WHAT COUNTS AS EXPERIENCE IS NEITHER SELF-EVIDENT NOR STRAIGHTFORWARD; IT IS ALWAYS CONTESTED, AND ALWAYS THEREFORE POLITICAL.

THE STUDY OF EXPERIENCE, THEREFORE, MUST CALL INTO QUESTION ITS ORIGINARY STATUS IN HISTORICAL EXPLANATION.

THIS WILL HAPPEN WHEN HISTORIANS TAKE AS THEIR PROJECT NOT THE REPRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE SAID TO BE ARRIVED AT THROUGH EXPERIENCE, BUT THE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF THAT KNOWLEDGE ITSELF.

(JOAN SCOTT, "THE EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE," SUMMER 1991)
WE HAVE QUESTIONS

Can we escape using experience as evidence? How can we be more conscious, more deliberate, in our use of historical narratives? How can we tell stories of ourselves—of being, of identity, of our own histories?

Is there a way to use the materials of this earth to tell stories, to create truths in unearthly ways—a way to narrate without narrativizing—a way to spin the threads of ‘experience’ into a net whose meaning comes as much from the holes as the thread itself??

[gram note: past → future]
POWER

Living in the earth-deposits of our history
HERE IS A STORY

Early historians of women’s history—whether amateur or professional—will write in order to “restore women to the historical record.”[1]

In order to accomplish their goal, the most basic challenge of history will need to be overcome: the identification of source or archival material. Early professional women’s historians will need to find the answer to their challenge in the burgeoning fields of social and/or cultural history. Historians of women will ask new, gendered questions, and “[will inspire] historians who were already working in the field of social history to re-examine their sources and to question the chronological framework upon which history was constructed.”[2]

Many of these early historians—both social historians, cultural historians, and women’s historians—will find their greatest source material in medieval law, court and church documents. A classic example of early cultural history is French historian Emmanuel La Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou*, published in the late nineteen-seventies.[3]

Ladurie will use inquisitional Church documents to great effect in order to tell his story of the village of Montaillou. Other upheaval...growth of the nation state...[and] isolation of the mountain folk” as critical contributing factors.[4]

The history of witchcraft will become a social story, but it will take the lens of women’s history to make it a gendered story. In 1988, historian Anne Barstow will note that “one might assume that the persecutions [of witches] have been seen as an integral part of women’s history, but that is not the case. The witch craze has been interpreted by most historians as *not* a matter of gender.”[5]

Barstow will make clear, existed—but it will take a gendered lens to find the gendered story within. Other historians of more modern ages will also manage to turn up evidence. They will look to diary entries, letters, and even cookbook marginalia to write history. [6]


Re-considered old evidence and previously disregarded bits of textual evidence left behind by older historians will become fodder for the explosion of women’s history over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. [Schrager, “The Difficulty in Staying Seen: The Conceptual Challenges of Writing Women’s History,” HI 2301 -- History: Concepts and Methods: Trinity College, Dublin, 2016. Revised.)

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[2] Ibid.


The Evidence of Experience, by Joan W. Scott.

THE CHALLENGE TO NORMATIVE HISTORY

Scott will write.

HAS BEEN DESCRIBED, IN TERMS OF CONVENTIONAL HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF EVIDENCE, AS AN ENLARGEMENT OF THE PICTURE, A CORRECTION TO OVERSIGHTS RESULTING FROM INACCURATE OR INCOMPLETE VISION, AND IT HAS RESTED ITS CLAIM TO LEGITIMACY ON THE AUTHORITY OF EXPERIENCING THE DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS, AS WELL AS OF THE HISTORIAN WHO LEARNS TO SEE AND ILLUMINATE THE LIVES OF THOSE OTHERS IN HIS OR HER TEXTS.

Scott, however, will not be interested in

CONVENTIONAL HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF EVIDENCE.

She will continue:

remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place. They take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize their difference. They locate resistance outside its discursive construction and reify agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualizing it. When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured—about language (or discourse) and history—are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world?

* 

In other words,

Scott will argue in “The Evidence of Experience” that “experience,” has often been used to back up progressive arguments and to explain histories of difference. But, she will say, experience is not a particularly critical form of data to base our historical (and personal) stories upon. As we use our experience as undeniable evidence, we will fail to recognize the historical categories that inform our experience. Experience as evidence is part and parcel of the liberal individual/neo-con cult of the individual. Instead, she will write, we need to recognize that our experiences are not just ours—they are informed by history and culture. Using experience as infallible evidence in history or activism will allow us to ignore the constructed—and therefore, never inherently truthful—categories that are themselves the "data" of our experience. (Schrager, "Revised Project Proposal." GSFS 189: Intro to Queer Critique. 2017. Revised.)
NOW: A CONVERSATION

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING
Aight. So. You’re saying that feminists contributed to the writing of “alt histories” that generally helped to broaden historical understanding. But Scott complicates that idea of “histories of other” to question and critique the idea-category that is “history” entirely?

AND WE WILL RESPOND
Yes.

AND YOU MIGHT ASK
So then what is Scott? Is she a feminist? Or a queer scholar? I mean, you read her for a ‘Queer Critique class.’ And she uses a poststructural analytic that lines up exactly with poststructural historians I’ve read. And that analytic might not come from Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, but it obviously echoes and aligns with her argument. And Butler, everyone agrees, marks the splitting point between essentialist (and archaic?) Feminism and a broader, more (post)modern, inclusive era of Queer Critique/Studies/Theory.

AND YOU WILL REMEMBER...
reading a section of Gender Trouble at 17, parsing the long complicated sentences, trying so hard to use your idea of Butler’s ideas in your high school term paper (ENG 12S):

...and reading it again at 19 (SOAN 191)...
...and again at 22 (GSFS 180):

"As feminists we have been less eager, I think, to consider the status of the category itself and, indeed, to discern the conditions of oppression which issue from an unexamined reproduction of gender identities which sustain discrete and binary categories of man and woman." (Butler, "Performativce Acts and Gender Constitution," Feminist Theory Reader, 2003)

AND YOU WILL THINK
Damn. "The status of the category itself." Just like Scott, I mean, just like Foucault, if we’re trying to go deeper. Is this what makes "queer" thought different from gendered thought?

AND CLARE HEMMINGS (feminist! Director of the Gender Institute at the London School of Economics!) WILL JUMP IN! TO SAY!
I ... do not want to leave Butler stranded at, constituting even, the border between poststructuralism and feminism ... (I want to) break from the claustrophobic assumption that feminism is anachronistic, has been left behind, is dead and buried. ... [to] provide a narration via feminist traces present in these dominant narratives already. (190)

'AND AT THE SAME TIME YOU WILL BE THINKING: Is that truly going “deeper” though? Or, mi studies even further?

AND YOU WILL REALIZE
There is still so much I do not know.

A TO DO LEARN LIST:
Private vs. public?
Subjectivity.
Power <<

>> POWER
Living in the earth-deposits of our history
adrienne rich
After reading Andrea Smith’s blog post entitled “The Problem with ‘Privilege’” it was easy to think about the privilege that I don’t have, ignoring that studying at a private institution is already a privilege that not many in my community have. This privilege comes with a lot of struggles and responsibilities.

Primera generación. Being a first-generation student is not easy. I am scared to ask too many questions because I don’t want to look “stupid.” My family has taught me to work hard on my own, but how can I work independently in college when the public education that I received in high school has failed me? I have to catch up to my classmates who have great writing skills. First day of freshman year, my classmates knew about Spivak from reading books at a young age. I sat in class quietly listening until I realized that I’ve known about Spivak’s theory because I am a part of one of those “subaltern” groups that have been excluded by hegemonic structures. I grew up hearing my mom saying that Ellos son unos corruptos. Nos han quitado todo. She always refers to “them” as corrupt, those who have stolen everything from us. Those who have taken our house. Those who label us “illegal” and “lazy.” Those who say that we come to this country to take their jobs. My mom has always told me that for this reason I have to go to college and earn the life that has been taken away. Now that I’m in college I read about abstract theories that, even when taken out of context can help me further understand my reality back home.

Tengo el mundo encima. The world on my shoulders. I am taking four classes. I need to call home every day to check up on my family. I have to translate legal documents into Spanish for my mom. I have to buy expensive books when I only have $20 in my bank account. I have to read over 100 pages every night and write two papers by the end of this week. I have to go to office hours before I fall behind in class. I have to meet up with my group for presentations. I have to apply to paid internships because I cannot afford to spend a summer without earning money. I have to fill out my FAFSA and CSS profile. I have four jobs on campus. Fitting three meals and 8 hours of sleep into one day is impossible.

La burbuja. I become overwhelmed by the workload. The college bubble blurs my reality. I have access to three meals a day, I don’t have to worry about paying water and/or electricity bills, and I have a bed that waits for me every night. I complain about the food on campus, but going back home my fridge is constantly empty. My family members work multiple jobs, but I only have to worry about my homework. Every month my family has to think about paying rent, food, and electricity, but I have a heating system in my room during the harsh winters.

La revolución empieza conmigo. Expressing my marginalization and my privileges is not the end of the story. We point our fingers at the fucked up system, making it sound like we are outsiders and ignoring the right here and the right now. Life after the bubble will bring new responsibilities and it will be up to me to strengthen my community.

On being a student at a private institution…

“of course i want to be successful but i don’t crave success for me i need to be successful to gain enough milk and honey to help those around me succeed”

rupi kaur
The word **ZINE** will begin as a “recent variant of fanzine, a neologism coined in the 1930s to refer to magazines self-published by aficionados of science fiction” (Redway, 140). Zines will make their way into the PUNK scene of the 1980s. The punk subculture, which centers on punk rock music, includes a diverse array of ideologies, fashions, and forms of expression, including visual art, dance, literature, and film (Wikipedia). In the late 1980s and 1990s, the zine will become a central component of the “riot grrrl zine scene.”[1] Michelle Comstock (2001), will describe the politics of these “grrrl zinesters” as “an adjustment ... of earlier feminist principles, including the privileging of gender as an universal category” (384).

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**RIOT GRRRL** is generally understood as a spontaneous social movement of mostly white, middle-class girls and young women that developed in the wake of all-girl punk bands. Angered by the treatment of women in the punk scene, some girls began to organize their own bands and to articulate their views about music and the larger social and political scene in zines” (Redway, 149).
I, ALEXANDER: The Many Faces of Alexander

At this point in my life, I feel that there are multiple versions of myself that currently exist. These versions of myself capture different parts of my sexuality in relationship to both gendered and racial expectations/norms, but there is no single, outwardly visible version of myself that encompasses all aspects of my sexuality. Although there are multiple versions of myself that exist, I would say that there are two (or three) main versions of me. These versions are fairly opposite in terms of geographic location and the conformation (or lack thereof) to gender normativity.

Neither of these versions, however, completely encompasses who I am as a person.
My first version is the main version that I lived for the majority of my life. This is the self that I am when I’m home in Houston. This Alexander is a straight, Hispanic male, whose ultimate goal in life is to get married [to a woman] and raise a family. It is expected that this Alexander fits into the stereotype of a Hispanic male. By this, I mean that he must act as macho as possible, which can be very difficult considering that this is not a characteristic associated with other versions of Alexander. This includes being interested in sports and yard work, among other things. He must also forgo any activities that may be considered inherently feminine. These include, but are not limited to, cooking and baking. This Alexander only uses non-gendered or male-gendered products. Similarly, this Alexander only wears clothing and shoes that are explicitly meant for men, and do not hint at any type of femininity.
This version of Alexander came about, and has persisted into the present for a plethora of reasons. I would say that this version initially arose from my academic setting. At my school, doing something feminine or generally associated with femininity, you lead other boys (exclusively boys) to ask: “Are you gay?”

At this point, I honestly had not tackled the idea of sexuality, and I Frankly did not give a crap about it. Also, I felt that it was nobody’s fucking business whether I liked boys or girls. Out of convenience, my response became “No. I’m straight, I like girls.” Because of this common interaction, I became more conscious of what I did. I would say that this is one of the big reasons that I continued this persona throughout high school. My father was the other person who had a major influence on my understanding of gender and sexuality. Being Hispanic, and having grown up in Nicaragua, my dad, in certain ways, has more of an old-world mentality. Even though he went to undergraduate and graduate school here in the United States, and has lived in the United States ever since, he still retains some of these values. One of these values is definitely that men are supposed to do “masculine” things, and women are supposed to do “feminine” things. In his eyes, there should not really be any crossover. As a result, I was not allowed to play with dolls or play dress up (even with costumes meant for men) in front of my dad. Instead, I had to do this at my next-door neighbor’s house. In fact, my dad got angry the one year that I took ballet with my twin sister. I would say that these views are a main reason that I also consciously adjusted my behavior to reflect more of a masculine persona. (Although certain things like sports were always a no-go for me). Even though I’m at college, this persona has continued for a variety of reasons. I would say that the biggest reason for the continuation of this persona is to benefit from heteronormativity, at least on a very local level. By this, I mean that I specifically kept up this performance in order to benefit from my father. I will premise this by saying that, in general, my father is a fairly progressive person. By this, I mean that he is a liberal democrat, who is pro marriage equality, pro LGBT rights, and pro women’s rights. However, when it comes to your own kids, this ideology goes out the window, and none of this is guaranteed. Since I do not know how my father will react to a non-heterosexual version of Alexander, I’ve only allowed my father to know or be aware of this specific version of Alexander. Although, for the most part, I do not care about my father’s reaction to my sexuality or what he thinks about my sexuality, I am still in need of his financial support in order to attend Middlebury College. Since this uncertainty does exist, I would much rather...
My second version was one that I was only able to craft after I had left home and gone to college. This Alexander is fairly opposite from the "home" version of Alexander in many ways. He is a homosexual male who also views himself, although not as strongly as the "home" version, as being Hispanic, mostly because of the macho image stereotypically associated with being a Hispanic male. In terms of "family," this Alexander only seeks a life-long partner, and, at this point, does not want to have children. In relation to a certain "homo sexual identity," this Alexander is still kind of in a transitional period. He knows that he is romantically interested in guys, but he does not know where he falls on the "top" versus "bottom" spectrum, or how to classify his body type using conventional identifiers (e.g., twink, otter, etc.). Frankly, this Alexander does not really give a crap about these classifiers to begin with, but is always curious. In fact, this Alexander just generally does not care about masculinity versus femininity. His fashion sense is more edgy, and he finds men's clothing to be incredibly boring. This is why, when he dresses up, he likes to wear eye-catching clothing and shoes. In fact, in terms of wedged boots, which he happily buys from the women's shoe section (and is a hell of a lot cheaper than buying a similar shoe from the men's department). Occasionally, he even wears makeup. When he wants to feel adventurous, he will wear colored eyeliner or nail polish. In fact, this Alexander's sense of style has started transgressing the physical body. See this Alexander's style on both the "home" and this version professionally highlighted hair is a physical indication of this Alexander's presence.
Unlike the “home” version, this version has only recently existed, at least in its entirety. In relationship to place, this VERSION of Alexander is allowed to exist, because there is no possible way for rumors of this Alexander to make it back home, mostly because home is over 1,500 miles away, and taint the “home” VERSION of Alexander. Naturally, this means that both versions of Alexander are pretty much mutually exclusive to location, except in the case of my mother, my twin sister, and my very close friends from home. Unlike the “home” VERSION, this VERSION is aware of the other VERSION’s existence, and is able to grow and adjust from the other’s experiences, whereas the “home” VERSION is relatively stagnant. Although this VERSION has only existed for a couple of years, its formation has been a long-term process. I would say that this VERSION originally started as slow modifications of my “home” self in high school, although elements of this VERSION started materializing much earlier (such as in Kindergarten when I wanted to be Britney Spears for Halloween or in Elementary School when I wanted to be a Girl Scout).
Between the two words: simple verb. Is.
A conjugated form of the verb to be. [infinite]
OED will tie that single “is” to existence, and will tie existence to fact.

To Be: “to have or take place in the world of fact, to exist, occur, happen” (OED).
“Is” will act as more than an equal sign
— it will make ideas real.

YOU WILL SAY
History is the past.
As you speak, you will tie the amorphous “history” down to facts—down to earth
... and then you will cram it into the box of “the past.”

YOU WILL SAY
History is the past.
History will carry no pronoun, no article to define its boundaries.
Past will be limited by “the,” an article, or determiner.
The will define and will determine the edges of past.
The idea of “past” will be made real, enough to think of as one thing.
Between the two words: a simple verb. Is.
A conjugated form of the verb to be. [infinite]
The Oxford English Dictionary will tie that single “is” to existence, and will tie existence to fact.
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... and then you will cram it into the box of “the past.”
I, Matt

I refuse to engage in the traditional frameworks of historicization that render experience indisputable.

Photography is a medium that ostensibly captures experiences that have happened, suggesting typically that these experiences were factual.

I create highly fictional, artificial scenes, and capture them in black and white film.

None of these events I’ve captured have happened, at least not in the ways a viewer of the image might be inclined to assume.

There is no truth behind the image.

I appropriate and reclaim markers of visual experience and history that would insinuate occurrence.

Experience assumes an individual has been there to see or feel the experience unfold. Whether experience is had internally in one’s own mind, or externally by what we perceive with our senses, there is a person there that documents it. By adhering to this framework of experience, we fail to ask ourselves how the identities that record experience are constructed themselves. The three images I’ve included in the zine are entitled Swamp People, Counter-Cola, and Audrey, Matthew and Elizabeth. At first glance, each of the photographs naturalize experience as having happened, and seem to be recorded by an individual. The viewer is led to believe upon seeing Audrey, Matthew and Elizabeth that the subject actually shaved their face beside an Audrey Hepburn poster, and somebody else captured the “moment.” As Audrey, Matthew and Elizabeth is a self-portrait I produced, every step in constructing the image was intentional.

Never once did a traditional experience unfold; the scene was highly staged, and through the medium of photography, made to resemble the snapshot photographs of our everyday lives.

We are inundated with digital images many of us consume as self-evidently truthful. This photograph in particular highlights the operational structures of gender and sexuality I’m attempting to unveil. We inherently assume gender based in experience. We see or hear men and women, yet the evidence we rely upon to conclude this is empirical, and we don’t question our methodology. In attempting to identify the gender of the sitter in Audrey, Matthew and Elizabeth, one is forced to rely on visual markers of gender, both photographically and textually. One might assume that the poster reading “LIZ,” the famous portrait of Audrey Hepburn, or the rows of dolls lining the walls belongs to a female-identifying individual. However, the male gendered connotations of the razor and shaving cream contradict the analysis that the sitter is female. This unpacking of experience, one that never leads to a conclusion, weaves together a photographic narrative that subverts the expectation of reality attached to the medium of photography. In both Swamp People and Counter-Cola, I construct similar conundrums that undermine the experiential photographs. Swamp People, which depicts the subject gripping a magazine clipping by two fingers. The clipping features a swath of modern presidential features. The subject’s clothing is emblazoned with the text, “Swamp People.” functioning as a caption to the magazine excerpt. Counter-Cola features a crushed coke can beside large knife, being washed in a sink. Both environments are constructed, alongside their captions, to create experience where none was had.

By positing the photograph as an object that disallows the viewer’s ability to arrive at an empirical conclusion, the photograph now allows the viewer to see the making of both experience and identity.
... am done? I am a senior. I am graduating.
I am a joint history & ENAM major. I promise you this is an important fact.
I told "someone" once that: every time I write, I reinvent my selfhood.

1...

My story of myself is both social & academic - the one informs the other & I ELANA cannot be separated from the two.

1?

I told someone once that: when I write stories [read: papers] I write my story of myself.
I tell myself this too.

[but, also, like, idk. What do you think?]

Here is a story.

ELANA believe that language is fallible, as corrupt and easily swayed as the beings that produce it – us. Poetry, that “patterned intensity of language,” pushes at the edges of our ability to understand the thing that writes us into being – and therefore pressures our understandings of our own selves. Poetry is in the ineffable made effable; it is lace, cobweb, netting. It is a structure built from holes and dissonances, an invitation to sink into sound, to slip through the concrete letters and emerge into something mysterious, something larger, something mystical. Poetry is beauty, a sublime beauty that is composed of the content tension of the many truths of the world.

"Fire and blood, both;" Wilbur Daniel Steele once wrote. “[S]pare one or the other, and where is beauty, the way the world is?"

Fire and blood, darkness and light, the living and the dying... A beautiful world must be rich with the pain of life—the pain of existing in a world where there is no single truth to cling to. Poetry is one style that allows history to be written, a style that allows the “little truths” of nonfiction and the “big truths” of fiction to co-exist in ways that expand our culture’s stories of self.

WHAT COUNTS AS EXPERIENCE IS NEITHER SELF-EVIDENT NOR STRAIGHTFORWARD; IT IS ALWAYS CONTESTED, AND ALWAYS THEORETICALLY IMPORTANT. THEREFORE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO QUESTION ITS ORIGINARITY STATUS IN HISTORICAL EXPLANATION.

THIS WILL HAPPEN WHEN HISTORIANS TAKE AS THEIR PROJECT NOT THE REPRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE ANNOUNCED AT THROUGH EXPERIENCE, BUT THE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF THAT KNOWLEDGE ITSELF.

(JOAN SCOTT, "THE EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE," SUMMER 1991)


