

General Editors' Introduction

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Since the 1990s, many academic disciplines and areas of interdisciplinary scholarship have experienced what's come to be known as the "archival turn." As visual resources documentarian Cheryl Simon noted as early as 2002, this turn represents, in part, "the emergence of an evidentiary aesthetic in the information age" (Simon 2002: 101), a period within which, she contends, vastly expanded digital data storage and communication networks have seemingly flattened time and collapsed space in the direction of an eternal here and now. Under such conditions, *archive* can become a fetish for the perhaps nostalgic notion of a specific and locatable past. As Martin Heidegger had remarked decades earlier, in surveying the immediate post–World War II technocultural landscape of Europe:

All distances in time and space are shrinking. Man . . . now receives instant information, by radio, of events which he formerly learned about only years later, if at all. . . . Distant sites of the most ancient cultures are shown on film as if they stood this very moment amidst today's street traffic. . . . Man puts the longest distances behind him in the shortest time. He puts the greatest distances behind himself and thus puts everything before himself at the shortest range." (Heidegger 1971: 165)

Now more than half a century later, smartphone in hand, all the world becomes for "Man," that privileged subject of Eurocentric modernity, an ever-expanding and increasingly accessible archive of all that has come before or happens now. In theory, at least, and in fantasy.

Within cultural theory, the "archival turn" has drawn on the expansive, critically powerful conceptualizations of "archive" in the works of such canonical thinkers as Michel Foucault (1977) and Jacques Derrida (1996) that gained purchase within the academy as part of a broader uptake of poststructuralist thought in many different fields over the last few decades of the twentieth century. *Archive*,

in this context, became a kind of code word cultural scholars could use to signal a certain attention to the politics of knowledge production. It meant one was asking meta-level questions pertaining not only to what we can know of the recoverable past but also to how we know it and who can know it, what gaps and elisions the archive might contain, whose lives are deemed worthy of remembrance, and what counts as knowing in the first place. Queer archival works such as Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings* (2003) and Anjali Arondekar's *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (2009), in deep if sometimes indirect dialog with such roughly contemporaneous works of the "archival turn" as Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002), and Antoinette Burton's *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003), brought an archival perspective into the heart of many vital conversations that have informed transgender studies as an interdisciplinary field.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that "transgender" as a concept, as an organizing rubric for an emergent social movement, and as an incipient field of study rose to prominence at the same moment as the archival turn in the early 1990s and signaled similar premillennial and postmodern anxieties regarding the collapse of time and place as did the archival imaginary (Felski 2006; Stryker 2000). *Transgender* was press-ganged into service as an avatar of its age: an elastic, recategorizable body for an era of flexible accumulation; a border-crossing body with a globalizable identity; a fluid universal medium with the capacity to absorb and dissolve other categories of personhood, thereby configuring as it flowed new zones of contact that conflicted with more established modes of embodied subjectivization; and a dematerializable and reconstitutable embodiment simultaneously everywhere and nowhere at once, like the Internet. That was in theory, of course, or perhaps in fantasy, though never in actual practice.

Practically speaking, transgender bodies are always somewhere. They are never "the body," always particular bodies. Knowledges of them are likewise partial, situated, and concrete. They have particular physical addresses, metadata descriptors, storage media, search terms, indexing strategies, and collection guides. Even the cloud, after all, is made of silicon and wire. However much "the archive" can be made to metaphorize certain conditions or qualities of the production, consumption, and distribution of contemporary knowledge, archives nevertheless also remain tangible places. In bringing together this first-ever collection of essays on "transgender archives and archiving," drawn in part from "Moving Trans* History Forward," the first-ever international conference on transgender archives held at the University of Victoria, March 21–23, 2014, guest editors K. J. Rawson and Aaron Devor have largely sidestepped work on "the archive" as that phrase gets tossed about in cultural studies, and have prioritized instead work about literal archives—tangible repositories of records of events.

Even more specifically, Rawson and Devor have selected scholarship focused on literal archives and records that document the lives of people self-identified or readily understood as transgender in contemporary terms, primarily in North America: police arrest records of public cross-dressers, special collections at university research libraries that carry runs of periodical publications from transgender organizations, community-based archives that document club and bar scenes catering to sexual and gender minorities, found objects and ephemera attesting to the presence of trans people in times and places where one might not have suspected or detected them otherwise, digital media collaborations linking diverse institutions interested in collecting and disseminating transgender histories, and oral history projects that offer a different kind of evidence of lives that unsettle the naturalized gender binary. In doing so, the editors call our attention not only to pragmatic problems encountered by archival practitioners when they try to collect, preserve, describe, and render accessible the material traces of transgender actions in the world but also to equally vexing taxonomic, evidentiary, and semiotic questions about what counts as “trans,” what counts as evidence, and how we make sense and meaning of what we encounter through transgender archiving and archives. They grapple with the fragmentary nature of surviving documentation, the conscious and unconscious biases and selection criteria that determine what records are saved, and the unequal accessibility of those records that are available for study and inspiration.

Several of our recurring sections extend the discussion of archives beyond the articles curated by the guest editors. “New Media” editor Tobias Raun examines how trans men archive their transitions on YouTube. Also in the “New Media” section, Ariel B. Handy and Thomas W. Johnson argue for the importance of preserving the ephemeral digital collections of subaltern communities in their contribution, “Eunuchs Online.” In the “Research Note” section, Elspeth H. Brown writes about trans oral history, elaborating her interest in developing radical democratic research methods for doing so, and briefly describing several exciting trans/feminist oral history archives projects. The “Arts & Culture” section includes three perspectives—from Kelly Besser, Zowie Davy, and Jessica Lee Mathiason—on Katie Herzog’s 2013 art installation, *Transtextuality (Senate Bill 48)*, consisting of paintings of forty-eight transgender “people of letters” (a riff of Gerhard Richter’s 1972 series of forty-eight portraits of “men of letters”), which, as Mathiason suggests, “not only rewrit[es] the archive” but also “foreground[s] the constructedness of art and the archive.”

For those of us whose work in transgender studies relies on archival materials, the articles assembled herein are nothing short of a prospector’s map to the data mine. The wealth of resources now available, or soon to become available, for investigating a deep though narrow sliver of the transgender past truly boggles

the mind of anyone who grew up starved for information about others like themselves, and who is fortunate enough to find one's particular kind of transgender kin and affines among those whose stories have found their way into the historical record. The "transgender archive" as it now exists, imperfect as it is, powerfully attests to the persistent, long-term presence of transgender people within society. Some kinds of trans people, at least.

As we've noted repeatedly in our general editors' introductions to each themed issue of *TSQ*, the mix of subject matter, viewpoints, methodologies, biases, prejudices, preferences, and areas of expertise included in any particular issue of the journal should be viewed as a point of departure for further conversation, rather than a definitive summation of current thinking on that particular topic. When we think of radical trans-of-color archival projects like those of Reina Gossett, who is documenting the lives and activist legacies of trans legends Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, or when we look in *TSQ*'s Google Drive to see the submissions the guest editors felt fell outside their curatorial visions—phenomenological work on embodiment as an archive of affect and experience, trans inclusion in Guatemalan archives, indigenous archives of Hawaiian *mahu*, work on archiving as a liberatory practice, even work that challenges the very viability of trans* archival projects themselves—we are more convinced than ever that the work collected between the covers of this volume, substantive and intriguing as they are, barely scratches the surface of what "transgender archives and archiving" can encompass, and what, in fact, these practices already are.

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