

## I. PAST

There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions<sup>1</sup>

After fifty-one years, Kaldor Public Art Projects has produced a digital archive accessible to the public. Simultaneously logical and perverse is the relationship between the inherently historical focus of archiving and the pursuit of presence held within the term 'contemporary art'. Kaldor Public Art Projects works with contemporary artists to facilitate live, often ephemeral, always temporal artworks. Here, the function of the archive seems completely logical. When projects cannot last, accurate documentation acquires necessity.

The standard view of the archive oftentimes evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artifacts against the archive as an active, regulatory discursive system.<sup>2</sup>

But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities.<sup>3</sup>

The archives at issue here are not databases in this sense; they are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not mechanic reprocessing.<sup>4</sup>

Interrelated elements together in a field.<sup>5</sup>

The nature of all archival materials are found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.<sup>6</sup>

The telling of history as a sequence of events acted out by individual agents is displaced by a focus on the simultaneity of separate but contingent social frameworks and an infinity of participating agents, and the process of history is preconceived as a structural system of perpetually changing interactions and permutations between economic and ecological givens, class formations and their ideologies, and the resulting types of social and cultural interactions specific to each particular moment.<sup>7</sup>

Since Kodak's invention of commercial processing capacity at the end of the nineteenth century, the photographic analogue derived from the negative has not only generated an endless stream of faithful reproductions, it also set the entire world of users into a feverish pace of pictorial generation and accumulation.<sup>8</sup>

Can anyone explain to me the need for one-hour photo-finishing? You just saw the thing, how can you be nostalgic about a concept like 'a little while ago'?<sup>9</sup>

This archival madness is a "burning with desire" to transpose nature into a pictorial fact, and consequently into an archival system. Many other desires soon followed, and would go beyond nature; they would encapsulate the entire mode of shining the world framed within a picture. The desire to make a photograph, to document an event, to compose statements as unique events, is directly related to the aspiration to produce an archive.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes they are collected in a linear structure forming a seemingly coherent narrative, or they may be transformed into fetishised, individuated units on which a dim spotlight is fixed, lending them an almost devotional character, in a panoply of sentimental configurations that, remarkably, are designed to evoke shrines.<sup>11</sup>

The snapshot that documents scenes of life's many turns — birthdays, holidays, and events of all kinds — perhaps exemplifies the most prominent aspect of the private motivations for image making, for it not only records that burning desire for the archival, it also wields a formidable ethnographic meaning.<sup>12</sup>

But,

Doesn't anyone just stop and look at things anymore? Sort of take them in, maybe even remember them? Is that such a strange notion? Does experience have to be documented and brought home and saved on the shelf? And do people really watch this stuff? Are people's lives so bankrupt they sit at home looking at things they already did?<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the other side of its utopian ambition is its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations. This move to turn "excavation sites" into "construction sites" is welcome in another way too: it suggests a shift away from the melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than the traumatic.<sup>14</sup>

Tracing-back to the original precursors,<sup>15</sup>

we are moved

towards the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects.<sup>16</sup>

It feels necessary in A world at once roiled and arrested by information flow and product glut. Thomas Hirschhorn calls this sensorium of Junkspace “the capitalist garbage bucket.” Yet he insists that, even within this prison pail, radical figures might be recovered and libidinal charges rewired — that this “phenomenology of advanced reification” might still yield an intimation of utopian possibility, or at least a desire for systemic transformation, however damaged or distorted it might be.<sup>17</sup>

W. G. Sebald surveys a modern world so devastated by history as to appear “after nature”: many of its inhabitants are “ghosts of repetition” who seem at once “utterly liberated and deeply despondent.” Sebald even questions the humanist commonplace about the restorative power of memory: “and the last remnants memory destroys.”<sup>18</sup>

What Conceptual strategies can be used to transform the evidentiary and documentary modes of archival materials into profound reflections on the historical condition?<sup>19</sup>

Certainly this move to (re)cathect cultural remnants comes with its own risks: it is also open to reactionary, even atavistic, deployments.<sup>20</sup>

Here, a fundamental question persists: it concerns the relationship between temporality and the image, or, rather, the object and its past. According to Foucault, this relationship is a prevalent one, so much so, he claims, that “in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments.”<sup>21</sup>

## II. PRESENT

The possibility of precise interventions in surpassed times<sup>22</sup>

is captivating.

But, what if there wasn't an archive? What if things that happened in the present were ushered into the past by the hands of time without any commitment to the future? Is it even possible to do something — anything — without commitment to the future? And does archiving — a devotion to selective historicising — alleviate the fear of entering the future having left something behind?

To work with the archive is to be

concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces... drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects — in art and in history alike — that might offer points of departure.<sup>23</sup>

The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings and values are lived and practised on the basis of residue of some previous social and cultural institution or formation.<sup>24</sup>

We are familiar with the critique of presence, especially as formulated by Jacques Derrida, who has shown—convincingly enough—that the present is originally corrupted by past and future, that there is always absence at the heart of presence, and that history, including art history, cannot be interpreted, to use Derrida's expression, as “a procession of presences.”<sup>25</sup>

invent life,  
it is you,  
the history of its past and  
the presence of its presentness.  
there is nothing else,  
nothing.<sup>26</sup>

This is not a will to totalise so much as a will to relate — to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs, to ascertain what might remain for the present.<sup>27</sup>

Anachronism, the slippage of discrete time periods into one another, is a major symptom of time breaking down. These temporal anomalies are triggered by human beings' predilection for the mixing of artefacts from different eras. This anachronism has led to stasis: time has stopped. 21st-century culture is marked by the same anachronism and inertia. But this stasis has been buried, interred behind a superficial frenzy of 'newness', of perpetual movement. The 'jumbling up of time', the montaging of earlier eras, has ceased to be worthy of comment; it is now so prevalent that it is no longer even noticed.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps all archives develop in this way, through mutations of connection and disconnection.<sup>29</sup>

### Do archives

emerge out of a failure in cultural memory? For why else connect so feverishly if things did not appear so frightfully disconnected in the first place?<sup>30</sup>

Once upon a time the enemy was censorship.<sup>31</sup>

It was the foundational principle of the state's power to monopolise knowledge, and to excise from public view achieve material it deemed too sensitive, that became the paramount legacy of imperial archive making.<sup>32</sup>

Now the enemy is white noise, now the real problem is the excess of information. So in a metaphorical way I would say that the problem now is not so much to add one more voice to the many voices that are filling the mediascape; the problem would be making a moment of silence. How can we be able to provoke an effect of blackout of the white noise? How can we be able to create a condition for listening to the whispering of the voice of young women singing in the night?<sup>33</sup>

Some artists attempt to arrest, delay, or extend the present in order to know it better. In his ongoing series, 'Tornado' (2000 - present), Francis Alys runs into tornados, video camera in hand, to locate and film the peaceful eye of the storm, which he describes as "some kind of immediate, absolute present."<sup>34</sup>

Even practices that are archive-resistant, such as the record-negation protocols of Tino Sehgal, and archive erasures, exemplified in Michael Landy's landmark 2001 work 'Break Down', are absorbed into archives.

## III. FUTURE

In 1798, Friedrich Schlegel famously characterised the historian as "a prophet turned backwards," yet the historical culture that emerged around 1800 has always had a forward-looking side. The modern study of history has always wavered between positivism and what one could call potentialism. Whereas the academic discipline of history emerged to reconstruct "what actually happened," in Leopold von Ranke's words, certain philosophers and political radicals sought to side with potential history — with history as becoming, and as a repository of un-actualised possibility and potentiality.<sup>35</sup>

Yet against the tendency of contemporary forms of amnesia whereby the archive becomes a site of lost origins and memory is dispossessed, it is also within the archive that acts of remembering and regeneration occur, where a suture between the past and the present is performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument.<sup>36</sup>

Like the contents of any archive, they are presented as promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios.<sup>37</sup>

But, within the “failed futuristic visions” recovered archivally, there is also an intimation of the utopian — not of reification but as a concomitant of archival presentation of the past as fundamentally heterogeneous and always incomplete.<sup>38</sup>

If we assume that the future is necessarily inscribed in the present constitution of the world, we attribute a teleological meaning to immanence, and inscription is turned into prescription.<sup>39</sup>

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”  
Time to turn back and descend the stair.<sup>40</sup>

But,

we should not forget that the present constitution of the world contains many different (conflicting) possibilities, not only one. Extracting and implementing one of the many immanent futurabilities: this is the shift from possible to real.<sup>41</sup>

This article is an archive, which will be archived. It is comprised, incidentally, only of male voices. Its exclusions and absences are historical residue that both persist and have potential.

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.<sup>42</sup>

The possible is immanent, but it's unable to develop<sup>43</sup>  
without disturbance

into a process of actualization.<sup>44</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in *T. S. Eliot Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005).
- <sup>2</sup> Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, exhibition catalogue, 2008, International Center of Photography, New York, p. 11.
- <sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 129.
- <sup>4</sup> Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, October 110 (Fall, 2004), p. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, p. 129.
- <sup>6</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Gerhard Richter's Atlas, October 88 (Spring, 1999), p. 129.
- <sup>8</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 12.
- <sup>9</sup> Scraps from the loft. 2017. *GEORGE CARLIN: BACK IN TOWN (1996)*, online, accessed 1 March 2021, <https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/2017/04/10/george-carlin-back-town-1996-full-transcript/>
- <sup>10</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- <sup>13</sup> Scraps from the loft. 2017. *GEORGE CARLIN: BACK IN TOWN (1996)*, [online]
- <sup>14</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 22.
- <sup>15</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, p. 4.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 11.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>19</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 22.
- <sup>20</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 11.
- <sup>21</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 23.
- <sup>22</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 15.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 122-123.
- <sup>25</sup> Boris Groys, *Comrades of Time*, e-flux Journal 11 (December, 2009), accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/>
- <sup>26</sup> Charles Bukowski, *no leaders* in 'Essential Bukowski' (London: 4th Estate, 2016)
- <sup>27</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 21.
- <sup>28</sup> Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), pp. 5-6.
- <sup>29</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 6.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
- <sup>31</sup> Franco Berardi on the future possibility of living well, e-flux podcast (July, 2019), accessed 1 March 2021, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/15xE1aae26eWmU5r5Nn2ZN?si=nB45--MMTh2TxAXWjWVsXQ>.
- <sup>32</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 21.
- <sup>33</sup> Franco Berardi on the future possibility of living well, e-flux podcast (July, 2019).
- <sup>34</sup> Cuauhtémoc Medina, *Fable Power* in 'Francis Alys' (London: Phaidon, 2007), p. 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Sven Lütticken, *Divergent States of Emergence: Remarks on Potential Possibilities, Against All Odds*, e-flux Journal 115 (February, 2021), accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/115/374499/divergent-states-of-emergence-remarks-on-potential-possibilities-against-all-odds/>.
- <sup>36</sup> Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, p. 47.
- <sup>37</sup> Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, p. 5.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, (London: Verso, 2019), p. 13.
- <sup>40</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'
- <sup>41</sup> Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'
- <sup>43</sup> Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, p. 21.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.