

# UCLA

## InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies

### Title

Book Review: Making History Matter: Documenting Feminist & Queer Activism in the 21st Century Edited by Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2p59h01b>

### Journal

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 9(2)

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### Publication Date

2013

### DOI

10.5070/D492017854

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**Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century** by Kelly Wooten, edited by Lyz Bly. Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2012. 196 pp. ISBN 978-1936117130.

*Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist & Queer Activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is a collection of essays that examines archival issues in feminist and queer activist communities. Its main thesis is that archiving is activism. This thesis echoes throughout the book in a variety of forms, but is stated best in the introduction by Alison Piepmeier: “the scholars in this volume explain that it’s a political decision to collect things that women, girls, and other underprivileged groups have produced” (p. ix). Reminiscent of Virginia Woolf’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own*, *Make Your Own History* proposes that women’s writing is still a political issue, as editors Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten seek to erase the distinction between archivist and activist. The collection’s essays are organized into four sections: Zines and Riot Grrrl, LGBT Archives, Electronic Records, and Second Wave Feminism. The book is mainly focused on issues related to zines and riot grrrl writings. This is due to the fact that much of the writing of and on third wave feminism and queer activism has been documented in zines, which makes zine preservation an important part of both archivist and activist communities.

The essay styles in this collection range from personal experiences and reflections to detailed accounts and descriptions of archival practices. One of the strengths of this volume is that it collects diverse and varying voices in the field. Elizabeth A. Myers contributes a strong piece describing collaboration as a particularly feminist endeavor because it “blurs authority” (p. 144), reminding readers that the importance of zine and riot grrrl culture was not just in the documentation of feminist and queer voices, but also in networks that formed around its creation. Myers is just one author among many who is rethinking archives against a traditional grain. Other contributions that focus on rethinking archives are by Alana Kumbier and Angela L. DiVeglia. Alana Kumbier considers an archives without documents as both creating a space and keeping a place for a history to come, while Angela L. DiVeglia reflects on the role of the archivist in the LGBT community. Speaking as a member of the community, she states, “... the archivist, in a way, is sort of a weaver who takes these disparate threads of history and myth and experience and story and helps weave them together into a fabric where we can see ourselves as part of a coherent history” (p. 88). DiVeglia’s essay exemplifies Virginia Woolf’s legacy, as well as the title of this collection, through a discussion of LGBT archives; where there were no sources to cite, she created her own by interviewing potential LGBT archive donors.

One issue that appears frequently in *Make Your Own History* is a tension between feminist and LGBT communities and large institutions. It surfaces as

Kate Eichhorn discusses Kathleen Hanna's decision to donate her papers to the Fales Library at NYU, when they could be more useful to an archives that does not have such strict policies regarding access. In Jenna Brager and Jami Sailor's "Archiving the Underground," the issue emerges as the authors discuss how the alignment by zine creators with publishers, distributors, archives and libraries have an effect on the circulation and readership of zines. One can think of this change in scale as a change in register of the voice of the zine creator. Brager and Sailor describe this voice as a whisper, the zine as a secret: "the danger...is that you are projecting that whisper far beyond its intended audience" (p. 47).

Representation seems to be a very sensitive subject, especially for Hanna. Eichhorn discusses the *déjà vu* of misrepresentation as it occurred initially during Riot Grrrl's emergence, and again at the announcement of Hanna's Fales Library donation. Even as the context of this issue is established, resolution is never proposed. The points of view in this collection should make expressions of alternatives and outcomes for overcoming obstacles possible. Who should have access, under what conditions is it appropriate to academically discuss zines, and how do we work out issues related to copyright and digitalization permissions? Based on the biographies of the contributors, many involved in the discussion wear multiple caps of academic, archivist, librarian, and zinemaker. Still, the conversation is influenced by a time when lines were more firmly drawn between the mainstream and underground media.

Are university archives not the appropriate place for zines or feminist and LGBT records to be collected? These institutions often have strict regulations regarding access. But women's writing, especially in zines, has a powerful and transformative effect on its readers. Instead of focusing on how communities can gain access to archives from the outside, we should consider how zines can change archival spaces from the inside.

There is context and understanding to be found in Amy Benson and Kathryn Allamong Jacob's "No Documents, No History: Traditional Genres, New Formats." The authors introduce suffragist and first president of The League of Women Voters, Maud Wood Park, who considered the donation of her papers to the Women's Archive "to be both a scholarly resource and a memorial to the power of women's efforts to secure the vote" (p. 123). Perhaps one can read Kathleen Hanna's contribution along similar lines, as both a resource and a memorial.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf combs the British Library in search of books written about women. Although she finds scholarship in a variety of different disciplines, it is only men who have written books about women. It is certainly Woolf's dream for women to have the time and space in which to write, but what is to become of that writing once the dream comes to fruition? As documented by the feminist and queer activist movements, the voice of women in

print has proliferated, but the real work to be done is in archiving. The room of one's own is no longer one's own, nor is it a room; it is an archive.

### **Reviewer**

Joseph Coombe is a first year student in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. He is interested in archival theory, the book to come, and database-driven scholarship.