

READING MEDIATED IDENTITIES:
Auto/biographical Agency in the Material Book, Museum Space, Social Media Platforms, and Archives

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the invisible or often ignored mediations operating on life narratives to reveal the ever-changing strategies authors, artists, and even corporate social media platforms adopt to shape, control, or resist the auto/biographical in these texts. Adopting Sarah Kember's and Joanna Zylińska's focus on the flow of mediation and following their suggestion to "cut" the flow in order to understand our selves within it, I concentrate on mediations operating in several spaces where we find auto/biographical texts: the material book, the museum gallery and its associated online counterparts, social media platforms, and archives. Texts include art works by Karen Hampton and Kara Walker; Dana Walrath's *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass*; April Drexel's installation *Kūpa'a*; Shapira Shahak's website *Yolocaust*; and Sydney Iaukea's *The Queen and I: A Story of Dispossession and Reconnections in Hawai'i*. In the process, I address a number of questions. As a text moves through different media or spreads through social networks, what agents act upon it? What do the text, the creator, and the audience gain, and what do they lose? How do constantly evolving technologies shape or stymie the auto/biographical "I"? As many of these texts testify to lives in specific times and places, how do the mediations affect larger issues of social and collective memory? Studying these mediations should therefore be a fundamental part of any reading of how we construct our identities and tell the stories of our lives.

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Introduction: A Tale of Two Selfie Books

I have two books before me, Kim Kardashian West's *Selfish* and Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections*—both commercially published books of continuous self-portraiture. I pick up the earliest, the thickest one, and turn the glossy pages. On each page, I find images of primping and preening for the subject's hand-held camera, sometimes in multiple sets, with barely discernible differences between facial expressions and poses. Limited textual glosses appear only sporadically throughout the book, and concentrate on the woman's make-up and hair, or recount what happened just before or just after the shot—undoubtedly the more memorable and interesting autobiographical morsels.

I pick up the other book. Though larger in size, it comes nowhere near the 445 pages of the first book. On each page, I find images of primping and preening for the subject's hand-held camera, sometimes in multiple sets, with barely discernible differences between facial expressions and poses. Limited textual glosses appear, but captions for each of the images are collected together at the end of the book. Each book features a multi-page spread that differs notably from the rest of the book in color, texture, and content. Both books were printed and distributed by famous art publishers: Rizzoli and Prestel. And both play with notions of self-regarding art, as the creators and subjects were fully aware when taking each picture that many more than just themselves would consume these images.

Published in 2015, Kim Kardashian West's *Selfish* opens with her earliest photographic self-portrait. Tormenting her younger sister, she grabbed a disposable camera and took her “first selfie” (7). Organized chronologically, the book contains pictures of herself and her friends taken between 2006 and 2014. She explains very little. Her outstretched arm holding the camera, the

telltale marker of the selfie, and our own eye provide enough information. “Photos are memories to me” she writes, “As soon as I see an image all of the details of the day or moment come alive for me”—and proves this claim by identifying the make-up and hair artists for each shot. On the inside flap of the dust jacket, Kardashian West tells us she selected the images to reflect “on my very public journey as a daughter, sister, friend, wife, and mother.” In a font invoking the handwritten scribbles on the perimeter of a Polaroid or on the back of a family photograph, Kardashian West supplies first-person, seemingly spontaneous remarks. Though only the loosest of life narratives accompanies these chronologically-ordered images, true fans will immediately recognize her sisters, friends, and other stars—from her autobiographical TV shows, her online profiles, or both. Many of the images will also be familiar—previously published as part of her many social media profiles across multiple platforms. One of her most famous selfies in a white bathing suit appears towards the end of the book, amongst several similar shots: “I was doing a photo shoot,” she recalls, “Took a selfie before I went out. Who knew it would get more attention than that actual shoot. #Power of the Selfie” (322–323).

Power of the Selfie

A photograph in an autobiographical narrative can embody the subject, demarcate an individual, and connect an author to a name. But the photograph itself offers a static view of a certain time and place. Explanations offered in the narrative, or beside or below the photograph, can affect the reading of the image and the text, confirming or clashing with the reader-viewer’s initial response. But the photograph emphatically asserts a body and a frame of reference. Though the discovery of the winter garden photo is a pinnacle moment in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes spends most of his text considering what is contained or generally suggested by a

photograph. Concentrating on the stillness and solidified self in the winter garden image, he likens the photograph to death, and the photographer to an embalmer: “the Photograph (the one I *intend*) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object; I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter” (14). In response, rather than dwelling upon composition and aesthetic value, Barthes seeks out the pleasure and emotion in photographs—most notably, in his pursuit of a picture of his mother and by extension, her essence.

One of the tensions explored within *Camera Lucida* arises from what is captured and what is lost, though still linked through the idea of referentiality, in a photograph:

Painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often “chimeras.” Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. (76)

But drawing on the work of Linda Haverty Rugg, Tanya Dalziell and Lee-Von Kim insist upon an auto/biographical distinction between the selfie and most forms of photographic life-representation, which always involve the disruption by an outside party—the photographer. Aided by recent technology, the selfie eliminates that external viewer and recorder, allowing the subject to interact exclusively with the camera itself whenever desired: “the innovation of the selfie . . . is the instantaneity of the self-produced image, and the autonomy afforded the auto-photographer” (378). Quoting Laura Bennett’s review of Kardashian West’s book, Dalziell and Kim focus upon the repetitive gaze offered readers through page after page of self-produced images, concluding that “the selfie might be considered as the modern iteration of photography’s rich history of self-looking and self-representation” (378).

Or self-voyeurism, I would add. In many of the images, Kardashian West smolders into the camera. In others, she looks away, or stares intently at the images of herself on her phone, determined to capture the right angle, expression, lighting, and background. A handful of pictures use mise-en-abyme to present fake selfies. Two black and white photos taken by others present Kardashian West snapping a selfie; her self-image appears on the following page (360-362). Towards the last third of the book, the pages change from a typically white background featuring colorful self-images to black pages offering a series of highly concentrated body shots and alluring poses. This section is bookended by empty black pages. The increased nudity, the intense, almost embarrassing intimacy and domesticity of the shots, and the order of their presentation all suggest that they collectively had a purpose—they were taken and intended for someone else. More than halfway through this section she offers a limited explanation: “I wasn’t intending to put these in the book but saw them online during the icloud hack. I’m not mad at them. lol [sic] They are taken with a blackberry and I don’t have icloud . . . it’s all a mystery!” (282). It is significant that Kardashian West did not distribute these images amongst the earlier pages of scantily-clad selfies, that she collects and highlights them in a dark section in the latter half of the book, and that they represent the most extreme nudity and intense sensuality. Whether read as reclaiming her right to the stolen photos, or as enticing a wider and more voyeuristic audience, in a highly promotional and aggrandizing way she republishes images stolen by hackers and spread around social networking sites. But she ends the book with two incongruous fairy-tale images: a selfie in her wedding dress and veil before she walks down the aisle, and a close up image of the wedding rings on her husband’s and her own hands, resting on a table bearing her new name “Kim Kardashian West”—an image arguing for a happily-ever-after ending (444-445).

As a reality TV star, social media mogul, and influencer, with over 233,000,000 million followers across three major platforms, Kardashian West's primary product is herself,¹ and she offers the promise of auto/biography in all of her productions. *Selfish* therefore supposedly offers inside, intimate looks to outside viewers. But the extent of her success and her significance extends beyond the merchandizing of lipsticks, make-up, and lifestyle products. Because she performs herself for literally hundreds of millions of people, she shapes our cultural understanding of selfies and self-image making. I am not suggesting she is the sole, or even most influential, arbiter of how people should represent themselves online, but I do contend that how she poses, what she chooses to reveal and display, or not, and how she circulates her self-representations has had an enormous impact on how other people distribute themselves on social media. Her followers and fans imitate, or even duplicate, her poses and personae. But Kardashian West's autobiographical performances are shaped and often mirror those of her sisters and other family members, resulting in a Kardashian aesthetic and style distributed to their overlapping networks and audiences. And even if she herself draws upon her fans for her self-image productions, her own poses or platform conventions swiftly come to dominate the virtual world, simply because of the sheer number of eyes that then consume her texts. Even if undesirable, her role in shaping or changing auto/biographical conventions on social media is undeniable.

Mediated Selfie Performance:

I pick up the other book, artist Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections* (2018). The book commemorates an art installation Ulman staged in parts on her personal Instagram account between April and August 2014, close to the culmination of Kardashian's *Selfish*. Immediately inside the cover I find handwritten remarks, yearbook style, to Amalia herself. In several

different kinds of script, they appear as different blocks in various orientations. All of the pages are glossy. No explanatory glosses are provided with this paratextual front matter, and I move on to Rózsa Farkas's foreword, which tells us what we may or may not already know. Over the five-month period, Ulman offered herself as "constructed from a series of posted images, videos, written descriptions and, in many ways, the comments of her followers, too" (6). Farkas not only describes the progression of the show through different stages of online femininity, but even before we encounter the self-representations, she discusses how Ulman's 2014 performance plays with our notions of autobiographical authenticity.

Commentary by Natasha Stagg, Hito Steyerl, and Rob Horning follows the introduction. Connected through their focus on in-person and online scams, only Horning directly addresses Ulman's installation. "One posts to social media less to express or define oneself than to discharge that responsibility to define oneself, putting the self's fate in the hands of the network," Horning asserts, warning that "the way in which virality can annihilate the self in social media makes those seeking that annihilation very dependent on amassing audiences," including losing oneself in attention-seeking rituals, such as checking in and liking other people's posts (24). Flagging the complicit nature of social media, he argues that there are material consequences of our immaterial actions. Especially troubling is the consumption of our friends as entertainment. Our desire for amusement and connection through autobiographical performance leads us to "warp one another with these narrative hungers" (25).

So ends the introductory material. Ulman's Instagram sequence begins with a series of light and airy images. Each page contains a fuzzy, amateur-looking photograph, surrounded by accentuating colors and a month and date at the top corner. There are no captions. Nail art, soft blond hair, light pink colors, clothes, *kawaii* images, heart-shaped sunglasses, rose petals—this is

her first act and first persona. By June 20, most viewers would have noted a change in her Instagram feed. After posting an image showing her with a man, a text message appears, indicating some kind of break-up, and although the images for June 21 and June 22 continue the light color scheme, she is alone in her selfies.

But when I turn the page, expecting another picture from June, I encounter an unexpected interlude. At the book's center, Ulman's chronological pictorial installation breaks. The stark white pages are no longer glossy; black and white text and photographs replace the previous colorful aesthetic. "On October 9 2013 I was travelling on a Greyhound bus from New York to Chicago when the bus crashed, leaving me unconscious, damaging my legs and sending me to the hospital for two months," Ulman writes (114). Here begin unexpected and raw autobiographical reflections not only about her *Excellences & Perfections* process, but also her broken body, and her healing process at the Ananda Meditation Retreat Center. "Always productive, I thought of including images from the facilities in Part III, when the character I was playing went to a drug clinic," she confesses, but instead she drew a line between her lived experiences at the center and her performance: "my feelings towards the community were sincere and no material from my stay was used in the fictional narrative of *Excellences & Perfections*" (114). After reading this text, I flip to the front and back of the book, now realizing that those yearbook-like writings were thanks yous and words of encouragement from members of the meditation center—perhaps from a card. I return to the center of the book and Ulman's diary narratives from the Meditation center. While not included in her installation performance, here in the book Ulman includes writings and pictures of the facility, thereby acknowledging a textual and graphic life experience, but one surrounded by an autobiographical performance striking in its inauthenticity.

Part II begins on June 22. Focusing on brands and money, the pictures of rumpled bed sheets, tattoos, drugs, guns, breast augmentations, and underwear selfies signal a turn to a darker side, reinforced by the black and white aesthetic. The bathroom and bedroom selfies look familiar, due to the unmistakable similarity of Ulman's poses in this section to Kardashian-West's. Pictures of make-up brushes alternate with multiple images of Ulman posing on a bed. A selfie thong shot in particular resembles the images in the black pages of Kardashian West's book. But by August, the tenor has changed again, signaling Part III. Returning to the initial soft and recuperative images, Ulman's selfies here look fresh, without much make-up. Pictures of food and comforting teas are interspersed with homey images of kitchens and flowers, babies and books. A man reappears, but one offering a loving and supporting gesture, and she finishes the last set of images with roses, delicate even in a black and white image. As Emma Maguire notes, "These three identities—the kawaii girl, the hustler, and the new age 'healed' girl—are mediated via three distinct aesthetics," each with its own series of technological, material, and visual cues suggesting how viewers should engage with the representations (178). Ulman's play with constructed female images becomes a guide for Maguire's own look at the interplay of online representations, girls, and predominantly web-based media. She notes the increasingly conflicting and contradictory examples of women and girls controlling their stories, yet profiting from images that peddle patriarchal or idealized notions. "*Excellences & Perfections* points to the fact that narcissism is gendered in Western media culture, and, specifically, it scrutinizes how narcissism is tied to gendered oppression in online economics where selves and selfies are commodities" Maguire argues, insisting that Ulman's performance, straddling autobiography and fiction, invites audience members to "re-examine how they consume images of young women on social media" (198).

Turning the page, I now find all the Instagram captions *not* accompanying the pictures, including comments, emojis, and her own responses. In the book, she therefore isolates her pictures from the generated, spontaneous responses to her work, breaking apart the convention of the blended text and image, and also separating her seemingly autobiographical performance from the autobiographical reactions of others. But, this division is imperfect, since her own narrative captions for the images, while not appearing with the photographs themselves, do interact with her followers' responses. Both Kardashian West's *Selfish* and Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections* contain selfies and images previously published on social media. A friend or follower would have seen the images sequentially and spontaneously, encountering them when posted as if they were happening in some kind of real time. Consumed in this manner, each image or group of images stands alone, leaving time and space for comments, questions, and responses from the following audience. Thus each post, whether by Kardashian West or Ulman, belies the planning and work that actually went into producing their highly scripted and controlled social media personae. Confused by the sudden turn of events in Ulman's evolving story, fans, followers, and members of the art world started questioning what was actually happening in her life (Maguire 174–175). This is the consequence of reading the texts as they appeared in real life and time.

But what happens when we don't read in real time? While Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and now even Snapchat allow a follower to read all the feeds chronologically, the display itself requires that we work backwards. But anyone reading the book version of *Excellences & Perfections*, published after Ulman's admission that she staged the installation, has to deal with three issues: the knowledge that the Instagram sequence was fake; the presentation of the installation surrounded by Ulman's own Instagram images; and the necessary registering of the

performance out of order. While a disciplined reader will search out the start of the performance and read chronologically, the Instagram platform makes this task very difficult, because the viewer must either scroll up the images to consume them, or click through all of the individual images and captions. There is also the matter of abundance. In addition to struggling with the same three temporal issues, anyone engaging with Kardashian West's social media will also have a very difficult time accessing the *Selfish* images, now lying so far back in her prolific feeds. Published commercially, and confined by the material nature of the book, *Selfish* and *Excellences & Perfections* isolate the reader from the original process of encounter and discovery, which focused on certain images and not on others, and called attention to autobiographical text in very directive and specific ways. These volumes are therefore hypertexts of their dynamic social media counterparts—offering more control over the selfies and images, but losing much of the spontaneity and newness of the social network versions. Because of this, I am aware that even when a book emerges directly from the published content on social media, I need to read the book and social media in significantly different ways.

Highly Mediated Road Ahead:

I offer this account of two selfie books as primer for the chapters ahead. Each book asks us to look more closely at the systems and processes of hidden mediation that alter auto/biographical works. Any critical analysis of such works will benefit from registering these processes, and recognizing the agents involved. If only for the sake of context, it is always better to know more. But uncovering these mediations specifically in relation to life narratives also reveal the *changing* strategies authors, artists, and even corporate platforms are adopting to shape, control, or resist auto/biographical work. By drawing attention to these usually and often

deliberately concealed workings, I hope to register and display the profound shifts taking place in the production of life narratives and in how we read them. Situated as I am in a community connected deeply to the land, and to the processes of decolonization, cultural recovery, and celebration, and writing at a time of exponentially increasing Native Hawaiian Scholarship, many of my texts not surprisingly come from Hawai‘i. Engagement with longstanding concealed forms of mediation is pervasive here. Our museums, radios, written texts, news media, and online performances advance or resist this ongoing project of decolonization. But regardless of the location, when working with human trace projects, with ongoing identity creation, and with intersectionalities, it is increasingly necessary to register the mediating processes or agents modifying the witnessing or recuperation happening in the original texts.

Chapter 1 concerns the materiality of the autobiographical text. Drawing from Alfred Gell’s claim that the creators and owners of objects impart agency through an abduction process, and from Sarah Kimber’s and Joanna Zylinska’s concept of mediation as an ongoing process, I consider how an agency of materiality impacts our auto/biographical reading of two texts: *The Diary of Lili ‘uokalani* as encountered by Miriam Fuchs, and Dana Walrath’s auto/biographical visual book *Aliceheimer’s: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass*. The highly physical nature of both original texts—the Queen’s original diaries and the artist’s book—alters as they move into a more accessible form, whether through transcription or commercial publication. The question here is therefore relatively straightforward. Given that the materiality of texts must be bent for reasons of distribution or preservation, how should this change affect our reading of them?

Because auto/biographical objects are often housed and displayed in museum spaces, curatorial and museum practices also mediate such objects in ways generally unrecognized by

viewers. Chapter 2 turns its attention to museums themselves—their practices, negotiations, and accompanying presence, both physically and online. Labels, spatial arrangements, and the building itself all speak to the viewer in a manner that provides context, and sometimes even implicitly contradicts, the displayed auto/biographical art. Such mediation of photographic and narrative works can diminish or mute the sensual aspects of the objects. In the case of such museums as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Jewish Museum Berlin, the buildings themselves act upon the museum goer in affective and highly scripted ways. And increasingly with the creation of an online museum presence, we must also ask how the autobiographical image or text is translated to a website, and with what results.

In something of a return to the realm of the selfie books, Chapter 3 begins a two-chapter engagement with social networking sites and lives online. While it may appear that social media end users control identity creation through an iterative process free of constraints, many life narrative scholars point out how the technology itself, and the groups using that technology, prescribe identity performance. Above all, as Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green declare, “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead” (1). Drawing extensively from the work of life writing critics, theorists, and media scholars, I focus on the changing nature of that technology, what motivates and guides users who create, consume, and pass on auto/biographical messages in various virtual environments, and what happens to those messages as they spread.

In Chapter 4, I shift my attention to the supposed irreproducibility of online texts and performances. Online texts and other autobiographical productions have a reputation for assuming that *because* of their virtual status, they will somehow last forever. But through what means, and in what forms? Technological obsolescence is already complicating or even prohibiting access to older electronically mediated auto/biographical texts, leading critical

scholars to raise issues about permanence. Key issues here are the demands of the internet as a potential archive. Social media platforms need users to produce, post, and respond, but how do users resist these demands, and when and how do they succeed? In turn, the platforms themselves develop archiving strategies, and policies that result in message decay, as forms of control—over the online actions of their users, but ultimately, over their offline identities as well, in anticipation of their eventual mediation. As life narratives vacillate and navigate between the various limited and more permanent options for placing lives online, the results are having increasingly wider implications for the representation of lives, on or offline.

Returning in Chapter 5 to the protective and prescriptive spaces of archives, I begin by comparing widely held notions of how archives function with the actual practices of today. Irrespective of the format of the material or the preservation environment, by means of their rules and procedures, archives mediate history and social memory through their creation of records. Such records frequently contain biographical information about people in power and about people as subjugated subjects. But through appraisal, organization, and description, archivists exert an extraordinary control over what is saved and destroyed of these records, and how to find information within what remains preserved. Archival records are themselves important for understanding decolonization work. In this chapter, I read Sydney Iaukea's *The Queen and I* as an example of how this work operates on cultural and personal levels. I also want to assess the degree to which recognizing the problems of historical insularity and the need to decolonize the archive itself has led the archival profession to take steps towards greater contextualization, community feedback, and participatory records control.

Examining how we remember, and how we create and control our pictures, voices, words, and records, not only offers important information about how we construct and negotiate

our social identities and memories, but in these times, also what systems control us. In their roles as Influencers, Kardashian West and Ulman play with autobiography as an economic influencing tool. Through their mediated selfies they expose, exploit, and resist conventions and mechanisms of online female representation. Fully conversant with the leveraging, mediating, and controlling systems involved, both women adeptly stage their popular cultural images online and in printed books, even though Kardashian West influences and creates conventions of online self-representation by harnessing the existing conventions common to online platforms, while Ulman implicitly critiques the entire environment. Paying attention to the mediating agents involved in creating, disseminating, and preserving auto/biographical performances will take us to many places, offline and on, and ideally retune our senses so that they can recognize the significance of those factors “outside” an auto/biographical text we take for granted. These places often host the greatest conflict and most extreme contradictions; they are the places where voices compete. Let’s pull back the mediating and obscuring curtain, and listen in.

Chapter 1: Mediated Voices and Constructed Bodies

Introduction

Embodiment is a key concern in life writing scholarship, since the subject examined is often a textual representation linking body and memory. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson remind us, the body itself is a text, “a site of autobiographical knowledge, as well as a textual surface upon which a person’s life is inscribed.” Because “[e]mbodied subjects are located in their bodies and through their bodies in culturally specific ways” (37–38), auto/biographical books are sites where authors make those distinctive connections to their bodies through words and voice, while in graphic narratives or visual texts, the artist actually shows her body, representing emotion and voice through images. Because authors and artists are increasingly incorporating objects or physical structures into their auto/biographical texts, critical scholars and readers need to develop more and better strategies for approaching these often complex material works and for locating the embodied voices. And yet, while many scholars are undoubtedly taking format and medium into consideration, most focus upon the visual and textual materials as representations, rather than upon the actual physical objects. Photographs, art installations, and graphic narratives all have material aspects not fully registered or addressed if the visual narrative is the critic’s only concern. This physicality necessarily causes the texts as objects to lose their connections to their creators, and this is compounded when the physical text moves into a new medium. In such cases, identity traces take on new meanings, further alienating them from the supposed referential “source,” while at the same time offering greater or easier access to the life represented because of the benefits offered by the new medium.

These simultaneous losses and gains are a key to understanding autobiographical texts as objects. While I will draw heavily upon life writing scholars, in the following discussion I will also explore issues of access and mediation in the light of recent material culture scholarship. By linking such work to parallel initiatives in current life writing theory, this chapter therefore begins the process of developing methods and arriving at critical and theoretical conclusions that will help us understand more clearly life writing texts as they increasingly move from stable to unstable and distributed media forms.

I begin with two primary texts, mediated through preservation and/or commercial publishing processes: Queen Lili‘uokalani’s diaries and Dana Walrath’s *Aliceheimer: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass*. When preparing a chapter for her book *The Text is Myself: Women’s Life Writing and Catastrophe*, Miriam Fuchs sought out copies of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s diaries; her encounter with a misleading copy led to some important assertions about the materiality of autobiographical texts. Walrath invokes the topsy-turvy world of Alzheimer’s through nonsensical drawings and appeals to Alice’s Wonderland to construct a powerful multigenerational narrative through visual art and textual vignettes. Originally displayed in a gallery space, her collages were then remediated into book form, thereby increasing access to her constructed art through the wider distribution that commercial publication makes possible. But this process of mediation flattens both her mother’s body and her layered art, as a set of 3-D objects becomes adapted to 2-D presentation. Some pictures are cut, and the text becomes harder to read, even as these verbal vignettes overshadow the impact and power of the physical art. Or put another way, the art objects previously glossed by the text now serve as illustrations for it. Drawing from Kember and Zylinska’s work on mediation as process, and from Alfred Gell’s observations on the agency of objects, I want to direct our attention away from, or directly upon, the frame of representation, rather than upon what it represents, to

consider how the physicality of the autobiographical object affects our understanding of the voice, agency, and life it both embodies and represents.

Voice, Mediation, and Little Books

While conducting research on Queen Lili‘uokalani’s *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*, Miriam Fuchs nearly made an irreparable mistake. “Autobiography as Political Discourse,” the first chapter in her book on autobiographies as performative responses to catastrophe (*Text 7*), examines the Queen’s memoir, the audience for which she wrote, and her acts of political resistance to save her Kingdom—first from the catastrophic overthrow and then from impending American annexation. Fuchs consulted the diaries to ensure historical accuracy, and to confirm the Queen’s political savvy. “The original volumes are not readily available to the public,” Fuchs explains, “but I anticipated no particular problems in using the photocopied versions, which are conveniently shelved in the Hawaiian and Pacific Collection at the University of Hawaii” (“Diaries” 39). As she examined the typed photocopies of the Queen’s diaries, however, she found herself beginning to question whether Lili‘uokalani could actually have authored her politically and strategically powerful memoir, leading her unwillingly toward agreement with the accusation made by Lorrin Thurston, the Queen’s bitter political adversary, decades after her memoir’s publication. When however Fuchs sought out and examined the physical diaries, she not only began to understand the peculiarities of the entries, but also recognized just how misleading the preservation process had been: “Utterly absent from the photocopied transcripts and utterly obvious in the originals was the way in which the physical dimensions of each diary determined the odd style of its entries.” And one further revelation: since Thurston “surely understood that the fragments and elliptical constructions were the result of the dimensions of the

diaries,” which he had read in the original, his dishonesty and vindictiveness as a source are confirmed by the physical evidence.

Fuchs offers her essay on the diaries as a “cautionary tale” about the dangers of not consulting original documents, dangers that unfortunately become apparent only when researchers decide for some reason to examine them. Reproducing primary materials by any method—even simple ones such as transcription and photocopying—may have the effect of distorting the original text. (39) Because for her research Fuchs was understandably foregrounding the diaries’ content over their status as material objects, she turned at first to the most readily available copies. Only because she fortunately decided to examine the diaries in person as material objects—which she so lovingly describes being laid before her by the white-gloved archivist—did she come to recognize what the transcribed photocopy obfuscated: that that various sizes of the diaries actually revealed Queen Lili‘uokalani's resourcefulness and economy when filling their often tiny pages.

In the following paragraphs, I will pay special attention to the specifics of how processes of mediation—in this case, transcription and photocopying—affect reception of the autobiographical text. In its *Statement on the Significance of Primary Records (1995)*, the Modern Language Association echoes Fuchs’ conclusions, and also offers guidance for how to conduct informed and responsible primary source research. Published at a time when for preservation purposes facsimiles, transcriptions, microfilmed preservation copies, and early electronic versions were increasingly being produced and substituted for direct access to manuscripts, brittle books, and rare items, the *MLA Statement* voiced concerns about these and future digital replacement practices. Mediated versions may increase access while protecting the originals, but at what costs? Pointing to the physical text as a material object, rather than simply

a container for the words and images, the MLA directs our attention to sensual considerations: folded leaves, book binding, marginalia, publishing practices, and physical design. These factors have always influenced our reception of texts, leading the *MLA Statement* to conclude that “since the shape, feel, designs, and illustrations of books have affected, and continue to affect, readers' responses (some of which have been recorded in the margins of pages), access to the physical forms in which texts from the past have appeared is a fundamental part of informed reading” (28).

The *Statement* makes three recommendations. First, and not surprisingly, that researchers should whenever possible consult the primary, predominantly physical record. Second, that researchers and archivists need to conduct more extensive physical, paratextual, and material object analyses of both the original resource and its reproductions, as digitizing and other preservation projects multiply in the near future. But third, and most challenging, the profession needs to influence directly these processes of reproduction themselves:

An appreciation of the significance of physical evidence also necessitates the adoption of standards for the creation and identification of reproductions, in order to minimize the damage done to primary records by the processes of reproduction and to maximize the usefulness of the reproductions.

By approaching electronic and digital preservation with the materiality in mind, the MLA concludes that “we will be more rigorous in our demands of new forms of textual presentation and more vigilant in our protection of the artifacts embodying the old forms” (28). In the twenty-three years following publication of this statement, occasional supplementary MLA publications have addressed issues related to electronic and digital scholarship: *Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media* (2012), *Guidelines for Authors of Digital*

Resources (2013), *Statement on Publication in Electronic Journals* (2015), and *Statement on Publication in Electronic Journals* (2015). Preservation and reproduction projects have evolved into an array of technologies designed to scan digitally, to remediate physical texts, to increase access, but also to data mine textual analysis.

Miriam Fuchs' article was first published in 1995—the same year as the MLA *Statement*—so when I first read it in 2011, I immediately consulted our bibliographic record for the diaries in the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library's public catalog to see if it now provided information about their sizes. Although she had initially accessed the photocopy of the transcription of the diaries, the library's bibliographic record referenced the original diaries, suggesting variances in volume size. But with changes in cataloging practice, the enhanced bibliographic record now provides only the physical attributes *of the photocopied transcription*, actually deepening the divide between the physicality of the original diaries and the transcribed copy. Retrieving the first volume of *The Diary of Lili 'uokalani* from the Hawaiian Collection, I open the pages to read short, typed entries and memoranda, uniformly consistent in size, and centered on a standard letter page. Such a typed transcription therefore captures only the words, whereas a scanned digital copy would at least have provided a flattened image of the original pages. In addition, nothing in the transcription indicates how the words were written to fit into the tiny, physical volumes, and any script, graphic, or other visual elements are excluded from the standardized, typed pages.

In the mid-1990s, Fuchs and the MLA both warned about the dangers of uncritically discarding the physicality of the text by embracing too readily an electronic future. Reading these words twenty years later, I am struck by how narrow the concerns were at that time—the privileging of print, for instance, even though non-book texts were even then increasingly being

taught, read and analyzed, and researched by scholars such as Miriam Fuchs. But in retrospect, I can also see how the voicing of these concerns contributed positively to the subsequent and continuing trial and error of digital preservation projects involving material object texts. For my purposes, however, I want to return here to that moment when Fuchs recognized that she had avoided making a major mistake. As the white gloved archivist laid out the volumes before her and carefully turned the pages, the crucial importance of the diaries' physical attributes became clear:

Only by viewing the originals did I realize that the diaries, in contrast to the photocopied versions, come in a variety of shapes and sizes. . . . Without sufficient editorial apparatus, copies that aren't really copies emphasize qualities of Lili'uokalani's prose that seem idiosyncratic on a standard page but are absolutely appropriate to the cramped format of the actual diaries. ("Diaries" 39)

The choice to transcribe, type up, and then photocopy (dated 1992) the diaries enables greater dissemination of their content, but "produces odd differences and dislocations" between these "unfaithful" copies and the originals ("Diaries" 40). Once Fuchs considered the materiality of the diaries—their size, how Lili'uokalani filled their small spaces—and the mediation of the copies themselves—typing the words, translating the parts in the Hawaiian language and in Lili'uokalani's own numerical code—she realized the dangers involved in relying on a mediated version, among them that "Lili'uokalani's prose, removed from its original context, is thus stripped of its history" ("Diaries" 40).

But the mediation process did not begin or end with the transcribed photocopy. Fuchs concentrated on disparities between the diaries and the copies. What else was happening in the process she describes? What else enabled or intervened in her research with the diaries? Her

PMLA article discloses other factors, which I want bring out. Only the Hawai‘i State Archives and Bishop Museum retain original diaries of the Queen. Fuchs chose to approach Bishop Museum. After consulting with an archivist,

He agreed to remove the diaries from a room that is dehumidified and air-conditioned twenty-four hours a day, which I was not allowed to enter. Returning to another room in which I waited, the archivist handled the diaries with spotless white gloves and carefully placed one volume, then another, and then another on a table before me, and he patiently turned down each fragile page for me to examine but not to touch.

Geographic proximity, her academic position, her specific research interests, and possibly other factors, such as professional connections, made it possible for her to enter the museum, speak with an archivist, and view (but not touch!) the diaries under very strictly regulated physical conditions: air conditioning, and object control—handled by “spotless white gloves.” All of this influences her encounter with the diaries—her memory of that moment of realization, and the redirection of her research, is inextricably entwined with the temperature controlled room, the gloves, and the pages being opened before her. What was lost through the transcriptions, then gained through viewing the original, itself took place within a material environment, which had an effect on Fuchs’ eventual critical biographical work on Queen Lili‘uokalani’s strategic and political memoir, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen*. The entire process, which allowed her to grasp fully the significance through mediation of her primary sources, was also necessarily mediated by her own specific experience of the surrounding intellectual and material conditions. Everything made a difference (“Diaries” 39).

Material Agency

Material objects are sensual objects. Whenever I cannot feel the paper, or move through a series of hanging photographs, my experience is mediated. Whether a theorist's words, a photocopied transcription, or the narrated experiences of another, mediation not only tells me about the "original," but also *how* to think about the object. But just as a tool needs to be held to feel the fit or weight, the object *and* its form of representation need to be experienced.

Objects themselves have a social life, as their material properties, their reasons for existing, and their intended and potential uses extend beyond their physical contours. Echoing Chris Gosden, Laura Peers identifies objects as "nexuses of social, economic and political relations involved in their production, collection, transfer, use and interpretation across time" (90). Similarly, Constance Classen and David Howes remark that "the sensory values of an artifact . . . do not reside in the artifact alone but in its social use and environmental context" (Edwards, et al. 200). And invoking Walter Benjamin's concepts of "aura" and "authenticity," Sven Ouzman describes how an object's "rights" and "agentiveness" are unavoidably violated by removing it from its original context for a new home inside a museum (274, 280). The language used in conjunction with an object points to a continuous and developing connection to humans, as issues of identity and culture mingle with use and value in any descriptions of objects or collections. In their study of sensory systems, objects, and identity in West Africa, Kathryn Linn Geurts and Elvis Gershon Adikah highlight muscle memory and sense-feelings in relation to specific objects, their use, and resulting experiences of well-being. Susan Stewart links our fascination with miniature objects to feelings of interiority, identity, and nostalgia, while gigantic objects arouse our sense of ideological structures that we can't quite fully perceive, yet still surround and act upon us. Daniel Miller's ethnographic writing on saris suggest that how a sari is

worn and feels both projects and reflects a woman's identity (23). Objects are defined in relation to people. Through their cultural systems, humans bestow or withhold purpose, value, and significance upon objects. In the case of made objects, they have strong identity connections to their creators, but fleeting provenance over time. Precisely because of their materiality, once objects are separated from their creator or intended space, these strong connections are easily broken or lost. This has important implications for lifewriting objects, when they move into new media. If no longer in use, an object loses its tenuous connection to humans, registering only through mediated versions that themselves can drift away from a relation to the "original."

Alfred Gell takes the connections between humans and their objects one step farther. Through a process of abduction, he suggests that created objects, as Piercean indexes, acquire a secondary form of agency: "the kinds of agency attributed to art objects are not 'self-sufficient' agents, but only 'secondary' agents in conjunction with specific (human) associates" (17).² Taking cars, dolls, and a found rock/tool on his mantle as his examples, Gell then describes the social and relational processes that turn them into secondary agents. As these material objects move into new settings, their agency can be lost, regained, or transferred. "Art objects lead very transactional lives," he observes, and "being 'made by an artist' is only the first of these" (24). With regard to the rock/tool found on a beach, he notes that the "origins of art objects can be forgotten or concealed, blocking off the abduction leading from the existence of the material index to the agency of an artist" (23). This is a complex and relational process, linking artists and objects through of series of connections and reconnections. Taking as examples an even wider range of objects, extending from Duchamp to "Olly," his Toyota, Gell contends that all of these objects are "an emanation or manifestation of agency" which becomes part of the owner's personhood (20). With reference to this "manifestation," Liana Chua and Mark Elliott argue that

“Gell’s index is not a mere representation of its object—say, a god or a set of social relations—but is fundamentally (part of) the thing itself” (8). Such “distributed objects” take on further qualities when combined in relation to an individual:

a person and a person’s mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong life itself after biological death. The person is thus understood *as the sum total of the indexes* which testify, in life and subsequently, to the biographical existence of this or that individual. (Gell 222-223, my emphasis)

Drawing his analogy from art, Gell calls this sum total an *oeuvre*—a single site for the convergence of distributed objects (235). Such a site looks outward, acknowledging the agency of objects, but more conventionally, turns inward as well, registering the activity of perception, cognition, and psychology (Chua and Elliott 9).

This idea of an *oeuvre* of distributed objects is potentially very useful for working with autobiographical objects mediated through narrative, captured on video or audio files, transcribed in diaries, constituted as portraiture—in fact, for working with any and all manifestations of auto/biographical narratives. With regard to agency, mediation is by definition the process by which an agent intercedes. While the first entry in the OED refers to the formal legal process, the second codifies mediation as “Agency or action as an intermediary; the state or fact of serving as an intermediate agent, a means of action, or a means of transmission; instrumentality.” The museum mediates objects; objects mediate the story of humans. Capturing a performance; pulling together a sound file; translating, updating or enhancing a picture,

whether in the dark room or on a computer—all of these actions are forms of remediation. Reformatting is a related process. Communications, digital culture, and media studies theorists describe the move into or between media as a kind of refashioning (Bolter and Grusin 1999, Grusin 2005). Grusin further argues that “Remediation identifies two distinct contradictory visual styles or logics of mediation”: “‘transparent immediacy,’ in which the goal of the medium is to erase the signs of mediation . . . and ‘hypermediacy,’ in which a medium multiplies and makes explicit the signs of mediation” (497). In a two-part essay on reformatting, Kiersten Latham argues that understanding these trade-offs enables the user or the museumgoer to see these systems of mediation and remediation in action.

But what happens when the loss is directly related to a life? If life agency is inextricably wrapped up in the experiential or sensual, is the loss too great? In an effort to avoid thinking of mediation as a transfer or even a translation event, with the necessary additions and subtractions that accompany a move between discrete states, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska propose a more dynamic and ongoing process:

Mediation does not serve as a translational or transparent layer or intermediary between independently existing entities (say, between the producer and consumer of a film or TV program). It is a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical. Mediation, we suggest, is all encompassing and indivisible. (xv).

This process is participatory and iterative—mediation is a becoming. Kember and Zylińska derive from this understanding the concept of “original technicity.” Because humans have always relied on technologies outside of ourselves—fire, tools—to live our lives, we “have always been technical, *which is another way of saying that we have always been mediated*” (18).

Insisting on taking into account both human and technological factors when considering mediation, they argue that the “very process of media emergence involves creation, whereby human creative activity is accompanied (and often superseded or even contradicted) by the work of nonhuman forces” (22). Situating themselves within media studies, Kember and Zylinska neither accept complete human dominance of technology and media, nor a deterministic understanding of technological affordances as driving human behavior and desires. Their understanding of mediation and media as dynamic, networked, and social, rather than technical operations on static objects, also causes them to reject the notion that technologies and media objects exist independently. The process of mediation blends and shapes as its product emerges. As a result, “*Every medium thus carries within itself both the memory of mediation and the loss of mediation never actualized*” and this “potentiality of mediation inherent both in the existing media and in the technological enframing . . . of the world points to the inherently creative character of mediation, even if this process of creation has to entail erasure, forgetting, overcoming, and at times violent transformation” (21). Media and media events are in this sense performative, rather than representational, and mediation itself becomes the world, the humans, and the technologies within it.

Given this ever-present world of mediation resonating amongst us, retaining a sense of identity, of a life not completely constituted and/or dissolved through change, requires what Kember and Zylinska identify as “the cut.” Basing their discussion on Deleuze and Guattari, they “suggest that the practice of cutting is crucial not just to our being and relating to the world, but also to our *becoming-with-the-world*, as well as *becoming-different-from-the-world*” (75). To explain this practice, Kember and Zylinska turn their attention to the photographer’s process of framing, freezing, and capturing an instant (88), offering “photography as an active practice of

cutting through the flow of mediation, where the cut operates on a number of levels: perceptive, material, technical and conceptual.” But they also acknowledge that objects, pictures, and texts can themselves become cuts, and recognize film-making, art, and writing as potential acts of cutting (71). I propose adding auto/biographical objects carrying testimony, human traces, and identity to this list of possible cuts to the flow of mediation, and in fact would argue that life narrative is in a sense the deep subject and precondition of all mediation.

To make this argument, let’s return to Kember and Zylinska. Media and mediation disambiguation is one of the principal goals of their project. What are usually treated as discrete media objects, they see as mediation processes, driven by social, cultural, corporate, and political influences. Examining carefully the overlapping and blurred lines between humans, Artificial Intelligence, Ambient Intelligence, and networked technologies such as social media enables us to see the narratives always being told to uphold social, consumer, and political structures (118). As Ambient Intelligence products increasingly help us in our homes, and wearable technology help us monitor our health, our choices, health, and lives also continually become data for multinational corporations and market research (124). Because Kember and Zylinska define the mediation process as co-constitutive, they sharply note how “demediation,” or the attempt to expel the role and actions of technology from a creative process, glosses over the technological part of that co-constitution (158). Offering the social media site Facebook as an example, they highlight how we are drawn into a process that creates free but valuable content for the company. Facebook foregrounds the personal human connections and content, encouraging a perceived sense of freedom and control. But the corporate-initiated and technologically-generated prompts to create content not only rely on our free and freely-given labor, but also change how we live our lives over time. Registering the pervasiveness of the mediation surrounding us, and the

enlistment of human labor within this environment, makes evident not only the complexity and rapaciousness of these processes operating within multiple media products, but also confronts us with the fact that we have far less human autonomy in this environment than the media providers, and our own narratives, suggest.

But as lifewriting scholars emphasize, to embody any lived experience in a text or any other form has always required and continues to involve a mediation process. Although recently the possible media and critical and theoretical approaches to such embodiments have multiplied in response to the increase in new outlets for auto/biographical expression, any recognition of the auto/biographical mode is shaped by socially determined, generic expectations: veracity, for instance, or a *bildungsroman* progression, or retrospective conclusions about the already lived life. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have repeatedly reminded us, in auto/biographies identities are constructed and discursive, but also socially determined, upheld, and produced (*Reading Autobiography* 33–34). Smith and Watson note that an autobiography is assumed to be a “narrative of agency,” but they also stress the complexity of agency as it operates within socially defined constructs:

People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-presentation in public. If individuals are constituted through discursive practices, how, then, can they be said to control their stories they tell about themselves? (42).

Viewed in this light, when Gell offered stories about the stone found on the beach on his mantel, or his Toyota “Olly,” as examples of “Art and Agency,” these narratives not only support his theory, but also situate him in a number of highly specific and mediated social contexts—within his own writings, within the genres deployed in his writing, and through the posthumous

publication of the book, within a discursive environment that he no longer occupies as a living being. Auto/biography is certainly a performative act of identity and agency, but the performance did not begin with a published book, nor end with a reader turning the pages.

Keeping Gell's own notions of abduction and oeuvre in mind, each accretion, deletion, and new work therefore becomes part of that performance, resonating within a kind of material intertextuality. And do our objects become a part of our stories and this performance, even when we cannot or no longer exercise discursive control? What happens to our framing devices and our interpretive strategies, when objects, however mediated, become part of an overall life text? The kind of material fabric Gell suggests through his theory confirms Kember and Zylinska's assertion that mediation "is all encompassing and indivisible" (xv). But if we keep in mind Gell, Kember and Zylinska, and even the *MLA Statement on the Significance of Primary Records (1995)*, we must ask ourselves, where do our material texts begin, and where do they end, if ever?

Material Life Writing:

Sitting in the overly air conditioned archives at the Bishop Museum, noting how Queen Lili'uokalani's ink fill the pages of the tiny diaries as the white-gloved archivist turns the pages, Miriam Fuchs is simultaneously mid-story in terms of her research narrative, near the end of the article prepared for a reader, and at the piko, or generative center, of her entire project's significance. As the physical properties of these tiny, leather-bound appointment books contribute to restoring Queen Lili'uokalani's voice and agency, previously muffled in the transcribed photocopies, did wonder and relief rise up in Fuchs? And as she tells the story of this

revelation, to what degree are the books and photocopies mediated yet retained through narrative?

Life writing takes and creates many forms, drawing upon a variety of media. Art installations, zines, photographs, book arts, online (micro and macro) blogs and vlogs, comic books and graphic narratives, and sound files are all avenues that scholars can and have examined to learn more about how we create stories about our lives—and especially now. Some scholars have employed auto/biographical criticism and theory to engage with physical objects—Tim Dow Adams’, Susanna Egan’s, and Linda Haverty Rugg’s work on life writing and photography and film for instance, or Smith and Watson’s reading of Tracy Emin’s *My Bed* (1998), which also provides the introduction for the essays in their edited collection, *Interfaces: Women / Autobiography / Image / Performance* (2002). More recently, scholars have increasingly invoked material theory when critically reading life writing objects. As she discusses the multigenerational comics auto/biographies of Art Spiegelman, Seth and John Gallant, and Chris Ware, Candida Rifkind for instance proposes a “aesthetics of smallness.” Rifkind extends her visual and autographical reading beyond the frames and gutters of the comics to the physical container of the book itself, comparing the character and frame sizes and shapes on the visual plane, and in relationship to the book as object (419). In her recent book *Picturing Identity: Contemporary American Autobiography in Image and Text* (2018), Hertha D. Sweet Wong reveals how artist Julie Chen “creates books that mirror structures of cognition and offer readers of her interiority” through spatial, tactile, and kinesthetic means (119). As Wong is quick to note, artists’ books are often experimental forms that explore the boundaries between different media. But to a remarkable degree, Chen’s books challenge the reader’s cognition and spatial understanding of the texts. Her sculpture-like texts incorporate subjectivity, memory, and

representation into the material, disrupting “the readers’ expectations about reading conventions” and requiring “readers to pay attention to the structure, to explore multiple surfaces,” all the while considering the overall play of image, text, object, and sense of time (142). Recent scholarship on government forms and other examples of bureaucratic definition through mediation has also focused upon how such apparently prescriptive practices can be turned into surrogates and performance spaces for agency, affect, and transformation.

In 2008, Anna Poletti made the case for life writing scholarship to look beyond traditionally published texts, and toward the burgeoning presence of life writing in physical, visual, and digital forms. “Adhering to the well-established standards regarding acceptable material, typographic, and visual presentation has resulted in the mass-produced book being accepted as an invisible medium of textual delivery in discussions of life writing,” she asserts, with the inevitable result that “as readers and theorists of life writing we are not accustomed to reading the object in which narrative is presented to us” (“Auto/Assemblage” 87). By habitually neglecting, or not even registering, the materiality of the book within our hands—whether the scholarly monograph or mass-produced memoir—we disqualify ourselves from productive engagements with other, more experimental lifewriting texts. In turn, “reading manuscripts, as well as zines or other non-mass produced texts throws into relief how our relationship with the book has to a large extent codified our expectations regarding materiality and presentation as readers and critics” (“Auto/Assemblage” 87). By deliberately engaging with the physicality and materiality of zines, Poletti seeks to unite the textual analysis of life writing with the material object. As a critic, she draws our attention to the layers of handwritten, handmade, or photocopied papers that when assembled together both form the zine and create a kind of graphic life narrative. Poletti calls this creative approach “constructedness” which “refers to the

presentation of text and images, layout, photocopying quality, and how they effect, interact with, contradict, or interrupt the narrative” (“Auto/Assemblage” 88). As objects consumed on a small scale by people close to the zine maker, zines embody the tensions and negotiations of self-representation inherent in the autobiographical act. Poletti also argues that changes made by zine maker can also alter the reading strategies and meaning making process for the reader. One especially rich source for such disruptions is the “error,” or “mistake.” Poletti suggests that by

[r]eading these “mistakes” through the concept of “autographics,” the decisions to release an imperfect, illegible text can be interpreted as the zinemaker explicitly and consciously engaging in a relationship with the readers through multiple modes which include not only the text, but extend to the visual representation (layout) and the material and experiential domain of the photocopied object. (“Auto/Assemblage” 91)

Such a reading has the potential of offering us a more complete and nuanced understanding of self-representation through the materiality of the zine (“Auto/Assemblage” 91). Because the Zine-maker’s auto-assemblage manifests itself through each cut, photocopy, hand-drawn image, and text, agency and auto/biographical voice materialize through the construction and the sensual experience of the object, as the layers and textures together offer content not limited exclusively to the written text.

Through the blacked-out markings and the layers of photocopied images, the zine shows, tells, and embodies the physical process of creation and the work of the self. Because the materiality of the zines that Poletti describes undeniably enacts a sensory engagement with the reader, she calls on the reader to look beyond the “usual” texts, and offers examples of how to go about reading, viewing, and experiencing such work. In many cases, extending the critical context into the realms of material culture or other methodologies may be necessary to interpret

or discuss responsibly a material object-text. But the potential rewards are substantial.

Registering the physical embodiment of identity through material construction and assemblage not only allows for a reading of a wider range of auto/biographical work at play, but also helps us to trace the process of identity negotiations embedded in material forms.

Aliceheimer's and the Constructed Body

In her book *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass*, Dana Walrath combines hand-drawn and constructed images with auto/biographical stories of life with her Alzheimer's diagnosed mother.³ Cutting, shaping, and reassembling the pages from a copy of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* enact Walrath's textual transition, through both visual and narrative forms, from the world of "sense" to the world on the other side of the looking glass in order to create a new, more accurate, and better story for her mother and herself. Employing Carroll's reconstituted nonsense tale as an overarching frame, Walrath offers loosely connected, seemingly nonsensical stories that chronicle her life with her mother. Combining swirling strokes of her pencil with layered pages from Carroll's text, Walrath represents and constructs their shared ever-changing realities. The result was originally displayed as art work in a gallery space. But then Walrath remediated her collages into book form, increasing through a commercial publication process access to her work and therefore her mother's experiences. Inevitably, however, the remediation flattens her mother's body and the layered art, as 3-D objects are adapted into 2-D presentation.

I myself first encountered Dana Walrath's book *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass* mediated through an online story and interview on the National Public Radio website. Accompanied by reproductions of Walrath's fantastical pencil drawings, this story drew me in because of my scholarly interest in autographics, but also because of my own parallel

family situation, which involves watching a parent decline slowly into dementia. It was for the second reason that I actually ordered the book, and I confess that as I read through her calming and delightful narrative, I grappled productively with my own emotions of pain, forgiveness, and peace. As a lifewriting scholar, however, I also noted in Dana Walrath's physical construction of her mother through this powerful, multigenerational graphic memoir the presence of what Kember and Zylinska refer to as the "cut." Walrath's construction of her mother's body, and of the accompanying story, disrupts the usually unobserved operations of mediation, including those that result in physical alterations of the originally displayed text through commercial publication (71).

Examining closely how the original collages connect with autographics and disability narratives provides a more informed means of discussing Walrath's transformational embodiment. Begun in 2010 as an art project following her mother's move into a care facility, *Aliceheimer's* captures experiences from the two previous years, when Alice was living in Walrath's wooded Vermont home. At the time Alice arrived she was inhabiting an in-between state in terms of her mind, memories, and body—between independent living and an impending "lockdown" care facility. With regard to Alice, Walrath concluded that the unfamiliar woods around her home could both shelter Alice and deter her from wandering, but in her introduction, Walrath also lays out her own intentions: "We had unfinished business. I wanted to create a bond with my mother, to redo the past, and to fill the hole inside of me. In the middle of her dementia, somehow, my mother wanted to do the same" (1). Originating as collage images in her artist's book, and then as standalone images in an art installation, Walrath transformed her collages by combining them with text, pairing pictures with her mother's story for the published book. Though the highly constructed and fantastical images and the biographical narrative center on

Alice, each story invokes a complex web of memories and figures that reach deep into the family and across time, ocean, and land to New York, South America, and Armenia.

The Alice icon is composed through layered collage and deeply indented pencil drawings. In one image, Walrath suspends Alice's bathrobe, constructed from cut out pages of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* paperbacks, in grey graphite curls swirling around the page. A cut out smile floats in the space just above the bathrobe. At the very top of the page, the handwritten text reads: "ALICE IS DISAPPEARING. SOON THERE WILL BE NONE." On the opposite page appears the following elaboration:

Alice was disappearing. Often, the "internal governor" of people with Alzheimer's also disappears: they say exactly what's on their mind. This disappearance lets new things appear. Alice found parts of herself that she had kept hidden, from her children anyway.

(11)

Whether singing "Seventy-Six Trombones" on her birthday, blurting out internal thoughts at a book reading, voicing previously unspoken desires and memories covered up by "good graces," or even feeling broccoli and apple trees growing from her ears, Alice's reality changes from moment to moment. Believing she has grown hooves, she nervously asks Walrath to check her feet under her blanket. Walrath feels her head, too, for horns. Alice sees her dead husband in the trees outside, and her own mother, long passed, sitting on the sofa. Her body also shifts in time—from the present to many destinations in the past, including wartime rationing, her first period, and her younger married life. Though Walrath realizes that some of these experiences are linked to feelings of guilt and longing, not all can be easily concretized or explained. Rather, as one set of powers fade, a new set takes hold. Walrath responds to this nonsensical world, the product of

plaques and Lewy bodies, with rituals of repetition, finding some comfort through her anthropological training in these alternate but at times internally coherent realities.

Through allusions to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Walrath frames these receding and emerging visual and textual stories, and the interconnections become more nuanced and multi-layered when the reader looks beyond the enrobed Alice icon. The continual topsy-turvy shifts of time, place, body, and memory disrupt Alice, and her increasingly child-like responses, when linked to Walrath's iconic Alice, enrobed in nonsensical but readable text and floating in a graphite halo—harken back to Carroll's tale. By mimicking the sudden pivots between Alice's past experiences, Walrath destabilizes the narrative, but she also supplies a repetitive structure graphically on the text block page by introducing each story with a thematic title and closing each story with "Aliceheimer's." And yet, the distinction is always maintained that while we as readers *see* the destabilization, Alice *feels* it. In both the pieced together body, full cheeks, and long pencil strokes of the Alice Icon, and in the visual text, the world defies gravity and structure. Further, what comes and goes in the stories is visually imprinted on the Alice icon. For example, one two-page spread offers four facial close-ups, and four full body drawings. Walrath has removed an eye, a hand, a foot, mouth, or hair from each one, but the handwritten label above and below every picture states that "She isn't losing tangible parts, though she is disappearing" (16).

But, ultimately, Walrath's quiet and patient responses to Alice's reality forge the most nuanced subtle, yet vital connection to Carroll's text. Both Alices encounter worlds of great tumult and wonder, yet are shepherded through them in the most matter-of-fact ways. In Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Anna Kérchy suggests the narrative unhinges the known from the unknown in a manner that results in "a cognitive dissonance and interpretive

hesitation within protagonists and spectators alike, upon being faced with the clashing possibly referential, metaphorical and metatextual meanings demanding multifocal re-readings” (70).

Walrath’s *Aliceheimer*’s evokes intertextual connections with Carroll’s text by adapting its framework and narrative conventions, while also explicitly linking Alice to Alice through both the visual collage and the memory-body experiences. The reader, recognizing Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* through the visual and narrative strategies, then bonds the two texts together as palimpsests, with all the accompanying multiplicities in interpreting the text that Kérchy lists.

In her autobiographical introduction, Walrath outlines her strategy for prompting curiosity and wonder in response to a familiar-unfamiliar Alzheimer’s reality. Combining her experience in teaching medical anthropology, her artistry, and her desire to remember these stories from this time in their lives, Walrath produces a text designed to entertain Alzheimer’s patients and their weary caregivers, and also to alleviate to some degree the current dominant narratives for Alzheimer’s, and aging in general. The power of the image “to tap into subconscious processes” helps the caregiver, reader, and patient to “rewrite the dominant biomedical story of dementia” which “is in desperate need of revision” (3-4). Social death—the erasure of people within a society, due to the stigma and fear associated with disability and disease—must be countered in social ways. How Walrath accomplishes this returns us to Kember and Zylinska, and their idea of “the cut” as enacted by photography and other art forms. Influenced by Jacques Derrida’s idea of “différance” and their own notions of “becoming,” Kember and Zylinska “suggest that the practice of cutting is crucial not just to our being and relating to the world, but also to our *becoming-with-the-world*, as well as *becoming-different-from-the-world*” which occur “both on the level of matter” as well as “the level of culture”:

The process of cutting is one of the most fundamental and originary process through which we emerge as “selves” as we emerge with matter and attempt to give it (and ourselves) form. Cutting reality into small pieces—with our eyes, our bodily and cognitive apparatus, our language, our memory, and our technologies—we enact separation and relationality as the two dominant aspects of material locatedness in time.

(75)

By carefully cutting out the shapes of her mother’s robe from Carroll’s nonsensical text and layering the fabricated pieces onto the page, Walrath alters her personal Alzheimer’s story. Then, through the display of the resulting art, and remediation of this display in her published book, she alters to some degree the wider and familiar story in our society. These cuts are “a way of shaping the universe, and of shaping ourselves in it” (Kember and Zylinska 75).

Life writing: autographics, vulnerability, and disability

Aliceheimer’s isn’t a comic in a traditional sense: narrative text sits on one side; the images appear mainly on the page opposite. Graphically, text does appear on the images, but it becomes secondary to our reliance on the narrative on the right-hand pages. Family photographs are sprinkled throughout the text. Sharply distinguished from the assembled images, they also offer evidence of a non-Aliceheimer. In some cases, Walrath overlays a photograph of Alice onto a hand drawn visual. Though the very nature of this memoir strongly resists a sequential narrative, as I paged through the visual images, I discovered a sequential narrative in reverse for the Alice icon. As her brain unties her from relational and recognized bonds, and as she becomes more child-like, her icon grows younger.

And yet, the memoir is published in the Penn State University Press Graphic Medicine series, so there is no question that the work is to be understood as a graphic narrative. “The

medium of comics is perfect for telling the *Aliceheimer's* story because comics are all about rule breaking,” Walrath writes in her introduction (3), and Candida Rifkind has also noted the efficiency of the comics medium for producing life narratives of collaborative and generational auto/biography, and particularly because of the visual and material aspects comics texts afford:

The verbal-visual medium of sequential comics adds the dimension of drawing, and an established cartoon iconography of emotion, to the “scriptocentric” culture of prose narrative. Drawings cannot recover the embodied moment of storytelling in its entirety, but they can mobilize another sign system to supplement the prose auto/biography. (401)

But even Rifkind speaks about the images as a “supplement” to the prose, acknowledging that because we are socialized to consider words as primary and images as secondary, we tend to read the visual as an illustration of the textual. Walrath deliberately tries to destabilize this semiotic hierarchy. For the most part, the visual and the textual are segregated—the images appear on the left, the blocks of words on the right. But in some cases, the images occupy both pages, and in others, photographs provide the occasion for text and images crossing and intersecting, thereby raising issues about referentiality and necessarily complicating identity.

While comics and graphic narrative scholarship can inform my strategies for reading the visual aspects of *Aliceheimer's* as a published text, it therefore provides little direction for dealing with the drawn and constructed original objects. And in this case, it also offers little guidance for engaging with the actual autobiographical subject—Dana Walrath. In an autobiographic comic, the reader customarily views the embodied emotions and experiences of the comics author in multiple and sequential self-representations (Rifkind 403). In the case of *Aliceheimer's*, reading the blended narrative in this way does allow us to witness Alice's magic, register her fears and relief, recognize her time shifts and super powers, and, most importantly,

see Alice in physical, iconic form. But even though we only encounter two drawn images of Walrath—one as a baby, and the other only representing her back—and even though the drawn images, and especially the Alice icon, may seem to be biographical, what the reader actually sees is what Walrath saw, what she sees as she constructs the objects and the text, and what she actually presents for us to see. At every moment, we see through her eyes.

Echoing Gell but with critical difference, Anna Poletti emphasizes the role of the book as a medium and a symbol for life writing (“Putting Lives” 460). Drawing upon media scholarship, she delves into materiality, tracing the historical evolution of the book as a container for life thought. Though she draws the line at employing material culture methodologies, throughout her article she returns again and again to a particular fantasy from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Les Mots* (*The Words*), involving a version of himself in the Bibliothèque Nationale:

Me: twenty-five volumes, eighteen thousand pages of text and three hundred illustrations, including a portrait of the author. My bones are leather and cardboard, my parchment flesh smells of glue and mildew, and I strut at my ease across a hundredweight or so paper I am taken up, opened out, spread on the table, smoothed with the flat of the hand and sometimes made to crack. I let it happen and then suddenly I flash, dazzle, impose myself from a distance (qtd. In Poletti “Putting Lives . . . ” 462).

Whereas Gell argues that the agency of the index/object is a consequence of the potential or actual abduction from the creator, Poletti, while acknowledging the wider social context as well as the spatio-temporal *durée*, nevertheless sustains her engagement with life writing by insisting with Sartre that the reader still registers the author as author, even if in book form:

it is a combination of the material affordances of the book and paper (the codex), the institutions charged with storing them . . . and the interaction with the reader that the

material presence of the book enables (reading) that, taken together, form ‘the record’ to which life writing contributes. (“Putting Lives . . .” 462)

Taking into consideration the materiality of the book, the symbol of the book in life writing, and the actualization of the book/life by the reader through the reading act, Anna Poletti proposes that “the record” so often discussed in life writing comes from the “performative power of the book’s materiality” released through the reading act: “It is the possibility of the book’s body outliving an author’s body that invites the fantasy of the book as a prosthesis for the life and work” (“Putting Lives . . .” 477–478).

Here lies the difference between a lifewriting and media studies approach to a text, as opposed to one directed by material studies. For Poletti, the assembled Alice is a testimonial to her life, illness, and disappearance, but for Gell, the layers of assembled text in her robe and the pencil indentations for her full cheeks in themselves speak for Alice and Walrath herself. In either case, however, the appeal to the material arises from the need to preserve a life, and for those dealing with Alzheimer’s, this need is especially acute. As memories, language, and markers of self-identity fade in turn, the imperative to retain prompts a kind of ongoing memorialization. In her introduction, Walrath identifies this imperative as the genesis of her art project, and Alzheimer’s researchers continually encounter efforts to fulfill this need. Reading through texts written by patients and their caregivers, Vaidehi Ramanathan noted a powerful desire to retain, to re-inscribe on the memory, or to show proof of presence in the face of an impending absence. Such stories are produced in an effort to hold on to life stories even as they are becoming unmade, and Ramanathan further observed a blurring between the caregivers’ and patients’ stories as the absences are “filled in” (82). Leni Marshall examines the idea of *méconnaissance*, or becoming unrecognizable to oneself through age or through illness, and

concludes that through this experience a woman loses not only her capacity for reflection and “the idealized self that she created” but also the connection to her mother, “one of the key building blocks in the foundation of the lived self” (65). But Marshall also suggests that this process lays bare the illusions created through Lacan’s first mirror stage, and thereby opens up the opportunity for change (67, 53). In addition to raising the mother-daughter relationship as a pressure point for both participants, Marshall also provides support for Walrath’s own hope, stated in her introduction, to revise the “dominant biomedical story of dementia and how we approach aging globally” (4). By showing, telling, constructing, and embodying Alice’s story, Walrath captures moments in their lives, retains memories, and reconstructs Alice through a visual and physical record. She transforms that time of *méconnaissance*, and those moments of misrecognition, into a new story of aging and Alzheimer’s.

Discussing the proliferation of disability life writing in the last fifty years, G. Thomas Couser celebrates the reclamation of the body and the agency that such work makes possible: “Because disability life narratives can counter the too often moralizing, objectifying, pathologizing, and marginalizing representations of disability in contemporary culture, they offer an important, if not unique, entrée for inquiry into one of the fundamental aspects of human diversity” (“Disability” 605). But Couser also notes that such narratives can come at a cost. In relation to *Aliceheimer’s* as an auto/biography, the relevant questions are very straightforward. What about Alice? Did she, or could she, give consent? Would Walrath’s mother want her story to be shown and told? If she did at the time, would she have wanted this at an earlier point in her life? Does this matter? Is Alice in short what Couser would call a “vulnerable subject—persons who are liable to exposure by someone with whom they are involved in an intimate or trust-based relationship but are unable to represent themselves in writing or to offer meaningful

consent to their representation by someone else”? In such cases, a close relationship actually ups the ethical stakes (Couser *Vulnerable* xii). Who is being cut, constructed, and reclaimed in *Aliceheimer’s*? Whose agency is embedded in the collages and drawings?

But another transformation is embodied in this text—one more subtle and intimate, and though mainly told, evident in all aspects of the entire hybrid project. *Aliceheimer’s* is both biography and autobiography, each narrative steeped in and responding to culturally defined codes and reader expectations. While the visual and textual focus is on Alice and the representations and material embodiment of her life, the one making the pencil marks, cutting the text, and employing the “I” to tell the stories is Walrath. In the introduction, and at various points throughout the text, she makes clear how profoundly this period affected her—her understanding of herself, her goals and direction, her relationship with her mother, and her responses as her mother’s own memories and family history come to light. Embittered by her job, seeking greater connection to her mother, and facing the heartbreak of knowing she will eventually put Alice in lockdown care, Walrath takes her mother into her home (1–2). The topsy-turvy world of Alzheimer’s unhinges Alice’s memories and their moorings, but through her mother’s slow fading, Walrath realizes her own opportunity to change their relationship, and prompted by Alice’s comment, to embrace once more her artwork. Both have been static or suppressed for many years prior, but embedded in Walrath’s narration and ultimately realized through the making of the book itself is her own personal transformation. Facing her own *méconnaissance*, Walrath embraces her new circumstances, her reflections on them, her own story.

Visual media therefore fosters a connection between author and reader through an appeal to embodiment—by showing, in addition to, or sometimes rather than, telling. But what about actual bodies, constructed or otherwise? Life narratives are always body narratives, and in the

cases of disability life writing, bodies of markedly particular kinds (Couser, “Disability and Life writing” 230). By cutting, pasting, marking, and drawing, Walrath actually constructs an iconic version of her mother’s body, as well as succeeding icons registering the shifting physicality, into which Walrath inscribes herself with each cut and line. As I open my book, however, while I can see the evidence of the physical collage, I cannot feel the layers pasted together. Some pictures also have dimples and shadows, caused by glue or bleed markings—places where her art on the previous page shows through. But my pages are smooth and glossy. Unlike Walrath’s original sketchbooks and displayed installations, their images in the book have been flattened, digitized, and published commercially. Though far more subtle than the process of transcribing then photocopying the transcriptions of Queen Lili’uokalani, the published version of Walrath’s constructed Alice further mediates the reader’s experience by unavoidably eliminating the sensory aspects—the possibility of touch and feel.

Walrath is highly aware of this challenge. The book’s struggle in its representations to maintain visual clues to the nature of the material collage and drawings offers the possibility of some understanding of the original art, and certainly insures that readers will grasp the constructed nature of the bodies and the text. As I examine it, the book in my hands reveals to me that it is only one product of the entire project, and in the published text she herself describes the initial art, digital versions, and life-sized canvases printed from the digital versions and augmented with embroidery (3). Each version is a testament to the life lived, a memory made physical, and a memorial to a previous life changed by interrupted cell signal transmission. The life has been embodied, and is on the record.

Conclusion

The transcription and reproduction of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s diaries and the layering and flattening of Dana Walrath’s collages through the mediating process of publication open up a much wider discussion of objects as they increasingly move into new media to provide greater access to content. If we can retain our awareness of the text as an object, we will begin to see how the author asserts its material qualities to provide us with sensory auto/biographical information. But by also remaining aware of the related tiers of media and technology, and their impact upon the effects of any resulting “new” products on the consumer/reader—in short, by foregrounding the processes of mediation in our analysis of such texts—we can sensitize ourselves to the gifts and the dangers such texts can represent. And at this particular moment, by discussing how such mediated texts as Lili‘uokalani’s and Walrath’s affect the reader, I also hope to set the stage for the following discussions of texts for which the mediation processes or the layers of new content, and their impact on those who engage with them, might not be as obvious.

Chapter 2: Museum Spaces, Experiential Mediation, and Life Writing

Gallery and museum spaces frequently mount autobiographical objects and testimonial works. For a limited time, the museum's white walls and parquet floors house works of resistance, witness, or identity exploration. Then the curators take down the canvases, turn off the computers and projectors, or carefully fold up textiles and pack them away. Building upon the materiality and agency questions raised in chapter one, here are the questions I want to raise in this chapter. What happens in a gallery space that displays auto/biographical objects? What happens when they're no longer on display? How do current practices and processes in museums alter the mediation of the auto/biographical works? And how does the museum's quest for relevance in physical, and increasingly, in online spaces, affect the auto/biographical objects or performances?

While continuing to explore the mediation of auto/biographical works, this chapter moves beyond materiality and toward an evaluation of the processes at play in a museum's highly authorized spaces. Some of these we recognize and come to expect—labels and wall glosses, for instance, which interject the curator's thoughts between a viewer and an artist's work. But others we are accustomed to ignore. In addition, gallery space itself is being deployed in ways that no longer limit materials through long established conventions of display, as artists extend their installations beyond the physical and static, deliberately creating temporary, process-oriented, or performance-driven works. Finally, museums are experimenting with virtual extensions of themselves, as collections, temporary exhibits, and pedagogical metadata go online. What happens to life writing, and to the observer's experience of it, when museums not only remediate the displayed objects to become "immaterial" or digital, but also add layers of new and blended media onto the installation's online presence? And what happens when the work itself is a dynamic

process, requiring audience presence and participation, but it is also mediated to offer access to individuals at a distance, though necessarily only to a small part of the process and experience? How and why does the museum leverage such works into other media, such as for instance the museum's own websites? By entering in this chapter into museum spaces to encounter auto/biographical texts, I not only want to redirect our attention to the mediating presence of the buildings, the labels and glosses, and the wide range of people and positions that authorize and complicate the text held within, but also want raise questions about the highly mediated alternatives to direct access, when either because of time or place, immediate experience, even within the museum environment, is not possible.

What We Can See

Woven raffia, carefully embroidered letters, words chemically burned out of woven textiles, and deep and earthy colors of natural dyes fill the S-shaped gallery space. This is how Karen Hampton tells her stories of herself and her family in *The Journey North* (2015), an installation of new and previous work. In *Lessons* (1999) she hand-stitched an American flag in red and blue thread. Each careful, methodical stitch mimicked elementary school penmanship practice, as in red thread her cursive embroidery spells out “Culture is the greatest defense against slavery.” In *Invisible Child* (1996), she blended woven textile with a series of reproductions of her earliest photograph as a child. As our eye passes from left to right, each image becomes darker, and darker, until she fades into the deep dyes of the woven cotton. One part of the gallery space contains transferred images of distant ancestors that Hampton discovered and recovered through archival and genealogical research. In the very center, pieces of fabric—silk organza and a basic muslin cotton— are stitched together with indigo dyed

thread. They are hanging from a branding iron. The outline of a woman in a nineteenth-century dress, collared with puffy sleeves, appears on the fabric, with seventeen women's embroidered names filling the space marked out by the skirt. Felicia. Eliza. Yaya. Elizabeth. And more.

Entitled *Flora's Daughters* (2002), in this piece Hampton sews the body of Flora Leslie, a mulatto slave manumitted by and the common-law wife of George J. F. Clarke in the racially mixed city of St. Augustine, Florida in the early nineteenth-century (White 36). The branding iron and cotton fabric allude to her slave life; the organza points to her wealthy, landowner years with Clarke. Each name sewn into the skirt represents a generation in the genealogy of women stretching from Flora to Hampton herself. Drawing upon her family, archival research, and genealogies, Hampton's art embodies her relatives and herself through colors, woven textiles, and sewn figures. But through the temporal layers represented by each of the names, she sews her family's history, including her own, together with the history of slavery, abolitionism, freedom, and the African-American experience. Or as Susanna White elaborates:

History has shown that those who control the official record hold power over those whose stories are silenced. Through textile and fiber-based investigations, Hampton brings these stories to life and we are able to gain a richer understanding of how events from the past affect, not only the artist's personal relationship to a complex history, but our own evolving history as well. (52)

I am inside the small gallery, weaving my way around the temporary walls dividing the room and holding up some of the artwork. Hampton's *The Journey North* tells five different stories, each taking up its own nook in the parceled-out gallery, and each one reflecting her connections to family and history. *The Abolitionists Story 1830–1870* presents twelve portraits of key abolitionists. *The Slavery Story 1839–1863* series addresses the slavery experiences of her ancestor on

Hampton's father's maternal side. In *Journey to Freedom* (2014), she maps out through a series of embroidered tea towels the biography of Matthew Roberts, who escapes enslavement and joins the Union army. *The Panama Story 1906–1931* tells the stories of members of her mother's family: an aunt and a distant relative, a filmmaker named Frank Finlayson. *The Florida Story 1774–1914* represents colonial Florida and the fortunes of Africans in America as experienced by her father's side of the family. Through embroidered maps and loose threads, Hampton invokes the racial diversity of St. Augustine and its ties to the slave trade. She also chooses contradictory textiles—organza and muslin—as materials for embodying her own family's heritage and experiences with slavery (White 36). Though all of these visual narratives blend biography and autobiography drawn from researched and reconstructed genealogies, *The Karen Hampton Story 1958–Present* takes special care to weave her own experiences together with significant historical and societal changes. By superimposing childhood photographs on woven and stitched textiles, she places herself, her body, on top of historical moments of heightened racial tensions, contested identity, and physical anxieties and experiences, such as the school busing program. In the corner, a video plays on a loop, showing Hampton at work, and describing her research and art process.

The Journey North was first exhibited in the Wellin Museum of Hamilton College in the fall of 2015. It was co-curated by faculty member Stephen J. Goldberg and Senior Curator Susanna White. The video playing in the corner was produced to accompany the original exhibit. But I view the travelling exhibition in early 2017 at the Honolulu Museum of Art.⁴ The display area has two doors; I enter the room through the door with the promotional poster next to it, and immediately encounter *The Slavery Story 1839–1863*, the earliest piece chronologically in terms of content. As I move through the room, examining carefully the embroidered tea towel maps to freedom and the woven self-portraits, I recognize that Hampton's work is assembled and displayed to be seen in a

specific order. In a sense, I am herded through the space. I read the small placards on the wall that combine art process and medium, biography, interpretation, and criticism. I watch the edited video playing in the corner, behind *Flora's Daughters* (2002), the family genealogy hanging down in the center of the room. Hampton's own words also ring out, reverberating from the white walls and parquet floors. In this same room, I have previously viewed other textile exhibits, such as specialty kimono. But Hampton's work surrounds me—textiles reaching across time, sewing together her family's past and her present, and weaving her personal story into broader historical narratives.

Like many museum spaces, the room itself is supposed to fade away into a non-descript backdrop. The curator or museum staff have planned every element in this room—the entry point, the lights, the additional walls, the labels and wall glosses, the colors of the floor and walls, the temperature and environmental conditions. Though all these choices have a specific purpose, collectively such physical details are supposed to disappear from direct view. “The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is ‘art,’” Brian O’Dougherty explains: “Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you can click along clinically,” your eyes all the while focused on the art (14-15). Such austerity conceals the economic and social differentials playing out within those white walls, and, even as O’Dougherty points to these complexities and describes many of their effects upon both artists and audiences, he also notes the unwillingness to change. The white cube ideal “has incubated radical ideas that would have abolished it. The gallery space is all we’ve got, and most art needs it” (81). Recent initiatives to paint over or cover walls with graphics, glosses, and text deliberately challenge this concept, integrating the voice of the museum curators and staff in visual, physical ways that sometimes go unrecognized by museumgoers. While such deviations from “clean” aesthetic may capture the attention of visitors to the gallery—new paint colors, wall

coverings, graphics, or furniture choices stand out sharply because patrons recognize the contrast to the expected white walls and polished floors—what these changes resist, and to what extent, are not questions that viewers necessarily answer, or even ask.

The Museum and the Land

Behind hedges and anonymous walls, Honolulu Museum of Art–Spalding House is tucked away off Makiki Heights Drive. Converted from Anna Rice Cooke’s art deco mansion, and arguably the most impressive of the multi-million-dollar properties hidden by shrubberies and gates in the neighborhood, the museum’s buildings and the grounds spill down the hill.

I walk into the first room of the house/gallery, well-lit with natural light. The *HI Society* exhibit fills all of the gallery spaces, and this first room contains paintings by Brenda Cablayan—houses, concrete overpasses, high rises, condo pools, or contemporary everyday Makiki scenes. “Who lives here?” the exhibit asks. “What are you? How you gonna act?” (Honolulu Museum of Art).

I walk into a darker, recessed gallery, just beyond. Eight upright meticulously fashioned dry boxes fill the L-shaped space, offering digital prints of fish ponds, maps, and cut and quartered ulua. Red and black dominate one side of the exhibit, and the grey-black of the ulua informs the other. Wall text and labels of varying degrees of size cover four of the five walls—combining traditional labels, glosses, and text drawn from portions of the work. Subtle yet specific details powerfully inform the installation. The thirteen coils of the noose around the ulua stand for the thirteen men responsible for the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. The numbers on the quartered ulua refer to the land transactions, prices, and taxes that make up the record of the museum and the surrounding area. The size of the dry boxes and their status as family objects are significant, and so are the maps and pictures of the fishponds, their erased or lost names

reasserted by inscribing them in red. Returning to first wall text, next to where I entered the installation space, I read it again, and realize that this piece is compelling me, as a viewer standing on the old wooden floor of the Anna Rice Cooke house, to remember what came before, and to therefore to acknowledge what has happened.

April A.H. Drexel's multimedia work explicitly points to the land on which the museum sits—this house, on these acres, in this ahupua'a, in this moku. Half of the installation restores ancestral or historical place names, which have been “erased, renamed or reduced to a single street name on current day maps.” The other half traces the “ownership history of these properties” from “the original land patent grant number” to the tax map numbers, as the properties were combined or divided (Drexel and Padilla). The museum's explanatory text emphasizes Drexel's meticulous researching of place names, properties, and money exchanged. Maps in black and red hang between black and red images of fishponds, the images alternating in reversed colors. The repetition of the hanged and quartered ulua, the dry boxes, the maps, and the pictures of the fishpond oscillates the viewer between loss and reclamation. The unnaturally butchered fish demonstrates the dispossession, while the emergence of lost place names on the fishpond pictures reconnects the land and traditions. On the wall appear the words “memory markers/invigorate/safeguard/ancestral knowledge” and “illegal government lots/exposed/“occupants”/hung and dried . . . KŪPA'A MA HOPE O KA 'ĀINA (Drexel).

I am reminded of Mishuana Goeman. “Our ability to understand the connections between stories, place landscape, clan systems, and Native Nations means the difference between loss and continuity,” Goeman writes, and goes on to assert that “the way we imagine space has tangible consequences for how we relate to all of our relatives, imagine citizenship, and organize communities” (301). Drexel exposes to public view the Honolulu Museum of Art's Spalding

House real estate transactions not only to create a genealogy of the land, hidden in plain sight behind the bureaucratic screens of transactions following the overthrow and annexation, but also to repopulate our historical understanding of the place by recalling the bounty of the land, which hosted a large fish pond that helped to sustain those who lived in this well-populated area.

Drexel's installation enacts what Goeman suggests: to rewrite, and therefore to recreate, the space by "flipping the script" (Drexel and Padilla). More succinctly, this display forces visitors to notice and meditate upon the space they are taught to ignore: the museum building itself.

The goal of the innocuous museum space is to focus the visitor's eyes on the art alone. But a museum's design and physical space affects not only our visual field, but our physical, sensory, and spatial understanding as well. David Brieber, Marcos Nadal, and Helmut Leder determined in their empirical study that the physical museum had the power to enhance memory recall and the valued assigned to artworks (36). Engaging with the formalist concept that the art stands alone, their study shows the opposite. The experience of the physical space, and the art within that space, increases both interest and memory recall. They postulated that the size of the art or of the museum space validated the authenticity of the art (Brieber, et al. 41). Specific qualities of the aural, visual, or spatial environment—sounds reverberating in an open marble sculpture hall, or the dimly lit and close confines of a pastel exhibit—affect the visitors' senses, even when they are supposedly focused on the objects on display. But so too does the location of the front door, or the entire museum, and so do the opening and closing hours, and the rules of entry, granting rights of access to some people at certain times while denying them entirely to others.⁵ And no matter how hard museums try to conceal or direct the visitor's attention away from their institutional pasts, political allegiances, funding sources, or acquisitions and curation practices, these are all deeply imbedded in the physical space and the ongoing operations. This

physical museum space embodies socially constructed and negotiated assumptions that more often than not reflect and sustain dominant power structures.

The ethnographies, catalogs, classification systems, labels, and value determinations for collected items deployed in the museum's everyday operations can both illuminate represented cultures and subsume them within the dominant culture informing the institution. Furthermore, museums are not just object repositories, or "*material* assemblages," but nexuses of social processes and assertions of power. As Byrne, et al. explain, "we mean that museums, the people who staff and run them, the objects and the various individuals and processes which led them to being there, those who visit them and those who encounter the objects within them in various media are all part of a complex network of agency" (4). Because agency is inherent to its operations, this network is especially responsive to auto/biographical works displayed in the museum's gallery rooms and created spaces. These responses, however, tend to resolve themselves through the series of negotiations, decisions, and agentic acts, such as label creation, that traditionally and customarily define museum operations. By paying close attention to the effects of these activities on the interactions between people and object in the physical environment, we can begin to recognize just how many forms of mediations have been, and continue to be, at work.

Labels, for instance, mediate between the objects, the museumgoers, and the museum as an institution. Tacked up on the wall next to artwork, or located on the Plexiglas of a diorama, the usually anonymous label paradoxically claims authority and authenticity through the levels of information it provides. Labels are not however uniform in what of information they need or choose to deliver. Whether the label supplies information about the artist, the materials employed, the scientific names or habitat information, historical context, the donor details, or the

dates of creation or acquisition, the result represents what the curator, perhaps in consultation with other stakeholders, wants to tell museumgoers about the object. But as Beverly Serrell explains, while the focus, intent, or content may differ between institutions, the label's ostensible mission is consistent: "When museum practitioners produce labels that are guided by clear goals, and contain accessible content and have words and visuals that work together, more visitors will understand, find meaning in, and enjoy museums exhibitions" (xv). According to Serrell, good labels will customarily supply what is generally considered to be the salient information about the work they accompany. In common practice, this follows a template familiar to most gallery or museum visitors, beginning with the name of the artist and title of the work, if known, and the materials or media employed. Then the curator will often use some of the remaining space to speak directly to the imagined viewer, often supplying the biographical, critical, and interpretive information deemed necessary for an enhanced understanding of work itself, often within the context of the artist's other works, or the other works in the room or museum or gallery as a whole. Acting as an intermediary between the artist, her work, and the museumgoer, the label also allows the curator to intervene, often to tell the story of the curation and exhibition process.

Serrell does note the potential problems that labels can reveal or create. The exhibition might in fact not have clear or coherent ideas to convey, or the curators involved might not produce labels appropriate for the actual audience. In his foreword to Serrell's first edition, Neil Postman identifies the cause of such challenges as language itself. Museums "tell us stories—great and small—about what it means and has meant to be a human being. Without words, the objects displayed cannot tell the whole story, cannot even tell an interesting story. But words in themselves . . . can misdirect our attention or trivialize the action, or, even worse, entirely miss the point of what we are seeing" (vii). Postman's warning suggests at least two responses: a

renewed commitment to producing clear object labels; or the deliberate subversion of any claim to knowledge on the part of the institution about the nature or meaning of the object on display. Postman insists that museums must be understood as political institutions, representing certain facets of humanity more fully than others, and offering socially-constructed stories of what it means to be human (Postman *End of Education* 164–165). Institutional identity, decision-making processes, historical verification, and power all influence curation—and the creation of labels. An economics of representation is also at work in labeling. Serrell suggests that in a 2000 sq. ft. exhibition space, containing perhaps twenty different exhibits or objects to look at, a visitor may only read about 625 words—roughly thirty words per label (125). Labels frame, stimulate, and enlighten, but they also can tell, scold, dictate, subvert, proclaim, and confuse. And no matter who actually writes them, labels convey “official” messages about their objects. Once placed on the wall, they become official, with some or all of their thirty words or so offering a translation, or distillation, of the object’s “testimony.” Museum labels therefore function similarly to other forms of condensed life writing, such as the obituary, the author biography, or contributor’s note—genres that serve specific purposes, and that package ideological resistance or personal idiosyncrasy within a socially determined template.

Labels themselves have been treated as sites for contestation or resistance. In a project called *Separate the Art from the Artist* (2018) for instance, Michelle Hartney placed nuanced and informative labels next to works in New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art that situated them in relation to the misogynistic actions of their artists. In the same year, the famous feminist art collective The Guerilla Girls offered suggestions for how to write wall labels for an exhibition of Chuck Close’s work in light of the #MeToo movement, entitled *From Nope to Hope* (2018) (Pes). Institutionally, both the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Worcester

Art Museum have proactively revised labels to acknowledge the sexual and racial issues raised by the works. In the case of auto/biographical or genealogical objects, which often embody the creator's own testimony and agency, the label can also act as an intervention, giving voice and agency to the curator, museum, or other parties that mediate between the artist and the viewer. Just as the physical mediations within a gallery space act upon the art and viewer in not fully recognized ways, labels can act as agents that focus the viewer's gaze, and seek to determine the context for the encounter with what is displayed.

Kaonain the Museum:

In Spalding House, I walk into an official, authoritative space that tells me something is art simply by hanging it on the wall. Laura Peers succinctly describes the processes, hidden from most visitors that inform museum exhibits: “clearly, what the visitor sees, and a site claims, as ‘authentic’ is the product of extensive negotiation and compromise by administrators, researchers, curators, and interpreters.” Because “authenticity is closely linked to authority,” discussion of works within a museum space should therefore take into account the decision-making, historical verification, and determinations of identity involved, which “can reveal structures of power in the present as much as historical facts” (92).

By directing the viewer's attention through a series of coded objects to the museum space and the land surrounding the HoMA's Spalding House, April A. H. Drexel's *Kūpa'a* also foregrounds those “structures of power.” The installation displays the transactions involved in the acquisition of the site and the construction of the house, but through Hawaiian rhetorical methods, it also comments simultaneously on the past and future of the museum as a contested site. After walking around the neighborhood with the curator Aaron Padilla, Drexel began to

research four addresses--the museum's and three other nearby residences. In a public talk, she talked about the process in two ways: first, by emphasizing the ease of access to the legal documentation through the State Archives, Bureau of Land Conveyances, and newspaper articles; second, by describing the consequences of working with this information, and making it available through her art. Drexel wanted to know who was there, and when. As she pored through the land transactions, she uncovered detailed stories about the people and families involved. Some material she did not feel she had the responsibility to use, and her decisions on how to proceed reflect her kuleana as an artist, and establish a kuleana for the art itself (Drexel and Padilla). Her research into the lives of those who at various times were present in this place took her back to land uses prior to the documentation of land transactions. A large fishpond at one time sustained many people, and agricultural uses supported kapa making. This research, now manifest in the art, establishes the genealogy of the land, stretching from the more recent real estate transactions back through the annexation, the overthrow, and the documented land transfers of the Mahele, to times long before.

When I first saw *Kūpa 'a*, a chatty docent accosted me and gushed about the layers of meaning in the piece, offering important details accompanied by a confession that she did not fully understand all of what was present. At an October 2014 public talk by Drexel, a local art critic echoed the docent's confession, confessing that although he could recognize the presence of metaphors and codes in the installation, he could not access and or interpret the work on his own. Drexel replied that by incorporating everyday objects into her work, she made it possible for those who recognized the objects and images to easily crack the cultural codes. Visual critics Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright have described this method as a process of viewer interpellation that calls for a cultural and collective, rather than an individual response:

for viewer interpellation by an image to be effective, the viewer must implicitly understand himself or herself as being a member of a social group that shares codes and conventions through which the image becomes meaningful. I may feel that an image apprehends or touches me personally, but it can only do so if I am a member of a group to whom the codes and conventions ‘speak,’ even if the image does not ‘say’ the same thing to me as it does to someone else. (50)

The docent and the art critic recognize the maps, images of ulua, and dry boxes, and perhaps arrive at a meaning for themselves. But for her intended audience and culture, Drexel’s choices and deployment of objects offer multiple meanings through an appeal to what she identified as kaona. Drexel explained to the art critic that her use of metaphors and codes was appealing to shared knowledges and frames of reference within Hawaiian culture that were especially familiar before the overthrow of the kingdom (Drexel and Padilla). As a result, attempts to translate kaona into a single stable reference reduce a complex exchange between the artist, the installation, the viewer, and shared cultural history down to something akin to a pun, or at best, an elementary approach to the work as having an overt and a hidden meaning. Instead, Brandy Nālani McDougall and Georganne Nordstrom describe kaona as an intellectual and poetic device that establishes a dynamic connection between storyteller and audience—a shared secret in plain view, understood by a few or many. “The composer is expected by Hawaiian audiences to employ kaona,” they explain, and

The expected role of the Hawaiian audience in this exchange is to look for and detect kaona in a composition so as to relate the numerous and varied allusions to their prior knowledge and experiences. In effect, those audience members who find the kaona and its meaning(s) are rewarded with a sense of exclusivity shared between the composer and

all who ‘find’ meaning," thereby receiving the ‘insider’ knowledge embedded within a composition. (101)

McDougall calls this “kaona connectivity,” a term that “describes how kaona, as a practice, requires us to connect with our kūpuna as well as with each other. Kaona is a practice of veiling and layering meaning as well as finding meaning. As such, it is dependent on audience, one that has cultural knowledge and experience, one that can receive this meaning, unveiling and sorting through each layer” (5). The connections across time—past, present, and future—are important aspects of kaona, and Drexel infuses them into her installation.

Drexel employs other Hawaiian rhetorical devices to encode her work. Pīna‘i, and helu, or repetition and listing, are integral to the visual and textual affect of the installation. Colors, the visuals of the ulua, the maps, the place names, the images of the fishponds, and the dry boxes recur and multiply—some always in the same form, such as the place names, others enacting repetition with a difference. For example, the different sizes of four of the dry boxes represent differences in land use, and the cuts of the ulua correspond to the size of the land grants and plots. With regard to the images of the fishponds and the maps, they are presented as both red on black in color, and black on red. Herman Pi‘ikea Clark and April Drexel supply the following genealogical rationale for these duplications:

In traditional Hawaiian Society, *mo‘okū‘auhau* were often referenced visually through the repetition of shapes and motifs in printed textile patterns, weavings, tattoos, sculpted images, and knotted cordage. While aesthetically pleasing in itself, the repetition of visual elements served to imbue an object with the *mana* (divine power) of particular ancestors. (55)

Lists of place names appear within the dry boxes, on the red and black maps, and as part of the wall texts and labels, creating a repetitive effect, but also establishing a decolonizing connection between Drexel's work and the physical space. As a result, while Drexel shared a genealogy of the project in her talk, the art offers its own genealogy, connecting the land under and around the museum to its past by visually and materially representing its mo'okū'auhau.

Drexel's artistic process draws heavily on Hawaiian rhetorical and aesthetic practice. My positioning in relation to her work and her talk, however, requires a broadening of my interpretive methodologies, mediating between what I know, what I can come to know, and what I can't know. Others have written about the need to take up this challenge. Margaret Kovach argues that altering the homogeneity of the academic interpretive landscape will require indigenous and non-indigenous scholars to learn about, consult, and employ indigenous knowledge systems: "Cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledges. At the heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful use of that culture's knowledge systems." Longevity cannot depend entirely on use, but requires creating new spaces for using such knowledge systems: "The infusion of Indigenous knowledge systems and research frameworks informed by distinctiveness of cultural epistemologies transforms homogeneity," and in the process "provides another environment where Indigenous knowledges can live" (12). Kovach outlines how to approach, how to use, and what must be kept in mind when consulting indigenous knowledge systems. She also identifies significant differences between Western and Indigenous thought and research methods, focusing on the need to adopt a conceptual framework that centers tribal epistemologies, to apply a decolonizing lens throughout the research process, to recognize the importance of story in data collection and in analyzing and interpreting research results, and to prepare oneself for the challenges of self-

awareness and responsible ethics. Kovach's research agenda not only requires changes in point of view, posed questions, and interpretations, but underscores the power inherent in the research process—something that Drexel herself echoes when she considers the consequences of putting art out into the public sphere. “Research is imbued with a power hierarchy, with the researcher having final control over the research design, data collection, and interpretation,” Kovach explains, and “The choice of methods is a solid indicator of the power dynamic at work” (125). Taking a decolonizing step must therefore not only lay bare the power differentials, but also impede efforts at using methodology to extract and take away data during the research process, instead of giving it back to the studied community (81–82). Relying on my own cultural, literary, or visual interpretive strategies would therefore only enable a limited reading of the text. Reading it as a genealogy of the land, however, connects the recent installation to a much longer tradition of Hawaiian intellectual works.

Drexel's installation specifically interrogates the imagined space of the land where I stand. *HI Society* may ask “Who lives here?” but the wall gloss for Drexel's installation inquires “What is the value in knowing?” and demands that I “take interest in and responsibility for place-based education, historical research, and resources of knowledge” (Drexel). I freeze in place, realizing that the wall text—and the entire installation—is requiring me to acknowledge my complicity as a visitor and viewer, the Honolulu Museum of Art as an institution, the previous land owners as a series of bureaucratic thieves, the annexation and overthrow crafters as greedy killers of a culture and a people, and even the Mahele as a kind of beginning to the end. By calling on *me* to reflect on my relation to these events inside and outside the museum, Drexel refutes the seemingly free and bare notion of the art gallery's “white cube.” When the artwork interrogates the very existence of the building that contains it and the viewer, that idealized

austere space for viewer and art to connect without outside interference is also exposed as a convenient delusion. But at the same time as it picks apart this fallacy, and mourns the loss of the place, by reintroducing the Hawaiian place names and documenting on site those uses and value of the land erased by the cultural break of the overthrow and annexation, Drexel's installation changes and rewrites the history of the space.

I take another look at the place names. I record them on my program, writing them onto the paper and into my memory.

What We Can No Longer See

Neither Karen Hampton's *The Journey North* nor April Drexel's *Kūpa 'a* are currently on view at the Honolulu Museum of Art or Spalding House. Hampton's exhibit closed in the spring of 2017, Drexel's in winter of 2015. For these two exhibits, we can no longer read the walls, weave through the pieces, or have those chicken skin moments inside the gallery space. New pieces have appeared there—on floor mounts, hanging from the ceiling, or stretched across the walls. With each new show, a new story; with each closing, the walls are whitewashed, wiping the slate clean for new stories to emerge.

Though no longer occupying a public space, traces and remainders of these installations linger in disparate forms and locations—memories, camera phone pictures, an exhibit catalog sold in the gift shop, websites still hosting promotional and explanatory materials. Each exhibit's duration was limited—neither became part of the museum's permanent holdings, and even if they had, parts of that collection rotate, go into permanent storage, or are loaned to other museums.⁶ Many works are hidden from view in private collections. Lost works, where provenance trails grow cold (purposefully or not) account for other works outside of the public sphere. For these categories,

limited or no mediated forms exist. For my discussion, I want to concentrate on museum-held works that a researcher or museumgoer may encounter once, but may never view again. Sometimes community protests or administrative censorship lead to the removal of a work from the museum's wall. For certain kinds of art, then, a museumgoer may only encounter one stage or portion of its existence, never having access to the work in its entirety. The ephemeral nature of these works, and the need to be physically present to experience them, because they are composed of objects, enact a process, or take the form of a performance, limit the degree of possible sensory engagement. This section focuses upon the kinds of mediations that step in as replacements when the original auto/biographical art forms are no longer accessible. I am especially interested in what happens when we can no longer view the works due to issues of preservation and care, censorship, or by the very nature of performance art.

Many art works prove to be fragile. Colors fade, years of exposure to humidity or air pollution prove damaging, or more recently, technological obsolescence requires continuous upgrading and maintenance. Museums take extraordinary precautions to preserve and conserve their most fragile works, yet some of these same pieces draw crowds of spectators, and with them, substantial additions through entrance fees to their operating funds, and increased prestige as an institution. Any visitor to the Louvre almost unavoidably views Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, but to see the small painting requires not only joining and even grappling with the throng of other visitors in front of it, but also looking at it through the mediating clear chamber that surrounds and protects it. Many museums also strictly control components of the physical environment—the temperature, the lighting, the relative humidity. But even under these favorable conditions, many works deteriorate. Some museums place such works in specially designed alcoves or rooms that feature even greater

environmental controls, while other museums squirrel away such fragile works in permanent storage.⁷

In another conservation strategy tightly tied to online technology, many museums are establishing and maintaining databases on their websites that provide digital facsimiles of the items in their collections, including withdrawn and stored works. Because of their specific implications for mediation, I want to discuss two works archived this way at the Tate Liverpool. Donald Rodney's photograph *In the House of My Father* (1996–7) captures an image of his own hand holding a folded and pinned structure. Constructed from Rodney's own skin, this tiny house is a separate artwork, entitled *My Mother. My Father. My Sister. My Brother* (1996–7). Battling sickle cell anemia, he created these two works in the hospital for an upcoming show, first creating the fragile house out of skin removed during surgical treatments, then having a photographer capture it nestled in his hand, the white hospital sheets serving as a backdrop. According to the Tate website, "Both works address Rodney's sense of family and identity, as a British-born artist whose parents had emigrated from Jamaica, as well as themes relating to mortality and his own illness."⁸ Like much of his work, both pieces are highly autobiographical, tightly focused on his diseased body.

When discussing the boom in disability memoirs, G. Thomas Couser suggests that through the act of self-representation, memoirists redefine their own experiences and how the world sees, or can never fully see, their disability. "Disability autobiographers typically begin from a position of marginalization, belatedness, and pre-inscription," Couser observes, but because their memoir is "written from inside the experience in question, it involves *self*-representation by definition and thus offers an opportunity for personal revaluation of that condition" (*Signifying* 7). Rodney's two works redefine intersections of family and disease in separate ways. The house constructed of removed, dried skin and pins is almost unbearably material. But the photograph operates visually as

a site of contrasts: the dead skin home nestled in his live hand, his body covered by hospital sheets, one art work containing another.

Neither I, nor anyone else, will ever see the house itself alone. While the skin sculpture and the photograph are separate works, *In the House of My Father* (1996–7) compresses the two into one. Easily digitized and distributed, the photograph is also the one mediated version of *My Mother. My Father. My Sister. My Brother* (1996–7) authorized by Rodney himself. In a sense, then, Rodney has made a “cut” of a cut. As Kember and Zylinska explain, photography is “an active practice of cutting through the flow of mediation, where the cut operates on a number of levels: perceptive, material, technical and conceptual” (71). Rodney coupled the photographer’s cut with his own surgical cut, freezing in place his precarious identity in illness and health, and therefore telling his story outside of medical discourse (Couser *Recovering* 11). But by flattening the 3D skin sculpture into a 2D image, the photograph will only ever offer the viewer the roof, a corner, and two sides of the house, perched on Rodney’s hand. The Tate’s handling of the two works in their website summary, and in a current show entitled “Ideas Depot,” continues this kind of mis-en-abyme relationship online and in person. By identifying the two as separate works, viewers recognize that they are encountering something that they can see but not see simultaneously. Though the sculpture is the reason for the photograph, you cannot fully view the sculpture, leaving the photograph dependent and independent. But at the same time, my ability to view the sculpture at all depends on the photograph’s mediation.

Extremely fragile during and after creation, *My Mother. My Father. My Sister. My Brother* (1996–7) poses formidable preservation and ethical challenges for display or storage. Because removed skin deteriorates rapidly, some artists working in this medium design their works to degrade or devolve as part of the process. Many museums have procedures for preserving other skin

artifacts—most notably, and notoriously, the *toi moko*, *mokomokai*, and *upoko tuhi*, or the Māori heads that Europeans and Americans collected in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries (Katz).⁹ In related developments, interest in the conservation and restoration of paintings has been trending in the art world, as enthusiasts seek out information about the hidden processes involved in such work. But the Tate Liverpool website is silent about this dimension of Rodney's work, so I contacted the gallery to find out more about *My Mother. My Father. My Sister. My Brother* (1996–7). What is its current location? Storage? On display? I also questioned myself about my interest in the work. Since writing about it forces me to rely on a mediating surrogate (the website) of another surrogate (the photograph), can I really discuss a work so removed from my experience? Do the surrogates provide enough detail? Do I have enough of a sense of the size, weight, color, and density of the tiny structure? Is it responsible for me to comment on something when I cannot even see the back of it? Can I separate the life narratives they embody, if I can only see one through another? And given this fact of access, how do I cite the work(s)? I received a reply from the Tate Liverpool. *In the House of My Father* (1996–7) will remain the only access provided to *My Mother. My Father. My Sister. My Brother* (1996–7).

Removed from View:

Although relatively rare, some museums do remove controversial artworks from view, whether because they connect too closely to a time of pain, or disrupt some viewers' strongest socially-determined values, or lack the necessary sensitivity or context to be displayed. Protest often precedes removal. On its website, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) maintains a running timeline of censored artists and performances, and over the last seventeen years, galleries, museums, universities, and government offices have removed art, often as a result of shifting

cultural values, priorities, and concerns. In the early 2000s, images and statements about 9/11 and war attracted the most attention; in more recent years, racism and political antagonisms top the list.¹⁰ Though Louis Lankford and Kelly Scheffer correctly remark that “*Any work of art may be controversial*” (201), they note that increasingly, such controversy results from more museums opting for edgier, and therefore riskier, installations, as part of their mission to attract larger and more diverse crowds, and to introduce visitors to a greater variety of art forms. In Hawai‘i, for instance, even though its self-reflexive nature worried the administrators, April Drexel’s *Kūpa ‘a* was installed at the Honolulu Museum of Art-Spalding House (Drexel and Padilla). Though the risks may seem considerable to an art institution’s governing board, controversy can also be a more general stimulus for creativity, reflection, and change. As Lankford and Scheffer explain, “Impassioned dialog fuels the exploration and examination of ideas that make a difference in the way people think about, value, and live with art” (202).

Because auto/biography inevitably shifts the viewers’ gaze outside of their own personal experience, works with such content can prove especially controversial—often because they reveal insecurities or deeply-held opinions that make viewers uncomfortable, or because they push hard against a social boundary. In the introduction to their edited collection on women’s self-representation through visual and performance art, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point to the criticism leveled at Tracy Emin for her controversial, partially readymade work *My Bed* (1998).¹¹ Noting that women’s artistic expression is often dismissed as “merely personal” and “merely narcissistic” (*Interfaces* 4), they then report on how Emin’s work was relegated to both categories. Pushing back, Smith and Watson contend that through their process, autobiographical representations such as Emin’s redirect the gaze on women in art away from their deployment as objects, and toward their status as autobiographical subjects (5). If art forms in general can resist,

testify, and represent new ways of seeing our world, and imagining ones we would like to create, auto/biographical art forms engage more intensely with issues of identity and representation, often making strong connections between personal experiences and identity formation within a cultural, social, or historic milieu. April Drexel's *Kūpa'a* retells from a personal and Hawaiian perspective the story of the land on which the museum sits, and recovers place names lost through a lengthy process of colonial domination. Karen Hampton's works literally weave together family, genealogy, slavery, and the African-American experience of the nineteenth-century and of her own age. Lankford and Scheffer remark that while art "viewed as ethically or morally offensive or as promoting cruelty" will inevitably spark controversy (208), what may disturb one community's beliefs may result from actually being confronted for the first time with the experiences and reflections of another's. As artists explore their own bodies, identities, and sexualities within the larger context of colonialism, racism, genocide, cultural annihilation, illness, and trauma, they may unavoidably trigger trauma within those who witness their work. "For the listener who enters the contract of the testimony, a journey fraught with dangers lies ahead," writes Dori Laub. This listener can become "co-owner" of the trauma, whose "impact on the hearer—leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact" (57, 72). Rather than trying to protect listeners or viewers by closing their ears and eyes for them, Laub advocates for preparing them to perform an important and vital act: that of bearing witness to trauma and atrocities.

'Cut:'

Drawing upon both German fairy tale imagery and antebellum portraiture, Kara Walker's carnivalesque silhouette art depicts grotesque orgies of sexual transgression and violence in enormous multi-wall installations. The recipient of a McArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1997 for

her “provocative and grimly humorous” work, “Walker’s installations, filled with slave-era, stereotypical figures, are graphic and violent tableaux that explore the vestiges of sexual, physical, and racial exploitation in a challenging manner” (McArthur Foundation).¹² In her self-portrait *Cut* (1998) she “examines her role as an African American woman artist in the public sphere” through a life-sized silhouette cutout, her heels clicking together in mid jump, her arms outstretched, her braids in motion—and her wrists cut, blood pooling on the ground (Shaw 125–6).¹³ Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw reads *Cut* as “the artist’s self-realization of her status as the ‘other of the other’ and one who dares to speak the unspeakable” within both the African American and the predominantly white art communities (8).¹⁴ I would add that the exaggerated movement frozen within the black silhouette, and particularly the dangling wrists, also embodies an autobiographical “cut” in time, a moment caught and printed, documented, interrupting the regular flow of mediation (Kember and Zylinska 72).

Shaw writes that Walker’s “work within the ‘discourse of the unspeakable’ has literally been ‘unseeable’ for some spectators,” and predominantly within the African American art community, because it violates the “established decorum and suitable subject matter for an African American women artist,” (8). To take a prime example, in July 1999, the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum (DIA) pulled one of Walker’s works, *The Means to an End: A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* (1995), from a new exhibit, citing concerns raised by African Americans.¹⁵ The removed installation offered graphic and caricature scenes from slave life, inevitably tapping into painful and unresolved cultural and collective memories. This is a hallmark of Walker’s work. Pointing to her “constant self-referentiality,” Shaw suggests that the “disturbing and often melancholic tone of Walker’s art reflects, and offers up for critique, the problem of the broader culture’s inability to come to terms with the past” (6). But in the DIA piece, by including a self-portrait, with dainty, nineteenth-century

heels turned out and full-skirted dress, Walker places herself inside her silhouette cutout tableaux of horror. Through this act, Walker asks us to join her in acknowledging a collective memory that until this moment neither she nor we have fully confronted.

For life writing scholars, this very public removal of *The Means to an End* from the DIA entwines Walker's art, biography, and censorship in ways that can never be disentangled. Furthermore, although removing the installation kept people from viewing it at a certain time or place, this act provoked many others to search out other mediated forms, and the controversy itself has proved to be a stimulus and a barrier for mounting *Cut* and her other works at galleries and museums. Precipitating possible controversy, The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis engaged its audience, recognizing the difficulties surrounding the depictions. The Walker Center Teen Arts Council (WCTAC) invited viewers to write postcards in response to their exhibit *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* (Feb 17, 2007–Jul 6, 2008) with prompts on suppression, power, and history. Some of the resulting postcards, handpicked for promotional reasons, appear on the Walker web site and offer up related and intertextual, visual auto/biographical works (Rochester). While the Walker provides an example of alternative approaches to controversy, censorship and withdrawing works from view provides an immediate resolution with far reaching consequences. Put another way, lifewriting scholars are particularly suited to recognize that denying direct access to her original, larger-than-life installations may be the result of the very qualities that make her work interesting and important—the inseparability of the personal, the historical, and the political.¹⁶

Art as Performance—Retention and Loss

I turn our attention to something happening now, live in the gallery space—possibly body art, or perhaps a computer program running a multimedia installation. If I step into a gallery and

observe, does that personal experience really offer greater insight than if I watched a video of the performance? And if so, what, how, and why? What if I were to read an account, written by the person across the gallery from me? Would that form of documentation be more authoritative? What happens if I view an installation evolving over time? Can I only claim to have “seen” the work if I return each day, and experience the process in its entirety? Or if I participate in a performance, then watch a mediated version—say a video—at a later time, because my sensory memory discerns a difference of information between the two, do I experience one as a record, a mediation, or an adaptation of the other?

Performance- and process-driven works comprise my final category of art works whose very nature may necessitate a mediated form. While many artists employ material objects as part of a performance or process—or even create them through that process—the objects themselves do not constitute the full work. If I cannot be present in the gallery for the performance, do I have limited or reduced access to the artist’s agency? If I encounter an evolving artwork, but its full performance runs for the entire length of the exhibit, can I actually claim knowledge about it, if I do not experience the whole? What is gained through surrogacy, and what is lost in that process? And how does all of this reflect the very nature of auto/biography? I will respond to these questions by discussing interactive and performative pieces, ultimately in relation to Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylińska’s expectations of the “liveness” of events.

“Performances have long been the exception, not the rule, in the mostly object-based art world,” Christiane Paul observes in her account of what she calls “new media art” (*New Media* 53–54). The nature of such artworks initially challenges curators and museum staff to come up with methods for mounting and maintaining them, and ultimately poses problems with regard to the end product that the museum would expect to acquire from sound or video art. Long-term process-

driven work proves especially difficult, as the “curator often mediates between the artist and the institution, which often must create formats and procedures to accommodate new media art; between the artwork and the general audience unfamiliar with new media art . . . and between the artwork and the press” (65). The technical and audio-visual resources needed to run or manage such art also increase the staff’s mediation, already heavily in evidence through labels, glosses and wall text, gallery configuration, lighting, signage, (electronic) docents, gallery maps or legends, and marketing campaigns directed at visitors entering the museum. Such necessary collaboration between curators, staff, and artists may have other unanticipated consequences. Sara Diamond for instance points to a blurring of roles, including authorship, as collaboration “inevitably leads away from the lucid single voice to work that is either explicitly or inexplicitly process-driven and multivocal” (136). Ongoing performances can be very difficult. Paul concedes that “even if a project is not interactive, the viewer may look at visualization driven by real-time data flow from the internet that will never repeat itself or a database-driven project that continuously reconfigures itself over time.” But if viewers do not spend enough time observing the project, will they miss out on contextual information vital to grasping the processes of the piece (54)?

Tania Bruguera’s 2018/2019 installation at the Tate Modern offers a specific example of how innovative and complicated such collaborations can become. Focused on immigration, the exhibit is a mixture of process and performance. Its name changes daily, depending on the number of people who immigrated last year, and the number of immigrant deaths recorded so far this year.¹⁷ The museum houses different kinds of performances, sensory experiences, and process-based works as components of the installation, including enlisting twenty-one local residents as “Tate Neighbors” to help with the creation of a commission. Intervention, evoking emotions, and portraiture are all key aspects of the exhibit, which is far more physically demanding of visitors

than Paul's examples of predominantly visual art. In the enormous Turbine Hall, the museumgoers' combined body heat determines how much or how little they will see of the portrait of a young Syrian activist painted on the floor under a temperature-sensitive paint. At a distance from Turbine Hall, the continuous release of a chemical compound produces tears in the museumgoers who walk through a much smaller white-walled room. Interaction in the gallery with the Tate Neighbors takes many forms, not all of them available to an individual museumgoer. And other unanticipated benefits and problems with such a project will appear in sudden and subtle ways.

Performance art can not only heighten sensory experience through its presence in a carefully created environment, but unlike object-oriented or visual works in a gallery, it can also directly aim to increase or mute response as part of the experience. Through presence and spectatorship, the attendees respond to the artist's demands for participation, without necessarily having or wanting to have a uniform experience. To make this point, Quinn Eades and Anna Poletti chronicle their attendance at Marina Abramović's *In Residence* (Sydney, 2015) through two running columns on each side of the page, offering their free thoughts and associations, their actions, and their responses to what was required of them. The performance itself called for muted sensory perceptions, asking participants to wear puffy vests for warmth and noise-canceling earphones for sound reduction. Eades and Poletti describe removing timepieces and locking away phones, preparing for presence through exercises, and addressing their understanding of their own roles. "I am interested in the order of things and notice the desire to 'do' the exhibition properly," writes Eades "to start at the beginning, to move sequentially, to be present, to immerse, not just to succeed but to excel" (280). Through their dual narration, they draw me into their experience, my imagination re-enacting the performance. No pictures accompany their article, but I found that I could google this performance, and scroll through hundreds of pictures and/or videos of Abramović's other events, selecting

approximate visuals that resonated with Eades' and Poletti's narration. Another participant may perhaps have snuck in a phone and captured the full sound, or Abramović may have recorded a version, complete with muted sound. But I was not there, and do not have access to these hypothetical archives. Instead, I have Eades' and Poletti's accounts, documenting not the performance, but their experience of it through their own bodies, ears, eyes, and wandering and worrying minds.

By pointing out that many performance pieces are staged and even restaged specifically to document them, Philip Auslander adds another important consideration to our understanding of mediation. Photographs are for instance a common medium for asserting veracity, but drawing on the work of Helen Gilbert, Roland Barthes, and Don Slater, Auslander stresses the illusionary nature of the supposed signified and signifier correspondence (1). Photographic records are more commonly kept for the artist and future audiences of the documentation, rather than for those who actually witnessed or participated in the performance. As a result, "it is not the initial presence of an audience that makes an event a work of performance art: it is its framing as performance through the performative act of documenting it as such" (7). In her discussion of Marina Abramović's reenactment of *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (2010) at the New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Amelia Jones echoes Auslander. Suggesting that "in its desire to manifest presence" Abramović's installation inevitably "points to the very fact that the live act itself *destroys presence*." As a participant, this was Jones' own experience: "as someone who sat across from Abramović in the atrium of MoMA, surrounded by a barrier like a boxing ring, itself surrounded by dozens of staring visitors, cameras, and lit by klieg lights, I can say personally I found the exchange to be anything but energizing, personal, or transformative" ("The Artist" 18). Jones strongly registered a disjunction between her understanding of presence, "unmediated co-extensivity in time

and place,” and what was unfolding before her: “But the event, the performance, by combining materiality and durationality (its enacting of the body as always already escaping into the past) points to the fact that there is no ‘presence’ as such”—the inevitable state of affairs that “haunts” performance studies (18). What makes sense of our present and pasts is subject perception, made possible by experience’s passage into memory:

All “events”—those we participated in as well as those that occurred before we were born—can only ever be subjectively enacted (in the first place) and subjectively retrieved later. There is no singular, authentic ‘original’ act we can refer to in order to confirm the true meaning of an event, an act, a performance, or a body—presented in the art realm or otherwise. We are always already in the ‘now,’ which can never be grasped, and yet all experience is mediated, representational. (42)

To return to Eades and Poletti, they presumably wrote their accounts after experiencing the entire event, and therefore drawing upon their memories. Although their use of present tense and italics to indicate actions creates the illusion of simultaneous experience and description, even the account of a play-by-play sports announcer is necessarily a step behind the action itself. Like Jones, Eades and Poletti are therefore creating autobiographical narratives, but to varying degrees also calling attention to the gap between participating and then recognizing the experience through memory.

Though audiences tend to expect that process-driven and performance art will act immediately and spontaneously upon them when they participate, and therefore grant their presence, they become part of a larger undertaking. The registering of an event as it unfolds tends to block out thoughts of previous planning and the processes of implementation, as the artist, the gallery, and the viewer join in agreeing to ignore for the moment the work necessary to create that moment. In addition, any single audience member can only see, feel, or interact with a highly

restricted part of the moment—that part available from one space in the gallery, or a single spot in line, or a vantage point near the stage, closer or further away from a speaker. For these and other reasons, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska propose that “liveness” is an “*illusion* of liveness”—a social construct with performative potential (xvi). Further, they argue that it is precisely during these kinds of performances that we can recognize the process by which we co-create events. This is mediation: not a spatialized or spatializing object, but “a multiagential force that incorporates humans and machines, technologies and users, in an ongoing process of becoming-with” (55, 40). Both the planning required and effort necessary to install and perform a process-driven work materialize when we identify and ask questions about all the people—including ourselves—who “realized” the piece. Whether a process, such as the *Tissue Culture & Art(ificial) Womb AKA Semi-Living Worry Dolls* (2000) that grew over time, or a performance piece, where no one can view the whole simultaneously, these highly mediated works recall Susan Stewart’s idea of the gigantic as all encompassing, devouring, and beyond our ability to describe. And when we try, “the depiction of the gigantic is a severing of the synecdoche from its efferent, the whole” (89). We may be shut out from experiencing the efferent, either by its sheer size or its evolution over time.

Life-writing scholars have always recognized this as a fundamental issue in auto/biography—how to compress, reduce, or epitomize a lived life by means of a readable and relatable narrative. The reader does not engage with a chronicle of all life events but with those parts the auto/biographer chooses to reveal. Like the full performance, or process-driven artwork, the full life cannot be fully grasped or conveyed—through our bodies, through reading or watching, or even through our presence. Stewart suggests that we understand the gigantic in relation to our bodies. We cannot fully comprehend the size or complexity—and I would add the duration—without being subsumed. The “gigantic envelops us” because it “is inaccessible to lived experience”

(101–102). The performance may have begun before we enter the room, and may continue after we exit, but the artist, the museum, and the auto/biographer rely heavily on an illusion of liveness that leads us to accept the parts they willingly reveal, on their terms. Whether we experience a live performance, hurriedly following a figure on the floor, or watch programmed images fill a museum room, we become absorbed into the mediated process of the art, which began before we stepped into the room, or even before the artist entered the gallery for the live show, and which will continue, mediated through our bodies and memory, as we turn away and enter another gallery.

So far, this chapter has called attention to the mediated nature of even sensory engagement with art as object, process, or performance, and also to the processes involved in installing, performing, censoring, and preserving within museum space and beyond. Inside this highly authorized and authoritative space, the museum staff, the labels, and the layout direct how the museumgoers will experience what the curators label “art,” and which is recognized as such by the “authority” of the museum’s rooms, buildings, and grounds. Focusing on what happens to auto/biographical art works inside and outside the frame of the gallery, I have sought to identify what issues and considerations that lifewriting scholars have taken into account when considering “original” and mediated art works in galleries and museums, and also what kinds of mediating forces have generally gone unnoticed. I myself for instance have not cried or laid down in Bruguera’s Tate Modern installation. I have not gaped at Walker’s art, larger than myself, stretched across multiple walls. I have not been present for Abramović—in MoMa or anywhere else. And yet, though my own experience of these works has depended on mediated versions—narrated, photographed, video-mounted on the web—within any gallery space the event or experience is always already mediated to varying degrees—the product of many different social, political, and economic, and artistic negotiations. By seeking out and recognizing the work of curators,

conservators, trustees, marketers, community members, and even ourselves, the complex network of mediation crystallizes before us. My own expectations and understanding of a work may depend primarily upon my spatial imagination, or I may be the type more comfortable relying on the labels, glosses, critical commentary and other agents mediating between me as a viewer /consumer and an artist's auto/biographical work. In turn enhancing or detracting from the auto/biographical texts themselves, this network of mediation can prove a rich companion to the art, and provide necessary context for the scholar. But we must also recognize that what an artist reveals, an art museum may conceal, so recognizing the pervasiveness of mediation also primes us to interrogate it.

“What we won't show you”: Museum online presence

I encountered some works discussed in the preceding sections firsthand, others online, and some through a combination of both. Many museums post digital scans of their holdings, often with a wealth of accompanying data of the kind often found on labels—medium, date, artist biographies, glosses and interpretation, dimensions, provenance—and also whether or not the piece is on view. The Honolulu Museum of Art offers material on 12,000 of its 50,000 total holdings online. The Tate Gallery boasts 70,000 works, broadcasts live events from its galleries, and posts 360 degree images on its social media platforms. The Art Institute of Chicago's website offer a matrix of choices to the viewer. Articles about the collections and suggested museum routes for visitors mix with general information and digital scans of the art. Blurring the lines between access, experience, visitor information, and advertising, larger museums routinely create multimedia marketing tools for promoting their permanent exhibits and limited-term shows, and distribute them across a range of online platforms. The museum website is therefore a hybrid, highly mediated space, reflecting, refracting, and augmenting the physical institution, and many of the strategies for managing the material space have their correlatives in the online

environment. But online, the museum has far less control over the viewer's sensory experience and decisions. The website cannot force people to keep clicking. Online viewers also consume the website contents on a wide variety of media—phones, laptops, tablets, desktop computers—and in almost any physical location imaginable. As a result, the art is “seen in a different context,” far outside the purview of the museum itself (Berger 20). But what about museums that rely upon a highly choreographed experience, or that engage senses other than sight, or create affiliations and associations through the museum structure itself? How successful are websites that seek to duplicate, expand upon, or lessen the sensory and experiential aspects of the permanent exhibits? In this comparative section, I will focus upon two highly biographical, sensory-dependent museums with very substantial online presences, to see what is lost and gained on both sides of this cluster of mediations.

The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum (USHMM) moves visitors through a series of experiential, carefully fashioned exhibits. The sinuous, crossing paths lead visitors toward an unknown, purposefully disorienting their sense of where they entered, and the direction of the path before them. Because light and darkness focalize parts of the exhibit, the visitor only discovers along that way that what seemed like hall of photographs turns into a concentration camp chimney from a different vantage point farther down the path. In his discussion of the USHMM, Michael Rothberg focuses on the sensory experience, suggesting that for the museumgoer, the manner in which space and time change, and the tactile aspect of the exhibits, creates connections impossible to make through purely textual study (262): “The narrative structure of the permanent exhibit reveals the museum's character as twofold: both a pedagogical tool for the dissemination of historical knowledge and a site of identifications meant to guide and evoke emotional responses based on personal interaction with the various

‘characters’ in the story” (259). For Elizabeth Ellsworth, the structure of the museum continually interrupts the non-linear historical narrative with shards of the present, as “daylight, the weather, the Washington Monument, the here and now of the nation’s seat of democracy breaks the exhibit’s narrative” (20).

Marianne Hirsch proposes that the USHMM engages “visitors in imaginary identification,” as the building design “get us close to the affect of the event, to convey knowledge and information” without “attempting any facile sense of recreation or reenactment,” instead concentrating attention on those lost by means of “representation of the lives ‘before’ through photographic images” (249).¹⁸ Through various artifacts, the museum conveys worlds destroyed, and vast number of lives now gone, in an “attempt to reverse, as well, the Nazi destruction not only of people and their communities but of the very records—pictures and documents—that might have testified to their former existence” (251). Encountered twice during the visit, the “Tower of Faces” displays “ordinary portraits of individuals and groups, of family and group rituals, of candid moments.” Viewers identify with such images, knowing perhaps that they and their own families create and possess similar pictures of their daily lives, and through these emotional connections, “the tower preserves and creates memory.” But after passing through the intervening rooms and years, when we come upon the tower the second time, “We see the faces more closely, we look into the eyes of people who were alive, full of joy, confidence, and hope.” Then our eyes sweep up and recognize the chimney, and as Hirsch explains, we confront “the immediacy of life at the moment photographed, transformed in an instant of this recognition into the death we know soon followed” (252–256). While much of the evidence of lives was destroyed with the lives themselves, the exhibit foregrounds a trove of photographs that in various ways survived, and are now curated by the museum. And because

they can only represent a small portion of the lives lost, their presence in the museum underscores the magnitude of the absence.

Over 45 million people have visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum since its opening in April 1993. Twelve percent were from outside the United States, and ninety percent were not Jewish. Timed tickets move people through the exhibits during peak periods in the summer, as passes at those times cannot meet the demand. In addition, 19.5 million people “visited” the online site in 2018 alone. The USHMM has 731,908 “fans” on Facebook, 290,005 Twitter followers, and has registered 6.5 million views of its videos. Out of the 113,291 historical photographs in its permanent collection and archive, 34,309 are accessible online. The USHMM also holds more than 22,237 objects and artifacts, 22,000 oral history testimonies, and over 111.5 million pages in its archives, including “200 million images from the International Tracing Service” (USHMM “Press Kit”).¹⁹ Serving as both a memorial to the victims, an archive of artifacts, images, and testimony, and a survivor registry, the museum “was designed to resonate with the history of the Holocaust” (O’Dowd 7). Through its permanent display, its temporary or traveling exhibitions, its archival documentation housed in the museum, and its listing of survivors and decedents in the Meed Survivors Registry, the USHMM preserves traces and testimonies to lives lived and then lost, leveraging its displays, artifacts, and archives to carry out its primary aim: to create, contextualize, and control a permanent memory of the Holocaust.

But if all the characteristics of the physical space are designed to exert an emotional and pedagogical power, how can the USHMM’s designers create a similar effect and provoke similar responses on the website? In some important ways, they obviously cannot; the very nature of a website acknowledges distance. Adele Medina O’Dowd, creative director for Web projects at the

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, puts it bluntly: “On the internet, there is no expectation that people will ‘experience’ anything, including the particular experience of remembrance.” Website users click on sites for specific information, practical needs, or forums for special interests—to search, shop, and discuss (6). Rather than simply offering such options to the website visitor, O’Dowd describes the strategies the Museum has adopted to create an experience of remembrance on its website, including providing virtual access to fragile objects and artifacts, deploying lighting and color to invoke the focalization at work within the museum itself, paying special attention to the presentation of video testimony, and even providing tools for relationship building between online visitors.

The website is also the information center for questions about the museum and its teaching programs, and the point of access to many of its primary research materials, including the catalogues of artifacts and photographs, and the Holocaust Survivors and Victims Database. Because visitors are just as likely to be looking for information about hours of operation as they are for artifacts or video testimony, the website must therefore play a number of roles, offering answers to the questions that visitors most commonly ask, and access to vital museum collections online for the dedicated researcher. This range of options diffuses the emotional power the site can exert, but multiplies the number of possible points of engagement, with a specific emphasis on pedagogy. By making instructional tools and factual information readily available, the USHMM assists teachers around the world integrate well-curated materials and tested and proven instructional methods into their lesson plans. As the comprehensive collection policy statement explains, for onsite visitors and for scholarly researchers and families seeking information online, “Museum staff collect, preserve, and make available to the public this collection of record of the Holocaust and support the Museum’s wide-ranging efforts in the areas

of research, exhibition, publication, education, and commemoration” (USHMM “Scope”). Though the website cannot convey fully the physical aspects and emotional impact of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, it can provide access to a trove of biographical traces in multiple formats.

But the UHSMM’s strategic vision has two parts. The first is the expected one: to insure “The permanence of Holocaust memory, understanding, and relevance.” Though intimately connected, the second is also much broader: to contribute to creating “A world in which people confront hatred, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity” (USHMM “Strategic”). The Museum therefore has a declared commitment to ending genocide, and in 1995 the Committee on Conscience was established as a standing body under the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. The Committee is responsible for guiding the efforts of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, and for preparing a response if it occurs (UHSMM “Simon-Skjodt”). Both parts of the UHSMM vision are therefore directed toward the future: first, to establish and maintain a *permanent* social memory of the Holocaust (my emphasis); and second, to work toward preventing impending genocides. In addition to providing information about and access to the Museum, its website also supports the work of responding to genocide of all types. When I first visited the site in 2017, a nearly full-page picture of Burma’s Rohingya refugees appeared on the home page, exposing the new forms and instances of genocide in our world. Below the splash picture were black and white photographs of Jews moving in groups with their packed belongings—just as the Rohingya were doing above.²⁰ But the color image stands out sharply against the black and white photographs, bringing the issue into the present and making connections between events then and now as an act of warning. “What is Genocide?” the website asks, after I clicked on the “Confront: Genocide” link. “The word, as we know it, didn’t exist

until 1944” the site explains, offering context for examples in our world today, and suggesting how we, as online visitors, might take action ([USHMM “Confront”](#)). While the physical building, the permanent exhibit, the collections, and the archives constitute a highly authorizing memorial to the Holocaust, this opening online picture contextualizes the Holocaust globally and temporally by broadening the Museum’s mission to include combating and preventing genocide among all humans, regardless of color, nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, or any other characteristic that one group settles on to hate and seek to destroy another. As the color picture changes throughout the year, responding to current and ongoing events, the USHMM website continually connects past atrocities and crimes against humanity in our present world.

Jewish Museum Berlin:

The Daniel Libeskind-designed building of the Jewish Museum Berlin also offer the museumgoer a meticulously choreographed experience.²¹ While the entire Museum is comprised of 6 buildings and a garden, the Libeskind building is the most well-known and the one that house the physical memorializing structures such as the “Voids.” The structure’s placement and design, the lighting, sound, and multimedia plans, the curatorial decision making, vetted through different, and sometimes opposing, constituencies—all act upon viewers as they pass through the circuitous, underground entrance in Berlin. This Museum’s mission seems at times at odds with the architecture and landscape. So for instance, while the building Daniel Libeskind designed mourns an atrocity, the collections inside celebrate the contributions of Jewish culture to Germany over the past few centuries. Each part of course ultimately grapples with the Holocaust; but in this case, the intensely sensory immersion created by the Museum’s physical spaces, which gives the displays their pedagogical power, also limits participation to those who travel to

the JMB itself. But in our increasingly networked society, expectations of remote and online access to exhibits and resources prompt museums to provide more than ancillary information. The means for such access—the online mediation—must also be reassessed and updated, as website design trends and software evolve over time, altering the messages conveyed and the functionality of the pages. In addition, museum missions and strategic directions change, often in response to new leadership. In 2016, the Jewish Museum in Berlin redesigned its website; examining some of the specific changes can grant us some insight into shifts in the messages offered to online users.

The physical design of a museum creates an environment for the worlds inside and out. In most cultures, museums are authoritative institutions, supported by the political and economic powers of a city, region, or nation. The USHMM suggests the same thing on its website: “Located among our national monuments to freedom on the National Mall, the Museum provides a powerful lesson in the fragility of freedom, the myth of progress, and the need for vigilance in preserving democratic values. With unique power and authenticity, the Museum teaches millions of people each year about the dangers of unchecked hatred and the need to prevent genocide.” (USHMM “About”). But erecting a Holocaust museum in Berlin unavoidably invokes the uncanny, for as James Young explains, “a ‘Jewish Museum’ in the capital city of a nation that not so long ago voided itself of Jews, making them alien strangers in a land they had considered ‘home’ will not by definition be *heimlich* but must be regarded as *unheimlich*” (1). Seeking to create this sense of unease and estrangement, the voids and spaces in Daniel Libeskind’s design disrupt and confuse, creating what Esra Akcan calls a countermonument: “it subverts connotations of monumentality by denying traditional form-making strategies, such as symmetry, hierarchy, visible entrance, and geometric order.” Due to its size and style, “this

building can never be conceived as a whole” (159), thereby enacting what Susan Stewart describes as the gigantic, where only a part can be perceived from any location or at any given moment. But Stewart’s understanding of the gigantic is also ideological, suggesting that such a building cannot convey a single “message,” but instead raises a number of issues that surround and act upon us, and can only be registered through a composite of personal and collective experiences acquired inside, outside, and above. By underscoring the museum’s challenge to express, explain, and memorialize an event too large and too unbearable to describe or contain fully, the physical, highly stylized design of the Jewish Museum Berlin fully conforms to Stewart’s idea of the gigantic. The building’s long angular line suggests a straightened Star of David and the continuous history of the Jews, shattered by the Holocaust. Housed inside the building, the exhibits and collections display Jewish cultural artifacts, but a substantial amount of space is devoted to the Holocaust.

Up until 2016, the main page of the Jewish Museum Berlin’s website mirrored key Libeskind structural and design elements. Cutaways and voids, erasures and revelations, covered the main page. Visitors could use the mouse to cut through an opaque colored screen, revealing a painting or a photo of a Museum object underneath. The Museum’s unique shape served as an icon on the site, acting both as a brand and a home button for website navigation. The menu offered user information, pedagogical tools for teachers, children, and parents, and access to the Museum’s blog and featured exhibits. The “Online Showcase” housed accounts of projects, digitized documents, and short interviews with the JMB curators. One series, entitled “What we won’t show you,” offered short videos of the museum staff, ranging from curator to docent, explaining why certain parts of the collection are not accessible to visitors. Or as the site itself puts it:

The objects a museum displays are significant. But what museums won't show you can be equally revealing. In these film clips, staff of the Jewish Museum Berlin talk about what you won't see, thereby shedding light on German-Jewish life, on collecting, restoring, presenting as well as on ethical questions and political debates. (Jewish Museum Berlin "What")

Available on the museum's YouTube channel as well, this series offers glimpses into the decision-making process provided by people at different levels of administrative power, calling attention to the difficulty of representing Jewish culture inside Berlin itself. So Cilly Kugelmann, Program Director, explains why the museum limits the number of photo blow-ups of Holocaust images; Inka Bertz, Head of Collections, clarifies why it does not display its "depot," or artifact holding area, due primarily to differences between exhibition and storage protocols and the lack of supplied narratives in the depot space; Dr. Manfred Wichmann tells us why the museum does not show medical records; and perhaps most interestingly, Dr. Mirjam Wenzel, former Head of the Media Department, offers an account of why there are no Holocaust representations—first because it is not representable, and second because it creates rifts between the evidence left to us and the human imagination. Finally, the "Museum on site" supplied an online version of the JMB itself, featuring a timeline of artifacts, computer graphics, animation, and interactive labels. The artifacts were not simply digitalized; the pictures had been eerily cleaned of background, and the objects flattened. Like the USHMM, then, the JMB did represent some aspects of its physical presence in its 2016 website design—in particular, its aesthetic impact and branding aspects—but also like the USHMM, it could only offer a muted version online of the affective relationship created between the Museum and the visitor to Berlin. In response, while parts of the collection were shown online, most of the media was designed specifically for the website.²²

In the early fall 2016, the JMB debuted a redesigned website. The dark borders, hidden artworks, and animation were replaced by a white background. The main links were surrounded by clean box lines, and offered different user options. Many of predictable informational links about the Museum and its exhibits appear, and users can also immediately access collection policies, publications, the archives, the library, and the blog. The icons for Facebook, Twitter, or email remain static on the lower left, offering easy link outs, and in the very bottom tray of the website appear the full range of social media icons, which repeat many of the menu choices from above, but purely in textual form. As you scroll, a picture of part of the collection appears and disappears in a web effect called parallax, which harkens back to the old website design. When you click on certain menus, diagonal lines flash across the screen, alluding perhaps to Libeskind's architectural lines. But in keeping with the clean lines of the new site, the parallax and flash elements are simple, neither impeding access nor slowing the response time of the site. "What we won't show you" is retained, and many of the topical pages have survived the transition. The online collections search and its results are only in German, but a link from the main website leads to a collection search that presents objects and collections with standardized provenance and descriptive information.

What has changed between the two websites? The aesthetics and the ease of use are most obvious. In their empirical study of museum website design, Jessie Pallud and Detmar Straub found that because "aesthetics is the single most important variable that influences user experience" it should be a major consideration (368). After aesthetics, they learned that "cognitive"—ease of use and content—"and emotional criteria play a role in the assessment of an interface" (368). S. Shyam Sundar et al. suggest that museum website designers must balance prescriptive agendas with opportunities for greater user decision making (395). Offering tools

and greater affordances can also have major benefits for the museum, for as Sundar et al. point out, “by giving users control over the interface, customization contributes to a higher sense of agency” (387). This often runs counter to web designer instincts, since many of the changes made for themselves—for instance, adopting new programming or creating consistent style sheets or architecture—may not be apparent, but may prove detrimental to the online user. Components of the new JMB design, and in particular the ability to share functions on other media platforms, offer visitors a greater sense of control and customization. Reducing the animation also allowed for retaining certain features without compromising load time or use despite the extensive changes.

As Pallud and Strab also point out, because “a direct relationship exists between intentions to return to the website and intentions to visit the museum” (367), the ability to keep online viewers clicking can translate into their arrival at the museum itself. For this reason, the website must conveniently and concisely provide information about days open, hours, address, the gift shop, and the restaurant, and also promote the museum’s ongoing and featured collections and events in arresting and entertaining ways. Both functions respond to the visitor’s informational needs, but especially on the promotional side, many of the online tools place layers of additional media on existing objects or art works. Such translations are an important feature of the JMB site, intentionally compensating for the absence of those contextual and experiential aspects only available in the physical space, which grant direct access to the objects, the collection resources, and the architectural environment. Do I still learn about Jewish culture on the website? Is there a narrative or sense of story? Yes, to both questions. But the highly affective, often fraught though largely invisible mediations enacted at the JMB itself often barely survive the move to the web, and must therefore be replaced by a different set of decisions

specific to the Museum's online presence. And as I have suggested, the features both before and after 2016 of the Jewish Museum Berlin website testify implicitly to the amount of work involved in that substitution.

In his hugely influential 1972 book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger focuses upon how photography redefined our access to works of art. Instead of going to the museum to see the original, a photograph facsimile can come to us. That changed everything—and when Berger added television to the mix, we read something prescient about how an art image interacts with our personal environment:

The painting enters each viewer's house. There it is surrounded by his wallpaper, his furniture, his mementoes. It enters the atmosphere of his family. It becomes their talking point. It lends it meaning to their meaning. At the same time it enters a million other houses and, in each of them, is seen in a different context. . . . In its travels, its meaning is diversified. (19–20)

Berger cites Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as a major influence on the chapter, but without explicitly engaging with Benjamin's ideas of "aura" and value. Instead, he concentrates on the meaning and the social construct of art, including the perpetuation of class through art in western media and the nearly religious views of artwork as relics, and museums as shrines. But as art images enter homes through televisions and print media, they are no longer bound by the museum walls: "When the camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of the image. As a result its meaning changes . . . its meaning multiplies and fragments into many readings." (19). For many museums, however, including those claiming to embrace media outreach, such fragmentation runs counter to the institutional

mission, and those controls designed for a variety of pedagogical, ethical, and affective reasons to prescribe the viewers' experience.

And especially for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, whose mission is to educate people about the Holocaust, prevent and combat future genocide, and "Secure the future of the field of Holocaust studies in the United States and Europe," and for the Jewish Museum Berlin, whose mission is to commemorate and mourn an atrocity, and to celebrate Jewish life and culture, control over their online presence and its reception becomes an important component of concretizing social memory (USHMM "Strategic").

Maria Zalewska further elaborates on the specific implications for such institutions: "Traditionally, audio-visual lieux de memoir (sites of memory) of the Holocaust have been limited to highly curated processes of memory production. That included the top-down process of writing Holocaust discourse via official, institutionalised and structured educational institutions and memory archives (like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad-Vashem, among others)." This collective adjudicated control over the narrative and its significance is however losing its authority, as "new media increasingly impact the way the memory of the Holocaust is represented, disseminated, and consumed by transnational audiences" (97). Strategic decisions of the USHMM regarding its online presence and the changes in the JMB website reflect concerns about these trends. In keeping with its mission to create a single site for permanent social memory, and to assert its unique role in creating it, the USHMM foregrounds the research and educational components available through its site, but backgrounds its permanent exhibit. The JMB reduced some of the experiential and sensory appeals initially featured on the website, limiting them to mainly design features, and also retuned the site to emphasize more strongly its usefulness as a tool for education about

Jewish life and culture, and about human rights. Both museums contain thousands of individual traces of human stories. Both museums have specific goals for shaping our social memory and understanding of the Holocaust and of Jewish culture. And both museums have modified their messages to fit within website designs and conventions, strengthening their strategic aims without giving up their efforts to prescribe to some degree what we will come to understand and believe.

Conclusion

I clicked on a page on the JMB website about the *Kindertransporte* and found a small, scruffy, well-loved stuffed monkey.²³ I recognized it from an NPR website story about the Berliner Family, splintered by the Holocaust.²⁴ Riding out of Germany with Gerhard Berliner on a *Kindertransporte*, the monkey moved with him to Sweden and then to the U.S., before returning alone to Berlin many years later, to be permanently housed in the Jewish Museum Berlin. While on display, the monkey caught the eye of a woman whose mother was also named Berliner. The monkey, a web search, and emails back and forth reunited members of a family devastated so many years before.

The monkey I had read about before was now appearing as a node in a complex network of online and offline connections, including me. It arrested me. As Louis Althusser famously observed, “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (162), and extending this claim, Sturken and Cartwright write that images interpellate consumers through access to cultural or social codes (50). An image, an object, or a series of objects can stop us, make us turn around, make a response. What drives the recognition is semiotics and culture, but what motivates the story? Even if there’s no story present, the viewer fills one in. Andrienne

Kertzer exemplifies this process, as she retells her experience with Ydessa Hendeles' *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, part of an exhibition entitled *Same Difference* (2002) in Toronto.²⁵ Thousands of pictures taken between roughly 1900 and 1940 of children and adults holding teddy bears bore no labels to tell the viewers what to think, what connections to make, or how to make sense of the individual photographs in relation to each other, or to the Holocaust. Unlike the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which forges strong links when possible for the museumgoers, Ydessa Hendeles' photographs do not, and Kertzer observes that "When the installation consists of so many untitled photographs, the visitor is left unsettled." Such a display therefore "directly challenges the affiliative possibilities that Hirsch finds in the Tower of Faces in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC" (208). Kertzer learns that two of the family pictures had labels, but after finding and reading them she becomes even more frustrated, because this information also fit the conventions of the exhibit by passively resisting attempts to extract a coherent story:

Determined to find a narrative, the visitor is frustrated even though she may think that she knows the plot; certainly the absence of names for those photographed suggests the anonymity of the victims of genocide. Do the winding staircases that go nowhere represent chimney smoke? Do they suggest the vanity of searching for meaning in the Holocaust? (Kertzer 210)

Just as translation studies recognize that whether due to inexperience or untranslatable concepts, receivers will approximate a translation largely derived from their own cultural milieu, readers interpret a text through a blending of the author's/artist's perceived creative output with their own knowledge. Intertextualities provoke strategies for creating meaning. In his profoundly influential essay outlining his theory of interpretive communities, Stanley Fish argues that the

text itself cannot offer a set meaning—that readers always create one or several for the text through the process of reading itself, directed by whatever systems of knowledge the readers have acquired. Or as Fish puts it, “Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies,” which “exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read” and “are not natural or universal, but learned” (484). As we view, read, and experience texts, our interpretive strategies put us in the know or in the dark, depending upon what intertextualities and messages we recognize.

In this chapter, I have visited several gallery spaces and examined many auto/biographical pieces. Standing before Karen Hampton’s genealogy of mothers and daughters in *Flora’s Daughters* (2002), I wanted to reach out and touch the contrasting cotton and organza fabric, but did not. April Drexel’s *Kūpa ‘a* (2014) told me the story of the land beneath the Honolulu Museum of Art Spalding House, and my feet, and gave me chicken skin. But many of the highly autobiographical works treated here I did not or could not see in person. Online even in Liverpool, Donald Rodney’s two intertwined works can only be seen as one. I examined Kara Walker’s larger-than-life tableau in tiny black and white photographs from a scholarly monograph. I watched Tania Bruguera’s Turbine Hall commission on a YouTube video on the Tate Modern’s website, and I was present with Marina Abramović only through Anna Poletti’s and Quinn Eades’s narrative accounts. These exhibits or performances hailed me, and I experienced them, even if not by lying on the floor, my body heat revealing a portrait underneath, or cringing before Walker’s full sized *Cut* (1998). While the same interpretive strategies accompany me whether I step into the authorized walls of the museum space or call up the collections online, my physical as well as social and cultural contexts shape what I see when

I get there. How do all these influences change the life stories I encounter once I'm there or "there"?

As I exit the museums and galleries, my shoes clicking on the parquet floors, or my mouse clicking on the space next to my keyboard, I leave behind many powerful auto/biographical works inseparable from the processes by which we construct social memories. I vow to keep seeking them out and experiencing them, when and how I can. Recognizing these processes, these mediations, uncovers networks of responsibility lying beyond the original artist. As we move from a physical space to an online environment, I suggest that we should continue to carry those recognition tools with us, and pick up more as necessary, to grasp the processes and structures of socially mediated and networked lives.

Chapter 3: Auto/biography Virtually Spread

Long after leaving Karen Hampton's installation, after the museum staff had packed up *Flora's Daughters* (2002) with care, and after the walls had hosted a new exhibit, I returned to the Honolulu Museum of Art's webpage in search of the biographical video that played on a loop in the far corner of *The Journey North*, causing Hampton's own voice to echo throughout the small space.²⁶ What I found was a text-based interview with Hampton, some images, a description of the installation, and a listing of the exhibit dates and associated programs. But no biographical video. Scrolling to the very bottom of the page, I spotted an embedded video, branded with the HMA logo, under the heading "Related Programming."²⁷ What the video captured were the responses of two youth poets, Ariel Pruyser and Malia Derden, as they toured Karen Hampton's work on February 4th, 2017, the opening night of the Honolulu African American Film Festival. The camera captures their words, voices, and bodies, the artworks, and the faces and sounds of the crowd, especially when parting for the poets as they head to specific artworks. As Malia Derden performs, a woman behind her holds up a cell phone—at one height, then higher—shooting yet another version of this performance, her filming caught by the camera through which I see. Both poets speak of their skin, bodies, families, and genealogies, reclaiming, formulating, and celebrating their own lives. Applause follows each poet's last exhale; the video ends with Pruyser's closing words, offering the viewer a blank screen for a moment, before YouTube autoplays the next suggested video.

This is an HMA digital object uploaded to its YouTube platform and collected on its YouTube channel, with an embedded link and video player on its web page describing Karen Hampton's exhibit. And yet, although the video itself may have been filmed, produced, and uploaded to YouTube by HMA staff, like any hyperlinked text, clicking on it connects the user to a

video now integrated into one of YouTube's many-mirrored servers across the globe. What appears to the user as a site of cohesive and complete information masks the images and objects, links, and source codes that transform disparate data into a single webpage. The YouTube platform undeniably facilitates interplay between the museum and the viewer, providing the museum with an easy-to-use platform for uploading content and for engaging with viewers and potential visitors. In turn, the viewer can click on full screen or closed captioning options, rate or comment on the video, subscribe to the museum's channel, or copy the link for passing along to other social media platforms or for embedding on a website, blog, or other online production. The video has therefore become more than a form of advertisement, or a digital object that I decide to view, but a "social object"—"one that connects the people who create, own, use, critique, or consume it." Such objects are "transactional, facilitating exchanges among those who encounter them" (Simon 128–129). Building on Jyri Engstöm's concept of "object-centered sociality," Nina Simon, museum guru and curator, suggests that site-specific objects, whether created, uploaded from elsewhere, or shared, connect social media users: "Each photo is a node in the social network that triangulates the users who create, critique, and consume it" (128). The comments and rating features on YouTube explicitly seek to create such nodes. As people share or embed the video within their own digital spaces, the network of people connected by this "social object" expands.

But when people share a video, photo, tweet, or post, and more people interact with it, does it remain the same text, or change relationally in response to the people who manipulate it? What prompts people to post their own auto/biographical traces online, and what motivates them to constantly share the traces of others? How do the social media networks and platforms themselves shape online identities? And what is the nature of the reverberations between online and offline lives? Digital or online texts have a durability, and even a physicality not acknowledged when we

speak of the “cloud.” When we share a text, the file size, metadata, and source code travel with it, including information about the histories of those who have previously passed it on. But such texts remain highly malleable as well—technologically easy to capture, modify, then upload again. A common activity across several platforms, reposting creates a wider circle of users, and through a variety of algorithms, this process is boosted. The latter intervention is arguably the most significant. Most social media platforms are for-profit enterprises, requiring users to sign terms of use agreements that above all secure the company’s right to the user’s data. For while a platform’s security settings may seem to approve or deny other users’ access to tweets, pictures, or blog posts, what protection is there from the platform itself?²⁸

The technology being generated by holders of huge data archives is formidable. Open AI recently announced new Artificial Intelligence code for predictive writing, reading comprehension, and translation so powerful and “natural,” that only a portion of it will be released: “Due to concerns about large language models being used to generate deceptive, biased, or abusive language at scale, we are only releasing a much smaller version of GPT-2 along with sampling code” (OpenAI).²⁹ As artificial Intelligence (AI) researchers draw on large datasets to test and improve their models, this material increasingly comes from human-generated outputs—drawn from Flickr to create human-looking photographs from Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs),³⁰ or scraped from blogs and other web pages devoted to user interaction (OpenAI). Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Facebook all have AI programs derived from and tested upon their massive globally-collected datasets, created from our use of their products.³¹ A fashion blog post, a family picture at Disneyland, a repost of your favorite show on Tumblr, or even that tweet you got from a friend about healthcare that you decided to retweet in agreement—all become part of the mediating platform’s datasets available for its own use, or for sale to other researchers and entrepreneurs, all

made possible by the terms of use agreement that we had to click on when we signed up for our accounts. Who then owns my daily posts, Instagram stories, and videos? Who monitors them? Who chooses to distribute, archive, modify, or destroy them? How in short do my personal, yet publically shared, autobiographical acts become someone else's?

This chapter focuses upon the technologies that circulate and the distributed consumption of autobiographical acts. To this point, I have drawn upon material culture theories to discuss the (non)materiality of the life writing object largely due to the mediality of the text. I will now combine the significant research on online lives produced by lifewriting scholars with recent discussions of participatory media practices and “spreadability” (Jenkins, et al. *Spreadable*). Social network sites, blogs, and online forums are all instances of the convergence of a media-rich environment, technological and autobiographical affordances and inducers, methods and modes of participatory distribution and consumption nodes, and community experience. But just as we need to recognize the structures, mediations, and authorization processes inherent in the museum's “white cube,” the intersections and layers of media, continuous creation, and story made possible by our current media ecology should be carefully considered as well. I want to call attention to the accretion of layers of intermediality as people create, repost, and modify auto/biographical texts, and to the ease with which these texts spread and are consumed. Above all, then, this is a chapter about process and processing: about becoming, about the pervasive accretion and distribution of that becoming, and what else—besides representations of ourselves and others—our texts become.

Auto/biography and Social Media

Online spaces are filled with online lives. From the personal webpages, chat groups, and online forums of the mid-1990s to the advent of Web 2.0 and social media platforms, and on to the various permutations and innovations of today, how we represent our lives and those of others has

become more varied and sophisticated, even as such representation has been mediated by an increasingly complex set of personal, cultural, technological, and political factors. “Nowhere is the power and diversity of the autobiographical more visible than online,” Anna Poletti and Julie Rak declare, as part of their call for increased interactions between media studies and auto/biographical methodologies researchers and scholars, because “acquiring and maintaining online identities make up the core activities of many users” (3). In 2003, and again in 2015, special issues of *Biography* grappled with life representations within the complex and rich virtual media environment. “As means to auto/biographical ends, these technologies undoubtedly present us with different affordances and constraints than those of print, photography, film, and live performance,” John David Zuern and Laurie McNeil note in their introduction to “Online Lives 2.0” (2015) But then they ask, “have we *ourselves*, as subjects of auto/ biographical acts, undergone a significant transformation?” (vii). Bouncing between human and technology-centered theories, this question reverberates throughout media scholarship. Returning to concepts introduced in chapter 1, I begin with a reminder of Kember and Zylinska’s claim that humans “have always been technical, *which is another way of saying that we have always been mediated*” (18). The importance of mediation for identity formation, agency, and embodiment has of course been recognized by auto/biography studies for some time, as a term like “relational identity” makes clear. But whether the focus is upon wearable and ambient technology, or games, or social media platforms capturing both durable and fleeting communiqués and pictures, although there have been some innovative studies, for the most part, the enormous range of autobiographical online identity scholarship almost inevitably lags behind in responding to the increasingly creative and bewildering spaces where our identity data is being placed online. Keeping my focus on the consumption, remediation, and distribution of auto/biographical texts through predominantly social network platforms, I want to explore a few

themes and threads that ideally will provide valuable context for assessing the spread of auto/biographical texts beyond the author's expected networks or audiences.

Even online, embodiment is a key to auto/biographical practices. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe that the body is the essential site for that confluence of experience, memory, identity, and agency that constitutes autobiographical subjectivity (15):

Embodied subjects are located in their bodies and through their bodies in culturally specific ways—that is, the narrating body is situated at a nexus of language, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and other specificities, and autobiographical narratives mine this embodied locatedness. (38).

How bodies are displayed, hidden, tracked, calculated, manipulated, and amplified online, where media logics foster and generate layers of mediation, reflects to varying degrees this offline nexus. As Lisa Nakamura notes in response to claims of supposed racial flexibilities online, “simply put, race and racism don't disappear when bodies become virtual or electronically mediated” (47). But the dynamics of the offline-online relationship are reciprocal. Helen Kennedy warns scholars entranced with the possibilities of online identity formation that “it is necessary to think about the ways in which online selves are socially meaningful to their offline counterparts” (36). Nancy Baym echoes this imperative, suggesting that the “best work recognizes that the internet is woven into the fabric of the rest of life and seeks to better understand the weaving” (2006, 86).³² And Smith and Watson point to the parallels between realms when articulating a basic principle of lifewriting studies: “Both offline and online, the autobiographical subject can be approached as an ensemble or assemblage of subject positions through which self-understanding and self-positioning are negotiated” (71). Whether writing a blog, updating an instagram account with photos or stories,

posting or tweeting, or even commenting in a Reddit thread, offline realities are reflected, refracted, or even deliberately concealed in online identities and discourses.

Just as we code-switch in our daily lives depending upon social context, we adapt to different online protocols and conventions. Imposed by the technology, the networked community, or from prescriptive social forces at play in the online and offline worlds, these disparate protocols impact and shape our online identities. Even the semantics can be prescriptive. Nancy Baym for instance bristles at the corporate connotations of referring to overlapping groups of users online as “communities,” suggesting that instead we consider “space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities and interpersonal relationships” as the frames of reference for understanding such groups. Broad enough to cover a range of platforms and online experiences, these elements foreground interpersonal communication as well as those structures governing technological spaces at varying levels of flexibility and control (*Personal Connections* 84). On online forums, subreddit, or some online games, for example, the moderators or administrators determine the practices and allowable communication, activities, and uses with little risk of outside intervention, whereas on social network sites, even if they provide spaces for groups to create their own protocols for sharing experiences, the platform itself and the corporation behind it make the global and overriding decisions about appropriate use and rules for its users. And as for mega-platforms, Aimée Morrison has suggested that “Taken together, coaxing and affordances offer a theory and a method by which to read how and why Facebook and its users are mutually implicated in the construction of digital life writing.” In keeping with Baym’s remarks, Morrison explores how the design of the Facebook platform interface, and the technology always at its mediating and appropriative work in the background, both suggest and limit what shared experiences, interpersonal relationships, and even identity formation and formats will appear in its virtual

environment (114). While Morrison looks specifically at Facebook, similar incentives, prompts, affordances, and constraints are at work in other social network sites as well. And while the ways that the platform alters its prompts, site structure, security, and sharing capabilities to carry out more efficiently the agenda of its owners should undoubtedly be sources of concern, it needs to be noted that through a subverting or retooling of the platform prompts and protocols, user creativity frequently leads to innovative and powerful practices of self-representation and interaction.

It is also important to note that for good or ill, similar affordances and forms of coaxing can emerge from an assembled group itself. “Community norms of practice are displayed, reinforced, negotiated, and taught through members’ shared behaviors,” Baym observes (*Personal Connections* 89), and Laurie McNeill refers to such group norms and expectations—particularly in relation to genre and writing—as exigencies (146). In her study of the six-word-memoir cross platform media practice, McNeill focuses upon how group-generated exigencies result in an overall imperative to produce frequent and accretive micro-auto/biographies, which she calls “auto/tweetographies,” and then detects this exigency affecting online life writing in general. “For contemporary online memoirists, this continuous compunction to produce (and consume) life narratives arises out of the rhetorical situation of the Internet in its latest evolution, the age of the social network and the microblog” which “demand a high level of participation, encouraging users to keep up a constant web presence.” Production combined with reciprocity results from this shared imperative. Auto/tweetographers are expected “to produce and consume life narratives continuously and collectively” with the “appropriate” responses, laboring “under the condition of reciprocity: they will write, someone else will read, and add their own contributions . . . to which the original writer will respond in the same manner” (149).

If and when this online exigency take hold, it will begin to affect and structure the users' offline lives. "The modes of auto/biography become part of millions of people's daily routines," McNeill writes, as "they now experience the social motive—the exigence—to log on and represent themselves and others" (151). Drawing upon Judith Butler's work on identity performance, Rob Cover also addresses the construction of subjectivity and the imperative to continuously update and "reiterate" identity through social networking sites in coherent and expected ways (60), concluding that while "persistent reconstitution of the self comes with the performative acts of every status update, every wall post, every new image upload, caption, tag," this "is always hidden within the broader performance of the profile as a whole and the fiction of the whole self it serves" (65). Echoing Kember and Zylinska, Cover acknowledges this work as a continual "becoming," but always within mediating socially determined and technologically and commercially reinforced frameworks of expectations and identity coherence that assemble a self under a name (67). Like McNeill's idea of exigency, Cover's account of this reiterative identity stresses its function as a cultural and social demand for what he calls "subject intelligibility and recognizability"—a continually performed and changing, but always stable and recognizable identity (57). Stressing the disarming and coercive potential of such demands, in a manner reminiscent of Lisa Nakamura, McNeill and John Zuern describe the web as a space that amplifies, rather than corrects or rectifies social problems: "Policing of access to, and self-performances in, these digital spaces reminds us of the power dynamics that the Web failed to dismantle" (xi). In the case of life writing, coding, programming, social expectations, and user practices mediate the transfer of those power dynamics influencing self-representation operative in the offline world into the online environment. While different platforms encourage and help people to create micro-autobiographical assemblages, social

and technologically-delivered incentives compel them to produce updates, affecting the conduct of their lives online and off.

And whether we choose to gather and enter our data into online spaces, or other entities and corporations, often without our knowledge or consent, gather it for us, more information about us enters the public sphere as our online life. Data about our bodies, our whereabouts, our shopping habits and our finances is tracked and stored in networked databases, and then distributed elsewhere—whether through purchase, or hacking. Social network sites foster our autobiographical habits and communication, but not for free—our eyes and our habits are the products these sites seek to acquire, use, and sell. In 2018, the *New York Times* detailed how in order to increase users, and thus profits, Facebook violated its own internal security protocols, and handed over sensitive user data to secure important partnerships with other technology companies. As the *Times* reported, internal records from 2017 documenting this process also “underscored how personal data has become the most prized commodity of the digital age, traded on a vast scale by some of the most powerful companies in Silicon Valley and beyond” (Dance, et al.).³³ The consequences of these transactions were profound. Microsoft’s search engine could see users’ friends. Netflix, Spotify, and Yahoo could read users’ posts. Amazon received contact lists. And all of this without users’ consent (Dance, et al.). As the *New York Times* article demonstrates, some of our greater risks arise from those entities we mistakenly believe have an obligation to ensure our security and safety. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska refer to social networking, and Gmail and Facebook in particular, as enclosures—contained user populations whose data they skim off for their own profit. After accepting a platform’s terms of use agreements, with each use we freely give it our data, which we later pay for in various ways. “Every act of consumption produces commodified information that is sold back to us in the form of personalized goods and services” (119), as our

lives “are being immediately even if not directly incorporated into the production and distribution of technovalue” (163).

We need to look at our auto/biographical actions online as free and affective labor. As early as the late 1990s, Michael Hardt was noting the changing role of such labor, including immaterial or service labor leading to “biopower,”³⁴ or the “the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, and society itself” (98). Shoshana Zuboff has labeled this labor shift “surveillance capitalism.” With the rise of technology complexes such as Google over the past twenty years, the need for greater predictive data has driven companies “to nudge, coax, tune, and herd behavior towards profitable outcomes.” Or as Zuboff concludes, “it is no longer enough to automate information flows *about us*; the goal is to *automate us*” (8). Through their ubiquitous and ambient computing, artificial intelligence, and networked products, such complexes collect thoughts, voices, bodies, identities, and movements, and Zuboff notes that these surveillance processes are designed to hide the coaxing, pressure, and even the technology from our recognition (11).

In auto/biography scholarship of lives online, concerns about affective labor lead to deeper concerns about the embedding of increased vulnerabilities into identity definitions. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak point to Mark Poster’s conundrum of identity formation’s inseparability from identity theft. As multiple and diverse components of an individual meld into one in the online environment, ideas of identity and agency become unstable. “[H]ow can identity be this expression of inner self-processing *and* the result of identification of micropractice?” Poletti and Rak ask, noting that “As more and more people use electronic banking, engage in online commercial transactions, and communicate with each other online, the idea of identity as property as well as one’s essence is put under increasing pressure” (9). Apps such as Venmo facilitate a cashless society, making payments between individuals almost effortless, but as you pay for lessons, rent, or dinner, the app shares

public notices of these payments.³⁵ This display necessarily alters our concept of self to include phone, social security, insurance, credit card, and bank numbers, addresses, and any other culturally and socially constructed activity that even peripherally involves monetary transactions. It also exponentially increases risks, which are often swiftly embodied.³⁶ As our identities converge, security problems result from accommodating this far greater accumulation of data, often leaving us vulnerable through no action of our own. For instance, hacking our Instagram or other social network sites not only violates our sense of privacy, but thanks to deliberate data consolidation on the part of the platforms, may also capture valuable passwords or telephone information. Hackers can lock us out of our own accounts, or mimic them to spam and scam our unsuspecting networks of friends. Trolling and online bullying can have devastating impacts upon individuals, families, or even businesses, and become almost impossible to anticipate, ward off, or stop without going offline completely.³⁷

In their study of self-deleting Instagram and Snapchat stories, Kylie Cardell, Kate Douglas, and Emma Maguire suggest that the greatest appeal for young users of these evaporating communiqués is that they not only provide a greater, though largely mistaken, sense of control over what and to whom they communicate on social media, but by supposedly eliminating all traces of the archived images, they also end the worry of having such materials reappearing when least expected or wanted (165). McNeill and Zuern point to cases where academics posting opinions unpopular or resistant to neoliberal dominant discourse on social media have been removed from their academic positions.³⁸ For McNeill and Zuern, such online vulnerabilities speak to a loss of control. If our identities are constituted by a series of assemblages, what happens as the parts begin to disassemble, or are even deliberately ripped apart? They conclude that keeping our data safe must also include monitoring and protecting our seemingly coherent identities in an environment

designed specifically for circulating, sharing, and spreading of these auto/biographical pieces in serial ways. This task has become a fundamental concern of autobiography: “To a significant degree, the ongoing construction of our online selves has been infused with an impulse to manage risk, not only to safeguard our finances and reputations, but also to ward off a kind of disintegration, the unsettling loss of control over the bits and pieces of ‘ourselves’ adrift on the Internet” (xiii–xiv). This is becoming an ever increasingly difficult task.

“Yolocaust”

A video from media content provider AJ+ crossed my Facebook feed a few times before I relented and watched it. I was reluctant on principle, since on many social media platforms, engaging with sponsored content alters future suggestions, what others are told about my consumption behavior, and even what I can see or not see from my network of friends. Packaged and marketed by Al Jazeera through its AJ+ Facebook presence, this video reports on a Berlin satirist/comedian who altered people’s selfies taken at the Holocaust memorial there to expose the dissonance between their poses and the place. Multiple media layers appear in this one product: the memorial site itself; the Yoga-posing selfie takers; the Berlin satirist who altered the selfies and then held them “hostage,” through what can be described as a form of online bullying or trolling; the creators of the news video, who may or may not have been producers at Al Jazeera; and AJ+’s own distribution of the packaged video, with an added textual gloss. Here is a further breakdown of the creative and accreting elements of this video: original selfies taken at the memorial site; selfies uploaded to social media; selfies discovered by the Berlin satirist; the layering of the selfies on top of Holocaust atrocity photos pulled from somewhere else on the web; the new composite photos uploaded to social media and distributed; a video made of this process and the results; the

packaging of the video with an additional textual gloss; and the video's distribution at Al Jazeera Facebook site, AJ+.

Watching the video prompted more questions. What exactly is AJ+? How did the comedian find the selfies? Did the selfie-takers respond and how? Why would anyone take selfies at a memorial site? Looking into AJ+ and the satirist eventually led me to the project. For about a week in January, 2017, Shahak Shapira, an Israeli-German comedian, posted something on his blog that he called *Yolocaust*.³⁹ Twelve selfies, with their associated number of 'likes,' geotagged locations, emojis, hashtags, and original picture captions, appear two by two. In each selfie, individuals or groups pose at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, the "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas" (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe). These posturings include yoga, juggling, and jumping on top of the memorial's square structures, which "symbolize gravestones for the 6 Million Jews that were murdered and buried in mass graves, or the grey ash to which they were burned to in the death camps" (Shapira "Yolocaust"). In his original gloss, Shapira noted that 10,000 people visit the memorial daily, "many of them take goofy pictures, jump, skate or bike on the 2,711 concrete slabs of the 19,000 m² large structure." He gleaned specific selfies from multiple globally popular social media platforms, where the visitors posted their images (Shapira "Yolocaust"). As the viewer mouses over the selfies of this kind that Shapira has selected, the memorial backdrop falls away. Now these subjects are smiling, bending, juggling, and jumping in front of images of Holocaust victims. Shapira's alteration of the pictures and his accompanying text and FAQ focus on the disconnect between the nature of the selfies and where they were taken: "*No historical event compares to the Holocaust. It's up to you how to behave at a memorial site that marks the death of 6 million people,*" he declares, and concludes by telling people who want their pictures removed to email him at "undouche.me at yolocaust.de" (Shapira "Yolocaust").

“Sites of collective trauma are seen as having a particular kind of authenticity and are often the focus of tourist activity,” Marita Sturken writes, suggesting “that people make pilgrimages to sites of tragedy in order to pay tribute to the dead and to feel transformed in some way in relation to that place” (11). In her research into social media, memorial sites, and the evolving construction of the Holocaust collective memory, Maria Zalewska likens travel commemoration online to the earlier practice of purchasing postcards at the camps. Postcards have always signified presence at “visited landscapes and places” but they also have “marked them as owned”—a practice that “allowed travelers to objectify the places they visited” (101). Selfies take the process one step further by not only potentially offending our sense of decorum at a commemoration site, but by presenting the visitor as the primary subject, turning the memorial, and the memory, into a set: “Authors become their own subjects. The place of commemoration matters only as much as it provides a background for authors’ perspective and subjective history. The space and memory become objectified” (109). But Zalewska condemns *Yolocaust*, observing that this strategy for “communicating one’s contempt for selfie-takers’ actions” had a double impact, provoking “a reaction of shock, anger and disgust with both authors of original social media posts, as well as with Shapira’s methodology” (96). His outrage at the selfie takers does not justify his own use of devastating and shock-provoking images, and the flippant, middle-school humor displayed in the email address added an additional layer of impertinence, rather than levity.

After one week and 2.5 million views,⁴⁰ Shapira pulled down the pictures, FAQ, and most of the site, replacing it with a letter addressed to the “internet” about his experience. He posted a portion of an email from one of the repentant selfie takers, explaining why he had taken the picture and apologizing for it, as well as many comments from others thanking, scolding, or trolling him (Shapira). The final paragraph further complicates the project through explicit self-promotion. To

this point, his impetus for *Yolocaust* has been vague. Anger? Disgust? Satire? Commentary? But finding his social networking contacts at the bottom of his letter suggests that the whole project has been a marketing campaign for his burgeoning comedy career.

By offering immediately viewable intertextual links between the original selfies and his shaming versions, Shahak Shapira created adaptations. Linda Hutcheon explains that “we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (8). For readers, the result is a learning process in reverse, as the new text provokes a reassessment of the “originals” viewed or consumed beforehand—what Hutcheon calls an act of “(re)interpretation and then (re-)creation” (8). But for an audience to recognize something as an adaptation, they must already be familiar with the adapted text. With *Yolocaust*, the source and the new work are viewed almost simultaneously. To participate in the process of recreation and reinterpretation in this case therefore relies less on memory than on toggling back and forth between the images. Shapira also makes Hutcheon’s palimpsest metaphor literal—layering parts of the selfies onto recognized images of concentration camp inmates, mass graves, and piles of the deceased. For viewers, and perhaps most strikingly for the selfie-takers themselves, once these links are forged, they cannot be unseen or undone. Through his shock-inducing palimpsests, Shapira fixes forever the selfie-takers’ lack of decorum, or following Zalewska, their narcissism. The process of discovery intensifies the effect. Rather than uploading only his layered adaptations, Shapira initially privileges the selfies as what you see when you land on the page. Only through the motion of mouse do you encounter his version, as the holocaust image appears behind the selfie subject, amplifying the comparison. In that instant he appropriates their autobiographical commemorations, already lacking in decorum, and shockingly juxtaposes the selfie subjects to the unnamed victims of genocide in the Holocaust photos. If posting the initial

photo was shaming in itself, this dynamic comparison offers supplementary condemnation of the selfie takers. *This is what you did, but this is what you **really** did.*

On the replacement *Yolocaust* webpage, Shapira describes his process. No special expertise, equipment, or programs were needed; he employed technologies many of us use daily.⁴¹ He found his pictures on social networking sites, copied them, isolated the selfie subject, then layered it onto the historical pictures using Photoshop, and uploaded the results to a webpage (Shapira “Yolocaust”). But something embedded in social networking sites themselves made both his activities, and online responses to them, easy as well. Uploaded by users in an ongoing project of sharing their lives, selfies are part of an individual’s total online presence. Without permission—or needing any—Shapira appropriated people’s faces, bodies, and written text. By then incorporating them into his own project, he essentially took the original photos hostage, altering the trajectory of the subjects’ own identity creation process by imposing a defining biography upon them in which he now figures pre-emptively as a participant in their autobiographical productions.

Maria Zalewska has raised concerns about her own work:

Writing about ‘selfies from Auschwitz’ forces me to consider the complexities of internet research ethics. I refrain from using images culled from Instagram in my work. The notion of users’ understanding of privacy terms and conditions is problematic. Similarly, it is not my intent to shame individual social media users Nor is it my goal to create an image-based archive pulled from social media without consent. That, in my opinion, would be unethical. (108 footnote 23)

Shapira and Zalewska are engaged in virtually identical projects: to explore how commemoration and the holocaust are constructed on social media. But Shapira’s deployment of online images,

and Zalewska's decision not to do so, do not affect issues of access. No technological or security barriers impede consumption, and Zalewska searches, views, and writes about such images.

What keeps her from adapting them for her own purposes is a self-imposed ethical concern that by using them without consent, she will be taking advantage of the users' misunderstanding and mismanagement of the security settings on their social networking accounts.

For many years now, lifewriting scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have posed questions about the problems inherent in online auto/biographical texts:

what is the ethics of appropriating materials from other people's lives or sites? How can users manage their personal sites to care for their privacy and vulnerability while pursuing self-exploration. . . ? How does a personal ethics of online self-performance intersect with a corporatized system for developing and managing one's public image?

And how to perform identity with increasing surveillance? (81)

Similarly, media scholars Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym ask "Why is it that selfies are so frequently featured in the public imagination not as sites of control but as places where control is lost?" (1594). They account for this paradox by reminding us that discourses of control "operate on multiple registers simultaneously." Thus a selfie posted as an act of self-empowerment can have the opposite effect once in circulation (1597–1598). Understandably, Smith and Watson and Senft and Baym are highly concerned with issues of appropriation, and so am I. But I am also interested in examining the logic behind online environments where copying from other users to recreate new products, sharing someone's post or tweet, drawing from others' data for personal purposes, and even surveilling are not only tolerated, but encouraged and celebrated activities on social networking platforms.

Whether encouraged technologically or socially, people are continuously performing and consuming iterative identities within online networks. I return to McNeill's idea of exigency, which she describes as an obligation understood and accepted by users "to produce and consume life narratives continuously and collectively" with the "appropriate" responses, laboring "under the condition of reciprocity: they will write, someone else will read, and add their own contributions . . . to which the original writer will respond in the same manner" (149). But this process of posting, reading, and commenting assumes the possibility of limits on production and consumption: users can effectively close their network and secure their posts for viewing only within a select group. As already mentioned, building on Engström, Simon calls the posted content of such communities "social objects": "Each photo is a node in the social network that triangulates the users who create, critique, and consume it" (128). But Simon's model can also account for more complex labor lying beyond reciprocal production and consumption. Shapira for instance engaged in the asynchronous and distributed collaboration encouraged on social media platforms, but then committed the ultimate transgressions.⁴² By putting his products on a website, rather circulating them through the social media platforms, he severely impeded others from easily forwarding the images or sharing them from the site itself. And as for engaging in reciprocal relationships with the selfie takers, this only began when he created his photo hostage releasing email process. If however we look at his assembly process, Shapira in fact enacted all three parts of Simon's triangulated process—though not in the expected order. As consumer, critic, then creator, Shapira posted his layered and remixed pictures on his site through a process not very different from reposting or retweeting someone else's posts and pictures with comments, or creating memes. "The decisions that each of us makes about whether to pass along

media texts,” Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green explain, “are reshaping the media landscape itself.” Whether enacted by individuals, or built into networked communities,

This shift from distribution to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined. (*Spreadable* 1–2)

Regardless of whether the result will be utopian, dystopian, or somewhere in between, while the technologies, platforms, and social expectations may be setting the stage for new forms of life narratives and identity assemblages, they also increase the vulnerability and fragility of these messages, as media increasingly spreads out of our control.

Spreadable Media

My concern here will be to identify and assess the changes in media production and consumption that encourage sharing. We have already considered why people update their life narrative and identity assemblages online, but what prompts them to share? Who benefits? And while most of us share and consume on a relatively small scale, what about those autobiography producers who distribute themselves to huge audiences and followers? How in short do influencers complicate, take advantage of, or transform this culture of sharing auto/biographical productions? And from a critical perspective, how are these productions and willingly shared reproductions different from traditionally published, textual auto/biographies? What supposedly began as a realm of openness, collaboration, and increased participation by a diversity of voices amplified through social networks has evolved into a system of continuous creation and circulation of life traces that information technology companies mine for data, which then

contributes to generating advertising revenue and “technovalue” (Kember and Zylinska 163), and even to upgrading and refining of Artificial Intelligence models.

In his 2006 book *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins predicted many of the changes that increasingly mobile technology has brought about.⁴³ As greater participation in media creation became possible, Jenkins anticipated that corporations would increase their control over those media, leading to a convergence of traditional media producers and fan or grassroots communities as both embraced new modes of production. “Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift,” Jenkins contends, but a development that “alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. Convergence alters the logic by which media industries operate and by which media consumers process news and entertainment . . . ” (15–16). Partly the result of the human desire to create and be heard, fan fiction, community forums, and a whole range of collaborations between traditional media producers and consumers generate multiple forms of life narratives, which then blend together in these new spaces or productions. Though acknowledging this as ultimately a corporate and end user phenomenon, Jenkins’ case studies emphasize the tensions that rise as institutional and technological power intersects with fan creativity and exploration. Considering his previous fan studies work in *Textual Poachers*, and the fandoms discussed there specifically devoted to popular culture, Jenkins was primed to recognize and celebrate increased community participation and mobilization. While pop culture fans offer an important population for observing the workings of a convergence model, such a model’s value for closing the participation gap through media literacy education that prepares people for their roles as “cultural producers” will be recognized by activists, educators, or other community groups (246, 259).

Yochai Benkler is guardedly optimistic as well. In *The Wealth of Networks*, he argues that information flows through non-proprietary channels can foster and motivate organization and information production in such areas as the arts, education, and political activism. He celebrates the fact that an individual voice can now travel through the global networks, reaching millions, and that large-scale collaboration and sharing of such resources with communal benefits, such as open source software, is on the rise (4–5). Jenkins focuses on media, and Benkler on the information economy, but both are encouraged by the emergence of new participation and production models outside of corporate and governmental structures—what Benkler refers to as the “networked public sphere” (10). Though Benkler warns of increasing surveillance of copyright fair use, patents, and trademarks, a trend at odds with—or resulting from—a society moving in the opposite direction, he notes approvingly “an increased ambition to participate in communities of practice that produce vast quantities of information, knowledge, and culture for free use, sharing, and follow-on by others” (470). Though positive change in information, economic, and media production will be a lengthy and evolving process, as media and markets shift and grow, new, less obviously proprietary systems and services are emerging.

But why do we repost, retweet, and pass on messages that we receive from others? And why do we pass on media messages and embrace this “ethic of sharing” (Benkler 470)? Julie Rak and G. Thomas Couser have both attributed the popularity and currency of memoir to its manifold of narrative conventions and the possibilities for self-invention it offers. Is the spreading of micro-narratives online akin to, or even a part of, the memoir boom? While some of our intense interest in self- and re-invention may lead us to imitate more established and commercial forms of life writing, many of the auto/biographical products appearing in social media seem to arise more directly from the convergence of media, technology, and society that

Jenkins describes. Certainly, sociability, a desire to communicate, and the need for a sense of belonging motivate offline and online behavior. But Nancy Baym credits the “drive to be social and find means of connecting with one another,” as “a guiding force in the internet’s transformation from military and scientific network to staple of everyday life” (*Personal Connections* 175). And whether it results in disclosing personal information, creating and providing free content, such as sewing or make-up tutorials, or deciding to pass on something received from elsewhere to your own personal networks, sharing is a strongly encouraged, and even mandated practice.

Here I will focus on the imperative to distribute content from another source. By forwarding or retweeting what I receive, I am seeking to supplement, or even subtly change, the nature of one of my online communities. When I encounter this new content, I first connect with it in some way. I feel it describes me, or it appeals to my interests. This is of course true for any new information, but according to Senft and Baym, “social media viewers tend to consume visual material not by gazing (as one would a traditional film shown in a cinema), nor by glancing (as one might do with a television turned on in the room), but in a segmented and tactile manner: ‘grabbing,’” which frequently involves downloading an image from online to offline, selecting freely available or shared images to pass on to our social networks, or taking something without permission through hacking or other stealing mechanisms. But forwarding and sharing also initiate a process with no determined end, for “once an image begins to travel around the web, the grab is truly at play, because it is impossible to control where an image will wind up” (1598). If our online consumption and actions differ from other reading or viewing processes, and grabbing—saving, sharing, stealing—becomes our primary method of sense-making there,

then it is by sharing, rather than saving or stealing, that we display our understanding, our values, and our need to connect with or influence others.

But many of the life narratives we consume and share online blend the personal and the corporate or economic together, often in barely concealed ways. Influencers—those Vloggers, Bloggers, and Instagrammers who reach large audiences with a shared area of interest (fashion, makeup, food, Disney) typically combine their own interests and expertise with life experiences. Often paid by companies to comment approvingly about their products, influencers turn their online persona and identity into a source of economic gain, often through finding the right mix of forthright commercialism and autobiographical narratives that gain the readers' trust and make product pitches seem more authentic. Continually sharing and re-sharing pictures, fan/follower messages, and other forms of micro self-productions not only increases the amount of commodified content the influencer can deliver to the audience, but almost instantly indicates what is or isn't working, and by rewarding the audience for participating, strengthens the bond. When followers see their shared pictures posted on their favorite Instagrammer's story, or their comments passed on to thousands of like-minded others, they feel like important contributing members of the community created and held together by the influencer.⁴⁴

Angela Dobele et al. suggest that sponsored viral marketing campaigns recognize that the “something” triggering us to forward messages isn't just our personal emotional response. By invoking complex or compound emotions (surprise and joy, for example) that viewers recognize as important to their specific community, campaigns produce that special incentive for passing the message on. Online campaigns should have two main goals—“consumption and forwarding behavior”—and these can be achieved by linking emotions to targeted messages designed to capture the imagination (302–303). In their research into what qualities distinguish shared from

unshared videos, Rosanna Guadagno et al. built upon the work on emotional contagion by Elaine Hatfield et al., who contend that when passing a video on to others, watchers have not only experienced the intended emotions, but concluded that their known audience will respond in the same way (2312), largely due to shared emotions about a body of videos and memes already online. An ongoing process of social validation also powerfully influences the decision to pass a video on to a friend group: “In environments where the correct course of action is ambiguous, people rely even more heavily on the cues provided by others” (2313). Like Dobele et al., Guadagno et. al found that “only content that generates stronger affective responses are [sic] likely to spread as a viral video” and significantly, “since the people to whom we are forwarding information are likely friends and acquaintances, we are more likely to forward positively-valenced information” (2318).

Mimicking the interactions of “friends and acquaintances,” influencers and viral campaigns employ affect, personal stories, and participation to tap into existing broad audiences, or to create their own followers and fandoms. Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton suggest that with its strong ties to the biological, affect can be seen as a return to the body: an appeal for a physical response to the content that will stir the individual to react—and for the marketer, ideally, to buy and share. And life writing is a one of the most proven and effective tools for producing affect. When a fashion blogger films her new baby cooing, or a food instagrammer post images of her littlest sister waving sparklers, influencers seem to be offering us a glimpse into their private worlds, leading audiences to feel touched both by the content, and the generosity. Inevitably, Garde-Hansen and Gorton cite Lauren Berlant, whose work on affect examines so closely and influentially this balancing act between public and private so expertly leveraged by many Influencers, Vloggers, and Bloggers, where “the inwardness of the intimate is

met by a corresponding publicness” (Berlant, qtd.in Garde-Hansen and Gorton 47). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the representation of online and offline lives shares many characteristics, among them the return to the body through affect, and the tension between intimacy and sharing found in the embodiment of life narratives. But journalists such as Allison Aubrey go further, writing about the effects of online life on offline body and mood. Also drawing from recent studies on emotion as a contagion in social media, Aubrey notes that for anger and the kinder emotions, the mirroring effects common to face-to-face interactions also happen online. “Emotions can spread through social networks almost like the flu or a cold,” she reports, “And the extent to which emotions can cascade is eye-opening.” Whether online or off, when negative or positive emotions ripple through networks of people (Aubrey),⁴⁵ they directly impact the offline body, often provoking the individual to respond in turn. Inspired by that complex negotiation between affect, identity, and embodiment, we react, participate, and share our related stories and the stories of others, Affective and emotional engagement sparks our actions and reactions wherever we might be—and not only our families and friends, and members of our networks online, but companies and influencers know how to leverage this fact to provoke the desired response.

The design of social media platforms undeniably performs this function. The same affordances, constraints, social expectations, and exigencies that solicit identity performances through our postings and production of media content also act upon us, guiding our consumption practices and sharing decisions. But we ourselves play an enormous role. Any of our posts, tweets, pictures, or videos can move within or outside our defined networks, turning each of these iterative auto/biographical texts into publications and circulation messages.⁴⁶ Henry Jenkins et al. call this sharing “spreadable media,” one of “the increasingly pervasive forms of

media circulation” that “recognizes the importance of the social connections among individuals, connections increasingly made visible (and amplified) by social media platforms” (*Spreadable* 3, 4). In contrast to Malcom Gladwell’s notion of “stickiness,” which refers to those hooks and bonds within a community that cause it to react to new content in a uniform manner, “spreadable media” refers to how media moves through multiple networks, the participation and collaboration it fosters along the way, and the neither fixed nor preset temporary creation of new networks that consume and act upon the media in their own distinctive ways. An awareness of this characteristic of online life can inform marketing and ideological agendas: “spreadable mentality focuses on creating media texts that various audiences may circulate for different purposes, inviting people to shape the context of the material as they share it within their social circles” (6). Regardless of empirical attempts to determine why online content gets passed on, Jenkins et al. argues that no single motivation prompts people to share media. “People make a series of socially embedded decisions when they choose to spread any media text,” asking themselves such questions as “Is the content worth engaging with? Is it worth sharing with others? Might it be of interest to specific people? Does it communicate something about me or my relationship with those people?” (*Spreadable* 13).

For this reason Jenkins et al. bristle at the use of “viral” to describe such circulation of material, because it not only erases the human agency responsible for the spread, but that agency’s continuing impact on reception (*Spreadable* 20). In this spreadable media landscape, piracy, gift economies, and labor shift in and out of prominence, reflecting not only the full dynamics of exchange, but also registering fluctuations of production and consumption roles through social networking sites.⁴⁷ Participation here is the key. For individuals shut out of traditional media channels, their greatest potential gains lie in the realm of spreadable media

(*Spreadable* 293). Nor is it the platforms alone that sparks this transition. Rather, they “provide a catalyst for reconceptualizing other aspects of culture” including relationships, social and political engagement, economics, and the law (*Spreadable* 3). How and what we share profoundly influence the changing nature of media ecology:

Content—in whole or through quotes—does not remain in fixed borders but rather circulates in unpredicted and often unpredictable directions, not the product of top-down design but rather the result of a multitude of local decisions made by autonomous agents negotiating their way through diverse cultural spaces. (*Spreadable* 294)

To Jenkins’ et al. claims, I would add the power of self-identification, and assumed solidarity with others, through the medium of life narratives—‘Me too.’ How does the message I’m about to share connect to my own story? How do I want it to connect? What do I write to provide context for why I am passing on someone else’s tweet, images, or video? What does that say about me? Both through the auto/biographical content we create, and the content we consume and pass along, we circulate life narratives. But, is this at the cost of control? When others send their pictures, political articles, or shopping vlogs, when I consume them then send them on their way, tagging a friend, am I stripping them of their agency? Of mine? When I upload my own picture from a recent trip, and write some text to accompany it, after I upload it, is it still mine? And my profile—if I have shared parts of it, can I say it is still my profile?

A couple of weeks ago, sponsored content from the independent media aggregator BuzzFeed popped up on my Facebook newsfeed. Entitled “I Bet You Forgot Facebook Used To Look Like This,” the article compared Facebook from 2009 to now, contrasting the simplicity of the posts and past functions with the more complex—but still inane—operating conventions of today.⁴⁸ Besides providing the needed chuckle, this content exposed the evolution of constructed posts, and in

particular, how content aggregators like BuzzFeed appropriate and package an individual's posted content as their own (Stopera). Many of the original contributors' names and images still appear alongside their posts; only a few are blocked from view. But the current versions are so cluttered with additional text, multiple ads, social media platform share buttons, and other suggested BuzzFeed content, that the list of changes forces the reader to keep scrolling, and makes it nearly impossible to determine what is and isn't part of the text. From the dense forest of images and texts, individual ads compete for our gaze, and the advertising revenue and market share they guarantee. As all users know, one misplaced click at the wrong moment or wrong part of the page will send us to advertisement sites, or, as Smith and Watson call them, "parasitic paratexts" ("Virtually" 87). Share buttons feature prominently, both as branding, and as continual reminders about our expected labor. An invitation/solicitation at the very bottom asks us for more participation and content: "Have an embarrassing Facebook status you want to share? Use our image uploader below for your chance to be featured in a future BuzzFeed post" (Stopera).

I now have the opportunity to pass this list on to my own newsfeed—an iterative act of identity and the sharing of something funny. But if I respond to the call for content, I can also "contribute," and if BuzzFeed does choose my video, comment, or picture, it will travel faster and further through their media networks than anything I could send out on my own. This is in fact a commercial transaction, though a highly unequal one. The user agrees to draconian terms for a moment of virality, while BuzzFeed and the original platforms enjoy the profits. Once we provide initial consent, BuzzFeed will take, package, and publish our micro life narratives, after which anyone can comment, laugh, respond, alter, then pass them on. By uploading my cat or dog video, comment about Target, or baking failure, at that very moment I relinquish my data to BuzzFeed. Unlike a commercial publisher, however, through their terms of agreement they claim a permanent

right to anything I will ever produce in their environment—my name, profile, mobile device id, email, IP address, and any other distinguishing information in my profile. If I log on using my Facebook profile, because it is easy, and I don't have to create another profile, the amount of data accessible to the platform increases. On BuzzFeed, setting up a profile, posting a review, and uploading content all constitute “[c]reation or performance of a contract, ” and “We keep your personal data for as long as we need it for the purposes for which it was collected” (BuzzFeed “Legal”).⁴⁹ Yet people still happily send their pictures to Buzzfeed, because there's a chance their funny post will spread.

When we agree to the terms of use, we enter into contracts with the social networking sites. This is a precondition for creating a profile, after which we move on to the next barrier to use set up by Facebook or by apps connected to our fitness trackers. Usually called terms-of-service agreements, they appear in a condensed scrollable box of text. Not understanding our contracts with the social networking sites makes possible the collection and retention of huge amounts of personal data, supposedly with our consent.⁵⁰ As Shoshana Zuboff explains, these contracts are called “click-wrap,”: because with one click, users agree to terms of service that not only authorize the invasion their digital online presence, but also accept any future changes in these terms without needing to be notified. Social networking sites “do not establish constructive producer-consumer reciprocities.” Instead, they offer communication opportunities as “the ‘hooks’ that lure users into their extracting operations in which our personal experiences are scraped and packaged” to generate targeted advertising revenue and behavioral data for their own and other technology companies. We are not only the customers in surveillance capitalism, but the platforms' unpaid labor force as well (10). Zuboff breaks these trends toward commodification and ownership through programming “actuation” down into three categories: tuning (or nudging), herding, and conditioning (293).

Tuning is how the platform architecture makes certain operations easy or difficult. For instance, how many pages can you force users to go through before they can opt out of allowing cookies? Herding moves users toward desired actions by offering limited alternatives. While it doesn't force people to follow a single path, herding highly increases the probability that they will (295). Although conditioning is hardly a new strategy for behavior modification, Zuboff marvels at the current range and scale of such operations enacted through myriad of wearable devices, smart phones, computers, and in-home ubiquitous computing services. Our data is turned on us: "As digital signals monitor and track a person's daily activities, the company gradually masters the schedule of reinforcements—rewards, recognition, or praise that reliably produce the specific user behaviors that the company selects for dominance" (296). It is not therefore over-reacting to say that companies harvest our data from online platforms so that they create and improve systems for controlling us.

Zuboff is far less optimistic about the current media ecology than Jenkins, seeing invasive actions from which we increasingly cannot or are unwilling to free ourselves, while Jenkins still has hopes for media literacy and grassroots activism. Revisiting Benkler for a moment, I want to call attention to his questions about how competing forces would evolve, as users become producers with an "ethic of sharing," and companies pursue copyright, patents, and trademarks (470). In 2006 and today, intellectual property remain a crucial concern not only for traditional companies, but for producers and influencers who make money from sponsorships attracted by their online presence (Jenkins, et al. *Spreadable* 183, McNeill 158, Maguire 157). By paying attention to the relevant patent applications and legal disputes, we can gain important insights into the technology worlds hidden behind their platforms. Though the process is lengthy and labor intensive, because processes, software, hardware, and models can be patented, they can produce huge revenues for the

holder.⁵¹ Many of the technological foundations of social networking sites are patented; if companies use them without permission, the owner has solid grounds for litigation. As a result, social networking sites also gather our data as part of their development of products they intend to patent—marketing tools certainly, but advanced artificial intelligence as well.

We certainly need to follow and value the role of agency and control. When Morrison reveals how we are coaxed by Facebook affordances to create certain kinds of identities, or McNeill exposes the social and technological exigencies, or when Cardell et al. describe how teenagers resist and work around the communication strategies offered to them, all of these critics are implicitly celebrating how exercising agency can counter or modify platform constraints. But we also need to recognize that how I customize my account, how I do the unexpected, and especially, how I frustrate the platform from carrying out its intended purposes all gets registered, collected, assessed, weaponized, then injected back into the code. Resistance becomes an important part of the feedback loop. Jenkins never really addresses this disarming, devoting himself to celebrating our agency in the decision-making we do daily to consume, create, and pass on as we grab and spread life narratives (Senft and Baym 1598). Zuboff's investigation of surveillance fits more closely with Kember and Zylinka's concept of mediation, which they describe as a symbiotic relationship between humans and technology. But while Kember and Zylinska concentrate on the agency of machines and technology, *Surveillance Capitalism* is Zuboff's manifesto to recapture our agency and control by focusing on the people who produced the programs designed to surveil and modify human behavior, and on those who sustain this agenda. Simply recognizing how the platforms nudge us, feed on our free labor, and monetize our participation may not however move us toward recapturing our agency or independence as effectively as we might think. As the next chapter

suggests, not only might we not be able to dislodge our selves from that control, but in fact, we might depend on it.

Conclusion

What else do our online postings and identities make possible? Through its blog, Open AI, an open source artificial intelligence research company, recently touted a new language model called GPT-2. It then released a portion of this powerful tool for language comprehension, writing completion, and translation. GPT-2 can continue and conclude a partially written article while retaining the same style and voice, answer comprehensive questions after “reading” it, or translates it fluidly into another language. Training and testing artificial intelligence models operating at this level of complexity require huge datasets. For GPT-2, Open AI drew upon over eight million web pages, mostly from Reddit. “We created a new dataset which emphasizes diversity of content, by scraping content from the Internet,” one AI programmer explained: “In order to preserve document quality, we used only pages which have been curated/filtered by humans—specifically, we used outbound links from Reddit which received at least 3 karma”—a Reddit indicator of humorous or well received content (Open AI f.n.1).⁵² Releasing only a portion of the model buys time for revisions, for legislation and for possible government intervention, but it does not stop others from trying to reproduce the entire program model. Furthermore, a recent *Washington Post* article about a new paradigm for censorship (inundation) lists possible “malicious” uses for the model, including generating false news articles, impersonating others for dishonest purposes, and creating and sharing fake or abusive content on social media (Applebaum).⁵³ Of course, bots and similar programs are already creating and operating user accounts, but Open AI’s model may be even more powerful.

In an article entitled “You Think You Want Media Literacy . . . Do You?” on her blog “apophenia,” danah boyd wrestles with the current media ecology. After working through a number of complex and sometimes contradictory issues regarding technology that call for critical thinking, questioning, and media literacy, boyd concludes that “If we’re not careful, ‘media literacy’ and ‘critical thinking’ will simply be deployed as an assertion of authority over epistemology”:

For better and worse, by connecting the world through social media and allowing anyone to be amplified, information can spread at record speed. There is no true curation or editorial control. The onus is on the public to interpret what they see. To self-investigate. Since we live in a neoliberal society that prioritizes individual agency, we double down on media literacy as the “solution” to misinformation. It’s up to each of us as individuals to decide for ourselves whether or not what we’re getting is true. (boyd)

But as Guadagno et al. have determined, validation is a powerful factor in what people passed on to their networks. In light of what boyd writes, determining what an authoritative source might be also requires us to ask *authoritative to whom?* If people consuming social media think critically by searching out and making sense of information drawn from within their own networks, their “critical” determination might amount to nothing more than a constant confirmation of their own epistemology. And in any case, “most people like to follow their gut more than their mind. No one wants to hear that they’re being tricked.” Though boyd unquestionably thinks “there might be some value in helping people understand their own psychology,” and she clearly values critical thinking skills, she is especially concerned when a semblance of that process turns it on its head, often in the cause of producing a “weaponized narrative.” Her example is “crisis actors,” a term that surfaced to discount those speaking out against school shootings, whether the parents in Sandy Hook or students from Parkland, Florida,

by suggesting they were not actually victims or their relatives, but paid performers. Such “arguments” are circulated and perhaps even composed by bots in the service of ideological entities, and whether the delivery system is Open AI, or paid agitators online seeking to disrupt those threatening certain special interests, boyd suggests that an effective response will necessarily involve major human interventions. While Open AI proposes that the Artificial Intelligence community should be allowed to police itself regarding such ideological weaponizing, and that protecting the rights of patent holders and regulating the releases of models and code should be the government’s primary role, boyd suggests we train students and ourselves in human psychology and the operations of epistemological difference, not simply in the service of empathy or argument, but also in the hopes of recognizing and defusing the destructive polarities fueling online activities. For boyd, understanding this new media ecology and placing it in historical and cultural context is imperative, but working on the human factor needs to come before before fixing the machines.

Drawing on their own insights, Kember and Zylinska advocate for “a system of care through good cuts” in media “that facilitate the flow of life through the network without drowning us in the process” (168). Because auto/biography critics have for some time been charting the fortunes of identity traces online by studying the evolution of social networking sites, they are primed to ask informed and compelling questions about the impact of such mediation on the representations of a life. And these same critics are also highly qualified to carry out boyd’s directive to identify how life can be differentiated from code. Kember and Zylinska put it this way: “The key ethical question facing us in the era of Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks is therefore not whether we should be ‘on them,’ but rather how to emerge with social media, and how to become-different from them” (172). Even as this becomes

increasingly harder to do, understanding what is happening to the representation of lives on social networking sites, and particularly in relation to data collection and behavior modification, needs to become the first step in a process of disambiguation—in becoming on our own.

Chapter 4: Irreproducibility and Technological Palimpsests

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

On March 13, 2019, three Facebook-owned social media platforms went dark. Users of Facebook, What'sApp, and Instagram who tried to log into their accounts received error messages instead. Unaware of the larger outage, some users assumed their accounts had been hacked or corrupted, deleted them, and started new ones. Trying to quell expectations of a Denial-of-Service (DoS) attack, and to inform users of the global outage and the hard work underway to get back online, Facebook tweeted an explanatory message on Twitter.

Living in a time zone three-to-six hours behind the North American continent, I did not know about the outage when I first tried to log into my accounts, but I soon did, as the news media had posted the story on their websites. By midday, I had logged back into a glitch-filled but intact Facebook. Throughout the day I kept trying to log into Instagram. I wasn't alone; #instagramdown became a trending topic on Twitter, provoking a flood of tweets and memes ranging from comic panic, despair at life without social media, and users returning to Twitter in huge numbers. A common meme showed a stuffed monkey, looking confused in alternating views, with the accompanying tweet "Me checking Instagram every 20 seconds to see if it is working yet [#instagramdown](#)" (@sam_glee1). As a fellow instagrammer, many of the memes strongly resonated with me. Concerned and annoyed, I recognized the silliness of my repeated log-in attempts, and also my ineptitude with Twitter, as I turned to an alternative platform. When my Instagram profile finally returned in the early evening, it lacked my uploaded photos and recent or archived stories. I then grappled for a few hours with what proved to be a greater fear

than I expected or would like to admit—that all my carefully taken and curated Instagram photos were gone.

On March 15, 2019, a gunman in Christchurch New Zealand strapped a camera to his body, linked it to a Facebook Livestreaming video function, then broadcast as he terrorized two mosques, killing 51 people as they worshipped. About 200 live viewers tuned in, but then millions of copies of the video spread through Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter. Undetected by Facebook's artificial intelligence, the video was only removed after a user reported it and police intervened. John McDuling notes that "The roughly hour-long period that elapsed between the start of the live stream and the video being taken down would prove to be a crucial delay that enabled the video to spread uncontrollably" (np). Watched by thousands, then copied and spread to millions, the video eluded Facebook's and Google's efforts to remove it from their platforms. The technology required to upload and spread the video, or to pepper us with targeted ads based on our data, or to streamline our "newsfeeds" based on our eyes and clicks exists; the technology to remove such a video does not. As McDuling also reported, "One week on from one of the worst terrorist attacks in this region's history, videos of the incident are still being shared in the darkest corners of the web. And people are still trying to upload them to Facebook" (np). Not immune themselves to crossing lines at times, by condemning the livestream, the world's major news outlets told an even larger set of potential viewers about the video.

Only a few days separated these two events. Both provoked a global response; both prompted social media users to post and repost, tweet and retweet, share and share again reactions, uniting people through hashtags. Many responses were new micro life narratives, sharing personal confusion, suffering, and disbelief. Mainstream media outlets tracking the

stories reported on social media responses from around the world, amplifying them, and provoking still more. The temporary loss of Facebook, What'sApp, and Instagram not only revealed the fragility of the platforms themselves, but at least for some of us, how strongly we depended on them for work or play. Furthermore, the need to upload life narrative content proved so strong that users flocked to other social platforms rather than halt production. With two platforms down, users pivoted to other social media, where they tweeted about their rediscovery of a little used platform, or posted life narratives about their inability to post life narratives. The terrorist livestream video continues to lurk on the web, exemplifying how spreadable and elusive online content can be. It went viral. Though the terrorist exploited the lack of oversight, whether human or technological, necessary to prevent or end the posting and sharing of his video, both events highlight how pervasive and fragile social media actually are.

This chapter explores the technological and social implications of the reproducibility and the irreproducibility of life performance texts on social media. In particular, I want to consider how texts and performances *decay*, either through purposeful or technological affordances of forgetting, and how this relates to collective memory. When a text continually changes, or when authors/users add new content, or when certain individuals or groups have access and others do not, how do we understand what we are encountering? When users choose to delete their autobiographical content, do we have other options for viewing or reading it? What are the affordances of commercial frameworks and platforms for saving content, whether our own work, or those materials we consume and subsume? In their 2009 collection, Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading agree that its capacity for saving and storing data is a fundamental asset of the digital mode (5). But can we find again what we store? How many times do the same stories, or new versions, appear? What effects do the perpetuation or the

precarity of data have on collective experiences or movements organized, conducted, or preserved on social media platforms? Why do some tout their archival features, while others attract viewers by guaranteeing messages will be of limited duration? Most of us assume that nothing can ever really be deleted from the internet. But how many screens back can you go on your feed? Can you easily find the “suggested” commercial content that you neglected to like a few hours before? The Library of Congress supposedly stores tweets. But are they accessible? What mechanisms currently exist for searching the vast quantities of data on Facebook, and how many can users actually employ? Should we therefore still feel secure that information will never be “lost”? Is an ongoing record being maintained of platform changes and new functionalities?

Huge collective texts on social media are hard to work with in their entirety, but to track a movement or draw upon an ever-evolving social practice, many media, memory, and life writing scholars, and anthropologists, social scientists, historians, and teachers, will want access to these interlinked and accretive texts. To what extent have these increasingly collective experiences moved life performances beyond single created, enhanced, and consumed texts towards ones implicated in wider forms of participation and consumption? Who or what has the means to retain these collective performances and messages when their moment has passed? Or conversely, why do users avoid, circumvent, or reject the archival affordances of many platforms, and gravitate instead to self-erasing technologies? And are they really? Greater access to life writing texts through digital remediation and participation creates new layers, new meanings, and more intertextual relationships, but also results in more hands, more widely distributed, controlling those narratives.

This chapter will focus on the challenges to archiving that are intrinsic to the very nature of the virtual lifewriting objects or constructions to be “saved.” As a result, this chapter will also provide important background for my discussion of archiving itself, in the next chapter.

(Ir)reproducibility

Despite the unprecedented and ever-increasing capacities for collection and storage, we grapple with the fragility of data and texts. What if something happens to a text, so I can no longer read it? If pictures, videos, or messages go missing after viewing, or a video story times out, can I still cite them? Does it make a difference if the author deletes it? Whether they be my carefully crafted Instagram images, or an activist group’s community events schedules on Facebook, or a politician’s tweets, what happens when they disappear? How do I gain access to missing material, and what kinds of access? As for auto/biographical traces, they reflect and perform identity online, but also connect to the life offline, and function as affectual objects. But as Cardell et al. warn, “Social media content with a limited lifespan is converse to the interests of biographers and other archivists and to theories of self-representation that emphasize the primacy of documentation and trace in assessing and understanding acts of life narration” (161). The fragility of these texts stems from the producers’ choices, the functionality and affordances of social networking sites, and socially determined behaviors and beliefs as well. Creators’ attitudes about this ephemerality and impermanence often differ from those who consume and study these texts, but in many cases the loss of texts is purposefully invisible to both. (Ir)reproducibility impacts how we approach, read, and interpret life performances on social media platforms, and the most prominent causes of this impermanence include technological obsolescence, desired or undesired message decay, archival expectations, and network insulation. In short, impermanence

and preservation are tools that users and platforms wield to maintain control over self-representation and identity texts.

Technological Obsolescence

Shahak Shapira's *Yolocaust* was accessible for one week in January 2017. As already mentioned, I encountered the project through an AJ+ video uploaded to social media platforms. By the time I accessed the site, Shapira had already taken down the photos, and posted the new page explaining the project. I therefore read his text backwards, with an immediately apparent intertextuality that influenced my understanding of the project. Online for two-and-a-half years, the replacement page has significantly outlived the original one week blog. Although I had viewed many of the pictures on the AJ+ video, I hoped to access the original project. Using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, which had made several captures each day of its single week on the open web, I found 147 captures or "crawls" for the site—each one accessible, and a few gathered before Shapira added any content. I soon located the original project, with what I believe to be its full functionality, including the mouse-over fade from the original selfies to his enhanced backgrounds. Each page header reminded me that the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine was providing this view. There were additional social media sharing prompts, and an "About this capture" drop down menu provided information on the webcrawl process, including associated URLs, and which bots had crawled the site. The "Collected By" information for January 19, 2017 listed the independent, self-proclaimed "rogue archivist collective" called Archive Team, which had captured the website through its "ArchiveBot" tool (Shapira "Yolocaust."). The bots capturing versions of the website, and the groups creating them, are intermediaries. They created neither the project, nor the website, but they took copies and deposited them in the Internet Archive, which itself crawled the site on other days.

As I looked at each day captured on the Wayback Machine, I saw how the text changed over the course of the week.⁵⁴ On the FAQ for the original page, Shapira provided instructions for how to have a selfie removed: “‘I’m on one of the pictures and suddenly regret having uploaded it to the internet. Can you remove it?’ Yes. Just send an email to undouche.me@yolocaust.de.” (Shapira “Yolocaust”). Within two days of the launch, the selfie subjects did begin to contact him. The archive crawls show something that only a site follower could have seen at the time—the dynamic changes to the site as he removed the pictures. Between the third and fourth day, the rate at which people had discovered and contacted him significantly increased. Because there is no capture for January 26, 2017, I skip from three pictures on the site to the replacement page. In the missing interval, I cannot tell if or when he removed more pictures, took down the site completely, or started preparing for the replacement page. Over 2.5 million people visited the page during that week, although Shapira declares that “The crazy thing is that the project actually reached all 12 people who’s [sic] selfies were presented” (Shapira “Yolocaust”). Reviewing his process lets us track the assemblage, and in this case the swift disassemblage, of the site.

“I locate myself as a literary scholar posing as a digital archaeologist,” Emma Maguire declares when describing the multimodal and digital text recovery required for her work. In her book *Girls, Autobiography, Media: Gender and Self-Mediation in Digital Economies*, she introduces us to girls and young women who play with, perform, or resist the expectations, consumption, and technological affordances of the medium they use to tell their multimodal, autobiographical stories. While many of these life performances are still available in their original medium, some texts are suspended in obsolescent technologies or locked down in archived form. For instance, the Sad Asian Girls (SAG)—artists Esther Fan and Olivia Park—

performed on a variety of social media platforms, but when they stopped producing their collective identity and multimodal projects, they deposited their work on a single website, SadContent.com, which acts as “an archive and a memorial.” “In a digital environment where information is fragmented across multiple sites, each vulnerable to changing interfaces and site restructuring,” Maguire observes, “this archive functions to preserve the SAG and the art that they created”:

This is important because it enables Fan and Park to stake a claim on their labour in the service of their artistic careers—potential employers can see examples and results of their work. It also provides a site (other than the Wayback Machine) that allows an audience to continue to view and circulate the work and the mission of the SAG. (153)

A static website can only provide a glimpse of SAG’s dynamic presence in multiple sites online, but it can serve as a creator-established summary or résumé. When tracking the viral value of Black girlhood through the “Eyebrows on Fleek” Vine video, however, Maguire must contend with the contradiction of a continuously spreading viral video initiated on the social media Vine platform, which can no longer be used to create new videos. Only a locked down archive remains accessible, due to a decision to consolidate by Twitter, the platform’s owner. Maguire wants to focus on Kayla Newman’s original labor, performance, and intellectual property, but difficulties continually arise in tracking actual rights to the material, due to the terms of service and the ease of sharing: “Because of the nature of viral video—it spreads rapidly and widely through many different participants and platforms—it is difficult to trace and assign cultural ownership” (168). Although the defunct Vine platform is not central to Maguire’s discussion, I am calling attention to it to reveal how changes in platforms—the redirection of users to upload videos on Twitter after its acquisition of Vine, for instance—alter the social media landscape, changing

auto/biographical products and processes, and demanding different reading and viewing strategies. By shutting down the Vine platform, Twitter disabled a central node for those users. People can still create the quick cut and quirky videos common on Vine, but now they must post them on Twitter. And unlike the SAG, who retained control over their work by creating a memorial website, Vine users must now rely on Twitter to preserve and supply access to their earlier auto/biographical videos. Copies still circulate, and many consumers of such videos saved or shared them on other social media platforms' feeds. But Twitter, not the creators, now controls, and will decide the future, of the original videos.

For her chapter on camgirls and lifecasting, Maguire also employs Internet Archive's Wayback Machine to examine many of Jennifer Ringley's (JenniCAM) and Ana Voog's images. But Maguire addresses the formidable problems of only having access to a dynamic live video through a series of static images, grabbed at various times by the archive bot. "The archive has transformed an interface that was once live and shifting from moment to moment into an artifact frozen in time," she writes, noting that time and technology change have eliminated that sense of liveness that was the main reason for the original's existence (28). Technology moves on, but many web-based or platform-created texts do not or cannot move with it, and if their online life traces linger on, it is only because of the dedication of those making copies, such as the groups contributing to the Internet Archive, or through the benevolence of the new platform owners, such as Twitter maintaining access to Vine videos

Despite the necessary technological archeology and rewinding that results from mediation, Maguire finds she still "connects" with Ringley's world, feeling a sense of familiarity: "The experience is similar to reading a good book where the fictional world comes alive for you, it is a form of inhabiting" (28). But the intervening seventeen years, with their

accompanying technological changes and shifts in the archiving medium, never allow for full immersion in Ringley's or Voog's performances. Maguire insists that acknowledging the challenges, even when they seem "tangential," is especially vital when reading these precursors in relation to such current practices as livestreaming: "I want to address this historical (dis)connection and my (dis)location in relation to these tests by positioning my methodology as, partially, one of recovering and remembering" (31). It is important that Ringley deleted her site in 2003, and that Voog expunged her site of her static images while Maguire was doing her research. The importance of these texts as specific kinds of gendered life performances, and as early versions of common media practices today, makes their loss or limited availability even harder to bear. Full access would provide important exhibits for understanding better the contradictory status of digital web products—pervasive, yet fragile and ephemeral—and also for tracing the evolving nature of autobiographical practices in the web-based environment. Technology may make possible the capture and preservation of our data, but only if we write the codes, programs, and bots to do that work can we insure that we retain what is of greatest value. Otherwise, the technology enhancements and preservation practices may themselves be the reason previous digital products occupy an obsolescent limbo.

Maguire warns that as many of the millennial web based-texts become inaccessible, we will no longer be able to study female auto/biographical practices that took place within that early burgeoning web-based ecology. The value of her own work depends on being able to place these early webcam practices of Ringley and Voog within a continuum of female artists using their bodies in their art:

the camgirls are pioneers of webcam technology and creators of automedia that engages with anxieties around identity on the internet, feminine embodiment and the gaze,

visibility, the consumption of eroticized female bodies, the digital potential for complicating notions of public and private, and the digital mediation of intimacy. (48–49)

But especially in relation to this particular moment in the history of the internet, the material is often sketchy, and for more reasons than technological obsolescence. As authors and performers move on, delete their sites, or consolidate their social media accounts, critics and fan audiences must turn to alternative archival forms, or in many cases grapple with the loss of these texts altogether—for instance, Maguire’s having to consult static archived versions of live online sites such as JennyCAM.

But global problems with archiving also make certain forms of historical research very difficult. Citing as examples certain online newspapers, countries’ domain level extensions, and many early websites now lost to us, Stephen Dowling emphasizes the ephemerality of the early internet. When describing the work of the Internet Archive, he notes that the process was always a few steps behind: “It took nearly five years into the internet’s life before anyone made a concerted effort to archive it. Much of our earliest online activity has disappeared” (np). Terry Matthew reminds us that obsolescence is not unique to the internet, pointing to several types of media decay caused by the environment or a lack of players or consoles. But Matthew also critiques the utopian claims made during earlier times about online permanence: “The promise came from the notion that digital data would always be there. It would always be preserved. The internet never forgets, and information wants to be free. With zero cost of distribution and a byte-perfect replication across multiple generations of copies, nothing would ever be lost.” But as platforms grew and declined in popularity, some servers assumed to be providing long term storage for data failed, and creators wanting to finish an experimental text either deleted

everything or repackaged it into an easier to view site, responding to present impulses arising from their reactions to their own texts in the now.

In fact, technological obsolescence can fuel creators' strategies for exerting control over their work. Unintentionally in terms of the platforms, and unknowingly with regard to the author, copies may still exist somewhere on the web—no longer technologically compatible enough to be fully viewable, but saved, and outside the author's control. If retrieved and translated, such texts can give us glimpses into what came before, allowing us to illuminate the often shady genealogy of early web self-representations. For example, thanks to the Internet Archive's captures from Ringley's JenniCAM, we can see enough to understand what we can no longer see. But the more common experience is an encounter with the tenuous nature of these online auto/biographical traces, as archives go dark, platform affordances modify our access, or we lose the translation tools necessary to counteract technological obsolescence.

Message Decay

Message decay impedes reproducibility, reflects patterns of consumption, and offers a self-reflexive level of auto/biographical control. From Trending Topics on Twitter to self-erasing messages on Snapchat or Instagram, social media messages have very limited lives due to a high rate of attention decay. Christine Perakslis and others have adopted from nuclear science the notion of the half-life—the amount of time an element will decay by half—to examine online prominence. “Researchers propose quantifiable *social media half-life* relative to tweets, posts, and hashtag trending,” she explains, and reports that “Engagement of a typical tweet is believed to halve within 16 minutes, a decrease of 24 minutes in 2014,” with an even “more rapid decay of expressions of solidarity globally” following tragedies (88). Fang Wu and Bernardo A. Huberman have investigated how quickly collective attention and novelty fade, and Sitaram Asur

et al. have identified a number of factors contributing to decay in messages, including novelty, the large number of competing messages being provided by the same medium, and the constant supplanting of older stories by new ones. Through a study of millions of trending tweets over forty days, they discovered that retweets drive stories through the network, and that “the nature of the content plays a strong role in determining if a topic trends, rather than the users who initiate it” (Asur, et al. 10). A tweet by a single author that endures for a time through retweets proves to have a story life shorter than topics prompting a mixture of retweets and newly constructed messages (11). They also discovered that stories resurged in popularity, possibly due to time zones or circadian trending—at night before bed, and again as people rose in the morning—but that Twitter’s “Trending Topics” algorithm would only highlight a trending topic once, even if it trended again later (3). Trending messages with a sudden rise in popularity throughout a social network site also have a high rate of decay—their content has the affective power to move members to share, but only for a short time.

But what are the half-lives of less volatile or meteoric messages? As images, videos, experiences, and comments are shared and reshared by individuals, groups, stars, influencers, businesses, and governments throughout social media platforms, how do their half-lives compare? And how does message decay relate to seeing someone’s post or tweet in the future? Or anyone finding my own? For many social networking sites, algorithms determine what people see and don’t see of their “friends.” Facebook offers additional functionality for end users to determine which friends’ posts to boost, and which to lessen. Post popularity may determine how much or little individuals may find and consume from members of their network. These conditioning factors impact the production of successive auto/biographical messages and their reception and close readings. A post has only a moment at the top of someone’s page to grab a

reader and prompt a response. Competition for space and audience attention on updating news feeds not only poses challenges for individual authors and their networked audiences, but also for scholars, who lose postings of interest as newer content pushes them deeper into the feed and the irretrievable past.

What happens when decay becomes a selling point on social media platforms? What does this tell us about the iterative and self-invention practices these technologies offer users? Many platforms provide self-erasing or limited time content services. Users can post a picture, video, and/or text, knowing that after a specified period of time it will disappear. Kylie Cardell et al. describe the dynamics of autobiographical practices at play in Snapchat “Snaps” and Instagram’s “Stories” as a struggle between lifewriting impulses. “Each of these in-app functions amplifies the role of the autobiographical in connection to social media content,” they explain, “evoking traditions like self-portraiture, memoir, diary, and autobiography and foregrounding the first person as a privileged and default position for users on these platforms.” But exactly “what kind of self-document or ‘memoir’ is a disappearing Instagram story?” (157–158) Because of the limited duration, these platforms offer users flexibility, security, and audience control over their online presences and auto/biographical performances, for the short and long term. Cardell et al. outline the specific strategies individuals employ, including alternate accounts for different audiences. The resulting texts (perhaps consciously, and sometimes unconsciously) “reflect an awareness of the constructedness of the self and indeed the autobiographical ‘I’—the different versions of the self that we might choose to project publically” (163).

This is itself nothing new. But citing Alice Marwick’s and danah boyd’s work on youth and privacy online, Cardell et al. offer another, less familiar reason why individuals gravitate towards a self-erasing platform: “the ability it affords them to communicate and narrate their

lives without the burden of the trace or the ‘archive’” (165). When speaking with Henry Jenkins and Mizuko Ito, boyd describes how the limited physical public spaces for teens impact how they approach public and private spaces online: “They want to be *in* public, but that doesn’t mean that they always want to *be* public” (Jenkins et al. *Participatory Culture*, 46).⁵⁵ Andrew Hoskins sees the self-erasing platform as a response to a “sociology of haunting,” as “thought to be deleted images, videos, emails” all pose a threat to return. Hoskins argues that both the haunting and the erasing response represent “a spectacular uncertainty for the future evolution of memory and of history” (18). In addition, knowing that the messages will disappear creates an urgency in followers to check and consume messages. “Impermanence is a currency here” Cardell et al. note, but wonder whether “freedom from surveillance, publicness, and the archival nature of social media forums” is worth the cost of needing to check in constantly (168). While the messages’ ephemerality allows the ‘I’ to change without disrupting the identity coherence created by successive, retained posts and tweets (Cover 67), the erasure changes what has been most important in self-representation. “On Snapchat and Instagram, the value of the autobiographical image is lodged in its (however brief) *circulation*,” Cardell et al. explain, while “the value of trace and preservation, that has so long been associated with practices of self-life writing, is subordinated.” As a result, how users actually participate on such platforms not only leads to new technologies and services, but also necessarily modifies how we create, consume, and write about auto/biography overall (169). People are increasingly documenting their lives; self-erasing or temporary messages allow them to regulate what they share, with whom, and for how long. Though running counter to previous auto/biographical practices, and particularly for researchers, archivists, and scholars, who will want access to such ephemera for biographical

context, planned decay offers creators far more control *of* their lives in public while *having* a public life.

Archival Expectations

In July 2016, Snapchat unveiled a new service: “Memories,” which allows users to save their snaps⁵⁶ in an archive featured on the app. As Casey Newton notes, “The introduction of Memories represents a significant shift for the famously ephemeral Snapchat—and reflects the app’s growing status as the default camera for millions of users” (“Snapchat”). In December 2017, Instagram followed suit, automatically saving users’ other otherwise temporary and quickly decaying posts unless overridden. Here, I want to discuss how social networking sites entice participation by offering the seemingly contradictory services of knowingly preserving and knowingly destroying. Both strategies offer control—for users, over their content and identity productions, and for platforms, over their users’ attention and data. Like life performances enacted through social media, archives preserve records and information. As the Society of American Archivists explains

All save items to serve as proof that an event occurred, to explain how something happened, or for financial or sentimental reasons. All types of archives may be stored in more than one location. And both personal archives and larger archives save a variety of materials that can range from letters, to photographs, to films, to databases, to official documents, and more. (4)

Social media services are continually juggling the constantly changing iterations of their platforms, and their users’ expectations about maintaining their micro self-narratives. Peddling preservation contrasts with the platform’s ever-refreshing services. Through posting, sharing, saving, and deleting, people are constantly managing their online lives, and whatever the

currently accessible textual, visual, or multimodal expressions might be comprise their virtual identities at that moment. But as Aimée Morrison and Laurie MacNeill note, the affordances, constraints, and exigencies of the social media platforms also profoundly affect the production of these online lives (Morrison 114, McNeill 146), as services are added, dropped, or altered in response to how people are using the platforms, and to the platforms' own agendas for acquiring new data or modifying consuming behavior.

Though remembering or preserving may seem at odds with the constant demand to share and spread, many platforms are increasingly linking the two. Twitter enables users to download their entire archive of Tweets. Rather than accessing a dynamic, online archive, the Twitter user downloads a static file. By downloading her archive of Tweets, the burden is on the user to manage file obsolescence, but also circumvents Morrison's concerns about silent supersession. However, the service only captures the user's Tweets—not the communication between Twitter users. For many years, Twitter passed their tweets on to the Library of Congress for accession, but this arrangement changed on January 1, 2018 when the Library of Congress announced they will no longer archive every tweet. Facebook has two familiar strategies for offering users glimpses into their "memories": dropping pictures or comments posted on that day in previous years onto a user's newsfeed, or selecting "memories" from the newsfeed side. Headers indicate the time passed—"Four years ago," "Six years ago"—and each revived picture or post has a "Share" icon at the foot of each memory. By pushing such posts and pictures out, complete with a menu choice for access and sharing, Facebook combines spontaneity with a bit of archival control. As for the Newsfeed, because it has many dynamic or algorithmic elements that change each time the user views the feed, particularly active users will have great trouble going back through their profile page. In response, Facebook now offers an alternative: the Activity Log.

Covering the entire ten years since I joined Facebook, my own Activity Log includes all of my posts, pictures, likes, follows, shares, and comments. I can click on a year, search by keyword, or filter the log to narrow my results—other people’s posts that I’m tagged in, for instance, or what others have posted on my Timeline/Profile.

Snapchat and Instagram are also adapting their services to accommodate saving while still strongly encouraging sharing. Begun as a self-decaying messaging system, Snapchat now offers personal archives, also called “memories,” of augmented reality pictures and videos. Users can search for snaps, edit them, resend them as new messages, and even place a frame around the picture to indicate its age. Like Facebook’s “Memories,” “Timehop” allows you to recover a picture snapped on a certain date, and “My Eyes Only” lets you lock specified snaps behind a PIN number.⁵⁷ Instagram countered their rival Snapchat with a similar service. Instead of losing their stories at the end of the twenty-four hour cycle, users can choose whether or not to save their otherwise decaying stories before they disappear. The “Story Archive” now grants users access to all their previous stories, with the default setting to save everything. Users must purposefully go into the “Story Archive” to delete them or change the default settings. Instagram also encourages users to create a larger, more robust story called a “Highlight,” a feature appearing at the top of their page. Both Snapchat and Instagram therefore offer archives for a user’s self-decaying messages, and both encourage the creation of new products out of this stored, predominantly visual content. “Photos remain one of the two or three most powerful tools to turn people into daily users of social networks,” Newton observes (“Snapchat”), and these new services allow individual users to access and share their own content, while for consumers, fans, or members of networked groups, these pictures, videos, or archived content remain “disappeared.” Users must re-share for their networked group to re-consume. I follow an

Instagramer who uses Highlights. After she assembles one out of her content, I and her other followers can view and consume it, but all the still-unpackaged stories will continue to disappear after twenty-four hours. As for Snapchat “Memories,” re-shared content self-erases at the same rate as any other snap. In practice, the content saved through these memory- and archive-branded services is predominantly auto/biographical. Whether interacting with an individual’s account, or a group’s activity and communication history, these services preserve the auto/biographical pieces in an archive customized by, but only accessible to the user—and as always, to the social media platform itself.

Because social networking sites depend on user participation and interest, they are constantly developing services to retain current members, and to attract new ones. For this reason, while these “new” preservation features amount to little more than basic storage and push technologies, their names appeal to emotion, nostalgia, and memory, affectively prodding the account owner into sharing or creating new content. While Instagram offers a way individuals or groups can brand their experience as “Highlights” of their lives, Snapchat provides a way for users to save their filtered and augmented photos as any other digital photographic snapshot.⁵⁸ Both invoke memory. But behind these affective appeals lies an ongoing and troubling misrepresentation of what these sites have actually been doing, and continue to do. Forgetting is a crucially important element in the social media environment. It underlies not only the constant iterative changes to the platform, which actively impede unguided “going back,” but also keeps users from thinking about what they assume has been discarded. Meanwhile, the affordances and the interface are being constantly modified to better nudge users into desirable action, but also designed to be so unobtrusive that we often only have a dim sense that something has changed. Most notably, when we embrace the new access we enjoy to self-preserving snaps, and when

previous years of snaps are restored in an instant through the app., we must forget—or somehow no longer care—that we actually wanted those snaps to self-destruct. Otherwise, we are forced to recognize that while we assumed our snaps and stories lived limited lives that was never the case. We may have lost access at their specified time of decay, but the platforms never did. The platforms have preserved everything all along, including those items we actively deleted.

Aimée Morrison effectively describes how Facebook posts move from third-person narratives to the first person ‘I,’ a hallmark and indicator of autobiography (124–125). But for Morrison, the terms of this self-representation are co-created by the design of the system and how people adapt, adopt, or innovate (126). She notes for example how platform instability creates difficulties in finding reliable biographical information in her self-updating newsfeed. Furthermore, because the site “exists in the perpetual present, with all traces of its prior incarnation, interfaces, functions, and displays obliterated at the moment the service is updated,” close readings, or almost any form of auto/biographical scholarship, are virtually impossible:

one day, a small shift to how photos are displayed in News Feed; another day, auto-tagging is introduced; all of a sudden, all of the privacy options have been reset and reordered; then Timeline is announced, and while it is introduced over the course of the year, the change is massive and the prior forms irrecoverable. (120)

And yet at any given moment, the sum activity of all the currently available posted videos, pictures, and comments is the individual’s online life performance, which the user has supposedly created and expects to control. Because “Facebook’s popularity is in itself an effect of the contemporary anxieties over subjectivity and its performances,” as Rob Cover explains, the “management of the profile” is therefore “an act of self-governance, which produces embodied selves and subjects through an interpellation that ‘hails’ one to choose the coordinates

of identity hood,” although “within the framework provided” by the social networking site, the interpellation not only did the “hailing” (66, 64), but presents itself as a means for “bringing various elements of ourselves together as an expression of identity coherence”—an amalgam of desired subjectivities and identities. By adjusting, adding, reposting, and replacing auto/biographical content, users constitute and reconstitute their online identities as part of a continuous process of becoming. But as Cover also notes, functional and format changes in the display enacted by the site, and not the person, disrupt this identity coherence (67), with consequences for those performing themselves online, and those who consume these performances. Both Morrison and Cover warn that constant and simultaneous re-inventions of the self and the social media platforms create discontinuities in the telling and reading processes. Though the micro self-narratives may remain, they are often out of sync with new site prompts, and also at odds with the affective language of memory and preservation that names and brands many of the social media storage services.

Certain things are certain. Social media platforms save all previously shared content; more recently, they have actively encouraged users to create new content by resending, reposting, or repackaging preserved materials for their networks to consume. But the result is an environment of contradictory and ever-changing services, and when, enticed by the functionality and controls that appeal to them, users adopt these new preservation services, they participate in an ongoing process of destabilizing past visual or narrative texts, and therefore their own online identities.

Friends and ‘Bubbles’

Shaped by social response and technological affordances, filters profoundly impact what we see on our social network sites, and therefore, how we produce, consume, and study

auto/biographical performances online. We share our photos, videos, and posts, we view media spread throughout overlapping networking groups, and through producing and consuming we seem to be participating in a shared experience. Millions of people read the same tweet; thousands follow the same Instagram account. But in fact, our contexts and combinations of messages differ, as through their algorithms and affordances, and by tracking our choices and clicks, companies such as Facebook and Snapchat customize their services to get us to refresh, create, and pass on. Nancy Baym calls social networks “egocentric”: “no two SNS users will have access to the same set of people or messages, giving them each an experience of the site that is individualized yet overlapping with others” (101). Many factors contribute to creating this unique experience—how we react to the unpleasant or unexpected, or even our beliefs about the nature of social media, will affect what we encounter online. As Paul Resnick et al. observe, “there is a natural tendency for people, particularly in the minority, to think that their own views are more broadly shared than they actually are” (96).⁵⁹ Social media exploits this tendency. As increasing numbers of people receive news and information primarily through social networking sites, algorithmically-driven content drawn from a user’s site history creates what Eli Pariser has called a “filter bubble” (9).

Pariser identifies three characteristics of filter bubbles: that each of us has our own; that the constant curations creating it are invisible to us; and that the filter bubble comes to us (9–10). As noted in chapter 3, because our chosen networks share photos, videos, posts, and snaps with us, and because we are also the recipients of spreading media from inside and outside those networks, we assume overlapping content and experience, as ongoing affect and validation reinforce technological behavior modification to arouse our desire to participate and share. But what happens when events offline break that bubble? To illustrate how insulated bubbles can

become, even for people who pride themselves on their political awareness, L. Elisa Celis et al. point to the shock produced by the results of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and the 2016 U.S. Presidential election (160). Bubbles are often appreciated by the users, even if they are unaware of their operations, and bubbles are certainly effective generators of site revenue through personalizing algorithms. And Celis et al. acknowledge that even if users, in an effort to prevent polarization or “the echo effect,” could block systems from capturing the data necessary to create bubbles, “this could come at a loss to the utility for both the user and the platform—the content displayed would be less relevant and result in decreased attention from the user and less revenue for the platform” (160). Identifying the challenge as “*Can we design personalization algorithms that allow us to avoid polarization yet still optimize individual utility?*” (italics in original, 160), Celis et al. found that by modifying one algorithm frequently used for personalization, and running it against specific types of static data sets, they could produce a scalable and technological solution to polarization. This solution has not yet been deployed in a dynamic system; they recommend testing as the next step for determining how well their modifications prevent polarization in the offered content and viewer’s beliefs (169).

I would note, however, that Pariser’s idea of the filter bubble and Celis’s et al. possible solution are the products of a technological determinism; they do not fully account for human agency and action. Although amplified by social networking sites, polarization for instance often predates these personalizing algorithms. We bring already formed bubbles to the net, which affect our online choices to click, ignore, comment, and share, and therefore refine the assembly of our personalized online bubble. With every newsfeed refresh, a more personalized set of posts appears, leading swiftly to an offering of texts that does not represent even the full range of texts posted by members of our chosen networks, but instead those texts most like the ones we have

read, watched, liked, or shared before. For social media creators, revenue considerations motivate assembling and distributing content to an already primed audience. For auto/biography or media scholars, knowing the imposed limitations on what we receive should force us to examine the algorithmically derived feeds.

Aware of the personalization and exclusion, some users develop “hacks” as work arounds. “I enjoyed watching teenagers when they started to realize that Facebook’s news feed algorithm resulted in their not seeing everything their friends posted,” dana boyd recalls: “They worked out—accurately or not—that posting brand names or links to BuzzFeed articles resulted in their postings appearing to be more likely to show up on their friends’ feeds. . . . They were ‘tricking’ the algorithm to get what they wanted out of the system.” Approvingly, boyd sees this strategy as “an act of resistance or an effort to reclaim power and control within a socio-technical context in which that is often taken away” (Jenkins, et al. *Participatory Culture*, 16). After two years of studying how human agency contributed to creating the filter bubbles that polarize our social networking sites, Philip Seargeant and Caroline Tagg concluded that platforms concentrating on individuals, such as Facebook, foster intradiversity:

the links which comprise the network are the result of encounters and relationships that have developed across a user’s biography, and while this affords a certain kind of diversity . . . it is also likely that the various connections share some initial affinity with the user which produced the connection in the first place. (43)

Intradiversity may have a small geographical reach for a person’s network, but may cross other kinds of boundary lines, including school, family, work, politics, interest groups, fan groups, and generations. And yet, these same connections can also produce interpersonal conflict, debate, and unpleasant interactions. These often disparate sets of audiences converge through the person’s

network, but due to personalization and filters, not consistently. Similar to messages which spread across wider cultural or geographical areas, messages spreading to an intradiverse group may run into issues of differing culture and affect. This harkens back to our earlier discussion of self-positioning and negotiation that occurs as auto/biographers decide how to deal with group or audience expectations, code-switching, and technological affordances. Users' specific intradiversity therefore depends greatly on how avidly they add friends or to what degree they limit their network out of audience concerns. People manage their interactions with diverse audiences by posting on different platforms, or creating multiple profiles on a single platform (Cardell, et al. 162). On a single site with a single profile, however, people's self-representations are often strongly influenced by their offline connections to their assumed audience.

Building upon Allan Bell's sociolinguistic model of audience design, Seargeant and Tagg use context design to make sense of these various interactions. Self-presentation itself becomes a mediation—a means for shaping how users communicate and perform themselves online, when their network consists of disparate friends and acquaintances across different parts of their lives. Context design is the process by which people “co-create new contexts in the course of their online interactions” by collaborating “to (re-)design and negotiate these online contexts,” always taking into account the technological, social, and communication dimensions of the site, and of the people who use it. Highly aware of the diversity of their network audience, users construct their messages on social network sites by negotiating those relationships—and “the agency people feel they have in acting on this awareness” is “relevant” (Seageant and Tagg 44). Cardell et al. reach a similar conclusion when discussing ‘Priv’ or multiple accounts as strategies for controlling audiences, and for exercising authority over online auto/biographical representation by being fully aware of “the constructedness of the self and indeed the autobiographical ‘I’—the

different versions of the self that we might choose to project publically and the subject's sense of themselves as ideologically interpolated" (163). After completing their two-year study of how people recognize, then assume authority over their context design, Seageant and Tagg concluded that people's actions toward others depended upon their offline relationships, such as a coworker or a family member. Due to these relationships, their online responses gravitated towards ignoring, deleting, or unfriending rather than reporting offensive posts to the social networking site, or confronting the offending poster themselves. Furthermore, Seageant and Tagg found that that people don't want to use sites such as Facebook for debate as much as other mediums of communication and entertainment. Even with the technological personalization, then, many users interact with those holding very different opinions, and "the ways in which most participants reported responding to acts of unintentional offence show how many people purposefully avoid conflict on Facebook, in part because of their attempts to navigate and manage the complex set of social relations which make up their online audience." Maintaining "*online conviviality*" if possible "appears to encourage users not to challenge or engage with difference (with what they see as inaccurate or offensive material), but to quietly ignore it," or if not possible, "to filter out of their newsfeed views and information with which they do not agree" (47). To control their own experiences, online users therefore knowingly control and construct their audience, and since untroubled production and consumption are major site objectives, Facebook and Instagram make unfriending or blocking very quiet actions, often going unnoticed by the affected individual.

Deliberate choices therefore insulate users' filter bubble, making personalization and designed contact the joint result of algorithmic and user forces. Many producers on social media sites consciously manipulate their posts, shares, images, and refinements, so when considering

the strategies social media authors adopt to create their self-presentations, we must try to take into account such actions. These forms of mediation are however very difficult to examine, due to the options made available to users by the social network sites themselves. If blocked or unfriended, we will seldom know what we did not, or could not see on Instagram, nor can we track more subtle changes to a user's personal settings which may result in hidden texts. Online life writers do not just create posts or pictures; through a variety of mechanisms, they create, expand, or restrict audiences as well. To evaluate their productions, or even to find secure footholds in the constantly changing environment of social networking sites, auto/biography and media scholars—and audiences—need to be aware of the forces that could be operating on what they can—and cannot—see.

I return to the two trending stories from that single week in March 2019. The one about the loss of social media services speaks to our reliance on key platforms, while the one about the mosque attack illustrates how easily and tenaciously messages spread across platforms and throughout a multitude of networks. Both stories provoked global and dynamic responses, creating context for thinking about the messages on social networking sites. People consumed the proliferating information intertextually, through tweets and posts, and through peripheral actions, such as changing a profile picture to display mourning or solidarity. As people passed on texts, wrote one of their own, or clicked “Like” or hearts on others, it felt like a shared moment—one largely in jest, the other in horror and sorrow. In the following days, new trending topics emerged, with the Facebook outage immediately reaching its social media half-life when the services were restored. Our collective attention went elsewhere. But the Christchurch Mosque Shooting live stream footage, consumed by almost no one when live, remains and continues to be spread through various internet networks. Its existence, and its amplification

through mainstream media, showed us the walls of our filter bubbles, illuminating the insulation installed by personalization algorithms and our own choices, uncovering groups and networks online never before encountered, or even imagined, by many. With regard to production or consumption, neither personal nor technological agency is absolute, and the internet also requires us to recognize and engage in new ways with the fact that life representations or their audiences are neither autonomous, nor entirely constructed.

Collective Forgetting

Trending topics or “viral” media cross social networks and platforms, reaching millions of people asynchronously. Prompted by friends or other media, some people seek out these videos, posts, or tweets. Others may consume them when they pass through their constantly refreshing feeds. Such texts can entertain, inspire, sadden, or even horrify, sometimes in combination, their half-lives elongated at times by organizations offline. In *Emotion Online: Theorizing Affect on the Internet*, Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton describe their encounter with the viral video *Kony 2012* when it exploded through social media networks, captured worldwide attention, and through #Kony 2012 linked users across networking platforms to create a consuming community. The hashtag (#) serves multiple connective purposes. It marks a community member, forges links to the original media, joins fans together in a hashtag constructed community, and endorses its spreadability. Seeking to understand the video’s spread and affective power, Garde-Hansen and Gorton watched it, then studied its rise in popularity as it achieved global reach. Fully agreeing that “all media are presented and practiced as emotional media,” because media is not an object in relation to an individual subject, but instead, echoing Kember and Zylinska, “media inside me and me inside media,” Garde-Hansen and Gorton nevertheless had trouble “reading” *Kony 2012*—recognizing the reasons for affective power, but

remaining themselves unmoved by it. This disjunction leads to an interrogation of the connections between emotion and online culture, and ultimately to the conclusion that “the demystification of techno-cultural power to reveal an affective core is problematic if it gets layered into a technology that is unevenly distributed across the world yet is continuously represented as an agent of simplicity and everydayness” (8–9). That a video may spread, but the affect may not, may be partially attributed to the force of distribution within dominant communication structures, or to who gets to feel emotions online. And sometimes, even though the video may not affect new audiences when it moves into different cultural communities, local fan bases or activists may draw upon the communicative and affective power of social media messages to organize, often through a series of constructed hashtags; to witness and document; and to seek out new members for their communities through strategic dissemination of the video (13). But successfully gathering an online consumption community together often entails masking this organizational work in the offline world. Arguing that “social media is only valuable once existing networks have been put in place,” danah boyd gives as an example the offline organization behind the *Kony 2012* video:

Through some investigation, we realized that Invisible Children had been touring churches for quite some time, building up a broad network of people whom they could activate. Sure enough, when they launched *Kony 2012* . . . [t]hey asked their network to tweet and they did. Because it looked like thousands of disconnected Twitter users suddenly started talking about one thing, the hashtag quickly trended, which helped it spread further. (qtd. in Jenkins, et al. 2016, 174)

In chapter 3, I quoted Helen Kennedy’s claim that “it is necessary to think about the ways in which online selves are socially meaningful to their offline counterparts” (36). Groups who

organize and act collectively are one of these counterparts, but as Garde-Hansen and Gorton argue, the sheer volume of participation and response may not correspond to the actual power or affect of these messages as they reach across networks and geographical areas: “Information is not always evenly spread in our online ecology (despite the spreadability of media content), and mass caring does not necessarily lead to action if mass online witnessing can be said to produce a bystander effect” (9).

With this proviso in mind, I want to conclude this chapter by considering how hashtags and spreading media, often of life narratives, create temporary collectives, drawing people together across multiple networks and platforms. #Kony 2012, #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter (or BLM), #NoDAPL, or #kukiaimauna⁶⁰ are all recent movements that have uncovered social pain points, evoked a seemingly sudden viral response, and thereby transformed individual witnessing into a consciously collective experience. Technologically connected through hashtag links, and affectively drawn together through shared experience, the individual tweets, videos, stories, confessions, and witnessing coalesce into an apparently spontaneous collective. Located online, it seems to defy location, but as #Kony2012 shows, the movement can be emotionally, experientially, or culturally tied to a sense of place, even as individuals in distant locations become nodes in a network granting the cause global reach and attention. I have personally watched as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and most recently, #kukiaimauna have dominated in turn my social media. In all of these cases, the shared texts drew upon a wide range of affective auto/biographical and self-documentation practices: filming and posting (or livestreaming) a police encounter; disclosing a previously hidden sexual harassment or assault on Twitter; or uploading a self-image displaying the connection between body and sacred land. All three have raised visibility for their cause, invoked solidarity, and witnessed and prompted action. But only

when other forms of media began to react to the trend and report on it did the volume reach beyond the online filters. While #kukiaimauna is still expanding its community, I would like to consider here #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo as subjects of collective, cultural, and popular cultural memory, and as instances of irreproducibility. Both movements are at least five years old. What remains accessible online now? What has been removed, and how can we tell? Is the collective experience now revealed as a fiction? What human or machine actions have hidden texts, never to be reread or studied? These hashtags and collected texts acquired significant popular currency at the height of their spreadability and connective power. But the iterative nature of social networking platforms encourages and rewards self-invention, spontaneity, and new productions. How has this desired impermanence helped or hindered the continued existence, and our ongoing understanding, of these movements formed through hashtag collectives? And do these collective actions and messages become collective memories?

Socially constructed, and a record of how a community came and continues to be, collective memories ground a group's understanding and vision of and for itself. In his book *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs offers a detailed outline of this social, malleable, and imagined phenomenon tied closely to how groups tell and retell their stories. Building on Halbwachs's work, Jan Assman argues that "memory is a matter of communication and social interaction" that "enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (109). Assman subdivides "collective memory" into "communicative" and "cultural memory." Communicative memory refers to the personal interactions and the stories we tell ourselves for a span of three generations, or to what can be remembered and corroborated within a family lifespan. Cultural memory refers to the enduring myths and symbols of a community, functioning as monuments and libraries in disembodied

forms (110–111). For Assman, “the past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbols as they are represented in oral myths or in writings, performed in feasts, and as they are continually illuminating a changing present” (113). We tell and retell to remember, to bring the past forward to the present and into our future.

These two notions of memory, complete with their associated inscription time spans, contain within them the processes of retaining and forgetting. Drawing specifically on Assman’s account of cultural memory, Karin Kukkonen describes what she calls popular cultural memory. How popular texts and audiences interact is her primary concern:

In popular cultural memory three dimensions of culture come together: the social dimension of the audience as its carriers, the material dimension of media texts and the mental dimension of codes and conventions that facilitate the reading process

Kukkonen repeatedly stresses “the material dimension of media texts,” whose “repeated reception” makes possible the building of “a common ground of codes and conventions, the mental dimensions” which provide “the basis of an audience community” (261–262). Readers and audiences gain this common knowledge through their shared consumption of texts, but also through a steady process of accretive but not fully conscious “imprecise intertextuality.”

Though source texts may not be fully recognized, as they must be to register a text as a parody or adaptation, they may still have their effect upon an audience (262). In her discussion of fan bases and popular cultural communities, Kukkonen stresses the importance of recognizing that Assman’s notion of cultural memory not only “allows for the *concretion of an identity* through the community of recipients” fashioned out of shared experiences, but also acknowledges that this identity is “*constantly reconstructed*” in relation to the present. In so doing, she broadens the scope of Assman’s notion by paradoxically decreasing the time frames necessary for

creating and accessing cultural memory. As a product of media and popular cultural memory, collective memory emerges transmedially, which she illustrates through a discussion of modernized fairy tales comics (264, 263). While Kukkonen is primarily concerned with the relation of image to memory in this process, I would note that much of her discussion is applicable to the impact of exigencies and affordances on social networking sites, and especially to how social media platforms and other traditional media, such as television and print, respond to viral, hashtag collectives, and how those collectives respond in turn.

For Kukkonen, how a community reads and consumes a text contributes greatly to the creation of a collective identity. Fairy tales are an especially good example for making this point, because they can be recognized even with only the barest minimum of details, and because their widespread cultural presence makes them especially good candidates for adaption, revision, and intertextuality. From this and the previous chapter, we know that our networks of friends on social media are not necessarily familiar with the same texts, and that due to a combination of technological affordances, personalization, and the choices I make to view, create, and spread texts, and to expand or cull my audience, my online experience is truly my own . But when we look at how individual witnessing texts come together through their shared admission of experience and through the linking hashtag, and then how this collation of micro life narratives crosses multiple users' feeds, pages, news websites, or even television screens when it goes viral, we can see how a series of texts held together by a reiterated theme, such as with #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter, creates collective identities through the creation and consumption of texts, and continually reshapes such identities through the constant influx of related shared experiences. As we read these texts, we participate, and as we participate, we become part of a community. But it is the lived experience we read about that may prompt us to self-disclose, and

because of the medium of reception, when we write our own micro life narrative, we then post by adopting the hashtag links connecting us to the larger collective. In turn, the hashtag and other linking mechanisms common to social networking sites place our posting with the other disparate posts, tweets, pictures, and videos under common indexing terms that explicitly mark the intertextualities at the message and the conceptual levels.

Kukkonen's ideas arise from close study of fandom audiences, and many media scholars look to fandom group dynamics as templates for describing and studying social media participation (Nancy Baym, Henry Jenkins, et al., Garde-Hansen and Gorton). And yet, while her account of popular cultural memory captures the iterative, dynamic, and ongoing collective identity work happening on social media through collective hashtags, she does not pay as much attention to the relationships between this linking phenomenon and the larger social network services landscape. Because it predictably focuses on *media* cultural memory, media studies does. Motti Neiger et al. for instance stress the active media dimensions of Halbwachs's ideas:

social groups construct their own images of the world by constantly shaping and reshaping versions of the past. This process defines groups and enables them to create boundaries that separate them from other groups that share different memories of the past, or perhaps, different interpretations of the same occurrences.

These identity-constructing memories and interpretations take the form of “public expressions such as rituals, ceremonial commemorations, and mass media texts” (3), often then mediated and spread through mass media, including online and social media. The five defining premises Motti Neiger et al. identify for collective memory all find parallels in online processes. Collective memory “is a socio-political construct”; its construction “is a continuous, multidirectional process”; it is “functional” in its boundary setting and in its defining of the group in contrast to

an “other”; it “must be concretized” through monuments, cultural artifacts, educational materials and the Internet; and it is also “narrational,” constantly telling stories about the group, including its key characters and participants, to highlight those changes and lessons that have shaped, and continue to shape the group as it moves forward (5).

When discussing the methods that collective memory adopts and the tracks that it follows, Neiger et al. emphasize the importance of production as well as consumption in the creation of media memory:

The boundaries of social collectivities are now inseparably connected to audiences that make use of that media. From an ‘identity politics’ perspective, one can manage several identities at once, determining which media to use in order to connect with other community members. (11)

Adopting a position similar to Cardell et al.’s regarding impermanence as a kind of currency (168), Neiger et al. note the absence of production-focused studies, and argue that “[i]mplementing such an approach toward the study of Media Memory” would be “significant” because it would allow media scholars “to position collective recollecting within the larger scope of the production of culture” (17). Such a methodological shift would make possible a far more nuanced understanding of social media’s undercurrents—the affordances embedded in created media messages and the platforms, for instance—and also of the socially determined exigencies at play, and how people or collectives resist them.

And as messages accumulate in newsfeeds and trending lists, they spread outside of geopolitical boundaries. By looking at the collective, digital witnessing of Neda Agha Soltan’s shooting and death,⁶¹ Anna Reading has drawn some important conclusions about how digital media spreads messages. For Reading, “new media ecologies and virally globalized memories

require a paradigm shift to a new conceptualization of mediated memory with a concomitant epistemology.” She refers to this environment as the “global memory field” (241), a term that captures the links between the global, digital, and technological, and points to the processes involved in transmitting and storing data across a geographic space. By comparing the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 with the shooting death of Neda Agha Soltan in 2009 as two very different examples of global memory field at work, Reading reveals the temporal specificity of its multi-directional aspects through a close look at six dynamics: “transmediality, velocity, extensity, modality, valency, and viscosity” (243). Valency refers to how disparate works coalesce into an assemblage, while viscosity harkens back to Jan Assman’s “floating gap” between communicative (covering three generations) and cultural memory (where no individual has a personal memory).

Reading is most interested in the spreadable and historically conditioned aspects of viscosity as it flows toward or resists territorialization. The transition from print to digital, for instance, has affinities with the move from orality to literacy. Current media technologies “in combination with other shifts, including globalization . . . are changing human memory practices both individually and collectively” (254). Collective messages and collective witnessing result in media memories that enter the global memory field, moving through individuals, but also undergoing the “territorializing processes of global media organizations and memory institutions” (247). Such processes can mask the challenges involved in researching past events, including the extent of data preservation and the ease of access. Citizen journalists were the primary witnesses and reporters of Neda’s shooting. Present in places closed off to mainstream media outlets, the initial witness could provide first-hand accounts and footage that others could not. He spread his narratives and images through telephone calls and social networking sites,

making Reading's point that in the global memory field "if one way becomes blocked, or disarticulated, other ways are found" (250). But mainstream media outlets, rather than the community-based witnessing websites and wiki and Facebook groups who originally provided content, dominated an Internet search conducted only a few months after the event, leading Reading to conclude that "the processes of territorialization and (de)-and reterritorialized struggles suggest that media organizations and public memory institutions have greater economic and technological resources to disassemble and reassemble, and to mobilize and securitize meanings about the past" (251).

Storage and greater online engagement—these are the keys to mainstream media's ability to keep their versions of the witnessing available online and dominant. But so too is the ability to aggregate messages arriving through a variety of media from many different locations, in the manner of #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. "The digital witnessing of Neda is no longer to be understood in terms of an analysis of the discrete camera phone images themselves," Reading explains, "but in terms of how these images involved the coextensive intersection of her images with other images, of her images prior to her death, of distinct other images" (246). Acquiring and assembling the individual images and stories into a collection facilitates consumption and responses in the form of new, remixed content. As the original and elaborations grow, this intertextual nexus centering on an individual or single subject embody the actions that lead to prominence in the global memory field. But as was the case for the citizen journalists who created collective texts in response to Neda's death, individually articulated then linked narratives are vulnerable to being subsumed or revised by larger media conglomerates. Or as Reading puts it

Memory as assemblage in a global memory field may involve the witnessing practices and discursive formations of prosumers that are then further mobilized through the territorialization processes of global media organizations and public memory institutions.

At first glance, such processes may seem primarily about gaining high ranks in search results, made possible by storage capacity and reach. But ultimately, the most important gain is the power to control the story. Once mobile, the original linked narratives become “insecure and open to change” (247), and the real power of media organizations and memory institutions is their ability to determine what story will be told, how it will be told, what will be remembered, and what will be forgotten.

As hashtag collectives trend on social media, their virality often masks both the offline organization and preliminary work necessary to spread them, and the long-term history of many of these social issues as well. An extensive network of church groups boosted #Kony2012. Harassment and the objectification of women did not begin right before #MeToo, nor did the sudden appearance of racism, colonialism, and imperialism result in #BlackLivesMatter. In all of these cases, life writing begins the process. But only when self-disclosure and self-documentation become visible enough to incite others to join in with their stories does a collective experience begin to form, and in the rare cases of trending, does a global memory field come into being, as the linked stories come to be recognized and comprehended through the link. “You never can tell where a social movement is going to come from,” Sarah Jaffe observes:

They’re built of a million injustices that pile up and up, and then, suddenly, spill over.

I’ve spent years covering movements, trying to explain how one incident becomes the spark that catches, turning all those individual injustices into an inferno. (80)

Whether the content is loosely held together or tightly bound, the pervasiveness of the problem and its resonance at a certain moment undeniably determines aspects of its valency. But not all. Each subject was an issue long before it “went viral,” and it continues to be a concern, even if it no longer rises to the top of Twitter’s trend list. But as Jeffrey Boakye notes, “Hashtags give visibility and digital momentum to ideas that might otherwise fade. For example, pre-2014, I’m sure a lot of people had an inkling that black lives mattered, but the hashtag [#blacklivesmatter](#) turned a moral given into a societal juggernaut” (np). DeRay Mckesson attributes this result in part to the insulating ignorance of the online and international communities:

When a message is spoken loud and clear and in unison, when formerly there were whispers or collections of disparate rumblings, it is easy to think of people as finally having found their voices, as if those voices had been lost. That they are being heard now, though, is more an indictment of the listener, not the speaker. We the protesters have never been the voiceless. We have been the unheard. Our storytelling has been key to our survival, as we have spoken about our pain and our joy, even if we were talking to ourselves. It is common since the protests began to hear people who are confused about our tactics ask: why are you doing this? Why are you demanding, now, to be heard?

The actual answer online is not primarily about the people bearing witness, but about filters and audiences. Filter bubbles are in place and waiting for users, even before they sign onto social networking sites, and these filters become more and more refined and excluding as they incorporate the users’ eyes, clicks, and decisions to block or defriend. The actual answer is also about individuals speaking, a community coming together, and organizing to speak collectively—and continuing to speak—as a means of resisting and working to change the

existing collective memory by redefining the relationships between one and “other.” Or as Mckesson explains, “Protest is telling the truth in public. Sometimes protest is telling the truth to a public that isn’t ready to hear it. Protest is meant to build a community, and to force a response” (np). Sarah Jaffe echoes this with regard to #MeToo

This is how we got to the moment when sexual harassment stories are big news. The structures of the legal system and the workplace did not change. Instead, tens of thousands of women said yes, me too. Then, rather than wait for men to absorb that knowledge and decide whether to change or not, they started naming names. And making lists. And talking to each other. (np)

But the process always involves a dynamic interchange between personal narrative, collective memory, and media spread. Though enabled and made manifest through online and other media environments, it is the autobiographical stories themselves, individually and collectively, that document, make visible, illustrate disparities, call for change, and work towards healing.

Just as Anna Reading went searching for the assemblages of Neda four months after her death, I began my research process by trying to relocate what I had witnessed on my social media feeds in 2014 with #BlackLivesMatter, and later with #NoDAPL and #MeToo. In the first half of this chapter, I identified four major obstacles to rereading digital, and particularly social media, texts: technological obsolescence, message decay, limited—and mainly personal—archival services, and both human and algorithmically based filtering and personalization. Because both #Black Lives Matter and #MeToo host authorized Twitter pages, I can easily search for the tweets authored by those handles, and for those grouped under the common hashtags. Since they are only a few years old, I am not worried yet about technological obsolescence obscuring the messages from the centralized movement pages, or even from other

digital products created by connected participants. As time passes, however, will I know if anyone has deleted digital products, or stopped hosting? Given the sheer volume of tweets, videos, posts, and pictures, could I know if any of them went missing? With regard to my Facebook newsfeed, which only allows me access to one or two days back in time, how can I locate those messages that I saw, but did not click, share, or mark in some manner that would make it possible to find them in my own archived history? Should I search by individual author? Hashtag? And if I do search by hashtag on Facebook or Instagram, what comes up is an amalgamation of posts and pictures displayed asynchronously, most likely impacted by personalization cues based on my subsequent social media histories. More troubling, the fact that such content no longer falls regularly onto my feeds suggests that either through my own agency, or as a result of the personalization algorithms, these actively produced messages are now being weeded out, even if I had received them in the past. I am therefore no longer part of that experienced collective, the audience who understands the cues Kukkonen identified as constituting and sustaining popular cultural memory, and who therefore reads the collective texts intertextually. I cannot re-enact my past experience of my feed as an online environment filled with connected and collective posts and products. Nor for that matter can I re-presence them by writing about them. But it is not productive to mourn the loss of texts either. We remain part of that ongoing process of validating and controlling, remembering and forgetting, that defines much of the social media world.

Two ideas have run as undercurrents throughout this discussion of social media auto/biographical online performances and collective memory texts: the flexibility of identity and the control of narrative through impermanence; and the iterative and dynamic nature of

collective remembering and forgetting. Others are also concerned with these undercurrents.

When discussing the acceleration and “plasticity of memory” Martin Pogačar suggests that

the means and desires to preserve and delete, and the environments where these processes unfold, are nevertheless under constant threat and allure of deletion, renegotiation and redefinition. Memory is the property of the present and the future, before it becomes a matter of the past. (x-xiii)

Jan Assman observes that while a specific amount of time is necessary to concretize collective and cultural memories, communicative technologies are decreasing the amount of time needed for reiterations and revisions. Philippe Lejeune recognizes that this acceleration can be seen as a disaster:

everything moves so quickly that our identity can no longer rely on the permanence of the world around us. . . . We are losing our long-term connections, our rootedness in the past, and our ability to project ourselves into a future, all of which allowed us to construct a narrative identity. (250)

But rather than mourn, Lejeune suggests that we ask whether or not “narrative identity . . . might not have another trick up its sleeve” (251), and the hacks, “priv” accounts, deletions, and carefully saved static copies online suggest that how we approach identity and creating life narratives in a networked environment can be proactive and productive. Who creates may no longer have control, but who can alter, frustrate, or work around developing expectations may in turn reprogram the algorithm to react in a different and welcome way the next time around.

Recognizing and understanding the operations of the functionalities, personalization, and filters directing what texts we can and cannot see can grant us greater insight into the production and consumption of social media texts. Tailored to our displayed preferences as a method for

keeping us enticed and checking in, these structural barriers and guides, both human and machine made, homogenize our experience, and consequently limit our awareness of the different experiences of others. In terms of auto/biography, we can see how deletion and limited timed texts on social networking sites are a response to such external forces of definition, and if the boom of social media practices continues at the current pace, people will almost certainly develop even more strategies to code for select audiences or to limit their self-representation to non-archival functionalities. But at least for now, online lives are intrinsically connected to the offline ones. If people develop new approaches for online lives, how will these affect autobiographical practices offline? Will online affordances and controls—the technological nudging and clicking—impact our approaches to creating or consuming offline representations? But my discussion of collective memory foregrounds the strategies that groups and audiences consciously employ on and offline to tell, retell, educate, indoctrinate, resist, and work towards change, altering their own monuments, rituals, texts, and stories in the process. So maybe more fluidity exists than we realize. And yet, a closer look at the results over time suggests that technology or media companies may have the greatest control over preserving the traces of individuals or even citizen collectives. Cardell et al. focus on how new social media practices run counter to more traditionally-minded archivists and biographers. But as I have tried to suggest from time to time, maybe the move to online identity narratives has brought to light lifewriting practices that we have been employing all along. Maybe then, social media is showing us that saving and archiving have always meant something different from what we thought.

Chapter 5: Archives Telling Stories, Recording Lives

21,269 signatures, on over 500 pages. To mark the centennial of the supposed annexation of Hawai‘i to the United States, in 1998 the Bishop Museum and Hawai‘i State Capitol in Honolulu mounted on display boards copies of the Kū‘ē Hui Aloha ‘Āina anti-annexation petitions from 1897 and 1898. Located by scholar Noenoe Silva in the U.S. National Archives, the petition confirmed the widespread political engagement of the Hawaiian people at the time, and retold a story silenced by years of neocolonial education. “One of the most persistent and pernicious myths of Hawaiian history is that the Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) passively accepted the erosion of their culture and the loss of their nation,” Silva writes, further explaining that much of the post-overthrow and post-annexation history has almost exclusively drawn on English language resources, purposely perpetuating only the pro-U.S. voices (1). The National Archives estimated this petition was signed by “more than half the 39,000 native Hawaiians and mixed-blood persons reported by the Hawaiian Commission census for the same year” and Silva reports that another petition from Hui Kāla‘āina, still missing, is estimated to have 17,000 signatures (National Archives “Educator”; Silva 159). It is therefore possible that together, the petitions contained the names of virtually every Hawaiian. Yet, in 1998 few people were aware of any of this. Because of centennial exhibit, as Silva recalls,

the Kanaka Maoli community throughout the islands suddenly knew of the existence of mass opposition to annexation in 1897. I was then deluged with telephone calls every day from strangers thanking me. In the phone calls and in person, many individuals told me that they knew or suspected that their grandparents or great-grandparents had been opposed to

the U.S. takeover, but they had had no proof before this. One woman clutched her petition book to her chest and proclaimed, “Now we will never forget again.” (3–4)

Hawaiians resisted by employing the resources of their language and story-telling genres such as mele and mo‘olelo in the Hawaiian language newspapers, and through such rhetorical practices as kaona. Not surprisingly, then, “The myth of nonresistance was created in part because mainstream historians have studiously avoided the wealth of material written in Hawaiian,” and Silva describes how these resources were simply ignored, or changed through a translation process filled with cuts and rearrangements. But the documents of resistance waited in archives, libraries, and families until the language knowledge was rebuilt, the culture rediscovered, and Hawaiian scholars could read about how their kupūna resisted, thereby authorizing and validating the continued resistance of today: “The petition, inscribed with the names of everyone’s kupūna, gave people permission from their ancestors to participate in the quest for national sovereignty” (4). While Silva’s detailed account of pre-annexation resistance corrected and redirected the commonly told story, the display of the petition pages themselves liberated the long silenced voices from dusty boxes in the archives, let their families find the names on the petition’s 556 pages, and hear those voices once more.

Silva re-presents a misrepresented history by adopting a different lens, informed by newspapers, documents, and records of words, deeds, and actions, with the U.S. National Archives itself playing a minor but important role in shaping her account. In some ways, the story of her work there is a familiar one. A researcher finds a hidden gem tucked away in some collection, which once found is released to a welcoming world. But this narrative not only masks many processes and people involved in the petition’s preservation, but also with its virtual disappearance. Power, dominant narratives, societal changes, and loss and reclamation understandably capture more attention than file organization, labels, and finding aids. But these archival procedures and

tools can hush resistance by hiding subjects, treated as objects, within a file structure developed and managed by agents of oppressive force. In short, the overt subjugation carried out politically and in the press becomes covert when carried out by archival systems of appraisal, provenance and description. Noenoe Silva's account therefore also documents her acute awareness of these systems and their effects.

Unlike social media texts, which are pervasive yet fragile, archives tend to be seen as stalwart and unchanging, regardless of format. As the hallmark institutions and collections for preserving and protecting the kernels of memory and history, archives house the records for composing official stories. As in museum and gallery spaces, where the glosses, labels, physical and even virtual presences frame not only the auto/biographical works displayed within, but direct the museumgoer's reading of them, the organizational, regulatory, and presentational practices of archives are highly professional and authoritative. Even as online and digital access to archival materials increases, the archives as institutions still place restrictions on use through such practices as closed collections, limited reading room hours, material preservation practices, surveillance over use, building security, and other contractual requirements for users, such as the display of credentials or the taking of oaths. And while access itself may be limited, once within, duplication of experience is almost guaranteed, due to the limited audience engagement the archive offers to itself as a text. Just as the curator and the museum determine which objects we can see, and what we will be told about them, so too the archivist and the archives exercise their power over what is accepted and kept, what is discarded, what can be viewed, and how.

This chapter deals with the socially-constructed notions of an archive, and its generally ignored mediality. Just as Anna Poletti has called attention to how autobiography and literary analysis tends to overlook the materiality of its objects of study, I will focus on the largely invisible

processes and people that create an archive. Archives purposefully blur our awareness of the many hands that have collected, processed, and established the conditions of access to the materials saved, and shroud the destruction of resources in a pragmatic and scientific methodology. More generally, an overarching narrative of impartiality and benevolence not only upholds and insulates the official record and the evidentiary role of an archive, but also legitimizes and insulates those in power. Combining archival theory with my earlier discussions of mediality, memory, and life writing scholarship, in this chapter I will focus upon the archive's often invisible mediation, the narratives that uphold it, and recent changes in the profession directed toward acknowledging and rethinking its agentic role. How do archivists envision their profession, their work, and the connections between archives and collective memory? How should the curatorial mediation flow be taken into account in any critical analysis of life narratives constructed from materials largely acquired through archival work? At the very least, some familiarity with the founding assumptions of an archive, and about the archivists' processes and methodologies, provides context for what the researcher or auto/biographer has "found," and therefore should be part of any critical and literary analysis of the resulting works.

In 2011 Sue McKemmish returned to an article she had written in 1996 about personal recordkeeping. "Evidence of me . . . in the Digital World" supplemented her original discussion of witnessing, testimony, and memory for individuals and collectives by adding digital formats and technologies as sources of "evidence" (117). Both articles are about identity formation—how we define ourselves through social categories, and the differences between the public and private roles in others' lives and our own. Many essayists have of course written on this topic. What distinguishes McKemmish is her focus on archival representations and the related issues of recordkeeping, provenance, collective memory, and the ongoing dynamic changes in records. Just

as lives evolve, so too have archival methodologies developed often subtly different approaches to collecting, recording, and providing context for details about lives, whether found in paper or electronic files. Both individuals and archives are always becoming. Archivists and archival scholars have been consulting social science and media scholarship to help them reflect on their roles in the memory processes, and to equip them for the future by modifying the record keeping systems to encouraging sharing, participation, and community involvement. Recognizing their power to collect and retain what will become social memory, and to expand and even change records of the past, archivists have begun the process of transforming their profession through education and through community involvement.

Much of this chapter will introduce the scholar of life narratives to the basics of the archive. My focus will be the gloved hands of the shadowy archivist, which speak to the mediation that has long taken place, and is happening before our eyes. When Michelle Caswell flips open to the bibliographies of many recent books on archives, she immediately notices the lack of critical or theoretical work by actual archivists and archival scholars: “Time and time again, I experience the same disappointment. No Verne Harris cited. No Terry Cook. No Sue McKemmish. No Anne Gilliland” (paragraph 22). This oversight—or ignorance—“limits humanities scholars because they are unable to address the specificities of archival interventions and to communicate meaningfully with archivists and archival studies” (paragraph 25). When I read archivists’ words and worries about evidence, creators, voices, and memories, I recognize immediately the relevance of such work to life narrative scholars who address traces, identity, and life stories. But like Caswell, I flipped open the bibliographies for archival studies, searching for points of convergence. No Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, no Paul John Eakin, no G. Thomas Couser, no Timothy Dow Adams. As life narrative scholarship increasingly addresses archival projects, and as archival scholarship

increasingly focuses on life traces, some understanding of common terms and mediations, of actions and reactions, and of agentive and auto/biographical acts would enhance the work that we all do. Archivists are engaging in interdisciplinary initiatives to incorporate knowledge systems and to give voice to archival subjects. Life narrative critical theory could enhance archivists' understanding of the lives contained in part in their collections, and of the range of complex and contradictory intersections between real and represented lives.

And life narrative scholars could benefit greatly from knowing what they are talking about when they talk about archives.

Hidden in Plain Slight: The Role of the Archivist

I want to return to Miriam Fuchs' "cautionary tale" about the importance of original objects from chapter 1 (39). She begins by describing Hawai'i's inhospitable climate for books and documents, and the protections therefore necessary to preserve archival materials. Her initial reliance on the surrogate resources offered to her speaks to this overarching guardianship. But this reliance led her to false conclusions, because she could not detect the extent of the mediation involved in the photocopied transcriptions—particularly the masking of diary size, but also how Lili'uokalani filled her diary pages with handwritten text. When however some doubts arose, and she decides to consult the original copies, she also encountered the protocols of the archives:

I went to the Bishop Museum, which stores thousands of documents and artifacts from pre- and post-Contact Hawaii, and consulted with an archivist there. He agreed to remove the diaries from a room that is dehumidified and air-conditioned twenty-four hours a day, which I was not allowed to enter. Returning to another room in which I waited, the archivist handled the diaries with spotless white gloves and carefully placed one volume, then

another, and then another on a table before me, and he patiently turned down each fragile page for me to examine but not to touch. (39)

The diary and Fuchs herself, marveling at the revelations offered by material object, which returned her to her initial research trajectory, draw the reader's focus. If however we shift our gaze to the periphery, we see it conforms to the most familiar images and assumptions about archives in general—from the heavily-controlled vault-like environment of the closed stacks, to the faceless, white gloved archivist turning the diary pages before her. Drawing heavily from Eric Ketelaar,⁶² Randall Jimerson points out the design similarities between archives and prisons as total institutions engaged in protection and control: “From security doors to lockers for researchers’ belongings, from closed stacks to reading room surveillance cameras, archives often resemble prisons or fortresses” (6). Whether through limited hours or demands for credentials, private and governmental archives customarily restrict access; once inside, a researcher enters a highly authoritative physical space that resembles, or actually is part of, a museum. Control and surveillance are givens. As we approach the service counter, everything around us is confirming the socially constructed expectations regarding archives we have brought with us. Reading room regulations, inaccessible and hidden stacks, and the required mediation at the service counter to examine the desired material confirm that the archive is a highly controlled and disciplined space. Fuchs’ shadowy, white-gloved archivist also stands in for all of the processes and people who have shaped and administered what we can know of the past, and what we are allowed to record or remember.

Accompanying and justifying archival protection and control are institutional narratives of neutrality and impartiality. Stemming from nineteenth century practices that saw archives primarily as storehouses of evidence, or “facts,” the professional commitment to neutrality dominated archival

education well into the 1980s, and continues to inform notions about archives and archivists held by the general public. As Terry Cook explains, the archivists' mantra has been that they create and follow procedures designed to insure transparency—a utopian notion of total and unmediated access that allows the “records to serve as trustworthy evidence of the facts, actions, and ideas of which they bear witness,” Archival protocols supposedly prevent interference: “the archivist is seen as neutral, objective, impartial, an honest broker between creator and researcher, working (again, quoting Jenkinson) ‘without prejudice or afterthought’” (Cook “Evidence”100). So, for example, accepting and preserving materials in original order not only elides those indexing or organizing principles common to librarians, but also defers to the authority of the originating body, agency, or donor, or creator, while at the same time denying that this authority has affected the materials. As Cook once more explains, “the pre-1930s archival pioneer thinkers asserted that records were a kind of natural, organic residue left over from administrative processes,” and therefore viewed the records themselves as “value-free vessels reflecting the acts and facts that caused them to be created” (*Archives, Documentation* 172–173). Such assumptions reify state- or source-established classification and documentation, relegating the archivist to the role of a guardian who protects the already-processed evidentiary record.

This narrative also privileges the work of those deemed worthy of working in the archives. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg recall historian and autobiographer Carolyn Steedman's words from their Sawyer Seminar:

the memory traces of past experience, material either carefully selected or randomly placed in an archive just sits there until it is read and used and narrativized. As Steedman put it during our discussion at the seminar, the archive is thus quite benign. The historian, the user, the social rememberer give the archive's 'stuff' its meaning. (1)

Cook notes the implicit connection here between impartiality and servitude, remarking that “in Canada, archivists were often termed the ‘handmaidens of historians’—a definition “astonishing for its servility and its gender connotations.” But in this, Cook finds nothing surprising: “Just as patriarchy needed women to be subservient, invisible ‘handmaidens’ to maintain male power, so historians required archivists to be neutral, invisible partners of historical research to maintain unchallenged the central professional assumptions of historians” (“The Archive(s) Is” 608). Similarly, even when archival scholarship could provide context for an argument, or broaden its perspective, when reading through recent humanities scholarship dealing with archives, Michelle Caswell notes the almost total lack of reference to practicing archivists and archival theorists. Echoing Cook, Caswell concludes

This omission is not the result of chance, but, I contend, is a result of the construction of archival labor as a feminine service industry and archival studies (if it is ever even acknowledged as existing) as imparting merely practical how-to skills

Observing that “the past decade of archival studies scholarship has put to rest any lingering illusions of neutrality and instead, archival studies scholars and archivists have embraced their active-and political-role as shapers of history,” Caswell rebukes humanities scholars for their lack of concern about their ignorance of the profession that produces the materials and institutions they write about (paragraphs 23, 25).⁶³ Unfortunately, the longstanding neutrality narrative regarding archives, sustained by the archivists themselves, contributes to the one-sided approaches to the subject which ignore or erase the actions and processes archivists perform on their holdings. Steedman’s perception of the archives as benign and passive, waiting for the historian or biographer to grant them meaning, neglects the social construction of the institution, and the deferral to those in power to determine what is saved or lost, and how to tell the stories.

In media scholarship, social/collective memory has two facets: one reflecting the past, and the other looking ahead, speculating on how we will remember it. According to Neta Kliger-Vilenchik, what we remember and forget illustrates the agendic nature of collective memory: “much ideological power lies in the mere question of which events are salient on the memory agenda and which are forgotten” (227). Keren Teneboim-Weinblatt argues that the constant construction work of collective memory is an important factor in forging links between media and prospective memory. In cases such as kidnappings or ongoing hostage situations, the problem media faces is how to represent something not yet completed. Teneboim-Weinblatt contends that “the appropriate question is how prospective memories are socially constructed and negotiated, including the intentions/commitments themselves and the timing, means, or conditions for the intended actions” (217). But while these media scholars speak to mainstream media’s role in creating the agendas for collective memory and formulating prospective memories, they virtually ignore the role archives or other memory institutions play in the overall collective memory process. What and how archivists appraise, discard, organize, and describe always influence the agendas formulated for collective memory, and determine how prospective memories, once experienced, are folded into the archival missions, policies, and processes. Socially constructed, and neither impartial nor neutral, these institutional interventions shape our overall social memory. To take only one of the most important influences, archives save or discard the official writs and expressions of institutional power that confirm, complicate, or refute constructed social memory. Schwartz and Cook describe the overlapping layers of power at play here:

archives—as institutions—wield power over the administrative, legal, and fiscal accountability of governments, corporations, and individuals, and engage in powerful

public policy debates around the right to know, freedom of information, protection of privacy, copyright and intellectual property, and protocols for electronic commerce.

Archives—as records—wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies. And ultimately, in the pursuit of their professional responsibilities, archivists—as keepers of archives—wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use. (2)

Jimerson goes even further, identifying archivists themselves as “active agents” who “engage in selecting which materials will be preserved for future use, documenting some aspects of society and neglecting others, constructing memory, protecting evidence for accountability, interpreting these resources and thereby shaping how researchers and other users will regard them.” Archivists can therefore be the guardians, or the enemies, of citizens’ rights, governmental accountability, and social justice (19).

To demonstrate how familiarity with the agentive roles of archivists has much to offer life writing critical analysis, I focus on four foundational concepts: the archival record, appraisal and value, provenance, and description. **Archival records** range in format from papers, to film, to sound recordings, to emails. Largely unpublished or difficult to access easily, such materials are valuable because of what they capture and preserve: cargo records from a ship, government adoption records, literary drafts and letters. Collections of such materials make up an archive, and unlike most libraries, multiple parts are often held together under a single overarching record. Such mini-archives commonly preserve traces of humans—as the creators, or as documented subjects. In

part because of the diversity of formats found for materials clearly linked together by event, historical period, or creator, archivists tend to discount the form, organizing and describing any collection by primarily focusing on the individual or institutional producer. Harris however describes how over time, the self- and public image of the archivist has changed in terms of what they supposedly do as agents to the materials. Late nineteenth century guidelines refer to “workers with the record”; Jenkins subsequently talks about the far more self-directing “keepers of the record”; and postmodern theorists refer to archivists as creators—the “narrators of the record” (qtd. in Jimerson 9).

But Cook sees an evolving tension within the self-definition of archivists arising from two dichotomous understandings of the record: as evidence and as memory. Looking self-reflexively at processing, Cook detects an insularity hiding behind archival professionalism:

Perhaps in such processes, we embed our own identity and our own collective memory and mythologies. Perhaps in defining and carrying out these processes, we have found our sense of community in like-minded professionals. (“Evidence, Memory” 97)

Highly concerned about professional white-washing that results from sustaining a predominantly white, educated, middle-class, male worldview, Cook critiques this dominant narrative formation for archivists in autobiographical terms. Extending this discussion, Sam Winn warns that by refusing to acknowledge the impact of personal characteristics and ideological pre-dispositions, archivists fall into the same trap as historians:

The historic record has been repeatedly muddled and punctuated by perfectly “honest” scholars who thought they were telling the truth. Archivists are not exempt from this defect—in fact, our hubristic trust in our own capacity for objectivity makes us rather dangerous custodians. (n.p.)

As both Cook and Winn point out, this contradiction between personal agency and declared professional objectivity can result in archivists zealously insisting on their lack of agendas at those moments when calls for greater expansion and inclusivity arise not only from those involved in social justice and human rights projects in Canada, South Africa, and Australia, but also from professional and methodological scrutiny. Michelle Caswell for instance offers a critical history of how the move toward pluralism in archiving led Shannon Faulkhead to shift her focus from evidence to memory; Vern Harris to concentrate on deliberate archival labor; and Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward to advocate for a multidimensional record through an archival continuum model (paragraph 10–11). The advent of digital and social technologies has also powerfully affected the archivist-as-arbiter model, due to shifts towards participatory, community-developed archives and archival records, where multiple creators, coming from such different environments as personal lives or official government policy offices, affect the collection of materials, and the supposed meaning of the existing archival records.

What materials are retained, or **appraisal**, is also the product of agency. “Contrary to popular misconceptions, archivists do not keep everything,” Michelle Caswell explains, “Archivists must determine the value of the prospective archival materials through an appraisal process.” But what constitutes archival value? According to Caswell,

value refers not to the monetary value of records, but their value in attesting to the events from which they emerged, their value in representing some important aspect of the past, and, in some strands of archival thinking, their value for present and future users.

(Paragraph 16)

Focusing on appraisal shifts archival scholarship’s interest to the *selecting*, rather than the *collecting*, of materials to be preserved and described. Further, it brings to the foreground the

relationships between perceived value, the mission and policies of a specific archives, and the individual archivist's training and values (Caswell paragraph 16). Especially since Terry Cook estimates that archivists keep only 1–5% of the institutional documents they receive, the consequences of selection on “what the future knows about its past” are therefore profound:

Appraisal imposes a heavy social responsibility on archivists. . . . We are literally creating archives. We are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not. In this act of creation, we must remain extraordinarily sensitive to the political and philosophical nature of the documents individually, of archives collectively, of archival functions, of archivists' personal biases, and especially of archival appraisal.

Both Cook and Caswell stress how rejecting materials from an archive can be seen as exiling them from history, and from social and collective memory, forever (Cook “Remembering” 169, Caswell paragraph 16)—a responsibility that cannot be elided through professional language, or claims of “true neutrality,” which Sam Winn claims “is an impossible aspiration, because we as archivists are individual practitioners called upon to distill the historic record through the inescapable lens of our personal worldviews” (n.p.). Other archives scholars note that even though training and practice can change as much as personal attitudes, archivists often still appeal to external criteria, rather than accept personal responsibility for their decisions. Randall Jimerson offers the example of the focus on archival ethics that emerged from social and political upheavals of the 1990s, and especially among South African archivists seeking ways to deal with the materials produced by Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One response to anxiety over the effects of power, voice, and biases on appraisal, preservation, and description was to establish a professional code of ethics, but Jimerson argues such a standard can prevent continued scrutiny of practice, blunting the ability to resist

specific exercises of external power and authority, and even removing certain acts of social justice from consideration for inclusion (349). In response, Terry Cook proposes a practice he calls macroappraisal, which shifts the focus to government-generated records resulting from the interactions between citizens and government, and could also potentially counter the individual biases or professional insularity of archivists or archives by sharing responsibility for appraisal and selection with the stakeholders (“We are what we keep” 184). As Cook suggests, recognizing the biases and silences sanctioned by education, professional practices, and codified ethics means changing the profession from within. By shaking off the neutrality narrative, and recognizing—and even embracing—that their role as appraisers is agentive and creative, archivists will begin to alter how they shape archives. Key projects underway in Australia and Canada are exploring the possibilities of such a shift. But a corollary to such an “embrace” of individual agency in the appraisal process must be to pay as much attention to destruction as creation. Richard Cox contends a “good archivist is as good a destroyer as a preserver” (7).

Provenance describes a philosophical and practical method for grouping collections together based on origin. Provenance also refers to the origin of individual records, while *respect des fonds* refers to grouping items from the same origin in one collection, and original order refers to organizing the individual records in the order first encountered by the archive or archivist. These definitions become prescriptive. Gilliland-Swetland for instance notes that most archivists are governed by the mandate that “records of the same provenance should not be mixed with those of a different provenance, and the archivist should maintain the original order in which the records were created and kept” (12). Though developed for handling physical materials, these procedures are also followed for non-print and non-physical formats. But Michelle Caswell notes that recently, archival

scholars and archivists concerned with context have been challenging the traditional notions of provenance:

In this new reconceptualization, provenance is an ever-changing, infinitely evolving process of recontextualization, encompassing not only the initial creators or the records, but the subjects of the records themselves; the archivists who acquired, described, and digitized them (among other interventions); and the users who constantly interpret them. (Paragraph 13)

In keeping with the goal of giving voice to those voices that have testified, resisted, and talked back to those dominant powers traditionally assumed to be the creators of archival records, context has become an increasingly important concern for archivists, which has in turn placed a great deal of pressure on traditional notions of provenance. Caswell cites Laura Miller, Joe Wurl, and Jeannette Bastian as scholars whose commitment to participatory archives has caused them to expand the definitions of creators and context, pushing the boundaries of creators so that “provenance becomes a tool for community inclusion, rather than one of limitation” (paragraph 14). Pointing to a census list from a slave ship, Jeannette Bastian powerfully reveals what traditional provenance excludes, and how it can be retrieved through a rethinking of context:

What then is the provenance of the record and to what extent does the content of the record play a role in suggesting a wider context? How far should archivists go in establishing a context that will enable the full interpretation of the record? Without expanding the context of the record beyond its immediate provenance, the record and its meaning have not fully come together. The full story is not told unless the cargo has a voice and the population speaks. (“Reading Colonial” 283)

In this case, reframing the notions of creator and context not only aspires to give voice to the previously voiceless slaves, but also exposes how existing ideas of provenance actively silence such voices.

Description refers to the range of actions archivists perform on records to make them findable and useable. Description of records or whole fonds is bounded neither by time or space, expanding to include anything added. Consequently, the organization, analysis, and metadata descriptions are also dynamic—changing in response to the growth of the archival record. Description therefore covers two actions: the analysis and organization of the fonds, and the production of materials arising from this process, such as a finding aid, or a record in an online database. Archivists and archive scholars offer important qualifications to the definition of description. Ann Gilliland-Swetland for instance argues that by sustaining the hierarchies imposed upon the records by the original creators, or the issuing governing agencies, provenance intellectually and practically determines description and organization (19). Wishing to emphasize the fluidity of the process, Caswell prefers the term “representation,” which she acquires from Elizabeth Yakel, and links to Verne Harris’s and Wendy Duff’s emphasis on story-telling as fundamental to the process of analysis and interpretation (paragraph 18). Caswell also stresses the descriptive power archivists wield even in supposedly the most objective mediations, such as the descriptive surrogates created for finding tools, which then become products themselves that can encourage or frustrate access to the record, and therefore affect the resulting research: “How archivists represent records determines how researchers may access them, and subsequently, which records they use to write histories, make legal decisions, and shape society’s views.” Schwartz and Cook argue that education and common practices have rendered the archivist’s agentive description and processing powers invisible to the profession itself for too long (5), and Jarrett Drake sees

description problems resulting from provenance as a colonial construct. By employing a system of archival processing born out of system of oppression, the archivist—knowingly or unknowingly—will continue that process when naming, organizing, or creating finding aids or other surrogates. Pointing to the unprecedented opportunities for authorship offered by the increasingly available technologies for community-based work, Drake advocates for a redefinition:

Users should not . . . see archival description that normalizes the violence archivists can legitimize through processes of naming and unnamings and gendering and degendering, but instead users should expect archival description that reflects the autonomous naming decisions of people and communities, including and especially if they wish to withhold their names. (n.p.)

Many archival scholars, from Caswell to Cook, Duff and Harris to Drake, Sam Winn, Sue McKemmish, and Shannon Faulkhead, have been calling for community and participatory archives models, which reject or rethink the conceptual and practical assumptions discussed in this section. But to understand the proposed changes, we must be familiar with the methods informing the actions of conventional archivists as they select, organize, and describe the archives. This brief introduction to archival methodology has therefore offered some awareness of the tensions in the discipline today, which should prove helpful as we examine the specific relationship between the archives and life writing.

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Life narratives scholarship talks about putting lives “on the record.” By writing, drawing, portraying, and capturing stories, people record their own lives or the lives of others through a variety of narrative mediums. But for many individuals, employing one of these mediums is the only way they can go “on the record.” Motivated by a desire for visibility or empowerment, or for

the opportunity to offer testimony or express resistance, such individuals create life narratives and records to counter and provide context for the laws, rules, histories, and processes selected and preserved through the official archival act. If, as many often do, we imagine the archive as a structure housing many boxes of paper, it is easy to forget the human agency at work inside. But just as lifewriting scholars always need to remember that a life exists behind and apart from a life narrative, we must also recognize that behind the archive's lists and forms referring to other people lie the people who composed the lists and forms, and behind the box of documents lie the people who collected, boxed, labeled, and created a handy chart to find that box. The materials in archives document particular social processes and personal histories: lists of children removed from their families, cargo lists on slave ships, the costs for building projects, or maps and land transactions. Recognizing the agentive acts that archivists perform, guided by their methodological assumptions, institutional policies, and procedures can grant life writers greater insights not only into what is in the archival record, but also what has been excluded—and by implication, where that might be. But also becoming familiar with the tensions involved in archival practice itself, and what implications these tensions might have for the future of archives, will also assist life writing scholars in assessing the impact of archiving on the materials they employ, including life narratives. Whether such narratives conform to or resist the selection, organization, and description processes employed on the archival records, familiarity with archival methodology and practice can only enhance our understanding of the materials drawn from an archive, help us hone our critical analysis, and in the process, expand our life narrative critical toolkit.

Participatory archives

Over the last twenty years, archivists and archival scholars have grappled with the exclusionary practices inherent in their methodologies. Formulating archival records through

appraisal, provenance, and description parallels the processes devised by larger systems of oppression—the western colonial enterprise, for instance—to determine what is worth keeping, how it should be stored, and who should benefit from access to it. In her landmark work on *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that the people working within systems of oppression often cannot see how their actions sustain such systems, but that colonized and indigenous peoples can benefit greatly from understanding what the West classifies and represents as valuable or worthless—including themselves:

Systems of classification and representation enable different traditions or fragments of traditions to be retrieved and reformulated in different contexts as discourses, and then to be played out in systems of power and domination, with real material consequences for colonized peoples. (46)

As archival scholarship began to recognize and articulate the social memory dynamics enacted or reinforced through their methodologies and processing, it provoked further scholarship that pulled the curtain back on how some of the most hallowed principles of archivists silenced dissenting voices on the margins. Linda Morra for instance insists on the importance of consulting both official and unofficial materials: “I work both inside and outside authorized, institutional spaces to track the material traces that Canadian women authors have left behind and that were also sometimes willfully omitted from ‘sanitized’ official archives” (I’m a dirty” 5). Addressing her book *Unarrested Archives*, Morra contends that “archival research for women writers necessitates moving radically beyond a standard comprehension of what constitutes archival materials and formal repositories.” Only by “reading in, around and against archival caches preserved by women writers” can researchers confirm greater agency and provide greater context for these lives (“Inside”

569). Shannon Faulkhead and Kristen Thorpe make a similar point about Indigenous knowledges and archival scholarship:

in the western world, when something is not written, if it is only discussed in the hallways or exists scribbled as notes in the margin, then it is treated as invisible by academia, and silent by those staunchly traditional archivists who need to hear it the most. But how can they be helped to hear it? (“Archives” 12)

In 2016, Morra discovered books from Canadian writer Jane Rule’s personal library for sale through the rare and antiquarian book dealer, Bolerium. Morra located over thirty books, many with inscriptions to and from other friends, relatives, and writers in her life. For Morra, the writing in the margins and the dedications offered information about the “sociopolitical networks and modes of sociability that informed and undergirded a queer female writer’s life” (“Inside” 574). Morra was troubled by the books’ current status as commodities rather than research resources. While valuable enough to sell, they were apparently not valuable enough to collect and preserve. But after speaking with the executors of Rule’s estate, and with the head archivist at the University of British Columbia’s Rare Books and Special Collections, she discovered that they did not meet archival criteria. Even if they had research value, as commercially produced objects, they fell outside the strong preference for archiving unpublished materials. Recalling Marlene Kadar’s work on the incompleteness of archives, Mark Celinscak remarks that “Individuals in unique positions of power determine what is irreplaceable and worthy of preserving” (587)—something that has already come up a number of times in this chapter. But the actual reasons for exclusion, or at least the justifications offered, are often remarkably mundane. Morra notes that sometimes the insurmountable problems are a lack of money, staff, or physical space for the archive itself (“Inside” 572).

A broadening of archival theory and methodology to include life writing scholarship could conceivably contribute to assembling a more successful argument for archiving such materials. One approach to broadening the landscape could be through provenance. Though there are many reasons for gaps and silences in the archives, many emanate from those traditional notions of provenance that have determined what to keep and what to destroy, how to organize and describe it, and which relationships between archival records are most important. Because so many stages of the archival processes occur after determining provenance, as both Bastian and Drake noted above, the origins of provenance in oppressive and colonial systems for determining value profoundly affect acquisition. By opening up the concept of the creator, however, many archivists have begun expand the recognition of context for archival collections. For instance, Frank Upward's records continuum model focuses on the ongoing and iterative changes made to archival records by a number of "creators," which broadens the concept of provenance. Accepting this possibility of multiple provenance tracks not only recognizes the co-creation of archival records over time, but also influences the archivists' approach to creating additional metadata and developing systems that structurally can accept it. Chris Hurley has proposed a parallel provenance system, designed to track a broader range of provenance while retaining traditional record-keeping or technologies as themselves part of the record's story.

But the most important innovations involve collaboration and interplay. As archives adopt web and social media based programs, initiate digitization projects, and actively seek out more born-digital materials, they are increasingly attempting to become participatory and community centric, in order to tap into the knowledge, interests, and power of the public. Some projects turn to crowd sourcing or other participatory models to enhance the descriptions of archival records by the communities most concerned with them; other projects search for the historical respondents to the

single voices of power saved in colonial records. These strategies often employ such lifewriting methods as testimony and oral history, so by working more closely with communities in the process of collecting and supplying context, archivists are moving closer to the agendas being pursued by life narrative scholars. And perpetually considering these projects in relation to standard archival methodology allows for agents inside or outside the institution to reinforce the undeniably beneficial work of the profession while at the same time locating what parts need to be changed.⁶⁴

Some of the most innovative and transformative scholarship in the last ten years has come from the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI), an international collective and collaborative archival education program operating in eight U.S. universities, and in partnerships with researchers across the globe. Committed to developing archival infrastructure initiatives, to cultivating diversity in archival scholarship and practice, and to making archivists more knowledgeable about the myriad of issues facing archives and communities today, AERI offers scholars and students opportunities for networking, and for proposing and nurturing innovations in the field.⁶⁵ Beginning from the premise that archival practice and archives themselves must develop new ways of looking at records, creators, provenance, and description, AERI develops conceptual models and best practices for governmental, institutional, and individual archives. Pluralism in approaches to evidentiary records is one of AERI's most important interventions, giving "equal footing to the range of perspectives explored, encompassing such considerations as culture, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic standing, gender, gender identity, sexuality, disability, and citizenship status, as well as to recognize the intersections among them" (AERI/PACG 72).

For Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, the goal of such diversity in approaches is to create an "*archival multiverse*." Quoting the AERI/PACG report, they highlight that this approach

encompasses the pluralism of evidentiary texts, memory-keeping practices and institutions, bureaucratic and personal motivations, community perspectives and needs, and cultural and legal constructs with which archival professionals and academics must be prepared, through graduate education, to engage. (qtd. in *Research Methods* 80)

By embracing such other decolonizing and diversifying initiatives, epistemologies, and practices as “records continuum, postmodern and postcustodial archival theory as developed in Australia and elsewhere⁶⁶; Indigenous ways of knowing; and emergent thinking on co-creation, the multiple simultaneous provenance of records, and the archival multiverse,” archivists can liberate their theory and practice from the either/or approach that dominates so much of their profession’s history (McKemmish and Piggott 111). Especially significant for lifewriting researchers, the archival multiverse can ideally accommodate “records as they exist in multiple cultural contexts” and “support broad definitions of a personal archive,” which would involve “all forms of recordkeeping, together with continuum-based views of the archive that encompass both records and archives as defined in life cycle thinking, as well as personal and corporate records” (McKemmish and Piggott 133). As part of its efforts to expand scholarship and practice, AERI tracks research themes, pluralizes archival education programs, expands archival research to respond to large societal problems, such as climate change, human rights, and sustainable communities, and in 2017 published a monograph that provides guidelines for conducting innovative research into key areas of archival practice.

Participatory archives and community projects draw upon the experiences and expertise of their user base to create, structure, and describe or represent the archival records. To take only one example, a Swedish participatory archives project aims to decentralize curation through what Isto Huvila calls “radical user orientation,” in order to supply greater context for both the products and

the process (16). Two separate physical archives were digitized and made available to researchers through a single online presence that users could enter not only to browse the contents, but also to edit and maintain them in designed fields, following guidelines established at the beginning of the project. As a result, the archival manager's principal role shifts from appraisal to technical assistance, and the user's shifts from consumer to co-creator. As Huvila explains, "allowing the users to edit actual records" contributes to the archives' own duties: to create "richer descriptions and links between records, to accelerate the process of updating the archive, to engage users to collaborate actively within the archives, and to reduce the need for administrative interventions" (26). Although the project staff retains the ability to "roll-back" problematic changes and track user edits, extending the responsibility for creating and curating records to the participants reorients the archive to the users' interests and needs, while also providing greater and more diverse context than the traditional provenance can provide (30, 33).

In their study of community archives in the UK, Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd cite five major motivators for their growth: increased awareness of the silences in the "dominant heritage narratives"; threats to community identities or ways of life due to such forces as deindustrialization; migration; increases in funding for such projects; and access to social technologies that can centralize data or digital representations online for decentralized use (74). As with the participatory project Huvila described, UK community archives aspire to shift the telling and listening, the creating and describing, away from the archivists from "outside," and into the community itself. Flinn et al. emphasize that engaged members "are all united by the desire to tell their own stories . . . on their own terms" and that the "community's custody over its archives and cultural heritage means power over what is preserved and what is destroyed, how it is described and on what terms it is to be accessed" (83). But challenges to cooperation between institutions and

communities remain formidable. Pointing to the disconnect between an *awareness* of the archive's power to establish cultural memory, and the *absence* of such recognition in existing policies and procedures, Flinn et al. conclude that acknowledgement

of the archivist's role and influence in shaping the archive is growing but such understanding is still not fully developed, especially at heritage policy level where the connections between heritage and community, cohesion and identity, archives and memory can be made in somewhat crude and mechanistic fashion. (76)

Although community archivists can greatly improve visibility and access to voices seldom seen or heard in heritage archives—and especially for volunteer organizations, where individuals take on the majority of the work—

Working relationships between community archivists and heritage professionals can (sometimes, not always) be subject to a number of pressures ranging from mutual misconceptions about roles and activities, differences over professional/non-professional practices, perceived lack of respect or acknowledgement of the others' skills and expertise, lack of cultural sensitivities or even racism. (80)

Part of the problem arises from the fact that intersecting or diverging epistemologies within communities influence the collecting and destroying, the describing and maintaining of records in ways that will affect the overall archive. In most of the documented cases, how archivists and community-based archives approach appraisal and description is the issue, but what a community chooses to give back to families, make accessible only to its members, or actually destroys—and how it does so—are also points of potential or actual conflict.

Community and participatory community archives undeniably seek to create spaces for experienced and knowledgeable appraisals, descriptions, and even broadened provenance. But who

sets up and ultimately maintains the archive still defines the levels of agency and decision-making. When an initiative operates completely outside the framework of a traditional archive, the community—whether diasporic or in a single location—defines the primary parameters, participants, knowledges, and protocols, But while participatory archives can be initiated and entirely managed by a community, as we saw in Huvila’s example, they may also be established by archivists who determine the selection of materials for inclusion and how outside people will participate. The intentions are often admirable. “Participatory archival approaches and principles re-define the notion of agency in records,” Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish observe (“The Role” 81), and McKemmish and Piggott approvingly note that “By expanding the definition of record creators to include everyone who has contributed to a record’s creative process or been directly affected by its action, notions of co-creation and parallel or simultaneous multiple provenance reposition ‘records subjects’ as ‘records agents’” (137).

Though in a regimented manner, such expansion seeks to acknowledge and acquire the stories and human element lost in archival professionalism. But does it do enough to counter, decolonize, or resist? Because this process still occurs within the archival world, Gilliland and McKemmish push for a participatory model that does more than broaden and contextualize records. Only by creating an ongoing forum for recognizing “different perspectives, experiences, beliefs and needs and a mechanism for reconciling the dual nature of archives that has been critiqued by scholars and distrusted by those who have been disenfranchised, silenced or otherwise marginalized or victimized by archives and recordkeeping” can an archive be fully and equally participatory (78). Working toward a human rights and social justice agenda, Gilliland and McKemmish specifically propose that archives need to work even more closely with the subject communities, to move away from lack of consent and toward “full, free, prior and informed consent,” and to establish a set of

participant rights, such as the right to name or describe, the right to be consulted as (co)creators, and the right to remove archival content (83).

South Africa, Canada, and Australia lead the archival world in such initiatives. Influencing the U.S. Information Schools through AERI, much of this scholarship seeks to educate new practitioners about best proposed practices for working with the people most affected by the records. One highly promising avenue links archival practices to human rights. For example, Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Eric Ketelaar, Melissa Castan, and Lynette Russell consulted the 2007 UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples “to identify obligations that should guide archival practice” and to inform an “exploration of the extent to which current Australian archival programs cover Indigenous cultural rights” (“Resetting”112). While acknowledging that existing archives can “play a critical role in the recovery of Indigenous knowledge and language, and provide evidence for establishing identity, family link-ups, community regeneration, land claims and redress of human rights abuse,” they also fully recognize that archives have been oppressive in the past (113). A very substantial institutional initiative reached similar conclusions. Funded by the Australian Research Council in 2004–2008, The Trust and Technology project, a partnership between the Public Records Office Victoria, the Koorie Heritage Trust Inc., Indigenous Special Interests Group, the Australian Society of Archivists, and other organizations, concluded that “Australian legal and archival frameworks have not considered archives-related Indigenous human rights issues, or provided for the exercise of cultural rights in records for Indigenous peoples who are considered to be the subjects of the records” (113–114). In response, the cooperative project developed “road maps” for arriving at such solutions as the recognition of collective rights; of the need for free, prior, and informed consent; of self-determination and exercising cultural rights as human rights; of the right to know the truth and to reply; and of the exercise and protection of rights

on social media. Perhaps the most sweeping proposal, however, was a call to reconfigure existing archives through a participatory model to accommodate the aforementioned rights (116–125). A huge step toward decolonizing the archives, implementing this recommendation would deny access to existing records collected without informed consent as a violation of indigenous human rights.

As participants in the Trust and Technology project, Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead, and Lynette Russell have focused on issues of indigeneity, orality, and how current archival processes and legal frameworks must be revised to accommodate multiple formats for archival records. In “Trust and Technology: Building Archival Systems for Indigenous Oral Memory,” the authors explain that one of the most difficult challenges for Indigenous human rights work appears at the point where Indigenous oral traditions and archives, rooted in materiality and mainly paper, interact. But institutional or even individual bias within the archives is not the only, or even the most serious problem indigenous communities face with regard to preserving oral traditions. Governments, courts, and many laws still privilege the written document, even in electronic form. McKemmish et al. report that the Trust and Technology project is seeking to change this, and much more:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples together with Australian archival institutions are creating world-leading best practices in areas such as access, digital archives and repatriation, supported by engagement in reconciling research which explores the transformation of relationships between Indigenous communities and the archives.

This initiative makes specific and pragmatic recommendations such as expanding concepts of name indexes, description and appraisal methods, and developing mutual agreements with indigenous communities on individual practices (“Distrust” 212).

While McKemmish, Faulkhead, and Russell are hopeful about their current work and the future of archives, there are also adamant about the need to pluralize and expand the record. Faulkhead recognizes the challenge of capturing the elusive ways that historical traces intersect, overlap, or contradict each other, but vividly insists that archivists must meet it, because “[p]alimpsest-like, layered, sometimes diffuse and even ghostly, the stories we tell each other make us who we are, and emphasize who we want to be” (“Distrust” 235). For McKemmish et al., human justice work is a key factor in this effort, because it reminds us that these archival records are not merely records. As Faulkhead and Thorpe explain, the “obligations and responsibilities to the care of records extends beyond the physical manifestation of the archive” to “include the obligations to respect and honour ancestors” (“Archives” 7). To do so will require professional archivists to come out of isolation, and to move towards co-creative efforts that will change our general understanding of archival materials, provenance, description, and even of who holds and cares for the materials, and how. Although many archives contain family objects, identities, generations of family stories, and connections to ancestors and genealogies pieced together through forms, maps, and governmental paperwork, institutional practices have made Indigenous work, including human rights work, difficult if not impossible. Initiatives seeking community and individual engagement in the archives will not only expand their range and relevance, but also broaden the focus from biography towards auto/biography, because for archivist scholars such as Noenoe Silva and Sydney Iaukea, the records contain the voices of their ancestors, speaking to them personally across time.

The Queen and I

I picked up Sydney Lehua Iaukea’s book *The Queen and I: A Story of Dispossession and Reconnections in Hawai‘i* after attending a Center for Biographical Research brown bag presentation. It was the only book I took with me when I nervously reported for federal jury duty.

I read it at the courthouse, and in various locations in downtown Honolulu—near ‘Iolani Palace, near Washington Place, near the broken copier at the Circuit Court. Though I walked past or near many of the places that Iaukea mentions, and I felt the special resonance of being in a historically charged place, I initially read the book only as *autobiography*. The description on the back reinforces this idea, calling it an “exposé,” and the references to “personal narrative” in the blurbs suggest that the book is principally Sydney Iaukea’s story. But while we certainly read the book through an autobiographical lens, she is also mapping out a story of land and dispossession firmly grounded in archival sources, including the words of her ancestor, through which she reclaims connections to family and to land lost in the years following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Though the documents, maps, and diaries she finds in the State Archives and the Bureau of Conveyances speak powerfully to her, by unfettering a Hawaiian epistemology, her narrative supplies rich context for disparate files and folders housed in these archives.

Margaret Kovach identifies two sets of differences as primarily responsible for the challenges facing an Indigenous scholar conducting qualitative research within Western academia. The first is the Western tendency to see research—and many other practices—as primarily an activity of finding and taking. Kovach suggests that Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars should instead employ “a research approach that is not extractive and is accountable to Indigenous community standards on research so as to honour the tribal worldview” (29). The second challenge requires “dealing with the undeniable”—the disparity between Western and Indigenous thought processes and worldviews. Kovach points to “a fundamental epistemological difference between Western and Indigenous thought,” which “causes philosophical, ideological, and methodological conflicts” that can “personally and/or structurally shut out (intentionally or not)” Indigenous researchers from academia and other institutional environments (29).⁶⁷ Daniel

Heath Justice makes the link between educational, political, and economic power, declaring the Academy a “privileged center of meaning-making in this hemisphere dominated by imperial nation-states” that have “served colonialist cultural influence, both directly and covertly,” often while sitting atop tribal lands (101). Given how formidable this challenge can be, both Heath Justice and Kovach ask whether Indigenous methodologies should be used at all in such institutions. But both conclude they should, because for all of its problems, Academia is a contact point “where the world of ideas can meet action and become lived reality” (Justice 102). One point of contact for Kovach is narrative. That “everyone understands story and that it is an effective means for gaining insight and making sense of the world is not contested”; however, Indigenous researchers using archival or community resources to locate or construct stories must contest the common academic assumption “that story is an apolitical, acultural method that can be applied without consideration of the knowledge system that sustains it”:

From that perspective, engaging with tribal stories means understanding their form, purpose, and substance from a tribal perspective. To attempt to understand tribal stories from a Western perspective (or any other cultural perspective) is likely to miss the point, possibly causing harm. (97)

Awareness of these fundamental differences must therefore inform not only the research process, but the methods for conveying the results to the Indigenous scholar’s audiences. As a Kanaka Maoli, and as a woman Iaukea, had to negotiate continually between at least two worlds, as she prepared her dissertation within a State academic institution, examined the maps and papers at various State archives and government repositories, and published her book with a major university press.

As a non-Indigenous reader, I must also register that my understanding of her work is shaped by my far greater participation in one of the two worlds. As I attempt to navigate this challenge, Iaukea leads me. I reread *The Queen and I*, and my focus widens. I listen. She begins with mo‘okū‘auhau, or genealogy, mapping out the disorienting and destructive disconnections the Hawaiian people and her own family have experienced in the wake of the overthrow and the annexation/occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom. By beginning with this desolation, and the resulting “insanity” that “runs through” her family (1), Iaukea forces the reader to register the sweeping consequences of this historical and personal breakdown. But as her story unfolds, she begins to repair this break, weaving and blending fragments back together through her research, life experiences, and writing. To call this text exclusively, or even primarily auto/biographical therefore simplifies the work that it does. Just as April Drexel’s research into and representation of the genealogy of land in *Kūpa ‘a* continues Hawaiian intellectual traditions, Iaukea’s multi-layered story foregrounds primary resources on land, power, and legal maneuvering that illuminate the causes of some of the most divisive moments in the Kingdom and Territory of Hawai‘i. As she searches the archives to find, listen to, and connect with her great-great grandfather, Cutis P. Iaukea, through his diaries, letters, and other legal papers, she inevitably encounters land transactions, disputed trusts, and the insanity trial of Queen Lili‘uokalani. Her struggles to gain access to these resources, to incorporate them into her personal history, and to make them available to us, all become part of the resulting narrative. In what follows, I will look at how she integrates Hawaiian epistemologies and research methodologies into her selection of archival sources, her representation of her own story, and her felt responsibility to liberate the voices imprisoned in archival boxes and/or within a deliberately suppressed language.

Iaukea introduces the reader to a fragmented and scattered world. But by juxtaposing ideas and events across time, she foregrounds the intersections and contradictions between her stories and those of the Hawaiian people. She begins with the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani, and its impact on Hawaiians’ place-based understanding of themselves:

As Hawaiians, our identity and sense of knowing come directly from relating to *ka ‘āina* (the land) and *ke kai* (the sea). A hundred years ago and today, we are connected to the land and deeply affected by its loss, because *ka ‘āina* is our older sibling, part of our genealogical makeup, and the entity that connects us to all that is—including *nā akua* (gods, goddesses), *ali‘i*, and one another. (7–8)

This severing of people’s attachments to land “represents a level of cultural violence that is unrecognizable within Hawaiian thought practices. Becoming cut off from *ka ‘āina* is more than physical separation. Layers of connectivity are severed” (20–21). For Iaukea, this state of affairs has intensely personal consequences: “If as Hawaiians we know ourselves through our connections to *ka ‘āina*, what happens when this connection is broken, and never allowed to flourish? Who am I without this?” (18). Though she knows that her mo‘okū‘auhau ultimately links her to Papa and Wākea, the progenitors of all Kānaka Maoli, the breakdown following the overthrow also produced the “insanity” of familial disintegration and enforced silences. No family member will reveal her immediate genealogy to her. Instead, a helpful and knowledgeable professional at the Hawai‘i State Archives introduces Iaukea to her ancestors through a series of unprocessed boxes. “It was there in the archives that the maps began to speak, that memories began to inform landscape,” Iaukea writes, restoring connections between records, maps, land, and family (23). Though she questions her right to do this throughout her narration, in the introduction she acknowledges and claims her kuleana, her right and responsibility, to present

these narratives. By setting her research in the context of the cultural, political, and familial environments of Curtis P. Iaukea and herself, Iaukea necessarily grounds her archival work in Hawaiian epistemology. Every reference to a letter, chapter, diary entry, or land record adds nuance to our understanding of the inseparability of Kānaka Maoli and ‘āina.

With this in mind, I now turn my attention to Iaukea’s analysis of the property settlements for Kealohilani and Washington Place. After outlining the geographic features of Hamohamo and Waikīkī, she lets Lili‘uokalani herself describe her summer home:

there is something unexplainable and peculiar in the atmosphere at that place, which seldom fails to bring the glow of health to the patient. . . . I have always left open my estates on that shore, so that the air and the sea-bathing, the latter most essential in our climate, might be enjoyed without any charge by all who choose to avail themselves of the privilege.

She continues her account of “the Queen’s retreat” by referring to families who simply enjoy the beach, and to the fishermen who launch their canoes from there (118–119). But then Iaukea situates Lili‘uokalani’s “contentment, emotional connection, and appreciation for this place” within a larger historical context: “For approximately four hundred years, the larger Waikīkī area was honored as a *wahi pana* (sacred site) because of its physical characteristics and long history of prominent *ali‘i* who resided there” (119).

Given this backstory, the account of the compromise that settled the legal suit over Kealohilani, one of the Waikīkī residences, and Washington Place becomes far more nuanced. Through a conventional use of archival materials, Sydney Iaukea follows the letters documenting the wrangling between the law firms up through the eventual resolution. But these resources do not refute or uphold the role a *kāhoaka* played in the process, which only become clear through

reference to the writings of Curtis P. Iaukea. His notes describe a meeting called by Princess Kalaniana'ole, the wife of Prince Kūhiō, and attended by Iaukea, his wife, and Myrah Heleluhe, “an intimate friend” of the Princess and her family, “and a lifelong retainer of royalty,” who had experienced a kāhoaka, which Sydney Iaukea explains “could be a *‘uhane* (spirit), a *hihi ‘o* (dream or vision), or *hō ‘ailona* (sign or symbol),” but in this case was a dream (116). In it, Prince Kūhiō, then in Washington D. C., instructed Heleluhe to tell the Princess that he wanted her to seek a compromise of the legal suit. The meeting with Curtis Iaukea marked the beginning, in the diary, of a possible settlement. Based on this kāhoaka, the Princess asked him to pursue a resolution, which he successfully did, and a few weeks later, a letter from Prince Kūhiō confirmed that he approved of the initiative. “*A happy ending as I thought,*” Curtis Iaukea concludes, “*And all the result of a Dream or ‘Kahoaka’ as a Hawaiian would say. Stranger things have happened. And I’m no dreamer*” (116). And many years later, his great-great granddaughter agrees: “Whatever the case, it [the kāhoaka] provided guidance for actions in the waking world” (116–117).

I would argue that Sydney Iaukea’s account of the legal suit and its resolution is an example of how Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, personal history, and detailed research in traditional and non-traditional archival collections can create a far more thoughtful and nuanced account of historical events and lives. Though she blends historical documentation and her analysis together in familiar ways, the personal consequences of the research are always present—and so too is permission for the reader to bear witness, and draw additional conclusions, because the richness of the connections cannot be filtered into a single thesis. In both form and content, then, the writing here is a model of how Indigenous beliefs and theories

of knowledge can interact historically and methodologically with imposed Western epistemologies and legal and narrative practices.

This mode of writing affects what primary resources she chooses to publish in her text, and how we are to understand them. Because so many Hawaiian-language newspapers and other documents still need to be found, collected, copied, and perhaps translated, a wealth of source material remains silenced. As a result, the previously unpublished materials that appear in Sydney Iaukea's book provide insights into a tumultuous and contested time, and also make available primary sources that are often unprocessed, out of order, and therefore unknown and unknowable to virtually anyone but the staff of the State Archives and other repositories. By featuring the unpublished chapters of Curtis P. Iaukea's narrative within her own, Sydney Iaukea therefore carries out a number of tasks. One is evidentiary. The diaries show, to her great relief, that her great-great grandfather "did not simply accept legal subjugation to U.S. political dominance in Hawai'i." Another is analytic and celebratory. The diaries "display Hawaiian political agency and legal acumen" (7). Perhaps most importantly, though, Curtis P. Iaukea's writings provide a guide of sorts for evaluating the huge numbers of other primary sources, including treaties, laws, court cases, maps, photographs, diaries, and letters that appear in *The Queen and I*. Iaukea's principle of selection leads her to documents relating to land, Native Hawaiian identity and agency, and the changing political and power landscape in the years following the overthrow. Her major concerns pass from the Lele of Hamohamo, to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, to the legal battle to reinstate the Crown lands, to Queen Lili'uokalani's Trust and its attendant legal battles. But her focus on documents that offer us agentive contemporary voices, and most notably, that of her great-great grandfather, grants us

access to a period of Hawaiian agency that was already beginning to wane under the pressures of occupation and the institutional characteristics of the territory.

I return now to Iaukea's own concerns about her right and responsibility, her kuleana, to tell these stories. Her uncertainty swirls and circles through the text until she describes the moment when she accepted her own authority as the person she is:

And then one day, as I was asking the same question, 'Why me?' a new thought came into my head—well, why not me? This is my reality, my experience. These were their experiences, their realities. Who else could do it? And then another thought. Wait, this isn't even really about me. This is about them. Our ancestors, whose stories were relegated to the basement of the archives. After everything they went through, their stories and their voices should be heard. They deserve that dignity. (107).

Here is the justification for Indigenous research, and especially for Indigenous archival research. Iaukea comes to realize that her efforts to locate, read, research, translate, and publish these resources and stories give voice and agency to her kūpuna. She further liberates these voices from boxes in the Hawai'i State Archives by creating finding tools for the Iaukea collection for future researchers, becoming an archivist herself—and not just of the historical record, but of her own life as well. Just as families first discovered their ancestors' resistance to annexation through the display of the anti-annexation petitions, Iaukea finds in the archives and Bureau of Conveyances the stories of her own family, never offered to her by her own immediate ancestors.

Noenoe Silva powerfully refutes the long-held belief that Kānaka Maoli were simple and unsophisticated by identifying its source:

Like other colonial myths, the notion of Hawaiians as unintellectual is directly connected to and made to seem credible by and through colonial policies and historiography. This

historical lack of recognition can be understood as an extension of the project of erasing or diminishing Natives as actors in our own history and chroniclers of our own history. (43)

Puakea Nogelmeier also credits a rising dominant discourse for attempting to erase Hawaiian culture through a systematic process of assimilation, and a rewriting of history:

The power of discourse not only establishes which voices will be heard, but also in what form they will speak in order to be recorded and recognized Views that were recorded and which have come to be seen as official, as objective, as learned, or validated by some other qualification . . . have gained status as authoritative historical data and thereby inform and influence modern interactions. (19)

Nogelmeier also strongly advocates for moving far beyond the long prevailing “discourse of sufficiency” comprised of a handful of edited and translated Hawaiian language texts that came to be considered as the only necessary native-produced resources for learning about Hawaiian culture—a comprehensive archive, in short (1). Drawing upon Edward Said and Michel Foucault, Nogelmeier points to the close connections between dominance and knowledge systems:

This kind of power over knowledge is able to essentialize the people and place, define the field in which they exist, and completely frame the understanding of the entire subject.

Left unchecked, the power-generated “knowledge” is internalized by the disempowered subjects of the discourse, the people themselves. (4)

Iaukea’s archival research and book offer knowledge lying outside of the discourse of sufficiency. Her blended narrative of primary source materials, historical and contemporary narration, and personal witnessing and autobiography creates a continuum or tradition rather than simply supplying some intertextual link. For a culture still reeling and disoriented in the twenty-

first century from the 1893 Overthrow, the resulting annexation/occupation, and the subsequent loss of language and land, texts that incorporate current archival research, and especially, key voices from Hawaiian intellectual traditions, reintroduce Indigenous epistemologies and traditions to their inheritors.

I hear again the voice of Margaret Kovach: “Cultural longevity depends on the ability to sustain cultural knowledges. At the heart of a cultural renaissance, Indigenous or otherwise, is a restoration and respectful use of that culture’s knowledge systems” (12). Through her blending of extensive archival research and personal witness, Sydney Iaukea resists silence and suppression by informing Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians about the writings and legal battles surrounding land, by releasing the voices of her ancestors, and by claiming her own genealogy and acknowledging her kuleana as a researcher through a tribute to her great-great grandfather, and his Queen.

Conclusion

I will end this chapter by calling attention to how important autobiography and stories, including their own, have become to archival scholars working with Indigenous researchers, and more generally, with members of communities involved in cultural or institutional memory projects. By turning to modes outside of traditional archival scholarship, many archival scholars demonstrate the connections between auto/biography, story, and the lives contained within archives. McKemmish, Faulkhead, and Russell for instance begin their work with a traditional scholarly introduction, but by page two they are supplying scholarly autobiographies that place them in relation to the community under discussion:

Fully introducing ourselves in terms of our backgrounds, experiences and motivations is custom in Australian Aboriginal society and is also symbolic of how, in Indigenous oral

knowledge, who the record keeper/creator is and where they come from are intrinsic parts of the record itself. (213)

Weaving together her story with her beliefs, Lynette Russell talks about her past, her education, and her recently uncovered and redefined heritage and identity. Shannon Faulkhead concentrates on her identity, her family, and her role in the Koorie community. Sue McKemmish describes her extensive background in archival work and scholarship, but also the moment of her awakening to the impact of colonization, while working at the National Archives of Australia, Victoria Branch, which handled the papers for Aboriginal Affairs (213–214). Locating them within a physical place and their overlapping epistemologies, these introductions establish the rights and responsibilities that these scholars will claim and exercise in this paper. Without being fully aware of it, then, many of them not only write life narratives, but approach their archival projects through burgeoning life narrative methodologies. Fully recognizing and embracing such methodologies would only enhance their current approaches.

I also encountered this auto/biographical turn in *Research in the Archival Multiverse*, edited by Gilliland, McKemmish, and Andrew Lau. Instead of an introduction or a preface, this collection begins with a dedication written by Shannon Faulkhead and Kristen Thorpe, both Indigenous archival scholars, to the Archives and Indigenous communities in memory of Allison B. Krebs, a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and a Ph.D. student in Information Science. This tribute mourns the loss of a bright, fresh scholar, but celebrates her research and advocacy. Part of the First Archivist Circle, which issued the 2006 Protocols for Native American Materials,⁶⁸ Krebs had strong feelings about the archival rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples, and with regard to the use of archival resources, she “also wrote poetically about the importance of these reconnections for communities and for reviving

Indigenous knowledge systems that had been subjugated through cultural genocide” (Gilliland 4–6). The editors also express their commitment to “yarning in the archives,” a talk story idea shaped by a belief that conversations and engagement over time will grow the archive into a shared space through a co-creative process (5). The editors also “yarn” their professional and personal life experiences with Krebs by telling stories, remembering quotes, and sharing interests and concerns. This dedication then transitions into the editors’ personal introductions by way of their relationship with Krebs:

With Ally we were three Indigenous women. Two from Australia, and one from the United States of America, all archivists and all passionate about improving archival science so that our communities no longer face the dilemmas and heartache of the past and present. (14)

By bringing together two compelling life writing modes—a celebration of life through the dedication to Krebs followed by the editors’ situated autobiographies—Faulkhead and Thorpe open a scholarly and pedagogically-oriented archival tome with deeply moving, yet powerful personal stories. Their mourning, and the assertion through narrative of the authority to write and to then talk about it, not only provide important historical and cultural context, but remind us of what’s at stake in the archives, and what happens there when we turn our attention to auto/biography.

Conclusion

In our haste or excitement to read or experience something, more often than not we neglect to register some of the most common components of the medium or process. We read written narratives, without thinking about the materiality of the object under our gaze; we step into a museum without considering the land underneath it; we view, like, and spread social media posts without reflecting on the algorithms calculating our next choices; we flip through documents in an archives folder, forgetting who helped us with our inquiry and who brought the folders. It is easy and convenient to ignore such things, and it is often the desire of the creators that we do so. “For the ‘content’ of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind,” Marshall McLuhan explains, in arguably the most influential book on media studies ever written, and “it is only too typical that the ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (18, 9). It has often been suggested that looking at those moments when content strikingly shifts from one medium to another will best reveal to us how the medium itself affects our lives through its extensions and amputations. But rather than concentrating on the transfer to new or different technologies, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska argue that even within a single form, mediation flow is a continuous process, with both temporal and relational aspects (203).⁶⁹ And like McLuhan, Kember and Zylinska argue that the “‘cut’ of the flow” is the best place to sense and comprehend these ongoing processes of mediation.

In this dissertation about auto/biographical content, works, records, and their mediations, I have primarily paid attention to the burglars and the cuts, pulling back the content curtain to see and describe the inner workings. I have focused on life narratives in part because they appear so

pervasively across multiple media. We tell our stories, and those of others, in many ways and places. But I also chose life narratives because of their fundamental importance. For Paul John Eakin, autobiographical story practice is something we do daily, and the relational, situated, cultural selves we construct for ourselves and others through life narratives comprise a substantial portion of who and how we are. This writing or representing of ourselves is a complex and ever-changing process, which is why Eakin remarks that autobiography is the “slipperiest of literary genres—if indeed autobiography can be said to be a genre in the first place” (*How our Lives* 2). And like the workings informing various media, the process of identity construction is also largely hidden from us—until something intervenes: “When this story practice is disrupted . . . we can be jolted into awareness of the central role it plays in organizing our social world” (*Living Autobiographically* 4). For Eakin as well, a cut, not a shift in medium, is what makes us conscious of what is going on usually unnoticed in some of our most common encounters.

Life narratives and critical lifewriting scholarship also offer readers access to a tremendous amount of information about individuals, events, and cultures. Many of our stories are about ourselves, but how, why, and where we share them tells us about our time and place. Because of this, life narratives also provide examples of elastic and easy-to-recognize modes for witnessing, resistance, and other kinds of recuperative works in various media.

I began this research inspired by life narrative scholars who have looked beyond the literary techniques and framing devices that have traditionally drawn the greatest attention in the field in order to interrogate the physical, spatial, visual, and productive characteristics of life narratives. Anna Poletti’s critical and material work on zine construction; Candida Rifkind’s attention to the physical, and not just the visual, nature of auto/biographical comics; Sidonie

Smith's and Julia Watson's analysis of Tracy Emin's constructed and readymade art pieces to foreground the tensions women create and must face when they adopt auto/biographical modes in visual forms that mediate between object and subject; Julie Rak's focus on the industry and production of trade auto/biographies—all these critical interventions have pointed beyond the narrative “content” toward integral parts of the production and nature of life narratives not fully considered before. These scholars' attention to the physical and the visual, or to the systems of production and publication employed by the author, should impact our understanding of what exactly a creator's work, and also our critical reading of that work, are doing.

Recent scholarship on online lives by such critics and theorists as Rak, Poletti, Morrison, Cardell, Maguire, Zuern, McNeill, and of course, Smith and Watson also leads us away from our familiar reading strategies and approaches to life narratives, and toward engagements with the ongoing operations of mediation also at work. Similar reorientations are leading autobiography theorists to other untraditional sources and forms of mediation. So Jeanne Perreault and Marlene Kadar both insist that in addition to working with “familiar literary genres, such as the play, the long poem, the short story,” we need to trace the autobiographical through “unlikely documents— a deportation list, an art exhibit, reality TV, Internet websites and chat rooms, memos and propaganda documents, memories” (2).

Though the huge range of options for auto/biographical production online may tend to draw much of our attention when exploring new ways to tell our stories, as I examined such opportunities, three consistent themes or trends emerged from innovative life writing, whether offline or on: gains and losses, impermanence, and influence. Because each trend interacts and overlaps with the other two, they are sometimes difficult to disambiguate. Consider them themes,

then, which appear in a great many interlinked systems producing highly mediated life narratives.

It is a commonplace in media studies that losses and gains are inevitable when material works or human experiences move into new mediums for representation and distribution. Kember and Zylińska conclude that “*Every medium thus carries within itself both the memory of mediation and the loss of mediation never to be actualized*” (21). When Dana Walrath published her sketches and fragile reconstructions of her mother’s Alzheimer’s identity, she knew full well that the process would flatten out her layered collages, and eliminate the feel of her pencil marks. But she accepted those losses in exchange for finding a larger and wider audience for her efforts to change how we speak about Alzheimer’s, and to promote healing—and levity—for caregivers. And as archivists decolonize their records and profession, while they will surrender full control over spaces, materials, description, and even their professional identity, the resulting deeper and more productive connections to communities and cultures, fostering healing, will compensate them for the loss.

The impermanence and instability of texts, regardless of medium, result in strategies of control over life narratives as well as initiatives for creating and accessing mediated alternatives. Limited term exhibitions, obsolescent technologies, or self-decaying messages force us to search for other versions or traces of the materials or texts—and often through circuitous and less than ideal means. With regard to proprietorship, I have been repeatedly asking *Who is controlling what, and for what purpose?* In many cases, removal serves as a form of protection, even it means silencing or denying access to records or texts, such as storing permanently fragile art objects, pulling down controversial art installations, deleting no-longer-live webcam files, or opting for limited-term pictures on social media. And yet, while many users deliberately choose

decaying-on-command formats as a strategy for controlling their virtual autobiographical identities, instability does not necessarily guarantee impermanence. When for example Snapchat and Instagram rolled out new archiving technologies, snaps and stories that users assumed were gone forever suddenly reappeared. Here then is a jolt or cut of the kind Eakin and others describe, within a single environment. Now you don't see it, now you do.

My final identified trend is influence. I began this project with the most famous online influencer, Kim Kardashian West, and one of the most well-known interrogations of feminine representations online, Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections*. The echoes of influence acknowledged and parodied by Ulman highlight how online representations unavoidably imitate what we consume. While online identities bear some relation to our offline lives, we construct them within a set of technological and social affordances designed to spread our self-representations and offer us the lives of others, in a feedback loop of consumption, imitation, and dispersal. And even as the technology coaxes us to create, it populates our feeds with carefully crafted productions, created in part by our own interactions online. How we contribute to and receive data from our diverse networks therefore defines not so much who we are, but who the medium wants us to be. To be a consumer, subject to influence, is also to be a mediated subject, and all five chapters of this dissertation discuss how authors, museums, platforms, users, and archivists develop and implement strategies for control. In some cases, controls can paradoxically be the agents for creating more expansive and complex biographies, such as social and collective memory projects. In all cases, though, such controls necessarily shape how we represent and live our lives. Studying these processes should therefore be a fundamental part of any study of how we construct our identities and tell the stories of our lives.

It could be charged that throughout this dissertation, I introduce and analyze a substantial number of amazing, heart-wrenching, hilarious, inane, disturbing, and powerful auto/biographical texts, but always move on too soon—skating over the surface of what I could say about the text itself, preferring instead to pull my readers’ attention back to the materials or platforms that display the texts. I would reply with McLuhan that for English scholars, the texts themselves are all too often the “juicy piece of meat” (18). If we jump too quickly and permanently into the texts themselves, we overlook the larger systems surrounding and working on us, and our own roles in their functioning, often performed unconsciously. When we stop, pull back from, or even deliberately cut the process of mediation, we have the opportunity to see how, and how much, the medium is us.

¹ As of July 13, 2019, I calculated 233,291,536 across Facebook, 143,000,000 for Instagram, and 61,300,000 on Twitter. I could not calculate her Snapchat followers, even after enlisting the help of expert users—my 15 year old niece and 12 year old daughter.

² In *What Do Pictures Want*, W.J.T. Mitchell discusses a pedagogical exercise which involved asking students to poke out their mothers' eyes from the pictures they brought to class. Many could not, exemplifying the additional hold that the image has over the students (9). This resonates with Gell.

³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/09/10/491508293/seeing-a-mothers-alzheimers-as-a-time-of-healing-and-magic>

⁴ The exhibit at Honolulu Museum of Art ran from October 20, 2016 to April 23, 2017.

⁵ See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (particularly 33), as well as Paul Chaat Smith's "Critical Reflections on our Peoples Exhibit." Smith discusses the curatorial negotiations and decision making that happen when a museum, and the exhibits within, must resist and yet still engage with hundreds of years of the dominant story of colonialism, imperialism, and genocide.

⁶ Survey from Quartz about the museums that do hold works from well-known artists: <https://qz.com/583354/why-is-so-much-of-the-worlds-great-art-in-storage/>
From *LA Times*: <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jul/20/entertainment/la-et-cm-lacma-broad-museum-storage-20130721>

⁷ The Honolulu Museum of art rotates its Japanese woodblock prints every two months, as part of a conservation schedule: <http://honolulumuseum.org/art/collections/5785-new-japanese-woodblock-print>, but users can access the digital versions online through the museum's collection database: <https://art.honolulumuseum.org/collections>.

⁸ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rodney-in-the-house-of-my-father-p78529>

⁹ For more information: <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/below-the-varnish-uncovering-the-obscure-sex-appeal-of-art-conservation-1362715>

¹⁰ <https://ncac.org/resource/art-and-culture-censorship-timeline>

¹¹ *My Bed* (1998) is a material, readymade tableau reflecting on Emin's life over a few weeks time. A video of the piece, with an interview with the artist, can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OD8yjJZdEOw> The video itself is an incredible work in and of itself, as it shows the process to set up the installation, with commentary and reflections from Emin herself.

¹² MacArthur Foundation: <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/566/>

¹³ <https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/cut>

¹⁴ The "'other' of the 'other'" is from Michele Wallace, "Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity." In Michele Wallace, ed. *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. Verso, 1990, pp. 213–240.

¹⁵ <https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/the-means-to-an-end-dot-dot-dot-a-shadow-drama-in-five-acts>. In her book, Shaw uses the title *A Means to an End . . . A Shadow Drama in Five Acts*.

¹⁶ <https://walkerart.org/magazine/new-responses-to-kara-walker>.

¹⁷ On 12/7/2018 the title was *10,146,323*. According to the Tate website, "The changing numeric title is drawn from data supplied by the IOM's Missing Migrants Project."

<http://missingmigrants.iom.int/>. The exhibit ran from 2 October 2018 to 24 February 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/hyundai-commission-tania-bruguera>.

¹⁸ Hirsch suggests that these images are powerful “agents of postmemory” (249).

¹⁹ <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-press-kit/>. Data updated on June 2019.

²⁰ The main picture on the site changes regularly, but I viewed these images in November 2017. Here is a link from the Internet Archive:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171117172716/https://www.ushmm.org/>

²¹ <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/libeskind-building>.

²² Wayback Machine provides examples of previous design:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120501085346/http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/homepage-EN.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130120015434/http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/homepage-EN.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130726002044/http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/homepage-EN.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140713043955/http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/homepage-EN.php>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141111034952/http://www.jmberlin.de/main/EN/homepage-EN.php>

Change in web site redesign happened sometime in August/September 2016:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160918174209/http://www.jmberlin.de/en>

²³ <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-kindertransport-1938-39>

²⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/14/663059048/a-toy-monkey-that-escaped-nazi-germany-and-reunited-a-family>

²⁵ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ydessa-hendeles>.

²⁶ Wellin Museum of Art produced a series of videos in support of the exhibit and uploaded them to their YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIY-vMMTBiQ>

²⁷ <https://honolulumuseum.org/art/exhibitions/15898-karen-hampton-journey-north/>.

²⁸ <https://gizmodo.com/facebook-blames-users-for-its-latest-privacy-scandal-as-1832738104>.

Not fully understanding how closed groups work in Facebook not only puts users’ health information at risk, but Facebook’s own revenue mechanism—making money through users’ data and highly targeted ads—means other corporations had access to this data and “even insurance companies may have access to these groups and may have used this privately disclosed information to make insurance decisions” (Melanie Ehrenkranz).

²⁹ <https://blog.openai.com/better-language-models/>

³⁰ Such as Nvidia’s model of composite, human looking photographs outlined in “A Style-Based Generator Architecture for Generative Adversarial Network.” <https://arxiv.org/abs/1812.04948>.

³¹ Facebook Engineering is an account a user can follow

<https://www.facebook.com/Engineering/>, and Google provides some of their datasets on their AI website: <https://ai.google/tools/datasets/>.

³² For a similar quote from the same article, see Smith and Watson, “Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation.” p. 70

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/technology/facebook-privacy.html>

³⁴ “Biopower is the power of the creation of life; it is the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, and society itself. The focus on affects and the networks of the production of affects reveals these processes of social constitution. What is created in the networks of affective labor is a form-of-life” p. 98. “Affective Labor.” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1999 pp. 89–100.

³⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/25/697090168/as-payments-go-social-with-venmo-theyre-changing-personal-relationships>

³⁶ How posts affect our moods: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/02/25/697052006/anger-can-be-contagious-heres-how-to-stop-the-spread--include>.

³⁷ Particularly in coordinated cases such as the RIP attacks, see *Why we can't have nice things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* by Whitney Philips for more information about online trolling and other behaviors.

³⁸ <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/26/689740061/tell-us-has-a-social-media-post-cost-you-a-job>, NPR looking for people to talk on this issue. They run a call on certain topics about 1–5 times per week.

³⁹ The title combines a somewhat now outdated, abbreviated catch phrase ‘You Only Live Once’ (YOLO) with the Holocaust, creating a generation and time specific parodic pun.

⁴⁰ He says “The page was visited by 2.5 million people” but it is not clear if he disaggregated views from individual IP addresses or dynamic IPs.

⁴¹ Please note: Photoshop and the website may require some tech experience, but could also be managed by using other apps and established open source style sheets etc.

⁴² While he utilizes accessible media to create his project, he doesn’t put it up in a place easily spread (and he has a whole page on his own copyright etc. which means he understands that he needs to control his productions). He benefits from the logics of sharing and social media, but fully understands the risks if he doesn’t lock down his own products, which makes them less easily shared.

⁴³ For instance, the dustjacket for the hardcover exemplifies convergence through a classic Ipod rather than a smart phone—a later more common emblem of platform, technology, and participation ubiquity that was not launched until 2007

⁴⁴ I follow multiple influencers who fit into overlapping categories. Every single one of them has spent multiple posts, vlogs, or stories on their process, their sponsorships, their work, and how they approach revealing and concealing their lives. This becomes, then, a convention in a sense, but also some of the most authentic feeling moments of their productions.

⁴⁵ For the full article and links to original research: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/02/25/697052006/anger-can-be-contagious-heres-how-to-stop-the-spread>.

⁴⁶ From Cardell at al., p. 166, distinguishes instagram posts from snapchat messages, suggesting that the snapchat messages are closer to text messages because of their targeted delivery and limited duration. I agree, but the posts are both organized on people’s pages as well as on mobiles to move as messages throughout networks.

⁴⁷ Jenkins, et al. defines piracy as stealing for profit, but this can be hard to discern, especially if we consider a case like the Fat Jew, an instagram star who took wholesale and posted other comedians’ posts, without reposting and without giving credit. In many cases, his number of followers and responses exponentially outweighed the responses on the original comedians’ accounts.

⁴⁸ https://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/do-you-remember-when-facebook-used-to-look-like-this?utm_source=dynamic&utm_campaign=bffbuzzfeedtasty&ref=bffbuzzfeedtasty&fbclid=IwAR0SKweAdfJsirr8L0ED5bwNgUdJIFhQLLqqENbbnyqABEPgZN-fl3sirEc Dated Feb. 15 2019.

⁴⁹ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/about/privacy?country=en-us#section-9>. For Influencers—for those who expect economic gain—there is a different form.

⁵⁰ Zuboff tells a story about Supreme Court Justice John Roberts admitting to not reading these as well, p. 49.

⁵¹ See: <https://www.npr.org/2012/10/11/162717373/in-digital-war-patents-are-the-weapon-of-choice> ; see also https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/08/technology/patent-wars-among-tech-giants-can-stifle-competition.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

⁵² See: foot note 1 on web page: <https://blog.openai.com/better-language-models/#fn1>.

⁵³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/amphtml/opinions/global-opinions/the-new-censors-wont-delete-your-words--theyll-drown-them-out/2019/02/08/c8a926a2-2b27-11e9-984d-9b8fba003e81_story.html

⁵⁴ The project began on January 18, 2017 with twelve pictures. By January 20, 2017 the site contained eleven. Between January 20 and 21, five pictures dropped off the site. January 22 and 23 only contained four pictures. January 24 and 25, only three pictures remained. The calendar for the Wayback Machine shows no captures for January 26, and when they resume again on January 27, 2017, Shapira had already uploaded the replacement page, which continues to show today.

⁵⁵ danah boyd from Jenkins, et al. 2017: “It saddens me that teens are pigeonholed as the overshare-y cohort who, uniquely, are going to ruin their lives. Are people unaware of mommy bloggers or parenting forums? There’s an entire online universe filled with parents documenting every gory detail of their children’s lives before they even reach an age at which they can reasonably consent or object to the process. What’s going to happen when these children become teens or twenty-somethings whose every poop and burp and childhood antic is documented? And why are people upset when teens share their challenges and struggles when adults do the same?” p. 55. I think boyd really points to the irony when people assume young people use social media in certain ways—in some respects, they are trying to take back a level of control.

⁵⁶ Snaps refer to Snapchats’ messages. These erase after view, or after a set period of time.

⁵⁷ From Newton: “if you forget your PIN, Snapchat won’t recover the images.”

<https://www.theverge.com/2016/7/6/12102294/snapchat-memories-private-snap-archive>

⁵⁸ Highlights has far bigger implications for influencers on Instagram, where the service may help to recap different paid initiatives or help organize the content on their sites as additional indexing tools (example: a fashion influencer may have different highlights for different types of clothing or hair or makeup etc).

⁵⁹ Resnick, et al. point to two studies of human perception: Ross, L., et al., “The False Consensus Effect: An Egocentric Bias in Social Perception and Attribution Processes.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, vol. 13, 1977, pp. 279–301; Sanders, G.S. and B.Mullen “Accuracy in Perceptions of Consensus: Differential Tendencies of People with Majority and Minority Positions” *European Journal of Psychology*, v.13, no. 1, 1982, pp. 57–70.

⁶⁰ It is not at all by chance that many of these appeared around the same time. This is the kind of activism that Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green discussed in *Spreadable Media* and Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito, and danah boyd bring up throughout *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era*. In Hawaii, #kukiaimauna, #aoletmt, #protectmaunakea, #WeAreMaunaKea and many other hashtags have gained local, national, and international attention for the ongoing resistance to the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) to be built on the summit of Mauna Kea. Labeling the acts, produced texts, and ongoing efforts as ‘resistance’ does not adequately capture the range of activism, identity, and cultural work happening at this time. That is true with the other hashtag collectives, as well. The hashtag marks, gathers, and communicates out, spreading to wider networks, bringing people together in a communication medium. But, the identity and

cultural work—and the solidarity building—runs far deeper and is more complex than what appears on social media. As attempts at TMT construction begins to ramp up again, social media and mainstream media call attention to the preparations, including the State’s security and the resistance movement protective measures. #kukiaimauna is trending again on social media, crossing into a wider array of networks.

⁶¹ From Reading: “Neda Agha Soltan, a young Iranian woman, was shot dead on June 22, 2009 on the streets of Tehran during protests following the Iranian June elections. Her death was digitally witnessed by a friend nearby using a camera phone: the data went viral. He emailed the data to another friend in the Netherlands. The camera phone video was uploaded to a number of websites; within hours still images from the video were captured, printed out, and used in protests at her killing and at the results of the Iranian elections in cities around the world” and picked up soon after by mainstream media outlets. “The witness video prompted the creation of a number of memorial websites, a Twitter icon, a number of Facebook groups, two Wiki pages, memorial art works, and songs commemorating Neda’s life and death” (241).

⁶² In particular, Jimerson quotes Ketelaar on his idea of the reading room as Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon—heavily surveilled.

⁶³ “There seems to be little understanding in the humanities that professional archivists have master’s degrees, that archival standards and best practices are culturally constructed artifacts, and that behind every act of archival practice is at least a century old theoretical conversation. Like so many other feminized professions—education and nursing are prime examples—archivists have been relegated to the realm of practice, their work deskilled, their labor devalued, their expertise unacknowledged” (Caswell paragraph 23).

⁶⁴ The projects listed are in no way comprehensive or exhaustive, but merely indicative of the range of projects happening and written about in the last few years.

⁶⁵ <http://aeri.website/about-us/>. Also, a list of their publications is stunning and their annual institutes not only bring forward different ideas, but help students and burgeoning researchers to publish—so there is a strong academic and professionalization component to their work. For publications, see: <http://aeri.website/publications-and-presentations/>.

⁶⁶ From the Society of American Archivists: “The idea that archivists will no longer physically acquire and maintain records, but that they will provide management oversight for records that will remain in the custody of the record creators.” See:

<https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/postcustodial-theory-of-archives>.

⁶⁷ Kovach knows that not all Native American tribes are the same, and addresses this in her book. But, while she bases her research and her approach on specific groups, she makes the point that the similarities in conceptual worldview across tribes enable her to make generalized statements. However, one of the tenets of her methodological approach suggests the researcher should situate herself within the culture.

⁶⁸ First Archivist Circle. *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, 2007, <http://www2.nau.edu/libnapp/protocols.html>.

⁶⁹ Kember and Zylinska rehabilitate McLuhan’s technological determinism stance quite a bit in their book through their survey of media theory. I agree with Kember and Zylinska that there is more hybridity between humans and technology when it comes to media. I do agree with what he’s saying above, but that it’s not just the technology that throws out the steak for distraction. There is a great deal of work by humans, and humans coding and programming technologies, to conceal these processes.

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