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Bodies of Archives / Archival Bodies

An Introduction

GIULIA BATTAGLIA, JENNIFER CLARKE & FIONA SIEGENTHALER

ABSTRACT

Compared to other disciplines and despite its central role in research practices, the concept of the "archive" has received insufficient critical attention in anthropology until recently. Anthropologists working in collaboration with artists and curators have experimented with forms of archive/archiving, raising important questions about both the collaborative and processual nature of archives. They thereby challenge ideas about the "archive" as a static repository of history. This special section begins with the premise that archives, prone to decay, dissolution, and rearrangement, are permanently in process. This perspective enables us to engage with cleavages and links between past knowledge and future imagination, as well as the role of representation and the anarchive. Our interest is not limited to objects, but also addresses the idea of the body (or collective bodies) as archives of experience, and the archive's potential for collaborative artistic and ethnographic practices. We ask: What forms of collaborative work does the archive offer? In what ways can the collective sensibility of the archive be explored? What can we gain from a process-based notion of the archive? What implications does this have on the role of the archive in art and anthropology, and for the practices related to it in particular?

KEYWORDS

archive, body, art, anthropology, anarchive

This special section interrogates the "bodies" of archives and "archival bodies" in the interdisciplinary field of anthropology and art. The questions tackled here presuppose a notion of archives as something processual, activated, and reactivated by bodies. We argue that archives are not only bodies of documents and knowledge, but also something fundamental to the body; the body *is* an archive, bodies are *in* the archive, and researchers intervene in either the material bodies of objects, files, or images that make up the archive.

The genesis of this publication began in June 2018 when we co-led a daylong panel at the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) Conference *Art, Materiality, and Representation*, held at the British Museum in London, England, where earlier versions of each article were presented.[1] For this panel, we initially invited contributors to investigate, through means of research and art, the role of the "body" in archival practices—beyond the repositories of historical materials, or the material itself, the "archivable" content (Derrida 1995; Zeitlyn 2012). As such, all contributors draw upon both classic and contemporary literature that theorizes the archive not so much as a "fixed" concept but rather as an experiential, dynamic, and performative practice.

As American art critic and historian Hal Foster (2004) and Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor (2007) pointed out in the early 2000s, the question of the archive in art can be traced back to the invention of photography (and other technologies, from oral histories to music recording).[2] Indeed, contemporary artists have long addressed the archival turn, or "archival impulse" (Foster 2004), whether it be a displaced agglomeration of information requiring (re)activation and (re)interpretation, or the creation of a new archive from fragmentary materials. As such, in various contexts, artists in particular have understood the social and human importance of archives (Campt 2012; Carbone 2017) that extends definitions of archives as fixed hegemonic entities (Houdek 2016; Zeitlyn 2012). Similarly, the "archival turn" has recently affected performance studies with the idea of "performing archives" (see Borggreen and Gade 2013), thus entering into dialogue with theater productions, folklore studies, and social rituals, as well as the visual arts, technology, and so on (see also Flynn and Tinius 2015). In fact, Borggreen and Gade argue that while at a first glance the concepts "archive" and "performance" may be seen in opposition (one static and the other dynamic), "'performing archives' refer to a process in which human beings create and handle the archives, but it also alludes to how archives are formative in shaping history and thus perform human beings, structure and give form to our thoughts and ideas" (2013, 10).

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Relatedly, in this special section, we focus on archives as active agents of creation and signification constituted by (and/or made of) bodies, within the discipline of anthropology in connection to art. While scholars have written extensively about the relationship between visual art and anthropology,[3] the role of the archive has not been properly addressed despite archives' being integral to anthropology, ethnographic field-work, and artistic practices related to postcolonial critique.

Writing from this moment at the start of a new decade in 2020, if authors such as Derrida and Foucault are now considered classic scholars who theorized the archive in terms of its hegemonic structure leading to colonial power and control (see also Dirks 2002; Houdek 2016; Stoler 2010), they also created the possibility of rethinking archives in subversive and *an*archival ways (the latter term we expand on further, below). On the one hand, Foucault (2012 [1969]) calls this "effective history" as a way to intervene in fixed, archived histories that have transformed "documents into monuments" and "define(d) within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations" (7–8). When rectivated by way of intervention, Foucault further claims that "documents" (e.g., the raw material, primary sources) can dismantle a "monumental" archived history (i.e., the "grand narrative") and opens up possibilities for new or alternative histories. On the other hand, Derrida senses the possibility of subversion in a recognition of the complexity of the archive as a notion, existent in the present that opens possibilities to become a concept in the future. In his own words:

> We have no concept, only an impression, a series of impressions associated with a word. To the rigor of the concept, I am opposing here the vagueness or the open imprecision, the relative indetermination of such a notion. "Archive" is only a notion, an impression associated with a word. (Derrida 1995, 24)

Building on Foucault and Derrida, contemporary scholars in this special section are also challenging notions of archives as a way of troubling assumed epistemic "truths" in favor of other ways of knowing, remembering, and narrating. This action involves, first, a critical negotiation by anthropologists of their relation to disciplinary histories and colonial archives; second, a consciousness of the multifaceted ways in which archives relate to anthropological practice and vice versa; and third, a consideration of the "anarchive" as a modus operandi that creates space for the performative, dynamic, messy, and processual aspects of practice and research (cf. Vierke 2015).

The European archive of imperial dominance in Africa and other regions of the world has been a fundamental part of the history of anthropology. The beginnings of anthropology were marked by what is known as "salvage anthropology"—the paradoxical effort to research, collect, and preserve the variety and history of humanity while (unwittingly or not) oppressing parts of it. For this reason, critics see in anthropological archives the entanglement of modern European science with exploitative practices. The last 40 years were crucial for the discipline's efforts to address this history and find ways out of the "crisis of representation" (Clifford and Marcus 1986) that ensued. Current debates about the provenance and restitution of objects in European museums attest, however, to the persistence of this crisis (Chambers et al. 2014). The ethics and validation of colonial archives are being questioned by postcolonial states, Indigenous movements, and their supporters. At stake is not only the ethical aspect of collecting other societies' cultural heritage, but also the notion of knowledge as such: the archive is deconstructed as just a part of a particular European modern epistemology, and it is challenged by decolonial claims for plural conceptions of collective memory, knowledge, and validation. Archives are confronted with counter-narratives that question the very occidental "modern" archival episteme (L'Internationale Online 2015).

This decolonial perspective is not a counter-perspective in the binary sense of the term, but rather also entails the complexities of plural ways of experiencing, knowing, and reasoning in a postcolonial and postmigratory world (Santos 2018).[4] It brings the sensory, affective, performative, and relational agency of archival researchers, creators, and collaborators into focus (Bissell and Haviland 2018; Carbone 2017). Anna Laine's contribution, "At Dalits' Feet: Archival Resources of Counteraction," discusses her work that challenges epistemic caste violence in contemporary India and its diaspora. Putting an emphasis on process and interaction as part of the production of photographs representing the feet of Dalit individuals, Laine and her partnering collaborators did not only symbolically reverse established hierarchies of the caste system but also challenged silenced gaps within dominant national and religious narratives in India. The performative engagement of the body as an archive that gets created through the production of photographs activates what are essentially anarchival energies that potentially undermine seemingly fixed social and representational categories. Laine also unpacks the curated presentation of these photographs in an exhibition that makes the perception and reception of this (an)archival body of work part of the process in creating space for discussion and bodily responses.

Congruent to Laine, Leora Farber's contribution argues along decolonial lines in her reflexive writing concerning the self-portraits by South African photographer and activist Zanele Muholi. In Farber's essay, "Dark Play: The Ethnographic Archive as Site of Embodiment in Zanele Muholi's *Somnyana Ngonyama* Series," she shows how these photographs refer to the othering and exoticizing visual language of early ethnographic visual archives, while simultaneously deconstructing, challenging, and undermining these archives with the uncompromising, direct counter-gaze of the photographic subject. This gaze is decolonial in that it not only deconstructs the colonial dominant narrative but also subverts it by forcing the viewer to reflect on his or her own positionality. This contribution adds a unique perspective on the defiant and oppositional gaze of the formerly objectivized subject that puts any possible taken-for-granted positionality of the viewer into question.

From a methodological point of view, researchers question constructed and consolidated "monumental" narratives by searching for immediate and primary sources that have not yet entered the normalizing mechanisms of the collective imaginary. They relate them in critical ways to contemporary discourses and practices, moving our anthropologist bodies into other physical and disciplinary places. In other words, the archive "comes to us" through material that was never "archived." It adopts meaning only in the process of interpretation (Battaglia 2018, 19).

This is done by Debra Vidali and Kwame Phillips who discuss this negotiation of the "aspirational archive" and its contradictory agency between centripetal and centrifugal forces. In "Ethnographic Installation and 'The Archive': Haunted Relations and Relocations," they collaboratively reflect on the potential of such material to become a multi-inhabited archive when it is re- or dislocated into a multimodal ethnographic installation. By remixing parts of the recordings of the popular Zambian radio program *Kabusha Takolelwe Bowa,* old answers to new questions are reformulated and offered in an interactive presentation mode. This not only creates space for an immersive coproduction of multisensorial and embodied knowledge in the present with material from the past, but it also creates "collisions" between different materialities, medialities, and temporalities.

The act of remediation is tackled by Alyssa Grossman and Arine Kirstein Høgel, who also plan to re-edit the material they discuss in their contribution, "Looking for a 'Now-Time' in Family Film Footage: Appropriating and Activating Archival Images in the Present." The difference in their work compared to that of Vidali and Phillips is that they are dealing with a

private archive created in the 1920s and 1930s. The authors make use of their individual relations to this material—one of a biographical nature, as a descendant of this family, the other with a specific interest in images as a researcher—and observe, compare, and analyze their distinct responses. While these responses clearly diverge, there is a remarkable commonality in their affective and sensory reactions to the archive in that they both experience a strong sense of Walter Benjamin's "now-time," a form of remembrance work and archival transformation that goes hand in hand with the construction of the past through the experience of the present (Benjamin 2010 [1942]). Collectively, Grossman and Kirstein Høgel argue for "haptic criticism" as an imagined connective tissue and critical means to reflect these subjective contradictions and complements of own and "other" pasts.

Such archival reconsideration, reinterpretation, and re-mixes contribute to an "anthropological history"—that is, an anthropological intervention into the "frictions" (Tsing 2005) of an unknown, forgotten, or yet to be constituted past to eventually create "a disturbance, a rupture" (Pandey 2006, 66). Conceived in this processual understanding, the archive adopts elements of an "atlas" (drawn from Aby Warburg; see Forster 1976), a "lab" (see Marcus 2014), or a "*dispositif critique*" (Caillet 2014; Fourmentraux 2016). Due to its heuristic properties, its multiple possible forms of manifestation (Starn 2015), and through the bodies that (re)activate it, such an archive enables understandings of the world in a spatial-temporal dimension always subject to change. It speaks to experimentation, to an "archiveology" that highlights transformative possibilities (Russell 2018) and "other kinds of ordering" (Foster 2004).

Such potentiality is characteristic of both the *an*archive as something that escapes the archive and "anarchiving" as a collaborative research process. Leading projects in this field, such as *Knowing from the Inside (KFI)*, exemplify a form of "research-creation" (Loveless 2015; Manning 2016) that conceives of *an*archiving *as* research. Workshops and exhibitions are grounded in experiments with "thinking through making" (Ingold 2013). Such an approach raises questions about how to archive knowledge that is generated collaboratively and that requires understanding bodies as archives of experience. Artists working with performance have similarly experimented with how to document artwork (Jones 2015). Indeed, Hal Foster (2004) describes the "*an*archival" in relation to art as that which emerges in the tension between documentation and event. Taking up a similar notion of the anarchival in "Anarchival Materiality in Film Archives: Toward an Anthropology of the Multimodal," Trudi Lynn Smith and Kate

Hennessy, as artists and anthropologists, argue that there is an entropic force of the anarchival in "fugitive" film archives. Their interdisciplinary work foregrounds the material dimension of archival research in film collections. Working with magenta film stock as a means to engage with the materiality of research, they acknowledge the "fugitivity" of ethnographic records and documentary tools and its implications for discursive formations based on such material. Smith and Hennessy are ultimately concerned with power and its manifestations, and how these are challenged by material, speculative, research-creation practices as means to communicate anthropological knowledge about archives.

Acknowledging the complexities of inter- and transdisciplinary practice across art and anthropology (cf. Clarke 2019; Laine 2018), this special section includes several experimental engagements with archives. Together, these essays navigate bodies, materials, and the ever fugitive spaces within and between archives and "anarchives." These essays are exploring the theoretical and methodological potentials beyond disciplinary and historical limits as they each uniquely investigate and experiment with the possibility to transform the documentary mode of archival material itself, as suggested by Enwezor (2007), as a way to open up new notions of, and perspectives for, future bodies of archives and archival bodies.

Notes

1. The emphasis on process that marked this panel has its roots in our individual practices and collaborative contributions, including the Art and Anthropology interest group (founded in 2012), its *Concepts in Art and Anthropology* workshop hosted by the Grup de Recerca en Antropologia i Pràctiques Artístiques (GRAPA) in Barcelona (2015), and the *Knowing from the Inside* (KFI) project, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, led by Professor Tim Ingold. At the *Concepts in Art and Anthropology* workshop (2015), participants created an open collection of key concepts, including the notion of the "archive." For the interest group, see http://www.anthropologies-of-art.net/aa-network.html (accessed February 11, 2019). For the entry on "archive," see http://grapaub.org/en/archive (accessed February 16, 2019). For KFI, see https://knowingfromtheinside.org (accessed January 13, 2020).
2. If the question of the archive is necessarily connected to that of technology, then Ogle (2010) argues that through the internet we are all becoming accidental archivists. This is a point we cannot fully address in this special section, but one that deserves further reflection.
3. See Schneider and Wright (2006, 2010, 2013), Banks and Ruby (2011), Sansi (2015), Laine (2018), and Siegenthaler (2013), to mention only a few.
4. Archives as embodied by humans and therefore something fugitive, mobile, and often unrecognized was also a central idea for the workshop laboratory *Aesthetics and Materiality of Knowledge—(Un)sighted Archives of Migration* hosted by Cathrine Bublatzky and Fiona Siegenthaler in November 2018 at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies at

the University of Heidelberg: http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/
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