INFINITE RECORD:
ARCHIVE, MEMORY, PERFORMANCE

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Heidelberg Castle. — Ruins jutting into the sky can appear doubly beautiful on clear days when, in their windows or above their contours, the gaze meets passing clouds. Through the transient spectacle it opens in the sky, destruction reaffirms the eternity of these fallen stones.²

This quotation from Walter Benjamin’s (1892–1940) fragmentary work “One-Way Street” places the Heidelberg Castle in a state of eternal existence. The decayed castle rises up like a stage; the wind and clouds drift past the set like protagonists and move along the parcours of forgetting and remembering. The scenario is thus the epimetheus of an archive in which the different splintered fragments all act on equal footing. This snapshot opens up a melancholy gaze on a scene that is often found in literature and art; inevitable transience is commemorated here.² The “melancholy gaze,” which has been consciously implemented since the Romantic age,⁴ also allows for a revaluation of “the ruins” and a complete switch to an opposite meaning. In this “trick,” destruction in the form of ruins is emphasized and “becomes (a sign of) “faith” towards unique, necrotic things.”⁵ The oscillation between the poles of physically limited human memory — remembering and forgetting — are dependent on one another in the history of cultural memory (i.e., “remembering not only counters forgetting, but is also always accompanied by forms of forgetting: obscuration and suppression”).⁶

An archive must first be understood as an institution that documents traditions, that entrusts the past to the present and future. In addition, archives primarily collect, register, and store relevant — historic, religious, legal, political, economic, or culturally meaningful — material; they thus create an impression of absolute knowledge. The hunt for this absolute knowledge and the imperative acceptance of the status quo in the sense of an almost “sacred promise of progress” is rooted in the period of the
beginning of the 18th century. A desire to establish an updated and comprehensive catalogue of all fields of knowledge could be sensed; the human spirit’s progress in all areas of activity was to be accounted for in the century. This is especially identifiable in the great encyclopedia L’Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, published in seventeen text and eleven illustrated volumes between 1751 and 1772. The great encyclopedists Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783) served as publishers and employed another 142 authors, among them Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who formulated over 70,000 individual contributions and thus created one of the Enlightenment’s incomparable major works. The dark Middle Ages were considered overcome; the age of light, the Enlightenment, followed. In 1782, the Enlightenment philosopher Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat (1743–1794) summarized it again:

The truth has triumphed; mankind has been saved (La vérité a vaincu; le genre humain est sauvé)! Each and every century will add new lights (lumières) to the previous one. And these steps towards progress, which cannot be stopped or slowed from now on, will have no other boundaries than those set by the duration of the universe (n’auront d’autres bornes que celles de la durée de l’univers).

The Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance project (2012–2014) once again discusses these poetic ideas and insights of cultural theory in the context of “artistic research” while simultaneously examining the role of remembering and forgetting, knowledge and ignorance as a matrix of artistic processes, especially in the performing arts.

“SURVEYING” AND “AUDACITY” IN THE WAKE OF CULTURAL CRITICISM

In 1749, the Academy of Dijon organized an essay competition and posed the bold question on whether or not the restoration of the sciences and arts has contributed to the purification of morals ("si le rétablissement des Sciences et des Arts a contribué à épurer les moeurs"). The question was especially audacious since the European Enlightenment had produced a philosophy of history that emphatically assumed that progress was self-evident in diverse sciences. This progress was based on the semantics of experience and reason that had been common since Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), and René Descartes (1596–1650), all prophets of modern science. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) did not answer the question that had been posed by the academy in accordance with the ideas of the enlightenment, which pay homage to the primacy of understanding; instead, he clearly rejected his generation’s belief in progress in that he perceived it in a kind of alienation from a human essence. Inherent in the rejection of encyclopedic culture is the theory that cultural man differs from pre-rational and pre-social beings. This also implies that Rousseau rejected the idea of a human being that permanently remained the same; he understood humans to be creatures that only develop under complex historic conditions. He then took the encyclopedist’s idea of a leitkultur [leading, dominant culture; cultural canon] ad absurdum and located nature in his rejection of enlightened society. Only a year later, in 1750, the previously more-or-less unknown philosopher was awarded the Academy’s prize.

Rousseau opposed the Enlightenment’s verdict and the implied positive philosophy of history with a sophisticated criticism that did not attempt to turn back time, but rather demanded that the present be read critically in reference to pre-civilized conditions. This criticism can be illustrated by a remark from Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the Enlightenment philosopher who stated “Rousseau, in fact, did not intend to place man back in his natural state, but to make him look back into the past from the intellectual level that he has already scaled.” Even now, the knowledge that was collected by the encyclopedists remains the foundation of our culture, even if modern society is taking leave from a leitkultur formed by European experience.
THE SUBJECT OF ARCHIVES: CULTURE, ART AND CRITICISM

By selecting this subject, the research project became committed to archives. In approaching this curatorial and dramaturgic agenda, which will be addressed here retrospectively, the *Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance* project has certainly proven to be both accessible and sustainable. Here, archives are understood to be the totality of discursive practices that define the statements of power within a culture (as a system) and thus shape cultural memory over time. Other terms that are closely related to the core concept “archive” include *archeology*, *souvenir*, *collection*, *repertoire*, *ritual*, and *discourse*. In their semantic positioning, these terms simultaneously refer to the maintenance and communication of knowledge regarding the past, present, and future. In this temporal continuum, the objective is also to trace “history,” which is defined as follows by the cultural theoretician and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945):

*History is not the entirety of past events, nor is it what remains of the past. On the contrary: one could even say that a living history exists alongside written history. It remains in existence throughout the epochs or even constantly re-materializes, and within it one is likely to find a certain number of currents, which had only seemed to have vanished.*

With *Infinite Record*, a relatively broad approach was taken to the subject, which allowed for flexible reactions to necessary shifts in the project’s focus. Doing research in the field of “archives” with artistic work — on equal footing with science and philosophy — is a time-honored tradition. Art has always been dealing with the subject and continues to do so as an expression of never-ending commentary; this is the...
equivalent of an accumulation of memory and a desire to hold on to a past that has not yet been interpreted, or perhaps even overcome.

The cultural and historical relevance of this research project was reaffirmed by a simultaneous presentation at the 55th Biennale in Venice in 2013. With Il Palazzo Enciclopedico/The Encyclopedic Palace, curator Massimiliano Gioni addressed the attempt to encompass all human knowledge and the audacity inherent in such a project. The exhibition's title is a reference to the Italian artist Marino Auriti (1891–1980), who searched for an architectural structure that could serve as a representative storage space for all of the world’s knowledge. Auriti’s model, an architectural monster of 136 floors and a total height of 700 meters, a “tower of Babel,” is contrasted in the Biennial with the recently published imaginations of the unconscious by Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), which do not seek to reach the heights of the sky, but rather the depths of the human soul.

Conscious knowledge (“knowledge of the world”), as well as unconscious knowledge (“imaginings of the unconscious”), creates a reservoir of commentary as traces of an endlessly continuing stream of consciousness. Both Auriti and Jung strove to visualize a complete spectrum of knowledge: weltwissen (‘knowledge per se’) and the unconscious knowledge of the soul, equally universal (‘archetypal’). They sought to minimize the “vacant space” that surrounds our conscious and unconscious knowledge organically, if not make it completely disappear. The “vacant space” is thus often seen as a danger, even though one could also disagree vehemently and argue that the “vacant space” actually offers the most welcomed opportunity to write into it, e.g., to leave a continuing trace of commentary.

The willingness to recognize the traces of the ever-continuing commentary — and successively expanding space — often meets with resistance. And so some experts are already warning that the “vacant space” is “a threat” to “our intellectual and cultural self-appreciation.” The aspect of the infinite nature of an archive is, however, not just founded in the fact that the potential space for commentary constantly expands (i.e., in the form of new and seemingly unlimited electronic storage media and the Internet), but also in the knowledge that a record in particular and the complete archive in general is more than a trace of what has passed, “a specific order of elements of realty; the archive continuously develops endlessly new relationships to reality.”

The French philosopher Michel Foucault’s (1926–1984) definition will serve as a preliminary designation of archive; it connects the “archive” with the “archeology of knowledge” as a method of discourse analysis:

*I understand an archive to be an ensemble of de facto existing discourses. This archive is not only considered to be an ensemble of events that rest in peace, but moreover an ensemble that constantly transforms throughout the course of history and thus enables the emergence of new discourses.*

**CURATORIAL ARCHIVE WORK AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE INFINITE RECORD RESEARCH PROJECT**

Throughout the world, artists have been working with archives as a context; the subject has experienced a leap in interest since philosophical debate within a theory of literature of continuing deconstruction began. Still, the project presented here is innovative in that it allows one to once again enter into a multi-dimensional discursive space, to practically perform in it and introduce new voices and sounds in the choir of previously given questions and answers in the constant and continuing discourse.

In order to approach this open complex of issues, which must remain fragmentary (e.g., archive, memory, and performance), the project was placed on three equal columns, as detailed below. They were then contrasted with Ivetta Gerasimchuk’s essay Dictionary of Winds, which served as an infinite source of inspiration for the project’s various protagonists while also being a corrective for the positions that were reached in the project’s context.
First, three internationally known artists were selected. They had the opportunity to devote themselves to the given topic in four-week residencies at Norwegian Theatre Academy (NTA)/Østfold University College. The artists were Wen Hui, Chinese dancer and choreographer, Arnold Dreyblatt, American composer and media and performance artist, and Louise Höjer, Swedish dancer, choreographer, art theorist, and closest collaborator of the German/British artist Tino Sehgal. Three artists were selected to contribute to the process of understanding in the context of the Infinite Record research project on the basis of their respective artistic and intellectual “experience.” (Fig. 002)

In addition to memory as such, Arnold Dreyblatt examines the techniques of archiving as a perpetual commentary that rises above the actual event or record.25 The issue is no longer primarily what is written and thus delimited, the accessible archive of experience and knowledge, but rather the unlimited writing that presents itself as an identity-founding ritual of a perpetual tradition.26 Thus a paradox entanglement of “completion” and “updating” occurs, which is the expression of the recognition of an almost inextricable and inexplicable cacophony of voices—a dia-logical augmentation and overlaying.27

Wen Hui is a contrast to this approach. She is taken with the idea of holding on to a veiled past that she senses in her own body and that can be translated into her own choreographic language with her dance experience. The actual archive record, fragments of a living history in China, is at stake; these must be archived and saved for subsequent generations. The artist assumes that collective experience in the past had effects on the body and is thus present in the body, and that the body can also recall the past.28 One could even say, in the case of Arnold Dreyblatt’s position, what is to be remembered defines the method of archiving: it enters into focus and becomes an essential part of artistic work. In the case of Wen Hui, what is to be remembered must first literally be worked out, whereby the use of the body—a quite transient carrier of information—is understood to be a technique to bring repressed knowledge back into consciousness. (Fig. 003)

Louise Höjer has been working with artist Tino Sehgal since 2005. Since then, she has accompanied all of his works during their creation while also realizing various re-installations of the works in the years that followed. Höjer appears as a kind of artistic ‘vessel’ that both makes Sehgal’s “constructed situations” accessible to experience while applying her own trace of commentary. The “paradigm of two-fold simultaneity” is immanent in Tino Sehgal’s artistic work, which does not leave a material trace in a classic sense (e.g., image, object, video). The “constructed situations” that are created by the artist in the framework of his art are ephemeral and immaterial; they defy classical archive concepts. By integrating visitors into the “works,” the artist creates new immaterial possibilities for production, inviting one to critically reflect on the issues raised within a predefined choreographed and dramaturgic structure. Multifarious arrangements of movement and bodies result with the participants’ involvement.29 In this kind of live art, its “interpreters” have contact with the audience by way of movement, dialogue, and singing.30 In the best case, the experience has an incalculable value—it leaves no material trace that could be weighed out in gold. By re-installing Tino Sehgal’s works, Louise Höjer appears as an archivist of fragments that reflect on philosophic subjects while issuing cultural criticism in the form of living artworks. Here the archivist becomes a commentator. (Fig. 004)

[b] Three seminars followed the respective artists’ residencies, offered together with the international partners at their institutions. The seminars dealt with each artist’s thematic, artistic, and methodological focus, and reflected on the questions they posed and their possible answers from a philological, philosophical, sociological, and political perspective. Artistic research necessitates that one not only understand artistic expression in the completed work but actively participate in its ongoing investigation, by including and staging the artistic process and building a bridge between the aesthetics of a work and the aesthetics of production. The seminar topics—Archive and Body, Resonance, and Repetition and Co-Affecting—resulted organically from the artworks’ themes. In accordance with Wolfgang Ernst,31 the archive concept was expanded so as not just to focus on written systems of storage, but also non-written storage media—all of the aspects that are immanent in the performing arts.
The three international partners each committed to organizing a seminar and developing an associated seminar program in cooperation with NTA. It was possible to attain the cooperation of international universities that can be considered interfaces between art, science, and philosophy, and proved to play exactly these roles during the project: York St John University in York, UK; Muthesius Kunsthochschule in Kiel, Germany; and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston, US. The final concluding seminar, titled *Infinite Record — Archive, Memory, Performance: the Continuous and Living Archive*, was intended to collect and concentrate the results of the three-year project and to document, describe, and order diverse thought processes with their associated intermediate steps and partial results. MIT served as the location for the final installment, and its environment was excellent for enabling access to new thought spaces, especially in the cooperation between academics and artists. The final seminar was however no triumphant endpoint, but rather a methodological opportunity for further artistic, academic, and philosophic approaches to the subject, as has been tried and proven in artistic research.

The fact that art and scientific research are connected appears as a banal conclusion in the face of established practice in artistic research. But making this connection productive means to shape, stage, and accept that a certain “experience of suffering” always precedes it, a certain “discontent in culture”—and that this has become a keyword for the critical diagnosis of modern culture. Cultural criticism—the most conspicuous characteristic of contemporary art—is a reaction to “civilization and its discontents,” whereby cultural criticism is understood to be a “normatively charged modus of reflection.” It is formed in the “evolutionary modern age” and attempts to sensitize its schemes of value and order for the impositions and challenges of modernity. Since the 20th century at the latest, contemporary art has been decidedly asserting its attack on general, temporally based culture by contradicting it in the form of a self-reflexive,
self-referential counterculture found in the collected splinters that, in the end, make up culture in perpetual change. One could go so far as to understand art as the impulse-giver for artistic reflection and thus as a “constant commentary about the impositions of modernity.”

As an “ever-evolving commentary” and living debate, art constantly resists an often-invoked leitkultur, in the sense of a civic/political identity, and essentially guarantees the survival of culture as such and “normalizes contingency, and likewise triggers complexity. It is endogenic quality of cultural meaning, which has left behind the idle idea of completeness.” In this way, all art, all artistic objects, all installations and all performances become fragments of self-researching cultural criticism — an unfinished answer for this “discontent in culture.” It is also a fleeting witness to culture’s perpetual change.

Once more, Benjamin’s aphorisms prove to be instructive, for example, when he writes in “Normaluhr” (“Standard Clock”):

To great writers, finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which they work throughout their lives. For only the more feeble and distracted take an inimitable pleasure in conclusions, feeling themselves thereby given back to life. For the genius each caesura, and the heavy blows of fate, fall like gentle sleep itself into his workshop labour. About it he draws a charmed circle of fragments. ‘Genius is application.’

“THE DICTIONARY OF WINDS” OR “OF THE LOSS OF THE ETERNAL”

Precisely 250 years after Rousseau’s essay was submitted and deeply shocked the omnipresent belief in progress, the magazine Lettre Internationale — a quarterly cultural publication for German-speaking countries — announced a new prize. The prize question was posed in the vein of cultural criticism, and was intended as a worldwide philosophical essay competition, with juries in seven languages (English, Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and German): Liberating the Future from the Past? Liberating the Past from the Future? Thirteen philosophers, poets, cultural historians and artists were responsible for the question.
Over 2000 essays were submitted from more than one hundred countries. Finally the prize was awarded to a young Russian author, Ivetta Gerasimchuk, for her work *Dictionary of Winds*. In the jury statement, *Lettre International*’s publisher Frank Berberich writes:

The poetic breath of a world that is fragmented per se does not produce systems of self-definition. The unity of the scattered fragments demands gentle attempts, which — in the knowledge of an unsystematic character — risk affiliation with the idea of perfection. Description, invention and analysis, as well as facts, images and terms are all intertwined in such attempts. The convincing essay is an architecture of (scattered) fragments. It can be understood as a self-reflective capitulation in face of the demand of an ideal/perfect solution, this essay objects to the postulate of a deduction ex cathedra...

The point of departure for her essay is a fictional struggle between two conflicting philosophical schools: the *Anemophiles* (“wind worshippers”) and the *Chronists*, friends of inertia, who each have different estimations of “archive” and “archiving.” The two opposing positions play out in the form of a dictionary — the reference to French encyclopedias hardly occurs by chance. Both groups are presented here according to the “dictionary”:

**CHRONISTS** (Cronus — one of the divinities of the Greek pantheon, later on as a result of being mixed with the Greek “chronos” — “time”) — originally these were Cronus worshipers, members of the society Cronus. In the broadest sense of the word, it refers to everyone who is liberating the past from the future. C. prefer the absence of changes over changes (“The absence of news is good news.”), they prefer calm to wind. A true C. will sit with a closed window even in the stuffiest room and will never turn on a ventilator.

C. are divided into passive and militant. C. are hostile to all changes, even to changes for the better since they inevitably bring with them something unknown. In order to avoid this unknown of the future, C. passionately study the past. The attitude of C. to history expresses the famous phrase of the Quintillion: “History is created to be written, not lived.”

Higher than anything else, C. value time, which they have proclaimed the greatest gift of the *Timekeeper*. It is insane to waste it, they believe that to be a sin. “To ignore time, to ignore history means to ignore Him and to sin,” wrote *Fata Morgana*, whose ideas became the essential precepts of C. “We do not know anything about the future — to prolong our life or cut it short — everything is in the power of the *Timekeeper*.” As obvious from the example of this quote, all *chronists* consciously or subconsciously believe in the fact that time is finite. On the basis of this, *anemophiles* have accused them of heresy many times (“if time is finite, then the *Timekeeper* is not omnipotent”).

Cronus worshippers, as indicated by the very word, have just as long a history as Cronus himself, a divinity that is capricious and perfidious. It is not known exactly why, but his name at one point merged in pronunciation with the word “chronos” (time), and bestowed upon Cronus were granted the functions of the divinity of time, and Cronus worshippers began calling him Cronus. In the future, C. stepped outside of the frame of a merely religious society and took up various types of activities, encountering more and more like-minded thinkers. The Code of the society pronounced mandatory devotion of C. to the ideas of tranquillity [sic], immutability and a sacred interest in history, as well as a renunciation of constructing plans for the future. Many scholars, politicians and simple residents subsequently encountering this document, noted with satisfaction that they were 100 percent C., all the more to their joy, nowhere was a rite of initiation mentioned, and given the meticulousness of the C., this must mean only one thing — that it did not exist.
ANEMOPHILES (Greek anemos = “wind,” phileo = “I love”) — originally wind worshippers in Ancient Greece. In a broader sense, it is all those liberating the past from the future. A. always prefer wind to its absence, even if it is the very strongest storm. A. always welcome all changes, even if they are not changes for the better. Such optimism is based on a very high degree of certainty in the fact that time is infinite, and the Timekeeper is omnipotent. Gregorius Ventus, a pillar of the anemophiles, wrote: “Since time is infinite, and human life occupies a part of it, it is also infinite (a part of infinity is equal to infinity itself, an axiom which Anemophob the Great came to in his youth). In precisely the same way, if the Timekeeper is omnipotent, and man and all that is inherent in him is a part of Him, then man is also omnipotent and should at the very least reveal these capabilities in himself.”

The society of A. was founded in the 3rd century BC as a counterbalance to the society of Cronus (chronists). Originally this was a religious union, and the A. themselves bowed down to all the winds, from Boreus to Aphalea. Gradually, the society moved on to other spheres of activity, luckily many like-minded people also found the society. In the Rules of the Organization (the time it was created is unknown), the following is written: “An Anemophile is a person of any age, gender, way of thinking and social status, who wishes to change his life, not being burdened by conventions of the past, and who liken themselves to the wind, always carrying changes. A genuine anemophile can even be a person who has never heard about our society, but who is loyal to its ideals.”

A. comprise an integral part of any civilization, but the concentration of them in various parts of Being are different. A. are divided into passive and aggressive. It is precisely from amongst the anemophiles that seers always come. It has been noticed that during insurrections the number of A. rises sharply, which is apparently connected with a shift of a portion of the chronists to the camp of A. During peace time the opposite process occurs. This is why, for example, all the fundamental works, encyclopedias, and dictionaries are created during times of social stability. It is not known whether this assertion applies to the Dictionary of Winds.

The story of humanity contains many examples of clashes between the A. and the chronist [sic]. The situation, however, is complicated by the fact that these clashes are fixed and studied by the chronists, who clearly exaggerate their victories and “have forgotten” about their defeats. A. are more interested in the future, and consequently they always turn out to be better prepared in their battles of sword and pen with the chronists.43

Neither the Chronists nor the Anemophiles triumph, and one can even say that the dictionary is intended as an “ironic emblem.”44 The Timekeeper — a reference to a divine presence or the absolute — is prominent in both citations above. The Timekeeper, whose omnipotence is discussed, has no entry of his own in the Dictionary of Winds; but the Clock (i.e., time) does. It is the last entry in Gerasimchuk’s poetic work. The Timekeeper is like a living source, an archive, “who, it seems, is the only one who combines in himself perfection and imperfection, all knowledge and ignorance, the ability to perceive the world in time and to perceive it simultaneously, to rule over time and not to rule over it.”45 The supposed farewell to the Timekeeper is a farewell to the eternal, evoking a feeling of sorrow (and perhaps hope) that resonates similarly in Benjamin’s observations of the Heidelburg Castle. This sorrow is based on “the realisation of the unavoidable passing-away of all things as consequence of the loss of the eternal in history.”46

ARTISTIC ANALYSIS AND THE DICTIONARY OF WINDS

The Dictionary of Winds, an endless source of inspiration, was also the point of departure for three further workshops completed with NTA and Muthesius Kunsthochschule students and directed by the curator. In
the following years, 2013 and 2014, acting and stage design students used the prize-winning essay as a kind of quarry in order to realize their first Independent Projects. The diversity of the individual projects was overwhelming—images, movements, and sounds were created, and spatial constructions, compositions, and choreographies developed, stretching from “miniatures” to “infinite space.” In 2014, typography students at the Muthesius Kunstuniversität also created book designs (book art and typographical designs) for the Dictionary of Winds under the directorship of Annette le Fort and André Heers. A previously held workshop not only emphasized word and script’s cultural history, as found among the French philosophers, but also applied practical approaches to “words” and “script” in multifarious variations, fitting them in the already existing relief of the entire project. In this workshop, the curator focused on subjects that repeatedly proved to be sources of ideas for artistic creation: “the power of words,” “resistance writing,” “the utopia of text” or “palimpsest.”

Dealing with the Dictionary of Winds—which intuitively touches on the subject of archives and addresses perfection, the fragmentary, knowledge, and ignorance—proved not only to be a stimulus for artistic processes, but also allowed participants to orientate themselves in the various discourses. Therefore aspects of the subject in terms of cultural theory, social politics, philosophy, and religion were brought to the fore flowing into the Jewish tradition’s understanding of revelation, script, and law. In complete accordance with this tradition, the insight arose that to “commit to the archive” primarily means to recognize that one can’t trace the “archive,” nor make the worldwide “archive” visible or definable in its “truth.” It is more and more clear that the archive can best become tangible in its dialectics of memory and forgetting, sending and receiving, where “the voice that reveals itself is understood as pure potentiality or maybe as a pure promise of meaning.”

The infinite abundance of meaning is most tangible in a metaphor from Jewish traditional literature: “The Torah was written black fire on white fire.” One can assume, as Axel Schmitt does, that the metaphor “distinguishes between the ‘white fire’ of the written Torah, which is described as an amorphous virtuality, and whose letters are not distinguishable from the whiteness of the page itself and thus non-readable, and the ‘black fire’ of the tradition understood as articulation, explication, reading and interpretation of that which is unreadable in its whiteness through the blackness of the letters.”

The Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance project plays with the knowledge and ignorance of the blackness and whiteness of the letters in space; the “archive” is thus subject to negotiation. This book advocates an understanding of the archive’s nature as ever-ambiguous, one that contradicts the very concept of ransacked knowledge and instead emphasizes its amorphous virtuality: where black is white and white is black.

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Josef Horovitz — Exhibition and Events in the Academy of Arts, Berlin (2012–2013). She is the curator and dramaturg of the artistic research project Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance.


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On February 12, 2014, during the symposium “Repetition and Co-affecting” at Muthesius Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel, Germany, Joan Jonas and I had a dialogue concerning the strange phenomenon that a performer’s archive is often discussed — especially by academics — as if the artist were not alive anymore. I called this dialogue, which had begun six weeks earlier in Joan’s loft in Manhattan, Ask me, I’m still here.

Joan Jonas: No, I think that what we do is forgotten. Actually, in essence. And then, the audience, everybody has a little fragment that they remember…but they remember very little and then they see it in their own way. So they remember something that you don’t remember. And you don’t remember their experience.¹

So how do we send ourselves back to remember, since we’re always focused on the work we’re currently making?

Anna Köhler: There’s an exercise that I do, that I “invented”…probably a million other teachers do it too, and you know, your students liked it too, and that is, I would send them on a, like, walk around the room and go through every year of their life so they would start with being born, and then year one and what do they “remember” from year one — of course they can’t, but because I just call it out they have to come up with something, year two, come up with something, doesn’t need to be accurate or whatever, but come up with something, and I thought if we, like, get into it, let’s say, what might be really fun is actually kind of going through the years and seeing what either one of us just physically remembers what we did that year, in a performance, what “sticks.”
On that day in Kiel, I wanted to conjure up Joan’s presence, since she couldn’t be actually there with me. So I used the footage of the meeting we had in January and positioned myself in a way that I would be half here, in the present, and half there, in the video, bringing Joan with me. Speaking my lines “live,” I made her appear in the present, too. And she was. Back then, in her loft, we had started to talk about what this means, this safekeeping of life and its things, whether we wanted it or not, and to me at least it became clear that Joan saw a much stronger need than I did in keeping everything pertaining to her work. I tend more toward the belief that a performance should pulverize itself into ephemeral and non-existence — except for at the moment it happens, in the German “Nu,” which directly translates into English as the “moment of now.”

So we talked a lot about the actual, practical ways of preserving material, down to different formats of video. But that’s IMPORTANT, you know?

A: It also seems that, of course, since there are more and more ways to preserve, it’s like more and more…it’s like a world-crushing amount of material that’s gathered…²

J: Yeah, it’s overwhelming.

A: And who is going to look at all that?

J: Yes, exactly. Well, they’re only going to look at things that they’re particularly interested in, you know, they’re not going to look at…there’d be too much to look at…

A: And how…if you think that videotapes are already breaking down...

J: Well, hopefully they find ways to, uh…they call it migrating…to another format. But you never know what’s going to happen in the future. It’s a very unstable medium.

A: Hm. So what is migrating?

J: Migrating means going, for instance, from VHS to beta, or from, you know, from tape to digital. It has to be done constantly, to keep up to date, because the machines become kind of periodically obsolete.
The medium breaks down...and I have already had to—well, not every year since I've been starting...I don't know how many times—upgrade. Museums are constantly dealing with this problem.

At any rate, I began to see ourselves as characters from a play, or opponents in a game, and the game was based on the *Dictionary of Winds*, where *chronists*—and that is indeed what they are called—who want to save everything play against the *anemophiles* (or, as I sometimes call them, “ephemerists”) who want no memories, but everything to be carried away by the winds.

Nine months later, Joan and I decided to come together again, this time in Cambridge, and play that game right on stage, at MIT, in front of an audience.

Here are the rules to the *Dictionary of Winds* game:

1. Choose as many headings as you want from the *Dictionary of Winds*, and print each one out several times on different sheets of white paper, so there are about 10 copies of each.
2. Place them in a laundry basket and mix them well, without crumpling them.
3. Both players take turns drawing one sheet of paper from the laundry basket.
4. Each person can choose to either tell a story related to their work, or show an image, or talk about a work idea the *Dictionary* entry evokes.
5. If nothing comes to mind, the sheet may be discarded, and a different one may be drawn.
6. If you pick the same *Dictionary* entry twice, you can either discard or add to the story you already told about this item.
7. Once you are finished with your choice according to Rule 4, you take your sheet and hang it on one of the laundry lines suspended across the front of the stage, and your turn is over.
8. You keep taking turns until either a) the performers have become invisible behind the wall of sheets of paper hanging from the laundry lines, or b) the laundry basket is empty.

For added ephemerality, have a fan blowing the suspended sheets of paper as if it were the wind. Simultaneously, make sure the game is being filmed, to constitute a definite memory in the *chronist’s* sense of the game. The game can only be won by playing it together, so it is not important if there is a winner, only that the game was played well. If it has been played well, it will be memorable in the performative sense of the word. Content, form, and dialogue are immediate and associative. Connections are unforeseen and so even more exciting.

It can only work if there’s love for the memory and each other.
Anna Köhler laid the foundation for her work as a director and performer in Europe, where she studied acting and directing at the Conservatory for Art and Drama, the Mozarteum, in Salzburg, and later received her degree in Acting and Aesthetic Studies at the Université IIIV Vincennes, Paris, after studying mime with Etienne Decroux. Since joining the New York experimental theater scene in 1983, she has worked on stage with playwrights and directors like Stuart Sherman, John Jesurun, Richard Foreman, Richard Maxwell, Fiona Templeton, and Werner Herzog, working alongside actors like Steve Buscemi and Mark Boone Jr. (the trio’s nightclub performances were legendary), Willem Dafoe, and Ron Vawter of the Wooster Group, and as a solo performer — her solo performance D’Arcness premiered at the Triple X festival in Amsterdam. She appeared in movies by Jonathan Demme, Peter Sellars, and Hal Hartley. As a director, she has conceived and directed plays that were shown in Salzburg, Kiel (Germany), São Paulo, and — of course — in New York.

Joan Jonas (MIT professor emerita) is a pioneer of video performance art. Her experiments and productions in the late 1960s and early 1970s were essential to the formulation of the genre. Her influence was crucial to the development of many contemporary art genres, from performance and video to conceptual art and theater. During the past decade, Jonas has collaborated with composers such as Alvin Lucier to develop collaborative video-performance works, and has performed and toured with The Wooster Group. Her most recent work continues to explore the relationship of new digital media to performance. Jonas has been awarded fellowships and grants for choreography, video, and visual arts from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the CAT Fund, the Artist TV Lab at WNET/13 (New York City), the Television Workshop at WXXI (Rochester), and the Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) in Germany. Jonas has received the Hyogo Prefecture Museum of Modern Art Prize at the Tokyo International Video Art Festival, the Polaroid Award for Video, and the American Film Institute Maya Deren Award for Video. Jonas has had major retrospectives at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1994), and Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart, Germany (2000), and was represented in Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (2002). In 2004, the Queens Museum of Art presented Joan Jonas: Five Works, the first major exhibition of the Joan Jonas’s work in a New York museum. The exhibition included a selection of the artist’s most significant installations, a video room, and a survey of Jonas’ drawings, photographs, and sketchbooks. She is creating a multimedia installation to be featured in the United States’ pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale.
WEN HUI

RESIDENCY: FEBRUARY 2013, FREDRIKSTAD
MEMORY MOUNTAIN

Wen Hui is a pioneer of contemporary dance in China. Trained in classical Chinese dance, folk dance, and ballet, she studied in the 90s in New York with Trisha Brown and in Germany with Pina Bausch. Wen Hui worked closely with groundbreaking choreographer Ralph Lemon on his Geography project. In 1994, she founded the leading contemporary Chinese dance company Living Dance Studio and developed her unique vocabulary of precise movements and a specific style of interdisciplinary dance. In 2005, together with her partner Wu Wenguang, she founded the independent art space for performing arts, documentary film, video art, and photography CCD Workstation (Caochangdi-Beijing).

It is the home of the Living Dance Studio and a documentary film archive.

Wen Hui’s major choreographies are based on and inspired by documentary material. Through decades of artistic research she seeks a body language to express the complexity of overwhelming, painful, and fragile life stories. In 2011, for the first time, Wen Hui met her 83-year-old great aunt Su Mei Lin. In ongoing talks, Hui’s “third grandmother” develops insight into China’s 20th century through her personal stories, characterized by loss, pain, and mistreatments. Wen Hui’s documentary film Listening to Third Grandmother’s Stories became a success with European film festivals and helped build the base for her current dance piece. During her residency in Fredrikstad, Wen Hui continued to work on this unique film, as well as implementing dance and photographic material to create a unique installation for galleries and museums.

The theme of the research project Infinite Record: Archive, Memory, Performance is not only very interesting to me but also of great importance. For many years my partner Wu Wenguang and I and many associated people at CCD Workstation worked on the topic of archive and memory under the headline Folk Memory Project. The aim was to collect individual voices, statements, and stories from Chinese people living in cities, villages, or in the countryside. We trained students and non-professionals to interview their relatives and friends and to document their personal experiences and views on Chinese history using photo, video, and film. The material was collected at CCD Workstation and became a source for the projects Memory I and II, as well as Hunger. We are continuously working on the collection — we archive it and present the material in various formats in performance contexts, as well as international festivals and exhibitions.

The four-week residency offered me the chance to step out of my very busy life in China and my international tour in order to concentrate on my installation project Memory Mountain, which is related to the Third Grandmother’s Stories. This is the third step, after having made a film and a performance project, Listening to Grandmother’s Stories.

Memory Mountain is a performative installation. During its presentation, Wen Hui reads the following texts:

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1.

WH  Grandma, can you see me?
G    I see you.
    Can you see me?
WH  I can see you.
G    I can also see you.
WH  Grandma, what am I doing?
G    It is like playing hide and seek.
    My hands are over your eyes.
    Yes.
    Can you see me?
WH  I see you.
    My heart sees you.
G    I can also see you.
WH  You can?
G    Yes.
WH  Grandma, where are you?
G    I am here. Do you see me?
    I can see you.
WH  I can see you, too.
    I can see you, too.
G    I see you.
WH  I see you too. Yes.
G    Yes.
WH  Grandma, where are you?
G    I am here. Can you see me?
WH  I can.
G    I can see you.
WH  I can also see you.
    Grandma, where are you?
G    I am here.
    I see you.
WH  Can you see me?
G    I see you.

2.

G    It looks like I am excited.
WH  Yes you are.
    You look very beautiful.
G    No.
WH  You are.

3.

G    Let’s play more.
WH  Ok.
    We will play more.
G    Let’s repeat.
    If we play you stay longer.

4.

G    Wen Hui, do you see me?
WH  Yes, I see you.
    Grandma, when you are sad, dance.
G    Is that so?
    If I am sad, I cannot dance.

5.

WH  Take a rest.
    I don’t want to make you too tired.
    You are really an artist.
    You are very talented.
G    I am crazy.
WH  Please take a rest.
    You must be tired.
G    No, I am not tired.
    Playing is not tiring.
WH  Playing does not tire you?
    What makes you tired?
    Does talking make you more tired?
G    Talking is also not tiring.
    Sometimes I forget something.
    We can take a little rest.
    Then we can keep going.
WH  What you are doing is fabulous.
    I was worried that you fall — I was really scared.
G    People will laugh at me.
    They will say I am too old.
WH  No other can do as well as you.
G    There will be someone else.
If you guide people they will follow.

WH  No, there are not many people with such an open heart.

G   Yes, that is true.

WH  You are so open.
    You are not afraid.

G   Some people turn good things into bad things, right?
    What we are doing is a real good thing.
Infinite Record resident artists Wen Hui, Arnold Dreyblatt, and Louise Höjer enact methodologies that continually point towards archives as intimacies with invisible, multiple, absent, or impossible bodies. Their work collectively inspires an understanding of archiving and performance as mutually constituting relational acts. It was choreographer and installation artist Wen Hui who brought the idea of “Grandmother” into this project, along with the immensity of a landscape — both natural and historical — with her piece Memory Mountain. Through her work I was inspired to rethink the concept of “archive” as alive: mortal, tender, and demanding as Third Grandmother’s body itself.

Infinite Record has made me curious as to what might be the qualities and values of a “living archive.” I am left rethinking an analysis of memory and performance as living parts of a wild and complex poetic ecosystem, and imagining how phenomena of repetition, embodied legacy, and the stickiness of being might perform “archivally” through our encounters with the landscape.

Wen Hui went up to a remote mountain village and met the wildness of Third Grandmother’s histories, which both complicated and confirmed much of what she knew about herself and her nation. In her encounter on the mountain she enacted an archival situation that lead to a series of documentary performance works, including Memory Mountain, the fabric and media installation she created in Fredrikstad. The impact of her work spatially is the embodiment of a personal relationship starting with the site (landscape of the mountain, formed by heaps of fabric stretched tall to fill the room) and the projected figure of Third Grandmother as both a source and an image of herself as multiple — child, mother, grandmother. Stories told on film inside the installation, behind the “mountain,” allowed us to hear and see “Grandmother” talking about her private life and the painful impact of China’s political history. The projections on the textile mountain share with an audience the mutual choreography, cradling, and joking of the two as they came to know each other.

1. “Third grandmother” is a term in China for a parent’s third aunt. Wen Hui had traveled back to her father’s village, Yi Men, in the Yunnan Province, to search out her family history and discovered the only remaining member of her father’s family there, a woman named Su Mei Lin, her third grandmother. Wen Hui’s documentation of their meeting informed her film Listening to Third Grandmother’s Stories and subsequent works related to this project.

Wen Hui’s performed exchange of sleeping gestures, playful movements, and mournful sounds with her third grandmother express the archive as an encounter on the periphery of the Chinese state. Memory in this work operates not only through documents, data, or propaganda, but also as sand, dress, bucket, blood, fire, forest, field, road, river in space, and embodied sensations. It exists in the stickiness between grandmother and child, words and saliva, and comes to us through their mutual shapes and affects. In her piece we perceive memory not only as knowledge but as relation. In the meeting of Wen Hui and her third grandmother exist the notion of archive as an encounter between past and present, and the instigation to continue. It requires we listen to the Grandmother living far outside the center and beyond her failing body.

Archives can represent our phobia of losing control of the body, of history. In their official form, they exist in contrast to the unconditioned aspect of memory, the instinctual and sensory or the changeable and even wild versions of lived experience. “Wildness,” as described by Hayden White “[…] belongs to a set of culturally self-authenticating devices which includes, among many others, the ideas of “madness” and “heresy” as well. These terms are used not merely to designate a specific condition or state of being but also to confirm the value of their dialectical antitheses: “civilization,” “sanity,” and “orthodoxy,” respectively. Thus, they do not so much refer to a specific thing, place, or condition as dictate a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and some area of problematical existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the normal or familiar” (151).

I would add to White’s description that the wild also describes the aging body — the state of radical transformation that comes to the elder. We fear aging like we fear the boundary between civilization and madness. But it seems that the uncanny familiarity of the “wild,” with its slippery and messy life, attracts us despite its threat to order. The wild, like the mountain itself, is a life force. What we have forgotten lives in the wild archive of our landscape and the live encounters it frames. The wildness comes from its entanglement in our own mortality and the landscape, which witnesses our secret survival rituals. Wildness is also where Grandmother is walking — where she is heading — as time slowly takes her body back to the dirt. This is the scariest attribute of a living archive: its proximity to and knowledge of death.

Both elders and landscapes act as organs of recollection. The living archive is composed of ancestral bodies, subject both to the laws of wildness and the fragility of relationships. But a living archive, like Wen Hui’s third grandmother, temporarily activates the voices of things and the spirits of place through encounter. “Grandmother” in this situation is both a thing and a place, as much as Third Grandmother is herself. I learn from Grandmother that I am both my own being, and yet am impoverished of myself. It is this truth that calls up my need to be with her. My poverty gives me access to the living archive around me, and its tendency to “wild” my understanding.

Memory Mountain is a performing archive where the landscape represents a language used to map gathering places for memory. Through the pink heaps of material used to compose the mountain, it is also Third Grandmother herself that grows in scale, mutually constituted. The relationship between landscape and material is Third Grandmother’s story: to care for the mountain is also to care for the scrap heaps that hold the remnants of life. Memory Mountain is continually proposing ways of enfolding the elder body, partially by way of listening.

After experiencing Memory Mountain, I began to reflect on memory as a phenomenon found within the landscape. In order to find a language for this, I began to draw portraits of sensations, very much like E. Canetti uses in his analysis of crowd symbols in Crowds and Power. I found a way of proposing how time and memory “live” in the environment around us and are activated by relations with elders. I’m thinking about the way memory moves, is given or taken away by place or event, is “held” and even stored by a site in order to be reignited through stories, visitation, and relation. If memory is alive — if it “lives” — then it wants. It can act like a creature or even weather to keep itself alive or fight for its dominance. Memories gather together and bond to each other for pleasure and survival. They collect, also, like dust in corners, or heaps of dead bodies in an open grave, uncounted. Every time I pass a cornfield I am eight years old again...
and can smell my grandmother’s house in the summer. I might go to cornfields to meet that memory, and likewise, whenever I meet Grandmother today I learn from her the stories of how to make roasted corn. This corn is legacy, the distance between childhood and adulthood. It is also rows of generations watching, waiting, before me and behind.

In this essay I do not propose definitions or associations for every image-sensation named, but will rather allow them to create the space of my reflection on the wildness of a living archive. A living archive is any body that carries, transmits, changes, or processes memory and time through relation. A living archive is a demand: it cannot exist alone, and it can die. It is as radical as a true elder can be: driven by desire, wisdom, experience. Its “body” may be a person or a thing, a place, or part of the landscape (both natural and human made). It may be that memory reconstructs itself through the meeting of body and environment, where we rely on elders to situate us within the arc of our own mortality.5

WAVE

Carving culture out of the wildness of existence, we soothe ourselves by our collections in the fight against the tides. In Writing of the Disaster, Maurice Blanchot reminds us “The disaster takes care of everything.” In the end, history is not up to us. Our responsibility lies elsewhere. Our responsibility lies in care of the living present. If I want to engage with the future, I can only do so as a listener, a responder, a maker. I enter a complex dialogue with legacy: I alter the wild landscape, shape it in my image, and am impacted in return by its hold on me. A living archive cares not only for our curated collection, but the aftermath of its destruction.

WHEEL

Archive is connected to the Greek word arkhein, meaning to rule. This implies an archive as the body of the state, the collection that stands as a civilized body in opposition to wildness. It is the proof of civilization, that society can control space and time through easily marked categories. Those whose stories or bodies do not conform to the archive of the state are often forced to conform, or ignored and erased. Industrial logic, membership, belonging — these are important to such an archive, as are linear time and inherent value. But my memory, your memory, troubles the state archive, as a formless affective presence, particularly because it can change. The truth in a report of “what happened” in writing is always made vulnerable later to the ephemerality of the values of a moment. And yet my voice, as testimony, has the power to ring in your ears long after I am gone because it carries with it the embodied experience of your hearing it. A living archive seeks transformation.

RIVER

The report of “what happened” is in fact marked on the land, on the public body, indisputably as an ethical call. An elder teaches us to read the changes in the land, to know through listening the stories we are part of. A continuous and living archive carries my refusal to be stable, and my body’s right to be multiple. I am an agent of progress inside ancient ways. This is my ancestral body, and it is wilding the truth. A living archive is never still.

POOL

A living archive experiences loss. It performs mourning, as a problematic vibration, a cry on the perimeter of the state document that silences, or attempts to. Though the situation of memory after loss may not
present as a clear image, like a wound, a beat, a cry, or an echo, it is a swing between different measurements of time. Many archives love order, as nature and the body love order, but both nature and the body love order because it can be broken. This is also the beautiful story of our own corpus: the viscous body, a wild complex orchestra of rhythms, categories, systems, made to work together in poetic harmony until nature, time, or the body itself destroys it. What a lovely paradox, a harmonic system made to eventually expire on its own. Cathy Caruth, in the introduction to her book *Unclaimed Experience*, reiterates a story told by Tasso in the epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*: the warrior Tancred wounds his beloved in battle, and then, by chance, wounds her again unknowingly when he strikes a tree with his sword out of frustration. Caruth is interested in the story of this repeated trauma in relation to the scream that Clorinda, the beloved, cries out at the moment of her second wounding:

[T]he example of Tasso is not just the unconscious act of the infliction of the injury and its inadvertent and un-wished for repetition, but the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound. Tancred does not only repeat his act but, in repeating it, he for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done. The voice of his beloved addresses him and, in this address, bears witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated. Tancred’s story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know.

Caruth asserts that this scream is a form of testimony to suffering, in a sense, that can never be received yet nonetheless has an effect. A living archive cries, repeatedly.

**WIND**

The wilderness is a zone of transformations that are ceaseless and overlapping. Performances are acts of transformation that wild the moment. They transform a space, body, object — and the action is messy. Performances have their own unique technology, allowing us to touch what cannot be touched, remember what should be forgotten, re-animate the dead. Performances demand that we trust the moment, and give time to human stories and methods of dreaming. They call out to us. Wen Hui’s travel to the mountain is a performance entering the archive by wrestling the wind itself, the unknown, despite the efforts of the state to keep order through silencing the past. I face my own interior wildness when I discover how much memory changes over time, and performances change the way I experience the subjective nature of time. I can both lose and acquire bodies. What is inside, what is outside, me or not me, in flux. The living archive might be invisible, yet it breathes.

**SPIDER**

Memories collect in uncanny patterns, in forms that do not follow the logic of industrial time or space. They follow patterns of animal desire, human behavior, nature, and sensation. A living archive is not only the warm embrace of a grandmother’s quilt, but a sticky enfolding into a performative web of impulsive nightmares. The struggle between the life and death drives, between the human and animal, and the failure of language, is part of what performance historically articulates. A living archive is a wild archive that is horny, mortal, treacherous and experienced. A living archive hunts to feed its young.
FIRE
The living archive clings like alchemical fire, burning everything it touches and dispersing meaning in the present. In response I feel sometimes I am only a hot body of ashes. At times the living archive is a fire we maintain and tend, to repeatedly eat our precious secrets — the fire as sin eater eventually betraying us through smoldering remains. Isn't the body of any archive mortal? Can't it all be burned down? Faced with the living archive, testimony is drawn out by the flame of relation.

PLAIN
As an archetype, wildness describes our fear and nostalgia for an imaginary time in human history when man was Edenic, “uncorrupted,” pure. The “Wildman” figure represents one of the oldest characters played by Carnival participants. Its origins are most likely in Greek and Roman culture, with festivals depicting barbaros, or barbarians, and even more peripherally with raw, caveman types. Hayden White, in his genealogy of the Wildman archetype, notes that from this period in ancient history, Europeans liked to represent those who were not citizens, who did not speak Greek, for example, as uncouth “babblers” (165). These peoples were seen as “pre-historic,” and believed to be uninterested in memory because they did not count time the way the market did, nor were they seen to use categories efficiently. Like elders in contemporary society, the Wildman is too close to the horizon of the mortal, a beast with a body dangerously animal and experienced, a living archive that enters town from the periphery.

CORN
European culture is partly founded on the idea of the Wildman: he was likened to an animal in that he lives according to his cravings and not according to reason, and therefore does not have a “soul, as he is outside God’s blessing and laws. Savagery or wildness, even more feral than “barbarian” (hordes of non-citizens), came to represent the polar opposite of civilization. Both the images of the “horde” and “caveman” represented the anxieties of those imagining man living without the structure of rule.

It is White’s argument that the image of the Wildman sent down to us through the ages makes him a dual figure, both the “incarnation of our desire” and also the expression of our anxieties about ourselves in nature (i.e., homelessness, death, and loss). The Wildman also symbolizes our phobia of drought, losing mastery over the land. The living archive fears starvation.

HARVEST
Wildness has been “despatialized” and interiorized psychically. Our dilemma is our longing to consume the wild expressed through an interiorization of the wilderness, desired in a material, territorial, and sexual sense. We likewise struggle with a longing to be consumed. We dream of escaping to wilderness even if we don’t think about it, partly as a way to escape memory. But in fact, it is memory itself calling us there. It seems the stickiness of the wild, its slippery and messy life, attracts us despite its threat to order. Maybe the classical state archive is not just a memorial, but also a response to the fear of our own destructive, horny, shit-faced nature. History has proven that we cannot learn well enough from experience, so we must learn from the institutions, the official archives, lest action itself (or testimony) be rendered a too violent and ineffable teacher. Can we be trusted enough to handle living archives, which demand tenderness and listening? Which demand attention also to our destruction of the wild? We, barbarians? A living archive is consequential.
BEETLE

The labor of collection is tedious and repetitive. The human archival capacity to straighten, define, categorize, preserve, and fit is immense and requires a great deal of struggle against the wildest elements of war, nature, and time. Despite our commitment to order, memory looks for unruly carnivals to express itself. It follows the logic of desire as the orbit of the wandering body in relation to a sensory landscape. Mikhail Bakhtin describes a “bodily drama” in his study of the carnivalesque aesthetic. Memory, desire, and impulse are defining our imaginary anatomy with the most private parts exposed, exaggerated, hyperbolized. Animalistic — and yet decidedly human — the carnival of memory is a body laughing while crying, drinking while pissing itself. The inner becomes outer, the lower becomes upper. A wild, living archive is fertile, infectious, desirous. It is masked, a little drunk, and inappropriately dressed. Imagine it as Grandmother telling secrets, breaking codes, getting a little tipsy on her special moonshine. Maybe she does so because death is already taking her body, so she can be radical. Or maybe only because someone is willing to listen. The living archive masquerades.

GRANDMOTHER

I live in a sticky, viscous body, a body “in the act of becoming,” which is never finished, never closed. I am an otherness that is fragile and powerful at the same time, threatening and seductive. In live performance, the viscous, failing, and desiring body is tracing its debt to the ancestors publicly. It is paying a debt to remember, to make remembrances and speech artifacts for future generations. To remember not just the right way, but the deep way, through public risk, letting a community determine its value. The living archive is a performative force of potentiality, capable of invoking its own double; it is also capable of expressing the immortality of people in the drive to remember, produce, recreate. The living archive is a shared body, wild in its goddamn insanity. It’s hoarding rotten principles and obsessions, unhealthy choreographies, and untenable relations, leaving behind traces of birth, sex, and death — the remains of living; the promise of more life; the promise of end. The living archive is a theater.

DIRT

I feel a debt to our ancestors in the stickiness of memory. The viscous body remembers, it recalls — holds, but not according to my chosen order. It holds according to the logic of nature, the wildness of birth — Grandmother’s saliva cleaning my face. We come through a viscous body without choice and before language, and return to it in death as our bodies decay. Grandmother’s memories are written in my DNA. Legacy is repeating endless cycles of struggle, perhaps dying young from the same illness as her. Legacy is eating food grown from the same soil my relatives are buried in. Legacy is many generations of uncanny dirt eaters. The living archive is an overcrowded boneyard.

NEST

We are born between piss and shit and blood into the sticky wilderness of childhood. The viscous body is perceived as wild, from the feminine, both threatening and invigorating to the philosopher or archivist (cf. Nausea by Sartre). The viscous body is absolutely excluded from the state archive due to its perceived promise of invagination, a threatening act meant to take in and lubricate whatever it touches, immediately submerging the archive in decay. A viscous body, intensely mortal, seems to rupture totality, shatter categories and the project of being a sovereign “me.” The viscous is the base material of birth but also death. It is material given without meaning. Memory is entangled in it: the performing body, the mother body, in
substances, traces, and smells. The relation between stickiness and care both enfolds me and separates me from myself. The sticky is the uncanny shadow of me becoming Mother, becoming Grandmother, becoming Death. It challenges me to listen and holds me close to the soil. Like Grandmother it calls me to listen because it is only through shared saliva and embodied testimony that legacy can be fully transmitted. A wild, living archive is contagious.

**BURROW**

A living being in relation is never finished, never closed. It oozes traces, legacies, inheritances. A body that dies gives life. My life, though temporary, promises a future, in actions that activate new meaning by storytelling a wild landscape and being wilded in return. My archive is not just in the stuff of my flesh, as a corpse, it is also in the mountain where people dance at my wake before I am buried there. A living archive is the rhythm of the landscape around my grave.

**FOREST**

Digging in archives is a tilling of the soil by each generation. When the landscape of memory is overturned, bones, detritus, and lost objects become evident. Likewise do the creatures of the underworld, those whose duty it is to be keepers of the bones and scabs of history. Like the earthworms and beetles of the forest floor, archives and performances mutually digest and metabolize the dark, unwanted particles of history and return them to the wind. This process is one with many failures. These earthly "abjections" of history are like chrysalises turned to hairy moths or vibrant butterflies, expressing everything from horror to a fantasy of spiritual ecstasy. The failures stick to me. The living archive, like rings of a tree, is slowly written.

**MOUNTAIN**

Grandmother embodies an uncanny doubleness, the expression of an unpayable debt, which is the gift of the body and the promise of death. All that we owe each other, Grandmother and I, can never be said. Our two bodies describe the borders between this world and the next. It is of course because of death, or expiration, that we cling to the discipline of the archive. This is understandable. Because of death, loss, the end, we try to engrave our memories in the eternal songs, texts, tapestries, and files — in art. The elders, those on the shoreline between here and the abyss, know this. And it is because of that radical closeness they often have the most irreverent stories and memories. They can reject knowledge in place of something else. Something other than knowledge emerges through experience. A living archive, despite its own fear, faces the unknown.

**BLOOD**

If memory is at home in a wild landscape, a grotesque body, or a sticky remainder, it can only be activated by further transformations and relations. This is how it has been for some time. The wild landscape is the ultimate elder and keeper of our histories, but it can only be activated through relationships. Grandmother is the agent of the sticky archive, the shepherd of the wild repository. And I, the child, am the inheritor of her mess. The living archive needs performances.

**HEAP**

Through Grandmother I learn that the archive lives between her and the landscape around me. In the system that repeats itself in birth and death. In the landscape where my ancestors are buried and my food is
grown, in the same soil. Through Grandmother I learn the secrets that the fathers and mothers will not tell, the resistance to rule. But like the mountain, she has become just another part of the landscape taken for granted by society. Like the Wildman, she may not organize her memories or her stories well, or care much for valuable things. Her life is in a heap — heaps of old baby clothes, laundry, gardening, unfinished projects, buried friends and lovers. Things she can no longer lift. Grandmother is like the mountain, but she has been like many things. As she becomes more and more like the mountain, the mountain becomes more and more like an elder, and when I go there, I remember where we buried our stories: in the forest, in the corn, in the sand, in the spider webs. In the race for progress, Grandmother’s heaps, fields, and nests are often cast aside. But they call me back. They stick to me.

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The Trinidad Carnival, one of the most vibrant street theater festivals worldwide, comes from encounters that have occurred since the 15th century between people of the Caribbean region and people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. This intersection of conquest, genocide, enslavement, indentureship, settlement, and betrayal has given rise to emancipation performance traditions, *emancipation* being the European word for the cessation of the Atlantic slave trade and enslavement that continued up through the 19th century. One aspect of the Trinidad Carnival, created by those who did not have any voice when this narrative was first written, is the masquerade, also called *mas* in the English-speaking Caribbean. Mas is arguably a derivative of the West African masquerade, commingled with other festive performance forms after having been brought to the region by the representatives of the other civilizations.

The mas of the Caribbean Carnival has become a contemporary performance art form, one which embodies a living museum. The people carry their archives on their backs, literally. It is a ‘live’ archive in that it is both as an encounter and the memory of an encounter, kept vital by people who were not recognized favorably by history until recently. Today, the mas circumscribes a space for artists and ordinary folks alike, bringing all voices to the table, so to speak. Trinidadian mas man Peter Minshall’s voice is loud and clear on this matter. (Fig. 119)

Carnival, in the context of Trinidad, is a freedom space. It evolved as a complex set of negotiations for emancipation from under the French Creole plantocracy, the British overlords (through their crown colony administrators), and the freed Africans under the custodial gaze of ever-active aboriginal ancestral spirits. An open space was eventually achieved in the mid-19th century, and since then, those who fought for that space have struggled for the right to fill it with whatever they feel like.
To masquerade—“to play mas,” in the Trinidadian Creole—is to engage in a personal performance mechanism through which a person can be anything he or she wants to be all year round, according to the publicist and economist Lloyd Best. During the two days of Carnival, in collaboration with the dream weavings of a creative bandleader and through myriad other negotiations, this year-long masquerade manifests into a fully costumed performance that is quite magnificent, though it can be viewed entirely differently, given one’s specific private and public codes of understanding. By playing mas one may conceal personal traits or reverse societal roles, as in the French Creole balls or the European concept of Carnival. One may also reveal one’s individual soul, or expose the inner vision of a community, as in the West African masquerade. The tensions that exist in the Trinidad Carnival are created by a commingling of these two contentions, along with the absorption of the customs of others. But these dynamics are not mutually exclusive—all elements of the mas function simultaneously.

In some instances, mas may be considered performance art. Art is defined here as a process which engages in a connection to the divine, or what Jean Genet refers to as ‘oblivion.’ This process can help to transcend the immediate “familiar temporariness” of the mere physical in order to inhabit a world of ideas, visions, dreams. This means that if you choose to, you can commit art through the mas, in the open and inclusive carnival space. This space is an emancipation island, observing the awakening of its creators. This awakening is ritualized annually on the Monday morning of Carnival, known here as “jouvay,” from the French jour ouvert, meaning “daybreak”—a new dawn. The carnival space is one in which an awakening can take place, where one can experience jouvay.

Over the years many have discovered the art in the mas, creating a new tradition of art in carnival spaces. It is one of the few environments in which the “conquered peoples” of the islands can explore their exile through dreams and the imagination. In this way they have seized the opportunity to re-create themselves in their own images.

George Bailey, Harold Saldenah, Ken Morris, and Carlisle Chang are among the most influential mas artists to emerge from the Trinidad Carnival. Peter Minshall, arguably the greatest of these artists, also comes from this tradition. Minshall has insisted, both with his creations and his musings, that the carnival space becomes one of self-discovery through the art of the mas; it is where an indigenous theatre manifests, in purest form.

As a dramatist, there are two formulations I take from Minshall and his works, the basis for what I call the Jouvay Process:

1. The art in the mas can be viewed as an archive of life on the islands, or a ‘living’ art history.
2. This art history is the foundation for a new tradition, which can inform any contemporary creation, and thereby move that other tradition forward. The Jouvay Process is one of awakening, manifesting when the creative principles embedded in the secret and subterranean survival strategies of the emancipation performance traditions are invoked.

Carnival bands are groups of volunteers, impressively outfitted by designers, who dance and sing through the streets “playing mas” during Carnival. Mas artist Irwin McWilliams, a fisherman, was one of our most impressive bandleaders. In the ‘70s and ‘80s, he skillfully used foam, wire, and fluorescent spray paint to create the paraphernalia of bands celebrating our marine environment—the physical relief of the islands and the tropical flora and fauna around us. His bands Wonders of Buccoo Reef (1971), Anancy Story (1972), and Know Yuh Country (1978) won him Band of the Year for those years; Seasons’ Greetings (1977) and The Rains Came (1980) won the People’s Choice. This artistic man of the sea emerged in what was a kind of golden age of mas, coming out of the George Bailey era with new young artists/designers following him, including Wayne Berkeley and Peter Minshall.

It should be noted that this was a period of intense nationalism. Many bandleaders’ projects can be seen to have roots in McWilliams’ attempt to “indigenize” the mas. McWilliams was able to put in
focus our physical environment in very simple ways, through a gentle and effective naïveté. His was a time of making “strange rare hybrids.”

Through a McWilliams-aesthetic mas in the early ‘90s called Donkey Derby (1993), Peter Minshall was able to go past satire and plumb the depths of the “Donkey” or “Mule” consciousness embedded in the social and cultural history of the islands. Using the vehicle of McWilliams’ approach, Donkey Derby — a straightforward, un-subtle mas band — was able to explore our psychic environment. Another Minshall band that explored similar themes was The Odyssey (1994), which commemorated the winning of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature by poet and Caribbean native Derek Walcott. Here Minshall invoked George Bailey and his intense African sensibility — Port of Spain style — to bring Homer to the streets of Trinidad, echoing Walcott’s use of Homer in rediscovering the Caribbean in his book-length epic poem Omeros.

Martin Bernal, in his book Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, has postulated that what has come down to us as Greek civilization and culture, the foundation of Europe, is really a distillation and refashioning of ancient African civilizations. To many, Bernal’s work of controversial scholarship is considered rabid Afro-centrism. Be that as it may, Minshall’s inhabiting of Homer’s imagination seems natural enough within the context of Trinidad’s art-of-the-mas aesthetic. The use of the flat African masks, worn high in the air, to portray the one-eyed Cyclops, imposing and garish, succeeds without effort. It is pure mas in its playfulness and simplicity. The Odyssey (1994) shows how a mas, invoking its own traditions through Jouvay Process, can speak universally while still contributing to the buzz of a contemporary debate.

It is Peter Minshall’s unique and distinct mastery of the art form that has made a complex historic societal process evident to us. Minshall’s Danse Macabre (1980) was a dance of death for our post-postmodern times. This small band, colored red and white with lots of black and brown, and made from crocus bags and lengths of rope, was skeletal in many ways. Some in the street audience even claim to have detected a distinctive odor as the band passed by. Aesthetically, it drew on a traditional dirty mas, a rough and ready old mas, for its texture and soul. It brought a fierceness into the gayelle (arena) of Carnival Tuesday’s nice and clean pretty pageantry, the early African Ju-Ju aesthetic of old bones and body paint that Bailey had shunned in order to embrace his splendid African portrayals, with its focus on fabric, reams and reams of patterned cloth. For some time, Tuesday had been set aside as Mardi Gras — Grand Tuesday — a predominantly French Creole incarnation, an incarnation or idea which, today, is still embraced. Tuesday, therefore, has been relegated to an idea of offering a “pretty mas,” removed from the “messy” negotiation of space. For this reason, the negotiation for art in the carnival space continues into the 21st century.

Art-in-the-mas history is the foundation of a new tradition, informing contemporary creations and thereby moving many different traditions forward. Trinidad Carnival is always a negotiation and will continue to be so because that is the cauldron in which Trinidad was created, and still continues to create itself. The society works through ongoing negotiations, for which the carnival is a metaphor. The art in the mas, therefore, is a very important mirror through which we can observe and reflect on this drama and our culture.
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