

Coming in Like a Wrecking Ball: Deconstructing Archival Authority

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What does it mean to be a radical archivist? What theoretical frameworks can help us understand the real limitations and benefits of archival practices? This panel will address how de-centering archival authority can provide access to new ways of understanding our collections, our professional practices, and how best to engage and serve our communities of users. As practitioners and students, we are interested in discussing alternative frameworks for archival practices that center communities in the production and use of records. Attendees of this panel will be encouraged to think about the radical potential of participatory, community-driven archives and the implications of community-centered efforts in understanding the truly useful areas where archivists and our theoretical tools can be most relevant and responsive to user communities.

Further Readings

Cook, T. (2001). Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth: Postmodernism and the practice of archives. *Archivaria*, 51, 14–35.

This article lays out the value in a postmodern approach to archives. Cook explains how postmodernism requires archivists to be reflexive about their practices, mindful of their biases, and open to new ideas. It also encourages archivists to see records as dynamic concepts instead of just static objects.

Duff, W. M., & Haskell, J. (2015). New uses for old records: a rhizomatic approach to archival access. *The American Archivist* 78(1), 38-58.

This article draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri to envision nonhierarchical, participatory approaches to digital initiatives. While the authors seem to re-affirm the notion of archivists as professional mediators, the article does raise some ideas regarding participatory approaches to archives as well as opportunities for users to create content and interpret materials.

Dunbar, A. W. (2006). Introducing critical race theory to archival discourse: getting the conversation started. *Archival Science*, 6(1), 109–129.

Dunbar argues for the applicability of critical race theory to the administrative and historical aspects of archives, and encourages engagement with critical race theory as a way of “raising the social consciousness of the archival field.”

Grimm, T., & Noriega, C. (2013). Documenting regional Latino arts and culture: Case studies for a collaborative, community-oriented approach. *American Archivist*, 76(1), 95–112.

Really excellent study of how de-centering the authority of the archivist in the processing and management of records can facilitate community engagement and collaboration.

Huvila, I. (2008). Participatory archive: Towards decentralised curation, radical user orientation, and broader contextualisation of records management. *Archival Science*, 8(1), 15–36.

In this article, Huvila presents a participatory archive model in which curatorial responsibilities are equally shared between archivists and participants who, as a collective, have the most knowledge on the record subject. The model is highly focused on usability and allows users to edit records directly. This radical approach has been criticized as being too impractical but its innovative perspective make it a worthwhile read.

Ingold, Tim. (2008). When ANT meets SPIDER. Social theory for arthropods. In Knappett, Carl, & Malafouris, Lambros. *Material Agency. Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (pp. 209-1216). New York, NY: Springer

This article is a wonderfully playful introduction into the discussion around the Actor-Network-Theory. Based on a conversation between an ANT and a SPIDER, Ingold draws his readers into the power of agencies beyond the anthropocentric.

Latour, Bruno, & Woolgar, Steve (1979). *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton University Press

This classic philosophic anthropological work is one of the fundamental early works of the Science and Technology Studies. The authors look at the structures of the production of scientific knowledge as a deeply social process.

MacNeil, Heather, & Mak, Bonnie (2007). Constructions of Authenticity. *Library Trends*, 56, 26-52

Constructions of Authenticity is exactly what it sounds like: A perspective on the various context in which the meaning and practice of authenticity in archives is constructed and processed. A good introduction to start thinking critically about archival concepts!

Maynard, S. (2009). Police/archives. *Archivaria*, 68, 159-182.

This article draws on the work of Michel Foucault to consider archives as physical spaces and materials, as well as connections between archives and police. The author discusses issues of surveillance, accountability, and access.

Ramirez, M. H. (2015). Being Assumed Not to Be : A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative. *American Archivist*, 78(2), 339–356.

This article centers on the need for archivists to engage with the ways in which racial oppression is constitutive of professional ideologies and practices.

Rawson, K.J. (2009). Accessing transgender // desiring queer(er?) archival logics. *Archivaria*, 68, 123-140.

This article raises and discusses barriers to access within archives as well as non-traditional archival practices, including the impacts of these practices on engagement and discovery.

Shilton, K., & Srinivasan, R. (2007). Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections. *Archivaria*, (63), 87–101.

In this article, the authors suggest a participatory approach to archives that is collaborative yet still aligned with the established archival concepts of appraisal, arrangement, and description. The predominantly traditional framework of this model make it an accessible and familiar starting point for archives interested in working with specific communities.

Spade, D. (2013). Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 1031–1055. <http://doi.org/10.1086/669574>

Although this article does not center on archives or librarianship, it is a critical read because of how Spade connects oppression to the operations of legal and administrative forms of power and advocates for intersectional resistance strategies in social justice activism.

Wurl, J. (2005). Ethnicity as Provenance: In Search of Values and Principles for Documenting the Immigrant Experience. *Archival Issues*, 29(1), 65–76.

Wurl argues for the expansion of provenance to include ethnic communities in the context of the creation of records and material culture.