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Archive (re)mix. Vues d'Afrique: An Introduction

The production of art, visual and textual, as an exercise in exploring archival materials and techniques has been with us for some time now. As is well known, by 2006 already Hal Foster was accounting for “an archival impulse at work internationally in contemporary art”.¹ Large numbers of essays and many books, treatises and anthologies alike, have been published and numerous exhibitions—indeed, whole biennial and triennial projects—curated on the question over the past fifteen years.² This begs a question: why a further foray into the subject?

There are several answers. First is a matter of geographical focus. These pages address artistic and literary production in and regarding the African world. While there are, of course, works concerning the archival impulse in this setting, these tend to be narrowly focused: centred, that is, on specific national environments—South Africa in particular.³ With essays on artists who hail from and/or focalise their work on Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Togo, the present volume's range is significantly broader.

1. Foster H., “An Archival Impulse”, *October*, vol. 110, 2004, p. 3.

2. Begoc J. and Boulouch N, *La performance, entre archives et pratiques contemporaines*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011; Bismarck B. von et al. (eds), *Interarchive: Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, Berlin, Walther König, 2002; Blazwick I. et al., *Gerhard Richter: Atlas: The Reader*, London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2012; Borggreen G. and Gade R., *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013; COMAY R. (ed.), “Lost in the Archives”, *Alphabet City*, n° 8, 2002; Enwezor O., *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, Göttingen, Steidl, 2008; Mokhtari S. and POINSOT J.-M., *Les artistes contemporains et l'archive : interrogation sur le sens du temps et de la mémoire à l'ère de la numérisation*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004; Schaffner I. et al. (eds), *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*, New York/London, Prestel, 1998, among numerous others.

3. Firstenberg L. and Peffer J., *Translation/Seduction/Displacement: Post-Conceptual and Photographic Work by Artists from South Africa*, Portland, Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art, 2000; Hamilton C. et al. (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, Cape Town, David Philip, 2002; Maart B., “Curator's essay”, in Maart B. (ed.), *Imaginary Fact. Contemporary South-African Art and the Archive*, Grahamstown, National Arts Festival, 2013, *inter alia*. There are also exceptions: see GARB T., *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive*, Göttingen, Steidl, 2013.

It is one of the first publications to date to consider, on a continent-wide scale, intersections between artistic and archival practices.

A second consideration relates to the national contexts in which the present project emerges. A collaboration between two institutions, one French, the other German, this volume takes to task a deeply entrenched tendency encountered in the academic worlds of both countries: a form of disciplinary specificity that tends to eschew cross-pollination. The essays gathered here seek explicitly to mix and to meld approaches, bringing literary and art historical studies into the ambit of anthropology and sociology, epistemology and philosophy—and vice versa. The goal is emphatically to break down boundaries between genres. This is expressed both in the subjects covered—from Hip Hop to museology, sculpture, installation, film, photography and theatre, to cite but a few examples—and in the ways they are addressed, by authors intent on exploring multiple layers of “encounter”⁴ between artist(s) and archive(s).

Still another focus is a quest to understand why it is that the archive, over the past decade and a half, has become so critical a subject of reflection for so many people. Undoubtedly, the veritable “archive fever”⁵ that has gripped artists and their critics alike bears intimate links to the ethics and the aesthetics of postcolonial thought: both “archival art”⁶ and reflection on the postcolonial condition, when at their best, share an abiding interest in the fragmentary and the transgressive. In these pages, we seek to bring together texts that explore this intersection, shedding light, in the process, on ties between emergent practices and socio-political states of affairs.

Of particular interest to us, in this latter regard, are ways in which individual creators, and cultural producers more generally, seek to subvert the archive and/or the historical order it implies, and the extent to which they succeed (or fail) to do so. Closely tied to this, in turn, is a desire to highlight, and to query, artists’ engagement with legacies of violence. While the matter of violence, and the related question of trauma, are not the subject of all of the essays collected in this volume, they appear as a thread—a leitmotiv of sorts—throughout, initiating conversations among practitioners working in a wide variety of modes and media.

That said, Foster shows, artistic practices that explore (or dissect) the archive commonly move beyond subversion and trauma both, evincing, through processes of connection and *détournement*, a desire to sketch out new histories. In the process, those who deploy such practices might be seen to be imagining alternative futures (utopias, even) as a means of transcending the trauma born of the archive’s excavation. “This move to turn ‘excavation

4. Foster H., *ibid*, p. 9.

5. Derrida J., *Mal d’archive*, Paris, Galilée, 1995; Enwezor O., *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, Göttingen, Steidl, 2008.

6. Foster H., *op. cit*.

sites' into 'construction sites'", he writes, "is welcome...: it suggests a shift away from a melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than traumatic".⁷

The retrieval and reactivation of hidden or hibernating texts and images from the archive⁸ play a key role in this latter regard. Both approaches are evident in the work presented in these pages. All of the practitioners addressed in the following essays—in different, often complementary and at times contradictory ways—are involved in processes of mining the archive as means of rethinking and, ideally, reshaping the present and future.

As the foregoing suggests, this foray into the arts of the archive explores multiple directions. Questions of the archive's excavation and its (re)building are, as one might imagine, key, as are three core approaches explored in the volume's constituent essays: processes of remixing, violating and performing the archive. These and related conceptual perspectives, in different ways and valences, intersect in the works and practices surveyed, simultaneously enriching and complicating visions of the archive and, ultimately, the archive itself.

REMIKING THE ARCHIVE

A common practice, deployed by several of the practitioners addressed in these pages, is that of the remix. This involves a revisiting and recombining of images, texts and/or tropes, mined in different areas of the archive—or, indeed, in different archives altogether. The result is a recombination that potentially ushers into being new semantic orders and new relations between images. From such an approach commonly emerge what Bruno Latour describes as "productive cascade[s] of re-representation",⁹ similar to filial intertextual relationships in literature. This idea carries a genealogical and hierarchical understanding. One image is considered to be the origin(al), with others relating to it as so many offspring.

The foregoing model carries many metaphorical possibilities. We might, for instance, speak of it in terms of generational conflicts between images and of processes of repulsion, growth and emancipation. Such conflicts and processes, in turn, we might contrast with other types of relationships born of archive remixes. Here, practices associated with the Internet, in particular, are relevant. Where the focus is on artists working extensively with the Web, relationships between images might be seen to emerge that are more horizontal, emphasizing a democratic or even a flat relationship between sampled elements.

7. Foster H., *op. cit.*, p. 22.

8. Assmann A., *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2006.

9. Latour B., "What is Iconoclasm? Or Is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?", in Weibel P. and Latour B. (eds), *Iconoclasm, Beyond the Image-Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Berlin and Cambridge, ZKM and MIT Press, 2002, p. 36.

A key consideration where hierarchical relationships are concerned is permutation. Close attention must be paid to shifts in significance and location resulting in mashups: emergent orders that, in time, may sediment, causing a new image to be seen as lying at the origin of a given archive. A further consideration, relevant as regards both hierarchical and horizontal relationships, is the matter of new combinations. As sampled images come together in novel configurations, they begin to resonate and interfere with one another. This causes friction¹⁰, which in turn gives rise to complex patterns and clusters of coagulated meaning.

Several of the essays collected in this volume foreground practices of remixing. Érika Nimis focuses on four contemporary women artists, Rachida Azdaou, Dalila Dalléas Bouzar, Amina Menia and Zineb Sedira, who use video and installation, as well as more “traditional” media such as drawing and painting, to tackle the history of Algeria over the past sixty years. The four artists, she shows, draw on multiple sources, mixing and melding official and family accounts, to tell stories of their country that displace versions of the past sanctioned by the powers that be. As one might imagine, the colonial archive plays a critical role in this setting. The same is true of two other bodies of work: key pieces by artists Bridget Baker and Anouk Durand that are the subject of Marian Nur Goni’s article. Here, past and present, “fact” and fiction, image and word are called upon in processes of mining and mixing public and private archives. The resulting works question silences and worry faults, underscoring the constructed nature of authorized accounts. Dominique Ranaivoson trains her gaze on the words of three writers, Rachid Boudjedra, Assia Djebar and Raharimanana. In their respective approaches to and representations of the past, she shows, all three make use of fragments which they remix in ways that highlight gaps, flaws and blurs inherent in archival materials and processes alike. Viviane Azarian considers ways in which digital technologies allow artists at work in the Great Lakes region of East Africa to deconstruct and reconstruct filmic archives to ends of rethinking and reworking issues of representation. Sam Hopkins and Nadine Siegert, in their conversation on the curatorial project *Mashup the Archive* at Iwalewahaus, University of Bayreuth, try to unpack what it means to develop new works based on older ones in the context of a museum institution and its collection. Questions of copyright, heritage and ownership are discussed in relation to the idea that a whole collection or even institution can be mashed up and remixed to create new meaning and unstable notions of the authority of the archive. But also the issue of knowledge production through the means of a collective and disturbing work on the archive are explored as possible modes to deal with the countless objects and stories kept in the archives that are connected with coloniality and modernity.

10. Tsing A.L., *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.

VIOLATING THE ARCHIVE

The recombination of archival elements results in their (partial) destruction and, in the process, gives rise to new elements and associated meanings, some of which can prove quite troubling to the established order of things. Such troubling, in turn, is linked to forms of instability that, Mike Featherstone proposes, are characteristic of contemporary takes on the archive.¹¹ Today, he holds, we must look at the archive as a fluid, processual and dynamic entity whose constituent elements can be reconfigured again and again. In particular, because of the impact of digital practices, we have to recognize that instability, contingency and, thereby, decentring are an integral part of the archivist's work. Artistic practice, one might argue building on Featherstone's proposal, is, today, the locus par excellence of such archivist's decentring. This is so in particular, one might argue further, in societies that have recently experienced great trauma. There, sampling, remixing and exploding the archive —playing havoc with canonical texts and images— is fundamental to the construction of imaginaries.

The foregoing has particular bearing on spaces that have been subjected to colonial rule. Iconoclasm —the deliberate destruction of images on grounds that they are incarnations of a false consciousness and are therefore harmful— played an integral part in the colonisation process: at the hands of powers bent on domination it served as a fearsome weapon. Partly in response, it was similarly (if to radically different ends) deployed in the struggle against colonisation. The resulting tension between these two uses of iconoclasm is not a mere thing of the past, however. In the works of artists who engage with the colonial archive, it resurfaces to powerful effect. One might point, in this regard, to the collective Bofa da Cara (Nástio Mosquito and Pere Ortín). In their well-known video collage *My African Mind* (2011) (CC1-01), Nástio Mosquito and Ortín mine and remix the colonial archive with the explicit goal of doing it damage. Their intent, however, is not only to explode representations of the past. It is also to speak of the present, which, in *My African Mind*, is shown to be shot through with violence —political, economic and social— that is a direct emanation of this same past. As in archival art at its best, the result is complicated, even messy. The tale told is not one of simple neo-colonialism. The revolutionary heroes of the past come in for a drubbing as well, which injects a heavy dose of cynicism into easy readings of the postcolonial condition.

As this suggests, violations of the archive are (or, at any rate, can be) deeply political undertakings. In some instances, they can involve a trespassing of borders or, altogether, a breaking of taboos. Here again one might point to a project involving Nástio Mosquito, this time in the company of Vic Pereiro, his other half in the collective Nastivicious. In a piece titled *ifind, iabuse to*

¹¹ Featherstone M., "Archive", *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 23, n° 2-3, 2006, p. 591-596.

simplify, icostumize objective mine, iyou what see (2011), which the artists describe as a “videowork [that] confronts us with the archive as storage space for a collective imagery of hope and despair, questions about the quality of good and bad”,¹² we encounter a remix that puts Nelson Mandela and Adolf Hitler in close proximity, juxtaposing the former’s raised fist with the latter’s straight-armed salute as if the two, in the end, were little more than extensions of one another. The archive of our collective imaginary is blown wide open, laying the ground for radical, and thereby highly productive, forms of questioning: for a rebuilding from scratch of this selfsame archive.

In the present volume, violations of the archive are considered by several authors. Maëline Le Lay addresses the work of two artists working in tandem: photographer Sammy Baloji and writer Patrick Mudekereza. Mining the archives of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren), focusing in particular on the remnants of the famed Lemaire expedition to Katanga (1898-1900), remixing these and melding them with contemporary photography and writing, in 2008-2010 the two artists took to task the insane violence of Belgian colonialism. Le Lay shows both the successes of the project —evinced in its ethical intent and resultant form(s)— and its failures. In the latter regard, she highlights the significant risk at which the project was (and remains) of being recuperated by the very institution that it seeks to question and, in the process destabilise: the museum that holds the Lemaire archive. In his second, highly regarded novel *Monnew*, Claire Ducournau shows, Ahmadou Kourouma too goes head to head with an institution renowned for the wealth of its archive: the Seuil publishing house in Paris. Mining the writer’s own archive —multiple annotated drafts of the novel and a rich body of correspondence— she brings to the fore tensions between writer and publisher. The tale she tells echoes other problematic encounters between African writers (Yambo Ouologuem, notably) and Seuil, highlighting, like Le Lay’s article, the immense complexity and the dangers of recuperation inherent in attempts to destabilise (the) established archive(s). Essays by Katja Gentric, and Emmanuelle Spiesse, though they are dealt with in another section of this introduction, may be seen to engage with violations of the archive as well.

PERFORMING THE ARCHIVE

Performance offers manifold means of questioning the archive and, in the process, redefining the power. The latter expression is borrowed from artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, who, in a 2010 photographic series by this title, uses performance to query how, and by and for whom, archives of a country’s past should function (CC1-02). The locus of Kiluanji Kia Henda’s action is a series

¹². [<http://nastivicious.com/?portfolio=dandaka>].

of empty pedestals in the heart of Luanda, towering masonry bases once occupied by (now toppled) colonial era monuments. Presenting himself atop these remnants of a power-laden historical archive, he proposes a rereading of the past and, in the process, effects a transmission of the archive into the present. His performances fill a gap—a void at the core of the archive—with new images and narratives that address Luanda's heterogeneous present. They creatively redefine (a certain) history's visual traces, bringing them into the here and now and imagining a future that envisions new heroes for the city yet to come.¹³ Posing in the clothes and fabrics of emergent Angolan fashion designers, he constructs himself as the incarnation of a new Luandan: a bright, queer and moving body that stands in radical contradistinction to yesteryear's "heroes" cast in stone.

In these and related uses of performance to trouble the archive, the question of trauma, previously touched upon in these pages, emerges as a key consideration. The notion that trauma cannot be adequately represented—that certain things can simply not be expressed in image or word—is one that has been addressed by several authors (one might mention Primo Levi, as well as Susan Sontag¹⁴). Jill Bennett sees things differently. At issue, she suggests, is less a matter of representation than one of performance. Through processes of performance, she proposes, artworks are able to trigger emotional responses and, in doing so, to involve audiences in acting out and working through traumatic experiences.¹⁵ In works like Kiluanji Kia Henda's, the archive, performed, emerges as the locus—the place par excellence—of such catharsis.

Performances of the archive draw the attention of several authors in the following pages. Sophie Moulard's essay highlights the role that different kinds of performance—urban, rural, live, online and on the page—play in deconstructions of the colonial archive effected by Hip-Hop artist Elom 20ce. Katja Gentic's text on re-readings of the colonial archive closes with an analysis of performance pieces by William Boshoff: works in which the artist transforms himself into a living, breathing archive. Still another text that may be seen to address questions of performativity—in this instance in the work of curators—is that by Katharina Greven and Pierre-Nicolas Bounakoff (see following section).

WORDS IN CLOSING: (RE)BUILDING THE ARCHIVE

Whether they choose to remix, to violate or to perform the archive—or indeed to work in all of these modes simultaneously—the artists surveyed in the following chapters are also all engaged in processes of rebuilding it. Each, in her or his own way, tackles the immensely difficult task of constructing

13. See Simone A., *For the City Yet to Come*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004.

14. Levi P., *Se questo è un uomo*, Turin, Einaudi, 1947 and Sontag S., *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

15. Bennett J., *Empathic Vision*, Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 18.

novel discourses from what one might term the ruins of archive. Every one of the thirteen essays that, together, constitute this volume could have been addressed here. The focus, however, is on four, which expressly deal with processes of archive building.

Katharina Greven and Pierre-Nicolas Bounakoff show how a museum, Iwalewahaus, University of Bayreuth, has taken up the challenge of archiving a massive body of objects hailing from Nigeria. These objects were collected in the 1950s and 60s by art aficionados Ulli and Georgina Beier and, thereafter, deposited at Iwalewahaus by Ulli Beier, the museum's founder. In their capacity as Iwalewahaus doctoral students, Greven and Bounakoff are closely associated with the inventoring and study of the Beier estate. Drawing on their experiences in this context, they reflect upon their own academic and archival practices. Their essay addresses the difficulties (and pleasures) of dealing with such a large and heterogeneous estate and the complexities involved in transforming it into a functional archive.

Emmanuelle Spiesse's text centres on Nigeria as well, in a context both distinct and related. She addresses a very different kind of museum, created by contemporary installation artist Dilomprizulike. Hers is a biographical project. Drawing on extensive interviews with the artist regarding his highly idiosyncratic museum, she sets about the task of producing an archive: of telling a previously little known story that intersects with the broader—visual and textual—archive of contemporary Nigerian art and the links that this bears to the global art archive.

In the two essays outlined above, close attention is paid to means and modes of collecting information. This in turn raises questions about the nature and the act of storing and mining data, and about ways in which these practices relate to the production of archives. It proves of considerable interest to consider these questions in light of the distinction that Johannes Fabian draws between databases and archives. Reflecting on the art of "writing from the virtual archive" in relation to oral texts presented in his online journal *LPCA*,¹⁶ Fabian points to the thick materiality of archives (as opposed to databases) and to the creative processes involved in building them:

"What 'Writing from the Virtual Archive' could entail to anthropology may become clarified if we consider the difference between a database and an archive. Databases, conceived and established long before the advent of the computer and the Internet, belong to the conceptual arsenal of a positivist and essentially ahistorical view of anthropology. Any depository of information may of course be called a database metaphorically... A virtual archive of the kind envisaged here is never a neutral storage device. Given the communicative prac-

¹⁶. See his online journal: [<http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/>] and the Archive of Popular Swahili section: [<http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/aps/index.html>].

tices involved in producing ethnographic texts, it is inevitably a partial, personal, and, again, ideally, communal creation".¹⁷

Communal creation is a key concern for Alain Ricard as well. It is in these terms that he names and analyses the collaborative work that he undertook with photographer John Kiyaya in the vicinity of Lac Tanganyika. His essay is an account of the construction of a photographic archive: a construction involving two complementary actors —the photographer and the author, a specialist of texts and literature. After creating a database —a selection of prints and negatives drawn from the artist's collection— Ricard began a wide-ranging conversation¹⁸ with Kiyaya, with a specific goal in mind: the creation, for each image/negative, of a caption and associated text. This process echoes Fabian's approach to the archive. For the latter, the act of communal creation implies giving free reign to the author of a given text (or body of images) by facilitating for her/him the process of offering an informative and analytical commentary on said text or image. Through their interaction, the author and the facilitator together produce meaning and knowledge. This gives rise to new "semantic layers" and, as a result, to novel forms of encounter.

How, in the archive-building process, materials hailing from a wide variety of sources and including many different types of media encounter and cross-pollinate one another is the focus of the last essay addressed in these opening pages. The Panafest Archive, a collective, multi-disciplinary project, focuses on four Pan-African arts and culture festivals of the 1960s and 70s. Four members of the Archive, Éloi Ficquet, Dominique Malaquais, Malika Rahal and Cédric Vincent, come together here to present its structure and theoretical underpinnings. The result is a snapshot of a building site in progress: a glimpse into the construction of an archive in the making.

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¹⁷. Fabian J., *Ethnography as Commentary: Writing from the Virtual Archive*, Durham, Duke University Press, pp. 122-23.

¹⁸. See his book based on conversations with numerous African writers: Ricard A., *La formule Bardey. Voyages africains*, Bordeaux, Confluences, coll. "Traversées de l'Afrique", 2005. See also Ricard A., "De la conversion à la conversation. Les premières années de Thomas Arbousset au Lesotho et les débuts de l'ethnographie (1833-1842)", *Perspectives missionnaires*, 2002, vol. 2, n° 44, pp. 43-57.

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