

Excavating the Photo-Archive: Exploring Memory and Healing through the Creation of Radical Archives



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Abstract

This project considers the use of photographic archives in works of two contemporary artists, Diego Cirulli and Ayana V. Jackson, because their work results in the production of radical archives. Radical archives depart from traditional archives in curatorial intention, form, and function to reveal narratives previously unexplored. Through the analysis of the archival artwork of an Argentine artist and a North American artist, this project explores the radical archive as a mechanism of repurposing knowledge and memory transmission in two specific regions that bear unique histories of oppression. These artists provide alternative methods of knowledge production to traditional archives. Archival art is best understood by analyzing its construction, performative aspects, and engagement with public feelings. The production of radical archives through archival art has therapeutic effects that enable healing processes in response to histories of trauma and misrepresentation not only for the individual artist but for the community. This work is a contribution to the developing study of radical archives in terms of memory and historical representation.

Keywords

Archive; Photography; Radical Archive; Memory; Archival Art; Public Feelings; Performance; Cultural/Collective Memory; Cirulli; Jackson

As daylight begins to fade on an afternoon in Buenos Aires, lights are plugged in to illuminate decaying photographic material that stretches across a long white table. The archive of *Revista 21* had been thrown into the trash and film negatives had been decomposing quickly in the humidity of the garbage bags which contained them. Among these photographs were images of Carlos Menem¹ drinking champagne a year before the economic crash of 2001, the riots in the street that followed, and Néstor Kirchner² in 2005 removing the portrait of dictator Videla³ from the Casa Rosada, the executive mansion and office of the President of Argentina. What remains, between patches of fungus that had eaten away at celluloid surfaces, are fragments of images meant to cover the political and cultural history of Argentina between 1998 and 2006, until digital photography largely replaced the use of film.

The process of the recovery and conservation of *Revista 21* reflects the impulse to preserve tangible memory within a particular institutional archive. You might say that if the photos were left to deteriorate, so would the memory. The impulse to preserve, order and record the past is inherent, but with every step toward preservation we must also ask *why*? What is it about these images that we want to preserve, what stories do they tell and why is it these stories that are saved? Can this archive's content really be understood as the social memory of a particular group? For the purposes of this article, I consider social memory as the intersection between collective identity and historical memory of a particular group. These questions are worth examining especially concerning archives which contain images, given that photographs are often unquestioned due to the medium's association with truth.

¹ Carlos Saúl Menem was President of Argentina from 1989 to 1999.

² Néstor Carlos Kirchner Jr. was President of Argentina from 2003 to 2007.

³ Jorge Rafael Videla Redondo was dictator of Argentina from 1976 to 1981.

Not only do archivists need to acknowledge the criteria for their selections; these selections, in order to be communicated to society at large and succeed in defining a collective memory, need re-contextualization beyond the archive. Resurfacing photographs outside of the archive transmits memory in a way that engages a present and active dialogue with the past. The recovery of *Revista 21* on one level resurfaced its contents literally. But the recent publication of its contents in photo-books, magazines, and the photos on display for the 25th Annual Argentine Photojournalism Exhibition in 2014 brought its contents into present discussion. This is a process that should occur with more archives, without them having to hit the trash first.

With the creation of radical archives, artists, scholars, cultural theorists, and activists have taken on the responsibility of intervening within or departing from traditional archives to answer questions of misrepresentation. Radical archives depart from traditional archives in curatorial intention, form, and function to reveal narratives previously unexplored. They provoke questions such as: To what extent are we prepared to allow histories to remain or be created within the institutional archive? What are the ways we can unlearn the archive?

By the end of the 20th century, contested archival materials began to appear with more frequency in works of art. The artists' intervention into the archive is the point of departure for this work because their process results in the creation of radical archives. By excavating photographic archives, artists begin to awaken ghosts buried in the past, and respond to problematic archival narratives. Through my study of two artists who follow this process—Diego Cirulli (Argentina) and Ayana V. Jackson (United States)—I want to explore how the original meanings of archived images change as they are manipulated and re-introduced in a new space. What is the affective response of the transference from archive to radical archive? Upon answering

these questions, this project looks to ways in which the radical archive can be further validated as an essential tool for investigating history and memory.

From Archive to Radical Archive

Recent theories and research in the field of Archival Science propose a paradigm shift that alters traditional ways of understanding the archive. This new thinking provides a new platform from which we can look at the archive. It is necessary to look at the work of archivists Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz first because their concept of “self-conscious archivization” takes steps towards upending problematic archival traditions. To begin to form a bridge between notions of the institutional archive and the concept of radical archives (specifically radical archives formed through works of contemporary art) I look to Anna Maria Guasch, Cheryl Simon, and Hal Foster who pioneered the study of archival art.

In their article, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” published in *Archival Science* in 2002, Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook bring to light an important issue regarding the accumulation of historical knowledge and the legitimacy of that knowledge. The keeping of records by archivists often rests on the declaration that the accumulation process is neutral and objective, yet it is quite the opposite—subjective and biased. Control over memory and history is an unavoidable byproduct of the impetus to order, understand, or regulate a social phenomenon.

Cook finds a solution where archival science meets postmodernism. A postmodern approach to the archive will inherently be a “self-conscious” one, in which archivists self-identify as active agents creating historical memory, not neutral keepers of unbiased historical information

(Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country,” 610). Cook claims that if archivists embrace this role, historians and archive users will have expanded possibilities for looking into the past (“The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country,” 631). Acknowledging that neutrality of archives is a myth is the point of Schwartz and Cook’s research, yet they do little to explore ways in which societies as a whole can deal with this myth, other than calling on archivists to re-evaluate the implications of their profession and adopt “self-conscious” methods of archivization. For a society to resist the hypomnesia that the archive seems to enable, the responsibility cannot lie exclusively with scholars and archivists.⁴

The problem is the incompleteness of self-conscious archivization, the dominance of hegemonic histories, the lack of underrepresented histories—and a solution remains unclear. We do know, however, that in response to this phenomenon, individuals have expressed the need not to destroy archives or discredit them, but to produce more archives—radical archives as counter-archives. A 2014 conference at New York University considered radical archives to include “archives of radical politics and practices; archives that are radical in form or function; moments or contexts in which archiving in itself becomes a radical act” (“Radical Archives”). This notion is similar to Kim Schwenk’s view in “Another World Possible: Radical Archiving in the 21st Century,” that archival methods become radical when they stand for comprehensive collecting or for valuing the underrepresented against a more conventional standard of archiving (51). We see this in community archives, for example.

⁴ In the introduction to her book *Arte Y Archivo 1920-2010 Genealogías, Tipologías Y Discontinuidades*, Anna Maria Guasch considers mnemonic processes in relation to the archive. Apart from *mimesis* (imitation) and *anamnesis* (the act of remembering), the existence of archives themselves actually permits a process of forgetting—*hypomnesia*.

Furthermore, according to Schwenk, “radical” archivization reflects a process of preserving memory and history with the specific intention of representing equality, integrity, and justice by those who create it (51). Without stepping far from this definition of radical, for the purpose of this article, I focus on the notion of archives as “radical in form or function” precisely because of their creation through visual art. That being said, I do think it would be valuable for radical archives to escape concrete definition because their virtue lies in the notion that they are free from any concrete criteria or system. In my understanding, radical archives can be anything from a work of archival art to a personal memoir, and from a series of interviews to performances and happenings—materials compiled not to limit but to expand future understandings of history. Most importantly, I propose that we look at both forms of archives (radical and traditional) as a locus of cultural translation that forever possess the possibility to produce new meaning through cultural exchange.

The impulse to resurface archival materials in works of art produces radical archives that provide crucial and unique memory spaces for cultural exchange hitherto denied by institutional archives. In “Burning Archives: Art and Archive: 1920-2010. Genealogy, Tipologies [sic] and Discontinuity,” Anna Maria Guasch writes that the relationship between art and archive is both paradoxical and counter-discursive. On the one hand, you have institutional archives, traditionally supporting hegemonic nation-centric narratives, and then you have their encounter with various artistic practices which often seek to deconstruct these original narratives. The radical archive is a site “in which creative productivity occurs in conjunction with dissemination, indexicality and fragmentation” (Guasch, „Burning Archives“). The creation of archival art—radical, non-traditional, or even private- or community-maintained archives—is seen as a reaction to the limitations of traditional and institutional patterns of ordering historical knowledge that, by

virtue of its content and construction, makes viewers both conscious of these limitations and proposes an alternative epistemology.

By transforming an archive from an excavation site into a construction site, the artist's approach recognizes archival material as having a potential to produce *new* meaning rather than maintaining the implications of a discourse in which it was created (Foster 22). In other words, the artist's task is to select an archive, unearth the contents within it, and re-present the material in relation to the original archive and to a different discourse (often through artistic manipulation, re-ordering and rehousing) so new meaning may emerge. The two artists of focus in this article found that the particular photos which inspired them *needed* to be pulled out of their original collections and demonstrated in a different way, that is, resurfaced and re-communicated. What results might be called a counter-archive, a collection of materials compiled in direct opposition to its originally intended archival classification. Or, what results may simply be called a radical archive—a collection of materials compiled to undermine the hegemonic discourse. Both counter-archives and radical archives emerge through the re-construction of archival material and subsequently embody a previously unexplored space of memory and potentialities for remembering. These radical archives attempt to make relevant problems caused or ignored by a particular institutional archive.

The choice to use archival photographs in particular (a medium often associated with nostalgia, emotion, memory and forgetting), in many cases is linked to melancholy or even depression. In her *On Photography* Susan Sontag writes that photography “transforms the present into the past and the past into pastness” (77). Once a moment is photographed, it is relegated to the past, yet in the past, it remains forever in the present moment. When a photograph is selected from the archive, it is understood as a moment frozen in the past. Furthermore, since it has been

selected for an archive, its preserved past makes it perpetually present. Is it this paradoxical present-ness of past photographs that these artists find to be problematic? Photography is a transnational cultural practice; it consistently travels across borders, digital domains, contexts, and histories. The photographic object, more so than letters or documents which are bound by language, therefore possesses an ability to speak universally outside of the archive in which it resides to produce new mnemonic and emotive responses. Both Diego Cirulli and Ayana Jackson revere this power and undermine it through their manipulation and negotiation of photographs in the various contexts of their works.

The performative aspects of Cirulli and Jackson's work reflect each artist's exploration of healing within the oppressed or depressed context in which they are working.⁵ Diana Taylor introduced the idea of performance as a way of transmitting knowledge and memory in her *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Performance, understood as part of an ephemeral body of knowledge alternative to recorded history, can transmit memory, make political claims, and manifest a group or individual's sense of identity. "If performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and the powerful could claim social memory and identity" (Taylor xvii). Where then do the histories of these ephemeral performances, these radical archives lie? Taylor suggests performances are transmitted through a "non-archival system of transfer, the *répertoire*" (Ibid.). While the archive denies agency, she argues, the repertoire (including spoken language, sports, ritual, performance, and dance among other things) requires agency. In other words, unlike the archive, the repertoire requires presence, that is, people participating in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there" for the

⁵ When I write about "depression" I am referring to Ann Cvetcovich's work *Depression: A Public Feeling*, in which she explains depression as a phenomenon not linked to biochemical imbalances, but rather as a result of histories of trauma, genocide, racism, globalization, neoliberalism, and oppression.

performance. If we begin to take the function of performance as mechanism of memory and history transmission seriously, we expand the notion of what history itself is, who it belongs to, and how it is remembered.

Diego Cirulli: *21 105 significación y re-significación de los espacios de memoria*⁶

In the wake of Argentina's period of state-terrorism, which took the lives of over 30,000 individuals through forced disappearance between 1976 and 1983, photographs of the lost individuals became iconic images of the struggle for post-dictatorial memory and justice. These photographs were compiled by human rights organizations to piece together the untold, forgotten narratives of the Dirty War.⁷ Before the late 1990s, as scholar Diana Taylor reminds us in her *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"*, "forgetting had become official policy, much against the wishes of certain groups that had vowed never to forget" (13).⁸ The strongest resistance against the policy of forgetting came from the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who wielded photographs of their disappeared children as they marched around the Casa Rosada. In their protests, the Madres politicized the notion of motherhood while activating social memory by subverting the policies of ignorance (Taylor 15).

Through an intervention into the archives of the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo⁹, Diego Cirulli found an opportunity to create a work that could place images not only where they had been silenced from him personally, but where they had been erased or denied from society at large.

⁶ Title of Diego Cirulli's art installation and book, translated as *21 105 significance and re-significance of memory spaces*.

⁷ As Charles Maechling points out in his article "The Argentine Pariah," during the military dictatorship no records were kept of the victims, abducted people simply disappeared.

⁸ During his presidency (1989-1999) Carlos Menem even pardoned several perpetrators (including Argentina's dictator Videla himself) who had been charged under the previous president.

⁹ abuelas.org.ar/idiomas/english/history.htm.

Cirulli's 2012 installation *21 105 significacion y resignificacion de los espacios de la memoria* (*21 105 significance and re-significance of memory spaces*) consists of his artistic regenerations of photographs from these archives held at ex-ESMA¹⁰ (Image 1). The primary body of the installation consists of twenty-one large-scale portraits of kidnapped women hanging in a diagonal line that bisects the room. Cirulli worked in the archives to select photographs of disappeared women who had given birth in the detention center. Additionally, he investigated the process of identification, location, and reunification of the children lost during this process.



1. Image taken from Diego Cirulli, *21 105 significación y re-significación de los espacios de la memoria* (2012).

¹⁰ The Abuelas y Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (The Grandmothers and Mothers of the Disappeared) were, and still are, the most unified human rights effort against the atrocities of the dictatorship. The madres took to the streets and public squares with weekly marches to protest the disappearances of their families and to search for the children born in detention camps. Today the abuelas are committed to building the absent archive of the dictatorship in their pursuit of historical justice.

The Higher School of Mechanics of the Navy (in Spanish, Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada, commonly referred to by its acronym ESMA) functioned as the largest clandestine detention center in Buenos Aires between 1976 and 1983. Today, exESMA functions as a memory and museum site; it has been re-named Espacio Para la Memoria y Para la Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights). www.espaciomemoria.ar/

The original archival portraits of lost individuals serve as symbols for justice in Argentina and point to the photograph as an essential tool in constructing collective memory. Yet, as Taylor reminds us in *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"*, the photos are “smiling, forever youthful faces [that] communicate an image of personal wholeness that elides the decomposed ‘real’ bodies” (142). Unlike these images that capture the disappeared at one moment in time, the images constructed in *21 105* suggest a process of disappearance, reminding the viewer not of the individuals themselves, but of the haunting nature of their disappearance.

The viewer is invited to walk around and between the portraits that hang one after another in a line. Unlike the sharp black and white photographs held in the original archive, in the images that Cirulli created, the faces are rendered in black ink in a hazy, almost opaque way. Essentially, the photographs become paintings. The paintings are rendered on multiple layers of thin tarlatan, and in each layer the face appears to a different degree of fullness. These paintings, hung one after another with a few inches of separation between them, replicate the order of an archival filing system, yet the palimpsestic visual character of each portrait undermines that systematic order. As the viewer walks through the hanging images, the faces seem to disappear and reappear in the space. While evoking the process of disappearance, the work reminds us that we cannot rely on the content of archives, on these images alone. In our spatial interaction with them we are forced to reconsider and re-signify this memory, this space, these individuals, and what they represent.

The social associations drawn from the original images are *mimetic*—they are imitations that bring the viewer to the past. Viewing a mimetic image, a portrait of one woman without inquiring into the story that surrounds her, is a misuse of the archive. In the process of manipulation and resurfacing, combined with the choice to include details of the women’s pregnancies, *21 105*

effectively triggers an *anamnestic* response from the viewer, one that mimics the act of remembering. Walking through the exhibition, the viewer not only walks through personal and shared memory, but takes into account both the archival attempts to retrieve that memory, and their own process of mnemonic or memory recall (Image 2).



2. Image taken from Diego Cirulli, *21 105 significación y re-significación de los espacios de la memoria* (2012).

In her article “Fotografías Y Desaparecidos: Ausencias Presentes,” Valeria Durán comments on the difficulty of representing the past precisely because there is no single “past” that can be represented, especially if fractured by trauma. A single and authentic past, she writes, does not exist. What does exist are the multiple memories that allow the past to be activated in the

present, and through this activation multiple identities are constructed, both individual and collective (Durán 135). In placing the physical images of these women in the exact space where they were once disappeared, their memory and history can be re-examined, and their souls are summoned. The artistic archival reinstatement of these pregnant women who were tortured during the *proceso*¹¹ places an anti-narrative of the Dirty War inside ex-ESMA, not only in terms of the politics of forgetting, but in terms of gender. The layers of *tarlatan* highlight the process of these women's disappearance while provoking reflection on what disappearance has meant for the collective identity of Argentina since 1976.

Cirulli effectively creates his own archive, a radical archive. Cirulli's choice to deliver the documented past to the present by his manipulation and creation of images suggests a dissatisfaction with the way the past is traditionally communicated. Given his aim to open an opportunity where an individual can process the significance and *re-significance* of memory spaces, he believes that this space does not exist naturally, and it is necessary to create space to encourage individuals to meditate on the meaning of their memories—both personal and collective. The archive of hundreds of black and white portraits of the disappeared, compiled by the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo through excavation, enunciation, or utterance through art, is a testament to the potential of the archive as a site of cultural translation. To enunciate is to express or pronounce with clarity—the photographs are extracted from their original archive and rearranged in a new sequence and in a new form which lends itself to a new understanding of the objects themselves, as well as the historical context which enabled the original archive to exist. We can think of this as letters being pulled from words in a sentence and rearranged to create distinctly new words. The enunciation of the radical archive is analogous to reading new words

¹¹The military dictatorship called itself the “Process of National Reorganization,” or “Proceso,”

created from an old sentence. An archive is in fact a mechanism for cultural expression; however, if unexplored (through intervention), its potential is never realized. Cirulli's intention was just that: an intervention using archival photographs, relocated, to impregnate an already institutionally symbolic space with new meaning.

Cirulli's formal process and strategy reveals that he reveres the archive while at the same time acting to dismantle its accepted function in terms of historical narratives. A space that simultaneously triggers institutional and individual memories of national trauma cannot exist within the archive alone.

Ayana V. Jackson: *Archival Impulse*

In her exhibition *Archival Impulse*, the North American artist Ayana V. Jackson follows a similar formal strategy of intervention, excavation, and manipulation to transmit memory and knowledge outside of a particular archive. Jackson's work considers the problematic role colonial archival photography has had in shaping racist perceptions of the black body for centuries. *Archival Impulse* seeks to revisit the devastating narratives of colonialism that have shaped the way the black body is seen and understood. Inserting herself as the subject, Jackson uses photography to re-stage archival images of the Global South from the late 19th and early 20th century. These images, in their circulation through Europe and the West in this era, are responsible for shaping the initial collective understanding of the non-white body. Jackson appropriates images by recreating them and inserting herself as the subject. With her powerful intervention and shuffling of character roles within certain images she attempts to confront the racism perpetuated by archival imagery. Jackson hijacks the way a viewer is taught to read and interpret images. Jackson draws inspiration from Hal Foster's idea that in confronting the archive, new systems of

knowledge can be created. By resurfacing these images, she addresses the visual representation of non-white European bodies locked within an archive, reminding us to revisit the colonial specter which, although at times forgotten, still haunts us.

Although the medium itself is photography, at its core, Jackson explains that the exhibit is performance-based. The choice to use her own body is at the heart of her work. From the outset, she realized that the exhibition would be about *her* body, *her* history, *herself*. During my personal interview with Ayana V. Jackson, she explained how this allowed her to investigate how she could “ultimately feel better about herself,” at a time when she was trying to understand her own black body and identity. *Archival Impulse* is a work with affective intentions, where the artist imagines that through her artistic process, she might make the viewer consider the role of these 18th century images in perpetuating racism; moreover, by putting herself in the images, the artist seeks to experience a personal transformation to make her “feel better” or help her to heal (Personal Interview with Ayana V. Jackson, 2015). With each image conceptualized as an individual performance, the series represents the creation of a space where new historical narratives might emerge—ultimately a space for a counter-archive, a radical archive. With each re-appropriation, the performed counter-archive complicates the memory cemented in the original photograph; it takes steps toward subverting the clichés born in the redistribution of these images in the 19th and 20th century.

Jackson’s *Demons/Devotees* (selected from *Archival Impulse*) reproduces an image from the Duggan Cronin Archive, which circulated throughout Europe in the 19th century. The original photograph depicts a well-dressed white woman standing at the apex of a pyramid of half-clothed or naked black bodies (Image 3).



3. Image taken from Jackson, *Archival Impulse and Poverty Pornography*, p. 6.

Positioning the pyramid in order to direct the viewer's gaze upwards, the clothed woman towers over a predominantly unclothed intertwined group of people, enforcing contrasts of order/disorder, white/black, and civilized/primitive. The photograph is an explicit representation of the black body as a resident of the permanent underclass—a message communicated through the visual language of its composition.

Jackson's *Demons/Devotees* is a clear and direct response to the original image. Exploiting the viewer's ability to read an image, Jackson replaces the white woman as well as the crouching bodies with her own (Image 4).



4. *Demons/Devotees I* Archival Pigment Print 112x112 (2012). <http://www.baudoin-lebon.com/en/artistes/oeuvres/15679/ayana-v.-jackson>.

The large scale makes every face and its unique expression readable. Although Jackson's body is repeated several times, the elegant contours of each pose reclaim the autonomy stripped away from the nude and half-dressed figures of the original image. While the original image depicts the white woman almost floating like an angel, with the black bodies almost blending into the surrounding foliage/earth, the naked black figures in *Demons/Devotees* stand out from the abstract background. Although the structural hierarchy remains, each body and each face is humanized with her distinct expressions. By creating variations on *Demons/Devotees*, Jackson substitutes herself for a white woman in one photograph, while substituting nude white men for

her repeated poses in the second image. The images are a mocking imitation of one another, each a response to the original (Image 5).



5. Images taken from Jackson, *Archival Impulse and Poverty Pornography*.

In a talk at New Jersey City University, Jackson explained that to use a body other than her own would be “mimetic.” If she photographed another woman, she would have occupied the powerful position of creator and photographer while her subject, following the artist’s vision, would be in a position of less power, ultimately becoming another colonial archive. Choosing to perform both positions herself, she avoids the problematic risk of mimesis or imitation and creates a situation that provokes an anamnestic process in the viewer—one that evokes the active process of remembering. This element connects Jackson’s archival art to that of Diego Cirulli. In re-staging and performing the images, she invites the viewer not only to journey through memory, but to question it.

More often than not, a journey through memory evokes feelings. The affective responses to both Jackson’s *Archival Impulse* and Cirulli’s *21 105 significación y re-significación de los*

espacios de la memoria were strong ones, not only for the spectators but for the artists. Performance evokes feelings and memories; most importantly, performance connects personal experience to collective experience—creating a space for shared feelings.

Conclusions

The two artists of focus intervene in photographic archives, make their own selections, and present the selection through alterations of their various fine art mediums. Moving beyond self-conscious archivization, these are instances in which individuals (not archivists but artists, photographers, and activists) extract material from the archive and resurface it through a different medium to answer personal and collective questions of identity, memory, and history. Their interventions result in a series of new images, constructions that bring archival material to an artistic space. The reappearance of photographs in both Cirulli's installation and Jackson's photographs awakens ghosts locked within the original archive—opening the artifacts to individual interpretations and readings beyond the original archivist's intention. The process and product of each work taps into both the artist and the viewer's anamnestic tendencies, urging a process of mnemonic, epistemological, and even identity re-signification.

Through the creation of a radical archive the artist/activist walks through a moment in the past, confronts demons and ghosts, and repurposes knowledge so we might attain a more comprehensive representation of a phenomenon. These collections in turn, if they are shared with the community at large, open doors to processes of collective healing (in traumatic or depressed contexts), merely by offering an alternative means through which the past can be considered outside of the traditional archive.

Knowledge transmission occurs both in the archive (via texts, documents, photographs, buildings, bones, etc.) and the repertoire (via embodied practice). As performances that negotiate the transmission of knowledge, radical archives rest in a space between the archive and the repertoire. Archival art and the creation of new memory spaces become a point of connection between the ephemeral and the concrete. This found space between the archive and repertoire may open doors to productive contact and transference between institutional archives and radical archives. In this way, radical practices are not necessarily in opposition to archival standards at all. The production of radical archives actually opens new outlets through which we can expand the use of traditional archives via exchanges and communication.

The artworks explored in this article do not only signify movement toward personal solutions for the artist, but also offer insight into how cultures can recover or understand histories of personal and collective trauma by embracing the ambivalent nature of the archive. In his *Memory, Trauma and History: Essays on Living with the Past* Michael Roth proposes that accepting the complexities of photography can be productive. Roth argues, “we should be less concerned with diluting its constitutive tensions than with learning how to live with its conflicted possibilities” (xxxix). Roth’s view on photography echoes my consideration of archives. In a context driven by the post-modern skepticism that began to deconstruct traditional institutional archives, how can we embrace the complexities of these historical apparatuses in ways that can be productive?

Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas address the role of the archive in terms of constructing national identity:

We can look at the archive as a site of cultural translation within which artists’ interventions have the potential to transform the values and functions of the objects framed by the

institution: what was once evidential has become symbolic through these processes of cultural exchange. (Simon 104)

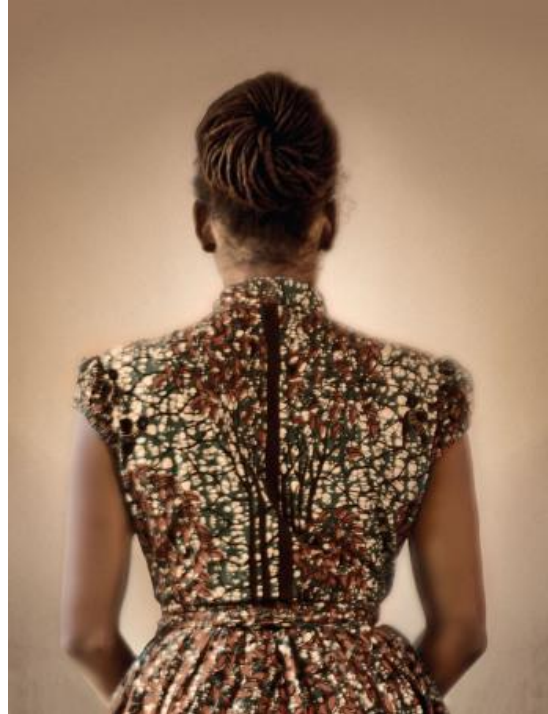
Payne and Thomas highlight how artist interventions open the doors to re-significations of the memory locked within the archive. I find their classification of this process as cultural exchange a positive one, which proposes a mutual interaction between archive and radical archive that valorizes both as legitimate reservoirs that can and should inform one another. Nevertheless, the impulse to extract, intervene, and create highlights the dissatisfaction with the original archive, which I find to be symptomatic of a larger problem that concerns questions of cultural memory in affective terms.

By looking at the unique histories of oppression which led Diego Cirulli in Argentina and Ayana V. Jackson in the United States to produce works of archival art, I suggest that the creation of radical archives is at once a symptom of and therapy to post-traumatic or depressed conditions. Placed in conversation with Ann Cvetkovich's work *Depression: A Public Feeling*, which attributes depression not to biochemical imbalances, but histories of oppression, inequality, or injustice, the creation of radical archives works on an emotive and psychological level to alleviate symptoms of depression. In their constructions of radical archives, the artists explored in this article reveal attempts to confront not only a series of problems concerning the archive itself, but also specific traumas that have resulted in depression on collective and personal levels.

In the creation of a radical archive, the artist's use of performance (including flexibility and movement) produces therapeutic effects. Inviting viewers to physically walk through the disappearing archive of *21 105* encourages a collective meditation on memory and the nature of Argentina's disappeared after over two decades of state-sponsored policies of denial and forgetting, while at the same time serving as a personal outlet for Cirulli to speak to a phenomenon that was

silenced in his family. Similarly, Jackson's re-staged photographs allowed her to explore her own identity and experience in a black body while at the same time negotiating problems of representation that affect all populations of the African diaspora in a time where the colonial past remains present. As explorations in memory that offer the creation of new memories, the creation of radical archives is a step toward finding a solution to the problem of the archive. Through what we might call *radical archive therapy*, the artist explores a creative process of healing that responds directly to the original archive as well as the conditions or context which enabled the original archive to exist. Both impulses to excavate the archive and to take control or facilitate new memory transmission, are rational responses to the histories of neoliberalism, colonialism, and oppression which, much like the photographs that illustrate them, are not constrained by borders.

In *Case 33* (Image 6), Jackson draws from the Afrofuturist idea of "walking backwards into the future" in acknowledgement of the history that preceded it. This image is an embodiment of Thomas and Cook's "self-conscious archivization" in a radical context. Her poised torso turns away from her camera in acknowledgement of her choices as well as the problematic images from which she drew inspiration.



6. *Case 33 IV*. Image taken from Jackson, *Archival Impulse and Poverty Pornography*.

This image is exemplary of the common ground between the archive and its radical counterparts—the notion of any archive, radical or not, as it operates parallel to systems of memory inherently selective and always biased. Without this acknowledgement, without the performance coming to a close, how can future collections of materials learn from one another? Adopting a self-conscious approach to the archive and pushing the boundaries of our conceptions of the archive opens new possibilities, ways of conceiving history, and of finding resolutions. In the postmodern world, the creation of radical archives can be viewed (along with depression) as a rational response to global conditions. Radical archives offer both the possibility of engagement with the archive and hegemonic narratives of the past, as well as individual and collective healing processes for the future.

By taking performance, feelings, and radical archives *seriously*, history can belong not just to the powerful, the archivist or the historian, but to the artist, the cultural theorist, the activist, and

others. Rather than understanding the seemingly incongruous nature of archive and radical archive as a setback, we should embrace their divergence as a valid resource for creative production, one that encourages processes of extra-archival memory and knowledge transmission on a global scale.

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