

Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies

Edited by Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022. 383 pp. Softcover. \$29.95. ISBN 978-1-4780-1797-4.

In recent years, humanities researchers have become increasingly fascinated with archives and archival practices. This trend is often referred to as the “archival turn,” and it has significantly impacted queer studies, prompting scholars to delve deeper into historical records to understand and create knowledge about LGBTQ+ experiences. Editors Daniel Marshall (associate professor of writing, literature, and culture at Deakin University) and Zeb Tortorici (associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese languages and literature at New York University) examine this shift, alongside fourteen other authors, in *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies*. This book offers a comprehensive analysis of how archives are shaping our understanding of LGBTQ+ histories, politics, and everyday life.

Turning Archival focuses on different aspects of the archival turn as it relates to queer histories and studies. The editors have laid out the chapters in informal sections that share thematic or historic similarities to show the progression of the archival turn. The first section lays the book’s foundation by explaining the roots and evolution of the archival turn and highlighting how the shift toward archival research has opened new ways of accessing and understanding LGBTQ+ experiences.¹ Marshall and Tortorici drive this point home by explaining that the loss of archival data related to the LGBTQ+ community limits historical knowledge and contributes to historical erasure. This section looks at many different works from well-known archival scholars, such as Susan Stryker; Ryan Lee Cartwright; Francis X. Blouin Jr.; and William G. Rosenberg, and considers how their respective works have added credibility to the archival turn.

The second section delves into the practicalities of archival research in queer studies, providing valuable insights into the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities that archival researchers face. This section presents the archive as a captivating force, drawing activists, artists, and scholars into its historical embrace. What makes this concept interesting is the comparison between the aspects of memory, silence, preservation, and revelation. The chapter by María Elena Martínez, who is an associate professor of history and American studies and ethnicity at the University of Southern California, covers the fascinating case of Juana Aguilar, a suspected hermaphrodite in early nineteenth-century Guatemala who faced charges for “committing *pecados nefandos*, or ‘abominable sins,’ with women” (p. 33). Aguilar’s case was so prominent at the time that one would think records would be readily available; however, this is where Martínez ran into some hurdles. She notes a lack of court

documents, which raises questions not only about Augilar's life but also about the "discourses of sex and sexual difference in late colonial Spanish America, and the influence of the new or 'enlightened' science on theories of the sexed body" (p. 34). Sadly, the scarcity of records seems to be the rule rather than the exception when it comes to documenting queer life throughout history.

After discussing the dearth of information available for queer archival studies, the section goes on to discuss the ethical considerations of this type of research. While it is true that most queer research often, but not always, includes explicit materials, it is important for researchers and scholars to preserve the privacy and dignity of the individuals who are represented in the archives. Anjali Arondekar, professor of feminist studies and codirector of the Center for South Asian Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, describes the state-sponsored campaigns to "purify India of cultural pollution" (p. 93) in his chapter, "Telling Tales: Sexuality, Archives, South Asia." These campaigns have led to "historical amnesia" among the Indian populace, as the current government promotes historical narratives that benefit it and erase alternative gender ideologies in Indian history (p. 93).

In the third section, the contributors spotlight research opportunities that exist in queer archives, including the unique possibility that a researcher can uncover overlooked experiences and aspects of the LGBTQ+ community. Archival sources may also help researchers challenge assumptions and narratives surrounding sexuality and gender. It seems that most of the authors contributing to this section hope to bring about a new era of activism and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community with the revelation and clarification of historical documents. The hope is that by shedding light on stories, histories, and herstories of resilience, resistance, and activism in these communities, the archival profession will take note and open its holdings to more queer-oriented research collections. This will in turn hopefully inspire and inform contemporary struggles for rights and recognition of the LGBTQ+ community.

The fourth and final section of the book looks toward the future of archives and discusses the direction that archival research in queer studies could take going forward. This section highlights the need for a more inclusive and diverse practice when it comes to collecting materials for archival preservation and research, and it calls for a fresh and critical look at how archives are created, maintained, and used. The contributors to this section discuss the importance of highlighting and considering experiences and voices of underrepresented groups within the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Kate Eichhorn, author and professor of culture and media studies at the New School, describes how archives have only recently (since the mid-1990s) been collecting materials that include queer theory as a focus (p. 303). She recounts how she attributes this refocus to the response the editors of *Radical History Review* received when requesting two special issues associated with queer theory. This, in turn, led archivists to push for more queer histories to be deposited into archives, as

well as to the creation of this book as a whole (p. 303). Eichhorn discusses how she hopes her contribution will not question the importance or validation of the queer archive; however, she does hope that it will cause researchers and archivists to take a step back and pose more in-depth reflections and questions as to how and why scholars engage with queer archives (p. 303).

Marshall and Tortorici masterfully compiled this work by interweaving theoretical discussions with practical examples, which invites not only scholars but also general readers to pick up the book. The editors skillfully incorporate multiple works by authors from different backgrounds to showcase the importance of archival research in uncovering and preserving stories, histories, and herstories of the LGBTQ+ community. Marshall and Tortorici do this while also making a case for the continuing relevance of queer studies throughout the archival turn and the archival world.

While many may look at this book and think that the subject matter is going to be dense, this cannot be further from the truth. *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies* provides a comprehensive analysis of the archival turn and offers practical advice that archival workers as well as researchers can use.

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- ¹ The authors use the term “archival turn” from Terrence McDonald’s work, *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1, to describe how it might be seen as a broader reimagination of the archive and humanities, as well as of the social sciences, in the late twentieth century.