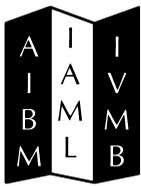


FONTES

A R T I S M U S I C A E





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ARCHIVAL EXCESS: SENSATIONAL HISTORIES BEYOND THE AUDIOVISUAL

Peter McMurray¹

English Abstract

Despite the increased interest in critical archival studies in recent years, most scholarship and theory still tends to consider archives as primarily textual repositories. Even discussions of sound archives often tend to imagine (or transcribe) sound objects as fixed texts. Drawing on a selection of multisensory objects from the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, an archive consisting primarily of materials related to 20th-century oral poetry from southeastern Europe, I consider here how many (if not most) archival objects exceed the sensory and media logics of the archive that holds them. In other words, these objects exhibit a quality of “archival excess,” fitting poorly in or being elided completely from catalogs, finding aids, and other archival inventories. They function as boundary objects, marking out the margins of the archives and the classifications that exclude certain objects inhabiting the same archival space. Rethinking the archive in terms of not only the audiovisual but also touch, taste and smell offers a way to reconsider latent assumptions about what kinds of things “belong” in an archive. Such a re-evaluation also raises significant questions about what kinds of humans archives produce.

French Abstract

Malgré l'intérêt croissant pour l'étude critique des archives au cours des dernières années, la plupart des études et des courants de pensée ont encore généralement tendance à considérer les archives comme des dépôts principalement textuels. Même les discussions sur les archives sonores ont souvent tendance à imaginer (ou à transcrire) les objets sonores comme des textes fixes. M'appuyant sur une sélection d'objets multisensoriels de la Collection de littérature orale Milman Parry, une archive composée principalement de documents liés à la poésie orale d'Europe du Sud-Est du 20^e siècle, je considère ici le nombre d'objets d'archives (sinon la plupart d'entre eux) qui dépassent la logique sensorielle et médiatique de l'archive qui les détient. En d'autres termes, ces objets présentent une qualité d'« excès archivistique » et cadrent mal dans les catalogues, les instruments de recherche et autres inventaires d'archives, ou bien n'y figurent tout simplement pas. Ils fonctionnent comme des bornes frontières, marquant les marges des archives et les classifications qui excluent certains objets habitant le même espace archivistique. Repenser l'archive en termes non seulement de l'audiovisuel, mais aussi du toucher, du goût et de l'odorat offre un moyen de reconsidérer les hypothèses latentes sur le genre d'objets censés appartenir à une archive. Une telle réévaluation soulève également des questions importantes sur les types d'humains que les archives produisent.

1. Peter McMurray is a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows and the Assistant Curator of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Poetry. This paper grows out of the Critical Archives Seminar at the metaLAB at Harvard, Spring 2015.

German Abstract

Trotz eines gestiegenen Interesses an kritischen Archivstudien über die letzten Jahre werden Archive in Forschung und Lehre tendenziell immer noch vornehmlich als Textspeicher betrachtet. Sogar im Rahmen der Diskussion über Tonarchive werden Tonobjekte häufig als feste Texte gedacht (oder umschrieben). Bezug nehmend auf eine Auswahl verschiedenartigster Objekte aus der *Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature* (einer Sammlung, die überwiegend aus Material im Zusammenhang mit mündlich überlieferter Dichtung des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts aus Südosteuropa besteht) untersucht der Autor hier, wie viele (wenn nicht gar alle) Archivobjekte die sinnliche und mediale Logik des besitzenden Archivs übersteigen. In anderen Worten: diese Objekte stellen eine Qualität von "Archiv-Überlauf" dar, so dass sie kaum in gängige Katalogsysteme, Findbücher oder andere Archivverzeichnisse passen oder von diesen sogar ausgeschlossen bleiben. Sie fungieren als Grenzübjekte, die die Grenzen von Archiven und Klassifikation markieren, obwohl sie den gleichen Archivraum wie andere Objekte füllen. Archive nicht nur in Bezug auf Töne, sondern auch in puncto Anfassen, Geschmack oder Geruch neu zu erfinden, eröffnet einen Weg, gängige Annahmen zu hinterfragen - unabhängig von der Auffassung, welche Art von Gegenständen in ein Archiv "gehören". Eine solche Rückwärts-Evaluation wirft auch wichtige Fragen darüber auf, welche Sorte Menschen Archive hervorbringen.

As one of its curators, I have the good fortune of showing the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at Harvard University to visiting researchers and other curious guests. While some expect a full-fledged tour, these introductory visits are typically rather modest affairs, at least in scope: the Milman Parry Collection, or MPCOL, consists of a single room inside Widener Library, the central library at Harvard. In the 1930s, Milman Parry, a young professor of Classics, went to Yugoslavia to study and document a living epic tradition. Based on textual analysis of Homeric epic, he had already hypothesized that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were products of an oral-poetic tradition. His multi-year field research (1933–35) with living bards demonstrated how a large poetry corpus could be transmitted orally and composed anew in each performance, ideas elaborated upon by Parry's student and field assistant, Albert Lord, in his landmark book, *The Singer of Tales*.² Parry, Lord, and another assistant, Nikola Vujnović, recorded thousands of epic songs from southeastern Europe through a variety of methods. While some were written down in the local languages (primarily Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, with some Albanian and Turkish)—usually by Vujnović but occasionally by some other scribe or by singers themselves if they were literate—a massive quantity was recorded as audio on aluminum discs, which Vujnović would later transcribe to facilitate Parry's and Lord's research.³

The heart of the MPCOL, as most understand it, are these discs and the hundreds of notebooks full of Vujnović's transcriptions and dictated texts. But these are far from the only materials in the Collection. First off, those same discs and notebooks contain dozens of lyric songs performed by women, despite the MPCOL's repute as a collection of epic or "heroic" songs performed by men. In addition, just two years after Parry's untimely death at age 33 in 1935, Lord returned to Albania to gather more epics to expand the corpus

2. Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

3. For overviews of Parry's work with Lord and Vujnović, see Gregory Nagy and Stephen A. Mitchell, "Introduction to the Second Edition," in *The Singer of Tales*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vii–xxix; and David Elmer, "The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Poetry," *Oral Tradition* 28.2 (2013): 341–354.

of Albanian-language texts. After World War II, Lord returned several more times to Yugoslavia and surrounding countries, as well, with interests in an increasingly diverse poetic repertoire. His students and other colleagues also began using the MPCOL as a depository for copies of their own fieldwork around the globe, adding material from Egypt, Central Asia, and the United States. Furthermore, a substantial body of sound recordings and other materials collected in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s, relates to traditional (modern) Greek poetry and Karagiozis shadow-puppetry.

In a typical visit with a guest of the MPCOL, I might pull out a few aluminum discs and notebooks for patrons to hear and browse. But inevitably, visitors begin pointing to the walls, adorned with photographs, musical instruments, maps, and other objects that may not fit my pre-planned narrative. On one occasion, a visitor went much further. In spring 2014, Wolfgang Ernst, the head of media studies at Humboldt University in Berlin and a longtime friend of the MPCOL, arranged a visit.⁴ He had already come once before and in addition had a good sense for the history and traditional narrative of the MPCOL—Homer, Yugoslavia, and so on.⁵ But Ernst's interests lay elsewhere. He came eager to look for traces of the history of sound technologies that had perhaps slipped through the cracks of these monumental narratives: rather than the iconic aluminum discs of the 1930s, he was more interested in the wire spools and reel-to-reel tapes of the 1950s; rather than lament the loss of Parry's sound recording apparatus from the 1930s—a specially commissioned two-turntable disc cutter that allowed continuous recording for hours on end, which has long since vanished from the Collection—he was more interested in a pile of tape recorders and a microfilm reader; and he was especially taken by two boxes of dot-matrix computer print-outs from the 1980s. These boxes held hundreds of sheets of tractor-feed paper, still connected together, with a few handwritten notes interspersed with printed lines of epic poetry, giving hints about the computer analysis Lord was undertaking at the time. With unflagging curiosity, Ernst politely asked about box after sealed box: What's in that one? What is that small leather case? Can we try plugging in one of these tape recorders to see if it still works—or even better, if by chance there is still a tape in it? At one point, as I climbed underneath a table loaded with record players and amplifiers, I came across a small stash of tape players—coated in dust—whose existence was a complete surprise even for me. In a moment of archival serendipity, in the last tape recorder we found an unmarked tape. The quality was poor enough I was unable to identify much about it from playback, but its very existence raised questions about what the archive holds—or more to the point, what we know the archive holds.

Oddly, in many ways these tape recorders do not belong to the archive—though they are certainly the property of the MPCOL. Not unlike the dust that had settled on them, they are a kind of archival sediment—technological detritus that was indispensable in the production of the materials that have since become the archive, but themselves left beyond the pale of the archive itself. The MPCOL has no catalog of old tape recorders—though perhaps it ought to. But these devices are hardly anomalous. Rather, they are the stuff of *archival excess*, the materials that sit just beyond the scope of what the archive allegedly holds, exceeding its capacity for containment and ordering. And yet, at the same

4. I warmly thank Wolfgang Ernst, Kathleen Wiens, Mirsad Kunić and Aida Vidan for their collegiality in both visiting the MPCOL and allowing me to include their reflections on and impressions of the space.

5. For example, see Wolfgang Ernst, "Toward a Media Archaeology of Sonic Articulations," in *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 172–183.

time, it is precisely by virtue of their falling outside the archive that the archive can come into existence. They are the exclusions that allow an internal logic of the archive such as it is to emerge.

Yet paradoxically, they sit in the same room, thus at once belonging and not-belonging, invisible to finding aids and catalogs yet irresistible to so many visitors. It is no accident that these objects are so often not texts, recordings, or other easily catalogued documents. Granted, an aluminum disc or a wire spool fits less comfortably into standard archival counting systems, but with time we have learned to accommodate such objects within the archive. But a musical instrument hanging on the wall, a portrait of a researcher or a singer, the glue that binds a notebook, a pile of tape recorders, or a now-obsolete deck of index cards—and why not even dust?—all serve as measures of the archive itself, as boundary limits of the logic of the archive and its ordering apparatus. To borrow the terminology of Science and Technology Studies (or STS), these are “boundary objects,”⁶ marking out the intellectual limits that serve as sites of contact and continuity between different discursive communities or disciplines. At the same time, however, I would add to the standard STS notion of boundary objects that these are also points of material rupture, a frontier where what Foucault termed the “enunciative possibilities” of one archive, discipline, or discourse begin to break apart.⁷ In sensory terms, these are objects of archival excess: sites of smelling, touching and tasting which exceed the sensory capacities we tend to ascribe to archival holdings. These objects extend (sometimes radically) beyond the archive’s (usually unstated) protocols that outline how the archive should be understood, sensed, and scrutinized. In this essay, I would like to undertake a micro-ethnography of the sensory excesses of the MPCOL, focusing on three objects housed in the archive to explore what their implications are for understanding the archival order of things and of the senses.

Object 1: Touching A Silenced *Gusle*

There are relatively few fragile items in the MPCOL, an archive whose legacy stems largely from sound recordings on heavy, durable aluminum discs. But some objects in the collection have weathered time better than others. A few months ago I found myself in the following situation: Standing unceremoniously on a chair, I reached up to the top of a tall bookshelf to get an instrument I knew was stored up there, grabbing without being able to see precisely what I was reaching for. Upon first touch, I felt and heard a quiet but distinct crinkling sound: I had grabbed wrong. I quickly shifted my hand position a fraction-of-an-inch to the left and lifted down a *gusle*, a bowed lute roughly 60 cm long with one (or less commonly two) strings. I immediately inspected what I imagined to be damage from my mishandling. The skin that covered the body of the instrument had apparently been punctured long ago, peeling back dramatically toward the edges in small, curling protrusions. I had touched one of these curls, hence the noise. No damage had occurred.

6. On boundary objects, see Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer. “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–1939,” *Social Studies of Science* 19.3 (1989): 387–420; and Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

7. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books), 129. Foucault interestingly speaks in passing of a “field or presence” within the enunciative field, noting the importance of its absences as well, and implicitly (I would add), the spaces that sit somewhere between those two categories (Foucault, 57–58).

Viewed only from the front, the instrument seemed unremarkable. Flipping the *gusle* over told a very different story, and made immediately clear why this ravaged instrument belongs in the archive. I had been retrieving it to show the instrument's backside to Kathleen Wiens, a trained ethnomusicologist and a curator from the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. The backside and neck of the instrument portray many of the celebrated heroes of Serbian literary, political and religious history, including a number of scenes from epic songs on the back of the instrument's bowl-like body, or *varjača*. Three of those four scenes, which are given much more space than the portrait-like carvings of saints and kings on the instrument's neck, depict heroes whose deaths are recounted in the epic song cycle on the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire (1389 CE). One panel depicts the Maiden of Kosovo (*Kosovka Devojka*) attending to the fallen hero Pavle Orlović; then Miloš Obilić, another hero from that battle who would be killed after assassinating the Ottoman Sultan; and finally King Lazar with his brother-in-law, Boško Jugović, the standard-bearer for the Serbian army, both of whom would fall in battle, leaving Queen Milica (not shown) to mourn their deaths. Moving on from the fourteenth century, the scenes jump to the twentieth century with a depiction of Gavrilo Princip, dubbed here "the Avenger," assassinating Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Duchess Sophie. This fateful double assassination in Sarajevo set World War I into motion. Finally, the instrument-maker's name and hometown are inscribed: Mitar Radulović, Nikšić. The instrument itself becomes an archive of a particular set of epic narratives of Serbian nationalism, tying together heroic labors of war (from the fourteenth century to 1914) with the creation of this particular instrument and the songs it will (re)animate.

These inscriptions alone make this *gusle* extremely compelling as a cultural object—but it goes further. For me personally, the most striking aspect of the *gusle* is the feel, not the imagery, of the carvings. To be sure, the imagery is rich. But running my fingers along the engraved contours, I begin to feel traces of how it was made, as well. In some places, I can tell the direction from which cuts were made. In others, I feel the slight prick of wood splinters, giving a sense of the directions of the original grain. This experience is less a romantic reverie than a reminder of the complex ecologies that produce instruments and the material traces they leave behind. The same could be said for the wood used in other instruments in the archive, but none of them have the same chiseling cuts that expose their grain so clearly. Ann Laura Stoler speaks of an "archival grain" that reveals constellations of power typically obscured in and by the archive: "Reading along the archival grain draws our sensibilities to the archive's granular rather than seamless texture, to the rough surface that mottles its hue and shapes its form. Working along the grain is not to follow a frictionless course but to enter a field of force and will to power, to attend to both the sound and sense therein and their rival and reciprocal energies."⁸ This idea of a wooden grain is striking as a metaphor, yet as with so many metaphors, a slightly more literal reading is productive as well. Reading for histories of power, we recognize that Serbian culture has been both oppressed (in the Ottoman period) and oppressor (in the late/post-Yugoslavian period), with the *gusle* playing a powerful role in the politics of both eras. The litany of figures and stories presented here—silently, inscribed into the instrument—

8. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 53, emphasis added.



ILLUSTRATION 1 The bowl of the carved gusle, showing, from bottom left, The Maiden of Kosovo, Miloš Obilić, King Lazar and Boško Jugović, and, bottom right, Gavrilo Princip shooting Archduke Franz Ferdinand. At the center are the name and hometown of the instrument-maker: Mitar Radulović, Nikšić.

creates a kind of micro-archive within the archive, all embedded in (or impressed upon, as Derrida put it⁹) the surfaces of this now-unplayable instrument.

And yet, it remains unclear how this instrument fits in the MPCOL. It, along with a dozen-plus other instruments (mostly *gusle*), ring the room, hanging or lying prone atop bookshelves. They neither appear in any official catalog of the collection nor include any specifics about their provenance. Within the archival space, they are literally marginal, pushed to the edges of visibility and storage. Yet even solely as visual relics—though most of them appear to be in good enough condition to be played—these instruments offer a prominent reminder that this collection emerged from the intersection of sound technologies and vocal/instrumental performance. The scholarly pendulum has swung repeatedly between these poles, favoring performance for decades before a recent uptick in interest regarding sound and sound technologies (i.e., Sound Studies). But as much as

9. Derrida speaks at length about the idea of an “impression” of the archive, literally that which is impressed or inscribed upon a surface but reveals the substrata that make up the psychological aspects of the archive and its power. See Jaques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

any other object could, the *gusle* straddles both those worlds, a deceptively simple instrumental technology that facilitates the performance of poetry.

Object 2: Smelling a Card Catalog

Dim lighting and a phalanx of shelving conspire to make entering the MPCOL a kind of anti-epiphany. Simply opening the door of the archive does not give immediate access to it, especially not visually; instead, a set of bookshelves, packed with a parquetry of tape reels and LPs (stored vertically) and oversized print volumes (stored horizontally), occludes any panoramic view of the archival space. Instead a sensory “blocking or occupying,” as Hans Gumbrecht puts it, mutes the vision of the archive. Yet such visual deprivation does not necessarily entail a lesser sensory experience; on the contrary, it primes the visitor to savor the distinctive smell of the archive.

Passage into the MPCOL entails movement through a variety of contrasting spaces: into the main library, through a gaudy (and echo-filled gallery) up to a secluded third floor, and then finally into the archive. Each of these spaces offers a slightly different olfactory experience from the previous one. But entrance to the MPCOL immediately foregrounds what can perhaps best be described as archival smell. Surely there are important differences in the smell of archives, but no matter how well preserved they may be, they ultimately function as crypts, housing the slowly decaying documents, recordings, and other objects. And thus most archives share in archival smell, to varying degrees. Mirsad Kunić, a Bosnian researcher who spent a semester at the MPCOL as a Fulbright scholar, described the archive’s smell as an encounter with multiple temporalities from his own life history as well as that of the archive: “I think I remember the pungent smell [*oporog mirisa*] of old paper (books, volumes), which I carry from my childhood, when I began to come across older editions of books. As a student, I would often stop by second-hand book shops and rummage through the old books, and of course also soak in that smell of ages past [*miris starine*] particular to books. And *that* is the smell that connects me to those old volumes in the MPCOL.”¹⁰ For Kunić, smell links up personal time and archival time, as both a physical process (i.e., decay) and a psychosomatic one (i.e., memory and nostalgia).

Slavicist Aida Vidan, a long-time researcher in the MPCOL, echoed Kunić’s thoughts about the temporality of smell of the archive: “I perceive it as a scent of continuity which brings an additional layer of density to the scholarly experience, as an olfactory bridge which spans times and places but also marks a safe scholarly harbor. When it’s too busy, too noisy, too fragmented out there, the scent of the MPCOL sets me in the right frame of mind to continue working where I left off. In this respect, for me it also provides personal continuity as I keep returning to the treasures of the MPCOL.”¹¹ Intriguingly, Vidan’s account posits smell as a form of sensory refuge against sound (“when it’s...too noisy”) and other telltale signs of modernity. The archive becomes a kind of monastic space that reorders our sensory capacities through its own menu of sensations. These in turn, as for Kunić, serve a temporal function for Vidan—her “olfactory bridge”—that connect scholarship and personal experience across time.

Nevertheless, smell does not permeate the archive evenly across every surface or object. Informal smell-driven observations immediately point to the greatest culprits of such

10. Mirsad Kunić, personal correspondence with author, August 2015.

11. Aida Vidan, personal correspondence with author, August 2015.

“smells of ages past”: paper, cardboard, bindings with glues, and wood, in a variety of forms from shelving to, in this case, musical instruments. Follow your nose: the commercial cliché, in fact, leads to particular areas of the archive where smells are more intense. The most distinctive smell to my sensibilities is further enclosed from the main shelves, enclosed like a nesting doll in a massive locked cabinet within the archive within the third floor collections within the library. Inside the cabinet reside dozens of thin cardboard boxes—these, too, give off a light smell—which each house five to ten notebooks used for taking down song texts (both in the field and afterward while transcribing). Not all the notebooks are uniform, suggesting that not all emit the same scent. But the overall experience is one in which smell comes to the sensory fore (I find) more than any other sensory modality, especially because the writing itself is housed within the notebooks within the boxes within the cabinet, etc. Long before I can see writing or even feel individual notebooks, I can smell the paper of those notebooks.

In short, the smell of deteriorating paper marks the presence of writing, always already decaying. It is the sensory aura (decay) appended to the material substrate (paper) that enables writing in the first place, demanding some form of inscription to outlast the ephemerality of oral/aural communication. Strikingly, although media theorists such as Lisa Gitelman and Ben Kafka have recently turned their attention to paper as an object of inquiry, they oddly seem to take its materiality for granted.¹² They focus instead on writing, with emphasis on its materiality—and they very much succeed—but neither seems to scrutinize paper’s ontology: for example, where paper begins and where it ends. If the smell of decaying notebooks can reach me from across the room, does it really make sense to speak of paper size as 8.5” x 11” or “tabloid”?

The index card offers an even more impressive rebuttal to this assumption. One of the other dense sites of smell in the MPCOL is a small wooden card catalog holding thousands of index cards in nine drawers. Not insignificantly, this unassuming catalog sits roughly eye-level just inside the door; it offers the visual welcome to the archive. It too emits a distinct paper-smell, though not as powerfully as the cabinet of notebooks. In addition to paper, the small, stained-wood file that houses the catalog becomes all but indistinguishable in its smell from the cards it contains. But in thinking about the objects that make and define the limits of an archive, this catalog serves a powerful function, in addition to its smell. For all intents and purposes, it does not exist—it does not show up in any catalog or listing of archival holdings. And yet the archive is contingent on it for its organization. The largest fond of sound recordings and written dictations of songs are accounted for and organized by this cataloging system. For STS scholars like Geoffrey Bowker and Leigh Star, major proponents of the concept of “boundary objects” discussed above, such classificatory systems are the touchstone for “sorting things out” in the archive.¹³ The archive proceeds from this organizational system. Yet the catalog would not appear in any finding aid or inventory of holdings requested annually by the library; rather, it *is* the inventory of holding.

Historically speaking, it served as the MPCOL catalog until a 1995 index was published, followed by a digital catalog of select materials a few years later.¹⁴ It remains a

12. Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 2012).

13. See Bowker and Star (1999).

14. For the published index, see Matthew Kay, *The Index of the Milman Parry Collection 1933–1935* (New York: Garland, 1995).



ILLUSTRATION 2 The handwritten catalog of the MPCOL on index cards

critical piece of the archive due to the peculiar dynamics of gender and genre in this archive dating back to Milman Parry's inception of the project. His primary aim was to gather epic songs performed by men; he also collected interviews with those singers, as well as a large number of lyric songs performed by women (sometimes simply called *žen-ske pjesme*, literally “women’s songs.” After Parry’s death, Albert Lord’s first published book was in fact a sampling of these lyric songs, written in collaboration with Béla Bartók, who transcribed the music.¹⁵ But in the decades that followed, as Lord published *The Singer of Tales* and follow-up work, these “women’s songs” were largely left untouched.¹⁶ With limited resources for updating catalogs (whether analog or digital), this old card catalog remains the only complete documentation of the holding of women’s lyric songs. Thus, if the card catalog as a whole is largely invisible as an object in the archive, the catalog of “women’s songs” is doubly so, excluded both as non-holding (i.e., as *catalog*) and as a genre/gender of lesser attention historically (i.e., as *catalog of women’s song*). While

15. Béla Bartók and Albert Lord, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

16. In recent years, this trend has changed, most notably with Aida Vidan’s *Embroidered with Gold, Strung with Pearls: The Traditional Ballads of Bosnian Women* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Hellenic Studies, 2003). Vidan is currently working to digitize these very catalog holdings related to women’s lyric songs.

this paper catalog would likely remain in the archive even once fully digitized, its scent—one of many sensory traces of archival time passing—bears witness to and embodies the gendered history of the archive.

Object 3: Tasting Dust—and Pastness?

Archives are sacred spaces within academic and historical institutions. Certain rules and rituals must be observed, officiated by those with the requisite authority. As with many sacred spaces, archives simultaneously cultivate and actively limit the scope of sensory activities that may take place within their precincts. Vision traditionally prevails through reading and other forms of looking. In an archive devoted to sound recordings—a possibility only since the late nineteenth century—hearing may also play a central role. Touch is inevitable but often highly constrained on grounds of fragility and preservation. In theory, smell should not be present, but in practice, it often is. And in fact smell is on some level embraced because, again, it indicates sensorially the passage of time, verifying the antiquity of the archive and its en-crypted holdings. But taste: taste, it would seem, is always already proscribed. The greasy, runny, spillable nature of food and drink make them necessarily anathema to archives. Yet taste can emerge still more directly from the archive, sometimes quite powerfully, if unintentionally. One such unintended (and frankly undesirable) form of tasting is the encounter with archival dust. In her book, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman compellingly explores the not-just-symbolic nature of dust in archives.¹⁷ In one especially memorable chapter, “Something She Called a Fever,” she rethinks Derrida’s notion of “archive fever” (*mal d’archive*) as a potentially real illness (or set of illnesses) brought on by inhaling dusts, including anthrax spores or other decaying bits from leather and parchment. The chapter’s researcher-protagonist, Jules Michelet, writes famously about his experience in French state archives in the 1820s: “these papers and parchments, so long deserted, desired no better than to be restored to the light of day... [A]s I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up.”¹⁸ While Steedman is more interested in the permeability of the body within the archive—spores *can* be inhaled, dust *can* enter the body—she offers a fleeting alternate reading on the meaning of Michelet’s dust from Roland Barthes. Barthes suggests that Michelet was not simply inhaling the archive, but eating it, a possibility he explores in the second of his essays on Michelet entitled, “Michelet, Eater of History” (*Mangeur d’Histoire*).¹⁹ For Barthes, Michelet draws “nutriment” from archival history, a kind of sacrament (“a pontiff who absorbs, sacrifices, bears witness, fulfills, glorifies”) and pastoral (“He ‘grazes’ on [History]; i.e., he passes over it and at the same time he swallows it”).²⁰ Barthes concludes by noting that for history (or History) to be written, for Michelet, it must be “consumed, devoured, ingested, so as to resuscitate the historian.”²¹

This model of a vampire-like historian has intriguing possibilities, especially when we return to the concrete realities of Steedman’s more literal dust: Michelet was *not only*

17. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

18. Quoted in Steedman, 10.

19. Roland Barthes, “Michelet, Eater of History.” In *Michelet*, trans. Richard Howard. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 17–25.

20. Barthes, 19–20.

21. Barthes, 25.

inhaling, but also tasting the dead, by way of ingesting dust particles. Nor was his tasting-by-dust limited to just “the dead”: inhaling and swallowing particulates in the air and around the room, Michelet was also indirectly consuming (still living) archivists, other researchers, perhaps custodial staff, as well as the soil, pollen, hairs, paper fibers, and other materials they and the archival objects brought in. Presumably, after toiling in the archive for such a long period, Michelet was not simply tasting the dust of others but also of his own activities—the autophagy of the archive, the microscopic self-cannibalization that takes place in this sanctuary, marking not just the passing of archival time (i.e., History) but also the passing of the researcher as Michelet (and others) while away their lives in the archive.

But for my purposes, I am less interested in the sacrament of dust than of its actual taste. Because it does taste. Returning to my opening anecdote with Wolfgang Ernst, our archival rummaging was deeply physical. After showing him a handful of wire and tape recorders that were easily accessible (and frequently shown to visitors), I then had to crawl under a table, crane backward, and lift recorders out from under the table to Ernst. They were not particularly heavy but the corporeal demands were not insignificant either, especially compared to, say, pulling an aluminum disc off an easily accessible shelf, or unlocking a cabinet to reach notebooks. Unsurprisingly, with each subsequent recorder, the coating of dust that had accumulated on each increased. The more I strained to pull recorders out, the more dust I incidentally inhaled and ingested. As I worked, my labors took on a clear taste and smell: the slightly acrid, cotton-mouth feel of dust in the air and in my mouth, accompanied by sneezes (exacerbating my mild springtime allergies) and coughs. I was tasting the archive, much to my chagrin. On some level this is a confession: I should keep these spaces cleaner, and indeed, I try to do so with surfaces I see regularly. But in this case, the tape we found intact and playable in the final tape recorder was both aurally and visually inaccessible, tucked away directly behind the large cabinet full of paper records, a storage area accessible only from the crawlspace beneath a table. Even in this archive devoted explicitly to sound and to understanding textuality (e.g., Homeric epic) as a form of orality, paper had literally and symbolically managed to occlude our vision once again.

Of course, this is precisely the aim of Ernst’s preferred approach to media studies, media archaeology, to excavate the strata of mediations between human activity and machines, to see more clearly through the opacity of writing, to excavate media histories that may not be readily visible or otherwise perceivable. Or as Ernst himself has written: “Media archaeology discovers a kind of stratum—or matrix—in cultural sedimentation that is neither purely human nor purely technological, but literally in between (Latin *medium*, Greek *metaxy*): symbolic operations that can be performed by machines and that turn the human into a machine as well.”²² Siegfried Zielinski has similarly emphasized the geological in his formulation of media’s “deep time,” drawing on “certain conceptual premises from paleontology” as methodological orientations to push against teleological media narratives: “the history of civilization does not follow a divine plan, nor do I accept that, under a layer of granite, there are no further strata of intriguing discoveries to be made.”²³

Once again, while media archaeologists understand their strata and sediment primarily as “conceptual premises,” that physical, literal sediment is precisely my point of inter-

22. Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*, 70.

23. Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 7.



ILLUSTRATION 3 Dust clings to one of the MPCOL's portable tape recorders

est. Dust in the archive is not merely a marker of time's passage, though it certainly indicates that. It also creates a physical barrier to access, not so much because picking up dusty objects is difficult (though it may be unpleasant). The barrier is rather psychosomatic: we inhale the dust, it clings to our fingers and clothes, and eventually lodges itself in our respiratory system. Our noses reflexively snuffle; perhaps we cough, or even intuitively recoil. Dust functions as a silent prohibition, warning that no one has touched these materials in years. And yet at the same time, that warning is the siren song of the archive: the more dust the greater possibility of a "discovery." Dust thus marks out yet another boundary within the archive: a kind of (secular) sacred space separating archival-humans from archival-objects that are at once both obsolesced and primed for discovery; unused and unknown but crying out to be used and known; lost to perception and yet, augmented with dust (and in especially unlucky cases, perhaps mold, rust, or other accretions) that adds unexpectedly to their sensory dimensions when encountered by an archivist or researcher.

On Archival Humans (If A Tree Falls in an Archive?)

In mentioning "archival-humans" above, I implicitly pose a classically Foucauldian, inverted question: not 'what kinds of archives have humans produced?' but rather 'what kinds of humans have archives produced?' The foregoing discussion unexpectedly

highlights the precarious and ephemeral place of humans in the archive: the instigators who begin gathering materials; the curators, catalogers and archivists (often the same people); and the researchers who make use of it. Theorists of the archive such as Arlette Farge seem to suggest that these groups are more different than same: the earliest collectors were bureaucrats and petty officials, the archival staff stands to thwart (or least complicate) the work of researchers, and researchers themselves compete against one another.²⁴ Given her witty prose, we might read these distinctions as ironic or simply humorous caricature. But in my own experiences as a curator, many of which are prompted by interactions with visiting patrons, I find the relationships among humans-in-the-archive to be largely collaborative (and I hope those patrons would agree).

Whether these different groups of human users collaborate or compete, the question remains: how does the archive produce humans? Or phrased differently, how do archives and their knowledge structures limit, elicit and/or inhibit certain kinds of humanness? If Jules Michelet is the model archival researcher, what kinds of researchers are implicitly defective in their approaches to the archive? Just as certain objects fit more neatly in an archive conceived as a repository of written records, the same holds for archival-humans with certain bodies and sensory capacities. Historian Durba Ghosh makes this point with her own recollection of archival olfaction as she returned for ongoing archival work in the Oriental and India Office Collections in London after finishing her dissertation: “I also found out at that time that I was newly pregnant, blessed with a very keen sense of smell that was meant to warn me away from smelly soft cheeses and other types of bacteria-laden goods. This new sense of smell also made me easily nauseated when I was in the proximity of the orange-red leather (and its fragments) of the East India Company’s records. In what was a case of real *mal d’archives*, I found myself rushing out to the bathroom upon receiving my documents for the day.”²⁵ *Mal d’archives*, as mentioned above, is the French title of Derrida’s famous book, *Archive Fever* (or perhaps more aptly translated, the ills of the archive).²⁶ Here, however, it serves as a reminder of the kinds of body-specific ills that can afflict archival-humans, perhaps targeting some more than others.²⁷ Less acutely, Farge and Steedman both comment repeatedly on the cold temperatures of many archives,²⁸ which certainly relate to document preservation but may also tie into a broader phenomenon of indoor climate regulation (i.e., heating, cooling of buildings) based on male metabolic rates that may poorly approximate equivalent rates for females.²⁹

From a broader sensory perspective, most archives dictate that archival-humans must be skilled readers and able lookers. Some archives like the MPCOL require skilled listening, but often that listening has already been done, as is the case with the thousands of

24. See Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

25. Durba Ghosh, “National Narratives and the Politics of Miscegenation” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 27–44.

26. See Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

27. Carolyn Steedman also discusses red rot/decay and leather and its potentially harmful physical effects in *Dust*, 26.

28. Farge opens her account of archives with cold temperatures: “Whether it’s summer or winter, you freeze. Your hands grow stiff as you try to decipher the document, and every touch of its parchment or rag paper stains your fingers with cold dust” (*Allure*, 1). See also Steedman, *Dust*, 28.

29. Boris Kingma and Wouter van Marken Lichtenbelt, “Energy Consumption in Buildings and Female Thermal Demand,” *Nature Climate Change*, “Letters,” August 3, 2015:1–5, accessed August 4, 2015, doi: 10.1038/nclimate2741.

audio-to-text transcriptions produced decades ago by Nikola Vujnović, the archival-human who played such a critical role in the MPCOL. Going beyond audiovisual media, as I have attempted here, immediately points to ways that archival-humans might gain greater access to and understanding of archival objects, but also the ways in which current archival protocols operate upon human bodies, rendering skilled viewers (and listeners) as effective researchers while others are precluded in varying degrees from access to the archive. In short, these and other more audiovisual sensory encounters with the archive must be rethought as *generating* sensation and dis/ability in the archival-humans it produces and sustains (or fails to).

At the same time, thinking about sensory-rich objects like those I describe here not only raises complicated questions about producing humanness but also about producing thingness. These objects point to broader questions about the classificatory logics that allow for the very existence of the archive: what kinds of materials are valued and saved? What kinds of materials are valued, saved, *and* integrated into catalogs and classificatory schemas? And finally, what kinds of materials are valued, saved, classified, *and* made available for a wider public of users and other allies beyond the given institution/archive? While some archives might never have accepted such irregularly-shaped, difficult-to-store objects (e.g., a musical instrument, tape recorders) based on acquisition policies, similar arguments could be made from a whole host of more mundane objects that might appear in any archive: a stapler, cardboard boxes, an old phonebook, a chair, an answering machine, or even infrastructural materials like electrical outlets or light fixtures. They too occupy the archive without necessarily being accounted for by it. These objects (including those discussed above and listed here) constitute a meaningful kind of boundary within the archive—except insofar as they do not actually fit *within* the archive, but instead fall into the literally dusty recesses of and beyond the archive. As far as the ordering principles of the archive are concerned, these uncatalogued, unclassifiable objects may not be objects at all.

This close sensory symbiosis of humans and things is reminiscent of the thought experiment of a tree falling in an uninhabited forest: does it make a sound? Whatever the answer, it depends on how we understand the relationship between humans and non-humans, an ever-shifting ecology of people, animals, plants, and other beings and things. In the context of an archive, humans and objects are so deeply co-constituted that the slightest shift in either population could have tremendous consequences for the other. If unseen, uncatalogued objects in an archive—like the MPCOL tape recorders—may effectively not exist due to the lack of sensory encounter between human and object, simple acts of sensory contact like inhaling, picking up an unknown object, or encouraging patron requests may in turn bring those objects (back) into a state of archival being.