

**READING
WRITING
RESEARCH METHODS**

2019-2020

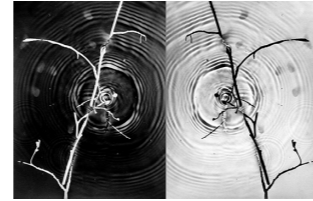
primary research (making texts about and discussing your own work)
[since this was session 1, we primarily wrote on works done before PZI]
26.09.2019

PHOTOGRAM DIPTYCHS

What Photograms of gelatin-silver negative and positive prints. Each print is on 16" by 20" multi-grade paper, with both negative and positive prints placed alongside each other to form a diptych. The negative and positive prints depict black-and-white abstracted yet recognizable familiar shadows of twigs, water droplets and a chemistry bond structure kit

How It was made in a darkroom with the following materials: a cookie tray, light sensitive paper, a jug of water, an off-camera flash, twigs, coins and a chemistry bond structure kit. The choice of material was mostly related to the university setting I was in, basically whatever I could find in the dorm room. After filling the tray with water, the paper was submerged into it. The twigs, coins and bond structure were then placed on top of the paper. The flash was then turned on, exposing the paper and creating a negative print photogram. This negative print was then put on top of another paper, embracing it with its already exposed print. Exposing this second print then led to the creation of a positive print.

Why The project began with an examination of the etymology of photographing, drawing with light. A photogram is an imprint caused by light, drawing itself around a shape. A camera-less process like making a photogram in the darkroom breaks the act of photographing into an uncontrolled playful act of working with light, light sensitive material and pure darkness. The imprinted images, both positive and negative, reveal forms and shapes colliding with light.



CLOSE UP: MEIKHA'S HOME

What: A digital photograph, close up and cropped, of a segment of a house. Everything is in focus so the background and foreground appear somewhat flat. On the background, an old window with lace curtains and rusty rod fencing. The walls are falling apart, with the brick exposed and the wood starting to crumble. A sheet of tarpaulin hangs below to hide some exposure. On the foreground, part of a clothesline droops with some torn shirts, held up by a bamboo stalk.

How Using a setting that allowed for a deep depth of field, this photograph was taken with a DSLR on a gray afternoon. The camera was handheld and zoomed into the scene. The intention was to provide more detail within the crop but also very little information about the general scenery. The ratio of the frame was set to 16:9.

Why For a close up, the 16:9 ratio (associated with narrative filmmaking) in this image reveals and hides at the same time. The intention of narrative is perhaps given in the form of 16:9 but not much is revealed in a close-up. I didn't want to reveal the entire house, mostly because the rest of it is falling apart. But I wanted to reveal parts of the house that show it is still a living space: clothes line, tarpaulin and lace curtains. On a personal level, this house used to be where my late-paternal-grandmother used to live. Currently, it is inhabited by people I do not really know, someone in the family gave it to people who needed it more. To an extent, the image engages with an attempt to reveal a memory of a place. An attempt which ended up as a close-up of its current state.

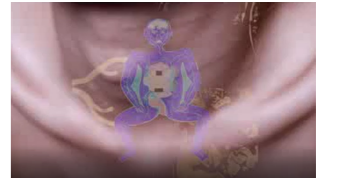


GIF: FEMALE BODY

What GIF, graphic integrated format, images of body parts: neck and chest. As the image moves, the parts come alive: the neck swallows and the chest heaves. It is the body of a female that is depicted. Before the movement is repeated, a layer of splattered paint filters above the image before the cycle repeats.

How The process begins with videography: capturing digital video footage of myself breathing and swallowing while naked. The camera is zoomed in, capturing the form as organs and not as a full body. The video footage was then compressed into mere 5 seconds of movement and then converted into a GIF format.

Why The GIF format is a very fleeting engagement with the moving image. Essentially, GIFs are flickers of images that are given a new context because of their short time-span and low resolution. Commonly used in the internet to morph long scenes into new internet meaning i.e. the meme, the GIF is a very impersonal format. Injecting footage of a female breathing into GIF-meme format, I decided to do this project to play on the concept of the female body online. The intention is devoid of sexuality, rather it tries to be more personal and abstract. Especially as the paint splatter filters over the GIF like a curtain, the intention is to disorient the average GIF viewer who associates the format with readily shareable flickers of content.



primary research session 2
articulating and interviewing on possible
self-directed research or current work
02.10.2019

THY INTERVIEWS FILEONA

What are you making? Fileona is currently thinking of using her DIY focal camera which she built herself to take her profile images on Facebook since 2013. She wants to explore the cycle of how all images are compressed when they are uploaded on a social media platform. No matter what medium she used to take the image, they will always be compressed back to 8MB size. This devaluation process reflects on a large amount of images being produced at the moment and how tech companies are trying to organise our personal data in unified forms.

Fileona's self-built camera is an analogue one with a microscopic lens. With this lens, she will be able to take the pixels information of red, green, blue channels of every image. Nowadays it's often a one-way process of digitalising the images and posting it online. By capturing the pixel information of images by the analog camera, she wants to reverse that process to make us realise how the images are presented to us the same way on screen.

And by capturing a compressed image online by microscopic analogue camera, she wants to ask if we will perceive the final image as more serious. As for now we only have a few seconds to grab the viewer's attention on social media. She also wants to see if this is a possible process since there will need to be many reiterations, and if the photos will be valid at all as subject matter. At present, she is debating whether she wants to shoot something else instead.

As Fileona's previous works are mainly street photography and she addresses the subject of her interests in an improvisational sense. Meanwhile, with this project, she approaches photography in a more conceptual way of thinking.

NOTES FROM GENERAL INTERVIEW WITH STEVE ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND READING APPROACHES:

Interested in broad essayistic, associative cultural analysis. I enjoy the work of Hito Steyerl because it is relatable and fast. I aspire to this mode of address. For my undergraduate I did comparative literature and art; concerned with the camera-facing post-colonial subject, how the camera is a tool which creates new narratives.

[How would you approach a close reading of your own work:] I would probably mimic Hito too much; [Steve suggests that you shouldn't be afraid of the voice of the essayist (the voice of informed opinion) which also involves some engagement with style, and which is rhetorical (the aim of rhetoric is to persuade and convince).] Previously concerned with the politics of digital images; issues of the post-colonial gaze; I did this for undergrad and at times felt the post-colonial was too over-indulgent in style and perhaps devoid of class analysis. In terms of writing, I would like to consider my part-time work in ghost writing and the labour involved. But at this point, most things feel tentative.

Scattered Research Interests
circa Dec 2019

Image Consciousness into Archive

I am interested in the sociological paradigms of computation and image understanding. As an indigenous person, the concept of lens-based image making is linked to technological advancement and globalisation. If the mechanical camera is a sign of modernity(that of colonial industry), then the computational camera is even more accelerating. But there are also means of image making that are more traditional, more indigenous to human physicality(mark-making). I am interested in dealing with the images of this history, specifically from an archive of the indigenous-camera interaction, though essayistic moving image making. I intend to translate this onto the virtual 3D camera (projection?) to give a more entangled image altogether.

Computational Image-making

Looking at images as pure technological beings, I am interested in how the modern day visual explorer (no matter where they are) experiences the sublime purely through technology (porn/videogames/TikTok/GoogleEarth/general internet images). I am interested in how computational image formulations(purity is pixel and code) can interact with real(capture) imagery as juxtapositions of changing “exploratory” contexts.

Hauntology and Cyberspace Depression

The internet allows for time-travel like never before. In this temporal sense(given remix culture, “comeback” aesthetics), the present seems to be haunted by nostalgia. I am interested in this distortion and whether it engages with the caged individual(caged within the grid of the pixel, the code, the cubicle of online work) through photorealistic image regeneration.

TENTATIVE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (Fileona Dkhar)

I am interested in the archive as a tool of constant collecting and also as a testimony of history. In fact, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, most of contemporary existence is collected and then archived. This is evident in our social media timelines and the repository of random digital matter in our devices. I would like to explore the concept of the archive philosophically and academically. Using this concept, I want to expose themes that are invisible or rendered invisible. I specifically mean: hidden off-shore accounts of cash reserves, invisible labor(ghostwriters), and lost indigenous history. I want to produce a conceptual digital archive, in the form of a website or wiki, highlighting these invisible themes. Taking these as tangents, I am interested in exploring who lays claim to this cluster of hidden “archiving.” I am also interested in questioning whether the archive has always been some form of database structure. Can anecdotes, passed on from generation to generation within a family, be an invisible archive? In rendering invisible things into an archive, but also asking whether an archive can be something invisible... I want to posit an archive/archeology for the future... since the future itself renders methods/practices of current digital archiving obsolete.

The personal and professional choice of using the archive as an artistic practice comes from the urgency of being indigenous. This idea of being “indigenous” is rooted in a mindset of preservation(nature), but this preservation is also one of invisibility (from modernity, capitalism). I have always been interested in the hypocrisies of visibility. Additionally, I am interested in the actual invisible functions within capitalist history (all those offshore accounts of billionaires that resist to be accounted/archived).

I would like to reference the following:

Walter Benjamin, A Short History of Photography

Gerhard Richter's Atlas

Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever

Giorgio Agamben, The Archive and Testimony

Hal Foster, The Archival Impulse

Charles Merewether, Archives of the Fallen

Spivak, An Essay on Reading the Archive

Jayce Salloum, the video installation as an active archive

Northeast India Archives

Radical

I realize that this proposal is dense right now but hoping the research phase condenses these ideas further. I feel like I would succeed if I am able to produce something digital(a prototype website) and engage with all the mentioned media/excerpts above

random key-sentences:

- Archiving is a verb in the present tense
- What does it mean to be represented in an archive
- Representative like a lawyer// Representation as series of images
- Invisibility of money
- Invisibility of representation
- Invisibility of the archive itself
- The archive as constantly being there in memory

sigmund freud// a note upon the mystic writing pad 1925

1. memory and recollection as a mystical process of writing through memory retrieval
2. we trace everything on paper but sometimes we never go back to our journals because we lose interest
3. memory works where perceptions are constant
4. forgetting and remembering are simultaneous
5. excitations are stored in memory, boredom is forgotten
6. the possibility of a mystical pad that succeeds in clarifying memory and excitement
7. the wax slab as a parallel to the memory stilulus in the human mind

Freud's note on mystic writing draws on the need for memory to be "remembered," that memory exists in order to be remembered. However, as he inquires, this memory is not entirely trustworthy. Into this Freud inserts the act of writing as the assurance that transforms memory into material.

Writing renders a mnemonic apparatus {a memory device} which can then be re-written, with the certainty of undistorted repetition {recollection}
W

The disadvantage is that the receptive capacity of the writing surface is soon exhausted. The sheet will be filled until there is no room on it.

The advantage is that it provides a permanent trace but it may lose its value over time because it ceases to interest me, I no longer want to "retain it in my memory"

Here the disadvantage is that I cannot preserve a permanent trace. Fresh notes means I have to wipe out the ones that cover the slate.

Freud's progresses towards a more metaphysical/conceptual aim for the memory apparatus, something like the wax memory slab, that mimics the actual memory organ -the brain- itself. Through this particular exercise, he actually highlights his thesis for the function of memory: to mediate a certain form of transmission, reception and storage of consciousness. He also mentions the act of passing- away and disappearing, linking memory within human consciousness... as a conception bound by time.

If I distrust my memory - neurotics - as we know, do so to a remarkable extent, but normal people have every reason for doing so as well - I am able to supplement and guarantee its working by making a note in writing... this note is preserved, as it were a materialized portion of my mnemonic apparatus, which I otherwise carry about with me invisible. I have only to bear in mind the place where this "memory" has been deposited and I can then "reproduce" it at any time I like, with the certainty that it will have remained unaltered and so have escaped the possible distortions to which it might have been subjected in my actual memory.

[How writing fails actual memory mechanisms]

The first is to choose a writing surface which will preserve intact any note upon it for an indefinite amount of time - for instance, a sheet of paper - which will become an instant memory trace.

The alternative is to write with a piece of chalk. I have a receptive surface which retains its receptive capacity for an unlimited times and notes upon which can be destroyed as soon as they cease to interest me, without need for throwing away the writing surface itself

I do not think it is too far-fetched to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system Pept.-Cs. and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception

hal foster// archival impulse 2004

1. archival artist create inventories, they sample, they share, they seek historical information, seek sources
2. the internet is a mega archive
3. there is a difference between the act of archiving vs the act of making/building a database
4. a matrix of citation and juxtaposition presents a quasi archival architecture, a complex sediment of texts and objects
5. the will to connect what cannot be connected is a will to relate.

Foster examines how modern art's practice of appropriation indicates a certain need to regenerate, remember and archive. The use of found footage is an intimate form of archiving, as is the use of mass culture's "visual artifacts." The end point is to either incite a memory for dismantling or challenge existing memory itself.

Foster mentions the internet and the database as a crucial thinking and collecting mechanism in modern society. This machinistic ideology permeates into the art world, especially in the artist themselves become archivists (perhaps not in the tradition of archeology but as integrated points of departure).

This hints at contemporary art's constant matrix of citations and juxtapositions. Formally or informally, artists function around a complex web of research (text, image and object)... indicating the artist is involved in endless thinking.

Foster ends with an absurd sentiment for the artist-archivist's role in history. Yet throughout the writing, he mostly mentions the archiving artist as a product of modern/technological society. The archiving is initially mentioned as a conceptual "verb," the artist's mode of constant referential praxis. But in suddenly linking the artist with history, since the archive is supposed to represent the past, he positions the artist as a generator of affect alone. Seemingly, he ends with the absurdity of what is to be done with history.

Archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. They elaborate on the found image, object and text, and favor the installation format as they do so. The sources are familiar, drawn from archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can be disturbed; but they can also be obscure, retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter memory.

Today, information does appear as a virtual readymade. Much data is to be processed and sent on, and many artists do 'inventory,' 'sample' and 'share' as ways of working. The ideal medium of archival art is the mega-archive of the Internet.

Archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps anarchival impulse), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled belongings and incomplete projects.

The will to "connect what cannot be connected" in archival art is not a will to totalize as much as a will to relate - to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes parodistically), to ascertain what might remain for the present.

Perhaps the paranoid dimension of archival art is the other side of the utopian ambition - to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia.

This move to turn 'excavation sites' into 'construction sites' is welcome in another way too: as a shift away from a melancholic culture that views that historical as little more than traumatic.

jacques derrida// archive fever 1995

1. the ponderous archiving machine (is this my artistic process?)// is there a ponderous archiving artist
2. the destruction drive is no longer a hypothesis for a database-ridden society
3. hypomnema: a reminder, a note, a public record, an anecdotal record, a draft, a copy
4. writing as a device of artificial memory
5. if the archive is not an external place then repetition itself, the logic of repetition (the compulsion to repeat) remains indissociable from the death drive.
6. archivization exposes destruction
7. remembering comes with forgetting

Derrida looks into the psychic processes involved in memory using Freudian psychoanalysis. He establishes a contemporary “fever” akin to Freud’s death drive inherent in the archival impulse. Here he mentions this volatility inherent in the concept of an archive, the object apparatus of memory. Most of what remains is an impression and charged with eros, it becomes beautiful.

Derrida links memory and archive in the hypomnema, a metaphysical apparatus of recollection (a post-it note comes to mind). Since this apparatus is also linked to a conceptual psychic process, the death drive is inevitably a destructive element against the anamnesis or remembering. Perhaps, complicatedly, Derrida alludes to time and death as forces that sweep off any monumental apparatus. One can think of this as inability of absolute recollection of one’s memories with time. One can also think of history itself as the great social death drive.

Derrida explains that archive fever or the destruction of the archive accompanies any mode of archiving. Hence, recollection also comes with forgetting. This is perhaps the problematic of the psychic process, which can then be extended into the more material idea of an archive apparatus. As such, the death drive along with eros can be viewed along the lines of an archival life... this is a strange metaphysical exercise.

Considering how Derrida wrote this during an age of electronic boom, he mentions “emails,” the article is somehow ominous. If the internet now is the ultimate archival apparatus, where does it exert its destructive drive? On our ability to make meaning?

The archiviolithic work is never present in person, neither in itself nor in its own effect. It leaves no monument, it bequeaths no document of its own. As inheritance, it leaves only an erotic simulacrum, its pseudonym in painting, its sexual idols... lovely impressions. There impressions are perhaps the very origin of the beauty of the beautiful. As memories of death.

The death drive is also an aggression and a destruction drive, it not only incites forgetfulness but also commands radical effacement, the eradication of that which can never be reduced to mneme or anamnesis, that is the archive, consignment, the documentary or monumental apparatus as hypomnema. Because the archive will never be memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.

Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction... The archive always works, and a priori, against itself.

The death drive is not a principle. It even threatens every principality, every archontic primacy, every archival desire. It is what we call, “le mal d’archive,” archive fever

giorgio agamben// the archive and testimony 1989

1. the archive as a general system of the formation and transformation of statements
2. “future memory,” things are collected for the historians gaze
3. the archive as between langue and corpus, what is said and what has been said
4. the obsessive memory of tradition
5. the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated
6. speech and enunciation and its existence for the future historian getting lost in the archive

Agamben’s essay highlights the bearings of archive and testimony within language and speech. Both, he assumes are problematic with regards to the subject. The archive, here, is everything that is not subjective because it is derived from statements. But he does not completely discredit the archive.

The archive works as a linguistic mode between statements, as if somehow between the tradition of history.

Agamben’s definition of testimony as the opposite of archive. Since it is not about statements, but rather about what is being spoken, the testimony is entirely about the subjective. In this manner, testimony is a charged form of linguistics, it gives impulse to speech.

The thesis of the essay is that subjectivity is the biggest contention between archive and testimony, is outlined and resolved. The suggestion for a resolution of the archive with its problem comes in the form of witness.

Foucault gives the name “archive” to the positive dimension that corresponds to the plane of enunciation, “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements”

Between the obsessive memory of tradition, which knows only what has been said and the exaggerated thoughtlessness of oblivion, which cares only for what was never said, the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying “I.”

In opposition to the archive, which designates the system of relations between said and the unsaid, we give the name testimony to the system of relations between the inside and the outside of the language, between the sayable and unsayable in every language - that is, between the potentiality of speech and its existence, between a possibility and impossibility of speech.

The archive’s constitution presupposed the bracketing of the subject into a simple function or an empty position. In testimony, the empty place of the subject becomes the decisive questions.

The relation between language and its existence demands subjectivity. This is why subjectivity appears as witness, this is why it can speak for those who cannot speak

walter benjamin// a short history of photography 1931

1. the first people to be reproduced(in photographs) entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact
2. the human countenance has a silence about it in which the gaze is rested
3. there will always be an absence of contact between actuality and photography
4. during the considerable period of exposure, the subject grows into the picture with the sharpest contrast
5. aura is a strange weave of time and space, the unique appearance or semblance of a distance
6. the photograph also represents the human need to possess and obhect

The act of viewing a photograph, Benjamin suggests, has transformed due to a consciousness of time arrested within the photograph. This consciousness seeks for temporal signifiers within a photograph (especially a portrait). The “here and now” of the captured moment is something the beholder seeks.

Benjamin ponders the photographic impact on self-awareness, especially while posing in front of the camera. He states that the first people to be photographed had an innocence. He blames the dismantling of this purity on “actuality,” the fact that the beholder and the poser sees themselves as representing a signifier(caption) in time.

After discussing the historical transition in the poser-capturer dynamic, Benjamin explains more the status of photography as art. He views his contemporaries’ obsession with questioning photography’s artistic capacities as a problem, since most art itself attempts to depict the real and photographic.

Benjamin presents his thesis for the historical place of photography and the debates surrounding it. He alludes that the distrust of photography as an artistic medium as well the viewing of works of art in comparison to photography is a modern condition. Bound by reproduction and repetition, the modern condition cannot take away photography’s influence on all visual culture. This influence can only form a collective corpus, of many imaged colluding in a technique of assimilation into collective creation. This projection of visual repetition seems very in line with modern practices of appropriation.

No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels and irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has seared into the subject, to find the immediacy of that long forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, must discover it.

The first people to be reproduced entered the visual space of photography with their innocence intact, uncompromised by captions. The human countenance had a silence about it in which the gaze rested. In short, early photography owes its effect to the absence of contact between actuality and photography.

It is indeed significant that the debate - about the history of photography - has raged most fiercely around the aesthetics of photography as art, whereas the far less questionable social fact of art as photography was given scarcely a glance.

But one is brought up short by the way the understanding of great works was transformed at about the same time as the techniques of reproduction was developed. The works can no longer be regarded as individuals; they have become a collective creation, a corpus so vast it can be assimilated ol through miniaturization... mechanical reproduction is a technique of diminution that helps men to achieve control over works of art without whose aid they could no longer be used.

charles merewether// archives of the fallen 1997

1. memory is a medium to witness something, photography is the act of archiving something that one witnesses
2. artist who work with archives seek to map/remap and restore the past from being erased from historical records. Ex: Eugenio Dittborn’s paintings of the marginalized and erased figures of Chilean history or Rosangela Renno’s Immemorial, portraits of workers and children who built Brasilia.
3. objects as evidence remain traces and testimony of things gone awry

If history is viewed through visual records, then photography and film(lens based media that depicts actuality) is indeed a crucial medium for the archive.

Photography itself, akin to Barthes’ writing, has an effect of restoring and capturing time... Merewether calls this photography’s archival effect. He further adds this gives it the benefit of perceived objectivity and neutrality when viewing the past.

Merewether discusses artists who engage with archival images and render them into installations. Yet there are different contexts that can arise within this practice. An artist can use the archive as a way of dismantling current notions of the past. An artist can also use the archive to play with records of the past, playing with the ability of manipulating stored records.

In critiquing nation-states and institutions, the artists use archives as evidence and medium. Photography is a specific factor in enabling this testimonial mode of critique.

The artist can also use archival art as a means to come to terms with the past, be it through the lens of identity or politics.

Archives are reminders/evidence of state actions. For an artist to use archives in their medium enables their work to become a memorial

Photography is critical to the practice and authority of the archive, in so far as it folds together history as representation and representation as history. Transferring the world to image, photography as a representational structure produces a certain archival effect. And, like photography, the archive gains its authority to represent the past through an apparent neutrality, whereby difference is either erased or regulated. Both the archive and photography reproduce the world as witness to itself, a testimony to the real, historical evidence.

Artists, like Dittborn, who work with the concept of archive use photography precidely to destailize its authority as a technology of remembrance, a technology that participates in constructing seamless narratives of identity.

Artists work with the notion of the unsanctioned or unlawful body of the nation as a way to adress the violence that characterizes the inscription of history... photographs that represent moments before which the body becomes absent.

The experience of seeing is itself subject to the forces of forgetting, and the labour of reading traces is equivalent to coming to terms with the past.

At a time when histories of identity and nation are being rewritten, these images are a timely reminder of the instrumental power of state institutions to control, if not determine, the lives of its populace.

The photographs become a memorial, a site where memory and forgetfulness face each other.

paul ricoeur// *archives, documents, traces* 1978

1. the notion of the trace as linked to the historians use of an archive
2. the archive, imbued with this trace, is viewed as a documentation (eyewitness testimonies for example).
3. archives are often institutional documentations, designated by an organized body that records
4. an archive, especially one that is under institutional sponsorship, becomes the historical stock of an institution which can impose its ideologies into the use of the archive.
5. the use of archive in giving testimony as a “debt to the dead” is an example of this sort of ideal

An “archive” in the fundamental sense represents the choice of an authority (person or institution) to curate, collect and preserve records. The choice is linked to the preferences and aims of the person or institution.

Often times, the archives represent the history of the individual or institution itself. This reflects the need to preserve things that are considered valuable.

Records of the past, photos or videos or writings or anything, become subject to preservation. This makes the records as material for the future. The use value here indicates a timeframe away from the present while also suggesting interests of current time will remain the same much later on.

A monument, the opposite of an archive, commemorates with a certain finality what the ‘present’ collective memory deems important.

A criticism is born that takes as its task to discover the monument hiding behind the document, a more radical form of criticism than the critique of authenticity that assured the victory of the document over the monument.

Archives are constituted by the set of documents that result from the activity of an institution or of a physical or moral person... it designates the organized body of records produced or received by a public, semi public institutional business or private entity.

Archives produce the documentary stock of an institution that produces them, gathers them, and conserves them.

At an elementary epistemological level, it has become banal to emphasize that any trace left by the past becomes a document for historians as soon as they know how to interrogate its remains, how to question them.

What makes a monument suspect, even though it often is found in situ, is its obvious finality, its commemoration of events that its contemporaries especially the most powerful among them, judge worthy of being integrated into collective memory.

The significant use of data stored in and manipulated by a computer certainly gives birth to a new kind of scholarly activity... a long methodological detour destined to lead to an enlargement of our collective memory in its encounter with the monopoly exercised over speech by the powerful

julietta singh// *no archive will restore you* 2018

Early in his famous book *Archive Fever*, Derrida worries over the novelty and value of his meditation on the archive, pausing to confess from the outset that in the end I have nothing new to say.

“Why detain you with these worn-out stories? Why this wasted time? Why archive this? Why these investments in paper, in ink, in characters? Why mobilize so much space and so much work, so much typographical composition? Does this merit printing? Aren’t these stories to be had everywhere?”

Derrida’s rumination on the archive turns out for him to be an irresolvable problem.

“I am a disquieted archive that fumbles in words. A thing made up of infinite, intractable traces.”

“The archive is a stimulus between myself and myself.”

It was then that I started to wonder over my own body as an impossible, deteriorating archive – a body that had across my life felt both excessive and insufficient, oftentimes even monstrous.

Abandoning the pursuit of a legitimate archive – one external to me- I began instead to dwell on the messy, embodied, illegitimate archive that I am.

Leslie Feinberg’s queer classic *Stone Butch Blues*, the protagonist Jess narrates the setting of her birth.

What she tells is her mother’s story, a story echoed across Jess’s childhood, one that thus comes to constitute her own sense of being. The story, in sum, is this: Trapped alone inside her apartment during a fierce storm, Jess’s mother weeps loudly in labor. Hearing these sounds of distress, the Diné women who live across the hall intervene to help birth the baby. When they offer the newborn over to its mother, she responds with a chilling declarative: “Put the baby over there.”

Like Jess, my memory of this early scene is fabricated through repetitive maternal narrations. The stories that comprise us have left us both wanting more, wishing we had access to a fuller narrative frame. I call this wishingwanting desire “the ghost archive.” Everything we need to know but cannot know as we keep circling and sniffing around the edges. Everything that keeps affecting us and affecting others through us. Everything that remains right there, but just out of reach.

According to psychoanalysis, the true origin of our obsessive behaviors exists in the unconscious. Freud calls those things that appear to disappear, those things that are invisible yet no less inscribed in us, permanent memory-traces. They are our unidentified ghosts making themselves queerly manifest.

One of the primary frustrations of psychoanalysis, at least from the vantage point of the couch, is that we cannot ultimately access the root of our obsessions.

The unconscious is the most evasive archive of all, yet is pulsing right there inside you.