Acknowledgments

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Introduction

ARCHIVE FEVER, ARCHIVE STORIES

[L’archive] est difficile dans sa materialité.

—Arlette Farge, Le goût de l’archive (1989)

[The archivist] is the keeper of countless objects of desire.


In an era when the echo chambers of cyberspace have given a whole new dimension to the concept of the archive, questions about the relationship between evidence and history are at the forefront not just of academic discourse but of public debate across the world. From undergraduate classrooms to the trials of Holocaust deniers to the tribunals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to the very public revelations of plagiarism among prominent popular historians in the United States, the relationship between fact and fiction, truth and lies, is a matter of heated discussion. While charges of inaccurate footnoting may have done little to damage the reputation of a public historian like the late Stephen Ambrose (whose book The Wild Blue drew fire for borrowing sentences and phrases from another historian without proper attribution), it remains to be seen what impact the public inquiry into Michael Bellesiles (who resigned his position at Emory University over charges of fraud in connection with his 2000 book Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture) will do to his scholarly career—and to the reputation of historians as archival truth-tellers—in the long term. Elsewhere in the world, debates that engage the challenges of “telling the truth about history” have had very real political and material consequences. In South Africa, for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission actively...
engaged with the question of archival evidence, deliberately choosing to "wrestle with ... notions of truth in relation to factual or forensic truth"—and producing in the process a nationwide public debate about the nature of citizenship after apartheid. Such a project was and is tied to "making public memory, publicly," and as such it often pits conventional forms of knowledge about the past (History) against the claims of groups who have typically been disenfranchised by dominant regimes of truth but who are also seeking political rights—in ways that endanger the status and livelihoods of some, traumatize others, and make visible the extent to which national identities are founded on archival elisions, distortions, and secrets. The public contretemps in South Africa has been echoed in trials over tribal rights and indigenous sovereignty from Canada to New Zealand, in debates over memory and forgetting in postwar contexts from Germany to Korea, and, increasingly, in human rights claims from Bosnia to Bhopal—raising provocative questions about the nature and use of archives and the stories they have to tell, not just about the past, but in and for the present as well.

Equally striking is the extent to which in the new millennium "archive stories" are to be found in domains outside the academy and the law. For although historians arguably have the most at stake in these debates—given their historical attachment to archival evidence for their professional self-definition and legitimacy—neither professional practitioners of the discipline nor the political elites who often rely on them are the only ones engaging with the limits and possibilities of the archive as a site of knowledge production, an arbiter of truth, and a mechanism for shaping the narratives of history. Take the case of the Lower East Side Squatters and Homesteaders Archive Project, which recently received a grant from the state of New York to create and maintain an archival collection documenting the culture of squatters as well as their battles with developers and city officials. As one of the group’s founders told the New York Times, “we want this archive to be a collection that anyone, friend or foe, can access to write our history." The squatters’ project is one of hundreds, perhaps thousands of similar archive enterprises taken up by groups who believe that their histories have not been written because they have not been considered legitimate subjects of history—and hence of archivization per se. The fact that many of these archive entrepreneurs rely on the Internet as their storage space represents a tremendous challenge to the basic assumptions of archival fixity and materiality, as well as to the historian’s craft itself. At the same time, recourse to the virtual archive does not mean that their posterity is any more secure. As Roy Rosenzweig reminds us, while the digital age may make for “a world of unheard-of historical abundance” and hence perhaps less elitist histories, the archives which cyberspace houses are no less fragile or vulnerable to disappearance, for a variety of technological, economic, and political reasons.

Of course, archives—that is, traces of the past collected either intentionally or haphazardly as “evidence”—are by no means limited to official spaces or state repositories. They have been housed in a variety of unofficial sites since time immemorial. From the Rosetta stone to medieval tapestry to Victorian house museums to African body tattoos, scholars have been “reading” historical evidence off of any number of different archival incarnations for centuries, though the extent to which a still quite positivist contemporary historical profession (both in the West and outside it) recognizes all such traces as legitimate archival sources is a matter of some debate. The respectability which oral history has gradually gained in the past twenty five years, together with the emergent phenomenon of the Internet-as-archive, has helped to prize open canonical notions of what counts as an archive and what role the provenance of historical artifacts of all kinds should play in History as a disciplinary project. Nor is what Jacques Derrida has famously called “archive fever”—that passion for origins and genealogies which, he suggests, is an inheritance from the ancient world—limited to denizens of the street or the Internet. The following is an excerpt from the script of Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones, in which the young Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi goes to the Archives Library at the Jedi Temple to consult with Madame Jocasta Nu, the resident archivist:

JOCASTA NU: Are you having a problem, Master Kenobi?

OBI-WAN: Yes, I’m trying to find a planet system called Kamino. It doesn’t seem to show upon any of the archive charts.

JOCASTA NU: Kamino? It’s not a system I’m familiar with ... Let me see ... Are you sure you have the right co-ordinates?

OBI-WAN (nodding): According to my information, it should be in this quadrant somewhere ... just south of the Rishi Maze.

JOCASTA NU: No co-ordinates? It sounds like the kind of directions you’d get from a street tout ... some old miner or Furbog trader ... Are you sure it exists?

OBI-WAN: Absolutely.
JOCASTA NU: Let me do a gravitational scan. . . . There are some inconsistencies here. Maybe the planet you’re looking for was destroyed.

OBI-WAN: Wouldn’t that be on record?

JOCASTA NU: It ought to be. Unless it was very recent. (shakes her head) I have to say it, but it looks like the system you’re searching for doesn’t exist.

OBI-WAN: That’s impossible. . . . perhaps the archives are incomplete.

JOCASTA NU: The archives are comprehensive and totally secure, my young Jedi. One thing you may be absolutely sure of—if an item does not appear in our records, it does not exist?

Not only is Obi-Wan Kenobi schooled in archival logic as part of his training in the arts of war, he comes to the archive with “common” knowledge (of the kind he might get “from a street tout”)—only to be reassured of the total knowledge which the official archive guarantees. An equally revealing example of the popularity of the archive idiom is the fall 2003 Marshall Field’s Direct catalog, where shoppers are encouraged to buy vintage clothing and other items from “The Archive” collection with the following copy: “Step into the Marshall Field’s Direct archive, a stylish collection inspired by the landmark Marshall Field’s Store at Chicago’s State Street. On these pages you’ll find faithful replications of architecture, history, and traditions, reinvented for today’s eye.” The availability of archival sources of all kinds online arguably makes us all archivists now. And, given the convergence of virtual archives and consumers—at least potentially—as well.

What Wired magazine has called “Go~lenmania” is thus at least partially akin to Derrida’s archive fever, with everyone acting as his or her own arkheian. The short-term and long-term political ramifications of that convergence have yet to be fully historicized in this, the information age, even as the connections between archiving information, accessing knowledge, and working the public sphere are proving crucial to political movements of all kinds. As Wes Boyd of MoveOn.org put it: “Google rocks. It raises my perceived IQ by at least 20 points. I can pull a reference or quote in seconds, and I can figure out who I’m talking to and what they are known for—a key feature for those of us who are name-memory challenged.” But the playfulness with which so many different kinds of popular media are representing the archive should not prevent us from appreciating the ways in which contemporary archive fever is bound up with convictions about the power of science to get at truth. Indeed, the most popular archive stories of the new millennium are shaped by a belief in the capacity of material evidence to create and sustain tests of verifiability. From the consistently high ratings of the various CSI television shows in America to the BBC’s Waking the Dead to mass popular fiction like Patricia Cornwell’s Kay Scarpetta novels to “high” literature like Michael Onodaite’s Anil’s Ghost—all of these point to an investment in forensics and a deep-seated faith in the capacity of science to read certain types of archives (corpses, crime scenes, DNA samples) that are highly material and embodied, in contrast to or perhaps in tension with the ascendancy of the kind of virtual space that Internet access has accelerated at a dizzying pace in the last decade. The resurgence of this positivism in popular generic forms, together with the heightened authority of archival cultures of law in the global arena since 1945, means that the archive (as a trope, but also as a ideological and material resource) has acquired a new kind of sacral character in a variety of contemporary domains. This sacralization occurs as more and more people seek and help to create access to a more democratic vision of the archive: that is, as different kinds of archival subjects and archive users proliferate, with their own archive stories to tell.

As the cultural theorists Larry Grossberg and Meaghan Morris have so trenchantly noted, this fear of the disappearance of “everything” into daily life—of which the democratization of the archive is just one instantiation—is not new to the twenty-first century, though it is perhaps especially threatening to contemporary historians at accelerating moments of interdisciplinarity because of the ways it strikes at the heart of the evidentiary elitism of the discipline. This is a fear which scholars engaged in oral histories have had especially to confront. In her study of memory and the Third Reich, Tina Campt addresses the anxieties which some academics feel at the possibility that “everything” might be an archive—including the comparatively slight oral histories of two Afro-Germans she uses. Campt insists that “the minute” and the “monumental” must be in constant dialogue, arguing that such anxieties say more about canonical disciplinary notions than about the legitimacy of memory work as an archive (especially if we understand that evidence is not facticity per se). Unease about the possibility that the archive is everywhere and hence nowhere is strikingly at odds, then, with the consumerist exuberance of the Marshall Field’s catalog—even as some of the most democratic of archives still arrive at our sightlines as if they were shrink-wrapped, that is, with very
little trace of how they were compiled, massaged, and otherwise packaged for mass consumption (Campt’s excepted).

This liberal triumphalist (and one must add, mass market–capitalist) incarnation of the archive at the height of globalization rhetorics and practices makes it all the more imperative that we talk frankly and openly about the archives and the encounters that we as scholars and especially as historians have with them. For archives do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretive applications. Though their own origins are often occluded and the exclusions on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures—pressures which leave traces and which render archives themselves artifacts of history. By foregrounding a variety of archive stories, this collection aims to unpack some of those histories and to begin to diffuse the aura which now more than ever surrounds the notion of “real” archives, especially those with which historians have dealt. The essays that follow try to denaturalize the presumptive boundaries of official archive space, historicize the production of some well-known and not-so-well-known archival collections, and point to some contemporary political consequences of archive fever. Taken as a whole, *Archive Stories* contends that the claims to objectivity associated with the traditional archive pose a challenge which must be met in part by telling stories about its provenance, its histories, its effect on its users, and above all, its power to shape all the narratives which are to be “found” there. What follows, in other words, are not merely histories or genealogies of archives or “the archive” but, rather, self-conscious ethnographies of one of the chief investigative foundations of History as a discipline.

Our emphasis on the need for archive stories—narratives about how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them to write history—follows in the first instance from a move in the Western academy (and also beyond it) to recognize that all archives are “figured.” That is, they all have dynamic relationships, not just to the past and the present, but to the fate of regimes, the physical environment, the serendipity of bureaucrats, and the care and neglect of archivists as well. To some extent the work of Michel Foucault, with its focus on archives as “documents of exclusion” and “monuments to particular configurations of power,” is responsible for the shifting fortunes of archival discourse in the academy. According to Carolyn Steedman, the appeal of archives is also inspired by the modern romance of dust: that “immutable, obdurate set of beliefs about the material world, past and present”—whether emanating from the state or from a rag rug—which has its own passions, its own dramas, its own dreams. Postcolonial studies and theory have provided another important fillip to the notion that archives are not just sources or repositories as such, but constitute full-fledged historical actors as well. This is in part because of the ways in which the colonial archives served as technologies of imperial power, conquest, and hegemony. In the context of Spanish-speaking empires, both Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Diana Taylor have demonstrated how histories of writing have helped to establish scales of credibility and legitimacy against which societies with either oral or expressive traditions (or both) were deemed inferior. These maneuvers effectively consolidated performance and embodiment as “native” and the text and especially the alphabet as European—and, by extension, civilized. The regimes of credibility and truth secured by later European imperial dominion were different in degree rather than kind, as the work of Ann Stoler and Nicholas Dirks has shown for the Dutch East Indies and British India respectively. Renewed attention to the question of the archive has also been motivated by postcolonial history itself, whether in South Africa where “many established ideas about the nature and location of the archive are under challenge,” or in a less well-known but equally compelling context like the Virgin Islands, where *sankofa* (reclamation) sentiments inspired by the disappearance of historical records and hence of community histories have prompted provocative debates about the very possibility of memory without official archives.

But our insistence on the necessity of talking about the backstage of archives—how they are constructed, policed, experienced, and manipulated—stems equally from our sense that even the most sophisticated work on archives has not gone far enough in addressing head-on the lingering presumptions about, and attachments to, the claims to objectivity with which archives have historically been synonymous, at least since the extended moment of positivistic science on the German model in the nineteenth century. *Archive Stories* is motivated, in other words, by our conviction that history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval (the kind of empiricism reflected in the CSR paradigm as well as in public debates about plagiarismin or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission)
but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention—processes set in motion by, among other things, one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there. This may seem a self-evident, even a pedestrian claim; and indeed, many if not most historians operate under the assumption that history is a highly interpretive act—even as critics equate such views with the death of history or worse, “the killing of history” per se.24 This is no mere rhetorical flourish, of course, since what archives hold and what they do not has implications not just for the writing of history but for the political fortunes of both minority and dominant communities the world over, with public contests over Maori history in New Zealand and the rewriting of textbooks shorn of anything but Hindutva politics in India standing as just two of many “global” examples.25 But whether historians concede or fully countenance the impact of such contingencies on their work is another question. They certainly rarely speak of them, and even more rarely do they do so in print—though they are quite ready and even eager to tell their archive stories when asked, as I discovered in the course of work on this book.

Many of the tales I have heard—prompted by the remark “I’m working on a book about people’s archive stories”—have been structured around the “boot-camp” narrative and involve the drama of getting to archives, living in terrible digs while working there, and enduring dilapidated work conditions and capricious archivists.26 Most have been framed by confessions of archive pleasure—what one historian called the “thrill of the archival ‘pay dirt’ moment”—or, alternatively, confessions of archive aversion.27 For some scholars, it is memories of the labor of research that are evoked by the subject of archive stories, whether they think of such labor as trawling, reading card catalogs against the grain, or engaging in a dreaded solitary existence. Others wax rapturous about the capacity of archival discoveries to bring one into contact with the past. In the context of a public discussion of archive stories, for example, a historian of early modern France I know recounted coming upon the collar of a priest in a Jansenist archive, folded and secreted inside layers of powder. She surmised that the authorities had arrested him and seized his collar, the material presence of which she found “a breathtaking and amazing thing.”28 And she added that its power had everything to do with finding it there, in the archive, an observation which echoes Achille Mbembe’s conviction that “the archive has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension”—that is, a material presence which structures access, imposes its own meanings on the evidence contained therein, and watches over users both literally and figuratively.29 For if the official archive is a workplace, it is also a panopticon whose claim to total knowledge is matched by its capacity for total surveillance. This makes archive users into stealth strategists and even, if only figuratively, into thieves as well. More than one scholar has confessed to me a desire to take objects from the archive—a photo of Tito signed by Churchill, a nineteenth-century pencil dangling from a hand-written diary—and who knows how many others have actually done so.

Given these conditions of archive creation, surveillance, and use, what is at risk in the variety of archive stories we have collected here is not merely the claims to objectivity which continue to underwrite the production of history and especially to endow it with its virtually unparalleled legitimacy as an arbiter of truth in a variety of public arenas, but also historians’ comparative silence about the personal, structural, and political pressures which the archive places on the histories they end up writing—as well as those they do not. Crucial to the task of re-materializing the multiple contingencies of history writing is the project of historicizing the emergence of state and local archives; interrogating how archive logics work, what subjects they produce, and which they silence in specific historical and cultural contexts; enumerating the ways in which archival work is an embodied experience, one shaped as much by national identity, gender, race, and class as by professional training or credentials; pressing the limits of disciplinary boundaries to consider what kind of archive work different genres, material artifacts, and aesthetic forms do, for what audiences and to what ends; recognizing, and accounting for, the relative evidentiary weight given to sources of various types and what Suvir Kaul calls “the play of rhetorical difference in each archive”; and not least, imagining counter-histories of the archive and its regimes of truth in a variety of times and places.30

We open in Part I with an emphasis on “Close Encounters: The Archive as Contact Zone” by foregrounding a variety of personal archive stories: testimonies about the embodied experiences of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and political encounters between the scholar and the archive itself. We do so because of our belief that the material spaces of archives
exert tremendous and largely unspoken influences on their users, producing knowledges and insights which in turn impact the narratives they craft and the histories they write. We do so too because as I have suggested above, there is a marked contrast between the silences in print about these experiences and the volubility of historians about their archive stories when asked. Durba Ghosh’s account of her research in Britain and India, for example, dramatizes the ways in which gender and race as forms of embodiment can mark the experience of the historian, subjecting her to certain kinds of surveillance and even limiting her access to documents. As an “Indian” woman seeking evidence of Indian women either silenced or marginalized by the colonial state and its archives, she was not only reading the archives, the archives were also reading her. As important, her determination to find traces of interracial sex in the archives called into question the legitimacy of the topic and her very respectability in the confines of a variety of archival spaces—spaces in which archivists she encountered were reacting as much to the imprint of contemporary anxieties about race and sexuality as they were to the pressure which unspoken colonial histories continue to exert on the present.

In his stories about research in Uzbekistan Jeff Sahadeo explicitly identifies the archive as a contact zone—in this context, as a site where past and present converge in the architecture of the space itself, whose very materiality is linked to regime changes past, present, and future. Sahadeo’s account of the creation of the Central State Archive (which sports a sign over the door that reads “without the past there is no future”) focuses on its Soviet and post-Soviet histories by way of setting the stage for a larger discussion of contemporary conditions of work in and on Central Asia. Here again, access and its denial rest on, among other things, one’s capacity to navigate highly charged relationships between local archivists and scholars. In terms of embodiment, this involves countenancing the starkly privileged lives which even Western graduate students lead compared with archivists who might be willing to receive chocolate or magazines from researchers—if not in direct exchange for services, then at least in recognition of the asymmetries of power and material opportunities between them, at both micro and macro levels (as reflected in requests for help with obtaining prescription drugs and emigration). Taken together, Ghosh and Sahadeo remind us of the varied economies of desire—those systems of material and symbolic power which structure experiences of yearning for and seduction by “the past”—at the heart of archival encounters.

If desire is in fact a crucial constituent of the archive experience, discourses of rationalization—of archive logics—have helped to obscure this dynamic at least since the nineteenth century, the heyday of objectivist claims about evidence and identity. Craig Robertson’s piece on the passport and its archives makes clear the role of archive rationalization in establishing the very grounds of modern identity, both individual and national. He does so in part by parodying the surveillance regime of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration where, post-9/11, even an official NARA card does not prevent the guards from screening his newspaper (though not his umbrella). But Robertson also links his archive story to the history of exclusion as embodied by the passport, the would-be panoptical technology for archiving personal identification via a catalog of bodily characteristics. He does so, significantly, not through an exercise in empirical research, but through a discursive reading of the fictions of access and transparency that modern bureaucracies perform. If the archive is a contact zone between past and present as well as between researchers and structures of local, national, and global power, the logistical difficulties Robertson faces as he tries to gain access to the materials he needs return us time and again to the bureaucratic nature of archival encounters—and to the ways in which the administrative apparatus of archives can limit the stories that are told. Indeed, the story of how archives come to be rationalized can and should be part of the histories we write, precisely because the literal, physical encounter with them can have such a profound effect on how one comes to understand and appreciate the histories they throw into bold relief.

This is the thrust of Tony Ballantyne’s essay, which describes his experience of reading the archives of “Mr. Peal” in New Zealand as a graduate student trained at Cambridge trying to come to terms with the limits of national boundaries for understanding the circulation of colonial and imperial knowledge. Ballantyne reconstructs not only the multi-sited provenance of Peal’s papers but also the impact which his own intellectual biography had on how he saw what he found as a way of re-materializing Peal and the circuits of production which undergirded Ballantyne’s dissertation and later monograph, Orientalism and Race. Though not as graphic as, say, Ghosh, about the bodily experience of his encounter, Ballantyne provides an instructive example of how the face-to-face encounter with archival collections can raise the intellectual stakes of a project, particularly when that encounter is embedded in larger debates about postcolo-
nial identity, indigenous sovereignty, and bi-culturalism of the kind which have shaped the National Library in which the Peal collection is housed.

The two essays which bring Part I to a close reflect rather differently on the question of how contact with "the archive" and what is found there shape the stories which historians can tell. Horacio N. Roque Ramírez's piece on Teresita la Campesina—the Latina transgender artist who was fifty-five years old and living with AIDS when he first met her—under­scores the power of oral history to queer conventional notions of what counts as an archive. Her testimonials constitute "living evidence," not just of her personal historical experiences, but also of how imperfectly either Latino historiography or even lesbian and gay histories have been able to capture stories like hers. In part because he resists reducing Teresita simply to "an archive," Roque Ramírez deftly captures her lived expe­riences and the way she works actively to frame them into a historical narrative of her own making. No doubt it would have pleased Teresita to know that her autobiography stands as a challenge to the presumption that archives must be disinterested and disembodied, as well as testimony to the fact that archives of ordinary people are, if not ubiquitous, then at least eminently "creatable" out of personal memories and reflections. Her "back talk" underscores the elasticity of the concept of the archive, and not just as a domain open to subjects beyond the privileged—though this kind of democratizing practice is clearly entailed by the claims which oral history makes on traditional assumptions about what kind of speech, what kind of talk, can count as archival. It is also, of course, evidence of what Thomas Osborne calls the "ordinariness of the archive" as well.11 Teresita's "archive talk" is, in short, lively evidence indeed of the ways in which all archival sources are at once primary and secondary sources: neither raw nor fully cooked, to borrow an ethnographic metaphor, but richly textured as both narrative and meta-narrative, as both archive and history-in-the-making.

The case of Adah Isaacs Menken which Renée Sentilles offers us in her essay "Toiling in the Archives of Cyberspace" functions, at least at first glance, as a pointed contrast to the living embodiment of history which Teresita strategically articulates. Sentilles's account of her use of the Internet to research Menken, a Civil War actress and poet, moves from shock at the number of hits that typing her subject's name into Google produces, to intrigue about what a virtual, disembodied research experience will be like, to skepticism about the ultimate utility of the Web as a tool of archival research. In one sense, Sentilles produces a story of encounter that is less transformative for her sense of identity as an archive user or the history she will ultimately write than do Ghosh, Sahadeo, Robertson, Ballantyne, and Ramírez. At the same time, as she wrestles aloud with the challenges which virtual archives pose to historians' professional training—their sense of what "mastery" is, of what archives count, of the durability or impermanence of the past as secured by archives, not to mention the romance of toiling in the "real thing" as opposed to surfing the Net—the same questions of identity and experience, access and denial, power and desire emerge as structuring features of her narrative. Not unlike Teresita, Sentilles is herself living evidence of how historians in the first generation of cyber-research are experiencing and above all historicizing the ever­shifting figure of the archive, even as they leave evidence of (and simulta­neously historicize) their own encounters for future scholars of the discipline and its cultures to analyze and interpret.

Part II, "States of the Art: 'Official' Archives and Counter-Histories," features genealogies of five specific institutional archival sites and the story of one "fictional" one in order to address the putatively transhistorical status of the official archive and its opposites, as well as the alternative histories they both have the capacity to yield. The first four pieces in this section historicize the origins and development of a particular institutional site with an eye to challenging the Olympian stature of "the archive" in its official incarnations, particularizing what have come to be seen (again, often implicitly) as universal sites of departure for historical narrative, and above all demystifying the processes through which documents and other forms of evidence are consolidated as the basis of History. Jennifer Milligan's essay excavates the history of one of the most influential archival institutions in the modern West, the Archives nationales in Paris. Not surprisingly, the foundation of this archive is coterminous with the Revolutionary state; its symbolic and material fate in the nineteenth century is linked to regime change and to the various forms of state power those changes inaugurated, policed, and memorialized. Even more telling is the way that putatively private events could shape the direction and organiza­tion of this ostensibly public institution, as Milligan's account of the Praslin affair (1847) demonstrates. The scandal surrounding the Duc du Praslin (who murdered his wife and later committed suicide) raised questions about the boundaries between state interests and private honor—giving rise to discourses about "public interest" (in the form of state prerogative
and broadsheet gossip) through which the Archives nationales secured its own legitimacy on the eve of the Revolution of 1848. As Milligan illustrates, not only did the archives actively articulate the relationship between the nation and the state, they participated as actively in the fate of the political regimes that sought to control them.

The ineluctable, even agonistic, vulnerability of archives to political whim and social upheaval is a theme that Peter Fritzsche pursues in his essay, “The Archive and the Case of the German Nation.” Acknowledging that “wars trigger archives” and that the state in Germany was as invested as any other modern nation form in utilizing the official archive as a mechanism for memorializing the logics of military and political power, he also argues for the traces of ordinary lives (what he calls the vernacular and racial archives) and intimate violences which are to be found there. He does so, not to recuperate or rehabilitate the German state archives for history, but rather to suggest their capacity for making visible (however imperfectly and distortedly) some of the most fragmented and fugitive traces of historical subjectivity. The nation and, by extension, its archives, are rarely if ever, in other words, the juggernaut the state may have intended them to be; Fritzsche’s account of the possibilities of accessing domestic time and the storied character of public and private histories is a salutary reminder of the limits, if not the aspirations, of hegemony. John Randolph takes yet another approach to the problem of the nation and the archive by drawing our attention to a particular archival collection with enormous influence in the story of modern Russia: that of the Bakunin family. Arguing for the value of appreciating archives as objects about which we can produce biographical accounts, Randolph emphasizes the ways in which the rhythms of daily life and especially of domesticity helped to consolidate (through “selecting, stitching, and guarding” its ephemeral pieces) the family archive. That this collection was fashioned primarily by a Bakunin sister-in-law, Natalia Semenovna Bakunina, is especially significant given the traditionally gendered equations of archive as public and male and domesticity as private and female. Although its survival was literally out of her hands, she effectively saved the collection from politically motivated arson by sending it away from its (and her) original home, after which it eventually found its way into a Soviet institution and to Randolph’s own sightline in the context of “the new Russia” at the end of the twentieth century. Randolph ends his meditation with a short but compelling analysis of one letter in the archive, written by Mikhail Bakunin about his sister Varvara, which appears to be marked in Bakunin’s hand with the words “TO BE BURNT”—more evidence of the precariousness of archival evidence in the face not just of the state or the archivist, but of the very historical subjects who author them.

Laura Mayhall’s piece, “Creating the ‘Suffragette Spirit,’” shows with particular vividness how influential the creation, maintenance, and regulation of a specific archival collection has been in shaping specific narrative outcomes. The Suffragette Fellowship Collection, begun to preserve and memorialize the British women’s suffrage movement in the wake of women’s formal emancipation after World War I, was spearheaded by those who had been active in or sympathetic to The Cause. To be sure, most if not all institutionalized archival collections bear the traces of such ideological investment and self-interest. But as Mayhall demonstrates, these foremothers instantiated a very particular strain of suffrage history at the heart of their archival project. Deeply influenced by one dimension of suffrage agitation and protest—one which equated militancy with window-smashing and especially hunger-striking and subsequent imprisonment—the creators of what was to become the Suffragette Fellowship Collection reproduced this aspect of the movement to the occlusion, if not the exclusion, of all others. As Mayhall relates it, the construction of the archive tended to follow the interpretive commitments of the militants, shaped as it was by ex-suffragettes with a definition of militancy that was not just narrow, but actively circumscribed the terms and hence the evidentiary and documentary basis upon which the Fellowship Collection was built. By enshrining this narrative not just in but as the archive, its founders promoted a historical account of British women’s emancipation in which only some suffrage women were legitimate and visible—in ways with enduring (if fundamentally inaccurate) popular appeal, as the figure of Mrs. Banks in Disney’s Mary Poppins testifies.

Kathryn J. Oberdeck takes up the relationship between archives and historical narrative from a different perspective in her essay on the company town of Kohler, Wisconsin. Reading the documents of and plans for the “unbuilt environment” in and around the village community—that is, those streets and buildings which were never built—Oberdeck argues for the importance of understanding spaces which were never materialized in or as history. Such a project takes aim at the telos that undergirds even some of the most nuanced disciplinary work, bound as it still is to using sources to explain “what happened” or to evaluate those policies, move-
were kept alive in the archives and hence in the
moments when
workers and village residents into the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s-historical
subjectivity in and for the modern historical record. Fawwaz did so not in
ist, and journalist who strove to register nationalist and Islamicist female
this section on "official" archives large and small by drawing out the story
stake in control over the layout and organization of a "model" town.
Oberdeck, for her part, makes clear the role that "cast-off plans" in the
"dusty drawers" of the archives can play in illuminating the dreamscapes
of what might have been but never was.

In the last essay in Part II, Marilyn Booth strikes a contrapuntal note for
this section on "official" archives large and small by drawing out the story
of Zaynab Fawwaz, a late-nineteenth-century Egyptian biographer, novelist,
and journalist who strove to register nationalist and Islamicist female
subjectivity in and for the modern historical record. Fawwaz did so not in
state or local archives but in fiction, specifically in her 1899 novel Good
Consequences, or the Lovely Maid of al-Zahira and in her writings for the
fin de siècle Egyptian press. Booth’s lively and rigorous reading, not just of
Fawwaz’s texts, but also of her canniness about the political stakes of
representing multidimensional women characters in the public sphere,
complicates our notions of what an archive is, whom it houses, and how
dynamically it responds to and is shaped by local pressures, in both a
temporal and geographical sense. Straining against all manner of contem-
porary conventions-nationalist, Islamicist, and even feminist-Fawwaz
emerges as a historical subject keenly aware of the power of the word to
shape contemporary political events and with them, the contours of His-
tory itself. Her determination to interpolate the reader of the time as an
active participant in and maker of that History, both locally and inter-
nationally, articulates an archival imaginary that is coterminous with the
nation but also exceeds it. Not least, Booth’s insistence on the press and
especially on the novel as legitimate archives (that is to say, as makers of
History) forces us to confront the limits of the official archive by acknowl-
dging the power of literature to materialize those countless historical
subjects who may never have come under the archival gaze. Like Roque
Ramírez’s Teresita, Booth’s Fawwaz requires us to expand the definition
of archival material—to see oral and print cultures as legitimate and power-
fully articulate archival locations. While claims to total knowledge implicit
in the official archive are indeed fictions, thanks to the interventions of a
figure like Fawwaz we are privy to a whole different order of archival
imaginary. Especially when ranged against the evocatively materialized
architectural spaces of the Archives nationales, the Bakunin estate, and the
Kohler leisure-scapes that precede Booth’s essay, Fawwaz’s discursive
archive is powerful testimony to the alternative historical narratives
available to us when we wander outside the conventional "houses of history."

Part III, "Archive Matters: The Past in the Present," closes the volume
with a turn toward the contemporary through an examination of the
imprint of history on recent events and archival configurations. Each of
the three essays in this section makes indubitably clear the pressures which
present-day politics place on the past: they illustrate, with three fascinat-
ing and timely examples, the stakes of archive stories for contemporary
history-writing, politics, and culture. "In Good Hands," Helena Pohlandt-
McCormick’s account of the 1976 Soweto uprising and her experience
researching it in the 1990s in the context of South Africa during and after
apartheid, raises crucial questions about how, why, and to what extent the
methods of the historian both in and out of the archive are shaped both by
immediate political events and by the knowledge that her archival work
will participate in narratives of historical change themselves in South Af-
rica and beyond. Her evocations hark back to Sahadeo’s essay in Part I,
reminding us of the high-stakes political game in which many scholars
endeavor to create new histories, especially outside the West. Her stories
of petitioning for access to archives of the uprising never before seen and of
sitting in the reading room knowing that the Vierkleur South African flag
had been recently replaced by one resonant with African National
Congress colors; her reading of the politically charged student documents; her
use of photographs and autopsy documents to historicize the violence
which the rising engendered; and not least, the humility of her recognition
of herself as an agent of history and history-making—all this makes for
breathtaking reading as well as a powerful commentary on the porousness
of "official" memories and, ultimately, the flexibility and malleability of
even the most disciplining of archives. Pohlandt-McCormick’s effort to
make some of that evidence available to the Hector Pieterson Memorial
Museum Project—arguably an "Other" of the national archive—speaks as well to the emancipatory (if not exactly utopian) possibilities of archive stories, even as it represents the transfer of custodial power from one political enterprise to another.

Adele Perry's analysis of the Delgamuukw case (like Mabo in Australia, the case about aboriginal land rights discussed by Ann Curthoys) addresses the works of archives, documents, and historical records in shaping current debates about dispossession, the colonial past, and the postcolonial future in British Columbia. As Perry so skillfully argues, Chief Justice Allan McEachern's 1991 decision put the limits of the official archive on trial by revealing the incommensurability of Anglo and white settler legal codes, procedures, and evidence with the kinds of oral testimonies so crucial to aboriginal identities and histories across the world. If McEachern's observations about the relationship between orality (understood here to be an incapacity for the textual) and primitiveness are staggering, they testify to lingering presumptions about the epistemological stakes of subaltern political and cultural forms, not to mention the risk to modern Western geopolitical imaginaries from non-European "historical" traditions. McEachern may be read as a caricature of certain nineteenth-century modes of discourse and practice, but late-twentieth-century scholarly response to his judgment and the ways in which that response reflect more widely held (if liberal) convictions about white settler community and history is equally instructive. Perry's essay offers a multi-storied account of the contretemps set in motion by the trial, critiques the commonly held belief in the power of a "total archive," and suggests that the enduring legacy of the Delgamuukw case is as an object lesson about the textual) and primitiveness are staggering, they testify to lingering presumptions about the epistemological stakes of subaltern political and cultural forms, not to mention the risk to modern Western geopolitical imaginaries from non-European "historical" traditions. McEachern may be read as a caricature of certain nineteenth-century modes of discourse and practice, but late-twentieth-century scholarly response to his judgment and the ways in which that response reflect more widely held (if liberal) convictions about white settler community and history is equally instructive. Perry's essay offers a multi-storied account of the contretemps set in motion by the trial, critiques the commonly held belief in the power of a "total archive," and suggests that the enduring legacy of the Delgamuukw case is as an object lesson about the presence—and I would argue, the persistence—of history in the present and the ongoing revisionism which that dynamic and fraught relationship requires of us.

Thanks at least in part to the dizzying possibilities of archives old and new, history is never over but renews itself through a variety of new interpretive frameworks. Ann Curthoys's elaborate genealogy of the Windschuttle controversy underlines the ferocity of scholarly and to some extent public reaction to History and its engagement with the problem of "facts," specifically with respect to the numbers of dead in an infamous massacre of aborigines in Tasmania. In a widely read and much publicized 2002 book, Keith Windschuttle argued that historians had fabricated evidence involved in arriving at the number of people killed—a claim which, as Curthoys amply demonstrates, resonated in both Australia and the United States, where calls to "tell the truth about history" dominated the history wars from the last decade of the twentieth century into the first years of the twenty-first. Curthoys turns her critical eye not just on the massacre in question but on the historical figure of James Bonwick—so crucial to Windschuttle's claims about fabrication—and in turn back to the vexed and ultimately political question of archival reliability itself. Keen to remind us that the Windschuttle debate was and is as much about fin-de-siècle local politics (in the wake of the Mabo decision and in the context of a conservative government avowedly opposed to aboriginal rights), Curthoys uses this particular "antipodean" archive story to raise questions about the politics and ethics of historical practice and perhaps most significantly, about the question of audience.

This is an appropriate note upon which to end the collection, since there would appear to be an ever-growing divide between the multiplicity of interpretive possibilities many historians hope to see the archive yield and the expectations of absolute truth which a variety of more general publics, undergraduate and graduate students included, not only desire but demand. The relationship of archival presences and absences to biographical "truths" about the U.S. presidential candidates in the spring and summer of 2004, and the flurry of debate about archives which it engendered, is only one of the more high-profile examples of the market demand for a certain kind of archival logic—one that is tied to the kind of "sequential" view of history that many archive makers and users are interested in challenging, if not refuting. What's more, the fetish of the archive as a surveillance apparatus has been matched in recent years by the fantasy that history is or can be a delivery system for absolute truth. Such a fantasy is not, of course, historically new; it is one of many Enlightenment legacies to modern Western historical thought. But the appeal of that fantasy has intensified and has perhaps even been democratized in an extended moment of political crisis in the West, where the "end of history" as we have apparently all known it has been prophesied with a combination of apprehension, moral certitude, and ideological triumph—and all this well before the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001. Particularly in the current conjuncture, when the evidence of daily lives, community identities, and confessional practices is increasingly archived because it is perceived to be nothing less than a matter of national and international "security," the task of understanding the role of archives and of critically
examining the kinds of stories which emanate from them has, perhaps, never been more urgent.

At the same time, we would not like to end on yet another triumphalist note, because we recognize that the telling of stories, like the production of history itself, has no intrinsically redemptive power, whether revolutionary or conformist. Stories—in whatever narrative form—embed as many secrets and distortions as archives themselves; their telling encodes selective disclosures, half truths, and partial pasts no more or less than do histories "proper." If this means that archive stories, including those on offer here, are eminently open to critique and interpretive contest, it also means that they participate in and help to fuel what Gayatri Spivak calls "the fear of undecidability in the subject of humanism."35 Nor would we like to stage yet another (ultimately unproductive and anti-interdisciplinary) contest between the unverifiability of "literary" narratives (of the kind which feature here as subjective personal accounts) versus the apparently self-evidentiary nature of "historical" documents. We resist this as much because such rehearsals beg the question of the historicity of disciplinary formations like Literature and History as because the very empirical status of "archival" materials is so repeatedly open to question when one ceases to take evidence (whether documents or testimony) at face value.36 In the end, the burden of this collection is not to show that archives tell stories but rather to illustrate that archives are always already stories: they produce speech and especially speech effects, of which history is but one. Talking about that speech and its effects—and arguing over its meanings—is vitally important for history as a practice, especially at a moment when many other disciplines invoke history as a self-evident methodological procedure and the archive as its instrument. Rather than promising a cure-all for archive fever, the species of archive talk made available in Archive Stories provides the possibility of a genealogical engagement with one of the chief modalities of History itself. Not incidentally, this comes at a time when academic history does so little to capture the popular imagination and even less to make people outside the university care about it. In offering a more transparent and ultimately, we believe, a more accountable basis for the production of knowledge about the past, Archive Stories aspires to illustrate the possibilities of an ethnographic approach to those traces which remain legible to us as history—a turn which astute observers like Anjali Arondekar have noted even the best and especially the most agonistic work on archives has failed to take.37 In pursuing this ethnographic re-orientation, we move resolutely if experimentally beyond naïve positivism and utopian deconstructionism, beyond secrecy and revelation, toward a robust, imaginative, and interpretively responsible method of critical engagement with the past. If in the process archives as such are rendered less Olympian, more pedestrian, this does not mean either the end of the archive as an analytically vigorous category or the death of the discipline.38 Hopefully, the kind of interrogations on offer here forms one of the bases from which histories in the twentieth century, with all their passion for and humility about what can and cannot be known, will come to be written.

Notes

1 For the beginning of this debate, see Fred Barnes, "Now Stephen Ambrose," The Weekly Standard, January 9, 2002; http://historynewsnetwork.org/articles/article.html?id=499. For Bellesiles, see Michael de la Meced, "Bellesiles resigns as fraud investigation ends," The Emory Wheel, October 25, 2002; http://www.emorywheel.com/vnews/displayv/ART/2002/10/25/3b9bc0a08d4a.


9 Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones script; http://www.geocities.com/jedtvega/ep2_script.html
as for suggesting a myriad of pop culture examples.

ushered thy Brooks, "The Tokyo Judgment and the Rape of Nanking," Studies Birmingham," Too Late: History in Popular Culture 1 _ 4 _

collection concerned about the erosion of the term 'archive' as I was taught to understand it (and by extension, of an individual). People seem increasmgly to be usmg ar­
chive'

mention the people who also an active and well-respected historian of gender and medicine. Thanks to Melissa Free for bringing this discussion on Victoria to my attention.


See Keith Windschuttle, The Killing of History: How a Discipline Is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Some Theorists (Sydney: Macleay Press, 1994), as well as Ann Curthoys's essay on his work, below. Clearly this critique is entailed by the larger “turn toward history,” and hence the (re)turn to the archive, since the 1970s. For quite divergent readings of this phenomenon, see Terrence MacDonald, ed., The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and Amy J. Elias, "Hip Librarians, Dweeb Chic: Romances of the Archive," Postmodern Culture 13, 1 (2002). Thanks to Tony Ballantyne for the latter reference.


Graduate Proseminar, University of Illinois, fall 2003.


For a wide-ranging discussion of suffrage representation, see Laura May-

33 See Caroline Alexander, "Foolscap and Favored Sons," New York Times Op-ed Page, Friday, July 23, 2004 ("one man's military records reveal more than just his story," referring to George W. Bush's National Guard service), and Eric Lichtblau, "Archives Installed Cameras after Berger Took Papers," New York Times, also July 23, 2004. For one popular take on the narrative sequence at the heart of History, I cannot resist quoting an Old Navy advertisement (for teen clothing) which ran on NBC during the Summer 2004 Olympic Games, in which a young woman bursts forth in the middle of a big lecture class with the exclamation: "History! I love History! First one thing happens, then another thing happens. So sequential! Thank you, first guy, for writing history down!"


36 See especially Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," Journal of the History of Sexuality 14, 1–2 (winter–spring 2005) (a prepublication copy was provided by the author) and Betty Joseph, Reading the East India Company: Colonial Currencies of Gender (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

37 Arondekar, "Without a Trace."

38 I use the term as an ironic point of departure, pace Spivak, Death of a Discipline.