Traces and Associations: Art and Archival Turns in the Late 20th and Early 21st Century

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Traces and Associations:
Archival Art and Archival Turns in the Late 20th and Early 21st Century

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................... 3

Ch. 1 Resisting the Paradigm and Staring Back .......................................................................................... 4
   I. An Introduction to Chris Marker’s Exhibition, Staring Back (2007) ................................................. 4
   II. Artists Have Archives: Chris Marker’s Memory Projects .............................................................. 5
   III. Ultimate Unity: Photography and Liberalism’s 20th Century Dream .......................................... 10
   IV. “Is Not Each Passerby An Actor?” .................................................................................................... 12
   V. In Conversation and in Context: Attempting Staring Back ............................................................. 15

Ch. 2 Resisting Amnesia and Gerhard Richter’s Atlas .............................................................................. 21
   I. An Introduction to Gerhard Richter’s, Atlas ...................................................................................... 21
   II. Memory Crises: The Business of Images ........................................................................................... 23
   III. Process as Montage: Dada and Photomontage Influences .............................................................. 25
   IV. The Unfinished Atlas: a Mime and a Model ...................................................................................... 31

Ch. 3 The Atlas Group (1999–): Resisting the Past As We Know It ........................................................... 35
   I. The Archive in the Digital Age .............................................................................................................. 35
   III. Satire: One Step Closer to Collective Memory .................................................................................. 40
   IV. Fantasy: The Digital Archive Makes Ghosts ....................................................................................... 44

Ch. 4 Impulse, Location and Recommendations for the Future ................................................................. 48
   I. The Anarchival Impulse: Theory and Criticism .................................................................................. 48
   II. Confrontation and Embrace: Art in Conversation With the Archive ............................................... 51
   III. The Digital Era: Archive As Location, As Continuum .................................................................... 57
   IV. Re-orientation and Reimagination: The Political Power of the Archive ......................................... 60

Conclusion and Afterword .......................................................................................................................... 64

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................................. 67

I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars.


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Introduction

The history of archival labor is lengthy, fraught with contradictions and paradoxes of the archive’s purpose and accessibility. Long used as a tool for control, archives occupy a position both of humanism and authoritative power. These objects are key players in the creation of historicity and the perpetuation of hegemony, specifically by working with such personal facets of human life: memory and experience. Archives have long posited themselves as totalities, with physical collections asserting themselves as objects of history and resources for specific knowledge.

In the late 20th century, a shift in archival labor occurred. Archival work today is understood as a state practice, with private collecting being made more and more visible. Contemporary archivists are more focused on the process of archiving rather than the finished product. These shifts are in large part due to the work of great scholars and thinkers around the world. Other influencers of these archival changes, those that we will be exploring in this paper, are the contemporary artists of the late 20th century and early 21st century. Their work on reimagining the archive was in part born out of the desire to reconcile with the traditional, authoritative archives of each of their individual contexts. Beyond that, each artist is concerned with archival history, issues of authoritative repression, and expressions of memory both personal and collective.
Chapter One: Resisting the Paradigm and Staring Back

An Introduction to Chris Marker’s Exhibition, Staring Back (2007)

In the summer of 2007, Chris Marker presented Staring Back at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio. Taken from Marker’s personal archive, some 200 photos were displayed from various political protests, including the 1967 march on the Pentagon, May ‘68 in Paris, and the 2006 youth protests in France. Accompanying the 200 photographs on display was a limited edition book including the images, a director’s foreword, and essays by curator Bill Horrigan, the Wexner Center’s founding director of the film/video program at the time, and art historian Molly Nesbit. Ranging from 1952 to 2006, Staring Back does not flow chronologically or follow a timeline of events. Instead, the resequencing and seemingly disparate pairings are a part of what makes Staring Back so unique. There was no obvious prerequisite for Marker’s photos, even the thematic throughline which appeared to be that of political protests was undermined by a section including portraits and the final room of the exhibition which featured photos of animals, “Beasts of…” In Horrigan’s essay “Some Other Time”, he wrote:

My wish from the start had been to shepherd Marker’s photos into public light and to offer them as a heretofore cloistered form of communication from an artist who for decades has been sharing the world as he’s sought and found it with readers and viewers around the globe—the photos providing, as it were, ‘another likeness,’ as I titled the essay I wrote to introduce Silent Movie.¹

Chris Marker, famously private and enigmatic, was praised for communicating the ideological and cultural affect of the last half-century through rhetorically fictitious manifestations. In the context of Staring Back, Marker presents an era of micro-demonstrations, a long and sordid period of unrest seemingly never-ending. Hope dwindling, progress and change at a stand-still, the world appeared to be caught in a circular series of turmoil, one which took place on the streets, in the eye of the public. Marker’s years of dedicated and precise documentation of these

events culminate in *Staring Back*. At the height of neoliberalism and the end of the Bush administration, the exhibition seems to stand as a testament to the restlessness of the time.

**Artists Have Archives: Chris Marker’s Memory Projects**

Chris Marker is probably best known for his 1962 short film, *La Jetée*. Produced as a short photomontage, the film combines photographs to tell a story of love and loss in a postwar future. The shots linger for varying amounts of time and the narrator gives only the most important details. Each film photo is in black and white. They are grainy and sometimes even out of focus: the banal aesthetic producing within the viewer a melancholy desire for the anachronistic, for some form of *before*. The prisoner in which the film revolves around is tortured through the bizarre mechanics of an imagined, post-apocalyptic France. The mad scientists force the prisoner to participate in their time-travel experiment, and after he falls in love with a woman he meets in the pre-war world, he is murdered after attempting to stay with her in the past. Because of the photograph’s pronounced focus on the subjects of the film, the background is often softened and unclear, like a memory. See the photograph of the man and woman walking through the garden (fig. 1), it is emphatically reminiscent of something *recalled*. The twist at the end of the movie reveals that the prisoner has been haunted by the image of his own death since childhood, having seen the murder take place on the airport jetty: the opening scene of the film. *La Jetée* will be one of Marker’s most seminal films, specifically exploring

![Figure 1. Still image from *La Jetée* (1962)](image-url)
time, memory, and storytelling through the photographic medium. It is here that Marker established himself as an artistic and intellectual force. In 1962 it was obvious that we were only on the brink of advancement. Professor Patrick Ffrench writes of the movie:

Produced in 1962, the image of *La Jetée* carries a meaning or has a memory which relates profoundly to that historical moment and to the wider history of the twentieth century. To this extent *La Jetée*, Marker’s sole fiction film, is much closer to the documentary than to fiction, and causes the structure of fiction to tremble through the interruption of the image as the vehicle of a historical memory.²

Marker was not only redefining form through the photomontage practice, but he was cementing his position in resisting the general anomie of the late 20th century. *La Jetée* will mark the first big example of Marker’s lifetime career in exploring history and memory. The science-fictional, plot-driven film is specific to Marker’s earlier work. The function and the form of the photomontage work to propel a narrative that is at once both otherworldly and excruciatingly familiar. We see Marker return to the project of *La Jetée* later in his career, when he focuses on multimedia productions. In the 1970s Marker spent much of his time travelling around the world, documenting everything from cattle to people to landscapes. Out of this decade emerged another one of his famous works, *Sans Soleil* (1983). Written under the pseudonym Sandor Krasna, and as a result of pseudo-documentarianism, Marker’s film is both experimental and shockingly ordinary. Footage from Japan, Guinea-Bissau, Paris, and San Francisco converges, is manipulated, and is repeatedly cut short. Viewers may be reminded of a home video, or perhaps of B-roll setting a scene that no one noticed has already arrived. Scholar Nace Zavrl reviews the film, writing, “The internal structure of *San Soleil* goes beyond the

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exploration of spatiotemporal possibilities, and begins to reproduce the random drifts of human remembering.”

In the film’s direct reference to *La Jetée* (during a scene in which Marker is unraveling Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*), Marker makes clear that he is confronting memory once again, through a delicate arrangement of narration and image. This time, however, in a form more closely related to the essay. Likewise, memory is no longer just the sordid cousin to actually living: it is not the painful, nostalgic, slippery entity so ingeniously presented in *La Jetée*. In *Sans Soleil*, Marker pits memory right up against the tumultuous reassertion of history. In the opening scenes of the movie, Marker, as Krasna, recites:

> He wrote me: I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?⁴

Here, he is laying out the movie’s central issue, which is personal, yet reminiscent of the chaos of the arriving 21st century. We can visualize Marker’s description of memory as the lining of forgetting which insists upon an understanding of both as inextricably linked. *Sans Soleil* will be remembered as one of Marker’s most successful projects, a pioneer in multimedia art, he established a beautiful resistance to mass media’s rise.

In one of his later projects, still predating *Staring Back*, Marker enlists the CD-ROM to take the questions of memory and history he has been working on for the past few decades even further. In *Immemory* (1998), the CD-ROM format allowed Marker to complicate his presentation and commentary on memory, utilizing the format’s functions to mimic a “choose-your-own-adventure” book. The viewer chooses which image they would like to follow

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³ Nace Zavrl, “‘Images Are My Memory’: Chris Marker’s Sunless,” *Film Matters* 7, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 45, https://doi.org/10.1386/fm.7.3.42_1.
and which “zone” they would like to get lost in: each detour offering up new “routes” and “passages.” Its comparison to a book is apt in that the CD-ROM’s space was limited, forcing Marker to forego his usual voice-over style in place of written text. But, comparing *Immemory* with a book falls flat when reading Marker’s writing in the *Immemory* booklet. He writes:

> In our moments of megalomaniacal daydreaming, we tend to view our memory as a kind of History Book: we have won and lost battles, found and lost whole empires. At the very least we are characters from a classic novel (‘My life is such a novel!’). A more modest and perhaps more fruitful approach would be to consider the fragments of memory in terms of geography.\(^5\)

With *Immemory*, Marker found a form that plays into the inner workings of the brain while emulating the voyeuristic notion of travel.

This was not Marker’s first multimedia project on memory. In fact, much of his work prior to *Immemory* looks like a lot of preparation: as if Marker were constructing the archive from which he would continue to take from for the rest of his career. Scholar Raymond Bellour writes on *Immemory*:

> Already in 1978, for the exhibition Paris-Berlin at the Pompidou Center, he designed a video wall evoking the imbrication of the First World War and the Soviet Revolution through a montage of films: *Quand le siècle a pris forme*. But in the late eighties, with *Zapping Zone* for the exhibition *Passages de l’image* (also at the Pompidou Center), Marker took the step which truly led him outside the screen and projection, to the installation and monitors: then for the first time he found the occasion to deliver the image that he had been seeking to conceive for so many years in front of his computer. In its voluntary disorder, its fractured zones, its ways of relating the different registers of historical and personal experience, and its sketch of interactivity, *Zapping Zone* is something like a first outline of *Immemory*.\(^6\)

In much of Marker’s later work, he invoked, instead of memory, this concept of *immemory*.

Constructing a model of memory not confined by the linearity of time or the specificity of

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\(^6\) Ibid.
history, these “Zapping Zones” become liminal spaces in which Marker explores what it means to remember.

*Staring Back* would be Marker’s last project on collective memory. Different, in so many ways, from his previous work, yet sensationally relevant, *Staring Back* is both a supplement and a finale. *Staring Back* alludes to *La Jetée* in Marker’s return to the banal aesthetics of black and white photography. The exhibition and the book include photographs from *Sans Soleil*, and the pairing and sequencing are clearly inspired by his work with *Immemory*. That being said, *Staring Back* is anachronistic. It’s not a multimedia project, it can’t be labeled as science-fiction. In fact, what separates this project from Marker’s previous work is its seemingly rigid adherence to traditional art and photography practices. The exhibition, especially with each photograph’s wavering contextual references and varying degrees of quality, seems to come directly from Marker’s personal archive. Marker was an avid archivist, both of pictures and of clippings. The phenomenon of the artist’s ever-expanding filing cabinet is a tangible, physical reality, especially for photographers and filmmakers, like Marker, who used archives to classify their own work.

*Staring Back* performs an archival function, while actively providing an alternative way of thinking through the anachronistic demands of the photographic archive. Marker is of course already working in the “alternative” space of the art world, implicitly claiming the photograph as one with both historical and aesthetic value. But the fragmented performance of recollecting the political protests of our past shows an attempt to connect history and memory. Marker’s involvement in archival theory spans the length of his career; he was almost always working under the longer project of “confronting the archive.”

7 *Staring Back* would be Marker’s last project on collective memory and the archive. Exhibited and published in 2007, Marker was already working with an expanse of multimedia. In producing the black and white images for

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7 Horrigan, “Some Other Time,” 143.
Staring Back, Marker recalls, even alludes to, the 20th century archival projects that created the very void he is attempting to fill.

**Ultimate Unity: Photography and Liberalism’s 20th Century Dream**

In Allan Sekula’s 1981 essay, “The Traffic in Photographs,” he contextualizes the rise of press photography within its own specific system of creation and distribution. Sekula frames his essay around the 1955 exhibition, *The Family of Man*. Originally shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition went on to tour “cities in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and the Third World.” Of the some five hundred pictures on display as “suggesting a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth.” In *The Family of Man* human experience, and human life, was ultimately flattened into an account of multinationalist harmony. As presented through the bourgeois concept of the nuclear family (see fig. 2), the exhibition universalized American culture and posited American familialism as the most modern, most advanced sociological form. Sekula contextualizes the exhibition in the 20th century in its “relation to the domestic sexual politics of the cold war” and “its exemplary relation to the changing conventions of advertising and mass-circulation picture magazines.”

Edward Steichen, the man behind the mission, was a powerful proponent of photography’s universal usage as a commonly understood language, working at the time as MoMA’s director of

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9 Ibid., 19.
10 Ibid., 20.
photography. The exhibition's “massive and ostentatious bureaucratic attempt to universalize photographic discourse”\textsuperscript{11} subsumed photography in its redemptive attempts at liberal subjectivism and placed it at the center of cultural development, mainly that of the mass-produced, mass-marketed commodity.

Chris Marker would have inevitably seen \textit{The Family of Man} in Moscow in 1959, and his projects began to emerge in direct response to these new systems of press-photography and mass media, those so easily obfuscated by neoliberalism. The propensity to humanize and universalize the multitudes of human experience would be criticized by thinkers and writers like Alan Sekula, but it would also be destabilized by photographers and artists who attempted to push back against the dominant liberal discourse of the time. Thus, \textit{Staring Back} can be read as an opposing anthology to \textit{The Family of Man}. The marketing of a peaceful world, and the liberal discourse commodifying the universal subject is completely undermined in Marker’s work which highlights acts of resistance during the 20th century, and contextualizes subjects within their immediate surroundings. Sekula discusses photography’s role in neocolonialism, and thus, \textit{The Family of Man}, writing, “As a symbolic practice, then, photography constitutes not a universal language but a paradoxical yoking of a primitivist, Rousseauian dream, the dream of romantic naturalism, with an unbounded faith in a technological imperative.”\textsuperscript{12} Marker doesn’t shy away from the dirty and violent facets of our

\textbf{Figure 3.} Page 8 of “I Stare 1” in \textit{Staring Back}

lives, in fact, *Staring Back* highlights them (see fig. 3). What is communal and humanist in Marker’s work is resistance against oppressive powers. The same powers that repeatedly impose upon us the hollow representations of mass media. Marker’s photographs are not symbolic, they are evidentiary.

“*Is Not Each Passerby An Actor?”*  
When flipping through the exhibition’s book, the softened, black-and-white images of *Staring Back* appear anachronistic. What’s interesting about this artistic choice is the context in which Marker is presenting the exhibition — in the era of digital media. There’s an obvious component of the digital era in *Staring Back* including the manipulation techniques Marker employs and the origin of the images being that of video footage, but it seems purposefully obfuscated, making the project one that both abides by and resists technological progress. In Marker’s manipulation of each image, the use of Photoshop’s blur and paint tools soften each portrait, expressing his subjective relationship to the present moment. Not only that, but Marker is resisting the standard of photography, confusing our preconceived notions of genres of art history, taking pictures both of events and of people. The Photoshop manipulation represents this coalescence as the blur works to emphasize the individuals within the larger context of the
historical event Marker is working to capture (see fig. 4). Here, Marker’s artistry extends beyond the camera, as he works to clarify the specific subjectivity of each photograph, beautifying, and emphatically placing each actor in the world. Not the world of patriarchal familialism, but out on the streets, in the world of public domain.

To understand in full the visual components of Marker’s *Staring Back*, we must look to Henri Cartier-Bresson’s successful practices of press photography. Cartier-Bresson was one of the early founders of Magnum Photos, an independent picture agency concerned with the complicated inner workings of photojournalism. Started by Robert Capa, the cooperative aimed to clearly and identifiably capture and proliferate global events and the multitudes of human experience. Cartier-Bresson’s practice of street photography incorporated the portrait, and, like *Staring Back*, his candid photographs had clear subjects, capturing both motion and a specific moment. In Cartier-Bresson’s seminal work, *The Decisive Moment* (1952) he creates a toolkit for this type of press photography in the book’s preface. He was concerned with the “Picture-Story,” a form of photographic reportage that was attempting to ethically, intentionally, and tediously take and choose photographs. In the preface, he writes, “Things-As-They-Are offer such an abundance of material that a photographer must guard against the temptation of trying to do everything. It is essential to cut from the raw material of life – to cut and cut, but to cut with discrimination.”

This is central to the picture story, but it is also an inherently archival tradition. Cartier-Bresson doesn’t share Steichen’s faith in the singular picture’s ability to espouse Truth. Instead, he recognized the artist’s active role in creating knowledge and cultivating their own specific subjectivity. In short, behind every photograph there is an author that is telling a story. This “cutting with discrimination” that Cartier-Bresson calls for is relevant to Marker’s technique of pulling stills from video footage. The footage found within his own archive. It is

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also relevant to the archivist’s responsibility to carefully curate a catalog: unable to include everything, the task is essential. The preface of *The Decisive Moment* contains the following subheadings: The Picture Story, The Subject, Composition, Color, Technique, and The Customers. Here, Cartier-Bresson was establishing a set of recommendations, rich with integral components of photography that was no doubt taken up by Chris Marker. Also deeply concerned with the portrait Cartier-Bresson puts into words the failures of *The Family of Man*, writing, “If the photographer is to have a chance of achieving a true reflection of a person’s world – which is as much outside him as inside him – it is necessary that the subject of the portrait should be in a situation normal to him.”\(^{14}\) His work is rich with this adherence to context, to the unique importance of each space and location. See the young boy strutting around Rue Mouffetard (fig. 5), his story coming to life as he is captured in mid-gallop and shadowed by his peers: almost seamlessly emerging from the backdrop of Parisian architecture. Cartier-Bresson compares his natural inclination towards street photography to respecting an animal’s natural habitat, as an insistence on context that invokes something larger: Is this what we can make of Marker’s “Beasts of…” section?

In his introduction to *Staring Back*, Marker’s curator Bill Horrigan, notes this omnipresent contradiction between the repressive logic of photography’s history and Marker’s

humanist approach, writing of Marker’s images as “young people alone in the midst of the multitude, unmindful of his camera’s embrace.” Marker’s work followed that of many influential thinkers, most notably Cartier-Bresson and the members of Magnum Photos, but also writers like Walter Benjamin. In Benjamin’s 1931 essay “A Short History of Photography,” he identifies and explores the political and social implications of photography. Benjamin’s call to future photography most relevant to our discussion of Marker’s archive. With the last few sentences of the essay Benjamin asks, “Is it not the task of the photographer – descendant of the augurs and the haruspices – to uncover guilt and name the guilty in his pictures?” Produced a century later, in the era of ubiquitous image, Marker not only turns the camera on the guilty, but on those who will hold the guilty accountable. And, as we’ve made evident through Sekula’s investigation of 20th century photography discourse, it is not only Marker’s photographs that are radical moments of resistance, but it is in the curatorial and archival elements that Marker answers Benjamin’s question, “Is not each passerby an actor?”

In Conversation and in Context: Attempting Staring Back

In Staring Back, resistance is based on subverting the nomanalist, positivist traditions of photography and archival labor that dominated the 20th century. In both an allusion to, and a subsequent condemnation of these popular practices, Staring Back becomes deeply concerned with the shifting times and the historical demarcations of our life. The question we must ask is not what statement Marker was attempting in the exhibition, but what Marker’s archival transmutation opens up for exploration. When Steichen’s family portraits and Marker’s protest

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17 Ibid.
portraits are confronted with one another they are both understood to be legitimized in the larger context of an archive. As photography became the quintessential medium of archives, there emerged not only a promise of Truth and objectivity but a promise of history as memory. It is not just that Marker is establishing a form of an archive that challenges how we conceive of the evidentiary qualities of the image, and specifically the portrait, but it is in Marker's own subjectivity that we learn to reconstitute the poetic nature of the image and this “new” archive.

In Molly Nesbit’s essay featured in Staring Back, she writes on Marker’s project, A Grin without a Cat, “Marker’s script had a preface that wondered what would happen to the images of the latest revolutions, to his own outtakes and to the other aftereffects of TV documentary.” Marker was working during the rise of contemporary media, even seemingly predicting our current reality in which the image is powerful for only a moment, but ubiquitous always. The paradox of digital media is its haunting liberation from formulation: the multiplicity and non-singularity of our digital world makes indeterminate any adherence to collectivity. What is so effective about Marker’s project is his ability to mirror the uncontained affect of contemporary society, exemplified in Staring Back as a non-hierarchical, nonlinear archive. Marker defines the process of extracting stills from his video footage as superliminal,

Instead of one frame lost in the stream of other, different frames, Superliminal is one frame lost in the stream of almost IDENTICAL frames, or so it seems, for when you take ’em one by one, one happens to be THE real photograph, something nobody then has perceived, not even the guy who shot it (me, in most cases). This expressively conscious searching is a practice that one must hone in an era where the image reigns supreme as a medium but resides in subjectivity. The signifying power of the archival form then comes to determine the political expression of Marker’s work. In Staring Back (and in

much of his earlier work) Marker is developing a position not wholly against the archive but in conversation with its muddied history. Returning to the tangible, in the project’s form, has an almost nostalgic operation, and in both acknowledging and rejecting the digital image, he responds to the contentious role of imagery in the contemporary era. The concept of *superliminality* embraces what the natural function of memory tells us, that we are living in an endless, open-ended paradigm of knowledge. If some of our first archives emerged from a dependency on standardization, and subsequent archives were implemented obfuscating their repressive logic for neoliberal purposes, then *Staring Back* is an example of a poetic archive, which is to say a personal one. One that has transmuted from the popular liberalist tendencies of the 20th century into a narrative archive that restores a genuine faith in the power of the gaze.

Much of Marker’s praise comes from those in the film world who believe Marker has truly grasped the nostalgic, melancholic function of progress. *Staring Back* specifically received acclaim applauding a romanticized version of self-preservation. Focused more on Marker’s cultural importance as an artist, much of this romanticization ironically mirrors the positivism associated with traditional archival work. Horrigan, so astute to Marker’s goals, even falls prey to this narrative, writing of the majority of the portrait’s subjects “...meeting the photographer’s gaze with mutual and varying intimations of empathy, forbearance, and love in its variegated descents.”  

While *Staring Back* is a performance of human relationality, Marker, as smart as he was, was well aware of the cultural function of the gaze so imminently tied to whiteness and maleness. Consider his seminal film, *Sans Soleil* (1983). The assemblage of video and voice-over Marker presented works like watching someone reach into the darkest, most unknown parts of our collective memory. In an obvious attempt at presenting an empathetic, humanist vision of a globalizing world, the fictitious components of the film reveal a reckoning with his own personal

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positioning. *Staring Back* is assembled with the same acknowledgment of the immensely complex act of staring at someone. It is bittersweet in its explicit desire for cross-cultural understanding and metaphysical connectedness, while displaying the realist position Marker so consistently takes up in his work. This resists the archive in and of itself: recognizing the glass can be both half full and half empty. Marker takes on the mythical task of story-telling, of relaying the epic accounts both of actual foreign places, and foreign concepts. He becomes the middle-man in his work, not documenting in the archeological data-driven sense, but in a ritualistic, time-honored expression of human life. His adherence to folklore, to ancestry, is a personalized acknowledgment of the past, one that respects the emotional, inaccurate reality of the human imaginary. Any romanticization of Marker’s art should not be objected to, especially because of his inaccessibility as an artist: before *Staring Back*, Bill Horrigan notes that Marker had “never consented to a public exhibition of his photographs despite the unflagging interest curators, museums, and galleries here and abroad had shown for decades.”

The phenomenon of his anonymity, however, should not cloud the subjectivity and open-endedness that Marker emphasizes in *Staring Back*. As we know from much critique of traditional archival labor, inaccessibility is not something to be applauded. His reserved nature comes from a genuine discomfort with presenting a singular *certainty*, even if that certainty is only certain of *uncertainty*. Marker knew he was a white European filmmaker moving through spaces that were not his and he alludes to this not only in playing with the authorial role, but in creating art that subverts how we understand meaning-making. Marker knew he was inherently involved in the hegemonic tradition of knowledge-production, but through his obsession with memory and instability, he acknowledges this and expounds upon this contemporary, almost spectral need for human connection. It is easy to accept this romantic and poetic lust for humanity, but to truly

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21 Horrigan, “Some Other Time,” 139.
believe in Marker, one should accept that whatever meaning we may want to extract is not even there. It is an impossible practice: *Staring Back* is an improper archive, its function isn’t immediately clear.

Marker is not focusing on enlightening his audience of one moment in history, he is not even attempting to expose a history which has been explicitly covered up. Instead, he is divulging a greater secret, as Horrigan puts it, “If we dissect this many-faced crowd, we find that it is the sum of solitudes.”

Digitization allows for artistic explorations of the breakdown of memory, and allows us to attempt to recover that which appears to be an antiquated form of story-telling. There is no myth to Marker’s return to the ontological, it is founded upon our earliest forms of structuring memory, and it works against what has emerged since: years and years of knowledge production that wrongly attempts to contain. This isn’t an ambiguous assumption or a suggestion that affect can not be analyzed: *Staring Back* functions ideologically. Attempting humanism and attempting collective memory in a period where identity has been fractured in a ploy to hide the functions of hegemonic powers, is an attempt to unmask what has been actively inflicting violence. The traditional perpetuates a desire for finitude that makes our future-orientation controlled and dictated by the powerful few. In questioning the evidentiary nature of photography, and of media in general, Marker establishes what has been lost through singularity and repetition. He exposes our desire to connect. The archive structures itself on mimetic repetition, it’s a gamble against history that thinks it can be won with asserting one iteration of human life. So, when Marker presents us with a book of eerily similar but explicitly distinct images of protest, the space in which we find ourselves reckoning with this juxtaposition is the space in which the archive is fully realized. In total, history is personal, but it is personal in a way that leaves spectral traces of some metaphysical desire for collectivity. Experience cannot

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be contained. It leaves marks that no hypomnema can replicate, so we look for traces. Marker redeems the archival function in presenting us these dysphoric traces of history and of progress.

The historical obfuscates and isolates events as objective and impersonal. Marker reminds us this is not the case. He builds upon what has been afforded to us by the labyrinth of our digital era. The image has been so hypermediated that it may appear like that of our subconscious. It is intangible, simultaneously in and out of our control. So what is to become of the images of the latest revolutions? Are we to accept that they may be lost forever? Or is it in the ubiquity of the image, the ubiquity of the hypermediated gaze that we are allowed what has been taken from us? There are everlasting effects, that when left uncontained, accept a deterioration that will echo on. We can challenge the utilitarian genre of the archive by promising to return to these liminal spaces provided to us by works like Marker’s. It haunts us — the people seemingly in the streets over and over and over again, but it is also calming: yes, we have been here before.
Chapter Two: **Resisting Amnesia and Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas***

**An Introduction to Gerhard Richter’s, *Atlas***

In 1972 Gerhard Richter exhibited *Atlas* for the first time at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Utrecht. It would go on to be exhibited 24 more times. Each time with a new iteration and a new sequencing of Richter’s some 340 sheets, which at the present now totals about 800. Art historian Benjamin Buchloh writes, “The term *atlas* has a more familiar ring in the German language, perhaps, than it does in English.”\(^{23}\) In German, an atlas refers to a media format that takes from traditional book binding methods. However, the atlas is not necessarily a written book, but instead a collection of various media objects. Richter explored archival paradigms in *Atlas* by interrogating his own collection of photographs and clippings. Like Marker, he was an archivist: he used clipping files in much of his work, revealing an ever-expanding filing cabinet of references and pictures. *Atlas* was a culmination of Richter’s work in the 1960s, when he began his project of assembling, as he states, “photographs, newspaper cuttings and sketches.”\(^{24}\) Colloquially, the German usage of the term atlas also refers to the family photo album, the personal scrapbook, and the memory aide. Richter’s process of collecting and assembling follows an archival accumulation of photographs, and his project alludes to traditional paradigms of photo archives under capitalist markets.

In an interview with editor Stefan Koldehoff, in 1999, Richter said:

*My motivation was more a matter of wanting to create order – to keep track of things. All those boxes full of photographs and sketches weigh you down, because they have something unfinished, incomplete, about them. So it's better to present the usable material in an orderly fashion and throw the other stuff away. That's how the Atlas came to be.*\(^{25}\)

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The desire for order follows the ontological, and cultural desire for an archive, however, Richter’s *Atlas* is specifically defined by its heterogeneous qualities and discontinuity.\(^\text{26}\) In presentation, *Atlas* has been exhibited as a flattened account of a traditional atlas: framed and hung upon the museum wall, it urges the viewer to take a long walk parallel to the images that span Richters personal life as well as the historical events of his lifetime (see fig. 6). Made up of personal photographs, newspaper and magazine clippings, and sketches, *Atlas* is a recombinative constellation of memory that is at once ephemeral, deeply personal, and also collective. *Atlas* functions almost as a plea: specifically in response to the context in which Richter worked.

Richter explores his German identity in *Atlas*, referring to a post-war present that emerged in great disconnect and dissasociation from its Nazi past. In “Gerhard Richter’s ‘Atlas’: The Anomic Archive,” Benjamin Buchloh’s exploration of *Atlas*, he writes:

Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas* is one of several structurally similar yet rather different projects undertaken by a number of European artists from the early to the mid 1960s whose formal procedures of accumulating found or intentionally produced photographs in more or less regular grid formations have remained strangely enigmatic.\(^\text{27}\)

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\(^\text{27}\) Ibid.
Richter’s work follows the basic premise of Marker’s *Staring Back* in the archival predispositions emerging in their work in the 1960s. It is important to note, however, that Richter was creating a picture file, mostly made up of press photographs, while Marker was producing images. In this moment of social and political upheaval, as well as during the great expanse of images and pictures, both artists were grappling with questions of collective memory in a culture that denied these realities through the proliferation and never-ending succession of images. In attempting order, and in attempting to make sense of the vast expanse of images, Richter was following a general trend in 20th century modern art of confrontational approaches to the emerging beast that was mass media. Richter was working alongside a variety of artists questioning the totality of media’s evidentiary nature. After the Holocaust, and after defecting to West Germany, much of Richter’s early works assume some nod to familial memory, and personal photographs of loved ones. The manipulation Richter goes on to explore through the intersection of painting and photography is greatly relevant to *Atlas*: not only in *Atlas*’ inclusion of abstractions and references, but also in questioning the discursive, complicated nature of popular images. Never finished, continuously edited and modified, *Atlas* is still being exhibited to this day. The most recent iteration is unrecognizable to Richter’s first exhibition in 1972, it appears never-ending in its goal towards infinacy. Though both poetic and banal in aesthetics and exhibitionary practices, Richter was signalling a turn in visual empiricism: the violent reality of Germany and the West’s emerging memory crisis.

**Memory Crises: The Business of Images**

In Benjamin Buchloh’s study of Richter’s *Atlas* he tracks the history of the atlas in a specifically German context. Buchloh describes the atlas’ rise in popularity, specifically in the
education system, as a medium for a variety of empirical sciences. He writes, “With the confidence in empiricism and the aspiration toward comprehensive completeness of positivist systems of knowledge have withered in the twentieth century, the term atlas seems to have fallen into a more metaphorical usage.” Richter destabilizes our English-language, traditional notion of an atlas with his eclectic range of images, and their lack of thematic sequencing. Its expanse is explicitly anti-positivist, emerging in reaction to an empiricism that shaped the historical events of Richter’s life. However, *Atlas* was not only responding to this hegemonic notion of historicity, but to the mechanical and commercial reproduction of images that exploded in the 20th century.

The issue of mechanical reproduction would be taken up by the art world in the later twentieth century, specifically the 1960s when the world saw a rise in contemporary art. However, this was not in an anti-capitalist stance, or even a specific commentary on the economic reality of the art world. Instead, we find that much of this art responded directly to the amnesiac condition of society in the late 20th century, in what Buchloh coined the “memory crisis.” He points to postwar German culture, writing of its entanglement in “the double bind of the collective disavowal of history through a repression of the recent past and almost hysterically accelerated and expanded apparatus of photographic production to solicit artificial desire and consumption.” This amnesia would go on to define the next century, not only in Germany, but in the increasingly Westernized, globalized world that would grow dependent on the referent, however far removed from the subject. We would see this explored in Warhol’s pop art and in all of the multimedia art that would deride the media-culture’s degradation of representational practices.

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30 Ibid.
Atlas is thus a resistance against an ever growing market of images, images that are deeply implicated in the business of selling referants, not meaning. Atlas returns to the ideal of a collective memory, one in which the picture is foundational on appropriating the archival form that was seminal to 20th century ideology. When looking through Atlas, either in the exhibitionary space or in catalogue, the images appear as indexes, and some of them as small as thumbnails (see fig. 7). Though it may feel natural to immediately view Richter’s work as a timeline or a series of categorical indexes, upon further observation, it contradicts those very assumptions. The de-sequenced collection of pictures, coming directly from Richter’s personal archives, was approaching the duress induced by mechanical reproduction. Atlas appears as an ironic call to cognitive dissonance, mimicking mnemonic desire through both the archive and the montage.

**Process as Montage: Dada and Photomontage Influences**

As Marker makes a call for memory and humanizes the portrait in direct allusion to photography’s role in neocolonialism, Richter calls for memory in a seemingly disassociated image culture, in specific regards to the rise of mechanical reproduction that altered the larger image economy. In Helmut Friedel’s introduction to the Atlas volumes he writes, “From the start,
Gerhard Richter never arranged the motifs in the Atlas in rigid chronological order; his preferred criteria were those of content and above all of form.”

Atlas is not a celebration of the proliferation of the image, or its subsequent status of ubiquity, but rather a condemnation of the traumatic split that mass-media has forged between our collective and subjective memory.

Richter, again, like Marker, utilizes the archival form in an attempt to construct meaning out of what first appears to be fragmented and disconnected. In the early years of Atlas, Richter included a series of family photographs, landscapes, newspaper and magazine clippings, and, notably, photographs from the Holocaust. In 1972, in the first exhibition, Atlas ended with these images (see fig. 8). Revealing, thus, the images of the Holocaust’s incommensurability with the flurry of mass media. By presenting these images towards the end of the exhibition, the referent and the image appear as more than a piece of a larger puzzle: each picture from the Holocaust, unlike the other aesthetically banal images, is a traumatic evocation of real, lived experience. The logic of Richter’s work emerges with these final photographs. Positing the image’s power to both cause amnesia and recall the past.

Figure 8. Atlas, Sheet 18

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Richter’s *Atlas* takes from a variety of art movements occurring in the mid-20th-century. The atlas is an archive but it is also a scrapbook: a catalog of the multiple components of Richter’s artistic process. *Atlas* makes Richter’s process visible, you can find references used for his later paintings all throughout the work. Richter was working at the height of the avant-garde movement, clearly interested in the traditions of dada and photomontage. In describing Richter’s illusive montage, Buchloh writes, “The poles of opposition could be called the order of perceptual shock and the principle of estrangement on the one hand, and the order of the statistical collection or the archive on the other.”32 Emerging out of the Dada movement of the 1920s, photomontages incorporated the disjunctions and fragmentations of the artistic movement in an attempt to rectify with the modern age. These fragmentations, when collected in an archival fashion, procure a “shock” value that would mimic the “experiences of daily existence in advanced industrial culture.”33 *Atlas* tackles the issue of totality, specifically in reference to a historicity owned (and subsequently repressed) by the state. Thus, *Atlas* exists to resist the capitalist commodification of all images. In Sekula’s aforementioned essay on The *Family of Man*, he likens the vast economy of images to the political economy in which it resides, writing, “Just as use value is eclipsed by exchange value, so the photographic sign comes to eclipse its referent.”34 The reduction of each image to a certain formal equivalence creates a referential function of each photograph that, in reference to Marx, “is both a fetishized end in itself and a calibrated signifier of a value that resides elsewhere.”35 Richter exposes this vast and destructive economy of images, through techniques previously introduced by a wide array of art

33 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 23.
movements, ultimately exposing the capitalist tendencies of photography subsumed by the state and the mass media.

By employing the photomontage, alluding to the immensely influential dada movement, and redefining the practice of sequencing, Richter avoids two of the big traps of 20th century image-making: that of the amnesiac barge of images, and that of the spectacularized images of atrocities. The image, since the beginning of its conception, has been defined in relation to the archive, as a source of legitimization. Richter plays on this relational position in culture, and redirects the Atlas to be a reflection of the mass of images bombarding the modern age. In Richter’s work the image isn’t given its importance in relation to an archive, or as a hegemonic tool used by institutions and the capitalists of the world, instead it is legitimated in its contrasts. When context, and the caption, are removed from Richter’s display of photographs and clippings, we are forced to follow his lead. How can picture advertisements for pantyhose compare to those of the Holocaust? Richter is forcing viewers to confront their daily assault of images. This includes their referents and symbols, not to mention their subliminal messages. When we are confronted with the images of the Holocaust, we are simultaneously confronted with all of the images that came before and those that will follow. Should I stop and look for longer? Should I keep going? Can I even look longer? Richter’s employment of the montage, and the collage, also resists the popular journalistic function of images in the 20th century. In Susan Sontag’s Regarding the Pain of Others (2003) she writes, “Photojournalism came into its own in the early 1940s–wartime. This least controversial of modern wars, whose justness was sealed by the revelation of Nazi evil as the war ended in 1945, offered photojournalists a new legitimacy, one that had little place for the left wing dissidence that had informed much of the serious use of photographs in the interwar period.”

hunker down on “empathy” and “World Peace” in the following years. Richter disrupts the sanctity of the horrifying, “spectacular” image that is promised through great suffering. How do we memorialize an image of suffering? How do we let it speak? In Richter’s mind, the question does not necessarily fall upon an ethics of seeing, but instead an ethics on the structure of seeing. The montage achieves an allusion that works to resist amnesiac desensitization to the image. The montage thus employs its own interpretation of an event. In the case of the archive, specifically of commercial archives, standardization is the driving force of sequencing, espousing a rationalist and dissoociated understanding of the image. In Richters work, however, the montage and the collage coalesce to a point of spontaneity in resistance against repression and historicity. Richter engages with the referents that capitalism built its empire upon, exploring, as Buchloh writes, “the various registers of photography as the representational system within which the historical repression is physically enacted and transmitted.”

What seems disjointed and disassembled is thus a mere representation of the disjointed, disassembled culture of the later 20th century. It is not that all the photos leading up to the ones of the Holocaust are in preparation, but it is a confrontation between images that informs us of Richter’s interpretations of the times. It is thus that Richter resists against the capitalist uses of images and proposes a recollection within the same spaces of which trauma was inflicted.

*Atlas* exhibited at documenta x in Kassel, Germany in 1997. Artistic director, Catherine David, was tasked with unpacking the precipice of the 21st century. As the first woman to direct a documenta, David inherently destabilized the traditional nature of the show. The turn of the century, following the demise of the Soviet Union, was an anxious time in regards to an uncertain future. David witnessed the instability of the cultural moment and seized the

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38 Ibid.
opportunity to, in effect, return to the ‘60s within the new order of the ‘90s. She was aspiring to revolution. Documenta x was a massive showcase of avant-garde revival, working through the expanding global market and new world powers, the exhibition disrupted the nominalist practices that were becoming more and more pervasive throughout the art world. While art was being asked to do the work of being a luxury, David sought to reestablish its role in culture. She created a cultural arc, beginning with World War II, to bring history into the present moment. A moment characterized by postwar, postcolonial, and postcommunist complexities. Including a lecture series, “100 Days – 100 Guests” (see fig. 9), she supplemented the exhibition with a wide array of cultural thinkers. David invented new rules of the game, assembling, on a grand scale, a future concocted by the fragments of a repressed and forgotten past. Atlas interpreted and articulated this conundrum, expanding on the documenta’s general concern with national identity. In Mónica Amor’s essay, “Documenta X: reclaiming the political project of the avant-garde,” she outlines David’s mission and examines the show’s commitment to photographic practices. Amor writes on the photographic and archival concerns of the documenta:

It is this tradition of the document, associated with its denunciatory role, its archival dimension, and the portrayal of the real, that is taken up by artists like

![Figure 9. Display for “100 Days – 100 Guests” conceived by Heimo Zobernig, chairs designed by Franz West](image-url)
Hans Haacke on the one hand and Gerhard Richter on the other. The latter set apart for his problematisation of the photographic image: its association with the real, and its possibility of reconstructing historical memory.\textsuperscript{39}

Richter’s focus on montage would be taken up by many other artists included in the show, including the works of Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé and Marcel Broodthaers, many of the pieces existing within historical gaps of representation. It was there, in those liminal spaces, that the past ushered in the present, not in a nostalgic function, but to go even further. Richter and the other artists introduced the chaos of the past, destabilizing its traditional illusion of order.

**The Unfinished Atlas: a Mime and a Model**

Gerhard Richter last exhibited *Atlas* in Munich, Germany in 2013. Richter’s exhibition which was, when first exhibited, made up of some 340 grid-like panels, now constitutes that of 802.\textsuperscript{40} Richter has continued adding to the archive, much like that of contemporary archival practices. In Terry Cook’s seminal essay (1997), “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” which tracks the professional discourse of archival theory and practice, he focuses on new archival education that has radically changed a long history of archive work. Cook tracks a large shift in the field, from that of the product-focused archive to that of the process-oriented activity of archiving. It is in this contemporary iteration of the profession that we will “preserve in the best manner the collective memory of nations and peoples.”\textsuperscript{41} Cook points to a professional shift in the 1970s, occurring around the same time of Richter’s first exhibition, that moved the archival paradigm from

“information” to “knowledge.””\textsuperscript{42} We can identify a similar set of values in \textit{Atlas}, in the image’s status as evidence of social and cultural interactions and conditions, rather than as a record for a singular Truth or singular representation of reality. The new archivists who emerged in the 1970s were not “passive keepers and custodians of records” but, “active interveners, even auditors, in the archival document continuum.”\textsuperscript{43}

We can apply Cook’s contemporary models of institutional archives onto Richter’s work, especially in the context of \textit{Atlas}’ showcase at documenta x. Cook writes, “the physicality of the record has little importance compared to its multi-relational contexts of creation and contemporary use.”\textsuperscript{44} Both the capitalist and the artist have a stake in the picture-archive, recognizing, on a theoretical level, the incredible capacity of each image. However, it is in these capacities that the two figures began to part ways. In the former the opportunity for capitalization emerges, and in the latter the desire to reimagine these homogeneous, traditional practices. This makes it clear that it is not amnesia and standardization that go head to head in ideological beliefs, but it is in the function of each archive that we recognize either an amnesiac, hegemonic ramification or a deep concern for the creation of a collective memory.

In recent iterations of \textit{Atlas}, Richter includes imagery from September 11th. On panel 744, Richter mounts a photocopy of different renditions of gray and white linear lines next to newspaper clippings depicting the fall of the World Trade Center (see fig. 10). The stripes are reminiscent of the striation in the World Trade buildings, mimicking and evoking the horizontality of \textit{Atlas} as a whole. There is a wealth of multi-relationalities hidden throughout Richter’s \textit{Atlas}. As the collection grows in parallel to Richter’s success, much of the later panels of \textit{Atlas} are more concerned with Richter’s landscape photography and sketchings of his later

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue” 40.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
works and exhibits (see fig. 11). That is not to say that *Atlas* must only be read as Richter’s personal archive, it is much more. When including newspaper clippings of one of the first major events of the modern era, it becomes obvious that Richter wants *Atlas* to move congruently with changing social and cultural times. How do these images of pain survive in Richter’s work? Not in the chaos of dissemination, but in the exact opposite: they survive in the continuum of images which allows for the constant reimagining of connections and distinctions. The picture-archive that Richter has developed over all of these years isn’t just a reflection of the status of photography from the time in which he is working, but it is a model for archival work. The heterogenous, ever-expanding vault of images will forever be more effective than the traditional archive in understanding and coming to terms with the multiplicities of the universe. The never-ending elaborations of *Atlas* should be a model for archiving that better understands and represents the historical moments of our lives. They are not contained in a singular image or an institutional archive. Resistance against history and hegemony don’t lie in any one of these
objects or memory-aids described. It is located in our ever-evolving relationships to these objects, all the way from our earliest memories to our present dispositions.
Chapter Three: *The Atlas Group (1999-): Resisting the Past As We Know It*

**The Archive in the Digital Age**

Traditional archival practices, on an institutional level, have been rendered almost completely antiquated by digital advancements. Out-dated systems that once dealt with massive amounts of tangible media objects, have finally found their answer to the long held question of what to do with *all of these images*. Thus came the computer. And shortly after the machine, came Artificial Intelligence. In Terry Cook’s essay “Easy to Byte, Harder to Chew” (1992), he notes the specific culpability of the machine in the furthering of automation and the further, subsequent diminishment of provenance. Cook writes, “It was no longer a matter of a few records being ‘machine readable,’ but all traditional media being rendered ‘electronic,’ the media lines being blurred thereby, and the paper backups either disappearing or not even being produced.”45 This is a contemporary archival practice: a practice that came to popularity in the United States, when the rise of the millennia brought forth the information conundrum. Where do we store all of this data? How do we organize never-ending information? What becomes of information? There are two key components to the traditionally archived media object: provenance and subject content. Provenance is the record of ownership and origin, while the subject content is the theme and material of the media object. The recent creation of metadata resulted in a lesser emphasis on provenance, instead highlighting content and the systems of knowledge relevant to each object, and ultimately creating a further reliance on cataloguing and data filing. These epistemological, traditionally homogenous efforts, however, are in direct contradiction to the affective functionings of our digital knowledge systems.

The re-removal of the object from provenance is a key point of concern in photography theory. How is this thus transformed in the digital era? Where there was once the photo referent, and commercial archives categorized by signifiers, there is now the ubiquity of the undecodable barrage of images available to all. But with the democratization of the image, comes a degradation of the image. What has become crucial to understand, then, as result of the digitization, is the channels through which the image flows. Vilém Flusse discusses this phenomenon in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000). He writes, “Like all apparatuses, the apparatuses of photograph distribution also have a program by which they program society to act as part of a feedback mechanism. Typical of this program is the division of photographs into various channels, their ‘channelling.’” Emphasis has shifted from the image and unto the channel, defining the current era of channel-facing photography: a practice concerned with the “specific channel of the distribution apparatuses” and photographers who “encode their images as a function of this channel.” This specific orientation in the practice of photography is inextricably linked to the condition of the digital image. In contemporary times, whatever Truth-claims traditional images and photographs held, are being re-subjected to the process of denial. With no tangibility or materiality, the image is now confirmed to be an illusion. Not so

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47 Ibid.
much in that it has lost its essence of humanism (especially considering the concept of humanism as that which emerged as a moral-aesthetic anthropology\(^{48}\)), or a function of phenomenological understanding of the world, but in that it contains a virtual depth hidden from the user. The fantasy of the digital image has reawakened the magical essence of photography, an essence that harkens back to the magic lanterns of early cinema (see fig. 12). Where we are now, at the peak of spectral surfaces, we are re-haunted by the phantasmagoria of the image. It is in its spectral evocation that we can reorient ourselves towards a true historicity. In David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom’s 1993 essay, “Reinventing Archive for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options”, they write:

The focus on identifying metadata that is required to create records, before they are created, makes the archivist an ally of information systems managers, auditors, freedom of information act administrators, information security personnel, and program managers without placing the responsibility for documentation on the archivist.\(^{49}\)

Identifying the metadata of each image’s channeling fortifies the rationalist and utopian ideals of the image and photography. Later combined with the decentralized, utopian dream of the Internet and computer processing, the goal for archivists should not be to simply reassert a hierarchical universe of images, but to resist claims of superficiality. In an age so structured by an inability to decode the images that have yet to cease, many artists have taken up the task of exploring coping mechanisms for dealing with this cultural conundrum. In the digital age, and during the end of the 20th century leading up to it, much photographic art returned to the early surrealist, Dada movements that worked with photomontage. What the digital era provides us with is an opportunity for folklore, for an image, and its corresponding archive, to once again project our greatest fantasies.

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Walid Raad’s multimedia project, *The Atlas Group*, includes a wide range of documents tracking the Lebanese Civil War. The objects of Raad’s archive are all imaginary (his word), they are artifacts that Raad has produced himself. *The Atlas Group* currently lives online as an in-progress archive, but in 2002 the project was exhibited at Okwui Enwezor’s documenta 11 in 2002 in Kassel, Germany. On the occasion of *The Atlas Group*’s inclusion in the documenta, artist Walid Raad addressed his motivation behind the creation of the group in an interview with artist Allen Gilbert. Raad characterized his work as his response to the end of the 20th century, the creation of the group emerging due to the withdrawal of reality itself: a result of what Lebanese artist Jalal Toufic identifies as “the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster.”

Like Richter, Raad is confronting the amnesiac results of coping with the trauma of a repressed history. *The Loudest Muttering Is Over: Documents from The Atlas Group Archive*, is a corresponding series of performance pieces in which Raad plays an artist/historian in a faux-lecture on *The Atlas Group* (see fig. 13). In *The Loudest Muttering Is Over* Raad has introduced the group under varying iterations of falsehood. Sometimes referring to it as fictional, sometimes imaginary, and other times as a group or a project instead of an organization.

Waalid Raad’s performance-archive characterizes the issues of historicity and archival labor that came to the surface in the late 20th century. Not to mention, Raad’s contemporary work deals with multimedia, combining our provocations on digital and electronic archivization with artistic confrontations with trauma. Raad’s engagement with a future based on materialist history is a reorientation towards a digital future, one that deals with the trauma and subsequent

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amnesia of history through the preservation of something as elusive as an affect. *The Atlas Group*, like Richter’s *Atlas*, has been exhibited multiple times, each time with new iterations and various plays on the version that came before it. In reconstructing the artifacts and documents of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991), Raad is also reconstructing our very basic understanding of provenance, and thus, knowledge. Including videotapes, photographs, films and other document objects, *The Atlas Group* archive, which ended in 2004, lives online at www.theatlasgroup.org. Regarding the specific context in which Raad is working, what is at stake in *The Atlas Group* is a reckoning with the imperialism and neocolonialism that has, at once, harbored and erased the atrocities of the late 1900s. The ideological rifts between the different factions of the Lebanese Civil War produced a hegemonic, global overseer to the daily violence and atrocities of the region. Much of *The Atlas Group* is concerned with foreign power’s ideological and military involvement in the Civil War. The historical value of Raad’s work is apparent in his ability to reconcile with the global, illusory attention and response to the war. The archives of the Lebanese Civil War, a war perpetuated by ideology and repeated violence, emerge as a second site of hegemonic violence. What can be preserved is not enough. Raad, and *The Atlas Group*, is attempting to tell a story.

**Figure 13.** Walid Raad performing *The Loudest Muttering is Over: Documents From The Atlas Group Archive* at Videobrasil’s 14th International Electronic Art Festival (2003)
Satire: One Step Closer to Collective Memory

We have previously looked at liberalism’s 20th century archives through the lens of Chris Marker’s *Staring Back*, and have investigated the effects of mass media through Richter’s *Atlas*, but it is here, with *The Atlas Group*, that we confront all aspects of archival practices. Combining the functions of object preservation, family scrapbooks, and digital archivization, *The Atlas Group* is an exploratory medium focused on the phenomenological aspects of the traditional archive. Raad is no longer concerned with the referent or the contextualization of an object’s provenance, but recognizes how memory emerges from a relational status to any said archive. This is understood through his employment of satire and fantasy, which conforms to and deviates from one another as Raad fictionalizes archival objects. However, we should make the distinction between the “fictional” and the imaginative, the former a loose concept that upholds the hegemony of Truth and rationality, and the latter a redemptive fortification of essence. What Raad accomplishes through *The Atlas Group* is thus a redemptive form of imagination, one that reasserts claims to Truth and confronts viewers with the inconsistencies between history and memory.

Raad is attempting to satire a couple of things, namely, the institutions under which he works. In the performance aspect of *The Atlas Group*, Raad costumes as the artist, the academic, and the historian: investigating the performativity involved in holding these cultural positions through an appropriation of those forms. *The Atlas Group* was in part introduced through Raad’s performance lectures, specifically *The Loudest Muttering Is Over*. Raad discussed this portion of the *The Atlas Group* in his interview with Gilbert, saying:

This ongoing, always-in-progress 70-minute lecture/presentation looks and sounds like a college lecture, an academic conference presentation, or an artist
talk. I sit behind a rectangular table facing the audience. I show slides and videotapes on a screen to my left. I speak into a microphone. There are a glass of water, a notebook, a pen, and a lamp on the table. I wear a light shirt and dark dress pants. I encounter technical difficulties. I am interrupted by people I have planted in the audience, who also ask questions during the question and answer period. I also answer nonscripted questions.  

Raad’s exaggeration of the academic and artist, and also the exaggeration of *The Atlas Group* as its own foundation and institution, are fundamental to the success of his work. When discussing the nature of artist conferences and events, Raad says, “Of course, this is somewhat of a caricature, one that I am certain some will recognize. But this is the caricature that partly informed the ‘performance’ dimension of the Atlas Group’s lecture/presentation.” To invoke the theatre alongside the archive is to illuminate one of the major facets of state and authoritarian archival work. The archive operates on the assumption of Truth, of validity and legitimacy. By satirizing this authority and legitimacy, Raad is asking the viewer (or audience member) to question the power with which we have indicted these claims of historicity. To perform, to dress up or masquerade is a traditionally satirical practice. The caricature is satirical, and through Raad’s appropriation of relevant themes and characters, the caricature becomes a political force against the intersecting hegemonic forces in art and politics.

Raad frequently opens *The Loudest Muttering Is Over* by introducing Dr. Fakhouri, “The most renowned historian of Lebanon.” Dr. Fakhouri provides the archive with excerpts from his journals, spanning the length of the civil war. The introduction to this piece, *Notebook volume 72: Missing Lebanese wars*, is as follows:

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52 Ibid.
53 André Lepecki, “‘After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason’: Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive,” *The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (2006).
It is a little known fact that the major historians of the Lebanese wars were avid gamblers. It is said that they met every Sunday at the race track -- Marxists and Islamists bet on races one through seven; Maronite nationalists and socialists on races eight through fifteen.

Race after race, the historians stood behind the track photographer, whose job was to image the winning horse as it crossed the finish line, to record the photo-finish. It is also said that they convinced (some say bribed) the photographer to snap only one picture as the winning horse arrived.

Each historian wagered on precisely when – how many fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line – the photographer would expose his frame.

Dr. Fakhouri represents the benevolent historian who is too preoccupied with the image, the perfect shot. Fakhouri illuminates a dissonance between history and reality, between the historian, the figure, and his function in society. See in fig. 14 how Raad situates Dr. Fakhouri’s journal entries—the estranged, timeworn non-Western document—within the Western, hegemonic white frame, translating and “clarifying” the original writing with san serif font. The satirization, not only of esteemed positions, but of actual documentation and its inclusion in a larger archive, situates archival labor in falsehood.

The act of archiving becomes a political caricature in Raad’s work, one that undermines its positivism and supposed legitimacy. Documenta 11 featured The Atlas Group as the piece was relevant to the larger exhibition’s postcolonial lens. Artistic Director Okwui Enwezor followed in Catherine David’s footsteps in decolonizing artistic

Figure 14. Notebook volume 72: Missing Lebanese wars from The Atlas Group
expressions of history and memory. The documenta was an explicitly postcolonial, deterritorializing effort. Enwezor himself was deeply concerned with the archive, focusing on documentary practices in contemporary art in documenta 11, and going on to curate a show for the International Center of Photography called “Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art” in 2008. In Enwezor’s 2004 essay, “Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights and the Figure of ‘Truth’ in Contemporary Art,” he reflects on the success and the implications of documenta 11. In a section titled “Identity Politics and the Rediscovery of the Human in Contemporary Art,” Enwezor writes:

Perhaps, then, this crisis, this confusion between fact and truth, verification and comprehension linked to the documentary may have its source at the level in which the documentary confronts the monstrous, the absolute, indissoluble reduction of human suffering to abject status and spectacle.54

Documenta 11 was an attempt to meet the rise of intellectual European humanism with what Enwezor coined “radical postcolonial doubt.”55

Sometimes, in his lecture performance, Raad will take up an accent. However, as performance critic André Lepecki noted, “He also carefully calibrates his Lebanese accent, making it more pronounced over the course of the lecture.”56 There is thus a double satirization taking place: that of the historian and that of the Middle Eastern man. As Raad is vying for authenticity, he marks our complicated negotiations with identity and legitimacy in a predominately Western, white industry. Raad’s use of the accent carefully situates him in his body, producing a specific subjectivity. By changing the

intensity of the accent at different points, Raad mocks the ignorance of many of the Western audience members who may not have even noticed the fluctuations. Enwezor’s documenta explored the ethical and aesthetic approaches to postcoloniality, which Raad furthers, emphasizing an embodied confrontation with his status as “other.”

**Fantasy: The Digital Archive Makes Ghosts**

Waalid Raad created the *Atlas Group* archive at a pivotal moment in the history of photography and archival practices. We have tracked above how archives are attempting to reorient themselves to the digital era, while also looking at the virtual image’s ability to conjure up a more magical essence. Unlike Marker, who was working on *Staring Back* during a similar time period, Raad chooses to invoke this essence through a variety of multimedia practices. However, Raad follows Marker’s suit in his appropriation of anachronistic aesthetics, illuminating more contemporary conceptions of archival labor. In “Reinventing the archive in the age of digital reproduction: Walid Raad’s the Atlas Group,” professor Jong-chul Choi references Georges Didi-Huberman’s concept of “the fantasy of referentiality,” writing, “In this fantasy, ‘technical images do not introduce traditional images back into life but rather than replace them with reproductions, displace them.’”

57 The *Atlas Group* as a piece of fiction, or even better, as Raad puts it, as an *imagination*, thus displaces the hegemonic archives of the Lebanese Civil War. In one section of the archive, *Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves, 1958-1959*, photographs from Dr. Fakhouri’s personal archives are exhibited. They are introduced as follows:

> The only available photographs of Dr Fakhouri consist of 24 black-and-white self-portraits that were found in a small brown envelope titled, *Civilizationally,*

we do not dig holes to bury ourselves. The historian produced the photographs in 1958 and 1959 during his one and only trip outside of Lebanon, to Paris and Rome.58

Images from a vacation to Paris and Rome are on display in this section of the fantasy, of the archive. Dr. Fakhouri assumes the role of global citizen, standing candidly in front of different monuments (see figs. 15-16). He provides the fantasy of the intimate photograph, of family scrapbooks and photo albums that contain a certain subjectivity. Choi defines the function of this fantasy as assuming of the “anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, thereby registering the difficulty, and at times the absurdity, of doing so.”59 In Raad’s archive, it is not only the heterogeneous sequencing, familiar to us by Marker and Richter’s work, that prompts contemplation, but in the theatricality of his fantasy as well. Raad is inviting viewers to think through these inconsistencies, approaching a complex, dialectic conception of the subjective/objective binary that hegemony constantly reproduces.

Choi applies the concept of the para-index to Raad’s archive and points to its fantastical nature to explain its coherence with the digital age. Choi writes of “the digital images’ semiotic

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59 Choi, “Reinventing the Archive,” 238.
expansion pillared by what [she] would call the ‘para-index (an index without a referent).” The para-index emerges naturally, as a result of the digitization of images. As we looked at earlier, the absence of the referent results in the emergence of “channeling.” How does Raad appropriate these realities to achieve his archival approach? Without the referent we are left with the fabrication of a narrative that combines the subjective and objective implications of photography. This nonlinear, exaggerated form of narrative harkens back to another anachronistic form of knowledge production: that of the oral epic. The oral story combines history and memory, and dramatizes it to create a more affective historicity. The epic is, as well, a pre-colonial form of narration and knowledge production that resists modern representation’s subjugation to a cultural regime of power. The traditional archive, in contrast, emphasizes a history that advances with disregard for memory. Thus it disregards its own complexities, creating a flattened version of the past. Raad resists this with *The Atlas Group*: the fantasy results not from a single story or individual memory, nor from a composition of lived human experience, but in a complete falsification of a subjective past. Dr. Fakhouri’s fictional, “obsessive return to Europe’s imperial origins” is in direct conversation with the psychological trauma of war. Not only war in the capital W sense, but in the contemporary neocolonial war that is global by all means, but obfuscated from the global public. Dr. Fakhouri can be read as *dis-figured*, as a coded representation of the impact of war and colonialism that has been both impaired and figuratively reimagined. Not only was the Lebanese Civil War essentially absent from global media, but its historicity is controlled by the state, resulting in a pervasive and cultural amnesia. This amnesiac trauma results, for Raad, in the ultimate fantasy: the reconstruction of collective memory.

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60 Choi, “Reinventing the Archive,” 235.
61 Ibid., 239.
Chapter Four: **Impulse, Location and Recommendations for the Future**

**The Anarchival Impulse: Theory and Criticism**

Questions on defining the archive were taken up by a wide array of different thinkers late in the 20th century. The archive that philosophers and academics were engaging with are distinct from the archival work of our artists, which are, as well, distinct from the actual archival labor methodologies being reconstituted in the late 1900s. In comparing theoretical approaches to the archive to those more practical and artistic, we see a specific timeline emerging. The art criticism following the theory, the artists following the art criticism, and archival labor practices progressing in tandem with these other fields. By attempting to put theory in conversation with the artistic practices we’ve explored here, we get closer to the future of the archive, zooming into the multitudes of archival opportunity, the collective desire for preservation, and the sordid processes of knowledge-production.

Central to the archival theory that was emerging at the turn of the century was Jacques Derrida’s “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression” (1995). Derrida’s work culminated in this seminal text in which he built upon archival theory from the 80s, ushering it into the 21st century, when the world stood right at the edge of the digital age. Derrida’s definition of “archive fever” was founded upon the idea that “the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory.”

Taken directly from Freud’s death-drive, the desire to document, for Derrida, is intricately bound-up in the desire for destruction. Derrida uses the language of the archive, the word *archive*, to set up a specific kind of knowledge. This is, obviously, not the same archive as Terry Cook’s or Allan Sekula’s. For Derrida, this archive is a

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philosophical, ontological hole that emerges from our attempts to recover the past. Derrida focuses on the actual word, writing:

Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive.’ And not only because of the two orders of the arkhe we distinguished at the beginning. Nothing is more troubled and more troubling...the trouble of secrets, of plots, of clandestines, of half-private, half-public conjurations, always at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself.63

Derrida is concerned with these junctions, the non-places which invite further consideration. He is concerned with a certain formulation of the Truth: the prosthesis of truth, made up of repression and substitutions. He recognizes that it is in the space, the in-between in which the archive will begin to grow and create meaningful change.

The issue of the archive was not only taken up by Derrida and other thinkers concerned with its philosophical implications, but by a wide variety of different actors in the late 1980s who were recognizing the timely cultural turning point. For many scholars, the issue of the archive was a literal one, looked at from the point of view of democratizing and making it more accessible. For other thinkers, it was explored as a societal and ideological object to be worked through, specifically in following the work of Michel Foucault, and the rising criticisms and analyses of modern Western power and control mechanisms. Many art critics also took up the issue of the archive, ultimately, in an attempt to resist it. The end of the 1980s brought with it the fall of communism, the decline of the nation-state, and the emergence of a powerful identity politics. The subsequent efforts of globalization produced a massive influx of telecommunication and a period characterized by a mistrust in facts and politics. In Sekula’s, “The Traffic in Photographs” he posits The Family of Man as an example of the emerging bourgeois crisis afflicting the Western world. Photography generally was playing a fundamental role. Sekula

writes, “Photography also needs to be understood as a simultaneous threat and promise in its relation to the prevailing cultural ambitions of a triumphant but wary Western bourgeoisie of the mid nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{64} These concerns were taken up by many art critics recognizing the major problems facing Europe. Much of this criticism worked through the disenchantment of traditional models, including the statue, the monument, and the archive. A published discussion between Benjamin Buchloh, Catherine David, and Jean-François Chevrier addresses this political, cultural moment through the lens of the art world. In two massive parts, “The Political Potential of Art” (1996) situates the art world in post-industrialism. Art critic Jean-François Chevrier alludes to the philosophical underpinnings of the late 20th century in his in-depth characterization of arising cultural issues. In a response to Buchloh’s sentiment on shifting away from the traditional theory of culture, Chevrier stated, “Any culture which demands monumental symbols, any culture which feels the need to project itself into eternity, is necessarily in a state of peril, with all the regressive effects that sentiment can bring. We know this is a problem facing us in Europe today.”\textsuperscript{65} Discussions, and further criticism like “The Political Potential of Art” was simultaneously emerging in response to contemporary art and being used to further influence artistic practices at the turn of the century.

Archival theory continued to expand in the next decade. In Hal Foster’s 2004 essay, “An Archival Impulse,” Foster considers the success of archival art in reestablishing marginal histories that have been politically and systemically repressed. Here, Foster is knowingly pulling from Derrida’s work, incorporating it into his own criticism and bridging archival theory to archival art practices. Foster goes further to focus on the power of art to create new ways of actively cultivating cultural memory, thereby avoiding surrendering to anomic fragmentation. He

\textsuperscript{64} Sekula, “The Traffic in Photographs,” 57.
writes, “It assumes anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity of doing so.”66 This anomic fragmentation is not only a mirroring of the archival paradox, but of the structuring of human memory.

Derrida’s term anarchive comes from the deeply human desire to remember in the face of mortality and unavoidable death and destruction. Foster references the term in connection to archive art in “An Archival Impulse,” writing:

In this regard archival art is as much pre-production as it is post-production: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps ‘anarchival impulse’ is the more appropriate phrase), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.67

Foster suggests that artists may be more concerned with the anarchival, in its recognition of the death-drive and violence of traditional archives. The anarchival has thus been characterized as a more open-ended model of an archive, one that is concerned with continued engagements rather than a singular totality. Derrida’s disruption to our archival tendencies, his emphasis on the death-drive and the paradox of totality, challenges the very hegemonic structures that produce archival objects. In part inspired by Derrida’s work, art critics took on the challenge of ideologically opposing growing Western intellectual humanism that worked to obfuscate the violent nature of state authorities. The 20th century brought with it a reintegration of philosophy in art criticism, beginning with a resurgence of Freudian theory in postwar German cultural theory that would eventually extend to Derrida. It was with these cultural shifts that philosophy,

67 Ibid., 5.
art criticism, and art would rise up to combat the rhetoric of equality, attempting to decolonize and expose the multitudes of oppression.

**Confrontation and Embrace: Art in Conversation With the Archive**

Chris Marker, Gerhard Richter, and Waalid Raad’s projects provide fertile ground for thinking further about the philosophical impulses of the archive as Derrida and Hal Foster have described them. In the ensuing years, many art historians and art critics exploring the multitude of artistic responses to global modernity have turned to philosophy and cultural theory to develop a framework for looking at emerging contemporary art. Central to this position was a direct critique of the expanding art market: condemning the increasingly connected sites of artistic and cultural production. Thus, the artists highlighted by critics like Chevrier, Foster, and Sekula subsume the incomplete, heterogeneous forms of the state as a methodical assessment of the cultural conditions of their time. Grappling with the hegemonic and institutional tools of control, the issues of images, symbols, and spectacles were taken up through much of the art that attempted to redirect our archival impulses.

Marker, Richter, and Raad engage with these concepts in diverging and intersecting practices, each producing their own personal models of history and memory.
One overarching similarity between all three is their ordinary choice of aesthetic, the majority of their images exhibited in black and white. The aesthetics allude to the traditional archive, while assuming an anachronistic characterization of mechanical reproduction in the context of global repression and anomic fragmentation (see figs. 17-19). The rise of mass media at once created and proliferated the spectacular image while degrading the image to a ubiquitous and repetitive position of indeterminate meaning. Thus, the goal of contemporary art was not so much to analyze the current cultural and political condition, but to directly take from it in their individual artistic processes. Marker, Richter, and Raad’s work assume the givens of mass media and the culture industry in their choice of black and white images displayed in a repetitive manner. Derrida posits repetition as one of the central tenets of hegemonic control within the archive. He presents it as follows:

If repetition is thus inscribed at the heart of the future to come, one must also import here, in the same stroke, the death drive, the violence of forgetting, superrepression (suppression and repression), the anarchive, in short, the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which carries the law in its tradition: the archon of the archive, the table, what carries the table and who carries the table, the subjectile, the substrate, and the subject of the law.68

Here, Derrida connects the repression and violence of the archive under law to systematic repetitions that simultaneously call to the future and beckon death. This repetition recalls a mechanical process, one that emerges in mass image reproduction and in the innate bureaucracy of the archival project. Richter’s work in particular explicitly materializes from the repressive reality of postwar Germany, implicated in the dialogic tension between German authority, mass media, and individual experience and memory, Richter’s use of repetition reinserts and actively opposes the “violence of forgetting” that Derrida is also working through. On sheet 30 (see fig.

20), for example, Richter decapitates famous male figures and presents them as homogenized and thus, as subversively unremarkable. *Atlas* can be understood as mnemonic meditation on traditional state practices. These are violent practices as Derrida terms them, inherently involved in the contradictory pleasure of destruction. He writes, “The death drive tends thus to destroy the hypomnesic archive, except if it can be disguised, made up, painted, printed, represented as the idol of its truth in painting.” Derrida’s use of Freud’s death-drive reveals a paradoxical status of the archive under institutional (state and mass media) usage. In *Atlas*, images of the Holocaust endure alongside the commodified images of the rising culture industry. As an anomalous archive, it projects a never-ending exploration of photography's role in both the death of reality and the reality of death.

There is a spectral component of Derrida’s work that affirms the instability of the Truth function of archives. In “Archive Fever” he writes, “The structure of the archive is spectral. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.” The trace of reference that Derrida puts forward is emblematic of the para-indexical components of *The Atlas Group* that was previously introduced by Choi. Raad’s use of the para-index is a product of his archive’s digital location as well as the ultimate fabrication of the objects included. *The Atlas Group* is thus based

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70 Ibid., 54.
upon the implementation of facticity, as in fact and as fiction. For Derrida, the archive inherently functions as a prosthesis, as a substitute for the real thing. Raad takes this idea further, creating a notion of hauntedness that completely rejects Truth and celebrates illusion. In a section of the archive titled, “Hostage: The Bachar Polaroids,” Raad constructs polaroids of captive Souheil Bachar (see fig. 21). The introduction states that “for some unknown reason, his body and face were always cut out. With the few brushes and colors available to him in his cell, Bachar decided to fill himself in.”

Bachar’s embodiment was thus created from an absence, but it is never fully realized, and he, ultimately, emerges as a ghostly outline. Raad’s work, in general, comes out of an absence very different from Marker and Richter’s: the absence of the Lebanese Civil War on a global, institutional level. He is working out of a postwar reality deeply embedded in neoliberalism and neocolonialism, and from the position of the colonized whose trauma has been systematically erased and further obfuscated from historical record. How then does one piece together and perform archival labor for what does not exist? Raad’s work haunts, as does the terror of the Lebanese civil war, and thus, his fabrications expose the contradictory, illusory nature of archival labor. His alternative narrative emerged from the blind spots of Eurocentric history, his revisionist sentiment creating a multivalent network rendering the unthinkable as possible. Derrida quotes Freud in “Archive Fever,” “…there is a grain of truth concealed in every delusion.”

*Staring Back* is concerned with the logic of representation both in history and memory. Marker’s exploration of memory is reminiscent of Derrida’s interrogation of the archive’s ability to not only record the past, but to *create it*. As the photograph became systemically upheld as a universal language in the second half of the 20th century, the camera became fundamental as an evidentiary tool useful to the world of archives. These positivist, dominant discourses on history sit in direct contrast to the ways in which Marker acts as a (self-proclaimed) historian. The desire for a totality presented both in the archive and the photograph, is founded upon a nostalgic desire for origin. This is the desire that art critics of the 20th century pointed to as the heart of the cultural crisis plaguing the Western, bourgeois world. Marker’s historicity is focused on the bodily experience of events: he is not documenting a singular occurrence in *Staring Back*, but instead using the camera to translate a visual testimony of the trauma of multiple events as impressed on the body. These dialectical images perform as a witness of witnessing, accentuating gestures, and thus, the embodied reactions to events that span over multiple temporalities instead of one specific moment (see fig. 22). Using his blurring tools, he highlights the recognizable face as it emerges out of the crowd, mixed into the everyday event. Marker’s work is romantic, but it also directly opposes the Western construction of a universal subject through its contextual adherence,
producing instead a rhythmic engagement with the flows of reality. Derrida asserts that the nostalgic function of the archive relies on the ideals of 20th century European scientific positivism. He begins his discussion of Wilhelm Jensen’s *Gradiva* with a look at archival desire, writing, “from in close to an impossible archaeology of this nostalgia, of this painful desire for a return to the authentic and singular origin.” This nostalgia is an important facet of the liberalism and humanism that Marker is undermining. *Staring Back* is unconcerned with origin or return, cultivating a poetic attendance to subjectivity in such a way that calls forth a response. Derrida writes, “I asked myself what is the moment *proper* to the archive, if there is such a thing, the instant of archivization strictly speaking, which is not, and we will come back to this, so-called live or spontaneous memory, but rather a certain hypomnesic and prosthetic experience of the technical substrate.” Marker’s archive calls for spontaneous memory. Constructed from traces, he witnesses and reports.

Derrida closes “Archive Fever” with asserting the archive as an object concerned as much with the future as the past. He writes, “But it is the future which is at issue here, and the archive as an irreducible experience of the future.” The archive’s future-orientation reveals its inherent political power, succumbing to, what Derrida would call “the specter of the oedipal violence” that whom there is no future without. The fragmented, heterogenous, repetitive characteristics of Marker, Richter and Raad’s archives reveal a similar future-orientation. Richter and Raad have yet to officially close their archive: following the origin date, the dash floats into nothingness almost as an offering. As art critics took up the issue of the archive in the later 20th century, they stressed the paradox of closing the archive. The openness of the archive is central

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74 Ibid., 22.
75 Ibid., 45.
76 Ibid., 54.
to its decolonized form, as art critics celebrated anomalous archives that embraced an epistemological focus. In theory, the future appears as a ghost, an illusion of itself. But in practice, the archives of our artists leave the door open for the future, as a call to further action and constant re-interrogation.

Marker, Richter and Raad are more interested in archive practices than the philosophy that undermines larger ontological questions. Each of their works are deeply personal, and profoundly ideological pieces of art engaging with, and developing a stance against, the archive and the modern reality of anomic fragmentation. However, Derrida’s linguistic contributions are useful. We can use his concept of the anarchival to prescribe an archival future that takes from these artistic archives to reimagine the possibilities for a collective cultural memory. Leaning into the technical diffuse of history allows for a purposely digressive archive revealing the implicit breakdown of memory. Power and bureaucracy succeed in obfuscating the death drive so inherent to the archive, promising both neutrality and Truth. Derrida’s call for an archive that is never-ending, heterogeneous, and fantastical at its core is answered by the archives of our study. They have practical consequences as well. These projects are not only a desire to reconcile the archival oppression concerning contemporary philosophy and art criticism, but they follow a logic of affective association that creates an archival location.

The Digital Era: Archive As Location, As Continuum

The digital era is specifically relevant to our exploration, as simultaneously remodeling archival labor and lending itself to an anarchival model. The nature of digital records, and the ever-expanding universe of the internet and digital machinery survive the tangible, materialist work of the archivist. This, in effect, promotes the concept of an archive continuum: a space for
living memory that hinges upon the surface-ness of the images presented on screen. These images, already implicated in the phantasmagoric nature of photography, become even more fantastical, opening up an opportunity for a more transcendent model of archival work. Though this sounds like a philosophical recommendation, it is rooted in the innate ephemerary of human memory that can be better expressed under an archival continuum. In Jay Atherton’s Essay (1985), “From Life Cycle to Continuum: Some Thoughts on the Records Management–Archives Relationship,” he writes:

...the impact of the computer on the life cycle has been striking, for with electronic data the stages in the life cycle cannot be separated. The nature and volatility of the recorded data will not permit it. Creation, for example, is an ongoing process rather than an event in time. The record thus created is probably going to be altered a number of times during its period of administrative use. While most office automation systems may give the appearance of emulating a paper system, the data certainly is not processed in the same fashion. Data base management systems completely separate elements in a record, allowing the user to bring them together, perhaps altered, in any useful combination.77

Atherton’s recommendations are for archivists working in institutional settings. He is not a philosopher or artist, but, at the time of writing, the Director General of the Records Management Branch of the Public Archives of Canada. His distinction between that of the digital data system and the traditional paper system reiterates the opportunities that the digital era lends to archival labor. The alterations to the process of combining that Altherton mentions are reminiscent of the resequencing of Marker and Richter’s archives. Thus, the computer allows for a redemptive, democratized future of archiving that our artists were in direct conversation with. Atherton, who was writing in the 1980s, would be pleased to see the rise of the Record Continuum Model that much contemporary archive scholarship adheres to.

The Records Continuum treats the archive as a location, specific to living memory. Scholarship on the subject aims to reinstate a transformative model of archiving that intends to focus on collaborative interrogation and interaction with records instead of a total, hegemonic, representational object. The methodology of the Records Continuum is in line with the contemporary field of academic study on archival methodology. In the 2016 article, “Critical Approaches to Archiving and Recordkeeping in the Continuum,” scholars define the new field as novel and contemporary. They write, “Critical archival studies so defined are part of an emergent critical archival methodology, a new epistemological paradigm in which we can explore and engage with the archival multiverse. Critical archival methodology is concerned with ideas about decolonizing and pluralizing the Archive.”  

The intentional, processional, and actively political model of the continuum mirrors and reflects a will to connect what traditionally goes unconnected. Based on intersecting, never-ending rings of exploration, the model proposes multiplicities and an opportunity for various contexts to be considered (see fig. 23). This paradigm of engagement and exploration provides the conceptual framework to work within an archive, to treat it as an ever expanding, ever changing space. Thus the archive loses its legitimacy as an object, but becomes anew: validated in what Foster refers to as the “will to relate—to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes paodistically), to ascertain what might remain for the present.”

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In both a practical and theoretical manner, this new will of the archive can be characterized as a dispositif of cultural memory. Marker, Richter and Raad are engaging with this mechanism: one that is founded upon the negation of preservation and the positivization of knowledge production. For each artist, they work not only within the space of the art world, but within the location of their constructed archive. Each of them creates a living memory that combines the personal with the cultural, and the private with the public. What the viewer is left with is a completely different sense of an archive. This archival notion is different for all three artists, and it rests upon a relational framework for working through the complicated nature of human experience and memory. These spaces, spaces that are left open and encourage reinterpretation, are categorically alive in comparison to the traditional, institutional archives of historicity. Hal Foster ends “An Archival Impulse” writing, “This move to turn ‘excavation sites’ into ‘construction sites’ is welcome in another way too: it suggests a shift away from a melancholic culture that views the historical as little more than the traumatic.”

It is in these locations, or sites as Foster would call them, where memory lives on in radical opposition to the dead, oppressive arkhon. The artists have not only presented us with a model similar to the Continuum Records, but they have reinterpreted the space in which images might live on, providing a completely new structure of seeing, remembering and, ultimately, reimagining.

Re-orientation and Reimagination: The Political Power of the Archive

Derrida posits an archival turn from the nomological to the ontological made available by new digital forms of hypomnema. Derrida’s understanding of hypomnema is implicated in a desire to remember and record, and thus a Freudian psychoanalysis of the death drive. Though Derrida’s archive is a product of his philosophy and analysis, he provides a political framework

in which to think about its hegemonic involvement. In a footnote in “Archive Fever”, Derrida writes, “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”\textsuperscript{81} The philosophical, art criticism, and artistic turns in the later half of the 20th century would point to the archive as a theory and an object to extrapolate from. These three fields of work were not completely rejecting the archive, but reappropriating it to reveal and work through its ideological function.

The politics of memory are tied up in the archival field, which is why a system of framing that reincorporates an ethics and positionality of radical difference is necessary. As revealed in the previous section, radical shifts in the technical world of archiving are beginning to mirror the processes of Marker, Richter, Raad, and other artists working within the archival location. The Continuum Record and recent critical engagements with archival labor are turned towards the political with recognition of the technology available to us to alter the process of legitimating history and cultural, collective memory. These changes emerge out of a long lineage of cultural rumination on the archive. Archival reorientations are made possible by our digital advancements: creating space for what has been historically erased by traditional practices. Through the creation of a truly democratized digital sphere, we have the opportunity to resurface the spectral qualities of archival labor that philosophy and cultural theory have been relating to memory for decades. This resemblance to memory, provided by a wealth of technologies, opens up space for an entirely new archival logic.

By recognizing the innate repressive qualities of the archive, qualities that only serve to reflect our larger bureaucratic and authoritative society, we can finally implement the utopian drive which is in itself innate in the practices of preservation, and furthermore, in memory. Many

\textsuperscript{81} Derrida, “Archive Fever,” 11.
contemporary, democratized archives are participatory in the sense that all history is
participatory, namely, they themselves partake in the active constitution of history, instead of
posturing as history themselves. When dealing with history, with trauma and oppression, it
cannot be the violent state that institutes representations of their own doing. With the digitization
of archives, and new technological capabilities for increased accessibility, we have the
opportunity to increase participation, and to reconcile the power of archives.

The archive is not utopia. That being said, the archive must be based upon utopian ideals,
committing to, and taking responsibility for, knowledge production and expressions of lived
experience: it should not fall into the trap of mere representation or future-orientation. We don’t
need more archives from “down below,” or to reconstruct the archive with a focus on
marginalization. The traditional archive is unsustainable, and the archival profession must be
completely reimagined as a political, communal act born out of direct opposition to its
bureaucratic past. Caroline Huang explores archival components of contemporary art in her
recent essay, “Dwelling on the ‘anarchival’: archives as indexes of loss and absence” (2020).
Huang emphasizes the death-drive as working in constant tandem to the utopian, political project
of the archive. She writes, “In this new form of archival labor, where the desire for oblivion
should be thought next to the desire for recognition to archive then is to hold onto the tensions
and to always retain an attentiveness to the failure of the archive.”

We must resist the desire for the symbolic, the desire for totality, the adherence to hegemony. If what was determined in the
last century was a “postmodern” uncertainty, then the archive holds the promise for a future of
fantastical re-orientation. This is central to Derrida’s philosophy, “It is a question of the future,
the question of the future itself, the question of a response, or a promise and a responsibility for

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82 Caroline Huang, “Dwelling on the ‘Anarchival’: Archives as Indexes of Loss and Absence,” Archival Science 20,
no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 275, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09333-0.
With our new tools, our imagination, and with inspiration from artists like Marker, Richter and Raad, the archive can serve a better tomorrow for political shifts and interventions in our collective practices of remembering.

These artists are not philosophers, nor are they explicitly working as political actors. They might even protest my mention of them here. But, their archives serve as powerful negations of authoritarian control, and provide models for real tangible changes to the archival field of labor. The archive may never be succinctly reconcilable, but that is a good thing, for if it were, it would again fall into the trap of finitude. The digital advancements of our era open up the opportunity for the democratization of the archive. This notion of accessibility renders each individual not only as the documentarians of their own past, but as the creator of their own futures. In turn, we are all poets. The archive is not owned by the state, or even the philosopher or artist. It is instead an opportunity for collective poetry, a location we can congregate in and create our lived experiences. Marker, Richter, and Raad, concerned with the improper use of the archive, turn our attention to its rhythmic schema: illuminating the innate incompleteness of the archive, and subsequently, positing its endless, fantastic and fundamental potential.

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Conclusion and Afterword

The archive is a necessity. The recent rise of citizen journalism and the history of photography’s role in advocating for human rights proves this. Thus, this paper is not a call for the abolition of all archives, but for a radical reimagining of their processes and cultural position. Reimagining the archive’s status in the digital era is an opportunity for re-orientation, for a collective expression of our lived experiences.

Archives were originally thought of as a spatial location, as a building that housed the knowledge of our past. We can return to the archive as a location in our digital era, one which allows for increased participation and discursive modes of documentation. As we enter an increasingly visual culture, one that depends upon a hierarchy of knowledge in which the image has immense power, archives of images are of great concern, posing uniquely significant questions of representation, historicity, and objectification. However, this is where we can emphasize the utility of art as a learning tool. Through works like Marker, Richter, and Raad’s we see that it is, in fact, possible to assemble an archive from the fragments of repression. Thus, the reimagined archive should be a welcoming space, and a location for collective existence that breaks through its traditional onto-epistemological implications. Art plays an integral role in our political understandings, and in thinking critically about these artistic contributions, we can imagine practices of historical documentation that draw directly from the reality of historical events: that which is contradictory, fragmented, and never actually complete.

Following the Enlightenment and the complete universalization of Euro-american tradition, globalization expanded Western influence with unparalleled economic, political and cultural force. The archive is a remnant of the history of hegemony, it is a remnant of exclusion, of colonialism and of violence. Thus, reimagining the archive must, ultimately, be a radical and
revolutionary act: one that restructures our reality against adapting structures of oppression. Of course, technological advancement has been cunningly presented as a utopian, universalized opportunity for democratic participation. And, thus, the limitations of presenting a new archival labor dependent on technology is incredibly apparent. This is precisely why we need more than a digitization of archives — we need a complete reimagining of their ethical, structural basis. History studies the past in a linear nature which is easily representable as such in a tangible archive. However, with the new, vast opportunities for representation, we can create spaces that are actively decolonial and a pedagogy that is engaged and passionate about building solidarity through welcomed difference and collective memory.

I write this senior project while the backdrop of the recent Coronavirus pandemic, and fears of our future ecological catastrophe, loom over me. These recent events illuminate the presence of the spectres of death that haunt our contemporary ideologies. When the pandemic began, there was an immediate push for individualized documentation. Professionals called upon the public to take photographs and start journals. The feeling that *history is happening* was almost as pervasive as the acknowledgement of the violence and death occurring all around the world. Therefore, we must, to some degree, return to a utopian vision that has historically been assumed by capitalist, hegemonic powers. An archive that emerges from our drive for a better future is radical: the archive can be co-opted, it doesn’t have to live in alternative universes.

My hope is that the archives of these events refuse the normative, Western regimes of visibility that work to obfuscate the actors and subjects of perpetrated violence. These archives must be emphatically open, as predicated upon both wandering and wondering. These archives must leave the establishment behind, and return to a poetics that recounts as memory does. My
hope is that future archives serve more as a talisman, and that our stories always leave room for interpretation. My hope is that these archives barely resemble an archive.
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