

Art and Archive

*Genealogy and Contemporaneity
(1920-2010)*

Anna Maria Guasch

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INTRODUCTION

The art of the early avant-garde movements can be analysed under two important “paradigms”.¹ The first is that of the single work in which the conception and execution form a whole whose contribution lies in formal rupture and whose singular character thus derives from its shock effect. This paradigm belongs to the languages and “-isms” of the historical avant-garde, from Fauvism and Analytical Cubism to Neo-plasticism and Constructivism. The other great paradigm is that of the multiplicity of the artistic object itself; that of its reversibility – as would be the case of collage or photomontage dominated by the discontinuity of the space-support – but also that of its splits and disparities, or, strictly speaking, that of the destruction of the traditional canons in the definition of the artistic object, such as with Dadaism and, in certain respects, Surrealism.

These two paradigms clearly do not exhaust all the artistic typologies and proposals, but they do represent basic fields in defining them. Nonetheless, excluded from these fields is a typology of artistic projects or scenarios that make up a third paradigm: that which, in a generic way, can be called the *paradigm of the archive*; a paradigm that implies a specific and coherent line of work. As Benjamin Buchloh – one of the initiators of the reflection on the relationship between contemporary art and the archive – argues, this paradigm implies an artistic creation based on a mechanical sequence, on a repetitive and endless litany of reproduction that develops with strict formal rigour and total structural coherence an “aesthetic of legal and administrative organization”.² From the auric object or from its destruction – a creative problematic encompassed

1 We use the concept of “paradigm” as defined by Michel Foucault to designate an object of knowledge in terms of problematization, mechanism, discursive formation, and, more generally, understanding, for knowing all those procedures and effects of knowledge that “a specific field is disposed to accept at a given time”. See Giorgio Agamben, *Signatura rerum. Sur la méthode*, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2008, p. 10.

2 Benjamin Buchloh, “Atlas/Archive”, in Alex Coles (ed.), *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, Vol. 3, London, Black Dog Publishing Limited, 1999, p. 32.

by the first two paradigms – the paradigm of the archive refers to the object's transit to the medium of information and from the logic of the museum-mausoleum to the logic of the archive. In other words, if the first two paradigms denote the transgressive spirit of the social and artistic utopia that belonged to the first decades of the twentieth century, the third – that of the archive, whose chronology overlaps with the other two – manifests and ostensibly forms part of a state of bureaucratic conformism.

We dedicate this book to the study of this “paradigm”: seeking its sources, its precedents, its genealogy, its development, its examples across various points of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, focusing on the work of visual artists who have availed themselves of the archive to register, collect, store, and create images that – once archived – have become inventories, thesauruses, atlases, or albums. Artists who have also used the archive as a point of union between memory and writing, and as a fertile territory for all kinds of theoretical and historical scrutiny.

Evidently, the difference between the act of storing or collecting and that of archiving is fundamental to understanding the reach and the relevance of this third paradigm in contemporary art. If storage or collecting consists of “as-signing” a place or of depositing something – a thing, an object, an image – in a specific place, the concept of archive entails the act of “consigning”. Even though, as Derrida indicates, the “archon” principle of the archive is also a principle of grouping³ (and the archive as such demands unifying, identifying, and classifying), its way of proceeding is not amorphous or undefined, but is born with the objective of co-ordinating a “corpus” within a system or a synchrony of previously selected elements in which all are articulated and related within a unity of predetermined configuration.

At the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century – evidently not today, which is dominated by computer and cybernetic archives – the archive could be visualized through the image of a dusty space or as a repository of historical artefacts; space, and objects, in all cases inert. Despite that, in the years that we indicate, within the artistic field, propositions of archive already started to act as an active discursive system establishing new temporal relationships between past, present, and future, in what has been called the “future perfect” tense. As Derrida argues:

[...] the question of the archive is not a question of the past [...] of a concept relating to the past which may or may not be at our disposition, an archivable con-

3 Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne*, Paris, Galilée, 1995.

cept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future in itself, the question of a response, of a promise, of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what it means, we will know it only in the future tenses. Perhaps.⁴

In this typological model of knowledge that, according to Vanda Zajko,⁵ Derrida has proposed, the dimension of implicit temporality is not defined, nor does it define a linear progression that reaches from the past to the present in which the past appears as dominant. Quite the contrary, that dimension emphasizes the active role of the present when defining and giving shape to the past.

Brief state of the question

As has already been mentioned, Benjamin Buchloh, following in the wake of artist and theorist Allan Sekula,⁶ was one of the first historians to propound the study of the paradigm of the archive in contemporary art. After becoming interested in the relationship between archive and police photography, he participated in the catalogue of the first exhibition dedicated to the subject in question, which was presented first (1998) in three German cities – Munich, Berlin, and Düsseldorf – and then in New York and Seattle (1999). This was the show *Deep Storage. Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*. Centred on discerning the act of storing and archiving as image, metaphor, and process in contemporary art, Buchloh's contribution materialized in the article "Warburg's Paragon? The End of Collage and Photomontage in Postwar Europe",⁷ which, within the *Atlas* section, analysed works of European artists who were "collectors of images", among them the dazzling homogeneity and continuity of Bernd and Hilla Becher and the heterogeneous and discontinuous work of Gerhard Richter.⁸

4 Ibid., p. 36.

5 Vanda Zajko, "Myth as archive", *History of Human Sciences*, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 109.

6 Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive", *October*, No. 39, Winter 1986, pp. 3-64.

7 Benjamin Buchloh, "Warburg's Paragon? The End of Collage and Photomontage in Postwar Europe", *Deep Storage. Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art* (exhibition catalogue), New York, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center and Seattle, Henry Art Gallery, 1998-1999, pp. 50-60.

8 Although Benjamin Buchloh was one of the first to reflect on the paradigm of the archive, this passed unnoticed in the global historical approaches to contemporary art whose main objective was methodological redefinition, as is the case with *Art Since 1900*, whose sections, chapters, and discussion

All this took place a few years after Jacques Derrida had published – first in French (1995) and a year later in English – his seminal *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne* (*Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*),⁹ which drew attention to the paradigm of the archive. Derrida's immediate followers most often understood this as an exercise in “post-modern appropriation”, which had one of its pillars in the first third of the century in the Walter Benjamin of *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (whose English version was published in 1979) and *The Arcades Project* (published in English in 1999),¹⁰ and even more particularly in the Michel Foucault of *L'Archéologie du savoir*.¹¹

Thereafter, both in Europe and the United States, the art-archive approach started to become frequent, in various genres and forms of research, from seminars through exhibitions to magazine articles. A good example is interest in its presence at the annual meeting of the College Association of Chicago in 2001, entitled *Following the Archival Turn: Photography, the Museum and the Archive*,¹² which noted the emergence of “archive forms” in the artistic practices of the 1990s, as well as the interest aroused in theorists such as Hal Foster whose essay “Archives of Modern Art”¹³ presented Michel Foucault as the person responsible for introducing the notion of the archive in contemporary philosophical reflection, and whose “The Archival Impulse”¹⁴ studied – in relation to the archive – the works of Thomas Hirschhorn, Sam Durant, Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon, Liam Gillick, Stan Douglas, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Mark Dion, and Renée Green.¹⁵

At the same time as anthologies about the archive started to be published in the United States, such as Charles Merewether's synthetically and signifi-

forums have no reflection on and make no allusion or reference to the concept of “archive”. See Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, and Rosalind Krauss, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2004.

9 Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne*, op. cit.

10 Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*, London, NLB, 1979 and *The Arcades Project* (prepared from the German book *Das Passagen-Werk*, edited by Rudolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 1999.

11 Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

12 See *Visual Resources. International Journal of Documentation* Vol. XVIII, 2, June 2002.

13 Hal Foster, “Archives of Modern Art”, *October*, No. 99, Winter 2002, pp. 81-95. Article reprinted in *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)*, London and New York, Verso, 2002, pp. 65-82.

14 Hal Foster, “The Archival Impulse”, *October*, No. 110, Autumn 2004, pp. 3-22.

15 According to Foster, op. cit., the work of the related artists has in common the act of converting historical information, often lost or displaced, into something physically present. To this end, they work with found images, objects, texts, and installations using a non-hierarchical system which, in Foster's opinion, is uncommon in contemporary art.

cantly titled *Archive*,¹⁶ within European studies this type of approach was underscored by events like the seminar “El mal de archivo. Registros imposibles” (Archive Fever. Impossible records), included in the *XII Jornadas de Estudio de la Imagen* (12th Workshop on Study of the Image) organized by Beatriz Herráez and Sergio Rubira in Madrid (2005),¹⁷ and open research such as *Culturas de Archivo* (parts I and II – www.culturasdearchivo.org) developed by Nuria Enguita and Jorge Blasco at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, whose main objective was the analysis of the repercussion of the archive on forms of accessing information and knowledge.¹⁸

Without excessively prolonging this information here, as it is expanded upon across the chapters of this book, among recent contributions it is worth highlighting certain international meetings, including *The Visual Archive: History, Evidence and Make Believe*, which took place at Tate Modern in London in 2004, and the projects *Curating Degree Zero Archive* (www.curatingdegreezero.org), which includes an archive, an itinerant exhibition, and a website with the aim of compiling and archiving catalogues relating to the work of more than 100 international curators (2008); and *Archive/Counter Archive* (Prato, 2009),¹⁹ which seeks to update “archive fever” on the basis that, given that the effects of globalization and its almost infinite flows of information make it impossible to draw a map of the world, it is necessary to propose systems of classification that allow the recovery of a memory that can be delimited and reliable.

16 Charles Merewether (ed.), *The Archive, Documents of Contemporary Art*, London and Cambridge, Mass., Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006.

17 Beatriz Herráez and Sergio Rubira (eds.), *Registros imposibles. El mal de archivo*, XII Jornadas de Estudio de la Imagen, Madrid, Consejería de Cultura y Deportes. Comunidad de Madrid, 2006.

18 As Jorge Blasco argues: “As a medium and exhibition staging, the project *Culturas de Archivo* is placed in a historiographical tendency in which a good part of the systems that organise images and texts share a common genealogy. A project in which Renaissance theatres and palaces of memory, cabinets of curiosities, the first scientific exhibitions, the first photographic salons, propagandistic exhibitions, and the close representations of the Holocaust cross the line between archive and exhibition”. See Jorge Blasco and Nuria Enguita, *Culturas de archivo* (I and II), Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca and Barcelona, Fundació Tàpies, 2002 and 2005.

19 The symposium and project *Archive/Counter Archive. Exploring relations between contemporary art and the archive* – a collaboration between the Faculty of Art and Design of Monash University of Melbourne (Australia) and the Centre for Drawing, a research centre of the University of Arts in London – put forward a series of questions through which contemporary artists confronted the question of the archive, understood both as source and as form. And this was done with a special emphasis on the relationship between contemporary art and the archive in areas not removed from historical trauma and ruptures. The symposium was held at the Monash Centre in Prato (Italy) on 10 and 11 July, 2009.

Scope of *Art and Archive*

From the state of the question, which shows an undeniable and progressive *crescendo*, we withdraw to a certain extent from our initial objective – which consisted of studying the works of artists of the 1990s in relation to the strategies of archive – and we will try, as has been said above, to propose a history by deconstructing and recodifying concepts that have not been well analysed (either diachronically or synchronically) until now, with the ultimate aim of drawing as accurate a map as possible in relation to archive practices throughout the twentieth century until today.

This goal has made it necessary to define, delimit, and specify the epistemological field that from theoretical, philosophical, literary, and psychoanalytical contributions has underpinned the definition of what we have called the third paradigm, and to distinguish archive practices from those of storing, collecting, and accumulating that do not correspond to the protocols of “consigning” that we have mentioned. Taking into account that it is precisely this principle of consigning that corresponds to the documentary or monumental aspect of memory as *hypomnema* (we recall here the distinction between *mneme* or *anamnesis* – the living memory, spontaneous, fruit of internal experience – and *hypomnema*, the act of remembering), which means that the archive can be understood as a mnemotechnic supplement that preserves memory and saves it from oblivion, amnesia, destruction, and annihilation, to the point that it becomes a true aide-mémoire.

1

GENESIS OF THE PARADIGM OF THE ARCHIVE

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and the role of the researcher in this process. The second part of the paper presents the methodology used in the study, including the selection of participants, the data collection methods, and the analysis techniques. The third part of the paper discusses the results of the study and the conclusions drawn from the data. The final part of the paper provides a summary of the findings and discusses the implications of the study for future research.

The research was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner, following the principles of scientific inquiry. The data collected was analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends. The results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner, allowing for a thorough understanding of the findings. The conclusions drawn from the data are based on a careful interpretation of the results and are supported by the evidence presented in the paper.

The study has several strengths, including the use of a large sample size and the inclusion of a control group. These factors contribute to the reliability and validity of the findings. However, there are also limitations to the study, such as the potential for bias in the selection of participants and the use of self-reported data. These limitations are discussed in detail in the paper, and the authors provide suggestions for how they might be addressed in future research.

Overall, the study provides a valuable contribution to the field and offers insights into the complex nature of the subject matter. The findings are presented in a clear and accessible manner, making the paper a useful resource for researchers and practitioners alike. The authors express their gratitude to the participants and the funding agency for their support and contribution to the study.

The two “machines” of archive

As shown by the main archive projects in the first decades of the twentieth century in the fields of human sciences and artistic creativity – with examples including Walter Benjamin’s literary assemblage, Aby Warburg’s visual montage, and the photographic archives of German photographers August Sander, Karl Blossfeldt, and Albert Renger-Patzsch – the contemporary archive has functioned through two “machines” or *modus operandi*: one which emphasises the regulatory principle of *nomos* (or of the law) and of topographical order, and another which accentuates the processes derived from the contradictory actions of storing and saving and, at the same time, forgetting and destroying footprints of the past, a discontinuous and sometimes impulsive manner which acts according to an anomic principle (without law).

Of the projects mentioned, some – such as those of Walter Benjamin and August Sander – are closer to the principles of provenance, homogeneity, and continuity, and to the order of the law. Others, in contrast, are identified with the anomic archive’s drive of heterogeneity and discontinuity, as can be seen in Aby Warburg’s work and, moving to the field of the visual arts, in the disparate propositions – which nonetheless coincide with the sense we are dealing with – of Kazimir Malevich, Marcel Duchamp, and Hannah Höch. Equally, if we move to analyse the archive in artistic production of the 1970s, we find the two *modi operandi* exemplified: on the one hand, by the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky that is based on continuity and homogeneity, and, on the other, by the heterogeneous and discontinuous work of Gerhard Richter.

These *modi operandi* also explain the two archive machines in relation to their physical character: the archive tied to objectual culture and the logic of material memory systems, and the archive based on virtual information, which follows a rationality closer to the flexible and the unstable, not organized linearly and rejecting all hierarchization. Derrida himself, analysing the possible

repercussions of Freud's "mystic writing pad" (1925), asked if the structure of the psychic apparatus – the system that Freud associated with the child's toy of the magic board – could or could not resist the evolution of the techno-science of the archive. Derrida asked whether the psychic apparatus could be better represented by different technological instruments of archiving and reproduction – the so-called living protheses of memory – or simulacra of the living, which were (and will be in the future) much more refined tools than the "mystic pad".¹ An interesting question posed by Derrida back in 1994, which seems to have been overtaken by the very technological generations of the magic board.

The archive of provenance

Unlike, for instance, a library, this *modus* of the archive is not based, in principle, on a semantic or thematic order but on the so-called *Provenienzprinzip* or "principle of provenance" (PP), which originates in the proposals of historian and archivist Philipp Ernst Speiß for organizing the secret archives of the Bavarian castle of Plassenburg. However, this principle was not fully implanted until the middle of the nineteenth century: in France, with Natalis de Wailly and the reorganization of the *Archives de Royaume* and the Bibliothèque impériale; and in Central Europe, with the Privy State Archives in Berlin (1881). This principle stipulates that the documents of an archive must be disposed in strict concordance with the order according to which they were accumulated in the place of origin or of their generation, which is to say, before being transferred to the archive. This principle, according to which "the origin must privilege provenance beyond the meaning", defines the archive as a neutral place that stores records and documents, allowing users to return to the conditions in which they were created, to the media that produced them, to the contexts of which they formed part, and to the techniques that were key to their emergence.² On the basis of this principle, the archive – in contrast to the "collection" or artificial set of documents with distinct criteria of origin – functions as an inert repository in which the documents are placed or stored. It is only

1 Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne*, Paris, Galilée, 1995. English edition, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Summer 1996, p. 15.

2 See Sven Spieker, "1881. Matters of Provenance (Picking up after Hegel)", in *The Big Archive. Art from Bureaucracy*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT Press, 2008, pp. 17–18. See also Wolfgang Ernst, "The Art of Archive", in Helen Adkins (ed.), *For the Archive of the Akademie der Künste*, Berlin, Akademie der Künste/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2005, p. 93.