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Body, Sex, Interface

Reckoning with Imagesat the Lesbian Herstory Archives

Cait McKinney

On a high shelf, in a small closet, at the Brooklyn brownstone that houses the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), sits a Hollinger document case hand labeled "unprocessed 'porn'? and several snapshots." Available for any visitor to take down and browse, the box is full of photographs that remain "unprocessed," awaiting an interpretive sort by volunteers. Processing an archival acquisition involves several steps toward making materials accessible, including selection, appraisal, and creating a finding aid, means of description, and narration that are core sense-making epistemologies of archival science, with its rational roots in modernity. Processing materials is labor-intensive, resource-heavy, and time-consuming, more so in the digital era. Between acquisition and access provision, the interpretive act waits to be written; photographs are not yet mediated by a database form that attempts to pin down the stories they capture. But while processing a photograph of a well-known lesbian or event suggests a straightforward routine of identification and classification, the often-anonymous, amateur images of sexuality in the collection are more difficult to consider. As the LHA's photo collection moves online, volunteers must grapple with materials that have been waiting patiently in their boxes, and questions such as "How do you 'process' porn?" take on a renewed urgency.

Founded in 1974, the LHA is a volunteer-run, community archives that operates on a shoestring budget funded mostly by individual donations—the archives will not accept state-supported grants and is skeptical of institutional partnerships.[1] An evolving, intergenerational coordinating committee of "archivettes" manages the archives, making decisions on a consensus basis. Most of these archivettes also work at the archives, staffing open hours, leading tours, and processing collections alongside a loyal group of interns and volunteers, many of whom are library science students in their twenties. Materials are spread over the basement and first two stories of the heritage home, while the top floor is home to the archives' "caretaker," who also serves on the coordinating committee. The collection

includes vertical subject files on dozens of topics related to lesbian culture—bathhouses, fat liberation, matriarchy, nuns, utopia, a book collection, three thousand spoken-word cassette tapes, videos, "special collections" that are personal papers donated by individuals and organizations, periodicals, and all kinds of ephemera including sex toys, buttons, posters, and T-shirts. The space feels unlike a conventional archives in that there are cozy reading nooks and macramé adornments and visitors are allowed to access and handle any of part of the collection without prior request.

The archives' photography collection contains roughly ten thousand images, loosely cataloged according to volunteer-generated subject headings. Emphasizing the late twentieth century, the collection includes portraits, snapshots, documentation of nightlife and activism, porn, and scores of images that defy easy categorization under any of these terms. Images of sexuality are prevalent in the collection and range from elaborate S/M scenes, to the most willfully amateur self-portraits and snapshots of lovers, to work by professionals such as Del LaGrace Volcano and Tee A. Corinne. The scope of the collection is simply: any image that has been "relevant to the lives and experiences of lesbians."[2] A "National Lesbian Photography Drive" announced in the LHA's 1979 newsletter sought to build the foundation for the col- lection, asking "lesbians all across the country to send photographs of themselves, friends, children, homes, pets, activities," so that "our future sisters will be able to see us."[3] Lesbian visibility in its historical iterations guides the growth of this col- lection, and yet this is a category that many images seem to exceed; a case in point is the recently digitized work of gender variant Volcano, who identified as a lesbian at the time of acquisition.

Digitization of this collection began in 2010, the first self-directed project to offer extensive online access to the archives. Preparing this collection for an online database involves several factors. I consider digitization at the LHA an expansive process that is not conceptually limited to the creation of digital les from "analog" sources; to digitize also encompasses the design and implementation of an online user interface, the creation and assignment of descriptive metadata to images, and the selection of which images to offer online. The complexity of images of sexuality presents opportunities for reflecting on the cultural politics of this process, including the accessibility of sexual materials in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) archives as they move online. An archives' responsibility to provide access to images of sexuality is balanced with questions of legality, ethics, and propriety, creating a tension informed by the growing pressure of "queer liberalism" on these archives as they move further into public-facing roles mediated by the web.[4] This article draws on interviews, documentary research, and ethnographic observation conducted at the LHA to trace the process through which volunteer coordinators designed and began to carry out the digitization of the photography collection. The design of this project has generated moments of

reckoning with various political contexts in which the archives moves, such as intergenerational feminism(s). Attending to these negotiations, I argue that the archives' approach to digitization is improvisational, open to revision and critique, and willfully imperfect in its management of considerations such as metadata. Digitization presents the archives with the opportunity to consider how historical representations of sexuality it houses challenge the normative imperatives that can accompany digital media practices, including the ways that all kinds of sex practices and gendered ways of being scramble the categorical logics of structured databases.

The photo collection is managed by Saskia Scheffer, who works in special formats processing at the New York Public Library and has been a volunteer coordinator at the archives since 1987. Saskia identifies the heterogeneous origins of the col- lection as one of its strengths. The subjects and photographers in many of the photos are unknown; donated by friends of the archives, these images hold stories that have been forgotten, or were never known. Unlike large institutions, the archives accommodates all kinds of donors as part of its inclusive politics of accessibility. Says Saskia, "We didn't have minimum requirements, and I don't mean for that to sound negative at all. If people had stuff, we took it. Still do. Not like if you don't give us a complete description with names and birthdates of everybody in the photo, we won't have it. We'll take it. We'll figure it out."[5] Though many of the photos resist attribution, the collection has been organized into subject les to facilitate browsing, in an interpretive practice aimed at access provision more familiar to libraries than archives. Digitization ultimately remediates categorizations already made by many volunteers. Most subject les are just the names of events or individuals, some famous, others just regular folks. More generally, descriptive subject headings are designed on an ongoing basis by volunteers when such headings seem like a logical addition to the taxonomy: these include "Military" and "Children of Lesbians." Many layers of "folksonomic" classification are at play here; rather than work with a standardized, controlled vocabulary of terms, as a librarian would in an institutional setting, the LHA allows the content of the materials and the judgment of volunteers to guide an evolving vocabulary.

Though subject headings offer a framework, what is contained in the folders often continues to perplex, especially the vernacular photographs of nonfamous lesbians engaged in everyday contexts. A fairly typical folder labeled with a first and last name contains undated snapshots, circa the 1980s, that depict an often-naked woman in all kinds of poses in the grass and in front of her motorcycle. What kind of record do these images offer when they make archival sense only because of their foggy relationship to the always-provisional identity category of lesbian?

The practical work of digitizing the photos is deceptively simple: Ronika McClain,

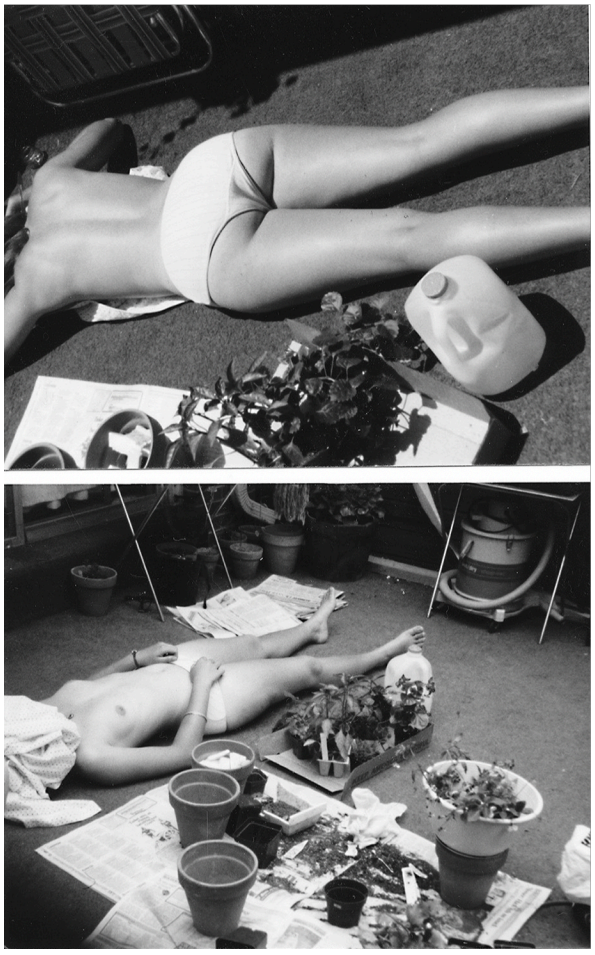
a twenty-one-year-old volunteer working with Saskia, systematically sorts through the collection, creating a Google spreadsheet that describes each folder and indicates whether there is donor permission to place the images online. Saskia chooses images to scan using a high-quality scanner to which she has access off-site. She uploads them to a server hosted by the Metropolitan New York Library Council's low-cost Digital Collection Hosting Service, where they are accessed via CONTENTdm, digital collections management software that she trained herself to use. The "online photo sampler" currently includes nearly 650 images, to which Saskia assigns metadata fields for size, title, creator, and descriptive tags to make the photos searchable for research queries. There is no existing searchable catalog besides an offline word document; this project will produce the first robust, search- able database. Digitization responds to a desire for access that is as much about sorting and sense making as it is about offering scans through an online interface.

In explaining why it is difficult to sort the collection to prepare it for digitization, Saskia uses the example of the peculiar box of porn she didn't know what to do with. It is so emblematic of the challenge some photographs pose for the sense-making practice of digitization that another title for this article could be "An Ontology of the Unprocessed 'Porn' Box." With a bias to the 1980s, the nearly five hundred photographs stuffed into this box are from many eras, feature many subjects, and were likely taken by dozens of photographers. But this is all speculation; there is no provenance or donor agreement form for these images. Saskia has no idea how they got to the archives, their stories lost to fading institutional memory.

The dominant genre in the box is the self-portrait, an analogue version of the selfies one might text to a lover today. I sift through dozens of blurry prints of women masturbating, sometimes inscribed to a lover on the back, and many photos of couples and groups engaged in a range of acts; generally, they're blurry and com- posed haphazardly. Some photos defy the generic conventions of amateur porn: I'm intrigued by a series depicting a thin, white woman lying mostly naked on the floor of a garden shed, her head outside the frame, torso arranged alongside plants waiting to be potted, a gallon-size plastic jug, and a Shop-Vac. Inscribed on the back with a first name and the date "June 2 1985," these are vernacular photographs that most archives would not collect; they lack a clear subject or occasion, they don't adhere to formal or aesthetic conventions of "successful" photography, and they don't make sense to the modernist, epistemological desires of conventional archives, which search out photos with known photographers, subjects, locations, or time periods. The box's contents evoke art historian Geoffrey Batchen's description of vernacular photography as an "abject" genre, in the sense of being liminal, ambiguous, and difficult to categorize.[6] Yet the strangeness of these images, their very ambiguity, is part of

what makes them compelling records of sexual subcultural style and its place in the archives.

Saskia tells me that the unprocessed porn box will likely never "see the light of day" that is the Inter- net.[7] Deselection—the process through which some materials are digitized and offered online, while others are not—has political implications for the evolution of LGBT archival collections, particularly in terms of the scope of an archives' online "holdings" in relation to its collection mandate. LGBT archives have a long history of collecting porn and other images of sexuality. Though some university collections acquire porn today and have done so in the past, in a historical context, prioritizing porn has distinguished LGBT community archives from other institutions.



Anonymous photos from the unprocessed porn box, image courtesy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives photo collection

The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, another community archives similar in scope and age to the LHA, has a mandate of collecting gay male porn and erotica and has built an extensive collection.[8] Archives scholar Marcel Barriault describes

collecting porn as a political act that challenges, deconstructs, and redefines what an archival institution can and should be.[9] Porn reflects more than the desires it portrays; as porn studies have shown, porn provides research "value" by illuminating the wider cultural frameworks in which it is produced and consumed.[10]

The porn at the LHA provides a critical record of lesbian subcultural moments in which power and pleasure have collided, such as the feminist S/M and porn debates—or "sex wars"—of the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the importance of porn for constructing histories of LGBT subculture, sexual images tend to be preserved by these archives without necessarily being made easy to access, a trend made more acute by the deselection of digitization.[11] As Barriault argues, there is a need for community archives "to ensure that archives as bodies of knowledge also reflect knowledge of the body."[12] As online interfaces become the primary mode of encounter between archives and publics, this means ensuring that the body gets digitized, as it were.

Given the limitations of labor hours and server space, deselection at the LHA is inevitable: the archives can't scan or pay to host all of its photos. Practicalities aside, deselection has significant ideological effects, the politics of which can be too readily justified by efficiency, or dismissed as inevitable; critical attention should be paid to the conditions of possibility that shape the decision-making process of digitization. The first reason the unprocessed porn is easier left in the box relates to copyright, ethics, and permission to circulate, all guided by the archives' evolving, feminist framework of consent and privacy.[13] It is dif cult to acquire publication permissions, and visitors to the archives are asked not to take photographs of images. The photo les greet users with a notice: "Much of what was given to us came from women who simply wanted their images saved, their lives remembered. They neither offered permission for publication, nor did we request it. . . . We are sorry that the collection is so inaccessible to publication use. As explained above, it came out of a different time and focus." Many photos were acquired during the sex wars and reflect the conflicting politics of representing sex held by this archives' intergenerational public. For antiporn feminists, the problem of pornography was precisely the mechanical reproduction of images, rather than merely the acts depicted in porn. As a compressed form designed to create small le sizes that can be sent and received with ease, the digitally reproduced image is constructed to circulate, formally biased toward a politics of media that contravenes the sex wars prohibition on distribution. Ultimately, consent to digitize is sought from donors and subjects, but as information studies scholar Jean Dryden has shown, cultural heritage archives choose images for digitization that are uncontroversial in their provenance to avoid complex, labor- intensive searches for permission.[14] Deselection is critical as decisions about what to put online shape what the archives becomes: images of sexuality can require

discussions for which an archives run on a consensus model by volunteers has limited capacity.

The undescribability of many depictions of sexuality in the LHA's photo collection is the second reason these images stay in their box. Batchen's argument is ultimately a suggestion that vernacular photographs do not articulate easily as evidence; they are the digital cataloger's "worst nightmare," as they evade attempts to render them searchable. Vernacular images of sexuality can be particularly perplexing. I asked Ronika for an image that was difficult to add to the database, and she thought of one of her favorites: "There's a woman who had a bunch of pictures of herself. She was naked, and she had a bondage harness on. We pulled that out, looked at it, and we weren't really sure what we could say. We said something like 'playful photographs,' 'nude photographs,' like worked around the information," eventually settling on the description, "tough and topless."[15] Listening to Ronika describe this process as one of careful interpretive work is exemplary of the archives' improvisational digitization tactics. They involve anti-expertise, the accessibility of archival tools, and an ethos of finding solutions that are good enough to guide the project. This good-enough approach to description and metadata is not a disadvantage of the community archives; rather, as librarian-scholar Jen Wolfe has argued, even in large institutional archives, when it comes to metadata, "sometimes 'good enough' is good enough."[16] In the interest of getting materials online, catalogers must accept the provisionality of these standards.

Saskia describes the temporality of this approach as a practice of addressing issues when they arise, rather than waiting to have everything worked out in advance. She relates moving mindfully between the professional context of her day job and working at the archives using the metaphor of a cook who prepares the same meal in a professional kitchen and on a camp stove: "I'm realizing that I have to really give us the credit that what we do is actually really good. So what if it isn't perfect. . . . It is absolutely usable."[17]

Ronika's uncertainty about the image of the woman in the harness relates to an absence of contextual information about the subject's sexuality and relationship to being photographed and represents a moment when ethical concerns become intertwined with the challenge of description: "A lot of the times it's really difficult to categorize what people are doing in these photos, and there are a lot of instances where we open things and go, 'What do you say about this? . . . She's clearly expressing this part of her sexuality that may be sort of hidden . . . that's representative of a lot of the things that are in this collection, that sort of tentativeness to make this representation of yourself, especially in the sexual images.' "[18]

The images offered online have all been cleared to circulate in public, either through donor agreements or through careful judgment by Saskia and Ronika. With- out a donor agreement, volunteers weigh the risk posed by publishing an image, asking whether there are recognizable women in the photograph, whether the image is donated or "found," and whether the subject matter of the photograph seems at all private or controversial, such as with an image that depicts nudity or explicit sexuality. These are ongoing, case-by-case decisions, and there is no overarching policy to follow. The LHA has made many efforts over the years to contact pre-Internet donors to request permission to list their materials online, but communication is often difficult to initiate. What is put online re ects the subjective feminist engagements that archives volunteers have with photography, the archives, and online media. Perceptions of the time in which a photograph was donated—how donors might have thought about the medium of photography then—are weighed in relation to common understandings of images and their circulation in the present, in which, for example, the sharing of "private" images via social media makes it easier to imagine these photographs as suitable for public consumption.[19] In an archives that describes itself as primarily by, about, and for "lesbians," the context of lesbian visibility and equal rights discourse is also critical. Art historian Carol Payne argues that photographic archives in cultural heritage organizations are technologies for constructing visual representations of imagined communities. The complexities of the collection at the LHA demonstrates how the imagined community of "lesbians" rests on an array of shifting, sometimes contested, boundaries and limits of that very category.[20]

The archives' approach to images of sexuality ought to be considered in rela- tion to the larger role that LGBT archives play in constructing a liberal, palatable version of historical sexual subcultures. Much queer archival theory has celebrated LGBT archives as "counterarchival"—and thus inherently critical—spaces that house the eccentric materials other archives might not value.[21] Emphasizing the desiring attachments that queer publics form to historical objects, the queer archi- val turn in the humanities has often downplayed the implicatedness of archives in cultural "regimes of normalization."[22] LGBT archives are worlding technologies that can be called on to support homonational trends, in which the recognition of gay and lesbian citizen-subjects as rightly historical is tied to broader political agendas of gendered and racialized violence, exclusion, and empire in the present.[23] Photographic archives, in particular, shift this politics into a regime of visibility that associates being seen with being welcomed into the fold of liberalism. Online media is similarly implicated in the pedagogy of recognition; an example is the resiliency rhetoric of the It Gets Better project, in which Internet access rescues youth into a normative developmental narrative by modeling how to "come out." Critical archivists, archives scholars, and archives users are generally well aware of the formative influence that archives play in contemporary LGBT politics. Alexandra Juhasz has called this role "queer archive activism,"

where the archives does not just collect and preserve objects but also performs public-facing outreach and intervention.[24]

Information science scholar Tim Schlak has argued that postmodern critiques of photographic archives approach photos as "very difficult objects to talk about, let alone classify, describe, and essentially 'own' as archival evidence"; however, archivists often lack the time or resources to build digital interfaces in such a way as to accommodate the complexity of materials, especially at a volunteer archives.[25] After discussing my own investments in the photo collection as an important record of sexual subcultures, in which images depicting sexuality are key, I asked Saskia if she foresees a time when any of the images from the unprocessed porn box might go online. Her response reveals a nuanced understanding of these theoretical implications: "The only thing that I can imagine we would do with something like that is a little sampler of things we don't understand . . . have a page with ten photographs and then say these are ten samples of a box that came to us from an unknown source. . . . But I have other things to do." I ask her to explain what this unknown sampler would demonstrate about the collection. "It would show something about the sources of the material. It would show how we have organically grown. How we don't discriminate. That there's very interesting things here to be seen. Just the fact that we have that and we didn't throw it away. . . . That at some point in time some- body thought this might be appropriate here."[26]

Though rhetorical, Saskia's online mini-exhibition of unprocessed porn would digitize this material for circulation online while holding off on "processing" the images. The hypothetical act of description proposed here is one of refusing to describe, of leaving open the ambiguity that can characterize an archival encounter with historical images of sexuality. The uncertainties, edges, provocations, and discomforts Ronika attributes to the image of the woman in the bondage harness are perhaps what give an otherwise innocuous portrait some of its charge in the first place. Though Saskia's idea is an intriguing thought experiment, she has "other things to do," a reminder that resource-strapped community archives must prioritize the needs users have for finding and accessing materials more easily through online interfaces. What Saskia and the LHA do make time for is a practice of self-reflexivity about their responsibility in shaping how the archives is encountered and an open- ness to revising how images are classified.

Information studies scholar Margaret Hedstrom calls the "archival interface" a "critical node in the representation of archives," through which archivists negotiate their role as intermediaries with the past.[27] Online interfaces are increasingly the most common mode of user engagement, forcing archivists to confront the interpretive nature of their role vis-à-vis digitization, in the wide sense of the term as I am using it here. Saskia describes creating the online catalog

as a process of making sense of a thing that sometimes does not make that much sense—an opportunity to organize, classify, and render searchable. But how do you make sense of dozens of undated photographs of a naked woman with a perhaps tenuous relationship to the category lesbian, posed in front of her motorcycle? As librarian-scholar Marlene Manoff explains, "However much one refines one's tagging, one is still forced to impose a level of specificity and explicitness on texts that, in the humanities at least, defy such clear-cut distinctions."[28] The textual desires we have of archives are often exceeded by the "multiplicity of [LGBT] donors' identities" and the elusiveness of photographs as media.[29] Pulling a "what do you say about this?" image out of the photo drawer evokes wonder, because the ways these photos do not make sense are dif cult to catalog and capture through mechanisms such as the searchable data- base form.

The digitization process creates an interface with palpable effects on user experience. The construction of the interface is evident in what is chosen for digitization, a practice Saskia describes as "completely subjective."[30] Often images are digitized because of researcher request, creating an emphasis on "research value." Selection can also be serendipitous, where Ronika flags compelling discoveries for Saskia. Both women described the intergenerational encounter of working together as personally fulfilling and an influence on the digital collection as it takes shape. For example, Ronika describes discussing the work of transgender photographers in ways that blended her emergence in a very recent queer scene with Saskia's long history at the archives as it has evolved to accommodate (or not) emerging trans politics. Saskia chooses images that evidence aspects of lesbian subculture she views as underrepresented. Images that make immediate visual sense take precedent; Schlak describes the emphasis on clarity as a textual paradigm, where photos obtain archival legitimacy once they can be described clearly as texts.[31] Says Saskia: "I also want it to look good . . . things have to be recognizable. Something nondescript, out of focus, in the distance, isn't going to be very helpful."[32] The garden shed portraits, for instance, do not "look good" in any conventional sense; their "deselection" from the LHA's online database contrasts with my academic and aesthetic affection for these pictures, which inevitably overemphasizes their significance in the collection.[33]

The photo sampler greets visitors with a graphic interface, the user-friendly "front-end" of a "back-end" database experience, that together mediate access and determine our connection to "history" as represented by this collection.[34] These complex virtual environments exert intellectual control over encounters once left open to more unstructured forms of in-person browsing in the photo folders; as Emily Drabinski warns, search functions can all but eliminate relational or happen- stance "queer" browsing practices by classifying materials along rm identity-based lines.[35] The photo sampler is pleasant to look at and reasonably easy to search but is ultimately a structured database that creates culturally determined

pathways to content. CONTENTdm is also designed for the creation of digital *collections*, which are necessarily partial and organized to cohere around an intelligible theme. The folksonomic naming of images through the assignment of descriptive metadata is another subjective process that shapes the interface. While fields for "date" and "creator" can be simple to complete, the eld for "description" requires Saskia to summarize the subject of an image in one short phrase. The descriptive tags she assigns to each photo in the "keywords" field are a familiar process for anyone who has uploaded a photo to a site like Flickr. Though she does not work from a con- trolled vocabulary, Saskia associates the goal of precision with her choice of tags and is well aware that good tagging is what makes effective information retrieval possible in online photo-sharing interfaces.[36]

In tagging photos, Saskia practices a careful, improvisational self-awareness. For example, the archives has many of the papers of lesbian-feminist artist Corinne, including source photographs for her 1975 *Cunt Coloring Book*. Saskia put six of Corinne's less explicit images online after she found them in a small, handmade exhibition catalog from the mid-1980s. She assigned the tags "art," "erotica," and "labia." I asked her to describe how she chose these particular images and why she labeled them as she did.

Untitled image tagged with the terms "art," "erotica," and "labia." Tee A. Corinne, image courtesy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives photo collection

"I had absolutely no problem with this because there are no recognizable women in it. Those images are well known. . . . We have her permission to use them; nobody's going to make a big deal out of it. And, yes, it's art. You know, I called it "erotica"—why didn't I call it "sexuality"? At some point I just need to get stuff up [online], and I can't spend more time waiting for inspiration. If changes need to be made, that will happen. I think that discussion will come; clearly, we're having one now. And maybe you will make me aware of something, or I will make you aware of something, and something changes in the metadata. I have no problem going in the system and adding or taking something away in terms of description. The more I work with it, the more that actually happens, because I realize that I can be more exact, I can be more precise. It will be better, it will be easier to use, more informative.[37]

A work-in-progress approach to metadata description is an advantage of the feminist community archives' do-it-yourself approach, evoking the "liberatory descriptive standard" favored by informationstudies scholars Wendy Duff and Verne Harris. This database model "seek(s) ways of troubling its own status and its *de facto* functioning as a medium of metanarrative," to "push the capacity of description to accommodate partial or multiple rather than complete closure."[38]

The discussion of Corinne's work was a moment in my inter- views with Saskia where my investments in the collection became explicit, as I relayed searching for "sexuality" without any results and searching for "porn" to find images of sex wars protests. Walter Kendrick argues that "erotica" lends images of sex a "specious aura of antiquity."[39] Writing long before the archival turn in the humanities, Kendrick is nevertheless engaged with questions of how classification and the archives define what is pornographic and what is t for public consumption. To archive is to shape access in ways that delineate material as one thing or another. Linda Williams's notion of "on/scenity" extends the naming and classifying effects of prohibitive gestures to the contemporary ubiquity of sexual images online, where once-unspeakable acts are increasingly represented in public as diverse forms of sexuality.[40] The online inter- face, as a site of mediation, marks some material for public consumption, while porn must stay, quite literally in this case, in the drawer. Returning to Barriault's concern that LGBT archives go beyond preserving images of sexuality to improving access, the names given to images of sexuality matter for mediating access to that material, but naming can also have the effect of pinning down meaning in ways that images will always transcend.

Art historian Tom Normand has argued that to not classify images in vernac- ular photography collections is to "honor their variety and diversity" to allow these outlaw forms to be liminal, to occupy the "threshold between or in the margins of categories."[41] The theoretical and practical question becomes, How do outlaw archives with an investment in finding mediated forms that attend to the

complexity of their collections design online interfaces that leave open the ambiguity of materials without falling back on the ease of deselection? Certainly, the desire for images that are as visually and historically legible as possible has implications for the future mediated form of this collection, whose drawers contain many "illegible" images. But what is critical in Saskia's words is the way she describes her process of "trying," of being "helpful," and of acknowledging and thinking through the contingency of this whole process. Moving with care, doing it yourself, deciding together, and thinking about the intersecting values of multiple archives publics, past and present, are digitization practices that constitute a feminist politics of getting by in relation to digital media. The LHA, with its willfully provisional, improvisational, and self-critical approach to digitization, is well equipped to engage with the urgent questions that images of sexuality pose in relation to digitization, questions that are inseparable from the archives as a mediated space in transition.

Notes

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1. The background information on the LHA in this paragraph is assembled from unstructured interviews I did with volunteers in 2012 and 2013, my own observations at the archives during the three months I spent doing doctoral research there in this period, and the organization's history and statement of principles, available on its website, www.lesbianher storyarchives.org/history.html.

2. "Statement of Purpose," *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, no. 1 (1975): 2.

3. "Announcing the Start of Our National Lesbian Photography Drive," *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, no. 5 (1979): 3.

4. David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

5. Saskia Scheffer, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, May 10, 2013.

6. Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing Photography History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 57.

7. Scheffer, interview, May 10, 2013.

8. Marcel Barriault, "Hard to Dismiss: The Archival Value of Gay Male Erotica

and Pornography," *Archivaria*, no. 68 (2009): 222.

9. Ibid., 226.

10. Feona Attwood, "Reading Porn: The Paradigm Shift in Pornography Research," *Sexualities* 5, no. 1 (2002): 91–105.

11. On the challenges that collecting porn poses for libraries and archives, see Lisa Sloniowski, "This Is Not a Love Story: Libraries and Feminist Porn," *Access: The Magazine of the Ontario Library Association* 18, no. 2 (2012): 14–17.

12. Barriault, "Hard to Dismiss," 225.

13. This framework is perhaps best exempli ed by the archives' donor agreement forms, through which donors are invited to maintain ownership of their materials and design various privacy restrictions, some of which are unprecedented in archives; my search of these forms revealed restrictions such as "for lesbian eyes only" and "for pro S/M viewers only," both of which, the archives' staff admit, are impossible to enforce while maintaining open access to the collections.

14. Jean Dryden, "Copyright Issues in the Selection of Archival Material for Internet Access," *Archival Science* 8, no. 2 (2008): 123–47.

15. Ronika McClain, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, May 3, 2013.

16. Jen Wolfe, "Playing Fast and Loose with the Rules: Metadata Cataloging for Digital Library Projects," in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 71.

17. Scheffer, interview, May 10, 2013.

18. McClain, interview, May 3, 2013.

19. See Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gómez-Cruz, "Digital Photography and Picture Sharing: Rede ning the Public/Private Divide," *Knowledge, Technology and Policy* 22, no. 3 (2009): 205–15.

20. Carol Payne, "Lessons with Leah: Re-reading the Photographic Archive of Nation in the National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division," *Visual Studies* 21, no. 1 (2006): 4–22.

21. Ann Cvetkovich, "The Queer Art of the Counterarchive," 32–35, and Judith Halberstam, "Unfound," 158–61, in *Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945–1980*, ed. David Frantz and Mia Locks (Los Angeles: ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, 2011).

22. Cvetkovich, "Queer Art of the Counterarchive"; Halberstam, "Unfound."

23. See Payne, "Lessons with Leah"; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

24. Alexandra Juhasz, "Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism," *GLQ* 12, no. 2 (2006): 319–28.

25. Tim Schlak, "Framing Photographs, Denying Archives: The Dif culty of Focusing on Archival Photographs," *Archival Science* 8, no. 2 (2008): 85–101.

26. Scheffer, interview, May 10, 2013.

27. Margaret Hedstrom, "Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 22.

28. Marlene Manoff, "Archive and Database as Metaphor: Theorizing the Historical Record," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 10, no. 4 (2010): 394.

29. Angela L. DiVeglia, "Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism," in *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012), 85.

30. Scheffer, interview, May 10, 2013.

31. Schlak, "Framing Photographs, Denying Archives," 88–89.

32. Scheffer, interview, May 10, 2013.

33. In other words, the exemplary function of these images in this article enacts a form of "selection" that is just as political as the deselection processes under consideration here.

34. Manoff, "Archive and Database," 386.

35. Emily Drabinski, "Gendered S(h)elves: Body and Identity in the Library," *Women and Environments International Magazine*, nos. 78–79 (2009–10): 16–18.

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39. Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 244. Citation is to the 1996 edition.

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