

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

A Critical Archival Pedagogy: The Lesbian Herstory Archives and a Course in Radical Lesbian Thought

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"WELCOME TO THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES" PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES BY KAILAH CARDEN

"[T]he archive" has a capital "A," is figurative, and leads elsewhere. It may represent neither material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgettings and collections...

— Ann Laura Stoler

I have learned that the goals of an archivist and of a storyteller are not so different. We keep stories alive, we create stories, and (*most of all*) we create potential.

—Arturo Muñoz

Introduction

Archives are variously understood as institutions, repositories, concepts, and even subjects. Here, we describe how we have taken up Lesbian archives as both radical sites of knowledge production and exchange, and as pedagogical subjects. In the spring of 2015, we piloted an undergraduate seminar entitled, "Radical Lesbian Thought," nicknamed "RadLez" by the students. For their final project, the six students in this course developed their own archives in relation to their learning through and at the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA). Additionally, Arturo, Cecilia, Maya, and Pinto, or The Rad Lez Kidz as they named themselves, expanded their archival inquiry as a self-directed independent study the following academic year, forging cross-institutional, intergenerational collaborations and shifting the location of pedagogical power.

Through the course, we radically co-produced inquiry and knowledge. Specifically, we undertook dialogic praxes of critical pedagogy to both study thought and to build thought. In other words, the subject matter was also the practice of learning. As Cecilia wrote at the end of the semester,

I have learned an immense amount not just about the histories of Radical Lesbian thought but also of a practice of thinking and knowledge production that we have both studied and endeavored in. . . . As we're studying the production of Radical Lesbian thought, we are also producing Radical Lesbian thought. . . . The course has mirrored a Radical Lesbian thought method of knowledge production.

We learned Radical Lesbian Thought through the doing of Radical Lesbian Thought. The dialogic interplay between content and praxis was ongoing so that the subject matter dynamically changed through our practice of it.

This paper is the story of how we collectively forged a critical, Lesbian archival pedagogy through dialogic praxes. In section one we explore three theoretical framings of archives (Gopinath, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; Stoler, 2002) paired with three features of our radical Lesbian pedagogical praxes: dialogue and difference; collaborative knowledge production; and archival methodology. In section two, we illustrate these critical archival praxes

through three course activities: writing and reading archival letters; conducting research at the LHA; and creating final archives.

Background

Radical Lesbian Thought: Centering the Archives

The syllabus for the course Radical Lesbian Thought emerged through dialogue between Kailah, a graduate student and TA in Educational Studies, and Sabina, an advisor and professor in Educational Studies. This dialogue was a practice of intergenerational Lesbian knowledge exchange that would be repeated throughout the course development, implementation, and the ensuing intellectual communities and projects. Significantly, the Department of Education at Tufts University supported this course idea through a course development grant awarded to Kailah. The program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Tufts co-listed the course.

Our initial course description, on the front page of the syllabus, communicated the parameters of our exploration of radical Lesbian thought and situated it as archivally contextualized:

Course Description: This course will consider radical Lesbian knowledge production during the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. Radical Lesbian thought encompasses dynamic, complex, and at times contradictory bodies of knowledge. Specifically, we will pay attention to the emergence of educational and activist knowledge movements by tracing early epistolary and news-making endeavors as they gave way to the formation of collective knowledge production across literary, historical, and other disciplinary areas. This course will contextualize the history of radical Lesbian thought both inside the academy—as connected to and in conflict with feminist theory and queer theory—and outside the academy in relation to feminist and queer knowledge movements. Course readings, assignments, and seminar discussions will provide an in-depth focus on critical questions of power in relation to choice, essentialism, and shifting spheres of knowledge and education along tense lines of race, class, and gender. The course will be organized as an archival research process, drawing on archival materials, and including research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, other Lesbian archives, and the student production of archives.

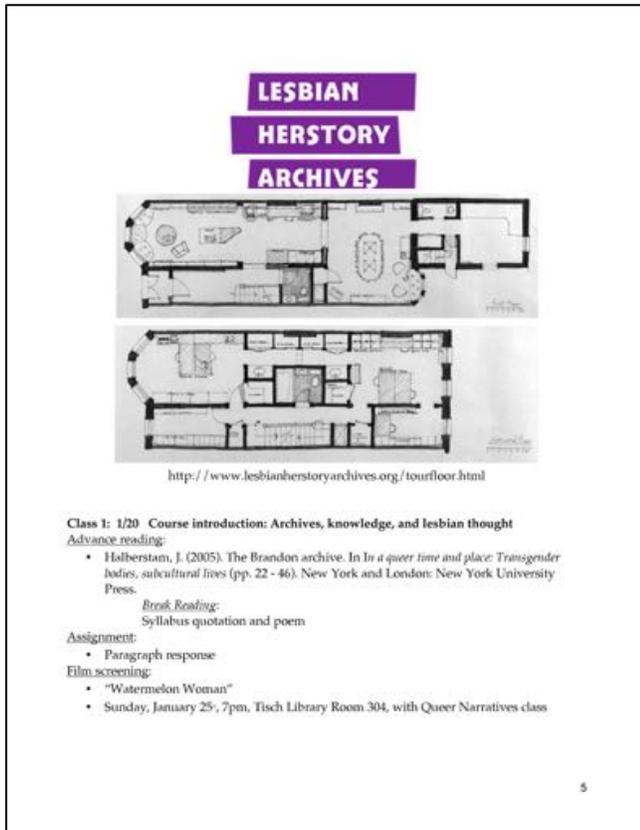
This guiding course description reflected our course-development dialogue and was the starting point for the process of collaboration that unfolded throughout the course. It introduced critical lines of inquiry as they are situated historically, intellectually, and politically, and introduced the LHA and archival methodology.

Disciplinary Context: Knowledge Production and Power

Questions of power are central to the critical theoretical traditions of Educational Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) within which we developed this course. However, even within those

traditions, we found Lesbian thought and knowledge production to be relegated to de-contextualized historical considerations or simply absent from scholarly discussions. Students brought this same perspective through their own academic experiences. Pinto reflected,

Lesbian history and existence have been erased in many courses I have previously taken regarding gender and sexuality, often in the name of queer theory and moving beyond the concept of fixed or labeled identities.



PAGE 5 OF RADICAL LESBIAN THOUGHT COURSE SYLLABUS. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES, LOGO CREATED BY CARRIE MOYER FOR THE LHA

Maya echoed Pinto, writing "I realized that I didn't really have a true understanding of any sort of 'Lesbian history.' Who would be included in such a history, anyway?" In a course where Lesbian herstory, culture, politics and thought were not only explicitly centered, but made up the entire content, different questions of power arose. Instead of using Lesbians and Lesbian thought rhetorically as an exception, a monolithic entity, or an entirely ignored category, in this course we attended to power contestations within and between Lesbian communities and movements. Students explored historical and contemporary Lesbian debates over separatism, race, porn, S/M, and trans issues, among others.

Our entrance into intellectual traditions was facilitated by our negotiation of identities as always intersectional, always in relation to knowledge, and always institutionally co-constructed (Collins,1999; Crenshaw,1991). We committed to substantive intellectual, structural

intersectionality that produced rich discussion, connection, tension, dissent, and knowledge. Rather than rely on or require categorical declarations of self, we engaged identity in the classroom as it emerged constantly in relation to powered contexts of ideas, debates, structures, and communities. We as teachers interacted with materials as Lesbian scholars, conveying to students not "I am a Lesbian," but rather, for instance, "I have these conflicting intellectual ideas about separatist traditions." The class was culturally and epistemically non-White, though a couple participants identified individually as White in relation to ideas or readings. Class dispositions, language, and other situated identities emerged throughout. Arturo described this intellectual process as affording "each of us our respective Radical Lesbian consciousnesses." The process was further facilitated by extending our class beyond the university and engaging dialogically with the LHA, both before and after our visit.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

We understand the LHA as an archive organized around Lesbians as a political, intellectual, and cultural category. Our centering of radical Lesbian thought and practice matched the foundational claims of the LHA. Founded in the 1970s by New York City Lesbians, the LHA is a volunteer-run, community-based archive, housed in a Brownstone in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Its early Statement of Purpose, as conveyed in an LHA newsletter, read as follows:

The Lesbian Herstory Archives exists to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations of Lesbians will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will also serve to uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture which they serve. The existence of these Archives will enable us to analyze and reevaluate the Lesbian experience. We anticipate that the existence of these Archives will encourage Lesbians to record their experiences in order to formulate our living Herstory (Edel, Nestle, Schwarz, Penelope, & Itnyre, 1979, p. 1).

This statement, which remains relatively unchanged, resonates with the scholarly importance of Lesbian knowledge production in the academy. The archive is a site of herstory collections and of knowledge production and exchange. Pinto reflected, "I had never critically considered the significance of knowledge as something produced by people, who come with their own subjectivities, or even archives as a manifestation of this knowledge production."

Through the centering of archival methodologies and the LHA itself, we all came to understand ourselves as archivists and pedagogues, as knowledge heirs of the LHA. Writes Fritzsche (2005),

Archives are not comprehensive collections of things... nor are they arbitrary accumulations of remnants and leftovers. The archive is the production of the heirs, who must work to find connections from one generation to the next . . . a cultural group that knows

itself by cultivating a particular historical trajectory (p. 16).

As heirs, we were simultaneously students and teachers, stewards and producers of knowledge. Students were able to understand radical archives as necessarily intergenerationally peopled. However, unlike the prevailing notion of sterile archive and staid scholarly practices, the production and exchange of knowledge was not uni-directional and acultural, but rather was multidimensional and culturally Lesbian.



"ARCHIVAL BOXES" PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES BY KAILAH CARDEN

I. Archive as Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations

Dialogue and Difference

For us, critical pedagogy is fundamentally a dialogue that centers questions of power production, reproduction, and disruption (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 2008). Dialogue is the heart of critical pedagogy, in large part because it is exercised through attention to difference. Britzman (2012) suggests that queer pedagogy is "a technique for acknowledging difference as *the only condition of possibility for community*" (p. 297, emphasis original). Lesbian archival dialogue is rooted in the ongoing establishment of an intergenerational, knowledge-producing communities of difference.

In developing this dialogic praxis in the service of difference, we had to land on a specific set of methodologies for critical Lesbian archival dialogue. We conceptualized archives as sites where powers collide and are resisted, and where knowledge-based collectivity is developed (Cvetkovich, 2003; Derrida, 1995; Foucault, 1982). Our theoretical engagements helped us to approach the brick-and-mortar LHA as contextualized and organized by socio-political knowledge traditions, movements, groups of people, and historically framed eras.

As jumping off points, we incorporated three central readings on archives into the syllabus. In advance of the first class meeting, we e-mailed "The Brandon Archive"

(Halberstam, 2005) to students with the assignment to write a response to the ideas in the chapter. "In crafting this response," we wrote, "be thinking about the role and meaning of archives, particularly for non-dominant people. Please do not summarize the chapter, but detail your own thinking in relation to it." This was the start of two things: our archival dialogic processes situating students as knowledge producers; and our conceptualizations of the archive as complex, contradictory, and open-ended—dialogues of and across difference.

"The Brandon Archive" facilitated this two-pronged approach to critical Lesbian archival dialogic praxes. Halberstam (2005) describes the archive produced in response to the 1993 murder of Brandon Teena—"a young female-bodied person who had been passing as a man" in Falls City, Nebraska (p. 22). Halberstam's scholarly analysis across specific powered sites of difference illustrates the meaning-making potential of an archive's content, form, and process. As Halberstam (2005) writes, archives are "simultaneously a resource, a productive narrative, a set of representations, a history, a memorial, and a time capsule," (p.23) as well as "a discursive field and a structure of thinking" (p. 33). So, with this first archival framework, we began to construct our own conceptualization of archives as sites where content and process are linked through continuous dialogue.

Collaborative Knowledge Production

In developing our own archival frameworks we found we had to shift entrenched power dynamics to foster collective knowledge production. Our second framing of archives was Gopinath's (2010) "Archive, affect and the everyday." This article works to attend to queer inflections of loss in commonplace artifacts and daily acts. As can happen, we did not find ourselves returning to this conceptual framework as a class, though individual students did return. In spite of the fact that we offered the whole class opportunities to connect this framework to our dialogue, it simply never gained traction. Instead of rigidly insisting students engage this work, we participated dialogically with students to cultivate a shared archival praxis that did not highlight this particular framing.

Gopinath's framework as peripheral to our understanding of archives highlights a moment of the ground-up construction of our critical archival pedagogy. Using the syllabus as a guide, not as mandate, fostered student understanding of their role as co-producers of course inquiry, content, and pedagogy. We were staunch about some expectations and inclusions, as we understood them to facilitate growth in ways students could not devise, design, or predict. An established expectation and practice of rigor in our class meant that we had shared trust that inattention to a framework was a decision made through substantive scholarly consideration. The *process* of collaborative decision-making remained integral. This expanded the rigor of the course, pivoting on agentic student participation and production. However, this came in part out of years of Sabina's pedagogical dispositions, and we do not imagine it as necessary to a radical archival pedagogy. We understand it as illustrative of possibilities, not as prescriptive.

Students had to grapple with shifting dynamics of collective decision-making and the demanding implications of co-producing thought. As Maya said, capturing the shared sentiments of her classmates:

I grew to more enjoy the freedom (and also responsibility) required by such a setup. In essence, I saw this as putting the onus of drawing meaning from our own work onto students rather than have a formulaic (linear) structure that more easily affords/feeds meaning and understanding to students.

While many students were initially uncomfortable assuming the role of knowledge producer, Arturo expressed what they all came to experience—he began to see it as a welcome change from his previous coursework:

Up to this point in my academic career, I have tried to steal whatever ontological sovereignty that I could. In other courses, I felt uncomfortable moving beyond or departing from the theories and frameworks that were provided by the professor for fear of it costing my grade.

In this course, not only did we pedagogically position students as knowledge producers, we gave students the option to grade themselves to further remove any real or perceived restrictions to their learning. As Arturo adeptly stated: “The most crucial part of self-grading is finding value in one’s own work.”

It was through the praxis of dialogue across different institutional locations of the classroom that we co-created our own knowledge producing community. Britzman (2000) posits that for dialogue between students and teachers “to occur, both educators and students have to learn to see knowledge as something that is made in and altered by relationships”(p. 49). Britzman (2000) goes on to state that “learning is the work of making interpretations, experimenting with the potential force or power of what knowledge can do, and with *marking* knowledge with new significance”(p. 49, emphasis original). As instructors, we explicitly marked the power in the process of knowledge production. Requiring students to prioritize readings, develop their own assignments, and choose the subject of their final projects—and giving them the option to grade their own work—shifted the power dynamics of the classroom. Explicitly, it fostered rigorous knowledge production. Importantly we did not entirely relinquish the power of the teacher, but instead used authority to facilitate the collective practice of critical Lesbian archival pedagogy (Wooten & Vaught, 2015).

Archival Methodology

Archival content does not guarantee an archival pedagogy, just as Lesbian content does not assure a Lesbian pedagogy. As hooks (1994) cautions, “different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory pedagogy” (p. 148). Instead pedagogy, and the methodology of knowledge production, must deliberately support the content taught. In our course we both studied archival methodologies *and* employed them as pedagogy. Students were in charge of creating their own Lesbian archival methodologies, which really took flight when we

read Ann Laura Stoler’s (2002) “Colonial archives and the arts of governance.” Stoler advances a methodology of reading *along* the archival grain. She suggests that while it is relevant to examine what is missing from archives, it also necessary to “read [an archive] for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake—*along* the archival grain” (p. 100, emphasis original). Reading along the grain is methodologically necessary to identify and analyze flows of archival power.

This archival methodological framework allowed us to consider the LHA as a complex, knowledge-producing subject. So in returning to hooks’ claim that radical content does not guarantee radical pedagogy, we borrow from Stoler to argue that radical content does not necessarily produce a radical archive.

As a class and knowledge producing community, we used Stoler’s (2002) archival methodology to ask of this specific terrain of power: what logics are active in radical Lesbian archives? what patterns of meaning emerge at the LHA? and what rises to the top in each archivist’s reading of the LHA? Because the LHA is a radical “grassroots Lesbian archives,” it is already reading *against* the grain of hetero-patriarchal histories (“History and mission,” 2015). Thus, it was especially important for us to read *along* the LHA’s grain to identify *regularities, densities, and distributions* of Radical Lesbian Thought. By examining the stories, artifacts, and ephemera that were preserved, we began to make sense of the salient narratives, epistemologies, and methodologies of the LHA.

Moreover, Stoler (2002) suggests that reading along the grain is a methodology that positions the archive as an ethnographic subject. Stoler argues that the shift from the “archive-as-source to the archive-as-subject” creates a corresponding reframing of “archives not as sites of knowledge retrieval, but knowledge production” (p. 87). As such, archives are defined not only by what they contain, but also by their dynamic processes of meaning making. This archival methodological framework allowed us to consider the LHA as a complex, knowledge-producing subject. So in returning to hooks’ claim that radical content does not guarantee radical pedagogy, we borrow from Stoler to argue that radical content does not necessarily produce a radical archive. Rather, by approaching the archive-as-subject we examined the practices of Lesbian archives to understand the totality of their radicality.

In the spirit of the pedagogical charge to collaboratively experiment with power and knowledge via radical archival methodologies, Arturo wrote that through the course, “I aimed to harness the potential of archives; I further aimed to exploit the power attached to the term ‘archive.’” Echoing Stoler (2002), he suggested that by contesting “archives, as structures and moderators of

power, [that] can create a static image of history” he sought new meanings and new archival methodologies.

II. Archive as Process: Critical Archival Praxes

In part two we move from the archival theoretical frameworks of the course to three examples of activities we collectively undertook: reading and writing letters, conducting research at the LHA, and creating final archives. These three activities—letters, field trip, and final archives—were informed by our archival frameworks of dialogue and difference, collaborative knowledge production, and archival methodology.

Letters as a Practice of Dialogue and Difference

In the spirit of Halberstam’s (2005) framework of dialogue across difference, we used letters as both artifact and practice. We were specifically interested in letters that were written to be publicly circulated to build and maintain intellectual communities. We read selected letters to *ONE*, a Gay and Lesbian newsletter, from the 1950s and 60s, an open letter from Audre Lorde to Mary Daly, as well as an anonymous letter later attributed to playwright Lorraine Hansberry, written to *The Ladder*, the first known U.S. Lesbian newsletter (Hansberry Nemiroff, 1957; Loftin, 2012; Lorde, 2007). The corresponding assignment was to “write an open letter to a current Lesbian/Gay/Queer media outlet.” The letters we assigned and the letters the students wrote pivoted on difference across vectors of socioeconomics, race, sexuality, gender, and ideology.

We scaffolded this epistolary activity by placing students in dialogue pairs to discuss these questions:

- What are the concerns and issues in the letters you read?
- What are the concerns and issues in the letters you wrote?
- Where do you see echoes, overlaps, and Lesbian knowledge disposition?

By identifying the “echoes” and “overlaps,” the students’ own letters entered into the ever-expanding archives of Radical Lesbian Thought.

These activities shaped our collective understanding of the potential of archives for teaching, learning, and creation. As Pinto stated halfway through the semester, “this class isn’t about just discussing the readings, but, rather, using them as frames of reference to dig deeper into concepts to deconstruct them and then reconstructing them entirely.” We read these letters, as Pinto articulated, not just for their content and concepts, but also for the opportunity to create, through deconstruction and reconstruction, our own radical archive of Lesbian thought.

Further, this activity anchored us in a generational and intergenerational Lesbian knowledge producing practice. In Cecilia’s final project, a letter to Sabina and Kailah, she reflected on the generational and intergenerational collective features of epistolary practices

in radical Lesbian knowledge-producing communities. She writes,

Using the letter as a means to transfer separatist Lesbian thought is important to me because of the way in which it has been used to create uncensored separatist conversations, which are able to remain within Lesbian spheres without being subjected to hetero-patriarchal exploitation. It also marks a collaborative Lesbian conversation, which I have participated in while endeavoring to produce the knowledge that has informed this archival letter. The practice of letter writing itself has been passed on intergenerationally as it was born out of a fugitive desire and means to produce knowledge (of kinship, of love, of politics, of life) along with sisters, lovers, fighters, etc. The physical artifact of the letter, too, is an inter-generational space and practice.

Here, in her final project, Cecilia circles back to one of the first activities of the course to analyze the importance of writing and reading letters as a way to exchange and produce knowledge in and across Lesbian communities. She marks this process, and her letter, as “archival.” In doing so, she circulates this letter beyond its named recipients, and enters into a larger dialogic conversation with Lesbian separatist knowledge producing communities, as an heir, author, and intergenerational kinship member. These roles, for all of us, were shaped and strengthened at our trip to the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Field Trip as a Practice of Collaborative Knowledge Production



“WELCOME TO THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES” PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES BY KAILAH CARDEN

After weeks of preparation and anticipation, our class made the trip from Boston to New York to conduct student-directed research at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. This trip afforded us the chance to, as Arturo said, “develop various conversations with Lesbians” historically and contemporarily in a shared space. We traveled by bus, train, and car, met in Brooklyn for lunch, and connected as

a reconfigured collective to enter the LHA. Part of our radical teaching was this journey itself. We were all first-time travelers on this intellectual pilgrimage to the LHA.

We came to understand the LHA as a site of intergenerational knowledge production and exchange, containing artifacts and people, that preserves a constellation of pasts. On walking through the doors to the Brownstone, we were greeted by LHA co-founder, Deb Edel. She welcomed us into a purple living room overflowing with books by and about Lesbians, arranged on the floor-to-ceiling shelves non-patriarchally by first name. Deb gave us a short history of her work with the LHA and other Lesbians as she took us through the multiple rooms in the house-turned-archive. She began to tell the story of the founding of the LHA, and explained that the 1970s were an exciting time. Halfway through her sentence, she paused, smiled and exclaimed, "It's *always* an exciting time to be a Lesbian!" Standing in a dusty, filtered-light, second-floor room, filled with filing cabinets, and boxes full of letters, sci-fi novels, and the collection of Audre Lorde, we recognized the significance of this invitation into a Lesbian herstory.

Despite researching the LHA before our visit, we were all surprised by the affective impact of this trip. Pinto recorded these feelings in her reflection on our visit.

My expectations before visiting the Lesbian Herstory Archives were humble. I was sure we had learned just about everything there was to learn about Lesbian history and the LHA would simply be a supplement to this learning journey. I could literally *feel* how wrong I was the minute I walked in. I was standing in the epicenter of Lesbian history, existence, and knowledge production, whether it was the books, magazine, flyers, buttons, jackets, or shoes that lined every inch of the space—a space that validated my (and so many other women's) existence.

This "epicenter of Lesbian history" provided a depth and richness to our inquiry that was not possible at our university. This field trip rearranged our class boundaries as the formal structures of the university fell away.

At the LHA, we conducted self-directed and co-constructed research to support our lines of inquiry. Pinto described this dynamic collaborative knowledge production in her reflection on our research at the LHA:

The most incredible part of visiting the LHA was sharing that intellectual and personal yet, ultimately, collective experience with everyone. . . . I came to understand that this space does not simply inhabit an address in Brooklyn; rather, its very existence and survival as an archive has worked to inform how we related ourselves to both the class and understood our realities. How can one single place do that??

Collectively, we understood the LHA to be both a site and a subject, and to therefore have its own agency and disposition (Stoler, 2002). The LHA allowed us all to participate in an intergenerational Lesbian dialogue, with people and artifacts, both in resistance to and outside of

dominant discourse. However, we also brought the intergenerational dynamics of our class with us.



PINTO CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON LESBIAN SCIENCE FICTION. PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES BY SABINA VAUGHT

Intergenerationality formed a continuous framework for the course. Kailah and Sabina as co-teachers operated intergenerationally. This was also reflected in the relationship between Cecilia and Sabina, as state-recognized daughter-mother, whose intergenerational relationship was formed in and out of the class in part through intellectual Lesbian knowledge exchange¹. Cecilia was a second-generation Lesbian in multiple capacities. Students experienced the merger of mother-daughter and teacher-student relationships as creating new possibilities—that families of origin can also be intellectual homes and that teachers can also be in intellectual kinship relation to students through shared knowledge traditions and practices. Moreover, this encouraged Cecilia's understanding of Deb as an intellectual and political kin, as a foremother, with whom she felt both excited and comfortable to speak at length during our time at the LHA.

After interviewing Deb in the LHA's working kitchen, Cecilia reflected on the praxis and "intense importance of intergenerational knowledge exchange particularly in Lesbian thought." She detailed the multiple instances and sites of intergenerational knowledge exchange throughout the course.

This occurred both through my work with you both [Sabina and Kailah] but also through our visiting the archive and the actual readings of older Lesbians. In my future work I wish to acknowledge the historical importance of all Lesbians and the way in which that informs my own archival readings now.

The literal presence of intergenerationality was also experienced by students as a symbolic experience of inquiry and of time.

Just as our learning took place outside, within, and across the boundaries of the classroom, the research conducted at the LHA had an impact beyond the official end date of the semester. Arturo shared,

The research I conducted and the artifacts I was able to interact with at the LHA have left a lasting

impression on me. The work I do will remain informed by the Lesbian materialities, preserved in this archive, that I was able to interact with. For that, I'm grateful.

In the end, the field trip was not simply an activity to support assignments, it also inspired future projects of thought and action. Through students' creation of their own archives, in addition to their continued work with Lesbian archives and the LHA, we were all reminded that learning is not confined to one classroom, one semester, or one site. For us, producing and exchanging knowledge was a tool to enter into, and create, ongoing radical Lesbian community.

"Finals" as a Practice of Archival Methodology

For the final project of the semester, students used the research they conducted at the LHA to create their own archives. Arturo created a video archive of his spiritual relationship to Audre Lorde, Ntombi Howell, and Florynce Kennedy; Pinto wrote a Lesbian separatist science fiction novella; Cecilia produced a Lesbian separatist letter; and Maya created, curated, and contextualized a herstory of Lesbian buttons. Other students conducted similarly unique and creative archival projects.

We came to realize that, while labeled a "final," there was nothing finished or complete about these archives. Unlike a traditional final, which is often a performance of knowledge to signify the completion or demonstrate the mastery of learning, these finals opened up new lines of inquiry. Pinto articulated the ongoing process of archival knowledge production in reflecting on the methodology she employed to create her own final archive.

This project granted me an imaginative freedom to do two things: 1) further explore another form of knowledge and archival production regarding radical Lesbian thought; and 2) create my own platform upon which I could address and tease out my tensions and conflicts, while still be able to critically interact with the material from class.

What students variously described as "imaginative freedom" (Pinto), "autonomy," (Cecilia) and "vast amount of conceptual space," (Arturo) in RadLez was a rigorous departure from their other coursework. Cecilia noted at the end of the semester that her "ability to design my own assignments, research focus, and project has made me greatly more invested in this class than I could have ever been without this type of academic independence." This process of sharing power itself, providing the option of self-grading for example, illustrates our ongoing power as teachers. Radical Lesbian pedagogy did not mean pretending power did not exist, but, as Audre Lorde (1990) says, bringing it to the fore and working within and across it.

To both shift power and make it transparent, we attended to multiple and contradictory stories simultaneously. We collectively explored the "problem of how knowledge of bodies and bodies of knowledge become a site of normalization" through our archival research and production (Britzman, 2012, p. 293). Throughout the semester we complicated and critiqued singular narratives of Lesbian existence, those same narratives many of us had experienced in other coursework, when Lesbians were included at all. Through their final projects, RadLez students challenged the systems and institutions that construct a singular, normalized Lesbian body and Lesbian thought. For example, Cecilia incorporated archival collections into her final that challenged dominant



DEBORAH EDEL, TEDDY MINUCCI, CECILIA, PINTO, MAYA, AND ARTURO. PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES BY EUGINA GELBELMAN

narratives of separatist Lesbians because they were produced by separatist Lesbians.

One of the parts of the Separatist community I most appreciated in this research was the multitude of voices that came out of it. This is interesting to me since the idea of "Lesbian Separatism" is often framed as a very individualist one, with a one-woman mold. At the LHA during this trip, though, I found archived profiles women in the Lesbian Separatist movement had written of themselves.

Cecilia located knowledge creation as a *collective* act, grounded in Lesbian community. "Ultimately," Cecilia wrote, "the Lesbian Separatist movement was creating a *community* (not an individual united identity), and in so doing was creating new visions of thought and knowledge for Lesbians, about Lesbians, by Lesbians and with Lesbians" (emphasis original). In order to produce their own archives, students read along the grain of the LHA to identify Lesbian "consciousnesses" (Arturo) and communities created through dialogue and difference. In capturing the complexity and multiplicity of these

communities in their archives, students resisted the “normalization” and simplification of Lesbian thought.

One Year Later: “Open[ing] Out of the Future”

As we experienced, “the archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (Derrida, 1995, p. 45). As we write, four of the RadLez students carry forward the potential we all co-created in the course. These students, under the collective, self-chosen name the Rad Lez Kidz, facilitated a showing of the LHA’s Audre Lorde exhibit at Tufts University. This required fundraising, returning to the LHA to conduct research, collaborating with Deborah Edell and the LHA volunteers, and producing their own companion archive, events, and exhibit. Due to the deteriorating physical condition of the exhibit, this is the final showing before the Audre Lorde Exhibit is permanently archived at LHA. Not only are these students continuing to be collective knowledge producers, but they are doing so well beyond the confines of the semester, classroom, and direction of Professor and TA. “I developed a sort of ‘Radical Lesbian consciousness,’” explained Arturo. “That is, I have become more aware of the potential that continues to exist for radical Lesbian thinkers/organizers/-identified people.”



ARTURO, CECILIA, AND PINTO. PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN AT THE AUDRE LORDE EXHIBIT OPENING AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY BY PEARL EMMONS

We collaboratively developed a radical Lesbian archival pedagogy through dialogue that spanned the classroom and the Lesbian Herstory Archives. In this paper we detailed the ways in which we framed and did not frame archives and shared illustrations of how our archival frameworks became student and teacher practice in the classroom, in the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and in between. Letters, the trip to the LHA, and student-produced finals are three activities that exemplify the salient frameworks of dialogue across difference and power, collaborative knowledge, and archival methodologies including reading along the grain and approaching the archive-as-subject. Our praxes informed our engagement with archival content, while the content continuously challenged and refined our praxes. As Maya noted, “I have had few classes that have given me no choice but to stretch and challenge my manner of thinking about theory, and theory-in-practice/as reality.” This

critical archival pedagogy, a pedagogy we applied to Lesbian archives, positions students as knowledge producers and ultimately creates “potential.” Arturo wrote,

I have learned that the goals of an archivist and of a storyteller are not so different. We keep stories alive, we create stories, and (*most of all*) we create potential. We sustain (in the case of this course) the Radical Lesbian Imaginary. This course creates potential, as each student in the course has created their own story.



MAYA AND PINTO. PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN AT THE AUDRE LORDE EXHIBIT OPENING AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY BY PEARL EMMONS

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Notes

¹ This was not an easy or predictable process. Cecilia and Sabina's months-long deliberation over Cecilia's enrollment in the class hinged on Sabina's normative understandings of the boundaries between private/family life and public/academic life. While numerous other faculty members had taught their own children in courses at Tufts, Sabina was so uncomfortable that she asked for permission from her chair and dean, hoping one would say "no." However, one had also taught her own child in a class, and both were supportive of the idea. As Cecilia wrote, the potential "complications" of her participation in the class, "were taken on in order that I might be able to participate in the only academic Lesbian knowledge producing conversation I might have access" to at Tufts. "This inherently marks an honoring of intergenerational Lesbian thought but also allows me to be formally engaged in a political and collective conversation with other Lesbians."



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