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Beyond digitisation: a case study of three contemporary feminist collections

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Using three contemporary feminist activist collections as case studies, this article challenges assumptions about digital archives and, more generally, digital collections. First, it challenges the widespread perception that so-called digital archives are necessarily democratising. Second, it examines how archivists and special collections librarians may adopt new media platforms, often in surprising ways, even as they avoid the development of large-scale digitisation projects. Finally, and most notably, this article makes a case for recognising how archivists and special collections librarians may use new media platforms to open up access to collections that exceed the narrow scope of digitisation projects. Here, what is foregrounded is not necessarily the limits of digital archives, but rather the limited way in which we continue to think about digital mandates in relation to archives.

Keywords: activist archives; digital archives; feminist collections

Throughout the process of bringing my book, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, through the press, editors and reviewers asked me to account for my 'comparative silence regarding digital manifestations'.[1] As one reviewer asked, 'Doesn't the digital archiving of [feminist and activist] materials represent a more democratically accessible and cost-effective means of preservation than physical housing in special collections repositories?' From a publishing standpoint, I was missing a potential readership; from a reviewer standpoint, I was failing to account for the most groundbreaking developments in archives today. Although I appreciated my reviewers' critiques, embedded in their collective response were a series of assumptions about digital archives – their potential and their possibilities. Most notably, my reviewers appeared to take for granted the fact that digital archives are necessarily more democratic, more accessible and, at times, even more cost-effective than archives comprised of documents and artefacts housed in physical repositories. Beyond failing to account adequately for questions of materiality (as if such concerns are ever an afterthought in the archive), the reviewers' responses appeared to be based on the assumption that digital archives hold the potential to do everything that existing archives do but without the elaborate gate-keeping rituals that have historically made archives and special collections hostile or at least inaccessible environments to most activists and minorities. But is this necessarily the case? Are digital archives inherently more democratic than archives housed in physical repositories?[2]

This article represents a somewhat belated attempt to respond to my reviewers' critiques. On the surface, I agree with the spirit, if not the reality, of my reviewers'

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shared insistence that digital archives are democratising. After all, the ability to engage in archival research remains a privilege and one that disproportionately favours tenured scholars and well-funded graduate students from established research institutions in the world's most privileged nations. It is also the case that in at least some disciplines, visiting an archive for an extended period of time to carry out primary research continues to function as a gate-keeping ritual – a sort of professional marker akin to the status of fieldwork in anthropology. For example, a medieval literature scholar on my own dissertation committee informed me on the occasion of my dissertation defence that, despite the fact that I consulted the materials central to my dissertation on microfilm, my dissertation was flawed because I had failed to access the original manuscripts in the archives where they are permanently housed. I would never dispute the value of encountering manuscripts in person: we all know how important a drop of wine, coffee or blood on a page can be and that such textual cues are obscured by many reproduction methods, perhaps especially microfilm. In my case, however, studying handwritten manuscripts from the Renaissance at the British Library rather than reading these same documents on microfilm at the University of Toronto's Robarts Library would have likely had little impact on my research – coincidentally, a comparative media study of Renaissance commonplace books and emerging digital collections. Of course, in this instance, what I failed to complete was not the research for my dissertation but rather the *ritual* of research I was expected to enact as an emerging scholar in the field of book history.

For me, lack of access to archives was a temporary condition remedied with a tenure-track appointment, which gave me at least limited funding to visit archives at home and abroad. For researchers in many other countries, however, the ability to engage in extended archival research outside their home country, or even domestically, is something that remains difficult, even inconceivable. As Jeff Sahadeo observes, in many regions in the world, the archive remains a highly fraught contact zone wherein Western currency and privilege determine access – a situation that can even leave native-born scholars with less access to their history than outsiders with Western capital, both monetary and symbolic. Outside the West, Sahadeo reminds us, 'the prestige and privileges of belonging to the Western world undeniably translate into power in the contact zone of the archive and beyond'.[3]

Given the economic conditions that continue to structure access to many archives housed in physical repositories, there is no doubt that digital archives hold great potential to democratise the archive by opening up collections to an increasingly wide range of scholars. If archival research was once primarily the domain of privileged scholars from elite research universities in the West, the development of digital archives holds the potential to change both how and who can engage in archival research. This change offers hope that scholars from around the world will be able to access materials once available only to researchers with the means to visit the world's archival centres. In the new world of digital archives, researchers from Gitksan territory in Northern British Columbia, for example, would in theory be able to access the documentary traces of colonialism housed in collections at the British Library without ever leaving home. In short, digital archives hold the potential to pry open the archive for scholars and other researchers, including people seeking justice in the face of historical wrongs, whether or not they can afford to dwell at length in these sites of knowledge and power.

The democratisation of archives, however, is concerned with more than the issue of access. The democratisation of archives is also about collection mandates and, once again, at least in theory, digital archives, or at least digital collections, are ripe with

possibility. The mandates of institutional archives are nearly always shaped by outside factors: for example, the special interest of university donors or, in the case of state archives, a nation's desire to construct itself in accordance with a particular set of values. While large-scale digital archives are often costly and difficult to maintain, from the pioneering days of Geocities, the Web has been a place where activists, minorities and esoterics of all kinds have developed collections too radical, marginal and obscure to meet the collecting mandates of most established institutional archives. Although these collections will likely never replace established archives affiliated with existing institutions, as my own research has shown, at least some archivists and special collections librarians see online DIY efforts (for example, individually executed projects such as the Queer Zine Archive Project) as projects that run parallel to and even support the work they are doing in institutionally based collections.[4] At their best, digital collections, including those initiated and maintained by individuals and small collectives, hold the potential to address some of the silences that have historically defined archives. As the founders of the Queer Zine Archive Project emphasise, 'By providing access to the historical canon of queer zines we hope to make them more accessible to diverse communities and reach wider audiences.'[5] Here, it is important to bear in mind that the founders of the online archive are fully aware of other zine collections, including the university-based collections discussed in this article, but understand their open collection as one that provides another route of access to queer zines. In short, the objective is to create a collection that is as accessible to a teenager living in a rural or remote community as it is to a university researcher. At least in some cases, then, the fact that digital collections hold more potential to foster unprecedented levels of accessibility to archival materials is difficult to dispute.

For this reason, it has become somewhat commonplace to conclude that digital archiving does represent a more democratically accessible and cost-effective means of preservation than the physical housing of similar materials in special collections and further to conclude that, when new collections develop without explicit digital mandates, it is due to either lack of funding, lack of appropriate planning or pure resistance to digitisation. My research on contemporary feminist collections, however, suggests that the decision to resist digitisation – or at least not to prioritise it – may be far more complex. My research further suggests that an archive's decision to refrain from investing in the digitisation of a specific collection by no means precludes the adoption of digital platforms and tools as a means to create new avenues of archival access. Indeed, sometimes the decision to avoid digitisation is part of a collection's inherent agenda. In what follows, I examine the three contemporary feminist collections at the centre of my study and discuss why each chose to reject digitisation as a short- or long-term goal at different points in its development. In addition, I consider what each of these case studies reveals about the limitations of digital-archiving initiatives, especially in the context of activist and minority collections.

Background

My recently published monograph, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, features case studies of three contemporary feminist collections located in the United States, coincidentally all at private universities (where there is more funding for special collections, including collections that hold the materials of radical social movements[6]). The collections at the centre of my study include the Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University; the zine collections at Duke University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library; and

the Barnard College Zine Library. It is important to emphasise that all of these collections were established in the past decade, and that they were developed by archivists and special collections librarians who are still relatively young. The fact that none of these collections has explicitly embraced digitisation, then, is not something we can easily account for on the basis of age or generation or professional training. These collections were developed by archivists and librarians who completed their professional training in the late 1990s to early 2000s and are well aware of the possibilities of digital platforms. That all of these collections exist in a discrete physical location and that none has a digital analogue (a parallel or related online collection), then, does not reflect a naïve resistance to digitisation or a paranoid reaction to the circulation of texts and images online. Rather, as I suggest below, each of these collections has from the outset or in the process of development steered clear of digitisation for distinctly different reasons, each of which also sheds light on some of the limitations of digital archives as they are typically conceived.

The zine collections at the Sallie Bingham Center

In 1999, Sarah Dyer, the founder of Action Grrrl Comics, emailed the Sallie Bingham Center at the Duke University Rare Book and Manuscript Library to probe their interest in acquiring her collection of more than 2000 feminist zines. Later, Dyer would explain that her decision to donate her zines to Duke University was based on two major factors. First, she recognised that the zines in her collection – highly personal, fragile and hand-bound documents made by girls and women – shared much in common at the level of content and form with the other materials found in the collections at the Sallie Bingham Center. In an interview carried out for my book, Dyer elaborated, '[a]s many of the zines are one-of-a-kind and certainly many of them are delicate, I was mainly concerned with finding an archive that had extensive experience with that sort of thing'.[7] She further explained that because 'there was an emphasis on ephemera and one-of-a-kind items like diaries' within the collections at the Sallie Bingham Center, she felt assured that the archivists 'would know what to do' with her zines.[8] For Dyer, the Center's experience working with particular types of documents (for example, personal papers and one-of-a-kind books, including artist books) influenced her decision. Second, Dyer was interested in placing her collection of zines in an archive with a focus on women's history.[9]

Dyer's donation was significant for several reasons – it represented the first major donation of Riot Grrrl and third-wave feminist materials to an established archive. It also resulted in Duke receiving a flood of similar donations from individual collectors, nearly all women, now in their thirties, who had been collecting materials related to feminist activism and cultural production throughout the 1990s. When I first started to do research in the zine collections at Duke in 2006, I asked the archivists at the Bingham Center, Laura Michum and Kelly Wooten, about their plans for digitisation. At the time, they had no intention of engaging in a digitisation project. Beyond the question of cost and human resources, they emphasised, like Dyer, the materiality of the zines and the inability to reproduce such materiality adequately in a digital archive. By the time I returned in 2011, they still had no plans to digitise their zine collections, but their reasons for choosing not to prioritise digitisation had also grown more complex.

Most notably, after five years of watching researchers engage with the Center's zine collections, they were even more emphatic about why zines needed to be viewed in the context of their larger collection of feminist documents dating back to the nineteenth

century. On the occasion of my second visit to Duke in 2011, Wooten explained, 'the connection between the zines and older forms of feminist self-publishing is becoming more clear to me the longer I work with our collections, but it hasn't been fully explored by researchers yet. I really, really want someone to get in there and look at that in more detail.'[10] When I asked Wooten how I might tackle such research, she responded: 'There's the visual analysis – what images are women from the 1960s and 1970s using in their comic drawings, in their clip art and where does it reappear in zines from the 1990s. You could trace those recurring images, for example.'[11] However, in archives, context is at times difficult to achieve fully. In many archives, including those located at Duke, visitors can only look at one box from one collection at a time (in many collections, researchers can only access one file at a time). In this sense, institutional protocols prohibit the opportunity to engage in the type of close comparative work that might be sponsored by the capacity to view otherwise disparate documents simultaneously. Of course, despite institutional protocols, archivists, such as Wooten, can and often do intervene. On the occasion of my second visit to do research in the zine collections at Duke, for example, Wooten went into the archive's storage and came back with a box of *off our backs* newspapers from the 1970s and 1980s. Her intent was to encourage me to look more closely at the extent to which clip art, headlines and photographs from *off our backs* (a long-running and popular second-wave feminist publication from Washington, DC which circulated throughout North America) had been recycled in punk feminist zines produced in the mid-1990s. The juxtaposition of these radical feminist newspapers and Riot Grrrl zines disrupted a well-entrenched narrative about what happened to feminism in the 1990s – in short, the juxtaposition challenged the assumption that young feminists necessarily rejected second-wave feminism in the 1990s. Indeed, looking at the publications side by side, it was apparent that young feminists in the early 1990s were not only continuing to read earlier feminist publications but also putting the discourses and iconography featured in these publications back into circulation. Although some of the recycling could be understood as a subtle attempt to undermine or parody their mother's generation of feminism, more often than not, the recycling appeared to take the form of a homage to an earlier generation's history of struggle.

In *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, I describe these encounters as forms of 'archival proximity'. The question I wish to foreground here, however, is what happens to the possibilities opened up by archival proximity in so-called digital archives? Theoretically, one should be able to bring all sorts of materials into contact in digital archives – the possibilities for archival proximity should be infinite. Digital archives should enable us, once and for all, to overcome the limitations imposed on us by the archive itself, with its rules of one box or even one folder at a time. I want to suggest, however, that how we interact with archival materials in digital archives may be even more restrictive – most notably because so many of these collections direct us or limit us to engaging with singular collections, one image at a time. After all, when institutional archives engage in digitisation projects, what users encounter online is typically either a single high-use collection, or selected materials from several high-use collections. The question that remains is how do we then create archival proximity in the space of digital archives? Is it even possible? If, for example, Duke was to pursue a digitisation project for its recently acquired feminist zines collections, how would they bring these texts into the broader context of their collections related to feminist and women's history? As emphasised, Dyer, their initial donor, was invested in locating her zines in relation to Duke's earlier collections of women's diaries and letters and adolescent literature. Short

of digitising the entire archive (which is evidently impossible), how might the archivists at Duke honour Dyer's concerns if they were to digitise her donated materials? Context is often why donors bring their materials to a specific archive in the first place. What remains unclear is how digitisation initiatives can take such intentions into account. In essence, how can archives engaged in the digitisation of specific collections or parts of collections ensure that their digitised materials continue to be framed by or read in relation to other collections? This question, of course, is especially pressing for collections such as those housed in the Sallie Bingham Center at Duke University where context is especially important, since the collection's mandate is itself framed by a specific political commitment – in this case to women's history. My point here, however, is not to suggest that digital collections necessarily erode archival proximity but rather to emphasise that digital collections have yet to exploit the possibilities fully for such proximity to be fostered.

The Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU

In many respects, the announcement of the Riot Grrrl Collection at Fales Library at New York University bore uncanny resemblance to the movement's initial 'discovery' by the mainstream media in 1992. Lisa Darms, senior archivist at Fales Library and Special Collections, explains that news of the collection's development was never a secret, but its announcement was also not something that remained entirely in her control or that of the collection's donors:

> We issued an internal newsletter, which is for the library. It's not private, but it's simply a print and pdf newsletter about acquisitions. It generally goes to alumni and donors. They wanted to announce the acquisition of Kathleen Hanna's papers. It was amazing to watch how quickly – I think the next day – at the *L Magazine*, someone who was probably associated with NYU in some way, found it and scanned it in black and white and put it on their online magazine. From there, it went viral. At that point, I barred myself – I worried about a flurry of people contacting me because it hadn't gone through the press office, which is the normal way we would do such things, but instead of anyone contacting me, all subsequent articles referred back to that one *L Magazine* article. I was somewhat ambivalent about it. I wasn't trying to keep the collection secret, but I did want to reach a certain number of potential donors before making it public.[12]

Although the *L Magazine*'s decision to scan and repost an article about the development of the Riot Grrrl Collection from an internal university newsletter and its subsequent impact is far less significant than the historical arrival of Riot Grrrl in the mainstream media, the similarities are worth considering. Like Riot Grrrl in its early stages of development, which was both public and fiercely protective of its ability to control its representation and circulation, the development of the collection was by no means a secret, but from the onset there was an attentiveness to maintaining control over the collection's publicity.

For me, there are at least two things that this turn of events reveals that are relevant to a broader discussion on archives and digitisation. First, the Riot Grrrl Collection illustrates how social media can be used effectively to promote archival collections. In the days following the *L Magazine* post, news of Fales Library's development of the Riot Grrrl Collection travelled quickly over multiple forms of media, proving especially viral in forms of media that had not yet come into being when Riot Grrrl entered most people's consciousness in 1992 (for example, blogs, Twitter and Facebook). If many

archivists and special collections librarians spend years attempting to generate interest in their collections, for Darms, this achievement was effortless. That news of an archival collection could 'go viral' says as much about Riot Grrrl as a cultural phenomenon as it does about the significance of the Riot Grrrl Collection. It also demonstrates how the social media also holds the potential to change radically who has access to archives by virtue of making archival collections visible to a larger number of people, including people unlikely to consider ever visiting an archive.

Of course, while most archivists want their collections to be used, few welcome their collections becoming destination points for 'fans', and, in the case of the Riot Grrrl Collection, this appeared to be a real possibility. Indeed, within days of the collection's development going viral on social media sites, fans were posting blogs and tweeting about the need to start planning 'road trips' to the collection. Immediately, the Riot Grrrl Collection was taken up as the Graceland of the Riot Grrrl movement, which was neither Darms's intention nor the intention of her donors. For this reason, I assumed that Darms would develop a parallel digital collection – perhaps, simply by making some of the collection's more frequently requested materials available online. This seemed especially likely given that Fales, at least in comparison to many archives, has both the expertise and resources needed to take on a digital-archiving project of this nature. Despite the fact that a digital collection may have been the easiest way to curtail a flood of fan requests to access materials from the Riot Grrrl Collection, Darms did not develop a digital collection. Somewhat surprisingly, in June 2013, Darms, along with donor Johanna Fateman, published *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, a 300-page glossy colour catalogue, with the Feminist Press. At first, I was surprised that the widespread enthusiasm for the Riot Grrrl Collection had resulted in a museum catalogue-style book featuring materials from the collection rather than a digital collection. Upon further reflection, I wondered if the decision not to create a parallel digital collection was in fact entirely consistent with the collection's original mandate.

As discussed at length in my book, in many respects the Riot Grrrl Collection was developed in order to rewrite the history of a specific moment in feminist activism and cultural production. With few exceptions, Riot Grrrl has been taken up by the popular media and by academics as an all-girl subculture; but everyone grows up, even rock stars and their fans. By the time Darms started to contact potential donors, many of the women most synonymous with Riot Grrrl were in their late thirties to early forties and had reinvented themselves as visual artists, performance artists, novelists and academics. Understandably, then, there was a desire, at least among some of these women, to locate their youthful interventions as an artistic, intellectual and political movement with a traceable lineage rather than a youthful subculture with an expiration date. Indeed, in my study, I argue that, by placing their personal papers in an established university archive alongside other notable collections related to earlier New York art scenes (for example, the Downtown Collection, which holds materials related to New York's downtown art scene in the 1970s to 1990s, and the Avant-garde Collection, which primarily holds materials related to the Intermedia movement in the 1960s), they effectively repositioned Riot Grrrl as a movement that may just as easily be read through the history of feminist avant-garde art, performance and writing as it might be read through the history of punk. The Riot Grrrl Collection, then, may be best understood as a form of position-taking, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's concept. In other words, the collection can be read as an interruption in the field of cultural production that effectively transforms Riot Grrrl's status.

As the above example illustrates, the archival apparatus may also be understood as an authorising apparatus which holds the potential to legitimise certain materials and to reposition them in the field of cultural production. But do digital collections share this potential? While digital collections no doubt open up archival collections, as previously discussed, do they serve to authorise documents to the same extent as collections held in material archives, or do they function along radically different lines? Here, I am suggesting that for groups who may feel that their histories have been marginalised, the material archive continues to hold a promise not obtainable through the development of digital archives, whether or not such archives are connected to established institutions. On this basis, my speculation, then, is that Darms's decision not to develop a digital collection and instead to publish a museum catalogue-style book featuring carefully selected documents, photographs and objects from the Riot Grrrl Collection was by no means a coincidence. In the case of museum exhibits, for example, a published catalogue is a way to draw attention to an exhibit's highlights, but these catalogues also function to create fixed narratives about the documents and objects in question; insofar as they function as souvenirs, they also work to distance viewers from the objects in question. In essence, the published catalogue featuring objects from the collection may have been understood as a vehicle better positioned to promote the implicit mandate of the existing archival collection than a digital collection. At issue here, then, is not a rejection of digitisation but rather a recognition of the limited potential of digital archives in the broader cultural field.

Barnard Zine Library

The Barnard Zine Library began with an ambitious proposal and modest budget in 2003. Recognising that zines are a 'nontraditional medium and potentially a little scary to administrators', Jenna Freedman's initial proposal included a seven-page rationale, primarily aimed at persuading her Dean that zines, specifically zines by girls and women, belong in university-based libraries and that a special collection of this nature was especially in keeping with Barnard College's history and mission:

> Although zines have been around for a long time, few libraries have yet to begin collecting and preserving them. This project will allow Barnard to provide catalog access to these important publications on an item level, something that is not being done systematically by any major library that catalogs with the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), which includes virtually every academic and public library in the United States and 85 other countries. Zines are a rich and democratic form of self-expression that range from scholarly treatises on diverse issues to wildly creative artworks. The collection and preservation of these materials will provide both contemporary and future researchers a unique insight into today's feminist culture.[13]

From the onset, Freedman's intentions for the Barnard Zine Library were driven by at least two distinct objectives: one centred on collection, and the other centred on cataloguing. Only later did Freedman recognise and openly admit that these objectives were by no means entirely compatible. 'If I knew what I was doing,' Freedman admits, 'none of this would have happened, so it's a good thing I was a bit naïve!'[14] For people outside the profession, the happy accidents guiding Freedman's work may not be apparent, but, inside the profession, the Barnard Zine Library represents a strange hybrid straddling the special collection, archive and catalogued library collection.

At the centre of Freedman's original proposal was an intention to establish an open stacks collection of non-circulating zines. In the original proposal, however, Freedman also sought to collect and preserve 'born-digital' zines or 'e-zines' and to explore further the possibility of digitising print zines whenever possible, emphasising that 'providing electronic access to print zines is important for research use as well as for preservation'.[15] As the collection developed, Freedman abandoned her proposed digitisation project. In lieu of digitisation, she eventually established a parallel archival collection which not only holds doubles of all the zines found in the open stacks collection but also hundreds of additional zines (many donated as part of larger zine collections by former zine producers, readers and individual collectors seeking a permanent home for their collections). Despite the fact that in many respects Freedman's proposed collection became more rather than less attentive to the preservation of printed materials as it developed and even found Freedman, a reference librarian, becoming an archivist 'by accident', the collection's profile and significance remained contingent on the advancement of another aspect of the originally proposed digital mandate.

Beyond Freedman's proposal to digitise print zines and even collect born-digital materials, she proposed to catalogue the zines collected with the goal of ensuring their visibility to not only Barnard Library users but also all users of WorldCat, the world's largest online public access catalogue. The decision to catalogue the zines was driven by a recognition that cataloguing would make zines increasingly accessible to users worldwide while simultaneously heightening the visibility of both zines and contemporary feminist discourses. As Freedman emphasises, cataloguing the zines was important for several reasons. First, cataloguing would enable readers and scholars to encounter them 'just as they would any other print, electronic, or media holdings as they searched the catalog'.[16] In other words, cataloguing the zines was a way to change the status of zines by effectively making these self-published works just as visible and retrievable as published materials in the library catalogue. Second, the cataloguing would enable the zines to be made available through interlibrary loans and therefore expand their potential readership. Finally, the cataloguing was a way to disseminate contemporary feminist materials not only within the Barnard College Library but also beyond it, to worldwide library users: 'For us the priority was achieving visibility for the materials, and the legitimacy their presence in WorldCat would bestow on them.'[17] The impact of Freedman's initiative is far greater than one might expect. If you do a search for the term 'riot grrrl' or 'third wave feminism' on WorldCat, for example, hundreds of documents appear. A closer look reveals that most of these hits are for zines, not published books or magazines, and the vast majority of these zines are in the Columbia University Library system; we can assume these zines were catalogued at Barnard by Freedman and her staff. In short, Freedman's decision to do item-level cataloguing of archival materials has made an entire body of knowledge about 1990s feminism visible on WorldCat which would otherwise not be visible to researchers.

It is on this basis that I argue that radical librarians and cataloguers are engaged in the work of reinscribing the epistemic terrain by situating knowers in spaces that were previously inaccessible and rendering certain knowledges visible that were previously obscured. Without downplaying the importance of digital archives, I maintain that the cataloguing work of activist librarians such as Freedman cannot be underestimated. Indeed, her cataloguing project demonstrates that the act of reinscription (tagging) may hold even greater potential for social transformation than the act of media transfer (digitisation).

Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined why three contemporary feminist collections chose not to pursue the development of digitisation projects. In the case of the zine collections at the Sallie Bingham Center, the decision not to prioritise digitisation reflects both a recognition that the materials in their contemporary collections – namely zines – are defined by their materiality and a recognition that archival proximity may be more effectively fostered by actual archivists than via digital platforms. Indeed, as emphasised above, there appears to be a strong sense here that their contemporary feminist collections may be most effectively animated when read in the context of their historical collections on feminism and women's lives and that this is something that would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve through the development of a digital collection. The second collection – the Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU's Fales Library and Special Collections – appears to represent a case in which digitisation has been sidelined in favour of dissemination formats that are already recognised as a proven means of position-taking in the broader field of cultural production. As I argue above, while digital archives may be democratising, groups that have traditionally felt marginalised from the mainstream continue to gravitate to archives housed in physical repositories, in part because these established archives remain an effective means to authorise lives, histories and work that may otherwise be overlooked. In this respect, not prioritising the development of digital archives may also suggest that, to date, digital archives remain differently situated in the field of cultural production than material archives. Finally, in the case of the Barnard College Zine Library, one encounters the case of a collection that has an explicit digital mandate but one focused on cataloguing rather than the transfer of printed documents into a digital format. Here, what is foregrounded is not necessarily the limits of digital archives, but rather the limited way in which we continue to think about digital mandates in relation to archives. As emphasised throughout this article, despite the fact than none of the aforementioned collections have chosen to embrace digitisation as it is commonly understood, each demonstrates a consciousness of how new digital media might be used to open up access to archival collections – for example, by publicising their existence to populations who have traditionally not accessed archival collections or by rendering archival documents visible in databases, such as WorldCat. What is perhaps most notable here, however, is that the assumed democratising potential of digital archives is not necessarily an assumption that all archivists and special collections librarians share, not even those developing activist-based collections.

Endnotes

1. *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* was published by Temple University Press in 2013.
2. For the purposes of this discussion, 'archives housed in physical repositories' refer to archives comprised of collections of material documents housed in fixed locations. I use the terms 'digital archives' and 'digital collections' to refer to a wide range of collections of documents and other materials available online whether they are hosted on institutional or personal sites. However, the division between these types of collections is not as obvious as one might expect. So-called digital archives have their own materiality and are often closely linked to physical repositories; archives housed in physical repositories are increasingly being made available through various digital platforms (this is discussed at length in the final case study presented in this article). The nomenclature I have adopted, somewhat reluctantly, in this paper reflects what may be best understood as an ongoing ambivalence in the field about how best to theorise and categorise archives in a digital age.

3. See Jeff Sahadeo's 'Without the Past there is No Future', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.
4. QZAP or the Queer Zine Archive Project is a donation-based, volunteer-run project that aims to digitise queer zines and make them readily available to visitors in an easily accessible digital format. Indeed, visitors to the site are free to download any zine and to use it for whatever purpose they wish (reading, research and even reproduction). Many of the zines available on the QZAP site are available in institutional collections, including the Barnard College Zine Library and the zine collections at Duke University. All the librarians and archivists I interviewed during the course of my research considered the work of QZAP to be in keeping with the work they are carrying out in their own university-based collections. For more on QZAP, visit their website at <*http://www.qzap.org/v7*>, accessed 14 May 2013.
5. See QZAP's mission statement, available at <*http://www.qzap.org/v7/index.php/about-qzap/mission-statement*>, accessed 14 May 2013.
6. Notably, all three contemporary feminist collections featured in my own study, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, are housed in archives at private universities. More recently, after considerable debate, the Occupy Wall Street Archive, originally a haphazard collection of documents culled together by a collective at Zucotti Park, was donated to the NYU's Tamiment Library & Robert F Wagner Labor Archives. It is worth noting that, while it took over a year for the Occupy materials to end up at the Tamiment Library, NYU archivists reached out to the collective when the occupation was still active. To be clear, these are just a few notable examples of activist-related collections ending up in private university archives. Moreover, while the practice of donating radical collections to archives at private institutions is controversial, in my own research I have discovered that, in many cases, activists support the move since the private institutions appear better equipped to both preserve and publicise these collections than public institutions and community-based collections.
7. Sarah Dyer, online interview, November 2011.
8. ibid.
9. ibid.
10. Kelly Wooten, interview, 26 January 2011.
11. ibid.
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