KEYWORDS FOR AN ARCHIVAL UNRAVELING:

TEACHING & LEARNING WITH AND AGAINST ARCHIVES

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

of Master of Arts in Art Education

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Spring 2025

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Abstract

Keywords for an Archival Unraveling is a contemplation on teaching and learning with and against archives across the boundaries of the university. The project utilizes an in-depth literature review and interview practice to expand on scholarship interrogating the archive as both a physical and conceptual product of colonial-imperial capture. Themes of anti-colonial and anti-imperial pedagogical theory, practice, praxis and archival history are explored in this project through conversation with five educators and researchers, all of whom work with archives in their practices: Josh MacPhee, Maria Cotera, Deirdre de la Cruz, Josh Rios, and Nicole Marroquin.

Primary research questions explored through these conversations and developed through the article "Speculative Memory Work, Archival Fissures, and Pedagogical Possibility," include: (1) How are educators across art education, cultural studies, history, and social and political education engaging archives in their teaching? (2) How can anti-imperialist and anti-colonial archival pedagogy help us better identify and dismantle archives that continue to legitimize state violence, displacement, and abandonment in our communities? and (3) How do practices in speculative memory work expand our understanding of the limitations of the archive and invite both educators and learners to think critically about the structures of knowledge we engage with intellectually and socially?

The keywords that emerged from these conversations— *interference, encuentro, shared stewardship, time travel, and haunting* —problematized the archive as a site of immense contradiction and entanglement requiring careful unraveling. Unraveling is posited in this project as a necessarily collective praxis interwoven with a practice of unlearning that engages agents of teaching and learning in processes of archival exploration, interrogation,

reconfiguration, refusal, and flight. Theories and practices in archival unraveling were developed, explored, and rehearsed in this project through conversation with educators working with and against colonial-imperial archives. Methods in speculation and the imaginary such as Critical Fabulation and Potential History are shown as essential to a praxis of unraveling as they point to practices of memory stewardship that are incompatible with the logics of the colonial-imperial archive. These methods of memory work encourage us to embrace other modes of collective memory and knowledge keeping that resist the authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies perpetrated by the legacies of the colonial-imperial archive.

Keywords: Archives, Archival Pedagogy, Teaching with Archives, Learning with Archives, Speculative Memory Work, Anti-Colonial, Anti-Imperial, Colonial-Imperial Archive, Unraveling.

Acknowledgements

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Forward

A quick Google search for the definition of the archive will lend the following result: "(noun) a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people." As contractually obliged, the definition is provided by Oxford Languages via Oxford University Press. Synonyms include records, annals, chronicles, and registers (Oxford). Below the dictionary section, Google lists the word's "origin": "*early 17th century (in the sense 'place where records are kept'): from French archives (plural), from Latin archiva, archia, from Greek arkheia 'public records', from arkhē 'government'. The verb dates from the late 19th century.*"

I begin this section here, with the etymology of *archive* in recognition of the language through which I convey my research and inquiry. The proliferation of the English language in North America is the result of over 500 years of settler-occupation on Indigenous lands. The genocide of Indigenous tribes in the US and Canada and resulting oppression, abandonement, and subjugation codified by the state has resulted in the endangerment and extinction of hundreds of indigenous languages. Archives have played a substantial role in enacting and legitimizing this violence as a Western invention used to support and permit the expansion of settler-colonialism at a global scale. As further discussed in the article "Speculative Memory Work, Archival Fissures, and Pedagogical Possibility," the archive's origins are rooted in the legitimization of capital, land theft, and property, specifically within the Western European context. The language of *the archive* is etymologically derived from French, Latin, and Greek, and entered more colloquial use following the establishment of the Archives Nationales in Paris after the French revolution for the purpose of consolidating and nationalizing a singular national history (Drake, 2019; Yale, 2015). Archives thus became a

way for France and other nascent nations to develop historical narratives based on the accumulation of physical records and the exclusion of oral and otherwise non-scriptic knowledge traditions.

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As a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), I am complicit in my relationship to an institution that actively participated in the re-settling of Potawatomi, Odawa, Ojibwe, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Myaamia, Wea, Sauk, Meskwaki, and Ho-Chunk land as a part of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The fair, in which entrepreneurial exhibitors capitalized on racist stereotypes to profit from the display and spectacle of indigenous peoples from around the world, was actively protested by the indigenous community, including Potawatomi leader Simon Pokagon (Newberry; AIC). In protest of the fair, Pokagon distributed a book made of birch bark, opening with the words: "I declare to you, the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands and homes, that we have no spirit to celebrate with you the great Columbian Fair now being held in this Chicago city, the wonder of the world" (Newberry). In October of 1890, Art Institute President Charles L. Hutchinson began negotiations with the Chicago Public Library and World's Columbian Exposition to develop the only permanent structure at the 1893 World's Fair: the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC).

To my readers

Keywords for an Archival Unraveling is a love letter to the vast network of educators, researchers, and artists whose work with and against archives has influenced my own practices as a researcher, educator, and artist. It is an invitation to think critically and rigorously with others about what it means to teach with and against archives in pursuit of an *archival unraveling*.

Many of the voices present in this publication are researchers, artists, scholars, and educators I encountered as a student at the University Michigan (U-M). This includes Maria Cotera, who co-founded the digital collective *Chicana Por Mi Raza* at U-M in 2005, and Deirdre de la Cruz, who co-founded *ReConnect/ReCollect* in 2021, at the tail end of my time as a student at U-M. Cotera's writings, in particular, significantly influenced my thinking on the archive and its historical exclusion of communities of color. When considering the possibility of a publication bringing together different perspectives on teaching and learning with and against archives across the disciplines of Art, History, Cultural Studies, and Education, I was reminded of the influence these projects had on my understanding of the possibilities of working with archives.

As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan studying American Cultural Studies, I was introduced to archival theory through Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2020). The keywords *interference, encuentro, shared stewardship, time travel, and haunting* offered here problematize the archive as a site of immense contradiction and entanglement requiring careful unraveling. This work of unraveling, inspired by the language of *unfurling* offered by Skyla Hearn, Sarah Ross, and Tempestt Hazel in the publication *Our Girl Tuesday: An Unfurling for Dr. Margaret T. G.*

Burroughs is subsequently understood as an inherently collective praxis. It is only together that we unravel the archive and only together that we imagine worlds beyond it.

Throughout the process of building this project, the word unraveling frequently came to mind. As I began to consider who I would interview for this project, the threads of connection between me and my interviewees — many of whose work I have followed for years and others I have peripherally known — began to further accentuate the senestation of *unraveling*. I am very thankful to Josh MacPhee, Maria Cotera, Deirdre de la Cruz, Josh Rios, and Nicole Marroquin for pursuing these experiments in unraveling with me and pointing me towards so many new paths of exploration and possibility in this work. Their words book-end my own theorizing.

Interviews with Josh MacPhee and Maria Cotera contextualize the physical nature of archives and highlight the modes of counter-archival work occurring inside both academic and community settings. Each offers insights into archival practices that challenge the nature of institutional archives while offering alternative modes of knowledge and memory stewardship. These same themes are expanded on in interviews with Deirdre de la Cruz, Josh Rios, and Nicole Marroquin, which book end the article "Speculative Memory Work, Archival Fissures, and Pedagogical Possibility." Their interviews emphasize the possibilities of archival engagement across multiple disciplines, the limitations of the archive, and the importance of imagining other modes of memory stewardship. *Keywords for an Archival Unraveling* is an open-ended invitation to educators and learners alike to think more critically about our relationships to collective memory keeping and challenge the arbitrary boundaries of knowledge imposed by institutional bodies such as the university. It is my

hope that these conversations may serve as seeds for further collaborations that seek to

dismantle the hegemony of the archive and ultimately abandon it.

With love and solidarity,

Mira Simonton-Chao

On *Interference:* A Conversation with Josh MacPhee

SPEAKERS

Josh MacPhee (JM)

Mira Simonton-Chao (MSC)

MSC

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the name "*Interference Archive*" and how you landed on using the word *archive*.

JM

I think the term *interference* has a dual meaning: social movements interfere in the status quo and we were attempting to interfere in the culture of libraries and archives in a way to interfere in movements too. Movements should recognize the culture that they produce as being important and meaningful.

We chose *archive* because it was the least bad of the choices. We didn't want to use the word library because we knew that we didn't have the capacity to have a lending collection. We didn't want people coming in and wanting to check books out, because we just didn't have the ability to keep track of that.

We wanted to be clear that this wasn't an art project. It's an actual collection. At the time, the word archive hadn't been gentrified by the art world — every grad student in the universe didn't have an archive of their belly button lint from the last six months or whatever is now passing for an archive. I find that the art world is incredible at doing *immense amounts of violence to the language that we have. Interference* is an actual, legitimate

archive. Even though it's organized in a way that's in contradiction to more traditional or conservative archiving practices, it doesn't make it any less of a substantive collection of materials organized around a set of principles. A*rchive* was the least bad choice.

The window out front says archive and social center, which I think captures the host of activities that are now *Interference Archive.* Out of the four people that founded *Interference*, only one of us was in archiving and library school and had any formal training. We were makers and amateur historians of *the culture [of movements]*, in a world in which there's not a lot of professional historians of the culture.

When *Interference* started in 2011, there was not a single professor in the United States, as far as we knew, who was a professor of political posters. One of the dominant forms of people articulating themselves when they're organizing was *not important enough* for there to be a single professorship dedicated to it in the United States. We were stepping into that.

MSC

What were your earliest interactions with archives?

JM

I think that I was politicized through being involved in punk rock in the late '80s, and then simultaneously found my way to anarchism. I grew up in a small town in Massachusetts. When I was trying to do research about anarchism, I had to go to the public libraries of the big cities because there just wasn't any [material in my hometown]. Because my interests

have always tended to be on the marginal side of what the mainstream is interested in, I historically just had to create my own collections of things.

When I was in high school, I made zines. There were no zine archives in 1989, so you just collected zines. And then I started developing these skills working with friends in punk making flyers, T-shirts, record covers and all that, [and] I pretty quickly pivoted and started doing that for social justice organizations. And so I got really interested in the history of political posters and that stuff and basically [started] a master collection of books about those things, because I didn't know where to go to find the actual posters.

My real first dive into archives proper was when I was working on my first book in 2003/2004 that was about a history of street stenciling. I went to some archives that had materials from people who had personal collections — mostly mail art, Fluxus art, people that did early street stenciling in the '70s and '80s — and I found the whole process profoundly alienating. You go and you ask for a thing, you can only get one thing at a time, it's not the thing you want, and you have to go ask for another thing. And then people are getting really frustrated with you because you don't know exactly *what you want,* and just this preciousness of a traditional institutional archive… That carried over in 2007 and 2008 [when] I did a big project with Dara Greenwald, called *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures, 1960s to Now*, which was this large scale exhibition of sorts from the 60s to the present, of what we were calling social movement culture. So the cultural production that was coming out of social movements, that we were defining distinctly differently from activist art or political art: things that weren't coming out of the art world, but were coming out of people in the movement. [We were looking at] stuff that was part of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the pro-democracy movement in China, the different

countercultural movements in Europe in the '60s and '70s, squatting movements, new social movements in sociology coming out of the '70s, and finding that educational institutions, places like NYU, had a lot of holdings around these movements, but they were not sensitive at all to [their] cultural production.

There's a real focus on secondary source material, people writing about these things but not on the actual objects that were produced in these movements, particularly because a lot of the stuff wasn't produced in English, so it wasn't being collected in US institutions. It's not authored in the ways that capital "A" art institutions know how to parse through. I would go to places like [the] MoMA (Museum of Modern Art), and I would go to the archive in Queens, which is their off site storage [and] where the majority of [the] MoMA collection is, and I would have to prove to the person there that I knew more about what they had in their collection than they did. Then they would bring me back into the stacks, and I would find these flat files full of posters from the American Indian Movement, Black liberation stuff, and they would literally have post it notes on them that said, "not cool enough to catalog" or are "to be cataloged sometime" with sometime in scare quotes. They pull out a lot of European artists, either in Europe or in the US that were connected to political movements, and then everything else would literally fall to the bottom of the flat file.

We started *Interference*, because we were like this stuff is *for us*. Like, this is the *stuff of life*. At some point in most people's lives, around the world, we're involved in social struggles to try to improve our families, our workplaces. All of these entities are producing culture all the time, and it's at the center of people's universes while they're part of those struggles. But we live in a social totality or hegemony that erases that stuff as soon as it's not *literally right in front of your face.* The motivation for starting *Interference* [was] to have an

open stacks archive to say, this stuff belongs to the people who make it, the people who are

parts of these movements. *It's not the terrain of experts, of academics, of institutional*

largess. This is *people's culture,* and it should be accessible to people, so anyone can walk in

the door and go through it. The whole organization of *Interference* is situated around this

contradiction in more traditional archives that you preserve stuff at the expense of those ideas

actually being in use. Stuff gets preserved in a way that actually gets in the way of it

continuing to be meaningful in the world. The use of the material is only for academic

inquiry, rather than its initial purpose.

MSC

Something I keep coming back to, and has been coming up naturally in our conversation, is

just how much the landscape of all this has changed in the last 10 years. I am wondering if

you could speak on the boom in digital archives, interest in archiving social movements, and,

in an increasingly surveilled digital space, your general thinking around digital archive

versus more traditional archives [over the past decade or so], and how *Interference Archive*

has been thinking about these things throughout the last 10 years?

JM

Interference has always been primarily interested in physical objects. We have digital

holdings, but it's never been a primary concern. The actual costs, both economic, social, and

environmental, [of the] digital landscape are completely removed from our vision. We don't

see it. It's offshore in the same way that our clothes are made in places that we can't imagine.

Theoretically, I think that there's a lot of reasons why digital archiving is dangerous, and it's not just about surveillance. It's about the insane, fascist wet dream that is running all that bullshit. And then practically, it's really fucking expensive. Everyone thinks, "Oh, you just put a website up and it's free." Renting the space online to store the kind of data that an archive holds is pretty soon going to be more expensive than renting physical space.

You can digitize shit and put it up till the end of time. It doesn't mean that it's accessible; It doesn't mean that anyone will ever see it. It's an algorithm that we neither participated in the writing of nor is in our interest.

Never mind the ever shifting landscape of file formats and data upgrades and all of that. Thankfully, it's tapered off a little bit, but for a decade at literally every single class visit that we would have at *Interference*, someone would ask, "what's your plans to digitize all this stuff?" with this sort of false utopian idea that somehow that makes things more accessible than having them in a space that people can come visit.

One of the things that I would always tell people is, I can take a poster and put it in the bottom of a flat file, and in 100 years, someone's going to open that drawer [and] that poster will be interpretable as an attempt from someone to communicate through text and image a political idea or an idea of some sort. If you show high schoolers floppy disks, they don't know what those are. They have no idea. They're like, "Whoa, is this some weird drink coaster?" Posters are actually far more stable a format, and far cheaper to preserve and give people access to. Once we decolonize the tech bro shit out of our brains, all that is very obvious.

Digitization projects are these multi-million if not billion dollar projects that are being functionally funded by arms manufacturers in order to suck all this shit into AI so that we can

have the world's most expensive homework machine that's run by new micro nuclear power plants that are going to make earth unlivable. I mean, it's fucking insane. Once you scratch the surface of digital archiving, it's just another tech fascist metric. And there's no neutral interface to access that data. Like a box is neutral. I mean, yes, someone decides what's in a box and not in a box, but the box itself is just a basic storage mechanism that doesn't have an ideology of its own. Versus the internet, or all of these kinds of digital storage, the interface of it — something that you can't put your hands on — it's being defined by someone else. You need a script, that's been written by someone with an ideology, to find the things in the digital box, which is not a box, it's a storage farm that's melting a glacier somewhere.

If someone comes here [to *Interference Archive*] and starts looking in a box for object A, inevitably, they find objects B and C, which are on either side, and which may or may or may not be more interesting than the thing they were looking for in the first place. There's a serendipity and a physicality to search through a set of [physical] objects that is qualitatively and quantitatively different than the interfacing with the internet.

The way to scale up a project like this is not by making *Interference* bigger, or by going online, but by replicating the model in ways that work in different locales. In some places, it would make sense for it to be in a public library; in some places, it would make sense for it to be in a church basement; or you know, a DIY, punk, social center [or] a dance studio. It depends on what the culture of the local place is. But we wanted to show that you could do this. You could have an actual collection that you could maintain to the best of your ability, on an all volunteer basis, in which your only major expense is rent. You could maintain it, and people could use it, and it would become a meaningful resource and a social center.

To do research here means that you're rubbing shoulders with someone who's doing something else. Everyone is just hanging out and talking to each other and jockeying for boxes or folders in the flat file. It's a social experience. There's a kind of joke here that is to do research at *Interference* is to volunteer at *Interference.*

We get people, academics usually, that will send a note that says, "Do you have issue number X, Y and Z of this journal from this year." And the response is, you can come and look. We don't have a catalog of everything that's in the collection. Stuff's being added to it every day. We don't have the resources to keep an online database of everything. There's probably 300,000 objects in 1200 square feet. We have a catalog that sometimes works and sometimes doesn't, because an all volunteer staff trying to maintain a digital interface is a very difficult thing. If you want to know what's here, you got to come and dig.

MSC

There's also an aspect of slowness and relationality that comes with that. You can't just command the information out of a magic box. You have to talk to people; you need to, potentially, get to know a few volunteers. I think that's what is so appealing about *Interference.* It is an archive, but it also isn't. An archive does not function relationally; It wants to impose order on everything and make everything legible.

JM

It's pretty illegible here, but that's part of the point. The point is to have a storefront that people are used to interacting with in a commerce based way, and when they walk in the door and are like, "What is this place?" then there's always someone here to try to answer that

question. And, that's the initial interaction. Then, ideally, that person stays and hangs out, has fun for half hour or 45 minutes, and comes back, maybe volunteers.

On *Encuentro*: Maria Cotera interviewed by Mira Simonton-Chao

SPEAKERS

Maria Cotera (MC)

Mira Simonton-Chao (MSC)

MSC

What were your earliest interactions with the archive?

MC

My relationship to archives has really changed over the years. My first book was put together via the institutional archives that were available to me. [It] was about three women of color ethnographers in the early 20th century. I spent time in Zora Neale Hurston's archive, Ella Deloria's archive, and Jovita Gonzalez archive all across the country. To write that book, I had a very traditional relationship to archives as evidence and reconstructing a past. For the project that I followed that book with, I was less interested in a scholarly product, [but] in how we recover an archive that is not being recovered. This comes partially out of the fact that my mom was an activist. She had a very large archive in her home, and I wasn't seeing that history anywhere in the textbooks.

I was teaching women's studies, like Intro to the Intellectual History of Feminist Theory, and there was no presence of Chicanas. There was more presence of Black women, Black feminists who were more part of a publishing network earlier on, but Chicanas were just absent from that story. It was just a mismatch for me, because my mom had a huge archive, and I knew there was that historical presence, but it was nowhere in the history

books, and that's because very few archives of Chicanas exist in institutional archives. My project *Chicana por mi Raza* really started with a pedagogical impulse, which was, I was teaching this feminist theory class [and] I had no secondary sources to talk about Chicanas and in particular second wave/late 1960s and early 1970s [Chicana feminism].

So I started just poaching for my mom's archive and scanning stuff and using primary materials to supplement [and] fill that gap for my students. When I showed them the primary materials, it was very surprising how they responded to them. I thought that they would find it confusing to switch from secondary to primary, but they were energized by it and this direct engagement with the archives.

I had a friend and collaborator. She was a filmmaker [who had] just made a movie about Chicanas and Latinas in the National Women's Political Caucus. Her mom was in that organization, as was my mother. Linda Garcia Merchant was very frustrated with how little documentary film existed about Chicanas. She also, in this moment, discovered a vast archive— like many of the women we interview, who have very large personal collections. So this became a question for both of us of, how do we recover this archive? Because these women are in their 70s and 80s, and it's going to disappear. What's the quickest way we can do that? What is the product we want to create, and what is the intent of it? Neither of us wanted to just collect archives for another film for her or for a book for me. We decided what we wanted to do was create a resource that scholars and teachers and creators could use to proliferate that production so it wasn't just funneled through us. *Chicana por mi Raza* was born as a collaborative and collective research project and research resource. [Through the collective] we could bring others in to partner with in the collection of archives but also in the use of the archival materials.

From 2009 to 2013 we were building the archive, doing oral history interviews with women, [and] taking students [with us]. Pedagogy was important at that point, because we would take students on these summer trips. [They would] see the whole life cycle of a digital archive. They would help us with the oral history interviews, scan materials, [and] then catalog based on their work. At the end, like a year later, they would write bios of these women. Then I started thinking about what it would mean to teach these practices in a structured way. At Michigan, I taught two classes in, I want to say, 2014 and 2017 called Latina Practices of Oral Histories. [The class would] break up into groups of four, and each group would choose one woman from Southeast Michigan, interview her, scan her archives, [and] go through the whole process again.

Using the materials in classrooms really got me thinking about the archive in a fundamentally different way — not as a site of evidence, not as a source of facts, not as data, but as an *encounter*. [The archive as] a multi-generational encounter that can happen either in really proximal and, you know, physical ways (scanning it, preserving it, talking to the women, sorting through their memory mediated through the archive). Not as research or a collection of objects, but as a multi-generational encounter that was really about the practice of memory keeping and how we all come to it.

From 2009 to COVID, our model was [to] choose three or four women in one location. We [would] install ourselves with a couple of students for a week. Usually, I did interviews, and they scanned the archives [of these women]. We spent a few days with them. We get to know what the archive is about, and then the students catalog the archive. COVID obviously put a stop to that kind of research. A bit after COVID, we started partnering with grassroots organizations and universities in specific locations to design this class model we

call the field school model. In the archival field school model, we work in tandem with universities and local grassroots organizations to identify those endangered archives that are substantial — those you're not going to even put a dent in in two days of scanning — and quite important. Then we bring up 15 students. We spend a week understanding the history of [the] place,the history of [the] Chicano Movement, [and] her particular history. Then the students have skill building in archival practice: How do you do a digital archive? Then the second week, we work very closely with the woman, and we scan her archive.

We did one in New Mexico with Enriqueta Vasquez [in] 2021, and in 2023 we did one with queer filmmaker Osa Hidalgo de la Riva in Santa Cruz, partnering with UCSC and her film production company, *La Riva*. Those field schools were very interesting, because they're a much larger group of people. The archiving process is super interesting, because there's a lot of back and forth with the person who's being archived. She is there as a consultant, moving around the room, answering questions. I think the benefit of this is that those pedagogical projects can continue after we're done with that first phase of work.

A lot can happen when the process is really grounded in a place, and we're not just flying in, doing a quick dig and then leaving. The students are all attending a school that is locally situated and then become resources if they wish to continue with the project [and] working with those individuals — which some have. Another benefit to the field school is, we might have the majority of students from that university, but there are also students coming in from all over, including community colleges, and community participants, folks who just want to learn about archiving, digital archiving in a project like this. We've kept it open in that way, pushing back against universities that don't want us to do that, so the groups that are doing this work can be really multi-generational, not just university students.

MSC

Something I was thinking about rereading information about the collective [is] how you're an educator in a higher ed setting but also in this collective space. Mentorship seems like a very big part of your practice. How are you working with learners outside of higher ed, and how are you engaging them with the archive?

MC

We are a collective because we have wanted to model a praxis that reflects the praxis of Chicanas whose projects we're uncovering. Because, really, what we're talking about is not just a life story, a project, but a certain approach to making things happen. Recovering the archives is less about preserving history, although that is critically important for us, than it is about living in different ways of doing things than how we do things now in the academy. These knowledge projects from the '70s are collective knowledge projects. It's a way to understand that to make something happen, you have to bring a group of people together. That is, our practice is really grounded in that idea of collective and horizontal knowledge creation. My job is to provide the resources, activate the space, and answer the questions. The students, I really see them as horizontal knowledge creators; everybody is involved in this process bringing in their different experiences and understandings to it.

I teach a class at Texas called Chicana feminist histories, and that is very much mediated by the archive. I use secondary sources, but I take a selection of materials from our archive, [and] have them read and evaluate a newspaper or magazine. Then at the end of the semester, we create our own newspaper or a magazine, and we print them, because I want

students to really understand the collective aspects of this work. And these works are not just objects but tools that we can use today, in these really difficult times, to carve out a space of freedom from the realm of necessity, as Frederick Jameson might say. I'm trying to get them to understand, in this embodied way, what it meant to make these print materials happen.

MSC

The landscape of the digital world and in particular digital archiving has changed a lot in the last 10 plus years, especially since 2009 [when *Chicana por mi Raza* was founded]. Was there ever an interest in having a physical archive?

MC

The reality of our project is [that] it has been completed with no external funding. All the funding that we use for the project is either coming from my research account or from internal grants to pay students or to take trips. Our archival practice is post-custodial by necessity. We do not have the infrastructures, nor do libraries, to collect more materials. We need to be real about this. The room Osa Hidalgo de la Riva materials were in, I can't tell you how many boxes there were, because they were in a mini storage that was 20' by 15'. When I opened the door, there were just boxes all the way up to the door.

[Libraries] do not have the resources, and they don't have the space [to acquire these physical collections]. The project has been a post custodial archive, because that's the only way we could make it happen. That said, I think the digital archive is fairly powerful as a tool of preservation, even if it is ephemeral. [Physical] archives are ephemeral too. Even when they're in institutions, they are ephemeral because [of] political reasons, space, value reasons.

Libraries deaccession materials all the time. And I promise you, the kinds of materials they

deaccession are the kinds of materials that are already marginalized in the archive.

I always like to push back a little bit against the idea that a permanent physical

collection is more safe than a post-custodial one. The post-custodial nature of our project

allows for a collective sharing of information. The process of engaging with our repository

requires that people write a proposal for what they want to do with the materials, that they

join the collective at least for the period that they are working in the repository, and do

something to give back to the project.

In my opinion, the biggest thing we need to do in the digital humanist community, is

create an infrastructure for all the archiving that's being done on Facebook and on Instagram.

There are amazing Instagram and Facebook projects, but where are those primary materials

being stored? What is happening with those projects? I can tell you right now, the Austin

ATX Barrio Archive on Instagram, which has been doing incredible work in recovering the

memory of Black and brown East Austin in the face of gentrification, Alan Garcia has all that

stuff on his laptop. That is not okay. I'm not blaming him, but we need to take responsibility

as a community to ensure that there are digital infrastructures. We have 30,000 items in our

repository. That's because we have a passion for it. We're preserving our own history. But if

we did not have the infrastructure to preserve those materials because of my association with

the University, that material is much more ephemeral.

MSC

We assume that a digital archive requires less infrastructure, but that's not true; Building and

renting space costs a lot of money. Something that's coming up for me is your affiliation with

the university, and I am wondering if you can speak to the tensions of the university [and the project's autonomy]?

MC

My project was started as an individual research project, partially because the libraries were not interested in working with me on this project.

There was a guy at the Institute for Computing and Humanities and Arts and Sciences [at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign] who saw us do a talk before we had a repository. He came up to us, and he was like, hey, we've been working on this project. You can test out this data management system. It was created for the natural sciences, but it might work for you, and it did it. So what ended up happening is that it became, in the eyes of the university, my personal data repository, not a university project. It turned out to be really great, because when we migrated the project to Texas, it migrated as my data package, as part of my research. Currently it sits on a data rack at a Texas Advanced Computing Center machine server, and both our data management platform and our file storage is there, but the university does not [control the collections]. Right now given the political climate, we're thinking to bite the bullet [and] offload it to a hosting service and pay an annual fee. Because as nice and convenient it is to have the university host it, we're in real weird times right now. But university librarians and archivists have an important role to play in these partnerships, and we do want physical materials acquired. We're not saying only digital.

Part of the virtue of these field schools is precisely that it puts us in touch with university resources that may become interested in collecting, which is exactly what happened in New Mexico. Enriqueta Vasquez, this activist who published *El Dorito*

newspaper, had this incredible archive that was in a goat shed in a rural village in northern New Mexico. And so when we brought the materials down to have the students work on them, we also had head of Special Collections, Dr. Margie Montanez as a consultant. She worked with us the whole two weeks, and at the end of it, she acquired the physical materials that paid for this elderly woman activist for her material.

There are partnerships, you know, but they cannot be guided philosophically or infrastructurally by the institution. One of the issues with NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] money and big grants is that chasing after large grants often forces a project to recalibrate its aims and objectives to meet those grants. We see *Chicana por mi Raza* as a semi autonomous knowledge project. It sits in this nether space between the community and the university that uses the resources and infrastructure of the university but is not guided by their values.

Speculative Memory Work, Archival Fissures, and Pedagogical Possibility

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"History as an imperial discipline tells plausible stories, without questioning the violence that provides its practitioners with the building blocks that render the stories plausible — worlds shredded violently into legible pieces to compose historical narratives." —Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019)

"If, as Audre Lorde taught us, the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house, then Craft is the process by which our own real liberatory tools are dulled, confiscated, and replaced. We believe our words sharper than they turn out to be. We play with toy hammers and think we can break down concrete. We think a spoon is a saw." — Fargo Tbakhi, "Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide" (2023)

Introduction

My earliest exposure to archives was outside of the classroom. While I must have unknowingly engaged with a variety of archives throughout my childhood and teen years, it was only in college that I was introduced to the term *"archive,"* and years later that I would develop a critical analysis of this ambiguous term. It was six months into the pandemic, and I was going into my second year at the University of Michigan (U-M) taking Zoom classes from my apartment in Ypsilanti, Michigan. It was a highly alienating experience, one that was only exacerbated by the dissonance I experienced as a commuter student at a largely residential campus. The tangibility of working with archival material became a respite for me to imagine other ways of living and being, all beginning with one simple encounter that would trigger countless others (Cotera, 2015). My entry point into archives came as a box of loose photos, typed student research papers, pamphlets, membership cards, and other paraphernalia from Marie Ting's time as a student leader as a part of the Asian American Association in the '80s and '90s at U-M.

This box of material, only a small portion of Marie's personal archive, would lead to tens of hours spent in university copy-rooms or slumped over a laptop entering metadata into a shared spreadsheet ultimately culminated in the creation of the *Activism, Organizing, and Leadership within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Spaces* digital collection hosted by the U-M Library. It was a student-driven pursuit informed by a legacy of community historiography passed down via the student coalition the United Asian American Organizations (UAAO) and supported by the generosity of the Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies Program and U-M Digital Collections faculty. As student organizers, we were not familiar with archival theory. We did not know the vocabulary of "reading against

the grain," or "counter archiving" (Callahan, 2024; Cotera, 2015; Yale, 2015). These frameworks were integral to our work but went unnamed as we developed our own archival theory rooted in a shared understanding of the importance of self-determination in historiography and collective storytelling.

Within the context of advocacy, activism, and organizing, the archive is always active. It is not a site of the forgone past but rather a reservoir of revolutionary praxis. As students of color organizers at U-M, we considered ourselves a part of a legacy of community historiography rooted in the struggle for Ethnic Studies led by Black students, as early as the Black Action Movement I in 1970 (Ransom & Rodriguez-Torres, 2021). This experience of the archive as a site of transformation and the transmission of cross-generational knowledge is not a shared experience for many of the students I worked with at both U-M and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Students have regularly told me that they consider the archive as something of a storage closet: where history goes to be filed away and, in many instances, forgotten. Many of the undergraduate students I work with across the disciplines of English, Art History, and Art Education admit to have rarely ever thought about archives, while others are only familiar with them in the context of academic research in which the archive is often configured as a reservoir of knowledge ripe for exploration and "discovery" (Azoulay, 2019; Drake, 2019). This is surprising given the archive's broader ubiquity across scholarship in the arts, humanities, and social sciences (Callahan, 2024; Foster, 2004; Yale, 2015). From archival research to archival intervention, recovery, and subversion, the language of the archive has inundated the academy while simultaneously proliferating in the mainstream. This begs the question, how are archives being taught and where are they being taught?

The archive and the subsequent act of archiving is now associated with any number of processes of collection, documentation, and reconfiguration, as exemplified by contemporary artists such as Adam Milner and Wendy Red Star (Callahan, 2024; Foster, 2004). From the "archiving" of an Instagram post to archival exhibitions at galleries, museums, and libraries, the archive has developed a commonality in colloquial use that has all but eviscerated any specificity it may have once had. To this end, one is consistently left asking, *what is an archive*? This article does not seek to provide a definitive answer to this question but rather draws on the work of scholars such as Elizabeth Yale, Sara Callahan, Jarrett Drake, and others to bring attention to some of the discrepancies in defining an archive, and further *the archive* (as notably theorized by Michel Foucault and Jacque Derrida) across the disciplines of Art Education, Archival Studies, Art History, and the Cultural Studies to consider the intersections of archives in teaching and learning.

Throughout this article, I grapple with the questions: What are the risks posed by the fallacy of the image of the archive as a dusty, historicized, storage space? What are the pedagogical possibilities of looking beyond the archive to other forms of memory stewardship and transmission? (Assmann, 2023; Azoulay, 2019). A particular focus is paid to archival history, and the archive's legacy as a device of colonial and imperial violence, dispossession, and subjugation with the aim to de-naturalize the archive as the catch-all of our individual and collective memory (Azoulay, 2019; Hartman, 2008; Yale, 2015). This inquiry is grounded in Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's assertion that "not everything should be archivable and not all forms of relationship should be mediated by the archive," complicating the neutrality of the archive as an unbiased vessel of knowledge (Azoulay, 2019). However, efforts to reveal the colonial-imperial nature of the archive inherently center colonialism and

imperialism, subsequently reproducing the archive's own violence. As such, this article is an imperfect exercise: a rehearsal in what I hope to be a larger repertoire of working with, against, and beyond the archive (Taylor, 2003).

The research that has come to inform this article began with a collaboration with the street paper Groundcover News and students enrolled in English 221 at U-M (taught by John Buckley). During the 2024-2025 academic year, the course was adapted to support the development of a functional archive of all of the articles published by Groundcover over the last fifteen years. This article is derived from action-research completed at U-M and SAIC as a workshop facilitator and Teaching Assistant as well as an in-depth literature review bringing together scholarship produced across the disciplines of English, Geography, Art History, Education, and History. It is additionally rooted in my intersecting practices as an artist, researcher, organizer, educator, and de facto-archivist. My archival practice, developed in collaboration with individuals and communities impacted by systemic violence and exclusion, is grounded in a skepticism of archives and the concentration of power and authority they present. These ethical commitments have developed out of continued inquiry into the implications of archival legibility on communities who have been disproportionately impacted by displacement, dispossession, subjugation, and abandonment as related to colonial and imperial projects. These are hefty veins of inquiry that I continue to disentangle and grapple with beyond the scope of this article.

Archival legibility is used in this article to refer to the imperative of colonial-imperial archives, and their successors, to render marginalized *agents* legible to concentrated bodies of power such as the state, the police, or the prison (Azoulay, 2019; emswiler 2023). In *Potential History*: *Unlearning Imperialism*, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay poignantly defines the

archive as "a technology operative outside of its walled institutional form that dissects everything into data to be processed and put in its 'right place'" (Azoulay, 2019). Azoulay's assertion of the archive's power echoes Elizabeth Yale in the article "The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline." Discussing the historical development of the archive, beginning with agriculture and the emergent need to keep track of land and production to the development of the archive as an "external memory system," Yale writes "Rulers exercising power through their control over resources invented the archive as a mechanism for consolidating and reinforcing that power" (Yale, pp. 31). As writing expanded in its use to record more and more things, such as poetry, mythology, and math, so did archives, and so the boundaries of the archive become more and more fluid all the while in the control of ruling powers (Drake, 201; Yale, 2015). As such, archives emerged as a technology of rule through which landowners and entrepreneurs exerted power through the authority of the written records, which became the basis of early archives (Yale, 2015). I have come to adopt this question of *archival legibility* as a grounding for my inquiry into how the archive has been and continues to be used to perpetuate state-sanctioned displacement, dispossession, subjugation, and abandonment (Azoulay, 2019; Clarno et al., 2024; Tadiar, 2019).

I present this article as an exercise in archival refusal and unraveling (inspired by the language of *unfurling*) facilitated by a discussion of two methods in speculative memory work, as offered by Saidiya Hartman and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (Betts et al., 2023). If the archive seeks ultimate legibility, and as such conclusivity, to refuse the archive is to refuse the logics of authenticity and credibility that maintain the archive's status as the catch-all of our collective knowledge while facilitating the destruction of other worlds (Azoulay, 2019; Ince, 2024). As Tina Campt writes in "The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor, and

the Practice of Refusal," "The practice of refusal is a striving to create possibility in the face of negation (2019)."As such, *refusal* is articulated two-fold in this article, combining a practice of writing that rejects the continued negation of other worlds with a commitment to archival skepticism.

In the context of an abolitionist working group, a friend of mine has described having tough conversations around abolition in relation to topics such as state violence and sexual violence as "exercising a muscle." This phrase continues to resonate with me and is reminiscent of Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's use of the word *rehearsal* in their book *Rehearsals for Living* (2023) also taken up in Fargo Tbakhi's article "Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide." In the article, Tbhaki references the Brazilian anti-fascist theatermaker Augusto Boal, writing that for Boal, "theater was not revolution, but it was a *rehearsal* for the revolution, meant to gather communities together in that rehearsal." Tbakhi thus asserts a two-fold statement: The revolution will not unfold on the theater stage, and the revolution will not be cultural. Azoulay offers a similar reflection on the importance of rehearsal in her book *Potential History*, which she poses as a proposal and exercise in unlearning. Noting it as a "series of rehearsals with others" in nonimperial thought (Azoulay, 2019, p.15), Azoulay writes that "such rehearsals in nonimperial political thinking and archival practice are not undertaken in preparation for an imminent day of reckoning, but rather as a mode of being with others differently" (Azoulay, 2019, p.10). We often use the term exercise in the context of the classroom, from exercises in basic mathematics to those in studio artmaking, but what does it mean to exercise the muscle of imagination? Of nonimperial and noncolonial imagination and of anti-imperial and anti-colonial imagination? (Azoulay, 2019).

By engaging in these rehearsals and exercises of unmaking and rebuilding, we ready ourselves for the "material work" of tomorrow and the many days after by giving ourselves the space to "try out strategies, think through contradictions," and remind ourselves of our own agency (Tbakhi, 2023). We exercise our muscles. This article is an exercise in anti-imperial thinking (that which opposes the continued expansion of imperial projects) and a rehearsal in thinking beyond the limits of *school* as dictated by neoliberal logics of efficiency, enforced respectability, professionalism, and arrival (emswiler, 2023; Tbhaki, 2023).

The Dusty Archive is a Dangerous Fallacy

During the Fall of 2024, I gave a guest lecture to a group of 20 students enrolled in the previously mentioned English 221 course. The lecture was a preface to an archiving and cataloguing project with the street paper, Groundcover News, based in Ann Arbor, MI. Students ranged from freshmen in their first semester in college to those in their last year, many of them there only to fulfill graduation requirements. To ease our way into the content of the lecture, I began by asking students to reflect on their pre-existing associations with archives. Overwhelmingly, students described archives with words and phrases such as "put aside," "dusty," "historicized," and "storage based." These associations align with other scholars' observations of how the archive is often conceptualized as a static repository when in reality archives live active, dangerous lives as they continue to legitimize colonial and imperial projects — such as forced displacement and abandonment — on a global scale (Assmann, 2023; Azoulay, 2019; Cotera, 2015; Tadiar, 2019; Yale, 2015). As Yale (2015) notes, archives have always been used to concentrate and leverage power to maintain and

reproduce control and hegemony. Referencing Jacque Derrida, Yale writes "there is a violence at the heart of archiving: when memories and stories are recorded in the archive, alternate possibilities, other ways of telling the story, are repressed or suppressed " (Yale, 2015, p.334). This is not to say that there is no resistance to such violence and reduction. Rather, such resistance, in the form of archival recovery work or counter archiving, is always *against* a body of power — the nation-state, the institution, the university, etc. — that has sought to reproduce its valor, authority, and hegemony via archival exclusion (Drake, 2019; emswiler, 2023; Yale, 2015).

Many artists, educators, and scholars draw on the archive and archival praxis as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, and I have been substantially influenced — as a student, educator, artist, and researcher — by projects such as the *Chicana por mi Raza Digital Collection* started by Maria Cotera and Linda Garcia Merchant and the *ReConnect/ReCollect* project led by Ricky Punzalan and Deirde de la Cruz (*Chicana Por Mi Raza*; *ReConnect/ReCollect*). Both of these projects take a relational approach to archival intervention, seeking not only to fill the gaps of the archive but to in many ways pursue archival transformation. In the article "'Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster': Feminist Archival Praxis after the Digital Turn," Cotera writes that the *Chicana por mi Raza Digital Collection* sought "to reimagine the archive not as a static repository but as an active site of knowledge production that could realize the emancipatory potential of its central subject, Chicana feminism" (Cotera, 2015, p.783). Cotera notes that the students who helped build the project, either through internships and course curriculum, emerged from their experiences with "new critical understandings of history and social justice, along with a strong sense of themselves as active historical agents" (Cotera, 2015, p.796).

In a similar practice of interdisciplinary archival work, the *ReConnect/ReCollect* project brought together a diverse and multigenerational group of scholars, archivists, curators, students, artists, and members of Filipino and Filipino American communities working across institutional and academic boundaries to carry out reparative curation, scholarship, and reconnection. Their work in reparative scholarship culminated in a multi-platform toolkit including suggested pedagogical strategies to teaching with imperial archives. Reconnection with the "Philippines Collection" — a speculative amassing of the disparate colonial collections of the Philippines scattered across several archives, libraries, and research museums at the U-M — was facilitated via events with community organizations throughout SE Michigan, three artist residencies connecting Filipino artists and cultural bearers with materials from the collections, and trips to the Philippines with the aim of building lasting relationships with Filipino and Indigenous scholars, cultural workers, and community organizers to increase accessibility to the U-M's collections.

Both *ReConnect/ReCollect* and the *Chicana por mi Raza Digital Collection* ground themselves in praxis of archival recovery work engaging with the archive as a site of active exchange. But what are the limits of activating the archive? What of the absences that cannot be filled, the records that cannot be rectified, and the documents that cannot be recovered? Where the archive fails, speculation excels.

Two Methods in Speculative Memory Work

I cannot recall my first introduction to *speculation* as a word, concept, or method, and in many ways this has haunted me. I remember reading Octavia Butler for the first time; I remember being told this or that was speculative fiction; and I remember biking home from campus one day and decisively thinking, Walid Raad is *speculative memory work.* This is best exemplified by the well-known Atlas Group Project, which presents Raad's efforts to "research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon, with particular emphasis on the Lebanese wars of 1975 to 1990" (The Atlas Group). A work of speculation, the project is at once imagined as it is rooted in the simultaneous ephemerality and eternality of trauma. In *Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves*, images of Raad's father in Paris and Rome are recast as lost images of Dr Fakhouri during his "one and only trip outside of Lebanon." As Alan Gilbert writes of Raad's work, "fiction was always the means never the end" (Gilbert, 2016). Drawing on the fictive, the abstract, and the imaginary, speculative memory work does not mend the violences of the archive but rather seeks other ways of relating to the past, present, and future that reject the authority and staticism of the archival record.

In many ways, speculation is as ubiquitous as the archive in contemporary life*:* elusive, ever-present, ever-sprawling. It is pervasive, ingrained in our contemporary experience within an increasingly global, capitalist landscape. As author Aimee Bahng notes, "from the financial sector, to the insurance industry, histories of imperial expansion, and generally the crafting of futurity across a wide array of platforms" *speculation appears all around us* (Bahng, p.xi). We are beset with futurism. But what distinguishes speculative memory work from the speculative is the stewardship of impossibility and a dedication not to

what is, according to historical record, the archive, etc, but *"what could have been"*

(Azoulay, 2019; Hartman, 2008 p.7)*.* It is a framework for activating the methodologies of

Critical Fabulation and Potential History offered to us by Saidiya Hartman and Ariella Aïsha

Azoulay, and for considering the pedagogical possibility of facilitating a *departure from the*

archive.

In the article "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman addresses the ubiquitous appearance of

Venus in the legal records, surgeons' journals, ledgers, and captains' logs in the archive of

Atlantic slavery. She does this while simultaneously addressing the impossibility of any

attempt to tell her story as a result of the violence *of* the archive (Hartman, 2008; Hobson,

2005). Hartman does this through a method of writing she refers to as *Critical Fabulation*.

Negotiating the violence of forcing productivity from the dispossessed, murdered, and

abandoned through a refusal to "pry open" the dead book, Hartman presents us with a mode

of storytelling "*in the meantime*" (Hartman, 2008, p. 14). It is a method of writing at the

intersection of impossibility and possibility, at the edge of the knife that dictates what is and

what could have been. It does not seek to mend the absences of the archive but rather escape

through them, amplifying the instability and infallibility of the archive. It is a tangle with the

imperial archive that refuses its logics of capture, reduction, and abandonment. As such, the

colonial-imperial archive is reconfigured as a point of departure. Critical fabulation, then

becomes a way of attending to the stories, lives, and insurgencies cut away from history and

the historical record: cut away but not disappeared.

In the article "In the Presence of Archival Fugitives: Chinese Women, Souvenir

Images, and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair," Z. Serena Qiu ventures into the scant archives

representing the number of Chinese women made spectacle as a part of the "ethnographic

villages" of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (Qiu, 2021). Drawing on Azoulay's analysis of archival photographs as "petty souvenirs," Qiu goes on to reflect on the implications of archival capture and archival flight produced by an exploration of this archive of photos, which in use were distributed *as souvenirs* at the fair. The methods at use are reminiscent of Critical Fabulation , working with and against the archive to tangle with the impossibility of knowing, understanding, and ultimately reviving these women. Reminiscent of Hartman's own repeated invitations to inquiry and the practice of "narrative restraint," in the article's closing, Qiu asks us the following:

> Might we see the photographs as the corrupted index of a fleeting presence, as a pause in these women's ultimate escape from surveillance and further epistemological extraction? Might we read the overburdening of these pictures as the failure to capture securely an ultimately fugitive subject? What if I defied the institutions that have made it my scholarly imperative to claim knowledge of these women, and instead abet their ongoing escape? (Qiu, 2021)

What does it mean to burgeon archival fugitivity? By collaborating with their subjects, Qiu and Hartman take on the role of accomplices, refusing to extend the exploitation of the archive in their own work. In considering what it means to attend to violence captured but also facilitated by the archive and to force productivity from the dead, Hartman tells us "It is much too late for the accounts of death to prevent other deaths; and it is much too early for such scenes of death to halt other crimes." Hartman follows this by asking us "what are the stories one tells in dark times?" and "how does a narrative of defeat enable a place for the

living or envision an alternative future?" To retrace our steps, one might also ask, what does archival failure leave us with? How do we contend with such failure rather than force its productivity?

Potential history serves as a methodology for refusing the forward-moving propeller of imperialist logic and its successor, neoliberalism (Azoulay, 2019; Clarno et al., 2024). As Azoulay writes, Potential History is a "form of being with others, both living and dead across time, against the separation of the past from the present" and a refusal to *let history be* (Azoulay, 2019, p.43). By dislodging history as a static script, *Potential History* joins a legacy of counter-historiography while also presenting us with a practice for reworlding.

Formatted as a series of rehearsals and exercises in nonimperial thinking, *Potential History* is an expansive collection of close readings and dissections of imperial devices— such as the museum and the archive —and their violent projects. From Algeria, Israel, the Congo, Haiti, and beyond, Azoulay exercises a refusal to perpetuate imperial violence that might have us close the book on what "history" has relegated as revolutionary *failure*. Potential history does not "mend worlds after violence but rewinds to the moment before the violence occurred and sets off from there," (Azoulay, 2019, p. 10). Through the close reading of photographs and a redressing of "historical fact," Potential History is a method of memory stewardship that refuses the colonial-imperial logics of the archive, museum, and other institutions that seek to legitimize state violence, dispossession, and displacement. It is a method of recognizing the innate fallibility of the imperial-colonial archive and choosing to abandon it. It is "the transformation of violence into shared care for our common world," a sentiment resonant in the work of Hartman, Raad, and so many other practitioners of speculative memory work.

In *Historial F(r)ictions: The Arts and the Teaching of History*, Penney Clark and Alan Sears make note of the important roles that artistic representation and fiction play in the shaping of "people's sense of history and collective memory" (Clark & Sears, 2020, p.5). They go on to acknowledge the importance of considering the possibilities for introducing various art forms into the history curriculum stating that it is "a significant pedagogical mistake to allow them to remain unexamined either as historical sources or historical accounts"(Clark & Sears, 2020, p.6). In 2021, the Museum of Modern Art brought together artists drawing on artifacts, archives, and testimonies to present a show responding to the legacies of colonialism. *Critical Fabulations* brought together work that specifically evoked Hartman's method of making (Lax, T.J. & Marcoci, R., 2021). Critical fabulation, then, became the vessel through which artists took up the task of addressing archival failures left by colonial and imperial violence. Clark & Sears use the phrase "Historical F(r)ictions" — also taken up by artists Nicole Marroquin and Andres L. Hernandez — to consider the needed tension of fiction and "historical fact" in high school level history curriculum and pedagogy. At the intersection of "historical fact" and fiction, speculation presents itself as another facet for deconstructing the colonial-imperial record. If it is a "pedagogical mistake," artistic representations as credible and valuable sources of knowledge and history, it is certainly one to sideline the work of speculation in relation to archives (Clark & Sears, 2020).

Fissures, Portals, and Possibility

In the article "The Pandemic is a Portal" (2020) published at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, author and scholar Arundhati Roy wrote on how pandemics and moments of mass loss have historically forced a "break with the past" continued by a reimagination of the

tomorrow. Roy writes, "This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" going on to say, "We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

This language of the "portal" and how instances of immense loss, violence, and rupture may offer us opportunities to imagine other worlds was taken up this fall at the University of Illinois Chicago *Through the Portal* Conference. It was there that I first heard this quote from Roy. Similar to the language of exercise, the word "portal" has stuck with me. *The portal,* the entrance, the site at which one might move from one world to another evokes possibility while simultaneously rejecting the *impossibility* posed by colonialism, imperialism, and its afterlives. It alludes to not new worlds but *other worlds*. On one side of the portal, one might just glimpse another world, although peering through a crack or a fissure. If I have been stuck on portals, I have been just as "haunted" by cracks and *fissures* (Chen & Yoon, 2022).

In the speculative documentary *Lyd* (2023), directors Rami Younis and Sarah Ema Friedland explore the histories and possibilities of the 5,000-year-old bustling Palestinian town of Lyd, given the name Lod after Israeli occupation in 1948. In a speculative rendering of Lyd, Younis and Friedland attend to the Potential History of nonimperial historiography by imagining an alternate reality without imperial violence, occupation, and dispossession (Azoulay, 2019; Younis & Friedland, 2023). Lyd, the personified city who serves as our narrator, explains how the massacre and expulsion of Palestinians from their homes

following Israeli occupation were "so devastating that they fractured reality," creating two

Lyds, one occupied and the other free (Younis & Friedland, 2023).

The film cuts between the speculative and the "real," drawing on interviews, archival

footage, and animation. Animated scenes lend themselves as a means of telling what the

imperial archive has rendered impossible: Townspeople traverse these two realities in their

corporal and animated forms. At one point, the animated Eissa Fanous, an artist who lived

through the Nakba and continues to reside in Lyd, proudly points to a monumental rendition

of his beloved Saint George, rendered as "a dark-skinned person from the East, not as a

crusading white man" (Collee, 2024). In one reality, Fanous shows us a small statue he has

sculpted of Saint George kept in his home. In the other, this animated speculation of *what*

could have been and still could be, his sculpture of Saint George overlooks a public square,

serving as a symbol of the city (Wilensky, 2024). But these realities are tenuous, and

throughout the film a small tear, a fissure, threatens to envelop the animated Lyd and make

obsolete this exercise in nonimperial speculation. Over the course of the film, the fissure

lengthens, widens, and cracks begin to form.

A fissure refers to a long, narrow opening or line of breakage often with implied

cracking or splitting and typically in reference to rock or earth. An *archival fissure*, I would

like to suggest, is an omission of the archive pried open to expose a *portal of possibility*.

Rather than seeking to recover the archive, to fill in the devastation, loss, and resilience that

has escaped colonial-imperial capture, Younis and Friedman invite us to speculate on

alternative realities and modalities of being. The fissure, in this case, collapses one reality

into another. But might these fissures also serve as portals from realities — of

colonial-imperial devastation, loss, and forced dispossession and displacement — into ones

of freedom and possibility, that taunt impossibility? And what might it mean for these realities to co-exist?

The archive assumes that all work wants to be documented, immortalized, and made legible. But legible to who? And to what ends? From the police database to the digital museum collection, the archive seeks legibility through capture (Azoulay, 2019; Qiu, 2023). It immobilizes and compresses subjects of state violence, colonialism, and imperialism, experienced over hundreds of years, into tidy boxes, systems, and data structures for use by the state and its accomplices. The academy and its disciplines are fully implicated in this violence as our work informs the webs of imperial policing and normalizes the archive's ubiquity in society (Clarno et al, 2024). By recognizing the archive as a colonial and imperial tool, we pursue an archival unraveling that invites alternative modes of collective memory preservation into our work. We encourage students to look beyond the institution for methods and means of documentation and preservation and usurp the power of the archive. The methods of thinkers, scholars, and artists such as Hartman, Azoulay, Qiu, and so many others offer us the tools of this unraveling, through which archival absences, losses, and holes can be reconfigured as fissures and cracks. They encourage us to exercise our skills in the imaginative work of reconfiguring absence as possibility and embracing the unknowability that the logic of the archive refutes.

Through these archival fissures and these portals of possibility, we rehearse other modalities of living, caring, and attending to our collective memory as well as our collective futures. We strengthen our ability to reject imperial thought and unmake the logics of domination that maintain violence, oppression, dispossession, and subjugation in the present. By countering the archival impulse across the boundaries of the university, may we attend to

and even mend some of the absences violently produced via the institution's possessive claim

on knowledge production and memory keeping? By reconfiguring the omissions of the

archive as fissures that hold portals to alternative realities of abundance and reciprocity,

might we challenge students and educators to *rehearse* alternative modalities of living,

caring, and attending to one another that are explicitly anti-imperial and anti-colonial?

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On *Shared Stewardship*:

Deirdre de la Cruz interviewed by Mira Simonton-Chao

SPEAKERS

Deirdre de la Cruz (DDLC)

Mira Simonton-Chao (MSC)

MSC

What were your earliest interactions with archives?

DDLC

I didn't really start engaging or delving into institutional archives until I was in college, and then not really in a systematic or disciplined way until I was in graduate school. I would have to say that my earliest engagement of that sort, that I would consider an archive, is really through looking at old photo albums.

I didn't think of [the photo albums] as an archive, but I was definitely aware that this was the past and that my looking at these photographs was a way of sort of telescoping the distance between past and present. Even though I never appeared in any of those albums, there were these lineages as well as memories: Seeing younger versions of the aunties and uncles who are now my elders was always very compelling to me. I would say that is my earlier interest in the past, or past records. My parents would make photo albums, and I'm sort of sad that we don't do it. I mean, I don't do it. I don't do it for my son. I don't do it for me. Of course, we all have our own digital archives…

MSC

There is something different about it, which is something I've been thinking a lot about… the kind of softer memory keeping of a physical photo album. I feel like having all of our photos digitized can feel more archival, as in a little bit devoid or clinical.

DDLC

The materiality too is missing. Just when I talk about it, I can almost feel that black photographic paper, you know that the album paper. Those old photo albums that were all that weird, sticky back with the plastic over it, right? But with some of the photo albums from my grandparents' time and my mom's childhood, they were just paper, this like construction paper but I'm sure something heavier. But I can feel it when I just talk about it. That's definitely missing from digital.

MSC

You mentioned that you started engaging with archives as an undergraduate. Can you talk about how you got to the point of doing the work that you do with archives, not just with the *ReConnect/ReCollect*, but also *The Philippines and the United States*? How were you engaging with archives prior to these bigger projects?

DDLC

It's really interesting because, the research that's defined my career for the last almost 30 years has really been Philippine focused [and] really been about religion. When I did archival

research for my dissertation and then my first book and then my second book, I was mostly working in Philippine archives, and then sometimes in Spanish archives, and occasionally in US archives. But I was not doing what I would call "US Empire" stuff.

When I got here [to the University of Michigan] almost 20 years ago, folks who worked on Empire studies or Philippine studies during the American period, would say, "Oh my gosh, you're at Michigan. There are these incredible archives there." I kind of stubbornly ignored them, because I didn't want to focus on US Empire. I was very determined that my research was going to be Philippine centric, and that my research languages were going to be Tagalog, and maybe English or Spanish. A lot of early [US Empire] studies, when it became really popular around the turn of the millennium, was very interested in the architecture of Empire, which is to say, critical, but still not really looking at Filipinos.

Looking at people like Dean Worcester and these other nefarious imperialists was not something that I wanted to do. However, I did recognize the value of the U-M archives for teaching, especially as I started to develop a Philippine history course. I wanted to make it really relevant for students, and not only heritage students, but all students. I started wading into the archives here for teaching. [I wanted] to make it even more topical and relevant for them in understanding how the university [U-M] was engaged and complicit in US colonialism [and] had this institutional history that was so connected to the Philippines.

It really wasn't until the pandemic, when my individual research agenda was grounded because I couldn't go to the Philippines, where [I was] going every year, that I kind of pivoted. Ricky Punzalan, who's my collaborator in many things, does a lot of really interesting critical archive work, got his PhD here around the Worcester collection, [and]

knows these collections really well from an archival science standpoint. He was like, "Let's do something."

MSC

When working with students who maybe don't have as much knowledge of colonialism [and/or] imperialism, how [has] working with archives supported or better facilitated that work with students? I am also thinking about how you are segwaying from using archives in your classrooms and then going beyond the classroom and developing these internships and fellowships with students.

DDLC

All of this work was enabled by excellent archivists who were committed to pedagogy. And I don't take for granted that this is how it is everywhere. I think that one of the ways that archives were helpful in teaching students about colonialism, it often started with the archivist explaining what the difference between an archive and a library is, which is not self-evident. An archive is organized by collection, meaning things come in because of a donation. So how stuff is coming into an archive, is how it's going to be arranged, and where that connects with colonialism — and this kind of gets back to some of the work that we did with ReConnect — is that the archive itself, in its very organization, is a colonial record.

It's really telling that you can't come to the University of Michigan and say, "I want to see the Philippine collections." There is no collection organized under the rubric of the Philippines. It's almost unthinkable, according to the logics of these institutions, [because] collections are named after the people who created them.

In terms of how to understand colonialism and imperialism from archives, you start with the very structure of the archive itself, and you just ask, well, where are the Filipinos? And then students start to realize, oh, shit, they're all really buried in there, because what people know is the name of the imperialist after whom the collection has been named. And the same goes for all of these collections. [In] scientific collections, you don't have the flora and the fauna organized by place, you have it organized by species or by holotype often itself and named after the person who supposedly "discovered it" knowing well that, of course, that it's likely a local person or an Indigenous person that helped them find that thing. Learning about archives, how they're structured, and how they're structured differently from libraries or other sorts of collections or repositories can be really instructive in and of itself. So you start asking students, well, how do you find the Philippines here? There's nothing named after the Philippines [in these collections and] that itself is telling who's being centered in the archives. When you look at the finding aid, all the collections are named after white Americans, even if their content is all about the Philippines. Undergraduates are capable of understanding archives as both a repository — where we go and look for stuff, pull up evidence of the past — and archive, maybe with a capital "A," that's really about the logic of what's visible and invisible and what can be said and what's been silenced. We've had these conversations in the classroom about history and how history is not just some transparent window into what happened, that it always entails power, and students generally get it.

MSC

The disciplinary contrast of being at U of M versus at SAIC is very interesting. It's interesting because within my current academic context, I think the archive is so separated

from its origins and the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, which I feel like were very present, for me as a student in American cultural studies, but at U of M, which has such a legacy of colonial-imperial violence. But SAIC is a smaller school. It's more evasive. I think there's less accountability. I also think the archive has been really conflated, in part, by contemporary artists, specifically white ones, and that's why I've been so interested in talking to educators who are working from more in History versus in Art Education.

I am wondering if you could speak on what you said about US Imperial studies and how it's evolved and kind of taken more of a front stage in the last, let's say, 20 years but also if you've observed changes of how the archive and archiving in general are discussed.

DDLC

I have long been betwixt between these two disciplines [of History and Anthropology] that have a long history of interaction, but aren't always talking to each other. There was some really interesting work done at the intersection of Anthropology and History in the early 21st century. There were several scholars coming out of both history and anthropology that started to do more of what's known as *ethnography of the archives*. So, approaching archives from an anthropological stance, from an ethnographic stance, and understanding archives as a field [with] its own social and political worlds inscribed in it. I was very much informed by that approach to archives. One always has to look at how the archive is organized and how its tools, its finding aids are constructed, or what voices are represented and which ones are not. And a lot of this comes out the post-colonial turn, and really trying to look for subaltern perspectives and voices and so forth. I think that that's informed a generation or two of historians.

I mean, there are still going to be those more hardline discipline based historians who think that archival research is the end all, be all. But I think that my generation forward really understands that every archive is inherently biased and part of the research that you have to do is understanding what those biases are in addition to the actual reading for content and evidence and so forth. There's more of a sense that archives are themselves, artifacts, with their own time and place. So that's another layer of critical inquiry that needs to go into any archive based project. And I think this is why I was really interested in what happens when artists and people who work in creative spaces engage and encounter archives, because they might see things or be drawn to things that are not per se about narrativizing historical content but about affect, or about a kind of certain visuality or something totally different.

MSC

I feel like so much of ReConnect/ReCollect is iterative and project based, and you're engaging with so many communities, and I was wondering if you can talk a little bit about the importance of bringing so many different communities into the work.

DDLC

We tried to be ambitious, as our resources allowed us to be. It was a little bit challenging, because we were just coming out of the pandemic, and we weren't sure what we were going to be able to do. With the artist residencies, which is really where my passion project was, I wanted to know what happened when different kinds of artists [and] culture bearers came in who would mine the archive for creative inspiration. When our project period was over, meaning we spent all the money, it was like, how do we model this so that it's sustainable?

And I was like, "You need staff and you need money." If you're going to do it in a way that everyone is paid for, and not just a free trip to the U of M and accommodations but you give people an honoraria, because you're taking them away from work —it's an expensive endeavor. It requires a ton of logistics. But we did want to repeat it in different ways. That's the iterative part of it, because we were really interested in what the value of these collections were for people of Filipino descent, and not assuming that everyone is even first and foremost interested in colonialism. I've evolved now to thinking that really one of the best ways to repair historical harm is to decenter empire and create new frameworks that are Philippine centered or Filipino American centered, that of course acknowledge and are honest and critical about the history of us colonialism, but do not reduce everything to US colonialism. The worlds that we have traces of in the US colonial archive are so much bigger than colonialism itself.

Decentering the US in US Empire studies is a great thing that can be done through some of this work. That was true when we brought in culture bearers, especially indigenous culture bearers, from the Philippines. They were really interested in the historical techniques of some of the artifacts that they were looking at that they themselves are masters in [such as] weaving or tattooing. They were perfectly aware of the colonial history, and we would talk to them about how these collections got here, and the connection to colonialism and so forth, but it certainly wasn't an organizing framework for them. There were instances where we had culture bearers, indigenous culture bearers, who were extremely glad that these things had been preserved right, and no kind of conflicting feelings about the fact that they were here. They just wanted access to that.

I think if you would have asked me a couple of years ago, should these things be here, I would say no, and they should be sent back. I would be a real absolutist about it, and while I still hold fast to the fact that a lot of things are here because they were unethically obtained, there's not one answer to repairing the harm of that unethical acquisition. The way to figure it out is to get people access and to provide the kinds of resources that allow people to come in and find what they want to find and what they're drawn to.

MSC

It's helpful to have these larger conversations about how archives came into being and to challenge the automatic impulse to put things on the internet, or say "let's make an archive." I think the approach ReConnect/Recollect takes is so interesting because the iteration is so inherently anti-colonial and -imperial, because these conversations rationalize the archive, and that's not what that archive was intended to do at all. It's actually the antithesis of it.

DDLC

Exactly. What we discovered over the process of bringing in people to engage the archives is that, for them, these histories of imperialism and colonialism [were] totally acknowledged and critiqued, but were not front and center. What they were more interested in were the subjects in the photographs. Yeah, the photographs were taken by imperialists, they show imperialist gaze, but that doesn't mean that the subjects in the photographs or the objects and the cabinets didn't possess their own power and beauty. That could not be contained by that imperialist framing.

That, to me, is far more anti-colonial and anti-imperialist than coming in and saying, "Oh, look how bad all this is, because it's the outcome of U of M's complicity with empire." That's a starting point, yeah. But the more we get prescriptive about that, what the framework has to be, then we're just re-inscribing the US at the center of things. I want to see the US de-centered in US Empire studies. Institutions need to account and recognize that there is a kind of moral burden that they share for the history of these collections, but that empire need not be the absolute center for what everybody wants to come in and experience and engage.

MSC

It's almost helpful to think of it as, like you said, the "starting point," that you seek to abandon.

DDLC

Yes, I'm more interested in the worlds that continued to thrive; the worlds that continue to thrive, but that evaded colonial epistemologies or colonial capture. That's the thing I'm more interested in, or that I've become more interested in, actually, as a result of this [referring to ReConnect/ReCollect].

What's interesting is because [as] I said earlier, I had kind of stubbornly avoided doing research in these collections, because I was like, "I don't want to study Americans." And now my thinking of that has totally changed. These collections provide incredible resources to study Filipinos, but one has to kind of come at them diagonally and imagine all of the worlds that preceded and exceeded what these colonists were able to to capture and collect and so on and so forth.

On *Time Travel*: Josh Rios interviewed by Mira Simonton-Chao

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SPEAKERS

Josh Rios (JR)

Mira Simonton-Chao (MSC)

MSC

What were your earliest encounters with archives, and when did you come to a more formal definition of an archive?

JR

I grew up around the University of Texas in Austin, and they have the Harry Ransom Center there, which is an archive but also an exhibition space. It's mostly for literature, but they have a very expanded definition of that. Somebody must have taken me there, because I wasn't a student at that particular university. The way that the Harry Ransom presented these archives as exhibition materials was really impactful. They have this kind of cross collecting imperative. I saw bunches of exhibitions there, and some of the things I saw there really informed my own thinking.

I have no interest in this person as a creative writer or whatever, but one of the exhibitions that I saw there had Norman Mailer's old word processor in a glass vitrine with all the discs piled up next to it. This was a good '80s word processor, between a typewriter and a computer, and it was beat up. I mean, all the keys were dirty, and you could just imagine this person typed the bejesus out of this word processor, really left their dirty, grimy imprint all over it. Another thing that was really impactful was a grid of framed typewritten

pages, rewrites of the first paragraph of *White Noise*, by Don DeLillo, who's a little more interesting to me, but still white guy author stuff. I want to say there were maybe eight framed pieces of paper in a grid, and each one represented the timeline of a rewrite [and] you see the development of the first part of this canonical novel.

MSC

It's so interesting that this was, kind of, your first exposure to archival material in this super activated way, as exhibition material.

JR

It wasn't like I knew to go in and request to see particular files or anything like that. There was no way for me to know how to do any of that. Something else that I saw that I think was really important too, were these mini reel to reel audio recordings. You couldn't listen to them. They were stacked up in this vitrine, in their boxes, and they were the therapy sessions of the poet [Anne] Sexton, which couldn't be listened to or digitized until after the death of her husband, who was still alive at the time. This was part of their acquisition contract. So, you know, that kind of knotted, contradictory, psychological, psychic space that was being created by that kind of activity definitely left a huge imprint. Those were formative years for me, in undergrad.

MSC

It's interesting that this really institutional space was challenging the archive in little ways.

JR

I mean, it is a rarefied space, for sure, and it's not accessible. It's open to the public, but where it is, you wouldn't just walk by it. It's not oriented to the public that way.

MSC

You said [that] left a major imprint, [and] I can definitely see how those descriptions lend to the course title "decolonizing time travel." I was wondering if you could talk about how your experiences as an undergrad in those spaces influenced the way you are now thinking about archives and teaching with archives.

JR

I've got degrees in art history and literature, and that meant spending a lot of time in libraries, which, of course, is this big kind of archival depository, and oftentimes that libraries build exhibition or display moments, let's say, [with] this space to present things to the public. That's kind of an exhibition, you know. Being in those kinds of spaces, and seeing that work — librarians doing curatorial presentations of artifacts, books, other materials — was impactful. I'm not sure how the leap exactly happened, where it became a teaching thing. No one ever told me to go [to archives]. They just said, go to the library. So that's where I would go, and I would see these presentations of first drafts, scripts for films, things like that. The Wittliff Collection has a lot of Mexican American literature and early cinema and television, especially by Chicano makers and cultural producers. They would have displays and presentations of research images for different movies. That was my first experience thinking about archives in terms of my own particular interests.

I don't know when this sort of archival turn happened in the art world. I'm not totally sure when Hal Foster wrote that essay about archives; Derrida was in the '80s with *Archive Fever*. All that's kind of before my time, in a certain way. My thinking about using archives and working with them in a formal educational process came with working with Nicole [Marroquin].

We both had these interests in history [and] exploring the representational contradictions of history. Proximity to power equates your relationship to the archive into history and whatever. The archive in history is a narrative, and that narrative informs what kinds of things are going to be deemed worthy in the future, to be collected and preserved. We were both thinking about these things, and then we did a team teaching and she came up with *Decolonizing Time Travel.*

MSC

I think that archival theory is important, because it gives a zoom out of power and structures, and the way that archives function as a structure — well, that's like, if you abide by Derrida's, the archive is the undergirding of what can and cannot be known. But there's other ways of knowing and being that exist outside of those bounds. What is the relevance of archival theory outside of the institution and outside of academia?

JR

You asked about first contact of the archive, and probably everyone's is family stories: the history of the people around you, what they have to say, what they have in way of photographs. Obviously, not everybody has the same capacities or privileges to have these

big family histories that are represented through collections of photographs. Coming from a family that was basically migrant farm workers, and from very rural parts of Central Texas, my grandmother on my mother's side didn't really have a lot of things. I have the wedding photograph of my grandmother and grandfather — a hand tinted photograph kind of thing. There was land, there were animals, there was a lot of beat up stuff, leaning sheds, wire spooled up, rural farm stuff, but not that much inside. They didn't have a lot of things but still had a lot to transmit.

One of the things that might be useful outside of the academy, in terms of archives, is to actually challenge these kinds of Hal Foster and Derrida descriptions of the archive as this scripto-centric form. The archive is always formalized as documents. 90% of it is written word, and it evacuates, to some degree, the potential to think about the power of the embodied transmission of archival knowledge. That's why people like Diana Taylor are so important, and other people have made this argument too. You have this formal structure of the archive, which shows us the narrative around power, the reproduction of power — not just like, here's what power looks like. The archive is national narratives, the Smithsonian, whatever it is. And a lot of that stuff is documents — written down. In some ways, that's the archive. Taylor ideas, the repertoire is performed, embodied, this thing that is shared through performance or performativity.

Thinking about the archive as a key element in the production of knowledge, what does it mean to sort of privilege the written script of the archive? And then what does it mean to de-privilege the embodied presentation of archival history? That could be as easy as teaching people how to prepare food. Food recipes go back 1000s of years. They track so much migration, beautiful things but also colonial-imperial influences too. Maybe the most

useful archive is the repertoire outside of the academy, because that's the one that people do every day. They tell their stories when they share how to make something or share how to do something.

MSC

I completely agree. I think something I've been thinking a lot about is the specificity of words. Is archive the best way to describe that? Is that not just collective memory and knowledge exchange that doesn't need to be associated with the word of the archive?

JR

I think that's why Diana Taylor's book has this other word *repertoire* involved, which comes from performance studies. There were these Continental philosophic theories of archives coming at the world, and at the same time you had people coming from feminist and anti-imperial perspectives formulating their own counter-narrative around the archive, as something that's performed or shared, not something that's stuffed away by some administrator. The impression I had of *Archive Fever,* is that there's this magisterial site, and the archive is the law. There's an administrator that's in charge of managing it, and these filtering processes that are boiling things down, reducing them, [and] there's this part about commencement and consigning. Where do we begin the story? I'm not into continental philosophy, but I know also that's something that Foucault is very interested in in his text: Where does the work begin? That's a problem of the archive too. Where do we start? Because you can't collect everything. You can't collect everything otherwise it would be isomorphic, or something. It would be an exact duplicate of the world, and that would be useless.

MSC

I also think so many of these conversations parallel conversations in art history around do we expand Modernism? Do we expand the canon? A question I have for you is, what does it mean to expand the archive rather than simply abandon it or embrace alternative modes?

JR

So there's the problem of you can't expand what doesn't exist, which is, of course, what Saidiya Hartman is coming up against. That's why she has to look in the archive of discipline: the reform school, the social workers journal, the police report, the psych ward. She has to go to those places, because those are the only places that record the stories of the dispossessed, of the oppressed. That's where your story is archived. She doesn't expand strictly, as in let me go uncover the secret documents that'll tell the story that I want to tell, because those documents may or may not exist.

She taps into the imaginative and does all these experiments in creative writing and creative thinking. To me, her book [*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*] was profoundly enlightening because of its absolute dedication to deep archival research but also deep imaginative practice.

MSC

I reread "Venus in Two Acts," on a very regular basis, because I think the way that she writes about her practice is also really beautiful, and the way that she makes it known how she's lingering in these contradictions of what's possible and not possible. Artists, writers, [and]

creators are so important to work with archives and reveal so much about them. Can you talk about the relationship between artists and writers and this kind of archival "truth"?

JR

The class that me and Nicole organized, [*Decolonizing Time Travel*] was centered around artist intervention into the archive, or thinking of the archive as a social-cultural material. It was artists thinking about history as a site where intervention can be made. There's a lot of people working like this, of course, so just trying to gather up those folks in some kind of way.

But Hartman too, back to that because there is this, the chapter that I really like to read has to do with Oscar Micheaux, a very early filmmaker who made films primarily for Black audiences, using Black actors. It's the beginning of cinema, and even at the start of the making of films, there is Oscar Micheaux, who's doing this sort of alternative practice. But in the book, [Hartman] is writing about Gladys Bentley, a performer in this era [of] the post-Great Migration era, establishment of the Black Belts, and places like Harlem and Bronzeville. She's writing about Gladys Bentley: She's queer. She dresses in men's clothes. She wears suits and she has a lot of female partners and love interests and she's a famous singer. People adore her. Hartman does this amazing thing of imagining [that] Oscar Micheaux made a film about Gladys Bentley, writes that up, and starts with this problem of commencement — where to begin. She writes a couple paragraphs, like this film could start like this, and she describes this whole scene: Gladys Bentley being picked on at some playground as a child, you know, describing her childhood. And then she goes, or it could start like this, and she gives us another entry into this story. She gives us multiple entries into

the story, and each of those entries is a beginning. There's something about how all these beginnings end up doing more than just leaving us at the beginning. They get us through this larger narrative. So that's about expanding the archive. But also I think about what creative, cultural production can bring to that. It's extremely valuable to think about the relationship between power and the archive and where certain people's stories are kept, and whenever you're faced with that limitation, what you do.

MSC

So much of the way we know how to live in this world is because so many other ways have been reduced, hidden or obscured via similar structures or processes to the archive.

JR

In the same way that she's writing about people at this turn of the century, specifically young Black girls who are facing all kinds of dangers at every turn, who are living out the reverberations of the plantation in the laundry room, [Hartman] is writing about all this absolutely radical experimentalism in daily life, joy, and how to deal with all the struggle and pain. The book is not about those people, so much as it's co-produced with them, somehow. It's also collaborating with the reader, in a way, like together we'll sort it out.

MSC

I'm curious about how you're thinking about archives in relation to teaching, but also how your sound practices and other creative practices all intersect with each other.

JR

There's some classes that are more conducive to this, but in pretty much all my classes, we talk about history. It might start off as the recent past, but then as soon as you start talking about it, we can't just end. It's, again, a commencement question. Like we can't really talk about the uprisings in Ferguson in 2017 without talking about the history of the Ferguson Police, you know? And then you end up thinking about civil rights, the Great Migration, and then before you know it we're at original sin, or one of the many original sins of the founding of the country.

There's no way to understand what today is without understanding how we got to today. You can't understand today, separate from what happened the day before, the year before, 10 years before, and so on. So there's this sense of the past as present, yeah. And in my mind, that equates to this idea of a ghost that's both of the past, but still here.

MSC

I think it also relates to the division of time as imposed by colonialism and especially by capitalism.

JR

Definitely capitalism and productivity, and then colonialism in terms of the great chain of being, social darwinism, in the sense that if we travel far enough away from the center of civilization, it's almost like going back in time. This is how early navigators and colonial jurists and stuff imagined it: The further you go away from Western civilization, to Australia or something, the further back in time you're going. So it's like space and time are brought

back together so that you could go to some far flung area and see the earlier version of your civilization happening at the same time that you're coexisting with.

MSC

That's why I love the course title *Decolonizing Time Travel* because it kind of asks, if our present is our past, how do you collapse time? Because all of those things are still actively felt, in good and bad ways. These imposed borders, divisions of time that have been created through capitalism, colonialism and imperialism, are perhaps happening all at once.

On *Haunting*: Nicole Marroquin interviewed by Mira Simonton-Chao

SPEAKERS

Nicole Marroquin (NM)

Mira Simonton-Chao (MSC)

MSC

What were your earliest interactions with archives?

NM

I didn't care about history. I have an art history degree, but I really wrote off art history because I saw flaws in it from day one. I was annoyed and agitated in classes and got pushed out. My favorite line was, "Nicole, this is a women's art history class, not a feminism class." Total bullshit, but I just didn't even think I had any interest in it. I wasn't in the story of how anything important ever happened, so I didn't care about it as much, but I had an intense interest in global art histories that were not the canon.

When I moved to Pilsen, I just instinctively could tell there were much more interesting things there than in the town I grew up in, which constantly rotates people. The thing about Chicago is there's so many kinds of people, old punk rockers and young punk rockers. It's a real neighborhood, and it's a real town. I was craving that and I was craving learning about Midwestern Latinx history, which just wasn't present when I was growing up in Ann Arbor. I heard these stories, and I needed to find out what happened in these schools, in this town, and in this neighborhood in particular. I ended up in the archives out of necessity.

One of the first places I went was the Chicago History Museum, and I had a terrible time. There were nice archivists, but everything was difficult there. There was no concerted effort on any part of their organizing system, on any part of the archivists, to create a way to find anything related to neighborhood histories, particularly in Latinx neighborhoods. There was still some mythical idea that Mexican people were not a significant population until the 2000s. Then I went to the University of Illinois, Richard J. Daily library. I like public archives. I had a great time at the Daly library, and then I had an incredible time at the Walter Reuther in Detroit. Those archivists got me super amped.

We're in a crisis right now. There are archives under threat all over the place. There's librarians downloading mass amounts of data all the time trying to preserve stuff that's being deleted. It took me a long time to get into librarians and archivists. I would say 2014 is the first time I started to seriously start a file. As in, these are the places I'm going, this is the stuff I'm looking for, these are the things that are on microfilm, these are the things that are in their holdings, [and] this is my to do list. A couple of dissertations that were written in the '70s that were incredibly helpful to me learning about things that had happened in the neighborhood. You just can't survive on Chicago Tribune archives, because they are not the voice of the people.

MSC

Did your research at these archives intersect with your artist practice and your teaching?

NM

I didn't quite know how it was going to intersect. It was very obvious how it would intersect with my teaching, because I was already doing a self-funded residency at Benito Juarez high school. Everything I found I would just take directly to them. I wasn't the audience. The stakes were higher for them. I would take it to them, and I would gauge from their reactions, is this interesting? Is this important? Do I need to keep working on this? Then I started having categories that were for later. I did it instinctively. I didn't know what it was going to be.

I got tenure in 2016 and at my tenure talk, I brought up this research I was doing, and I was advised against it because it wasn't clear how I was going to work it into my art. I was doing sculpture at the time. I wasn't a printmaker since the '90s, and people didn't have any faith in my printing or something. Then I went off to Oxbow, and in the middle of the night I would go into the printmaking studios. I burned some screens. I couldn't remember how to do anything. It'd been 25 years, and I forgot to tape out around the edges and the ink was everywhere. It was a total fucking disaster, but I still have those prints, and they were cool.

MSC

I really love your masthead prints. Can you talk a little bit about that work, your research philosophy, and how you're thinking about that in relation to the students and communities that you work with?

NM

I've been in college since 1988, and I have not been present in any of the stuff: in the literature, in the documentation, in the archives, in the libraries. But I've always seen these

opportunities for stuff to be done differently. I became a teacher, and I just started doing what I wanted. I knew what needed to happen, and I was just going towards that point like a boulder rolling down a mountain.

I was offered a student teaching position in Ann Arbor. I walked in and two students told me, "Go get me that." And I was like, fuck these people and went straight to Detroit. I taught in some fucked up charter schools, and I also taught at West Middle, which was really fucked up. But I would look into this sea of brown faces and think there is nothing that is built for these children. Pre-made curriculum is trash, so I had to make it myself. I wanted to talk about stuff that other people weren't talking about in school. I went to really radical schools, where there was people trying new things and fucking it up. Trying new things and fucking it up is my mode. I don't ever want to teach something I've taught. If I've taught it four times, I'll keep the warm feelings in my heart of being confident about how great it went the last time, but I don't want to do it again. I get bored very easily. I fantasize constantly about creating a curriculum about this third space that many of us live in that would open up opportunities for people to feel informed, for one thing, but also excited and curious about all the stuff that has yet to be done.

MSC

There's always new material.

NM

Always. Every time somebody comes out with a new book, there's 10 new paths that need to be done next. There's so many things to figure out. And I'm not that interested in people

learning facts. I'm interested in stoking people's curiosity about things and showing them where they are in the timeline and in the world relative to recent history.

MSC

Something I love about being in the archives, and specifically connecting with primary sources, is that I often feel like the material could have been written yesterday. It feels like a collapse of time, which leads me to asking you about the course that you co-taught with Josh, *Decolonizing Time Travel*.

NM

Teaching with Josh was so enriching to me. More than once, I would just be a puddle of emotion before class even started and be so amped about it. He and I think really differently, but we both get jazzed about each other's sources. We're interested in very related things and have similar beliefs, I think in part because we're both from South Texas. If you're from South Texas, you have to think about third space differently, especially as somebody who's native to South Texas. It's a place that changed identities, made us foreigners out of the blue.

The course title, [*Decolonizing Time Travel*] was based on a book that we were both really into at the time. I remember reading every single page of this book. We were both so jazzed about this book. It made such an impression on me. The first title was DIY Time Travel, and then it became *Decolonizing Time Travel*. We were talking about time travel a lot, and about going back into the past and into history and reconfiguring it in order to change the future.

After the first year we taught it, that Saidiya Hartman book, [*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*] came out, that we're both obsessed with. And we were like, how can we change the whole class to have that as the umbrella text, with all the spokes coming down into the different types of readings. It's a super interdisciplinary class, organically built by two people who are super nerds. The idea was to have them do the thing that charges us up, which is to go for it: release yourself from time, release yourself from space, get into an archive, and get lost. Push into it and find yourself. I think the best part about it was that we both crept into it carefully. Collaboration isn't, this is my class, and then I let you sprinkle something on it. We both insisted on some things, let go of other things. That really allowed it to become this whole fresh, new thing.

MSC

What led you to that transition from teaching K-12 in public schools to teaching at the college level?

NM

I'm more interested in K-12 people. No offense to us, but that's where it's at. That's where the urgency is, that's where the intensity is, that's where the people are. I like public schools, and I'm interested in good old Freire, being with the people as a methodology. I think my life is slightly empty right now because I'm not working with young people. I like them because they tell you what's up. And if you haven't made a reasonable case about why they need to do something, they just won't do it. They will leave or walk out or tell you to fuck off, which I appreciate. Or they're like, this is boring and stupid, which I love. I don't like the weird,

transactional relationship in college where they're like, Oh, I'm going to kiss your ass and do you favors so that I get an A. I taught college because I graduated undergrad with 240 credits. I'm a school person. I like learning stuff. I figured a way to stay in school forever is to teach college. That's the best way to do it. I'm interested in teaching and learning everything about it. I'm going to be researching forever. I've always been a researcher. Archives are new to me.

Art school is great because of the freedom it gives me and allows me to teach in a bunch of different ways. Teaching [art] education was the greatest because I love having people think about how they teach and learn. That's where it's at with me, and I'm finding it really hard to just teach art right now, really missing talking about *how it happens*. I miss that part a lot. I don't think I'm going to stay away from art education. I am just resistant to starting an art education department here [at Stamps] myself, because I know how much paperwork it takes.

MSC

Can you talk a little bit about the show *Historical F(r)ictions* and the speculative work you have done?

NM

Working with Andres [Hernandez], he came with this entire planet of stuff, and I came with this whole heap of things that I was already in the middle of working on. During the residency, which was a six month residency at the Cultural Center in that space where Buddy is now, we were both present and doing things: making work, having people come through and talk to us about it.

I was teaching *Doing Democracy* with Andres, and we were reading books that had been written and released three months before — the same with me and Josh — teaching them at the same time. Every day I was getting shipments in from eBay of discarded newspaper photos that I had found that I'd never seen before, and Andres would be like, I know what that is. And I was like, *you know?* And it just revived my interest in teaching and learning.

Every class I taught with Andres, we read a bell hooks chapter [from *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*]. I had a teacher in grad school who told me that our job is to find the gaps between what's known and known. The unknown part, what's not in history necessarily, between what's known and what's known, and the spaces between, that's our stuff — taking those archival silences and telling that story. And I was like, Oh, I just need a defined assignment. I'm there now. I'm focused and asking questions that don't need answering.

I really like the unknown and the not knowable as a topic, and that's where I was focusing with Josh, too. The idea was to go back and find things that we could plug into: finding ourselves in the archive, finding new information, or finding gaps. That's what Saidiya Hartman was getting at. You find all these disparate sources and leads, you put them together, and you build the new thing. We have to make it, because our books were burned, our people were burned, and there is no human library to turn to to get the information we need. It's not in the canon. The power of that is that you can take things in the past and change the future with them. All I wanted to do was teach young people. I grew up not knowing shit about Mexican Americans in the Midwest or Chicano movements or people's fight for justice.

I have taught about that, lectured about that, and presented images. And images are evidence still to most people, even though I can arrange them in a way to tell a different story, if I wanted to. But I'm trying to keep it as honest as possible based on what I know. I'll share every idiosyncrasy or gossip I've heard about the photos. I've done a lot of oral history. I've talked to people who have since passed away, who I can't go back and ask them about it. I've gotten to this amount of information that is very ethically suspect for me to just hold on to it. If I get anything, I have to put it out there: make it accessible, give it to people. Hoarding information is some fucked up thing that happens with historians and archives. I hate it. I live to get this information into young people's hands.

I was co-teaching with other people in Juarez, and this information I got from someone and that I brought to these young people, and… I saw their lives change. I watched it. I saw a public consciousness around struggle. By introducing these little bits of information and then making it public knowledge over time, I saw things change. I don't give a shit about authorship. I don't know how long I'm going to live as long as any information I've got is transmitted with care and persistence to the people who need it to be able to get shit done. Then I'm happy.

MSC

I was wondering how you approach addressing the colonial-imperial archive as this violent kind entity in relation to what it can give us. How do you talk about the violence of archives classes, while also being like, we need to get into these archives?

NM

Us in the archives is different from people from a dominant culture in the archive. That's just a fact. It's not for us, it's not about us, and as soon as you know that, it's fine. The archive will never be complete; The archive is flawed. They don't collect stuff that wasn't written about, and they don't write about stuff that wasn't collected. Maria Cotera's incredible scholarship has taught us that. [The archive] is not something we should hang our hopes on.

I will introduce one or two articles about the archives being full of ghosts, being like don't go there looking for your heart, go there looking for traces and absences, and you'll understand it. I would say it's different for artists because we're also already trained to think in a different way. Sometimes I'll look at stuff, and I know because I'm confident in myself now, that a project is going to come out of it. I don't know what it's going to be, and it might be in five years. Whenever I go with students, I tell them, we're going on a drift. You're going to turn on your art sensibilities, and you're going to notice stuff. You can do it through text. You can do it through images. You can do it through whatever pattern recognition you choose to do. It doesn't matter, but take notes and notice shit, because this is all you know as an artist. Another thing that Josh and I would do is to tell people to get lost. It's a time suck, but it's a good time suck.

I've had students in the archives twice this semester, and of course, the archivists are tricky. They always pull out stuff I've never seen. I thought I had seen it all. I did all this research, and they pull out something they know what I haven't looked at. I'm working on something right now because there's this booklet I found that these Chicano students worked on called *Carnal Knowledge*. It's a 1973 handbook for Chicano students moving to Ann Arbor. It's like here's the thrift stores, here's the hotels. This is where you should live. This is how much it costs. It's typed, they used a stencil to write the word carnal, and I'm reprinting

it this week on the Riso. And the Chicano student organization created this brown paper, it's all typed, and I'm just going to put it into a mini booklet. Probably the first three pages and then some of the back pages, where they were proposing a new curriculum for the School of Social Work. They were also recruiting in South Texas and then sending a bill for their hotels to U of M. They were bodacious! What shut them down in '75 was, believe it or not, anti-affirmative action. You never know you're gonna see this stuff!

Closing Notes

Keywords for an Archival Unraveling is an invitation to think with others across the boundaries of academic disciplines and institutional hierarchy to imagine other ways of living and being with one another. It is an invitation to resist the confinement of our collective knowledge and memory documentation and transmission to the archive and to pursue other modes of exchange. By teaching the archive's origins as a colonial and imperial tool and challenging its naturalization in contemporary life, we pursue an archival unraveling that invites alternative modes of collective memory preservation into our work. We encourage students to look beyond the institution for methods and means of documentation and preservation and usurp the power of the archive. The offerings of theorists, thinkers, and practitioners such as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay and Saidiya Hartman and so many others offer us methods of speculative memory work that challenge the dynamism of the archive while also encouraging us to undertake the deep imaginative work of abandoning it. However, these methods do not serve our collective futures in the hands of the few. It is an urgent undertaking for us to claim the means of our own world-building and embrace the challenge of imagining a different yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

I hope that the ideas presented in this thesis — via my conversations with Josh MacPhee, Maria Cotera, Deirdre de la Cruz, Josh Rios, and Nicole Marroquin and my own theorizing on speculative memory work and archival fissures — may serve as invitation to others to pursue other modes of unraveling in their own teaching and learning with archives. As such, I ask both students and educators to consider what it means to engage with a praxis of teaching with *and against* the archive and to complicate our collective understanding of the archive. It is only from this point that we may work together to imagine archival

relationships that traverse archives without allowing them to totalize our understanding of

collective knowledge and memory. The archive will not free us, but perhaps through its gaps,

its omissions, and its *fissures* we may glimpse other tomorrows.