



7-2018

## Volume 27: Archives

Sophonie Bazile  
*University of Kentucky*

Christine L. Woodward  
*University of Kentucky*

Zachary Griffith  
*University of Kentucky*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#).



### Recommended Citation

Bazile, Sophonie; Woodward, Christine L.; and Griffith, Zachary (2018) "Volume 27: Archives," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Vol. 27 , Article 1.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27>

Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol27/iss1/1>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Questions about the journal can be sent to [disclosurejournal@gmail.com](mailto:disclosurejournal@gmail.com)

# disClosure

A JOURNAL OF SOCIAL THEORY



VOLUME 27

## Archives

EDITED BY SOPHONIE BAZILE, CHRISTINE WOODWARD & ZACHARY GRIFFITH

*disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*

Volume 27: Archives

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Sophonie Bazile, Christine Woodward, and Zachary Griffith  
*University of Kentucky*

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Shannon Branfield, English  
Juan Fernandez-Cantero, Hispanic Studies  
Leslie Davis, English  
Alina Hechler, Gender and Women's Studies

Emily Kaufman, Geography  
Jaeyeon Lee, Geography  
Jess Linz, Geography  
Chinwe Morah, English

FACULTY ADVISOR

Jim Ridolfo, Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies  
*University of Kentucky*

PRODUCTION EDITOR

Jess Linz

COPY EDITORS

Leslie Davis and Zachary Griffith

INTERVIEW EDITOR

Sophonie Bazile

EDITORIAL BOARD

Benjamin Agger, Sociology  
*University of Texas, Arlington*  
James Boon, Anthropology  
*Princeton University*  
Matthew Edney, Geography  
*University of Maine*  
Nancy Fraser, Political Science  
*New School for Social Research*  
Cynthia Feeland, Philosophy  
*University of Houston*  
Sander Gilman, German/Psychology  
*University of Chicago*  
Derek Gregory, Geography  
*University of British Columbia*  
Peter-Uwe Hohendahl, German Studies  
*Cornell University*  
Anton Kaes, German  
*University of California, Berkeley*  
Douglas Kellner, Philosophy of Education  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

Dominick LaCapra, History  
*Cornell University*  
Maggie McFadden, Women's Studies  
*Appalachian State University*  
Michael Palmer, Poet  
*San Francisco, California*  
Marjorie Perloff, Comparative Literature  
*Stanford University*  
Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Anthropology  
*University of California, Berkeley*  
Barney Warf, Geography  
*Florida State University*  
Samuel Weber, German  
*Northwestern University*  
Jim Winders, History  
*Appalachian State University*  
Irving Zeitlin, Sociology  
*University of Toronto*

*disClosure* is a refereed journal produced in conjunction with the Committee on Social Theory at the University of Kentucky. Artists retain copyrights over their contributions. Funding for this volume was provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Cover art: G. Tytler (possibly). Skeleton of the Missouri Leviathan: the skeleton is shown standing in a pastoral setting, with a Native American shown seated on an elephant to indicate scale, while another Native American and a man in Western dress look on. 1842. Watercolor. Reproduced under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0).

Credit: Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/xbsd73ny>.

Web hosting by bepress via UKnowledge.

*disClosure* Editors  
213 Patterson Office Tower  
University of Kentucky  
Lexington, KY 40506-0027  
[disclosurejournal@gmail.com](mailto:disclosurejournal@gmail.com)

eISSN: 2332-9246  
ISSN: 1055-6133  
<https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure>  
<https://www.as.uky.edu/socialtheory>  
<https://www.facebook.com/disclosureatUKY>  
<https://www.twitter.com/disclosureatUKY>



# Table of Contents

- viii**    **Editors' Preface and Acknowledgements**  
Sophonie Bazile, Christine Woodward, and Zachary Griffith
- x**        **A Word about the Cover Art**  
Sophonie Bazile, Christine Woodward, and Zachary Griffith
- 1**        **Place, Memory, and Archive:  
An Interview with Karen Till**  
Emily Kaufman and Christine Woodward
- 8**        **Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Archives:  
An Interview with Kim Christen**  
Leslie Davis, Zachary Griffith, and Jacob Neely
- 15**       **Categories as Archives: From Silence to Social Justice:  
An Interview with Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra**  
Sophonie Bazile, Juan Fernandez-Cantero, and Jess Linz
- 21**       **Images, Silences, and the Archival Record:  
An Interview with Michelle Caswell**  
Harrison Cole and Zachary Griffith
- 28**       **Three Poems**  
Wendy Burk, Julie Swarstad Johnson, and Sarah Kortemeier
- 36**       **To Un-Become: Between Historic Reminder and Hallucination, Geo-  
graphical Document and Childhood Memory, Collective Tragedy and  
Personal Healing**  
Saša Rajšić
- 42**       **Holodomor**  
Taylor Diken

- 44 Gonna die (poem)**  
Wes Grooms
- 48 Library**  
Jessy Randall and Briget Heidmous
- 50 The Meadow and the Archive**  
Kris Bronstad
- 55 Subjectivity and Methodology in the Arch'I've**  
Elizabeth J. Vincelette
- 72 Composition and Cultural Rhetoric**  
Alex Hanson, Stephanie Jones, Thomas Passwater, and Noah Wilson
- 88 The Death of Professor Jones: Ghosts and Memory in a Small University Archives**  
Erin Dix
- 94 Queering the Archive: Transforming the Archival Process**  
Lizeth Zepeda
- 103 Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory**  
Gina Watts
- 112 Togetherness with the Past: Literary Pedagogy and the Digital Archive**  
Madeline B. Gangnes
- 127 People of the Stacks: 'The Archivist' Character in Fiction**  
Sharon Wolff
- 134 A Reckless Verisimilitude: The Archive in James Ellroy's Fiction**  
Bradley J. Wiles
- 151 Book Review: Cruising the Library by Melissa Adler (2017)**  
Kathryn McClain and Jennifer Murray

## 2017-18 Editorial Collective

**Sophonie Bazile** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of Geography. Her research interests include Haitian studies, immigration, and queer theory. Her current research is concerned with how immigration categories spatially organize bodies with a focus on Haitians living with temporary protection status in Kentucky.

**Shannon Branfield** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of English specializing in Victorian literature and gender theory. Her current research focuses on sensation fiction and the Victorian canon.

**Juan Fernandez-Cantero** is a 3rd-year PhD student in the Department of Hispanic Studies with interests in analyzing the intersections of urban studies, education, and coloniality in colonial Latin American literature and culture.

**Leslie Davis** is a 2nd-year MA student in the Department of English focusing on 20th- and 21st-century transatlantic fiction, poetry, and drama. Her current research deals with how individual and social traumas are registered spatially and temporally.

**Zachary Griffith** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of English specializing in post-45 American literature, film, and television. His current research deals with nostalgia and reconstructions of the recent past in contemporary American culture.

**Alina Hechler** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies. She is currently looking at conservative women's engagement with feminism.

**Emily Kaufman** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography with a focus on race, security, GIS, and feminist methodology. Building on her prior work developing the analytic of bio-spatial police profiling, she is currently researching children's embodied experiences of policing.

**Jaeyeon Lee** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of Geography with interests in feminist theory and psychoanalysis. Her current research involves Korean comfort women.

**Jess Linz** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of Geography with interests in urban geography, feminist epistemologies, and affect. Her current work is on gentrification in Mexico City and the opportunities for action that arise in the wake of natural disasters.

**Chinwe Morah** is a 4th-year PhD Candidate in the Department of English specializing in Postcolonial and Anglophone literature. Her current research focuses on the reemergence of the genre of provincial literature in the works of postcolonial anglophone writers.

**Christine Woodward** is a 2nd-year PhD student in the Department of Geography. She is planning a dissertation on urban spatial politics in Brazil and the United States, and maintains an academic interest in digital mapping, critical data studies, queer and feminist theory, and the politics of the body.



## Editors' Preface and Acknowledgements

Sophonie Bazile, Christine Woodward, and Zachary Griffith

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

The 2017-2018 Editorial Collective is pleased to present the 27th volume of *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*. Published since 1992, *disClosure* is an annual graduate student-run journal that is produced in conjunction with the Committee on Social Theory. Each year, a collective of graduate students write and distribute a call for papers, determine a review process for the submissions, copyedit, and are responsible for the design and production of the journal, including layout, cover artwork, and the order of submissions. Each issue of *disClosure* is based on the theme from the previous year's ST 600: Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Social Theory capstone course.

Over the past year, we have compiled an exciting collection of interviews, scholarly articles, poetry, and fiction that explore the volume's central theme: "Archives." Archives are dynamic constellations of absence and presence, ghosts and ghouls, dust and the digital. As such, discussions of archives stretch into multiple schools of thought and practice, raising questions about power, knowledge, memory, community, and social justice. The works collected here, each one employing its own theoretical and methodological approach to archives, contribute to these important and timely conversations.

The volume features interviews from the four scholars invited to the University of Kentucky for the Committee on Social Theory's 2017 Spring Lecture Series: Karen Till, Kimberly Christen, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, and Michelle Caswell. They were generous with their time and energy, sharing insights gathered from years of engagement with archival issues in their research. In their interviews, they tackle archives from the perspectives of indigenous knowledges, privacy, knowledge production, memory, legacies of colonization, violence, community control, art, embodiment, identity, and difference. Ultimately, their words remind us what is at stake in discussions of archives: the past, present, and future of the people who archives do—or do not—represent.

The poetry and artwork in this collection reflect the fragmentary and distant yet paradoxically immediate nature of the archive, tracing the ways in which the stories that we tell, the stories that we remember, and the stories that become official shape our existence. These works also productively probe the role that geography and power play in archives and memory-work, while asking provocative questions about the presence of the past. Together, they comprise a multifaceted study of the archive and its significance in our lives.

Neither this volume nor the conversations that inspired it would have been possible

without University of Kentucky professors Richard Schein (Geography), Mónica Díaz (Hispanic Studies and History), Melissa Adler (Information Science; now at the University of Western Ontario), and Jim Ridolfo (Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies), who conceived of “Archives” as a theme for the Spring 2017 ST600 course and served as its instructors. Their work in inviting the Spring Lecture Series speakers to campus set the foundation for the journal. More importantly, their willingness to share their personal experiences with archives moved the topic from being abstract to concrete and urgent, and we thank them for it. We also want to extend a special thank you to Dr. Ridolfo for his help as the collective’s faculty advisor. His advice on the editorial process from writing the call for papers to production design was invaluable.

We are grateful to the University of Kentucky’s Committee on Social Theory for its support. Program Director Dr. Jeremy Crampton and Interim Director Dr. Michael Samers have been excellent partners throughout the publication process. We appreciate the labor of Social Theory Research Assistants Katie Ratajczak and Jess Linz, as well as administrators Eva Hicks and Lori Tyndall. Their work organizing lunches and flights, making flyers, filming events, reserving space, and troubleshooting often goes unnoticed, but is indispensable and greatly appreciated.

We also want to thank those who have shared their expertise with us over the last year. Adrian Ho, the Director of Digital Scholarship at UK Libraries, was instrumental in keeping the journal going through a difficult transitional period. In addition, he led the push to assign digital object identifiers (DOIs) to all *disClosure* articles. We also appreciate the work of former editor Eric Huntley, who worked alongside Adrian to apply the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial License retrospectively to all *disClosure* content and get the journal indexed with the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Former editors Ashley Ruderman and Cate Gooch also gave generously of their time, answering our questions and sharing materials.

Importantly, we want to recognize those whose time and efforts made this issue possible. We extend a heartfelt thank you to this year’s editorial collective whose dedication and commitment, amidst the joys and pains of coursework, teaching, research, and personal lives, made this volume happen. Finally, we cannot forget the authors whose work on archives covers the pages of *disClosure*, Vol. 27. We are grateful and humbled that they chose to share their work with us.

## A Word About the Cover Art

Sophonie Bazile, Christine Woodward, and Zachary Griffith

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

While searching for an appropriate cover image for the volume, we wanted something that evoked the themes present in the discussions of archives. The image we chose, titled “Skeleton of the Missouri Leviathan” (c. 1842), does this in both form and history. The skeleton in the painting was owned by 19th-century fossil showman Albert Koch. In 1840, Koch purchased several mastodon fossils from a Missouri farmer. Eager to differentiate his exhibit from other curiosities of the time, Koch combined the bones of his mastodon with extra vertebrae and ribs from other mastodons. He took his now 32-foot long skeleton on tour, charging crowds fifty cents per view. The painting itself is based on a lithograph for one of Koch’s showings. The existence of the Missouri Leviathan brings up issues regarding the ownership and knowability of the past, entanglements of archives and capitalism, and the materiality of archival substance.

Then there is the painting itself. The description of the painting on the Wellcome Collection website is as follows: “the skeleton is shown standing in a pastoral setting, with a Native American shown seated on an elephant to indicate scale, while another Native American and a man in Western dress look on.” The painting, then, foregrounds how power, race, and geography are the bedrock on which archives are built. Who in the painting owns the skeleton? What past does it represent? Who benefits from its display? The Native Americans or the man in ‘Western dress’? As the Missouri Leviathan reminds us, and as the works in this volume go on to explore, the digging up, organization, and display of the past is never neutral.

## Place, Memory, and Archive: An Interview with Karen Till

Interviewers: Emily Kaufman and Christine Woodward

DISCLOSURE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

*Dr. Karen Till is Professor of Cultural Geography at Maynooth University, director of the Space & Place Research Collaborative (Ireland), and founding co-Convener of the Mapping Spectral Traces international network of artists, practitioners, and scholars. Till's 2005 book, The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place, explores German memory and modernity, showing how places and spaces exemplify the contradictions and tensions of social memory and national identity. Her current book in progress, Wounded Cities, is based upon geo-ethnographic research in Berlin, Bogotá, Cape Town, Dublin, Minneapolis, and Roanoke. It highlights the significance of place-based memory work and ethical forms of care at multiple scales that may contribute to creating more socially just futures.*

**Emily Kaufman (EK):** We have had debates in class about the proper use of *archives* or *the archive*. We're wondering: how do you define *the archive* or *archives* and if you prefer one over the other?

**Karen Till (Till):** That's a very difficult question. I think that *the archive* would be defined by an institutional history that also has a history associated with nation-building projects tied to histories of colonialism and getting rid of local forms of knowledge production and circulation and transmission. I think a lot of people have done some interesting work about problematizing the Western colonial version of the archive, including Derrida's [(1995)] *Archive Fever*, which I've drawn from quite a bit in my own work, where you have archons, the policers or masters of what's collectible and how it's organized, of very specific histories. Some of my work in Germany refers to the National Socialist project of genocide and mass murder, which was to create an archive of Jewish history and kill the Jewish population in Europe. Also, Achille Mbembe's work about the spaces of death and silence in the colonial archive ['The Power of the Archive and Its Limits' (2002)]. So, there are some extreme

moments of violence [associated with the archive]. Depending on which project I'm looking at, I may turn to those different kinds of nationalist colonial histories.

I also draw heavily from Diana Taylor's work on *The Archive and The Repertoire* [(2003)]. She was saying that within the history of Latin American Studies and performance studies, which also has a Western colonial history, these other kinds of embodied knowledges—gestures, family traditions, and forms of connections of families over generations to land—that are not necessarily collected, could be another form of the archive: the repertoire. To have a real conversation where you're trying to undo colonial histories and trying to imagine a more collaborative future, where you're respecting local knowledge systems and forms of communication, you must look at that kind of tension between the two [the archive and the repertoire]. Some people have interpreted her work as saying these are in opposition, but I think she's saying they're potentially in creative tension. When you begin looking at Taylor's work and the part of Derrida's work where he not only deconstructs, but reconstructs—he will also look at the possibilities of the archive [in *Archive Fever*—then, this embodiment part that we bring in from Taylor's discussion means that...we're all living archives with our body memories. Or it [the archive] can be at different scales for different functions.

So, I would ask instead, "What's productive about putting a boundary around *archive*? What's your goal in doing that?" Then you can look to different practices and literatures that will help you make that boundary drawing productive.

**EK:** You mentioned digitizing to increase access, which brings us to another question: Where do you see archives intersecting with social justice?

**Till:** I'm currently researching and thinking about the artistic practice of dance and theatre companies [ANU Productions and CoisCéim Dance Theatre] who produced *These Rooms* [2016]. I think that their work is trying to encourage a broader range of publics to bear witness or become secondary witnesses to citizens' experiences of war as it comes into the home, which is seen as a safe space. There's this idea that even if people study urban warfare or state violence in cities, then only the city becomes this architectonic entity, when in fact it's a dynamic entity, and the split between the home and the public gets a bit tricky. Perhaps this is where Rich Schein's work on landscape as archive [*Landscape and Race in the United States* (2012)] becomes quite important, because there are possibilities of artists collaborating now with people who are archivists, with local history experts, and some cultural and historical geographers that have a multi-scaled way of thinking about different articulations of memory or knowing. You can do some conceptual mappings to pursue spatial justice. This is where I'm a geographer, of course. The discussion of spatial justice is really where it's at.

There's a potential of the archive to work at multiple scales and multiple localities to help spatial justice projects. Eyal Weizman's group on Forensic Architecture [based at Goldsmiths, University of London] are trying to create what we would call geo-visualizations of places of past violence, wherein regimes didn't document but erased histories. What we have are people's personal testimonies. Another example in Argentina is a group called 'Memoria Abierta' [*Memoria Abierta* (2005)] who has worked with people's families and survivors of different forms of disappearance, in [the Dirty] War, to recreate the minute geographic details of all the places of detainment, torture, and disappearance. We're talking about thousands of places in the city. Even in a place such as Berlin, which is very well

studied, had close to 5,000 labor camps throughout the city [during the period of National Socialism].

The scales of what we're talking about is on every street and in every neighborhood; not one but multiple. We're talking about a particular kind of landscape of incarceration and violence that needs to be mapped, quite literally, to help us think about how those systems of violence and injustice happened, and how we need to be aware of what this means, and how democracies fall, and so quickly, and turn into these systems. Weizman's project is really looking at Palestine, but then it started to move out to other parts of the world, and he received grants to create a forensic architecture program. There's a new book called *Forensis[: The Architecture of Public Truth, 2014]*, Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman] which is a book of case studies from around the world that came out of that project. They're using AutoCAD and other kinds of geospatial geo-visualization technologies, along with archival materials and testimony, to try to recreate or to document these spatial systems of terror.

Additionally, this is now being used as evidence in courts. This is where the idea of recreating a crime scene becomes very complicated and interesting. In Argentina, and other places, you have different people who are trained. For instance, Robert Jan Van Pelt has done a lot of work with Deborah Dwork [*Auschwitz, 1270 to the present* (1996)] on the history of the architecture of Auschwitz and documenting it in terms of literal built environment landscapes to stop the extreme holocaust deniers.

The stakes are very high and I think not only in terms of legal or justice systems, but in terms of asking us as scholars to begin to think about categories and theories differently, as well as other possibilities. It's a collaborative venture. It has to be worked through in a group with a range of different experts with a spatial justice goal. As well, artistic performances and other ways of inviting different kinds of publics to bear witness in a way that's not voyeuristic but asks the audience-participants to take some responsibility for looking [is important]—for not just walking by a landscape that has in the physically built environment evidence of all of this violence, but that creates an understanding of citizenship beyond a set of rights that includes responsibilities at multiple scales.

**Christine Woodward (CW):** In “Mapping Spectral Traces” you talk about caring for place. If you think of the archive as mapping practice, how can that offer alternative historical and spatial imaginaries?

**Till:** In an article I wrote called “Wounded Cities” in *Political Geography* [2012], I talk about what I call a “place-based ethics of care.” It's exactly what you're talking about. It draws from feminist political theorists, such as Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher's book called *Moral Boundaries* [(1993)], as well as other feminist scholars who say that in the history of political theory, care has not been seen as a quality of citizenship, of political action. And they go and look at the gendered reasons for that kind of political knowledge construction. They talk about the ways in which care is a species thing that we do; it's part of being human. Care is done in a way that leads to an intersubjective encounter, meaning that if you are to care for someone and allow yourself to be cared for, you have to recognize histories of injustice. You have to recognize that not everybody is treated the same in your society. It means you have to recognize that it's not just, “I'm connecting to you” (I'm empathetic, I hear your pain)—it means, “I have to take some responsibility for understanding how it's that you may be treated

differently from me, and why, and how did that happen.” It requires looking at larger systems and legacies of injustice, which is quite a bit for a political citizenship discussion.

There are discussions by feminists about global citizenship and different kinds of scales, but often justice and rights are seen as going down two trajectories. I really love Iris Marion Young’s work [*Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)], where she talks about the problems of distributive justice and talks about care without using that terminology. Her work echoes the conversation we were just having about care and how, again, we have to look at the systemic forms of violence and injustice within societies. And this means [for Young] critically reimagining the Westfalian model of the modern nation state and the idea of citizen rights [*Global Challenges* (2007)]. She tragically passed away much younger than we would have wanted, so, in some of her later work she starts looking at alternative forms of sovereignty. I know this sounds weird, but it means you’re going to be looking at archives and collections and ownership differently. She was looking at the Haudenosaunee, or the Iroquois Confederacy, as an alternative form of collaborative sovereignty, in which it’s not just the rights of the individual but the collective [in *Responsibility for Justice* (2011)]. She also looked at other existing forms of archives that would not normally be considered if you were looking for questions of sovereignty. While that does not sound like mapping, it is multi-scalar and it is about land-justice of a certain kind and different forms of spatial justice, ultimately.

It’s a very important time, because the natural world does not follow political boundaries—it never has. Indigenous peoples have been trying to remind us of that for quite some time. With new technologies, we should be able to take advantage of a range of opportunities and resources whether or not it’s in a state-holding or other form of archives. The past is a resource for us to imagine more just futures.

**EK:** We tend to have more of a spatial focus than other disciplines, so some phrases stood out to us. You talk about the ‘multiple space-times of memory.’ I was wondering if you could say more about that.

**Till:** If we look within memory studies and the politics of deciding who has the right to narrate a certain kind of past and represent it, some institutional forms, like monuments, memorials, and street names, inscribe the past *onto* a particular location and territory, creating a kind of spatial boundary. You’re controlling space to control the narrative of time. Simultaneously, if you do the same with controlling the moment of remembering and the form of it, you’re going to remember a certain nation or a group or kind of spatial entity.

These are politics that happen all the time. I work in cities and I do a lot of urban geography work, even though I’m a cultural geographer, and they [planners and government officials] think about land use maps and land use planning maps [as ‘reality’]. They do *create* these boundaries. Areas become privatized in very bizarre ways. But when you get it translated into the planning speak, it’s a ‘construction site’ and it needs to be fenced off to do certain things.

Due to the history of National Socialism in Germany, there’s an advanced state of conversation about memory and memory politics. It’s a very complicated situation but the geographies of that reality are everywhere. Some of the memorials that didn’t get selected [for the central Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin] created those multiple space-

times. They're fascinating. Remember, [in the 1980s and 1990s,] the Kohl administration tried to deny the generation born after 1945 of any responsibility for what had happened. That's precisely what a lot of people, a lot of protest actions, a lot of younger generations, did not want. [They didn't want to draw a line under the past.] The other metaphor that I use, which has been obviously affected by a current bigger international project, is this idea of an open wound. [In the debates about what became the central Holocaust Memorial,] People didn't want to have the construction site fenced, to keep the conversations open—needing to return to it as a more appropriate form of democracy and critical memory work. When you're walking around the city [of Berlin], you can see these material remnants or objects. Particularly in that city, given all the history of construction, reconstruction, memory planning, and different kinds of urban imaginaries, a construction site is a place to think about [the politics of memory].

**CW:** The title of your talk is “Archiving Bodies with Place.” Could you give us a preview and discuss what you mean by that title?

**Till:** Absolutely. What I find interesting about this particular artistic production [*These Rooms*] is how closely these artists work with archivists. They [ANU Productions and CoisCéim Dance Theatre] cannot do their work without them [archivists]. They also work with local histories in interesting ways and they try to re-inhabit and communicate different stories of women and civilians and underrepresented people who don't always get documented in the archive. But histories have now become widely available because of digitization.

The artists chose to interrogate the memory of 1916 as a heroic moment in the formation of the Irish free state. The Irish state was not formed as a result of the 1916 Easter Rising. There was the War of Independence and the Civil War—a series of brutal wars [after the Rising]. What's remembered [today]? There was the Proclamation, and usually it's the men who are remembered, who were then martyred [executed by the British] because of the Proclamation and the Rebellion. If you look at the “heroes,” this is problematic because none of the important women, including Cumann na mBan [a female Irish Republican paramilitary organization] and the women's armies, are mentioned. These [other histories] are now made available through all sorts of resources.

So, because of the wars after 1916, you have different nationalist groups collecting testimony witnesses about the Rising. Shortly after 1916, an early version of what is now the political party Sinn Féin, collected testimonial witness by 38 women to the murder of 15 civilian men in a part of north Dublin not far from where the Proclamation was declared. During the Rising, there was intense warfare in which British soldiers raided homes, some of which were not held by the Irish Volunteers or the Irish Free Army or the other people involved in the Rising. They [British soldiers] killed those 15 men and a young boy who just turned 16 [in a building on North King Street]; and then 1 person dies later. They buried two people in a cellar basement whose bodies were later uncovered. There was a military investigation, which provides us with military histories that weren't made available before. The military [at the time] realized that if this [information] was released [to the Irish people] there would be another Rising because it was just so brutal. It was murder. I mean, you cannot read it any other way.

That's the story that inspired *These Rooms*, which was performed geographically near



the places where this happened. The artists are bringing these archival testimonies of 38 women to life in a way that also requires you as the audience member to make some choices and become part of the performance. They're moving the archive through their research, through their embodied performance, and some very rich installation work goes with it.

In this particular performance, you get to decide where to go, whereas before they [ANU Productions] kind of moved you [the audience] through different parts of the city or the street. The artists are working at multiple scales: they're working across and through space-time because it's not a recreation. They're always moving back and forth [between times], and in this performance, it's between 1916, 1966, and 2016.

It was only with the 1916 Centenary that people started to find out about some of these histories. The archival documents are being released and there have been many collections that have helped people to work through these kinds of very extreme, traumatic, urban war experiences. Those collections have become the basis for a lot of performances last year. The artists are doing research and communicating it spatially in a way that's going to reach more people and stay with them than any book I can write. Even if you cannot handle that kind of artistic work, it'll stay with you for some time after the performance is over. And they're asking you to make choices. You cannot just sit there and watch the performance and say, "Oh, that was entertaining." You have to physically move when they [the performers] ask you questions. You have to respond somehow.

The artists are moving the archive through bodies and through these places, because the body is always emplaced. And the artists are trying to communicate the archival testimonies of these women, who were separated from the men and their sons while the soldiers were breaking down doors and going through walls. They're hearing and imagining things and are trying to find people.

When the performance was still in development, I interviewed the artistic team, in February [2016], and they did performances in October/November [later that year]. This is all very recent and they're making a film and then they also have a non-professional dance project. (They invited 38 women [from the public] to work with dancers and interpret the archival materials themselves. Then, they did a kind of non-professional dance project as part of it.) The artists worked collaboratively, so [for *These Rooms*,] the directors were having the dancers and performance artists in the project go through all the [archival] materials and try to create the movements. They created some workshop areas [in the National Museum of Ireland] that they had used for a previous performance.

I like studying and working with artists who are asking similar questions and have similar political agendas. They even do research in similar ways [as I do]. Yet, their final outcome is very different and I think I have much to learn from them.

**EK:** It brings up interesting questions about what art is and what it can do. You made the differentiation between the output of your research and the work of these performance artists. I've been wondering about the difference between activism and art in memory work. It seems that artists and activists usually go together, or complement each other, but that they diverged in the outcome. Not to draw boundaries around the researcher-artist-activist, but what do you think each aspect brings out in memory work?

**Till:** Part of the problem are the categories; and we don't have language for some of those

explorations. I think it's important to let people self-identify and they may choose, for various reasons, to use certain labels. Artists don't earn much money. I don't know why people think they're privileged because they're living well below what graduate students earn. I mean, these are important people. For the artists who may self-identify as artists, they just have to do what they do. They cannot live without doing their creative practice. If you talk to an artist and they're passionate about what they do, that's the most common thing that you'll hear from them. An activist wanting to create change will have a much more strategic end goal while an artist goes on a journey of exploration without knowing what the outcome will be. I think that's something important to learn from artists and it's undervalued, too. Part of the frustration of artists that apply to grants like we do is that they have to use the neoliberal, managerial scientific form where they must justify their art for the spending of state, private, or foundation money. But if you do talk to an artist, they're very clear about the larger structure of a project. For *These Rooms*, it was those testimonies. I think that many artists, not only the community-based artists but ecologically-based artists as well, are clearly activists.

**EK:** How do you see yourself in terms of artistic and activist place-based memory practice? I'm wondering what your threshold of involvement has been like?

**Till:** Everybody is not going to be an activist and maybe not everybody wants to change the world. I think there's a range of possibilities for scholars to do their work. At the same time, we're very privileged. My salary is being paid by the state. The public are the very people I personally feel that I have an ethical responsibility towards. I believe in trying to break down the barriers between academic and other forms of expert knowledge, and to do so, I try to also think about collaborations. I try to do as much public engagement and service learning as I can.

I feel privileged to work with amazing people, including artists, activists, practitioners and community leaders, and they have been incredibly generous to me. Through their support, I've begun to curate exhibitions and other projects that I think enhances the research I do.

I also know that as a geographer and a civil servant, I should always be doing local research. This is difficult because I've lived in many countries and you don't always get to choose where you live. You go where there might be the possibility of getting a job. But even if you're not from that place or community, you can be doing work locally. You don't necessarily have to write about that work in your publications or research, but if you can, I don't think that's such a terrible thing.

Also, in the U.S., the histories of forced removals of indigenous peoples, African Americans and working-class communities through urban renewal and other projects has benefitted public universities. Public universities are also developers in most countries and turns its back on local communities. My responsibility as a civil servant is to acknowledge how and where my institution has done damage and acted unjustly to other peoples, and to try to open our doors and create welcoming environments for our neighbors and a range of knowledge producers to work together to create a better future.

# Traditional Knowledge and Digital Archives

## An Interview with Kim Christen

Interviewers: Leslie Davis, Zachary Griffith, and Jacob Neely

DISCLOSURE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

*Dr. Kim Christen is a Professor in the Department of English, the Director of the Digital Technology and Culture Program, the Director of the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation, and the Director of Digital Initiatives for the College of Arts and Sciences at Washington State University. Christen is also the Director of the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal, a collaboratively curated site of Plateau cultural materials; Mukurtu CMS, a content management system and community digital archive platform built around the particular needs of indigenous peoples globally; and co-Director with Jane Anderson of Local Contexts, an educational website for innovative traditional knowledge licenses and labels for indigenous cultural heritage. Her academic research and grant-funded projects focus on the intersection of digital technologies, intellectual property rights, archival process, cultural heritage movements and the ethics of openness within Indigenous communities, and with and by libraries, archives, and museums.*

**Zach Griffith (ZG):** Can you tell us about your origin story as an academic?

**Kim Christen (Christen):** Having grown up in the suburbs of Mesa, Arizona, I was not necessarily aware of the large number of reservations in the area. During my freshman year in college, I took an Intro to World Religions class. It was one of those huge classes with 500 people. The instructor, who was this alternative-type guy, did not stick to the five major religions. So, we had a whole section on Native American religions, which honestly blew me away. He was using an overhead projector with transparencies, if you all have ever seen those, and he had gone around the Phoenix area and taken pictures of all these businesses, like Kachina Cadillac, that were using the names of Native American nations or deities. He showed those places and then he took out the names of Native American nations or deities and replaced them with Christian, Jewish, or Hindu names to ask, "Would we do this? Would

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

we call a gas station ‘Jesus Mart’?” The answer would be no, right? Yet, we call stores Kachina Mart without a second thought. It’s because we don’t have a narrative about kachinas and people know very little about their meaning to Native communities.

After that class, I was struck by how things can get erased in our landscape. It really started me down the line. My honors thesis looked at a legal case around the use of peyote, the narratives from those on both sides about the use of peyote, and how peyote is classified. We have a regulatory structure that completely marginalizes other communities’ traditional knowledge of plants. The federal government classified peyote as a Schedule III narcotic, but it’s used in the Native American church as part of their ceremonies. Since it has been classified as a narcotic, you can be arrested and put in jail for possessing it. The court case was about two Native American men who had been arrested for having peyote in their truck on the way to a ceremony. I continued to explore these themes in a master’s program in cultural anthropology and conducted research in Australia, which was another eye-opening experience for me. The research was more about how do traditional practices, or the things that indigenous communities label as traditional, get reconfigured in modern situations in ways that don’t replay the progressive narrative that is often overlaid onto indigenous communities.

From there, I went on to complete my Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness Department at UC Santa Cruz, which is really a theoretical department. I was reading a lot of postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and really trying to see the construction of the sorts of structures that we use to filter things through. All of this happened before I had any interest in anything that was digital or media related. There was a digital media program that was sort of in its infancy at UC Santa Cruz while I was there and I started working as a teaching assistant in that department. I immersed myself in the department. As I was doing research, I was digging out archival records of people that I’d met and people who I’d worked with. I wasn’t doing archival research in the sense of trying to find information about something abstract. It was archival research for very personal reasons for the communities that I’d built personal relationships with.

So, the origin is that all origin stories are messy. There’s no singular story but I would definitely say that what still sticks with me today emphasizes *what’s not seen* and *what don’t we see*. It’s not so much about it not being there as it is that we just don’t have the lens on. I saw those things growing up in Arizona every day with my own eyes, but I didn’t *see* them. My dissertation looked at those rearticulations of traditional practices in modern settings. How do these practices get reconfigured and layered and how does that make these worlds more visible? It brings in the social justice angle because when those things start to become visible then how do we make sense of them within a legal structure or within a social structure where indigenous communities are marginalized, penalized, or oppressed for certain beliefs, the way they look, the way they act, or even the way they talk?

**Jacob Neely (JN):** How do you define the archives, or archive, and what is the role of the archivist?

**Christen:** Well, traditionally, archives have been sites of collecting that have attempted from their beginnings to take a veiled neutral stance because they were instruments of the state, instruments of empire. I think we can see them as these structures and systems, much

like government or anything else that performs a certain function in society. Rather than what *is* the archive, what *function* does it serve? It serves as a site for remembering. Not only are archives sites of memory and remembering but they're now becoming these generative sites of creation; creation of knowledge. They're sites *for* and constructions *of* memory. They're constructions, first of all, of a national origin story: "This is who we are as a nation." I was just looking at the national archives for the U.S. and it's very much framed around the origin stories of the nation and, within that, it's always our goal to look at the cracks and what's *not* there; what's not put into the glass case for viewing. I'm very interested in what never gets processed. Every time you go to an archive or museum or a library—and we can say it's about budgets, of course—but it's not all about budgets because if you look at the history of archives, only certain numbers of collections ever get processed. If you go to any archive, they'll say, "We have hundreds of collections that we haven't even processed yet." Our university has that, every archive has that. To me, it's more about the decisions we make around that.

Rather than seeing archives as these sterile places where things are collected and placed, it's more effective to see them as generative sites for knowledge construction. At that point, they would become active instead of passive, but I think it would require a whole shift in standards in how we train archivists in the workflow from appraisal to accessioning to processing. If you've read about post-custodial archives before, then you know that the archives were always about the physical custody of materials: "I have your records and papers now." However, proponents of post-custodialism are saying, "We are not going to be the keepers of your collection. We might digitize it, have digital surrogates and make those available, or use them for an art display, but we are not going to keep them." It's getting away from this notion that it's the material object—the thing, the collection, the papers—that have value. I mean, yes, they do have value but archives can also be sites for reimagining and repurposing. Digital technology allows us to do some of that, although not without its own baggage as well. Post-custodialism moves away from the ownership model and the collection model, which is very much steeped in the colonial model: "We're going to own territories, we're going to own knowledge, we're going to take this over."

**ZG:** Can you talk about how archives figure into your own research and what kinds of archives you work with?

**Christen:** My work around archives did start out being *in* archives but is now more about building the digital platform that we have created and restructuring standards for archives. Most of my work has to do with creating new workflows for archivists, for those people who are doing archival work but are not necessarily archivists. How do we look at the archival work that people are already doing? That reimagining, that telling of those stories? They're making choices even though they might not look at it as appraisal, accessioning, documentation, and metadata. They might not put it in those terms but that's what they're doing when they're reorganizing and reformulating bits and pieces of information of images, of pictures. For my master's research, I ended up in the national archives in Australia and that involved looking at colonial records. I looked at early explorers who went through the area where I was working in Central Australia. It's really fascinating to look at the framework of a white, male, botanist in the early 1900s who happened to be on the expedition that was trekking through

Central Australia. I mean, it's a perspective and I wondered what he was leaving out. I know that there were women were there, but not in his recording of the time and place. What is interesting about the colonial history of Central Australia is that it has a trajectory that's 150 years apart from that of the coast of Australia because the early explorers kept dying. They thought, "There must be a great ocean in the middle of the continent because nobody could live in this landscape." But Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for at least 60,000 years before the explorers got there and those dates go back even further now. Aboriginal people have always lived there. Why not take that origin story?

I spent a lot of my time in the archives with my children in Australia. My oldest son, Jakob, is 19 and he's a freshman in college. He was 2, at the time, and he broke one of the photocopiers in the national archives. That's just the other reality of your life as a scholar. Your personal life is very much intermixed. I must say, I haven't done archival research like that in many years because it led me to the creation of Mukurtu as a software platform, as a digital archiving platform. I was reimagining that scenario for what happens to those documents when we can get them back to the communities and they can tell their stories on top of the story of W. E. H. Stanner. How do we layer other community histories around that? Now, I spend most of my time thinking about workflow and standards, such as the standards for the creation of a metadata description, which is very formulaic. A description for a photographic representation should be a sentence, maybe two. It's very much that bird's eye objective view where anybody looking at this photograph is going to see the same thing even though we know that's not the case. How do we create structures that allow for those cultural protocols, the knowledge systems, that already exist? For instance, The Warumungu community already has a system for knowledge circulation that is different from an archival, standard knowledge circulation. So, how do we create archives that respect those different ethical codes for managing, circulating, sharing, and duplicating what's in those records?

**Leslie Davis (LD):** What was the team building process like for you? Did you need a very diverse team when you started this project just by the nature of the issues you wanted to address?

**Christen:** I think that's where my disciplinary, or anti-disciplinary background, serves me well because I didn't have any notion that this was an anthropology project or a digital-humanities project. It was "here is a problem that we have; we need to come up with a solution." It turns out that the solution needs software engineers, designers, archivists, anthropologists, and community members. It was very much purposeful and, in fact, the several sets of software engineers and developers that I've worked with over the years have all had leanings towards social justice. One of the first developers that we worked with was a group called CivicAction and I was really impressed with them because their focus for building technology was social justice. I told them that we already had a prototype of what we could do and we had gotten some funding to take it further to create software that people could download and use. I came to find out that one of the software engineers had a B.A. in anthropology and he was in the Peace Corps. I was trying to explain to him the cultural protocols that we needed to embed these protocols in the design because not everybody can see the same material. He told me, "In the village that I lived in while Africa, I wasn't supposed to ever talk directly to the woman who would be my mother-in-law. Is it like that?" I was like, "Exactly. You're hired."

You're the guy." I needed to find technologists who understood the cultural imperatives of Mukurtu because this is not building technology for technology's sake. It's a cultural shift, it's an ideological shift in how we understand making information available.

It has a partial technological solution, but I'm here to tell you that after fifteen years of doing this, it's also about winning hearts and minds. I say this because the archivists at the other end must decide "I need to change my metadata" and that's not an easy thing for some of them to do but it is changing. The very first time I was invited to give a talk at the Society for American Archivists about the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal, I described these different narratives of metadata and explained how we weren't using Library of Congress headings and you could see alarms going off in people's heads. We must learn to let go of our attachments to these standards that stand in for our ideological preferences. The Library of Congress subject headings—and they're getting better—but they represent a worldview where you can have a subject called Indians of the Northwest. What does that subject heading do? That kind of generalization is a political statement, it's an ideological statement. If you're going to recreate that in a digital archive with your subject heading, then you have already lost. I had to get people on board so we could make the technological shift to allow for different metadata. You cannot just build something and people will come. That's why the ideological shift is necessary as well.

We finally got to a place that we were able to start the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation on our campus two years ago. It's in the library and all our team is there. We do a sort of boot camp or indoctrination for any developer that comes in and it's lovely to see the change. The developer on our last project works for a software development company and he wrote a blog piece about how working on Mukurtu got him to think differently about programming. I call that a win. I don't spend as much time in the classroom anymore because of my administrative duties, but I see that as a way of teaching. It's a way of teaching members of our team—who work with these big companies as programmers, coders, developers, and software engineers—that software programming, that standards and systems, are in no way neutral and that we embed our ideologies into software just as much as we did into the physical structure of the archives.

**ZG:** What are some of the specific design or functionality choices that you made in designing the Mukurtu platform? What ideas went into conceptualizing it from the start?

**Christen:** The conceptualization of Mukurtu came from the community wanting to share their materials on their own terms. The three main functions, what we call Mukurtu Core, are communities, cultural protocols, and categories. To set up any Mukurtu site, you have to set those up. We very purposefully unraveled this notion that any piece of content in the archive, in the digital space, is not tied to something else. There's no free-floating item or record that exists. Everything has to be put in relationship to something else. This is different from your standard library records management systems. Every single story we're telling is part of a relationship. Everything is part of a community and communities have cultural protocols about how materials should be accessed, circulated and shared. How do we highlight those relationships? There's the *who* of Mukurtu; everything is part of a who, so, it's not dehumanized. Then, everything has a *how*; that's the cultural protocols. How do I want this to be seen? Only by women, only by men, only by those who are initiated, only by

the 14 people in your class. There's this notion that this information is just floating out there and it's all up for grabs but, in fact, that's not the case and we all filter our information. So, it's really trying to take those social networks, protocols, and relationships that already exist and build them into the software. That's the core of Mukurtu and every feature that we've built into the system over the last 6 years has been community driven.

We piloted what we call community software development. All our features come directly from communities who are using Mukurtu who have a specific need. The features do not come from professional archivists and librarians. I say "professional" here to differentiate the outside profession that's driven by certain degrees. So, that's why the first instances of Mukurtu was focused on photos, because we started by working with the Warumungu community. We received a set of 800 photos from a missionary in Australia. All the missionaries from one area had collected these photographs and the last surviving missionary had inherited the photos from the earlier missionaries. The photos dated from the 1920s to when we met one of the members of the missionary in 2002. He had 40-50 years of this history in photographs that Aboriginal people in Tennant Creek had literally never seen. It all started around photographs, and every other feature in Mukurtu has grown from specific documented community needs.

**ZG:** Do you have any data that you could share about how widely Mukurtu is being used and who's using it?

**Christen:** I'll have to push back against that a bit. My standard answer is that I think the quantification of "use" is antithetical to building relationships. There's an impulse to quantify users, user statistics, clicks-per-page, etc. Google has provided us with a rich suite of tools and metrics for dissecting the way that we interact with the Internet and the way we interact with information that's moving around the Internet but we put too much weight on what that data means and what metrics mean. Is it important for us to know that 600 people have clicked on the Plateau Peoples' Web Portal or is it more important for us to know that Native community members are curating the content through their own narratives? Mukurtu and the Portal and everything else that I work on is about relationships and constructing our knowledge around the notion that knowledge is a social act—it's grounded in those relationships. User statistics don't tell us anything about that and the notion of people as "users" is not helpful. On the other hand, I'm practical and I do know that there are instances where user statistics are needed. For example, we put numbers in with all sorts of caveats for grant reports.

I will say that we have over 250 installations of the platform worldwide. Any community who chooses to make their instance of Mukurtu public can be found online. Since the whole premise is that there are cultural protocols around access to knowledge, I'm not going to put out list of names of communities that are using Mukurtu if they haven't made that information public themselves. There are the 250 that we know because people come to our workshops, or we work with them very closely. Those metrics are seen as a sophisticated way of measuring a certain kind of use, but I want to ask how do we measure relationships? The reason I only look at Google analytics once a year when I do grants and reports is because it tells me nothing. What I do know is that we held sixteen workshops with 150 native community members across the United States last year. That I know. I saw



them and I met with them and we had human interaction. Dozens of them went on to use the platform and we're in conversation with them and we're supporting them.

And that's the other thing: relationships are a lot of work. This notion that you build a piece of software, put it out as open source, and then people just use it only works in a certain genre of software. However, when you're building a platform for relationships and you're pushing away from a colonial structure of archives that has done all this violence, then it's different. Building relationships takes time. We're putting a lot of our training online but I know there's only so much that can happen online. We also have to hold workshops, we have to have phone calls with people, we have to have Skype conversations with people. That's why we created the Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation at the university so that we can have a space where we do workshops, where we put out information, where we host people. It has to be that whole picture.

**LD:** It seems like a lot of your Twitter feed is an amplification of things that are going on. Do you ever see that there's a time for confrontation or intervention?

**Christen:** I don't think that Twitter is the right space for intervention, but I do think it's a space to open up the possibility of intervention. I mean, in 140 characters? I think it's more about amplification. It's about small bites of information that are then connected. Maybe some of you have looked at the DocumentNow project. One of the people on the team is Bergis Jules who's an archivist at UC-Riverside and the project is looking at how tweets can be ethically curated and managed. So, what happens when something like Ferguson takes place? Or what happens when there's a protest around Trump and people are being arrested? How are we using these Tweets to avoid causing more violence because police are now pulling Twitter feeds and Facebook to surveil people? In a certain way, you renounce your privacy once you agree to an open, public Twitter account. It's the antithesis of something like Mukurtu, which is all about how we put those protocols in place so that when you sign your user agreement for Mukurtu you know that it's actually upholding your own values.

**JN:** You were just talking about archiving social sources like Twitter. These communities using Mukurtu are writing down some of their traditions in a digital space, which has been done through oral tradition for a long time, leaving room for improvisation and for adaptation. Do you think that having them in an archive where people can refer to them limit improvisation or could become a totalizing influence?

**Christen:** Mukurtu allows for those multiple ways of telling that story to sit side-by-side. When we're doing workshops and we're talking to people about using Mukurtu, we say, "You can constantly update this." But we don't mean write over, we mean put next to. There's no limit on a record. There's no limit to how many iterations of a record you can have as one version of that story. I don't think the technology has a universalizing impulse; I think it's people who have to change their minds. It's the impulse that tells us there's only one story or narrative. That's our intellectual history, in which information is constructed in a linear and progressive fashion. Mukurtu itself is not a totalizing tool, but I'm sure someone could use it that way! How do we train people to use it to see they can have three different versions of a song and they can all sit side-by-side? To recognize the multiplicity as valid and valuable?

# Categories as Archives: From Silence to Social Justice

## An Interview with Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra

Interviewers: Sophonie Bazile, Juan Fernandez-Cantero, and Jess Linz

DISCLOSURE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

*Dr. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra is the Alice Drysdale Sheffield Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of several books, including How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World (2001), Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700 (2006), and Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World (2007). Cañizares-Esguerra is currently working on two book-length projects: Categories as Prisons, which explores how historiographical categories organize what questions about the past are permissible and therefore how archives and narratives are organized; and The Radical Spanish Empire, coauthored with Adrian Masters, which challenges the Anglo-American liberal notion that parliamentary democracy, humanitarianism, print culture, and the public sphere were the crucibles of modernity, arguing that sixteenth-century Spanish America witnessed massive popular participation in the creation of new laws and radical forms of antislavery and abolitionism, as well as the creation of vast archives of new social and natural knowledge and the rise of systematic skepticism and philosophical pragmatism in governance.*

**Sophonie Bazile (SB):** How do you define archives or the archive, particularly in your own work?

**Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Cañizares-Esguerra):** Well, there's the traditional answer: a building which contains documentation about different topics. Archives are often documentation about bureaucracy. They are spaces that document the workings of the state, by and large, but not only the state. Local communities can also have their own archives.

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

Archives are supposed to be—allegedly—spaces to keep collected memory. They are, in other words, the institutionalization of memorialization. Archives are not only associated with the everyday functioning of the state but also with the legitimization of bureaucracies, of government, of authority. Early-modern archives (the subject of my own work) tend to store petitions and the legislation and resolutions triggered by these petitions. The archive, itself, therefore, documents the very source of legitimacy of states, namely, receptivity to petitioners. What's interesting about the way most societies worked in the past is that legislation was created through petitioning. The largest archive in the world, I believe, is the Vatican, which stores millions of petitions over millennia since the bureaucratization of the Vatican as a state. The laws, at the time, in most states in the world, came from below. A student of mine, Adrian Masters, has shown that 99% of the hundreds of thousands of sixteenth-century royal decrees in the Indies were verbatim copies of petitions. Individuals petitioned to the state and then the monarchs and other institutions turned those petitions into laws. Eventually, the laws were compiled and codified. The Justinian Code would be the best example of the codification of petitioning from below and the legal codes themselves are archives.

The paperwork around petitions constitutes the bulk of the premodern and early modern archives. But there's more to the archive than paper. Anything that holds and keeps traces of the past and allows for the interpretation of those traces is an archive. For example, landscape, in the case of geography, can be an archive. There are traces of changes in the way that space is organized. Different parts of the city are archives themselves because they show different understandings of space over time. Maps, of course, are archives. As they change, they document the materiality of space that might be long gone. Materials and objects can also be archives. The distillery we visited today would be, in a way, an archive of different eras. The tourist guide showed us this small house near the distillery where a federal employee used to live. In 1933, after prohibition, all distillers were required to house a federal employee on the premises. The distillery had to provide him with food in addition to shelter. The guide explained to us that the buildings where federal employees used to live had no bathrooms. Although the distillery was required by law to feed and shelter the federal employee, the law did not specify that the premises had to have a bathroom. So, the employee would have had to relieve himself outside! The house, on the premise of the distillery, documents the materiality of an ongoing conflict between the federal government and local communities in Kentucky bourbon country. Ultimately, anything can be an archive.

**SB:** If everything can be an archive, then how are you configuring the archive/archives within your own work?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** I'm very interested in two aspects of the archive. First, is the way that categories frame understandings of the past and frames the materiality of memorialization. The materiality of *how* information is kept and *what* information is kept, ultimately. Archives are organized around narratives. Documents are not filed randomly. There are principles that organize the way information is kept, namely, what's remembered and what's deliberately forgotten. Archives are just as much about remembering as they are about forgetting. The writing of the past is 50 percent remembering, retracing, interpreting traces. The other half is about what is forgotten, silenced, and implicitly left out. So, one has these two dimensions to any archive and one must constantly keep them in mind. I'm particularly interested in

the role historiographical categories play in the organization of archives, both in the positive sense of what is kept and in the negative sense of what is what's not kept and silenced. I'm interested in how historiographical categories, such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Protestantism, and the Reformation, organize archives. Namely, I'm interested in categories that deeply affect what is remembered and forgotten by curating the questions we are allowed to pose. These categories are productive in that they generate narratives and accounts but also silences. I find these categories to be complicit in the making of Trump's wall. The bricks of Trump's wall were baked in the ovens of historiography.

Why is México seen as this "other" in the south rather than Canada in the north? Why is it that western Europeans or members of the European Union do not need visas but one needs a wall south of the United States? If you think about the history of this continent, you have to agree that the history of México and the history of the United States resemble each other much more than they resemble the history of western Europe. If there's any country that's historically close to the United States, then it would be México and, yet, we have a wall. Why do we have a wall? There are historiographical categories to blame: The Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment, among many others.

**Jess Linz (JL):** Do you mean the similarities between the two countries?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** Yes, the processes of obliterating similarities and common origins. I have a book in which I argue that the Iberian and, in many cases, Mexican, foundation of 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan theology is something that kids in high school in this country never come to see or to even imagine because it's an assumption that seems absurd. It's impossible to imagine. Historiographical categories as archives frame what is intelligible and what is unintelligible. If I were to say that the best way to understand Shakespeare's *The Tempest* [(c. 1610)] is understanding Our Lady of Guadalupe, you would most likely reply: "You're nuts! One has absolutely nothing to do with the other." Yet Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe are two peas of the same pod. They emerged in the same period. Both seek to answer questions about the New World in similar ways and they engage with demonology in the same ways. The Elizabethan, the *Tempest*, and the Mexican Our Lady of Guadalupe are remarkably similar ways of understanding the role of angelic and evil intelligences over the preternatural and the peculiar occult forces shaping the Americas. Similarly, if I were to tell you that Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an epic in which the devil has the standing of a hero, is very much a derivative of traditions of the Spanish-American epic that preceded *Paradise Lost* by at least a century at least, then you would say, "Well, that's nonsense!" That's the function of a category like the Reformation: by exaggerating the differences between Puritan and Spanish colonization of the Americas, it obfuscates cultural resemblances and common cultural origins. Categories obfuscate to make it difficult for you to see these connections and the origins of institutions because the origin of institutions need to be cleansed for difference to be justified and for walls to be built.

**JL:** In that case, where do you see the archive or archives intersecting with social justice?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** Social justice means the redistribution of wealth to secure access to sufficient resources among marginalized populations. But social justice can also mean equal

access to the framing of historical narratives. The politics of the archives today, for me, is the struggle over the power of historiographical categories to organize archives, to determine what aspects of the past are selected and chosen in narratives, collections, and memorializations. Ideas that are embodied in institutions are deeply complicit in what's happening in this country today. The Left is as complicit as universities and academic institutions through the uncritical consumption of foundational historiographical early-modern archives, which in turn yield such narratives as "western civilization." Courses and museums on "western civilization" educate us daily on ontological differences between the global north and the global south. These categories and these narratives are the clay that makes the bricks in Trump's wall. One does not need to support Trump to justify cultural walls.

**JL:** Are there any scholars or theories whose work informs yours on the archive or archives?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** I'm not a specialist on archives, so my understanding of the archive and the role of historical categories in the organization of memorialization and silence comes from angles that are not necessarily based on the literature on archives. I would say the Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* [(1995)] is one work that was influential. There's also Neil Safier's work [*Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (2008)] on eighteenth-century expeditions to the New World and how those expeditions got to be remembered once they got back in France. Safier's work describes the expedition of Charles Marie de La Condamine who went to Peru in the New World to measure the arc of the Meridian to determine whether the Earth was flat on the equator or not. It was part of the debate between Cartesians and Newtonians in France. The Newtonians won the dispute. As part of that debate in the French academy, expeditions were sent to the north to Lapland and expeditions were sent to the equator to measure the shape of the Earth to determine whether it was gravitation à la Newton or gravitation à la Descartes. The expedition sent to the tropical equator in South America, however, was not led by La Condamine. La Condamine soon came to dominate the memorialization of the expedition. He alone became famous. His fame came from the breadth of his writings. Yet, his writings were not original. He claimed empirical originality, but his writings were derivatives and even plagiarized. La Condamine drew in a large local archive compiled by local intellectual communities of Indians, blacks, creoles, and Jesuits.

La Condamine achieved a reputation as an extraordinary philosophical traveler and as a person who wrote from first-hand experience. Yet, he was recycling things he didn't see and presented them as if he had witnessed them. He managed to create a narrative about himself of empirical innovation and philosophical interpretation. How did that happen? Where is that authority coming from? Safier describes how the printing press and public sphere work to memorialize and create the persona of the academician who is objective and authoritative. The book therefore makes explicit how memorialization through print and academies works. My emphasis, however, lies somewhere else. Unlike Safier, I seek to understand how categories of historical analysis work. How memorialization works through historiographical categories themselves, not print culture or academies.

**SB:** What has been your experiences visiting an archive? Or, do you remember the first time you ever visited an archive?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** Well, again, it depends on how you define an archive. I mean, a book can be an archive and a china set can be an archive. But I would say that the institutional archive was exciting and humbling. It was irritating in that the places I visited did not work the way I expected them to work and I had issues of time, resources, and money. Some archives were very bureaucratic and slow and the staff were not interested in serving those who were using the archive. They were officers of the civil bureaucracy who were more interested in watching soccer games. It was a mixture of frustration and excitement with the findings, expectations, and irritations. And adventure!

**SB:** What were you researching?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** I was researching my first book *How to Write the History of the World* [(2002)]. I visited many archives and I spent a year in Madrid, Spain. I went to Valencia, I went to Seville, and I went to México, too. I spent 6 months there working in México City, in the national archive.

**Juan Fernandez-Cantero (JF):** In those institutional archives, what was your approach for reading those silences that you discussed previously?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** There are things that are kept and things that are not kept. There are things, however, that cannot be recorded because they cannot be imagined. The things that can be imagined and recorded leave traces in documents, manuscripts, notarial records, etc. So, the fact that the archive is silent about certain aspects does not mean that it cannot yield the information about silences. It all depends on the questions you bring to bear and the assumptions you have. Historiographical categories prompt historians to pose certain questions to the archive. Other questions cannot be imagined within the boundaries of the possible. The archive is organized in a certain way that can yield predictable answers. On the other hand, if you bring to bear questions and assumptions that are not built into the archive, one could have that archive speak and yield information that it wasn't supposed to record.

**JF:** How do you see your work in making visible different epistemologies within academia?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** Academia is organized on the assumption that you must constantly challenge paradigms and create new ones. If one is not breaking new ground, then one will be unemployed. So that's the dynamic implicit in the system. There's a large marketplace of new and challenging interpretations all the time but it doesn't mean that all these new interpretations and perspectives aren't complicit with the structures of historiographical discrimination I have sketched here. What appear to be new and liberating paradigms can, in fact, be reinforcing old walls or creating new ones.

**JL:** I wonder if you want to keep talking about that and how you conceptualize that changing. Is there a way to dismantle those walls? How do you conceptualize changes to that kind of oppressive imperial categorization?

**Cañizares-Esguerra:** Well, I'm preoccupied with how a region is defined in the United States. How Latin America, México, is conceptualized in the Anglo-American imagination and why it is imagined and conceptualized the way it is. Not only in the Anglo-American imagination, but in the Latino imagination as well, which conceptualizes the region within the same discursive rules. I think there are very deep epistemological foundations that since the Reformation have framed how the region has been understood. This way of knowing, seeing, and interpreting evidence has yielded a number of categories that are the foundation of area studies in general and Latin American studies in particular. There are a number of assumptions that organize the study of Latin America in this country. When I ask my students on the first day of class, "what is the first thing that comes to mind when they think about México?" their answer is usually, "conquistadors," "Indians," "poverty," "corruption," "violence," "drugs," and "pyramids." Why are these ideas so dominant? How did they get there? Which historiographical categories shaped the students' common sense? So, how to break such narratives? I tell my students that I'm offering them a class on Latin American colonial history that is about the origins of scientific revolution, the origins of democracy, the origins of globalization, capitalism, industrialization, and modernity. All the things that students see originating in Western Europe and in the United States I argue first originated in the "Mexican" south. I use the same archives that have produced overly tragic, negative narratives of absences and failures to tell a radically different story. I pose different questions to the same archive and in doing so, I'm laying the groundwork for the possible constitution of new collections of papers and objects to archive.

# Images, Silences, and the Archival Record

## An Interview with Michelle Caswell

Interviewers: Harrison Cole and Zachary Griffith  
DISCLOSURE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

*Dr. Michelle Caswell is an Associate Professor of Archival Studies in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she is also an affiliated faculty member with the Department of Asian American Studies and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Her book, Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia (2014), which explores the role of archives and records in the construction of memory about the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia through a collection of mug shots taken at Tuol Sleng prison, won the 2015 Waldo Grifford Leland award for Best Publication from the Society of American Archivists. Caswell is also the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive, an online repository which documents and provides access to the diverse stories of South Asian Americans.*

**Zach Griffith (ZG):** Can you tell us about your origin story as an academic? What is your background? What have you studied?

**Michelle Caswell (Caswell):** I'm a sort of Frankensteinian amalgamation. I come from a working-class background, neither of my parents graduated from high school. I'm from Chicago and attended Chicago Public Schools. I was always bused in to magnet schools outside of my neighborhood that were much more diverse—I grew up in a white neighborhood—and I attended a public high school on the south side of Chicago that was predominately African American. From there, I went on to complete an undergraduate degree at Columbia University in New York. I wound up being a religion major, which was not something I had anticipated. I had fantastic professors who sparked my interest and I ended up taking a significant amount of coursework in what was called Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures (MEALAC). I thought that I might be a professor of South Asian studies or religion but having come from a working-class background, I had no guidance or role model

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.



about picking a practical profession for this religion degree.

I wound up earning a master's degree in Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School, focusing on world religions and South Asia. I had all these jarring educational experiences where what I was learning in the classroom was so different from my own lived experiences. I'm an atheist and I'm Jewish and here I was in a Christian divinity school studying Hinduism. After I graduated with that master's degree, I didn't want to be in academia anymore and got a job at the Asia Society Museum in New York as the Arts and Culture Website Producer. I interviewed visiting artists and speakers who came through the museum and published that information online. Then, I started working in non-profit marketing and decided to move back to Chicago and got a job as the Development Director for the Vietnamese Association of Illinois, which is a refugee-based social service agency. I moved around to other organizations doing non-profit fundraising and marketing. It felt like I was doing some good in the world but the work wasn't my own. It didn't feel like I had a career. I looked around and noticed that my friends who were librarians seemed to be happy with their jobs. I decided that I would go back to school to earn a master's degree in Library and Information Studies to become a librarian. I earned my master's at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee while working part-time as the assistant bibliographer for South Asia at the University of Chicago. As I was working on the degree, I realized that I loved doing research and writing. I had found my passion. I then went on to earn my Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a minor in Language and Culture of Asia.

While I was working for the University of Chicago library, I met Samip Mallick, now a very close friend, who was working as the South Asian Outreach coordinator in the International Center at the University of Chicago. We were working on a memorial service for a faculty member and as we were going through this person's papers in the University of Chicago Archives, we started talking and Samip asked, "Well, who is collecting records documenting South Asian American history?" I answered, "I have actually done that research and nobody is." Collecting South Asian American history was not a priority for anybody. Always the go-getter, Samip responded, "Let's just do it. Let's start that project." So, we started the South Asian American Digital Archive. Originally, we thought that it would be a project at the University of Chicago. However, like most archives, it has a huge backlog of materials that are unprocessed and there is no way to sort of jump the queue unless you have money, which we did not. We decided to go out on our own and created a digital-only archive. We received pushback and were told that digital archives were not archives. We were also told that there were no community archives in the United States, yet, we were founding one.

We founded what is called a post-custodial archive. Most archives accept physical custody of materials and then take care of, or steward, those materials. We knew we didn't have the money for a physical space, and we both knew we wouldn't be in Chicago for much longer. Instead, we created an online-only, post-custodial repository, which meant we borrowed materials from donors, individuals, families, organizations, and archives. These materials were then digitized, described using terminology the community uses to describe itself, published online, and, finally, returned to the owners. The South Asian American Digital Archive has been around for nine years [10 years now] but we have no physical space, although it obviously requires material infrastructure to run a digital archive. Samip has since moved to Philadelphia and he is the executive director and our only paid full-time employee. My background in marketing and fundraising has been useful because I now

spend a lot of my time marketing and writing grant applications for the organization. It's been a labor of love. It's been a lot of work but it has been a way for me to make sense of these disparate pieces of my background and I use it as a lab, of sorts, for my research. I'm now an associate professor of archival studies in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA, and I teach courses on community-based archives. I'm constantly drawing on examples from the South Asian American Digital Archive in my classes and I write about it constantly.

**ZG:** How do you define the archive or the *archives*?

**Caswell:** I always use the 's'. I say archives to distinguish between what archival studies scholars study and where archivists work versus how humanities scholars think of "the archive" in this kind of Derridean or Foucauldian metaphor, the first law of what can or cannot be said. That's not how archivists conceive of archives. Archivists conceive of archives as collections of materials, collections of records—*record* is a key concept for archivists and archival studies scholars—collections of records that are stewarded across space and time. What's interesting about that definition is that every single one of those words is contested, which is what I like about it. My favorite definition of record is based on Geoffrey Yeo's definition of record which is 'a persistent representation of human activity that travels across space and time.' A record does not have to be material in that definition. Older definitions, the Society of American Archivists' definition of record, involves materiality, but I think it is important to recognize oral records as records or kinetic records as records. A dance can be a record. I try to expand the canon of archival theory, which was based on dominant Western ways of being and knowing the world, to include other ways of being and knowing the world.

If archives are collections of records, I think there's also a component of preservation to make something an archives. This notion of stewarding something across space and time is a commitment to stewarding that material through preservation. It does not mean forever; it does not mean in perpetuity, but through some period of space and time. When people throw up a website and say that it's an archive, it's the kind of thing that drives archivists crazy, and that's one of the reasons—there is no commitment to stewarding it into the future. I think another key element that makes something an archives is description: creating metadata so that the materials are findable. I want to acknowledge that this definition is rooted in my own experience as someone who is trained in the dominant Western paradigm and that there are many other definitions of what an archives is. I run into this interesting rhetorical battle where, on the one hand, I'm defending the concept of the archives from these humanists, but at the same time critiquing that standard definition. I'm on doing work on both of those fronts.

**ZG:** How do you see the archives intersecting with social justice?

**Caswell:** I think there's a 100% overlap. For me, the work of archives is the work of social justice and this can take many different forms. It can be advocating for the use of records for social justice aims. For instance, collecting records that you know can be used for human rights claims, land dispute claims, legal claims, or claims about representation. Claims that communities have been here, that communities have existed. Fundamentally to me, the act of remembering and forgetting is about creating a future in which resources are more

equitably distributed. For me, archival labor should be infused with a social justice ethics. When making appraisal decisions about which materials to keep and which not to keep, archivists should be thinking about representation and who matters and whose stories are worth documenting. There has been a lack of care among archivists when it comes to documenting communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and people who are marginalized due to beliefs, geography, and social class. I think we have an obligation to center those people who have been marginalized in our appraisal decisions moving forward. When we are describing records after we have acquired them, it's important to use the same languages that communities use to describe themselves. Epistemic violence happens when you go to look for yourself or your community in an archive and the language that's used is a racial slur or is offensive. Describing materials accurately using language that is emic to the communities they belong to is important. Once the materials are described, promoting their use for social justice aims is important. Traditionally, archivists have not been able to conceive who their users are beyond academics. It used to be just historians and maybe genealogists. A way to expand this narrow notion of who uses the archives, particularly when it comes to human rights concerns, is to create what I call a survivor-centered approach to those records, which is centering survivors in these decision processes, and I think that's also true about digitization. Ethics should permeate every aspect of the archival process as well as archival education. They're inseparable.

**ZG:** Are there any scholars whose work has informed the way you think about archives?

**Caswell:** Yes. The most important theorist for me is Verne Harris who's a South African archivist who's the Director of Memory and Dialogue at the Nelson Mandela Centre for Memory in Johannesburg. His work is what enabled me to be in this field. We read his work on the last day of class in my MLIS program and it opened a world of possibilities in terms of my commitment to ethics, my commitment to social justice, and my commitment to marginalized communities. Verne's work is influenced by Derrida and he thinks that we have a commitment to what he says is to heed the call of social justice. For Harris, the act of archiving is political by definition and there's no way for anyone to keep their hands clean in the archive. He's been inspirational and he's a beautiful writer. What I also find to be incredibly exciting are younger archivists. Jarrett Drake, who is a digital archivist at Princeton [he is now an anthropology doctoral student at Harvard], is one of the founders of this project called the People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland. After the shooting of Tamir Rice, he got a group of volunteer archivists to go around Cleveland and start collecting oral histories of people who have been impacted by police violence. That project has now turned into a community based project that's been handed over to local activists who are working for prison evolution and against police violence. Jarrett is a brilliant thinker and writes incessantly. I love that there's an activist/practical component to his work.

**Harrison Cole (HC):** You mentioned that you developed a post-custodial archive for SAADA. Is this something that you would like to see more widely applied to other archives? What types of archives might benefit from this model?

**Caswell:** It's a very particular model that works well for us but it doesn't work for everybody.

It's a good question because I don't want to promote open access as a universal solution. It works for us because of these practical reasons—that we knew we would not be in Chicago forever and we did not have any money. It also worked for our communities because there is no single South Asian American community. Additionally, the owners of the records we work with have intense sentimental value associated with them and would not want to give them up. I would say, too, that part of our mission is to uncover lost histories and promote them. It makes access—universal access to the materials—foundational to the work that we do. This is certainly not the case for many communities. I know that Kim Christen was here a couple of weeks ago talking about Indigenous records where the notion of universal open access to those materials is quite damaging to those communities. In that case, a universally accessible post custodial archive wouldn't work as a model for that community since it doesn't reflect the community's values. It's important to think about the ways that these values are embedded in technical decisions and make sure that those values reflect the community.

SAADA just received a grant from GIZ, which is a German government funding agency, to start a new project documenting Islamophobia. We don't know how to do that; we've been stuck. We've felt stuck as an organization. What the grant will enable us to do is assemble a board of advisers to figure out what the project will look like, how to collect these materials without exposing that community to further surveillance, and whether we should be collecting the materials at all. It's of extreme concern to us that the records we collect do not harm the community. At the end of this project, after we've assembled the board and the meetings have convened, the answer might be that this isn't a good project or that it's not the right time to do this project. It may even be that this is the right time to collect these materials but it's not the right time to make them accessible. We have to be prepared for all possibilities.

**HC:** I wonder if you could speak to the micro history projects in the context of traditional archival practices and if there are any precedents for this and how you would like to see it evolve.

**Caswell:** Well, the First Days Project is a project run by SAADA in which immigrants are able to record brief narratives about their first 24 hours or 48 hours in the United States. It began as a project focusing only on South Asian American immigrants because that's the focus of our collection. But we received such an outpouring of interest from immigrants from other parts of the world that we decided to open it up. We had a long discussion as a board about making it a separate project and whether it diverged from our mission of documenting South Asian American history. In the end, we decided to move forward with it. It's quite a departure from a standard traditional archives and I'm glad that you noticed that because we're compelling people to record their stories, to create their records. Most people walking down the street don't care about that distinction, but in the archival world, it's a big distinction. Dominant western modes still see records as neutral byproducts of activity and according to this more traditional Western version of archival theory, records are supposed to be impartial, which means that the people creating them should have no notion of how they might wind up in an archives in the future. When I first wrote an article on the First Days project and submitted it for publication, one of the reviewers said in the review that it was an interesting project, but, essentially, it was not an archival project. I responded that

these are records because they are documenting the function of SAADA trying to document immigrant histories. The editor was satisfied with that rhetorical move. I think that this is true for any kind of oral history project. The more conservative archival theorists working in the dominant western paradigm think oral histories are not records for the same reason: they are artificial; they are not impartial because they are created purposefully for creating the records, not for fulfilling other functions.

**HC:** In some communities, there's a tendency to twist or spin or even omit their more troubled or troubling facets. I wonder, in your experience, how people have grappled with these uncomfortable moments especially when people might be implicated in them.

**Caswell:** It's a huge issue for us with SAADA. Until recently, South Asian immigrants were seen as model minorities. The myth of the model minority is that South Asians come to the U.S., they're highly educated, they make a lot of money, they assimilate, and they don't get involved in politics. Seemingly, it's a model that's held out for other minority groups to attain, which in reality masks anti-black racism. What we're trying to do is document this century-old history of South Asians coming to the United States and being incredibly politically active. I'm talking about the history of the Ghaddar Party. Ghaddar means revolt or revolution in Urdu, which was a political party of activists trying to overthrow colonial rule in India by any means necessary. In fact, there was the Hindu-German conspiracy trial in 1917 in which there were South Asian immigrants to the United States who were laundering money and arms from the German government in order to take those arms up against the British. The history is more complicated than the dominant narrative and I think that we must be very careful about it. Many archives are documenting immigrant and refugee histories that only document the success stories, stories of achieving the American dream. Yet it's also important to document political activism, resistance, and failure as well. How we do that is tricky but essential.

**ZG:** Why are images of particular interest to you, especially in relation to your book *Archiving the Unspeakable*? What does the study of images offer that studying other archival materials or artifacts does not?

**Caswell:** There's something about photographs that speak to us very deeply. I think it's particularly true when you're studying cultures whose languages you cannot read. There's something incredible haunting about those Tuol Sleng photographs. They leave such an impact. The manner in which they're viewed at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is so jarring. It's such a haunted space and the ways in which they're on display for foreign tourists now is so striking. Originally, after the Khmer Rouge were overthrown by the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese quickly turned the Tuol Sleng prison site which had previously been a high school into a museum because they recognized the importance of that site for controlling the narrative about who the Khmer Rouge were and who was responsible and why. They turned it into a narrative that justified their own overthrow of the regime based on humanitarian grounds—they had their own political agenda there. There was also a practical agenda where people didn't know if their loved ones had been killed at Tuol Sleng or not. There's something about those records as photographic records that's haunting, that the texts don't

convey and it's perhaps because I don't read the language. I also think it's necessary to have an intervention in this discussion about the ethics of viewing images from an archival studies perspective. If we see photographs as records, first and foremost, not as aesthetic objects or art, then we tie them to the context of their creation. You cannot view that photograph or interpret it without knowing that it was taken by the Khmer Rouge regime. It's only when we see them as art objects and we put them on display at a museum without context that we do a real injustice to the victims and our looking is no longer grounded in ethics, it's grounded in spectacle.

**ZG:** Can you talk a little bit about the power, and even the politics of silences, within the archives? What work do silences do within the archives, and once identified, what work can and maybe should be done to address them?

**Caswell:** I think it depends on the nature of the silence; there are so many different types of silence. There's a silence that's done on purpose that needs to be respected and there's a silence that's done because of white supremacist attitudes from archivists about what's important to collect. To me, these are two of the major forms of silences, the latter of which needs to be addressed immediately by archivists—at all kinds of institutions and all levels. I think we need to train archivists to start questioning these notions of what's important and what our role is and what the ethics are from the very start in their master's programs. I think we need to shift our notion of what's important from the "stuff" (objects, things) to the people, to the relationships. That's actually what's more important. It's a huge shift for us because we've been so focused as a field on the stuff. The stuff is great but the stuff is great only in so much as it enables you to tell stories about the people.

## Three Poems

Wendy Burk, Julie Swarstad Johnson, and Sarah Kortemeier

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA POETRY CENTER

*These three works of visual art and poetry emerged from our professional experience as librarians and poets at The University of Arizona Poetry Center, a special collection of contemporary poetry housed in a public university. Frequently described as a “living archive,” the Poetry Center’s library houses both open stacks designed for browsing and closed stacks containing archival collections related to contemporary poetry. Our collections, building, and everyday work, as seen through the alternate lens of our identities as writers and artists, comprise the subjects of our collaborative assemblages. We began by generating a list of questions that became the titles of the three pieces. Based on our questions, we each wrote a poem that incorporated fragments of language found on the spines of books and in archival documents. Finally, we rendered the poems as visual assemblages incorporating found objects, photographs of public and hidden spaces in our building, and repurposed archival and office materials. The pieces progressed via a series of exchanges, so that each assemblage includes work by every collaborator. Specific authorship is relinquished in favor of collective achievement, reflecting the collaborative and sometimes hidden nature of the librarian’s and archivist’s work.*

**Is the Archive Alive?**

Your battles are over. What befell  
has been slipped into folders, boxed, and measured.  
Your ink so flat, fruitful,  
still desires to unfold —

I am sorry  
I don't remember  
I have found great comfort  
I regret  
I have been terror-stricken


— an apology or an argument.

What do we reach for now, but words?

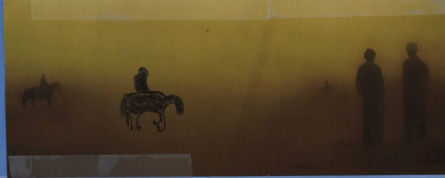
With them, with their aid  
we finish each other's sentences  
and we finish the sentences of the dead.




Is the Archive Alive?



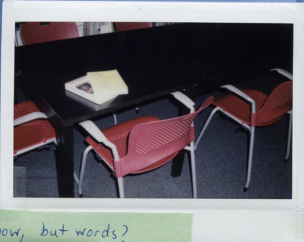
Your battles are over. What befell  
has been slipped into folders, boxed, and measured.  
Your ink so flat, fruitful,  
Still desires to unfold —



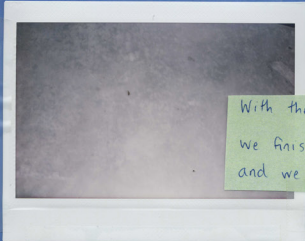
I am sorry  
I don't remember  
I have found great comfort  
I regret  
I have been terror-stricken



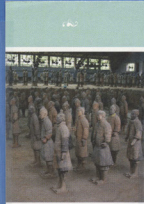
— an apology or an argument.




What do we reach for now, but words?



With them, with their aid  
we finish each other's sentences  
and we finish the sentences of the dead.



"When I began a deliberate inquiry into my past, starting in 1989, I thought of myself as a man walking around with shrapnel sealed in his flesh, and I wanted to get the fragments out ... A commonplace about trauma, one buried deep in the psyches of American men, is that is is noble to heal alone."  
Barry Lopez



"You art a bottle-headed flap-card knave!"  
The Learning of the Shrapnel

**YOU ARE HERE**  
**YOU ARE NOW**

NEWLIGHT PRESS - newlightpress.blogspot.com

**How Do We See What Is Hidden?**

Let the edges blur.  
A triangular way in.  
Perhaps there is no way in.  
Consider the edges.  
A dark click.  
Look up.  
There is a bright shelf in the ceiling,  
call it thought.  
Stop thinking of time as a fever,  
or even as a bloom.  
Let time be a wild root.  
Or a monster's careful  
and ongoing notes in the dust under the bed.  
Or a wrecked armada.  
Freelance there.  
In a waiting space.  
In the huge haiku  
of a single, testing breath.



**How Do We Love the Past and the Present?**

The brightest go first. Light  
can illuminate, or it can bleach  
all the color from a book's spine,  
so we keep the rarest things  
safe in cooled darkness.  
Two gardens rival each other  
from either side of the glass  
and both need attention, although  
neither demands it: one could ignore  
the bamboo as easily as the books,  
and both might do just fine or wither.  
In my wallet, I keep a plan  
for an orderly apocalypse,  
reminding me who to call  
if the waters rise or fire falls  
from a wire in the ceiling. Who  
can I call to tell that the air  
is burning out there, the hottest  
October on record in a year hot  
with hatred? I affirm that this  
is a radical act of love: to look  
you in the eye and say good morning,  
to bring you what you ask for  
out of the cooled darkness  
where it rests. This is what light  
can do: a whole lot of damage,  
but how could we see to read  
all these words without it?



Wendy Burk is the Library Director of The University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her publications include a book of poetry, *Tree Talks: Southern Arizona* (Delete Press, 2016). She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and an M.A. in Information Resources and Library Science, both from The University of Arizona. Contact: [wlburk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:wlburk@email.arizona.edu).

Julie Swarstad Johnson works as a Library Specialist at The University of Arizona Poetry Center. She is the author of a poetry chapbook, *Jumping the Pit* (Finishing Line Press, 2015). She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from The Pennsylvania State University.

Sarah Kortemeier is the Instruction and Outreach Librarian at The University of Arizona Poetry Center. Her poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Sentence*, *Fairy Tale Review*, and others. She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing: Poetry and an M.A. in Library and Information Science, both from The University of Arizona.

To Un-Become:  
*Between Historic Reminder and Hallucination,  
Geographical Document and Childhood Memory,  
Collective Tragedy and Personal Healing*

Saša Rajšić

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS HELSINKI, FINLAND



Photography by Vitalis Neufeld

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

<https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.27.06>

*To Un-Become: Between Historic Reminder and Hallucination, Geographical Document and Childhood Memory, Collective Tragedy and Personal Healing is an multimedia art project, which explores the concept of un-becoming through revisiting Operation Storm in Yugoslavia and its consequences over two decades later. My interest in the concept of un-becoming was sparked by a court case in which General Ante Gotovina, a former Croatian military officer, was found guilty of organizing and implementing a permanent and forcible removal of the Serbian people in a 1995 military action entitled Operation Storm. Not long after, Gotovina's convictions for crimes against humanity were reversed by the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Gotovina then returned to Croatia where many considered him a national hero. Furthermore, the Appeals Chamber also disputed the existence of a criminal enterprise whose purpose was the permanent and forcible removal of Serb civilians entirely. I wonder if this allowed Gotovina to successfully un-become a criminal, and also ask whether the same un-becoming process is possible for the survivors of his actions? To research this question, in April 2017 I retraced the journey of over 650 km from my first refugee house in Niš, Serbia to my former home in Karlovac, Croatia. For over two weeks, dawn to dusk I walked following the same route hundreds of thousands of other people were forced to take two decades ago during Operation Storm. This experience merged the evidence of war with my own memories, both actual and constructed, creating a visual noise that became my truth during the walk.*



My mother found me in my bed, crying, with a pillow over my face, one year after we moved into our refugee apartment in Niš. She sat next to me, hugged me, and asked my why I was crying.

“I can’t tell you,” I replied.

I don’t remember exactly, but knowing my mother, she must have been crying together with me. When I finally had gathered my courage, with tears in my eyes, I said that I had lost something.

“What did you lose,” she asked.

“I can’t tell you,” I repeated.

“Can you at least tell me the first letter?”

“C,” I replied inaudibly.

“Second?”

“H.”

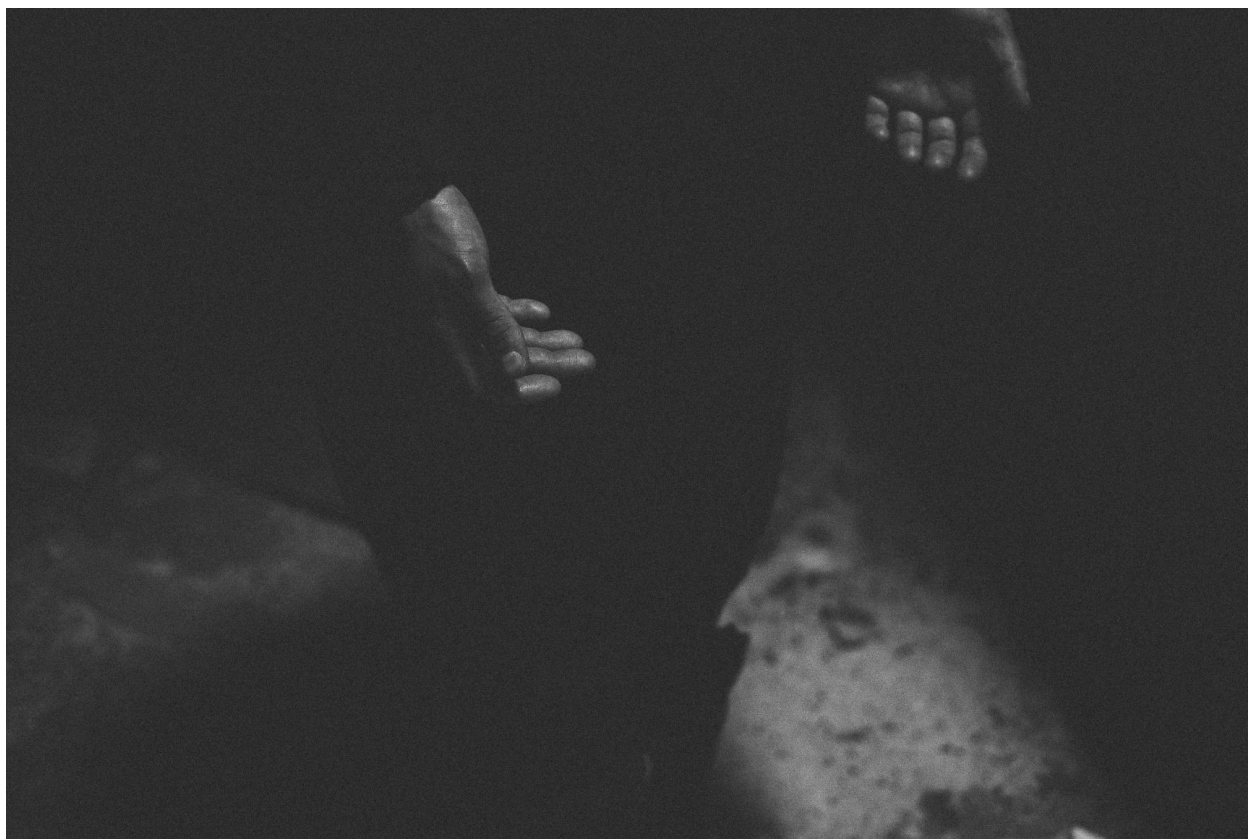
“Third?”

“I.”

Letter by letter, I sobbed the word “childhood.”

“It is still on the bench in front of our house.”

I was eight years old.



The Serbian Red Cross was helping refugees. Most often, help was in the form of non-perishable food. We received flour packed in sacks bigger than my seven-year-old body.

The Red Cross office was downtown, and we had to take the bus to bring our flour home. The Red Cross symbol on the sack let other passengers know that we were refugees.

I was ashamed of it.

I was afraid of it.

Other children bullied me daily. They would tell me that I was Ustaša and that I should go back to where I came from. I did not know what it meant to be Ustaša. Adults used that word when spoke about the war, and that could not be good.

Ustaša was not good.

Ustaša was me.

A few months in a row, we only received flour. Our apartment was filled with it. There was so much flour, we spread it across the apartment by walking--by living. A white circle formed where my mother would bend over to scoop flour from the sack into a plastic bowl.

I found her there, once, in that circle, crying with a plastic bowl of flour in her arms.



For weeks we were hiding in an underground shelter. It was a dark, unfinished room, that I was afraid to enter. This is where my grandmother kept our winter food including her homemade šljiva (plum) jam. When she made it, she would give each kid a spoonful of boiling jam. It burned our tongues for days. We hid here with a neighboring Croatian family during the siege of Karlovac.

Karlovac was unclaimed.

Serbian or Croatian soldiers could take over the city and enter our shelter at any time. My father and our Croatian neighbor came up with a plan. I remember hearing them talking. If Croatian soldiers came in, our neighbor would speak up and claim we are all one Croatian family. If Serbian soldiers were to come in, my dad would do the same.

I sat in the dark thinking about my grandmother's jam and how šljiva sounds the same in both Croatian and Serbian.



Saša Rajšić is an artist and founder of the To Un-Become project. The project began as one-time performance and since then has evolved into a multimedia art project with contributions from artists from Germany and Serbia. Rajšić was born in Karlovac, Croatia, and like thousands of fellow Croatian Serbs, fled his country due to a threat of ethnic cleansing in the early nineties. He lived as a refugee in Serbia before immigrating to Canada in 2005. Rajšić earned his BFA from OCAD University in 2011. He received the Mudge Massey Traveling Award that enabled him to enroll in MA studies at the University of the Arts Helsinki, the Jacques Dagenais Science in Culture Award in 2010, and Performance Studies International Enrichment Award in 2012. Recently, he presented his work at the Annual Meeting on Law and Society in Toronto and the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration in Thessaloniki, both in 2018. Rajšić is a member of Displaced Peoples, a collaborative research network of the Law and Society Association. His work has been exhibited in Scotland, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Serbia, Germany, Greece, Palestine, UK, USA, and Canada, where he currently lives and works. Contact: [sasa@sasarajsic.com](mailto:sasa@sasarajsic.com).

# Holodomor

Taylor Diken

Gaylord boxes hold acid-free folders hold dried wood pulp  
and ink the storyteller  
except when it's not  
except when it burns

Gaylord boxes stacked on dusty shelves stacked  
on concrete floors stacked  
on burial grounds, the old myth come to  
life in the files, the obsolescence of discs,  
the stories that haunt

This is a new nation for us,  
us pinkos, us Rusnaks  
gathered at St. Elias speaking our own po-našemu  
no organ for the choir  
heritage inherited without fear of reprisal

They can't take our memories if we hold them in our tongues  
(and we never could afford ink,  
anyway) but tongues are desperate for some taste  
other than ash and the kontakion

And burial grounds hold archives hold history  
just not ours.

Taylor Diken is a graduate student in Library and Information Science at the Catholic University of America. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 2016. You can find her on [ORCID](#) to follow her work. Contact: [taylordiken@gmail.com](mailto:taylordiken@gmail.com).

## Gonna die (poem)

Wes Grooms

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Inspecting you.  
Dissecting you.  
Connecting you.  
Disrespecting you.

No account for you.  
No accountin' for you.  
Just a count of you.  
Discounted. You.

Systemized.  
Perspective.  
Context.  
Collective.

The global weight.  
Locked in place.  
The global reach.  
Chains 'round our feet.

Abject poverty.  
Rejected lobbying.  
Victims.  
Mobbing.  
Urban quandary.

Myriad causes.  
Nobody's fault.  
Never pauses.  
This mental assault.

Outta breath.  
Still in debt.  
Our blood.  
Let, in death.

What did you hear of us?  
Violence.  
Silence.  
Too impolite to discuss?

Meaningless.  
You judge us.  
Existence, begrudged us.

Join us!  
See us!  
Hear us!  
Fear us!

You pry.  
You draw; you write.  
We try.  
We comply.  
Still.

Yet you obscure us.  
Feed off us.  
Forgotten.  
You are us.

We gonna die.  
By you.  
By us.



## Bibliography

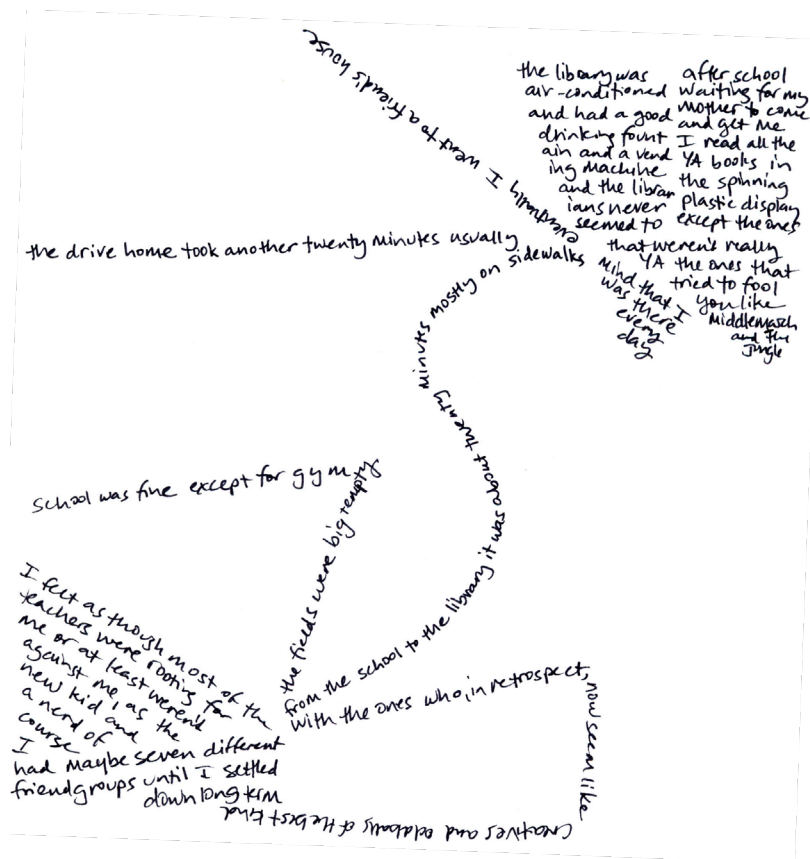
- Moser, Caroline O. N., and Cathy McIlwaine. 2016. "Latin American Urban Violence as a Development Concern: Towards a Framework for Violence Reduction." *World Development* 34 (1): 89-112.
- Winton, Ailsa. 2014. "Gangs in Global Perspective." *Environment and Urbanization* 26 (2): 101-416.

Wes Grooms is an emerging critical urban theorist whose work is anchored in the applied disciplines of public administration and urban planning. He is currently engaged in an exploration of how social welfare goals such as justice, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, and sustainability are realized and prevented in the accredited educational programs associated with these disciplines and through their practice, primarily in the public sector. Contact: [wes.grooms@louisville.edu](mailto:wes.grooms@louisville.edu).

# Library

Jessy Randall and Briget Heidmous  
COLORADO COLLEGE AND MAPPING PROJECT

"Library" is a visual poem from Mapping Project, a collaborative effort of Jessy Randall and Briget Heidmous. Jessy writes words and Briget draws. <http://www.briget-heidmous.com/mapping-project/>



© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

Jessy Randall, 47, has had diagram poems, poetry comics, and other things in *Poetry, Story*, and *The Best Experimental Writing 2015*. Her most recent book is *Suicide Hotline Hold Music* (Red Hen, 2016). She is a librarian at Colorado College and her website is <http://bit.ly/JessyRandall>. Contact: [jessyrandall@yahoo.com](mailto:jessyrandall@yahoo.com).

Briget Heidmous, 28, is an artist and curator. Her website is: [www.briget-heidmous.com](http://www.briget-heidmous.com).

## The Meadow and the Archive

Kris Bronstad

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE-KNOXVILLE

*“The Meadow and the Archive” is a short fictional story about a government archives branch operating in a totalitarian empire in which components of the natural world have been eradicated. Archivists observe and assist a woman whom manages to liberate an important element from a particular collection. It is hoped that this element will contain the beginnings of a wilderness that the empire has systematically worked to destroy. The transaction also offers hope for other subversive modes of archival use.*

On what would be Jerusha’s last day, a familiar woman watched us through the glass doors of the archive. Jerusha and I watched back from behind our desk. “Stop staring,” Jerusha whispered. I turned away. I was very fond of Jerusha – she was my mentor, and I considered her a friend. I would never do anything that would upset her or get her into trouble.

The woman’s name was Shifrazeah. She had been to the archives before. On some days she would come in; on others she would only wait outside like this and then leave. I thought it was curious, but Jerusha reminded me there were other reasons the woman could be there: the archive is only one suite in a shaded arcade of government departments, including a train station a few outlets down. Most of the people strolling past or hovering outside – staring at the small, isolated strips of government-sanctioned plants on the side of the walkway – were waiting for their train.

That day, Shifrazeah came through the doors. She was tall and wore a grey overcoat and carried a small red purse. As she walked to our front desk, a researcher looked up at her, his mouth agape. I felt Jerusha tense with alarm. I have wondered since if Jerusha worried he was some sort of government spy. But it seemed the researcher was just lost in remembering something and did not notice Shifrazeah. He mumbled to himself and looked back at his screen.

I pushed our roster toward Shifrazeah. She held her breath and took the ballpoint emblazoned with the name of our empire and our agency’s role in it. She wrote her own name and the title of the materials she wanted to see: The Hellenwood Papers, Box 19. It was what

she always asked for, and she wrote the words neatly but as quickly as possible, and then stepped back.

Shifrazeh did not like to stand close to us. Jerusha had told me that the woman had an extraordinarily acute sense of smell: It was painful for her to be there. I could see it on her face. Her jaw tensed, her smile collapsed. I thought about the other researchers and their smells: of paper and canned meat, toothpaste and tobacco, sour sweat, train station coffee. I tried not to think about what Jerusha and I smelled like, but I knew it must be the same, only with antiseptic and earthy strains of tunnel clinging to us a little deeper.

Jerusha ducked into the back hallway where recently touched collections sat on shelves running the length of the entrance to the tunnels. The tunnels connect government hubs across the city to one another. They are also where papers are kept by the empire when people do not ask for them. The tunnels are staffed by bureaucrats, called earthworms, who sleep underground in monastic cells adjacent to the chains of boxes. They have more knowledge than us, more power. They tell us which boxes can or cannot be requested. They can pass us forms that say RESTRICTED instead. Sometimes boxes that are allowed into the hands of a researcher one day will be restricted the next. These are the transactions that make researchers tremble and leave as quickly as possible, and we never see them again.

Each time Shifrazeh had come in, I worried that Jerusha would return with a restricted slip for her. I imagined, given Jerusha's obvious interest, that such a denial would be bad for her as well. But that day, too, Jerusha emerged bearing The Hellenwood Papers, Box 19, between outstretched fingers. Shifrazeh seated herself in the farthest desk from the door and Jerusha gently placed the box in front of her.

Jerusha had warned me, in the firm, with the intense manner she took on when we were alone, that we must try not to think of Shifrazeh at all. It's easier that way, if we could manage. The less we noticed, the less we could be asked by the empire to remember. That way, no one gets into trouble.

But it was impossible not to notice Shifrazeh. She had no pencil with her, no notepad, no computer, no crumpled envelope or newspaper to fill the blank space in with penciled dates and names. Instead she brought a tiny vial with a sandy-colored cork stopper the size of a thumbnail. She would open the vial and sit it on the edge of the desk. She sat the cork, which was bigger than the vial itself, beside it.

The first time I saw this I turned to Jerusha. I expected her to react as I had, with bafflement and stifled laughter. But she grabbed my wrist and stiffened her face, silently urging me not to say anything.

Later, Jerusha told me there were old arts not known by the empire or their earthworms. And these arts still existed. They are hidden, she had said., but they are important.

\*\*\*

I had seen inside Box 19 before we checked the materials back in and it went to the earthworms. Inside, were a series of neatly arranged books. They were beautiful, bound in an almost mystic shade of sea-green fabric. Shifrazeh always looked at the book that was a paler shade of green than all the others. It was the #11 field journal of someone from a time long before the empire. There were handwritten notes inside. I had not been able to understand them. There were many equations. But the word I noticed again and again in the

journal was “goldenrod”. I knew this was a flower. It was one of many I had never seen.

They were among the things you didn’t notice were missing until you started to pay attention: types of flowers, trees, birds, insects, which the government considered invasive and impure. You heard whispers that all but the white wildflowers had disappeared, that there were no more bees; you could see that the ivies that used to cover buildings and viaducts were now gone; you noticed that everything smelled greasier, heavier, burnt, and that the smells of gardenia or lilac that used to accompany you on your walk home from the train had not been back in years. Then the names themselves became unmentionable.

That is one more way they control us, Jerusha had told me. They plucked from the environment what allowed us to exist in the ways that they could not manage and they tried to destroy all traces of it. Remember these things, Jerusha said, but know also it is dangerous to pay attention. People disappear, too.

In her trips to the archive, Shifrazeah had flipped through the pages of the #11 field journal but always landed on one page in particular, in the very middle. The book lay perfectly flat opened to it. She would sit very still in front of it with her hands in her lap.

I had looked at this page. It was— or it had been — completely blank except for a small black bump, as if some very small bug had been smashed between the pages.

\*\*\*

On what ended up being Jerusha’s last day, all the researchers left early to catch the 16.50 train. Shifrazeah left at the same time as everyone else. On her way out, she looked at Jerusha and nodded. I pretended not to notice.

I went to go collect the boxes, but Jerusha stopped me. The earthworms wouldn’t come out until the top of the hour, she said, and she wanted to tell me something before then. She grabbed my hand. She told me she and the woman — Shifrazeah — came from the same place, an old unincorporated town in the middle of a giant goldenrod meadow. The town and the meadow were destroyed. It can never exist again, she said, not in the way it did.

I was shocked. This was not the kind of history we ever spoke of to anyone. But we all knew it, and Jerusha did not need to tell me the rest of it: how she and countless others were taken in some violent way into the empire; how the fury of that conquest was tamed and cleverly hidden with pen and paper; how it was captured and moved deep into the earth, and tagged with anonymous, bloodless names and numbers, excising the horror of what actually happened. This was a story we know too well. Whether you could find any evidence of it in the archive was another question.

The archive functions both to remember and to hide, Jerusha told me, as it is constantly edited to protect and promote the empire, to highlight a memory may also destroy it.

Jerusha let go of my hand. She walked toward Shifrazeah’s desk, where the book from Box 19 still lay open. She unfolded a scrap of newspaper she took from her pocket. Inside was a scalpel which she used to sharply nick the paper. She pressed her finger to the attacked page and then rubbed her fingertip on the newspaper.

Jerusha walked back behind the desk. She showed me the newspaper, on which there was the tiny black bug she must have taken from the empty page of the field book. “I told you there are arts we cannot talk about,” Jerusha said. “So I cannot tell you how Shifrazeah has done what she has for us. What matters is that she took what was needed from here. It is in now safe.”

I did not understand, and I was frightened. Stealing from the empire would send you to a hard labor camp.

“It’s okay,” Jerusha said, noticing my face. “No one will know. To the earthworms, there is nothing missing. But for us, it is hope. We have goldenrod again. We have the beginnings of a new meadow. Not in here anymore,” she said, gesturing to the bug. “It is with Shifrazeh. While right now the meadow is small, upside down, an imprint of a meadow, some day it will grow.”

Jerusha smiled. “I am ecstatic,” she said, “because she has liberated it from here.”

She crumpled the newspaper and threw it into the trash under the desk. Then she squeezed my hand again and walked out the glass doors. I was left to wait for the earthworms by myself.

\*\*\*

I have thought about Jerusha and Shifrazeh a lot while going back and forth on the train. I have wondered if I will ever understand what they did. Where is the meadow and how was it liberated? Whether it begins in that vial — a scent, a little homunculus of a meadow, a seed of sorts — is beyond what I know.

But I have arrived at seeing how such extractions could be possible. I have spent years, after all, watching over researchers. I have seen them again and again reach a state of trance. In this state they twitch, hammer keyboards, talk to themselves. They groan with weariness from the work of re-creating the conversations of long-abandoned offices. They sigh with love for the archival voices they have just heard underneath the muted cries of trains stopping and starting again or the banter of earthworms emerging with mail and messages for us. Sometimes the researchers stare blatantly and blankly at me and the other clerks, jerking their heads up on the verge of questions. But we are not who they are looking at and we are not the people they can ask questions of.

If researchers can fall into this flow between themselves and the words of buried records, what else could be retrieved? What could be accomplished in the reading rooms of the empire?

I watch for the meadow when I am out. I like to imagine that one day I will see it from the train. I like to think that we will not know it is here until it is too late to stop it, until the railroad tracks are bent and buried under the colorful weight of echinacea and yarrow, aster and columbine, the air full of goldenrod spores.



Kris Bronstad is the Modern Political Archivist at the Modern Political Archives of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The MPA is part of the University Libraries as well as the Howard Baker Center for Public Policy. Contact: [lbronsta@utk.edu](mailto:lbronsta@utk.edu).

# Subjectivity and Methodology in the Arch‘I’ve

Elizabeth J. Vincelette  
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

*This article explores methodologies from the fields of library archival science, human geography, composition and rhetoric, and established editorial practices in English studies. By elaborating on the role of a researcher’s subjectivity in archival creation, this work expands the conversation regarding methodology and archives, especially how archives present us with new ways of seeing and making narratives during the editorial decision-making involved in their creation. Writing about my own experience, I privilege the researcher’s point of view with a narrative about my construction of a digital archive. With archival research, we should promote the revelation of methods and methodology to shape the expectations of our scholarship to include such discussions and consider how metacommentary—through explication of methods and methodology—enriches the research process. This article offers an affective methodology of archival work through an exploration of theory, the research narrative, and a pedagogical narrative. I also address the paradox of destruction and preservation in an archive and how embodied pedagogy both extends and complements archival inquiry.*

## Introduction

This article explores methodologies from the fields of library archival science, human geography, composition and rhetoric, and established editorial practices in English studies from the perspective of a researcher-archivist. By elaborating on the role of subjectivity in archival creation, I expand the conversation regarding methodology and archives, especially how archives present us with new ways of seeing and making narratives during the editorial decision-making involved in their production. I offer a feminist methodology of archival work by investigating the relationship between archival research, subjectivity, and narrative; the paradox of destruction and preservation; and how embodied pedagogy extends

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

and complements archival inquiry. Like Gillian Rose (1997), I “reflexively examin[e] my positionality” (305) as part of my research practice and recognize the “feminist task” (305) as “less one of mapping difference . . . and more one of asking how difference is constituted, of tracing its destabilizing emergence during the research process itself” (313). As such, I situate feminist, archival methodology as an *affective methodology*, in which I define *affect* as contingent, active reading, speaking, and listening with empathy. In their edited collection on affective methodology, Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage (2015) identify *affect* as “bodily, fleeting[,] and immaterial and always in between entities” while encouraging research with “*strong situational specificity*” (2). Affect, when applied to methodology, characterizes methodology as a web of mutual and interdependent actions imbued with power relationships. As Anna Gibbs (2015) writes, in response to de Certeau’s (1984) *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, *affective methodology* demands that researchers re-evaluate the research process: “If, since Michel Foucault, we are used to describing methodology as a toolkit, affect theory has never represented simply one more tool in the bag, but rather requires us to rethink what it is we do when we use any of our tools. It emphasizes the “*relationality* of empirical research, especially with human subjects, and it directs our attention to the ethics and the politics of the incorporation of the voices of those subjects in our writing” (223). Writing about my own experience, I privilege the researcher’s point of view with a narrative about my construction of a digital archive.

Primarily a researcher, I nevertheless became a *de facto* archivist in practice, albeit not one schooled with the rigor of an academic degree, qualifications, or experience in the field. The two professions—archivist and researcher—though related, have dissimilar objectives, but the “line” between researcher and archivist is not definitive. Not only does an archivist’s activities affect research, but an archivist’s professional duties also involve some amount of research when categorizing materials for preservation. Since I usually work as a researcher, I needed to adjust to my role as an archivist’s intern when I held an internship in Special Collections at my university archive. I learned the university archivist’s perspective of archives and found that positioning myself as an archivist was difficult because I wanted to pursue research on the collection and often wrote with more detail or description of the documents than was the norm. For example, there were several times when I was unable to decipher signatures on letters when creating finding aids. Rather than cataloguing the letter as an unknown, I spent hours reading about the recipient of the letter as well as other clues that might lead to identifying the author, often with no success. Researching detracted time from creating the finding aid (my assigned task) and I realized I acted as a researcher rather than as an archivist. Despite archivists’ occasional forays into historical research, time constraints prevent their focusing on chasing leads. In my case, the roles of archivist and researcher were conflated once I created a digital archive.

### **Methodology, Context, and the Archive: Subjectivity, History, and Narrative**

Although commonplace in composition studies, linguistics, and rhetoric, as well as in archival scholarship within library science, methods and methodological criticism seldom appear in literary studies, my “parent” field of study. Literary criticism stems from a tradition in which transparency in methods and methodology is neither expected nor required, reflecting a stylistic and philosophical slant against metacommentary. One exception in literary studies is editorial theory, which offers a rich tradition of metacommentary in the sense of an overt

unmasking of both the *methods* of a project, the step by step tasks of performance,<sup>1</sup> as well as its *methodology*, the researcher's theoretical stance. Barbara L'Eplattenier (2009) points out the difference between methods and methodology, often conflated terms, and how "methodology allows us to theorize the goals of our research, [whereas] methods allow us to contextualize the research process of the researched subject and materials. Methods make the invisible work of historical research visible" (69). Publishing one's methods is revelatory, and a complement to philosophical or ideological views expressed in a methodology. Some scholars, such as literary critic Tim Milnes (2009), regard methodological criticism as little more than extraneous commentary. Milnes observes that metacommentary "is the product of a more basic misconception that underpins much institutionalized literary criticism and commentary today: namely, that interpretation requires a 'methodology' in the first place" (23). Milnes indicates that interpretation does not *require* a methodology, meaning that it is either unnecessary to criticism or that it is simply superfluous to include explanation of one's methodology. However messy, interpretation inherently does have a methodology and Milnes's comment, instead of causing us to disregard methodology, should prompt us to question how we write our criticism and our research overall, including that of archival work.

When scholars explain the steps of creating and interpreting, they may attempt to unmask some of the mysteries of unseen thinking processes, even of epistemology itself. Revealing our own positionality (as researchers, archivists, or researcher-archivists) follows a tradition in feminist scholarship across a number of disciplines, and such revelations are always incomplete, contingent, local, and marked by institutional ideologies. Gillian Rose (1997) warns against the "god-trick of claiming to see the whole world while remaining distanced from it" (308), or what Donna Haraway (1988) exposes as "the impossibility of entertaining innocent 'identity' politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing" (585). Likewise, Knudsen and Stage (2015) remark upon the "trap of the researcher inventing the world" (6). In my own work, following Rose's (1997) critique of how reflexivity is often used to avoid a sense of "false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge" (306), I do not claim reflexivity as a "strategy for situating knowledge" (306).<sup>2</sup> Instead, I embrace the ambivalences, the slippery and elusive acts of interpretation, and I acknowledge the messiness of transparent reflexivity as innate to the research process. Pamela Moss (1995) discusses the "fluidity and simultaneity within betweenness," in which "researchers must engage in reflexivity," what she defines as "those introspective aspects of thought that are self-critical and self-consciously analytical," and which "[permit] us to position our own involvement in the production of knowledge" (445). Moss's work, like those of a number of theorists across disciplines, underscores a belief in transparency, a foundational principle of affective methodology.

Methodological metacommentary reveals praxis, the linking of theory and practice, and exposes institutional, pedagogical, and even activist obligations of theory. With archival research, researchers and archivists alike should therefore promote the revelation of methods and methodology to shape the expectations of our scholarship to include such discussions, and we should contemplate how metacommentary—through explication of methods and methodology—enriches the research process. Methodologies published for material culture studies influence my own archival work as both a researcher and creator of a digital archive, including Ian Hodder's (2003) discussion of interpreting documents. Hodder describes how documents require contextualization in order to be understood, and that documents

themselves are always contextualized by their material, social, or historical conditions. These “conditions” reflect the same circumstances of the researcher, what Clare Madge (1993) calls “issues of identity (nationality, race, gender, age, class),” or “where the researcher is ‘coming from’” (297)—their position.<sup>3</sup> Both Hodder and Madge, in addressing the positionality of texts and the researcher, underscore what I see as a built-in tension between text and context pursuant to any written artifact. Editorial theory has addressed this tension for decades, and the advent of cultural studies and composition—both interdisciplinary fields within English studies—influences how we represent archival material in our work. Much of my own recovery work preserving and digitizing a nineteenth-century scrapbook focused on how materials are situated or conditioned by their containers. The scrapbook held letters and manuscripts from a nineteenth-century newspaper, an archival “container” in its own right. Containers—the archive itself, the collection within the archive, the scrapbook within the collection, the original newspaper in the scrapbook—all involve exchanging of artifacts, such that the action of transferring an artifact creates intertextual, social, historical, and cultural relationships.

Recovery projects like my own often culminate in digital archives used for display, and as counterparts of print publication, digital archives constitute a relatively new genre (in the history of textual genres). In literary studies, genre theory has shifted from viewing genre as a type of classification to situating genre as constituted by social action.<sup>4</sup> Action makes meaning, and in the case of archival work, the action often involves the recovery, usually by researchers, of little known authors or texts. Constructing digital archives influences what exists in scholarship about a topic such as my own, American women writers who published in the newspaper *The Independent*. Through my work, I hope to encourage interest in nineteenth-century women’s authorship in American periodicals by representing primary source materials from a physical archive—the manuscripts and letters to the editor of a major newspaper, *The Independent*—and by developing biographies and critical resources. My larger goal is to help scholars develop, or even reveal, networks of social groups, discourse communities, and circles of influence, such as those of the women (many of whom knew one another) represented in my work. Thus, construction and editing involved in such a project translates to recovery, not only for the women writers in the project, but also today among scholarly and editorial circles. Recovery work constitutes a public, social act, broadening these “recovered” authors’ space in scholarly, literary culture, while potentially doing the same for the researcher.

### **Methodology and Subjectivity: History, Archive, and Narrative**

Historians, archivists, archaeologists, and other researchers using archives participate in the discourse of power and knowledge of constituting history: from the vetting and accepting of materials, to the organizing and ordering of documents, to their interpretation and representation. During the nineteenth-century, Leopold Ranke (as cited in Wallerstein 2004) charged that history should be written *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*—or, as it “really did happen” (4)—as a reaction against hagiography in historiography. Ranke proposed that history should be written according to the scientific method, and that historical documents penned when events occurred should be protected in archives as methods to guard against presumably corrupt interpretation. Historical writing is thus a compensatory act, a substitute for what cannot be retrieved. It is what F. R. Ankersmit (2001) calls “instant epistemology”

(74). Historical representation is a means by which ideologies become universal and eternal, with history acting as a narrative construct; this does not, of course, mean that every scholar's historical work will achieve such eminent status, but that the process reflects *historical representation*. It is impossible to record something exactly as it happened and separate writing from perception and interpretation. Creation and the unification of personal interests with historical voices mark the role of artist, of storyteller, of archivist, and archival researcher alike. The researcher becomes part of the story they want to represent while they interact with the materials and when they labor to create something significant. The work is always already personal, mirroring themselves, their passions, hobbies, life's work, burgeoning career, or activism.<sup>5</sup> The process is what Linda Markowitz (2005) refers to as a "feminist struggle," a challenge to "the various ways reality is often divided into simplistic dichotomies of nature/culture, public/private, rational/emotional" (40).

Although not expressly articulated, a similar methodological slant to those outlined here emerges from essays concerning archival work, including in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, edited by Lucille Schultz (2008), and *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette Burton (2005). Both collections focus on the researcher's experience in the archive. There is no separate, specific methodology chapter or discussion in either collection, but a methodological perspective manifests itself—that the personal experiences of the research process ultimately affect how we read and understand history. In a similar fashion, Elena Trivelli (2015), in her exploration of archival work after a crisis, offers a research methodology in which she describes her responses as "*entangled with*, rather than *by-products of*, the material and the absences" (128) she encountered in the archive. A researcher's task may depend on an archivists' work but focuses on continual discovery and decision-making regarding how to contextualize archival materials through archiving, editing, and authoring. Researchers must sift through an often-vast amount of information that has already been partially catalogued or dissected, often before arriving at an archive, and then they must dissect even further.

In the archives, I became one of many centers, physical and digital, as my subjectivity and identity determined aspects of archival creation while I constructed a digital archive. I created a story from the materials, incorporating narratives they inherently suggested, what Eric Ketelaar (2001) calls "tacit narratives." Ketelaar describes how such narratives are unstable and contingent, evolving over time depending on how records are used. Likewise, Antoinette Burton (2005) posits that "archives are always already stories" (20). Objects in a collection begin to speak about their world as we invest time in them. For example, the scrapbook I worked with has its own narratives—a story of its creator, who placed letters written to the editor of *The Independent* by a number of authors, mostly during the years 1880 and 1881; it also suggests a narrative about the importance of periodicals in the late nineteenth century in America. To create the digital archive called *Independent Women*, I separated the women's materials in the scrapbook from the materials authored by men contained in the scrapbook, thus removing the texts from their context and creating a new one. My decision-making to begin the project developed in stages—knowing first, that my university library needed someone to organize the collection; second, that there was some interest in the topic in scholarly circles; third, that I would have institutional support for my digitizing work once finished with the finding aid; fourth, that I was intellectually invested in the materials.

During this research project, my discoveries about the scrapbook maker, and nineteenth-century scrapbooks overall, have brought me to weigh how scholars have separate personal fulfillment from potential scholarly value. The cultural import of the scrapbook includes how it presents evidence of nineteenth-century leisure activities and a window into the world of American periodicals—and how hobbies and periodicals overlapped in the late nineteenth century. In a study of scrapbooking, Katriel and Farrell (1991) identify three activities of scrapbook keeping, all of which overlap with archival creation: saving items for “future appreciation”; organizing with “spatial arrangement” and placement of items on pages; and “contemplating and sharing” (4-5) or inviting others to view the work. Construction of a scrapbook, then, is not unlike that of an archive, as both participate in exhibition and memory-making. The ephemeral becomes material because of its preservation, and the act of including an item in an archive, digital or otherwise, assigns the item value.

Prior to the entrance of the researcher on the scene, an archivist, among many other potential actors, participates in the “drama” of material objects. After arrival at an archive, materials must be accessioned, meaning that an archivist takes items in to the archive. Then the archivist must act as a gate-keeper for an archive, often accessioning items depending on a budget. After, the archivist must decide what to keep or “weed,” a term from archival science, on some level determining trash from treasure. At many institutional archives, patrons will call the archive to offer to donate an item that they think is important, sometimes asking for a fee in return. At times, gate-keeping has begun before the “gate” of the archive with donors’ agendas. In addition, when items are first acquired by an archive, a record is made of their provenance, marking the pedigree or genealogy of the items, ensuring their institutional authority by virtue of the records. Although the moment of accession, or of being “accepted” into an archive, is not the origin point on a time-line for any materials, the provenance or story underscores a faith in origins or origin stories. Both Donna Haraway (1991) and Sandra Harding (1991) discuss why such faith in origins is suspect, given that knowledge is, in fact, knowledges, with an “s,” such that emphasizing the origin of any knowledge mistakenly values claims to origins that are always indefinite. Instead, the “interpretive act” of research serves more as a source of what Gillian Rose (1997) calls “a key site of academic feminist power” (307),<sup>6</sup> which I position on an imaginary time-line *after* materials are accessioned. Here, I imagine a time-line to suggest the usual order of events for materials entering an archive, but I do not mean to imply that the process is clear-cut or linear, as my use of the term “time-line” might intimate.

Continuing the work of an archivist, the researcher likewise cuts and categorizes, making sense of the parts of the archival body in order to create a new text, whether an article, monograph, digital archive, or other work. Decision-making involves technical skills and the intellectual work of contextualizing. The application of meaning to materials is what “makes” the materials an archive. Archival materials can break historical silences when researchers give them voices, and the silent object speaks through the experiences of those who interact with it. In the collection I studied, the scrapbook presented a cultural object, fascinating in its own right, despite its contents. I envisioned the number of people involved in handling the documents, from the authors who wrote them; to their editor and typesetter, whose newsprint-fingerprints appear on some pages; to the woman who carefully glued these papers onto the pages of a scrapbook, itself her mini-archive. Because the pages of the scrapbook were not acid-free, according to archival preservation practices, I was made

to dismantle the scrapbook by slicing out the pages with a razor blade in order to “free them up” to fit in acid-free folders—in other words, “for their own good.”

This sort of destructive activity, although necessary for preservation, does not square easily with the archival principle of *respect des fonds*, which the Society for American Archivists explains as a tenet of preservation.<sup>7</sup> The term *respect des fonds* means to categorize things as they arrive, or if it is the case, as they are found, with the practice of preserving the original order or the *fonds*, or “found objects.” The term *respect des fonds* is related to the aforementioned concept of provenance, with the provenance of materials marking their inception or “birth” into an archive. However, the term *respect des fonds* imparts an idea of respecting, or honoring what is found in as close to a state to accession as possible. “Respecting” the “found objects” sanctions what are often already-created historical products or those which have a potential to *become significant* by the very fact of their acceptance. Additionally, the word *fond* means “base” or “foundation,” suggesting a directional order to how we perceive evidence; origins are located at a base or root, and from there we build up knowledge, even if we construct on footing often resulting from chance. Therein lies a paradox—that the “origins” archivists must respect are built upon suspect faith—in the vein of Haraway (1991) and Harding’s (1991) argument.

Acquisition by an archive contributes to the idea that knowledge can be owned, ordered, categorized, or hierarchically arranged. Once materials are “processed,” a *finding aid* is created for researchers, reinforcing the idea that records are “hidden” and await discovery. In this narrative, a researcher is later fortunate enough to discover the materials, which lie, like a static, sleeping virgin in a fairy tale who “comes to life” with the researcher’s “kiss,” or entrance on the scene. In my own work, the process of preserving the scrapbook was a form of textual violence, a cutting and ordering, the anatomical dismemberment of an archival body, a sort of creation of a textual Frankenstein’s monster. As I filed papers into acid-free folders, items became unglued, tape lost its stick, and newspaper clippings crumbled. Saving the scrapbook meant reversing the process of its creation, and recreating it in a new form, not only in folders in a Hollinger box housed in Special Collections, but again in a digital archive. Just as at the site of an archeological dig, as objects were uncovered and removed from context, the “dig”—in this case the scrapbook—was itself destroyed even though preservation was achieved, enacting an inherent paradox of archival methodology.

Destruction can bring the opportunity for reinvention or rebirth, despite violent, or even morbid, associations. As the would-be editor of a digital archive representing materials in a new textual body, I became not just textual anatomist of stored work, but undertaker and caretaker of texts, their curator. Dana Gioia (1996) likens the display of rare manuscripts under glass cases in library exhibits to the exhibition of “waxy cadavers of the blessed in the churches of Southern Europe” (25), comparing preservation and representation of actual and textual bodies. Definitions of the word curator capture the paradox of discipline involved—with curing as *healing*, *guardianship*, and *restriction*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the etymology of “curator” as the Latin *curare*, to cure or to heal.<sup>8</sup> Curation is central to the humanities and a particular responsibility of digital humanities because curation in the digital humanities surpasses preservation or traditional custodial responsibilities by emphasizing public display, often of recovered materials, with revelation in new, digital textual bodies. Julia Flanders (2005) argues that textual editors working in digital humanities operate as curators to “preserve the propriety” (32) of the relationship



between the physical medium and the textual meaning—in other words, to discipline the text. This sort of control can be likened to Foucauldian discipline, as institutional, as part of how bodies function in systems.

For textual bodies, editors or curators discipline texts by dismantling, anatomizing, and encoding them for display. As Stephanie Jed (1989) argues, we make texts “chaste” and defines the term “chaste thinking” as a

figure of thought constituted at the join of two conflicting lexical families of terms, one representing the impulse to touch and the other, the impulse to be cut off from contact. These lexical families include, on the one hand, words related to touching or the absence of touching—*tangible*, *contaminate*, *contact*, *integrity*, *intact*, etc., and, on the other hand, words related to cutting—*chastity*, *castigate*, *caste*, and Latin *career*. (8)

The irony is that in order to make a text chaste, it must be touched—not unlike the paradox inherent in medical anatomies, wherein cutting leads to an understanding of wholeness. For instance, when I dismantled the scrapbook with the razor blade, I violated a textual body with the agenda of preservation and eventual representation. Taking an archival collection from accession to its display reveals a series of dualities that are at the heart of creating a new archive from an old one: recovering/covering up; destroying/preserving; dismantling/re-assembling; anatomizing/totalizing. I was motivated not only by a desire to correct a record but by fears of making errors, of perpetuating mistakes or creating a distorted body. Writing about a Renaissance anatomy textbook, Devon Hodges (1995) comments that the anatomist threatens existence with “his painful procedure for revealing truths . . . [and although] he tells us that he will expose a tangible truth, the anatomist instead turns up depths, displaces parts from a coherent whole, and flattens out bodies . . . turning finally into fragments that are not immediately placed in a new order” (6). When scanning the collection in my role as the creator of a digital archive, I felt a researcher’s anxiety about potential failure to grasp all details, perhaps by error or mis-transcription, a fear I would use the digital archive to misrepresent the physical.

With the creation of a digital archive for public display, new problems arose, such as deciding how to display some of the materials, and not knowing how the efforts on “my end” will translate to a user’s screen, a problem of representation and reception. I wondered, *how does one scan letters that are folded in half with writing on each side folded page, the way someone writes on a card? Should I scan that as one page or two, when the letter writer meant it to be two separate, but attached pages, something the original recipient and a contemporary would understand? To what degree can I control representation?* Because a digital archivist often must adopt principles other than *respect de fonds* and make choices based on themes or resemblances, digital copies do not necessarily mirror the contents of a folder (or of a material reality). Classification may determine organization but not actual location, and the design of a website or digital archive that contains a database could emphasize certain items more than others, such as with color, arrangement, and the number of links. Full control over a representation is impossible because representational possibilities do not end with the display created on the editor’s end, but continue with each individual view of a site, or an item on a site.

Processes of preservation and its theoretical questions are inseparable from representation and questions of authorial intention. Archives present a constant tension between preservation and creation, characteristics that are more complimentary than opposite. When scanning the pages (now loose from the scrapbook), I regretted not having photographed the intact pages of the scrapbook before its dismantling. I could have attempted to preserve the context of the original letters, or at least recorded it, in a fashion closer to the scrapbook-maker's intent (though some items had fallen loose). The maker had already altered the original context and intention of the letters and manuscripts of poems and essays in the collection, which had initially been addressed to *The Independent's* editors. In other words, the original authors'—those who had written the items glued in the scrapbook—intentions had already been violated when the private and business correspondence to the editors were given to the scrapbook maker for her personal collection.<sup>9</sup> The manuscripts and letters were intended to be final copies, what are often thought of by scholars to best reflect authorial intent, yet the scrapbook embodied a new, parallel text. Likewise, all the manuscripts in the scrapbook became printed articles in *The Independent* and then, in the twentieth and twenty-first century, became public—even social—again in digital archives, both in the historical newspaper databases housing periodicals and even in my own small project.

### **Final Reflection: Affective Pedagogy and the Archive**

As a conclusion, I offer a narrative relating my experience with teaching students about archives because the affective methodology I describe in this article would be incomplete without its complement, *affective pedagogy*. I situate affective pedagogy as an extension, or even culmination of, my own research processes. In "Affect as Method: Feelings, Aesthetics and Affective Pedagogy," Anna Hickey-Moody (2013) discusses affective methodology as performing research that expresses *affect as method* during the "processes of making meaning" (85), calling for an awareness of how we feel to be part of pedagogy. As with a number of other learning experiences, I have and continue to learn a great deal about theory and methodology from teaching. For an undergraduate second-level composition course, I created an assignment derived from my own research experience using archives and from the narratives collected in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, in which Lucille Schultz (2008) remarks that the authors of the essays in the collection "name the subjectivities with which they intentionally and unavoidably approach the print materials, the ephemera, and the physical sites they interrogate" (vii). I asked students to choose a text from the university archives, meaning anything from a letter, to an oral history, to a photograph, a map, a drawing, scrapbooks, etc., and to explain what the item is, how it reflects a historical context, and how they reacted to the object.

Using the archive in the classroom can encourage students to reconsider what they know or expect about gender, identity, class, history, culture, and the canon. Archives can move us beyond anthologies as a site for textual selection for our classrooms and shape our pedagogy. In a review of anthologies of women writers, Karen Kilcup (2009) noted that anthologies "represent a form of what we might call embodied pedagogy, enabling and engendering certain kinds of teaching via their shape, content, and apparatus" (7). Just as it does for researchers, the archive affords students the opportunity to question power and choices—not only in what gets into the archive—but also through what students select and represent from the archive. It can fill in some gaps, populate some spaces, provide possibilities, confront

norms, and bring us beyond the standard of “read a book, write a paper” in so many of our classes. Working with the archive always involves a negotiation of assumptions and tensions. Thus, to complete my exploration of archival methodology, I provide an overview of three related tensions that emerged when students worked with archival projects, researching and then displaying their work on a course website/digital archive.

The first tension concerned perceptions of “real history” and archives. Any researcher—and our students—faces an interplay between what one finds in the archive and what one expects based on individual assumptions, the ideologies of our research, and the language of our disciplines. Stephen J. Milner (1999) argues that “the historian is as conditioned by the archive as the archive is by the historian’s disciplinary and ideological standpoint” (95). If anything, our students are even more “conditioned”—or, as it were, *constrained*—than instructors, because when their encounter with an archive is based upon an assignment we give them, the assignment will express (implicitly or overtly) our interests—and perhaps not only our disciplinary conventions but our own background. In addition, the archivist at my institution guided students towards what she thought they might find interesting based upon what had been popular with other students, what appealed to their intellectual or personal interests, and the students’ majors.

My assignment read, “Students will choose their own topics from any collection held in the archive and will have the opportunity to work with historical materials ranging from Civil War letters to Civil Rights documentation—a wide range of fascinating, real historical artifacts.” The last part of this description that reveals what I will call a “celebratory” approach to archival work—an expectation that students would enjoy the work because they were able to touch materials from the past. I took students to Special Collections for an orientation because of my anticipation of their fear and my desire to unmask the secrecy of the archive. Also, most of them did not know where to find the room and told me they were intimidated.

Nearly all students noted that the sensory experience of the archive, the tactile aspect, made their work seem to them more “real,” and that they felt more “invested” in their work than in most projects they create for classes. Students’ sensory experience indicated a shortening of what Mark Salber Phillips (2003) calls the construction of “historical distance,” the way historical writing necessitates imagining a reader’s nearness or remoteness, or the perception of time or space between ourselves and a historical moment or object. Actual or imagined, we conflate physical and historical proximity in our experience with texts. This feeling of proximity depends, in part, on a reader’s ability to transport herself to an imagined place or space, that is, on the reader’s perception of reality. The more real, the more tactile, the more authoritative, the more pleasurable; thus, we can repeat these experiences with historical objects, reliving the perception of closeness. Sara McLafferty (1995, 438) remarks on how, when researching, she must continually “remind” herself that the connection she senses is “false.” This connectedness results in a sort of seduction, which students, returning a number of times to the archive over several weeks, recalled as a desire or pleasure; one student explained that working in the archive began as something potentially “boring” to something they couldn’t “drag [themselves] away from.” The students’ desire was an expression of what Jacques Derrida identifies as “archive fever” in the eponymous text, in which he describes such desire as a sickness, as he confronts his longing for the past in the Freudian archive, where he tries to meet his desire for knowledge by delving further into the archive. Derrida

describes the sense of longing as a “need” for archives—in the sense that “mal d’archive” is not so much a sickness as a “passion” to search through records that are traces of the self/subject, and that the historian/researcher tries to reassemble the traces/impressions collected or left in an archive. For Derrida, the archive is not only the site of cultural memory, but the site by which individuals structure their own memory, and ultimately, their identities.

Often, students experienced nostalgia after handling or viewing the objects even when the objects had nothing to do with their personal experience. It is something any researcher might feel—a nostalgia for a past world unrelated to ourselves, a romantic sort of desire or fantasy. The object freezes a moment in time, a point in history. As Linda Markowitz (2005) explains, “When students participate in learning, they come to discover how their personal experiences are situated in larger social systems, systems which help them give rise to their interpretations of reality” (42). Markowitz’s statement reflects Donna Haraway’s (1991) situated knowledges and echoes Gillian Rose’s (1997) remark that “reflexivity may be less a process of self-discover than of self-construction” (313). With experiential learning in an archive, students participated in multiple systems (social, historical, institutional, among others) that allowed for a feeling of intimate connection with a historical object, not unlike how often, upon a first visit to a place we have seen only in photographs, we feel an intimate connection to our pre-existing knowledge of people, places, or time, whether real or imagined.<sup>10</sup> The student’s sense of “reality” also suggested their perception of the archive as impartial (despite my attempts to dispel that). Students recognized that because history is a discipline born of science, the archive, by extension, participates in a scientific paradigm of knowledge organization. In a lecture prior to our archive visit, I explained how, historically, archives were established to function as controlled repositories of the past, supervised spaces with guarded and limited access, which made research an activity under the watch of gatekeepers. Importantly, guardianship need not mean preventing access, but protecting documents for preservation and posterity, and most archivists and librarians today promote access to collections as a form of stewardship.

The second tension when teaching with and from the archives involved false binaries, especially what I will call an “objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy,” in keeping with my earlier discussion of Gillian Rose’s critique research claims regarding transparency. I asked students to write a paper about “their” archival collection in two parts, an “Introduction to the Materials” section and a “Research Narrative.” My division of the assignment into these two parts reflected my own struggle at the time with incorporating affect and subjectivity in my own work and reveals my scholarly “upbringing.” The “archive assignment” revealed my training to disconnect “serious” research from the personal, and my anxieties were influenced by disciplinary boundaries in the academy, including the conflation of what is called “personal opinion” with subjectivity. Likewise, students expressed anxiety, having difficulty in their papers transitioning from what they assumed to be an “objective” analysis of an archival item to their “subjective” research narrative. My students’ struggle with what they perceived as an objective/subjective split resulted in my changing the assignment to remove the two parts, working with students to create a less restrictive, less divisive set of guidelines for representing their experiences working with the archive. The divided paper became one narrative, an archive narrative that blended research methods with narrative, all expressions of embodied experiences in the archive.

In Karen Kilcup’s (2009) discussion of anthologies as “embodied pedagogy,”

which I apply to archival work, she argues that we should “consider moving from creating anthologies that embody a pedagogy of diversity toward those that also encourage a pedagogy of connection, ... mean[ing] that we should shift emphasis from a recognition and celebration of difference to an acknowledgment of responsibility and action” (32). The last part of this idea—an emphasis on responsibility and action—emerged in my students’ work with archives. Two students worked with the papers of the Florence Crittenton Home, an institution with over 3,100 occupants that housed unwed mothers during their pregnancies from 1894 to the 1960s. The site of the home stood on the edge of our university campus, and my students expressed a desire to raise funds to have a historical marker placed at the site in order to raise awareness of local women’s history. Because of this sort of extension beyond what I called “read a book, write a paper,” I can tentatively suggest that students working with archival materials can glean an enriched view of the past, however “real” within the choices they make and that are made for them.

Part of the students’ experiences reflected tensions associated with archival discovery, limits, and organization. Not understanding provenance or *respect des fonds*, most students have a faith in institutional and scientific methods that, to them, seems “natural,” again echoing Ranke’s historiographical approach to record history as it happened. Many students view records as akin to scientific proof or as commemorative data (perhaps conflating the two), to the degree that with the creation of any archive, there is an ever-present threat of hagiography, cultural engineering, and monument building, what Antoinette Burton (2005) describes as the “evidentiary elitism” of much history-making, despite the good that comes from archival work (5). Students read objects as evidence of their times, and we archive some materials because of the sheer improbability that they have survived time.

Students believe archival materials to be legitimate because of the inclusion of items in the archive, a process always informed by its counterpart—exclusion—a dialectic that suggests the archive as a metaphor for research. The archive is a scene of creation composed by author and researcher, what Barbara Biesecker (2006) calls a site of “doubled invention” rather than a site of a “singular discovery” (124). Students need to understand the seen and unseen archive and know the types of choices already made regarding their objects—that is when it can be known. They select within a range of texts that have been taken into the archive (sometimes because the papers belong to a prominent donor to the university)—and choose from among what has been processed. Our students’ abilities to discover hidden or marginalized voices thus depends upon the history of local sites. Archives reflect gender norms and past practices but are limited by how collections were accessioned, weeded, and catalogued. For example, for many women, their names, work, papers, and images, were catalogued under the names of men, often their husbands. The organization of the archive often hide or silence, and we often lack a textual apparatus to approach the archive beyond a surface layer of organization offered by a finding aid (if we even have that).

Students worried about not having enough detail in their research and representations, a consistent problem in most research, archival and otherwise, and they feared incompleteness. As Walter Benjamin (1999) remarks,

What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of

any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this 'completeness'? Is it a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection. And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. (204-205)

Benjamin's comment concerns infinite collecting and endless knowledge-seeking, a specter haunting archival work, the ability to finish archiving at all. To preserve something does not mean to finish, and even with a small-scale project like my own work I had to decide when to stop adding information inseparable from decisions about preserve the digital archival material. Knowing when something is finished arises from educated guesses about how useful more information would be to an audience. By extension, in institutional, corporate, and private archives, millions of items sit in boxes "awaiting" processing. Even as we process them, more items enter the physical archives, and although salvaging might become an object's salvation, the work of an archive is never complete, fraught with endlessness of possibilities, the dream of the archive.

This dream of potential creation and endless opportunity informs how we position ourselves, and teach our students how to do the same, in relation to archives. And, despite the tensions I have outlined, the archive assignment provided students and myself with opportunities to consider what Jennifer Fleissner (2002) describes as a feminist "form of historical reading," which "must always insist both on the structuring force of 'gender' or 'culture' in producing texts and subjects and on the way in which these processes are never complete" (57). There need not be what Gillian Rose (1997) exposes as a binary in much feminist methodology, when she notes that "the relationship between researcher and researched can only be mapped in one of two ways: either as a relationship of difference, articulated through an objectifying distance; or as a relationship of sameness, understood as the researcher and researched being in the same position" (313). Instead, blurring the "either-or" by acknowledging a *lack of transparency* even while self-disclosing one's position, can at least offer a more nuanced understanding of archival research. Gender, culture, texts, and subjects, as both constructed and incomplete, are thus not unlike the archive itself—social—always process, forever incomplete, endlessly productive, inventing, generative, and a source for finding and representing ourselves and others. Students, like myself, went to the archive looking for a research topic and found themselves to be the topic of the research, but the idea of an archive as a mirror of society is always limited. The archive can only be a partial reflection of social mores that students, researchers, and archivists can explore, even as we write ourselves into existing narratives, and even as we create new ones.

## Endnotes

- 1 Although outside the scope of this article, Judith Butler's (1990) arguments regarding performativity, agency, and identity inform my consideration of researcher as performer. Likewise, Knudsen and Stage (2015) discuss research as a performative process as part of affective methodology edited collection *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*.
- 2 Also see McDowell (1992), Nast (1994), and Katz (1992) regarding how reflexivity cannot provide a stable framework for making knowledge claims.
- 3 Like Madge, I will reveal my own position, in my case as a middle-aged, heterosexual white woman of a middle-class background, and I offer this information also as a response to Erica Schoenberger (1992) and others who call for feminists to explore how their own identity affects their knowledge production (even as knowledge production affects one's identity).
- 4 See Carolyn R. Miller's (1984) seminal article, "Genre as Social Action" and Miller's (2014) follow up, "Genre as Social Action (1984), Revisited 30 Years Later."
- 5 For more regarding visibility of position and avoidance of definitive claims, see Gilbert (1994), Katz (1992), Kobayashi (1994), Mattingly and Flaconer-Al-Hindi (1995), McDowell (1992, 1994), Nast (1994), Farrow et al. (1995), and Staeheli and Lawson (1994).
- 6 For more regarding the researcher's privileged position in relation to the act of research and its material processes or products, see McLafferty (1995).
- 7 See the Society of American Archivists (2005) glossary at [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=196](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=196).
- 8 Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "curator," accessed November 10, 2017.
- 9 One prominent example concerns two letters written by P. T. Barnum, who labeled his correspondence PRIVATE in capital letters. From other letters in the collection, we can determine that the editor of *The Independent*, William Hayes Ward, shared such private correspondence with Miss Jefferis, a family friend and the scrapbook maker, giving her the letters for her personal autograph collection.
- 10 For a related perspective from the field of digital humanities regarding the romantic attachment to virtual objects, see Alan Liu's discussion of "found originals" in *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database*.

## Bibliography

- Ankersmit, Franklin Rudolf. 2001. *Historical Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Biesecker, Barbara A. 2006. "Of Historicity, Rhetoric: The Archive as Scene of Invention." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (1): 124-31.
- Burton, Antoinette. 2005. "Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories." In *Archive Stories: Facts,*

- Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette Burton, 1-24. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Butler, Judith. (1990) 2011. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1986. *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Farrow, Heather, Pamela Moss, and Barbara Shaw. 1995. "Symposium on Feminist Participatory Research: Concluding Remarks." *Antipode* 27: 100-1.
- Flanders, Julia H. 2005. "Digital Humanities and the Politics of Scholarly Work." PhD dissertation, Brown University.
- Fleissner, Jennifer L. 2002. "Is Feminism a Historicism?" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21 (1): 45-66.
- Gioia, Dana. 1996. "The Hand of the Poet: The Magical Value of Manuscripts." *The Hudson Review* 49 (1): 9-29.
- Gibbs, Anna. 2015. "Writing as Method: Attunement, Resonance, and Rhythm." In *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, 222-36. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gilbert, Melissa R. 1994. "The Politics of Location: Doing Feminist Research at 'Home.'" *The Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 90-6.
- Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- . 1988. "Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575-99. doi:10.2307/3178066.
- Harding, Sandra. 2016. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hickey-Moody, Anna. 2013. "Affect as Method: Feelings, Aesthetics and Affective Pedagogy." In *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, edited by Rebecca Coleman, 79-95. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hodder, Ian. 2003. "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture." In *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 155-75. Thousand Oaks: Sage Press.
- Hodges, Devon L. 1985. *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jed, Stephanie H. 1989. *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Katriel, Tamar and Thomas Farrell. 1991. "Scrapbooks as Cultural Texts: An American Art of Memory." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 11 (1): 1-17.
- Katz, Cindi. 1992. "All the World is Staged: Intellectuals and the Projects of Ethnography." *Environment and Planning D; Society and Space* 10 (5): 495-510.
- Ketelaar, Eric. 2001. "Tacit Narratives: The Meaning of Archives." *Archival Science* 1 (2): 131-41.
- Kilcup, Karen L. 2009. "Embodied Pedagogies: Femininity, Diversity, and Community in Anthologies of Women's Writing, 1836-2009." *Legacy* 26 (2): 299-328.



- Knudsen, Britta Timm, and Carsten Stage. 2015. "Introduction: Affective Methodologies." In *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, 1-22. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kobayashi, Audrey. 1994. "Coloring the Field: Gender, 'Race,' and the Politics of Fieldwork." *Professional Geographer* 46 (1), 73-80.
- L'Eplattenier, Barbara E. 2009. "An Argument for Archival Research Methods: Thinking Beyond Methodology." *College English* 72 (1): 67-79.
- Madge, Clare. 1993. "Boundary Disputes: Comments on Sidaway (1992)." *Area* 25 (3): 294-99.
- Markowitz, Linda. 2005. "Unmasking Moral Dichotomies: Can Feminist Pedagogy Overcome Student Resistance?" *Gender and Education* 17 (1): 39-55.
- Mattingly, Doreen J., and Karen Falconer-Al-Hindi. 1995. "Should Women Count? A Context for the Debate." *The Professional Geographer* 47 (4): 427-35.
- McLafferty, Sara L. 1995. "Counting for Women." *Professional Geographer* 47 (4): 436.
- Miller, Carolyn R. 1984. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (2): 151-67.
- . 2015. "Genre as Social Action (1984), Revisited 30 Years Later (2014)." *Letras & Letras* 31 (3): 56-72.
- Milner, Stephen J. 1999. "Partial Readings: Addressing a Renaissance Archive." *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (2): 89-105.
- Milnes, Tim. 2009. "The Incommensurable Value of Historicism." In *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on Orthodoxy*, edited by Damian Walford Davies, 14-31. New York: Routledge.
- Moss, Pamela. 1995. "Embeddedness in Practice, Numbers in Context: The Politics of Knowing and Doing." *Professional Geographer* 47 (4): 442.
- Nast, Heidi J. 1994. "Women in the Field: Opening Remarks." *Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 54-66.
- Phillips, Mark Salber. 2003. "Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography." *PMLA* 118 (3): 436-49.
- Rose, Gillian. 1997. "Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities, and Other Tactics." *Progress in Human Geography* 21 (3): 305-20.
- Schoenberger, Erica. 1992. "Self-Criticism and Self-Awareness in Research: A Reply to Linda McDowell." *Professional Geographer* 44 (2): 215-18.
- Schultz, Lucille M. Foreword. 2008. *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, edited by Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, 1-9. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Staeheli, Lynn A., and Victoria A. Lawson. 1994. "A Discussion of 'Women in the Field': The Politics of Feminist Fieldwork." *Professional Geographer* 46 (1): 96-102.
- Trivelli, Elena. 2015. "Exploring a 'Remembering Crisis': 'Affective Attuning' and 'Assemblaged Archive' as Theoretical Frameworks and Research Methodologies." In *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, 119-39. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. *Word-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Elizabeth Vincelette, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in the English department at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. Her research interests include archival research, American literature, and the teaching of writing. Dr. Vincelette is a member the National Council for Teachers of English and has presented at a number of conferences, including the MLA, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the American Literature Association. Contact: [ejvincel@odu.edu](mailto:ejvincel@odu.edu).

## Seeking Glimpses: Reflections on Doing Archival Work

Alex Hanson, Stephanie Jones, Thomas Passwater, and Noah Wilson  
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

*This article explores the role of archival research in understanding and generating social histories from the perspectives of four different doctoral students as they reflect on their archival research experiences. We argue that archival research is complex, subjective, contextual, and at times, incomplete. Our various perspectives address ideas of privilege, representation, what it means to remember (or forget), how archives are constituted and reconstituted, and where we can make meaning in archival spaces. This article demonstrates that although archival research has had a presence in Composition and Rhetoric for some time, that presence is continually shifting, and even when embarking on archival research with comparable exigencies, the undertaking and experiences of that work is inconsistent. This article, therefore, explores the inconsistencies present in archival work, arguing that part of understanding archival research is understanding varied archival research experiences, perspectives, and understandings.*

Since the 1980s, scholars of rhetoric have found archives to be productive sites of inquiry (Balif 2013). Rhetoricians have often examined the stories we tell from archives and how those stories inform present conditions; they have also looked at how our collected histories and the constitution of the archive determine the available means. Consequently, scholars of rhetoric have often taken an interest in revisionist and social histories that encounter the limitations, gaps, and constructions of the archive.

As scholars and students of rhetoric, we have spent time in archives attending to social histories, an area of study which we believe explicitly draws our attention to how archives and archival research practices are structured. We understand social histories as an examination of how the past is used to tell stories which have been excluded from dominant narratives of history. This examination also offers other ways of reading more traditional histories.

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

Working with social histories offers ways to complicate our understanding of the archive. However, we understand that the telling of social histories does not escape the archive itself. The Derridean figure of the archon and the power behind the practices of archival work already structure what is held and what is not held and determines what we have access to in terms of points of departure (Derrida 1998). However, social histories allow us as researchers to disrupt the “thick layer of events” of traditional historical narratives (Foucault 1982, 3).

Carolyn Steedman reminds us that “Archives hold no origins, and origins are not what historians search for in them” (Steedman 2001, 1175). Indeed, she argues that “[T]hey hold everything in medias res, the account caught halfway through, most of it missing, with no end ever in sight. Nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, although things certainly end up there” (1175). When doing social histories, archives cannot provide us with beginnings—only dusty glimpses into the contexts in which those documents appear in both their pasts and their presence. It is for this reason, for the “double nothingness” of social histories “about something that never did happen in the way it comes to be represented” and “made out of materials that are not there,” that rhetoricians are situated well to engage in archival work (Steedman 2001, 1179).

An archive scripts modes of being and knowing, both materially and textually, that provide affordances and limitations to telling the past. Our methodological approach involved examining our personal connections to underrepresented communities and the ways in which histories constitute communities. This multivocal piece assembles our encounters with different archives, different experiences, and different projects to show how our relationships to the past and to the archive determine what we can tell from them in the present.

Our article is divided into four sections. In the first section, “Ideas of Archival Privilege,” Alex Hanson recounts her experience visiting a university archive and the privilege inherent in such an action. Such privilege raises questions about what it means to visit and have access to an archival space, as well as what can be uncovered in that space. In the second section, “What Happens When Understanding is Deferred,” Stephanie Jones considers the question of what can be uncovered, as she creates and examines African American social histories to identify a thread between nationalist patriotism and the historical commodification of African Americans through archival research. In the third section, “Queer Remembering,” Thomas Passwater reflects on how archives and archival scholarship sustain our attention toward certain relationships to the past and argues that scholars should call specific attention to how their works are being structured. While Thomas argues that scholars give attention to how their work is being structured, Noah Wilson explores what is accounted for in that structuring. In the fourth section, “(Un)Intentional Archival Spaces,” Noah reflects on his engagement with an online community’s nontraditional digital archive and suggests that archival research can benefit as much from attending to the construction and maintenance of archival spaces as the archival objects themselves

### **Ideas of Archival Privilege (Alex Hanson)**

I ended up in the archives for reasons similar to Stephanie, Thomas, and Noah; I was doing a research project in a class we were all taking. My project focused on the position of mothers in an international literacy organization’s materials. Despite our shared impetus, my focus in this section is not primarily on that project, but on what I took away from my archival research experience—the ways institutional archives can function as exclusive spaces that require various facets of privilege for access. I understand archives as storage

spaces of history, as collections of experiences, stories, memories, and artifacts stockpiled in a specific location. A location, in this case, is not defined by its materiality but by the ideas, identities, and experiences it contains. Defining archives in Composition and Rhetoric is not without its challenges. As Lynée Lewis Gaillet (2010) acknowledges: “Most disciplines agree the word *history* involves the study of the past and that the term *archives* includes non-replaceable, valuable items, but in the field of rhetoric/composition defining *rhetorical history* while determining what legitimately constitutes *archives* is often complicated” (30). While Gaillet’s own definition of archives centers on the materials that constitute an archive, the definition from *The Glossary of Library and Internet Terms* she references in the chapter centers on the place where these materials are stored. This juxtaposition demonstrates how the two are not mutually exclusive—where archival materials are located relates to whether or not something counts as an archive. More than what constitutes archival research, I am interested in the privilege associated with much of archival research, particularly when archives are stored in an institutional repository rather than in a space that makes them a community resource.

Archival privilege relates to ideas of access to time, money, and materials, as well as access to a specific way of knowing. Barbara L’Eplattenier (2009) recognizes how “the time, money, and access to archival texts (our primary sources) are difficult to come by” (73). These are not the only aspects that position the archives, and specifically institutional archives, as a privileged space. There is also a certain set of knowledge and understanding that is expected to enter and access archival materials, as Malea Powell (2008) writes about her own experience:

Access required knowledge of a very specialized type: how to find and identify the documents within catalogs and holdings lists and finding guides, and to do so in such a way that your simple request would pass unimpeded through the system’s many gatekeepers; how to fill out forms, pay for things, use the physical space of the archive—all of these an elaborate maze each time I visited someplace new, all designed to keep the knowledge safe, protected, away from the prying eyes of the uninitiated and uninformed (116).

As a PhD student, I have what I think of as a certain amount of archival privilege, and it is that understanding of privilege and the intersections of my identity that I intend to explore here. My experience with the archives is the result of various aspects of my identity—I am a PhD student, a mom, a first-generation student, and a white, able-bodied woman. In my year and a half of coursework as a PhD student, I have taken three courses that have encouraged my exploration of the archives. This encouragement, along with introductions to various works of scholarship on archival research, meant that I was given the ways of knowing necessary to begin archival research. I learned before I entered the archives that there are rules—a list of guidelines, or “Visitor Policies,” as the university designates them, comprising 15 items. This list can be found on the website and is available upon your first visit to the Special Collections reading room, where you must sign-off, much like a medical waiver, that you have read and understood the policies. My being a PhD student also meant that I knew that archival research entails a certain amount of meandering through materials, meandering that may be incredibly valuable or confusing; I knew before I embarked on my research

project that I would probably request a box of archival papers, only to realize that a single page among them might inform my research. This meandering also meant that I spent almost ten hours reviewing three boxes of materials before walking away with five pages of typed notes. I learned I could bring my laptop into the reading room, and I recognize the privilege in this access to technology; having a laptop and being able to type notes meant my time in the reading room was substantially less than if I had only been able to handwrite my notes. While money is not something I have a lot of, and I do not know many PhD students who do, by being at a private University I have access to materials because the University has money. What I have is the time and knowledge. I would not have this time or this knowledge without my education, and without small classes which have explicit instruction in archival methods and methodologies and carve out space to conduct archival research projects. This class time is a substantial part of why I even entered the Special Collections at my University.

All of the reading I had done before considering archival research had me intimidated: *so many rules*, I thought, *what happens if I can't get to my boxes in the two-week window they're available?* One of the classes I took involved spending half of a class period reviewing parts of the special collections relating to social histories that the University archivist had pulled before our visit. As the class waited to go outside, the archivist kindly asked me to wash my hands before entering and then explained how no food or drink was allowed in the reading room. "Including gum," she said as she scanned our small group of six but clearly directing her comment towards me, the only person nervously working away at the spearmint. I said goodbye to my gum as I dried my freshly washed hands and entered the archival space reserved for classroom discussions. Materials were spread out across tables, and as we began to peruse them, I found myself drawn to ones from a local literacy organization because of how the materials related to parents. The child-rearing aspect was what initially intrigued me, but as I began to look through the pamphlets the archivist had pulled, I was even more drawn in because of how the materials positioned mothers. As a mom, I felt anger, guilt, and sadness about the pamphlets that seemed to blame mothers for children with intellectual disabilities. I was struck by how an organization providing literacy education was also providing education about social values and beliefs. The archival materials made me curious about how women who were developing literacy skills must have felt as they read about how they were responsible for intellectual disabilities in their children and how they should return to their pre-baby figure as soon as possible. I could not ignore how the literacy organization seemed to be using guilt as a rhetorical tool to persuade mothers to make certain choices, especially regarding children with intellectual disabilities. If I were not a mom, I have no doubt that my interest in those materials would have been markedly different.

The more I interacted with materials about disability, and the more I talked with colleagues about their archival experiences, the more I began to realize how my status as an able-bodied woman relates to my level of archival privilege. I have no trouble physically accessing the special collections reading room where archival materials must be viewed. Located on the sixth floor of the library, the special collections reading room already distinguished itself by being at the top most spot; the primary means of access is an elevator. Once on the floor, the reading room is entered through dual heavy glass doors that have no activation button. The only way to open them is by planting your feet and pulling hard. Once I physically accessed the space, I also needed to be able to physically interact with materials that require careful and delicate handling in a silent room. I needed my eyes to be

able to see the materials, and I did not see any indication of accommodation for those who may not have this same means of access. I needed to be able to flip the materials slowly, gently, and carefully without a tremor or uncontrollable motion of my hands. I was given specific instructions to carefully review the materials, to not tap them on the desk when I was finished, to clearly place a marker in the box to indicate where the materials had originated. I needed to be able to walk back and forth as I finished one box and went to collect the next. I needed to be able to lift the three to five-pound boxes, carry them quietly, and set them gently back onto the reviewing table. I needed to be quiet, and I needed to have a certain amount of control and ability over my body. My able-bodiedness was one part of the privilege I needed to inhabit the archival space and access the materials.

Understanding what is meant by archives depends on the source. Robert J. Connors (1992) defines an archive as “a storehouse of data about the past,” located in libraries and institutional spaces (17). According to Connors, “Archives are specialized kinds of libraries that usually contain materials specific to one institution or activity” (20). In “The Things They Left Behind: The Estate Sale as Archive” (2015), Jody Shipka proposes that “flea markets and estate and yard sales be treated as archives of sorts.” Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch (2010) encourage readers to think of “lower-case-*a* archives...archives that don’t immediately promise insights into the practices or histories of our field. [They] can range from small, local archives run by community members...to boxes of materials found in someone’s office, garage, or even in a relative’s attic” (17). Despite the varied interpretations of archives in Rhetoric and Composition, the archival privilege needed to access said materials, particularly archives as understood by Connors and Gaillet, and as written about by Powell, is consistent. Christopher Phelps (2007) in “My Dream Archive,” writes that despite the privileged requirements necessary to access archives, “the traveler is sustained by the prospect of discovery and the insight, the perpetual hope that the next box, the next folder, the next life, will contain the elusive find that will afford a window to the past.” I agree with Phelps that the thrill of the search makes archival work enticing, but I wonder what happens when the window cannot be opened, when the panes are fogged over, when the glass is broken. How can a traveler be sustained by a journey that she cannot even begin? The archives need to be a space where individuals with disabilities feel welcomed. The archives need to be a space where individuals with schedules that do not allow for 9 a.m. 5 p.m. access can still visit. The archives need to be a space where a single parent whose child may be in daycare and who needs to be reached during the day can have a cell phone on and nearby. If archives are a space for individuals to look into the past, that space should not be limited to a select group who fit a specific identity.

### **What Happens When Understanding is Deferred?: Examinations of the Ethics and Efficacy of African American News Outlets (Stephanie Jones)**

I am often inspired by the people around me. Witnessing the projects of Alex, Thomas and Noah unfold pushed me to engage with how I understand and am excluded from the social histories typically taught in the field. My purpose in my research was to bridge what is commonly known about rhetorical ethics and efficacy within American news outlets, the stories often found and examined in coursework, and trace the thread between nationalist patriotism and the historical commodification of African Americans through archival research. If American economic history is our activity system, then slavery is the process it explicates.

All my previous experiences with archival research have been secondhand. The weight of the importance of the work I examined was just as heavy as the subject matter I planned to dive into. Nothing I read before really prepared me for this. Black publications produced a lasting black identity, and it is thus irrefutable because black identity exists or is tangible now through our historical and legal records, such as the 13th Amendment and *Brown v. Board of Education* (Logan 2008). The well-documented work towards establishing black culture as a rich, diverse, and folkloric society became a generative feature of African American humanity.

For this project, I am looking through the George S. Schuyler Papers, specifically anything classified as unpublished. While most of this collection contain old scrapbooks, there are very interesting bits of prose to examine, an unpublished obituary, parts of a play, and published articles. Schuyler was a satirical writer and reporter during the Harlem Renaissance. He was a problematic but necessary voice in the black community in the 1930's who became particularly polarizing during the Civil Rights movement when he broke away from the mainstream completely and denounced anything to do with Dr. King or Marxism (Ferguson 2005). One reason I chose this archive is because the library's description of Schuyler mentions that his change in views might be linked to the Scottsboro trial in 1931. This is particularly fascinating because I am interested in how black communities are educated about events in their communities through news media. Another reason I chose to look at Schuyler is that I am interested in how influential he was at the beginning of his life. When I began going through Schuyler's archive, something that struck me as significant for understanding how his work was received in the larger community was the congenial way other reporters constructed their assessments of his work.<sup>1</sup> The rhetoric describing his early journalistic pursuits is starkly different from those used to describe his later works, which I believe is due to him being on the wrong side of history as a result of his belief that there was no need for African Americans to fight for their Civil Rights. However, when he is read in light of the Harlem Renaissance writers, an interesting attitude and rhetorical treatment emerges (Schuyler 1994). I begin with an examination of the reception and history of Schuyler's work in his archive as my method of identifying and constructing his narrative and its contribution to black identity formation. In addition, I document places where the shift from process to product of black identity occurred.

Now that I have read through the bulk of his earliest writings from the archive I think I have more questions about Schuyler's life and motivations than I do answers. Some of this is unsurprising—traditionally, many things go unsaid in the black community. However, from what I have read so far, my conclusions about his motivational shift will only fuel a different project and perhaps the plot of a dime store mystery novel, but none of the questions I had in this experience were answered by the folder I pulled. Even though I found the reading interesting, any theories I had about it had been mostly speculation based on what was missing from his archive after 1931. I hope readers come away from my research with a more layered understanding of how working with documents and experiencing firsthand the history of my own community strengthened my relationship to the field. How important archiving Schuyler's work was to him should be mirrored in how important all stories are to our collective knowledge. While thinking about his personal history is heavy, it is also inspiring to see the quintessence his publications had in the black community.



### Queer Remembering (Thomas Passwater)

Alongside Alex, Stephanie, and Noah, I walked into the archive with a particular way of reading texts to understand the past. As with the telling of any history, queer relationships to the past are structured by the archive and how it organizes collective memory. However, to be queer may be to not have a history, but to participate in the invention of a history that is never truly one's own. Indeed, queer archives have often had to attend to the silences and erasures of queerness, making the archives spaces for rhetorical and historical invention (Morris 2006). As a site of contesting histories of erasure, queer histories are often made from working with ephemera and taking up ephemerality as an epistemic orientation toward queer histories (Cvetkovich 2003). Jonathan Alexander (2012) and Jacqueline Rhodes write, "We can only catch a glimpse of its trajectories, its possibilities. But doing so, no matter how provisionally, offers us a challenging sense of queer rhetorical strategies" (13).

I became interested in the rhetorical practices of ACT UP—how queer rage provided promising potential for rhetorical theory. Forming in the late 1980s to respond to government inaction on the AIDS crisis, ACT UP played a critical role in queer history and remains one of the best-known LGBTQ activist organizations. Queer historians often write the history of AIDS in the U.S. alongside the rise of American conservatism from the post-war period to the 1980s and posit ACT UP as a central player in creating queer visibility.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, early queer theorists drew on ACT UP as a grounding for their work. These scholars draw on the affective dimensions performed by the organization's activism: queer outrage, pain, and shame (Jagose 1996). However, this grounding poses that radical queerness emerges as a response to the AIDS Crisis, allowing 1990s activism and scholarship to travel. Further, early queer theorists abstracted their theory from late 1980s and early 1990s experiences, but favored queer as something universal and not tied to the specific experience of being bodied queerly (Rand 2014).

As I worked with the papers of Robert Garcia, founding member of ACT UP and chair of its Latino caucus from 1987-1991, I found that my ways of reading the texts were challenged. To be sure, his papers showed the outrage and pain I had expected to find—certainly, ACT UP's rejecting rhetorical situations and appropriating them is a site of productive inquiry—however, what was evident throughout his papers as well was hope, a commitment to building coalition and community, and a deep desire to preserve a queer history. His texts were so abundant and overflowing with different affective responses to his present conditions and to his ideas of a queer past that the queer archival methodological orientations that I had been trained in did little service to his experience and the work that ACT UP sought to do.

Championed by Leo Bersani (1995) and Lee Edelman (2004), queer theory's antirelationality schools of thought advocate that the critical potential of queerness is located in embracing abjection from normative society. Antirelationality's centering of negative affects can become a means of structuring queer collective memory (Castiglia and Reed 2012). Shame, loss, and failure are the resources of the queer archive. Heather Love (2007) writes, "These feelings are tied to the experience of social exclusion and to the historical 'impossibility' of same-sex desire" (4). Archival queers, then, become those that tend to these affective relationships across temporalities and spaces (Morris and Rawson 2013). These affective responses become rhetorical strategies for telling queer histories. Because the archive so often fails queer people, Jack Halberstam (2012) positions forgetting as a resource for queer survival—a refusal to participate in the construction of histories that could only

be told in straight time and spaces. But, I, to echo Mari Ruti (2017), find myself hesitant to believe “ignorance is somehow intrinsically politically subversive” (37). We might need to ask who or what we can afford to forget?

Jessica Enoch (2013) asks us to consider work that does more than recover lost voices, but work that asks how our collective attention is rhetorically oriented toward remembering some bodies, some identities, and forgetting others. Similarly, Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed (2012) argue that queer theory and queer histories have engaged in cultural forgetting around AIDS. They argue that this cultural forgetting only silences the productive activism, sexualities, and lived experiences of queer people who lived during and before the AIDS crisis—instead taking up a need to perform shame or distance from the crisis and more radical sexualities that preceded it. This is also seen in Patrick Moore’s (2004) assertion that the politics of shame erases queer histories of sexuality and, by extension, queer cultures, calling us to preserve LGBTQ histories and reclaim AIDS. Ruti describes the antinormativity arguments in queer theory that underpin the structuring of queer archives as “a politics of negativity devoid of any clear political or ethical vision: it wants to destroy what exists without giving us much of a sense of what *should* exist.” These authors critique the antirelational paradigm of queerness, embracing the abjection and shame imposed on queer people by normative society—or that one can simply refuse to participate or remember our entanglements with histories, social institutions, and bodies that are not always our own.

Put differently, queer theory’s “various romances of negativity” are only possible if “one can frame queerness as a singular abstraction that can be subtracted and isolated from a larger social matrix” (Muñoz 2009, 12; 94). This means that doing queer rhetorical work structured only by our negative affects is to only do a history of queerness-as-abstraction, as somehow universal, and to forget the very bodies that ACT UP fought to ensure were not erased. Further, what is at stake is what it means to be queer, whose queerness is evoked when we describe our work as such, and what doing queer work means. By turning to queer bodies and refusing to give abstraction primacy in inquiry, we might be able to remember differently—perhaps queerly—and provide new avenues for queerness’s critical potential to radically influence our scholarship and activism.

Robert Garcia, with many of the founding members of ACT UP, authored a document in 1989 called “A His and Herstory of Queer Activism.” The document provides an introduction of LGBT rights activist time-periods, such as the homophile movement, gay liberation, and ends with the chapter “Right-Wing Reactionaries, AIDS and Renewed Queer Militancy.”<sup>3</sup> The text shows their commitment to preserving queer histories as well as the ways in which they saw their radical activism as directly connected with the histories in which they participated. They write in the introduction,

[I]t is our common belief that the act of elucidating the struggle for homosexual liberation is, in itself, a political act. The AIDS crisis—allowed to run rampant because of institutionalized homophobia—far from being a distraction in the pursuit of liberation, is galvanizing us once again into political community.<sup>4</sup>

Two years after their formation, ACT UP took an interest in documenting their history in accessible ways for their members in this document. The chapter “ACT UP,”

written by Mark Bronnenberg, states that ACT UP “has sparked a new kind of political activism, reflecting similar ideologies and concerns of earlier lesbian and gay political organizations, refracted now through the context of the AIDS health crisis.”<sup>5</sup> ACT UP drew on long histories of LGBTQ activism and LGBTQ activist ideologies rhetorically refracted and adapted to new and shifting contexts.

Bronnenberg is also careful to note that the Zaps, the disruptive demonstrations that ACT UP was possibly most known for, “have taken the form of noisy picketing, phone calls, letter-writing campaigns, sit-ins-die-ins, kiss-ins, and other unimaginable acts.”<sup>6</sup> However, he also adds, “Zaps did not originate as a concept with ACT UP; they had been used successfully by the Gay Liberation Front, from which ACT UP has borrowed some of its tactics.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, he writes, “This kind of highly theatrical protest traces its lineage back to the Sixties, the New Left and the civil rights movement.”<sup>8</sup> As ACT UP wrote their own histories, they were careful to show the traces of inheritance that they saw themselves as participating in as much as they were responding to a new, if refracting, context and crisis.

To be sure, Robert Garcia and the founding members of AIDS experienced loss, outrage, and trauma that can never be fully representable, and to elucidate even some of the experiences of that loss is important work. And, further, there are still endless insights we can learn from ACT UP’s approach to activism. However, taking up a queer remembering of ACT UP challenges positioning of the organization within theorizing queer histories. To challenge their position within queer theory’s archive is not to undermine the importance of the organization—far from it. Instead, what this challenge does is allow the organization to speak back to our assumptions. My interest here is to suggest that how we remember matters and that being in the archive means attending to how our attention is being structured, which, in turn, structures the histories we tell.

By allowing Garcia’s papers to confront the assumptions I brought with me into the archive, my reading of his work changed the way that my attention had been structured. He wrote, “So, I would whisper to myself as I was marching, shouting, demonstrating, fighting back: ‘Robert, every step is a tear you don’t want to cry, every arrest is an act of hope’” (Bytsura 2014). While I entered the archives at Cornell to study queer outrage, I walked out of that space with renewed interest in the promise of how queer bodies reorganize the world around us and a deep desire to demand more from queer histories. Indeed, a queer remembering asks us to not only remember our losses and our trauma, but to preserve our pride and our desire for more than what this world has given us.

### **(Un)Intentional Archival Spaces (Noah Wilson)**

Stephanie, Thomas, Alex, and I each entered the archive with the same anxiety that comes with a lack of expertise. Having only cursory experience of them, I often regarded archival stacks as merely the “physical stuff” of history; the gold-standard referential material backing every academic assertion. The materiality of the objects themselves grant a particular credibility to our claims; we create “good scholarship” by sifting through the archival stacks. Before actually working through an archive, I found the scholarly exercise quite intimidating because it seemed impossible to ever assert a claim confidently. I held onto that impractical image of the ideal archive that Michel Foucault (1997) critiques:

The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all time that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place (334).

I cannot help but find Foucault's description reminiscent of what digital spaces such as the internet claim to be. Foucault argues that archives are far from objective and to treat them as such ignores important additional layers of meaning built into their respective stacks. In my project, I was interested in exploring this rhetorical activity and labor that remains wholly necessary but mostly unseen.

I wanted to delve into Glenn and Enoch's (lowercase 'a') archival spaces that Shipka explores in her contribution to *Reconstructing the Archive*. Not unlike Shipka's question of what "becomes of the experiences, written texts, and other material artifacts associated with the not quite so famous," I found myself drawn to the artifacts that were not intended to serve a traditional archival function and yet whose construction requires similar rhetorical activity. Shipka's project ultimately calls for a "social turn" for the archive, an attention to "mundane" archival activity. As an answer to her call, my project looked for similar traces of the "mundane" online by tracing the rhetorical genealogy of a webpage. Mary Queen (2008) describes *rhetorical genealogy* as "a process of examining digital texts not as artifacts of rhetorical productions, but rather, as continually evolving rhetorical actions that are materially bound, actions whose transformation can be traced through the links embedded within multiple fields of circulation" (476). Queen asks that we look at digital texts as constitutive rhetorical activity: never truly static, digital artifacts like webpages are instead *active* rhetorical actions playing out in real-time. Rhetorical genealogy asks that we regard digital texts' seemingly minute changes, such as word choice alterations from one webpage iteration to the next, as a visible trace of the rhetorical activity that prompted said changes. In my project, I focused on the asynchronous online community,<sup>9</sup> Piratebox, as they continued to develop their open-source software project. Piratebox's ongoing collective project is developed largely through community forums and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) pages. The FAQ page functions as a central hub and public face for their project; I therefore traced the changes to this page over time using the Internet Archive's *Wayback Machine*. Chronologically aligning these "change traces" with conversations pertaining to the projects' development across its community forums allowed me to map out the project's rhetorical genealogy: not only could I *identify* specific changes to the community's webpage but I could also explore *why* these changes happened.

Not unlike sifting through the archival stacks at my university hoping to find unarticulated connections, I culled countless forum posts in hopes of excavating Piratebox's larger network of activity. The value in working with digital texts is what they reveal about more traditional modalities, the seemingly hidden features of our daily writing practices we have grown accustomed to ignoring. Tracking conversations about bugs and installation instructions between a lead developer and his community provided me with a far richer picture of communal rhetorical activity. Similarly, I think we can learn a great deal from the often-ignored record keeping practices of the archivists we rely on. These records would

allow us to see the rhetorical decisions made in curating and maintaining an archive in addition to the new connections between visitors we would not be able to trace otherwise: connections between institutions, scholarship, and the archival material itself. In completing this project, I have come to realize that what is just as important as the objects themselves, digital or otherwise, is their origin and movement. The archival nature of the internet makes tracing these movements far easier to follow if you know where to start; these traces have always been there waiting to be discovered.

My project began with a focus on seemingly insignificant alterations to two lines of text from one version of a Piratebox webpage to the next. Tracing the social activity leading to these two changes on Piratebox's community forums, I was able to track important communal rhetorical activity. I saw the long-term discussions between the lead developer, the public face of the project, and the larger Piratebox community that provided him the insights and software testing that indirectly drove the project. In charting the contours of this online community, I learned that the relationship between a project's developer and its community is symbiotic, the project truly needs both to continue. I also learned that it is not an ideological alignment between online community leaders and members that sustains this asynchronous, decentralized, open-source software project. Contrary to my assumptions, when an open-source project lacks the commitment and involvement of its base it may not solely be the dogged persistence of its lead developer that sustains collective action but rather the frequent, inconsistent, incidental community contributions. This scatter plot of actions is easy to ignore because these connections are hard to see. It is easy to dismiss a one-time action from a single user, but when I examined twenty, one-time user actions as the movements of a single collective entity, the larger picture changed and I paid attention differently. I observed that what kept Piratebox going was collective action across a larger time-frame and with far more users than I expected. I had to shift from pinpointing individual actions towards attending to the aggregative action of a larger group: it was not one person inspiring others to action; rather, the community functioned together as a single entity. As Shipka would suggest, in peering into the mundane I found small but recoverable traces that led me to hidden archival depths. In complicating what I defined an archive to be, I had peered into the scattered and seemingly unrelated actions of an online community and found traces of something far more interesting.

My work examining internet communities made me realize that our regard of archival engagement might be incomplete. As Jennifer Clary-Lemon (2014) concludes in her "Archival Research Processes: A Case for Material Methods," there are important layers of rhetorical accretion embedded within the construction of the archive itself, that

approaching our archival research processes with heuristics aimed at combining object selection with ongoing interpretation of accreted layers of understanding – to listen differently to the archives, as it were – give us a richer base from which to make meaning out of the histories we read (339).

If we are to embrace Foucault's critique, we need to not just look at the *gold* in our vaults, the objects themselves, but where that gold came from, where it was mined from and what processes and decisions allowed it to wind-up where it did. It is easier to see this frequently

ignored activity when we disorient ourselves; for me this was averting my gaze from physical stacks towards digital spaces and then from individual contributions towards aggregated action. The internet is often viewed as the ultimate repository, a vessel capable of holding all of our accumulated knowledge, and yet I found that it, too, was not without its own issues of access and representation. Perhaps in the same way that Shipka previously called for us to move *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, we might now call for a move toward an “archive made whole.” I argue that rather than trying to develop the perfect system for the preservation of history, an archive that secures our current standards of objectivity, we might instead peel back the more “subjective” archival layers and see where the messy and problematic aspects of archival construction we wish to ignore actually fit in. We can learn about the rhetorical nature of knowledge and history if we unfreeze the archive from our illusion that it could ever be that “place of all time that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages” (Foucault 1997, 334). Attending more to archival objects’ histories before their arrival in the stacks provides insight into the rhetorical activity that led to demarcating someone’s personal material as important enough for preservation by people who never knew them. In short, attending to an archive’s rhetorical accretion and its rhetorical genealogy not only provides knowledge of archival functioning, it also restores the important layers of meaning that we have been conditioned to ignore.

### **Contemplating *Everything***

As graduate students, the archive serves as our window into forgotten bits of history. We seek what has been passed over, left behind, and forgotten to connect us with the untold stories of the past. We then tell the rhetorical histories of those stories in order to make better sense of our positionality. This is “contemplating everything” (Steedman 2001, 1177). When we come to sit with the materials, the dust, the undifferentiated *Everything* of the past and wonder where to start our telling. Steedman reminds us that “the historian must start somewhere, but starting is a different thing from originating, or even from beginning” (1177). Social histories and rhetorical histories remind us that the archive forgets just as much as it remembers. As Toni Morrison (2004) says—it is through the process of re-memory that we articulate the power of the archive into stories. Additionally, Derrida (1998) notes frankly, “There is no political power without control of the archive, or without memory” (4). With the words of these scholars in mind, we set out into our archives to seek the truth. Collectively, the process taught us that our varied archival research experiences, perspectives, and understandings bridge the gaps between us and allow for more complex ways to see the past and see new pathways to future projects.

Reflecting on archival practices highlights means of interrogating power—that we might remember differently, know what it is that we have forgotten, encounter what we cannot access and speak back to what has been denied, or provide new ways of accessing and knowing how archives act on what they gather. Steedman adds, “And while there is closure in historical writing, and historians do bring their arguments and books to a conclusion, there is no End—cannot be an End, for we are still in it, the great, slow-moving *Everything*” (1177). We argue that it is not the goal of archival projects to make the past known, to make the *Everything* knowable; in fact, our project is the opposite. Our work is not trying to make the past known. We, as rhetoricians, as historians, are trying to see the unseen, to sift through the dust of the past without necessarily any tidy outcome.

## Endnotes

- 1 George S. Schuyler Papers, Reel 1. Vol. 1&2, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries. Syracuse, NY.
- 2 See Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011); Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015).
- 3 "A His and Herstory of Queer Activism" by ACT UP, 1989, Box 2, Folder 15, Robert Garcia Papers, Cornell University Human Sexualities Collection, Ithaca, New York.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 9 Asynchronous Online communities are those that do not communicate in real-time via technologies such as instant messenger but instead on forums on their "own time."

## Bibliography

- Alexander, Jonathan, and Jacqueline Rhodes. 2012. "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive." *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture* 13. <http://enculturation.net/queer-rhetoric-and-the-pleasures-of-the-archive>
- Ballif, Michelle. 2013. "Introduction." In *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, edited by Michelle Ballif, 1-7. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Bersani, Leo. 1995. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronski, Michael. 2011. *A Queer History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bytsura, Bill. 2014. "Robert Garcia." The AIDS Activist Project.
- Castiglia, Christopher, and Christopher Reed. 2012. *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Clary-Lemon, Jennifer. 2014. "Archival Research Processes: A Case for Material Methods." *Rhetoric Review* 33 (4): 381-402.
- Connors, Robert J. 1992. "Dreams and Play: Historical Method and Methodology." In *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, edited by Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan, 7-20. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Cvetkovich, Anne. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1998. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Enoch, Jessica. 2013. "Releasing Hold: Feminist Historiography Without the Tradition." In *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, edited by Michelle Ballif, 58-73. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Faderman, Lillian. 2015. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ferguson, Jeffrey B. 2005. *The Sage of Sugar Hill: George S. Schuyler and the Harlem Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neil Leach, 330-36. New York: Routledge.
- Gaillet, Lynée Lewis. 2010. "Archival Survival: Navigating Historical Research." In *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo, 28-39. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Glenn, Cheryl and Jessica Enoch. 2010. "Invigorating Historiographic Practices in Rhetoric and Composition Studies." In *Working in the Archives: A Practical Research Guide for Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by Alexis E. Ramsey, Wendy B. Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo, 11-27. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Halberstam, Jack. 2012. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jagose, Annamarie. 1996. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Leavitt, Judith Walzer. c1996. *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- L'Eplattenier, Barbara E. 2009. "OPINION: An Argument for Archival Research Methods: Thinking Beyond Methodology." *College English* 72 (1): 67-79.
- Logan, Shirley Wilson. 2008. *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Love, Heather. 2007. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Moore, Patrick. 2004. *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the History of Radical Gay Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Morris, Charles E. 2006. "Archival Queer." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9 (1): 145-51.
- Morris, Charles E., and Rawson, KJ. 2013. "Queer Archives/Archival Queers." In *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, edited by Michelle Ballif, 74-89. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Morrison, Toni. 2004. *Beloved*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Phelps, Christopher. 2007. "My Dream Archive." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53 (18): 1.  
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/My-Dream-Archive/46646>.
- Powell, Malea. 2008. "Dreaming Charles Eastman: Cultural Memory, Autobiography, and Geography in Indegenous Rhetorical Histories." In *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, edited by Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan, 115-28. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Queen, Mary. 2008. "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World." *College English* 70 (5): 471-89.



- Rand, Erin. 2014. *Reclaiming Queer: Activist & Academic Rhetorics of Resistance*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Ruti, Mari. 2017. *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schuyler, George. 1994. "The Negro-Art Hokum." *The Nation*, June 16, 1926. Rpt. in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, edited by David Levering Lewis, 96-9. New York: Penguin.
- . *George S. Schuyler Papers*. 2017. Reel 1. Vol. 1 & 2. Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries. Syracuse, New York. November.
- Steedman, Carolyn. 2001. "Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust." *The American Historical Review* 106 (4): 1159-80.
- Shipka, Jody. 2015. "On Estate Sales, Archives, and the Matter of Making Things," In *Provocations: Reconstructing the Archive*, edited by Patrick W. Berry, Gail E. Hawisher, and Cynthia L. Selfe. Computers and Composition Digital Press. <http://ccdigitalpress.org/reconstructingthearchive/shipka.html>.

Alex Hanson is a PhD student in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric at Syracuse University. Her research interests include feminist rhetoric(s), multilingual writers, translingualism, writing program administration, and mothers in academia. Contact: [amjanney@syr.edu](mailto:amjanney@syr.edu).

Stephanie Jones is a PhD student in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric at Syracuse University. Her research interests include growth mindset inspired pedagogy and cultural diversity rhetoric developing an intellectual foundation for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of the minority experience in the United States education. Contact: [svjones@syr.edu](mailto:svjones@syr.edu).

Thomas Passwater is a PhD student in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric at Syracuse University. His research interests include queer rhetorics, research methodologies, rhetorical histories, writing program administration. Contact: [twpasswa@syr.edu](mailto:twpasswa@syr.edu).

Noah Wilson is a PhD student in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric at Syracuse University. His research interests include digital rhetorics, procedural rhetoric, genre studies, literacy, and surveillance studies. Contact: [npwilson@syr.edu](mailto:npwilson@syr.edu).

# The Death of Professor Jones: Ghosts and Memory in a Small University Archives

Erin Dix

LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

*The following is a true story of hauntings, literal and figurative, at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. It is the tale of Haunted Lawrence: a walking tour of the Lawrence University campus featuring historical stories of the ghostly and unexplained, designed and led by staff in the University Archives for the past ten years. Perennially popular with the campus community, the tour has grown to plague the university archivist. This essay is an attempt to exorcise her personal Haunted Lawrence demons.*

“Do you have records of strange occurrences in X dorm? Ceiling tiles in my room are moving on their own.”

“Has anyone died in Y building? I heard disembodied crying in one of the bathrooms.”

“How can I learn more about Z former student? I made contact with him using a Ouija board.”

When I was a newly minted archivist (not a paranormal investigator, ghostbuster, or exorcist), I would never have anticipated fielding these kinds of questions – but each one of these is a real inquiry that has come my way at one time or another in the past few years. In fact, it often seems to me that many members of our campus community associate the University Archives *primarily* with ghosts and hauntings. Search the university’s website for related terms and you will find that the top results are all links to Archives pages. There is a simple explanation for this: Haunted Lawrence.

When I began as the university archivist at Lawrence University, a small liberal arts college and conservatory of music in Appleton, Wisconsin in 2010, I inherited Haunted

Lawrence. This popular annual walking tour had been conceived, designed, and implemented by my talented predecessor. She researched ghostly phenomena documented in our archival records; interviewed a number of faculty, staff members, and alumni who had experiences to share; and wove these stories together with historical information about campus buildings and grounds to create a compelling tour narrative. Collaborating with very generous staff members from our Facility Services and Campus Safety offices, she led nighttime walks of ghostly hot-spots for several years in a row. Having heard of the tour, I clearly remember praising Haunted Lawrence during my on-campus interview for the job: what an innovative outreach strategy!

The benefits of sponsoring Haunted Lawrence were clear, in terms of furthering the Archives mission. Outreach is an essential responsibility for any archives – what good is it to collect and preserve historical records if no one knows that your repository exists for researchers to use? I believe wholeheartedly in the value of promoting understanding of our college’s history through the Archives – among all constituencies, but especially among our students. College archivists have many ways of going about this work: integrating hands-on instruction with primary sources into courses across the disciplines; collaborating with student organizations to collect their records or research their history; designing exhibits and presentations; engaging with social media; and so on. Haunted Lawrence provided a truly unique way to share information about our college’s history. It was especially useful for reaching students who might not have sought out or encountered the Archives through other means. In my early days of leading the tour, I sometimes worried that we had pulled a mean trick on our attendees, sneaking historical context into the script like vegetables in dessert. (“Surprise! The delicious, spooky brownie you are eating is 30% zucchini. Let me tell you about the history of Main Hall, the only campus building on the National Register of Historic Places...”) But I was more often surprised to find that students seemed just as interested in the campus history as in the ghost stories, or, at least, they were polite about it.

Within a couple of years, Haunted Lawrence had started to wear on my nerves. My growing frustration was due at least in part to merely the tedium of repetition. In each academic year the student body is different, and each individual student has just four years or so in which to accrue experience and knowledge of the university. Institutional memory among the students is constantly in flux. For each year that we have offered Haunted Lawrence, interest has always been very high. Advanced registrations fill in just a few hours. Reporters from the student newspaper have covered the event with one or more articles every year for the past five years. (That even includes one year in which we did *not* offer it – the story was about *why* we had chosen to cruelly deprive students of the opportunity, and when our benevolence would permit its return.) For a time, I assumed that eventually students would tire of this subject matter, but with the yearly turnover, they have not. So, we have presented essentially the same script, year after year, and it receives essentially the same reactions, year after year. I have much of the narrative memorized.

As more time passed, the subject matter of Haunted Lawrence also began to trouble me. My level of comfort with Haunted Lawrence content fell across a spectrum. On the harmless end: our earliest report of a haunting on campus dates to 1899, when the student newspaper reported that women residents of the only dormitory on campus at the time heard “a deep groan” and footsteps on the stairs. “The ladies who heard it, arming themselves with hat pins and fruit knives, went out to conquer or die, but owing to their inability to locate

the ghost, could not do either.”<sup>1</sup> The author of the article uses a tongue-in-cheek tone (“we should advise all ghosts, especially such are vulnerable to hat pins, to stay away”), the image of “hat pins and fruit knives” is funny, and this all happened more than 100 years ago. And it’s based on actual records housed in the LU Archives! This is the anecdote I typically produce when someone like a local news reporter asks for a ghostly soundbite.

More problematic are the stories that stem from on-campus deaths of historical figures. For example, the tour narrative has always included the story of the 1898 death of a professor in his classroom in our oldest academic building. In recent years, we added to the retelling a dramatic recitation of the report that was published in our local newspaper: “He seated himself at his desk, took up his text book, and was about to call upon some member of the class for a translation, when suddenly he was seen to clutch at the arms of his chair, his head dropped upon his desk, and when the students stepped forward in alarm, they found that his spirit had already taken its departure.”<sup>2</sup> This excerpt reliably frightens the audience. But as a result, if Hiram Jones is remembered for anything today, it is most likely that people say his spirit wanders the corridors of Main Hall – not that he was a professor of Latin and Greek at Lawrence for more than 40 years. In the LU Archives, there is a large bound volume containing almost one hundred letters written to Jones by his former students to celebrate his fortieth year of teaching in 1894 – a testament to his lasting impact as a teacher. But, like Jones, those letter-writers are long gone. What remains of his memory is an untouched volume and annual retellings of a ghost story.

Similarly, in the LU Archives collections we have one death mask – a plaster cast made of the face of a former president, Samuel Plantz, following his death. Every iteration of Haunted Lawrence includes a theatrical unveiling of the death mask, to gasps and grimaces. Plantz died suddenly on November 13, 1924, still in the position of college president which he had held for 30 years. He remains the longest-serving president in our history. 1894 to 1924 was a period of tremendous growth for the university, due in no small part to Plantz’s leadership. The LU Archives houses 26 boxes of his papers, which clearly document the breadth and depth of his involvement in running the institution. Plantz was beloved by generations of students, who dubbed him “Doc Sammy.” On the day of his burial, the entire student body of more than 1000 processed to the cemetery. I say all of these things about Plantz when I produce the death mask, in a small effort to counteract the fact that I am also using his likeness for Halloween amusement.

Taken by themselves, Hiram Jones and Samuel Plantz were relatively minor thorns in my conscience. But in recent years, I encountered a new trend. Students started asking about particular sites on campus where, they had heard, something happened and a student died. But instead of invoking apocryphal or long-ago stories, they referred to real, tragic events that took place on our campus as few as seven or eight years ago. A few years, it turns out, is all it takes for a suicide or an accident to fall out of the student body’s collective memory and join the realm of campus lore. For someone with a longer history at the institution and a personal memory of these events, this is a jarring realization. Fielding questions about recent campus tragedies in the context of Haunted Lawrence has made me deeply uncomfortable – enough to reconsider the entire enterprise. Is there really a difference between trivializing an untimely death that happened in 1898 or 1924 and one that occurred in 2007? If so, where do you draw that line? How much time must pass before it becomes acceptable to start scaring people with stories of a real person’s ghost haunting your halls?

On the other hand, we are still talking about ghosts here. This is a topic that, depending on your beliefs, you may or may not take seriously. (Navigating those waters with a diverse group of Haunted Lawrence attendees makes for yet another fun challenge.) In this context, isn't it silly to wring hands over the notion of protecting a respectful memory of the lives and deaths of a few individuals at a little college in Wisconsin, most of whom are long gone? How much could any of this possibly matter?

I have no answers to these questions, other than a general sense that it probably is not logical to feel badly for Hiram or Samuel; no individual has any real control over whether and in what ways their memory will endure beyond death. Donating your papers to a repository might seem like a way to gain a measure of control – to ensure that at least somewhere, your story will be saved. For some donors of materials, preserving a legacy in this way is clearly the primary goal. For others, like family members who may be grieving, the promise that a piece of their loved one's memory – even just a scrapbook or a few letters – will be kept safe into the future can provide great comfort. But at the point of donation, the responsibility for stewarding these materials (and control over the stories they might tell) is out of the donor's hands and has transferred to the archivist.

My job is fundamentally about promoting understanding of our institution's history on our small campus. With the accumulated historical records from hundreds of transfers and donations in my care, I have more control than most over our institutional memory and the stories that we tell about Lawrence. This can and often does feel like a weighty responsibility. For me, the problem of Haunted Lawrence boils down to this: its popularity has meant that the same tales are told over and over again. I worry that what is generally known of Lawrence history on our campus, the stories that are the most firmly embedded, are too heavily weighted toward the ghostly and the unexplained. Too much fantasy and not enough reality; too much death and not enough life.

Ruminating on questions of death, memory, and archival responsibility, it is easy to forget that there are ways to tip this balance. Haunted Lawrence, though by far the most popular, is still only one piece of the Archives' campus outreach. I have focused efforts on teaching, helping students develop the skills they need to decipher and interpret primary sources. Students have uncovered and shared untold stories from our campus history, often in creative and compelling ways. The Archives has played a crucial role in campus conversations about aspects of our history that require a more nuanced understanding than "just the facts." Even social media allows us to share daily historical tidbits, and each one of these is part of a larger story.

So, while for some, Haunted Lawrence still presents the most memorable stories of our institution, we are working on other ways to broaden the picture. These efforts contribute to building a wider awareness of campus history: the good, the bad, and even the ghostly.

## Endnotes

- 1 T. R. Moyle, "Spectator," *The Lawrentian*, February 1899.
- 2 "Death of Prof. Jones," *Appleton Weekly Post*, April 14, 1898.

Erin Dix is the university archivist at Lawrence University in Appleton, WI. She holds a Master's Degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Bachelor's Degree from Lawrence University. Contact: [erin.k.dix@lawrence.edu](mailto:erin.k.dix@lawrence.edu).



# Queering the Archive: Transforming the Archival Process

Lizeth Zepeda

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

*The purpose of this work is to recognize the lack of queer of color lens within the archival profession that determines the appraisal, preservation, and impeding access. Queering the archive transforms the institution with possibilities of inclusivity for social justice and the rewriting of histories. Traditionally, the archival institution has reaffirmed hegemonic power structures by erasing and ignoring histories of marginalized communities. A way to disrupt this is to queer these archival institutions to confront these power dynamics and make interventions against the racist, sexist, classist and heterosexist structures that maintain them. Thus, this paper focuses on how processing through a queer of color lens can transform archival institutions by contextualizing and uncovering erased archival histories. Specifically, I will discuss the Sarah S. Valencia Collection, a manuscript collection of a Mexican-American woman and her family dating back to the 1860s in Tucson, Arizona. As a queer Chicana feminist archivist with a queer of color lens, I read many of the contents of the archive differently. Through a visual representation of photographs, a seemingly heterosexual woman, shows moments of queerness that could have only been discovered through a queer of color lens.*

Queering the archive changes how we define lives and allows for infinite possibilities of inclusivity for social justice and reframing of history. Some archivists have a difficult time with the concept of what queering can mean because it disrupts the fundamentals of what processing archival collections represents. Traditionally, in theory, processing remains neutral and unbiased to allow for future research to interpret the collections. This stance on neutrality reinforces marginalization for those that are deemed 'queer' to society. By adding a queer of color lens while processing archival collections, one will be able to change traditional structures and make interventions against racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist systems that maintain them. Queerness is complex and is often not expressed explicitly

in communities of color or in general. In other words, there are factors at play that can inhibit someone from expressing their desires or gender identity. Hence, a queer of color lens is crucial for an archivist to participate in the contextualization of materials for a more adequate documentation of those communities that have been under-documented. This paper focuses on how queer of color lens in processing archival collections can transform archival institutions by contextualizing and uncovering erased archival histories. Specifically, I will discuss the *Sarah S. Valencia Collection* housed at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson, Arizona.<sup>1</sup> Sarah Valencia was a Mexican American woman who lived in Tucson where her family history dates back to the 1860s, shortly after the Gadsden Purchase that ceded control of southern Arizona from Mexico to the United States.

### Queer of Color Lens in Processing Archival Materials

When actively describing materials and collecting people's past experiences, biases will nevertheless be present. There is a need to have a deep reflection and acknowledgement of who is being excluded from these narratives. With a queer of color lens, archival materials can be a site to dismantle white supremacist and heteropatriarchal structure in the archive. Queer is a complex theoretical framework that can take up many shapes. Queer theorist, Nikki Sullivan (2003) states, "[...] queer is a positionality (rather than an innate identity) that potentially can be taken up by any who feels themselves to have been marginalized as a result of their preference, then one might argue that the majority of the world's population is (at least potentially) queer" (49). The act of queering is to actively complicate traditional notions of how stories are told and documented. Patrick Steorn (2012) suggests going beyond "homosexuality" or "queer" in databases because one will not find hits using these terms, but instead to look into 'contextual research,' in places that could be read as queer. Steorn also brings up a reminder that "[t]he term 'queer' was coined to destabilize homogenous identity categories, so to insert it as a static label in a museum [or in this case archival database] would be to work against its disruptive power" (359). Categorization and cataloging are problematic but they contribute to providing access in the archival field. Queer theory provides the tools to rethink this presumption.

Roderick Ferguson (2004) for instance defines a 'queer of color analysis,' "[as interrogating] the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices" (149). In his book, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, he begins with a description of a photograph he found in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. He painstakingly describes the photograph taken in 1938 of four men at a railroad station in Jim Crow Manchester, Georgia. These photographs are undoubtedly part of the nation's memory, but Ferguson affirms, "I know as well that there are subjects missing who would be accounted for – the transgender man who worked at Levi's and wore a baseball cap and chewed tobacco; the men with long permed hair who tickled pianos; the sissies, and bulldaggers who taught the neighborhood children to say their speeches on Easter Sunday morning" (viii). These stories are hidden between the lines in these collections, however, archivists do not necessarily have the tools to identify them. Ferguson's account significantly contributes to thinking about how to queer archives, specifically looking between lines for clues, adding historical and personal context, as well as contesting heterosexuality as default even when there are hints that suggest other possibilities.

## Sarah S. Valencia Collection

Using the tools provided by queer scholars and interpreting the lens through a ‘queer of color critique’ is putting theory into practice in processing archival collections. Within archival institutions, archivists are forced to follow and reinforce a culture of neutrality, access, and preservation at the center of their work. To counter this, Elizabeth Kaplan (2000) states, “[t]he archival record doesn’t just happen it is created by individuals and organizations, and used, in turn, to support their values and mission, all of which comprises a process that is certainly not politically and culturally neutral” (147). Stating that biases are not present in the collecting process of archival materials by the collectors is putting too much faith in an individual. Archivists should instead be conscious of this and participate in the interpretation of these materials.

The *Arizona Archive Matrix* was a project carried out by archival repositories, which created inventories and surveyed what was collected in the state of Arizona.<sup>2</sup> Fifteen archival repositories participated in the project and in 2012, it was discovered that there were only four archival collections identified statewide as LGBTQIA.<sup>3</sup> The statistics of how many collections are considered LGBTQIA in Arizona is alarming. The Arizona Historical Society has only one collection identified as LGBT and the majority of the materials are periodicals from various parts of Arizona. Some topics include Same-Sex Marriage, HIV/AIDS, and different organizations around Southern Arizona dating from 1991 – 2010.<sup>4</sup> These periodicals and newspaper clippings tell an important history of LGBT communities in Arizona, but the documentation of these communities continues to be a small percentage. With such a massive backlog of unprocessed materials, severe budget cuts, and no direct collection, there is little hope that the Arizona archivists will prioritize collecting materials from queer of color communities. However, there has been positive changes in the state of Arizona. For example, in 2012 Dr. Jamie Lee from the University of Arizona began the Arizona Queer Archives, a community archive documenting the LGBTQIA community.<sup>5</sup> The efforts made by the Arizona Queer Archives are changing Arizona statistics, but more work needs to build on these initiatives to end these cycles of under-documentation.

I received my first hands-on archival education at the Library and Archives Division at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson, Arizona. The organization was founded on January of 1884, by a group of men who called themselves the *Society of Arizona Pioneers*, where membership was only granted to men who had “settled” in the Arizona territory before 1870. It was later renamed the Arizona Historical Society (AHS), and now focuses on including the histories of others in the area.<sup>6</sup> Since the scope was historically narrow, there has not been a traditionally inclusive space for non-heteronormative identities. It is for this reason that it is crucial to disrupt dominant notions of heteronormative practices at play within these historical archival institutions. Archivists are trained to resist contextualizing historical artifacts in an effort to maintain “neutrality.” However, it is naïve to think that processing a collection will remain an objective process. This is precisely why it is important to forgo this presumption and affirm the significance of contextualizing materials so as to not foreclose any interpretations.

While processing the *Sarah S. Valencia Collection* at the Arizona Historical Society, I immediately noticed various moments of queerness.<sup>7</sup> The collection has four linear feet, or about eight boxes of materials, ranging from personal records, genealogy, family photographs and artifacts. The materials are in both English and Spanish with most of the correspondence

being in English. Valencia was born in Tucson, Arizona on May 4, 1908. She also went by “Sara” or “Sally” (depending who she was corresponding with). She grew up close to the downtown area and attended Davis Elementary School where she received a bilingual education. Later in life, she became a counselor and worked in the tribal communities in Arizona. She was briefly married to Ernesto “Henry” Parra. Religion was an important part of Valencia’s life. Even in the description of her grandfather, Alcario Valencia, she writes with an emphasis in capitalization, “ALL MY AUNTS AND UNCLES AND THEIR CHILDREN BAPTISED AND CONFIRMED EACH OTHERS’ CHILDREN and our family get together were here and later in California.”<sup>8</sup> She seemed to have held on to everything related to her family history, including photographs and letters, until the death of her parents.

While processing Valencia’s letters, I came across love letters and poems from her former husband stating that he wanted them to reunite and one of the letters was even written on a napkin. She sent him prayers in the hope that he would stop drinking but they never remarried and there was no evidence that she ever had a romantic relationship with anyone else. She never remarried and lived with her father until he passed away in the 1960s. There was no information about Valencia’s life in the control file (where information about the donation inventory is recorded). All we know is that the materials were never claimed and if the AHS had not taken them, they would have been thrown away. I spent the summer of 2013 reading Valencia’s letters and looking through her photographs to piece her life together. The materials were donated in boxes with no identification or visible order. Included in the collection is a single black photo album with photographs dated from the 1920s. Within the pages of this album, Valencia can be seen cross-dressing. She has short hair hidden under a cap and is wearing pants with a stripe on the side and a white-collar shirt and sweater (See Appendix A).<sup>9</sup> Her hands are in her pockets and she has her mouth closed tight and she appears to be looking down. Another photograph shows Valencia wearing the same outfit but is standing with a friend in an endearing manner (Appendix B).<sup>10</sup> In the third photograph, it could be argued that the pose shows Valencia about to kiss her friend (Appendix C).<sup>11</sup> In this same album, there are also photographs of what looks to be a wedding of a couple outside of a home surrounded by rocking chairs and plants. Upon closer inspection, I noticed that “Katie and Josie” is written in pen on the photograph. The two women are posed in this photograph like a traditional wedding couple (Appendix D).<sup>12</sup> It could be that this performance of a wedding is merely the two women playing dress-up in a suit and wedding dress with a bouquet from the garden but it can also be read as a queer moment or the desire to be married to another woman. These intimate moments are scattered in several pages of the album alongside photographs of different family members and could have easily been overlooked.

This is not the only instance that lends itself to queer readings. I further closed the gaps within Valencia’s life thanks to a conversation I had with a former archivist who collected the materials back in 2006. This former archivist stated that a disagreement of an unknown nature left Valencia ostracized and living alone without any contact from family until she passed away at 99 years old. Kwame Holmes (2015) alludes to the importance of gossip within the histories of queer bodies. Holmes states, gossip “[...] could function as an archive on experience even as it resists recognition and institutionalization” (56). If there is an attempt to create linear stories within archival institutions, specifically with archivists,

documenting how collections are acquired and then processed, so much will be lost. Leaving these stories out of the narrative is a disservice especially when users access the collection and are not provided the whole story.

The conversation with the archivist changed the way I looked at the photographs of Valencia. I read her lack of remarriage or any reference to any other relationship in her letters as something significant to add to this narrative. There needs to be an allowance for these moments to exist and it is crucial to document them. A queer of color lens is important during the processing part of the archivist role but it should also be considered in other parts of the position. For example, during a research consultation, the archivist or reference librarian may stumble upon materials that might have not been cited or marked as potentially queer. This is a unique point of view because outside of the original location, the archivist processing the collection will be one of very few to touch every single piece of material.

The possibility that Valencia may very well have been a lesbian is not necessarily important in this sense. Rather, what is important here is reading her life as open to the possibility of queerness without presuming an identity. Valencia's cross-dressing and the other photographs break the heteronormative narratives and speaks to why it is necessary for archivists to stop assuming a neutral stance and challenge the protocols that discourage additional information in the archival process.

## Conclusion

It is important to incorporate a queer of color lens in processing archival materials to ensure that processing archivist do not disavow queer possibilities. The act of queering has provided the opportunity to disrupt fixed archival institutions that have the power to erase and ignore histories of those who do not fit white and heteronormative practices. Within such institutions as the Arizona Historical Society, there have been legacies of erasure of underrepresented groups and creativity is needed to reimagine what transformative spaces can look like. In this case, through a visual representation of photographs, a seemingly heterosexual woman exhibits moments of queerness that could only be uncovered through a queer of color lens. Although, I did not label the manuscript collection as gay, lesbian, or queer, I considered other possibilities like adding context to the significance of those photos and Valencia's life in the historical or biographical note of the finding aid. While I no longer work at the Arizona Historical Society, I have decided to revisit this collection and request to add context to the control file as well as "cross-dressing" as a Library of Congress Subject Heading in the catalog record.

Queer archives are complex, messy, disruptive, and extremely personal because they delve into the intimacies of gender and sexuality. As Anjali Arondekar et al. (2015) state, "[q]ueer archives are all about the soiled and untidy – about leaving your dirty *chonies* [underwear] on the kitchen table" (213). Because queerness and racialized queerness disrupt the historical structure and organization of archives, they confront and often exceed the limitations delineated by "standards and best practices." Nevertheless, a queer lens offers a more flexible approach to collecting and processing in archival institutions. Adding an access point to a record that is not traditionally read as queer allows researchers to make their own interpretations. Thus, using a queer of color lens as an analytical and practical tool in archives presents archivists with opportunities to change what accessibility looks like for under-documented communities and researchers alike.

## Endnotes

- 1 Sarah S. Valencia Collection, MS 1467, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson.
- 2 Arizona Archives Matrix. nd. Accessed January 5, 2018. <https://azarchivesmatrix.org/>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender, MS 1437, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson.
- 5 Arizona Queer Archives. nd. Accessed January 5, 2018. <http://azqueerarchives.org/>.
- 6 Arizona Historical Society. n.d. Accessed January 5, 2018. <http://arizonahistoricalociety.org/ahshistory/>.
- 7 Sarah S. Valencia Collection, MS 1467, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson.
- 8 Sarah S. Valencia Collection, MS 1467, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson Box 1 Folder 2
- 9 Ibid., box 5, album page 17.
- 10 Sarah S. Valencia Collection, MS 1467, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson box 5, album page 1 box 5 album page 26.
- 11 Ibid., MS 1467, box 5, album page 1.
- 12 Ibid., MS 1467, box 5, album page 1.

## Bibliography

- Arizona Archives Matrix. nd. Accessed January 5, 2018. <https://azarchivesmatrix.org/>
- Arizona Queer Archives. nd. Accessed January 5, 2018. <http://azqueerarchives.org/>
- Arizona Historical Society. nd. Accessed January 5, 2018. <https://arizonahistoricalociety.org/ahshistory>
- Arondekar, Anjali, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, Susan Stryker, Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici. 2015. "Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion." *Radical History Review* 122: 211-31.
- Drabinski, Emily. 2013. "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction." *Library Quarterly* 83 (2): 94-111.
- Ferguson, Roderick A. 2004. *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Holmes, Kwame. 2015. "What's the Tea: Gossip and the Production of Black Gay Social History." *Radical History Review* 122: 55-69.
- Kaplan, Elisabeth. 2000. "We are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and Construction of Identity." *The American Archivist* 63 (1): 126-51.
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender, MS 1437, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson.
- Sarah S. Valencia Collection, MS 1467, Arizona Historical Society – Tucson.

Steorn, Patrik. 2012. "Curating Queer Heritage: Queer Knowledge and Museum Practice". *Curator: The Museum Journal*. 55 (3): 355-65.

Sullivan, Nikki. 2003. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press.

## Appendices



Appendix A  
MS 1467 Box 5 Page 17



Appendix B  
MS 1467 Box 5 Page 26



Appendix C  
MS 1467 Box 5 Page 26



Appendix D  
MS 1467 Box 5 Page 1



Lizeth Zepeda is a Diversity Resident Librarian and Research Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. She was formally an Outreach Archivist and Librarian at the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson, Arizona. Lizeth holds a Master of Library and Information Science with an emphasis in Archival Studies from the University of Arizona's School of Information and a Knowledge River Scholar. She holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from California State University, Long Beach. Her research and archival interests include working with traditionally under-documented communities, outreach programming, Spanish-language materials, and queer(ing) archives. Contact: [Lzepeda@utk.edu](mailto:Lzepeda@utk.edu).

## Queer Lives in Archives: Intelligibility and Forms of Memory

Gina Watts

*Exploring queer archives through a variety of texts and case studies, this paper seeks to understand three primary themes: the departure of traditional archival theory in queer archives, the absence of records and what they might mean for queer history, and a conception of queer time and space contributed to by archival records. Together, these suggest a specific form of intelligibility and memory available to people identifying as queer through the existence of these communal archives, one which reaffirms a history that some were determined to bury and which challenges and expands typical understandings of activism in the archival profession. Finally, this paper seeks to understand how these departures result in a particular political power available to queer archives.*

Queer archives as a concept have a variety of meanings, much like queerness itself. They might refer to archives that collect materials from LGBTQ communities or people; they might refer to an archive that seeks to disrupt or interrogate traditional, institutional archival practices; they frequently mean both of these at the same time. This paper seeks to encapsulate the way these different meanings have played out in case studies and scholarship, with the ultimate goal of understanding how and why queer archives have come to be the political force in the profession that they are today.

To understand where queer archives are coming from, it is important to lay out the straight archives, as it were. Traditional archival practices today in the United States are ruled by concepts like provenance and original order. Provenance refers to the origin of the records, the understanding that there is a chain of custody leading up to the day the records arrived in the archive which lends them both authenticity and context. Original order, as an extension of this, refers to the way that the creator or collector had their own records arranged, an arrangement which is understood to provide more context than simply the materials themselves.

When processing a new collection to be accessible for researchers, adhering to or reproducing original order is the gold standard. These concepts have in common another

aspect: the processing archivist is the decision maker in these matters. It is the role of the archivist to verify the provenance, keep the records together and in original order, and to faithfully reproduce all of this information for researchers in an objective and complete finding aid, keeping any interpretive work on their part invisible. These practices culminate in *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, or DACS, a manual that lays out description and arrangement tactics and which is functionally the bible of any major archive.

Queer archives, alternatively, are skeptical that this is the best or only way to deal with records. Here, I will explore the ways in which queer archives differ in both practical and philosophical ways, focusing on the power of archives, representation and absences in archives, and the ways in which queer archives shift meaning. Who is included in the archive and who is not, and how does that relate to power dynamics? How does archival representation or absence translate into empowerment, understanding, or influence? How do people render themselves intelligible and remembered in the face of institutions who have ignored them? These questions and more will be examined using a selection of major texts in this area.

Alana Kumbier's *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (2014) looks at archives in an interdisciplinary way, not only speaking to archivists but also to queer studies theorists and those who may have communities they want to archive themselves. Her book analyzes films that portray archives as well as grassroots archival projects, pulling in work from memory studies and cultural histories. In *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (2015), Amy Stone and Jaime Cantrell approach the topic from the perspective of how queer archives make LGBTQ life more visible, comparing the closet and the archive: "Inside both the closet and the archive are systems of logical organization and systems of secret keeping" (3). They are interested in the experiences of researchers looking at LGBTQ materials, whose essays populate the rest of the book.

A selection of articles from *Radical History Review* provide even more perspectives. Jen Jack Giesecking's "Useful In/stability" (2015) details his experiences at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, analyzing how both the stability of the location and the instability of the collections help interrogate how the archive does its work. "Drawn from the Scraps: The Finding AIDS of Mundo Meza" (2015) by Robb Hernández questions whose archives are seen as incomplete and theorizes how their fragmentary nature can produce more dialogue about the collection, using Chicano artist Mundo Meza's materials as an example. In "Archival Justice" (2015), K. J. Rawson interviews Ben Power Alwin, archivist of the Sexual Minorities Archive, about the collection, the space it resides in, and the power it has for its researchers. Finally, Elise Chenier (2015) in "Privacy Anxieties" looks at the open access nature of the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony and discusses the ethical and activist implications for its materials. Together, these sources ask the sort of questions which can lead us to a better understanding of how queer memory is discovered, treasured, and used by its communities.

## Archives and Power

To begin, a common thread throughout these texts involves archives and empowerment. Archives represent material history: the idea that a person can find their families, or those whose lives mirrored theirs, in an acid-free box, and in doing so, find themselves, be recognized by the historical record, and claim their right to take up space in the world. This has more

than simply emotional impact—archival records show important legal precedent, challenge our assumptions about the past, and can otherwise lend strength to those looking for support. By contrast, not existing in the archive can seem like not existing at all. Stone and Cantrell comment that “Archival exclusions are reframed as intentional, pervasive reproductions of social order” (7). Reclaiming that space is a means of reclaiming existence as a whole and of creating a more inclusive world for those still discovering their sexuality. Kumbier notes that this process is not necessarily simple and requires a departure from traditional archival practice: “[Queer studies] scholars have created their own archives by conducting oral history interviews, assembling ephemeral material that circulated in LGBTQ communities, conducting ethnographic research through participant observation, and what Marcus calls ‘auto-archiving:’ writing personal memoirs to document queer histories” (14). Institutional archives tend to be strongest in areas where the records have high levels of stability (often due to retention requirements), and in turn, records are most stable when they are created by institutions that have the means and motivation to protect them. Even queer materials that are part of these stable records are often created by those other than the queer people themselves and instead by those policing them in some way. Collecting ephemeral material in queer archives functions in two ways, both as a necessity due to the lack of other records and as an implicit rejection of traditional ideas of which records should matter in an archive.

Ben Alwin articulates the personal and political impact of these interventions in his interview with KJ Rawson. Alwin runs the Sexual Minorities Archive (SMA) in western Massachusetts, and lives in it as well—it is kept in his house. This location is important and speaks to the larger mission: “The ability to control the histories of sexual and gender minorities is an important motive for the SMA, not merely because it responds to the systematic misrepresentation and omission of queer histories in traditional archives, but also because it creates a domestic, anti-institutional environment for queer researchers” (Rawson 2015, 178).

This translates to a degree of personal power that researchers and volunteers have within the space, something not always available in tightly controlled institutions. Alwin continues later: “I tell volunteers who work here, when they label one subject file and they catalog one book, it’s a political act... Everything that we can do to erase the erasure and to give voice where there was silence, that’s what we’re doing with this archival work every day” (Rawson 2015, 185). It is evident even from the transcript of this interview that there was a great deal of emotion in the room, which is important: traditional archives may frequently be frozen, silent closed-stacks where one is expected to wear gloves and leave all personal possessions in a distant locker, but there is no such expectation of this impersonal attitude in the SMA.

Moreover, such a vulnerable response can be said to have more weight and meaning in a traditionally sanitized space. If archival work is political, it also has an impact on people’s personal lives, and keeping emotion out of the equation stops making sense in that context. (A necessary side note: this is a single example, and there are most certainly warm, welcoming institutional archives where you can cry if you want to. However, the rhetoric around queer archives echoes this idea frequently, and I think it is important that people feel the need to distinguish these types of archival work in this way.)

Chenier, writing on the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (ALOT), provides another perspective. Her work questions the open access archive, separating the empowerment of a

community from the empowerment of the individual in order to make sure one is not coming at the cost of the other. The specific question she approaches is about consent: if someone consented to give an interview and make it available prior to the existence of online archives, does that mean that those interviews should be made available digitally? Chenier points out several advantages of making interviews available online, mostly related to the availability of the material to new audiences: “The web also allows us to put the ‘aural’ back into oral history. In nondigital brick-and-mortar archives researchers rarely listened to the original recordings... Aural history brings the material alive in ways that a transcript cannot” (Chenier 2015, 133).

However, she also notes that LGBTQ history has some particular difficulties related to open access: “...the ways in which people are ‘out’ can often be inconsistent and variable according to shifting contexts and individuals... Even if narrators are fully out, what about the people they name in their interviews?” (Chenier 2015, 134). It is not limited to queer contexts; she comments that in other archives, it was not uncommon for interviewees to consent to the material being in the archive but declined to allow it to be placed online. Even when archives can try to protect materials with, for example, confidentiality agreements or passwords, there is discomfort with material being online for anyone to potentially find. These privacy concerns speak to the power that archival materials are seen to have—these fragments of personal lives can impact perspectives on historical lives as well as the lives of people today. This is the strongest reason for the care involved in arranging, describing, and making accessible archival materials, and why the LGBTQ community has often taken it upon themselves to care for their own in spaces they control.

### Archival Absences

Having established that archival materials have influence on both personal lives and political matters, I would like to look at the archival materials themselves. It is impossible to research queer archives without paying close attention to the concept of archival silence. The scarcity or hidden nature of LGBTQ materials is something any of the communities have to face and they have done so in a few different ways. Though perhaps not truly an archive, per se, I will start with Kumbier’s analysis of Cheryl Dunye’s film, *The Watermelon Woman*. The film is an invented documentary about a young filmmaker trying to find the archives of an (also invented) African American lesbian actress from the 1920s named Fae Richards. Dunye, who directs and plays the filmmaker, takes the audience through the process of trying to find records that do not exist of a woman only ever credited as the Watermelon Woman. Dunye’s character finds scraps here and there, but nothing particularly complete. What she does find, of course, was all created for the film but now exists as a real archive created by Zoe Leonard. This dynamic of a fake archive created to represent an absent archive has interesting implications: “Like the film that provides the context for its creation, the collection documents a past that Dunye and Leonard know *is there*, but for which there is no record... it makes the absence of a ‘real’ archive visible, and in doing so, authorizes and inspires future projects” (Kumbier 2014, 57). In this archive, something can be true without ever having actually happened—something a traditional archive would have great difficulty making sense of. These contradictions are everywhere in queer archives and come about precisely because of the sense that we are missing important queer history. Establishing its existence in other ways allows queerness to make a stronger claim to precedent, even without

authentic materials.

Stone and Cantrell discuss an important consequence of this contradiction—taking the absence of records as evidence of queerness: “What appears as silence and closeting may have been a proliferation of signs, symbols, and strategic display of queer identities. Yet absence and the closet have been marked as a kind of gay and lesbian legibility.” This equivocation not only complicates queer studies by “[obscuring] alternative sexual formations” but also by assigning meanings to things that may have multiple interpretations (Stone and Cantrell 2015, 4). There are many reasons that something may not appear in the archive, and not all of them are LGBTQ-adjacent. Indeed, asserting that queerness was invisible historically takes away a rich history of symbols and codes that queer people have used over time. This emerges as one of the cautionary themes of queer archives—it is already a fraught landscape in terms of applying descriptions to those who appear in the archive because of the way preferred terms have changed over time and are different for every individual. Complicating the situation further by assuming queer materials are absent in traditional archives—and thereby assuming absent materials are queer—does not help.

Hernández takes this point and expands it: what about records that exist but are merely incomplete? Taking the case of Mundo Meza, a Los Angeles-based Chicano artist from the 1970s and 80s, Hernández introduces the concept of “queer detrital analysis” to describe the archival work of pulling together disparate pieces to add meaning to the collection itself (71). His argument rests on the traditional meaning of provenance, which relies on a traceable chain of ownership over the length of the material’s life. Hernández comments that someone like Meza, a queer man of color, is more likely to both have an ‘incomplete’ collection and to be accused of having one—“Redactions, omissions, editorial revision, and rediscovered ‘lost’ manuscripts abound” in traditional archival collections as well (72). As an example, Hernández offers the handwritten 60-page finding aid of Meza’s contemporary and friend, Legorreta. The finding aid is not written to traditional archival standards. Instead, “relaying personal memories, career highlights, anachronistic citations, and social documentation in accordance to his artist subjects” (79). These types of meanings added to archival fragments constitute a different understanding of an archival subject, one which Hernández posits as inherently queer. This archival material integrates emotion and personal narrative in a way not usually located in finding aids. As a result, it means so much more. What it may lack in standardization and searchability, it makes up for with richer personal depth and meaning for the researcher to uncover. If traditional archives made use of this strategy, what new research would result?

### Queer Time and Space

Beyond discussions of the material itself, these sources make a case for a different understanding of queer memory altogether. Frequently described as “queer time and space,” these writers paint a picture of how queer archives work for the researchers on the ground. Alwin touches on this in the interview with Rawson: “The personal and private nature of LGBT materials in someone’s home fosters, to me, a real sense of comfort and being at ease... You don’t need to put on gloves and ask me to go get it” (180). This refrain appears in other places as well—that traditional archival policies restrict researchers in their mission to protect documents, effectively prioritizing materials over people. In her analysis of *The Watermelon Woman*, Kumbier asserts, “[the film] critiques the ways libraries and archives mediate access

to information, and draws attention to the power relations that undergird research in both spaces” (53). Dunye’s character encounters policies ostensibly for security and safety of records, which also result in undue surveillance of researchers—having to state reasons for requesting certain records, for example, or having limited options in terms of reproducing materials. Having materials open and available is one more way that some queer archives differentiate themselves from institutional archives—it becomes a philosophical standpoint that these stories belong to all and archivists need not act as their gatekeepers. The homes they are kept in contribute to this feeling.

The same queering can happen with time instead of space: Kumbier exemplifies this with her analysis of Aliza Shapiro’s *DATUM*, a collaborative art and archival installation. The project was designed to mimic the process of archiving using the artist’s personal and professional photographs. Visitors would be faced with open files of materials, able to be moved from the context of one group of photos to another and to be pinned to a makeshift timeline on the gallery wall. They could also scan or print any of the materials to bring home. Shapiro says that part of her inspiration was to allow attendees to see the personal archive of an artist who is still alive and present, something which is rare among archival collections (Kumbier 2014). Kumbier aligns this project with Tom Boellstorff’s concept of coincidental time, which “attends to moments, and is not based in logics of accumulation or duration.” Of Shapiro’s work, she adds: “Though the archive on display was, indeed, an accumulation of records of past times, what mattered more were the meanings those records held for participants, as well as meanings participants expressed in their interactions with the collection” (Kumbier 2014, 161-162).

In other words, past events were made present again through the interactions of the visitors, something that the interactive nature of the exhibit helped foster more so than traditional archives. Kumbier also applies this more broadly, saying that Shapiro’s work to make these materials available to the public while she is standing right there disrupts the timeline that archives typically deal with, where materials are donated once they are inactive and frequently once their creator has died. Questioning this timeline gives archives more options in terms of interacting with both donors and researchers, bending the expected rules.

### **A Case Study: The Lesbian Herstory Archives**

I would like to turn my attention to one specific queer archive, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, an institution that featured in all of these sources. The Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) dates back to 1975, founded by Joan Nestle, among others, and housed in her Manhattan apartment. Today, the LHA is kept in a house in Brooklyn, the purchase of which was a fundraising goal for close to a decade, and is staffed almost entirely by volunteers. In contrast to most archives, anyone who volunteers at the LHA can rearrange the materials at any time, creating their own finding aids in their own styles and calling themselves an ‘archivette.’ Giesekeing wrestles with this, calling attention to the dichotomy of stability and instability present in this particular archive through his personal experiences doing research there. In particular, he is interested in how the two can coexist: “Useful in/stability then is the project of making use of queer refusal, flux, and instability alongside common-sense-making tactics of survival through stability” (36). The archive throws away the rulebook of most archival institutions, creating space for a more subjective form of memory. The instability of the materials is central to the way they hold multiple meanings for different people, and this

stands in opposition to traditional archives' position that places the processing archivist's opinion above others'.

Kumbier's analysis, however, discusses another way of viewing these practices. In *The Watermelon Woman*, Dunye's character visits the Center for Lesbian Information and Technology (CLIT), which Kumbier asserts is a clear stand-in for the LHA, giving a gently teasing account of some of the problems there: "The CLIT archive is disorganized and, though the boxes are out on shelves and physically accessible, visitors would be hard-pressed to identify the contents of any of them" (62). It does certainly present a problem if the very communities an archive is trying to reach cannot access materials due to lack of organization or indexing. Taking a stand against hierarchical organizing is all well and good until no one can find the same thing twice.

In addition, Dunye's character is not allowed to film any of the objects because of privacy concerns, something which presumably happens frequently at the LHA: "A significant amount of material in grassroots archives like LHA is not legally approved for publication, representation, or display in public venues...When donors entrust the LHA with their papers, they sacrifice (or protect against) public visibility and legibility as lesbians, but still contribute to a historical record that attests to their existence" (Kumbier 2014, 63). Such a particular sacrifice makes sense in many contexts—Gieseck opens his article with a scenario where LHA volunteers had to save a deceased donor's materials from her homophobic family—but it does have interesting implications for the advocacy work these archives tend to value.

To begin with, the political power that the LHA could represent has limited spheres due to the niche nature of specialized archives and the organization and privacy concerns. But within those spheres, the archives could mean a great deal to someone looking for a community. How much outreach is appropriate for a place like the LHA, which would theoretically want to both reach the people who need them and keep themselves and their materials safe? How can that political power be harnessed?

In 2003, a group of ten historians wrote an amicus brief for the Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which ended up dismantling sodomy laws in Texas and thirteen other states. The historians focused on two primary arguments: that historically, the word sodomy and the implication of same sex couples were not connected, and that using sodomy laws to prosecute gay couples was a relatively recent phenomenon. To make these arguments, the authors rested their respective research in the areas of marriage and LGBTQ history, which in turn relied heavily on queer archival materials, some of which would not have been kept by large institutional archives. This case became one of many stepping stones to legalizing same sex marriage in 2015. So, while the tensions between privacy and advocacy, organization and instability still exist in places like the LHA, the fact that the materials are broadly being kept, and kept safe, is a political act that has had far-reaching implications for many people in their day-to-day lives.

## Conclusion

Queer archives present an important alternative to traditional institutional archives, showcasing the changes that can come about from prioritizing the communities present in the archives. The sources presented here represent several facets of study facing those interested in queer archives: What does absence from the archive mean? How can it be corrected? What



can one do with fragments of collections? How can normative concepts like space and time shift in light of their particular contexts? While these sources can only provide some answers to these questions, it is part of the whole picture of what queer forms of memory can look like. Stone and Cantrell speak on the power of queer archives: “LGBT archival research becomes queer when it becomes part of a process of recovery and justice for a queer past and present...a recuperative project of moving from silence to productive, transformative discourse” (3). With the development of queer memory, people have the ability to claim their existence, their history, and their role in a community.

Additionally, there are more important goals that can be achieved, like the use of archival materials in support of same-sex relationships. These priorities guide the changes that queer archives have made from traditional archives—that most materials are in open stacks instead of closed stacks, that archivists are not the gatekeepers of describing and arranging collections, and that they are often maintained in people’s homes instead of frozen reading rooms. These can have peripheral effects that are not always ideal: collections are frequently not in a climate that protects them, items may not be described for researchers to be able to find, and privacy concerns can prevent public use of materials. But these are solvable problems and queer archives are taking steps in the right direction to diversify and make more welcoming the archival environment.

### Bibliography

- Chauncey, George. 2004. “What Gay Studies Taught the Court: The Historians’ Amicus Brief in *Lawrence v. Texas*.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10 (3): 509–38. Project MUSE. Accessed Feb 24, 2018.
- Chenier, Elise. 2015. “Privacy Anxieties: Ethics versus Activism in Archiving Lesbian Oral History Online.” *Radical History Review* 2015 (122): 129–41. doi:10.1215/01636545-2849576.
- Giesecking, Jen Jack. 2015. “Useful In/stability: The Dialectical Production of the Social and Spatial Lesbian Herstory Archives.” *Radical History Review* 2015 (122): 25–37. doi:10.1215/01636545-2849504.
- Hernández, Robb. 2015. “Drawn from the Scraps: The Finding AIDS of Mundo Meza.” *Radical History Review* 2015 (122): 70–88. doi:10.1215/01636545-2849540.
- Kumbier, Alana. 2014. *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive*. Sacramento: Litwin Books.
- Rawson, KJ. 2015. “Archival Justice: An Interview with Ben Power Alwin.” *Radical History Review* 2015 (122): 177–87. doi:10.1215/01636545-2849603.
- Stone, Amy L., and Jaime Cantrell. 2015. “Introduction: Something Queer at the Archive.” *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gina Watts is a December 2017 graduate of the University of Texas School of Information and currently works as a Library Specialist at Texas State University. Research interests include archival outreach and education, and the intersection of gender, information equity, and feminist pedagogy in libraries and archives. Contact: [gmw54@txstate.edu](mailto:gmw54@txstate.edu).

# Togetherness with the Past: Literary Pedagogy and the Digital Archive

Madeline B. Gangnes  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

*Archival materials are invaluable to an understanding of the historical, cultural, and material contexts in which literary texts were published. Materiality, paratextual elements, and other key characteristics of literature cannot be discerned from recent editions. Yet original and rare versions of literary texts are difficult or impossible for most scholars, let alone their students, to access. Digital facsimiles provide opportunities to examine archival texts over the Internet, alleviating logistical and financial barriers. In *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2001), Carolyn Steedman writes: “The Archive is a place in which people can be alone with the past” (81); archives are generally thought of as quiet, solitary environments. However, digital archives afford a communal engagement with the past. In this essay, I describe my experiences teaching British literature through digital facsimiles of first or early printings of novels and poetry that are available online. I draw on my observations as an educator, as well as those relayed by my students, to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of using such archives in undergraduate literature courses. I analyze what it means to be together with the past, and how a shared experience of the Archive can be developed and improved through digital resources.*

The Archive is a place in which people can be alone with the past....  
–Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*

Archives are places of quiet contemplation. There, one can commune with history through the documents and objects left behind by the dead or entrusted to the care of others. If a library is, as it has often been described, a kind of secular church or cathedral, then an archive is a chapel. Archives are tended to by an order of devoted adherents. Scholars make pilgrimages to archives, spending hours, days, weeks, months in quiet solitude, perusing the shelves, cartons, and binders, searching for knowledge and inspiration. There is a profound

and often gratifying aloneness to be found in archives.

Yet the library-as-church, the archive-as-chapel, also evokes a sense of community. Using archives need not be a solitary activity; it can be a collective experience. Just as there is value in congregational worship in addition to solitary prayer, there is a value to being not “alone with the past,” as Carolyn Steedman writes, but *together* with it, in engaging with the Archive as a community of scholars (Steedman 2011, 81). Digital archives afford opportunities for this shared engagement in ways in which physical archives cannot.<sup>1</sup> A group of scholars may visit an archive together, even huddle around an archival object in the same room, but simultaneous engagement with the text is not possible in this context. Through digital archives, a large group of scholars across the globe may examine archival materials in facsimile simultaneously. Concerns of scarcity and physical space that are associated with physical archives become largely inconsequential. The digital Archive becomes a place of *togetherness*.

This kind of communal experience of the Archive is valuable to scholars at all levels of study, but it is essential to the most effective incorporations of archival materials in literary pedagogy. Drawing on archival materials helps students engage with the historical, cultural, and material contexts of the time periods in which works of literature were published. John S. North argues that when reading archival documents (in his case, nineteenth-century periodicals) for literary scholarship “we find ourselves more deeply immersed in the day than we could be by any other means” (North 1978, 6). Likewise, Jim Mussell (2012) observes that literary archives provide access to information regarding “alternative forms in which a text was published” as well as “the broader historical culture in which such forms were meaningful” (204). In the case of serialized fiction or other texts that first appeared in periodicals or collections, such “alternative forms” of canonical texts were published alongside a host of other texts and paratextual materials. Students and scholars alike should be made aware that literary texts that are removed from the material contexts of their prior presentations to readers are divorced from the signs of their full cultural and aesthetic meanings.

While a digital facsimile is certainly not identical to the “original” document, facsimiles can, and do, help readers become “more deeply immersed in the day” in which literary texts were published.<sup>2</sup> As Mussell argues, using archival materials for literary scholarship can be “an attempt to reconstruct a lost context,” which is especially important in cases where significant edits and/or additions were made for later editions of a text, or for texts that were originally accompanied by illustrations (Mussell 2012, 204). These and related questions are of particular significance for texts which are published in serialized, “pre-original” versions prior to their publication in other forms.<sup>3</sup> Digital resources, then, “provide a different way to approach” what Mussell refers to as the “absent context” of literary works that is diminished or stripped in more recent editions (Mussell 2012, 204). This is not to say that later editions do not have their own advantages; in fact, critical or “authoritative” editions are immensely helpful in scholarship and pedagogy. However, the choice to use any one edition over others will necessarily involve differences that significantly influence a reader’s experience of the text. Likewise, when a group of scholars favors a particular edition in discussions of a text, the discourse surrounding that text will be similarly influenced.

A classroom—whether physical or virtual—is populated by a community of learners. For the sake of simplicity, consistency, and clarity, students in a given course generally read the same texts together according to a shared schedule. If archival materials (even in

facsimile) offer a more complete view of a text and its contexts, and learning as a community enhances students' understanding of a text, then it follows that digital archives are an invaluable resource for literary pedagogy. Providing students with a means through which to recontextualize fiction allows them the opportunity to more fully immerse themselves in the period in which works of fiction were written, which can lead to a greater and more nuanced understanding of the texts themselves.

In this essay, I first detail my efforts to foster this kind of learning environment when teaching nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British literature using digital archives. I then offer my observations as an instructor, as well as my students' responses, to provide a picture of the benefits of using digital archives for studying literature from these time periods. Finally, I address the drawbacks of using such archives in this way. By describing my approach and the outcomes of my undergraduate literature courses, I provide concrete examples of how digital archives can and cannot, and perhaps should and should not, be used for literary pedagogy. I hope to not only present a model for how educators at any level of instruction can create a sense of "togetherness with the Archive" through the use of digital facsimiles in their classrooms, but also make a convincing case for the merits of doing so. Further, I argue that the use of digital archives, whether by students or professional scholars, illuminates as much about the nature and value of archives themselves as it does the content and context of archival materials.

### Teaching Together

Archivists, historians, literary scholars, and other specialists are well aware that the ever-increasing availability of digital archival content on the Internet has enabled research that could not have been conducted even several years ago. Through my own scholarship on late-Victorian periodicals I have become increasingly aware of the benefits and drawbacks of these materials and the level of engagement required to effectively navigate and make use of them. Though I began working with digital archives specifically to access illustrations printed alongside serialized Victorian fiction, I have begun to see these archives as objects of study in their own right rather than simply as conduits through which to access literary materials. Given the benefit of digital archives to my own work, as well as my budding interest in archives, it seemed not only natural, but vital, to incorporate digital archival materials in my teaching. If these resources were valuable to me, I reasoned, they would certainly be valuable to my students. The results of the courses I designed around these materials far exceeded my expectations, for both good and ill.

To date, I have made extensive use of digital archives in teaching two undergraduate courses:<sup>4</sup> a Freshman-level composition course I titled "Writing About Late-Victorian Serialized Fiction and Periodicals" and my university's Sophomore-level survey of British literature from 1750 to the present, which I subtitled "The British Canon in the Digital Archive." The composition course necessitated the use of digital archives because I hoped to mimic the Victorian experience of reading fiction serially, and to require students to engage with the materials that were published alongside serialized fiction, not just the main texts themselves. Today, serialized fiction is almost always read and taught through single-volume versions in which the text's original segments are collected, revised, and often expanded.

Scholars of Victorian periodicals have long sought ways to somehow recreate the experience of reading serially when teaching Victorian fiction. In *The Victorian Serial*

(1991), Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund describe the benefits and opportunities of what they call a “re-creation” of the serial reading experience, especially in classrooms (275-78). Teaching serials in installments, they argue, allows “modern students to recover the excitement, suspense, and involvement that characterized so much of the nineteenth-century literary experience” (276). Teaching serially also significantly changes the texts: “New parts of the work demand and receive attention along the way of reading, and the questions asked about literature before it is completed turn out to vary in unexpected ways from established concerns” (276). In designing my composition course, I closely adhered to Hughes and Lund’s advice for teaching serialized texts during one academic semester, but my strategies for teaching serially were greatly facilitated by the use of online digital scans of Victorian periodicals, which were not available to Hughes and Lund in the 1990s.

I chose the readings for each course guided in part by the selection of periodicals that were readily available online. My goal for the composition course was to include major readings that spanned not only a range of literary genres, but also a range of periodicals that varied widely in format, content, and audience. I also deliberately chose primary texts that continue to be widely read in the twenty-first century in order to show the ways in which reading them as digital facsimiles may influence readers’ understanding and interpretation of them. I had specific authors I wanted to teach, but sometimes one text was chosen over another because of its availability; for instance, it is much easier to find a digital facsimile of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* than *Treasure Island*.<sup>5</sup> I approached my course design with certain readings in mind, but archives had the final say.

Digital archives also aid in the creation of atypical reading schedules. To underscore the fact that Victorian Britons read multiple periodicals every week or month, I chose to have my composition students alternate between two texts at a time rather than reading a full novel before moving on to the next. I paired the texts thematically to facilitate broader discussions each week rather than considering each novel as a self-contained text. For example, several installments of *Kidnapped* (1896)<sup>6</sup> were covered in the same week as several *Sherlock Holmes*<sup>7</sup> stories, allowing for an examination of how attitudes about “children’s literature” and “genre fiction” differed in the nineteenth century from twentieth-century classifications. The same was done for Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899)<sup>8</sup> and H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1897)<sup>9</sup> with reference to nineteenth-century imperialism, then *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)<sup>10</sup> and poems and short stories by New Woman writers from *The Yellow Book*<sup>11</sup> related to Aestheticism. We also examined 1880s-90s political cartoons from the satirical magazine *Punch* and selected articles from 1888 issues of the monthly women’s-interest magazine *The Woman’s World*. The semester was not long enough for a reading schedule that would match the texts’ original publication schedules, but alternating back and forth between multiple texts, and accessing them in separate issues of periodicals, gave students a sense of a Victorian’s experience reading several serialized texts each week. It also drew attention to the fact that these texts were not read in one sitting, but instead were digested over the course of weeks or months. Digital facsimiles of each individual magazine or newspaper issue forced students to “pick up” each installment and read it as a discrete part rather than grouping installments together.

This atypical reading schedule that digital archives enabled created a kind of solidarity among the students in my composition course. Hughes and Lund speak of a “sense of community” that reading serially creates: the “class reading *together* rather than isolated,

separate individuals, generates associations and connections for students that are less easy to develop when whole works are read sequentially” (Hughes and Lund 1991, 276, emphasis mine). Reading serially encourages a *togetherness* with the text, wherein students empathize about frustrating cliffhangers, for example, or share the unexpected disorientation of switching back and forth between readings. Writing in 1991, Hughes and Lund were likely dividing bound printed novels into short sections to be read throughout the course of the semester. Digital scans of the original periodicals, by contrast, not only provide opportunities for mimicking the pace of the texts’ serialization, but also facsimiles of the material contexts in which they were published. Reading major texts alongside their respective periodicals’ paratextual elements—illustrations, advertisements, editorial notes, and other fictional works and essays—enables students, individually and as a group, to make connections between the canonical texts and related elements that are usually excluded from collected volumes.

I fostered a collective engagement with the periodicals themselves by requiring students to reference and analyze paratextual materials from Victorian periodicals in their assignments. Most of the graded coursework was longer essays, but I also assigned six short discussion board posts: one for each of the six major periodicals from which our readings were taken.<sup>12</sup> Since the enrollment for this course was seventeen students, we were able to examine roughly one hundred articles, essays, poems, novel extracts, short stories, advertisements, and other periodical materials over the course of the semester on top of the texts assigned in the syllabus.<sup>13</sup> Students briefly summarized their chosen texts for the class and asked each other questions or made observations about others’ choices. I encouraged the students to respond to each other’s posts through threaded comments—another way in which digital technologies facilitated a collective approach, especially for students who were shy about speaking during seminars.

Through these response posts, topics that were glossed over or absent from the novels covered in this “writing about literature” course became foregrounded. Reframing the course’s focus in this way organically created a historical and cultural lens through which to approach canonical works of fiction. Patterns quickly emerged in the “matter” chosen by the students for their response posts. Popular topics included animals, unusual technologies or inventions, fashion, travel, popular culture (e.g., Victorian-era celebrities), war stories, and/or any text accompanied by eye-catching illustrations or photographs. Some of these themes were in evidence in the course’s primary texts, but most would have been overlooked had we not engaged with these hundred additional texts. This organic method of recovering “absent contexts” could not have been achieved solely through lectures or isolated research projects; it was made possible by the collective experience of students mining digital archival materials for myriad fragments of late-Victorian culture *together*.

Given the positive outcomes of the composition class, I chose to foreground digital archival materials in my British literature survey and framed the course through the lens of archive theory and discussions of digital archives. On the first day of class, I asked my students to spend five minutes writing out a response to the following prompt:

Should books be available to read for free (online, in libraries, etc.), or is it reasonable to ask people to pay a fee to access them? Why or why not?

Consider:

- If you wanted to read a book or poem for free, how would you try to access it?
- What regulations, laws, technological considerations, and/or other factors might make it difficult to access a book or poem for free?
- What would you do if you couldn't easily access the material for free?
- How would you feel if you were required to read something, but you couldn't afford to pay for it?

I then asked each student to share what they had written with the class. Some students strongly felt that it is important for everyone to have free or cheap access to knowledge. Others—especially those who were also taking STEM classes—focused on the financial burden of textbook costs. Still, some worried that freely available knowledge might undercut writers' ability to earn a living from their work. By the end of the first lesson, the class had come to a consensus that recurred throughout the semester: knowledge should be freely or cheaply available to everyone, but someone should make sure that the producers of knowledge are paid for their contributions.

Using this exercise as a jumping-off point for the course, I emphasized the fact that format and materiality significantly impact a reader's experience of a text. The first readings I assigned for homework were Brewster Kahle's keynote address "Universal Access to All Knowledge" (2007) and Emily Monks-Leeson's article "Archives on the Internet: Representing Contexts and Provenance from Repository to Website" (2011), along with a directive to "Take steps to protect your eyes while reading digital materials!" and links to several articles and applications on how to reduce eye strain while reading on digital devices. I repeatedly drew my students' attention to differences between first (or early) printings of texts and later versions (word and punctuation changes, different titles, and so forth), as well as illustrations and other paratextual materials that do not accompany the texts in other formats, e.g., a Norton anthology that is routinely used for the survey, or an online text version found on a site such as Project Gutenberg. I trained them to become attuned to the presence and importance of visual details that suggest a text's material features, and prompted them to consider the relationship between materiality and meaning-making in literary texts.

Similar to my composition course, I assigned four discussion board posts about using archives: three as responses to the digital archives through which we accessed our readings, and one response to visiting our university's Special Collections, which houses a large collection of rare and first- or early-edition volumes of British literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Special Collections archivists prepared a presentation and a selection of books based on my syllabus for the class to peruse during their visit. I instructed my students to examine the various books and choose one as the topic of their response post. There were awed murmurs and expressions of disbelieving delight when they were told they could touch and read the books without wearing gloves. Many students took photographs of



their favorites, huddling in pairs or small groups around particularly impressive pieces like a set of first-edition volumes of *Northanger Abbey*. One particularly excited student posted a series of photos to her Snapchat Story. By the end of the period, several of them had made plans to return to the Special Collections together to see other books, and later confirmed that they had indeed come back on their own time, both individually and in pairs. Again, the Archive promoted togetherness, both in person and over social media.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Special Collections response posts reflected an excitement about archives that was not present in the students' responses to digital facsimiles. There was interest before, but now there was passion. Several students expressed Steedman's notion of being "with the past": "it was almost as if I was transported back in time," said one student, while another recounted her profound connection with an early edition of Robert Burns's poetry:

[W]hen I held that fragile book in my hand, it felt like a priceless treasure. Upon opening the book, I felt as if I was going back in time to the period in which this edition was publish[ed]. ... The book, with its barely attached cover and the feel of the many years that have passed since its publication, made me realize the power of what a paper, a pen, and a creative mind can do. Feeling the book and the pages, smelling the odor of many years, and making the words out silently made me feel a sensation of 'belonging' to the book.

The students' visceral responses to archival objects during the Special Collections visit ramped up the paper v. digital debate familiar to casual readers, literary scholars, and archivists alike. Up to that point, the class had discussed pros and cons of digital archives and expressed preferences of one over the other in terms of their individual reading experiences. After the visit, they became more personally invested in the strengths and weaknesses of each, and were more outspoken about what they felt was "lost" when reading a digital facsimile of a text compared with a physical archival copy. The student who wrote about Burns remarked, "If I were able to access the texts only through [an] online archive, whether it was a digital scan, photograph, or videos, I would not be able to feel the same way that I did." Others wrote that digital scans cause the reader to "lose important information," that "the size of the book is lost," and (echoed by multiple students across response papers) "it's not the same." Firsthand experience of physical archival materials made the students palpably aware of the privilege that comes with access to archives, both physical and digital.

Questions of access became even more complicated when the class's chronological engagement with primary texts passed 1922: the current cut-off year for Public Domain status of published works. The only freely-accessible original scans of a first edition of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) are presented one page at a time through Woolf Online.<sup>14</sup> I was not cruel enough to subject my students to that torturous prospect, so I only asked them to spend a few minutes looking at scans of the first edition, then read the book however they chose: any edition of a physical copy, eBook, online, etc. There was a palpable sense of relief among the students at this freedom; no longer would they be chained to digital devices. Some went out of their way to buy a hard copy, even with free or cheap digital versions of the text available online. I used the Public Domain cut-off as an opportunity to discuss copyright law, returning to Brewster Kahle's "Universal Access to All Knowledge" to

see if students' attitudes about freely-accessible knowledge had changed since the first week of the course. In this way, the question of access that I posed at the beginning of the semester came full circle; a relatively standard survey of British literature also served as a class on the social, political, financial, and logistical considerations of the Archive.

### **A Collective Vision**

Many of us who work with digital archives initially find ourselves seduced by the seemingly infinite possibilities afforded by the resources at our fingertips. A variation on the following notice appears in the syllabi for both courses in which I have used digital archives: "All materials will be provided by instructor; there is no need to purchase textbooks." The notion of a "free" (in terms of course materials) class is, understandably, a relief to students who are burdened by rising textbook costs, but it also hints at a kind of future intellectual utopia where all learning materials are affordably and easily accessible. There is something powerfully alluring about Brewster Kahle's vision of achieving "universal access to all knowledge." Kahle is the founder of the Internet Archive (Archive.org), of which I make extensive use in my research and teaching. In "Universal Access to All Knowledge" (2007), he argues that access should be at the core of efforts to digitize and distribute content. Kahle says that "democratic ideals ... are baked into" archiving as a profession; archivists should strive to make archival materials freely and widely accessible to the public (30). Assigning Kahle's essay at the beginning of the course set an idealistic tone for the semester, which then became productively complicated and challenged as the class progressed.

As my students soon learned, no archive is truly free. In fact, Kahle provides a detailed account of the specific costs of digitizing documents and maintaining servers. The significant operating costs of the venues through which my students accessed digital materials are only made possible by donations, grants, and other sources of outside funding.<sup>15</sup> While most of the texts we examined are well out of copyright, there is still a financial burden associated with making the materials available. In my survey course lectures, I therefore made sure to point out which archive(s) hosted the day's reading(s), which archive the original text belonged to, and who had digitized it. I asked my students to read the mission statements of major digital archives and repositories and encouraged them to explore the materials offered beyond the assigned readings. I impressed upon my students the fact that these resources had been made available because the owners of the materials felt that it was important for them to be made accessible. The methods and avenues through which texts make their way to readers are often taken for granted, as are the efforts of the editors, publishers, archivists, librarians, and other people through whom texts pass before they are read by an audience.

Framing students' experiences of digital archival materials through the lens of archives' creation and maintenance encouraged them to consider the purpose and goals of digitization projects. Most of my students were immediately attentive to the advantages of facsimiles over plain-text versions of novels and poetry, either online or printed. They quickly picked up on one of my main reasons for using digital archives: the material aspects of a text that can be discerned through facsimiles. One student echoed North<sup>16</sup> by observing that a scanned image of a book "created a much more immersive viewing experience" than the plain-text version, and that visible "details such as transparency in the pages and smudges along the text create the illusion of reading the physical edition" in ways that other formats do not. Another said that a high-quality scan allowed her to "see the texture of the pages and if I tried I could

imagine what they would feel like if I had that physical version....” Other students praised logistical advantages of digital versions in general, such as the ease of accessing a digital version compared with hunting down a physical book, and interface-related capabilities like zooming in on images to see small details, and, of course, searchable OCR text to help them find specific scenes or lines from a given text.

Beyond the convenience of digital materials and the ability of high-quality scans to hint at physical materiality of printed works, digital facsimiles make available key characteristics of texts that may be omitted in later editions. This is vital when the physical version of a text incorporates visual elements beyond text. In the case of William Blake, for example, I had the students view several different versions of the same four poems. There are wonderful printed facsimiles of Blake’s work in circulation today, but most are based on one particular manuscript, and Blake’s images can vary significantly from set to set. Furthermore, a facsimile of Blake’s work is still far easier to find in print than the illustrations that originally accompanied works like *Kidnapped*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *The War of the Worlds*, *Goblin Market*, and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Examining digital scans of these and other illustrated readings allowed for close visual analyses and discussions about the interplay between text and image. The ability to read texts that are—with a few exceptions, e.g., *Through the Looking-Glass*—now published without illustrations was crucial to understanding the imagetextual meaning-making that occurs in early editions of the texts.

Meaning-making in literary texts is also heavily influenced by adjacent and paratextual materials, which is why it is extremely advantageous that digital archives allow *browsing*. A class on Victorian periodicals is not possible without access to original editions or high-quality facsimiles of complete (or near complete) issues of the periodicals. The physical originals are generally housed in archives, which makes them essentially inaccessible to undergraduate students unless their institution’s Special Collections happens to have them. Paper photocopies have been used for classes on this subject in the past, but that solution is only feasible for excerpts. The ability to access entire issues of periodicals or collected volumes enables students and scholars to browse through the materials. Interfaces on major online archives generally have a viewing option that arranges the images in a way that mimics a book or magazine—in some cases in a sophisticated enough fashion that small but important details such as which pages face one another are preserved. Readers can click through large volumes and examine materials that surround a specific serialized text. This not only places course readings in a concrete historical, cultural, and material context that is lacking when they are reprinted, but also gives students the opportunity to discover related texts that have not been assigned (and might not be assigned in any literature course).

The digital Archive, then, is undoubtedly rich with possibilities, especially for scholarship related to literature. It provides a means of easily and affordably discovering or rediscovering content and contexts from which texts have been separated in later printings. It creates a space in which students can explore and share key aspects of texts that are difficult to access anywhere else. That said, most digital resources are far from perfect, and using them comes with a host of difficulties. Teaching with digital archives makes abundantly clear that the idealism of Kahle’s “Universal Access to All Knowledge” is grounded by the reality that archives—both physical and digital—are tied to a complicated and treacherous web of financial, logistical, and ethical concerns (Monks-Leeson 2011).

## A Shared Reality

The drawbacks and complications related to using digital archives for course materials are by no means negligible. Several of these complications are linked to the same notice from my syllabi cited above: “All materials will be provided by instructor; there is no need to purchase textbooks.” The word “purchase” gestures to the financial considerations linked to digital archives. As stated above, no archive is truly free. I did “provide” the course materials for my classes in the sense that I collected digital files and links to websites in a centralized location. I did not, however, provide the resources required to read them, nor was I responsible for the financial burden of hosting the materials. Even if access to digital archives is freely (or cheaply) available to students, it still involves substantial financial costs. At a major American research university, it is generally safe to assume that students will have access to a laptop computer or tablet that they can bring to class and use to read the course materials at home. Failing that, they are at least guaranteed the use of a computer at a campus library or media laboratory. However, this is not true of every college and university, even those of the comparably prosperous global North. Even when library computers are available, it would be unfair to expect students to spend hours reading on a computer screen in a public space. Students have the option to print out materials, but that solution assumes they can easily and affordably print hundreds of pages over the course of the semester. “There is no need to purchase textbooks” does not mean that there is no need to purchase *anything*; the student must have already paid for the means to access the “free” texts, or must be able to pay for these means. Depending on an individual’s financial resources, the seduction of Kahle’s intellectual utopia may sour as early as the first time a student or scholar attempts to access digital archival materials on their own.

The financial considerations of digital archives are directly linked to logistical concerns. Even if a student has a reliable device on which to view digital archival materials, not all online materials can be downloaded, and some have such large file sizes that they cannot be practicably stored on students’ personal devices, which limits the locations where they can read, and how portable their readings will be. One of my students, for example, lamented the short battery life of her computer and phone, which limited her ability to read outdoors. Attempts at reading digital archival materials on a phone are generally futile in any case because most require extreme zooming on a small screen, if they even load at all. This student and several of her classmates also expressed frustrations about not being able to make notations on a digital text as they might on a printed copy. PDF files of some of the readings were not reliable, which meant that they could be neither annotated digitally nor printed out. The inability to annotate by hand was a common complaint; despite the requirement to bring a computer or tablet to class if possible, many students showed a preference for taking notes on paper. Even those of us who embrace digital technologies ideologically are often more hidebound in practice than we anticipated.

The scanned facsimiles we examined presented many of the problems inherent to digital facsimiles, especially those created by individuals or institutions that do not have codified guidelines in place for digitization. The scans varied widely in quality, sometimes even from page to page. Some had a higher resolution than others, and some were in a flat photocopy-quality black-and-white—perhaps created from 1-bit microfilms—rather than color or grayscale, causing their legibility and indicators of materiality to suffer in some cases. Conversely, there were also drawbacks to the highest-quality scans, especially those

of books that were printed on thin paper. I thought that the bleed-through of text on some pages gave a wonderful sense of a book's materiality, but several students complained that it made them difficult to read. One student said that she "ended up reading a regular text version because the words on the other side of the page would mix with the words on the page I was reading." Another said that he had to increase the brightness of his display and zoom in to read the text. The file size of high-quality scans also required more bandwidth and computing power, which made them slower to load and navigate. Cumbersome interfaces could make such situations even worse: one particularly frustrated student complained (of a specific site) that when he tried to zoom in on a blurry scan with small text, the page would sometimes refresh and take an excessive amount of time to load, causing him to lose his place on the page.

Frustrations with digital archives seemed to compound over the course of the semester. I entered these courses already painfully aware of many of these issues, but I tried to keep my responses to myself until I received feedback from my students. I find it very difficult to endure reading on my computer screen for hours at a time. It is much more difficult for me to fully comprehend texts without being able to mark them up and make notes by hand. I like to read in locations that do not always have a reliable Wi-Fi connection. So, when teaching these classes, I "cheated." I downloaded files. I printed out at least a couple of hundred pages. I read text-only versions of books on my e-reader. I read hardcopies I already owned or borrowed them from the library, then searched for the corresponding page numbers in the digital scans later. In short: I did everything I asked my students to avoid doing if they could help it. Essentially, I created courses that even I could not realistically take according to my own directions. The advantages of digital archives were not great enough to make me determinedly face their drawbacks.

These failures (as I saw them) gave me two options: either I could pretend that I was reading the course materials exactly as I had instructed my students to do, or I could admit to not being able to do so myself. I chose the latter. Once I began to sense my students' frustration with the digital materials in class, I held up the printouts of the readings I had made for myself. I read some of my marginalia aloud to my students when it was relevant to our discussion. I empathized with their frustrations concerning blurry scans, small text sizes, poorly designed interfaces, and connectivity troubles. Our collective failures to adhere to the impossible goal of achieving a truly digital reading list became important teaching moments. Students shared their pleasant experiences with particular digital resources as well as their frustrations. Through experience, rather than through instruction, my students and I learned how digital archives work—or fail to work—and how to most effectively navigate them.

In the end, these classes became exercises in exploring both the opportunities and the limitations of digital archives, rather than simply focusing on literature and composition. I have generally been able to convince my students of the value of using such archives, despite the difficulties we encountered. My favorite student assessment of our experiments with digital archives reads, "I prefer reading books printed instead of online and going through this class has just reaffirmed my preference." The phrase "going through" underscores the fact that extensively using digital archives is a process—one that may be rewarding in important respects but one that is not always pleasant. Regardless of how each student felt at the end of the semester, the general attitude in each class was one of camaraderie, of solidarity in the face of a grueling ordeal. As we coaxed our inner Luddites to accept change, we were acutely

aware that misery loves company. At least we were all “going through” this *together*.

### **Conclusion: A Common Goal**

Using digital archives for any significant amount of research or pedagogy involves many challenges, a good number of which are difficult to surmount given the technologies that are currently available to most consumers in developed countries—in the case of my pedagogy, undergraduate students at a large American state university—let alone those in developing nations. Still, such archives offer valuable access to materials that are difficult, or often impossible, for scholars and students to examine in another format. I have taught one course that simply would not have been possible without the use of digital archives, and another whose effectiveness would have been severely diminished without them. Many of my major research projects would also have been impossible to pursue without these archives. The considerable physical and mental strain on myself and my students has been worth grappling with because working with digital archives—individually and together—has sparked insights and discussions that would not have emerged in similar classes that are taught with newer, printed editions of literary texts.

Despite their significant drawbacks and limitations, I contend that using digital archives contributes significantly to students’ and scholars’ understanding not only of the texts they are examining, but of how archives and archival materials are used, organized, and made accessible. There is still much work to be done to increase the ease and efficiency with which these materials can be used, however. Those who teach with and study digital archival materials must develop strategies for mitigating the negative effects of reading long texts online, especially in the case of novels and other lengthy texts. Scholars and instructors should also take time to familiarize themselves and their students with the full capabilities of the sites through which they access digital materials. Individually and as part of a larger scholarly community, we must find new ways to navigate and make use of digital archival materials and foster an environment of “togetherness with the past” that is vital to effective scholarship and pedagogy.

## Endnotes

- 1 In this article, I use a broad definition of the word “archive” that includes a range of physical and digital repositories of unpublished or rare materials that are difficult to access in their original forms.
- 2 Clearly distinguishing between “original” and “facsimile” is fraught, but for the purposes of this article, I use “digital facsimile” to refer to digital scans—generally available on the Internet—of physical books and periodicals.
- 3 “Pre-original” is generally used in discussions of nineteenth-century French serialized literature, but as the systems of serialized publication in Britain were similar to those in France, I feel the term is appropriate here.
- 4 I’ve used digital archives in other courses, but have not relied as heavily on them as I did in these two courses.
- 5 High-quality scans of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* as published in *Young Folks Paper* are hosted by the University Libraries Digital Collections at the University of South Carolina: <http://library.sc.edu/digital/collections/rlsk.html>.
- 6 The all-ages adventure novel *Kidnapped* was serialized in *Young Folks Paper*: a weekly newspaper targeted at children.
- 7 *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891-2) was serialized in in the general-interest monthly magazine *The Strand Magazine*.
- 8 *Heart of Darkness* was serialized monthly as “The Heart of Darkness” in three installments in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, a journal that features literary fiction, criticism, political pieces, and similarly “serious” content.
- 9 *The War of the Worlds*, a “scientific romance,” was serialized monthly in *Pearson’s Magazine*, which generally focuses on fiction and articles related to science, politics, and history. H. G. Wells used the term “scientific romance” for his early novels “evolving from the romantic tradition but incorporating some scientific breakthrough that is crucial to the central conflict.” He later referred to them as “scientific fantasies.” See Thomas Renzi, *H. G. Wells: Six Scientific Romances Adapted for Film*, Second Edition (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), xx.
- 10 This version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in a single issue of *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*: a monthly literary magazine. The novel was heavily revised and expanded into the 1891 version that is most widely read today.
- 11 *The Yellow Book* (1894-7) is an avant-garde literary and visual arts journal.
- 12 My institution currently employs Canvas LMS (Learning Management System) as our online learning platform. Canvas’s features include online discussion boards, a system for submitting and receiving feedback on assignments, grade and attendance trackers, among other capabilities.
- 13 Accounting for a few rare instances of two students choosing the same text to discuss in their response posts.
- 14 Woolf Online is a “digital archive of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*” funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and maintained by a group of Woolf scholars. It is

currently found at <http://www.woolfonline.com>.

- 15 There are also significant ethical and political concerns bound up with archives (both physical and digital), especially in the case of materials created by and/or related to colonized peoples and other marginalized groups. No archive is apolitical, and control of archives represents a kind of power by the archivist over the archived. See, e.g., works by Kimberly Christen on digital archival materials by indigenous peoples, including “Does Information Really Want to be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of Openness,” *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 2870-2893. As my courses centered on European texts in the public domain, we did not devote a great deal of time to these discussions, but I did challenge my students to consider the problematic nature of canon-building and the assumptions we make about the quality and value of literary texts in the Western academy.
- 16 See John S. North in the introduction to this article.

### Bibliography

- Christen, Kimberly. 2012. “Does Information Really Want to be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of Openness.” *International Journal of Communication* 6: 2870-93.
- Hughes, Linda K., and Michael Lund. 1991. *The Victorian Serial*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Kahle, Brewster. 2007. “Universal Access to All Knowledge.” *The American Archivist* 70 (1): 23-31.
- Monks-Leeson, Emily. 2011. “Archives on the Internet: Representing Contexts and Provenance from Repository to Website.” *The American Archivist* 70 (1): 38-57.
- Mussell, Jim. 2012. “Teaching Nineteenth-Century Periodicals Using Digital Resources: Myths and Methods.” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45 (2): 201-9.
- North, John S. “The Rationale—Why Read Victorian Periodicals?” 1978. In *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, edited by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, 3-20. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Renzi, Thomas C. 2004. *H. G. Wells: Six Scientific Romances Adapted for Film, Second Edition*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Steedman, Carolyn. 2011. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.



Madeline Gangnes is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Florida and a graduate of the University of Dundee's MLitt in Comics Studies program. Her research focuses on the relationship between imagetext works and other media. Her dissertation examines the use of digital archives to access serialized Victorian fiction and the paratextual materials printed alongside canonical texts in periodicals. She also conducts research related to digital humanities, climate fiction, and film and media studies. Madeline is currently the editorial assistant for *Studies in Comics*, the president of the University of Florida's Graduate Comics Organization, the associate editor of *Sequentials*, and a member of UF's Trace Innovation Initiative and UF's Science Fiction Working Group. Contact: [mbgangnes@ufl.edu](mailto:mbgangnes@ufl.edu).

## People of the Stacks: 'The Archivist' Character in Fiction

Sharon Wolff

CAMMIE G. HENRY RESEARCH CENTER, NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

*Archives and archival professionals suffer from what may be termed as an "image problem" due to their general lack of exposure to the public. With their efforts being tucked away in various repositories, their fictional representatives become an important way to give people an idea of what they do. With the help of an article by Arlene Schmuland, two works of fiction, *People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks from 2008 and *The Archivist* by Martha Cooley from 1998, are used to compare fictional archivists and the ways their differences may indicate a change in how their real-life counterparts are seen by the general public.*

In the archival field, there is something close to an obsession with how we are seen by the public. This is born out of an acute awareness that the public generally does not know we exist, or if they know, they have little understanding of what we do. Like our colleagues in libraries and museums, those of us who work in archives do our best to provide free and open information to anyone who asks for it. Most of us, with the exception of those who work in private company archives, serve the public interest. But it is extremely difficult to serve the public if they do not know where to go for the information they want, or if they do not even know that a resource exists to help them get that information in the first place.

The problem is that unlike libraries and museums, archives are places that are often used exclusively for research, and they do not have the benefit that libraries do of being a frequent presence in high schools. Archives and archivists are a concept that are almost never introduced to people in everyday life. As John Grabowski (1992) says, "Archivists, blessed or damned, if you will, with a professional moniker of great popular obscurity, have...a greater problem in creating an awareness of their importance among the public than...our colleagues in allied historical fields" (465). Archives are something that exist in the peripheral of the average person's view, if at all. Unfortunately, they often exist similarly in the views of presidents of universities and companies that have archives. David Gracy (1984) is not

exaggerating when he points out that “The misconception by our publics and by those with the power to allocate resources to our repositories strikes at the heart of our existence and ability to function. With diminished resources, every activity of archives suffers” (8). Without the support of people in power, our funding is not prioritized and our existence is threatened. Without the interest of the public, our entire purpose is underwritten and our existence is moot.

With such a limited exposure to society, every image of archivists, fictional or otherwise, is magnified in importance, and our fictional image already matters quite a bit. According to Raymond Mar (2004), “...our interactions with fictional narratives should not be viewed as frivolous; stories have the power to change our beliefs about the real world. Researchers have repeatedly found that reader attitudes shift to become more congruent with the ideas expressed in a narrative after exposure to fiction” (1414). People within the archival profession like Gracy and Grabowski have been advocating for decades for increased outreach by archivists in an effort to make us more visible. However, as much good as outreach will undoubtedly do, a large amount of control over our image belongs to the media creators of the world. Jonathan Gottschall (2012) points out that “The emotions of fiction are highly contagious, and so are the ideas...In fact, fiction seems to be more effective at changing beliefs than nonfiction, which is *designed* to persuade through argument and evidence” (150). With that in mind, it behooves us to be aware of how we are represented, especially as a fictional depiction of an archivist is often the only thing people have to refer to. The question becomes, what does an archivist look like in fiction?

According to Arlene Schmuland (1999), who examines this topic extensively in an article of hers, the overall picture is less than flattering. Schmuland looks at books with archival representation across every genre, from the fantasy world of *Centaur Aisle* by Piers Anthony, to a romance in *Sweet Starfire* by Jayne Ann Krentz, to the mystery in *Provenance* by Frank McDonald (54-65). Common physical traits associated with archivists that Schmuland comes up with are that they wear glasses, are middling to advanced in age, take little care in their outfits or dress conservatively, and are physically unimposing. As she summarizes, “a more precise description might be that of a middle-aged, visually impaired person in badly chosen clothing with almost no social life” (Schmuland 1999, 36). A look at the psychological profile that Schmuland pieced together comes off slightly better: “an archivist is usually a person with intelligence, efficiency, and a strong sense of duty and devotion to work. However, they also have traits like introversion, general condescension, and the belief that they are a gatekeeper deigning to allow others access to precious knowledge” (37).

Besides novels, anyone who has attended one of Leith Johnson’s (2017) “Archives in the Movies” presentations at a yearly Society of American Archivists meeting knows that these stereotypes hold true on film as well as on the page: the imposing, in fact downright threatening, archivist in *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941), the emotionless, disengaged archivist in *Cloud Atlas* (Wachowski 2012), and humorous yet dismissively disinterested archivist in *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb* (Levy 2014). The good news is there may be hope for both movies and books. Schmuland states that “Novelists are including archives and archivists in their writings more and more every passing year. Stereotypes are...strengthened through repetition, and new images are added to them” (52).

While there have been several published works that include archival aspects in the nearly twenty years since Schmuland’s prediction, one in particular stands out: *People of the*

*Book* by Geraldine Brooks from 2008. Though *People of the Book* does not have an archivist as a main character, the reader is briefly introduced to one that breaks a myriad of character stereotypes into pieces. This stands in contrast to *The Archivist* by Martha Cooley, which was published in 1998 and was mentioned in Schmuland's article as a new release. When comparisons are drawn between *The Archivist* and *People of the Book*, it is easy to see the difference in their respective depictions of fictional archivists. Indeed, if *People of the Book* is any indication of future trends, there may yet be hope for the archivist character in fiction.

When Schmuland's article first appeared in print, *The Archivist* had been out for a year. The story is set just under fifteen years prior to the book in 1985 and follows Matthias Lane, who is an archivist at a prestigious university. One of the collections under his care is a bulk of letters donated by Emily Hale containing correspondence between her and T.S. Eliot. The collection is closed to researchers until 2020 at the request of the donor, contrary to Eliot's wishes, which were for Hale to destroy the letters. Lane's wife, who, like him, was an avid reader of poetry, had been dead for 20 years after her suicide in a mental institution that he put her in. As the story progresses, the reader learns that Lane's wife left a journal for her psychiatrist to read after her death that was to be burned when he finished going through it. Due to legal obligations, the institution cannot destroy a patient's property and the journal ends up with Lane, who still does not dispose of it. Eventually, after reading his wife's journal and gaining a better understanding of her thoughts, he removes the letters from the archive and burns them, fulfilling the poet's original intent that no one except Emily Hale read them.

In her article, Schmuland notes the symbolism of burning the letters, "While that action is not typical of archivists in fiction...Lane is acting as a gatekeeper, controlling access to a collection" (42). This is significant because, according to Schmuland, Lane is an "archivist who displays many of the psychological traits associated with archivists in fiction" (26). Essentially, Lane fits the stereotype of an archivist's mentality to a 't'. Though he loved his wife, he is content with being alone and is not bothered by solitude. He is enamored with his chosen field, expressing a profound interest in the pursuit of knowledge and dedicating his life to the care and keeping of written information. He is openly dismissive of people he calls "pseudo-scholars," but claims that he does not "hoard the treasure" because he will "allow the collection to be read and used by anyone who passes [his] inspection" (Cooley 1998, 6). Throughout the book he refers to himself as a "guardian" of the archive, a "warden of the obscure," and a "keeper of countless objects of desire" (6). These are all traits that add together to create a perfect stereotype image of an archivist, according to Schmuland's findings. To the casual reader, despite being fictional, Lane is an archivist, and his burning of the letters at the end of the book represents actions that a real archivist might take. This is a problem.

Thematically speaking, of course, the ending is a beautiful moment. Lane experiences a kind of catharsis, an atonement for how he treated his wife before her death. His burning of the letters is his way of doing for Eliot, a poet that both he and his wife shared admiration for, what he could not do for his wife. For the archival profession, the ending is deeply troubling. In fact, the implications of Lane's fictional actions are downright disastrous. It represents a harmful stereotype, the archivist as a jealous gatekeeper, taken to an extreme conclusion. By burning Eliot's letters in a desire to honor the poet's wishes, he betrays the intent of the donor and his duty to posterity. While Eliot may have been the creator of

the letters, Emily Hale was the recipient and subsequent donor of them; it should not be Eliot's desires Lane seeks to fulfill but Hale's, not to mention the untold numbers of future researchers whose sources went up in smoke with the letters. Lane himself mentions how the destruction of the letters goes against the school of archival thought: "An archivist serves the reader's desire...My own training...had taught me to privilege the reader's curiosity over all other considerations" (Cooley 1998, 322). By having her character do this, Cooley paints archivists not only as people who are solitary guardians of information, but as people who can and will take advantage of their privileged access for personal reasons. In short, *The Archivist* perpetuates tired stereotypes while adding dangerous fuel to the fire.

Fortunately, *People of the Book* stands in sharp contrast. The story follows an Australian conservator, Hannah Heath, after she works on a five hundred-year-old illuminated Jewish text called the Sarajevo Haggadah. While she does her work, she finds objects or stains within the pages of the book, and the narrative switches between Heath attempting to work out the origin of them and the people in the past responsible for the events that cause the item to become a part of the book's story. Though the main character is a conservator, not an archivist, she does come across one while conducting her research. It is this encounter that makes the book stand out as a beacon of hope for fictional archivists.

At this point in the story, Heath is attempting to track down clasps that she believes were originally attached to the book. She has determined that the binding was done in Vienna and sets up a meeting with Frau Zweig, the chief archivist, to go through some archival documents that may help her with her task. What follows is the moment that Heath first meets Zweig at the Vienna Museum:

...the chief archivist...was not at all what I expected. In her late twenties, she was dressed in high black boots, a teensy plaid skirt, and a tight, electric blue jersey that emphasized an enviable figure. Her dark hair was cropped in a jagged bob and streaked in various shades of red and yellow. There was a silver stud in the side of her...nose. (Brooks 2008, 101)

To put it another way, she is young, attractive, fashionably dressed, and either wears contacts or does not have vision problems. Zweig later further confounds stereotypes by taking Heath out on the town the night before she flies out of Vienna. Perhaps most importantly, Frau Zweig—the chief archivist—is a woman. Schmuland notes that "The women are more likely to be clerical-level workers than the men. If the archivist is in an administrative or supervisory role...the archivist is more likely to be a man" (35). By putting Zweig in a top managerial position, Brooks not only flouts a longstanding character tradition, but also subverts a more widespread 'understanding' rooted in deep-seated sexism.

For as much as *People of the Book* does for the heritage field with its character, it does unfortunately perpetuate some classic, and harmful, stereotypes surrounding archives themselves. For example, after Heath is left alone in the museum's basement storage room with the box she wants to look at, she has to blow dust off of the first folder she picks up from the box. Not only does this action belie the fact that a dusty archive is an ill-kept one, it defies the laws of physics to have a dusty folder inside a box that not two sentences ago was sealed shut. Alas, the image of filthy records moldering away in a dank basement continues to prevail in this text. Schmuland herself observes that "Dust is the single most pervasive motif

associated with archives, even outside of fiction” (42). There are also several mentions of working by sunlight or having large windows in a workspace to facilitate visibility, which is actually the opposite of stereotyped images of archives, but incorrect information nonetheless. Any archivist worth their salt will attest to the destructive nature of UV radiation present in natural sunlight and the danger that prolonged exposure to it will put materials in.

Workspace imagery aside, *People of the Book* and *The Archivist* represent two different ends of a spectrum of archivist characters. However, both works have something in common: they are based in fact. The Eliot/Hale letters are in a real collection housed in the Princeton University archives that is, in fact, currently closed to researchers until 2020. The Sarajevo Haggadah is also a real illuminated text with a long history of brushes with destruction. Each of the authors have based their work in truth which, for one, means they have to invent a lot less. It has the added benefit of giving their work credence. This same credibility is what makes the books and their archivist characters significant. Because the texts are works of realistic fiction and the focus of archival interest is real, readers are more likely to accept the respective archivists as ‘real’ as well. That is, seeing how the authors have put so much research into the rest of the book, why would the same not be true for these characters? Add this to the complete dearth of archivists in fiction to begin with and the origins of many misconceptions become obvious.

There is a bright side, of course. While *People of the Book* is only one example, it may represent a trend towards a more well-rounded depiction of archivists and archives in media. Proper handling of archival artifacts is stressed when the main characters of Dan Brown’s *Angels and Demons* (2000) visit the Vatican Secret Archives, as well as when the main characters encounter the Declaration of Independence in *National Treasure* (Turteltaub 2004). The archivists and historians in an episode of *The Crown* (Lowthorpe 2017), who are responsible for publishing previously classified records from WWII, demonstrate significant moral backbone and dedication to public access to the information they uncover, despite the embarrassment to the British royal family. ‘Archivist’ was even added as a character class and characters were referred to as “...exceptional support characters...” (Wyatt 2005, 82) in the *Heroes of Horror* supplement to the 3.5 edition of the *Dungeons and Dragons* role-playing game. With luck, creators of fiction of all kinds will continue to give archivist characters traits that mark them as individuals rather than stereotypes, and a true ‘archivist image’ will develop in fiction.

### Bibliography

- Brooks, Geraldine. 2008. *People of the Book*. New York: Penguin.
- Brown, Dan. 2000. *Angels and Demons*. New York: Atria Books.
- Cooley, Martha. 1998. *The Archivist*. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company.
- Gottschall, Jonathan. 2012. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Grabowski, John. 1992. “Keepers, Users, and Funder: Building an Awareness of Archival Value.” *The American Archivist* 55 (Summer): 464-72.
- Gracy, David. 1984. “Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution.” *The American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (Winter): 6-10.

- Johnson, Leith. 2017. "Archives in the Movies 14." Film clip compilation. Society of American Archivists annual meeting. Portland, Oregon.
- Levy, Shawn. 2014. *Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb*. Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- Lowthorpe, Philippa. 2017. "Vergangenheit." In *The Crown* created by Peter Morgan, episode 16. Scotts Valley: Netflix.
- Mar, Raymond A. 2004. "The neuropsychology of narrative: story comprehension, story production and their interrelation." *Neuropsychologia* 42: 1414-34.
- Schmuland, Arlene. 1999. "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography." *The American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (Spring): 24-73.
- Turtletraub, Jon. 2004. *National Treasure*. Burbank: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Wachowski, Lana, Tom Tykwer, and Andy Wachowski. 2012. *Cloud Atlas*. Burbank: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Welles, Orson. 1941. *Citizen Kane*. New York: RKO Radio Pictures.
- Wyatt, James, Ari Marmell, and C.A. Suleiman. 2005. *Heroes of Horror*. Renton: Wizards of the Coast.

Sharon Wolff graduated with her MSIS from the University at Albany, SUNY, in May of 2016. After finishing her degree, she spent a year building her experience with internships, short-term projects, and career development activities. She began working as the Assistant Archivist at Northwestern State University in September of 2017. Contact: wolffs@nsula.edu.



# A Reckless Verisimilitude: The Archive in James Ellroy's Fiction

Bradley J. Wiles

AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

*The archive as both plot element and narrative presentation factors significantly into the work of James Ellroy's novels in the L.A. Quartet and USA Underworld Trilogy series. This article examines the important role of the archive as a source of information and evidence that Ellroy's characters utilize in their attempts at either maintaining or attacking the status quo. Through these novels, Ellroy conveys the potential power archives wield over the trajectory of history and our understanding of it by demonstrating how the historical record is often shaped in favor of the powerful. Yet even if the archive is a manifestation of the power narratives that dominate society in any given time, it also holds the potential to reveal truths that disrupt that power.*

## **Introduction: Archives, Power, and Literature**

In his 2009 work on archives and social justice, Rand Jimerson captured the dominant strand of modern archival scholarship and theory by describing the historical intersection of recorded information, political power, and social memory. According to Jimerson, documents and archives have been used repeatedly to consolidate the power and authority of the state and other powerful groups in society: "Thus, the emphasis of records as agents of truth needs to be examined within a political context. The power conferred by knowledge makes records creation and preservation a significant locus for political influence in society. Archives thus need to be evaluated as centers of power" (129). Much of this power derives from the inherent nature of archives, which are constructed using surrogates of memory (in place of actual memory) that interpret the past to reflect certain perspectives (Jimerson 2009). Long before historians, pundits, and artists had a chance to craft the initial drafts of history, the archival record was being shaped to fit a set of values deemed important by powerful individuals and institutions.

---

© 2018 The Author(s). This is an open access article published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original author(s) and the publication source are credited.

The notion of power as it relates to memory, history, and the documentary record has been explored periodically in creative literary work, especially following the rise of large-scale totalitarianism in the twentieth century. European novelists like George Orwell and Milan Kundera blurred the lines between political reporting and fiction, using personal stories to demonstrate the conditions of a world in which power is gained or lost through control over written records and personal memory (Jimerson 2009). The ability of the state or other powerful interests to control the future is often predicated on its success at defining the past. Like most notable social commentators, Orwell and Kundera needed only to observe the world around them to see how the Nazi and Soviet regimes sought to align the historical record with their imperial missions. Similar critiques of American power have emerged in post-war American literature, particularly in genre fiction dealing with government conspiracies, military adventure, law and order procedurals, and political history. Many of these stories include the archive as a plot element and explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the importance of records and information as evidence and the ability of archives to illuminate hidden truths.<sup>1</sup>

This article discusses the archive as represented in James Ellroy's most fully realized fictional worlds: the L.A. Quartet (*The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential*, and *White Jazz*) and the Underworld USA Trilogy (*American Tabloid*, *The Cold Six Thousand*, and *Blood's A Rover*). In this series of consecutive novels, the archive plays an important role as a source of information and evidence that characters utilize in their attempts at either maintaining or attacking the status quo. The archive contains the darkest of secrets and the most vindictive of plans; everybody has something to hide and everybody can be gotten to. Throughout the series, the archive most often emerges as a wedge used by characters to compromise others, serving as a constant reminder that the past is irrevocable. But perhaps more consequentially, and like Orwell and Kundera before him, Ellroy's writing conveys the potential power archives wield over the trajectory of history and our understanding of it by demonstrating how the relationship between records and memory shapes the public consensus on specific events in the past, often favoring the powerful. The archive is a manifestation of the power narratives that dominate society in any given time, but it also holds the potential to reveal truths that disrupt that power.

### **The Physical and Intellectual Archive: Plot and Narrative in the L.A. Quartet**

The novels in the L.A. Quartet are works of historical fiction in the broad sense, but they incorporate elements of noir detective fiction, hard-boiled police procedurals, and pulpy sex-crime paperbacks. The densely layered story lines move from book to book, re-circulating the themes of official corruption, terrible family secrets, racial and class strife, and characters operating in a world of moral ambiguity. The main protagonists are invariably cops, lawyers, or private investigators interacting with heavy-handed departmental brass, ruthless attorneys, ambitious politicians, psychotic gangsters, career criminals, entertainment industry bottom feeders, and all other types who inhabit the unclear boundary between good and evil in mid-twentieth century Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> The bookends in the Quartet, *The Black Dahlia* and *White Jazz*, are written in the first-person voice, while the remaining works (and those in the Underworld USA Trilogy) are written in third-person omniscient, each installment typically following three main protagonists whose paths interweave.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with the L.A. Quartet, the archive or many archives are notable primarily as collections of records and documents with an identifiable provenance and location. Most often these are police file cabinets, evidence rooms, bank vault “dirt” stashes, and other ostensibly secure repositories. The records are utilized by the characters as an integral part of the action and storyline, and they exist in a way that is simultaneously graphical and intellectual. Documents are integrated into the narrative on the page as discrete records and records series, helping to expedite the plot by providing a textual account of actions, motivations, and facts in a particular format or genre such as news copy, memoranda, letters, recordings, transcripts, and journal entries.

These archives serve practical and personal ends for the characters. In *The Black Dahlia*, a fictionalized account of the infamous and unsolved 1947 murder of Elizabeth Short, Detective Dwight Bleichert encounters a sort of archival shrine that his partner has constructed to the victim in an obsessive search for justice:

I checked out room 204 at the El Nido Hotel, hoping for some kind of a message, some kind of a clue... The room was a typical Hollywood bachelor flop: Murphy bed, sink, tiny closet. But the walls were adorned with Betty Short portrait pictures, newspaper and magazine photos, horror glossies from 39<sup>th</sup> & Norton, dozens of them enlarged to magnify every gruesome detail. The bed was covered with cardboard boxes – an entire detective’s case file, with carbons of miscellaneous memos, tip lists, evidence indexes, field interrogation and questioning reports all cross-filed alphabetically... The bulk of the information was staggering, the manpower behind it more staggering, the fact that it was all over one silly girl the most staggering of all (Ellroy 1987, 180).

In the follow-up novel, *The Big Nowhere*, one of the main protagonists, LA County Sherriff’s Department Deputy Danny Upshaw, becomes obsessed with solving a brutal sex crime that eventually links him into a wider criminal conspiracy involving corrupt cops, gangster-run unions, and an anti-Communist crusade within the Hollywood studio system. Upshaw’s case is ultimately made by connecting the paper trail, but this comes with great difficulty:

There were six cabinets full of them: musty folders stuffed with occurrence reports, mugshots clipped to the first inner page. The filing was not alphabetical, and there was no logic to the penal code placements – homosexual occurrences were lumped with straight exhibitionism and child molestation; misdemeanants and felons brushed against each other. Danny scanned the first two files in the top cabinet and snapped why the system was so sloppy: the men on this squad wanted this wretched data out of sight and out of mind (Ellroy 1987, 183-184).

Sifting through vast amounts of records and information is one of the primary obstacles that Ellroy’s protagonists encounter. This is further complicated by the nature of records creation and recordkeeping, which are subject to the disparate prejudices, competencies, and motivations of many individuals and institutions. The following section from *The Big*

*Nowhere* illustrates this point:

Danny bolted out of his cubicle and back to the records alcove adjoining the squadroom. One battered cabinet held the division's Vice and sex offender files – West Hollywood crime reports, complaint reports, arrest reports and trouble call sheets dating back to the station's opening in 1937. Some of the folders were filed alphabetically under 'Arrestee'; some under 'Complainant'; some numerically by 'Address of Occurrence.' Some held mugshots, some didn't; gaps in the 'Arrestee' folders indicated that the arrested parties had bribed deputies into stealing reports that might prove embarrassing to them – and West Hollywood was only a small fraction of County territory. Danny spent an hour scanning 'Arrestee' reports... knowing it was a long shot to keep him busy... The slipshod paperwork – rife with misspellings, smudged carbons, and near illiterate recounting of sex crimes – had him to the point of screaming at LASD incompetence (Ellroy 1987, 75-76).

Records and archives also fulfill a voyeuristic aspect of investigative work and intelligence gathering, something that is revisited throughout the Quartet and the Trilogy. In *The Big Nowhere*, Lieutenant Mal Considine culls through backlogs of federal House Un-American Activities Committee files for information that he intends to use to pressure witnesses into testifying against fellow-traveler subversives: "The dirt in the files had him riled up like back in the Administrative Vice days, when he put surveillance on the girls before they took down a whorehouse – the more you knew about who they were the better chance you had to get them... after forty-eight hours of paper prowling, he felt like he had a pulse..." (Ellroy 1987, 84).

Characters and storylines originating in *The Black Dahlia* and *The Big Nowhere* continue through *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz* with various archives and stores of documents playing an integral role in breaking cases, understanding the motives behind heinous crimes, and settling personal vendettas between departmental rivals. In *L.A. Confidential*, Sergeant Edmund Exley prepares for his promotion to the Detectives Bureau using the evidence scrapbook from his celebrated father's glory case—a grisly series of child murders from twenty years earlier that works its way back into a current investigation:

Ed drove to his apartment, read, remembered. The scrapbook held clippings arranged in chronological order; what the newspapers didn't tell him he'd burned into his memory ... [Exley's father] keeps copies of the death photos; he shows them to his policemen sons – so that they will know the brutality of crimes that require absolute justice (Ellroy 1990, 47-48).

The notion of archives as a wedge against enemies turns up repeatedly throughout Ellroy's novels. In *L.A. Confidential*, Exley's chief departmental nemesis, Officer Bud White, maintains a file on a series of prostitute homicides that he intends to solve to ease his own conscience and as a balance against Exley's growing prestige. In another instance, Sergeant Jack Vincennes hoards photographic evidence from a pornography investigation that

connects to wider criminal conspiracies. Vincennes later becomes the victim of an extortion plot by a journalist with a stash of documentary evidence detailing the truth surrounding an “accidental” homicide from Vincennes’ past. At the book’s climax, Exley risks life and limb to uncover a cache of files that nullifies an opponent in the District Attorney’s office and eventually clears the way for his promotion to LAPD’s Chief of Detectives: “Ed laid a folder on his desk. ‘Sid Hudgens had a file on you. Contribution shakedowns, felony indictments you dismissed for money. He’s got the McPherson tank job documented, and Pierce Patchett had a photograph of you sucking a male prostitute’s dick. Resign from office or it all goes public’” (Ellroy 1990, 478).

The destruction and rebuilding of the archive is a recurring theme in Ellroy’s novels. This is first introduced in *The Big Nowhere*, when Sergeant Buzz Meeks undertakes a personal kamikaze mission to irrevocably alter the historical record:

A flick of the overhead light: the living room jarring white – walls, tables, cartons, shelves, and odd mounds of paper ... a once in a lifetime shot at the political moon. Graphs and charts and thousands of pages of coerced testimony. Boxes of photographs with linked faces to prove treason. A big fuckload of lies glued together to prove a single theory that was easy to believe because believing was easier than wading through the glut of horseshit to say, “Wrong.” Buzz doused the walls and shelves and tables and stacks of paper with gasoline. He soaked the... photos. He ripped down graphs, emptied the cans on the floor and made a gas trail out to the porch. He lit a match, dropped it and watched the white whoosh into red and explode (Ellroy 1988, 405-406).

In *White Jazz*, Lieutenant Dave Klein is an irredeemably corrupt cop who must manipulate the documentary record to placate his criminal and police overlords, and to keep from being implicated in a federal probe into organized crime in South Los Angeles. Klein is assigned to investigate a burglary in return for his superior officer (Exley) destroying a coroner’s file with evidence tagging Klein for murder. He decides to find a fall-guy for the burglary and pores over his options of frameable candidates from the Administrative Vice department’s “pervert file.” Klein later sets fire to a cache of files in a bank-deposit box to destroy homicide evidence against his love interest and to curry favor with certain members of the LAPD brass whom the files also implicate in widespread criminal malfeasance. Just as the noose is tightening around Klein’s neck, he escapes to Mexico but only after chronicling the extent of his crimes and various sins of the LAPD, then forwarding this evidence to the press. However, the information is quashed by forces within the Los Angeles political power structure and the book’s epilogue details how the central players in the web of criminal conspiracies in the Quartet managed to avoid justice and flourish in spite of their misdeeds.

*L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz* convolute and eventually resolve the overarching plotlines from the previous novels, but they also represent a stylistic evolution. *L.A. Confidential* finds Ellroy utilizing larger sections of the text to tell the story through non-protagonist perspectives, mostly through the presentation of official police reports and news copy. These sections give the reader multiple viewpoints and conflicting accounts on events as time passes. They also break up the narrative to offer an official or public version that the characters more fully explain or contradict when the narrative resumes. The use of archives

and records as plot and narrative is common to other popular genres, especially police procedurals and other variations of the mystery story. The use of archives and records as part of the textual presentation also has many literary precedents, particularly in the tradition of polylogic epistolary novels. However, Ellroy's use of this type of narrative more resembles the work of John Dos Passos in the U.S.A. Trilogy (*The 42<sup>nd</sup> Parallel*, *Nineteen Nineteen*, and *The Big Money*), a similar multi-volume work of historical fiction communicated in part through multiple documentary formats. But where Dos Passos used records and documents to give the narrative a more official feel and place it within historical context, Ellroy's intent seems quite different. According to Jonathan Walker (2002), "The result of placing Ellroy's novels next to 'official' documentation is a screech of feedback. He works in the spaces between the facts to undermine, contradict, deface, and rewrite the official version. His model for historical truth is not the academic essay but the scandal-sheet magazines that figure prominently in all his novels" (183).

Indeed, Ellroy's fascination with the Hollywood gossip and scandal magazines of 1940s and 1950s, and the kind of scurrilous "dirt" these scandal magazines accumulated, inspires his use of document inserts and record aggregations. In a 2009 interview, Ellroy told *The Paris Review*: "I loved *Confidential*. Along with the Lutheran Church it's probably the biggest cultural influence of my life. Who's a homo? Who's a nympho? Who's got a big one? Who's got a small one? Who fucks people of color? Who's getting head at the Griffith Park john? That shit was important to me then, and it's important to me now" (Rich 2009, 67). However, Ellroy's interests are not entirely prurient: "Sometimes I need to get outside of the perspectives of the characters in order to convey information that they don't know, and offer occasional editorial comments and historical facts in a compressed, direct way. That's where the document inserts come in. It's also a great excuse for me to write copy for Hollywood gossip rags" (Rich 2009, 66-67).

It is during *L.A. Confidential* that *Hush-Hush* magazine, a fictionalized rival of *Confidential* magazine, becomes a prominent part of the narrative and sets the stage for more extensive use of document inserts. Stylistically this is important because the interspersed records offer such a sharp formal contrast to the often telegraphic and tersely-worded text. In a way, the documents are simultaneously augmenting and competing with the rest of the narrative; this becomes more graphically apparent in *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*. As the *L.A. Quartet* concludes, the archive takes on another dimension: it shifts from being primarily a plot element (something the characters encounter and utilize) to a more significant part of the text and narrative that is constructed by the characters and interacted with by the reader. As the *Underworld USA Trilogy* begins, the records and documents that show up are no longer compiled by an unknown omniscient entity that is not a part of the story. At this point they become extensions of the protagonists' and supporting characters' deliberate actions to gather and manipulate information.

### **Truth, Memory, and the Documentary Record in the Underworld USA Trilogy**

At the outset of the Trilogy, Ellroy moves beyond conventional literary genres and is writing something closer to fictionalized social history. The books' subject matter expands geographically and topically, moving beyond the confines of Los Angeles' criminal underworld to various locations controlled by the Chicago-based Outfit—a nationwide organized crime syndicate with key members in New Orleans, Tampa, Miami, Dallas, Los

Angeles, and Las Vegas, and growing business interests in the Caribbean. It also expands beyond the purview of local law enforcement concerns to various players in national defense, domestic and foreign intelligence, and the political networks that determine public policy through covert actions. If the L.A. Quartet amounts to a series of crime stories depicting the raw moments of a socially repressive time and place, the Trilogy takes this to the macro level, framing personal stories of corruption and redemption within the big explosive events between the years 1959 and 1972.<sup>4</sup>

With *American Tabloid*, Ellroy keeps the three-protagonist formula and re-circulates the themes of personal secrets, official corruption, and political malfeasance, but on a much grander scale that sets the tone for the remainder of the Trilogy. *American Tabloid* offers an account of the John F. Kennedy assassination from the perspective of the men carrying out the scut work on behalf of powerful criminal and political forces. Though he keeps many elements of the police procedural, Ellroy is no longer solely dealing with the base motivations of cops and criminals or questions of personal morality in pursuit of justice and order. Rather he attempts to address the larger historical forces that have shaped the modern American character. Consider this excerpt from the prologue:

Mass market nostalgia gets you hopped up for a past that never existed. Hagiography sanctifies shuck-and-jive politicians and reinvents their expedient gestures as moments of great moral weight. Our continuing narrative line is blurred past truth and hindsight. Only a reckless verisimilitude can set that line straight... It's time to demythologize an era and build a new myth from the gutter to the stars. It's time to embrace bad men and the price they paid to secretly define their time. Here's to them (Ellroy 1995, prologue).

In a 1997 interview, Ellroy summarized his ideal protagonists: "What interests me are the toadies of the system" (Duncan 1997, 246). In the Underworld USA Trilogy, powerful elites drive history forward from behind the scenes, working through a network of goons, hatchet-men, cutouts, fixers, and other street-level surrogates. Ellroy demonstrates that sustaining this elite sphere often means simply maintaining the social and political status quo, so as not to upset the compartmentalized existence between regular citizens and those in "The Life." According to Tim Ryan, in Ellroy's books, "it is civilization as we know it that is rendered marginal and insignificant ... Ellroy's underworld is an elite sphere to which one must gain access... To be part of the criminal and political underworld is to be part of the only civilization that matters" (Ryan 2004, 277). Being in "The Life," particularly as a toady, involves many unsavory tactics including shakedowns, beatings, bribes, intimidation, and murder, but it also requires a willingness to influence history in more subtle ways. Controlling history means controlling and manipulating the documentary record, not only as an *ad hoc* necessity of business, but also to maintain those separate and secure compartments over time.

For instance, in *American Tabloid*, reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes purchases *Hush-Hush* magazine to disseminate propaganda reflective of his ultra-conservative political views and obsession with celebrity gossip. He sends his pet goon, Pete Bondurant, to fire the editor and obtain his information files, which leads to a severe beating for the editor and the discovery of secret documentation that proves illegal financial collusion between Hughes

and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon—just as the 1960 presidential race is getting into full swing. As in previous instances, the information and evidence found in this archive serves as an effective wedge for Bondurant to assert his usefulness to those who outrank him in “The Life.” But it also provides a distinct thrill for Bondurant, who quickly recognizes the larger implications of his find:

The files were Sol’s revenge against HUAC. It was some kind of fucked-up penance: Sol wrote right-wing-slanted smears and stashed this shit for payback. File #3 packed more photos: of canceled checks, deposit slips, and a bank note. Pete shoved his food aside—*this* was smear bait supreme... Pete rechecked the evidence pix. The verification was solid—straight down the line. His food was cold. He’d sweated his shirt starched to wilted. Insider knowledge was a big fucking blast (Ellroy 1995, 43).

*The Cold Six Thousand* begins in the immediate aftermath of the JFK assassination with mob lawyer and agent provocateur, Ward Littell, on the scene at the Dallas Police Department to make sure that the frenzied response to the shooting results in a slipshod investigation. Littell’s position in “The Life” puts him at the nexus of all parties complicit in the assassination, but eventually his attempt to control the fallout and balance his increasingly complex entanglements leads to a complete turnaround in his motivations. Littell’s conversion is accompanied by constant efforts to buttress his lies and actions with documentary sabotage, forgery, and obfuscation. This intensive approach to documentation is typical of Ellroy’s protagonists. The paper trails that they follow to solve crimes and get an upper hand on opponents is mostly made up of the everyday byproducts of human activity, or at least they begin that way. These evidentiary aggregations accurately reflect the nature of archives and how they function in the real world, with all of the attendant characteristics and problems like overwhelming bulk, deterioration, poor organization, and incompleteness. But also in real life, archives and records are constructed by humans and thus only bound by the moral and legal constraints that society and those with custody place upon themselves at any given time. In recent decades, archival disciplinary thought has largely rejected the notion that records are inherently neutral and inert, that custodianship is passive. The archive portrayed in Ellroy’s novels supports the idea that records creation and accumulation is the result of deliberate efforts to influence policy, history, and memory, though in much more nefarious ways than people typically encounter in real life.

Just like his characters, Ellroy is purposeful in using archives to help develop new myths and create a “reckless verisimilitude”—the characters to get away with often unspeakable crimes and Ellroy to better understand the era he writes about in the Trilogy. Ellroy deliberately distorts the past in pursuit of a higher but repressed truth that exposes certain events and people for what they really are (Walker 2002). In the case of the Trilogy, he seeks to expose the less virtuous motivations of the powerful, which, though exaggerated in his fiction, are undeniably part of this country’s history. Walker (2002) contends that Ellroy also wants to demonstrate, “that history is fundamentally contingent: simultaneously conditioned by the actions of individuals and outside of their control” (184). The growing prevalence of the archive in the Trilogy serves to elevate these claims of a manufactured and often hidden truth. The archive that develops becomes an essential expository channel



with the document inserts throughout the series accounting for 15-20% of the total textual presentation in each of the entries.<sup>5</sup> The records speak for themselves and their creators, while remaining a significant part of the plot—something to which the characters are inextricably tied. As Walker asserts, “Ellroy sees reality as composed of texts as well as people and events: advertising signs, newspaper headlines, television screens, police radio signals, bebop jazz rhythms... Ellroy sees the distinction between text and context as a false one” (Walker 2002, 188-9).

Ellroy’s juxtaposition of various kinds of media invests the archive’s content with a tremendous amount of authenticity and makes his version of “history” more plausible. Walker notes that in Ellroy’s books, “The story of the crime and the story of the investigation are connected. You only reach the truth through the distortions of memory and lies. There is no objective truth that does not include subjective distortion and vice versa” (191). The characters assume that the documents and records amount to irrefutable evidence of bad behavior or actions (often of deviant sexuality, criminality, or political malfeasance) and that these are confirmed simply by the existence of those materials. After all, why would anyone bother to record and keep this information if it were not true or at least believable? But just like the plot-related archives, the records in the textual presentation do not always tell the whole story and often only hint at the workings of the characters at a particular point in the story. In all instances, the truth value of the records as information and evidence is never really under question. Even though the document inserts and the archives the characters encounter are a result of human artifice, this does not necessarily make them subjective entities. Walker argues that, “Within the world of the novels, there is always a definite (and obsessively-detailed) truth... Ultimately, even though the historical record is what misleads you in reality, within the novel the possibility of truth is still associated with documentary proof” (184).

In fiction and in real life, the truth value of the archive rests in the eye of the beholder. In Ellroy’s books, the plot-based archives and document inserts exist equally for the protagonists and the reader, helping to reveal inner motivations and external developments at appropriate times throughout the story. What makes Ellroy’s use of the archive most effective to the reader is that he does not ascribe full meaning to the documents and archives within the context of the story. In many instances, the archival material brings up as many questions as it answers and requires further confirmation or interpretation by the characters. This narrative collaboration allows an exploration of the relationship between memory and truth, as well as that between fiction and history. According to Walker, in Ellroy’s books memory is often compared to “a tape, photograph, or film and subjective reveries are intercut with records that are messed-up, incomplete, deliberately mutilated, or encoded, requiring the reader to reconcile their own recollections and understanding of the historical events he depicts” (190). Ellroy’s novels remind us that sometimes “tidied up narratives have the sanitized gloss of the newspaper puff pieces that he juxtaposes with the real ‘secret shit.’ Underneath the surface of our narratives, suppressed possibilities seethe. Ellroy attempts to liberate them through invention” (190-191). Ellroy’s approach to history disavows facts that are unknowable and memories that are unreliable in favor of a good story that is plausible on a metaphysical and mythical level.

### Archives, Power, and the Changing Metanarrative in *Blood's A Rover*

*American Tabloid* introduces two major aggregations of records and information that become essential to the Trilogy: the Teamster's Central States Pension Fund Books and the extensive surveillance file of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, both of which are secret and only really accessible to those of a certain rank within "The Life." However, these aggregations function very differently in the series. The reader does not encounter the content of the Fund Books on the page as discrete records, but the Books—and what they represent to the characters—drive the plot forward by providing the key to the various criminal and political conspiracies unfolding in the series. More than a MacGuffin, the Fund Books are consequential because they prove fatal to the characters who attempt to control them—not because of the information the Books contain, but because of the raised stakes in the "The Life" that access to the Books confers. Hoover's file, by contrast, is presented on the page as assorted documents spread throughout the narrative prose, which amounts to an excerpted paper trail drawn from a larger archival corpus ostensibly in Hoover's possession. As in the *Quartet*, the information contained within these and other archival aggregations is used to manipulate, coerce, and threaten to achieve specific ends. However, the scale reached in the Trilogy goes well beyond personal or professional vendettas and illuminates the role of information and documentation in helping to facilitate a sea change in American society.

The events covered in the Trilogy represent the "last grasp of pre-public accountability in America where the anti-Communist agenda... justified everything" (Woods 2009, 60). This includes the copious gathering of records and intelligence by the government and other powerful entities on American political subversives and other real or perceived enemies of the status quo, a historical reality that becomes the driving force behind the archive in the Trilogy. In *American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand* the cumulative textual archive, composed of multi-format document inserts, suggests that a powerful outside party is authoring events to some degree. The archive that builds shows how Ellroy's characters are culpable in maintaining this elite sphere through both their reactionary, self-serving behavior and a genuine belief in what they and their masters considered to be the natural order of things. These characters operate in the shadowy back channels of public policy via the institutions established to maintain that power, and Hoover proves to be the primary personage behind it all. The archive that Hoover maintains represents the documentary record of the predominant metanarratives driving society during this turbulent era, namely white male supremacy and Cold War political orthodoxy.<sup>6</sup> These dual metanarratives are embodied in the official nature of the documentation. Though the methods and activities documented are clandestine, the labeling and implicit statutory endorsement demonstrates the functioning of a bureaucratic structure that seeks to sustain itself and maintain order at any cost. That these documents are evidence of malfeasance seems to be of little concern, which is often the hallmark of repressive governments that consider themselves infallible. History has shown that managing repression requires the pen and the typewriter as much as the sword and the gun.

The final installation of the Trilogy, *Blood's A Rover*, signals the breaking down of these metanarratives, reflected in the social upheaval that helped erode the consensus on white male supremacy and American political and military hegemony—in addition to other changes prompted or solidified by opposition to the Vietnam War. This breaking apart is also reflected in the document-based archive presented on the page, which shifts from reflecting

the products of a repressive surveillance state to one that exposes the private misdeeds behind the crumbling public facade of a corrupt, powerful elite. Human intention and artifice continues to be the main determining factor in the historical record, but in *Blood's A Rover*, the document-based narrative grows more expansive and inclusive of other contributors who operate in opposition to the prevailing power narratives. According to Ellroy:

I wanted to dramatize the seismic shifts that took place during the sixties and seventies. I wanted to show the effects of ideological transformation... This novel displays my greatest diversity of characterization. Karen Sifakis is a mother and a revolutionary. Marshall Bowen is a homosexual black man who goes undercover for the FBI. These characters think about their actions and what they mean. They're not afraid to write down their thoughts. There are a lot of diary entries and correspondence that give us different perspectives on American history between 1968 and 1972. It's all about conveying the complex ideological nature of the era (Rich 2009, 66).

It is clear from the outset of *Blood's A Rover* that Ellroy intends to deliver on this revolutionary arc and he does so by introducing the story with this bit of metafiction:

I followed people. I bugged and tapped and caught big events in ellipses. I remained unknown. My surveillance links the Then to the Now in a never-before-revealed manner. I was there. My reportage is buttressed by credible hearsay and insider tattle. Massive paper trails provide verification. This book derives from stolen public files and usurped private journals. It is the sum of personal adventure and forty years of scholarship. I am a literary executor and an agent provocateur. I did what I did and saw what I saw and learned my way through to the rest of the story. Scripture-pure veracity and scandal-rag content. That conjunction gives it its sizzle. You carry the seed of belief within you already. You recall the time this narrative captures and sense conspiracy. I am here to tell you that it is all true and not at all what you think (Ellroy 2009, 9).

Where the preface of *American Tabloid* finds Ellroy setting up the series and discussing his own motivation for telling the stories of bad men who secretly defined their time, this represents a direct challenge to the audience from a fictional character. He is daring us not to believe it, but tacitly admits it might be unbelievable. *White Jazz* has a somewhat similar preface, but it reads like the first-person recollections of the protagonist, which aligns with the format of the story. It is difficult to guess why Ellroy chose to make this intertextual reference for *Blood's A Rover*, but the message itself seems to place a very high value on historical documentation and the emphasis on archives and records never abates throughout the story.

The character providing the introduction is Don Crutchfield, an unlikely hero and ideal Ellroy protagonist: a toady of the lowest level who gets in way over his head but survives through a mix of luck and brutal determination. In many ways Crutchfield is the consummate

Ellroy character and seems the closest to a thinly-veiled version of Ellroy himself. In his memoir and other biographical pieces, Ellroy has laboriously detailed his own misadventures with petty crime, substance abuse, and general lowlife behavior in the decades after his mother's murder, before he became a successful writer. Crutchfield shares many of these qualities, including an ongoing mother fixation and voyeuristic pursuits that are legally questionable. However, these have also seasoned Crutchfield to be a prolific documentarian, which proves fortuitous when his career as a law enforcement hanger-on brings him into contact with the world-changing clandestine plots and conspiracies of the previous books in the Trilogy. Crutchfield shifts between observer, participant, and recorder of history as it unfolds, and his ability to stay just below the radar of the most powerful players is the main reason he lives to tell the story.

Crutchfield also embodies the ideological shift that Ellroy sought to portray, going from a low-level stooge with authoritarian sympathies to full-on revolutionary. It is fitting that Crutchfield's political conversion comes full circle with an act of archival destruction while encountering the primary embodiment of power in the Trilogy, longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and his massive surveillance file:

It was his file space and Wayne's file space and Reggie's lab gone mammoth. The basement ran the length and breadth of the house. The ceiling was raised for more paper. The shelves topped Mount Matterhorn and almost scraped clouds... He had forty-four paper bombs, mesh-netted and screw-topped. He uncinched the duffel bag and placed them shelf by shelf... He put on his gas mask. He ran through the basement. He popped all forty-four screw tops. The fumes went up. Colored clouds rose. The walls contained them. Paper singed, curdled, crackled and charred. Little explosions went off. The file shelves rattled. Paint peeled off the walls. The fumes turned re-colored: dark/light, dark/light. Paper flecks vaporized in thin air... Mr. Hoover weaved and drooled. Mr. Hoover clutched his chest and staggered upstairs (Ellroy 2009, 633-634).

Though already old and infirm by the time of Crutchfield's intrusion, this final act of sabotage shows just how tightly bound Hoover's power was to his ability to control others through information and documentation. It is as if his life force drains as his archive disintegrates. In the final passage Crutchfield makes a claim to the archive, to the historical narrative that he helped write, and to truth that remains forever fixed in the jumble of memory and evidence of the initiated, but elusive to everyone else. It serves as a self-referential bookend to the introduction and as a coda to the stylistic and creative lineage began several books earlier:

The photograph has been preserved. History stopped at that moment thirty-seven years ago. History reconvened with the first batch of paper. Documents have arrived at irregular intervals. They are always anonymously sent. I have compiled diary excerpts, oral-history transcripts and police-file overflow. Elderly leftists and black militants have told me their stories and provided verification. Freedom of

Information Act subpoenas have served me well... I found the journals of Marshall Bowen and Reginald Hazzard. I found Scotty Bennett's notebooks. The Richard M. Nixon Library provided perfunctory support. The J. Edgar Hoover library was resistant. Hoover spokesmen have consistently denied the charred files in his basement and refuse to link the event to Hoover's death... My own memory rages in sync with everything I have described. I have not forgotten a moment of it. Forty thousand new file pages buttress my recall. I burned all of my original paper. I built paper all over again, so that I might tell you this story (Ellroy 2009, 639).

### **Conclusion: A Reckless Verisimilitude of Our Choosing**

On October 26, 2017, the United States federal government was set to release all previously undisclosed documents relating to the Kennedy assassination. In many ways, it seemed to present a moment of apotheosis for a country that has grown exponentially conspiracy-minded in the decades since—a reckoning of the historical record with a unique strain of American paranoia. Would this evidence that was kept hidden for so long finally reveal the truth about what happened? What web of conspirators might be exposed for this crime? Would this lead to any justice for those responsible, however delayed? That there was a conspiracy of some kind behind the assassination is an opinion shared by a majority of contemporary Americans, regardless of political background, which demonstrates just how amenable we are to the kinds of mythologizing Ellroy and others turn into popular art (Swift 2013). After all, the records are being released as a result of legislation passed in the wake of Oliver Stone's 1991 film, *JFK*, which itself is based on one of the more outlandish conspiracy theories of the assassination. It seems disconcertingly fitting that the final authorization for the release of the documents rests with a conspiracy-theory-loving former “reality” television star, a man who routinely approaches established facts—about himself, about this country—with selective incredulity.<sup>7</sup>

America's current post-truth era, with its alternative facts, fake news, and information bubbles, is perhaps the most analogous embodiment of the reckless verisimilitude that Ellroy offers in his fiction. Truth is less about the evidence you bring to bear than the feeling of righteousness you get from whatever truth you have chosen. An endless news cycle and pervasive access to media delivery systems help ensure that almost anyone can have a voice and find a sympathetic audience for their version of the truth, all the better if it contradicts the truths proffered by nebulous establishment elites. In this environment ironies abound: we are a nation increasingly mistrustful of institutions that we believe are guilty of infringing on our rights as private citizens, yet we often have no problem sharing our most personal details with complete strangers across globalized communication networks. Driven by the demand for extreme transparency, information and documentation are available on all manner of topics at an unprecedented level, yet evidence that contradicts or disproves our own confirmation biases is expressly avoided and becomes part of the conspiracy against our inviolable beliefs. Unlike Ellroy's goal of uncovering truths about power through the distortion of memory and the strategic deployment of documentation, we increasingly embrace only those “truths” that are unfalsifiable or that we are unwilling to subject to logical scrutiny.

Much has been written about post-consensus America and how the democratization of ideas and information can serve as a bulwark against any one set of values or beliefs becoming dominant and oppressive towards others. It is hard to believe that anyone would want to go back to the binary certitude of the Cold War era, but in lieu of a more ordered system we are forced to deal with the resulting chaos and point-scoring that ensues. It is difficult to say what the current state of incredulous relativism means for historical documentation and how we understand our history moving forward: why bother to adopt or uphold rigorous standards of archival custodianship, access, and preservation if the information and evidence these collections provide is meaningless to those most in need of convincing? If objectivity is constantly edged out by tribal self-righteousness, what good are the lessons that history holds? Since most of us likely will never have the surety of fictional insiders like Don Crutchfield, or similar opportunities to repeatedly fix the historical record, it is up the custodians of those records to help ensure that, even if everything is subject to reflexive skepticism, the archive remains the best resource we have in figuring out what is true and what is not.

Historical fiction like James Ellroy's offers a way forward to a greater understanding of truth and power—not in the suspension of disbelief to further blur the line between real and imaginary, but in fiction's ability to tell a compelling story. In the last year or so the biggest and most consequential stories to American power and the quality of our citizenship have been archives and records stories—Russian interference in the 2016 election, the DNC email hacks, the Paradise Papers, and countless other revelations that hold direct implications for leadership, public policy, and popular opinion. Clearly, archives and records have a story to tell through what they reveal at face value, but also through their inevitable interpretation by pundits, politicians, artists, and others seeking to insert their version of events into the conversation. In this context, archivists, curators, historians, and other custodians of the historical record have no need to try to make archives sexy or insist they be something they are not: the drama is inherent, the struggle over what might eventually become the historical consensus is palpable, and the relationship of archives and records to power grows immutable as time progresses.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Jimerson specifically mentions a book by Martha Cooley (*The Archivist: A Novel*) but many other examples exist from novelists writing for both popular and literary audiences (A. S. Byatt, Stephen King, Alice Walker, C. D. Payne, to name a few).
- 2 For a more extensive look at Ellroy's work (particularly his pre-Quartet and Trilogy novels) see Peter Wolfe's *Like Hot Knives to the Brain: James Ellroy's Search for Himself* (2006).
- 3 Ellroy's third person omniscient novels (excluding *The Black Dahlia* and *White Jazz*) roughly follow an A-B-C format with three protagonists that have become archetypes in Ellroy's fiction (The Player, The Heavy, and The Underdog). Each chapter centers on one protagonist, followed by the next, followed by the last. This sequence repeats throughout the books with some deviation when a particular protagonist is removed from the story (usually because they were killed), which results in an A-B or B-C format. The narrative in *Blood's A Rover* is notable in that two of the protagonists perish before the story concludes and their perspectives are replaced by two other characters who previously had supporting roles.
- 4 Namely the Castro revolution in Cuba, the election and assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights Movement and counter-movement, the Red Scare and the Vietnam War, the race riots and rise of Black militancy, the rise and fall of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the FBI's ongoing counterintelligence programs against political subversives.
- 5 In an admittedly unscientific assessment, I looked at the number of pages devoted to the archive (mostly extra-narrative document inserts) in each entry from the Underworld U.S.A. Trilogy. The percentages (archive text pages divided by total text pages) for each book worked out thusly: *American Tabloid* 15%, *The Cold Six Thousand* 20%, and *Blood's A Rover* 18%. Again, very unscientific, but even a rudimentary analysis of the text shows that records and documents have an important place in this series of novels.
- 6 Metanarrative definitions: Metanarrative or grand narrative or master narrative is a term developed by Jean-François Lyotard to mean a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values (*New World Dictionary*); Any narrative which is concerned with the idea of storytelling, *spec.* one which alludes to other narratives, or refers to itself and to its own artifice. Also: a piece of narrative, esp. a classic text or other archetypal story, which provides a schematic world view upon which an individual's experiences and perceptions may be ordered (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*).
- 7 In a development seemingly tailor-made for the conspiracy theory set, the October 2017 release excluded some of the more sensitive documents and the disposition of their release will not be known until Spring of 2018 at the earliest.
- 8 Andersen's recent book helped form the basis for some of the ideas in the conclusion of this article and is an excellent resource for understanding a uniquely American strain of skepticism toward facts and evidence.

## Bibliography

- Andersen, Kurt. 2017. *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History*. New York: Random House.
- Duncan, Paul, ed. 1997. *The Third Degree: Crime Writers in Conversation*. Harpenden, Hertfordshire, UK: No Exit.
- Ellroy, James. 1995. *American Tabloid*. New York: Knopf.
- . 1988. *The Big Nowhere*. New York: Mysterious Press.
- . 1988. *The Black Dahlia*. New York: Mysterious Press.
- . 2009. *Blood's A Rover*. New York: Knopf.
- . 2001. *The Cold Six-Thousand*. New York: Knopf.
- . 1990. *L.A. Confidential*. New York: Mysterious Press.
- . 1992. *White Jazz*. New York: Knopf.
- Jimerson, Rand. 2009. *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists.
- Pepper, Andrew. 2000. *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Rich, Nathan. 2009. "James Ellroy: The Art of Fiction No. 201." *Paris Review* 190: 37-69.
- Ryan, Tim. 2004. "'One Shiny Bleach Job': The Power of Whiteness in James Ellroy's *American Tabloid*." *Journal of American Culture* 27.3: 271-79.
- Swift, Art. 2013. "Majority in U.S. Still Believe JFK Killed in a Conspiracy." *GALLUP News*, November 15. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/165893/majority-believe-jfk-killed-conspiracy.aspx>.
- Walker, Jonathan. 2002. "James Ellroy as Historical Novelist." *History Workshop Journal* 53: 181-204.
- Wolfe, Peter. 2006. *Like Hot Knives to the Brain: James Ellroy's Search for Himself*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Woods, Sean. 2009. "James Ellroy's American Apocalypse." *Rolling Stone*, October 6, 60-63.



Bradley J. Wiles is a librarian and archivist based in the Quad Cities of Iowa and Illinois, and a library faculty member at American Public University System. He holds BA and MA degrees in history from Western Illinois University and a MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research interests include archives and records administration, digital humanities, historic preservation, and the development of local history resources. He is also the founder and chair of the Quad Cities Area History Network, a non-profit organization that supports organizational and individual efforts to preserve, promote, and increase accessibility to historical collections and resources in the greater Quad Cities area. Contact: [bwiles@apus.edu](mailto:bwiles@apus.edu).

## Cruising the Library

Kathryn McClain and Jennifer Murray

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Melissa Adler. *Cruising the Library: Perversities in the Organization of Knowledge*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017 (248). ISBN: 978-0-8232-7636-3. \$28.00

Melissa Adler's *Cruising the Library: Perversities in the Organization of Knowledge* engages and critiques the systems of organization in the library classification system using a critical lexicon that intentionally disrupts expectations. Adler sets the tone from the very beginning with the use of the term "cruising" in the title: "The notion of cruising embraces promiscuous and perverse readings. The shelves are the streets, and when browsing or cruising the library, the classification roughly serves as a map to guide our desires" (xii). Adler encourages "perverse readings," by which she means readings that do not fit within the power structure of the library. However, she is careful to note that perverse texts bring potential risks because they still must exist within the library's power system: "To be perverse is to be vulnerable because being illegible and outside the law is to be at risk of being coerced into a category with a name and its rules or to suffer the painful consequences of failing or renouncing the law" (5). Adler details the complicated and often incongruous ways that texts and readers must submit to existing power structures within the Library of Congress classification system and within libraries themselves. As she walks us through various categories of texts and classifications, Adler reminds us that readers enter libraries to find pleasure in books and wittingly or unwittingly submit to the laws of classification and "terms of use" of the system of power. She describes the experience for many as "simultaneously thrilling, intimidating, and fearsome" when "[submitting] to the library's disciplinary techniques"; but she notes that "[t]he threats of punishment and shame are real. And the shelves, with their separation of subjects from one another and the placement of sexualized and racialized subjects in the margins, reflect one's alienation" (177).

As previously discussed, Adler first calls for "perverse readings" and for cruising the library in the book's introduction. Her first chapter discusses the naming of subjects in

the library, and it pays particular attention to the medicalizing of subject headings and the pathologizing of disciplines and sexualities. Her primary example is the subject heading “paraphilias,” a psychiatric term that had replaced “sexual deviation” in most catalog entries without human review; such a change erases materials for library users outside of the medical sciences and misrepresents historical concepts of perversion and deviation (28-30). Chapter two uses the Library of Congress’s infamous Delta Collection as an example of protecting texts for the public while also restricting texts from the public. This collection exemplifies the library’s role as a servant to government officials (67). Chapter three does a close reading of the library shelves and the physical act of cruising library spaces, and Adler uses specific examples at the University of Kentucky’s William T. Young Library to demonstrate how shelving influences user interaction with library books (108-10). Chapter four examines libraries as tools for nation-building: places that organize and create “sub-categories” to mask racial, sexual, and gender difference. In considering the possibility of a universal collection, Adler also suggests that the idea of a universal classification system is rooted in fantasy and would actually further contribute to institutionalized racism and heteronormativity (140). Chapter five engages libraries in digital spaces as part of a neoliberal apparatus; she calls for the categories to “keep moving” and “always be open to possibilities for unmasking and remaking - not to keep adding to existing structures but to undo them and start again” (163). Finally, Adler’s epilogue considers the “masochistic user,” as referenced previously in this review.

Adler’s text has a strong argument because it considers the history of the library in the United States. The analysis on the Library of Congress’s catalog and its international influence during the Cold War is especially telling as the book recognizes the work to enhance democracies in opposition to communism and to spread American culture in order to win against the Soviet Union (139). Such a reading sets up a strong connection to the library’s continued use by Congress today by senators on the issue of immigration (11). However, our one critique for the text deals with the contemporary library, particularly in relation to the Internet and online search terms. While Adler does acknowledge that the Internet is “another battleground for claim to territory and authority” concerning classification, she then moves away from digital spaces and accepts them “with great reserve” (170). Since this text seeks to engage with past and present concerns for library classification, a stronger analysis on digital influences, particularly in relation to the Internet search engines that are competing with library classifications, would have been a welcomed addition.

Adler has written on all manner of topics connected with Library Information Systems, most notably the intersections of Disability, Race, Gender, and Queerness with the library classification systems. She is currently an Assistant Professor teaching Research Methods & Statistics in the Master of Library and Information Science program at University of Western Ontario. We look forward to her next project which continues a line of inquiry into the organization of knowledge, examining the creators of systems from the Enlightenment era to the present, and is tentatively called “Organizing Knowledge to Save the World.” As a feminist critique of the library’s systems, it looks to be an important next step in her research and a worthwhile follow-up to *Cruising the Library*.

Kathryn McClain is a PhD student at the University of Kentucky. Her research interests include late 19th and early 20th century American literature, narrative theory, adaptation studies, and masculinity studies. Contact: [k.j.mcclain@uky.edu](mailto:k.j.mcclain@uky.edu).

Jennifer Murray is a PhD student at the University of Kentucky. Her research interests include multicultural American literature, Holocaust literature, trauma theory, gender studies, and disability studies. Contact: [jenn.murray@uky.edu](mailto:jenn.murray@uky.edu).