

Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz

THE MAKING OF OUR LEXICON

Adieu. Welcome.

Introductions are often written at the end, when the book that is just beyond their threshold has in fact already been written. Therefore, they resemble more the words of an adieu. The book is being archived, packed up, and closed. On the other hand, this is perhaps the first time when we, as its curators, glimpse the existence of our book as such, now that it is taking the shape that will distinguish it from all the others. For the first time the book knows that the time has come. We settle our accounts with what has been gathered inside, ready to close the gates, so that they can be opened again.

The movements of closure and opening—mimicked by your turning the pages again and again—are folded one into the other, like the recto and verso of a page. What holds them together is the temporary absence of reading that is filled up with a suspended breath, a tiny affect of a hand moving, of eyes remembering and anticipating. Nothing is ostensibly happening, yet this is one moment of decision, of eventful suspension. You are the agents of time, the harbingers of a new arkhè, or beginning. You are treating the archive as though it had not yet been closed. By doing so you become capable of turning it against itself. There will be no rest in this archive, now that you have come.

The beginning of a description

Our *Lexicon* is a collection of encounters with archives and archival materials—an encounter understood as an affective and critical practice involved in the construction of memory. This book offers glimpses into the intimate relation born out of the experience of finding, accessing, remembering, or, indeed, imagining and creating an archive. Such an archive may be institutional, public, private, or still in the making, perhaps wished-for, bordering on the imaginary and the impossible.

The volume, encompassing contributions by 25 different authors, is organized into entries, each introduced by a simple keyword, as you would find in a lexicon. Each entry represents a singular account (a “story”) testifying to the affective, political, and intellectual challenges posed by individual and collective memories. The authors featured in the book cover a wide range of relations with archival practices: they are involved in archives either as professionals, artists, engaged participants, researchers, writers, curators, or in many of these roles rolled into one.

Differently from a standard lexicon, however, this book does not attempt to present an accomplished, unified body of knowledge regarding its topic: each entry gives a particular access to the scope and resonance of a concrete archival *exemplum*. In other words, each entry is both a story and a reflection on the way the author has chosen to address the question of the archive itself. The format of each contribution is likewise various: the book encompasses short narrative essays, personal meditations, visual artworks, performance materials, and other kinds of creative compositions. The only restriction imposed on the authors was brevity: each story is concentrated in a few pages and is intended to offer a glimpse into a much broader horizon, in time, space, and thought.

The use of keywords

In our *Lexicon* the keywords function as a double, Janus-like vector of time: they point to a past as well as to a future use. In the beginning, as we started conceiving the book, they served as orientation to the authors, a signpost to trace a route along the winding paths of his or her memory. The choice of keyword and topic developed at the same time, reinforcing one another. Starting with a specific archive in mind, each author was asked to select a word that conveyed its affective core. In turn, once the keyword appeared, it fed back into the composition of each entry, giving it a centre of gravity, a *body*. Now that the book has taken shape, the keywords remain as both a reminder of, and a passageway to, each archive, marking the space between author and reader. The pages where the keywords are placed are thresholds where reading is delayed; each keyword becomes an echo chamber reverberating with its past operation, now amplified by the resonances you are bringing to it.

At a certain point—maybe with a slight surprise—you will find some blank pages where you can mark *your own* keyword: here you are given the space and time to take stock of the affects gathered in your reading. Imagine this space as a resting space in your ramble: you are taking a walk passing from one spot to the next, you sit down on a bench, at the crossroads of a

public path. You may write, draw, doodle ... or just enjoy the whiteness, full of potential, of these pages, then move on, leaving them behind until your next return.

How this book became an affective archive

By eschewing the neutral randomness of alphabetical order, the present trail of keywords gives shape to a constellation linking one archive to the other. An important part of our curatorial work went into tracing our chosen path by following the associations, the points of contact or conflict that unexpectedly emerged while we experimented with the effects of different orderings.

By way of an extended process of montage and composition, this book became for us a *habitat*, a lived environment. The longer we dwelt in it, the more relations of proximity started to emerge beyond our own initial expectations. As soon as we started thinking about proximity or distance, as soon as we accepted the challenge to pursue and reshuffle the multiple and ambivalent affects released by the collected encounters, we realized that our *Lexicon* had become in its turn an affective archive.

We had embraced the pleasure of engaging with the composition of its internal echoes on the stage of our paper theatre: a magic lantern superimposing our own mode of encounter with a collection of other people's archival encounters. Our *Lexicon* is the result of this double motion: our own affective movement inserted into the affective movement of the archives that we had collected. This is why we present this *Lexicon* not as a collection of archives but as a praxis striving towards, as well as working for, an affective archive.

Ours is only one of many possible trails: the reader is invited to shape her own different route, create different constellations of archives, as well as insert one of her own. The static nature of the lexicon, traditionally used as a reference tool characterized by sufficiency, is intentionally rejected by embracing insufficiency and movement as the book's structural elements. Incomplete by design as a lexicon, it is therefore fully complete as an affective archive.

Rather than a concept, *affective archive* names for us a horizon, a limit, a possibility always ready to be enacted and released in every archive. Seen as a process of memory-making in which everybody is involved—producing the scene of our common, yet also divided, dwelling space—the affective archive wavers between materiality and immateriality, between conservation and transformation. Ultimately, the hybrid term *affective archive* is intended to acknowledge the impulse that both creates and mobilizes the archive as an endless process. Speaking of affective archives,

therefore, makes us partly responsible for the yet unknown directions of our own archiving, acknowledged as a vector of transformation.

Once you see affect moving in the archives, there is no longer any rest within them. This can be both a source of terror and delight, as we shall see in the next story.

A tale of fire and books

François Truffaut's film *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) tells the wonderful story of a community: the community of the *hommes-livres*. They are free (*livres*), yet at the same time castaways in a society where the act of reading is considered a crime: playing on the double meaning of the French word *livres*, Truffaut turns the book lovers into *free men* who decide to become human *books*. Each has learned by heart the text of a favourite book, banished by law and destroyed by fire. Though physically burnt by the regime's Firemen, each of these books is thus held virtually—in *potentia*—in their bodies. By means of their wondrous technology of memory, the “book-men” take refuge in the forest, getting ready for the moment when someone will care to *browse* them, when someone will care to listen to what they are able to repeat.

In this tale each book is turned into a walking body, and vice versa: each body is turned into a walking book, just like Guy Montag, a fireman now become book-lover, who chooses to archive in his memory Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. In a stunning act of revolt, the readers turn themselves into the physical support of the books by now destroyed, each word burning in their memory so that they can mumble, mouth, and spit their content like a flame. Their mission is to ensure the survival of each individual archive through repeated chains of transmission.

We are opening up our *Lexicon* with this story, because it shows the emergence of an affective archive embodied by a new community defined by archival practice. The books are archived in, and as, bodies, made to live once again, both in the encounter with a listener and in solitary, intimate repetitions of passages. These oral performances are both acts of memory and desire. What they hold in store is the distilled memory of a desire not only to read—a desire that fired the need to preserve the book in the first place—but also to pass it on despite all odds. Through the trauma of loss, a radical desire is released, with a paradoxical liberation that coincides with their exile. This story is both a tale of terror and one of *jouissance*.

A tale of terror. Or, archive by fire (Marco Pustianaz)

By conflating multiple references to utter destruction—from the burning of the Library of Alexandria to the Nazi burnings of books—*Fahrenheit 451* plays on the intimate bond between terror and archive. In order to produce the urgency of an archival community literally rising like a phoenix from the ashes, this tale has to stage the terrifying horizon of a holocaust, “a complete burning.” As books perish amid the flames, bodies take the task to become their new vessel and support.

Two lessons may be drawn from this tale of conversion. Firstly, if a body can become an archive, it is only because the body is already a living archive. Secondly, if an archive can be turned into a body, the fantasy of closure inherent in archival conservation is already compromised. In effect, once tied to a body, the archive is tied up with the history of that body, implying becoming and mortality. The book’s legacy embodied in the *hommes-livres*, for example, has also become fatally mortal, measured by their human lifespan. Embodiment brings to the fore the precariousness



A tale of delight. Or, *jouissance d’archive* (Giulia Palladini)

In the last scene of *Fahrenheit 451*, we witness the body-to-body transmission of one of the books archived by the *hommes-livres*: *The Weir of Hermiston* by Robert Louis Stevenson. An old man is standing on a deathbed arranged in a forest, on the shore of a small lake, warmed up by a fire. He is covered with a black coat, a young boy sitting at his side, quietly listening. The man, whose name has become *The Weir of Hermiston*, is “reciting himself” so that his grandson can in turn become the book: the child first listens, then patiently repeats the passages, in no hurry, as a habit that the two have seemingly been sharing for a while, as a rehearsal for a moment to come. The child is learning the book by heart, in order to pass it on, to keep alive the embodied knowledge of the dying man for a time when the evidence of his bodily existence has disappeared from the world.

We might imagine that the child has never actually “read” *The Weir of Hermiston*; that his own experience of reading, having grown up among the *hommes-livres*, ignores the attachment to the materiality of books felt

of any archive's closure. Conservation is carried forward, yet is also undetermined by transmission, which implies translation and change, in other words, loss.

It may be paradoxical to link archives with loss. Yet, an archive is defined by its own partiality, which stands for everything else that has been lost: it is a synecdoche, a part for the whole. This is only the first of many archival duplicities: archives, even though presumed to stand against loss, are themselves born out of it. By emerging from loss, they somehow also represent it. As if what is not there lent the archive its power to show and speak. The affective archive of the *hommes-livres* has to do with mourning, an active mourning, since it impels the invention of a new technology: embodiment.

As a consequence of its embodiment, the archive ceases to have a domicile and is forced to embrace nomadism and migration. It also loses any pretence of sufficiency: its survival is not guaranteed, but is entrusted to the chance agency of other bodies who choose to take up its affective potential and become its new archiving impulse. And so on and on, because



by those who initiated this community. After it has been learnt by heart, each book reaching the forest where the *hommes-livres* hide gets burnt, eliminating all evidence of its bodily existence in the world: only thus will it never again run the risk of disappearing.

The image of the child consigning the book to memory resembles that of a spectator arrived too late on the scene of history—the past in which that particular book had materially existed. At the end of the film, he takes over the narrative and continues reciting the book to the dead body of the old man, who, like the protagonist of his beloved Stevenson's novel, dies "as he thought he would, while the first snows of winter fell". The child is handed both the product and the memorability of someone else's attachment. He is, like many of us, consigned the burden and delight of his grandfather's legacy, but this kind of belonging entails a technology of archiving as well. The survival of this technology in the bodies of those who are going to archive the first generation of *homme-livres* reproduces the bizarre duality of survival (as embodied praxis) and disappearance (as materiality) that characterizes the destiny of books in the science-fiction future first imagined by Ray Bradbury and later re-staged by François Truffaut.

one instance of successful transmission is never enough; it needs an endless chain of bodies that might at any time fail to link up.

It is important to stress the attachment to the technology of this particular transmission, in order to better understand how a private attachment to an individual book can translate into the social foundation of a community. Maybe what is tragic is not just the loss of any specific book—this would be a sentimental reading of the freemen’s affect—but the even more terrible danger of losing the singular connectivity experienced through the technology that has shaped their attachment in the first place. Losing a technology means the loss of all connections enabled by it. The response of the *hommes-livres* will be to displace that technology, translating utter loss into exodus or exile.

The impulse by which the archive is subjected to the trauma of displacement may be called its affect. Affect neither belongs to the archive nor to its future carriers; it neither names the latter’s decision to become the archive’s destiny, nor a quality inherent in the archive *per se*. Affect names the linkage by which their (imaginary) conversion becomes possible: it is the hyphen turning each *homme* into the hybrid identity called *homme-livre*.



To a certain extent, in the uneasy position of the child as “latecomer spectator” (echoing a beautiful expression by Joe Kelleher) and in the demand placed upon him to handle the continuation of a particular memory, we could also recognize the plight of any researcher in front of archival materials. In any encounter with the materiality of a disappeared past, what is at stake is the complex responsibility of taking care of an impossible survival; similarly, in imagining how *to pass on* what is left for us to receive, there is at stake a distinctive restlessness of affects, demanding not only further transmission, but also a particular politics of use involved in the passing on of any memory.

The glimmering horizon that we call *affective archive*, in which I have inscribed the narrative of this story, names the always latent possibility to think of memory as something other than a series of traces: mine is a desire to reconfigure memory as a praxis produced always in a landscape of radical discontinuity with the past, and even with the future. The logic of the affective archive resists the stasis of consignment: it names the movement that both accumulates and organizes what can be spoken again, in its intrinsic multiplicity, in its forms of appearance going beyond the sole

In this tale, an explicit connection is made between trauma, affect, and technology. As a result, the *hommes-livres* become transmitting machines, whose attachments blur the boundary between political and psychic life: they become their own technology.

Archives and bodies are also implicated through repetition and disruption. Without repetition there would be no effect of continuity and persistence; without disruption there would be no dislocation and passage. In our tale, transmission originates as a response, as an impulse to avert oblivion, destruction, and obliteration—the negative obverse of its positive drive. The ardent desire of the *hommes-livres* hovers on the horizon between life and death, the slippery location of every archive. In an essay by Shoshana Felman bearing the title “Fire in the Archive,” she has concisely renamed death as “forgetfulness”: “There would be no archive without the possibility (the danger) of forgetfulness.” The act of archiving stands as an attempt to avert or infinitely delay what we know is inevitable: the fragility of connections and their continuous loss.

Archives are sites where our relation with historicity becomes deeply enmeshed with affect and trauma. The traumatic horizon of loss impels



domain of value—at least, a value deemed as objectively measurable. An affective archive is both the deposit, the habitat, and the means of production of historical potentiality.

Indeed, in *Fahrenheit 451* any one body, including the child’s, is serving not only as a temporary memory support. One day each *homme-livre*—or at least so they imagine in their utopian vision—will be called upon to reproduce, once again, the books that had been made to disappear. Not only will the books, one day, be printed again, but also the archiving technology invented by the *hommes-livres* (or retrieved from an obliterated past) will be handed over to other book lovers, as a tactics to be deployed when future moments of danger occur. In a sense, the political project of transmitting such technology also involves the secret encoding of possibilities of resistance: *how to turn yourself into an affective archive*.

It is reasonable to imagine, on the other hand, that the child will also want to make other uses of such memory in the future. Perhaps the child will forget some of Stevenson’s words, and become attached to other, invent other words, or group them differently – playing with their montage, their composition, their order. We might imagine the words of *The Weir of*

a dislocation, an exodus. Traumas are productive sites of future history, especially as their import and meaning is not available immediately, but *goes underground* as a deferred, delayed effect. History, as Cathy Caruth has argued, “is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas.” We are “implicated,” not just involved but also enmeshed, entangled in so intimately that it is no longer possible to tell apart inside and outside, the cause and the effect. As a result, traumas cease to be our own, they become “each other’s.” They are archived through the embodied linkage of affect.

The social effect produced by such linkages is shown by the free-men’s community, who have literally walked through the fire of trauma to institute a new beginning with their archival act. Whether they can faithfully remember their book is perhaps of secondary importance; even if they could, we know that their affective archive is a product of loss anyway (of a specific materiality, for instance). What is crucial, rather, is that, having consigned their bodies to the archive, they now belong to it in a radically different way. They belong to it by belonging each to the other: their belonging has begun again with an archival act. Hence the institutional or foundational nature of archives: they posit, albeit silently, a beginning.



Hermiston as they become part of a constellation with other words, both in his memory and in the liberated future in which books will be printed again; we might imagine, too, this new constellation encountered in turn by other newborn bodies, other archiving subjectivities. On the other hand, it might be the child’s own affective archiving that suggests the intimate necessity connecting Stevenson’s words, and distinguishes them from the random accumulation of any other words: we might imagine that this would happen not so much as a gesture of loyalty, but as an inventive act of memory.

We might wish that the child, on recalling one day the early moment of transmission on his grandfather’s deathbed, would also remember the joy of reading that had long before imprinted its mark on the utopian project of the *homme-livres* and nourished their labour of renewal. We might wish that the sparkle of this joy would be mobilized for other forms of renewal, impressing other forms of attachment on the unlimited surface of the future. We might dream about this child as an artist working with memory, playing with history as though with creative matter, and approaching his own archiving as an act of making, a re-production outside the lineage of filiation.

As Derrida suggested in *Archive Fever*, archives have little to do with preserving the past. They are there to launch a future. In the archive, we never encounter the past but only what remains of it, after the fire. Yet, those poor remainders are produced retrospectively by our encounter with the archive to become the foundation of what we will have been, of what we are now. From so little, so much. That is part of the terror in the archive.



We might finally figure this child as a spectre of a certain *jouissance d'archive*: a lightness of memorability and renewal, an act of choice and courage participating in the singular and collective encounter with a certain habitat of memory, with the forms of appearance and metamorphosis that constantly shape and transform our own idea of archiving.