

“must not be interpreted restrictively.”²⁴ The second edition of *Demystifying Copyright* provides a good starting point for such a discussion, first by enabling archival staff to easily attain a basic understanding of copyright and to be confident in their interactions with their users; second, by reframing copyright as a balance between the interests of copyright owners and those of consumers of copyrighted works; and third, and perhaps most importantly, by addressing copyright from the perspective of the researcher, which paves the way for librarians and archivists to develop copyright policies with users’ needs in mind.

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Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archives. ALANA KUMBIER. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014. 266 pp. ISBN 978-1-936117-51-2.

Ephemeral Material brings together theoretical and methodological discussions about queer archival practices focused around five case studies. Alana Kumbier is the Critical Social Inquiry and Digital Pedagogy Librarian at Hampshire College in Amherst, Maryland, where she teaches and practises critical library instruction. She holds a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from Kent State University, Ohio, and completed a PhD in Comparative Studies at the Ohio State University. *Ephemeral Material* is adapted from Kumbier’s dissertation work, which she concluded in 2009. The book is the fifth volume in Litwin Books’ groundbreaking series Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies, which has previously explored feminist pedagogy in library instruction, documenting queer activism and workplace issues for LGBTQ librarians.

The very concept of “queering the archives” raises important questions for information professionals. *Queer* is not an easy word for some of us, and it is worth exploring how and why Kumbier has elected to use it in her work. The word *queer*, which originally meant “strange” or “out of sorts,” evolved in the late 19th century into a common pejorative slang term used to describe homosexuality. The use of *queer* also sets up heterosexual desire as a “normal” sexual expression in opposition to the “peculiarity” of same-sex desire. In the 1980s, activist groups responding to the AIDS crisis deliberately adopted the offensive term as a way to challenge and disrupt heteronormative politics

4 *CCH Canadian Ltd v Law Society of Upper Canada*, [2004] 1 S.C.R. 339, 2004 SCC 13, at para. 48.

and culture. By the end of the 1990s, *queer* had not only been reclaimed to describe a politicized sexual identity, but it had also been incorporated into academic scholarship as part of a wave of research grappling with the very nature of sexual and gender expression. The idea that political and cultural practices could be “queered” emerged alongside the writing of Judith Halberstam (1998), who describes *queering* as a verb and queer methodology as a “scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior” (p. 13). This history is important to understand because *queer* nevertheless remains contested both within and outside of academic communities; however, when evoked with careful consideration, *queer* can be a critical linguistic tool.

Kumbier uses *queer* as both adjective and verb, and as a way to describe the oppositional, unruly, and coalitional approaches to archival studies and archival practices that she observes in her case studies. It is the very *queer-ness* of these approaches that calls attention to the deficiencies in traditional archival practices, particularly those that obfuscate political and cultural contributions from sexual and ethno-cultural minorities. As Kumbier notes in her introduction, the concept of queering the archives also responds to Laura Millar’s call for a more “expansive understanding of archives” (p. 12). By focusing on queer archival *practices*, rather than LGBTQ collections, Kumbier suggests that projects such as zine making and documentary filmmaking complement more conventional collecting as they are a means to create and reimagine heritage as something more than GLAMs (galleries, libraries, archives, museums). As she discovered in her own fieldwork, queer archival initiatives can even be temporary endeavours that may not ever contribute to traditional heritage systems. The very notion that archival initiatives can be short-lived challenges long-standing assumptions about the purpose and power of archives as persistent tombs of documentary evidence. It also highlights the importance of archival work as a critical practice.

The book is divided into two sections, each prefaced by a short introduction that draws out parallels and implications that emerge from particular case studies. In the first section, “Negotiating Archives,” Kumbier includes case studies that look at two films: Cheryl Dunye’s 1996 feature, *The Watermelon Woman*, and the 1999 documentary *Liebe Perla*, which explores the experiences of short-statured people during the Holocaust. Archivists may be more familiar with Dunye’s film, given its status as a cult favourite and the attention it has received from critical theorists Ann Cvetkovich¹ and Laura L. Sullivan.²

1 Ann Cvetkovich, “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture,” *Camera Obscura* 49/17, no. 1 (2002): 1–147.

2 Laura L. Sullivan, “Chasing Fae: ‘The Watermelon Woman’ and Black Lesbian Possibility,” *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 448–60.

The Watermelon Woman follows a young woman, played by Dunye, as she searches the archives for evidence of Fae Richards, an African-American character actress from the 1920s. The narrative of the feature is significant because it reveals the myriad and complex challenges faced by researchers looking for evidence of black history in archives. It is, however, Dunye's filmmaking process that inspires Kumbier and forms the focus of her case study. As Kumbier explains, the filmmaker had to create a Fae Richards archives as a prop for the production, and in doing so she reimagined what a historical collection about a black lesbian woman from the 1920s might actually look like.

Liebe Perla tells the story of German researcher Hannelore Witkofsky's meetings with Perla Orvitz, the last surviving member of the Lilliput Troupe, a Jewish musical family from Hungary. Orvitz and her siblings were detained at the Auschwitz concentration camp and were subjected to medical experiments at the hands of notorious Nazi physician Josef Mengele. During one of these experiments, Mengele filmed the family of dwarves as they stood naked and were examined by scientists. Although Mengele's film was likely destroyed, Orvitz remains haunted by the thought that it might some day resurface and be viewed again as a decontextualized documentary record. Like the Fae Richards archives, *Leibe Perla*, which tells the story of Orvitz and her family, stands as a counter-record, created by and for the subject(s) of the original record. Kumbier explains that counter-archives intervene in the "repetition of practices" that can render some experiences less visible and uphold power relations between archivists and those documented in their collections. She also notes that counter-archives do not just fill a gap in a collection or satisfy an institutional documentation strategy, but rather serve as catalysts for contemporary documentation projects that explore the experiences of those previously left out of the historical record.

In the second section of the book, Kumbier introduces the concept of "archiving from the ground up," which she describes as a critical archival practice that "responds to archival exclusions – specifically the historic exclusion and under-documentation of queer cultures in archival collections – by working with members of those cultures to document the present and create a record for the future" (p. 124). Kumbier then offers three additional case studies, which describe queer archival initiatives that use this critical practice to both document communities and contribute to the process of community development. The first of these case studies recounts Kumbier's own work on the New Orleans Drag King Collection Project, an archival initiative that she hoped would "help foster some public-remembering around drag kinging, and lesbian and queer women's culture in general" (p. 124). What is interesting about this project is that, although the community documentarians decided to work with an existing institution, the Newcomb College Archives, the archival practices they employed were rooted in grassroots community development.

They conducted oral histories, for example, with current and former drag king performers, and used events such as the International Drag King Extravaganza to solicit materials and records from the community. In this sense, the resulting archives was created from the ground up.

Kumbier's fourth case study, on artist Aliza Shapiro's DATUM installation, also looks at the ways in which community documentarians have used events to create archives and, in turn, have used archival practices to build community. DATUM involved a three-day open house during which friends, artists, and members of the public were invited into a gallery to sift through the artist's collection of personal photographs, and were encouraged to catalogue, organize, and display these photographs in any way they felt most suited the images and their relationship with the artist herself. As Kumbier recalls, some participants pinned photos along a timeline, while others selected images to scan and reprint using equipment made available in the space. At the same time, Shapiro moved through the event space, photographing the archival work that was happening and effectively creating a record of the present for the future. As Kumbier explains, the process of documenting what is currently unfolding is challenging, as communities of people rarely acknowledge the potential impact of the present on social, political, and cultural futures. Shapiro intervenes by creating the social space for a community to come together and ensuring that this experience is documented as it unfolds.

The final case presented in *Ephemeral Material* looks at the work of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP), which operates online and in a private home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Like the New Orleans Drag King Collection Project and DATUM, QZAP is an example of archiving from the ground up because participants not only come together in person or virtually to engage in the collaborative process of zine making, but they also document their experiences on a blog and in the very zines that result from the project. Participants use the QZAP zine library to inspire new writing and give back to the library with additional donations. In this sense, the community of zine makers becomes both researchers and archivists, tying the two practices together through a queer archival practice. This responds to the mission of QZAP to "establish a 'living history' archives of past and present queer zines."³

Ephemeral Material imagines how the practices described in Kumbier's five case studies might contribute to more critical archival practices that better respond to exclusions than our conventional methods. Kumbier shows that by queering the archives, communities have exposed the problems with traditional heritage projects and offered innovative, collaborative approaches that complement, challenge and, in some cases, avoid traditional archives

3 Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP), "About QZAP," accessed 27 October 2015, <http://www.qzap.org/v8/index.php/about>.

altogether. Professional archivists reading Kumbier's book will be reassured by the knowledge that communities are invested in documenting their own experiences, and may even be inspired to incorporate some of these practices into their own professional work.

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