In the Stacks of Barbara Godard

or

Do Not Confuse the Complexity of This Moment with Chaos

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How we choose to remember is as significant as what we recall. (Godard, "Contested Memories" 7)

Barbara Godard first appeared in my library office doorway a year and a few months before her death in May 2010. She was in remission from cancer, but had retired from York University and was trying to sort out her home before her son Alexis moved in with her. She needed to make space because, as I was soon to discover, every available piece of wall, closet, and storage in her narrow Victorian home in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood had been completely overrun by her books and attendant papers: newspaper clippings, exhibition catalogues, programs, correspondence, student papers, meeting minutes, and working drafts of her own work.

She had ostensibly come to talk to me about digitizing *Tessera*, a project our Digital Initiatives unit would complete six months later, but at the end of our conversation, she offered to donate a few books she was carrying in her bag to York Libraries. She mentioned her home library and the difficulties she thought she might have in paring it down to a more manageable size, and I offhandedly offered to lend a hand sometime, wondering what sort of treasures and oddities might be found in the library of one of Canada's foremost feminist literary scholars.

Over the next few months, every time I saw Barbara she would hand me a book or two from her personal library, again to donate to York Libraries. It was only after a few months of

these gifts that I realized she intended to donate a large part of her collection to us, seemingly one item at a time. I hastily suggested the benefits (for both of us) of donating everything at once, and she invited me down to Major Street to take a look at the collection. What followed was a transformative, fascinating, sometimes sad, and sometimes frustrating experience for me as the librarian fortunate enough to find herself in the thick of Barbara's personal and idiosyncratic library.

Barbara's collection was large, loosely organized, and interspersed throughout her house. Although she had been working closely with our archivists in the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections in collating her personal fonds and the *Tessera* fonds for over a decade, in her personal library she had not yet been asked to collude with institutional practices and, as such, her books were jammed full of notes and photocopies, and the papers of colleagues and students were tucked in-between them, connected in ways perhaps only clear to Barbara herself.

We tend to distinguish between books and papers in libraries and archives. We house them separately and have significantly different processes for arrangement and description. Barbara maintained no such institutional illusions and in one glance, her collection made visible and material the intertextual and the dialogic, as well as the historical palimpsest of her own thinking.

Upon further examination, the collection revealed a vision of community as well. Her library/archive embodies a material web of connections between writers, artists, filmmakers, editors, translators, and academics engaged in various forms of feminist cultural production and activism. And thus began a process that would rapidly turn into a project that raised larger intellectual questions about feminist history, feminist archives, and archival theory. The acquisition of her collection allows us, as do other feminist archives and collections, to confront

the reality of libraries and archives as sites of a hegemonic rationalization that excludes certain forms of lived experience and fixes others into place. "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory," as Derrida says in *Archive Fever* (4). At the same time, libraries and archives may also be approached as places integral to the destabilization of subjects. As Barbara herself said in "Contested Memories: Canadian Women Writers in and out of the Archive,"

A physical site, the archive is not only an institutional space enclosing the material traces of the past, but also an imaginative site and a conceptual space of changing limits. As both noun and verb, both what is preserved and gathered and the simultaneous action of its gathering, the archive amplifies the dialectic of the operations in this space that confers order in creating a system of classification. (10)

Barbara's collection demands that we interrogate the particular archival challenges posed by it and ask ourselves whether these seemingly logistical issues cast a unique light upon the hegemonic nature of our technologies of organization, access, and preservation. As a feminist I wonder how the archivization of this collection might also destabilize the subject in as much as it fixes the collector into place and assures her legacy? As a practitioner, I hope to make institutional or professional change as a result of such reflection. I don't know that Barbara intended for me to ask these questions or not, but I like to think she would be pleased to know that her collection made such interrogation possible.

More specifically, in her library, we see a resistance to the ways in which our ordering schemas work to disrupt the intertextual relationships carefully uncovered and preserved by the collector. Also, as we struggle to absorb and manage her eight thousand volumes and many metres of paper records, I see a particular problem with the ways in which the archival tradition

of emphasizing the provenance of the material buries the connections not only between a whole constellation of texts but also among the web of relationships in feminist communities. In fixing one context for her books and papers, all the other possible contexts are broken. In attempting to process her sprawling, delightfully textually promiscuous collection—and in so doing also document the network of Canadian feminist cultural production of which she was an integral node—the ways in which our technologies of archivization form an oddly rigid disciplinary system become clear. Archival systems actively collude in making statements inert, and as Foucault reminds us in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, the archive may govern enunciability itself (129). My postscript to this Festschrift in honour of Barbara Godard will therefore attempt to resuscitate this collection by describing both our acquisition of it and our struggles to absorb it into the larger Library. Finally, I will attempt to elaborate upon some of the issues for feminist archivization raised by the Godard library. It is my hope that my story will inspire scholars to visit and engage with Barbara's mysterious, bursting texts full of cryptic notes and various academic and cultural ephemera and, in so doing, formulate new enunciations.

The House

She talks and cities move behind her as on a screen with words and a lot of women walking at a good pace so that they can reach a life of their own in this world. (Brossard)

When I visited Barbara's home in the Annex, I was delighted to receive a personally guided tour through her space. We began on the second floor, where she had a large room devoted to reading, lined with her theory books, art books, and her Québécois collection. Next we visited the attic, where she kept her desk and computer, and there I found two rooms lined with

Canadiana. The basement was half-lined with books on translation and post-colonial and race theory, various fiction and poetry. This description sounds very tidy, however, and doesn't do justice to the visceral impact of her space, which was utterly overwhelming. There were piles of books and papers on the floor, and photocopied journal articles, news clippings, and student papers jammed between and inside the books on the shelves like feathers about to lift the whole collection to some alternate space. Being there felt like being inside a conversation with Barbara, never sure what was related to what, trying to find patterns and connections in a seemingly endless barrage of information organized around a central core of feminist cultural activism and production, but sometimes only in the most esoteric of ways. A mind and a collection always in a process of becoming, never finding an end point. Resisting end points. One might open a closet door and find the closet lined with books. One might take a book off the shelf, only to find a row of books lined behind the first row. One might worry that there was another row behind the second. One might have walked into Borges' Library of Babel. One might wonder what kind of karmic punishment it was to be the librarian whose job it was to sort all this out.

Adding to the confusion, Barbara talked throughout the tour, alternating between descriptions of her struggles to keep trees from being cut down in the Annex, her plans for where her son's belongings might go, and explanations of why she had particular items in the collection. I was struck, as I moved through the space with her at my side, at the sheer volume of people she knew, seemingly every editor at every feminist press, every feminist journal, dealers/owners at various specialized bookstores, librarians, archivists, and library staff, literary scholars, feminist scholars, poets, filmmakers, writers, artists. The tour and the contents of the collection itself, as I will describe shortly, made manifest for me the Canadian feminist cultural and political community of which we were both a part, and the ways in which Barbara had

collected the production of this community through the assemblage and curation of her personal library and archive.

Once I left her house that day, and after I had had a rather stiff drink, I began planning to go back into the house with a camera and/or a filmmaker, and perhaps some other academics who might ask different questions of her than I had—but Barbara died unexpectedly a month later, before I could make the arrangements.

The Acquisition Process

It was clear when I first revisited the house after her death that we would not be able to absorb Barbara's complete collection. Aside from the fact that many of her books were duplicated within our own collection, we struggle with limiting space constraints. However, Barbara's son Alexis very generously agreed to fund Jay MillAr (noted Toronto-based experimental poet, book publisher, antiquarian dealer, York alumni, and librarian) to complete an inventory of the collection, while simultaneously looking for items that could be placed in the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections and, of course, boxing up the books as he got through them. This project took a long time and eventually, at Alexis's request, we boxed up the rest of the still un-inventoried collection and papers and brought them up to York, where MillAr continued his work and then several student assistants after him. Our criteria for keeping books were developed by archivist Anna St. Onge, in conjunction with myself, and were as follows:

Books that are:

- rare (first editions, signed, and/or including ephemera)
- heavily annotated by Barbara
- formative to her thinking (i.e., her collection of fine editions of works by Cixous)

- representative of her scholarly and/or political "reach" (i.e., internationally published journals or anthologies with articles by Barbara included)
- not duplicated in our circulating collection, or additional copy needed

In all cases materials from the Godard collection are catalogued with a special note attached to the bibliographic record indicating provenance of the item. MillAr also attempted in his inventory to keep track of the original spatial order of her collection: Where were items kept in the house? Which room? Or, in some cases, as part of what subject area? He also indicated if any associated ephemera were tucked inside particular books. The purpose of this unusually detailed inventory is to help future researchers get a sense of the web of connections that Barbara herself may have been trying to make in organizing her books this way and, of course, to keep some sort of record of how she organized and spatialized her own collection. In this case we attempt to align at some level with the archival principle of original order defined as "the organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records" whose goal lies in "preserving relationships among the records and to respect the context in which the records came to be" (Millar 100). So where we cannot keep the whole library and all of its records, we have attempted to keep at least a partial record of what was there.

Why a Godard Collection? What's in There?

For 30 years, Barbara Godard has been a turning platform in the academic life, the literary and the activist life of Toronto. (Brossard)

Barbara's importance as a scholar and author is easy to uncover. One can point to her critical accomplishments in translation studies, for instance, or her many journal articles, her important translations, or even the way she effortlessly bridged various scholarly and poetic traditions, languages, and communities. However, what became increasingly clear after my visit with Barbara and subsequent sorting of the books and papers left behind was less the archive as a document of Barbara's legacy as a scholar—in some ways she seemed to resist organizing this particular set of material around herself as a central figure—but more like what Marlene Kadar calls an "epistolary constellation," which documents and draws a skein of connective tissue between particular kinds of feminist and literary cultural activism/production across a wideranging set of borders, materialities, and geographies ("An Epistolary" 103–13). Indeed many of Barbara's notes are, unfortunately, written on bits of tissue, tucked between pages of books, word traces resting on top of the print, fragile, perishable, ephemeral, but nonetheless stubbornly there, superimposing something new not over the text so much as beside it. In her collection we see papers or books from (now defunct) feminist or Canadian literary publishing houses, feminist journals, women's bookstores, photocopies and books by obscure women writers found at Library and Archives Canada (and from libraries across North America). We also have discovered theses, student papers, and published articles from present and former graduate students.

Our preliminary skim of Barbara's collection also reveals correspondence with writers and artists, signed first editions of novels and books of poetry by many contemporary experimental Canadian writers, exhibit catalogues and posters for avant-garde art shows, as well as ticket stubs and programs for showings of the works of feminist avant-garde filmmakers such as Barbara Sternberg and Cheryl Sourkes.

Of course one also finds in the book collection the range of interests and influences one might expect—a large collection of material by Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, and a collection of fine French editions of works by Hélène Cixous. We've also found tattered, underlined, and torn teaching copies of books by important feminist thinkers like Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, full of sticky notes, photocopied journal articles, news clippings, and tissue fragments with little notes scribbled upon them; these books are often bound together by elastic bands, clearly after intense engagement with the texts therein. Each of these books full of papers operates like a miniature archive in and of itself, an almost incomprehensible "inter-text," making material the ways in which the meaning of a text is constructed within different discursive formations.

And then there are the many waterlogged books—damaged, according to her son Alexis, from being placed behind the sink to read while washing dishes, or while falling asleep in the bathtub reading. One has the sense that Barbara, when alone, continued talking to her books, scribbling notes everywhere, continually and actively engaging with texts at even the most quotidian of moments. These moments themselves are documented as we also find notes in the books from her son's school or his soccer coach intermingled with meeting agendas and postcards from friends far and wide. In this collection we see the life of a working single academic mother unfolding before our eyes and wonder at how she juggled so much labour—dashing from classroom to committee meeting to parent—teacher interview to conferences, maintaining relationships all over the world—all the while stealing time for the focused reading and writing necessary to prepare her classes and write her many articles and presentations.

Other fragments noticed in the collection so far are the set of international anthologies with chapters by Barbara in many languages, evidence of her reach beyond Canadian borders.

Interestingly, we also find scholarly works sent to Barbara from academics working abroad with notes from the authors pleading with her to review the book for a Canadian journal, evidence of her role as an international feminist literary hub. We also find small collections of materials documenting feminist academic/cultural production in other countries, such as a radical feminist journal from Delhi, either gathered while she was there or sent to her in hopes that she could disseminate the word from her turning platform in Canada.

Feminist Archivization

Aside from the academic, cultural, and historical significance of the feminist constellation documented in Barbara's collection, attempting to grapple with Barbara's unique, stubborn approach to her own archivization needs to be considered through a feminist theoretical lens. In the later stages of her career, Barbara began teaching a graduate course called "Theorizing the Archive" at York University, while at the same time actively beginning to archive her own papers with the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections. In the introduction to the course syllabus she speaks to the archival turn in critical theory, our current societal obsession with memory, and how archival processes transform documents into monuments with symbolic function for the nation. She is interested in how digitization has renewed the utopian hope that all information can be captured and represented in some way, and suggests that therefore display has or will become the central preoccupation of the contemporary archive rather than accumulation and classification. Barbara notes that this shift leads to the processes of archivization going on display themselves. In adding films and novels with archivist characters to the course, she argues that archivists and archival processes are now as much the subject of cultural production as they are a part of the process of cultural production. For Barbara, this shift

makes increasingly visible the epistemological and ideological bases of selecting, ordering, and exhibiting material traces.³

Unsurprisingly then, given her intellectual engagement with theories of the archive, Barbara's own papers and library challenge our institutional practices in various ways and resist some of the ideologies underlying traditional practices. For instance, archivists struggle with the "flatness" of her papers—the way everything relates to everything—a flatness that reveals, perhaps, her refusal to organize her materials within any hierarchical epistemological schema that might fix subjectivity and relationships in rigid, finite ways. She resisted end points. The flatness of the records also challenges the archival principle of maintaining original order—archivists are forced to order the material themselves so as to store it and make it accessible somehow—which, of course, underscores their role as order-makers. As Derrida indicates in *Archive Fever*, the technologies of archivization produce the historical event as much as they store it (17). Barbara's archive renders that production more visible.

Her book collection vexes us in other ways. It was interesting, as the librarian working from within her collection, to discover that for Barbara, reading was an act of self-inscription ("Becoming My Hero" 142). Such self-inscription was a necessary feminist project if one was to escape one's father's library and become autonomous. And because archives organize books held in Special Collections by provenance as well as through standardized Library of Congress headings, Barbara has now written herself into the institutional library catalogue as well—she has invaded "the library fortress" ("Women of Letters" 258). Every bibliographic record for every item we kept from her collection, regardless of location in our library, has a note indicating the book came from Barbara's collection. The special items with notes and ephemera will be kept and collocated all together in our Special Collections vault. And while a collection of

damaged books full of uncatalogued papers is slightly unorthodox in institutional archives, it is certainly not unheard of, and our archivists wisely suggested, wherever possible, in keeping notes, clippings, and papers inside books as we found them, in keeping with both principles of original order and provenance. Provenance matters because

the archivist does not reorganize groups of archives by subject, chronology, geographic division or other criteria, [as] to do so would be to destroy the context in which the archival record came to be, diminishing the role of the creator and the relationships that person had with other people or agencies. (Millar 98–99)

These traditional principles allow us to keep the books full of notes and clippings intact so that future researchers can examine them—each one an open-ended archive in miniature, a set of corresponding inter-texts, each one also documenting how a reader wrote herself into the library.

However, this notion of a stable, centred subjectivity, emphasized by the principle of provenance, seems at war with feminist postmodern understandings of subjectivity as multiple and discursively produced. It does not capture that which constitutes the subject and assumes a certain unity. It ignores the collectivity of labour and the ways in which feminist collectivity empowers women to speak, to articulate one's own voice as Barbara herself described of the *Tessera* editorial collective (Cotnoir 12) The provocation posed by feminist understandings of subjectivity also challenges the archival belief that provenance does not affix meaning to materials. In her death should Barbara's library fix her identity forever into place? Is this collection only about Barbara? Who and what is lost if we consider this collection of materials solely as the record of one woman and her thinking? In privileging the individual record creator over other kinds of content and context in our ordering schemas, how do we provide access to the relationships or proximities that are produced through the collection? This emphasis on the

individual is particularly problematic when dealing with a collector who is understood to be a cultural and political turning platform, a dissemination mechanism in a larger feminist community. As Hope Olson indicates in her article examining the logic behind Library of Congress subject headings, all classification schemas are themselves socially embedded, gendered, and actively construct subjects ("How We Construct Subjects" 509). How does the archive collude in erasing communities and collectivity while rationalizing the subject?

Barbara herself once defined archives as "the words of others" (Letter to Kate Eichhorn). She studied with Barthes, who is known to have killed the Author. I feel haunted by these awarenesses now in my work. She also said of Marian Engel's representation of the archive in her novel. *The Bear*:

The information is fragmentary, written as brief notes on scraps of paper which are stuffed inside the books. Ever iterable, reproduceable, this is the promise of the archive, meaning which is never closed and open to the future, but which consequently undermines every form of order as it is contingently assembled from shards of the past. ("Contested Memories" 12)

Here she recognizes and celebrates the archival resistance to subject cataloging and the resulting open-endedness of meaning that this allows. It seems possible to extend this open-endedness to a reconsideration of provenance as constitutive of subjectivity in the archive and to begin to think how we might undermine or decentre these stable subjects gathered in our facilities. Typically, feminist archival research methodologies have been about locating the female subject, examining the subject position of the researcher, and interrogating and reclaiming authority for those voices excluded from the canon (Kadar, "Afterward" 116). There is room yet for work thinking through how we might rethink the subject in a feminist archival theory, which might insist upon both locating the female subject and destabilizing her at the same time. Certainly the emergence of the

digital archive shows great promise for opening up the closed stacks of the archive and making the texts that lie within fonds more accessible, visible, and infinitely re-order-able. It also heartens me to know that Barbara's collection will live in our archive alongside the fonds of Deborah Britzman, Kate Eichhorn, Didi Khayatt, Barbara Sternberg, Clara Thomas (to name just a few feminist thinkers in our collection), and to imagine the bridges that could be built across these collections and the epistemological ruptures that might ensue.

All told, I suspect that this collection, if explored, used, and reconnected to the wider community, will tell us as much or more about a certain kind of feminist activism and cultural production over the last thirty years than it does about Barbara herself. In reading Barbara's essay "Becoming My Hero, Becoming Myself," however, I was struck by the strangeness of my own positionality as a librarian, feminist, reader, and writer in this process. She talks in that paper about the ways in which women are able to speak to one another in and across texts. One might say that she writes about how she assembles her own library—and there I stood, day after day, in the middle of skimming her textual notes and, with my many colleagues, largely dismantling her library, so carefully and intimately gathered, attempting to translate its provocations and possibilities between archivists, librarians, staff, and scholars. I was distraught at times, to be a part of this process, while honoured and challenged by it at others. On the whole I feel quite fortunate to have had this expansive conversation with Barbara from inside her library, mostly posthumous though it has been. Despite my growing conviction that I need to decentre the creator from her collection, it is still useful to remember ""Walter Benjamin, who insists that only in extinction is the collector fully comprehended ("Unpacking my Library" 67). I feel certain somehow that many of us will benefit from continuing to try to comprehend Barbara, her work, and her collection/collective. As Brossard said, "she talks, and cities move

behind her." It is an intimate and haunting experience, not only to use an archive but to be a part of its absorption into a public institution and in so doing make public what was once private.

Despite her extinction, or perhaps strangely because of it, I can't help but feel touched by the collector.

Notes

- For an inventory of the Godard fonds, see the finding aid at:
 http://archivesfa.library.yorku.ca/fonds/ON00370-f0000236.htm.
- 2. Acquiring, organizing, and preserving Barbara's collection was possible only because of the collective labour of many people across many of the York University Libraries' departments and beyond. Particular thanks need to be given to all of the archivists in the Clara Thomas Archives, and especially Anna St. Onge, whose assistance and guidance was crucial at the outset of the project and throughout. Karen Cassel, manager of Monograph Acquisitions, went through every one of eight thousand titles brought from the house on Major Street. Paul Harrison and his staff in Shipping carried dozens of boxes up and down stairs in Barbara's house to bring them to us. Jay MillAr's work in a hot attic for many weeks established best practice for our student workers to follow later in the project. Bobby Noble, Kate Eichhorn, Philip Kiff, and Jackie Buxton were invaluable external collaborators throughout. Catherine Davidson, associate university librarian (Research and Collections) and Michael Moir, university archivist, funded the student staff who worked on the project. And lastly, none of this work would have been possible without the generosity and patience of Alexis Godard and his partner Melissa Dagleish.

3. Archivists themselves have debated these issues at length. As Terry Cook reminds us, archives have their historical origin as record-keepers for the state "as part of the state's hierarchical structure and organizational culture. Archival science not surprisingly found its early legitimization in statist theories and models, and from the study of the character and properties of older state records" ("Archival Science" 18). Summarizing Ketelaar, he suggests that the twenty-first-century archive must transform itself into archives for the people, of the people, perhaps even by the people, and notes as well the tension between postmodernist thinkers and their questioning of meta-narratives and archival theory's positivism, which embraces concepts such as "universality, logical autonomy, interiorization, and anti-historicity" ("Archival Science" 18). Cook would like us to work harder to make transparent the ways in which archival appraisal, arrangement, and description is an act of historically and socially situated interpretation and narration ("Fashionable Nonsense" 28). Other archivists disagree with a postmodern approach to archives and continue to insist on the evidentiary role of the archive for many reasons, including the contradictory possibility of both the establishment and destabilization of subjectivity and identity made possible by the preservation of records that contradict dominant meta-narratives (Hardiman 36).

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