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INTRODUCTION

ARCHIVE AND CONFLICT ARTISTIC STRATEGIES COUNTER-ACTING REPRESSIVE HISTORIES

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he relationship between archives and conflict is deeply intertwined, as archives serve both as repositories of historical documentation and as battlegrounds for competing narratives. Scholars such as Michel Foucault

battlegrounds for competing narratives. Scholars such as Michel Foucault have emphasised that archives are not neutral spaces but are imbued with power dynamics that influence which histories are preserved and which are marginalised.1 Archival materials related to conflict, whether they be photographs, documents, or testimonies, play a crucial role in shaping collective memories and historical discourses. They provide evidence of atrocities, support claims for justice, and offer insights into the lived experiences of those affected by conflict. However, as Derrida points out, the process of archiving itself can be an act of control, determining what is remembered and what is forgotten.² This tension is evident in the examination of post-conflict societies, where archives become sites of remembrance as much as sites of contestation. For instance, photographs from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1948-), preserved in repositories like the Israel State Archives and the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive, document the historical and ongoing impacts of the conflict, serving as tools for asserting narratives and rights.3 Thus, archives are not merely passive repositories of knowledge but active players in the ongoing struggle over historical accountability and collective memories.

The current volume of *Archivo Papers* is the result of over a year of collaboration between Archivo Platform and the Global Art Archive research

network (GAA, Universitat de Barcelona). This partnership commenced in March 2023 with the seminar 'Archive and Conflict. Archives and the Techno-Aesthetics of Datafication," which laid the groundwork for the thematic focus of this volume. As the title of the seminar suggests, the relationship between archives, conflicts and digital technologies was emphasised from the outset. Within this triangulation, the relationship between archives and conflict situations has occupied a specific critical position, often serving as a basso continuo against which contemporary discussions on documentary bodies in conflict situations must necessarily be positioned. In this volume, the editors aim to highlight the evolving nature of archives and the critical role of photography and other lens-based media in shaping our understanding of historical and cultural legacies related to conflict. By investigating the convergence of documentary sources in both analogical and digital archival contexts, and the ways in which they express imaginaries, representations, and memories, this volume seeks to elucidate the complex mechanisms that influence our perceptions of the past, the present and thus the possibility of realising more equitable futures. Through diverse case studies within visual culture, archival materials are interrogated and critically appropriated, demonstrating the significant contribution of the visual arts in challenging and contesting historical narratives

IMAGES BETWEEN CONFLICTIVE HISTORIES, REPRESENTATION, AND MEMORY

In an era dominated by visual culture, the role of photography in documenting and interpreting history is profoundly complex. The contributions in this volume delve into the intricate processes of production, selection, and accumulation of documents that collectively shape our perception of archives and the historical narratives they support. By scrutinising the ambivalence of photographic images and their representational limits, the editors seek to challenge the traditionally perceived factual and objective nature of archival materials, understanding how photography, as both an art form and a documentary medium, plays a pivotal role in shaping historical consciousness. Lens-based media offer more than mere visual records; they embody the cultural, social, and political contexts in which they were created. However, the interpretation of these images often depends on the frameworks and biases brought to archival creation and its examination. This duality raises essential questions about the relationship between images and their historical and memorial representations, encompassing various dimensions such as documentary, fictional, material, digital, etc. These aspects are addressed throughout this volume via scholarly articles, visual essays, and artist portfolios.

One landmark event that encapsulates the critical reflection on historical legacies of conflict and cultural representation is Documenta11 (2002), directed by Okwui Enwezor at the turn of the century. This iteration of Documenta was transformative, marking a significant moment for the critical examination of

imperial and capitalist power dynamics. Enwezor questioned how it was possible to make sense of the changes and transformations that evoked the spectres of turbulent times⁵ and his vision extended beyond conventional curatorial practices, emphasizing transdisciplinary action within the "contemporary global public sphere."6 Documenta11's innovative format, featuring five Platforms spread across four continents, redefined the boundaries of exhibition spaces, transforming them into interdisciplinary research and discussion forums. This approach challenged the traditional structure of art exhibitions and provided a broader context for understanding global conflicts and cultural exchanges. Enwezor's curatorial strategy, which replaced the single curator hierarchy with a collaborative model involving five guest curators, underscored the importance of diverse perspectives in interpreting historical events. The inclusion of previously underrepresented artists and the focus on postcolonial and global themes fostered a deeper engagement with the complexities of historical memory and cultural identity. Documenta 11 thus served as a crucial forum for questioning established narratives and exploring new modes of knowledge production.⁷

In 2008, Enwezor furthered his exploration of archival representation with the acclaimed exhibition "Archive Fever" at the International Center of Photography in New York. Drawing inspiration from Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'Archive* (*Archive Fever*, 1995), Enwezor examined the ideological implications of photographic dispersal through mass media and its role in shaping public perception. By juxtaposing works of established artists who engage with archival forms, Enwezor highlighted the transformative potential of archival materials in reflecting on the present,8 noting that

Archival returns are often conjoined with the struggle against amnesia and anomie. A heightened sense of urgency surrounds the demand to remember and commemorate in societies where social codes of communication have been unstable or preempted by state repression."⁹

Enwezor's approach emphasised the importance of conceptual strategies that repurpose archival materials into profound reflections on the historical condition, thereby challenging traditional documentary modes. Expanding on these themes, Simone Osthoff's book *Performing the Archive* (2009) invites us to view the archive as a dynamic and generative production tool. Hosthoff's hypothesis challenges the conventional notion of history as a linear discourse based on chronology and documentation. Instead, she proposes a generative archive, one that is continuously transformed through artistic performative gestures. This perspective aligns with contemporary art practices that frequently incorporate multiple recursions of fiction and non-fiction, destabilising established historical narratives and integrating theory and history into the creative process. In

FICTIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND PERFORMED ARCHIVES

The extensive body of artwork produced since the 1990s, situated at the intersection of contemporary artistic practices and photographic archives within the framework of the historiographical turn, can be understood through two discursive lines. Firstly, through the notion of history proposed by Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1939-40), which conceives the past as an active time that challenges us, as subjects of the present, to be held accountable for it. Secondly, through the revision of the notion of the photographic archive, conceived since postmodernity not as a repository of ultimate truths but as a space whose images can be re-read and re-signified. This perspective, accompanied by a conception of the photographic image that questions the 19th-century paradigm of its objectivity and transparency, emphasizes the conditions of production, dissemination, and consumption of photography. From its role as mere illustration of a singular History to its axial function as the articulator of multiple histories (consciously and radically plural), photography is instituted as a foundational tool in the relationship that these artistic practices establish with the past.

Archival artistic practices, converging within this theoretical framework, offer a diverse array of possibilities, including strategies at odds with the 19th-century concepts of archive and photography, such as fiction and reenactment. In this context, and echoing Wolfgang Ernst's assertion that traditional archives "are not dynamic by themselves, but keep the memory of a departed dynamics intact by spatializing (topologically) the temporal sequence that led to the records," contemporary art activates them, challenging their role as static repositories bound to the principle of provenance.

The artistic proposals under discussion intentionally blur the boundaries between historiography and fabulation, not to assert that all historical narratives are inherently literary or fictional due to their linguistic construction, but to advocate for the historical legitimacy of a narrative grounded in visual expression. They recognize, consistent with Enzo Traverso's observation, that archives, despite serving as primary sources for historians, can themselves be deceptive, as they never provide an immediate or completely unbiased reflection of reality. However, rather than simply acknowledging this potential for deception, these artworks engage in speculative exploration of the past, tracing a reverse trajectory. They do not merely accept the archive as a repository of falsehoods, they transform falsehoods into archival material, thus challenging conventional understandings of historical truth.

Therefore, they take a stance that emphasizes the distinction highlighted by Enzo Traverso between the historical narrative, involving the construction of history through narrative, and historical fiction—essentially, the literary imagining of the past.¹⁵ This fiction, now articulated through photographic images, exploits the credibility conferred by such representations, engaging with the notion of mimesis as described by philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Here, the inventive imitation capable of conjuring the "as-if" blurs the boundaries between fictional and historical narratives.¹⁶

The intertwining of fabulation with authentic accounts reaches a point where they become indistinguishable, enriching historical narratives through the transformative potential of imagination. The fusion of fiction with contemporary art, photography, and archival material leads us to acknowledge that all recounted history, as Reinhart Koselleck suggests, ultimately traverses the realm where fantasy becomes necessary for generating even a minimum of meaning and coherence.¹⁷

In addition to fictionalization, we come across alternative artistic approaches that embrace a reenactment methodology. Here, the emphasis is not on crafting a narrative but on addressing the omissions and gaps within history through a performative strategy. By relying on the body and staging, they shed light on stories that have been silenced or underrepresented, thereby granting them visibility. Aligned with Jacques Rancière, who states that "the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought," 18 these artworks do not question the inherent fictional aspect of reenactment. Instead, they conceive staging as a path equally valid to narratives formulated from historical sources. In this regard, we can interpret this performative strategy from what Rebecca Schneider defines as the condition of reappearance: "When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of reappearance [...] we almost immediately are forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh." 19

Consequently, reenactment underscores the significance of the process itself and, through a ritual order repetition, rethinks the place of particular events within historical narratives, now generating a history embodied in bodies. Likewise, when these artworks extend reenactment into the realm of photography, the resultant recreations are captured in images that may subsequently be established as historical knowledge, akin to some of the earliest war photographs of the 19th century, as highlighted by Susan Sontag. Despite their staged nature, these images later attained status as historical evidence. While reenactment's capacity to bring memory into the realm of knowledge predominantly centers on personal experiences, it also leads to the question posed by Marianne Hirsch: "Can we remember other people's memories?" Therefore, the intertwining of fiction and performance as artistic practices with photography and archival methods can prompt a reimagining, echoing Jacques Rancière, of the distribution of the sensible, involving the imagination and embodied experiences within the sphere of our shared reality.

THE TECHNO-AESTHETICS OF DATAFICATION AS A BACKDROP

Today, the digital turn is of paramount importance in all areas of society and culture. Even if the use of computer media and their datafication procedures are not always at the centre of the topics and cases dealt with in this volume of *Archivo Papers*, the link between culture and digital technologies is an inescapable background, surfacing where it needs to resonate more strongly. We are compelled to question

the current state of historical documentary bodies, even in cases that seem far removed from issues of data technology. Our access to archives and the tools we use to analyse their content are not immune to contemporary information flows. Thus, we cannot ignore the challenges of media archaeology and remediation, nor the urgent issues of recognizing gender, sexual, racial or colonial biases.²¹

Accumulation, selection and preservation of data are processes within a liquid territory, with constant fluxes of information taking place in real-time. Digital technologies have extended the boundaries of archives, collections and repositories. This new technological framework urges us to recognise errors, limits and exclusions, to identify what remains hidden or has gained excessive centrality in the processes of information capture, classification, ownership, property, and access. For example, in the age of the Internet, the constant flow of data through undersea cables provides us with a global network in which extractivist and warmongering apparatuses take shape. We are in a moment of renewed Cold War,²² where conflicts manifest not only in direct warfare but also in disputes over the control of software and hardware. Alongside the use of missiles and weapons, data storage and processing technologies will determine the geopolitical balance of the 21st century.

The interconnected planetary network also broadens the conflictuality of the digitised archival machinery into new dimensions that we cannot fail to notice. One such dimension is the (im)materiality of the system that enables contemporary datafication. At first glance, the digital sphere leads us towards *dematerialisation*, as everyday language suggests – we connect wirelessly, we work with files in the cloud, and so on. However, the hidden infrastructures of the global archive, such as undersea cables and server farms, occupy vast spaces and consume massive amounts of resources and energy. Beyond its physicality, this archival apparatus has direct consequences for the environment and for various bodies—human, natural, social, or bodies of knowledge.²³

Another dimension to explore is the power differential registered in data. Traditional archives were already sites of domination and authority, through their form and content, but also through their censorship, concealment, or destruction. Today, under the dominance of datafication, such processes have only accelerated and expanded. Colonialism and extractivism have not stopped at the unequal exchange of goods and commodities or the subordination of cultures along the North-South and centre-periphery axes that have hierarchically structured the "modern/colonial world system" since the 15th century. A Instead, they now unfold in new digitalised forms, such as the increasing financialisation of economies, the commercial flow of migrant people and ideas, and the monetisation of behaviours and everyday life.

Throughout the months of study and collaboration culminating in this volume, our aim has been to consider these dimensions within the cultural framework that we have termed the 'techno-aesthetics of datification'. We have sought not only to record how the relationship between archives and conflict,

more or less mediated by digital technologies, is reflected in contemporary culture. Beyond focusing on disputes surrounding data or document accumulation, we have explored how the ubiquity of the digital archive is a source of conflict. To this end, we ask: how does contemporary visual culture deal with this intersection of archives, conflict, and digitisation?

The answer to this question can be approached in different ways. One option could be the appropriation of usual archival modes of operation, using their narrative and objectifying capacities to shed light on invisible conflicts. This can be done by working on existing repositories or creating new ones; by engaging with the performativity of archives through fictionalisation and reenactment, as noted earlier; or through deviant media "guerrilla" strategies, as proposed by Mark Dery in the 1990s. Following this last path, diverting usual modes of archival operation may lead to considering alternative forms of archiving, such as the anti-archive, counter-archive or anarchive. In this sense, we refer to the theoretical proposal of the Chilean sociologist and philosopher Andrés Maximiliano Tello, who defines the "anarchivist movement" as a way of confronting the totalising machinery of the contemporary archive. One characteristic of this "anarchivism" is "the physiological accession of its juridical accession," meaning:

access as an indisposition of official catalogues and restrictions of use, disturbance of their orders and their commercial deprivations, but also as a technical possibility to produce various forms of accessio (attack) to the very corpus of archontic archives that shape the social field and determine the aesthetic and political experience we have with the new digital environments.²⁶

Paraphrasing Gilles Deleuze's *Post-scriptum on Societies of Control* (1990), Tello reminds us that just as the machinery of disciplinary societies was exposed to strikes and sabotage, the computer machinery of the society of control is exposed to piracy and viral propagation. In other words, some operating conditions of technoarchival power can serve as tools to counteract its own alienating capacities, even exploiting its expansive and accelerating properties to direct them against itself.

* * *

The essays in this volume explore the dynamic relationship between archives, visual media, and the representation of conflict. Through a variety of theoretical approaches and case studies, the authors demonstrate how archival practices can be sites of both contestation and transformation, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive historical discourse. Anna Maria Guasch's essay "Archive, Record and Power: The archive as a productive space of conflict" examines the relationship between archival practices and conflict, highlighting how conventional archives often reflect existing power dynamics and dominant ideologies, leading to disputes over representation and interpretation. However, she also elucidates the emergence of *conflict archives*, which operate within more open frameworks and

engage with contested histories and perspectives, fostering new and productive disputes. Through case studies on the works of Antoni Muntadas, Stefanos Tsivopoulos, and Marco Scotini, Guasch demonstrates how integrating feminist, queer, postcolonial, and decolonial perspectives in archival practices can challenge entrenched hierarchies and advocate for social justice. This approach underscores the ethical responsibilities of archiving sensitive material and promotes the inclusion of marginalised voices, suggesting that conflicts within archives can catalyse transformative change, ultimately shaping collective memory and historical narratives in more inclusive and equitable ways. In the same line of thought, Sara Callahan discusses the nuances of archival theory, including perspectives from figures like Foucault and Derrida, as well as critiques of traditional archival practices. In her essay "Strategies of Critique in Contemporary Artistic Archival Practices," Callahan delves into how contemporary artists Katarina Pirak Sikku, Kader Attia, Michael Rakowitz, and Kajsa Dahlberg, engage with the archive and grapple with specific instances of conflict within their artistic practice, such as racial biases, cultural authenticity, identity politics, and environmental degradation, challenging conventional approaches to archival discourse by reframing confrontational strategies and incorporating elements of care, repair, empathy, and permeability.

Focusing on the relationship between representation and power dynamics, Paul Grace scrutinizes how conventional portrayals of atrocities reinforce existing hierarchies of knowledge and serve dominant interests. In "Horror Vacui: Hidden Photographs and the Counter-Archive," Grace examines Alfredo Jaar and Robert Fitterman's works to explore counter-archival strategies that challenge the authority of representation and disrupt the symbolic power structures of conflict. The author further analyzes photography's role in perpetuating narratives of conflict, particularly in the Rwandan genocide, and how image manipulation perpetuates violence. Grace suggests that while representation can reflect and perpetuate power imbalances, counter-archival practices have the potential to subvert these dynamics and provoke critical engagement with traumatic events. On a complementary perspective, Michael Rowland delves into the transformative potential of contemporary visual practices in reshaping historical narratives and material realities. Focusing on how Brazilian architect Paulo Tavares combines critical engagement with visual archives, lensbased technology, and non-Western perspectives to challenge conventional Western modes of visualizing history, the author examines creative methods for decolonial, emancipatory, and ecological ends, through a compelling case study for reimagining collective conceptions of history and society.

Daniela Cifuentes Acevedo's article examines photographs from the book *La Violencia en Colombia - estudio de un proceso social* (1962) that depict women as victims of violence during the Colombian war. Using a gender studies lens to analyze Aby Warburg's "Mnemosyne Atlas" as a method to rethink patriarchal history, the article highlights the need to redefine archival methods and expose historical gender biases. On the other hand, Gustavo Balbela's article, on the other hand, examines how the far-right shift in Brazilian politics revived a long-hidden military threat. Through an

analysis of the archive's role in the author's artistic practice, it built a response to this resurgence during Bolsonaro's tenure. Combining press images and texts with photos of Porto Alegre during the 1964 military dictatorship, and drawing inspiration by Georges Didi-Huberman and Allan Sekula, the author explores the archive's capacity to connect mundane urban elements with violent historical processes.

In this volume, we also highlight one of the recent proposals by German-American historian Sven Spieker, who in 2016 presented his "Manifesto for a Slow Archive" in the magazine *ARTMargins Online*. Spieker suggests a way of operating in the field of art-archive relationship that understands the archive as an environment, ecologically speaking. In "Exploring the 'Slow Archive': an interview with Sven Spieker," we asked the author to provide context for his proposal, delving into some of the "Slow Archive" characteristics, such as "the slowing of information flow as a new archival politics," "the strategic assumptions of fiction as fact," and "digital obscurity" opposing the supposed transparency of the global neoliberal archive. At a certain point in the interview, Spieker posed a very appealing question: "How can we retake the archive and revive or instil in it a critical function without either nostalgically invoking its humanist incarnation or endorsing its neo-liberal nemesis, the idea of a fully transparent, fully capitalized mega-archive?"

Turning our focus to a practice-based perspective, we interviewed Lebanese artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. The artists discuss their visual practice, which uses the armed conflict that has shaped life in Lebanon in recent decades as a conceptual framework. Their work not only questions the geopolitical determinants of the conflict but also closely examines the historical forms of narrating it. This analysis is conducted through photographic and videographic images, which they critically examine. In this context, it is significant that the artists define themselves as researchers (rather than photographers or video artists), highlighting their alignment with artistic practices that, since the historiographical turn, adopt the modus operandi of historians.

This volume of *Archivo Papers* also includes two Visual Essays, offering a different, not solely textual, way of accessing the theoretical core. Diego Marchante 'Genderhacker' contributes his essay 'Queer Futurities. Artistic Strategies for the Dynamization of Archives." In it, he introduces his work on generating a counter-history to recover feminist and queer threads in archives, incorporating performativity, and operating strongly in the digital terrain through the creation of online repositories and archiving tools. Amalia Caputo's essay, "Permeable Membranes. The Archive in Visual Atlas Constructions," explores the relationship between the multiplication of photographic images in the digital environment and the incorporation of this multiplicity in physical space. For this transmediation, which Caputo has incorporated in various installations since 2000, she draws on the visual apparatuses proposed by Aby Warburg for his "Mnemosyne Atlas."

The Portfolio section of this volume includes works by contemporary artists Azadeh Akhlaghi and Maryam Jafri. Azadeh Akhlaghi is an Iranian photographer and filmmaker who, after living in Australia, returned to Iran to work as an assistant

director with Abbas Kiarostami. Her work 'By an Eye-Witness' adopts the strategy of staging events that span a 90-year time frame to embody the collective memory of her country. By depicting scenes that feature the violent, traumatic, or controversial demise of poets, journalists, students, intellectuals, or political activists, Akhlaghi leads us to the realm of the sensible and lived experience. Maryam Jafri's portfolio features three bodies of work that explore archival imagery in relation to cultural and historical representations, addressing the interplay between material and digital archives, and focusing on the preservation and disappearance of images from historical narratives. Jafri's artistic practice combines found and original material, emphasising extensive research-oriented methodologies while also exploring the roles of chance and intuition in the creation of the final works. Her projects "Independence Day 1934-1975" (2009-2019), "Disappearance Online" (2021), and "Getty vs. Ghana" (2012) exemplify this approach. They investigate subjects such as decolonization processes in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, revealing similarities in Independence Day ceremonies orchestrated by departing colonial powers, as well as the digitization of historical images and the implications for cultural memory and copyright law.

In today's world, marked by increasing conflicts and a pervasive digital ecosystem, the use of archives has become an essential cultural concern. This volume addresses these pressing issues by exploring how archives serve as tools for understanding, preserving, and reinterpreting cultural and historical narratives. The editors hope that readers will find insights in the various articles that make up this volume of *Archivo Papers*, fostering critical discourse and promoting a deeper understanding of historical visual representations and their legacies.

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- 1 See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of knowledge & the Discourse on Language, 1972.
- 2 See Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression, 1995.
- 3 See Ariella Azoulay, The Civil Contract of Photography, 2008.
- 4 The seminar programme and the abstracts of the presentations can be found here.
- 5 See Okwui Enwezor, *The Black Box*, 2002.
- 6 Ibid.
- A. Downey, "The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI", *Third Text*, 17(1), 85-92. 2003.
- 8 Okwui Enwezor, Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art, 2008, 33.
- 9 Ibid., 37.
- 10 Ibid., 46.
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- **12** Ibid., 12.

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- Paul Ricoeur, *Tiempo y narración: Configuración del tiempo en el relato histórico*, 5th ed., trans. Agustín Neira (Buenos Aires, Ciudad de México: Siglo XXI editores, 2004), 82.
- 17 Reinhart Koselleck y Carsten Dutt, "Historia(s) e Histórica: Reinhart Koselleck en conversación con Carsten Dutt," *Isegoría*, trans. Faustino Oncina, no. 29 (2003): 217–218.
- Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 38–39.
- 19 Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (June 2001): 113.
- Marianne Hirsch, "Connective Arts of Postmemory," *Analecta Polit*. 9, no. 16 (June 2019): 172.
- For "media archaeology" see Jussi Parikka, What is Media Archaeology?, 2012. For the concept of "remediation" see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation. Understanding New Media, 2000. The problem of 'biases' is very relevant today, especially with regard to Big Data and the repositories used to train artificial intelligences. See, for example, Cathy O'Neil, Weapons of Math Destruction, 2016.
- For years, scholars have recognised the fact that the world is heading towards a 'new Cold War'. See, for example, Noam Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War*, 2003.
- See, for example, Nick Srnicek, Platform Capitalism, 2017, 27-28.
- We take the expression "modern/colonial world system" from Latin American decolonial theory. See, Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 2000.
- 25 See See Mark Dery, Culture Jamming, 1993.
- See Andrés Maximiliano Tello, *Anarchivismo*, 2018, 265. Italics are in the original. Free translation from Spanish to English by the editors.
- See Sven Spieker, *Manifesto for a Slow Archive*, 2016.