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Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever, Margaret Henderson

Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism

In recent years scholars have begun the work of tracing the history of the Australian women's movement, particularly in its second wave form.¹ As Vera Mackie argues in *Mapping the Women's Movement* (1996), this phase of reflective "stocktaking" is essential if the history of what has been done and achieved is to be passed on (277) and we are to escape the ever-present threat of amnesia or forgetfulness that often troubles those social movements that lack formal structures for the passing down of memory (Rowbotham, 13). But the production of any history of the second wave Australian women's movement, that is, as a political movement and a new social movement – and in particular accounts of the role of activists within that movement – is intimately connected to the movement's archival legacy; in short, the possibilities for writing that history depend on the nature and quality of the records and sources that have been preserved. However, as Deborah Cherry notes, 'what is recorded, preserved, or printed depends on the interest, politics and prejudices of those who control and determine what is of historical value'. For these reasons, she suggests, those who seek to trace the records of women's place in critical social and cultural movements must confront the fact that 'the historical archive is a fissured, fragmentary monument to the past, shaped by historically specific relations between power and knowledge' (6).

In this article we speculate on the limits and possibilities for what we loosely term 'the feminist archive' and the role it might play in forging community memory of the nature, extent, impact and legacy of second wave feminist activism in this country. Our speculations arise out of our experiences when attempting to research and teach the modern Australian women's movement, particularly from a cultural historical or cultural-literary studies perspective when the limitations of the historical record become very clear. It's timely to consider such a project, as pioneering feminists retire and move on from public life and a new generation begin the work of revising and retelling feminist histories, as *Australian Feminist Studies* recognises in its forthcoming Seventies issue (2007). In doing so we recognise the significance of archival sources as one the 'technologies of Western feminist storytelling', a critical issue raised recently by Clare Hemmings (2005, 117) in her analysis of the dominant stories told of the development of Western second wave feminism generally and feminist theory in particular. Hemmings makes the case that critical engagements with historiography are crucial to our capacity to intervene effectively in 'the contested politics of the present over the "truth of the past"' (118).

The productive role of formal and informal records in supporting and fostering collective memory and identity is well-recognised, but at the same time the relationship between communities, memories and record-keeping is increasingly understood as a complex and contingent one. For example, any discussion of archival records must inevitably acknowledge the epistemological pressure that has recently been brought to bear upon the very concept of 'the archive'. Debates both within and beyond the formal realm of professional archival science have challenged the positivist understandings of such repositories as unproblematic storehouses of records that simply 'reflect' a pre-given reality.² There is now widespread recognition that archival records are far from 'inert' (Harris, 136) and the processes of their gathering, selecting, and ordering represent mediating acts: acts that shape and transform the possible meanings of those artefacts and the historical narratives they might sponsor. Jane Taylor encapsulates this point when she questions whether an archive can be understood any longer as simply a place for storing sets of materials or whether it needs to be recognised instead as 'an idea, a conception of what is valuable and how such value should be transmitted across time' (244). Her conclusion — that an archive is 'at once a system of objects, a system of knowledge and a system of exclusion' (246) — points to the profoundly political nature of the archive and challenges many hitherto basic assumptions about 'archival fixity and materiality' (Burton 2). Other critiques of the status of archives and the practices of those who engage with them acknowledge the ways in which archives exist in dynamic relationship not just to the past, but to the present and the future, and that a crucial element in that dynamism is a struggle over meaning and the never innocent reading practices we bring to bear on an archive in its totality, on individual artefacts lodged therein and on the relationship between the two. As Hayes et al observe, 'different meanings are created by different readers who bring diverse reference systems with them' (113). This quality of instability has been captured most insistently by Derrida's assertion that 'if we want to know what [the archive] will have meant, we will only know in times to come' (36).

As we outline below, however, our concerns are not just with the status and treatment of the existing records of the second wave women's movement lodged in public and private collections around the country, but with the larger question of the partial and fragmentary nature of what must be understood as a dispersed 'national collection' or 'feminist archive'. By 'national collection' we refer to the totality of the heritage of the Australian women's movement as it is preserved across the nation in a diverse range of public and private collections. Achille Mbembe rightly notes that 'no archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society' (21), but we must surely be concerned by the fact that significant aspects of a social movement that is a mere four decades old either remain only partially documented and — where it survives — that that documentary heritage has been preserved in an uneven and piecemeal fashion, thereby limiting public and scholarly access to materials that are vitally necessary to contesting the ways in which that movement is recalled, narrated and debated. In the words of Jeanette Allis Bastian, 'without historical documentation [how] can communities build reliable and durable memory' (ix)? How does the current status of our Australian second wave feminist archive constrain the stories we might tell?

The Truth Is Out There – Isn't It?

Our focus is on a broad range of materials which made the culture of the second wave Australian

FURTHER INFORMATION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Bartlett is Senior Lecturer in Women's Studies at the University of Western Australia. She is currently researching the 1983 Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp before it disappears from archived memory.

Maryanne Dever is Director of the Centre for Women's Studies & Gender Research at Monash University. She is currently completing a co-authored study, *The Intimate Archive*, to be published by the National Library in 2008

Margaret Henderson is in Contemporary Studies at the University of Queensland, and has just published *Marking Feminist Times: Remembering the Longest Revolution in Australia* (Bern: Peter Lang) to critical acclaim.

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women's movement (framed by the period 1970 to 1990), rather than on formal organisational records. We adopt this perspective in recognition of the fact that the cultural politics and creative dimension of the women's movement was intrinsic to its modus operandi as a new social movement (Melucci 12), and one of its major achievements (Kaplan 202). Surveying the current state of holdings nationally that relate to the second wave of the Australian women's movement yields some surprising insights into the ways in that movement is currently archived. The extent, location, and range of holdings in public collecting institutions of the artefacts and texts produced by the women's movement varies dramatically according to media and yet there are three recurring characteristics of the extant Australian feminist archive: it is dispersed in location, fragmentary in nature, and those specialist feminist collections that do exist are usually unfunded and/or rely on volunteer labour resulting in holdings that are sometimes uncatalogued, difficult to access and often not well-known beyond local networks.³ While most of the state capital cities in Australia have both public and often a private/volunteer-run collection, regional and rural areas suffer from exclusion from national feminist histories of this period due to these their localised knowledges.

The most extensive holdings are in the realm of print culture, principally books – both fiction and non-fiction – and periodicals. Not surprisingly, the [National Library of Australia](#) — which serves as the national deposit collection — is the major repository for monographs, anthologies, and edited collections produced by and/or relating to the women's movement, although various state libraries and university libraries also have fair collections, and the specialist [Fryer Library](#) (located at the University of Queensland) has impressive holdings of feminist creative writing published by mainstream and feminist Australian presses. Adelaide's [Women's Studies Resource Centre](#) also houses the Adelaide Women's Liberation Archives and boasts a catalogued collection of 20,000 books. The papers of a number of feminist publishing cooperatives and presses have also made their way in recent years into public collections. For example, the Women's Redress Press papers are now held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney and the Sybylla Press papers at the State Library of Victoria, while the papers of Sisters Publishing along with those of the Sugar and Snails children's literature publishers (originally Women's Movement Children's Literature Co-operative) and McPhee Gribble Publishing are held at the University of Melbourne. The Lespar Library of Women's Liberation housed in the GALAWA collection (Gay & Lesbian Archives of Western Australia) at Murdoch University holds some 3,000 book titles all in catalogued order, but the collection is difficult to access and has no searchable on-line presence, only a hard copy catalogue dating from the 1980s.⁴ This means a potentially interesting and useful collection is relatively difficult to access and assess.

It is when we turn to periodicals, however, that the fragmentary and dispersed nature of the feminist archive becomes all too apparent. To give a more precise picture of what is held, we have sorted periodicals into newsletters, newspapers, and magazines and journals.⁵ Each category contains a reasonable number of titles (see Table 1 for a summary, and [Table 2](#) for further details), and several titles are available in the one location as complete print runs. For example, full collections of *MeJane* and *Mabel* are held in the [Jessie Street National Women's Library](#). A substantial number of titles, however, are not available as a complete series at the one location (and inter-library loans for periodicals are seldom permitted). Fortunately, if the holdings nationally are reviewed, only a minority of titles are incomplete. However, where gaps exist, it is generally in the first few issues of a publication and these gaps are particularly significant as it is often in these early issues where the 'voice' of the publication is most clearly articulated.

NEWSLETTERS	minimum 15
NEWSPAPERS	6
MAGAZINES AND JOURNALS	17

Table 1: Australian feminist periodical titles by category. Classification is approximate, particularly the division between magazines and journals.

Newsletters of the various metropolitan based women's liberation movements and the Women's Electoral Lobby are well represented at the National Library of Australia, the Jessie Street National Women's Library, and relevant State Libraries, and complete holdings are often available, although again not necessarily in the one location. There is also a number of publications deriving from regional and special focus feminist collectives, such as *Sisters News* (publishing), *Wimminnews* (Canberra), *Sibyl* (Perth), *The Rippling Web: A Womenspirit Link-Up, Women Arise!* (La Trobe Women's Liberation), *Feminist and Gay News: The Dr Duncan Revolution Bookshop*, and the *Women's Art Movement Newsletter*. Similarly, newspaper holdings are in relatively good shape, with complete runs of most of the feminist newspapers being available, including, *MeJane*, *Rouge*, *Girls' Own*, *Vashti's Voice*, *Mabel*, and *Scarlet Woman*. The National Library of Australia and the Jessie Street National Women's Library have particularly strong newspaper collections. The Lespar Library in Western Australia also holds newspapers, journals, magazines, and newsletters from across Australia and from the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany. A wide range of feminist magazines have been preserved, from the Union of Australian Women's (UAW) magazine *Our Women* (1953-1971), through to *Everything: Anarchist Feminist Magazine* (1979-1985), *As If* (the Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminist magazine) (1973), and *Lip: A Feminist Arts Journal* (1976-1984). But these too are scattered across a number of locations, and with notable gaps in holdings. Like mainstream magazines, feminist ones often had short lives, often ceasing publication before they were being systematically collected by institutions.

Once we move away from print culture, however, the holdings are much smaller and, in the case of what might be broadly termed 'material culture', virtually non-existent. First, let us consider the kinds of records that preserve the movement's 'voice', namely, conference proceedings, recorded music and song lyrics, and oral histories. The holdings of conference proceedings are substantial and broad, showing the range of areas around which feminists routinely organised. All the "Women and Labour" conference proceedings are available in multiple sites, as are the "Feminism and Socialism" conference of 1974 and the "Women's Liberation: Getting it Together" conference of 1979.⁶ The 1980s are better represented, including the Socialist-Feminism conferences of 1984 and 1987.⁷

Recorded music and song lyrics form a smaller presence in the national feminist archive. A search on LibrariesAustralia shows two feminist albums, while the National Film and Sound Archive holds the "Women's Liberation Anthem" and recordings of two performances by the women's band, Clitoris.⁸

If we broaden the category to include radio, the picture improves slightly. For instance, the ABC radio archives have a nearly complete set of *Coming Out Show* tapes, but these are not primarily intended for

public use, and hence are not readily accessible.⁹ The Lespar Library holds 150 hours of tapes of Perth radio 6NR's feminist program, *Out of the Gilded Cage* (1976-1981), together with 30 vinyl records of women's songs or groups, including the Ovarian Sisters, held by GALAWA. The omissions are clear: where are the signs of feminist community radio that flourished nationwide? Women's rock and punk bands? Women's cabaret and performance? And women folk singers? (And how are those vinyl discs to be played now?) It is any wonder that people think feminism was no fun.

Oral histories of second wave feminist activists are, at present, the major contributor to the voice of the movement; however, these holdings too are nowhere near as extensive as one might expect. The National Library of Australia has the largest collection, followed by much smaller collections in the Jessie Street National Women's Library and the State Library of South Australia. A very small number of interviews are also held by State Library of Western Australia, Newcastle University Archives and Macquarie University Library. The National Library's collection of around 41 interviews can be divided into two series: a set of interviews recorded by radio station 2XX in the 1977 (fifteen interviews), and a much larger set from the early 1990s on (with a small number of interviews recorded during the 1980s). Most of the later interviews have been transcribed and many of the interviewees are relatively high profile figures, for instance, Sara Dowse, Anne Summers, and Ann Curthoys, although lesser known identities are also included. The Jessie Street National Women's Library and the State Library of South Australia collections have fewer high profile feminists as subjects of their interviews. A further set of interviews with women activists — some 24 hours in total — compiled in 1996 as part of ARC funded research project on the history of the Australian women's movement since 1967 are held in the Mortlock Library within the State Library of South Australia.¹⁰ Given the comparatively 'thin' nature of the feminist voices preserved thus far, whether in music or reminiscence, and the importance of voice in conveying emotion, contradiction, political rhetoric, pleasure, and disagreement, the expansion of the aural record should be a priority.

When we change media, moving from sound to the visual (for our purposes, photographs, cartoons, and posters), the gaps are even more pronounced. Considering the number of feminist photographers, artists, graphic designers, and screen printers; the use of humour by activists; and the theatrical strategies and colourful nature of the women's movement, this is a particularly curious lack. Australian feminist cartoons and comics are formally represented by four cartoon books, one comic, three postcards, eighty Judy Horacek cartoons and two of her prints, and three individual cartoons. Most of these are held by the National Library. Photographs are similarly under-represented with [PictureAustralia](#)'s catalogue — which covers all state libraries, the National Library, specialist and university libraries, and some government libraries — showing a total of twenty photographs and two collections relating to second wave feminism (and out of that twenty, quite a few are photographs of the one event — the Sydney International Women's Day rally in 1972). While it is true that not all libraries have digitised their full photographic collections so that they are searchable through [PictureAustralia](#),¹¹ in terms of what is currently publicly accessible, it is a slim record indeed. Posters are the most prominent visual texts currently available. The Jessie Street National Women's Library has probably the largest collection, although theirs is not catalogued and it is therefore extremely difficult to make judgements as to the nature, quality and specificity of the holdings.¹² According to publicly accessible on-line catalogues, the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of Victoria have the next biggest holdings (numbering around forty), while the Women's Library, the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives, and the National Library of Australia hold some feminist ephemera, including posters and photographs. Regardless, visual culture and visual documentary evidence of the Australian women's movement are marginal presences in public collecting institutions. And yet, as we suggest with respect to the traces of feminist musical engagement, the material is almost certainly out there, but has not yet made it into the archives. Our concern is that without a coordinated national effort to collect it, those surviving materials — fragile and ephemeral as they are — may yet be lost.

Our final category, that of the material culture of the women's movement, is such a minor feature in Australian museums and libraries that it could be said to scarcely exist which begs the question of where material culture currently features in the national story of the second wave. Badges and leaflets can be found in a few scattered locations. The best holdings, not surprisingly, are found in the specialist collections — the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives (held by the University of Melbourne Archives) has, for instance, a banner, t-shirts, and collective logbooks, as does Adelaide's Women's Studies Resource Centre and Perth's Lespar Library of Women's Liberation but you have to go there to find out about them. How strange that a movement which aimed at a total transformation of life (which meant, for better or for worse, t-shirts, sponges, tea towels, op shop clothing, second hand lounges, homemade yoghurt and group households), and which was accused of later retreating into lifestyleism, appears to have so little of its material culture lodged in museums and other repositories. Judging the full extent of holdings in material culture is further complicated by the fact that our museums, archives and libraries do not appear to use consistent keywords in cataloguing material associated with the Australian women's movement which frustrates efforts to identify material through their otherwise impressive on-line search facilities. Searching the catalogue of a single institution can mean performing multiple searches under terms such as 'women's liberation', 'feminism', 'equality' and 'women's movement'. [The Powerhouse Museum](#), for example, has a small collection of badges associated with various formal and informal Australian feminist political campaigns. Searching their database under 'feminism' produces only three hits; however, on further searching similar items can be found listed under 'women's issues', 'contraception', 'abortion', 'political badges', and 'badges, social comment'.¹³ This suggests that excellent initiatives such as Federated Open Search Project of the [Collections Australia Network](#) could easily fail to identify relevant material catalogued under alternative keywords. These issues, together with the seeming paucity of holdings of items of material culture limits the ways in which we might think about the materiality of the movement, about the nature of 'feminist object-hood', as well as about the relationship between activism, material culture and other documentary forms for the writing/interpreting of the second wave. It also limits our capacity to think about how a study of material culture might enlarge our historical understandings of second wave activism in Australia.

Looked at through the prism of national holdings, we have a women's movement preserved often in relatively inaccessible fragments, not always professionally catalogued and conserved, and offering a somewhat two-dimensional record: in the printed word, organisational records, some voices, and only a few pictures, photographs, and objects. Such an archive could never be accused of subscribing to a metaphysics of presence or to a monumental form of history. The [Australian Women's Archives Project](#) (AWAP) is a visionary project that attempts to reduce the effects of this fragmentation by listing and providing links to repositories that demonstrate the contribution women and their organisations have made to Australia. Indeed, one of its key goals is the encouraging Australian women and their organisations to preserve their records and to make them more accessible to scholars and the general public. The searchable-on-line register of the AWAP certainly provides a valuable source of biographical

data about Australian women, their organisations and their records. Ironically, however, as the AWAP website acknowledges [14](#) the on-line register is not comprehensive and, as we argue here, its reach is necessarily limited for our purposes here by the fact that too many records and artefacts concerning the Australian second wave activism remain in private (and thus fragile) spaces, rather than public collections. The potential and the hazards associated with such private holdings is demonstrated in a recent anecdotal account of two feminist activists at the point of retirement: one donated her collection of books and papers to a library which has since catalogued and made them available, and the other donated hers to a local charity and an unknown fate! As activists move house, shift direction, or as cardboard boxes in garages begin to rot, material artefacts of second-wave activists are in danger of being thrown into the wheelie bin rather than into the more formal collection repositories where we would like to see them placed.

What's Feminist About an Archive?

'Memory, like history, is rooted in archives' claim Schwartz and Cook (18), and as records they 'wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies' (2). In thinking about the making of a 'national' archive of Australian feminism, what sort of shape and form might we anticipate? What aspects of the collective memory of feminism can be included and how? Given the women's movement's position as a major political and social force in recent Australian history (Lake 16), what role should national cultural institutions, such as the National Museum of Australia, play in the collection and preservation of women's movement history? Should we make claims upon the state to support the feminist archive, as the Australian women's movement did in many other fields such as refuges, health centres, and the femocracy? How would such collections speak to each other, across those divisions between mothers and non-mothers, lesbians and straight, middle and working class, hirsute and clean shaven? A feminist archive must surely be a 'site for contestation of power, memory, and identity', something Schwartz and Cook perceive to be all too often elided from dominant perceptions of archives as value-free and objective collections. There must be scandal, conflict, and polyphony to capture the sheer diversity of feminist thought, cultural production and activism. And the many stories and competing versions must be allowed to buttress each other so that the tension between them demonstrates the vitality of the movement. As Harris suggests, 'far from constituting a solid structure around which imagination can play, [the archival record] is itself the stuff of imagination' (151).

Models of collage or montage might be useful, or a palimpsest that superimposes layers of meaning three-dimensionally. A cyborgian model of weblinks might also be functionally effective, given the early women's movement chant about being webs and weavers (and male-devouring sexual spiders), as well as the mythical tarantella and its dance. Dance emerges constantly in accounts of 1970s and 80s activism, through women's dances, spiral dances, desert dances, and seems an apt metaphor for that embodied movement of politics and play in its many forms. The intricacies of myth also offer a model of contested family relations, given the names of journals like *Hecate* and *Lilith* which remain active today (and perhaps *Mabel* and *Scarlet Woman* who have fallen by the wayside).

Possibly following the 1980s debates around the shape a feminist novel might take, which defies the rational, linear, progressive narrative of gradual climax and resolution on the grounds that is patterned on male (sexual) pleasure, [15](#) maybe a feminist archive would take pleasure in an amorphous polysemy, as a collection of voices that are ludic rather than lucid. Teresa Ebert names ludic feminism as a form of postmodern politics that is 'a cultural politics: it is a discursive practice that seeks open access to the free play of signification in order to dissemble the dominant cultural policy (totality) which tries to restrict and stabilize meanings' (147). There must be the kind of riotous irreverence and passion of early dissent, the wit of women cartooning and making comedy, and the sheer power of producing a publication even on the gestetner, especially on a gestetner.

The representation of feminism has rarely been in the hands of feminists since the 1990s (see Natasha Campo's work). Media discourses of feminism have solidified into the successes of liberal legislation and language changes or the seriousness of stern ideologues positioned as 'other' to the mainstream reading public. A national archive then will actively shape the kinds of memories and historical resources available to write and represent feminism historically. The production of new knowledge and discourses about feminism will be in reference to a national archive –not necessarily imagined as a building in Canberra — but a diverse, potentially dispersed, but comprehensive collection of the country's feminist activism that is catalogued, accessible, reflective and known. In this sense, it will comprise an archive of collected memories of feminists and will shape the collective memory of the nation: 'they are the basis for and validation of the stories we tell ourselves, the story-telling narratives that give cohesion and meaning to individuals, groups, societies' (Schwartz & Cook 13). Writing about such collections may well be a critical step in making existing collections 'national' and in contesting the shifting and competing meanings that attach to the term 'feminism' in our national context.

Materials: what to collect

- Overalls
- Flyers
- Posters
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Gestetner ink
- Shopping lists
- Poetry
- Letters
- Quilts
- Dissent
- Sponges
- Rosters
- Voices on tape
- Laughter

Magarey has argued that the creativity generated by the women's movement is seldom recognised even though it served such a vital function in disrupting the dominant culture and producing an alternative women's culture (2004). And it was so much fun. Collecting remnants of such a cultural renaissance, as she calls it, would be as important as the ephemera of everyday life that constituted feminist culture. Grimshaw notes her pleasure at finding local regional archives replete with baby books, school reports,

useful recipes, and household accounts, which enabled her study of families in colonial Australia to 'render everyday life in terms of cultural understandings relevant to the period, rather than simply within the meta-narratives of historical sociologists' (17).

Chords and lyrics
 Scripts
 Desire
 Radio programmes
 Film
 Photographs
 Friendship
 Banners
 Telegrams
 Consensus Decisions
 Newspaper clippings
 Anger
 Power
 Lust
 Memories

How are memories extracted and then committed to a shared language? Is language enough? Writing about the 1983 women's peace camp at the Pine Gap US military installation, Margaret Somerville draws on Frigga Haug's idea of memory work to assemble stories about this landmark place and time in her personal history. She has an assortment of photographs, the sorts archivists find themselves with, and uses them as mnemonic devices to prompt the outpouring of words. Images are potent devices for remembering. As strangers to the scene of archival images we need narratives to make sense of them but as participants there is the potential for multiple narratives to emerge from such images. Archival photographic collections need narratives to accompany them, but the multiple layers of meaning and remembrance in any photograph (what Alan Sekula (352) refers to as the 'messy contingency of the photograph') can be expected to exceed narrative recollection. Interestingly, Somerville remembers the separation involved in documenting:

On the last day I decided to take the risk of separating myself out from the dancing just enough to record some of it ... I felt distanced and sad, but was leaving anyway and it would be my only record. It was almost as if the camera had to take the photographs itself, I had to be so quick and surreptitious. The photographs are shonky, taken from strange angles, depending on where I am sitting ... (23)

Somerville describes her photographs as quick, amateur, distanced and almost stolen images. In her remembrance of taking the photographs in order to give material substance to her personal involvement she mourns the fact that she has to disengage in order to document, as Sontag also reminds us. She continually rearranges them in order to make meaning of the event, and finds herself responding viscerally to them – remembering the heat, the emotion, and other family photos. Moreover, in bringing the photographic record into the feminist archive, we must be mindful not to lose sight of who created individual images and also their 'history of ownership over time': information that is critical to 'understanding the ongoing and shifting meanings which surround photographs' (Hayes et al, 117).

But not everyone has a camera. Somerville notes that there are no photographs of Aboriginal women in her collection, even though they form such a strong presence in her memory of the event. How are Indigenous women to be represented in any feminist archive? The US has established specific collections of black women's history, like the [Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial Museum](#) and the National Archives for Black Women's History, but in the 1983 event that Somerville remembers - and others like some of the Women and Labour conferences - Indigenous women were pivotal and cannot be relegated to an Indigenous women's corner of the building or the national capital. In her recovery of Australian feminist history through the operations of memory and desire, Susan Magarey suggests that characterising the movement as white and middle class is largely warranted and yet it is more complex than that: oral interviews she accesses demonstrate some of the associations and negotiations with ethnic and Indigenous women, and also retrieve some of the passionate debates remembered between lesbian and straight women. Memories, she suggests, as much as texts, are divided and multiple on the same topic and also shift over time and through various vocabularies of critical language.

Silence
 Fear
 Desperation
 Artwork
 T-shirts
 Grant applications
 Badges
 Addresses
 Special Branch files
 Cassette tapes
 Reel-to-reel
 Drag

Both Magarey and Grimshaw champion oral histories as sources of desire, passion, personal investment but also serendipitous stories and associations. Despite several small collections of oral histories in libraries across the nation, it seems increasingly imperative to collect the voices of an aging pioneer generation. As Magarey notes, a key question for any archival process is negotiating how those feminists 'want to remember feminism themselves, and how they want feminism to be remembered' (10).

We only have to look at the on-line archival collection of the [Chicago Women's Liberation Union Herstory](#) site to see the potential offered by scanning and web-based technology to make the feminist past become alive and accessible. This site makes use of the web-based technologies to offer visitors audio and video memoirs and the opportunity to engage with the musical heritage of the movement. Similarly, "Documents from the Women's Liberation Movement" produced by the [Special Collections Library](#) at Duke University is worth a look. Here, various American women's liberation movement theoretical texts, photographs, manifestoes, newspaper articles, and song lyrics are available in their original formats at a click. Without parallel sites offering a diverse range of sources on Australian second wave activism, we risk reinscribing the sense that the Australian movement was simply a derivative of its North American

counterpart.

There is a timeliness to our claim for the importance of rethinking what our feminist archive might look like. As we noted above in the anecdote of the library and the charity book sale, as our activist population ages and considers retirement and downsizing, extant materials that are privately held face an increasingly precarious future. This is an ideal moment, therefore, to launch a systematic campaign to collect, preserve and make publicly accessible the heritage of a political movement that has radically reconfigured the lives of Australian women and the meaning of politics in this country. As Taylor observes, 'documents and objects are preserved, in part, in order to challenge interpretation' (245). Advances in technology in recent years offer new possibilities for presenting this history for public and scholarly interpretation, new possibilities to tell the stories of this movement: its struggles, contests, and creativity, its wit and passion and dreams. A national archive that values the material culture and transformative cultural activism of the second wave, must surely be part of those dreams.

Notes

1. See, for example, Chilla Bulbeck, *Living Feminism: The Impact of the Women's Movement on Three Generations of Australian Women* Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Margaret Henderson, *Marking Feminist Times: Remembering the Longest Revolution in Australia*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999; Gisela Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest: The Australian Women's Movement 1950s – 1990s*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996; Susan Magarey, 'Feminism as Cultural Renaissance' *Hecate* 31.1 (2004): 231-46; and Susan Magarey, 'Memory and Desire: Feminists Re-membering Feminism'. *Lilith* 14 (2005): 1-13.

2. See, for example, Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002; Maryanne Dever, Ann Vickery and Sally Newman, *The Intimate Archive*. Canberra: National Library of Australia, forthcoming 2008; Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive*. Paris : Seuil, 1989; Carolyn Hamilton et al, Eds. *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002; Louise Kaplan, "Archive Fever: Material and Psychic Reality in Biography". *Biography and Source Studies* 6 (2001): 105-14; Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory'. *Archival Science* 2:1/2 (2002):1-19; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

3. We refer here to the Jessie Street National Women's Library (Sydney), the Women's Library (Sydney), the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (Melbourne), and the Women's Studies Resource Centre (Adelaide). The Lespar Library was another volunteer women's liberation library until it was deposited with Murdoch University Library in its GALAWA special collection. Similarly, the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Archives have been hosted by the University of Melbourne Archives since 2000.

4. Lespar Library of Women's Liberation, *Lespar Feminist Library Catalogue : Titles, authors, subjects.*, 3rd ed. Edn. The Library, Darlington, W.A, 1986.

5. Please note that our classification of periodicals is provisional only, and is used to give a general sense of the size and shape of the field. The division between newsletters and magazines, for example, is not always straightforward

6. The National Women's Conference on Feminism and Socialism (Melbourne, 1974) proceedings are available at, for instance, the National Library, the State Library of Victoria, Monash University Library, the University of Adelaide's Barr Smith Library, and the Jessie Street National Women's Library. The proceedings of the "Women's Liberation: Getting it Together" conference (Sydney 1979) are held at the Department of Education and Children's Services: Women's Studies Resource Centre.

7. The proceedings of the 1984 Socialist Feminist conference (Melbourne) are held at the Victoria State Library and the Department of Education and Children's Services: Women's Studies Resource Centre (which is quite a valuable repository of material relating to the Victorian women's movement). The 1987 Socialist Feminist conference (Sydney) are available at the Jessie Street National Women's Library and the State Library of New South Wales.

8. The albums are Geraldine Doyle's *Stand on Your Man* (available at Macquarie University Library, La Trobe City Library, and the Northern Regional Library and Information Service), and *Between Women: A Selection of Original Feminist Songs*, written and sung by Pip Porter (held at the ANU Library, the State Library of South Australia, Charles Sturt University Library, and the Department of Education and Children's Services: Women's Studies Resource Centre). The NFASA holds the "Anthem for Women's Liberation" featuring Eric Bogle, and two recordings of the women's band, Clitoris, playing at the Balmain Town Hall and the Pram Factory in 1975 (title numbers 568912 and 568915).

9. Useful works on the *Coming Out Show* are *Coming Out! Women's Voices, Women's Lives: A Selection from ABC Radio's Coming Out Show*, Ed. Julie Rigg and Julie Copeland (Melbourne: Nelson in association with the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1985); and *The Coming Out Show: Twenty Years of Feminist Radio*, Ed. Liz Fell and Carolin Wenzel (Sydney: ABC Books, 1995).

10. The collection description lists this as 'A series of interviews with women involved in the Australian Women's Movement supervised by Ann Curthoys, Susan Magarey and Marilyn Lake as part of their joint Australian Research Council project 'A History of the Australian Women's Movement 1967-1988'. Location: SL:M OH 346. According to the catalogue, there is currently no public access to this material and no information on interview subjects.

11. Film and video are outside the scope of this project, however, holdings in the National Film and Sound Archives are similar to the other institutions we examined – small and fragmented. The NFASA holds only around a dozen relevant items, but includes some gems, for instance, Sara Dowse's "home movies" of the Mt Beauty conference.

12. The Jessie Street National Women's Library indicates on its website that it has substantial photographic holdings covering the last thirty years of the women's movement, but these are not catalogued and so there is no searchable list on-line and the holdings and do not appear in PictureAustralia. Their website contains the following statement: 'The large poster collection of well over

1000 posters illustrates changing attitudes to women particularly in the areas of work and education and date from the late 1960's to the present day.' See Jessie Street National Women's Library:

<http://203.147.135.214/archives.html>

13. The best on-line cataloguing of related items of material culture can be found in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (Melbourne) at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~alga/collection.htm> This site offers outstanding detailed descriptive listings of their holdings, including T shirt and badge collections, which are available in PDF format.

14. The second of the AWAP's priorities is listed as: "identification of suitable collections of records, and brokering of arrangements for the archiving of these records, in some cases contributing to the costs of indexing the records".

15. For debates on the form of a woman's novel see: Finola Moorhead, *Interview in Making Stories: How ten Australian novels were written*. Ed. Kate Grenville and Sue Woolfe. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993 pp206-31; Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, London: Routledge, 1980; Deborah Cameron, Ed., *The Feminist Critique of Language: a Reader*, London: Routledge, 1990; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985; Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Trans Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Cornell University Press, 1985 (Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un 1977); Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, eds., *Breaking the Sequence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Table 2: Australian Feminist Newspapers, Journals, and Magazines, 1970-1990 (source: LibrariesAustralia)

Australian Feminist Newspapers 1970-1990

Girls' Own
Mabel
MeJane
Rouge
Scarlet Woman
Vashti's Voice (later *Vashti*)

Australian Feminist Magazines and Journals 1970-1990

As If (Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminists)
Melbourne Feminist Collection
Our Women: National Magazine of the Union of Australian Women
Power and Desire: a Journal of Sexual Politics
Red Page
Refractory Girl
Rippling Web
Shrew (Brisbane)
Sister: A New Direction for Women
Sister: For a Universal Society
Womanspeak

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