



*Abstract:* In four exploratory theoretical gestures (appraise, dispose, hoard and mediate), I propose the “archive as dumpster” as a framework for returning to the physical conditions of memory, where “picking through the trash” subverts traditional archival methodologies by insisting on the very material consequences of a culture inculcated in networked digital communications. I make an argument that by posing the archive as a mediatic question (Parikka 2013), we can begin to account for the ways in which the perceived immateriality and weightlessness of our data is in fact with immense humanistic, environmental, political, and ethical repercussions. It is also a means by which we come to understand who we are, looking forward. In both cases, pitting the archive’s orderly ambitions against the dumpster’s stinking mess reveals a “call of things” (Bennett 2011); the slow and often distanced process of disposal and waste to remind us who we are, in and over time, in and out of our bodies, increasingly under the impression of a dematerialised engagement with our stuff.

## The Archive as Dumpster

Mél Hogan



In *Le goût de l’archive* Arlette Farge explains, “the archival operation first of all consists of separating the documents. The question is to know what to keep and what to abandon” (87). Likewise, in *On Garbage*, John Scanlan explains that the “creation of garbage is the result of separation—of the desirable from the unwanted” (15). In a simple configuration of matter, garbage and archives alike rely on a process of separation to parse the valuable from the worthless.

However, far from merely practical, or bound up in obvious questions of cultural value, I argue that this process of separation is also an act toward differentiation and self-affirmation through a distancing of human bodies from, and disposing of, the past. Conversely, by “becoming-with” with the archive we can allow ourselves to imagine the archive as embodied, occupied, and as (our) habitat (Haraway 300).

In four exploratory theoretical gestures (appraise, dispose, hoard, and mediate), I propose the “archive as dumpster” as a framework for returning to the physical conditions of memory, where “picking through the trash” (the theme of this special issue of *Pivot*) subverts traditional archival methodologies by insisting on the very material consequences of a culture inculcated in networked digital communications. I make the argument that by posing the archive as a mediatic question as proposed by Jussi Parikka in a 2013 lecture called “Save as: Social Memory,” we can begin to account more seriously for the ways in which the perceived immateriality and weightlessness of our data have important humanistic, environmental, political, and ethical repercussions. Pitting the archive’s orderly ambitions against the dumpster’s stinking mess reveals a “call of things,” as explained in Jane Bennett’s lecture on hoarders at The New School in 2001 (n.p.). In a video recording of the event, Bennett theorizes how hoarders see possessions as pieces of themselves rather than as either valuable or worthless objects. Conversely, the slow and often distanced process of disposal and waste reminds us

who we are, in and over time, in and out of our bodies, and increasingly under the impression of a dematerialized engagement with our stuff and ourselves.

### **Appraise**

*And nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, though things certainly end up there. You find nothing in the Archive but stories caught halfway through: the middle of things; discontinuities.<sup>1</sup>*

The decision of what to keep, which is accomplished through acquisition and appraisal, has become a core archival function; it works to instate value by sorting what is worth keeping, based first and foremost on perceived long-term (i.e. one hundred years or so) historical value. This value is then enacted through historical imaginings, predominantly in the form of narrative storytelling as a way of processing our knowledge of the past into various coherent versions of history.

Undoubtedly, decisions about what to keep are necessary in traditional archival operations, if based only on the sheer practicalities of space. Given the limits of a physical repository, as well as the costs of conservation and management, the aim to protect artifacts against rapid deterioration based on environmental, human, and technological factors, requires careful discrimination to sustain itself. Appraisal is therefore always informed by material considerations, a space

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, 45.

reserved for precious artifacts that best affords the telling and retelling of stories.

Of course, this overly simple version/vision of the archive—as a neutral repository, one that offers up unbiased objects for interpretation—has now long been subject to scrutiny. Described as an “archival turn” within the humanities by anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, a newer critical attention to the archive’s power has meant looking past the orderly stacks, down to the cutting room floor. Stoler identifies the archive as “the supreme technology of the late nineteenth-century imperial state, a repository of codified beliefs that clustered (and bore witness to) connections between secrecy, the law, and power” (87). Having drawn much needed attention to this turn, Stoler is often quoted for proposing an against the grain reading as a “focus on the politics of knowledge” that is “a methodological commitment to how history’s exclusions are secured and made” (45). This mode of reading that repudiates the Eurocentrism of history is now so pervasive among postcolonial, queer, and feminist academics (and artists, and activists) such as Jane Anderson, Anjali Arondekar, Antoinette Burton, Ann Cvetkovich, Kate Eichhorn, Linda Morra, Marlene Manoff, Walid Ra’ad, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Katie Shilton & Ramesh Srinivasan, and Tess Takahashi. These critics (among many others) argue that to do archival research without accounting for the limitations of the archive as institution, concept, and practice, is to negate the voices and agency of those most affected and denied by its regulatory powers. This turn towards the

archive, as subject rather than source and repository, is not relegated to the margins of theory, however; Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault all painted the archive as a failed, sprawling, and traumatized endeavour. In each case, the archive is incapable of laying down the enunciative foundation on which (its) history is built. And yet, as now widely understood, preserving this instability is what drives the archival yearning—the feverish impulse activated by the death of memory, as first described by Derrida, and later theorized as “archivization” by Carolyn Steedman (198).

To question the archive’s intentions, then, is also to make a statement about its perceived authority, anchoring it anew as a site of privilege and, increasingly, as a site of precise and predictive algorithmic automation. Despite attempts by postcolonial thinkers to shift if not topple the power invested in the archive by foregrounding its limitations, little has been done to disconnect the archive from the possibilities of recovery, of a past. Critiques that emerge from conceiving of the archive as subject (rather than source) do not do enough to challenge its prospects; the archival turn still “coheres around a temporally ordered seduction of access, which stretches from the evidentiary promise of the past into the narrative possibilities of the future” (Arondekar 5). In other words, despite the potentially fictive status of the archive, its empirical and evidentiary statuses remain.

The authority and objectivity of the archive are enhanced by Bennett’s “call of things” to be in their place, where what is discarded plays a

cleansing and abolishing role that defines the present anew (n.p.). This methodical archive stands in contrast to the messiness of life, what Mary Douglas describes as an attempt to positively reorder our environment to make it conform to an ideal that derives from a certain “economy of values” (qtd. in Scanlan 42). The archive is less about reality, and more about contrived conjecture. To define the archive is to describe the ideal future of a given society, differently emphasizing notions of time and space, in different “now” moments, as afforded by the materiality of each medium. This holds true despite seeming more complex in our current digital era. Increasingly, the archive refers to digital storage as often as it does to the physical repository, and to the so-called Internet of things in between. And although this is a giant conceptual leap, the discursive transition feels seamless. Needless to say, the interplay of concerns—*les enjeux*—of the archive are vast; as a unified concept it becomes important again for what it highlights and reduces to the problematic relationship between preservation and disposal, conceived largely around the volatility of memory and the feverish desire to counter loss.

If Stoler’s “archival turn” was a turn toward the archive as site of inquiry in and of itself rather than as a source for objective primary research, the online archive turns to the question of if and how these two—subject and source—are made distinct and whether such a distinction can still be proven desirable or productive. Geert Lovink asks, “Will the elites establish safeguarded ‘islands in the Net’ where essential knowledge is stored, leaving the wired billions floating in

their own data trash?" (n.p.) With the rapid development of Web technologies requiring constant upgrades for content management systems and consistent refreshing of content to keep social systems vibrant and formats valid, how do networks themselves age in the living archive? Is the Web archive, at least in part, also an archive of its fissures, a trail of broken and faulty links and 404 errors? Should it also reveal the network's "wear and tear"? As a large unsorted store, the online archive, without assessment of its content, communities, and cultures of use, is allegorical to the dumpster.

The online archive offers multiple modes for self-appraisal and exclusion, based on an understanding of the value of the archive. However, despite the established yet ever-evolving concepts that have founded archival value (fixity, integrity, and authenticity), the online realm, free of such referents, is without clear determinants of cultural importance, worth, or usefulness. This lack of clear values is not because digital content is without worth, but because we (still) do not know how to collectively assign it to content online outside of a scarcity/capitalist model, or how to best organize large amounts of data within a framework that is about more than the moment of search (and hence antithetical to long-term visions). This situation is made most evident by the large scale dumping of early Web histories by user-generated content (UGC) sites, such as GeoCities, Friendster, and Google Video, in contrast to the seemingly unassailable position of Google as a search engine or Facebook as a social media network today. Given the sheer amount of ephemera online, does archival

value only come into play when content is at risk of being removed? Or when our privacy is at risk? Increasingly, we wonder if we retain the right to curate our own stories, including the intention of deletions, gaps, silences, and absences.

In a technological landscape with ubiquitous recording and disseminating, the crux of the archive could become about what is forgotten, erased, thrown out, deleted, and never there. The undocumented becomes precious. However, unlike the conventional archive where storage limitations impact archival processes, the rubric of “the digital” and “online” (as) archive has been totalizing. Archives are less a product of memory preservation and more of an operation to erase and eliminate. In this way, archival theory, its workflow and its politics are interconnected; archival value is shaped by the “techno-logics” in place.

Simply put, appraisal is a system of cultural values that informs systematic decision-making by experts to determine value. Value—regardless of its shifting definition and scope—is the underlying motivation for all archival preservation achieved through appraisal. And yet with the recent push to keep everything in databases, these values are disrupted. In the archive as dumpster, however, we can shift attention from the value of artifacts to the value of value itself. As a mediatic question, there exists complex Web infrastructures that serve to connect and disconnect certain bodies from their past, by failing also to confront distant others with those whose media has been used up.



## Dispose

*... the archive as the repository of material which has only been loosely classified, material whose status is as yet indeterminate and stands between rubbish, junk and significance; material which has not been read and researched.<sup>2</sup>*

With the advent of binary code, the relationship between data and memory has been altered; it is increasingly defined by the ephemeral and, in turn, a blind faith in the invisible and humanly incalculable story of bits and bytes of data. In a long media history dedicated to materialist explorations, scale has been one of the more tangible transformations, made visible in no small part by the corresponding energy demanded of mass data aggregation. Outside of this binary, however, the notion of memory and/as storage—and its limits—have been more material. There is proportionality to it; physical objects fit within a certain space, with a volume that correlates to the cultural importance of the space occupied. Storage, such as holding tanks, cargo trains, underground caches, tanker ships, container trucks, and gas tanks, parallel the expansion of serious digital storage infrastructures, server centres, and rendering farms, often relying on retrofitted power grids which serve up decidedly different imaginaries for the repository and preservation of memory. Because the capacity of media storage has increased rapidly and exponentially—from the punch card, to analogue, to digital, to solid state, to cloud “space”—storage is now largely understood to be ever-expandable, to the point

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<sup>2</sup> Mike Featherstone, “Archive,” 594.

where many argue that this new archive inherently bypasses the issue of appraisal (and therefore, value) by allowing that no digital artifact be thrown away, discarded, or deleted. In this way, as posed by Zoe Sofia, collecting and keeping become acts of digital containment (182). They assume a synchronous dumpster/archive, where things are neither lost nor preserved.

Following Stewart Brand's predictions in *Escaping The Digital Dark Age*, based on the total amount of data there is in the world, data is continually surpassed by storage capacities: "There is more room to store stuff than there is stuff to store. We need never again throw anything away" (46). As a result, he adds, "that particular role of archivists and curators has become obsolete" (46). This view is also substantiated by Brewster Kahle (the founder of the Internet Archive), who argues that this largescale vision is precisely what allows for a project to archive itself. He proposes, "Let's go index every document in the world," and exhorts that, "once you have that sort of mindset, you can get really far" (qtd. in Koman n.p.). In comparison to what is amassed through the Web, Kahle estimates that adding the totality of all film, music, and printed matter produced yearly is just "not that big" (n.p.). The amount of content stored and the means through which the index is searched suggests that "what we have on the Web is phenomenal," explains Kahle. "There are more than 10 million people's voices evidenced on the Web. It's the people's medium, the opportunity for people to publish about anything—the great, the noble, the absolute picayune, and the profane" (n.p.).

New Media scholar Eric Kluitenberg argues that collection of ephemera online becomes a challenge to the power of the system of archiving that determines the structure and discourse of historical worthiness. As he explains, “ephemera are considered noise, irrelevant, and as a result, a large aspect of living culture is often excluded” from traditional repositories (qtd. in Currie n.p.). But as Katharine Mieszkowski points out in a *Salon* article about “dumpster diving” the Web: “It’s just such banal ephemera that counts, if you have enough of it” (n.p.). For social media sites, and large-scale collaboration projects, the banal comes to constitute an important slice of Web culture, the kind of daily ephemera largely bypassed by traditional archival collections precisely because of its “junky” quality (n.p.). As Mieszkowski suggests, value is a matter of collection in and of itself and of the network or relationship among items in a collection. This is a point also reinforced by Richard J. Cox in his exploration of personal archives generated online and their growing importance in society’s conception of digital historical value. Cox argues that we are on the cusp of a new archival future shaped in no small part by trained citizen archivists (n.p.). Presumably, the value of the personal archive online also requires individuals to be archivists of their own lives, and hence, implies recognition of one’s worth and historical importance within and beyond a collective. It also, to some extent, implies that the archive is built into the collective body and that such connectivity constructs memories at least as much as it preserves them.

More than a decade ago, in a keynote address for *Preserving the Immaterial: A Conference on Variable Media* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Bruce Sterling stated:

We have no way to archive bits that we know will be readable in even fifty years. Tape demagnetizes. CDs delaminate. Networks go down. ... When a piece of software decays, it doesn't degrade like a painting, slowly and nostalgically. When software fails it crashes; it means the Blue Screen of Death. (n.p.)

What Sterling argues, then, remains part of the dominant discourse about the Web's failed potential for preservation though it now seems largely accepted that a sudden loss is more dramatic than a slow fade. The emphasis on speed and movement, and the (in)ability to control time, both have a part to play in the conceptualization of the archive as inherently volatile. Here again, the dumpster model is favoured, where to contain as much as is technologically possible is the ultimate goal.

With more than twenty years of broad public access to the Web, we can now reflect back on the promises of the Web to store, share, and contain media. It can be argued from this reflection that the Web's own archival conscience grew out of the first signs of its decay, which were rapid and for which loss now appears permanent. Decay, after all, is a threat to memory, to history, to community, and to a knowledge of the self that the archive generally attempts to preserve.

Referring to this fleeting circulation of digital media, Diane Vogt-O'Connor argued in 1999 that, "since this data is our cumulative memory as a species, the situation is dire" (21). Stewart Brand declared in 2003 that the "health of civilization is understood to be at stake" by the ephemerality of digital media (46). Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig echoed this in 2005, claiming that "technological change has indeed become a troubling constant in our world, and one that greatly erodes the reliability and durability of the data and documents on which we rely as both historians and modern human beings" (243). More dramatically, Mike Featherstone concluded in 2006 that, analogous to a historical cancer, the danger "of unperceived degradation ... will develop within the digital archive, as dissociated cellular elements are re-associated into linear distributions and one cell's identifying code is transcribed into others in a generative chain" (595). A few decades in, dumping as archiving remains a viable tactic; it is a mode of doing informed foremost by what technology most easily facilitates, ideologically driven by surveillance and commercial profitability. Together, the National Security Agency's (NSA) collect-it-all mentality, Google's email Archive, and Facebook's insistent social networking and Timeline feature, set the tone for an archival impulse to store "big" data.

The dumpster-like quality of the Web is therefore in its viral, palimpsestic, and rhizomatic nature. The lack of fixity, integrity, and authenticity, which have come to shape evidence and a general trust in the archive as a system for organizing narratives, is challenged by

the sprawling and ungraspable originating points and/or finality of digital creations. Notably, the very coding that allows the easy duplication and quick sprawl of digital content online is also an important element of the paradox constituted by the possible structures of the archive: in an odd way, their perfection is also their imperfection. The structures of the archive are coded in a precise fashion that allows for unlimited perfect copies (unlike photocopied paper documents), but any loss in this perfection can mean disaster and a loss of control.

As addressed here, the anxiety that surrounds the volatility of online flows has, in some cases, made hoarders of its more attuned users, turning the archive into a catchall container. This is because technologies of storage and retrieval permit it, and are technologically deterministic, rather than because it has been deemed appropriate beyond those technical affordances. In this way, volatility—both the acknowledgement of it and the desire to control its consequences—has come to define a new kind of archival fever. The Web constantly overwrites itself, but unlike the palimpsest, past iterations are cached in layers rather than made visible underneath current iterations, if at all retrievable. The volatility of media is often equated to the volatility of memory itself, and in turn, of history as a deeply political enterprise of preservation and loss. In this way, Wendy H. K. Chun's framing of the enduring ephemeral proposes a kind of sustainable volatility that becomes an important paradox to consider. Chun explains that in trying to grasp "a present that is always

degenerating, we must analyze the ways in which ephemerality is made to endure” (168). Through the enduring ephemeral we understand unpredictability as a dynamic—and perhaps a more optimistic outcome—with a potential of recuperation and recovery rather than an inherent threat to preservation, forever shifting what it means to dispose and to dump.

### **Hoard**

*This classical notion of archiving excludes too much, a problem increasingly recognized within the archiving world itself and even more pressing now that digital media allows countless people to put weird stuff online.<sup>3</sup>*

Despite (or perhaps because of) decades of archival theory, “the archive” is made increasingly difficult to critically engage with on common grounds. It includes the physical repository, servers, hardware and its mechanisms, the interface, the Internet archive, the database, .tar and .zip file extensions, and the so-called dump file—what Arjun Appadurai might define as an anthropological or living archive (25). The dump file, known as the “core dump” or “memory dump,” has become computer jargon to indicate the storing of a large amount of raw data for future examination and serves the discursive function of highlighting the act of unloading or discarding without much care.

The archive as dump or dumpster calls to attention not just the slew of media that host and are created to hold and serve its contents, but

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Kluitenberg, qtd. in Morgan Currie, “Towards a Radical Archive,” n.p.

also to the blurry connotations of (digital) value and questions new materialists, media ecologists, and media archaeologists alike inspire. It is technologically possible, easier, and less time consuming to hoard than it is to carefully appraise, sort, organize, and preserve the vast streams of data we generate. What happens to memory, then, when the current communication tools and devices at our disposal encourage us all to hoard rather than to collect? Is the people's hoard the response to the selective "collection" and thus a question of class discourse and distinction? If it is, then conceiving of the archive as dumpster might shift our attention to the privileges of disposing as a luxury that speaks to yet another archival turn regarding privilege and perception.

As suggested so far, drawing from media scholars of the archive, memory is part of a technical remediation of events, shifting our relation of time from rhythms to live feeds. The archive can be seen as processual rather than oriented to thingness, and hence decentred from so-called material and embodied realities. As the Web and digital files become a norm for cultural circulation, expert curatorial decisions are usurped by the technological (yet speculative) possibility of taking and keeping everything, of fetching data on demand, often in and from no apparent space at all (such as the cloud.) Arguably then, in the digital realm, storage is set toward a preservation of a "deep time" of culture (Zielinski 1), in which we venerate the keeping, and yet—beyond sentimentality—we are mostly oblivious to obsolescence, waste, and dumping. There, deep into the fossilized dumpster, we



would be confronted with deep time—deeper even—with the time of toxic dust and soil.

Of late, more scholarly attention has focused on the cloud because of the immaterial and ephemeral fantasy it presents and reinforces. As many have noted, this is a fantasy rooted in denial and in a lack of accountability for the very real and material infrastructures and bodies that enable the virtual (LeBel, n.p.). Theoretically, this material/ephemeral binary contradicts itself; it serves rather to reinforce one *in* the other, rendering these counterparts constitutive rather than exhaustive opposites, a version that serves capitalist ends that rely on invisible and cloudlike infrastructural modalities in order to push veiled surveillance ends through advertising. One of the main arguments made here, then, is that the Web—its networked infrastructure and cloud storage—demands a new materialist response to the dominant discourses and conceptual frameworks (i.e., of the immaterial as inherently inconsequential) that are misleading and with grave political and environmental repercussions.

The archive as a mediatic and materialist question might also push us to consider temporalities and time spans: if, as explained by Parikka in the introduction to *Medianatures*, media are of nature (minerals and materials) and inevitably return to it to decay or to be recycled (n.p.)—what happens to the archive if we account for location, temperature, air, water, minerals, and so on? What if we also consider what is wasted, left out of the archive, disposed and dismissed, as part of a historiography of the archive itself? Together

these questions suggest that archive is always material, and through appraisal and disposal practices and discourses—framing the archive as dumpster—we can engage with the concept beyond the prevailing binaries that insist on the digital versus physical. Instead, all of it is a dump; much of it is wasted, likely to end up in landfills. The virtual/digital repository is material and its footprint is enormous.

A new materialist lens can provide continuity between the so-called old and new configurations of the archive, whereby the dumpster becomes more than a formal consideration; it provides a reminder of both the impracticalities of decay, destruction, and loss as well as the feelings of carelessness, saturation, and bewilderment that feed the feverish impulses to contain and protect markers of time against itself. The dumpster, because of what it so strongly conjures to the senses—rot, mould, stench—reminds us that bodies are foremost the receptors: bodies that are close to what is kept pristine and bodies that coexist with landfills. Digital waste is highly toxic.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett urges us to pay closer attention to our collection practices and the call from our garbage that ensues from what we have deemed worthless. But when we delete a file online, we rarely consider the impact of digital disposal. It is no stretch, then, to also extend Bennett's insights to practices of digital hoarding—both personal and those facilitated by technology—which together raise questions of pollution, contamination, and digital detritus, generally subsumed under the idea of the “viral” proliferation of data.

The challenge of tackling the concept of the archive as dumpster has been taken on by scholarly practitioners such as the Digital Methods Initiative in Amsterdam, who, among other projects, created the website [deletefrominternet.com](http://deletefrominternet.com), inviting people to nominate websites “unworthy of the Internet” for deletion to help “clean up the Web.” Through its so-called anti-social bookmarking service, the project attempts the impossible discursive democratization of appraisal, where the inherent and predictable failure to achieve it becomes in and of itself their most important commentary about Web culture, which further reinforces the dumpster quality of the Web. Similarly, Timothy Holman, creator of *The Useless Web* ([theuselessweb.com](http://theuselessweb.com)) carefully curates sites that serve no purpose, but rather insist on the artistic and sometimes aesthetic qualities of online trashy culture, with either flamboyant over-the-top music and animation (such as [www.omfgdogs.com](http://www.omfgdogs.com)) or overly minimalist and trite renditions ([www.a-blue-box.com](http://www.a-blue-box.com)). Without being explicit about his personal assessment criteria, Holman insists that some sites can in fact be “too terrible” to make the cut, for example, [www.eggparm.com](http://www.eggparm.com). Another project in this vein, by *Les liens invisibles*, is the (now defunct) online *Musée des ordures* which addressed in a more overtly political tone “the daily overproduction of user generated content and the continuous political solicitation to which we are subjected,” for which they deem it has become “ever more difficult to make sense of the sheer number of objects circulating on the internet” ([www.ordure.org](http://www.ordure.org)). They explain their project as a response to built-in obsolescence and waste which “thrives in the sway of the brutalising

exploitation of natural materials and processes usually dealt with elsewhere,” pointing to the bodies that are abused in the process, exploited and toxified, for the sake of profit (n.p.). Similarly, but with a more pragmatic end goal than showcasing Web “ordure” through social media, American programmer, Justin Blinder, created Dumpster Drive ([dumpsterdrive.com](http://dumpsterdrive.com)) as a means for online users to recycle and repurpose each other’s digital files. Circumventing permanent deletion, the project website explains that it makes trash social, allowing users to dumpster dive through the discarded files of others.

These projects remain more tongue-in-cheek comments on the circulation of digital ephemera, but they raise pertinent issues and bring us back to the materiality of our bodies and the environments in which we live. These examples may raise questions about the importance of cleaner code, more efficiently processed, and thus requiring less energy from servers. They may spark something in users to consider the ways that obsessive gadget habits clutter landfills and how their digital hoards clog the Internet pipes.

### **Mediate**

*At heart of the question of archive is the question of care, and I think today in order to care, one must think of archive, the exteriorisation of our memories, gestures, speeches, movements.<sup>4</sup>*

In a sense, or as nonsense, we are already our own archives, increasingly plugging in and out, recharging and syncing our lives to

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<sup>4</sup> Yuk Hui, “Archivist Manifesto,” n.p.

vast databases whose contents are held in faraway server centres guarded against us. We are obsessed with being connected, being social, curating our own tales to the public. These transfers are ongoing and alive in electronic flows and electric currents between nodes as continuous feeds. A statistic often recirculated is that approximately 90 percent of existing total data was generated in the last two years (as of December 2014). The near future (2020) is estimated to be home to upward of twenty five billion Internet connected devices (Patel n.p.). We design devices to keep up with our need to generate data and then work to contain that data in sprawling data centres. Servers are meant to always be on, always able to refresh and deliver data, as though this kind of response—synchronicity and instantaneity—were inherent to the technology. As a new archival dream, we have crafted the machine that never sleeps, ready to render and deliver the past collected through media in a split second's notice.

Reinforced by the growing popularity of memory apps that serve as prosthetic memory (TimeHop, Memoir, Memento, etc.,) and as technological tools for total recall, Chun draws our attention to the "overriding belief in digital media as memory" itself (153). Following this, digital streams, rather than discrete digital objects, constitute the new materialist memory, where it becomes more difficult to parse out items with perceived value from the flow that carries and only temporarily contains it. In other words, for networked objects, digital value is instated in the transmission of data, wherein archives carry

through (rather than contain) digital objects, thereby rendering any notion of value difficult to arrest, grasp, or convincingly establish.

This archive as dumpster—the ideal explored here in which the archive accumulates everything without discrimination—has no outer limit. And yet, the more we encourage the mass hoarding of digital media based on this dumpster model, the more we reinforce the logic of the always-on, always-ready archive that is propelled by server farms and generative of incredible amounts of wasted resources: electricity, land, and water. Arguably then, the relationship between what the virtual world affords and the virtuality we must buy into is crucial. Those of us who purchase new devices and gadgets are responsible for generating the very data streams that constitute and feed the archival impulse, and yet we are rarely the same people who are confronted with the disposal of those devices, which are highly toxic and polluting. Most of us reading this are also not the people working in noisy data server centres—football field sized repositories that guard our data against time.

If extending the archive to its material extremes like this seems a stretch, it is because the silence about its materiality is also part of perfecting the longstanding archival delusion. The networked digital realm works because of our belief in so-called wireless technologies and cloud computing to store our memory and memories for us. We see the incredible democratizing potential of sharing our ideas and data online to a point of cruel optimism (Berlant 13). Rather than a conspiracy theory that emerges from the archival impulse, the ease (if

not urgency) to perpetually and urgently self-archive seems to be matched affectively with the affordances of our devices; we are both users of and used by the machine that is recording our lives. Whether by the NSA, YouTube, Amazon, Facebook, Google, or Apple, the archive is increasingly distilled into—and by—corporate interest.

At this point, the archive as dumpster mediates three conversations that build from one another, despite the leaps and bounds required to connect ideas. First, the archive is framed as the primary concept for defining cultural and historical value. Then, as a mediatic question, the archive is revised with the advent of new storage media, a process that is itself more revealing than the media stories it tells. This is not only because it points to our conflation of memory and media, but also because it demonstrates our dependence on a unifying ideal for aggregating the past. In other words, one trajectory that tracks the archive by its capacity to contain media mirrors back to us our investments. The third conversation is about the potential of new materialism and media ecology, and more specifically the boundaries of the archive as never being merely concept or ideal, institution or storage, agent or actant, process or operation. Rather, presented as a set of material properties, politics, and interactions. This is felt on two levels: one is the argument that the archive is preoccupied with disposal as a way to establish value, and the second is that networked media has enabled a version of the repository that appears ephemeral because it is virtual, and which facilitates (if not encourages) mass hoarding as a means to not think (too much) about

the process. Ease and convenience are coded into the operation. And yet, this virtual archive generates unparalleled amounts of e-waste and is of fatal consequence to the many in toxic environments who work to disassemble, melt, and trade metals and plastics anew. Maybe the archive cannot be held accountable for all that is dismissed and not cherished, but it certainly calls for theoretical intervention in light of its cultural overuse.

The perpetual “archiving” of data means that it remains existent on dormant servers somewhere “out there.” We encourage hoarding without conscience, without consequence, without affective insights into what we are doing or who might be affected. Old emails, social media streams, texts, and increasingly, the Internet of things, continue to exist on servers that hoard our data for us, often as a business model for “free” services.

It becomes a difficult point to make: that the archive must be seen beyond its role and infrastructures, shifting the attention instead to the materialist questions that constitute it. This new vision includes the bodies that occupy the spaces that manage it, adjoining McLuhan’s idea of technologies as human extension with Bennett’s assessment of hoards as extensions of humans as well. But instead of an extension, the archive is a body itself, has a body, with an accumulation of agencies, sprawling, contradictory, competing, connective.

For Kluitenberg, thinking through the “living archive” offers “multiple, dispersed discourses of present, living culture,” and he suggests that



“there are dominant forces that try to control this dispersal and order it in a particular way, making the archive immutable” (qtd. in Currie n.p.). Discursively, the notion of control over the circulation of data online is central to reframing the archive; it is an explicit attempt to coordinate if not replicate the human mind to the preservation of humanity itself, a storage that would necessarily be mobile: a moving memory. While the connection between the living archive and life itself seems to be a natural one, for media scholar Geert Lovink, “what is embodied is no more alive or dead in terms of the ability to trigger memory ... knowledge is stored in people, in organizations, ever transforming networks, ‘living’ entities rather than dead documents” (n.p.). He concludes that “in this hegemonic ideology knowledge only exists if it is up-to-date and can operate strategically, not hidden somewhere in a database” (qtd. Lovink n.p.). But in less theoretical terms, the living archive forgets, and it fails the people it purports to mediate and preserve. The objects of technology are always more valued, even when disposed of, than the bodies marked and mangle by an economy that reinstates and reinforces rapid cycles of technological development for the few by the many.

### **Final Thoughts**

Living entities, in contrast to the dead, suggest that memories can lie dormant, and sometimes be resurrected. While there may be no definitive endpoints to digital flows circulating through the Web, the interception of particular nodes, as moments of interruption, can in itself serve to frame the online archive as a moving memory. As such,

the living archive is perhaps best envisaged as an archive of life layers, where “life” depends heavily on the materialization of experience to establish value, and whereby perpetual transmission is favoured to permanent storage. How data is circulated, transferred, and shared, and in turn, adapted, maintained and preserved, informs specific notions of value and access, bringing us back to its etymological roots (of database) that emphasize the intersections (or moments of exchange) rather than the means (or technologies) by which the exchange is made. That being said, the means by which exchanges are made online render the process exponentially quicker than its analogue component, and as a result, dramatically increase the volume of data. According to Lisa Gitelman, the presumed temporality shaped by these various processes follow “a logic less atemporal than it is antitemporal,” demanding not only a “moving memory” as proposed by Chun, but also a mobile archive of sorts (145). Diana Taylor’s proposed repertoire prompts us to further consider the role the body plays not only in memory recall but also in the necessary re-creation of memories by the archive itself. She argues that transmission of knowledge in the repertoire requires people, a presence that facilitates a transfer that is inherently changed through re-enactment.

Unlike objects in the archive, which she deems more stable, the body captures and transmits memory primarily through affect. Risking pushing this idea too far, conceiving of an archive as foremost “embodied” or as “living” in this way, may prove useful for seeing a

more utopic version of the archive as a habitat (occupied) rather than as property (owned). In this vision, we may live within the archive as dumpster, confronted with, and also responsible for the mess we are making of ourselves through wasteful habits and addictive technologies of dislocation and disembodiment. ☉

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