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The Digital and the Public as Each Other's Flip-Side in Today's Humanities

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Having decided to open our journal to the generality of proposals that spontaneously arise from the Digital and Public Humanities, the second issue of 2024 closes *magazén*'s first year as an open platform for our wide field of inquiry. After four years of thematic volumes offering reflections on focussed methodological topics, our first open call to the scholarly community gained us over fifty quality proposals, of which in the end only eleven made it as finished articles in this year's volume. The current issue adds five more papers to the six that appeared in the Summer issue, thus completing our volume with a wide array of promising research in our broadening field. In this process of very tough scholarly selection, we are glad that the whole spectrum of disciplines subsumed into the Digital and Public Humanities is still well represented: from philology to history, from art history to archaeology through GLAM studies and architecture. Furthermore, it comes as a welcome confirmation of our journal's scope that the published papers show a constant intermingle of digital aspects and public instances. It thus appears that this interdisciplinary field has reached a final self-understanding with regard to the need of envisioning the digital and the public as reciprocal flipsides which must go hand in hand.

This introduction paper was mutually agreed on by the editors of *magazén* with the precious support of the Journal Manager Elisa Corrò, who was instrumental in coordinating the editorial work of this issue.

The first paper of the present issue by Alíz Horváth et al. deals with the challenges of facilitating multilingual scholarship in the Digital Humanities, considering the fundamental requirements of linguistic diversity and inclusion. Adopting the concept of user profiles from User Experience Design, the article focuses especially on the issues of language vs infrastructure, the visibility of multilingual practices and practitioners, and the evolution of different literacies to propose new ways in which multilingualism can be enhanced.

The second contribution by Ricardo Velasco Trujillo focuses on issues of accessibility and sustainability of digital archiving infrastructures. Proposing a collaborative model for knowledge and creative content production he analyses how the work of memory construction initiatives in post-conflict societies can be supported by open and de-centralized ecosystems in the digital public sphere.

Subsequently, Sharwa Gogawale et al. present the dataset NetLay for benchmarking layout classification algorithms for historical books and documents printed in various styles of Hebrew scripts. The article evaluates the performance of deep learning-based algorithms identifying the spatial structure of document images for subsequent processing tasks of character recognition and information extraction.

In the fourth paper, Giulia Crisci presents the case study of *documenta fifteen* (2022) in Kassel, taking into account artworks such as *The Black Archives* and *Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie* and *Borrowed Faces and Frictional Conversation* by Yasmine Eid Sabbagh to engage in a discussion on the role of archives to disseminate knowledge and to build a shared public memory in the postcolonial era. In the fifth and last contribution of this issue, Federica Martini and Julie Enckell analyse the Women's Audio Archive (WAA) project, using it as a starting point to discuss the links between conversational audio productions and feminist oral history practices in digital art history.

Our thanks go to the experts and scholars involved in the peer review process, which truly have been a big amount because of the successful open call. Our gratitude also goes to our advisory board members, to the published authors, to the very proactive members of our editorial board, as well as to our excellent publisher's team.

Multilinguality in Action: Towards Linguistic Diversity and Inclusion in Digital Humanities

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Till Grallert, Sharanya Ghosh, Yuri Ishida,

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Abstract   The article addresses the multilingual landscape in Digital Humanities, focusing on understanding its practitioners. We adopt the concept of user profiles from UX design to help create visibility and empathy for the unique needs of multilingual scholars. In a DH2023 workshop, using a dataset of six user profiles, participants examined multilingual DH, exploring the complex interaction between language use, identity, inclusivity, and infrastructure. Only by including multilingual perspectives, we argue, can DH promote diverse knowledge systems towards more supportive infrastructures and a more inclusive scholarly community.

Keywords   Multilinguality. Multilingual DH. Non-Latin scripts. User personas. Research infrastructures.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Multilinguality to the Fore. – 3 A Workshop to Address the Question of User Profiles. – 4 Decoupling Language Culture from Infrastructure. – 5 User Profiles for Representation and Fostering Inclusivity in DH Research. – 6 A Wider Perspective on Literacies. – 7 Moving Forward. – 8 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

In an era marked by claims of creating global interconnected knowledge, the multilingual landscape of Digital Humanities (DH) presents both promise and challenge. The creation of user profiles, stemming from persona creation in UX design, has emerged as a useful strategy for understanding the diverse needs and obstacles faced by researchers in multilingual environments. Through discussing the intricacies of the experiences of multilingual digital humanists, it is easy to see that there is an interplay between individual language usage and infrastructural dynamics. At a recent writing sprint at the 2023 ADHO conference, scholars converged to explore the dynamics of multilingual DH. From this collaborative endeavour, a number of themes emerged providing invaluable insights into the complexities of navigating linguistic diversity in digital scholarship. As we assess the current state of multilingual DH, it becomes evident that innovative initiatives exist on the horizon. These initiatives not only seek to bring many more multilingual scholars to the table and to centre their voices, but also to engage in critical conversations about decolonizing knowledge spaces. We contend that engaging with multilingual DH necessitates making room for a wide spectrum of stakeholders who work in and across multiple languages. By creating space for diverse voices, we enrich the scholarly discourse and increase our chances for meaningful, inclusive knowledge communities. Ultimately, acknowledging the crucial role of infrastructures for digital scholarship means making space for discussion of the role of humanists in shaping inclusive infrastructures.

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2   Multilinguality to the Fore

In prior investigations, we explored the distinction between multilingualism and multilinguality, a differentiation underscored by linguists to differentiate between the broader effort to define multiple "official" languages and more personal, strategic utilization of multilingual resources by individuals (Horváth et al. 2024a; 2024b). Given this distinction, it is perfectly possible for someone to be "multilingual", yet to function in languages outside of the official multilingualism of the territory in which they live and work. This distinction between the personal and the official is particularly salient in the realm of textual Digital Humanities, where researchers actively engage with a vast array of linguistic tools in their scholarly endeavours. What we call "scholarly multilinguality" is a domain that requires a significant amount of reflection, since it both has the potential to enrich our research production and to form a stumbling block for digital research.

Our research into user profiles revealed that researchers in Digital Humanities routinely leverage their varied linguistic resources in various aspects of their daily and professional activities, with differing degrees of success and ease. For example, an individual might use a second language (L2) for everyday communication within an academic setting or for more casual scholarly exchange and communication. This operational use of language contrasts with the use of what are commonly termed "research languages". The latter refer to languages of specialization required for accessing archival materials, conducting source-based inquiries, or performing other scholarly tasks. Research languages are skills that researchers do not necessarily possess in extenso from the beginning of their PhD, but are rather developed over the course of a career. This use of research languages is a fascinating area of study, particularly as it often involves engagement with historical languages in different states of evolution or very different contextual features, where factors such as orthography, script, or abbreviation play critical roles in forms of professional reading. As the documentation, collection and even dissemination of textual data in one's research languages becomes increasingly digital, a paradox presents itself. Although the promise of universal character encoding would seem to suggest that any textual data can be handled with ease, in reality, not all languages are on an equal footing. When discussing the multilingual capabilities of researchers in languages and literature, it is essential to acknowledge how they navigate and utilize these complex layers of language in their work, from note-taking and citation management to corpus creation, analysis, dissemination of research findings, and ultimately, the publication of their work in either digital or print formats, including how easy or seamless it is for them to combine these languages in the same workflow or publication.

This concept of multilinguality stands in contrast to multilingualism, which typically refers to a more static, agreed-upon set of languages used within a specific political geography. The limitations of traditional multilingualism are readily apparent to those living or working in a context where their essential linguistic tools derive from geographically or temporally distant sources. Moreover, specialists in historical humanities disciplines – such as history, philology, and literary history – readily understand that the linguistic resources necessary for modern or contemporary scholarship differ significantly from those needed to explore older states, or regionally variant forms, of language. The concept of scholarly multilingualism might then be introduced, referring to the expectation for scholars to disseminate research and teach in multiple languages, often influenced by national or regional expectations. While research infrastructures, like library catalogues or research platforms, may support this form of multilingualism to varying degrees they do so by performing a state function. And even then the globalization of the research publishing industry predominantly encourages a tilt towards English as the common language of scholarship.

Addressing the interplay between infrastructure and scholarly multilinguality, we observe that while infrastructures can both constrain and enable scholarly work, bringing together diverse users within a shared space, they do not inherently resolve the tension between these elements. Commercial infrastructures like Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 have made notable advancements in supporting a wide array of global languages with functionality such as machine translation, multilingual search functions, and transliteration tools. The suitability of these commercial tools for scholarly work warrants careful consideration, as they are usually more suited to general purpose uses by a wider public. Academic knowledge infrastructures are built for more specific uses and necessarily smaller audiences, and they do not receive the same amount of funding for system administration, research and development, let alone maintenance.

Expanding this dialogue, it becomes crucial to emphasize understanding and prioritizing the needs that will most significantly impact the scholarly community and finding ways to articulate the requirements of specific multilingual communities, not only from the perspective of legal compliance, but also as a question of language justice. By engaging in continuous dialogue with users and stakeholders, infrastructure providers can better identify and address the most pressing needs, fostering a more inclusive and effective environment for scholarly multilinguality. This approach does not merely aim to accommodate a wider array of linguistic resources, but also acknowledges the evolving nature of scholarly work and the diverse linguistic landscapes in which it operates. Through collaborative effort and

a commitment to language diversity and inclusivity, we can strive toward infrastructures that challenge conventional thinking through their ability to support and enrich the multilingual and multifaceted nature of contemporary scholarship. The question of multilingual infrastructures must not be left to tech companies to resolve, but as we have argued elsewhere (Horváth et al. 2024b, 4), digital humanists should have a place at the table to suggest innovative solutions.

3 A Workshop to Address the Question of User Profiles

To this end, we organized a workshop for the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) 2023 annual conference in Graz, Austria in order to explore the state of multilinguality in DH, based upon extensive discussion of six data-driven user profiles we had previously created and published (Horváth et al. 2023, dataset). These personas included a variety of knowledge actors in multilingual DH academic environments: an assistant professor, a full professor, a doctoral student, an academic technology specialist, a librarian, and an independent scholar. Such profiles were created to showcase various realities and challenges that people experience while navigating their multilinguality in global, digital contexts.

With the fourteen participants of the workshop, our objective was to think through collectively the aspirations and difficulties of DH researchers working with non-Anglophone textual data, particularly text written in non-Latin and right-to-left scripts. Following a guided discussion, our main goal was a co-writing experience in the interest of knowledge sharing and community building. The idea of having a co-writing sprint at the ADHO conference was first and foremost one of knowledge sharing and collaborative learning. The authors of this paper have been researching and publishing on the topic of multilinguality in DH for some time now, but our perspectives are enhanced by the diversity of experiences that one finds at a global conference. The contributing group included individuals with significant experience in different geographical areas, with varied linguistic backgrounds, and holding positions in global academia in France, Germany, Hungary, India, Japan, Poland, Slovenia, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Admittedly, this variety of perspectives was not fully global, but nonetheless provided a rich starting point from which to enrich and refine existing debates about multilinguality in DH. All participants were invited to be a co-author of this article.

We believe in the importance of strengthening the agency of digital humanists in contributing to the design of workflows sensitive to key multilingual issues. However, as our workshop also confirmed, a relative lack of awareness of the complex issues that multilingual users face still persists in the broader DH community. These problems

are particularly pertinent to the limitations of infrastructural functionalities in the context of under-resourced languages and scripts, which have been significantly neglected.[1] Our stated goal was thus to "create space for dialogue and debate, as well as to introduce and develop further the creation of multilingual DH UX personas" to explore "how these debates can inform future plans for the multilingual DH community" as well as "how multilingual user personas can be recreated in local environments and globally" (Horváth et al. 2023).

The workshop consisted of a discussion of a pre-circulated paper which itself had been based on the creation and exploration of six user personas that we, the organizers, had previously created as a dataset (Horváth et al. 2023). Following the discussion, we held a collaborative writing sprint with all the participants. The result was an extensive collection of insights regarding multilingual aspects in DH and the potential roles of the user profiles within the larger DH community, far too many topics than can be reported on in a short length piece of writing. In the present article we have chosen to address a specific strain of insights which emerged from the writing sprint. More specifically, the participants elaborated on the need to challenge the monolinguistic hegemony of digital systems, to use user profiles as a way of imagining and increasing more inclusive participation in DH research, and to expand our notion of knowledge infrastructures as social objects intersecting with a variety of literacies. These nuanced approaches to multilinguality underscored the roles and significance of language in research and provided potential means and contexts to refine the idea of user profiles in practical ways. Interestingly, the former aspect regarding the question of language eventually not only included discussions related to scholarly multilinguality and language-specific issues in the development of knowledge infrastructures, but also revealed hitherto largely overlooked, potential connections and confluences between DH and other fields such as identity, literacy and even language acquisition.

In what follows, we attempt to shed light on the multifaceted role of language in DH practice and claim that the question of language cannot be considered in isolation, nor in DH alone, but rather it should be discussed in relation to relevant fields which can in turn mutually influence each other.

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1 Fiormonte 2021; Ghorbaninejad, Gibson, Wrisley 2023; Golumbia 2013; Grallert 2022; Horváth 2021; 2022; Horváth et al. 2024a; 2024b; Kirmizialtin, Wrisley 2022; Spence, Brandao 2021; Wrisley 2019.

4   Decoupling Language Culture from Infrastructure

Arguments have been forming around the importance of language equity in the existing scholarship, which can be witnessed, for example, in the publication of volumes such as *Global Language Justice*, exploring the emergent theme of language marginalization and the importance of linguistic diversity and language loss from a variety of perspectives: social justice, environmentalism, human rights, technological advances, and infrastructure development. As one of the editors, Lydia Liu mentioned in a recent interview, the purpose for the creation of this multifaceted edited volume was not to "advocate for the preservation of languages as fixed cultural artifacts" but to "ask how current circumstances might produce new formations and emergent lifeworlds" while considering language as an "open, experimental frontier" (Glasberg 2024).

Our pre-conference 2023 workshop discussion reflected the value of that argument; the participants expressed their need for multilingually enabled knowledge infrastructures to support their daily research and teaching practices. In a globally connected academe, they insisted that infrastructures should be accessible for as many people as possible. They criticized the assumption in application and interface design that localization can seamlessly bring digital environments to global language communities, on account of the fact that such apps and interfaces have not been designed with internationalization in mind. More thought should be given to the ways in which people interact with systems of thought in language, rather than assuming everything can flow – through translation from English or any other hegemonic language – to communities of a "target language". Multilingual options should be standard for academic knowledge infrastructures which means bringing more multilingual minds to the design process; developing tools for English speakers that await translation for the world creates a new manifestation of the digital divide.

Another aspect of why language culture should be decoupled from knowledge infrastructures in a digitally connected world has to do with the abundance of digital sources of knowledge already found in non-Latin scripts, available, but perhaps siloed or undiscoverable, in digital knowledge spaces of non-Anglophone countries. In order to enable a culture of truly globally connected knowledge, libraries (and other GLAM infrastructures) in the "West" who have adopted English as one of their working languages, should strive to secure the interoperability of knowledge infrastructures, not only within their own language sphere, but also with non-Western, non-Anglophone countries and data in non-Latin scripts.

This was seen as even more relevant, as the entire technology stack, including the basic standards for protocols, interfaces, formats

etc., is biased towards English. When the developers only speak a single (Anglophone) language, their mental model of knowledge is often unconsciously coupled with their language culture.[2] It was concluded that having multilingual eyes in the development (or design) process helps the decoupling and enables more truly universal knowledge representation. Knowing that most people authoring the standards, writing the implementations, maintaining the infrastructures, or feeding the algorithms embody multiple multilingual personas, might enable changes towards a more diverse and inclusive digital environment.

5 User Profiles for Representation and Fostering Inclusivity in DH Research

Enhancing the visibility of these scholarly experiences is crucial to set the foundation of practical solutions. Venues like our workshop at DH2023 helped us understand the field better and encouraged us to identify common problems while shedding light on hitherto marginalized factors by creating an action space for more minds to come together.

In our communities we are all in silos. The user personas that we created show us that across communities similar issues can arise, issues that many scholars can relate to, revealing the ubiquitousness of problems that may have previously been considered to be "edge cases". In this vein, such user personas can also create empathy for different kinds of people, bringing the lived experience of individuals of diverse backgrounds closer to the larger DH community and relevant stakeholders in a broader sense. Our data-driven user profiles can contribute to the amelioration of the situation in a DH context by highlighting the realities and challenges of multilingual users. In turn, more researchers might find themselves in the company of others, having tried to use different digital environments.

The six user profiles, which served as a starting point for the workshop, showcase data-driven, but fictional, individuals with diverse training and professional background, but all of them can be characterized as multilingual actors in DH. We have argued elsewhere for the need to differentiate between official multilingualisms and scholarly multilinguality (see Horváth et al. 2024a; 2024b) and understood the latter as a means to highlight the different contexts in and degrees to which scholars use various languages (such as a native speaker of German specializing in Chinese studies who works in Southeast Asia and predominantly publishes in English).

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2 Examples of publications on these topics include Fiormonte 2021; Phillipson 1996; 2012; 2013.

To take this a step further, our workshop has shown the importance of also considering the extent to which different languages are used by DH practitioners for specific tasks. For example, further investigating how important each research language an individual uses is in the context of digital projects and scholarly communication, how certain languages appear in a user's professional and personal life, and how these spheres can become blurred in certain forms of research can shed light on the nuances of multilingual realities.

At the same time, it is important to realize that these user profiles also constitute a moving target. Generating user stories and showcasing scholarly realities, these persona profiles narrativize multilinguality. However, one point that emerged in our workshop discussion was related to the inherent change that these stories entail, showcasing how the careers of these users evolve and shift in light of and as a result of the situation of the current DH landscape. The profiles are not static characters, as it was highlighted during the workshop, therefore their authenticity could be further enhanced through continuous updates about their future career stages – this could enrich the ephemeral, snapshot-like state of their current, momentary position and tell the stories as multilingual journeys.

6 A Wider Perspective on Literacies

During our pre-conference workshop and writing spring at the 2023 ADHO conference, as we previously mentioned, we prepared a reading and circulated a set of published user profiles. We also had a set of questions for a guided discussion of these issues. One of the ways in which the participants steered the discussion was a pleasantly surprising new one for us, that of the thinking about multilingual users in DH and the question of evolving literacies. It was pointed out that the user profile dataset, while it encompassed researchers who work in different languages within specific academic or alt+ac positions, not enough emphasis had been placed on the degree to which they use their different languages for specific purposes. For instance, it would be insightful to compare the significance of different languages in digital research and scholarly communication, as well as the blurred lines between personal and professional language engagement within certain research contexts.

Participants felt a need to recognize that literacy is a process, rather than a static achievement assumed by the published dataset of personas. Languages are deeply intertwined with the history and culture of their communities, emphasizing the importance of language learning for understanding different perspectives. By integrating acquiring languages and literacies into multilingual profiles, perhaps including even the learning and acquisition of technical languages,

and recognizing that multilingual users' experiences with language resources evolve, we can paint a more inclusive picture of literacies as in a constant state of development. Ideally, a broader range of profiles, including non-academic or non-professional ones, should be incorporated to ensure the accessibility and usability of digital textual practices across diverse user groups.

Furthermore, the discussion delved into the dual nature of language usage, distinguishing between working *in* and working *on* specific languages and scripts. This duality underscores both the potential and the challenge for enhancing linguistic inclusivity in DH. Encouraging scholars to publish and produce research in languages other than English, supported by DH infrastructures, particularly for non-Latin scripts and marginalized languages. At the time of writing this article, such practices are still relegated to the margins of DH. Some participants even raised the question whether non-Latin scripts should have dedicated infrastructures. In both cases, the field's accessibility could extend beyond the Anglosphere, although the global interconnectedness of the field would find different expression depending on the vision that would be chosen.

Languages are deeply intertwined with the history and culture of their communities, emphasizing the importance of language learning for understanding different perspectives. By integrating language learning into multilingual profiles, we can highlight both professionals and students who choose to engage with languages beyond their immediate expertise, or who are required to do so in order to gain access to research conversations centred in specific geographic or linguistic communities. By centring the question of literacies in the multilingual DH user profiles, it may even be possible to encourage more monolingually leaning practitioners to do so.

7 Moving Forward

Handling the role and significance of language in digital scholarship constitutes an ongoing challenge, particularly in the context of non-Latin scripts. A growing number of initiatives, however, have been engaged in raising awareness of the relevant difficulties and language-based inequities and/or aim to integrate linguistic perspectives into their activities. In the final section of our paper, we will briefly provide an overview of some recent examples of different natures as case studies to offer practical inspirations moving forward.

Besides the above-mentioned, and much-needed, edited volume, *Global Language Justice*, which provides an interdisciplinary meditation on the realities and broader consequences of language loss, and another recently published volume, *Multilingual Digital Humanities* (edited by Lorella Viola and Paul Spence) with a more specific

focus on multilingual aspects related to technology, concerted efforts have recently started to take shape in the form of collaborative research and digital tool development projects, working groups and special interest groups, as well as on an infrastructural level. The year-long initiative, *New Languages for NLP: Building Linguistic Diversity in the Digital Humanities*[3] (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities), aimed to mitigate the limited scope of languages and scripts currently available in SpaCy by supporting the creation of NLP models for eleven languages ranging from Yiddish to Kanbun, Classical Arabic, Old Chinese, Yoruba, Kannada, Ottoman Turkish, Nineteenth-Century Russian, Tigrinya, Efik, and Quechua. Between 2021 and 2022, the Institute contributors, including junior and more senior researchers, graduate students, and research software engineers from around the world, have managed to make varying, but unequivocally significant, progress towards diversifying the landscape of Natural Language Processing.

In our DH2023 workshop, the importance of and need for language sensitivity on an organizational and infrastructural level also emerged as a key motif. Existing research infrastructures and DH organizations handle the question of language in multiple ways, depending on their area of focus. Without attempting to provide an exhaustive overview, here we will briefly discuss numerous examples to illustrate how communities of varying size and geographical embeddedness deal with multilingual perspectives.

First of all, on an infrastructural level, two of the key research infrastructures in the European area, DARIAH (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities) and OPERAS (Open Scholarly Communication in the European Research Area for Social Sciences and Humanities) have both recognized the need to include multilingual perspectives in their respective initiatives. The DARIAH-sustained metablog, OpenMethods, for example, concentrates on making digital tools and methods more visible in a creative and openly accessible format by sharing relevant published contents (which includes the appropriate documentation of a digital tool or method) with critical introductions written by the editors or external (volunteer) contributors. While the introductions have been consistently produced in English as lingua franca, the platform showcases projects in a variety of languages, thereby making an effort to be linguistically inclusive.

In addition, early 2023 brought the establishment of the DARIAH working group dedicated to Multilingual DH by co-founders Author and Maroussia Bednarkiewicz. Through frequent conferences, workshops, and further public presentations, regular meetings, and the

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[3] See https://newnlp.princeton.edu/ and a related book chapter by the organizers in Tasovac et al. 2024.

organization of trainings, the working group aims to strengthen the representation and visibility of the challenges and realities of under-resourced languages and scripts in DH and digital research infrastructures and to enhance digitally-enabled scholarship in such languages thus fostering the creation of a linguistically more inclusive DH environment. On the other hand, multilingual perspectives not only appear in the case of other working groups as well under the auspices of DARIAH and provide common ground for intersectional collaborations. For instance, together with the Research Data Management working group, the Multilingual DH working group has recently won a DARIAH grant to organize a multi-day workshop on "Creating, Managing, and Archiving Textual Corpora in Under-Resourced Languages" scheduled for late 2024 in Hamburg to collaboratively produce a practical workflow to help scholars handle their sources as basis for further analysis. Meanwhile, multilingual aspects have found their way to the activities of the Bibliodata working group, the members of which has recently published on open bibliographical workflows and the challenges of multilinguality (Malínek et al. 2024), as well as the Ethics and Legality in the Digital Arts and Humanities (ELDAH) working group, which has been working on a multilingual consent form wizard. These initiatives offer multiple paths, directions, and trajectories to consider to see how language can appear in the context of digital scholarship while providing possibilities for future collaborations.

The OPERAS research infrastructure also aims to integrate the question of language into its projects, particularly through its Multilingualism Special Interest Group. OPERAS predominantly stands for fostering open scholarly communication in the humanities and social sciences, which explains the somewhat different manifestation of multilingualism here compared to the above-mentioned examples in the context of DARIAH. In the realm of scholarly publishing, the Multilingualism SIG focuses on remedying the dominance of English by supporting "researchers and institutions who want to continue publishing in their own language and to develop transnational scientific cooperation" (Multilingualism). An important highlight of their activities includes the development of a multilingual discovery tool and a pilot Translation Service, while also collaborating with external stakeholders to help "address language biases in assessment and supporting language skills of non-fluent speakers in concrete situations" (Multilingualism).

On the level of DH organizations, the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) assembles and connects a variety of local

or regional DH communities.[4] The localized focus of these organizations seems to also imply language diversity or at least a focus on certain languages (often beyond English), depending on the dominant languages utilized in the respective areas and regions. However, the case of ADHO constituent organizations also showcases the importance of distinguishing between multilingualism and scholarly multilinguality. On the one hand, the majority of these organizations are connected to regions where English is not the official language, which can be considered a fundamental source of support towards ensuring the presence of certain languages that local scholars work on and/or in. On the other hand, the dominance and prioritization of specific language(s), for example at the annual conferences of these organizations, does not necessarily entail the equal representation of scholarly multilinguality, particularly with regard to the case of scholars working in a certain language environment while using sources in one or more other languages or scripts.

Here, a workshop on "Towards Multilingualism In Digital Humanities: Achievements, Failures And Good Practices In DH Projects With Non-latin Scripts"[5] at the ADHO DH 2019 conference in Utrecht acted as a catalyst for strengthening the international collaboration and networking of a globally dispersed multilingual DH community. It resulted in a website and mailing list (`https://multilingualdh.org/en/`), as well as the idea to propose a special interest group (SIG) on multilingual DH within the ADHO association, which was finally enacted at the ADHO DH conference 2023 in Graz.

Furthermore, on a national level, working groups on multilingual DH have been launched such as in the German-speaking DHd association or as a Multilingual DH community interest group within the UK-Ireland DH association. The multilingual DH group in the DHd association addresses not only the hardships of multilingual DH practitioners who are constantly confronted with "incompatibilities or simply a lack of support and functionality for certain written languages" but also the "marginalization of multilingual DH both in the Digital

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4 The ADHO constituent organizations as of March 2024 are: Australasian Association for Digital Humanities, the Association for Computers and the Humanities, centerNet, Canadian Society for Digital Humanities/Société canadienne des humanités numériques, Digital Humanities Alliance for Research and Teaching Innovations, Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa, Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum (DHd), European Association for Digital Humanities, Humanistica: L'association francophone des humanités numériques/digitales, Japanese Association for Digital Humanities, Korean Association for Digital Humanities, Red de Humanidades Digitales, and the Taiwanese Association for Digital Humanities. For more information, see `https://adho.org/membership-individual/`.

5 See `https://multilingualdh.org/en/dh2019/`, an expanded version of this text has been published as Grallert et al. 2023a. On the topic of multilingualism in the DHd association see also Grallert et al. 2023b; 2023c.

Humanities community and in the 'conservative sciences'". Furthermore they connect their working group initiative to the criticism of a new "colonialism" in the digital transformation of scholarship where due to its economical/financial superiority,

> the global North [...] shapes and determines the field of discourse and opportunities. This 'colonialism' and the marginalization of the digital science practice of the global South and the one-sided focus on topics of the global North represent a hierarchization of scientific practice that must be addressed, discussed, and practically challenged.[6]

The UK-Ireland Multilingual DH community interest group aims at fostering and expanding "multilingual digital research and practices within the UK and Ireland's community of Digital Humanities researchers and related practitioners", "more explicitly address[ing] the anglophone assumptions that dominate our digital research and practices" and to collaborate "with international initiatives to foster more language-inclusive research and digital infrastructures, and to raise awareness of the ways language intersects with other forms of exclusion in our field and in wider society".[7]

Other community building efforts – here supported by a university library – include the establishment of a Multilingual DH Lab at the new Ada Lovelace Center for Digital Humanities at Freie Universität Berlin. While taking up on the idea to provide "a space for research on and experimentation with the use of non-Latin scripts in digital environments" the organizers of the lab also point to the aspect of digital monolingualism as "a barrier to global scholarly exchange in general (e.g. lack of visibility/accessibility of and access to research or sources in non-Anglophone languages and non-Latin scripts)".[8]

This short overview of recent initiatives illustrates some of the ways digital humanists in the Global North have begun to foreground multilingualism (and multilinguality) in a variety of different domains such as NLP, scholarly publishing and translation, but it is important to underscore that they are thus far mostly accessible to researchers located in these countries. They also show how digital humanists have begun to insist on the importance of the topic for its capacity to "[disrupt] digital monolingualism" in the profession, not only because it concerns themselves in their daily research practices but also because of how it intersects with the general transformation

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[6] See DHd MLDH WG https://m-l-d-h.github.io/DHd-AG/ (our translation).

[7] See https://digitalhumanities-uk-ie.org/community-interest-groups/multilingual-dh/.

[8] See https://www.ada.fu-berlin.de/en/ada-labs/multilingual-dh/index.html.

of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences within the digital space. From the perspective of a globally connected culture of thinking, the digital has introduced more barriers across languages than it has removed. Furthermore, the initiatives, while starting points, link practices in Digital Humanities and multilingualism to large-scale projects predominantly in the Global North. More dialogue with the societies outside of the Global North needs to take place. More consideration needs to be given from an equity perspective as well to ensure that research done there can also benefit from the advocacy for multilingual perspectives (Ghorbaninejad, Gibson, Wrisley 2023). Advocating for the place of multilingual perspectives requires us first to establish their visibility in multiple aspects of our professional life: conferences, transnational organizations, peer review and the evaluation and funding of research. While these initiatives are essential for laying the foundation for a multilingual future in DH, they are first steps.[9]

8   Conclusion

In recent years, much has been made of decolonizing cultural practices, particularly in the domains of educational curricula and GLAM collections. These debates bring to the fore not only questions of representation and inclusion, but also the inherent privilege of European and Western knowledge systems and the power dynamics of education and cultural institutions. The realm of digital infrastructure and tools has absorbed and reproduced much of this power and privilege. When users engaging with multilingual resources – be it various data forms in distinct languages or textual data mixing different languages – approach those responsible for developing, maintaining, or adapting scholarly infrastructure, a common refrain is heard: it is not feasible to accommodate every unique user need or use case. This response reflects institutional power to balance the capabilities of infrastructure and larger institutional priorities in technology investment and management.

In this article, using a range of methods from participative persona creation process analysis, collective ideation and co-writing sprint in a workshop setting, as well as community-driven data collection and comparative analysis, we hope to have made a case for seeing multilinguality as a strength, rather than a weakness. It is a subject that should be taken on at levels higher than the individual institution.

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[9] For a first attempt at sketching concrete steps in the many different communities of the larger knowledge ecosystem of Digital Humanities, see our article: "Who are the Users in Multilingual Digital Humanities?".

We have also made the case for infrastructure as a site of decolonial reflection and action for Digital Humanities. As we suggested in the previous section, there is space for community engagement and ethical stewardship in the domain of multilingual knowledge practices. In the limited words available to us here we can only hope to raise awareness of the question and to call actors within the community to imagine change and implementation of frameworks encouraging greater linguistic diversity within our academic communities and the larger societal spheres that they represent. Ultimately, our call is for a change in mentality, away from infrastructure as a set of constraining functions which exclude some members of our community, to one in which we constantly keep in mind what multilingual functionality on the web can be and how (knowledge) infrastructure developers and managers can contribute to decolonizing digital spaces and amplifying underrepresented voices and cultures, improving the quality of infrastructure but also empowering individuals to engage with and celebrate linguistic diversity in meaningful ways.

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Building a Model of Sustainable Digital Ecologies for Archiving and Showcasing Grassroots Memory and Symbolic Reparation Initiatives

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Abstract　In this paper I discuss the experience of a practice-research project whose objective was to understand how digital archiving infrastructures could support the work of grassroots memory construction initiatives in post-conflict societies. Through a collaborative model for knowledge and creative content production with four initiatives in Colombia, the project addresses persistent inequalities in access to digital resources that limit the capacities of these initiatives to communicate widely their work and have greater impact within their communities. The paper discusses a model that draws on activist research methodologies for the development and implementation of creative digital practices integrating digital archiving with digital storytelling, centring the values of access, transparency, and knowledge democratization. The digital ecology proposed, I argue, offers new possibilities for the sustainability of grassroots memory and symbolic reparation initiatives developing in contexts of precarity, while serving also as a platform for public humanities research.

Keywords　Digital ecologies. Digital archiving. Memory. Symbolic reparation. Post-conflict societies.

Summary　1 Introduction. – 2 Access and Transparency. Conceptual Foundations and Values of the Model. – 3 Addressing Inequalities in Access to Digital Resources in Modelling Collaborative Digital Archiving Practices. – 4 Designing and Implementing the Model's Digital Infrastructure. – 5 Model's Collaborative Ecology. – 6 Conclusion. Benefits and Contributions of the Model.

1   Introduction

In August 2020, while starting a postdoctoral fellowship with the Mellon Engaged Scholar Initiative at the University of Texas at Austin, I was faced with the frustrating dilemma of facing the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, while also having the resources to develop a public facing project in Colombia, proposed for the program. This project was conceived as a channel for knowledge dissemination beyond traditional academic publishing, and as a way of creating a space to centre and make visible the knowledges of the actors and communities that have contributed to the advancement of my scholarship on the role of cultural practices during Colombia's national reconciliation process.

The initial objective was to develop a public event based on the principle of the dialogue of knowledges – between academic and practice-based community knowledges[1] – to share the results of my research with the leading actors of community memorialization initiatives I have documented between 2016 and 2019. These initiatives developed in the context of Colombia's post-conflict transition and national reconciliation process, an ongoing process that started following the implementation of transitional justice in 2005.[2] The Law 975 "of Justice and Peace" which passed that year introduced a series of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms aimed at the demobilization of armed groups and the integral reparation of the victims of Colombia's internal armed conflict.[3] The introduction of transitional justice was a pivotal moment in Colombia's recent history and politics. Among other set of societal transformations, it ignited a memory culture advanced initially by cultural programs and forms of cultural production promoted by official non-judicial bodies such as the National Center for Historical Memory, which had started as a Commission for

[1]   See the premises of the Dialogue of Knowledges at www.dialogodesaberes.com. For a notable example of a project based on these premises in the context of higher education see Krøvel 2020.

[2]   Transitional Justice is broadly defined as the range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale human rights violations, violence, conflicts, systematic repression or exclusion of particular social groups (because of their political, ethnic or religious affiliations, etc.) in order to serve justice and achieve reconciliation. For more see Teitel 2000; Reiter et al. 2012; Hayner 2001.

[3]   Botero, Restrepo 2005; Orozco 2005; Rettbergh 2005; Orozco 2009.

Historical Memory in 2007,[4] following the mandate of the Law "of Justice and Peace". This approach to foster a memory culture as a foundation for the construction of a post-conflict society was soon taken and appropriated by victims' organizations and communities through their own cultural initiatives developed autonomously across the national territory, as the post-conflict transition and national reconciliation process progressed (Velasco Trujillo 2020).

Employing multi-sited ethnographic and audiovisual documentation methods, between 2016 and 2019, I followed the development of different grassroots cultural and memorialization practices in different areas of the country. As a result of this work, I accumulated a robust body of original documentation that included hundreds of hours of video of participant observations and interviews with leaders and other actors involved in the development of these initiatives, as well as thousands of photographs. The body of documentation also included archival documents, booklets, posters and other visual materials and ephemera.

As empirical foundation of my work, and part of my research archive, this was the material I was using recurringly in my analysis. But the disruption to the initial plan of developing a public-facing event in Colombia led me to assess this original documentation in a new light. I asked: how could this personal research repository be productively transformed into documentary assets that could be consulted by others, avoiding being reduced to data confined in a hard drive? Driven by this question, I started seeing the potential of this personal archive to be converted into a publicly accessible digital repository: an online digital platform where documentary assets could be made accessible to local actors and communities, as well as to other scholars working on issues of memory, symbolic reparation, and the convergence of human rights and cultural activism in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies. How this artefact was conceptualized and developed is the topic of this paper.

The paper contributes to a growing interest in the role of archiving and memorialization in transitional societies. As Motha and Van Rijswijk argue, memorial and archiving practices are "central to contexts where transitional justice, the redress of historical wrongs, or reparations are at stake" (2016, 2). Based primarily on an empirical perspective, the paper demonstrates how collaborative digital

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4 The Law of Justice and Peace of 2005 mandated (article 50) the formation of the National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación – CNRR), and within it the Sub-Commision of Historical Memory, also known as the Historical Memory Group (Grupo de Memoria Histórica). In 2011, with the passing of the Law 1448 "of Victims and Land Restitution", the Historical Memory Group was transformed into the National Center for Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica), which is in operation to this date.

practices between researchers and community memorialization initiatives can contribute to the construction of what Julia Viebach has termed "transitional archives" (2021). Viebach uses this term to refer to a plurality of records and bodies of documentation that form, consolidate, and which use gain significant importance in societies undergoing transitional justice processes. These range from "those collected by international and civil society organizations documenting harm and abuses of power by state and non-state actors" (404), to a broad spectrum of documentation practices, which, like those proposed in this article, contribute to truth, justice, and reparation, the core principles of transitional justice.

It is relevant to stress that the practices described in this article have developed autonomously and organically, and respond to a set of objectives and priorities that differ significantly from official institutional approaches to archiving and memorialization. Thus, the article offers a vantage point to the type of documentation, records, and practices that organizations and social actors from the grassroots level deemed worthy of preserving, protecting and giving access to, as part of their memory construction and symbolic reparation efforts. Crucially, the article also invites us to imagine the modalities or ecosystems of collaboration that can facilitate this process, including the active role of community-engaged researchers and their own documentation and digital practices. In this regard, the model discussed aligns with what has been termed 'ecosystem thinking' (Bloom, Dees 2008; Baldassari, Diani 2007), a perspective that allows to bring out often overlooked but indispensable complementarities in systems of support and collaboration, to offer "new approaches and strategies to catalyse social innovation" (Rangelov, Theros 2023, 798).

Thinking along these lines about how to transform my research documentation into a public resource, access and transparency emerged as foundational values of the digital environment envisioned. Yet the question of a relationship mediated by technology between the researcher and the grassroots initiatives documented emerged as a problematic horizon of possibility within a broader context of the unequal distribution and access to digital resources. This was the original tension out of which the model for a collaborative digital platform that I describe in this article developed. Initially conceived as an open digital repository for a book project's research archive, it evolved into a collaborative documentary ecology integrating digital archiving with creative digital storytelling. The digital ecology that developed aimed at balancing with equity the needs I face as principal researcher with the archiving and communication needs of participant initiatives. I argue that this model offers new possibilities for the sustainability of grassroots memory and symbolic reparation initiatives developing in contexts of precarity, while serving also as a Digital Humanities platform designed to bring

these knowledges to a broad audience and foster further research on grassroots memorialization in transitional societies.

In the (following) second section, I describe the evolution in the conceptualization of the model and the values that guided it in its early stage. The third section discusses the central questions that oriented its development, in relation to the problem of an unequal distribution and access to digital resources, which limits the capacities of grassroots organizations to systematize and digitize their work, therefore affecting their intended impact. Section four describes the model's basic digital infrastructure, and section five discusses the initiatives involved in the initial stage of the project, their common needs, and the implementation of its collaborative ecology. The final section summarizes the benefits reported by the leading actors of the initiatives, as well as the challenges of continuing the development of the model beyond the initial stage discussed, strengthening the resilience of its digital ecology and its focus on accessible, transparent, and inclusive archiving and knowledge dissemination practices.

2 Access and Transparency. Conceptual Foundations and Values of the Model

By 2021, the results of my ethnographic work in Colombia had resulted in a robust body of audiovisual documentation comprising terabytes of interviews, ethnographic videos, photographs, and other visual materials and documents. Most of the grassroots memorialization initiatives I have documented up to that point kept evolving in a context of precarity and lack of institutional support, despite their contributions to mending the social fabric, advancing a culture of peace, and contributing to the dignification and symbolic reparation of victims of human rights violations committed in the context of Colombia's protracted internal armed conflict. These were the fundamental tenets of the transitional conjuncture, as the recovery of the memory of the victims became a state responsibility, typified as a mechanism of symbolic reparation within the transitional justice framework (Ministerio de Justicia y del Derecho 2011; Velasco Trujillo 2020). In this context, the question of how to make my documentation publicly accessible gained additional relevance. As Viebach has argued, in transitional justice contexts archives have "a broad societal, political and historical significance as a collection of relevant records", and because of this significance, they are worthy of preserving and protecting (2021, 405). But not only was documentation of the initiatives I have studied in need of being preserved because of their value in the context of the post-conflict transition. The initiatives themselves, and the actors and communities that have shared their knowledges and experiences, could also benefit from a digital space where their

work and contributions to Colombia's reconciliation process could become visible. Many of these initiatives were action and place-based practices whose interventions were more ephemeral than material cultural forms and products. In many instances, the only records that existed of their work were the multiple files of my ethnographic documentation – saved on encrypted hard drives.

Beyond the relevance of archiving and giving visibility to these initiatives because of their relation to the transitional context, a broader perspective regarding access to these knowledges also informed the process of converting a personal research archive into a public digital resource. In her influential article "Reflections on the Photographic Archive in the Humanities", Margrit Prussan asks: "What happens to research related photographs after their intended purpose has been served?" (2018, 135). Prussan affirms that if the images were part of data associated to an academic project since their conception, and if they have played an important role in the production of theory or in the visualization of scholarship results, "there is a need to preserve them and make them accessible, at least within academia" (139). Prussan's question raises points of central concern within the humanities to be considered in relation to access and preservation of research data in the form of visual materials. Her concern centres narrowly on scholarly dynamics, including theorizations and visualization derived from visual materials that have been conceived, like in my case, as fundamental to the research, documentation, and analytical processes.

My point of departure for thinking about access and preservation coincided with Prussan's, in as much as I understood the value of ethnographic audiovisual data in the conceptualization and theorization of cultural manifestations in post-conflict societies, and of the preservation of this type of documentation when conceived as a "transitional archive", as previously discussed. It was this body of documentation that provided the empirical foundation for the concept of "Cultural Ecologies", which I propose as an analytical tool to reveal the interconnectedness and complexity of the assemblage of cultural practices and initiatives that emerged following the implementation of transitional justice in Colombia. Drawing on "ecosystem thinking", broadly defined as a "paradigm of social innovation that builds on metaphors and insights from ecology" (Ragelov, Theros 2023, 798), the concept of "cultural ecologies" developed into a theoretical tool that illuminates the conditions in which these practices have developed, as well as the complex factors that foster or interrupt their development and sustainability (Velasco Trujillo 2020). However, despite the centrality of this documentation in my theorization, my orientation for preserving and making documentation accessible was founded more on a principle of reciprocity, a preoccupation for 'giving back' to those who have contributed to my research, and for creating conditions for collaboration mediated by technology.

Moreover, in the early conceptualization of a digital repository, visualization was not only conceived as the means to translate the research and analytical process to the academic community, one of the central rationales Prussan proposes. I approached visualization as directly tied to the values of access and transparency, a strategy for the digital repository to become productive beyond individual scholarly contributions, interpretations, and theorization. In this regard, visualization emerged as part of the creative component envisioned in the model, tied particularly to the concept of digital storytelling, a technique for making content not only accessible but interactive and engaging for academic and non-academic audiences alike, a point to which I will later return.

Making the "raw" documentation comprised of interviews, ethnographic observations, and other visual materials accessible for consultation constitutes the main means through which this digital repository model can become a resource to foster further research, and an additional channel through which personal interpretations and their empirical foundations can be open to debate and scrutiny. To open a researcher's personal archive so that others – including research subjects and collaborators – can consult it, create new knowledge, and examine in more depth the empirical grounds of the hermeneutic process, as well as the richness of the raw documentary materials, constitutes an important point of departure to guide more transparent, decolonial, and democratizing knowledge production practices. Furthermore, this process provides a particular vantage point to assess the relationship between researcher and social actors during fieldwork as well as the conditions under which documentation is gathered and knowledge is being produced. From this perspective, preserving and making documentation accessible constitutes a foundational opportunity to promote transparency and inclusive research and knowledge dissemination practices. This is central to the model I propose and to the professional ethics I promote and defend through the digital practices the model foregrounds.

It is important to stress that the need for preservation and for making documentation accessible was not only a need to be confined "at least within academia", as Prussan conceives it. The digital archiving model was initially conceived to centre and make visible the knowledges of the actors and communities whose practices I have documented. But also, and crucially, the main motivation was to share those documentary assets and make them accessible to these actors and communities, a practice that is marginal within academia despite the increasing salience of decolonial discourse and a heightened sensibility against extractive research practices. As Gaudry has argued, "research and publishing expectations drive researchers to take meaningful information, often from a marginal or 'under-researched' community" with the purpose to present it exclusively

either to academic audiences or to governmental bodies, for whom preserving the integrity of that extracted knowledge is not of central concern (2011, 113). With the goal of advancing disciplinary knowledge or informing policy decision-making, the author implies, "rarely are the people who participate in the research process as participants or 'informants' considered to be the primary audience when it comes time to disseminate the research" (113).

The digital ecology proposed aims at tackling extractive dynamics and foster instead inclusive knowledge production and dissemination practices. In this process, making documentation accessible to participant initiatives is of primary relevance not only because of the difficulties in access to scholarly publications for actors outside academic institutions, but also because of the transnational context of research in which this project has been framed since its conception, and particularly the global north-global south relationships involved. It was this initial acknowledgment of knowledge-power dynamics that led to the development of a collaborative model for knowledge and creative content production; a move from a top down researcher-centred approach to digital archiving to a sustainable ecology of horizontal collaborative practices for archiving and showcasing the work of grassroots initiatives and their crucial contributions to the post-conflict transition.

3 Addressing Inequalities in Access to Digital Resources in Modelling Collaborative Digital Archiving Practices

The shift to the conceptualization and development of a model of collaborative digital practices necessarily involved asking how digital archiving practices and infrastructures could benefit the grassroots memory activism initiatives involved in the project. With an emphasis on praxis, the development and implementation of the model was guided (and continues to be guided) by these central interrelated questions: *What digital infrastructures, ecologies of practices, and collaborative entanglements can facilitate the work of grassroots cultural initiatives focused on autonomous memorialization and symbolic reparation strategies? How can these systems be developed in sustainable ways that are adaptable to the needs of their communities?*

Despite the importance of memory construction and symbolic reparation initiatives in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies, little is known about the role of autonomous digital archival practices for the development and sustainability of such initiatives. A discussion of the state of knowledge in this area is beyond the focus and scope of this article. Relevant to this discussion is the fact of the lack of praxis-based and decolonial approaches to understand these issues, that is, projects that seek to explore or implement solutions through

collaboration and the development of digital infrastructures designed to both document and help advance the work of participant initiatives. The model proposed attempts to address this issue building on a trajectory of research and on the low-cost digital archiving infrastructure developed during the early conceptualization stage, which resulted on the web platform Cultural Ecologies of Memory (CEM).[5]

The development of the model was facilitated by relationships of trust built with four grassroots initiatives, who were invited to participate. These four initiatives, which I describe in section 5, form the collaborative ecosystem of the initial or pilot stage of the model. As mentioned before, the idea for the model was shaped during research and documentation conducted between 2016 and 2019. I developed the concept of 'cultural ecologies' as an analytical tool to reveal the conditions for the emergence of a wide range of cultural initiatives that have proliferated during Colombia's post-conflict transition, as well as the complex factors that foster or interrupt their development and sustainability. Among the factors I identified as potential barriers for the broad impact and the long-term sustainability of the memorialization practices of grassroots organizations is the problem of access to digital tools and infrastructures, a context of precarity, and the inability to cope with technological changes. For instance, in cases I documented between 2016-17, initiatives that had built their online presence to disseminate and showcase their work did not have a sustainability plan for their websites, which quickly felt into obsolescence, and could no longer be accessed by 2019 (the year I started systematizing this data). Loosing online presence did not only affect the communication and outreach strategies of these initiatives but had an overall effect on their ability to seek funding and partnerships, among other issues, which affected their work and the impact they intended to have in their communities. None of the initiatives studied did systematically employ digital archiving or file management systems.

Because of the unequal distribution and access to digital tools and technologies, grassroots organizations among vulnerable communities are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to systematically document and showcase their work and contributions to national reconciliation after periods of violence or repression. This problem is aggravated by the fact that their initiatives develop in precarious conditions, lacking substantial funding, and in many cases the necessary equipment to conduct and sustain their work effectively (personal

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5 The digital infrastructure for the platform was developed by Luis Gómez, a developer affiliated with the Australian Academy of Sciences. First serving as consultant in the early conceptualization stage, Gomez has played a central role in the development of the model. The platform is currently the core part of the model's digital ecology: website link `https://culturalecologies.com/`.

ethnographic observations 2016-23). Consequently, they mostly rely on the contingent support or expertise offered by state commissions, higher education institutions, museums, or documentation centres.

The model being discussed emerged as a small-scale intervention and laboratory aimed at tackling these structures of dependency and subordination by advancing the autonomy of participant grassroots initiatives for integrating the use of digital tools into their workflows in sustainable ways. An initial premise was that this model would not only serve their immediate documentation and archiving needs but also foster opportunities for collaboration, dissemination, and for broadening the scope of their actions and interventions as producers and custodians of knowledges that are of central importance for the promotion of a memory culture necessary for the sustainability of any reconciliation process. In this sense, the model proposed aims at strengthening or contributing to the formation of civic networks across the communities involved. Civic networks are defined as a "web of collaborative ties" between organizations "acting on behalf of collective and public interest" (Baldassari, Diana 2007, 736), without recourse of state institutions. In the context of Colombia's post-conflict transition, the common interest across the initiatives and organizations involved is the goal and conviction of contributing to memory construction, symbolic reparation, and peace building from the grassroots level.

4 Designing and Implementing the Model's Digital Infrastructure

The low-cost digital infrastructure developed during the early conceptualization stage, the platform CEM above mentioned, was crucial in thinking about the autonomy of the model's digital ecology and its long-term sustainability. The foundational components were grounded on an architecture designed to operate in low-budget situations, relying on grant funding, and independent of institutional support. The context of the project being designed at the postdoctoral career stage, a fix-termed transitional position that offers no guarantees of institutional affiliation beyond the end of the term, as well as the project's transnational nature were important determinants in developing this approach. This context also allowed for more horizontal relationships with the grassroots initiatives who might have hesitated to participate and contribute documentary assets and data from their archives, totally or partially, for a project directly connected with an institution outside their country and dependent on policies and other dynamics beyond their control. Thus, independence and reliance on contingent funding played an important role, in addition to the fact that the project had an already existing an adaptable

digital infrastructure. This infrastructure was then further developed with a focus on supporting the communications and archiving needs of participant initiatives, structured conceptually around two main strategies: digital archiving, and digital storytelling.

Digital archiving involves selecting and curating documentary materials from the initiatives involved, according to their own priorities, as well as those related to the project's collaborative process. The latter included interviews with participants and other ethnographic documentation. These materials are structured as digital objects and described using metadata elements that expand the Dublin Core Metadata Scheme, a standard model of fifteen core properties for use in resource description.[6] In response to the project's collaborative ethos and inclusive values, we employ an expanded version of this scheme by introducing what I describe as 'additional annotation entries', designed to include input or clarification from participants or their collaborators. For instance, in addition to 'Description', the main category used to describe an object in the Dublin Core scheme, the expanded scheme includes the entry 'Annotated Description', to make possible any input that can add additional relevant information to the objective description entry. This can be relevant for the description of cultural artifacts whose authors might want or request to make annotations after its publication. Annotations entries are also added to the 'rights' category, and to additional fields employed that include restrictions for use and distribution, which are of central relevance when working across collaborative networks. The introduction of annotations entries illustrates how the digital practices integrated into the model advance the values of access, inclusion, and transparency starting at the process of description, one of the building blocks of digital archiving. Finally, all documentary assets are published as digital objects, and made accessible through CEM's archive section, except for restricted content, as determined by participants.

The digital storytelling strategy involves the creative process of using the digital space to showcase each of the initiatives, exploiting its interactive possibilities by combining descriptive and interpretive text with sensorial ethnographic audiovisual elements. This process allows for narrative and analytical text to interplay with (and be enhanced by) rich visual sensorial information, making content both accessible and engaging to a broad audience in ways traditional printed and academic formats cannot. The approach to digital storytelling is grounded on rigorous compositional techniques that define

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6 The core description elements of the Dublin Core scheme are: Title, Subject, Description, Author, Publisher, Contributor, Date, Type, Format, Identifier, Source, Language, Relation, Coverage, Rights, Identifier, Source. For a thorough introduction to metadata schemes for digital collections, see Miller 2011.

the different elements and the forms in which they can be combined.[7] These elements, or building compositional blocks, are comprised of different formats of text, photography, collection of images, video, and sound. The ways in which they can be combined or arranged is defined in templates for publishing structured in the content management system employed, to which I refer below. This approach proposes a contribution to public and Digital Humanities praxis that integrates elements of compositional techniques, visual and sensory ethnography (Pink 2015; 2020) to enhance and enrich traditional humanities hermeneutics in the digital space. At the same time, one of the main functions of the use of digital storytelling is to serve the communication needs of participant initiatives using the techniques developed. In this process, a core strategy of the model is to give leaders of each initiative the necessary training to present their work through their own perspectives and voices. This collaborative approach to content creation can facilitate making the platform and its content accessible to other human rights and cultural activists, grassroots leaders, organizations, and communities. This is further reinforced by including interviews with participants, participant observant videos, and other documentation that can enrich the perspective given on each of the initiatives, as well as the model's collaborative ecology.

Conceptualized around these two strategies, CEM is built as a repository that allows to save and structure research data employing an open-source headless content management system (CMS), that is, a content management system that is completely independent of any predetermined front-end template or 'head'. This system was optimized for storing and structuring data from ethnographic and archival materials, including audiovisual documentary assets. The model is designed for all data stored to be accessed through a RESTful web API in a React application via Json objects. RESTful, which stands for 'Representational State Transfer', is an architectural style for an application program interface (API) that uses HTTP requests to access and use data.[8] The architecture therefore separates data systematization and storage, the process of converting curated documentary assets into digital objects, from the front-end design and templating processes, or the presentation layers. All systematized data and documentation, including individual digital objects published for consultation as well as more complex forms of organization and articulation of text with audiovisual or archival elements used in the creation of digital narratives, are structured and stored independently

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[7]   I developed these compositional techniques building on my training and experience in music and audiovisual composition.

[8]   For further reference, and a thorough discussion of RESTful API design and best practices, see Subramanian, Pethuru 2019.

and can be accessed or retrieved for different purposes (a digital exhibition, installation, etc.), and through different platforms (a website, a mobile app, etc.).

The headless CMS-based architecture is crucial for the longevity, sustainability, and resilience of the model. For instance, any digital object's structure, or digital storytelling compositional arrangements, can be modified or updated according to evolving functional requirements, communication uses, or changes in custodial model. Furthermore, a headless CMS is not conditioned by and does not condition the front-end as a traditional CMS does,[9] and therefore offers a multi-platform approach to the use and presentation of content. This functionality is also crucial because it provides multiple possibilities for future development, including independently developed frameworks or applications by any of the participants or third parties collaborating with them. Thus, the model's architecture and back-end infrastructure were conceptualized and designed to offer great flexibility and versatility for adapting to a rapidly changing technological landscape.

The use of a headless CMS allows the various collaborators and initiatives involved to structure, store, edit, and publish content in a non-centralized manner. It also allows them to manage their assets independently. However, publication and access privileges can be assigned according to the project's needs, editorial workflows, or other operational requirements, including data security and management plans. Because the grassroots initiatives that participate have different and independent trajectories, the model's architecture has been designed to provide social actors leading them with the possibility of using their data and assets for other purposes and independent projects, which is central to the long-term sustainability of their initiatives. Employing a free of cost, open-source headless CMS plays a key role in this regard because it guarantees the longevity of all data stored, and autonomy in its intended uses, independent of any user interfaces or front-end frameworks devised or employed at present or in the future. This is integral to the model's operational structure and a fundamental block of its digital ecology.

In addition to its back-end design and infrastructure, at present the model relies on the platform CEM as its front-end web interface to give access to curated documentary assets of each initiative, and to visibilize each of them independently through digital storytelling. Composed as audiovisual essays that discuss and explore each of the initiatives, their objectives, actors involved, and other

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9   As is the case with web publishing platforms such as WordPress or Omeka, for example. These platforms condition the data used to pre-determined templates that significantly restrict how data is presented or published in the front end, which results in a broad range of limitations that the model discussed in this article tackles in its design and infrastructure.

characteristics, these are structured to form micro-sites within the platform. These microsites are organized as 'cases' of the cultural ecologies of memory, that is, cultural manifestations that, by being entangled in the complex network of memorialization and symbolic reparation practices within the post-conflict transition, exemplify the central concept at the root of the project.

In sum, the digital infrastructure of the model discussed was designed to serve the archiving and communications needs of grassroots memorialization initiatives. The architecture employed to store and structure data provides participant initiatives with a versatile and sustainable solution for their archiving needs, and for managing their documentary assets. At the same time, the digital ecology developed allows these initiatives to exploit the richness of ethnographic documentation and its articulation with interpretative and narrative text for content creation, structured around digital essays. It is important to note that the implementation of this model required training participants in the use of a headless CMS for the systematization and management of their documentary assets and for collaborative content creation. This transfer of digital tools was one of the central goals of the project and an important contribution to the advancement of the initiatives, as I discuss in the closing section.

Crucially, while the model currently relies on the web platform CEM as an interface for consultation and dissemination, the digital ecology discussed provides participants with foundations for developing other communication options, as well as future uses of data and content. This openness of the model was central to its design. While its current interface, the platform CEM, serves as a resource to study concrete examples of cultural and memorialization practices and their role in post-conflict societies, the model is focused on creating conditions for equitable, sustainable, and collaborative digital practices, that include the sharing and transfer of digital infrastructures with the initiatives involved to help their needs and support their mission.

5 Model's Collaborative Ecology

The collaboration model was guided by an activist research approach aimed at addressing the inequalities in access to digital resources that limit the capacities of participant initiatives to communicate widely their work and have greater impact within their communities. Charles Hale (2006) uses the term 'activist research' to refer to a method through which the researcher (1) affirms an ethical or political alignment with the struggles of the communities being studied, and (2) establishes a dialogue with these communities that informs and actively shapes each of the stages of research. Following these premises, activist research was employed in combination with

multi-sited ethnography. Furthermore, this methodology was oriented by the "ecosystem thinking" approach discussed in the introduction. As a mode of coordinating collective action, this approach strengthens the capacity of the initiatives to contribute to their communities by creating conditions that foster complementarity, cross-pollination of ideas, resources, commitments, and other commonalities. The ecosystem logic, as Rangelov and Theros argue, builds on diversity and interdependence (2023, 799). Employing activist research through an ecosystem lens, required working on finding a common vision for the use of the digital space through our shared commitment to contributing to inclusive memory construction and autonomous symbolic reparation from the grassroots level. Our ethical and political alignments converged in the goal of foregrounding the autonomous contributions to the post-conflict transition made by grassroots organizations working with complete independence from transitional institutions and governmental entities.

Participant initiatives, described below, were chosen because they were lacking digital tools for documenting, archiving, and disseminating their work, securing or restricting access to sensitive data. Developed in a context of precarity and lack of institutional support, the initiatives that formed the project's collaborative ecosystem make visible injustices and forms of exclusion against historically marginalized communities who suffered different forms of violence and stigmatization as a result of violence and forced displacement, of their gender or political orientations, race or ethnic identities. These communities and initiatives also remain underrepresented in current institutional memorialization, reparation, and reconciliation programs. Through the implementation of a collaborative ecosystem, the model and its practices reinforce the potential of each of the initiatives to generate impact within their communities, and foster opportunities for disseminating their work and make visible their collective commitments to peace, reconciliation, and social and historical justice.

'Memorias desde el Tugurio' (Memories from the Slums), led by human right defender and archivist Eberhar Cano, is an initiative working on digitizing and providing access to a repository of documentary photography and other archival materials related to the human rights and social justice activism of grassroots social movements in the slums of Medellín, particularly in the Moravia area, a former municipal dump. Since the mid-1950s and through the 1970s, slums were formed as a consequence of rural exodus, populated by families forcibly displaced by violence and the armed conflict, a process that intensified during the 1980s (Alcaldía de Medellín 2006; Martínez Zapata 2014; Vilar, Cartes 2016). They built informal settlements in the most precarious conditions, facing state abandonment, and a process of social rupture and stigmatization that further undermined their dignity.

Figure 1a-b   Grassroots organizing by communities of Medellín's slums

In 2018 Cano was entrusted by Vicente Mejia **[fig. 1a]**, a leader in the "Golconda" group (a faction of the liberation theology movement in Colombia), with the custody of photographic records and other documentation of more than a decade of their work with slum communities **[fig. 1b]**. These visual records constitute what Cano calls, the "subaltern memories of the city's recent past" (Personal communication, August 2023), which underscores the importance of the digital preservation, and dissemination of this documentary archive. Thus, the initiative aims primarily at repairing the dignity of Medellín's slum communities by visibilizing their struggles, organizational strategies, and resilience.

A second initiative, 'Unión de Costureros' (Sewing Box Union), has been developed by a collective of women belonging to internally displaced populations and led by Afro-descendant human rights leader Virgelina Chará. The collective uses fabrics as a medium to make visible their claims for justice and reparation in public space. Their main strategy is to intervene monuments of historical and political significance, a strategy that has brought the collective significant visibility. The initiative has evolved into a micro-scale social movement for reparation and historical redress connecting forcibly displaced and refugee populations, as well as grassroots human rights organizations across borders. For this project, we worked on curating the documentation of ethnographic work and community engaged research I conducted between August 2018 and May 2023, focusing particularly on three interventions in major monuments in Colombia's capital, Bogotá.

As action based symbolic interventions in public space, such strategies are ephemeral and are only referenced on local news covering the events, or in social media posts by participants, institutions involved, and audiences. As part of their memorialization and symbolic reparation practices, the collective process involved in the elaboration of the fabrics have become important spaces for rebuilding the social fabric among those who have experienced the rupture brought about by forced displacement, forced disappearances, and other human rights violations. At the same time, the acts of the coverings serve as practices of civic engagement where different sectors of the citizenry can participate and learn more closely about the claims for justice and peace that define the vision of the initiative (Velasco Trujillo 2020). As such, the socio-cultural practices of Unión de Costureros constitute important repertoires of symbolic reparation and reconciliation, whose documentation needs to be preserved and made publicly accessible **[figs 2a-b]**.

Figure 2a-b   Symbolic coverings of monuments by the sewing group Unión de Costureros

'Women who Weave History in Latin American and the Caribbean' is an initiative led by human and women's rights activist Angélica Rodríguez. This memory creation project from a feminist perspective grew out of Angelica's work with *Fundación Al Derecho*, a human rights NGO she co-founded. The main aim of the project is to make visible the work of women leaders across the Americas in different fields and belonging to a diverse range of social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, highlighting their contributions, and bringing attention to the fact that women's perspectives have been historically marginalized across the different sectors the interviewees represent. Rodríguez started the initiative by interviewing women leaders and then publishing these interviews on YouTube. This platform, however, does not allow for the systematization of the interviews, and for rigorously describing each individual digital object with professional metadata standards. With the objective to reach one thousand interviews, the model and digital ecology described has offered the tools the initiative needs to realize its long-term vision, and to guarantee the longevity of the project with its potential as a public research resource. Nevertheless, YouTube continues to provide free of cost video hosting capabilities, an important aspect of the longevity and sustainability plan, and these videos are then embedded in the platform CEM. In this way, the project can continue to grow organically following the original conception and channel of communication but articulated to a more versatile digital ecology with rigorous digital archiving protocols and greater capabilities. Building on this new digital infrastructure, the initiative brings stories of leadership, agency and societal impact by women to a broad audience, serving as a platform for recognition of their work, and as a resource for other women working in human rights, social and environmental justice activism throughout Latin America.

The fourth initiative is the 'Archive of Artists with Dissident Gender Identities' led by Leandra Plaza, artist, curator, and feminist activist. Her contribution aimed at consolidating a digital archive of the work and trajectories of LGBTQ artists and other creative actors with dissident gender identities in marginal areas of the city of Cali, who have been persecuted, stigmatized, or marginalized in the creative sector because of their sexual or political orientation, or because they use the visual arts to denounce persistent inequalities, violence, and human rights violations committed against these groups. This work constitutes an exploration of the way in which cultural and memory activism intersects with resilient ways of inhabiting the city and participating in its cultural and public life. Leandra defines her articulation of her work into the model as a process of "digital curatorial activism" centring dissident artistic practices as nodes of creativity, utopian visions, and mutual care. Leandra's long-term vision for her use of the platform CEM is to serve as an inclusive digital

space that communicates the vision of these artists, promotes tolerance and respect for diversity, as contributes to the symbolic reparation of these communities, while at the same time making visible their vulnerability and the context of precarity in which they work (personal interview, September 2023).

In addition to the grassroots memorialization initiatives involved, the collaborative ecology was designed to include partner organizations with the potential to serve as co-custodians of data. The *Archivo Oral de la Memoria de las Víctimas* AMOVI (Oral Archive of the Memory of the Victims) at Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS) in Bucaramanga, Colombia, offered consultation and guidance for best practices for managing sensitive data and for working collaboratively in creating special collections with victims of human rights violations and other vulnerable actors. As partner organization, AMOVI can serve as co-custodian of selected data or collections if needed or requested by any of the initiatives participating in the project. Having this institution as regional partner in Colombia and as a potential part of the digital archiving ecosystem offers an additional structure for strengthening transparency, access, data longevity and security. This external support can therefore reinforce the resilience of the model. The collaborative ecology was also designed to offer professional development and training opportunities for graduate students involved as research assistants. In its initial stage, Alexandra Chocontá Piraviqué, a doctoral student in Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota, contributed to an analysis and systematization of interviews used in the initiative "Women who Weave History", described above.

The dynamics and ecology of practices that developed and resulted from the collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas and resources among these social actors and initiatives have fostered conditions that reinforce the sustainability of the initiatives within the broader ecology of cultural practices that continues to develop during Colombia's transitional conjuncture. As I have demonstrated, this model of sustainable digital ecologies focuses on serving as a resource and archive where curated documentary assets of each of the initiatives are made accessible, and was built around the principle of the collaborative construction of knowledge and creative content to make visible the contributions of the initiatives to memory construction and reconciliation.

6   Conclusion. Benefits and Contributions of the Model

The benefits to date of this model, as reported by participants, can be grouped into these categories: technical and digital literacy advancement, and methodological and organizational advancement. All participants consistently reported direct and indirect benefits of learning new digital tools and interacting with the model's digital ecology. The direct benefits include gaining greater control of their documentary assets during the systematization process, which allows them to structure a rigorous inventory of materials as well as classification systems. Furthermore, the training received and the experience of direct engagement with the digital tools employed allowed participants to critically assess the vulnerabilities of their archives and to better understand the conceptual and technical aspects of devising a sustainability and longevity plan. For Eberhar Cano, the use of the CMS employed allowed him to create a management plan of the photographic archive under his custody, articulated to parallel projects for collaborative exhibitions in cultural venues in the city of Medellín. In this regard, the development of digital narratives in the CEM platform have provided all collaborators with a blueprint of creative and engaging ways to present their initiatives to a broad public within the platform's unifying framework, with the concept of cultural ecologies as organizing category. As discussed, this interpretative framework centres the relevance of the initiatives in terms of their contributions to the cultural ecology of practices that have diversified and sustained a memory culture as a pillar for reconciliation, peace and community building during the current post-conflict transition.

Indirect benefits were mainly associated with the articulation of the systematization process with the advancement of independent research and creative projects, and with the possibilities offered by ethnographic documentation derived from the project. Angélica Rodríguez reported that engaging with the classification of the interviews of her initiative played a key role in refining the conceptual framework as well as the central categories employed in her research. Through this process, the notions of memory, identity, and territory, emerged as central organizing categories, which facilitated both analytical and thematic coherence. For Rodríguez, aligning her project with the concept of cultural ecologies of memory, has led her to think more critically about how the preservation of the memory and knowledges of the women interviewed, and their work in the defence of human rights contributes to post-conflict community building (personal communication, July 2023). Similarly, Alexandra Chocontá Piraviqué reported being able to better conceptualize her doctoral project by her increased understanding of the role of archives and memory in peace building and reconciliation from a gender perspective. All initiatives reported gaining a greater

understanding of the role of memorialization and cultural practices in post-conflict societies, gained particularly through exposure to ethnographic documentation and interviews conducted with all participants during the development of the project. Moreover, creative documentary materials that resulted from this process, added to the documentary assets of each initiative, and provided creative materials that significantly enriched the digital narratives developed.

The benefits in terms of methodological and organizational advancement derived from the experience of active participation in the project included gaining relevant experience and professionalization in research and collaborative methodologies, as well as learning organizational and project management skills. For instance, as graduate research assistant, Chocontá Piraviqué gained exposure and experience in project planning, and in field research conducted under guidance, but autonomously. She also reported gaining communication, community engagement, and conflict resolution skills through the experience of navigating working with different community partners in Colombia, who had different interests and priorities with respect to their involvement in the model. All participants reported the benefits of learning from the collaborative and activist research methodologies employed, which they in turn aim at using in their own work. Angelica Rodríguez commented that she has been able to expand the objectives and horizon of possibilities of her initiative by her exposure to these methodologies, and she is currently using her materials and the tools gained for developing workshops with her collaborators in collaboration with cultural centres and memorial sites in Latin America. The experience of participating in the project also exposed participants to the use of project management tools, which they all reported conceiving as a professional development opportunity they can replicate in their own spheres of practice.

In sum, this article described a model of participant-centric research for the development and implementation of an equitable and sustainable digital ecosystem of knowledge and creative content production in collaboration with community memorialization initiatives working at the interface of redress and social justice. Through community engagement, using activist research, ethnographic, and audiovisual documentation methods, the model described was designed and developed to both understand and support the documentation and archiving needs of grassroots cultural initiatives advancing or documenting human rights activism practices, memory construction and symbolic reparation strategies in a transitional society. I have demonstrated how the collaborative model relies on low-cost digital infrastructures that not only serve the immediate documentation and archiving needs of the initiatives involved, but also implements a robust and sustainable digital ecosystem for the public sharing of knowledge.

By employing ethnographic and activist research methodologies, and centring the values of access, transparency, and knowledge democratization, this model offers new possibilities for visibilizing the memory activism and symbolic reparation strategies of participant initiatives, while serving also as a public humanities platform. This platform was designed to foster inclusive research and knowledge dissemination practices, making accessible for consultation the knowledges and experiences of social actors working from the grassroots level within the context of Colombia's post-conflict transition. The model's ecology of digital practices opens a range of opportunities for dissemination, and for broadening the scope of the initiatives involved, their actions and interventions as producers and custodians of knowledges that are of central importance for the promotion of a memory culture and for the sustainability of Colombia's ongoing peace and reconciliation process. The digital documentation, narratives, and practices that resulted from the development of this model, and the platform CEM used for its dissemination, gains increasing importance in the context of Colombia's post-conflict transition because it provides access to knowledges and practices that actively contribute to this historical process. The model therefore can be seen as contributing to the formation of transitional archives (Viebach 2021), a term used to refer to a plurality of records and practices that contribute to truth, justice, and reparation – foundational principles of transitional justice.

Integrating digital curation and storytelling strategies, CEM, the digital platform developed is used to give access to original archival and audiovisual documentation gathered during fieldwork, and to showcase in a web application each of the initiates to a broad public. CEM makes this body of documentation interactive and publicly accessible as a resource for consultation (except restricted content) to promote further research across different fields of practice and academic inquiry, including the areas of human rights advocacy and activism, transitional justice studies, memory studies, and peace studies.

Crucially, the ecology of digital practices implemented provides each of the initiatives with tools to secure and systematize their documentary assets in a digital archive modelled according to their needs and requirements. The architecture employed allows participants to securely manage and use their data autonomously, including accessing, retrieving, or migrating their documentary assets for other purposes, for example a digital exhibition or collection, another web application, or for its co-custody by a partner institution if the need arises. This architecture was designed to foster opportunities for broader dissemination, for the longevity and sustainability of the initiatives, but also to create conditions in which the memorialization initiatives involved can thrive and have greater impact within

their communities. This aspect gains increasing importance because of the context of precarity in which these initiatives have developed. The model proposed relies on the use of digital technologies to mediate /generate new forms of collaborative research and knowledge dissemination practices that benefit all participants, fostering a generative and redistributive approach to knowledge democratization. The ecology of practices that developed, it is hoped, can lead to the formation of a civic ecosystem, defined as "pathways to complementarity between diverse social actors driven by shared concerns" (Rangelov, Theros 2023, 799).

Founded on the principle of a dialogue of knowledges, this model for archiving and collaborative knowledge production builds on and foregrounds the wide range of knowledges and experiences of participants initiatives and the actors leading them, as well as their commitments to their communities and the post-conflict transition. The collaborative ecology of practices creates structures of support and accountability involving community and institutional partnerships that can offer data and documentation co-custody. With this ecosystem approach, the model advances digital ecologies for community digital memorialization, centring transparency, sustainability, and equity in access to digital resources. The model exemplifies an open and de-centralized ecosystem for digital curation and archiving, collaborative research, and participant-driven creative content creation to bring grassroots and community memorialization practices to the public digital sphere.

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NetLay: Layout Classification Dataset for Enhancing Layout Analysis

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Abstract   Within the domain of historical document image analysis, the process of identifying the spatial structure of a document image is an essential step in many document processing tasks, such as optical character recognition and information extraction. Advancements in layout analysis promise to enhance efficiency and accuracy using specialized models tailored to distinct layouts. We introduce NetLay, a new dataset for benchmarking layout classification algorithms for historical works. It consists of over 1,300 images of pages of printed Hebrew (or Hebrew-character) books in a variety of styles, categorized into four different classes based on their layout (the number of text columns and regions). Ground truth was crafted manually at the page level. Furthermore, we conduct an in-depth performance evaluation of various layout classification algorithms, which are based on deep-learning models that learn to extract spatial features from images. We evaluate our algorithms on NetLay and achieve state-of-the-art results on the task of layout classification for historical books.

Keywords   Historical document analysis. Layout analysis. Layout classification. Multi-label classification. Convolutional neural networks. Deep learning.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Related Work. – 3 Dataset. – 4 Methods. – 5 Results.

1   Introduction

Numerous institutions and libraries worldwide are digitizing their archives to democratize access and safeguard them from physical deterioration. This calls for an ability to perform primary processing of numerous texts automatically. In the field of document image processing,[1] benchmark datasets with corresponding ground truth are essential for evaluating, developing, and comparing algorithms, as they also drive the creation of new approaches to address emerging challenges. Recent advancements in image analysis and computer vision have automated most of the tasks in the pipeline for automatic document analysis. Document layout analysis acts as a crucial preliminary step for various document image analysis tasks. Advancements in this field hold immense potential for boosting efficiency and accuracy through the development of specialized models tailored to diverse document layouts. Document image processing encompasses classical machine learning techniques, requiring meticulous feature selection, and deep neural network-based approaches where features are inherently learned within the network. While both techniques play a role, recent breakthroughs in image classification have been primarily driven by deep-learning methods.

A key advantage deep learning offers over traditional approaches lies in its inherent ability to extract features directly from the data. This not only liberates paleographers from spending weeks or months on feature selection but also empowers neural networks to uncover novel and intricate features that might evade even the most discerning human expert. A critical aspect of this endeavour is addressing the challenges inherent in ancient and medieval handwriting studies, necessitating the training of specialized models tailored to distinct layouts. However, the scarcity of diverse stylistic representations poses challenges for developing multi-domain general layout analysis, compounded by the predominance of datasets containing Latin script.

Addressing these disparities is imperative for advancing historical document analysis research and development, particularly in historical document layout analysis. However, the current landscape of available datasets suffers from two major limitations that hinder progress in historical document analysis. Firstly, the lack of stylistic

1   We use the term 'document' in its general sense, ranging from literary works to personal notes, from full-length books to individual pages.

diversity can significantly hamper the development of general layout analysis methods capable of functioning effectively across multiple domains. Secondly, the vast majority of existing datasets primarily cater to documents in English, neglecting the inherent differences in text features present in other languages. This disparity can lead to problems when applying these methods to languages like Hebrew, highlighting a critical gap in resources dedicated to historical document layout analysis datasets. While significant strides have been made in the domain of modern documents, addressing this discrepancy is paramount to propelling research and development forward in the field of historical document analysis.

Long-standing efforts have been devoted to creating layout analysis datasets, with the huge dataset PubLayNet (Zhong, Tang, Jimeno Yepes 2019) for contemporary documents emerging recently. However, existing datasets tailored for historical documents remain limited in scope. The majority of openly available historical document layout datasets mostly address more popular scripts and languages. The Europeana Newspapers Project (ENP) (Clausner et al. 2015) contains common European languages like Dutch, English, German, etc., from the seventeenth century onward, and contains 500 page images. The PRImA Layout Analysis Dataset (Antonacopoulos et al. 2009) places emphasis on magazines and technical/scientific publications, the majority in Latin script. Addressing these disparities and incorporating the representation of less common and older languages – like Hebrew – in datasets are imperative for advancing historical document analysis research and development.

Before we address the more complicated question of Hebrew 'manuscript' layout, we must solve the problem of automatic layout classification for 'printed' Hebrew books. Hebrew books often have non-standard layouts, multiple languages (Hebrew/Aramaic; Hebrew/Yiddish, etc.) per page written in the same script and alphabet, and different script type-modes per page (Ashkenazi square plus Oriental semi-cursive ["Rashi"]). Sometimes, different text fields are not clearly distinguishable.

To address these challenges, we present NetLay, a dataset containing 1352 pages, taken from books with diverse layouts sourced from the collection of the National Library of Israel (NLI). In addition, we propose several benchmark techniques to perform layout classification. We implement various deep-learning models. We also propose a multi-label encoding scheme based on the spatial and global interdependencies of distinct layout elements.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 is a short survey of the related literature. Section 3 explains the properties of the dataset proposed. Section 4 describes various methods used for layout classification. In Section 5 we evaluate several deep-learning classifiers and present our results.

2 Related Work

Understanding the layout of a document serves as a preliminary step for various document image processing tasks. These tasks include information retrieval, page segmentation, word spotting, and optical character recognition (OCR), which aims to extract meaningful textual information from these images. Breuel (2003) proposed novel algorithms and statistical methods for flexible page layout analysis, combining globally optimal geometric algorithms with robust statistical models and meticulous engineering techniques. Page segmentation algorithms typically fall into two categories: bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up algorithms work in a hierarchical manner to group elements such as pixels, patches, or connected components into progressively larger regions. In contrast, top-down algorithms divide the entire page into regions in a single step. Many of the early page layout analysis methods often relied on assumptions about document structure and employed a top-down approach, particularly for well-formatted, modern binary (black and white) documents. Typically, these methods rely on mathematical morphology and connected components (Alarcón Arenas, Yari, Meza-Lovon 2018), Voronoi diagrams (Kise, Sato, Iwata 1998), or run length smearing algorithms (Wong, Casey, Wahl 1982).

There are, however, also numerous other techniques that don't fit neatly into one of the above categories. These so-called mixed or hybrid approaches aim to merge the efficiency of top-down methods with the robustness of bottom-up ones. Corbelli et al. (2016) proposed a hybrid layout analysis pipeline, integrating both top-down and bottom-up approaches. They employ the X-Y cut algorithm and a support vector machine (SVM) classifier for illustration detection, coupled with a convolutional neural network (CNN) and random forest classifier for content classification identifying different classes of layout entities. Pixel classification approaches have also been explored for page segmentation. Wei et al. (2013) framed the problem as pixel classification, where each pixel is represented as a feature vector based on the image's color. They employed techniques like Gaussian mixture models (GMM), multi-layer perceptrons (MLP), and SVM to classify pixels into categories such as decoration, background, periphery, and text pixels. Chen et al. (2014) subsequently improved upon this work by incorporating more comprehensive features encompassing texture and colour properties like smoothness, Laplacian, Gabor dominant orientation histograms, local binary patterns, and colour variance.

With the onset of deep learning, many authors have addressed the problem of layout segmentation and analysis using different deep neural network configurations. Borges Oliveira and Viana (2017) introduced a novel one-dimensional CNN approach for rapid automatic

layout detection of structured documents. Barakat and El-Sana (2018) presented a binarization-free method for page layout analysis of historical Arabic manuscripts, training an FCN to predict the class of each pixel and segmenting main text and side text regions. Kosaraju et al. (2019) proposed DoT-Net, a texture-based CNN for document layout analysis that can capture textural variations among the multiclass regions of documents. Alaasam, Kurar and El-Sana (2019) proposed a Siamese network-based layout analysis method tailored for challenging historical Arabic manuscripts. Da et al. (2023) introduced a two-stream vision grid transformer for layout analysis, conducting visual pre-training in two stages utilizing 2D token-level and segment-level understanding.

Although layout analysis and segmentation have been extensively explored, layout classification remains relatively understudied. This process involves categorizing documents based on their spatial arrangement, aiming to comprehend the overall layout of content within a document. This understanding serves as a cornerstone for the development of advanced algorithms for segmentation and OCR. Hu, Kashi and Wilfong (1999) introduced interval encoding, a novel feature set for capturing layout information. They utilize this encoding within an HMM framework for fast document image classification based solely on spatial layout.

3 Dataset

There is a critical necessity of implementing a layout classifier to augment the efficacy of dedicated models used in transcription systems like eScriptorium (Kiessling et al. 2019). To that end, we sourced images from the digital collections of NLI, tailored specifically for this task. High-resolution images of pages in the NetLay dataset were curated from a random selection of printed Hebrew books at NLI. From each book, one page image was carefully chosen for inclusion in the dataset. The dataset includes a total of 1352 images of single pages or facing pages. It is balanced and comprises the following classes: no text ("empty"), single column, two columns (occasionally on facing pages), and complex layout (three or more regions, or regions with insets), with 300, 442, 300, and 310 samples, respectively, for each class.

Facing pages, each containing one column, are usually one continuous work, but may also be two related works, one on even numbered pages and the other on odd ones. Two-column text may be read across both columns (as in poetry, for example), or column by column, or they may be two works side by side – in the same language or in two (perhaps a translation or commentary), in the same font or not. Complex layouts often contain separate, but related, works by different authors [fig. 1].

Figure 1 Document samples from NetLay: (a) no text; (b) single column; (c) two column; (d) complex layout. The figure contains illustrative examples of document images representing each class within the dataset. The dataset is publicly available at https://github.com/TAU-CH/midrash_layout_classification_using_multilabel_vgg/tree/main/data

4   Methods

The challenge of layout class identification presents itself as an image classification task, where the goal is to assign a specific class to a given document image. Given the complexity and variability of layouts, employing deep-learning models emerges as the most effective strategy for image classification tasks. Therefore, our approach uses deep-learning-based models to accurately categorize document images into distinct layout structures. In this section, we outline the experimental setup, including model architecture, training methodology, and evaluation procedures. We adopt state-of-the-art deep-learning models tailored for image classification tasks. To assess the performance of our approach, we conduct several benchmark experiments. These experiments aim to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed deep-learning models in accurately classifying layout structures. To ensure a robust evaluation, we divided our dataset into three distinct subsets: training (80%), validation (10%), and testing (10%). This split allows for effective model training, hyperparameter tuning, and unbiased performance evaluation. All the experiments for training the deep-learning models were conducted on a machine equipped with an NVIDIA Titan T4 GPU with 15 GB of memory.

Predictions are evaluated based on four standard performance metrics: accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

We employ two methods for the task of document image layout classification.

1.1 Single Label Classification

Single-label classification involves assigning one class label to each instance from a predefined set of classes. In the context of document layout classification, our objective is to categorize layouts into four distinct classes: no text, single column, double column, or complex.

Below, we explore various architectures and propose methods employed for this task.

EfficientNetV2 We utilize EfficientNetV2 (Tan, Le 2021) for spatial feature extraction, pretrained on the ImageNet dataset. The core architecture employs the mobile inverted bottleneck (MBConv) (Sandler et al. 2018), with squeeze and excitation optimization.

In the EfficientNet family, comprising models from EfficientNet B0 to B7 (Tan, Le 2019) which employs mobile inverted bottleneck convolution (MBConv) with squeeze and excitation optimization. The variations can be seen in MBConv block count, width, depth, resolution, and overall size of the model. EfficientNetV2 introduces enhancements like fused-MBConv blocks alongside regular MBConv blocks, which lead to higher accuracies with fewer parameters. EfficientNetsV1s demonstrate adaptability through transfer learning, excelling when trained on diverse datasets. However, challenges such as slow training with large image sizes and inefficiencies in early layers due to depthwise convolutions are evident. Addressing these concerns, EfficientNetV2 introduced novel design elements and employs training-aware neural architecture search and scaling strategies to jointly optimise model accuracy, training speed, and parameter size.

Table 1 The multi-label encoding scheme

Class	Page width text line	Half page width text time	Page height vertical separator	Half page height vertical separator	Multiple fonts
Empty	0	0	0	0	0
Single column	1	0	0	0	0
Two columns	0	1	1	0	0
Complex layout	1	1	0	1	1

Table 2 Performance metrics (accuracy, precision, recall, and F1), for each class, using EfficientNetV2, ViT, and VGG16 with multi-label encoding

Method	Class	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1 Score
Efficient-Net	0 (Empty)	98.50%	0.94	1.00	0.97
	1 (Single column)	93.98%	0.97	0.84	0.90
	2 (Two columns)	95.49%	0.83	1.00	0.91
	3 (Complex layout)	93.98%	0.90	0.84	0.87
ViT	0 (Empty)	99.25%	1.00	0.97	0.98
	1 (Single column)	94.78%	0.89	0.95	0.92
	2 (Two columns)	98.51%	0.94	1.00	0.97
	3 (Complex layout)	94.03%	0.93	0.81	0.86
VGG16	0 (Empty)	99.26%	0.97	1.00	0.98
	1 (Single column)	99.26%	1.00	0.98	0.99
	2 (Two columns)	98.53%	1.00	0.93	0.96
	3 (Complex layout)	98.53%	0.95	1.00	0.97

Vision transformer We also experiment with the vision transformer (ViT) architecture (Dosovitskiy et al. 2021), which transforms image processing by dividing input images into fixed-sized patches, departing from the conventional pixel-based evaluation of CNNs. ViT encapsulates each patch into a latent representation while retaining positional information, forwarding them through a transformer encoder. The input image, denoted $x \in \mathbf{R}^{H \times W \times C}$, undergoes transformation into a sequence of flattened 2D patches $x_p \in \mathbf{R}^{N \times (P^2 \cdot C)}$, where $N = W \cdot H/P^2$ signifies the resulting number of patches of size $P \times P$, and $H \times W$ is the resolution of the image. With C representing the channels, typically 3 for RGB images, our model embraces a patch size of 16 × 16 pixels. This architecture facilitates the breakdown of images into manageable patches, subsequently processed through transformer layers adept at capturing both local and global dependencies. Our methodology aligns with the ViT paradigm, expanding the adaptability of transformers to encompass image classification tasks.

4.1 Multi-Label Classification

Multi-label classification involves the assignment of multiple labels to each instance simultaneously. It involves predicting multiple categories or classes for a given input, making it a more complex problem compared to traditional single-label classification. To address potential overlap in class characteristics, we also employ a multi-label classification approach. Each of the four classes is encoded as a five-dimensional vector, allowing for shared attributes across classes [tab. 1]. This method offers distinct advantages, particularly in

handling overlapping attributes among certain classes. Furthermore, the extraction of spatial document image features for layout classification is facilitated through the utilization of a VGG16 (Simonyan, Zisserman 2015) based backbone.

Complex layout classification We delve deeper into understanding the complexities of layout structures. Figure 2 showcases various examples from the dataset, highlighting the variability in spatial arrangements of text columns within the complex layout structure. For instance, Figure 2(a) exhibits a C type structure, while Figure 2(b) displays an L type arrangement. Moreover, Figures 2(c) and (d) portray complex spatial configurations bearing resemblance to an O and a U, respectively [fig. 2].

We identified seven distinct subcategories within the complex layout arrangement [fig. 3]. These subcategories are characterized by different spatial configurations of text columns, including variations such as C, L, U, and O shapes, along with their corresponding reflected counterparts – C2, L2, and U2. Each of these subcategories captures unique layout features, contributing to the complexity of the overall structure, and poses different challenges for accurate classification. Through training an end-to-end CNN-based classifier, we aimed to comprehend these features and effectively capture the nuanced spatial relationships within the complex layout structures. Our experiments yielded a classification accuracy of 60%, indicating the model's ability to distinguish these spatial features significantly better than random guessing.
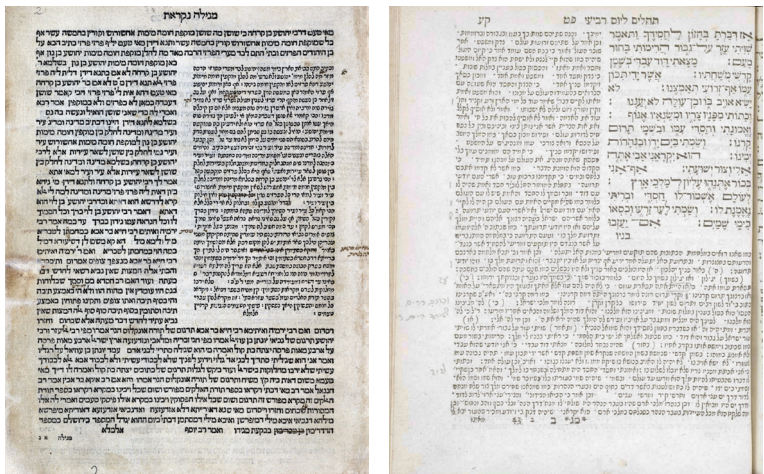
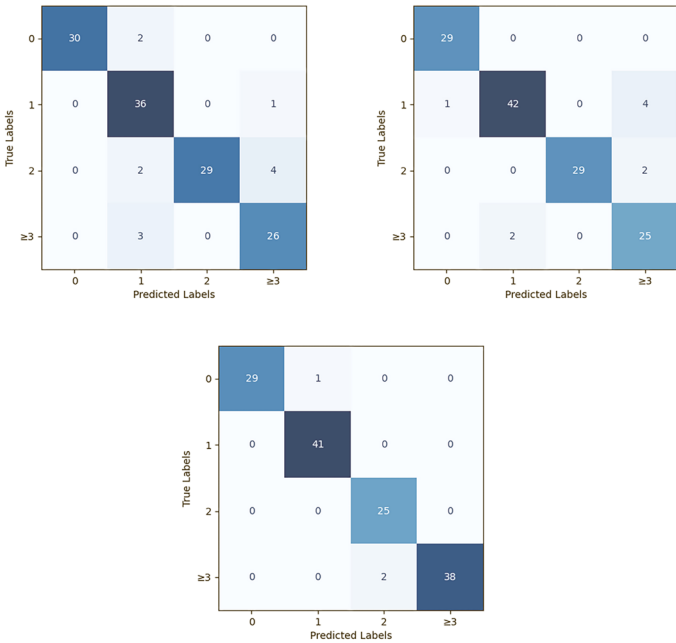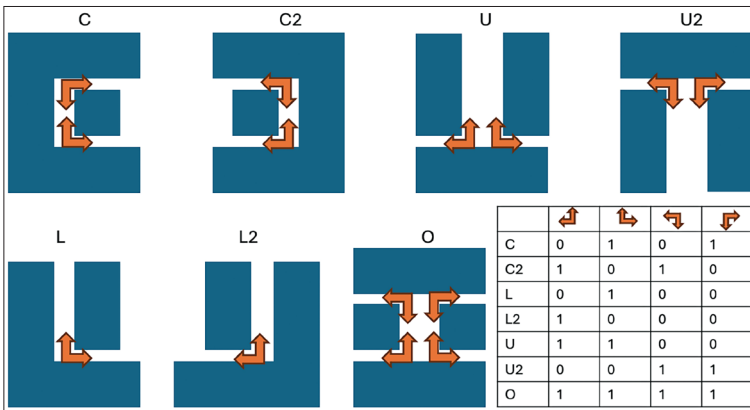**Figure 2** Examples of complex layouts

Figure 3 Confusion matrices for the different classifiers. (a) Confusion matrix for EfficientNetV2; (b) Confusion matrix for ViT; (c) Confusion matrix for multilabel encoding with VGG16

5   Results

In this section, we present the outcomes obtained from various deep-learning classifiers, which serve as foundational benchmarks for future comparative analyses. The aim was to assess the effectiveness of the proposed features and methods introduced here for facilitating efficient document layout classification. We achieved competitive performance on the document classification task. Figures 4a-c showcase the confusion matrices corresponding to the trained models.


	⮐	⮑	⮌	⮎
C	0	1	0	1
C2	1	0	1	0
L	0	1	0	0
L2	1	0	0	0
U	1	1	0	0
U2	0	0	1	1
O	1	1	1	1

Figures 4a-c   Examples of complex layout structures with corresponding spatial arrangement features

The evaluation metrics, including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1, are utilized to assess the models' performance across different classes, as showcased in Table 2. Notably, employing EfficientNetV2 yielded an impressive overall accuracy of 90.98%, while the ViT model achieved an even higher accuracy of 93.28%. Furthermore, leveraging the multi-label encoding approach with VGG16 resulted in the highest accuracy of 97.79%. To elucidate the influential features guiding the model's final prediction, we employ the gradient-weighted class activation mapping (Grad-CAM) technique (Selvaraju et al. 2017). This approach leverages the gradients of a target class flowing into the underlying CNN architecture, specifically VGG16 in our study, to generate a coarse localization map, thereby accentuating pivotal regions crucial for predicting the target class. Figure 5 depicts the salient features relevant to the classification of layout structures [fig. 5].
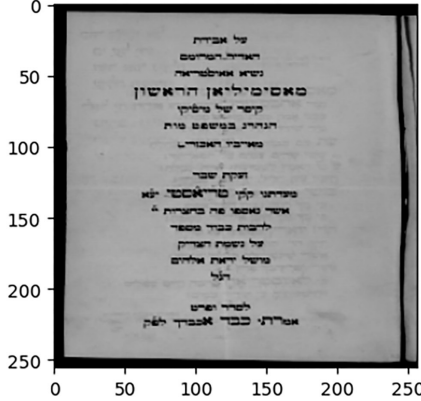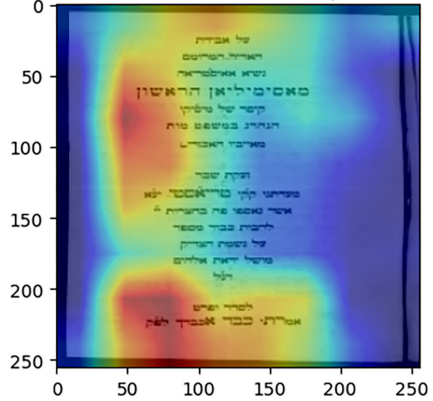
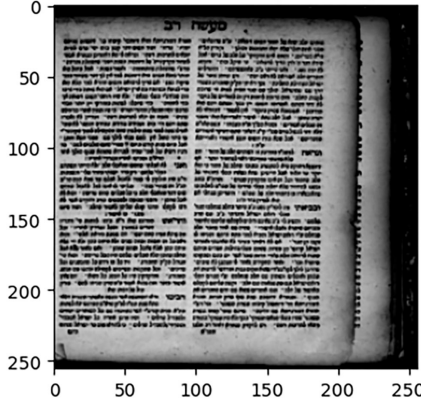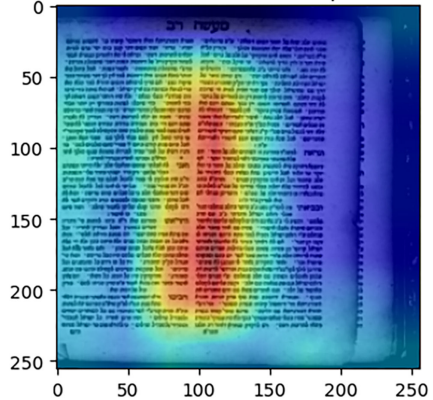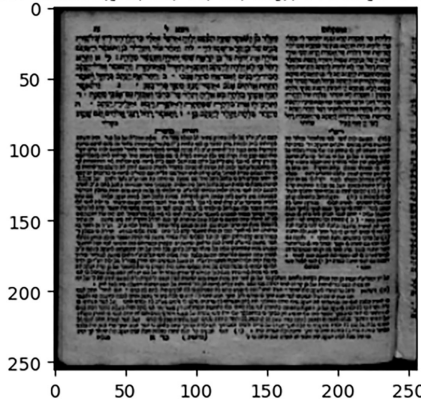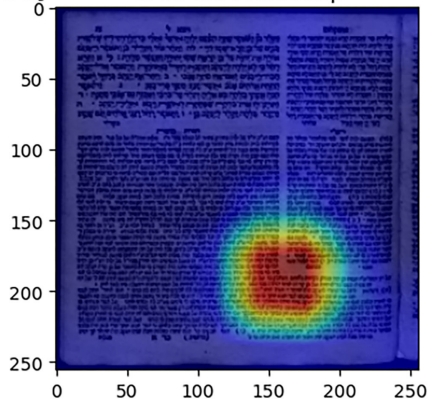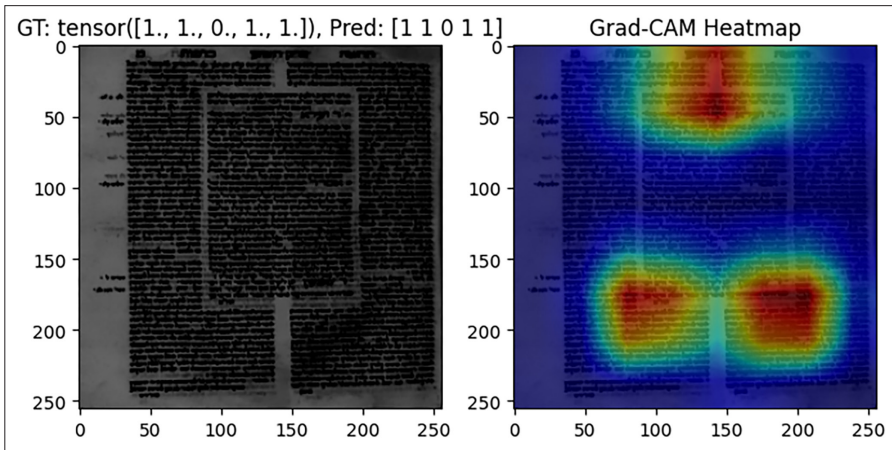## 6   Conclusions and Future Work

Conducting layout analysis on simple layouts, containing one or two columns of text, is relatively straightforward, but analysing complex layouts that feature text columns in structures diverging from the standard one or two columns, such as L, U, O, and C shapes, alongside other complexities, presents significant challenges. Therefore, layout classification is vital for distinguishing between simple and complex layouts. This distinction allows for the application of existing layout analysis algorithms on simple layout document images but specialized analysis methods for complex layout document images.

We have introduced a dataset designed for benchmarking layout classification methods, along with a single-label multi-classification algorithm and a multi-label multi-classification algorithm to address the layout classification challenge. Our findings indicate that multi-label encoding leads to a more separable feature space, thereby enhancing accuracy. The visualization of classifiers further supports this conclusion, revealing that the classifiers indeed focus on features employed to encode the multi-labels for each class.

Future work includes further improving results for complex layout classification in a variety of languages and scripts, considering pages with marginal and intertextual comments, considering books with changes of script size and/or language within paragraphs, and pages from incunabula and other early printed books with unusual nonstandard layouts. This will be combined with reading-direction recognition, language, and script detection to achieve complex page

analysis. These algorithms would serve as a solid base for efficient automatic processing of printed books. At the same time, the automatic classification of page layouts for printed books is an important preparatory step for the more challenging task of page layout analysis of handwritten manuscripts.

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Fare e disfare l'archivio
Tra pratiche artistiche contemporanee e opzioni decoloniali a *documenta fifteen*

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Abstract   This article focuses on the relationship between contemporary artistic practices and archives. It investigates – through the lens of postcolonial studies and decolonial studies – how artistic creation contributes to reflections on knowledge and public memory construction from the grassroots. The analysis of this dense intertwining starts from the case of *documenta fifteen* – held in 2022 in Kassel, Germany – by retracing some of the exhibited projects, such as: *The Black Archives* and *Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie* exhibited in the Fridericianum Museum and *Borrowed Faces* and *Frictional Conversation* by Yasmine Eid Sabbagh presented in *Hafenstrasse*. These works, although situated in specific geographies and contexts, in their common instances make it possible to construe a critical discourse on the archival apparatus and at the same time they elaborate new proposals in the urgency of finding another way of dealing with the history of the oppressed, recovering traumatic memories, using the tools of narration, reactivating processes of subjectivation and recognition of marginalised communities.

Keywords   Contemporary art. Performance. Archives. Memory. Documenta.

Sommario   1 La febbre degli archivi. – 2 *Documenta fifteen* e l'archivio come *lumbung*. – 3 Contro-archivi black e femministi. – 4 Riconfigurare, reiventare e fabulare con l'archivio. – 5 Rifuggire l'archivio. – 6 Segni comuni e risonanze.

1 La febbre degli archivi

L'archivio è ormai da almeno due decenni un campo di profondo interesse per le pratiche artistiche contemporanee. Molti artisti da geografie differenti vi rivolgono la loro attenzione, guardandoli nella loro entità di collezione e traccia, affascinati dai display e dal ruolo chiave nei processi di memorializzazione e di costruzione del sapere. Una così vivace sperimentazione è accompagnata da un dibattito scientifico e critico prolifico quasi febbrile, che fa degli archivi una vera passione interdisciplinare, mettendo profondamente in discussione il loro funzionamento e i meccanismi che producono e da cui sono prodotti: dalla filosofia, con il fondativo *Mal d'archivio* di Derrida (1995), alla storia dell'arte e ai performance studies (Taylor 2003; Baldacci 2016; Scotini 2022), che guardano al particolare modo in cui gli artisti si appropriano degli archivi come spazi di residualità e d'invenzione. Anche la scienza archivistica partecipa a una ridefinizione critica della disciplina (Penzo Doria 2022). Da essa arriva un riconoscimento ai crescenti processi dal basso che portano alla luce un uso politico, attivo e democratico degli archivi. Nella loro creazione la soggettività è finalmente vista come elemento determinante al pari della sfera emotiva (Valacchi 2023).

Un vero momento di svolta è il *corpus* che viene dagli studi post e decoloniali, che costituiscono la principale lente attraverso cui guarderò ai casi studio che qui propongo. Si tratta di lavori artistici e progetti culturali d'archivio presentati a *documenta fifteen*, la quindicesima edizione dell'influente esposizione d'arte contemporanea nella città di Kassel, Germania,[1] ed esperiti in prima persona, pertanto nutrendo questa ricerca grazie agli incontri, alle interviste, ai materiali fornitimi dagli artisti stessi. *Les archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie*, *The Black Archive*, *Borrowed Faces* e *Frictional Conversation* sono azioni artistiche situate nel sud globale o prodotte dalla sua diaspora. Tutte passate attraverso storie di dominazione coloniale, stabiliscono nessi insorgenti rispetto all'archivio ontologicamente legato a quello stesso sistema d'oppressione.

Come dimostrano le lunghe analisi di Anna Laura Stoler (2002) sui dispositivi archivistici coloniali, essi non possono intendersi come meri depositi istituzionali, dove si impilano e sistematizzano le scelte dei funzionari; essi sono piuttosto concetti epistemici di larga scala, con un'azione diretta sulla produzione della conoscenza e dell'autorità. Seguendo e rafforzando le fondamentali disamine di Michel Foucault (1969), gli studiosi e le studiose post-coloniali, così come artiste e artisti, svelano che l'archivio ha profondamente a che fare con ciò che può essere o non può essere detto. Esso è un luogo di

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[1] La mostra si è tenuta tra il 18 giugno e il 25 settembre 2022.

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violenza epistemica, perché per lungo tempo ha negato parola, rappresentazione e *agency* alle soggettività colonizzate. Tuttavia, come i casi studio presi in esame manifestano, può ribaltarsi in sito di resistenza e di «disobbedienza epistemica» (Mignolo 2011). Ovvero la possibilità di sciogliere i legami, le connessioni e i riferimenti ai paradigmi conoscitivi su cui il colonizzatore ha fondato la sua spoliazione, per proporre altre opzioni e progetti decoloniali.

2 *Documenta fifteen* e l'archivio come *lumbung*

Il processo di co-costruzione della 'mostra' ha profondamente determinato la natura di ciò che è stato condiviso a Kassel nell'estate del 2022, proponendo nel suo insieme un'interessante visione sfaccettata e diversificata di pratiche artistiche e archivistiche, in realtà molte più di quelle che qui sono prese in esame. Affidata al collettivo curatoriale indonesiano ruangrupa, il punto di partenza scelto, come metafora e come modo d'azione, è il *lumbung*, che nel linguaggio vernacolare e agricolo indonesiano designa uno spazio di stoccaggio comune per il surplus del raccolto del riso che la comunità gestisce collettivamente, come tattica per affrontare un futuro incerto. I ruangrupa si ispirano a una modalità di redistribuzione e gestione collettiva delle risorse, per inventare delle economie comuni e solidali che continuino ad allargare e nutrire le pratiche degli invitati, sfidando l'istituzione europea a fare un passo indietro rispetto al sistema dell'arte e lasciarsi 'usare', per supportare processi in corso in altri luoghi, di cui beneficiano più larghe comunità **[fig. 1]**.

Figura 1 Gudskul, *Harvest*. 2022. Kassel, Fridericianum Museum, *documenta fifteen*. Courtesy degli artisti

Uno degli aspetti più innovativi è costituito dalla scelta di non commissionare nuovi lavori artistici, quanto piuttosto di usare la mostra come una piattaforma di traduzione di progettualità – peraltro non solo strettamente artistiche – già in corso in una geografia molto estesa, che servisse ad ampliarne la fruizione pubblica.

L'*artistic team*, formato da curatori, artisti e altri gruppi invitati via via per delega, ha condiviso la progettazione della mostra e la gestione del suo budget. In questo fare comune è preponderante il ruolo della questione educativa, in linea con quanto succede dal *pedagogical turn* (Bishop 2013) in avanti: sempre più artisti e curatori integrano alla loro pratica una preoccupazione pedagogica che li porta a concepire come opera la creazione di spazi e processi educativi alternativi e non gerarchici. ruangrupa, che dal 2018 ha fondato a Jakarta sulla Gudskul, una piattaforma educativa e informale che lavora sulle connessioni e relazioni, propone lo stesso modello a Kassel con la Sekolah Temujalar (Scuola Temujalar) nel museo Fridericianum. Il titolo, che tiene insieme i termini indonesiani *Temu* (incontrare) e *Jalar* (diffondere), è già un manifesto programmatico.

Questo implicarsi nella questione educativa e più largamente epistemologica, intendendola come chiave per processi di *lumbug*, spiega un'attenzione così spiccata per progetti che si volgono all'archivio seppur per contraddirlo e riformularlo, in quanto coacervo di logiche eurocentriche e dominanti. È proprio sul piano epistemico che le maggiori frizioni si sono prodotte. Nell'estate dell'apertura, una grave e preoccupante polemica della stampa e delle istituzioni pubbliche ha investito gli artisti e i curatori, accusati di antisemitismo per alcune delle loro rappresentazioni, o per riferimenti alla causa palestinese.[2] Questo doloroso dibattito, che ha prodotto una sequela di dimissioni, ritiri di lavori in mostra, lettere pubbliche e gogne mediatiche ha anticipato in modo inquietante le tensioni esplose nei

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[2] Per una ricostruzione completa della vicenda e degli scambi, tra accuse e dichiarazioni in quotidiani e riviste di settore, si veda l'articolo di Alex Greenberger, «Documenta's Anti-Semitism Controversy, Explained: How a German Art Show Became the Year's Most Contentious Exhibition», in *Artnews*, pubblicato il 22 luglio 2022. Molti degli articoli che hanno alimentato la polemica sono stati pubblicati su *Die Zeit*, ancor prima dell'inaugurazione della mostra. Gli *statmet* di curatori e artisti in supporto di ruangrupa, oltre che sul sito ufficiale sono stati pubblicati da ex-flux, ad esempio: ruangrupa «Anti-Semitism Accusations Against Documenta: A Scandal About a Rumor», 7 maggio 2022.

Si segnala inoltre un articolo che ha direttamente interessato uno dei casi studio in esame: Kevin Culina, «Zufallsfund offenbart neuen Antisemitismus-Skandal auf der Documenta», in *Welt*, pubblicato il 27 luglio 2022.

Per il *New York Times* ne ha scritto Alex Marshall, «Documenta Takes Down Art After Antisemitism Accusations», il 21 giugno 2022; anche il *Guardian* ha seguito da vicino tutta la diatriba dedicandole diversi articoli, tra cui quello sulle dimissioni della direttrice Sabine Schormann, «Documenta 15: Germany Art Exhibition Chief Resigns Amid Outrage Over Antisemitic Works», pubblicato il 17 luglio 2022.

mesi successivi in Germania. Una dura prova per la società tedesca, che lo studioso Iain Chambers (2024) associa al senso di colpa occidentale, che blocca e silenzia ogni discussione sulla formazione storica della questione ebraica e palestinese.

3 Contro-archivi black e femministi

Una selezione di libri sulla storia dei movimenti di emancipazione nera nei Paesi Bassi, il riallestimento di due mostre, *Facing Blackness* (2022) e *Black and Revolutionary: The Story of Hermine and Otto Huiswoud* (2018), diventa la nuova architettura che *The Black Archives* concepisce per *documenta fifteen* negli spazi del Fridericianum, come luogo di conversazione e di incontro. Questo progetto, nato nel 2015 ad Amsterdam dal 'New Urban Cafè', ha dal suo principio scelto l'informalità e la convivialità per raccogliere libri, documenti, manufatti di artisti, scienziati e scrittori olandesi neri. Una rete relazionale di attivisti lo anima e ne fa una piattaforma per organizzarsi e reagire alla strutturale discriminazione delle persone razzializzate. Gli oltre diecimila volumi e i documenti si concentrano su razzismo e questioni razziali, schiavitù e colonizzazione, genere e femminismo, scienze sociali, in Suriname, Antille olandesi, Sud America e Africa. Essi costituiscono a tutti gli effetti un contro-archivio, ovvero una collezione di ciò che è stato sepolto e reso muto (Merewether 2006). In questa azione di contro-narrazione vi è la possibilità di rendere udibili voci precedentemente silenziate (Kros 2015); tale esigenza è riaffermata da un vasto programma pubblico che accompagna la collezione per nutrire i legami con la società contemporanea, spostando l'archivio da appannaggio degli studiosi e degli storici a strumento di interrogazione del presente. Senza separazioni nette di spazio, appena dietro *The Black Archive*, in un dialogo fatto di controstorie viene presentata un'installazione che dà accesso a una parte della collezione di *Les Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie* **[fig. 2]**.

Les Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie. 2022. Vista dell'installazione. Kassel, Fridericianum Museum, *documenta fifteen*. Courtesy dell'archivio

Anche questo contro-archivio muove dalla stessa necessità di restituire una vita pubblica alle tracce, ai documenti, in seno alla vita di una comunità militante, in un periodo di sollevamento popolare, ovvero l'Hirak[3] del 2019, le cui rivendicazioni democratiche hanno rinvigorito il movimento femminista algerino. Sono tre ricercatrici femministe, Saadia Gacem, Awel Haouati e Lydia Saïdi, a iniziare un lavoro di raccolta che ricostruisca la storia del movimento e delle lotte delle donne in Algeria.

Il lancio avviene sui social network con la creazione di una pagina Facebook, prima interfaccia digitale, indirizzata soprattutto alle persone che stavano protestando per le strade del paese.[4]

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[3] Si tratta di un movimento pacifico di rivolta popolare iniziato con partecipatissime marce pacifiche nelle principali città dell'Algeria ogni venerdì e poi diffusosi anche nei piccoli centri, con manifestazioni spesso anche il martedì. Il sollevamento reagisce all'ennesima candidatura del presidente Abdelaziz Bouteflika, considerato una marionetta di un regime militare e antidemocratico. Il movimento ottiene la deposizione di Bouteflika, ma non si ferma, consapevole che la vera rivendicazione sia per un'Algeria democratica e popolare. L'Hirak dura fino a che l'epidemia di COVID-19 nel 2020 non costringe all'isolamento e a un arresto brutale di ogni forma di aggregazione fisica.

[4] Informazioni dedotte dalla partecipazione alla conferenza *Fare archivio*, da booq a Palermo il 3 dicembre 2022, in cui era presente Saadia Gacem in rappresentanza del collettivo.

Sempre più spesso le piattaforme social si fanno sistemi di archiviazione *open-access*, soprattutto laddove mancano infrastrutture pubbliche e libertà d'espressione. Un progetto a lungo termine di raccolta e digitalizzazione di documenti dall'indipendenza (1962) in poi, inizia con donazioni di donne più anziane che riaprendo le scatole in soffitta ritrovano le foto in bianco e nero della manifestazione dell'8 marzo 1990 ad Algeri, i rapporti delle riunioni delle *moudjahidate*[5] del 1982 o ancora un'agenda realizzata dal collettivo feminile Aicha, un prezioso documento per rintracciare le date più significative per le lotte e le vittorie in termini di diritti.

L'ambiente creato al Fridericianum, perimetrato da grandi riproduzioni fotografiche su tessuto della manifestazione dell'8 marzo 1990 ad Algeri e del galà che l'ha preceduta, accoglie su un lungo tavolo copie delle pubblicazioni, dei manifesti, delle locandine in libera consultazione. Vicino a questa postazione, due schermi, uno per guardare il girato della manifestazione, l'altro per ascoltare due interviste a due femministe di generazioni diverse e un carosello di fotografie. Al centro dello spazio è proiettato sul pavimento un video realizzato da Saadia Gacem e dall'artista Sofiane Zouggar: *Gestes d'archives* [**fig. 3**].

5 Le *moudjahidate* (plurale di *moudjahida*) sono le combattenti della guerra di indipendenza algerina (1954-62).

Il video mostra mani nude che aprono scatole e dispongono i documenti a uno a uno su un tappeto. È il tentativo di restituire un rapporto intimo e di familiarità con questi archivi, di farne emergere la materialità e l'ingaggio fisico e affettivo che con essi si può stabilire.

Entrambi i contro-archivi producono uno slittamento importante dell'architettura dell'archivio, da ufficiale e istituzionale a domestica e incarnata, anche in risposta alla difficoltà di accesso ai propri archivi istituzionali, come nel caso dell'Algeria, o alla totale mancanza nel caso della comunità nera olandese. Esaminare gli archivi, scrive Mbembe (2002), significa essere interessati a ciò che la vita ha lasciato indietro, essere interessati al debito. Per il filosofo camerunense è proprio l'annullamento del debito che lo stato persegue nel suo modo di comporre la storia, con i frammenti di memoria che sceglie, annullando la differenza tra vittime e carnefici. Sulla riapertura di questo debito, insoluto e forse insolvibile, sembrano insistere queste azioni che perseguono la possibilità di riscrivere la propria storia, come soggetti attivi, a partire dalle mancanze, per fare i conti con ciò che è assente, con la materia spettrale che costituisce gli archivi. «L'archivio è tutto un avere a che fare con i morti-viventi. È infuso dalla presenza di ciò che è assente e dall'assenza di ciò che è presente»[6] (Harris 2014); ciò che è andato perduto, disperso o dislocato si riconfigura come aspetto essenziale di questi progetti.

4 Riconfigurare, reinventare e fabulare con l'archivio

Il contro-archivio è spesso un'entità instabile e incompleta, in continua contestazione ed espansione. Come strategia artistica esso raggiunge nuovi territori e, tra alterazione e fabbricazione, sfida la storia maggiore, incoraggiando l'«anarchivismo» (Kashmere 2010). Questo spirito caratterizza il lavoro aperto da *Borrowed Faces* (2017-in corso) del collettivo Fehras Publishing Practices, fondato a Berlino nel 2015 da Sami Rustom, Omar Nicolase e Kenan Darwich, tre artisti queer richiedenti asilo. Nello spazio ex industriale di Hafenstrasse, il grande ambiente dedicato a *Borrowed Faces* si apre con alcune postazioni informatiche che permettono di navigare dentro un archivio digitale che raccoglie materiali sulla storia dell'edizione in lingua araba, tra Mediterraneo, Nord Africa e diaspora africana. Scegliendo diversi filtri di ricerca (anni, regione, personaggi ecc.) si accede alle schede, che descrivono accuratamente la collezione tra periodici, riviste, libri e altri prodotti editoriali, provenienti da soffitte, librerie, magazzini tra Beirut, Damasco e Berlino. Il periodo storico su cui si concentra il lavoro a *documenta fifteen* è quello della Guerra Fredda,

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[6] Ove non diversamente indicato, tutte le traduzioni sono a cura dell'Autrice.

tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta del Novecento, in cui da un lato la propaganda sovietica, dall'altro la ricerca di un'egemonia culturale americana agiscono profondamente sulla regione.

In quegli anni si costruiscono le condizioni della globalizzazione, in uno dei momenti considerati tra i più fertili e allo stesso tempo critici della storia dell'editoria araba. Beirut e il Cairo si popolano di librerie e tipografie, grazie al sostegno delle università istituite dalle

potenze coloniali o alle iniziative delle famiglie d'élite.[7] Proprio a Beirut è ambientato il fotoromanzo che completa il progetto, il cui secondo numero è stampato su grandi pannelli, che perimetrano lo spazio adiacente alle postazioni informatiche. Già nel primo numero di *Borrowed Faces* [figg. 4a-b], un'estetica pop, coloratissima lascia immergere i lettori nella storia di tre giovani donne provenienti da diverse regioni del mondo arabo e ritrovatesi a Beirut negli anni Cinquanta.

I personaggi sono fittizi, interpretati dai fondatori del collettivo, che si fotografano in abiti femminili. Seguendo le loro storie emergono notizie reali sugli attori culturali della regione, sulle uscite editoriali, sulle politiche americane del *Franklin Book Programs* e quelle russe del *Soviet Book Market*, sulle ambiguità e conflittualità che esse generavano. La seconda parte, realizzata per Kassel, racconta con lo stesso stile del movimento di solidarietà afroasiatico e le sue pratiche editoriali, indagando anche il contro-progetto finanziato dalla CIA, il Congresso per la libertà culturale e le sue intromissioni nella produzione culturale. La narrazione si sviluppa tra il Cairo, Beirut, Bandung, Roma, Parigi, New York e Mosca, intessuta grazie a una riunione femminista sul ruolo delle intellettuali donne durante gli anni Sessanta del Novecento.

In questo lavoro, il cui titolo dichiara già una reazione alla cancellazione, la raccolta e la digitalizzazione dei documenti, tra i più deperibili e inaccessibili, permette un'accurata articolazione e ricostruzione di un contesto e di una storia minore che non si ferma alla dimostrazione del vero, per invischiarsi nel verosimile della fabulazione. Ciò in prima istanza denuncia che ogni collezione e catalogazione racconta una storia che non è mai innocente e spinge il limite, per mettere in discussione le storie dominanti che hanno plasmato gli immaginari. Fehras scrive: «L'archivio è la febbre della modernità – ma esso è abbastanza per appropriarci delle storie che hanno costruito ciò che siamo? Come possiamo veramente riappropriarcene?» (ruangrupa 2022, 100)

Nel tentativo di problematizzare e far proprie le narrazioni che li hanno formati, riaffermano un legame queer e non binario con questa eredità. Queer è soprattutto l'atteggiamento non ortodosso in cui l'archivio nutre la 'fiction' e viceversa. Questa strategia fa pensare a quella della studiosa Saidiya Hartman (2021), che con la sua fabulazione critica aggira i vuoti degli archivi della schiavitù, ad esempio provando a inventare più versioni della stessa storia di una ragazza uccisa sul ponte di una nave, laddove di lei non resta che una riga su un atto di tribunale. Contro-agire, contro-archiviare, riscrivere per animare oltre: «È una cosa che si prende e si dà... una negoziazione. Contro gli un-commons» (Kashmere 2010), contro lo spossessamento.

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7 Contestualizzazione storica fornita dagli artisti nel dossier di presentazione della ricerca condiviso con l'autrice, in una corrispondenza tra febbraio e marzo 2024.

5   Rifuggire l'archivio

Al piano superiore di Hafenstrasse, una grande sala, con una più piccola stanza adiacente, è dedicata al terzo e più radicale dei casi scelti: *Frictional Conversation*, un progetto di ricerca artistica di Yasmina Eid-Sabbagh, condotto insieme ad alcuni residenti di Burj al-Shamali,[8] un campo rifugiati palestinese nel sud del Libano, esistente dal 2001 e ancora aperto. L'artista lavora e abita per anni nel campo, cominciando a indagare il rapporto tra le persone e i loro archivi persi. Ben presto si rende conto che le persone, seppur per frammenti, avevano potuto portare con sé importanti collezioni e si dedica alla loro localizzazione e alla tessitura di relazioni.

Lo scopo diventa creare un deposito digitale che possa rispondere all'urgenza di nuove pratiche di memoria contro la cancellazione, rifuggendo la logica coloniale dell'archivio. Il processo è fatto di incontri e lunghe conversazioni attorno ai materiali di famiglia. Ad esempio, quelli che Hasna Abou Kharoub custodiva in una grande valigia nera, aperta durante la notte, perché nessuno disturbasse le loro sessioni, ripetute per mesi.

Un rituale in cui dalle fotografie scaturivano storie, silenzi, emozioni, oppure un tergiversare, per non soffermarsi su certi soggetti, su certi momenti. Il rifiuto è registrato al pari di altre testimonianze, in questo caso con la scelta di scansionare i negativi a bassa risoluzione, menzionando la loro esistenza nei registri, ma senza svelare i loro contenuti visivi e i relativi livelli emotivi (Eid-Sabbagh 2019). Le fotografie sono trattate come sostanze multistrato, formate da un oggetto fisico, di per sé già composto, portatore di diversi strati meta-mediali. Di conseguenza, una registrazione sonora, come quella del fotografo del campo che dichiara di non poter cedere le immagini che conserva perché appartengono alle persone ritratte, è pensata come una versione di quelle stesse fotografie, così come il relativo negativo e la stampa. Il deposito non è mai stato reso pubblico, vi hanno accesso solo l'artista e le persone coinvolte. Negli anni è stato mostrato, in alcune sue parti, attraverso interventi performativi[9] capaci di stare nelle tensioni tra emersione e sparizione

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[8]   I primi arrivi e accampamenti risalgono al 1948, anno della *nakba*, il primo esodo del popolo palestinese che pianta le tende informalmente in questa cittadina non lontana dal confine. Nel 1954 l'UNRWA lo riconosce come campo ufficiale. Successivamente, vista la crisi e la guerra in Siria, il campo ha accolto anche rifugiati siriani. Nonostante l'ONU abbia sancito il diritto al ritorno di queste persone in patria, a tutt'oggi esse vivono rifugiate in questo e molti altri campi in Libano e disseminati nella regione.

[9]   Alcuni dei luoghi in cui è stato presentato *33' – Elements for a Performative Intervention*: Museum of Contemporary Art, 3rd Contemporary Art Biennial, Thessaloniki, Grecia, settembre 2011; 4th Riwaq Biennial, Jerusalem Show VI for Qalandiya International 1 *Gestures in Time*, Abwein, Palestina novembre 2012; Les Halles de Schaerbeek, Bruxelles, dicembre 2012; Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Parigi, maggio 2015.

e nell'impossibilità della piena rappresentazione, risollevando interrogativi sulla violenza coloniale degli archivi, non volendo nutrire gli immaginari stereotipici sui rifugiati. Durante una performance al MACBA di Barcellona l'artista percorre lo spazio con un piccolo proiettore, per sette volte si ferma a enunciare sette futuri possibili per la collezione e ne lascia vedere dei frammenti.[10] E se essa fosse sepolta sotto il soggiorno di Hasna Abou Kharoub in una capsula del tempo, facendo affiorare solo la domanda: quale futuro è ancora possibile immaginare in un campo profughi? Oppure, se le fotografie dentro la stessa capsula decidessero autonomamente di alterarsi a vicenda con le muffe o il rumore di fondo? Se così non fosse nel 2024, quando un gruppo di archeologi le ritroverà, dovrà necessariamente arrendersi di fronte alla negazione di integrarsi alle logiche istituzionali (Eid-Sabbagh 2017).

Ogni apparizione è concordata e negoziata con le persone coinvolte, che diventano coautori dei processi di rappresentazione anziché continuare a subirli. Durante i cento giorni di *documenta fifteen* questo processo continua, un gruppo di abitanti di Burj al-Shamali insieme all'artista lavorano ad altre possibili ri-materializzazioni della collezione. Per alcune ore al giorno invitano il pubblico a unirsi a momenti di condivisione. Si accede alla stanza senza scarpe, per camminare o stendersi su un pavimento completamente ricoperto da tappeti persiani, al centro un grande pianoforte e altri strumenti dislocati nella sala vengono suonati da musicisti. *Sonic re-materialization*, una delle performance previste nello spazio, è stata il tentativo di tradurre attraverso il suono le conversazioni avvenute durante le giornate passate a discutere delle fotografie. Un altro momento di condivisione passava attraverso il cibo: in *Culinary re-materialization*, si cucina e mangia insieme conversando.[11] Tutte tattiche per la ricerca di altre materialità per un archivio che non vuole esporsi in quanto tale, ma si incarna e interroga la responsabilità di ciascuno.

Dopo i cento giorni nella stanza rimanevano fruibili alcune tracce, gli strumenti musicali potevano eventualmente essere suonati da chi attraversava le sale, tra i tappeti erano custoditi dei piccoli fogli, stralci di conversazioni sulle fotografie, oppure la trascrizione di alcune registrazioni fatte al campo, che venivano diffuse grazie a delle casse. Nella piccola sala adiacente, quasi completamente al buio, veniva diffusa una trasmissione radiofonica, una registrazione effettuata nei cento giorni, in cui il gruppo sperimenta ancora un'altra

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10   Gli interventi performativi si sono svolti nel contesto della mostra *Against Photography. An Annotated History of the Arab Image Foundation* tenutasi al Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Barcellona (MACBA) da aprile a settembre 2017.

11   Le informazioni sono dedotte da un'intervista dell'artista rilasciata all'Autrice il 4 aprile 2024.

forma di rimaterializzazione sonora, ispirandosi al desiderio di creare una radio nel campo. Lo script era già stato elaborato tempo prima dall'artista, tra i futuri possibili, Leyla (personaggio di finzione) propone un programma di sette giorni per riportare le conversazioni intorno alla collezione di fotografie. Quanto è difficile ascoltare le foto di un massacro familiare? O quanto è udibile la gioia di uno zio e di suo nipote che mangiano frutti appena raccolti dall'albero?[12]

6   Segni comuni e risonanze

Ognuna delle esperienze ricercate e descritte è profondamente situata in un contesto geografico, politico, sociale ed è diretta espressione di istanze specifiche: la riemersione, il riconoscimento di storie considerate minori, quelle del femminismo algerino o quella dell'editoria araba, il recupero e la trasmissione di saperi ed esistenze, come quelle delle comunità nere in Olanda, l'elaborazione di nuove politiche della memoria palestinese. Ciascuno di questi progetti sceglie formalizzazioni e linguaggi che talvolta si somigliano: contro-archivi che raccolgono documenti, fonti audiovisive, che danno vita a mostre, progetti editoriali. O ancora archivi digitali e processi performativi tra conversazioni, collezione e rimaterializzazione. Ognuna di queste pratiche ha tanto a che fare con la creazione di archivi, quanto con lo smantellamento del dispositivo normativo e di controllo, pensato dai potenti per decidere cosa ricordare e cosa lasciare all'oblio.

Quando James Clifford (1993) interroga la tendenza a raccogliere, classificare, categorizzare, non può che rilevare che essi non sono di per sé prerogativa occidentale, lo diventano quando a questi si associa l'accumulazione e la preservazione, piuttosto che la redistribuzione, o ancora un sistema ordinatorio basato su una nozione lineare di temporalità. Nella lunga storia coloniale, l'archivio, con il suo sistema tassonomico, è stato il miglior alleato per la tipizzazione dell'altro attraverso l'occhio fotografico, per appropriarsi dei suoi oggetti e, isolandoli dal loro contesto, istituzionalizzare l'alterità. Caratteristica fondamentale era la recisione del sistema di relazioni che aveva prodotto oggetti e documenti, per reinserirli in un ordine nuovo.

Il discorso che si articola attraverso questi lavori presentati alla *documenta fifteen* disobbedisce a tali norme, proponendo di volta in volta opzioni e visioni decoloniali (Mignolo 2011). È una disobbedienza in primis al meccanismo di silenziamento ed esclusione, con una presa di parola che si dà nella possibilità di tornare a essere soggetti della propria storia. Gli atti e i documenti non sono più scindibili

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12   Si tratta di frasi pronunciate da Leyla nella registrazione ascoltata dall'autrice durante la visita di *documenta fifteen*.

dalle reti relazionali che li hanno prodotti, che diventano di fatto il centro stesso dell'altro racconto. Al patrimonio con dubbia ricaduta pubblica e scarsa accessibilità si risponde con pratiche di *lumbung*, di messa in comune, in cui cade la sequenza lineare tra catalogazione, conservazione, fruizione per una costante disseminazione e redistribuzione, con più mezzi possibili, il digitale, i social network, le edizioni, le mostre, le performance, i programmi pubblici. È una disobbedienza nei confronti delle architetture degli archivi tradizionalmente imponenti, tortuose e respingenti, che si fanno familiari, intime, immersive.

Per Mbembe (2002, 209) il vero potere degli archivi risiede nella loro duale natura materiale e immateriale, nella possibilità di trascendere l'architettura e il documento per istituire immaginari. A questa possibilità non si rinuncia, ma la si ribalta con altre architetture per altri immaginari. Così assistiamo all'invenzione di materialità come quella dell'incontro, del cibo e del suono. L'oralità è al centro di *Frictional Conversation* per respingere l'occhio fotografico su cui l'imperialismo si è costituito (Azoulay 2019). La frizione è tra il rifiuto dell'immagine e le agentività del suono, le risonanze, gli echi possibili che esso produce per amplificare i processi di emancipazione (Labelle 2018).

Gli immaginari così mutano, si 'queerizzano', per narrare, fabulare e speculare su futuri possibili. In questo rinsaldarsi, diluirsi, osmotizzarsi di pratiche della memoria che propongono altre forme di implicazione con il passato, gli archivi si fanno strumento per le lotte del presente e sito di futurità. Forse il più potente atto di disobbedienza epistemica è contro la linearità del tempo.

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In Their Own Words: Disseminating Feminist Self-Art Histories in Sound Archives

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Abstract   In 2009, artist Marysia Lewandowska began digitizing and sharing the Women Audio Archive (WAA) online. Begun in 1983 and conducted until the early 1990s, the WAA is a sound archive containing around 120 hours of public and private conversations recorded by the artist between London, the United States, and Canada with a Sony Walkman WM-F1 cassette player. The WAA embodies the trajectory of feminist interview and oral history practices of the 1970s in an exemplary way, deliberately exploiting the potential of analog recording technology to capture traditionally marginalized voices of art and social history. Considering the obsolescence of recording technologies and dissemination channels, this paper interrogates the historical forms of accessibility to feminist art practices of self-historicization and calls for reflection on the shift that the digitization of these sound documents entails. Particular attention will be given to the historical negotiations of intellectual co-ownership and the contemporary contexts in which private analogue sound archives can become public and open source following their digitization.

Keywords   Feminist art interview. Feminist oral art history. Feminist conversations in visual arts. Marysia Lewandowska. Cindy Nemser. Nazli Madkour. Helen Khal. Eleanor Munro.

Summary   1 Feminist Q&A. – 2 Speech-to-Text. – 3 Self-History or History of the Self. – 4 Collecting Art Talks. – 5 The Missing Voice. – 6 Public Playback. – 7 Conclusions.

> When we talk of recording history, we do not necessarily think of it as evidence. But a large part of that evidence is already edited, if not missing.
>
> (Marysia Lewandowska, *Speaking, the Holding of Breath / A Conversation Between Marysia Lewandowska and Caroline Wilkinson*, 1990)

> We hesitated to publish these interviews in this way. We know we are taking a risk by leaving them exactly as they were said. [...] This work of putting them in order would have been an act of censorship whose effect would have been to hide what is undoubtedly essential [...]. The essential is what we did not want to say but what was said without our knowledge, in the failures of clear, limpid, and easy speech, in all tongue slips.
>
> (Xavière Gauthier and Marguerite Duras, *Woman to Woman*, [1974] 1987)

Since 2015,[1] eighty-two sound files from the *Women's Audio Archive* (WAA) have been publicly available online.[2] Founded in London in 1985 by artist Marysia Lewandowska (Szczecin, Poland, 1955), the WAA was conceived as an analog collection of conversations recorded with a Sony Walkman WM-F1. Up to the early 1990s, Lewandowska's sound archive inscribed itself in a critical genealogy of feminist oral history. The cassettes keep track of dialogical reflections on feminist theory, collective organization, the functioning of the art system, and its alternatives, creating a sound record whose storytelling relies on the historical and aural performance of the voice.

Conversations as a means for art writing came to feminism in a variety of ways. Undervalued in the academic sphere, interviews flourished in feminist art practices of the 1970s and largely contributed to critical revisions of objectivity and authorship in art writing. For feminist art criticism and history, conversations allowed the renegotiation of power dynamics in public speech away from the mainstream media and the production of new collective approaches to art epistemologies.

In the following pages, we will explore how feminist art conversations serve as unedited carriers of voices to preserve art history in

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1 This essay resorts to sound documents alongside the cited bibliography. In particular: Olivia Alexandra Fahmy's conversation with the artist Nazli Madkour (2024); conversations between the authors and Marysia Lewandowska (2023; 2024); sound files of conversations recorded by Marysia Lewandowska for the *Women's Audio Archive* (in the text indicated as WAA); interviews conducted by Cindy Nemser (Getty Museum Archive); the radio series *Women in the Arts* by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro (Pacifica Audio Archives), and the magazine *Audio Arts* (Tate Archives). Mention is also made of the podcasts *Recording Artists: Radical Women* by Helen Molesworth and *Bow Down: Women in Art* by Jennifer Higgie.

2 The Women's Audio Archives are hosted online by the Library and Archives of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York.

the making and counter the scarcity of historical sources (Bard et al. 2023; Bly, Wooten 2013; Malhotra, Carrillo 2013). Taped conversations function, in this context, as much as a documentary act and as an act of presence, which the audio recorder allows to re-present and play back (Couzins 2022, 36-7).

Whether transcribed or kept as sound documents, from the 1970s to the inception of the WAA in the mid-1980s, feminist art interviews have combined alternative visions of contemporary and historical art with an unprecedented transdisciplinary ability to bring together methodologies from cultural journalism, feminist oral history in the social sciences, and activist self-archiving through recording technologies. This plural weaving of sources, voices, and references is reflected in the case studies featured in this essay, which considers both transcribed interviews and sound documents disseminated in the feminist art press (*Feminist Art Journal*), the anthologies that collected tape-based interviews in print form,[3] radio experiments (Radio Pacifica) and sound archives (WAA). Through the WAA, we will be able to observe the trajectory of these feminist forms of art history writing up to their recent resurgence in the context of digital archives and podcasts to interrogate their contemporary relevance in the critique of canonical art history.

1 Feminist Q&A

Conversational art practices have evolved amid what Christopher Grobe (2017, 6-7) describes as a "confessional turn" in art, when recording technologies enabled the capturing of "private selves [...] in public performances". Although related to specific dialogic protocols, publicly performing and recording one's self offered alternatives to more structured survey and Q&A forms dominating the so-called "interview society" (Atkinson, Silverman 1997).

The "culture of questioning" acquired unprecedented breadth in the 1950s and 1970s, at the same time when artists' interviews got increasingly mediatized (Gelshorn 2012; Wuggenig 2007). The hypervisibility of video and print interviews with contemporary artists such as Francis Bacon, Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol contributed to the commercialization of their voice, giving access to primary information with exceptional accuracy (Gelshorn 2012; Miller 2007; Wolf 2020).

Simultaneously and more critically, recording conversations unsettled singular authority because of its dialogical outset. Interviews shifted the writer's position as the "true interpreter" of the artist's

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3 Khal 1988; Madkour 1991; Munro 1979; Nemser 1975.

work and challenged critics' claims of "objective and disinterested universality" (Jones 2012, 27). In inheriting from the decentred form of writing proper to interviews, feminist dialogues shattered the canonical critical judgment that equated objectivity with renouncing personal experience. Encouraging a conscious co-authorial position, the personal is accounted for as a source for inclusive art discursivity where recourse to the spoken word, recalls Sherna Gluck (1977, 3), was one such means to refuse "to be historically voiceless" and redefine what reverts to "historical importance".

Gluck's assertion weaves a direct link between the pioneering phase of oral history in the 1930s and the new feminist positioning of the discipline in the 1970s, not least through an unparalleled technological acceleration of sound recording (Ventrella 2021, 50-3). Back in the 1930s, the realization that technologies such as the telephone had an impact on reducing journal writing and paper-based correspondence invited social scientists to produce their own sound documents. Translated into the sphere of the visual arts, these observations fitted into a dense web of experiments at the crossroads between activism, artistic practice, and feminist interventions in art history.

2 Speech-to-Text

To track art conversations through the feminist press is to witness how aspirations to self-archiving emerge across conceptual approaches to information and institutional critique. In the 1970s, countless data and images on women artists were collected and disseminated as reports or published in new scholarly journals and art magazines. International networks including WEB – West-East Bag (1971-73) acted as paper-based databases to gather information through slide registries and newsletters devoted to women artists. Archival initiatives, such as the Feminist Library in London, established documentation centres and structured library projects. Parallel to this, transhistorical group exhibitions set up the institutional frameworks where women's art practices could exist as aesthetic and research subjects (Dumont, Sofio 2007; Nochlin, Harris Sutherland 1976; Vergine 1980).

Amid this collective effort of self-history, conversational practices combined with editorial and curatorial projects to preserve and review ongoing reflections, research findings, and practices. As Zapperi (2013, 7) highlights, this context where the subjective and affective bond enabled feminist artists, art historians and historians' desire for memory and knowledge to situate itself in their specific historical condition. Where feminist documentation centres laid the foundations for safeguarding the work of historical and contemporary women artists, the rich production of journals confronted the silences of official art history at the accelerated temporality of the

periodical. There, interviews provided an essential methodology to record art history in women's own words.

In January 1970, art critic and feminist activist Cindy Nemser (New York, USA, 1937-2021) recorded a conversation with artist Eva Hesse (Hamburg, Germany, 1936-New York, USA, 1970) in her studio at 134 Bowery in New York. An art historian by training, Nemser had come to feminist commitment through reporting from and eventually actively participating in the feminist collective WAR – Women Artists in Revolution. In 1970, she launched a survey titled *Forum: Women and Art*, in which she questioned gender politics in the art world. Hesse, one of the circa fifty questionnaire respondents, replied to the question, "How do you feel about the position of women in the art world today?" with a controversial and notorious sentence: "Excellence has no sex" (Nemser 1975, 9).

Nemser's assessment of the responses to her questionnaire was harsh. This was, perhaps not surprisingly, her only quantitative and collective survey experience, which preluded to an intensive interview practice with individual artists. The body of conversations also included two fictitious interviews – *Interview with an Anonymous Artist* (1970a) and *Interview with Successful Women Artist* (1972) – which summarize Nemser's vision of the actual conditions of women's art in a collective persona. Many of these preliminary insights converged in the editorial plan for the *Feminist Art Journal*, which she co-founded with art historian Patricia Mainardi (Paterson, NJ, USA, 1942) and artist Irene Moss (1927-2012) in 1972.

Hesse and Nemser met three times in 1970 to record an interview for *Artforum* (Nemser 1970b). A second, revised interview version was released in 1973 in the *Feminist Art Journal* when Hesse's retrospective exhibition was held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (Nemser 1973). Finally, the conversation was included in the anthology *Art Talks* (Nemser 1975). This recorded encounter constitutes a unique resource for the study of feminist interviews. Along with the original sound file, we have access to three distinct transcripts of the conversation aimed at feminist and art press. The three versions of the interview released between 1970 and 1975 reveal different editorial stands and narrative flows. The orientation of the text – interview or conversation – is defined through the fine-tuning of the spoken word, the silences, and the discursive circularities that orality implies in the search for a dynamic balance "between extreme precision and spontaneity" (Nemser 1975, 5).

The *Artforum* interview focused on Hesse's vocabulary and references, progressing from influences on her artistic work – "Do you identify with any particular school of painting?" – to the elaboration of an original language – "Is there another work that particularly embodies your impulses towards contradictions?" (Nemser 1970b, 59). The text questions Hesse's place in art history and the network of

intellectual and artistic affinities established through her practice. Nemser's short questions clarify or complete an unfolding thought. No concrete biographical data regarding education and life experience is shared in this version, if not by ellipsis (Nemser 1970b, 62-3). Only the expanded text published in the *Feminist Art Journal* addresses the artist's biographical experience at length. Nemser re-edited the tapes ("Hopefully, the entire tape will be made available to the public at a future date", Nemser 1973, 13), embodying aesthetic statements in raw and direct language. Hesse's answers were extensive, though the transcription still renounces the reciprocity the original sound file revealed, eliminating laughter and hesitation.

Ultimately, a new version of Hesse's interview was included in the *Art Talk* (Nemser 1975) in a longer form. Here, Nemser's voice and personal recollections of encounters with Hesse's work are conjugated in the first-person singular. To this more subjective voice responded the last, incomplete lines of Hesse's journal in May 1970, shortly before her premature death: "I have not not [*sic*] kept writing. I will try a tape recorder after I get one", followed by "I did a tape interview with Cindy Nemser—3 different days would say each day—" (Hesse 2016, 887). The impossibility of self-recording transfers the storytelling role from Hesse to Nemser. It condenses in the long dash the potential transcriptions to come from the last tape containing Hesse's voice.

3   Self-History or History of the Self

By examining language and historical contexts, feminist interviews aim to identify the circumstances by which women's voices can access public debate, be recorded and preserved for posterity (Malhotra, Rowe Carrillo 2013; Olsen 1978; Sandino, Partington 2013). Far from being a mere art writing method, the conversation is a tool and premise for "collectivizing knowledge", disrupting "our own assumptions by staging an encounter between various voices and positions" (Horne, Tobin 2017, 33). The aim is not only to record and evidence women artists' practices. As artist Yvonne Rainer (2008, 8) highlights, "stolen moments, appropriated knowledge, quoted references, reported conversation" constitute the dialogical environment where new discursive art practices develop and become visible.

This desire for a multi-faceted and collective discursiveness is also reflected in the anthologies of feminist interviews, which provide a privileged site for observing the feminist epistemological drive to transform and pluralize the critical act (Lonzi [1969] 2010). When collected, feminist conversations give way to a contextualized and polyphonic perspective on art history. Many interview anthologies have a thesis (to prove the existence of women artists), a documentary goal

(to archive the history of women in their own words), a pedagogical purpose (to constitute the materials necessary for teaching the art of women artists) and the awareness that, when dispersed in the feminist art press, the existence of these dialogical acts is volatile. In *Originals: American Women Artists* by Eleanor Munro (New York, USA, 1928-Rye, NH, USA, 2022), orality defines a new field of art history that places the personal and the subjective at the centre of the "imaginative work" (Munro 1979, 18-19). What is distinctive about Munro's book is its deliberate intention to write a history of art from interviews, which are quoted but not reproduced in their entirety. On this ground, Munro rejects the role of the "objective interviewer" to adopt the self-analytical position of the "empowered art critic":

> I spoke with each artist from one to five or six hours. I asked the subjects, however short an interview we were going to have, to talk in a circular way beginning with early memories and ending in the present. (Munro 1979, 20)

Along these lines, Munro makes the conversation's dialogical dimension tangible, while restructuring it to serve her narrative plan.

4 Collecting Art Talks

In a valuable double review of Munro and Nemser's books, Margot Kriel (1980) delivers a rare comparative analysis of feminist interview styles. At the time of the review, Kriel was an art historian and professor affiliated with the Women's Studies Program at the University of Minnesota. In 1978, she conceived a transdisciplinary course on women's painting, music, and literature and started a long-time collaboration with *WARM – Journal of the Women Art Registry in Minnesota*. Through this experience she gained hands-on knowledge about the biases at work when collecting "the raw material of history" through interviews and discovering "a hidden legacy" of women artists (Kriel 1980, 60-1). It is, however, on the biographical level that Kriel expresses her hesitation when she notes that Munro and Nemser's interviews "read like stories" and seem inclined towards "increasing our awareness" through codified narrative models that leave the artists' work in the background (Kriel 1980, 62-3). Mainstream art criticism's preoccupation with the subjectivity of the interview is here rephrased in feminist terms with the concern about losing the individuality of the artistic practice in favour of exemplarity. Although much feminist work of the 1970s was understandably devoted to "recovering from revisited archives a substantial and consistent record of women artists across all ages and cultures", the aim was not to create new categories but to dissolve

"a fixed categorization – a 'stereotype' – for all that women artists have done" (Parker, Pollock 2013, xvii, 3). This implies, on the one hand, putting on record the history of contemporary women artists and, secondly, producing "diverse records" of women's artistic activities (Pollock 2003, 34).

More or less consciously, the interview collection's tendency to prove a thesis on women's artistic creation challenged the singularity of the spoken word and its legitimacy in rendering the stakes of individual art practices. If the result is not always or necessarily essentialist, losing sight of the singularity of the artist's work sometimes strays from the objective of documenting an aesthetic method to produce quantitative evidence of women's creativity. Still, as is also evident in the critical corpus of women artists' voices assembled by artists Helen Khal (Allentown, PA, USA, 1923-Ajaltoun, Lebanon, 2009) and Nazli Madkour (Cairo, Egypt, 1949), the quantitative perspective seems indispensable when bringing the continuity of women's contribution to art history is a priority. Even more so when, as with Khal and Madkour, the question of sexual difference openly meets the project of writing a post-colonial art history.

We read in Khal's (1988) introduction to *Women Artists in Lebanon* that her research aims to trace the historical development and document the present of women's artistic participation in Lebanon. An artist herself, Khal is a peer of the artists she encounters and benefits from insider information on the topic she analyses, with methods akin to social science investigation. Preparing her interviews with questionnaires enabled her to move away from the cultural journalism and self-analysis methods adopted by Munro and Nemser. As for *Women Artists in Egypt*, recounts Madkour, the origin of the project is in the impulse of Nawal El Saadawi (Kafr Tahla, Egypt, 1931-Cairo, Egypt, 2021) to produce history books on women in different fields of knowledge (Fahmy 2024, recording). Madkour confronted the task as an amateur historian, passing through the orality of preparatory conversations as a premise for inviting the artists to write self-presentations (Fahmy 2024, recording). Neither for Khal nor for Madkour the end result is an interview. The questions serve to pave the way for the creation of a dialogic self-portrait.

First published in Arabic, the English edition of *Women Artists in Egypt* includes an augmented introduction. This includes a critical statement on the difference between Egyptian women artists' experience and that of their "Western sisters" as described in Linda Nochlin's landmark essay *Why Haven't There Been Great Women Artists?* (Atallah 2020, 11; Madkour 1991, 8; Nochlin 1971). The commentary on Nochlin's text also recurs in the introductions by Nemser (with polemic) and Munro (with praise). Across the multiplicity of responses to Nochlin, the conversation proves the ability to provide interviewers room to formulate their own answers and theoretical positions.

5 The Missing Voice

For the Women's Audio Archive, Marysia Lewandowska imagines a logo made of three concentric circles with a semicircle evocative of an ear in the middle. In the first essay on the WAA, a brief statement situates the prerogatives of the archive in the "impossible task" of unravelling "the knot of the relationship of language/voice/power" (Lewandowska 1990, 55). A brief statement situates the archive in the "impossible task" of untangling "the knot of the relationship of language/voice/power", followed by a text laid out in two columns (55). On the left is Lewandowska's first-person writing, and on the right is a dialogue with artist Caroline Wilkinson. Each section follows its own temporality and sense of reading, inviting the voices to overlap in a non-linear narrative.

Lewandowska came to sound out of interest "in language and the construction of historical evidence" (Lander, Lexier 1990, 377). With a background in textiles and art history, her definitive inscription in art practice finally occurred in London, where she arrived in 1982. One year later, Lewandowska joined the Banff Centre in Canada for a seven-month residency, where she participated in a two-week workshop on recording with John Cage and met artists such as Barbara Kruger and Allan Kaprow. Back in London, she recalls, the creation of the WAA served as a way to claim a space for herself in the local art scene: "I quickly realized that in coming on behalf of the Women's Audio Archive, I was self-instituting myself" (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording).

The conversations prompted and recorded by Lewandowska document artistic practices and feminist engagement. The meetings occur in studios or public spaces and follow a loose structure. The aim is to "shatter language" and find a discourse closer to the body (Lewandowska 1990, 56). The linguistic desire to explore "the privilege of truth" is coupled with the archival need to preserve artistic projects that are doubly volatile due to technological obsolescence and a structural lack of listening to women's voices (Lewandowska 1990, 56).

Archiving conversations allows for both the collection of information and experience – "By means of recording, conversation represents time. It enters history. It articulates history" – as much as memory formation in the listener (Lewandowska 1990, 60). The records assembled in the WAA are historical and sound matters that convey information and evoke memory without concealing the subjective nature of the operation. The archive thus cumulates different functions of oral history in the visual arts. The tapes bear a specific sound aesthetics; they chronicle art history; they document displacement and new contested identities in artistic scenes, working on the register of "affective resonance" and memory (Sandino, Partington 2013, 5). Situating oneself "in", "about", and "nearby" what is recorded opens

up the possibility of studying conversations as "extensions" of the artistic process beyond their documentary value. Nevertheless, once the voices are on the record, how to "voice the archive"? (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording).

6 Public Playback

Between 1983 and 1990, when the WAA was being made, Lewandowska recalls carrying her Sony Walkman everywhere, relishing the possibility of publicly recording in a protected manner, though not without apprehension (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording). She would tape public talks, hiding the microphone in her sleeve or purse. Later, when digitizing the tapes in 2009, the sound engineer told her that emotion or anxiety was audible in her sound files (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording). The noises and rustlings in the sound file testify to a specific economy of truth related to the artist's experience in Poland in the years immediately preceding the 1982 martial law, where "recording in public was not well tolerated" and "everyone was self-archiving":

> Everyone gave you their version of the truth, and you could only trust a few people around you. So, you had to find a way to verify what was true. (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023, recording)

The archived conversation establishes a "liquid" relationship with the present, from which it is possible to confront the voids of the past. With Italo Calvino, Lewandowska states: "It is not the voice that commands history, it is the ear" (Lewandowska 1990, 62). On this priority given to aurality, she lays the foundation for public accessibility of her archive.

The proximity of conversation to the sound arts, its format of "real intervention" rather than "reflection of an artistic event", confronts the artist's spoken word with the possibilities opened up by the storage and dissemination of material (Furlong 1994). The advent of the cassette prompted a shift from the live broadcasting of independent radio to the copying and multiplication of tapes. In 1973, William Furlong's *Audio Arts* magazine created a unique editorial platform that found in the audiotape the ideal vector for sound arts and the "unmediated voice of the artist" (Furlong 1994, 4). Volume 4 of *Audio Arts* includes two conversations on feminism in the visual arts: no. 1, titled *Feminist Issues in Contemporary Art* (1979), records an exchange between artist Margaret Harrison and curator Lucy Lippard; no. 3 records a discussion between artists Mary Kelly and Susan Hiller on *Women's Practices in Art* (1979) hosted by Conrad Atkinson. Conversation styles vary: Harrison and Lippard discuss freely, comparing

feminist experiences in the United States and Great Britain; in the case of Kelly and Hiller, the moderating role adopted by Atkinson orients the conversation towards the objective of documenting recent feminist struggles in the London art scene. Similarly, in some feminist radio experiments broadcasted live, the spoken word is taped to create a record that is eventually circulated in feminist documentation archives, as in the case of the five-episode broadcast *Women in the Arts* (1971) by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro for Pacifica Radio.

Recorded conversations interrogate the contexts in which live events are documented and their eventual retrievability. The WAA was first made available for research weekly in Lewandowska's studio in Shoreditch, London. The emphasis on listening in presence is consistent with the principle of the conversation. The playback function and its documentary value imply an embodied representation, though "the recording of the sound and the moment of replay does not share the same space and time" (Lewandowska 1990, 59). Replay means manifesting a historical voice in the public domain, a task that the WAA's online availability will reconfigure in Lewandowska's reflection on intellectual property and authorship.

It would not be until 2009 that the WAA will be recontextualized through the medium of the online archive. A corollary of the digitization of the tapes is the shift in the status of the archive from private to public. Together with her students at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, NY, in 2009, the artist contacted her conversation partners to negotiate the release of their voices under the Creative Commons license. All the bureaucratic passages performed in the process were carefully documented, providing a detailed record of the multiple forms of intellectual property each conversation was subject to, leading to retrospective negotiations with artists who conditioned permission for digital distribution on the re-listening and validation of the cassette (Enckell, Martini, Lewandowska 2023; Gausden 2015). Once in the public realm, listening to the WAA conversations is no longer contingent on the physical encounter in the artist's studio. Nevertheless, other forms of encounter, not least through the medium of the exhibition, are envisaged by Lewandowska. In 2015, for the show Renegotiations in Aukland, she employed materials from her recently digitized archive as a "source for imagining a fictional round table" (Enckell, Martini, Lewandoska 2024, recording).

7   Conclusions

Transcribed or aural, informational source or final object, the dialogical feminist acts analysed in the preceding pages retain a deliberate ambiguity between recording the event as it is and editing the sound file through montage or transcription. This ambiguity is sometimes reflected in the synonymous use of interview and conversation, two genres in which semantic areas broadly intersect without completely overlapping. In the transcription, the cursor shifts from conversation to interview depending on the editorial address and the negotiations between interviewer and interviewee. In lending themselves to capture a thought in the making, conversations facilitate a deliberately non-linear dialogical exchange that unravels the patriarchal structures of canonical art history. However, the presence of the recorder (Nemser 1972), the preparation through scripts or advance questions (Khal 1988), or the fact that certain artists are interviewed several times by different interviewers predisposes the setting of concepts in narration. Even the choice to transcribe in a register close to orality proves more the dialogical origin of the text than adherence to the as-told-to event. The risk of the search for authenticity hangs over artists' interviews, and the co-presence of those who produce the work and those who put its narration into dialogical form creates an inevitable expectation of truth. Barely touched by the precautionary mistrust of mainstream art criticism, the ambivalence of the interview remains unresolved outside feminist art practices, which are able to grasp its potential to produce new genealogies and terms for art history beyond the romanticism of genuineness. Moreover, this is partly because, in an activist context, the priority of recording as many vulnerable sources and voices as possible leaves limited time for theoretical reflection and critical archiving of methods.

Between the 1970s and the mid-1980s, interviewing was experienced as a means to bridge outward feminist activities (exhibitions, publishing, activism...) and inward feminist activities (self-consciousness sessions, community life...), corroborating the assumption that personal and artistic experience are inseparable (Paoli 2011, 17). The construction of this feminist alternative to art history meant earning awareness about the exclusionary dimension of the vocabulary and syntax used in art writing (DeVault 1990, 99). The prejudices to be countered applied as much to what was said through the semantic distortions of women's spoken words as to their voices, which historical and literary tropes represented as "apolitical and seductive" (Cavarero 2003). Considering women's voices as a form of relational knowledge that involves listening, feminist conversations thus revealed the systemic weave of these missed inscriptions in historical records (Lippard 1976; Nochlin 1971; Parker, Pollock 1999).

The transitions of recorded conversations from cassette to feminist art press and books tell of a multiplication of preservation strategies, the constant search for new audiences, and the anticipation of the obsolescence of historical analog archives that become again relevant today in the shift towards online repositories. In recent years, the digitization of sound recordings of feminist interviews, such as Cindy Nemser's files, has led to new conversational formats in podcasts. Notably, the Getty Archives have commissioned art historian Helen Molesworth to realize the first season of the podcast series *Recording Artists* (2019). Molesworth's season 1 includes six episodes, each providing a portrait of artists Alice Neel, Lee Krasner, Betye Saar, Helen Frankenthaler, Yoko Ono, and Eva Hesse using sound files of interviews made by Cindy Nemser and Barbara Rose (Washington, D.C., USA, 1936-Concord, NH, USA, 2020) in the 1970s. Like *Recording Artists* by Molesworth and Jennifer Higgie's *Bow Down* (2020), many contemporary feminist conversational practices mediated by the podcast straightforwardly address ways to make archives' contents public again and re-perform historical narratives from the present, emphasizing the significance of this reclamation of history.

However, the discursive potential of dialogical art writing often appears unresolved and remains partly unresolved in a study that, like ours, aims to locate the singularities of certain protagonists of conversational practices. Each interviewer and interviewee analysed in our essay vary in education, forms of feminist militancy, access to publishing platforms, and specific historical inscription in a given cultural context. Added to this is the academic resistance to oral sources, which has been resolved more readily by history than by art history, and the related difficulty in recognizing an epistemological autonomy to the conversation. To define the reasons for this academic reluctance, artist Patricia Norvell notes that the recorded dialogue is "information without analysis, without interpretation, without criticism" (Norvell 2001, XIV). In these threefold absences lurks the reserve about the deliberate subjectivity of feminist art conversations, and the more general reticence that hangs over self-produced forms of art writing. Often, as is also the case with the art historian Valentina Anker (Padua, Italy, 1938), interviews take place as a method to self-produce as comprehensive a study as possible on women artists outside an academic world, which is indifferent to this line of research. After failing to secure research funds for a national project on women artists in Switzerland, Anker published her interview collection, *La Relève des Muses: Entretiens avec des femmes artistes*. Her initial plan was to adopt social science methodologies, such as questionnaires, to extensively study women artists' practices and experiences. She then turned into an interview project facilitated by a network of supportive women, including Gilberte Gillioz, secretary of the art history department at

the University of Geneva, who helped conduct and transcribe the interviews in her free time.

Anker's experience, far from being unique, highlights a crucial aspect of feminist interviews, whether on tape or podcast. Conversations are, still today, a flexible tool for recording accounts that too often go unnoticed by conventional art history and search for visibility by reaching a broader audience. While the incorporation of sonic art into academic study and art history is still ongoing, cultural institutions have made significant strides in developing discursive programs and multimedia art criticism that enable feminist sound records to reemerge in the public realm. Although reproducing some of the historical forms of disappearance we have traced in this essay, the resurgence of these sound files allows us to insert contemporary conversational productions into a broader genealogy of feminist oral history practices and consolidate the legitimacy of art histories as told through the words of historical feminist practices.

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