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The Image Bank: Reflections on an Incomplete Archive

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The Image Bank:

Reflections on an Incomplete Archive

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of a digital archive for The Image Bank at GSU as a process of excavation and reconstruction. It defines the digital archive as a medium for the institutionalization of knowledge, its reproduction, and preservation. In addition, this thesis examines the digital archive as it operates on a continuum of materiality and immateriality, encompassing fractured distinctions between its possibilities and impossibilities in an increasingly dematerialized digitized landscape.

INDEX WORDS: Archives, Digitization, Digital humanities, Image bank for teaching world religion, Museum anthropology, Human-centered design

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all contributors to the archive, making this work possible. This includes the persons, peoples, and communities pictured in the collection.

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PREFACE

The scope of this thesis examines the development of a digital archive (accessible here) for a collection of photographic slides which comprise The Image Bank at Georgia State University. This collection of photographic slides is a small portion (numbering 448 photographic slides) of the original collection of approximately 5500 slides called the Image Bank for Teaching World Religion. The Image Bank at GSU currently resides under the auspices of Professor Louis A. Ruprecht Jr with the GSU Anthropology Department where I was able to access and digitize the slides.

The Image Bank for Teaching World Religion (IBTWR) was initially developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s by Richard M. Carp of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. It was intended as a resource for teaching and studying religion through a visual medium. It emphasizes the importance and transformative capacities of material culture and aims to enrich religious studies and higher education, providing a deeper understanding of various beliefs, practices, and the human experience.

I developed a digital archive for The Image Bank at Georgia State University through an ongoing archival project within the GSU Anthropology department to support the IBTWR's original purpose as a teaching tool and my belief that an Image Bank that is made accessible to a broader audience as a visual archive and creative resource can prove beneficial and relevant in a contemporary digital age.

The collection of slides currently housed at Georgia State University was initially selected and acquired by Professor Louis A. Ruprecht Jr. He was introduced to the Image Bank during a 1993 Summer Institute sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities:

"Beyond the Text: Teaching Religion and Material Culture," hosted by Richard M. Carp and Mark Juergensmeyer. These slides include various curated images representing religious traditions, rituals, pilgrimage, architecture, art, and symbolism.

My work with the Image Bank at GSU involves digitizing the photographic slides, developing and curating the digital archive online, hosted through Omeka, and conducting qualitative and secondary research. This has contributed significantly to the evolution of the archive and this thesis as a continuous research project. This project is driven by the need to create and maintain a critical and sustainable digital archive and resource. The foundations of the current project can be traced back to a series of strategic and technical discussions initiated in 2019, which were unfortunately interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thus, the bulk of my recent work on the Image Bank at GSU, which includes the digitization and development of the digital archive as well as the research components, spans approximately one year and a half. In that time, this project has evolved in many ways through combinations of reflections and reflexive theoretical strategies that illuminate the project as a continuous process and a possible location for exploratory, collaborative, and participatory efforts.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is intended at this juncture as a companion piece to the digital archive of the Image Bank at Georgia State University, which comprises a portion of the Image Bank for Teaching World Religion (hereafter "Image Bank"). The work contained here details the process of the creation of this digital archive and endeavors to undertake a general analysis of digital archives and the processes involved in its creation through conceptual considerations of the archive's liminal location at various intersections that invite a reconsideration of the concepts of materiality and immateriality in the age of rapid digital technological innovation and development.

Throughout the Image Bank's existence, technology has played a critical role in its creation, abandonment, and re-preservation. Therefore, this work considers the digital archive through ideas and theories drawn from scholarship on material culture, anthropology, archival curation, and human-centered design principles.

At the outset of this project, I needed to learn a great deal about digital technologies and archives and other technical skills involving digitization, design, computer programming, and user experience design and research. For many reasons, it was a struggle to construct, grasp, and maintain a certain depth of theoretical analysis for the Image Bank and what it represents, notably because this work is deeply conflicted; it encompasses disruptions across time and embodies a layered work of memory.

At its core, the Image Bank demonstrates disruption in disruption. Rapid and radical technological innovation disrupted the Image Bank's initial creation and purpose, eventually leading to its neglect.

The Image Bank's original ethos embodies a desire to disrupt orthodoxies of knowledge production about religion during its initial creation phase during the early 1990s, specifically, to redefine Religious Studies' teaching methods and thinking, particularly in American higher education institutions. The Image Bank highlighted the significance of material culture and analysis in Religious Studies. This was to broaden the understanding that religion and religious thought cannot exist only in textual form; religion is lived, it is art, and it is material culture.[1]

1.1   Research Objectives

This research project examines the digital archive through ideas of materiality and immateriality as conditions across a disruptive technological terrain. As digitized objects are continuously reassessed, updated, and reconfigured, this work explores how they reconfigure their existence in material, digital, and immaterial landscapes. This thesis seeks to expand our definitions and analyses of material culture within our increasingly intricate and intertwined technological landscape.

In addition, institutionalizing power, authority, and knowledge production through archives is another critical concern. The creation of the digital archive as a body of knowledge produces monumental amounts of information including objects, media, and interfaces, evoking forms of

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[1] From "Creating an Image Bank for Teaching World Religion: Challenging and Reifying Structures of Knowledge" by Richard M. Carp, 1992, *Issues in Integrative Studies*, 10, p. 79-107.

authority and legitimacy such that it reproduces knowledge to command definitions and redefinitions of what is known and unknown.

1.2   Research Themes

1. This thesis examines how digital media and technologies complicate and challenge notions of materiality, immateriality, ephemerality, and permanence. It examines specific implications within the arenas of anthropology, history, museum studies, cultural studies, and heritage preservation.

2. Secondly, this thesis examines the concept of the archive, the development of digital archives, and its continuing impact and reformational strategies through the traditions of analog and digital archival practices within anthropology, history, heritage preservation, and museum studies.

3. Thirdly, this thesis examines the archive as a system of institutionalized power and authority reinforced by curatorial practices. This positions the archive as a powerful cultural mediator capable of shaping social memory, discourse, dominant interpretations, and reflexive discussions in all its forms.

1.3   Section Overview

1. Chapter one traces the creation of the Image Bank at Georgia State University, examining the methods as pivotal processes of analytical preservation encased with a disruptive framework to create a critical digital archive.

2. Chapter two examines digitization as a process of translation, a bridge between worlds; considering the intricate meanings and effects of our consciousness of material culture as digitization creates new artifacts from material objects to be rendered and accessed through a digital interface.

3. Chapter three involves an exploration of the archive, mapping the archive into the realms of possibilities and impossibilities through theoretical analysis of the construction and evolution of archives as a social institution of knowledge reproduction and interpretation constitutive of the powers of memory, legitimacy, and authority.

4. Chapter four examines photography's legacy, its impact on human consciousness, social memory, and knowledge reproduction. It discusses photography as a tool of the photographic archive and anthropological inquiry, its relation to representation, perception, and reality.

5. Chapter Five centers on the idea of an engaged museum through the combination of digital technology, engaged anthropology, and human-centered design principles in the endeavor to create meaningful museum experiences, ensuring sustainable, accessible, and inclusive museum spaces.

6. Chapter six concludes this thesis by advocating for the consideration of the Image Bank as an evolving critical digital archive. As a visual archive, the Image Bank offers transformative possibilities for collaborative and participatory learning.

Figure 1 Website interface showing the digitized image of the Ring of Brogar

"we need to turn our observational skills on the encounters we ourselves create; we must observe not only what happens when "we" encounter "them," but also what happens to us when we mediate those encounters via a particular kind of technology that has the capacity to transform both our way of seeing and our way of understanding the world" - Michael V Angrosino

1 CHAPTER ONE

"MISSION IMPOSSIBLE"

The tale of the Image Bank for Teaching World Religion has many beginnings. While tempted to begin at the point of familiarity, the forces of linear storytelling compel me to start at the beginning as it is known to me. The development of a digital archive of the Image Bank at Georgia State University can be traced back more than three decades ago. In the late 1980s, then-graduate student Richard M. Carp PhD at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, sought to redefine the teaching of religion systematically and holistically by centering the significance of visual imagery and material culture to how humans practice, think, and communicate religious traditions, lifeways, and cultures.

With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Carp turned to the examination of anthropological data, particularly visual anthropology. He developed the idea of the Image Bank as a comprehensive and innovative archival database to augment and complement academic research and instruction. The bulk of the Image Bank is in the form of photographic slides collected from private collections of anthropologists such as Edith and Victor Turner, Caroline Williams, Maria Gimbutas, and Karen McCarthy Brown. These anthropologists worked across the various subfields of anthropology in the 20th century focusing on the visual and material elements of human societies and cultures.

Therefore, the Image Bank as a physical visual archive was developed as a disruptive undertaking meant to challenge the disproportionate value placed upon scriptural and textual canons by integrating technology to create a pedagogical tool for a broader, holistic, and participatory education in the humanities.

However, the archive was caught within the transitional forces of technological development and innovation, which developed significantly, rapidly shaping the later years of

the 20th century, giving rise to the development and proliferation of digital photography and computer technology which made image recording, processing, and sharing much more widely accessible across the globe.

Marianna Cerini (2020) writes that by the early 1990s, photographic slides were rapidly falling out of use. First introduced as Kodachrome in 1935 by the Eastman Kodak Company, photographic slides are rectangular pieces of "color reversal film encased in cardboard" (para. 4), which were loaded into slide projectors and projected onto screening surfaces. After the Second World War, this technology became widely used and commonplace. Cerini (2020) explains that the photo slides became very popular in the 20th century because the finely grained and tonally rich attributes of the film could "record the hues of fabric and skin, atmosphere and light" exceptionally well so much so that it was the most dominant way for capturing and recording moments until the emergence of Digital photography (para. 5)

Lee Shulman, curator of *Midcentury Memories. The Anonymous Project*, an exhibition of hundreds of digitized mid-20th-century photo slides, describes the project as a compelling exploration of collective memory and the human past left neglected and forgotten in the rift of time resulting from technological changes and developments. These profound technological shifts have left lasting imprints on our world today. Hence, the Image Bank has become a representation of representations, illustrating the legacy of disruption and abandonment that has shaped the Image Bank as we have it today.

 A significant portion of the Image Bank consists of photographic slides, which at that time were easy to access and easy to use. However, today it remains a format of photographic data rendered obscure and inaccessible by modern digital photography and technology. This age of digital photography contributed significantly to the decline of the slide archive, cementing its

fate in the backrooms and memories of institutions and collections. Therefore, developing the Image Bank as a digital archive is also a story of translation through digitization, a powerful medium of knowledge production, recreation, transformation, performance, and narrative continuity within the modern digital world.

Thus, this research theorizes technology as a disruptive process constructing and deconstructing the Image Bank as an artifact in and out of itself. The American philosopher Randall Dippert (1995) notes that artifacts result from intentional behavior embedded in linguistic, communicative, and symbolic forms of meaning (p. 119-121). Therefore, the Image Bank presents the possibilities and consequences of technology and digital archiving as a process, fundamentally questioning ideas about neutrality, objectivity, and curatorial authority within an ever-shifting and malleable digital landscape.

A few years after the initial development of the Image Bank had been completed, Dr. Louis A. Ruprecht Jr, currently a professor in the Anthropology Department at Georgia State University, acquired a portion of the Image Bank after being introduced to it during a National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar in 1993 titled "Beyond the Text: Teaching Religion and Material Culture." The Seminar was co-directed by Richard M. Carp and Mark Juergensmeyer, where Dr. Ruprecht was able to acquire 500 slides from the Image Bank at the end of the Seminar.

In the early months of 2020, just before finishing my undergraduate studies, I joined a doomed fellowship of a small group of students who began thinking about how best to preserve the partial archive. In the face of our seemingly overwhelming task, we named the project "Mission Impossible," a phrase that would haunt us a few weeks later when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the United States. The school had to close for the rest of the spring semester,

stalling the project for over a year.

Preserving the Image Bank as a visual archive presented a number of practical and theoretical considerations. Hence, after several careful discussions and research, developing a digital archive and digitizing the photographic slides became the most advantageous medium and method in the contemporary digital landscape. Consequently, the intent behind the development of the Image Bank as a digital archive was also a process of narrative continuity. This made the archive's contents legible and accessible in our contemporary milieu. Thus, digitization is theorized as a process of translation, recreation, transformation, and performance working through tangible evidence of memory, creating new data rendered visible, intelligible, and accessible within the contemporary digital landscape.

A significant matter of consequence within this preservation process concerned the final location of the archive. The internet's ability to facilitate access on a massive scale (Bernardi & Dimmock, 2007, 189), creates opportunities and possibilities for new encounters and revelations. Accordingly, the final destination for the Image Bank was conceptualized as an independent website, but with considerations for technical skills, resources, and time, a website builder with a proven focus and applicability for historical and archival projects would be best suited to the project.

Omeka was chosen based on recommendations from Brendan Harris, a former GSU graduate student and member of "Mission Impossible," and Dr. Jeffrey B. Glover an Associate Professor in the GSU anthropology department. Omeka is significant because it is a website builder, an open-source content management software program that is relatively free and inexpensive with many widely available technical resources. Compared to other archival software programs, Omeka is more advantageous because its free plan provides a 500-megabyte

storage offering and a "robust and extensive meta-driven framework" (Bernardi & Dimmock, 2017, p. 194).

In this case, the work involves visual images that interplay with ideas of material and immateriality through technological disruptions and socially produced reconstructive and deconstructive categorizations. Bernardi and Dimmock (2017) write that the visual image and its relationship to material culture significantly impact socio-historical constructions and reproductions of ideas of knowledge on local and global levels (p. 189). Therefore, digitization may be seen as a curatorial performance, that is aware of the liminality of the digital archive and in recognition of a critical theory of practice.

The archive's accompanying indices testify to previous efforts to comprehensively organize the Image Bank into categorical themes representing the images' various social, religious, and geographical contexts, laying a foundation for the archive's socially constructed interpretations. Julia Petrov (2012) reminds us that artifacts can be taken out of their contexts by both curators and audiences through various deconstructive and reconstructive social avenues, such that new meanings and associations may become more significant than the artifact itself (p. 222).

Therefore, the project encompasses the processes of translation of material and immaterial objects through material mediums that facilitate conventions of knowledge reproduction, narrative space, and accessibility. Thus, this project draws from a human-centered design and research approach, for digitizing and documenting the archive and maintaining its coherent integrity and physicality in both material and virtual space.

In the fall of 2021, after a few failed experiments with a Kodak digital film, a mini slide scanner, and magnifying photo camera lenses, digitization formally began with the Epson V600

perfection photo scanner, which the GSU archaeology lab had recently acquired. The Epson

V600 proved to be the most suitable equipment for the project due to its ease of use and the

ability to scan up to four slides at a time, making the process less exhaustive and time-

consuming. Additionally, the V600 allows the images to be previewed and checked for any

disturbances to the image quality. The images may then be scanned and saved directly into a

folder on the desktop.
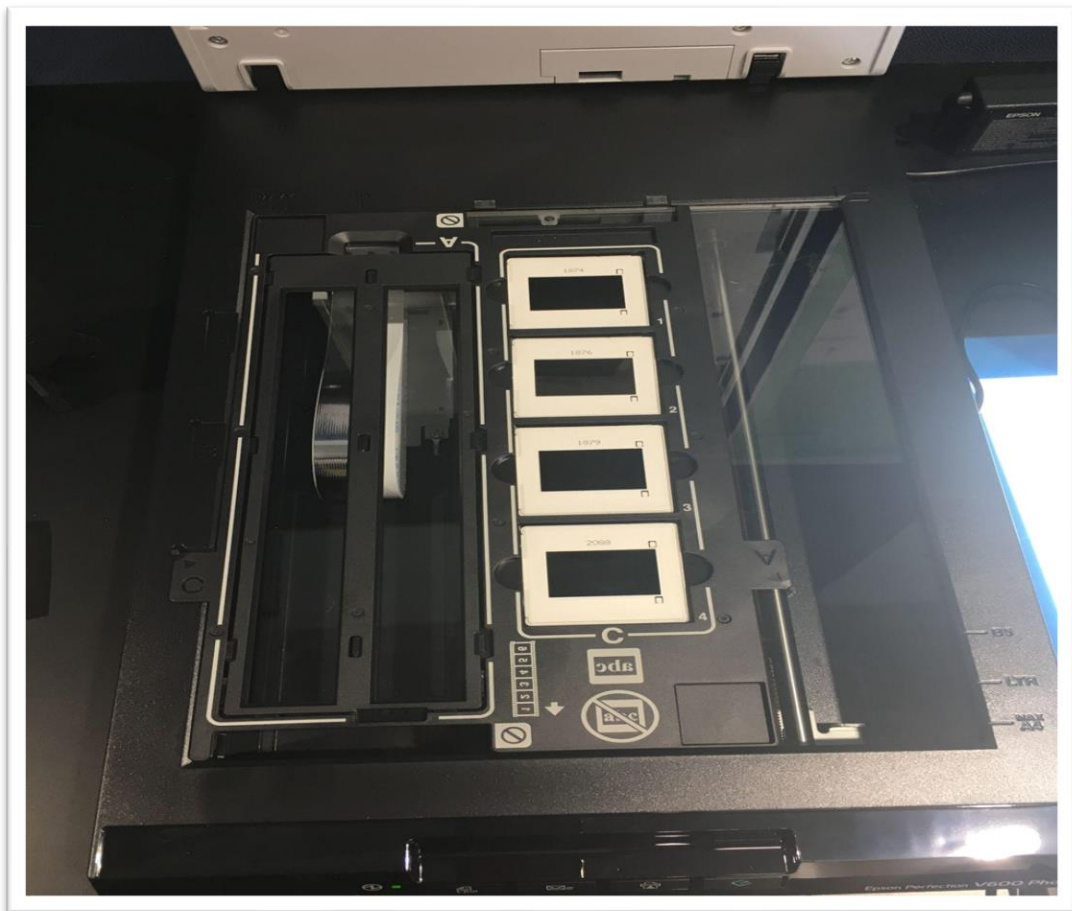
Figure 2 Scanning slides using the Epson V600

While the indices document the entire Image Bank, numbering about 5500 slides, the

slides physically present at GSU only amount to a little less than 500, representing a fraction of

the Image Bank for Teaching World Religion. Moreover, digitization was followed by weeks of

careful cataloging for the newly digitized files using a Google spreadsheet file to create and maintain critical archival provenance, metadata, and structure by combining the information from the indices with newly generated information from the digitization process for data reconciliation and consistency.
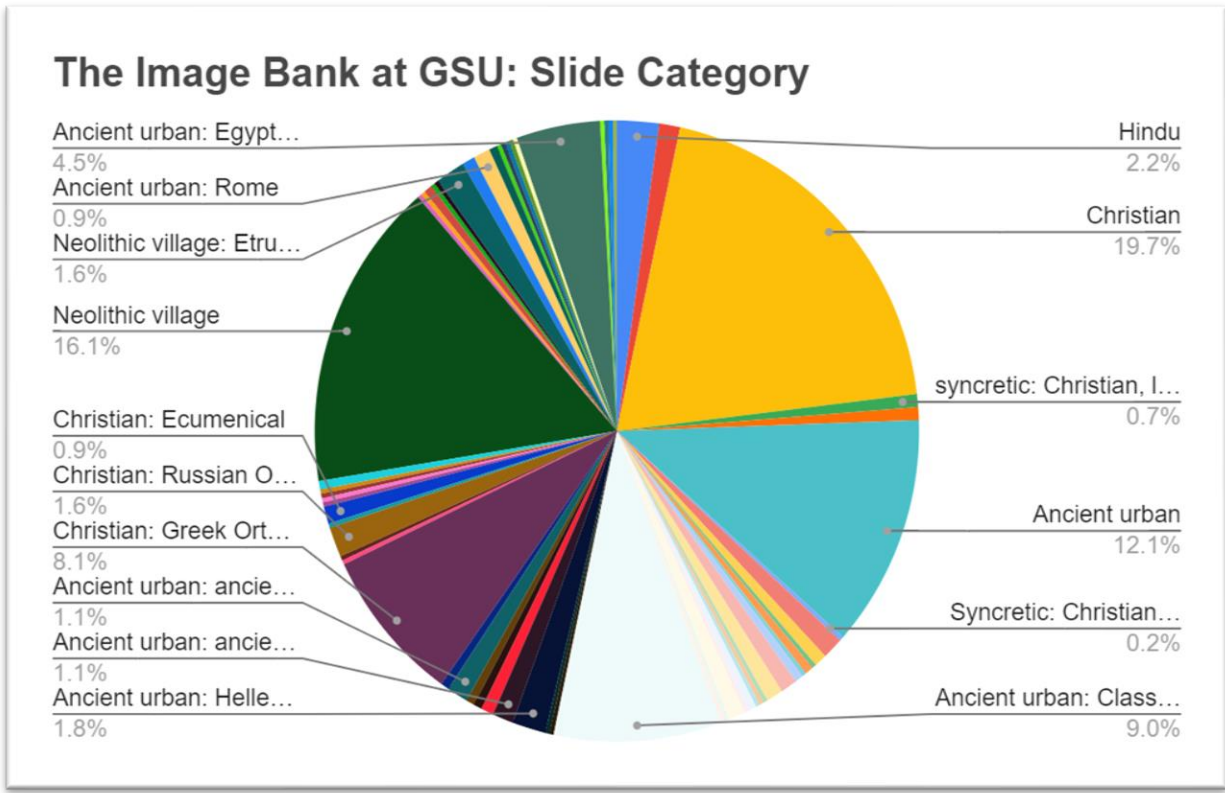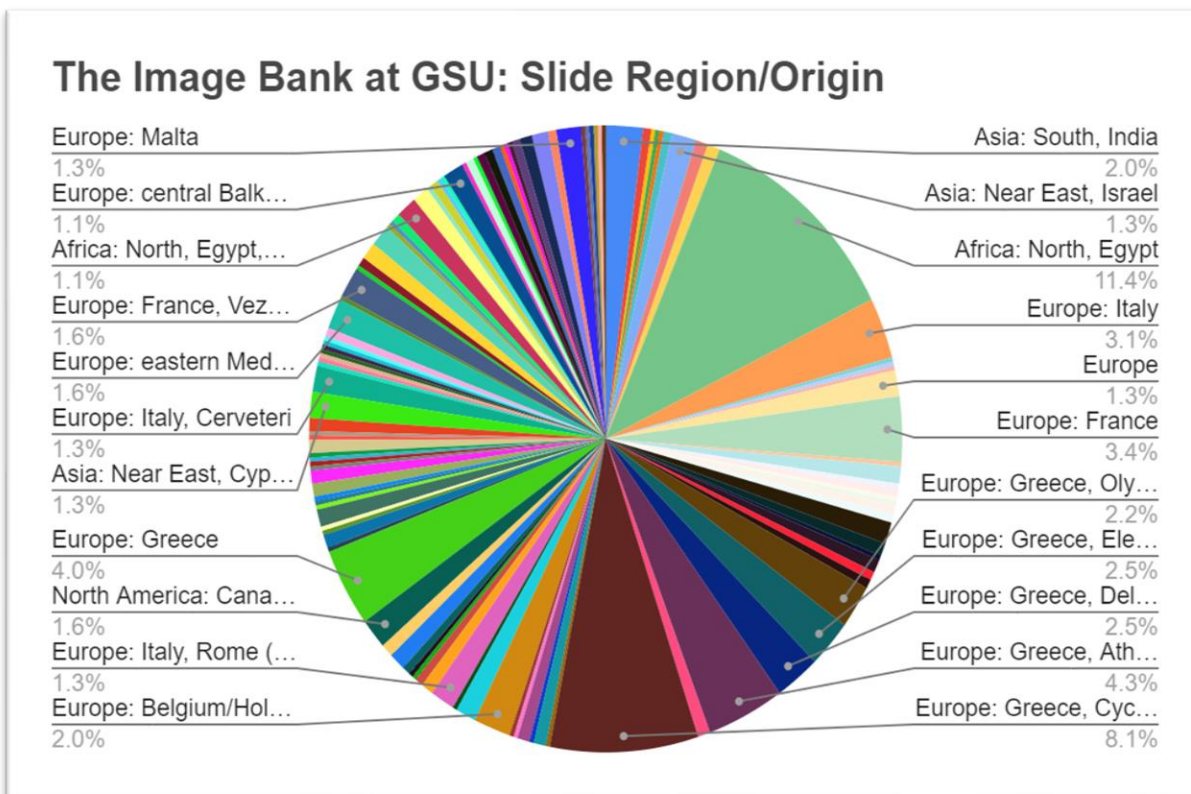
Figure 3 Pie Chart showing the major organizing categories for the archive's content

Figure 4 Pie Chart showing geographical distribution for the archive's content

.
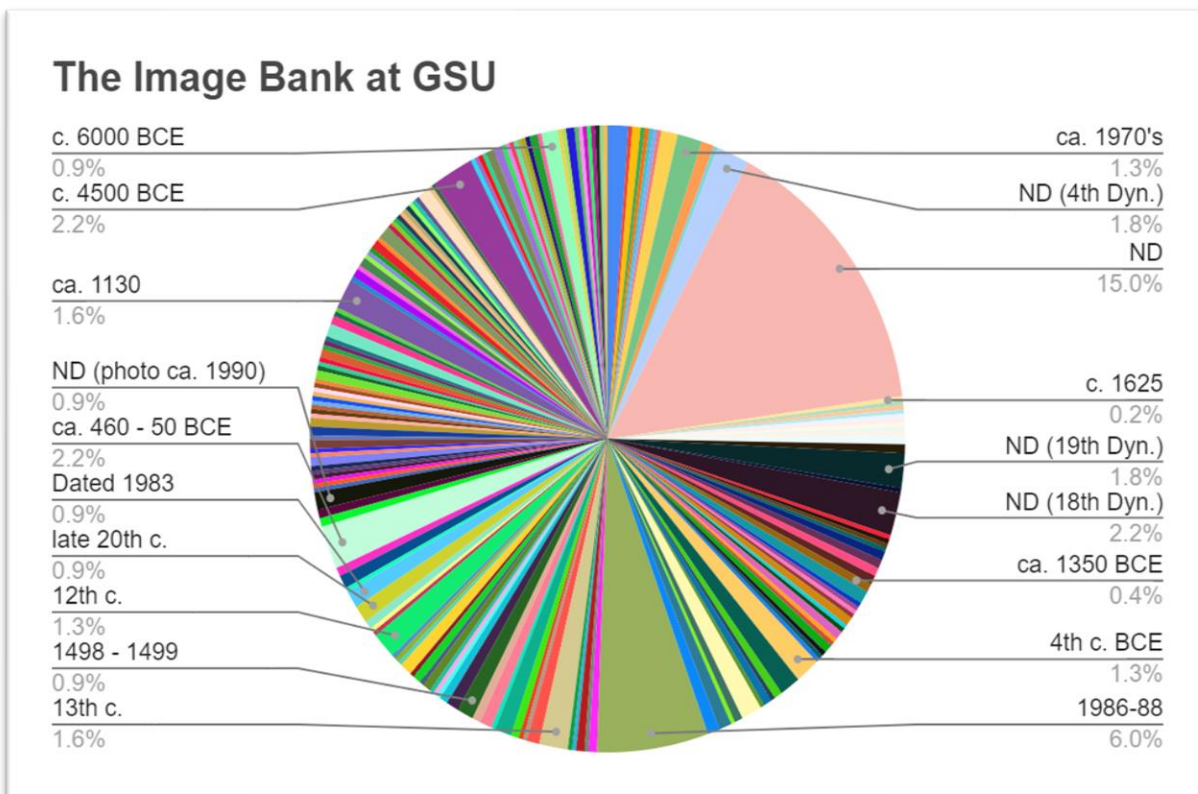
Figure 5 Pie Chart showing the date distribution for the archive's contents
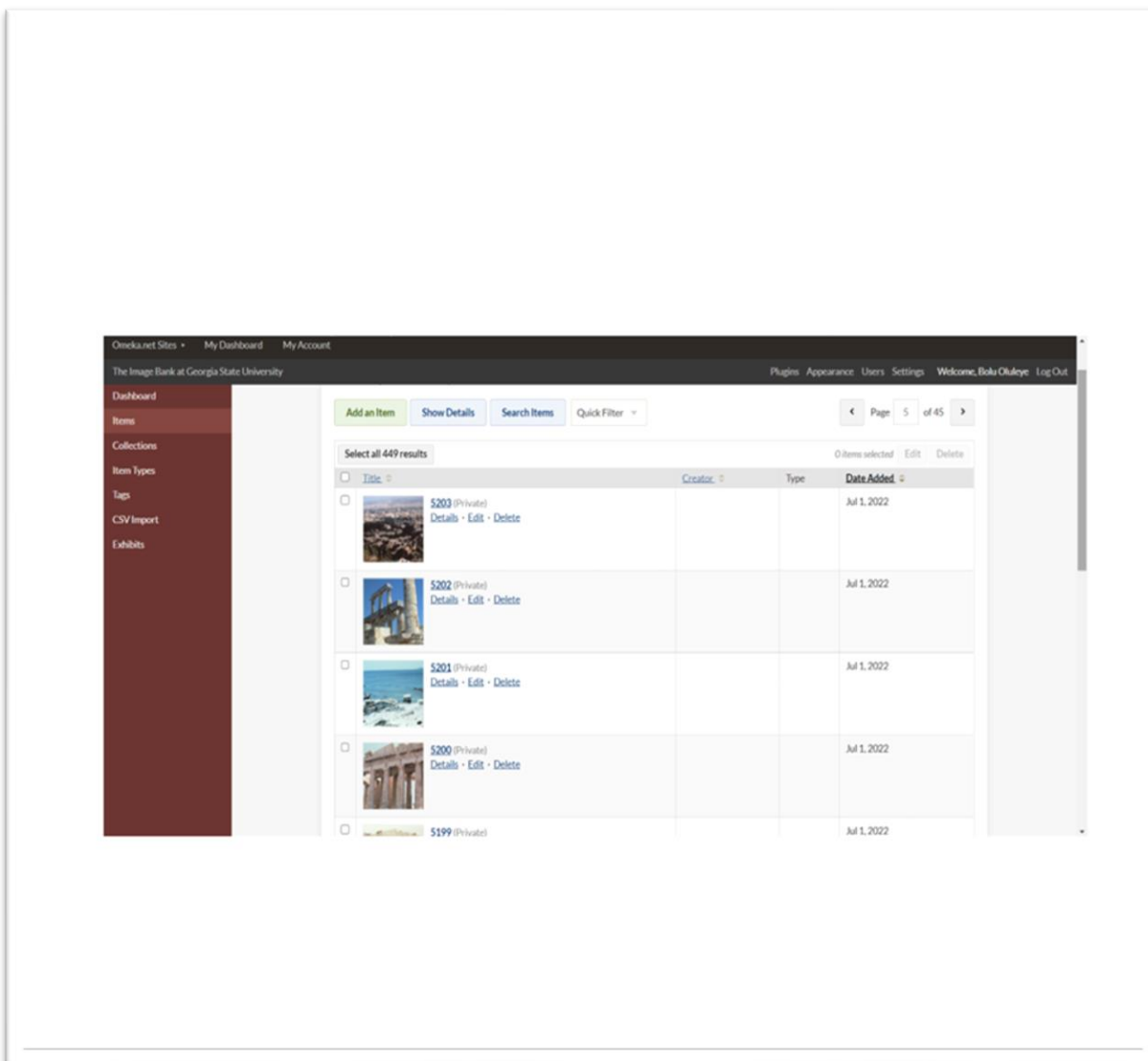
Figure 6 Omeka adminsitrator page showing four digitized slide images

Digital cataloging was intensive and time-consuming, further complicated because the accompanying indices compiled in the 1980s are arranged by categorical themes instead of numerical data or chronology. As a result, a digital catalog is necessary to document and maintain critical metadata. This is essential for long-term goals regarding contextual access, exhibition, and preservation.

In the summer of 2022, the digital image files were watermarked and uploaded onto the Omeka generated website, followed by months of data entry using the digital catalog. Entering accurate contextual information about the images is essential for preserving the archive's provenance and related metadata. It is also crucial for promoting the exhibition and storytelling capabilities of the archive as it leads us back to its origins as a teaching tool and as a medium to explore possibilities of rediscovery and reproduction that shape and represent knowledge through display and interpretation.

On October 12, 2022, I spoke with Richard M. Carp, the original developer responsible for the Image Bank in the late 1980s. Carp describes the development of the Image Bank as a mining operation purposely intended to design an innovative, accessible, and searchable database, primarily for introductory undergraduate courses in religious studies. As a result, the Image Bank prompted a reconsideration of the significance of visual and material culture at that time. According to Carp, expecting the archive to remain in a static state is impossible due to the ephemeral nature of products of human labor and intelligence within malleable realities. As a result, the Image Bank can be seen as a socio-cultural artifact, an incomplete archive in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Figure 7 From The Image Bank; Nataraja, Dancing Sun (bronze), anonymous artist; Asia: India; Ca. 10th century CE. Source: Los Angeles County Museum of Art

"the peculiar efficacy of archives to make us forget that they, too, are historical artifacts–not simply clear panes through which can see the past, but products of particular people's labor"- Kathryn Burns

2   CHAPTER TWO
AN ARTIFACT OF ARTIFACTS

I first received the portion of the Image Bank currently residing in the GSU archaeology lab in three plain and simple white boxes contained within a larger white box. Examining the contents of each of these boxes revealed hundreds of photographic slides containing representations of images including Hindu deities, Egyptian monuments, Greek landscapes, and Latin American festivals. All these images are significant and relevant in many ways. Still, they prompt puzzling questions about the kinds of curatorial methods, knowledge, and ways of seeing involved in its creation and exhibition. This highlights the complexities of knowledge reproduction and representation within the historical construction of collections, archives, and narratives.

Therefore, I came to see the Image Bank as a work of memory, a layered practice of revisitation, re-examination, and re-analysis of the archive as a scholarly and pedagogical tool, initially developed by those other than myself existing within a new process of reconstitution, transformation, and digitization. At the outset of the Image Bank as an archival project, it was pertinent to reconsider the Image Bank through ideas of meaning-making, possible interpretations, inter-relatedness, and relevance, all of which, if done properly, could potentially present a much more cohesive and comprehensive story for audiences and end users to follow.

Accordingly, as the work on the digital archive progressed and its research dimensions continued to develop significantly, I began to consider the archive through ideas of embodiment; a tangible material object possessed of historical facts leading to a redefinition of its boundaries, placing those plain white boxes onto a stage of ideas that reconfigure the archive as an artifact, and an artifact of artifacts, a representation of representations (Bernardi & Dimmock, 2017) .

Jules David Prown (1982) offers a working definition of material culture based on the idea that artifacts can be understood as manifestations of a community or society's beliefs, values, perspectives, and assumptions at a given period (p. 1). According to Prown, material culture, which is also used to refer to the body of artifacts or materials available for study, cuts across various disciplines, including history, art history, archaeology, and anthropology, which presents opportunities to examine how objects are produced, utilized, and thought about in ways intimately connected to social and historical contexts.

Therefore, material culture as a disciplinary field of study aims to understand culture through materials as the subject matter of analysis. Prown (1982) explains, writing that "the word "material" in material culture refers to a broad but unrestricted range of objects. It embraces the class of objects known as artifacts–objects made by man or modified by man." (p. 2).

Prown argues that material culture as a field of study and inquiry ultimately necessitates multidisciplinary collaboration that facilitates the emergence of new holistic research methods and modes of thinking through which material culture can be analyzed at various levels of abstraction, including the singular object level and the broader level tracing the evolution of cultural patterns and systems that continuously shape the human experience through the production and consumption of material culture.

Likewise, the development and proliferation of digital technology, a term which includes "a wide spectrum of media formats, tools, computational processes, and visualization platforms" (Sternfeld, 2011, p. 550), challenges the boundaries of traditional ideas of material culture, providing unique spaces and new ways of thinking, mapping critical intersections and applications of digital technologies within historical practices and across disciplines concerned

with the study of material culture creating new possibilities through newly generated data, theoretical frameworks, and new interdisciplinary collaborations.

In this sense, the Image Bank at Georgia State University is conceived as a critical digital archive, a continuous work within a hopeful archival practice constructed by theoretical frameworks aiming to understand and position the archive within ideas that challenge prevailing notions of material culture by negotiating terrains of materiality and immateriality. Thus, utilizing concepts and practices from anthropology, archival methods, and human-centered design principles, this project seeks to create and maintain a critical digital archive and discursive practice through the intersections of technology, art, material culture, and human experience.

As an archive and record of representations, the original Image Bank had aimed to redefine a field of academic scholarship that has often overlooked the significance of material culture and objects besides textual and scriptural traditions. According to Richard M. Carp (1992), the Image Bank was initially designed to "allow teachers to present both religion and religions in terms of the material culture which expresses, generates, sustains and transforms them" (p. 83). Hence, socio-cultural ideas of material culture serve as a pillar of this project in its original constitutive practice.

However, the development of digital technologies in the new millennium led to a disruptive terrain. This left the physical material archive undervalued and invisible within the digital landscape. Consequently, digitization reconstitutes the Image Bank along a continuum of materiality and immateriality, creating a hybridity of losses, gains, and re-representation.

I am borrowing from the arguments outlined in Walter Ong's 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, which reconceptualized writing as a technological tool enabling cultures of literacy, profoundly reshaping human consciousness and creating new senses of space and time. Writing acts as a bridge facilitating the creation, spread, and preservation of new thoughts and ideas. Hence, this research proposes an argument for digitization beyond a consequence of modern digital technology but as a constructive bridge developed as a product of human labor and thinking during the period of production, enabling the translation of material artifacts into digital artifacts.

In the paper "Archaeology of a Digitization" published in 2014, Bonnie Mak explores the creation and circulation of digital resources, the vague relations between material and digital artifacts, and its effects on ideas and reproductions of cultural heritage through the development of the Early English Books Online database (EEBO). The EEBO is a searchable database of printed works in English up until the 1700s, providing images and full-text transcriptions.

Since its creation, the EEBO has rapidly become a valuable resource for many scholars in the humanities (Mak 2014, p. 1516). Bonnie Mak (2014) argues that digitization is a hybridization process that fuses "traditional and new" technologies (p. 1515). This creates digital data with historicized sources that provide alternatives for knowledge production and transmission. In reference to the EEBO in this case, Mak (2014) situates the database within a 21st-century process of digital materialization and continuous evolution, writing that:

> The digitization of a medieval manuscript is the materialization of 21st century perception of an object that has been evolving for over 500 years. The digital encoding of such an artefact – the 8th century *Lindisfarne Gospels* by the British Library, for instance, or the 13th century *Codex Gigas* by the National Library of Sweden – occurs

in a particular approach to recalling and commemorating a specific
past for modern audiences. (p. 1516)

Digitization also represents embodiments of human abilities and consciousness in ways such that the digital representation is always a product of consequential material realities and possibilities, which in turn shape the relationships between the material object, its digital representation, and its reproduced knowledge on a continuum that continuously challenges material and immaterial realities. Accordingly, digitization does more than transform material objects; it encodes them with metadata, a form of data describing other data forms that historically situate the digital representation as an object in its own right constitutive and engaged through the physical components and complex infrastructure of digital technologies.[2]

Furthermore, digitization creates situations of loss in which sensory modes of engagement are lost entirely or severely undermined. Mak (2014) writes that this is a process of silencing other ways of engaging with artifacts which "may include touch or taste or smell" deliberately suppressed through digitization (p. 1519). This silencing is concerning, considering many academics, including researchers and students, increasingly rely on digital documents, images, and artifacts as primary sources of historical data (Mak 2014, p. 1519).

Digital technologies present possibilities and opportunities in many areas and disciplines. In areas related to cultural heritage and museum studies, digitization is increasingly becoming a significant factor in a variety of discussions. This is especially relevant to discussions and efforts around artifact repatriation movements. For many, digital artifacts are not just reproductions of

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[2] From "When Archival Description Meets Digital Object Metadata: A Typological Study of Digital Archival Representation," by Jane Zhang and Dayne Mauney, 2013, The American Archivist, 76, p. 174-195.

the digital terrain. It has also become a symbolic avenue to address and redress inequalities and to improve access to cultural artifacts. Consequently, there is a crucial need for a much more complex discussion about the possibilities and impossibilities of digital technologies and repatriation.

Accessibility to cultural heritage remains a critical issue for many communities worldwide for various reasons. These include imperial exploitation, conflict, or opportunistic profit-making from cultural resources. However, digitization is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It is a layered practice of socially reproduced knowledge that intersects with significant issues related to ownership, access, ethics, and preservation of cultural heritage.

Digitization is not an objectively neutral activity. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the constraints of digitization in technical, socio-cultural, and theoretical spheres. For instance, the digital environment enables the manipulation of artifacts through their reproduction and circulation, which may include aesthetic edits, image resolution adjustments, cropping for focus, and much more. This immediately reproduces a selective and privileged body of knowledge.

Furthermore, digital representations of material artifacts may become complicated through changing cultural perspectives and ideas of ownership. According to Bell, et al. (2013), the circulation of digital artifacts may involve degrees of difficulty and tension for cultures who want a certain level of ownership of their digital artifacts, as these artifacts are also considered essential constitutive bodies of knowledge. They write:

> While digital technologies allow for materials to be repatriated quickly, circulated widely, and annotated endlessly, these same technologies pose challenges to indigenous communities who wish to maintain traditional cultural protocols for viewing, circulation, and reproduction of these new

> cultural materials… Digital technologies and the internet have combined
> to produce both the possibility for greater indigenous access to material
> collections held in collecting institutions, as well as a new set of tensions
> for communities who wish to control these materials and thereby limit
> their access and circulation. (Bell, et. al., 2013, p. 197)

Additionally, Bell, et. Al. (2013) assert that digital repatriation opens up arenas to actively engage anthropological thought and theory through participatory and collaborative methods with communities that critically interrogate the relationship between "digital and material forms of cultural heritage" (p. 296). On that account, it is crucial to shift the focus of ideas about digital artifacts that position it as a replacement for physical artifacts; instead, it may be much more helpful to understand and appreciate the digital artifact as a dynamic resource of alternatives for a variety of new creations, collaborations, and revivals.

Making the Invisible Visible

The archival research project ["Tracing the Potter's Wheel"](#) presents a dynamic case study in the uses of digital technologies for collaborative multidisciplinary participation in historical and archaeological research involving the application and utilization of digital technology, significantly shifting ideas and understandings about digital archives and technology. "Tracing the Potter's Wheel" seeks to understand the emergence of the potter's wheel and pottery traditions in Bronze Age Aegean communities as a technological innovation that notably shaped and configured the material cultural legacies of the Aegean across time and space.

"Tracing the Potter's Wheel" is an innovative archival project built on archaeological archiving traditions. It aims to create a multidisciplinary, functional, and usable collaborative digital archive based on user-centered design thinking principles. According to Loes Opgenhaffen (2022), "Tracing the Potter's Wheel" is conceptualized as an archive within an

archive interrogating the ideas around digital devices as disruptive tools within traditional research practices by utilizing the theoretical framework of "Tradition in Transition," which combines traditional archaeological archival practice with digital technologies with hopes that "new types of data will be obtained… which may lead to a different kind of knowledge" (2022, 4).

Therefore, "Tracing the Potter's Wheel" involves the selection of archaeological data for further studies, recording the object with various tools such as digital photography, scanners, and 3D modeling while documenting the entire process of recording and studying the artifact, which is then archived together with the object, translating material objects and practices into "database structures and metadata categories" within a multilayered archaeological archival tradition (Opgenhaffen 2022, 1-2). Opgenhaffen explains:

> digital archives have the potential to draw together multiple communities of practice, of visualisers, digital archaeologists, pottery specialist, experimental archaeologists, professional potters, amateur potters, and many more. The traditionally separated practices, conventions and procedures of digital, visualization, experimental and science-based communities of archaeologists are shared in this research archive, and subsequently used and learned by specialists, novices and lay persons who could then become a member of any of these communities and contribute to them with their own data and experience. (2022, p. 3)

Accordingly, "Tracing the Potter's Wheel" is not only a digital repository of archaeological objects and data. It is a body of work created through a combination and multiplicity of practices often left invisible in the archives. Archives extend beyond objects. They also chronicle memories and ideas concerning what has been done, what is valued, and thought processes and experiences. Incorporating this kind of information creates opportunities for new bodies of knowledge to emerge, thus enhancing the archive.

Therefore, "Tracing the Potter's Wheel" illustrates the possibilities of digital technologies to foster collaboration, participation, and the creation of novel forms of material culture. Opgenhaffen elaborates that using digital tools within archaeological research has created avenues for possibilities and choices that enhance the retrieval of archaeological data, analysis, and creation of new information and reconstruction of past human behavior and experiences (2022, p. 4).

Finally, studying material culture offers numerous opportunities for understanding people, cultures, and the human past. Artifacts are manifestations of human activities, thinking, and experiences. They carry critical details about systems, patterns, and interactions across time and space. In the process of capturing and recording material artifacts, digital technology creates new digital artifacts with distinct data forms that exist within a continuum of materiality and immateriality in which these digital artifacts need to be reexamined and understood as evolving, dynamic and alternative resources beyond static, one-dimensional ideas about digital technology and material culture.

Figure 8 From The Image Bank; Catacomb of Priscilla; Europe: Eastern Mediterranean; Ca. 2nd century CE. Source: Jane Dillenberger

"But I want to say more than this. I want to do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive. I want to tell a story about two girls capable of retrieving what remains dormant–the purchase or claim of their lives on the present–without committing further violence in my own act of narration. It is a story predicated upon impossibility–listening for the unsaid, translating misconstructed words, and refashioning disfigured lives–and intent on achieving an impossible goal" - Saidiya Hartman

3   CHAPTER THREE

ABSENCE AND PRESENCE IN THE ABSTRACTION OF THE ARCHIVE

The digital archive embodies contemporary digital practices and capabilities. For many users, the digital interface represents a medium through which documents are collected, retrieved, and circulated. Therefore, the digital archive also represents the possibilities and impossibilities encompassing various forms of tangible and intangible materiality intricately bound to socio-cultural interactions defining it as a site of power, authority, and legitimacy shaping reconstructions and understandings of the past and present.

Archival scholarship generally defines an *archive* as a collection of documents given meaning and legitimacy through human activity. Therefore, archives are always a product of human labor. Furthermore, the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot defines archives as assembling institutions of historical facts and sources that condition history's existence and interpretations (1995, p. 52). Michael A. Peters and Tina Besley give a slightly different definition, writing that archives are cultural institutions that create frameworks for social and collective memory (2019, p. 1020).

Consequently, an archive is a complex concept that ranges from physical to abstract forms. Accordingly, Okwui Enwezor (2008) elaborates that it is difficult to accept a single standard definition for archives because:

> No single definition can convey the complexities of a concept
> like *the archiv*e .... The standard view of the archive oftentimes
> evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves
> laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artifacts
> against the archive as an active, regulatory discursive system. (p. 11)

Archives as an institution of record-keeping have been widely utilized in many cultures and societies worldwide, from ancient Mesopotamia clay cuneiform tablets to oral record-keeping collections. Archives have served crucial societal functions ranging from legal records to financial transactions and cataloging the actions of the everyday citizen.

However, the development of archives, as they are known today, is intricately connected to the material realities and developments of the early modern period. The invention of the printing press in the 15th century created the ability to produce printed materials on a massive scale, which continues to have dramatic effects on the transmission of ideas today. Alexandra Walsham (2016) explains that the early modern period was characterized by significant social, political, and religious transformations marking a crucial period in archival development; She writes that:

> the advent of mechanized printing, the expansion of literacy, the rise of new conventions of self-expression and other related changes in the realm of communication; urbanization, capitalism and the emergence of a market economy; social mobility and migration; state formation, civil war and constitutional revolution; the dual Protestant and Catholic Reformations and Confessionalization; and the Renaissance reconfiguration of attitudes towards history, memory, and time themselves. (p. 12)

Adrian Cunningham (2008) cautions against the irresponsibility of conflating archives and the work of archivists with that of librarians and curators. Cunningham asserts that archives manage systems of record-keeping across time and domains of use, whose records have been appraised as authentic evidence of social life and from which meaning and value are extracted through complex contextual relationships surrounding its creation and use (p. 532). Likewise, Eric Mechoulan (2011) argues that the archive is a system of documented traces of the past given authority through acts of conservation and extraction, which constitute transformative processes

weighed with socio-political considerations always linked to relationships of power and social imbalances which are evident when we consider public and private interests (p. 92-99).

Therefore, the archive is a multi-dimensional and socio-dynamic space overseeing the aims of documentation, record-keeping, and preservation with the crucial legitimizing justification for furthering utility and knowledge. By function and necessity, Cunningham (2008) stresses that the archive is a complex space for strategizing, capturing, and preserving information in context (p. 533). Consequently, archives require complex, dynamic, intertwined, and fine-tuned metadata regime structures that transform the archive as an event-oriented space within an object-oriented world (Cunningham, 2008, p. 533).

Thus, the digital archive constitutes a similar but distinct sphere in relation to digital libraries and museums due to the essence of its function; it must be understood in its devotion to preserving evidential and contextual knowledge of digital records as proof of human activity and the past (Cunningham, 2008, p. 532). Accordingly, Ward and Wisnicki (2019) note that traditional archives, usually regarded as producers and curators of the past, are being challenged to reorient their ethos and work beyond the past and present toward the future (p. 201).

Subsequently, the emergence of the digital archive is as much a result of technological innovations in as much as it is the consequence of interactions between digital culture and conversions across the digital landscape. It is also the evolutionary legacy of extensive analog regimes for carrying non-digital archives and records forward through time (Cunningham, 2008, p. 533). Mechoulan (2011) asserts that the emergence of digital archives and forms of record-keeping presents as many possibilities as it does difficulties; therefore, it is critical to address these challenges with epistemological and historical measures (p. 92).

One of the most critical challenges facing archivists within the digital landscape is preserving contextualized digital objects and information. The reality is that while digitized objects may be relatively easy to preserve, the temporality and multiple operational registers of the digital object enable its rapid transformation and movement from one format and interface to another at greater risks of electronic vulnerability and radical de-contextualization (Cunningham, 2008, p. 533; Ward & Wisnicki, 2019, p. 203; Mechoulan, 2011, p. 100).

Within archives, context is extremely crucial; it is not an exaggeration to state that context is everything. Context structures the ways digital objects move from one format to another while remaining legible and visible within the digital landscape. According to Mechoulan (2011), digital archival context is constituted by metadata which governs its transference and legibility through various migrations and conversions (p. 101). Additionally, Joshua Sternfeld (2011) expands upon metadata's tangibility, explaining that metadata validates digital content through contextualization, which he defines as the relationship between units of information made trustworthy and consequently effective (p. 548).

In archaeological terminology, for example, the context of an artifact refers to three essential elements, its immediate surrounding, its position, and its association with other items found at the site. All the elements need to be analyzed and interpreted towards the reconstructive process of understanding the human past (Renfrew & Bahn, 2003, p. 566). Likewise, Kate Palmer Albers (2017) explains that within archival settings, records are understood not just through the contents they offer but through the other informational forms associated with them, meaning that, ultimately, information is processed through the company it keeps (p. 6).

De-contextualization within the digital landscape is the observation of various

technological migrations, dissemination, emulations, and mutations. Albers (2017) explains that as digital objects travel through time and interfaces, they require straightforward and searchable descriptions that inform and satisfy our communicative impulses and understandings (p. 6). Consequently, de-contextualization within the digital landscape is extensively shaped and influenced by desires to optimize computer algorithms, computer vision, and machine learning technologies to enhance visibility and accessibility across platforms (Albers, 2017, p. 4). However, within this vast and shifting sphere of possibilities also come the challenges of knowledge reproduction and interpretation across a strained and sometimes combative social and digital landscape.

Digital archives have emerged through the interactions between culture and technological transformations of the 20th and 21st centuries with firm roots within our material and social realities. Ward and Wisnicki (2019) note that archives are usually viewed as institutional agents of the past (p. 203). Still, post-colonial theorists examining the legacies of colonialism and imperialism are increasingly seeking to reform and, in some cases, to reinvent the archive (Ward & Wisnicki, 2019, p. 202-203). Therefore, the digital archive and its objectified contents are theorized across liminal spaces of possibility and impossibility and located within a continuum that encompasses and challenges materiality and immateriality across space and time.

De-contextualization illustrates the vulnerability and temporality of digital objects as it renders them illegible and obsolete over time. Consequently, de-contextualization should be considered a process that reverses a collective process of social memory, knowledge production, and interpretations. Mechoulan (2011) argues that modernity can be understood through its demarcations of the past, and to understand the past, historians need to recontextualize it by breaking down associated information into building blocks of metadata to reconstruct meaning

and interpretations that will remain sensible under the selective gaze of history (p. 100). Thus, as an institutional agency, the digital archive is not a neutral sphere. It is a space continuously shaped by material and social realities entrenched in collective memory, technological developments, preservation practices, and political decisions.

The Silences Of The Archive

According to Jacques Derrida (1995), all forms of archives have multidimensional functions. They inhabit systems of recordkeeping and knowledge reproduction while being centers of power spinning the wheels that construct and re-construct time, obscuring and excluding, shaping social memory and our interpretations of history. The impossibilities of the archive are generated within silences and given life through its capacity to maintain dominant hegemonic ideology through selective narratives that reinforce systems of marginalization and institutional neglect.

On the other hand, Derrida believed that archives could open up new possibilities and ways of seeing. This would provide opportunities for transformative archival reconstruction and understanding of the past within the present.[3] The works "Venus in Two Acts" and the "Rani of Sirmur" by Saidiya Hartman and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, respectively, demonstrate efforts to read against the archive. They involve the excavation and reconstruction of historical narratives and actors within a negative space of historical invisibility and narrative impossibility within the terms of the archive. This is to recover dispossessed and marginalized individuals and their histories often rendered invisible. Hartman and Spivak both argue that historical records

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[3] From "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," by Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, 1995, Diacritics, 25, p. 9-63 (https://www.jstor.org/stable/465144).

function in distinct ways; to simultaneously record and silence specific events happening within a particular socio-historical context.

Saidiya Hartman describes her work, "Venus in Two Acts," as an instance of "critical fabulation." This theoretical framework combines historical archival research and critical theory to create a fictionalized reconstructive narrative to fill in the absences and gaps of the archive (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). Hartman (2008) explains that her intentions aim to salvage the lives of archival captives held by the legitimized authority. The intent of the work is shaped by a narrative reconstruction that strains against the limits of the archive, demonstrating the "impossibility of representing the lives of the captives… by rearranging the basic elements of the story… by throwing into crisis 'what happened when' and by exploiting the 'transparency of sources' as fictions of history" to resist the abstractions and silences of the archive (2008, p. 11).

Consequently, Hartman brings us aboard a ship named "Recovery," sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, a journey through the memory of the Middle Passage. Like many ships sailing across the Atlantic in the 1700s, the "Recovery" carries enslaved laborers, becoming a site of death for two young girls in particular. The ship's captain, John Kimber, severely beat the girls repeatedly for several weeks, leading to their deaths (Hartman, 2008, p. 7). John Kimber was charged, tried, and acquitted for their murder in 1792.

During Kimber's trial, the name Venus is briefly mentioned in court records. It is confined to only a few sentences used in reference to the two young girls who died aboard the "Recovery." Venus has long been associated with the Roman goddess of love and beauty, a symbol of imperial Rome. Venus is reinvented in the early modern period within the ecosystem of transatlantic slavery. Here, she symbolizes the objectification, subjugation, and invisibility of

the lives of enslaved Black women. It represents the selective powers of the archive to reproduce

the possibilities of what is known and left unknown. Hartman writes:

> I could say after a famous philosopher that what we know of Venus in her many guises amounts to "little more than a register of her encounter with power" and that it provides "a meager sketch of her existence." An act of chance or disaster produced a divergence or an aberration from the expected and usual course of invisibility and catapulted her from the underground to the surface of discourse. We stumble upon her in exorbitant circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts, no glimpse of the vulnerability of her face or what looking at such a face might demand. We only know what can be extrapolated from an analysis of the ledger or borrowed from the world of her captors and masters and applied to her…One cannot ask, "Who is Venus?" because it would be impossible to answer such a question. There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories. And the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed off as insults and crass jokes. The archive in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative. (2008, p. 2)

Hartman's (2008) work situates the archive across the tensions that transgress its

possibilities and impossibilities through acts of reconstructive fictionalized accounts of the two

Venuses, a practice she refers to as a glimpse of beauty and an instant of possibility (p. 8).

Hartman's accounts focus on archival failures to provide substantial accounts and evidence of the

lives of enslaved women beyond acts of dispossession and subjugation. Instead, the accounts of

the lives of enslaved Black women of the early modern transatlantic period remain present in the

absence of the archives in the negative space of marginal borders that delineate what is known

and unknown within the archive. This negative space also provides opportunities and practices of

narrative freedom against the impossibilities and limits of the archive and archival power, which often traffics between the spaces of "fact, fantasy, desire, and violence" (Hartman, 2008, p. 5).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) examines the powers and uses of language within the archive that maintains imperial narrative traditions of domination and subjugation over the lives and experiences of colonized women that establish the native as a "self-consolidating other" (p. 250). Unraveling the Indian Subcontinent through colonial records, Spivak brings us to the kingdom of Sirmur in the Himalayas. Here she begins a deconstructive argument that contemplates the colonial archive as a production of the interactions between imperial aspirations and patriarchal systems, recreating colonized women as allegorical representations of the objectified status of women in modern colonial India.

The persona at the center of Spivak's analysis is the Rani, or queen of Sirmur. She appears in colonial records almost as an invention, becoming the kingdom's sovereign after her husband is deposed of and banished, answerable to British colonial interests. Spivak (1985), invoking a narrative imagination, writes that we can imagine the Rani "in her simple palace, separated from the authority of her no doubt patriarchal and dissolute husband, suddenly managed by a young white man in her own household" (p. 267).

The Rani threatens to commit Sati - the Hindu ritual of self-immolation for widows (possibly out of fear for her husband's life, although it remains unclear whether there was a significant threat to the King's life from the colonial authorities during the period). Spivak (1985) writes that the practice of Sati became the site for the formation of identity and ideas where women's free will is negated into obscurity through the patriarchal subject formation and imperialist object constitution. Thus, she emerges in the archive between contested ideological

battlegrounds tied to imperial interests and patriarchal traditions during a period of growing

abolitionist efforts. Spivak elaborates by writing that:

> For the female "subject," a sanctioned self-immolation within
> Hindu patriarchal discourse, even as it takes away the effect of "fall"
> attached to an unsanctioned suicide, brings praise for the act of choice
> on another register. By the inexorable ideological production of the
> sexed subject, such a death can be understood by the female subject
> as an exceptional signifier of her own desire, exceeding the general
> rule of a widow's conduct. The self immolation of widows was not
> invariable ritual prescription. If however, the widow does decide thus
> to exceed the letter of ritual, to turn back is a transgression for which
> a particular type of penance is prescribed. When before the era of abolition,
> a petty British officer was obliged to be present at each widow-sacrifice
> to ascertain its "legality," to be dissuaded by him after a decision was, by
> contrast, a mark of real free choice, a choice of freedom. (1985, p. 268)

What is hidden by the colonial archival record is the agency of the Rani and her

utilization of the practice of sati as a negotiating implement of resistance to manage her

circumstances and exert some measure of control over her life. However, such interpretation

remains obscured by colonial linguistic norms of the archive, which records the Rani

fundamentally within the space of imperial power and dominance, superseding the woman's

experiences and reducing her to an object of slaughter and control. Hartmann's and Spivak's

works demonstrate critical re-examinations of archival records to recover and illuminate the

experiences of the marginalized and dispossessed, creating alternative possibilities and

interpretations against the limits and erasures of the archive.

The Unthinkable

Like Hartmann's and Spivak's reconstructive efforts towards archival visibility that defy

power structures influencing dominant representations and interpretations of history, Michel-

Rolph Trouillot, in his groundbreaking work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of*

History, challenges the production of historical narratives and the role of archives and archival authority in legitimizing history.

Trouillot centers his arguments within a metanarrative deconstruction of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. The Revolution ended in declaring the former French colony of Saint-Domingue the independent state of Haiti and the first country to declare slavery illegal. Prior to the Revolution, Trouillot notes that a slave revolt had almost been considered an unthinkable impossibility at that period within the transatlantic context of the French empire.

Here, Trouillot challenges the Haitian Revolution's reduced status and achievements. He analyzes the Revolution's records through the consequences of intentional silences and absences within the archival records. Trouillot (1995) recognizes the importance of popular media and cultural spaces in constructing historical narratives and social memory, which he considers dependent on historians and archival powers (p. 20).

For Trouillot archives do not necessarily create historical sources. Instead, he argues that archives are to be considered assembling institutions that encompass active processes of production and preparation of facts for historical intelligibility (Trouillot, 1995, p. 52). Therefore, Trouillot considers the archive a site of mediation. This creates possibilities for critically re-examining archival narratives and socio-historical processes that condition our understanding of history.

The Haitian revolutionary army was vulnerable to factions that fell along rigid social caste systems. These factions became apparent during the revolution creating what Trouillot calls "the war within the war," which Trouillot distills into a re-examination of the multiple executions of the African-born revolutionary, Jean Baptiste Sans Souci, by Caribbean-born

Creole, Henry Christophe, who would later become Henry I, king of Northern Haiti. Hence, Trouillot embarks on an ambitious metanarrative journey, reconsidering the Haitian Revolution through its silenced narratives of internal factions and battles, calling into question the prevailing mythos of the revolutions within the social memory of Haiti and the world beyond.

According to Trouillot, Haitian history is steeped in erasure and revisionism. Trouillot explains that the executions of Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci and the man himself have almost been excised from Haitian collective memory, symbolizing the epitome of war within the war and the powers of historical silences. He writes:

> And indeed they tried to rewrite it as much as they could. For most Writers sympathetic to the cause of freedom. Haitians and foreigners alike, the war within the war is an amalgam of unhappy incidents that pitted the black Jacobins, Creole slaves, and freedmen alike, against hordes of uneducated "Congos," African-born slaves, Bossale with strange surnames…That many of these Congos were early leaders of the 1791 uprising, that few had become bona fide officers of Louverture's army, that all were staunch defenders of the cause of freedom had been passed over. The military experience gathered in Africa during the Congo civil wars, which may have been crucial to the slave revolution is a non-issue in Haiti. Not just because few Haitians are intimate with African history, but because Haitian historians (like everyone else) long assumed that victorious strategies could come only come from the Europeans or the most Europeanized slaves. Words like Congo and Bossale carry negative connotations in the Caribbean today… "Congo" came to describe a purported political minority at the time when the bulk of the population was certainly African born…Jean Baptiste Sans Souci is Congo par excellence. He was the most renowned of the African rebels and the most effective…He is a ghost that most Haitian historians–urban, literate, French speakers, as they all are–would rather lay to rest. (Trouillot, 1995, p. 67)

Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci first died by gunfire by Henry Christophe during the revolution. He dies another death during the construction of Henry Christophe's palace in the foothills of the town of Millot, which the king names "Sans Souci," furthering the erasure of Jean-Baptiste. Trouillot employs (1995) a reconstructive method within his deconstructive metanarrative to

excavate the remains of Jean-Baptiste, who was more than a negligible figure within the silences of history (p. 58).

Trouillot explains the importance of Christophe's palace connecting his intentions through historical references that symbolize his domination over his enemy. The construction of the palace in Millot also symbolizes Christophe's conquest, domination, and appropriation of Sans Souci in literal and figurative terms allowing the silencing to continue. He writes:

> Christophe built Sans Souci, the palace, a few yards away from–if not exactly–where he killed Sans Souci, the man…the king was engaged in a transformative ritual to absorb his old enemy. Dahoman oral history reports that the country was founded by Tacoodonou "put Da to death by cutting open his belly, and placed his body under the foundation of a palace that he built in Abomey, as a memorial of his victory; which he called Dahomy, from Da the unfortunate victim, and Homy his belly: that is a house built in Da's belly." The elements of the Sans Souci plot are there: the war, the killing, the building of a palace, and the naming it after the dead enemy. Chances are that Christophe knew this story. He praised Dahomans as great warriors. He bought or recruited four thousand blacks –many of whom were reportedly from Dahomey–to bolster his army. (1995, p. 65-66)

Trouillot is concerned about how power operates at multiple levels, continuously molding the production of historical narratives and practices. Trouillot (1995) argues that silences are an inherent part of history because when something is recorded, something else is left out, creating selective histories (p. 49). The history of the Haitian Revolution, the French Empire, and afterlives of Transatlantic Slavery creates a disruptive space of layered silences and absorbed lives.

Accordingly, from a Derridean perspective, selective histories across formats and technologies act as mechanisms for archival conditions of exclusion and incompletion. This

requires radical efforts to read against the archive's impossibilities, looking through its limitations for instances of possibilities.

Therefore, archives and archival practices must be understood as active constructions and reconstructions of the past within the present. Walsham (2016) observes that archives function as monuments and memorials that bear witness to historical consciousness and endeavor to preserve the past for the future (p. 15). She writes that archives should be located "on a linguistic and conceptual spectrum with other kinds of repositories…treasuries, shrines, museums and cabinets of curiosities" (Walsham, 2016, p. 15).

In creating the Image Bank within a critical context, I found it highly imperative to think about archives reflexively and holistically. It is crucial to grasp the root of the institution to recognize an authoritative power within the archive that simultaneously legitimizes its content as records and objects. Archives are not passive entities. They are spaces where social forces interact trans formatively through multiple layers of material performances and ideas in reproducing knowledge.

Figure 9 From The Image Bank: Close up detail of Mary's head, Byzantine School; Europe; Ca. 13th century CE. Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

"In the modern way of seeing, reality is first of all appearance–which is always changing. A photograph records appearance. The record of photography is the record of change, of the destruction of the past"- Susan Sontag

"The image has no fixed meaning. It has potentially a wide range of meanings….There is no escape from the fact that meaning is in the end interpretation…it is always contextual" - Stuart Hall.

4   CHAPTER FOUR

PIECES OF TIME

As a photographic archive, the Image Bank functions as a site for recording visual memories gathered within an ecosystem that informs and interprets simultaneously. Photographs can be described <u>as records of specific time forms</u> that no longer have a material reality; that is to say, they remain confined to memory. Photographs are not static records. They result from material performances constantly negotiating social memories and imaginations of the past, present, and future.

Notably, the development of the photographic camera can be traced back to the camera obscura, a device often in the shape of a box with a small hole on one side through which images are projected onto a surface. By the 19th century, the earliest photographic processes were being developed, with names such as Joseph Nicephore Niepe, Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre, and Henry Fox Talbot developing various photographic techniques that would become the predecessors of modern imaging technology (Gayed & Angus, 2018, p. 231).

Nevertheless, the invention of photography marked a momentous and controversial moment in history. Shortly after the photograph was officially announced in 1839, its invention became immersed in nationalistic politics centered on the individual developers and, by extension, their countries of origin, namely France and England (Gayyed & Angus, 2018, p. 231). Douglas R. Nickel (2001) writes that the controversy surrounding photography's invention involved:

> the Englishman William Henry Fox Talbot and the Frenchman
> Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre, backed to varying degrees by
> Their respective national science establishments, claimed priority
> to the invention, with Daguerre's bid being further complicated by
> a challenge from his countryman and original partner, Nicephore Niepce,
> and the civil servant Hippolyte Bayard. For this reason, both the
> French and English announcements logically featured a narrative of
> their claimants' actions and intentions leading up to their independent
> success, with the clear polemical aim of affirming precedence.
> Photography's literature begins with tremendous self-consciousness
> about the invention's origins in experimental science, its potential as
> technology, its relationship to the traditional representational arts, and
> the seemingly superhuman properties of its results. (p. 549)

Since then, photography has become extremely prevalent in everyday life. The further development of photographic technology and the advent of digital media has entrenched photography into almost every arena of modern society. Consequently, photographs do much more than record moments; they are a manifestation of social realities and relations. Helen Vallianatos (2019) asserts that a photograph is a culturally mediated image (p. 70). Additionally, Elizabeth Edwards (2009) describes photography as a material process through which the photographer and subject constitute "physical or material traces of the historical past" (p. 131). Thus, the photograph occupies a variety of functional sites in modern society[4].

With the development of art history as a discipline, photography entered a broader recognition sphere.[5] It became regarded as a form of valuable artistic expression. Drawing from Marxist analyses and economic theories, Okwui Enwezor (2008) describes photography as a commodity resulting from surplus value (p. 12). In Marxist theory, surplus value for a

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[4] See Carp (1992), page 85 for more information.

[5] From "Photographic Perspectives: Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History," in *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline,* ((p. 246-457), by Frederick N. Bohrer, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield, 2002, Routledge.

commodity refers to the difference between the value of goods and services and the wages

workers receive for their labor. Although slightly distinct, the photograph possesses forms of

value that distinguish it beyond practical attributes in the various ways photographs encompass

economic, social, and religious functions.[6]

In Susan Sontag's essay collection *On Photography*, Sontag explores the definitive

hallmarks of photography's effect on modern society. Sontag argues that photography has

radically impacted modern society's conceptions of reality. She writes that modern society has

been conditioned to see reality in fragments, and the photograph constitutes a fragment. Sontag

explains that:

> A photograph is a fragment–a glimpse. We accumulate glimpses,
> fragments…All photographs aspire to the condition of being memorable–
> that is unforgettable…In that view that defines us as modern, there
> are an infinite number of details. Photographs are details. Therefore,
> photographs seem like life. To be modern is to live, entranced by the
> savage autonomy of the detail. (Sontag, 2007, p. 126)

Accordingly, Sontag argues that photography has impacted modern humans through its powerful

ability to shape collective social memories, public opinion, and our understanding of reality.

Therefore, photography is a powerful technology; it can also function as a tool for manipulation,

dehumanization, and the invasion of privacy.

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[6] From Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art (1st ed., p. 11-13), by Okwui Enwezor, International Center of Photography.

What Shall We Say of the Dead?

Photography has left a profound, impactful legacy on anthropology, particularly within archaeology and ethnography. Following the Second World War, photography became a major tool of anthropological inquiry. In archaeology, photographs remain essential for documentation, artifact analysis, and exposing the interrelationships between various objects (Vallianatos, 2019, P. 72).

Furthermore, photography became even more significant within ethnographic research; it became a primary tool for recording and capturing the subject. Therefore, photography within anthropology creates conditions for examining representations and constructions of identity, authenticity, and knowledge[7]. In the digital era, the digitization and proliferation of anthropological photographs create new opportunities for viewing, interpretation, and meaning. Jenny Newell (2012) explains that digitized images generate new types of questions, complicate historical narratives, and facilitate access to alternative experiences of the past (P. 293).

Photography within anthropology has also dredged up surveillance, invasion of privacy, and reproductive copyright issues. From the moment of capture, the photograph enters a dimension of dialogues between the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer; between ideas of memory, history, and identity about the past and future, pushing the photograph beyond photography into an aura that gives the photograph the status of the document, anthropological artifact, and the authority of a social instrument (Enwezor, 2008, p. 13).

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[7] See Carp (1992), page 85-87 for more information.

In the book *The Mirror in the Ground: Archaeology, Photography, and the Making of a Disciplinary Archive*, Nick Shepherd explores the development of South African archaeology as a discipline developed in tandem with the camera in the field as an apparatus of truth. Shepard argues that photography remains a critical method for conducting archaeology and reconstructing the past. Shepherd (2015) writes that archaeological photography also functions as an invitation to reconsider the invention of meaning in different contexts and how the discipline has been shaped (p. 10). Thus, photography in archaeology becomes a critical mode for exploration and a medium through which we can observe the reflections of societal practices.

The modern development of archaeology in South Africa begins as a byproduct of amateur efforts within settler colonial societies at that time. Shepherd (2015) writes that although archaeology in southern Africa explores the experiences of indigenous peoples in the region, it was perfectly acceptable to practice "African archaeology without knowing, or wanting to know anything about African people," as archaeology becomes a medium through which the landscape is assimilated into the imaginations and dialogues of colonial settler societies (p. 86).

Shepherd argues that early archaeology in southern Africa became intimately tied to settler-colonial aspirations, and archaeology became a possibility of enacting claims upon the land. He writes that:

> The excursions and activities of the Archaeological Society were a way of Engaging landscape, but they also formed the basis for a complex claim to territory. In *White Writing,* JM Coetzee (1988) writes of a tradition of settler poetry in South Africa in which the poet seeks to establish a reciprocity with landscape, finding a formulation of words to fit the land and speak its soul…For its professional and amateur savants, the discipline of archaeology offered a way of reading landscape, deciphering the "hidden histories" written in the language of stone and bone…With archaeology one encountered the past as embodied experience. In the materiality of sites and remains, one could see, touch, smell,

sometimes taste the past and – as it were – dwell poetically in the time of Man Apes of Makapan Caves and the Cultures of the Later Stone Age. That these Other histories, in contemporary contested landscapes, was both the point of contradiction and the point of purchase of these claims. (Shepherd, 2015, p. 93)

Photography emerges in southern African archaeology, intrinsic to the procedures of excavation and interpretation recording sediment, artifacts, and camp life while navigating through concepts of time, progress, race, culture, and "the notion of Africa" and its relationship to the "idea of Europe" (Shepherd, 2015, p. 16).

Archaeological photography in southern Africa contributes a certain richness to the region's visual history and ethnographic record while speaking to its contested social realities, a medium of exploration, erasure, and dehumanization. Likewise, Shepherd (2015) argues for a departure from the idea of archaeology as a tool of domination and exploitation; the discipline should be understood as a practice occurring within a radicalized landscape of racialized colonial apartheid where race is, first and foremost, an organizing principle (p. 151). Therefore, the archaeological photographic archive of the region invites us to reconsider the discipline in the measures through which it explores knowledge, mediates meaning, and constitutes a performance of memory. Shepherd (2015) observes that:

> The photograph of stone implements have a formal beauty that speaks
> to the aesthetics of archaeology. They also speak to the care with which
> such implements are collected, catalogued, arranged and photographed.
> The photographs of black co-workers speak of hidden histories and the
> limitations of the colonial archive…They direct us to think about the
> nature of the knowledge enterprise in archaeology, and the forms of
> violence associated with these ways of knowing. They also direct us
> to think about the centrality of bodies – especially black bodies – as
> objects of exhumation and speculation. (p. 151)

In the analysis of Danish colonial archives and the process of digital reparation by institutions in Denmark to redress the colonial presence of Denmark in the Caribbean and beyond, Temi Odumosu (2020) argues that these reparative digital archives create an unstable mechanism through which "the means of production, right of access, and dissemination" is controlled by the archival stakeholders, curators, and funding authorities (p. 295). Odumosu argues that digital archives have problematic and consequential relationships with the concept of authority as digitized images from the colonial period involve processes of violation, creating critical questions about best practices for preserving and sharing these histories without replicating historical patterns of abuse.

It is a difficult question to answer because removing the accompanying historical contextual information about the digitized image does not rectify the violence through which it came to exist. Arguably, it renders it vulnerable to new acts of misrepresentation and erasure occurring within contemporary contested socio-political realities. Therefore, these realizations require significant attention and vigilance when digitizing sensitive images and materials. It is crucial to integrate actions of applicable praxis within the curation and digitization of images.

Accordingly, Jenny Newell's work demonstrates the impact of facilitating a collaborative and participatory network when working with digitized objects and images within a museum context. Newell explains that digital resources create new possibilities and avenues for interaction and engagement; the perceptions and meanings of digitalized objects vary across cultures. For instance, digitized objects can be areas and avenues for addressing social issues. Additionally, in some parts of the Western Pacific, artifacts are often regarded to have a humanlike ancestral presence and affect, which can take on new roles in the digital space (Newell, 2012, p. 297). Thus, we must think beyond the confines of the image with the

awareness of the errors of conflating content with meaning and reducing the photographic archive to an uncomplicated and passive representation.

Richard M. Carp notes that photography is an editorial and selective process in which certain elements of what is visible are chosen, framed, and reproduced according to certain intents and interests (1992, 85). Hence, the Image Bank is also a product of editorial and selective processes and considerations. This reproduction of the archive represents a layered performance in memory, not just through the images, but through the written indices that provide its descriptive metadata.

At various points during the development of the digital archive, I struggled between the impulses of rephrasing or rectifying certain descriptive language for a contemporary somewhat progressive audience while maintaining the contextual integrity of the original archival description as a product of its time. Thus, it is crucial to re-examine the archive as a photographic repository with careful attention to its role as a medium for memory and collective knowledge.

Figure 10 From The Image Bank; Pilgrimage to Tinos: "Gypsies" arrive for festival; Greece, Tinos: Ca. 1986-88. Source: Jill Dubisch

Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end. - bell hooks

5   CHAPTER FIVE

THE FUTURE IS HUMAN-CENTERED

Digital technologies have rapidly become intertwined with our everyday lives and experiences; it is essential in many facets of society, including the health, government, education, and entertainment sectors. Furthermore, digital technologies are increasingly being adopted within museum contexts and cultural preservation efforts, significantly contributing to museum practices and experiences. Thus, this section examines the possibilities of combining engaged anthropology and human-centered design principles with digital technologies within museum spaces as a practical framework to create engaged practices making museums more relevant and sustainable.

Engaged anthropology comprises various experimental strategies and applied practices that aim to "mobilize anthropology for constructive interventions…making anthropology relevant and useful" in various social arenas, particularly politics and social justice movements (Kirsch, 2018, p. 31). Similarly, Christina Kreps (2015) argues for the utilization of engaged anthropology within museum spaces to create a theoretical praxis, applying theory to practice, framed around the fundamental functions of museums as arenas "for the dissemination of anthropological knowledge to audiences beyond the academy" (p. 57). For Kreps, the museum is a site of possibilities that can facilitate the utilization of applied anthropological practices towards reconstructing the museum as a socially relevant space for public engagement capable of addressing larger concerns.

For instance, Aline Gubrium (2009) argues that digital technology, when combined with anthropological frameworks such as community-based participatory research (CBPR), provides opportunities for developing innovative approaches for highlighting human experiences, addressing pressing social issues, and structuring critical understandings of these issues (p. 5).

Collaborative and participatory strategies have long been fundamental within anthropological practice. Engaged anthropology builds on these collaborative and participatory methods to achieve its goals and recognize new avenues for anthropological research. Additionally, human-centered design has been well-known within the arena of user experience (UX) design, product development, and research. It has significant potential for applicability across a variety of areas. Michelle Crandall (2019) explains that human-centered design concepts are increasingly being adopted and utilized by local governments across North America (p. 40). Human-centered design principles are used for research and problem-solving to improve services, products, relationships, and experiences for everyday people (2019, p. 40).

For example, user experience research methods, including generative user interviews, focus groups, and naturalistic observation, are widely used across higher educational institutions to map out target groups' experiences to deliver effective and appropriate solutions to problems. In my experience working as a UX research assistant with the GSU Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Online Education (CETLOE), we have been working collaboratively with students and other target groups as well as other researchers and designers to understand user experiences when using the university's digital technologies and services, identifying significant areas of frustrations and barriers to provide solutions through participatory and collaborative methods.

Furthermore, In the field of design and product development, human-centered design is closely utilized within a product development process called Design-thinking. Design thinking is a five-step iterative problem-solving methodology that centers people's experiences, in this case, a product's end user, towards creating better solutions (Crandall, 2019, p. 41). Therefore, human-

centered design involves a collaborative and participatory process that brings together a product's end users and designers to work collaboratively toward enhancing a product or service (Crandall, 2019, p. 41).

Aila Regina da Silva and Gabriele Mauany Ferreira Alencar (2021) discuss utilizing human-centered participatory design strategies to understand the experiences and expectations of museum visitors in Sao Paulo, Brazil (p. 28-32). Da Silva and Alencar created an interactive prototype for a tool that facilitates online and onsite collaborative and participatory museum interactions. da Silva and Alencar (2021) explain that museums are heterogeneous spaces requiring constant reconfiguration and societal adaptation (p. 28). Therefore, human-centered design strategies have the potential to provide opportunities for museums to critically engage their audience while being attentive to the limitations and barriers of these technologies.

Furthermore, museum experiences will invariably vary among individuals for various reasons; experiences are complex subjective phenomena. For this reason, museum experiences are important factors with critical capabilities for shaping our understanding of the museum, its purpose, and its effectiveness. Mary Oakland and Shana West (2013) write that user experiences are significant as they deal with subjective emotions and feelings generated during interactions in digital or physical spaces (para. 7).

Hence, orienting an engaged museum towards prioritizing visitors holistically as crucial participants within a diversified and inclusive museum process is essential. Utilizing human-centered design and research principles could provide museums with the capacities to anticipate the needs of visitors, to be able to understand and meet the visitor where they are, to build upon

what they know, and create a supportive space for visitors to grow and thrive ensuring the relevance and sustainability of museums across possible futures.

Museums in the Digital Age

Christina Kreps (2015) identifies museums as sites for public engagement and education (p. 57). Additionally, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) considers museums to be sites of archival power because of their abilities to sort sources "to organize facts, according to themes or periods, into documents to be used and monuments to be explored" (p. 52). Therefore, museums are significant in shaping public education, social memory, and our ideas of the past, present, and future. Museums are increasingly identified as spaces for public engagement, education, and the transmission of ideas. Henceforth, museums can be nurturing spaces for converging creative and innovative forces that enable us to rethink the present and imagine radical futures as "a practice of freedom" (Hartman, 2008, p. 3).

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an avenue for serious reconsideration and discussions about the roles and futures of museums in the 21st century. The nature of the pandemic caused increased awareness and traffic within virtual museum spaces, which can be described as achievements towards ensuring greater opportunities, visibility, accessibility, and accommodations. Samantha Sonnet (2022) writes that the adaptations made by museums towards investing in more online exhibitions have been highly impactful. Sonnet explains, writing that:

> Virtual museum exhibits offer many accommodations and opportunities, but rather than being privileged to travel, the visitor is now privileged by having internet access. It is apparent that some museums are more comfortable in creating innovative and exciting virtual exhibits than others…Museums usually partake in an exhaustive amount of planning to effectively execute an in-person exhibit. The development of virtual museum planning and exhibitions

has relieved some of this pressure to perform. (2022, p. 2)

Consequently, museums are emerging in the digital space in several innovative ways, recreating museums as imaginative, aware, and socially relevant institutions. The Japanese American Museum of San Jose creatively combines digital technology with a human-centered community-based participatory approach. The museum is utilizing immersive digital technology, art, and community involvement to create an augmented reality experience showcasing the multi-layered and multicultural history of San Jose's Japantown district.

Figure 11 Website page showing descriptive details for the Hidden Histories exhibit
Source: Hidden Histories of San Jose Japantown

The Hidden Histories of San Jose Japantown exhibition by the Japanese American Museum of San Jose uses augmented reality, art, and local historical sources and culture. Utilizing mobile devices, visitors will be able to interact with the various artworks overlaid on the current Japan town to explore the histories and legacies of San Jose's East Asian communities.

Figure 12 The Hidden Histories of San Jose Japantown exhibition
Source: The Hidden Histories of San Jose Japantown

Similarly, The Colored Girls Museum VR by The Colored Girls Museum in Philadelphia,

in partnership with the Center for Digital Humanities at the University of Arizona, aims to build

a multi-disciplinary experimental virtual museum exhibit within a virtual museum to create a

visual and culturally transformative art experience. The Colored Girls Museum VR project

employs engaged, collaborative, and user experience design principles to establish a dynamic

virtual space that situates the museum as a site of socially relevant participatory actions and

research networks. The Alliance of Media Arts and Culture, an organization whose goal is to

promote collaboration, innovation, and development in the cultural and media arts fields, writes:

> It will be equal parts exhibition space, culture center, research facility,
> gathering place and think tank. The goal of the project is to co-create
> an immersive museum experience in virtual reality–in the browser.
> Combining photogrammetry, archiving, oral history and the latest web

VR technologies, we intend to create an exact replica of the museum in Germantown that will be accessible to audiences around the world. We will also build out meeting spaces for arts and culture groups, a theater for film screenings and live performance, and a museum gift shop where artists can sell their work…The museum will be designed and developed by diverse, intergenerational creative teams around the world…intergenerational artists, creative technologists and developers from the US, India, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East will be able to collaborate, and the notion of tech that "embraces who we are" reflects the authentic experience and powerful voice of the colored girl. (Para. 3-5)

Figure 13 A museum visitor in The Colored Girl Museum in Philadelphia
Experiencing the museum, The Colored Girl Museum

Undoubtedly, digital technologies have the capacity to be a dynamic and innovative resource. However, virtual museums and digital technologies also present significant barriers and challenges, particularly those involving digital literacy, ability, and access, which, if not addressed adequately, will result in privileging certain factions of users and visitors over others.

According to a 2019 survey conducted with the American Alliance of Museums by the Knight

Foundation, which collected data from 480 museums across the United States, museums need to

be better equipped to be able to utilize digital technologies effectively (Sonnet, 2022, para. 5).

Sonnet (2022) explains:

> This survey demonstrates that "dedicated digital staffing" is severely
> limited, meaning that half of the institutions have either no staff dedicated
> to digital media or that the department was run by a single individual.
> It also found that 31% of museums admitted they had no digital strategy,
> and 29% claimed that this was a process in development. This means that
> only 25% have a planned or implemented digital strategy for their strategic
> plan. In addition, 41% of museums do not have any defined goals, KPI's
> or outcomes for digital projects and less than half report that digital leaders
> are a part of senior leadership teams. Lastly, 54% of museums reported
> capturing basic feedback or demographic from their audience while only
> 18% use this data to shape their exhibits for the future. (Para. 6)

Consequently, it is apparent now more than ever in the digital age that museums must

reimagine the institution to create new pathways and opportunities for the emergence and

utilization of digital technologies for the possibilities of a changing future. Walsham (2016)

notes that technology has a way of seeping into every social stratum, including people "who do

not possess the capacity to use them" (p. 24). Therefore, holistically centering people's

experiences and needs through engaged, participatory, and human-centered research frameworks

can be critical for identifying areas of frustration and challenges to provide solutions and rectify

barriers, creating engaged, equitable, and socially relevant museums.

Engaged anthropology offers a theoretical framework for addressing pertinent concerns.

It centers our work within our socio-cultural and political contexts. This is not an argument that

all anthropological practices, museums, or heritage preservation efforts are political. For

example, the Image Bank is not a contested political space but a product of certain socio-historical factors and technological innovations that have shaped its existence. Therefore, it is crucial to think critically about the Image Bank, what it is, and what it could be.

Consequently, human-centered design and research strategies provide the means for centering the audience or end user of the product in the case of the archive beyond a mere visitor but as a valuable collaborator in its development and reproduction of knowledge. The Image Bank is evolving. Therefore, it is critical to its future to reach out and center its users as essential participants in its maintenance and evolution.

Figure 14 From The Image Bank; Tomb of Ramose: funeral procession and women mourners; Egypt, Thebes; 18th Dynasty. Source: Caroline Williams

"The archive is not a matter of the past, but a concern for the future"- Eric Mechoulan

6 CHAPTER SIX

THE WORLD AS IT WAS: REFLECTIONS ON AN INCOMPLETE ARCHIVE

My work digitizing the slides and developing a digital archive for the Image Bank at GSU spans well over a year, during which I have come to understand that the archive will remain incomplete in some form or another. The instabilities of the digital terrain result in constant reproductions and a continuous disruptive evolution across material and immaterial realities. Hence, the Image Bank remains an incomplete evolving digital archive within a reflexive tradition resulting from anthropological theory, archival scholarship, and human-centered design principles with a growing awareness of the new digital technology as a medium for promoting participation and collaboration.

Throughout this work, I have endeavored to be aware of my curatorial position and responsibility in reproducing the archive. It is critical to recognize that the Image Bank at GSU does not occupy a position of absolute objectivity or neutrality; it has not been a passive creation. Reflecting on developing the Image Bank for Teaching World, Richard M. Carp (1992) writes:

> Yet one cannot work on this project without the uneasy
> sense that the lens is really an eye, and that the eye looks
> back. The Image Bank for Teaching World Religion reinforces
> the tendency of the university to reduce the rest of the world to
> objects of study, but it also resists this tendency both by turning us
> into comparable objects of study…and by forcing us to see that
> "the others" have their own views of us. (p. 87)

Therefore, both Image Banks have been produced with the intent to accomplish specific goals; in my case, to preserve a small portion of the original archive, which had initially been developed as a teaching tool, an aid to provide "an exemplary look at the relationship between vision and religious experience on a global and historical basis" (Carp, 1992, p. 83).

Additionally, the Image Bank at GSU can be considered as an artifact, structured and restructured through renegotiations of technological power and historical facts across a multilayered practice of interactions continuously reproducing and reinterpreting its contents as knowledge and measures of value. The Image Bank at GSU encompasses a continuous process intended to create a sustainable archive and archival practice.

The future of the Image Bank at GSU offers a wide range of possibilities and opportunities. The eventual digitization and reconciliation of the entire Image Bank for Teaching World Religion (IBTWR) with the Image Bank at GSU are one of the possibilities that open up new opportunities for both Image Banks, offering a broader depth as a teaching resource and a visual archive providing a platform for multidisciplinary engagement.

Furthermore, the current digital archive for the Image Bank at GSU still requires considerable work. This includes user-centered research to guide the development process to determine the usability, functionality, and accessibility of the website from its users' experiences. This is a crucial area where we lack adequate information, undermining serious strategic undertakings for the website's future.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct detailed interviews with users to determine their needs and preferences. This will provide valuable insights into how to make the website more user-friendly and accessible. It will help us identify potential areas of improvement. Thus, we must continue creating a critical digital archive built on principles of engaged anthropology and human-centered design, aware of the potential of the Image Bank at GSU as a transformative resource.

The Image Bank (IBTWR) was initially developed to provide a participatory teaching and research tool to democratize access to knowledge. This already implies a focus on its intended end users. Furthermore, this digital archival project situates the Image Bank at GSU within a digital environment and hopeful facilitation to enable opportunities for participatory user-centered collaborations.

The digital archive has enormous possibilities for multidisciplinary collaborative practices, enriching its use and development towards a sustainable future. Consequently, the digital archive needs to find its audience or end users. This will significantly inform the development and research strategies to determine users' needs and expectations.

Further user research provides information on users' experiences with the digital archive and interface. This allows us to map out their needs and frustrations and creates opportunities for a responsive and sustainable archive. Archives significantly shape our collective memories, our understanding of the world, and ourselves. The digital archive has emerged as a site offering opportunities for preservation and interaction. However, it exists in a world of rapid information conversions fostering a sense of instability and a fear of obsolescence in the long run.

Thus, technology can provide a wide range of opportunities and possibilities for the digital archive, making it an effective tool for advancing social and educational goods. Anchoring the archive within the theoretical frameworks provided through engaged anthropological thinking and human-centered design is imperative if we are to create critical and sustainable possibilities for the present and future use fo the archive, to ensure that it is not only preserved but that it is accessible and beneficial to people as a dynamic space for collaborative and participatory learning.

Figure 15 From The Image Bank; Sugar Skulls at Street Vendor, Day of the Dead; Mexico, Oaxaca; Ca. 1980s. Source: Jason Pollen

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