

EDITORIAL: ON ARCHIVES, MIGRATION AND GENDER

Vera Herold

Universidade Católica Portuguesa
vera.herold@sapo.pt

Verena Lindemann Lino

Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC)
verenalindemann@campus.ul.pt

We would like to follow Jacques Derrida's path in *Archive Fever* and begin neither "at the beginning, nor even at the archive" "[b]ut rather at the word 'archive'" (1995, 9). Derrida is not alone in noting the relevance of the word's etymology. Deriving from the Greek *arkhē* – meaning "origin," "beginning," but also "government" – and *arkheion* – designating the house or residence of the *archons*, the rulers, or superior magistrates – the word carries with it a nexus between "commencement" and "commandment," but also the emplacement of the law within a particular site (see Derrida 1995; Assmann 1999, 143). It was at the house of the *archons* where official and historical documents and artifacts were stored, ordered, and interpreted, producing, as Derrida highlights, a place where law and singularity intersected in privilege (1995, 10). The *archons* drew on the documents stored at their residence to recall and impose the law. They served at once as guardians and hermeneutical authority, holding the single right to interpret the archive and the documents kept within. The archive, thus, was a domain of political power where certain citizens produced and acted upon the law, combining, as Derrida notes, the "domiciliation" of the law with a "patriarchic [...] function" (1995, 10). In other words, following Derrida's path, we find inscribed into the etymology of the word "archive" not only a link to political power but a link to a particular form of political power: a political power that derives from an

epistemological project organized around a locally rooted and gendered social formation.

However, it is not only archive's etymology that illustrates the complex interrelationship between (the) archive(s) and notions of gender and immobility. Having gained unparalleled currency in several disciplinary contexts, the archive has become a means for scholars as well as artists, activists, and archivists to readdress the past and reframe histories and subjects. This has proven particularly productive in the context of disciplines such as sexuality and queer studies, (post)colonial studies, diaspora studies or black studies, where the effects of archives as technologies of government and power are particularly tangible. It is in these fields that scholars most feel the challenges posed by omissions, silences, and biased accounts. How can one, for instance, write the history of the Atlantic slave trade if, as Saidiya Hartman writes, “[t]he irreparable violence [of it] resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered” (2008, 12)? Confronted with the inability “to exceed the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive” (2008, 12), Hartman suggests working with and against the archive by adopting what she terms “critical fabulation”: a mode of narration that

emphasize[s] the incommensurability between the prevailing discourses and the event, amplifie[s] the instability and discrepancy of the archive, flout[s] the realist illusion customary in the writing of history, and produce[s] a counter-history at the intersection of the fictive and the historical. (Hartman 2008, 12)

Although many archival projects in academia and beyond have admittedly been motivated by a “historical desire, [...] for lost bodies, subjects, and texts, and for the evidentiary models they enable” (Arondekar 2015, 99), Hartman's words illustrate that what has come to be described as the “archival turn” implies much more than “recuperating” “lost” or “invisible” voices or traces. Rather, it “registers a rethinking of the materiality and imaginary of collections and what kind of truth-claims lie in documentation” (Stoler 2002, 94).

While often associated with the publication of Derrida's *Archive Fever*, this epistemic shift is informed by different analytic, practical, and political concerns which in part precede Derrida's text (Stoler 2002, 92-93), but also by current developments in digital media and information technology. Paul Basu and Ferdinand de Jong (2016) correctly emphasize the importance of Michel Foucault's work as philosophical ground for the reconsideration of the traditional disciplinary understanding of archives as institutions and sites of knowledge retrieval. Against

the idea of a repository of historical evidence or “archive-as-source” (Stoler 2002, 93), archives have increasingly come to be understood as artefacts of knowledge production, whose mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, interpretation, and organization constitute a research object on its own. Especially in cultural theory, *the Archive* with a capital A is often used metaphorically, referring neither to a particular site nor grouping of documents, but rather, in a Foucauldian sense, to “the law of what can be said” (Foucault 2000 [1972], 129). However, the relationship to archives and documentation has also changed due to the current abundance of images, texts, video, and digital data. As Tavia Nyong’o suggests, for younger generations, “the primary commonsense usage of the word *archive*” may no longer refer “to an institution housing documents but to the ubiquitously accessible location where digital copies of one’s e-mails, MP3 files, videos, et cetera, one’s so-called data double, are stored” (Arondekar et al. 2015, 217).

The shift of focus in archival practice, research, and theorization has led to a considerable opening of what might be considered an archive and archival inquiry. Ann Cvetkovich, for instance, has described her own work as being “organized as ‘an archive of feelings,’ an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (2003, 7). Antoinette Burton (2003), in contrast, examines the domestic space as an archival source in texts by three twentieth-century Indian women writers as a means to record their perspective on colonial modernity. And, in *Unruly Visions*, Gayatri Gopinath explores how aesthetic practices by queer diasporic artists engage in archival excavation and thereby “disrupt the normative ways of seeing and knowing that have been so central to the production, containment, and disciplining of sexual, racial, and gendered bodies” (2018, 7).

The present issue of *Diffractions* is inspired by approaches like these and their engagements with archive(s) through the lens of cultural texts and aesthetic practices. The articles reunited in the thematic section of this issue explore the relationships between archives, migration, and gender from various perspectives. They investigate archival encounters in cultural texts and in artistic productions, inquiring into the epistemic power of archives, but also into their subversive potentialities – since, as Stuart Hall (2001) reminds us, the archive is always re-read

in light of the present and, therefore, holds within it the potential of its own dissolution.

In this issue's first article, "Re-framing Art-History's Archive: Self-as-Other and Other-as-Self in Amrita Sher-Gil's and Pushpamala N.'s Citations," Julia Alting inquires how these two artists challenge the male archive of the art canon, particularly that of self-portraiture. In her close reading of two female self-portraits, she teases the female archive out of its Spivakian double bind position to make the subaltern's speech acknowledgeable.

Similarly, Daria Steiner's article, "Heroines of Hunger Relief: Challenging Feminization of Famine in Twenty-first Century Cultural Archive(s)," engages with the hegemonic cultural memory of the Irish Great Famine (1845-1852). Looking for unapologetic and independent heroines in contemporary archives, such as Emma Donoghue's novel *The Wonder*, the author shows how tropes of famine feminization can be subverted through the agency of heroic female figures.

While teasing out of and smuggling into the patriarchal archive change official discourse and cultural memory from within by challenging established archivability criteria (Mbembe, 2002), alternative archives subvert them from without. Still, alternative archives have their own archivability criteria that require further inquiry. While less frequently questioned, they also contain inclusions and exclusions, sometimes difficult to address and challenge, especially in the case of subaltern minorities and victims.

The third article, "Invented Histories: Gossip as Archival Practice in Anna Burns' 'Milkman,'" is an inquiry into the violent power dynamics of the patriarchal yet oppressed Northern Irish Catholic community. Holly Wielechowski focuses on the role of gossip in this context to excavate the vast grey zones occupied by collaborators, beneficiaries, bystanders, and implicated subjects (Rothberg, 2019). In this case gossip is less of an archive and more of an archival practice of control, violence, and exclusion.

Not unlike gossip, the orality of archives made of familial or communal memories are deemed unreliable. Their often-anecdotal character sheds light, adds detail, or challenges official cultural memory discourse, punching a "hole within a totalizing whole" as Joel Fineman writes (1989, 61). These are the archives that Sophie Pinto examines in her article "Inherited Stories of the *Salto* – the Leap: The Clandestine Journey of Portuguese Migrants to France in the 1960-1970s & José

Vieira's People of the *Salto*." Focusing on José Vieira's documentary series, she analyses first-person memories of illegal immigrants and the way in which these memories are hidden or revealed and handed down to following generations. Proposing a queer reading, she argues that these affective archives constitute, together with the families' documents and artifacts, a communal archive made of minor and intimate counter-(hi)stories.

In "When the Archive Vomits Salazar: Representations of Women in Portuguese Contemporary Film," Adriana Martins shifts the focus to critical remediations of archival material in Portuguese cinema. She discusses how three women filmmakers expose archival violence and create revealing counter-histories to the female ideal cherished by the official ideology of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship.

In the following contribution, the case study "Entre a Arte e a História," M. Angélica Beghini Morales and Thiago Haruo Santos reflect on the impact of artistic residencies in the Migration Museum of the State of São Paulo. They illustrate how the inclusion of art in historical museums may bring about new forms of representation and inclusion of contemporary minorities' own voices. The dialogue between the museum's collection and artistic residencies brings historiographic knowledge to art and artistic vision to history.

Zsuzsi Flohr's artistic contribution explores her means to address the legacies of a violent past within a personal postmemory project. In the photographic essay "Recollecting Wounded Narratives: The Reconstruction of a Backpack," she asks how contradictory familial memories of a mythical long-lost object reveal social and gendered nuances in private Holocaust (post)memory in Hungary. This sensitive and personal text also reveals the tensions between the injunction to remember and the wish to forget.

The thematic section closes with an interview with scholar Gayatri Gopinath about "Queer Diasporas and Archival Production." Working at the intersection of transnational feminist and queer studies, postcolonial studies, and diaspora studies, in this interview Gopinath explores some of the main notions and concerns of her pathbreaking work on "queer diaspora" and queer visual aesthetic practices.

Diffractions' 4th issue continues with a non-thematic section. Carlotta Defenu's article "Translation in Progress: The Manuscript Of 'O Corvo' by Fernando Pessoa" undertakes a critical genetic analysis of Fernando Pessoa's

translation process of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" by comparing the manuscript with the final translation, opening the field to further genetic study on Pessoa's translation practice and poetry production.

Finally, the two book reviews relate to the topics of the present and the last issue of our journal. Miriam Thaler engages with Olivette Otele's "African Europeans: An Untold History" and Iyari Martinez Márquez leads us through Malcolm Miles' "Paradoxical Urbanism."

The pages of this issue challenge and deconstruct various archives. Returning to Derrida's path from the beginning of our introduction, we would like to suggest that they make two of the three Derridean "impressions": a "*scriptural* or *typographic*" imprint and an imprecise impression of a not-yet-concept that, agreeing with Derrida, we do not feel is feeble, but the archive's futurity (Derrida, 1995, 22-24). The archive is "dependen[t] with respect to what will come" (Derrida, 1995, 24), never closed and always open to the future, only to be challenged all over again.

References

- Arondekar, Anjali. 2015. "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia." *Differences* 25, no. 3: 98–122.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2847964>
- Arondekar, Anjali, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, and Susan Stryker. 2015. "Queering Archives. A Roundtable Discussion." *Radical History Review* 122: 211–231.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2849630>
- Assmann, Aleida. 1999. *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München: Beck.
- Basu, Paul, and Ferdinand de Jong. 2016. "Utopian Archives, Decolonial Affordances: Introduction to Special Issue." *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 24 (1): 5–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12281>.

- Burton, Antoinette. 2003. *Dwelling in the Archive. Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1995. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (summer): 9–63.
- Fineman, Joel. 1989. "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction." In *New Historicism*, edited by Harold Aram Veesser, 49-76. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 2000. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage.
- Gopniath, Gayatri. 2018. *Unruly Visions. The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 2001. "Constituting an Archive." *Third Text* 54: 89–92.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *small axe* 26: 1–14.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2002. "The Power of the Archive and its Limits." In *Refiguring the Archive*, edited by Carolyn Hamilton et al., 19–26. Springer Science + Business media Dordrecht. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0570-8>
- Rothberg, Michael. 2019. *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." *Archival Science* 2: 87–109.

Creative Commons Attribution License | This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.