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Imagining the Archive: Documenting GABRIELA Network an activist Filipina women's organization

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Imagining the Archive

DOCUMENTING GABRIELA NETWORK, AN ACTIVIST FILIPINA WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

BY REBECCA DEAN

At the 2009 Thinking Gender Conference, I was not the only person struck with the feverish plague known as “archive fever.” As famously theorized by Jacques Derrida, the condition of archive fever makes us more alert to our compulsion to store the past and also, more importantly, to consider the relationship of the archive to the future. For Derrida, the archive “is a question of the future, a question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.”¹ Documenting GABRIELA Network, an activist

1. Derrida, J., & Prenowitz, E. (1998). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (p. 36). University of Chicago Press.

Filipina women’s organization, has provided me with many lessons, most especially the role of imagining the archives. The process of imagining is to redefine and develop the notion of the archive for the future in order to meet the goals of feminist struggle. What I quickly observed at the conference panel aptly titled “Lost and Found,” was that scholars from film and media studies were well advanced at reinterpreting the meaning of the archive, repertoire, and narrative.

As an archivist I am just as concerned about what the archive will contain, as I am with how the archive will change and shape our interactions with the past and future. The memory that

is being kept through text and traces of women’s organizing, film, and repertoire is novel to the world of archives that has for so long only concerned itself with the official documents and correspondence of high power entities and individuals. Organizational memory such as those like GABNet’s is a part of contextualizing feminist knowledge production and re-writing history.

Thinking Gender 2009 was an open platform for this type of feminist history making. Tess L. Takahashi has recognized a “deluge of ‘imaginary’ archives” produced by artists and critics, including a recent set of contributions in the jour-

nal *Camera Obscura* where authors were asked to fantasize, imagine, and speculate an archive of the future. Takahashi writes, “These imaginary archives often envision unrecorded pasts, produce other means of legitimizing information, make old systems signify differently, and imagine as yet undetermined futures through the evocation of everyday people’s personal experiences.”²

The archive as a feverish imaginative project has illuminated its power as irony, new meaning, women’s organizing, and narratives of desperation. In this view, *Thinking Gender* offered an inquiry into the concept and symbols that the archive represents in relation to feminist knowledge production. Such a view can supply further applications to research on gender. In other words, I hope that the various archival projects explored at *Thinking Gender* 2009 inspire future imagining, speculation, and deconstruction of the archives we encounter in our scholarship and activism on gender and sexuality.

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² Takahashi, T. (2007). “The Imaginary Archive: Current Practice.” *Camera Obscura* 22(3): 179.