Introduction

When I first heard Le Tigre perform “Keep on Livin’” at the 2001 Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, it was as though the writing of this book had come full circle, since one of its starting points was a performance by Tribe 8 on the same stage in 1994. In connecting the experience of living with a history of sexual abuse to the difficulties of coming out, songwriters Kathleen Hanna and JD Samson credit as one of their influences the article I wrote about Tribe 8’s 1994 performance, an article that formed the nucleus of this book, and they dedicated their Michigan performance of the song to Tribe 8’s Lynn Breedlove. Even without those associations, I would have fallen in love with the song because it captures the way that survival is as simple and as elusive as being able to “taste that sweet sweet cake.” I hear the insistent refrain of “you gotta keep on (keep on livin’!” as part curse and part celebration; Hanna’s cry of “you gotta keep on” sounds like an impossible demand for survival, but when the chorus answers with “keep on, keep on livin’” it sounds like the cheer that can help sustain you. Performed live, the song creates an opportunity for the audience to shout out the words as a group and affirm the many kinds of survival that bring them together. The music helps return the listener to the pleasures of sensory embodiment that trauma destroys: “Cuz those are your arms, that is your heart and no no they can’t tear you apart.” Unapologetically feminist and queer, Le Tigre supplements their songs with videos and slides projected on a screen behind them to create a multimedia forum for the polemical messages inspired by their political commitments. The combined power of song, visuals, and live performance lends itself to the formation of a public culture around trauma that doesn’t involve medical diagnoses or victims.

Performances by bands like Le Tigre and Tribe 8 have been my inspiration here and form the archive in which my own feelings are deposited. Sometimes the most effective way I can explain my project is to point to
work like theirs because it articulates better than I can what I want to say. If I were to “follow the trail of breadcrumbs in my head” (to quote Kathleen Hanna) and try to tell the story of how I came to write this book, I would probably start not with trauma but with depression. Or to use less clinical terms, feeling bad. When I was in my late twenties, I started coming up against the life challenges that sent me to a therapist to explore why I was feeling bad. A major relationship break-up. A shifting sexual identity. A dissertation to finish. These were all equally important problems, since—as is so often the case for academics—my personal life was deeply entangled with my intellectual life. In the process of exploring how my early history might be contributing to my current distress, many therapists suggested that my history of incest was probably at the root of my adult struggles. I was fascinated with this idea since it offered a convenient explanation for why I was depressed (and probably would be for a long time), but I was also skeptical about this magic-bullet theory of sexual trauma.

One reason for my skepticism is that the feminist recommendation to tell my story, whether in therapy or more publicly, did not provide emotional relief or personal transformation. My aesthetic sensibility rebelled against this path; I was afraid my story would resemble a clichéd case history from a self-help book. My intellectual training also threw some roadblocks in the way; I was too steeped in Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis to believe that telling the story was going to make a difference—unless the circumstances were very particular. And even if I managed to circumvent these censors, the story itself couldn’t be articulated in a single coherent narrative—it was much more complicated than the events of what happened, connected to other histories that were not my own. I’ve often been moved by listening to others go public with their experiences, but I didn’t know how to tell my own story.

In the wake of this impasse, the trail of breadcrumbs led me to the category of trauma. Intellectual life has been one of my survival strategies, and I frequently find solace in theoretical concepts and debates that situate my own experience in a larger context. Despite the risks involved in taking on a discourse that has been dominated by medical and pathologizing approaches, I have been drawn to the category of trauma because it opens up space for accounts of pain as psychic, not just physi-
cal. As a name for experiences of socially situated political violence, trauma forges overt connections between politics and emotion. Sexual acts, butch-femme discourse, queer transnational publics, incest, AIDS and AIDS activism, grassroots archives—these are some of the sites of lesbian public culture where I have not only found the traces of trauma but ways of thinking about trauma that do not pathologize it, that seize control over it from the medical experts, and that forge creative responses to it that far outstrip even the most utopian of therapeutic and political solutions. I write about these lesbian locations rather than more obvious sites of geopolitical catastrophe classified under the rubric of trauma: war, genocide, the Holocaust. The feelings and events that draw my attention don’t necessarily command the national and transnational publicity that such traumas generate. In fact, the kinds of affective experiences that I explore here are lost in discourses of trauma that focus only on the most catastrophic and widely public events. I’m interested not just in trauma survivors but in those whose experiences circulate in the vicinity of trauma and are marked by it. I want to place moments of extreme trauma alongside moments of everyday emotional distress that are often the only sign that trauma’s effects are still being felt.

Trauma discourse has allowed me to ask about the connection between girls like me feeling bad and world historical events. To do so, though, has necessitated grappling with an apparent gender divide within trauma discourse that allows sexual trauma to slip out of the picture. Sometimes the impact of sexual trauma doesn’t seem to measure up to that of collectively experienced historical events, such as war and genocide. Sometimes it seems invisible because it is confined to the domestic or private sphere. Sometimes it doesn’t appear sufficiently catastrophic because it doesn’t produce dead bodies or even, necessarily, damaged ones. Although one feminist response has been to argue for the inclusion and equation of sexual trauma with other forms, my hunch has been that its persistent invisibility actually demands a quite different approach, one that can recognize trauma’s specificities and variations. Thus, my argument is not necessarily for the inclusion of lesbian sites of trauma within trauma studies or the national public sphere; I am instead interested in how these lesbian sites give rise to different ways of thinking about trauma and in particular to a sense of trauma as connected to the textures of everyday ex-
perience. Moreover, in focusing on cultural responses to trauma, I resist the authority given to medical discourses and especially the diagnosis of traumatic experience as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Although I was interested in feminist approaches to trauma, the solemnity of so much feminist work on incest did not speak to me. I wanted something more than self-righteous anger or hushed tones of sympathy or respectful silence. I found what I was looking for in lesbian subcultures that cut through narratives of innocent victims and therapeutic healing to present something that was raw, confrontational, and even sexy. Much of this lesbian writing about sexuality is working class in origins and has ties to a butch-femme culture that preceded the 1970s women’s movement. Making prominent interventions in the 1980s sex wars, it has a combative relation to feminist efforts to prescribe a correct sexuality. When Amber Hollibaugh talks about “dangerous desires,” or Joan Nestle describes the power of vulnerability, or Leslie Feinberg and Cherrie Moraga write about not wanting to be touched, they celebrate the hard-won experience of sexual pleasure without denying its roots in pain and difficulty. Dykes writing about sexuality and vulnerability have forged an emotional knowledge out of the need to situate intimate lives in relation to classism, racism, and other forms of oppression. Although the backgrounds of these writers were very different from mine, they moved me in a way that no one else had, and I wanted their work to be part of my discussion of trauma and sexuality. Their writings have also been points of reference when theoretical concepts fail me. In Dorothy Allison’s bold words, “Two or three things I know, but this is one I am not supposed to talk about, how it comes together — sex and violence, love and hatred. I’m not ever supposed to put together the two halves of my life — the man who walked across my childhood and the life I have made for myself. I am not supposed to talk about hating that man when I grew up to be a lesbian, a dyke, stubborn, competitive, and perversely lustful.” Allison is breaking the silence, but she’s doing so in a way that is fiercely uncompromising, that doesn’t edit out anger, or lesbianism, or complex sexual lives. Moreover, Allison’s work circulates within lesbian public cultures that create a collective audience for trauma rather than consigning its representation to therapeutic contexts. These public cultures have taken sexuality out of the bedroom and the intimacy of the couple and made it the focus of col-

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lective conversations about s/m, butch-femme, dildos, and more. These public cultures provide a vehicle for discussions of sexual trauma as well.

My thinking about queer trauma has also been indelibly affected by the AIDS crisis, which is another crucial foundation for this project. Whereas my own distress both past and present seemed suspect—too girly, too middle-class, too intellectual—watching my friends die was a much more tangible and legitimate form of suffering. It was okay to feel bad about that. My involvement with AIDS activism also provided a public forum within which to express outrage and sadness and to understand these very personal losses as part of a broader landscape of social problems. But if AIDS gave me a touchstone for sanctioned grief and anger, it also taught me that such legitimacy was not always universally acknowledged. The AIDS crisis offered clear evidence that some deaths were more important than others and that homophobia and, significantly, racism could affect how trauma was publicly recognized. I was not, for example, willing to accept a desexualized or sanitized version of queer culture as the price of inclusion within the national public sphere; I wanted the sexual cultures that AIDS threatened to be acknowledged as both an achievement and a potential loss.

The formation of a public culture around trauma has been especially visible in the queer response to the AIDS crisis. Queer activism insisted on militancy over mourning, but also remade mourning in the form of new kinds of public funerals and queer intimacies. Like the dyke sexual cultures I write about, the AIDS culture that compels me embraces camp, shame, and the perverse and resists therapeutic models of sickness and health. Another touchstone for me has been David Wojnarowicz’s shameless representations of cruising and his vision of carrying a dead body to the White House as an expression of public mourning:

Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference . . . I imagine what it would be like if friends had a demonstration each time a lover or friend or a stranger died of AIDS. I imagine what it would be like if, each time a lover, friend or stranger died of this disease, their friends, lovers, or neighbors would take the dead body and drive with it in a car a hundred miles an hour to Washington D.C. and blast through the gates of the white house and come to a screeching halt.
before the entrance and dump their lifeless form on the front steps.
It would be comforting to see those friends, neighbors, lovers, and strangers mark time and place and history in such a public way.4

As the years passed, I found that the deaths of my friends stayed with me, and my own experience of AIDS activism made me want to document it before it was lost or misrepresented. As a way of continuing to combine activism and mourning, I turned to the task of preserving the archive of AIDS activism by conducting oral histories with lesbian AIDS activists included here. My desire, forged from the urgency of death, has been to keep the history of AIDS activism alive and part of the present.

In addition to incest and AIDS, a third inspiration has been the history of race in the United States, a history that is inescapably marked by trauma. As a Canadian who is a longtime resident (alien) in the United States, I have been struck by the everyday effects of a racial history that is different from the one I grew up in, and this geopolitical landscape has been more of a point of reference for me than the Holocaust, which although it has been a major influence on this project, was not its starting point. Genocide, slavery, and the many other traumas of “American” history (broadly conceived as a transnational one that exceeds the borders of the United States) are part of its founding and yet have too often been ignored and forgotten, especially as trauma. I would like to see encounters with the traumatic past forge a path between a debilitating descent into pain and the denial of it. The challenge is that these national traumas are buried more deeply in the past than the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and other geopolitical sites of trauma where there are living survivors, and thus they require different theoretical and memorial strategies. At the same time, they continue to haunt the present, and they take surprising forms, appearing in textures of everyday emotional life that don’t necessarily seem traumatic and certainly don’t fit the model of PTSD. Whether the language of trauma is used or not, the project of investigating racial histories needs to be part of an interdisciplinary trauma studies. Everyday forms of racism, many of which are institutional or casual and thus don’t always appear visible except to those who are attuned to them, are among the effects of longer histories of racial trauma. This insight has been a crucial resource for me in tracking the diffuse effects of sexual trauma and the connections between catastrophic events and very ordi-
nary ones. I find that the demands of thinking about race in relation to trauma converge with those of thinking about sexuality because both require a method that is alert to the idiosyncrasies of emotional life. Both projects benefit from the queer strategies that have made it possible to collect the strange archive of feelings assembled here.

Archives of Trauma

This book’s structure and materials are diffuse. It approaches national trauma histories and their cultural memory from the unabashedly minoritarian perspective of lesbian cultures. Its sites of investigation—lesbian sexuality, migration and diaspora, and AIDS activism, among others—are intended not to constitute an exhaustive survey but to represent examples of how affective experience can provide the basis for new cultures. It is organized as “an archive of feelings,” an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception. Its focus on trauma serves as a point of entry into a vast archive of feelings, the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures.

My hope of making the book’s marginal, idiosyncratic, and sometimes unexpected sites relevant to more general understandings of sexual and national trauma is grounded in the conviction that trauma challenges common understandings of what constitutes an archive. Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all. Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics. It thus demands an unusual archive, whose materials, in pointing to trauma’s ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral. Trauma’s archive incorporates personal memories, which can be recorded in oral and video testimonies, memoirs, letters, and journals. The memory of trauma is embedded not just in narrative but in material artifacts, which can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem ar-
bitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value.

In its unorthodox archives, trauma resembles gay and lesbian cultures, which have had to struggle to preserve their histories. In the face of institutional neglect, along with erased and invisible histories, gay and lesbian archives have been formed through grassroots efforts, just as cultural and political movements have demanded attention to other suppressed and traumatic histories, ranging from the Holocaust, to labor and civil rights activism, to slavery and genocide. Forged around sexuality and intimacy, and hence forms of privacy and invisibility that are both chosen and enforced, gay and lesbian cultures often leave ephemeral and unusual traces. In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge. The intersections of trauma archives and gay and lesbian archives will be explored more fully in a later chapter, but the problem of the archive also frames the book’s more general discussion of trauma and its mode of inquiry.

For example, the individual chapters of this book should be understood as working as much to produce an archive as to analyze one. The genres used to advance this book’s arguments cover a wide range; they include novels, poems, essays, memoirs, video and film, photography, performance, and interviews. The eclecticism of my materials also stems from the fact that both lesbian and trauma cultures frequently produce minor or experimental genres. Many of these materials are the product of alternative presses, performance venues, film festivals, and other cultural spaces and networks that nurture a fragile yet distinctive independent media. Moreover, even the texts that belong to more traditional and tangible genres, such as the novel or feature-length film, participate in public cultures that include more experimental and ephemeral materials, and they can’t be understood independently of them. Anthologies with a mixture of voices and genres render visible counterpublics that haven’t produced major novels or films. Performance art persists around the edges of the theatrical world, adapting to small spaces and making the most of the power of a single performer. It is no accident that two of my examples in the next chapter, 2.5 Minute Ride and Milk of Amnesia,
are performance pieces and that both emerge from the crucible of New York’s Lower East Side, where performance cultures and queer publics are mutually constituting. Performance is emblematic of the public cultures that intrigue me; with few resources—low budgets and makeshift spaces—it insinuates itself as an alternative to the television news shows, big-budget movies, and New York Times best-seller lists that are part of a culture industry increasingly owned by a small number of transnational conglomerates. Queer performance creates publics by bringing together live bodies in space, and the theatrical experience is not just about what’s on stage but also about who’s in the audience creating community.\(^6\) I am determined not to underestimate the power of such genres and publics. They act as a guard against fears about the displacement of political life by affective life and the conversion of political culture into a trauma culture.

My approach to genre has been inclusive because the resulting range of texts and artifacts enables attention to how publics are formed in and through cultural archives. Cultural artifacts become the archive of something more ephemeral: culture as a “way of life,” to borrow from Raymond Williams, or a counterpublic, to invoke recent work on the public sphere.\(^7\) My materials emerge out of cultural spaces—including activist groups, women’s music festivals, sex toy stores, and performance events—that are built around sex, feelings, and trauma. These publics are hard to archive because they are lived experiences, and the cultural traces that they leave are frequently inadequate to the task of documentation. Even finding names for this other meaning of culture as a “way of life”—subcultures, publics, counterpublics—is difficult. Their lack of a conventional archive so often makes them seem not to exist, and this book tries to redress that problem by ranging across a wide variety of genres and materials in order to make not just texts but whole cultures visible. In using the term public culture, I keep as open as possible the definition of what constitutes a public in order to remain alert to forms of affective life that have not solidified into institutions, organizations, or identities. Like Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, I would like to “support forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity” because “queer is difficult to entextualize as culture.”\(^8\)

My investigation of “trauma cultures”—public cultures that form in and around trauma—means that ultimately this book is not only focused
on texts as representations or narratives of trauma but also concerned with how cultural production that emerges around trauma enables new practices and publics. My claim that trauma raises questions about what counts as an archive is thus connected to a further claim that trauma also raises questions about what counts as a public culture. My goal is to suggest how affect, including the affects associated with trauma, serves as the foundation for the formation of public cultures. This argument entails a reconsideration of conventional distinctions between political and emotional life as well as between political and therapeutic cultures. This book implicitly juxtaposes cultural production and therapy, not in order to dismiss the latter but in order to expand the category of the therapeutic beyond the confines of the narrowly medicalized or privatized encounter between clinical professional and client. By foregrounding cultural approaches to trauma, however, I do seek to counter the assumption that clinical approaches are the only model for responding to trauma. Trauma cultures are actually doing the work of therapy; rather than a model in which privatized affective responses displace collective or political ones, my book proposes a collapsing of these distinctions so that affective life can be seen to pervade public life.9

Most of the materials explored in this book are contemporary—a choice driven by the conviction that the study of the present transforms historical methods and is of equal importance to the work of historicizing sexuality as is the study of premodern periods. The chapters on activism and the history of ACT UP/NY, for example, reveal how perilously close to being lost even the recent past is, especially when it includes not only traumatic experience but gay and lesbian and activist histories, which are constantly being erased by resistance and neglect. Using a range of methods, including an experiment in the genre of the oral history interview and its connections to testimony, this chapter engages with the difficulty of gathering even a history of the present and the challenge, even for experimental ethnography, of documenting emotional life. It is my hope that making the history of the present more strange will produce a new sense of how to approach the history of the past.

This book lies between the queer and the lesbian, not quite occupying either category comfortably. Its cultural cases and sites can be described as queer, although using that term alone does not account for the ways in which many of them are specifically marked as lesbian. Yet naming as my
focus lesbian culture does not quite do justice to what are frequently the queer ways in which they occupy that category. In many cases, my materials operate in a critical relation to monolithic or homogeneous understandings of lesbian culture, opening space for sex radicalism, specificities of class and region, or racial differences. For example, the writings of Dorothy Allison, Amber Hollibaugh, and Leslie Feinberg emerge from butch-femme discourses that have been a vehicle for articulating not just sexual differences within lesbian culture but class differences. And the racial and national specificities of work by South Asians such as Shani Mootoo and Pratibha Parmar or Latinas such as Carmelita Tropicana, Cherríe Moraga, and Frances Negrón-Muntaner are underdescribed by the category lesbian. The category lesbian remains only one index of the many cultures and publics within which my examples operate, but it is no less significant for being only a partial description. Thus, rather than presuming a singular understanding of lesbian identity or public culture, this project accounts for a range of public cultures that emerge in relation to trauma. In some cases, these cultures may be exclusively lesbian, and in other cases, lesbian culture may be part of a more diverse public organized around sexuality or ethnicity. This book uses both the queer and the lesbian in order to resist any presumption that they are mutually exclusive—that the queer, for instance, is the undoing of the identity politics signified by the category lesbian, or that lesbian culture is hostile to queer formations. Because the focus is on publics rather than identities, the category lesbian occupies a range of meanings and can be more and less foregrounded within individual cases.

In tracking an archive of trauma, I hope also to forge methodologies for the documentation and examination of the structures of affect that constitute cultural experience and serve as the foundation for public cultures. It is important to incorporate affective life into our conceptions of citizenship and to recognize that these affective forms of citizenship may fall outside the institutional practices that we customarily associate with the concept of a citizen. My investigation of the affective life of lesbian cultures is motivated in particular by my dissatisfaction with responses to homophobia that take the form of demands for equal rights, gay marriage, domestic partnership, and even hate crimes legislation; such political agendas assume a gay citizen whose affective fulfillment resides in assimilation, inclusion, and normalcy. Within the trauma archive that
interests me are the affective lives that counter the clichéd narratives of
domestic contentment as well as anxiety, depression, and despair as the
paradigmatic American national affects, and the structures of feeling that
can bring into being alternative cultures.

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In chapter 1, I survey the theoretical influences that guide the book’s
approach to trauma. While acknowledging the powerful theories of
trauma that have emerged within clinical psychology and poststructural-
ist theory, I also turn to feminist theory, critical race theory, Marxist cul-
tural theory, and queer theory as resources for a demedicalized and de-
pathologized model of trauma. Discussions of two performance pieces,
Lisa Kron’s 2.5 Minute Ride and Carmelita Tropicana’s Milk of Amnesia,
also reveal how catastrophic traumatic histories are embedded within
everyday life experience. Trauma becomes the hinge between systemic
structures of exploitation and oppression and the felt experience of them.

Chapter 2 argues that lesbian sex cultures can add to trauma theory
by juxtaposing butch-femme discourses about sex with a classic text
of trauma theory, Sigmund Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Like
Freud’s analysis, butch-femme writings create links between trauma and
bodily penetration. Femme discourses about getting fucked reframe the
relation between trauma and touch, at once acknowledging the trau-
matic power of touch and embracing it. Butch discourses about emo-
tional vulnerability connect the trauma of physical touch to the trau-
matizing potential of being emotionally touched. These writings about
lesbian sexuality offer new ways of understanding trauma’s double status
as both physical and psychic, exterior and interior—a paradox that has
preoccupied not only Freud but contemporary theorists of trauma in-
cluding Jean Laplanche, Mark Seltzer, Leo Bersani, and Ruth Leys. In
addition to having been crucial to the formation of sexual public cultures,
both in the pre-Stonewall decades and in their reappropriation over the
last decade, butch-femme discourses provide a vital archive of not only
sexual intimacy but trauma theory.

Chapter 3 continues the book’s discussion of sexual trauma by explor-
ing lesbian public cultures that have formed around incest. Using Mar-
garet Randall’s memoir This Is about Incest and Allison’s Bastard out of
Carolina and Two or Three Things I Know for Sure, along with perfor-
mances by punk band Tribe 8 and self-help books, the chapter examines lesbian and queer representations of incest that respond to trauma by acknowledging the messy and dangerous dimensions of sexuality as well as embracing shame, aggression, and perversity. The stories and performances it scrutinizes refuse to present the incest survivor as innocent victim and use the public cultures forged around lesbian sexuality as a resource for irreverent, angry, and humorous responses to trauma.

Both chapters 2 and 3 insist that sexual trauma also has persistently national dimensions, whether in the case of Allison using an incest story to incorporate southern white trash culture into U.S. history or Moraga writing about being sexually touched as freighted with histories of racism and colonialism. Chapter 4 addresses trauma as a national category even more explicitly by asking what queer transnational publics reveal about the traumatic histories of migration and diaspora that haunt the construction of the nation. Focusing in particular on queer Puerto Rican diaspora as represented in Negrón-Muntaner’s video Brincando el charco as well as queer South Asian diaspora as represented in Parmar’s video Khush and Mootoo’s novel Cerise Bloom at Night, the chapter considers how queer transnational formations produce creative responses to trauma. The chapter seeks to incorporate the affective life of queer diaspora cultures into the transnational archive of migration as trauma history.

Chapters 5 and 6 take on AIDS, which has been acknowledged as a national and global trauma, but only through forms of cultural struggle that have had to address its close ties to homosexuality and forms of sexuality constructed as deviant or perverse. I focus on activism, but more specifically on lesbian AIDS activists whose role in the AIDS crisis has not always been fully acknowledged. The chapters engage critiques of therapeutic culture as a response to trauma by exploring the affective dimensions of activist cultures in a way that problematizes distinctions between therapy and politics, or between mourning and militancy. Through an ethnography of lesbian AIDS activists, I seek to uncover the emotional histories that lead people to activism and to document the legacy of this activism in the present. Yet this ethnography remains experimental, confronting the limitations of the interview as a way of creating an emotional archive. Chapter 5 explores the challenges of documenting the intimacies of personal relationships and political controversies within ACT UP. Chapter 6

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focuses on mourning, juxtaposing the interviews with memoirs by lesbians who have been involved in caretaking. The memoirs show how those on the supposed periphery of the AIDS crisis, who occupy what is so often a feminized role, turn the care of the body and encounters with death into a queer experience. The chapter also considers the ongoing legacy of AIDS activism and how its history continues to pervade the lives of activists.

Chapter 7 looks at the intersections between archives of trauma and archives of gay and lesbian history. Through discussion of grassroots, community-based archives such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn and San Francisco’s Gay and Lesbian Historical Society, and their more recently developed and more institutionalized counterparts in San Francisco’s and New York’s Public Libraries, the unorthodox nature of the gay and lesbian archive is used as a way of shedding light on the challenge of creating trauma archives. The chapter also examines how documentary video, in its passionate quest for histories that can provide the foundation for culture in the present, incorporates and transforms archival materials. It explores Not Just Passing Through, a documentary video about archives and Jean Carlomusto’s simultaneously personal and public work in To Catch a Glimpse and Shatzi Is Dying, which address mortality by remembering her grandmother and her dog, respectively. The particular ways in which new documentaries create affective archives are instructive for the ongoing project of creating testimonials, memorial spaces, and rituals that can acknowledge traumatic pasts as a way of constructing new visions for the future. These queer lesbian archives and documentaries deserve a place alongside Holocaust and war memorials because they make room for the intimate histories demanded by emotion and sexuality.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue that considers how the many representations of the murder of Brandon Teena, including the films The Brandon Teena Story and Boys Don’t Cry, constitute a case of queer trauma in the national public sphere. The epilogue also discusses responses to this book while it has been in progress in order to further consider the value of both lesbian feelings and trauma as the foundation for public cultures.