

Matter and Meaning: Materiality and the Visual Arts Archive

Abstracts

Professor Maryanne Dever

Professor and Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts of Social Sciences, University of Technology Sydney: *'Thinking inside the box'*

If archival evidence is conventionally understood in terms of the relationship between events and documents, how might our developing interest in questions of matter and materiality fundamentally reshape our thinking around evidence and events? In this paper I will unpack a series of archival boxes – some conventional and some less so – as a means to draw out what we might mean in practice when claiming to engage with archival collections in terms of their materiality. I am interested in how we might rethink the capacities of the documents we encounter and how this in turn might fundamentally challenge what we measure or weigh as archival “evidence”. I want to consider how this might move us away from engagements focused exclusively upon the interpretation of text towards a focus on presence and structures of feeling and how it can also challenge conventional hierarchies that often privilege the evidentiary potential of documents over other significant residual objects (the snapshot, the briefcase, the hand-made love token) that make their way into collections. I draw on my recent work examining the materiality and expressive potential of archived paper as a way of highlighting both under-examined aspects of the original materials with which we work and various taken-for-granted assumptions about what order of thing matters in archival research. In probing these questions my concerns are not simply methodological but also ontological and epistemological.

Deborah Schultz

Senior Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture, Regent's University London: *'The Materiality of Photo Archives'*

Photography and photographic archives have significantly shaped our methods of analysing works of art. Photographs of works of art function not only as reproductions of something else, but also as objects with tactile qualities. They are physical handled, passed around, looked at up close; by contrast digital images or slide reproductions are viewed from afar and are not to be touched. The boxes which house the photographs are lifted off of the shelf and opened up, the blank uniform covers revealing nothing of the diverse contents inside. The relationship between the viewer and the method of reproduction has a fundamental impact on how the images are conceived of, viewed and valued. While recent conferences and publications have explored the formation of photo archives for academic research and in particular for art historical studies, this paper examines the materiality of the photo archive. It explores the ways in which methods of viewing photographs of works of art shape subsequent thinking about the works themselves. Whereas images on a PowerPoint or 35 mm slide sequence, or in a print publication, are fixed in a spatial sequence, individual photographic images are freely mobile. They can be looked at in an infinite range of different combinations, thereby generating a wide range of thoughts. In this sense, photo archive methods are akin to the open networking structures enabled by digital technology, enabling fluid forms of comparison and association.

Claire Smith

Curator of Posters and Designs, British Film Institute: *'The Performativity of Paper: Designing Superman's Flying Ballet'*

Production design for British film has become firmly established as a field of academic study in recent years, with the semiotics of design and its function within the *mise-en-scène* now embedded in our wider understanding of the history of film. Yet within this, comparatively little is known about the specific role of the sketch artist and the vast swathes of paper artwork that they have collectively produced. The sensory, material presence of paper often remains conspicuous by its absence.

This paper redresses this through a detailed exploration of a singular paper item, created for the central flight sequence of *Superman* (1978). Produced by sketch artist Ivor Beddoes, the 20 metre scroll was just one of potentially thousands of drawings generated for this production, and reveals a little of the film's nuanced design process. The format and scale of the object grants it a certain amount of agency within its current home at the BFI National Archive, as does the way in which its creator has knowingly curated and inscribed it. Read within the wider context of Beddoes's collection, it draws attention to the complex work done by paper to produce a visual effect, iterating some of the layered, performative moments that take place prior to the finished shot.

Dr Alexandrina Buchanan

Senior Lecturer in Archival Studies, University of Liverpool: *'From materiality to written record: the challenge of the object-as-record'*

Towards the start of Michael Clanchy's celebrated *From Memory to Written Record*, a legend is recounted regarding the Earl Warenne's response to Edward I's 'Quo Warrento' proceedings, which demanded sight of the evidence by which the magnates held their franchises. Instead of a charter, the Earl brandished a sword passed down from William de Warenne, who fought at the Battle of Hastings, saying 'Look at this, my lords, this is my warrent! For my ancestors came with William the Bastard and conquered their lands with the sword, and by the sword I will defend them from anyone intending to seize them.' Clanchy uses this dramatic incident to argue for the persistence of oral cultures into an increasingly textual world – but he might equally have argued for the persistence of materiality, of objects as touchstones with evidential value. Moreover, despite the dominance of the oral -> textual -> virtual narrative, the physical object maintains a significant presence in archival culture, particularly - but not solely - in the archives of art and design.

Archivists have moved on from Sir Hilary Jenkinson's evasion of the evidentiary potential of non-textual objects by notionally consigning a spar of wood to the Royal Botanical Gardens and an elephant to London Zoo, despite their potential status as records. Drawing from the documentation movement, community archives, the 'material turn' in the humanities and affect theory, as well as the use of tangible and intangible heritage for restitution of rights by first nation peoples across the globe, archivists are now more than ever aware of the evidential, symbolic and affective values of non-textual objects and their archival potential. Nevertheless, the main focus has been on the potential archival values of objects not originally created as records and the added significance of the physical characteristics of those which were, using methods such as 'archaeology of the book'. Moreover, in the acceptance of non-textual objects as records, there

remains the potential that inclusivity can devalue diversity and fail to recognise the existence of alternative traditions within the normative culture.

By contrast, the aim of this paper is to identify record types lurking within modern Western culture in which materiality and textuality are brought into a mutual relationship by the record's creators in order to enable the object to function as a record: where the object becomes a record or extends its recordness by virtue of its materiality. My paper will examine some examples of archival items which fulfil traditional definitions of 'recordness', being persistent representations of transactions, maintained as evidence or information, but whose function is performed primarily through their materiality and only secondarily through their textuality. Such records disrupt any binary between material and oral versus textual but also help to define what each aspect brings to records as functional entities.

Ben Cranfield

Lecturer in Film, Media and Cultural Studies and Director of the PhD in Humanities and Cultural Studies, Birkbeck University of London: *'The Queer Materiality of the Archive: 'Back to where we have not quite been'*

When I first met Isik.Knuttsdotter, an artistic duo and founder 'occupants' of the collective Fourthland, they placed between us a bundle - a cloth parcel tied loosely with string. I was soon to discover that the bundle contained part of their 'archive'. The 'documents' of this archive were not written papers, or traces of bureaucratic process, but the residual objects of artworks, workshops and projects. These objects, including a mouth piece made from wax and old copies of the Metro newspaper, a cloak made from pheasant skins, and a spool of waxed paper, were both documents of past artistic projects – recordings of interactions between the artists and participants – and objects to facilitate further discussion, thinking and making. Over the last six months I have continued to meet with Fourthland and participate in archival enactments, through which their collection of ephemera are interpreted, expanded and re-materialised. In turn, I have reflected on each exchange with my own words that have, in turn, been incorporated into their archive of practice through such re-materialisations as choral performances and exhibition texts.

In this paper I want to explore how Fourthland's iterative practice of materialising their archive within different contexts and with different participants institutes radical forms of timeliness – different ways of being present with the past - through a reimagining and repurposing of the archive. To do this I want to deploy two very different, but related theoretical positions. I will use Raymond Williams' triadic structure of residual, dominant and emergent to explore the possibilities present in the object traces of practices that appear as out-of-time and at the 'very edge of semantic availability'. Secondly, I wish to explore José Esteban Muñoz's notion of 'the then and there of queer futurity' as he finds it in the ephemeral - that which is 'about another understanding of what matters.' I wish to argue that Fourthland's archival objects and encounters, through their recalcitrant materiality, suggestive intimacy and persistent communality, combine the potentiality of Muñoz's 'hermeneutics of the residue' that allow one to get 'lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality' with William's project of locating a space at the edges of the dominant culture.

In turn I will argue that such encounters with an archive of artistic practice and an archive as practice can help one rethink the material presence of all archival traces. I will examine how such

encounters force one to pay attention to the agency of the archival object as always more than simply the trace of the past, but rather may be understood as fragments of becoming.

Professor Matthew Cornford

Artist and Professor of Fine Art, University of Brighton: *'Archiving the Art School'*

Nearly all British art schools have now been absorbed into the university system and many of the original buildings repurposed, left unoccupied, or demolished. My ongoing research project with professor John Beck is to locate, investigate and photographically document these former buildings or sites, of art and design education. It is our ambition to create a photographic inventory of every former art school in Britain. In parallel with this fieldwork, we are also creating an archive of designed and printed material that includes; over 150 picture postcards featuring various art schools, printed prospectus for former art schools (some designed by members of the teaching staff), student magazines and posters.

The popular 'idea of art school', during its so called heyday, which we see beginning in the 1950s and ending at some point in the late 1980s is also represented through culture artefacts, including Mal Dean's *Art School Dance Goes on Forever* (1970) record sleeve for Peter Brown & Piblokto. Posters and lobby cards for the art school related films such as *Beat Girl* (1960) *The Idol* (1960) and *Joanna* (1968) and first editions of various books *Art Student Observed* (1973) *After Coldstream* (1973) and *After Hornsey* (1973). Whilst some of this material can be accessed and viewed online and in reference libraries, much of it remains scattered and un-catalogued; we have chosen to seek out the original.

The proposed presentation will aim to explain why we have chosen to go to the trouble and expenses of doing this and how this task has only been possible through online auction and shopping websites. The talk will go on to explore the 'value of the original over the copy', what new knowledge and insights are gained in viewing and reading this original material over digital copies. How the physical characteristics of this material helps inform our contextual understanding of what was going on in art schools during these crucial decades. I also want to raise some questions about what has been lost, what we cannot find out about and how the 'expanding digital environment' might affect future material based research into academic institutions.

Sadhna Jain

Course Leader, MA Graphic and Communication Design, Chelsea College of Arts: *'Notations and Scores: The Potential to Perform'*

Martha Rosler presents a lexicon of kitchen objects from A to Z in a feminist parody of the domesticated housewife from the 1970s in her video piece, 'Semiotics of the Kitchen'. The recorded video performance currently sits online, the 'housewife' staring out from behind the kitchen table awaiting the start of our interactions. The parody has consequently spawned many imitations and re-interpretations, comparable to the modern video meme. The underlying process of 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' has unintentionally created as one of its strongest features a form of 'score' which allows the original video to be perpetually re-opened and re-performed. By extending the existence of the work in this manner the relationship of matter and meaning can be negotiated and evolved according to either the original context or an equivalence. Collectively,

each performance and iteration of the work through the process of a 'score' contributes to an unauthorised archive; material, digital, distributable, tactical, and with a register of 'voices'.

This presentation will explore how materiality in the form of notations and scores creates methodologies for making and engaging visual arts archives and other cultural/social encounters. At its core this creative approach when developed with intention encourages dialogic and subjective qualities of communication and interactions. Taking an important cue from the Fluxus movement of the 1960s and 1970s: (anti formal art in preference for an audience engaged interaction/participation) these following definitions are important to the practice: Visual Notations aim to capture and communicate; movement, gesture, thought and relationships of body to material worlds, to derive and make meaning. Scores aim to present the ideas of others as a system of constituent parts so they can be accessed, shared and constructed by participants.

The creative methodologies of Notations and Scores in relation to a range of public visual materials and exhibits was introduced to the MA Graphic Communication Design students at Chelsea College of Arts as a design challenge. The journey of the project included critical evaluation of how graphic communication design as a process could contribute to capturing and framing the more intangible and temporal aspects of material interactions and physical encounters. Giving leverage to an unmaking process due emphasis was given to exploring graphical visual language as notation. This paradigm shift from formal image text relationships to more gestural uses of drawing, typography and sign connected with the proposition of making material (printed) scores.

Conceptually, I propose that scores can be positioned as either a witness event, or an invitation to re-enact/re imagine what was seen or created by others. Therefore in the context of an archive, notations and scores potentially allows 1.the re-making of meaning; 2. extending and capturing the parameters of the space which forms the context for each specialist archive collection.

Althea Greenan

Curator, Women's Art Library, Goldsmith's University of London/PhD Candidate, University of Brighton: *'Slide Walks in the Women's Art Library: Digital interventions for feminist visibility'*

This research considers how the political origins and material detail of the slide collection held at the Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths University of London interrogates practices of slide digitization. This paper considers how making bad digital photographs and videoing examples of working with digital image files suggest ways in which the digitisation of complex photographic materials such as slides might be productively troubled to reveal the multiple practices they embody. By considering a digital future for the collection of 35mm artists' slides, this research proposes the Women's Art Library slide collection as a site for understanding in what ways the artists' slide might continue to speak to us as a politicised information communication technology.

The artist slide file is the only material in the WAL that has been trialled as a digitized object and set up in a networked environment. The full contents of files were digitized to create the online experience of browsing through the slide files, but the result disappointed the artists by losing the integrity and visual authority or weight of their files. The process revealed how normative practices of digitization using slidescanners excised important evidence of the individual artist's production and relationship to the slide collection. What else does the artist's slide represent besides artwork?

This paper considers how the digital material I create through photography and video is a new text that suggests how the slide collection can be performed today. The digital text collects image, marks, paper, ink, plastic, dyes, glue, scrawls, type, autograph, time, place, algorithmic transformation to consider the labour manifest in this feminist project driven to accumulate as much evidence of women's art practices as possible. Guided by the material more performatively, this research explores how a slide collection set up as a feminist alternative to institutional slide libraries can suggest a different understanding of digitization's potential to convey what an archive continues to say, rather than what it once said.

Rebekah Taylor & Jim Walker

Archivist & Special Collections Officer and Lecturer in Visual Theory, University of the Creative Arts, Farnham: *'The Materiality of Animation Archives'*

The historiography of animation is one that revolves around the materiality of its final production, the completed film is deemed and defined by the format and form of its screening. This is in contrast with how animators engage with and perceive their practice. In particular the diversity of processes, techniques and the materiality of their work is a constant embodied presence that informs and enriches the visual narrative of the animation. The immateriality of Caroline Leaf's sand and painting on glass animation means that the animated film denotes and records the creation and erasure of each frame. In turn the gestural and painterly process of her films references the visual language of painting and it is this expressive playfulness that extends animation beyond the confines of cel and contemporary computer forms. It is therefore important to consider the study and analysis of animation as an archaeological process, which reveals each strata of its production in relation to different forms of periodization.

Animation archives consist of a vast range of material- acetate cels, puppets, VHS, audio, born digital files- and the work that goes into these archives, including hand drawn material, means a vast amount of material is produced. Within the Bob Godfrey animation archive, as well as the archival material itself, the material such as boxes specially made for the collection, often have doodles and drawings which show insight to the animator's work. The importance of the materiality of the collection is highlighted through aspects of materials, such as the quality of paper produced, the type of ink used in paint, being often asked after by students undertaking workshops with the collection. This materiality does often prove challenging in terms of conservation – acetate cels are particularly vulnerable to the environment– deterioration showing the vulnerability of animation. This paper proposes to look at a case study of animation archives housed at the university for the Creative Arts, Farnham – this includes the animator Bob Godfrey, who produced the first Oscar winning animation in 1975-Great, the lives and times of Isambard Brunel. It will look at the importance of the materiality of animation, how to best capture this within the archive catalogue regarding subject terms, and how to capture this online, including digitally. The paper will also touch of conservation issues particularly relevant towards animation.