

Camp's Colliding Images.

INTERVIEW OF
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 AND ASHOK SUKUMARAN, LED
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 JOHAL
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○ Still from "From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf", CAMP, 2009–2013

Stuart Comer (SC) and Rattanamol Singh Johal (RSJ) **Let's just begin with how CAMP was formed. What inspired you to come together and when did this happen?**

Shaina Anand (SA) It was 2007. None of us came from plastic arts — we didn't go to fine art school. Ashok came from architecture, and I studied film. But I think the frustrations of our disciplines were finding ground in media art and in a certain kind of art practice. We both had an independent art practice by then. Ashok had done some fundamental work with electricity and the built environment and space. The network critique was right there. He had also won the Golden Nica by then, from Ars Electronica. And I had done *Khirkheeyaan* (2006). All those early works were not inside galleries; they were in public space. The *Glow Positioning System* (2005) connected a whole square in the city via people's windows. Window to window, everyone sharing electricity and Christmas lights. It could be hand-cranked, like a pre-cinematic moving panorama, but in the city. Old meets new and a possible third thing that happens.

Ashok Sukumaran (AS) And I'll just insert one thing that Shaina had done. She ran a TV station inside a market in 2005. It was an amazing open studio with students who were producing a television channel for an indoor market of 300 shops.

SA Even in that pedagogical experiment, running the market TV station, we had MiniDV cameras and the students had to flip the screen around. So, they could still see, but those they were filming could also see. The thing that made video different from film was feedback — you could watch it immediately. Those features were already being used structurally because one had been burnt out by the gaze. When you're twenty and you watch *Reassemblage* (1982) by Trinh T. Minh-ha, you're not really into the film. But that first line says, "I do not intend to speak about, just speak nearby." Those were the concerns. We were doing these wild things on the streets, in markets, in Khirkee village. No permissions. The street is yours; the infrastructure is yours. That privilege escalation, that hacking, that possibility of anything can happen when two

unconnected things connect. By then, it's 2006 and we have an art world boom. Our galleries are getting bigger by the square foot and everyone's art is just scaling up. It's not changing, it's not getting more ambitious, it's just getting bigger. This wasn't our scene, but we were still part of the art world because we were showing internationally by then. But back in India, nobody understood what we were doing.

Long story short, we wanted to set up CAMP then because we wanted our own infrastructure, we wanted our own cinema. And, of course, we wanted our own archive and one month later, we wanted other things... But that desire to create an autonomous space that you can run with your own rules, whether they are Commons After Missed Philosophies or whatever, you want to do it your way.

SC **And when did you coin the term CAMP? Maybe you could talk a little bit about how the name emerged and the process of coming up with the backronyms.**

AS We wanted to be able to organize and name ourselves so we could raise money and do interesting, ambitious art projects...

SA To receive a seed grant for the work we wanted to do, we came up with the name Critical Art and Media Practices, the acronym for which is CAMP. But Ashok immediately said, "we can't have this kind of cute NGO name!"

AS It's the same with pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive). Those words are loaded, but you can also have other words. You can change your mind. So, we decided to play this joke about what the possible expansions of the CAMP acronym could be. Sanjay Bhangar, the third co-founder of CAMP was a self-taught programmer who was running the Indymedia website and was also a spirited hacker. We built this piece of software that would spin out different names for CAMP every time the website was opened. We called them "backronyms." It was a nice way to have a laugh every time somebody loaded the website. We didn't believe that the joke would last so long, let alone end up on the wall of our exhibition at MoMA, but here we are. We stretched it. We also had people saying, "what does this mean? You're not making a commitment to your name!"

SC **I'm thinking about the question of artistic collectives and the relationship to the market specifically. You've already talked about CAMP starting to coalesce at exactly the moment the market really starts to boom in India. Was this**

a major shift at that time more broadly? Or did you feel it wasn't so much a trend as it was a very specific direction for you?

SA I think it was even against that trend because collectives had already become market palatable, right? The text that's still on our website from 2007, explicitly says we're not a collective, but rather a space where interests and ideas gather and take form.

AS Not all of us wanted to be identified all the time as artists. Folks had other ambitions within this kind of hybrid structure. There can be projects that have real world implications. It was very much part of the imaginary that we wouldn't be restricted to what the art gallery could consume or show. The idea of a collective had already turned into a kind of sealed envelope: these three people or those four people are "x or y collective"... Functionally, they became the equivalent of any other individual artist.

SA It also comes from cinema, which a single person cannot do — it's inherently collaborative. And as Alain Badiou says, it's impure. It's the impure form where paintings, culture, sound, theatre, poetry, and music... all the previously known cultural forms can make impossible movements because you can now have all of them together. Also, the internet was new. The idea that it's possible to be autonomous with nothing — you don't need to have major funding or a big infrastructure, but you can be autonomous. The internet is free, it's a forest. Organize it. Hide in it. Build something beautiful. Those ideas really did inform us back then.

What do you do if you want to make a film? You need a camera, mics, you need someone to press record, you need actors, and you need an audience. But what if their roles in this collaboration were interchangeable? Are you the actor? Are you the viewer? Are you the maker?

AS It's also about trust, and there's kind of a separation. For example, we didn't travel on the sea for much of *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* (2013). Unlike the BBC, we didn't do the Dhow Cruise from Dubai to Gujarat and shoot the hell out of it. We trusted that there was already a way of documenting this — or a way of playing with the images of this — that existed among the sailors. We didn't have to jump on board and act like a film crew. We shaped it in certain ways, but we didn't try to say that we have a better idea of how to do this. Slowly, over four or five years, it took shape both while collecting material but also while editing. We had a huge col-

lection of these cell phone videos, maybe 300 or 400 of them, not all of which are in the film. We used to share these back with the communities. We've given DVDs of these videos to DVD markets in the Gulf and so on. We were always doing these kinds of video exchanges. People would take the film from us, and there's a beautiful story: when we were in Karachi for the first time, we found *From Gulf to Gulf* in the pirate DVD library at Rainbow Center, in Sadar Bazaar. Nobody knows where it came from.

SC How did you identify or introduce yourself to the sailors? How did you connect with them and how did you determine which sailors you would work with to use their footage?

SA That takes us back to the 2009 Sharjah Biennial and the book, *Wharfage*, which was the diary of a year in the life of these boats. And specifically, the year of the global financial crisis, as the diary runs from 2008 to 2009. The whole idea there was to borrow from the "minor," in the way that Deleuze and Guattari understand Kafka. Even though Kafka was Czech and Jewish, he wrote in

German, the dominant language and the language of the oppressor. So, the minor in a major key or scale. That's what we were trying to do. We took official boat reports and manifests, documenting a very vital form of sea trade that is often dismissed as informal piracy, smuggling, and so on. We took those taped records and made the book. You can read the name of the boat and what it's carrying. Through that exercise, each boat becomes an image. You can know what is under that tarpaulin cover, you can imagine a used car, a dentist chair, macaroni, shoes, prayer mats and so on... The other part of the project was a radio show — Radio Meena — a five-day broadcast during the opening week of the biennial. It was the radio show that got us hanging out every night with these sailors and friendships were struck. As the song requests and accompanying files came in, we would play the audio. But when we were cleaning up my laptop, we realized that many of these files were not just songs. They were single take music videos shot by the sailors on the high seas. The collaboration began intuitively and continued in the months and years that followed.

○ CAMP members at CAMP studio, Bombay



RSJ How did this collaboration work? Was there an outcome in mind?

AS The collaboration was structured by the idea of making a film together. One of our presenters in *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf*, Junas Salemamad Bhagad, was already directing a film on board using a VHS-C camera, way before we met him. We found out he had an interest in making a film because we talked to him. Junas and his collaborator, Siddik Umar Sanghar, were very involved in the idea of making a film using the ships as a vehicle. They were traveling like crazy on very complex and interesting itineraries between Somali ports, Salalah (Oman), Aden (Yemen) etc. It became fascinating for us to follow their journey. And we found ourselves in friendship and with the shared sense of making a film together. Alongside this, we continued collecting and talking to people about these videos they were shooting on their phones while at sea.

SC Let's talk about your specific approach to "found footage," for lack of a better term, and how *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* relates to your online video archiving platforms. This project was several years in the making, so what was the process by which you were compiling, collating and editing this material?

AS We don't use the term "found footage" — we like to say that it's much more than found — it's *sought out*. We went into the CCTV control room in the UK in 2008 to seek out some footage. Similarly, we were traveling and seeking. We traveled alongside — not on — the boats for many, many months and years, from Porbandar in Gujarat to Somalia, seeking out interesting, filmic clips and stories about what was happening. It was a very laborious process, but not like sitting in an archive or searching the internet for material online. We traveled through this landscape and people were showing us clips from East Africa, or something that happened to a particular boat in the northern Persian Gulf the previous week. It was a form of storytelling and exchange. People gave you a story with the clip, and this exchange was done over Bluetooth and not on the internet. Files were transferred from phone to phone. It was a slow process which began with traversing this world. At some point we realized that these clips were an amazing form of ephemeral media, constantly being deleted from people's phones because devices of the time had a two-gigabyte memory limit. We were collecting this material from the source before it disappeared, by literally sitting with the person who shot it.

SC I'd be curious to hear you talk a little bit about not being on the boat, about that aspect of remove as you start to compile this material. In *Bombay Tilts Down* (2022), where you're dealing with the surveillance camera, there's a different kind of remove, even though you have a more direct relationship to the recording device.

SA The remove is already there in *Khirkeeyaan* (2006). I'm not in the room as the filmmaker and I'm not saying, "rolling," or saying, "cut." Something else is happening. What is CAMP doing? We're doing quite a bit, but we're not calling the shots. This applies, as well, to the Palestine film — *Al Jaar Qabla Al Daar* (*The Neighbor Before the House*) (2009-11) — or *The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories* (2011). We're not there, but we're there. What are we enabling? It's formal and structural. We are, of course, there all the time but that image has been created through something that we set up because of which something else is happening.

AS We are saying that we can set up the infrastructure differently — to be intimate and produce a new kind of image.

SA For example, *Khirkeeyaan* is a mashup of two kinds of media that were everywhere in the streets of Delhi or in the city of Bombay at that point — one is CATV, which is just cable TV, and the other is CCTV. The apparatus of CATV, up to around 2012, was terrestrial cables and not the dish antenna. The network was built using coaxial cables. The cable TV provider would send out the signal through an RF modulator, and it went from one house to the next, to the next, but then at someone's window it would be tied to their metallic grill and there would be a splitter and a booster, and the signal would fork out from there and on to someone else's window. So, that was cable TV and the small — 14-inch or 17-inch — television set was in people's homes, even in shanties. Around 2008 or early 2006, just before *Khirkeeyaan*, there was a new infrastructure we started seeing in India, which was CCTV, with these tiny cameras that cost no more than 500 rupees (less than \$10 then). The cameras were suddenly everywhere — in the little grocery store, in the beauty salon, in the abortion clinic.

AS They were often next to each other, these two systems, the cable television and the surveillance camera. *Khirkeeyaan* is the meeting of the two systems, which allowed something new to happen...

—SA Everyone was talking about relational art, dialogical art, we had conversation pieces... And of course somewhere in the back of my head I had Bruce Nauman and Julia Scher and Nam June Paik. But it's not about my body, and it's not about space, and it's not that documentary image or ethnographic film in which, when the subaltern speak, they will speak about lack. *Khirkeeyaan* was proof of concept for me — that if you exit the frame, there will be some equality and the dynamic will change. In the Nepal episode [Episode 2: Nepal at Home], it begins with them talking to the girl whose house is bare because she's just arrived as a new migrant while the others are settled into their homes and lives in New Delhi. The older lady says to her, "Now we eat rice in gold," and she says, "I'm still eating rice in silver." That's poetry, right? They're not saying I'm still poor, I eat rice in stainless steel, while you're eating it on brass. When you exit, something else happens.

—RSJ **The unedited footage of the *Khirkeeyaan* episodes is publicly available on pad.ma. This might be a good moment to pivot and speak specifically about your archival practice and how the online platforms you have created dovetail with the works in the show.**

—SA We all had different things we wanted to do, out of which pad.ma was born. The lawyers wanted to challenge the Copyright Act and were very committed advocates for building a commons. They didn't want to let everything be seen as third world piracy. Everyone was taking on other roles: lawyers as cinephiles, artists as archivists and coders, and so on. Personally, I wanted documentary images to be archived so that you can watch them, study them, understand them, consider the different forms of address and ethics. Not the archive as a scene of redemption but a cautionary tale... don't repeat the mistakes and don't film the same thing. Look for the missing image.

—AS The film economy is very particular: you shoot the hell out of everything and then produce this one-hour document in which you often cut people off when you edit and then there's all this other material which could possibly tell a story beyond the remit of your film and beyond your authorial decisions in that moment. Authorial intentions expire but the footage could be continuously generative. Jan Gerber and Sebastian Lütgert in Berlin had just built a movie database called OxDB, which still exists, and to them too archiving footage was a great idea. In the end it's not so much about archiving existing cinema, but inventing a new cinema

and to push the boundaries of what it can be. Pad.ma is not only the leftover of the filming process, but really a starting point for something new.

—SA In 2007 we'd had about 30 years of video in India, independent video that you could make as a non-state actor. So, if we were to build an archive of the contemporary, what would the medium be? Video. And if it's a non-state archive, who are its custodians, caregivers, contributors? This community of artists, documentary filmmakers, collectives, cultural practitioners, sometimes NGOs. A non-state archive of the contemporary, that was the one-line motivation behind building pad.ma. But where is its home? Is it in a library or inside a university for which you need an access card? Is it pay-per-view? No, it had to be on the internet. Jan and Sebastian, when they coded it, created the possibility of time-based annotation. You could search using time codes and it would give you the in-point and out-point span, from which you could cull your own clip and add layered annotations.

—AS Now there are a lot of other reasons to use it, including online disinformation and lack of referencing. It links back to the source, which both AI and disinformation erase. Indiancine.ma was a sister project that came out of the centenary of Indian cinema and thinking with Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen's *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (1994). Within our configuration of cinephile lawyers, scholars and artists there was the idea that we could turn the archive of Indian cinema into footage we could rework, beyond existing individual films. The footage could be re-edited and could fertilize new imaginaries.

—SC **There's this question for me about the living archive that the online platforms represent, and the live image, or the live feed, that a CCTV camera represents. *Bombay Tilts Down* (2022) is not particularly an archival piece. *Khirkeeyaan* (2006) means something quite different today than it did when it was produced, primarily because of the rise of Zoom and how commonplace online conferencing has become in everybody's lives. A self-imposed surveillance state has proliferated, and *Bombay Tilts Down* emerges from this moment when all these symptoms of image culture collide.**

—SA Both the words you used, the live and the archive, are those that come most immediately to mind, because *it is* an archive. Bombay in those COVID lockdown months looked the way it did, and now it's a different city. You will not get that clear

sky ever again for a hundred years. The coastal road is done. Palais Royale will remain illegal and incomplete, but it did get built. The city has changed, and the four shanties that you see when the camera finally descends — the descent into the ordinary, to borrow Veena Das' coinage — they're still waiting on unfulfilled promises. The textile mill workers lived there and have been waging a struggle for more than thirty-five years now. The mills were in the east, but they lived in the west, in these four, very densely populated neighborhoods. As the mills closed, the promise was that the mill lands would be divided and redeveloped in thirds: one-third for social housing, one-third for green spaces, and one-third for private redevelopment by mill owners for the Trump Tower and what not. There was enough land for all of it. But those broken promises are the painful heart of what makes Bombay this extreme, unjust city. The voice of Vilas Ghogre, the Dalit poet and activist, tells us: "Our housing still remains a question." Why couldn't that happen through years of deeply engaged struggle, years of standing on the roof and saying, "I won't move!" and "Where's our house?" In all these senses, *Bombay Tilts Down* is an archive... the dead poets come up and we return to things like Masao Adachi's "landscape theory," *fukeiron*. To understand power, you want to understand politics, because reading power will show you what the state of politics is, but also where your politics can lie, if you can read that landscape. I think this happens in *Bombay Tilts Down*, and perhaps that is why the panorama of the city is through vertical tilts.

—AS But also, the social relations between people are being mediated — you are looking from strange places at each other. In that situation, how can you imagine another place from where to look? What kind of gaze could it be, where people are friendly with some weird camera in the sky, and can pull at it, almost like with a rope? You can point it towards them and push it down, and put it up, it's being controlled from the ground. It's a kind of triangulation: the camera is up there, the subjects are in front of the camera, and they're pulling it down towards them. The music was important, I think, because we were tired of ambient sound. What is the sound of the CCTV images?

—SA BamBoy (Tushar Adhav), who composed the soundtrack, grew up in the former mill neighborhood of Parel and he was into dubstep and grime and his own invention of rap. He was so hungry for the archive of Bombay poets and writers we laid out for him. They were the ancestors he did not yet know about.

—SC **Could you talk a little bit about the specific formal equation of *Bombay Tilts Down*, because it is both horizontal and vertical. There's something extremely powerful about how these vectors of horizontal and vertical work together as a sort of musical composition in its own right.**

○ Still from "From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf", CAMP, 2009–2013





—SA When *Bombay Tilts Down* begins, we’re zoomed quite far in on many of the screens and you’re looking at the horizon. Then you start seeing ships in the distance: big ships, many miles, maybe 20 miles, from the shore. What was revelatory for us, as we were taking these shots in the beginning to understand the form, was that when you’re that high up, say on the 36th floor, and you’re zooming in, your tilt-down will last 12 minutes. The distance you’re travelling as you’re tilting down, you are travelling from that big ship or oil rig 20 miles out at sea and then you’re coming to the fishing boats, which means you’re still on the sea for three minutes. By the fifth or sixth minute you’re seeing the coastal road, and the reclamation of land from the sea. Then it detects a scene of crime: this building belonging to this oligarch, or this building with its very checkered history, or another building standing on the property of a former textile mill. The layers blend and fade into each other... a new day, a new time, in a single take. When you’re watching it up close, it’s really like a brush. One day is painted over by another day, and you get that effect because the fades go from top to bottom to match the tilting action, so you really feel like something’s gone.

—AS One time is painted over another time. More broadly, a lot of politics has been about land. *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* leaves the shore, leaves the nation; their business is elsewhere, their boats operate between Salalah and Somalia. In *Khirkeeyaan*, it’s an old, feudal neighborhood with some migrants, and those lines cut across the land. In *Bombay Tilts Down* it’s the idea of the verticality of the development, but also about people who are settled below, and their long, durational relationship to what has become. These are, I think, quite important because aspects of each work as they’re reshaping our relationship to what used to be called land and everything in India, including caste, is linked to this battle for space.

—SA Charles and Ray Eames’ *Powers of Ten* (1977) keeps coming back to me, because ten to the power of this, and they’re on a planet, they’re in space, they’re clear of the Milky Way... Right now, we’re on the 36th floor and I want to ask myself — in the face of Musk and Trump and Ambani — where next? We need to keep that imagination alive.

10 Theses on the Archive

LAWRENCE LIANG,
SEBASTIAN LÜTGERT,
ASHOK SUKUMARAN
AND SHAINA ANAND
2010

1. DON'T WAIT FOR THE ARCHIVE

To not wait for the archive is often a practical response to the absence of archives or organized collections in many parts of the world. It also suggests that to wait for the state archive, or to otherwise wait to be archived, may not be a healthy option.

This need not imply that every collection or assembly be named an archive, or that all of art’s mnemonic practices be, once again, cast into an archival mould. It suggests instead that the archive can be deployed: as a set of shared curiosities, a local politics, or epistemological adventure. Where the archival impulse could be recast, for example, as the possibility of creating alliances: between text and image, between major and minor institutions, between filmmakers, photographers, writers and computers, between online and offline practices, between the remnant and what lies in reserve, between time and the untimely. These are alliances against dissipation and loss, but also against the enclosure, privatization and thematization of archives, which are issues of global, and immediate, concern.

The archive that results may not have common terms of measurement or value. It will include and reveal conflicts, and it will exacerbate the crises around property and authorship. It will remain radically incomplete, both in content and form. But it is nevertheless something that an interested observer will be able to traverse: riding on the linking ability of the sentence, the disruptive leaps of images, and the distributive capacity that is native to technology.

To not wait for the archive is to enter the river of time sideways, unannounced, just as the digital itself did, not so long ago.

2. ARCHIVES ARE NOT REDUCIBLE TO THE PARTICULAR FORMS THAT THEY TAKE

Archival initiatives are often a response to the monopolization of public memory by the state, and the political effects that flow from such mnemonic power. But attempts at creating an archive are not necessarily supplementing the memory machine of the state. The state archive is only one instance of the archive; it is not the definition of archives, but merely a form. As a particular form, state archives do not exhaust the concept of the archive. The task of creating an archive is neither to replicate nor to mimic state archives but to creatively produce a concept of the archive.

An archive actively creates new ways of thinking about how we access both our individual and collective experiences. An archive does not just supplement what is missing in state archives, it also renders what is present unstable.

Nietzsche defined happiness as the capacity or power to live one’s life actively — affirming the particularity or specificity of one’s moment in time. In doing so he refused to subsume the conceptual possibility of what it means to be happy under a general form of happiness.

When we subsume the concept of archives to its known form we are exhausted by it and suffer from archive fevers and archive fatigue. Contemporary archival impulses attempt to realize the potential of the archive as virtuality, and challenge us to think through the productive capacities of an archive beyond the blackmail of memory and amnesia.

The production of a concept is a provocation, a refusal to answer to the call of the known, and an opportunity to intensify our experiences. The archive is therefore not representational, it is creative, and the naming of something as an archive is not the end, but the beginning of a debate.



3. THE DIRECTION OF ARCHIVING WILL BE OUTWARD, NOT INWARD

We tend to think of archiving as the inward movement of collecting things: finding bits and pieces, bringing them together, guarding them in a safe and stable place. The model of this type of archiving is the fortress, or the burning library. This model already provides a clear sense of the limits, or ends, of the archive: fire, flooding, data loss.

Can we think of the archive differently? When Henri Langlois, founder of the *Cinémathèque Française*, stated that ‘the best way to preserve film is to project it’, he hinted at the very opposite philosophy of archiving: to actually use and consume things, to keep them in, or bring them into, circulation, and to literally throw them forth (Latin: *proicere*), into a shared and distributed process that operates based on diffusion, not consolidation, through imagination, not memory, and towards creation, not conservation.⁽¹⁾

Most of today’s digital archives seem to still adhere to the model of the fortress, even though, by definition, they no longer preserve precious and unique originals, but provide cheap and reproducible copies. These copies can be ‘thrown forth’ on a much larger scale, and with much greater efficiency, than Henri Langlois — or Walter Benjamin, theorist of analog reproduction, advocate of its technological potential and critic of its practical political use — would have ever imagined. To archive, and to be archived, can become massively popular.

The astonishingly resilient archiving practices around Napster or The Pirate Bay, and the even more virulent promise of actual or imaginary archives far beneath or beyond them — if, for one moment, we could step outside the age of copyright we all inhabit, and fully embrace the means of digital reproduction most of us have at our disposal — not just directly follow the trajectory traced by Benjamin and Langlois, but extend it to a point in the not-so-distant future where we will think of archiving primarily as the outward movement of distributing things: to create ad-hoc networks with mobile cores and dense peripheries, to trade our master copies for a myriad of offsite backups, and to practically abandon the technically obsolete dichotomy of providers and consumers.

The model of this type of archive, its philosophical concept, would be the virus, or the parasite. And again, this model also allows us to make a tentative assessment of the risks and dangers of outward archiving: failure to infect (attention deficit), slowdown of mutation (institutionalization), spread of antibiotics (rights management), death of the host (collapse of capitalism).

4. THE ARCHIVE IS NOT A SCENE OF REDEMPTION

Important as the political impulse of archives is, it is important to acknowledge that archives cannot be tied to a politics of redemption.

A large part of what may be thought of as progressive impulses in historiography is informed by a desire to redeem history through a logic of emancipation. The resurrection of the subaltern subject of history, the pitting of oral against written history and the hope that an engagement with the residue of the archive will lead to a transformative politics.

Benjamin’s theses on the philosophy of history has served as an important intellectual reference point for such initiatives. Benjamin says that:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.⁽²⁾

Benjamin does not hide the redemptive messianic thrust in his thesis: According to him ‘Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption’.⁽³⁾ Hope, in this formulation is primarily messianic, ‘For every second of time is the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter’.⁽⁴⁾ Elsewhere Derrida writes that ‘Spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive and ties it, like religion, like history, like science itself, to a very singular experience of the promise’.⁽⁵⁾

Archival initiatives have unconsciously continued this theological impulse. Their desire to document that which is absent, missing or forgotten stages a domain of politics which often privileges the experience of violence and trauma in a manner in which the experience of violence is that which destroys the realm of the ordinary and the everyday.

Thus if you examine the way that histories of the oppressed are written about, it were as if life is always subsumed under the threat of death, and living is forever condemned to a shadowy existence under the idea of a ‘bare life’. The subsumption of life into a condition of bareness is as illusory as aesthetic practices which attempt to redeem experience from the clutches of time and history.

If the archival imagination is to rescue itself from this politics of redemption, it will have to allow for a radical contingency of the ordinary. It will have to engage with ‘forms of life’ which exceed the totalizing gaze of the state as well its redemptive other. Radical contingency recognizes the possibilities of surprise in the archive and in the possibility that a descent into the ordinary suspends the urgent claims of emergencies.

5. THE ARCHIVE DEALS NOT ONLY WITH THE REMNANT BUT ALSO WITH THE RESERVE

Capitalistic production proceeds by isolating the extract from raw materials, producing the remnant, that which is left behind. And the archive, resisting obsolescence, is constituted through these remnants. This is one common view. But there is another place in the contemporary where the role and responsibility of the archive may lie. That is, in addressing the reserve, that which is not yet deployed. And that which, like residue, is cast in shadow.

In surveillance systems for example, we are forced to rethink the idea of ‘waste.’ Those millions of hours a day of CCTV images are not just the leftovers of the surveillance machine, they are its constitutive accumulation. They are the mass which waits for the event, and it is this mass that produces the threat.

Following Michel Serres we could describe this mass as having ‘abuse value’, something that precedes use value or exchange value.⁽⁶⁾ Of course, abuse value and exchange value can change hands. The line between residue and reserve can be unstable. Suddenly, the nuclear arsenal is rendered waste, and is sold as junk. Our accumulated ideas expire. But to look to the reserve has a strategic value for the archive. It is a way of addressing capital not only as the production of profit from labour and commodities, but as the accumulation that can be used for speculation, and to extract rent.

The archive in this sense is sympathetic to those practices which sabotage capitalistic accumulation, and those which have an interest in the future, and in the ‘unrealised.’



6. HISTORIANS HAVE MERELY INTERPRETED THE ARCHIVE. THE POINT HOWEVER IS TO FEEL IT.

Archives have traditionally been the dwelling places of historians, and the epistemic conceit of history has always been housed in the dust of the archives. But in the last decade we have also seen an explosion of interest in archives from software engineers, artists, philosophers, media practitioners, filmmakers and performers.

Historians have responded by resorting to a disciplinary defensiveness that relies on a language of ‘the authority of knowledge’ and ‘rigor’ while artists retreat to a zone of blissful aesthetic transcendence. There is something incredibly comfortable about this zone where history continues to produce ‘social facts’ and art produces ‘affect.’ Claims of incommensurability provide a ‘euphoric security’ and to think of the affective potential of the archive is to disturb the ‘euphoric security’ which denies conditions of knowing and possibilities of acting beyond that which is already known.

Rather than collapsing into a reinforcement of disciplinary fortresses that preclude outsiders and jealously guard the authenticity of knowledge and experience by historians, or resorting to a language of hostile takings by activists and artists, how do we think of the encroachments into the archives as an expansion of our sensibilities and the sensibilities of the archive. Archives are not threats, they are invitations.

Lakhmi Chand, a writer based in the media lab of the Cybermohalla in New Delhi asks ‘*Kya kshamta ke distribution ko disturb karta hai Media?*’: Does media disturb the distribution of ‘capacity’ or ‘potential?’⁽⁷⁾

The invitation to think of the ability to disturb the kshamta of the archive seems to be marked by a different relation to time. The idea of capacity marks a time: This time is neither in the past nor in the future though they may be related, it is a marker of the present — or exactly where you are.

Anna Akhmatova writes in Requiem:

In the dreadful years of the Yezhov terror I spent
seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad.
One day someone “identified” me. Then a woman
standing behind me, blue with cold, who of course
had never heard my name, woke from that trance
characteristic of us all and asked in my ear
(there, everyone spoke in whispers):

— Ah, can you describe this?

And I said:

— I can.

Then something like a tormented smile passed
over what had once been her face.

1st April 1957 ⁽⁸⁾

The question ‘can you describe this?’ was not a question about the possession of a skill, or even the possibility of language to speak of certain things under certain conditions. It is about a moment or a context that arises in which anyone can be faced with the question of: Can you? And they must either answer ‘I can’ or ‘I can’t’.

How do we think through the ways that archives challenge us to think about the experience of potentiality? To dwell in the affective potential of the archive is to think of how archives can animate intensities.

Brian Massumi argues that affect is critically related to intensity. We are always aware of our potential to affect or to be affected, but this potential also seems just out of our reach. Perhaps because it isn’t there actually — only virtually. Massumi suggests that:

Maybe if we can take little, practical, experimental, strategic measures to expand our emotional register, or limber up our thinking, we can access more of our potential at each step, have more of it actually available. Having more potentials available intensifies our life. We’re not enslaved by our situations. [...] Our degree of freedom at any one time corresponds to how much of our experiential “depth” we can access towards a next step — how intensely we are living and moving.⁽⁹⁾

How do we imagine archival practices as the little practical, experimental and strategic measures that we pursue to expand our sensibilities. The affective potential of archives is therefore both a political as well as an aesthetic question in its ability to activate one’s capacity to act, and it is on the very faculty of imagination and possibility that this conflict is located.

7. THE IMAGE IS NOT JUST THE VISIBLE, THE TEXT IS NOT JUST THE SAYABLE

Serge Daney makes a famous distinction between the image and the visual. The image is what still holds out against an experience of vision and the visual. The visual is just the optical verification of what we may know already, or which may be read, or deciphered through reflexes of reading. The image, on the other hand, is alterity.⁽¹⁰⁾ Jacques Ranciere, in *The Future of the Image*, will develop this by saying that images are not restricted to the visible. He will reject the subordination of the image to the text, of material to history, and of affect to meaning. He suggests that the commonest regime of images is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, (between image and text, between presence and inscription) a relationship that plays on both the analogy AND dissemblance between them. But, of course, ‘this relationship by no means requires the two terms to be materially present. The visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes, words deploy a visibility that can be blinding’.⁽¹¹⁾ Ranciere thus invents the ‘sentence-image’. The sentence-image is a form that could appear in a novel, equally as it could appear in a cinematic montage. In it, the ‘sentence-function’ provides continuity against chaos, while the ‘image-function’ disrupts consensus.⁽¹²⁾ The sentence-image provides a way to think across the modernist incommensurability of painting, literary works, and films, i.e. their autonomy. It allows us to acknowledge their appropriations, invasions and seductions of each other. The archive assembles another site where we can conceive, differently or similarly, of the connections and the distance between the functions of writing and of images. It suggests the possibility of art, if art is the alteration of resemblances between the two. With the introduction of software, we have yet another possibility for the disjunct: a third heterogeneity, another possible element of surprise. And perhaps to extend our thesis then: the software is not just the searchable, or the database.

8. THE PAST OF THE EXHIBITION THREATENS THE FUTURE OF THE ARCHIVE

What is the relation between memory and its display? Between the archive, ‘the system that governs the appearances of statements’ and a culture of appearances?⁽¹³⁾ In ‘Archives of Modern Art’ a 2002 essay for the journal *October*, Hal Foster develops three useful stages of the museum as the site of memory, in modern art.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the first stage, in the mid-1800’s, Baudelaire writes that ‘Art is the mnemotechny of the beautiful’.⁽¹⁵⁾ Which with Manet for example, has become the art of outright citation. Here art is the art of memory, and the museum is its architecture.

The second moment occurs with Adorno’s essay, the ‘Valery Proust Museum’, which marks a point of suspicion of the museum as the ‘mausoleum’ of art. The museum is where art goes to die. But, it is also the site for a redemptive project of ‘reanimation’.

The third moment occurs when this reanimation is possible through other means, i.e. through Benjamin’s mechanical reproduction. The key difference here is between Benjamin’s reproduction, which threatens the museum, and Malraux’s, which expands it infinitely. For Malraux, it is precisely the destruction of the aura which becomes a basis for the imagination of the museum without end.

But there are ‘problems of translation’, gaps, between Malraux’s *Musée Imaginaire*, its english name the ‘Museum without Walls’, and the concept of a ‘Museum without End’. Which on the one hand, have fed many a modernist museum architect’s fantasy of endless circulation, and views through the glass, while on the other, continue to offer the promise that art’s institutional structures can have a relationship with the world. Foster’s account of modern western art’s archive ends with a split in art itself, between its display function that appears in spectacular form in the exhibition, and its memory function, which retreats into the archive.

The challenge for the archive, which today threatens the exhibition with its own sensual ability to relink and rearticulate these two functions, is how not to end up as a spiral ramp, or as a flea market. In other words, how to avoid the tyranny of the two historical ‘freedoms’: one, the (modernist) formal strategies of audience participation in the spectacle, and two, the (postmodernist) eclecticism in which anything, included and curated, could be accorded ‘exhibition-value’. Or we could put it this way: how does the archive avoid the confusion, that persists in the exhibition (as Irit Rogoff notes about the Tate), between accessibility as entertainment and marketing strategy, and access as something deeper, as something that is ‘closer to the question’.⁽¹⁶⁾



9. ARCHIVES ARE GOVERNED BY THE LAWS OF INTELLECTUAL PROPRIETY AS OPPOSED TO PROPERTY

As the monetary value of the global information economy gains more importance, the abstract value of images gets articulated within the language of property and rights. The language of intellectual property normativizes our relationship to knowledge and culture by naturalizing and universalizing narrow ideas of authorship, ownership and property. This language has extended from the world of software databases to traditional archives where copyright serves as Kafka’s gatekeeper and the use of the archive becomes a question of rights management.

Beyond the status of the archive as property lies the properties of the archive which can destabilize and complicate received notions of rights.

They establish their own code of conduct, frame their own rules of access, and develop an ethics of the archive that are beyond the scope of legal imagination. If the archive is a scene of invention then what norms do they develop for themselves which do not take for granted a predetermined language of rights. How do practices of archiving destabilize ideas of property while at the same time remaining stubbornly insistent on questions of ‘propriety’.

Intellectual propriety does not establish any universal rule of how archives collect and make available their artifacts. It recognizes that the archivist plays a dual role: they act as the trustees of the memories of other people, and as the transmitters of public knowledge. This schizophrenic impulse prevents any easy settling into a single norm.

Propriety does not name a set of legislated principles of proper etiquette, instead it builds on the care and responsibility that archivists display in their preservation of cultural and historical objects. The digital archive translates this ethic of care into an understanding of the ecology of knowledge, and the modes through which such an ecology is sustained through a logic of distribution, rather than mere accumulation.

It remembers the history of archivists being described as pirates, and scans its own records, files and database to produce an account of itself. In declaring their autonomy, archives seek to produce norms beyond normativity, and ethical claims beyond the law.

10. TIME IS NOT OUTSIDE OF THE ARCHIVE: IT IS IN IT

In his history of the book and print cultures, historian Adrian Johns argues against what has traditionally been seen as the ‘typographical fixity’ which was established by the print revolution.⁽¹⁷⁾ Earlier scholars had argued that scribal cultures were marked by all kinds of mistakes of the hand, and the book was therefore not a stable object of knowledge until the emergence of print technology.

Adrian Johns demonstrates the fallacy of this assumption by looking at the various conflicts that erupted with print technology, and far from ensuring fixity or authority, the early history of printing was marked by uncertainty. For Johns, the authority of knowledge is not an inherent quality, but a transitive one. It is a question that cannot be divorced from the technologies that alter our senses, our perception and our experience of knowledge.

Rather than speaking about ‘authority’ as something that is intrinsic to either a particular mode of production of ‘knowledge’ or to any technological form, John’s work demonstrates how it would be more useful to consider the range of knowledge apparatuses which come into play to establish authority.

The preconditions of knowledge cannot easily be made the object of knowledge. It is a matter of making evident or making known the structures of knowledge itself, which emerge in ways that provide definitive proof of the imperfectability of knowledge.

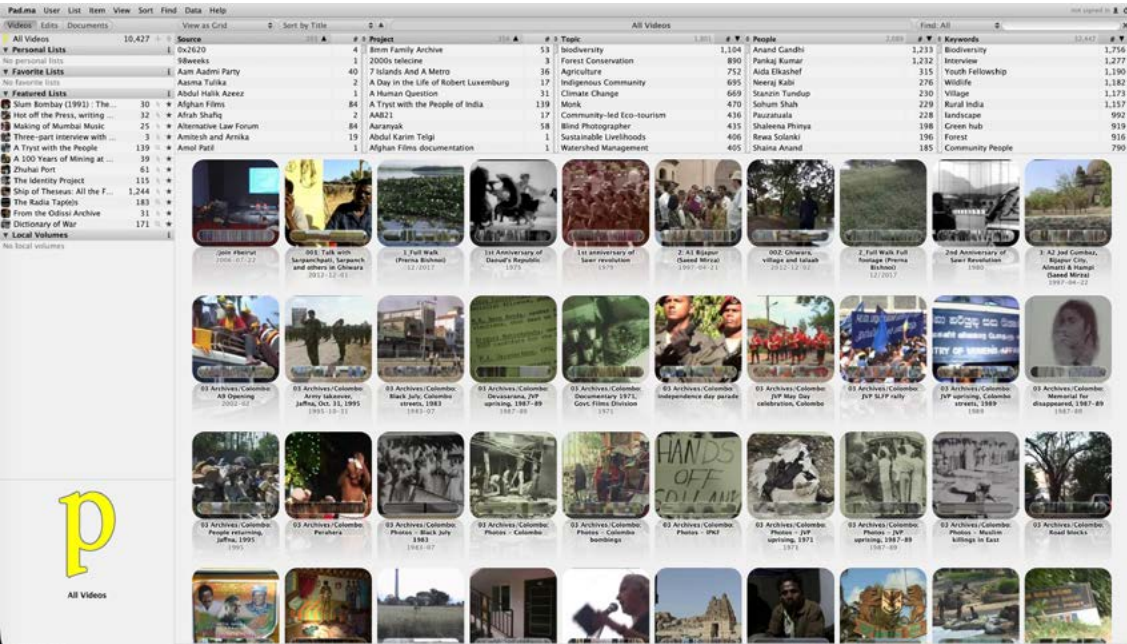
Archives are also apparatuses which engage our experience and perception of time. This is particularly true for archives of images, since photography and cinema are also apparatuses that alter our sense of time. The traditional understanding of an archive as a space that collects lost time sees the experience of time as somehow being external to the archive itself. It loses sight of the fact that the archive is also where objects acquire their historical value as a result of being placed within an apparatus of time. The imagination of a video archive then plays with multiple senses of the unfolding of time.

In her reflections on the relationship between photography, cinema and the archive, Mary Anne Doane states that photography and film have a fundamental archival instinct embedded in them.⁽¹⁸⁾ And yet this archival nature is also ridden with paradox, because of the relationship of the moving image to the contingent. The presence of the contingent, the ephemeral, and the unintended are all aspects of cinematic time, and the challenge of the moving image as archive is the recovery of lost time, but within the cinematic.

The recovery of the lost time of cinema and the contingent can be captured through an experience of cinephilia, for what cinephilia names is the moment when the contingent takes on meaning — perhaps a private and idiosyncratic meaning, but one in which the love for the image expresses itself through a grappling with the ephemeral.

The archive is therefore an apparatus of time, but its relation to time is not guaranteed or inherent, it is transitive and has to be grafted. The archive of the moving image grasps this problem in an erotic and sensuous fashion, grafting the experience of time as an act of love.

Negri speaks in *Insurgencies* about the love of time: These two registers, of love — of time, and of cinema allow us to think about the cinematic and archival apparatus of time, and the way they shape our relation to our time and the time of the image.⁽¹⁹⁾



User interface for Pad.ma (<https://pad.ma/grid/title>)

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