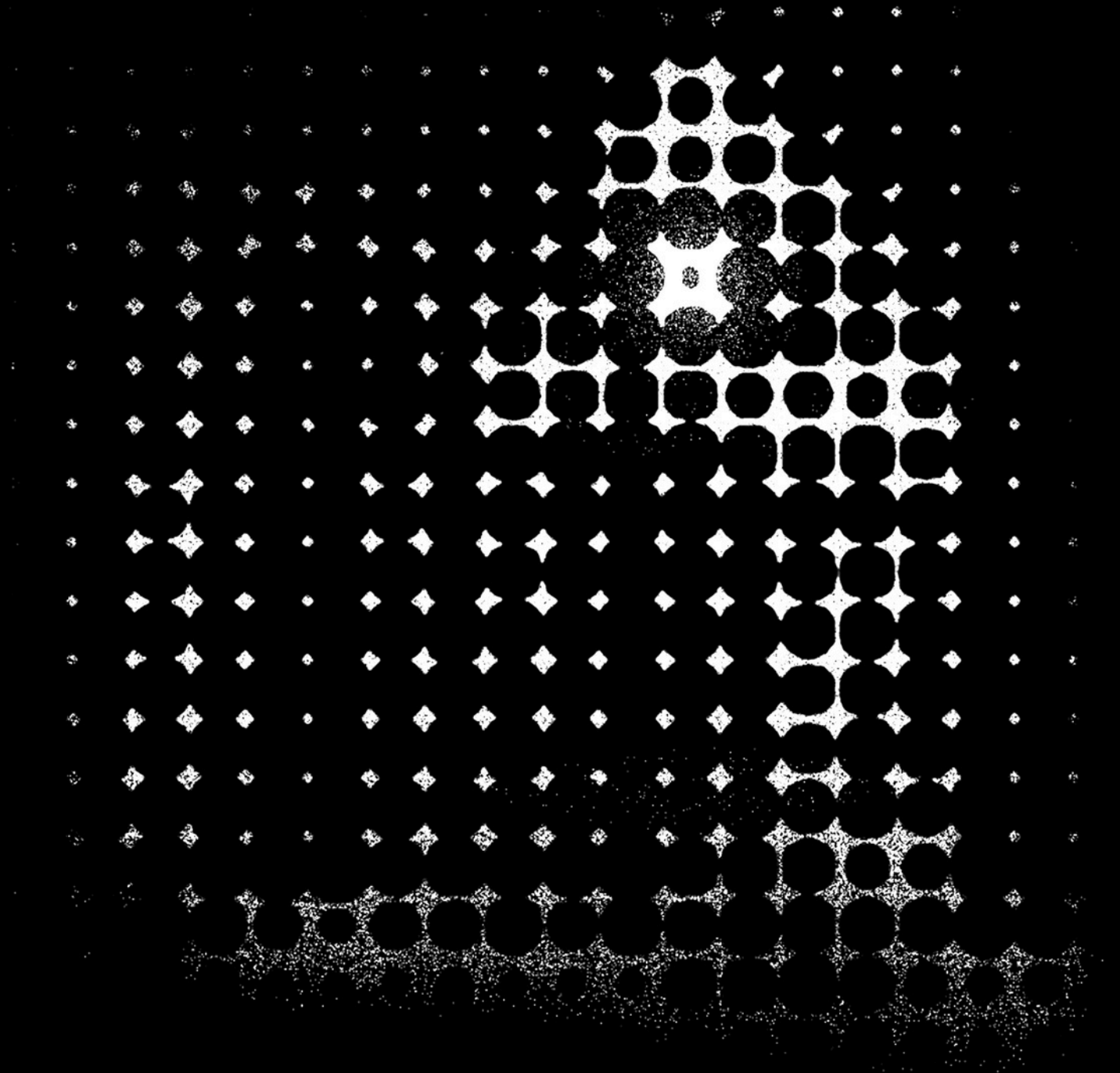


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Unconventional Archives

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Abstract

This paper examines how the meaning and function of the archive have shifted in the context of the digital age. Once understood as a stable and institutionally controlled physical space containing reliable records, archives have transformed into accessible systems that exist through digital technologies and online platforms. By examining archival theory and contemporary artists that engage with archival material, this paper argues that traditional archives cannot be understood as a neutral or objective source of historical truth. Instead, they operate as systems of power that shape historical narratives and determine which voices are preserved.

While the internet has enabled broader access and participation in archival creation, it produced instability, algorithmic control and the loss of material aura. These conditionals challenge the foundational concepts of archives such as permanence, authority and objectivity. Through the analysis of case studies, this research shows how artists respond to these limitations by developing unconventional archives. Instead of replicating traditional archival models, artists introduce additional narratives, experiment with viewer experience and technologies, redistribute authorship and treat the archives as a separate medium. Unconventional archives thus offer a more accurate reflection of informational society that relies on constant data production and its circulation. These archives have adapted to the modern needs, and created space for artistic and cultural expression.

Introduction

When thinking of an archive, one can imagine an old room, shelves filled with books and files, securely hidden from the outside world, where the content has been selected and placed there by a person or institution for a particular purpose. Access to the archive is limited to specific researchers or scientists. These places are considered to be a reliable source of information, records and materials.

With the creation of the internet, the idea of an archive has shifted from its original meaning. Websites such as The Internet Archive make material accessible for any user to view and download. Wikipedia allows users not only to view the information but also to modify and add their own text or images. The archive is no longer created by a single authority but becomes a collective process.

Does allowing anyone to create and modify the content challenge the archive's reliability as a source of truth? Furthermore, how does the digitalization of archives change the way material is stored and experienced by the viewer? Artists who work with archives challenge these questions and traditional archives, by changing the content, presentation of the material and viewer's experience.

This paper focuses on what could be understood as an archive today. Arguing that, in the age of the internet, the archive has shifted from being an institutionally controlled source of information to a public structure where anyone can produce, alter and publish records. While this democratization of information allows visibility and open access, it also weakens the reliability of the archive as a source of truth. Contemporary artists engage with archives, where the intention is not to bring objectivity and truth back but to show the inherent nature, biases and power, and the archive becomes an artistic medium itself.

Firstly, the paper defines a traditional archive, its power and influence on society. Secondly, explores examples of conventional archiving processes that include selecting materials, digitalization of physical objects and the loss or transformation that comes with it. Thirdly, analyses contemporary art works that function as unconventional archives, focusing on how artists challenge institutional authority, recontextualise material and change the viewer's experience of the archives. Lastly, the paper redefines an archive in contemporary meaning, how and why artists can use unconventional archives in their own work.

This paper argues that the growing amount of unconventional archives shifts institutional control over knowledge and provides a more accurate reflection of contemporary society than traditional archival models.

Defining an Archive

Before exploring the idea of unconventional archives it is first important to understand what a traditional archive is and what role it plays in the society. Archives consist of a set of records and documents that are stored in a physical space or are available on the internet for open or restricted access (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Unlike libraries that consist of multiple copies of the material, archival material is normally unique and stored as originals. The records come in different formats such as text, photographs, video, sound, analogue and digital. They are held by individuals and institutions, both public and private, such as individuals, families, museums, universities, states, corporations (International Council on Archives 2025).

Each archive exists for different purposes, focusing on different types of records. They can preserve material belonging to a specific academic, corporate, governmental, museums, religious, historical institution (Society of American Archivists, 2025). Personal archives may hold family relics, objects of value, photos, letters, art objects and more.

Historical use of Archives

Historically, archives fulfil the need to collect, preserve and pass information across generations. In order to be transmitted, the culture needs to be recorded and stored somewhere. Otherwise, the stories that are just told orally will not survive (Carter, R.G.S., 2006). Archives function as a form of collective and personal memory, where communities and individuals are able to remember their past, maintain and form a shared identity and build a strong community.

Beyond memory, archives hold evidential function. They contain original documents and records which serve as evidence of past actions and decisions, reasons for them and their impact on those affected (The National Archives, 2025). They “provide the evidence required to protect people’s rights and seek remedies when necessary. They enable the rights to freedom of expression and information through journalistic and academic expression, historical research and public access to official documents and are an essential resource for business, writers, genealogists, researchers and historians (The National Archives, 2025)”. Because archives are used as legal, historical and institutional evidence across these contexts, they are often perceived as objective sources of truthful information.

However, this notion of objectivity also brings power. Before the modern era, to be a subject of archival documentation was a privilege for those in the position of power. Their life and actions were preserved in relic-like fashion, granting authority, visibility and the right to shape historical narratives (Laermans, Gielen, 2007). Instead of pure documentations, this determined whose voices were heard, and whose claims could be supported with evidence.

In contrast, in the contemporary informational society, the relationship between archives and power has transformed. The production of information no longer depends on institutions and elites. Individuals continuously create and circulate content through cameras, digital platforms and social media, while simultaneously producing data through participating in this digital system. Information functions as a tool of expression and mechanism through which society can be monitored and controlled (Laermans, Gielen, 2007).

For digital archives, the power is redistributed instead of fully disappearing. While the material is produced and circulated by users, instead of just institutional authorities, the visibility of archival content is controlled by the digital system. Accessibility and long-term preservation largely depend on digital platforms, search engines and algorithms. Even when users create the material, they do not have full control how it is distributed, sustained and made visible.

Gaps in Traditional Archives

It is impossible for the archives to stay entirely truthful and objective, the process of selection inevitably produces gaps within the archival material. The gaps occur when some perspectives, individuals or groups are being ignored, silenced or neglected. These gaps may cause a negative impact. For example, as Amcher states in *Archival Silences*, marginalised groups who do not have their past documented in the archives properly, may end up unable to argue their case, to seek accountability, claim their rights and thus may be further victimized.

Postmodernists' reflections have challenged the assumption of archives as a reliable and objective source of truth (Schwartz, 2002). Archivists in the past have been viewed simply as those who pass records from the original source on to the researchers. However, scholars such as Schwartz argue that "Archives— as records— wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies" (Schwartz, 2002). Archivisation is therefore not only a process of storage of various materials and records, but refers to the system of formation and transformation of utterances, or in other words, the law of "what can be said" (Laermans, Gielen, 2007). While the material that has not been included in the historical records remains forgotten and non-existent.

Before the material gets into the archives, archivists have the power to manage the records, their selection, descriptions, preservation, use and presentation within the archive. These decisions determine how the past is being remembered and how it will be reinterpreted in the future. As the International Council on Archives states, archival records should not be viewed as an objective truth, they represent specific perspectives shaped by the worldview and experiences of entities producing them, while viewers' context and experience are equally as important for the interpretation of archival resources (International Council on Archives, 2025). Archivisation does not simply document the past but actively produces it, includes

specific perspectives, while excluding others. This results in the way society understands their past, and which stories are privileged and which are silenced (Carter, R.G.S., 2006).

When the institutional archives fail to document memory of marginalised or minority groups, those groups can respond with a creation of their own archive. One example is The Canadian Women's Movement Archive (CWMA). Pat Leslie, the initiator of the collection, addressed the need to preserve feminist women throughout history due to "lack of representation of women's stories in traditional Canadian archives and historical narratives" (uOttava 2025). CWMA has been documenting records of women's organisations and individuals in Canada from the 1960s to 1990s and became the most representative archival collection of the Canadian second-wave feminist movement (uOttava 2025). With a creation of their own archives minority or marginalised groups can choose how they want to be represented within the archive and what material to include. Giving them control over their own historical documentation.

Even when the archivists and viewers are aware of the material selection and occurring gaps, traditional archives stay limited by institutional control, physical access, and established power structure. Some communities or individuals may not wish to be included in the state or institutional archives, while others may be actively silenced by those in power. This represents an issue of who has the power to document history and whose memories are preserved as part of the official record.

Digital Archives

With technological advances, contemporary society has easy access to tools of documentation such as smartphones, digital cameras, 3D scanning applications and internet-based platforms. The internet allows a vast variety of media to be constantly produced, shared and stored, resulting in distribution of large amounts of documentation that lives outside of traditional archival institutions. This creates an opportunity for any individual or group to create their own archives without relying on institutional control.

While the possibility for anyone to create an archive introduces new challenges, such as misinformation and instability, it reflects contemporary society more accurately than selective institutional models from the past. These archives emerge from everyday contributions of users with different viewpoints, instead of a few numbers of authoritative figures.

In the digital age, often described as the breakthrough of information society, the media and content is being constantly shared, added, changed and transformed. The same conditions apply to digital archives. Laermans and Gielen in *The archive of the digital an-archive*,

drawing on Wolfgang Ernst's concept of the "digital an-archive," argue that digital archives are designed for constant updating and circulating. This concept is fundamentally contradicting the original purpose of the archives, which is long term record preservation. Digital archives are always rewritten through algorithms, interfaces and user interaction. This system functions through constantly producing and reorganising material. According to the authors, the creation of digital archives becomes a separate medium itself (Laermans, Gielen, 2007).

As cited by Laermans and Gielen, French archivist Marie-Anne Chabin argues that in the context of digital archives the problem is in "the open nature of the database, since in the present it is no longer what it was a year ago and will be again very different next year" (Laermans, Gielen, 2007). She explains the necessity to 'close' the always transforming database, for the purpose of long-term preservation. This shows the paradox of digital archives which are always open and changing, while traditional archives fundamentally rely on permanence. Resulting in the conclusion that digital archives cannot function in the same way as the traditional archives, the two are contradicting each other.

What is lost through digitalization

The process of digitalization brings gains and losses to the new digital archive. One of the most essential losses concerns the material presence of the object. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin argues that the reproduction process of artworks, causes the loss of the objects "aura". Which he describes as the original object's presence in time and space. When an object is taken out of its context, location and history, its authenticity is changed (Benjamin, 2008).

Although Benjamin was responding to early forms of mechanical reproductions, such as photography and cinema, similar concerns are still applicable in the context of digital archives. As discussed in *3D Heritage Visualisation and the Negotiation of Authenticity: The ACCORD Project*, digital reproductions may appear as "weird" or not "authentic", due to the absence of their physical substance, history, location and material (Jones, Jeffrey, Maxwell, Hale, Jones, 2017). The objects which are part of the digital archives are no longer material entities, but their representations.

This transformation is further continued with the digital archives. As Laermans and Gielen argue, digital archival material exists fundamentally as data, as ones and zeros, which can be accessed only through specific programs, interfaces and devices. The way the material appears and interpreted depends fully on the technological system through which it is being accessed. The archive does not exist outside of screens, software and interfaces. In the future, as technologies continue to evolve, devices and software will be updated or become completely different.

As a result, digital archives will require constant adaptation, or complete transformation in order to be accessible. Fundamentally challenging the idea of static long term preservation.

A similar issue has been described in the *Designing Friction* manifesto, which addresses the loss of physical resistance in digital interactions. Contemporary digital technology transforms people's engagement with objects into interactions with a device. The device replaces numerous objects of everyday life, thus reducing the diversity in physical movement of the users, resulting in the same tactile actions. The loss of physical resistance emphasizes the detachment of the archive and the records it contains from the original object.

However, this loss does not necessarily result in the failure of digital archives. It opens space for rethinking of authenticity. Drawing on Latour and Lowe, Stuart Jeffrey suggests that aura may migrate to digital objects themselves through careful aesthetic construction and active community participation in their production (Jones, Jeffrey, Maxwell, Hale, Jones, 2017). Similarly, Fiona Cameron argues that digital historical objects can develop their own forms of authenticity over time, as "the digital historical object is a creative work in its own right with a history and provenance" (Jones, Jeffrey, Maxwell, Hale, Jones, 2017).

While digital archives are not easily suited for long-term preservation, in a similar way as traditional ones, the instability is not necessarily their negative side. With appropriate transformation and updating, digital content can remain accessible even if its form changes. As digital archives have become a new medium, their purpose does not lie only in preservation but in the ability to comment on, reinterpret and recontextualise the material and the past.

The loss of material context of the original objects allows archival material to be rethought, reinterpreted and restructured. When approaching critically, digital archives can function not as weakened copies of the traditional ones, but as a new medium that is capable of creating new narratives, archival experience and artistic expressions. Instead of aiming for objectivity, they work by transformation, participation and technological advancement, offering an archival practice that aligns with the conditions of contemporary technological society.

Redefining an archive

The limitations of traditional archives discussed above does not mean a complete failure of traditional archival models. Instead, it indicates a mismatch between the established archival principle and the conditions of the digital age. Traditional archives exist in permanence, stability and institutional authority, while contemporary society is shaped by constant technological change, network and distributed authorship.

In response to this shift, alternative archives have emerged. They do not attempt to be objective, static or long lasting and replicate traditional models. Instead they are embracing constant change, subjectivity and technological advancement. These archives, referred to as unconventional archives, use digital tools to collect, reorganise and present material in ways that reflect contemporary culture and knowledge production. Unconventional archives are often created by individuals, artists or online collectives, and they recontextualise existing records, add personal or marginalised narratives, and treat the archive itself as a creative medium.

An unconventional archive includes main functions of a traditional archive, such as collecting, organising and presenting material. Each of these functions are rethought for the purpose of the archive. Instead of being created by institutional authority, unconventional archives are created by individuals, groups or internet collectives. They are presented and published through digital platforms, interactive environments, VR, websites, code based websites, and can take the form of a research project or an artwork.

Unconventional archives differ from traditional archives in several key ways; most importantly in who collects the material, for what purpose, how the content is structured, and how it is accessed. Instead of trying to achieve objective truth the archive may be grounding in subjectivity, the process of archiving itself, and the use of materials from multiple sources. In this context, the archive can be understood not only for its content but as a separate creative work.

In this paper, unconventional archives are examined through a set of interconnected criteria which determine them. They include the content of the archive and the motivation behind its collection; the structure and recontextualisation of material, where the original records are being transformed, rethought and reorganised to layer additional narratives; authorship, which determines who creates and adds the material to the archive; and viewer experience and presentation, focusing on the platform, interface and technology through which the archive is accessed. Although the criteria is described separately, it often overlaps within each example discussed in the case studies.

The following case studies show how contemporary artists use unconventional archival methods to recontextualise material, challenge the authorship and experiment within the viewer's experience of the archives and their content.

Recontextualising material

Penelope Umbrico is an American artist who works with found images through search engines and picture sharing websites. Her ongoing project *Range: of Masters of Photography* (2012-ongoing), is an unconventional archive that works through appropriation, repetition and recontextualisation of existing material. Unlike traditional photographic archives that aim to preserve original prints, her work questions authenticity and authorship through the creation of digital reproduction of images.

The art work explores digital technology's effect on our relationship to and experience of photographs. She collects photographs of mountains made by 20th century historically recognised 'master' photographers. If used in a traditional archive, such photos by the masters would be considered as significant material and stored as originals. Although the artist rephotographs them using numbers of smartphone apps and digital filters, creating a new body of works. The camera app filters simulate analog film photography by adding effects such as holes, gaps, chemical burns which are possible only with analog photography. "Light leaks and chemical burn filters are especially absurd in the context of both analog photography and smart-phone camera technology: 'master' photographers would never accept such mistakes in their work" (Eisworth, 2021). Through this process the artist undermines the authority of the photographic masters and the technologies that imitate similar image production.

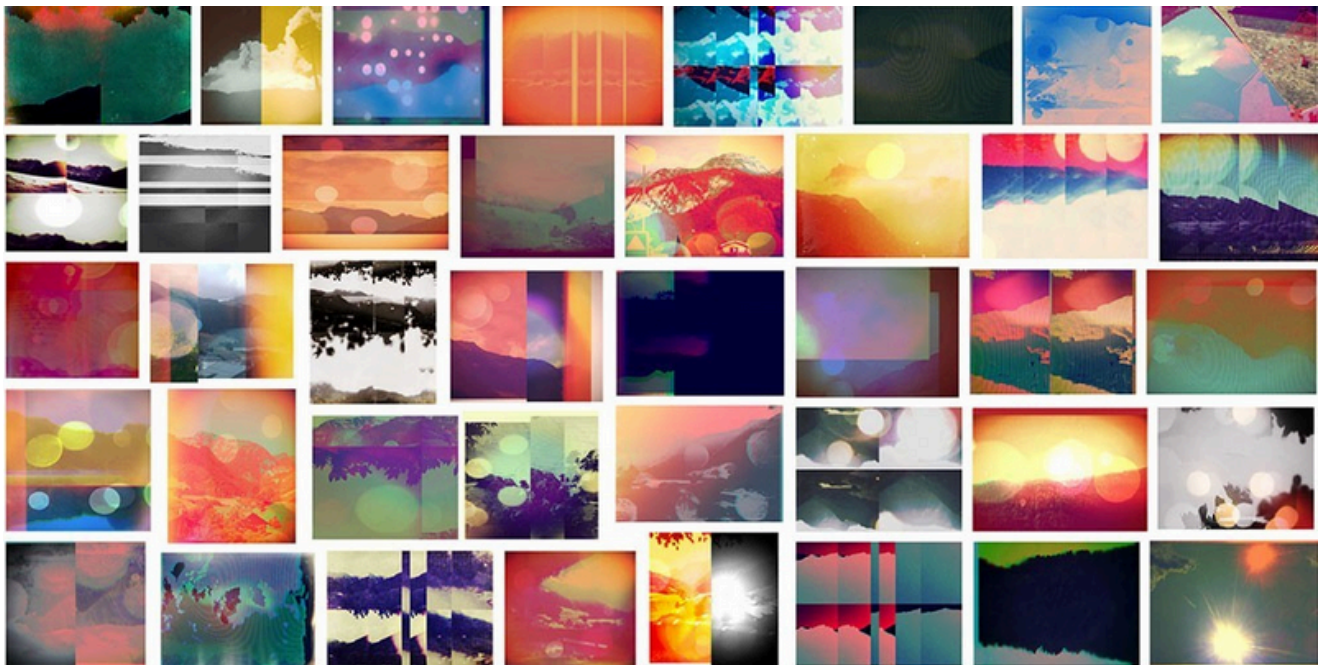


Fig 1: RANGE (1850-2012): of Aperture Masters of Photography by Umbrico, P. (2012).

With this technique the artist is able to create big amounts of these photographs. Taking the initial material out of the context and adding layers and effects, creating a lot of variations in order to make a new collection that is commenting on the always advancing technology, and mock the absurdity that comes with it. The work itself is now becoming an archive which is always growing. The content of which is the image of a mountain, being a symbol of stability and site of orientation, which is the parallel of the shifting photography medium during the digital age.

This work is an archive created by an individual, who is using mass produced and publicly available images. Through recontextualising the material and transformation with the use of digital apps, she created an archive which is presented in different formats such as a book, an installation and online publication.

Through recontextualisation and digital transformation, Umbrico's work functions as an archive that critically reflects on authorship, authenticity and photographic production in the digital age.

Viewer experience

Another example of a digital archive is a Museum of Stolen Art (2023), created by Linza Agency. Unlike Umbrico's work, which recontextualizes already canonised photographic material, this archive is using material that has been violently stolen from their original context. The project documents Ukrainian cultural artefacts from museums, streets, architecture and religious sites that have been damaged or stolen during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Museum of Stolen Art is a digital environment that gives an opportunity for anyone to access Ukrainian art through a website. The viewer is spawned in a floating outdoor space, and has the ability to walk around with an avatar, or even use VR. Instead of being a flat documentation the archive allows an immersive viewer experience.



Fig 2: Museum of Stolen Art by Linza Agency (2023).

The museum having a digital form allowed the creators to experiment in the way they present the objects. Some items appear in a photo format, where it depicts Ukrainian culture, traditions and people, while others take a form of 3D scans. For example, a scanned memorial sign, where the text, despite the low quality of the textures, can be still read. Some elements are almost completely remodeled to match the original appearance. In some cases, artefacts are converted into abstract digital forms, like the mosaics that are turned into VFX particles that are moving. A stained-glass window is digitally translated into a low-poly architectural environment. The material and geometry recreate its real life glass qualities. The museum has a lot of interactive features, where the player can turn on an audio guide, click to read about an item, collect coins as they are exploring the location, creating active engagement with the archival records.

At first glance, the Museum of Stolen Art resembles a traditional archive that has simply been digitalised. It stores and presents historical objects, while providing information and aims to preserve cultural memory. However, the digital format allows the archive to function in ways and mediums that are unavailable for physical institutional space. Artists used different techniques of storing and presenting the artifacts, such as 3D scans, flying texts, use of visual effects, and spatial alignment of the museum. The artefacts now are being re-presented through digital location, animations and interactions. The content of the archive is not only focusing on the specific objects themselves, but explores the way a viewer is experiencing them individually and as a collection in the digital space.

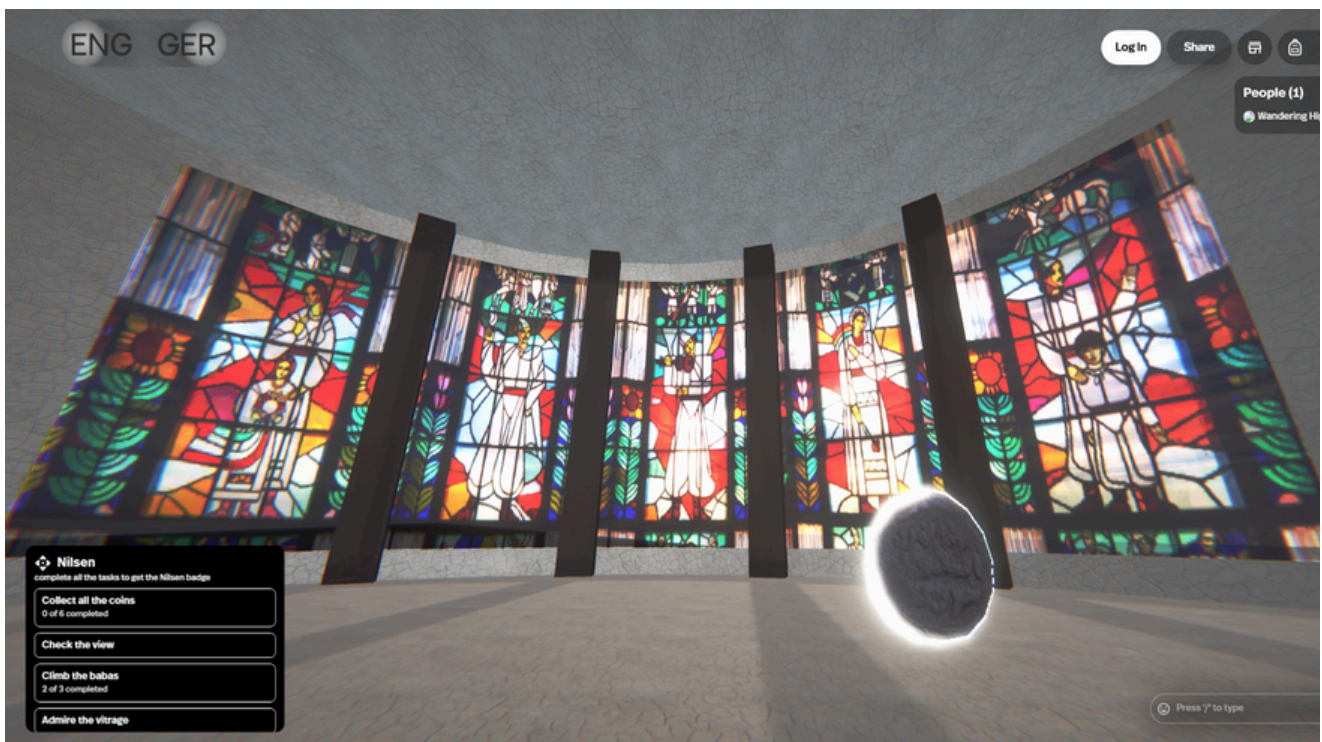


Fig 3: Museum of Stolen Art by Linza Agency (2023).

From an archival perspective, the project shows how the viewer's experience can be a crucial part of an unconventional archive. Instead of passively observing the material, the user constantly interacts, listens, reads and explores the space.

The archive is openly accessible online, removing the institutional and location restrictions of engaging with the material, which often happens with traditional archives. The accessible, educational and entertaining nature of the archive can help to reach the topic of cultural erasure and war crimes to younger audiences and people from outside of Ukraine.

The authorship and selection also depart from the traditional archival techniques. The archive is not created by an institution but by individuals and collectives responding to cultural erasure. The content is determined by acts of destruction and theft, instead of traditional archival selection. The archive shifts from imposing an institutional narrative to documenting cultural loss, allowing citizens to reclaim authorship and use it as a political and cultural statement against Russian oppression.

Clement Valla

Another example of digital material being reorganised and presented differently within an archive can be seen in a work by a New York based artist Clement Valla. His project *Overgrowth* (2022), is a collection of one thousand still images of point clouds depicting natural environments. As Valla states, “Each unique artwork features what could happen when we step back and let exuberant nature be, with varying flowers, grasses and plant life ” (Valla, 2020), the work captures nature and digitalizes it through 3D scanning, creating pixelated and distorted images.

A related work, *Pointcloud.garden* (2020) by Valla, involves point clouds of gardens and flowers, presented in HTML-based animated renderings rather than static images. The works are pixelated moving reconstruction of real places, the titles of each garden includes their geographical location and the names of the plants that are being depicted. In both of the works the artist creates a digitalised archive of real objects and places, with a focus on the visual and procedural limits of digital capture.

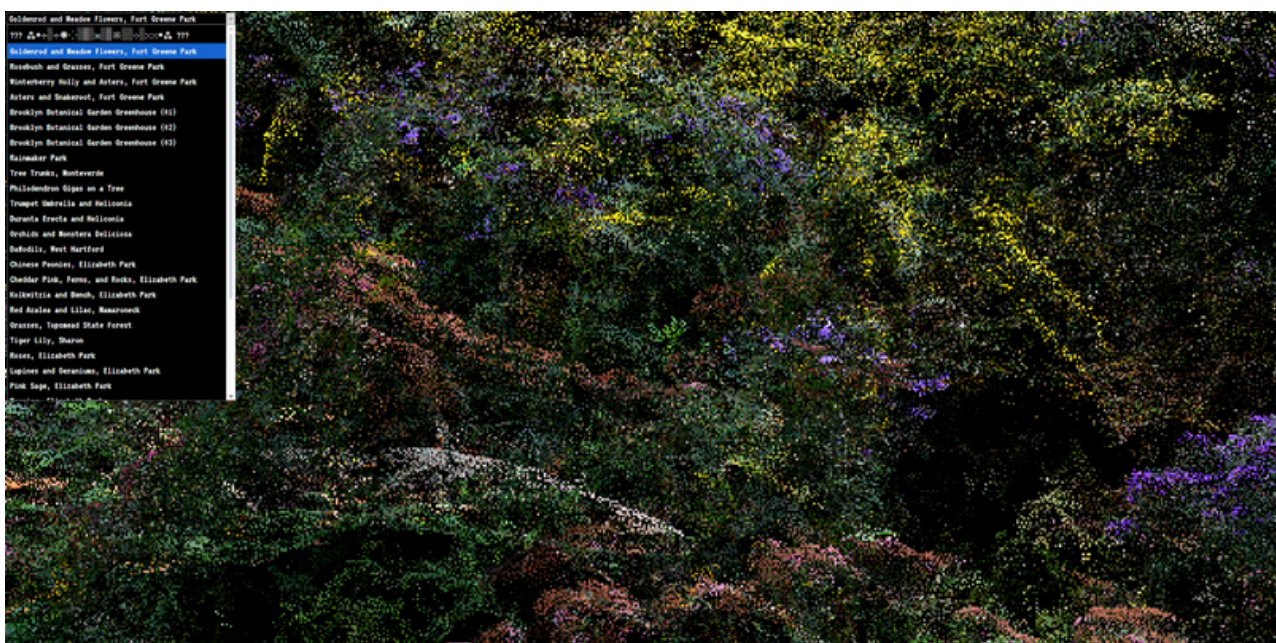


Fig 4: Pointcloud.garden by Valla, C. (2020).

In traditional archives that document real places, nature, botanic, or landscapes the goal is to classify, educate and preserve the specific locations and plants within a realistic, systematic way. By keeping and emphasising the technological distortions and gaps, Valla highlights the imperfections of the digitalization processes. The content is now framed around the process of digital capture, instead of fully focusing on natural environments. The archive becomes an artwork that views nature through a subjective contemporary technological view.

The archive focuses on viewers' aesthetic experience, instead of being informative. The technological art approach changes the way the viewer perceives regular subjects such as nature collection. In this case the work explores a juxtaposition between nature and technology. The process of digitalization becomes as significant as the archived content itself. Demonstrating how unconventional archives prioritise experience, process and interpretation over objectivity and scientific accuracy, while the archive is presented as an aesthetic and conceptual work.



Fig 5: Overgrowth by Valla, C. (2022).

Jake Welch

Jake Welch is an artist based in New York. His project *The Restroom Archive* (2025), continues with the topic of what can be archival content. The work consists of rotating 3D scans of restrooms presented within a simple HTML webpage. Each scan is labelled with the location and the date scanned as part of the title, which gives the work a documentary character.

The scanned toilet spaces are often viewed as private and unpleasant, and are often overlooked. In traditional archival context, such material would rarely be considered a serious material for preservation. Archives usually prioritise culturally, historically or politically significant material. Welch's project challenges this notion by focusing on everyday spaces that are usually left unnoticed.

Through 3D scanning and online publishing the restrooms are detached from the original context and function. The user experiences them as abstract digital objects instead of usable spaces. This detachment is similar to the loss of material context discussed earlier, where the digitalization transforms objects into their representations that are accessed through interfaces.

The act of 3D scanning takes more time than simply taking a photograph. The artist's choice to 3D scan these spaces and publish them on a code-based website, allowing users to rotate and inspect them closely, suggests that significance is produced through archival framing rather than the initial value of the subject.

Similarly to Valla's work, this archive has become an artwork. The simplicity of the project demonstrates the possibility, provided by technology tools, for anyone to create unconventional archives independently of institutions. With exposing private spaces on the internet, the project questions privacy, publicity, and the content that can be archived. The project challenges what can be part of archival collections and what not, similarly to earlier discussed study by Schwartz on archival silences. The project is not intended to preserve these private spaces, but to question why certain spaces are remembered while others are often overlooked or excluded.

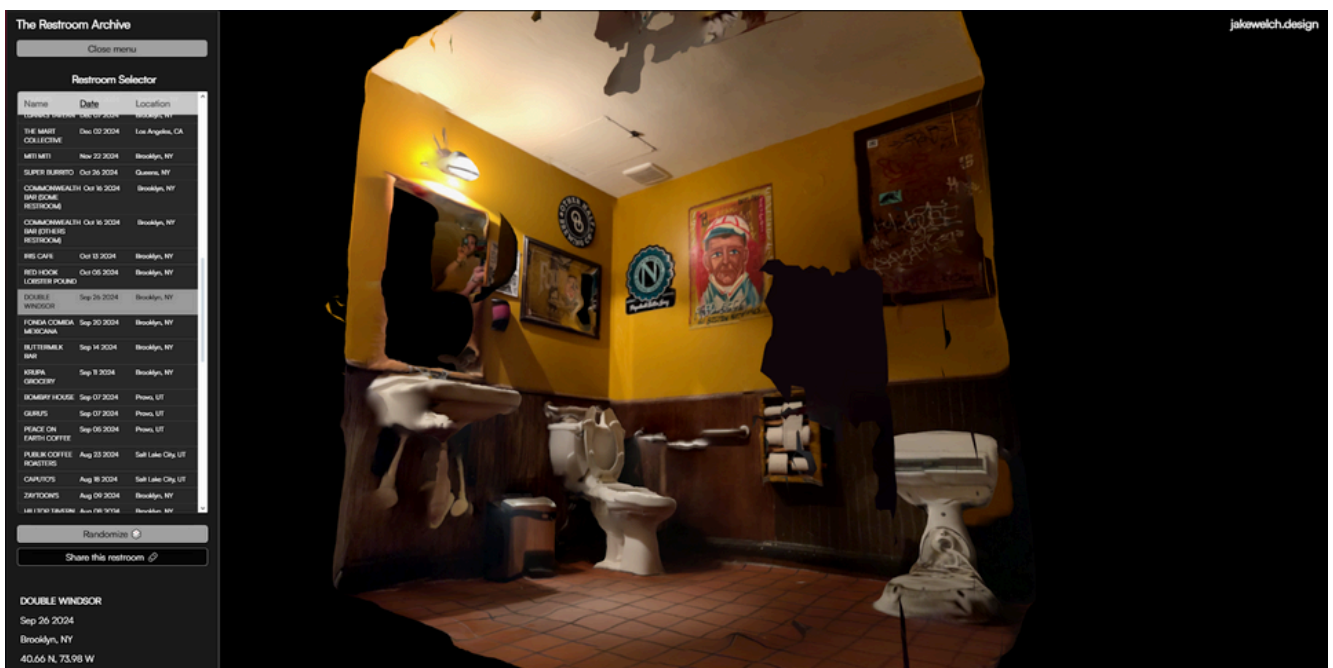


Fig 6: The Restroom Archive by Welch, J. (2025).

Authorship

Learning to Love You More (2009) is a web-based project created by artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher that is an example of an archive built through public participation. The project invited the general public to respond to simple assignments created by the artists, such as recreating a poster from their teenage years, writing a short life story in less than a day or posting their favourite songs from their childhood. Around eight thousand participants were completing the instructions and attaching a video, text, audio, photographs according to the theme (July, Fletcher, 2009). Resulting in an archive containing thousands of personal responses of various people. The work was posted online and the content was presented at different places around the USA.

Unlike traditional archives where the material exists independently and is later collected, this project was encouraging users to produce the content through the archive. This changes the relationship between the archivists and records, where instead of purposely collecting material for a specific purpose, the project allows the material to be produced without much intervention.

The authorship is distributed around thousands of users. The artists were the creators of the original idea and the themes, but did not have as much control over each individual's contribution. The collective authorship represented how multiplicity of voices can coexist within the same archive.

LEARNING TO LOVE YOU MORE

HELLO ASSIGNMENTS DISPLAYS LOVE GRANTS REPORTS SELECTIONS OLIVERS BOOK

ASSIGNMENTS:

40. Make the saddest song.

47. Re-enact a scene from a movie that made someone else cry.

46. Draw Raymond Carver's Cathedral.

45. Reread your favorite book from fifth grade.

44. Make a "LTLYM assignment".

43. Make an exhibition of the art in your parent's house.

42. List five events from 1984.

41. Document your bald spot.

40. Heal yourself.

39. Take a picture of your parents kissing.

38. Act out someone

Assignment #43

Make an exhibition of the art in your parent's house.

Amy Rollo

New York, New York USA

Email Amy

← →

1



This needlework entitled "Amy's Roses" (how very appropriate) was done by my mother when I was a baby and has hung in my room since.

REPORTS:

Vindy Loo

Aimee Lolley

Laura Scalet

Jessica

Jessica Ann

Joanna Zuckla

Nina Yuen

Elizabeth

Sean Carroll

Sophie Elliot

Chris Willets

Ryan Biracree

Erin Please

José Manuel da Silva Barbosa

Danielle Charron

Gustavo Gonzalez Garza

Kelly Alba

Dana West

Nina

Hamlett Dobbins

Jason Prowler

Jenifer Hill

Trisha Masterson

Sarah Aleshire

Yuri Ono

Rachel Grant

Anna Wilson

PREVIOUS

Fig 7. Learning to Love You More by July, M., Fletcher, H. (2009)

The structure of the archive is not chronologically linear, the content can be found through listed options of themes. Viewers' experience of the archive involves the encounter of a wide range of personal narratives, without having much context about each individual case. Making the archive about participation, personal experiences and emotions of the participants, giving an overview of everyday life of the people who are part of the archive. The archive has been closed, and the content is not updated. For nowadays users who are accessing the archive, the experience becomes about interpreting this vast range of information, and aligning it with an image of almost unknown participants.

Main Differences

After examining the case studies, it becomes clear that unconventional archives act as a separate medium instead of a tool for preservation. They have changed from being stable to always changing and a transforming medium; from institutional authority to distributed authorship; from aiming towards objectivity to subjectivity; and from being a static storage to experimental artistic practice.

Umbrico's work demonstrates how archival material can be recontextualised and expanded, while undermining the idea of authenticity and authorship. The Museum of Stolen Art explores an experimental approach to viewer experience, focusing on immersion and interaction. Valla's point cloud project grounds in the relationship between interfaces, aesthetics, creativity and the digitalization processes. Welch challenges what can be considered as archival content, by emphasising on the digital records and their disconnection from original function. Learning to Love You More redefines archival creation by distributing authorship among a collective of internet users. Taken together, these projects represent how unconventional archives prioritise process, experience and interpretation, presenting the archive itself as a creative medium and a tool for artistic expression.

Conclusion

This paper explored how the meaning and function of an archive have shifted in the context of the digital age. Once understood as institutionally controlled physical spaces containing reliable information and records, archives have transformed into a publicly accessible system that is created with digital technologies, online platforms and user participation.

By examining archival theory and contemporary artistic practices, this paper has argued that traditional archives cannot be understood as neutral tools for storing objective truth. Instead, it functions as a system of power that shapes historical narratives, determines which voices are heard and produces archival gaps. While the internet allows for participation and democratizes access to information, it also brings instability, algorithmic control and loss of material aura. These conditions contradict the traditional archival ideas of permanence and objectivity.

Through analyses of case studies, this research has shown how artists respond to these limitations by developing unconventional archives. Instead of replicating traditional archival practices, the emerging ones rely on subjectivity, recontextualisation of material and technological use. Artists bring additional narratives, redistribute authorship, experiment with viewer experience and purposes of the archives. Using the archives as a creative medium.

Unconventional archives offer a more accurate reflection of contemporary informational society, in which data is always produced, modified and circulated. By adapting to these conditions, such archives create space for artistic and cultural expression, critical reinterpretation and alternative ways of engaging with memory and history.

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