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Ruby Rich's Dream Library: Feminist Memory-Keeping as an Archive of Affective Mnemonic Practices

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa

Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia; sharoncd@uow.edu.au

Abstract: In the so-called West, feminist activists and scholars have long been traumatised by the erasure of their histories via dominant patriarchal narratives, which has served as an impediment to the intergenerational transmission of feminist knowledge. Recently, while acknowledging the very real and ongoing impact of this historical omission, some feminists have issued a call to turn away from a narrative of women's history as 'serial forgetting' and towards an acknowledgement of the affirmative capacity of feminist remembering. At the same time, memory theorist Ann Rigney has advocated for a 'positive turn' in memory studies, away from what she perceives to be the field's gravitation towards trauma and instead towards an analysis of life's positive legacies. In this article, I combine both approaches to investigate one feminist memory-keeper's archive, analysing what it reveals about 'the mechanisms by which positive attachments are transmitted across space and time'. Throughout her life, little-known 'between-the-waves' Australian feminist Ruby Rich (1888–1988) performed multiple intersecting activist activities. While she created feminist memories through her work for various political organisations, she also collected, stored and transmitted feminist memories through her campaign for a dedicated space for women's collections in the National Library of Australia. Propelled by fear of loss and inspired by hope for remembering, Rich constructed a brand of archival activism that was both educational and emotional. In this paper, I examine the strategies Rich employed to try to realise her dream of effecting intellectual and affective bonds between future feminists and their predecessors.

Keywords: Ruby Rich; archival activism; feminist memory; intergenerational feminist knowledge; National Library of Australia; women's library

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1. Introduction

Sitting in the Special Collections Reading Room in the National Library of Australia (NLA), searching through the papers of 'between-the-waves' feminist Ruby Rich (1888–1988), I came across a copy of *The Dawn Newsletter* (*Dawn*), a magazine of the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV).[1] Dated April–May 1966, it carried a brief news story, 'Dream Library Takes Place', describing Rich's and her close friend and *Dawn* editor Bessie Rischbieth's (1874–1967) (Lutton 1988) attendance at the recent unveiling of the NLA Foundation Stone, two years before the brand new building would be open to the public.[2] On the back page of the newsletter, Rich had inscribed a shaky, pencil-written notation: 'The future of our past [with the following directive] use this in reference to lack of records on women's history'.[3] I was there as a Library Fellow, granted three blissful months to work on my project, 'Memory-Keepers: Women activists' strategies to document their history and preserve their own memory'. I began with the fraught story of how the achievements of women have often been overshadowed by the dominant tale of men's triumphs. I then looked for evidence of the immense, time-consuming and often costly project of documenting, organising and maintaining the record of women's activism for feminist scholars who would later write those histories. Tracing the history of Australian women's archival activism centred on reconstructing their varied individual and collective

endeavours to act as gatekeepers of their own memory until wider social shifts allowed that memory public visibility. Ruby Rich was very much at the heart of the story.

Rich was a prolific social and political activist, nationally and internationally. Active in the Australian Jewish community, she had also been vice-president of the Feminist Club of New South Wales; president of the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV); a founder and later president of the League of Women Voters of New South Wales; the AFWV representative at the Women's Nationality Conference (1931) at The Hague, the Netherlands; and deeply involved in the peace movements of the League of Nations and the International Alliance of Women (Tate 2012). Rich was also an archival activist. She lobbied for space dedicated solely to women's history in memory institutions. She collected remnants of the lives of many of her peers—textual and visual reminders of their activities—and sorted them into scrapbooks and document folders that she stored in her home. Later in her life, and with some assistance from librarians, she then organised a collection that would fill over 110 archive boxes and deposited it in the NLA. This was in addition to her organisational papers that were also lodged with the National Library, such as those of the AFWV. She shared memories of her peers—past and present—with contemporary audiences including Hazel de Berg, interviewer for the NLA's oral history collection. At the behest of the Director of the NLA, and with his guidance and instructions, she solicited papers and ephemera from fellow feminists in Australia, assuaging their fears and anxieties in the process, and, when she travelled overseas, she arranged for appropriate materials to be sent back to the NLA via the Australian High Commission.

Despite her abundant efforts and affiliations, Rich is little known today for her feminist activism, and even less so for her memory work.[4] As I will go on to elaborate, there are numerous reasons for this erasure. One is the unfortunate effect that popular feminist storytelling via the 'waves' metaphor has had on eclipsing the memory of those whose activities do not align with the time periods identified by those discrete waves. Another is the often-hidden nature of women's mnemonic practices. The laborious, drawn out and often mundane nature of Rich's collecting, organising, maintaining, storing and lobbying, taking place 'behind the scenes', as it were, do not tend to attract public scrutiny or interest in the way that, for instance, a spectacular feminist protest might. Finally, there is also the fact that, while women's papers did make it into Australia's central repository, Rich's decades-long campaign to have a separate section of the NLA devoted entirely to women's history failed. She was unable to exert enough influence on existing power dynamics to be able to realise her 'dream library' of a 'women's library' within the main library. There is, therefore, no overarching triumphalist narrative of feminist success with which to remember and celebrate her archival endeavours.

Yet, Rich's archive is significant for the insight it gives us into feminist memory practices and resistances, and the affective dimensions of both, from the mid- to late twentieth century. Ruby Rich was acutely aware of, and passionately tried to ward off, the imposition of a narrative of feminist discontinuity. In her NLA interviews in the 1970s, she revealed that she had dedicated herself to what was an often thankless, expensive and onerous task of feminist memory-keeping because she wanted to fight historical erasure and transmit knowledge of feminist pasts to future feminists. She hoped to forge intergenerational connections and demonstrate a continuum of women's activism. She exhibited a wilful determination to positively influence Australia's feminist memory culture in the face of countless obstacles. While her records reveal the ways in which she was affectively invested in the project of feminist memory-keeping, her letters to friends, fellow feminists and the NLA also disclose its heavy emotional toll as she fought to convince the gatekeepers of Australia's national memory of the merit of her imagined archive.

In 1966, Rich still hoped that her envisioned library would come to fruition. Yet, her *Dawn* marginalia of that year—'The future of our past. . .use this in reference to lack of records on women's history'—spoke to a feeling of presentiment. Here, marked on the underside of a celebration of the nation's preeminent memory institution, was a reminder of both the positive potential of the future to remember the feminist past and the distressing

phenomenon of the erasure of women's memory in the present. The more I discovered about her mission, the more affectively saturated this pithy encapsulation of her alternating hope and despair came to be. In this paper, I trace how Ruby Rich went about her feminist memory work, the feelings she expressed about it, and the affective nature of the archival future that she imagined. Paying attention to affect and power in the archive, I aim to uncover and analyse the ways in which Ruby Rich's archive enables us to expand our knowledge about the feminist activist's role in shaping an 'archive of mnemonic practices' to try to effect a positive intergenerational feminist memory culture while navigating 'the dynamics of power and privilege' that determine not only inclusion and exclusion in but also the spatiality of our memory institutions (Findlay 2016, p. 155). Before doing so, I briefly explore recent thinking on power and affect in the archive.

2. Power and Affect in the Archive

Marika Cifor writes that archives are in large part 'about creating, documenting, maintaining, reconciling and (re)producing' the 'social relations, differences and individual and collective identities' that we 'form, sustain and break'. They are concerned with the relations 'between records and people, ideologies, institutions, systems and worlds—across bounds of time and space' (Cifor 2016, p. 8). Importantly for her work on social justice, she acknowledges that a growing body of literature now demonstrates that archives are sites of power and privilege. They can 'both produce and reproduce justice and injustice in the decisions they make on how they shape the past and engage the present' (Duff et al. 2013, p. 319). Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook note that, as records of history, archives 'wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups and societies' (Schwartz and Cook 2002, p. 2). An archive is 'at once a system of objects, a system of knowledge and a system of exclusion' (Taylor 2002, p. 246). Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever and Margaret Henderson add that the nature of a collection—its inclusions and exclusions, based on what those in control at the time deemed to be of historical value—is critical because it profoundly defines the limits and the possibilities for writing inclusive histories and constructing diverse memory cultures (Bartlett et al. 2007).

Drawing on the theorising of Ann Cvetkovich, Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, Cifor proffers an avenue for addressing the 'damaging and unjust dynamics' within repositories. Archivists, she claims, need to pay much more attention to affect (Cifor 2016, p. 10). To simplify what is a complex theoretical and ethical argument, I interpret Cifor's challenge to be that if archivists were to value affect when appraising items and view those items as 'repositories of feeling', they could diversify their holdings through representing the life experiences of alternative or marginalised communities (Cifor 2016, p. 9). Scholarship now affirms that all archives 'produce affects and enable affective experiences for those who encounter them' (Cifor 2016, p. 15). Cifor wants more recognition of emotions than this. She calls for what she terms 'emotional justice' in the archives: 'This acknowledgment of affect and positioning it as an appraisal criterion at multiple stages of appraisal processes together afford the potential to challenge and change what and why records are collected and to grasp traces of voices, affects and experiences of those denied by power that would otherwise be lost to the archival record' (Cifor 2016, p. 18). Such a shift would amend a system that, she contends, has too often only provided archive users with 'the opportunities to empathize with the records and therefore the affects of those in positions of power' (Cifor 2016, p. 15).

While archives are sites of power, they are also 'sites of promise and desire' (Dever 2017, p. 1). Feminist archival studies scholar Maryanne Dever asserts the following:

> If archives matter for us as feminists, then their mattering is bound up in their productivity and their potential far more than in any idea of the past. To borrow and adapt from Derrida (2002), if we want to know what a feminist archive is, what feminist archiving looks like or what archival tools and theoretical

> dispositions feminist researchers might require then 'we will only know in times to come'. (Dever 2017, p. 3)

The feminist archive is constructed with the future—an uncertain or unknowable future—in mind. The 'very acts of documentation, collection and deposit anticipate a future readership.' (Brennan 2018, p. 15). It is only when future historians make use of its contents that some of the potential of the archive is realised. As I go on to demonstrate, Ruby Rich believed that the potential of the feminist archive would only be realised if current and future generations of feminists had a dedicated physical space in which to *know about* and *feel* connected to their feminist predecessors. The challenge that she presented to the normal practices of those in control of archives at the time was, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, her collation of women's personal and professional papers went against the grain of a national memory culture that had privileged men's records when deeming what was of historical value. On the other, she disputed how those in control of Australian memory institutions envisioned and policed the spatiality of the collections they assembled.[5] More than that, as the years went on, she also found herself promoting her twinned educational and affective mission as a means of counteracting an emerging popular form of storytelling that deployed a waves trope to identify a first wave of feminist activism that ended as far back as the 1910s and a second wave beginning in the 1960s, with little in between.[6]

3. Hoping for a Feminist Continuum through Knowing about and *Feeling* Feminists in the Future

Two press cuttings dated 1983 that I came across in her archive, one from the Melbourne daily *The Age* and the other from the national monthly *Australian Pensioner*, explained to readers that the then 95-year-old Rich and her friend and fellow feminist activist, 80-year-old Jean Arnot (1903–1995) (Jones 2019) had been considered 'militant hotheads by female detractors in their day'. Drawing attention to the feminist continuum in Australia, Rich and Arnot told journalists that early feminists, themselves included, had won rights like suffrage and equal pay, and 'the later feminists had this to build on'.[7] While Rich had attended suffrage meetings in London in the early twentieth century, both women had been ardent equal pay activists in Australia. Each text continued:

> "The idea around today that Women's Liberation began in the 60s with Germaine Greer, street marches and burning bras (so demeaning!) is foolish," they echoed each other's thoughts with a frown.
>
> "We didn't call it Women's Liberation. We called it Justice for Women."[8]

Rich had previously used interviews conducted for the NLA's oral history collection between 1975 and 1977 to similarly advocate for the continuity of feminist history. However, here, she also voiced her fear that this feminist history was being left behind. 'People forget that we have great women', she told de Berg. 'I have a drawer full of famous women I have met and I have many Australians in that drawer. I feel they are very often forgotten.'[9] Her collection is strewn with newspaper and magazine cuttings on varied aspects of her peers' lives that had doubtless been stored in drawers in her Sydney home before she, with some assistance from NLA representatives, organised her records for depositing in the library. She supplemented this material culture with memories of her own. For example, in another interview, she told de Berg that she wanted to talk 'on the great women that I have been privileged to meet, to know and in some instances to be privileged to work with'.[10] And she did. She talked about feminist lawyer Viola Smith (1893–1975) (Barker [2002] 2006), feminist journalist and radio commentator Linda Littlejohn (1883–1949) (Foley [1986] 2006) and feminist human rights activist Jessie Street (1889–1970) (Radi [2002] 2006). In a previous recording in 1975, Rich had asserted that all the women she mentioned in her recollections 'deserve really a chapter on their own, each one. Each one had very much to give'.[11] The ageing activists' mnemonic tactics, in the face of threatened obscurity, ranged from disrupting contemporary discourses of feminist discontinuity and collecting and storing women's memorabilia to sharing her personal memories of feminists with listeners, and in anticipation of future audiences who might visit her oral histories.

Rich resisted the continuous erasure of feminist histories by dominant patriarchal narratives. Contemporary theorists argue that scholars often approach women's history as a story of 'serial forgetting' because of the resulting complexities inherent in ensuring the intergenerational transmission of feminist knowledge (McRobbie 2009; Chidgey 2018). However, Rich was also struggling against an emerging framing of feminism, through the 'waves' metaphor, as disjointed or discontinuous, a practice which has had the unfortunate effect of eclipsing mid-twentieth century feminist history. In this, she was not alone. For example, in 1987, English journalist and former editor of the *Guardian* women's page Mary Stott (1907–2002) reflected that it was 'hard' to 'bear the casual assumption of so many younger women in the seventies, that the women's movement disintegrated after the initial suffrage victory in 1918, until Women's Liberation roused us all from sleep in the sixties'. She bitterly refuted any supposition that '*Nothing*' happened despite, she said, the existence of abundant evidence of ongoing feminist campaigns including those against marriage bars and for equal pay.[12] Australian-born writer Dale Spender (1943–2023), too, rebutted these erroneous claims, although she did so from the perspective of one of *those* younger feminists and only after experiencing her own personal conversion. In her 1983 book based on her interviews of five prolific but overlooked twentieth-century feminists, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement This Century*, Spender confessed that, prior to this, she had not known that women had 'a rich and resourcing history'.[13] Along 'with most if not all of my generation I came to share an experience historically common to women, of believing that we were the first generation to make the radical claim for full humanity' (Spender 1983, p. 2). To impress upon her reader the serious repercussions of such ignorance, she turned to American feminist and historian, Mary Ritter Beard (1876–1958). Feminists who believed they were without a past 'had no choice but to begin from the beginning'. Paraphrasing Beard, Spender wrote the following:

> If we believe we are without a past, she said, our collective strength is undermined, and the idea that we are inferior takes hold of our minds and helps to construct the bonds of oppression. If women are to be liberated, she argued passionately, then they must know that they do have a forceful, valuable and marvellous past. They must know that they are part of a long constructive tradition, that there is a collective, historical experience of women which is a strength to be drawn upon, she asserted.[14]

This led Spender to the realisation that 'a male dominated society will not forge for us the links between one generation of women and the next and that unless we take matters into our own hands and actively make those links we are just as effectively divided from older women, as we are from women of the past' (Spender 1983, p. 6).

Rich told de Berg that her desire, or need, to link past, present and future—including forging connections between the young and the old, as well as between the living and the dead—was informed by her upbringing. The 'feeling of doing my duty', she said, had 'impelled' her to 'run round the world, not always at my comfort and ease and pleasure' to 'make that collection of great women' that filled her drawers at home and eventually her archival boxes at the National Library. Demonstrating a keen respect for legacy, she continued: 'I was always brought up to think we have not paid our debt to the past unless we leave the future indebted to us', adding, 'Will you remember it? We have not paid our debt to the past unless we leave the future indebted to us.'[15] This was a positive feeling of responsibility. She felt 'very happy', she said, 'to be talking to those who will come after me'.[16] She told these future listeners that she was doing 'my best to bring up memories of the past, to tell the facts, to say how I remembered the things that did take place, the feelings that were evident in regard to the things we were trying to do'.[17] Her mission was to do justice to the memory of past and present women activists. She regarded collecting remembrances of their life experiences and feelings and making these available to librarians and archivists who would then make them accessible to future generations, to be a form of 'paying it forward'; an expression of gratitude aimed at predecessors upon whose achievements she and her generation had built her lives.

A close reading of Rich's oral testimonies reveals that the feminist memory-keeper imagined performing intergenerational connection in the archives in terms of forging affective bonds too. An elderly Rich repeatedly told de Berg that she hoped that visitors to Canberra would call on the new and beautiful National Library; consult her documents, ephemera and audio recordings which would be deposited there after her death; and come to 'know' and 'understand' the women she recollected. For example, in December 1976, she addressed her present interviewer and future listeners: 'I want to speak to you on one of these great women, whose photo and articles I have in my collection and whom I was privileged not only to know but to have a long and lovely friendship with, namely the late A. Viola Smith' [mentioned earlier]. In line with her previously stated commitment to communicating feelings, Rich also expressed a desire to perform something akin to Cifor's 'emotional justice' in the archives. She hoped to speak of Viola's 'work' on a 'future occasion', to 'be a party to having it [knowledge of her work] brought forward'. However, at *this* moment, she prioritised conveying *feeling* over *knowledge*. She set about infusing her materials and memories with emotion, rendering them 'repositories of feeling'. Establishing herself as an emotional conduit, she aimed to transmit these 'feelings' to future listeners, enabling them, she believed, to develop affective bonds with the women she recalled. Rich viewed this exchange as one of reciprocity between present speaker and future listener: 'I suggest to-day that we speak, and I feel that you're speaking with me somehow, that you're feeling Viola's presence, I want you to feel her presence'. In trying to call her imagined future affective encounters into being, she recreated both a sense of her late friend's interiority and her own feelings towards her: 'She just had such sincerity, and dignity and such kindliness that all I've ever said when I've spoken to her, I loved Viola and I love speaking about Viola and I love to honour her memory in any way I can.' Rich continued: 'I'd like it if all of you that have heard of her feel that sense of gratitude that I feel to all these great women'.[18] 'Feeling Viola's presence' meant affectively experiencing Rich's relationship with her generation of feminists. In this reciprocal imagining, future feminists would feel connected to past feminists through experiencing their expressions of intra-generational gratitude and love.

4. The Archival Activists' Feelings about a Room of One's Own

Rich's archive throws up abundant evidence of her almost unyielding devotion to establishing a dedicated physical archival and gathering space through which to successfully transmit feminist knowledge and feelings, thereby achieving her imagined feminist future. This vision of a discrete physical space was informed by, and fed into, international developments in the area of women's tangible cultural heritage—historical endeavours that have faced significant problems that have hindered their success (Kean 2005; Cobb 2015; Watton 2022). Many individuals and groups involved in various women's movements, including the suffrage campaigns, immediately began preserving their archives for an era when they thought changing attitudes would mean they could be afforded public visibility (Strachey 1928; Stanton et al. 1881–1922; Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie 2019). Others attempted to create stand-alone women's archives. In the 1930s, women led global campaigns for the World Center for Women's Archives, Inc. (New York) and the International Archives for the Women's Movement (Amsterdam). They encountered a lack of funding, causing the US venture to be disbanded, and susceptibility to external forces, as the Amsterdam archives were looted by the Germans and then the Soviets in World War Two. Greater successes followed in later decades, such as in 2003, when some of the looted records were returned to Amsterdam (now in Atria: Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History).[19] In Australia, success stories have been equally patchy. South Australia's Women's Studies Resource Centre opened in 1975, the United Nation's designated International Women's Year, and then closed permanently in 2015 following financial difficulties, while, in 1989, the Jessie Street National Women's Library was established in Sydney and remains open at the time of writing (Secomb and Francis 2004; Ramsay 2022). Other significant collections have been subsumed into national and state libraries. This includes the papers of Jessie

Street and Bessie Rischbieth's suffrage collection, which features materials from the militant British campaign in which she was involved, which were donated to the NLA in 1970 and 1967, respectively.[20] Therefore, and certainly from the 1950s to the 1980s when her archival activities were at their peak, at the time when Rich was challenging the spatial practices of Australian archivists by calling for a discrete Women's Library, she was able to draw on scattered contemporaneous experiences and perspectives.

An exchange of correspondence in 1974 and 1975 between Rich, who was then in her eighties, and Elizabeth Reid, then in her thirties, illuminates the older feminist's thinking about the journey she had taken in the previous decades in her mission to realise the Women's Library.[21] On 14 November 1974, Reid, the world's first advisor on women's affairs to a national leader when she was appointed by Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in April 1973 and Convenor of the National Advisory Committee for International Women's Year (IWY NAC), wrote to Rich: 'I believe that, at the time when it was founded, you were amongst a delegation which visited the National Library, during which visit the Library promised that it would commence a special feminist collection.' Affirming that this had never come to fruition, Reid told Rich that she had recently been spurned by bureaucrats when she proposed 'the establishment of a Women's Resources Centre at the national level as part of the Department's program for International Women's Year'. She expressed her dismay that 'the concept of and need for a women's resources centre was just not grasped'. She begged Rich for any details she had at hand on 'the original proposal for a special feminist collection'—including those involved, those appealed to and the vision for the collection—clarifying that these would help her 'to continue the fight which you [Rich] and others started'.[22]

Illness prevented Rich from replying until January of the following year. When she did, she wrote of the 'very great pleasure' she derived from Reid's letter and then she outlined her story. 'It is a fact', she said, 'that I was associated with an endeavour to have kept as a separate section in the National Library of Australia, a special collection of records concerning women's past and present struggles and achievements for equal status and their activities in various fields.'[23] She told Reid that she had met and corresponded with then Director of the Library Harold White (1905–1992) from the early 1950s, when they were involved in efforts to memorialise the Australian suffragist Vida Goldstein (1869–1949) at the Library, adding that the late Mrs. Bessie Rischbieth (1874–1967), 'whose feminist work and book "The March of the Women" are doubtless known to you', also attended many of those meetings. Indeed, Rischbieth had confirmed her decision to bequeath her collection of suffrage materials to the National Library as far back as 1953–1954.[24] Rich continued: 'Sir Harold responded warmly, or so it seemed to us, to our desire to see recognition given in the Library to the contribution women had made and were increasingly making towards national and international development.' Believing that the separate women's collection would come to fruition, Rich 'obtained, when overseas at Congresses, material relevant to the History of Women's activities, photographs of leading women etc., for the Library', and, at White's direction, these were sent back to Australia via the Librarian at Australia House, London. She attached the 'Dream Library' article from the previously mentioned 1966 *Dawn* newsletter which 'shows that as late as 1966 we thought our project would be achieved'.

There are various fragments of Rich's correspondence with White—as well as with Reid and fellow feminists—strewn across both her personal papers and those of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, of which she was variously a member and office bearer, which are revealing of her physical and emotional investment in a feminist memory project—ultimately, a project over which she had relatively little control. At the beginning of 1961, she wrote to Harold White multiple times in quick succession, attaching brochures on existing women's collections; outlining her work so far for the NLA's Women's Library, including calling at the U.N. Library in Geneva to tell them of 'your project'; and requesting assurances that 'you would like me to assist you further in this matter'.[25] When White did reply, he thanked her for the published materials she was forwarding from London and

elsewhere. He also signalled his interest in attaining 'manuscript and pictorial records', which he defined as 'letters, papers, diaries and photographs'. These, he said, were '[m]ore difficult to secure, but equally important'. He then proceeded to instruct Rich on an emotional dimension of the archivist's work: 'It may be necessary, in some cases', he explained, 'to allay the natural fears of those who may feel that by depositing manuscripts they may be revealing to the general public the story of their own or of other people's activities before this would be properly due'.[26]

What White did not instruct Rich on was the emotions of the archivist, and certainly not the likely emotions of one who was driven by such a formidable sense of duty. Nowhere did he write of loss, yet this was a sentiment that Rich and others like Reid felt keenly. It was the fear of irredeemable loss which played a major factor in inspiring their memory work. In her 1975 appeal to approve the establishment of a separate women's resource centre to the Secretary of the Department of the Special Minister of State, which was responsible for administering the affairs of the IWY NAC, Reid expressed a sense of urgency predicated on imminent loss: 'Without these sources Australian social history will be incomplete, and the greater the time which elapses with no effort being made to seek them out the more likely it is that they will be irrecoverably lost.'[27] A few months prior to that, Rich had responded to Reid's information-seeking letter, writing as follows:

> Regarding your concern as to the likelihood of books, manuscripts etc., on the history of women, being irrevocably lost unless something is done about it very soon, I feel I must say how greatly I agree with you. In fact, I have spoken for years and years on that possibility and on the need for action to be taken to remedy the neglect. I almost feel an obligation to keep on trying to see that something is done during this wonderful opportunity of the I.W.Y.[28]

In the same correspondence, Rich vacillated between hope, regarding the potential of 1975, and despondency, when recalling her growing awareness that the Women's Library was not going to be realised. To 'the great surprise and disappointment of Mrs. Rischbieth and myself,' she wrote, 'we were informed that the plan for a Special Women's Section in the N.L.A., was not to be fulfilled . . . Sad to think that just when a new library was being built, this opportunity to emphasise what women had done for National development was being passed over'.[29]

Prior to this, Rich had not been inactive in her quest to persuade the NLA to honour what she believed was their promise to devote a dedicated space to women's history. Soliciting records from colleagues at home and abroad and facilitating and supporting the exchange of information were on her growing list of feminist memory practices. To these, she added lobbying those in authority. She repeatedly wrote to Harold White enquiring about the status of the women's library, in one instance referring to 'the great hope held by Mrs. Rischbieth and myself and many others regarding the housing of books, manuscripts, etc., on women's achievements':

> For many reasons [*we feel that*] it is essential that there be established in the [*our A*] National Library a specific women's section because the emancipation of women is, in fact, a specific step in human evolution which, in the various directions, has been initiated by women themselves. This fact, which is vital for the inspiration and encouragement of present and future generations of women, would be lost sight of if material relating to women's emancipation were to be embodied in a general section [*italics and underlining represent handwritten notations on the draft made by Rich*].[30]

'Therefore', Rich concluded her letter, 'we would be relieved to know, as soon as possible, if it is decided to establish a specific women's section in the Library.'[31] Although Rich's archive contains no definitive rejection penned by White, a close reading of the phrasing they each used in their correspondence across the years reveals their diverging positions on the idea of a dedicated space. So, whereas Rich repeatedly referred to 'a specific section being established in your Library on the work of women', 'the Women's Section', and 'your

special room, devoted to women's achievements',[32] White continually deployed evasive terminology, such as 'a representative collection on the achievements of women', 'our holdings', 'our steadily growing collection', 'the collection', 'our collection on women's achievements'.[33]

Private communications to her friend, 'Rischie', illustrate something of the toll that this absence of knowledge about, and lack of control over, the outcome of her archival mission was having on Rich's mental state. In August 1966, she shot off three letters to Rischbieth over four days, issuing herself ultimatums:

> I shall continue to work for the National Library, if we have a women separate section, not otherwise. I shall then work for the Fawcett library or the Amsterdam archives. There must be places that will perpetuate in a big way the women's revolution, as documented in publicity material, books, poems, etc. and etc.[34]

Two days later, she was 'adamant' that '[i]f the Women's Library section is decided upon in the affirmative I might chose [sic] that as my one and only hobby until my ticket of departure is given to me'.[35] She pleaded for assurances that she had remembered White's initial promise correctly: 'Please Rischie, write to me quickly what you can remember regarding that promised piece of ground.' [36] Two days later, she wrote again, endorsing her friend's offer to request a letter from White 'stating that his Council has agreed to set aside space in the National Library for showing the contribution made by women to Australia's development'. She advised her to mention the Fawcett Library in London, doubtless in the hope that the existence of such a renowned women's collection named after the celebrated suffragist, Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929), would be persuasive: 'We could say that we hope something of the kind will gradually be established in Australia.'[37]

> Two years later, Rich wrote to Elizabeth Long of the National Council of Women of Canada:
>
> Unfortunately the original idea as I understood it to be (and an idea shared by my colleagues), was that a separate room was to be set aside for our collection of women's work for national and international development, has now been abandoned and such material will only have a separate section in which to be presented.[38]

'I retain the hope of establishing somewhere and somehow a library entirely devoted to the social revolution brought about by the development of women since the time of Mary Wollstonecraft', she continued.[39] In turn, Long revealed the fatigue that archival activism had caused her and her colleagues after their women's collection, the Lady Aberdeen Women's Library, was integrated into the University of Waterloo Library: 'At first, we all were shocked over the idea, but we discovered it is truly in women's favor because books by great women in their special field will rub shoulders with others in the same category, and will have the same readers'. The library's constant state of precarity wrought by persistent financial troubles prior to this led her to confess: 'I am so weary of finishing off all the problems involved in placing our books that I am sure neither I, nor any of my colleagues want to give more of our lives to this one interest.' Referring to another memory project, this time the new *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, which was soliciting entries on women, Long wrote, 'I am trying to keep out of it. In fact I am too old to do anything more. Or nearly!'[40]

While there is no doubt that these ageing memory-keepers were worn down by the obstacles and challenges in the way of realising and maintaining their archival visions, in their own archives, their tenacity is deeply evident. For instance, the last trace I found of her lobbying in Rich's papers was a letter from the previously mentioned Jean Arnot, on behalf of herself and Rich, then in her nineties, to Director General of the NLA, Harrison Bryan, requesting that the library revisit its decision regarding the separate Women's Library.[41] Hope drove her campaign to combat feminist memory loss and bring her imagined archival future to fruition. Theorist Ann Rigney has defined hope as a specific 'structure of feeling'—drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of perhaps not yet fully articulated feel-

ings vying to emerge at any one time in history—which serves to motivate people to try to achieve what may still yet be possible.[42] In this way, she aligns with Ernst Bloch's definition of hope as 'the still undischarged future of the past' (quoting Bloch (1995), vol. 1, p. 200. In Rigney 2018, p. 377). Performing an intervention in memory studies, Rigney has advocated for a 'positive turn' away from what she perceives to be the field's gravitation towards trauma. If memory scholars want to acknowledge that the past throws up positive as well as negative legacies, which she believes they should, then they need to seek out a new 'repertoire of tools to capture the transmission of positivity' (Rigney 2018, p. 370). Ruby Rich's archive, then, offers the interested memory scholar insight into a range of feminist memory practices and strategies to enact intellectual and emotional justice in the archives, including challenging archival practices, seeking out and disseminating information about archival precedents, lobbying those in control of memory institutions, soliciting and forwarding historical records, constructing and depositing personal papers, and recording memories of those who have passed. Inspired by the pervasive fear of loss, and in the face of relentless resistance, which elicited feelings of frustration and despondency, Rich's activism nevertheless tells the story of feminists as 'wilful subjects', to draw on Sara Ahmed's concept, determined to remember the past in a way that would feed into a better, feminist future.[43]

5. Conclusions

Throughout her life, Ruby Rich performed multiple intersecting activist activities. While she created feminist memories through her work for various political organisations, she also collected, stored and transmitted feminist memories through her archival activism. By bringing to the fore her *hidden* memory work, her archive can help us to work towards realising Ann Rigney's ambition of making visible 'the mechanisms by which positive attachments are transmitted across space and time' (Rigney 2018, p. 370). Rich disrupted a popular discourse that explained the temporality of Australian feminism as disjointed with her insistence on the feminist continuum. She exercised agency in the archives through soliciting, selecting and preserving feminist memory, thereby countering narratives that framed women's history as 'serial forgetting'. She recorded her own feelings as she enacted feminist memory practices and strategies to realise intellectual and emotional justice in the archives. More than simply communicating feminist emotions, Rich sought to cultivate feminist affect for future generations. She injected emotions into her materials and memories, rendering them 'repositories of feeling'. She established herself as a conduit of emotion in the hope that her archive would enable future visitors to develop affective bonds with their feminist predecessors. She wanted them to feel *her* gratitude and love for the women upon whose labours she had built her life, as would future feminists. As a 'wilful subject', Rich performed her brand of memory activism in a way that would challenge the spatial practices of those in positions of power in Australia's memory institutions. While her dream of a dedicated space for the Women's Library would not be fulfilled, the nature of the materials that she created and collected have allowed those who come after her to 'grasp traces of voices, affects and experiences of those denied by power that would otherwise be lost to the archival record' (Cifor 2016, p. 18). In the face of ongoing loss and erasure, her archive continues to represent the hope of effecting a better, feminist future.

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Notes

1 The *Dawn* was also the magazine of the Women's Service Guilds (WSG) of Western Australia, and Bessie Rischbieth, founder and editor of the newsletter, played a leading role in both the WSG and AFWV from 1909 until her death in 1967. See (Byard 2014).

2 *The Dawn Newsletter*. April–May 1966. In Papers of Ruby Rich, National Library of Australia [hereafter NLA], MS7493/38/245. The NLA had been created by a 1960 Act of Parliament, although planning for its expanding collections began before this. Prior to this, the National Library was integrated with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. In August 1968, housed in a new, purpose-built building on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra, it opened to the public. History of the Library. *National Library of Australia*. Available online: https://www.nla.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/history-library (accessed on 9 September 2023).

3 *The Dawn Newsletter*, April–May 1966.

4 Australian feminist history has paid Rich only limited attention. For a very recent exemption to this, see (Rubenstein Sturgess 2023).

5 For more on spatiality, including a summary of feminist approaches to this concept in their writing, see (Tally 2013).

6 For a discussion of 'waves', see (Marino and Ware 2022; Crozier-De Rosa 2024).

7 Marilyn Lake details the rich history of feminist activism and achievement in all decades of the twentieth century in Australia in her 1999 book. See (Lake 1999).

8 Janet Hawley. 26 August 1983. The Veterans' Verdict. *The Age*. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/84/531. And Janet Hawley. 13 September–13 October 1983. Burning Bras Anger Pioneers. *Australian Pensioner*. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/84/531.

9 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 4 August 1976. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/2/8.

10 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 12 December 1976. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

11 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 4 June 1975. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

12 (Stott 1987, p. 221). For more on Stott, see (Purvis 2004).

13 Mary Stott was one of her interviewees and the title of the book is Stott's reply to Spender when she asked why there had been no women's movement between the 1910s and 1970s (Spender 1983, p. 5).

14 (Beard 1977). In (Spender 1983, p. 4).

15 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 12 December 1976. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

16 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 4 June 1975. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

17 Pencilled strikethrough in original oral history transcript. Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 12 December 1976. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

18 Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg. Transcript. 12 December 1976. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/4/32.

19 After a troubled financial history, the Women's Library (formerly Fawcett Library), which includes UNESCO-recognised archives that former British suffragists began establishing in the early twentieth century, is now housed in the London School of Economics (LSE). For the history of the International Archives for the Women's Movement (abbreviated as IAV after its Dutch name), now Atria, see (de Haan 2004). For the New York endeavour, see (Voss-Hubbard 1995).

20 For details of provenance and contents, see the NLA's finding aids: Jessie Street. Available online: https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231546119/findingaid (accessed on 7 April 2024) and Bessie Rischbieth. Available online: https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-250831564/findingaid (accessed on 7 April 2024).

21 For more on Reid, see (Arrow 2017; Fleming 2018; Land et al. 2000). On IWY 1975, see (Olcott 2017). On Australia, see (Piccini 2018; Milner 2020).

22 Elizabeth Reid to Ruby Rich. 14 November 1974. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/79/499.

23 Ruby Rich to Elizabeth Reid. 13 January 1975. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/39/290.

24 Harold White to Bessie Rischbieth. 12 February 1954. In Papers of Bessie Rischbieth, NLA, MS2004/5/31.

25 For example, see Ruby Rich to Harold White. 14 February 1961, 13 March 1961 and 22 March 1961. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/37/279.

26 Harold White to Ruby Rich. 21 March 1961. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/38/250.

27 Report of the Committee Members who Attended Weekend Meeting of 3–4 May. Background Paper No 2. In Papers of Elizabeth Reid, NLA, MS9262/14/8.

28 See note 23.

29 See note 23.

30 Ruby Rich to NLA. Unsigned and undated draft of correspondence with handwritten title paper.In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/38/280.

31 See note 30.

[32] Ruby Rich to Harold White. 13 March 1961, 22 March 1961 and 30 November 1962, Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS 2818 Box 37 File 279.

[33] Harold White to Ruby Rich. 10 January 1962 and 24 October 1962. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/37/279 and Harold White to Ruby Rich. 15 June 1962 and 13 July 1964. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS 2818/38/281.

[34] Ruby Rich to Bessie Rischbieth. 1 August 1966. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/37/279. An extensive special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* published in 1987 is devoted to the history of the Fawcett Library, now the Women's Library in London.

[35] Ruby Rich to Bessie Rischbieth. 3 August 1966. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/37/279.

[36] See note 35.

[37] Ruby Rich to Bessie Rischbieth. 4 August 1966. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/37/279.

[38] Ruby Rich to Elizabeth Long. 22 May 1968. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/38/250.

[39] See note 38.

[40] Elizabeth Long to Ruby Rich. 6 June 1968. In Papers of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, NLA, MS2818/38/281.

[41] Jean Arnot to Harrison Bryan. 20 July 1983. In Papers of Ruby Rich, NLA, MS7493/38/250.

[42] Concept developed in (Williams 1961).

[43] Quoting (Ahmed 2014). In (Rigney 2018, p. 373).

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