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Edited by Sara de Jong and Sanne Koevoets

Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives The Power of Information

Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms

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THE LIBRARY AS KNOWLEDGE BROKER

Sara de Jong and Saskia Wieringa

The traditional task of an archive is to store and preserve material, largely in a written format, about a particular person, event, phenomenon, movement or time period, to be used at a later date and/or by a larger group of people. A library is a collection of books for the use of scholars and other readers. The major goal of a women's library and/or archive is to preserve the heritage of women and their movements, and to contribute to emancipation through disseminating knowledge about gender issues. Decisions on what to preserve and what to collect are made by the archivist, the librarian and their staff. This knowledge chain has been in place in women's libraries and archives from the moment of their conception and construction. In the case of the IAV (International Archive for the Women's Movement) in Amsterdam, this was in 1935.

However, the postmodern as well as the poststructuralist and more recently the digital turn seem to have broken down this knowledge chain. In this article we discuss these developments and point to present and future conceptualizations of libraries and archives in relation to the production of knowledge. The change from a positivist to a feminist empiricist or standpoint epistemology took place in the 1970s and 1980s and produced a feminist epistemology that posed new questions pertaining to gendered knowledge and (feminist) science. Although these developments led to new suggestions concerning the adjustment of 'malestream' history and the reinsertion of women as actors in history, they could still be incorporated within the traditional archive/library paradigm relatively unproblematically. Whereas feminist empiricist and standpoint epistemologies focus on the absence of women's and other marginalized perspectives in the archive as a *corrective* of the historical record, aspire to a fuller picture, and want to produce a more 'true' account of history, postmodern theory fundamentally questions any truth claims or grand historical narratives that may emerge from the library space.

The digital turn heralded a time in which large amounts of primary materials are accessible via the web. The library/archive no longer appears to be primarily a physical space; rather it is also increasingly a virtual space. A specialized

archive-cum-library is expected to be accessible worldwide; on the one hand, it will collect and preserve the digital record, while on the other it will function as a social space for the sharing and collective production of knowledge. The library thus seems to simultaneously become both more global and more local.

Accordingly, the poststructuralist, postmodern, and digital turns of the past few decades pose new challenging questions, both for the practitioners of postmodern librarianship and for the scholarly community of students, teachers and researchers who engage with the library. These questions, as well as the different answers that have been proposed, have far-reaching implications for the role of the library and its relation with its users. In this article we will trace the historical trajectory of the I(I)AV in Amsterdam to Aletta, Institute for Women's History,[1] in order to discuss the transformations that libraries are undergoing and to argue in favor of a post-structural and postmodern perspective on the library.

Preserving and inserting women's history

The International Archives for the Women's Movement (IAV) was founded in Amsterdam in 1935. The profiles of its three founders—Johanna Naber (historian), Rosa Manus (a leader in the international women's suffrage and peace movements) and Willemijn Posthumus-van der Goot (the first woman with a PhD in economics in The Netherlands and author of several scientific studies on women's labor)—is reflected in its original mission: to preserve the cultural heritage of the women's movement for future generations. There was a sense of urgency as the protagonists of the first wave of the Dutch women's movement, such as Aletta Jacobs (who had left her collection of movement papers and books to Rosa Manus), were dying. The initial goal of the IAV was thus to preserve their legacy, so that future generations could learn from their experiences. Additionally, the institute was to promote knowledge and scientific study of the women's movement in the broadest sense, both nationally and internationally. From the very beginning the archival staff of the IAV—which included its founders—also

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[1] In 2012 Aletta, Institute for Women's History merged with E-Quality Information Centre for Gender, Family and Diversity Issues. The new organization has a broader mandate and also carries out advocacy and projects related to gender issues. In January 2013 the organization was renamed Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History.

published articles and conducted research. In 1937, for instance, they published a survey among the 'Veterans of the Women's Movement'.[2]

Until the Second World War the IAV was active on three fronts: the academic field, the national emancipation struggle and the international women's rights and peace movements. International and research-oriented, these were the key concepts of the IAV's founders. Without compromising on these principles, the emphasis later shifted to the history of the Dutch women's movement, and to emancipation and empowerment; later the inclusion of the heritage of migrant women in The Netherlands became a focal point. During recent decades, discussions have centered on how to collect material relevant to its mission, without privileging the mainstream of the Dutch women's movement—consisting mainly of white middle-class feminists—which was traditionally linked to the institute. More concretely, the question became: how to collect the memories of migrant women and of women of other marginalized groups that have not always left behind minutes or other paper documents of their meetings (which often took place at their kitchen tables, in the factories where they worked, or in other unofficial or non-institutionalized locations). This necessitated two policy shifts. First, new links had to be forged with those groups and representatives of earlier groups of Black, Migrant and Refugee Women (as they called themselves). Secondly, new methods, such as oral history, had to be mobilized to collect these materials.

The development of women's studies

Women's studies gained momentum in the wake of the so-called second wave of the women's movement, from the 1970s until the 1990s. The emphasis on feminist epistemology, spearheaded by writers such as Hartsock[3] and Harding,[4] offered a critique of 'male science' and provoked a renewed interest in women's perspectives, in order to either fill in the gaps in or to rewrite mainstream history.

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[2] For the early history of the IAV see Francisca de Haan, "A 'Truly International' Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV, now IIAV): From its foundation in Amsterdam in 1935 to the return of its looted archives in 2003," *Journal of Women's History* 16.4 (2004): 148–72; Francisca de Haan and Annette Mevis, "The IAV/IIAV's Archival Policy and Practice; Seventy years of Collecting, Receiving and Refusing Women's Archives (1935-2005)," in *Traveling Heritages; New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Aksant 2008), 23-47.

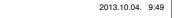[3] Nancy Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited & Other Essays* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

[4] Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986); ---, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991).

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Two approaches dominated this first phase of feminist history-writing: feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory. Feminist empiricists argued that the empirical, positivist method of doing research was not wrong in itself, but that the sexist and androcentric biases present in much research needed to be eliminated. Standpoint theorists went a major step further, arguing that value-free science is an *a priori* impossibility. They held that research is always a political enterprise, informed by biases relating to the position of the researcher, the selection of methods and the use of results. Thus they insisted on taking the perspectives of women as well as those of other marginalized groups as the starting point for research and claimed that such a point of departure would lead to "less partial and distorted accounts of […] the whole social order".[5] As Harding emphasizes in the introduction to the 2004 Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader, standpoint theory has both an explanatory and a normative component.[6] The aim of standpoint theory was to maximize objectivity, resulting in what was called a 'strong objectivity' characterized by a rigorous reflexivity of one's situatedness.

Women's history became a critical topic in the women's studies courses that sprang up all over academia, where the work of feminist historians such as Kelly,[7] Kleinberg[8] and Lerner[9] was widely read. This was a heyday for women's libraries and archives. The collections were widely used by expanding groups of students, activists and scholars. A renewed interest in 'common women' also entailed new ways of collecting information, and an interest in new sources, such as personal documents and oral history.[10] That collecting information on women's issues and

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[5] Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity'?," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128.

[6] Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

[7] Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory; the Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[8] Jay S. Kleinberg, *Retrieving Women's History; Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

[9] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[10] See for research into the collection of personal documents of the IIAV: Mineke Bosch, "A Woman's Life in a Soapbox. The Collection of Personal Documents of Women in the Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Amsterdam," *History Workshop Journal. A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historian* 24 (1987): 166–70. See for an analysis of the video documentaries based on oral history that the IIAV started collecting after 2005: Grietje Keller and Josien Pieterse, "Dance around the camera—experiences with recording video oral history from the second wave women's movement," in *Traveling Heritages; New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 229–43.

movements is itself a process full of biases and assumptions was pointed out by Withuis. She documented how shifts in the collection policy of the IAV over time partly reflected the personal contacts and interests of the staff as well as their blind spots.[11]

During the so-called second wave of feminism and with the emergence of women's studies programs, there was also a growing need for the improved accessibility of library resources. As existing mainstream thesaurus systems were gender-stereotyping and the old indexing system used at the IIAV could not adequately capture the new developments, in 1987 the IIAV, together with Flemish partner organizations, started developing a Dutch women's thesaurus. Ten years later, in 1997 a project was launched to develop a European Women's Thesaurus, which has now even been translated into non-European languages such as Japanese and Farsi.[12] The thesaurus includes an ever growing number of keywords regarding the position of women and women's/gender studies. This online thesaurus, which is integrated in the search engine, serves as a tool to index and retrieve information in collections of the institute as well as in other libraries and archives and provides access to rich cross-references and multiple levels of relationships between keywords. As such, this thesaurus is more than a tool that facilitates access to texts; the way it facilitates certain research and learning practices can be an object of inquiry in itself.

A first major advance in women's and gender studies was its breaking through the boundaries between the so-called 'public' and 'private' spheres by analyzing the shifting power nexus between them and by showing how the distinction served to maintain a hierarchy between 'female' activities conducted in the private sphere versus 'male' activities in the public sphere. Most importantly, the famous radical feminist slogan 'the personal is political', pointed to the fact that issues that were traditionally understood as 'personal', taking place in the private sphere, e.g. domestic abuse, were tightly connected to a public sphere in which women were devalued. Next, under the influence of cultural studies,

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[11] Jolande Withuis, "'Een Schatkamer van Feministische Kostbaarheden'. Het Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging tussen 1935 en 1952: Betrokkenen, Beweegredenen, Beleid," in *De Jurk van de Kosmonaute: Over Politiek, Cultuur en Psyche*, ed. Jolande Withuis (Amsterdam: Boom, 1995), 114–41.

[12] Tilly Vriend, "It's a Women's World in the Women's Thesaurus: on the history, development and use of the (European) Women's Thesaurus," in *Women's Memory: the Problem of Sources: 20th anniversary symposium of the Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation*, ed. D. Fatma Ture and Birsen Talay Kesoglu (Istanbul: Kadir Has University, 2009), 1–12. Available from: http://www.aletta.nu/epublications/2009/Tilly_Vriend.pdf.

the boundaries between so-called highbrow and lowbrow culture were put into question, which challenged the idea that certain cultural expressions were more worthy of study than others.[13] Later, in the process of crossing the boundaries between the academic disciplines, women's and gender studies ruptured the boundaries of identity categories as well, including those related to ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. The IAV's library collection expanded to cater to all these new interests.

The postmodern turn and the digital age

The mission of the IIAV/Aletta has remained basically unchanged since its inception. Its founders had a unique combination of academic excellence, international acumen and commitment to the women's cause[14] and this is still reflected in the aims and policies of Aletta. What has changed considerably is the academic discipline of historical investigation. The discursive, poststructuralist turn in women's and gender studies that has been gaining momentum from the 1990s onwards has profoundly influenced gender history as well as other disciplines.[15]

Under the influence of postmodernism, historians have moved away from the search for 'pure facts' and 'simple truths' (which were supposedly waiting to be discovered in archives and could be found by 'objective' methods), in favor of situated approaches that produce partial perspectives. Women's historians are no longer only searching for ignored heroines or the forgotten aspects of history; nor do they only insist that all histories are gendered and that therefore gender aspects need to be addressed everywhere. Women's historians now realize that even if a women's canon is unmarred by a serious gender bias, it may still contain other biases. 'Adding' the histories of migrant women to the white mainstream histories only defers the problem. Every decision to focus on a specific issue means that a choice is made and possibly another bias introduced. Any effort to freeze a master (mistress) narrative excludes other narratives. Objects and docu-

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[13] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980): 57.

[14] Francisca de Haan en Annette Mevis , "The IAV/IIAV's Archival Policy and Practice; Seventy Years of Collecting, Receiving, and Refusing Women's Archives (1935–2005)," in *Traveling Heritages; New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Askant, 2008), 23–47.

[15] Clare Hemmings, "The Life and Times of Academic Feminism: Checking the Vital Signs of Women's and Gender Studies," in *Traveling Heritages; New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008), 263–85.

ments in the archive "cannot provide direct and unmediated access to the past".[16] If we have learnt anything from postmodern epistemologies it is that 'truth' is always provisional, and bound to the context in which it is produced.

New questions have cropped up, while the old ones have not become obsolete. Whose histories are being collected? And for whose benefit? These questions are still as relevant as ever. At the same time, poststructuralist insights have raised the question whether we should limit ourselves to the history of women. What is a woman anyway? In search for answers to these questions, the institute underwent a shift in both content and methods of collecting—not only documents and facts are important, but also memories and points of view. Just as people migrate throughout the world, concepts also travel in time and space. The meaning of concepts such as 'womanhood' or 'gender' change over time, and differ between cultures, classes and religions.[17] From this perspective, the image of archives as treasure troves where that one single 'truth' about an organization or the movement as a whole can be dug up has become untenable. Instead, archives can serve as sources of inspiration and theoretical reflection for a large complex group of people with multiple identities.

In his seminal essay "Archive Fever", Jacques Derrida deconstructs the notion of the archive, which has influenced theories about the archive within library studies as well as in other disciplines.[18] He emphasizes how the archive is always simultaneously 'institutive' and 'conservative';[19] archives do not merely record, but rather *produce* events through the available technologies. As Marlene Manoff, director of the humanities library at MIT, recounts, one of Derrida's claims is that Freud's theory of psychoanalysis was shaped by the technologies of communication at that time, and consequently, psychoanalytical theory would have been transformed by the availability of other technologies.[20]

While every archive is always technological and marked by its technological ramifications, the digital turn makes Derrida's observation even more

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[16] Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Libraries and the Academy* 4.1 (2004): 14.

[17] The above paragraph is adapted from Saskia E. Wieringa, "The (Sexual) Revolution of the Amsterdam Women's Archives and Library," in *Traveling Heritages New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Aksant 2008), 9–23.

[18] Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Libraries and the Academy* 4.1 (2004): 9.

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25.2 (1995): 12.

[20] Marlene Manoff, "The Materiality of Digital Collections: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Libraries and the Academy* 6.3 (2006): 321.

concrete and has made some of the aforementioned postmodernist-inspired questions even more urgent. Many library scholars have observed that with the advent of the (digital) knowledge society, libraries were forced to radically adapt their practices. In Laura Cohen's much cited work 'A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto', published in 2006, librarians are called upon to embrace the developments of the new information age and to be proactive in learning about and incorporating new technologies in order to develop the library.[21] From a Derridean perspective, these new technologies would create as well as destroy the archive, as they significantly alter the way knowledge is 'conserved' and made available. Since 2005, under the lead of a webmaster and supported by a new PR department, the IIAV has begun to advance its services according to many suggestions later included in A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto. One of the 'commandments' of Cohen reads: "I will be willing to go where users are, both online and in physical spaces, to practice my profession."[22] As all libraries and archives, the IIAV also experienced a decrease of visitors to the physical space the institute inhabited until 2011, though since its move to a more central location in Amsterdam visitor numbers are on the rise again. Simultaneously, there has been a marked increase in the use of its websites. The institute mobilizes social networking sites Facebook and Twitter to collect a growing number of friends and followers; its online presence also extends to Wikipedia and YouTube. Its successful blogging website[23] provides a platform both for guest bloggers and staff members. Indeed, the Institute has not waited passively for users to come, but has entered virtual places to find them, to assess their needs and attempt to meet them. It has also been using a variety of online media platforms, including YouTube, to "tell the library's story", which David Lee King (2007) suggests is the most important competency of a 2.0 librarian.[24]

Cohen further suggests that the librarian 2.0 "will create open Web sites that allow users to join with librarians to contribute content in order to enhance their

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[21] Laura Cohen, "A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," Library 2.0: An Academic's Perspective, posted 8 November 2006, http://liblogs.albany.edu/library20/2006/11/a_librarians_20_manifesto.html.

[22] Ibid.

[23] 'www.talktoaletta.nu'

[24] David Lee King, "Basic Competencies of a 2.0 Librarian," The David Lee King Blog, comment posted 5 July 2007, http://www.davidleeking.com/2007/07/05/basic-competencies-of-a-20-librarian/#.UFnnn0ZjWf4. (accessed 21 September 2012)

learning experience and provide assistance to their peers".[25] In the project 'Back in a Bite', which kick-started in 2009, first and second generation migrant women were invited to record their life stories and recipes through video oral history interviews. While some oral history interviews were conducted by Aletta herself, the target group was also encouraged to submit their own video recordings in order to create a shared archive. In this way, the institute seeks to be a real but also virtual community center, involving an extended group of users in the writing of their own histories and using new technologies to advance inclusive practices.[26]

As the record becomes increasingly digitalized and is made accessible through huge search engines, a relatively small institute like the IIAV/Aletta faces an increasing number of dilemmas. How can such an institute preserve its unique position as the major repository of material from both the 'first' and the 'second' waves of the women's movement and of much that happened before between and after those waves, in a world that is characterized by the paradigm of universal access?[27] Around 2010 the acquisition policies of the institute were refined to privilege the collection of digital material over print where possible. At the same time, the institute stepped up its efforts to digitalize large parts of its collection in collaboration with partners in the library or publishing world. Together with other special libraries its collection was integrated in the NCC catalogue (*Nederlandse Centrale Catalogus*), making it accessible via WorldCat (the free accessible world catalogue). Another good example of these changes is the acquisition of digital access to the Gerritsen collection, in collaboration with the University of Groningen. Gerritsen was the husband of Aletta Jacobs, who built up a major collection on women's issues before the Second World War. After his death the collection was sold abroad and lost to Dutch users. However, through digitalization it has become accessible once again. The IIAV also collaborated with Alexander Press, a commercial publisher, to make parts of the IIAV collection accessible within a larger collection on the history of the women's movement worldwide. In

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25 Laura Cohen, "A Librarian's 2.0 Manifesto," Library 2.0: An Academic's Perspective, posted 8 November 2006, http://liblogs.albany.edu/library20/2006/11/a_librarians_20_manifesto.html.

26 Eileen de los Reyes, "Becoming Pockets of Hope: The Challenge to Academic Libraries in the 21st Century," in *Crossing the Divide: Conference Proceedings ACRL Tenth National Conference,* ed. Hugh A. Thompson (USA: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2001), 28–9.

27 The history of women's movements worldwide is long and various authors mark different beginnings. Yet usually the designation 'first' wave is used for that part of the movement that started in the late nineteenth century, and 'second' wave for that phase that started in the late 1960s. We follow this popular usage here.

exchange for the contribution of the IIAV the institute gained access to materials from many libraries around the world. It is through such collaborative, digital practices that the IIAV/Aletta has safeguarded its relevance as the primary archive and research institute on women's history in The Netherlands.

However, not only library practice needs to change; library and information sciences also need to formulate new paradigms that can effectively capture the postmodern library.[28] Gary Radford argues that the positivist emphasis on libraries as spaces of rationality, order and structure is outdated and unable to grasp the specific complexities of libraries in the digital age. Drawing on Foucault's 1967/1977 essay "La Bibliothèque Fantastique", Radford proposes a postmodern epistemology of the library, which favors creativity, fantasy and fluidity in the library experience. Texts (understood as written, as well as oral and other types of documentation and recording) can no longer be understood and treated as having stable meanings and values independent of their context and material instantiation. Radford's analysis has far-reaching implications for understanding the position of the librarian and her/his relation with the user of the library: "With the development of increasingly sophisticated information technologies, the location of specific texts or facts may not be the primary issue in most library searches, and the role of the librarian as a fact provider is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. [...] The librarian's role becomes that of a guide, not only to the pre-existing order of the library that comprises its catalogues and indexes, but to the creation of new orders developed and made possible by the capabilities of computer searching."[29]

After years of delivering skills-based library courses to students, Ellen Broidy, librarian at UC Irvine, realized that the information age required her to move beyond mere searching skills, and to engage with the gendered politics of information. With this in mind, she co-developed the course 'Gender and the Politics of Information', which, among other things, aimed to make students aware of the gendered nature of information. In her view, this is of central importance to understanding the technologized present of the information age in which both librarians and library users find themselves.[30]

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[28] Gary P. Radford, "Flaubert, Foucault, and the Bibliotheque Fantastique: Toward a Postmodern Epistemology for Library Science," *Library Trends* 46.4 (1998): 617.

[29] Ibid., 630.

[30] Ellen Broidy, "Gender and the Politics of Information: Reflections on Bringing the Library into the Classroom," *Library Trends* 56.2 (2007): 501.

Hence, not only library and information science needs to find new paradigms to understand the postmodern library. Library users, particularly those with an interest in women's and gender studies, need to *both* find new conceptualizations to engage with the changing institute of the library *and* start asking new questions about past library practices. In the same way that empiricist and standpoint feminism inspired critical inquiries of the malestream library, postmodern and poststructural (feminist) theories should invite new forms of engagement with libraries and archives, departing from the recognition that the libraries are constituted *by* knowledge practices as well as constitutive *of* knowledge practices.

Suggested assignments

- What are the different technologies of knowledge that your women's/gender/feminist library offers, including books, diary, oral history tapes, posters, digital journal articles, DVDs, photographs and sheet music, and are these digitalized or in other formats? What are the implications of these different modalities of materiality for knowledge production and knowledge dissemination? Think about the opportunities offered by the library's technologies and consider their limitations.
- How does your women's/gender/feminist library define women/gender/feminism? Have these definitions shifted during the history of the institute and if so, how has this impacted upon the collection policies? What exclusions, silences and gaps are present in these definitions?
- Map the different and discontinuous knowledge chains your library is involved in. Who can be seen as actors in these knowledge webs? Organizations, persons, computers, events? How does the production and dissemination of knowledge take shape in these webs of knowledge exchange?

The library as knowledge creator and knowledge broker

To further conceptualize the changing position of women's libraries and feminist libraries today, and of the changing relationships between librarians, library users and library spaces, it is instructive to complement Radford's Foucauldian intervention with insights from poststructuralist feminist theories. In this section we will argue that students cannot only find poststructuralist feminist theory

in the library, but can discover how it is also *about* the library. From this point of view, we can observe that with regards to texts—that is, the materials in the library and/or accessible through the library—a democratization of knowledge takes place not only through the technological advancements of our era, but also through the revaluing of multiple knowledges in the *plural*, capacitated by insights from postmodern feminist theory.

What Radford fails to note is that the librarian's changing role as a guide instead of a fact provider is not a neutral one; s/he is always situated. As Elizabeth Yakel observed, this understanding is often lacking among library users: "Users can be largely unaware of the invisible archival role and responsibility behind the data they are using, particularly in a networked environment. Thus, they may see the role of the archivist as essentially preserving the data or perhaps managing the information, but not as having anything to do with knowledge creation."[31] Similarly, Hope Olson has argued that cataloguing practices are not neutral. Comparing the position of information specialists with researchers, she states: "Our theories, models and descriptions, applied in our role as intermediaries between people and information, are as presumptuous and controlling as scientists' construction and containment of nature."[32] The aforementioned Women's Thesaurus, for example, is not just a technological tool, but a 'woman-made' creation reflecting the situated understandings of information specialists, who by creating the thesaurus established linkages between different concepts. The library is not just the gateway to knowledge, but also a *knowledge broker* and *knowledge creator* in its own right. An insight into the conceptualization of those two positions is crucial for students and researchers when engaging with the library and archive.

In the case of IIAV/Aletta, the role of the library as a knowledge creator can be taken very literally. Apart from storing information and making it accessible to its users, it accepted that a small specialized library had to become more pro-active, and set up a modest research department in 2005. This IIAV research department aimed to support the analysis of the processes and dynamics of organizing against gender, ethnic and other hierarchies. But it also became concretely involved in the creation of knowledge, for instance through a project

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[31] Elizabeth Yakel, "Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century," *Archivaria* 49 (2000): 152.

[32] Hope A. Olson, *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 4.

of making video oral histories of women who were active in the 'second wave' of the women's movement. This ambitious collaborative[33] project (the aim is to collect 100 video portraits) was kick-started with the production of a documentary about the women's health movement based on oral history interviews. The project will be expanded to incorporate video portraits of representatives of all major elements of the Second Wave of the Dutch women's movement. In many cases the paper archives are already available at our institute, but the medium of film can record such other dimensions as emotions or possible disconnects between words uttered and body language.[34] The IIAV has been using technology innovatively to expand its oral history collection. For instance, a search function based on speech recognition was developed for its video oral history collection in collaboration with Twente University.

Libraries can also be seen to produce knowledge through their choices for particular forms of material and modes of access to material. As Manoff identifies, there is an increasing awareness that the materiality of sources is a valuable object of study in the context of knowledge production.[35] 'Real' as well as virtual texts have a material embodiment; the latter sometimes mediated by hardware such as computers.[36] Different types of material and different forms of transmission of one identical text (in terms of content) can alter the ways in which it can be received, used and created as knowledge. For example, the method of recording video oral histories creates a different kind of knowledge from written documentation about the same topic, while the search technology of speech recognition produces new logics, structures and connections from conventional search engines. Hence, librarians who consider accessibility and efficiency in evaluating the use of technologies are engaged in practical and fundamental issues about knowledge production. They are not a neutral portal but play a significant role in the knowledge creation process. As Manoff claims, this implies that "we need to educate future librarians to understand their role in transformations that are

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[33] The project was executed in collaboration with Utrecht University.

[34] Grietje Keller and Josien Pieterse, "Dance Around the Camera – Experiences with Recording Video Oral History from the Second Wave Women's Movement," in *Traveling Heritages; New Perspectives on Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Women's History*, ed. Saskia E. Wieringa (Amsterdam: Askant, 2008); Josien Pieterse, "Het Gedeelde Archief: over de Dilemma's van het Open Archief," *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 15.2 (2012): 43.

[35] Marlene Manoff, "The Materiality of Digital Collections: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Libraries and the Academy* 6.3 (2006): 311–25.

[36] Ibid.

inseparable from the history of technological and cultural development".[37] It also means that teachers need to educate their students about the role of libraries as knowledge creators rather than mere repositories of knowledge.

As Partridge et al. observe, "libraries are no longer about books or even information".[38] They quote Mackenzie to state that the new role of libraries is "facilitating people to participate, interact and create, to provide the means for that to happen".[39] This can happen both online, through Facebook, Twitter and blogs, as well as in physical spaces. Two surveys about the use of Danish public libraries in 2004 and 2005, found that more than half of the users come to the library for reasons other than collecting books. For instance, they come to meet people, to work and to study.[40] The library has taken over a traditional role of the 'church' as the community meeting space of the information age.[41] Through the establishment of its own research department and its seminars and publications, Aletta also sought to take the position of knowledge broker, creating a platform for researchers, students and teachers to meet each other and reflect. As described in Niegaard, one of the major changes in the position of the library is the shift from "collections to connections" and "from transactions to relations"[42] or, in the words of Yakel, from "boundary marker" to "boundary spanner".[43]

However, the library and archive can be seen to play a broker role in a very different vein as well. The library of today positions itself in a postmodern digital age, in which libraries are simultaneously described as superfluous, as essential places for refuge[44] or as the quintessential institutes of the knowledge society.[45] As

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[37] Marlene Manoff, "The Materiality of Digital Collections: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Libraries and the Academy* 6.3 (2006): 323.

[38] Helen Partridge, Julie Lee and Carrie Munro, "Becoming 'Librarian 2.0': The Skills, Knowledge and Attributes Required by Library and Information Science Professionals in a Web 2.0 World (and Beyond)," *Library Trends* 59.1-2 (2010): 315–335

[39] Ibid., 316.

[40] Hellen Niegaard, "Library Space and Digital Challenges," *Library Trends* 60.1 (2011): 178.

[41] Ibid., 175.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Elizabeth Yakel, "Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century," *Archivaria* 49 (2000): 143.

[44] Eileen de los Reyes, "Becoming Pockets of Hope: The Challenge to Academic Libraries in the 21st Century," in *Crossing the Divide: Conference Proceedings ACRL Tenth National Conference,* ed. Hugh A. Thompson (USA: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2001), 23–9.

[45] Hellen Niegaard, "Library Space and Digital Challenges," *Library Trends* 60.1 (2011): 175.

Manoff formulates this set of contradictions: "We cling to our libraries and our artefacts even as we dream of ever more encompassing virtual collections."[46] She locates the anxiety people express about the development of libraries in the fact that "libraries represent one of the last best hopes for maintaining the continuity of past, present, and future".[47] IIAV/Aletta has attempted to express its relation to both past and future in its slogan 'Sharing the past, creating the future', which in 2012, after the merger with the organization E-Quality, has been adapted to 'Sharing the past, debating the present, creating the future'. The IIAV/Aletta sees itself as an institution with a 'Janus head'. One side is directed towards the past, the other side is looking towards the future. Its aim is to make the collections serve future generations of academics and other information seekers on the histories of gender issues.

Conclusion

Throughout this article we have sought to challenge the conventional compartmentalized 'knowledge chain'. Traditionally, libraries are understood as repositories of the knowledge that is produced by scholars and then transmitted to students who in their turn visit the library to get access to the accumulated wisdom. But in the current information era and with the advent of postmodern and post-structural feminism, the conceptualization of the library and archive as mere collector of knowledge is not tenable and should be replaced by the much more fluid position of knowledge broker and knowledge creator. This does not only involve the changing role of information specialists and new collection policies, for it also implies that students need to engage with the library in alternative ways based on an understanding that the library has become part of a complex web of exchanges that transcend the linearity of the traditional knowledge chain. This article has shown that the new paradigm of the library as knowledge broker and creator requires students and teachers to see the library as an active agent in creating knowledge rather than as a passive collector, and it suggests ways of engaging with the library as an institute constituting knowledge in its own right as well as being constituted by the knowledge/power nexus.

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[46] Marlene Manoff, "The Symbolic Meaning of Libraries in a Digital Age," *Libraries and the Academy* 1.4 (2001): 379.

[47] Ibid., 380.

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