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2021

"Introduction" The Social Movement Archive

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We are disruption and consent to disruption. We preserve upheaval. Sent to fulfill by abolishing, to renew by unsettling, to open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual area, we got politics surrounded. We cannot represent ourselves. We can't be represented.

–Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study.”¹

I. When I think of an archive I think of time and space. I think about how archives have been made linear and how to disrupt that linearity.²

When we decided to write a book about social movements and archives, we spent a lot of time worrying about the formal limitations of a book: the way a book is bounded by space and time; the way it is structured and forecloses other possible structures; and the way it frames ideas and precludes other possible framings. These concerns are not all that different from the concerns—about space, time, organization, and description—that archives grapple with. Exploring how we archive is one way to begin to understand the complex relationships between archives, cultural reality, people, and objects. Archives not only reflect reality, authority, and political power, but also play a role in actively producing these things.³ The stakes here are high.

We are interested in these stakes, particularly in relation to how archives contend with projects that are about socio-political disruption, upheaval, and transformation.⁴ We could spend a lot of time investigating whether and how archives can contend with “movement,” with direct action and performance, or with political projects that are nonlinear. However, we are less interested in contributing to the growing body of academic, theoretical texts about archives and social movement material than we are in exploring what archives mean to and for activists who are involved in producing cultural ephemera.⁵ We are interested in tensions the archive produces and how archivists working in spaces that collect social movement materials navigate that tension. We're also interested in how a critical understanding of material culture in relation to movement activism might introduce new ways to think about archives and archival processes.

We've both spent many years thinking about the capacity of archives to shape our understanding of social and political reality and the potential for social movement materials to shape our understanding of archives. We are both trained archivists (who work as educators in libraries) and long-time volunteers at Interference Archive, a community archive of social movement ephemera located

1. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, “The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study.” (Chico: AK Press, 2013): 20.

2. Nitasha Dhillon, Decolonize This Place (see chapter 2)

3. For an introduction to these issues, see J. M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, 1-19 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>

4. Strategies to contend with traditional constructs of power and authority within archival work, and to engage with socio-political transformation have been practiced and imagined by groups including Documenting the Now, Witness, The Blacktivists, Archivists Against History Repeating Itself, and others.

in Brooklyn, New York. This is not a book about Interference Archive or New York City, but these contexts influenced how we approached this project. We learned about many of the movements represented here and met many of the people we interviewed for this book through our work at Interference Archive and our own involvement in social movement organizing in New York City.

We set out to have conversations with activists about how material is used in social movement contexts and how it has been (or might be) reused, both inside and outside of archives. We spoke with activists and artists who create materials in a variety of physical formats, and who have worked within and across a broad range of movements including women's liberation, disability rights, housing justice, Black liberation, antiwar, Indigenous sovereignty, immigrant rights, and prison abolition. We asked questions about cultural production as well as about the relationships between materials, movements, and messages. We also asked questions about how movement material should be archived, what skills and knowledge archivists should have, and how archivists should think about attribution, reproduction, privacy, and access. These conversations, edited for length and clarity, appear as the fifteen illustrated chapters of this book. We hope that if it were possible for a book to simulate the experience of visiting a community archive of social movement ephemera, both by offering illustrations of movement material and featuring conversations that might occur in these kinds of spaces, this book does that to some extent.

II. There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use non-human elements in our practices, but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another [...] We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are of the world.⁶

One of the chapters in this volume contains an interview with a group of environmental activists and artists from a collective called the Environmental Performance Agency (EPA). The EPA's work, which involves performance and public fieldwork, is not about a

specific political or ecological project even though it responds directly to current political and ecological circumstances. Instead, the four EPA agents focus on disrupting prevailing paradigms about who or what has agency to shape an environment. Their project is, on one level, completely recognizable in that it is definitional. But it is also completely radical because it revolves around drawing attention to (and paying attention to) the agency of nonhuman organisms (specifically urban plants) as they play an active role in defining and producing environmental reality. The EPA's work is less about manifesting political change than it is about changing how people think, "finding a language(s) to share our experiences," and "developing ways to observe, listen, respect, and document" something that's already happening. It is hard not to read this work as a form of archival practice that emerges from and responds to material.

The idea of nonhuman agency as a consideration in archival practice is one that we kept returning to during this project. Looking to the landscape of new materialism and material ecology research, we believe that a critical understanding of material culture might allow for a "reconfiguration" of the space-time of the archive, and of the "relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion" the archive allows, responds to, and produces.⁷ It is easiest to think about the idea of nonhuman agency in relation to living stuff, but many of the other people we spoke with for this project similarly describe the material they make as part of their activism in terms of its agency and aliveness. Activists from Decolonize This Place (DTP) and Mobile Print Power speak about how their banners and graphics, often created for a particular direct action campaign, "live on afterwards," travel, and accumulate new meaning through reuse. Indigenous activist Sikowis discusses the ways Indigenous art is integral to resistance work and characterizes material culture as an active agent in the process of decolonization. Laura Whitehorn, who has created material in support of Black liberation and prisoner abolition struggles for decades, describes her experience of making art while incarcerated as humanizing and almost transportive. Sky Cubacub, who creates clothing and wearable prosthetics for queer and disabled people, introduces the potential for material to make us "super-human." And performance based groups like Pink Bloque draw attention to the material dimensions of the body, the

5. For readers interested in diving into this literature, a few possible starting places include: Andrew Flinn, "Archival Activism: Independent and Community-led Archives, Radical Public History and the Heritage Professions," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 7(2), 2011, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt2490x>; Sylvie Rollason-Cass and Scott Reed, "Living Movements, Living Archives: Selecting and Archiving Web Content During Times of Social Unrest," *New Review of Information Networking* 20, 241-247 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614576.2015.1114839>; Gina Watts, "Applying Radical Empathy to Women's March Documentation Efforts: A Reflection Exercise," *Archives and Manuscripts* 45(3), 191-201 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2017.1373361>.

6. Karen Barad. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Susan J. Hekman and Stacy Alaimo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 147.

7. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 120-154. See also: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2010); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept," *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (2011): 591-609.; Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

8. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.

9. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 138.

perception of feminized bodies in public space, and the way the deployment of feminized tropes—pink clothing, a wink, a hip swivel—can be used strategically to change how a space feels and how political ideas circulate and are received.

Media ecologist Jane Bennett writes of the “capacity of things” to “act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” and we might extend this definition to consider the capacity of bodies as well.⁸ Material and bodies are deeply intertwined with social practices, places, and communities and they also participate in remaking those practices, places, and communities; and they have the capacity to move beyond them, to acquire new meaning, and to be a force of disruption. Our bodies and the stuff we make don’t “require the mark of an external force like culture or history to [be] complete.”⁹ Social movement material (a banner, a video, a raised fist, a pamphlet, a chant) might be “living its life” out in the streets of a new city,¹⁰ might overwrite an institutional narrative in the halls of a museum, might disrupt ideas about linear time and social progress, or might offer a counternarrative to the mainstream propaganda of an oppressive government. It might move us, or move us to action.

Of course, as archivists, we have critical agency too. The way we use and interpret and share material, and the way we grant others access to use and interpret and share material, is perhaps paramount in terms of the agency and meaning of material once it enters the space of the archive. In *After Silence: A History of AIDS Through Its Images*, the activist and artist Avram Finkelstein writes that “the political poster is a public thing[;] it comes to life in public spaces, and outside them, is academic.”¹¹ In her work on queer use, the post-colonial and feminist theorist Sara Ahmed discusses the way that environments, and particularly institutional environments, change use contexts and impose an interpretive lens that dictates what materials mean.¹² Archivist Lincoln Cushing warns that “once a community-based collection goes into a more established institution there is the strong likelihood it will lose its political punch.”¹³ Institutional spaces, which are steeped in hierarchies and colonial histories, dictate what kind of use is “proper” and also function as “a container technology.”¹⁴ The logic of the institutional container dictates specific uses (or prohibits “improper” use)¹⁵ and often

contributes to the erasure or obfuscation of material that doesn’t “fit” into the paradigm.¹⁶ The implications for archives here are apparent: “you can stop something from existing by making it harder to use;” you can stop an idea from circulating; you can shut certain communities out.¹⁷

The alternative Ahmed offers is queer use, the kind of use that, like an occupation, allows the people (and material) that have been historically excluded to “take up residence in spaces not built for them.”¹⁸ If we think of the agency of social movement material and its capacity to *take up residence in the archive* and transform it, then we can begin to see why a critical consideration of both material culture and use might offer a path forward for archives. We can’t make material that is counter-institutional fit into institutional spaces without neutralizing it, so we need to become open to the disruption that movement material introduces into “spatial and temporal context[s].”¹⁹ We need to welcome the “unsettling” of “the meanings and consequences” of archives and archiving.²⁰

What would happen if we start with a critical consideration of archiving which doesn’t place the archive or the archivist at its center? What if instead, we begin with material and movements and then ask ourselves: what is the use of archiving this? who is this archive for? And let these questions drive our practice.

III. Maybe our archive logic will be something that interrupts what an archive is.²¹

All of the activists we spoke with for this project share the conviction that movement materials have value as historic artifacts and continued relevance in relation to ongoing struggles for social justice. In light of this, activists overwhelmingly believe that their work should be archived, even as they point to problematic gaps in cultural records that have excluded, minimized, or mischaracterized the history of social movement activism and voice concerns about archival practices that might make their materials difficult to access or reuse. In spite of these concerns, activists believe that archiving this material might amplify and contextualize social movement histories and help dispel the idea that “movements just suddenly happen” or are merely reactions to

10. Nitasha Dhillon, *Decolonize This Place* (see chapter 2).

11. Avram Finkelstein, *After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 39.

12. Sara Ahmed, “Queer Use,” *feministkilljoys*, November 8, 2018, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2018/11/08/queer-use/>

13. Lincoln Cushing, “The Cuba Poster Project: Collecting for People, Not Profit,” in *Collecting Prints, Posters, and Ephemera: Perspectives in a Global World*, eds. Ruth Iskin and Britany Salsbury (Bloomsbury, 2019), http://www.docspopuli.org/articles/Collecting_for_People_not_Profit.html

14. Ahmed, “Queer Use.”

15. Ahmed, “Queer Use.”

16. Garland-Thomson, “Misfits.”

17. Ahmed, “Queer Use.”

18. Ahmed, “Queer Use.”

19. Garland-Thomson, “Misfits,” 593.

20. Harney and Moten, “The Undercommons”; Garland-Thomson, “Misfits,” 593.

21. andrea haengi, *Environmental Performance Agency* (see chapter 4)

discrete political situations.²² For most of the activists that we spoke to, the idea that movement material should circulate, retain agency, and be used to support ongoing struggles for justice and social change is one that should inform archival priorities.

However, the more we talked about archives, the less stable the idea of the archive became. On the one hand, almost everyone referenced a similar institutional, linear archive—one that is rooted in colonial history, that “has capitalist value systems overlaid on [it],” that is full of “dead” things, that is decontextualized, and that only “archivists and scholars [... with] some kind of educational credentials” know how to use.²³ This is the archive that we invoke when we speak of unsettling.

On the other hand, the conversations we had offered many alternative ideas of what archives can be. Environmental Performance Agency agents describe urban landscapes and human collectives as archives; DTP activists characterize their actions as archives and invoke the decolonial counterarchive which reinserts histories that the institutional archive has sought to erase or neutralize. Members of Mobile Print Power speak of their artwork, which comes out of participatory public events, as a kind of archives. For the creators of the Next Epoch Seed Library, who collect, document, and disseminate seeds from urban weed species, their whole project is a form of archiving.

What is clear from these conversations is that even as we share a conception of what the archive is, there is also a porousness in terms of how an archive might change in relation to the material it houses, the people who use it, and the culture in which it is situated. The work of transforming archives—of undoing the conception of the archive against which other archives are measured—is deep and difficult. Marz Saffore of DTP notes: “there’s so much with archives, the history of archives, and the colonial roots of classification. . . movement based material can get stranded in history and I wonder how that can not be the case.”²⁴ The idea that movement material can get “stranded” or lost if it isn’t archived and also (or perhaps especially) *if it is archived* is one that many archivists should find unsettling and should use, like a torque, to begin to disrupt the fraught colonial, racist, and classist legacy of archives.²⁵

There is real material tension here and there are real stakes. The process of unsettling the archive involves us and implicates

us. This is not just theoretical work; it is personal but it is not about introspection or guilt; and it is not static or solitary. Indigenous activist Sikowis reminds us that decolonization is a process that we need to take on together: “it isn’t just about Indigenous people taking a stand, it’s also about white people recognizing the hurt that white supremacy creates.”²⁶ In a discussion about the legacy of cultural appropriation and theft of indigenous artifacts, Sikowis also points to the ways that institutions can tokenize and exploit the communities whose materials they collect.

We reread our conversation with Sikowis in late August 2020 after we heard about the cancelled Fall 2020 Whitney Museum exhibit *Collective Actions: Artist Interventions In a Time of Change*, which the museum characterized as a response to the “pandemic, structural racism, and demands for social and racial justice” and which sought to feature hastily collected and dishonestly acquired work by undercompensated and misattributed Black artists.²⁷ When we learned that the Whitney Museum used their special collections to circumvent their own curatorial and appraisal processes and attempted to profit off of the work and cultural experiences of Black artists, we thought immediately of the DTP banner *They Want the Art, Not the People*, hanging less than one year earlier over an occupied Whitney Museum Gallery during the Nine Weeks of Art and Action.²⁸

To what extent have institutional policies and procedures within archives historically wanted the collections, not the people? How can we reconcile tensions between what activists hope archives can do to reactivate and amplify the material they create within archival spaces that have complex histories and material limitations? What do conversations about counterarchives, social movement organizing practices, and material culture offer to archival spaces, not just as a counterpoint but as a path forward?

22. Ed Hedemann, War Resisters League (see chapter 10)

23. Jess Epstein, Mobile Print Power (chapter 5); Catherine Tedford (see chapter 11); Bev Grant (see chapter 7)

24. Marz Saffore, Decolonize This Place (see chapter 2)

25. The literature on histories of colonialism, racism, and classism in archives is extensive; as one starting point, see Mario Ramirez, “Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative,” *American Archivist* 79, no. 2 (2015).

26. Sikowis (see chapter 12)

27. Valentina Di Liscia and Hakim Bishara, “Whitney Museum Cancels Show After Artists Denounce Acquisition Process, Citing Exploitation,” *Hyperallergic*, August 25, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/584340/whitney-museum-black-lives-matter-covid-19-exhibition-canceled/>.

28. Decolonize This Place (see chapter 2)

IV. Inside the Archive

Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering.²⁹

For this book, we set out to speak with activists who are creating the kinds of social movement materials that increasingly end up in archives.³⁰ These conversations offer a glimpse of what people involved in material production, who all have different cultural associations with and experiences in archives, imagine archives could be. Creating space to reimagine archives by bringing in perspectives of non-archivists and having critical conversations unencumbered by concerns about institutional bureaucracy, austerity, and labor is valuable. These conversations have the potential to change the way archival critique happens, who contributes to those conversations, and who has access to them.

However, we recognize that the imagined archive that emerges from the conversations in this book is full of contradictions and that, when considered in relation to what actually happens (or even feels possible) in most archives, it produces tension rather than solutions. Our goal with this project is not just to reveal that tension, but to provide inspiration for reimagining archives and archival work.

We thought that some foundation could be laid for responding to the conversations and desires expressed by activists in the following chapters by speaking with a few archivists who are currently (and thoughtfully) working with social movement materials like those described in this book. Their perspectives on social movement archiving and on the contradictions and challenges involved in doing this work are important because they provide us with a framework for how to contend with the imagined archive and for how to read and digest the chapters in this book.

A global pandemic diminished our plan to visit archivists far beyond the New York City area, but we are indebted to those we were still able to speak with at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Swarthmore Peace Collection, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. It is notable that these are different kinds

of archival spaces but they should not be read as representative of archival types. Rather, we think that the specific concerns, histories, and practices introduced by the archivists we spoke to are significant because they are, like the material each archive houses, particular and complex. While the issues raised in these conversations—about people, labor, funding, access policies, and relationships with the communities represented in archival collections—speak to common concerns among archival professionals, it is clear that each archive is, to some extent, an uncommon and unreplicable space.

Archives can reconcile their priorities with the needs of the communities who use them and contribute to them.

Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz at the Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA), an all volunteer collectively-run space in Brooklyn, described LHA's carefully considered funding and archival practices that reflect community priorities and ensure that LHA volunteers and collection donors, not external funders, dictate archival priorities. Like many of the feminist collectives whose materials they house, work at LHA is guided by consensus-based decision-making processes. As a counterinstitutional space that centers the community whose materials are in the archive ("the archive is the community," Smith-Cruz noted), there are usage restrictions on some collections. LHA donors often maintain an ongoing relationship with the archive and play an active role in defining access policies for their materials and contextualizing work they donate. Materials at LHA are organized by type to facilitate browsing; visitors can access the space anonymously and don't need an appointment or credentials; books and unpublished works are organized by first name to disrupt patrilinear naming conventions.

Archives can be transparent about their role and their practices.

Negotiating and defining archival practices and priorities is often a hidden part of the labor that archivists undertake and one that is complicated, even in an autonomous space like LHA. Smith-Cruz spoke about the different motivations that people have for archiving their materials (narrative correction, love, the

29. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 144.

30. Many archives and other cultural heritage collections have begun focusing collection efforts on activist material from movements including Occupy Wall Street and The Women's March. See Ashley Stull Meyers, "'Signs of the Times,'" *Art Practical*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.artpractical.com/feature/signs-of-the-times/>; and Cristian Salazar and Randy Herschaft, "Occupy Wall Street: Major Museums And Organizations Collect Materials Produced By Occupy

Movement," *Huffington Post*, December 24, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/occupy-wall-street-museums-organizations_n_1168893?ref=new-york&ir=New+York.

31. War Resisters League (see chapter 10)

need for documentation) and misconceptions that some donors have about what an archive can do. Sometimes there is a lack of acknowledgement of the “labor of attention” that goes into archival work, or donors expect the archive to amplify their work or their name. Smith-Cruz emphasized the importance of transparency in terms of establishing: what the role of the archive is, who participates in archival labor, what donors should expect when they hand over materials, and who the archive is for.

At the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, part of the sprawling New York Public Library system, Digital Archivist Zakiya Collier also discussed the role of the archive in amplifying material and acknowledged the way that institutional visibility and institutional resources make collections more visible and draw attention to movements that were previously overlooked. Collier reflected on how archiving materials in a space as visible as the Schomburg can raise privacy concerns for material creators, whose association with radical documents might make them vulnerable to online harassment or jeopardize their employment.

Collier has spent a lot of time thinking about how to overcome the access barriers that large institutional spaces present, specifically for radical communities of color. Institutional surveillance, processing backlogs, and a reliance on legacy archival processes that are not always intuitive make it harder for people to access physical collections. And with digital archiving, lack of intuitive search interfaces and reliance on third party software means that technology isn’t always ideal to ensure collections are findable and usable.

Archives can allow the materials they collect to shift their practices.

Zakiya Collier explained how her work with counterinstitutional material within the Schomburg Center has prompted her to create new practices for connecting with the creators of material collected as part of digital archiving projects. Collier works on the #SchomburgSyllabus project, an initiative to collect contemporary syllabi about Black experience and connect this material to traditional archival collections related to self-education initiatives within Black communities. She reflected on how archives can connect

with movements to ensure that archival language reflects “how the people in this movement would describe things.” Collier has created templates for reaching out to creators of this digital content to notify them about inclusion of their material in this project, with an opt-out clause, noting, “informed consent is important.”

Archives can (and must) negotiate change.

Many activists in this book spoke of digital archives as an optimal way to archive movement materials and ensure broad access. While social movement material can be made more usable through the creation of virtual exhibitions and public facing guides, this labor needs to be balanced with the significant labor of customizing and managing digital platforms and developing infrastructure to preserve materials for the long term. The staff at the Swarthmore Peace Collection talked about their own struggles to archive born digital and digitized materials when this work comes at the expense of other intellectual labor. Some of the Peace Collection archivists also talked about how their own jobs had changed over time to reflect changes in their collection: archivists must continually learn new skills and reorient their work. They must balance institutional expectations, donor relationships, and user needs all while maintaining fidelity to material agency and social movement contexts.

Scarcity and precarity are issues that archives share with social movements.

All of the archivists we spoke to talked about capacity. They referenced labor limitations, funding shortages, and processing backlogs as ongoing challenges. Zakiya Collier shared thoughts on archives, labor, and funding that were echoed by the staff at the Swarthmore Peace Collection: grant funding in archives restricts the possibilities of what can be collected and cared for, especially with regards to digital collections and current issues. Grants restrict the longevity of support and ultimately the ability to maintain long term relationships between an archive and the community whose history it holds record of.

Transparency with donors about funding, processing backlogs, and digitization priorities are important but may not be part of

institutional practices even if, as Collier noted, movement activists would likely understand and identify with the funding and labor limitations that archives face. Not only is there often a gap between what activists hope will happen when their material is archived, and what does, in most instances, actually happen; there are also gaps between what many archivists would *like* to do, and what is possible within the constraints of the institutions they work in.

Archivists and activists can learn together and from each other.

Reflecting back on our conversations with activists, a few of them echo the concerns of archivists we spoke with. They acknowledge systemic underfunding, lack of labor capacity, and gaps in knowledge about activist histories (particularly given the gaps in the archival record) as potential impediments to archiving movement collections. They also reference the problematic colonial history of archives and gaps in knowledge about archival practices as one of the reasons that many activists don't consider archiving their work.

Peace activist Linda M. Thurston, who has worked closely with archivists and curators at Swarthmore for years on the transfer of materials from the War Resisters League to the Peace Collection, describes how little most activists know about archival training: "I don't know what library science degrees teach. We're doing peace movement activism. Maybe someone's doing work on unions. What does the archivist know about unions or peace movements?"³¹

Thurston and other activists wish they had more knowledge about archival best practices and institutional processes. Betsy Yoon, a member of the Nodutdol collective and a trained librarian, notes that they would benefit from "a grassroots resource for organizations like us who [don't] necessarily have the capacity to hire an outside archivist but who have material that would benefit from archiving."³² Filmmaker Fivel Rothberg similarly indicates, "it would be amazing if disenfranchised folks were given the tools to describe the material they are creating or the movements they're involved in."³³

* * *

When we began this project, we sat down to write the questions we thought we wanted to ask: questions arising from our work in mainstream archives, in community archives, and in activist spaces; and from our research into other community archiving projects. But, in return for our carefully crafted questions, we received many more.

Fivel Rothberg, who conducts archival research for his filmmaking, notes, "not only is there a challenge in terms of archiving what gets made by social movements, but also it's challenging to get access to archives, and that needs to change. Why isn't it easier?"³⁴ Archivist Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz asks potential donors to LHA, "what is your archiving intention?" Media activist and educator Daniel Kim asks, how can we "make [our materials] accessible to people who want to be a part of this movement and this work?"³⁵ Activist Nitasha Dillhon wonders, "how can archives also be political accomplices?"³⁶

This book does not have the answers. In fact, the conversations here often offer contradictory suggestions. We hope, then, that this book will complicate the perspectives and assumptions we bring to archival conversations and preserve, in ways that are both illuminating and fraught, some of the paradoxes and challenges that archives and archivists grapple with.

We learned so much from the activists and archivists who made time to speak to us about these issues. Most of all, we learned how to ask better questions. We imagine that, as you read, you'll spot questions that we didn't think to ask. We invite you to read this book as a way to consider: the questions you might ask of the communities whose history you are working to archive; the questions introduced by the materials you collect; and finally, the questions you ask yourself about why you archive.

32. Nodutdol (see chapter 8)
33. Fivel Rothberg (see chapter 6)

34. Fivel Rothberg (see chapter 6)
35. Nodotdul (see chapter 8)
36. Decolonize This Place (see chapter 2)