

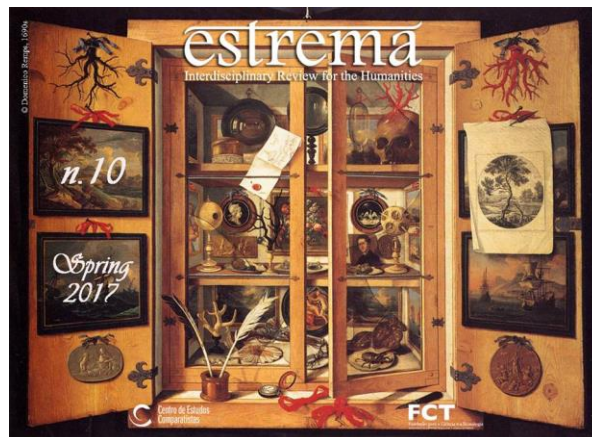
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Review of *Archive Everything. Mapping the Everyday*, by Gabriella Giannachi, and *Rogue Archives. Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*, by Abigail De Kosnik.

Giannachi, Gabriella, *Archive Everything. Mapping the Everyday*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2016, 24 pp., b/w images throughout, ISBN-100262035294, ISBN-13: 978-0262035293, Hardback \$ 42.

List of figures. Acknowledgments. Introduction. 1. A Brief History of the Archive. 2. Archives as Archaeological Sites. 3. Architecture, Memory, and the Archive. 4. Diasporic Archives. 5. The Art of Archiving. 6. (A)live Archives. Afterword. References. Index.

De Kosnik, Abigail, *Rogue Archives. Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press: 2016; 430 pp; b/w images and graphs throughout, ISBN-10: 0262034662, ISBN-13: 978-0262034661, Hardback \$ 45.

Acknowledgments. Introduction. *Break 0: A Glossary of Key Terms*. 1. Memory Machine Myth: The Memex, Media Archaeology, and Repertoires of Archiving. *Break 1: Canon and Repertoire*. 2. Archival Styles: Universal, Community, and Alternative Digital Preservation Projects. *Break 2: Archive Elves*. 3. Queer and Feminist Archival Cultures: The Politics of Preserving Fan Works. *Break 3: Fan Time versus Media Time*. 4. Repertoire Fills the Archive: Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice in Fandom. *Break 4: "Works" or "Performances"?* 5. Print Fans versus Net Fans: Women's Cultural Memory at the Threshold of New Media. *Break 5: A Femlash Parable of the Print-to-Digital Transition*. 6. The Default Body and the Composed Body: Performance through New Media. *Break 6: Body and Voice in Fan Production*. 7. Archontic Production: Free Culture and Free Software as Versioning. *Break 7: Licensing and Licentiousness*. Conclusion: Fan Data: A Digital Humanities Approach to Internet Archives. Appendix: Oral History Project, Demographics, and Ethical Considerations. Notes. References. Index.

Pedro Moura¹

Drawing from Foucault and Derrida, the *archive* has been an instrumental concept with considerable traction within the humanities in the past two to three decades. Allied to issues such as cultural and collective memory, the expansion of political agency, the emergence of multiple user-friendly documentary and database technologies and the openness of self-formation and self-actualization performances, its applicability as a nexus for the negotiation of a number of tensions is ever-present.

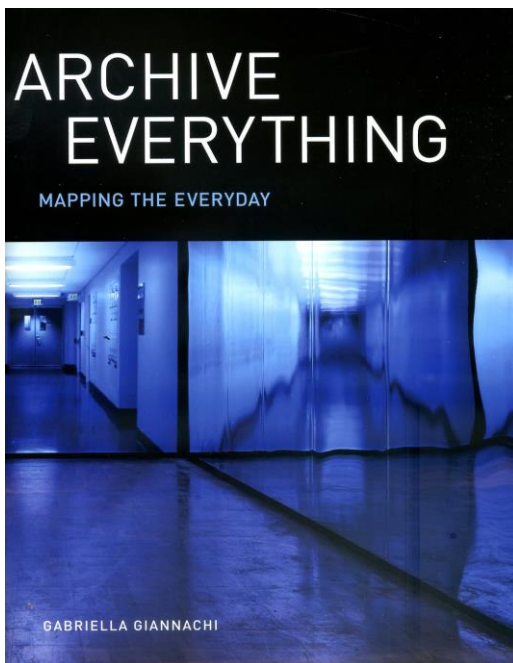
Within artistic practices, the “archive” has also been an important

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notion, on the one hand due to its figural embodiment in the works of artists such as Duchamp, Cornell, Boltanski, Richter and Calle, and on the other thanks to the theoretical work of people such as Hal Foster (“An Archival Impulse”) or Ernst van Alphen (“Staging the Archive”). While both of these books do not exclusively address the visual arts, they have a number of creative practices at their core, whether from so-called highbrow or popular cultural areas, practices that inform all their subject matter, or at least shade, as it were, their authors’ perspectives of *how* one can reassess the archive (everyone seems to agree that there is constant reassessment from the start).

Perhaps it is a disservice to read both projects in tandem, and the fact that they address archives and are issued by M.I.T. is probably not a sufficiently strong argument to do so. However, having done precisely that, I feel a certain degree of complementariness and overlap between them, thanks to common ground (the performativity of the archive, the use of Diana Taylor’s notion of the *repertoire*, just to name a few) but also some counterbalance, especially where the digital is concerned.



Gabriella Giannachi’s book can be seen as a sort of overall history of the archive as a conceptual construct. She treats the archive as both a noun and a verb, that is to say, from both the positivistic, objective consideration of archives as repository spaces and their specific contents and from a cultural studies-inflexed view of it as a practice involving subject and discourse formation, as in Derrida’s “archiving archive” (an oft-repeated quote). While it is not new to consider the archive in these two ways, Giannachi’s discourse is quite upbeat about its possibilities, as when she writes in the introduction that “[t]he apparatus of the archive is the network of strategies we use to map

everything in both space and time precisely so that we may find what is as yet un-lived in our lives” (xxi). One could say, perhaps, that the archive is for Giannachi the performance of a hope, well integrated into the developed world’s drastic changes in the socio-economic level: “It is well known that we have been moving from a goods-producing society to a service-performing and experience-generating economy” (160). The author explores then how these changes have expressed themselves in relation to the archive but also how the changes of the archive have influenced societal practices at large.

The author presents a panoramic history of the archive by organizing it under a metaphoric approach, speaking of Archives 1.0 (the documentary repositories of Antiquity) through 4.0 (an expansion of web archives via open “adaptive” access to databases). However, this gives off the idea of a somewhat excessive trust or even faith on present digital, web-native forms. I feel that using this sort of similes is somewhat problematic, for three main reasons. First and foremost, it commingles a little too much digital development with ontological progress, always a danger in itself. Second, it is a disservice to forms that do not relate to the affordances of digital technologies and are still relevant, as it also forgets to provide for a post-digital age, whatever shape this may have. And lastly, it does not count with the many forms of info-exclusion (due to cultural, economic, political, or identity-related obstacles). The tool itself may invite a progressive use, but its conditions of possibility may be curtailed.

The book’s organization invites the reader to consider very different practices as acts of archiving, and broadens the applicability, as it were, of the concept, in very telling ways, thanks to the varied, judiciously chosen case studies. While Giannachi is drawing from a multitude of (expected) transdisciplinary sources, she redeploys some of the concepts in novel, illuminating ways. The return to an “archaeological” interpretation of the archives, for instance, is very pointed. Less in a Foucauldian manner (although building *upon* and *from* it) than as paying attention to its material specificities and in transhistorical relations, Giannachi draws from Michael Shanks’s description of stratigraphy as a discipline that ““translates

variations in space into variations in time' [and therefore], in the context of archiving, is a tool for engaging with the instability of the object as it not only discloses information about the archive as palimpsest, as archaeography, but also generates knowledge about the relationality of its contents" (35). Same goes to the engagement with Suzanne Briet's "inter-documentary dialogue" in order to understand both the past and the present value of the object at stake (75 ff.).

Performativity, especially feminist and diasporic performativities, is one of the book's strong suits, bringing old yet still pertinent tropes (the body as a site of identity, the personal as political, the reclaiming of subalterns' voices and agencies, and so on) to an ever-expanding program of identity, activism and community generation. Indeed, the possibility of replacing "archives *about* communities" with "archives *of* communities" open a path "to re-form ourselves, socially and politically, within the archive" (100), and going well beyond self-documentation to reach post-bodily memories and nonhuman self-memory systems.

There is a celebratory overtone throughout the volume, a belief in the transversal interconnectivity of the archive, thanks to the many changes that were afforded by the social and cultural, political and artistic, transformations of the archive, as the one turning archivists into active, and even creative, forces, and the end of the distinction between archivist and user, in an ever-expansion of both input and output agencies. On the one hand, this is all very good, especially where the multiple relational dimensions of the archive are concerned, amply debated and clarified by Giannachi. But on the other hand, and on a flipside of the exemplary cases, this may forward a reification of the chronological progress that associates "past archives" with imperial projects and present forms as empowering. Whereas it is a wonderful potentiality to "archive everything," power relations within this supposedly universal archive is not a guarantee. Giannachi writes:

The 21st-century archive is no longer a space of neutrality, where the subject is put into parenthesis; rather it is the place where the subject intervenes, speaks up, takes on the act of remembering, often sharing very

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personal memories, and so changing the way a given history is recorded or understood. (91)

No doubt about this, and blog-life-writing, vlog-diaries, daily tweets, Facebook exposure and so on have changed, for better or worse, the mediascape of such actions. But one should be wary in losing sight of the fact that such degree of freedom of input and output can also be co-opted for non-progressive agendas of control, to which one may contribute sometimes willingly if distractedly. While Giannachi also points out that social media may lead to the “enslaving [personal memory] within a corporate collective” (146), this aspect is not as underlined as it probably should. De Kosnik is much more balanced in this assessment, as when she writes in her book, that

[r]ogue cultural memory is not essentially the product or tool of marginalized and minority groups; it may certainly be used to serve the interests of dominant classes and groups. But, over the past few decades, it has been effectively developed and deployed to strengthen the positions and fuel the activities of subordinated individuals and collectives, and to further the projects of democratization outlined above. (10)

Abigail De Kosnik’s book, indeed, is paradoxically much more focused on both media/environment (internet-related archives) and genre (fanfiction, her area of expertise) but more open-ended in her overall assessment. As the title and subtitle point out transparently, she is much more interested in “rogue” forms, which allows her to diversify her choice of practices. Instead of thinking of the internet as a well of endless possibilities where one can archive (and retrieve) “everything,” but following a sort of positively self-organizing mode, De Kosnik emphasizes the freer yet more stressed structure of these rogue archives. These are defined in a clear, succinct manner:

constant (24/7) availability; zero barriers to entry for all who can connect to the Internet; content that can be streamed or downloaded in full, with no required payment, and no regard for copyright restrictions (some rogue archivists digitize only what is already in the public domain); and content that has never been, and would likely never be, contained in a traditional memory institution. (2)

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Like Giannachi, De Kosnik points out to the important emergence of agency on the part of the user, enlarging the *rogueness* of memory itself: “where it used to mean the *record* of cultural production, memory is now the *basis* of a great deal of cultural production” (3).



While not abdicating from a historical contextualization, and adroitly conversing with modern and postmodern stances, the author zeroes in on contemporary archiving. With this in mind, and expanding her own coined term of “archontic archive” – which basically means (new) texts created by building upon previous (source) texts, i.e., created by fans through variation, crossover, accretion, etc. (immediately connecting to issues such as canon-formation, originality, gatekeeping, and so on) – De Kosnik analyzes not only text-medial practices but also other types of practices, from fanart to cosplay. In other words, she is pursuing that which John Fiske called “textual productivity” (the notion is not quoted directly, but Fiske is present throughout) and there’s a naturally inclination towards marginalized communities. The commingling and mutual reinforcement of social sciences, mediology and performativity will sharpen the author’s arguments about the *making* aspect of the archives, that is to say, the very *action of acting upon* the archives by the producers of archives.

Fan culture scholars will find both a treasure trove of references and a pleasurable read in De Kosnik’s book, if sometimes they may be daring for the uninitiated. But more important, perhaps, is the way she contributes to the notion of the *meta-archive*, engaging with both “vast narratives” (as discussed by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin’s co-edited volume *Third Person*) or Jim Collins “sophisticated hyperconsciousness,” although

neither of them is quoted. Meta-archives, “comprising every version of a source text that have ever been imagined, told, played, sung, written, or recorded in an audiovisual medium, are *conceptual* rather than *perceptible*” (added italics, 34), which allows for evermore additions.

If the internet may give the idea that one can “archive everything”, De Kosnik pays particular attention to accessibility, the very basis for the discourse-formation within the web, and also other issues such as web-identity (much more problematic for women or minority’s within hegemonic societies that for heteronormative users) or even the speed and span of critical attention and retrievability and negotiation with cultural memory at large. Above all, she is attentive to the constant effort needed in “correcting” or “guiding” the internet, instead of reifying its technological affordances. De Kosnik could not be clearer when she affirms “one of my central claims is that digital technologies are not innately archival, but must be *made* to serve archival purposes by the constant efforts of archivists” (30).

Is everything worth archiving? The problem is that this question is (almost) meaningless and its undertone of value judgment misplaced. The point has less to do with what is being archived *per se* than with the importance that such archiving practices has for its users as well as the subsequent use that people do with such material. We do always already archive everything. These two books, however, will help us map and distinguish the many polyvalent manners through which we do so.

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Abigail De Kosnik is an Assistant Professor in the Berkeley Center for New Media (BCNM) and the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies. She is also an affiliated faculty member of Gender & Women’s Studies. Bringing together interests in feminism, queerness, popular culture, fan fiction and new media, she has co-edited, with S. Ford and C. Lee Harrington *The Survival of Soap Opera: Transformations for a New Media Era* (University Press of Mississippi, 2011) and penned a number of articles in her areas of expertise.