

# Useful In/stability: the Dialectical Production of the Social and Spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives

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## Abstract

Queer theory's embrace of instability paints stabilizing practices as normalizing and unjust. Rather than upholding a stance of opposition by championing instability alone, what can be gleaned for queer theory by examining the tension of the in/stability dialectic? This essay reflects on the author's own embodied experience as researcher within the social and spatial dimensions of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA). Informed by critical geographic studies and queer theories, the author suggests that the usefulness of in/stability—all at once together and in conflict—is part of the work toward justice that results when the archive sits in the juxtaposition rather than choose a side within the binary. The resultant practice of *useful in/stability* suggests a turn for queer theory and analyses by examining and struggling with concepts rather than succumbing to binarial mores.

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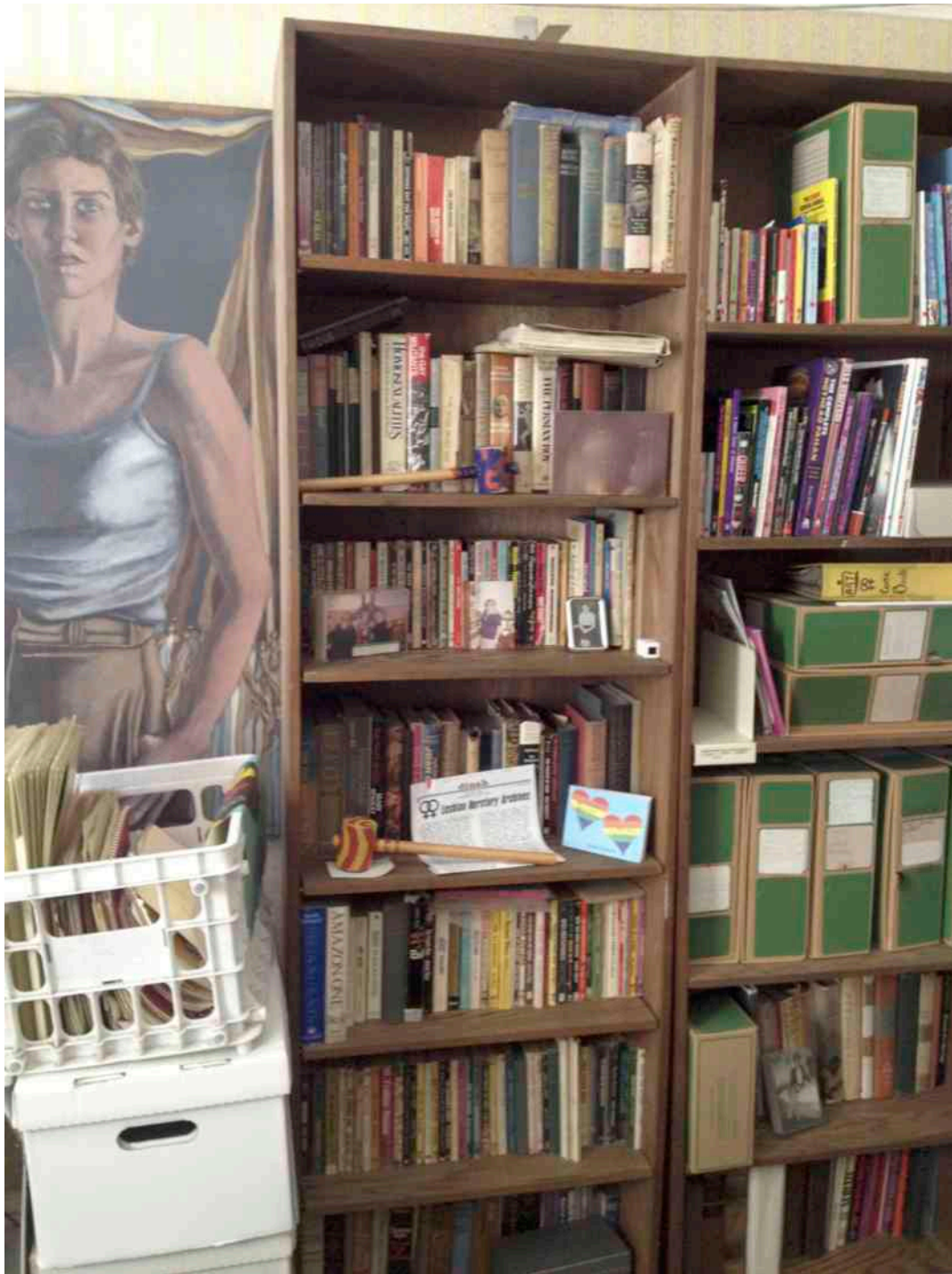


Figure 1. Marge McDonald's bookcase of lesbian books, photos, and mementos is mentioned often at Lesbian Herstory Archives, pictured in the center. McDonald can be seen in photos on the third shelf from the top. Credit: Jack Jen Giesecking CC BY-NC 2013

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## Useful In/stability: the Dialectical Production of the Social and Spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives

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When Marge McDonald left many of her belongings to the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) upon her death in 1986, her homophobic family in Columbus, Ohio, sought to auction or destroy them. The LHA reached out to local lesbian groups in Columbus, which took as many materials as possible, including an entire bookcase, and drove these objects in a pickup truck to New York City, where they remain for-evermore intact (see fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> I begin with McDonald's story because it is emblematic of the LHA as a social and spatial site of queer knowledge production, both stable in its physical form and unstable in its sociality.

Responding to similar threads of loss and continuation, queer theory's work toward justice refuses binaries that restrict and deny difference. When discussions of stability and instability emerge often in queer theory, the resultant approach calls for destabilizing the "stable" norms of unequal societies. However, queer theory's embrace of instability paints all stabilizing practices as normalizing and unjust. Rather than upholding a stance of opposition and refusal by championing instability alone, what can be gleaned for queer theory by unpacking this dialectic? In examining the social and spatial qualities of the LHA, I adhere to both stability *and* instability, or what I call "*in/stability*." The usefulness of *in/stability*—all at once together and in conflict—is the work toward justice that the LHA produces when it sits in this juxtaposition. The resultant practice of *useful in/stability* illuminates a turn in queer analyses by examining and sitting in queer struggles rather than succumbing to binarial mores.

The renowned LHA in Brooklyn, New York, functions as a sociospatial exemplar of *in/stability*: a fixed, owned property that is also an always-in-process archive. While many women's objects and documents have found a permanent home in this space, the archive, founded and solely run by volunteers, is almost exclusively funded by donations. Finding aids for many collections have yet to be written. Many records lack dates or location information, leaving the researcher's search for lesbian history fragmented and unstable. Many archives have backlogs and an all-volunteer staff—as is often the case in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) archives and activist archives generally—but the LHA especially and intentionally embraces a more flexible production of its archival structure *with* its donors and visitors. A sociospatial analysis of the current state of the LHA helps us rethink what the politics of *in/stability* offer practices and theories of queering.

My arguments draw on theorists who have reckoned with binaries rather than disposed of them. For example, the "disidentifications" José Esteban Muñoz traces in

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the dialectics between selfhood and the social that emerge when performers disidentify from the racial and sexual mainstream speak to this project.<sup>2</sup> Such disidentifications mind the gap between refusal and adoption. My analysis also extends Ann Cvetkovich's writing on the LHA, a space that she describes as an "archive of feelings": "the profoundly affective power of a useful archive, especially an archive of sexuality and gay and lesbian life, which must preserve and produce not just social knowledge but feeling."<sup>3</sup> I read this "useful archive" as derived not only from a space of knowledge and feeling but also from its materiality.

Lesbian activist and LHA cofounder Joan Nestle wrote, "For gay people, history is a place where the body carries its own story."<sup>4</sup> I, too, build on my own embodied experiences as the lesbian-queer-trans researcher in the archive to reveal the tension between the instability of its archival structure and its stable physicality. Informed by critical geographic studies and queer theories, I propose that the lack of traditional archival order and the LHA's location in a permanent physical property demonstrate a queer tension of in/stability. Through five accounts I share from my embodied experiences as a lesbian-queer-trans\* person conducting research in the archive, I develop the idea of *useful in/stability*. This concept suggests a turn for queer theory: making use of the spatial and social life of the LHA in the tension of in/stability increases the work toward justice due queer life. Steve Pile, in his work on geographies of resistance, writes that "the subjects of resistance are neither fixed nor fluid, but both and more."<sup>5</sup> Pile's sentiment of "both and more" describes the resistance I outline here. By turning from a politics of refusal that dwells on instability, the LHA in its in/stability is a radically inclusive and useful space of growth and difference.

### Conceptualizing In/stability

A relatively undertheorized set of concepts in social theory, the paired notions of stability and instability permeate the moral and value judgments of everyday life, sexually and otherwise. The association between in/stability and queering run deep. As critical geographers Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash state, "Queer scholarship, then, in its contemporary form is anti-normative and seeks to subvert, challenge and critique a host of taken for granted 'stabilities' in our social lives."<sup>6</sup> While the two words appear often in queer and geographic theoretical work, I could find no formal definitions in major texts or dictionaries from these areas of study. Drawing from key deployments of the terms, I define *stability* as "resistance to change," "a state of constancy," or "a sense of dependability"; *instability* is its antithesis, characterized by "changeability," "inconstancy," and "unreliability."

Critical geography uses space as a method and lens of analysis to combat social exploitation and oppression. In this framework, space is not a fixed container but is constantly (re)produced in how it is perceived, conceived, and lived, from the scales

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of the intimate to the global. Critical geographers Michael Brown and Larry Knopp, in discussing their work forming a queer epistemological frame for mapping, write: “Queer theory is not simply about destabilizing epistemologies and ontologies. . . . The tensions and conflicts that we describe here . . . were not simple or easy moments of harmony or reconciliation or commensuration.”<sup>7</sup> While their article also does not seek “reconciliation,” Brown and Knopp’s work highlights how everyday life for LGBT people involves a much more complicated dance between tensions, such as in the stable and unstable space of the LHA.

In theorizing archives, queer theorists account for narratives, representations, memorials, documentaries, ethnographies, digitalia, allegories, and objects to trace productions of queer life.<sup>8</sup> In theorizing the production of space, geographers examine the embodied experiences of spatial and social contact as coproduced. Both types of work embrace what Judith Halberstam describes as “new models of queer memory and queer history capable of recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and fleeting trends; we need, in Jose Muñoz’s words, ‘an archive of the ephemeral.’ ”<sup>9</sup> Cvetkovich’s work on the LHA describes the place as “a ritual space within which cultural memory and history are preserved.”<sup>10</sup> Cvetkovich goes on to suggest that by making a space to collectively remember and evidence the trauma of gay and lesbian life that might otherwise disappear, the LHA rewrites what documents and whose bodies are deemed significant to the archival sphere. The question of what makes up an archive in general, then, and the LHA especially, holds a special place in the lesbian and queer imaginary that makes room for not only the ephemeral but also the affective and material.

The LHA can be read as solely a lesbian, feminist, and/or lesbian feminist project, as it continues to extol these politics and theories; indeed, the concept of “queer” as it stands today did not exist throughout half of the institution’s existence. Yet to consider “queer” anachronistically unfitting erases the archive’s contribution to queer theory today as well as its work as a predecessor and ancestor to queer ideas and concepts. The experience of the social and spatial LHA demonstrates what can be generated by holding a dialectic in tension while working firmly against the projects of heteronormativity and patriarchy.

### **Getting (Un)Situating in the Archive**

In my research, I examined organizational and publication records from the LHA, the world’s largest collection of materials by, for, and about lesbians (broadly and self-defined). The LHA uses the word *herstory* in its name to denote women’s erasure from his-tory; I use *history* in this article to claim the place of lesbian and queer life within dominant narratives. The collections include anything any self-identified lesbian, dyke, gay, bisexual, homosexual, Sapphic sistah, and/or queer woman from anywhere in the world and from any time has ever touched, owned, or produced.<sup>11</sup>

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The archive encompasses over a dozen types of records and various ephemera, as discussed below. In my own research experiences in the LHA, this tension between the in/stability of locale, identity, and sex influenced my own interactions with finding aids (or lack thereof) and primary materials related to lesbian herstory.

Founded in 1974 in lesbian activist Nestle's apartment, the LHA now resides in a historic brownstone townhouse in Park Slope, Brooklyn, purchased and paid off primarily through donations.<sup>12</sup> The spatial fixity of the building is unlike the social production of the archive. The archive holds fast to its politics to remain independently funded and run by lesbians alone. The archive is completely volunteer-run and organized by "coordinators" who collect, save, and store these documents and ephemera. Every lesbian is welcome to come and coproduce the archive once that person has taken part in an orientation, and thus collections could be updated or reconfigured at any given time. Each *archivette*—an LHA term for coordinators as well as for more come-and-go volunteers—takes part in producing finding aids uniquely; only a handful of coordinators have possessed professional archival or library training.

This article on my time at the LHA draws from a larger historical geography of contemporary lesbian and queer society, culture, and economies in New York City. My overall study addresses the shifts in lesbians' and queer women's spaces in New York City from 1983 to 2008—that is, from the AIDS epidemic to the rise of the internationally syndicated television drama *The L Word*—in order to understand the associated shifts in these women's experiences of justice and oppression over time. I use both *lesbians* and *queer women* to encompass my research participants' own identifications as well as those of the women whose stories constitute my archival research. Along with a year's worth of continuous research in the LHA, the project included group interviews with forty-seven self-identified lesbians and queer women who came out during this period.

This essay concentrates on my experiences working with the LHA lesbian and queer organizational records, as the prioritization of activism and political work is a core component of lesbian and queer women's communities and identities.<sup>13</sup> These organizational records provide the detailed, often day-by-day, stories of lesbian and queer political upheaval, radical activisms, desirous socializing, and practices of fighting against and even taking part in unjust economic processes such as disinvestment and gentrification. I draw on my field notes and participant observations from my time doing research in the LHA. I use group interview transcripts as a lens to read the stories found in the archive.

## **In Situ: Five Instances of Embodied Contact between Research and Researcher**

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Lesbians have been deprived of virtually all knowledge of our past. This is deliberate since it keeps us invisible, isolated and powerless. —*Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History, 1840–1985*, Lesbian History Group

The intentional invisibilization of lesbian history, to which the early 1990s British collective the Lesbian History Group attests in their quotation, makes finding any collected materials on the lesbian and queer past a difficult pursuit. Lesbians and queer women have been further silenced since their socialization as women in private spaces is marked as less visible or radical.<sup>14</sup> Poor women and women of color face extreme invisibilization of their spaces and experiences due to their having less access to power, money, respect, and rights.

Even with a strong understanding of such structural inequalities, I arrived at the LHA expecting to find all materials regarding all types of women organized, cataloged, and dated. What I found was very much otherwise. The five instances I examine here reveal my piecing together of the concept of useful in/stability through my own embodied interactions with the materials and space of the LHA.

### *1. Searching for a Stable History: The First Day*

My first visit to the LHA in 2007 involved taking a tour, which is the way each visitor enters the space, that is, through the stories of another woman about the many women in the archive. The rooms, bathrooms, and closets burst with topic collections, fiction and nonfiction books, videos, photographs, personal collections, videos, T-shirts, comics, organizational records, biographies, stickers, artworks, geographic-specific materials, unpublished studies, buttons, biographies, audio recordings, a dildo, and a Gay Games medal. During my time there, piles of unsorted publications formed a two-foot-high mound in a corner of what was once a bedroom overlooking a tree-lined street. There are even hats, stickers, and buttons displayed next to and in the sink in the old, large bathroom (see fig. 2).

The coordinators recommended that I begin my research in the subject files in filing cabinets that line the living room wall, containing entrées into popular topics, including bars, celibacy, Disney World, dyke marches, libraries, queer activism, sports, tourism, and utopias. I chose “bars” since they were the only type of place listed and found in New York City. Over five days, I recorded the entry tickets, postcard advertisements, and flyers spanning four decades of a random assortment of lesbian bars and parties through-out the world. The last item in the folder was an ad about an Olivia cruise. When I asked a coordinator if she should move this flyer from the “bars” folder to another on “tourism,” she told me, much to my surprise, that any lesbian (broadly defined) could help produce the archive. I could even place it there if I wished. Since permission is required for photographing many of the materials, what remains of this version of this file in this moment is my notes.



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**Figure 2.** The author at the original bathroom sink in the master bedroom in the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Credit: Jack Jen Giesecking CC BY-NC 2013

clapping his hands. I twitched before I emoted in reply. While enlivening to my colleague, the project of destabilizing had its limits in that it constrained my ability to produce the most thorough historical geography possible. Working from or depending on instability alone would not be enough to make sense of my experiences in the LHA or of the LHA itself.

## 2. The Stability of a Building of One's Own

I was often cold in the LHA. Physically frozen actually. Most researchers are cold in archives, either from winter drafts or from blasting air-conditioning in summer. My mentioning to a coordinator that I was cold led to her telling me (again) about the history of the physical building of the LHA. It was also a key story I heard repeated as tours entered the small, back bedroom where I set up my computer. A coordinator would tell visitors about the purchase of the building in 1991, after almost a decade

Therefore, the construction of these files or of most collections was not static: I frantically scribbled in the following marginalia of my notes: “Did no one know everything that existed here? Was there no order to our history, even one of our own invention?”<sup>15</sup>

It is a common joke that those who are keen to work in archives are often energized by the order of the materials as much as by the materials themselves. While activist archives are notoriously underfunded and always in process, the LHA enacts a specific way of destabilizing what *archive* means. My social science researcher frame was set increasingly askew. The sensation of instability swam up to meet me.

That same week, I shared my situation with a white, male, heterosexual critical geographer, and my feeling of undoing grew even worse. He was ecstatic for me: “*This is queering!*” he said,



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of fund-raising, and what it meant for lesbians to have a permanent place of their own. She would explain that the LHA is funded by small grants and donations to meet the needed \$300,000 as part of a politics of controlling and owning a space of their own.<sup>16</sup> The building sits in the internationally renowned Park Slope neighborhood—known primarily because of its intense gentrification—and is now worth well over \$2 million.

In my research, women repeated the story of the building's purchase, as did women in the minutes and flyers of organizational records, women in feature stories of publications, and women who wandered through the archive whispering to one another while holding hands and kissing. The LHA is a constant, materialized myth that lesbians keep telling, a set of rooms of their own that all lesbians share. Choosing to purchase a house, rather than a commercial space, in which to place the LHA allows for the tension of useful in/stability to begin to form. The archivettes and LHA donors and visitors make use of the space of the home, a space where women often have been forced to remain. As such, the LHA founders purchased a historically feminized, disempowering, and therefore destabilizing space and reinvented it as a useful, stable space from which to collect and share lesbian histories. At 484 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn, New York 11215, lesbians have physically evidenced their own existence on their own terms within the bounds of capitalist property ownership; what could be more stable in the neoliberal era than property ownership?

These are points of stability I experienced in the archive: the drafty or air-conditioned cold as a weathered constant of place, the reinvention of the meaning of home as a way to demonstrate women's refusal to be ignored or invisibilized, and the knowledge that the building and collections were permanent, material, and visible. When I bumped into the walls (often) or picked up my pen from the floor (more often), I would let my hand rest against the surfaces to remind me of this place and its rare claim to being real in a world that often seeks to deny LGBTQ people who they are. It was at these moments that the LHA as a material space of affect and knowledge production melted into one. I knew that something beyond stability or instability was possible.

### *3. Instability and Stability in Relation: Realizing the Space-Time of the Archives*

As happy as I was with my daily cups of chamomile tea to keep me warm those first few weeks in the LHA, I soon experienced a more profound and staying state of shock: many of these materials lacked any mention of location and/or date, and almost all lacked an author. Such anonymity was sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional, and always frustrating. Coordinators had no more information than I and so shared in my confusion and poured me another cup of tea. As I shared during a group interview with research participants:

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What's interesting about the archives is that maybe a third or a quarter of the fliers I read [so far] don't have a date on them. So you have no idea *when* they happened. And then a lot of things don't say *where*, it's just a phone number. . . . They would check their answering machines first to see if you were, you know, coming to beat them up. It's like a timeless, spaceless archive up to a certain point. Or then people just forgot to put the years on. One flyer reads: "COME TO THE RALLY! FRIDAY!" And you're sitting there screaming to no one but yourself, "*Which* Friday are you talking about?!?!?!" *This is our history!*

After that discussion ended, one of my research participants asked me if I was really surprised. She had a good point. Even in creating an archive of lesbian history, those spaceless and timeless moments in the LHA speak to the very visible partiality of history generally and more lesbians and queer women especially. The depth of lesbian and queer invisibility never seemed so palpable as it did when I was sitting in that archive the next day. I knew that I could count on it to remain there while also recognizing the flummoxing effects of its constant flux not only on me but on generations past and those yet to come. My research revealed that sitting in the tension of the LHA's social and spatial in/stability is useful in deepening and broadening lesbian history.

Only records from more recent years consistently provided the *when* and *where* of their meetings. Threats to LGBTQ people's safety lessened somewhat over time, while the determination to be out increased. Being ambiguous was helpful in organizing groups, meetings, and activism that could attract attention from those wishing to thwart these efforts or harm these women. Negotiating these roadblocks became central to the project of mapping a larger lesbian-queer history.

#### *4. Identity Matters of and to In/stability*

Lesbian-queer women continue to possess less support and access to record their history than men and heterosexuals, and this situation is only amplified for low-income women and women of color. In 1998, seven years after the archive moved into its building, lesbian activist, archivist, and coordinator Polly Thistlethwaite recorded that the institution was organized, supported, and dominated by a primarily white lesbian community constituency.<sup>17</sup> Critical geographer Joana Coppi writes that while founding the LHA in a "large apartment sidelined financial questions in the 1980s and allowed for an emphasis on cultural and political activism across race and class," by the 1990s the "building fund campaign made fundraising the primary concern of volunteers." This shift further sidelined the concerns and voices of working-class women and concerns of some women of color.<sup>18</sup>

One of my favorite notes to myself while in the archive reads, "Don't forget where you found Audre." This location refers to the top row of the bookshelves in the closet on the right in the back room. There sits the selection of papers that Audre Lorde left the

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LHA. Uncertainty, chaos, and disorder produce and affect women's raced and classed bodies and spaces in different ways. I stopped to marvel how you can climb on a chair, take down her boxes, and leaf through drafts of her poems, books, and letters on your own. I also considered what it took for Lorde to create this work and the labor necessary both to leave it behind and for me to find it. My whiteness has its limits to what it can connect to and what instability it comes to bear. Our races visibilize our difference—my whiteness, her blackness; it is that which binds us in the useful in/stability of lesbian-queer life that sits in LHA documents and materials. Her work and presence remind us that lesbians and queer women of color and lesbians without means dwell even more profoundly in the in/stability dialectic. In/stability works differently for different bodies. It is the chance to make use of that in/stability in partnership with the LHA that allows for collaborative work toward justice.

Inasmuch as *queer* is constantly in flux and unstable, it is also therefore untethered from normative modes of thought or practice. The LHA commits to this flux *in place*, creating a stable space from which to remain in that state of flux. To read the spaces and experiences of these women over time, I needed to mind the LHA's in/stability in my choice of research methods and analysis.

### 5. *Stabilizing an Archive While Respecting Its Destabilizing Power*

In my search to describe the changing landscape of lesbian and queer culture and spaces over time in New York City, I consulted organizational records and publications because they provided the only (mostly) consistently dated materials to trace over time. The LHA holds over 2,300-plus organizational records, which primarily include documents regarding social, political, or cultural organizations and groups. From my experience in other LGBTQ archives, such as the LGBT Community Center National History Archive of New York City and the New York Public Library Lesbian and Gay Collections, I believe this collection to be the largest and most comprehensive LGBTQ organizational history in existence. I wrote in my field notes after my first month at the LHA: "These are my only options. These options are amazing."

By first selecting only those 724 records with meetings or offices in New York City, I then identified all organizations that began in or after 1983, which totaled 382. Organizational interests as well as reasons for forming or disbanding were incredibly varied, from the renowned Lesbian Avengers, Queer Nation, and ACT UP to lesser-known, wide-ranging groups and organizations like the following:

- Gay Veterans Association, Inc.—nonprofit dedicated to full equality for service members and veterans (1985–98)
- Imperial Kings and Queens of New York—transgender and cross-dressing social and political organization (1968–present)

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- Lesbian Sex Mafia—sex-positive group that organizes sex parties and sex education (1981–present)
- Orthodykes of New York—organization for Orthodox Jewish lesbians (1999–present)
- Shades of Lavender—part of the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force with a specific focus on lesbians with AIDS (1993–99)
- STP (also known as *Swing the Pussy*)—antiviolence and information-sharing broadsheet newsletter (1998–2002)
- USS Northstar NCC-10462—Star Trek fan club (1991–99)
- Women About (previously Hykin’ Dykes)—outdoors socializing group (1988–present)

Around this point, I saw myself becoming the dyke detective at the dining room table in the back bedroom on the second floor. I made seemingly basic materials legible, weaving histories of thousands of women from one city together. By now, though, I knew that making stability out of instability was impossible. I could only seek to make the material as useful as possible. A sole dot-matrix printout from the Lavender Bytes Computer Club indicated a span of years when such printers worked at such-and-such quality to presume the group’s existence at that time. The early statements from the LGBT Community Center announced that this group’s meetings were to be held in such-and-such locale, thereby temporarily fixing space and location. But these were not always positive pursuits. For some organizations, only by researching which homophobic epithets different city council members screamed over the years was I able to determine when these groups formed. In recording this information, bridges are built to connect and grounding given from which to expand these once spaceless and timeless and now partial histories as some absences were filled in, file by file.

### **Discussion: Offering Up Useful In/stability**

While queer theory has dwelled for decades in the possibilities and affordances of instability, stability in queer life, theory, and space is useful in other, complementary ways as evidenced in my experiences as a researcher in the LHA. The archive generates new spaces and practices of archiving. I even accidentally archived my own dissertation notebook. During breaks, I alternated between carefully reading an original *Wonder Woman*, volume 1, issue 4—which I poured over repeatedly for the chemistry she had with her nemesis, the vixen known as Cheetah—and a full set of Alison Bechdel’s *Dykes to Watch Out For (DTWOF)* (see in figure 1, the top shelf of the bookcase to the right). After months of searching every nook and cranny, I eventually found my notebook between volumes of Bechdel. Relieved and ecstatic, I suddenly understood that it will be welcome to find its own in/stability there soon, too. As such, the seemingly normative aspects of the LHA’s property ownership are queered, creating Muñoz’s disidentifications in the tension of the political, geographic, and social project of Cvetkovich’s useful archive within.

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My larger project, a historical geography of contemporary lesbian and queer society, culture, and economies, is fed by the tension of in/stability. Beyond the material stability of physical space lies a production of space in online environments. After much deliberation, I put all of the archival data into one giant spreadsheet to make use of the tension of in/stability and bring all of this work into conversation on one page. The resultant schematic includes over two thousand nodes of where and when lesbians and queers were and what they did in their organizing. Information from physical boxes and drawers that left me giddy sometimes and, more often, crying was placed into digital, tabular form and thus generates larger narratives about these women, ordered according to the logics of my research prerogatives. Is it an injustice to seek stability and place into grids the stories and labors of queer bodies that made such efforts to upend heteropatriarchal structures? How else can I tell a history of queer life other than to queer the queer, to put it in “order” to make some semblance of a useful narrative so that we know who we are, when we were, where we were, and what the hell happened to get us to our various heres?

This is one way to work between the stability and instability of queer archival disorder and invisibility: finding at least one (physical or digital) place from which to record and see all of our stories all at once. In the end, my work at the LHA knits together as much of lesbian and queer commonality and difference from these records of social change and radical activism as was possible for me. I continue to develop a set of interactive data visualizations to reckon with this massive set of data, which can be found at the project’s website, [jgieseking.org/category/data-visualizations](http://jgieseking.org/category/data-visualizations). Not only are these stories bound to the material archives; they will grow and be shared online to question the stability of history and archives generally.

My compulsion to order is not based (solely) on a need for stability inasmuch as it is a call to contribute to understanding narratives of lesbian and queer instability and, therefore, to bring stability and instability into conversation. There is also my own agitation to make sense of the unknown as a social scientist. This framing of queer research and lives affords ways to substantiate—while holding up for critical inspection—the binaries that queering often works against.

Useful in/stability then is the project of making use of queer refusal, flux, and instability alongside common-sense-making tactics of survival through stability. Excluding the useful aspects of stability ignores the ways of queering the binary of stability and instability as a dialectic. This usefulness extends from queer theorists to the lesbians and queers who make up the LHA. My examination of useful in/stability also points to other binary couplings that can be seen anew when addressed in tension, which can assist in the work toward justice by more fully accounting for difference. Embracing merely the instability and flux of the archive as it is socially and materially produced leaves out the effort toward permanence and remembrance that the founders and archivettes seek to support. In/stability is as interdependent as the

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stories and lives of those in the LHA. Queer archives, as the LHA demonstrates, partly come into being through their own useful in/stability for researchers, archivists, and archival subjects alike. Useful in/stability can be embraced even while we organize, categorize, and classify what lies within—and see where it takes us.

## Notes

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