MARIANNE HIRSCH

Feminist Archives of Possibility

This is my fantasy.

It's 2027 and we are nearing the end of the second term of Michelle Obama's presidency. We are also nearing the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Pembroke Center's Feminist Theory Archives, founded in 2003. Women, gender, and sexuality studies is a thriving multidisciplinary academic field, undergraduate and graduate, housed in the university's central humanities building. It shares a floor with cognate disciplines such as African American, Indigenous, ethnic, and environmental studies, among others, and it draws on faculty from across the university as well as on artists and activists from across the globe. A thriving research center down the hall hosts working groups that examine the dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, and power throughout history and across the globe—imagining alternative epistemological, psychological, and social structures for the future.

One of my former students, now a tenured professor, has secured a grant from the Pembroke Feminist Theory Archives to teach the required undergraduate/graduate feminist theory course using the archives as a basis for the course syllabus and a site for student projects. Let us call her

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Susan. Following a broad national call to create materials and pedagogies for the transnational study of women's histories, the Pembroke Center has initiated a collaboration with feminist centers and archives in other parts of the world, linking documents and collections online. One of the requirements for Susan's course is that it take advantage of these transnational efforts, and thus she looks forward to working with colleagues at feminist centers in Turkey, Hungary, Palestine, China, South Africa, and Chile, all in network connection with Pembroke. Students located at these different centers will be able to learn together, exchanging materials, projects, and analyses. Innovations in virtual reality enhance embodied collaborations with students and faculty at teaching sites linked across continents in a virtual classroom.

Another goal stipulated by the grant is for the course not only to use the archives but to reflect on the archive as an epistemological structure that produces the very history it is archiving. Feminists, along with other critical scholars, have argued that if we want to make space for alternative forms of collection and consignation, for shifts in the logics of intelligibility and knowability, we need to question the very structure and conception of archives and the ways in which they institutionalize knowledge. We need to redefine what constitutes an event or a life worthy of being remembered and transmitted to the future, thus creating the opening for countermemories and for previously forgotten or ignored narratives, narratives that are potentially disruptive or subversive. The Pembroke Center Feminist Theory Archive emerges from this critical view of the archive as an official structure of knowledge, but of course as an *archive* it has also acquired its own authorizing power. Its transnational expansion of the 2020s is but the latest step in the ongoing effort to examine its own presuppositions. Looking toward the archive's twenty-fifth anniversary, it seems worth asking, again: How do feminist archives, and feminist theory archives, in particular, shift our structures of knowledge and intelligibility? What kind of past might be produced if the archive were connected to other sites of theory production across the globe? Courses such as Susan's promise some fresh answers and new possibilities.

As I imagine Susan's course preparation, her syllabus and assignments, however, I wonder: What will her students have learned by the end of the semester? How will they remember my/our generation of feminist theorists? What does the archive reveal and what does it conceal about the genealogy (or the genealogies) of what we are presently calling *feminist theory*—a formation specifically of second-wave feminism? And

how do particular archival practices enhance the generation and transmission of this knowledge and the imagining of new feminist theoretical futures?

Luckily for Susan, the Feminist Theory Archives are now all online, easily searchable. But as she begins to research her course, she realizes she keenly wants her students to engage with the materiality of the objects and papers in the archive, to inhale, as historian Carolyn Steedman puts it, "the dust of others, and of other times" (Steedman 17). Innovations in haptics enable such a multisensory engagement, even without travel.

But Susan is still a product of the twentieth century, and, as she begins to research the papers of Naomi Schor, the Feminist Theory Archive's inaugural collection, she is eager to go through the boxes herself. She wishes literally, rather than virtually, to touch the young scholar's notebook and see the handwriting inside it so as to better imagine the girl who would become an important theorist of French women's writing and of the detail. The rich texture of the materials convinces her to begin her own part of the course with Schor and with one object in particular, an object that she hopes will open up the potentialities and the limits of archives for her students. She zeroes in on the folder that contains notes for a 1994 course on French feminism: there is a course description, a page of handwritten notes that were, most likely, the basis of the typed description, and then, two green Post-it notes, hard to read but transcribed by the archivist:

> *depression today [disappearance of women and literature] I write as someone in mourning, which I hope will not be taken as reactionary perspective. I loved the moment of feminist criticism in which the search for specificity was everything. But specificity is a dead concept I mourn early feminism, I mourn the passage of [fictions?] even as I know they are neither complete nor*

Susan loves the idea of starting with these Post-it notes, afterthoughts that remain unfinished but that express mourning and regret for what, in 1994, already seemed lost. But what exactly did Schor mourn? What was the unreadable word "[fictions?]"? How might she have finished the sentence? What does the Post-it add to the course description and to the knowledge the archive transmits? Why is she worried about seeming reactionary? Can the archive slow, or counteract, the passage of whatever Schor was mourning—the passage of time, of lives, of ideas—by transferring the past into the future, however partially and imperfectly? And how does this note about mourning a certain feminism signal the construction of the archive—and

particularly this archive—as a space of mourning? What are the implications of placing feminist theory under the sign of mourning?

These might be good questions to raise in class discussion, especially in relation to some of Schor's published work on the detail that Susan also plans to assign. In Schor's book *Reading in Detail*, the detail is coded as feminine and this notion of the feminine as itself a product of a certain moment in feminist theory, and its complications later, with different theorizations of trans* sexualities, promise to offer opportunities for a discussion of history and genealogy. And isn't that what an archive is, a series of details? Details open up the past, even as they threaten to overwhelm us with minutiae that obscure larger meanings. Or are those larger analyses precisely in the fragmentary and the small, in the resistance to monumental structures and stable meanings? We might think of these details, or fragmentary Post-its, again in feminist terms, as "points of memory" (Hirsch and Spitzer, "What's" 61–63). Following the theorist Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum*, points of memory can be seen as points of intersection between past and present that can interpellate those of us who seek to know. A point is small, conveying the fragmentariness of the vestiges of the past that come down to us in the present. Details, points of memory, can produce piercing insights that traverse temporal, spatial, and experiential divides. As points multiply, they can convey the overlay of different temporalities and interpretive frames, resisting straightforward readings or any lure of authenticity. Susan will introduce some of these ideas through Schor's Post-its and the affects of nostalgia and mourning that they evoke but that, in their opacity, they also refuse.

Delving deeper into the Schor papers, Susan finds, first of all, the evolution of a scholar coming to feminism in the 1960s and '70s. Is this a linear story? How did the scholarly and analytic questions evolve and who shaped them? What institutional contexts facilitated or impeded this scholarly evolution? What were the pushes and pulls, the obstacles and opportunities, the balance between life and work? This last issue seems urgent: feminist lives continue to be challenging, even in the late 2020s.

These questions convince her to ask each student to choose one theorist to focus on for the semester, tracing the growth of a career in the context of published work, institutional affiliations, and evolving scholarly trends amid shifting political climates. They would begin, of course, by tracing the theorist's idea of feminist theory, the central questions the work addresses within specific fields, the work's contribution to an ongoing set of questions about the workings of gender, sexuality, difference, and power.

But she also worries about how the boundaries of this particular archive would delimit the students' choices of theorists to study, and she decides to make this process of selection a topic of discussion and debate. How can their choices be made inclusive of different feminisms? Will they need to go beyond this archive so that generations of feminist theorists of color are fully represented? And where will they find these papers? This will be one of the crucial tasks of the course.

How wonderful, once the choices are made, will it be to have research and reading notes and earlier versions of articles and books, to peruse correspondence with publishers, to gain insight into the revision process. Graduate students, particularly, can learn what it takes to put a book together and to move from one project to the next, often reconsidering fundamental assumptions. They can trace how some of these challenges have remained constant and how others have evolved over the decades. On the basis of course syllabi and teaching files, they can see how teaching, research, and writing intersect and how students contribute to our scholarship. They can see how long it can take to develop an idea and to nurture it through publication. And they can appreciate the impact that social difference among feminists has had on the institutional barriers they have had to face.

At the same time, they can also study the collecting practices of these scholars. Collecting is about the future, a future when we ourselves, or others after us, will want to look back on the past, placing it into a chain of continuity, measuring change and innovation. When did feminist theorists begin to see themselves as part of an emerging field? When did they begin to archive their scholarly, pedagogical, and administrative activities? How organized, how haphazard is a given theorist's collection? How, Susan will ask her students, do the material practices of collecting inform the analyses and the narratives we can build about feminist theory? How, in fact, did these theorists envision their future and the future of the field they were building? What, besides their published work, students will ask, would they have wanted to transmit to us? Can the archive be read forward rather than backward—for the possibilities these theorists envisioned rather than by way of the retrospective knowledge of some of the successes and of some of the setbacks that define their project in retrospect? When did they begin to realize that they were participating in a revolution that would transform institutions and ways of thinking? And did their collecting practices embody these conceptual transformations? Can the archive reflect this paradigm shift?

In her beautiful book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman suggests that archival remains are encrusted in dust. For

her, dust is a metaphor for "the immutable, obdurate set of beliefs about the material world, past and present [. . .] with which modern history-writing tries to grapple" (ix). Dust, in this sense, restricts the stories that can be told about the past by determining sequences and recognizable plots, beginnings, and endings, thus delimiting explanations. But the dust of the archive, Steedman suggests as well, may also be more yielding and revealing. As the organic by-product of slowly decomposing archival remnants and their unfiltered storage, it confirms, she writes, "a grand circularity of nothing ever, ever going away" (166). It is imperishable matter, waste and debris that does not disappear. And yet, I imagine that hovering in the air—stirred into motion by a breath, a breeze, the vibrations of a sound—amorphous particles of dust might carry much that may yet be unthinkable about the past. Instead of defining and restricting narrative explorations of archival materials, dust can carry enabling elements for multiple resonances and interpretations.[1] Working in the archive, even in the dustless digital archive, Susan hopes that her students will find such open-ended narratives and, indeed, something that may be unknown or as yet unthought, or even unthinkable, about this feminist past, and thus also about feminist futures. How to create this possibility, so that instead of a stable repository, the archive becomes an engine of circulation, a set of acts or practices that mobilize different ways of thinking and are mobilized by them. Instead of valuing authenticity or legitimacy, Susan wants her class to look at the archive as the site of potentiality, provisionality, and contingency, consisting of "dust, data, and traces that will be assembled and reassembled, each time, in different ways, for use in an ever-changing present" (Hirsch and Taylor).

The Schor collection contains more than a record of Naomi Schor's professional work. Susan finds Schor's personal correspondence: her postcards and letters to her mother from abroad, the beautiful envelopes created by her sister, artist Mira Schor, a feminist theorist in her own right. But there are also boxes of personal/professional letters exchanged with colleagues across the United States and Europe, many of whose papers are collected in the Feminist Theory Archive—Alice Jardine, Nancy K. Miller, Karen Newman, and many more. The letters of recommendation files are especially intriguing. Although they are restricted and students will not be able to read the letters themselves, the list of people Schor wrote for might reveal something of the relationships and influences that shaped this community or, better said, these communities. As Susan considers this vast correspondence, along with conference programs and the collected volumes in which Schor's work was published, and as she sees box after box containing

manuscripts and drafts by other feminist theorists that Schor read and commented on, she begins to wonder whether an archive catalogued by individual theorists can give a sense of a community of scholars whose members read each other's work, wrote to and for each other, disagreed and argued with one another, shaping something new and exciting together. She especially wants her students to sense the texture of the collaborative practices that convey Virginia Woolf's point in *A Room of One's Own*, that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (68–69). These lines of influence within and across generations of feminist theorists are certainly present in the Schor papers, though, of course, they are delimited by the institutional contexts Schor was engaged in and the exclusions those institutions practiced. Beyond this, however, to get a sense of how feminists transformed or tried to transform institutions—how they worked together on committees, mentored each other, assumed administrative responsibilities, built academic programs, cowrote or coedited volumes and journals, how they co-organized conferences, colloquia, and speaker series, how they expanded their circles locally, nationally, transnationally, and globally, within and outside academia, how they engaged in activism, how they built research centers like the Pembroke Center—to get a real sense of all that might require a different approach than studying individual theorists who donated their papers to the archive. Of course, individual collections do contain records of some of the collaborative practices that shaped feminist theory. And they also give a sense of the limits of conversation and collaboration—the limited reach of conferences, letters, volumes, and collaborative efforts. But do they also account for the creative conversations and the crushing or enabling disagreements, the conflicts, divisions, and competitions that are part of collaboration and collectivity? Is there an archive of feelings, to use Ann Cvetkovich's phrase, for feminist theory? Susan wants her students to see feminist theory not as a set of teleologically evolving intellectual questions relating to gender, power, and social difference, but as the process of creating the possibilities for these conceptually new questions to emerge. What kinds of institutional contexts enable feminist thinking?

Susan decides to stick with the Schor papers to see where they would lead her in her search for records of community, connectivity, and conceptual revolution. She begins to look at some of Schor's own collaborative work. She comes to a coedited volume on Irigaray, another on difference, coedited with Elizabeth Weed. Then there is Schor's work as coeditor

of *differences* and the volumes to which Schor contributed. Susan stops over one of the first articles Schor published in a feminist-edited journal, the 1981 issue of *Yale French Studies*, *Feminist Readings: French Texts/American Contexts*. Naomi Schor contributed an essay called "Female Paranoia and Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism." This sounds like a promising topic for insights into the archive of feelings of a generation of feminist theorists, Susan thinks.

The issue itself is coedited by seven women: Colette Gaudin, Mary Jean Green, Lynn Higgins, Marianne Hirsch, Vivian Kogan, Claudia Reeder, and Nancy Vickers. As I'm one of these seven, Susan decides to look at the issue more closely and to turn to my papers in the archive to see what more she could find about the process of putting such an issue together in 1981. Sadly, there's a dearth of information besides the issue itself, which is available on JSTOR. In my papers, she finds only one file, labeled "*YFS* rejects." How ironic that the archive contains more on those who were omitted from the issue. Interesting to see the different handwritings on the mimeographed comment sheets attached to each of the five rejected articles, and also the preparatory notes about a meeting at the 1980 Houston MLA conference that resulted in a conversation among a number of American feminist theorists that appears in the issue's introduction. Susan finds more about the process of collaboration in the introduction to the issue itself. The narrative seems quite detailed and revealing: "This is a very unusual issue of *Yale French Studies*," the introduction begins, "in that its guest editor is a seven-headed monster from Dartmouth. Its gender is feminine. Its training is academic, and its orientation for this issue is feminist" (Gaudin et al. 2). The story of the collaboration, of both its attractions and its pitfalls, is spelled out in the section that follows, giving a vivid sense of the interpersonal and institutional contexts that engendered the project. Called "Feminists Reading: Collectivity as Method," the section traces the institutional context of an all-male school that had recently begun to admit women students and to hire female faculty, including in Romance Languages where the seven of us met and worked. It outlines our male senior colleagues' warnings about the risks we were taking in presenting collaborative work for tenure and their assurances that it would not be counted. And it discusses our defiant perseverance. We wrote: "[W]e attempt to challenge the inherently competitive characterization of critical discourse as individual property: rather than allowing ourselves to be pitted against each other, we choose to combine effort, responsibility and recognition" (Gaudin et al. 3). Reading this narrative, Susan believes she can sense the excitement we were feeling from infiltrating the power structures

both by bringing feminism to a traditional journal like *Yale French Studies* and by challenging the tenure system through collaboration. Her impressions are only confirmed when she goes to a chapter on female friendship in my 1997 book *Family Frames* to find a photo documenting the seven-headed monster coediting the introduction and an account of what working in that group had meant to me:

> *We look very earnest in this posed photograph, poring over the typed pages of our manuscript. We don't smile or engage the photographer, nor do we look at one another. Although some of the tensions in the group may already be visible in this picture, I have kept it in my office, always. Much has evolved for the individuals depicted in the photo and for the group as a whole: departures, tenure denials, personal rivalries, continuing friendships. But for me, seeing myself embedded, visually, in this oval-shaped group, working together on a project of great urgency, has remained, in spite of the difficulties, an idealized moment in my professional career, as tenuous and fleeting as the click of the shutter would indicate. (Hirsch,* Family *237–38)*

Departures, tenure denials, personal rivalries: now there's a different story from the introduction, and Susan is intrigued. Searching a bit further, she discovers more clues, particularly an essay by Jane Gallop that discusses the *YFS* 62 issue. In fact, Gallop's "The Monster in the Mirror" is a pretty scathing, if humorous, critique of *YFS* 62. In Gallop's reading, the "seven-headed monster" from Dartmouth is "quite funny: non-human it might be, but nonetheless Ivy League" (48). She continues: "the image of the monster thinly disguises a monstrous narcissism. This reader, for one, recoils from such unseemly self-congratulation. The irony of this irony is that when the editors say they are beautiful, they become ugly" (48).

Gallop's essay is part of a book, *Around 1981,* that does close, and what she calls symptomatic, readings of a number of anthologies of feminist literary criticism and theory published between 1972 and 1987. Through this detailed attention to anthologies as the place in which to trace both the formation of a field and its institutionalization, Gallop can reveal what she calls a kind of "collective unconscious" of a field that is defined by its contradictions (7). She engages in "an act of demystification [. . .] to chip away at certain reigning myths of what has gone on in feminist literary criticism" (7). And indeed, her reading of *YFS* 62 chips away at the myth of collectivity and collaboration that the issue's introduction upholds and that my chapter

in *Family Frames* ever so gently questions. Both in the introduction and in my essay in the *YFS* 62 issue that she quite ingeniously, if painfully (for me a least), reads against each other, she finds the contradictions that define collectivity: the desire to be part of the group and the struggles against its inhibitions and constraints.

Susan goes back to my papers to find out more about *YFS* 62 but there's no record of Gallop's assertion: "In 1979, I received a letter from seven Dartmouth women inviting me to contribute to a feminist issue of *Yale French Studies* they were editing. Jumping at the chance to be published in the top journal in my field, I immediately sent them an abstract on Irigaray and Freud. I never received an answer. This absolute lack of response was, for me, worse than rejection" (54). Now Susan decides to call me, and we plan to get together. She needs to supplement a fragmentary paper trail with oral history, though she has no illusions about the contingencies of personal and, indeed, institutional memory so many decades removed.

In 2027, I'm retired from teaching, happily writing and enjoying the auspicious political times when many of my dreams are finally coming to reality. I have to confess that I'm a bit embarrassed at the mess I handed to Pembroke when I sent my files there on the occasion of my retirement a few years ago. Earlier papers were in file folders and notebooks, but we never found a record of Gallop's submission, I assured Susan, and I also told her that Gallop and I had become friends after we worked through her response to *YFS* 62. Looking for the record of that continued friendship proved difficult, however. I was never able to archive my Facebook page before Facebook disappeared, and the hard disks I donated contained years of Word documents I could myself no longer open. Photos, too, were lost, as I thought I was storing them in the Cloud and thus neglected to download them before the Cloud itself self-destructed.

"You will have to take my word for our friendship," I tell Susan in 2027, "as some of the records of it have succumbed to digital rot. But yes, there's definitely a story here, and it's one you won't find in the archive. Just after our issue was published, we heard, much to our dismay, that Jane Gallop, already a very well-known theorist and brilliant reader of Freud, Lacan, and French feminist theory, was giving a talk about our journal issue in several places. She gave it at Yale, no less! And it was said to be quite the performance. In my own essay in the issue, an essay on Mme. de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* as a mother/daughter story rather than a love triangle, I use a phrase Gallop cheerfully deconstructs. I wrote:

> *To study the relationship between mother and daughter is not to study the relationship between two separate differentiated individuals, but to plunge into a network of complex ties, to attempt to untangle the strands of a double self, a continuous multiple being of monstrous proportions stretched across generations, parts of which try desperately to separate and delineate their own boundaries. ("Mother's" 73)*

"The repetition of the word *monstrous*, the struggle for separation and individuation, the fact that I am the only one of the seven to have an essay in the issue—all this was grist for Gallop's mill. If there is a blind spot in any part of the issue—and how could there not be—she found it and gleefully pointed it out. But there is more: at Yale, and later at several other schools like Brown and Penn, where I was on the podium as a respondent, Jane wore a skirt made of men's ties—as a literalization of 'the network of complex ties' in my essay.

"Well," I tell Susan, "this was the humor of the eighties. But it was incredibly wounding and, we all thought, uncollegial and unsisterly. Of course, none of us remembered that we had failed to respond to her abstract, but be that as it may, we were convinced that she had misread the institutional situation we were in. And this is what I said in my response at the feminist conference at Penn. By exposing us to senior male colleagues at these prestigious institutions, she clearly failed to see the context in which we were working. For her, we had power, we were in the Ivy League, whereas she was teaching in Texas. But in our own eyes, untrained in perceiving privilege, we were incredibly vulnerable. The seven of us were all in the same department, Romance Languages. Two of the seven had battled prejudice and had, deservedly, earned tenure; a third was coming up soon; and the other four were all going to come up in the same year. It was not clear whether there was a quota, but we knew we were in every way competing against each other even as some of us were going to be judged by some of the others. None of this was in the introduction, of course, but it was a palpable undercurrent of our work and of our determination to counteract the noxious effects of a system of competition and what seemed like a zero-sum game. As unexciting as it may sound, in the seventies and eighties the feminist mission was to get tenure for as many women, especially women of color, and as many male faculty of color as possible, so that, once in, we could transform the system from the inside. But often, the obstacles seemed

insurmountable. And one of the obstacles was the way the system divided us against each other.

"There's more to say, of course. Gallop is a smart reader and she found a great deal between the lines. But none of what I am telling you could actually be found in the archive. I can only say this to *you*, because we are good friends; even so many years later, conflict and competition among feminists is difficult to talk about. Why was I the only one who had an essay in the volume? Given feminist process, it was no doubt a mistake for one, or even more than one, of us to be singled out.

"How did we cowrite an introduction in seven voices, folded into one? Again, a lot of discussion, compromise, disappointment, adjustment. The work on *YFS* 62 was amazing, and the result was a great issue, historic, but the process was tough. There's your archive of feelings, Susan."

Susan has videotaped our conversation and asks whether I mind if she puts it on the course website for students to consult. And she suggests that her students could interview the other coeditors of *YFS* 62 and, in fact, Jane Gallop as well as other contributors who are still among us so that her class might, at least in this small way, evaluate the potential of oral history as a supplement to the archive. I tell her I have to think about all this. I worry that my words and image might carry too much truth value or authenticity for the students and that what I consider a story of feminist conflict and institutional critique could be read as a set of nostalgic personal reminiscences. Before leaving, Susan asks—and I detect an ironic smile—whether I'd join Naomi Schor in saying I miss early feminism? What, in fact, had Schor meant by that and what had it meant to me? What did it mean to me now? She adds that she had her students think of this second wave moment as one of white privilege and exclusion. I agree, of course, but I don't know what to say. The visit leaves me anxious.

After retiring from Columbia and sending my papers to Pembroke, I had been eager to be done—to move forward rather than reliving my own feminist past. I'd done a lot of personal writing about painful political histories, my own and that of my parents and grandparents. I'd taught the "Genealogies of Feminism" course in women, gender, and sexuality studies on several occasions, persuaded that early histories are important to recall and preserve. And in some cases, these teaching experiences provided quite personal occasions to reexperience the exhilarating urgency and passion that fueled both the accomplishments and the disagreements and disappointments, the failures, of those years. But now, I wanted to live in what I hoped would be a differently feminist present, to look to the future.

And yet, a lot of my work is based on oral history, and I appreciate its value not just in supplementing more traditional archives but in opening up the emotional life of the past and the contradictions shaping the act of recall. Thinking about Susan's students, I worry that we are not leaving them enough if we restrict the archive to what is on paper, on our hard disks, or even on what we used to call YouTube. I think of all the stories that feminist theorists might share in a series of collected oral histories and about the unexpected connectivities that an expanded transnational oral history archive could reveal. Is not the archive, in Giorgio Agamben's terms, the "system of relations between the unsaid and the said" (145)? Oral history seems an appropriate vehicle to capture not just the unsaid but this very system of relations as well.

Oral history is full of pitfalls, however. Not only do we misremember the past, but we also recall it from the vantage point of our present-day needs and desires. Oral history thus brings the archive into the present, not just through the process of selection and classification but through a form of elaboration. In Paul Connerton's terms, it can add incorporated memories to forms of memory that are inscribed. As I look back at the papers I've donated, I realize how much of what they fail to tell I might want to transmit—not for nostalgic reasons but to flesh out details and fragments, precisely from a privileged viewpoint of retrospection. The archive is not just a site of preservation. It is also a site of desire. How can we ensure that it conveys not just what was, but what Ariella Azoulay calls "potential history"—what might have been?

I suggest to Susan that oral history interviews might be most productive if they focused quite pointedly on specific objects or documents in the archive.[2] I'm thinking, as one possible example, of a "Feminist Theory" course I cotaught at Dartmouth with my colleague Ivy Schweitzer in 1993. The ambitious syllabus I donated to the archive reflects the concerns of the time. Looking back at it, I see the commitment to presenting a diverse and inclusive introduction to theories of gender and sexual difference from Simone de Beauvoir to Judith Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, and Chandra Mohanty, representing divisions among different feminisms both within the United States and between what we were then calling the first and third worlds. But what the syllabus cannot show, and what I'd want to think about in an oral history interview, might be some of the inevitable pitfalls of the identity-based approach to inclusion that dominated that moment. I recall our class discussions as lively and often contentious. On a largely white campus in a glaringly white town in a white state, a campus plagued

by a sexist, racist, and homophobic fraternity culture and a destructive reactionary student publication, the *Dartmouth Review*, feminist students, and especially feminist students of color, were embattled. No syllabus could do justice to their sense of betrayal by the larger society, by the university, by feminism itself. Students wanted to help shape the knowledge they were acquiring. A few weeks into the term, it was a group of Jewish students who came to our office hours to complain. "You are both Jewish feminists," I recall their telling Ivy and me. "Our syllabus has readings about African American, Asian American, Native American, Hispanic feminisms, it spends time on Third World women. We've discussed these histories at length. But where is Jewish or Jewish-American feminism and where are the books and articles that grapple with the androcentrism of Jewish thought? Why are you leaving your own specific identities and thus also ours out of the course, folding them into an undifferentiated whiteness?" We both immediately felt guilty about the omission, though I also remember wondering whether I considered myself a "Jewish feminist" and what that might be. No doubt, these questions led to some fruitful if unfinished discussions about diversity, inclusion, identity.

If that moment stands out as a powerful point of memory out of myriad such moments in nearly fifty years of teaching, it's because that discussion would continue to resonate at the various moments when identity returned, often for very good reasons, in feminist pedagogies. And as it reemerges at various moments, it clearly signals that feminist thinking does not evolve in any linear fashion. This is where a retrospective reflection is useful, thinking about the history of identity politics in feminism, its many returns, the difficulties of working through the privileges and conflicts, and the rare and powerful moments of solidarity and coalition. It would be useful to juxtapose that syllabus and that teaching moment with others where classes worked through differences of identity, privilege, and experience.

What would be gained by collecting small stories such as this one as part of the archive? Perhaps these are ways of harnessing the dust as debris, constructing a history rhizomatically through details that can acquire and then also lose their significance. I'm convinced that we ourselves cannot assess the meaning of our history. But if we want to enhance the parameters of the archives we are addressing to the future, we might want to collect as many different kinds of objects and documents as we can. Oral history has the potential to enlarge and enhance archival documents and images. It can convey the processes and performances of doing theory

as well as the forms of conflict, negotiation, and collaboration. It can outline histories and geographies of collaboration and the challenges of broader transnational feminist work. As the different archival media and materials speak to each other, they can reveal these connectivities and their affective and embodied textures.

Preparing for my meeting with Susan's students now, in 2027, I wonder whether we can liberate the archive from traditional constraining alphabetical, chronological and linear forms of classification. How might it be possible to visualize the archive's points of contact, connection, conflict? The Feminist Theory Archive's upcoming twenty-fifth anniversary in 2028 might offer the occasion to commission an artwork. The feminist artist Andrea Geyer has worked for over a decade to map connections in her ongoing project "Revolt, They Said." Her wall-sized diagrams draw lines among women who contributed to and shaped various museums, art projects, and institutions over time. What would such a diagram connecting the people whose papers are collected in the Pembroke Feminist Theory archive and its international partners look like? Such a work would certainly help me to envision the archive both as a list of holdings and as a web of connections circling within and across time and space. In such a network—we might call it a "network of complex ties"—we might stop and consider different knots and nodules, each a site for the production of feminist theory. These sites could link the past to the future in an archival web of open-ended possibility.

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MARIANNE HIRSCH writes about the transmission of memories of violence across generations, combining feminist theory with memory studies in global perspective. Her recent books include *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012); *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (University of California Press, 2010), coauthored with Leo Spitzer; and *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (Columbia University Press, 2011), coedited with Nancy K. Miller. Hirsch is the William Peterfield Trent Professor of Comparative Literature and Gender Studies at Columbia University and the director of Columbia's Center for the Study of Social Difference. She is a former president of the Modern Language Association of America and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Notes

1 See Hirsch and Spitzer, "Vulnerable Lives," for a related discussion of Steedman on the archive.

2 I am grateful to Brent Edwards for this suggestion, which emerges from his course "Black Radicalism and the Archive."

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