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Introduction

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Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives
The Power of Information

Titles in the Series:

Edited by Sara de Jong and Sanne Koevoets

Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives The Power of Information

Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms

A book series by ATGENDER

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INTRODUCTION

Sanne Koevoets and Sara de Jong

"Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives: The Power of Information" invites teachers and students in gender and women's studies to engage with libraries and archives not only as storehouses of knowledge, but also as objects of reflection in their own right. When writing and compiling this volume, we had three specific aims in mind. Firstly, we wanted to highlight how gender studies and the institutions and practices that preserve and disseminate knowledge about gender issues are historically and systematically intertwined. Secondly, we saw the necessity to reflect on the symbolic meaning as well as the institutionalized practices of libraries and archives as they are undergoing profound transformations under the influence of new (technological) developments. Finally, we set out to engage with the question of how these transformations give way to new ways of producing, preserving and disseminating knowledge through feminist practices situated between the force fields of cultural and academic institutions, material and virtual culture, and the collective imaginary.

From its very conception, this project has been an explicit attempt to make visible those spaces, practices and practitioners that have traditionally remained invisible. At the 2011 annual AtGender Spring Conference librarians, archivists, information specialists and researchers met within the context of working group 3, 'Information and dissemination: infrastructures and networks in Europe and beyond,' which aims to make information on women and gender visible and accessible. It is a curious paradox that the people (often women) engaged with collecting and disseminating knowledge for and about women - which has been and remains of central importance to the production and emancipatory potential of feminist research - have remained largely invisible themselves. This paradox was succinctly sketched when someone in the meeting suggested that: "Librarians are the housewives of gender studies: the work we do is simply expected to be done, but we are invisible, and the work we do is invisible. It is only when things go wrong that we are noticed."

Librarianship is widely considered to be a feminized profession. In the United States, librarianship became feminized within 30 years, with 20 percent

of librarians being female in 1870, compared to 80 percent in 1900.[1] This development, by which women quickly entered and came to (quantitatively) dominate the field whereas men retained administrative and managerial positions, has been linked to the dynamics of late 19th century industrial capitalism. As such, the feminization of librarianship in Europe has likely followed a different course than it has in the United States—particularly in post-communist countries. However, little information is available on how librarianship became feminized in Europe. This may very well be an effect of the invisibility and lack of status awarded to feminized professions.[2] Indeed, judging by the unavailability of historical data on the library profession in Europe, European library professionals are suffering from a profound case of invisibility.

This is not to say that the stereotype of the female librarian is not as universally recognized and symbolically powerful in Europe as it is in North America.[3] It has been argued that this stereotype is predicated on sexism and ageism, and that librarians' attempts to subvert the stereotype have only strengthened the underlying sexism of the image. Librarians in the United States were debating how to rid themselves of the stereotype of the 'old fogey bookworm' as early as the 1900s. Some of them insisted that librarians should behave more professionally, whilst others suggested that librarians should be friendlier and keep an open attitude.[4] Both suggestions implicitly reinforce the dual assumptions that women's work is unprofessional (or less so than traditional men's work), and that women should be friendly and serviceable. As such, these strategies sustain the sexist ideologies from which the stereotype can be seen to stem.

Congruent with the lack of historical data on the feminization of the library profession, a critical European voice on the intersections between librarianship and gendered ideology appears to be lacking. From a gender studies perspective it is undeniably problematic if the very field of studies that has aimed to combat gendered historical invisibility and disempowerment should itself reflect or even contribute to the marginalization of a feminized profession. As such, this

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[1]   Joanne E. Passet, "Men in a Feminized Field: The Male Librarian," *Libraries & Culture* 28 (1993): 386.

[2]   Hans Prins and Wilco de Gier, *The Image of the Library and the Information Profession: How We See Ourselves; a report of an empirical study undertaken on behalf of IFLA's Round Table for the Management of Library Associations* (München: K.G. Saur, 1995), 22.

[3]   See Sanne Koevoets's article in this volume for a discussion of the stereotype of the female librarian.

[4]   Rosalee McReynolds, "A Heritage Dismissed," *Library Journal* 110 (1985): 25–31.

volume should be read as an attempt to explicitly engage with and subvert the sexist stereotype of the docile female librarian by making visible the often unacknowledged work done by the 'housekeepers of gender studies'.

Most importantly, however, this volume was conceived of as a pedagogical tool, aimed at stimulating gender studies teachers to critically reflect, together with their students, on libraries and archives as profoundly gendered knowledge spaces. Whilst feminist standpoint theory with its recognition that knowledge always emanates from and is produced within a specific situationality is now commonplace, libraries and archives have so far largely escaped critical feminist reflection on their status as both knowledge producers in their own right and as constituted by political, social and cultural knowledge regimes. The conventional understanding of libraries and archives as depositories and repositories of knowledge does not give sufficient impetus to such (post)structural interrogations. Consequently, we have set out to provide an array of different and complementary perspectives both from within and aimed towards libraries and archives, not only as locations, but also as objects of scrutiny. The goal of this volume is thus to 'open the black box of the library' through considering the analogies between gender studies research practices and library, archival and ordering practices, in order to consider the challenges involved in preserving and disseminating knowledge about gender issues, as well as producing situated feminist knowledges from within and about the institutional and technological dynamics of libraries and archives. Our starting point is that this consideration is of integral importance to teaching students of gender studies about the political and epistemological challenges of doing gender research.

We showcase the library as a lively, fast changing and thoroughly political space with which students can engage both critically and creatively, and within which lies embedded the possibility of a multitude of feminist practices. The library is revealed to be a central institution of the information age that is both alive and lively, rather than a relic of the past. In this we follow Niegaard's assertion: "In the global information society, the library's best days still lie ahead of it, provided it is allocated the necessary resources and permitted to adapt in an age where a greater proportion of the world's information, knowledge, and cultural services are disseminated digitally."[5] As such, this book aims to provide inspira-

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[5]   Hellen Niegaard, "Library Space and Digital Challenges," *Library Trends* 60.1 (2011): 175.

tion and guidance to teachers, and to assist them in navigating with their students through the complex dynamics of libraries and archives.

Into the labyrinth: exploring libraries and archives

In order to investigate the multitude of ways in which archives and libraries are interwoven with the fabric of feminist thought and everyday life, we must of course begin with a consideration of what archives and libraries are thought to be and what they are expected to do. The most apt description of libraries and archives is that they (together with museums) are *memory institutions*. The value of archives and libraries is to be found in their contributions to academic, social, economic and personal development. These contributions can be achieved not only through the collection and preservation of the cultural and intellectual record, but also by organizing it in such a way that it becomes accessible and approachable. In this way, they are interwoven into the civic fabric of the collective identity of communities, cities and nations.[6]

Archives and libraries are thus also interwoven with collective and partial gendered identities, and women's archives are historically sustained by the promise that the access they provide to women's history and feminist intellectual, political and cultural work will contribute to emancipation. But this promise is simultaneously a burden: the preservation, organization and dissemination of knowledge are processes encumbered by a multitude of political, economic and technological challenges, and they raise important epistemological and ontological questions. Can collections be organized in such a way as to give access to the truth of past events, or are organizational principles always reflective of current institutional and symbolic paradigms? Do archival sources serve merely as the empirical material by which we produce knowledge, or do archives and libraries also actively participate in the production of knowledge? To what extent does the dream of a 'universal', complete library cover up the fact that every great collection tends to exclude as much as it reveals? Libraries and archives are always and undeniably caught in the dialectic of completeness and accessibility. On the one hand, the dream of a universal library that gives access to all of humanity's greatest achieve-

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[6] Lorcan Dempsey, "Scientific, Industrial, and Cultural Heritage: A Shared Approach," Ariadne 22 (2000), http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue22/dempsey.

ments and every aspect of historical truth is as pervasive as it was during the construction of the Great Library of Alexandria. This dream is currently gaining new impetus, as digital technologies appear to promise the capacity to more easily collect different kinds of media in one repository.[7] However, such a multitude of archival materials and partial knowledges threatens to devolve into an uncanny *chaosmos* as puzzling and impenetrable as the universe it is supposed to reflect. In order to be accessible and meaningful, knowledge must somehow be ordered and organized according to a recognizable and navigable structure. This demand for organization poses its own dilemmas, which prompted Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) to question whether a library could ever really represent the evolution of knowledge. Since the materiality of books suggests a linear organization, yet knowledge is produced in a non-linear fashion and emanates from networks of cross-references between the disciplines, Leibniz suggested that reference systems tend to atomize knowledge in a way that inhibits rather than capacitates the process of interdisciplinary scientific discovery.[8] A poststructuralist conceptualization of the library may rephrase this dilemma in terms of Michel Foucault's notion of *discursive formations*. Foucault considered principles of classification to be "facts of discourse that deserve to be analyzed beside others".[9] As Gary Radford has argued, the library materializes explicitly the way in which discursive formations organize elements (such as books and magazines) so as to produce coherent meaningful patterns. The production of meaning is intrinsically connected to power structures, and has material effects.[10] Foucault claimed that knowledge is not made for understanding but "for cutting".[11] In his view, the function of knowledge is to make distinctions and categorizations, and so it is always involved in producing difference. Libraries are spaces explicitly *and* reflectively produced by the practices of categorization, and as such they offer a rich ground for exploring how knowledge 'cuts' through the fabric of societies and cultures.

7   Thomas Kirchhoff et al., "Archives, libraries, museums and the spell of ubiquitous knowledge," *Archival Science* 8.4 (2008): 252.

8   Chris Hart, Manmohan Bains, and Kathryn Jones, "The myth of material knowledge: reading the image of library buildings," *New Library World*. 97.3 (1996): 24–25.

9   Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 22.

10 Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, "Structuralism, post-structuralism, and the library: de Saussure and Foucault," *Journal of Documentation* 61.1 (2005): 69–70.

11 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 88.

This poses two challenges to feminist scholars navigating the library space. Firstly, we may ask why books are organized in a certain way. Students of gender studies, often engaged in interdisciplinary studies, will recognize the experience of a library search that sends them from one corner of the library to the other: the works of Freud, classified in the Dewey Decimal system (DDS) under the 100s (philosophy, psychology, etc.), are generally not to be found anywhere near the feminist critiques of his work that resulted from feminist literary studies (under Literature). The DDS was initially conceived as a neutral system that could organize all of the world's knowledge within one logical structure. However, the DDS has been criticized for its resistance to new developments, for favoring a male-centric worldview, and for the way it atomizes knowledge and thus fails to reveal cross-connections between the disciplines. The DDS serves as an example of how the systems used to order library collections can offer fundamental challenges to feminist research projects, and how ordering systems are products of situated perspectives. At the most immediate level, this means that gender studies students need to realize that the situatedness of knowledge production is layered: researcher, teacher and student perspectives are shaped by their own (social, cultural, institutional, etc.) situatedness, but the formulation of certain connections through research is simultaneously suggested or limited by systems of organization that stem from historical traditions. This holds true both for research at large institutional libraries and for research in smaller feminist archives—it just does so differently.

The second challenge concerns the fact that, as Radford suggests, "the arrangement of real books on real library shelves giv[es] rise to real experiences".[12] In addition to untangling how libraries may reflect and propagate the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge over others, students of gender studies should be invited and encouraged to reflect on how such epistemic privileging feeds into and strengthens forms of social and cultural marginalization that give way to real and lived experiences of marginalization. Such archival effects are not merely a mirage.

Additionally, it should be noted that libraries and (most notably) archives are no longer exclusively storehouses for the paper record. Digital technologies are transforming libraries and archives into virtual spaces for storing, organiz-

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[12] Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford, "Structuralism, post-structuralism, and the library: de Saussure and Foucault," *Journal of Documentation* 61.1 (2005): 70.

ing and making available an explosively expanding multimedia record. As feminist scholars, we need to explore how these transformations are reshaping the archive, since, as Jacques Derrida has argued, the technologies of *archivization* define and limit what *can* be archived. His argument is profoundly political: archivization structures history and memory; in doing so, it structures the relationship between the present and the past. He states: "Archivization produces as much as it records the event."[13] While Derrida's conception of the archive is often read as a metaphor, it rather offers an analysis of the way in which technologies of archivization frame the ways we relate to and within the world. Marlene Manoff aptly summarizes his argument as follows: "The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. [...] Electronic archives have very different implications for the historical record than do paper archives."[14] Now that archives and libraries are facing the transformation from (mostly) paper records to (partly or exclusively) digital records, students should be invited to engage with the question of what Derrida coined *archival violence*. Derrida claimed that "there is no political power without control of the archive",[15] and that archival power involves complex and elusive processes of exclusion masked as selection. Students of gender studies must develop a critical awareness of how libraries and archives not only store documents of the past, but also effectively produce the present, in order to reflect on the possibilities they offer for shaping feminist futures. In order to do so, they should be challenged to read along and against the archival grain.[16]

A thematic investigation of (teaching in) women's Lib(raries)

We divided the contributions to this volume into three themes, with a view to capacitating teachers of gender studies to investigate, together with their students, the different forms of engagement with the past, the present and the future that are inscribed in and formulated through libraries and archives. Each section

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[13] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17.

[14] Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Libraries and the Academy* 4.1 (2004): 12.

[15] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4 (note 1).

[16] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

includes theoretical discussions alongside practitioner perspectives, in order to make clear the entanglements between theory and practice in knowledge spaces. The articles presenting analyses of empirical examples are 'sandwiched' in between the first and the last articles, which are more theoretical in nature and focus on (re)conceptualizations of the archive and library.

The first theme revolves around the feminist histories and legacies, both as they are preserved, made accessible and are produced inside of libraries and archives and in terms of the parallels in the development of women's/feminist and gender libraries and archives on the one hand, and gender studies as an academic discipline on the other. Because we begin our investigation into the legacies and histories in and of libraries and archives through stating the connections with gender studies, the 'histories' we refer to go back to the Second Wave of feminism. The first article (De Jong and Wieringa) traces the transformation of a women's library along the development of feminist epistemologies, whilst the article 'Parallels in the history of women's/gender studies and its special libraries' (Aleksander) shows that the gender library is invaluable for illustrating the history of gender studies. Finally, Radicioni and Virtú investigate how activist libraries based in the LGBT and feminist movements navigated dilemmas of professionalization.

The second theme, 'Practices' engages with the question of archival and library practices from a feminist perspective. How do ways of collecting, ordering and preserving the historical and cultural record influence the kind of knowledge that can be produced and disseminated about gender and feminism? How are the practices of archivization, of archival research and of teaching on and in libraries and archives related? The emphasis on practices allowed us to focus on the political aspects of the everyday activities that take place in and around libraries and archives, and show how these practices emanate from a radical situatedness of all actors involved. The articles present a number of case studies, and travel from Icelandic municipal archives (Bogadóttir) to an academic library in Cyprus (Baider and Zobnina) and to an archive in Brussels that aims to empower women in the Maghreb region through information (Claeys). It traces the creation of a European digital database of feminist texts (De Jong, Vriend and Meulmeester), and the ways this database has served as a learning tool in an 'English as a Foreign Language' class in France (Perry).

The third theme was given the hopeful title 'Utopias'. In this section, we begin to formulate how the challenges created by the move towards digitalization

also offer new possibilities for constructing feminist libraries and archives and for experimenting with feminist ways of relating to and within these knowledge spaces. The first article of this section shows libraries as active and dynamic sites of knowledge production that challenge the mainstream and re-create new cultural memories (Maxwell). The closing article by Koevoets aims to formulate new feminist figurations of female librarianship in the information age.

The three themes offer a variety of partial perspectives on archives and libraries, from disciplines ranging from library and information science to language education, and from sociology to cultural studies. What all authors have in common is the belief that archives and libraries are complex nodes in the networks of knowledge production, and that it is time that we begin to fill the gap in knowledge about the significance of these spaces for the development and successful progression of gender studies teaching and research. Moreover, the volume presents a strong case for considering archival practices—be they the practices of the information specialist, the teacher, the researcher or the student - to be part of the specific competences of gender studies.

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