesbian history⁴³. Other examples—semantic this time—are women who simply did/do not identify with the word ‘lesbian’ because of its race and class connotations, especially in relation to scientific discourse around pathology, gender inversion and perversion. Many women involved in intimate or erotic relationships, did not fall under these categories, more than likely due to a more privileged position in society.

Either way, it is safe to say that the identity category of “lesbian” was avoided—a label imposed rather than adopted, until it became a political and gendered identity in the late 1970s. According to Faderman (1981), terminology of the late 19th century defined lesbians by their rejection of the feminine role: “she found that role distasteful because she was not really a woman—she was a member of the third sex” (Faderman, 240). Classified as inverts, sexuality here was a direct product (of readings) of gender and proper display of racialized femininity. Gender and sexual orientation are strongly interconnected and, be it through biology or politics, gender display—one’s understanding of self in gendered terms—plays an important role in archiving individuals, that is, situating individuals within a sexual history, especially in a subculture

⁴³ Joan Nestle, on the other hand, a self-identified fem, argues that butch-fem couples were the most visible representation of lesbianism and as such became what lesbianism was recognized as, and later on, critiqued by lesbian feminists for its so-called imitation of patriarchal/heterosexual gender conformity.

which claims drag, camp, butch/fem, gender-fucking and trans identities as part of its proud heritage.

In Max Valerio's *The Testosterone Files* (2006), he traces his biographical account of transitioning, from a radical punk dyke feminist to a 'regular' transguy. What is interesting in Valerio's account are his multiple conceptions of what lesbian sex consists of—always in relation or in contrast to his conception of heterosexual transguy sex with queer and non-queer women. Prior to his transition (FTM), Valerio felt that he engaged in sex with women from a nonlesbian standpoint, but this time, from a masculine female-bodied nonlesbian standpoint. The relationship between body and identity—or the disjuncture—is one that also puts into question the politics of understanding trans history as belonging to GL history. While GL archives, for the most part, seek out documents pertaining to trans lives, there may be difficulty in justifying their relevance especially if one considers that many trans people no longer identify with the queer community during and/or post-transition.

In certain cases, claiming these histories into the GL archives stands to contradict the politics of self-definition and inclusion by imposing a reading that is, as such, (intentionally) hegemonic. Conversely, the community-based nature (however skewed) of the archives renders it a project whereby individuals have little control over the ways in which their collective queer identity forms, and as such, becomes a project that provides only fragments, with varied and complex interpretations of masculinities. Lesbian feminism brought forward the notion that the category of 'woman' could be inclusive of masculinity—that woman did not typify one mode of expression—while transitioning (from female to male) was not deemed necessary, nor politically progressive. That said,

as mentioned earlier, butch identities were also seen as reproducing the heterosexual matrix. Women who were fem,⁴⁴ on the other hand, were too feminine, and also appealing to the unequal relationships within heterosexual desire that lesbian-feminism struggled against⁴⁵. And, important to note, is that the joint category of “lesbian-feminism” itself was not politically allied prior to the 1970s. In fact, much of feminism was fraught with the denial of lesbianism altogether as it was believed to taint (i.e. the lavender menace!) the feminist mission of equality, with men (Warner, 2002). As a result, issues of class and race were also ignored in the pursuit of gender equality. Not until the birth of radical lesbian movements (like the aptly names Radicalesbians)⁴⁶ was the question of “What is a lesbian?” addressed within the North American predominantly white second wave feminist movement: “a lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion [...] It should be first understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behaviour possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy”(1). Interestingly, lesbianism evolved to convey emotion (rage) above all else, in relation to gender and sex, omitting race and other forms of oppression. The lesbian-separatist movement in Canada, though vocal, was small and deemed alienating, “impractical and divisive” and “the majority of lesbian activist argued for some collaboration with straight feminists and to a lesser extent with lesbian and gay liberationists” (Warner, 81–82).

⁴⁴ Fem (or femme) is the feminine counterpart to butch and a category within itself—both an important part of lesbian culture, and lesbian organization of public spaces.

⁴⁵ Joan Nestle has often argued that butch-fem couples were at the frontlines of the battle as they were most visible/obvious and as such most prone to attacks and homophobia; the fem position is one which requires that we look at the change of context to understand resistance.

⁴⁶ Formed in NY in 1970, the Radicalesbians were originally the Lavender Menace—a group which contested the exclusion of lesbians from the women’s movement (more here: <http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/radicalesbians.html>)

In response (and as a critique) of the “whiteness” of Western feminism, various antiracist scholars have emerged through queer feminist theory (Pérez, 2003; Muñoz, 2005; Nestle, 198, 1998, etc.). For Emma Pérez (2003), “the queer-of-color gaze is a gaze that sees, acts, reinterprets, and mocks all at once in order to survive and to reconstitute a world where s/he is not seen by the white colonial heteronormative mind,” (124) which ties in well with Stuart Hall’s (1997) argument that new postmodern subjects assume different identities at different times, with no unifying coherent ‘self’ (Bennett, 2005). The importance of words as classificatory terms is being addressed: José Esteban Muñoz (in Pérez, 2003) proposes, “disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy” (124). Identity, then, centers on unity and continuity, and is about belonging to a group. And while questions of sexuality in an archive privileges sexual orientation (in very specific terms) as the basis for collective history, Muñoz and others concentrating their research on the intersection of race with queer theory propose that not only is sexual orientation sometimes conceived of differently through diverse ethno-cultural lenses, it is often not the dominant identity marker—and that, by choice or by virtue of belief systems.

These examples—feminine queer women, transmen and queer women of colour—are three among many. What I hope to have done is to unravel some of the ways in which the politics of particular social movements shape their membership—with feminist and queer movements being deeply invested in questions of membership as part of the movements’ political agenda, and as such, vigilant gatekeepers of these identity categories, shifting but traceable within a socio-historical context. The complexity of the

interplay between sexuality and identity begs us to ask, as Sedgwick does, if institutions like GL archives and the narratives they produce are not responsible for the creation of binaries such as homo/hetero, prolonging and enhancing their separateness, while in society, the two categories become closely intertwined. And if we assume that archives are positioned within a context whereby these binaries are inherently challenged, we must ask ourselves which identity formations qualify for inclusion and which do not, and why?

Lastly, we should also consider how identity politics put into question the ways in which lives are framed—should women who identify as queer but who live straight lives be included? Should transmen who, for example, no longer belong to a lesbian community and lead a straight life be included? Or what of communities, as Namaste (2003) suggests, subsumed under the GLBT banner but who identify outside of it:

it is important to point this out, because most of the Anglo-American writers and activists on "transgendered" issues come out of the lesbian/gay community and express themselves in those terms. My empirical research contradicts this underlying assumption, since most of the transsexuals I have interviewed do not articulate their needs according to a lesbian/gay framework. All of this to say that questions of language are deeply political!

How can the GL archive account for the shifting in and out of politics of queerness, or is that what queerness entails? These questions are at the crux of queer historical research, pointing to the importance and limitations of doing queer history in a Canadian context. Perhaps the most noticeable misnomer of the GL archives in Canada is their simultaneous exclusion of two-spirited folks while claiming national (or provincial) identities. "Two-spirited" is most often likened to the Western idea of transgender, transsexuality, or 'gender-bending'—men who live as/are woman, and vice versa. However, unlike the mainstream GLBTQ understanding of transsexuality, the emphasis of two-spiritedness is

not about gender or sexuality. Two-spirited people were revered in their families for being a ‘third gender’ able to help men and women communicate in an otherwise gendered organization of culture. While I recognize ‘two-spirited’ does not pertain to sexual orientation (or gender) as it is understood in a radical queer or GLBTQ context, the term can still provide insight into inclusion/exclusion debate surrounding the politics of race, nationhood and political identities. Whose history is “Canadian” and queer? Whose history is legitimated through the archives? And how is history used?

In Julian Carter’s *On Mother-Love* (2005a), Carter suggests that one of the legitimate uses of history is to intensify one’s connection to the present and into one’s political engagement with the world, a practice that is of special importance to disparaged groups and that often proceeds by means of profound identification with the “otherness” by which we are defined.

Carter proposes a queering of lesbian history to be at once inclusive of diverse, hidden, and contested subjectivities, and, as a result, inclusive of nonlesbian positioning within a queer lesbian historiography. The early practitioners of lesbian history were

committed to recovering the suppressed past of people ‘like’ them and simultaneously to demonstrating the fruitfulness of working from one’s own actual/social position rather than striving for an impossible and ideologically suspect universality (Carter, 2005b, 8).

I am aware of not imposing a “lesbian” label on relationships that were not yet framed as such or in other words, as discussed in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976), relationships based on a lesbian identity which came into existence through scientific discourse in the late 19th century. And, Kate Krug’s *Dykes Tales: Lesbian Identities From Gender Inversion to Post Modernism* (1991), explores “a variety of lesbian identities

which reflect the discursive contexts through which lesbian sexuality is constructed” (72), which I propose is one of the key points to reading the GL archives within a present-day context. More precisely, reading the GL archives requires us to attribute the same level of introspection as is attributed to the study of sexuality proper, carefully assessing context, discourse and power relations within a historical framework.

These three examples of nonlesbian/female-bodied sexual encounters reveal much of the ways in which gender and sexuality function to define each other and bring to light the complexities of creating a shared history that does not find its only commonality by standing in opposition to the mainstream, or, in other words, defined by what it is *not*. While I am aware that including transmen in my discussion of (the limitations of) lesbian identity is problematic, or at least not a straightforward parallel to make, I do find it absolutely necessary to conceptualize and politicize absence as broadly as possible in queer women’s historical narratives. Absence in identity politics is about not belonging to a particular identity category or not being represented within one. Absence also means being made invisible, or rendering oneself invisible through a rejection of certain identity politics, either as a subversive, proactive or provocative gesture (Noble, 2006). And finally, absence can mean that identity allows the self to shift in and out of certain groups.

CONCLUSION

As I am writing this conclusion, CBC radio is discussing the human rights complaint against *Bar le Stud* by Audrey Vachon and her father, Gilles Vachon, who were asked to leave the terrace as the bar refuses service to women. The Vachons claim they would be the first to defend homosexual rights; they feel outraged by the bar's decision that its clientele is in favour of this exclusivity.⁴⁷ CBC commentators suggest that gays, as a group who themselves have been discriminated against in the past, should be the last to impose such restrictions. This is the kind of argument, in my opinion, that privileges the mainstream position—as it implies that queers should somehow have the experiential insight to “know better”, as though nothing is learned by the dominant culture, the oppressing force. Undoubtedly queers are divided over this issue, but my own queer subject position understands the media coverage of this event as a one that does not reflect the particularities of gay male culture, i.e. a long tradition of exclusively male spaces, nor the context in which these kinds of bars were born. While I think it is deeply rooted in misogyny, I believe the issue to be far more complex than the one presented in mainstream media.

Reflection upon this current news item is timely for me as I write a few closing remarks on the nature of absence in the queer archives. While the connection between these two is not altogether evident at first glance, for me it links at least three things: the continued gender divide within the queer community, the discourse around queers as being distinct within a human rights context, and the insider perspective which suggests

⁴⁷ The story is reported: <http://www.canada.com/topics/news/national/story.html?id=048305a8-b89b-4fb3-883c-179641caf57b&k=22772>

that gays and lesbians have, in resistance to the mainstream, created its own culture which today, much like the example of the bar points to, means that these cultural artifacts exist in their own right.

In relation to my project, the important thing this points to is that the discourse around queer history is often a simultaneous insider/outsider narrative, the impact of these stories, the traces they leave behind (if any) and who is there to collect them, and preserve them. Much of my work is about the absence of women, and what this absence reveals about the processes and operations of the archives, as well as the discourse around sexuality—as both compartmentalize and simplify the process of historicization and identity politics. While many of the archivists assert that lesbians, as part of the women’s movement, normally had their own archives, they claim that they were part of a “culture of secrecy”, inaccessible and generally short-lived. These archives, no matter how obscure, serve as the “other” archives (and loosely thought of as complementary), however, sometimes in lieu of engaging seriously with the lack of content pertaining to lesbians in archives with a broad mandate. In addition to this, Blair, for example, openly admits that some men prefer working with men—yet this decision is never deemed secretive or exclusive, just a social formation which is rooted in gay culture (much like the male bars mentioned above). While I believe that community grows out of organic networks, the connection between lesbians and gay men has been overextended to the loss of queer women’s voices and places within history.

That said, I do think that what has been collected is due in large part to the efforts of the archivists I interviewed for this project. While gender is only one facet of the ways in which different historical traces are left behind, it is one that is linked with power:

politics, funding, and visibility. The progress of GL archives is often attributed to issues of government sponsorship, funding, access by the community and broader public and mainstream visibility, all of which are tied in, according to my research, to the historical context of the archives, and the impact of feminism and the gay liberation movement. The women's movement archives, in contrast, failed to maintain its own preservation project since it could not afford, literally, the time and energy that is required of archiving. The CLGA archives, which adapted its mandate to be ever-more inclusive, shares many of the same goals as the AGQ, though larger, more ambitious and aggressive in its acquisition strategy, which sets the parameters of sexual identities, and the politics embedded in a culture that encourages visibility, being "out" and "proud", as I expand on below.

The CWMA, while it is a collection that continues to grow at the University of Ottawa, is also itself archived as a fonds; thus an archive of an archive. These archives, originating from Toronto, reminds us at once of the physical and geographical importance of archives, which in this case also traces the shift from community-based to institution or university-based archives, and more importantly, the political shift which incurs from this transition.

Of particular interest to my research is the contrast between the women's movement archives—and its trajectory—with the two GL archives. The women's movement archives and the gay liberation archives both started out as a clearly defined political social movement; the women's movement archives remained as such while the GL archives became, in time, identity centered. Tracing a history of these archives, as I have done here, suggests that this shift, however crucial, is barely noted, or embraced in

any overt way by the organizations; or that identities are themselves politically charged. While most archivists express some frustration with “inclusion” (of women and ethno-cultural communities in particular), little is being done to address the ways in which the archival mandate adapted, or was influenced by, the various (sometimes contradictory) trends in identity politics that offered an implicit critique of movements narrowness, i.e. being white, male and urban dominated. In my opinion, this is also reflected in the shift of these archives towards their respective Gay Villages—though this can be analyzed in various ways—a commitment to the GLBT community, an alliance with progress that is equated with equality rights, the development of queer business and the further solidification of community through visible geographical boundaries and cultural symbols.

In my first chapter, based on the work of post-colonial feminist and queer theorists engaging with the question of the archives, I was able to conceive of the archives through the interlocking concepts of *location*, *materiality* and *process*. Understanding the archives in this way facilitates its study; we can then take each of these concepts separately and engage with the ways in which they are flexible and/or problematic, as I proposed in queering the archives.

For the purpose of my research I chose to extract archival narratives from three particular GL archives in Canada, allowing various entry points into the discussion of the politics of the archives. In particular, I was able to show that the private/public split is embedded within gendered conceptions of the archives, which in turn are informed by the way sexuality and privilege play off one another, often to the exclusion of other identity markers, such as age, race, ethnicity, religion and so on. Being “out”, visibly queer and

able to clearly formulate one's sexual identity in GLBT terms serves the purpose of making the individual into a viable archival subject and reinforces this subject's position against the thing by which it is defined.

One point that I think comes across quite clearly in my analysis of these institutions is the static nature of the repositories in contrast to the politically charged, and dynamic nature of identity politics. In that respect, archives that originated out of a particular movement, specific to the politics and influenced by other social movements of the time—which is the case for all archives and which is particularly evident in the ones I have chosen for my case study—remain the same repository, which in later years, come to have a totally different mandate. I think that this may answer, in part, the lack of lesbian representation both within the holdings and as people involved in the maintenance of the archives. In other words, the lack of women working at the archives reflects the lack of holdings, which is a further reflection of the ways in which lesbian communities work(ed)—through informal networks and often under the guide of feminist movements. It also points to the role of the archivists, which I have shown in my research, as critical artifacts in the study of the history of GL archives.

I begin to unpack the question of lesbian (in)visibility in my research, by asking how the GL archives prioritizes or facilitates the preservation of certain historical traces and how the GL archives relegates lesbians to a secondary role within the broader GLBT community. Lesbian/queer women's history in Canada is wedged between the women's movement and the gay liberation movement—if not destroyed, overlooked or lost. Issues of race, ethnicity, religion, age, education and class further complicate the ways in which history is conceived and preserved, whom it speaks of and whom it speaks to. My work

also looks at the changing nature of the GLBT community, its mainstreaming and the impact it has on lesbian history, and asks us to reconsider how we “look at history”, where we are looking, and who is doing the looking.

The fact that archivists are actively seeking out lesbian and other ethno-cultural content, as is the case at the CLGA, suggests that unlike straightforwardly gay content, there is no organic or natural association with these communities. And, because there are no women and no ethno-cultural diversity within the long-term members working within these GL archives, the network, such as the one Blair speaks of, is not in place to grow nor to form community around the archival project. Lesbian archives, in resistance to this exclusion, tend to form short-lived archives of their own, almost always eventually folding due to lack of funding and sustained availability to volunteer.

In an attempt to answer absence, queer theorists have proposed that these archives are not the central voice of the movement, but rather that lesbian history, along with various other ethno-cultural groups, record and preserve their histories in ways that—implicitly or overtly—queer the archives. Rather than centralized and structured, queer(ed) archives come in the form of artist intervention, implicitly critiquing the archives and their power to exclude or skew information, while also admitting the significance of documenting queer histories and the impact of “making history”. Queer history then, include the feminist and GL archives, but also ascertain that queer history is more accurately represented through a variety of entry points into the culture, whereby various narratives can be presented simultaneously, in contradiction to one another, or as an act of resistance to “making history”. Returning to Foucault’s (2006) notion of “truth” here, I conclude that fiction, art intervention and archival artifacts provide “multiple and

mutually incomparable” versions of history, in the words of Zemon-Davis (1988).

Foucault argues that things are ‘true’ only within a specific historical context, wherein discourse produces a certain kind of knowledge (be it moral, ethical, legal, medical, etc.). History is ruptured, discontinuous and consisting of radical breaks.

I finish off my thesis by critically and theoretically engaging with identity politics and looking at how categories of sexual orientation throughout history have functioned as categories of dis/identification, for women in particular. This segment of my work provides an intricate and intentionally confusing glance into the difficulties of identity categories, which are always in discursive flux, dependent on socio-geographical context, and ultimately attached to the individual’s right to self-define and self-identify, in contrast with (dominant) history’s need to impose and uncover labels, or categorize for the sake of preservation (or destruction).

More could be said here about the debate of nature/nurture, originating out of a feminist context to challenge traditional gender roles currently used in the TG/TS⁴⁸ debate and against the absorption of TS within queer culture. The idea that a group can be included into a “history” through which it does not see itself is a fascinating part of this project which I only begin to talk about here, but is worthy of further research. While similar examples of this kind of encompassment or appropriating can be seen in colonial archives, especially in anthropological photography (Fusco, 2003), the TS/queer divide is further complicated by sometimes transitory identities of individuals—a transition mirrored in the flowing in and out of queer communities (in some cases only) and the spaces—both mental and physical—allotted by a movement which is always ‘othered’

⁴⁸ TG/TS refers to transgender/transsexual as they are seen as two very separate identity categories—the first inherently political, the other, “essential”.

and thus inclusive, if only by default.

The Future

Despite the concurrent popularization and overwhelmingly critical approach to the archives by scholars, artists and activists, the archives remains a hot topic allowing for broader discussion of the interplay between identity, community and history, in both material and theoretical terms. Identity based on sexual orientation on the one hand, and a sense of true self which is further solidified through community and common language on another hand, is exponentially complicated by the ways identity and culture influence one another.

It is an interesting time to be studying gay and lesbian history, and memory institutions such as the archives I visited. The last three decades have brought positive change to the attitudes towards gays and lesbians in Canada, but heterosexism and homophobia have not been altogether vanquished. Without claiming that a distinct culture is impossible without resistance to it, I can safely argue that the GL archives were born of, like the women's movement archives, a historically specific political context.

Archives are fascinating places, a point I have perhaps understated throughout my thesis. They continue to be important and unique repositories of GL stories in Canada and for the future of GLBT research. An important note on the future, however, leads me to a brief mention of the fact that none of the archives I visited planned for the 'digital era' in any significant way—perhaps with the exception of the CLGA which had their publications digitized by an American company—and there was very little mention of plans to include Web-born documentation, correspondence and websites, for example.

The ephemerality of digital artifacts is a point undertaken by various preservers of new media (especially in the domain of new media art), but remains a point of contention in many already under-funded and under-resourced community and university archives.

The flipside of this is that some websites built through content management systems (CMS) or Wikis come with a built-in “archive”—while I would not argue that these archives in any way stand to compare with traditional archives—it does suggest that an awareness of the need to preserve is becoming more widespread. Canadian online projects like *Gaisetlesbiennes.com* (in Québec), *Superdyke.com* (social networking sites/forums for discussion in Vancouver), *The Rainbow Encyclopedia Project* (a online historical encyclopedia in Halifax), and *Nomorepohlucks.org* (portal of local events and news in Montréal), all serve different functions in their virtual communities—some extending to ‘real’ communities as well—simultaneously recording and preserving, at least for the time being, the conversations, events, news and culture of local/virtual groups. Further to this, video and online radio—both of which have come to be known as ‘podcasts’—have placed traditionally inaccessible tools into the hands of the general public—and have been embraced in large part by the queer public. *GayWire* (featuring a queer lecture series from Edmonton) and *Dykes on Mykes* (the longest running dyke show in the world, out of CKUT radio, Montréal) are two podcasts of many which extend the reach of radio exponentially and which, in my opinion, offers much to the idea of a modern archive in that each show is extensively documented, hosted by various podcasters, and accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. While podcasts and other digital ‘archive’ formations point to a (potential) broadening in audience—that is the receivers of media—it does not answer the question of its production/producers, and

as such, is problematic in the same ways all archival projects are, by definition, as podcasts and digital artifact merge object and archive. Without delving too deeply into this topic, I simply want to suggest that the traditional archives' incapacity to keep up with the quickly expanding form of communication suggests that new conceptions of the archives are necessary; the archives collect "backwards", as it preserves the past for the future, but must also look to present as it challenges its very structure.

The archives, in its most cherished moments, bring the personal to the public. The future of the archives will necessarily see this cycle back, as new technologies allow and facilitate self-documentation, and the recording of everything—from the intimate to the utterly useless—to then be shared through video distribution sites like *YouTube*, photo-sharing sites like *Flickr*, and social-networking software like *FaceBook*, or stored on private servers, as "memory aids", through projects such as Life Logging.⁴⁹ This is for me a particularly interesting topic as it is framed, to a large extent, as the archive of the future, that is, the self-archive. If we consider that self-documentation, at its root, is based in biographical works or "self-fashioning", a gendered analysis could very well counter the idea that this kind of archive is a novelty, as women have long written from the perspective of the self and the private (Cody, 2001).

The project I had set out to do in the early stages of my research consisted of a much more project-based, or pragmatic, methodology. I had wanted to write experience-based accounts of my visits to the archives, in which I would weave my critical engagement to the various processes and operations of the archives. However, it did not take long before I came across the issue of women's visibility (or, absence) in the

⁴⁹ An interesting project in "life logging" is Microsoft's "My Life Bits" Project: <http://research.microsoft.com/barc/MediaPresence/MyLifeBits.aspx>

archives, which I felt needed to be prioritized, and which I felt was not best suited by my original conception of this project. What I chose to do instead, is weave together the three archival stories, pulling out the important threads, which either highlight or contrast the processes and politics of these three institutions, allowing me to really focus on this contradictory idea of archiving absence.

Though archives have served as important tools for research for various theorists and historians of queer culture, their limited scope and precise mandate both allow for and constrict the possibilities of conceiving a queer archival project that is self-reflexive. The archives I used here as case study addressed some key questions about the nature of archives, especially as pertains to queer women's identities and identity politics. My decision to not explore in more detail the few obscure independent lesbian archives or history initiatives that did or do exist in Canada—such as Nova Scotia's *Women's History Club* spearheaded by Diane Graham, Debbie Mathers, Janice Acton; the *Calgary Lesbian History Project* which was Carolyn Anderson's PhD dissertation,⁵⁰ or *Traces* in the Lesbian and Gay Community Centre in Montréal, for example—I chose to concentrate on three archives which were accessible, while also looking for other forms of culture recording and preserving, that both queered these archives and captured important and unique segments of queer culture, and, which put into question the very notion of the archives as a neutral, authoritative, complete and representative endeavours. In other words, I could not simultaneously argue that archives are not the sole repositories of history while only looking to various archive formations to make such a point; I believe video banks, artist intervention and other subversive projects tell us more

⁵⁰ A trace of this project is located here: <http://www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/%7Ecanderson/home.htm>

about the self-referential nature of queer culture.

Some of the interesting methodological obstacles I encountered were in trying to write about absence while also being asked to edit out certain segments of the interviews—some of it I had deemed crucial—but obviously conceded to omitting them out of respect for my interviewees and because, in the end, it was not time for those particular stories to be uncovered. Much of what I have presented here is information which is not found in textbooks, published in articles or readily available in any archives; the interviews provided my research with original ideas, voices and insights from the people most invested in gay and lesbian archives in Canada: the archivists. Most of my interviews I conducted were with archivists, few with researchers, and I played a minor role as donor and located myself as a researcher, to explore as many angles as possible. Gay and lesbian archives in Canada are usually used for research rather than the object proper of research, and what little is revealed from the organizations appears in the form of conference papers, publications and newsletter from the organizations and archivists themselves. What I have discovered in this research is that archives, memory, community and identity are all incredibly rich concepts in their own right, truly deserving of more attention in queer-feminist archival theory. What I was able to do is lay some of the groundwork about gay and lesbian archives in Canada, pointing to some of the more obscure sources, and suggesting areas of potential future research.

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