

## **Art of the Archive**

T 12.30 – 3.00

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### **Summary**

The hypothesis of this class is that archives are not merely passive repositories; they are powerful tools that can be used to shape society, politics, culture. As such, they are contested spaces, offering rich possibilities for contemporary artists. In this class, we will be exploring these possibilities through theoretical texts, art historical examples, projects and in-class discussion.

To better understand the functions of archives, we will be looking at various kinds of archives, and asking critical questions such as:

What is left out of the archive? What are its boundaries?

What has been forgotten or unnoticed in the archive?

Who has access to the archive? Could it serve a different purpose, if placed in different hands?

How is the archive organized?

How could it be re-organized to serve a different function?

You will extend this investigation by developing projects that interrogate and re-structure existing archives in order to critique existing social narratives. You will also imagine and develop your own archives whose contents and/or structure elaborate your cultural/political stance.

### **Course Materials**

#### **Attendance and Participation**

Attendance will be taken each day within fifteen minutes of the start of class. Therefore, it is essential that you arrive on time. Three or more unexcused absences will result in an automatic F.

This class follows a seminar format, and you are expected to participate in discussions about readings. Failure to do so will result in a failing grade.

#### **Etiquette**

Laptops and mobile phones are not to be used in class.

You may bring a beverage to class, but not food.

#### **Office Hours**

Tuesdays 11AM – 12 noon at the ITP Adjunct Office.

#### **Readings**

You are required to do the in-class readings and write a short (max 150 words) post on the class Tumblr expressing a single question or idea or association that the readings bring to mind.

### **Project 1: Create a fictional archive**

Create a fictional archive based on material created from scratch or appropriated from another source. Present this archive in a way that offers an insight into the event or culture that it purports to document.

### **Project 2: Archive archaeology**

Choose a particular archive, such as Google Street View, the Wikileaks Iraq War file, or your high school yearbook. Create a work, such as a collage, visualization, or essay video, which uses at least one document or image from the archive to call attention to the underlying logic behind it.

### **Project 3: Creative Archives**

In this project, you will create a prototype or sketch for a new archive that serves a purpose such as telling untold stories or fueling cultural innovation.

### **Final Project Proposals**

You should begin thinking about your final project as soon as possible and take advantage of office hours early in the semester. A 1-page written proposal will be due on 10/25. Feedback will be given the following week.

### **Prototype/Research Presentations**

The 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> sessions of class will be reserved for prototype presentations. In these presentations, you will be asked to talk about the thought process behind your work, reference points to other projects that inspire you, and your plans and progress to date.

The week before your prototype presentation, you will be asked to select a short reading for the class.

### **Final Project**

For your final project, you will either develop a new archive intended to serve particular social or cultural function, or critique an existing archive in order to offer a new social narrative.

You may also extend any of the previous projects to a fuller state of development.

Week 1 | 9/6

### **Thirteen Theses Against Snobs**

What is an archive? What do archives contain, and what do their contents say about history?

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "Thirteen Theses Against Snobs", from One Way Street.

Week 2 | 9/13

### **The Archival Document as Fact, Fiction, Symptom**

Readings for this week:

Paul Ricoeur, "Archives, Documents, Traces" from Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006, pages 66-69.

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," from *Screen*, Volume 13, Issue 1, Spring 1972. Available online.

Introduction to Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, pages 3-17.

Walid Raad, "The Operator #17 File" and "The Secrets File" and "Let's Be Honest, The Rain Helped," from Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006, pages 177-180.

JG Ballard, "The Index", 1977.

Week 3 | 9/20

### **Project 1 Due: Fictional Archives**

Week 4 | 9/27

### **Contesting the Archive**

Readings for this week:

Jon Rafman, "The Nine Eyes of Google Street View." Available online at <http://www.artfagcity.com/2009/08/12/img-mgmt-the-nine-eyes-of-google-street-view/>

Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument" from Okwui Enwezor, ed., *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, London: Steidl, 2009, pages 11-48.

"Money Behind Mirrored Walls" from Trevor Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map*, New York: Penguin, 2009. Pages 168-85.

Bruce Sterling, "The Blast Shack", Available online at <http://www.webstock.org.nz/blog/2010/the-blast-shack/>

Week 5 | 10/4

**Project 2 Due: Archive Archaeology**

10/11 No class

Week 6 | 10/18

**Creative Archives**

Readings for this week:

"Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation" and "On the New" in Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008. Pages 23-42 and 53-66.

Danny Birchall, "The Avant Garde Archive Online", *Film Quarterly*, Vol 63, No. 1 (Fall 2009), pp 12-14. Available via JSTOR.

Kenneth Goldsmith, "If It Doesn't Exist on the Internet, It Doesn't Exist." Available online at [http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/if\\_it\\_doesnt\\_exist.html](http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/if_it_doesnt_exist.html)

Kenneth Goldsmith, "UbuWeb Wants to Be Free." Available online at <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/ubuweb.html>

Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, "From Enthusiasm to the Creative Commons" in Merewether, *The Archive*, p 149-153.

Week 7 | 10/25

**Personal and Collective Archives**

Readings for this week:

Excerpt from Eric Michals, "Bad Aboriginal Art."

Excerpt from Mary Kelly, "Post Partum Document."

Clay Shirky, "Private, Public and the Collapse of the Personal" in The New Normal exhibition catalogue, New York: Independent Curators International, 2008.

Christian Boltanski, "Research and Presentation of All that Remains of My Childhood," in Merewether, *The Archive*, p 25.

Andy Warhol, "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol" in Merewether, *The Archive*, p 31.

### *Final Project Proposal Due*

Week 8 | 11/1

### **Project 3 Due**

Week 9 | CLASS TO BE RESCHEDULED

### **The Order of Things**

Readings for this week:

Preface to Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*.

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins."

Michel Foucault, "The Historical a priori and the Archive" in Merewether, *The Archive*, p 26-30.

Susan Hiller, "Working Through Objects" in Merewether, *The Archive*, p 41.

Clay Shirky, "Ontology is Overrated: Categories, Links and Tags." Shirky.com (2005).

Susan Stewart, "Wunderkammer: An After as Before" in Ingrid Schaffner & Matthias Winzen, Eds., *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, New York: Prestel, 1998.

Week 10 | 11/15

### **Prototype discussions 1**

Week 11 | 11/22

### **Prototype discussions 2**

Week 12 | 11/29  
**Prototype discussions 3**

Week 13 | 12/6  
**Final Presentations I**

Week 14 | 12/13  
**Final Presentations II**