

INDIGENOUS ARCHIVES

*THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF
ABORIGINAL ART*

EDITED BY DARREN
JORGENSEN AND IAN MCLEAN



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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
<i>DARREN JORGENSEN AND IAN MCLEAN</i>	
1 Introduction: Convergent Archives	1
<i>IAN MCLEAN</i>	
Part 1: Limits to Archives	23
2 Reflections on the Rodney Gooch Files	25
<i>ANNE MARIE BRODY</i>	
3 Creating the Archive – Research into the History of the Utopia Art Movement	50
<i>CHRISCHONA SCHMIDT</i>	
4 Three Certificates Are Not Enough: Rover Thomas and Art Centre Archives	62
<i>SUZANNE SPUNNER</i>	
5 Namarari and the Papunya Tula Archive: Linking Art History and Biography	88
<i>ALEC O'HALLORAN</i>	
Part 2: Histories From Archives	111
6 Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula: History, Landscape and La Niña 1974	113
<i>JOHN KEAN</i>	
7 Between Rocks and Hard Places: Mary Puntji Clement and the Kalumburu Art Project	167
<i>PHILIPPA JAHN</i>	
8 Wild Styles at the Outstation: Jackie Giles and Ngipi Ward at Patjarr	192
<i>DARREN JORGENSEN</i>	
Part 3: Indigenising Archives	207
9 Memory, History, Archive: Ngaanyatjarra History Paintings	209
<i>EMILIA GALATIS</i>	

10	Wukun Wanambi's Nhina, Nhäha, Ga Ngäma (Sit, Look, and Listen) <i>ROBERT LAZARUS LANE</i>	227
11	Our Art, Our Way: Towards an Anangu Art History with Ara Irititja <i>JOHN DALLWITZ, JANET INYIKA, SUSAN LOWISH AND LINDA RIVE</i>	250
12	The Third Archive and Artist as Archivist <i>MARGO NEALE</i>	269
	Part 4: Decolonising Archives	295
13	Losing the Archive: Julie Gough at the MAA, Cambridge and Christian Thompson at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford <i>JESSYCA HUTCHENS</i>	297
14	Bleeding the Archive, Transforming the Mythscape <i>GENEVIEVE GRIEVES AND ODETTE KELADA</i>	321
15	Anachronic Archive: Turning the Time of the Image in the Aboriginal Avant-Garde <i>KHADIJA VON ZINNENBURG CARROLL</i>	342
16	Aboriginal Transformations of the Photographic Archive <i>JANE LYDON</i>	362
17	KEPT IN SILENCE – an Archival Travelogue <i>BROOK ANDREW AND KATARINA MATIASEK</i>	383
18	Afterword: Diagrammatic and Database Dreamings <i>DARREN JORGENSEN</i>	414
	Bibliography	429
	List of contributors	452

PREFACE

Darren Jorgensen and Ian McLean

Because a society archives what it considers to be its most significant things, the archive reveals what and how a society thinks, and the values by which it lives. Thus the archive is what Foucault dubbed a ‘truth regime’: its function is to produce truth – or determine what is true. As the touchstone for authority (truth), the archive is the guardian of ideology and the central site of power. This is what Foucault, who made the archive his field of study, meant by reminding us of the ancient aphorism that ‘knowledge is power’. He coined the term ‘knowledge/power’ to indicate that each is one and the same: knowledge produces power and power produces (or delimits) knowledge.

Foucault’s historical studies are based on the assumption that each society and culture is differentiated by a particular truth regime as revealed in its official archives – as if, like a fingerprint, the archive is an identity marker. This scenario is complicated in the modern state as it consists of many competing interests each with its own specialised archives. In his later writing Foucault developed a keener sense of the continuous flux of power, characterising it as a distributive, networked and relational economy in which, despite being increasingly governmentalised or regulated by the state, various truth regimes (or archives) are engaged in constant struggle: dominant groups ‘together with the resistance and revolts which that domination comes up against’.

However, beneath this turbulence, Foucault – ever the structuralist – detected a deeper, more steady current: ‘a massive and universalizing form, at the level of the whole social body’. This ‘locking together of power relations’² occurs in the common ground between these competing groups (or archives), making ‘visible those fundamental phenomena of “domination”’ that comprise the over-arching truth regime or official archive that sets the ideology of our times. In this Foucauldian spirit, we have compiled a selection of essays that work with varying purposes across different types of archives, ranging from those held by state museums to those in Aboriginal art centres. They address Indigenous Australian art through archives of all kinds, but these archives are all of a kind: each is a voice in the struggles that produce power in ‘the whole social body’. Together their essays touch on the turbulence that makes up the ‘massive and universalizing form’ of *The Archive*. Working within this turbulence, they cannot help but affirm its power, to demonstrate just how essential archives are to the functioning of contemporary Aboriginal Australian art. As Indigenous artists authorise themselves through *The Archive*, the Aboriginal art world authorises its auctions, exhibitions and writings with certificates and signatures, dates and names. Archives carry with them an authority that art alone does not. So it is that our contributors have reason to consult and defer to *The Archive*, to elucidate the very specific information it holds, to use it as a toolbox for research, or to treat *The Archive* as a subject in its own right.

In conceptualising this book we were well aware of the so-called ‘archival turn’ in contemporary art. Inaugurated by Appropriation Art in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and since then a feature of much contemporary art, it inevitably frames the essays in *Indigenous Archives*. Thus they address questions that

inexorably flow from a turning: What does it mean for art to turn to The Archive? In what sense is art archival? What is it about The Archive that it can turn art? Towards what in art is The Archive being turned, and what is it about The Archive that art might turn on it? The bigger question, which Nikolas Kompridis points out in his rumination on the aesthetic turn in politics (and from which we directly purloined the aforementioned questions), is how do we judge the many turns – the ideological, the linguistic, the aesthetic, the material – that afflict our times? Are they a matter of fashion, or if they collectively point to some larger underlying turn, which of them matters the most? ‘Turns’, writes Kompridis, ‘can be overturned – some more easily than others’, and he argues, ‘if we are to speak confidently’ on the matter, ‘we must show that this turn involves a consequential change in our understanding of’, in this case, art. He suggests that the more meaningful the turn the more substantial and long-lived must be the relation of its terms, such that the turn in question may in fact be one of many returns.³

Australia was the site of the first archival turn in contemporary art. It was a defining characteristic of the Papunya Tula painters who initiated the Aboriginal contemporary art movement. In what was perceived at the time as a contentious and dangerous move, they revisited their archives as a means to create a modern art that spoke to their contemporary political concerns. This occurred shortly after the 1967 Referendum and in the midst of Land Rights demands, that is, in what was also a decisive turn in the Australian polity towards Aboriginal politics. Thus in Australia the archival turn in contemporary art was also an Indigenous turn. This is further underlined by the archival turn that occurred in white Australian art later in the 1970s and the 1980s with Appropriation Art. Two of its key artists, Tim Johnson and Imants Tillers, also turned towards Papunya Tula painting in

their appropriations, as if emulating not just the look but also the form and content of the art.

In Australia Indigenous artists and scholars have used photographs, ceremonies and files to change our understanding of art, its histories and properties. In what has become the most classic example, featured on the cover of this book, Brook Andrew's *I Split Your Gaze* (1997) dusts off an ethnographic photograph of an Indigenous man, to split his image that splits the viewer's gaze looking at him. *I Split Your Gaze* is contemporary with Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996), and both deconstruct The Archive's authority to recreate the turmoil by which archives are constituted and reconstituted. For Derrida, archives enact a concealment rather than a revelation. In the process of concealing its items, The Archive conceals itself, gathering itself against an outside by which it also defines its difference. Paradoxically, it is the outside to which The Archive defers, in a doubled movement by which The Archive is both constituted and is exposed to its own undoing.

More than ten years after its exhibition, Djon Mundine and Fiona Foley complained that Andrew had not consulted with the descendants of the archival photographs that he had used to create *I Split Your Gaze*.⁴ For Mundine and Foley, Andrew had skipped a crucial archival protocol, one that differentiates the Indigenous Archive from its outside. But the scandal of Andrew's work is greater than this. For if, as Derrida argues, The Archive's authority crucially depends upon forgetting, upon a historical amnesia, the power of the archival photograph signals the trauma that brought about the forgetting in the first place. *I Split Your Gaze* produces a new historical trace upon this trauma of the old, working not to reveal this man's place in Australian history but concealing it, in the process deconstructing the possibility of archival truth itself.

Contrast Andrew's photo-compositions with his contemporaries, with Leah-King Smith's 1991 *Patterns of Connection* series and Brenda Croft's 1998 *In My Father's House*. The first sees archival photographs of Indigenous people through a fish-eye lens, and like Andrew recreates their heroic place in history with a layered looking. The second series also writes over photographs, these being Croft's family archive that have come to symbolise the personal histories of many Indigenous Australians. While trauma is written into the distance of the fish-eye and the writing over Croft's family, Andrew's photo-compositions make it uncertain whether the image stands for a traumatic history at all.

Paralleling the work of artists, Australian art history has seen its own archival and Indigenous turns. Vivien Johnson undertakes a dogged archival journey in *Once Upon a Time in Papunya* (2014), in the process overhauling the history of painting at Papunya in 1971. Crucial to Johnson's chronology is the label on a box of slides, through which she argues for a 'School of Kaapa', a group of figurative works on board that preceded, and were independent of, the 'School of Bardon' that has become the origin story of contemporary art in the Western Desert.⁵ These figurative works create a stylistic bridge between the 'painting men' who had gathered around Bardon, and the naturalism of Albert Namatjira, the celebrated landscape painter, whose style Kaapa also appropriated. All of this rests upon an archival reading, a reading of the writing on a box of slides.

Other signs of this archival and Indigenous turn appeared when a box of paintings stored in a New York university gallery were discovered to be a lost collection of Noongar paintings from the 1940s. The return of this collection to Perth led to a series of exhibitions and the ongoing creation of an archive around this collection.⁶ Also in Western Australia, ceremonial archives were

used to resolve a debate over the origins of a group of so-called 'Bradshaw' rock paintings in the Kimberley. The publication of *Gwion Gwion: Secret and Sacred Pathways of the Ngarinyin Aboriginal People of Australia* (2000) illuminates the ceremonial and cultural context of the Gwion Gwion. Here one archive conceals another, rock art concealing ceremony and ceremony concealing rock art, to create The Dreaming Archive, an assemblage of enunciations and metaphysics, ceremonies and representations, that determine the possibilities of what can be said and done. While the turbulence of modern history shapes archives of the nation state, the repository of The Dreaming Archive is situated in deep time, its epochs glacial rather than centurial, its enunciations multi-dimensional rather than polemic.

Indigenous Archives is framed by contemporary archives that authorise and govern Aboriginal contemporary art and debates around it, and is haunted by both this Dreaming Archive and the deep-rooted archival impulse it represents – what Derrida describes as a pathology to order the world in one way or another. McLean's Introduction anatomises this tendency, this gaining power over things by ordering them, while Jorgensen's Afterword tracks the shifting identity of The Dreaming Archive within Aboriginal art centre archives.

Indigenous Archives is an outcome of an Australian Research Council project to investigate the uses of remote archives for scholarly research,⁷ and of a symposium in Alice Springs in 2014 that addressed remote art centre archives.⁸ The first of four sections considers the limits of such archives for the art historian. Each essay is based on PhD research projects by art historians working with remote art centre archives in their investigation of a particular artist. Two essays draw on the relatively elusive and partial archives of a place, Utopia, that lacked a proper art

centre. Anne Marie Brody, whose professional work as a curator with Utopia artists from the beginning of the art movement there has given her unique insights into the art, and analyses the significance of Rodney Gooch's archive of the artists' work that he developed while acting as their field worker. While undertaking her dissertation on Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Chrischona Schmidt was confronted with the lack of a complete archive of the artist's work. Her essay considers the issues of working with partial archives spread across the country in galleries, art museums and other places, and the problems she encountered in developing her own archive of Kngwarreye's work. Suzanne Spinner guides us through the complexities and controversies of provenance in Rover Thomas's art through the evaluation of archival evidence – what it can reveal and also what it might not reveal. She draws on the Waringarri Arts archives and also considers the archives of other people for whom Thomas worked. Alec O'Halloran shows how even one of the most substantial and complete art centre archives, that of Papunya Tula, presents problems for the art historian seeking to write a biography of one of its original painters, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri. The lesson of this section is that The Archive is not sacrosanct. Rather, it is an incomplete document that requires – indeed only gains its power – through extensive hermeneutical revision. In other words, behind The Archive is the archivist, the interpreter and organiser of The Archive.

Having established the importance of the archivist in the first section, the second section comprises essays that develop various arguments about Indigenous art from art centre archives. While, as in the first section, these writers build out from existing archives, their examination is instrumental rather than hermeneutical – they make use of archives for larger ends rather than reflect on their limits. John Kean also works with the Papunya Tula

archive in his essay on the early life and art of Johnny Warangula Tjupurrula, supplementing it with the examination of private archives, weather records, diaries and photographs. Philippa Jahn also uses art centre archives to flesh out the place of an artist within a regional history. She examines the ways in which the choices of Kalumburu artist Mary Puntji Clement reflect the regional politics of northern Australia. Sadly, as this book was going to print, Clement passed away, leaving us many wonderful paintings from an all too brief career. After Jahn documents her life and what is now her legacy, Darren Jorgensen uses the archives of Kayili Artists to work out what Jackie Giles and Ngipi Ward have in common, and how their work embodies a general 'style' that grew out of this desert outstation.

The third section examines the ways in which contemporary artists have built their own archives, beginning with an examination of two examples of remote artists who have sought, in their art practices, to archive local histories. Emilia Galatis examines Warakurna history paintings and Robert Lazaras Lane investigates Wukun Wanambi's archival, multi-media art. John Dallwitz, Janet Inyika, Susan Lowish and Linda Rive take us through the Ara Irititja archive of Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara speakers, a digital repository whose accessible, multi-media model is now being adopted by Indigenous communities in other parts of Australia.⁹ Ara Irititja functions like an Anangu Google, but one that allows its contributors to upload content while holding ceremonial knowledge in confidence. 'It can hide things if necessary, and then bring them back later. The Ara Irititja computer is clever like a dingo', says Wilton Foster.¹⁰ This is true not only of secret-sacred content, but of anthropological archives, including many photographs, that have been imported into Ara Irititja, reproduced from one archive into another. Here the photographs

become part of a living archive, as Ara Irititja allows its users to add to the information around them, to name their subjects and places. Using examples from her experience curating and collaborating, Margo Neale proposes a ‘third archive’ that lies in the country itself, and in the minds of the Elders.

Indigenous Archives makes a decisive shift in the fourth section to highly urbanised centres. Four essays by seven authors bring different perspectives to bear on the work of seven artists who aim to decolonise existing museum archives developed in the colonial period. Jessyca Hutchens investigates the different strategies of decolonising the museum that arose from the art residencies of Christian Thompson and Julie Gough in British institutions that hold Aboriginal materials from the nineteenth century. Odette Marie Kelada and Genevieve Grieves trace the various ways in which artists Vernon Ah Kee and Yhonnie Scarce adopt archival strategies to invert the legacies of colonialism. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll argues that this return to archives by Indigenous artists – she examines the work of Brook Andrew, Daniel Boyd and Julie Gough – is necessarily anachronistic in order to maintain its deconstructive edge. Jane Lydon analyses how Vernon Ah Kee, Brenda Croft, and Christian Thompson use historical photographs to deconstruct existing histories and their archives, and reconstruct new ones. The fourth section concludes with Brook Andrew and Katarina Matiassek’s travelogue into the colonial archives of the Austrian anthropologist Rudolf Pösch – what might be considered the diary of an excursion into an existing archive in preparation for creative research.

Arguably these seven artists can only deconstruct the archive by, in turn, becoming archivists. The same is true of academics, who have long been compelled to work with archives – to either affirm or deconstruct them – so that they are able to authorise

what they say, or in Foucault's terms to place statements in relation to each other. Yet as this volume shows, the logic of such authorisations and relations are not only academic. The recursive logic of *The Archive*, which embeds knowledge in relations, is a universal activity that occurs in all cultures. This is because *The Archive*, as the site of ideology and power, produces social order and the culture that constitutes it. Thus its recursive logic is also at work in the compulsions of artists and Indigenous communities, and is tied less to any one logic than it is to the contingencies of history and subjectivity. *The Archive* relies upon archives that are idiosyncratic and political, and dependent upon technologies and powers. They envisage modes of relation while overwriting other modes of relation. *Indigenous Archives* examines the various ways in which archives and archivists have made, and are remaking, Aboriginal identities and histories.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to one of our authors who may not live to see this book in print, the community leader and political campaigner Janet Inyika, in whom we lose a living archive of both the Pitjantatjara Lands and Australian history.

Notes

- 1 R. Bell, 'Bell's Theorem: Aboriginal Art – it's a white thing!', 2002, viewed 23 January 2016, <<http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/bell.html>>.
- 2 M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1982, pp. 777–95 at 795.
- 3 N. Kompridis, 'Introduction: Turning and Returning: The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought', in N. Kompridis (ed.), *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, pp. xiv–xxxvii at xiv–xv.
- 4 F. Foley, 'When the Circus came to Town', *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 245, 2011, pp. 5–7; D. Mundine, 'Nowhere Boy', *Artlink*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2010, pp. 18–22.
- 5 V. Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2014, pp. 11–43.
- 6 These exhibitions include Koolark Koort Koortlity (Heart Coming

Preface

- Home) and Revel Cooper both at the John Curtin Gallery in 2014, and Bella Kelly at the Vancouver Arts Centre in Albany in 2016.
- 7 ARC project number DP110104509 Mobilising Remote Aboriginal Art Centre Records for Art History.
 - 8 Art Centres Art Histories Symposium, Alice Springs, 4 September 2014.
 - 9 For example, at the Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre, viewed 3 March 2016, <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/for/indigenous_australians/storylines>.
 - 10 W. Foster, 'Why is Ara Irititja Important?', viewed 3 March 2016, <http://www.irititja.com/about_ara_irititja/index.html>.

INTRODUCTION: CONVERGENT ARCHIVES

Ian McLean

Arch: from Latinised form of Greek *arkh-*, *arkhi-*, ‘first, chief, primeval’, comb. form of *arkhos*, ‘chief’; with derivatives *arkhe*, ‘rule, beginning’, and *arkhos*, ‘ruler’.

The gathering of curiosities is an age-old human habit – we are the bowerbirds of the primates. The gathering already is a consigning, which as Derrida reminds us literally means ‘gathering together signs’. He characterised this act as one ‘of assigning residence’ – an archiving or arranging of these propitious signs into ‘a single corpus...a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration’.¹ In Australia the shaman did it for tens of thousands of years in secret caves, whereas systematically arranging curiosities into a cabinet was a characteristic archival act of the European Renaissance. Buttressing the arrangement with an arsenal of tabulated and catalogued data, a meta-archive, is a symptom of modernity. But driving this evolution of archive types is an archetypal impulse. The wise ape, *Homo sapien*, is sometimes called *homo aestheticus*, but why not *homo archivist*? This upright primate made its monumental mark on the world because of its ability to order its curiosities into a type of language that animated the things of world, bringing them into being. The archive has a divine status: through it the world is written into existence.

Thus we should not be surprised that Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) opens with a concerted attack on the work of the archive. Following his familiar strategy, Derrida warns against the ways in which authority is so omnipresent (universal) that its power is embedded in language: 'The meaning of "archive" comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially...the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded'; *Arkheion* is in turn derived from '*Arkhe*', which names at once the '*commencement*' and the '*commandment*': it creates and commands.² From this Derrida makes three closely related accusations against the archive: it enacts a 'patriarchic' politics 'without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such', its documents 'state the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law', and they do this from a specific place.³ Thereby an otherwise invisible law is embodied (in the archons) and physically manifested (in the archive). In short, the archive and its archons spin a magic that gives the spirits a powerful presence. If human funerary rites are designed to send ancestral spirits away so that their ghosts won't return to haunt present generations, the archive calls them back to aid in the political demands of the day.

These claims, which for Derrida state the obvious, are quickly asserted as a sort of rallying call before mounting his main attack of deconstructing the 'patriarchive' through a 'project of general archiviology'⁴ – i.e. to unpack the archive by tracing and pinpointing its genealogy, its ancestral history. Thus archiviology is not concerned with the archive's manifestation in the actual institutions of the law or its changing forms in the modern world, but with its founding in the metaphysical underworld. Derrida digs around in Hades for the archetypal ur-archive. Having declared his position, Derrida hurriedly – on the second page of his article – segues into the domains of mythology and Freudian

psychoanalysis in order to investigate how the ‘irrepressible force and authority of transgenerational memory’ is passed down via the ghosts of ancestors, as if ‘an ancestor can speak within us’ and we too can ‘speak...in such an “unheimlich”, “uncanny” fashion, to his or her ghost’.⁵

The dream world, which is where Freud conducted most of his research, is the river Styx across which ancestral ghosts traditionally journey from the spirit world to that of the living. Freud began writing *The Interpretation of Dreams* in late 1895, coincidentally at the very moment that Spencer and Gillen introduced the pivotal Indigenous concept that they – following Gillen’s discussions with Arrernte shamans and ceremonial leaders – translated as ‘Dreamtime’. ‘Dreamtime’ takes this name because, as in other cultures, the visitations of spirits generally occur in the dark, unpredictable crosscurrents of dreams. Like Freud, Dante and numerous shamans before him, Derrida crosses the river Styx as if the archetypal archive is wrought in dreaming’s inferno of the unconscious, and – and here his reference is also Freud – its origins are biological rather than cultural, let alone political.

In fact archiviology can push back beyond the origins of biology (of organic life and its spirits) to the very formation of the laws that govern our physical universe, as if the impulse to archive – to order information – haunted our universe from its beginnings and is impressed in the very atoms from which the molecules of our DNA are made. In our universe’s dark regions are archived its own creation – ghostly echoes of the big bang – which scientists are in the process of decoding by creating their own mirror archive of data, a mirror of a mirror.

The archive always comes after the big bang: it is a second order. More than a regulating commentary on something other that preceded it, the archive seeks to resurrect this prior other as if

in its ghostly remnants the fiery forces that brought it into being can still be traced and mined. Thus the archive is like a magical glass that, as in a *séance*, ghosts appear to reveal their secrets.

By their very nature ghosts cannot be touched. Leaving no impression and passing through things, they are mere shadows of their former lives, only appearing like images on a screen. As much as the archive purports to catalogue the hidden order of things, something secret, mysterious and unknowable remains. The archival impulse is never satisfied. Like a photograph its ancestral resurrections always fail: the subject remains an image; the ghostly ancestral realm persists. Thus for all the marvellous scientific revelations of late, the big bang still is the stuff of myth and enduring mystery.

Animating every archive is a secret past. The issue is one of form not content. It is not a matter of what the secret actually is but its intractable ghostly form: no matter how much the archive renders visible or public, how much data it pulls into the public domain or how many photographs we compile, an invisibility endures. Thus the archive is founded by a fundamental lack, which is why desire – the archive's subjects are objects of desire – is a fundamental drive of the archive. Only the ghost whisperer – the archon or shaman – can mediate this desire. Hence the pivotal factor in archiviology is not the ancestor or its ghost, but the ghost whisperers – the archons. Their unique ability to converse with ghosts makes them the guardians of the law and the keepers of its place and its secrets. 'They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives'.⁶ No wonder the archon is the principal target of Derrida's critique.

In their 'archive fever', says Derrida, the archons aim to 'bring to light a more originary origin than that of the ghost...a more archaic impression...which is almost no longer an archive', but

instead ‘confuses itself with the pressure of the [ancestral] footstep which leaves its still-living mark on a substrate, a surface, a place of origin’. The archon dreams of cataloguing that ‘instant when the printed archive is yet to be detached from the primary impression in its singular, irreproducible, and archaic origin’, as if this originary moment, this commencement, is a law, a commandment. At this point the archive seeks to be its subject (what it archives), ‘an archive which would in sum confuse itself with the *arkhē*... An archive without archive’.⁷ This delusion is the symptom of archive fever.

Archive fever infects traditional Indigenous societies, which are societies beholden to the ghosts of their ancestors and take their law from the places in which they walked. In retracing their footsteps the shaman establishes the *sensus communis* of the Indigenous world. This retracing is authorised by the archive of ancestral signs at his command. The shaman is the classical archon whose ability to converse with ancestral ghosts unlocks the ‘archontic power’ (as Derrida called it) of the archive.

Like the big bang, when the ancestors returned into the earth after their wanderings, creating the hills, rivers and waterholes that are the bones and lifeblood of the country, they made a living-evolving memorial or museum of their escapades. To those who still feel this ancestral pulse – this *tjukurrpa* (Dreamtime or Dreaming) – the lie of the land and its ecosystems echo ancestral events. However, this echo is just the surface inscriptions of a deeper script, screening from view the animating forces or ‘archontic power’ of the country.

Country is there in the open to be read by those with eyes, but within its folds and crevices are secret places that only initiated men can visit; and in these secret places are secret caves in which secret objects with esoteric signs are carefully wrapped and stored.

These are generally ancestral relics saturated with the origin of things – indexes for the ancestors’ footsteps. The most important part of the archive, they are the keys that unlock its workings and call forth the ancestors. Only the archons or shamans can unlock this ‘archontic power’. This dangerous activity requires the careful management of the archive. Like a nuclear power plant, some of its power is released into the public realm to abet current needs but its blinding furnace must be obscured, kept secret and secure in the private domain or all hell will break loose. This is why nuclear plants are closely guarded secretive places. The shaman’s hermeneutic task is not just to plumb the ancestral secrets in the archive but also to be their keeper.

The archon’s command, which for Derrida is the ultimate command, lies in *his* hermeneutic rather than political or military power. In calling forth and conversing with ghosts so that he might release some of their ancestral power into the public domain, the archon fulfils the political function of the archive to provide the ‘institutional passage from the private to the public’. However, Derrida added, this ‘does not always mean [the passage] from the secret to the nonsecret’.⁸ The ghost whisperer’s job is, through *his* hermeneutic skills, to police the threshold between the secret and non-secret in ways that maintain rather than subvert this difference.

If the archon’s command is not political, there can be no political power without control of the archive and its archons. This is why today Indigenous activists focus so much attention on controlling the modern archive of their cultures, as if it is the only way to wrestle back political advantage. However, controlling the archive is not the same as being its archon. Moreover, while the modern archive and the shaman’s archive are each expressions of the archetypal archive (phenotypes of the same genotype),

each has radically different procedures and categories. This is not unusual, which is why on first encountering another's archive we are invariably bewildered, like Foucault's uneasy laughter on reading 'a certain Chinese encyclopedia': 'In the wonderment of this taxonomy', he ruminated, 'is demonstrated...the exotic charm of another system of thought...[and] the limitation of our own'.⁹ This ordering of things – 'the pure experience of order and of its modes of being'¹⁰ – is, said Foucault, the beginning and ending of all knowledge. We only truly know about other cultures through the taxonomies with which they order their world, no matter how strange and foreign they may appear. And the often stark silhouette of this strangeness is the best means we have of knowing our own culture, its limits and oddities.

Convergent Archives

Perhaps the different archives of the world can be broken down into a sort of language tree – a network of relations – but their radically shifting categories are exceedingly difficult to map. Instead they appear, as they did to Foucault, as utterly different paradigms with no relation to the other. An archive readily incorporates anything whenever or wherever it was made if it meets the criteria of the archive. The things we now know as art previously lived a different life in other worlds where a dissimilar epistemology ordered the ruling archive. For example, ecclesiastical archives made certain objects visible as icons, whereas the art archive made these same objects, taken from the altars of churches and rehoused in the white walls of the art museum, visible as art.

The step from secret esoteric designs in the service of ancestral ghosts and shamans to art in the service of aesthetics, curators and art centre managers, was a paradigmatic shift radically altering the nature and function of ostensibly the same objects. Yet on

remote Indigenous communities some of the most celebrated contemporary artists move between both paradigms without a blink of the eye. What does it say about the convergence between these radically different archives when the same person can be a successful contemporary artist in his day job at the community art centre and a shaman working similar signs in ceremonies at night?

From the time they encountered the modern archive Indigenous people were keen to engage it because they knew, from their own archival practices, that it was the power behind modernity and its objects that they desired. Even first-contact Indigenous people were keen to give their stories, often illustrated with artworks, to the archives of anthropologists and missionaries. William Barak's art-making is probably a direct outcome of his role as a close and committed informer for the anthropologist A. W. Howitt, whereas Albert Namatjira's watercolours are a direct result of his desire to participate in the modern art market on its terms.

Thus the Western archive stimulated the production of modern Indigenous art – art calibrated to the needs of the art archive rather than the shaman's ghost whispering. Further, since the beginning of their contact with Western art forms, Indigenous artists have never hesitated to appropriate them into their archival practices. 'That print', Bede Tungutalum said to me a few months ago while strumming his guitar at a party in a print studio in Port Kembla where he was resident artist, 'has a song. I'll sing it to you'. It was the story of the ancestor Murtankala and her daughters Wurupurungala and Murupiyamkala (similar to the Yolngu story of the Wagilug and Djan'kawu sisters) who created the features of the landscape and gave birth to the tribes, but it was sung country and western style. As Bede made clear to me that night, this print was a contemporary (i.e. living) archive of ancient ancestral stories. Subsequently bought by Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art,

it will be duly photographed and catalogued in its art archive as an original work of art by Bede, as it will also, no doubt, be catalogued in the archive of the Duck Point print workshop and the Tiwi Design art centre, which Bede founded with Giovanni Tipungwuti in 1969. Indigenous art, which began as an archive, is now destined to be archived in Indigenous art centres as well as far off Western institutions.

In the current enthusiasm for cultural convergence we should not lose sight of the radical differences being obscured in the archival blurring that occurs in the production of Indigenous contemporary art. If the shaman's archive archives ancestral origins, what does the modern archive archive? The shaman's archive became the subject of a modern archive, such that the ancestral subject of the Indigenous archives disappeared from view or, once removed, were sublimated into the modern archive. Where the shaman looking at *his* archived signs – say a group of *tjurungas* – saw ancestral ghosts, the modern archivist looking at her archive of the same *tjurungas* saw artefacts or perhaps even art.

The art archive is a quintessentially modern epistemology that bends things to its order: ritual objects became art, artists rather than ancestral beings or their incarnations create the art, and art curators and critics, not shamans, mediate their meaning and function. The cultural convergences of colonialism swirl in its powerful transcultural currents, but a shared archival impulse fuels this convergence. Thus Western interest in archiving Indigenous culture was not just due to the political machinations of the immense Imperial archive designed to regulate the British Empire that was established in nineteenth century. It also expressed the deeper drive of an archetypal archival impulse.

Little need was felt to archive Australian Indigenous culture during the early phase of colonialism, as it was not seen to be in

any way providential. Only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the ascent of social evolutionism that believed primitive cultures held secrets about the origins of Western modernity, did the race begin to archive Indigenous things. Driving this Western archival impulse was a deep yearning for ‘a more archaic impression’. A similar drive was evident in Western modernism, which also got underway at this time. Its search for originality made its adherents particularly interested in the Indigenous curios that colonists retrieved from shamanistic rituals. Thus in the late nineteenth century there began a convergence of Indigenous and Western archival impulses, each lusting after an archive that confused ‘itself with the *arkhē*’. Both took their bearings from an ultimate primeval origin as if caught by the allure of an unattainable ancestral secret. In this respect the modern art archive has all the characteristics of the archetypal archive, as if Indigenous shamans didn’t have to become modern; they already were modern.

The shaman was also modern in the sense that he located the ancestral imprints in his archive not just in iconographic signs but also in aesthetic affects. The shaman’s work of revelation and concealment with the documents of his archive is primarily conducted in a performative mode: it lies in the evocations of rhythm and patterns through art, dance and music. The European Enlightenment called such evocation aesthetics, a notion that became central to modern ideology but which its philosophers never fully grasped and which its archives have never successfully tabulated, except to occasionally reduce it to a style or even an ethnic sensibility that would provide the basis for a *sensus communis*.

Aesthetics, the science of feeling, refers to a sensibility that discerns underlying energies that animate the sensible world – what Western modernist critics called ‘significant form’, by which they meant something akin to the music of the spheres. Kant, the most

important philosopher of aesthetics, argued that aesthetic sensibility, like other faculties, would in its most disinterested mode – a mode that was true to its own logic or operational structure rather than simply following external (e.g. utilitarian) preferences – reflect a universal and therefore quasi-objective judgement, as opposed to the sort of subjective taste that generally prevailed in public opinion. In thus providing the basis for a fully public rather than just private taste, aesthetic sensibility could underwrite a cosmopolitan *sensus communis* that overcame individual, tribal or national prejudices. Aesthetic experience or fine art had become a definitive hallmark of modern art by the turn of the twentieth century, and also a modern conduit of transculturation.

The notion of aesthetic experience became important in modernity because it provided a means of conceiving a *sensus communis* that was true to the workings of individual sensibility rather than imposed from above or outside individual experience, yet conjoined rather than divided individuals. As conceived by Kant, aesthetic experience is essentially anthropocentric: in prioritising the individual's experience, fine art becomes an index of the human subject's freedom – embodied in the genius artist – rather than ancestral presence. In short, fine art displaces ancestral presence into significant form. Thus modern aesthetics effectively relocated the presence of the ghost into fine art and that of the shaman into the artist. The secret did not so much disappear – it wasn't foreclosed, to use the language of psychoanalysis – but repressed in the idea of fine art or significant form.

Aesthetic affects also provided a primary means by which the shaman hid the ancestral secrets of his archive in full view, thus ensuring the safe passage of its power into the public domain. The Yolngu, for example, called a particular optical aesthetic affect *Bir'yun*. After consulting his informants in 1937, the anthropologist

Donald Thomson described *Bir'yun* as 'the flash of light – the sensation of light that one gets and carries away in one's mind's eye, from a glance at the *likanbuy miny'tji* [paintings that are ancestral manifestations]', or as Howard Morphy put it: '*Bir'yun* is the shimmering effect of finely cross-hatched paintings which project a brightness that is seen as emanating from the wangarr [ancestral] being itself'.¹¹ Here, indeed, is an archive [the shaman's catalogue of signs] that confuses itself with the *arkhē* [the ancestor].

This convergence of Indigenous shamanism and Western modernist art in the realm of aesthetics was imperfect, as the ancestral content of the shaman's archive had been sublimated in the art archive. In its most ideal form, the art archive completely aestheticises its objects of desire. In actuality this was rarely the case, as despite Kantian theory and the rigour of critics such as Clement Greenberg, many moderns inclined to the spiritualist or metaphysical content of the shaman's aesthetic practices. The 'flash', said Martin Heidegger, is a universal sign of ancestral intervention:

In the flashing glance and as that flash, the essence, the coming to presence, of Being enters into its own emitting of light. Moving through the element of its shining, the flashing glance retrieves that which it catches sight of and brings it back into the brightness of its own looking.¹²

Rather than the disinterested terms of Kantian philosophy that sought to engage the logic of significant form, many modernists understood the aesthetic aims of their abstract art in spiritual terms that resonated with shamanism. From the other side, as if sensing this convergence, Indigenous shamans pushed their optical

aesthetic affects towards a modernist purpose, in much the same fashion that Michael Fried claimed American colour-field painters did in the 1960s – what he called a ‘purely visual or optical mode of illusionism’ that conjured ‘a depth of field or space accessible to eyesight alone’.¹³ In doing so, Indigenous shamans slipped almost unnoticed into the shoes of contemporary artists, transferring their shamanistic practices to that of art.

This transformation has often been charted in the evolution of Papunya Tula paintings. As if caught between two archives – those of shamanism and art – the early Papunya painters were driven by a deliberate duel between the shaman’s secrecy and the purely aesthetic demands of the art archive, as if they believed in calling up the ancestors through the appropriate iconography would augur well in their assault on the white artworld. However, this pushing against ancestral secrecy produced considerable anxiety in other Indigenous communities.¹⁴ This anxiety continues to haunt remote Indigenous art, resulting in the prohibition of iconography that references the shaman’s archive. The prohibition means that these days Indigenous artists opt for the purely aesthetic domain of the modern archive, and simply ‘make their art flash’. As in Western contemporary art, aesthetics is no longer a tool to mediate the secret and the public in cementing ancestral connections, but a means of making art.

A similar transition from ancestral impressions to fine art occurred in the Western world some 500 years earlier, and was also instigated by contact with exotic cultures, and in particular with the so-called ‘curios’ of nature and culture discovered there. This is how Indigenous objects first caught the eye of Western modernists. Curios are things that strike our eye, spark our mind, and ignite desire (in bookseller’s catalogues ‘curious’ once referred to texts with erotic content) because they are extraordinary in

some way – an excessive shine, a peculiar shape, a wildness or seductive charm. Like *Bir'yun*, the flash of the curio confuses itself with the *arkhē*.

A curio is anything out of the ordinary. From the Latin *extra ordinem*, the extraordinary is 'out of order' – an *atopos* or unplaced thing. It is a mystery, perhaps providential or auspicious, perhaps forbidden, taboo or secret, perhaps a magical relic, a sign of the divine, a message from the gods or a remnant of their being that is both alluring and dangerous.

When things appear out of place our lack of knowledge is revealed. In sensing another order we are made uneasy. The archive is our cure. Giving the curio a place and order settles the existential dread we have of ghosts and brings them under our command, be it through shamans or fine art. Thus curiosity brings out the curator in us. Our instinct is to pocket the curio – to remove it from the world and add it to our collection or cabinet. Fitting it into the existing order of our archive, we simultaneously tame and capitalise on its wildness. From the Latin *curiosus* 'careful, diligent; inquiring', and *cura* 'care', curiosity has the same etymological roots as curate and also cure or heal. The curator makes sure that nothing is out of order.

Western picture making was rerouted in the modern era via the Renaissance 'cabinet of curiosities' into the spectacular archives of scientific illustration and the shimmer of fine art. These storage cabinets in which curios from around the world were ordered, archived and displayed, gave birth to the modern art museum. Princes and scholars were the initial creators of 'cabinets of curiosities' – Leonardo and Dürer each had a cabinet – but they ultimately descend from the collections of ecclesiastical relics and the sacred stones stored by Indigenous shamans in their private abodes.

Like the secret cave and the inner sanctum of the cathedral, the prince's curiosity cabinet was an *arkheion*, a place in which power was centred: indeed the centre of the centre. The art museum is a place in its own right but usually situated in an existing precinct of power. The National Gallery of Australia is adjacent to the High Court and in a precinct of government ministries over which looks the houses of Parliament, in the front of which is a Western Desert design of a waterhole, designed by the Warlpiri ceremonial leader Michael Nelson Jagamara – a former buffalo shooter and drover, and son of the powerful Warlpiri shaman, Hitler Tjupurrula. This *curious* convergence of Western and Indigenous histories and archives at the *arkheion* of the Australian nation state became a symbol of Australia's hopes and aspirations as a nation at the turn of the twenty-first century. This same convergence is now well and truly embedded in the prominence of the Indigenous contemporary art movement in the nation's art world, as if the constitution of the nation state, founded 115 years ago on the idea of a white Australia, has become irrelevant to its future.

The Indigenous Contemporary Art Archive

The Indigenous contemporary art movement is a direct outcome of the new government-subsidised, Indigenous-run art centres established in the 1970s and 1980s, of which Papunya was the first example when it was incorporated in 1972. From the beginning the modern archive played a central role in the work of the art centre, and was instrumental in shifting its product from being catalogued in art museum archives from 'primitive art' to 'contemporary art'.

When Geoffrey Bardon initially galvanised the painting movement at Papunya in mid-1971, he immediately felt the urge to archive the men's painted scraps of board. No doubt the artists'

fevered desire to tell him the stories of their paintings contributed to this urge, though as his writings attest, Bardon had his own fever. So too did 22-year-old Felicity Wright when, some fifteen years later, she was appointed to establish the first official art centre at Yuendumu. One of her priorities was to establish a systematic photographic archive of the work produced, and this is now standard practice. Today the most sophisticated procedures are brought to bear on the archiving of Indigenous art in Australia's state fine-art museums.

The archiving of Indigenous contemporary art in art centres follows many of the standard procedures of the modern art archive but it also added a new feature. This additional element was a parallel textual documentation of the story that the painting told, for these artists specialised in history paintings. This document, got directly from the artist's mouth, was like an artist's statement. Used as a written certificate that accompanied the painting and a copy kept in the art centre, it is in some respects the love child of the shaman's and anthropologist's archives, both of which were more interested in the didactic story rather than poetic or aesthetic features of the artwork. The document's abbreviated descriptions are the surface movements of the darker whisperings and knotty hermeneutics that originate in the very different epistemology of shamanistic practices, but its form mimics the written text of Western archival practices. Perhaps Indigenous artists got the idea from making drawings for anthropologists, though illustrated bibles and biblical teaching aids that missionaries used could also have been models. Either way, the artists considered this written document an essential feature of the work, as if its text authenticated or authorised the image.

The art centre certificate was part of a modern Indigenous archival impulse that began in the 1960s – modern in the sense

that Indigenous painters sought to incorporate their ancestral stories in Western archives, as occurred for example at mission churches in Millingimbi, Yirrkala and Yuendumu. The same men behind the church at Yuendumu were also behind the Yuendumu men's museum that opened in 1971, which was an Indigenous-driven hybrid archive based on Indigenous and Western models that housed secret artefacts and murals to be looked at or engaged aesthetically, but also, for a while at least, to be used in ritual ceremonies. In the 1980s as the contemporary art movement began to take off and an art centre was established at Yuendumu, the museum fell into disrepair. The shaman was no longer needed.

In Yirrkala the art centre includes a museum in which a history of modern Yolngu art is displayed, including its origin works – the church panels and a replica of the bark petition from 1963 (also a text work) – and employs several Indigenous archivists who busy themselves archiving every document they can lay their hands on from existing archives, as well as making their own photographic records of new ceremonies. However, left out of this modern archive at Yirrkala are the secret sacred ceremonies, as if a clear distinction has been drawn between the shaman's archive and the modern one maintained at the art centre.

A primary duty of the art centre manager is archivist. She photographs each work produced in the art centre, and enters its details into a digital archival software program especially developed for art centres. Yet she would hardly seem a shaman. Does she dance with ancestral ghosts or deal in secrets? Who then is the archon of the art archive? Where are its ghosts and secrets?

The art archive that administers Indigenous contemporary art, and is the subject of the essays in this book, has its own ghosts and secrets that are embedded in its formative structures. The origin

of the art archive can be traced to Vasari's *Lives* (1550), which put the artist and his (there are no women artists in Vasari's archive) inventive imagination – which Vasari called *disegno* – centre stage. While, in a nod to the ecclesiastical authorities of the day that ruled with an iron fist,¹⁵ Vasari ascribed the origins of *disegno* to 'Almighty God...the Divine Architect of time and of nature' – as if God was the first artist – Vasari's focus is the art and not its divine origins. He effectively transforms the artwork from an archive of ancestral secrets and creations into something created by mortal artists. In the art archive the artist has ancestral status. He authors the work, and his name, person and life stories are the central feature of the archive – a direct substitution of the lives of the ancestors that concern the shaman's archive.

If the lives of the ancestors are documented in the lie of the land, Vasari had to rely on 'the tales of old men and from various records and writings, left by their heirs a prey to dust and food for worms',¹⁶ records kept in churches, castles and town halls of transactions between artisans and patrons, and the remembered chatter collected from the oral archive of gossip. The place of his archive is the book, thus removing its documents from their place of origin, for example church murals, to the text's narrative. These fragmented tales, woven into a narrative of cultural renaissance (the second coming of classical authority) and historical destiny, was reproduced in many editions and distributed across Europe, effectively establishing a global vector for the archive and a new art world that would come to have universal aspirations. Vasari's paradigm of *disegno* underpinned the pedagogy of the new academies of the Enlightenment – the first art centres – which produced their own archives, some of them becoming magnificent collections and art museums.

At first technological limits restrained the art archive. While the book was Vasari's cave, he couldn't actually collect the objects of his desire in the book. Most of them were on church walls in Tuscany and even further afield. As his paradigm quickly took hold across Europe, increasing its geographical reach, the archive was increasingly unable to contain its subject except in a virtual way. This explains why easel paintings, which hardly existed before the birth of the art archive, quickly became the dominant art form, and a virtual world of reproductions suddenly proliferated from the widespread copying of paintings, plaster casts of sculptures and prints of artworks. In locating the art archive in the book and text-based narrative, Vasari had condemned its subject, art, to become like the book: something easily reproducible. Only with the invention of photography did the fine art archive gain real traction. In one space, be it the limited space of a book or that larger space we art historians once called the slide library – since made redundant by Google – the art of the world could be easily assembled, juxtaposed and mapped into a structure, system or language that made from art its own self-sufficient narrative, a *tjukurpa*. The art archive had come of age.

Photography was also a boon for the modern archive more generally. Being 'simultaneously the documentary evidence and the archival record', as if 'the camera is literally an archiving machine', the photograph is the privileged form of the modern archive in all its forms. The photograph sparked, said Okwui Enwezor, an 'archival madness, a "burning with desire" to transpose nature into a pictorial fact', and, he should have added, artworks.¹⁷ The pioneering German art historian Aby Warburg exemplified this modern archival madness in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, in which he vainly sought through a complex cartography of black

and white photographs to map from the babel of images over the ages a history of human cosmology would, in revealing its own archetypal logic, would finally articulate its soul. Contemporary artists, including Indigenous ones, have taken this approach to heart, either in soul-searching explorations or to open the modern archive up to its own logic.¹⁸ Today, Enwezor argued, ‘we witness firsthand how archival legacies become transformed into aesthetic principles’.¹⁹

The photographic reproduction is the actual archival object of the art archive and the larger modern archive of which it is part. Increasingly the actual or original object is out of reach of researchers, who must make do with photographic simulations. Like the ancestral ghost, the photograph is only a trace, an echo of the original. Thus the photographic archive requires an archon whose privileged access to the original underpins *his* hermeneutic authority. The artist, as the privileged ancestral origin of artworks, is seizing this role, but in doing so encountering the same ‘indeterminate zone’ of secrets, ghosts and elusive origins as the shaman. So too do other aspiring archons of the art archive – the art historian, curator and art centre manager – each beaver away as if the archive can provide ‘a suture between the past and present’,²⁰ origin, and trace: ‘an archive which would in sum confuse itself with the *arkhē*...An archive without archive’.²¹

Notes

- 1 J. Derrida, ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’, *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1995, pp. 9–63 at 10.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 9.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 26.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 27.
- 6 *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

Introduction

- 7 *ibid.*, p. 61.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 9 M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994, p. xv.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. xxi.
- 11 H. Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p. 194.
- 12 Quoted in S. Eldin, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, Continuum, London, 2001, p. 75.
- 13 M. Fried, 'Jules Olitski (1966–67)', *Art and Objecthood*, University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 132–47 at 139.
- 14 V. Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010.
- 15 Pope Paul III established the Roman Inquisition – which famously tried Galileo in 1633 – in 1542, eight years before the publication of the first edition of Vasari's *Lives*.
- 16 G. Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston Du C. De Vere, 10 vols, Macmillan and Co. and the Medici Society, London, 1912.
- 17 O. Enwezor, 'Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument', *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, International Center of Photography, London, 2007, pp. 11–51 at 11–12.
- 18 H. Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, vol. 110, 2004, pp. 3–22.
- 19 Enwezor, 'Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument', pp. 21–2.
- 20 *ibid.*, p. 47.
- 21 Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', p. 61.