Anarchival Proposals in Design Anthropology

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With this position paper we wish to introduce the notion of the anarchive into the discourses and experimental practices surrounding the emerging field of design anthropology. In so doing, we want to sketch out three aspects of the anarchive and what we term anarchival practices in relation to design anthropology. These aspects relate to 1) the anarchive as a living and processual archive in the digital age to be used creatively in the design process, 2) the anarchive as a way to tap into that which cannot be archived in a traditional sense (affective/relational) and 3) anarchival practices as setting an agenda for a (design) anthropology of the otherwise as an alter-politics of design. It should be noted that these aspects are very much in-the-making and all serve as propositions to engage with the joint thematics presented in the research network for design and anthropology so far. We view archives and, in particular, anarchives as concerns within both design and anthropology, and, consequently, something that might evolve into a shared experimentation in design anthropology.

During the past decades the nature of the archive has been up for discussion especially following Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault's postmodern voices and deconstructivist scepticism in relation to historical documentation and power (Manoff 2004:10). They - among others - have shed light on how historical documentation cannot be seen as an objective representation of the past, but consists of a range of objects that have been kept for different reasons. Put differently, there is no access to the past which is not mediated. Historian Dominick LaCapra describes a danger when looking at the archive as a substitute for 'reality' in a literary sense since the very process of selecting material to document something entails an interpretation (Manoff 2004:14). In his *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault describes the archive as: 'the system of discursivity' which establishes the possibility of what can be said. Knowledge and power, following Foucault, is an inseparable part of the archive (Manoff 2004:18). Derrida argues that there: "...is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (Derrida in Manoff 2004:9).

In his book from 2014 *Digital Memory and the Archive*, and more specifically in the chapter "Underway to the Dual System: Classical Archives and Digital Memory", media philosopher and archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst talks about the effects of digitization on archival practices, in particular relating to media and art: "Dynamic information rasters and new search methods that go beyond the rigid indexes of traditional finding aids come into play." (Ernst 2013:81). The index becomes more than a search- or classification construct, it is actively shaping the experience of the archive and is "self-operant and self-aware" (Ernst 2013:83). When talking about digital archives and algorithmic objects, Ernst states that "Operative mathematics (in other words, the world of computers) has less to do with concrete numbers than with relations and is thus structurally related to the essence of the vectorially linked digital archive (...) it is no longer a question of reactivating objects, but of relations." (Ernst 2013:83). This new archive is an emergent archive, changing relations through the interaction with it; from read-only to user-generated, a "...generative, participative form of archival reading" (Ernst 2013:81f). Ernst uses the Internet as an example, and argues that it "...is a collection not just of unforeseen texts but of sound and images as well, an anarchive of sensory data for which no genuine archival culture has been developed so far in the occident" (Ernst 2013:139). We take up this notion of the anarchive up as part of an ongoing research project entitled *Immediations: Media, Art, Event*, where we are currently working across artistic, designerly and philosophical fields under the heading of research-creation or research-through-design (Frayling 1993). In the following, we sketch out three aspects of the anarchive and anarchival practices that we believe engage with important design anthropological considerations.

1) The anarchive as a living and processual archive in the digital age to be used actively in the design process

As part of the research center CAVI (www.cavi.au.dk), one of the authors has been engaged in a variety of participatory design processes at the intersection of interaction design and digital aesthetics throughout the last decade. From this has emerged a general interest in the active documentation of design processes, both as part of the individual process, as a way to carry out research on design processes, and as a way to foster creative resonance between different design processes. As part of this, CAVI has developed a so-called Process Reflection Tool (PRT) which aims to document the design process as a range of events and sub-events (Dalsgaard and Halskov 2012). So far, PRT has mostly been used for the design researchers to 'collect' information and documentation in the form of pictures, text and video during the design process to be reflected

upon, either as part of the process, but mostly when the process has ended. However, if we take from Ernst that digital archives might be more about activating relations, there is a creative potential inherent in working with design documentation as a kind of participatory and processual anarchiving, bringing together both designers, users and other stakeholders in the shared creation of collaborative design materials that can be used across different design processes.

2) The anarchive as a way to tap into that which cannot be archived in a traditional sense

Following on from the above, the notion of the anarchive also opens a way to engage with that which cannot be archived, as stated by Ernst. Ernst talks about sensory data that might be difficult to 'capture' in traditional forms of documentation. The same might be said for e.g. atmospheres or affective tonalities of, for instance, particular design events such as workshops, field studies and so forth. From an anthropological point of view, fieldnotes might be said to be the very foundation of insights, but when aiming at documenting what lies beyond words, a range of challenges emerge where anthropology might benefit from collaborating with design practices and possibilities. What happens in situations where we cannot describe what is happening visually? How do we develop ways of engaging with complex entanglements of sound, words, smells, sensations, spiritual forces ecc. that might end up being left out in the design documentation? Often the focus in our notes - the very foundation of our analysis - ends up being defined what we can capture with words. This relates to ongoing debates within archival practices in anthropology in the wake of "the ontological turn" (Holbraad et. al. 2007; Venkatesan 2010; Pedersen 2013). Anthropologists can be said to face not only a range of theoretical and analytical new openings, but also methodological challenges turning towards ontology, materiality ecc. This turn has, from our point of view, a range of methodological challenges that are not deeply adressed in the debate which mostly takes a theoretical/philosophical/analytical shape.

3) The anarchival practices as setting an agenda for a (design) anthropology of the otherwise as an alter-politics of design

Anthropological engagements with f.i. postcolonialism or minorities are often inspired by Foucault and pay a thorough and enriching attention to how some voices are left out of public discourses and archives thus questioning objectivity and especially representation (Said 1979). In anthropological encounters with "the power in relation to the archive" there is a call for a participation which is more broadly recognized in the discipline concerning how to put forward the voices of the people

whose perspectives the state excludes - or at least to shed light on how they are excluded. Following this the anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli is f.i. working with indigenous people in Australia whose voices are given little or no space in the public discourse in relation to defining what the surrounding environment consists of entailing spirits and magical forces. Povinelli is through a media project trying to empower the worlds of indigenous people. In this vein, anthropologist Ghassan Hage (2012) introduces the concept alter-politics as an anthropological possibility to critically exceed who we are. No matter who we are as individuals or as society we can always be in the world in another way (Hage 2012:289). These insights can find their way into design processes through forms of anarchival practices, opening up the contexts of intervention for critical design anthropological engagements, an alter-politics of design.

Arguably, and intentionally, this position paper asks more questions than it answers, engaging with themes across the Network's preceding seminars, opening the venue for fruitful discussions.

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Links

Page visited 14/6-2015:

Povinelli, Elizabeth. (2011). New Media/Other Worlds? The lecture is part of the ICI Lecture Series On Complementarity.

https://www.ici-berlin.org/de/videos/povinelli/part/1/
https://www.ici-berlin.org/de/videos/povinelli/part/2/