

Archival Activism, Symbolic Annihilation, and the LGBTQ₂+ Community Archive

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ABSTRACT LGBTQ₂+ community archives, often founded in the 1970s and 1980s, are no longer necessarily outside the archival mainstream from the perspective of non-white, and non-cis LGBTQ₂+ people. Histories of whiteness, settler-colonialism, and cisnormativity within the LGBTQ₂+ community archive can create the “symbolic annihilation” of trans and Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) histories *within* the queer community archive, if left unaddressed. Our current moment requires an active reimagining of what activism means within legacy LGBTQ₂+ community, activist archives. This article describes my efforts, as a volunteer and board member at the ArQuives and as the director of the LGBTQ₂+ Oral History Digital Collaboratory, to help bring an intersectional, trans-inclusive framework to an LGBTQ₂+ community archive with origins in Canada’s gay liberation movement. The Collaboratory is a five-year digital history research collaboration, funded by Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, that connects archives across Canada and the United States to produce a collaborative digital history hub for the research and study of gay, lesbian, queer, and trans oral histories. We have four archival partners: the ArQuives (formerly the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives); the Digital Transgender Archive; the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria; and the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony. In this article, I focus on the Collaboratory’s efforts to bring trans visibility to the ArQuives’ collections.

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous readers for their excellent recommendations on this piece, as well as Cait McKinney, Rebecka Sheffield, Raegan Swanson, and Ed Jackson for their insightful comments. Thanks as well to Elizabeth Holliday for their excellent research assistance.

RÉSUMÉ Les archives de la communauté LGBTQ2+, souvent établies dans les années 1970 et 1980, ne se situent plus nécessairement à l'extérieur des courants archivistiques dominants du point de vue des individus LGBTQ2+ non blancs et non-cis. Les histoires blanches, colonialistes et cisnormatives dans les archives de la communauté LGBTQ2+ peuvent entraîner l'«annihilation symbolique» des histoires des trans de même que des noirs, des autochtones et des autres personnes racisées au sein des archives de la communauté queer si elles ne sont pas abordées. La situation actuelle exige que l'on s'emploie à réimaginer ce que l'activisme représente dans l'héritage des archives militantes de la communauté LGBTQ2+. Cet article décrit mes efforts en tant que bénévole et membre du conseil aux *ArQuives* et comme directrice du *LGBTQ2+ Oral History Digital Collaboratory* afin d'encourager l'adoption d'un cadre de travail intersectionnel et inclusif pour les trans dans les archives communautaires de la communauté LGBTQ2+, lesquelles trouvent leurs origines dans le mouvement de libération gaie au Canada. Le *Collaboratory* est un projet collaboratif de recherche en histoire numérique, subventionné par le Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada, mettant en contact des archives du Canada et des États-Unis pour créer un centre collaboratif d'histoire numérique pour la recherche et les études des histoires orales des gays, lesbiennes, queer et trans. Nos partenaires sont quatre archives : les *ArQuives* (anciennement les *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives*), le *Digital Transgender Archive*, les *Transgender Archives* à l'Université de Victoria, et les *Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony*. Dans cet article, je mets l'accent sur les efforts du *Collaboratory* pour rendre les trans visibles dans les collections des *ArQuives*.

In the fall of 2013, I began volunteering at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA), the world's largest LGBTQ2+ community archive. I had never actually been to the archives – even though it is located in the city where I live, in Toronto's gay village. The CLGA's reputation was emblematic of a certain version of cis, white, Anglo Canada from which I had felt quite alienated since first encountering it in 2000, when I moved from the US to Canada for my job as a historian at the University of Toronto. But, I thought, maybe this reputation was unfounded; even if it was not, maybe the organization needed some help to work on trans historical collections, in which I was particularly interested. I remember walking up the brick walkway, climbing the stairs, and stepping into the mid-19th century Italianate home in which the Archives is housed. The name of the organization, emblazoned on a large metal sign over the doorway, seemed from another time, sparking a sensation of temporal drag.² The signage enacted a wayfinding recalcitrance, connecting our current wave of LGBTQ2+ activism – shaped by queer, trans, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) sensibilities – with the undertow of a sometimes disavowed political history: the (white, cis) gay and lesbian movement. I had not identified as gay or lesbian for two decades, preferring the term *queer*; my partner of 13 years had recently transitioned, and our son was growing up in a world of new vocabularies to describe gender and sexual diversity.

I entered the front office and met several affable, cis gay white men in their 60s and 70s. Despite their warm welcome, I must admit I felt awkward and out of place. Like many identity-based community archives, this one was physically located in a former home; it clearly felt like a “home away from home” for these volunteers.³ Was this organization for me, too, I wondered? As I signed in, I reflected: If I am feeling this sense of trepidation – despite my privileges of whiteness and tenure, among others – how do other people feel when they walk in here? Trans people, people of colour? It took me a while to realize that, actually, they do not usually walk in. Figuring out why and what the archives can do about this, if anything, has shaped my volunteer work ever since. Fortunately, I was hardly the first person to

2 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

3 On the relationship between LGBTQ2+ community archives and the space of the home, see Marika Cifor, “Aligning Bodies: Collecting, Arranging, and Describing Hatred for a Critical Queer Archives,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 756–75; Jen Jack Giesecking, “Useful In/Stability: The Dialectical Production of the Social and Spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives,” *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 122 (2015): 25–37; Danielle Cooper, “House Proud: An Ethnography of the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 3 (2016): 261.

have these realizations at the CLGA, and I have been joined in this project of institutional transformation by dozens of others over the past six years.

This article is about my efforts, as a volunteer and researcher, to collaborate in bringing an intersectional, trans-inclusive framework to the CLGA, a LGBTQ2+ community archive with strong roots as a white, gay-liberation activist project. This team endeavour has included both the dedicated volunteers I met on that first day, including Board President Dennis Findlay and so many others, and a small but dedicated staff – especially the current Executive Director Raegan Swanson and Community Engagement Coordinator Jennifer Aja Fernandes.⁴ Volunteer efforts to make the archives more inclusive, particularly in reference to lesbian inclusion, go back decades, but my focus here is on the recent past and, in particular, the challenges facing trans inclusion and anti-racist collecting approaches in a historically white-majority gay and lesbian community archive. The effort to make CLGA more inclusive has had many components over several years, including most recently a name change: the organization's official name is now the ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives. The ArQuives is not only the world's largest community LGBTQ2+ archive but also North America's oldest, founded in 1973. Like other gay archives founded in the wake of Stonewall, the ArQuives has shifted from being a gay archive to being a lesbian and gay archive and, in its most recent iteration, an LGBTQ2+ archive – all within the structural envelope and legacy of a mainly white, gay, male, and cis archival activist organization. The ArQuives is a case study in what happens when a community archive can be understood – simultaneously – as both an activist, radical archive (from the perspective of the state and/or the mainstream archives profession) and as the epitome of a mainstream, white, cisnormative archive (from the perspective of many others, such as queer women, trans people, and people of colour).

My goal here is to reflect on what *activism* might mean in the context of a community archive whose very identity is based on its activist history. In what ways are historical lesbian and/or gay archives, founded as political projects, still activist? Fifty years after Stonewall, to what extent are these archives challenging the mainstream? How have these archives themselves become “mainstream” from the standpoint of those who do not identify as white, lesbian, and/or gay?

4 I would also like to acknowledge and appreciate the work of the following volunteers, board members, and staff members whose work on issues of anti-racism, trans positivity, and other aspects of equity, diversity, and inclusion has overlapped with my years at CLGA/the ArQuives: Jade Pichette, Cait McKinney, Aaron Cain, David Udayasekaran, Rachel Epstein, Kabir Ravindra, and Leyla Shahid.

In this article, I argue that LGBTQ2+ community archives are no longer necessarily outside the mainstream, if explored from the perspective of non-white, and non-cis LGBTQ2+ people. LGBTQ2+ community archives' historical identities as political, activist projects documenting the social movements of gay men and lesbians require active reimagining in our current moment, where the acronym LGBTQ2+ can sometimes function as a synonym for whiteness and cisnormativity. I argue that simply adding trans collections to a historically lesbian and gay archive, as one example of making the archive more inclusive, cannot adequately address the racialized, cisnormative logics that structure the historically lesbian and gay archive. In LGBTQ2+ community archives, which are hardly outside the mainstream when it comes to whiteness and cisnormativity, engaging systemic racism and cis-centrism within archival collection, description, staffing, and programming requires ongoing political commitment. This ongoing commitment to anti-racism and trans inclusivity within the historically gay and/or lesbian community archive is necessary, even though these efforts cannot fully or adequately address histories of structural inequality within the LGBTQ2+ community archive. To make such claims, I discuss both the history of the ArQuives, as a case study of a historically gay and lesbian community archive, and the LGBTQ2+ Oral History Digital Collaboratory, an activist oral history project I direct and in which the ArQuives is one of four archival partners. To provide a specific example of what trans-inclusive work can look like in a historically gay and lesbian archive, I discuss the promises and challenges associated with the trans collection guide that we have researched and written to make trans collections more visible to researchers. In the conclusion of the article, I briefly explore a few promising directions for community-driven archival approaches that address the desire to preserve LGBTQ2+ activist histories while refraining from extractive logics regarding documentary heritage.

Symbolic Annihilation within LGBTQ2+ Archives Scholarship

Organizations such as the ArQuives (formerly CLGA) are classic examples of both activist archives and community archives. The leading community archives scholar in the UK, Andrew Flinn, describes the *activist archivist* as one who, rejecting the field's more traditional advocacy of neutrality, acknowledges the

role of the recordkeeper in the creation and stewardship of records.⁵ Writing with Ben Alexander, Flinn includes in his definition the practice of “archiving activism” – where people actively seek to collect and document social movements and activist campaigns for social justice.⁶ As he argues in another piece, activist archival work is that which challenges the status quo in order to end discrimination and enable “social transformation.”⁷ Susan Pell prefers the term *radical archive*, arguing that these archives offer critically important spaces of empowerment and self-determination for marginalized groups, who use these archives in contemporary social struggles in order to intervene in dominant discourses about power, belonging, and knowledge production.⁸ Most of the community archives literature describes activism in the context of mainstream erasure of marginalized communities, with activist archivists “bridging the divide between mainstream archives and community archives.”⁹ The word *mainstream* emerges over and over again in the literature on community archives, as the “other” against which the oppositional community archive makes its political and historical intervention. As Michelle Caswell has written, “community archives can be read as a direct challenge to the failure of mainstream repositories to collect a more accurate and robust representation of society.”¹⁰ The logic here is that a community archive founded as part of a social movement is necessarily one that challenges the mainstream. As I suggest in this article, however, such an assumption may not necessarily be warranted in the case of all LGBTQ2+ archives, depending on how one defines “the mainstream.”

- 5 Andrew Flinn and Ben Alexander, “‘Humanizing an Inevitability Political Craft’: Introduction to the Special Issue on Archiving Activism and Activist Archiving,” *Archival Science* 15, no. 4 (2015): 331. For a critique of neutrality in the profession of archives, see Randall Jimerson, “Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *American Archivist* 70, no. 2 (2007): 252–81.
- 6 Flinn and Alexander, “‘Humanizing an Inevitability Political Craft,’” 329–35, 331–32.
- 7 Andrew Flinn, “Archival Activism: Independent and Community-Led Archives, Radical Public History and the Heritage Professions,” *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 7, no. 2 (2011), accessed November 14, 2016, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt2490x.pdf>.
- 8 Susan Pell, “Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive: An Ethnographic Reading of an Activist Archive,” *Archivaria* 80 (Fall 2015): 33–57.
- 9 Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge, “Archivist as Activist: Lessons from Three Queer Community Archives in California,” *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 308.
- 10 Michelle Caswell, “Community-Centered Collecting: Finding out What Communities Want from Community Archives,” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 51, no. 1 (2014): 3, doi:10.1002/meet.2014.14505101027.

Activist archives are usually community archives – that is to say, archives created and maintained outside government, state, or even university settings and often sustained by volunteer labour. As Caswell has argued, “community archives are independent grassroots efforts for communities to document their own commonalities and differences outside the boundaries of formal mainstream institutions.”¹¹ Such archival collections are for the most part gathered and organized by members of specific communities, who also determine who has access.¹² They are often sites of radical history making, organized to preserve the histories of social movements and focused on documenting the activists, affects, and ephemera that more established archives reject.¹³ As outsider archives, these community-driven projects can be creative and capacious in terms of what they collect. For example, the San Francisco-based GLBT Historical Society preserves the blood-soaked shirt Harvey Milk was wearing when he was assassinated and has exhibited “please touch” collections of S&M toys; in Toronto, the ArQuives has archived transsexual sex worker and performance artist Mirha-Soleil Ross’s sex toy/blow-up doll, a prop from one of her performances.¹⁴ These community-based archives collect and preserve the haptic, material history of radical social movements in order to create a usable past for activists, artists, and historians in the present.¹⁵

- 11 Michelle Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation,” *Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014): 31. See also Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (2009): 71–86; Andrew Flinn, “Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151–76; Jeannette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds., *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory, Principles and Practice in Records Management and Archives* (London: Facet Publishing, 2009).
- 12 Elena Carter, “‘Setting the Record Straight’: The Creation and Curation of Archives by Activist Communities. A Case Study of Activist Responses to the Regeneration of Elephant and Castle, South London,” *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2017): 31.
- 13 Flinn, “Archival Activism,” n.p. See also Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, “‘It Is Noh Mistri, Wi Mekin Histri.’ Telling Our Own Story: Independent and Community Archives in the UK, Challenging and Subverting the Mainstream,” in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Bastian and Alexander, 3–27; Marika Cifor, Michelle Caswell, Aldo Allina Migoni, and Noah Geraci, “‘What We Do Crosses over to Activism’: The Politics and Practice of Community Archives,” *Public Historian* 40, no. 2 (2018): 69–95.
- 14 Cifor, “Aligning Bodies”; K.J. Rawson, “Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics,” *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 123–40. See also Jennifer Tyburczy, “Queer Curatorship: Performing the History of Race, Sex, and Power in Museums,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 1 (2013): 107–24; Marika Cifor, “Presence, Absence, and Victoria’s Hair: Examining Affect and Embodiment in Trans Archives,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 645–49.
- 15 On the relationship between social justice and archives, see Anne Gilliland, “Neutrality, Social Justice and the

Archives scholars have tried, without much success, to nail down a shared understanding of the term *community*. Terry Cook, for example, in tracing an archival paradigm shift toward social engagement and community facilitation, drew from Benedict Anderson to define community as an imagined space where “all members feel an overarching ‘comradeship’ of belonging.”¹⁶ Andrew Flinn often begins his discussions of the term by complicating it, for example, by arguing that the meanings of community are “not necessarily clear or fixed,” and are “particularly complex and fluid and capable of multiple interpretations.”¹⁷ Rebecka Sheffield also draws attention to the term’s slipperiness in her overview of community archives.¹⁸ Eventually, however, scholars have advanced a definition of community such as the one Flinn eventually arrives at: a community is a “group who define themselves on the basis of locality, culture, faith, background, or other shared identity or interest.”¹⁹ What these definitions share is an understanding of a group that shares common interests or identities and is usually defined against another, normative formation, such as the “mainstream.” However, as I discuss below, the term *community* has been critiqued within LGBTQ2+ scholarship.

A sustained commitment to dismantling white supremacy and settler-colonial archival logics has recently shaped a number of inspiring archivist projects, some of which have made their way into the scholarship on community archives. For example, the Mukurtu content management system is an open-source platform that allows access to digital heritage while honouring Indigenous control over who has access and how, thus securing Indigenous cultural sovereignty.²⁰ Jane Anderson and Mukurtu’s founder, Kimberly Christen, have movingly discussed

Obligations of Archival Education and Educators in the Twenty-First Century,” *Archival Science* 11, no. 3–4 (2011): 193–209; Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23.

- 16 Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (2013): 98. For a discussion of the queer body in the archive, see Jamie A. Lee, “Be/Longing in the Archival Body: Eros and the ‘Endearing’ Value of Material Lives,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (2016): 33–51; Jamie A. Lee, “In Critical Condition: (Un)Becoming Bodies in Archival Acts of Truth Telling,” *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019): 162–95.
- 17 Flinn, “Community Histories, Community Archives,” 152–53.
- 18 Rebecka Sheffield, “Community Archives,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, 2nd ed., ed. Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017), 351–76.
- 19 Flinn, “Community Histories, Community Archives,” 153.
- 20 Michael Rodriguez, “Mukurtu Content Management System,” *Technical Services Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2018): 406–407; Kimberly Christen, Leslie Davis, Zachary Griffith, and Jacob Neely, “Traditional Knowledge and Digital Archives: An Interview with Kim Christen,” *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 27, no. 1 (2018): 8.

the importance of engaging with Indigenous temporalities, relationships, and geographies – what they call “slow archives” – in decolonizing archives.²¹ Archival activists such as Jarrett M. Drake and Bergis Jules have been creating and publishing archives of racist police violence as well as drawing attention to the labour and funding precarity of activist, community-based archives.²² While this vein of exciting scholarship focused on dismantling white supremacy and colonialism in the archives includes some references to LGBTQ2+ subjectivities and histories, for the most part, the specificities of sexual- and gender-nonconforming histories do not play visible roles in this thread of archival activism.²³

The scholarship specific to gender- and sexual-nonconforming archives represents a growing subfield within the community archives literature, with excellent case studies and theoretical interventions by a range of scholars. For example, a series of wonderful analyses of the Lesbian Herstory Archives has built on co-founder Joan Nestle’s early writing.²⁴ K.J. Rawson has explored the complexities of trans and racialized subjectivities in relation to archival access, describing the importance of spatial and visual discourses within the LGBTQ2+

21 Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson, “Toward Slow Archives,” *Archival Science* 19, no. 2 (2019): 87–116.

22 Jarrett M. Drake, “Diversity’s Discontents: In Search of an Archive of the Oppressed,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 47, no. 2 (2019): 270–79; Bergis Jules, “Towards Building Community-Based Archives of Activism,” *Documenting DocNow*, January 31, 2019, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://news.docnow.io/towards-building-community-based-archives-of-activism-87584f03d6db>; Bergis Jules, “We’re All Bona Fide,” *On Archivy*, January 5, 2018, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/were-all-bona-fide-f502bdaea029>; Bergis Jules, “Let the People Lead: Supporting Sustainability vs Dependency Models for Funding Community-Based Archives,” *On Archivy*, November 3, 2017, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/let-the-people-lead-supporting-sustainability-vs-dependency-models-for-funding-community-based-82f76d54c483>; Bergis Jules, “Report-Architecting Sustainable Futures: Exploring Funding Models in Community-Based Archives,” *Sustainable Futures*, February 25, 2019, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://medium.com/community-archives/report-architecting-sustainable-futures-exploring-funding-models-in-community-based-archives-163f2ba073c7>.

23 Michelle Caswell, “Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives,” *Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2017): 222–35.

24 Joan Nestle, “The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York,” *Feminist Review* 34, no. 1 (1990): 86–94; Rachel Corbman, “A Genealogy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1974–2014,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014), accessed June 28, 2019, <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol1/iss1/1>; Rebecka Taves Sheffield, “The Emergence, Development and Survival of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives” (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015); Rebecka Taves Sheffield, *Documenting Rebellions: A Study of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2020); Cait McKinney, “Body, Sex, Interface: Reckoning with Images at the Lesbian Herstory Archives,” *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 122 (2015): 115–28; Gieseking, “Useful In/Stability”; Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz, Flavia Rando, Rachel Corbman, Deborah Edel, Morgan Gwenwald, Joan Nestle, and Polly Thistlethwaite, “Getting from Then to Now: Sustaining the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a Lesbian Organization,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 213–33.

archive – the “feel” of the space for all researchers – in securing environmental accessibility.²⁵ Syrus Marcus Ware has interrogated the erasure of Black and Indigenous presence within white trans archives.²⁶

However, despite these interventions, the community archives literature in general can sometimes reveal an assumption that the diverse sets of people gathered together under the category “LGBTQ2+,” or sometimes “queer,” share a common set of objectives and outlooks. In contrast to goals in the emerging work on anti-racist and decolonial archiving, the admirable goal in researching the histories and affective geographies of LGBTQ2+ and/or queer archives is often pursued without an intersectional lens, meaning that questions of differences within the LGBTQ2+ acronym remain unasked; these silences reproduce structural inequalities, naturalizing these spaces according to white, cis, and other normative formations. For example, authors of a recent article on queer archives in California use *queer* as an umbrella term without analyzing how other vectors of difference, such as race, gender, or embodied history, shape the archives, their collections, or their volunteers.²⁷ In this example, the term *queer* functions as a trans-evasive code that centres cisgender gay and lesbian experience.

- 25 Rawson, “Accessing Transgender.” For some of Rawson’s other work on trans archiving, see K.J. Rawson, “Archival Justice: An Interview with Ben Power Alwin,” *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 122 (2015): 177–87; K.J. Rawson, “Archive This! Queering the Archive,” in *Practicing Research in Writing Studies: Reflexive and Ethically Responsible Research*, ed. Katrina M. Powell and Pamela Takayoshi (New York: Hampton Press, 2012), 237–50; K.J. Rawson, “Archiving Transgender: Affects, Logics, and the Power of Queer History” (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 2010); Charles E. Morris III and K.J. Rawson, “Queer Archives/Archival Queers,” *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Michelle Ballif (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 74–89; and K.J. Rawson and Aaron Devor, eds., “Archives and Archiving,” special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015).
- 26 Syrus Marcus Ware, “All Power to All People? Black LGTBTT2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2017): 170–80.
- 27 Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge, “Archivist as Activist.” Although this is an excellent article in many ways, its lengthy historical overview of the ONE archives makes only the briefest reference to the role that Reed Erickson, the eccentric trans philanthropist, played in bankrolling the organization from the 1960s through the 1980s, thus erasing the important trans history of this archive. For that history, see Aaron Devor and Nicholas Matte, “Building a Better World for Transpeople: Reed Erickson and the Erickson Educational Foundation,” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 10, no. 1 (2007): 47–68; Aaron H. Devor and Nicholas Matte, “ONE Inc. and Reed Erickson: The Uneasy Collaboration of Gay and Trans Activism, 1964–2003,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 179–209; Holly Devor, “Reed Erickson (1917–1992): How One Transsexed Man Supported ONE,” in *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, ed. Vern L. Bullough (New York: Haworth Press, 2002), 383–92; Abram J. Lewis, “‘I Am 64 and Paul McCartney Doesn’t Care’: The Haunting of the Transgender Archive and the Challenges of Queer History,” *Radical History Review* 2014, no. 120 (2014): 13–34.

A cursory look at the intersectional history of LGBTQ2+ people demonstrates that this presumption of a common history – the basis for the claim of “community” – is far from accurate. This history – shaped by racism, settler-colonialism, sexism, and cisnormativity, among other vectors of power represented within the LGBTQ2+ acronym – characterizes not only LGBTQ2+ social and political history but also its archival activist history. Yet despite important interventions from trans scholars and scholars of colour, the idea that LGBTQ2+ archives share a common set of goals as community archives remains entrenched within the archives literature. The term *community archives*, shorthand for non-governmental archives, can therefore sometimes render invisible the very real histories and relations of power that exist among and between sexual- and gender-non-conforming people based upon race, embodied histories, sexuality, colonialism, class, and other markers of difference. In smoothing over these distinctions in the LGBTQ2+ context, the term *community* can reinscribe cisgender settler-colonial whiteness as the norm, because this is the historical foundation of most lesbian and gay community archives founded in the US and Canada in the 1970s and 1980s. While these archives might share commonalities relative to government or institutional archives, where LGBTQ2+ records are marginalized, *within* LGBTQ2+ archives, one finds, not surprisingly, a long history of one racialized group represented in this acronym being privileged over others as time unfolds. As a result, despite being of and for the “community,” LGBTQ2+ archives can also produce what Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez have described as the “symbolic annihilation” of trans and BIPOC people *within* the queer community archive.²⁸

Some of this work of symbolically annihilating difference within the LGBTQ2+ category can unfold, surely unintentionally, through scholars’ uses of the words *queer* and *community* to describe LGBTQ2+ archives. In the growing subfield of LGBTQ2+ archives, scholars and activists often use *queer* as an umbrella term to describe historically gay and lesbian archives that may – or may not – also have some trans, bisexual, intersex, Two-Spirit, or sexual- or gender-minority holdings. While I can sympathize with the desire to find an umbrella word to describe the proliferating sexual- and gender-minority identifications that are

28 Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, “‘To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing’: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives,” *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 56–81; Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor, “‘To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise’: Community Archives and the Importance of Representation,” *Archives and Records* 38, no. 1 (2017): 5–26.

the focus of LGBTQ2+ community archives, the use of *queer* as an umbrella term can be worrisome. First, in constructing a dichotomy between queers and straight people, rather than between queerness and normativity in broader terms, *queer* can often function as what Julian Carter has called a “race-evasive” code for whiteness.²⁹ For decades, queers of colour have shown how the term *queer* erases intersectionality: As Gloria Anzaldua argued, “Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all ‘queers’ of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shoved under. . . . When we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences.”³⁰ Susan Stryker has argued that “all too often queer remains a code word for ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’” with trans experience falling outside “a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity.”³¹ In other words, the umbrella term *queer* within community archives historiography can homogenize the differences among queer and trans people in the service of valorizing the work of LGBTQ2+ activist archivists in relation to a normative, archival “other” – the official, non-community, state-supported archive, for example. But without activism from within the so-called queer archive, the life histories seen as non-normative in the context of the gay and lesbian past – such as those of trans people, Two-Spirit people, queers of colour – remain invisible.

Within the LGBTQ2+ context, the term *community* is also complex and political. As Myrl Beam has argued, working with scholarship by Miranda Joseph and Nikolas Rose, the use of *community* within the contemporary LGBTQ2+ non-profit sector functions increasingly as a form of biopolitical, neoliberal governance – as a “sorting hat” that identifies those bodies (cis, white, etc.) that are incorporated into a national imaginary while others (trans, BIPOC) “are located outside the life of the nation, a threat to it, and exposed to early death.”³² Although theoretical literature outside the archives field has voiced

29 Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

30 Gloria Anzaldua, “To(o) Queer the Writer: Loca, Escritoria, y Chicana,” in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujilla (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1998), 264.

31 Susan Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 214.

32 Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 83; Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Nikolas Rose, “The Death of the Social? Re-Figuring the Territory of Government,” *Economy and Society* 25, no. 3 (1996): 327–56.

suspicion concerning the work that the term *community* can do in constructing and entrenching hierarchies, community archives scholarship often suggests that an LGBTQ2+ community exists as a singular thing, that the various people gathered under this acronym share a common history and political project, that they feel an overarching comradeship of belonging. This uncritical use of *community* within the growing subfield of gender- and sexual-nonconforming community archives provides an opportunity for reflection: How inclusive is the term *community* within an LGBTQ2+ context? What types of social and political hierarchies does the term construct, and how?

Many LGBTQ2+ archives in the US and Canada were founded decades ago by cisgender, white, gay and/or lesbian activists at a time when same-sex sexuality was demonized in both countries and lesbians and gay men were second-class citizens under the law. More recently, however – in the era of neoliberal governance, marriage equality, pink-washing, and corporate sponsorship for many gay and lesbian organizations – a lot has changed.³³ In the journey from homophobia to homonationalism, to reference activist Tim McCaskell's book *Queer Progress*, how far outside the mainstream is a heritage, community-based, formerly gay and lesbian but now LGBTQ2+ archive, regardless of how many new initials and numbers it adds to its name?³⁴ Not as far outside as it once was, I would argue. The astonishingly rapid social and political changes affecting lesbians and gay men over the past 40 years in the US and Canada raises the question, What does activist archival practice look like within an LGBTQ2+ archive that *already* defines itself as an activist community archive? How can activists reframe what the literature increasingly describes (somewhat problematically) as the "queer archive" from within, to transform an archive founded in the heyday of gay liberation into an organization that brings an intersectional, trans-positive and anti-racist analysis to queer and trans history?

33 For some examples of LGBTQ2+ history and theory that have explored these questions, see Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94; Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Beam, *Gay, Inc.*; Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–65.

34 Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016).

The LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory

These are some of the questions I have been asking from the perspective of my work both as a volunteer and as the director of a community-engaged research project, the LGBTQ Digital Oral History Collaboratory. The Collaboratory is a five-year digital history research collaboration, funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, that connects archives across Canada and the United States to produce a collaborative digital history hub for the research and study of gay, lesbian, queer, and trans oral histories. We have four archival partners: the ArQuives; the Digital Transgender Archive, directed by K.J. Rawson; the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria, directed by Aaron Devor; and the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony, directed by historian Elise Chenier.³⁵ The Collaboratory explores the histories of trans people, queer women, gay men, and lesbians in the US and Canada through a virtual research meeting place, several oral history projects, and a digital LGBTQ oral history hub and has created a collections guide for trans materials at the ArQuives. Several of the oral history projects represent original research, while two are historical community endeavours that the Collaboratory has collected, preserved, transcribed, and made accessible to a wider audience. The older projects are the Lesbians Making History (LMH) oral history project concerning "gay women" in the 1950s and 1960s, collected in the 1980s and early 1990s in Toronto, and the Foolscap Gay Oral History Project, 105 interviews completed in the 1980s concerning Canadian homophile activism, gay organizations, bar culture, and the drag scene.³⁶ Three of the newer projects focus on trans oral history: an oral history project on trans activism relating to the province of Ontario's de-listing of gender confirming surgery in the late 1990s, completed in 2016 by post-doctoral fellow Max Arnost; the Trans Partner Oral History Project, concerning the experiences of partners of trans men through transition, completed in 2016; and the Trans Oral History Project, focused on the life histories of senior trans

35 LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory website, accessed August 21, 2019, <http://lgbtqdigitalcollaboratory.org/>; "Trans History, Linked," Digital Transgender Archive, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>; Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony website, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://alotarchives.org/>; "Transgender Archives," University of Victoria, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://www.uvic.ca/transgenderarchives/>.

36 Cait McKinney, "Lesbians Making History: Oral History Project," The ArQuives, 2016, accessed July 10, 2019, https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/exhibits/show/lmh_oralhistories/lesbians-making-history; Juan Carlos Mezo and Zohar Freeman, "Mapping Foolscap: Gay Oral Histories, 1981–1987," The ArQuives, 2016, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/exhibits/show/mapping-foolscap>.

activists, which will be completed in 2020 with postdoctoral fellow Evan Taylor as lead interviewer.³⁷

In addition to these oral histories, a major subset of the Collaboratory's day-to-day work has focused on trans collections and their visibility at the ArQuives. Trans materials and experiences within LGBTQ archives require additional critical attention, in terms both of praxis and of documentation and scholarship.³⁸ The ArQuives, in particular, has been justifiably criticized, as recently as 2015, for its erasure of trans specificity in its name, mandate, and webpages.³⁹ Since 2014, however, a shifting team of around 10 of us, affiliated with the Collaboratory, has invested significant labour and technology into identifying, collecting, describing, digitizing, and displaying trans collections at the ArQuives, the Collaboratory's main archival partner. My first project as a volunteer in 2013 was to organize, describe, and catalogue the papers of trans activist Rupert Raj, who had donated his materials in 2006. Two years later, I had conducted four oral histories with Raj about his activism in the 1970s and 1980s, written a 34-page finding aid to his papers, written and posted his Wikipedia page, and organized a successful public launch, in September 2015, of the collection that celebrated Raj's contributions to trans history.

In 2016–17, Collaboratory postdoctoral fellow Cait McKinney spearheaded a year-long process to organize, describe, and preserve the papers and videos of Mirha-Soleil Ross, a transsexual artist, activist, and sex worker best known for her video and performance art and her role as co-editor of the 1990s zine *GenderTrash*.⁴⁰ Ross had donated boxes of material, but due to personal circumstances, she had not signed a deed of gift. McKinney jumpstarted the process of

37 Doug Graffeo, Elspeth Brown, and Zohar Freeman, "Trans Health Care Activism in Ontario, 1998–2008," The ArQuives, 2016, accessed July 10, 2019, <https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/exhibits/show/trans-surgery-activism-ontario/transhealthactivismproject>; Elspeth Brown, Trans Partner Oral History Project, audio recordings, 2012–2016. I regret that I need to use a pseudonym ("Max Arnost") here to protect the confidentiality of the former postdoctoral fellow, who has been the target of harassment and doxing due to their trans-positive politics. As a result, I do not want to put their name in printed or electronically searchable material.

38 Marika Cifor has argued that "there is little documentation of . . . trans experiences more broadly in LGBT archives and collections." See Cifor, "Aligning Bodies," 767.

39 Aaron H. Devor and Lara Wilson, "Putting Trans* History on the Shelves: The Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria, Canada," in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*, ed. Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 257.

40 Viviane Namaste, "Undoing Theory: The 'Transgender Question' and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 11–32; Viviane Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2005); Eliza Steinbock, *Shimmering Images:*

connecting with Ross to get the deed of gift signed and then worked closely with her over the course of a year to organize, describe, and catalogue all of Ross's materials. This was a major, deeply moving, collaborative project that involved many: Ross, based in Montreal; a group of close friends and supporters such as Trish Salah (associate professor of gender studies, Queen's University) and Nora Butler Burke (PhD student, Concordia University), in Montreal and Toronto; and a group of interns and volunteers, most prominently archivist Aaron Cain and York University PhD student Sid Cunningham, in Toronto. Over a year, McKinney, Cain, and Cunningham, based at the ArQuives, worked closely with Ross through regular Skype meetings, discussing each artifact and its access. During this process, Ross and Butler Burke worked in Ross's storage in Montreal to sort through and prepare additional materials for donation, and then Butler Burke drove the new donation down to Toronto; the Toronto-based group sent some materials back to Ross in Montreal. Working with McKinney and Cunningham, some of my undergraduate students created a digital exhibition on the zine *GenderTrash*.⁴¹ This collection – one of the world's most important regarding trans activism and cultural expression – is now fully available to researchers and has generated immediate interest from trans studies scholars such as Laura Horak and Marty Fink as well as from scholarly associations such as the Adult Film History Scholarly Interest Group of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies.⁴²

Not all of our trans community archives work has been as smooth as our work on the Ross collection. I would argue that one of the reasons the Ross project unfolded as collaboratively as it did has to do with the ArQuives' success, in the wake of serious growing pains, in shifting from a gay and lesbian community archive to one that is explicitly trans inclusive. These growing pains can be seen most clearly in the Collaboratory's effort to create a trans collections guide for the ArQuives, a project we began in 2014. I will explore this project below in more detail, as a case study of what can happen when “trans” meets “gay and lesbian” in the LGBTQ community archive. But first, allow me to sketch the

Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

41 LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory, “*Gendertrash*: Transsexual Zine, 1993–1995,” The ArQuives, 2017, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/exhibits/show/gendertash/gtintro>.

42 More recently, the ArQuives successfully raised funds to support two limited-contract trans collections assistants, Sajdeep Soomal and Tobaron Waxman, who together pursued collections development work with members of the Canadian trans community that resulted in additional trans holdings now at the ArQuives.

scene with a brief historical portrait of the ArQuives. I take the time to do so because I suspect that the ArQuives is quite likely not the only lesbian and/or gay community archive that has navigated the uneasy tensions between cis-centric organizational pasts and trans-positive, anti-racist futures.

The ArQuives as a Community, Activist Archive

Flynn's definition of activist archives as those that challenge the status quo in order to end discrimination and promote social transformation certainly describes the social history of many gay and lesbian archives in Canada, the US, and Europe. As Aimee Brown has shown, the 1970s were an especially rich time for the founding of what she refers to as LGBTQ archives: between 1972 and 1974 alone, lesbian and gay activists founded four archives, including Jim Kepner's Western Gay Archives, which later became a major component of the ONE archives; the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York; and the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives (CGLMA) in Toronto.⁴³ Most community-based LGBTQ2+ archives were founded in the wake of Stonewall and most, if not all, focused only on the first two letters of this acronym. The history of name changes tells the story: in the complex history of the ONE archives, names included the Homosexual Information Center (HIC) in the mid-1960s, Jim Kepner's Western Gay Archives (1972), the National Gay Archives: Natalie Barney/Edward Carpenter Library (1979), and the International Gay and Lesbian Archives (1984) before the organization merged with the ONE archives to become the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (1994).⁴⁴ In Canada, the CGLMA changed its name first to the Canadian Gay Archives in 1975, then to the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in 1992, and more recently, to the ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives.⁴⁵ As cis-centric, mostly white artifacts

43 Aimee Brown, "How Queer 'Pack Rats' and Activist Archivists Saved Our History: An Overview of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Archives, 1970–2008," in *Serving LGBTQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections, and Access*, ed. Ellen Greenblatt (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011), 123.

44 Sheffield, "The Emergence, Development and Survival of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives"; Diana Kiyo Wakimoto, "Queer Community Archives in California since 1950" (PhD dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2012), accessed August 17, 2019, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/53189/>.

45 In 2017–2018, as part of its strategic planning process, the CLGA initiated a lengthy process of consultation and discussion regarding a proposed new name for the organization – one that would be more inclusive and that

of their time, these historical gay and lesbian archives did not explicitly seek to collect trans materials for most of their organizational histories.

The ArQuives is an activist archive whose origins lie in the radical, gay liberationist politics of the early 1970s. In 1973, Jearld Moldenhauer, a member of the collective that published the gay liberation newspaper the *Body Politic*, proposed the formation of the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives to steward the newspaper's growing set of documents, and other collective members quickly agreed. Aware of the international dimensions of the movement, collective members wrote to other gay liberation organizations internationally, seeking archival donations, especially newspapers and other periodicals; in this way, the archives – still located in the *Body Politic* offices – soon developed one of the most extensive international gay periodical collections in the world.⁴⁶ Collective member Ron Dayman publicly announced the formation of the CGLMA in October 1973, while attending a national gay conference in Quebec City.⁴⁷ The *Body Politic* followed up with an announcement in issue 10, in 1973, calling on readers to donate materials. In 1975, a six-person collective organized to look after the archives, which was renamed the Canadian Gay Archives to reflect a broader collecting mandate.⁴⁸ The archives became an autonomous body operating under the auspices of Pink Triangle Press, which provided office space and financial support. It has always been an activist archive: as James Fraser, the volunteer who transformed it from a one-cupboard reference collection in 1976

would also sidestep the use of acronyms, as these change so quickly over time. The board, which included queer and non-binary people of colour, struck an ad-hoc naming committee, which worked with the executive director to issue a call for proposals for an outside firm to consult and manage this process. The Archives retained the partnered services of two companies: Lee Jacobson Consultants and the Idea Shoppe. In collaboration with the ad-hoc committee, the consultants created a survey and sent it to over 350 organizations and individuals in every province; 25 percent of those surveyed were BIPOC, and the overall response rate was 40 percent. Working with the survey results, the consultants developed a short list of three name proposals, which they presented to the board; the board selected The ArQuives, and the name was approved at the May 7, 2018, annual general meeting.

- 46 James Fraser, "Canadian Gay Archives," *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977–78): 158; Ed Jackson, correspondence with the author, October 18, 2019. Jackson recalls that the archives were originally kept in the places where the *Body Politic* was put together; this began in the back shed at 4 Kensington Avenue, which also housed Jearld Moldenhauer's Glad Day books. After Moldenhauer and John Scythes purchased a house on Seaton Street, the archives moved there. Eventually, Ron Dayman removed the archives from Seaton Street and stored them in his basement until they moved once more, with the *Body Politic*, to a rented storefront at Carlton and Ontario.
- 47 Sheffield, "The Emergence, Development and Survival of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives," 52.
- 48 Marcel Barriault, "Archiving the Queer and Queering the Archives: A Case Study of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA)," in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Bastian and Alexander, 100.

into Canada's largest collection on gay life, wrote in 1977, "The Archives itself is a part of the movement whose story it attempts to preserve."⁴⁹

Most community archives were formed as a response to symbolic erasure by mainstream institutions. In the case of the ArQuives, this erasure was not only symbolic, but also literal – or nearly so. In December 1977, the Ontario Provincial Police raided the loft space where the *Body Politic* newspaper and the Canadian Gay Archives were located, confiscating files and charging gay activists Ed Jackson, Ken Popert, and Gerald Hannon with using the mail to distribute "immoral, indecent, and scurrilous material."⁵⁰ The police carted off 12 boxes of archival material and newspaper files, and the *Body Politic* went to court three times over the next six years, winning decisively in 1983; finally, eight years after the raid, the police returned the confiscated files to both organizations. The raid underscored the archive's precarity. Activist and archives co-founder Ed Jackson recalls watching the police go through the archives' filing cabinets, which were visually indistinguishable from those of the *Body Politic*. And although the police "did not take much of anything"⁵¹ from the archives' files, Jackson said the raid "made us aware of how vulnerable the material was and it seemed important to create a separate legal entity that could be demarcated more clearly and create a legal defence. It reinforced the sense that precautions had to be taken to ensure that the archives could be protected legally."⁵² In the wake of the raid, the archive collective sought to incorporate as a separate organization in 1979, but the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations rejected the organization name, Canadian Gay Archives (CGA), on the grounds that CGA did not meet the definition of an archives because it was not attached to a public body, an organization/corporation, or a church. By early 1980, however, after significant organizing and pushback, the ministry agreed to the name.⁵³ The following year, Revenue Canada refused to recognize the Archives as a charitable organization on the grounds that there was insufficient public benefit in a gay archive,

49 Fraser, "Canadian Gay Archives," 159; Victor Russell, Karen Teeple, and Harold Averill, "James Andrew Fraser, 1946–1985," obituary, *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985), 245–6.

50 Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

51 Ed Jackson, personal correspondence with the author, October 18, 2019.

52 Ed Jackson, personal correspondence with the author, March 17, 2019.

53 Sheffield, "The Emergence, Development and Survival of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives," 65–68.

another decision that the Archives successfully appealed. The Archives' work as a community archive, in other words, was illegible: the entire archive, which activists saved from literal erasure, became symbolically erased in the eyes of the state.

Scholars of affect, feeling, and queer archives, most especially Ann Cvetkovich, have shown how queer ephemeral gestures, acts, and traces – queer archives – are creative responses to the chronic distress of everyday trauma, the quotidian experiences of LGBTQ2+ people.⁵⁴ Cvetkovich has described queer cultural production – from mixed tapes to memoirs, performances, journals, and photographs – as a queer “archive of feelings”⁵⁵ that indexes both everyday trauma and queer resilience. In this way, she argues, these unorthodox archives resemble “gay and lesbian cultures, which have struggled to preserve their histories.”⁵⁶ In her reading, queer artifacts carry with them traces of trauma. In the case of the ArQuives, activists created an archive to address symbolic erasure, only to find the archive itself under erasure as the police threatened to seize the entirety of the Canadian Gay Archives. Here we find not only an archive of queer feelings, produced as responses to the everyday traumas of homophobia and police repression, but also an archival trauma to an entire community of archival activists, first, as the police rifled through the archives in the process of confiscating the queer records of the *Body Politic*, and then, after years of court battles, as the state refused to recognize the archive as an archive.

This history of traumatic archival erasure has shaped how the ArQuives' activist volunteers understand their own history. It is probable that this history, along with other factors, led to a deepened and ongoing commitment to remaining a community archive, autonomous from both the state and the university. Perhaps the experience of having the archive confiscated, combined with the successful effort to force the police to return it, also reconsecrated the radical politics of its gay, white, cis founders. The ArQuives, then, is an activist archive in multiple senses: its archival holdings document social movements, to be sure, but its very

54 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); José Esteban Muñoz, “Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling: Approaching Kevin Aviance,” in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*, ed. Jane Desmond (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 423–44; Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

55 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

56 Ibid.

existence as an archive is, in itself, a radical refusal of symbolic annihilation. Perhaps for these reasons, the ArQuives has been extraordinarily fortunate to benefit from many volunteers' nearly life-long commitment to preserving gay and lesbian history.⁵⁷ Recently, the ArQuives has been undergoing a generational shift, as new volunteers and staff bring new questions and new priorities – including an intersectional, anti-racist, and trans-positive approach to LGBTQ2+ archiving – to the historically gay and lesbian community archive. This has not always been an easy process, because activist archivists, even those within the LGBTQ2+ “community,” do not necessarily share the same activist commitments and because privilege can be difficult to see or acknowledge by those who benefit from it the most. Today, the ArQuives sees itself as an explicitly anti-racist, trans-positive, and -inclusive archive, even though fulfilling this promise is always a work in progress.

The ArQuives Trans Collection Guide

I have been fortunate to be part of this transformation toward a trans-positive and anti-racist queer archive, not only as a volunteer and board member, but also through the research project I direct, the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory. In our collaboration with the ArQuives, the Collaboratory has been committed to expanding the “lesbian and gay” archival past to include, in particular, intersectional trans history. But this process of bringing trans archives into dialogue with gay and lesbian archives has not always gone smoothly. In this section, I will explore one of our efforts to bring a trans-positive lens to a gay and lesbian community archive framed by a commitment to sexual minority, rather than gender minority, histories. My focus here is on the Collaboratory's effort to create a collections guide to the considerable trans materials held by, yet not fully visible in, the ArQuives' collections.

One of our several projects has been a collections guide to trans materials in the ArQuives, which we are calling The ArQuives Trans Collections Guide. A collections guide is a narrative summary of an archive's strengths in a particular area, across fonds and holdings, rather than an inventory of specific collections; it is a type of meta finding aid, whose purpose is to direct researchers to holdings

57 Long-term volunteers Alan Miller and Harold Averill have been volunteering every week for over 40 years.

in focused areas of inquiry.⁵⁸ As scholars such as K.J. Rawson, Lisa Vecoli, and Laura Peimer have argued, trans materials are not only notoriously invisible within archival collections, including gay and lesbian community archives, but also entangled in epistemological challenges, some regarding what counts as “trans” and what vocabulary and naming practices are used in metadata, and others regarding privacy, description, and access.⁵⁹ This important project – the archive’s first collections guide – makes trans materials easily searchable across the various holdings at the ArQuives, including manuscript collections, oral histories, commercial audio-visual materials, books, periodicals, photographs, and ephemera. After a year researching the ArQuives’ trans holdings, Collaboratory postdoctoral fellow Max Arnost produced a 40-page draft narrative, along with an Excel spreadsheet identifying nearly 1,300 holdings specific to trans history. This was a massive amount of work as the ArQuives did not at the time have an integrated, publicly accessible database; instead, we had 14 separate databases organized around different formats.⁶⁰ While familiar with the critique by David Valentine and others that *trans* as an umbrella category can homogenize race and class differences, Arnost decided to cast a broad net, including in the guide, for example, a photograph of a drag queen taken on Halloween night in 1975.⁶¹ As Arnost noted, because the ArQuives has been almost completely volunteer run and all the cataloguing has been done by volunteers with varying levels of training, metadata has been inconsistent among records. For example,

58 I am using the term *finding aid* to mean a description of records, including information on acquisition, processing, and scope of the collection, a biographical note, and an inventory; see Richard Pearce-Moses, “Finding Aid,” in *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), accessed August 21, 2019, <https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/f/finding-aid>. Strictly speaking, the archival definition of a finding aid also includes what I am referring to as a *collections guide*. In my experience as a researcher, however, a finding aid describes a particular fonds, not a set of fonds on a specific topic. To distinguish these two types of finding aids, I have adopted the terminology of Duke University Libraries, which use the term *collection guides*. See “Collection Guides,” Duke University Libraries, accessed August 21, 2019, <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/>.

59 K.J. Rawson, “Introduction: ‘An Inevitably Political Craft,’” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 544–52; Laura Peimer, “Trans* Collecting at the Schlesinger Library: Privacy Protection and the Challenges of Description and Access,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 614–20; Lisa Vecoli, “The Tretter Collection: What We Have, What’s Missing, and the Challenges of Trans History,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2015): 607–13.

60 These 14 databases have since been consolidated into a newer version of Inmagic, and holdings are available for searching from offsite for the first time.

61 David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

a search for the term *Two-Spirit* revealed fourteen entries, while a search for *2-spirit* revealed eight records, not all of which appeared in the previous search for *Two-Spirit*. A search for *Aboriginal* revealed only one item, while searches for *First Nations* and *Indigenous* revealed none; a researcher who used only one or two of these terms would not find materials relating to (for example) Mohawk artist Kiley Longboat.⁶² These metadata inconsistencies are of course typical for volunteer, community archives, and they reflect how terminology itself changes over time. It is partly for this reason that the trans collections guide is such an important tool.

In many ways, the trans collections guide has been a lightning rod for some of the epistemological challenges that emerge when “trans” meets “gay and lesbian” in the context of a historically gay archive. We began with Arnost’s draft, which I shared with the CLGA’s Executive Director at the time, Rebecka Sheffield. Sheffield had also been the Collaboratory’s Digital Archivist while a graduate student. She in turn sought feedback from one of our longer-term volunteers, and soon, I had three drafts to work with. Many of the concerns were small errors or mistakes that could easily be rectified, but others were more meta critical, revolving around cis-centric homonormativity in the archive and clashes between the intentions of an activist document and those of a standard collections guide.

As just one example, let me focus on the rather dry topic of the archives’ vertical files. Vertical files are collections created by the archive, comprising resource materials such as pamphlets and clippings from periodicals, arranged for ready reference and organized according to subject. The ArQuives has a massive international vertical file collection – so extensive that Gale Cengage spent months digitizing the files for inclusion in an online resource on LGBTQ history and culture since 1940. Arnost’s original draft drew attention to the ArQuives’ vertical files, noting, “The CLGA’s International Vertical Files . . . are particular[ly] rich and can be used both as sources on various global contexts and as evidence of how trans history, people, communities, and activism relate to different global contexts.”⁶³ Sheffield, in her revisions, added the following to an earlier section on classification and cataloguing challenges: “Alternatively,

62 Max Arnost, “Trans Collections Guide (originally titled ‘Pathfinder’),” (unpublished draft manuscript, November 25, 2015), [Microsoft Word file], 6.

63 Arnost, “Trans Collections Guide,” 15.

researchers may begin their explorations with the CLGA's Vertical File collections, which include clippings and ephemera that have been received by the archives through donations, but which [do] not come from a single provenance."⁶⁴ Arnost's response to this addition, however, was critical. They wrote, "Why recommend starting with the vertical files when it's already been stated that those were collected without trans-awareness/priority/expertise? The recommendation of starting with the vertical files," they worried, "will result in many dead-ends and frustration/circular experiences." As editor, I responded by reinserting an appendix that had been dropped from Sheffield's draft, but left her sentence in, arguing, "Like all vertical files, they are not comprehensive, and may reflect uneven awareness of issues relating to the content of the material reflected in the files. This is true for all vertical files in all archives: the archivists who add to those files are rarely experts in the area that the files reflect." Arnost responded, "Given how trans erasure actually works systemically, I can't agree, but again, your call at this point." And really, Arnost is right about this. Trans erasure is systemic and cannot be attributed simply to a lack of volunteer expertise; the whole question of who has volunteered at the ArQuives historically, and why, is part of the systemic cis-centrism and whiteness that we are currently seeking to shift at the ArQuives. Arnost saw the vertical files as a site of the symbolic annihilation of trans people and their histories, despite their location within (or perhaps because of their location within) an LGBTQ2+ archive.⁶⁵ At the same time, however, I did not want to discourage researchers from beginning their browsing with the vertical files, especially since, as Arnost noted, we have rich trans materials there, and I would hate for some researcher in trans history to miss them. Yet as former postdoctoral fellow Cait McKinney observes, the protocol to start with the vertical files can produce a direct confrontation between a trans researcher and an epistemology of systemic trans erasure. Because of these community archives scripts and protocols, we need to be meeting trans researchers, and/or researchers in trans history, with more intensive and personalized research services: this is part of what trans-positive community archives work looks like.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Rebecka Sheffield, revisions to Arnost, "Trans Collections Guide," (unpublished draft manuscript, December 27, 2015), [Microsoft Word file], 7.

⁶⁵ Caswell et al., "'To Be Able to Imagine Otherwise.'"

⁶⁶ Cait McKinney, correspondence with the author, October 21, 2019.

This one example of many, for this one project, suggests that intersectional, trans-positive activism from *within* the so-called activist archive cannot proceed only by adding trans collections, organizing programming, and making trans materials more accessible to researchers. All of this is, of course, important and necessary. But it is not enough. True archival activism from within the activist archive requires deeper conversations at all levels about how structural forms of inequality shape organizations, including activist ones. Creating a trans-positive LGBTQ2+ archive requires discussing and working against trans marginalization and cis-centrism within the historically gay and lesbian archive. These are not easy conversations to have. However, at the ArQuives, we are at least having them.

Conclusion

The Collaboratory's work on the trans collections guide focused on materials already donated to the ArQuives. Making visible the materials of LGBTQ2+ people outside the white, cis, settler-colonial, usually gay male norm requires specific strategies and approaches; otherwise, the default historical formation of white "gay and lesbian" people and their histories will continue to overdetermine the LGBTQ2+ archive. At the same time, however, it is critical that historically white gay and lesbian archives do not reproduce colonial relations in their efforts to acquire new collections to "diversify" white, cis, LGBTQ2+ holdings.

There are multiple ways in which historically white gay and lesbian archives such as the ArQuives might approach the thorny terrain of collection politics. While a full discussion warrants a separate essay, allow me to close with one possibility: taking a postcustodial approach. A postcustodial archival approach means that the care and custody of the records does not occur in the archive itself but is the responsibility of the organization, person, or network that generated the archival material, where the materials remain.⁶⁷ In this situation, the role of the archive is one of advice and support, without any claim on the records themselves: rather than asking groups to "hand over" their records, archives can "hand

67 Pearce-Moses, "Postcustodial Theory of Archives," in *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/postcustodial-theory-of-archives>. For a longer view of the role of custody and access in archival practice, see Jeannette Allis Bastian, "Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 76–93.

on” their materials, knowledge, and skills to those who might be interested.⁶⁸ Initially, the concept emerged in relation to the shift to electronic records and the digital age; more recently, however, theories of postcustodial relationality between archivists and non-institutional recordkeepers emphasize contributive justice and the addressing of structural inequalities.⁶⁹ While Andrew Flinn has argued that a postcustodial framework might be appropriate for formal heritage institutions seeking to build trust with community archives, I suggest here that a postcustodial approach is eminently suited to community archives themselves, particularly for historically white and cis-centric LGBTQ2+ community archives working with trans and queer people of colour activist networks, people, and organizations.⁷⁰ Postcustodial approaches dovetail with an LGBTQ2+ archival ethic that privileges anti-racist and trans-positive collecting practices over extractive logics that reproduce structural inequalities and relations of power.

In my recent collaborative work with the ArQuives, we have pursued this strategy with some of the archival records concerning Toronto’s Black queer history. I conducted oral histories with several key representatives of the city’s Black activist organizations as part of the Family Camera Network, for which I was a co-investigator; archivist Lucie Handley-Girard and I collaborated with the narrators to digitize a subset of their personal photographs and activist archives for the ArQuives, returning the originals to the narrators along with digital copies.⁷¹ This project led to the ArQuives’ support of Black activist and

68 Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn, and Elizabeth Shepherd, “New Frameworks for Community Engagement in the Archive Sector: From Handing Over to Handing On,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 61.

69 F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era,” *American Archivist* 44, no. 3 (1981): 207–16; Terry Cook, “Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post/Custodial and Post/Modernist Era,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (1994): 300. For more recent directions, see Joanne Evans, Sue McKemmish, Elizabeth Daniels, and Gavan McCarthy, “Self-Determination and Archival Autonomy: Advocating Activism,” *Archival Science* 15, no. 4 (2015): 337; T-Kay Sangwand, “Preservation Is Political: Enacting Contributive Justice and Decolonizing Transnational Archival Collaborations,” *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018), accessed September 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.36>.

70 Flinn, “Community Histories, Community Archives,” 168.

71 Jimmy Zavala, Alda Allina Migoni, Michelle Caswell, Noah Geraci, and Marika Cifor, “‘A Process Where We’re All At The Table’: Community Archives Challenging Dominant Modes of Archival Practice,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 45, no. 3 (2017): 202–15. For the Family Camera Network’s oral history work, see Thy Phu, Elspeth H. Brown, and Deepali Dewan, “The Family Camera Network,” *Photography and Culture* 10, no. 2 (2017): 147–63; Thy Phu and Elspeth H. Brown, “The Cultural Politics of Aspiration: Family Photography’s Mixed Feelings,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 17, no. 2 (2018): 152–65.

artist Courtney MacFarlane's exhibition and public programming concerning Toronto's Black queer history, *Legacies in Motion: Black Queer Toronto Archival Project*.⁷² These collaborations have helped to build trust between the ArQuives and some key Black organizers – an ongoing process – and have helped to render visible the structural histories of racialized collecting within the ArQuives since the 1970s. Our goal has been to draw attention to the important historical legacy of this Black queer organizing, and to support the stewardship of the archival record – but not necessarily to collect those records ourselves.

Taking a postcustodial approach to organizational and personal records is one of many strategies that historically white lesbian and gay community archives might consider as part of a larger effort to develop anti-racist and trans-positive sensibilities, discussions, practices, and policies within majority white, cis, LGBTQ2+ community archives. Some of the other initiatives I have outlined here, from oral histories to collections guides, represent other strategies. Together, these and the multiple other approaches underway at the ArQuives and no doubt at other historically white lesbian and/or gay community archives, represent a new wave of archival activism. It is only through such strategies that archival activists can address symbolic annihilation *within* the LGBTQ2+ community archive.

72 For the *Legacies in Motion* exhibition, see "Legacies in Motion: Black Queer Toronto Archival Project," Myseum, accessed August 19, 2019, <http://www.myseumoftoronto.com/programming/legacies-in-motion-black-queer-toronto-archival-project/>.

BIOGRAPHY Elspeth H. Brown is a professor of history at the University of Toronto. Her research concerns queer and trans history, the history and theory of photography, the history of US capitalism, and oral history. She is the author of *Work! A Queer History of Modeling* (Duke University Press, 2019) and *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884–1929* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). She is co-editor of *Feeling Photography* (Duke University Press, 2014, with Thy Phu), “Queering Photography,” a special issue of *Photography and Culture* (2014), and *Cultures of Commerce: Representation and American Business Culture, 1877–1960* (Palgrave, 2006). She is the Director of the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory – a five-year digital and oral history public, digital humanities collaboration – and co-investigator for the Family Camera Network. She is an active volunteer and vice president of the board for the ArQuives: Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives.