

ANDREW KÖTTING'S *LOUYRE: THIS OUR STILL LIFE* AN ARCHIVAL READING

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the experimental documentary *Louyre: This Our Still Life* (2011) by the subversive British filmmaker Andrew Köttling, drawing on contemporary conceptualizations of archival art. It reads the film as “anarchival” through the lens of Derrida’s psychoanalytic deconstruction of the concept of the archive and the curational discourses that were influenced by it. Furthermore, placing the film within a democratic horizon, the paper argues that the film is also a counter-archive, in that, as a public archive that sublimates trauma, it enunciates counter-hegemonic, non-patriarchal discourses on art, disability and care.

KEYWORDS: Köttling; archive; Derrida; anarchival; counter-archive

1. Introduction

This paper explores the autobiographical experimental documentary *Louyre: This Our Still Life* (Kötting 2011) by the British avant-garde filmmaker and multimedia artist Andrew Kötting (b.1953), through the prism of contemporary conceptualizations of archival art. The film is a highly idiosyncratic art/home movie, filmed for over twenty years in a remote farmhouse in the French Pyrenees. It focuses on Kötting's disabled daughter Eden, surviving and growing up in nature, against all medical odds, by doing art and being loved. Kötting cuts-up, in a distinctive zany way, fragmented audiovisual archives of his burdened but immanently creative family life with imagery from the majestic mountainous landscape, voice-overs that feel archival, as well as culturally freighted prose poetry in uppercase subtitles. From the close reading of the form of the documentary, we argue that an "anarchival impulse" (Foster 2006) spills throughout Kötting's dadaist, punk and anarchic aesthetic. Besides considering the film "anarchival", in our interpretation of its meaning, we probe to what extent it can also be considered a "counter-archive", in the sense of not simply an oppositional artistic discursive practice, but an antagonistic and yet re-articulating artistic discourse on art, care and disability (Karaba 2011; Kouros and Karaba 2012). Before introducing our archival approach to the film, it is useful to provide a brief context of Kötting's work and style.

Following the generation of British film artists, like Derek Jarman, and influenced by American experimental film makers, like Stan Brakhage, Kötting's diverse oeuvre spanning almost thirty years – he has created performance films and video works, artist's books, gallery installations and works for digital and animation platforms, often collaborating with other artists and mostly with his daughter Eden – is not easily categorized, since it circumvents conventions both of narrative cinema and experimental cinema, as well as of fine art (Evans 2007; Mollaghan 2010, 125; Scovell 2019; Sinclair 2012; UCA in Canterbury, n.d.).¹ From the middle of the 1980s to the middle of the 1990s, he created a number of short experimental films, often produced via the London Film-Makers Co-op, in which he experimented with format, texture, sound, his childhood memories and the

¹ Kötting archives and provides access to many of his films and video works, along with other visual and textual material in his meticulous website, where one can also find Eden Kötting's art work (Kötting, n.d.).

invention of marginal characters, with a distinctive absurdist, dadaist, punk and DIY aesthetic (Curtis 2007, 126; Kemp n.d.; Mollaghan 2010, 125). According to artists' film expert and curator David Curtis (2007): "[Kötting] has been identified as committed absurdist, but the surface chaos and anarchy of his films conceal the instincts of a perceptive documentary-maker" (126).

Kötting gained a wider audience and recognition with his first feature documentary *Gallivant* (1996). It is a road/family movie about his three-month clockwise journey around the coast of Britain, with his grandmother Gladys and his daughter Eden, in which he records their encounters with marginal and eccentric characters, nevertheless with the British landscape as protagonist. From then on, his work is underpinned by a psycho-geographical approach² to places, journeys and landscapes (Evans 2007; Scovell 2019), in which he explores the nature of performance within public space, both into actual and mental/psychic landscapes.³ He also teaches time-based media and, according to his own research statement: "He takes landscape and journeys as springboards for autobiographical inquiries into identity, belonging, history and place" (UCA in Canterbury, n.d.).

Kötting's oeuvre has at its core the life and art relationship with his disabled daughter Eden (b. 1988), who was born with Joubert syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes severe neurological complications, mainly affecting movement, sight, and speech, and is linked to a shortened life expectancy. In 1989, Eden's mother, Leila Macmillan, Kötting, and Eden, moved from London to Louyre in the French Pyrenees, in a remote old farmhouse, where they lived on and off until 2010. In Kötting's words:

I started to make a record of her life and all the people in it. I was projecting her life, creating a soundscape and images of everything around her in those first couple of years. It was absurdist and nonsensical and became the film *Hoi-Polloi* [1990] [...] I need to record her as much as possible because of her life expectancy. (Kötting et al. 2006)

Faced with Eden's mortality, Kötting's archival impulse urged him to keep film diaries with a Nizo Super 8 Camera at first and the last three or four years also with

² The concept of psycho-geography was developed by the situationists and refers to "the study of the precise laws and the specific effects of the geographical environments, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviors of individuals" (Debord 1955, 23).

³ His *Earthworks Trilogy* – consisting of the resolutely independent feature films *This Filthy Earth* (2001), *Ivul* (2009) and *Lek and the Dogs* (2018) – is an investigation in controversial psycho-geographical storytelling.

a cheap Samsung digital camera. After facing the difficulties of the first few years, when Eden even had to learn to eat (Sadhu 2011), from her early childhood, Kötting initiated her to art and she started drawing and painting found objects from around the house, “still lifes”. Originally, Kötting’s intention was to publish a book with Eden’s art work accompanied with his prose poetry. Eventually the artists’ book project, which has been in various exhibitions, “spilled” into a film project and the almost one-hour documentary *Louyre: This Our Still Life* premiered in competition at the 2011 Venice Film Festival (Kötting 2012). He frequently archives versions of his works and collaborations in different media and for that he uses the notion of “spillage”. According to his research statement:

[he] has a wide range of formal interests but also refuses to adopt conventional ideas of closure around artworks in any medium and therefore embraces the notions of “spillage” from one discipline into another. Ideas and images frequently migrate between media, echoing and amplifying this spillage. (UCA in Canterbury, n.d.)

For the close reading and interpretation of the film, the paper employs contemporary conceptualizations of archival art. Since approximately the middle of 1990s, the so-called “archival turn” in the arts and humanities has radically questioned conventional perceptions of the archive solely as an institutional place of preservation or a repository of documents and historical material, related with bureaucratic practices and formal institutions that represent preservation, origin, authority and permanence (Karaba 2011; Kouros and Karaba 2012; Merewether 2006; Stoler 2009). It is widely agreed that the discussion started from the 1970s, with Michel Foucault’s expansion of the notion of the archive, as a tool in his epistemology of archaeology, which discerns the systematization of discourses pertaining to historical formations of knowledge and power (Foucault 2006 [1969]; Karaba 2011). The discussion intensified after Jacques Derrida’s contribution in deconstructing the archive, along with issues of psychoanalysis, time, memory and technology, in his book *Archive Fever* (Derrida 1996 [1995]). From then on, with no signs of waning, the archive has been variously adopted “as a theory, curatorial trope, poetic form and subject of inquiry” (Eichhorn 2013, 4), relating art to questions of knowledge, power, law, subjectivity and cultural politics.

For the purposes of explicating Kötting's archival art film, we draw on some of the original psychoanalytical deconstructions of the archive by Derrida, but also configurations that art historians, theorists and curators developed. Specifically, seminal is the work of the historian Benjamin Buchloh, who reads both some of inter-war and post-war avant-garde artists' work, albeit in a differentiated way, as controversial archival anomic art, in that they sought refuge from the discontents of twentieth century modernity in anomie, anarchy and utopia (Buchloh 2006 [1993]; Karaba 2012). Furthermore, the psychoanalytical deconstruction of the archive's authority by Derrida, led art theorist Hal Foster (2004) to coin the term "anarchival", a neologism that resonates with anarchy, so as to problematize postmodern archival art "in the intersection of institutional and libidinal archival impulses" (Karaba 2012, 83). As shown above, art critics, and Kötting himself, describe his work as dadaist, absurdist and anarchic. At a first level, from the close reading of Kötting's controversial cinematic form, we argue that the film can be considered an anarchival documentary.

At a second level, though, we question to what extent might the notions of anomic and anarchival art be sufficient to better understand the film in the context of the cultural politics it performs, regarding contemporary discourses of disability, trauma, care and ultimately subjectivity and cultural politics. To this end, we further relate, in an inclusively disjunctive way, Kötting's anarchival documentary with the alternative conceptualizations of an instituting and enunciating "counter-archive" (Karaba 2011, 2012). Greek scholars and art curators Panos Kouros and Elpida Karaba (2012), view the archive from the political horizon of democracy, especially in our stagnating and individualizing neoliberal times, and insist on the public, collective and institutionalizing, rather than solely institutional, character of contemporary archival art. As Karaba (2012) puts it: "the constitution of an archive is a political, democratic exercise, a poetic act" (85). In Kötting's (2016) words: "What else is art but the public sharing of intensely personal experiences or ideas?" Kötting, in this autobiographical archival art film, not only publicly exposes his personal and familial trauma, but he also makes the personal political, to resonate with the seminal feminist slogan. With his anarchival approach, he undermines patriarchal authority through the ethics of care and co-dependence towards his daughter and also with his "spillage" between trauma, life and art. We argue that the film resonates a *future promise* (Derrida 1996[1995]), in that it enunciates

through artistic therapeutic praxis the potential for alternative discourses on disability, art and emancipated subjectivity.

Moreover, in order to intersperse the democratic perspective of our interpretation of the film, we sketch out Rosi Braidotti's (2014[2011]) concept of "nomadic subjectivity". Her feminist philosophy of nomadism and "becoming-nomad" is articulated as a counter-discourse that "challenges the separation of critique from creativity and of reason from the imagination" (43). She proposes a sustainable nomad subject always in a flux, in perpetual becoming-other and capable of moving across established categories and levels of experience. Braidotti's becoming-nomad resonates with Kötting's spillage between media and between art and life, as well as with his psycho-geographical journeys through land, mind and psyche. Moreover, her sensitive deconstruction of the concept of the monster resounds with Kötting becoming-other through Eden.

In what follows, we briefly present the background of the theoretical, philosophical and curatorial discourse on the archive we use. Then, we focus on the film's formal analysis, in order to disclose the interweaving that makes it an anarchival. In the last part, we interpret the film both as anarchival and as a counter-archive.

2. Framing archival art

By 2011 when the film was released, archival-art was already established as a distinctive contemporary art-practice and the curational and theoretical discourses around its form and meaning, as well as its history and/or genealogy were flourishing (Karaba 2011). Certainly, all this production was also informed by discourses on the cultural changes from early to late twentieth century modernity, modernism and postmodernism, as well as from the critical waves of post-structuralism in philosophy and cultural studies, with their critical discourses on media, cultural struggles, meaning, identity, knowledge, power and subjectivity. For our needs here, we will start by positioning Kötting's work within some of these broader contexts.

To begin with, Kötting specifically refers to dada in his statement of interests: "He is interested in teasing out both the 'melancholy' and the 'dada' in contemporary culture" (UCA in Canterbury, n.d.). In retrospect, in the early 1990s, the inter-war movements of dadaism, surrealism and the Soviet avant-garde, broadly termed as

the “historical avant-garde”, were re-approached as forerunners of archival art (Buchloch 2006, Karaba 2011, 2012). The aesthetics of collage and montage of these historical avant-garde movements, also in response to the disasters of World War I, were an expression of dissidence against the repression of a rationally and bureaucratically organized modernity. They heavily relied on collecting and rearranging fragments of culture with the intention of shock. Especially dada artists, like Marcel Duchamp, sought to expose accepted and often repressive conventions of order and logic, favoring strategies of chance, spontaneity, and irreverence. With their collages, photomontages and re-appropriations of everyday objects, they did more than merely launch a cultural attack on typical concepts of what art is and how it is made. According to Karaba (2011):

The fragment, the discontinuity, the everyday experience of multiple subjects were suggested as a line of flight away from the failure of bureaucratically organized modernity to resist reactionary powers. [translation ours] (29)

Another aspect that was discussed in the historical accounts of archival art, was the responses to an emerging modern media and machine culture (Buchloch 2006; Karaba 2011, 2012). On the one side, from the late nineteenth century photography and documentary film was used in producing institutional and scientific archives, for example medical, police and forensic archives (Doane 2002). From the other side, the historical avant-garde appropriated the new media of photography and film, against their uses as pure documents. Indicative is the optimism and faith of Soviet documentarist Dziga Vertov, who proclaimed his Kino-eye montage as the merging of man and machine in the coming of the communist world. Vertov is considered as one of the fathers of experimental cinema, and Kötting’s filming and editing approach seems to draw on Vertov’s legacy (Mermigka 2020). Moreover in this respect, the philosopher Walter Benjamin defended cinema as bringing a rupture in human perception, art and aesthetics and affirmed belief in its democratic potentials in his seminal text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Benjamin is also hailed as a modernist archivist for his *Passagenwerk*, an enormous archive he created, with “ruins of modernity” consisting of fragments, photographs, excerpts from texts, comments, records of his dreams, notes and diary entries from his personal life and

travels (Karaba 2011, 28-29). As we will see, Kötting specifically refers to “the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction” in his documentary.

In the post-war period, with the advent of the “society of the spectacle”, to use Guy Debord’s term, versions of critical archival art that emerged did not share the previous optimism in photography, film, collage and montage, since the ideological and sensational uses of them by late capitalism’s cultural industries had enfeebled and depoliticized their potentials for critical cultural politics. Buchloch’s seminal accounts of the emergence of anomic archival art note that post-war critical artists not only faced the trauma of World II, the rationalized genocide of the Holocaust, but also the sweeping of traditional values and the repression of memory by consumerist society and economic and social deregulations, an ever-emerging anomie of the capitalist market. Buchloch refers to anomic archival art in two closely related senses: both as reflecting capitalism’s deregulation and anomie and as resisting this peculiar new anomic order of post-war capitalism’s modernity. Furthermore, often archival artists, in their ambivalent appropriation of anomie, used and recontextualized family archives so as to reveal both the personal and public trauma and the discontents of modernity (Buchloch 2006, Karaba 2011, 30-48).⁴ In this respect in terms of cinema, the work of experimental film-maker Jonas Mekas, the founder of *Anthology Film Archives* of the underground American experimental cinema, is exemplary. His autobiographical film-diaries convey broader issues of trauma, exile, childhood, home and homeland, as well as the invaluable bonds of friendship (Mermigka 2022). Kötting has much in common with Mekas’s poetics, politics and aesthetics.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Kötting started making films, the doctrine of “capitalist realism” (Fisher 2009), that is the ideology of neoliberalism that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of socialist realism, was ever more expanding and propagating itself as the only alternative. Mark Fisher likens capitalist realism to a “pervasive atmosphere” that affects areas of cultural production, political-economic activity, and general thought and action. In this late capitalism’s pervasive atmosphere, Kötting’s early filmmaking, influenced by Derek Jarman, was obviously pervaded by a post-punk and anarchist aesthetic, by

⁴ Buchloch (2006), after referring to Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, probes as anomic the work *Atlas* by Gerhard Richter, who recurred to archiving mass-culture commonplace images along with amateur family photographs and photographs from the Nazi concentration camps, in a more orderly fashion than the historical avant-garde and reminiscent of the taxonomy of institutional archives.

which he sought “to experiment with the moving image outside of the industrialized pantomime” and challenge the “state cultural apparatus” (Evans and Kötting 2005). From the 1990s, he started to develop the concept of psychogeography, drawn from the radical political and artist movement of the situationists and their head-on attack on the “society of the spectacle”, for the merging of art, politics and everyday life (Plant 2000). Kötting’s explorations of the British landscape in his *Earthworks Trilogy* cultivates an awareness of the ways in which everyday life is conditioned and controlled and how the influences of this controlled environment can be exposed and subverted.

With these bags and baggage of radical and rather dissident cultural politics, Kötting’s work with his daughter Eden veered him to an “archival impulse” that eventually brought him, as we argue, to the creation of the anarchival documentary *Louyre: This Our Still Life*. The term “anarchival” is taken from Hal Foster’s (2004) article *An Archival Impulse*. The art historian coined “anarchive” as a derivative of Derrida’s (1995) conceptualization of the archive and, in particular, the philosopher’s idea that “anarchiving destruction belongs to the process of archivization and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes, and beyond” (59).

First of all, Derrida’s (1995) distinctive deconstruction of the archive begins with the analysis of the Greek word *arkhē*, which means both beginning and authority. From the *arkhē* derives *arkheion*, the Greek word and etymological root for archive. He writes:

The meaning of “archive”, its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, a residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. [...] The *archons* are first of all the documents’ guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. (9-10)

Thus, Derrida (1995) thinks the archive in between the terms of its commencement and commandment, its place and the representation of law. For that, he names his approach “toponomological”, from the Greek words *topos*, for place, and *nomos*, for law. He pays his debt to Freudian psychoanalysis, by psychoanalyzing Freud’s archive for the deconstruction of “the institution of the limits declared to be insurmountable” (10), that permeates both state and family

archives, rational consciousness and psychic unconscious, as well as the domains of the private and the public. Related to this psychoanalytical toponomology and to the close relation between Freud's reality and pleasure principles, he asserts that "[t]here is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside" (14).

Furthermore, however, the commencement or institution of any kind of archive involves incessantly another of Freud's pair, that is the pleasure principle and the death drive. An archive is instituted by the pleasure principle, in that it is related with the compulsion and fetishism of collection, the fantasies of unification and wholeness, and the desire to preserve memory of the past in the present and as a promise for the future. However, the profound origin of the archive is the mute, destructive and aggressive death drive. Beyond or maybe because of the fact of human finitude and the needs that stem from it, Freud's death drive for Derrida (1995):

is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement. It works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own "proper traces [...] It devours it even before producing it on the outside. This drive, from then on, seems not only to be anarchic, anarchotic (we must not forget that the death drive, originary though it may be, is not a principle [...]). It will always have been archive-destroying, by silent vocation. (13-14)

Derrida's archive fever (1995) then is about the positive and productive contradictions and transactions between Eros and Thanatos. On the one hand, the pleasure principle, with its double sense of *arkhē* (reality and pleasure). On the other hand, the death drive, with its anarchotic, anarchic and malicious impulse to destroy archives and their toponomological *arkhai*, as if the archive is always and a priori set against itself. From this psychic economy between reality (topos), desire (nomos) and destruction (death), an archive always remains precarious, incomplete and uncertain, in this sense enclosing a future promise.

Hal Foster's (2006) discourse on archival art takes into consideration the libidinal implications of Derrida's account and claims that at the beginning of the twenty-first century one of critical art's dominant features is an archival impulse. Art that sublimates and discloses the anarchival impulse:

not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival material as found yet constructed,

factual yet fictive, public yet private. Further, it often arranges these materials according to a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects. [...] Perhaps all [such] archives develop in this way, through mutations of connection and disconnection, a process that this art also serves to disclose. (Foster 2006, 5-6)

For Foster (2006) and in even closer resonance with Kötting's open representation of disability as we will argue next, "the private [art] archives do question the public ones: they can be seen as perverse orders that aim to disturb the symbolic order at large [...] which no longer operates through apparent totalities" (21). Furthermore, "these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects -- in art and in history alike -- that might offer points of departure again" (5). As Buchloch, he sees the artistic will "to connect what cannot be connected" (21) both as reflection of contemporary anomic order and as a presupposition for the artist, "not only to represent, but also work through and suggest new orders of affective associations" (21). These partial, provisional and often absurd connections that intent to stimulate the affect instead of just being sensational or allegorical, might protect us from fantasies of representational totality and the totalistic assumptions of capitalist culture (Foster 2006; Karaba, 2011, 55).

As Karaba (2011) notes, even though Foster sees the orientation of anarchival art as often more "'institutive' than 'destructive', more 'legislative' than 'transgressive'" (Foster 2006, 5), throughout his text he discusses utopia and at its end he specifically recurs to utopian ambitions and recovered and unexpected utopian demands – "to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia" (Foster 2006, 22). According to Karaba (2011), Foster does not clarify how – or whether – utopia is differentiated from fantasies of totality (56). In their curational discourse on the public and democratic character of archival art, Kouros and Karaba (2012) assert a specifically democratic and non-utopian archival art and for that they attribute a discursive and performative character to archival art. Karaba (2012) criticizes the seductive associations with anomie and utopia, in that even though they have invested the archive with a future promise of freedom from the discontents of late modernity, they disregard the fact that they are historically and presently related with totalitarian efforts. Instead, she proposes that the archive remains – albeit always somehow unrealizable – within a democratic horizon as a public "becoming law like" counter-hegemonic but at the same instituting art practice (Karaba 2012, 82-87).

Since we are skeptical about Karaba's exclusive disjunction between utopian/anarchist and democratic politics, we employ a more inclusive disjunction. We argue that Kötting's documentary is both anarchival and a counter-archive, which performs an idiosyncratic yet public counter-hegemonic struggle for meaning. For this purpose, after the anarchival close reading of the film, we interpret the film through Derrida's toponomological and anarchontic approach. We content that Kötting, in his psychogeography of the topos, assumes the archiving authority and responsibility, albeit in an anarchic non-patriarchal way. The film is an "enunciating agent" (Karaba 2012, 81), that articulates alternative and emancipating discourses on the connection between art and disability.

3. Anarchival film form

The film opens with a time-lapse shot of a dead rodent decaying, signifying from the start that the film dwells upon mortality. After, a female voice greets us in French and the film's title, music commences mixed with male and children's voice-overs, reciting descriptive and/or contemplative words. Indicatively, a child's voice: "In the background a house lies. Where is this place?" and then a male voice: "Your first look at something that's always there." In the wobbly shots, the farmhouse is unveiled, signaling that the film derives from the place. Then, Eden and her mother are having an outdoor bath, surrounded by deep forest. In a frame-within-frame shot of a window of the house, Kötting's voice calls to a briefly glimpsed Leila, while Eden takes the center of the zoom shot. Next, she poses for a few shots and she sings, followed by images of dead animals and bones. There is also a close-up of a cow, somehow reminiscent of Luis Bunuel's *An Andalusian Dog* (1929). In the next successive shots, from close-up to tracking middle and long shots, some out of focus and overexposed, Eden is blissfully drawing. The shot of the village's nameplate is edited with traveling shots through the great outdoors, also featuring the superimposed face of Leila. The yellow uppercase subtitles narrate the artist's decision to move away from London through the metaphor of crossing a river. The uttered words "still is the land" by a male voice and an old picture of farmers connotes the preoccupation with the land, its stillness and its ghosts, and also the title drops the word "still". The film's opening illustrates Kötting's bricolage and cut-up approach. To further the formal analysis, it is useful firstly to discern between the visual, audio and textual components of the film and

provide some descriptions and context, before we explicate on Kötting's editing methods and argue about the film's anarchival style.

The visual component consists of images of the outdoors of the farmhouse, often hidden in the background behind flowers, plants, sunlight and snow. Sometimes its inhabitants are peeped from the surrounding forest, the lit windows offering a play with movement and shadow (Sinclair 2012). Co-dwelling animals and insects, flies, bees, snails, lizards, snakes, also appear. Also, there are magnificent topographic sweeps of the great outdoors, both of the stillness and the transience of nature, rocky mountains and deep forests, caves and ridges, high altitude panoramic views of cloudy and clear skies. However, first of all, Eden inhabits the film's landscape. As Kötting (2012) puts it: "The things that move through her move through me and move through the landscape, and come back at you".

There is Eden's footage from her early childhood and her birthday parties – one of the last scenes is from her twenty-second birthday. Eden as a baby, a child, a teenager and a young woman appear in a non-linear fashion, doing mundane or recreational activities, but mainly drawing and painting. Often, her father's camera-eye records her in extreme close-ups, almost in her mouth, as she talks and sings in her own language. These shots of such close proximity are less obnoxious, when seen under the prism of confronting us with our unconscious affective aversions to Eden. Besides, according to the always invigilating father (Kötting 2012): "Eden likes nothing better than to listen to herself or to watch herself, and it gives Leila and myself respite at the end of the day". From the place to the person and back to the place, Eden's film archive also reveals the indoors of the house, the organization of the family life, her mother and the artistic playground that the parents have created to make her precarious life bearable and worth-living. In terms of texture, from the Super 8 film stock and the lo-fi digital definition, for the director: "There's something about the pixelations that are at odds with the grainy quality of Super 8 and makes the images more painterly" (Kötting 2012). In both formats, throughout the film there are painterly spills and splashes, created by nervous camera movements, probing with focus and sensing light and shadow.

In terms of the sound continuum, apart from the on-camera dialogues between the family and relatives, and the sounds of the environment, there are male, female and children's voice-overs, that provide absurdist verbal non sequiturs, that is non-

coherent utterances. Indicatively, a male voice: “Seeing is believing. And, did you know, seeing is believing” and then immediately after a male voice: “The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook and so does the bourgeoisie.” Some were taken from actual sound archives, but most were made to “feel archival” (Kötting 2012). They deconstruct the manipulative voice-over of conventional documentary. They sound like upper-class documentary voices-overs, like Attenborough’s, and have a televisual, BBC-like tone (Kötting 2012, Sinclair 2012). At some times, they are dead serious, and at others they verbally caricature Britishness and Frenchness. For Kötting (2012), the use of such sound archives, comes from his early childhood memories, “when we would have 16mm public information films shown at Easter and at Christmas as a school treat”. The music, by Scanner, plays, with some pauses, throughout the film. It is composed from rather melancholic and moody sound conjurings, it counterpoints the funny voices and gives an existential and melancholic tone to the film.

Furthermore, apart from the subtitles transcribing Eden’s speech, between the visual and the audio elements, there are the poetic uppercase yellow subtitles, nor exactly visual neither exactly silent. Kötting’s prose poetry is sometimes autobiographical – “Well-being comes over me intermittently. Like presently” – others contemplative – “We hunt and we are only alive in those moments when we improvise. No schedule. Just small surprises and the smell of damp beds” – and also aphoristic and culturally freighted – “Viral mass culture networks with spectacle both everywhere and nowhere.” Critics have characterized these statements portentous (Sinclair 2012, Kötting 2012). For Kötting (2012), with his brash style:

It’s a bit of a piss-take on the pretentiousness of art-making [...] looking at some home-movie footage, with disparate noises coming at you, pretending to be art and really, it’s all bollocks. I’m aware of the fact that that’s how a lot of people will always regard... not just what I do, but the pretentiousness of poetry, the audacity of putting oneself or one’s art or one’s existence onto any kind of pedestal and sending it out into the world. [...] When I put these titles into uppercase, it’s almost as if I’m shouting these things at the audience.

The images of the place and Eden, the voice-overs, music and the texts are fragmented, juxtaposed and disjointed incessantly throughout the film. There aren’t any linear sections, for example subsequent and successive scenes of the landscape and then Eden, or a linear narrative of her growing up, or of the difficulties faced because of her disability. Kötting cuts-up the shots and the relationship between

Eden and the landscape resides in the intervals of his rather fast editing. Kötting (2012) works intuitively – “[my] gut feeling is the motor” – and the only structure as such in the film comes from some archival intertitles he found, which demarcate the seasons. He uses the dense soundscape as a semi-autonomous component to make sense of the images: “You know it’s right when you’ve found the right soundbite or you’ve removed the right words from a sentence” (Kötting 2012). According to Mollaghan (2010), by disconnecting what is being heard from the image shown, Kötting challenges the viewer’s faith in the naturalness of sound and image and he makes them think of what is being shown and heard both as a construct and a conveyor of memory (125-130). The poetic subtitles give a pace, in that they “are little guy-ropes that peg the film down briefly before the images and the ideas move on to something else” (Kötting 2012).

The film illustrates heavy labor in editing, works like a contingency of images, sounds, voices and texts and invokes the methods of bricolage and cut-up as its main montage principle. Kötting also coins the term “reverse engineering”, which dictates that assembling a film through editing is more important than working from a script (Kötting 2020). By invoking these montage principles, the film is also about the process of creating itself as anarchival art film. Besides, Foster’s article (2006) discusses anarchival art both in terms of pre-production and post-production, but also comments on the secondary manipulations in post-production as more often constitutive of it, also in the context of the digital transition (4-5).

For the purpose of designating the film as anarchival, it is helpful to elaborate more on Kötting’s methods of cut-up, reverse engineering and bricolage, also in the context of his dadaist and punk aesthetic. He works with recorded fragments of reality in order to subvert both cinematic narrative and dominant cultural narratives, that often represent themselves as totalities. Indicative is the entry for the letter N in the archival-like Alphabetarium that he compiled with art critic Gareth Evans: “N is for never a finite Narrative” (Evans and Kötting 2005). The artist’s cinematic plan – or lack thereof – is based on what he calls “reverse engineering” (Kötting 2020) in terms of filming and montage. This is a process or method through which one attempts to understand how a device or system works simply by observation and deductive reasoning. Kötting follows the same path, not filming and editing based on script, but having as principle and guide the dadaist concepts of creative

accidents, serendipity and happenstance (Bennet 2020, Evans and Kötting 2005; Kötting 2020). Cut-ups are his way of exploring reality and life. Against conventional narratives that dictate coherence, wholeness and closures in revelations and climaxes, for him “[l]ife is full of the stuff that flies at us in bright splinters. It is full of cut-ups, blip-verts and misunderstandings. It is a mosaic, deprived of wholes but FULL of parts” (Kötting 2016). Thus, he asserts that “[c]ut-ups are closer to reality. No singular grain of truth. Bits and pieces gleaned from a set of contexts and practices” (Evans and Kötting 2005).

Bricolage, as the combination or creation of a work from a diverse range of things, in order to subvert dominant meanings, has been associated with the punk subculture. Drawing on cultural theorist Dick Hebdidge (1979), Kötting revives, with his film practice and style, a sort of semiotic guerilla warfare against hegemonic culture, as Umberto Eco would have called the cultural politics of the punks, who, inspired by the surrealist and dadaist art movements of the 1920’s, developed bricolage as their main action plan (105). The bricoleur – a concept that first appeared in anthropological studies of so-called “primitive” tribes – appropriates significant objects, relocates them in different positions, and thus constitutes new discourses and conveys new messages (Hebdidge 1979, 103-104). Punks worked under this very bricolage principle in order to convey new messages and meanings and, most importantly, to differentiate themselves from mainstream culture, “whose principal defining characteristic, according to Barthes, is a tendency to masquerade as nature” and to impose itself on people “as if composed according to ‘the evident laws of the natural order’” (Hebdidge 1979, 102). They achieved this by making “a virtue of necessity” , through a “do-it-yourself” aesthetic that summarizes punk’s philosophy in its whole (Hebdidge 1979, 109-112). Kötting reflects on the importance of punk style today as permitting both the untrained outsider to make art and the attack on the pretentiousness of contemporary art-world (Bennett 2020).

It has been argued, that although Kötting films Eden with deep and obvious love, their residency in the remote house looks idyllic, and that the film boldly differentiates from “the brow-furrowing language of a conventional documentary about disability”, nevertheless it is opaque and slightly frustrating, in that it doesn’t convey anything about “the real challenges involved in being with Eden” (Bradshaw 2011). Furthermore, hypothetically, it could be argued that Kötting’s

dadaist and punk anarchival impulse is more or less outdated, in terms of more self-critical contemporary distortions of the archive, and that it is spilled with a desire of a purely avant-garde opposition, that nowadays is rather academic. However, these arguments can be controverted by thinking that Kötting's anarchival impulse discloses the ambiguous desire to reactivate old and failed artistic visions in the service of creating new possible discourses for alternative and emancipating conceptualizations of the spillage of life into art and vice versa. Foster (2006) acknowledges a paranoid dimension in anarchival art, which derives from the tensions between transgressive and instituting attributes:

Perhaps the paranoid dimension of archival art is the other side of its utopian ambition – its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of into the no-place of utopia. (22)

4. An anarchival counter-archive

The film's log line is that the home movie "is a portrait of a remote tumbledown Pyrenean farmhouse". As we recall, for Derrida (1995) the *arkheion* is initially a house, a domicile, an address, a residence, a topos that is run through a certain authority. Kötting as a father probably felt contradictory emotions about the disabled child; he could have abandoned her to her mother or to social services, to chase after his career. Maybe he thought of it, but he actually took Eden, along with her mother, away from the busy urban buzz to this Eden-like remote place, possibly so as to concentrate on her and to hoard as many memories, before her looming death. Kötting as film-maker started recording her from early on, with the impulse to use film as a mnemotechnical device. Also, as filmmaker with a growing commitment to psychogeography, he put their precarious family life in the beautiful natural and mental background of the filmic topos. Commencing from the topos, he authorized himself as the guardian of archiving Eden's life on the verge of death. His first autobiographical take on Eden's topos, that is her in situ archive, was *Hoi Polloi* (1990). In there, as a filmic archival topos, the author sublimates with absurdist self-sarcasm and intertextuality his anarchic death drive. Before we explain, according to Derrida (1995):

the anarchy drive eludes perception [...] except if it disguises itself, except if it tints itself, makes itself up or paints itself in some erotic color. This impression

of erogenous color draws a mask right on the skin. As inheritance, it leaves only its erotic simulacrum, its pseudonym in painting, its sexual idols, its masks of seduction: lovely impressions. These impressions are perhaps the very origin of what is so obscurely called the beauty of the beautiful. As memories of death. (14)

Hoi Polloi's sublimated anarchival impulse is not only obvious in the beautiful audiovisual cut-ups, that disguise the hardships with libidinal tints, but also in the beauty of cinematic drama. At the end of the film, Eden's wheelchair is run over by a truck and falls off a cliff, a scene reminiscent of the montage of attractions scene in the Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) by Sergei Eisenstein. Kötting (2012) explicitly confesses:

Her head and the remote Pyrenean landscape in which the film was set became metaphor for both inscape and landscape And with the hindsight of time's arrow a latent Freudian desire to be rid of the difficulty that was her.

After that film and other experimental works, the father/film author took the child on a journey. In *Gallivant* (1996) Eden was initiated to one of her father's favorite arts. The documentary as an art or medium can never be purely objective. The reality captured by the camera is a result of mediation or archivization. Since the filmmaker, however unknowingly, "chooses the framing, lighting, shooting angles etc., they construct *a version of reality and not reality itself*" (Stefani 2007, 9-10). Or in the film-author's words:

Consciously or unconsciously, we manipulate our memories to include or omit certain aspects of our lives. Every documentary film, even the least self-referential, demonstrates in every frame that an artist's chief material is himself. It is an excavation of oneself. [...] Memory is the past rewritten in the direction of feeling and anything processed by memory is fiction. Therefore, our memories are fictions. Memory loves to go hunting – especially in the dark. (Kötting 2016)

At the same time, the father/film-author/artist initiated Eden into art. It would be hyperbolic to claim that art saved Eden's life, since there aren't concrete scientific discourses on that matter. It certainly though saved her father's mental constitution: "If Eden wasn't interested in drawing and painting and collaging then I think I would have killed myself by now" (Kötting 2016). He kept on with his film-diaries, probably impulsively omitting or masquerading the difficulties of bearing a disabled child and concentrating on Eden's art practice. The topos, Louyre became a long term artist's residency, an in situ archive of their lives and "still

lives”. Art and documentary then as yet another archival topos for the Köttings. Kötting as the authority of the archive provided the technical regulations of it. To recall Derrida (1995): “the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship into the future” (17). In one of Kötting’s yellow uppercase subtitles, against the image of a dead mouse, both Benjamin and media philosopher Marshal McLuhan are cited: “In the age of mechanical reproduction the medium is the message or might even become the work of art”.

In the meantime, in 2006, the father/film author/artist after his father’s death reflected and sublimated how it was like to be a son, perhaps so as to contemplate more on what it meant for himself to be a father. The project *In the Wake of A Deadad* is an installation with video and photography, with Kötting’s performances in sixty-five locations he has been with his father, an almost hour-long video and an artist’s book, including large inflatable figures of his father. It’s a “chapel erected in memory of my father, a study of patriarchal bonds and the secular exorcism of a difficult relationship” (Kötting n. d). Derrida (1996 [1995]), in an attempt to explain why Freud did not retain a psychoanalytic archive, refers to the legacy that the psychoanalyst accepted from his father, a legacy connected to the Jewish law. According to the philosopher, this legacy determined Freud’s career as a scientist of the Oedipus complex and the unconscious patricide. In Derrida’s point of view, the monotheistic legacy that Freud inherited from his father became a burden to him and led him to the decision not create or keep an archive of psychoanalysis and, continuously, bestow it on the next generation. His commitment to the Jewish legacy drove him to the decision to destroy, so to speak, the psychoanalytic archive and prevented him from setting himself free from his own Oedipus complex. Taking as a starting point the inquiry in regard to why Freud did not retain a psychoanalytic archive, Derrida thoroughly analyzes the unconscious dimensions associated with the archive, the double bind of the pleasure principle and the death drive that governs the creation of all archives. Kötting, as artist/son, having waited after his father died, sublimates the Oedipal patricidal drive in an anarchival multi-media reconciliation. But how does he probe his authority and also his impulses as a father and as a film author in the topos of *Louyre: This Our Still Life*?

The title of the film obviously plays with Eden’s still life, but could also be interpreted as signifying the trauma of a family life at the fingertips of illness and

death, as well as the struggle of the father/film author to overcome it and sublimated through art. In a real-life situation like this, we can compassionately understand Kötting's confession about having the latent but looming dark desire to get rid of her. Fortunately, in the father's psychic domain, this dark desire did not prevail, which however doesn't mean that it stopped working underneath. Kötting, as father, having somehow resolved his issues with his own father through art, obeyed to some extent his anarchotic impulse, removed the full authority from the figure of the father, and passed it to the record keeper, film author, artist and gardener of the topos, the Garden of Eden. It is indicative that, as a critical bearer of a symbolic law, that is as father/film author, he wondered:

What does it mean to make work about oneself? [...] To what degree is this, a solipsistic act? And to what degree has solipsism allowed us access to the world? [...] What does it mean to set another person in front of the camera? Am I not trying to extract something from their soul? When I am exploiting? When am I adoring? Is it one and the same? Is not possible to do both? (Kötting 2012)

An interpretation that breeds on the questions of archival desire and cultural politics, linked with trauma, could be as follows. On the face of it, one, of course, could say that Kötting does not destroy his archive. On the contrary, he retains it and bequeaths it as a form of art to his daughter Eden. That being said, the legacy that Kötting leaves to his daughter is purely symbolic and actually takes the form of a public archive, in which a distinctive destruction of the archive is inscribed within in it. He disguises his father-daughter archive in his distinctive anarchic cut-up style, most probably to eradicate bad memories and sublimate the trauma. In a way, the film author succumbs to the drive of destruction of the father's archive, which hoards his trauma. As Karampa (2011) explains: "To the extent that through the compilation of documents we put a certain inquiry and a plot onto the archive, we transform [the trauma] into a story, which stands at opposite points of trauma (167). Kötting the film author has pushed to the side conventional father figures and, with his own anarchival and non-patriarchal way, he enunciates his "alternative gesture" for the transformation of trauma into an enunciation for an ethics and aesthetics of care and co-dependence. Again, in Kötting's (2012) prose: "Monotheistic belief systems and their potential for fanatical mis-interpretation at the hands of [men] frightens me. It obsesses me and depresses me. It impacts on this my discourse of care".

In this sense, the film is at the same time anarchival and a democratic counter-archive that enunciates with its form also a deeper meaning, quite different from the politics of representational totalities or recuperation of utopias:

And if one's life is so entwined with THE CARE of somebody else and there is no obvious separation then it is probably easier to pull on THE WHOLE rather than attempting to demarcate the two. Maybe it is even a device for holding THE WHOLE thing together. [...] Call me naïve, call the hereabove a tautology but ART can give you a flavour, a trace element, an atmosphere or even an insight into what being alive with somebody like Eden means. (Kötting 2012)

The democratic character of this anarchival counter-documentary stems from its public and instituting artistic practice of claiming a place in the discourses of disability, care and art. Kötting doesn't just claim a place in cinema's institutions and official archives. He has actually succeeded in gaining recognition as a film artist in Britain's high art institutions. Through his efforts to make his experimental art public, he also claims a space where words like disability and care are often emptied of their meaning in the transactions of state and capitalist politics. Even though he expresses his cultural politics in demanding anarchival form, he actually reflects on archival politics and constitution of meanings. Borrowing some of Karaba's (2012) insights, the film is an enunciating agent and a vector in the name of a group or a vector around which a group is articulated. In this sense, the film is not only an oppositional avant-garde film but also an antagonistic and yet re-articulating counter-archive. Its production mode and its public artistic character are acts of emancipation because it places anew this power at the disposal of agents, opening it up to its poetry and revolutionary drive (85-86).

Even though an array of women and feminist philosophers have articulated critical discourses on the ethics of care, vulnerability, precarity, and cohabitation, for the last few words, we divert to Braidoti's nomadic subject, partly because we were inspired by Kötting's entry in his *Alphabetarium*. In the entry *nomadic*, the father/film author/artist/carer writes:

Keep innovative production alive in this country. From the outskirts (but at the center of experience) keep the creative human story turning. Tell tales from the end zones, fire yarns for gathered folk to stave off night (but dig into it also, like darkest peat, damp to touch). (Evans and Kötting, 2005)

Kötting himself and his spillage between media, art, life and politics embody the concept of nomadic subjectivity that Braidotti suggests. The act of wandering urges him to create new situations that magnify the experience of life. At the same time, he captures with his camera the effect of the geographic landscape into human soul following the proposal of the situationists to incorporate art in everyday life. On a first level, the psychogeographical exploration creates a line of flight for him. On a second level however, the disability of Eden comes down to be the one that constitutes him:

Eden, as daughter, agent, collaborator and catalyst. Eden as moral compass offering thresholds for ventures into the very core of consciousness and percept. Journeys into the unknown. Without her I am lost. (Kötting 2006)

Braidotti (2011) has looked into the notion of monster that she considers as “the bodily incarnation of difference from the basic human norm” pondering on the possibility of learning from it “to think differently about difference”. She thinks that: “The peculiarity of the organic monster is that she is both Same and Other. The monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar: she exists in an in-between zone” (216). Eden’s disability pushes the artist to experience that in-between zone and to realize that “[...] margins are central. Edge lands are normal” (Evans and Kötting, 2005). As a neurodivergent artist, she drives him to reclaim becoming in the interstices of conventional archives and archival art practices. Because of Eden, he becomes a nomadic subject that abandons the center to live on the periphery, to explore the experience of becoming-other. Treasuring that experience in this non-patriarchal anarchic is what makes it a counter-archive and a promise for the future.

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