

Review / Reseña

Marshall, Daniel and Zeb Tortorici. *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022. 392 pp.

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Marshall and Tortorici's anthology is an intervention in a context characterized by a new archival fever boosted by two convergent processes. The last decade has been the scene of the multiplication of grassroots-based archival projects. Feminist, queer, and trans collective archival projects had a decisive role in renovating this process by expanding the logic of what deserves to be archived and, by doing so, fighting for their belonging to national narratives that have usually excluded or erased their heritage. By placing themselves in those national and community narratives, they are transforming collective storytelling processes to legitimize their claims to expand social and intimate rights. Likewise, the increasing academic interest in archives as conflictive spaces of knowledge production and as a category has been the base for the transition from the so-called *archival turn* to the formation of an interdisciplinary field. However, the theorization and the expansive (and sometimes uncontrollable) reference to archives (usually by naming them with capitals, The Archive) has also led to multiple disciplinary conflicts about the legitimate use and administration of archives between historians, the information sciences, anthropology, cultural studies, and other disciplines.

Turning Archival is a collective exploration of archival practices and theories. The book aims to consolidate queer archival theory and practice. The book opens a conversation in a still changing field between scholars, archivists and artists based

in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The interdisciplinarity of this book showcases the challenging and rich nature of an ongoing dialogue for re-imagining the epistemological, social, and political role of archival practices in a contemporary society that is constantly redefining its relationship with the past. Grounded in a diverse range of disciplines, the authors formulate different answers about the implication of the expansive notion of archives and how queer archival practices have transformed our approach. The book addresses varied topics such as trans and queer sexualities, histories of LGBTQ+ archival practices, disability, ableism, emotions, researcher's positionality, and the role of institutional archives in large-scale geographies including the Americas, Europe, South Asia, Africa and the Arctic.

Turning Archival embodies a consistent intellectual project that brings together people in dialogue extended in time. One of the biggest strengths of the book is the continuity between one chapter and another, which shows the real dialogue between authors and reinforces the diverse but still rational intervention in the field. As a resonance of pivotal works on queer history, this anthology helps us to remember how the contemporary transformation of our understanding of gender and sexuality shifted our navigations in the archives. By formulating questions about the always conflictive relationship with fragmentary queer and trans pasts, the book provides potential tools to distinguish ourselves from previous lived experiences. The book helps us to remember how these fragments in the archives are “turned on to feast our imagination on the present” and how they are activated by a field usually impacted by intellectual and political agendas formulated within and beyond academia. Following the open criticism of this archival theorization to the act of reading archives as positive documents of self-evidence, the authors make visible the procedures, institutions, and practices that made those documents accessible and what that can tell us about past *and* present configurations of gendered and sexual experiences.

Turning Archival engages with current debates about the material process of building an archive, the procedure by which documents and objects got to be archived, how the archive reconfigures the context, how people define what an archive is, and what this tells us about the gains (and losses) of intimate objects of queer and trans genealogy. As the editors make explicit in the introduction, the use of the term “turning” allows them to theorize how research and preservation turn archival material into something else. Like others in the field, the book challenges the portrayal of archives as spaces of positive evidence by reconstructing their destructive role in producing a collection and considering how scholars could deal

with it. The book calls attention to the materiality of archival documents (and the struggles to preserve a material always at risk of disappearing) and how histories of LGBTBIQ+ archiving and preservation affect the production of queer histories.

The authors approach the productive power of archiving institutions and their specialists to understand how they have shaped our understanding of queerness. For example, the chapter by Ann Cvetkovich—whose work is already influential in the field—explores how the material translation from community to institutional archives helps us to understand how institutional languages mediate practices of knowledge production. In this sense, the book deploys some questions about the various coexisting languages in documentary sources and theorizes about the multiple processes of translations mediating the transformation of the status of documents from intimate belonging to institutionalized repositories.

One of the main contributions of this anthology is addressing the methodological challenges and political assumption of queer invisibility in archives. While the category of invisibility guided questions in gender and queer history since the 1970s in the early days of women's history, the book addresses the opacity of the contemporary search for visibility. The book stresses the challenges of tracing lives usually fragmented in ephemeral material. Like previous works in the field, this book recalls the paradoxes of working with documents produced by state and medical violence in which queer and trans voices are usually under scrutiny and mediation. In contrast with other historiographical approaches that interpret silence and invisibility as a coordinated effect by power institutions to erase gender and sexual non-conformity, this anthology expands our imagination to replace the practices that queer subjects used to avoid clashing with the institutions that produced archival material. In this volum, authors such as Javier Fernández-Galeano, Emmett Harsin Drager, Kate Clark, and David Serlin propose a counter-pathological narrative that re-contextualizes documents in an effort to counterbalance the stigmatizing nature of therapeutic records. In this sense, there is a call to invert the negative connotation usually projected over archival gaps and an invitation to explore them as spaces of autonomy. This book moves to accept loss as part of queer history and to explore its productive impact on scholarly and knowledge production.

Moreover, the book places the researchers' and archivists' desires at the core of archival theoretical thinking. The book recognizes the ethnographic turn on archival thinking to place the body of the researcher itself in the mechanism of historical production. By playing with the idea of being "turned on" by the archives, the book explores the fantasies that mediate archival research and how it transforms

their archival practices. Javier Fernández-Galeano contributes to this volume by placing the researcher's body, positionality, and feelings in relation to archival research in the core of epistemological reflexivity. In his brilliant chapter, the historian reconstructs the paradoxical feelings of this work—the guilt of working with documents produced by state violence, yet all the while still hoping to find queer subjects—and the effort of trying to balance it all with the potential power of the queer history of building alternative readings (or, reproducing violence.)

In summary, this book would interest those working on archival research, queer history methodologies, and cultural studies. By expanding and contracting our interpretation of archives, the book uses documentary sources to mediate the paradoxes of exploring queer lives. Every chapter is a unique opportunity to reconnect with the challenging, sometimes frustrating, but always gratifying labor of seeking queer and trans traces in documentary sources. *Turning Archival* can serve as an extensive toolbox with which to navigate the echoes and silences in the archives.