

STORIES

AND

THREADS:

Perspectives
on Art Archives

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STORIES AND THREADS: Perspectives on Art Archives

Editors' Introduction

Sara Buraya Boned,
Jennifer Fitzgibbon
and Sezin Romi

Archives, above all else, are durational; formed and shaped by the circumstances of their production and transformed by the contexts of their engagement and interpretation. The following texts present a series of perspectives on art archives, authored by those connected to the activities of the Archive Group of L'Internationale, and yet within this commissioning framework, those who approach the archive with different professional backgrounds, research interests and reasons for their engagement.

Art archives are complicated by issues of the visual and the publication presents various texts structured along a series of five key threads. Our objective with approaching the publication in this way was to open up the subject of art archives for further discussion and analysis, which as the following texts show, sometimes leads to more questions than answers. The archive is both a repository for stories and in turn, different stories are told about the archive. The assumed authority of the document as record is questioned and the answers have sometimes slipped forward into new questions, propelled by curiosity and differing experience. Contemporary art archives are complex spaces of engagement with multiple agents, from the archivist and the librarian to the researcher, from the curator to the artist, from the activist to the student, etc. and it is through their collaboration and cooperation that the archive becomes meaningful. This publication aims to draw out these meanings, presenting them as perspectives on contemporary art archives in the present moment.

How this publication came together

In 2018, after eight years of collaborating within L'Internationale¹, the Archives working group² came up with the idea of constituting an archive that would preserve the memory of the confederation for the

years to come. The purpose would not be to create another administrative or bureaucratic structure, but instead to experiment on a shared project that would prompt us to think about different developments and questions emerging out of contemporary art archival practice.

As a starting point, the group decided that this archive would include materials related to events, exhibitions, and research projects realised during the five years of *The Uses of Art*. The proposal was to jointly present materials from all the partners, and to create a common website that would allow them to be accessed by the public. The project would further facilitate knowledge exchange on archiving, digitisation, and research tools and the organisation of workshops and events. The idea of a proper “L'Internationale archive” took shape as a series of pilot projects that would allow us to begin compiling, describing, and archiving, and thereby gaining a shared sense of the whole. Each institution selected archival materials from former projects and prepared them for the trial software under the coordination of Salt.

In September 2019, group members convened at Salt in Istanbul to discuss proposals for realising the pilot project. Different positions on the project's purpose quickly formed. Does it make sense to create an archive of L'Internationale? Is the confederation a subject that produces memory autonomously, or are member institutions the agents? If the confederation has a memory of its own, do we need to create a distinct instance for that memory and legacy? What is the meaning of having all the documents in the same digital space? How can the resulting archives be curated and disseminated? And so on, and so on. At the end of the gathering, we decided to change direction and foreground the exchange of knowledge as the main objective for the group.

With the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, meetings were held predominantly online. At that point, the Archives group refocused its various discussions and exchanges towards producing a publication that would reflect their sometimes different and sometimes common perspectives on archiving. These would all be made accessible through an e-publication, a format we share thanks to yearslong work on

L'Internationale's online platform, which produces publications in the epub format that result from the different lines of research pursued by the confederation's members.

For the next two years, Archives working group members shared concrete cases, specific processes, and reflections emerging through practice in the archive and with collaborators (artists, curators, researchers etc.), paying attention to the specificities of working with archives of contemporary art.

The present publication is the result of this process. It contains experiences, lessons, challenges, and open questions, all coming from the practices of preserving and enlivening memory in contemporary art institutions. In what follows, the stories that situate the archives are interwoven with the practices threading through and around them.

The book as archive. How is it structured?

Stories and Threads presents five key “series” relating certain threads that go across the publication, and which help us to understand the relation in and between the texts, as if the book itself was an archive. This arrangement reflects the themes and experiences of the institutions and organisations in the group, and more broadly, it relates to the subjects of plurality, diversification, and change reflected in L'Internationale's *Our Many Europes* project.

Series one reflects on issues of *history/power/agency* in the archive, addressing questions of influence. Who makes the stories that become archived? And who bestows power to the archive as a custodian of history? What are the absences and erasures, and who decides what remains untold? **Series two** explores *transversal practices* within and between archives, examining different activities for organising information and creatively conceptualising axes of information within the archive and through external partnerships. **Series three** foregrounds the *spaces* of the archive, highlighting the unusual, virtual, and non-traditional spaces where archives are formed and stored and

how space influences the ways in which archives are conceived and accessed. **Series four** explores *storytelling* as a way of accessing and engaging with the archive. What kinds of stories emerge from the archive, what kind of questions do these stories raise, and how are they related to history-making? **Series five** reflects on the theme of *embodiment* in the archive, both in terms of how the body experiences the archive, and how the body is itself an archive of experience. These threads are conceived as distinct, but when woven together they form a textile of the archive and the different perspectives and practices that constitute the present moment.

Stories and Threads thus aims to present a perspective of the various research projects and activities of the Archives group that relate to or grew out of the activities of *Our Many Europes*. The texts provide a sense of the terrain of archives associated with L'Internationale; the five series form a way to navigate the publication, while encouraging the reader to imagine alternative signposts and routes for accessing the various texts, reflections, and images in the publication. This is an invitation to go “through one heavy door...”, as Cathryn Klasto proposes in the poem included in this publication.

Series One: History/power/agency

This series begins with a conversation between artist and researcher **İz Öztat** and Salt's Senior Librarian and Archivist **Sezin Romi**, who evaluate the notion of the archive from the perspectives of both the archivist and the artist as researcher. Focusing on the formation and transformation of the library and archive collections at Salt Research from 2007 up to today, the conversation elaborates how archive collections develop and mutually relate, their role in historicization through specific research projects, and matters of artist archives. While Öztat emphasises how she benefits from the sources in her academic studies and creative process, Romi explains how archival collections accumulate over the long run from an institutional perspective.

Sarp Renk Özer follows with a reflection on Salt's research-centred mission. The two-chaptered essay begins by addressing a historical lack of consistent, long-lasting, methodical, and coordinated enterprises within the field of culture in Turkey. It refers to the chronic scarcity of publicly accessible documentation and publications covering art in twentieth-century Turkey. It unfolds by examining the motivations behind Salt's position in the field as a research institution dedicated to building a vast library and archive on visual practices, the built environment, and the social life and economic history of Turkey. Focusing on the institution's selected programs, the contribution concludes with contemplations about Salt's public-minded values, user-oriented approach, and understanding of timeliness.

Next, **Marcell Mars** and **Tomislav Medak** discuss the role of archivists and librarians in the creation of libraries for free access and for every member of society. The text relates the topic of access to knowledge with the politics of memorialisation. Discussing different library projects, Mars and Medak address various themes, including attacks on libraries, such as the destruction of texts; challenges of compilation today, including a discussion of the Internet and digital tools in facilitating information access and their limitations in the libraries; and the politics of personal libraries. They also share thoughts about the tendency of online infrastructures built and maintained by amateur librarians and archivists to be alternative, publicly accessible, digital libraries, while public libraries still provide printed materials for their users.

The rest of this series gives attention to a special collaboration. Since 2009, Museo Reina Sofía and **Red Conceptualismos del Sur** have been working together to confront the dominant circuits of cultural production from the South to the North, and to replace these with horizontal itineraries that include South-South trajectories between archives, museums, researchers, artists, and institutions. This collaboration aims to transform traditional museum policies by integrating, for example, practices and approaches such as network decision-making, the potential of the archive in relation to the collection, and the claim

of a shared legitimacy in cultural productions and historical narratives.

In the context of this long-term alliance, the present publication introduces three texts by Red Conceptualismos del Sur: *Founding Declaration of the Red* expresses the network's objectives and understanding of archival practices as a duty and political practice; *Institution by Declaration*, by Damian Cabrera and Javiera A. Manzi, coordinators of the network, updates the organisation's pledge with regard to the preservation, research, and dissemination of artists' archives in Latin America; *For a Common Archival Policy: A Call for a Best Practices Agreement* is a collective campaign prompted by the network in 2019 as part of their militant action around the archive.

Series Two: Transversal practices

Starting off this series with a vision from the archive's interior, **Beatriz Fernández Rodríguez** and **Carolina Santamarina** describe a history of managing institutional memory, in this case, the institutional memory of Museo Reina Sofía. From their professional perspectives as librarian and archivist, they underline the importance of preservation and access, not only of the objects collected by the museum, but also of the history of the institution itself. Exploring key challenges of today's institutional archives, such as the infrastructure needs, the archivist system, the questions on digitisation, the complexity of copyright issues, or the balance between use and preservation, they approach concrete questions and propose solutions on their daily practices as museums professionals. Important projects like *The museum meets its archive*, or *#LaDigitaldelReina* (the new Digital Library project), offers examples on what contemporary art institutional archives are standing up for nowadays.

In the same series of sharing and analysing institutional practices, **Elisabet Rodríguez** and **Marta Vega** explore the most relevant archival projects of MACBA archive history, including the Digital Repository, which has become a crucial tool for research in contem-

porary art in Catalonia and in Spain, thanks to its important work on Metadata and link with the museum's new website in 2020. Highlighting recent trajectories of work, new tools implemented, and the importance of normative elements like the thesaurus, their text also proposes a journey towards different dissemination projects, including exhibitions and research processes jointly developed by artists, researchers, and archivists activating the MACBA holdings, and relating the latter with other archives beyond the institution.

This series is completed by **Jennifer Fitzgibbon's** introduction of the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) at NCAD Dublin. She considers the collection's nascent beginnings in the 1970s up to its current position as Ireland's national repository for all forms of documentation on Irish art and design. The text highlights some of the different types of archives and holdings that constitute the collection, including the Artists' Books Collection and the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment Archive. Referencing diverse and multiple forms of archival holdings, the text raises questions about how best to capture the complete lifecycle of an artwork, especially in relation to ephemeral art practices, and highlights a partnership project between NIVAL, NCAD, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, in which aspects of the performance art holdings were exhibited as part of an online programme in 2021.

Series Three: Spaces

This series starts with **Cathryn Klasto's** search for the histories of the Valand Archive in an interview with **Henrik Hamboldt**, the former librarian of the Valand Art Library who is responsible for the archive, and **Katty Axelsson**, who digitised and catalogued previously unlisted items in the collection. The Valand Archive is an archive of student work in *Fri Konst* (Fine Art) at the HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design, University of Gothenburg, from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Describing practical experiences of working with

the archive, the interview presents insights into what constitutes an archive of artworks, how the archive has changed over time, and the space of the archive, as well as ideas about order, disorder, organising, documenting, and ultimately, about how these factors inform issues of access to the archive and institutional collaboration.

The interview is complemented by a visual essay by **Gloria López Cleries** titled *Konst Arkiv*, which depicts the physical spaces of the Valand archive through a journey that explores the relation of the body and the object, the space, the time, and its materiality. Along the way, López captures handwritten notes left behind by people who work in the archive. These traces and gestures prompt further reflection on the how/why of the archive. The visual approach provides another way to consider the archive, moving away from text-centric responses to a personal reflection through images, so that questions emerge, such as, how can we rescue or recover the archive, who takes care of the archive, and what is the archive for, if it is not accessible?

Continuing this series, **Daniel Pecharromán Calvo**, of the Library of Museo Reina Sofía, interviews **Gema Marín Mengual**, **Pedro Merchán Mateos**, and **Rita Zamora Amengual**, students from the master's degree programme in Art History and Visual Culture of the Museo Reina Sofía, who participated as researchers and co-curators in the documental exhibition *Design, edit, liberate: An approach to the visual thought of Alberto Corazón* at the Space D of the Museum Library. Their conversation explores the process of researching the Archivo Marchán/Quevedo, an archive donated to the museum by the well-known art critic Simón Marchán Fiz, as part of their master's studies, with the aim of producing a collectively curated show around the work of the Spanish artist Alberto Corazón. The conversation poses questions related to the accessibility of archives during the Covid-19 pandemic, the conservation of objects and their digitisation in a time of ecological crisis, and the presence of hegemonic discourse in archived and preserved materials in relation to absences and the production of invisibility.

Weaving art historical analysis of conceptual art in Poland together with the histories of institutions and art spaces, **Łukasz Guzek** completes this series with a detailed analysis of the contemporary artistic landscape of Poland and the post-Yalta East European region. The text traces the development of the artistic scene of Poland over the decades, with attention to the emergence of artists' spaces, galleries, and artistic events like open airs, through the lens of the ephemeral material that conceptualist practices produce and the spaces that hosted them.

Series Four: Storytelling

This series opens with artist **Enric Farrés Duran's** consideration of his project *Things That Happen, Things That Remain* with the historical archives of MACBA as an exercise of writing from outside of the archive. Taking a playful approach, Farrés Duran proposes a personal and contextual vision of the process he underwent upon receiving an invitation to intervene in the archive with his artistic practice. This is a vision that proposes to embody the archive, to transit it, circulate it, and be inextricably linked to it, its everyday life, its physicality, its intimacy, and its history.

The series continues with a conversation convened by **Lotte Bode**, researcher at M HKA, with the performance artist **Katya Ev** and **Kobe Matthys**, who is founder of Agency, a cultural initiative operating in Brussels since the 1990s, to discuss possibilities for inventing new modes of production and distribution of art. The ensuing discussion considers past experiences including Soviet artels and the history of cooperatives to raise the questions about ownership of art and the role of contemporary art institutions or archives—and the connections between these topics.

Closing this series, Head of Collections of the Van Abbemuseum **Steven ten Thije** reflects on the relationship between the idea of true information and the archives in the context of the museum's activities.

Examining the correspondence between Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, he proposes that Adorno placed fact after fact in a distinct order rather than telling the “truth” in a theoretical framework. He compares Adorno's approach, which he invites readers to discover on their own, with archival exhibitions organised by museums. Focusing on the Van Abbemuseum projects *The Living Archive* and *The Making of Modern Art*, he shows how the museum explores the affinity of the archive and the museum.

Series Five: Embodiment

Cathryn Klasto opens the final series with documentation of a visit to the Valand Archive. Part concrete poem, part reflection, Klasto's text gives tangible and visible form to the recounted experience by way of finding, analysing, and becoming.

Next, **Aimar Arriola**, curator, editor, and researcher, and one of the co-creators of the *AIDS Anarchive* project, proposes “superficial reading” as a theoretical approach to the archive that combines an epistemological position and a method of analysis for researchers to use to study archive material and the histories interweaved in it. He further reflects on three curatorial processes with *the AIDS Anarchive*, and on how time and his own life affected the way he relates to surface reading.

Kate Antosik-Parsons presents research from a six-month research project enabled by NCAD's participation in *Our Many Europes*, which focused on the intersections of the politics of performance in the 1990s in Ireland with a view to simultaneous international developments. She considers how we reflect on these practices now, over twenty years later. Foregrounding an approach based on archival research and oral history, Antosik-Parsons' writes about mapping artistic activity in Ireland at a time when documentation, information, and history was dispersed across different repositories and in artists' personal collections—and about the eleven detailed interviews she carried out

based on that research, covering key themes of post-conflict politics, the body, collaboration, and artist-led activity. Special attention is given to the inherently embodied nature of capturing these stories, which now serve as an important primary source for further research on performance histories in Ireland.

From a historical perspective, **Teja Merhar, Jana Intihar Ferjan, Ida Hiršenfelder and Sabina Povšič** presents *The Archives of Moderna galerija, Ljubljana*, in which they review the history of the institutional archive of the museum. The authors describe recent activities to increase digital discovery and access to the collections on modern and contemporary Slovenian art through cataloguing and online developments at Moderna galerija's Photo Archive and Web Museum.

Completing this series, **Rok Tevar** tells the story behind the formation of the Temporary Slovene Dance Archive, which was founded by the author in 2012. The Temporary Slovene Dance Archive presents a historical overview of the development of dance and performance practices produced outside institutions in Slovenia. The archive, which was located at the author's apartment until 2017, moved to the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in 2018. The author explains the mission of the Temporary Slovene Dance Archive and discusses the appropriation of archives by institutions. Addressing questions about archiving dance, which is a temporary experience, Tevar explains the difference between the dance and the archive. He evaluates curatorial projects on archives as a tool for transferring memories to the future.

Conclusions

The archives and initiatives that have contributed to this publication work to expand the horizons of archival engagement outside of the institutional framework, with the aim of building collections through active, public participation. The perspectives set out in this publication are informed by different experiences of the archive and are rooted in concrete practices; there is no universal view posited here. What is

apparent is that art archives are facing a number of pressing challenges today, including digitisation, long-term storage, access and visibility, and information control (e.g., listing and cataloguing). Outside of these practical considerations, the following texts also highlight how art archives are sites of contested agency and various contributions address the topic of misinformation and the potential dark side of storytelling. Instead of giving a normative and unequivocal view on what archives are and how they must work, *Stories and Threads* formulates these questions on ownership, authority, recognition, access, distribution, and related topics that contribute to the collective efforts of the contributors to question and amplify the relevance of archives today, not least with view to their important role in producing our future.

Our editorial decision to select the piece *ceci est la couleur de nos rêves* (2019) by Enric Farrés Durán as cover image for this publication captures this idea: if an archive can be compared to a blank canvas, on which we can invent different ways of writing and making visible the narratives of the past, we must also explore different readings of it. There are many stories hidden in the margins, waiting to be discovered. We hope to have brought forward some of those stories here.

ENDNOTES

- 1 L'Internationale started in 2010 with the project *1957-1986. Art from the Decline of Modernism to the Rise of Globalisation* as a group of contemporary art institutions that shares a common vision and ethics. Over the years, the confederation has continued to develop joint projects and propose institutional alliances and shared programmes. Between 2013 and 2017 the confederation developed *The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989*, followed by *Our Many Europes. (OME) Europe's Critical 90s and the Constituent Museum* between 2018 and 2022, the programme of which this epub is part. L'Internationale will continue working from 2023 to 2027 on its new programme, *Museum of the Commons. Towards a Healthier Arts Ecosystem*.
- 2 The Archives group is a cross-institutional working group formed by one member of each of the confederation's organisations. Like other groups in L'Internationale, the Archives working group is dedicated to the exchange, reflection, and discussion of their practices and challenges, as archivist and librarians for contemporary art institutions, and to the development of a common agenda and joint projects.

SERIES ONE:

HISTORY / POWER /
AGENCY

ARCHIVES IN THE MAKING, FOR THE MAKING

İz Öztat
and Sezin Romi

Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center opened in 2001 in the building now home to Salt Beyoğlu in Istanbul. Platform organised exhibitions, conferences, and events. It also established a contemporary art library and archive and hosted many artists from Turkey and abroad within the scope of Istanbul Residency Program. The institution concluded its activities in 2010, transferring its entire archives, which focus on art in Turkey, to Salt, which was newly founded in 2011.¹ These archives, along with the libraries and archives of Garanti Gallery (2003-2010, Istanbul) and the Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Center (1997-2010, Istanbul) form the core of the current collection of Salt Research, which is specialized in art, architecture, and design; social life; and economic history.

The following conversation between artist and researcher İz Öztat and Salt's Senior Librarian and Archivist Sezin Romi revolves around the formation and transformation of library and archive collections now at Salt Research from 2007 up to today, focusing on research projects, artist archives, and their mutual relationships. The conversation foregrounds the importance of access to knowledge and considers the archive as a source of production, from the perspectives of both the archivist and the artist as researcher.

İz Öztat: Sezin, we will try, via our own experiences, to construct a story of the transformations undergone by the library operating within Salt Research, located at the former Ottoman Bank building that has become Salt Galata, and the online-accessible archive. We realised it would be difficult in the future to trace this process if we did not form a narrative about it now to record our experiences. So, we decided to try to remember together. How has this infrastructure that you are affiliated with as an “archivist” and I as a “user” evolved in time?

In 2007, I had finished my BA in visual arts and returned from the U.S. I was trying to gather information on artistic production in Turkey, which had not been part of the art history courses I attended in the U.S. This pursuit brought me to Platform's library, where we met. What were the conditions that brought you there, what was your position at the institution?

Sezin Romi: I remember meeting you at the temporary office of Platform, which was on İstiklal Street. Following my compulsory internship at the Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Center, I was at Platform on a project-based task—to catalogue its entire book collection. It was a project I became part of while I was still a university student. My aim was to gain experience, and I considered it an extension of my internship. Later, I realised that the real reason I was there was that the library would be founded within the institution that was to be newly established—Salt Research.

In September 2007, we had moved to the temporary office because Platform building was being renovated. At the time, Platform's publication collection was not searchable through an online catalogue. It was grouped on the shelves in general categories, such as theory, philosophy, artists' monographs, group exhibitions, art in Turkey, and art history, and items could be tracked via various lists. This was accompanied by files of artists from Turkey. Visitors at Platform had access to the books and the archive. As your own research suggests, the collection provided a significant collection of resources for art history and art production in Turkey, and users interested in these subjects consulted Platform.

iÖ: How had the sources in the library collection until this point been compiled? Did the library have a purchasing process during that period that focused, for instance, on certain subjects?



Artist files at Platform Garanti CAC's temporary office, 2008



Library collection at Platform Garanti CAC's temporary office, 2008

SR: The story of how the library collection came together goes back to the personal interest of the founding director of both Platform and Salt, Vasif Kortun, who collected books with the dream of establishing an art library. When, following his master's studies in the U.S., he returned to Turkey to write his thesis, he observed how inadequate libraries were and how difficult it was to access archives. When Kortun went back to work in the U.S. in 1993, he began to collect books with support from museums and art galleries for the library he aimed to establish in Turkey. He brought these books with him when he returned to Turkey at the end of 1997, making them available for visitors' use in 1998 at an initiative he founded, İstanbul Güncel Sanat Projesi [Istanbul Contemporary Art Project] (İGSP). When Platform opened in 2001, he donated the books to this institution, and he continued to expand the collection with both donations and publications he brought from his travels. In the meantime, in 2006, Platform was invited to the Frieze Art Fair as one of two not-for-profit international institutions. The institution took part in the fair with its project *Collecting Point*, through which it compiled around 1200 art publications from various individuals and institutions and added them to its library.

Then, in 2009, Platform organised the exhibition *The Columns Held Us Up* at Artist Space in New York. The installation, realised by artist Céline Condorelli, took Antonello da Messina's painting *Saint Jerome in his Study* as a point of departure and enabled the collection of donated publications for Platform's library. The installation was formed of cardboard boxes and designed as a reading room, and publications brought together throughout the exhibition were added to the library.

At present, all these publications are accessible to users at Salt.

İÖ: The *Open Library* exhibition was an important stage in the cataloguing of publications accumulated up to then, and in opening of the



Platform Garanti CAC, *Collecting Point*, stand at Frieze Art Fair, London, 2006. Salt Research, Platform Archive



Céline Condorelli, *Revision—part I*, installation view from the exhibition *The Columns Held Us Up* organized by Platform Garanti CAC at Artists Space, New York, 2009. Salt Research, Platform Archive

collection to the public. Could you talk about this exhibition and its influence in the formation of the library that would evolve into Salt Research?

SR: When, in 2007, the *Open Library* exhibition opened, the simultaneous project of cataloguing the books also began. It was exactly at that time that I began to work at Platform on a project-based agreement. The aim was to catalogue the publications that previously had been registered by manually-prepared lists, and to ensure their searchability via an online catalogue at international library service standards.

In fact, I realised only much later that *Open Library* was a beginning for Salt Research, insofar as it was when I started, in 2009-2010, to systematically read and examine examples for the library of the new institution that would be established. I was a third-year university student, and I had no plan whatsoever of becoming a librarian. I imagined that a library job consisted of highly routine and boring work. Of course, both prejudice and the libraries I had experienced up to then played a part in that opinion.

In comparison, *Open Library* was different from all the libraries I had previously encountered, both in design and function. The design by Superpool presented a free and dynamic environment, quite different than the regular seating order we are used to. In addition to creating an atmosphere where a guest can pick up a book from the shelves and read it, it also provided the means to freely work and study, and hosted events. In the evening, curtains were pulled across the shelves, and the space was turned into an event venue. In other words, it was completely “live”.

Open Library was one of the examples that guided us during the design process of Salt Research. The transformation of libraries, libraries as a space of meeting and socialisation, and

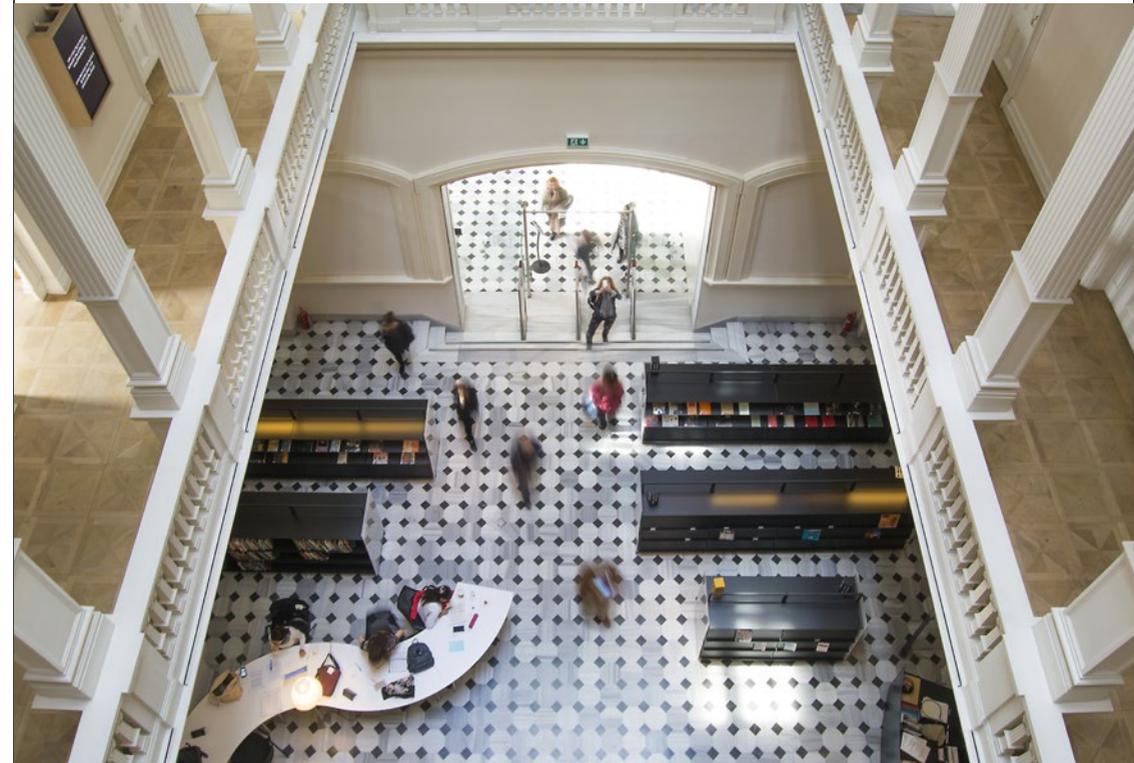
user-centred library models were among topics that were frequently discussed. We also worked very closely with ŞANALarc, the designers of the space. We aimed for Salt Research to be open to all, to host users in a hospitable environment and to create a space where they could spend time around books, a space that inspired thought and production. When you look back, those elements are all already there in the essence of *Open Library*. In addition, with its location in the central courtyard of Salt Galata, it is important that Salt Research is not a conventional, silent, isolated library space. We had always imagined the courtyard as a living, changing, transforming space. We did, after all, also use it for events like performances, exhibitions, and talks.

İÖ: **At *Open Library*, which used the exhibition space for different functions, I remember meeting, for the first time, individuals I would later become friends with. The multi-coloured poufs in the space were later carried to other spaces and continued to be used. I find it very valuable that the institution was able to transfer the experience it gained from the research carried out within the scope of its program into projects it dreamed of realizing in the future—and as a user, I can trace these stages, these experiences that have been transferred.**

We can also mention the function of artists’ files, accessible at Platform office, during a time when online tools and institutional infrastructures were not yet used in an effective manner.

SR: The artists’ archive, which also featured your file, was of critical importance during that period. We should, of course, remember what the period was like. When social media and other digital platforms did not exist, and many artists did not have web sites, the artists’ files at Platform were a significant reference point for researchers from both Turkey and abroad.

View from *Open Library*, Platform Garanti CAC, Istanbul, 2007
Photo: Iwan Baan. Salt Research, Platform Archive



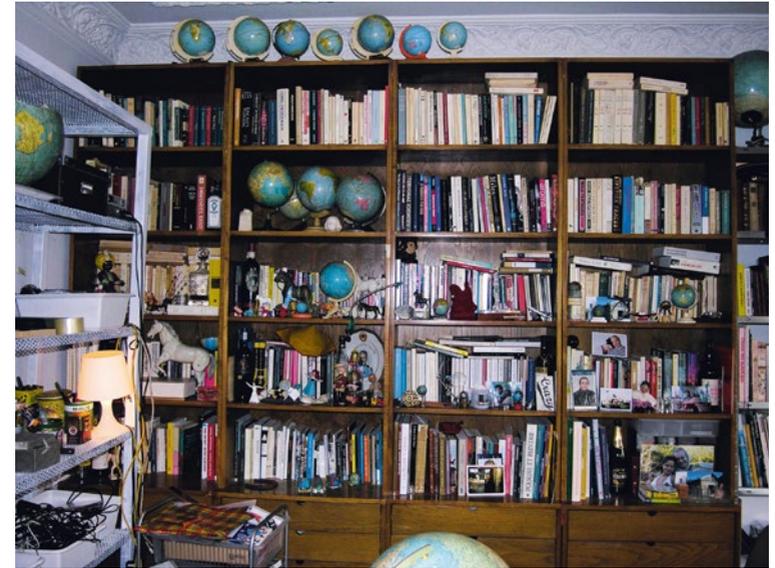
Salt Research, 2017
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci

Occasionally, Biennial curators would carry out research on artists using those files. We even assisted them when they wanted to establish contact with and meet the artists. I remember some of such meetings between artists and curators taking place at Platform, accompanied by their file in the archive.

These files remained open to use after Salt Research was opened. However, we observed that they did not continue to be used as they were in the period I just mentioned. Artists became more efficient in self-archiving with the support of digital technologies and platforms. So at Salt, too, we had to somewhat change the scope of art research. The inadequacy of resources on art history in Turkey from the 1950s to the present day, and the urgent necessity of bringing together existing archives inevitably changed our direction.

İÖ: Salt Research opened in 2011 when Salt was founded. I was one of the few users who came to help ensure that all the books were on the shelves by the opening date. This was also the first time I had a chance to look at the books in Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin's personal library. I felt great excitement as I tried to trace the research process behind the works he produced from the books he had collected. Could you tell us how the Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin Collection was included at Salt Research, and how it has been handled?

SR: The research project on Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin was the first comprehensive project I took part in at the institution. The process began after his sudden passing at the end of 2007. The aim was to protect his remaining works and prevent them from becoming lost or dispersed. In the first stage, the decision was made to transfer the artist's library, consisting of some 1,200 publications, from his home to Platform. In 2008, the cataloguing of all the books at the artist's house began. I remember feeling very strange at the time. To enter the private sphere of



Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin's library collection at his house in Istanbul. Salt Research, Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin Archive



View from *I am not a studio artist*, Salt Beyoğlu, 2011
Photo: Serkan Taycan

someone I did not know at all, the desire to know him, to investigate, the curiosity provoked by what he had left behind. Simultaneously, in order to create an inventory of all the artist's works and keep track of them, all the materials in his storage and studio were transferred to Platform. We worked on the Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin project as a large team that included the artist's wife Camila Rocha as well as the young researchers Boysan Yakar and Güneş Forta. Following the traces in documents in his archive, and with the guidance of people who knew the artist well, including Vasif Kortun, we tried to fill gaps in the narratives. This long and arduous process also formed the basis for the opening exhibition of Salt, titled *I am not a studio artist* and the eponymous publication edited and prepared by Duygu Demir.

Personally, I began to think about artists' archives. This long-term project I was part of also became the subject of my thesis. In my thesis, I examined the relationship between the artist's archive and their production. Difficulties and ethical dilemmas regarding how such an archive is to be handled after the artist's passing and decisions related to the re-presentation and production of their works were among the topics I sought to understand. Today, this work that was initiated in the immediate aftermath of his passing provides the basis of both Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin's representation and the fact that his works remain well-organised.

İÖ: From what you have just told me, I understand that the process in which the Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin Archive was catalogued and opened to access within the scope of Salt Research served as a guide in shaping the institution's vision regarding artists' archives that would later be included in the collection. Could you talk about the other artists' archives opened to access within Salt Research, how this work chronologically progressed, and the methods you have implemented in the cataloguing and interpretation of the archives?

SR: In addition to that of Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, as of December 2022, Salt Research has made the archives of the following artists accessible online: Ahmet Öktem, Altan Gürman (in collaboration with Arter), Cengiz Çekil, Gülsün Karamustafa, İsmail Saray, Kutluğ Ataman, Moni Salim Özgilik, Mustafa Altıntaş, Nur Koçak, Sabiha Rüştü Bozcalı, Serhat Kiraz, Tomur Atagök, Yusuf Taktak. The institution is in the process of cataloguing and digitising the archives of İpek Duben, Gürel Yontan and Özer Kabaş.

The gaps in art history in Turkey, the inadequacy of accessible sources to fill such gaps, and the urgent necessity of bringing together archival materials in the hands of certain individuals, most of them artists, also influenced the institution's vision regarding art archives. Artists' archives that have been made accessible at Salt Research are formed of documents and visual materials that artists were able to protect through their own efforts. Artists' work shed light on the art environment in Turkey and from time to time, different artists' archives complement each other. For instance, correspondence between artists—or, sometimes the photograph of an artist's work which does not exist in her or his own archive is found in the archive of another artist who took part in the same group exhibition. All this presents a type of collective information on art history in Turkey from the 1950s to the present day.

I must also mention that the collaboration between the institution and the archive owners played a highly significant part in how these archives were brought together and opened to access at Salt Research. At Salt Research, we mostly digitise materials that are borrowed through a mutual protocol and then return the originals to their owners. Research plays a critical role in the process that leads to their being opened to access. The cataloguing process of an archive can only be carried out through research, by asking questions. Cataloguing is, in a sense, the identification of archival materials by the archivist,



View from *It was a time of conversation*, Salt Galata, 2012
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



View from *First May Exhibition*, Spor ve Sergi Sarayı
[Palace of Sports and Exhibitions], Istanbul, 1977
Salt Research, Ahmet Öktem Archive

that is, the entry of all elements that provide information about the content, and their presentation to the access of the user. At times, exhibitions, spaces, or institutions we have never heard of are discovered during the process. The cataloguing process plays a critical role in allowing information to reach the user in a seamless manner. Of course, we should also underline the fact that the archive will never be complete, and that it is open to further development and correction through user participation. Time will tell who will use the archive and when, and to what research it will contribute.

İÖ: The artists' archives catalogued and opened to access by the institution also orient Salt's exhibition and publication program, as you mentioned when you were discussing Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin. How did work carried out within the scope of the archives influence the institution's exhibition program?

SR: The relationship between research and programs can differ from one project to the next, or according to conditions. An archive and related research can evolve into an exhibition, and an exhibition can lead to an archive and a research project. Research projects can also, in addition to the exhibition, be visualised and presented in various formats, such as web projects or e-publications. For instance, a lengthy archiving and research process was necessary for the Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin and İsmail Saray exhibitions. As for the Gülsün Karamustafa and Nur Koçak archives, and the İpek Duben archive we have recently begun work on, these were transferred to the institution only after their exhibitions opened.

The 2012 exhibition titled *It was a time of conversation* was realised following an archiving and research process that focused on three exhibitions held in Turkey in the 1990s. Exhibition archives were compiled within the scope of a project

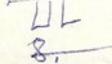
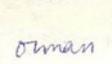
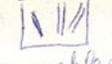
that aimed to interpret the art environment in Turkey in the 1990s through these exhibitions, and they were then added to the Salt research archive collections. It was during the same period that photographs taken by the artist of the *First May Exhibition* held at Spor ve Sergi Sarayı (Palace of Sports and Exhibitions) in Harbiye that opened on 1 May 1977, which we came across when cataloguing Ahmet Öktem's archive, inspired us to organize the exhibition *Scared of Murals*. This also paved the way for a research project examining artist's rights in Turkey, and the relationship of art with society, economy, labour, and politics and censorship practices in the period from 1976 to 1980. Discussions were held via public programs, e-publications were published, and compiled archival material was made accessible online at Salt Research.

Salt's current and ongoing research project focuses on performance art in Turkey in the period from the mid-1980s until the end of the 1990s. The project is being carried out in the light of interviews held with dancers and (experimental) theatre groups as well as other contributors to performances. The aim is to form a comprehensive inventory on performances organised in Turkey in that period through the contributions and support of these individuals, and to compile and make public archival materials that have been preserved up to now by individual efforts. The project is visualised in September 2022 via the simultaneous launching of a web site and the 90s Onstage exhibition.

I have no doubt that these examples vary, and that new relationships between archives and exhibitions will be added in time. **As a researcher and a user who has closely witnessed the development of both Salt Research and the entire collection, I am curious about your experience with the archive. In 2019, you carried out a research project and wrote an article about artist and educator Altan Gürman, a pioneer of conceptual art in Turkey. Could you tell me how you used the archive during this research process?**

İÖ: When, in 2018, I began to work as the Learning Programme Coordinator at Arter, I also witnessed an early stage of the preparations for a retrospective exhibition and accompanying publication on Altan Gürman, an artist and educator who was a pioneer of conceptual art in Turkey and a founder of the Basic Art Education Department at the Academy (i.e., the institution today called Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University). Both because of my interest in the role of education in the shaping of an artist's identity and my position at the institution, I began to examine the Altan Gürman archive that Salt had opened to access as part of the collaboration between the institutions. When Başak Doğa Temür, the curator of the exhibition, invited me to contribute to the publication with an article on Altan Gürman as educator, I wrote a text (Öztat 2019) on the conditions in 1969 that allowed the establishment of a Basic Art Education Department at the institution at the Academy and how the educational approach was structured there.

It was impossible to access primary sources because no archive had been kept within the Academy. I began to work with the documents and correspondence in Altan Gürman's archive, as he had acted as a pioneer in the establishment of the department and was its director from 1974 to 1976. To fill the gaps in Altan Gürman's archive and focus in a more comprehensive manner on the contributions of actors who shaped the approach to Basic Art Education during this period, I began to look for documents that belonged to Ercümen Kalmık, Ali Teoman Germaner, Erkal Güngören, Özer Kabaş and Nuri Temizsoylu, who were also part of the founding staff of the Basic Art Education Department. At this stage, with your guidance, I examined the Erkal Güngören archive that Salt Research had begun to digitise during that period, and met his daughter Elâ Güngören, who was carrying out academic work on Basic Art Education.

3
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 7 yine bu sergi için bir boy gözlükleri parlamış
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Letter sent from Füsun Onur to Cengiz Çekil,
 June 11, 1980. Salt Research, Cengiz Çekil Archive

İÖ: Since the publication of *For Careful Eyes* (Brehm 2007), the first book bringing together Füsun Onur's works, I have closely followed the artist's practice and its interpretation. The fact that the artist has responded with silence to the intense interest she has attracted after the age of seventy, has evaded questions by saying that she is not bothered about the past, and has not brought forward texts she wrote in the past, creates the impression that she is an artist who does not like to speak about her work or express her views on art. Rather than surrendering to this impression, I positioned the artist's work and her writings from 1966 to 2003—her MA thesis, texts she wrote on her works, articles she wrote that were published in art journals, and her letters—as my primary source, and related them to the narratives, contexts, and discourses they invoked.

When Bige Örer and Nilüfer Şaşmaz invited me to contribute to the publication that was to be produced within the scope of the Füsun Onur exhibition for the Turkey Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale (Öztat 2022), they had also created an archive containing the *Statement of Purpose* the artist had presented to the Maryland College Institute of Art upon receiving her MA degree in 1966 and articles she had published in various art journals. Based on these documents, I began to interpret the decisions Onur made when shaping her oeuvre along with the questions she asked regarding art and the debates around art during that period. By accessing archived clippings in various artists' archives of articles about Füsun Onur from the online catalogue of Salt Research, I was able to trace the perception of her artistic production carried out in Istanbul since 1970. Once I found a letter in the archive written by Onur to her friend and fellow artist Cengiz Çekil, in which she explains her motivations in shaping the work described, I was able to better understand how she sarcastically conveyed her criticism of the environment she was part of into her work.

As I grow older, I realise that new generations are not aware of the period I witnessed and its debates, although they took place in the recent past. Therefore, I find it important to record with proper referencing and to point at online resources which people who are interested can access. For instance, in the article I wrote on Füsün Onur, I mentioned how, in an art environment that was put to test following the globalisation process that began after the fall of the Berlin Wall, works by artists from Turkey entered international circulation at exhibitions that brought together works based on national or geographic belonging, and debates around the concepts of centre/periphery. In the footnotes, I referenced the “International Turkey exhibitions” map prepared by Salt and the text titled *International Circulation and Artists from Turkey* in the publication titled *10*, again published by Salt (1999).

SR: Beyond the archives, you are also a close follower and user of the Salt Research publication collection. Can you discuss the importance of the accessibility of these publications and the means they provide you with as a researcher?

İÖ: Knowing, when I begin research on any topic, that I can search my keywords at saltresearch.org, examine the sources I discover, and propose those that need to be added to the library collection, meets my most basic needs as an artist living in Istanbul. This serves as a source for my production process that progresses, to a great extent, on the basis of coincidences and the establishment of unpredictable connections.

In addition to this, as an artist who is interested in the writing of art history in Turkey, I can access primary sources in the archive and the library collection, which enables me to go after details that are left out of the existing narratives.

SR: In addition to being a researcher, you also use the archive as an artist. For instance, since 2010, using archival materials, you have transformed your acquaintance with Zişan (1896-1970) into a long-term project. You discover and track down, via documents, what Zişan anonymously produced throughout her life, and produce new works. I would like to hear how the archives at Salt Research have inspired you as an artist. Could you discuss your journey with Zişan and in that context, the new projects you are working on?

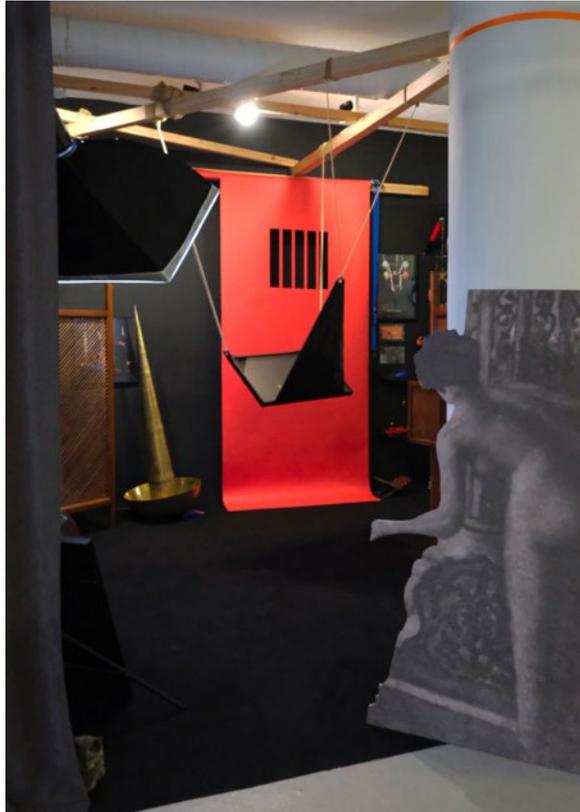
İÖ: Since 2010, I have been fabricating the (auto)biography of Zişan⁴, who appears to me as a historical figure, a ghost, and an alter ego. I take on Zişan’s archive and interpret it through my own practice to propose a complex temporality in which a suppressed past haunts an increasingly authoritarian present. Each chapter of Zişan’s (auto)biography, titled *Every name in history is I and I is other*, manifests as exhibitions accompanied by publications.

The chapter titled *Boo* feeds off the research process that seeks to imagine the love affair between Zişan and Vita (Sackville-West). In 1913, while Zişan was working at the photography studio of her father Dikran Bey, Vita came in to have her photograph taken. They fell in love at first sight. During the one-year period when Vita lived in Istanbul, they spent time together in the photography studio, imagining each other in the representations they produced, getting to know each other’s desires and documenting their love. In constructing this story through an improvisational process, both I and my collaborator Ra, two subjects whose assigned genders are female, became Zişan and Vita in addition to being ourselves. The outcomes of this process will take the form of an installation, video, and a publication.

One of the sources for building our visual language was a collection of 105 postcards featuring the Ottoman-language



Postcard sent by Handan Ruchdy to her sister, Nice, April 19, 1913
Salt Research, Sabiha Rüstü Bozcalı Archive



İz Öztat, *Boo Boo*, installation view from SAHA Studio, 2022



View from *Scared of Murals*, Salt Beyoğlu, 2013
Photo: Cem Berk Ekinil



Moni Salim Özgilik, *Eller Eller* [Hands Hands], performance, Abdi İpekçi Park, Ankara, 1990
Salt Research, Moni Salim Özgilik Archive

correspondence of Handan Rüştü, posted between 1910 and 1916 and today held in the Salt Research archive. In the installation and in the video, we reinterpreted the orientalist themes, the visual expressions involving intimacy between women, and the voyeuristic gaze of the postcards.

In trying to figure out how the postcards could become part of the publications that I imagine producing in the near future, it was necessary for me to know what is written on them. With the permission of Handan Rüştü's heirs, who donated the archive to Salt Research, Hacer Er transliterated the written content of the postcards. I imagine including a selection of postcards in the publication, quoting Handan Rüştü regarding her relationship with the postcards and bringing these together with a fictional text.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For further information on Salt, see Romi (2022).
- 2 It is available online (Salt Research, Gülsün Karamustafa Archive), <https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/189431?locale=en>
- 3 Digitisation and cataloguing work on the Özer Kabaş Archive began in December 2021.
- 4 Zişan's (1894-1970) destiny was marked by an ambiguous belonging from the outset. Born from an affair between Nezihe Hanım, a teacher from an upper-class Turkish family, and Dikran Bey, an Armenian photographer, she fled Istanbul with her father in 1915 to escape the Armenian Genocide. She then embarked on a lifelong journey through a vast geography and the guts of the 20th century as a camouflaged heroine who permeated the canon of avant-garde art without being noticed. She did not identify as an artist and disseminated her work under pseudonyms throughout her life. Her imaginary archive contains texts, sketches, photographs, photo-collages, objects, and ephemera.

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CODE NAME 136¹: THE INSTITUTE OF REGULATING INSTITUTION'S TIME²

Sarp R. Özer

Uses of a Time Machine

I studied at a university initially established as the State School of Applied Fine Arts (Marmara Üniversitesi 2020). Unlike the Academy of Fine Art's traditional Beaux-Arts teaching, the school was founded in 1955 to provide higher art education based on Bauhaus principles. After a couple of decades, that original idea was abandoned, and the institution changed beyond recognition with a new curriculum, staff, and organizational framework. The reason for this was more political than pedagogical. After the 1980 coup, the Academy of Fine Arts was also restructured.³ The dictatorship planted both schools under the newly formed YÖK (Council of Higher Education),⁴ which serves the government by implementing disciplinary policies and denies independence to the universities.

There is an etatist adage that hints at the death anxiety of the state. It proclaims, 'The state remains eighteen years old forever'. With this gerontophobia, a rigorous anti-aging regimen set in motion by any means necessary, including several military coups. As a result, constitutional laws, institutions, their missions, and staffs are subject to constant change. At odds with being forever young, perpetuity is considered a symbolic yet integral part of the essence of tradition, which commends not to terminate institutions except for political parties. These, rather, get renamed or restructured as a form of exorcism. Either imposed as a top-down disciplinary measure ("starting fresh") or implemented consensually as a form of virtue signalling (conformism), such revamps have caused widespread identity disturbance among institutions of different nature in Turkey.⁵

This essay will not scrutinize why and how art schools and public cultural institutions were rendered obsolete in Turkey. My aim, rather, is to present the scene and indicate a historical lack of consistent,

long-lasting, methodical, and coordinated enterprises within the field of culture. This absence resulted in a dearth of publicly accessible documentation and publications covering art in twentieth-century Turkey. Despite a profusely productive context, discourse confirming novel practices in the country or referring to its realities from elsewhere in the world remained weak until the 2000s.

Given such a delay, the non-documented was bound to be largely forgotten or misinterpreted—suppressing minor histories and reinforcing established narratives deluded by the authorial ambition of building a canon oriented towards the West. It was impossible to log a memory without referring to the permanent traces left behind by such recollective incapacity. According to a proverb formulated in the form of a question in Latin, knowledge requires a historical *a priori*, a faculty of remembering: ‘Who would know/learn without documentation?’ (cited in Pound 1975). However, the mind has a far more crucial task: putting the past in context. As Chris Marker noted in *Sans Soleil*, ‘We don’t remember, we rewrite our own memories’.

Concerned with filling voids in memory and facilitating the public’s recollection process through resources and tools provided by its research arm, Salt Research, which comprises a specialized library and an archive of physical and digital sources and documents on visual practices, the built environment, social life and economic history, Salt is a cultural institution that modestly answers a common need for knowledge and a free-to-all social learning environment. Because it is not dedicated to expert culture and its reach does not remain stuck within its own building, Salt is used and accessed from across the country rather than just by the locals of a single city. The reason for this is no PR trick, but issues from the implementation of online research capabilities and the commitment to open access knowledge from the very beginning. Salt was “COVID-19 ready” in terms of digital content over a decade ago. Thus, it had to do very little to adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic, which globally brought on-site cultural activities to a halt. These are not favours of fortune but simple evidence

that Salt was set up according to expectations for an institution of the present in terms of utility.

The one and many lives of the applied arts school intended to be the local Bauhaus is not an isolated incident. Desperate attempts at branding art museums as modern in the twenty-first century, the *Kunsthalle* on steroids, bench-pressing to look like an Institute of Contemporary Art, are concerned with validation within the global contemporary art network rather than with minding local realities. Their undertakers have a track record of turning a blind eye even to matters of their own interest.⁶ Denoting this chronic inclination in Turkey to adopt Western institutional models and culture—instead of devising anew according to the country’s own needs—helps distinguish Salt from local contemporaries founded around the same time, i.e., during the proliferation period of art museums in the 2000s. This distinction is fundamental, emphasising Salt’s divergent worldview, its institutional subjectivity.

Unlike any other institution in Turkey, Salt is self-described as “timely” and “critical”, operating according to a pragmatic agenda rather than surrendering to arbitrary decision-making, sectarian interests, or populism. The emphasis on timeliness refers to the configuration of the institution’s time (Kortun 2018). The latter is regulated according to how the institution thinks and reacts under local, global, and environmental circumstances. Contrary to a rigid punctuality restraining institutions within the ephemerality of now, most commonly practiced by striving to remain present in the public eye, it presses for a contextual understanding of contemporaneity.

A coincidental situation in contemporaneity could be considered free-falling in the moment; indifference towards the past; or a state of apathy or obliviousness to its own time, surroundings, and pressing realities, thus tunnel-visioning towards a predetermined future. Contextual rapport with the present is the opposite of this approach. It treats not only the past but also current phenomena as a historical problem, accounting for and referring to causes and ante-

cedent conditions. The past and present are beclouded by alienation, a common contemporary problem aggravated by engineering of public opinion.

The institution's time is more than a metaphor or methodological proposition. As institutions do not speak but perform to express themselves, they have to regulate time in a practical manner. This cannot be exercised as a crude, strategic move to maintain public relevance by symbolically amplifying the public's voice or preventing its suppression with knee-jerk representational politics. The former mission statement of the International Council of Museums pointed out the primary aim of such a regulation protocol: 'to do everything in one's capacity to advocate a better world than the one received' (Kortun 2018).

Such entities are exanimate without the people who run and incarnate them, i.e., imbuing souls into these lifeless yet immortal bodies. They inform the institution; particularly about the definition of a better world. They do not hold onto values by default, but reflect the morals of the company they keep, the ones who react to the time they live in, affecting the institution's time accordingly. Both the current and formerly active people of the institution are an archive of the institution's subjectivity. There is a de facto code of conduct between the two towards the cause of not making things worse.

How could one hope to form any rapport with the realities of the present moment and its publics by making commitments years in advance? What is the use of blockbuster events? How to allocate a budget and spend recklessly while the country goes through an unending economic downturn? How could one be trusted in public service if one is only loyal to one's employer? What justifies shying away from acknowledging the hardships taking place in the streets or the struggles of one's companions? Why even bother with the threshold if promises about a better world are indirectly made through the institution by those who conveniently capitalize the worse?

The point of these questions is not to position any approach as a paragon of practice, but to emphasize that an institution becomes

contemporary only when its operations actually derive from public concerns. No institution is immune to organizational maladies, and all are prone to infrastructural, financial, and bureaucratic difficulties, which create challenges to consistently staying on the right side of history. Such challenges belong to the realm of formalities and protocols, and they are part of a more extensive, legally binding system that dramatically restricts one's maneuvering capabilities. Institutional entities rely on ardent survival protocols, preferably run by monk-minded operators as if they were part of an order to protect an esoteric knowledge or a figuratively petite object. Thus, the institution's time regulation also sets an ample limit on perseverance. Because what is the point of making pickles that last forever if, eventually, no one has the appetite for them?

Uses of a Heritage Machine

However useful it has been to make critical knowledge accessible in organizational science and public cultural service, the essential function of Salt is defined by its research arm. Salt has formed an unparalleled archive in terms of inventory volume and content to shed light on twentieth century Turkey and onwards. Through histories of art, architecture, design, and the history of city, society, and economy, it covers a timeframe spanning from the period of the Ottoman Empire's dissolution up to the current moment. This archive defines the institution's function as a research facility, making it clear that it is not another display venue, and it articulates the institution's role in civil society. Because Salt does not serve as a custodian safeguarding valuable documents in a vault, the archive is in use, with its many potentials being activated neither in an academic sense of knowledge production, nor for its own sake. Rather, its use is to extrapolate lessons towards building a viable world, 'negotiating, fermenting, testing out, in the best case, possible futures' (Kortun 2018).

Whether exhibition-making, publication development, web use, or other digital affordances including social media, Salt's programs and

activities are sourced from the archive. This methodology enables the institution and its constituents to place historical revisionist accounts that went unnoticed or were bound to oblivion within the purview of common knowledge. As indicated earlier, the lack of documentation and research and the absence of formal entities that support or engage these tasks in Turkey might be considered the main reasons for missing or erased fragments of stories. However valid such explanations are, a more critical factor might be reckoned among the causes of this omission: interference with history. Vasif Kortun, who served as Director of Research and Programs at Salt (2011–17), alluded to this distress in construing the mission of a cultural institution as ‘asking questions around unresolved, ignored, absented and obscured stories from the past’ (Ibid). The first part of the sentence was constructed with a null subject that took the identities of the perpetrators for granted, which might be a deliberate choice—because perhaps it suffices for an institution to fulfill its mission so long it inspires the public to ask, *Cui bono?* Or does it?

Filling in fragmented stories requires examining conflicts, un-conforming individuals, and groups as well as revolutionary acts or possibly emancipatory ideas, in order to insert them within public memory. Considered a marginal activity, unearthing such accounts is unofficially proscribed by the state. Systematically deleting memories to avoid accountability, the state employs a range of disciplinary measures, censorship, and prosecution. The iron gauntlet deters attempts that would prompt questions or cast doubts over a thoroughly edited and enforced historical narrative.

History writing serves to engineer public consent to maintain political stability. The indifference it produces significantly facilitates day-to-day governance as if the arrow of time were proceeding ‘in the unbreakable stream of a monolithic wide moment’ (Tanpınar). As a standalone, dislocated temporal zone, this everlasting present is neither haunted by the past nor does it lead to any future. The hegemony of such extended periods emits generic references as turning points

that posit special significance to a single agent, dismissing the complex relations of overlapping causes. Like the use of “post-1989”, which indicates the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of history englobing *a posteriori* as a whole, the term post-1980 is employed in Turkey to refer to a time that is ongoing and endless. It dismisses the heterogeneous social temporalities and diverse generational experiences that coexisted.

Salt developed a comprehensive research project exploring this era, which was presented as an exhibition entitled *How did we get here* in 2015.⁷ As an attempt to debunk this understanding, the exhibition indicated that the 1980s in Turkey did not end after 1989, but in 1993 with the passing of the eighth president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, who was the first elected politician after the coup that laid the foundation of “New Turkey”, i.e., the Erdoğan regime. Hinting at the lingering outcomes of this period up to when the exhibition took place, *How did we get here* sought to expose how distinct generations lived differently through what was assumed to be a common experience.

Emphasizing such incoherencies in the assumed common sense by highlighting examples from popular culture and social movements that took place after the coup was instrumental in underscoring that the familiar is not the same. This was particularly useful in instigating debates among younger spheres of the public that were deliberately raised to be indifferent to the recent past by post-Özal governments, and who became politicized after the Gezi Park Protests. In short, it highlighted the necessity to probe beyond traumas, nostalgia, and melancholy in order to grasp the conditions that preceded the ongoing political context in the country.

Contrary to common assumptions, Salt does not limit its inquiries to the boundaries of its own archive’s inventory or any other private collection that it is or is to be entrusted with. It conceives the totality of visual and material culture as an open archive to be excavated, and this is what was done for *How did we get here*. There are stories Salt explores that cannot be recounted through documents or photographs.



View from *Clue* workshop organized as part of Gülsün Karamustafa's *A Promised Exhibition*, Salt Beyoğlu, 2014
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



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Installation view from *Apricots from Damascus*, Salt Galata, 2016
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Salt Galata, 2017
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Installation view from *How did we get here*,
Salt Beyoğlu, 2015
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci

Robinson Crusoe
389 Bookstore
moving to Salt
Beyoğlu with
"hand-to-hand"
support from
volunteers, 2014
Photo: Mustafa
Hazneci



Amateur Archives workshop, Salt Galata, 2016

In such cases, historical anecdotes, mundane objects, television footage, statistical data, magazines, or other means are required to trace what is common between different lives. Through cases such as the short-lived periodical *Sokak*, *How did we get here* sought to extrapolate causes, like a hostile media environment that singled out non-conforming publications, to lingering effects, like how the local press lost its political and cultural influence and surrendered to authoritarian monoculturalism (see also Elveren and Uncu 2022).

That exhibition's 2013 prequel, *Scared of Murals*, also comprised similar programmes in terms of content and presentation, and research output. As an ongoing archival inquiry that remains open to contributions, it exemplifies how Salt conceives archiving. The exhibition was named after a banner that was demonstrated several times in 1980, including at the Visual Artists Association's march during the Kuşadası Culture and Art Festival in protest of laws that proscribed painting murals in public space. It originated from the digitization process of artist Ahmet Öktem's archive, which contains photographs from *1. Mayıs Sergisi* (First May Exhibition), an exhibition that took place in 1977. Some of the works that were on display in 1977 are missing or non-documented. During the public presentation, Salt included both works that survived and those that were absent. For the missing works, Salt left empty spaces with an open invitation to the public in case anyone could provide further information or documentation. This decision emphasized that as much can be learned from absence as from presence.

As mentioned, the archival collection of *Scared of Murals* remains open for new insertions. Like other research inquiries undertaken by Salt, the approach is not conclusive or definitive. Acknowledging the possibility of errors in advance, Salt invites the public to not only insert new content but also correct errors and missing information in the archive. This is not a symbolic gesture of humbleness, but a methodological approach towards a plural, unauthorial mode of history writing, as also seen in the research projects *Turkey's*

Participations to International Biennials and International Exhibitions on Turkey, both of which can be found at Salt Online. These projects were developed with a browser-based application called Graph Commons, which served to visualize data into interactive maps. The program reveals the complex relationships between entities and occurrences of different nature, such as individuals, organizations, events, and so on, through its graphic and network design. It spreads nodes on a huge canvas without forcefully positioning them in a strict timeline. In this way, Graph Commons serves as an ideal tool for Salt to articulate the historiographic approach outlined in its self-description: 'The research projects, visual presentations, international publications, and local archival collections at Salt expand beyond linear chronologies, medium-based questions, and the traditional separation of fields of study'.

Furthermore, Salt devises methods to make use of the archive when tools or documents do not suffice to shed light on or even constitute a story. Another exhibition that took place in Salt Galata, titled *Empty Fields* and held in 2016, similarly addressed archival absence in its exhibition display by retaining empty spaces of the missing works. This exhibition was about the century-old natural science collection of the Museum of Anatolia College, catalogued in great detail by Prof. Jacob Manissadjian, an Armenian-German scientist, botanist, and plant collector. The inventory of the museum was dispersed shortly after the genocide in 1915. The remains of the archive were entrusted to Salt by the American Board Archives. Many items did not include the data required by Salt's resource description standard Dublin Core, a common standard for archival catalogues.

Dublin Core requires at least fifteen different types of information about each document to specify resource descriptions such as creator, description, and date. This had to be expanded to forty-five because Salt holds physical documents from different periods, languages, and world systems. As the *Empty Fields* exhibition pamphlet described:

When the cataloging was applied to the American Board Archives, many of these new fields often ended up highlighting the lack of information, appearing as blanks. Empty Fields proposes that the multiple blank fields in the American Board Archives do not indicate a lack, but rather actual gaps in historical narratives. In particular, these gaps embody the impressions left by communities who were a part of the American mission past. In the archive, the fields most often left in a state of “waiting-to-be-filled-in” are those of Western Armenian, ArmenoTurkish, Greek, and Greco-Turkish languages formerly used in the Ottoman Empire. By recognizing and working with these empty fields, the underlying sense of a curatorial narrative emerges in the exhibition. It points out how archival classification systems not only grind out information but function as charts to help to explore the unknown depths of archival materials. (Hovhannisyan 2016)

The correlations between the projects unpacked above do not stem from the use of archives. The cases reflect the institution’s unassertive, curious, and impartial historiographical approach. In fact, history is just an instrument that Salt uses to comprehend and navigate the present. For this reason, *How did we get here* serves as more than a program title and can be understood as an umbrella question Salt poses throughout its many activities. Salt is not interested in collecting evidence or documents to underpin predetermined verdicts or make convictions in any form. It rather formulates questions to delve into topics that require cross-examination, myth-busting, or reconsideration. Thus, these efforts ask, Who owns the history? And how to think about or devise ways to reclaim it?

Another former Director of Research and Programs at Salt, Meriç Öner (2017-2021), draws parallels between the institution’s method to delve into history and how it makes use of archives in the editorial process. According to Öner (2016, 01:01:45), the three forms of

the sentence “A story on everyone exists” epitomize Salt’s research and programming motivations. First, acknowledging the inconsistent realities that subjects face within the same temporal frame, even if their lives are not validated as “history” in the common sense. Second, the phrase is edited to become “everyone exists.” Finally, the syntax changes to arrive at “everyone, a story.” This does not propose shifting focus from extraordinary to ordinary, known to the unknown, major to minor, professional to the amateur, but taking all in its most plural form of totality to account for rather than taking what is given for granted.

In a sense, Salt reverse-engineers histories and disassembles them into bits and pieces for the public to recompose according to its own subjectivity by drawing sources from the open archive. This way, the institution takes a modest step towards countering alienation from history. It demystifies its writing process through public programs and provides resources for the public to claim agency on the constitution of a plural history by making use of the library and archive. Even though the archive is considered material of history, it is not conceived as an academic or artistic resource, but as a point of departure for curious constituents with undefined and unconventional practices. According to Salt’s subjectivity, anybody can make art—and so history as well.

Even though the data on Salt Research’s online traffic from various cities of Turkey is not collected, the proliferation of amateur historians who self-publish findings online with reference to collections of Salt Research hints at the institution’s reach. Often created by self-proclaimed researchers and titled after various subjects of memory or history, these social media accounts and blogs propagate archival images with subjective interpretations. Because they exemplify the kind of cultural production that Salt seeks to facilitate and encourage, the institution has reacted to this interest and started a campaign under the hashtag #arşivdençıktı (out of the archive). As the institution’s relationship with its publics was not designed as a top-down content flow but



View from *Who am I?* workshop organized as part of *1+8* exhibition at Salt Galata, 2013
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Salt Research Ferit F. Şahenk Hall, 2018
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Archival storage units, Salt Galata, 2013
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Salt Research
office, 2017
Photo: Mustafa
Hazneci



Book exchange, 2016
Photo: Mustafa Hazneci



Salt Galata's entrance on a Sunday afternoon
right after the institution was closed, 2022
Photo: Sarp Renk Özer

by the goal of remaining useful, Salt has devised similarly minded programs such as *Researchers at Salt*, *Amateur Archive Workshops* or *Ask an Expert*—all aimed at fostering curiosity rather than expertise.

When given a fair chance, the public always reclaims what belongs to it by making things public. That is why the activation and empowerment of the curious as a constituent expanded the institution's reach beyond artistic and academic spheres. This has meant providing an environment self-described as a “learning site” alongside tools and resources, so that self-assigned agents of causes parallel to Salt's would make new inquiries or open old cases without even referring to Salt. What matters is, these kindred spirits propagate coherent world views through their works. This understanding has enabled Salt to exist beyond its walls, which is exactly what various global cultural institutions strive for but fail to achieve because they miss the point. The “without walls” definition was often misinterpreted as a colonial crusade to chart new territories.

Such a mode of existence is only viable by developing a subjectivity that can be useful for disambiguating the meaning of a better future, such that this would be conceived by any rather than by a few. Redundant recipes such as content production or material investments in facilities or identity from the cookbook of cultural institutions have proved useful for regurgitation at best. There is no cookie cutter solution to becoming immaterial or to rooting in minds as an idea other than earning trust, which one cannot will. As a debranded institution, Salt is not a building, a website, or an entity. It is an answer to a need which has assumed other names and forms, including Code Name 136, Platform Garanti⁸, or İstanbul Contemporary Art Project⁹, in the past. This is how it retained the potential to exist within and beyond its own capacity and lifespan. Now that a modest historical background for public mindedness is constituted, Salt is just a vessel.

ENDNOTES

- 1 136 is the door number of Salt Beyoğlu. The institution was referred to as “Code Name 136” until its name was decided.
- 2 This text was commissioned before Salt underwent a revamp in 2022 that introduced substantial changes to its organizational framework and visual identity. Thus it refers to the former settings and values effective in the institution's first foundational decade (2011-2021).
- 3 The institutional history can be seen on a timeline at <https://msgsu.edu.tr/universite/kurum-tarihi/>.
- 4 The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) was established in 1981 to restructure academic, institutional, and administrative aspects of higher education in Turkey. Constitutionally empowered, it now oversees and encompasses all higher education institutions in Turkey. (See Council of Higher Education 2018)
- 5 The evidence of these unstable conditions is in plain sight. Because even the future of the governmental system of the state (which changed four years ago) that incorporates and legally binds all institutions as subsidiaries is yet to be determined by the results of the upcoming election in 2023.
- 6 Vasif Kortun, former Director of Research and Programs at Salt, was not able to make a public statement regarding Turkey's withdrawal from the European Union's Creative Europe programme, which funds and supports artistic activities and production, together with local administrators of cultural institutions. A statement was made online through L'Internationale with the directors of the confederation's constituent institutions (Badovinac et al. 2016)
- 7 The exhibition was part of L'Internationale's five-year program “The Uses of Art – The Legacy of 1848 and 1989”.
- 8 The predecessor of Salt, the contemporary art institution Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center opened in 2001 where Salt Beyoğlu is now located. It organized exhibitions, conferences, and events, hosted an international residency program, and maintained a library and archive of contemporary art that provided foundational material for Salt Research.
- 9 Founded by Vasif Kortun in 1999, ICAP (İstanbul Güncel Sanat Projesi) maintained a walk-in contemporary art library built up by Kortun, which was later donated to Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center.

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PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE RETURN OF THE REPPRESSED MEMORY OF THE WORLD

Tomislav Medak
and Marcell Mars

When the dominant idea of freedom in an age is that of freedom regulated by markets, the collective capacity to pursue autonomy, equality, and welfare becomes reduced to the freedom of capital flows, the freedom of competition, and the freedom of consumer choice.

Under the coercive invisible hand of the market, the freedom of journalism tends to transmogrify into sensationalist media acting on behalf of commercial and political interests; the freedom of expression into officially condoned hate speech; the freedom of research and education into sky-rocketing student fees, precarious academic labour, and intellectual self-censoring.

When the idea of freedom as regulated by markets meets the idea of political freedom as self-assertion of ethnic domination, as was the case over the last three decades in the countries of former Yugoslavia, then the sensationalist media, the normalized discrimination, and the intellectual self-censorship turn a blind eye when books are thrown out of the libraries, documents are disappeared from the archives, and monuments are blasted into the air.

Thus are material acts and facts created that wipe out the collective memory of a past where the emancipatory labour movement and anti-fascism defeated—even if temporarily—Nazism, racism, and exploitation of the underclasses. In their toleration of such material acts and facts that destroy memory, the media, the public, and the intellectuals are complicit in a rewriting of history anew. The monoethnic identity of new capitalist nation-states thus descends into a self-justificatory spiral of historical revisionism.

In this short text, we return to three of our interventions into the politics of memorialization to highlight the role of amateur archivists and librarians in countering the revision of history, and in undoing the policing of access to the critical knowledge necessary for debunking revisionism that is imposed through the intellectual property regime.

Debunking Historical Revisionism

The post-socialist period brought a surge of historical revisionism, particularly in Eastern Europe. Fuelled by the European Parliament's 2009 resolution against "totalitarian regimes", which effectively equated fascism and communism, historical revisionists, Holocaust deniers, and neo-fascists started publishing their confabulations through institutional publishing pipelines. Consequently, their narratives began to colonize the public understanding of the Second World War, absolving the Quisling regimes of their complicity and responsibility in the extermination of Jews, Roma, Sinti, Slavs, and other ethnic minorities, as well as in repression against communists, antifascists, crips, and queers. These confabulations have seeped into national Wikipedia entries, due to that medium's formal criteria for citations from published sources. As a result, many East European Wikipedias have become hotbeds of alternative, reactionary historical narratives.

In 2022, Memory of the World initiated a project of digitizing post-Yugoslav revisionist and non-revisionist historiography, which included work with two historians to create a series of small experimental publications debunking the methods and claims of historical revisionism. By contextualizing passages from revisionist texts with non-revisionist texts and archival documents, intervening with critical tools including footnotes, source citations, and commentary, and providing access to the original archival sources, the intervention aims to tackle not only revisionist narratives but also the shortcomings of historiographic methodology constrained by intellectual property, which restricts access to many of the sources that allow for a critical reading of revisionist narratives and a proper collective accounting for the past.

The series of debunking publications was written on Memory of the World's publishing platform *Sandpoints*, which was initially developed to document practices of social movements and prototyped through our Pirate Care Syllabus (<https://syllabus.pirate.care>). It con-

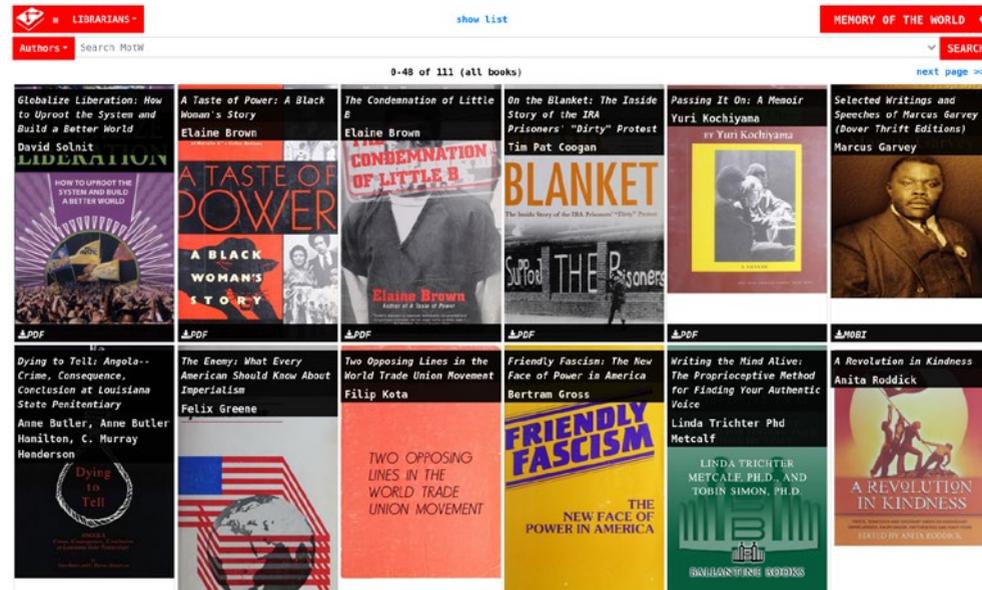
tains both the revisionist texts and the critical commentary, and the entire collection of texts and can be used as a website or printed as a booklet.

Herman's Library

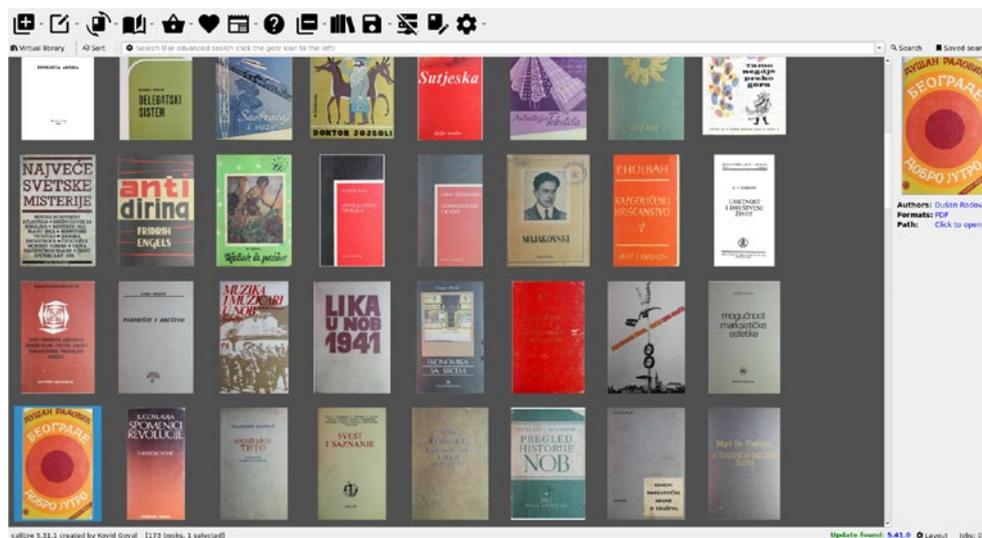
For over forty years, Herman Wallace, a Black Panther activist, lived in solitary confinement in Louisiana's state prison system. Wallace, born in New Orleans in 1941, was initially convicted of armed robbery and sent to the Angola prison in 1971. In 1971, together with Ronald Ailsworth, Albert Woodfox, and Gerald Bryant, he established the Angola Chapter of the Black Panther Party. After a prison guard was murdered, with no physical evidence linking them to the scene of the crime, the Angola's most prominent organizers for prisoners' rights, Herman Wallace, Albert Woodfox, and Robert King, were convicted of the murder and sentenced to solitary confinement for life. In July 2013, Amnesty International called for the release of 71-year-old Herman Wallace, who had advanced liver cancer. He was released on 1 October and died three days later, on 4 October 2013.

In 2003, the American multidisciplinary artist Jackie Sumell asked Herman Wallace a question: "What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6' x 9' box for over 30 years dream of?" The answer to this question was made real in a remarkable project called *The House that Herman Built*. Although Wallace passed away in 2013, the project has transitioned from being a virtual simulation of that home to an actual home to be built in his birthplace, New Orleans.

While Wallace was still alive, Sumell also asked him what books the dream library in his dream house would contain, to which Wallace responded with a list of around one hundred books that had formed the basis of his political subjectivation. Until that home is built, Herman's dream library remains housed at an art residency in Stuttgart, where it is kept locked and under restricted access in the library. Therefore, in 2015, Memory of the World approached Sumell and



Herman's Library (<https://herman.memoryoftheworld.org>)



Otpisane (Written-off) (<https://otpisane.memoryoftheworld.org>)

arranged to digitize the collection, so that others may access it and learn from Herman's politicization (<https://herman.memoryoftheworld.org>).

Otpisane (Written-off)

Otpisane (Written-off) (<https://otpisane.memoryoftheworld.org>) is a collection of books that were digitized based on the write-off lists and witness accounts documenting the massive removal and destruction of books from public libraries in the early 1990s in Croatia. Under the guise of a legitimate librarian procedure of writing off damaged or unused copies of books, almost three million books by Serbian authors and publishers printed in Cyrillic as well as books dealing with socialism, the Second World War resistance movement, or the history of the labor movement were removed from the shelves of Croatian libraries in just a couple of years in the early 1990s. This removal and destruction of books *en masse* testifies to the ideological and censoring function that libraries and memory institutions can play in processes of state and ethnic identity building.

In 2015, on the 20th anniversary of *Operation Storm*, which saw some one hundred thousand Serbs flee Croatia, the Croatian government organized a military parade. In response to the construction of collective memory that celebrated armed conflict instead of the peace-building and integration that ensued in 2000s, the collective What, how and for whom/WHW and Memory of the World jointly organized an action calling people to bring copies of the books documented to have been removed from the library shelves two decades earlier to Galerija Nova in Zagreb for digitization. Through the act of digitization, that which was repressed from collective memory was brought back to public agenda.

The collection and action were based on data collected in extensive research on "library cleansing" conducted by the economic historian and unofficial archivist of the Korčula Summer School, Ante

Lešaja, and documented in his book *Libricide – The Destruction of Books in Croatia in the 1990s* (Lešaja 2012). What Lešaja's work clearly shows is that the destruction of books—as well as the destruction of monuments of the People's Liberation War—was not a result of individual actions, as official accounts are trying to argue, but a deliberate and systematic activity which symbolically crystalizes the dominant revisionist politics of the 1990s.

And yet, if public libraries can serve repression and regulation by sanctioning political domination, they can also act as infrastructures of emancipation from the domination of the market and of nationalism.

Public Library

Emerging from the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the institution of the public library gradually formed in the liminal zone of capitalist development. By providing decommodified access to increasingly commodified culture and knowledge, the public library limited the market's ability to decide who will have access to education and edification—and whether knowledge serve continued domination or transformation of the world.

From those early days, the public library held a utopian promise of making all the world's memory available to all members of society without barriers—a promise that, with the emergence of the internet, appeared within reach. And yet, the parallel rise of digital capitalism and the reassertion of capitalist nation-states has severely limited the public library in the pursuit of its emancipatory mission and sometimes has driven overzealous librarians to commit systematic acts of ideological purge.

The parallel effect of enclosures and discriminations by means of intellectual property and identitarianism has led to the creation of digital shadow archives and libraries by internet communities, often in open disobedience of copyright law and the dominant ideology of nationalism, providing access to knowledge for all and the preserving

collective memory of emancipatory struggles when public institutions were denied or have failed to do so.

Evisceration of the public library's mission

In the present, however, the public library is an endangered institution, doomed to extinction. While the Internet has enabled a massive expansion of access to all kinds of publications, libraries were initially and remain severely limited in extending to digital 'objects' the decommodified access they provide in print. Consequently, the centrality of libraries in facilitating, organizing, and disseminating information, science, and literature has faded.

For instance, until relatively recently, libraries did not—and in many places still do not—have the right to purchase e-books for lending and preservation. If they do, they were limited in how many times and under what conditions they could lend digital books before not only the license but the "object" itself was revoked. In the case of academic journals, the situation was even worse: as journals moved to predominantly digital models of distribution and streamlined their costs, libraries could provide access to publishers' servers and "preserve" the journals only for as long as they continued paying skyrocketing prices for subscriptions.

While a transition to digital media has provided opportunities to reconsider how societies produce, sustain, and make available written culture and science, i.e., to socialise those forms of production, vested commercial interests in combination with the property-form that treats intellectual creation as if it were a piece of land have created insurmountable barriers to transforming our systems of cultural and knowledge production.

In the 1960s, the library field started to call into question the merit of objectivity and neutrality that librarianship embraced in the 1920s with its induction into the status of science. In the context of social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, librarians started to question

‘the myth of library neutrality’ (Branum 2008). With the transformation of information into commodity and the transition to a knowledge economy, librarians could no longer ignore that the notion of neutrality effectively perpetuated implicit structural exclusions of class, gender, and race, and that in their roles as librarians, they were gatekeepers of epistemic and material privilege (Jansen 1989; Iverson 1999). The egalitarian politics inscribed into the public library’s DNA through its decommodifying mission started to trump neutrality, and libraries came to acknowledge a commitment to the marginalized, their pedagogies, and their struggles.

However, the economic developments of recent decades have created conditions for public libraries that largely overturn the reorientation towards socialising knowledge. In 2019, we learned from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s annual survey of libraries in the United Kingdom that over the last decade of Conservative-led governments, no less than 773 out of 4,356 public library branches have closed, that spending on libraries has declined by 29.6%, that the number of salaried staff has dropped from 24,000 to 15,300, and that visits have dropped from 315 million to 226 million. Much of this decline is a consequence of the reduction of funding for local councils left with no choice but to direct their modest means toward ‘priority services such as social care’ (Flood 2019).

Petit-bourgeois denial prevents society from recognizing this disturbing insight into the public library’s decline and potential extinction. As in many other fields, the only way out of this obsolescence and defunding offered by the policymakers is innovative market-based entrepreneurship. Some have suggested that the public library should become an open software platform on top of which creative developers can build app stores (Weinberger 2012) or Internet cafés for the poorest, ensuring they are only a click away from the Amazon.com catalogue or the Google search bar. But these proposals overlook, perhaps deliberately, the fundamental principles of access upon which the idea of the public library was built.

Those who are well-meaning, intelligent, and tactful will try to remind the public of the many critical social elements brought together in a public library—as a major community centre; a service for the vulnerable; a centre of literacy, informal, and lifelong learning; a place where hobbyists, enthusiasts, old and young meet and share knowledge and skills (Mattern 2014). Unfortunately, for purely tactical reasons, this kind of reminder does not tend to contain an explanation of how its varied effects arise out of the central function of the public library in societies: that universal access to knowledge for each member of society produces knowledge, that it produces knowledge about knowledge, and that it produces knowledge about the social constitution of knowledge. The public library thus creates and recreates sociability through access to knowledge.

The public library does not need creative crisis management that wants to propose *what* the library should be *transformed into* after our societies—obsessed with the logic of markets, intellectual property, and authorship—have made it impossible for this institution to continue providing access to knowledge and thus to perform its principal mission in the digital domain as well as in print. Such proposals, if they do not insist on universal access to knowledge for all members of a society, are Trojan horses for the silent but creeping disappearance of the public library from the historical stage. Sociability—produced by public libraries, with all the richness of its various appearances—will be best preserved if we manage to fight for the values upon which we have built the public library: universal access to knowledge for each member of our societies with no barriers.

Shadow Libraries

Staying with public library’s principal mission in the shift to digital access thus necessitated disobedience.

Science Hub, Library Genesis, Aaaaarg.fail, Monoskop, and UbuWeb (just as our Memory of the World) are all examples of fragile

knowledge infrastructures built and maintained by brave amateur librarians and archivists practicing disobedience to provide access that the public library was long unable to provide in the digital domain. These projects thus complement the public library, doing in the digital realm what the public library does in the realm of print.

Science Hub (<https://sci-hub-links.com>), the “Robin Hood of access to science”, provides public access to tens of millions of scientific articles that are protected by intellectual property and legally available only to academic institutions and individuals that can pay exorbitant subscriptions or per-article prices. Science Hub was created in 2011 by Alexandra Elbakyan, a computer science student in Kazakhstan who a couple of years earlier developed a script to circumvent paywalls to access articles she and her university could not afford. After repeatedly being asked to share articles, she set up a website that functions as a search engine and a repository of all retrieved articles. Ten years later, Science Hub provides access to over 60 million or around 85% of all articles behind paywalls, serving requests coming largely from low and middle-income countries. Since 2015, Science Hub has been sued by the likes of Elsevier for damages running into tens of millions of dollars. It has had several of its domains revoked over years, and recently Twitter also revoked its account, following an injunction from an Indian court initiated again by Elsevier—the largest in the oligopoly of five commercial publishers, famous for the 37% profit margin it makes from articles that scientists write, review, and edit for free. Losing domains is a given for ‘shadow libraries’, but Elbakyan managed to keep the servers out of reach of the authorities where it was sued. Elbakyan holds that the Mertonian ideals of science are grounded in ‘common ownership of knowledge (i.e. communism)’ and that copyright law should be abolished (Elbakyan 2016). By choosing not to hide but rather to speak out in the media and in letters to courts, Elbakyan has upheld the principle that the public has the right to knowledge. In so doing she has chosen to act in the tradition of disobedience disrespecting the unjust laws.

Library Genesis (<https://libgen.rs>) is an online library with over two million books. It is the first project in history to offer everyone on the Internet a free download of its entire collection (as of this writing, about hundred terabytes of data), together with the all metadata (MySQL dump) and PHP/HTML/Java Script code for webpages. The largest online library prior to Library Genesis was *Gigapedia*, later renamed *Library.nu*, which handled its upload and maintenance costs by selling advertising, which helped publishers to eventually trace its operators, take legal action against them, and take down the library. (Losowsky 2012) The news of the takedown of *Gigapedia/Library.nu* came as a major blow to academics and readers across the economically uneven world of knowledge and culture, who suddenly found themselves denied access to all digital texts available to their counterparts in well-funded academic institutions usually situated in high-income countries. The decision by Library Genesis to share its collection, metadata, and webpages came in response to this vulnerability and has spawned a network of similar sites (so-called ‘mirrors’), providing an exceptionally resistant infrastructure for knowledge commons.

Beyond Science Hub and Library Genesis, there are also smaller shadow libraries with very specific approaches to their collections:

Aaaaarg.fail (<https://aaaaarg.fail>), created by the artist Sean Dockray, is an online repository with over 100,000 books and texts. Its distinct feature is the community of researchers from critical theory, contemporary art, philosophy, architecture, and other affiliated fields who maintain, catalogue, and create the literature lists and the discussion boards of the collection.

UbuWeb (<https://ubu.com>) is the largest and most significant online archive of avant-garde art in its various forms: poetry, sound, video, writing. UbuWeb was created in 1996 by the conceptual artist Kenneth Goldsmith, who continues to edit it today. UbuWeb has grown into a resource of critical relevance for access to and education in contemporary art, so much so that the Zurich University of the Arts maintains an official mirror of UbuWeb (<https://ubu-mirror.ch>).

Monoskop (<https://monoskop.org>) is a wiki for arts, culture, and media technology, created with an initial focus on avant-garde, conceptual, and media arts in Eastern and Central Europe. It is primarily the work of Dušan Barok. Nowadays, it encompasses various geographical, artistic, and academic fields, with comprehensive articles and lists of often rare sources on issues such as architecture or anthropocene. In the form of a blog at [Monoskop.org/log](https://monoskop.org/log), Barok also maintains an curated online catalogue of books numbering over 3,000 titles.

Alexandra Elbakyan, the community behind Library Genesis, Sean Dockray, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Dušan Barok indicate that the future of public library does not need crisis management, reinvention, or outsourcing, but simply the freedom to continue extending the dreams of Melvil Dewey, Paul Otlet, and other visionary librarians to provide universal access to knowledge for all without socioeconomic barriers—both digitally and in print.

With the Internet and the plethora of software tools for maintaining digital text collections, librarianship has been given an opportunity to include thousands of amateur librarians who can, together with the professional librarians, build a distributed networked infrastructure to share the catalogue of digitized knowledge and culture.² However, just as public libraries were denied the ability to provide digital access, so are they denied from working with shadow librarians who complement their work in the digital realm. Under these conditions, shadow libraries will have to continue to disobeyingly complement and act in lieu of public libraries, standing up to the exclusions of intellectual property and identitarianism.

After all, a public library is:

- free access to books for every member of society
- library catalogue
- librarian

With books ready to be shared, meticulously catalogued, everyone is a librarian.

When everyone is librarian, library is everywhere.
(Memory of the World 2012)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Korčula Summer School was a yearly gathering of prominent Marxist intellectuals from both sides of the Cold War divide, organized on the island of Korčula between 1964 and 1974. Organized by the editors of *Praxis* journal, it was a place of convergence for most prominent critical thinkers of the period, including Agnes Heller, Leszek Kołakowski Ernst Bloch, Eugen Fink, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Henri Lefebvre. Together with Ante Lešaja and Documenta, Memory of the World has digitized the archive of the *Praxis* journal and the Korčula Summer School, which can be found at <https://praxis.memoryoftheworld.org>.
- 2 This opportunity can be compared to what the project SETI@home made possible in the field of astronomy (See <http://setiathome.berkeley.edu/>).

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INSTITUTION BY DECLARATION (2022)

Damian Cabrera
and Javiera Manzi A.

The network *Red Conceptualismos del Sur* (RedCSur) defines itself as an affective mesh of researchers, artists, and activists. Conceived geopolitically from the global South (presently with members from Latin America, Spain, and Poland—many of whom are migrants), the network actively participates in diverse fields where critical research, archives, and the arts intersect with the political.

Since RedCSur took shape, one strategy in its repertoire of collective practices has been the production of declarations and manifestos. These active and creative instruments mark a positioning at each juncture. We consider declarations and manifestos to be a form of thought in themselves, capable of condensing polyphonies of the present, making affirmative gestures in moments of intense uncertainty, and calling for cross-border actions. While the terms “manifesto” and “declaration” coexist and may serve as synonyms within the Red, in recent years we have preferred “declaration”.

RedCSur has issued declarations at various moments. The first instance was after the fire in the Helio Oiticica archive in 2009, then during the coup in Paraguay in 2012, the coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in 2016, the situation in Venezuela in 2014, the silences of the Colombian democracy in 2018... A declaration was issued amidst the social uprising in Chile, during the coup in Bolivia in 2019, and most recently in solidarity with the Palestinian people and persecuted activists in Cuba. While the first of these declarations were made in the tradition of the political manifesto, in which both Leftist activisms and artistic vanguards have taken part, an evaluation our practices at the Red’s tenth anniversary encounter prompted us to shift our mode of collective pronouncement, towards an emergent voice that might be both multiple and shared, based on a principle of listening. We aimed then to create spaces in which various positions of difference and situated thought might encounter one another, spaces we called *Círculos de la*

Palabra (speaking circles). Using a methodology similar to popular education has allowed us to express our presence not only through declarative texts, but also through active listening as a political exercise of shared response. We have also added graphic campaigns to our declarations/calls, which have served to connect poetic/discursive elements with poetic/visual ones.

The two following texts were produced by the RedCSur in the spirit of these declarations. The first, “*Instituent Manifesto of the Red de Conceptualismos del Sur*”, is the founding manifesto that expresses the ideological configuration of the Red, its operative structure, and its principal policies and lines of action. This manifesto works both inside and outside the Red: internally it serves as a cohesive medium, and externally it serves as a form of introduction. Second, the “*Call for a Common Archive Policy*” is one of the Red’s efforts to connect with others, a reaction to regional and state policies that neglect archives and to market tendencies that seek to privately appropriate the archives of art and politics.

The idea of an *instituent* manifesto for the Red marks a foundational aspiration. It establishes the conceptual and chronological locus of the Red’s origin while also fostering transition and initiation: whoever decides to join the Red should accept the terms of the declaration and its array of ideas and become familiar with its affective lexicon and its history—its memory. After the physical meeting of RedCSur in Buenos Aires in 2018, a committee reformulated this instituent declaration, which was newly published in 2020. This collective writing sought to gather and imagine the concepts, ideas, and voices floating around the Red, establishing common sensibilities. Where certain practices and concepts that form part of the *life of the Red* did not have lexical corollaries, these were created.

In late July and early August 2019, the Archive Manual Meeting was held by RedCSur’s archives node in Santiago and Valparaíso in Chile, working from the bookstore and social centre Proyección, the memory space Londres 38, the Creative Campus of the Andrés Bello

University in Santiago, and the cultural park of Valparaíso. This face-to-face space of encounter, work, and communication was motivated by the need to question and share our practices and lessons, and from there to shape a “*Basic Basket of Inappropriable Archives*” that could allow us to share Red’s work in recent years with others outside of RedCSur. What strategies, practices, and modes of doing might be shared and replicated by others?

At the end of 2019, we published the “*Call for a Common Archive Policy*” online. The writing of this text was once again a collective exercise, based on conversations and exchanges of ideas at the in-person meeting in Chile and projected outwards towards other individual, collective, and institutional actors who had contributed by formulating questions and problematizing archival practices. Not unlike the collective writing of the “*Instituent Declaration*”, the archives meeting also led to the review, rewriting, and broadening of the original archive policy and the creation of a new text delving more deeply into ideas that had grown from over ten years of lived experience working with archives.

The first version of the “*Call*” was presented at the seminar *Archives of the Common III: Inappropriable Archives?* at the Museo Reina Sofía in September 2019. It was later disseminated, and a range of institutions, collectives, and persons signed the document with the aim of building a broader network of alliances both inside and outside institutions capable of defending vulnerable archives; of reinforcing policies of care, co-responsibility, and accessibility of archives; and of implementing good practices of archival conservation, contextualisation, socialisation, and imagination.

In declarations written by many hands, RedCSur sees in the verbal power of the common a horizon beyond definitive syntheses, residing in a motley and fluid character and open to reformulations motivated not least by the energy of effusive encounters. The “*Instituent Manifesto*” and the “*Call*” are two examples of a widespread practice within the Red of attributing the value of that which

is created and recreated through utterance to collectively written discourse. To invoke a desired reality, to affirm its subjective and communitarian features through linguistic rituals with the aim of preserving, through these gestures of hands in motion, the need to institute reality by declaration: shaping our own archive.

LINKS

“Instituent Declaration” (2020): https://docs.google.com/document/d/16Yb2rTQ1wAD1ocjaqLiUGbPD___D2djfzTAPyKqao5s/edit

INSTITUENT DECLARATION; FOR A COMMON ARCHIVAL POLICY: A CALL FOR A BEST PRACTICES AGREEMENT (2007)

Red Conceptualismos
del Sur / Southern
Conceptualisms Network



Instituent Declaration

The Red Conceptualismos del Sur (RedCSur) is an affective and activist network that seeks to act from a position of south-south plurality in contemporary epistemological, artistic, and political disputes. Formed in 2007, the Red works to influence the critical quality of artistic, archival, curatorial, and social movement practices on the premise that research is itself a political act, intervening in specific conjunctures that mark our nonsynchronous present.

Every act of naming has performative effects; language produces reality. In our name, the word “Red” describes a commingling web (capable of containing, contacting, even capturing) that is open to connecting with places positioned as “South”, understanding South not as a geographical location but as a place of geopolitical and affective articulation. Within these coordinates, the Red generates south-south relations, forming complex frameworks both historically and contextually defined as south. This definition is not absolute, and it is open to other geopolitical positions. It is based on a manifest partiality and locus, adopted with an acknowledgment of powers and limitations.

The term *conceptualismos* (conceptualisms) comes from the moment of the Red’s establishment in 2007, in the context of a meeting in Barcelona entitled “Vivid Radical Memory” at which narratives about the roots of conceptualisms were discussed. We have often felt uncomfortable with this name and have even considered changing it, insofar as our way of doing things goes far beyond this singular ascription, anchored in a specific moment in the relationship of art and politics. But we have opted to claim this legacy, which is also our own, by condensing the name into an unexplained “c”. In calling ourselves

RedCSur, the C might adopt meanings, among many others, including concepts, courses, conditions, caresses.

Characterisation of the RedCsur: what it is, who participates, how it works

The Red brings together around forty artists, activists, and researchers as active members. Many of us are Latin American, intra-, and intercontinental migrants who experience forms of displacement and dislocated belonging on a daily basis, which entails learning to inhabit borders. We collaborate in various institutional and non-institutional spheres, including universities, museums, and spaces of activism, to create alternative circumstances for the production of knowledge and political disobedience. We seek to generate indivisible articulations between the elements poetry-thinking-creation-action, recognising the practical within theoretical exercises, and vice-versa. Those who make up the Network are connected by an ethical-political principle, through practices of affectivity that can be traced in unpredictable ways and which may take shape virtually prior to any face-to-face encounter.

The Red acts as a point of convergence and a place for collaborative and affective work. Those who wish to join must put their time, ideas, and will into collectively contributing to its smooth and successful functioning. Being in the Red is a way of seeking antidotes to indifference and impotence, a way to respond to the present and its historicity.

The Red is currently organised around four nodes: **archives**, **research**, **publications** and activation. We promote collective projects, forming working groups within nodes and between nodes, as well as transversally in curatorial and research projects. We also hold plenary meetings (annually, at a minimum) to discuss and resolve transversal issues and to appoint our delegates. We forge connections with other persons, groups, and institutions from varying positions and on different scales.

We work together and share our ongoing endeavours through regular face-to-face meetings and on using various virtual platforms. Arriving at this point was not a quick, logical, or efficient process, but a winding road along which we encountered both disagreements and discoveries in our work together. We have tried and continue to experiment with various methodologies and modes of collaboration, rotating general coordination and delegates among nodes. Face-to-face meetings nourish both connection and political imagination, providing spaces for internal and public discussion.

The research work, actions, and political experiences take shape and grow out of the alliances RedCSur establishes with different actors, based on a perspective of autonomy. From a position that does not renounce institutions but tries to generate institutional spaces, the Red's projects have been possible thanks to each member's work and outputs and to individual and institutional support. The Red has also put together **pragmática vitalista** (vitalist pragmatics), an essay on modes of building and defending a timespace of common affirmation, with the aim of testing other economic practices and redistribution of resources and of finding allies.

The Red has established alliances with institutions in both the Global North and South, which have allowed it to have an impact on various scales. Noteworthy alliances have been formed with the **Foundation for Arts Initiatives**, which has supported various Red projects since 2009, and the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. There have also been joint projects with institutions from the south, including the **Archivo General de la Universidad de la República** (University General Archives) in Montevideo, the Gino Germani Research Institute and **Memoria Abierta** (Open Memory) at the University of Buenos Aires, the **Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos** (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) in Santiago de Chile, the **Museo de Arte de Lima** (Lima Art Museum), the **Centro de Documentación Arkheia del Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo de la UNAM** (Arkheia Documentation Centre at the University Museum

of Contemporary Art, National Autonomous University of Mexico; UNAM) in Mexico City and the [Centro de Artes Visuales/Museo del Barro](#) (Visual Arts Centre/Barro Museum) in Asunción, which have been fundamental for the Red.

The Red, for its part, works to expand the possibilities that these alliances offer to other actors. That said, we do not perceive ourselves simply as “mediators”. We understand that our proposals and interventions do not, for example, go straight from artists to institutions as untouched missives. On the contrary, we intend that instituted practices be altered, reconsidered and, at certain points, overturned by these interactions. In other words, interaction affects practice. Our alliances involve not only resources but also the negotiation and construction of spaces of co-responsibility and partnership, with all the tensions that such relations entail. This has allowed us to generate unexpected possibilities.

In the process of shared construction, we recognise an ethical affinity and a principle of autonomy between the members of the Red, the dynamics of the respective nodes, the specific projects, and our allies. Autonomy coexists with a policy of listening, which allows for the creation of agreements and common criteria. This implies understanding but also disagreements and agreements to differ. Autonomy and collaboration are ways in which the Red expands and shapes itself. We are committed to a style of listening that is permeable, which helps us to be absorbent and avoid the reproduction of authoritarian and hierarchical ways of relating. Creating spaces of listening and practicing vulnerability involve allowing time for things to resonate and space for elaboration and affective response, both to that which can be assimilated and that which might be heard as background noise. A culture of listening allows for the uncomfortable to take its place and settle within us.

We recognise inequalities in the existential conditions that define the abilities of members and nonmembers to influence Red policy. We promote hospitality and mutual support as a way of expanding the feminist, gay-lesbian, queer, and multispecies perspectives

of our agency. This has allowed us not only to recognise but also to experience the precariousness of our productive work alongside the enormous labour of care; it is the condition of possibility of our monstrous ideologies.

We are interested in taking up the anticapitalist spirit; the decentralising and libertarian impulse of left and anarchist internationalisms; and anticolonial, decolonial and antiimperialist, antiracist and Third Worldist ecological struggles—but all on the condition that these do not become mere slogans, and that they can help push a boundary or produce a micropolitical discovery in our approaches, recognising the importance of their resonance both in results and in processes. The ideological agendas that influence RedCSur actions are not static. Their characteristics are exposed to the evolution of those who participate in their trajectories. We accept this mobility of our collective positions, which are subject to revisions, tensions, and questioning, recognising that disagreement is part of the articulation of the common space.

Purpose of the Red

The Red’s purpose can be summarised along at least three axes: advocacy in memory and archive policies; production of knowledge and approaches that allow us to intersect different knowledge; and community-building and international solidarity.

We have been engaged in the disputes over memory and the interpretation of poetic-political practices that have taken place in Latin America since the 1960s. These have been exposed to fetishisation, institutional precariousness, censorship, and self-censorship; restriction of access, limitation of use, and closure of meaning; and commodification and marketisation as experiences of the past. Our work on archival politics and self-managed and institutional modes of cultural creation have been ways of testing practical responses to promote forms of the commons that allow us to perforate restrictions on critical memories.

The Red is conceptualised as a site for the production of situated knowledge. We recognise the ambiguities and forms of short-circuit that are inherent to collective processes of knowledge production, which rather than withholding information or presuming fields of thematic exclusivity, test modes of distributing energies, capacities, and responsibilities in the creation of a commonality. Critical positioning on the frontier of legitimised spaces of knowledge does not imply a devaluation of scholarship (whether popular, academic, indigenous, militant, etc.), even if we experience different conditions of access to different discursive regimes, including hegemonic academic or art discourses, activist lexical repertoires, or indigenous voices. The Red calls for the construction of situated and hybrid knowledges yet to be found that do not necessarily correspond to an academic logos. In accordance with this need, we propose policies of translating concepts, seeking terms that are related to the ethical anchors of enunciation from which they operate in their respective fields. We understand translation as not merely linguistic but also involving other logical paradigms: translating the idea to the graphic, the graphic to the action, the action to the text, and the common experience to the manifesto.

At the intersection between practice and knowledge and the politics of memory, we seek as a Red to draw maps of attachment with the aim of building community and sustainable forms of international solidarity. The Red acts as a point of convergence and an arena for collaborative and affective work. Through its activity, the Red builds an already international community among its members and at the same time establishes mechanisms of alliance and collaboration with institutions, organisations, movements, researchers, artists, archivists, and educators. Along with this, it seeks to take a position and support contingent political processes in different parts of Latin America and the Global South as a way of tracking emerging futures, which allow us to anticipate the violence to come, but also connects us with the urgency of reinforcing those moments where possibilities of other worlds appears.

Trans-bio-regionality

We conceive of the trans-bio-regional as a common and hybrid biological fabric, traversed by shared historical trajectories and specificities and involving cultural, linguistic, and ecological landscapes in a border situation. The trans-bio-regional is drawn through ways of living and dying that trace continuities and discontinuities in the lives of the different inhabitants and species of a territory, its resources and raw materials, and its languages and knowledge.

A common history of colonialism has led to the existence of a geographical South in South America in which Spanish and Portuguese have become dominant languages and aesthetic forms that govern our interactions. This visual and linguistic colonisation has been territorial, cultural, and spiritual. The homogenising conditions that this process created, now subverted, can be imagined as a commonality and have been recovered at different times as a propitiating element of integration.

Thus, one element that identifies the founding moment of the Red is its common linguistic component which, although heterogeneous, is marked by Spanish and Portuguese. On the one hand, our opting for Spanish/Portuguese bilingualism marks a resistance to the imposition of English as the *lingua franca* of the art and academic worlds and a desire to strengthen Latin American connections. On the other hand, we know that these “official” languages express a colonial history under which different registers and accents swarm, transforming their nature and being imagined as power, and that they are influenced by indigenous languages, which as minorities in our constructions of the commons contribute meanings that can destabilise the regulating languages and invite imaginary common languages, *manchados*, *mestizos*, *cholos*, *chixi*, *champurria*, *jopara*. From this linguistic complexity, the Red recognises that, in this South, its internal relations are mainly in Spanish, then in Portuguese. But we express a desire to establish ourselves as a Red of languages and visual systems with a

starting point of listening and learning and the assumption that no single language, accent, or dialect is capable of naming or clearly focusing on certain realities marked by the historical burden of that language. In other words, each language and each image bring a world into play, and if pushed down, they can become levelled out. This implies, in turn, that there are areas that allow the construction of an inclusive “we”, (ñande), and that, at times, this “we” becomes an excluding one (ore). Likewise, the members of the Red live within other dominant languages, including English and French, a condition that is generally linked to migration experiences and which carries the potential to put us in dialogue with other trans-bio-regions and languages.

From its specific practices, the Red seeks to influence imaginations and policies, producing *Ch'ixi* contexts and spaces *in situ* and in trans-bio-regional relations, and revealing active and powerful ambiguities and opacities. We recognise the difficulties of thinking about our South, the need to specify it each time. The embroideries for memory *bordados por la memoria* in Mexico in the context of massacres and disappearances perpetrated by the narco-state, the *huipiles* woven by women in Guatemala as a way of perceiving and making sense of the world, the graphic art that proliferated after the revolts of October 2019 in Chile, the rituals of the *Arete Guasu* in Paraguay—they do not speak to us of a homogeneous timespace, or of the same South. The complexities of historical processes, linguistic conjunctions and discontinuities, and different historical processes and the violence that transverses them require us to assume the existence of intra-regional subjugations. In this sense, we are interested in permanently questioning the conditions in which subordinate identities, in relation to dominant instances, can produce images or participate with their meanings against the threat of appropriation, neutralisation, and instrumentalisation. The Red recognises the effects of the construct of the nation in our relations, which are mediated by the nation-state borders. We seek to remain open to trans-bio-regional ecosystems that extend beyond themselves and permit common and heterogeneous ecosophies

and practices that cut across regional state and market divisions. This implies imagining alliances that can connect people and conflicts not only by their belonging or roots to countries but also to bio-regions, that is, territories with common geography, landscape, ecological and historical features, and shared languages, which do not always correspond to the delimitations of the nation-state, and which can coexist in the same state or cross several states. Moreover, *bio* in the term *trans-bio-regional*, speaks to us, in its most decisive sense, of the tensions of living and dying with dignity in our region.

We seek to enable a form of decolonial internationalism that can be put into practice both at a distance, with that which is distant, and within a closer proximity. It is from this standpoint that we repudiate renewed forms of external imperialism and the extractivist advances of transnational corporations that do not recognise borders, in addition to the internal colonialism that the state exercises over migrant and indigenous peoples and over communities and subjectivities subjugated by other forms of structural inequality that coexist in a territory demarcated by borders.

What we have done

In the thirteen years of RedCSur's existence, we have promoted several initiatives in archival policies, curatorial experiments, collective research and publications, seminars, and actions of international solidarity.

The Red has carried out collective research processes and created archives for the preservation and social integration of documents, seeking to house them in public institutions located in their places of emergence and promoting their consultation through digitisation and multiple modes of use. A foundational project was *Cartografías Críticas* (2007-2011), which formed a crucial antecedent for our projects currently underway. These include the archive of the artist and poet Clemente Padín in Montevideo; the archives belonging to the [CADA](#)

group, the *Agrupación de Plásticos Jóvenes* (APJ), the Centro Cultural Tallersol, Guillermo Nuñez, the feminist photographer Kena Lorenzini, and Luz Donoso in Santiago de Chile; artists *Juan Carlos Romero* and the flags of AIDA in Buenos Aires and those of *Graciela Carnevale* in Rosario and Elena Lucca in Resistencia; Cira Moscarda in Asunción, Umberto Giangrandi in Bogotá, and the *Visualidades y Movilización Social* (Visualities and Social Mobilisation) Collection in Mexico City, among others. At the same time, we have developed the archives-in-use platform to share these collections of documents, which has become a working tool and an alternative policy for the systematisation and social integration of archives.

The *Call for a Common Archival Policy*, launched in 2019, is an initiative that seeks to build consensus on memory practices and policies and aims to pass on the principles that guide the Red's archival practices to other self-managed, civil, and institutional archival processes in order to enhance the archival imagination and to expand and strengthen joint alliances and safeguarding policies capable of withstanding state neglect or mercantile voracity.

In articulation with its archive and research projects, RedCSur runs curatorial and editorial experiments. Noteworthy exhibitions we have promoted include *Inventario* (Inventory) (Rosario, 2008), *Perder la Forma Humana. Una imagen sísmica de los años ochenta en América Latina* (Losing the Human Form. A seismic image of the eighties in Latin America) (Madrid, Lima, Buenos Aires, 2012-2014), and *Poner el cuerpo. Llamamientos de arte y política en los años ochenta en América Latina* (Embodying it. Appeals of art and politics in the eighties in Latin America) (Santiago, 2016). The Red's editorial work began with publications like *Conceitualismos do Sul/Conceptualismos del Sur* (São Paulo, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 2009); *El deseo nace del derrumbe* (Desire is born of collapse) (Madrid, MNCARS, 2011 republished in 2018); *Perder la forma humana. Una Imagen sísmica de los años ochenta en América Latina* (MNCARS 2013-2014); and *(Des)inventario. Esquirlas de Tucuman Arde* ((De)inventory. Splinters

of Tucuman Arde) (Santiago de Chile, Ocholibros/MNCARS/RedCSur, 2015), which reviews the ways in which Graciela Carnevale's archive was constituted and circulated; *Arte y disidencia política. Memorias del Taller 4 Rojo* (Art and political dissent. Memories of Taller 4 Rojo) (RedCSur, MNCARS, Proyecto Bachué, Bogotá, 2015), which gathers the testimonies of 4 of the 5 members of this association of artists; and *Archivo CADA. Astucia práctica y potencias de lo común* (CADA File. Practical astuteness and common powers) (Santiago de Chile, Ocholibros/MNCARS/RedCSur/MMDH, 2019), which takes up the process of institutionalisation of the Archive of the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (Art Actions Collective) at the Museo de la Memoria in Santiago de Chile. The Red is currently working on a collective project, the exhibition *Giro Gráfico* (Graphic Turn), scheduled to open in 2022.

Recently, the Red has formed *pasafronteras* (border crossings), a dual publishing house that releases publications born within and outside the Red. *pasafronteras* reflects an internationalist spirit that also seeks to rescue informal and solidarity-based (migratory) economies, which enables other ways of thinking about the politics of printing and distributing books and proposes different modes of movement and displacement to work on the limits, on the edges, and on the borders of genres and formats (from the printed book to the online magazine, the podcast, the fanzine). We have recently edited the fanzine *8M* (2019) and *Archivos del común II. El archivo anómico*. (Archives of the common II. The anomic file.) (2019).

For its part, the magazine *Des-bordes* proposes a crossover between committed research, critical analysis of current political conflicts, visual culture, and artistic practices. We think of the magazine as a porous platform where we can expand affinities and spread and exceed RedCSur. In this sense, the journal is traversed by the question of how to inhabit borders, but also of how to blur them in order to unblock the unmanaged movements between thinking and doing that help us to confront the present.

We have tested and proposed different forms of internationalist and trans-bio-regional political statements and actions that establish dialogues outwards from the Red. This work involves collectively taking a position and articulating dissent on the present, processes that are contentious both within and outside the Red. Some such declarations have included the “*State of Alert*” for the burning of Helio Oiticica’s archive (2009), the *declaration in repudiation of the coup d’état in Paraguay against Fernando Lugo* (2012), the *communiqué on the situation in Venezuela* (2014), and *¡No temer al mundo! Enfrentarlo para crear otros mundos* (*Don’t fear the world! Confront it to create other worlds*) in protest of the coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2016).

In recent years, graphic campaigns have been fundamental in this process. These have been instituted in choral rather than unison forms of position-taking, which are no longer just a positioning but a call for internationalist-solidarity graphic action, transversed by diverse experiences and inscribed in specific contexts. This form of plural enunciation has been built from the time of the campaign *Todos somos negros* (*We are all Black*) (2009), which the Red carried out with Juan Carlos Romero in the context of celebrations for Bicentennials in Latin America, and it has crossed through others, including the campaign *Fora Temer* (*Out with Fear*) (2016-2017), in repudiation of the coup that removed Dilma Rousseff from the presidency of Brazil, and *Nuestro Murmullo será ensordecedor* (*Our Murmur will be deafening*) (2018), in support of the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion in the region. We have also promoted the campaign *Colombia, ¿Cuáles son los silencios de la democracia?* (*Colombia, What are the silences of democracy?*) (2019) and the graphic call *Estallamos* (*We Explode*) (2019) about the revolt in Chile, as well as *No al golpe fascista y racista por Bolivia* (*No to the fascist and racist coup in Bolivia*) (2019).

Finally, the Red’s seminars and public activities seek to open opportunities for communication in which it is possible to reflect on the Red’s fields of action and to intervene critically in spheres of dis-

cussion, broadening them by proposing new vectors, recovering memories of practices and knowledge, and creating common lexicons. Seminars and public actions carried out by the Red include the international seminar *Conceitualismos do Sul/Sur*; different versions of the seminar *Archivos del Común*, organised with the Museo Reina Sofía; the seminar *Cuerpos desobedientes. Nuevos cruces entre arte y política en América Latina en los años 80* (*Disobedient bodies. New cross-overs between art and politics in Latin America in the 80s*); the meeting *Memorias disruptivas. Tácticas para entrar y salir de los Bicentennios en América Latina y el Caribe* (*Disruptive memories. Bicentennial Tactics of entering and leaving in Latin America and the Caribbean*); public activities in the framework of the *Second Meeting of the RedCSur* and sessions open to the public of the plenary meeting *Memorias y Archivos: categorías modernizadoras, repercusiones y disidencias posibles en los ‘Conceptualismos del Sur’* (*Memories and Archives: modernising categories, repercussions and possible dissidences in the ‘Conceptualisms of the South’*).

RedCsur functions as an evolving body, an organisation of connections and affects that has sought to articulate its geopolitical position within a horizontal framework, where ways of doing, thinking, desiring, and working together can take place in a space of common care for those who are no longer here and for those who are yet to come, where the spectres of the past can arrive to inhabit the nonsynchronous present we inhabit and bequeath to us the hibernating powers we seek to reawaken. The Red is an active exercise of political imagination that organises its forces from the frontiers of the agonistic. Therefore, it does not construct positions in space based on limited and closed antagonisms but faces differences from the contingent and unstable, pushing the margins of the possible. The Red is the unfinished; it is power. It is what was, what is to be (and what will be).

The Red Conceptualismos del Sur
For a Common Archival Policy: A Call for a Best Practices Agreement

Ten years ago, in an emblematic keynote address, Suely Rolnik warned of an ‘archive furore’ around ephemeral and dematerialized practices intertwining art and politics since the 1960s in Latin America. Today, the devastating consequences caused by the withdrawal of the State—and the subsequent lack of public policies associated with archives—and by the art market’s excessive voracity for archives related to art practice and many other documentary collections is all too clear.

This appeal embraces and joins a broader concern regarding the deterioration, fragmentation, and privatisation to which archives of differing natures are being exposed, a concern voiced by international organisations such as the International Council on Archives and Archivists Without Borders, among others. Given the common heritage at risk, we feel the compelling need to respond to the urgent appeal of our shared responsibility. The two fires that destroyed most of the Hélio Oiticica Archive and the Brazilian National Museum, respectively, are dramatic milestones of an irreparable loss. But they are not the most visible face of what is prompting this *state of alertness*. The privatisation and dispersion of numerous collections in the hands of private collectors has a more insidious, persistent, silent face.

In view of this situation, we hope with this call to help lay the foundation for a shared set of binding policies for a common archival management that will not get caught in the dichotomy between public and private spheres. We believe it is necessary to harmonise criteria and methodologies, and to unite communities that can sustain and be co-responsible for an archival policy committed to promoting cognitive justice and epistemological solidarity, and thus to broadening the scope of political and institutional imagination.



Campaign poster for the *Call for a Common Archival Policy*, 2019. Courtesy of Red Conceptualismos del Sur.



Campaign poster for the *Call for a Common Archival Policy*, 2019. Courtesy of Red Conceptualismos del Sur.

We launch this call to all individuals and groups involved in activities related to archives: depositors and guardians, archivists, researchers, artists, activists; institutional bodies of archives, libraries, universities, museums, documentation, or research centres; local, national, and international networks. Our goal is to jointly establish a series of criteria and guidelines for best practices and, above all, to implement common measures for reducing the hazards that now threaten archives and that have already affected them.

We regard the following as basic, non-negotiable starting points for promoting a common archival policy:

1. Defend the integrity of archives and documentary sets.

Prioritising the indivisibility of archives is a fundamental archival principle if we want to prevent their fragmentation and dispersion. The distinction between original artwork and its record has favoured the segmentation of the documentary body by highlighting some parts to the detriment of the rest. Therefore, we also stress the need to respect the internal logic of each archive with the aim of protecting production contexts, rejecting the imposition of any previously defined organisational criterion that might erase or obliterate the unique history of each documentary body.

2. Promote localisation. Leave no institutional option untried that may allow archives to remain in the sites where the experiences they convey took place, in order to prevent their decontextualisation or alienation from their original contexts, and to favour situated knowledge around their memories. In cases where archives have already been relocated, ensure access (either digitally or through physical copies) to the place of origin of the practices, even if the archives are no longer physically located there. A situated institution is not one that is located at a specific geographical site, but one that is able to protect contexts and restore archives' historical and social conditions.

3. Generate adequate conditions for the preservation of records and facilitate access to them in both material and digital form.

Digitization does not *per se* guarantee easy access to material documents or their successful conservation, and it is important to consider the risk of technological obsolescence of the recording and storage devices we use. Both material and immaterial preservation of documents are to be pursued, and for this, access is crucial. We call on all those involved in archival work and policymaking to ensure public access to these materials, favouring diverse uses that should not be restricted to consultation or exhibition, but should allow for other modes of activation, including the uses that certain communities can make of documents in order to activate their own memory, rites, and affects. The goal should be to create an access policy that is effective at different levels, allowing remote digital access, but also reinvigorating the invaluable experience of a direct relationship with physical materials, shared with other people, by appealing to the communities involved and all those interested.

4. Contribute to forming a community of care around each archive. Promote co-responsibility agreements between institutions, archivists, depositors, and custodians; subjects of documents, artists, activists, researchers, and their respective communities; and all those interested—based on the reciprocity between the different agents involved in each archive, irrespective of their level, and on shared commitments to the long-term sustainability of the archives.

5. Activate archival imagination as a strategy to respond more effectively to the changing current moment and to an increasingly aggressive market. Diversify and create tactics to preserve the integrity of the archives with the prospect of establishing institutional and extra-institutional alliance policies that allow archives to be maintained as jointly-managed common

Llamamiento a un acuerdo de buenas prácticas

Si hace 10 años -en su difundido y emblemático texto- Suely Rolnik advertía sobre el "furor de archivo" desatado en torno a las prácticas efímeras o desmaterializadas que entrecruzaron arte/política desde los años sesenta y setenta en América Latina, hoy no quedan dudas de las consecuencias devastadoras que sobre esos y muchos otros acervos documentales provoca el repliegue del Estado (y la consiguiente ausencia de políticas públicas) tanto como la desmesurada voracidad del mercado del arte.

El presente llamamiento recoge y se suma a una preocupación más amplia frente al deterioro, la fragmentación y la privatización a la que se ven expuestos archivos de diferente naturaleza (preocupación que ha sido manifestada por diversas instancias tales como el Consejo Internacional de Archivos y Archiveros Sin Fronteras, entre otros). La urgencia y la responsabilidad colectiva nos interpelan ante un patrimonio común en riesgo. Los incendios del archivo de Helio Oiticica (2009) y del Museo Histórico de Brasil (2019) son hitos de pérdida irreversible que muestran la cara más visible de lo que impulsa este estado de alerta. La privatización y dispersión de numerosos acervos en manos de coleccionistas privados muestra otra cara, más persistente y silenciosa.

Frente a esta situación, proponemos contribuir a sentar bases y acuerdos para impulsar una política vinculante para la gestión común de archivos que no quede atrapada en la dicotomía entre lo público y lo privado. Consideramos necesario sintonizar criterios, metodologías y ensamblar comunidades que puedan sostener y ser co-responsables de una política de archivos que apueste por la justicia cognitiva, la solidaridad epistemológica y que amplíe la imaginación política e institucional.

Lanzamos este llamamiento convocando a personas y colectivos implicados en archivos; depositarios y guardadores, archiveros, investigadores, artistas, activistas, instituciones tales como archivos, bibliotecas, universidades, museos, centros de documentación, centros de investigación, redes locales, nacionales e internacionales, a acordar una serie de criterios y orientaciones de buenas prácticas y sobre todo a articular iniciativas en común que respondan a las amenazas que se yerguen sobre los archivos o que ya los han afectado.

Entendemos que algunos puntos de partida innegociables a la hora de impulsar una política del común para los archivos son los siguientes:

1. Defender la integridad de los archivos y conjuntos documentales. Priorizar la indivisibilidad y el orden propio de los archivos son principios archivísticos fundamentales para evitar su fragmentación y dispersión. La distinción entre obra y documento en los archivos de arte ha favorecido la segmentación del cuerpo documental poniendo en valor algunas partes en detrimento del resto. Ante esto sostenemos también la necesidad de **respetar la lógica interna** de cada archivo para resguardar sus contextos de producción, sin imponerles criterios de organización previamente definidos que borren u olviden la historia singular de cada cuerpo documental.

2. Propiciar la localización. Ensayar distintas alternativas de institucionalidad que permitan mantener los archivos en el lugar en que acontecieron las experiencias de las que dan cuenta, para no descontextualizarlas ni enajenarlas de sus contextos y para favorecer el conocimiento situado en torno a sus memorias. En caso de que el archivo ya se haya deslocalizado, asegurar el acceso (digital o con copias físicas) en el lugar de origen de las prácticas aunque el archivo no quede físicamente en ese lugar. Una institución no está situada sólo por estar en un determinado espacio geográfico, sino en la medida que pueda resguardar contextos y restituir condiciones históricas y sociales de los archivos.

3. Generar condiciones adecuadas de preservación y acceso de los archivos, tanto materiales como digitales. La digitalización no garantiza el destino de los documentos físicos, y es preciso estar alerta al riesgo de obsolescencia tecnológica de los dispositivos de registro y almacenamiento que utilizamos. Es necesario apostar por una preservación material pero también inmaterial de los documentos y para ello el acceso es fundamental. Llamamos a garantizar la **accesibilidad pública** de esos materiales, favoreciendo usos diversos, que no se restringen sólo a la consulta

o a la exhibición, sino que habiliten otros modos de activación. Recuperar una política de accesibilidad en diferentes escalas, que permitan el acceso digital a distancia, pero también revalorizar la relación directa con los materiales físicos y en co-presencia de otras personas apelando a las comunidades implicadas e interesadas.

4. Impulsar acuerdos de corresponsabilidad entre instituciones, depositarios y guardadores, sujetos de los documentos, artistas, activistas, archiveros, investigadores y la comunidad cercana e interesada, basados en la reciprocidad entre las distintas instancias que participen en cada archivo, sea cual fuera su escala, y en compromisos compartidos para la sostenibilidad de los archivos en el largo plazo. Contribuir a formar una comunidad de cuidado en torno a cada archivo.

5. Activar la imaginación archivística como estrategia para responder al cambiante y crítico momento presente y a un mercado cada vez más agresivo. Diversificar y crear tácticas para sostener la integridad de los archivos, con el **horizonte** de políticas de alianza institucionales y extrainstitucionales que permitan sostener los archivos como un común co-gestionado a impulsar esto como una política común y vinculante en cada situación concreta de archivo en que estejamos involucrados.

Pensamos la imaginación archivística como un modo de dejar este llamamiento abierto a la inventiva de nuevas posibilidades, porque sabemos que los primeros cuatro puntos son urgentes, pero posiblemente no sean suficientes. La imaginación archivística es un llamado a prestar atención a los movimientos del presente para encontrar respuestas situadas. Para ello llamamos a activar tanto la imaginación histórica, que pueda volver sobre prácticas de otros tiempos para convocar su potencia disruptiva sobre el presente y alentar su dimensión de porvenir, como la imaginación internacionalista, que pueda poner en común conflictos y soluciones ensayadas en diferentes latitudes de manera descentrada de los ejes norte/sur o de centros/periferias.

Convocamos a quienes, a título individual, colectivo o institucional, coincidan con esta formulación a adherir al llamamiento como toma de posición, a compartir, a expandir su alcance, y sobre todo a impulsar esto como una política común y **vinculante** en cada situación concreta de archivo en que estemos involucrados.

Firmas

Red Conceptualismos del Sur Archiveros sin fronteras (Chile)	Maestría Museología y Gestión del Patrimonio de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Colombia)
Museo Centro Arte Reina Sofía (España)	CRAC, Valparaíso (Chile)
Archivo General de la Universidad de la República (Uruguay)	Departamento Teoría de las Artes Universidad de Chile (Chile)
Centro de Artes Visuales / Museo del barro (Paraguay)	Núcleo de Estudios y Documentación de la Imagen, Instituto de Investigaciones Geohistóricas Universidad Nacional del Nordeste (Argentina)
Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, MUAC-UNAM (México)	Biblioteca de la Facultad de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)
Asociación Civil Clemente Padín (Uruguay)	Archivo histórico de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)
Archivo Graciela Carnevale (Argentina)	Biblioteca General de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (España)
Archivo Elena Lucca (Argentina)	Sociedad Española de Documentación e Información Científica SEDIOC (España)
Archivo memorias de la resistencia, Centro Cultural Tallersol (Chile)	Archivo José Carlos Mariátegui (Perú)
Archivo Guillermo Nuñez (Chile)	Aita Tecnología Andina - ATA (Perú)
Archivo fotográfico Kena Lorenzini (Chile)	Magister Arte, Pensamiento y Cultura Latinoamericana de la USACH (Chile)
Proyecto Juan Acha (México)	Archivo Yeguas del Apocalipsis (Chile)
desarchivo.org (Brasil)	Revista Archivos (España)
Centro de Arte Experimental Vigo (Argentina)	Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (El Salvador)
Archivo Luz Donoso (Chile)	WET labs (México)
Archivo Guillermo Dstisler (Chile)	
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Montevideo (Uruguay)	
Museo arte moderno Chile (Chile)	
Archivo Central Andrés Bello de la Universidad de Chile (Chile)	
Anarchivo Sida (España/Chile)	
Archivo de las Culturas Subterráneas (Argentina)	
Videoteca Digital de la Cineteca Nacional (México)	

property. We believe that the imagination can be deployed in different archival processes, both in the process of conformation, organisation, and description and with regard to the forms of access, use, and management associated with specific archives. We do not understand imagination as an isolated or hypothetical exercise. Rather, it is above all else an active disposition to reformulate how archives are made. The exercise of imagination is not only projected towards the future, i.e., it is not simply innovation, but also implies reformulating our relationship to past experiences. When the Uruguayan artist and promoter of mail art networks Clemente Padín was imprisoned in 1977, his house was raided, and his files were destroyed. In response, Padín sent a circular to the mail art networks calling on other artists to contribute to their reconstruction. His archive was never the same, but many people responded and sent materials, copies, and postcards, helping to reconstruct a new archive, which emerged as international solidarity.

We conceive of archival imagination as a way to maintain this call's openness to the invention of new possibilities, for we know that the first four urgent points may not be enough. Archival imagination is a call to attend to the present in order to find situated answers. For this, we call on all who are interested in archives to activate both historical imagination, which can recall practices of older times (such as that of Padín's Archive) that are capable of summoning disruptive power over the present and encouraging its future expansion, and internationalist imagination, which can help as we aim to share conflicts and solutions of different latitudes—new decentred solutions that refuse to align with the traditional North-South axis or the centre-periphery distinction. We invite all who individually, collectively, or institutionally agree with this proposal to adhere to this call, to expand its scope, and above all to promote it as a common and binding policy for the different archival situations we are involved in.

Image of the *Llamamiento a un acuerdo de buenas prácticas* (Call for a best practice agreement), 2019. Courtesy of Red Conceptualismos del Sur.

SERIES TWO:

TRANSVERSAL PRACTICES

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVE PRACTICES AT THE MUSEO REINA SOFÍA

Beatriz Fernández Rodríguez
and Carolina Santamarina

It is often said that memory is not linear, and this is a timeless truth. The memory of institutions is not always built to plan, but rather with “what remains”. And sometimes, what remains is not exactly what we would have chosen to leave behind. However, institutional memories should be linear and exact, even if they do seem as full of holes as Swiss cheese.

As a living and changing organism, the memory of an institution is a challenge for researchers to reconstruct. In many cases, institutions that work with memory, with readings and re-readings of various space-time frameworks, with narratives and margins, are often not aware of their own construction of (their own) history. The act of looking to the past or future makes it difficult to pause in the management of the present.

For this reason, in this article we would like to pause and consider how the museum treats “its present”—and institutional practices that can guarantee the future of that history for institutional stakeholders.

Produce or archive vs. produce *and* archive? Which Boolean operator¹ governs the museum? Does the museum leave space for the archive? Are there defined policies and structures for archiving this living organism? Who, how, and when is it archived? How is the museum justified as a custodian of other archives, if it does not manage its own? Is the history of the museum told by the museum, or can it be told by its researchers? Has the arrival of the document in digital format simplified or complicated the management and therefore the reconstruction of that memory?

These are some of the questions that we would like to pose, in addition to analysing the structure that forms the backbone of the institution and the tools at its disposal for the management and dissemination of its memory.

With a quick glance to the archival tools available to it, it could be said that the Museo Reina Sofía has: one, a Central Archive, responsible for the care of all the documentation produced by the institution; two, a web page, with some historical accounts of present and past activities and exhibitions; and, three, a Collections Department and a Library, which are responsible for personal works and archives, a reflection of the art history of the moment.

In this text, however, we are going to analyse the issue in more detail, with the aim of understanding whether there are cracks in the structure that weaken this memory palace.

The Central Archive

One of the great milestones related to archives and document management in Spanish legislation was the publication of Royal Decree 1708/2011, which establishes and defines the Spanish Archives System and regulates its operation in a way that guarantees the correct conservation and dissemination of information, in any of its formats, both for institutions and for citizens.

The Central Archive of the Museo Reina Sofía, which forms part of this national archive system, is a service that at present is not sufficiently integrated within the institution. This is evident by the hidden position it occupies not only on the website but also inside the physical Museum. Many internal users are unaware of how to access the archive facilities, or even of their location.

A lack of standardisation of processes and a lack of professional resources, both human and material, have not favoured an effective performance of this archive's functions. However, the archive preserves unpublished collections of unique historical value, waiting to come to light to complete our history of art.

A key error often made by staff is to believe that the archive is a container or space where "old" documents can be kept, rather than a conjunction of physical, human, and technological elements that are

together responsible for collecting documentation as a transparency measure and public service, that is, as a guarantee of rights and the preservation of memory as indicated by the law of Spanish Historical Heritage.

To consider the MNCARS archive, we must go back to Royal Decree 535/1988, which configured the Reina Sofía Art Centre as a National Museum. Here, the first reference to the function of the archive appears, divided into two units known today as: 'central archive, Section of the Library and Documentation Centre Department', and 'Archive of the Registry of Artworks (ROA Archive)'.

The central archive deals with the conservation and dissemination of the documentation produced by the different departments of the museum in the exercise of their functions. This includes mostly administrative and management documentation, which acquires different value over time, but other collections of historical and research value are also preserved. We refer to the documentation produced by predecessor institutions of the MNCARS, such as the Museum of Modern Art (1895), the National Museum of 19th Century Art (1951), and the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art MEAC (1968).

The documentation of these institutions, without which the complete history of the institution could not be understood, nor the life of many works in its collection, was inherited by the current museum. As Enrique Varela (2013) has pointed out, the historical archives of museums are essential to deepen the knowledge and study of museum collections.

The archival system of the museum

The office (or department) archives are those which produce and manage the documents in their first stage of life. These documents have administrative, fiscal, and legal values regarding the proof of both administrative and individual rights, and their consultation is usually frequent initially by the producers of the documentation themselves, al-

though with the passage of time, they acquire secondary values such as source of information and testimony for historical reconstruction.

The constant creativity, movement, and change that characterise many museum departments often generate a complicated casuistry for archives, which by their nature function better with regulated and well-defined procedures. For this reason, administrative archives need to carefully face a functional analysis that clearly defines: WHAT documentation they generate, WHERE it is kept, WHO is responsible for it, HOW they define their documentary typologies, and how the physical or digital folders are named for storage following a common criterion, etc.

The correct conservation of documentation related to working methods in the present will allow us to study and analyse in the future how, for example, the organisation of public activities was managed in the past, how the programming of exhibitions has evolved, and the difference in dissemination in the museum both before and after the COVID pandemic. As public servants, museum professionals are custodians, responsible for what we produce, and we must leave an authentic and reliable testimony to be able to reconstruct our own history in the future.

We cannot forget the fact that today, institutions produce and manage hybrid documentation, on paper and in digital format, which represents an enormous challenge for these archives and their management. But the arrival of the digital age should not be an obstacle. We must learn to adapt to a new reality and be aware that we are responsible for *managing the change*. If this change was previously presented as an option, it is now an obligation, not only in a legal sense but also as a requirement from users, who increasingly demand from us higher quality so that their research can be nourished by the testimonies, data, and content that the documents contain.

In this sense, the central archive provides a method by which museum staff can assess the construction and proper functioning of the archives of each department, identifying procedures and functions, redundancies and, above all, uniformly organising the increasingly abundant documentation.

Infrastructures, documentary collections and description instruments

Museums are usually located in rehabilitated buildings that have undergone numerous reconstructions, which has caused movement and dispersion of the storage and documentation areas and their infrastructure. Throughout its time, the archive of the Museo Reina Sofía has had different spaces for depositing documentation, some more appropriate than others. It seems understandable that the priority of the archives in an art museum would be works of art, but it is important also to reflect on the value of the institutional documentation produced and the way in which we are preserving and disseminating it, as a key piece of future reconstruction. Currently, the archive has two deposits, one in the same building as the archive, and another outside the institution, which makes immediate access to information difficult. It is also important to highlight the surprising richness and variety of the documentary holdings of the museums, even though the archives have generally suffered from a lack of space, resources, and personnel.

In addition to the documentation produced by the institution itself in the exercise of its functions, museums usually hold personal archives—which in the case of the Museo Reina Sofía are managed by the library service—as well as documentation of institutions and organisations that no longer exist, as is the case of the aforementioned MEAC. It is also necessary to consider the documentation that enters the archives by way of purchase or donation. One example is the recent donation, of great historical value, of photographs from 1949 of the old Hospital Provincial of Madrid, which occupied the Sabatini building before it became a museum.

Another characteristic shared by the archives of museum institutions is the variety of media, due to the abundance of graphic documentation such as maps, plans, or drawings. In this way, one can find in the MNCARS archive documentation on paper, photographic negatives, videos, slides, and even models, such as those submitted to the *Competition for ideas for the expansion of the museum*, held in 1999.

It must be considered that each material has specific characteristics that require specialised treatment when dealing with its installation and correct conservation.

Another important element is made up by description tools. The Central Archive of the Reina Sofía uses several such tools simultaneously, ranging from the Albalá archive management software, which collects an organic-functional table of changes that have occurred in the organisation chart of the institution, to several databases as well as an index of plans. However, these description tools are not usually available to the public, which prevents direct consultation by users and forces users to be present for the consultation.

The current project *The museum meets its archive* is an attempt to improve both access and dissemination of this central archive, custodian of so much history. This project will entail the largest-ever opening of the museum's central archive. It will mark the first time that both the institution's staff and citizens can navigate and approach the archive holdings directly, within the limits of access established by current legislation.

This project has several objectives that, by the end of 2022, will begin to show a positive impact. Among other things, worthy of mention is the conversion of the analogue Central Archive into a mixed archive, enabling the receiving digital documentation; the migration of the file software to one capable of managing both paper and digital, which will also allow us to provide users with a web portal to search and retrieve documentation, with different levels of access depending on the accessibility of the information and distinguishing at minimum the profiles of museum staff and citizens; and lastly, the beginning of retrospective digitisation of archive documentation and incorporation into the archive web portal to facilitate searches (including the full text).

As part of this project, work is being done on a document management consultation that requires conducting interviews with the different departments. The aim is to identify documentary series pro-

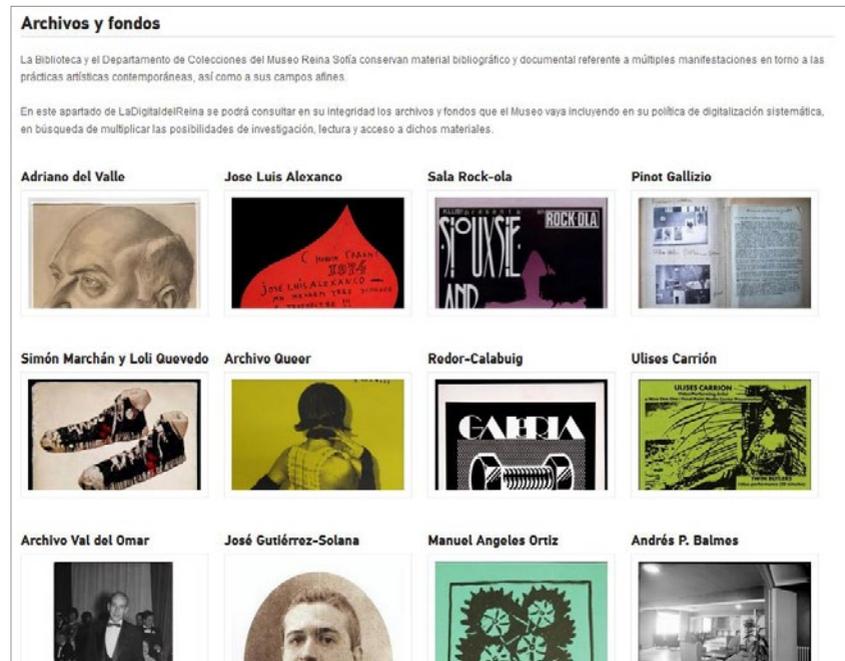
duced and related tasks and processes, and to update relationships with the central archive. One result of this consultation will be the production of document management guidelines for the entire museum—not least for the creation, naming, and structuring of digital documentation. The implementation of these guidelines will facilitate the subsequent transfer of digital documentation to the archive and its incorporation into the future Central Archive web portal. The project *The museum meets its archive* will gradually favour access to the information transferred to the Central Archive, that is, to the memory of the Museum.

Digital library

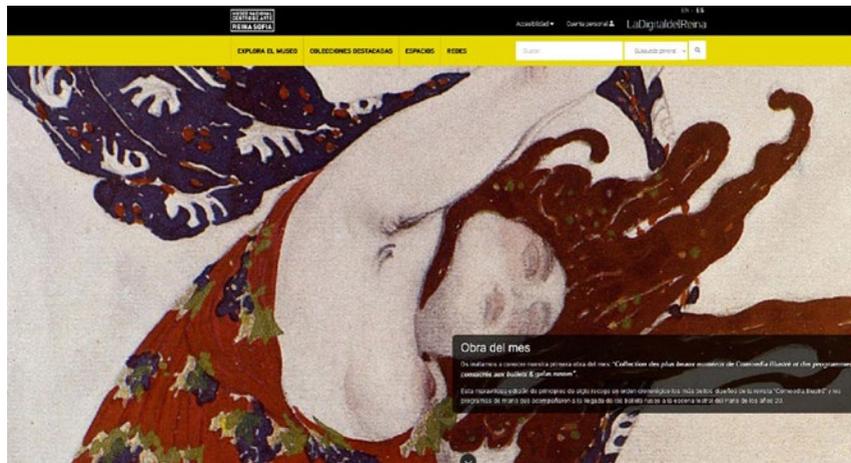
As part of this method of understanding our responsibility to the memory of the institution, and of delving into needs related to the dissemination of its collections, the project *The museum meets its archive* is complemented by a tool that is more hybrid, public, and relational in nature: the Digital Library of the Museo Reina Sofía, called '[La DigitaldelReina](#)'.

One objective of the Reina Sofía digital library is to offer unitary public access to all the collections that are part of the museum and accessible while respecting intellectual property laws, while also using the versatility of new technologies to weave in digital humanities in ways that improve user experience and complement the contextualization and knowledge of the heritage guarded in the museum. The Digital has been conceived as a research tool that will integrate the works of the museum, whatever their type (artistic, documentary, photographic, immaterial), into a single platform. The project thus attempts to transcend the collections themselves and generate spaces for relationships between traditionally separate sources.

This relational aspect, in which materials from various sources converge, allows, for example, the exhibitions and the works on display to be linked with related archives, other reference material,



Tab with the collection of digitised personal archives that form part of the museum's collection



Main screen of LaDigitaldelReina

photographs of the rooms, and files of the artists exhibited—which in turn can be linked to the works and exhibitions that have been shown in the past. It also grants access to the photographic archive of the Museum, which in turn can be related to artworks, activities, and exhibitions. This virtually allows for the unification of files stored in different departments. It marks a further contribution to the construction, conservation, and distribution of the museum's memory.

The project moreover makes available the habitual tools of a digital library. These include the combination of several search terms in different fields, the management of filtered results through unified vocabularies, full text search and navigation between the contents of the materials on which OCR (Optical Character Recognition) has been performed, index searches of which works have been extracted, and the creation of thematic databases, for example, of works of art contained in catalogues. In addition, it will have a viewer with excellent zoom capabilities, conceptual maps of artists, timelines, and so on. The digital library is also offered as a channel for cooperation with other technological and research projects, such as Wikipedia or VIAF (Virtual International Authority File). This collaboration helps to lessen physical distances, creating a virtual connection space between Spanish and Latin American contemporary art.

All this supposes an enormous amount of work on the data, which must be extracted, transformed, and enriched, in order to eventually be distributed. It means forming a digital artistic “system” that allows for new stories and new ways of making links with the users. The entire project is in line with the objectives of the European Union to promote wide digital access to any user beyond geographical barriers. One example of this is the new Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and Council on copyright and related rights in the digital single market (DEMUD), which has signified an important step towards opening a black hole of twentieth century, which is what the lack of legal access to contents of that historical period has become. As Raquel Xalabarder, Professor of Intellectual Property at the Open

University of Catalonia, tells us, because it has not been possible to legally use an artwork, the work has lost its value to society—and this was due to regulatory failings. The new directive seeks to correct this failure, allowing management entities to offer extended licences to holders who are not in their repertoire, insofar as they are sufficiently representative of this kind of rights management, and it in turn allows cultural institutions to digitise and distribute all those materials for which there is no management entity that can offer a licence. This is undoubtedly a great leap for cultural institutions to be able to give access to their collections and thus restore the void represented by the content of the twentieth century. The discontinuous line of memory notwithstanding, we like to think that the digital library will contribute to the mental map under construction that is history.

The Museum, custodian of other memories

The Museum also stands as custodian of other memories. Thus, there are numerous archives of artists, galleries, and other institutions that arrive to be preserved as well as disseminated through the echoes produced by the institution. The management of these legacies is faced with various problems. Historically, personal archives are already entities swimming between the waters of libraries and archives. If we add to this the ingredient of the museum, management, division, and approaches become quite complicated. This affects the treatment of the archive as a whole: its installation, levels of protection, forms of cataloguing, accessibility, and so on. How are these relationships determined? What impact does this work have?

It is often said that the original organisation of the archive must be respected. But this maxim (the principle of provenance) often serves to avoid undertaking the study and restructuring of the archive in question. Of course, there is no need to intervene in an archive that arrives organised by the artist, gallery, or institution. But is this usually the case?

Personal archives are intimate stores of the most diverse materials, including works of their own creation, works by others, documentary collections created according to the artist's interests, personal and intimate documents (letters, writings, notes), manuscripts of publications, and photographs—an endless number of typologies that open the door to multidisciplinary management with multiple approaches. For this reason, their amphibious nature is what urgently requires an approach from a collaborative intelligence, in which classical systems become more flexible to expand the framework and integrate new ways of constructing meaning.

It is important to highlight the value of public institutions in the preservation of personal and collective art archives, which in many cases could be lost forever. A contemporary art museum is a privileged place to prevent becoming a warehouse of “closed” archives, as it has the possibility of interacting directly with the artists and therefore acting as one more element in the narration of art. Dematerialize the institution, that is, to highlight the actors and recipients.

Technology and digitization play a fundamental role. While such tools do not resolve every issue, they do offer possibilities for intersection, fusion, and relation that allow traditional limits and divisions to be overcome virtually. A correct archiving policy allows the creation of new narratives without distorting the original files, temporal and contextual lines for historiography, new cartographies, and of course, a vital preservation for the history of art.

By way of conclusion, to close that line that delimits the circle, we share these words by Julio Cortázar. They speak to us about memory and the importance of the relational element, connecting with the central objective of the LaDigitaldelReina.

Memory plays a dark game, of which psychological studies can furnish many examples—I am referring to the arrhythmia of man and memory, which either will not come to him or else pretends to be an impeccable mirror, but when tested turns out to have lied scandalously.

When Diaghilev restaged the Ballets Russes, some critics complained that the colours of *Petrushka* had lost their original brilliance; yet they were the same sets, perfectly preserved. Bakst had to brighten the colours to make them match apothecotic memory.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Boolean operators, also known as logical operators, are words or symbols that allow the logical connection between concepts or groups of search terms in order to quickly amplify, limit, or define a search.

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DISSEMINATING THE MACBA ARCHIVE THROUGH CATALOGUE, EXHIBITION, AND ACTIVITIES

Elisabet Rodríguez
and Marta Vega

The MACBA Archive opened in 2007 to promote research into contemporary art and conserve the Museum's documentary heritage. From the outset, the documentary fonds conserved in the Archive have formed part of the Museum's collection, along with its artistic heritage. This is especially relevant for contemporary artistic practices in which the concept, the process of creation, the ephemeral, and the immaterial play prominent roles. With respect to such practices, the differentiation of certain types of work from their documentary trail is a complex task.

The close links between the Archive's documentary fonds and works in the collection, along with the desire to include documents in MACBA exhibitions, helped to determine the cataloguing program chosen for the Archive. We use MuseumPlus to inventory the Museum's artistic heritage, manage loans of works and exhibition movements, register restoration interventions, and generally, to integrate the entire heritage-related circuit and work teams.

In the Archive's early years we prioritized the creation of technical guidelines to describe the fonds based on the Archival Description Standard of Catalonia (NODAC). We also began cataloguing documentary units. Having catalogued most documentation, we turned our focus to the other aim that motivated the Archive's establishment: guaranteeing the dissemination of documentary heritage and facilitating its consultation for research.

For preservation requirements, documents are stored in conservation boxes in spaces not accessible to the public. In this context, the online catalogue available via the Museum's website is one of the most important tools for ensuring knowledge of the documentary fonds and the collection of artist publications. To a large extent, the everyday work of the Archive team involves overcoming the tension generated by this twofold and sometimes incompatible desire to preserve the documents and ensure access to them.

Although the MuseumPlus system covers many basic needs of internal functioning, it does not facilitate the catalogue's integration into the website and the subsequent dissemination of the Archive. The website incorporates the Archive catalogue by means of exports that, due to their complexity, are performed infrequently, and months can pass without it being updated. For this reason we plan to switch to a new collection management program that will allow us to work in the cloud and constantly update the catalogue for public consultation.

The Archive's first online catalogue had a limited series of basic fields that included descriptive but not content metadata. In a complementary manner, some lists of the different fonds and general information about them were provided on the website. The Archive's catalogue was recently improved in the course of two fundamental projects: the establishment of the MACBA Digital Repository and the renovation of the Museum's website.

The MACBA Digital Repository (repositori.macba.cat) was created in response to the need to conserve works of art and documents created in digital format, which are increasingly present in museum heritage. Another basic function of the Repository is to store digitisations that the Museum systematically carries out to preserve its most valuable audiovisual works and documents. This digital store is managed with the open-source program DSpace and the Dublin Core metadata system.

But the mission of the Repository is not just to conserve; it also enables the Museum to open its heritage beyond the physical boundaries of the MACBA building. To this end, one of the biggest challenges has been to establish and negotiate copyrights related to the public dissemination of digitised content. In the case of the first recordings of activities at MACBA starting in 1995, for example, there were no contractual clauses regulating this type of dissemination, since the content only existed in formats that required in-person consultation.

Today, MACBA has a transversal team of museum professionals specialized in copyright and receives external legal advice. Following



Image of the MACBA Digital Repository dedicated to the exhibition *Repair Manuals and Cosmic Sounds. Self-publishing to heal the entire universe*, Nov 25th 2021 to May 1st, 2022

a content review, three basic levels of access to the Repository have been established:

- internal consultation for the museum team managing the content.
- consultation in the library or other spaces of the MACBA.
- remote consultation for anyone who is interested.

The MACBA Historical Fond, grouping all documentation produced by the Museum's activity since its establishment, stands out among the archive fonds in the Repository. This is a continually growing fond that is now mostly created in digital format. We are also in the process of digitising all analogue documentation generated since the early 1990s when MACBA was conceptualized and built. The MACBA Historical Fond is a clear example of the evolution from analogue documentary production to digital production. In the Repository, the fonds of artists such as Joan Brossa and the photographer Xavier Miserachs also stand out, as the copyright holders have enabled the public dissemination of all pertinent documentation held by the Museum.

The selective digitisation of documentary fonds, along with management of copyright of new incorporations, will allow us to offer an increasing volume of content remotely. In addition to digitised documents, the MACBA is producing new research content to document its heritage.

The renovation of the MACBA website in 2020 was another opportunity to rethink the Archive catalogue and incorporate new ways of accessing content. In addition to maintaining the search by minimum essential fields (author, title, year), we identified three essential needs: to enable browsing by means of the fonds classification table; to incorporate subject keywords; and to facilitate access to the full document when it is open in the Repository.

In the MACBA Archive, the classification table aims to represent how documentation producers organised the documents according to their activities. We do not always know the original order, but we try to make it representative of the main lines of work of the artist, gallery, or group that generated the documentation.

At present, the website allows users to navigate the classification tree and discover the documents in each branch. This assists in extensive documentary fonds in cases where the researcher is not looking for a specific document or does not know the title, as it allows for the location of a family of documents to consult.

In the Archive, we also work on identifying the relationships in the catalogue between works of art and the Museum's heritage documents, such as between a collection artwork and an archive document that refers to it. Collaboration between the different departments of the Museum in cataloguing efforts and the establishment of common guidelines will further facilitate connections that help to draw a more complete picture of artistic practices.

With respect to subject keywords, we developed a thesaurus for the MACBA Historical Fond in 2020 with the intention of expanding and extending it to the Archive's various collections and fonds. Most terms are taken from other specialist thesauruses, such as the Thesaurus of the University of Barcelona (THUB) and the Art & Architecture Thesaurus® (AAT) of the Getty Research Institute. In addition, we introduced terms representative of the MACBA's lines of thinking. The enrichment of metadata with these keywords will enable thematic selections within the Archive. Finally, the documents contained in the Repository are being incorporated gradually into the website, in order to facilitate access from the catalogue card to the full digital document.

The improved visibility of the catalogue through the website and access to documents via the Repository have helped to increase the number of archive consultations. But it does not replace the experience of direct access to the original in most cases. Nor does the catalogue propose different associative routes through the materials of

the kind that could be generated in exhibition contexts. For these reasons, it remains vital to activate the Archive by means of activities and exhibitions.

Dissemination through exhibitions and activities

Perhaps the biggest problem facing the professionals who work in archives is how to make the materials they preserve visible and accessible. Archives are frequently seen as inaccessible spaces, bunkers where no one knows quite what is inside. For the conditions of access and consultation are different to those of a library: gloves must be worn to consult the materials; flash photography or indelible inks may not be used; and forms must be filled out and signed specifying the use of information, as much of it cannot be shown to the public unless 30 years have passed since the author's death. This all makes the archive special and a little more inaccessible.

An added problem is the time involved in cataloguing personal holdings, which leads to a delay in the dissemination of their content. The MACBA Archive has many artists' holdings, some of them still unprocessed, others at the initial or intermediate phase, and very few completed. Many people are unaware of its existence, and it is our job to find a way to put all the content out there—even if only by offering an outline of everything we have.

Various exhibitions have been held at the Study and Documentation Centre since MACBA opened in 1996, starting with *In Reserve. Special Books from the MACBA Library* and continuing with various displays up to the present-day *Repair Manuals and Cosmic Sounds*, all showing a sample of the materials conserved. The aim of all these exhibitions has been to bring some of the materials closer to the public and make people aware of what can be found in the Archive, in addition to activating and dynamizing it.

Exhibitions have also included displays of archives by other collectives, including *A DIY Archive*, *Dislocated Archive* and *AIDS Anarchive*.

In this sense the Archive serves not only to dynamize its own contents, but also to present others that have not had the visibility they deserve. Finally, the Archive has hosted exhibitions of students in the PEI (Independent Study Program), including *Of Riots, Grief and Parties* and *Plague*, which proposed acquisitions to fill out the Archive's collection and showed materials on specific themes preserved in it.

The cycle of encounters "What a Book Can Do", an additional dynamizing activity that has been held for three years, has brought together editors, artists, illustrators, and people related to the artistic context who write books. These sessions establish a dialogue between the guests' practices and the contents of the MACBA Archive. At each meeting, publications related to the theme of the session are selected and shown live to participants and public alike, making contents visible that would otherwise remain anonymous in the Archive.

Exhibitions of content from the Archive

Archives and documents: The first exhibition of the Study and Documentation Centre set out to show and highlight, by way of introduction, some of its contents. It included editions and documents that constituted the strengths of the newly opened archive: editions of Dieter Roth, Robert Filliou, and Marcel Broodthaers, for example, using the book as a support for the presentation of their work; important intellectual and critical journals of the 1970s including *Avalanche* and *The Fox*, and publications by artists.

In the Margins of Art. Creation and Political Commitment. This exhibition brought together books, pamphlets, postcards, and other printed materials from the archive holdings in which artists from the second half of the twentieth century put their creative capacity at the service of political demands.



View of the exhibition *Archives and Documents*, Dec 3rd 2007 to June 8th, 2008. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: Tony Coll



View of the exhibition *On the Margins of Art. Creation and Political Commitment*, July 10th to Nov 8th, 2009. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: David Campos

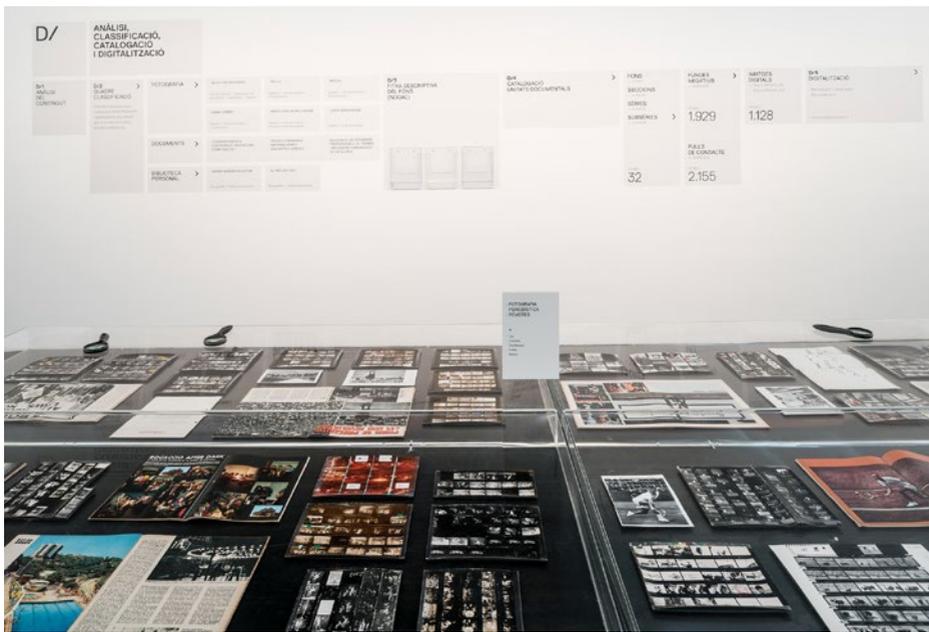
A.XMI. Xavier Miserachs Archive. This was the first and only exhibition to date showing the processing task carried out by the Archive. The public was able to learn about the different phases of incorporating, cataloguing, and disseminating materials in these holdings. A selection of photographs, documents, books, and journals were displayed.

Sample #1. Documents on Stage. The first of the samples held in the Study and Documentation Centre presented a series of reflections on the relationship between performance and the Archive, and its apparent contradictions: the former with its ephemeral nature, and the conservation and permanence of the latter. It also highlighted the difficulty that is often involved in documenting this type of ephemeral practice. The exhibition brought together a series of documents related from various points of view with transdisciplinary ephemeral practices in the field of performance, such as happenings, music, dance, theatre, performance itself, and other live arts.

Sample #2. This Is Mail Art. This exhibition presented contents related to artistic practices using mail delivery as a distribution system, from the Pere Sousa Fonds, Nervo Óptico/Espaço N.O., and the documentary collection Edgardo Antonio Vigo.

Sample #3. Anti-Books. This exhibition selected artist books from the 1960s and 1970s from among the more than 4,000 conserved in the Archive. Influenced by the conceptual and minimalist movements, particular emphasis was on Hanne Darboven, Sol Lewitt, and Dieter Roth.

Sample #4. Things That Happen: To mark MACBA's twenty-fifth anniversary, artist Enric Farrés was asked to carry out an investigation and subsequent exhibition of the Museum's Historical



View of the exhibition *A.XML. Xavier Miserachs Archive*, Nov 12th 2015 to March 23rd, 2016. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: Miquel Coll



View of the exhibition *Sampler #3. Anti-books*, Sep 25th 2019 to Feb 28th, 2020. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: Silvia Poch



View of the exhibition *Sampler #1. Documents on the Stage*, Apr 7th to Sep 22nd, 2017. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: La Fotogràfica



View of the exhibition *Sampler #4: Things that Happen*, Apr 22nd to Nov 5th, 2021. MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: La Fotogràfica

Holdings, bringing together all documentation produced by the MACBA, in any medium or format, in the course of its exhibition, cultural and educational activity.

The peculiar characteristic of this exhibition was that the curator decided not to organise a typical commemorative exhibition with photos, videos, or other historical materials from the Museum. Instead, he chose existing materials in the Archive, such as anachronistic invitations for the exhibition invitation, with the aim of generating new content and, most importantly, of opening the exhibition with all the display cases empty, creating a program of activities in which the material generated would later become part of the exhibition.

One characteristic of historical holdings is that they draw on the materials produced by the Museum's various departments. The curator came up with the idea of carrying out activities that would generate documents that after the exhibition would form part of the Archive, rather than just using existing ones.

Repair Manuals and Cosmic Sounds. Self-Publishing to Heal the Entire Universe. This exhibition of graphic, textual, and sound publications used collective and experimental self-publishing to address the climate crisis and the self-management of resources, presenting many archive publications on these subjects as well as others that were purchased to fill out its holdings.

Exhibitions with content from other archives

Dislocated Archive. Using materials from other archives and documentation centres, this exhibition explored practices, discourses, and dislocated sexualities and possible forms of sexual dissidence.



View of the exhibition *Repair Manuals and Cosmic Sounds. Self-publishing to heal the entire universe*, Nov 25th 2021 to May 1st, 2022 MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: Sílvia Poch



View of the exhibition *Dislocated archive*, Feb 15th to July 13th, 2018 MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds. Photograph: Roberto Ruiz



View of the exhibition *Aids Anarchivo*, Nov 15th 2018 to Apr 4th, 2019
MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds.
Photograph: Eva Carasol



View of the exhibition *A DIY archive*, Apr 27th to Sep 10th, 2019
MACBA Collection. Study Centre. MACBA Historical Fonds.
Photograph: Roberto Ruiz

AIDS Anarchivo. In this exhibition by Equipo re, an investigation into the cultural and social dimension of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Spain and Chile was carried out using documents and materials from various archives and centres.

A DIY Archive. This exhibition opened a personal archive to the collective, containing editions of self-organised feminist and queer collectives, associations, and groups dealing with the relationship between drawing and music.

The existence of the archive as a mere entity that conserves materials makes no sense without their dissemination. The challenges of the future involve finding new ways to make these materials—both publications and collections in the process of being catalogued—accessible, with the aim of creating a more dynamic, interactive archive that generates further content. As archivists, we believe that we have a duty to make other realities visible—including archives that have remained anonymous—and to ask ourselves what we keep, for what reasons, and for whom. With our apparently objective work of conservation, we are also conditioning the future of information or misinformation.

All illustrations on pp. 140, 142, 143, 145 and 146:

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© Of the artworks: The artists

COLLECTIONS AND COLLECTING PRACTICES AT THE NATIONAL IRISH VISUAL ARTS LIBRARY (NIVAL)

Jennifer Fitzgibbon

The National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) is a public research resource dedicated to the documentation of twentieth and twenty-first century Irish visual art and design. NIVAL collects, stores, and makes accessible for research an unparalleled collection of documentation about Irish art in all media. Housed in the National College of Art & Design (NCAD) and resourced through a strategic partnership between NCAD and The Arts Council of Ireland, NIVAL makes its collections accessible to everyone for exploration, education, and research. The collection contains documentary material in all formats including books, catalogues, videos, slides, artists' papers, and ephemera in print and digital format. Most collections are from a single source, organisation, or individual, containing books, ephemera, posters, journals, and sometimes artefacts related to artist makers.

The origins of NIVAL are organic and borne out of a need to collect and store and make accessible a quantity of ephemeral information that would otherwise slip through the cracks. The legacy of NIVAL's founder Edward Murphy is still apparent today in the collection policy of the library, which was started in the 1970s as part of a wider project to build the holdings of the library at the National College of Art & Design (NCAD) and formally established as NIVAL in 1997. What grew from 10 filing cabinets in the early years now totals over 250 linear metres of ephemera in 60 filing cabinets and over 100 special collections.

Much of the ephemera, special collections and archives that constitute the holdings were already being collected before NIVAL became what it is today. This prompts a consideration of how archives are catalysed, and how they come into being not necessarily by an institutional imperative but rather by the work of a curious individual or collective of people who recognised a need to do something to document the present moment and to address the gaps. In its nascent

beginnings, NIVAL was an informal collection of documentation captured and organised by the work of a curious college Librarian and it was later formalised through the implementation of more standardised archival practices, transforming into the national repository for visual arts documentation through a formal funding partnership many years after the original collection building work had begun.

The NIVAL website is a key resource for accessing information, with over 2000 galleries and 5000 artists listed online. Where information is not yet listed or available, staff with backgrounds in fine art and art history help to guide researchers through the collections, offering suggestions to related materials and making connections that otherwise might not be explicit. This body of tacit knowledge has been accumulated through years of working with the collections; being at the coalface when collections are acquired and subsequently arranging, listing, and cataloguing them. NIVAL typically acquires material by donation or bequest through negotiations with artists and estates that often take many years between initial discussion and final deposit. These ongoing stakeholder relationships in the form of active collaboration between the library and the donor are central to the library's collection policy.

NIVAL has special collections on artists, designers, and cultural organisations that cover a period from 1900 to the present day. The collection includes artists that were born in Ireland and/or those from other countries who reside within the 32 counties, including Northern Ireland. It has holdings on fashion, stained glass, design, art galleries and artist-led festivals, as well as special collections on individual artists and art critics. Some highlights of these special collections are the Dorothy Walker Collection, an art critic and key protagonist in organising exhibitions of modern art in Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s, who formed an acquaintance with the artist Joseph Beuys, and the Artists' Books Collection.

The library began collecting artists' books in 1997, and it continues to actively acquire new works through donation or purchase. The works are made by individual artists, groups of collaborating artists, or



Egan Gallery Collection, Dublin's earliest commercial gallery,
National Irish Visual Arts Library, Dublin.



Scrapbook of ephemera compiled by Anne Yeats, c. 1954, Irish Exhibition of Living Art Collection, National Irish Visual Arts Library, Dublin.



Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment members march on O'Connell Street, Dublin for International Women's Day 2018. ACREA Collection, National Irish Visual Arts Library. Photograph by Karl Leonard.



Photographs, slides and cassette recordings from the Women Artists' Action Group (WAAG) Collection, National Irish Visual Arts Library, Dublin.

artist and writer partnerships. They consist of hand-made, letterpress, and published works, both unique and in editions, and they can be created in a variety of materials. A special emphasis of the collection's acquisition policy is on books where the maker has complete control over the creative process.

The holdings at NIVAL are also representative of how artists themselves were seeking to fill gaps in the funding and support infrastructure for the arts in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s by establishing their own initiatives, such as the Sculptors' Society of Ireland (SSI) and the Women Artists' Action Group (WAAG). One of the events that catalysed the founding of the SSI in 1980 was a visit to Ireland by the Japanese/New York-based sculptor Minoru Niizuma who talked about the importance of forming 'a federation' of artists to ensure that practitioners maintained control in the face of bureaucratic intervention. A small group of artists set up an all-Ireland, not-for-profit professional organisation to promote and support sculpture and to liaise with larger national entities such as the Arts Council. One of the ways the group sought to achieve this aim was through information capture, which can be read as a drive toward self-empowerment, with the establishment of an index of sculptors, the compilation of a photographic and slide library and the dissemination of updates and opportunities in a printed newsletter. The newsletter was a key resource for advertising exhibition opportunities, commissions and jobs for artists before the advent of digital bulletins. The SSI lasted for 25 years before coming under scrutiny for not accommodating more expanded/time-based/experimental practices and in 2005 the SSI was remodelled into a new information resource organisation called the Visual Artists Ireland. NIVAL holds a partial representation of the slide library along with administrative records of the SSI, and these records are an important source for researchers interested in the histories of artist-led organisations and their aims to actualise new forms of information sharing, documentation and by extension, legacy control. What remains in NIVAL are these information-based 'artefacts'.



Third Eye Centre, Glasgow exhibition leaflet published to coincide with a festival of Irish contemporary art, 16th January–23rd February, 1982. Nigel Rolfe, *Across the Water*, 11th Paris Biennale (1980) (left), Alastair MacLennan, *48 hour performance*, Berlin (1981) (top right), John Aiken, installation view at Project Arts Centre, Dublin (1981) (right centre), Nigel Rolfe, performance shot (bottom right), Nigel Rolfe Artist's File, National Irish Visual Arts Library, Dublin.

The Women Artists' Action Group founded in 1987 also established a visual archive of members' artwork. This slide library grew out of a collective process of open submission, where artists were invited to submit images of their work for exhibition at the Project Arts Centre in 1987 and these later became the basis for the WAAG slide library. This visual archive of approximately 1000 images of artists' work who were variously involved with the activities of the group, although somewhat incomplete due to a lack of membership lists and the removal of some the original slides by the artists for other exhibitions, constitutes an extensive visual record of women artists' practice and represents an important moment in the history of feminist art activism in Ireland. These archives reflect a cultural shift in how artists were recognising the importance of information sharing as a means of self-empowerment and how the management of information, whether it be the acquisition and dissemination of images, newsletters, establishing an index of practitioners was a key element of this process.

Another important collection in NIVAL is the archive of the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment. This activist group was established in 2015 by visual artists Cecily Brennan, Alice Maher, Eithne Jordan, and the poet Paula Meehan. The group initiated an online campaign inviting members of the wider creative community to sign a petition for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland. The key aim of the campaign was 'to promote national and international awareness of the restrictive reproductive laws of Ireland and to encourage and inspire other groups and activists to use cultural means to promote social change'.¹ The group organised demonstration marches including the March for Choice (2016 and 2017), Strike for Repeal (2017), and International Women's Day (2018), together with exhibitions and events, including "Day of Testimonies" (2017) held at Project Arts Centre, "Art and Action" (2017) held at NCAD Gallery, "EVA International Biennial" (2018) held in Limerick, various "Shred It" events (2017-2018), "20 Seconds for Yes" (2018), and "Witness" (2018). The archive represents an important moment in



Mobile Encounters – Documenting the Early Years of Performance Art in Ireland, NIVAL exhibition developed in collaboration with the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), IMMA Project Spaces, 12 Dec 2014 – 15 Feb 2015. Photograph by Joseph Carr.

Ireland's social and cultural history, documenting how artists played a role in the decisive referendum, not only by giving a voice and representation to artists as citizens and activists, but also by encouraging and inspiring other artists and groups to join them in the call for constitutional change.

As a collecting institution, NIVAL aims to capture archives and special collections that reflect the complete cycle of an artwork, including the preliminary visual and textual research that happens in advance of making as well as that which comes after the creation of an artwork, so that it can be stored and accessed again in the future. Much of the ephemera in NIVAL's collection from the 1970s and 1980s is in the form of press releases, notices, advertisements, and other forms of self-promotion produced in advance of an event. The holdings on performance art in Ireland are particularly well represented in this regard, with a prevalence of artist-produced promotional materials represented in the collection such as posters, flyers, press releases, postcards depicting artists' work, and images from collaborative live art events. These forms of visual document represent an important historical record in the absence of other forms of photographic documentation.

Where photographic records are available, these tend to be singular, isolated moments in a performance. One of the most challenging aspects of documenting and researching performance histories is that the singular moment captured in a photograph often does not reflect the reality that artists performed their work multiple times in different places, which can make performance histories more challenging to research using traditional art historical methodologies of time/place/date/chronology. This highlights the significance of good record-keeping in the archive and the importance of capturing the small snippets of information, such as captions on the back of printed photographs and annotations in the margins of typed scripts, journals, and documents. Together, these threads of information, dates, and named individuals help to build a bigger picture of histories that are yet to be written.

In 2021, NIVAL presented a curated selection of ephemera and images from its performance art holdings for online publication as part of a project called “Aftereffects and Untold Histories, Politics and Spaces of Performance since the 1990s”. The project consisted of a series of online talks, events and web content presented on a dedicated website in partnership with L’Internationale, NCAD, NIVAL and IMMA that examined the intersections of politics and performance in Europe in the 1990s and their legacies today. The “Aftereffects” programme was organised into five weekly themes, namely: Setting the Scene; Artists’ Self-Archiving; Art in Public; Activism and the Archive and Intergenerational Legacies.² These themes were chosen as part of a method to access the material in the archive without overstating timeframes or chronologies. The aim of the online exhibition was to present a history that foregrounded images using a series of photographs and scans of Irish performance art, showing the archive’s variance and texture, and providing a way for the public to engage with the archive through visual storytelling.

The questions that motivated this online presentation of the archive were, firstly, ‘How can historical archives be contemporary?’ and secondly, ‘How can we add new knowledge to historical material?’ The exhibition aimed to catalyse new modes of engagement with and reflection on NIVAL’s holdings. The library facilitated unparalleled access to its holdings for a commissioned postdoctoral researcher to conduct a series of eleven in-depth interviews with performance artists from Ireland, a project described in further detail in Kate Antosik-Parsons’ essay in this publication.

NIVAL continues to build a world-class archive of ephemera on Irish art and design using a combined approach of sourcing new collections with a diverse mix of material, such as posters, press releases, invitations, photographs, and articles published in books, catalogues, magazines, and journals. It ensures the long-term preservation of digital ephemera and the stability of more fragile paper-based collections by using best practice standards for digital collections management

and collection conservation. Key relationships with other national cultural institutions and artist/makers serve to strengthen relationships with wider audiences and build holdings that are both diverse and multidisciplinary. All these activities sustain NIVAL’s vision as an internationally recognised and trusted custodian of Ireland’s record of art and design from 1900 to the present day.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Further information about the Artists Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment Archive can be found at: <https://dri.ie/new-collection-published-dri-artists-campaign-repeal-eighth-amendment-archive>.
- 2 More information about the “Aftereffects” programme can be found here <https://ncadinpublic.ie/public-programmes/after-effects>.

SERIES THREE:

SPACES

TRACING THE VALAND ARCHIVE: AN INTERVIEW WITH HENRIK HAMBOLDT AND KATTY AXELSSON

Cathryn Klasto

Valand Archive is an archive of student work within *Fri Konst* (Fine Art) at HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) that dates from the late nineteenth century to today. Henrik Hamboldt was responsible for the archive and the Valand art library from 1998 until 2011. Since 2011, no-one has been formally assigned to it. Katty Axelsson temporarily worked on digitalising the Valand archive from 2018-2020.

Cathryn Klasto: Thank you both for agreeing to talk with me about your experiences working with the Valand archive. It is such valuable knowledge to retain and document. I want to begin by asking you about the archive's origins. When was it started, by whom, and with goals?

Henrik Hamboldt: According to the knowledge I have from my bible of the archive—that is, the 1972 book *Valand Konstskola* by Kjell Hjern—the archive was started by Axel Erdmann, who was a teacher at Valand between 1912 and 1916. It is hard to know what his exact goal was, but it is likely that he wanted it to be a source of inspiration for students. Erdmann managed to get 300 objects into the archive during his time at Valand, and he wanted the archive to continue recording how artists were working so that current students could have a knowledge of who came before them. When Erdmann left the school, however, the archive was completely forgotten. No one even knew where it was! Later, in 1945, it was discovered in the art museum. When the school moved to Guldheden in 1950, which was also when the Valand name became official, the archive was reactivated and reopened to accept new student work. It was not until the school moved in 1995 from Lindholmen on Hisingen to

Vasagatan 50, where we are now, that the archive became an “official” art archive. It was also then that the school employed art historian and archivist Gun Schönbeck.

CK: Why do we call the archive an archive and not a collection?

HH: One might say that it was originally a collection, but that it became *something like* an archive when Gun Schönbeck began a process of categorisation. Of course, I have opinions as to how this process occurred in 1995. For example, I think we have a very good approach to prints and drawings, but when it comes to 3D work and paintings, there is disorder in terms of the relation between time and scale.

Katty Axelsson: I also think we can say it was a collection from the start, but that it became an archive when the registration process, in the form of a physical ledger, took place. That said, the room it is housed in, from the perspective of environmental control, is not good for art or for people. I suppose when the school moved to Vasagatan 50, there was no other space to put it. So maybe, because it now exists without formal maintenance, we can say it has gone back to being a collection.

HH: Yes. To keep it as an archive, there must be someone who not only has the knowledge of working with art archives, but who also can spend time caring for it and interacting with it so that it is accessible to students and staff. As it is currently stands, the archive grows by around ten works every year. So, there is a future to consider.

CK: Are there forms of protocol in place regarding the acceptance of works into the archive?

HH: There are no established protocols. The tradition has been that the teacher of the final year masters’ students oversees the process of works entering the archive, deciding on what is approved or not. This is something to think about for the future, that is, whether there should be selection criteria, and whether BFA students could also be involved.

CK: Has there never been discussion about accepting works that might be seen as inappropriate in terms of subject matter?

HH: There has been discussion about this in the past. I remember a conversation about the publication of a catalogue and whether some works were considered decent or “ethical” enough to be published. But I don’t really get involved in that. It is not up to me to decide. The teacher is in charge.

KA: We did recommend that students not apply with a very large sculptures, for example, because of limited storage capacity.

HH: Yes! Let’s just say we are quite pleased when we receive a drawing on paper!

CK: Has there ever been student interest or collaboration with the archive?

HH: In 2007, there was an exhibition at Rotor Galleri at Vasagatan 50 organised by two former students. I recently found an article about it in *Göteborgs Posten* by Mikael Olofsson. I was worried about handing the archive over to them, but they took good care of it. There was also discussion about collaborating on a public exhibition of the archive for the Jubilee celebration. I had hoped that a publication could be made that

would pick up from where the book published in 1991 had ended, to mark 100 years since the founding of the university. But this did not end up happening.

KA: There is document that details what was shown from the archive in the 2007 exhibition. It was not the case that the whole archive was opened or shown. Select works which were curated. During my time working with archive, I often received spontaneous questions from curious former and current students about the archive wanting to know what was inside and whether it was possible for them to come in. I must say, Henrik has done a great job of protecting the archive. The archive has not been made accessible because no one has created infrastructure to allow that to happen, and without the infrastructure, it is a security and safety risk to let people in. In fact, some innovation and a lot of work needs to happen before it would be possible to open the archive and allow for student collaboration.

HH: I can think of one other instance of an individual student from Conservation who came and worked with some five to ten works. In truth, the most frequent question I get about the archive is: 'Do you have any works I can put in my office?'. I'm rather strict when it comes to this, because if you have too many things in the building without any control, the purpose of the archive disappears. One must be aware of what an archive is and is not. The purpose of an archive is to preserve things; it is a space for researchers interested in the history of the school and how students engaged with artmaking at different times. That is why it was great when Katty was with us, because she took control of the archive and formally began to digitalise what we had.

CK: Gloria, the artist who is developing a visual response to the archive as part of this *L'internationale* publication, noticed objects that appear to have been used to teach art history—objects that have been categorised, catalogued? She was particularly interested in the three boxes of slides. Where did these come from?

HH: There are three wooden boxes of slides that were used in lectures in the Aulan, Valand's lecture hall. I am not sure where they came from. They were often used as a resource for guest lectures, but they were used frequently, at least when I started at Valand, by a teacher named Sven-Olov Wallenstein, who taught art history, aesthetic theory, and philosophy. Some students really enjoyed these topics, but I also remember that some students were quite opposed, arguing that art education should only be practical.

KA: I think there is a physical list that details the slides, which is not formally included as part of the art archive but rather as part of the wider university infrastructure. The archivist from the central university was preserving this kind of information, including historical photographs. I believe the list can be found in both the orange metal cupboard and the large wooden cupboard in the archive. It has not been digitalised.

HH: As far as I am aware, the orange metal cupboard contains slides from past student exhibitions, from the late 1960s onwards, and in the wooden cupboard is more art-historical slide material. I took over that material, but it has not been added to. In many ways material other than the student art works stopped being put into the archive when the art library at Vasagatan 50 closed in 2011 and was moved to the central university library collection.

CK: Can you say anything about the mysterious brown suitcase?

HH: Aha! That suitcase was included in a donation by Gustaf Tobison, who enabled the Tobison student scholarship. There are also some old chairs in there that belonged to him. I think we had to accept those items as part of the donation! But that was before my time. We would have received it after Tobison passed away in 1981. It may be interesting to know what that Tobison was a student during between 1911 and 1916, so at Axel Erdmann's time. There are many works in the archive by Tobison, many which have not been categorised or catalogued.

KA: I took photos of many of the uncategorised works and put them in the digital repository, just so we retain that knowledge. I saw this as being in the school's interest. Returning to the suitcase, it must have been there before the move from Hisingen in 1995, because it was marked with the room number of the old building. It's good you bring this up! The space is so restricted that I ended up using those chairs as side tables when I was trying to organise things! It's hard to know where to keep everything and what should be preserved in a particular way. The suitcase is just kind of sitting there. When I came in 2018, the space had been used for storage of all kinds. There was old equipment, computer hard drives, old things belonging to teachers who had left—some things that would have been useful to save, probably, but no one had had the time to go through it. I really tried to get the space in order, to do a basic clean up, to begin digitalising what items were there.

CK: Could you say something more about the process of digitalising the archive?

KA: I came to this work as a trainee in university administration,

so I had a limited time to work with it, although it did kind of become my baby! Logistically, it was a tricky process to start. I was not the first person to have tried. There were several attempts before my time, but I was not able to access those previous attempts, so I never found out how far along others had come in the process. I worked a lot to get a safe server area managed by the university where the digital archive could be stored securely and regularly upgraded, which took considerable time. Until that was set up, I did a lot of work trying to translate information from a handwritten ledger that was had been started in the 1950s onto a computer. I found it easier to start with the newest works in the archive and go backwards, because we had direct access to the newer works and their paperwork. In fact, I took poor-quality photos of the works with their paperwork and uploaded them onto the digital register straight away, because paperwork can easily go missing or become separated from the work as things get moved around. My idea was that the information could allow someone else to continue working on it. It was difficult to figure out how to best use the space in order to organise the works, and such that the digital register could spatially represent each work's location (for example, such that a painting by Tobison could be found in the area designated Section A). The room was not large enough get this in order! There are too many things in there! Where does one put everything?!

CK: What do you think about moving the digital archive from a university server to a public website so that others could access these resources?

KA: I think it is perfectly possible to make it public in the future, or at least more public, so that researchers and art students in the department can use it. But my sense is that many people

have particular expectations of an archive, and of what they should be able to find. Our register is partial, and some works were categorised one way by one person, and others another way by someone else. That causes frustration. 'Why is that not in there? What do you mean by this?' So, until the register has some clarity, it cannot really be opened up or released. It would not be able to serve the public's needs.

HH: And of course, once people have some access, they might then want to actually take a look at things. That requires someone there to show them the archive and to answer their questions. Even without public access of the kind you are suggesting, I had an instance recently where someone wanted to see works by Siri Magnus, who was a student at the beginning of the twentieth century. So, I had to cycle in and assist this person, with the added help of my colleague. They had questions. For example, what was Siri Magnus doing at this time in print-making? With these kinds of questions, accessing the archive becomes a larger public process beyond simply accessing database information.

KK and HH: Also another thing: there are some works in the archive, such as video works, that would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible to digitalise. This is partly because digital work so quickly becomes outdated in terms of technology. There are many VHS tapes we no longer have the technological means to show. Someone would need to translate them to another media. Another issue is that we could never show the full digital work in the register due to copyright. In fact, there is a parallel archive of the hundred or so video works, but this is just in place to be able to look up the artist and title of the work; the works are not viewable. Around fifty of the videos were made by students and the other half are other artist videos that we

have copies of as an institution, and it is actually easier to show these institutionally owned videos from the perspective of copyright. However, all of these videos need to be included within the main digital archive. We get more and more digital work from students, so there needs to be a solution for this.

CK: Do you have any final thoughts on the future of the archive?

KA: I would love another art institution in the city or region to take care of it. People have come in from various institutions to see the work, so I was hopeful, particularly in regard to those institutions with which we have a long history. However, I contacted some people, and even though there is interest - time, resources, money, and space are issues for other institutions as well. The people I spoke with also saw the archive as more part of the university's history, rather than as an autonomous art archive that could be housed in another institution.

HH: We must remember that Valand has a complicated history. It was first a private institution, then it belonged to the city, and finally it became a part of the university and the state in 1977. So now that the art archive is part of the university and it is their property, it is also their responsibility to determine its future. I really see it becoming a source of historical interest in the future, insofar as it contains such a rich history of art life in Gothenburg. It is very important to ensure that the archive is kept and its value recognised.

KONST

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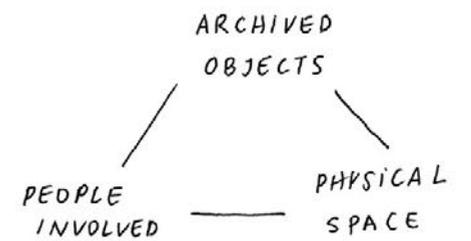
Gloria López Cleries

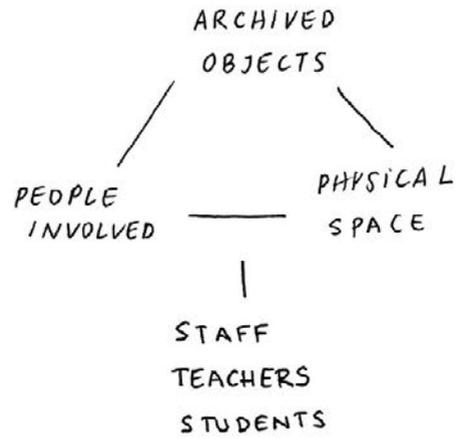


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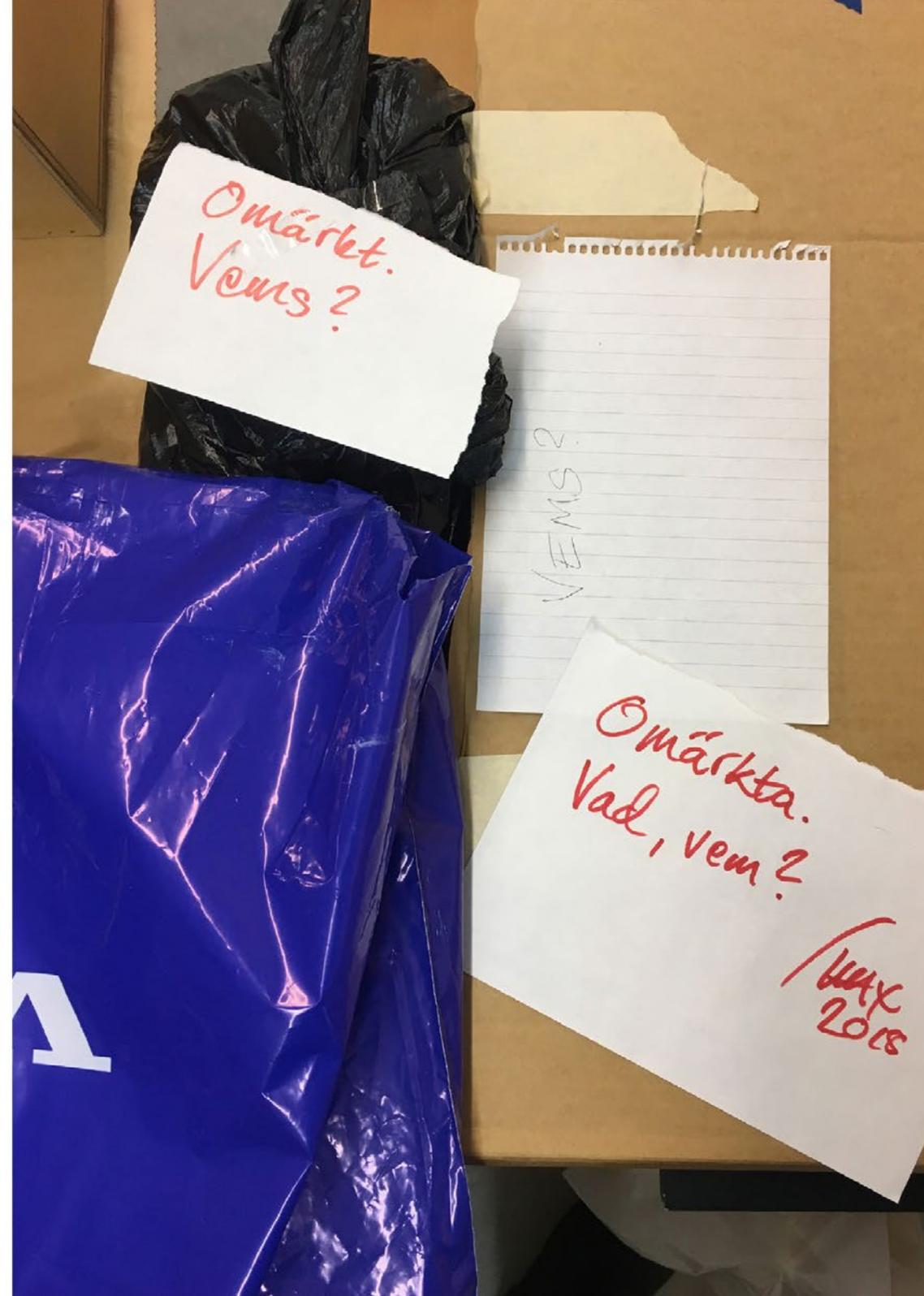
WHAT MAKES AN ARCHIVE ?





- WHO TAKES CARE OF IT?
- WHO ARCHIVES IT?
- WHO CLEANS IT?
- WHO MAKES IT WORK?
- WHO CARES ABOUT IT?

Translation:
 Unlabeled. Whose?
 Unlabeled. What, who?





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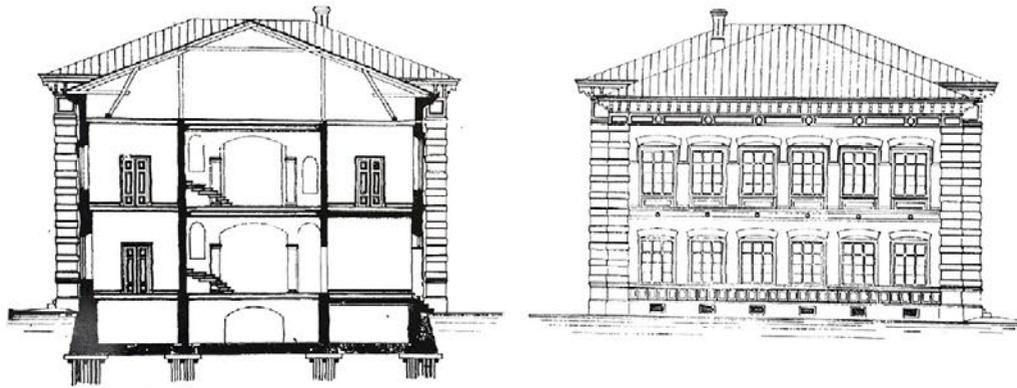
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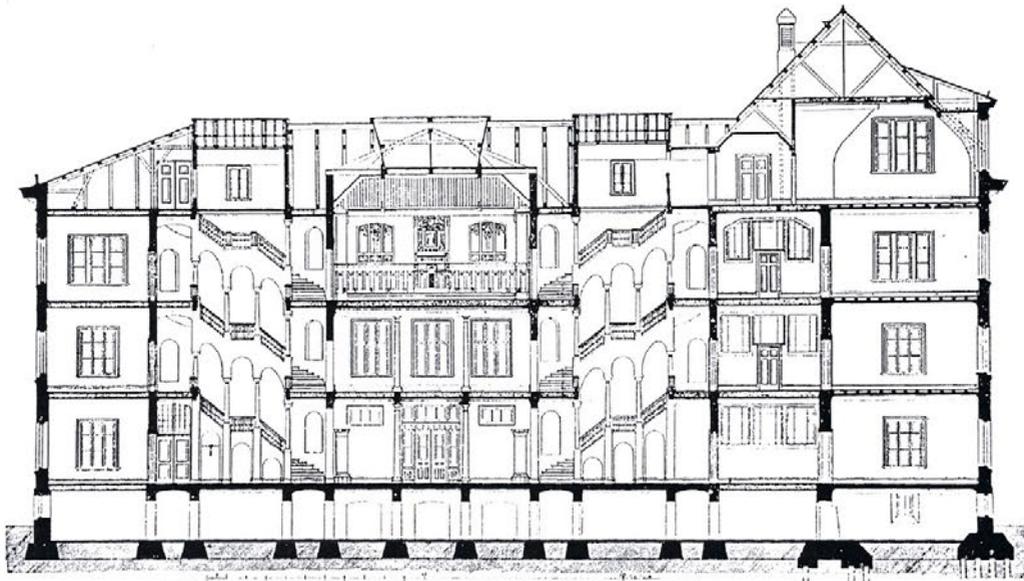
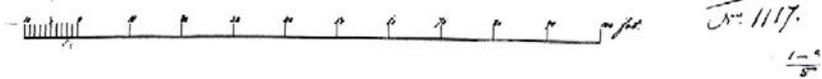
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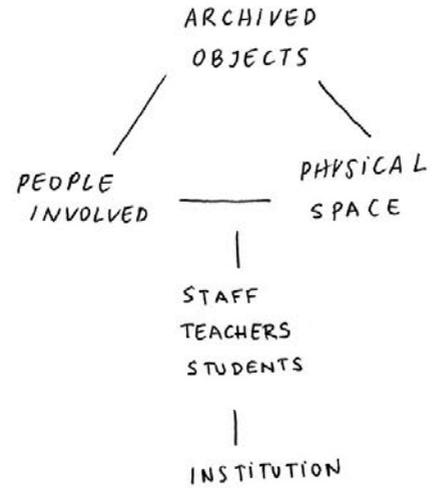
*Rekonstruktion af den gamle Skole (Historisk Skole)
 Vestergade 47 Kv. Kræmmerby.*



Grundriss af linie AB.



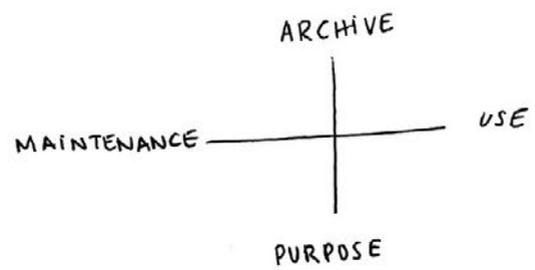
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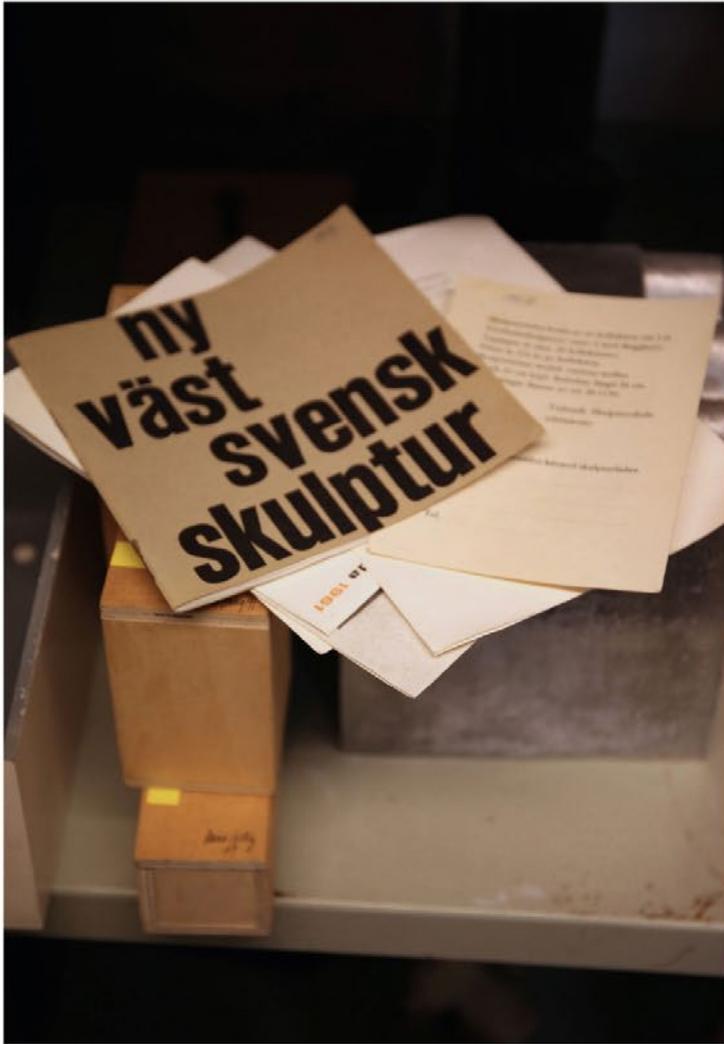
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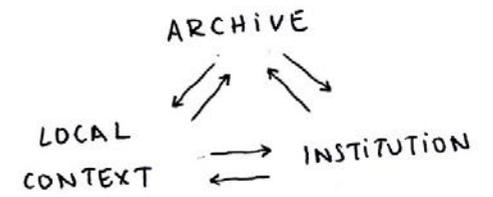
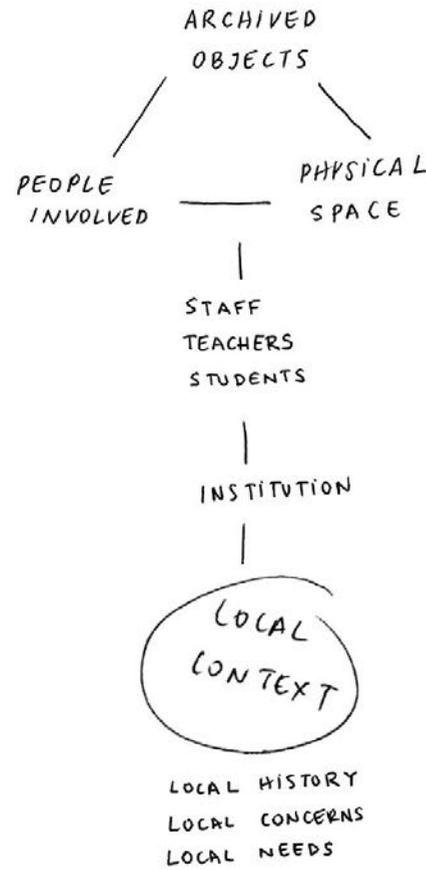
WHO OWNS THE ARCHIVE?
 WHO HAS ACCESS TO IT?



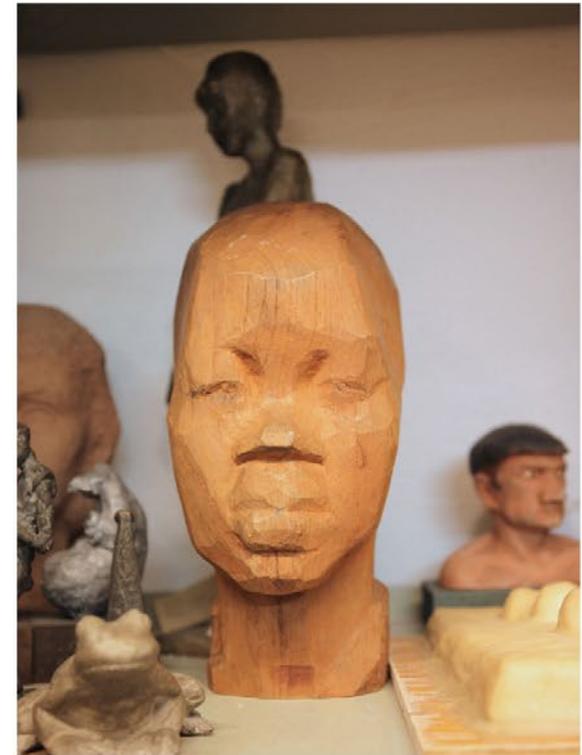
WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE FOR?



HOW DOES IT RESPOND TO THE LOCAL CONCERNS?



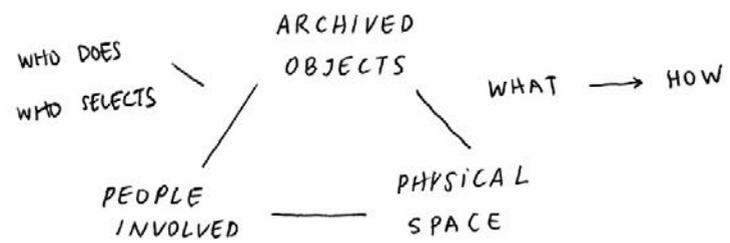
HOW DOES IT RELATE TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT?







WHO DECIDES



WHO DECIDES

WHO DECIDES WHAT

WHO DECIDES WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE FOR?



WHO DECIDES WHAT CAN BE ARCHIVED?



WHAT DOES
THE ARCHIVE
TELL ?

WHAT DOES IT TELL
ABOUT THE INSTITUTION ?



WHAT DOES IT REPRODUCE ?

WHAT POWER DYNAMICS
DOES IT REPRODUCE ?



ATTEMPTS TO EXPOSE THE ARCHIVE. FROM THE MARCHÁN/ QUEVEDO ARCHIVE TO ESPACIO D OF THE MUSEO REINA SOFÍA LIBRARY

Gema Marín Méndez, Pedro Merchán Mateos, Daniel Pecharromán Calvo, and Rita Zamora Amengual

Approaching the archive, we tend to abstract it as a sculptural presence: a rigid shape, enclosed on all sides, whose core is being filled with internal gestures that we imagine are constant, but which are imperceptible from the outside.

Far from this idea of an inflexible element, however, the archive represents a vulnerable entity whose permanence is beyond all possibility. Perpetually damaged, it must invariably be rebuilt to persevere against the threats of time, light, water, and the weight of our hands and our breath each time we make use of its material. And when the time comes, it will need a new archive, which either fully or partially embraces and contains it, enclosing it as a historical element.

Faced with this vision of the unwell subject, perhaps it is convenient for us to poeticise the archive from the perspective of its possibility as a territory. Approaching it not as an enclosed environment but as a continuous, treelike extension that brings together all times and all places. This idea replaces the existence of multiple archives in the form of hermetic containers with that of a single universal archive, crossing and interrelating the rest: from the pristine archive (which, if we have a desire for myth, we can assign to the Library of Alexandria) to the final archive, part of whose history was already written from the beginning. This approach makes use of the archive as a terrain that can be traversed: a fertile soil for knowledge and imagination, where the past is recognised in the present so as to expand its possibilities.

The archive of the Museo Reina Sofía would thus connect with a history of this Universal Archive: with the archival holdings of the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art, from which it originated, and in turn with those of its predecessor, the Museum of Modern Art, as well as with that of the Prado Museum, whose roots connect to many other Spanish museum archives, and with the common substratum of universal culture. Proceeding from this image, it is natural to incorporate

currents in the archive that start from the territory and are diverted to flow outwards, forming ponds on its surface that make other lives possible.

One such exercise of rupture and overflow of the archive in our museum is *Casi Libros*, the mediation program of the Museo Reina Sofía Library, launched in a 2021 of still-latent viral suspicions. A reading group, workshops on the collection of photobooks, gatherings, and activities have been fruitfully incorporating new and dedicated presences, perspectives, and contexts to the library space. Before *Casi Libros*, the Library made another commitment to the democratisation of its contents with Espacio D, an exhibition room set up in 2012. Located in a connecting space between floors, Espacio D functions as a terrace that looks out, panopticon-style, over the library's reading room. Every year three documentary exhibitions are presented in the space that offer a renewed encounter with the museum's bibliographical and archival collections, as well as with the documentary collections of other institutions whose main axis of artistic reflection, dissemination, and care is the book form.

One such annual exhibition is curated by the students of the Theory and Criticism major of the master's degree in History of Contemporary Art and Visual Culture organised by the Autonomous University of Madrid, the Complutense University of Madrid, and the Museo Reina Sofía, which is taught in the Museum itself. Each exhibition is born of a study proposal made by the archival collections housed in the institution. This exercise offers students their first approach to the methodologies associated with curatorial practice.

During the past academic year (2020/21), the archive proposed by the Library Department to students was the Marchán/Quevedo Archive, which is one of the most valuable personal archives in the Reina Sofía's documentary corpus. Gathered through the tireless activities of Professor Simón Marchán Fiz and his wife, María Dolores Quevedo Ibáñez, the archive provides an exhaustive overview of the study and systematisation of Spanish artistic practices during the last

decades of the twentieth century, especially those related to conceptual experimentation. It includes letters, catalogues, essays, posters, photographs, and slides, among other materials, building a network of relationships between Marchán and the contemporary art scene.

The trajectory of Simón Marchán Fiz cannot be understood without his friendship with Alberto Corazón, one of the most representative theoretical and artistic agents of Spain in the past century whose legacy, in the form of works, designs, and publications, forms a substantial part of our present imaginary. Marchán and Corazón collaborated on numerous works, investigations, and programmes including the seminar series *Nuevos comportamientos artísticos* (New Artistic Behaviours), which was essential to the development of conceptualism in Spain. This complicity led to the decision to focus the documentary exhibition on a study of Corazón's work between the 1960s and 1970s, with the title *Diseñar, editar, liberar. Una aproximación al pensamiento visual de Alberto Corazón* (Design, edit, liberate: An approach to the visual thought of Alberto Corazón) (June 25 – October 15, 2021). The exhibition was accompanied by the publication #ACTA6, the sixth issue of the students' magazine in which experiences and reflections that occurred during the encounter with the materials of the Archive were collected. The very design of the magazine formally imitated the cover of the Documents series, edited by Alberto Corazón, which is represented in the exhibition.

In the following conversation, three students who took part in this process discuss their experiences approaching the complex materiality of the Marchán/Quevedo Archive and articulating the final museographic proposal and the difficulties associated with the process—both those implicit in the curatorial exercise and those derived from a situation as problematic as the COVID-19 pandemic has been.

We are Gema Marín Méndez, Pedro Merchán Mateos and Rita Zamora Amengual, former students of the Master's in History of Contemporary Art and Visual Culture. During the 2020-21 academic year, we worked

with the holdings of the Marchán/Quevedo Archive, conducting research and curating the exhibition *Diseñar, editar, liberar. Una aproximación al pensamiento visual de Alberto Corazón* (Design, edit, liberate: An approach to the visual thought of Alberto Corazón) (Espacio D, June 25 – October 15, 2021). Beginning from different research trajectories, the various fields of study that interest us converge in the practice of research in Contemporary Art. Gema Marín Méndez has a master's degree in Architecture and combines her architectural practice with artistic research. Pedro Merchán is an art historian and predoctoral researcher at the Autonomous University of Madrid. Rita Zamora Amengual is a graduate in Fine Arts and researcher.

Did you have previous experience working with archival holdings?

This project was our first contact with archival holdings. Along with twenty colleagues, we were charged with reviewing the documentary collections of the Marchán/Quevedo Archive with the aim of later developing a curatorial and editorial project. Although the group was relatively large and heterogeneous, none of us had experience in curatorial research from an archive. We did, however, share a series of theoretical references including Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Rolnik's *Archive Mania*, and Foster's *An Archival Impulse*, which somehow appears tangentially in both projects.

Due to COVID-19, the Library imposed health protocols that limited access to and regular use of the collections (quarantine of documents, etc.) How did this situation condition the research process?

The Marchán/Quevedo Archive brings together an enormous variety of materials and documentation related to the Spanish and international art scene of the second half of the twentieth century. It encompasses works by artists (including Mail Art

and original photographs) and catalogues as well as personal documents (including correspondence and Marchán's personal library) and administrative documentation on the founding of the Museum itself. The diversity and abundance of documents together with the COVID situation conditioned our research. Materials had to be consulted individually, in groups of a maximum of six people, and keeping a safe distance. After consultation, materials had to be quarantined for fifteen days before being handled again. Holdings were consulted on a rotating basis: approximately once a week, we went to the library and were assigned a box following the order of the numbering established by its archivist, Simón Marchán Fiz. The opportunities to see the content were, therefore, very partial and fragmented; communication was limited by social distancing and the silence of the library, which meant that we could not share our different impressions *in situ*.

In order to bridge the gap and share our findings, leaving a record of what seemed remarkable to us about each of the materials, we generated a collaborative "archive of the archive" in the cloud. We wrote several documents to index and describe the content of each box, for consultation as a road map by our colleagues who had not been able to see the materials. Each of us had had direct contact with only a very small number of boxes belonging to different points in the chronology of the archive. Our reading was not only partial but also decontextualised with respect to materials preceding and following those we consulted. It was therefore difficult to grasp the order that had been carefully considered and studied by Marchán Fiz and the narratives that were distilled from it.

As you delved into the Marchán/Quevedo Archive, what narratives and questions were outlined as curatorial possibilities?

The narratives that appeared as we pooled our research were based, we believe, on the impossibility of reading the entire archive in a linear manner, either because of its size and heterogeneity or because of the restrictions. At this juncture, the questions raised were less related to artists or specific cases and more to questions reaching beyond the specific context of the Marchán/Quevedo archive and pointing to broader issues, such as what it means to reread and interpret an archive that has been the basis for constructing one of the key stories for the History of Contemporary Art in the Spanish State.

Any reading of an archive inevitably implies a reinterpretation of the facts, regardless of the extent to which they are presented as objective and immovable truth. In the same way, archiving supposes curation: the curation of a certain era, of a complex and nuanced lived time, which is reduced to a limited selection of documents that indicate specific dates or milestones highlighting what was considered important and worth keeping for posterity. The story presented by the objects is approved and endorsed by academics and other important personalities within the History of Art who, even if they have known only a small part of the story, are established as authority figures over this objective truth. Is it necessary to respect the historiography narrated by the archivist? How can we bring the past into the present? What has been archived and why? What is an absence, in an archive of this nature? How to detect such an absence if the archive originally gathered the invisible or non-hegemonic materials of the time? What is a lack? Can we separate the archive from the institution that contains it? How does the free interpretation of the people who reread the archive come into play and how can these new readings overlap and weave threads with the present? What role do we have as researchers?

Our initial proposal was driven by all these questions.

It was motivated by what interested us about the archive and what could be related to current events. Intrigued by the potential gaps in this all-encompassing account of the *Nuevos Comportamientos Artísticos* (New Artistic Behaviours) enunciated by Simón Marchán, we proposed two possible curatorial strands. The first sought to analyse the relationship between Jorge Glusberg, Simón Marchán, and the artistic practices of the Centre for Art and Communication of Buenos Aires (CAyC). The second aimed to draw a line between the past and the present through Marchán Fiz' interest in new technologies in the artistic practices of the 1960s and 70s in Spain, and to trace how this spirit of capturing the novel, the transgressive, and the cutting-edge—both conceptually and technically—has continued to this day in an artistic panorama where the virtual and the technological are on the rise.

Our investigations, however, ran into some constraints: the need to attend to the rigour of the narrated discourse and its subsequent critical fate, the importance of not distancing ourselves from the content of the archive itself, the partiality of our visions as derived from the logistics of the consultation, and the contingencies born as a result of working with the archive of a living person. Aspects came into play that ranged from the legal (respect for copyright, the right to privacy, and data protection) to the personal (respect for memory and for personal narration).

By having the opportunity to speak with Marchán Fiz himself, the curatorial project took on a new perspective. Marchán Fiz' account shed light on the documents, but it also differed from what we had perceived in the archive. The most notable facts Marchán Fiz told us were full of fissures—paths that had been followed as a result of chance, arbitrary or circumstantial changes of course, and it was difficult to record all these particularities in a single discourse. How could it be

possible to make clear the personal story, the lived history, the memory of a living person in inert material? How are these personal stories, even from the private sphere, captured in the archive and how are they transformed to become institutionalised? Where does the person end and where does the institution begin?

What circumstances intervened in the formal conceptualisation of the exhibition?

All the questions that had been raised seemed to point to a common problem: the ontologically superior position that the living occupy with respect to the dead and to objects. For this reason, we tried to propose curatorial and editorial exercises as critical tools that could gather this ontological tension. In the case of the exhibition, the contact with Simón was fundamental. The exhibition concepts that we had developed prior to our meeting with Marchán Fiz emphasised the archive as text and as fiction, which ultimately relegated the objects themselves to the position of narrative devices, whether from the more “official” story or from more fictional exercises that we developed. These concepts were based on our ability to handle the inertness of the archive while generating new discourses.

The proposal that took material form in Espacio D, however, began less from the textual and more from the positive fact of the object—and particularly the artistic objects related to the artist, editor, and designer Alberto Corazón, composed mostly of graphic works, books, magazines, and conceptual art projects. In *Design, edit, liberate*, documents became “matters of fact” in Latour’s (Latour 2004) sense. This approach required formal devices that affected the objects. We wanted to respect the conditions in which they would be received: posters and placards, considering their verticality, were placed on walls or

hanging from the ceiling, and books, magazines, notebooks, and sheets of paper went horizontally on vitrines.

Initially, we imagined a light space with horizontal exhibitors set on boards and easels to generate a dialogue between the object and the exhibition itself and to avoid conditioning, as much as possible, the movement of the public. By presenting the art object on something formally reminiscent of a table, we left open the question of the book or notebook’s status as art objects or aesthetic devices. But budgetary limitations and the need to keep documents out of reach for conservation purposes ended up determining the choice of the display cases that were eventually used, and which inevitably directed the flow of traffic due to their robustness. With this material reality, the show ended up being grouped into material blocks: books and magazines, posters, and graphic work.

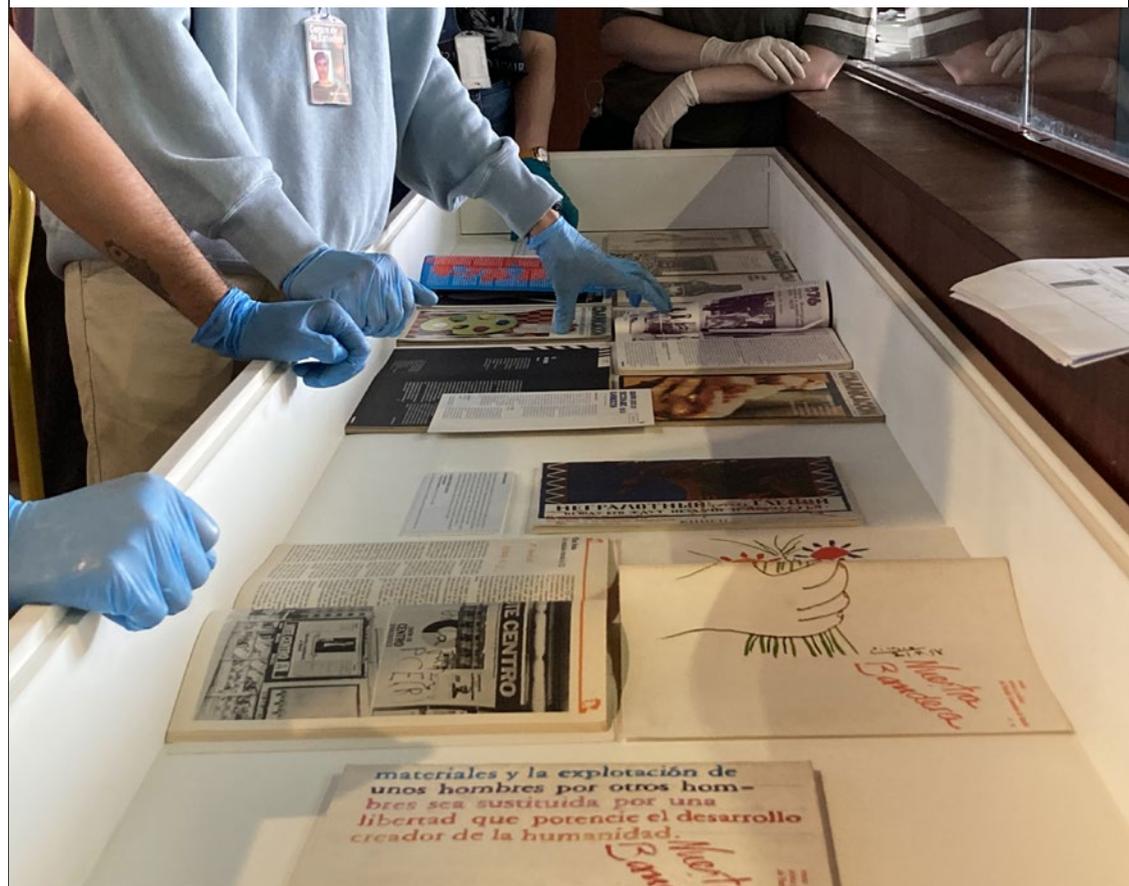
From your experience as curators-in-training, do you think the archives are sufficiently accessible? What accessibility, preservation, and reuse methodologies would you recommend? What ideas do you have about the management of the archives in the future?

The first thing that should be asked is what we mean by accessibility. Do we understand it in the physical sense of our capacity to be physically alongside documentary holdings, or of the susceptibility of archived objects and things to be found (to appear)? Institutions often focus their efforts on providing facilities with sufficient logistics so that nobody is left out, but archives must think beyond this. Physical access itself is conditioned by the influence that architecture exerts on people. If the exterior is developed under the codes of a certain architectural language, this can generate rejection and even a disconnection with the context in which it is inserted, which would place the sense of accessibility of a local archive, for example,

in crisis. Architectural imagery can be violent and exclusionary. This also applies to the experience of interior space where environments are closed and uncomfortable, or when the body that enters is exposed to unexpectedly hostile situations, such as searches and security controls, especially for those bodies exposed to greater violence due to their exclusion from the hegemonic identification categories imposed by the institution itself.

The very condition of user is determined by specific legal and regulatory restrictions. In other words, consultation requires a very specific reality in which various biopolitical devices of class, race, and gender are intertwined, in addition to a willingness to consult the material: outside of a specialised context, there is no notion of public accessibility to this kind of archive. Access, therefore, has a subtly invisible symbolic charge that turns the one who queries into a desirable, tolerable subject of research. Perhaps it is time to ask about the users of the archives beyond inclusion.

Protocols also determine accessibility. The bureaucracy that must be navigated in many cases to gain access, although it has its *raison d'être* in maintaining a certain order and control, imposes an anticipated temporality beyond the time of the document-subject encounter. If the act of accessing the physical space of the archive is already limiting for certain bodies, the bureaucratisation of this access also limits the profile of the users insofar as it demands a greater dedication of time. In our case, for example, participation in bureaucratic consultation processes favoured understanding of the archive's content, since it required prior knowledge of the archive's inventory and its catalogue. This also allowed the library staff in charge of accessing the material to be part of the process, facilitating the task that, due to the immense amount of material available, required external advice. Staff helped not least to assess the volume of boxes suitable for daily consultation.



Installation of the exhibition *Design, Publish, Liberate. An Approach to the Visual Thought of Alberto Corazón* at the Museo Reina Sofía's Library, 2021. Photography courtesy of Pedro Merchán

Ultimately, all these factors determine the uses that can be made of the archive/document. The *raison d'être* of an archive, in this case the imperative of conservation and transmission of a story, determines accessibility—i.e., the limitation and control of consultation for the preservation of documents, understood here as witnesses and proofs of that narrative truth to transmit. And this, in turn, establishes the conditions of its possible handling and users. Accessibility should consider users as well as modes of accessing documents, with the aim of enabling other uses—including those that are not necessarily physical as well as imaginary uses that emerge from contact with the material. Based on the constraints derived from the issue of accessibility, we can consider aspects like capacity and desirability, and propose other methodologies of possible use. In our case, we believe the encounter with the object is fundamental and that contact with materials should be enabled as much as possible, to facilitate agencies and collaborations between actors (objects, subjects, things in general...) and diversify uses. In this way, we can expand the concept of the archive and its qualities: archives are not only the object of academic research, but are capable of being looked at from curatorial, editorial, and artistic perspectives, and are capable of being intervened in or mediated beyond the passive act of observation during consultation.

Today, it also seems appropriate to question the need for conservation and its role in the climate crisis we are experiencing. Faced with the fragility of physical objects, institutions have responded with “dematerialising” and “virtualising” policies for archives. Digitising documents does not necessarily guarantee that they will be preserved in better conditions; it is common for digital archives to lose quality over time and for their virtual existence to endow them with a volatile and elusive quality: archivists often consider that the physical preser-

vation of documents makes them easier to locate compared to the sea of digital documents tirelessly named and renamed, of duplicates, etc. Sometimes the analogue copy more successfully stands the test of time. However, in the ecological crisis in which we find ourselves, it is worth asking about the obligation to avoid the deterioration, destruction, or disappearance of all materials in an archive. This is even more the case if the task is fulfilled by means of processes that demand an enormous amount of material resources, which come not least from mines and factories in Southeast Asia and thus perpetuate colonial relations between the West, the main consumer of resources, and the East, resource quarry of the former.

Not unrelatedly, the constant updating of archives corresponds to a totalising logic, as an attempt to manage the completeness of the archive—a task that is impossible to finish, insofar as the present is a constant generator of documentary material, but also with respect to documents of the past that are constantly being “discovered” or “found”. The very reading of the lack, which was a great concern for us during our deep study of the Marchán/Quevedo Archive, and which informs the marginal readings not narrated by canonical historiography, has a negative consequence. The archive inevitably comes up against its limits: it is impossible to archive and preserve infinitely, not only because of the ecological impact this entails, but also because of the human inability to take on all the material that has been archived, that is archived, and that will continue to be archived.

These anxious logics of the archives, which attend to the need to cling to collected materials, lead us to question the spatial capacity, both physical and virtual, that this accumulation implies. The unending excess of information could, in the future, condition decisions about the validity of documents suitable for archiving and conserving. Then, criteria of the archivist,



Exhibition view of *Design, Publish, Liberate. An Approach to the Visual Thought of Alberto Corazón* at the Museo Reina Sofía's Library, 2021. Photography courtesy of Joaquín Cortés and Román Torres (Museo Reina Sofía)

the institution, or other positions of power would go beyond the mere fact of protecting the information. If an archive already speaks to us of absences, about what the archivist looks away from, the excess of information can also be seen as an inaccessible map in the research process, a great and impossible attempt to fill a void that leads to exhaustion of the researcher.

Thus, we ask about the importance of managing conservation policies and establishing selection criteria as a response to the excesses and accumulations of content that themselves become inaccessible. Perhaps one of the conditions of the archives is to understand that the excesses of information are as relevant as the lacks, since they allow different actors to intervene from their respective positions, projecting knowledges, experiences, and intuitions in the encounter with the object. In this way, the archive will not be read as a single story but will require all narratives that emerge from the materials that compose it, with their fullness and their emptiness, taking each interlocutor as an active element that participates in the agglomeration of transtemporal and interconnected stories, all manifested from the same archive.

In what way could the work have been facilitated by having the collections digitised? How important was the material approach in your research?

The digitisation of the archival collections can help researchers prepare for consultation and assist in preventing the sensation of partial and abstract consultation that we faced due to the magnitude of material stored in the Marchán/Quevedo Archive. Cataloguing and digitisation suppose another type of accessibility with its own times and means as well as specific capacities. For example, when sufficiently developed, these tools allow readings and relationalities through hyperlinks and multi-

faceted searches that would be impossible within the physical archive. This leads us to understand that objects, like subjects, achieve another kind of agency by entering digital languages and interpretation frameworks, and that we can take advantage of this to generate other types of stories and readings that question the concepts supported by the “physical” archive—in particular, that of originality.

The physical-digital dichotomy is insufficient when it comes to critically addressing archives because there is as much materiality in a physical document as there is in a video, blog, or digital photograph. These media simply pose different relationships with the user and the world. In our case, the material approach took on a special relevance, perhaps due to the impossibility of apprehending the archive individually. In the archive of the archive that we built to communicate with each other, descriptions of physical objects were combined with intimate and personal experiences between object and subject: what do I see, what do I not see, what texture does it have, how does my body feel in this encounter, how does this activate my memory, etc. As the curatorial project focused on the positivity of the aesthetic artefacts housed in the archive, we focused the editorial project *ACTA#6* on collecting the affective and accidental experiences that resulted from the collaboration between objects and subjects. In some way it is the consequence of the provisional archive we made, and of the curatorial project: the passage from “positive” objects to object-subject collaboration.

What is your final assessment of the experience using the archive?

Pedro Merchán Mateos: In my case, the archive has represented a before and after in my research practice. Obviously, archives are fundamental to art history as a repository of primary sources. But the archive should not only be a place of consultation

for research, nor should research become a process of extracting documentary resources. Moving away from the vision of the archive as an aseptic collection of things suspended in time involves situating the archive in its multiple dimensions: symbolic, material, affective, social, political, etc. Archives can be many things and require, at the intersection of these dimensions, responsibility of use, which is not so much an ideology as a work ethic. If archives can be many things (a magazine, an exhibition, a way of working, an ephemeral community, a public...), this also holds for research. It is in the uses of the archive that we can learn other uses for our own practices.

Rita Zamora Amengual: Personally, coming from the field of fine arts, getting to know the archive of Simón Marchán Fiz made me think about historiographical practice for the first time and the way in which stories are constructed, not only framed by theory generated *a posteriori*, but also born as a result of events, planned or fortuitous, that occur in the past and the parts of which it is considered important to record and document. The at times personal character of Marchán Fiz's materials made me realise the affective dimension they contained, and how these important “milestones” had been produced as a result of a series of relationships that allowed for both theoretical and conceptual as well as relational exchanges. Thus, one of my fixations in reading the archive was the discovery of small objects that seemed to have been kept by Marchán as a souvenir or memory of an exhibition, and the importance of which was later reconsidered such that he decided to include them in the archive. From drawings made by artists for his wife, to postcards and invitation-artworks, many of the objects that could be considered artefacts, in the sense Clifford (2001) has meant it, which passed into the field of ‘Art with a capital A’, coexisting side by side with more noble materials (such as, for

example, photographic prints by Tino Calabuig or conceptual artworks by Alberto Corazón).

Gema Marín Méndez: For me, consulting the archive turned out to be a largely positive experience, full of fortuitous encounters and surprises in both research and personal learning. Beyond learning about the context of the history of contemporary art in Spain from contact with certain documents and materials, I was surprised by the generosity of Simón Marchán and María Dolores Quevedo in making objects as intimate as letters, post-cards, dedications, or travel photographs available. Exposing themselves publicly in these objects gave me the opportunity to be a spectator of certain secrets and details that hinted at the relationships that were woven to shape the narrative of their story. I was allowed to get to know the protagonists of these stories through an unexpected closeness or intimacy, and to guess how certain personal gestures could intertwine and influence important moments in the Spanish artistic context. All this facilitated the capacity of the archive to overflow its limits, to serve as an artefact through which other types of contact with objects could be explored, and to discover that all these connections are also evidence of the potential to interact with the archive in an active way, expanding its scope and making room for other ways of telling stories.

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ARCHIVING EPHEMERAL ART IN POLAND FROM BEFORE THE POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH OF 1989

Łukasz Guzek

In 2009, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MoMA) established an internal archival department called Artists' Archives. Since then, the Archives have become a vital part of MoMA's activities, as a place where knowledge is created, research is conducted, and digital materials are produced and published on the Museum's website, www.art-museum.pl.

The Artists' Archives have compiled and shared archival collections by Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973), Eustachy Kossakowski (1925-2001), Włodzimierz Borowski (1930-2008), Tadeusz Rolke (b. 1929), Zbigniew Libera (b. 1959), in addition to creating collections such as the Polish Performance Archive (1965-2016) and the Archive of Fine Art Prints of the Exchange Gallery (1978-2017).

One fundamental task undertaken by the Archives has been the archiving of ephemeral art, including performance and conceptual art from the period of 1965 to 1990. This material is abundantly present in the collections.

The research on contemporary art in the Central European area is based on methodology developed by Piotr Piotrowski, author of an inaugural publication on the subject (Piotrowski 2009). Central to Piotrowski's method is the concept of "horizontalism", presented in opposition to verticalism, a research assumption about the unidirectional influence of conventionally understood "Western art" on the East and the consequent consideration of Eastern art as the effect of a passive adoption of Western avant-garde models. According to the vertical perspective, art created behind the Iron Curtain was seen to have artistic forms comparable to those of the West, and there was a widespread belief in the derivative nature of the art of the post-Yalta European region. Piotrowski, however, sought to create a research school to identify original sources of artistic solutions emerging in the East and to understand artistic trends in the local socio-political and

artistic contexts. This was a research perspective based on “horizontalism”. This practice of orienting research towards the search for specificity and the articulation of national or regional art stories is surely the more adequate method, and it can yield interesting research results. In this text, however, I propose to adjust this method, with the aim of making it more precise. Firstly, it should be assumed that it was conceptual art itself that initiated the breakthrough leading to the crystallisation of a new theoretical base and to new forms of art that enabled the individualisation of national “schools”, or the characterisation of the art of an entire region. In this sense, conceptual art was the necessary precursor to the postulated “horizontalism”.

Broadly defined, conceptualism encompasses a range of ephemeral practices: installation in a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces, and in landscape; ready-made objects; the use of new media, i.e., photography and film and later video; and finally, live actions, happenings, and performances, including performances for camera. The practice of this art was highly political. While painting in varieties of abstraction, or semi-figuration with deformation effects was accepted in official art institutions, galleries and museums, conceptualism was not. Never and nowhere. As conceptual art practices developed from the mid-1960s to the political breakthrough of 1989, when they were granted to an official place in culture as greater attention began to be paid to areas eradicated during the period of totalitarian rule, conceptual art was only accepted in the un-official sphere. And in each of the countries on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, where openness to new art was a political statement, an un-official art institution based on conceptual practices was established. The art institution is understood here as the development by the artistic community of its own internal hierarchy of valuation and critical assessment, that is, defining art, determining what art is (and what it is not), recognising art in certain classes of works and kinds of procedures, and creating a stable system for the distribution of these values through the created circulation of works, such as exhibitions and other presentation forms, as well as

relations between art professionals. This kind of system emerged in Poland, and it was extremely robust.

Emerging in the second half of the 1960s, Poland’s un-official institutionalisation of conceptual art reached its heyday in the 1970s, a time when conceptual art prevailed, and continued into the 1980s, when it showed remarkable resilience in the face of adverse political circumstances. After the imposition of martial law on 13 December 1981, artistic life was paralysed and almost all art institutions closed down. However, the institutional strength of the art system that had been built up soon led to its revival in private homes and studios. It paved the way for new art around the mid-1980s based on post-conceptual practices, while preserving the developmental continuity of art, which persisted after the political breakthrough of 1989.

At the heyday, more than 70 galleries were operating in the Polish art world, more or less permanently. In addition, regular open-air workshops, and occasional symposiums, conferences, and lectures were held. Varying in status, the institutions that made up the gallery system were nested in official institutions, such as student clubs and the seats of the Artists’ Union. In contrast to other Central European countries, there were few galleries or apartment exhibitions in private homes in Poland. There was no such pressing need, as other exhibition options were available. Under the totalitarian system, there was no possibility of setting up NGOs. This social role was performed, rather, from within the niches of art institutions. Often, the views of a given gallery director determined the programme of the official gallery, which could, by varying degrees, integrate the un-official art institution. It was the kind of art presented that played a decisive role. In other words, the kind of art presented was what determined affiliation with the un-official institution, not the legal framework or the ownership of the venue.

In this sense, the terms used in studies of art in other Eastern European countries are less appropriate in the Polish context. In Poland, conceptual art and art of conceptual provenance was not pro-

moted or supported by official decisions of state cultural policy, and therefore it was not officially promoted institutionally. But it was not eradicated outright, as in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Rather, its promotion occurred according to an un-official attitude, while it remained invisible to and ignored by the state. This institutional development of conceptual art in Poland resulted from the definition of contemporary art, while the administrative affiliation of the premises is of secondary importance. Terms used in other studies, such as a “second sphere”, are misleading, since the places where conceptual art was shown in Poland belonged to the “first sphere”. Only the art itself did not belong there. The term “independent” is equally misleading for the Polish context, where the independence of conceptual art was defined through the artistic facts created, not *de jure*. The collective terms used to describe the gallery movement, such as “artist-run” or ARI (artist-run-initiative), are similarly inadequate with respect to the Polish situation, as the institutions themselves were generally not grassroots, but were official institutions taken over by proponents of contemporary art with conceptual characteristics. We can call this the practice of Situationism, or a kind of Polish Situationism, seizing an opportunity on a hit-and-run basis under the conditions of a totalitarian state. Given these circumstances, the term “un-official” is more indicative of the distinctiveness of the content presented in a particular gallery than an alternative organisational form or administrative status (non-official, non-governmental). The art was validated through the type of art created, the form or artistic content, and not through the institution that presented it. This is institutional theory applied against the grain.

All these initiatives have created an institutional network. The number of artistic works produced in these institutions is enormous. And it provides abundance of research material that is now being systematically studied. However, the research is still far from yielding a complete picture of contemporary art in Poland and defining its “horizontal” and therefore locally specific nature. The difficulty of archiving this art lies in its ephemeral nature, and in the fact that it was created in

a network-like, decentralised institution with no single decision-making centre. Today, the archives are mainly in private hands and not highly valued by the heirs. Bringing together these scattered fragments into a coherent picture is the task of researchers studying the period retrospectively and of contemporary art museums. The first methodological step is to link the development of the gallery system to conceptual art. The movement of conceptual galleries established in Poland was active mainly in the 1970s. However, to understand its institutional nature, it is necessary to trace the history of such galleries in Poland.

The gallery movement and the avant-garde tradition

In the post-World War II period, the most important Polish art centre was Krakow, where the Krakow Group (Grupa Krakowska) was founded in 1957 with Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) as its leader and the Krzysztofory Gallery as its venue. The Krakow Group was characterised by post-avant-garde eclecticism; the artists who formed the group represented a variety of approaches to art rooted in all trends of the historical avant-garde. At the same time, this mixture of styles provided fertile ground for the development of art. The Krakow Group was, both in terms of continuity in the development of avant-garde art forms and the biographies of its members, a continuation of the pre-war group (the so-called First Krakow Group). It was the only circle in post-war Poland that drew so much from the tradition of the historical avant-garde.

A second important milieu that emerged in the second half of the 1960s was centred around the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, founded in 1966. It was established on the initiative of Kantor, who moved in Krakow and Warsaw circles and was a leader for both. At the same time, the Warsaw milieu had its own anchoring in the tradition of the avant-garde through its doyen, Henryk Stażewski (1894-1988), who was a member of the massive international abstractionist groups *Cercle et Carré* (from 1929) and *Abstraction-Création* (from 1931).

Hence his paintings and collages, both geometric and organic abstraction in the style of Hans Arp, were based on avant-garde art learned at its very origins. This link to the pre-war avant-garde determined the special status of these two circles in Polish art, both of which provided a symbolic bridge over the Iron Curtain.

Ephemeral art of the 1960s

A few examples of the 1960s art with ephemeral characteristics are presented below. The emergence of such art forms indicated the degree of artistic development in Poland at this time. For any art that becomes institutionalised in the form of a movement or ideological and formal objectives, such as avant-garde movements, it is the emergence of live forms, not least in theatre or dance, that tends to represent the fulfilment of these objectives in the most advanced and radical way. Tracing the emergence of live art forms in Polish art is therefore also a way to write art history (cf. Cseh-Varga & Czirak 2018; Badovinac 1998).

Early happenings by Kantor in the late 1960s initiated a shift towards new art and mark the beginning of the history of contemporary art in Poland. These included “Linia Podziału / Dividing Line”, 1966; “Panoramyczny Happening Morski / Panoramic Sea Happening”, 1967; “List / Letter,” 1968; “Lekcja anatomii wg Rembrandta / Anatomy Lesson according to Rembrandt”, 1968 and 1969; and by Włodzimierz Borowski, including “Mirror Manifesto (Manilus)”, 1965; “IV Pokaz synkretyczny – Ofiarowanie pieca / IV Syncretic Show – The Offering of the Furnace”, 1966; and “VII Pokaz synkretyczny – Zdjęcie kapelusza / VII Syncretic Show – Hat Off”, 1967. During this time, the action form, in this case the happening, represented the most radical artistic solutions. This form challenged official cultural policy and its manner of valuing art, thus contributing to the establishment of an art institution with its own valuation system, independent of the official one.

Ephemeral art of the 1970s – the context of development

The 1970s saw a rapid development of contemporary art in Poland. This was due to the coincidence of two factors: a relative liberalisation in the socio-political sphere overlapping with the formulation of the conceptual art premises.

At the same time, the Krakow Group with the Krzysztofory Gallery, as well as the Foksal Gallery, artistically rooted in the painting tradition and new realism, were gradually losing their influence as the conceptual movement gained traction. These institutions had apolitical programmes and, in this sense too, were far removed from the radicalism of conceptual art.

Meanwhile, the gallery movement emerged with the spread of conceptual art. Along with other artist-run initiatives, a system of open-air events concurrent with the conceptual practice of conferences, symposiums, and festivals contributed to the formation of the art institution. The institutionalisation was so strong and operated on such a large scale during this period in Poland that it was able not only to organise events presenting new trends, but also to conduct international exchanges and anchor contemporary art in society. This led to the creation of an un-official art with its own circulation and valuing system. Its un-official nature made it political, even if it did not take a more conventional political stance such as direct criticism of the government and the totalitarian political system in general.

Within the conceptual gallery movement, various initiatives were taken by artists. For the conceptualists, however, conferences or symposiums, that is, the kind of events that allowed the emulation of conceptual, scientific mechanisms, were of paramount importance. However, the practice of art as a science stemmed from the assumptions of conceptual art and reflections on the definition of art. Artistic research and theoretical speculation, a crucial component of today's practice in the field of art, were part of the nature of conceptual art and a form of practising it, as was any organisational activity, such as

setting up and running galleries and curating art projects. In conceptual art, the roles of artist and art theorist have blurred. As artistic practices, both were equally legitimate within the accepted definition of conceptual art. Therefore, as the conceptual movement gained momentum, new forms of presentation emerged as art forms beyond the established frameworks of museums and galleries, fostering the establishment of an alternative art institution. This phenomenon was inherent in conceptualism and occurred in all countries in the region. But this was the case primarily due to artistic reasons. The socio-political context also contributed to the development of conceptual art. This is because it offered an opportunity to practice contemporary art outside official institutions, and therefore outside the control of state authorities, which was a key motivation for artists from behind the Iron Curtain. Thus, despite the efforts of the authorities, contemporary art was created everywhere, using the fundamentals of conceptualism. This demonstrates the enormous political role of conceptual art, escaping the totalitarian system and creating enclaves of freedom through art. Conceptualism was political as it was radically different in its nature and thus critical of state-promoted art, whatever that art might be.

In Poland, the gallery movement gained considerable momentum at that time, although the ARI gallery model itself originated in the 1960s and was based on the model of the Krzysztofory and Foksal galleries, the founding myth of the gallery movement. The conceptual gallery movement developed throughout the 1970s, reaching its peak in the second half of decade, when such activity could draw on many local models and was well established in the artists' society.

An outline history of the gallery movement in Poland

The first event initiating the gallery movement was the first meeting of galleries and artists in the OdNowa Gallery, Poznań, in 1968. Eight galleries and five *Salony Debiutów* (Salon of Debutants) participated. This event may also be seen the establishment of an un-official art institu-

tion. Such gallery meetings or symposiums later became a pillar of the movement's strength. The OdNowa Gallery, for example, was one of the galleries operating at student cultural centres, which was common in the countries behind the Iron Curtain.

In the 1970s, there was an acceleration of the gallery movement, which, in line with the idea of conceptual art, expanded organisational activity as a recognised artistic practice. In 1972, also in Poznań, NET Initiative was founded by the artist Jarosław Kozłowski (b. 1945) and the critic Andrzej Kostołowski (b. 1940). Based on distributing a manifesto-letter, entitled *NET*, to artists in Poland and abroad, the project was the result of the development of the conceptual art trend and referred to the artistic practices of mail art and Fluxus. Since 1975, *Flash Art* began publishing its Art Diary mailing list. NET integrated artist-run initiatives and transformed them into a movement (network). The gallery movement was further integrated through the *Przegląd dokumentacji Galerii Niezależnych* (Documentation Review of the Independent Galleries), which took place in 1973 at Repassage Gallery in the University of Warsaw student's club, convening nineteen galleries.

Conceptualism redefined the place of media in art and gave art a new role in relation to reality. The main tenets of the creation practice were based on tautology and structural analyses of the medium, while the narrative, "literary" function of the media was rejected. In this concept, surrounding reality was treated as ready-made. Hence, documentation and recording played a key role in this concept of art. One of the main means of exploring the medium was through a performance for camera. While performances of this type took a wide variety of forms and became common during the heyday of conceptualism, conceptual art based on photo and film experimentation was largely introduced in Poland by two groups, Permafo and the *Warsztat Formy Filmowej* (Film Form Workshop).

Permafo Gallery and Group, which operated in Wrocław from 1970 up to the Martial Law in 1981, was the first declared conceptual gallery based on new media art. The gallery operated on a hit-and-run

basis in the Artists' Club (a colloquial name for a network of social institutions functioning everywhere in Poland and the same in other countries behind the Iron Curtain) as panels were set up to form an exhibition space and then dismantled. However, this was enough to create an influential milieu. Permafo also published art-zine under the same name in the years 1972–1980. It was founded by Andrzej Lachowicz (1939-2015) as a leader, Natalia LL (1937-2022), personally associated with Lachowicz, art critic Antoni Dzieduszycki (1937-1997), and Zbigniew Dłubak (1921-2005), a father of Polish photography. Permafo Gallery made significant contributions to the establishment of conceptual art as a leading trend and to the un-official art institution in Poland.

Film Form Workshop (FFW) was founded in Lodz by students of the cinematography department of the Lodz Film School (PWSFTviT in Lodz). It operated from 1970 to 1977. After 1977, members pursued individual careers. The leader was Józef Robakowski (b. 1939), and founding members included Wojciech Bruszewski (1947-2009), Paweł Kwiek (1951-2022), Andrzej Różycki (1942-2021), Zbigniew Rybczyński (b. 1949), Ryszard Waśko (b. 1947), Janusz Połom (1959-2020), and Antoni Mikołajczyk (1939-2000). Although FFW never found its own gallery, the group organised screenings and created a broad and influential milieu that worked like an art institution.

Beyond Permafo and FFW, several galleries that operated as part of the conceptual gallery movement devoted most of their programmes to photography and film as media. These included Foto-Medium-Art by Jerzy Olek (1943-2022) in Wrocław, Foto Video by Maria Anna Potocka (b. 1950) in Krakow, Mała Galeria ZPAF by Andrzej Jórczak (1944-1981) and Marek Grygiel (b.1951) in Warsaw, GN by Leszek Brogowski (b. 1955) in Gdańsk, Art Forum by Tadeusz Porada and FF by Krzysztof Cichosz (b. 1955) in Łódź.

An early example of the gallery as a conceptual artwork itself was Galeria Tak (Yes Gallery), founded in 1970 by Leszek Przyjemski (b. 1942), with Anastazy Wiśniewski (1943-2011) at the beginning. Yes Gallery was the most radical form of gallery in the entire gallery move-

ment, and Przyjemski was the most acute dissident artist in Poland. His entire work (as both artist and organiser) was harsh critical commentary on the surrounding reality and political regime. He was forced to emigrate with his family in 1981 and now lives in Germany. Yes Gallery was an idea-institution or art project, not a place. As an artwork it was a poster with a gallery manifesto printed on it. As Przyjemski stated in this manifesto text, the gallery was to approve all activities in/as art. Thus, the activity of the gallery as an institution emulated the prerogatives of the authorities in a totalitarian state, with the same approval mechanism (say yes) for various artistic activities. Another idea-institution founded by Przyjemski was the Museum of Hysterics, operating permanently since 1968, the year he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, based on Przyjemski's belief that the world around him is mentally ill, and that under this circumstance, one can only function as a madman (hysteric). It was presented for first time on the Baltic Sea beach in Gdańsk-Brzeźno during the International Meeting of Non-existent Galleries in 1975. Przyjemski's activity contributed radical forms to the beginning of the conceptual gallery movement and to the un-official art institution in Poland.

80x140 Gallery was founded by Jerzy Treliński (b. 1940) in 1971 in the local Artists' Club in Lodz. It became one of the most radical forms of conceptual gallery within the conceptual gallery movement in Poland. At the same time, it was a work of art of its founder. The 80x140 Gallery was a board of these dimensions, hanging on the wall. On/in this gallery, documentation of the action and texts by artists, such as manifestos and statements, were presented. Inside the 80x140 Gallery is nested the A4 Gallery by Andrzej Pierzgalski (1938-2016), which operates on the same principle: the publication (exhibition) of works of conceptual art on the area of an A4 sheet of paper. These galleries were also significant for the formation the conceptual gallery movement and the un-official art institution in Poland at its beginning.

The key outcome of the conceptual movement developing in the second half of the 1970s was the concept of Contextual Art

formulated by Jan Świdziński (1923-2014) in 1976. In the exhibition entitled “Contextual Art” in St. Petri Gallery, run by Jean Sellem in Lund, the manifesto “Art as Contextual Art” was published in English. A book with a batch of his theoretical texts was subsequently issued by Remont Gallery, Warsaw (Świdziński 1977; 1979). These publications were followed by a conference on Contextual Art at the Center for Experimental Art and Comunication (CEAC) in Toronto, where Świdziński met Joseph Kosuth, who presented his concept of “anthropologized art”, published earlier in 1975 in *The Fox* art-zine as an article titled ‘Artist-as-Anthropologist’. From then on, the two artists respect each other. A transcript of the Toronto discussion was published the Świdziński’s book *Quotations on Contextual Art* (Świdziński 1987). These events had a tremendous impact on the Polish art scene. Since then, Świdziński has become a major promotor of conceptual art and Kosuth’s idea of conceptualism had dominant influence in Polish art.

Another landmark event in the period of the second half of 1970s was the *IAM* (International Artists’ Meeting or I am), organised by Henryk Gajewski (b. 1948) at Remont Gallery, Warsaw, in 1978. This international performance art festival was the first major presentation of this art form. Since then, the term “performance art” has been fixed in the Polish discourse of contemporary art as a form of conceptualism belonging exclusively to the field of visual art (and not to theatre or dance practices). This event marks the moment when the independent, un-official art milieu is so strong that it could organise large-scale events and international exchanges (in this case, a meeting of 48 artists from abroad and 26 from Poland). At this point, an alternative art institution to the official one had been established and was prospering. The official art institution, in turn, was marginalised as a source of new art ideas and deprived its social influence in the art field. In the same year, a second international festival of performance art entitled *Body and Performance* took place at Labirynt Gallery, Lublin, establishing the position of performance art as a ground-breaking practice of contemporary art in Poland based on its inherent artistic and social radicalism.

This festival was organised by Andrzej Mroczek (1941-2009), gallery director and curator-friend of many artists. Thanks to Mroczek’s connections, the Labirynt Gallery was not boycotted during the Martial Law period, even though it was a municipal institution. Both Remont and Labirynt were landmark points in the historical network of un-official art institution.

The years 1980 and 1981, the time of the Solidarity movement and the relative freedom brought about by the weakness of the authorities and the economic crisis, was a time of recapitulation and of large, group, grassroots exhibitions held by the various circles that together an art institution based on conceptualism. The first edition of “Konstrukcja w procesie” (“Construction in Process”) took place in Łódź, an international exhibition of art and realisations in urban space and of conceptual and post-conceptual art. The meeting was a summary of a decade of conceptual art, international contacts, and the relationship of conceptualism and new media. 54 artists from all over the world participated. The curator of the international section was Ryszard Waśko. A special section of Polish art was curated by Antoni Mikołajczyk, and a section for documentary film was curated by Józef Robakowski. The exhibition was prepared by the Film Form Workshop milieu. The second edition was held in Munich in 1985, convening 46 artists. In 1990, “Construction in Process” returned to Łódź bringing together 96 artists. The fourth edition was convened again in Łódź in 1993, this time with 150 artists. In 1995, the fifth edition took place in the Negev desert in Israel; the sixth edition took place in 1998 in Melbourne with 96 artists; and in 2000, the final edition of “Construction in Process” was held in Bydgoszcz with 130 participating artists.

Another significant development was the “IX Spotkania krakowskie” (“IX Krakow Meetings”) in Krakow, an annual event of local importance which in 1981 had an international character and provided an overview of the conceptual and performance tendencies as well as international contacts. The artist Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931-1999) and art critic Andrzej Kostołowski were curators, and 40 artists participated. The ex-

hibition was closed by the authorities with the introduction of Martial Law. The catalogue of this edition was published in 1995, when the next X Krakow Meetings took place, curated by Artur Tajber (b. 1953).

“70–80. Nowe zjawiska w sztuce polskiej” (“70–80. New Phenomena in Polish Art”) in Galeria BWA, Sopot, presented a summary of the decade of Conceptual Art. 35 galleries from Poland constituting the ARI movement were invited. This event marked a peak development of this movement. The organisers were Józef Robakowski and Witosław Czerwonka (1949-2015), and a reader was produced containing statements and manifestos by artists and theoreticians representing the decade was published (only in Polish).

Musealisation of ephemeral art

In the late 2000s and 2010s, contemporary art museums began to emerge in Poland. In general, this was a boom time for museums. In 2008, a new building for the museum of contemporary art in Łódź was opened as the Muzeum Sztuki / Art Museum / ms2. Originally opened in 1931, the Muzeum Sztuki (ms) is the first contemporary art museum in the world. It became an institution on the initiative of avant-garde artists Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, housing the a.r. group collection of post-cubist, constructivist, and neoplasticism works. In addition, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej / Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN) was opened in a temporary building. The new building is still under construction. Previously, contemporary art in Warsaw was gathered by the National Museum in Warsaw, and this collection is still there. In 2008 the Center of Contemporary Art (COCA) in Torun also has a collection of contemporary art. In 2011, Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow (MOCAK) was opened in Krakow. Previously, contemporary art was gathered in Krakow by the National Museum in Krakow, and this collection is still there. In Wrocław, the Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław (MWW) (Wrocław Contemporary Museum) was opened. Previously, contemporary art in Wrocław was

gathered by the National Museum, and this collection is still there. Finally, in 2014, Cricoteka, the museum and archive of Tadeusz Kantor was opened in Krakow.

A contemporary museum, in order to accurately present the history of contemporary art, needs to assume the methodology of shaping the collection and to capture in its collections the role of ephemeral art and the connection of this art with the gallery movement and the un-official art institution. This is difficult due to the ephemeral nature of the forms. However, museums manage to achieve this task by collecting pictorial, photo, and film documentation. The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw maintains a documentation department specialised in these practices, and other museums have such records in their collections as well. However, this is only a partial solution. An image, even with an accompanying description, can help to understand the work itself, but at the same time it is presented in isolation from the context of its creation. Moreover, even large collections exhibited as a separate performance collection will not present the origins of this art in the context of the time of their creation. Furthermore, curators often show live art and ephemeral art in conjunction with other works, depending on the narrative needs of a particular exhibition, which further isolates these works and ignores the context of their creation.

To grasp the entirety of ephemeral phenomena of Polish art, it is necessary to integrate into the collections the works themselves and the context of their creation in galleries. It should therefore be the task of museums to preserve the documentation of the entire institution, not only the works created. Entire archives of conceptual galleries and the artists who create them should be added to collections, and indeed this has started to take place. Contextualisation is the only way to make the heritage of ephemeral art as an integrated artistic and socio-political phenomenon evident and accessible to researchers.

The holistic acquisition of archives, rather than individual documentation, documents, works, or artefacts, is also necessary to convey the historical truth of how these facilities and the gallery movement

operated. All those who created the archives were also compiling documentation and their own archives, performing what Zdenka Badovinac refers to as ‘self-historicisation’ (Badovinac 2018, pp. 38-40). These stories must form a part of the contemporary art history told in museums if conceptual art is to be understood by future generations of viewers and researchers.

This kind of archival process is ongoing in the Artists’ Archives at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. In 2017, Józef Robakowski donated the complete Archive (and Collection) of the Exchange Gallery in Łódź to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and in 2021, MoMA also received the invaluable Collection and Archive of the Construction in Process 1981-2000 from Ryszard Waśko. Further documentary resources of Polish ephemeral art are being developed and will be gradually made available on the MoMA website. Given the breadth of the un-official art institution in Poland, there is still considerable work to be done.

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SERIES FOUR:

STORYTELLING

THINGS THAT HAPPEN, THINGS THAT REMAIN¹. STORY OF A PROJECT BY ENRIC FARRÉS DURAN WITH THE MACBA'S HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

Enric Farrés Duran

On opening day it was decided to give a guided tour of the exhibition. People had to sign up and form two groups. Two groups of ten people, and that was it. One at seven in the evening and the other at eight. This was actually the opening, as we hadn't been able to celebrate the start of the exhibition—or, for that matter, the museum's anniversary. The museum was very young, just turned 25, though I've always wondered whether museum years are the same as human years. For example, dog years are seven of ours, so if the museum were a dog-museum, it would be 175—it would be very old. We hadn't been able to celebrate because of the virus, for fear of getting infected, for fear of going into the museum archive and getting infected, even though historically it is one of the most aseptic places there is. The show was a commission, on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, working with the museum's historical holdings—documentary holdings in constant motion. Unlike the personal fonds also contained in the archive, where the producer has died and time is on our side, this collection is living or under construction. In fact, it is a river-archive, where the flow of information never stops, where the documents and data that flow from the museum's various departments have to be transferred-channelled in real time, looking to the future. If one thing is plain, it is that at the end of time, when everything has been destroyed and sold, the historical holdings will be the last to switch off the lights and leave, as they contain little that can be marketed. Historical holdings, it seems, allow us accurately to anticipate the future unknown, despite their scattered, shifting beginnings. What is the first document that the museum itself generates? The archive seems to be laughing at itself.

The guided visits started at the entrance to the exhibition; that was the meeting point, and, when everyone was there, we gathered in the middle of the plaza. With our backs to the museum. In front of the museum was the space responsible for generating the last document



The two consecutive guided tours are presented simultaneously.
 View of *Vis a vis guided tour*. Video, two-channel, 2021.
 Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán

that had entered the archive's historical fonds. Specifically, it was the press dossier announcing who had won the international competition to fill that space. Which architecture practice would be responsible for carrying out the proposed remodelling. I told them to take a good look at the space that was the square, to observe all the details of the ground, the buildings and especially the clouds, because in two years' time a new building would stand there, and they would never again be able to see that space with nothing in it. When they were old, those enthusiastic young visitors would probably say, 'That wasn't there when I was young'. The visit began right there, contemplating the empty space and understanding, as Jorge Blasco (2017) writes in *Archivar*, that 'the archive does not exist, it happens'. That spatial perspective served to explain to the visitors the situation of the archive within the institution. Standing in the middle of the rectangular plaza we saw how it was dominated by a building by a star architect, a great Richard Meier. The plaza was a great setting for the building to be the protagonist, reflected even in its name. Despite officially being called *Plaça dels Àngels* after the Convent of the Angels that has occupied the square since the fifteenth century, everyone now knows it as MACBA Plaza. The museum swallowed it all up from the outside. Unlike the unity of Meier's building, which was tightly sealed, the other half of the square was dominated by a sort of postmodern pastiche. There was a small fifteenth-century chapel that had been renovated in the late 1980s, and a "screen building" with rather vague uses dating from the 1990s. Nothing fit. Stone, brick, disproportionate glass doors, decorative marble slabs in the facade, a festival of materials organizing a series of spaces that created some fabulous nooks. Complexity, palimpsest, and superimposition of layers of all kinds made up the place where the archive was located, in contrast with the granite structure of one colour with a single name where the museum was located. Internally, in fact, the museum building took its name from the architect who designed it: the Meier Building. Meanwhile, the complex that stood before it had many different names that constantly changed: CED, CEDOC, Screen

Building, Convent, etc. What happened there was not so easy to name. Not least using the name of an architect who lives on the other side of the world. One of the most surprising things about the relationship between these two spaces is that when you arranged to meet someone to go to an exhibition, everyone got it wrong. Everyone went into the museum, and when you explained that actually, it was right in front, everyone was adamant: 'But there is nothing in front of the MACBA'.

Once we have located the mental and physical space in which the project is situated, we begin to approach the archive. In the street, from a certain distance, we can situate the archive of a public institution according to a series of functions and definitions. The three functions are clear. The first is to conserve documentation from destructive attacks of all kinds: biological, political, natural disasters, or the passage of time. The second function is to catalogue: adding information to this documentation so that we can find it with relative ease when we need it. And the third is to disseminate this documentation so that someone knows that it exists. Can we look for something that we do not know exists? In theory we can, can we not? In fact, this is precisely what we must do, is it not?

In addition to fulfilling these three functions, the institutional archive is traversed by definitions. First and foremost, we understand that the archive is a place. It is an entity that exists and occupies a physical space. 'Follow me', I told the visitors. We were facing a corner of the plaza that has been used as an improvised public lavatory for twenty-five years. Hundreds of thousands of litres of piss are patiently emptied against the archive, day after day. This intimate relationship, this marking of territory, is causing the steel that forms the structure to begin to decompose. The archive is a physical place, and it is precisely from this place that the first intervention in the exhibition can be seen. A window in the archive allows those inside to see that it is pissed on every day, regularly. It's a question of enjoying the users' relationship with the archive, from the inside. Beyond the archive as a place to look at, the ability to activate it as a place from which to look,



Documentation of the piece *Coses que passen*.
Vinil, label, 2021. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán

from close at hand (I'm being pissed on) to furthest away (documentation supporting metaphysical speculations). In fact, the first thing we found when we finally entered the exhibition was this: a viewpoint. The piece that gave the overall project its name, *Coses que passen* (Things That Happen), was a hole. Just inside, there was a large window covered with black vinyl leaving an opening in the centre in a 16:9 aspect ratio through which you could see everything that was happening in the plaza. The film lasted 243,360 minutes. The total time of the exhibition. The archive as a place from which to observe what is happening, mediated by a conventional proportion that conveys the fiction constructed using images. We found the counter mould of this fiction just behind it, where there was a screen of the same size nailed to the wall, at the same height. *Crédits* (Credits) was a video featuring the titles of all the documents in the historical holdings. All the ones that are catalogued, that is. The ones that have a title, at least, and a document to certify it. All the documents therefore appeared in the form of credits, ninety minutes of them. In time-honoured fictional fashion, the titles of the documents went from bottom to top, and, in contrast to the pretentious credits that appear at the beginning of films, these titles of documents appeared disguised as technical credits, the ones that come up at the end of any fiction, archival documents seen as the grafters who make the fiction possible. A fiction that, in the archive, can take the form of a doctoral thesis, curatorial thesis or thesis of any kind. This video was accompanied by ninety minutes of music, during which the different cinematographic genres took visitors through all the moods and clichés of fiction. Romantic, horror, sci-fi, sensual, epic, and dramatic soundtracks guided them through the feelings that accompany archive research. During research you lose your concentration but not your ability to make up a story: someone enters, and you fall in love, you find a document that fits what you are looking for and you start to feel epic, or a suspicious movement sets alarm bells ringing.

Once we had seen these two pieces, we saw that the exhibition was completely empty. Full and empty at the same time, as there

were a number of exhibition displays (especially pedestals) that contained nothing. On each of these display elements was a pink poster announcing future activities. A public program of activities that affected the exhibition instead of an exhibition with small appendices in the form of parallel activities. In the archive world, the world was upside down. Next to the video there was one that read, *Result of the Document Infection Workshop*. One of the aims of the project was to make the functions of the archive explicit by turning it around. To turn the focus around and focus on what was intended to be invisible: the mechanisms that shape the archive itself. Looking at an infected document through the eyes of the archive—and, more specifically, from the viewpoint of the conservation department—we analyse the data that a document may contain, and how it interrelates. And what hierarchy we establish. We understand a document to contain a set of data. It is presented to us in a hierarchical way at the moment we *naturally* exterminate the fungus from a document in order to preserve the sign (text-image) it contains and that gives it meaning. But we cannot overlook the vantage point from which we establish this meaning. Beyond the data that the author of the document initially produced, an infected document contains a biological process that is taking place, happening at that precise moment. From the viewpoint of its primary mission, the archive is much more interested in this process, and, for this reason, I wanted to show a document—any document, but one that was infected. With this in mind, I asked them to show me a document with these characteristics. The document they brought me was a completely normal printed A4. Far from my expectations of fungi and fantastic lichens, my eyes perceived nothing. Nothing but a tiny, 2-mm brown shadow. That was where the infection was. I complained that it was hardly spectacular. The archive was exaggerating. This attitude disappeared when I was forcefully told. 'In 200 years, this tiny mark you see here will have caused the total destruction of the document'. Not only could the archive see invisible things; it dealt with times that were completely different to ours. The eye of the archive



Dissemination material from the *taller d'infecció de documents* workshop held on 10 and 17 June with Isabel Ayala. Image courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



Documentation of the publication *Aparicions*. Artist book, 490 p. 29,7 cm x 21 cm, 2021. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



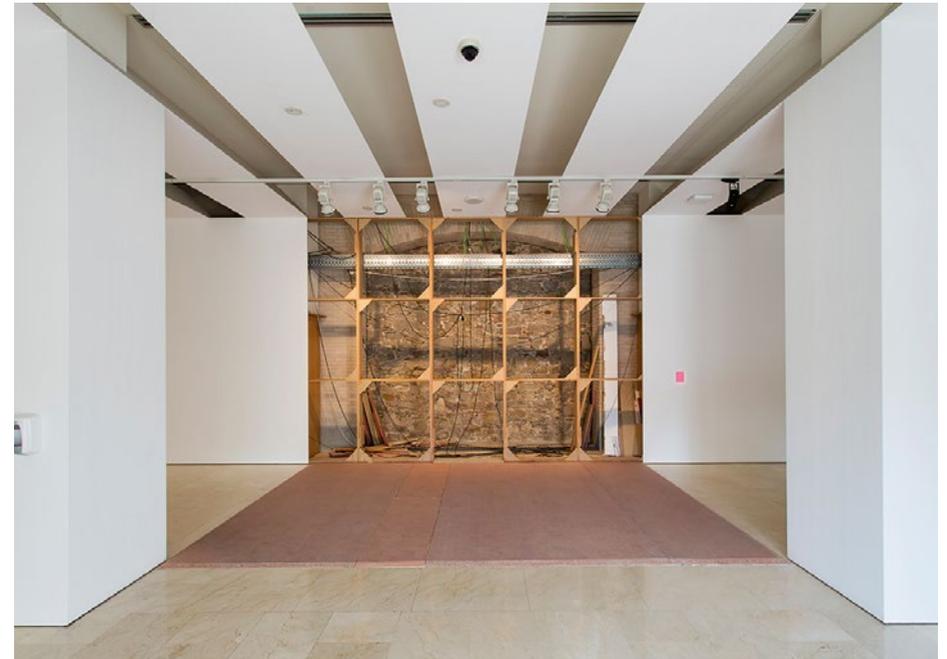
Documentation of the *taller d'infecció de documents* workshop. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



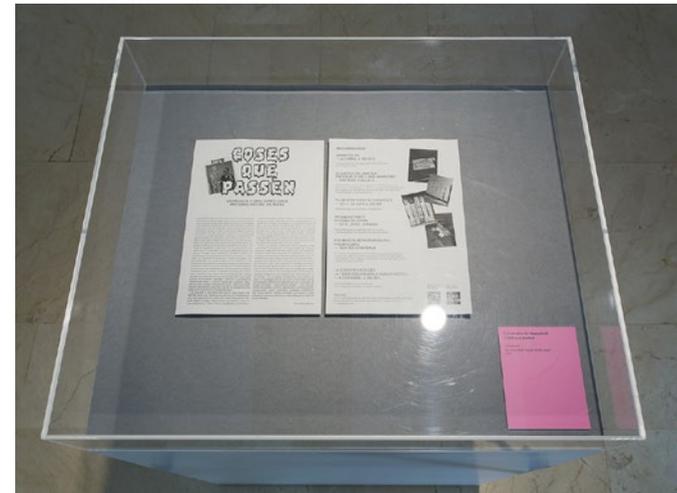
Dissemination material of the *Metanoise party* workshop. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán

could see things we could not and had a completely different sense of chronology—forwards and backwards. This document had to be exhibited. The problem came when the document in question turned out not to be part of the institution’s historical holdings. The historical holdings consisted of all the documentation generated by the museum in the course of its activity—that is, the documents produced by the museum itself. Due to the conserving nature of the museum, all this documentation had been created in a totally aseptic context, which it had at no point left to become infected. There were no infected documents in the historical holdings. Frustration. This fact eliminated any possibility of exhibiting an infected document. Unless the Conservation Department caused the very infection it had been eradicating for the last 25 years—25 years of accumulating knowledge about how to eliminate biological processes turned inside out in a moment. And that’s how the *Document Infection Workshop* came about. The research process made it possible to find the formula to infect documents quickly, since infecting is not that easy: it is a question of time. Initially, the service provided documents from the archive itself to infect, and then, to open the process to participants, in the second session we infected documents they had brought from home. Photos of dad, bills, love letters, everything could be infected. As though it were an exercise in fundamental rights, to be able to maintain the anonymity of the documents that were to be infected, a private space was set up for use by the participants. A curtain created a quiet, anonymous space for infection. Once we had infected the documents, we chose one and placed it in the exhibition display case. The whole process called for scrupulous control, as the infection had to be controlled and not transferred to other documents in the museum archive or to those from participants’ homes.

The second display case in the exhibition was also empty, and the poster read something like, *Result of the MetaNoiseParty*. Given that the second mission of the archive is to catalogue—that is, to manage the set of controlled data that allows us to describe



Documentation of the installation *Brutícia fixada pel departament de conservació*. Site Specific Instalation, 2021. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



Full room of the current exhibition to the showcase. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán

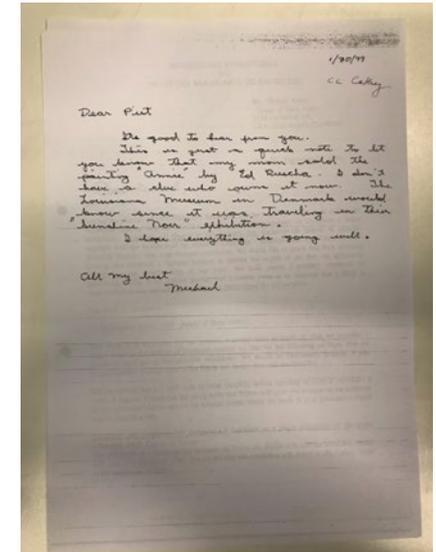
a document, with all the political and epistemological implications that this entails, enabling us to introduce it into an environment where it is to coexist with other documents, and to access and relate to it. In short: the archive is also the data added to the document, the metadata that makes up a system. This activity was described, more or less, as follows:

Meta noise refers to metadata that is considered irrelevant. It is present in systems that do not have a controlled vocabulary, and takes the form of misspellings, joke tags or terms that only a small community of people understand. But what does it mean to tag documents? What are the political implications? Is folksonomy cool or is it useless? By describing the world are we creating it? These questions are the driving force of the activity, which takes as its starting point the case study of the collective construction of the common vocabulary of keywords used by the museum's historical holdings.

Here, the protagonists are series of metadata, which, as its name suggests, goes *beyond* data. Metadata constitutes the position of the document in a system and, by establishing a position (and, in the process, a series of relationships with other documents), constructs its specific meaning. These themes were discussed with all the participants in order to find new words that could describe the documents. The selection of documents to be described was: a letter from Michael Asher explaining to the director of the museum that the piece he is looking for, by Ed Ruscha, has been sold by his mother; the handwritten notes of Jorge Ribalta (head of public programs at the museum) from the first meeting where the possibility of setting up the museum archive was discussed; a rubber stamp-shaped object bearing the text "Approved: The Director"; and others. After a long process of collective tagging and selection of the word to be entered into the system for use in the future, the term :(was chosen. At the



Dissemination material of the *Metanoise party* workshop.
Image courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



Letter from Michael Ascher explaining that the painting they are looking for by Ed Ruscha is for sale in his house. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán



Documentation of the *taller d'infecció de documents* workshop. Photography courtesy of Enric Farrés Durán

end of the workshop, all the work material was placed in the display case.

The final mission of the archive is dissemination. Why do we preserve and catalogue if no one can see it? If we understand that this is a technical job that requires results, someone has to see it, but we could also imagine a solipsistic curator who does it for sheer pleasure, for free, or a cataloguer who catalogues for the love of the catalogue. And the last definition points to people: the archive is people. Some work with documents, making drastic decisions while conserving, cataloguing and disseminating—constituting the memory of the future!—and others consult the archive, they are the users who go through functions and definitions, using the documents to generate fictions with multiple meanings and significances. From the archive as a place and its relationship with people comes the notion of hospitality. People are the protagonists of the publication *Appearances*, created jointly with the Publications Department—whose job it is to make catalogues—and the team of designers. The publication features all the pages of institutional and technical credits in the catalogues published by the museum in the last 25 years. An artist's book made up of pages of pain, certifying who is who and who did what for posterity, accompanied by a beautiful text by (here I was going to write the name of the author of the text, but since I decided not to use any names in this story, I prefer not to—I hate narrative texts full of irrelevant names that I don't know, in the hope that some unknown person reads this text...) that says something like, *From here on, nothing is fiction*.

Finally, in the last display case, a kind of déjà vu appears. Suddenly, the paper we have in our hands, the hand-guide we picked up at the entrance and glanced at before folding it in half, appears perfectly glazed and preserved. Simultaneously, our dirty hands touch and do not touch the document, it is multiple and it is unique, it is now and it is many years from now.

The hand-guide says something like this:

Things That Happen is a public program of activities, a physical space and a virtual space to think about the format of the archive itself and how it relates to other contexts of visibility and exchange. The archive is a way of accessing information, as is what we understand by the exhibition, the book, or the radio program. Given that an archive is by definition open, and that the user has permanent access to the content, what does it mean to show an archive? What are we showing? What are we showing it to? What is shown, what is hidden and how is it shown? It is a commonplace that the archive, in its processes, is imagined as and wants to be invisible, it wants to allow access and not be accessed, and it is in this invisibility that we stand, welcoming it in order to be able to perceive its characteristics. It is here that we realize that, in the course of the working process, we have—naturally?—been generating documents. And, as an activity carried out by the producer-museum, we will be conserved, catalogued, and made visible in the historical archive. It seems inevitable that the river-archive will end up flowing into the system it describes, blending with everything that surrounds it.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Intention: to write this text without consulting any documents. Without entering the archive, from the outside.

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HOW CAN CO- OWNERSHIP AND *ARTE/S* BE PRACTICED IN THE ARTS? A CONVERSATION WITH KATYA EV AND AGENCY

Lotte Bode

As the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA) is driven by the ambition to rethink the museum as a complex of relationships and to reimagine collecting as a process of mutual collaboration in line with the spirit of *The Constituent Museum*,¹ researcher Lotte Bode of M HKA engages in conversation with artist Katya Ev and the association Agency, two parties who radically rethink the notion of ownership, authorship and the collective in different ways. Since M HKA integrated Katya Ev's performance *Augenmusik* into the collection, the museum has developed a strong relationship with her, and currently she is developing new work that will be co-owned by a group of creators. Agency has collected thirty years of research surrounding the topic of intellectual property, and is preparing to found a cooperative that could manage their depot. As Katya Ev and Agency's founder, Kobe Matthys, meet each other for the first time, they find out that their practices intertwine and enhance each other in multiple ways.

LOTTE BODE: Katya, a few years ago your performance *Augenmusik* (2016) was integrated into the collection of M HKA.² Because the work is site-specific, linked to a certain political and social context, and connected to different or what you call "derivative" art works, the archiving of the work presented a huge challenge for you as an artist as well as for me and my colleagues from M HKA's collections department. This became a motivation for you to rethink the question of ownership in your upcoming work. Can you explain how?

KATYA EV: The performance *Augenmusik* is a site- and context-specific performance that took place in the streets of Paris after the Bataclan attacks in 2015, which were followed by the declaration of a nationwide "state of emergency" in France that lasted for eight months. The performance invoked the controversies of

Katya Ev and
Kobe Matthys,
Brussels,
2022.
Photography
courtesy of
Lotte Bode



the security state, opposing it to individual agency by the use of a strong symbolic signifier of the state power, namely flashing police lights. Bach's polyphonic composition *Die Kunst der Fuge* was playing simultaneously with the police lights and became audible only when all the lights came together. *Augenmusik* was a collective, unsanctioned action that took over the whole city. The multi-layered piece engaged music, urban mapping, and negotiating with police and governmental authorities.³

As the context-specific character of the work is linked to the political situation and the geographical particularities of the place, each reactivation is an open process that I see as a collaboration between the artist and the hosting institution. Eventually, performers, political stakeholders, experts, and so on can be involved as well. The process calls for the collective weaving of a new narrative and rethinking mutual engagements and care.

The trajectory you, Lotte, and I effectuated together with M HKA revealed how distinct the process of creating a live piece is from developing different forms of sustainability. It allowed us to realize how demanding it is to translate liveness into language, in the form of a score or instructions, or into an archive, in terms of labour, resources, and engagement and conceptual vision, both from the artist and the institution. We also recognized the importance of this translation for transmitting of an original context-specific performance to a secondary audience. This experience indeed paved the way for me to develop my upcoming performance, *Lactating Bodies*, which includes questions from the early stage of its conception, as a conceptual part of the work. I envision these in collaboration with TWIID, a legal sounding board in the arts.

LB: In *Lactating bodies* you reflect on how the artwork can be co-owned and co-authored by all creators involved. This group of



Katya Ev,
Augenmusik,
Paris, 2016.
Photography
courtesy
of Mathilde
Geldhof



Katya Ev, *Augenmusik*, Paris, 2016.
Photography courtesy of Alex Martinelli

co-creators consists of you, lactating mothers, dramaturges with legal backgrounds, other artists, and so on. How will this co-ownership develop?

KE: The project of *Lactating bodies* developed from my artistic research on economic, legal, and social relations around breast-feeding. Conceived as a participatory performative setup devoted to the physicality, aesthetics, and performativity of lactation, it brings together questions about remunerated labour, body labour, and invisibility.

The conceptual idea of the performance expanded through collective reflection that took place in the framework of the yearlong trajectory *Emptor* by Jubilee.⁴ We foresee a residency with five lactating mothers, scenographers, dramaturges, and a performer, in which we will experiment together and create the scenography, dramaturgy, and *modus operandi* of the performance. The collision of perspectives between cross-disciplinary professionals and the persons who are the primary focus deepens and reveals hidden complexities in relation to the monetary value of the body labour involved in breast-pumping, and to co-ownership questions of donated milk and co-authorship of the performance. In a discussion group we held at a collective reflection moment organised by Jubilee, mothers even claimed the milk was the child's property. So, the way in which the ownership of this body liquid is questioned can go really far.

KOBE MATTHYS: It is an interesting thought to also include the nonhuman agencies as part of this entanglement. For example, bacteria make a big part of the mother's milk. The intestinal microbiome in the gut of the child is mostly depending on these bacteria.

KE: Yes, with the discussion we opened a Pandora's box!

KM: That may be why Agency ended up with 2000 boxes! We have dealt with all kinds of questions on co-ownership. From an ecological point of view, everything exists in entanglements, which are always reciprocal. The “Creatio ex nihilo” doctrine behind authorship law is based on the premise that an artist can create something “out of the nothingness”. But this is an extractivist, colonial, modern point of view. Legal researcher Sarah Vanuxem (2018 and 2020) has found many traces that non-modern notions of property are based on ecology. Some of us might recognize this in old notions: for example, when we say “the properties of a plant”, we refer to the ecological characteristics of that plant. Only since the introduction modern law has the notion of property become associated with questions of ownership. In this modern law of property, only humans can be “subjects” and own “objects” labelled as nonhuman. There is a cosmology that divides nature from culture. This is a very Western European, colonial construct that plays a significant role in the current craziness of world capitalism.

LB: Kobe, could you explain how Agency, the association you initiated in 1992, works and how it addresses the questions you just raised?

KM: It's important to situate Agency's practice in the political struggles around the time it was founded. In 1994, the World Trade Organisation implemented the same trade rules in most nation-states around the world, implying that the enclosures of modern property laws were set as default. This has been the new condition in which artists, too, have been operating since the 1990s. Before that, if an artist wanted to claim authorship for something, the person in question had to register some sort of deposit or archive. In the past, if an artist did not care to reg-



Katya Ev, *Lactating Bodies* at 'Assembly of Practice' organised by Emptor by Jubilee, BUDA, Kortrijk, 2022

ister, then intellectual property would simply not be applied. From a legal point of view, today, the simple act of creation is considered the equivalent of a registration. The logic according to which authorship exists by default forces artists who intend to walk different paths to fabricate alternative juridical constructs in line with those paths. Artists have no choice but to become legally involved if they want to embark on different adventures. A very known example of such an effort is the open-source General Public License (GPL).

LB: Agency creates “assemblies”, gatherings that combine performances and exhibitions and depart from the research you conduct on specific cases. Could you elaborate on this?

KM: Agency invokes the ecology of practices through being present with material things.⁵ Our trajectory started in improvisational performance and participatory practices. Because such practices are not fixed but ongoing, the modern framework of the intellectual property regime directly endangers the mode of existence inherent to them. As soon as these practices are subjected to that system, they lose their meaning and are forced to transform. If constraints inherent to practices are rewritten externally from this practice imposed by law, this kills the ecological mode of existence of a practice. Aside from improvisational practices, many other practices suffer from this problem, which brings about a worldwide potential extinction of many practices. Philosopher of science Vandana Shiva (1993) has called this the introduction of “the monocultures of the mind”. How can we prevent more practices from disappearing? Agency creates alliances with human and nonhuman practices that offer resistance in different ways.⁶

Practices are singular, and we don’t attempt to find a “one-fits-all solution”, as the Copyleft movement attempted

to do. That movement defended the general principle that nothing should be enclosed, that everything should be available and open. For computer software programmers, who initiated the movement, this idea might make sense, because their code work is based on existing modular algorithmic programming loops based on machine instructions, but the same application of Copyleft could disturb, for example, the ecology of an illusionist’s practice. If a magician shares their tricks with everyone, the audience loses their interest. Practices are always situated parts of modes of existence.

KE: What you are formulating very clearly are considerations I was intuitively arriving at as we went through the acquisition process of *Augenmusik*. Improvisation is important in *Augenmusik*, which raises the concern that it doesn’t make sense for artworks of this kind to be transferred in a classical way. They require caring to make the work develop and live further. This calls for *taking care* of the work rather than *having* it, because *having* the work doesn’t bring about any interesting consequences.

KM: Exactly, I think it is comparable with intending to “collect” yoga. Is that important? Yoga is all about a living practice that keeps on transforming many bodies every day.

LB: Agency was recently approached by the Flemish Community about purchasing an assembly for their collection. You have heard about the questions Katya dealt with regarding the acquisition of *Augenmusik*. Hearing those questions helped you reflect on the problems that accompany the practice of collecting art. What agreements did you make with the Flemish Community regarding the acquisition of this assembly?



Agency, Assembly, KIOSK, Gent, 2018.
Photography courtesy of Rachel Gruijters

KM: How can we imagine collections differently? How can collection policy support the actual facilities that practitioners have already developed for practice, instead of centralising everything in one general depot? We share some of these problems with the collection process of *Augenmusik*. On the one hand, there is the problem that our assemblies are ongoing and thus variable. The Flemish Community would like to obtain a kind of fixed road map for their collection, but our adventures of collective assemblies cannot be defined in advance. We can physically transfer a kind of “manual”, but essentially it implies that if someone desires to invoke an assembly via Agency’s practice, it should be done with the collaboration of the Agency association and follow the modes of existing inherent to its situated practice.

On the other hand, there is the problem of the activations and the related costs. Agency proposes something comparable to a prepaid card system that is used by telecom providers. The Flemish Community owns a prepaid card and this budget allows citizens to access Agency’s research and activate an assembly.

KE: How did you write this manual? At a certain point you will have to transfer a version of that text to the Flemish Community. Will you modify the manual with each performance?

KM: We wrote a document that collects traces of various past experiences creating these gatherings with different artistic and/or nonartistic practices. The text is not a series of fixed instructions, but rather deals with the constraints one faces in collaborating with Agency.

KE: This agreement could apply to the question of how *Augenmusik* could develop. The work can only be understood by accumulation, by the act of doing, and by keeping all options open to add other ways of adapting the work. What if the association would no longer exist?

KM: The future of Agency is hard to predict. If the association stops existing, the practice may or may not disappear. For example, Brazilian dialogue theatre maker Augusto Boal developed a practice in the 1950s called *The Theatre of the Oppressed* and wrote a book about it (1974). After his death, other people continued to experiment independently with these kinds of practices. There are very different branches of this practice in various situated environments. Even Boal had himself already adapted his practice when he was a refugee in France. Although *The Theatre of the Oppressed* was initiated by an individual, there are today many associations that keep this practice alive.

LB: My question may be indebted to the modern interpretation of authorship, but what about the integrity of the artist?

KM: We are more concerned about the practices' modes of existence being under attack by enclosures than the artist's integrity. It is a gift to entangle yourself with a practice, since it makes you experience something transformative, which is what matters in the end. If a practice is no longer generative, it will probably no longer be practiced.

LB: Your work with Agency over the past thirty years has led you to develop an extensive depot of research, which is the basis for Agency's past assemblies, exhibitions, and publications. You are currently preparing the foundation of a cooperative society to manage this collec-



The Practicothèque under construction, Brussels, 2022.
Photography courtesy of Lotte Bode

tion of boxes. Before we talk about the cooperative, could you tell us how the depot has taken shape?

KM: We are building alliances with other practices. That is why we ended up building what we call a “praticothèque”. Just like there is a *herbothèque* with herbs or a *bibliothèque* with books, we have a praticothèque with practices. The boxes contain traces of practices and the ways in which practitioners defend ecologies or these practices’ modes of existence, which mostly happens when there is a problem or controversy. The praticothèque is Agency’s depot for research, composed in cooperation with other researchers.

LB: In the past thirty years, you never sold any of the boxes to collections. By founding a cooperative society, you are able to share the research with other practitioners or researchers. Where did the idea originate to found a cooperative that could manage Agency’s praticothèque?

KM: It is matter of mutual aid. Have you read *Mutual aid* by the Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin (1902)? According to Kropotkin, most human entanglements are based in cooperation. In the Middle Ages, Russian peasant cooperatives, or “artels”, were a way of organising collective life. In his research, Kropotkin analyzed how people pursued mutuality and were motivated to do this *in spite of* anything else. People think: “we can no longer stand to stand a side, there is nothing worse than doing nothing.” By this Kropotkin means that motivation is not specifically based on heroism, love, or family, but on various kinds of kinship. There is a solidarity that concerns the community at large, rather than, for example, the need to protect only one’s own family. Evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1988) confirms that nonhumans have similar motivations for

living in cooperation. The biological term “symbiosis” refers to how nonhumans live together like this.

KE: In contemporary Russian, an artel is a voluntary association of people for joint work or other collective activities, often with a common income and shared responsibility. The word “artel” either has an Eastern origin attributed to the Slavic verb *roti-sya*, which means “to promise” or “to swear” and refers to a mutual guarantee that comes from the noun *rota*, which means “oath”. Or, it boasts a Western origin, from the Italian *artiere*, “craftsman”.

KM: That’s very interesting.

KE: Initially, artels emerged on the basis of community, kinship, and national ties. With time, especially with the development of a market economy, these ties expanded. From what I could research, artels have existed from the fourteenth century, and they were initially established as hunting and fishing artels. Afterwards, they spread among masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, and so on. In the east, in Siberia and the Urals, there were also artels for gold mining and salt production. At the end of the nineteenth century and before the October Revolution, there were even industrial and creative artels of the intelligentsia. Since early 1920s, Soviets applied the term artel to various production cooperatives. In agriculture, the notion of agricultural artel coincided with the term *kolkhoz* (collective farm), which is a very different type of collective organisation and is far removed from the original notion of artel. In the 1970s and 80s, the term artel was only allowed for gold, mining, and as an alternative to *kolkhoz*. In contemporary Russian, an artel sounds like a relic of antiquity that does not refer to any commonly existing phenomena.



Kobe Matthys and Katya Ev in front of the practicothèque under construction, Brussels, 2022.
Photography courtesy of Lotte Bode

KM: The premodern notion of artel is interesting. The Agency association is itself an artel, and so is the foundation of the cooperative that will own the practicothèque. The artels we construct are what is possible within the very limited current juridical system of the Belgian territory. By setting up a cooperative aside from the already existing association, which is a NGO, new forms of mutuality can grow.

LB: Under Belgian law, a cooperative is a legal construction, which aims to meet a specific need of the co-operators. It pursues not the greatest possible profit, but a common goal that should benefit the shareholders themselves, a goal they want to achieve by cooperating with partners. A cooperative has its own legal personality and has at least three founders who must contribute “something”, but there is no minimum capital. Shareholders can enter or exit the cooperative without too many formalities.⁷ What involvement is required from the co-operators of the cooperative you are founding?

KM: There are two different types of co-operators. On the one hand, there are the founding co-operators who can bring things into the depot. They have more say in the long run and their role is to guard the goal of this cooperative. Next to that, there is a kind of membership that is comparable to a library membership, which grants access but requires less involvement. The two kinds of co-operators have a different fare. In a cooperative, you can have multiple practices making use of the same facilities, as long as they respect a common agreement, which can be formulated in the goal of the cooperative.

LB: Katya, what can institutions offer in the story of co-creation and co-ownership according to you?

KE: The relation to property strongly defines the economy of visual arts that functions by the same principle as the larger economy, namely, by private property. Notions such as co-ownership and co-authorship are central to shift from an economy to an ecology of artistic practices.⁸ From the logic of one sovereign self, we move towards an ecosystem that can be defined as having “interdependent cycles of resources and energy”.⁹

Lactating Bodies can be seen as a poetic gesture of commoning intimate body labour. How can the performativity of lactation belong to an art institution, a space historically weighted with patriarchal narratives and representations of the female body? And what role and responsibilities can art institutions take on in co-creating new societal ecologies via contemporary participatory performative practices? By including lactating people in the process of creation, I can give them the opportunity to determine for themselves the conditions in which they will appear. An institution can create a nest for such a process, engaging with the creation from the early stages and becoming a caregiver for the artwork (and the artistic team) and, later, also for the mothers participating in the performance. This would reverse ingrained roles (mothers, as caregivers, would become care-receivers), shifting towards a fairer social reality. “Care” involves more than assisting the presentation of the performance, expanding to include notions of hospitality, protecting the sensitivities of all parties, creating a thoughtful legal frame, reframing lactation as labour, and protecting the sustainability of the performance and its liveness.

In Russian we have a saying that goes something like: “Don’t bring your own teapot to a foreign monastery.” It means you should not come to foreign territory with your own set of rules. When I collaborate, I aim to create a process that includes the institution in this ecology from the work’s very conception. It interests me to work with constraints and to get to know the

limitations of institutional frameworks on all levels, be it labour budgets, architectural space, and so on. To weave something interesting from that makes the work itself context-specific and reflects on the conditions in which it exists. In this scenario, the institution would be actively involved in the creation, and becomes a caretaker of a practice and the way it can evolve through time.

LB: Thank you very much, Katya Ev and Kobe Matthys.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Constituent Museum. *Constellations of Knowledge, Politics and Mediation*. 2018. An ePUB published by Valiz, Amsterdam (www.valiz.nl) and L’Internationale Online (www.internationaleonline.org)
- 2 The work is part of the Flemish Community Collection, a public collection deposited primarily at public institutions. Through this arrangement, the collection is made physically accessible and visible.
- 3 More information about the performance *Augenmusik* can be found [here](#).
- 4 Jubilee is a platform for artistic research based in Brussels. In May 2022, Jubilee organised a collective reflection together with BUDA on the relationship between the artist and artwork, with the practice of Katya Ev and Clémentine Vaultier at its core, titled “Assembly of Practice: whose artwork?” *Emptor* is a collective research project that focuses on the question of how to practice “property” for a sustainable visual arts field, in which both Katya Ev and Agency are involved. As Jubilee did not receive renewed subsidies from the Flemish Community, the organisation will cease to exist from 2023 onwards.
- 5 Kobe Matthys has spoken more about the notion of an “ecology of practices” in an interview in *L’Art même* (Matthys 2022), stating: “Agency organises assemblies around the operational consequences of the modern

apparatus of property rights for an “ecology of practices”, a notion derived from [Félix] Guattari’s book *Les Trois Écologies* (ed. Galilée, 2008). For him, ecology refers not only to the environment, but also to social relations and mental health. (...) The concept of ecology of practices prevents the reduction of one practice to another. Each practice is singular and made possible by a milieu, an environment or a mode of existence.” (Author’s translation)

- 6 The so-called “monkey selfie” is an example of such nonhuman practices. When in 2011 photographer David Slater went to Tangkoko National Park in Indonesia to photograph crested macaques, the monkey named Naruto managed to take some autoportraits with Slater’s camera. Slater published some of those photographs but was later sued for violating copyright law by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) together with primatologist Antje Engelhardt. For more on the relation between nonhumans and the concept of intellectual property, see again Matthys’ interview in *L’Art même* (2022).
- 7 See “Cooperatieve venootschap,” accessed on 13 October 2022, <https://www.liantis.be/nl/zelfstandig-worden/ondernemingsvorm-kiezen/cooperatieve-venootschap>
- 8 Here, Katya cites the project description of Emptor: ‘An artistic research on the ecology of artistic practice’, viewed 13 October 2022, https://jubilee-art.org/?rd_project=emptor&lang=en.
- 9 This is a reference to ruangrupa’s notion of “ekosistem” (2022)

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ART AND ARCHIVE IN THE AGE OF FAKE NEWS

Steven ten Thije

There is a story, a myth, something I once read on a website, now lost in endless pages of google search. It is a story of Donald Trump who, when accusing Bashar al-Assad of being the first leader ever to use chemical weapons on his own population, was corrected by a journalist in the following manner. The journalist did not simply say, 'Mr. President, you are wrong'. Nor did the journalist correct the American President with the truth. Instead, this journalist replied with a small assignment, saying, 'Mr. President, please leave this building, and take this and that bus to this address, where you can buy a ticket and enter a museum. That museum is the Holocaust Museum. Please inspect the display very well and then ask yourself, was Assad really the first?'

As happens with myths, this story improves each time it is told, but the spine remains the same. The only institution capable of correcting the President's mistake beyond doubt was the museum. The house of the original document. The house of truth. From time to time, when thinking about the contemporary significance of the (art) museum and the archive, I am reminded of this story. The museum and the archive show things that, beyond anything else, and first and foremost, simply are what they are. So basic and pure as to produce the magic of truth.

A description of the inner workings of this magic have appeared before in history, in a way that is useful to recall. In 1939 two friends and also colleagues exchanged letters over a submitted article. These friends were Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. (Benjamin and Adorno 2006) At the time of writing, they were separated by an ocean, as Adorno already had fled to the United States together with the other editors of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the famous periodical of the Frankfurt School. The subject of the exchange between Benjamin and Adorno was unpleasant. Benjamin had been working for several years on what all his friends, including Adorno,

believed to be his magnum opus: the Arcades Project, a monumental study of nineteenth-century Paris that would illuminate less the city than the thinking and being of modernity. Benjamin had difficulty turning his endless notes, gathered during long sessions at the Parisian National Library, into a text. Finally, he had managed to produce a manuscript with the poet Baudelaire as its main protagonist. But Adorno and the other editors who read the text were not convinced, and Adorno took it upon himself to inform his friend of their concerns.

The main problem Adorno saw was that Benjamin had used a textual strategy that collapsed description and interpretation. Instead of introducing theory as the building block that would put the two in proper relation, the meaning of what was described miraculously appeared without mediation. In one dramatic line, Adorno tried to warn his friend, writing, ‘the work has situated itself on the crossroad between magic and positivism. This site is bewitched’.

Benjamin was heartbroken by the dismissal, which came on top of his already very dark state as Nazi Germany took over Europe. In a long letter, he tried to explain to Adorno what he had intended. Adorno had neglected one vital part of what he had been trying to do. Benjamin’s method was philological, inviting the reader to dive into the rich world of the detail of historical description. While captivated by this world of precision and detail, a world of minute facts, any further perspective would slowly be eclipsed until, suddenly, the text would burst forth with meaning like a lighting flash, illuminating the philosophical and political-philosophical truth of what was being read. Instead of placing the facts in a theory, he had placed fact after fact in a distinct order to create a reading experience capable of producing meaning and truth in a different manner. This strategy resembles the experience of a museum exhibition archive, where one is confronted with isolated pieces of information brought together in the mind of the reader/visitor.

Benjamin did not manage to convince his friend of his position. Nevertheless, the exchange offers a precise description of the strategy

invoked by the journalist in inviting Trump to allow himself to be corrected by visiting a museum. The journalist took Benjamin’s position, believing that by seeing the documents one after the other, and being drawn into their magical power of being simply what they are, Trump would at one point be struck by a lightning flash of truth.

The Living Archive

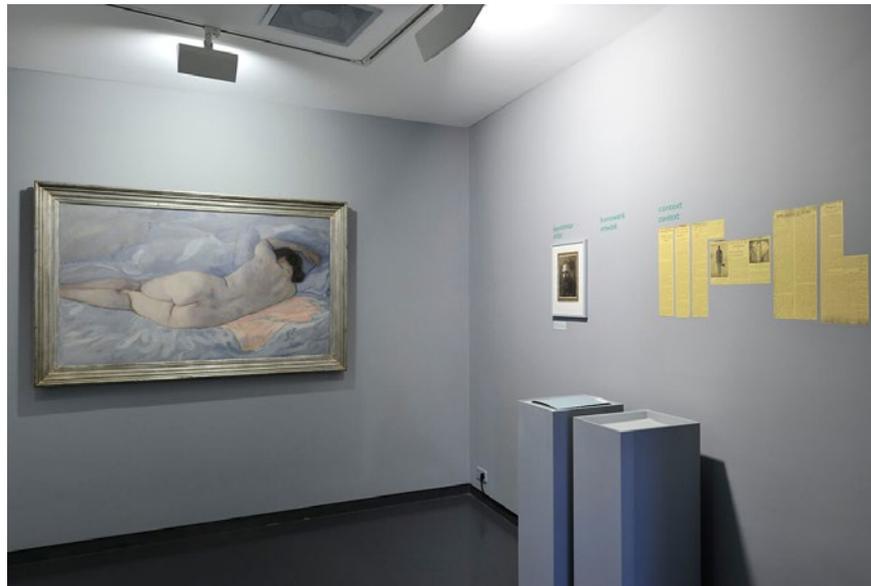
In recent years, the Van Abbemuseum has explored the affinity between the archive and the museum. This effort began with an exhibition series called *Living Archive*, in which Curator and Head of Library and Archive Diana Franssen produced a series of one-room exhibitions. Initially these exhibitions worked only with archival material. Later, they combined archives with art.

The first exhibition functioned as critical footnotes to the museum’s programme and vision. It took up, for instance, the famous exhibition by Jean Leering *De straat (The Street)* (1972), which reflected on the street as public space and was one of the first—if not the first—exhibitions to deal with a social-political phenomenon without the use of art. This exhibition, titled *De straat, vorm van samenleven (The Streets. A Form of Living Together)* (2005), demonstrated through archive material how the Leering’s 1972 exhibition had obtained a mythical status and questioned to what this was justified. (See Fletcher *et al.* 2009)

In this and other early exhibitions, the material maintained a more classical divide between the act of the “art” exhibition or “art-work”, on the one hand, and the *Living Archive* exhibition as an archival response, on the other. However, Franssen had already started to play with this distinction by combining methods to show art with strategies for showing archival material. In this, she was inspired by conceptual artists like Hans Haacke or Michal Asher who worked with archival material in their practice. The difference was that her role remained that of a curator in a municipal museum presenting information related to the history of the institution to the public. While the presen-



Exhibition view of *De straat, vorm van samenleven* (The Streets. A Form of Living Together) Van Abbemuseum, 2005. Photography courtesy of Steven ten Thije.



Exhibition view of *In Living Archive. Mixed Messages*. Van Abbemuseum, 2008. Photography courtesy of Steven ten Thije.

tations could be read as art installations (Franssen was originally also trained as an artist), they were presented and received as exhibitions.

Franssen later developed this strategy further by mixing artworks with archive material. In *Living Archive. Mixed Messages* (2008), for example, she presented Jan Sluijters' *Liggend Naakt* (*Receding Nude*) (1931), combining it with newspaper articles presented on the wall that critiqued the kind of nudity featured in the painting and debated whether such art was proper or offensive. The novelty for the Van Abbemuseum in these presentations was less that the exhibition was enriched with stories from the archive, and more that the fundamental logic and purpose of these exhibitions was to present archive and artworks on an even level, making the encounter between the two the main experience of the exhibition.

Bringing this back to the discussion between Adorno and Benjamin, the objective of the exhibition was not so much to introduce an argument or provide evidence for a theory, but to confront two kinds of documents that share situatedness in a time and space. Two documents—a painting and a newspaper article—invite us to experience the time that passed between their respective moments of origin. This creates a complex relationship, drawing together the original encounter between the painting and the article's author and the article's confrontation by a new agent: the visitor.

This visitor is then confronted with a new “document”, the exhibition itself, now construed as a third fact to reflect on, insofar as the article no longer has the news value it had in the 1930s. Here, the exhibition does not aspire to push the visitor towards one or another stance. The “flash” of the confrontation is that one realizes the primary quality of time, namely, that things and perspectives change. Today we no longer debate whether the work is offensive in these terms. This flash strikes us, however, because there is nevertheless a relationship between then and now.

The experience of the truth-quality of the original is different from the goal of the journalist's suggestion to Trump. There, the idea

was that the President would find the undisputed truth in the museum. What happened in the *Living Archive* series, in contrast, is that the visitor was not offered one truth but brought into an experience in which truth is both constructed and deconstructed. The documents are certainly true, yet what they convey is no longer truthful in the same manner as before. The “truth” has changed, which in turn can be considered a new truth, if of a different nature. The truth here is the realization that our reading of documents and the truth we find in them is contingent on our positions and values. We produce this truth as a private act in public, through personal experience in a public institution.

The Making of Modern Art

This quality of the *Living Archive* exhibitions thus points towards one of the possibilities of combining art and archive in art museums. This possibility opposes the original relationship between art, the museum, and truth. During the nineteenth century, the art museum developed in tandem with the academic discipline of art history, and it functioned as a laboratory for researching art while simultaneously presenting the most common disciplinary conclusions on the history of art. Just as Trump was supposed to find the truth on the historical use of chemical weapons, the visitor of the museum was supposed to find the truth about the history of art. Presenting the work in the museum took the works out of living history and showed their fixed position in the now properly described and defined evolution of art.

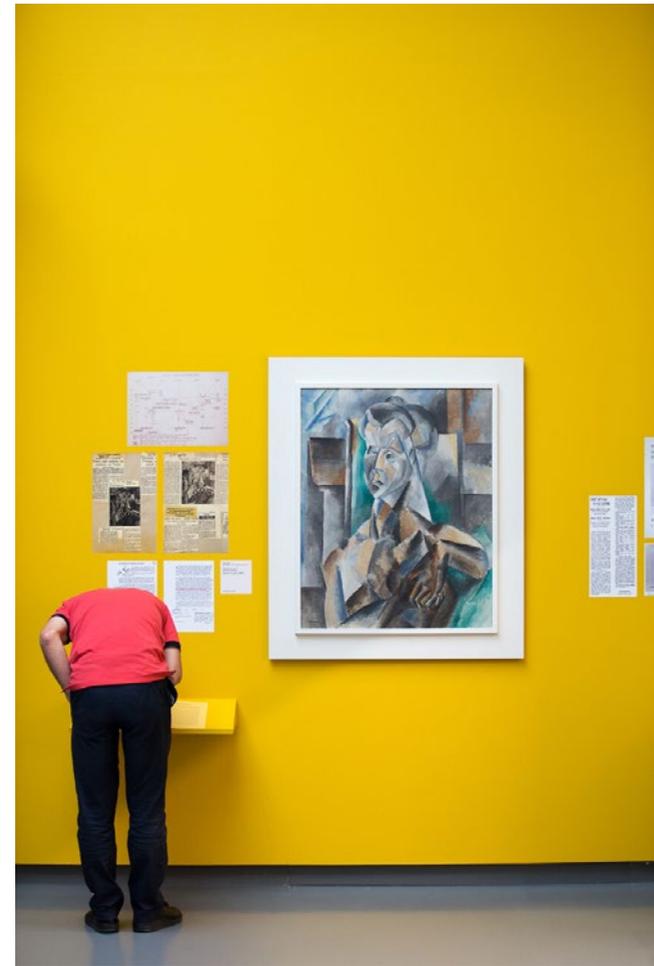
This view of the museum neglected the fact that the exhibition itself was a new historic act. The exhibition did not exist out of historical time, and the presentation of the work meant that the work was re-inserted into history anew. The effect of the museum on the original was that it created a kind of double life of the artwork. On the one hand, the exhibition showed the work as fixed in time, related to its original place in evolution, but at the same time it brought that state-

ment into the contemporary sociopolitical domain, such that the actively present past could define the present and the future. The exhibition did not present a truth but constructed it at the same time. While this truth is not necessarily untrue, it is always incomplete and selective. It shows one series of facts (i.e., artworks) as meaningful and coherent, without necessarily making evident that it could also be replaced by another series of facts. As a result, the series itself becomes a fact that produces new truths.

This philosophical issue that defines the museum was later addressed directly in the Van Abbemuseum, in an exhibition produced together with the Museum of American Art, Berlin (MoAA), entitled *The Making of Modern Art* (2017–2021). This exhibition functioned as collection display for several years and combined original works of the museum collection with a diverse group of copies. This combination drew from the institutional logic of the MoAA, which had previously only worked with copies.¹

This fact makes the MoAA an intriguing institution that has as one of its subjects a reflection on the truth-producing effect of exhibitions. The main material the MoAA reflects upon is the history of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) in its early phase, exploring the critical role of the latter museum in producing the hegemonic, i.e., “truthful,” narrative of Modern Art. What the MoAA noted is that the MoMA was effective in actively installing a specific interpretation of modern art history, with travelling exhibitions, sometimes also consisting of copies, that produced a dominant story of modern art. However, MoAA has also noted that this narrative lost force in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, not only because that narrative was replaced with a different one, but because the truth-producing quality of the museum itself was transforming.

The MoAA explored this waning force of the traditional form of truth production in the museum was primarily through the copy form. What the MoAA realized early on is that the copy is in some ways more interesting than the original. The copy has the remarkable quality of



Exhibition view of *Making of Modern Art*. Van Abbemuseum and Museum of American Art, 2017–2021. Photography courtesy of Steven ten Thije.

both presenting the original through reference and adding something new to it: the copy. In this way, the MoAA makes explicit what museums do all the time. When museums present an artwork from their collection, the work is inevitably inserted into a new context and narrative. The new situation is a kind of copy of the original, as the presentation of the work as a historical document refers the work back to its previous life while adding a new instance: the moment of the exhibition. The exhibition itself is a further cultural document, based on how its temporality adds a new layer of meaning to that which is produced by bringing together the material in the exhibition.

The MoAA makes this logic explicit by producing exhibitions with copies. Copies can also recreate entire exhibitions, thus presenting copies of exhibitions. It is tempting to see this strategy one that debunks the proposed narrative truth presented in the exhibitions copied by exposing its constructed nature. But this is not the case. The truth is not contested as irrelevant; it is merely presented as what it is: a production. The truth of the original exhibitions of MoMA and of the exhibitions of MoAA remains based on the facts that the copies still refer to something that really happened. It is the meaning of the event that is never fixed, which lives in the form of endless reinterpretations that reproduce the same truth or a new one. The question to ask is therefore not if what is seen is true, but more, which truth is presented here and why?

Virtual truth production

What MoAA makes explicit to the museum visitor is that each visit produces not only an individual museum experience, but also a dialogue on different possible readings of history and its meaning. We are invited to experience how the common horizon of public debates is not based on a given truth, but on the collective production of that truth in and by public institutions like museums. And, in the Internet-dominated world today, museums reconnect people to the material

facts of an event and the traces events leave in the form of documents and artworks.

The Internet functions like a museum on steroids. It forgets almost nothing, and each intervention is marked as an event that leaves a trace. At the same time, these events are so prolific that they become unintelligible for human consciousness and can only be “read” by algorithms. Whether this will replace our sense of historical experience and discussion of a shared understanding of truth is still unclear.

The archive and the museum have their own role to play in this contemporary recalibration of the mechanics of truth production. The digitizing of collections and archives produces a new territory in which museums can experiment with the presentation of material that are copies of original documents in their holdings. These new presentations are a new kind of exhibition that itself is a new event to be archived and noted as a new cultural fact. This happens in a delicate context where truth production is an instrument of different governments that seek to confuse the public. The “fake news” endemic we face misuses the possibility of public debate of a state of affairs based on the presentation of documents by rapidly producing an endless number of different possible interpretations and obscuring the possibility of arriving at shared truth. Here, truth production is frustrated insofar as the production of so many different truths at once makes truth itself useless.

In this precarious moment, I feel sympathy for the journalist who sought to counter one of the most destructive misusers of truth production by suggesting that the latter pay a visit to the classic institution that facilitates truth. Today, it must do so not with the goal of producing a singular truth, once and for all, but to allow the sociopolitical process of truth production to have clear, public, and accessible site in the life of a community. The extent to which museums are yet capable of fulfilling this function is an open question. What the above hopefully makes clear is that they at least have some methods for doing so, not least by strategically bringing together archival material and art.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For the world of ideas related to MoAA, see Benjamin 2013.

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LINKS TO CITED EXHIBITIONS

- [Living Archive: De Straat : Vorm van samenleven \(vanabbemuseum.nl\)](#)
- [The Making of Modern Art : Een verhaal over moderne kunst \(vanabbemuseum.nl\)](#)

SERIES FIVE:**EMBODIMENT**

The room is full of *things*; *things* in piles, in mounds, *things* that lean onto and into each other, *things* that lean against the walls, persistently pushing at the seams. There are boxes, containers, shelves, draws, racks, stacks, tables, chairs, rolls. The ceiling is low, exerting a subtle architectural pressure, almost as if the room were wearing a hat that is slightly too tight. If you stay a while, you will hear the sound of water pushing through the pipes, a sonic reminder that life exists above.

I spend a long time looking, lifting, pulling, sliding, untying, opening. I would not say that finding and meeting the archive for the first time was a deep encounter (Hartman 2018)¹, but certainly an attentive moment of excavation, one which generated more questions than what it answered.

Analysing

Picture a set of nesting dolls. The small infant lies hidden within bigger, more visible wooden bodies, its spatial threshold precisely calculated: the state, the university, the faculty, the department, the unit, the discipline, the archive. How we care for our children reveals much about our behaviours, desires, values, histories.

Lawyer Andrea Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2016) has argued that air can become institutional affect, a notion which rests on a capacity to engineer atmosphere. Air circulates information, meaning that analysing air is a process of opening knowledge. The dust particles hanging in the basement, attaching themselves to the *things*, carry more than their elements. They are pockets of institutional data, relaying a subtle absence of care, uncertain belonging, and a strong sense that the space has been forgotten for some time. This recognition produces emotional affects; there is a sadness that creeps up on you when you come to the realisation that this archive has never quite managed to become archive. It is stuck somewhere in the middle of devastation and preservation (Derrida 1995), a place where traces of past effort re-

main, future promise and potential exists, but limitations loom large. Will the future breathe this dust?

In the archive, one witnesses *things* struggling for spatial autonomy. They are forced into close proximity, into a lack of privacy: genres collapse, movements collapse, media collapse, forms collapse, materials collapse. Is this a loss of control or an intimacy of possibility?

A rumour exists that the *things*, in the near future, will be forcibly separated from each other, dislocated. The *things*, breaking free of their basement constraints, will form new spatial relations; the baby having flown the nest. One might stumble across them in libraries, receptions, offices, corridors. While they won't have to fight for breathing room or be obligated to inhale the dust, they will be alone. Perhaps even lonely? Apparently 24% of Swedes would like to have more friends (WSP 2019).

Some might say that loneliness is a small price to pay for visibility, for contemporary activation. But who has the power to fragment, disassemble, disentangle? Who decides what becomes visible? What stays hidden? What disappears?

Becoming

A generative ontological process of transformation.

What

What if

What if the archive could operate as sponge. A porous body which is maintained through its capacity to absorb and circulate flows of activity, activity which in turn, transforms the body's individual elements. Whole but holely.

What if we generated spongy methodologies of collaboration which allowed the archive to operate beyond the limits of its architectural structure; allowed it to interact with and produce publics, to be a hosting site.

What
 What if
 What if we committed to the archive becoming

Processes of learning
 Processes of maintenance
 Processes of publicness
 Processes of localising
 Processes of community
 Processes of research
 Processes of exhibiting

Let us not forget our motto:

Tradita innovare innovata tradere
Renew our heritage and pass it on renewed.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/saidiya-hartman-on-working-with-archives/>, accessed 26 March 2022.

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SURFACE MATTERS, OR HOW TO ENGAGE DIFFERENTLY WITH THE HIV/ AIDS ARCHIVE

Aimar Arriola

In my work as a curator and researcher of the HIV/AIDS archive, I have tried to employ a gaze and a mode of analysis that could somehow begin to remedy the questioning, inquisitive vision that medicine, but also cultural analysis, has projected onto the AIDS archive¹ since the start of the crisis as we know it. My attempt has been to make the gaze in my revision of the AIDS archive one that accepts the fragility of the practices and experiences under consideration as well as my own, which translates into the inability to fully account for them. Likewise, I have tried to offer a perspective that recognizes the distance of my vision and the fact that my access to the experiences under investigation is second hand—mediated by the material surface of photographs and documents, computer screens, and exhibition displays. Much of this work has been carried out in the context of the *AIDS Anarchive* project, which I have carried out jointly with Nancy Garín and Linda Valdes since 2012-2013 on the cultural and social dimensions of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crises in Spain and Chile, along with case studies from other contexts in Latin America. Some of the *AIDS Anarchive* project's primary milestones have taken place in the context of *L'Internationale* network, including a written essay, an exhibition at MACBA, and an exhibition in preparation at the Van Abbemuseum.² In addition, my reflections on the AIDS archive developed substantially in the context of my doctoral thesis, written between 2014 and 2019 and defended in 2019 at the Department of Visual Cultures of Goldsmiths, University of London (Arriola 2020).³

In my doctoral work, as well as in later texts and public actions, I have referred to this gaze or way of interpreting the AIDS archive as a surface reading. This is a conceptual reference to recent debates in the field of literary studies, but also in visual culture, which suggest the urgency of paying attention to what things say—to that which is manifest in a text, image, or object, rather than 'plunging into their depths'.

In my work around the AIDS archive, the surface has come to represent two things: the method of analysis known as surface reading, and the material surfaces I have dealt with in my work, ranging from the physical dimension of images, gestures, and objects that populate the archive to the books and exhibitions I have produced together with Linda and Nancy. My approach to these various surfaces has been one of surface reading. In the present text, I defend this epistemological position as a different, less violent, and less inquisitive way of relating to the archive.

The debate about surface reading as a method of analysis first appeared in the field of literary studies in a volume edited by Best and Marcus (2009),⁴ which opposed a particular notion of interpretation known as symptomatic reading and invited readers, instead, to look at and engage with the surface. Whereas symptomatic reading, as a method of reading literary texts firmly rooted in psychoanalysis and Marxism, assumes that ‘the most interesting aspect of a text [or a cultural object] is what it represses’, surface reading suggests attending to what is manifest in texts rather than ‘plunging into their depths’ (Best and Marcus 2009, p. 3). Best and Marcus identify Fredric Jameson as one of the foremost exponents of symptomatic reading, emphasising the latter’s assertion that the role of interpretation should be to seek ‘a latent meaning behind a manifest one’.⁵ In symptomatic reading, ‘what a text means lies in what it does not say, and thus, in order to determine meaning the interpreter is required to “rewrite the text in terms of a master code”’ (p. 3). For Best and Marcus, when symptomatic readers evaluate the elements present in a text, they do so by ‘constructing them as symbolic of something latent or concealed’. Conversely, Best and Marcus take surface to mean ‘what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible [...] what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*’ (p. 9).

Following Best and Marcus’s suggestion, my curatorial and academic work has examined images, gestures, and objects from the AIDS archive that constantly ask for my attention at the surface.

Symptomatic analysts may have studied the same images, gestures, and objects in the past, but only to question them about what they hide or conceal. My recent research and curatorial work have proposed to take surface reading as a method out of its niche in literary studies and into the field of visual culture, and especially to the analysis of the HIV/AIDS archive. With this epistemological shift, I do not seek to reveal the “hidden depths” of the AIDS archive. My role is not to return to the surface the deep history that the archive represses. Instead, I propose surface reading as a way of engaging differently with the HIV/AIDS archive. My defence in this text and in my curatorial work of surface reading as a different way of engaging with and learning from the AIDS archive resonates with a statement by Foucault about his relationship to archives: rather than digging in, penetrating the archive for ‘relations that are secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than [...] consciousness’, Foucault (cited in Best and Marcus, p. 13) describes himself as seeking ‘to define the relations on the very surface of discourse’ and ‘to make visible what is invisible only because it’s too much on the surface of things’.

Some authors have pointed out the limitations of surface reading as a research and analysis method. For example, based on the works of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams, James Baskin (2015) assessed criticisms of symptomatic reading by surface readers. While Baskin acknowledges that surface reading offers the possibility of reimagining and expanding more traditional modes of criticism, he argues that all forms of cultural analysis must engage first with contextual and sociohistorical analysis. My work does engage with the contextual or historical conditions of the images, gestures, and objects of the HIV/AIDS archive with which I have interacted. Unlike Baskin, however, when I point out contextual or historical conditions in my writing, I do so not to shed light on the surface or on what it does not say; rather, I point out these conditions in the belief that the sociocultural context is already present on the very surface of things. So, for example, when in my doctor-

al dissertation I refer to the political conditions of the dictatorship in Chile surrounding the work of the Yeguas del Apocalipsis, or to austerity measures in Spain—specifically, the cuts to public health spending that provide context for Miguel Benlloch’s action, *DERERUMNATURA* (2016)⁶—I do not intend to add context to an image, gesture, or object. Those conditions are already registered in what the images, gestures, and objects themselves are saying. And when it seems that my analysis partakes in close reading, in the kind of inquisitive analysis at the centre of symptomatic reading, this closeness does not seek hidden meaning, but rather an intimacy from which to engage with surface. Critics, such as Baskin, may dismiss surface reading as obvious or even unambitious due to surface readers’ alleged preference to not pursue truth. Surface readers are often dismissed as being complacent with the status quo, with accepting things as they are, or even of short-sightedness, as they insist on focusing on the surface rather than looking through it to discover what lies beneath. Ultimately, what I have tried to defend in my work with the HIV/AIDS archive is that the power of surface reading, the possibilities it offers to think and act differently, lies precisely in attention, in the will of surface readers to finally give the archive the attention it has been asking for so urgently. In the specific context of the AIDS archive, this attention to the surface counters earlier forays into the archive, in which reading the archive meant either mastering it—in the mode of scientific knowledge production—or searching for hidden meanings in images, gestures and objects, as was typical of cultural criticism in the 1980s and 1990s.

My focus on the surface as a concept that motivates my research and curatorial work is neither idiosyncratic nor capricious; it is the result of engaging attentively with the archive, of being receptive primarily to what is already there, on the surface. When I started my research and curatorial work with the AIDS archive, the surface was not present; it emerged gradually as part of the research. There are also personal reasons for my interest in the surface that help to explain some of the motivations behind my research work and the meaning of

my gaze. Since I was a child, I have been fascinated by the appearance and meanings of the surfaces that surround me, whether the pop music videos I watched in the 1990s on my family’s television screen or the photographs from fashion and style magazines that used to decorate my school folder. Growing up as a teenager in the rural Basque Country while coming to terms with my homosexuality, I was often rejected by my classmates, who would call me ‘superficial’ for the things I said or the way I looked. On a personal level, my work with the AIDS archive from the perspective of surface thus has also been a way to understand and assimilate part of the logic according to which some beings, some bodies, are considered superficial and others deep, and to explore the possibilities of surface for thinking and acting differently, and even for resistance. As Pedro Lemebel (as cited in Lagos 2018, p. 178) says, ‘sometimes, minorities can use superficiality as a weapon’.⁷ On a personal level, too, and as someone who has entered academia relatively recently, my use of surface reading as a method of analysis can be seen as a reaction to the language typically used in research. This is especially true in the case of academic research, which frequently invites us to dig, deepen, and penetrate, to direct our interpretive apparatus beyond the surface.

Likewise, my approach to the notion of surface is not only theoretical; it has practical implications and is reflected in aspects of my curatorial work, establishing a mutual dialogue between theory and practice. Specifically, engagement with the surface translates into greater attention to the materiality of the images, gestures, and objects in the archive, seeking a better balance between interpretation and the autonomy of the sensory world. For example, this can be seen in the evolution of our approach to presenting archive materials in the exhibitions connected to the *AIDS Anarchive* project. In the first—at Tabakalera, Donostia-San Sebastian in 2016—the emphasis was on explanatory depth—that is, on explaining the cultural contexts in which each examined case was set, as evidenced by a profusion of texts and labels that accompanied the documents, works of art, and

other archive materials, to the detriment, perhaps, of their material and aesthetic value. In later actions, however, such as the forthcoming presentation of the *AIDS Anarchive* within the exhibition *Rewinding Internationalism*, which addresses and critically considers the resurgence of internationalism in the 1990s, there is a renewed relationship with the materiality and visual dimension of the documents.⁸ The texts, images, and sounds are presented as evocations rather than sources of explanation, keeping, not least, with the exhibition's general aim to avoid hard-and-fast readings and univocal meanings. The exhibition at MACBA's Study and Documentation Centre in 2018 was somewhere in between, with the visual and plastic value of the archive materials enjoying greater prominence and a textual tone that intended to evoke more and explain less. This evolution in my understanding of the surface has been transformed into a desire to continue thinking about the exercise of curating from a position that embraces both surface reading as an epistemological position and the material surface of things as a source of experience and knowledge.

By highlighting the possibilities of surface reading in this text and in my recent research and curatorial work, I would like, modestly, to inspire other researchers and curators who are doing work on the AIDS crisis, regardless of the context. Symptomatic analysis, which establishes that the meaning of things lies in what they do not say, has largely determined the existing cultural analysis of the AIDS archive, with its focus on the Global North. To conclude, by suggesting that we distance ourselves from the hegemony of symptomatic analysis, I propose that a new approach to the AIDS archive is possible only if we shift our interpretive gazes towards modes of analysis and practice based on attention and receptivity, indulging in a different attention that requires time. I suggest that we start to engage with the images, gestures, and objects contained in the AIDS archive—as in any archive that has life at its heart—in ways that do not seek to dominate the archive or question it for meanings that are always assumed to be hidden.

ENDNOTES

- 1 By 'AIDS archive', I refer to the sum of cultural responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the almost four decades of the pandemic as we know it. These responses encompass the available literature on the cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS and the fictional books, art exhibitions, and performances created during the four decades of the pandemic. My use of the term AIDS archive is based on a bibliographical essay by Daniel C. Brouwer (2012), "Activating the AIDS Archive", which was included in a special anniversary forum on the U.S. activist group ACT UP.
- 2 More precisely, an essay published in the inaugural issue of the journal *L'Internationale Online* (Arriola and Garín 2014); the exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*, 14 November 2018 - 18 April 2019, Study and Documentation Centre (CED), MACBA, Barcelona; and the forthcoming participation in the exhibition *Rewinding Internationalism*, which opens at the Van Abbemuseum in November 2022, as a case study. The two exhibitions form part of *L'Internationale's* program *Our Many Europes*.
- 3 Aspects of this text feature in the introduction to the thesis.
- 4 The method is not the authors' original idea; Best and Marcus situate their possibility of surface reading within a precise genealogy that ranges from aspects of Susan Sontag's interpretation work to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of reparative reading, i.e., her response to what she called paranoid reading or hermeneutic of suspicion.
- 5 They refer specifically to *The Political Unconscious* (Jameson 1981) as 'the book that popularized symptomatic reading among US literary critics' (Best and Marcus, pp. 2-3). As Best and Marcus point out, the notion that underpins all forms of symptomatic reading, namely, 'that the most significant truths are not immediately apprehensible and may be veiled or invisible', has a long history. For example, Umberto Eco traces it back to the Gnostics in the second century, who held that truth was always 'secret, deep and mysterious'. For a brief genealogy of symptomatic reading from the Gnostics to Jameson, see Best and Marcus (2009, pp. 4-6).

- 6 Chapters one and three of my thesis (Arriola 2020) are devoted to the Yeguas del Apocalipsis and Miguel Benlloch, respectively.
- 7 My translation of the full sentence reads, 'Sometimes minorities concoct other forms of contempt using apparent superficiality as a weapon'.
- 8 This exhibition is curated by Nick Aikens at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and scheduled to open in November 2022.

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AFTEREFFECTS AND RESONANCES: THE EMBODIED HISTORIES OF PERFORMANCE ART IN IRELAND IN THE 1990S

Kate Antosik–Parsons

The oral histories of artists can provide numerous entry points into the histories of art, for as historian Lynn Abrams states, an oral history is an opening ‘from the present into the culture of the past’ (Abrams 2016, 16). Dominic Johnson imagines the living artist as ‘a portal or window on to a frequently untouched archive of performance’ capable of taking us back to an event or moment of performance that exists largely outside written histories (Johnson 2015, 11). Performance art often uses the body as the primary medium. It follows, then, that the histories of performance art become embedded in the body that enacted them. In 2019, I embarked on a research project on performance art in Ireland in the 1990s for the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) in Dublin as part of their contribution to L’Internationale’s *Our Many Europes*.¹ This essay presents six snapshots from this project, moments that may exist outside of ‘recorded histories’ and can contribute to understandings of the embodied histories of performance art.

The project combined archival research and oral history interviews, two research practices I approach as bodied. Working primarily with the archives of the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) and of the Project Arts Centre in the National Library of Ireland, I undertook archival research mapping on performance art in the 1990s. Reflecting on the embodied aspect of my archival research, I consider that my bus journey from Dublin’s Northside over the River Liffey to the stop where I alighted and my walk to Thomas Street through the gates of the NCAD campus were a daily starting point, the journey allowing me to plan the direction the day would take. Once physically in NIVAL, my hands moved constantly between my notebook and the file in front of me, examining different documents and photographs. I recall the feeling of anticipation when I requested folders and boxes of files from staff, their contents leading me deeper into my investigations, and the converse feeling of deflation when I hit a dead end.

I remember my preference for sitting on a specific side of the large research table in NIVAL's reading room to experience myself in that space in a specific way, and my irritation when I arrived through the door to find someone else occupying that position. There was a repetition to my movements as I oriented my body to the scanner; opening and closing its lid to scan paper-based documentation became second nature, my fingers pressing the keypad to operate the machine. My body's clockwork-like urge for a cup of coffee or a lunch break brought a moment of pause that gave me time and space to make sense of my findings and to contemplate how to progress the research.

After the mapping phase, I selected eleven artists² for interview based on criteria including education, performance festivals and collaborations. I sought to include a mix of well-established and emerging artists. In aiming to identify rich seams in the archival research, I wanted the oral histories to extract certain threads that could lead to further avenues of exploration.³ I contacted the artists by email, though I often relied on personal contacts to provide introductions to those whom I did not know. Interviews lasted between one to two hours. Prior to each meeting, I compiled a list of works relevant to the time and sent a suggested list of topics that we might cover so that the artists had the opportunity in advance to recall the time some 20 to 40 years ago. Once the interviews were conducted, I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed the interviews carefully, sending each transcription to the artist for their approval. Some made small clarifications or amendments, while others preferred to participate in a more collaborative and substantial editing process. It was evident that the artists themselves differentiated between the audio recordings and the edited transcript, both of which were deposited into the National Irish Visual Arts Library.⁴

Following Dominic Johnson, who conducted substantial oral histories with performance artists between 2007 and 2014, I conceive of the transcript as a 'mediated record of a live encounter' (13). The oral history's live encounter can be thought of as a body-to-body trans-

mission. For if knowledge about the performance is archived in the artists' body, then the storytelling aspect of the live encounter is made up of both a co-creation of knowledge and a transmission of knowledge from one body to another, expressed in words, gestures, movements, feelings, and intensities. Considering the idea of the 'archival body', performance scholar Helen Nicholson writes of 'a mediating presence between past experiences and future lives' (Nicholson 2015, 108). Nicholson argues that 'archiving [stories] in the body through performance is not about "preserving" and "conserving" or fixing history, but about making it a part of a dynamic of lived experience' (ibid). The oral histories of performance art are thus doubly bodied—by the artist and by the witness, whether the latter witnesses the live performance or participates in the live encounter of that performance's retelling.

When I arranged to conduct an interview with Fergus Byrne, he suggested that he could be contained within a box. In an email on 2 October 2019, Byrne wrote that 'because all the natural gesticulations and body language of an interview are not present in the transcription or aural record, in order to give the listener an equal experience I thought to limit my use of gestures'. Byrne readily identified the performative elements of the interview and prior to taking part actively imagined himself connecting with future listeners of the audio recording, or as he put it, 'being the sound box that I will later be'. Before we commenced, it was understood that this oral history would traverse a fixed temporality: we would speak of the past in the present and inform listeners of the future, with the meaning-making unfolding at different points. When I arrived at his studio, Byrne hadn't constructed the box but decided instead to be blindfolded with the aim of folding his arms across his body to restrict his movements. Seated in his studio with the recorder on the floor in between us, for one hour, thirty-five minutes and nineteen seconds, Byrne recalled performance memories blindfolded. About halfway through the interview I experimented with closing my eyes and then kept them closed for different durations of our conversation. There was something strangely com-

fortable about engaging with our subject in this manner that didn't privilege the ocular. I realized, too, that several of Byrne's performances contained an element of some manner of bodily restriction, for example the performance *Headguard* (1995), in which he walked from Dublin's main thoroughfare, O'Connell Street, to Dame Street with a bicycle tube wrapped around his head, calling awareness to other embodied senses.

When I travelled to Belfast to speak with Brian Connolly, Connolly asked me to wait in the lobby of the Belfast School of Art building at Ulster University and ring him when I arrived. I did as instructed, and I was surprised when Connolly stuck his head out of a random door, sneaking me in the back door of the institution to bypass the security desk. With a wave of his hand, he explained that the other way was too much hassle. As we ascended into the heart of the building, I wondered, what did this incident say about the artist and about histories of Performance Art more broadly? Later, as I learned more about Connolly's market stall performances, which are grounded in the absurd and in circumvention of authority, I imagined connections. Seated in the staff break room, we recorded the oral history as someone microwaved their lunch in the background, the ding of the microwave bell audible in the background on the recording. Listening back to this made me laugh. Did that person catch snippets of our conversation and wonder what the hell we were talking about? As we spoke, I showed Connolly some archival photographs I had unearthed of performance interventions by him and his collaborator Maurice O'Connell in Temple Bar, documentation he indicated he had not seen before. Connolly's affective response to viewing these photographs was a perceptible wave of emotion. His body communicated this, and conveyed the strong affection for his collaborator and their work. Attuned to the body in our interview encounter, I witnessed Connolly's expression and felt a tangible affinity with the performance memories he activated.

It was a happy coincidence that my project coincided with Sandra Johnston's exhibition *Wait it Out*, which was shown at Project Arts Centre from 29 August to 18 October 2019. At the exhibition opening, I was introduced to Johnston by artist Dominic Thorpe, a performance artist and collaborator. This proved valuable in establishing a connection with Johnston, as she later suggested that without the personal introduction, she would have been less likely to take part in the project. I attended Johnston's live performance as part of that exhibition, during which several intensely affective moments occurred and a witness unexpectedly called out to the artist in the height of the penultimate action, shifting the dynamic of that moment. I felt I wasn't right for weeks afterwards. Each time I recalled the performance, an unbearable intensity washed over me. I wondered whether this foreshadowed how the interview encounter with Johnston would unfold. Twenty-two days later I flew over to Newcastle and met with Johnston in her office at Northumbria University, and the intensity of my feelings about the work I had witnessed returned. As Johnston detailed some of her earliest performances, many of which were private gestures or actions, I was conscious of the hairs raised on my forearms, registering the affect of her recollection of these performances. This embodied response prompted a cognitive reflection that made it possible for me to connect to the histories she articulated.

Alanna O'Kelly and I recorded her oral history in the East Ground Gallery of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), where her work *Sanctuary/Wasteland* (1994, purchased by IMMA in 1997) was to be installed for *IMMA Archive: 1990s from the Edge to the Centre* (2020). As we were seated on fold-out chairs, we sipped coffee brought to us by IMMA staff surrounded by various boxes of equipment for the installation of the exhibition. This site was meaningful for O'Kelly, as the museum's crucial support of her practice during the 1990s allowed her to create large-scale, time-based works. As we discussed *Sanctuary/Wasteland* O'Kelly recalled the performance central to this work, revealing that it had three different filmed iterations. I had only seen

video documentation of this work, and as we spoke O’Kelly communicated some of the embodied aspects of this performance, her gestures conveying how she positioned the camera close to her body as she filmed the remains of a famine grave in the West of Ireland. It struck me that as we sat in the space where O’Kelly’s work would be installed, her bodily movements anticipated what would happen in this space. When we departed, the gallery continued to bear the resonances of her oral history and performances, both aurally and gesturally expressed.

Frances Mezzetti and I met twice during the project. The first time was with the intention of chatting informally about performance practices in the 1990s, as I had previously uncovered scant information about Mezzetti’s work. I was following a hunch that Mezzetti fit within the parameters of my project, based on information from other performance artists I had spoken with. As we sat discussing performance art, Mezzetti gestured towards several boxes of materials relating to her performance practice, and I noted a feeling of elation upon confirming that my instinct was correct. Several weeks later when I arranged to return and record her interview, Mezzetti’s house was warm and inviting, and we sat comfortably, drinking tea as we discussed different aspects of her practice. Movement is a core part of communicating ideas within her work, and when I recorded Mezzetti’s oral history, I noted that her gestures and the way she held her body as she talked demonstrated the importance of movement in understanding her embodied performances. Furthermore, Mezzetti radiates a calm that puts one at ease in her presence, and this, coupled with the deep listening techniques woven into Mezzetti’s practice, enables her to peel back layers of histories in her research, which feeds directly into the creation of the work. These layers are evident in the stories she tells, and in the details she recalls. Mezzetti and I shared a fortuitous connection: she developed a performance entitled *Between and Beyond* (2008) from the life history of my father-in-law’s aunt, Rose Parsons.⁵ At our meeting, Mezzetti gifted me documentation related to the performance,

including a portrait she had sketched during the performance and research notes. Reflecting on this shared connection between us, and on the meaning performance documentation can hold, I have written elsewhere (Antosik-Parsons 2020):

Examining the documentation and contemplating the performance eleven years after it took place, *Between and Beyond* raises several points of interest. [...] Though Rose’s life history does not belong to me or Mezzetti, the history attached to this specific performance finds new life in the present through our mutual engagement with it. When entrusting me with the performance documentation, Mezzetti extended her performance, enabling it to move between and beyond different layers of histories and their absences. In turn, this remembering and retelling of the performance suggested ways in which it is possible to enact new relationships to past performances.

Speaking with Mezzetti not only opened new understandings into her performance practice, but experiencing the documentation also made it possible to contemplate differently the temporalities of performance.

When I initially contacted Anne Seagrave, she was living in Poland but on an extended visit to the Scottish Highlands. We tried to coordinate schedules, but it didn’t work. Because video conferencing was not her preference, we agreed to communicate via email. I was initially disappointed with this, as I thought it might be difficult to create rapport through email communication, and I feared that capturing Seagrave’s insights into performance through this method might not allow for the rich embodied experiences that occur when speaking live. To establish a connection with Seagrave, I sent two pictures of myself, one from my staff identification card, the other a performance photograph, and gave her some information about me. I imagined this

gesture as an ice breaker before we would delve into our subject matter in the interview. Our discussion about Seagrave's practice unfolded over an elongated period of seven weeks, as we exchanged emails back and forth. I felt a small thrill each time I received a response taking me deeper into Seagrave's practice. During our exchange, Seagrave said she would be visiting Dublin shortly before Christmas if I would like to meet, and I instantly agreed. On a dark December evening as the rain bucketed down, we met at Trinity College's majestic front gate before heading to a nearby coffee shop. Once seated with steaming mugs of tea in front of us, Seagrave said that she was glad we got the questions out of the way before we spoke in person. Seagrave spoke candidly about being a student in Belfast in the 1980s and about her subsequent move to Dublin, filling in more details about what the performance art scene was like at the time. She also detailed the different challenges that she saw performance art to face in terms of acceptance by the establishment. I suppressed the strong urge I felt to take out my pen to write notes, for it occurred to me that this would radically change the dynamic of our encounter. I accepted that I would have to remain content with the opportunity to have this incredible conversation about performance art entirely 'off the record'.

Embodied Performance Histories

Reflecting in the here-and-now about this research prompts consideration about the aftereffects and resonances of performance art. Beyond the oral histories that I recorded with artists, a vital part of this research was made up by conversations with other people, mainly performance artists whose practices developed in the 1990s and 2000s. I spoke with Amanda Coogan, Dominic Thorpe, Michelle Browne, Áine Phillips, Helena Walsh, and EL Putnam. Many of them shared their own stories of encounters with performance and of the individuals, organizers, and events that were critical to their own development. These artists were keen to hear about the development of the project, shar-

ing insights and propelling further reflection.⁶ These conversations confirmed for me that there is no singular definitive history of performance art in Ireland and reinforced the importance of performance artists constructing their own histories, especially as performance art often resides outside the art historical canon. Recalling Helen Nicholson's ideas on the body as an archive 'where emotions, experiences and expectations are (consciously or unconsciously) recorded and to which we can, or may, return', the body in the live encounter of these oral histories occupied a central position (Nicholson 2015, 108). The embodied histories of performance art are communicated beyond that which is collected and recorded in written form. These oral histories provide a starting point for further exploration of performance art in Ireland. Staying open to the nuances, layers, and multiplicities of these histories can enable greater understandings the legacies of these performance practices in the present moment.

Acknowledgement: The author wishes to thank Dominic Thorpe for his invaluable support of this project.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This primary source research formed the backbone for the Aftereffects and Untold Histories, Politics and Spaces of Performance since the 1990s.
- 2 Fergus Byrne, Brian Connolly, Pauline Cummins, Brian Hand, Sandra Johnston, Fergus Kelly, Danny McCarthy, Frances Mezzetti, Alanna O'Kelly, Anne Seagrave, and Seán Taylor.
- 3 See my discussion with Jennifer Fitzgibbon of NIVAL on this project from 30 April 2021 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro3-ctC1oTg> (viewed 17 September 2022).
- 4 Excerpts of the eleven interviews have been published online alongside documentation from NIVAL at <https://ncadinpublic.ie/public-programmes/after-effects/week-3> (viewed 5 April 2022).

- 5 This was performed live for Michelle Browne's *Out of Site* performance event. At the time of this performance, which I did not view live, I was unaware that Rose Parsons was its subject. See also Antosik-Parsons (2020).
- 6 I also want to acknowledge the many conversations I had with NIVAL Staff and with Donna Romano, Head Librarian, NCAD, who shared my enthusiasm for the material I was uncovering.

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THE ARCHIVES OF MODERNA GALERIJA, LJUBLJANA

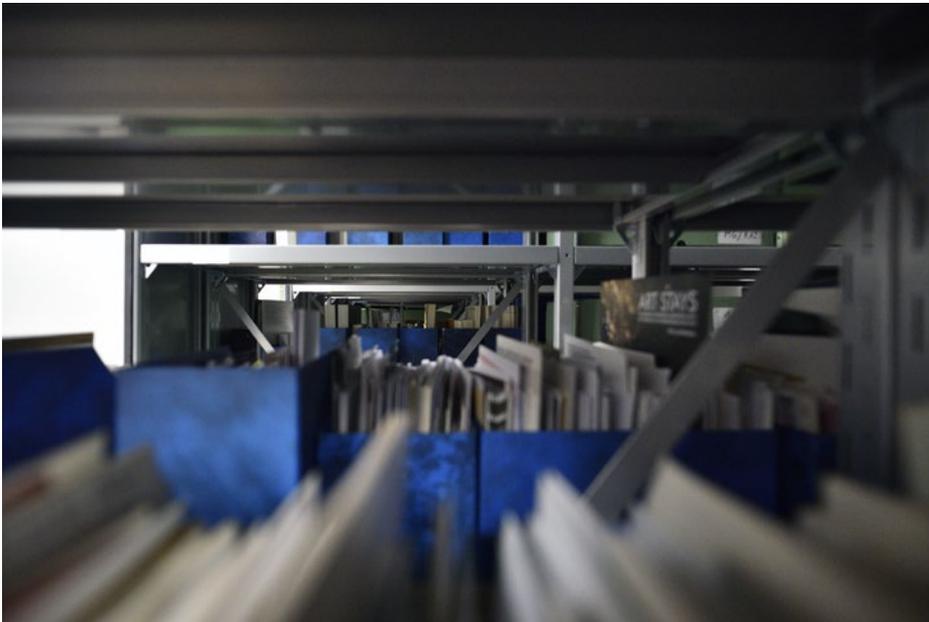
Teja Merhar, Jana Intihar
Ferjan, Ida Hiršenfelder
and Sabina Povšič

The Archives Department

Since 1971, the Archives Department of Moderna galerija has been systematically collecting, processing, presenting, publishing, and preserving data and documentary material related to twentieth and twenty-first century visual art and artists in Slovenia. One component of the documentary and archival material kept in the Archives refers to exhibitions in Slovenia, exhibitions of Slovenian artists abroad, and various exhibition venues since the early twentieth century. The data is sourced daily from press releases, invitations, leaflets, brochures, posters, newspaper announcements, catalogue data, and other materials, and added—also daily—to the RazUme database. This database currently contains information about 55,440 exhibitions, actions, performances, and other events.

The other component of the archival material refers to twentieth and twenty-first century artists and authors of art theory and criticism active in Slovenia and abroad. The RazUme database currently contains data on 292,200 bibliographical units referring to artists. A large part of this material consists of newspaper clippings kept in artist's folders, and their primary materials. Here, two corpora deserve special mention: firstly, the Jakopič Correspondence, which forms part of the archive of the artist Rihard Jakopič and comprises letters, official correspondence, and notes sent to Jakopič by prominent artists and other public figures, and which now constitutes an invaluable primary source for researching modernism in Slovenia; and secondly, the Igor Zabel Archive, which makes up one part of the legacy of our notable art critic and curator of modern and contemporary art.

In addition to artists', curators', and critics' primary materials, there are also an archive related to Moderna galerija itself and various donations. The collated data and materials serve as a basis for evaluating museum objects of modern and contemporary art and for



Photography courtesy of Dejan Habicht / Moderna galerija, Ljubljana



researching their history and contents, as well as authors, researchers, and other people involved in the production and distribution of such objects. By regularly publishing data in (selected) bio-bibliographies in Moderna galerija's exhibition catalogues and journal articles and by making data available online, the Moderna galerija Archives Department raises awareness and educates the interested public. The Archives Department further participates in various European projects and in the European-art.net (EAN) international network of contemporary art archives.

The Photo Archive

Founded in 1948 at the same time as Moderna galerija, the Photo Archive has grown over the years into a rich archive of photographic material on Slovenian modern and contemporary art. The collection primarily consists of in-house photographs on the following subjects: works of art from the Moderna galerija collections; works of art by modern and contemporary Slovenian artists from other public and private collections; and exhibitions and other events organized by Moderna galerija. The Photo Archive also keeps videos of lectures and other events organized by Moderna galerija. The rest of the archive consists of photographic material acquired by the museum from artists and other owners. Most of the material is analogue and is gradually being digitised. The material can be viewed in the Photo Archive by prior arrangement, and is available, to a very limited extent, on the Moderna galerija website. One of our future challenges will thus be providing online access to the Archive.

Interlinking all the Moderna galerija databases, and thus optimizing our work, will be a major challenge, but doing so will allow us to offer online users much more comprehensive and complex information on our collections and archives.

Web Museum

The Web Museum is a repository for the storage of digital audiovisual cultural heritage, featuring online access to audiovisual materials when permitted by the artists. The archive is an inventory of artistic practices based on media technologies from early video production to contemporary digital content and time-based art. Most of the documents are connected to performances, discursive programs, artistic events, and exhibitions. One relevant emphasis of this project is to facilitate online publishing and storage on local servers and independence from corporate control over artistic audiovisual production.

Through semantic connections, the Web Museum draws attention to the heritage that has not been included in prior systematic overviews of artistic production in Slovenia. One added value of the repository is the creation of a common open-source backend web-based interface for multiple users in an attempt to decentralize the archival process. In this way, the museum archivists are not the sole gatekeepers of the archive. At the same time, the storage is not completely open and maintains some of the credibility of administrative archives. Organizations and individuals making important contributions to nongovernmental artistic production are invited by the museum to become the so-called users of the Web Museum, while the museum provides server storage with technical and content support to digitise, systematise, and publish the materials online when this is legally permitted. The master copies of the archive are not centralized by the museum but returned to their original producers in an attempt to respect their self-determination. Ideally, this archive is neither entirely open nor entirely closed, but a structure negotiated by its users, who together have a better understanding of the needs that art production creates.

THE TEMPORARY SLOVENIAN DANCE ARCHIVES. FRAGMENTS OF AN ARCHIVIST

Rok Vevar

Genealogy of the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive

I declared the establishment of the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive (TSDA) in my apartment in Šiška, in Ljubljana, shortly after moving into it in 2012. At that time, I began to systematise the materials that had been piling up for years from various donations, given to me because of my research interest in historical and theoretical work produced outside public cultural institutions in the field of contemporary dance and performance practices. As interested users of the materials began to turn to me, I realised that the collections were becoming an archive.

In 2011, I systematised materials in the library of the Public Fund for Cultural Activities (JSKD; *Javni sklad za kulturne dejavnosti*, at Cankarjeva 5), an institution that was previously called the Association of Cultural Organisations of Slovenia, and prior to its current title renamed the Public Fund for Amateur Cultural Activities.¹ Neja Kos, a retired consultant in the field of contemporary dance at this institution, had been collecting the materials since she began working there in 1977. This is the institution which, during a certain period, most constructively made up for the institutional deficit in the field of contemporary dance in Slovenia. When the employees of this institution began to throw away systematised materials, Nina Meško, Neja Kos, and I decided to move them to my apartment. Already before that, I had brought home materials that the Maska Publishing House wanted to get rid of when relocating from their joint offices with the Exodos festival. Furthermore, in 2012, I received materials from Ksenija Hribar, the choreographer and founder of the Dance Theatre Ljubljana (Plesni teater Ljubljana)², via her sister, Tanja Sciama. After several research visits to London where Hribar worked between 1960 and 1978, I used the acquired and donated items to create an extensive collection

of Ksenija Hribar's materials. These became the basis for the book *Ksenija, Xenia: The London Dance Years of Ksenija Hribar*, published by Maska, JSKD, and Nomad Dance Academy Slovenia in 2020.

Between 2012 and 2017, I organised guided individual and group tours of the archive in my apartment as well as short lectures on the history of dance. Ida Hiršfenfelder, contemporary sound artist and archivist, took care of the digital Web Museum (*Mrežni muzej*), after attending one of the lectures at the suggestion of Zdenka Badovinac, director of the Museum of Modern Art and Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova.³ On their invitation, I moved the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archives to the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in spring 2018. In April of that year, the TSDA opened in the new institution.

An Archive without a Plan

The Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive was created without a plan. It emerged as a systematisation of my own research interest prior to my realisation that it could be an archive. In the beginning, it was not a project, but at some point, it turned into one. If I am a dance archivist, or more precisely an archivist of the performing arts, this was not my conscious decision, but it is a determination that makes me happy. At the beginning, I received the materials that I kept in the archive because artists and cultural workers, my friends, wanted to get rid of stuff before moving house. They deposited it in a place of anticipated or perceived interest, so as not to throw it away. My apartment, in which I declared the establishment of the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive in 2012, became a repository of various materials. TSDA thus tells the story of the currency of certain artistic practices in the Republic of Slovenia or the city of Ljubljana and is not my private achievement, but rather the achievement of the local community of artists. Because of all of this, I was never able to own the material I kept, and at the same time, when various public cultural institutions in

the field of performing arts began to show interest in it, I did not allow them the possibility of selective ownership.

The archive, which is always evolving and in a constant process of transformation, maintains printed matter, typescripts, and manuscripts; correspondence related to local and foreign artists who have worked and performed in Slovenia in the field of contemporary dance and contemporary performing arts; documentation of the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenija from its founding in 1994; folders of festivals, of educational programs in contemporary dance, of letters of recommendation—which are a rich source of biographical data, and of photographic materials (mostly photographic prints); an extensive audio-visual archive; and two extensive collections: one of the critic, journalist, and dance pedagogue, Marija Vogelnik, and one of dancer and choreographer, Ksenija Hribar.

An Archive without Cultural Production

One of the first decisions of my archival activity was to start creating it without producing it—without providing it with a formal foundation of production at the outset that would demand its own time and draw from the time of creating the TSDA. At the same time, this means that it was not my job (in terms of production), but my hobby, a leisure activity. This is still 80 percent the case today. This decision did not mean that the TSDA would not emerge from the process as a phase product, but by deciding to create an archive, I avoided the ideological form of contemporary cultural production in which work and production eliminate or reduce creation to a minimum at the expense of production—especially the organisational elements of production, such as communication, organisation, fundraising, promotion, etc., which results in a weak product and where capitalists—sources of public financing, their networks—both formally and actually subordinate the work.



Photography courtesy of Dejan Habicht / Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

Creating Archives

The creation of an archive does not mean the appropriation of archival documents, but a form of fidelity to documents in a way that approaches them as manifestations of time. The loss of documents in archives in most institutionalised archives is the result of a focus on production at the expense of their creation: ignoring their time by fetishizing materiality, quantity, and preservation, whereby archives become more important than their documents. This is the appropriation of time, and with it, of all their potential histories: the wet dream of authoritarian approaches to time, which can lead to historical revisionisms. I understand this as the territorialisation of time, and the cultural and political context I come from is always deep in revisionist falsifications of time, or always on the fringes of such. Time cannot be taken possession of, and simultaneously, certain documents always point to a time that has never been documented. For me, histories are forms of documentary and speculative time. Because they are the product of what can be understood in a given present, they are always fundamentally uncertain, incomplete. Speculative time is a list of things we do not know. It is very important to me that even that which we do not (yet) know, is transparent.

Toni Morrison's suggestion that certain cultural as well as artistic forms are in some cases forms of oblivion is very appealing to me: the storage of a time that at a particular moment had to be forgotten. The poiesis of forgetting. In the novel *Song of Solomon*, Morrison sends her hero, Milkman (Macon Dead), to explore a family history in the southern United States. Milkman attempts to find traces of his vanished great-grandfather, Solomon, about whom it was rumoured—along the lines of the mythical folklore tradition that certain enslaved African Americans learned to fly—that he had flown back to Africa. Milkman finds no trace of his great-grandfather for a long time, until he figures out that the song and dance performed by children at a playground in the heart of the city, witnessed regularly by the young

researcher, is exactly the document, the story, he is looking for. The documents we deal with in archives are not only traces of memory, but also forms of forgetting. Less the affirmation of memory than the necessity of oblivion. The task of curatorial projects, historiography, or artistic handling is to transform forgetting into forms of memories, to create redistributions from the stocks of time and various forms of that from which the past can ultimately transform into some new future.

Archive as Work with Time

The work with time is twofold in the TSDA, as time is settled within the materials the archive stores, and simultaneously, the creative time needed must also be ensured such that the practice of archiving reaches its product. In both cases, TSDA is a rebellion against the erosion of time, against the ideology of contemporary cultural production, which seeks to provide art and culture with a mere sequence of present time(s), producing the illusion that in the field of art and culture we live in year zero, all the time. Some cultural contexts are more, others less, inclined to such practices.

In recent years, the deficit of the public sphere in public spaces has been articulated regarding forms and manifestations of the public, but what tends to be lacking in the public sphere in such cases is mainly time. Individual texts without their contexts, present time(s) without their genealogies and without visions and plans, spaces without their time; territories enclosed with hedges, technical barriers, and police guards. Guardians against the invasion of anything or anyone *different*.

Of course, the time contained within the documents cannot be repeated. Creating with archival documents cannot be any kind of repetition of time, but I find its possible transformations very exciting. It can be understood by developing something with it. By turning it into one of its possible historiographical, theoretical, or artistic forms.

By creating differences from it or with it (complex repetitions), rather than identities (simple repetitions). This is the only way to make time available to us and to secure access to texts: only by actualizing or transforming their potential contexts, with which time is also shown to us in its undocumented places, in its absences or in that which was once necessary to forget. For me, these transformation processes are processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, as the future, the past, and the present can transform, change, complement, and correspond with each other, thus discouraging territorial treatment.

The Shape of the Archive

The Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive is not a replica of the existing archival institutions in the Republic of Slovenia. Even if it would wish to become one, it does not have the necessary financial, legal, personnel, and other material conditions. The concept of an installation in time protects it from institutionalised legal frameworks that tend to turn archival activity into defensive shelters of materials. Thus, it remains a process of an authorial archival work, and I am able to keep some documents in individual collections that would cause public institutions procedural problems in regulating their ownership and custody rights. At the moment, the TSDA continues to curate mostly my own individual research and curatorial interests.

The history of artistic practices in the territory of the country today called the Republic of Slovenia is connected with two organisational forms: (1) public artistic and cultural institutions, and (2) forms of self-organisation, which in Slovenia today we call the 'non-governmental sector', and which has had very different names in the past, including independent culture, alternative culture, subculture, and experimental artistic practices, as well as various avant-garde (e.g., constructivism), neo-avant-garde (e.g., reism), and particular avant-garde (e.g., retrogarde) labels with their aesthetic specifications. In certain periods, forms of self-organisation did not have specific names.



Photographs courtesy of Dejan Habicht / Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

The art created within such forms of self-organisation, related to various historical forms of precariousness, represents at least two thirds of the total artistic production in the history of art in Slovenia. The institutions that had a state-building and nation-building function in various state and political systems of today's territory of the Republic of Slovenia were mostly a structural copy of the institutions that existed in the monarchies that colonised the area before 1918. For me, the artistic practices that emerged from self-organised structures of societies, associations, and often not-officially-registered communities are certainly the key protagonists of the history of artistic practices in the Republic of Slovenia. This includes contemporary dance, which since its beginnings has been an emancipated artistic ground for creative realisation, especially for female artists. The self-organised forms of artistic production, with their respective precariat, are, with their exceptional heritage, what I recognise in the field of contemporary dance and contemporary performing arts to be forms of uninhibited artistic audacity. With TSDA, I strive to provide space and time for this aspect of artistic production.

Archiving Dance

The archiving of dance is constantly confronted with its absent object, which is primarily choreographic. This absence is the source of the proverbial melancholy of dance history. The artwork, which unfolds over time, dances its disappearance. I do not understand the history, theory, or curation of dance as reconstructions, conservations, or consolidations of its fundamental disappearance. When it comes to dance, the most exciting thing for me is that each individual embodiment carries with it a whole series of eliminated traces. The uses of bodies that seek to unify a particular body, for example in identity, choose aspects of the body or perform a selection of bodies, without entirely removing their remnants. That is why I may find the archiving of dance or the conversion of archival documents into various possible forms more

exciting when it deals with the unpredictable remnants than with that which wants to be visible or most obvious. Dance always contains more bodies than are obvious or available in the missing object, or than are contained in its traces in the available documents. The past of dance's time emerges in the interspaces of its documents. The information that appears in these interspaces, even if it only has an indirect connection with the missing object, may be more interesting than the object itself. It remains there primarily because so far, no representation has managed to annihilate it: uncertain, unencoded, and potent presences. Precisely because it refers to an uncertain body, dance seems to me such a potent archive, such a great supply of what is always stored within it. A deposit of things that no one remembered to remove, because the remains and traces are always poorly visible. For me, dance is the creation of something other than what bodies have always been: not the production of identities, but of differences.

The Archive and the History of Dance are Two Different Things

Choreography in contemporary dance—as an expanded practice, as publicists at some point described it by analogy with sculpture—can be an artistic, cultural, or usable function, methodology, or practice. As such it is concerned with the conditions, creation, or production of the composing, constructing, performing, or perceiving of various presences, absences, or representations of human bodies, as well as with traces or indications contained within those bodies.

The archive of dance consists of documents. In some of its parts, of course, there is also the documentation of testimonies, reflections, conclusions, and interpretations of events and experiences. The history of dance is not exclusively the history of works of art and artistic processes, but also the configuration of (interpersonal) relationships, the history of social ways of composing life, community, and art, and of decisions and agreements related to an indifference to human bodies. What seems vital to me is that dance is a practice in which the

(human) body does something, builds, shapes something with itself, and at the same time it must invent, again and again, the tools, methods, and technologies with which these things are possible.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Public Fund for Cultural Activities is a state cultural institution that has been producing artistic and cultural activities by non-professional artists in the Republic of Slovenia since 2000. Between 1977 and 2000, the name of the institution was the Association of Cultural Organisations of Slovenia. The institution emerged after the Second World War as the Union of Cultural and Educational Societies and is related to the role that culture, art, and education played during the anti-fascist struggle during the War. In the postwar period, these societies renewed the network of municipal cultural centers and continued to develop programs similar to those that had been carried out during wartime. The government of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia planned to develop a socialist workers' art from this union, but this never came to a proper conceptualisation. At different periods, the institution took care of cultural programs, cultivating possibilities for talented young people to choose artistic professions, with varying intensity. In the other republics of socialist Yugoslavia, such institutions, despite individual attempts, did not work as effectively as in Slovenia, where amateur culture abounded.
- 2 Plesni teater Ljubljana took the name after the London Contemporary Dance Theater, where dancer and choreographer Ksenija Hribar (1938-1999) performed between 1967 and 1974. After returning to Ljubljana in the late 1970s, Hribar began working with young dancers, and together with them she founded the first professional dance theater in Slovenia in 1985. Between 1985 and 1993, Plesni teater Ljubljana operated as a contemporary dance group, and in 1994, after moving to the premises at Prijateljeva 3 in Ljubljana, became a production house without a dance ensemble.

- 3 The Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova is a unit of the Museum of Modern Art, a public cultural institution established by the Republic of Slovenia.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

AGENCY is an international initiative that was founded in 1992 and is a registered association in Brussels. In collaboration with researchers, it constitutes a cooperatively-owned and growing 'list of boundary things' that resists the radical split in the classification of nature and culture. This list is mostly derived from controversies and legal cases involving property from the start of the enclosures of the commons around the seventeenth century until today and from various territories of world integrated capitalism. Agency calls forth these boundary things from its list in varying 'assemblies', which combine exhibition, performance, and publication formats. Each assembly speculates about possible inclusions.

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MARCELL MARS and **TOMISLAV MEDAK** have been collaborating for over twenty years. They are among the founders of Multimedia Institute/MAMA in Zagreb. Together, they run the shadow library Memory of the World/Public Library. Their co-edited publications include *Guerilla Open Access*, among others. With Valeria Graziano, they are convenors of the Pirate Care project. With Andrew Lison and Rick Prelinger, they contributed to the book *Archives* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

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TEJA MERHAR is an art historian and has worked as a curator in the Archives Department of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana since 2010. Merhar regularly contributes texts to catalogues accompanying exhibitions at the Moderna galerija, including bio-bibliographies (including of Tadej Pogačar, Srečo Dragan, Marko Peljhan) and chronologies (for the exhibition *Crises and New Beginnings: Art in Slovenia 2005–2015*, 2015), among other genres. For the exhibition *Southern Constellations: The Poetics of the Non-Aligned* (+MSUM, Ljubljana, 2019), she prepared an extensive study of International Collaborations in Culture between Yugoslavia and the Countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

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İZ ÖZTAT is an artist, writer, and educator. She works with diverse media in her quest to engage the return of suppressed pasts in the present, questioning official narratives through possibilities of critical fabulation. In her individual and collective practice, she has worked alongside struggles against taming of running waters for progress and profit and has tackled matters relating to freedom of expression, (self) censorship, queer desire, and the consensual negotiation of power. Öztat has been engaged in an untimely collab-

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STORIES AND THREADS: Perspectives on Art Archives

eBook publication

Published by

L'Internationale Online
www.internationaleonline.org

2022

ISBN 978-91-527-1342-6

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Cover photo

ceci est la couleur de nos rêves.
Enric Farrés Duran, Installation, 2019. Collection Kervahut - Laurent Fiévet. Photo: Roberto Ruiz. Documentation of the drawing workshop linked to the exhibition Lina Bo Bardi Drawing at the Joan Miró Foundation.

Special Thanks

Elisa Seghers

This publication extends the discussions begun during a number of physical and online meetings held with the members of the archives workgroup of the project Our Many Europes (2018–2022). We would like to acknowledge their contribution to this publication of:

Evi Bert, Jennifer Fitzgibbon, Robert Jarosz, Cathryn Klasto, Daniel Pecharrómán, Bojana Piškur, Sabina Povšič, Elisabet Rodríguez, Sezin Romi, Carolina Santamarina, Steven ten Thije and Marta Vega.

With support of the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union

Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute

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L'Internationale brings together seven major European art institutions: Moderna galerija

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Fundació Joan Miró

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FJM 720

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Manipular con guantes

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Mantingueu constants les condicions ambientals

Mantener constantes las condiciones ambientales

Keep in stable environmental conditions

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Glass! Tape it