

NOBODY'S BABY  
QUEER INTERGENERATIONAL THINKING ACROSS ORAL HISTORY, ARCHIVES,  
AND VISUAL CULTURE

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department  
of American Studies.

Chapel Hill  
2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rachel Gelfand: *Nobody's Baby: Queer Intergenerational Thinking Across Oral History, Archives, and Visual Culture*  
(Under the direction of Sharon P. Holland)

This study examines forms of queer relation and formats for accessing the past. Structured through personal experience, it puts pressure on the concept of “generation” in memory studies, trauma studies, and Holocaust studies. Simultaneously it addresses assumptions of non-biological attachment in queer historiography. I focus on three forms of “queer intergenerational relation.” I argue oral history, archives, and visual culture construct distinct spaces of memory transmission, and constructions of “queer family” complicate how such spaces enact memory work. These arguments are grounded in my position as a queer historian and child of lesbian mothers.

Part I studies visual art and memory transmission in the context of my relationship with the parents of my known sperm donor. I analyze a collection of art made in the Nazi ghetto of Terezín that hung in my paternal grandparents’ home. The works included portraits, landscapes, and scenes of Terezín, where my Czech Jewish grandparents were imprisoned. I study the art and spatial practice of their home exhibit. I then examine Palestinian art of the 1950s-1960s and my grandmother’s 1950s photo album from their decade in Haifa, Israel.

Part II analyzes oral histories with lesbians and trans parents who had children in the early 1980s in Boston. This original research chronicles debates around co-parenting, AIDS, donors, “chosen family,” and custody. It marks a transition in queer historiography and its

relationship to biological belonging. “Queer family” emerges as a mix of creative processes working simultaneously toward and away from normative structures of family making.

Part III explores collaborative research with Vicki Gabriner, a friend of my mothers, ex-Weatherperson, and co-founder of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance (ALFA) in the early 1970s. This third node enacts non-biological ties of “queer family.” Gabriner and I studied in ALFA’s archives together. Our queer method utilizes archives as a space of intergenerational exchange. Part III connects lesbian feminism, antiwar organizing, and FBI’s COINTELPRO programs. It opens up questions about wiretapping, state surveillance, and its reverberations in archives and recording technologies. Part III looks at the tugging affects of being taped, participatory research, and understudied activist roots of Atlanta’s feminist history.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation does not follow the usual parameters of the genre and I feel grateful that I was so thoroughly supported by my advisor and my committee to do this work. Thank you to my dissertation committee members who got me excited about my project's possibility. Della Pollock, Ann Cvetkovich, Tim Marr, and Michelle Robinson each offered instrumental insights along the way. Thank you Sharon P. Holland for guiding me in this process. You have been there for me through your own loss and I feel lucky to have gotten to spend this time working with you. During our meetings, whether at Open Eye or a SunTrust parking lot, I learned so much. It has been incredible to be your advisee. You encouraged me to find my own way while always seeing the big picture and assuring me the connections were there.

This project would not have been possible without support from the Royster Fellowship. The Royster Society of Fellows helped me workshop my project and find interdisciplinary connections across campus. The project was supported by UNC's Carolina Center for Jewish Studies and Graduate Certificate in Participatory Research. The Participatory Research program helped me land my first year. The program encouraged me to explore participatory models of history, archival intimacy, and the messiness of research. Thank you Jacquelyn Hall, Rachel Seidman, and Jessie Wilkerson for guiding me in my first interviews and bringing me into the Southern Oral History Program. Thanks to my fellow graduate colleagues in American Studies: Josh Parshall, Elijah Gaddis, Elijah Heyward, Matt Swiatlowski, Trista Porter, Kimber Thomas, Meredith McCoy, Danielle Dulken, and Heather Menefee.

This project would not be possible without the generosity of interviewees and archivists. To those I interviewed for this project, thank you all for your time and historical knowledge! Thank you to the librarians at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture, Northeastern University Archives, Lesbian Herstory Archives, and the Schlesinger Library.

I want to thank Ruth von Bernuth of the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies who brought the *Defiant Requiem* to UNC in 2017. The concert performance of Verdi's Requiem paid tribute to my grandparents, Hana and Edgar Krasa, who passed away during the writing of this dissertation. It was moving to experience this performance, which honored the Krasas's commitment to sharing Terezín music. I want to thank Hana and Edgar Krasa for their love. I knew I could call their house and they would pick up with that incredible grandparent joy—"Hi Rachel!! Eda—It's Rachel!" I want to thank Dani Krasa and Tatjana Meschede, who have been generous in helping me with this project. I love you both and feel grateful you were able to visit North Carolina each spring. Each time you came, you encouraged me to explore a new place.

Thank you to the Gelfands and the Kagans. My grandparents, Jack and Esta, Irving and Matile, would have loved to see me reach this point. They are definitely with me. Thank you to my two moms, Marcy Kagan and Judy Gelfand. Marcy, Part I comes entirely from your 2005 suggestion. It has been a gift to be exploring (queer) intergenerationality at the same time as you through our own means (yours being art, mine writing). Judy, I cannot believe you sat down and read this whole thing so quickly. Thank you for edits and encouragement. Thank you both for supporting me and reminding me, as drafts multiplied, that "this is just a part of my process."

My moms have an inspiring capacity to build deep relationships and cohere a chosen family. They opened their doors to friends and family for every holiday, and the depth of conversations about life, death, love, and loss they have at each of these gatherings taught me an

ethic of emotional presence. Thank you Leslee, Rochelle, Claire, Sally T, Sally E, Rho, Karen, Melanie, Andre, Deborah, Jim, Nancy, Bruce, David, Scott, Ann and Charlotte for your love and support. Thank you also to the next generation: Sammy, Leah, Eric, Sonia, Marah, Eli, Yonatan, and Benyamin. To my sister Dory Kagan, I am lucky to be in this family and life experience with you. I was always the more timid one, and you have helped me bust through that a little each year. You are brave, quick-witted, and an impressive maker of things. I want to thank Jesse Posner, who was my first friend and who offered important insights over the phone as a fellow child of lesbian mothers. Thank you to friends: Ariela Kuh, Iemanjá Brown, Amelia Runyan, Sammy Lyon, Moe Norton-Westbrook, Brittany Craig, and Amanda Martin.

To Vicki, it is hard to know what to say. I feel so much love for you and this process has really been a labor of love for you. It is dedicated to your commitment to personal scholarship and it follows your model of asking our mothers about their lives. I feel grateful we were able to collaborate on this project, and that I was able to learn so much about your life through this work. I love you always.

To Shoshana, you have helped me through each trying stage of this process. I love you and admire you. You are the true academic in our house. You teach me about introspection, humor, being ethical, being a good partner, and I appreciate that you always say I can carry a tune. That means a lot to me. Thank you also to Joel and Melody Funk, who have been great resources and incredible cheerleaders along the way. Finally, thank you to our cat Mikey who, despite my commitment to being a dog person, won me over immediately in his sweetness. I especially appreciate his daily companionship during my years of dissertating.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALFA	Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance
CARASA	Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse
CASPAR	Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation
CESA	Committee to End Sterilization Abuse
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
GCN	<i>Gay Community News</i>
LCCN	Lesbians Choosing Children Network
LGPP	Lesbian and Gay Parents Project
LMNDF	Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund
LOC	Lesbians of Color/Lesbianas de color
NLFS	The National Lesbian Family Study
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity
R2N2	Reproductive Rights National Network
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SOHP	Southern Oral History Program
TWWA	Third World Women's Alliance
UMASS	University of Massachusetts
UNC	University of North Carolina
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

## INTRODUCTION

In February 1985, a close friend of my mothers, Vicki Gabriner, came to their house in the Boston neighborhood of Jamaica Plain to record an interview. Vicki, who a few weeks later would be present at my birth, sat down to ask a pregnant Judy Gelfand about the baby-to-be, her relationship with my mother Marcy Kagan, and the reactions of both their parents. At the outset, Vicki explained her intention “to document this process with the baby in mind.” The interview was recorded on two sides of a tape cassette and not listened to again until I, the baby in question, was in the final stages of writing this dissertation. As I listened, I was struck by their young voices and the image of the two lesbian friends sitting and talking as I floated, two weeks from delivery, in Judy’s uterus. I thought about Vicki’s impulse to document and my own path to oral history.

I was also particularly struck by the day of the interview. They mention during their two-hour conversation that Judy had just returned from meeting the mother of “the known sperm donor” for the first time. Dani Krasa did not have children of his own at the time, but he believed politically in helping lesbians have a child. With the due date approaching, Dani’s mother Hana wanted to meet. During lunch at a Chinese food restaurant, which I would later go to regularly with Hana and her husband Edgar, they discussed Hana’s role as grandparent. The baby would have three sets of grandparents and, as Vicki and Judy put it in the interview, “many lesbian and non-lesbian aunts.” This interview brought together the three forms of (Jewish) queer relation that structure this dissertation: Vicki is a non-biological relation and a close member of my

mothers' "chosen family;" Dani and his parents are a biological and familial tie, but not as close; Judy and Marcy represent biological and non-biological parents who shaped the relational narratives I was raised within.

Clearly, I was not nobody's baby. I was everybody's baby. But the formulation of *nobody's baby*, for which this dissertation is titled, describes a queer approach to memory transmission. Nobody's baby refers to what does not get passed on, what inheritance misses. It cites a feminist politic that refused to be infantilized. It sites the ephemerality of queer pasts. Memory is partial. Queer methods to accessing the past are grounded in ephemerality and the importance of what escapes the archive. At the same time, nobody's baby centers futurity and its dilemmas. The desire to create new generations is always historically situated, and the idea of generation itself demands further scrutiny.

Using personal experience as a theoretically and historically generative tool, my project intertwines three distinct historical moments that complicate concepts of "generation." It analyzes 1940s experiences in the Nazi camp of Terezín through visual culture. It documents 1980s practices of the "lesbian baby boom" in Boston through oral history. It examines 1970s lesbian feminist activism in Atlanta through the archives. Weaving these dense moments and materials together, this work puts pressure on assumptions of biology in studies of memory, diaspora, and trauma, and simultaneously, on assumptions of non-biology in queer understandings of family and belonging. *Nobody's Baby* is grounded in my own position as queer *and* as the child of lesbian mothers with a known sperm donor. While queer intergenerationality presupposes connections outside "the family," there are generations of queer experience *within* my family. In this dissertation, I argue memory studies must reconsider its reliance on filial bonds and queer studies must contend with the significant presence of children

of gay, lesbian, and trans parents. Examining visual art, oral history, and archival materials, I trace the affective life of memory, loss, and family.

This study is written in a three-Part structure. Each Part attends to one form of queer relation and one format for accessing the past. This framework moves away from a linear inheritance model and values reflexive inquiry. Drawing on my own family experiences, I center process and eschew outcome. I consider how inheritance (usually hetero) and ambivalence (usually queer) work in close proximity. The dissertation's three-Part structure reflects its method of thinking through juxtaposition.

Before I give an overview of each Part, it is important to understand how they function as a cohesive project and generate new ways of approaching memory processes. Situated at the intersections of American studies, memory studies, and queer studies, this work sits alongside projects in critical memoir and modes of inquiry grounded in personal experience. Its structure draws inspiration from concepts of analogy seen in Bill T. Jones's dance method,<sup>1</sup> work by Carolyn Dinshaw which urges historians to take a "queerly historical" frame,<sup>2</sup> and from Jodi Byrd's formulation of enjambment.<sup>3</sup> Each of these works lay distinct historical moments end to end. Through the apposition of discrete histories, locations, and time periods, themes and

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<sup>1</sup> *Analogy: A Trilogy* is a three-night performance piece by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. It includes elements." Bill T. Jones, "Director's Note *Analogy: Trilogy*" American Dance Festival, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw writes of "a queer desire for history." Her approach to history demotes narrative in an effort to draw out the affective and haptic dimensions of crossing time. She writes, "I suggest that with such queer historical touches we could form communities across time." Carolyn Dinshaw in "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion." Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher S. Nealon, Tan Hoang Nguyen. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 178.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd outlines the project's method to place "seemingly disparate histories, temporalities, and geographies into conversation in the hopes that, through enjambment, it might be possible to perceive how Indianness functions as a transit within empire." She continues, "To read mnemonically is to connect the violences and genocides of colonization to cultural productions and political movements in order to disrupt the elisions of multicultural liberal democracy that seek to rationalize the originary historical traumas that birthed settler colonialism through inclusion." Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), ii.



repetitions build. In this project, the Parts address complex matrices of intimacy and institution, and they linger in the ephemerality, ambivalences, and paradoxes of memory work.

Part I is a critical intervention into projects of memory studies and third generation theory. I analyze a collection of Terezín art that hung in my donor/birthfather's parent's TV room, where I spent significant time as a (queer) child and adult. The collection of drawings included portraits, landscapes, and scenes of Terezín (or *Theriesenstadt*), where my Czech Jewish grandparents were imprisoned. How did these drawings transmit traumatic historical experience differently from US narratives of Holocaust commemoration? How was this transmission framed by the queer lineage of our connection? Art in Terezín was a tool of documentation, reflection, and a way of countering Nazi narratives in international settings. My analysis of my grandparents' home exhibit thinks through the circulations of originals and reproductions of Terezín art.

This Part is given greater complexity through an analysis of Palestinian artwork of the 1950s and 1960s. I study works of Palestinian artists who utilized art to document, reflect, and create belonging. This Part opens up visual genealogies that connect the artists of Terezín and Palestinian artists. It offers similarities in style and use of art to process, witness, and transmit traumatic experience after. Studying Terezín and Palestinian art, my methods include an art historical framing that contextualizes the training and experiences of the art makers. It includes a visual analysis of the works themselves as well as an analysis of the spatial practice of my grandparents' curation. This work makes an intervention in emergent scholarship of the "third generation" (or grandchild generation) by centering settler colonial theory.

Part I contends with "aesthetic inheritances" and what happens when the space of transmission is no longer there. My study of their collection of Terezín art analyzes the layers of

memory work in the art pieces individually and as a whole. Each work has accreted meaning in its making, saving, framing, and hanging. This Part moves back and forth between the multiple contexts they contain: their making during the war, their curation in the Krasa suburban home in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Krasas's 1950s experiences in Israel in between which impacted their understandings of curation, home, and archive.

In Part II, I utilize queer oral history methods to chronicle the context of reproduction that precipitated the above connection. I interview fifteen lesbian and trans individuals who had children during the early 1980s in Boston. This project challenges notion of “queer family.” Having children as queer subjects is viewed in queer theory as a pernicious act, a succumbing to US norms and requirements to (re)create nuclear family. Through oral history I present a more nuancing accounting of early dialogues surrounding lesbian and trans reproduction. Interviews chronicle the shift from radical lesbian mothers groups in the late 1970s to a more “right to parent” organizational model by the late 1980s. The interviews contextualize the “lesbian baby boom” within the social and political milieus of Boston, from the “Nobody’s Baby” softball team to AIDS care. These interviews, between queer listener and queer teller, range in intimacy. Interviewees include my mothers, close acquaintances, and individuals I did not know. Part II thinks through how lesbian and trans parents were both subverting and upholding norms of family. It engages critically with the narrative of “chosen family.”

Part II puts into practice queer oral history methods and in doing so, it challenges the assumptions of this emergent subfield and shifts its definition of “queer intergenerationality.” In 1995, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy noted oral history’s singular capacity convey gay and lesbian history and experience. She wrote, “Not being born and raised in a public lesbian and gay culture, each gay and lesbian person had to construct his or her own life in oppressive contexts, a

process that oral history is uniquely suited to reveal.”<sup>4</sup> My experiences growing up with models of queerness complicates this framework of oral history. Queer historiography and queer theory generally presuppose gay departure from straight family.<sup>5</sup> This Part contributes original research that diverges from this narrative and propels us into deep engagement with what biological belonging means in queer contexts.

Having discussed donor/daughter and parent/child relations, Part III turns to non-biological connection within queer family. I explore collaborative archival research with Vicki Gabriner, a friend of my mothers who was present at my birth and with whom I remain very close. Together we studied in the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance’s archive. Gabriner was a co-founder of ALFA and ex-Weatherperson. I interviewed three ALFA members in multiple settings to chronicle ALFA history. The organization began its grassroots lesbian archive in 1972, two years prior to New York’s Lesbian Herstory Archive. When the ALFA closed in 1994, its collection was acquired by Duke University. This study expands its archive to think through the implications of FBI surveillance present in ALFA history. The FBI arrested Gabriner in 1973 in her Atlanta lesbian collective house. Preparing for trial, which was eventually won, she listened to wiretap recordings from her Weather years and reviewed FBI documents received obtained through a FOIA request. Because of this process, her personal papers were a mix of

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, “Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History” *Radical History Review* 1995, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 60.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Schulman argues that it is precisely a lack of shared experience with family and the particularly exacting homophobia that occurs within the family that sets gay and lesbian movements apart from other forms of US movements for social change. She writes, “Most social movements have been constructed by people who were related: civil rights and labor movements involve multi-generations of rebellion by the same families. Even feminism has tried to be a movement of mothers and daughters. But the gay and lesbian movement, like the disability movement, is made up of people who stand apart from the fate of their family members, and whose most intense oppression experiences may be at the hand of those same relatives.” Sarah Schulman, *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 38.

lesbian activist documents and FBI memos. Sifting through this archive, I reflect on the role of surveillance in archival praxis.

This Part critically engages with the queer archival turn and with queer oral history. I spend time studying the literature of queer oral history, and I delve into the method of bringing archival subjects to the boxes and folders that chronicle their involvement in movement history. Archives are a space of transmission, but it is important to chronicle how the possibilities of this exchanges differs in home, grassroots, and institutional archives. This work centers radical lesbian archiving in the South and thinks critically about shared technologies of aural capturing from oral history to wiretapping. Our process has been deeply marked by Vicki's serious health diagnoses. This work attends to the affective dimensions of archival engagement and the grief and longing therein.

In 2011, I moved from Philadelphia to New York. My friends and I arrived in Flatbush, Brooklyn in the middle of a snowy winter after navigating the narrow, unplowed streets of South Philly in an extra-large moving truck. It was a move of ambivalence. I was doing well in Philadelphia and only just learning to love it as an outsider. Unpacking the next day, I got a call from my moms. They had not wanted to bother me during "the move" but Vicki had gotten a bad diagnosis. She had a rare, incurable blood cancer. Sitting in my new room, two train stops away from Vicki's childhood home, my grief was overwhelming.

When I began graduate school, Vicki and I took on researching Atlanta as a site of lesbian feminist activism and archiving. This work pulled from both our strengths in history and personal scholarship. It also gave us time with each other. That moment in 2011 shaped the contours of this dissertation. My engagement with Vicki over the years has generated new ways of thinking about the tools of memory transmission and what queer intergenerational exchange

can mean. Our many phone conversations reflect the themes of this project—aural technologies, connection across historical experiences and relational ties, and the process of mourning imbued in research and writing.

In studying visual, oral, and archival forms of memory, this dissertation uses a queer lens to examine im/material mnemonic practices. Each Part pushes back on its discipline and pulls across discipline. Through a process of recursivity, it draws connections between home, archive, family, and the state. In doing so, it offers generative praxis in *queer intergenerational thinking*. While trans- and cross-generational emphasizes pathways for the traveling of information, intergenerational points to the liminal and threshold quality of transmission. The inheritance of lived experience is multidirectional. The term “queer” functions as noun and adjective. As noun, it is a contemporary term for sexuality outside compulsory heterosexuality, which despite its ubiquity, retains insinuations of sexual dissidence. As verb, to queer is to break up categories, to make strange, and to put at odd angles. *Queer intergenerational thinking* moves toward the ephemeral and the arc of the archive. This thoroughly interdisciplinary and intimate endeavor begins with the archive at home.

## Part I

### A Queer Family (Post) Memory Visual Art and the Archive at Home



Figure 1. 1

“Loss leaves a long trail in its wake. Sometimes, if the loss is large enough, the trail seeps and winds like invisible psychic ink through individual lives, decades, and generations. When the losses are as enormous as those that followed from the Holocaust—when what was lost was not only individuals but a world—the disappearances and the absences may haunt us unto the third generation; and they may inform our very vision of the world.”

- Eva Hoffman. “The Long Afterlife of Loss.”

“Indeed, the politics of mourning might be described as that creative process mediating a hopeful or hopeless relationship between loss and history.”

- David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*.

## **Housing Memory**

My grandparents, Hana and Edgar Krasa, lived in a small house on Hartman Road in Newton, Massachusetts. They lived there from 1970 until 2015 and so they were there, on a cold February night in 1985, when I was born to my two lesbian mothers. As survivors of the Nazi camp of Terezín, my paternal grandparents saw in me a life after loss. They left Czechoslovakia in 1950 for Israel with their son Dani in utero and arrived in the US in 1962. Dani and my mothers had not been close before, and it was not until my mother, Judy, was nine months pregnant that Dani told his parents about the soon-to-be-born baby. Upon hearing that I would exist, they were of two minds: Hana was excited, Edgar was cautious. Would I be another loss? In this question, I see a particular relationship between the “lesbian baby boom” and the desire to create family for those who lived through the Holocaust. Dani did not have children “of his own” until I was eight years old. I was not as close to Hana and Edgar as I was to my mothers’ parents and their families, but there was a bond and I spent significant time at their house across town in my childhood. As the parents of my biological father and not of my lesbian mothers, Hana and Edgar always sat outside my “family” in some ways; in equal measure, I was outside their family. The transmission of their Holocaust experiences to me was refracted through the queer lineage of our connection and the uncharted grandchild-grandparent relationship we forged.

The above epigraphs juxtapose two writings on loss. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian write of mourning as process and politic from the perspective of American studies. Drawing across disciplines, scholars in American studies have looked at histories of trauma and its remains. Taking up Douglas Crimp's call for mourning *and* militancy, such scholars have marshaled loss as a poignant political tool. Eva Hoffman, a thinker and memoirist of the "second generation" of Holocaust survivors, writes from a personal lens of Jewish immigrant experience. In Part I of the dissertation, I seek to open up new dimensions for discussions of "Holocaust commemoration" by putting American studies and queer studies in conversation with works of memory studies. Queer scholarship troubles the frame of biological belonging that permeates key memory concepts such as generation, diaspora, and postmemory. Works in American studies address the complexities of national belonging and the pervasive workings of colonialism and constructions of race. Both fields, American studies and Queer studies, critically engage with the role of visual culture in the production of dominant (and counter) narratives. Scholarship on Holocaust commemoration innovatively contends with afterlife of trauma and the residual importance of its materials, but it is entrenched in heteronormative family and Zionism. Coming into the field of American studies at the onset of the ASA boycott of Israeli institutions in 2013, I thought hard about the connections between my grandparents' art collection and their years in Haifa. This Part of my dissertation delves into the framing and the politics of loss.

My relationship with the Krasa collection of Terezín art is a story that used to be told forwards but now works only in reverse. It is the story of my child and adult experiences with a familial collection of drawings made by professional artists in the Nazi camp of Terezín. Visual art has been at the center of the journey toward a non-heteronormative grandchild-grandparent relationship. As Lisa Saltzman writes, "It is those visual forms, the particular visual strategies



that are used to give the past a place in the present, the aesthetic inheritances that are mobilized to make memory *matter*.”<sup>6</sup>

In the back room of my grandparents’ ochre house, there hung a collection of drawings made by Jewish artists imprisoned in Terezín, or in German, *Theresienstadt*. Memory was turned into matter at each stage of the drawings’ life. In making the works, artists were profoundly recording, remembering, and tracing their very present terror and deterioration. In saving, smuggling, and arriving with the works, my great-grandmother, Elsa Krasa turned art to testimonial object. Yet, the process of becoming object and becoming collection was ongoing. As the works became a home collection, my grandparents constructed and maintained a space-to-be. The commemorative space of the room came into being in its activity. My grandparents’ four decades of coexistence with the room brings up questions of loss, trauma, and recovery. In looking at visual and spatial practices in the house, my meditations attend to the affective and corporeal work of the collection. Why is it “those visual forms” that so affect? Hugging the walls of the room, the drawings invoke a bodily space. The air matter in the center of the room is psychic, physical, and cut by story. For my grandparents, curating was a genre of return.



Figure 1.2

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 7.

Over the last thirteen years, I have worked and reworked papers about my grandparents' Holocaust drawings. In a way, compulsive research and writing has been my genre of return and my attempt to get closer to an "aesthetic inheritance" I have had trouble grasping. Through narrative and corporeal means, the psychic ink of the artists seeped through to me, the third generation. This recursivity, present in Part II and III of the dissertation, is a through line of my project. The oscillating nature of memory, its leaving and returning, upends a linear temporality.

In 2005, I took a course with Carlos Massota at the Universidad de Buenos Aires entitled "Poetics of Remembering, Politics of Forgetting." It was not until taking this class, a hemisphere away from my family, that it occurred to me that my grandparents and their collection of Terezín art made during the Holocaust could be a topic of inquiry. It was in Argentina, surrounded by discussions of how trauma is commemorated on personal and national scales, that I started thinking about how such traumas were relayed to me. Southern Cone thought on commemoration offered language I could not find. There was a noun for forgetting. Chilean theorist Elizabeth Jelin's work presented a nagging question, which reverberated through the house on Hartman Road: "What do those who are supposed to receive the transmission incorporate?"<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1.3: Elsa Krasa, Hana Krasa, Rachel Gelfand, 1987

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, trans. Marcial Godoy-Anativia and Judy Rein. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 96.

Ten years and a few conference papers later, my grandmother Hana passed away. She was diagnosed with a fast moving cancer at ninety-one. From her hospital bed, she led us in Czech children's songs despite her pain. Her death shifted the processual<sup>8</sup> creation of the Krasas's home space. It was seismic. The glue and matriarch were gone. Edgar and Hana met after the war in Prague and moved to Haifa in 1950, to New York in 1962, and to the Boston area in 1964. The house on Hartman Road was their home for forty-five years.<sup>9</sup> Without Hana, Edgar quickly declined and the family decided to sell the house. Edgar moved to assisted living and when the apartment downstairs from Dani opened up in 2016, Edgar moved there. Less than a year later, at the age of ninety-two, Edgar also passed away.

The *shiva*, or Jewish mourning period, after Edgar's death took place in the downstairs apartment. For each day of sitting *shiva*, my mothers brought a box-of-Joe from Dunkin Donut's. Dani and his wife Tatjana Meschede had created a board of images of Edgar's life. The photo board sat alongside Hana's board—images of their lives in Newton, Haifa, New Hampshire, and Prague. Dani and Tatjana's two sons mingled with their cousins and Vicki Gabriner, who will be the principal subject of Part III, stopped by with her wife Rochelle Ruthchild, an interviewee for

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<sup>8</sup> In 1995, Barbie Zelizer wrote that there are six characteristics of collective memory: processual, unpredictable, partial, usable, particular/universal, and material. "Remembering is processual action by which people constantly transform the recollections that they produce. These transformations are not incidental but instead constitute collective memory's defining mark." Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* (June 1995), 218.

<sup>9</sup> Hartman Road is named after Arnold Hartmann, who was a German Jewish émigré from Schildberg, Germany. Hartmann arrived in the Boston area in 1880 at the age of two. He first worked in the wool and leather industry and he moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina for business. In 1918, he began his career in real estate development in the Oak Hill area of Newton, which he continued through 1960. During World War II, Hartmann wrote letters seeking assistance for Jewish family members in Breslau of then Germany, now Poland. His correspondences (written from Newton and Buenos Aires) are archived at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). These letters offer a window into the Hartmann family's diaspora across Shanghai, Germany, and South America. They depict a network of assistance organizations in the Boston area, and they further connect my grandparents' neighborhood--and Hartman Road in particular--to Jewish diasporic circuits. According to USHMM records, Hartman's cousins, Philipp and Regine Hartman, were unable to escape Europe and died in Terezín. It is striking that in this suburban area, the primary mover and shaker was a German Jew with close, familial connections to Terezín. Neighboring roads include Arnold Street (a reference to himself and his son Arnold Jr.) and Rosalie Street (a reference to his daughter Rosalie and his mother was named Rosalia). See: Arnold Hartmann Correspondence, 1939-1946, 2000.63, USHMM and <http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/historic/research/collections/papers/hartmanncorr.asp>.

Part II. Holocaust scholars and homecare workers who cared for Edgar came and went. The apartment had sparse decoration from the old Hartman Road house. On the walls of the apartment, the collection of Terezín art hung above where Edgar ate and slept his last months. This moment was important for three reasons. With Edgar’s passing, the *shiva* became the last family gathering during which the drawings hung together. Second, it was the first time no one who had been in Terezín and knew the context of the drawings was present. Third, it was a moment where all the principal subjects of my dissertation were in the same room. While the dissertation presents each Part as a distinct history, in my experience, they frequently overlap in family gatherings.

The developer who bought the Hartman Road house did not have use for the ranch-style house with extensive yard and vegetable garden. The plot was razed for redevelopment in line with the large houses that had grown up among the 1960s, single story two-bedroom structures. And this is why the story begins at its end. The home exhibit of Terezín art that I study in Part I exists in memory only. What work did their commemorative space do in the decades it existed? To paraphrase Jelin, what did those of us supposed to receive the transmission absorb?

\* \* \*

In this Part, I make a series of overlapping arguments regarding the Krasa collection that put pressure on the idea of “generation.” I argue that the body of scholarship devoted to “third generationality” must think about both their settler colonial locations and the assumptions hereditary holds. Thinking queerly about postmemory means detaching inheritance from biology while at the same time discussing biological ties *within* the queer family. I study three levels of reproduction at work in my grandparents’ curated space: visual reproduction or the rendering of

Terezín life by professional artists, reproduction or birth in a queer context, and reproduction of displacement and loss in the creation of the Israeli state.

Within these frames of reproduction, I argue that art served a dynamic range of functions within Terezín. I examine the ways in which the space of the house was operationalized in response to personal trauma. I contrast the art in the Krasa house with that of archives and museums, placing their pieces within a larger diaspora of “Holocaust art.” While Terezín art has been recently shown in big exhibitions, other pieces sit deeply buried in Israeli and US archives. I place my own experiences with the drawings in juxtaposition to the US narratives and popular culture of the “Americanization of the Holocaust,”<sup>10</sup> which boomed in the very same years I spent in the Krasa house.

This analysis is usefully complicated by my position as a queer and the child of lesbian mothers. Any viewing of the art pieces was most definitely inflected with Hana and Edgar’s struggles to accept: their son’s choice, my mother Marcy who is not biologically connected to me, my mother Judy who is biologically connected to me, and my sister Isadora, who has a different paternal donor. Each viewing of the art occurred in the midst of familial figures navigating these waters of genes, legal guardianship, and unequal attachments.

My work traces the role of postmemory—the relational structure through which children of trauma survivors hold the past of their parents—in the art collections’ memory processes.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia” *Public Culture*. 12, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 23.

<sup>11</sup> Marianne Hirsch first discussed postmemory in reference to Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* in 1992. Honing the concept’s definition, Hirsch wrote more extensively on the affective idea in 2008. “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by

The idea of postmemory, first theorized by Marianne Hirsch in the 1990s in the context of children of Holocaust survivors, has been a crucial turn in memory studies and the discipline's understanding of the generation that came after. Postmemory describes Dani's generation, what Eva Hoffman calls "the hinge generation," or the next generation who held the closest proximity to those who were there. It is a structure through which to think about the back and forth dynamic of parent and child. Hirsch's concept has been taken up as a useful frame in thinking about the children of the children of those who experience trauma: the third generation. Within this generational frame, scholars investigate how recall and its reverberations move through storytelling, objects, images, and the family archive. While Hirsch's recursive concept does not require genetic connection, heredity has remained central to memory studies and its understanding of family and diaspora. As Stefan Helmreich points out, diaspora shares an etymological root with sperm, with spores. Diaspora refers to a scattering.<sup>12</sup>

This question of queer life in diaspora is something many scholars have taken up under the rubric of "queer diaspora." Gayatri Gopinath, David L. Eng, and Jarrod Hayes argue diaspora is premised on heteronormative lineage.<sup>13</sup> Queer studies, queer of color critique, and works on queer diaspora challenge the binary constructions of nation/diaspora, home/exile, and production/reproduction. Eng writes, "queer entitlements to home and nation-state remain

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traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the experience of postmemory and the process of its generation." Marianne Hirsch, "Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 106-107.

<sup>12</sup> Stefan Helmreich, "Kinship, Nation, and Paul Gilroy's Concept of Diaspora," *Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (1992): 245.

<sup>13</sup> For more on queer diaspora theory see Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). See also Jarrod Hayes "Queering Roots, Queering Diaspora" in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, eds Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 72-87.

doubtful.”<sup>14</sup> For Gopinath, queer diaspora is a critique of national narratives of home. Queer theory on diaspora shows the ways in which ideas of family and nation are set at odds with queer ways of being. Defining queer diaspora as a frame of analysis, David Eng writes, queer diaspora “investigates what might be gained politically by reconceptualizing diaspora not in conventional terms of ethnic dispersion, filiation, and biological traceability, but rather in terms of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency.”<sup>15</sup> This reframing urges studies of diaspora, memory, and trauma to question the assumptions of genetic (filial) ties.

Moving throughout the house on Hartman Road, I ground my analysis in a feminist and queer perspective. Following Marianne Hirsch’s call for feminism in memory studies,<sup>16</sup> I want to look at how transmissions of the past are gendered and the ways in which generations have always been less hetero than they are formally defined. I do not carry traditional markings of the third generation. I did not grow up in Dani’s house and did not absorb his “emotional sequelae”<sup>17</sup> to his parents’ traumatic experience. Yet, if trauma is transmitted, early and often, in images and in structures, my time spent in my grandparents’ house for holidays, birthdays, and other gatherings is significant. The back room was a location of everyday movement, daydream, solitude, zone-out, and flight. How did the time I spent with the drawings at a young age imprint a past upon me?

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<sup>14</sup> David L. Eng, “Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies,” *Social Text* 52, no. 53 (Winter 1997): 32.

<sup>15</sup> Eng, “Out Here and Over There,” 33.

<sup>16</sup> In 2012, Hirsch wrote, “...feminist and queer readings can...illuminate not just what stories are told, but how those stories are told and how those images are constructed. In its awareness of power as a central factor in the construction of the archive, moreover, feminist analysis can shift the frames of intelligibility so as to allow new experiences to emerge, experiences that have hetero remained unspoken, or even unthought.” Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Eva Hoffman, “The Long Afterlife of Loss.” *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 407.

While there is a lack of language for the contours of memory transmission, Eva Hoffman hits on something when she writes that loss “winds.”<sup>18</sup> From a psychoanalytic perspective, trauma overwhelms and arrests the individual. In such an experience, it is “overwhelming immediacy, that produces its belated uncertainty.”<sup>19</sup> The event does not go away, but rather is always returning and always fractured. For the second-generation or postmemory generation, life and creativity is often “shaped by the child’s confusion and responsibility, by a desire to repair, and by the consciousness that her own existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss.”<sup>20</sup> As the first granddaughter born, in what ways have I too been a form of compensation? While Hirsch uses postmemory as a structure to speak to the commonalities of experience with the second-generation, the questions she raises about how to receive this inheritance of loss are important to my own process. “How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them?”<sup>21</sup> As a living connection, what are my responsibilities and what is not mine to know?<sup>22</sup>

### **Third Generation Theory**

As I begin a queer reframing of postmemory, it is evident that the concept of third generation must be defined. To this end, I turn to contemporary conversations of emergent “third

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<sup>18</sup> Hoffman, 406.

<sup>19</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Grappling with this question, Hirsch looks to Gayatri C Spivak and Toni Morrison. As Morrison asserts in *Beloved* some stories are not to be passed on. This “historical withholding,” as Spivak describes it, recognizes what will not be transmitted. This is not presented as a choice, but rather as elemental to mother/daughter exchanges. “Historical withholding intervenes” (Spivak quoted in Hirsch, 81).



generation” scholars of Holocaust Studies. Published in 2016, *In The Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and The Third Generation* heralded the arrival of an adult third generation. For the anthology’s editors, Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein, and David Slucki, third generationality is defined by the ways in which Holocaust memories are mediated through parents, grandparents, Jewish communities, and “global Holocaust discourse.”<sup>23</sup> The anthology sets academic parameters by presenting a working definition of the third generation. It is “simultaneously broad and quite specific, connoting relationally and investment in Holocaust histories, a sense of 'bearing witness' to the aftermath of the Holocaust, a distance from the events, and a way of making use of these connections. The third generation is defined in relation to ancestors, to the Holocaust, and to each other. It is never only one thing.”<sup>24</sup>

Its writers work to articulate what constitutes membership of “the third generation” from their relative milieus of South Africa, Israel, the United States, Brazil, Berlin, and Australia. The editors, located in Melbourne, argue that “grandchildren of Holocaust survivors have a particular relationship to the Holocaust,”<sup>25</sup> as they hold both intimacy to and remoteness from that mid-century moment. The text’s transnational perspective offers insights into commonalities of experience between members of a grandchild generation, but it misses the opportunity to situate those experiences within a colonial frame. While it is clear the third generation’s concept of Holocaust history is born of an intertwining of familial and national narratives, the anthology does not make explicit the relationship between its writers and their settler milieu. While the authors caution against a “homogenizing generation,” they do not hone in on the shared but

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<sup>23</sup> Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein, and David Slucki *In The Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and The Third Generation*, (Elstree, UK: Vallentine Mitchell, 2015), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Jilovsky et al, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Hirsch, 1.

distinct experiences of settler identity<sup>26</sup> held by almost all of the book's third generation writers. How do members of the third generation relate to narratives of *national* belonging? How does this third generation relate to the state? They are most often members of a second generation in terms of immigrant arrival. If all memory is social, the location of the grandchild generation matters, as memories are products of the imagined communities they circulate within.

The third generation is characterized by coming of age during a "boom" in discourse of Holocaust commemoration in the 1980s and 1990s led by US institutions. In an examination of how and if memories embedded in my grandparents' collection were transferred to me, the question of my own imagined Holocaust must be addressed. One key concept in the study of memory is Maurice Halbwachs's assertion that all memories and all forgetting are constituted within social frames.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, even memories of events seen first-hand are socially constructed, filtered through the culture we will live in. How we remember and forget is inextricably tangled with language, with our experiences, with the experiences of others in society. Memory itself, as Jelin writes, is subjective, an object of dispute, and historicized,<sup>28</sup> which is to say our recollection of past events changes over time as society changes.

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<sup>26</sup> For this project, I utilize Patrick Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism, which uses the concept primarily outside US geographies, but I want to be clear Wolfe did not coin the term. Wolfe argues settler colonialism is "a structure not an event." ["The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event."] Grounded in anthropology, Wolfe argues that while settlers "destroy to replace," this colonial formation is "inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal." The process of "elimination of the native" is structural and includes a pervasive matrix of removal, mass killing, and assimilation. As J. Kehaulani Kauanui writes, Wolfe's theoretical work describes "the elimination of the native *as native*." As Wolfe notes and as is evident in the context of Palestine, settler colonialism is an ongoing process. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 387–409. Faye Sayegh first used by the term, settler colonialism, in *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (1965). See also: Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (1973). Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries: A People's History* (1979). Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (2006). Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadat, "Acts and Omissions: Framing Settler Colonialism in Palestine Studies" (2016). J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity" *Lateral: Journal for The Cultural Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>27</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, "Memoria colectiva y memoria histórica," *Revista Sociedad* 2, no. 13 (1999): 20-32.

<sup>28</sup> Jelin, xv.

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked an explosion of Holocaust narratives in American popular culture. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, published in 1986 and 1991, by Art Spiegelman was a best seller and part of a rise in creative works by the second generation. In *Maus*, Spiegelman used the viscosity of the comic genre to re-frame his father's experiences through dialogue and flashbacks to the events of the war. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and Czech communism, the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in 1993, the release of *Schindler's List* in 1993, and many fiftieth anniversaries of war events in 1995, the mechanisms of culture were working full steam to build an American Jewish narrative of the Holocaust; and I was in its midst. In its tone and repetition, Holocaust education in school and religious settings did not get me interested in the subject, instead it pushed me further away.<sup>29</sup> I was oversaturated and resistant to the gendered dynamics of young adult Holocaust texts.<sup>30</sup> Still, Holocaust images and narratives seeped in.

The third generational perspective struggles with questions of heredity and proximity. Is generation defined by blood relation or by thirty-year spans? Is the "third generation," as the editors ponder, defined as anyone born between 1979 and 1989?<sup>31</sup> The editors of *In The Shadows*

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<sup>29</sup> Ernst van Alphen writes of this feeling in his own Dutch education. "I had the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust drummed into my mind. Or rather, the Dutch school system and representations in the media tried to do so. My resistance to teachings about the war and the Holocaust requires explanation... Why was I bored instead of feeling morally address?" (van Alphen quoted in Jelin, 98) The education system's prescribed moral reactions gave him no room to feel for himself, to attach his own meaning.

<sup>30</sup> In my elementary school, I remember girls read young adult novels about the Holocaust. It was its own genre. As a tomboy I resisted, however I did ended up reading many such books (*Island on Bird Street* by Uri Orlev and *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry) as required reading. I also remember being impacted by homosocial films such as *Europa, Europa*, which was directed by Agnieszka Holland and released in the US in 1991.

<sup>31</sup> This age bracket is narrower than other markers of the "third generation." I should point out here that Dani and Tatjana's sons, my half-brothers, were both born in the 1990s and had an extremely close relationship with Hana and Edgar Krasa. It is also noteworthy that 3G, a non-profit in Boston focused on the third generation, casts a wider net. Their website states that to be a part of 3G: "You don't have to be a grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, simply a desire to help us ensure the world never forgets. Typical age range is 20-30's but all are welcome!" (<http://boston3g.org/category/s1-main/c18-faq/>)

of *Memory* write with some regret that they have “primarily relied upon hereditary notions of generation.”<sup>32</sup> This sentence is immediately followed by a reference to Erik Jensen’s writings on gay and lesbian “generations,” who, he argues, attribute political consciousness to their awareness of Nazis persecution of prior homosexual “generations.”<sup>33</sup> My work sits in the uncomfortable space between these two sentences. The counter example to heredity is a queer generation, or a connection to the past through shared sexuality but not through childrearing or biology. Generation, I argue, has to be rethought to encompass both biological ties that are not familial *and* nonbiological ties that are familial.

*In The Shadows of Memory* opens up space for innovative methods by presenting texts at the intersection of memoir and academic inquiry. The anthology emphasizes the role of the aural, textual, and visual remnants of the past, with essays drawing from grandparents’ letters, oral histories, and family photographs. In addition to intergenerational dialogue, the project highlights conversations between third-generation writers, with one essay co-authored by two Jewish Australian siblings, Ben and Jordana Silverstein. Attention to creative works of descendants of Holocaust survivors is a central theme of emerging publications on the third generation. In *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (2017), Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger analyze “recurrent antagonisms of assimilation and historical alienation” of the grandchild generation. They contend the “third generation must gather knowledge piecemeal, from vague references, indirect stories, conversations overheard, oblique observations, and from documents.”<sup>34</sup> *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives in Memoir and*

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<sup>32</sup> Jilovsky, Silverstein, and Slucki, *In The Shadows of Memory*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> The article referenced here is Erik N. Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2, (Jan.-Apr., 2002): 319-349.

<sup>34</sup> Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*

*Fiction* (2016), also edited by Victoria Aarons, stresses that the third generation is marked by the end of “direct survivor testimony.” Aarons hones in on literary works and celebrates Holocaust literary representation’s continuation or survival.

While these works do not contend with settler colonial frameworks, I do notice a shift in how some thinkers of the third generation relate to Zionism and contested narratives of national belonging. The Silverstein siblings, discussed above, incorporate settler colonial frameworks into their individual scholarship. Ben Silverstein is a lecturer in indigenous studies and Jordana Silverstein writes at the intersection of postcolonial theory and Jewish cultural history. Their work suggests a potential turn in third generation writing that contends with structures of settler colonialism and Zionism. Drawing from her position as a Jewish Australian, Jordana Silverstein thinks critically and comparatively about how narratives of national and cultural belonging are shaped by affects of anxiety and effects of land occupation.<sup>35</sup>

### **Framing Settler Perspective**

Contributing to this new current of third generation writing, my project places the Terezín drawings within their larger geopolitical context. As objects that have accreted meaning through the experiences of their curators, the drawings cannot be disconnected from the decade Hana and Edgar lived in Haifa, Israel. This settler experience informed the curatorial practices they employed as they set up their suburban home. The structure of this Part of the dissertation moves

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(Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Jordana Silverstein’s own comparative study, *Anxious Histories*, centers the role of national and settler identity in orthodox Jewish politics and its Holocaust education. This text “denaturalizes historical narratives about the Holocaust” (3), and attends to “settler colonial ways of remembering and forgetting” (4). She argues Holocaust education is permeated by anxieties and ambivalences of diaspora. Jewish arrivants in New York, USA and Melbourne, Australia convey “strong Zionist feelings” at the same time that they express concern about the precarity of their current belongingness. Jordana Silverstein, *Anxious Histories: Narrating the Holocaust in Jewish Communities at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

back and forth between the history of the Terezín drawings and the works of Palestinian artists. First I describe the house in Haifa as a location of making “family” and simultaneously a participation in settler violence. Then I go back in time to the Terezín artists and their cultural milieu. I analyze three Terezín pieces within the room’s collection. Then I return to the work of Palestinian artists making connections in style and influence between the two distinct histories of art making. Then I go to the room itself. The room’s belated arrival in this text mirrors the relationship Hana and Edgar had with the room. In closing, I spend time thinking through the implications of the room’s absence today.

Edgar’s mother, Elsa Krasa, in Czechoslovakia saved the collection of Terezín drawings after the war and kept them when Hana and Edgar fled to Israel. This time period is marked globally by decolonization, Cold War alignments, the Suez-Sinai War (which Edgar was conscripted into), and in the US, sit-in movements, white flight, and a politic of segregation. Michael Rothberg asserts this period is vital to understanding Holocaust commemoration. Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) offers a mode of historical engagement that does not see the memory plane as a finite space. Rothberg studies how the constitution of Holocaust commemoration was inextricably linked to concurrent movements for decolonization in the 1960s. He asserts, “early Holocaust memory [of the 1950s and 1960s] emerged in dialogue with the dynamic transformations and multifaceted struggles that defined the era of decolonization.”<sup>36</sup> Rothberg draws from Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Hannah Arendt who all asserted totalitarian violence must be contextualized within colonial history and seen as a “choc du retour” or “boomerang effect” of colonization. Nazi violence employed tactics of extermination used in US colonies, but it was

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

also a manifestation of the racial logics produced through European imperialism. As Adolf Hitler set out to conquer the Continent, he utilized the violence that the metropole was “defined by and permeated with.”<sup>37</sup>

While Rothberg’s work is situated in memory studies, works of American studies thinkers have also contended with the “special” relationship between the US and Israel, especially in the formative years of 1960s. Keith Feldman’s *A Shadow Over Palestine* (2017) goes deeper into the postwar era and argues narratives of difference in Israel and the US were co-constituted. Feldman writes that “[s]truggles over hegemony in the United States became entangled with transformed relations of rule in Israel and Palestine...US civil rights and antiwar struggles, Zionist settler colonization and Israeli military and administrative occupation, and Palestinian narratives of dispossession, dispersion, and resistance were forged, felt, and thought together.”<sup>38</sup> Through an ethnic studies lens, Feldman notes how American, European, and Palestinian memory influenced one another in a crucible of 1960s geopolitics.

Ariella Azoulay centers the role of objects and archiving in the construction of Israeli power. Archives, she writes, are the “medium for the performance of national sovereignty.”<sup>39</sup> When Palestinians were forced to leave large land areas in 1948, the objects they left behind were garnered in the Israeli State Archive, under the 1950 Absentee’ Property Law and the 1955 Archives Law. Azoulay notes this cloistering of objects made Palestinian possessions readily accessible to Israeli historians while disallowing access to objects’ descendants. Rothberg,

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<sup>37</sup> Rothberg, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ariella Azoulay, “Photographic Conditions: Looting, Archives, and the Figure of the “Infiltrator,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*. (Issue 61), 6.

Feldman, and Azoulay offer insights into the historical moment in which Elsa Krasa saved the drawings and in which a new archive institution, Yad Vashem, was formed in Jerusalem in 1953.

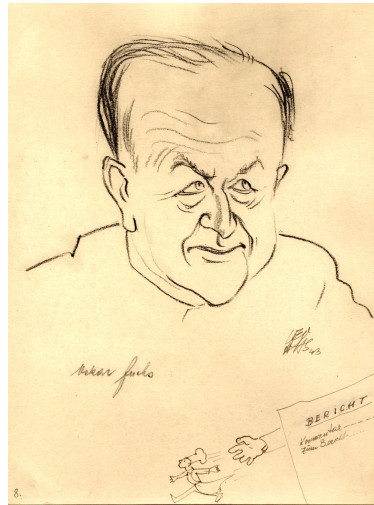


Figure 1. 4 Oskar Fuchs Portrait, Leo Haas

There are over a thousand drawings made in Terezín that exist today globally and thousands more destroyed or yet to be found. There are comprehensive histories of Terezín's professional artists. But there is no scholarship on how the works of Terezín's prolific productions have operated in home spaces. The above drawing is a useful entry point and guiding image to frame questions integral to my dissertation. The caricature is of Oskar Fuchs, my grandmother's father. This is an image fixed in a location that no longer exists. It hung above my grandparents' dining room table. Walking into the Krasa house, this drawing was directly facing the front door, guarding the rest of the suburban layout that stretched behind it. Sitting for meals of dumplings, soups, and Edgar Krasa's famous birthday cakes, the portrait floated above meal conversation. Above the caricature, there was an enlarged black and white photograph of my grandmother's mother, Rosa. For as long as I can remember, the original photo was loosely tucked into the frame's bottom corner. Hana's parents presided over the table and alluded to the larger collection of drawings, displayed at the other end of the small house in the TV room.



While outside the TV room's curated space, which is the focal point of this Part, the caricature densely contains elements of Terezín works: portraiture, barter economics, humor, documentary, and reproduction. Drawn by Leo Haas, a well-known Jewish political cartoonist, the portrait holds the presence of both sitter and portrait artist. Haas's signature is on the right and Fuchs own signature sits underneath his image to the left. This co-signing signals the piece's co-constitution. The drawing reflects the camp's barter system and the popularity of portraiture in Terezín. It also highlights the humor of such drawings—Haas depicts Fuchs chastising a Terezín cook. Oskar Fuchs was a member of Terezín's Jewish Council and responsible for making sure cooks did not give food out unevenly. Edgar Krasa, as Terezín cook, did just that. He gave extra food to artists, such as Haas, to augment their clandestine artistic production. What Haas could not have guessed was that Oskar Fuchs's daughter Hana would marry the very cook he caricatured after the war. The 1943 drawing imagines a relationship that never came to exist between father and son-in-law. In 1944, Oskar and Rosa Fuchs were sent from Terezín to Auschwitz where they did not survive.

Adding layers to this object of loss, the Haas portrait is a copy not an original. Yad Vashem owns the original. The reproduction gave daily presence to the missing original and represented the museum's refusal to give Hana the piece when she heard from a friend that the museum had it. Karl Loesten, head of security in Terezín, donated this drawing with a large collection of Haas portraits of Terezín leadership.<sup>40</sup> As such, the framed replica over the dining

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<sup>40</sup> "Karl Loewenstein (1887-1976) was born to Jewish parents in Siegen, Germany, and in 1917 he married Margot Hamburger, who also came from a Jewish family. In 1919, however, he converted to Christianity as a Lutheran. After having served as a naval officer during World War I, he worked as a director of a bank in Berlin, named Busse and Co. He was active in a Lutheran parish in Berlin-Weissensee, and in the 1930s, was one of the founders of a Confessing Church congregation that split from that parish. Due to his involvement in the Confessing Church, as well as his Jewish background, he was arrested in November 1941 and deported to the Minsk Ghetto. In May 1942 he was transferred to Theresienstadt, where he was appointed by the camp commandant to supervise the security services in the ghetto, including the fire brigade. He survived the war and following liberation, he moved to Great Britain, where one son lived, and then to Australia, where another son (Fred Lowen) lived, before returning to

room table signaled a larger body of work in circulation in museums, archives, and home exhibits of Terezín survivors. It highlighted questions of ownership and the role of art and archives in the creation of the state of Israel. In its pairing with my great-grandmother Rosa's portrait image, it emphasized the similarities and distinctions between photographic and drawn representation. The drawing was the Terezín image most deeply imprinted on. I sat as toddler, teenager, and adult with my seat directly facing the framed duo. As part of a larger diaspora of "Holocaust art," the pieces in the Krasa house existed in tension with those of archives and museums. While some Terezín art has been showcased in exhibitions, other pieces sit deeply buried in US and Israeli archives.

### **Haifa: The House of Memory**



**Figure 1. 5: "Our New and Improved Castle"**

In discussing the design of the Krasa home in Newton, it is crucial to connect it to their prior residence in Haifa. This home, their "new and improved castle," predates their relationship

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Berlin, where he lived the remainder of his days." <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn500111>

with the Terezín art. Edgar had collected the drawings and left them behind with his parents when he left Czechoslovakia.

On my last visit to Hartman Road, I went with Dani to look at a family album of their years in Haifa. I had never seen the album before and it presented a new visual landscape within the familiar space of their house, now quiet without Hana and Edgar's presence. In 1948, Palestinian residents were forced to leave the plot of land, which Hana and Edgar moved to in 1950. Visual cultures, and photo albums especially, are a way of melding personal and familial narratives grounded in landscape, celebratory gatherings, and collective landmarks. Looking at the album, I tried to glean more information about their experiences starting a family in Haifa.

Visual art has been a key site of commemoration and documentary practice in response to the large-scale, forced removal of Arab residents by Israeli forces at the outset of the UN's partition. Lila Abu Lughod and Ahmad Sa'di note the centrality of the visual in Palestinian mnemonic practices and the importance of home. "The events of the Palestinian expulsion in 1948 have rendered the old family home a place of painful memory and a symbol of what has been taken."<sup>41</sup> In my project, I chronicle the work of Palestinian artists during the years the Krasa family lived in Haifa. Following this road, I begin with the text that moved me into this line of inquiry, a 1969 novella by Ghassan Kanafani.

In Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa*, he tells the story of a middle-aged Palestinian couple who drive to Haifa in 1967 from Ramallah, where they were exiled from Haifa for two decades.<sup>42</sup> The protagonists, Said and Safiyya, go to see the city they were raised in and the house they lived in. Entering Haifa, the husband, Said, drives like he used to drive. The roads are

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<sup>41</sup> Abu-Lughod and Sa'di, 16.

<sup>42</sup> In 1967, Ramallah was captured by Israeli forces, which opened up the border to Israel for residents of Ramallah.

old routes. The muscle memory is still there. Yet, these roads also bring him back to the day he left. He flashes back to the trauma of that day in April 1948 when he was pushed to the sea. On the drive, Said and Safiyya relive *al-Nakba*. On April 21, 1948 Jewish militias forced residents through the streets then to British ships that sent them over the border with 750,000 other Palestinians. In 1948, Safiyya stepped out of the house to see what was going on and was swept up in the crowd. She could not get back to the house to get their infant son. In the novella, twenty years later the couple pull up to their old house. “Suddenly, the house loomed up, the very house he had first lived in, then kept alive in his memory for so long. Here it was again, its balcony bearing its coat of yellow paint.”<sup>43</sup>

A Jewish woman answers the door. The house still has much of Said and Safiyya’s furniture and decorations. This was very striking to me. The Jewish family was living with the home décor of the house’s former Palestinian owners. The Jewish woman recognizes Said and Safiyya “from the photographs.”<sup>44</sup> Kanafani’s text utilizes this home space as its primary setting. The novel could be a play for the way in which all action occurs within the context of this house. This also was striking because there were few interior images of the Krasa house in the Haifa photo album. Most images, utilizing outdoor light, were taken outside with backdrops of Mt. Carmel or Haifa’s beaches.

Kanafani’s novella shifts perspective part way through and tells the Jewish woman’s history. Miriam and her husband arrived in Haifa, and they were given the house by the Israeli government. In one scene, Miriam describes when the couple first arrived in Israel and saw a

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<sup>43</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *Palestine’s Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories* trans. Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 161.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

dead Palestinian boy thrown in a truck “like a piece wood.”<sup>45</sup> In this moment, she flashed on seeing her own brother’s body disposed by the Nazis. Yet, the Jewish couple stayed, and when they found Said and Safiyya’s son in the house, they raised him as their own. The reader meets the son, 20 years old, returning to the house in military uniform—he is a part of Israeli armed forces. He does not want to know his biological parents. Said and Safiyya leave the house distraught. Kanafani brings the reader through this encounter between Palestinians and European Jews. It centers the house and the next generation. It reflects a Jewish desire for new family and a Jewish capacity to turn a blind eye to the realities around them. Miriam shares a flicker of ambivalence about her role as settler, but she is unable to move from that recognition to empathy or a changed course of action.

The Jewish woman who answered the door in Kanafani’s story in some ways could have been Hana, my grandmother. After losing both her parents to Auschwitz, Hana returned from Terezín to Prague. There she found that the apartment she grew up in was occupied. She looked for her parents in life insurance records, in all manner of bureaucracy, without finding them. Edgar worked after the war as a cook in the Israeli embassy in Prague and embassy officials helped them get the necessary false papers to get out of Communist Czechoslovakia. Like the characters in Kanafani’s novel, they travelled through Italy to arrive in Israel. In the new settler state, they lived in Wadi Jamal, Haifa. Their house was built by a Jewish arrivant, but previous landowners were likely Arab. Their neighbors were Arab and Jewish. Hana created the family album as a way to narrate and document their experiences. Through the album genre, Hana’s activated private visual objects in tandem with existing public (and state-level) visual narratives. Yet, her album work also offered nuances of settler experience that did not always align with

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<sup>45</sup> Kanafani, 169.

dominant ideology. As Azoulay asserts, the keeping of visual items was a highly political endeavor in the context of Israeli looting.

Decades after Kanafani's novella, *Return to Haifa* was adapted into a film in 1982, and it is often cited as "the first Palestinian film." In the novella and the film, lost connections between biological relations demonstrate the gravity of exilic loss. These themes of biology and belonging reverberate throughout my project. Kanafani's text locates the child/future as a contested entity and it imagines dialogue about this futurity between European Jews and Haifa's Palestinians. In its film version, *Return to Haifa* brings up themes that recur in this Part of artists' struggles over visual representation and a commemoration of art-makers. Mossad, Israel's intelligence arm, assassinated the author Kanafani in 1972 for his political involvement as spokesperson for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). As such, the film created a decade later contends with the loss of Kanafani and the persistence of his message.

Visual art, on institutional and local levels, has been a vital element in the creation of the state of Israel. Art made in Nazi detention has been an especially crucial for Yad Vashem, which was created in 1953 but conceived of during the war. Yad Vashem was built on Mount Herzl, named for the famous Zionist thinker. It sits adjacent to the Jerusalem Forest, which was built by the Jewish National Fund on expropriated land. The museum, remodeled in 2005, is known for its prism-like architecture through which more than 600 photographs, 2.2 million "pages of testimony," and oral history videos are displayed. The Art Museum is one of the six main components of the museum complex, and it was recently rebuilt through donations from Miri and Sheldon Adelson. The Art Museum holds 10,000 works of art made by Jewish artists during World War II. These works offer a different way into the history of violence and loss that the museum aims to convey. As the Art Museum website notes, "The art displayed in the new

Museum allows a different view of the Holocaust — based on the experience of the individual — using a medium that appeals not just to the intellect, but also penetrates straight to the heart.”<sup>46</sup>

For curators of Yad Vashem’s Art Museum, drawings made in Nazi camps offered memory work both particular and universal.<sup>47</sup> It highlights individual perspective and transmits a collective experience on an affective register.

The museum is a critical site for the production of Israel as an idea and physical territory. In her position as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton visited the Art Museum in 2009 and viewed pieces of a mural drawn by Bruno Schultz. Schultz, who is sometimes called the Polish Kafka, was a Jewish writer and painter. An SS officer asked him to paint a mural in his home, which was rediscovered in 2001. Yad Vashem took these pieces of the wall without permission setting off an international legal dispute with Poland and the Ukraine. At the conclusion of the visit, Clinton wrote in the Yad Vashem visitor book highlighting “the resilience of the human spirit in the face of despair.” Clinton’s trip highlights the Holocaust art exhibition’s diplomatic utility as well as it reflects Ariella Azoulay’s assertion that the archive is the “medium for the performance of national sovereignty.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “Art Museum.” Yad Vashem, accessed October 27, 2017. <http://www.yadvashem.org/museum/museum-complex/art-museum>

<sup>47</sup> This again refers to the concepts of memory formulated by Barbie Zelizer. She writes, “the same memory can act as a particular representation of the past for certain groups while taking on a universal significance for others” (230).

<sup>48</sup> Azoulay, *Photographic Conditions: Looting, Archives, and the Figure of the “Infiltrator,”* 6.



Figure 1. 6: US Secretary of State Visit 2009      Figure 1. 7: Paul Newman Visit 1960, Image Credit: Leo Fuchs

The story of Ein Hod, a Palestinian village on the other side of Haifa, is also emblematic of the relationship between art and territory. During *al-Nakba*, Palestinians were forced out and to a temporary set up a few miles away. In 1953, Marcel Janco, a Romanian Jewish artist who helped found Dadaism, became interested in the evacuated village.<sup>49</sup> He petitioned the Israeli government for the go-ahead to start an art colony in the space. The colony became a highlight of state guided tours. In 1961, James Baldwin visited the colony. He was in the early stages of writing *Another Country* and *The Fire Next Time*.<sup>50</sup> In the 1960s, Eleanor Roosevelt visited.<sup>51</sup> The cast of the US film *Exodus* (1960) visited while shooting on location. Any of these famous American visitors could have driven by the neighboring area of Haifa where Hana, Edgar, Dani, and his baby brother Rafi were living in the early 1960s. The showcasing of this Dadaist project echoes current tactics of pinkwashing.<sup>52</sup> Jewish artists, who survived Nazi camps, made art and

<sup>49</sup> Susan Slymovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrative the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998): 33.

<sup>50</sup> Feldman, 1.

<sup>51</sup> “The new owners, who included other refugees from Central Europe, incorporated scattered stones from the original village in order to retain elements of the old architectural forms, even preserving these features (as they put it) ‘like a reservation of the [Native American] Indians.’ The village mosque was turned into a restaurant and bar, unashamedly named ‘Bonanza,’ which became a popular destination with visiting celebrities such as Eleanor Roosevelt, the Marx Brothers, and Danny Kaye.” Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 142.

<sup>52</sup> Pinkwashing refers a political strategy in which pro-gay policies are highlighted while racist or xenophobic policies are subsumed. Israel has marketed itself as magnanimously “gay friendly” while eschewing Palestinian politics as homophobic. This strategy plays to a liberal US public, but it veils infringed human rights and illegal



experimental pieces to work through their own traumatic experiences. Yet, these creative projects took place in the houses and town streets of the Palestinian community they were actively displacing; making for a tripled effect of displacement and blurring the hard line between cause and effect, making way for *affect*. Ein Hod's Palestinian residents, unable to move back into their town, lived in a makeshift, temporary village up the road with the same name, Ein Houd.<sup>53</sup>

*Exodus* is a filmic representation of *al-Nakba* and Israeli settlement, which is worth exploring in more depth. Growing up in a lesbian household that participated in Reform Judaism, *Exodus* (and *The Ten Commandments*) were among our few VHS movies. They were the films I watched when I was home sick from school, the ones that blur together in the haze of a high fever. *Exodus* has been an effective narrative for Israel's geopolitical presence for five or more decades.<sup>54</sup> In 1948, many Americans were on the fence about the new state of Israel. As Amy Kaplan reminds scholars, "American press was rife with analogies between the newly stateless conditions of Arab refugees and Jewish displaced persons from World War II."<sup>55</sup> The Deir Yassin massacre of hundreds of Palestinians by Jewish forces in April 1948 was decried in the international press. In a *New York Times* editorial, Albert Einstein and many other well-known Jews in the US penned a collective letter describing right-wing aspects of the Israeli government

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settlements. Whether or not there is an explicit connection between Israeli pinkwashing and its 1960s emphasis on abstract artists, the loose parallel was useful to my thinking. Pinkwashing gives another example of how queerness and belonging become intertwined in machinations of nation and home. I use pinkwashing rather than homonationalism, which is not a state practice. For more on pinkwashing and this distinction see: Jasbir Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* no. 45 (2013): 33-34.

<sup>53</sup> Slymovics, 25.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Kaplan's analysis of *Exodus* cites Edward Said, who said in 2001, "the main narrative model that dominates American thinking still seems to be Leon Uris's...novel." Amy Kaplan, "Zionism as Anticolonialism: The Case of *Exodus*," *American Literary History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 872.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 883.

as fascist and pointing directly to the destruction of the village of Deir Yassin. As the Suez-Sinai War began in 1956, President Eisenhower threatened sanctions.

*Exodus*, which was published by Leon Uris in 1958 and released as a film in 1960,<sup>56</sup> was a bestseller and functioned together as innovative forms of public relations.<sup>57</sup> *Exodus* was the way that Israel became legible to the US. They were fighting the British. It was anti-colonial. The epic framed Israel for an American audience through the familiar language of exceptionalism.<sup>58</sup> It was unique *and* exemplary. *Exodus* built a pioneer story. The film called the Deir Yassin massacre “the blackest blot,” but the plot continually blamed Palestinians for their own forced removal. It is framed in settler terms that ironically echoed decolonial rhetoric. Against this project of the “Jewish Western,” Palestinian artists sought to convey the realities of their experience through art. The fight through visual art over how the violent history of 1948 would be remembered echoes the political mindset of Terezín’s professional artists, who sought to counter Nazi propaganda’s masking of mass violence.

While Hana and Edgar left Prague, Edgar’s parents stayed and navigated the communist strictures of postwar Czechoslovakia. Hana’s brother, and only surviving relative, was starting a family of his own. Hana and Edgar were starting their family and becoming close friends with fellow Europeans Holocaust survivors having children in Haifa. Edgar’s mother Elsa saved the collection of Terezín drawings and attended annual commemorations at Terezín’s “Memorial for

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<sup>56</sup> Another Hollywood blockbuster of 1960 was *The Diary of Anne Frank* directed by George Stevens. As Terezín’s Kurt Gerron was forced to make Nazi films, Stevens was chosen by the US government to film DDay and the war’s aftermath in Dubeau and Dachau. Following this military duty, Stevens directed *Giant* for which he won an Oscar. In 1969, he directed *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which won Oscars as well.

<sup>57</sup> This is noted on the “Babylon” episode of *Mad Men*, in which Israel’s Board of Tourism becomes a client of the fictional Sterling Cooper advertising agency. Don Draper, advertising genius, reads *Exodus* on and off throughout the episode as the agency struggles to find anyone Jewish to aid them in their sales pitch. Interestingly, *Mad Men* later features a character who was born *in* a concentration camp who eventually has a mental breakdown.

<sup>58</sup> “‘It’s 1776 in Palestine’” had been a slogan to muster American support for Zionism since the 1930s” (Kaplan, 876).

National Suffering,” despite the memorial’s relative obscurity, geographic distance, and inattention to Jewish loss.

Returning to Michael Rothberg, it is important to note the temporal parallels between the genesis of Holocaust commemoration in the 1960s and the emergence of decolonial movements. Historians generally mark a shift in Holocaust discourse in the early 1960s following the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann (1960-1962). Rothberg specifically studies vibrant conversations about commemoration and the presence of French forces abroad during this period. French Jewish socialists were critical of and outspoken about France’s use of torture in Algeria and Vietnam. In the United States, there were new student sit-ins from Greensboro to Baltimore each day of the spring of 1960. During this period, the Krasas left Haifa on visas to the US. The drawings arrived via Elsa Krasa in 1964. Elsa visited for Dani’s bar mitzvah and smuggled the first work to the surprise of Hana and Edgar. Hana had not known about the art before it arrived in her home. The arrival of the drawings occurred many decades before the US Holocaust Museum, which was initiated in 1978 and opened in 1993—with a cornerstone laid by Ronald Reagan in 1988. And they arrived after Hana and Edgar’s years in Israel via my great-grandmother Elsa’s “excellent smuggling.”<sup>59</sup> Elsa, Hana, and Edgar’s experiences during and after the war inform how the collection was saved, framed, hung, and rearranged over the years. Each of these stages, in which memory is turned into matter, occurred within political and cultural moments grounded in visibility.

## **Making Terezin**

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<sup>59</sup> Hana Krasa, interview by author, 2012.



Figure 1. 8 “Barackenbau,” Fritta. State Jewish Museum, Prague.

With the historical context of the Krassa collection in mind, a meditation on my grandparents’ collection of Holocaust drawings and its role in transmission of memory must first turn to the context of their making. In 1941, my grandfather entered Terezín as part of the *Aufbaukomando*. The *Aufbaukomando*, or construction command, was a group of 342 skilled Jewish workers brought to Terezín ahead of transports to build and prepare the star-shaped military garrison. Edgar was working in kitchens since he was fourteen when he was asked to help plan Terezín’s kitchen, just three years later. How did Edgar end up being one of the two cooks brought to Terezín? How voluntary was it? The family story was he was offered this opportunity in exchange for protection for his family. But for more details of his life, I turned to a nine-hour oral history interview he sat for at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2003. I also studied archives sources at the Center for Jewish History in 2014, and on a sunny day in Buenos Aires in 2005, I read his memoir, *Determination and Luck*, in a park. Through the audiovisual time travel of his digitized interview and via written materials, I garnered Edgar’s life history.

Edgar was born in 1924 and raised in the Sudetenland spa town of Karlsbad. This export and tourist region was hit particularly hard by the global economic depression. With its relatively high population of German nationals, it also began to feel the pressures of fascism in 1933 when

Hitler came to power. In Karlsbad, Edgar's parents, Alois and Elsa Krasa, struggled financially. Alois Krasa's savings, made in Vienna's textile industry, were devalued after World War I. By 1933, his father was no longer able to find work as a Jew and the family moved to Prague. With German occupation of all Czech lands in 1938, many Jewish parents in Prague thought it would be easier for their children to move abroad if they knew a trade. School was not an option for Edgar after 1938 because his family could not afford entrance money. An aunt suggested he apprentice in a kitchen so that he would not be hungry.<sup>60</sup>

For three years, Edgar apprenticed at a large restaurant in Prague. When that restaurant was no longer able to keep a Jewish apprentice, he worked in the Prague Jewish Community Center, which provided meals and lodging to German and Polish Jewish refugees. The director of this shelter, Karl Schliesser, was put on the Jewish Council of Elders tasked with organizing the creation of Terezín as a prison ghetto. Schliesser asked Edgar if he would join in the work of planning Terezín's food infrastructure. In Edgar's oral history interview, he points out the contradiction of that moment. Schliesser told him they were creating a Jewish ghetto to hold the Jews of occupied Czech lands but that he would protect his family from being sent to Poland. Edgar notes this indicated the Jewish Council understood Terezín would be a transfer point along routes headed to concentration camps further east. It was not solely a ghetto for Czech Jews. In the winter of 1941, with esteemed engineers and construction workers, Edgar took a passenger train to Terezín to become one of two cooks. The boy raised in poverty felt elevated to the "importance level of lawyers."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by Joan Ringelheim, September 09, 2003, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>61</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by Joan Ringelheim, September 09, 2003, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Terezín was a sleepy fortress town originally built for 8,000 soldiers and townspeople by the Hapsburg emperor Joseph II in 1790 at the confluence of two rivers. Terezín's name comes from Joseph's mother Maria Theresa. And it has a twin fortress, Josefov, named after the emperor himself.<sup>62</sup> The two fortresses were intended to protect against Prussian forces, but neither experienced direct siege. Terezín held political prisoners, such as Gavrilo Princip, when Austro-Hungarian forces controlled it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has 12-meter walls, a moat, and few gates. In *Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald describes what he imagined Terezín to be like in the centuries before WWII. He writes, "I see a quiet garrison for two or three regiments and some two thousand civilians throughout the nineteenth century, somewhat out of the way, a town with yellow-painted walls, galleried court-quarters, armoires, bandstand concerts, occasional forays for the purpose of military maneuvers, officers' wives who were bored to death, and service regulations which, it was believed, would never change for all eternity."<sup>63</sup>

When Nazis took control of the new nation of Czechoslovakia, Terezín, sixty kilometers from Prague and close to the railway, was designated as a ghetto to remove Czech and German Jews from their metropolitan homes. Those in the *Aufbaukommando* were tasked with preparing the small Hapsburg fortress to hold 60,000 prisoners and manage a constant flux of new arrivals and transports to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen. This infrastructure would be put to the test during Terezín's four years as a transit camp. It is estimated 33,400 died in Terezín of illness, starvation, and violence. By the end of the war, Terezín imprisoned 140,000 Jews with 88,000 sent to death camps.

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<sup>62</sup> Unlike Terezín, Josefov Fortress in eastern Bohemia was not used during World War II and remains a residential space not unlike Sebald's imaginings. Today it hosts "Brutal Assault," an annual heavy metal festival. The August festival's motto is "Against Intolerance and Violence." It began in 1995 and now features over 80 bands during four days and functions through a "cashless" economy. <http://brutalassault.cz/en/>

<sup>63</sup> W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2001), 200.

While Edgar worked on kitchen design, Fritz Taussig, or Fritta as he was known, worked on Terezín's art departments as part of the *Aufbaukomando*. Fritta was required to set up the Drafting or Technical Studio, which would produce illustrated reports, architectural blueprints, and propaganda posters for the Nazis. One of Fritta's early illustrations, "Barackenbau," (Figure 12) demonstrates how artists were implemented from the beginning of the ghetto. This 1942 drawing documents the efficient building practices and productive labor of the *Aufbaukomando*. Within weeks, transports into Terezín began. Jewish prisoners from Brno, Prague, and German high society quickly filled the barracks. Nazis attempted to utilize the skills of those held in Terezín. While artists in the Technical Studio depicted positive representations of the ghetto, the Nazis set up a second studio to expand artistic production. Artists in the Decorative Studio made portraits, landscapes, and replicas of famous paintings for SS homes.<sup>64</sup> It is to the required and clandestine visual art created in the two studios that I now turn.

### Three Terezín Artists



Figure 1.9 Drafting/Technical Studio, Leo Haas, 1943

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<sup>64</sup> Sybil Milton, "Art in the Context of Theresienstadt," *Art, Music, and Education as Strategies for Survival: Theresienstadt 1941-45* ed. Anne D. Dutlinger (New York: Herodias, 2001), 24.

In the above drawing, Leo Haas depicts the community of artists at work. At the head of the table sits Joseph Spier, who headed the Decorative Studio, with his son Peter Spier on his shoulder. To their right, Charlotta Burešová rests her chin on her arms and eyes the viewer. Moving towards the right of the page, Haas draws Malvina Schalková with glasses, Petr Ginz with long Elvis hair, Fritta standing with glasses, and Ferdinand Bloch at the furthest right-hand corner. Towards the bottom of the page, the viewer sees Leo Haas's hand and signature. In order to analyze individual works displayed in my grandparents' TV room by three artists: Fritta, Haas, and Hilda Zadiková (who was in the Decorative Studio), it is vital to think through the cultural movements and milieus present around that table of artists working. The artists' training and politics offer a window into the aesthetic inheritances imbued in the works they produced.

These artists were a part of a vibrant cultural life that took hold in Terezín. Imprisoned and living with constant anxiety about transports, Terezín's Jewish painters, scholars, composers, and musicians produced prolifically. In the 1930s, artists from Berlin and Vienna had fled to Prague, which was already a hub of music and art making. First in secret and then quite openly, there were performances and lectures night after night in the camp.

The art makers of Terezín, brought together through the two Nazi studios, came to the camp with dynamic and varied prior experiences in Europe's art world. Adolf Aussenberg worked in the film industry prior to the war.<sup>65</sup> Friedl Dicker-Brandeis studied at the Vienna Academy for Graphic and Applied Art before joining the Bauhaus from 1919-1923. Dicker-Brandeis was a well-known designer in Berlin and Vienna. In Terezín, she instructed children in art utilizing new theories of art therapy generated through the Bauhaus movement. Charlotta (Lotka) Burešová studied at Prague's Academy of Fine Arts. In Terezín's Decorative Studio,

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<sup>65</sup> Adolf Aussenberg Papers, RG 101, Box 1. Center for Jewish History.



Burešová was tasked with creating replicas of Rembrandt and Rubens, often from postcard images.<sup>66</sup> Karel Fleischmann was a doctor and a founding member of the avant-garde group, “The Line.” Frantisek Moric Nágl studied with Hanus Schwaiger in Prague and was known as a “peasant painter” during the interwar years. Otto Ungar attended the Prague Academy of Art before becoming a high school art teacher. Frantisek Zelenka was an architect, with a functionalist orientation, and a part of the avant-garde “Liberated Theater” group in Prague. For the “Liberated Theater” and poet-playwright E.F. Burian’s leftist productions, Zelenka made poster art. In Terezín, Zelenka utilized these skills to make posters for plays and operas.<sup>67</sup>

“Assigned art,” as historian Marjorie Lamberti terms required work, was a part of the Nazi labor camp system. Professional artists in Terezín and other camps were a part of the war effort. During the day Terezín’s Technical Studio workers planned and recorded the expanding Terezín ghetto. Workers in the Decorative Studio made objects to be sold outside the camp.<sup>68</sup> During the night, the artists used pilfered materials to draw the realities of Terezín. Leo Haas describes the painters gathering in the workroom in the dark “night after night.”<sup>69</sup> Clandestine art was a documentary form, but also it became a barter tool and way for the artists to process Terezín’s chaotic world. It soon became known around Terezín that artists were smuggling out art on the horse-drawn cart that brought manure to the agricultural workers in the morning.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Anna Hájková, “Art: Lotka Burešová and her Terezín Friends,” *Leo Baeck Institute* 94 (Spring 2014). <https://www.lbi.org/2014/03/buresova/>

<sup>67</sup> Arno Parík, “Short Biographies of the Terezín Artists,” trans. Thomas Winner and Irene Portis-Winner *Seeing through “paradise:” Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp*, 85.

<sup>68</sup> The Museum of Jewish Heritage has a collection of Terezín assigned art by Peter Loewenstein: [http://collection.mjhny.org/index.php?g=detail&object\\_id=17562](http://collection.mjhny.org/index.php?g=detail&object_id=17562)

<sup>69</sup> Mary Constanza, *The Living Witness: Art in the Concentration Camps and Ghettos* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 33.

<sup>70</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by Joan Ringelheim, September 09, 2003, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Figure 1.10 “Assigned Art”



Figure 1.11 “Clandestine Art”

From 1941 through 1944, Edgar worked to set up the Terezín kitchens. With thousands of Jewish prisoners arriving every few days, barracks rapidly expanded and so did their kitchens. At 17 years old, Edgar planned daily meals for tens of thousands of prisoners. Through a lawyer he was bunked with, he began meeting the painters working in the two studios. He also met Rafael Schächter, a choral director who, within months of arriving in 1941, began to hold evening singing sessions in the basement of the men’s Sudeten barrack. Schächter encouraged the Jews to sing Czech popular songs, music everyone knew that spoke to their collective experiences. Young Edgar decided to use food to a similar end, making Czech foods when possible. In his 2003 oral history interview Edgar remembered, “in his way he [Schächter] did work on the Czech mind, and I worked on the Czech stomachs.”<sup>71</sup> In the camps, a barter system arose with the Czech guards smuggling goods in and out. Edgar was incredibly well positioned to trade food for other “disappropriated” items in the camp. He saw the artists working in a similar vein to build morale and he supported artists with extra food rations.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by Joan Ringelheim, September 09, 2003, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>72</sup> Something I never asked Edgar directly was how he dealt with having so much power in Terezín through his access to food. In the archives, I found a caricature titled: “Three Kings of the Ghetto: Baker, Cook, and Pastry Baker” by Erich Lichtblau-Leskly. I sat in the quiet reading room. It was a moment of recognition. The cook was unmistakably Edgar. He sat on stove with a ladle and a pad of butter; his chef’s hat was his crown.

The artists used creative means to make their unauthorized pieces. Drawings were made on wrapping paper with pencil or pen and ink. Petr Kien used burlap for oil. Fritta used charcoal.<sup>73</sup> Their work depicted hunger, crowded conditions, the elderly and the sick, as a part of a camp-wide frenzy of cultural activity. Historians and Terezín survivors have outlined different theories on why artistic production was so vital to Terezín prisoners. Gerald Green believed there was a “will to create” and Lucy Dawidowicz felt artists were “impelled” to leave a “documentary record.” Marjorie Lamberti called for historians to attend to the uses of art for the artists that created the drawings. Lamberti wrote in 1995, “we must ask what art signified for them at the moment of creation.”<sup>74</sup> At the time, there was no way to know if such documents would be preserved. After studying the unusual history of Terezín, Lamberti believed creative expression was “a form of resistance and a strategy for survival.”<sup>75</sup> Looking at the intentions of the artists in their time, Johanna Branson argued the artists were in conflict with Nazi power over how Terezín would be represented.<sup>76</sup> In this war of representation, Jewish artists sought to create a narrative contrary to that of the Nazis and to get that narrative into global circulation. Beyond documentary purposes, art making was a survival strategy and a barter tool. In the summer of 1942, German and Austrian Jewish elites were brought to Terezín. These prisoners were told that Terezín was to be a spa town for “privileged” Jews who were World War I veterans, had Christian spouses, or were very wealthy. But by the fall, Terezín had 131 deaths a day.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Costanza, 121.

<sup>74</sup> Marjorie Lamberti, “Making Art in the Terezin Concentration Camp” *New England Review*. 17, no. 4 (Fall, 1995): 105.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Joanna Branson, “Seeing through ‘paradise:’ art and propaganda in Terezín.” *Seeing through “paradise:” Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp.* (Boston: Massachusetts College of Art, 1991), 37.

<sup>77</sup> Lamberti, 106.

Before 1943, Nazi administrators intended the works of the drafting studio to impress their superiors by sending illustrations emphasizing productivity back to Germany.<sup>78</sup> Yet there was a shift in thinking about the role of Terezín in the SS upper ranks as the war progressed. When Danish Jews were sent to Terezín in 1943, the Danish government fiercely lobbied to see the camp's conditions. Due to international political pressure, Nazi leadership decided Terezín would become a propaganda tool in and of itself. Terezín had already been spoken of in German media as a spa, an old age home, and a "paradise" for the Jews. The SS began requesting illustrations from the artists with a more global audience in mind. These works depicted pleasant scenes from Terezín and resulted in short booklets such as Joseph E.A. Spier's *Bilder aus Theresienstadt* (Figure 1.14). This booklet presented an imagined middle-class European lifestyle, "cheerful, colorful, spacious, prosperous... The SS chose these kinds of images because they fulfilled the need to reassure visitors from the outside that nothing unusual was happening in the concentration camps of the Reich."<sup>79</sup> The Nazis began a "beautification" campaign in Terezín. This included repainting the outsides of buildings, starting gardens, creating "coffeehouses," and sending over 7,000 prisoners to Auschwitz to reduce overcrowding. In 1944, they invited the Red Cross to see how well the Jews in Terezín lived. Members of the international and Danish Red Cross came to visit along with top Nazi officials. The entire visit was carefully orchestrated with prisoners forced to play the part of the pleasantly imprisoned. To the dismay of those in Terezín, the Red Cross visitors submitted a glowing report, which included Spier's booklet.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Branson, 42.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 42.

Visual representations were at the center of this propaganda project. The Nazis also filmed Terezín during this “beautification” period, but the propaganda film, “The Fuhrer Gives the Jews a Town,” was never publically released. Thus, Spier’s booklet was the key pro-Nazi representation of Terezín that reached the outside world.<sup>81</sup> Following the visit and the film shoot, hundreds of thousands of Jews were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. These transports occurred within weeks of the Red Cross visit and they included all known artists, musicians, and notable leaders in Terezín. These hurried 1944 transports deeply affected Edgar and Hana. Edgar was sent on a transport to Auschwitz in September (and then Gleiwitz); Hana’s parents were transported to Auschwitz in October. Hana’s father, Oskar Fuchs, was a member of the Jewish Council, which managed the camp’s daily life, and therefore considered a notable person.

Many scholars of memory from Elizabeth Jelin to Dori Laub argue that interpretive testimonies were not possible during the Holocaust. Jelin writes “there were some people in the ghettos and the camps who perceived and denounced what was happening, people who buried their diaries and other writings. What was missing was the human capacity to perceive, assimilate, and interpret what was going on. The outside world was not able to recognize it, and therefore nobody took the place of the observer/witness of what was taking place. One could argue that the available cultural interpretive frameworks were short of the symbolic resources needed to account for and make sense of the events.”<sup>82</sup> For Jelin, the overwhelming trauma of the moment disallowed its representation or its interpretation. Yet, the artists in Terezín utilized the visual vocabulary of art history at their disposal and the ubiquitous symbols of the camp to create visual testimony that not only witnessed but also built narrative. As professional artists, they

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<sup>81</sup> Branson, 50.

<sup>82</sup> Jelin, 63.

were trained to observe. Versed in diverse schools of art making, they utilized an arsenal of satire, Dadaism, caricature, and New Objectivity's realism. Influences of George Grosz, Otto Dix, Pablo Picasso, and Käthe Kollwitz can be seen in these works grappling with the devastating conditions and deceptive façade of the Nazis beautification of Terezín.

Satire was a key part of this visual rendering. For example Norbert Troller's "Terezín Still Life" from 1942 is a colorful painting of a table with plates and bowls, much like a classic still life painting. But in Troller's "Terezín Still Life" the plates and bowls are empty (Figure 1.13). The cornucopia associated with a still life is entirely absent. In this way, Troller used art as a medium for efficient commentary, drawing from tropes of art history. Troller was an architect by training. After the war in the US, Troller built over eighty Jewish Community Centers from Durham to Duluth and published a memoir through UNC Press.<sup>83</sup>

Fritta, or Fritz Taussig, was one example of a Czech artist who produced emotive works of documentation and satire. Fritta was born in 1906 in Bohemia. He studied in Paris until 1930 when he moved to Prague, where he worked as a draftsman, graphic designer, and satirist. He contributed to the historic satirical weekly, *Simplicissimus*.<sup>84</sup> Depicting the same spaces that Spier's booklet rendered as bourgeois scenes of pleasure, Fritta showed vacant, emaciated faces at Terezín's "Kaffehaus." Utilizing his background in political satire, another drawing showed rich Germans enjoying an apartment, a luxury offered to only a handful of well-connected detainees. The image critiques unequal treatment in the camp. In one drawing, Fritta drew Terezín as a Potempkin Village with bodies hidden behind building façades (Figure 1.12).

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<sup>83</sup> Norbert Troller. *Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 12.

<sup>84</sup> This Munich paper began in the 1890s critical of Prussian, then Weimar forces. The publication functioned in exile during the 1930s with many satirists leaving Germany while others remained and began producing pro-Nazi materials (Erich Schilling is one example).



Figure 1. 12: "Potempkin Village," Fritta



Figure 1. 13: "Terezín Still Life," Norbert Troller



Figure 1. 14: *Bilder aus Theresienstadt*, Joseph Spier



Figure 1. 15: "Kaffehaus," Fritta

The underground art of Terezín did make it out beyond the Reich. After the visit of the Red Cross, four artists, Haas, Fritta, Bloch, and Ungar, along with their families and an avid art collector were interrogated by Adolf Eichmann and imprisoned in Terezín's Small Fortress. The art collector, who had been an affluent businessman and had retained some privileges in the ghetto, traded food for art with many of the artists and smuggled the works out to his Christian relatives. The works had made their way to Switzerland and word of this got back to the Nazis. This deeply undermined the intention of the beautification campaign. During interrogation, the Nazis asked Haas, "How could you think up such a mockery of reality and draw it?" The image in question portrayed Jewish prisoners searching for potato peels. When Haas responded that it was a study of something he had observed, Hans Gunther responded, "Do you really think there

is hunger in the ghetto, when the Red Cross did not find any at all?”<sup>85</sup> For the Nazis, there was no room for a reality other than the one they built during “beautification.” The artists were tortured and killed, with the exception of Haas, in either the Small Fortress or Auschwitz.<sup>86</sup>

Leo Haas was born in 1901 in the city of Opava, where he began his art practice very young as the grandchild of a church muralist. He began studying formally in an academy in Karlsruhe, but he soon lacked funding to continue so he began playing music and making portraits of the bar scene. In 1921, he moved to Berlin to continue his studies and apprenticed briefly with Emil Orlik. He traveled in Paris and moved to Vienna, where he worked as a journal caricaturist and became a part of the arts scene. Returning to Opava, he worked in advertising and set design until becoming a well-known portrait painter. These experiences in the 1920s gave him a diverse set of skills and influences. His training and politics put him in line with Expressionist artists. In 1939, he was sent to Nisko, a Nazi camp. There he painted SS portraits and secretly depicted camp life. In 1942, Haas was sent to Terezín. From there, he was sent to Auschwitz, then Sachsenhausen, where he drew counterfeit US money for the Nazis.<sup>87</sup>

Born in Prague, Hilda Zadiková was a painter before the war who trained in Munich. During art school in Germany she met her husband, Arnold Zadikow, who became a well-known sculptor.<sup>88</sup> In the Albert Einstein Archives in Jerusalem, there are a correspondence between

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<sup>85</sup> Leo Haas, “The Affair of the Painters of Terezín,” *Seeing through “paradise:” Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp*, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Gerald Green, *The Artists of Terezín* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc. Publishers, 1969), 97-115.

<sup>87</sup> Haas, “The Affair of the Painters of Terezín,” *Seeing through “paradise:” Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp*, 68.

<sup>88</sup> Arnold Zadikow has an interesting history of his own. He was a sought after artist, known for his modern headstones. He designed gravestones for Magnus Hirschfeld, a physician known for his advocacy for sexual minorities and trans individuals. He also designed the gravestone for a family member of Albert Einstein.



Zadiková and Einstein, who attempted to aid the Zadikows leave Prague.<sup>89</sup> In Terezín, Arnold Zadikow died of appendicitis in 1943 while Hilda and her daughter Mariánka survived and moved to the New York area. Hilda Zadiková worked in the Decorative Studio, and during “beautification” processes she was required to make signs for the “library” and other locations that did not exist. Below is an entry Zadiková made in her daughter’s notebook of 123 collected inscriptions and drawings from friends and family in Terezín. The script says: “My dear little one! May we survive the worst times together, and stay friends in the good ones. Your mother.” Her mother’s bouquet drawing (entry 24) as well as a note from Eda (Edgar) Krasa (entry 39) were digitized and published in *The Terezín Album of Mariánka Zadikow* (2008). This facsimile text curates and circulates Mariánka’s small book of personal notes for a public audience.



Figure 1.16: Hilda Zadiková

The drawings of Terezín, professional and amateur, were buried, hidden in the walls, or under the floorboards in Terezín. Haas returned to Terezín in 1945 where he recovered his art and

<sup>89</sup> The professor was an acquaintance who got the Zadikow family on a list at the American embassy in 1936, but the family did not have the \$10,000 bribe needed and could not get a visa to elsewhere. Debórah Dwork, “Introduction,” *The Terezín Album of Mariánka Zadikow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1-19.

Fritta's materials. Some like, Hilda Zadiková's daughter Mariánka, were able to keep small objects with them when they left Terezín in 1945.<sup>90</sup>

### **An Analysis of Three Drawings**

Work by Zadiková, Haas, and Fritta are represented in the Krasas' curatorial space. Their collection carries this complex history of production. Before studying the space of the room as a whole, I want to analyze three pieces displayed in the Krasa TV room on Hartman Road. These works by Zadiková, Haas, and Fritta represent larger themes of Terezín art. The analysis was conducted in dialogue with my sister Dory, who is a painter and works in the art world. She too grew up going to the Krasa house for family gatherings, but she sat even further outside the Krasa fold because she was not biologically tied. Her perspective pushes the question of relation and lays out the ways in which this queer family construction was still pulled by bloodlines.

#### **The Washroom**



**Figure 1. 17**

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<sup>90</sup> Dworak, 2.

While the majority of my grandparents' drawings were portraits and landscapes, "The Washroom" by Zadiková, shows an interior scene of Terezín. It hung on one's left when entering the room and is significant because it represents the extensive production of drawings portraying quotidian Terezín experience. The image shows a crowded space of women washing themselves in rows that angle back away from the viewer. The women do not address the artist. They talk to each other or take a moment for themselves. According to Hana, the water was cold and showers were extremely short in the former military barracks.<sup>91</sup> But the women do not look hurried.

The piece is a reproduction of an illustration of women cleaning themselves. Was Zadiková drawing from art's tradition of bathhouse scenes? Women in this scene are in motion giving the piece vibrancy. On the one hand, it looks overcrowded with figures not given distinct, personalized features. On the other hand, it looks like there was room to move around. Does the sketch seek to document women bathing against the Nazis' dehumanizing prison structure?<sup>92</sup> Is it a commentary on the struggle to survive in an environment of rampant illness? Art Spiegelman studied pieces like Zadiková's before drawing *Maus*. Reflecting on such work, he notes that art of the camps was "a kind of commemorating, witnessing, and recording of information—what Goya referred to when he says 'This I saw.'"<sup>93</sup> Zadiková, an artist of the Decorative Studio, relays a moment in the daily life of women in Terezín that the viewer would not otherwise know. For the artists, drawing was a means to document and to imprint such memories.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Hana Krasa, interview by author, 2012.

<sup>92</sup> According to Adolf Hitler, "The Jews undoubtedly constitute a race, but they are not human." (Huyssen, 133). This is a quotation utilized in the premise of *Maus*.

<sup>93</sup> Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 46. In Sybil Milton's *Art of The Holocaust*, she notes three artists, one of whom is Leo Haas, who explicitly said Goya influenced them.

<sup>94</sup> Milton, 38.

In an analysis of the work of Zadiková, there are three aspects that require more investigation. One aspect of the work that demands attention is that the site of cleaning is clearly divided by gender. In the ghetto organized along gender lines, the artist, as a woman, had access to happenings, customs, and images distinct from that of male artists. The task of recording weighed on the shoulders of both genders. Because of the gender divide, men and women saw the same camp or ghetto differently. Elizabeth Jelin argues observations and memory are gendered processes in which men and women are likely to attend to different details and hold on to different aspects of a narrative.<sup>95</sup> The methods of hiding clandestine drawings were also often linked to gender. For example, Zadiková “was able to save fragments of them, and carried them in a pouch hung around her neck and hidden inside her dress.”<sup>96</sup>

A second significant detail of the work is the perspective. With the point of view situated slightly above, the artist achieves a feeling of distance from the scene. It gave them a sense of distance from the present, of escape, of privacy, and of an element of control. It gave them a space to sit with the actualities of their detention. A third detail so obvious that it escaped my initial notice is the nudity of the subjects in the drawing. Although it is not likely an intended symbol of human vulnerability, for me at the least, it is significant because it shows a scene of transition, of a moment where the subjects relate to each other without the recognition of being drawn. As a young child, I do not remember noticing their nakedness. Dory observed that the subjects “look like they’re working in a crowded space...[but] don’t look distressed...and it’s not terribly voyeuristic...it looks like a bathhouse, where women are gossiping and they are all getting clean. Not like being in frigid waters maybe not ever getting clean, which would be my

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<sup>95</sup> Jelin, 82.

<sup>96</sup> Branson, 40.

idea based on movies.”<sup>97</sup> On a similar note, before asking my grandparents, I assumed this piece was an image of showers women were forced to take upon entering the camp. This assumption reveals the imagined Holocaust I carried with me, letting it stand in for certain knowledge.

My grandma had a personal relationship with Zadiková, who gave her a hand-drawn calendar of Terezín scenes. There were no calendars in the ghetto and in this way, art served to create normalcy and time itself. This may be why Hana and Edgar chose to frame a poor photocopy of this work. The washroom sketch is one of the few pieces in the Krasas’ collection that is a reproduction rather than an original. My grandparents remained close with the artist’s daughter, Mariánka Zadikow, who was their peer in Terezín and who sent them this Xeroxed piece in the 1990s. The original hung in Mariánka’s house. My assumption is that she has a similar collection of multiple sketches by her mother, and possibly her father, the sculptor, who died in the camp. It is curious Mariánka sent this particular image to share. As my sister put it, “[t]he fact that this was a piece that Hana and Edgar found later in their life and chose to hang on their wall starts to give evidence to what the purpose of this art was for them. And maybe what the purpose of this art was for the artist’s daughter. Then [it] makes it feel like having this art on the wall is to remember that they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Or that they are not isolated in their home from other people who survived. They are all connected to one another.”<sup>98</sup> The materiality of this piece’s reproduction signals how common it was for Terezín survivors to display some form of Terezín art in their home. Curation for both Krasa and Zadikow families was ongoing with copies being made and circulated between home spaces. Commemorative spaces were a patchwork of original and reproduced images. In the TV room,

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<sup>97</sup> Isadora (Dory) Kagan, interview by author, March 12, 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Isadora (Dory) Kagan, interview by author, March 12, 2016.

there is also a small painting by Zadiková of the entrance to the attic where my grandfather lived in Terezín. It was copied and sent to Mariánka in exchange.

#### Edgar Krasa: A Portrait



Figure 1. 18

Of the collection of twelve pieces, three are portraits of my paternal grandfather. They are all originals sketched by Leo Haas with pencil and on wrapping paper. The drawing appears soft with pencil shading that must have taken some time. The above portrait always particularly drew my attention. My sister agreed this piece was the most striking for her. On March 20th 1944, when Haas drew this image, his subject was 20 years old. I did not know this young Edgar that returns my gaze so strongly. Looking at these images on my laptop in Argentina in 2005, I wondered what this young man was like. He was my age at the time. And I wondered why he was wearing a tie, as it contradicted my imagined Holocaust of distress and disarray.

Through interviews with my grandparents, I discovered that the tie itself was imagined. My grandfather requested this portrait from Haas and he gave it as a birthday present to his

mother. Depicted in elegant attire, Edgar was able to dress up on his mother's birthday through portraiture. This detail reveals the many levels that visual culture operated on in Terezín. As a barter object, it was material for literal survival for the artists in the face of starvation. It was also an object of immaterial value—a prized gift. In a gender and age-segregated ghetto, when would a mother see her son? Portraits offered mobility, or mobility of one's likeness, within the camp. The portrait artist, my sister noted, has power and can control how the subject is depicted. Haas shows Edgar in a very positive light. The lines are open but the shading makes the image lively. In the portrait, Edgar wears a tie, marking him as a modern and successful professional. His head slightly off center, giving the image more vibrancy, and his face looks on the verge of a smile.

This drawing is representative of copious portraits done within Terezín. While my grandfather survived, the majority of those portrayed by Haas were sent to Auschwitz where they died. For those depicted, Sybil Milton writes portraits offered “a sense of permanent presence among the living, extremely important when temporal physical presence was so fragile and tenuous.”<sup>99</sup> The drawings, in their relative permanence, portrayed the Jews as individuals rather than the numbers they were given. A Haas portrait may have been an indication of social stature.<sup>100</sup> Often drawings by Haas were co-signed by himself and the sitter—as a signal of their co-constitution. In a caricature of Edgar, which hung next to this soft portrait, Haas drew a rabbit as his signature. This was his caricature moniker, Haas means “hare” in German.

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<sup>99</sup> Milton, 23.

<sup>100</sup> For more on social stature see Anna Hájková's work on everyday life in Terezín. Hájková writes, “Terezín had a social elite of young Czech Jews; they were the first to arrive in the ghetto, and often worked in advantageous positions as technicians, cooks, bakers, butchers, and physicians. Their living conditions in Theresienstadt were vastly better than everyone else's and they succeeded in creating for them a livable situation many of them genuinely enjoyed. This social elite of young Czech Jews came to consider, in some ways, Terezín as their home.” Anna Hájková, “Women as citizens in the Theresienstadt prisoner community,” *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, published on: 27 June, 2016, accessed 22/01/2018, <http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/women-citizens-theresienstadt-prisoner-community>

Similar to photographs, the portraits, even the caricatures, hold the moment of the rendering. For my grandfather, the portrait hung in Newton may have offered a way to connect with both the artist and his younger self. By necessity, Haas did not create a work that was intended for preservation. The framing of such a piece signals the memorial nature of its presentation. “Something not precious made precious,” as my sister described it. The drawings brought back memories of friendship with those who did not survive and the profound risks artists took to produce mediums of memory.

#### A Violin at the Window

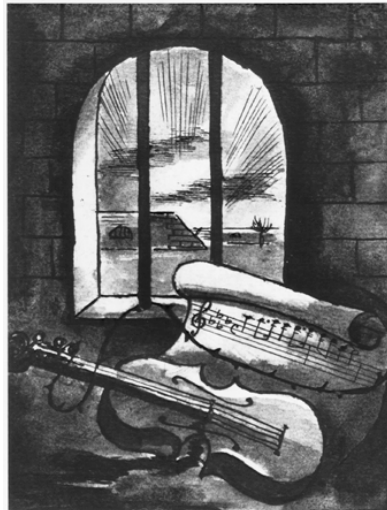


Figure 1. 19

I chose to analyze this Fritta drawing because it was the most important image to my grandparents. It was the one that led the conversation about the Krasa art collection. It is ubiquitous on the Internet. Since I began this project, it has been a cover image for USHMM’s Cultural Life in Terezín website. It was also on the playbill program of Defiant Requiem performances, a contemporary concert performance of Verdi’s Requiem and Terezín cultural history. But the original always lived in the TV room. The piece was drawn by Fritta and was a



gift to my grandfather on his birthday. As a gift, this drawing again reveals not only a friendship but also how art was a valued medium in Terezín utilized to demarcate the passage of time.

Distinct from the rest of the collection, this pen and ink piece does not sketch a realist scene but rather presents symbols of musical resistance in the camp. While the USHMM describes this piece as a still life, Dory asserted this piece was created in Fritta's head. The creative visuals document a feeling. They present an intuitive, straightforward narrative of imprisonment, music making as a resistant act, and a future out there. It can be read as both dark and hopeful, one contrasting the other. With respect to its perspective, the location of the viewer is within the prison bars. So viewing this image within the TV room, you were placed through perspective inside the enclosed space of Terezín. This creates a double tension between incarceration and the outside view towards a better future marked by hopeful rays of light, as it carries the position of both the moment it was made and the moment it was viewed.

Initially in secret and later with Nazi approval, Jews in Terezín played in musical ensembles, formed choruses, and put on operas. In such works, there was often double meaning carried to listeners. Late night choruses sang Czech songs. Plays sometimes carried messages of veiled resistance, which passed under the radar of the Nazis. For example, in my grandfather's 2004 memoir he writes of *Brundibar*, the children's opera. "The highlight is the finale: 'We won a victory over the mean tyrant, sound your trumpets, beat your drums, and show us your esteem!' The Germans never picked up the meaning of the 'victory over the tyrant,' because it was sung in Czech."<sup>101</sup> *Brundibar* was performed fifty five times in Terezín. My grandfather sang in frequent performances of Verdi's Requiem, a Catholic mass for the dead. Musicians played new compositions written in the camp, layered with references both dark and buoyant. The hundreds

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<sup>101</sup> Edgar Krasa, *Determination and Luck*, Unpublished 2004, 21.

of performances in Terezín touched Jews of all ages. My grandmother, for example, went to see every piano recital of Alice Herz-Sommer.<sup>102</sup> For Hana, the music was a necessary escape and listening became a tool for survival.<sup>103</sup> Fritta's piece depicts central symbols of this creative and collective resistance. As a gift and in its message of a horizon beyond, it represents the role of art to construct a sense of solidarity, hope, and community amongst Jewish prisoners. It expressed the importance of a future in the preservation of the present and the remembrance of the past.

The window in the drawing was a motif found in almost all of Fritta's work, both assigned and clandestine. He utilized arched doorways and windows, sometimes barred and sometimes open, as a symbol of internment. The arched window became a motif because of the 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape they were imprisoned in and the metaphoric value they held. Fritta's work was often highly symbolic and interested in revealing the façades of Terezín and giving the essence of its surrealist atmosphere. They can be seen in the satirical work, "The Shops in Terezín (Potemkin Village)," and the formal Nazi-assigned drawing, "Barackenbau," previously discussed. Fritta also made a book for his son Tomas, which prominently features similar window imagery (see below). His work was often more abstract than other Terezín artists. As a former cartoonist and graphic artist, Fritta utilized such motifs to build a visual language.

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<sup>102</sup> For more on Herz-Sommer see the documentary film: *The Lady in Number 6: Music Saved My Life*, 2014, which won an Oscar for best documentary short. Like Terezín's visual artists, musician culture was highly gendered. For more on gender and music, see: Anna Hajkova, "The Piano Virtuoso Who Didn't Play in Terezín, or, Why Gender Matters" *OREL Foundation*, 6 May 2011.

<sup>103</sup> Hana Krasa, interview by author, 2012.



Figure 1.20



Figure 1.21

Fritta's versatility is demonstrated in a landscape of Prague's Charles Bridge that was also present in the TV room. As I move to a study of the room as a whole, this piece offers insight into the breadth of work made in the camp. Art making offered an escape for the maker and a moment of privacy. As Helga Weisssová-Hosková, a child artist in Terezín, reflected in an interview, "We were always close together, never separated—no privacy. But in my drawings, I had my privacy."<sup>104</sup> This landscape speaks to the role of art as way of mustering Czech identity and nostalgia for life in Prague. Unlike the dead trees of Terezín, there is some greenery and the viewer is placed underneath this arbor, on the shores of the river.

In 1944, Edgar was transported to Auschwitz. He left his collection of a dozen or so drawings with his mother. In Auschwitz, Edgar was able to get on a work detail in Gleiwitz. He was a part of the Death March from Auschwitz during which, he pretended to collapse from exhaustion. A soldier shot him to make sure he was dead and then the march moved on. He survived by finding other escapees in the woods and together walking to prison camps that had already been liberated. Eventually he made it back to Terezín, which was health quarantined by Russian forces. There he found both his parents, Elsa and Alois. While Edgar left

<sup>104</sup> Helga Weisssová-Hosková. Video Interview. 1 April 2009. <http://www.journallive.co.uk/north-east-news/todays-news/2009/04/01/holocaust-survivor-ehibits-artwork-on-tyneside-61634-23280395>

Czechoslovakia, his parents remained. She smuggled the drawings, as indicated by the crease of this landscape, so that they would serve as material links to the experience of Nazi imprisonment. In her saving, they became mediums of memories, an object for those complex memories of coming of age in Terezín could reside. The act of my great-grandmother and my grandparents carrying, unpacking, framing, and hanging the drawings chronicle the beginning of the curation process. As material objects to which memory can be tied, the drawings become “places of memory,” each one, a physical space reflective of the past and of the war years.

Of the piece itself, my grandfather remarked that the landscape is an unusual take on the iconic Charles Bridge.<sup>105</sup> Rather than facing the other way towards Prague Castle, this drawing depicts the bridge from its less famous direction and from the banks of the river. The perspective, with a tree hanging above, gives the viewer a space of repose. For my grandfather, who received this gift from Fritta and who was not originally from Prague, did this landscape provide nostalgia during internment in Terezín? Was the work done from memory—as many Terezín musicians recalled long works from memory for their performances? Was a similar version—most likely of a German landmark—made for an SS home? Did the drawing carry a second meaning of Czech nationalism or hope of return? Portraying this Czech icon, the drawing is another example of the small, daily resistances of the inmates. Its backward bridge speaks to the circumstances of their imprisonment. Again, this piece demonstrates the role of art as a currency and object of personal property in the ghetto. With almost no personal possessions left to them, Jews made and traded artwork and keepsakes that were used to decorate bunk areas. The works gave a sense of humanity and individuality back to their owners.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by author, 2012.

<sup>106</sup> Arno Parik, “Art in the Terezín Ghetto” *Seeing through “paradise:” Artists and the Terezín Concentration Camp*, 50.

The three pieces of Zadiková, Haas, and Fritta give a closer view of what the works of Hartman Road contained. As a mix of reproduction and originals, the space of the TV room displayed multivalent testimonial objects and that the process of curation was ongoing. Moving away from the histories of Terezín's artists and my analysis of their individual drawings, I turn to Palestinian artists and an analysis of key works of the 1950s through the 1970s. As such, I leave and return to the Krasa room of drawings, this belated arrival mirrors my grandparents' own spatial relationship to their collection. It also echoes a frequent literary device of Americanist works (from Faulkner to Morrison, Hawthorne to Roth) where rooms are locations of memory's temporal and spatial shifts.

## Making Palestine



Figure 1.22

Studying Palestinian artwork made in the aftermath of 1948, I have been struck by similarities in form and function with the work of the Terezín artists. Palestinian artists utilized drawing as a tool to document violence, to remember the lands they left, to communicate internationally, and to build a collective identity. While the historical moments are distinct, there are useful parallels of detention and displacement. Artwork was made and saved as visual testimony, but it also was a way for the professional artists to grapple with traumatic moments

through a process of leaving/returning. After thinking through the importance of “Holocaust art” in the creation of the idea of Israel and the Israeli, it is vital to look at the social commentary of artists forced to leave that geographic space. In this section, I respond to Michael Rothberg’s call for historians to look for “multidirectional” influences and overlapping lineages—in this case, in art history. While there is a wealth of compelling contemporary work by Palestinian artists, my analysis focuses on art made in the 1950s through the 1970s. This narrow frame correlates roughly to the years my donor’s family lived in Haifa. But in order to get to that window of creative production, I must begin further back.

Zulfa al-Sa’di was an artist of the same generation as the Terezín artists. Born in 1906, al-Sa’di became a prominent artist in her time. Historians Kamal Boullata and Gannit Ankori emphasize her central role in the genealogy of Palestinian art. Al-Sa’di was from a well-known family in Jerusalem and she apprenticed with Nicola Sayigh, who was, Boullata notes, “one of the last master iconographers of the Jerusalem School and a pioneer of studio painting.”<sup>107</sup> In 1933, Al-Sa’di was the only artist in the First National Arab Fair in Jerusalem, which was widely attended by national and international public figures. In her exhibit, al-Sa’di displayed oil paintings alongside embroidery work. The show contained portraits of iconic Arab political figures of different eras not often juxtaposed together. It also included landscapes and a still life. These works were the only al-Sa’di paintings to survive *al-Nakba*. As Boullata writes, “They endured because al-Sa’di was able to dismount and roll the works into a tube which she carried with her when she fled the Jewish assault on the Arab residential quarters of her native city in the spring of 1948.”<sup>108</sup> In Damascus, al-Sa’di taught art classes to children, not unlike Terezín’s

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<sup>107</sup> Kamal Boullata, “The World, the Self, and the Body: Pioneering Women in Palestinian Art,” in *Self-Portrait: Palestinian Women's Art*, eds Tal Ben-Zvi and Yael Lerer (Tel Aviv: Andalus Publishing, 2001), 177.

<sup>108</sup> Rose quoted in Ankori, 176.

Friedl Brandeis-Dicker. But she did not make new work in exile and she was barred from returning to her home. Through teaching, al-Sa'di carried the artistic milieu of Jerusalem in the 1930s to refugees in Damascus and later in a Lydda refugee camp. In so doing, al-Sa'di bridged generations of art makers. The rest of al-Sa'di's work of was likely looted or destroyed.

Gannit Ankori chronicles looting and the destruction of art objects at the outset of *Palestinian Art* (2006) because it informs what historians can glean about art making before and after 1948. Ankori cites the memoir of John Melkon Rose, an Armenian in West Jerusalem, who wrote a first-hand account of the destruction of Palestinian home spaces. "From our veranda we saw horse-drawn carts as well as pick-up trucks laden with pianos...radios, paintings...To us this was most upsetting. Our friends' houses were being ransacked and we were powerless to intervene."<sup>109</sup> Ankori also cites observations of her own father, who was an Israeli soldier. Her father confronted some piano looters in 1948 because the Israeli military had a stance against such theft. But her father quickly realized the looters were the "*crème de la crème* of Israeli society" and part of an elite military unit. In that moment, Ankori's father recalled his own grandfather who was a composer in Poland and who died "a broken and dispossessed victim of war."<sup>110</sup> Ankori begins her detailed history of Palestinian art with this family anecdote to highlight the ubiquity of theft as well as the familiarity first generation settlers had with

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<sup>109</sup> Rose's book describes the changes West Jerusalem experienced. He writes, "To me the saddest part was the lack of familiar faces. I would wander through neighborhoods that I had known so intimately but which were now so strange: strange people enjoying themselves on the verandas of friends' houses where I had been a frequent visitor" John Melkon Rose, *Armenians of Jerusalem: Memories of Life in Palestine* (London: Radcliffe Press, 1993), 219. Of Rose's memoir, anthropologist Rochelle Davis writes "Rose was one of the few non-Jewish residents of the city to remain behind in West Jerusalem when it was occupied by the Israelis in 1948...He is perhaps the only person who has put these experiences in print" Rochelle Davis, "Jerusalem Witness: John Rose's *Armenians of Jerusalem*," *Jerusalem Quarterly* Issue 8 (2000): 33.

<sup>110</sup> Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 46.

dispossession. Throughout such stories, objects of art, pianos specifically, that signify cultural loss.

Looting was (and remains) a significant element in the construction of the Israeli State Archive. In 1950, the government passed the Absentees' Property Law, which stated the photographs and documents of "absentee" residents would become a part of the state archives. This rule was coupled with the 1955 Archive Law, which trusted the Israeli State Archive to preserve "any writing on paper or any other material, any graph, diagram, map, drawing, painting, character, file, photograph, film, record etc. in the possession of a state institution or local authority, except for material that has no value as an original."<sup>111</sup> As such, archiving and looting were deeply entangled. Azoulay argues that looting is practical and performative in the construction of "differential sovereignty." She writes, "Looting is a particular form of "changing hands—it is simultaneously the process of depriving people of what belongs to them and appropriating it in a way that naturalizes the possession and the new emplacement of the looted material."<sup>112</sup> What are lost in this archiving process are not only Palestinian objects, but also the loss of the larger culture, the commons of pre-1948 society.<sup>113</sup>

Nahil Bishara (née Akael) was a promising art student before 1948, whose visual and sculptural work were lost, looted, or destroyed during *al-Nakba*. Bishara was the first Arab student at the New Bezalel Academy of Art from 1942-1944. The academy's professors were mostly German Jewish artists who had been a part of the Weimar cultural scene and studied at Bauhaus (1919-1933). This included the school's director Mordecai Ardon, who became a

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<sup>111</sup> Azoulay, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 12.



mentor for Bishara during and after her studies at New Bezalel.<sup>114</sup> Ardon attended the Bauhaus school in the early 1920s then continued his studies in Munich (where he could have easily met Hilda Zadiková). For Bishara, “The Bauhaus ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, postulated by Ardon, remained an essential aspect of her work, for example when she designed and supervised the renovation and decoration of the East Jerusalem YMCA building.”<sup>115</sup> In 1952, Ardon left the art school and the Israeli government began funding the academy. While studies of Palestinian art often begin after 1948,<sup>116</sup> both al-Sa’di and Bishara laid the foundation for exilic productions that came after them.

### Three Palestinian Artists

The work of Ismail Shammout in refugee camps in the 1950s grew out of this artistic tradition. Shammout was born in 1930 and forced to leave his home in Lydda at eighteen. In July 1948, Jewish armed militias entered homes and made residents leave at gunpoint. Shammout was a part of the eleven-mile walk Arab residents were forced to take to the border. After days of walking, they arrived at Khan Younes, a refugee camp.<sup>117</sup> Shammout had apprenticed with Daoud Zalatimo and this intergenerational tie was significant. As Samia Halaby writes, “there were precious connections between the two halves of the twentieth century in Palestinian art

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<sup>114</sup> Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky, and Johannes Itten mentored Ardon at the Bauhaus school. In Berlin, Ardon’s work included communist cartoons. In 1933, Ardon moved to Palestine and gained prominence as an abstract painter. Agi Katz, “Obituary: Mordecai Ardon,” *The Independent*, 18 July 1992.

<sup>115</sup> Ankori, 40.

<sup>116</sup> As artist Samia Taktak Zaru satirically writes, “There appears to have been some sort of agreement between art historians that fine arts were not developed in Palestine until 1948” (Ankori, 22).

<sup>117</sup> The walk took three to five days, during which, the armed gangs threatened the walkers and confiscated their food and belongings. Samia Halaby, “In Remembrance: Ishmail Shammout, 1931-2006” 5 July 2006. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/remembrance-ismail-shammout-1931-2006/6067>

history that were so traumatically divided. The fragile connections between the two halves, between the older generation and those coming to maturity after the *Nakba*, held unusual importance.”<sup>118</sup> In Khan Younes, Shammout painted prolifically and held an art show in the camp in 1950. By 1954, he was a part of a Cairo exhibition, which gave his work an international stage. Through this exhibit, his painting “Where to?” became an iconic representation of exile.

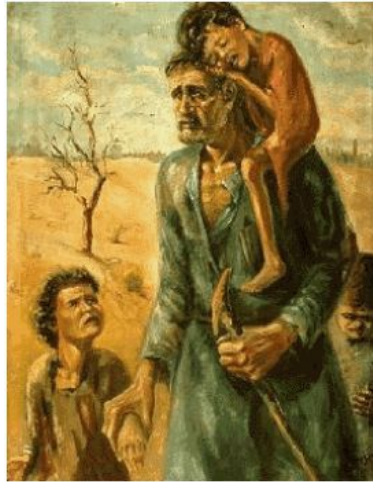


Figure 1. 23

Shammout’s 1953 painting depicts a grandfather with three children on the long march from Lydda. Made in the refugee camp shortly after Shammout’s own experience of this traumatic displacement, the piece is both documentary and metaphoric. The palette is primarily ochre. This could be a way of conveying the harsh landscape through which Lydda residents walked. Its palette conveys the trip from Lydda taken by foot. Its colors could also point to Shammout’s limited access to paints in Khan Younes. The life-size oil on canvas foregrounds four figures. Two children walk next to and behind the elderly man. The child on the left side tilts his head up at the man with a quizzical and concerned look. The child behind the group looks down, possibly at his feet, though no feet are shown in the painting of the forced trek. The third and youngest child sleeps or cries on the elderly man’s shoulders. These figures crowd the

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<sup>118</sup> Samia Halaby, “Abed Abdi and the Liberation Art of Palestine” 3 March 2013. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10806/abed-abdi-and-the-liberation-art-of-palestine>

foreground and are where the viewer's eyes are drawn. In the middle of the image, there is a tree without foliage. This bare natural landscape echoes the man's tall stature and his emotionally loaded expression. The man looks off in the distance, disconnected from the far background, which looks to be towns, possibly the Arab village of Lydda. The sky reflects the browns of the earth landscape, with one cloud in the right corner, possibly a threatening storm. Drawing from his personal experiences, Shammout produced a painting with wider resonance. "He transformed a painful—almost unbearable—reality into a potent symbolic icon that became instrumental in the Palestinian nation-building process."<sup>119</sup>

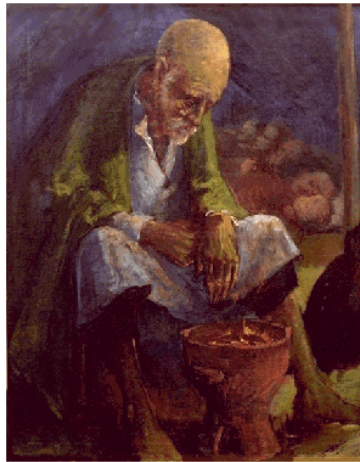


Figure 1. 24



Figure 1. 25

Shammout continued to document displacement, loss, generation, and interiority with "Memories..." (1956) and "Here Sat My Father" (1957). "Memories..." portrays an evening scene in the camp. An older man sits by a fire with a crowded sleeping area in the background. "Here Sat My Father" shows a child looking at an empty chair outside a barrack-like building. Neither figure looks toward the viewer in the style of a portrait. Both lean toward the object of warmth/absence in introspection. Shammout's work in this era, Ankori argues, spoke to both

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<sup>119</sup> Ankori, 49.

Palestinian and international audiences “supplying the former with tangible foci around which a national collective identity might coalesce, and the latter with scenes of human suffering that might elicit sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians and rally political support for their cause.”<sup>120</sup> Through depictions of personal experience, Shammout added to a growing body of work centered on themes of loss, fragmentation, rootlessness, and Palestinian national identity.

Born in 1942, Abed Abdi is an artist from Haifa of the next generation. His experiences show direct connections between Palestinian and Terezín artists. Abdi was forced to leave Haifa as a child with his mother and siblings while his father remained. The family moved from one refugee camp to another until 1951 when some were allowed to return. Back in Haifa, Abdi became a Communist youth and joined social realist art circles. Of this time he remembered “[m]aybe four years after my return [to Haifa], I realized that I had a tendency towards art resulting from troubles. I did not live a happy childhood...The socially and politically restricted environment led me to question why things were as they were, why was my sister in exile, why are there wars, why are there closed borders and as a result I realized that I needed creativity, a spiritual need, and it was perhaps a language of expression available to me.”<sup>121</sup> For Abdi, visual culture was an avenue to digest and dissect the experiences of his divided family and the restricted geography carved through state violence.

In the 1964, Abdi left Haifa to study art in East Germany’s Dresden Academy of Art. Abdi was mentored in Dresden by Lea Grundig, a German Jew and peer of the Terezín artists. Before the war Grundig studied with Otto Dix, Käthe Kollwitz, and other influential German

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<sup>120</sup> Ankori, 48.

<sup>121</sup> Excerpt of an interview Halaby conducted with Abdi in 2012. Halaby, “Abed Abdi and the Liberation Art of Palestine,” 31 March 2013. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28293/Abed-Abdi-and-the-Liberation-Art-of-Palestine>

artists. Lea married Hans Grundig, an artist in the city's New Objectivity movement. Her wartime pieces darkly represent the losses of war and her experiences in a refugee camp in Palestine.<sup>122</sup> During the war, Hans Grundig was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp where he (along with Leo Haas) was compelled to produce counterfeit money.<sup>123</sup> By the 1950s, Lea Grundig was teaching in Dresden and well known for her anti-Nazi illustrations of the 1930s.<sup>124</sup> When Abdi arrived in East Germany (GDR), he found an art community invested in a long tradition of social realism and political art. In Abdi's words, "I was accepted as a special student by Lea Grundig and studied with her for two years. I built a good relationship with her. She belonged to a German Jewish family and had fought against Nazism."<sup>125</sup> With Grundig, Abdi studied works of Kollwitz and delved into the ideological frameworks of social realism.<sup>126</sup> Of the connection between the two artists, curator and historian Tal Ben-Zvi writes:

The encounter between Abed Abdi, a 22-year-old Palestinian recently arrived from Israel, and Lea Grundig, his teacher at the print and etching department at the Dresden

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<sup>122</sup> Grundig's most iconic work is "Valley of the Dead." See selected inventory and biography of Lea Grundig here: <http://www.gseart.com/Artists-Gallery/Grundig-Lea/Artworks/Grundig-Lea-Mothers-In-War-5745.php>

<sup>123</sup> This project, known as Operation Bernhard, was another example of how visual artists' skills were utilized by the Third Reich. It adds another layer to themes of facsimile in this Part. Enrico Heitzer, "Dealing With Multiple Pasts: Conflicts And Memory Politics In The Sachsenhausen Memorial Since 1989" *The Journal of Social Policy Studies*, 13, no. 3 (2015): 489.

<sup>124</sup> Tal Ben-Zvi, "Abed Abdi, *Wa ma nasina* Curator Statement," 1.

<sup>125</sup> Halaby, "Abed Abdi and the Liberation Art of Palestine." 31 March 2013. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28293/Abed-Abdi-and-the-Liberation-Art-of-Palestine>

<sup>126</sup> On Abdi's period in East Germany, his son Dr. Amir Abdi wrote, "Studying in Dresden was one of the most important stages in my father's life, as it was his first encounter with a new culture. Dresden is characterized by its rich culture and tragic history, which are evident in the ruined buildings, the palaces of King Augustus II the Strong, Elector of Saxony and Poland, the museums and churches, which were destroyed in the Allied bombing of February 1945. These scenes reminded my father of the Naqba and the exile of his family from Haifa to refugee camps in neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the cultural and social situation in Germany's history prior to World War I, and the political situation led by the Weimar Republic, poverty, economic crisis and the awakening of artistic movements such as '*Die Brücke*' (The Bridge) and '*Der Blaue Reiter*' (The Blue Rider) that emerged in Dresden, all played a significant role in enriching the young artist's vision, as well as Käthe Kollwitz's black and white prints dealing with motherhood and poverty, and the 16th century works of Albrecht Dürer and Grünewald" (195). Amir Abdi, "The Wandering Museum in the Works of the Artist Abed Abdi" *Abed Abdi / 50 Years of Creation – A Retrospective*, Umm el Fahem Art Gallery, 2010.

Academy, was of great significance for him. Their relationship went far beyond the usual student-teacher format; Grundig opened her home to him and was his social and cultural mentor for most of the time he spent in the GDR. It is important to emphasize that this somewhat surprising encounter between a young Arab victim of the *Nakba* and the Jewish Holocaust survivor Lea Grundig was marked by their political and experiential common denominator, their commitment to social and political justice, their protest against war and the heavy toll it exacts from humankind. It was not therefore, influence derived from a Jewish cultural or historical context, but rather one of a communist cultural and philosophical context. It was actually their communist, cosmopolitical, and a national identity that enabled their encounter and friendship, and their great mutual admiration.<sup>127</sup>

Abdi and Grundig's relationship runs counter to totalizing narratives of Jewish-Arab antipathy.

The two shared a dedication to push back against forces of state violence. For Abdi, Dresden was a generative space of study and artistic development. It was also a space to process his childhood of traumatic separation and quotidian survival in refugee camps. His print portfolio from this era depicts refugee experience exclusively. Unlike Shammout's pieces, Abdi's pen and ink drawings portray central figures that look directly at the viewer. They convey the deep sadness of refugee experience but also project hopefulness.



Figure 1. 26



Figure 1. 27

Abdi returned to Haifa in 1971 from Germany. He became a drawing instructor and graphic editor for numerous publications including *al-‘Ittihad*, the Communist paper, and *al*

<sup>127</sup> Tal Ben-Zvi, “*Wa-ma Nasayna* (We Have Not Forgotten): Palestinian Collective Memory and the Print Work of Abed Abdi.” *Israel Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017): 187.

*Jadid*, a literary journal. As a prominent illustrator, Abdi created the visuals for important fiction of the era, which was often pushed in print media.<sup>128</sup> Abdi's illustrations in the fiction, Emile Habibi's *The Pessoptimist: The Secret Life of Saeed* and Salman Natour's *Wa ma nasina* (We Will Not Forget), offer particularly salient representations of Haifa and the violence of 1948. Habibi's novel was published in installments in the Communist paper. It tells the story of Saeed, a protagonist continually encountering Israeli military forces and navigating the shifting borders of a post-1948 Israel. *The Pessoptimist* focuses on Haifa and uses an epistolary form. Saeed writes letters from an unknown location that may be jail or alien abduction. The text uses sarcasm, surrealism, and humor in ways that echo the satire of Terezín art. Abdi's accompanying images depict a landscape of loss through the singular figure of Saeed navigating old archways and the crowded architecture of Haifa. It reminds me of works by Fritta, who portrayed Terezín with similar archways. There is a confluence of style, tone, and iconography to depict the temporality of trauma's memory. In 1977, Abdi with Gershon Knispel constructed the "Monument to the Present." This social realist sculpture in Sakhnine ties Palestinian figures with the land and commemorates the deaths of protesters.<sup>129</sup> The sculpture's three dimensionality and size convey the magnitude of loss and a revolutionary spirit. Through print and sculpture art, Abdi processes present violence and transmits historical experience to future generations.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ben-Zvi, 195.

<sup>129</sup> Halaby, "Abed Abdi and the Liberation Art of Palestine." 31 March 2013.  
<http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28293/Abed-Abdi-and-the-Liberation-Art-of-Palestine>

<sup>130</sup> Of this monument Abdi wrote, "Generations come and go and each one leaves behind it monuments whose existence continues in the present. These remnants sadden me, a sadness that comes to me from within the uprightness of the palm tree, the depth of the cactus's roots, from the height of a derelict mosque, or a rusty church bell that will peal no longer. I feel the wounds of the continuum of the not too distant past and its suffering: the rocky surfaces of the bastion's stone walls lay strewn before the bulldozers of 'progress.'" Abed Abdi, "Monument to the Present, The Story of a Monument, Land Day in Sakhnin, 1976-1978" (Haifa: Arabesque Publishing, 1978), 1.



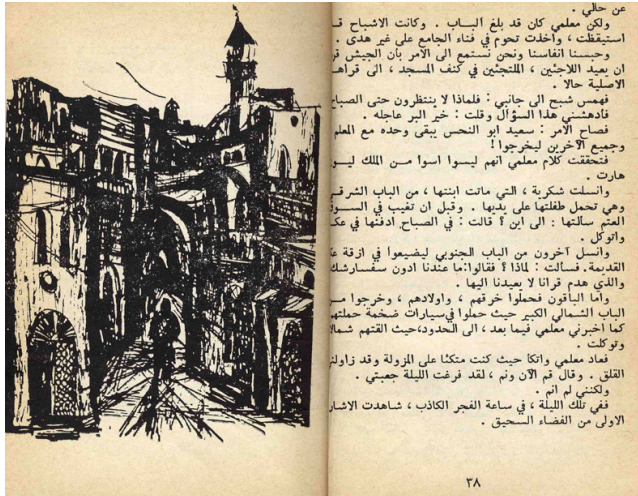


Figure 1.28 *The Peessoptimist*, Emile Habibi



Figure 1.29: *Wa ma nasima*, Salman Natour

Salman Natour's short stories, which were printed a decade later, show *Al Jadid* continued to use fiction and art to convey experiences of trauma and an emergent national identity. Abdi's illustrations in Natour's *Wa ma nasima* utilized images and experiences from his biography.<sup>131</sup> In the story "What Is Left of Haifa," the accompanying illustration portrays Haifa on the day of chaotic removal in April 1948. From an aerial perspective image depicts crowds in the streets of Haifa being pushed to the sea with Abdi's father in the center. This illustration uses patchwork of Haifa scenes to convey both scale and intimacy of *al-Nakba*. The drawing mirrored Natour's text and others such as Kanafani's 1967 *Return to Haifa*, which similarly emphasized a father in the chaos of crowds. Abdi's work has received renewed attention in the 2000s. There was a retrospective exhibit in 2008 at Umm al-Fahm Art Gallery, publications by art historians and critics, and an interview with fellow artist, Samia Halaby, who has extensively chronicled Palestinian art history in 2012.

Samia Halaby was born in Jerusalem in 1936 and was twelve years old when she was forced into exile. Halaby's family moved to the US where she became an abstract painter.

<sup>131</sup> Ben-Zvi, 196.



Halaby is known for her use of bright color in non-representational work. Departing from abstract work, Halaby created documentary art for the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Kafr Qasem massacre. Halaby's method for her series of drawings drives home the intersections between aural and visual transmission of historical experience. For two decades, Halaby studied what occurred at Kafr Qasem through interviews, visits to the site, and archival research. From these materials she rendered what interviewees described. These drawings provide a visual record that did not exist. They are figural, realist, and distinctly unlike her colorful abstractions.

In October 1956, Israeli border soldiers entered Kafr Qasem (and two other Palestinian towns, Rafah and Khan Younis) during the English attack on Egypt's Suez Canal. In Kafr Qasem, the soldiers declared an impromptu curfew and then killed farm workers returning from the fields who had no knowledge of the curfew. This three-town massacre of Palestinian residents is considered an episode of ethnic cleansing. Halaby's original works are large drawings on paper with pencil and were exhibited to commemorate the massacre in 2006. In 2017, the images were published as a book, *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre*, with accompanying documents from Halaby's research.<sup>132</sup> Like the Terezín artists, Halaby used visual art as a tool of documentation for an event with no photographic evidence. She engaged in a long process to draft a visual archive that reflected town members' childhood or youth experiences of trauma and chaotic loss.

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<sup>132</sup> Samia Halaby, *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre* (Amsterdam: Schilt Publishing, 2017), 36.



Figure 1.30

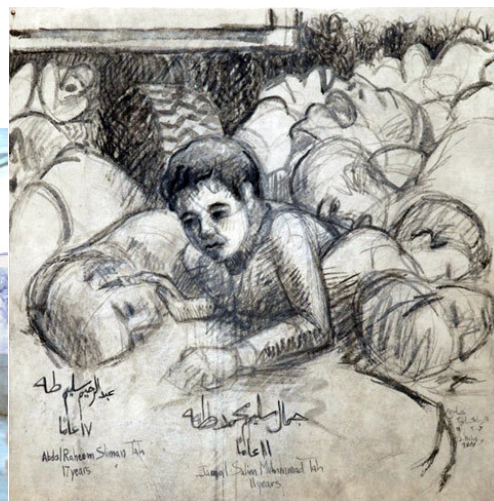


Figure 1.31

Halaby's work pushes back on a half-decade history of visual erasure. One interviewee, Abdel Tanam, described the consequences he paid for attempting to draw the Kafr Qasem massacre in his youth. Tanam was accused of being a part of Palestinian resistance in the 1960s and imprisoned. During this detainment, Tanam drew pieces that criticized the war in Vietnam.<sup>133</sup> But this work had a double meaning. Through Vietnam, he was able to critique Israeli occupation in plain sight, as Israelis likely saw themselves in a similar de-colonial struggle to that of the Vietnamese. Halaby's work was able to retrospectively attend to representations of mass violence in villages such as Kafr Qasem. Her research revealed moments of art in detention and the dangers of re-presenting Kafr Qasem's history through Tanam's story.

<sup>133</sup> In the interview with Halaby Tanam recalled, "At age 14 I began drawing about the massacre and the Israeli police used to come and confiscate all my drawings. They entered my home three to four times and took my drawings...In prison I did a lot of drawings and the Israeli jailers would not let me send them out without their permission and they did not give such a permission. They came and took all the drawings I made...I did not draw about the massacre or about Palestinian politics because they would have made life impossible for me. So I drew about Viet Nam." Halaby, *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre*, 246-247.

In studying Halaby's prolific writing and artistic endeavors, I stumbled across an article that detailed Halaby's home space.<sup>134</sup> Unsurprisingly, her studio apartment shows an overlay of art in quotidian home life. Her paintings for her upcoming show "Illuminated Space" lined the walls. Her home exhibit is distinct because it is in the home of its maker but it reminded me of my grandparents' daily connection to their Terezín art. There was a parallel in living amongst work that grappled with the dead.



Figure 1.32 Halaby Studio

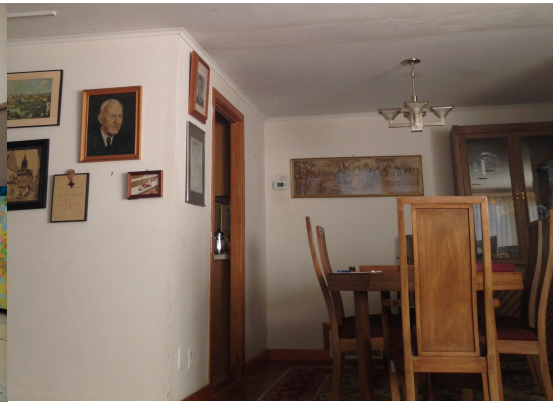


Figure 1.33 Krasa Dining Room

While the above left picture shows Halaby's home in Manhattan, the right image I took on my last visit to Hartman Road. You can see the table where we ate Czech dumplings and the duo of images of Hana's father and mother facing the table, next to the door. On the day I took this picture, I sat with Dani and looked through the Haifa album together. Prior to this viewing, I had only imagined Haifa through stories that the Krasas told. Dani often recounted the story of being told by his father that the numbers tattooed on his arm were their telephone number, which was puzzling because they did not have a phone. The Haifa album, like the Terezín art, lived in the home. We sat on the living room couch, with framed family pictures all around us. The album

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<sup>134</sup> For a digital tour of Halaby's studio apartment see photographs of Lara Atallah accompanying an interview in the monthly magazine, *Brownbook*. Inea Bushnaq, "Visions of Samia" *Brownbook* Issue 41 (September – October 2013) <http://brownbook.tv/visions-of-samia/>

was a visual tool Dani could utilize to share his early experiences. On that afternoon, I wondered whether the album would become institutionally archived in the future. Through the genre of the album, Hana sought to create new documentation of Krasa family life after almost all personal effects were lost in the war. Beyond what was lost, they were very limited in what they could bring from Czechoslovakia and were only able to send a few belongings ahead of their escape.<sup>135</sup>

For historians, images of street scenes, neighborhoods, and home spaces convey more than what the photographer intended—they depict the social fabric of that world. Family albums and displayed family photographs are crucial aspects of visual culture. They respond to and reflect dominant visual narratives. Yet, they are not often on public display or utilized as visual texts of historical inquiry. Hana's Haifa album shows the pageantry of settler life. For Purim parties, kids dressed as American cowboys and Indians, or in stereotyped Asian "costume." These colonial, orientalist paradigms pervaded the culture, connected U.S. settler cultures to other such regimes, and solidify the recursivity I call upon to guide my work in this dissertation as structures of feeling and loss, family and generation cohabitate with state formations. European Jews in Israel brought their imperial racial logics from Europe and combined them with postwar Hollywood's copious settler imagery. Jewish children in Haifa incorporated and performed within this cultural milieu, participating in what Philip Deloria has termed "playing

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<sup>135</sup> Of photo albums, displacement, and repetition, Svetlana Boym writes, "When I emigrated from the USSR, we were not allowed to carry family albums. Photographs with more than three people in the picture were considered a 'suspicious grouping.' Each picture we took with us thus became unique and unrepeatable. I began to rephoto those pictures caught between two cultures—one of sparseness and the other of excess, one of archival obsession and the other of obsolescence. I still don't have a proper family album, but I constantly reframe photographs." Svetlana Boym, "Off-Modern Homecoming in art and Theory," *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, 157.

Indian.”<sup>136</sup> The costumes are gendered with Dani, and other boys, eagerly taking on the role of cowboy or Indian.



Figure 1.34



Figure 1.35

The album also contains group pictures of families with young kids. These appear to highlight groups of new friends and celebratory gatherings. There are photographs of hikes, pet lizards, and their garden. The images chronicle outdoor adventures and Dani’s early years.



Figure 1.36



Figure 1.37

<sup>136</sup> Tracking white men’s minstrel acts of embodying Native identities, Deloria seeks to understand how white settlers (child and adult) were using such moments of “play” to define their own identity. From the Boston Tea Party to boy scouts and hippie culture, Deloria marks “mimetic action” across decades of US culture. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 120.

In them, I see the family resemblance. In my childhood pictures, I look much like Dani with short curly hair, tan, and playing outside. Dani looks very much like Edgar, his own father. Hana's absence in the Hartman Road house loomed large in my belated viewing. Her handwriting captioned each image. Dani described what the images depicted, but his memories were from a child's perspective. Hana, the album's maker, was no longer there. After our conversation over the albums, I visited the back room of the Hartman Road house one more time.

### **Home Exhibit(ion)**

Loss is at the center of spatial practice. Looking at my grandparents' house, I want to understand how they experienced and utilized the room as a tool of mourning and transmitting trauma. To do so, I draw from Michel de Certeau, Gaston Bachelard, and Susan Stewart. Calling the Hartman Road home an exhibit might seem like an overstatement – such altars and commemorative practices are ubiquitous in intimate space. I sit here at my desk underneath a patchwork of images of my life and family. Far from home, such objects are even more laden with my attachments and experiences. For my grandparents, I argue the process of saving and hanging the works of Terezín provided a necessary healing function.

While the drawings as mnemonic objects construct what Frances Yates and Pierre Nora called “lieux de mémoire” individually, hung in a line around the walls of the TV room, they produce as a whole a “lieux de mémoire” in the space they encircle. Although there are relics of prewar Europe and postwar Israel in all parts of my grandparents' house, this room specifically, where the drawings can be protected from light, provides a “micro-space,”<sup>137</sup> in a sense a micro-museum, to remember a traumatic and nostalgic past. In the words of my grandfather, the space

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<sup>137</sup> Joel Candau, *Antropología de la Memoria* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2002), 111.



brings “pieces of memory from people with whom they were closely associated...They bring special memories of those years, fond memories of hard times.”<sup>138</sup> For my grandparents, and my grandfather especially, the collection is a space where memory can reside and where one can reflect on the events of the past. Although it seemed strange to me initially that they have fond memories of Terezín, that is, in major part, an ideology I learned from US narratives within which there is little space for remembered moments that are not tragic when it comes to Holocaust histories. For my grandparents, the drawings have value because of tangible quality that nods to a period so definitive in their lives. Expanding my analysis to the room in its entirety, I am interested in the narrative *and* commemorative space the home exhibit created. The room ultimately came to serve distinct purposes for Hana, Edgar, Dani, Tatjana, my sister, me, and grandchildren, Yonatan, Benyamin, Rebecca, and Alex.

The collection, similarly to the act of giving testimony, built a “relationship to the past [that] is one of both proximity and distance—returning to an extreme situation, as well as returning *from* it...[It] does not require reliving it, but rather the ability to [incorporate] it into life in the present and the future. Locating memory in the present gives that memory a fundamental quality that enables survivors to access and construct that past without fully returning to its horrors.”<sup>139</sup> In its connection with the present, the collection shows the quotidian quality of carrying memories of Terezín. In creating the space of the TV room, my grandparents built a commemorative space that they can enter, and just as importantly, leave.

De Certeau turns to Sigmund Freud’s concept of the spool to develop the oscillations of loss. Freud’s grandson played with a spool throwing it away from him and winding it back.

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<sup>138</sup> Edgar Krasa, interview by author, November 15, 2005.

<sup>139</sup> Jelin, 95.

Freud noted his grandson's great joy in this act of rejection and recovery. Within a spatial play, the grandson (and granddaughter) is differentiating self from object. In Freud's view, the spool stands in for the mother as the child works out self/other, self/mother, and begins to build and divide an interior and exterior world. Using Freud de Certeau argues, the child's first spatial practice hinges on leaving and returning. De Certeau reminds the reader of this psychoanalytic anecdote to recall "this (perilous and satisfied) process of detachment from indifferentiation in the mother's body, whose substitute is the spool...this manipulation is an 'original spatial structure.'"<sup>140</sup> For my grandparents the room was a place they could enter but also leave. There was yo-yo effect within the house. The room, situated in the back of the house, has an inside/outside quality. They often did not heat the room in the winter fully. It was tethered to the house, but with the door closed it felt far off and away from the warmth of conversation which always hovered around the dining room table.

De Certeau's differentiation between space and place offers some insight into the workings of the room. For de Certeau, place is an "instantaneous configuration of positions."<sup>141</sup> An object can only be in one *place* at a time. There is no overlap, and even if a configuration is fleeting, it is stable. Space, on the other hand, "is composed of intersections of mobile elements."<sup>142</sup> Space is actualized in the moment through activity and story. When de Certeau writes "space is practiced place," he articulates that space comes into being when transformed by walking, talking, and other "operations." In the case of the TV room, movements of entering and leaving, turning lights on and off, watching TV, and watering the plants all created a moment in

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<sup>140</sup> de Certeau, 109.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 117.



which the room was a space. There is a continuous flux back and forth between space and place, which de Certeau argues is realized through telling. “Stories thus carry out the labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.”

The spatial practice has to be contextualized in terms of gender. From Freud to Gaston Bachelard, gender seems to always be at play in theories of space. For Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, the house is the mother and the child inside the house is the son. Feminist scholarship works against this male protagonist and the top-down approach of de Certeau. Yet, in my grandparents’ home, spaces were mobilized according to less than traditional gender roles. Both my grandparents worked full time outside the home. My grandfather vacuumed for at least the last ten years they were together and cooked. My grandmother was the green thumb and was also a baker. I imagine my grandmother still did the bulk of the cleaning and maintaining of the room of the collection. According to Hirsch gender “can offer a lens through which to read the domestic and the public scenes of memorial acts. And even when gender seems to be erased or invisible, feminist and queer reading can nevertheless illuminate not just what stories are told or forgotten, or what images are seen or suppressed, but how those stories are told and how those images are constructed.”<sup>143</sup>

While the curating I discuss was a joint effort between my grandparents, it is important that the chosen avenue of commemoration was a domestic space. It was Hana who cared for the plants and made more decorative decisions while Edgar most likely used the vacuum, which I noted behind the door in my 2014 visit. As a tomboy, baby butch child and queer adult, sexuality

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<sup>143</sup> Hirsch, 18.

and gender framed my body in the space of the room. My tour of the room is specific to the memories the room holds to me as a grandchild, simultaneously inside and outside the family.<sup>144</sup>

The house my grandparents lived in is the first place since their childhood home where they put down long-term roots. After living there for over forty years, it housed their memories and was a space of healing, nesting, and deterioration. Each grandparent had multiple knee replacements and the walls covered with art came to serve a dual purpose as a useful support. As they walked around the house (mobilizing space), their hands moved/balanced/steadied themselves from chairs, to tables, to the walls and their bodies tilted forward towards a slight hunch. For them, the room in the back of the house was a literal storehouse of memories.<sup>145</sup> For me, the house reverberated with the “protected intimacy”<sup>146</sup> of early home spaces and housed the images that I carry somewhere inside myself.



Figure 1. 38

Standing in a space in-between the living room and the dining room, there was a hallway straight ahead. If you walked down that hallway, you passed the kitchen on your right and a bedroom on your left. The hallway ended at the door behind which the Terezín drawings lived.

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<sup>144</sup> In the work of de Certeau, tours are embodied, ground level “speech act,” while maps are aerial view. (de Certeau, 117).

<sup>145</sup> Mayer Kirschenblatt and Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *They Call Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of A Jewish Childhood in Poland Before The Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 375.

<sup>146</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 3.

Years ago, there would have been an elaborate Czech meal being prepared. In their last years, it was more likely that you would share some homemade cake and fresh Turkish coffee, which Edgar loved and shared as a rite of passage. I never asked if his love for Turkish coffee was cultivated during their decade in Haifa.

To get to this threshold, you walked down the long narrow hallway. On the right side, the walls displayed pictures and drawings of Prague. There were photographs of family lost and artwork depicting Czech and Jewish landmarks of their previous Prague lives. On the left side, the wall was lined with art and ephemera of Israel. On both sides, as you moved toward the back room, you felt at your shoulders their displacement from Europe and on the other side their own displacing of Palestinians. You walked between two histories of violence. This collection led to the Terezín collection. On the placement of things in home spaces, Susan Stewart asserts that “[to] arrange the objects according to time is to juxtapose personal time with social time, autobiography with history, and thus to create a fiction of the individual life, a time of the individual subject both transcendent to and parallel to historical time. Similarly, the spatial organization of the collection, left to right, front to back, behind and before, depends upon the creation of an individual perceiving and apprehending the collection with eye and hand. The collection’s space must move between public and the private, between display and hiding.”<sup>147</sup> Hana and Edgar placed their own history within national narratives. Carrying the weight of these images, you then entered the back room.

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<sup>147</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 154.



**Figure 1. 39**

As you opened the door, you saw a wall strung with framed drawings, landscapes, and photographs. You entered a space where you could see everything at once. In the rectangular space, you stood in the middle pivoting around as if at a museum. The couch disallowed the possibility of leaning on the walls. Entering the room, on your immediate left was a poster that says “Silenced Voices: Music Banned by the Nazis.” This rested somewhat behind the door. The collection began with drawings of everyday Terezín. Framed to your left were Hilda Zadiková’s washroom sketch and another reproduced sketch of the kitchen. Above these indoor scenes there was an abstract black and white woodblock print made after the war by Helga Weissová-Hosková. It displayed an emaciated person lying face down on the ground. The woodblock’s skeletal figure, in a frame above the Hilda Zadiková piece of women bathing, appears to look down at Zadiková’s aerial drawing. The two works intensely juxtapose intimate scenes of the ghetto life and postwar affect.



**Figure 1. 40**

As you stepped deeper into the room, there were two landscapes: one of Terezín and one of Prague. The watercolor of the Charles Bridge in Prague acted as a centerfold for the wall. Down its middle, there was the crease. Crossing the bridge, there was the ink drawing of the barred window and violin, which reiterate the poster's remembrance of banned music. In the far corner were three portraits of Edgar as a young man. As you panned to the other side of the room, the tone of the room was less formal or museum-like. There were plants in the winter, some kitsch miniature animals, and more images of Terezín. There were two photographs of the camp, including one of Hana's barrack. There were smaller cards above the TV from Terezín—a birthday card and a small color piece of Terezín's choir, of which Edgar was a part. Tucked in the corner diagonally across the room from the portraits, there was a watercolor of the two-story building Edgar lived in with Rafi Schächter, the choir director.

Tracing this storyline around the room, arbitrarily from left to right, the viewer entered and left Terezín's milieu. You went inside the camp's intimate spaces, retreated to colorful scenery of Prague, returned to Terezín to see Edgar up close. There was a constant shifting between inside and outside the barracks. You saw work by men and women artists who saw differently in the gender-divided ghetto. In the center of the room, you were surrounded by the story of Schächter's choir. The room presented a tribute to the artists and musicians of Terezín. It exhibited the experience of Terezín with similar ephemera to what one would see in a museum. It echoed new interest in the Schächter's choir, of which Edgar was a participant, and its Verdi's Requiem.<sup>148</sup> Yet, it was in their home space where they spent their entire days as their mobility

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<sup>148</sup> *Defiant Requiem* is a concert and PBS documentary that tells this history of the choir's performance of Verdi's Requiem in Terezín, which I viewed on Netflix. While both Hana and Edgar participate in this documentary and concert, it is largely Edgar's story.

declined. Looking at three aspects of the room, I study how memory was becoming matter through objects.

### The Corner

*...every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house.*  
- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

In the far corner of the back room, the portraits of Edgar hung where the walls met. You had to enter the room fully to get a good look at the portraits. Was this a haven that “radiates immobility”<sup>149</sup> as Bachelard describes his corners? It was in a way a time capsule. It displayed three drawings of Edgar when he was 20 years old. While I caution in using Bachelard’s poetics, which specifically refer to a happy childhood home, this theoretical framework importantly triangulates home, memory, and the spatiality of introspection. There was no place to hide in this corner, but its layout did generate reflection and almost museum style observation. The space enacted in looking at these works paid tribute to the artists and to the prolific genre of portraiture in Terezín. As previously mentioned, painters and cartoonists drew the characters of the camp, on commission and as gifts (ie. the portrait of Edgar in the tie). Although Edgar’s portraits took up much of the wall space, the story of the tie brought his mother to the wall as well.



Figure 1. 41

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<sup>149</sup> Bachelard, 137.

The repetition of the three portraits all next to each other, as if in a huddle, reminds me of trauma's repetition. Besides group photographs, there were no other representations of Edgar hung in the house. The three drawings on wrapping paper keep his image fixed in the war years. Yet, repetition also brought out the different styles of portraiture made with the same materials. As Stewart writes, "To group objects in a series because they are 'the same' is to simultaneously signify their difference."<sup>150</sup> Situated above the couch and next to the window, you had to lean forward to get a close look. The drawing before the window seemed to almost be gazing out at their vegetable garden, which overflowed with tomatoes in summer.

### The Exercise Bike

*In order to advance, I walk the treadmill of myself.*  
- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*



Figure 1. 42

When I visited my grandparents' house in 2014, Hana had moved her exercise bike into the back room. Mounted on the bike was a word search booklet. Riding the bike introduced a new operation to the space of the room. By getting on the bike, Hana brought movement and enacted practiced place through a whirling of wheels. Even while mobilizing space, she was

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<sup>150</sup> Stewart, 155.

immobile. The bike went nowhere. Seeing the bike, I immediately thought of the central theme of the stationary bike in *Maus*, a 1986 comic by second-generation writer/comic Art Spiegelman. In *Maus*, the father tells his son about his experiences in Poland and Auschwitz while exercising. The metaphor speaks to the processes of working through. There is a mind, body, heart, and spatial connection. When Spiegelman's father is on the bike, he gets revved up and delves deeper into the trauma of the story.<sup>151</sup> It is as if you can see the wheels turning in his head.

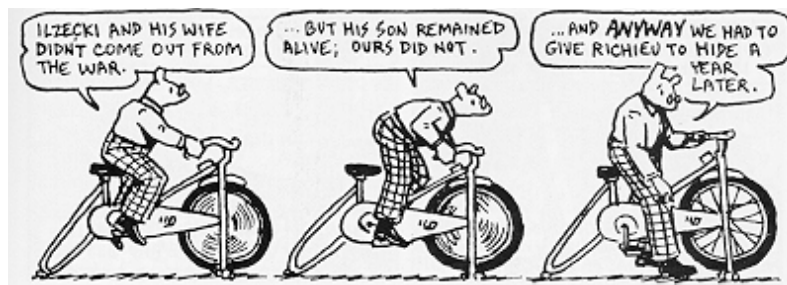


Figure 1. 42

Against the ubiquity of the father/son plot, I was happy to replace Spiegelman's father with my grandmother in my own mental image. I was amazed at how quickly I recalled this image from *Maus*. In the above bike scene, Vladek Spiegelman practices a rite of return. You can almost see his leaving and returning in the lurch forth. In this moment of cycling, he recalls his lost child. This is a theme that Hirsch argues is very prevalent in memoirs of return. We see him going over the events in the repetition and return. He gathers speed, but fails to recoup his son again and stops biking. Did Hana have moments like this? Did the word search or the TV provide a different course? How did she spend this cycling time with drawings? Was there a searching and returning to words and family lost?

## The Birthday Card

<sup>151</sup> Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Begin* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 83.



In an expansion of what constitutes the collection of drawings, I want to focus on a small birthday card that Elsa, my great-grandmother received in the camp. For her 47<sup>th</sup> birthday, her twenty or more “roommates” in the barrack made her a card and they all signed the back. The card says “Good Luck” in German and has a drawing of flowers in a vase. In the room, the card sat above the TV with other Terezín ephemera and some miniature animals and souvenirs. Rather than a piece by a professional artist, this card attests to drawings made by amateurs for diverse purposes. This gift was a collective project and it was small enough to tuck in a pocket.

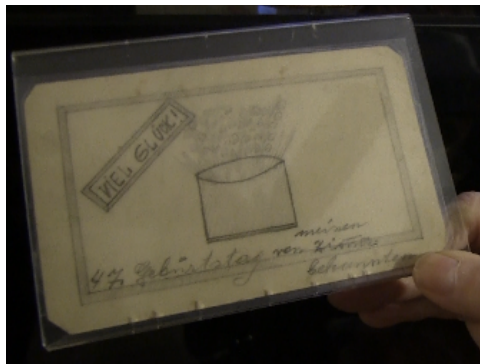


Figure 1.43

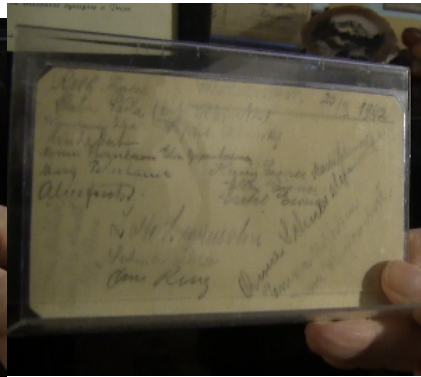


Figure 1.44

In Terezín, miniature objects were easier to share and save. While many survivors threw out such memories of imprisonment, Elsa kept them. This act of saving seems to be both to honor the names of those who signed this card in 1942 as well as to share such objects with future generations. Her process of trafficking this material object that held the markings of those lost to the US, created, what Marianne Hirsch calls “testimonial objects.” “Such ‘testimonial objects’ carry memory traces from the past, to be sure, but they also embody the very process of its transmission. They testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced and, also, to the ways in which material objects carry memory

traces from one generation to the next.”<sup>152</sup> This card reflects a quotidian moment in Terezín and reveals how gifts and celebrations were tools of survival.

The card itself might be thought of as somewhere between a souvenir and an antisouvenir (what Stewart terms souvenirs of the dead).<sup>153</sup> It sat with souvenirs from other trips, and it was the first thing my grandmother pulled out to show me from the room in that 2014 visit. The card subtly told of how crammed the barracks were. As a community of middle-aged women, they experienced profound hardship in Terezín and most likely did not survive the war. What other gifts did this group of women make for each other? In saving this card, it became a souvenir of sorts and a way to return. While Susan Stewart did not have such a souvenir in mind when she wrote *On Longing*, I think her definition is helpful to understanding how this card makes memory matter. “The souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self. The souvenir therefore contracts the world in order to expand the personal.”<sup>154</sup> In proximity and in hand, there was a rite of return in reading the names on the back and picking up the card. It honored the mothers of the camp and the community they built in confinement.

### **Leaving/Returning**

In its form and function, the collection of drawings bore strong resemblance to a museum model. Yet, the room’s quotidian activities of exercising and watering the plants took it far out of the museum framework. A museum you can go home from, but this is not so in home curation.

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<sup>152</sup> Hirsch, 178.

<sup>153</sup> Stewart, 140.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., xii.

Hana and Edgar walked this line of public/private and inside/outside in their curation of the room. Looking around the space provided a reminder that not all Holocaust materials reside in official museums. “The set of objects of the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe.”<sup>155</sup> In turn, the collection of my grandparents could not be seen either as a complete entity. In 2014, my grandparents learned of two drawings they did not know about, a second caricature of Oskar Fuchs in Yad Vashem’s holdings and a portrait of Rafi Schächter. This came to light because of Yad Vashem’s exhibition of Holocaust portraiture, “Paintings for Posterity.” The Krasa family met this second piece of Hana’s father through email. They were sent copies and they hung the two new drawings in between pieces in the TV room. The Fuchs drawing was a more realistic portrait than the caricature above the dining room table. While the collection began with works brought over by my great-grandmother, the many copies of Terezín drawings arrived in this fashion. In this way, the collection was a collective effort of my grandparents’ close, international community of Terezín survivors. It carries the history of their immigrant experiences from Haifa to the US. The collection was in an ongoing process of becoming, accreting meaning through each stage of curation. This curatorial space was a complex mix of original and replica overlaying public and private, real and reproduced, and US and Israeli geographies. The collection was always arriving, but never fully there; its life followed a belated course.

If the house is a tool of analysis of the soul, the back room gave a spatial articulation to my grandparents’ trauma. As a space of memory, it was a memorial act, but it was also a way to find distance from an ever-present Terezín. In closing the door, my grandparents could leave the storehouse of memory in some measure. Like the body, the house stores trauma. The room and

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<sup>155</sup> Eugene Donato quoted in Stewart, 161.

its walls are always part of the house, even with the door closed. As Caruth writes of trauma there is a constant “oscillation between a *crisis of death* and a correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.”<sup>156</sup> This oscillation was encapsulated in Hana and Edgar’s spatial practice.

As the *shiva* ended, the apartment was packed up again. The question of the moment is how this inheritance will pass on. What will be the future of the Krasa’s collection of art? Should it be donated to a museum? Or should it stay in the family? In the family, and in the archive, it will likely be divided up, dispersed. The drawings are no longer under the care of those who knew the conditions under which those marks were made. Do they still do commemorative work for those with a second-hand or third-hand understanding of their meaning?

In this Part I have traced the making, saving, framing, displaying, and impending dispersal of a collection of art made in Terezín. I have contextualized this familial collection within the larger milieu of the camp’s cultural life. The chapter is loaded with visual material to convey the key role of visual testimony in the transmission of trauma and personal experience. In this personal case study, the overlapping of the lesbian baby boom with the outpouring of Holocaust narratives in the US created a dynamic situation for the transmission of memory across a less than linear generational link. By viewing the Terezín art through the lens of queer family, I question how commemorative space both influences and is influenced by the presence of queer ways of being. The personal dimensions of the collection of Terezín drawings opens up a conversation about the role of art and the centrality of home spaces in the construction of political structures. I juxtaposed art practices of displaced and imprisoned Jews and Palestinians to complicate and contextualize narratives of Zionism. The third generation of Holocaust

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<sup>156</sup> Caruth, 7.

survivors, which includes Jared Kushner, is a complicated collectivity. While I did not for the most part fully understand the drawings in a conscious manner in my childhood, they transmitted to me images and emotions key in my construction of the past. The collection of drawings communicated in their quiet way. They were a direct line to our collective history as a family. The sketch was made there. How will I carry that experience forward?

With a psychic ink, the artists in Terezín imprinted a past in the space of my grandparents' house. In curating and maintaining this space-in-waiting, they carried forth the aesthetic inheritance that my great-grandmother intended. As a listener and viewer to the stories of the drawings, I became a part of their memorial project. Our process of transmission was direct and indirect, mobile and immobile, as it wound through a queer lineage. The digital nature of my spatial practice, transmission of images through email and virtual galleries, with the tangible objects of art conveys another visual mobility in an oscillation of here and not here, of leaving and returning. In a "parallel reality of the digital,"<sup>157</sup> my experience of transmission happened near and far from the house itself. Returning and leaving the house of my memory, I take part in the long afterlife and many oscillations of loss.

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<sup>157</sup> Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller, 12.

## Part II

### “Nobody’s Baby”

Reimagining Oral History, Reproducing Archive

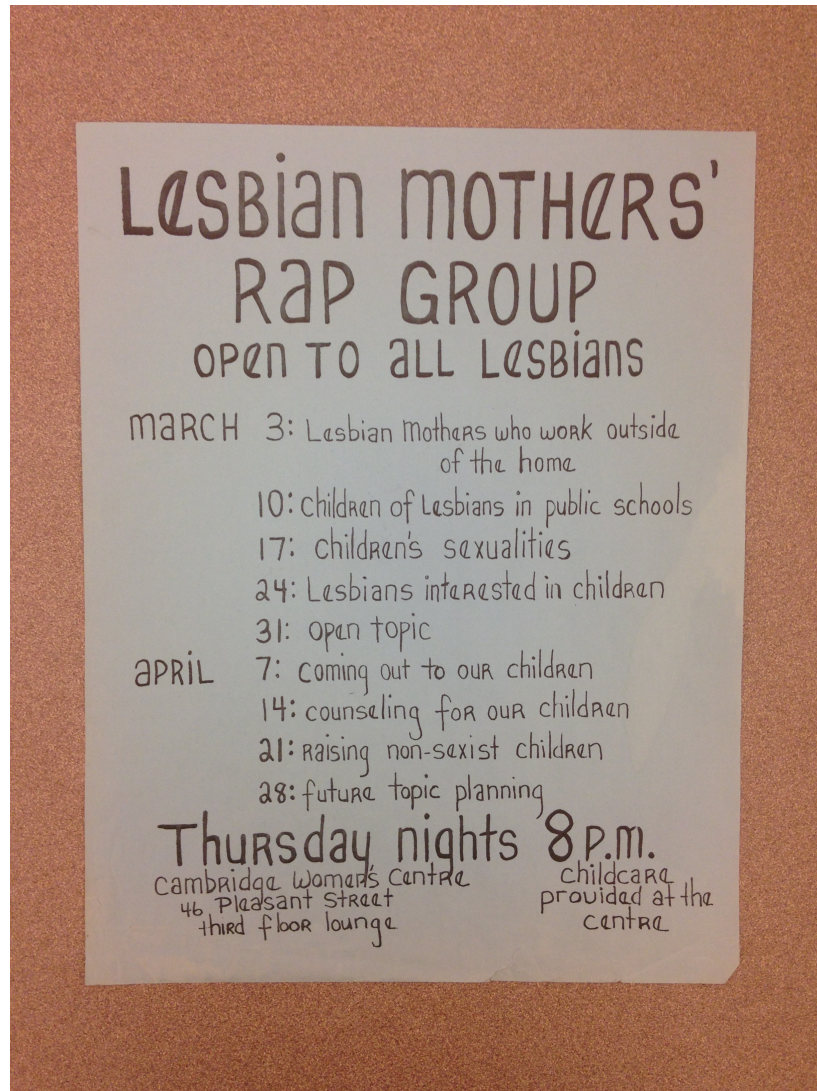


Figure 2.1

## **Telling Queer Family Stories**

On a summer night in the late 1970s, I imagine concurrent activities in the midst of a city's multivalent movements. On one side of Boston's Charles River, at the Cambridge Women's Center, a group meets for their Thursday evening "Lesbian Mothers' Rap Group." On the other side of the "Salt and Pepper Bridge," a softball game begins between "Nobody's Baby" and "Paul's Dolls." "Nobody's Baby" was my mother's team. While the other teams had male coaches and names reflecting the coach's propertied relationship with team members, Judy Gelfand's team of mostly lesbians was not following such scripted relationships. They were nobody's baby.

This concept of nobody's baby sites/cites the ephemerality of queer pasts in the exchanges among softball games and insemination, public records and private matters. I argue that all of these interactions created and sustained the ever-evolving concept of queer parenting that emerged in fledgling queer communities of women in Boston from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. What slips through and does not transmit is in many ways, nobody's baby. But in a more historical mode, the team "Nobody's Baby" points to the social and political milieu influencing and being influenced by groups such as the "Lesbian Mothers' Rap Group." Judy and my mother Marcy attended the same Women's Center weekly meeting a few years later. They were now interested in "having a baby without a man," as the eponymous book published

in 1985, the year of my birth, put it.<sup>158</sup> After my study of curation, representation, and reproduction of Holocaust memory, I turn now from visual to aural transmissions of historical experience. Thinking deeply about the role of visual art in building narrative and building home, Part I put forth a framework for memory studies and queer studies that challenges assumptions of “generation.” In the first Part, I note Hana and Edgar Krasa and my lesbian mothers, Marcy Kagan and Judy Gelfand, shared a desire for futurity. Here I delve deeper into what was at stake in this unusual connection. Moving back in time to before the bulldozing of the Krasa house, I study the experiences of queer parenting and the process of recall itself. I hone in on reproduction in a more literal sense by turning to the context of my birth, engaging in a more pointed critique of biological belonging.

In Part II, I analyze a collection of oral histories I conducted with individuals who had children in the late 1970s and 1980s as out-lesbians in the Boston area. Some of the individuals I interviewed are trans-identified, part of a queer population often underrepresented in most social science studies of “lesbian parenting.” Deciding to inseminate oneself as a non-heterosexual person or have a baby with a gay man was not something US social structures abided. The processes of making family undertaken by the individuals I interviewed were creative and queer. Reproduction was being recast. At the same time, lesbian mothers were doing exactly what the culture encouraged and required of women, getting pregnant and creating new generations in one’s likeness. This double process, of untying what the family could be and simultaneously inhabiting what “family” was known as, is at the center of this Part’s study of memory transmission and queer intergenerationality.

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<sup>158</sup> Susan Robinson and H.F. Pizer, *Having A Baby Without A Man: The Women’s Guide to Alternative Insemination* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 1. This book’s writers were based in Boston and consulted Boston gay and lesbian lawyers, including interviewee Alex Coleman.



Secondly, I argue that group dialogue was a key component of how the concept of “lesbian mother” was constructed. Discussion, both in public and private settings, was a central tool in creating the “lesbian baby boom.”<sup>159</sup> In visiting academic archives, I found documents revealing lesbian parenting in thought and action. There were flyers, topic lists for group meetings, conference schedules, and conference expense reports, but there was little about the contents of such gatherings. The folder marked “Lesbian Mothers’ Group” at Northeastern University’s archives held less than a dozen documents. My endeavor to collect oral histories not only seeks to fill an archival lack, but also intends to unravel the social and political milieu that produced queer processes of family making in the 1980s. My focus on Boston follows my method of using personal experience as a theoretically generative tool.

Following Part I’s attention to childhood home spaces and loss, I began my research for Part II by reaching out to Jay (Barb) Cischke, who ran the daycare I attended. My sister Dory and I grew up with Jay, a white, bearded wilderness EMT from Michigan. My cousins, sister, and childhood friends all ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner at Jay’s. While the Krasa grandchildren ran around the backroom under Hana and Edgar’s Terezín drawings, Dory and I ran around Jay’s home daycare, in an apartment in downtown Boston. Barb then, now Jay transitioned during the writing of this dissertation and was diagnosed with cancer. When we talked on the phone, it was my first lengthy conversation with Jay as an adult. I asked Jay about pronouns, about health. Jay felt too old for pronouns, but she/her, they/them, he/him all worked. We talked about their cancer diagnosis, which was stage four and was forcing Jay to close the daycare after thirty-five years. Jay became an interviewee for this study and we subsequently did a three-hour interview together. Not only did Jay interface with many such gay and lesbian parents, they were the non-

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<sup>159</sup> In addition to formal groups, such as the Lesbian Mothers’ Rap Group, I am also thinking here of conversations that occurred within friend groups and at support groups, such as those at the Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation (CASPAR).

biological parent of two children. Jay identified as trans for a long time and their gender fluidity was a huge influence on me. While my moms were lesbians, Barb was queer. Yet, the connection between Jay and my extended family was strong. Jay spent many nights on our couch during a bad break up; she cooked for my cousin in the hospital and we grew up with Jay's children, who are a few years older than me. What is important here at the outset is both the contrast between the Krasas's care for their grandchildren in their home and Jay's daycare *and* the preemptive process of mourning imbued in oral history. The genre of oral history moves in a medium of loss and losing. As I address in Part III, oral history is an embodied process and frequently an apparatus for grieving. The work of oral history is permeated by affective ties that un/entangles blood and belonging.

The utilitarian value of the word "family" in US political life is undeniable. It is a marker of right-wing politics, of wholesome living, of the not-queer. "Queer" by contrast is often presented as a possibility, a not-yet-arrived utopic way of connection outside familial frames. Family, when given a homo-adjectival qualifier, usually refers to non-biological, chosen family. This is because "family" is a word tied to what Sarah Schulman calls "familial homophobia."<sup>160</sup> Family assumes an older disapproving generation of heterosexual relations. In the case of my "family," there are multiple generations of queer relation. Queer family is a phrase increasingly common in US discourse. What I want to interject into this tangled web is two-fold; 1) the idea that queer family describes a matrix of *both* biological and non-biological ties, and 2) the sense that multiple generations of queer experience are interacting within such biological/non-biological family structures. *Queer intergenerationality*, a term used to describe a kind of mentorship or connection between older and younger queer individuals, must be expanded to

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<sup>160</sup> Sarah Schulman, *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 1.

reflect dialogue between gay relatives of different biological generations.<sup>161</sup> I bring pressure to this construct much like I examined the efficacy of memory studies's "third generationality" in Part I.

## **Queer Historical Practice/Queer Methods**

*Might 'queer' also work as an analytical lens or conceptual frame with which to view and practice history?*  
- Jeffrey Escoffier, Regina Kunzel, and Molly McGarry

In 1995, the *Radical History Review* published "The Queer Issue." As gay and lesbian historians, the editors sought to put the "moment of Queer" in conversation with a parallel discourse of gay and lesbian historiography. They presented some skepticism. How would queer, a non-linear and not-yet arrived utopic horizon, gel with the practical concerns of describing and coalescing the past? And would queer "elide gender in a way gay tended to in the past? Does queer erase difference between and among those whose variously deviant sexualities correspond to very different histories of marginalization? What is the place of empirical historical research in queer studies? What is the relationship between studies of queer reading strategies and representations and those that seek to explore the meaning and texture of people's lives?"<sup>162</sup> Today, twenty years into or beyond what Eve Sedgwick marked as the "moment of Queer,"<sup>163</sup> these questions still speak to why queer studies and its lines of inquiry do not move easily into

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<sup>161</sup> While I use the term biology with some frequency in this study, my goal is to complicate and think deeply about how "biology" as a social construct operates in queer relation formation. Genetics, while offering tangible continuities of "family," must be situated within histories of science and white supremacist politics of US (settler colonial) contexts. In my formation of queer intergenerationality, I draw on work by Daniel Marshall, who uses concepts of "intergenerationality" and "queer kinship" in his chapter, "Gay Teachers and Students, Oral History, and Queer Kinship." In this project, he uses "queer intergenerationality" to describe connections between gay teachers and gay students in 1970s Australia. Daniel Marshall, "Gay Teachers and Students, Oral History, and Queer Kinship," *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, 167.

<sup>162</sup> Jeffrey Escoffier, Regina Kunzel, and Molly McGarry, "The Queer Issue: New Visions of America's Lesbian and Gay Past: Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review* no. 62 (1995): 3.

<sup>163</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

the historians' milieu. And squarely at the center of this friction sits oral history. Oral history is the queer form of history telling, radical in its approach to lived experience as knowledge. This field importantly values subjectivity and the two-person process of conducting an interview. At the same time, oral history often moves from a life history point of view, not accounting for memory's eccentric/queer reifications and temporal layering. Oral history can become stuck in the very progress narrative that queer critics have long eschewed.

In my dissertation of memory transmission and queer intergenerationality, it was important for me to undertake an oral history of though small in scope. My goal has been to sit in this space where queer can serve as a conceptual frame for the practice of history. Queer archives have been characterized as “where one collects or cobbles together historical understandings of sexuality and gender through an appraisal of presences and absences.”<sup>164</sup> Oral history seeks to enter queer experiences into that archival scarcity. The role of archives and state apparatus is something I take up in more depth in Part III. Oral history is an important mode of memory transmission. Like sharing space with visual art, oral history invokes process and the ephemeral. Oral history is a production stemming from both intimacy and institution; it puts lived experience on the record, relies on trust, and follows the brain's process of re-presenting the past. The goal of the method is to enter interviews (recording and transcript) into the archives; as such, oral history and archives are thoroughly entangled. In Part III, I address with greater depth the questions of subjectivity, performance, geography, and mourning imbued in oral history as a queer practice. New works in “queer oral history” have informed my practice in this Part. I argue my project adds a new node of influence, the rise of lesbians having babies, to discussions of oral

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<sup>164</sup> Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, “Editors' Introduction: Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings,” *Radical History Review* 1, no. 11 (2014): 1. This double special issue could be seen as a rejoinder to “The Queer Issue” from 1995.

history, theory, and practice. “Queer oral history” is shifted by this move from solely biological belonging, a bastion of heterosexuality, to other forms of belonging found in queer family.

My work follows the important historical contribution of Daniel Rivers’s *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children in the United States since World War II*. Rivers’s work and particularly his chapter, “Lesbian Mothers Activist Organizations: 1970-1980,” lays the deep historical groundwork on which this work rests. Rivers studies pre-Stonewall formations of parenting outside heteronormative bounds and through this frame he gives new context for post-Stonewall narratives and what appeared as a sudden baby boom. In this Part, I spend time at the cusp moment of the early 1980s and continue the story beyond those years. My method differs from Rivers in its smaller pool of interviewees, its local focus, and the explicit presence of my experiences and personal connection to the historical subject.

As a queer historian and the “kid of” lesbian parents, the interviews I conducted narrated experiences I lived through as a child *and* experiences I see my queer peers navigating as they have children.<sup>165</sup> This is what Daniel Winunwe Rivers calls “a shared vocabulary” and “shared epistemology” in his 2012 essay, “Queer Family Stories: Learning from Oral Histories with Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers from the Pre-Stonewall Era.” Rivers views his own position--as the child of a “Native American lesbian feminist household” in California--as crucial to gathering historical and theoretical knowledge. In the chapter, he describes the experience of interviewing Vera Martin, “who raised children in a complex African American queer world of 1950s Los Angeles.” As a two-person process, Rivers was very aware of how narrator and interview employed shared vocabularies of butch-femme and lesbian feminism. As the

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<sup>165</sup> “Kids of” is a term utilized by Daniel Rivers in his book *Radical Relations*. I like this language much better than the other terms I have come across such as queerspawn or gayby. Yet, I remain hopeful better language comes into being, as none of these terms present the person in question in adult terms.

interviewer he notes, “[M]y own experience helped us speak about lesbian and gay parenting as a historical fact and about Martin’s motherhood and lesbianism as not mutually exclusive.”<sup>166</sup> In the specific interview that Rivers details, there are mutual understandings of racism, gender, and feminist politics that allow for a different kind of interview. There is commonality between strangers through their distinct experiences. Rivers notes that these “shared epistemologies do shape the way we see the past, but as part of doing so, they also enable us to move beyond a post-Stonewall framework and to articulate a queer family history.”<sup>167</sup> For Rivers, queer family history refers to a study of non-hetero pasts and family making that does not anachronistically superimpose a post-Stonewall identity of gay and lesbian.

Rivers works within a longer tradition of gay and lesbian historiography, which relied from its outset on oral history.<sup>168</sup> For gay historians, such as Allan Bérubé, the methods of oral history allowed for a public-facing work and opened up space for the specific relationship between queer listener and queer teller. He was in “ongoing public dialog with the communities whose history [he] was documenting and to which [he] belonged.”<sup>169</sup> This dynamic is what Nan Alamila Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez termed “queer oral history” in their 2012 anthology, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Defining this methodical practice they write, “If there is not a narrator to claim that sexual space of queer historical being and its retelling, and a queer researcher to hear, record, and draw out yet more details, desires,

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<sup>166</sup> Daniel Rivers, “Queer Family Stories: Learning from Oral Histories with Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers from the Pre-Stonewall Era,” *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, 69.

<sup>167</sup> Rivers, “Queer Family Stories,” 69.

<sup>168</sup> In historical works of the 1970s, oral history was a key component of collecting information about gay and lesbian life. For more on the use of oral history in LGBTQ historiography, see my literature review in Part III.

<sup>169</sup> Allán Bérubé quoted in Nan Alamilla, “Who Is The Subject: Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. 17, no. 2 (2008): 181.

and meaning from it, no queer oral history is possible.”<sup>170</sup> Their definition of queer oral history then, presents the interview as an embodied experience of knowledge co-production. Queer theory, as Boyd notes, pushes the field of oral history from an evidentiary model to a discipline concerned with subjectivity, gesture, and what goes unsaid.<sup>171</sup>

*Bodies of Evidence* culls feminist and activist methods of oral history practice to theorize a field of “queer oral history.” The edited anthology surveys oral history projects from three decades with each chapter including an extended interview transcript followed by interviewer comments and analysis. Boyd and Roque Ramírez describe dialogue/interviews across generations of queer experience as cross-generational. They note the importance of communicating information between “historically distinct queer periods”<sup>172</sup> and echo Daniel Marshall’s call for intergenerationality. Marshall argues queer oral histories are a queer culture building project.<sup>173</sup> A 2016 article by Kevin Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Jason Ruiz has further carved the contours of “queer oral history” out. In “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” they write that queer praxis offers distinct approaches to knowability, performativity (object of inquiry and tool of inquiry), and the intimate space of the interview. Yet, queer oral history remains, in their view, defined by a queer listener and queer teller who share experiences of coming out and familial homophobia.

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<sup>170</sup> Boyd and Roque Ramírez, “Introduction: Close Encounters,” *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Boyd, “Who Is the Subject: Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” 177.

<sup>172</sup> Boyd and Roque Ramírez, 10.

<sup>173</sup> For more on “queer culture building” see Berlant and Warner’s essay which describes how queer erotic life is always public and how public sex troubles the very norms of futurity that concern this Part’s study of queer reproduction. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter, 1998): 547-566.

My perspective as interviewer problematizes the inside/outside dichotomies of queer oral history. I do not share narrators' experiences of growing up in a "straight family." At the same time, my childhood and adult experiences of queer culture make me ask different questions and make me attuned differently to responses. While some queer oral history occurs between peers, it is largely assumed that the queer interviewer is seeking out (soon to be lost) historical information from a generation they feel removed from. I sit slightly outside this paradigm because of my close connections to experiences of an older generation of lesbian and gay individuals. I grew up in a milieu that discussed familial homophobia and experiences marked feminist and gay movements. At the same time that my mothers and their friends navigated sexual identity in public and private spaces, I made my own calculations about how and when to discuss lesbian moms, sperm donors, and of course, my own sexuality. These parallel processes informed the interviews I conducted.

Queer historical projects sit in contrast to social science approaches to sexuality, which observe the present. Kath Weston's 1991 anthropological text *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* draws on interviews and field research to chronicle shifts in ideological strategies within queer San Francisco of the 1980s and 1990s. Her work, drawing on kinship studies, articulates the ways in which rhetoric of family is framed by historical and material context.<sup>174</sup> She argues that "gay kinship ideology" gives primacy to the question: who is family *to me*?<sup>175</sup> Weston describes the ways in which this highly individuated narrative draws on the very concepts of family, blood, and biology it elides. But she does not address what happens beyond

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<sup>174</sup> For more on kinship and its relationship to queer theory see: Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory" *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, eds George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 295–314.

<sup>175</sup> Kath Weston, *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 84.



the 1980s and 1990s. “Who is family to me” is more complicated for the next generation. The ties my mothers made have formed my familial structure. Vicki Gabriner, who I discuss in Part III, is a part of what I consider family/relation.

Twenty years after *Families We Choose*, Mignon Moore argues, “few scholars and hardly any sociologists have made race or ethnicity the focus of analysis of lesbian families...if we do not fully ‘race’ ourselves and our subjects, we cannot decenter the White gay subject as the norm.”<sup>176</sup> Moore contends the practices of social science research double down on its inaccuracies by overrepresentation of white subjects and by omitting intersectional analysis. I will address the role of social science in more depth towards the end of Part II, but Moore’s observations clearly extend to the work of oral historians and humanities thinkers.

What LGBT historiography has not able to sufficiently address is the “romance of community.” Using the “gay theater community” as an opening example, queer thinker Miranda Joseph argues such invocations of community deserve closer study. While “community” is an idea critiqued often in theory, it remains remarkably common in academic and everyday language. Because the word evokes feelings of togetherness, goodness, understanding, and belonging, Joseph argues, it is “deployed by any and everyone.” But, following Joseph, the appeal for community in discourse can, in actuality, foreclose membership and reify power structures.<sup>177</sup> Joseph also observes that in the early 1990s, “the gay community” was used in ways “implicitly exclusionary” of trans experience, a queer politic, and people of color. These years of study in San Francisco correlate closely to the years discussed in this oral history project. While I

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<sup>176</sup> Mignon R. Moore, *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood Among Black Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>177</sup> Joseph situates her discussion of community within paradigms of capital. She writes, “social relationships that are discursively articulated as community are imbricated in capitalism.” Miranda Joseph, *Against The Romance of Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3.

will not be invoking phrases such as “the community that raised me” or “Boston’s lesbian community,” these phrases frequently floated through the interviews. Oral histories are an opportunity for individuals to place their life histories within a larger political and cultural frame.

Turning toward my own approach to the interview process, my method was a mix of oral history and archival research. Steeped in a Boston-centered history of lesbian, gay, and trans parenting, I conducted fifteen interviews in a life history approach, which utilizes open-ended questions and is conversational. Questions began with background about their childhoods, high school years, and young adulthoods and the interviews ranged from one to three hours in length. Sometimes I directly utilized my interview guide and other moments I asked what happened next or what the next chapter entailed. I chose interviewees not with a goal of writing a comprehensive historiography, but rather with an interest toward interviewing both people I was close with and people I did not know. Reflective of my own position, almost half of interviewees were Jewish, almost all were originally from outside Boston. Many interviewees were working class and grew up poor. But the majority of narrators were middle class in their upbringing and white. Some interviewees I know very well, a few knew me as a baby, and others I was meeting for the first time. Most interviewees are female-identified and lesbian-identified, while a few are trans and gender fluid. Interviews were conducted mostly in people’s homes, with one interviewee just moving in and another in the process of moving out. These experiences echoed questions of recall in home spaces I studied in the case of Terezín art. I also interviewed both my mothers, Marcy and Judy, reiterating my project’s personal and intergenerational frame.

My collection of oral histories was funded through a grant from Harvard’s Schlesinger Library, which is a premier site for the collection of women’s history. In Part III, I discuss at length the how the Schlesinger Library was actively in collusion with FBI investigations into

lesbian feminists in the 1970s. Ironically, Harvard's archive facilitated this aspect of my project and will give the interviews collected an institutional home. For this Part, interviewees signed consent forms for their oral history to be archived at the Schlesinger Library. These forms were telling in and of themselves, as they were worded with she/her pronouns and did not anticipate the queer and trans subjects I would be interviewing. Putting queer oral history into practice for this portion of my dissertation, I navigated such assumptions of gender, sat with the intimacy of interviewing individuals one is close to, and sought ways of accessing the past that laced participatory methods of archival research with aural materials.

In addition to conducting interviews, I went to the Cambridge Women's Center archives at Northeastern University with my mother Marcy. Together we studied the documents from a slim folder marked "Lesbian Mothers Group" and we combed through issues of the alternative weekly, *Gay Community News* (GCN). In doing so, I continued an archival approach that originated in my collaboration with Vicki Gabriner, which I discussed in Part III. This approach brings the subjects of movement cataloging to the archives and centers the intimacy of conducting research with close (queer) family. Given these methods and materials, I turn now to the interviews.

### **Growing Up (Sideways)**

*I grew up in the 1950s where everything was gendered.*  
-Alex Coleman

In Alex Coleman's interview, the 1950s was a place, a location, where gender dominated. While some interviewees began by describing the immediate milieu that led them to become a parent, most interviewees spent significant time contextualizing their lives with early childhood experiences. I asked at the outset about interviewees' backgrounds. Through this life history

approach, the project's interviews were woven with the presence of previous generations of parents and grandparents. Interviewees were born between 1940 and 1957 into differing cultural settings. Conversations about childhoods began with histories of immigration and migration and what it felt like to be a young gay kid within the era's strict gender norms. Interviewees attended to the eccentricity of being a kid as well as the world they inhabited.<sup>178</sup> They described experiences of growing up in segregated residential spaces and of diverging class realities. In their memories of the 1950s and 1960s, interviewees noted local actions of the Civil Rights movement and McCarthyism.<sup>179</sup>

Beginning my interview with my mother Judy, I asked about gender roles in Long Island where she grew up. "I would say very strict. I wasn't aware of other gender roles other than the stereotypical ones. I can't think of anybody when I was growing up that I thought was gay. I don't have any relatives who I thought were gay. I don't have people in my family that were untraditional. I can't think of anybody that was really bucking the system."<sup>180</sup> For Judy Gelfand, growing up in a Jewish middle class family, gender dynamics were clearly defined. She was one of many interviewees who were seen as tomboys as children and struggled with the era's strict dress codes. Alex Coleman, who grew up in same town, remembered the books they read about Nurse Nancy and Doctor Dan. "And I remember from even then and before thinking that's ridiculous! Why can't it be Nurse Dan and Doctor Nancy?"<sup>181</sup> Coleman echoed Gelfand's recollections. "I didn't know anything about lesbians or anything like that as a young kid. It

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<sup>178</sup> The heading for this section refers to Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1-25. Bond argues childhood itself is a queer zone.

<sup>179</sup> In this Part, I will cite the first mention of each interviewee. For oral history citation details, see bibliography.

<sup>180</sup> Judy Gelfand, interview by author, June 24, 2017.

<sup>181</sup> Alex Coleman, interview by author, June 23, 2017.

wasn't spoken of." A few minutes later Coleman continued "I remember hearing about Christine Jorgenson in the mid-1950s...I remember that." Coleman identified as trans from a young age, but "that wasn't a part of the consciousness of the time." Like a few other interviewees, Coleman noted feelings of being outside in regard to both gender and ethnicity. "We were also outsiders because we were Jewish. Surprisingly enough on Long Island."

For Marjorie Posner, who grew up Jewish in working class Springfield, there was a similar sensation of being outside. "There's a feeling now that I sort of identified as being an outsider and that was because I knew that there was something terribly, terribly wrong with me because I like the girls. There was something about being an outsider. I'm not sure I associated it as much with being a Jew but definitely I didn't know the word homosexual. But I certainly had the feelings and I knew it was a really, really, really bad idea to express them anywhere. I put on some weight at that time. I admit it was a protective measure. It kept me at distance from any expectations and I also got to be really funny. I was the class clown, class comedian. As part of that dynamic, I traversed a lot of social groups."<sup>182</sup> For Posner, humor brought her into black and white circles in high school, where "there was a great deal of racial tension." In our interview, Posner described fights at school between white and black students. She told the story of one fight in particular that she and a friend, who was African American, were able to stop or delay. Posner's interview described the interpersonal and quotidian experiences of desegregation.

Upon further research, I was able to situate Posner's experiences within the larger racial politics of Springfield in the mid 1960s. In July 1965, police violently arrested over a dozen African American Springfield residents outside a bar. When a demonstration was organized in

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<sup>182</sup> Marjorie Posner, interview by author, June 25, 2017.

response, the Springfield mayor called the National Guard.<sup>183</sup> This event in Springfield occurred the same week as uprisings in Watts. Springfield ramped up redistricting and desegregation after the summer of 1965. Posner entered Classical High School the following fall. Classical High School was the college preparatory school in downtown Springfield. It was racially mixed prior to the 1960s, but it became a focal point of racial tensions in those years.

High school, for many interviewees, was a place of social and political awakening. Sheera Strick grew up in Brooklyn, which she described as “a very provincial place.”<sup>184</sup> All four of her grandparents had immigrated from Eastern Europe and she remembers her world as very much a Jewish enclave, “My parents didn’t associate much with people who weren’t Jewish...It was a restricted way of life.” But, as Strick explained it, “Pretty much every Friday my friends and I would get on the train and go to the clubs in the Village. That was an eye opener, the music was an eye opener. Just the street life. Some of the folk clubs, but also the jazz clubs. We saw some of the early jazz greats there.” Traveling from segregated boroughs to Manhattan, Strick gained a wider perspective beyond her family’s world by sitting in Washington Square Park. “Eye-opening” moments became a frequent refrain. Jay Cischke, who grew up in Michigan, also referred to “eye opening” trips to Detroit. “I mean I grew up in a rural place where people didn’t go to school and everybody worked in a factory. Everybody called themselves shop rats and worked in the assembly line, including my sisters, and I didn’t want that life. But I read all the time and I knew there was another world out there. And the fact that you had to go all the way to Detroit to go to a gay bar, you met people from all walks of life. It was a real eye opener and an

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<sup>183</sup> Patrick Johnson, “Policing Our Community: Demonstrations in Springfield Against Police Actions, 1965-2015.” *The Republican*, 12 May 2015. Accessed July 5 2017.  
[http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2015/05/policing\\_our\\_community\\_followi.html](http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2015/05/policing_our_community_followi.html)

<sup>184</sup> Sheera Strick, interview by author, June 26, 2017.

avenue out of that kind of poverty for me.”<sup>185</sup> This theme of teenage adventures in gay bars, jazz bars, and downtowns permeated early portions of many interviews.

Lillian Gonzalez grew up in the South Bronx. Both her parents migrated from Puerto Rico in the 1940s. Gonzalez remembers becoming politicized at an early age “because of the poverty levels and growing up in the projects. You get to see what’s going on around you.”<sup>186</sup> Gonzalez began reading about the war in Vietnam “and it was a real eye opener for me.” She recalled that reading *Standard Operating Procedure* “really radicalized me.”<sup>187</sup> Gonzalez was very active in organizing activities in her high school. Gonzalez got a scholarship to the Spence School, a private school in the Upper West Side. “The socio-economic differences were really astounding.” She continued, “Being a person of color, this was a white institution. And during that period of time in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, there was a lot going on in terms of the Civil Rights movement, the Black is Beautiful movement.” Gonzalez recalled how students of color at Spence pushed back on the school’s institutional racism and classism. “There were moments in time, I remember, [that] we all stood up. There was an assembly. All the people of color stood up and we just marched out because [we] said, this is irrelevant and it's insulting. And we just walked out.” Gonzalez added, “I know that at the time there were other things going on within the gay community. But the Civil Rights piece was just much more relevant at that point in time to where I was myself.” Gonzalez describes how 1970s movement work for black and brown

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<sup>185</sup> Jay Cischke, interview by author, June 27, 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Lillian Gonzalez, interview by author, June 27, 2017.

<sup>187</sup> This text, *Standard Operation Procedure: Notes of a Draft-Age American*, draws on “testimony” from Vietnam veterans’ in 1970 compiled by James S. Kunen. Published in 1971, this book described the violence and trauma of an ongoing war through first-hand experience. It draws on the Veterans’ Inquiry (Citizens’ Commission of Inquiry on U.S. War Crimes in Indochina), and reflects the postwar impulse to document war crimes through recorded interviews. James S. Kunen, *Standard Operation Procedure: Notes of a Draft-Age American* (New York: Avon, 1971): 1.

power occurred on a high school level. She also points to the ways in which New York's "gay community" did not speak to lesbian and gay youth of color. For Helen Raizen, the Civil Rights piece was a vital part of her high school activism. Raizen joined Northern Virginia CORE and was involved in picket lines in the mid-1960s. Through CORE, she then started doing antiwar work once the Vietnam War began. "It was like one thing [led] to the other."<sup>188</sup> Raizen's activism in CORE and against the war was central to her teenage experiences. Yet, this work was not explicitly connected to her parents' struggles with state surveillance.

McCarthyism was kept out of view during those years. As an adult, Raizen learned her father was suspended from his government job because he gave conflicting reports to the FBI about a "left-leaning paper" he subscribed to in the 1940s. While Judy Gelfand did not see family members "bucking the system," my mother Marcy Kagan and her siblings grew up as red diaper babies.<sup>189</sup> "Our house was filled with politics and music. There were a group of musicians my father played with. They played all Russian music and all the old Communist songs."<sup>190</sup> She continued, "We had a lot of rules about what we could talk about inside the house and outside the house." Then Marcy told a story, one I already knew well and felt grateful to record:

My father never was a card-carrying Communist but he went to a lot of political meetings. And so you know one of the stories I've heard is that--when we lived in Wave Crest [Apartments], my mother's parents lived upstairs. We lived on the second floor. They lived on the third floor and they had a lot of political books in Russian as well as in English. And one day my grandmother was home and the FBI came in and she pretended she didn't speak any English...She knew what they were asking and they kept asking her questions about my father and my mother and what they did and where they worked and she served them cookies and tea and sent them on their way and, you know, they were like trying to read the books...I never told anybody that my family was communist and it

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<sup>188</sup> Helen Raizen, interview by author, June 25, 2017.

<sup>189</sup> For more on red diaper babies see *Red Diapers: Growing Up In The Communist Left*, eds Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1-23.

<sup>190</sup> Marcy Kagan, interview by author, June 26 and 27 2017.



wasn't until I was in college that I first thought, I wonder if I could even say this? The first time I said it, I thought for sure somebody was going to come and arrest me. I was in college already. I mean I just really thought we were still being hunted.

For Marcy, McCarthyism left an indelible mark and impacted her perception of surveillance, secrecy, and political movements. Themes of McCarthyism and the role of the FBI in public records and private spaces recur in my project in Part III.

Interviews traversed geographies of childhood, high school, college years, and dropping out of college years. They encompassed experiences of coming out threaded through with stories of racial tension, hippie scenes, and political activism. Interviewees reflected on high schools in the process of desegregation and memories of the Civil Rights movement from Northern Virginia to Rochester, NY. There were also themes of gender identity and the constrictions therein. Stories of wearing boys' clothes or not being allowed into the activities of boyhood recurred. Interviewees expressed both awareness of being gay and the importance they observed of conforming to societal rubrics. Experiences of youth were reflective of class and locality (urban, rural, suburban). Some interviewees discussed McCarthyism and Cold War politics. For some these matrices of surveillance impacted their family and created an atmosphere of fear and secrecy. For others, there were no role models of adults breaking societal norms or political requirements. Discussing antiwar activism, there were themes of New Left sexism as well as transformative experiences at demonstrations. Learning about Vietnam and seeing the violence of police at marches were eye-opening moments. Being a part of the antiwar movement and being a part of racial justice work brought interviewees into activism. The above personal experiences of the world around them were overlaid with consciousness-raising groups, going to gay bars for the first time, and generally pushing back on cultural norms.

## “Rebellious Thinking” and The Counter Culture

*Not to be trite but it was an anti-establishment culture that crossed all kinds of lines, it crossed lines of sex, it crossed lines of drugs, it crossed lines of politics...People felt empowered. I certainly did. So the idea that you could have a kid without being married was not widely accepted, but it was something that people said, ‘Well that’s ridiculous, if I want to have a kid, I don’t need to be married for it!’ So those kind of values are being questioned left and right, around everything.*  
- Judy Gelfand

The early 1970s offers important context in this larger project, as interviewees’ experiences and observations during this time deeply informed how they saw the world and themselves. Queer historiography is frequently critiqued for its overdetermined “moving to the city” narrative as well as its heavy reliance and reification of “closet” dichotomies.<sup>191</sup> This oral history project was in constant interaction with these narrative frames. Most interviews described when and where they moved in their early 20s. These transitions from one place to another led to political and personal shifts. While attempting to gather histories from the 1970s and 1980s in Boston, I found myself with an archive full of stories of the 60s, and 70s in cities like in Madison, Detroit, Berkeley, Buffalo, Washington DC, and Northampton. Each area offered its distinct experiences of war, the antiwar movement, black power, gay scenes, hippie scenes, and the women’s movement. As I discuss in Part III, A. Finn Enke writes about how geographies of movements are given complicated layers through oral history. For Enke, the archives did not convey how women “found” feminist movements. The collections focused on organizational leaders and a manifesto-based understanding of feminist history. But oral histories revealed more about how and *where* the women’s movement and lesbian culture was experienced.<sup>192</sup> My

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<sup>191</sup> For more on how the closet narrative is a troubling construct, see Marlon B. Ross, “Beyond The Closet as Raceless Paradigm,” *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 161-189. And for a laugh, see John Robert’s Mother’s Day sketch, which includes the line: “he moved to the city and now he’s gay.” This sketch plays on the ascribed storyline of the city being a place of perversity. There has been much critique of this framing of queer life. For more on rurality and queerness see Rachel Garringer’s oral history project, “Country Queers,” <https://countryqueers.com/>.

<sup>192</sup> A. Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke

research opened up many more geographic locations and themes of transience than I anticipated. As I will discuss at more length in Part III, searching for circuits and pathways to activism through oral history opens up possibilities for queer methods.

Interviewees described coming into adulthood (or adolescence for younger interviewees) with relatives, friends, or boyfriends impacted by the draft, combat, or going AWOL. There were four or five narrators who told stories of their first demonstration. Such stories signaled key moments of witnessing the power of state violence. Joyce Kauffman, who grew up Jewish and working class in Norwood, MA, remembered going to a demonstration in Detroit after Kent State. “It was terrifying. It was after the riots and the police were in riot gear on every corner.”<sup>193</sup> Judy attended University of Maryland, which was often under curfew. She notes, “[w]e would plan to go down to Route 1 and block the road and the police would come and then they'd throw tear gas and we'd go back and forth. It was like almost a social event. Because I was so close to Washington there were demonstrations all the time against Vietnam. And I would go to all of them. So that really opened my eyes and radicalized me in some respect.” For Judy, this experience shifted her perceptions of state violence. She did not become a political organizer, as Kauffman did, but she felt a part of a counter culture. This shift began with the “eye-opening” experience of mass mobilizations.

Antiwar movement stories also frequently described the sexism that interviewees encountered working within the New Left. Recalling her brief stint with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in Cambridge, Sheera Strick told this anecdote:

During the Cambodian bombings in '68, I remember sort of handing out leaflets or whatever, doing something, not any big thing and someone came over and said to

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University Press, 2007), 1-25, 145-177. Enke's preferred pronouns since publication of this text are they/their.

<sup>193</sup> Joyce Kauffman, interview by author, June 22, 2017.

someone I was with, 'Well I have another thing for you.' It was a guy...I can't remember exactly what he said. But it was clear to me that, you know, the girls were assigned to certain tasks and they saved other tasks for the men...After that, I kind of started pulling away from the antiwar stuff and doing more women's stuff.

For Sheera Strick, antiwar activism pushed her in the direction of feminist activism.

Demonstrations for many interviewees were paired with joining consciousness-raising groups, which I argue were a foundational model of future "lesbian mothers groups." Both Sheera Strick and Judy joined consciousness-raising groups at the same time as antiwar mobilizations. Judy's group met in the Maryland dorms. "This is what young women are doing. Not just at Maryland. Because Maryland was not a radical place." In Cambridge, Strick remembered, "A lot of women meeting at each other's houses and talking about their relationships and their lives. I joined a group...This was 1969." For Rochelle Ruthchild, it was a consciousness-raising group that moved her toward lesbian identity.<sup>194</sup> "Berkeley was very transformative because I just kind of soaked up everything that was going on there. There were Black Panther demonstrations. I mean every time you went to the university something was happening. And I joined a consciousness-raising group and I used to go to a lot of women's meetings and demonstrations."<sup>195</sup> Describing the meetings, Ruthchild remembered, "There were a number of heterosexual women in our group and they would be complaining about their boyfriends. But then they wouldn't think of actually sleeping with a woman." Being in the consciousness-raising group moved Ruthchild towards gay life. Such meetings fit into a larger context where group dialogue was an important part of organizing. For example, Alex Coleman cited "T-groups," a social psychology tool being

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<sup>194</sup> I should reiterate here that Rochelle Ruthchild and Vicki Gabriner, the primary subject of Part III, have been a couple for the last thirty years.

<sup>195</sup> Rochelle Ruthchild, interview by author, June 26, 2017.

innovatively used in Buffalo, NY, as a method that influenced his activist work.<sup>196</sup> Participation in consciousness-raising informed interviewees' decisions later on to create or seek out lesbian mothers discussion groups.

### **Lez-Beantown: Boston Feminisms**

*Ultimately when I moved to Boston, there was a lot going on in Boston in terms of the women's movement. The women's movement was really exploding and people were in consciousness-raising groups. And were organizing events around many, many issues. Reproductive rights, lesbian and gay stuff, the war had ended, but there was—  
plenty to protest.  
- Joyce Kauffman*

In the mid-1970s, Boston was a center for the women's movement in the US. It was not necessarily a hub of gay and lesbian life, and it is not often the focus of gay and lesbian historiography. It was not San Francisco or New York. But Boston's queer scenes offer insights into how race and class work in tandem with sexuality.

Boston is the most segregated place I have ever lived.<sup>197</sup> In the mid-70s, the city was humming with white violence. Desegregation and busing were at the center of the city's political turmoil for years following a 1974 federal ruling on school desegregation in Boston. I will return to this ruling in Part III. Activists in Kauffman's circle organized against the explosion of anti-busing violence that followed the desegregation measure. While busing histories focus on South Boston, Charleston, and Hyde Park, white violence pervaded each neighborhood. In West

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<sup>196</sup> T-Group methods were created in Bethel, Maine at the National Training Laboratories for Group Development. This research institute continued work by Kurt Lewin who studied "group dynamics," "action research," and "change" process. The T-Group modality utilized discussion of personal experience as a way to promote group dialogue and social change. It emphasized openness between participants, as it sought to encourage people to interact in a different and more honest way. "Over 67 Years at the Forefront of Experiential Learning." *NTL Institute*. <http://www.ntl.org/?page=history>. Accessed 22 February 2018.

<sup>197</sup> US 2010 Census Project at Brown University used census data to rank Boston as 11<sup>th</sup> most segregated city. For more on this innovate project see: John R. Logan and Brian Stults, "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census" Census Brief prepared for Project US2010 (2011). <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010>. Accessed 19 February 2018.

Roxbury and Roslindale, white neighbors put burning crosses on black families' yards and white feminists stayed over in targeted houses in attempts to forestall more white violence.<sup>198</sup> From 1974 to 1976, violence in and around Boston schools became a quotidian part of city life. These years were a defining moment for Boston and its persistent evasion of *Brown vs. Board of Education*.<sup>199</sup>

Kauffman continued by discussing the Combahee River Collective, which began as a Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1974. The Combahee River Collective wrote throughout the 1970s and held regular meetings and consciousness-raising sessions that began at the Cambridge Women's Center.<sup>200</sup> Published in 1977, the Combahee River Collective Statement popularized a key component in the black feminist thought known as intersectionality. As Kauffman remembered, "As you can imagine it was very challenging to people because this was the time of serious identity politics, you know, with lesbian feminists, radical lesbians, militant lesbians, you know, feminists who were antigay. There was a lot going on. So the whole idea of intersectionality was a challenge to a lot of people. But it was a pretty exciting time." The Combahee River Collective's black feminist analysis offered what Kimberly

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<sup>198</sup> Ev Machtinger, interview by author, SOHP Collection, Interview U-1077, March 25, 2014.

<sup>199</sup> In December 1974, there was a march in Boston in support of busing, which was the genesis of many organizations including the National Student Coalition Against Racism. For more on busing in Boston, see "Deep are the Roots: Busing in Boston" Jane M. Hornburger, *The Journal of Negro Education* 45, no. 3 (Summer, 1976): 235-245. See also Jeanne Theoharis's chapter, "Beyond the Redneck: Polite Racism and the 'White Moderate'" in *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights* (2018) and more broadly, Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (2016).

<sup>200</sup> Kimberly Springer, *Living For The Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 59. See also: Barbara Smith, "Doing it from Scratch: The Challenge of Black Lesbian Organizing" *The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 167-178.

Springer calls an interstitial politic.<sup>201</sup> Beyond intersectional approaches, Springer writes “interstitial politics formulated by black feminists stated that their socially constructed collective identity emerged between that of “blacks” and ‘women.’”<sup>202</sup> During the 1970s, Boston was a notable hub of black feminist thought and organizational work.

The Combahee River Collective continued to organize and publish in the years that followed the anti-busing violence in Boston. In 1979, there was a succession of murders of African American women in Roxbury. It was the same year that the Atlanta child murders began. By 1981, twenty-nine African American children, adolescents, and adults would be murdered in that city. The Roxbury murders, according to Kauffman, “were deeply disturbing and not resolved, or investigated.” She recalled working on demonstrations that called for the police to “step up their game” in investigating the deaths. A coalition called CRISIS (not an acronym) was created to organize around the wave of violence towards black women.<sup>203</sup> The Combahee River Collective’s pamphlet, “Why Did They Die?” offered direct information to Roxbury women and addressed larger questions of institutional violence. In Boston, as in other places, activists were making connections between local, national, and international forms of white heteropatriarchy.

Boston was simultaneously a key place for protests against apartheid in South Africa beginning in the early 1970s. Polaroid had chemistry facilities in Cambridge and employees at the lab started the Polaroid Workers Revolutionary Group. This group organized in the Boston

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<sup>201</sup> In the 1977 statement, the Collective writes, “In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women’s revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex.” The Combahee River Collective’s critique of lesbian separatism doubled down on its logic of “biological determinism.” Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in The Seventies and Eighties* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1986), 1-21.

<sup>202</sup> Springer, 11.

<sup>203</sup> Springer notes in a footnote that historical record differs as to how coalitional CRISIS was. Through oral history interviews Springer conducted, she found there was less “bridging” in this organizational work than texts suggest. For a text noting coalitional work see: Jaime H. Grant, “Who’s Killing Us?” *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing*, ed Jill Radford and Diane E. H. Russell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 145-160.

area from 1970 to 1977. Caroline Hunter, one of the group's co-founders, was a chemist at Polaroid and discovered they were making identification booklets for the South African government. Hunter spoke at an International Women's Day rally in 1971. After this rally, a few feminists took over a Harvard building for two weeks and successfully negotiated for seed money to open the Cambridge Women's Center.

Kauffman remembered being at the Cambridge Women's Center "three or four times a week." Kauffman taught classes there as a part of the Women's College. Kauffman was involved in the Boston Area Socialist Feminist Organization and the creation of a women's center in Somerville. Interviews painted a picture of how lesbian and feminist activism overlapped and influenced each other in the 1970s. Rochelle Ruthchild described taking karate classes through Female Liberation. Holly Bishop remembered attending a Daughters of Bilitis meeting in 1970: "This is the first time I ever sat in a room with other people who said that they were lesbians and it is intense."<sup>204</sup> There was a radio program called Gay Way on Boston airwaves and Ruthchild was a part of an action at WBCN, a rock n roll FM station, demanding airtime for women (they brought live "chicks" to the station referencing the deejay's call for more "chicks" to volunteer as typists). Such feminist actions occurred regularly in Boston in the early 1970s. The Cambridge Women's Center itself resulted from a feminist occupation of a Harvard building in 1971.<sup>205</sup>

The women's health movement also had its roots in Boston and Cambridge. In our interview, Liz Coolidge remembered close connections between the Boston Women's Health Collective and the Women's Community Health Center in Cambridge. In 1973, the former wrote *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which began as a 1970 pamphlet. The latter provided abortions and

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<sup>204</sup> Holly Bishop, interview by author, June 26, 2017.

<sup>205</sup> For more on that history see: *Left On Pearl: Women Take Over 888 Memorial Drive*. Directed by Susie Rivo. 2016. <http://leftonpearl.org/>



created a pelvic exam education program, which, Liz Coolidge noted, “was kind of a radical way of teaching at the time.”<sup>206</sup> For Coolidge, women’s health activism was a shaping experience. Its “demystifying” approach to sexuality informed her continued work in community health.

As a college town, Boston area student activism was a large part of the city’s political life. Lillian Gonzalez, at Brandeis became involved in the Latino Union, which was a part of a sit-in at the university that demanded better financial aid and supports students of color. “That freshman year there was a lot going on. I was very engaged with some of the seniors in that class who were also very politically active and there was a lot of education that I received through that because you really start learning these are some of the methodologies.” Through student activism, Gonzalez learned techniques of resistance and skills for interacting with institutions of power. She also worked at the Framingham prison, where she taught Spanish and spent time with political prisoners, such as Susan Saxe, who further influenced her political thought.<sup>207</sup>

During these years, Gonzalez began a relationship and went to Gay Pride. “That was wonderful. I felt totally comfortable. It was really feeling like coming into my own!” Many interviews included an experience of first going to Pride in Boston, and I started keeping a tally of how many interviewees noted “bags over heads” at Pride. This visual offered shorthand for an ideological shift they sought to convey about being gay in public. Kathy MacDonald moved to Boston to attend a religiously affiliated nursing school. She moved at age eighteen from a small logging town in northern Maine of roughly 600 people (“I probably knew 594 of them”): “I went to Gay Pride for the first time in 1977 here in Boston and I think there were 500 people and I was

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<sup>206</sup> Liz Coolidge, interview by author, June 22, 2017.

<sup>207</sup> Susan Saxe was a Brandeis alumnus who in the 1960s was involved in a bank robbery intended to finance student activism against the Vietnam War. A police officer was shot during the robbery and Saxe was imprisoned. She escaped and was a fugitive from 1970 to 1975 living mostly in lesbian feminist communities. She was caught in Philadelphia and represented by Nancy Gertner, a young lawyer who became involved in Vicki Gabrinier’s case in 1977, which I discuss in Part III.

totally blown away because I'd never seen so many queer folks in my life all in one place. Of course now we've have demonstrations with half a million people and things like that. But in 1977 that was a lot of us. And there were people who went with bags over their heads cut out eyes and stuff because they couldn't safely be out. They would have lost their jobs.”<sup>208</sup>

MacDonald experienced firsthand the risk of being lesbian in public. After being seen at a gay demonstration, MacDonald was expelled from her nursing school, half a year shy of her degree. MacDonald, who was then nineteen and not out to her family, found a support network at Lesbian Liberation meetings at the Cambridge Women's Center.

Judy Gelfand went to work as a teacher in Arlington a few years into her time in Boston. When talking about Pride and homophobia, Gelfand described carefully choosing her words and pronouns in what-did-you-do-this-weekend conversations during the lunch hour. “Gay and teaching don't go together. You could lose your job...I wouldn't be forthcoming in any way. So it was a secret I carried around with me. In Boston, it wasn't a secret...but when I went to work it was a secret. So when you go to Gay Pride, you worry. Like who's going to see you?” Alex Coleman recalls being let go from positions because he “did not fit their image.” He described feeling stuck in the work place whether out or not. “When I kept the secrets, people were picking up things and when I wasn't keeping secrets people were using it against me.” Discrimination in employment and hiring led multiple interviewees to becoming self-employed. Jay Cischke could not get hired as a health educator and started the daycare. Soon after, Massachusetts attempted to pass a bill against gay educators, including childcare providers, but the measure did not succeed.

Beyond employer and legislative forms of homophobia, interviewees experienced street harassment, verbal and physical. One interviewee told a story about homophobia in medicine

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<sup>208</sup> Kathy MacDonald, interview by author, June 25, 2017.

that was particularly troubling. During a bout of vaginal bleeding related to a cyst, Marjorie Posner was rushed into emergency surgery in Northampton, MA. She was twenty-one. She had gone to UMASS in Amherst and taken a class called “Awareness and Sex Stereotyping” through which she and many classmates came out. After surgery, the doctor took Marjorie aside. He explained that, “in the medical field we’ve determined the cause of homosexuality. It is a hormone imbalance.” He had removed one ovary and one fallopian tube in addition to the cyst:

‘I balanced your hormones. You are not a lesbian anymore.’ And it was God-awful. It was God-awful in ways I can’t even explain to you. I thought I couldn’t have babies. And it struck me, you know, I always thought I’d have a baby. And it never occurred to me that all these feelings about girls would get in the way of that. I remember just sobbing...Now I wasn’t a lesbian anymore. That was a problem because that was kind of the first thing I’d ever figured out on my own. But the other thing that I was sobbing about was I wasn’t going to have a baby and having that taken away somehow was madness. So, clearly he was wrong about lesbianism.

This attempt to “cure” shows the trauma that medicine’s homosexuality as pathology ethos produced. For Marjorie, being a lesbian and having a baby grounded personal frameworks that did not clash. She needed both. In Northampton, she became a part of the Common Woman Club, which started a restaurant. Marjorie served brunch and learned to keep the books.

For other interviewees, the idea of not being able to have children was a barrier to coming out. Sheera Strick recalled sleeping with men and women, the later of which was more casual, “a dalliance.” In relationships with women, she would “freak out.” “There were no models of people having children and for me that was a big piece of it.” For many interviewees coming out and thinking about having children were entwined. For Cheryl Schaffer sorting out how to have children was part of coming out and “the only reason I was distressed.” Posner remembers “My mother said to me, just don’t have children...She also said don’t tell your father.

Well, my father was gay...He was actively a homosexual...So don't tell your father was very weird.”<sup>209</sup>

Holly Bishop, who also lived in Northampton, recounted the importance of women's health workshops in opening up ideas about lesbians getting pregnant. In her interview, she describes a series of workshops at Hampshire College in 1975 where, “people were talking about it as a sort of almost outlaw. Kind of you know we could figure it out. We can do our own health practices. A whole lot of women's health, you know, helping people get abortions, teaching people self exams, and part of that was some people experimenting with trying to self-inseminate.” Bishop tried inseminating with a gay friend during these years, but did not get pregnant. Her interview described the DIY philosophies of activism around feminism and health.

### **“Lesbians with Children”**

When Carol Nelson and her girlfriend Judy moved to the Boston area in the late 1970s, they lived in Framingham, which is about thirty minutes from Boston. Looking to get connected to social networks in Cambridge, Carol and Judy began volunteering at the Lesbian and Gay Parents Project (LGPP). Judy had seen an ad for the group in the weekly paper, *Gay Community News* (GCN). “This was our first contact with people who were trying to figure how to have children.”<sup>210</sup> Nelson remembered the small group was mainly a hotline. They answered phones, gave referrals, and provided support to gay and lesbian parents struggling with custody of children after divorce. The Lesbian and Gay Parents Project is not mentioned in Daniel Rivers's *Radical Relations*, but it mirrors groups in other cities focused on supporting lesbian mothers with custody. Carol remembered, “only one of us was a parent in the group...and I'm not sure [if

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<sup>209</sup> Cheryl Schaffer, interview by author, June 26, 2017.

<sup>210</sup> Carol Nelson, interview by author, June 25, 2017.

that] person still had their child. But we all had this interest, and that's what we did, we manned the phones mostly." The Cambridge group was short-lived, but it led to close friendships and demonstrated for Carol of the possibility of raising children outside heterosexuality.

While some interviewees described having "no role models," many also told stories of their close relationships with lesbians who had children. Marjorie Posner was in a relationship with a woman in Boston with a teenage child. When Marcy Kagan lived in Buffalo, she moved in with a close friend who was a lesbian and pregnant from a relationship with a man. For the next four years, Marcy and her friend Cindy lived together in group houses or neighboring apartments. Cindy's son "was sort of my kid and I adored having him and Cindy and I were very close. We didn't parent together but it was like it was a community parenting." Helen Raizen also lived in a communal setting in Madison with lesbians who were raising a child. These experiences were formative in her thinking about parenting outside a heterosexual frame.

On a national level, 1970s organizing around lesbian mothers took the form of mothers' defense funds. These organizations sprang up around custody cases, but often continued on as a support network for lesbians with children. Daniel Rivers points out that the fact that "all lesbian mothers activist groups in the 1970s focused on lesbian mother custody battles in the family courts...attests to the widespread dangers of custody loss faced by lesbian mothers."<sup>211</sup> He notes that such groups formed in cities and rural areas, and "grew out of lesbian feminist communities and were connected to a wave of grassroots, feminist reproductive rights organizations in the 1970s."<sup>212</sup> In 1974, the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund (LMNDF) formed in Seattle, they put out a national newsletter. Custody Action for Lesbian Mothers, a more legally oriented group formed in Philadelphia in 1974. Dykes and Tykes formed in New York in 1976. Dykes

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<sup>211</sup> Rivers, 83.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 80.

and Tykes worked in coalition with Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers, and the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA).

In Boston, there was a Lesbian Mothers Day rally in 1978. Kauffman explained, “There had never been a mothers’ day demonstration in support of lesbian mothers and as I know you know, there have always been lesbian mothers. There are many, many, many women who had children in heterosexual relationships and later came out.” The event was organized in tandem with a demonstration at Manhattan Family Court organized by Dykes and Tykes and a rally in Seattle organized by LMNDF. In New York, Audre Lorde read poetry. In Boston, Lee Swislow gave a speech about custody law as a form of patriarchal social control linked to white racism and issues of reproduction, from forced sterilization to abortion access. Swislow saw activism around mothers losing custody due to their sexuality as a part of a greater matrix of racial justice. *Gay Community News* in Boston covered the event reporting hundreds at the demonstration.<sup>213</sup>

This event was possible because of annual “Lesbians With Children Conferences” held in the Boston area beginning in 1976. In 1977, the conference was a weekend retreat outside the city. In 1978, the “Lesbians With Children Conference” was held in Cambridge and Audre Lorde was the conference’s keynote speaker. Archives were useful in culling information about the workshops at these conferences. The conference schedule detailed the workshop topics that ranged from the practical to the emotional. Members of the Lesbian and Gay Parents Project ran a few sessions. To give an example of the daylong event, after Lorde’s talk, the first round of workshops were: Raising Third World Children, Legal Issues-Custody Information, Dealing With Anti-Male Attitudes in the Womens Community, Building Support Networks Among

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<sup>213</sup> “Lesbian Mothers Organize Rallies, Plan Mother’s Day Weekend Demonstrations” *GCN* 5, 13 May 1978. “Hundreds Attend Lesbian Mother’s Day Rally,” *GCN* 5, 27 May 1978. Bromfield Street Educational Foundation Records, Box 18, Northeastern University Archives.

Lesbian Mothers, Co-Parenting Issues When a Woman with Child(ren) and a Woman Without Child(ren) Relate to Each Other and Share Parenting, and Co-Parenting Issues When Both Women Have Children. The conferences were discursive space where lesbians interested in parenting were interacting with lesbians who were already parents. It also brought organizers living in different cities into dialogue. While the majority of lesbians participating had children from prior straight relationships, a few women presenting had children “on their own.” The conference format both facilitated and foreclosed conversations about and across race, class, and parent role. The simultaneous workshops meant conference go-ers had to decide which topic to address, a familiar dilemma then and now.

Archival study of the experiences and thought produced in such conferences had its limits. Audre Lorde’s 1979 speech is not archived in her papers at Spelman College nor at Northeastern’s collections where I found the conference program. What happened to Lorde’s notes? Did they inform her drafts of the essay published in 1986, originally titled “Into The Fray: Lesbian Parenting”? This frequently anthologized essay speaks directly to lesbian parents of color. Did the Boston conference feel like the oppressive meetings of white Bostonians that Cherrie Moraga describes in her forward to *A Bridge Called My Back*? Lorde’s speech was not included in her preserved writings. I asked interviewees what they remembered of the speech, but no one could recall the speech’s content. Conference records tracked a boom in participation by the conference at UMASS the following year. Was this influenced by Lorde’s speech?

As previously noted, interviewees recalled being hugely impacted by lesbians who had children in the 1970s. Julia Perez, who was an organizer for the above “Raising Third World Children” workshop, decided to get pregnant as an out-lesbian in the early 1970s. For Helen Raizen, and many others I interviewed, Perez was the first lesbian to get pregnant that she knew

in Boston. After having a child, Perez began dating Cheryl Kennedy who had a child from a prior relationship. The two adopted a third child. Of the workshops listed from the “Lesbians With Children Conference” of 1977, which would Cheryl Kennedy attend? She was raising black, brown, and white children in an interracial couple. When I asked in my interviews about how the idea of lesbian parents came into interviewees’ consciousness, many pointed to the first lesbians they heard of having children. Lillian Gonzalez said, “Joyce [Kauffman] is doing this. We can do it too. And in some ways at least for me that just sort of cut the ice, to see what was possible.” Judy responded that she had heard that Rochelle Ruthchild had a kid, “here’s somebody who actually had a baby and she’s a lesbian!” Both Joyce and Rochelle, when asked the same question, cited being influenced by meeting mothers through organizing within the women’s movement. “There were lots and lots of lesbian women who had children who were involved in the work, the organizing work that was going on in Boston.” These oral histories point to a history of the “lesbian baby boom” in Boston directly growing out of the presence of lesbians who had children in hetero contexts.

## **Being Parents: Debates and Dialogue**

*In the early 80s, there was this movement that started on the West Coast, San Francisco, Bay Area, around lesbians being parents. And for a long time the whole thing was gay and lesbian people are irresponsible, they just want to have sex. They don’t want the responsibility of being parents. [Pause] And then people started saying no we want to establish our own families...So there was a lot mixed stuff going on in the community. Like is marriage a heterosexual archetype, cultural creation that treats people as equals? Is that what we want? Or do we want to establish something new and different? I think that question still remains. I mean I think that that is a very viable question. But then here are all these lesbians whose biological clock is ticking along, most of whom are in relationships except for me--again being the outsider, and thinking about saying no, I want to be in a committed relationship and I want to raise a child or children in that relationship. And different people had different ideas about what that might look like.*  
 - Alex Coleman

Boston was not the first place for dialogue around the idea of lesbian and gay parenting. But in the 1980s, Coleman’s peers in the Boston area were engaging in a dynamic process of



figuring out what parenthood could and would be. His framing of conversation about “lesbians being parents” opens up the mix of queries such discussions produced. What would it look like? There was concern about being absorbed into constructions of parenting that were hetero and patriarchal. There were also tensions in the association of queerness with pleasure and the idea that gays eschew responsibility. These interchanges shaped the process of getting pregnant and becoming a parent. Yet, as Coleman astutely points out, biological clocks hurried conversations along, possibly curtailing anticipatory reckoning with parenthood as institution and experience.<sup>214</sup>

Before turning to the discussion groups, which formed around questions of gay and lesbian parenting, it is important to contextualize such face-to-face conversations with what ideas were circulating through print dialogue. *GCN* was a central thread in interviews because of its role in linking and elaborating on gay experience. As Helen Raizen put it, the weekly paper known as *GCN* “created some community here.” In the archives, Marcy and I combed through *GCN* issues for stories of national and local lesbian custody battles. I thought reading *GCN*’s coverage would help animate how such information filtered into the lives of interviewees. Instead, our most fruitful finds occurred in the classifieds. This section contained personal ads right next to searches for a softball coach; housemate-needed posts right next to queries about donor sperm. These juxtapositions productively show how conversations about casual sex and having babies were interwoven in quotidian life for both lesbians and gay men.

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<sup>214</sup> I refer here to Adrienne Rich’s 1976 phrasing of “motherhood as experience and institution,” in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 1-20.

**SOFTBALL COACH WANTED**  
JP: B League dyke softball team looking for woman coach and a pitcher. 524-0971. (34)

**GWM 28, 5'11", 270, brn hair sks sane husky strong M w/mustache for friendship/love & getting in shape. Boston, N Shore area, signed PC in BT. GCN Box 640. (34)**

**HNDSM GWM WNTS BUDDY**  
Go places/do things. 28, 5-9, trim, musc, hairy, warm, Jog & work. out reg. Be similar quality. GCN Box 641. (35)

**Italian GWM 32 lkng for lover if U are**

Figure 2. 2

**ROOMMATES**  
Lesbian sks same to share tobacco-free 2 bdrm apt on N. Shore. Interests incl natural foods, cats, music, avail 2-80. 90/mo + util. Call 922-4548. (28)

Forming household of 3-4 lesbians in wonderful 8 rm house in Dorchester I own. Sharing & separate space. Nr T. Call Vicki, 282-9388, after 4. (25)

Responsible, quiet, GWM 32 yrs old seeks same to share 2 bdrm apt w/free off-street parking. Only 3 minutes walk to train station. \$100/mo, everything included (heat too). Call Niel eves at 356-0265. (25)

GWM 33 prof resp seeks apt to share thru June. Must be quiet & near T. Unshared studio/1 br also possible. Peter (617) 547-7138, 8-10 pm only. (27)

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12  
Yamaha FC \$125 or best evenings.  
**RESOR**  
WINTER  
Ski, snow-s beauty of away from Manor is meals, fri res/info call

Figure 2. 3

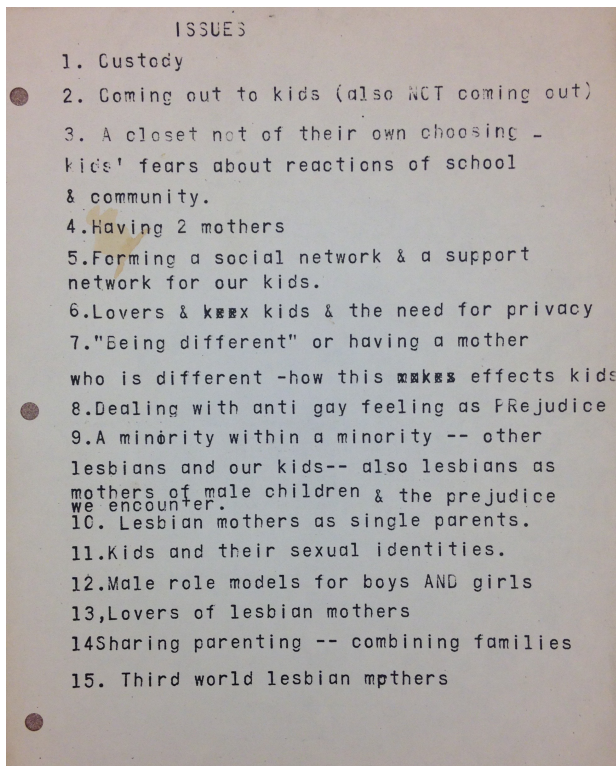
**INTERESTED IN FATHERHOOD?**  
Lesbian sks GM to be sperm donor. Anonymity/participation in child rearing negotiable. All inquiries kept in strictest confidence. Serious inquiries only, please. GCN Box 590. (12)

Figure 2. 4

**Alternative fertilization-GM donor wanted by mature lesbians. Excellent chances of early success-write with brief description of who you are and what your needs are. GCN Box 55.**

Figure 2. 5

The classified section of *GCN* gives information about how some individuals in the early 1980s were seeking sperm (outside of medical avenues) and what types of donor relationships lesbian-parents-to-be were envisioning or struggling to envision (“Anonymity/participation in child rearing negotiable”). The paper and its workers facilitated this platform of exchange. Jay Cischke worked on the weekends delivering *GCN* papers. They described in our interview the weekly process of dissemination. “It was a very popular paper over the country; [we also] mailed copies out of the country...I was driving with bundles of papers to all the buyers and bookstores all around...And guys [at the South Station Post Office] would not touch the paper...They said, you have to bring them up here and put them down the chute. We're not touching a queer paper.” For postal workers, *GCN* struck a chord of danger/perversion. The paper dealt with serious incidents of homophobic aggression including arson in July 1982 that burned down *GCN*'s building.



**Figure 2. 1: Lesbian Mothers Group (1974-1980)**

The Lesbian Mothers Rap Group began meeting in 1976 on the Cambridge Women's Center's third floor. The 8pm group had a printed list of ground rules for dialogue and a list of "issues" to discuss (see illustration). There was childcare provided in a separate space. After a round of check-ins, there was "a suggested time limit of 15 minutes for any woman to discuss a particular issue."<sup>215</sup> The document titled "Issues" had fifteen numbered topics, custody was number one and Third World

lesbian mothers was number fifteen.<sup>216</sup> This ordering reflects issues of custody were not addressed as explicitly interwoven with issues germane to women of color, as the Mothers Day rally called for. The text may not be an explicit list of the priorities of the group, but it demonstrates the ways white supremacy functioned in the everyday spaces of feminist dialogue. The list includes "a minority within a minority—other," which seek to get at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender identity. But I imagine it was also a way to address being a lesbian/parent in the gay world of majority non-parents. When I went to the archives with my mother, this document was the one that for her had the smack of recognition. She exclaimed that she remembered this. The paper looked worn with coffee stains and typewriter edits. A historian

<sup>215</sup> Lesbian Mothers Group, Women's Educational Center (Cambridge, Mass) Records, Subject Files, 1966-1998, Box 10, Northeastern University Archives.

<sup>216</sup> "Issues." Lesbian Mothers Group, Women's Educational Center (Cambridge, Mass) Records, Subject Files, 1966-1998, Box 10, Northeastern University Archives.

could proffer that this was a text in frequent circulation, but the ability to go to the archives with a person who was there, who lived the historical moment, gives the historian further insight into the experience. In this method of recorded exchange in the archive—this text sparked a different conversation than we would have had otherwise.

Oral history relayed different layers of what going to Lesbian Mothers Group meetings was like. In the early 1980s, Marcy and Judy went to a few meetings. On the Women's Center, Judy said "I was never attracted to go there....I wasn't an activist. So I didn't go there much." But she recalled, "Marcy and I went together and people were talking about the whole idea of having kids, how to have kids. People were very nervous about having known donors because of the legal ramifications of losing your child to the father. And a lot of conversation was about that and there were conversations around insemination and how people would do that. I remember heated discussions but I don't remember it being, you know, wildly contentious." Interviewees often began discussing the groups by setting the scene—climbing the stairs to the third floor. Marcy said, "We walked up the stairs into this room. There were pillows on the floor and couches and it was like a long and narrow-- . And there were lots of women there. Some of them had kids and some of them didn't have kids and we had all kinds of conversations...I always felt like I was totally different than everybody who was sitting there." Both interviewees highlighted feeling that their interest in a known donor collided with the interests of the majority. "I felt like Judy and I were the only people in the room who considered knowing the donor. And so we didn't even bring it up because there was a conversation about it and there was so much negativity around, rightfully so, about the fear of what would happen." For Marjorie Posner, there was a similar feeling of being disconnected:

I remember going with Jeanne to a Women's Center meeting. I don't remember if I was already inseminating or just starting. And at the Women's Center in Cambridge, there

were meetings and the room was full of women. People were talking about inseminating and talking about having babies. And I remember we both had a reaction to this one woman. There were a couple of women talking about some kind of an immaculate conception. Except that's not what they called it but it was sort of like: the spirits, if we all got ourselves in the right order for this, you know, the goddess would impregnate us and it was like, uh no, that's not how that's going to work out. So I don't recall [going to] a whole lot of those meetings.

While these interviews made it clear that the Women's Center was not a home for many interviewees, they did also often reference information gleaned from attending such meetings.

Marcy mentioned conversations about "second parents" and being impacted by exchanges with women across the lines of racial and class segregation in Boston.

I do remember there was one meeting we went to where a woman had come down from Lowell. She already had a kid...She had a factory job and one of the guys, who she was close to in the factory was the father of her kid and she had had a boy and he was six maybe seven. The factory guy was a friend of hers who hung out with them, but the kid didn't know that he was his father. She thought if people in her town knew that this guy was the father and that she was gay she would lose her job and she would lose her kid. There was an intense conversation about that. Maybe there were some lawyers there...but the conversation that night was: how do you have the life you want to live when the outside world is so terrifying and you're the only one in your town? She didn't know any lesbians where she lived. I felt sitting in that room that my life was so different than her life. It was eye opening in that sense.

This excerpt describes some of the interclass contact that occurred in the Women's Center group. Marcy's narration describes the distance, geographic and socially, between living as a lesbian in Jamaica Plain and Lowell.

During the same years, Jay Cischke was a part of lesbian group, not at the Cambridge Women's Center but at the Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation (CASPAR). While building a childcare business and delivering GCN, Jay also attended a weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting through CASPAR that dubbed itself, "Sisterhood," and met regularly for a decade. The CASPAR group was predominately comprised of lesbians with children. As Jay remembers, during meetings "their kids would come to my

house and we took turns watching kids so that we could meet.” Most of the group members had children from previous heterosexual relationships. Many were “women who came out of a battered women shelter. And while they were in the shelter they met other women and then came out to each other.” Cischke met a partner of many years at the CASPAR group. They both had two-year-old children who were playing together in the back of the meeting. This group, which called itself “Sisterhood,” was less oriented around planning to have children and more focused on living as a parent, staying sober, working through trauma, and navigating poverty.

Cischke helped organize a spin-off group through CASPAR devoted explicitly to lesbian mothers. But before long Jay recalled, “they voted that I couldn’t be a part of it because I wasn’t a birth mother. [They said] I didn’t understand what it was really like. He wasn’t really my kid—like okay.” This last part was added ironically. Jay took care of a child, whose mother struggled with addiction, from ages two to eight when he returned to live with his mother. “So I couldn’t be a part of a support group that I actually helped start.”

Cischke also helped start CASPAR’s softball team that played in the Somerville league for over twenty years. The team was named “Sisterhood” after the name of their CASPAR group, which formed around being a group that did not go to the bars after the game. Jay remembered being a pitcher and that “everyone thought we were nuns.” The name Sisterhood was not read as feminist or gay but rather Christian. “And when they found out that we were a lesbian team, nobody would shake our hands anymore. But they loved our team, until someone found out we were a lesbian team.” Many of Jay’s teammates brought their kids to the games. There are many pictures of me at such events. And somehow I have a Sisterhood uniform tucked in the bottom of a drawer. Its bright purple color and dolphin mascot were familiar to me when I came across it, in that way of childhood memories.

Softball was a public space to enact a lesbian/feminist politic. With her partner at the time, Judy Gelfand formed a team called “Nobody’s Baby” in the mid-70s. Their team played in Jamaica Plain and around Boston. As Enke argues, the softball field was a key zone of sociality in 1970s lesbian life. While in the 1950s and 1960s, softball players may have been living non-heterosexual lives, Enke argues there was a shift in the 1970s toward “saying it” rather than “playing it” on the field. This trend, which Enke documents in Midwestern cities and which I will discuss more in Part III, was very much true in Boston. The uniforms reflected this shift in politics around sexuality. “You didn’t have to be an avid softball player to play and you just wanted to be part of a social experience really.” Judy remembered going out looking for sponsors in the summer of 1974. She remembered, “[w]e got T-shirts that said Revere Riding Stables on the back and we decided to name our team, Nobody’s Baby. The reason being [that] all the teams that were in the league were called Paul’s Dolls and Dick’s girls. It was a male coach who called the team his girls, his dolls his--nobody used the word bitch. But, you know, his. So we decided to do something that reflected that. It was a statement. We’re nobody’s baby.” Unlike other teams they played against, Nobody’s Baby was “playing it.” It was presenting a politic on the field and a public lesbian culture. “I would say at that time in the early years for softball teams most people were straight.” Judy continued, “There might have been a lot of closeted gay people in some of those teams, but I don’t remember there being a women’s team that was women-focused or gay. Like everybody on our team, I’m not sure everybody was gay [on our team], I’d say most people were. I’d say maybe 90%.” Social life also coalesced for interviewees around women’s percussion groups, visual art, and self-defense.

### **AIDS-Related: Getting Pregnant and the Emergence of AIDS**

*How were you actually going to get pregnant? People considered one-night stands, you know, getting friends to donate. This was also around the early 80s when the AIDS crisis began. And so there was lots of concern about that. Because lots of us were having gay men be donors. And there was no testing.*  
- Joyce Kauffman

In the interviews I conducted, much of the recorded material focused on “how they did it.” I have been reflecting on why this was so often the focus of narration. While it was in my interview guide, it came up often without my asking. There are a few simultaneous reasons that speak to the multiple temporal audiences of oral history. On the one hand, interviewees spoke to the present. “How they did it” is where intergenerational interest most often lies. On the other hand, interviewees rehearsed the conversations of the era they described. At the time of navigating not-hetero pregnancy, *how* was a central topic of informal and formal conversations (how did that couple do it, how are you going to do it). At the same time, interviewees also addressed what the “outside world” had always asked. The media’s obsession in the 1990s with “turkey baster babies” became a recurrent theme. And there I was, sitting there with my recorder, a product of this very question. Interviewees spoke to future archival listeners, present-day “kids of,” and their 1970s/1980s interlocutors concurrently as they described what was for some their most transgressive act: reproduction outside the compulsory heterosexual frame. AIDS was a major part of the social and political milieu of the years interviewees were getting pregnant. “AIDS-related” – a phrasing for the quick and long deaths of individuals gay and straight – became a recurrent expression that was overlaid with the close *relation* interviewees had with those who passed away in the 1980s and 1990s.

While some interviews recalled always wanting to have children, others were ambivalent and a few felt that they had already raised siblings in their youth and maybe that was enough. Yet, each began recounting their searches for donors or attempts at insemination. Many interviewees mentioned placing ads in *GCN* or *Bay Windows*, another gay newspaper. Some



placed ads in Jewish magazines and one even placed an ad in the *New York Review of Books*.

These ads, as Marcy and I noted in the archives, receded as the AIDS epidemic grew in Boston and stories of the disease filled *GCN*. This overlay of classifieds of reproduction and deterioration was striking. It persisted in archival and oral history research.

In the archive, AIDS became more present with each issue of *GCN*. The textual history gives visual dimensions to this concurrency. In a 1982 issue (see illustration), the classifieds contained conference information about the Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2).

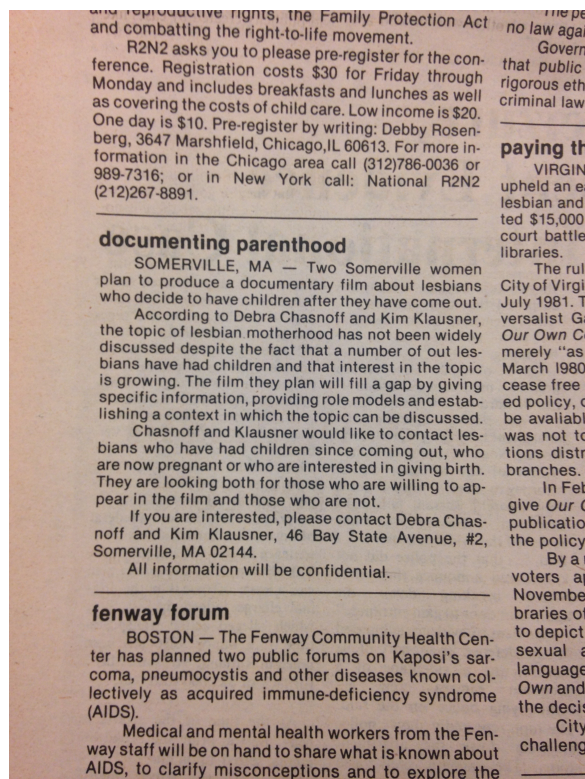


Figure 2. 2: *Gay Community News*, Classifieds, 1982

Below was an advertisement, “Documenting Parenthood.” This was a call to lesbian mothers for a documentary “about lesbians who decide to have children after they have come out.”<sup>217</sup> This local call assured confidentiality and was a part of the 1984 film *Choosing Children* by Debra Chasnoff and Kim Klausner. This film expanded and coalesced narratives around “lesbians choosing children. Below the filmmakers’ information there was an ad, “Fenway Forum.”

This announcement publicized two public forums

at the Fenway Health Clinic on Kaposi’s sarcoma, other diseases associated with AIDS, and common misconceptions. This 1982 example shows how reproduction and illness overlapped in daily life.

<sup>217</sup> “Documenting Parenting,” *GCN* 9, no 2., 6 November 1982, Bromfield Street Educational Foundation, Box 22, Northeastern University Archives.

The Fenway Clinic in Boston arose out of women's health and abortion access movements, Black Panther free clinics, and Homophile Community Health Services.<sup>218</sup> In the 1971, Fenway was founded through War on Poverty funding. It was an OEO community health center focused on STD services and run initially by volunteers. By the early 1980s, Fenway Clinic became a key site of care for patients diagnosed with HIV and AIDS. Aware of few resources for women, the Fenway developed its alternative insemination program in 1983. This program "grew at the same time AIDS care, research, and education did."<sup>219</sup> Below is an insemination tank at the Fenway Clinic.



Figure 2. 8

AIDS was a presence in each interview I conducted. Interviewees describe losses at work, in their families, and among their closest friends. Marjorie told the story of going to California on vacation with her partner Jeanne. They found a mimeographed pamphlet about the gay illness and Jeanne, a physician, panicked. Marjorie had already been inseminating with a gay friend from work. In the interviews I conducted, stories of insemination were interlaced with stories of AIDS-related deaths. Marcy's narration offers an example of this back and forth:

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<sup>218</sup> Thomas Martorelli, *For People, Not For Profit: A History of Fenway Health's First Forty Years* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012), 11.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 98.

I was working at the Hyatt. A lot of the men and women that we worked with were gay...They were the ones who educated me about you know what happened at night in the Fenway and sort of what their lives were like and their multiple partners. That happened before AIDS touched any of them. I would hear their stories and we would laugh about their life and how different their life was from my life. And then one of them got sick. And so it became a very different conversation. When Fred started to get sick, I remember Ellen [a coworker] and I talking about it and Fred being terrified. That also coincided with Judy getting pregnant and my hurting my back and then having to leave that job so I kind of lost track of them. And then you were born. So I lost track of that connection but that was the beginning of the AIDS epidemic touching my life. And it happened while Judy and I were starting to talk about having a baby and where we would find a known donor...Whereas prior to that happening, I was very open to using a gay man and having a relationship that would be bonding for all of us, but that quickly went away for me once I was close enough to watch someone start to get sick, and hearing everything about what it was.

For Marcy, the early 80s held the conversations about the death of friends, coworkers, and family and how to get pregnant as a lesbian. The above story was mirrored later on in our interview when Marcy told the story of her cousin Freddy, who died of AIDS the same year. “We went to his funeral when you were about two months old.” This experience of familial loss brought her in contact with the homophobia of her own relatives. Both Marcy and Jay lost family members to AIDS. As Marcy put it, “Everyone you talked to knew people who were dying.”

Jay Cischke lost their nephew as well as most of their family at the newspaper. As Jay recounted, AIDS “became a major part of the Boston scene. I think most of the guys I worked with at *GCN* died of AIDS.” The AIDS epidemic deeply impacted print infrastructure. It also became a focal point of organizing for interviewees. Cheryl Shaffer began working at AIDS Action in 1989 and Lillian Gonzalez became involved in the Latino Health Network. Coleman remembered, “a lot of lesbians were involved in helping to care for their gay male family and friends. I mean it was family in a lot of ways. It was really a death sentence pretty much at that point. Many would-be donor candidates could be HIV positive. First we didn’t know what was going on, but then it became clear.” Almost all interviewees similarly first inseminated outside of

medical spheres with gay men they knew. During the time that they were attempting to get pregnant, most interviewees switched to a clinic and away from gay known donors. “Men who would have had children didn’t, either because they couldn’t because they were sick or because they were afraid that they were [sick] and wouldn’t live and it wouldn’t be fair.” Coolidge, Coleman, and Schaffer all noted AIDS impacting the gay male baby boom’s later surge.

Debates of the era about whether to have a known or unknown donor were re-staged in the context of the oral histories I conducted. The interviewees who had children in the early ‘80s did inseminate with a gay known donor. Kauffman noted not “really understanding what this was going to look like.” She was single at the time and eventually navigated three involved parents (herself, her partner, her donor). Strick, in her interview, recalled interviewing men about becoming a donor before choosing a gay man who understood the balance of involvement she sought. As Schaffer put it in her interview, “I think we felt more comfortable with gay men. What we were worried about at that time was the father claiming parental rights and taking the child, interfering with the two of us raising the child. That was what we were nervous about. So we were looking for a known donor but not a father. And I don’t think we were thinking very clearly about that. I think we were really focused on what we thought was our immediate legal threat so we chose somebody who had no interest whatsoever in being a father, but was willing to do this as a favor.” Interviews gave narrators a space for reflection not often open. In the interview process, they were able to go back and think through the process of having children. They reflected on the range of involvement of known donors and the odd experience of cold calling men they knew to varying degrees. As Judy observed, “I mean it’s a weird thing to call someone and say hey. Would you be interested in you know, donating your sperm. It wasn’t a common thing then. It wasn’t totally uncommon.” Meetings about the practical and the legal

implications followed calls with donors. There was much discussion in the lesbian mothers group about whether or not donors should sign contracts or be on birth certificates. My donor Dani initially saw helping lesbians become pregnant as an extension of his political commitment to reproductive rights. Dani and Judy met regularly to discuss what they would do if different scenarios arose. In the meetings was she would ask a question, which had come out of Women's Center meetings or conversations with other lesbians who had children through a known donor. Dani would go home to consider the question. They would reconvene.

Interviewees were "choosing" known donors in large part because in the late 1970s and early 1980s sperm banks had rules prohibiting access to unmarried women. The few banks that did give sperm to "single women," which was code for lesbians, were expensive and far away in California. Jeanne, Marjorie's partner at the time, ordered sperm as a physician from such a bank:

She got a liquid nitrogen tank, which she had in the basement. And she was ordering sperm. These vials would come. They were numbered and everything. I can remember people coming over and I would go down and hand out sperm. [Laughs]... You know people come over with these you know little coolers and weirdness or some put it in their pocket. I was pulling up these things and there'd be all these little vials in the tank and I pulled one off and you know they were hard to see because they were all crusted over and I was like look and see was that the right number. Maybe, you know, take this one. This predated Fenway.

Many interviewees remarked on the almost comical nature of the process of insemination through unknown donors. As Coleman put it, "Some of it was very surreal. We had these tanks of liquid nitrogen. I felt like something out of a sci-fi movie." Getting pregnant was very much a DIY process, following the precedents set by social activism organizing, especially of the women's health movement. Through word of mouth many interviewees learned about a women's clinic that was giving out fresh sperm. Becky Sara, a midwife at the clinic of Dr. Mitchell Levine, set up an anonymous exchange for lesbians looking to get pregnant. This clinic,

also known as “Mitch’s clinic” became one of the only locations for alternative insemination or AI in Boston before the Fenway Clinic’s program gained prominence. As Carol Nelson remembered, “We were the first couple in that practice that used AI through them...[Becky Sara] really had a little notebook and she found donors--. This was kind of all her thing. She found donors. She went and picked up sperm and met you at the doctor’s office.” Almost half of the interviewees I met with went through this particular clinic, which was first in Cambridge then Arlington. In their stories of “Mitch’s clinic,” they talked about the risks in hindsight of HIV positive sperm, of the informality of this anonymity, and of the word of mouth process.

### **Pregnancy and Transpregnancy**

In 1987, Alex Coleman inseminated through Mitch’s clinic and became pregnant. In our interview he talked about how becoming pregnant was not incongruous with being a trans man. He remarked, “I wasn’t sure how I was going to feel being pregnant. But I have to say it was like me [pause] being pregnant.” He had not yet transitioned, but it was very much on his mind. Working as a lawyer at the Juvenile Court, he told the court stenographer that he was pregnant. Her response was “you want to have your cake and eat it too.” For the stenographer, gay and pregnancy were oppositional ideas. Lesbians becoming mothers were double dipping. This was the response of a few interviewees’ parents as well. “I was told I was selfish,” Liz Coolidge recalled. Someone she knew was asked by a parent, “why don’t you just get a dog?” The months of pregnancy for the parents I interviewed were a period of transition within a larger context of a decade of flux. Their narration of being pregnant noted shifts in how society read them, the process of working through familial homophobia, and an excited uncertainty.

Out of the Women's Center group meetings, a few pregnant participants formed pregnancy support groups. Marjorie Posner remembered being part of a small group that met regularly. Often they would meet at someone's house and that experience was somewhat divided. "The pregnant women would hang out together and the non-pregnant women would go off." These groups continued dialogue begun in the Women's Center group about what being a non-biological parent entailed. The groups were also a space to talk about being lesbian-and-pregnant. "I remember talking about walking around pregnant and being assumed to be straight. And I've always walked in the world more as a butch. You know it was very weird. I mean lesbians wouldn't look at me anymore. And you know straight people were talking to me all the time." In Bonnie Mann's 2007 article, "The Lesbian June Cleaver," she talks about this dissonant shift in how lesbians were read once pregnant and "the approbation" on the part of members of the LGBT community.<sup>220</sup> For Marjorie Posner, being pregnant and becoming a parent became an unexpected window into dialogue with straight women. Marjorie's group also created its own birth class. While Marcy experienced births as a part of the hippie scene in Buffalo, most interviewees had not been close to pregnancy and birth as a part of their gay and lesbian social circles. The support group hired a midwife for the birth class, and she did not understand this lack of knowledge. As Marjorie put it, "Lady, you're in a room full of lesbians. We've never had a baby."

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<sup>220</sup> Bonnie Mann, "The Lesbian June Cleaver," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 151. This essay on lesbian difference does not take into account multiple forms of difference at work in identity construction. It does point to the figure of a (white) lesbian mother as a particularly poignant figure in conversations of tolerance. "We live in a time when the homosexual provides both a spectacular figure for self-congratulatory heterosexual tolerance, and a sign that emerges at the limit of things gone too far, of the crumbling of values that mark our national identity. The tensions between these two seems to operate in an especially poignant way in the lives of those of us who are both lesbians and mothers" (151). Mann pushes back on sameness as a goal of lesbian parenting. Using June Cleaver as a persistent ghost of motherhood, Mann sees lesbians refiguring mother *and* mother refiguring lesbian. Cleaver stands in for mother in this question of difference and belonging.

Most interviewees discussed the response of their parents to coming out and getting pregnant. Kauffman noted her mother was not happy about her “having a baby out of wedlock.” Many interviewees sent their parents letters once pregnant. Carol Nelson did not get a response from her parents and was pained by the silence of those months of pregnancy. Rochelle Ruthchild wrote a letter asking her parents to give her space during her pregnancy, but they called immediately. Her father told her it would not be his child, but “a bastard.” For the soon-to-be-grandparents, there was a lot of concern about how they would tell their peers and about the societal repercussions of having a baby without being married never mind not being heterosexual. My grandparents had diverging reactions to my imminent birth. Marcy’s mother adjusted very quickly. She lived in town and was a part of many gatherings at our house, forming close relationships with my mothers’ lesbian friends. My mothers had different narrations of Judy’s parents’ reaction. Marcy said Judy’s parents “were not thrilled.” Judy remembered, “They were excited despite themselves.” Rather than bring her parents “out of the closet,” she remembered it putting them further in. “Not only do they have a daughter that they didn't really want to talk about or explain to their friends about her social life but now their daughter is pregnant.” For interviewees, parents’ excitement could be confusing as it ran so counter to their reactions about their children being gay. Responses were a complicated mix of how-dare-you, concern for the child, and open elation. Having a child was participating in a framework heterosexual parents could understand. Deviance redeemed? Grandparents continued to be a key topic of the oral histories as interviewees described being new parents.

Another persistent topic that often dovetailed from stories of grandparents and custody was a legal case from 1985. The year I was born there was a high profile case regarding gay foster parents in Boston. This case was closely chronicled in *GCN*. Not long after two gay men



became foster care parents, right-wing media caught wind and the state swiftly revoked foster care opportunities from gay and lesbian adults. This case further entrenched the idea of gay parents as oxymoronic and dangerous. It also furthered the feeling that gay and lesbian parents would have to get pregnant themselves, as the Massachusetts state systems did not support gay adoption.<sup>221</sup>

## **Birth and Babies**

*At some point . . . the [Sears] clerk asked which one of us was her mother and we said we both are because even though she was tiny and wouldn't have understood at that moment what was said, we just wanted it to be from the very beginning that we were always honest about who we were and who our family was.*  
- Kathy MacDonald

I interviewed Kathy MacDonald and then separately interviewed her partner Helen. They both told this story of the Sears clerk. Their shared language pointed to the importance of this public questioning of biology and parenthood and this moment as a turning point in how they approached being out in the wider community. Many interviewees also told stories of grocery store questions. “What a cute baby, who’s baby is it?” These frequent interchanges made interviewees decide how they were going to present themselves to strangers. Many picked when and how to come out in such scenarios. Others moved from a politic that MacDonald described of being out in all situations, or at least they remembered that stance. These moments of the interview were very familiar to me. The grocery store scenario reminded me of the questions I navigated as a child—What does your dad do? Who is picking you up today? Doesn’t your mom have curly hair? I, like the interviewees, became a skilled circumventer. But these dilemmas of how and when to describe familial attachments began before my birth and, according to the interviews I conducted, was a central topic of discussion at the time.

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<sup>221</sup> In other states, such as North Carolina, social services did not create an explicit policy about foster care adoption for gay parents in the 1980s. This speaks to distinct policy landscapes at the state level and to a particularly restrictive or reactive moment in Boston politics.

As Marjorie Posner alluded to in the pregnancy support group, there was a constant conversation about what the role of the non-biological mother would be. Ideas of biology often came to a head in conflict with interviewees' parents. Lillian Gonzalez remembered having to read her parents "the riot act" explaining the role of Vivian, her partner and the non-biological mother. "I finally had to read them the riot act and the riot act was this: you want to see your grandson, you've got to treat her with respect. Period. She's my partner. She's my son's other mother. And this is just the way it is.... So you know they tried to be on their best behavior as best they could, but the nastiness would creep out every now and then. But at least I felt like I had that conversation with them to say this is what I need and this is what your grandson needs. Because he needs his family to be respected." Lillian's account frames family and "other mother" in ways that challenged the norms of her Pentecostal upbringing. In my family, Judy's parents often evaded explaining Marcy to their peers. "How do I find my place in this?" Marcy recalled feeling the lack of a defined role. Co-parenting became a term useful to discuss equal parenting between the biological and non-biological parent.

Because of the reflective nature of the interviews, I noticed narrators were more willing to discuss the complexities of relational dynamics than they may have been in the '80s and '90s. Holly Bishop described her search for how to be a non-biological mother, "It's like there's not a role slot for the second mom. You're not the dad. You're not the biological mother. There was a biological mother sitting in that role. It's hard to find it I think...I'm not the only person to have some of those feelings...the politics of the time sort of didn't maybe allow for the conversation." Bishop's reflections chronicle how non-biological parents navigated motherhood without a natal connection. It also provides insight into the discourse of the time, which projected a rhetoric of sameness, of equal parenting, and even of ease. Sheera Strick, who had one child and her partner

had one child, noted distinctions between being the biological and non-biological parent. During early infancy, the biological parent and the child were not separate units, but after that period the relationships evened out. Thinking about the roles of biological and non-biological parent, she recalled, “It’s a little bit different. I mean it is different. I think people who say it is exactly the same are, I don’t know, probably deluding themselves in some way.” Strick took a moment to parse these fine distinctions because they often were not centered in lesbian parenting narratives.

Non-biological relation in the interviews expanded beyond the nuclear family. Rochelle Ruthchild pointed to her partner, Vicki, who I discuss in Part III. Vicki “navigated a lot of different relationships without being biological.” Vicki and Rochelle began seeing each other when her son was in elementary school, but in the years before they started dating, she was integrally involved in raising my sister and myself. For Helen and Kathy, Kathy’s closest friend Bill played a similarly integral role. Helen recalled, “He was...a family of choice to us. Trudy called him called Uncle Bill. And he died like five weeks before Billie was born. Billie's named after him.” Following the Jewish tradition of naming children after deceased family members, Helen and Kathy named their second child after Bill, who died of AIDs-related illnesses. They mourned the loss of Bill by creating a quilt square as part of the national Names’ Project AIDS quilt. In this process, Helen and Kathy participated in national structures of material mourning. The AIDS quilt has become a mobile tool of conveying individual and collective loss. Now thirty years old, the quilt has become a means of intergenerational transmission of historical experience (a portion of the quilt visited UNC’s student union in January 2018). It furthermore coheres queer loss into national narratives of commemoration and nationalist forms of belonging. The quilt’s 1987 display on the National Mall in DC drew on this symbolic space of mourning and

recognition. That the quilt is on tour in parts speaks to the efficacy of this fragmented form of memory work.<sup>222</sup>

While interviewees described their deep attachments to non-biological relations, Joyce Kauffman also noted a surprising disregard to attachments formed by the child in creative formulations of family. As a lawyer, Kauffman observed the legal ramifications of unresolved questions about views of biology and parenthood in lesbian circles. “What’s our ethic in the community? If you are raising a child with someone, and they think that person is their mother. And then you break up and that person isn’t their mother? How do you square that?” In her law practice, Kauffman watched couples break up and biological parents encouraged by peers to take full custody. After fighting for lesbians to have custody with former heterosexual partners, non-biological parents were facing similar legal struggles. Kauffman remembered friends telling her that she was “the real mother” when she broke up with her partner of many years. “It was a profound lack of understanding.” Helen Raizen and Kathy MacDonald had serious concerns about legal rights in co-parenting and their class difference. Kathy was finishing her degree when Helen birthed their first child. Helen had a stable job, legal rights to the child, and owned her own home. As Kathy explained those years, “If that relationship had fallen apart, I could have ended up with nowhere to live, no way to support myself and lost my kid. And so it required a certain amount of trust that that was not going to happen.” Custody was at the forefront of parents’ minds.

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<sup>222</sup> The AIDS Memorial Quilt website offers its history, a digital display of the quilt, and a gift shop (<http://www.aidsquilt.com>). The ongoing commemorative work of the quilt sits in juxtaposition with permanent spaces of AIDS memorials such the Grove in San Francisco, the new New York AIDS Memorial in front of St. Vincent Hospital, and a monument planned for West Hollywood. In Massachusetts, there have been art installations, such as the 2012 “Medicine Wheel” and there is a plan for a permanent memorial in Provincetown. For more on the AIDS quilt as a tool of US memory see: Carole Blair and Neil Michel, “The Aids Memorial Quilt And The Contemporary Culture Of Public Commemoration.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (2007): 595–626. Gregg Stull, “The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Performing Memory, Piecing Action,” *American Art* 15, no. 2(Summer 2001): 84-89.

Class tensions played out in relationships as well as in group dynamics. Working class individuals, whether single or coupled, struggled under the financial burdens of parenthood. As Kauffman remembered, “Many of us were working class women and didn’t have any money. I didn’t have any money when Becca was born. I had nothing.” In the pre-pregnancy and pregnancy support groups, there were women who had money and “those of us who didn’t. And there was a lot of tension. They had access to more of everything than some of us did. How was I going to pay for day care? How was I going to work and take care of Becca? I was single. It was overwhelming. There was tension around that frequently.” While shared desires of lesbians to have children did create zones of interclass contact, class divides were not bridged but deepened as lesbian and trans individuals entered the world of parenting.

Most of the interviewees I met with had their first child between 1982 and 1987, but as previously discussed, getting pregnant for some was a process of a few years. By the late 1980s, the number of lesbians having children increased rapidly. Half of interviewees discussed their first memories of babies and strollers at Pride. For Jay Cischke, who ran a play space during Pride, the rise in strollers was precipitous and led annual expansions of children’s activities.<sup>223</sup> This was Marjorie Posner’s version, “So there were a lot of women coming out who had children but there were very few women who were making babies here on the East Coast in Boston. And it felt like we were doing something that was new. You know that was really quite new. I can remember when Jesse was just an infant and going to Gay Pride. And walking the road with the stroller, and the crowd—people [were] crying and clapping. Just being totally blown away and going silent. It was just like it felt really it was shocking to me.” This stroller brigade’s dramatic

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<sup>223</sup> Jay noted that in recent years there has been a shift in Pride’s management in Boston. While they had always done the children’s space for free, Jay was now considered a vendor required to pay for space. “It’s so commercial now and it used to be a true community thing with volunteers.”

effect on Pride go-ers reflects the incongruous visual of gay and lesbian parents. It also cannot be separated from the rising explosion of AIDS-related deaths among Pride go-ers.

This moment highlights the generational pressure for queers of the mid-1980s. There was an intense desire to make new generations. The stroller brigade marked this futurity. For communities under erasure, like my paternal grandparents after World War II, there is a need to create familial networks. The affects and effects of this desire pervade my work in Part I and Part III. The intergenerational bonds formed in trauma's wake compel particularly intense and tangible processes of memory transmission. For Pride go-ers, the emotional impact of seeing future generations and a queer form of reproduction was powerful.

This shift was produced through years of dialogue as well as the rise of the Lesbians Choosing Children Network (LCCN). This group was founded out of the Women's Center Thursday night meetings and replaced the more informal gathering as a more organized structure. Lesbians Choosing Children marched in Pride with a banner. Helen Raizen remembered the "real explosion" of lesbians having children could be traced back to LCCN. Schaffer remembered meetings as a place for talking about the idea of lesbians raising children, which was not "the most common form of lesbian conversation at the time." Lesbians Choosing Children organized an annual Mothers' Day Picnic, which Raizen described as organically coming together after a slew of newly lesbian mothers bumped into each other in the Jamaica Plains Arboretum on Mothers' Day.

In my family, my mothers' friends Vicki and Claire would go to the Mothers' Day picnics, as would Marcy's mother and sister. Marcy struggled to balance "chosen" and biological family. "There was always tension like that for me. What to do with my chosen family and then what to do with the fact that my [biological] family had moved to town. Even though I mixed the

two all the time, it wasn't always easy.” Marcy’s mother added an intergenerational dynamic to friend gatherings and the concept of a lesbian mothers’ day. “I was caught in the middle of my sister saying things like ‘why can't we just do it our family.’ And my feeling like well this is my family. I mean I have another family. And her feeling like well I mean just our biological family. There was always tension around that.” This tense mix of biological and non-biological family productively unravels a non-biological concept of queer family. The conversation between Marcy and her sister points to conflict over the meaning of “family” and its limits. For Marcy’s sister, the “biological family” or “our family” did not include Marcy’s friends. Family was linked through reproduction. For Marcy, the lesbian mothers’ day event was an opportunity to bridge that gap of “straight family” and “gay family” and enact her conception of relationality.

For one of my last interviews, I pulled up to the house, which was in the process of being sold. It was being rapidly prepared for a big move, an uprooting after thirty years in one place. Toward the end of the interview, Holly Bishop went upstairs to find a few pictures she had found during the move. She came down with one image of the Lesbians Choosing Children Network. It was a photograph of the LCCN banner at Pride, and who was holding the banner, but Vicki and Claire (see two individuals to the right in Figure 2.9).



Figure 2.9

Neither Vicki nor Claire was choosing children at that moment. But they were part of the network. Holly was less surprised than I was that they were heading the LCCN brigade. As a historian, I expected the banner carriers to be lesbian mothers, but their prominence complicates the boundaries of who was part of the group and what constituted “choosing children.” It did not necessarily mean reproducing, but rather being an integral part of raising children.

After pregnancy support groups waned, some lesbians began parent groups, which continued the emphasis on building “networks” for the children of (gay and) lesbian parents. These groups and park gatherings offered a space as well to work out practical concerns of first time parenting. As Alex Coleman remembered, “When my child was little, before I really started transitioning, we were part of a small group of lesbian parents. And there was this sort of support group, but I really didn’t fit in—both because I wasn’t coupled and because I didn’t totally identify as a lesbian. I did politically.” While Alex shared experiences of donor insemination and political engagement, he did not share experiences of gender identity nor of a partner relationship. Parent groups coalesced around lesbian identity and an increasingly narrow view of lesbian motherhood. The parameters of which included donor insemination, partners, class experiences as well as racial and gender identity markers.

LCCN came out of a group process that was initially more integrated, but as the group coalesced in the mid 1980s, it became almost all phenotypically white. This can be seen in images of the 1980s Pride marches. Lillian Gonzalez remembered that divisions of the Pride march were always an issue. “It felt like you had to make choices about who you were [going to be] marching with. Am I marching with the parents or marching with the church or marching with Latinos? It is really where you start defining what's the most important thing. And all of them are important.” Gonzalez recalled experiencing the 1970s and 1980s as a time “of very



little intersection.” Gonzalez’s observations of Pride and the lack of intersectional organizing in queer contexts points to the kind of identity boundary marking outlined by Miranda Joseph. The gay “community” and the creation of “chosen family” solidified aspects of racialization that makes the radical nature of “queer” suspect. While Vicki and Claire appear confident leading the LCCN brigade at Pride, Gonzalez was put in an uncomfortable position of deciding where to place her body in the parade. LCCN did not do the necessary work to push the category of “lesbian mother” into an intersectional framework and out of a narrative that was rapidly coding the concept of “lesbians choosing children” as white.

Racialization and the concept of choice were persistent themes of the oral history interviews I conducted. My mother Judy, as I mention in my Introduction, chose Dani as the biological donor specifically because she wanted a Jewish donor. Alex Coleman similarly expressed the personal importance of a Jewish donor. For Gelfand and Coleman, it mattered that the child would be biologically Jewish. This mindset adheres to the idea of that biology is real and not a cultural construction. It reflects baby boomer experiences of being the child of first generation immigrant Jewish families and the formative experiences of growing up in the years following the Holocaust. For Coleman, this decision reflected an investment in Jewish cultural, racial, and ethnic identity. Whether or not interviewees consciously chose donors of the same racial and ethnic identification, they were making decisions informed from US racist paradigms that narrowly define race and do so particularly intensely in the domain of family. While they were highly aware that they were solidifying a culture, they were less explicit about the fact that this solidification was racial. For my mothers, the importance of a Jewish donor lessened with their second child. The donor they used for my sister Dory was not Jewish, but with two Jewish mothers, it was never indicated that she came out less Jewish. The biological importance was

cast out. This all brings us back to the LCCN and its organizational work through the 1990s. As I will argue in the next section, the LCCN was both influencing and influenced by coalescing ideology around queer (pro)creation.

### **The Rhetoric of “Choosing Children”**

*I think a lot of us were really struggling with that concept of creating family. Butting up against not wanting to mimic heterosexual nuclear families. You know, in the seventies and eighties we were all busting out of the mold. We were radical and we were different and we weren't going to be like them. But the fact of the matter is we were forming families. And then not respecting them. Not giving them the kind of respect that those ties deserve.*  
- Joyce Kauffman

Dialogue through “rap groups,” organizations, and informal friend gatherings created a language used to convey relation in the context of lesbian parenting. Phrasing was figured out through conversation and hearing how others put it: “other mother,” “co-parent,” “second mother,” “non-biological parent” were all tossed around. Choosing children or choosing motherhood may have come out of the language of choice in reproductive health. The processes of insemination and donor selection highlighted the aspects of choosing children. Chasnoff and Klausner’s *Choosing Children* (1985), mentioned in the previous section, also influenced how lesbians framed their processes of creating family. The same filmmakers went on to make *That’s a Family* (2000) and *It’s Elementary* (1999), which both functioned as educational films normalizing family difference and lesbian and gay families in the school system in particular. As Joyce Kauffman points out, there was a complicated mix of feelings about avoiding the trappings of heterosexual nuclear families, but at the same time, respecting the relational ties formed through the nuclear-ish families that they were forming. “Chosen” family and “choosing family” interestingly have diverging implications. While chosen denotes non-biological relation, choosing denotes having biological kin. Both carry a subtext of responses to homophobia—of parents who reject their children and of choosing-against-the-norm to get pregnant.

Yet this language of choosing children created divisions within the category of “lesbian mothers.”<sup>224</sup> Holly Bishop told the story of presenting at a Lesbians Choosing Children conference. A woman confronted Bishop in the Q&A about the lack of support lesbians who had children from previous relationships experienced. Bishop recalled, “It was a big auditorium full of people. And this woman got up and said something very angry about a choice, in choosing. She really didn't like lesbians choosing children. ‘Some of us didn't have a choice’ [she said]. ‘And we've been trying to raise our kids all these years and nobody's bothered to help us or notice. All of a sudden this thing--.’ It made some sense but I didn't know that [at the time].” When I brought this up with my mom, Marcy, she agreed, “We didn’t support them.” Lesbians Choosing Children as a group name centered donor insemination as its demarcation of “community” though it also included families that formed through adoption. The name also did not leave much room for gender fluidity and it is to this problem of inclusion that I turn to in the next section.

Anthropologist Kath Weston argues there is a “persistent (mis)reading of chosen families as ‘freely chosen.’” This misreading is “shared both by advocates of chosen families, who tend to view the idiosyncratic qualities as a strength, and by detractors of chosen families, who paint an alarming picture of a society in which the dissolution of ‘the-family-as-we-know-it’ means ‘anything goes.’” The currency of choice, for both groups, falsely imagines the individual making decisions about who is family without the constraints of cultural norms. Weston situates “gay kinship ideologies” within social, economic, and political context. AIDS, the privatization of care, the war on drugs (which she does not mention) all shape relationship forming

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<sup>224</sup> This theme of interviews reminded me of Joseph’s analysis of “community.”

practices.<sup>225</sup> As Weston writes, “Individuals who choose their families are raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized in specific ways that make a difference for the relationships that result.” Ideology draws on existing cultural modalities. In the case of family and rethinking relation, “chosen family” still uses biology as a stable and useful metric. By framing queer family as solely non-biological, it makes “blood” or “biology” the pivot point. By framing it as “alternative,” it clear it is being shaped by and against the entirely mythic and persistent construct of the white, nuclear, middle-class, and American family. Yet, Weston notes, the language of choice has been a particularly effective rhetorical strategy.<sup>226</sup>

### **Transparenthood, Schools, and the 1990s**

*Every time I came out about something about myself, I lost people I was close to.*  
- Alex Coleman

Each interviewee chronicled their years as young parents and when their children entered the school system, it was a turning point. As Kauffman pointed out to me, as interviewer, “You have to understand you were the first.” Entering the school system, as parents and children, was entering the straight world. As Marcy put it, “The lesbian community was my community and my friendship network was my community but we lived in a straight world and you went to school in the straight world. And so your friends were all kids of straight families.” Following the model of parents such as Sheera Strick and her partner Karen who had a child a few years

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<sup>225</sup> Weston parses chosen family as “made to order” (free will, all-American choice) and chosen family as “made to order” (made by institutions of power). This emergent queer ideology exists within existing frameworks and this is “constrained by culture, economic developments, the historical moment, the state.” Institutions of power give “chosen family” less flexibility than it proffers. Weston continues, “It is also noteworthy that the rise of chosen families has coincided with the decades in which government policies and a restructured economy have shifted the burden of child care, health care, and elder care away from public institutions, back into the privatized space of households and social networks” (Weston, *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science*, 84).

<sup>226</sup> Given current attachment to gayness as genetic, the born-this-way model of conceptualizing sexuality, it is interesting that the “chosen family” rhetoric simultaneously persists. While in the 1980s and 1990s there may have been a period of openness about the definition of “chosen family,” the process of rights-based gay organizing has narrowed the concept. From commitment ceremonies to marriage, the idea of what constitutes gay family or how such a configuration can be represented is constricted in popular imagination.

prior, my mothers and their peers went into the school and met with each teacher to explain their family structure. As Coolidge put it, “We’d talk about the forms. Can you change this to parent-parent instead of mother-father? There was all that on the ground education. That was in the 90s, early 90s. But people were doing that at daycare centers, at healthcare settings, in churches, religious settings, in schools.” Interviewees wondered what conversations happened between parents and teachers behind their backs. When Joyce Kauffman attempted to get a “What Makes a Family” photo exhibit up in a Cambridge elementary school in 1992, the opposition was strong. Parents thought the school would become a target. Carol Nelson also discussed school pushback. “Just because you’re in liberal Brookline, doesn’t mean you didn’t get eye rolls.” Alex Coleman’s attempts to have the Brookline school that his son went to pay attention to his presence as a then-lesbian parent were unsuccessful and showed how difficulty being out at school was multiplied when one was a single parent, with no same-gender partner to force the school out of its avoidance.

When Alex decided to transition in 1993, he laid the groundwork for this change with his child, neighbors, and some of the schools’ parents. He found “almost no support” in the school. Right-wing leaders in Newton who were against sexual education heard about Alex’s story and a media storm ensued. The school guidance counselor did a poor job of explaining Alex’s transition to students which further enflamed the situation. The school’s principal Marty Sleeper was well known for his involvement in “Facing History,” a K-12 educational project committed to inclusivity and raising awareness about genocide, bullying, and the Holocaust. The conflict between Alex and the school came to a head when the principal put out his hand to physically block Alex’s entry into the classroom. Coleman, a lawyer, was quick to respond. “This is a public school. I have every right to do anything another parent does. As long as I behave

appropriately, which I always do. I fully intend to participate as fully as any other parent in the school.” The school retreated after this tumultuous exchange, but Alex’s kid faced bullying about his family until he graduated in eighth grade. This event was much discussed in lesbian parenting circles. Alex noted that lesbians were not supportive of him. He was forced to leave gay organizations (Um Tikva) and feminist organizations (Boston Women’s Collective) when he came out as trans. Ironically, lesbians in Boston used rhetoric that previously had continuously been used against them: “would transitioning be good for the child?” This framing shows the endurance of “save our children” narratives.

Many interviewees, including Alex, participated in a longitudinal study undertaken by psychologist Nanette Gartrell. The National Lesbian Family Study (NLFS), which began in 1986, conducted interviews with both parents who used “donor insemination” and their children. “The NLFS is a longitudinal, descriptive survey documenting the lifestyles of these families. By following this cohort from the children's conception until their adulthood, it seeks to broaden our understanding of lesbian families and communities.”<sup>227</sup> NLFS first published its findings in 1996. The study published articles through the 2000s and continues to gather and publish new data today. For Alex, the study was “not reflecting my life.” The study would “ask all these questions that didn’t fit and I say look you know--And they would come out with these publications and there wouldn’t even be a footnote. And I felt invisible and that felt bad.”

Holly Bishop, who conducted interviews for NLFS in its early years, also told a story of gender in regards to the study. She remembered asking a question in an interview that referred to the donor as the dad, to which a butch respondent said, “I am the dad.” There was little structure in the study to attend to gender. By 2000, there was a line recognizing “one birthmother was

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<sup>227</sup> Nanette Gartrell, Jean Hamilton, Amy Banks, Nancy Reed, Carla Rodas, Amalia Deck, “The National Lesbian Family Study: 3. Interviews with Mothers of Five-Year-Olds,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 70, no. 4 (October 2000): 542.

transitioning to become a man.”<sup>228</sup> But there was no section on gender identity or trans experience. When new articles come out about how the “kids are alright,” they invariably cite the NLFS. But its unrepresentative cohort undercuts the study’s claim of national breadth. The study’s participants have consistently been 94% white and 82% middle and upper-middle class.<sup>229</sup> Gartrell’s study was an interesting layer of recorded interview within the oral histories I conducted. Some individuals I interviewed were participants in this study, but they also cited the study. This hermetic loop offered insight into narrative formation. Which came first—the “just as functional but more tolerant” children or the study’s findings that children were “just as functional but more tolerant?” This was how Alex phrased the study’s outcomes. On the scale of national and state policy, the NLFS was referenced as key evidence against Iowa’s 2009 legislation to ban gay marriage. This was the moment that brought queerspawn star child, Zach Wahls, to prominence.<sup>230</sup>

In my interviews, the 1990s stories chronicled shifts in the law. Second parent adoption in Massachusetts passed in 1993. Kauffman was on the legal team that worked on the case,

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<sup>228</sup> Gartrell et al, 543, 2000.

<sup>229</sup> Nanette Gartrell, Nanette, Jean Hamilton, Amy Banks, Dee Mosbacher, Nancy Reed, Caroline H.Sparks, Holly Bishop, “The National Lesbian Family Study: 1. Interviews with Prospective Mothers,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66, no. 2 (April 1996): 275.

<sup>230</sup> On January 31, 2011, Zach Wahls stood in front of the Iowa House Judiciary Committee to give a three-minute testimonial. Conservatives in Iowa were pushing back on gay marriage and on the brink of signing a constitutional amendment, which explicitly defined marriage as a heterosexual institution. Wahls, a 19-year-old student at the University of Iowa, was tall and phenotypically white; he appeared simultaneously confident and nervous in a neat gray suit. Standing without notes, hands in pockets, Wahls gave a brief but impassioned speech in which he described his Iowan family. He was “raised by two women,” conceived through artificial insemination, and related to his sister through their anonymous donor and shared mom. Wahls tells the room of his high ACT scores and Eagle Scout status. “If I was your son, Mr. Chairman, I believe I’d make you very proud.” Wahls speaks about the importance of family as “the love that binds us” and closes by saying his family “had zero effect on the content of [his] character.” The video of Zach Wahls went viral on YouTube and circulated widely through social media. The viral video had incredible traction because of the “heterofuturity” it proffered. Wahls notes in his testimony that strangers cannot tell that he is not from a straight family. At age nineteen, Wahls intuited the political utility of his societal successes, highlighting his intelligence, and scout service. His presence is a clear statement that, even with codified gay marriage, white patriarchal power will continue unthreatened. I include this case because of its ideological effectiveness and because I was sent the viral video incessantly when it was circulating.

known as the “Adoption of Tammy.” Many interviewees recalled the invasiveness of home studies required in applications for second parent adoption. As Gonzalez remembered, it was “a little scary because you’re trusting that they’re not going to do anything stupid like take a child away... We had to go through this process to affirm what is.” During these segments of the interview process, interviewees often asked me about my memories of this time or what my mothers’ adoption process was like. In oral history’s space of exchange, I ended up sharing experiences as both child of lesbian mothers and as queer adult.

While group dialogue at the Women’s Center ended, a group at the Fenway began called “Considering Parenthood.” The name, “Considering Parenthood,” points to shifts in language and in the function of the group. “Considering Parenthood” at the Fenway drew inspiration in form and content from the book, *Considering Parenthood* by Cheri Pies, which was published in 1988 and served as a practical guide for undertaking reproduction as a lesbian.<sup>231</sup> Liz Coolidge, who ran “Considering Parenthood” group for three decades, said in our interview that she also inspiration from the “Maybe Baby Groups” at the Whitman Walker Center in DC. Coolidge’s groups at Fenway Health point to a shift towards clinic-based groups and an educational focus on, as she put it, “things to consider.” It also removed lesbian and mother from the group name. This was likely a response to the disappearance of “lesbian” and the adoption of “queer” practices that seem/seemed more non-normative but has become in fact quite normative. The name change also points to the rising number of gay men who were “considering parenthood” in the 1990s. Parenthood and parent are gender neutral and allow for trans participants or anyone who do not identify as a lesbian mother. Yet, parenthood also folds queerness, trans-identity, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers into the institution of Parent. The term, parenthood, can function as a tool of circumvention. A group member could tell a co-worker about the group without

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<sup>231</sup> Cheri Pies, *Considering Parenthood* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1988), 3.



totally coming out. I could say my parents are coming to town without offering up details of gender or non-normativity. Finally, the name “considering parenthood” opens up space for the many who considered but “chose” not to have kids.

## **Creation/Preservation**

The interview dynamic shifted when conversation reached the 1990s. It no longer was the story of before you were here, or how you got here. It became a conversation about shared experiences from different age vantage points. Interviewees asked me how I navigated elementary school. I talked about remembering second parent adoption. I took time out of the interview to tell Marjorie and Carol Nelson the deep impact their daughters had on me as a teenager. I was struck by the ease with which their daughters were out about their mothers. With Jay, the interview often travelled through stories of my cousins and sister. I shared with Jay my own memories of their daycare space. These exchanges of intimacy entered the historical record.

It was also clear from conducting interviews that a larger (queer) oral history fervor was in full swing. *The Dyke Bar History Project*, based in New Orleans, is chronicling lesbian bar history. Members of this project conducted oral history interviews with some of the same individuals that I interviewed during the same week.<sup>232</sup> Many interviewees talked about their interest in how their children would describe their own experiences. Some noted a parallel oral history project collecting interviews with children of gay, lesbian, queer, and trans parents called *Gathering Voices: Oral Histories of Young Adults with LGBTQ+ Parents*.<sup>233</sup> This project is a

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<sup>232</sup> *Last Call: New Orleans Dyke Bar History Project* is a digital archive, podcast series, and live performance. Through New Orleans based, the collective conducted local interviews in the summer in preparation its fall tour of the piece, “Alleged Lesbian Activities.” <http://www.lastcallnola.org/> [Hannah Pepper-Cunningham. Email Correspondence. 3 March 2017.]

<sup>233</sup> *Gathering Voices: Oral Histories of Young Adults with LGBTQ+ Parents* is an ongoing oral history project in the process of becoming a book. <https://www.gatheringvoicesproject.com/>

peer exchange rather than an intergenerational one. It attempts to get at the experiences of the generation “lesbians choosing children” produced.

Using an open-ended oral history model, I did not ask questions the same way to each interviewee. I tried to tailor questions to what I knew about the interviewees’ experiences and during interviews I followed the lead of narration. While some interviewees moved chronologically through their experiences of growing up, adulthood, and parenthood, others moved more circuitously. This back and forth across time gives insight into not only what occurred but also what it felt like, and what experiences influenced each other across decades. I asked interviewees one uniform question: Looking back how would you characterize those years of the 1980s? This question became more explicitly concerned with affect, when I was asked to rephrase. What did it feel like? Interviewees responded with a smattering of fear and excitement, of feeling “pioneering” and feeling just a part of “the historical moment.” It was “scary,” “exhilarating,” “intellectually stimulating,” and “a big period of transition.” These comments were peppered with an uncertain future. “It’s great now, but they can take it back the minute they want to.” Many interviewees reflected on how there was a narrative of loneliness connected to being gay or lesbian, and by having children, they were able to dodge this social isolation. This refiguring of the concept of “lesbian” had legislative and cultural impacts. As Cheryl Schaffer reflected, “I mean my life not only was not possible in 1970, it was unimaginable. I couldn’t imagine my current life. It didn’t exist. So it kind of had to be made up as we went along.” This making-it-up process has been at the core of what I have tried to understand through oral history. Decisions interviewees made in the language they used, legal agreements they constructed, and questions they could not resolve were all a part of forming norms of queer/lesbian parenting.

The interview process brought me into new dynamics with my mothers and the parents of children who I know. It also brought me into the houses of individuals I had never met or heard of who had some shared experiences despite our different generational takes. In both cases, I was treated as a collector of historical record. Stories were told for me but primarily for imagined future researchers trying to grasp what the long ago 1980s were like in Boston. By following the trajectory of life history, themes of secrecy and openness recurred from the McCarthy era to grocery store “whose baby is that” scenarios. Interviews expressed, and entered into the archives, narratives of death and birth. They parsed the experiences of diverging from and entering into societal norms, the approbation of reproduction in a rejecting culture. Oral history was my way of preserving discursive history. But preservation is a process of creation, a generative crucible that is selective and loss-inflected. Present-day narratives of queer/lesbian experience informed how interviewees talked about the past. These circuits of narration offered information of its own, melding politics of time with the politics of today.

Through oral history, Part II deepens our understanding of family, generation, biology, and kin. My study of lesbian and trans parents has traced early experiences and honed in on Boston queer life from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. I argue this time period offers important historical information about how concepts of “queer family” were formed. It gives insight into how important intersectional viewpoints become in the work of analyzing “generation.” As I continue to build a nuanced modality of “queer intergenerational thinking,” this Part’s attention to generating or reproducing, quite literally, has been a fulcrum. Continuing my work from Part I, this oral history project provides details of the donor insemination process and how our (queer) granddaughter-grandparent relationship was formed. As I turn to Part III, I go deeper into non-biological attachments and dialogue between generations of queer experience.

### Part III

#### Queer Practice

#### Meditations on Oral History, Archives, and State Surveillance



Figure 3.1

In 1985, when my mother Judy was pregnant with me, Vicki Gabriner recorded an interview with her. She wanted to capture the threshold moment of a lesbian having a child. Vicki asked Judy a series of open-ended questions. She then assiduously added the tape cassette to her personal archive of documents and ephemera from a life in movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Vicki Gabriner moved to Boston in 1978 after living in Atlanta where she helped found the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance in 1972. While her Atlanta years will be the focus of this



**Figure 3.2: Jamaica Plain, 1983**

Part, her closeness to my family, her role as a part of my family, must first be conveyed. When Vicki moved to Boston, she became a part of Judy's friend group and close friends with my mother Marcy. In the early '80s, she started dating Judy's best friend and housemate Claire Craig. Claire was from Baton Rouge and Vicki was from Brooklyn. When I was born, Vicki and Claire lived up the street in Jamaica Plains, Boston and stopped by daily. Vicki did not have children and Claire would not have a child until ten years later. Judy was the first person in her friend group with a child. Vicki and Claire were central caretakers for my sister and me from infancy to adulthood, as aunts, godmothers, figures of comfort and home.

In this Part, I offer a specific iteration of queer methods of archival research. After Part II's study of reproduction in a queer context, I turn to non-biological relation to examine oral history as queer practice and archives as a space of collaborative historical inquiry. This work returns to some of my analysis in Part I of this dissertation, where I also examine the presence of the state in the archives.

In 2014, I visited Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center, which has housed the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance archives since 1994. I was curious about Vicki Gabriner's time in ALFA in the early 1970s. It was moving and unexpected to open the ALFA Collection box and see the folder marked Vicki Gabriner. I took out articles she wrote and saw her familiar handwriting. I found mimeographed letters with errors and edits. We had discussed her political past for a decade, but here she was in the archives saying things I had not heard.

After this first visit alone, Vicki came to North Carolina and we went through ALFA archives together. We spent a week at Duke's archive, where I conducted an experimental form of oral history in the ALFA archives. Our collaborative method utilized the archive as a space of transmission between generations of queer experience. This oral-history-in-the-archives process, the practice of bringing the subjects of movement cataloging to the archives has been a central component of my study of inheritance and memory transmission. My work with Vicki is framed by questions of intimacy, institution, and intergenerational queer connectivity. This third node of my larger project focuses my queer-familial connection with Vicki and its inheritances and thus concretizes the implications of queer family-making practices, bringing to fruition the many threads of this dissertation.

To begin this Part, I first situate my work within the field of oral history and specifically the emergent methods of queer oral history. After this discussion of process I turn to the history of ALFA through an analysis of interviews I conducted with members Vicki Gabriner, Lorraine Fontana, and Claudette Hopkins.<sup>234</sup> These interviews productively juxtapose the importance of both home and civic spaces in ALFA history. Located in Little Five Points, the ALFA house was where the grassroots ALFA archive began in 1972. Meanwhile, in public spaces ALFA created a

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<sup>234</sup> For the purposes of this Part, I will refer to the three interviewees by their first name. This choice distinguishes Part III from Part II. I make this shift to push pressure on the interlocking questions of intimacy and institution, which are the focus on this portion of the dissertation.

softball team that prided itself on being Atlanta's first out-lesbian team. Softball participation was a political strategy that helped grow the organization. The story of lesbian softball in Atlanta opens up histories of race and class on the playing field and in lesbian spaces.

But I also had another story to tell. I make an argument that Atlanta was an early location for lesbian archival practice and a revealing urban space through which to understand relationships between class, lesbian feminism, race, gender, and state power. My work in the first section draws on A. Finn Enke's monograph *Finding The Movement* and its spatial analysis of softball. But I focus on the specific context of Atlanta's softball leagues in the 1970s. In 1976, Vicki Gabriner published "Coming Out Slugging" in *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*. Enke uses this very essay as a key theoretical text in outlining the relationships among radical politics, public space, and softball. Using both Enke and Gabriner, I delve into Atlanta's queer landscape.

My triangulation of archive practice, oral history, and affect theory draws from a series of participatory methods. In tandem with our collaboration in the archive, I conducted a recorded interview with Vicki for UNC's Southern Oral History Program (SOHP). It followed a life history approach that moved chronologically across her experiences. The following summer I conducted a second series of recorded interviews with Vicki for SOHP and spent time studying her personal archive in her home. Through this work, I entered another archive—that of the FBI—which Vicki had catalogued after her 1974 FOIA request. As an activist in civil rights and antiwar movements in the 1960s, Vicki was involved with the Weathermen collective for a year before moving to Atlanta. In 1973, the FBI arrested Vicki for accomplice to passport fraud and conspiracy to commit passport fraud. Her time in ALFA was framed by her legal preparations and federal trial. In this process, Vicki studied redacted memos and listened to FBI wiretap recordings of her. The role of FBI archives will be studied in the second section of Part III.

Before delving into this history, I must ground my oral history and archival work with founding members of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance within a larger matrix of (queer) oral history method.

### **Oral History as Queer Practice**

On a warm August night in 2014, queer artists gathered at the Miami Beach Botanical Garden to memorialize the death of queer scholar, José Esteban Muñoz. In their piece “Cruising Hialeah or Ghosts of Public Sex,” the Digital Hostage Collective inaugurated a long-term project to connect Muñoz’s childhood in Hialeah, Florida with neighboring queer Miami. They explained, “The Cruising Miami Project aims to bring José home to South Florida’s queer community... While growing up in Hialeah, Muñoz was largely unaware of the queer culture flourishing at that time in South Florida... Likewise, the queer community of South Florida is largely unaware of his work.”<sup>235</sup> To mourn and remember Muñoz, the night’s events centered oral histories from the 1980s describing public sex at the Botanical Garden. Visitors could walk the grounds, hear soprano Celeste Fraser Delgado and tenor José Vilanova singing on the green, and pick up ear buds to listen to cruising stories of Miami’s Latino men of the ‘80s. Amidst “haunting arias” meant to evoke the long afterlife of loss, listeners were simultaneously mourners, voyeurs, and inheritors of ephemeral pasts. In the same moment, the recorded narrators, many of whom did not survive the AIDS pandemic, briefly returned as aural ghosts of public sex. While some listeners knew the botanical pathways and its cruising history first hand, others stood in the locations described, and imagined summer night encounters for the first time.

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<sup>235</sup> Digital Hostage Collective, “Cruising Hialeah or Ghosts of Public Sex.” <https://vimeo.com/108409676>



The Collective's use of oral history in a queer act of remembrance is illustrative of the possibilities queer oral history opens up. In 1996, Muñoz wrote a groundbreaking essay, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," for *Women and Performance*. In the piece, he pushes back against the academic demand for evidence. He writes:

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.<sup>236</sup>

Muñoz, like the queer artists of Cruising Miami, sees potential in interactions that do not leave traces. He encourages queer thinkers and performers to both expand concepts of materiality/evidence and simultaneously divest from institutional models of preserving. "Queer acts, like queer performances, and various performances of queerness, stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities."<sup>237</sup> In what ways is oral history a queer act? In what ways is it not? To practice oral history is to travel amidst qualities of mourning and landscape present in "Cruising Hialeah or Ghosts of Public Sex." Oral histories are ephemeral and for queer and minoritarian communities, ephemerality has long been a tool and a process. With Muñoz's concepts of ephemera and evidence in mind, this section examines the field of queer oral history.

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<sup>236</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women and Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996): 6.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



**Figure 3. 2: "Ghosts of Public Sex" Digital Hostage Collective**

Oral history records memory's process and becomes a written *and* oral telling of the past. Queer oral history specifically provides a method for an encounter between mainly a queer listener and queer teller. It is an attempt to break down traditional dichotomies of the growing discipline of oral history. In a queer oral history, emotion/analysis, friend/lover/informant, and past/present are destabilized to some extent. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez's collection, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, thinks deeply about what is queer about queer oral history. I seek to elaborate on their endeavor to carve out queer contours of method. I want to think deeply about the following questions. How have gay and lesbian oral history projects grappled with the genre's subjectivity? How has the desire to gather historical fact compelled us and what does preservation produce? How have scholars engaged with the affective and erotic dimensions of oral history? As discussed in Part II, because of my position as queer, historian, and child of lesbian mothers, I am particularly attuned to how stories pass between generations of queer/lesbian experience. Oral history is a collaboration that brings to the fore methodological questions of listening, recording, and embodied transmissions of the past. In an examination of practice and process, I look at how queer methods have developed and what central themes recur. I argue oral history is a queer practice in which temporal boundaries blur. I further contend there is much to yield by toying with the format of

oral history and, by returning to that Miami night, re-imagining how collected stories are shared. I close with my own explorations of oral history and queer intergenerationality.

### **“Inventing Ourselves”**

But other parts of the story will soon be history, exactly the kind of details of a life that we always want to know. What does it feel like? I’ve read newspapers for that weekend, both dailies and Sundays, and nothing of what I remember is mentioned. Nothing in my experience of that weekend merited a public record...If someone ever wants to remember, to reinterpret that particular geography, to piece together those details, to imagine what it must have been like (Which pub was where? With what pleasure or hysteria was gay London celebrating that holiday? Why, at the beginning of the summer of 1984, were we being so carefully watched by the police?) then they will need more than what survives in the newspapers to help them.

- Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde*

In 1985, the Hall Carpenter Archive took up oral history in attempts to convey the type of London weekend Neil Bartlett found absent from the record. Forming two autonomous gay and lesbian working groups, members of the Hall Carpenter Archive (hereafter, “the Archive”) in London began to interview peers. The project of over 60 interviews resulted in two publications of edited transcripts: *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men’s Life Stories* and *Inventing Ourselves: Lesbian Life Stories*. Both books pulled their title from narrators’ accounts. In *Walking After Midnight*, the men’s collective stated their desire to be active participants in history writing and saw the book as “a search for our past as gay men.” Interviewing men who came of age in the 1920s-1980s, interviewers looked for glimpses “of the language used, books read, and the pubs and clubs where gay men met.” In the era of AIDS, the group approached interviews with great urgency and saw the project as a way of “ensuring...we will not be hidden, neglected, or dismissed.”<sup>238</sup>

Both projects of the Archive sought to delineate gay and lesbian identities, but they simultaneously questioned the stability of such categories. *Inventing Ourselves* was titled after

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<sup>238</sup> Hall Carpenter Archives, *Walking After Midnight: Gay Men’s Life Stories* (London: Routledge, 1989), 3.

the following excerpt, “I still find it difficult to believe that I was produced by my parents. I feel as if I invented myself...I don't know if perhaps being lesbian makes you see the world differently. That you never see yourself as this one static being: 'Now I'm mature; now I'm grown up.' I see myself as somebody constantly able to change and able to take different viewpoints, and to learn new things.”<sup>239</sup> This interviewee framed herself as a product of constant formation and reiteration.<sup>240</sup> Without models, coming out was a process of creating. In conversation with the men's collective, the lesbian working group stated goals of contributing to lesbian history, questioning the past, and witnessing each other. Through involvement in feminist organizing and women's groups, the lesbian interviewers entered the project with knowledge of “the significance of voicing and analyzing personal experience.”<sup>241</sup>

The Archive offers insight into 1980s projects of gay and lesbian oral history that sprung up formally and informally in this era. Project coordinators described why they chose oral history, “The wider oral history movement which aimed to broaden history's scope by looking at 'ordinary' experience still largely uses the personal landmarks of heterosexuality to question people's lives. It is painful to realize we cannot rely on our families to pass on our stories and validate our lives.”<sup>242</sup> They describe being drawn to oral history because of its subjective qualities. “Critics of oral history who have a naive trust in society's written records of itself mistrust the subjectivity of oral accounts...Because it openly acknowledges the problems of looking retrospectively at the past, oral history engages honestly with the process of history, which is one of constant re-interpretation. The speakers in this volume are very attuned to this

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<sup>239</sup> Hall Carpenter Archives, *Inventing Ourselves: Lesbian Life Stories*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 1

<sup>240</sup> For thoughts on the role of identity reiteration through oral history see Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Who Is The Subject: Queer Theory Meets Oral History” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (2008): 177-189.

<sup>241</sup> *Inventing Ourselves*, 1.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

and often are very careful to say ‘At the time I felt that. Now I don't.’ Following these introductory thoughts, the edited interviews that follow have no explicit interpretation and only a short postscript by the interviewee.<sup>243</sup> The books are a distillation of the extensive oral histories collected and archived. They argue that interpretation and analysis of gay and lesbian life can be found in the transcripts themselves.<sup>244</sup> They present feminist roots, champion interviews as theoretically generative, and describe the unique relationship of queer subjects to oral history. As a case study, the Archive frames key areas of my own inquiry: subjectivity, the body, mourning, and geography.

### **Telling Queer Stories**

In historical works of the 1970s, oral history was a key component of collecting information about gay and lesbian life. To know the geographies and experiences, the actions and ideas of the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, one had to interview those who were there. Historians such as John D’Emilio, Estelle Freeman, Allan Bérubé, and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy sought to garner lived experience through recorded conversation. In doing so, they were a more academic and in-depth aspect of larger dialogues between generations of queer experience that were

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<sup>243</sup> Clearly, the editing of transcripts highly impacts how such volumes can be used as historical documents. What the editors excised as extraneous or improper for their oral history publication could be read quite differently in a different era or editor. Oral history projects, like all archives, are partial and selective historical collections from top to bottom. This does not discredit their historical data, but rather adds layers of information and nuances of analysis. Who was selected as an interviewee? Who was not? Who interviewed whom—and what information was added or omitted due to the dynamic between teller and listener? These questions permeate oral history praxis and reiterate the problems of evidence.

<sup>244</sup> For D’Emilio, oral history was a means to information and it served as the historical backbone to his first book, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* in 1983. For Bérubé, it was an invitation for participation. He presented his interview-based studies of gay men and women in WWII service in a ‘traveling slideshow’ to get feedback and find new narrators. This format created an ongoing dialogue between the historian and the public about the queer history they shared (and desired). Allan Bérubé, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 41-125.

occurring in bars and community organizations.<sup>245</sup> The impulse to gather data in the late 1970s and early 1980s was informed by a desire for continuities and contrasts between gay pasts and presents. As Gay Liberation gained and lost steam, as AIDS-related deaths exploded, the insistence on gay history and capturing a gay present became crucial. As Kennedy writes, “The urgency with which lesbians and gays went in search of their history, first in grass roots community projects and later in the academy, to reclaim a history before its bearers died, encouraged a focus on dates, places, names, and events.”<sup>246</sup> Urgency emphasized evidence. Kennedy sought a more complex conception of oral history practice.

In 1978, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis embarked on a discipline-defining project to record interviews with forty-five of Buffalo’s white and African American working-class lesbian community.<sup>247</sup> Kennedy was an anthropologist and Davis was an activist/musician in the lesbian community. They spent over a decade interviewing and analyzing the stories they collected. Instead of dismissing information that conflicted between narrators, they saw disagreement as meaningful content.<sup>248</sup> This method of narrative analysis, crucial to oral history as a field, was developed in Kennedy and Davis’s work. In the project’s product

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<sup>245</sup> Vicki Gabriner remembers meeting women at an Atlanta bar “who had been lesbian in the 1950s and ‘60s, who had come up through the school of hard knocks of lesbian life. As I met this group of lesbian southerners, I was very drawn to all of them, feeling that each of them had a piece of history that helped me to understand the world I was entering” Gabriner quoted in James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (Rutgers University Press, 2001), 178.

<sup>246</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, “Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History,” *Radical History Review*. 1995, no. 62 (1995): 71. On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall, Kennedy looked back on gay and lesbian oral history and called for deeper engagement with subjectivity.

<sup>247</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 16.

<sup>248</sup> About this process, they observed, “An example that was significant for the development of our analysis involved disagreement about the quality of bar life. For some narrators, time in the bar was the best of fun, for some it was depressing, and for others it was both. We came to understand that these contradictory memories conveyed precisely the freedom and joy and the pain and limitation that characterized bar life in the mid-twentieth century” (Kennedy, “Telling Tales,” 71).

*Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, Kennedy and Davis outline their method of unstructured interviews in which narrators guided the process.

Interpretation invested in discord and the misremembered is a cornerstone of the field of oral history. Alessandro Portelli's *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (1991) discusses labor movements in northern Italy using oral history. In his findings, Portelli notes some workers in Terni, Italy remember the steelworker Trastulli's murder by police as occurring in 1949 while others remember it occurring in 1953. For Portelli, inaccuracies are revealing. While 1949 was the correct year of Trastulli's death, 1953 was the year of a massive strike. Narrators connected these two moments and collapsed them. These not-exactly-factual memories give the researcher some information about what it felt like to be in that historical moment. Portelli concludes, "Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."<sup>249</sup> In Kennedy's reflections, she points to divergent stories of the night the Stonewall Riots began in Martin Duberman's *Stonewall*. She calls for gay and lesbian historians to dig deeper into why queer narrators remember what they do.<sup>250</sup> She emphasizes how oral historians have contributed to the production of Stonewall and the selectivity of who is interviewed and what is recorded.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 50.

<sup>250</sup> Trauma studies is a resource for oral historians grappling with such moments of subjectivity. In Kelly Oliver's *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, she opens with an example of a woman who remembered that the Jewish uprising in Auschwitz blew up four chimneys. Historians found only one chimney destroyed. Because her testimony was incorrect, some historians felt it should be discounted entirely. But psychoanalysts argued that crucial information existed in the fact that it felt like four. Rather than seeking to confirm facts they already knew, psychoanalysts and memory studies scholars listen "to hear something new, something beyond comprehension" Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>251</sup> Kennedy suggests that arguments about whether lesbians were a part of Stonewall signify tensions of that time more than anything else. Today's emphasis on the central role of trans women in Stonewall (and their absence from Kennedy's analysis) reiterates this argument of the importance of present issues in constructions of the past, particularly of Stonewall as icon and rallying point. It simultaneously highlights the persistent selectivity of memory production in regard to female-identified actors.

In *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, Kennedy and Davis employed ethnographic training to interpret narration itself. Reflecting on the project, Kennedy argues for storytelling style as evidence.<sup>252</sup> The stories that came up in interviews had been honed through years of practice. “[T]hey had been shared before with friends at parties and in bars.” Kennedy highlights the connection between storytelling skills and working-class lesbian experience. She notes, “[W]orking-class lesbians spent a lot of time socializing together in explicitly lesbian space. Their lives were defined by finding and supporting other lesbians in a hostile environment and by developing strategies to live with some dignity and pride. What better way to accomplish this than by sharing stories about these successes and defeats.”<sup>253</sup> Stories in the bar presented lessons and offered up interpretations of queer life that week. Narrators shared their repertoire and conveyed renditions of bar tales. Kennedy sees storytelling as a process of through which lesbian narrators created “their own guidelines for living.” As a tool of queer survival, stories articulate shared experiences through humor, extravagance, and repetition. “Because the majority of lesbians grow up in a heterosexual culture, they have no guidelines and no patterns for creating a homosexual life.”<sup>254</sup> My experiences growing up in a lesbian household and then coming out myself do not match this assertion. Yet, it speaks to larger phenomena of queer culture building and the work of storytelling in lesbian spaces.

### **Queer Bodies/Queer Spaces**

Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and The Repertoire* argues information is communicated corporeally. She writes:

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<sup>252</sup> Kennedy, 61.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 61.



The repertoire...enacts embodied memory — performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing — in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge...The repertoire requires presence — people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning. It's imperative now, however overdue, to pay attention to the repertoire. But what would that entail methodologically?<sup>255</sup>

Works of performance and oral history meet in Taylor's query of method. Focusing on the body and its repertoire, Taylor expands planes of transmission and emphasizes the importance of "being there." The ephemeral qualities of knowledge production are conveyed through this juxtaposition of bodily archives and "supposedly stable" object archives.

In *Bodies of Evidence* (2012), Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio Roque Ramírez center the role of queer bodies. They write, the "physical presence of sexual or gendered bodies effect the oral history collaboration."<sup>256</sup> Their impressive collection of recent oral history projects is divided up into four areas: silence, sex, friendship, and politics. Within these partitions, each chapter begins with a long transcript excerpt followed by the researcher's reflection. Historians describe the intimacies conveyed through verbal and non-verbal means.

Yet, oral history is not only a bodily experience in the moment of conversation. Its content conveys lived experiences felt in the body. Stories of sex, of the way clothes felt, and other embodied moments are recorded. The reader experiences these excerpts corporeally. As Boyd recalls in an earlier essay:

I remember reading Madeline D. Davis and Kennedy's 1986 *Feminist Studies* article "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York, 1940–1960" in an undergraduate course...in 1986. At the time, this article seemed scandalous; it talked openly about lesbian sex, and I was spellbound. The content itself was, well, juicy, but the method and analysis seemed revolutionary. In fact, I remember

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<sup>255</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 28.

<sup>256</sup> Boyd and Roque Ramírez, 2.

where I was sitting when I read this essay—like a moment frozen in time. In it, Kennedy and Davis explain their commitments to both working-class lesbian history *and* oral history. As a working-class lesbian history, the subject of their study is a community of women centered around lesbian bars prior to the emergence of the gay liberation movements of the 1970s. They had a hunch that these women, who had been stereotyped as “low-life societal discards and pathetic imitators of heterosexuality,” might actually have contributed to forging a “pre-political” culture of resistance that shaped the development of gay pride and contributed to larger political movements.<sup>257</sup>

In addition to giving a great synopsis to Kennedy and Davis’s larger political project, Boyd recounts reading this “juicy” material in an embodied, temporal, and spatial manner. In queer oral histories, sex has long been a central component of conversation. Sexual details offer insights into everyday experience, play with the public/private dynamics of oral history, and create an in-conversation. Discussing sex breaks down traditional boundaries of academic inquiry. It is a vulnerable act and an intervention into the false distance of research.

### **Friendship as a Queer Tool**

Esther Newton’s *Cherry Grove, Fire Island* (1993) was an early and influential queer oral history project. In her ethnographic study of resort life, Newton reflects on how flirtations factored into interview dynamics. As a young lesbian interviewer, her interviews with older lesbian residents of Cherry Grove were often charged with erotic energy. She writes, “information has always flowed to me through the medium of emotion.”<sup>258</sup> Rather than creating a firm line between emotion and research, Newton utilizes a method attuned to the interactions of

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<sup>257</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Elizabeth Kennedy’s Oral History Intervention,” *Feminist Formations* 24, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 84.

<sup>258</sup> Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 12.

sexual bodies. Oral historians vacillate on what to do when one likes their interviewee<sup>259</sup> and when one does not.<sup>260</sup> As Michael David Franklin writes in *Bodies of Evidence*, “oral history lies at the intersection of two vectors of power within the university: the regulation of relationships and the administration of knowledge production.” As most oral histories are tied in some form to the university, their shared and intimate processes of listening/telling are not autonomous co-productions of knowledge. As a researcher with the Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project, Franklin was integrally involved in procuring IRB approval for projects, which included interviews of trans narrators. The University’s transphobia was on full display in this process. As he reflects on the roadblocks the academy put up, he is highly aware that oral history is always operating within institutional constraints. Yet, in this zone monitored by the administration, unique friendships formed.<sup>261</sup> For many oral historians, relationships formed in the interview process become long-lasting connections. Oral histories simultaneously chronicle friendships, losses, and lives built in relation.

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<sup>259</sup> See Valerie Yow, “Do I Like Them Too Much?: Effects of the Oral History Interviewer and Vice Versa,” *Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, “Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with ‘Difficult’ Stories,” *Oral History Review* 37, no. 2 (2010): 199. See also: Lisa M. Tillman-Healy, “Friendship as Method,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no. 5 (2003): 729-749.

<sup>260</sup> In “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics,” Kathleen Blee reflects on interviewing members of Indiana’s KKK and calls for researchers to study “unsavory, dangerous, or deliberately deceptive” political action. Kathleen M. Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 2, (1993): 596.

<sup>261</sup> Franklin describes bonding over losses he had recently experienced. “These deep losses that I feel daily have for me a strange communion with the longing that Carol [narrator] has expressed for friendships in the past and currently, on the oral history record and off it...And I understand that our friendship is not outside of power, that it quite literally inhabits the confessional mode as theorized by Foucault. Yet even within this vector of power, our friendship has emerged around the creation of her oral history, the midwifing of her life’s narration that she drives but that Dorthe [fellow interviewer] and I redirect and refocus through our questions and words of encouragement. If the university is increasingly becoming the domain for the administration of sexuality in the competitive arena of global capitalism, I suggest that in its cracks the contradictions of unlikely friendships can proliferate.” Michael David Franklin, “Friendship, Institutions, Oral History.” *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, 164. Franklin cites Roderick Ferguson and a dissertation by Thomas Roach, *Shared Estrangement: Foucault, Friendship, and AIDS Activism*, Unpublished Dissertation, 2006.

This brings up new questions of the bounds of the interview space and the practices of interpretation. In Anna Steftel and Stacey Zembrzycki's collection, *Oral History Off the Record*, historians discuss the possibilities and limits of sharing authority, of deep and difficult listening, and of publishing as product. Steftel and Zembrzycki worked together in Montreal interviewing Jewish Holocaust survivors. As their partnership gelled, they noted that their de-briefing after interviews, what they term "corridor talk," had become one of the most interesting aspects of the work. How does "corridor talk" or talk amongst oral historians inform method and analysis? The title, *Off The Record*, alludes to the multiple uses of recording technologies (journalism, investigations, oral history), which I also address in this Part. In the collection, queer oral historian Alan Wong writes powerfully about moments of familiarity and shared experience in the interview space in his dialogues with gender diverse people of color. Wong juxtaposes interviews with strangers, friends, and family. What does it feel like to hear a story that strikes close to home? What does the interviewer do when the story being told includes one's biography?<sup>262</sup> Steftel and Zembrzycki write, "If an interview is a document that is cocreated by

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<sup>262</sup> Wong writes poignantly about the anxiety he feels when interviewing his father and the conversation nears the era of his coming out. Wong's father uses the space of the interview to unload all his painful memories about his son coming out. "As we neared the 1990s and the disclosure of my sexuality in his narrative, a feeling of dread began to wash over me; the uncertainty of what he was about to say was unnerving. I tried to convince myself that I had nothing to worry about. When we reached the coming out event in his story, however, my worst fears were realized. All of his negative sentiments about this episode in his—our—life still remained after all of these years and now came pouring out of his mouth for me to hear. What made the situation worse was that he was referring to me in the third person as he spoke, even though I was right there in front of him. Through all of this, I chose to remain silent; I saw myself as the family oral historian during the process, and to interject or try to discuss the matter with my father would have been intrusive and disruptive to the project at hand. I wanted to be, in a word, professional. Thus, I continued to listen to him as all of his hurt and anger filled the air, while my own feelings remained bolted up inside me. It was an endurance test, one that tied my stomach in knots and constricted all of my nerves. To me, this was no longer a matter of deep listening; it had become, in effect, difficult listening." Alan Wong, "Listen and Learn: Familiarity and Feeling in the Oral History Interview," *Oral History Off The Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, eds Anna Sheftel, and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 109.

interviewer(s) and interviewee(s), then examining the dynamics of the relationships that evolve in the interview space are crucial to understanding how oral history works.”<sup>263</sup>

In this work, shared authority has been a key concept for oral historians. Michael Frisch articulated the concept of shared authority and Linda Shopes has honed in on his ideas and rearticulated them as sharing authority. A veteran of oral history, she notices, “While sharing authority is surely intrinsic to the interview, equipoise between narrator and interviewer hardly is: interviewers at times run over narrators with their questions, failing to wrap them around what’s really on the narrator’s mind; narrators don’t answer questions asked but use interviews to comment on subjects far removed from the presumed topic of inquiry.”<sup>264</sup> Sharing authority is about negotiating the interview space, but it also extends back to project design and forward to interview style and final uses. Shopes bears down on collaboration and its loose uses in oral history. She notes, “Collaboration is a responsible, challenging, and deeply humane ideal.”<sup>265</sup> In *Bodies of Evidence*, Horacio Roque Ramírez describes sharing authority “with distinctly queer twists.”<sup>266</sup> Reflecting on his oral histories with gay Latinos and trans Latinas at Proyecto, a queer Latino HIV agency, he notes the ways in which power is shared through queer Spanglish, “together we queered English and Spanish, perverting their respective uses.”<sup>267</sup> It was a joint tool and offered some moments of what Shopes defines above as “equipoise.”

## Mourning

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<sup>263</sup> Steftel and Zembrzycki, “Introduction: Toward an Ethnography of Practice.” *Oral History Off The Record*, 11.

<sup>264</sup> Linda Shopes, “Sharing Authority,” *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 104.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>266</sup> Roque Ramírez, “Sharing Queer Authority.” *Bodies of Evidence*” *The Practice of Queer Oral History*, 193.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

In addition to his methodological contributions on sharing authority queerly, Horacio N. Roque Ramírez also writes about a central impulse in queer oral history, that of mourning. His essay, “Memory and Mourning: Living Oral History with Queer Latinos and Latinas in San Francisco,” frames his project within an atmosphere of documentation.<sup>268</sup> Ramírez writes that, “[t]o land in San Francisco as a gay *Latino* in the mid-1990s was to arrive in the midst of queer community loss and destruction. But at the time there was also a specifically queer Latino and Latina renaissance in the making, with a new generation of artists, health workers, educators, and activists forging a varied culture and politics of visibility and identity. There remained also the artifacts, memories, and ghosts of the dead among the living.”<sup>269</sup> Ramírez’s oral histories documented “life at the moment of its loss,”<sup>270</sup> but they also were stories of migration, love, sexuality, gender, race, and California geographies. After those he interviewed passed away, he grappled with how to share their stories. To gain insight into how to bring his research to the public, he looked to cultural productions of loss and reckoning around him.

Ann Cvetkovich similarly utilizes documentary film and performance to chart approaches to loss. Both Ramírez and Cvetkovich point to Douglas Crimp’s “Mourning and Militancy” to describe mourning’s role in activism. Crimp dramatically appealed to his peers in ACT UP in his 1984 talk. He wanted to be clear that it was not mourning or militancy, but rather “mourning *and*

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<sup>268</sup> Roque Ramírez notes, “when I began to record oral histories in the spring of 1995, it was by no means the first time anyone had taken an active role in documenting life and loss among queer Latinos in San Francisco. Local, community-based, artistic and cultural productions had, since the mid- to late 1980s, record the lives and labors of a dying generation.” Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “Memory and Mourning: Living Oral History with Queer Latinos and Latinas in San Francisco,” *Oral History and Public Memory*, eds Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 167.

<sup>269</sup> Roque Ramírez, “Memory and Mourning,” 167.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

militancy.”<sup>271</sup> Drawing from psychoanalysis, he called attention to the importance of mourning and connected mourning’s affects with political effects. For Ramírez and Cvetkovich, this call for mourning and militancy requires queer oral history to be public history and for stories to find avenues for non-academic viewing, listening, and reading.<sup>272</sup> Ramírez writes that “[q]ueer oral histories that find audio, textual, and visual spaces for public and communal experience in the ongoing age of AIDS are necessarily a living archive that must constantly refer back to its losses...This commitment to history mourns just as much as it celebrates the lives it records....mourning is nothing less than the social and political responsibility to remember.”<sup>273</sup> Interviewing lesbian activists in ACT UP, Cvetkovich deftly weaves trauma studies scholarship with queer ethnographic and oral history methodologies. For the narrators Cvetkovich worked with, interviews were a way back. For her as researcher, oral histories became a tool of conjuring.<sup>274</sup> She writes, “Gathering oral history is itself a form of mourning, a practice of revivifying the dead by talking about them and revivifying moments of intimacy that are gone.”<sup>275</sup> In the space of the interview, friends and past lovers were conjured and commemorated through story. The overwhelming and quotidian formats of loss were poured over, reiterated, detailed. For Ramírez, oral histories and community productions that conjure the dead cut

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<sup>271</sup> “Militancy, of course, then, but mourning *and* militancy.” Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (Winter, 1989): 18.

<sup>272</sup> The ACT UP Oral History Project in New York and Philadelphia is an important community endeavor in this vein. <http://www.actuporalhistory.org> This project is held in the New York Public Library.

<sup>273</sup> Roque Ramírez, “Mourning and Memory,” 182.

<sup>274</sup> According to Avery Gordon, conjuring “is a particular way of calling up and calling out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation. As a mode of apprehension and reformation, conjuring merges the analytical, the procedural, the imaginative, and the effervescent.” (Roque Ramírez, “Mourning and Memory,” 171).

<sup>275</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 238.

against “narrative exclusion”<sup>276</sup> of San Francisco’s gay Latinos and trans Latinas. There is something queer in the act of revivifying the dead. It produces overlaps in time and space and undoes the dyadic nature of the interview. As Sharon P. Holland notes, “Bringing back the dead (or saving the living from the shadow of death) is the ultimate queer act.”<sup>277</sup>

The evaporating and ephemeral qualities of such a ghostly exchange were present in the Cruising Miami Project that opens this study. In that moment, oral histories offered dialogue between the dead and the living and among the dead themselves. The ephemeral character of loss and the intimacy of mourning are key rubrics of queer oral history. Cvetkovich contends, “[t]he archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records.”<sup>278</sup> She looks to the Lesbian Herstory Archives, as a grassroots archive housing particularly intimate objects, but ultimately she utilizes oral histories with “living archives”<sup>279</sup> to locate queerness in lesbian public culture. For Muñoz, “ephemera does not ‘forget’ materiality, but rather refashions it...Ephemera includes traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies...”<sup>280</sup> In performance and conversation, ephemera circulates and disperses. In oral history, there is a compulsion to capture such ephemeral elements. This oxymoronic tension

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<sup>276</sup> “The intersection of narrative exclusions was all too clear: queer historiography of the Bay Area remained white, while the Latino historiography of the region—what there was of it—erased the queer specificity of our lives” (Roque Ramírez, “Mourning and Memory,” 167).

<sup>277</sup> Sharon P. Holland, *Raising The Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 102.

<sup>278</sup> Cvetkovich, 244.

<sup>279</sup> See Jane Rosett and Jean Carlomusto’s project, “AIDS: A Living Archive,” 2001.  
[http://sfonline.barnard.edu/ps/Car\\_Rose.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/ps/Car_Rose.htm)

<sup>280</sup> Muñoz, 10.



poses a problem for queer oral history. When do stories of sex need to remain obscured? What are the goals of trace leaving? For me, it is crucial that oral history does not seek to know all.

## Geography as a Queer Tool

In *Finding the Movement*, A. Finn Enke pushes scholars of feminist and lesbian history to look beyond the archives. Feminist collections are limited in their focus on “feminist-identified spaces, archived manifestos, and the records of named feminist organizations.”<sup>281</sup> Enke uses oral histories to mark the terrain of activism in cities of the upper Midwest. Like Franklin’s Queer Twin Cities project, Enke’s work focused regionally in their interview-based project of 120 interviews. They write, “Oral histories first led me to puzzle over the connection between space, women’s *movement* and feminism.”<sup>282</sup> Listening with “an ear to contested spaces,” Enke finds a more nuanced and geographic story of women’s activism. For Enke, life histories offer insight into the circuits of movement building, as noted in Part II. Interviewees “consistently narrated their lives through references to places and movement through highly contested geographies.”<sup>283</sup> This searching for pathways and activism as it fits into the built environment opens up possibilities for queer methods. It is a bottom-up approach that is attuned to *how* stories are told and where they happen. Enke’s attention to the spatiality of storytelling draws on theorist Michel de Certeau, who noted distinctions between aerial and on-the-ground description.<sup>284</sup> While Enke focuses on the Midwest, this Part of my project is specifically attuned to southern US.

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<sup>281</sup> Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, 256.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>284</sup> For Michel de Certeau, space, place, and narration are inextricably tied. He notes two kinds of narration: map and tour. While maps gives an above view, a “‘tour’ is a speech-act,” and thus navigates inside. Space is constructed through imagining. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

Southern geographies are not often centered in queer histories. Yet, in *Men Like That*, John Howard argues oral history is a vital method for garnering Southern gay life, especially of the 1950s and 1960s. Howard writes, “[a]rchivists and university administrators often express reservations about the validity of the field [of gay history]; families seeking to preserve the ‘good name’ of their relatives routinely deny access to materials... Thus, oral history serves a vital role in reclaiming the lesbian, gay, and bisexual past, especially in the South.”<sup>285</sup> Howard conducts oral histories in rural Mississippi with men-who-have-sex-with-men. Like Kennedy and Davis, he did not structure his interviews, but rather began with, “Tell me your story.”<sup>286</sup> His project seeks to chart queer desire in Mississippi rather than a history of those who identify as gay. To learn about sex, Howard relies on “twice-told stories” and incorporates this second-hand information. Like Enke, he offers spatial analysis and is interested in quotidian experiences of those not usually studied as queer or activist subjects. As Nan Boyd notes, “By using a different method, Howard uncovers new actors and new social worlds that are shaped by sexuality, but he also identifies the limits of a method that privileges the historical agency of those who claim a gay or lesbian identity.”<sup>287</sup>

In *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, E. Patrick Johnson combines aspects of Howard’s methods with critical performance ethnography. Through oral histories of black gay Southerners, he studies the co-performance of narrator and listener. Instead of focusing on building a historical narrative, Johnson uses his training in performance studies and ethnography. He explains that co-performance “entails ‘paying attention’ in a way that engages the bodily

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<sup>285</sup> John Howard, “Place and Movement in Gay American History: A Case from the Post-World War South,” *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Brett Beemyn (London: Routledge, 1997), 211.

<sup>286</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>287</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Who Is The Subject: Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” 186.

presence of both the researcher and the researched in the moment of the narrative event.”<sup>288</sup>

Johnson curates oral narratives into thematic chapters and brings stories from his interviews to the stage. This work importantly reconfigures the relationship between teller and listener—it adds a public, listening audience. It also retains embodied actions through live performance of transmitting knowledge lost on the page. The audience is free to participate in more than one set of knowledge being produced. This work highlights ways to acquire and share knowledge beyond the episteme. Its method is very much a dismantling of knowledge production as from the top down; instead, its embodiment practices produce another language paired with the “script” utilized on the stage.

Critical performance ethnography emphasizes the co-creative process of the interview. It is an investment in dialogic exchange. Johnson draws from the work of S. Soyini Madison, who has also brought oral histories to the stage. In *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance* (2005), Madison writes, “you not only do what the subject does, but you are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in their symbol making practices and social strategies as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires—coperformance is a doing with deep attention to and with others.”<sup>289</sup> This emphasis on “deep attention” is a key through line of queer oral history’s investment in affect and activism.

As a co-creative process, oral history is the moment of interaction. Della Pollock’s writing on the interview as performance itself offers insight into oral history and remembering as practice. Rather than conduct recorded interviews, Pollock describes directing her undergraduate students to listen, listen again, and then tell the stories of their interviewees back to them, “I tell

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<sup>288</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 8. Johnson continued this method in his next project, *Honeypot: Southern Black Women Who Love Women*.

<sup>289</sup> Madison quoted in Johnson, 8.

them they can use only the technology of the ear. That they must listen body to body, heart to heart, not so much recording as absorbing the other person's story. I then generally talk with them some about what it means to *listen hard* and to learn something *by heart*.”<sup>290</sup> The tape recorder is demoted in this process and the act of telling is ritualized differently. Intimacy or lived relation for Pollock is a crucible of becoming. Remembering becomes centered and whole body. Against a politic of preservation, listening and listening out loud re/mold histories in the space of the present. In this project, Pollock cites Trinh Minh-ha’s *Woman, Native, Other*. Discussing roles of listener and speaker in narrative, Minh-ha explains, “To listen carefully is to preserve. But to preserve is to burn, for understanding means creating.”<sup>291</sup> This process describes listening as creating through the means of attempted preservation—a preservation that thwarts the denotation of the word itself.

While gay and lesbian oral histories have sought to preserve experiences left out of the archives, collected tapes and transcripts became extensive archives unto themselves. These archival holdings delineate queer identity and solidify LGBT political power. As such, oral history and archives are bound up in each other. If power is coalesced through the expansion of the archive, gay and lesbian oral history projects have been a major component in building homonormative logics. At the same time, the intense desire to preserve is closely linked to fears of loss and ways of mourning. It grows out of longings—personal and political. Ann Cvetkovich expresses this urge or need in the following manner:

I was driven by the compulsion to document that is so frequently, I think, engendered by the ephemerality of queer communities and counterpublics; alongside the fierce conviction of how meaningful and palpable these alternative life worlds can be lies the fear that they will remain invisible or be lost. Oral history can capture something of the

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<sup>290</sup> Della Pollock, “Memory, Remembering, and Histories of Change: A Performance Praxis,” *SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*, eds S. Madison and J. Hamara (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), 89.

<sup>291</sup> Minh-ha quoted in Pollock, 89.

lived experience of participating in a counterpublic, offering, if nothing else, testimony to the fact that it existed. Often as ephemeral as the cultures it seeks to document (since both tapes and transcripts are records of a life event that is past), oral history is loaded with emotional urgency and need.<sup>292</sup>

Queer oral history centers the process that the desire to document produces. Ultimately, the “narrative event,” as E. Patrick Johnson calls it, passes.<sup>293</sup> The affective energies and erotic dimensions become a recording, a performance, or a transcript. The bodily experience of the interview lingers on. But the fatigue, exhilaration, sadness, or anger fades eventually. Stories do burn into researcher’s imaginations, and other stories, especially if off the record, do not remain. Given the tools of queer methods this literature review has offered I now turn to my oral history project and my experience of the “event of narration.”<sup>294</sup>

### **Queer Intergenerational Method: Interviewing ALFA Members**

In March 2014, I sat down at Vicki Gabriner’s kitchen table for a life history interview to be deposited in the Southern Oral History Collection’s Civil Rights Collection. It was one month after our collaborative archival research. As I have discussed in this dissertation, my bond with Vicki begins at my birth. As I grew up and came out, we remained close. Our relationship has become a friendship, but it is also a mother/daughter, godmother/daughter, or grandmother/granddaughter relationship. These forms of interconnectedness heavily influenced

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<sup>292</sup> Cvetkovich, 166.

<sup>293</sup> Johnson, 8.

<sup>294</sup> Johnson draws on work by Richard Bauman and Mikhail Bakhtin who parse “narrative” and “narrated” events. For Bakhtin, there are “two events—the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself (we ourselves participate in the latter, as listeners or readers); these events take place in different times (which are marked by different durations as well) and in different places, but at the same time these two events are indissolubly united in a single complex event...thus we perceive the fullness of the work in all its wholeness and indivisibility, but at the same time we understand the diversity of the elements that constitute it. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 255. See also Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-20.

and at times guided our method making. Our work practiced a queer intergenerational method, as a back and forth between generations of queer experience. My interviews with Vicki have been a passing down of experience. They are an inheritance in which I am queer relation. For Vicki and others who chose not to have children, my sister Dory and I were the next generation. This configuration demotes the primacy of nuclear family and biology. In this section, I will draw from the archival and oral history work I undertook with Vicki. Then I will turn to my interviews with Lorraine and Claudette.

Born in 1942 and raised in South Brooklyn, Vicki's story arcs out of the McCarthy era and Jewish Left politics. From 1964 to 1967, Vicki and her husband organized voter registration in Fayette County, Tennessee during the summer. In addition to this work, they gathered documents throughout the South of Civil Rights activism for Wisconsin State Historical Society's archive. During the school year, they were graduate students in Madison, Wisconsin and active in the antiwar movement. After graduation and divorce, Vicki joined Weathermen for a year and participated in the Second Venceremos Brigade to Cuba in 1970, where she met Atlanta feminists. Leaving Weathermen shortly thereafter, Vicki moved to Atlanta. In 1972, finding a lack of inclusion in gay and feminist organizations, a group of lesbians in Little Five Points founded the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance. ALFA became an umbrella group through which lesbian feminists organized and created community space. For 20 years, ALFA collected periodicals and ephemera of local organizing, which Duke acquired, when ALFA folded in 1994.

Vicki and I visited Duke's archive for a week of research. Each day we went to the ALFA archive and over the documents she relayed experiences of Atlanta in the 1970s. Against my compulsion to preserve and with Pollock's queer method of listening in mind, I chose not to record our conversations during our archival sessions. I jotted notes down of what we discussed

and compiled them into a field journal. This included conversations over breakfast, on the daily bus ride to Duke, and before bed. This queer interlude model created an ongoing dialogue, which was more of a continuation of our previous way of relating. Stories were told out of chronology. They took on their own rhythm and followed their own themes. We took turns guiding conversation and asking questions.

In the archives, we looked through ALFA documents from meeting minutes, newsletters, and flyers to videos, t-shirts, and banners. We scanned documents ourselves and in hushed voices discussed the ideas and images we encountered. The work was very hands on and this haptic connection with the past was filled with feelings. On the first afternoon, I looked over at our table while scanning and Vicki was tidying the papers. Over the next three days we spent in the archives, Vicki continued to tidy, clean, and report when pieces of paper had become unglued. She mothered the documents and in this way, there was affective presence both in the very personal content of the archive and in her approach. As we went through documents together, conversations were sparked and I did record a few moments of such whispered telling and asking. We facilitated each other's experience of the past. Vicki brought to life things I could not see myself. She quietly sang the lyrics of "Still Ain't Satisfied" because they popped off the page at her. I noticed generational differences and nuances that she passed over. Rather than get a private room where the archivist must be present, we worked at large tables with other researchers, who were each invested in the aged pieces in front of them. The archivists were thrilled to have an ALFA member diving into the records. I noticed that because of our closeness there were stories Vicki shared with neighboring researchers and archivists that she did not tell to me and vice versa.

The problems with this method turned out to have to do with another form of recording and saving. We spent a lot of time figuring out what to scan and study later. Similar to the tape recorder, this work of how to preserve distracted us from discussing topics that the documents brought up. As in any collaborative research, time together was limited. There was much we could not see in the twenty-nine boxes of ALFA materials. Just as memory transmission in visual art and oral history is partial in nature, collaborative archival study could not be comprehensive.

When we got to the boxes of ephemera, we took our time taking out t-shirts, armbands, and banners. Vicki opened a huge banner, which is often depicted in historical writings about ALFA. Vicki unfurled the banner and it stunk. I recoiled in embarrassment and hoped she would put it away. Instead, she marched up to the front of the room with it to inform the archivist of its condition. If as Dwight Conquergood argues, research is a corporeal work, this moment offers a way into thinking about the enactments he described.<sup>295</sup> As Judith Hamera puts it, “Research methods are not a separate category of experience...they are also enactments.”<sup>296</sup> Our work in the space of the archive drew out its emotional and olfactory dimensions.

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<sup>295</sup> Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *The Drama Review* 2, no. T174 (Summer 2002): 145.

<sup>296</sup> Judith Hamera, “Performance Ethnography,” *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), 321.





Figure 3.4 Vicki Gabriner, February 8, 2014. Photo credit: Rachel Gelfand

After our time at Duke, I conducted an interview with Vicki for the SOHP's Long Women's Movement Project in her Brookline, MA home. As in our archival process, intimacy and institution framed this work. I recorded a long-form, life history to be deposited in a public archive. The recording captured sounds of the house, a space I have known for decades. We put our connection as both friends and family into the historical record. The interview now sits in SOHP's collection. A few months later, I returned to Boston for a third round of engagement with Vicki's history. Together we applied our oral history-in-the-archive method to her papers. Yet to be deposited at the Schlesinger Library, Vicki's personal archive contained dozens of catalogued boxes. Within these papers, there were micro-collections. This included an extensive FBI archive, which she had held since her FOIA request in 1974. Many of her files overlapped with Duke's collection, but her collection filled in some of aspects of Atlanta life missing from the ALFA archive. For example, the boxes contained unique material on the ERA movement in Georgia and on COINTELPRO in lesbian communities.

As an oral historian herself, Vicki was a co-creator of our dialogue. In 1980, she piloted her own informal oral history with ALFA co-founders. Her writing on this work uses brackets to convey memory's spoken and unspoken processes:

The process of recall has been intense, because in order to remember, one relives to some extent. 'When did ALFA have its first meeting?' 'Well, let's see. I was living at the commune on McLendon [*PAUSE*—silently recalling the womyn in that house and their interactions]. I was lovers with Alice at the time [*SPACING OUT*—remembering how that was...] because I remember that we went to the meeting together and it was at GLF's headquarters on Pine Street. That was before the winter of 1972 because we were in the Mansfield House by then, so it must have been in the summer sometime.' Whew! Then the process of refinement, checking memories against each other until we come up with an accurate chronology.<sup>297</sup>

In this document, Vicki's reflexive narration animates what recall and return feels like. She lets the reader into internal thoughts and the ambivalences of recall that are not necessarily said out loud in an interview. These silences move the interview and explain connections. The links she brackets are queer—based in landmarks, lovers, and spacing out.

These ellipses of remembering are ephemeral. In trying to remember when the organization's first meeting occurred, Vicki thinks back to where she was living at the time. Vicki remembers which house it was. Tied with that recall is a memory of the experience of living in those rooms. These thoughts are bracketed because they are an internal dialogue. In our talks, I could not enter these selective inner processes of recall, but Vicki let me in to some of these types of intimate associations. In this passage, as Vicki remembers where she was living, she simultaneously recollects whom she was sleeping with. She indicates that she pauses to note the unsaid memories of that relationship. Finally in this excerpt, she determines the year of the meeting by figuring out when the ALFA house on Mansfield Street began. She remembers the first meeting was in an event space of Atlanta's Gay Liberation Front. She transparently narrates

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<sup>297</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "A Hystory of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance," Unpublished, (1980), 1.

the process of calling such moments up in one's mind and the subsequent practice of checking memories with those of other activists. She writes, "in order to remember, one must relive to some extent." This is the corporeal engagement with the past that the space of the interview holds.

In my interviews with Vicki, she narrated her own spacing out moments. Our interviews included reflections on processes of remembering and not remembering, saying and not saying. When we began discussing Weathermen, her arrest, and the FBI, she noted connections between spacing out and difficult stories, "I think partly it's hard to tell the story. So I get focused on something and then I go. I space out because it's too hard to talk about it or understand it or know what to say. It's so full of contradictions." When our interview reached Vicki's experiences with COINTELPRO, she told me about her arrest and trial with much more narrative than our archive conversations. It was a story. She described the knock on the door and while her written accounts, which we found in the archives, were descriptive, her story of her experiences with the FBI were much more vivid and detailed in our interview. It was during the interview that I learned she listened to the wiretap in an FBI office. I had envisioned it differently from our archival study. Our kitchen table interview clarified that moment of her history and conveyed it dramatically. As the interview continued, she described how the arrest came about:

When I came to trial in 1977, as part of preparation for that, I filed several FOIA requests, F-O-I-A, to get my papers, my FBI papers. I got this gigantic batch of papers mostly due to the fact that I had been in Weathermen. It's an interesting exploration into what the FBI can do and what it can't do because I was making no attempt after I was back from Cuba to be hiding and it took them a few years to find me. And I will just say that how they found me was one of the most distressing moments in my life. I went through every single sheet of paper that they sent me. I sat at the table and I went through 1-2-3. I typed a—there was a catalogue. I catalogued the whole thing. And then I get to one. I got to one FBI report which indicated that they had found out where I was because of someone at Radcliffe. I had applied for money to write about Susan B. Anthony, who had become one of my heroines. Someone from the Institute to which I had applied, and

the name was redacted so I couldn't see who it was, but they had got my information from someone at Radcliffe. My application had passed through this person's hands and on the application was my name and address obviously. So that's how they found out.<sup>298</sup>

In a dramatic overlap of academic institutions and intimate life, the FBI arrived at Vicki's lesbian group house via the FBI's university connections. I include the transcript at length for its narrative elements. Sitting with my recorder, I imagined the scene and it sunk in in a different way. Transcribing it, it sunk in further. Vicki describes her experiences of studying FBI documents repeatedly as *distressing*. For Vicki, it was unsettling to learn an archivist gave her address to the FBI. Ironically, Vicki recently donated her papers to the Schlesinger Library.

As I have attempted different interview formats with Vicki, I have approached interviews with other members of ALFA in diverse ways. Believing memories are located in places, I traveled to Atlanta and walked around Little Five Points. I interviewed Lorraine Fontana, another founder of ALFA, in her house in Little Five Points. Returning a second day, we conducted a driving oral history. She toured the neighborhood and made stops tracing the locations of ALFA activism. These included softball fields, group houses, and gay bars that have since closed. Finally, I conducted a third interview with Lorraine over her albums. Again, the material objects produced different stories and new chronologies. While an oral history is always a snapshot of one's repertoire on that particular day, through shifting methods, distinct ways of telling occur.

Juxtaposed with this in-home and in-car interview, my interview with Claudette Hopkins occurred over the phone. With Claudette's permission, I recorded a life history that focused primarily on her ALFA days. While this interview was not in situ or even across a table, the phone conversation presented its own mode of narration. Phone conversations have an intimacy of voice but also an audio texture of geographic distance and digital intermediaries. This format

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<sup>298</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014.

takes away the interviewer's physical reactions. I ended up conveying my listening through more vocal mhmms and uh-huhs. Even without room tone, the sonics of the house, of both our queer houses, made it on to the tape. Claudette talked to me while preparing and eating her dinner after work. House sonics include the sounds of silverware on her side and the meowing of my cat on my side. Yet, phone interviews do "lack the visual cues and interactivity of an in-person conversation"<sup>299</sup> They bring up the questions of recording technologies and of the wiretap history I invoke in this project. Each of the three interview processes contained multiple conversations over days and weeks. Each offered new ways to archive, understand, and perhaps interpret ALFA history and its afterlife.

In addition to creative modes of interviewing, queer methods require creative forms of sharing of oral histories. In "Cruising Hialeah or Ghosts of Public Sex," installations of recordings were placed in the locations of narrated events. In an act of remembrance, oral histories were called up from the archive. This installation of story produces a uniquely embodied and spatial listening. Queer oral histories challenge the structures of interviews, publishing, and performance. Utilizing subjectivity, embodiment, mourning, and geography, queer researchers and narrators play with this format of dialogue as history production. The concept of co-performance aptly describes this choreography. Yet, the "co-" does not produce equal footing. Oral historians grapple with the power differentials of recording, interpreting, excerpting, publishing, or posting. Queer oral historians must also explicitly engage with power differentials and the "romance of community," discussed by Miranda Joseph. While the category of queer oral history may be useful, it is its methods that queer and that do unexpected, discipline shifting work. Queer practices in oral history open up discussions about ephemera and evidence.

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<sup>299</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 99.

I have been drawn to this work because of its questioning of archive-building projects, even as it participates in the creation of queer historical objects. Oral history may be about creating evidence and putting an exchange into text/tape, but its products only capture a sliver of what happens in dialogue. Queer oral history gives primacy to the bodily experience of conversation. Interviews are spaces of transmission as they narrate landscapes, traverse silences, and recall loss. Ultimately, memories sounded are re-listened to, transcribed, and often interpreted. Oral history is a queer practice in its ephemeral, quotidian, and affective dimensions.

### **ALFA: Lesbian Feminists Archiving in the South**

*Each of the archives that preserve gay and lesbian history has a history that itself belongs in the archives.*  
- Ann Cvetkovich

After its founding in the summer of 1972, for the next 20 years, ALFA served as a cultural and political umbrella group for lesbians of Atlanta's Little Five Points neighborhood. Responding to A. Finn Enke's call for a spatial analysis of women's activism, I look at the locations of ALFA organizing from 1972-1975. In these dense years of activism, ALFA members creatively utilized residential and civic space. With backgrounds in antiwar activism, socialism, and civil rights work, the women who formed ALFA brought in radical strategies and complex analyses of power. Drawing on ALFA archive materials and oral histories, I analyze the geographies of movement building and the roots of lesbian feminism in the South.

Despite ALFA's longevity, historical study of ALFA is quite limited.<sup>300</sup> In my work with Vicki especially, we let our relationship lead our methods. As Gerna Lerner asserted, it has been

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<sup>300</sup> There are four works on ALFA. See Heather Branstetter, *An ALFA-Omega Approach to Rhetorical Invention: Queer Revolutionary Pragmatism and Political Education*, Unpublished Dissertation, 2012; James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Saralyn Chestnut and Amanda Gable, "'Women Ran It': Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian Feminist Community," *Carryin' On in the Gay and Lesbian South*, ed. John Howard. (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 241-284; and *Sinister Wisdom* 93: Southern Lesbian-Feminist Herstory, 1968-1994 (Summer 2014).

key to the field of women's history for researchers to make their own methods when needed.<sup>301</sup> I was eager to explore intergenerational dis/connection as well as my desire to preserve and record. Given my methodological commitments, I will turn now to the scene of Little Five Points, which Lorraine and Vicki arrived to 1970 and Claudette in 1973.

In 1968, student activists at Emory University working against the war in Vietnam founded a counterculture newspaper, *The Great Speckled Bird*. The *Bird*, as it was known, became a New Left mainstay in Atlanta. It was distributed across Georgia (22,000 copies in its peak) and internationally through the Liberation News Service. In the first year of the publication, coupled and often married teams staffed the *Bird*. Men were the editors, writers, and business people. The women typed and “were doing the real necessary shitwork,”<sup>302</sup> as Becky Hamilton wrote in 1970. Reflecting on that year, she noted, “A woman's caucus of the *Bird* was formed because we needed each other.”<sup>303</sup> The group pushed for oversight of the often-sexist advertisement section of the paper, a women's issue, and full-time salaries. She remembered, “[W]e as women began a fuller participation in the structure that existed but had never worked to our advantage. We pushed the rotation system. Every three months all the big shit work jobs (circulation—ugh, keeping the books, opening the mail, typing, layout, managing editors) were rotated. We learned how to do everything. It is inefficient. But it gave us strength as a cooperative.” Hamilton ends her article in the *Bird* about the caucus with an editor's note, “This article has been really hard to write. All the goodbad (changes) don't come out in a line of

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<sup>301</sup> Lerner's words, written in the days of ALFA activism, remain relevant, especially in light of the lack of historical study of Atlanta radical feminism. She writes, “[f]or women, the problem really is not that we must acquire not only the confidence needed for using tools, but for making new ones to fit our needs.” Gerda Lerner, “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (Autumn 1975): 13.

<sup>302</sup> Becky Hamilton. “Even A Woman Can Do It: Bird Women's Caucus.” *The Great Speckled Bird* 3, no. 41 October 11, 1970, 3.

<sup>303</sup> Hamilton, 3.

writing.”<sup>304</sup> The *Bird* house and office was located by Piedmont Park in Midtown, but the paper was very connected to Little Five Points, a hub of “freak,” hippie, leftist, and lesbian life.<sup>305</sup>

Located northeast from downtown, Little Five Points and the area near Candler Park was a walkable neighborhood of Atlanta. Claudette remembered the neighborhood as quite rundown but everyone living there could afford to. Big houses were cheap to rent as a result of white flight and urban renewal. The historic African American community of Rose Hill was pushed out through the expansion of Candler Park in the 1920s and city ordinance in the 1940s.<sup>306</sup> Many *Bird* women lived in the Candler Park area. In this group of budding feminists and newly out lesbians many were from Georgia, but many like Lorraine and Vicki were from the North. Vicki and Lorraine each arrived in Atlanta in the fall of 1970 and both quickly became involved with the *Bird* Women’s Caucus.

For Lorraine, living in Atlanta was an opportunity to do antiracist and antipoverty organizing. After attending Queens College, she joined VISTA, a War on Poverty program, and worked in Atlanta’s West End. She loved the city and returned permanently in 1970, much to the dismay of her large Italian immigrant family in Astoria, Queens. She briefly pursued a Ph.D. in clinical psychology before leaving to work as an organizer. For Vicki, who is a little older than Lorraine, Atlanta was an unexpected home. By the end of 1970, Vicki had just returned from a trip to Cuba. She worked there in the cane fields on a work solidarity trip with the Students for a Democratic Society. It was in Cuba that she met women activists from Atlanta. Frustrated with

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<sup>304</sup> Hamilton, 3.

<sup>305</sup> Sally Gabb writes of *Bird* staff, “We were stridently ‘freaks.’” Sally Gabb. “A Fowl in the Vortices of Consciousness: The Birth of the *Great Speckled Bird*.” *Voices from the Underground : Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press*, ed. Ken Wachsberger (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 94. For the New Left and increasingly feminist and gay communities Gabb was immersed in, it was political to be out or to be non-normative.

<sup>306</sup> For more information on Rose Hill history: <http://www.biracialhistoryproject.org/RoseHillMarker.html>



the men of Weathermen on the trip, Vicki became closer with Atlanta activists. Leaving New York and leaving Weathermen, Vicki took a road trip to Atlanta and stayed. In Atlanta, many lesbian activists had similarly “come out” of left organizing.

Civil Rights and Cuba solidarity work were experiences shared by several founding members of ALFA. Elaine Kolb came to Atlanta from New York State and was a member of the Third Venceremos Brigade.<sup>307</sup> Sally Gabb had been in North Carolina at Duke University in the mid-60s and took part in North Carolina sit-ins. Although she was in New York for journalism school in the late 60s, “it was a radicalization of my thoughts, but not yet my actions.”<sup>308</sup> Women in Little Five Points were forming collective houses and buying clubs.<sup>309</sup> Many organized with the *Bird* Women’s Caucus, which in 1971 formed Atlanta Women’s Liberation, as well as Gay Liberation Front, which formed in Atlanta that same year.

Yet, they soon decided it necessary to form an organization of their own. As Vicki said in our first life history interview, “We were at a point in our lives where we need to create—We needed to have lesbian space. We need to attend to our own needs.”<sup>310</sup> To this end, ALFA immediately utilized a communal house as a meeting space, deeming it the ALFA house. After a series of meetings, the group put out the word of their existence through the *Bird*. The article, “Lesbians on the Move,” was printed in August 1972 alongside a GLF article concerning an arrest of a gay man in his home. This piece was an invitation and declaration:

We are a political action group of gay sisters, We are the large coordinating group for smaller consciousness raising groups and an umbrella group for Women's projects and

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<sup>307</sup> “Elaine’s Song” *The Great Speckled Bird* 5, no. 29. October 9 1972.

<sup>308</sup> Gabb, 93.

<sup>309</sup> One such buying club was the Atlanta Anti-Imperialist Coalition which in 1974 became the Sevananda Co-op. Lorraine Fontana, interview by author, February 22, 2015.

<sup>310</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014.

gay Women's projects. We will serve as a communications center for all these groups. We intend to provide alternatives for ourselves and all sisters that will free Women to live outside sexist culture. We aim to reeducate the non-homosexual community, society in general, by being visible and vocal at every opportunity. We aim to reach out to all sisters in order to establish solidarity. We intend to work with gay brothers to further our mutual goals of gay liberation. We intend to initiate demonstrations and public actions to emphasize our demands.<sup>311</sup>

ALFA presented itself as a space as well as a didactic, direct action oriented project. It focused on the political power of being out and the need for women's spaces.

By the fall, ALFA again was in the *Bird*. In a women's issue of the paper, they advertised an open house at the ALFA house. In this page spread, Lorraine updated readers on ALFA's ideas for a lending library and possibly a softball team. She invited readers to the ALFA house on Mansfield Street in Little Five Points.<sup>312</sup> Lorraine and others living in a lesbian house called Edge of Night chose to utilize the communal house for ALFA meetings. It was a focal point of a network of lesbian communal houses in the neighborhood, which had names such as Marmalade Manor, Tacky Tower, and Rubyfruit Jungle.<sup>313</sup>

For Claudette, who moved to Atlanta in 1973, the city was where she became involved in feminism, but her arrival was exacting. Claudette now lives in New Jersey, but she is originally from a small town in South Carolina near North Carolina. In 1965, she was one of five African American students to enter an all-white high school. She attended Winthrop College, where she studied physical education and computer science. She left college and moved to Charlotte where she worked at a record company and the Federal Reserve. Her partner at the time had just had a

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<sup>311</sup> "Lesbians On The Move," *The Great Speckled Bird* 5, no. 33 (August 21, 1972): 15.

<sup>312</sup> Lorraine Fontana, "ALFA House Open," *The Great Speckled Bird*, October 9 1972.

<sup>313</sup> ALFA house called Rubyfruit Jungle predates the famous novel by Rita Mae Brown. Lorraine explained that a child living in the house came up with the name and Rita Mae Brown visited for an event prior to writing her book. Lorraine explained this to me on our driving tour of the neighborhood of Little Five points. At the time we had stopped in the parking lot of the feminist bookstore Charis Books (Fontana, interview by author, February 23 2015).

child and she left those positions when she was offered a higher paying job in Atlanta. She arrived in the city with her possessions packed into a VW Beetle to “finalize the paperwork” of the new job. The employer delayed and disappeared for a few hours, only to return and say they were no longer hiring for the position. The friend who found Claudette the job was white and the employer refused to hire a person of color. “That was my big setback when I got to Atlanta, was because I had a black face.” Claudette was left with no job and no backup plan. She knew no one in Atlanta. “That’s basically how I became involved with ALFA and Lorraine because I was living in the ALFA house. I didn’t have a place to stay. That was the first place I stayed, at the ALFA house. I had no knowledge of feminism in terms of being an activist.” Claudette and her partner lived briefly in a feminist house in Charlotte. When they had a son, their Charlotte housemates, engaging the rising separatist ideology of the era, told them they had to move. “At that juncture, I didn’t want anything to do with feminists if that’s what feminism was about.” In Atlanta, Claudette found feminists with experience in activism and more nuanced critique of separatism. “ALFA was my roots in terms of learning about and appreciating feminism...getting involved in things like the ERA...and speaking out in the community. I did get an appreciation of feminism that I did not get in North Carolina.”

The ALFA house offered a space for lesbians to live, organize, and socialize. Information about the house was distributed to bars as well as publications, like the *Bird*. Many ALFA participants learned of and got involved in the organization because they needed a place to live. ALFA’s open-door policy was a complicated undertaking, but it importantly brought new members into the organization outside the *Bird* social circle. Claudette took on a central role with ALFA’s softball team, worked on ERA organizing, helped plan conferences, and took part in house upkeep when ALFA bought a house in 1974.

ALFA's growing library and archive at the original ALFA house on Mansfield Street was a very early installment of radical lesbian archiving. Elizabeth Knowlton was a key figure in developing ALFA's Library Committee and cataloging incoming print media.<sup>314</sup> While ALFA women were collecting newsletters and lesbian publications from other parts of the country, they were also sending publications out nationwide. As such, home spaces were the location of producing lesbian texts and cataloguing them. Lesbian feminists working at Sojourner Truth Press in Atlanta brought those skills to ALFA's newsletter, "Atalanta." This newsletter, which began in 1973, became a key component of ALFA organizing. It created a network and a communication center.

At the same time, ALFA women were in constant conversation with both *Bird* editors and editors of the *Atlanta Constitution-Journal* about representations of gay and lesbian life—or lack thereof. ALFA took this conversation nationally when it wrote a letter to *Ms. Magazine* in 1972 calling for the magazine to cover lesbian issues.<sup>315</sup> In Atlanta, the *Bird* covered lesbian, gay, and feminist issues because staff, occasional contributors, and readers pushed them. The mainstream press had a long history of serving as a tool of gay oppression. When Atlanta police arrested gay men in park and public bathroom stakeouts, the papers printed arrestee names and addresses. For example, in what the media dubbed the Atlanta Public Library Perversion Case of 1953, the city's two papers both printed names six times.<sup>316</sup> In this climate, ALFA and GLF pushed paper editors over issues such as their coverage of Susan B. Anthony events.

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<sup>314</sup> Elizabeth Knowlton, "How To Start A Lesbian-Feminist Organization (Or Any Kind of Non-Hierarchical Group)" (1984) ALFA Archives, Box 1, File 19 Duke University.

<sup>315</sup> Letter to *Ms Magazine* (1972) ALFA Archive, Box 1, File 19 Duke University.

<sup>316</sup> John Howard, "The Library, The Park, and The Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta," *Radical History Review* 1995, no. 62 (1995): 166.

In 1973, ALFA opened its doors again for a series of coalition-based events celebrating Susan B. Anthony's birthday and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seneca Falls. In the *Bird*, Vicki contributed a long piece titled "Failure is Impossible" which told Anthony's history and listed planned events. The National Organization of Women (NOW) presented a slide show on "The Beginning of a Long and Real Revolution." On the eve of Anthony's birthday, "Women Get the Vote" was shown and Vicki presented on "Susan B." The main event was a birthday party for Anthony that doubled as a benefit for the Georgia Women's Abortion Coalition. The last event was a screening of the lesbian film, "Holding," at the ALFA house. The series of events raised awareness for feminist causes and brought organizations together under the imagined<sup>317</sup> foremother of suffrage and equal rights.<sup>318</sup>

The organizers advertised this event in the *Bird* and *Atlanta Journal*. Yet, ALFA's lesbian event was left out of the mainstream press coverage. ALFA promptly wrote a letter to the editor. In it Vicki wrote, "It is a humiliating experience for us as lesbians to be told essentially that our very existence is not recognized by the Journal."<sup>319</sup> As ALFA was beginning to produce its own media, it frequently submitted events to the mainstream press and wrote letters asking why events were not published. Both *Atlanta Journal* and *Atlanta Constitution* editors responded dismissively saying they received many requests or that the women's department would have to decide. Vicki wrote in frequently to the *Bird* to report on the press's censorship of ALFA events. In "Journal-Constitution in Closet," Vicki wrote, "As for these papers being 'family

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<sup>317</sup> As Lisa Tetrault notes, this imagined lineage to Anthony utilized a longstanding tradition in US politics to coalesce around an origin. Tetrault notes that Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton knew the importance of this politic and worked to make Seneca Falls an origin for their generation and future women. Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>318</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "Failure is Impossible," *The Great Speckled Bird*, February 19 1973. In our interview, Vicki reflected on this time. Ending with the quip—"We found out failure is possible."

<sup>319</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "Journal-Constitution in Closet," *The Great Speckled Bird*, May 21 1973.

newspapers,’ I would point out that all us *queers* have mothers and fathers, some of us have children, and besides we are human beings just like everyone else.” Reading this in the archives I was struck by our connection and my position as a “kid of” lesbian parents. This editorial pushes back on the rhetoric of family being imposed in public and discursive cultures of the 1970s. The mainstream Atlanta newspaper could not contain lesbian content. Family and *queer* experience were mutually exclusive. Vicki uses the language of “queer” to drive home the familial attachments this outcast grouping (queer subjects) maintained both with older and younger (biological) generations.

In preparation for the Susan B. Anthony birthday events, Vicki applied in November 1972 for a grant to the Radcliffe Institute to study Anthony. This application deeply impacted Vicki’s experiences in Atlanta and the work of ALFA. When Vicki was in Cuba, Weather members accidentally set a bomb off in a Greenwich Village townhouse in New York. The explosion killed three people and sent many collective members underground. As a part of COINTELPRO, the FBI was following up on all Weathermen. Yet, as their extensive documentation shows, they could not find Vicki. She was not hiding, but the FBI documents show that they had a “coverage” problem in Atlanta’s “tight knit feminist communes...[of] apparently lesbians.”<sup>320</sup> When the FBI came to her house on Euclid Terrace and arrested her. This occurred days before “Journal-Constitution in Closet” came out. After checking her closets for weapons, she was taken downtown and arraigned on charges of passport fraud and conspiracy to commit passport fraud in Boston. This charge threatened up to 5 years of jail time and the FBI probed Vicki for details of other Weathermen, of which she had none. Her years in Atlanta became framed by trial preparation. W. Arthur Garrity, the Boston federal judge tasked

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<sup>320</sup> United States Government Memorandum, February 28, 1973.

with her case, ignored it from 1974-1977 because he was in charge of implementing busing desegregation. Following her arrest, Vicki organized a defense committee with ALFA comrades, became involved in ERA activism, and in July 1973, she joined ALFA in a picket of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Demonstrators utilized public space to protest mainstream media's refusal to represent lesbian life and to speak out against the firing of an out-gay editor.

ALFA's criticism of *Bird* and of Atlanta's mainstream coverage of gay and lesbian life worked in tandem with their own production and collection of print media. Through newspaper distribution and street protest, ALFA created a presence both in readers' homes and newspaper editors' offices. These activities were spatial strategies. They engaged with residential space through their newsletter and editorial writing. They engaged with civic space by picketing downtown, creating t-shirts, and inviting the public to open house events.

Vicki and other ALFA members brought these strategies to their work on the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1972, Vicki and Cheryl, from WRFG's women's radio show, started going to ERA coalition meetings. Georgia's coalition included the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, Churchwomen United, NOW, and Georgia Women's Political Caucus. In a 1974 article in *Quest*, a radical feminist journal, Vicki recalled those first meetings, "[w]e were both fascinated and intimidated to find ourselves in meeting with women who had been politically active for 20 and 30 years. I was excited by the possibility of a mutual exchange of ideas, although the excitement was not shared by most members of the coalition. There was not much receptivity to the dungarees, no make-up, impatience, and unconscious casualness which is a part of my counterculture style. Nor was anyone too happy about my lesbianism."<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "ERA: The Year of the Rabble" *Quest*, 1, no. 2 (Fall 1974): 65.

This group of women had finally succeeded in getting Georgia legislators to ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1970 (fifty years after suffrage for women was enacted). They were versed in state politics and well positioned to lobby for this new issue of ERA ratification. The more conservative of these groups saw lobbying as the only way to pass the ERA. Seeking a more activist approach ALFA women and members of the Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) chose to form their own organization, Georgians for the ERA (G-ERA), May 1973. This group continued to work in coalition with the existing network, but they argued it was important to be out. They did not want to closet their politics whether it was radical, socialist, or lesbian-identified. It was also important for ALFA members involved in this campaign to bring the ERA struggle into public space. For historians, organizing for the ERA in Georgia in 1974 demonstrates persistent tensions of feminist politics.<sup>322</sup> There were fissures over sexuality and the effectiveness of public protest. In 1974, Vicki became a full time G-ERA organizer and worked to plan a march through downtown Atlanta. Groups in the Parade Coalition included the G-ERA, NOW, Georgia Nurse

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<sup>322</sup> In 1972, federal legislature passed the Equal Rights Amendment and it was up to the states to ratify it. If 38 states ratified the bill, it would become national law. When Georgians for the ERA decided to organize a march ahead of Georgia's next legislative session and invite Gloria Steinem, the larger ERA network responded they could not support a public protest under any circumstances. Churchwomen United and AAUW said they would support a march, but not with the presence of lesbian feminists and socialists. Without these organizations, G-ERA changed the event from march to parade. They asked Eléonore Raoul, an 87-year-old white suffragist, to lead it. Raoul connected generations of women's activism in the city. Raoul led a pro-suffrage march of 500 down the streets of Atlanta in 1915 on horse. G-ERA's Parade Coalition expanded to labor, feminist, and black women's activist groups. After accepting the invitation, Steinem received letters from conservative women concerned her presence would alienate legislators. Steinem rescinded her offer to speak because of the pressure; although she wrote a letter stating she disagreed with the exclusion of "unpopular" women (lesbians and socialists). After a series of letters between the G-ERA and Steinem, she agreed to come to Atlanta to meet privately with the two camps of ERA organizing. The divergent groups came together to meet Steinem and she mediated. No one changed their position. Some labor groups did not continue to endorse the parade after Steinem pulled out, but Georgia Nurses Association and UAW stuck it out despite the potential liability of working with radical lesbians. NOW also remained a strong ally. Despite or because of Steinem's highly politicized absence, there was a large turnout for the parade with over a thousand marchers and Raoul leading the way in a 1930s convertible. Vicki recalled in our first interview: "The fact is I think Gloria Steinem not being there, in the long run, didn't matter. We had a much larger turn out than we thought we would. Once word got out that there was this wrangling going on, I mean the people who supported us said, oh yeah, we better get out in the street and march. I think we had 2 or 3 times more people than we thought we would have. There was racial diversity and most of the speakers were women. Was it a success? Obviously, the ERA did not pass in Georgia. I'm not sure the ERA will ever pass period" (Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, June 2014).



Association, Black Women's Coalition, Feminist Action Alliance, Communication Workers of American, SWP, and student groups.<sup>323</sup>

The march utilized the space of Atlanta's streets to galvanize attention to the ERA and the turnout in 1974 was much larger than expected. When legislators met the following week, the ERA was not ratified. The G-ERA continued to organize, march, and write. They created a newsletter and improved their analysis of the importance of the ERA to unions and women of color. In 1975, 3000 people turned out for an ERA march. Yet, the amendment remained unratified in Georgia with many increasingly boycotting the state.<sup>324</sup> When the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gays met in Atlanta in 1978, ALFA members and other organizers asked local businesses if they supported the ERA and printed a pamphlet letting conference attendees know which businesses to shop in. This tactic sought to respect the boycott without keeping gay and lesbian activists from coming to Atlanta. It spatialized economic boycott, and turned businesses into contested sites useful toward political education and mobilization. In 1978, it had been six years since national passage of the ERA, and the ERA was ultimately never ratified in Georgia. Phyllis Schlafly's STOP ERA movement utilized divisions within Georgia by highlighting the involvement of out-gay organizers and framing homosexuality as a threat to US institutions of family. Schlafly perniciously and poetically named the amendment the "Pro-Gay ERA."<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "ERA: Year of the Rabble," 67.

<sup>324</sup> Organizers "contributing financial support or ERA ratification; providing alternative arrangements for housing and food to limit cash flow into the city; using the conference to educate people about the ERA, and proposing that future conferences be held in ratified Southern States." Vicki Gabriner, "Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men, *Atlanta*, May 1978.

<sup>325</sup> Schlafly's STOP ERA rhetoric impacted the narratives of lesbians and trans parents who had children during the 1970s and 1980s. Standing for "Stop Taking Our Privileges," the campaign threatened moderate and conservative women with military service, unisex bathrooms, and generations of queerness (aka queer "kids of" such as myself). One Maine STOP newspaper advertisement succinctly broke down the campaign's fears concerning gender,



Figure 3. 5: ALFA Omegas, 1974, Photo credit: Lorraine Fontana

Following ERA organizing in the winter of 1974, many ALFA women became involved with softball as the season warmed. With the next legislative session a year away, ALFA activists looked to new avenues of public engagement. The organization decided to create an out-lesbian, integrated softball team and enter the City League. Lorraine remembers long conversations over the team name, the ALFA Omegas. Playing in parks throughout Atlanta, the team gained visibility and the organization grew. The women promoted themselves as an out and egalitarian team. They were “saying it” not just “playing it” as A. Finn Enke distinguishes. According to Enke, “softball in public parks was an activity and a location through which a wide range of political activism took place.”<sup>326</sup> Utilizing the built environment, ALFA practiced and played softball in Iverson Park. For spectators and players, many of whom were lesbian

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sexuality, and childhood: “What does the word ‘sex’ mean? The sex you are, male or female or the sex you engage in, homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, sex with children...or whatever? Militant homosexuals from all over America have made the ERA issue a hot priority. Why? To be able finally to get homosexual marriage licenses, to adopt children and raise them to emulate their homosexual ‘parents,’ and to obtain pension and medical benefits for odd-couple ‘spouses.’ ...Vote NO on 6! The Pro-Gay ERA.” This quotation was printed with the image of two men at New York Pride in a Maine newspaper and circulated to turn women away from the ERA through homophobic, save-our-children rhetoric. Schafly’s fears then connect directly to the language of the Lesbians Choosing Children Network in nearby Boston, which I discuss in Part II. Lesbian and trans parents made a point to say that they were not raising children to “emulate their homosexual parents.” Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 115. Tiemeyer cites Jane Mansbridge’s *Why We Lost the ERA* and notes the relationship between the ERA and Gay Liberation.

<sup>326</sup> Enke, 147.

identified but not “saying it,” this was a new configuration of civic space. ALFA had gay cheers and eschewed competitive norms. They rotated all their players equally, which allowed Vicki who “was by no means a jock,”<sup>327</sup> a place on the field. Lorraine also learned new skills and became the pitcher. As a player manager, Claudette taught her teammates how to play and wrote team updates in the ALFA newsletter. According to Vicki, “That was the honeymoon summer. Everything went right. Oh and the thing was that we won most of our games.”<sup>328</sup> Claudette was known in the league for her home runs and split catches at first base. In our interview Claudette remembered, “[w]e didn’t do too badly. We ended up with two teams. We had ALFA one and ALFA two. [Laughs]. Because there were so many people who wanted to be involved. So it became a big thing. It was a good way of actually marketing the organization. Because we would have games every week and what not. And, you now, it gave us an avenue to socialize after the games.”<sup>329</sup>

After wins and losses, teams and fans went to the Tower Lounge or back to the ALFA house. As Vicki put it, “I’m not a drinker, but at certain points that was really where lesbian space was, in the bars. Very early women’s music concerts were in the bars and we always went there after the game.” ALFA’s presence at bars, on fields, and in ERA marches shifted the organization’s status and made it a more well-known organization in Atlanta. This use of public space must be situated in a larger context of gay park life in the Southern city.<sup>330</sup> As a part of

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<sup>327</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, June 2014.

<sup>328</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014.

<sup>329</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014.

<sup>330</sup> As John Howard describes, Atlanta’s public parks were a site of sex and social anxiety starting in the mid-century. Howard describes the increasing police presence in locations of public sex—homo and hetero. In 1953, the FBI and Atlanta’s local police colluded on a stake out of library restrooms. This surveillance (the police constructed a two-way mirror) led to the Atlanta Public Library Perversion Case, as *The Atlanta Constitution* called it. The media covered the trial in great detail and repeatedly included full names and addresses of the 20 young men

their politic of visibility, ALFA saw softball as a political strategy and way to build membership, as Claudette noted. After the summer of 1974, ALFA membership grew from thirty to a hundred members.

Enke's attention to contested spaces brings up issues of body and attire central to lesbian life and feminist activism. Clothing and comportment are mediated through public space. Centrally located, municipal parks were an especially physical or corporeal landscape. As leisure locations, they were not apolitical, but rather "key arenas of movement-building."<sup>331</sup> In Vicki's "Coming Out Slugging!" she describes what it felt like to be a part of the ALFA team. It was a bodily experience. She writes, "We ran onto the field, most of us with our hairy legs and hairy armpits, sweating in the sun, exercising our muscles."<sup>332</sup> For jocks and non-jocks alike, playing became a way of building muscle and figuring out one's relationship to those muscles. "Softball made us feel more powerful because we were learning to use our bodies as physical instruments."<sup>333</sup> In this way, ALFA's "softball strategy" was an embodied form of activism.

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arrested. This case offers interesting parallels to gay and lesbian community library/archive projects two decades later. In the 1950s, heterosexual couples were increasingly public about sex and courting and Piedmont Park in Atlanta became a crucial ground of contestation. The city's political elite first banned parking cars at the park, then they ordered more lights. In response to calls from civic and religious groups, police increased their park sweeps. This led to an increased awareness of gay men's presence in the park. Prior to the spread of gay bars in Atlanta, the gay scene was in tearooms and parks. While the 1950s began with questions of whether to close the park at night, by mid-decade the police had become central in policing sex. As Howard notes, these two cases in Atlanta [suggest] "an understanding of public space and homosexual encounter that must go beyond issues of male sexual "promiscuity" and social, legal, and religious oppression to consider the spatial terms of the conflict." Howard encourages historians to look at the parks and public spaces themselves in order to understand sex politics and policing. Out of this history, Piedmont Park became a key location of gay pride. The juxtaposition of gay park life in day and night—of softball, picnics, and cruising—has been taken up by [queer](#) memory projects in Atlanta.

<sup>331</sup> Enke, 18.

<sup>332</sup> Gabriner, "Coming Out Slugging!" 54.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 55. In many ways, "Coming Out Slugging!" is a report back relaying a success of lesbian and feminist organizing. The piece was published *Quest*'s second year in an issue entitled "Organizations and Strategies." In 1976, readers would have coming to this article after flipping through "Use and Misuse of Coalition" by Sandra Flowers and "Designs for Income Sharing" by Caroline Sparks. The new journal, edited by Charlotte Bunch, was a place for "long-term, in-depth feminist political analysis and ideological development." The editors continue, "We dare to challenge ourselves to new forms of thinking, to the creation of those needed strategies, and to take on issues

The team changed the City League and they were equally changed by their interactions with league players. While ALFA members lauded themselves for demonstrating to the league how out and how non-hierarchical a softball team could be, team members were simultaneously learning from seasoned league players. Enke writes, “Women of an established working-class softball culture inspired and challenged self-identified feminists.”<sup>334</sup> At the Tower Lounge, Vicki remembers women “who had been lesbian in the 1950s and ‘60s, who had come up through the school of hard knocks of lesbian life. As I met this group of lesbian southerners, I was very drawn to all of them, feeling that each of them had a piece of history that helped me to understand the world I was entering.”<sup>335</sup> The exchange was two-way and often across lines of generation and class. Softball teams, such as the Lorelei Ladies and Atlanta Tomboys (1944-1960), carried a much longer trajectory of Atlanta white (queer) women’s sports. The City League was mostly white with the exception of Claudette on ALFA teams, a player on the Lorelei Ladies, and a team from Bankhead named the Panthers. Though the Panthers were not connected to an organization or the Black Panther Party, the team brought a black feminist politics to the field through a black power ethos.

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which affect women but which have not yet been defined as ‘women’s issues.’”<sup>333</sup> Answering this call for creative strategy, Vicki described the personal and political implications of “out-lesbian” softball. The article informs feminists in other regions: “We’ve learned in Atlanta that softball can be powerful politics” (57). Yet, it conveys this message in a playful tone.

<sup>334</sup> Enke, 148.

<sup>335</sup> Gabriner quoted in James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 178.



**Figure 3. 6: ALFA Omegas, 1974. Photo credit: Lorraine Fontana**



**Figure 3. 7: Panthers, 1975. Photo credit: Lorraine Fontana**

With a much larger membership base following softball, ALFA decided to host a conference of Southern lesbians. Without money to rent a space for the conference, sessions were held in ALFA house and other lesbian houses around Little Five Points. The 500 attendees walked around the neighborhood and sat in living rooms for panels. Minnie Bruce Pratt, Charlotte Bunch, and other activists took part in sessions. The theme of the Great South East Lesbian Conference was “Building Our Community,” and workshops took place on topics of racism, separatism, and socialism. On the second day, there was a workshop added entitled, “FBI Harassment of the Lesbian Community.” Vicki led the conversation discussing Susan Saxe and Kathy Powers, two lesbian feminists who went underground after an antiwar-related bank robbery went wrong. In discussion, Vicki raised awareness about the role of grand juries in lesbian communities, and the Lexington 6, a group of lesbian feminists in Kentucky who refused

to testify to a grand jury about the whereabouts of Saxe and Powers.<sup>336</sup> A grand jury, she noted, “seeks information about living arrangements, traveling, and contacts in other Lesbian communities, political associations, roommates, and family.”<sup>337</sup> This conference discussed the role of the FBI in home spaces, it utilized houses in its conference structure, and it advocated for an out-lesbian community. Yet, this exciting event began on a sour note when five women from Durham were arrested after a dispute at a diner outside Atlanta. Being out-lesbians in public, commercial space quickly became a liability for this group, and much of the conference was spent raising funds for their bail and legal fees. As such, the residential, commercial, and legal realms were all overlapping in the summer of 1975 for ALFA and conference go-ers.

Given the backdrop of persistent FBI interest in “living arrangements” and intimate spaces of lesbian feminist organizing, my analysis has returned again and again to how ALFA has utilized public and private spaces. In the archive, I was particularly aware of how archival documents offer insight into spatial formations. A map of an ERA conference (with handwritten directions in Vicki’s handwriting) gives an aerial experience of ALFA life during this period. While oral history interviews offer narration of interior spaces, the archives offer distinct ways of imagining and visualizing historical moments. At the same time, Lorraine’s photo albums, which were in her home and not an archive, present the opposite of an aerial perspective. Her images of porch conversations of the 1975 conference give historical details of participation (no registration lists were in the archives), and they reconfigure the genre of the family album. The family album is supposed to trace biological connection and mark important events in familial

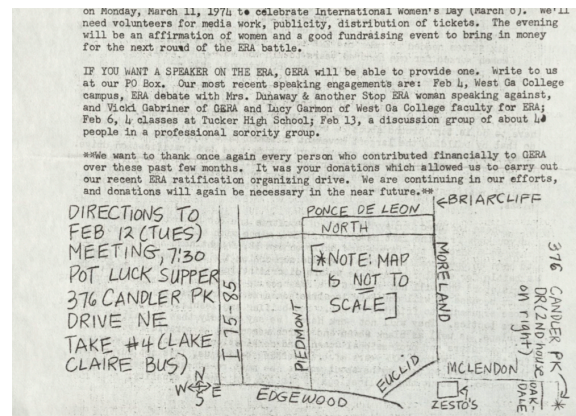
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<sup>336</sup> For more on the Lexington 6, see James Sears’s *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*.

<sup>337</sup> Vicki Gabriner, “FBI Harassment of the Lesbian Community,” *ALFA Newsletter: Special Conference Issue*. July 1975.



life. As *the* photographer of the ALFA “family,” Lorraine used photography to document group events, capture personal portraits, and she used the album to collate these busy years of activism.



**Figure 3. 8: G-ERA Newsletter, February 1974.**



**Figure 3. 9 Great Southeast Lesbian Conference, 1975      Figure 3. 10 Photo Credit: Lorraine Fontana**

Despite softball’s success as a form of outreach, ALFA remained a predominately white organization disconnected from Atlanta’s African American communities. In our interview Claudette highlighted the lack of racial diversity in the organization. “There were very few black women in ALFA. And, you know, I felt like the token Black. For a long time, actually. I remember at least two other women, who were there as frequently as I was there.” The lack of outreach for Claudette stemmed from ALFA not really getting its footing. “They didn’t really do a whole lot of outreach to the Black community because they still weren’t that well organized themselves. You know what I’m saying? They were open to anyone who wanted to join the organization. But interestingly when I moved to Los Angeles with Lorraine, I actually became



the founder of a group out there called Lesbians of Color.” ALFA’s lack of outreach noted by Claudette reified longstanding exclusionary practices of white feminism and its lesbian feminist iteration. Claudette chose not to stay in Atlanta for more than two years. Her decision to move to Los Angeles reflects a lack of inclusivity in both Little Five Points and Atlanta’s historic African American neighborhoods. As Dwight McBride writes, there is a reason that Atlanta was not a destination for black queer subjects. In “Can the Queen Speak?” McBride argues African American intellectuals and bourgeois enclaves, such as Atlanta, must not conceive of the “black community” and black gay and lesbians as separate entities.<sup>338</sup> In Atlanta, it was not until 1994, the same year that ALFA closed its doors, that Zami, a QPOC organization formed. This timeline speaks to Atlanta’s racial and sexual politics because in other cities, as I will now discuss, such organizations came together in the 1970s.

When Claudette moved to Los Angeles in 1976 and founded Lesbians of Color (LOC), she joined a softball team called TNT. This team quickly became an outgrowth of LOC activism. Most of TNT’s players were also in LOC and soon there were two teams due to high interest. Claudette continued to be a player manager for TNT, which was sponsored by a woman who, “owned the biggest black gay bar” in Los Angeles. They would go to the bar after the game and “it was just marvelous.” On Sundays, Lesbians of Color/Lesbianas de color met at the Alcoholic Center for Women, and Claudette remembered “[w]e would talk about economics. Basically we had somebody speak on different things. We talked about everything from the experience of healthcare to jobs. There was somewhat of a feminist agenda in terms of making sure that we were visible in the community as lesbians. We were always engaged in Pride marches and that kind of stuff.” LOC utilized public space through its softball team and it convened in private

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<sup>338</sup> McBride observes, “the political process that legitimates and qualifies certain racial subjects to speak for (represent) ‘the race,’ and excludes others from that very possibility.” Dwight A. McBride, “Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 364.

spaces utilizing the NBFO's model of political education. TNT's presence on the softball fields of Los Angeles continued the politic of "saying it" Claudette had experienced in Atlanta. Softball and Pride marches offered public settings to expand membership.



Figure 3. 11: Lesbians of Color at San Francisco Pride 1978. Photo Credit: Lorraine Fontana

In 1978, LOC traveled to Pride in San Francisco. The presence of LOC at the march struck a cord with women of color attending Pride. Claudette recalled, "We took about seven people up there and by the time the march was finished we had about three hundred people behind our banner." LOC's brigade expanded exponentially because it was marking a space for women of color in Pride's narrative of queer belonging. Claudette spoke at the 1978 Pride rally, which further brought LOC into public awareness. Following 1978, LOC chapters formed along the West Coast in San Diego and San Francisco. LOC members also attended the first convening of the National Lesbian Feminist Organization, which was held in Los Angeles in 1978.<sup>339</sup> After this conference, members of LOC began planning a conference of their own. In 1983, the Los

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<sup>339</sup> Yvonne Retter, *On The Side of Angels: Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1990* (Unpublished Dissertation 1999), 198.

Angeles chapter of LOC organized the National Lesbians of Color Conference.<sup>340</sup> LOC formed and functioned on the West Coast during the same years as the Combahee River Collective and the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), which had a West Coast chapter from 1970 to 1983. The historian Kimberly Springer, whose research utilized dozens of oral histories with black feminists, notes the two TWWA branches (East and West) differed in how they handled lesbian identity. "It is unclear whether West coast heterosexual members [of TWWA], succumbing to fears of lesbian baiting, expelled lesbian members or whether members who were lesbians, weary of homophobia, left the organization. Regardless of that distinction, the West Coast branch lost several members who were central to running the organization."<sup>341</sup> Springer also notes the Los Angeles chapter of the NBFO continued through the late 1970s working "toward Black feminist change in its geographic area."<sup>342</sup> Seasoned organizers from both organizations likely contributed to LOC's development in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Yvonne Retter notes, "From 1978 until the mid 1980s, LOC was the most active and visible lesbians of color group in Los Angeles."<sup>343</sup>

In my interview with Claudette, I was initially intending to focus primarily on her years in Atlanta. It quickly became a much more robust discussion of LOC and the history of black

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<sup>340</sup> Yvonne Retter describes the conference in her study of lesbian activism in Los Angeles. She writes, "The conference, held in Malibu in September of 1983, was attended by over two hundred women from various states. The list of workshop presenters suggests that a broad spectrum of political and ideological viewpoints (including the heterosexual one) were included. As in most lesbian conferences, there were those who were happy to be in the company of other lesbians of color for a weekend of discussion, learning, intercambio, music, and fun. Others however, were troubled by what they felt were unaddressed political issues... Thus, it can be seen that LOC gatherings faced some of the same dilemmas as white-dominated lesbian gatherings. Should we concentrate on the political or the cultural? Could we develop a coherent lesbian of color agenda and implement it? Who was 'allowed' to attend these conferences?" (Retter, 275-276).

<sup>341</sup> Springer, 131.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 212. This is a footnote to a section in Springer's book which discusses the dissolution of black feminist organizations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. She does not include the organization, Lesbians of Color, in her analysis of black feminist organizing structures explicitly.

<sup>343</sup> Retter, 200.

lesbians in Los Angeles. Did this shift reflect the awkwardness of my own position as interviewer? Claudette was critical of ALFA and its lack of outreach to black lesbians, but was she also holding back? It was only the second time we talked and she knew I was Vicki's baby. At the end of the interview, which was shorter than my other two, neither of us wanted to get off the phone. I continued to ask questions, but this hesitation to cut the tape may have also been a reflection of our shared awareness that Claudette had more to say. Again our conversation of Atlanta moved away from organizational history and toward Claudette's experiences as a non-biological parent in the mid-1970s. When Vicki wrote in her editorial to Atlanta's *Journal-Constitution* about "queers" who had children, was she thinking of Claudette? Claudette's time on ALFA's softball team and her continuation of politicized softball in Los Angeles speaks to the effectiveness of softball as an organizational tool. Softball is not mentioned in Springer's text as a strategic spatial politic, nor is it explicitly discussed as a key zone of activism in Yolanda Retter's history of Los Angeles lesbian life. Yet, softball, Pride marches, and public meetings all engage in important and distinct ways with public space and with the process of movement building. Yet, race and space are historically situated concepts intrinsically bound together. Race is spatialized and space is racialized.

As I will discuss in the next section, state surveillance must also be viewed through a spatial lens, as it blurs concepts of public and private. Kimberly Springer's *Living For The Revolution* uses oral history to marshal an in-depth analysis of black feminist politics on national and local levels, but it also draws from archival sources. In her research, Springer utilized the NFBO archive at the Schlesinger Library and she filed several FOIA requests. The TWWA files were the only ones she received but they contained over 500 pages of documentation.<sup>344</sup> This archive of the FBI chronicles infiltration of meetings, daily activities of TWWA leaders, and

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<sup>344</sup> Springer, 206.

photographs of members, which were included in the “Extremist Photograph Album,” a companion album to the existing “Weathermen Album.”

The actions of the FBI demonstrate the blurring of public and private. After entering her home, the FBI was forced to release evidence relevant to Vicki’s case. Her FOIA request yielded a massive archive, which became part of Vicki’s personal archive. The documents reveal FBI’s surveillance of Vicki in public spaces of Atlanta as well as their illegal wiretaps of Chicago’s SDS office, where Vicki was briefly stationed in 1969. When Judge Garrity finally took Vicki’s case in 1977, he swiftly sentenced a year’s probation. Vicki appealed and won with her lawyer, Nancy Gertner, who had previously defended Susan Saxe. Atlanta’s dense years of lesbian organizing in the early 1970s were peppered with two presences, both of them existing in apparent contradiction: FBI surveillance as well as swift 1960s movement building. These two entities, which in many ways go hand in hand, shaped the contours of 1970s Atlanta organizing. In Atlanta, lesbian feminism was a politic, a location, and an activity. It was a product of engagement with contested spaces. Now thoroughly catalogued in archives, it has entered digital and institutional localities, circulating in new public/private forms.

### **“Bugged By The Past”**

In the ALFA archives, I read and re-read an article written by Vicki in 1977 about her experiences with the FBI. The essay entitled “Bugged By The Past,” described two bodily encounters with the FBI—her arrest and her aural process of listening to wiretap recordings. The FBI documents presented a form of institutional archive that sought to record and preserve in the interest of tracking and surveillance. Vicki’s trial preparation process also brought her to an FBI room in Boston. There she sat with a huge reel-to-reel tape player and listened to wiretap

recordings of her SDS days. In a journey back in time, she heard herself in an SDS office five years prior. In “Bugged By The Past” she wrote, “I was in a time warp. It left me frightened, angry, and spaced out all at the same time.”<sup>345</sup> Conjured through the senses, remembering in the FBI office was a physical experience. It was upsetting on political and temporal registers to listen to this recording. It was a confirmation of the surveillance they knew existed, but it was also a corporeal encounter. In my interview with her she explained, “Somehow there was something very visceral about the experience of sitting, watching the reels go round and round and round. The FBI agent sitting over there.” Floored by the experience, Vicki shared her auditory time warp with other feminists through print media and reiterated this story that we found in the archives in our recorded interviews. Her conversation of being recorded was also recorded. The layers of tape also were layers of return.

In Atlanta, during those years of waiting and preparing for trial, Vicki recalls that she “spent a lot of energy re-thinking my past, wanting to own all of it, both the ‘agony and the ecstasy.’”<sup>346</sup> Her activism in the 1960s was the root of her radical feminism in the 1970s. As many ALFA women were politicized after 1970, Vicki was tasked with explaining her Weathermen activities to a slightly younger generation. New ALFA members had not “come out” of movements of the 1960s and were more engaged in lesbian separatist ideology. ALFA founders pushed back against criticism of lesbians who did activist work alongside men.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Vicki Gabriner, “Bugged By The Past,” *off my back*, 7, no. 8 (1977): 12.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>347</sup> For more on these conversations, see Jill Raymond’s response to Jill Johnson about Susan Saxe. Jill Raymond refused to testify at a grand jury looking for Susan Saxe. She was part of the Lexington 6. Vicki was very interested in this case and other COINTELPRO situations and she kept newspaper clippings and other ephemera on issues she was following. These documents were in her personal papers. In Raymond’s essay, she wrote that Saxe was a call for feminists to thing about the seriousness of political goals. Jill Johnston says she is giving feminists a bad name and why was a dyke with two or three straight men at a bank robbery of 1970. Raymond argued there was an embarrassment about armed struggle, or an antiwar apocalyptic romanticism (revolutionary-ism). This she wrote

Benefit promotional materials show this to be a transmission of movement history between slightly different generations of feminists within ALFA. Sitting with flyers of ALFA benefits at Duke's ALFA archives, Vicki discussed this work of explaining to ALFA members why she had been a part of Weather organizing. In our conversations, she described receiving and cataloguing copious FOIA documents during her trial. Her tactile experiences with the FBI's redacted photocopies and oral record presented a foil for our work in the archive.

For Little Five Points, Vicki's trial offered a microcosm of national politics. In a *Bird* article, "Local Woman Arrested by Feds," the newspaper piece by Krista (last name unknown) begins, "the awesome power of the federal government is getting closer and closer to home and the effects of Watergate type activities by the Nixon administration are becoming more and more evident. Just ask Vicki Gabriner."<sup>348</sup> Vicki responds that, "This whole thing came totally and clearly out of *right* field. I never expected to be arrested by the feds. I never thought that I would have to deal with my experience as a weather(person) again in such a direct manner." In this piece, the *Bird* notes that other defendants who were illegally wiretapped only read transcripts and did not hear "the actual tapes." Vicki's case was a landmark trial for her ability to hear the tapes. Citing the government's "*terrible batting average* against radicals in political conspiracy trials"<sup>349</sup> (emphasis mine), Vicki goes on to describe the importance of public advocacy. In preparation for trial, Vicki submitted a series of letters written by prominent individuals in Atlanta's Civil Rights activism in support of her case (Andrew Young, Julian Bond, Panke Bradley, James Bond, John Lewis). The *Bird*'s reporting highlights the national context of Vicki's arrest and wiretap listening experience.

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was an effective government tactic.

<sup>348</sup> Krista, "Local Woman Arrested by Feds," *The Great Speckled Bird*. May 13 1974, 6.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

### Three Sites of Memory

Vicki's story conveys the intricacies and overlaps of several technologies of capture surveillance, recordings, and archives. Her writings and actions place Old Left, New Left, and Lesbian Left in conversation. When she came to trial in 1977, she wrote a Pre-Sentencing Statement. This statement, preserved in Duke's archive, holds the space of the courtroom. Vicki read the statement aloud before receiving her sentence. Therefore the document functions as a crucial site of memory that is both textual and oral. It contains the thoughts and emotions that Vicki, as defendant, had in the courtroom and it holds the moment of its reading. Before Judge Garrity, Vicki read her statement which argued that, "Although the trial was singularly apolitical on the surface, it was totally political at its core. It can only be understood in the context of the Viet Nam War."<sup>350</sup> While Vicki was being charged with the fraudulent signing of a document, she was actually on trial for affiliating with Weathermen. This statement was written almost a decade after her involvement with Weathermen. In her writing, Vicki held the complicated feelings of being a part of a militant organization and recognized the political dimensions of her trial. She became a part of Weathermen because the US was in a prolonged imperial war in Southeast Asia. In a post-Watergate US, in which the public had also recently learned of COINTELPRO,<sup>351</sup> Vicki noted to the courtroom that her case was "a small part of that plan of surveillance and disruption."<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "Pre-Sentencing Statement," ALFA Archive, Box 1, File 5, Duke University.

<sup>351</sup> For more information on the history of COINTELPRO in the public eye, see *1971*. This 2014 documentary by Johanna Hamilton and Laura Poitras draws a lineage between Edward Snowden, WikiLeaks, and the Citizens' Committee to Investigate the FBI in Media, PA. The later group broke into an office of an FBI field office on International Women's Day, March 8, 1971 and shared the documents they stole with newspapers across the country. See also Betty Medsger *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI*. This burglary took place three months before the release of *The Pentagon Papers* by the New York Times in June 1971. These



Framing her life in terms of war, Vicki's statement rolled back a few decades to her childhood as a war baby in the era of Joe McCarthy. Her first memories were of the atomic bomb and she remembered going with her mother to PTA meetings. Her mother was the PTA president and very involved in teacher organizing against firing of leftist teachers in New York schools. She recalled briefly the execution of the Rosenbergs. In our first interview, which happened to coincide with the anniversary of the execution, Vicki reflected on this moment in court:

To talk about my case and not talk about the context in which it happened and the war in Vietnam was to not do justice to what really happened. I talked about the Rosenbergs and how it was so important it was that people were beginning to talk about them and what a relief it was for me to be able to call out their names and ask them to stand with me. And I did that on several occasions and it was always a feeling of tremendous power. I don't know if power's the word. It was always a powerful experience for me to be able to just say Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Even just to say their names and say what they had meant to me as a kid. That's stayed with me. I mean that's always stayed with me. Every June 19<sup>th</sup> I know its June 19<sup>th</sup> and I have to count up sometimes the years. What's the anniversary date? But I don't think a June 19<sup>th</sup> goes by without my figuring that out.<sup>353</sup>

Vicki felt a shedding of the layers by calling out the Rosenbergs by name. In this part of our interview, Vicki noted the importance of annually remembering and returning to the Rosenberg execution. She was 11 when the execution occurred, but it coalesced as a key referent of the past and political present. For decades, one would not mention the Rosenbergs, not in the least in a court of law. In 2009, Vicki wrote a dissertation on Brooklyn women's activism in the PTA, conducting several interviews with women who had been leftists and active. They were extremely guarded when it came to communist politics. In Vicki's childhood, politics was closeted. Then in her antiwar activism in the late 1960s, there was again a layer of secrecy. The

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documents revealed secret information about US actions during the ongoing Vietnam War. For more on *The Pentagon Papers* see Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Viking), 2002.

<sup>352</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "Pre-Sentencing Statement," 1.

<sup>353</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, June 2014.

same red squads were policing the New Left. They were also policing gay sex, as homosexuality and communism were always tied together in their un-Americanness.

The court was not persuaded by Vicki's statement and she received a year's probation. Reflecting on this experience, she wrote a poem, "Sentence Stress." In the piece, she excerpted court transcripts, FBI memos, and wiretaps (italicized), which she delineates through footnotes:

I listened to taped conversations  
Riding the TimeLine  
Between  
Then&Now  
Caught  
in the Past in the present

*I think we probably should not speak over  
these telephones.*

*Well, fucking' A, I want to talk to you.  
Yeah, but we certainly can't do it on this  
phone, we have this, this, this, the problem is,  
they have a live tap...  
Yeah, I know.  
and is listening to every word we say, uhm...*

The floodgates open  
To let back in the 60s  
in the 50s

I re-explore connections  
Intense  
Energy

In this excerpt of the poem, Vicki conveys the affects of archival return. Returning to the time of the wiretap feels intense and loaded with energy, as the transcript excerpt highlights a tense moment of awareness that surveillance was taking place. Listening to the wiretap a decade after the moment of its recording, she rides her own timeline. This listening triggers her own recall and a flooding of decades past. The wiretap holds the moment of the phone conversation. The act of listening puts her in a liminal zone—caught between "then&now." The piece of phone

conversation holds the feeling of those hectic years. There is anger, frustration, fear, and awareness. This poem was not in the ALFA archives, but in Vicki's personal archive, which is located in her home and which will be given to the Schlesinger Library. After our time in Duke's ALFA archives, Vicki mailed me a package containing photocopies of her published and unpublished writings. I read this piece alone and felt the space of the courtroom within her dissonant reunion with her past. As she concludes "Sentence Stress," she writes:

There is a lot of stress  
There is a lot of power  
in the doing and the living and the remembering and the connecting and the going  
on.<sup>354</sup>

In the space of the ALFA archive, our project continued the doing, living, remembering, connecting, and going on. It was a transmission of lesbian strategies of activism, and I incorporated new knowledge of surveillance histories. Although current state archiving and surveying mechanisms differ, they come out of this COINTELPRO past.

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<sup>354</sup> Vicki Gabriner, "Sentence Stress," Unpublished 1980.

After reading Vicki's writings and hearing her stories of arrest and trial, I was eager to look through her personal papers, which included the FBI documents themselves. These memos offered their own kind of blackout poetry. They hint, reveal, and redact conversations about Vicki between agents and between agents and informants. As we combed through her archive at her house, we moved back and forth between boxes of Atlanta materials, FBI files,

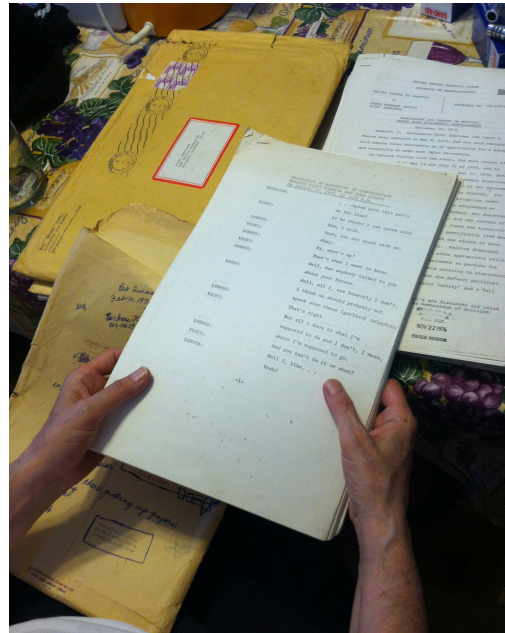


Figure 3. 10: Wiretap Transcript

and documents from our lives together in Boston. The FBI documents, heavily redacted, narrated state memory and present a different angle on Vicki's lived experience. For example, in 1970, one memo described Vicki as "adrift and alone" and posited it may be a good time to see if she would be an informant. "If cooperative she could be directed to reaffiliate with her familiar associates of SDS."<sup>355</sup> The documents also show conversations with female informants in which the agents showed informants pictures from the Weather album.<sup>356</sup>

Yet, the most compelling document for me was the transcript of the illegal wiretaps she had described to me. Transcribed, the wiretaps became a script. In our study of the FBI boxes, Vicki read this transcript aloud re-enacting the recorded conversation. As such, the transcript offers remarkable layers of repetition and reproduction. As a site of memory, it holds the

<sup>355</sup> United States Government Memorandum, January 15, 1970.

<sup>356</sup> The fact that this FBI document was called an "album" again complicates the concept of a "family album," a theme throughout this dissertation. Family albums exist at the intersection of personal, collective, and national forms of belonging. As with aural tools, the album utilizes technologies of capture that can be used by actors with differing intents. The album can be a tool for grassroots organizers, such as Lorraine, and for state surveillance, as is the case with the Weathermen Album.

moment of the recording. The phone tap in question was in the national headquarters of SDS in Chicago. Did FBI agents enter the office and rewire the phone that Vicki and others held to their mouth? The transcript also carries the work of the FBI transcriber and archivist. Through photocopying, this transcript exists in multiple archives. It sits in both Vicki's living room and some FBI server. It also carries the memory of our re-enactments.<sup>357</sup> I now have a video recording of this performance of a recording.

This third site of memory is a textual version of an aural experience. Vicki's reading gave the text inflections it lacks without a reader who was there. Vicki understood the pauses and patterns of coded conversation the SDS-Weathermen activists utilized. In Vicki's poem, "Sentence Stress" she excerpted a piece of the transcript that conveyed a desire to speak plainly over the telephone wires ("*Well, fucking' A, I want to talk to you.*"). Yet, in her reading of the text while we poured over the FBI boxes last summer, she focused instead on a more opaque section of the text. Often, two activists on the phone would choose a person they knew in common without saying their name (i.e. remember the person who danced at the party with Alice). Then they would use the letters of the person's name to convey information. These dialogues are repetitive in their work to utilize phone lines to communicate without saying what they were communicating. As a script, the document exists in between listening and speaking. It comes into being in its re-saying. As I move from archive to oral history, it is clear textual and oral sources exist in tandem, overlaid and transferred back and forth between forms.

### **Aural History: Technologies of Capture**

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<sup>357</sup> Marita Sturken argues "reenactment" is a memory activity. She argues visual cultures and video offer ways in which to access the past crucial for collective identity, mourning, and narratives of belonging. She writes, "It is the reenactment, the replaying, the fantasizing of the story that allow the mourning process to proceed and the event to acquire meaning." Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 28.

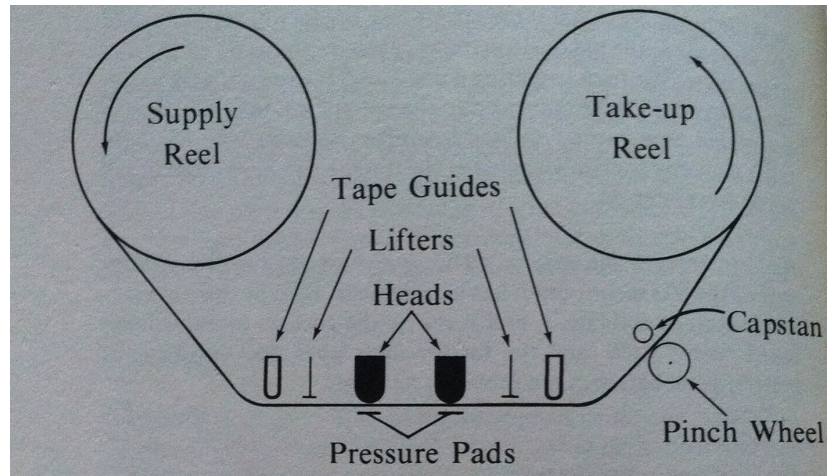


Figure 3. 11: Image from *The Tape-Recorded Interview* by Edward D. Ives<sup>358</sup>

From reel-to-reel recorders to digital devices (iPhone and Zoom recorder), the process of saving sound is utilized to convey a dialogue. Oral history is a performance that draws the past into the present. In the case of both wiretaps and wav files, there are tactile and aural components. With a reel-to-reel player one sees the motion of the tape and the tapes themselves produce a sound. A digital recording offers a similar left to right orientation of play and pause. Even as it offers much greater accessibility and mobility, digital recordings have not led to more listeners of oral history. The field still struggles with how to publically share the content of oral history collections. Alessandro Portelli, Sherna Berger Gluck, and many other oral historians have long argued for the importance of aurality. In 1990, Portelli laid out what was lost when the “transcript turns aural objects into visual ones.”<sup>359</sup> The transcriptionist, Portelli argued, does a great deal of interpretation and this work is comparable to the work of a literary translator. Listening allows one to take in information that comes through tone, pauses, not-pauses, and

<sup>358</sup> Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual For Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 42.

<sup>359</sup> Portelli, 47.

exclamations. The written form flattens the “emotional content of speech.”<sup>360</sup> The transcriptionist decides when to punctuate and when to indent.

In my study of oral history, I have been interested in the genre’s shifting technologies. The recording device and the im/material recording itself are distinct sites of memory. The former acts as a temporary container. The latter becomes a digital object with increasingly diffuse locality. My interviews are on my hard drive and shared with the Southern Oral History Program as a wav file, but contextualizing the beginnings of magnetic recording is vital to understanding how historical moments brought today’s sound mediums into being. The history of capturing sound demonstrates the interlocked relationships of oral history, entertainment, and surveillance. Tools of audio arose out of war and postwar desires to move away from live broadcasting. There is a direct line between analog and digital tools of saving sound. During WWII, Allied forces noted the Nazis’ capacity to air high quality, pre-recorded radio communiqués that were longer than 78s allowed. After the war, US forces brought home magnetic recording equipment captured in Germany. John Mullin, an entrepreneur and engineer, worked on the technology and pitched it to Hollywood executives.<sup>361</sup> Bing Crosby became interested in magnetic tapes because they would allow him to pre-record his radio show. He became an investor in Mullin’s “Magnetrack” which Ampex bought in 1947. This company, located in Redwood City, was a key corporation in the development of Silicon Valley. Magnetic tape was also found to be a useful way of storing information. In the 1950s, IBM developed technology further to create RAMAC, Random Access Method of Accounting and Control,

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<sup>360</sup> Portelli, 48.

<sup>361</sup> Steven Schoenherr, “The History of Magnetic Recording,” 5 November 2002. <http://www.aes.org/aeshc/docs/recording.technology.history/magnetic4.html>. This great resource demonstrates how often inventions in recording were products of war.

which was effectively the first hard drive.<sup>362</sup> This winding history of storing and recreating sound shows technologies' overlapping usages and also how that first move into the creation of the hard drive signals "control," "method," and ironically, "accounting."

These themes are explored in interesting ways in the 1974 film, *The Conversation*. Images of "bugging" from this film have pervaded my imagination of COINTELPRO during this research process. The film coincides temporally with Vicki's arrest and trial. *The Conversation* utilizes the spine-chilling familiarity of re-listening and recording. This Francis Ford Coppola thriller is intent on conveying the experiences of the one who conducts the wiretap. In a scene of listening, the protagonist played by Gene Hackman, rewinds and replays a conversation he has recorded using new innovative technology. Each time he replays, the viewer sees the scene again. The listening is a flashback, or return to the moment of sounds recorded.<sup>363</sup>

Continuing my research this fall, I stumbled upon a site of memory I had no idea existed. I was looking into Vicki's experiences as a Civil Rights organizer. In 1964, she went to Fayette County in West Tennessee with her then-husband, Bob Gabriner. They worked on a voter registration project for three consecutive summers. During their last two summers, Vicki and Bob also collected interviews and documents related to Civil Rights organizing in the Deep South. As graduate students at the University of Wisconsin, they proposed to the Wisconsin Historical Society that a team of organizers go collect materials for WHS archives. They argued that the history of the movement should not be based off of the archives of national headquarters

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<sup>362</sup> Paul Ford, "How Bing Crosby and The Nazis Helped To Create Silicon Valley," *The New Yorker*. 8 May 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/how-bing-crosby-and-the-nazis-helped-to-create-silicon-valley>

<sup>363</sup> See clip discussed above: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoaFl\\_D0S8w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoaFl_D0S8w) Coppola was inspired to make this film not by Watergate, which became its context, but from the 1966 Michelangelo Antonini film and Julio Cortazar's 1959 short story, *Blow Up*. Although *The Conversation* is not about government surveillance, it was an inspiration for another Gene Hackman film, the 1998 thriller, *Enemy of the State*. This film is a meditation on the new technologies of digital and satellite surveillance. It brings the viewer to outer space and through the wires of surveillance camera monitoring and satellite technology.



of Civil Rights organizations, but rather off the documents of black and white Southern organizers working in the field. The Wisconsin Historical Society gave six workers small stipends to go collect in Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Louisiana.

What I did not know was that the state historical society also interviewed Vicki. In a Google search I happened upon an interview that was conducted in 1966. It was an hour and forty-five minutes. Vicki was 22 at the time of the interview. It was an amazing archive or time capsule to find. I clicked on it—her voice was the same in essence but simultaneously quite different in texture, accent, and tone. It was a younger version of Vicki and her Brooklyn brogue was thick. She spoke in a style that I associate with the era. The recording, which must have been on a reel-to-reel player before digitization, was warped. The distortions of sound I imagined to be similar to the FBI reel-to-reel Vicki listened to in the mid-70s in the FBI office. Sitting in my house in North Carolina, my listening felt invasive and voyeuristic. I shared the link with Vicki and sent her again on the return of aural history. She listened to herself—this time rather than five or ten years after the moment of the recording, this listening session was fifty years after its production. Vicki called me back and told me that she felt okay with it being online and found it very interesting. She did not remember the interview. In re-listening, she was attuned to content, worried this public document might contain something embarrassing or poorly stated. It was not a return to the room of the interview—she did not remember that moment or the interviewer—but the stories and emotions she described to the interviewer were familiar and intimate. She was glad that she remembered details in 1966 that she could no longer recall in our interviews.

One aspect of the interview particularly striking to me was the difference in style. Oral history is not a static genre. It changes over time. Nick Fisher, the interviewer asks questions that Vicki answers in short form. This gives the interview more of a social science tone, but the

interview also has clinical dimensions in moments. His questions show oral history's roots in qualitative research as well as psychology. He presses her on how being a Civil Rights activist made her feel—how did it affect her relationships with her parents, with her husband, and with her friends. She pauses at moments and in a slightly confrontational tones asks if she is getting at what he is looking for. Overall the interviewer is an empathic ear, curious about the pains and practicalities of organizing against Jim Crow. The interview brought new layers of comparative analysis and opened up a new space of corporeal encounter. It was again a foil for the experience of listening to illegal wiretaps and for our conversations. Its location in the non-space of the Internet gave it a public scope that speaks to the unknown futures of archival and oral materials. Digitization offers access with multidirectional modes of time travel. On the one hand, digital oral history places the subject almost too squarely in the past by presenting the interviews as a part of a dusty, historical record. On the other hand, digitization offers online listeners direct access to the moment of recording, re-presenting the voice in powerful ways.<sup>364</sup>

As an interviewer, I was nervous about how Vicki would feel re-listening to her interview from 1966. Our interviews have been extremely intimate. I worried as I conducted my first interview (which is almost exactly the same length as the 1966 one) that Vicki would reveal more than she intended because of our intimacy. But, the tape recorder is not easily forgotten. Our conversations were mediated by its presence. It brought institutions of academic and Internet publics into the space of her kitchen, where the interview was conducted. To analyze the relationship between oral history and surveillance, it is vital to include an audio clip of my oral

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<sup>364</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by Nick Fisher, May 22, 1966.  
<http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15932coll2/id/54529> (link contains audio)

history interview with Vicki in the spring of 2014.<sup>365</sup> This extended clip speaks to the themes of this study. It conveys our dialogue, the history of ALFA, and Vicki's experiences with the FBI. Oral histories are hardly listened to. But listening reveals density of information and the order in which stories came up. It carries tone and the quality of eavesdropping on a two-person talk.

This audio clip is from the second hour of our first interview at the kitchen table of Vicki's home in Brookline, MA. This oral history was conducted as a life history interview. I returned for follow-up interviews four months later. The second round of interviews was informative, but it is truly a unique situation to hear someone's life history for the first time. Our first interview contains a succinct and far-reaching history of Vicki's life. It begins with Vicki recalling coming out. She describes the physical aspects of attraction. She remarks upon her noting of shifts within herself. She had left Weathermen and moved South. While we had collaborated in the archives, we felt it was important to talk about ALFA on the record for the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP), yet our interview was inflected with our close relationship. When I ask Vicki what a lesbian feminist is, she asks me what I meant by the question. Did I not know? I spend some time defining the term, as I understood it. In this way, we both shared being in the hot seat. We shared the role of interviewer at moments. Against the norms of listener/teller, Vicki and I put dialogues between generations of queer experience on the record in our SOHP interview. They were spontaneous but also pertinent conversations.

In this excerpt, Vicki describes her Atlanta neighborhood spatially and brings the listener into the streets of Little Five Points. You can hear my own desires to record certain stories. Rather than linger on the founding on ALFA, I move on to the story of her arrest. She describes the arrest affectively and brings the listener into the space of the house she was arrested in. While

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<sup>365</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014. Audio Excerpt: <https://soundcloud.com/rachelsttimemachine/gabriner-on-alfa>

her written accounts in “Bugged By the Past” were descriptive, in the interview she describes the knock on the door. It is a story with a narrative arc and humorous details. Her story includes the bodily and affective experience of arrest. Through my own iterations of listening, I returned to the moment of our conversation and the ambiance of the space of exchange. I re-listen to remember, memorize, and hear differently than I did in the moment of interview.

Following the story of arrest, Vicki describes her process of archiving the documents she received from her FOIA request. In this part of the interview, as previously mentioned, Vicki describes her *distressing* experiences of studying FBI documents. Stress and distress are affects of state presence in daily life. For Vicki, it was unsettling to learn it was an archivist who gave her address to the FBI. Vicki did not explicitly explain why this was “one of the most distressing moments in [her] life,” but my conjecture is it was because Vicki experienced a break in trust. The library of women’s history was more deeply entwined with surveillance systems than Vicki imagined. FBI documents show that Schlesinger librarians had a copy of the “Weatherman Album,” which was disseminated internationally. The librarians used this interesting rendition of the photo album genre to identify Vicki as an individual the FBI was interested in. Yet, when the FBI went to arrest Vicki in Atlanta (using the address supplied to them by the Schlesinger), they did not seem to have an image of what she looked like. After aggressively entering her house, the FBI agents asked Vicki if Vicki Gabriner was home.

After Vicki’s stories of FBI memo cataloging and her arrest, we laughed about the irony that Vicki’s entanglement with the FBI will come full circle. She chose to leave her papers to Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library. Her story is a reminder that academic institutions are closely connected with other institutions of great power. University archives are spaces of interaction with the past, but research and access to documents reflect present politics. Vicki was interested

in Susan B. Anthony in a search for a feminist genealogy. I have combed the ALFA archive in a similar searching. The ALFA collection, unlike the majority of Sallie Bingham Center documents, is kept onsite because it is in such frequent use. The documents produced and collected by ALFA in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s have been compelling resources to current scholars of feminism and social movements.

Through diverse means, I learned different aspect of Vicki's personal history and activist experiences. The archival research focused on ALFA. It explored and returned to a specific time and place. Vicki and I were both encountering a younger Vicki in the throes of lesbian feminist activism and entanglements with the FBI. The life history interview was also exploratory and collaborative. It was a second engagement with Vicki's repertoire, and it moved chronologically. Through the FBI documents we explored together another form of preservation. The FBI's audio and textual record are affective in ways similar to the ALFA archives. Yet, one also learned about the experiences and frustrations of informants and investigators. While Vicki holds the copy of her FBI file, originals sit in FBI storage and servers unredacted. Are there individuals attending to those documents as I have poured over them and the ALFA archive?

Throughout our research, Vicki conveyed the distressing effects and affects of being watched and listened to by the FBI. She also described pride, or *nachas* in Yiddish, she felt in watching my growth, my academic pursuits, and my interest in her activist past. Halfway through our interview, Vicki said, "Let me just say something right here. For me, one of the most extraordinary experiences in this process of talking about this – is talking about it to you. You who I saw emerge from your mother's body and then we hung out together. You changed my life because you loved me and I loved you."<sup>366</sup> Our interview was imbued with emotion and a play

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<sup>366</sup> Vicki Gabriner, interview by author, SOHP Collection, U-1072, March 8, 2014.

with the traditional oral history dynamic. Yet, we could only push the narrator/researcher roles so far. In the life history interview, our roles remained more fixed than in our archival work. In both methods, we shared an intimacy across institutional frames. We put into practice ideas about the limits and possibilities of queering archival spaces and digital collections. For Vicki, it was a moment of mothering, an affective connection with both the documents and with me. For me, it was a moment of reckoning with the desire to record and to preserve. Our collaboration emphasizes the role of lesbian feminists in the South in discussions of feminism and radical lesbian archives. It produced queer methods unique to our relationship, but exciting in a general way that I hope can expand conversations of queer intergenerationality and queering the archive.

At each level of archival and oral history research, our study was both a physical act and a temporal project. I have sought to deepen my connection to Vicki through documents, through listening, and through imagining her in other times. In our collaboration, archival documents and digital wav files have produced moments of return. Archival and aural return are forms of time travel in which one experiences the past in the present. Through ears, eyes, and hands, the moment of the recording is recalled. In the archives, one is always leaving and arriving in terms of presence with the documents, ephemera, and the memories tied to them. Our visit to the archives was carried out both as an act of love with all its attending fears of mortality and incommunicability. It is further a political act as we utilize the lesbian feminist archive as a space to build a transmission of queer histories.

Engaging with the oral and textual record, my exploration of methods has centered on listening and intimacy. Simultaneously, governmental and academic institutions have framed this inquiry. Vicki's story makes evident the overlaps between New Left and lesbian feminist activism. Her activism with the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance was concurrent with her

struggles with a COINTELPRO-era prosecution. Through wiretaps and transcription, the FBI created material objects out of fleeting conversations. In Vicki's pre-sentencing statement, she wrote out the words she sounded in the courtroom. Collecting Civil Rights documents in the rural South, Vicki was on both sides of the process of amassing material. She has been interviewee and interviewer, document donor and collector. Our work offered me opportunities to explore the dynamic corporeal and temporal elements of these complex layers of trace leaving. My hope is that the repetitions and reproductions of our methods generate creative and embodied transfers of knowledge that recognize and articulate the multiple spatial and scalar dimensions of recollection.

## Coda

In this dissertation, I have explored a very personal inquiry into queer methodological tools and the mediums of aggregating the past. As it progressed, the dissertation became a journey, an assemblage of histories of activism and trauma, and a vessel for the loss and future loss of those close to me.

In Part I, I studied visual art because of its quiet way of transmitting experience. The room in my grandparents' house was a shifting space: a playroom, a TV room, a room for the kids to go during family gatherings. As an adult, I began to be curious about the room's curatorial dimensions. I noticed the way my grandparents' cared for the works, which they could have donated to a museum, but chose to keep close to them. Part II began as a way for me to contextualize the relationship between Hana and Edgar and my mothers. I wanted to spend more time with questions of queer family-making. I wanted to learn more about the ways in which Boston's "lesbian baby boom" was historically situated. My oral history work in Part II became a way to gather political and social histories of activism in Boston. It also challenged the norms of queer oral history. While I was a queer interviewer meeting and interviewing queer subjects, I was also a product of the stories they told. I had my own childhood memories of some historical moments interviewees noted. In Part III, I delved into Vicki's history of being wiretapped and spent time learning 1970s lesbian feminism in Atlanta. I was interested in how that sonic moment of re-listening to the wiretap recordings reverberated in our oral history work and our ongoing dialogue over the phone. Our conversations in Duke's archives, over Vicki's personal papers, and amongst her FBI files offered a juxtapositional method for addressing queer archives. In this Part, oral history, archives, and state surveillance overlapped.



My goal in this dissertation has been to model how deep queer attachments across biological and non-biological relation offer insight into the workings of memory transmission. Part III puts into practice the ideas of relationality, dubbed “chosen family,” that were generated through dialogue in the 1980s and discussed in Part II. My connection to Vicki sits in juxtaposition to my relationship with Dani, Hana, and Edgar, with whom I share genetic material. Each form of queer relation is connected to Jewish immigrant experiences and grounded in memory transmission’s ephemerality.

The compulsion to save, as I have discussed, is always framed by death and deterioration. Archiving is in many ways a rescuing from the home. Queer archival practice has often sought to maintain the quotidian elements of home spaces and personal effects of queer living/dying. Oral history and archives are projects of intergenerational exchange invested in a trans-temporal collaboration. Archival preservation is done in hopes of an afterlife, a transmission of information from one generation to the next. In oral history, a younger generation seeks similarly for a passing down of memory. These methods are acts of mourning, as they call up the stories of



**Figure 4. 1**

the dead and plan ahead for the loss of the interviewee or archival subject.

On a sweltering June afternoon in 2014, I went to Vicki’s house on a research trip. She was preparing her home archive for donation and the living room was filled with documents from a life in activism. There was memorabilia from voter rights campaigns in West Tennessee, photographs of protests against the Vietnam War, memos from the Georgia campaign for the ERA, benefit flyers for her legal battle against

allegations of Weathermen conspiracy, clippings about lesbian feminists and COINTELPRO, and FBI documents. In her very hot second floor apartment in Brookline, MA, we looked through this accumulation of varied documents and ephemera. Resting on top of a stack of redacted FBI texts, was a picture of a bloody, crying baby. It was familiar to me—it was my birth photo. The intermixing of this personal photograph with political files drove home for me the ways in which birth and death are present in the archive.

We looked at her personal archive at an interstitial moment. Vicki was preparing her papers for submission to the Schlesinger Library. As I looked at the crying baby, I wondered if this birth photograph would go along to the archives. I wondered if it would be considered historically or politically pertinent, an object for future generations to study, or if it would stay in the home. On the one hand, I thought my birth photo fits well into the political archive because of my quite literal participation in the “lesbian baby boom.” On the other hand, was this an object that you keep close, to refer back to, or to just have? Vicki had been in the delivery room that day. My mothers’ friend Claire had, so I’m told, shouted out “it’s a girl.” This birth image marks a landmark moment in both their lives. How could these layers of accreted meaning be shared with future researchers through the visual object? The photo only shows a crying baby.

When Vicki’s first round of donations went to Harvard, this image did not go along. It stayed in their house. When I asked her about it over the phone, she had to check and see where the image was. It had remained in the living room.

Now, as emerging Parkinson’s symptoms have eclipsed Vicki’s blood cancer, it is time for the rest of her materials to be donated. This time the question of what will go in the archive is not entirely in her hands. This responsibility has fallen to her wife and her friends. At one point, Marcy called me to let me know that the rest of Vicki’s stuff was going to the archives. Did I

want to come see and participate in figuring out what was being donated? Bringing everything full circle, the question I had considered remotely became something quite tangible. Would I give Vicki's framed copy of my birth photo to the archive? And not just any archive, the archive that had forced Vicki to negotiate the distressing realities of FBI surveillance and jurisprudence?

Marcy's call brought up the complexities of personal research. My academic mind ran through the work I had left to do in Part III. I knew Vicki's objects would not be accessible for a few months while they were being "processed." And eventually, they would join the first round of her donations in their "offsite" home. But I pivoted simultaneously to the sadness of the call. Our collaborative work had only been possible for a few years. The shipping off of "the rest of the stuff" of Vicki's political life marked her own mortality and an impending loss. You can't take it with you.

Inheritance is, as I have discussed, not just a question of biology or relation. It is a legal construct and a cultural construct. In the meting out of who gets what, the ideals of "chosen family" have material consequences. While I have joked that I am "everybody's baby," this comes with responsibilities of care. When my mothers made their wills during my childhood, they put Vicki as our guardian in the event that both mothers passed. She was encoded in the law as a caretaker of my sister and me. I knew this as a child. I also understood how cross-adoption, which my mothers completed in 1993, codified the familial structure I knew. This points to the ways in which laws have shaped queer relation and queer relation has shaped the law. But all this is to say, even as the strictures of "nuclear family" remain stable within the families of the "lesbian baby boom," the networks of care they built leaves the next (queer) generation with distinct commitments.

The next Part of this dissertation project, this labor of love, is to fulfill an obligation of care. It is to care for those who loved me and, oddly, for their stuff and its “aesthetic inheritances.” Modalities of queer archiving push back against a dichotomous view of home/archives. The objects of queer experience are not inside *or* outside the archive. They exist in both. As such, I hope to give the birth photo, Vicki’s copy that is, to the archives. I have another copy and I will keep that one for myself. This continues the politic of collaboration Vicki and I began, in which we put our relationship on the record. When Vicki emphasized the importance of our relationship during our first SOHP interview, she was bringing our affective tie into the archive and putting the “lesbian baby boom” in juxtaposition with her ALFA years.

Putting Vicki’s copy of my birth photo into the archives would build on existing archival records of lesbian birth photographs. In my research at the Northeastern University Archives with Marcy, we combed through *GCN* weekly issues from the 1980s in search of classifieds about sperm donation and of a collective birth announcement she remembered. We could not find it, but this story of a group lesbian baby announcement in *GCN* recurred in my oral history interviews. As Helen Raizen remembered it, her lesbian pregnancy support group took out an advertisement together in 1987. “We took a picture of all seven babies when they were born and published it, as a birth announcement, in *GCN*.”<sup>367</sup> We discussed the excitement of that moment and the ripple effect the lesbian birth photo had in gay and lesbian publications. It put the “stroller brigade” into textual circulation at the same time that the queer paper was marked by AIDS-related obituaries. Yet, there is an irony that I could not find that particular edition of *GCN*. Particularly that I could not find it with my own mother looking with me at my side. As I have argued in this dissertation, this ephemerality matters to the assemblage of queer archives.

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<sup>367</sup> Helen Raizen, interview by author, June 25, 2017.

Moments of birth and death, issues of inheritance and ephemerality, reverberate throughout each Part of this dissertation. The project begins with the dismantling of my grandparents' home art installation of many decades. In 2016, the house was sold. The structure was bulldozed with 21<sup>st</sup> century suburban structures ready to fill its sizeable lot. The art lost its hub, but it continued for another year to serve as a comfort or a familiar haunting for my grandfather in his last year. Now the art collection is neither in an archive nor a home exhibit. Its cohesiveness has been undone. This is not to say that the accreted meaning held by these dense visual memory objects is gone. But it shifts. Installations are temporary by definition. My grandparents' curatorial work of their art collection will not continue with future generations.

This distinction separates Part I from Part II and III. For the latter two, mourning is incomplete. The loss is yet to come. Yet, what I have sought to make visceral in this project is the feeling of conducting history when familial loss is impending.

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This dissertation has been my genre of return, my attempt to get closer to an "aesthetic inheritance," and most definitely a way to process my own internalized homophobia. As I note in the dissertation, I share with interviewees skills in circumvention. Starting in third grade, I found ways around conversations that would reveal that I had lesbian moms. When I came into adolescence, leaving my confident tomboy self, I did not address my queer household when I could omit it. Now I have written a dissertation that spends time thinking about what was at stake in queer forms of relation. To do this work, I have drawn on personal experience and this has brought my familial structure into everyday conversation in academic and personal circles.

When asked by an innocent passerby about my work, I surprised the inquirer with a complicated and personal genealogy of queer juxtapositions. In these conversations, I was

coming out for myself and for my moms. In Jewish contexts, I was coming out about my criticisms of Zionism. In gay contexts, I was coming out about criticisms of equality-oriented gay politics. In women's history contexts, I was coming out as critical of feminist archival institutions. So this project has propelled me away from that circumventing impulse. And pushed me to practice a politic of vulnerability. For every positive response I received from the person who asks the question, there were a dozen people who rocked back on their heels and made it clear that this information was too messy, too much.

The repetition of this conversation and the recursive process of writing about personal connections sit within the larger project of memory transmission. I trace affective life across visual art, oral history, and archival materials. I spend time complicating concepts of memory, generation, and archive. And I contend with how I will share the historical and traumatic moments I have grappled with beyond the lives of those I chronicle.

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To fields of interdisciplinary inquiry, my methodological contribution has been both in style and in content. I have chosen to work in long form. The Parts structure gives more space, more air to the nuanced and interdisciplinary questions of the project. Much like how I chose oral history over journalism, the life history over the sound bite, I chose Parts instead of chapter formatting. I did this because I believe in the long story. In order to build interdisciplinary conversations and make interventions in method and historical content, I needed to give the project room. I hope other scholars will work in this direction, against the grain of hyper-consolidated arguments. What can the long form do for interdisciplinary aims, if we let it?

Across the three Parts of this dissertation, I have pulled three threads of curation, radicality, and queer ways of being. In closing, I want to re-draw the connections the layering of

Parts has allowed. Curation, primarily a tool of memory transmission discussed in Part I, cuts through each section of the dissertation. In Part I, I argued my grandparents' curatorial practices were informed by their life experiences from Prague to Haifa to Boston. In Part II, I curated a collection of oral history and documented the ways in which queer familial connections were imagined during the "lesbian baby boom." One moment of curation in this Part occurred when lesbian mothers in Cambridge created the "What Makes A Family" photography exhibit at an elementary school. The perceived publicness of this curation caused neighborhood uproar in the 1990s. This exhibit reiterated the poignancy of visual narrative tools. In Part III, I began my analysis of oral history as a queer practice with Cruising Hialeah. This sonic curation both mourned José Muñoz and built connections between the Cuban-American thinker and geographies of queer Miami. This moment reminded us that curation is closely tied to loss. Curation or the act of assembling public and private art shares an etymological root with cure. They come from Latin *cura* denoting care and heed. It is a root taken up in language of the Church (curate) and often carries a double-edged connotation of guardianship and management. As Azoulay asserts, curation is a technology of state power. It could be argued it creates more pain than it heals. Curation always brings up questions of ownership and belonging. In this work, I have tried to be the guardian of a body of research, to handle with care. As a historian, my work is to move private experience into public arenas. This process does not occur without marked loss and potential harm. The project's attention to state surveillance, especially in Part III, drives home the ways in which curating information can be a troubling endeavor.

The second thread I want to return to here at the end is that of radicalness. Radical is not a term I use often in this dissertation. But maybe it should be. I begin with the work of shifting third generation scholarship towards addressing state violence in Israel. This is not a common

move in Holocaust studies. It could be considered radical. In Part I, artists risked their lives to document Nazi violence and there is something unusual, possibly radical in the decision of my great-grandmother to save and smuggle such works. Palestinian artists took on the work of documenting Israeli violence and the conditions of forced exile. Throughout Part I, there are histories of radical movements, both artistic and political. There are also the tender and radical attachments formed between my grandparents and I, which occurred in the same era they were beginning to talk publicly about their traumatic war experiences. In Part II, there is a radical rethinking of biological belonging. The investments in our culture to that genetic tie are so strong, to argue against its logic and its overdeterminancy is radical. I am critical of the work of the Lesbians Choosing Children Network and language I heard during the interviews that framed lesbian families as the same as straight families. I firmly believe being raised by two mothers shifted my experience of the world in significant ways. The children of lesbian and trans parents are not ‘just like’ the children of heterosexual, cis parents. Our experiences are informed by different understandings of biology, generation, gender, and queerness. This assertion remains, in many ways, radical. In Part II, the political movements that interviewees were involved in prior to having babies were radically intent on changing abortion prohibition, restricted access to women’s health, entrenched racial segregation, continued US policies of war, and pervasive homophobic cultures. In Part III, it is clear that radicality is intimately tied with state surveillance. Radical feminism informed the creation of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance and the work of Vicki, Lorraine, and Claudette both during and after their ALFA years. The histories of lesbian activism in the 1970s remains understudied and the work of Part III to situate this history both on the softball field and as a part of longer trajectories of organizing offered important contributions to histories of the left. Part II and III drove home the ways in which the



Old Left and New Left were entwined. Vicki was deeply influenced by the Rosenberg trial. Interviewees in Part II discussed being raised as red diaper babies. Cuba arose throughout the dissertation as a focal point of radical histories. It was, for example, where Vicki met the women she formed ALFA with. As a scholar in American Studies, I am not surprised that Cuba was a frequent specter in this very US-centered project. Finally, my goals in Part III were to experiment with historical method and the genre of oral history. This work pushed radically on established ways of writing history and utilized temporality as a tool that undoes biological belonging, historicity, and my own mourning process.

Unlike radical, queer is a term that does appear frequently in this dissertation. I use it to describe the intergenerational work of the project. I use queer to describe myself, to designate my historical methods, and to mark the memory work therein. This dissertation's attention to queer ways of being has offered contributions to the multiple fields that utilize "queer" as a coalescing term. Queer theory, queer history, and queer oral history are each distinct, but they are aligned in their investments to rethinking the norms of their fields. Here are a few contributions *Nobody's Baby* brings to queer thought. This project offers a new way to think about "queer intergenerationality." Rather than a link between queer subjects of different eras found outside the home, I present the term as an intra-familial concept. I offer a version of "queer methods" that, while very particular to my experience, has potential for other queer historians. I bring radical lesbian activists to the archives *and* I emphasize the importance of Southern iterations of queer archives. I reframe assumptions of queer oral history. I push back on the framing notion of this emergent subfield is that the interviewer and interviewee share experiences of familial homophobia and coming out. I share experiences with interviewees as queer but also as an individual with childhood memories of histories discussed. While

problematizing biological belonging, I spend time thinking about donor experience in lesbian and trans reproduction. I argue there is a queerness in this connection. Building on works of “queer diaspora,” I put pressure on the concept of generation as it is used in memory and trauma studies. But I simultaneously put pressure on “queer diaspora” which is premised on the straightness of home. I delineate these contributions to queer scholarship because I have chosen in the dissertation to take a decidedly meandering approach. I want the reader to get lost, but not adrift, in the questions of memory, archive, and generation I invoke. My style is not often declarative, but through repetition and a circuitous telling I transmitted the core tenets of my dissertation.

Sensory experience of each Part is an important final thread to delineate. In Part I, Hana and Edgar touch the walls of their house in a visceral way. In Part II, interviews were in homes, offices, and outdoor spaces. When I got home from my research trip to Boston, I transcribed and excerpted portions of each interview. I curated or collated moments of each interview into a narrative. In this work, the moment of the interview viscerally returned in my ear buds and in the space of my own home. I listened. I moved the WAV files to hard drives and turned paper consent forms into digital documents. In each Part, I spent time in the archives and touched documents that had been sitting in folders, in boxes, for who knows how long. In Part III, my work with Vicki in the archive evoked the senses. As Vicki unfurled the ALFA banner, the smell expanded out through the space of the reading room. While I recoiled in embarrassment, Vicki did not. This likely speaks to our generational differences. She learned in the 1960s and 1970s to be outspoken. In the 1990s and 2000s I did not learn the same militancy. Across each Part, there were moments that drew on sensory experiences and the haptic work of research. As I carry this

project forward, I am eager to explore more embodied forms of writing as well as more embodied avenues for sharing history.

*Nobody's Baby* is a project I created to tell history through juxtaposition and to forefront a respect for what does not pass on. I would like it to be used in research on lesbian activism, on intergenerational memory projects, on Jewish immigrant experience, and on mediations of method. I place myself at the center of this work and I have looked primarily at relationships between older and younger queer generations. But there is so much more to say about dialogue within generation. "Queer intra-generationality" in the context of this project would center the doubling dimensions of the ties between my sister Dory and myself. As I navigated being the queer child of lesbian mothers, my sister was also navigating the same schools and scenarios in a parallel fashion. Our differing experiences of donor-daughter dynamics and our shared attachments to Vicki, Claire, and the rest of our mothers' close friends created reverberations throughout this project. We have informed each other's "queer intergenerational thinking" through short and long form conversations, over text and on long drives. It is funny because her name has now become a cultural referent to the (queer) forgetting fish in *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*. But Dory has been a key interlocutor for this memory work. I hope that the reader has been able to find Dory throughout this project. I also hope the reader has been able to carry us through losing Vicki. The multidirectionality of generational affect, queer and otherwise, is the glue of this work. Visual, sonic, and textual forms of remembering are filtered through queer familial bonds and the work of forgetting is given its due.

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### **Oral History Interviews**

#### **Part I**

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#### **Part II**

Bishop, Holly. Personal Interview. June 26 2017.

Cischke, Jay. Personal Interview. June 27 2017.

Coleman, Alex. Personal Interview. June 23 2017.

Coolidge, Liz. Personal Interview. June 22 2017.

Kagan, Marcy. Personal Interview. June 26 and 27 2017.

Kauffman, Joyce. Personal Interview. June 22 2017.

Gelfand, Judy. Personal Interview. June 24 2017.

Gonzalez, Lillian. Personal Interview. June 27 2017.

MacDonald, Kathy. Personal Interview. June 25 2017.

Nelson, Carol. Personal Interview. June 25 2017.

Posner, Marjorie. Personal Interview. June 25 2017.

Raizen, Helen. Personal Interview. June 25 2017.

Ruthchild, Rochelle. Personal Interview. June 26 2017.

Schaffer, Cheryl. Personal Interview. June 26 2017.

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### Part III

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