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## ROUNDTABLE ON THE CRITICAL ARCHIVE

MATHIAS DANBOLT AND SVEN SPIEKER, EDITORS

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### INTRODUCTION

The present roundtable investigates the critical archive as a material concept in the fields of artistic production, art historiography, curatorial practice, and criticism. For us, the term *critical* has at least two meanings. First, a critical approach prepares the way for the analysis of a given issue or situation, the first stage in the formation of a judgment that is, as such, a form of knowledge production; second, critical is a term used to describe a pivotal point in an evolving situation, a moment of crisis that may decide that situation in one way or another. To speak of the archive as critical in the sense in which we understand it means to address it with both these meanings in mind. On the one hand, a critical archive would be an archive that, even where it does not itself act critically, may nevertheless enable or prepare an informed judgment that may, as such, become the basis for deliberate action or intervention; on the other hand, the critical archive may point to a moment of crisis, an impasse, or a calamity that can be located either in history (witness the interest in archives and their public display in countries, such as those of the Southern Cone of Latin America or Eastern Europe, with a traumatic, and often repressed and invisible, recent past), or, crucially, in the archive itself. In this latter case, it is the archive's own power and authority that come into focus: its power to consign and to commemorate, its authority to

select and store documents, as well as the structures and hierarchies that undergird that authority. And precisely this moment of archival (self-)critique is given play in many of the artistic and curatorial projects that participate in what is described as the archival turn in contemporary art. How, such projects may ask, has the archive's power to consign and commemorate affected the way we conceive of documentary evidence in different media and other contexts? Conversely, can there be such a such a thing as "artistic evidence" that creates its own archive? One decisive difference between archive-based artistic practices and historical archives, which often operate in secret, is the fact that the former deploy the archive and its practices visually—as it were, in plain view. In this way, not only do such practices aim to recognize the archive as a place of (knowledge) production rather than a place of passive consignment, they also variously invite us to participate in the archive's evolving configuration. Here the archive shifts its focus from being a stable site or place (*arkheion*) to a performative *process* whose critical power is derived from its openness as an unfinished structure. We invited the participants in this roundtable to examine the many different historical and institutional permutations of such a (self-)critical archive, as well as its possible impact on our understanding of the relationship between art and historical evidence.

#### TOM HOLERT

A dominant trope of contemporary cultural production, our attitude to the archive oscillates between its fetishistic embrace as a mystifying container of archaeological splendor, on the one hand, and its theorization as the quintessential matrix of power-knowledge, on the other. It may be difficult to gauge the exact impact of the archival impulse on the whole of current global artistic practices, but there is some evidence that it has forever transformed the ways in which we do, and think, art. Hence, the ontological status of *both* the archive and art has been challenged, if not transmuted.

Of course, generalizing about the archive and art should be avoided at all costs. Archives are distinct from artistic practices, and the ways they interact and depend on each other vary endlessly. Just think of the vast differences between the archiving technologies of big data enterprises and the proverbially dusty environments of traditional archives in relation to the wild diversity of formal-discursive

responses across the entire spectrum of contemporary art practices that they elicit.

However, as we look at the numerous articles, conferences, exhibitions, and catalogs devoted to the subject of the archive in the field of contemporary art, what stands out is a tendency to revel self-indulgently in physical and virtual, private and public archives, often with the explicit aim of reviewing and revising (and frequently beautifying) histories, many of them marginalized or forgotten. The archive and the archival practices of contemporary artists have brought into being the onto-epistemological realm of "the archival," a deep space of counter-memories and historical revisionism. The cultural discovery of the archival, however, has not met with unanimous assent. Some critics lament "the atrophy of any sense of futurity or forward propulsion," as Simon Reynolds put it in his rant against the way in which the allegedly progressive temporality of pop music retreats into a past manufactured out of nostalgia and collectibles;<sup>1</sup> the nerdy antiquarianism of many visual artists dwelling in the archives of past futures may be the source of similar disaffection.

Obviously, such rebuttals are in need of some nuance. Entering the archive, retrieving precious (or otherwise valuable) evidence of past power and suppression, and displaying these findings in gallery installations or video essays that then become items to be archived in turn by museums is only one out of many possible sequences of archival events in art. An important strand of contemporary art practices is directed toward the nonreifying opening and liquidation of archives, turning them from rigidly organized storing spaces into future-entailing processes. And wouldn't an aesthetic politics of the archive also question the authority of canonical archive discourse, from Foucault to Derrida, Agamben, and Spivak, and inquire into the theoretically inspired desire that undergirds our obsession with the archive, to consider the possibility of nonarchival, an-archival thought? Foucault may be of use to render the an-archive palpable. He suggests a dislocation or disturbance within the very "element of the archive" that, as he claims, "begins with the outside of our own language (*langage*)."<sup>2</sup> Hence, the "archive" operates as a structuring force in an area *beyond* our current compla-

1 Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011).

2 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

cent archive discourse. And it is here where artists might turn (should they not have already, a long time ago) in order to reflect and contest the pull of the archival on their practices.

*Tom Holert is an art historian, critic, and artist based in Berlin.*

#### STEFANIE BAUMANN

How can archives and critique be thought of together? The question is far from simple, and quickly reveals a problematic tension. While an archive is commonly understood as a monopolistic structure in which traces (be they objects or documents) are collected, selected, and organized for the sake of knowledge production, critique is a philosophical attitude or approach that questions the tenets of knowledge itself, its intertwinement with power, and their mutual constitution as an apparatus. While an archive is an apparatus with its own constitutive power—choosing the records to be included in its collection; establishing the conditions for access to them; ordering the corpus of documents and subordinating it to specific keywords and categories—a critical position would question this very power and the authority from which it draws its legitimacy. Critique is an emancipatory process of thought in its effort to elude the snares of institutionalized, and therefore domineering, knowledge, or, to use Foucault's terms, an act of "desubjugation of the subject in the context of . . . the politics of truth."<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary art (but not only here), it has become common to adopt the form of the archive or, more precisely, some of its elements (i.e., the collection as a practice) as a critical response to established knowledge production. Such archives, while functioning similarly to those they intend to critique, try to shift the focus—that is, through a different set of criteria—to neglected aspects, thus making visible and thinkable alternative ways of understanding an issue. They thereby critique predominant power structures in order to replace them with new ones. Others work with an obsessive imperative of storing masses of material.

But fewer works reflect critically on the archive itself. Is it possible to think of a structure that functions like a framework for its own critique? A structure that, at one and the same time, reproduces *and*

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 44.

undermines the established logic and figure of the archive? A critical archive would then be a heterotopic, self-reflecting form that follows an unstable order that it critically adopts. Rather than constituting a regular form that would ensure a steady access to heterogeneous contents, the archive would itself appear as a multiplicity, amalgamating dissensual logics in order to generate an ongoing confrontation of critical positions.

*Stefanie Baumann currently teaches at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts in Beirut.*

#### ADHAM HAFEZ

If an independent or private archive or collection of artworks is a radical gesture in and of itself, the same gesture in a country where all forms of memory are policed, politicized, and hidden from its people is a violent critique of power, and of essentialist discourses about culture. After the military coup d'état of 1952, led by Nasser and the free officers, cultural institutions in Egypt were nationalized with a view to creating an "Egyptian and Arab" identity. The new ministry to take care of cultural affairs was, significantly, named the "Ministry of National Guidance and Culture." The name itself deserves a moment of pause.

The Egyptian state around the time of the late president Sadat established the State Security, which was run by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. An institution that was set up to defend the security of the citizens was suddenly defending the security of the state's apparatuses. With the constant strengthening of the police state in Egypt, the country's cultural sites that under Nasser had been re-created as "national" centers became sites of control where memory was nothing but an exercise in shifting frames and contexts. Nothing was included there without its context or frame, and the frame could change frequently, alternately obscuring or revealing the material it hosted.

It is no wonder that in Egypt archives are often set on fire. Not the material they contain, but the actual physical buildings: the vehicles and the physical structures themselves. In fact, the archive's content here is the site, the policed gate, or the state that controls who can enter the archive. The content is not the document, manuscript, book, or digital file. An archive in Egypt is a place that we as citizens are encouraged *not* to go, so as *not* to remember. We are constantly choreographed away from archives by the state: by the aggressive police units inside

and around the national archives; by the fact that one needs to hand in one's name and identity card number before reading a book; and by the fact that you need to register the book title you read next to your name, in dusty large-sized notation books that can be found at the archive's entry gates. Perhaps the large, dusty logbook full of names and book titles—the gateway into Egyptian archives—is the truly critical archive, for it is here that the state engages with how people access memory, its sites, and its history. It is here that the state constantly collects information from the people, each time they are in contact with an archive, a collection, or a public library. At the gates of the national archives, the citizens are producing knowledge.

*Adham Hafez is a researcher, choreographer, and performer based in Cairo.*

#### INA BLOM

Many types of critical archives have been created, and the past decades of art production have seen a proliferation of practices that produce alternative histories or memories by exposing the ordering principle of the official archive to various types of an-archival inventions or interventions. In this context, however, I want to draw attention to the redefinition of the archive that emerges when changes in writing and recording technologies challenge traditional notions of the permanence and stability of the archival document.<sup>4</sup> A digital age centered on the concepts of permanent transfer and immediate access transforms not just the law of the archive and the question of what it means to store information for future use, but the very definition of social memory.

In *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), Maurice Halbwachs described social memory as enacted through ritual, language, art, architecture, and institutions. Shared memory was a function of persistence over time—a stability and capacity for storage that contrasted with the fleeting character of individual memory.<sup>5</sup> However, today's new time technologies make us question this description of how collectives remember, as well as the social ontology that it presupposes. Interconnection through real-time networks gives unprecedented priority to the present and the future, and it also complicates the dis-

4 As is discussed in Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Rumoren der Archive* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2002).

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1925).

inction between internalized and externalized memory functions. Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman have used the term “mnemonic control” in their description of the way in which control today is increasingly oriented toward a preemptive ordering of future memories, or the virtual domain of the not-yet-lived: Such control cannot be understood without paying attention to the intimate intertwining of media technologies and subjective temporalities.<sup>6</sup> Today, some of the most interesting critical archives are those that take an archeological approach to this new ordering of memory, moving deep inside technical machinery in order to discover and rethink the reordering of collective memory facilitated by the various affordances of electronic network formations. Such practices are not new, but seem to have appeared alongside the expansion of electronic media in the 1960s; a number of inventions and experiments made in the context of early analog video art attest to such preoccupation with the changing nature of social memory. While critical media is an old concept, the idea that many of these new media practices constitute critical archives is of relatively recent date and worthy of further study and discussion.

*Ina Blom is Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo.*

#### MIRIAM BASILIO

At least 1,704 executions took place in the Camp de la Bota between 1939 and 1952 during General Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship. In 2002, Francesc Abad began collaborating with historians, activists, and family members of the deceased, creating a website (<http://www.francescabad.com/campdelabota/>), exhibitions, and publications to create a virtual site of memory documenting these atrocities. Located on the waterfront at the end of the Avinguda Diagonal on the border between Barcelona and Sant Adrià de Besò, Camp de la Bota was also the location of a shantytown where political and economic refugees displaced after the Spanish Civil War settled. Abad framed his project as part of a larger narrative of economic development linked to the political amnesia that resulted from the urban redevelopment that began when the 1992 Olympics displaced working-class residents. He has had

6 Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman, “Mnemonic Control,” in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, eds. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Wilse (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

a long trajectory as a conceptual artist concerned with language, the archive, politics, and memory. Abad calls this project an “open archive,” emphasizing the collaborative aspect of the work and the catalytic role that it may have. For example, survivors and relatives have come forward with testimonies or documents. In sharing documents and oral histories online and by organizing exhibitions between 2004 and 2007, Abad has created virtual and ephemeral memorial sites that are open, dialogical, and evolving rather than static and institutional. The website—in Catalan, Spanish, and English—is divided into sections: people, testimonies, history, exhibitions, and publications. There is also an interactive map of the exhibition’s itinerary—it traveled to eleven cities where executed people had resided. The website also includes links to videos of oral histories, digitized photographs, letters, archival documents, and texts from the two exhibition catalogs. It presents formerly private family mementos and archival material often hidden during the dictatorship, and the stories of people who overcame a lifetime of terror and intimidation to speak. The video format signals the intimate nature of testimony and the urgent need to record accounts of elderly survivors. Visitors to the exhibition or website gain insight into the work of the archivist, historian, or family member attempting to recover information that is often fragmentary yet can serve as documentation of repression and political killings. The open-ended format also opens up a space to think about the experience of trauma itself, the impact of terror, and the passage of time on memory.

*Miriam M. Basilio is Professor of Art History and Museum Studies at New York University.*

#### TIMOTHY MURRAY

What I call the “archival event” requires a critical rethinking of archivization in the age of electronic art and digital culture, by curator, artist, and researcher alike. At stake is a reconceptualization of the artistic archive away from critical dependency on the psychology of identification, the heroics of connoisseurship, and the taint of collecting. In receiving the archival event, participants in assemblage, reading, and artistic creation open themselves to unforeseen impacts of critical and cultural transformation.

The critical impact of the archival event is exemplified by The Wen Pulin Archive of Chinese Avant-Garde Art, held in the Rose Goldsen

Archive of New Media Art at Cornell University. The videomaker and critic Wen Pulin had been videotaping Chinese contemporary art events since 1984. Given Wen’s participation in the Tiananmen uprising and his subsequent self-exile in Tibet, I became concerned that these tapes might not continue to remain a subject of indifference to the authorities. To initiate the founding critical intervention of the Goldsen Archive, I then worked with Wen from 2002 to 2004 to digitize the tapes for duplicate preservation in the Goldsen Archive, where they would remain free of any potential interference.

The range of materials stored somewhat haphazardly on these 360 hours of tape testifies to the rather natural archival growth of electronic art within the context of contemporary Chinese art. Included is the infamous Avant-Garde Exhibition in 1989 and its abrupt closure that helped spark the Tiananmen Square Incident, thus attesting to the political complexities of electronic performance and contemporary art in China. Wen’s exceptionally radical event of archiving Chinese avant-garde art lies at the center of his country’s momentous contemporary art production, as does his manipulation of the video camera and, now, the computer. Prominent throughout the archive are related examples of how frequently Chinese artists turned the electronic apparatus of video surveillance against its governmental agents. Wen Pulin’s random accumulation of radical footage, moreover, exemplifies the critical archival function articulated by Foucault. The “statements in the density of the accumulation . . . never cease to modify, to disturb, to overthrow, and sometimes to destroy” the clear focal point of the images they mean to archive.<sup>7</sup> As users of the Goldsen Archive discover, the resistant processes of electronic and digital accumulation remain fundamental to any comprehension of the radical socio-cultural legacy of contemporary art and its archival event.

*Timothy Murray is Curator at the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art, Cornell Library, Ithaca.*

#### BILJANA PURIĆ

The critical archive as enacted within the exhibition context opposes the traditional structuring of the archive as a nondialogic knowledge base, but is instead an open site for nonnormative meaning production.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 141.

It actively curates the multiplicity of positions with no hierarchical concerns. As an open and living structure, it welcomes critical dialogue and input from the outside world. It also avoids hierarchical structuring or the imposition of any form or practice as normative, thus dismantling power relations inherent in the construction of knowledge.

Two exhibitions staged in Belgrade recently—the 54th installment of the October Salon and the exhibition *In Praise of Deserters*—work as alternative knowledge bases for dominant historical and artistic narratives, and can serve as examples of critical archive practices in the exhibition context. Both shows tackle some of the recurring issues in Serbian politics, such as the persistence of patriarchal values and norms and the myth of war heroism. The October Salon focused on feminist art produced mainly in the area of the former Yugoslavia, while *In Praise of Deserters* showed a collection of rarely seen photo and video documentation of civil and artistic antiwar protests in Belgrade during the 1990s. They created a rupture in the traditional understanding of history as a singular, linear narrative, substituting for it alternative histories that escape from a prescribed marginality and preconfigured slots in order to bring into dialogue different social conditions within the current moment. Such gestures create an open and nonexclusionary knowledge base in which institutionalized cultural and social practices and images are dialogically investigated and qualified.

The exhibitions also provoked questions regarding the function of traditional archiving as a practice that sediments knowledge into discrete spatial and temporal localities.

The critical archive lacks two of the defining attributes of the traditional archive—its authority and closed structure. It offers histories in place of history, substitutes normativity with dialog, and instead of closed structure offers an open and living one that is in constant interaction with the outer world.

*Biljana Purić is an art and film critic based in Serbia.*

#### SVEN LÜTTICKEN

The dialectic of artwork and archival document has now been incorporated in the very fabric of artistic practice itself. At one time the distinction between them was relatively clear: artworks were a class of artifacts demanding public display and aesthetic contemplation; by

contrast, the documents kept in archives were either kept under wrap by the state, or accessed only by a relatively small group of researchers. Ever since Aby Warburg, it has been one of the tasks of art historians to reconnect the museum and the archive and to problematize aestheticist-formalist and teleological approaches. However, the dichotomy itself has remained intact.

Museums such as the Van Abbemuseum have now integrated their “collections” and their “archives” to a significant extent, in keeping with artistic practices that have increasingly incorporated different forms of archival research—from museum archives to all kinds of historical and political archives. These institutional and artistic developments both have their roots in the alleged “dematerialization” of art in Conceptualism—which, although not a dematerialization in the strict sense of the word, did entail a shift from the production of more or less unique objects in conventional artistic media to printed matter and “ephemera.” Since these types of artifacts are traditionally associated with archives and libraries, old distinctions were undermined. Of course, Conceptualism and institutional critique also problematized the scopic paradigm of modernism through the use of language, and the more recent forms of investigative and research-based art are scarcely imaginable without the entwined genealogies of Conceptual art and institutional practice.

A detailed engagement with the historical record—or what has been kept off the historical record—is crucial to finding one’s bearings in a contested present, and in that sense artists can only be applauded who have delved into the holdings of, for instance, the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, or the Centre International de Recherches sur l’Anarchisme in Lausanne.<sup>8</sup> Still, while such practices would certainly appear to be more progressive than the ongoing mass production of precious neo-objects for Gagosian, Guggenheim, and the like, this “progressiveness” is also problematic. Increasingly, history is transformed into a deposit of potentially valuable materials to be mined by post-Fordist workers. In other words, we are dealing with a kind of productivist mobilization of the historical record. Or perhaps,

<sup>8</sup> Artists who have used the holdings of the International Institute of Social History include Zachary Formwalt and Nicoline van Harskamp; artists who have done research at the Centre International de Recherches sur l’Anarchisme include Nils Norman and Rob Hamelijnck and Nienke Terpstra, the publishers of *Fucking Good Art*.

as Hito Steyerl has suggested, one should speak of circulationism rather than productivism: the endless recycling, postproduction, and acceleration of images and texts as the equivalent of production in the post-Internet economy.

As Steyerl notes, such a neo-productivism

might also just go as wrong as its predecessor, by aligning itself with a Stalinist cult of productivity, acceleration, and heroic exhaustion. Historic productivism was—let's face it—totally ineffective and defeated by an overwhelming bureaucratic apparatus of surveillance/workfare early on. And it is quite likely that circulationism—instead of restructuring circulation—will just end up as ornament to an internet that looks increasingly like a mall filled with nothing but Starbucks franchises personally managed by Joseph Stalin.<sup>9</sup>

It is best to acknowledge that we're already there: that we live in neo-Stalinist times. Imagine that the year is 1935 or thereabouts, and try to act accordingly as you toil the archive in search for constellations of snippets that produce sparks of *Jetztzeit* and contribute to breaking open the deadlocked present.

*Sven Lütticken teaches art history at the University of Amsterdam.*

#### CLAIRE HSU

I cut out a *Time* magazine article in 2011 on the science of optimism that has been taped to the wall above my desk ever since. Its instant appeal, among the barrage of other material we sift through on a daily basis, may relate to the fact that I generally consider myself an optimist, but have little understanding of what makes me so. More specifically, perhaps it offers insight into what many have identified as an archival turn within the field.

The article points out that the hippocampus is the structure within the brain that is crucial to memory. A human being with a damaged hippocampus is unable to remember or create images of the future. Scientists who study memory propose that memories are susceptible to inaccuracies because the neural system responsible for remembering

9 Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?," *e-flux Journal* 49 (November 2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/>.

the past may not have evolved for memory alone. The core function of the memory system may, in fact, be to imagine the future—to enable us to prepare for what is yet to come.

Optimism plays an essential role in this process, for we must be able to think positively to imagine the future and ourselves in it. Optimism, the article proposes, starts with the human ability to mentally travel through time, between the past and envisioned future. This ability to conjure multiple moments in time is critical to our survival and that of upcoming generations. Awareness of mortality on its own would have led to the end of our existence. So optimism and the ability to project a bright future have evolved alongside the knowledge of our inevitable death.

In that sense, we might argue that the promise of the archive in today's digital world (a recuperated hippocampus, if we were to draw an analogy) is a function of optimism, and, ultimately, of a will to survive and progress. Today's archive is not a place where objects come to rest, but a space that critically engages the past to imagine an alternative future. We would all agree that with instantaneous access to reports on human carnage the world over, we are in desperate need to conceive different systems of order.

The archive today is a tool, a vehicle, and a space that provides the resources to potentially counter, complicate, enrich, and re-imagine prevailing systems relating to the production, circulation, and ownership of knowledge. At the Asia Art Archive, this is happening in the discipline of art history, and particularly in the histories of modern and contemporary art, which are specifically framed through a Westward-facing lens. The archive has evolved into a multifunctional space—it no longer simply orders "objects" into a structure, but it serves as a platform that enables the co-creation of meaning and experiences.

As we try to imagine alternative spaces from which knowledge is to be considered and produced, Asia Art Archive is not concerned with ownership—who has access to the knowledge in our archive and who does not, or who can create knowledge from the material in the archive and who cannot. Rather, we are excited by the possibilities of challenging the authoritative power and control originally associated with the archive, and, alongside others in the field, generating a space where members of the community can come together on equal ground to research, debate, and discuss. In the end, it is our committed engage-



ment with artists and the emulation of their strategies that will keep us critically (and optimistically) involved in the imagination of a future that is only possible through time travel.

*Claire Hsu is the founder and director of the Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.*

#### PAULINE BOUDRY AND RENATE LORENZ

Last week we delivered an artist talk where we used the term “archive” quite colloquially, speaking about a number of photographs from the late 19th century that we had used in the context of our film installation *Toxic* (2012). These photographs show so-called *péderastes*, people who were accused of being homosexuals and transvestites and who were caught by the police in the 1870s. Since the police had not yet developed a photographic apparatus, they took the arrested alleged homosexuals to commercial studios. On the photographs you see them in a bourgeois surrounding. In contrast to the setting, they show quite “faggy” poses and appear as dandies, or in drag as a woman in a long dress, or in some kind of carnivalesque uniform.

Speaking of the archive, we were quite unhappy with that colloquiality. What exactly does the word “archive” refer to: Is it the massive authoritative stone building of the police department where we found the pictures? Or is it rather the interior design of an old bourgeois library such as Trinity College in Cambridge, where for another of our projects we had to put on white cotton gloves so we could see the 150-year-old residues of the house maid Hannah Cullwick, residues of an “unfinished past,” as Mathias Danbolt so nicely put it, that became the starting point for our project *Normal Work* (2007)?<sup>10</sup> Would we rather speak of the materials, photographs, songs, diaries, and scores as an archive? Or do we address as archive the normalizing gesture with which these materials are organized and more or less hidden in the library (at Trinity, we had to formally apply with a serious “straight” research question to see the materials)? The archive is of course not an innocent institution. It is the continuation of colonial power, the pre-eminent instrument of organizing difference and of safeguarding reproductive futurism. An ironic quotation from the punk movement of the 1970s cuts right to the chase: “get married, have kids, build a house. . . .”

<sup>10</sup> Mathias Danbolt, “Touching History: Art, Performance and Politics in Queer Times” (PhD dissertation, University of Bergen, 2013).

A “critical archive” is thus a paradox, if we understand critique as a practice of disobedience, of trying not to be completely subjected to a certain institution, as Foucault has suggested. Consequently, a critical archive might, for instance, demand practices of visualizing and disobeying the rules of visualization at the same time. In his characterization of the “ephemeral,” queer theorist José Muñoz gives the example of a performance by the artist Tony Just, who visited a run-down public men’s tearoom where (semi)public sex had taken place many times. In his performance, Just scrubbed the space and applied intense labor to make it look shiny and clean. Interestingly, his visualization of queer sex did not happen by showing the traces of sex but by eliminating them, a process of erasure that, as Muñoz says, “redoubles and marks the systematic erasure of minoritarian histories.”<sup>11</sup> This performance of eliminating traces is, at the same time, a visualizing practice. Looking at the photographs of *péderastes* we mentioned before, we could see their gestures as critical archives as well. Their fagginess is included in the setting, and they queer that setting at the same time: the settings of the police who arrested them, the photographic apparatus itself, and the bourgeoisie who utter their spatial interpellations in the photographic studio that tried to call them to order.

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#### AMELIA BARIKIN

For his project *The Worldly House* at DOCUMENTA (13) in 2012, Danish-born artist Tue Greenfort took over an old wooden birdhouse situated amongst the lushly forested pathways of Kassel’s Karlsaue Park. The house was originally built in the 1950s for the black swans that live amongst the park’s network of canals.<sup>12</sup> Now the house is largely neglected; the roof is covered with moss and lichen, the structure tinted with a patina of organic greenery. Raccoons sometimes make their homes here. Access to the interior is via a small footbridge, and the floor is raised above a canal filled with fish, which swim under and around the structure and can be seen from both inside and outside the house.

<sup>11</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>12</sup> See the presentation of *The Worldly House* at [tuegreenfort.net/post/34698314235/the-worldly-house-2012-walking-through-the](http://tuegreenfort.net/post/34698314235/the-worldly-house-2012-walking-through-the).

Within this place of human function and animal function, Greenfort worked to create an archive that engaged with the philosophies of Donna Haraway, most specifically Haraway's research into interspecies coevolution. Browsing through bookshelves and texts—which include theory books and notebooks, video projections and artists' films, sound installations and computer screens—visitors to *The Worldly House* were granted access to a hefty archive of material relating to Haraway's thinking on the interaction between the human and nonhuman. Historical and new materials were combined; virtual databases were set against paper-based records. Greenfort also invited numerous artists to donate works for inclusion in the house—a gesture that resonated with Andy Warhol's earlier obsession with instant archiving, or the collecting of things solely for the purpose of archiving them.<sup>13</sup>

As a frame for both knowledge preservation and knowledge production, the archive is a valuable tool for epistemological processing. No two persons can ever have the same experience of an archive, since the pathways of navigation remain multiple and open. The archive also demands time. It needs a temporal commitment to unfold. In the archive, history—once considered distinct from the present—is mapped and then remapped as reconfigurable spatiotemporal data. But the archive may also be considered a living form, subject to processes of evolution. By remaining “open to the elements” as a temporary and permeable structure, *The Worldly House* blocks the idea of the archive as a closed repository or registry through its explicit engagement with the contingencies of site. Circled by birds above and navigated unknowingly by fish below, the human-made contents of the building enter into a strange dialogue with their earthly and nonhuman surrounds, a dialogue that suggests equivalences of value between the content of the records stored within (art, philosophy, text) and their worldly actualizations without (trees, sky, water, grass). The critical potential of this intense site specificity lies in its “anti-isolationist” stance: the discursive function of the archive is re-engaged and “tested” via the unscripted and uncontrollable contact between human and nonhuman visitors to the building. In a way, Greenfort's project suggests that one of the most significant of all archives is not a material collection

<sup>13</sup> Andy Warhol, in *The Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether (London and Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006).

of things or documents or images, but is rather the vast expanses of genetic materials that connect organic life—a network of cellular memories that evolves in coexistence with other living organisms (as Haraway writes, “to be one is always to *become with many*”).<sup>14</sup> Originally, the double meaning of the word “archive” signified both the contents and the place for storage of the records. Perhaps archives are then already a form of “worldly housekeeping,” a way of housing new connections, to paraphrase Thomas Hirschhorn, between things that might otherwise seem impossible to connect.<sup>15</sup>

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#### CRISTIÁN GÓMEZ-MOYA

In the Southern Cone of Latin America, in the shadow of human rights and their post-neoliberal effects, archives devoted to political memory have begun to be exhibited, in a new documentary language, in the fields of contemporary art and culture. Beyond the aphorism of culture and of barbarism, these archives can now be examined outside of the habitual mnemonic biases—the bias of the visual as the only form of access, and that of the specter as a form of absent humanity.

One need look no further than such exhibitions on human rights to notice that such archives have taken on a deterritorialized patrimonial value in the contemporary culture of tele-memory. Nothing is new in affirming the artistic and cultural “memory boom,” linked as it is to the museification of curatorial spaces that are themselves linked to the virtualization of horror: from memory and human rights museums to multimedia documentation centers, interactive galleries, Web platforms, digital library collections, and so forth. These forms of exhibition often also house documentary archives in diverse technological forms (audio files, movies, paper records, videos, graphics, maps, databases, etc.).

Recognized as deploying a politics of images rather than as stable collections in the manner of a traditional taxonomic archive, these new

<sup>14</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> Hirschhorn says: “To connect what cannot be connected, this is exactly what my work as an artist is.” Thomas Hirschhorn in “Interview with Okwui Enwezor,” *Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, eds. James Rondeau and Suzanne Ghez (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000), 32.

forms of exhibition are managed by familiar administrative apparatuses, consisting of electronic registers, protocols of indexation, copy-right, reproduction of images, and so on. However, we can also observe in such exhibitions new forms of *documentality*, since they allow people to interact with these registers by examining, photocopying, scanning, photographing, downloading, collecting, and forwarding the documents they contain, rather than merely contemplating them. Despite the tragic fate of these documents, such exhibitions configure a performative system, a kind of relational space associated with a form of life, a mediatized *bios*. We might say that in this way they expand their bio-political reach toward the exchange between communities and documents, generating new forms of life that are mediated by reproductions, transfers, and even documentary modifications that visitors can put into effect.

The curation of contemporary art, based as it is on the documentality of human rights, has provoked an important ontological turn in the archival administration within museums and galleries. In the future, it may be impossible to say where a political document comes from or what its origin is, since the only relevant criterion is the opening of the archives and their performance within a community. If one had to think through a “critical archive” of the memory of human rights with regard to the possibility of their exhibition, one would thus have to consider the crisis in the administration of memory in the era of living memory. That is, consider the very right of a community to activate the archive and intervene in it as a form of life in the archive.

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## SEEING A WORLD APART VISUAL REALITY IN MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI'S *CHUNG KUO/CINA*

JENNY LIN

*To me it seems positive that I did not want to go on searching for an imaginary China, and that I entrusted myself to visual reality.*

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI, 1974

### DOCUMENTING DESIRE

“Dear Antonioni, Your vigilance as an artist is an amorous vigilance, a vigilance of desire.”<sup>1</sup> So wrote Roland Barthes in a letter to Italian film *auteur* Michelangelo Antonioni. Certainly desire, usually unfulfilled, lies at the heart of Antonioni’s films. Audiences witnessed yearning for impossible intimacies in *L’Avventura* (*The Adventure*) (1960), *La Notte* (*The Night*) (1961), and *L’Eclisse* (*The Eclipse*) (1962)—Antonioni’s trilogy on emotional alienation set against post–World War II modernization in Italy. *Zabriskie Point* (1970), a portrait of US capitalism and counterculture in the late 1960s, concludes with the spectacular destruction of objects of bourgeois desire, while *Professione: Reporter* (*The Passenger*) (1975) portrays a documentarian’s desire to trade in his staid identity and embark on an adventure doomed to failure. In between these feature films, wanderlust figures into Antonioni’s lesser-known documentary work, *Chung Kuo/Cina* (*China*, first in Chinese,

1 Roland Barthes, “Letter to Antonioni,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 311 (May 1980): 85.