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“Performing Archive”: Identity, Participation, and Responsibility in the Ethnic Archive

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Archives Remixed

Critical Perspectives and Pathways

Publishing the Archive

“Performing Archive”: Identity, Participation, and Responsibility in the Ethnic Archive

Performing Archive: Curtis + “the vanishing race” marks the first foray of the Claremont Center for Digital Humanities into digital publication work. Built as a Scalar book, *Performing Archive* is an aggregation of several existing archival visual, material, and sonic collections based on the work of Edward S. Curtis, an early-twentieth-century photographer whose lifelong work, *The North American Indian*, has been one of the most influential and widely circulated representations of Native Americans in U.S. visual culture.¹ [Scalar](#) is an open-source publishing platform that allows for a range of media types from multiple sources. Our collection includes selections from the Claremont Colleges Honnold-Mudd Library Special Collections, [Northwestern University](#), the [Library of Congress](#), the Smithsonian by way of the [Digital Public Library of America](#), and the University of Indiana Bloomington [Archives of Traditional Music](#). In addition to aggregating nearly 2,500 items related to Curtis and his ethnographic and photographic work with western American and Canadian tribes, our book also brings together a number of new scholarly works designed to facilitate teaching Curtis’s work for its significance in the history of national and racial identity formations in the United States. As of September 2013, the project is in that liminal space between early pilot and future funding. Our narrative here is based on the work that we were able to accomplish between June and the end of August 2013; it is our hope that it will be much expanded upon in the near future.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s *Planned Obsolescence* includes a call to “value process over product,” and this has become something of a mantra in digital humanities work.² This essay is an effort to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings and implications of both our three-month process and its product. In particular, we would like to consider how our digital book both publishes an archive and allows authors and readers to “perform archive” or enact “liveness” with the materials therein.³ We also want to use this as an occasion to raise questions regarding the liberal discourse of digital access that seems at times to overshadow opportunities for critical intervention at this moment of digital-archive fever. In particular, we want to bring the insights of critical race and ethnic studies to reorient the issues of archival agency, as well as consider the ways in which recent paradigm shifts in the archival practice with respect to Native American materials can contribute to the discussion in the digital humanities about issues of cultural representation and its relationship to scholarly design.

Placing our work

Performing Archive was created with a couple of goals and audiences in mind. As part of an Andrew W. Mellon foundation planning grant, we wanted to demonstrate that it was possible to work with existing

digital resources to build a robust pilot project that enabled curricular integration and undergraduate research. Our curricular integration entailed working with seventeen faculty teaching a first-year seminar at Scripps College to create a resource that leveraged local special collections and engaged students in a critical conversation about race, technology, and historical identity formation. The Scripps faculty selected an unusual special collections resource: one of fewer than three hundred existing complete sets of the twenty-volume *The North American Indian*, by Curtis. The digital humanities planning grant team agreed that the Curtis materials and their use in the Scripps course constituted an excellent opportunity to address all of our goals.⁴

While not naively celebrating technology use and collaboration, we did want to embrace disruptive potentials where they exist. To that end, we developed a project team that brought together undergraduate and graduate students, programmers, library specialists, and faculty, and we opened up the project planning to the entire group from the outset. We did not limit broad contribution to the planning stages; our two undergraduate fellows, Amy Borsuk and Beatrice Schuster, created new scholarly content for the book in addition to supporting the work of faculty and graduate fellows. We also brought together individuals from very different institutional contexts—private and public research universities and liberal arts colleges—so that we had a number of perspectives on how to reach various audiences, and a range of expertise in the many fields under consideration for the project. Those of us working and studying in liberal arts colleges had rich insights into the ways that undergraduates might engage the materials in classes and a critical sense of what was possible in our local infrastructure. Ulia Gosart, whose recent doctoral research in archival science focuses on the preservation of indigenous knowledge and histories, contributed her expertise on recent alternative models of archival development and stewardship that emphasize active community participation. From his background in critical race studies and his various involvements in digital humanities, David Kim helped explore ways to unpack the layers of epistemological authority invested in the archive through digital methodologies and remediation. Our third fellow, Heather Blackmore, is a doctoral student in a cinematic arts program who brought her considerable knowledge of early-twentieth-century media and photographic conventions to bear on discussions of Curtis's work. Combined with additional faculty expertise in art history, Native American art, literature, and digital humanities methods, our collective level of experience and expertise was diverse and significant. All of this came to bear in discussions with our programming partners, who were crafting new information flows and an entirely new, experimental interface for *Performing Archive*. Through these conversations we were able to integrate some of our theoretical and practical insights at the levels of structure and content.

Naming our work

Our choice of title for the Scalar book warrants unpacking and is, in many ways, a map to our thinking about the goals of the project as a whole. Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade gloss our titular phrase in this way: “Performing archives refers to a process in which human beings create and handle the archives, but it also alludes to how archives are formative in shaping history and thus perform human beings, [as well as] structure and give form to our thoughts and ideas.”⁵ As Ken Gonzales-Day reminds us in his exhibit for the book *Visualizing the “Vanishing Race”: The Photogravures of Edward S. Curtis*, the photographer often staged the images that he published. Gonzales-Day's exhibit draws our attention to the movement of various props, like wigs or breastplates, through multiple photographs and across tribal lines. As a work of “salvage ethnography,” *The North American Indian* was a production staged to argue that western tribes were in fact vanishing and that they needed to be documented for the edification of those who would remain in their place.⁶ What is more, Curtis understood some of the urgency of the ethnographic process to be rooted in his sense that Native peoples represented the clearest instance of white culture's pre-history; thus, he was documenting the distance that he and his patrons had come in social evolutionary terms. In Borggreen and Gade's terms, the archive of visual, sonic, and material culture compiled by and on behalf of Curtis was an attempt to perform a Native American being, in the sense of performing his idea of what “Indianness” was, and to fundamentally shape white America's sense of the historical place of tribal culture and practices.

Performing

In addition to unveiling the posed and thus manufactured nature of Curtis's documentation, the notion of "performing" in our project also addresses the possibilities for rethinking the archive's status as fixed and permanent knowledge formation. Our decision to think of our book as a performing archive and a space for further archival performance is informed by work in feminist digital production and critical race studies. Feminist scholars and artists have interrogated the idea of a static, authoritative archive through a variety of physical and digital performances. For example, a 2007 installation, "The Performing Archive: Restricted Access," by Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, created a real-time performance installation of archival research on 1970s feminist performance art.⁷ A year later, the re.act.feminism project established their web presence with "a performing archive," a video archive of 1960s and 1970s performance art. For re.act.feminism, the notion of "a living archive, emphasizing the use, appropriation, and re-interpretation of documents" is part of the *raison d'être* for a web-based archive.⁸ These projects are part of a much larger "performative turn" that has inflected work in traditional humanities disciplines and across many fields in cultural studies, influenced by Judith Butler's now foundational theorization of performativity in relation to identity formations.⁹ A similar turn within digital scholarship has both valorized and critiqued digital publication as a way to give voice to the hitherto unheard, or as sites of "self-fashioning."¹⁰

Within digital humanities work, archives are regularly theorized and problematized in relation to Jacques Derrida's "Archive Fever."¹¹ Very often the focus turns to creating pathways to wider access, establishing more inclusive canons, enhancing the search capacities of database, and anticipating the preservation challenges of our rapidly accumulating contemporary "digital cultural legacy."¹² While these aspects of the current attention to the archive broadly prioritize the issues of scale and scalability of digital archives, we thought it was important to also recognize what "more and better" does not fully capture: the opportunity to reimagine different and differentiated archival models and practices that digital media and a performativity critique of the archive offer.

While, as we discuss below, the idea that our book is an archive deserves some qualification, we nevertheless found that theorizations of archives as sites of performance offered productive ways to think about the function of *Performing Archives* as something other than an essentializing access project. Thinking of "performance as critical discourse allows for focusing attention on data, not only as accumulation of cultural material, but also as a source to how data lives and operates within a culture by its actions."¹³ Thus, performance helped us reorient away from thinking of the data that we were creating and aggregating as something upon which other forces would act and toward the idea that the data was already acting—in this case, at the moment of production to imagine the twentieth-century Native American in terms of absence or soon-to-be absence. In fact, Curtis's deployment of the terms "data" and "information" in the opening lines of the preface to *The North American Indian* reveals rather effectively that the focus on more accumulation and wider circulation of archival data predates the current information age and the proverbial "big data" and "data deluge." The impressive scale of Curtis' ethno-photographic data only served to more firmly establish its representational authority in the collective imagination.¹⁴ Curtis's salvage ethnography produced the sense that a remarkable array of cultures and individuals could be reduced to a history of disappearance. This required us to confront the ways that the data continued to act, both in the contexts from which we drew our materials and in the context of our digital book. Julie Louise Bacon observes that "archives express the link between 'poesis' as 'the act of (history) making,' and 'techne' as 'the systemization, or industrial treatment of that act.'"¹⁵ So if our data were always already enacting certain ideologies and subject formations, then we also needed to be aware of the ways in which the technologies of the archive were integral to the staging of those performances. This meant considering the visual and textual technologies of Curtis's initial publication, the digital technologies that formed the basis of subsequent special collections publication at the Library of Congress and Northwestern University, and our Scalar book, as well as the media transformations that were part of the storage and sharing of the audio recordings and material culture items that we included.

Thus, one layer of “performing” in our project highlights the recent reconsideration of the very condition of the archive in the age of relational databases and the remediation of the digital interface. The digital archive, as a system, is both “generative” in the Foucauldian sense of “archive as first the law of what can be said,” but it is also performative in ways that continue Diana Taylor’s critique of the traditional binary between memory and history, the repertoire and the archive.¹⁶ These recent interrogations of the archival form from both feminist engagements with ephemerality and performance critique make visible the iterative possibilities that digital media enable and render the archive anything but fixed and determined. While the term “generative” in relation to computer processing and big data emphasizes a system’s autonomy in the production of narratives and interpretations, our subtle yet significant reorientation toward the “performative” makes more explicit the possibilities to intervene and critique the production of historical knowledge. At the same time, the emphasis in performance theory on the social and material conditions of each event helps to foreground the social and technical infrastructure involved in performing the archive. Where generative notions of archival technology tend to obscure the technologies at work, a performative focus brings them into greater relief.

For our project, performativity also reflects our conceptualization of agency—both its possibilities and limitations—in relation to the technology of the archive. The history of how various disciplines considered the significance of Curtis’s documentation of his Native American subjects attests to the shifts in our understanding of agency in relation to evidence and the embodiment of identity. On the one hand, *The North American Indian* is certainly reflective of the “science of race” and biological determinism, as it was advanced through the emergence of ethnography as a methodology of early cultural anthropologists. As Shawn Michelle Smith has argued in *American Archives*, the “visual paradigm” of this era—the convergence of “biological racialism” and “the reinvention of subjectivities through photography”—established and circulated gendered and racialized identities in the United States.¹⁷ Mick Gidley and Christopher Lyman, each of whom has recently produced a prominent analysis of Curtis’s legacy, have relied on the “social construction” understanding of identity categories in order to emphasize the power disparity at play. This approach simultaneously forecloses the possibilities of Native American self-representation and promotes many misrepresentations and essentialist iconographies.¹⁸ More recently, however, scholars have also begun to question the social constructionist’s tendency to overdetermine the lack of agency of the subjects who, after all, chose to pose for and participate in Curtis’s project. According to Shamoan Zamir, Gidley and Lyman’s framing “characterizes the work primarily in terms of ‘the formation and perpetuation of an iconography,’ concluding that the images must be seen as ‘reconstructions or, more accurately, constructions produced at the behest of a prevailing ideology.’”¹⁹ Zamir argues that “to dismiss the photographs in *The North American Indian* as fabrications is, therefore, to hold to conceptualizations of cultural authenticity and historical accuracy too narrow to allow the varied historical forms of Native agency to come into view.”²⁰ Instead, Zamir suggests, we should also account for the ways in which by posing for Curtis, his subjects were not singularly victims of his exploitation but also a “newly emergent” class of Native American “leaders and cultural brokers.”²¹ For Zamir, the “performance” of these leaders “was the vehicle for a genuine self-expression.”²² Strategically aware of both the limits and the possibilities of self-fashioning in cultural politics of representation, they possessed a “skillful command of documentary evidence,” very much like the feminist archivist/performers mentioned above.²³ Aaron Glass similarly argues that while it is important to recognize the insights of “the dominant strain of criticism of Curtis over the past 25 years,” which has highlighted how images were staged, posed, and manipulated for the purposes of “constructing a highly selective and romantic picture of Native Americans,” such framing has the tendency of “ignoring the active participation and possibly strategic agency of the indigenous people who chose to sit and pose and dress up for him.”²⁴ Further extending calls by scholars such as Zamir and Glass, we might also consider how this type of archive might be leveraged to answer Taiaiake Alfred’s call for indigenous peoples to “regenerate ourselves culturally and achieve freedom and political independence” by redressing the “legacies of disconnection, dependency, and dispossession” enacted by years of colonial domination.²⁵

Thus, in relation to the notion of “performing,” this project attempts to 1) unveil the performative nature of Curtis’ documentation that, as a particularly influential ethnographic archive, still largely persists with a certain level of empirical objectivity in popular imagination, and 2) explore the performative agency to be

gained from the archive despite its deeply rooted associations with notions of authenticity, evidence, and tradition. This includes explorations of historical agency, as well as contemporary forms of agency facilitated by our techno-social production. To be certain, technological intervention is not required to do such work with archives; however, especially for the undergraduate audience that we have in mind, aggregating the archival sources in tandem with these critical contexts and meta-considerations of the very enterprise of archival knowing is a unique opportunity that platforms like Scalar present. Although *Performing Archive* duplicates digital surrogates that are already available in various digital collections, we wanted to explore the possibility for repetition with difference in “publishing the archive.”

This attention to archive-as-technology seemed particularly critical given that we were dealing with a collection of artifacts that were everywhere inscribed with the operations of social networks. We were eager to de-center Curtis—so that these were not “his” photographs, but rather the photographic products of a series of patrons, assistants, subjects, agencies, photographers, and ethnographers. Zamir and Glass have both pushed Curtis’s scholarship toward recognition not only of the performative nature of the work, but also of its “essentially collaborative nature.”²⁶ Thus we turned our attention away from the “salvage” work of Curtis and toward the preservation, self-fashioning, and strategic positioning on the part of the many subjects who sat for Curtis.²⁷ In our contemporary moment, we were concerned with the social networks that continue to create, remix, and monetize *The North American Indian*, and we wanted to open up our archive to more contribution. If archives function as technologies to “introduce patterns that act as a form of social management by contributing to the production of the framework of perception, and thus the scope of what we live as the present,” then the many brick-and-mortar and digital archives that hold *The North American Indian* and related materials were fundamentally shaping not only the stories that Curtis told but the storytelling of entire groups of people involved in the production of the images and text.²⁸ Our own technological context enacted a similar patterning; it was shaped by the source archives and was shaping what would be possible for future performances within our digital “archive.” *Performing Archive* is in some sense a “social management” tool, and we needed to be aware of the kinds of management we were enacting. Digital archives such as ours are “thresholds” both in Bacon’s sense of staging a performative event and in Alan Liu’s sense of a “thick, unpredictable zone of contact” between media types and social groups.²⁹ Archival theory and history were particularly crucial to understanding how we wanted to structure this particular threshold.

We found ourselves similarly interested in the notion of an archive alive to possibilities of rehistoricization, reuse, and remix as enabled by two features of the Scalar architecture: community contribution and media import within the network. As in many web publication platforms, Scalar enables reader comments. These are simple one-click operations that do not require a Scalar account and allow a user to remain anonymous. Contributions of this type show up as a comment thread on a particular page of the book. We have chosen to actively solicit a more involved kind of community contribution for the archive, utilizing the different “book user” categories available within Scalar. Any reader can request a Scalar account and then be set up as a Commentator, Reviewer, or Reader. A Reader can add signed comments to any page, a Reviewer might edit existing pages—amending our annotations of media or adding additional commentary—and a Commentator can both edit existing pages and add new pages, which will appear as commentary to existing pages. We are particularly interested in the Commentator category, which will enable other users to respond to and supplement our work. We also plan to use the additional Author category for those users who would like to build out new areas of the archive, creating new scholarly or artistic content directly within our own infrastructure. Also as a teaching resource, we are eager to see how Scalar’s participatory platform can create opportunities for the students to develop and share their own interpretations of the archive. This more granular approach to defining the contributor’s roles and participation relates to the broader discussions around scholarly communications in digital environments. While the current vernacular ethos of participation in social media often results in the abstraction of the category of the “user,” we want to explore how specifying the contributor’s social and disciplinary positions can help us to contextualize participation in order to highlight the importance of epistemological diversity in any collaborative model of scholarly production.

While there are many affordances within the structure of the existing book, perhaps the most exciting opportunity for reuse and remix arises from the open data structure and Scalar’s unique multimodal

authoring interface. As previous projects developed in Scalar attest, its particular advantage is the ability to make visible the interconnections amongst not only the aggregated source materials but also across interpretative “paths.”³⁰ While such interconnections, or perhaps narratives, are often seen as naturally emerging from the relational database, Scalar’s interface allows the user-scholar to make interpretative associations with intention, while simultaneously maintaining the possibilities for robust searching and chance encounters through its database. By and large, individual media assets are not housed within the Scalar infrastructure. Instead, Scalar pulls media in from partner archives like Internet Archive or Critical Commons for display within each Scalar book. What does reside locally is the metadata for each item. This structure reduces the storage overhead for any one book and for the Scalar platform as a whole. It also means that once the metadata has been created, it and the associated media content can be leveraged in any Scalar book anywhere. Consequently, not only can users browse through our material as they see fit, they may also make use of our metadata and media linkages to create entire new books utilizing the media content that we have aggregated. Having established the links with archives like Northwestern and the [DP.la](#) (Digital Public Library of America), we have made it possible for other Scalar users to make use of these same resources within this platform. Similarly, our local content and metadata—both from the Honnold-Mudd Special Collections and from the Archives of Traditional Music, which are housed now in Critical Commons—are available through the Scalar network.

Archive

Such understanding of the performative in our approach to historical knowledge and identity formation allows us to imagine different archival practices post-digitization, from simply inheriting cultural legacy through digital surrogates, to making explicit the terms by which we inherit the archive, to thinking of the archive as an historical prompt to new kinds of performance. As a field, digital humanities has been particularly attentive to the issues of the relationship between formal transformations (materiality) and its interpretative possibilities (epistemology). In many aspects, *Performing Archive* is not an archive as traditionally understood, both in its technology and in its claim to authority. Although it leverages the database’s ability to ingest publicly accessible resources, compiles them as a searchable index, and presents them in a single, unified interface, these procedures do not amount to properly archiving the materials. As many have noted, the archive’s metaphorical utility/ubiquity in the digital environment of blogs and content management systems (CMS) makes it tempting to refer to compiling or aggregating endeavors as archival, but they do not address the painstaking process of digitization, descriptive metadata and, most importantly, the preservation and sustainability measures that underlie an archive’s first and foremost function as secure storage.³¹ Rather, the project leverages archival work (on the Claremont instance of *The North American Indian*) and the availability of *The North American Indian*, already digitized and cataloged by the institutions listed above, to reflect on the particular cultural and epistemological authority traditionally invested in the archive, and to explore ways to unpack the construction of Curtis’ visual ethnographic archive.

As mentioned earlier, one of the project’s critical as well as design priorities to emerge from our first meeting was to “de-center” Curtis as the creator of the archive. This is not to say that Curtis’s biography and ideology, his expressed benevolent intention toward his subjects and evidently sincere scholarly passion, his financial necessities and motives, and other particularities of his social and cultural position do not matter for the contemporary interpretation of *The North American Indian*. They are obviously important aspects of any scholarly consideration of his work; as such, various paths in our Scalar book address these layers of “authorship” and “authorial intention,” as well as Curtis’s historical context. We found, however, that the Northwestern and the American Memory digital archives already effectively provide context on Curtis, the “entrepreneur, photographer and enthusiast.”³² Both sites prominently feature Curtis’s face on the main page, and much of the “editorial” content offered in addition to the digital collection is about Curtis himself. For example, the section entitled “Edward S. Curtis in Context” in the American Memory site (prominently featured and linked to in the Northwestern version), provides Curtis’s “biographical timeline,” a map titled “North American Indians as Witnessed by Edward Curtis,” and a couple of introductory and illuminating essays that focus on his relationship to the tribal members, his skills as a

photographer, his often tenuous relationship to the scientific community of his time, his influences, and his social connections.

Instead of duplicating this contextualization centered on Curtis, and in response to insights like those of Glass and Zamir regarding the agency of many other individuals and entities in bringing the collection into existence, we put our collective effort toward a different framing that is reflective of how recent consideration of Curtis's work shifts the attention toward the subject's "performance," as well as new ways of thinking about the images. On one level, our effort to de-center Curtis is evident in such simple decisions as not featuring the image of Curtis in any manner that is prominent. But more significantly, it is reflected in the sections developed by the graduate fellows, independently authored but collaboratively conceived from the start. From her media studies perspective, Heather Blackmore's video essay, for example, asks not what Curtis was thinking, but rather urges viewers to think self-reflectively about what it means to be an audience to such images and the effects of consuming racial tropes. Ulia Gossart, drawing on her archival studies and community informatics background, asks us to consider a radically collaborative model of archival building that privileges tribal member perspectives in place of those of Curtis (more below). David Kim's network visualization provides a different kind of access to these images, one that denaturalizes Curtis's own titles and description of the subjects he photographed. Similarly, our two undergraduate research fellows, Beatrice Schuster and Amy Borsuk, wrote short essays to introduce students to contemporary uses of Curtis's materials in fan fiction and the rights issues that emerge when images like those in *The North American Indian* become the basis for commercial production. Keeping in mind *Performing Archive's* possible pedagogic utility for undergraduates who are beginning to think about the history of race and national identity in the United States, in relation to visual culture by way of digital access to archival materials, our project offers different access or pathways to Curtis's materials than other representations, despite the fact that the core archival source is same.

Even as we consider *Performing Archive* to offer different modes of access to the dispersed archives built around *The North American Indian* project, we had to confront the larger structural issues around the technologies of digital archives, race, and identity formation. Much of the work on the technologies of digital archives has focused on a 2007 special issue of *PMLA* on "Remapping Genre," in which an extended discussion of the database as genre takes place. Ed Folsom, of the Whitman Archive, set the terms for the discussion in his piece, "Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives." Folsom draws on Lev Manovich's work to argue that the "attack of database on narrative" essentially restructures the narrative logic of the brick-and-mortar archive, as Folsom sees it, to that of digital database.³³ But as Jerome McGann points out in his reply, the processes of formal transformation and digital migration highlight that the "n-dimensionality" (multidimensionality at any level) that Folsom associates with the database is actually a quality of narrative and of the literary archive.³⁴ Thus McGann demystifies any grand sense of the database as an autonomous system capable of superseding the constraints of narrative. At stake for both McGann and Folsom, however, is the question of archival simulation: "How do we design and build digital simulations that meet our needs for studying works like Whitman's?"³⁵

For our purposes here, there are two problems: first, the ethnic archive does not prioritize the "simulation" of inherited works as its end goal. Second, as a largely visual archive, *Performing Archive* asks us to think about the relationships between representation and knowledge creation differently. As Dana Williams and Marissa Lopez argue in their formulation of the "ethnic archive" (in an issue of *PMLA* in 2012 concerned with "Practices of the Ethnic Archive"), "If the archive has historically provided an opportunity to establish tradition, the ethnic archive affords an opportunity to do the opposite: to challenge assumptions cultivated as truths; to contest the hegemony of the nation-state's imagined pasts and gestures; and to invoke a multiethnic cacophony of voices that require reconsiderations of established knowledge and knowledge production alike."³⁶ Citing the critical framework of postcolonial critique in their discussion, they focus on the formal transformation of the archive, asking critical ethnic studies to move beyond the inclusion of heretofore forgotten works to "reconsider the archive wholesale, questioning its politics and practices, and implement new practices and methodologies."³⁷ Despite the rather stark differences between the textual-studies orientation of the digital humanities' literary archives and our approach to an ethnic visual archive, which embraces postcolonial critique's fundamental orientation toward decentering knowledge formations,

we share a priority in appealing to the possibilities for performance to defamiliarize established conventions. In fact, we see a productive intersection between the ethnic archival theory's call for the incorporation of transnational and diaspora studies into "new methodologies of interpretation and translation informing archival practices," and McGann's notion of "deformance." For McGann, "deformative moves reinvestigate the terms in which critical commentary will be undertaken. Not the least significant consequence ... is the dramatic exposure of subjectivity as a live and highly informative option of interpretative commentary."³⁸ Both perspectives reject enlightenment ideals of the cumulative archive—i.e. that more materials lead to better, more accurate knowledge—in order to emphasize the digital archive as a site of critique and interpretation, wherein access is understood not in terms of access to truth, but to the possibility of past, present, and future performance. In our case, the past performance takes shape most often in visual and sonic materials. We are not attempting to create simulations of the text; in fact, we deprioritized reproducing and considering the text of *The North American Indian* for this phase of the project. Instead, as described above, we were interested to see how the dispersed structure and multimedia capabilities of Scalar could enable us to perform the past, present, and future of these consolidated archives.

Ending at a Beginning: The Protocol for Native American Materials

There is something fitting about ending this piece with a consideration of one of the issues that shaped our early work on *Performing Archives*. A project that is at the threshold between pilot and full scope must return to the processes of starting, imagining, and inquiring that have been and will continue to be central. Arguing from a feminist critique the perspective of the digital literary archive, Wernimont asks, "Are digital archives feminist because the content is by women, or because the modes of production are feminist, or because the technologies themselves are feminist or used to feminist ends? Is it all three? Do we have to account for both the historical and social contexts from which particular archives arise when thinking about the nature of their feminism?"³⁹ These are questions that collectively address the relationship between the archival content and the critical priorities embedded in the technical design of digital archives. As a part of our attempt to de-center Curtis so as to allow for different frames of access, we wanted to create spaces within our archive that can be developed from an entirely different model for archival building. In terms reminiscent of Wernimont's feminist argument, we wanted to think about not only the content but the modes of production and use in ways inflected by critical race and ethnic studies. If, as discussed above, the performative framework of the project allows for a different kind of archival agency, then how might that agency be distributed to also include the perspectives of Native American subjectivities whose relationship to this now digitized, inherited cultural legacy might further disrupt Curtis's authority in the matter? We approached this possibility not from the multiculturalist framework of inclusion, but for the epistemological rupture that such inclusion may enact.

In this regard, we were very intrigued by the recent developments in the archival profession, namely the Protocol for Native American Archival Materials (PNAAM), which was "developed to identify best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival material held by non-tribal repositories."⁴⁰ Established in 2008 by the Task Force elected by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the PNAAM prioritizes tribal intellectual and cultural authority. It proposes that non-tribal archival institutions share or even "repatriate" their records and artifacts of tribal provenance. Despite the seemingly benign proposal for "tribal consultation" on archival practices, in its call for "rethinking public accessibility and use of some materials," the protocol is also a radical departure, in many ways, from the SAA's code of ethics that stresses liberal democratic ideals of open access and public ownership.⁴¹ As such, while the SAA recognizes and supports the formation and the continuing development of the Protocol Working Group and Task Force, it has yet to officially endorse the document.

The difficulty here is that the familiar solutions of more inclusion and the technological solution of digital's wider access are inadequate. The protocol's assertion of greater control, limitation in access, and

prioritization of tribal self-narrative seems incongruous with the current digital archival fever that celebrates openness, access, and infinite narrative possibilities. However, the Task Force tries to make the case for SAA's endorsement by pointing to the development of Mukurtu, a content management system that has been garnering attention in the digital humanities and archival practice.⁴² Mukurtu does not simply inherit the archive; rather, it locates much of the content and access decisions with tribal members. It is a model for digital archives that is based on a different set of values even as it shares with digital-archive fever a certain liberatory agency. But this agency is not framed necessarily in terms of multicultural inclusion. The differentiating feature of the Mukurtu platform is that it allows the tribal members to design archival narratives and access in a manner that "simulates" their own set of understandings of intellectual value and artifactual materiality. The appeal of the platform is its closed quality, thus strictly delimiting conversations to those within authorized user groups, rather than across or between groups. Interestingly, this solution might substitute one kind of cultural blindness for another. As one panelist observed at the 2008 annual conference of The Society of American Archivists, digitizing and providing open access to Native American archival materials may violate custom not by making resources available, but by invalidating or ignoring tribal or community investment in materiality, in which sharing archival memories presupposes and values that those archival materials accumulate traces of the users who see, hear, and touch the materials.⁴³ According to this view, the formal transformation from material object to digital representation itself entailed a violation of cultural values.

At the outset of this project we found ourselves uncertain with respect to our own obligations regarding *The North American Indian* materials. In order to address this and what seemed to us a larger lack of consolidated knowledge in this area, Ulia Gosart developed her section of *Performing Archive* as a kind of digital repository of archival protocol and history, in which she discusses the development and the priorities of the Protocol for Native American Archival Materials. She also outlines a method by which our project might engage with the over one hundred tribal communities represented in *The North American Indian*. Given the time frame of the pilot, the actual design and execution of this aspect of project remains aspirational at the moment. Nevertheless, we believe the performative framework of the project takes into account the protocol's critique of the dominant mode of archival building and anticipates future collaborations. It will also be a technical challenge to emerge from epistemological diversity to explore the ways in which the features of the Scalar platform may correspond to those of Mukurtu, or differently address the structural needs of an archive that is interested in a wide array of performative possibilities. We are struck by the use of the idea of "simulation" for the Mukurtu platform and wonder how that conception interacts with a theorization of the ethnic archive like that of Williams and Lopez. We are particularly eager to remain vigilant with respect to neoliberal discourses of access, representation, and participation, which "entails the disarming and disappearance of sites of tension."⁴⁴ Rather than creating a closed or hermetic space, or one where difference is flattened in a homogenous and anonymized whole, we wanted to create spaces through which tension would be visible. We understand this as a partially realized goal in the case of the social network visualization, wherein one can see the linkages and relationships from which disputations regarding agency and power arise. It is an aspirational goal with respect to various stakeholder communities, whom we hope will find the archive to be an occasion to perform their own engagements with the materials. *Performing Archive* is, following Bacon, a "poetic and critical affirmation and intervention in the rhetoric and orthodoxies surrounding individual imagining and social agency" in our contemporary moment—a space where resistant performances can be enacted.⁴⁵

A range of Scalar publications can be viewed in the project showcase, <http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/showcase/>.



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0 Comments on the whole post

Footnotes

1. Edward S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, 20 vols., Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1907-1930. [[↗](#)]
2. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Also published at Media Commons, <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/mcpress/plannedobsolescence/two-authorship/from-product-to-process/>, accessed August 2013. [[↗](#)]
3. This idea of enacting liveness derives from a 2013 “Performing the Archive” event at the Hemispheric Institute. See <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/past-events/1705-july-10-2013-performing-the-archive-15-years-of-the-hemispheric-institute>. [[↗](#)]
4. The digital humanities planning grant team consisted of Scripps College faculty member, Jacqueline Wernimont; our Digital Initiatives Librarian, Allegra Swift; and our Research and Development Librarian, Sam Kome. [[↗](#)]

5. Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, "Introduction," in *Performing Archive/Archives of Performance* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013), 10. [2]
6. Jacob Gruber, "Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, New Series 72, no. 6 (Dec 1970): 1289-99. [2]
7. The installation was shown at the 18th Street Art Center (Los Angeles, CA), the Yerba Buena Museum (San Francisco, CA), and the Haus der Kunst (Munich, Germany). For a profile of the show see http://www.hatchfund.org/showcase/the_performing_archive. [2]
8. re.act.feminism, A Performing Archive, <http://www.reactfeminism.org/about.php>. [2]
9. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Queer theory's critique of the archive has been particularly influential in laying the grounds for the reconsideration of the evidential authority traditionally invested in the archive. See José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to *Queer Acts*," *Women & Performance* 8.2 (1996): 5-16; Anne Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); as well as the film *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) directed by Cheryl Dunye, and the related book of photographs, *Fae Richard Photo Archive* by the filmmaker and photographer Zoe Leonard. [2]
10. See for example, Lilian Manzor's *Sites that Speak*, <http://scalar.usc.edu/hc/sites-that-speak/index>; Henry Jenkins's work on participatory culture; or Anne Kustritz's work on "digital self-fashioning" presented at MIT7 2013, <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit7/subs/speakers.html>. [2]
11. Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 9-63. [2]
12. See Matthew Kirschenbaum's plenary talk at the 2011 Digital Humanities Summer Institute, "Digital Humanities Archive Fever," <http://vimeo.com/28006483>. June, 2011. [2]
13. Borggreen and Gade, "Introduction," 13. [2]
14. The entire text of the preface is available on Northwestern's site. These two lines, written more than a century ago, perhaps surprisingly reflect familiar contemporary discussions about the archive: "The task of recording the descriptive material embodied in these volumes ... had its inception in 1898. Since that time, during each year, months of arduous labor have been spent in **accumulating the data necessary to form a comprehensive and permanent record** of all the important tribes of the United States and Alaska that still retain to a considerable degree their primitive customs and traditions.... The passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some tradition, some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other; consequently **the information that is to be gathered, for the benefit of future generations**, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once or the opportunity will be lost for all time. It is this need that has inspired the present task." (Vol. 1, "General Introduction"). [2]
15. Julie Louise Bacon, "Unstable Archives: Languages and Myths of the Visible," in Borggreen and Gade, *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance*, 77. [2]
16. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). [2]
17. Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6-7. [2]
18. Mick Gidley, "Ways of Seeing the Curtis Project on the Plains," in *The Plains Indian Photographs of Edward S. Curtis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 39-66; Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982). [2]
19. Shamoan Zamir, "Native Agency and the Making of The North American Indian: Alexander B. Upshaw and Edward S. Curtis," *The American Indian Quarterly* 31 no. 4 (Fall 2007): 613-653, 615, emphasis original, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_indian_quarterly/toc/aiq31.4.html. [2]
20. *Ibid.*, 639. [2]
21. *Ibid.*, 633. [2]

22. *Ibid.*, 648. [2]
23. *Ibid.*, 634. [2]
24. Aaron Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive: Performance, Materiality, and (In)visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Hamat'sa," *Visual Anthropology Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 128-49, 130. See also Marcus Amerman's visual art engagement with Curtis's work and a contextualizing response in *Staging the Indian: The Politics of Representation*, ed. Jill D. Sweet and Ian Berry (Saratoga, NY: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, 2001), 46-9. [2]
25. Taiaiake Alfred, *Was'a'se: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 20. [2]
26. Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive," 129. [2]
27. *Ibid.*, 135. [2]
28. Bacon, "Unstable Archives," 78. [2]
29. *Ibid.*, 89; Alan Liu, "Imagining the New Media Encounter," in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/>. [2]
30. A range of Scalar publications can be viewed in the project showcase, <http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/showcase/>. [2]
31. The timing of this writing coincided with the government shutdown, the first few days of which the images from the Library of Congress were not accessible, making it abundantly clear that providing access to digital archives is not the same as archiving itself. For more on the archival metaphors of digital culture and the ephemerality of digital memory, see Wendy Hui Kyung Chun's *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011). [2]
32. "About the Work," Northwestern University Library, Edward S. Curtis's "The North American Indian," 2003. <http://curtis.library.northwestern.edu/curtis/aboutwork.html>. [2]
33. Ed Folsom, "Database as Genre: Epic Transformation of Archives," *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (October 2007): 1571-79. [2]
34. Jerome McGann, "Database, Interface and Archival Fever," *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (October 2007): 1589-92, 1589. [2]
35. *Ibid.* [2]
36. Dana A Williams and Marissa K. Lopez, "More than a Fever: Toward a Theory of the Ethnic Archive," *PMLA* 127, no. 2 (March 2012): 358. [2]
37. *Ibid.* [2]
38. Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 116. [2]
39. Jacqueline Wernimont, "Whence Feminism? Assessing Feminist Interventions in Digital Literary Archives," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2013), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000156/000156.html>. [2]
40. Society of American Archivists, "Final Report: Native American Protocols Forum Working Group, 2012," <http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/0112-V-I-NativeAmProtocolsForum.pdf>. See also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edition (London: Zed Books, 2012) for additional thoughts on indigenous methodologies. [2]
41. Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html> [2]
42. Mukurtu, <http://www.mukurtuarchive.org/>. [2]
43. This discussion took place at the panel, "Forum on 'Protocols for Native American Materials,'" http://saa.archivists.org/4DCGI/events/eventdetail.html?Action=Events_Detail&&InvID_W=814. [2]
44. Bacon, "Unstable Archives," 81. [2]
45. *Ibid.*, 82. [2]



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