

# The Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets Chapbooks, Archives, and Sara Ahmed's Feminist Affects

A woman's language conveys the web of interconnectedness, the immense, intricate dance of relationships happening in the most spacious of moments, now.

—Penn Kemp, "Deftly Stroked Images"

In this essay, I theorize the Living Archives chapbook series, which is produced and published by the Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets.<sup>1</sup> I explore the first two chapbooks of the series in conversation with the work of feminist theorist Sara Ahmed, focusing in particular on her concepts of feminist wonder, feminist hope, and the "non-presentness" of any particular encounter. In addition to familiarizing readers with the critically neglected Living Archives series, I suggest that reading the series through Ahmed's work on feminism, affect, and the "now" helps us to recognize the multiple temporalities and constitutive emotions of the Feminist Caucus' archival project. In particular, Ahmed offers a lens through which to read some of the project's silences, tensions, and potential inaccuracies productively, from an angle that does more than just point out failings. This essay works through three examples. First, rather than reading chapbook descriptions of Caucus meetings for their factual accuracy, we can read them as narratives of remembered moments of affective feminist community. Second, when the chapbooks lament their own exclusions, we can recognize such self-critique as fundamental to feminist hope. Third, when there is palpable silence within chapbook pages, we can—rather than simply diagnosing a breakdown in communication—look for the potential "elsewheres" of the text. Additionally, multiple temporalities (the cohabitation of the now, the past, and the future) emerge as a theme throughout this investigation in accordance with their centrality in Ahmed's work and in the Feminist Caucus' archival project.

The Feminist Caucus was established as a committee of the League of Canadian Poets in 1982. This founding was achieved amidst “much vociferous discussion” at the League’s 1982 Annual General Meeting; indeed, some League members resigned to protest the inauguration of the Caucus (Kates and Springer 245; Struthers n.pag.). The official motion that launched the Feminist Caucus stated that its members would “undertake research and develop strategies to increase participation by and recognition of women in all aspects of poetry” both within the League and beyond (Struthers n.pag.). Founders were mobilized by gender disparities in wages for freelance work, support for reading tours, membership in the League of Canadian Poets, and representation on the League executives and committees (Kates and Springer 245; Nelson, “Sexual Politics” 25-34; Struthers n.pag.). First published in a 1981 League newsletter, Sharon Nelson’s report on these disparities was an effective call to arms. Indeed, her article was republished in the first Feminist Caucus chapbook, discussed below, as the text that “represents the Feminist Caucus’ beginning” (Ford, “Out” 15). Most texts in the chapbooks, however, arise out of presentations given at the Feminist Caucus’ annual meetings, held in conjunction with the League’s AGM. The twenty-five chapbooks in the ongoing Living Archives series generally include poems, essays, letters, sketches, and introductory material. The chapbook titles over the years indicate the breadth of topics: from *What’s a Nice Feminist?* in 1989 (Nicholls) to *Urban/rural: Women, Writing & Place* 1995 (Bannerman and Graham) to *O(pen)ings: Feminism and Postmodernism 2000* (Edwards) to *Poetry and the Disordered Mind* 2012 (Monahan). Material from the chapbooks has been collected in two publications: *Siolence: Poets on Women, Violence and Silence* (McMaster) and *Imprints and Casualties: Poets on Women and Language, Reinventing Memory* (Burke). These books are listed as volumes one and two; a third volume is forthcoming (Burke, “Re: Living”). In what follows here, I focus on the first two chapbooks that the Feminist Caucus published: *Stats, Memos & Memory* 1982 (Ford and Nelson) and *Illegitimate Positions: Women & Language* 1987 (Ford and McMaster). *Stats, Memos & Memory* consists of an essay by Cathy Ford that introduces the Living Archives series, followed by two essays by Sharon Nelson. *Illegitimate Positions* contains texts by Cathy Ford, Erin Moure,<sup>2</sup> Suniti Namjoshi, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Penn Kemp, Margaret Christakos, Bronwen Wallace, and Susan McMaster. This paper draws primarily from the chapbook contributions of Ford, Moure, Nelson, Wallace, and McMaster. I focus on these texts because they relate most directly to the Caucus’ conceptualization of the Living Archives series itself.

When we think about the question “why archive?” the most obvious answer might be: we archive so that material is preserved for the future. Jacques Derrida goes so far as to say that “the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. . . . It is a question of the future” (36). If the decision to archive is future-oriented, it is a decision made in a present time that imagines future presents. Multiple temporalities are inherent to the archival impulse. For instance, by stating that the Living Archives series is a collection of chapbooks that document the Feminist Caucus’ annual panels, I have already alluded to moments that are key to the existence of this self-titled “archive”: the moment of the panel, the subsequent moments when its proceedings are collected for publication, along with the far-reaching moment when the Caucus members decided to produce chapbooks in the first place. Similar moments exist for any conference proceedings. But the unique conditions surrounding the publication of the Living Archives series add other temporalities, complicating the timeline from live panel to written text. For instance, the two chapbooks that I focus on in this analysis have dates on their covers: 1982 and 1987. However, the copyright pages of each indicate that they were both published in 1992, although they anthologize the presentations from the 1982 and 1987 Feminist Caucus meetings. Cathy Ford explains in the chapbook *Stats, Memos & Memory* that the series launched in 1992 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Feminist Caucus within the League of Canadian Poets (“Out” 7). This retrospective publishing task was complicated by the fact that material from the previous decade was “drifting in basement boxes or scribbled notes or cardboard files” (McMaster, “A Living” 46). Indeed, to publish annotated proceedings years after the fact was—unsurprisingly—“an arduous task, due to the difficulty of establishing the accuracy of records kept over ten years, last-minute changes to panel participants, and research back to written materials that were spoken from” (Ford, “Out” 10). For these 1992 publications, the chapbook editors also invited the original speakers to comment on their original texts, adding to the temporal multiplicity of each publication.

In thinking through the interconnected temporalities that inhabit panel proceedings, the relationship between the moment of a live panel and the moment of its future written proceedings might seem to be the simplest intertemporal relationship in the publication process. But in the case of the Living Archives, the bumpy process and the intermediary years between the panels and their respective publications may make readers skeptical of the chapbooks’ claim to “archive” the panels. For instance, commenting on the editorial processes behind the Living Archives series as described by Cathy

Ford in *Stats, Memos & Memory*, Patrick Finn writes that “Ford’s words are moving and her argument compelling, yet I cannot help wondering what actually occurred in 1982. What was said in those early panels that has been excluded?” (104). He goes on to critique a different chapbook for its “invasive revisionism” (105), part of which he attributes to it being “billed as being from 1985–87” when its “construction and publication” actually occurred in the early 1990s (108).<sup>3</sup> Finn problematizes these self-styled “archives” in productive ways, but in turning to the chapbooks’ descriptions of their originary panels, I am interested in *how* the panels are described rather than wondering if the descriptions are factually accurate. Rather than scrutinizing the descriptions for their historical precision, I read these descriptions as affirmations that the chapbooks emerged from remembered/lived moments of affective community, thus providing one way of articulating a genealogy of this feminist story and its drive to archive itself.

Ahmed’s conceptualization of feminist wonder offers vocabulary through which to describe this point. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed discusses “emotions that bring us into feminism,” notably wonder and hope (178). Part of the Feminist Caucus’ rationale for archiving their meetings sprang from an urge to capture the heady moments of feminist assembly. In response to the question of why the Caucus members acted on the desire to archive, McMaster answers, “Simple, I think. Too many of us had had some kind of significant turn, or rush of relief and freedom, or moment that couldn’t be forgotten, in one of these panels” (“A Living” 45). Ahmed states that the experience of wonder—which would be integral to these Feminist Caucus unforgettable moments—can offer decisive instances of feminist self-identification (*Cultural* 180). For Ahmed, feminist wonder is twofold. First, there is the wonder that comes from learning that the world is the way it is because it has been *made* that way over time through work (rather than accepting current conditions as natural or ordinary, which elicits no wonder) (180). This wonder inspires the feminist conviction that “refuses to allow the taken-for-granted to be granted” (Ahmed 182). Second, there is also the wonder that comes from realizing that the world can therefore be different, that it can be changed through collective action (Ahmed 181). This inspires the feminist conviction that “energises the hope of transformation, and the will for politics” (Ahmed 181). Feminist wonder is, for Ahmed, something that occurs collectively, the “affective opening up of the world through the act of wonder, not as a private act, but as an opening up of what is possible through working together” (181).<sup>4</sup>

With this in mind, I turn to Cathy Ford's description of the 1987 Feminist Caucus meeting. In *Illegitimate Positions*, she writes:

The scents and sense of a hot room in Ontario in summer, a room filled with women, the perfume of bodies and flowers and words, the spectrum of colour, shape, and size, was an intoxication we were welcoming as a gathering of women writers, as a Caucus. There was a sense of amazement, 'we' did this? . . . I remember, again, that time and place which illustrated to me, again, that it is *also* when the strongest, most articulate, most forthright women open their intellects and hearts and written words to discussion, to sharing, that it is both a time of sorrow (those realizations, frustrations, efforts) *and* joy (that giggle, that connection of a common experience). ("Instead" 7-8)

Clearly, Ford remembers this as an encounter ripe with affect: it is electric, erotic, sad, and euphoric. Ahmed's description of feminist wonder offers one way of reading this narrative. To draw on Ahmed's definition discussed above, this is, for Ford, a collective experience ("gathering," "sharing," "connection") that involves both lament for current conditions (the "sorrow" of "realizations") and "amazement" at what might be accomplished through feminist action. Ford's evocation of "a room," "a hot room," "the bodies sprawled; the sound poems played and danced across the room" (7) depicts a space full of women, the atmosphere electric and emboldening. Ahmed, writing more than a decade after Ford, affirms that "[t]he passion of wonder can be passed between the bodies that make up the cramped spaces of Women's Studies" (Ahmed 183). The chapbook that emerged from this particular cramped space explicitly asks the question: what connects feminists? (Christakos 37). One answer to that question is: a sense of wonder, insofar as "what is shared is . . . the capacity to leave behind the place of the ordinary" (Ahmed 183).

But what if—to come back to Finn's questions—that's not what really happened in that "hot room in Ontario"? What if everyone wasn't having such a great time? What if the Living Archives' expressed intention to "collect and present, as far as possible, what had *actually happened* at each panel" (McMaster, "A Living" 46, emphasis added) is an impossibility, given the fraught nature of memory and textual representation, not to mention the potential "invasive revisionism" described by Finn? The chapbook contains other (different) descriptions of this same panel; read collectively, they can offer the impression that we are informed about what "really" happened. For instance, in the piece immediately following Ford's, Erin Moure remembers the panel as "well-attended. There was much questioning and listening, much thoughtfulness, along with a little 'cold air'" ("A Space" 11). Though it may be difficult to imagine "cold air" in Ford's "hot room," we assume that

the composite portrait painted by numerous voices is a more complete, well-rounded remembrance of the live panel. The idea that different participants had different experiences of the shared moment—and the idea that some might have felt more “cold air” than “feminist wonder”—is confirmed in the piece that Cathy Ford wrote as an introduction to the entire Living Archives series in *Stats, Memos & Memory*. There she acknowledges that “[f]or some, this place among women, among poets, is the safest place they have found; for others, this is the least safe place of all—it demands truth, beauty, honesty, integrity, political commitment and action” (Ford, “Out” 16-17). If the euphoria of one remembrance of the panel is tempered by another, does it become impossible to assert feminist wonder as grounds for feminist collectivity? I have made this assertion above by utilizing Ahmed’s concept of feminist wonder and it is the breadth of that conception that can actually accommodate “a little cold air.” Feminist wonder turns its “critical gaze” not only on oppressive conditions in the world but also on the “very forms of feminism that have emerged here or there” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 182). That is, feminist wonder *includes* turning a critical eye on manifestations of feminism. Ahmed cites Black feminism as an intervention steeped in feminist wonder, a critical wonder, “which includes the very political movements to which we are attached” (182). Part of the intervention of Black feminism has been to denounce the ways in which terms such as “women” and “feminism” have been deployed with inherent exclusions (Ahmed 182). The first two Living Archives chapbooks celebrated the diversity of voices between their pages *and* worried about a lack of diversity. Rather than reading this concern as evidence of the collective’s failure, I argue that it can be conceptualized as part and parcel of feminist hope, which Ahmed defines as invested in multiple temporalities. Feminist wonder therefore is experienced by Feminist Caucus poets who felt an unequivocal sense of solidarity *and* by participants who felt marginalized by that particular “we.”

In the founding chapbooks of the Living Archives, there are passages that celebrate the multiplicity of voices represented in the chapbooks. Susan McMaster notes the “very disparate things” and “all the different voices” of each annual panel (“A Living” 46-47). Similarly, Ford describes the series as “a celebration of a multiplicity of voices, perceptions, and literary styles” (“Out” 7-8). In fact, the form of the publications was meant to preserve this multiplicity. The Feminist Caucus decided to produce anthology-like chapbooks collected into a series because it was seen as a form that could

accommodate diverse texts without imposing an overarching narrative. The chapbook series was “a flexible but simple format that could accept anything, and still make sense of it” (McMaster, “A Living” 47). This editorial decision is part of what makes the Feminist Caucus conceive of these archives as “living,” as in the title *Living Archives*. The series is conceptualized as a “large, perhaps even amoebae pool” because of its co-extant diverse voices (Ford, “Out” 12). The amoeba metaphor connotes *aliveness*, and in particular, aliveness that does not have a definite, predetermined shape. Another text conveys the series’ aliveness by anthropomorphizing it as progeny. In an extended metaphor that McMaster returns to over three pages, the Feminist Caucus members “give birth” to the idea for the series, and the first two chapbooks are the “twins” they produce (“A Living” 46-47). Her tone is light but the metaphor conveys the real labour of collating these texts. It also conveys their sense that the project insisted on being archived. Their drive to archive their annual meetings gestated over time, growing and “making a fuss. Obviously, vigorously alive” (McMaster, “A Living” 45). The metaphor is slippery: the drive to archive is itself a child that “wouldn’t lie down and be quiet” but the chapbooks are also babies. Because McMaster is writing in 1992, when six panels from the previous decade are still waiting to be transformed into chapbooks, they are described as “yet unborn” (“A Living” 47). So when the Feminist Caucus describes these archives as “living” they refer to the persistence of the archival drive, the chapbooks as their collectively birthed offspring, and the collected voices as generative in their differences.

Lest readers be tempted to gloss over these choices of metaphor, one of Sharon Nelson’s texts in *Stats, Memos & Memory* is a cogent reminder of the power of metaphorical language in feminist analysis. In “Metaphors, Analogies, and Things That Go Bump in the Night,” Nelson dissects common axioms that reinforce a man/woman binary. But she spends the bulk of her essay examining the metaphors used to describe divisions between feminists in the women’s movement. She discusses the “sisterhood of womankind” as a dangerous metaphor that blinds us to the vast differences between women’s experiences (44). Her reasoning is similar to Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s influential critique of the international “sisterhood” evoked in the 1984 anthology *Sisterhood is Global* (Mohanty 109-17; Morgan). Nelson’s argument is also akin to those that Ahmed attributes to the critical wonder of Black feminism. What they hold in common is an awareness of intersectionality that leads to a critique of signifiers meant to encompass *all* women or *all* feminists. When the



Living Archives are celebrated as “an amoebae pool” (Ford, “Out” 12), it is with the hope that they can avoid such a homogenization of women’s different perspectives. Yet alongside this hope and celebration (“a sense of amazement—‘we’ did this?” Ford, “Instead” 7) is a sense of anxiety that the “we” of the Living Archives is not as multiple as it could be. One of the most poignant statements identifying both joy and sorrow appears in Ford’s piece in *Stats, Memos & Memory*: “I am as much celebrating what is here as I am grief-stricken at what is not; as proud of what is said as I am ashamed of what’s been missed or said without sufficient regard for the place of others” (“Out” 17). Ford declares grief and shame interspersed with pride and rejoicing in response to the contents of the Living Archives inaugural chapbooks. I read this narrative of multiple affects through Ahmed’s description of feminist hope. Rather than identifying hope as entirely invested in what the future might bring, Ahmed describes hope as inhabiting a present in which the past unfolds. Multiple temporalities are integral to Ahmed’s understanding of feminist hope; indeed, the past, present, and future are of recurring concern in recent reflections on hope and feminist theory (Coleman and Ferreday 316-17). Consider Ahmed’s sentence: “To have hope in feminism is to recognise that feminist visions of the future have not been realised in the present” (*Cultural* 187). This hope is connected to the past because present conditions repeat past oppressions and are thus undesirable from a feminist perspective. This hope is in the present because it is predicated on an evaluation of present conditions. This hope is also in the present because it informs feminist action. This hope conceives of the future through a sense of the “not yet,” as in “the moment of hope is when the ‘not yet’ impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 184).<sup>5</sup>

I have paraphrased Ahmed’s concepts of feminist hope and wonder in order to place her work in conversation with Nelson and Ford as they address feminist exclusions. In the quote above, Ford laments that certain feminist voices might be excluded from the amoebae pool of the Living Archives. If we imagine the chapbook texts as the present tense of Ford’s comment, her concern is that the past (the panels) that has informed this present was itself misshaped by all the lamentable conditions in the world that would bar diverse voices from participation. Ford recognizes what Ahmed posits as fundamental to feminist hope: that “feminist visions of the future have not been realised in the present” (Ahmed, *Cultural* 187). Key here is the interpretation facilitated by Ahmed, which allows us to read Ford’s



realization as integral to feminist hope, rather than to read her realization as a sign of feminist failure. Ford gestures at this reading when she writes: “What has been done so far by the Feminist Caucus is not enough. Perhaps that is its saving grace, the very irony that most feminist action contends with” (“Out” 14). The connection between these two sentences, the second purporting to be an interpretation of the first, may seem puzzling at first glance. But it can be puzzled out as an expression of feminist hope, a hope that recognizes the past and the “not yet” in the present. Neither my comments nor Ahmed’s concepts suggest that admitting feminist exclusions is sufficient response to those exclusions. What I am proposing, by placing Ahmed in conversation with the Living Archives, is a productive way to read such admissions. I want to pre-empt the assumption that divisions within the feminist movement are equal to feminist failure and that feminism is therefore not a viable intervention. Imagine an all-too-familiar recalcitrant voice that says, “Well, if those feminists can’t even get along with each other or agree on what they want, how can they possibly get it together enough to change the world?” In this viewpoint, feminist disagreement becomes a pretext to dismiss feminism itself.

In her text on metaphor, Nelson gives us good reason to beware this faulty logic. She argues that the metaphor of the “sisterhood of womankind” is a patriarchal construct that functions to undermine feminist solidarity by encouraging feminists to falsely perceive “unity as a necessity, difference as divisive, and division as disunity” (“Metaphors” 45). In other words, the notion that women are all “sisters” rests on the assumption of their sameness; when sameness is meant to beget consensus, disagreement is seen as malfunction and failure (Nelson, “Metaphors” 40-45). This conclusion—that feminism fails when there is internal division—can be rejected if we adopt narratives that do not rest on the sameness of the subjects who identify with the feminist movement. I am reminded of Dionne Brand’s reflections on the Canadian women’s movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Remarking on the tension within the movement, Brand says, “It was hot. The women’s movement is where all this kind of stuff happens. It’s very charged and angry, but it’s where it happens. People from outside can look at it and see it as fighting, but we’re fighting for something. It will look like it’s in disarray, a mess, but that’s what struggle looks like” (qtd. in Rebeck 122-23). A perspective that asserts “that’s what struggle looks like” is immediately distinguishable from a perspective that asks “why can’t these ‘sisters’ just get along?” In addition to this example from Brand, I have suggested that

Ahmed's narratives of hope and wonder provide other models for narrating feminist community. Indeed, Ahmed's work is premised on a definition of collectivity as "a process of 'collecting together' without a common ground" (Ahmed, "This" 568) just as community is "a site lived through the *desire for* community rather than a site that fulfils and 'resolves' that desire" (Ahmed and Fortier 257). These two definitions come from different texts and contexts.<sup>6</sup> But what they have in common is the idea that the togetherness of collective action does not rest in the homogeneity of the group or in the perfect execution of its commitment to inclusivity.

Feminist hope, wonder, and struggle are counter narratives to the idea that admissions of feminist disunity are equal to feminist defeat. By rooting feminist hope and wonder in the past, present, and "not yet," Ahmed's arguments in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* echo her essay "This Other and Other Others." One of the central manoeuvres of Ahmed's argument in "This Other and Other Others" is to draw a connection between the "otherness" of the future and the "others" of feminist community. She argues for an "ethics" or a "politics" of thinking through "particular encounters" with others, rather than focusing on the future "as the time of and for otherness" (559). She refers to "particular encounters" with others, rather than "particular others," in recognition of the fact that one cannot fully read and know another other (561-62). Indeed, to suggest that the essential particularity of someone is accessible by encountering them would reify the encounter and privilege the present. Rather, Ahmed proposes that we "think of particularity in terms of modes of encounter through which others are faced" (561). These encounters are always shaped by the "non-presentness of the particular" (568); we come back—again—to the importance of temporality. In Ahmed's lexicon, to hold on to the "non-presentness" of a particular encounter is to recognize "the history that the encounter reopens, as well as the future that it might open up" (568). As the culmination of the essay, Ahmed provides a literary mobilization of her theoretical concepts: she describes her "encounter" with a text (the story "Douloti the Bountiful" by Mahasweta Devi, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) (565-68). Similarly, her concept of the "non-presentness of the particular encounter" can frame one poet's contribution to *Illegitimate Positions* in order to explore the historicity and futurity of the chapbook text as a "particular encounter." Like Ahmed's concepts of feminist hope and wonder, her "non-presentness of the particular encounter" is invested in ethical relationships between "others" and a revitalized understanding of "failures" in those relationships.

Bronwen Wallace contributed one poem to *Illegitimate Positions*. Entitled “Bones,” it appears toward the close of the chapbook, immediately preceding McMaster’s concluding remarks on the launch of the Living Archives series. The explanatory note that precedes “Bones” was penned by Erin Moure and dated 1992 (Moure, “In” 42). In two short paragraphs, Moure specifies that Wallace decided *not* to publish the essay she wrote for the *Illegitimate Positions* panel in this chapbook.<sup>7</sup> Moure states that Wallace disagreed with the two quotes that were sent out to the panel speakers as prompts for their contributions.<sup>8</sup> Moure implies a causal connection between Wallace’s response to the quotes and her decision to excise her essay. Readers thus begin this particular encounter with Wallace’s poem “Bones” having been advised of an absence in the text, or at least a substitution. In Ahmed’s lexes, a literal absence/substitution in the text coupled with Moure’s candid note alert us to the “non-presentness” of our “particular encounter” with Wallace’s writing. The absence that alerts us to this “non-presentness” is not a lack or a blemish; we are *not* asking, “what’s missing?” but rather “what makes this encounter possible (its historicity)?” (Ahmed, “This” 562). Ahmed’s point about the non-presentness of the particular encounter is that there is no essence of the other that we strive to access in the encounter. All encounters are mediated and formed by their pasts and futures (Ahmed, “This” 562). Ahmed explains,

[T]o discuss the particular modes of encounter (rather than particular others) is also to open the encounter up, *to fail to grasp it*. . . . We need to question not only how we arrived here, at this particular place, but also how this arrival is linked to other places, to an elsewhere that is not simply absent or present. . . . [I]t is a particular encounter that I might have with this other that opens up the possibility of encountering other others, a possibility that we can lovingly interpret as the promise of both the elsewhere and the “not yet.” (“This” 562)

What I am most interested in mobilizing from her argument is the idea that it might be ethically responsible to recognize how we “fail to grasp” particular encounters. The verb “to fail” in the italicized “*to fail to grasp it*,” recalls my point above on metaphorical and narrative reframings of feminist failure. Rather than lamenting that the *Illegitimate Positions* panel was not properly archived, we reframe this “failure”—itself resulting from a moment of feminist disagreement—as a particular encounter between text and reader. Being denied the end point of perfect representation of the live event is a “failure” that occasions openings. We research the “historicity” of this particular encounter; its “futurity” includes such research, my musings here, and unknown future “not yet’s.”

I choose the example of “Bones” because it is editorially framed as absence or substitution, immediately linking it to an “elsewhere.” In the case of “Bones,” the “elsewheres” of Wallace’s contribution to the chapbook could include: the inclusion of her missing essay in another collection, the inclusion of “Bones” in another collection, material at Library and Archives Canada related to the *Illegitimate Positions* chapbook, contemporaneous feminist discussion on the panel’s topics, and—most obviously—the Living Archives chapbook published a year later, *Two Women Talking: Correspondence 1985 to 1987 Erin Mouré and Bronwen Wallace* (McMaster). If we follow Ahmed’s lead in her description of her encounter with Devi’s text, then “elsewhere” might also include a description of my own material encounter with *Illegitimate Positions* within a variety of institutional structures. In evoking these potential “elsewheres” I am not suggesting that we can thereby access the ultimate Truth of the text. Contextualizations are not fluorescent lights illuminating a text’s essence. Deeper historical and intertextual contextualizations are part of exploring a text’s “elsewhere,” but we perform such investigations not because the text/encounter is hidden or empty, but because it is laden and open. We approach the text with critical wonder, knowing that we will “fail to grasp it” (Ahmed, “This” 562) and joyfully reclaiming that failure as the starting point for a more ethical reading of the text. Ultimately, Ahmed suggests that being denied that end point of completion, access, essence, or perfection is a “failure” that occasions openings, inviting us to think harder about intertextualities, intertemporalities, and “elsewheres.”

I began this essay with the question of the temporalities of an archival impulse. Temporalities, particularly the cohabitation of pasts, presents, and futures, are central to Ahmed’s definitions of feminist wonder, feminist hope, non-presentness, and the not-yet. These concepts provide one productive way to read the founding chapbooks of the Living Archives series. In particular, I have placed Ahmed’s theorizations in conversation with chapbook descriptions of the joys and struggles of feminist collaboration, articulated through various metaphors, affect-laden narratives, or absences. Of course, in describing the Feminist Caucus chapbooks as archives invested in multiple temporalities, I have glossed over the fact that these publications are not, technically speaking, “archives” at all. The editors of the Living Archives figure the series as archival because they hope the series will provide a record of their meetings over time. Their use of the term is thus fitting insofar as it captures their conception of the series. In opposition to

cliché perceptions of archives as closed, highly regimented spaces or as dusty, irrelevant material, the Feminist Caucus specifically labels their archives as *alive* (i.e., the “Living” Archives). The adjective “living” resonates with the importance accorded to living bodies and their affects in the chapbooks. In this sense the “living” aspect of these archives invites readers to consider the weight of the originary event in the pages of its corresponding publication, which has been part of the work of this essay. But the series was also labelled “Living” because the Feminist Caucus anticipated that the contents of these publications would be re-collated differently in the future, as they were for the 1998 and 2000 anthologies and for potential digitized versions.<sup>9</sup> They thus envisioned the series as “living” because of its potential for future evolution. In this sense, their faith in the “living” quality of their work is akin to Ahmed’s point on the exponential “elsewheres” of an encounter with a text. These publications are imagined as alive with a multiplicity of poetic voices, manifest in texts that are amenable to future formats, and imbued with the lived experience of Feminist Caucus gatherings. From this standpoint, the “now” during which we encounter them is indeed, as poet Penn Kemp stated in the epigraph above, “that most spacious of moments.”

## NOTES

- 1 I am grateful for support from the Fonds de recherche du Québec—Société et culture, Mount Allison University, and the LCP Feminist Caucus. Many thanks also to the *Canadian Literature* reviewers for their invaluable feedback.
- 2 At the time of these publications, Erin Moure spelled her name Erin Mouré. This essay uses the current spelling, except in the citations for works published under the previous spelling.
- 3 Finn’s article focuses mostly on *Two Women Talking: Correspondence 1985 to 1987 Erin Mouré and Bronwen Wallace* (McMaster), which is listed as the second chapbook in the Living Archives though it was actually published third, in 1993. *Two Women Talking* is likely the Living Archives chapbook that has garnered the most critical attention. Finn’s critical concern that the chapbook has misrepresented its source text is very different from the approach that I suggest in this essay.
- 4 Based on commentary Ahmed has posted to her blog ([feministkilljoys.com](http://feministkilljoys.com)), it seems as if her next book’s discussion of “feminist astonishment” will have much in common with this conceptualization of feminist wonder (Ahmed, “Feminist”).
- 5 Her repeated emphasis on the imperative “we must act” in this section is noteworthy (Ahmed, *Cultural* 184). Ahmed is clear that feminist hope must induce political action. She acknowledges Anna Potamianou’s critique of hope as potential stagnation “which may actually foreclose transformation” (qtd. in Ahmed, *Cultural* 185).
- 6 In “This Other and Other Others,” Ahmed is speaking directly of the grounds for feminist politics (568). In “Re-imagining Communities,” Ahmed and Fortier are addressing the idea of “communities” more generally.

- 7 Moure stipulates that Wallace did publish the essay elsewhere and provides bibliographic information (see Wallace, "Statement").
- 8 The quotes in question came from Gauthier (162-63) and Spender (51). (Ford and McMaster n.p.)
- 9 Digital editions of these chapbooks are being discussed. See "Women and Words: Canadian Feminist Literary Collectives 1980-2000," Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory, [www.cwrc.ca](http://www.cwrc.ca).

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