Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive: An Ethnographic Reading of an Activist Archive

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RÉSUMÉ Les débats portant sur l'aspect politique des archives se centrent surtout sur le rôle des archives dans la production du savoir. La critique se concentre souvent sur le contrôle de l'information exercé par les archives et sur son utilisation pour maintenir le pouvoir de groupes privilégiés. Au cœur de ces débats, on discute souvent des archives institutionnelles (par exemple : le gouvernement, les universités, les organisations professionnelles) et, par conséquent, le pouvoir archivistique est conçu en général comme une domination. Dans cet article, je cherche à imaginer autrement l'aspect politique des archives à partir de la perspective des archives autonomes et à partir des pratiques archivistiques des activistes afin d'explorer le pouvoir archivistique comme une force habilitante. Je m'inspire des enquêtes sur le terrain de la *56a Infoshop Archive* et du *Southwark Notes Archive Group*, tous les deux de Londres, en Angleterre. En me servant d'une approche ethnographique, je me concentre sur la création des Archives et sur leur activation dans les luttes politiques, en examinant les liens entre l'action d'archiver, la production du savoir et les pratiques politiques. Je soutiens que les archives autonomes et activistes resituent les archives comme site clé du pouvoir politique, tout en renversant le rôle des archives comme outil de domination. En collectivisant la production du savoir et en fonctionnant comme espaces de responsabilisation, ces archives radicalisent l'aspect politique des archives et, de façon plus vaste, pointent vers des possibilités pour les politiques démocratiques.

ABSTRACT Debates about the politics of the archive centre largely on the archive's role in knowledge production. Often critiques focus on the archive's control of information and its use in maintaining privileged groups' power. Within these debates, it is often institutional archives (e.g., government, university, professional organizations) that are discussed and, as a result, archival power is largely conceived of as domination. In this article, I seek to re-imagine the politics of the archive from the perspective of autonomous archives and from activist archival practices in order to explore archival power as an enabling force. I draw upon fieldwork at the 56a Infoshop Archive and from the Southwark Notes Archive Group, both in London, England. Using an ethnographic approach, I focus on the formation of the Archive and its activation in political struggles, examining the relationship between archiving, knowledge production, and political practices. I argue that autonomous, activist archives reaffirm the archive as a key site of political power, yet at the same time they subvert the archive's role as a

tool of domination. By collectivizing knowledge production and operating as spaces of empowerment, these archives radicalize the politics of the archive and point to possibilities for democratic politics more broadly.

Introduction

Archiving is becoming an increasingly visible part of activist practice, pursued alongside and simultaneously with demonstrations, workshops, petitions, and other tactics. Groups are building upon a long history of social movements that have been archiving their activism by creating their own autonomous archives.[1] This is particularly notable among less institutionalized and horizontally organized movements. Groups like Occupy Wall Street[2] and Olympic Resistance Network[3] are archiving records of protest events, creating oral histories, and assembling media articles. Other groups are actively encouraging and sharing archivist skills. Radical Reference[4] and Activist Archivists,[5] for example, are holding conferences and offering tutorials for activists on how to create their own archives and catalogue documents. More than just repositories of activist materials or resources for the production of histories, radical archives are used strategically and directly in contemporary social struggles as groups intervene in dominant discourses, claiming the authority and rights to represent themselves. These autonomous, activist archives offer spaces of empowerment and self-determination, as well as collectivized forms of knowledge production. They are thus important sites through which to understand the changing politics of the archive, and to think about the relationship between archives and politics more broadly.

1   Activist archives emerged throughout the 20th century from across the spectrum of social justice movements in Canada and around the world. Activist collections can be found in institutional, professional, and grassroots archives, with some existing exclusively online and others only in hard copy. A few examples from Canada are the collections of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, accessed 18 June 2015, http://www.clga.ca; the Canadian Women's Movement Archives Collection, University of Ottawa Archives and Special Collections, accessed 18 June 2015, http://uottawa.ca.libguides.com/content.php?pid= 194014&sid=1626252; the Labour Archive, Dalhousie University Major Research Collections, accessed 18 June 2015, http://libraries.dal.ca/collection/archives/ collectionsguide/labourarchives.html; and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs Library and Archives, accessed 18 June 2015, http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/library.
2   On the OWS Anarchive, see: #jez3prez and atchu, "On the Question of the Anarchives of Occupy Wall Street," *e-misférica* 9.1–9.2 (2012), accessed 24 April 2015, http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/jez3prezaatchu.
3   Vancouver Media Co-op, "Anti-Olympics Archive," accessed 24 April 2015, http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/olympics/olympic-resistance-network.
4   Radical Reference, "Radical Reference Presents: Do It Yourself Archives," accessed 24 April 2015, http://www.radicalreference.info/anarchistbookfair/2009/diyarchives.
5   Activist Archivists, "Tips for Catalogers," accessed 24 April 2015, http://activist-archivists.org/wp/.

The politics of the archive centres largely on its relationship to information and knowledge production. Critical work emerging from archival and cultural studies has emphasized the archive's social and political role in ordering knowledge, establishing criteria for credibility, and anchoring claims to authority and truth.[6] It has further pointed out that the archive's control of information has often been used to maintain the power of privileged groups in society. Similarly, archivists are critically reflecting on the power inherent in their practices. They are actively seeking to increase inclusion of marginalized groups in the archive, to expand access to the documents held there, and to disseminate information more broadly and innovatively.[7] The debates across these various fields have created a more nuanced understanding of the power that operates within and through the archive; however, because most of the existing work has focused on the archives of the privileged, notions of archival power have largely been conceived of as domination. I argue that, by starting from the standpoint of autonomous, activist archives, a different politics of the archive becomes visible, one that is critical in furthering social justice projects. To develop such an understanding, I ask: What powers do autonomous archives give to radical groups? How are autonomous archives being used to confront and challenge dominant truth claims? What forms of knowledge are produced in activist archival practices? And does the politics of the archive differ when marginalized groups mobilize archival power within struggles for self-determination? By addressing such questions, I explore the power that the status "archive" confers on a collection of materials,[8] while also recognizing that archival power

6   Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge, and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression (Religion and Postmodernism)*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1–19; Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87–109; Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 9–25; and Andrew Flinn, "Archival Activism: Independent and Community-Led Archives, Radical Public History and the Heritage Professions," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 7, no. 2 (2011), accessed 24 April 2015, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pt2490x.

7   These issues have been a part of critical and ongoing debates addressed in *Archivaria*. See, for example, Elizabeth Yakel, "Thinking inside and outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 140–60; Sarah Tyacke, "Archives in a Wider World: The Culture and Politics of Archives," *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001): 1–25; Jeannette Bastian, "Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 76–93; Krisztina Laszlo, "Ethnographic Archival Records and Cultural Property," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 299–307; Joan Schwartz, "'Having New Eyes': Spaces of Archives, Landscapes of Power," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 1–25; and Wendy M. Duff, Catherine A. Johnson, and Joan M. Cherry, "Reaching Out, Reaching In: A Preliminary Investigation into Archives' Use of Social Media in Canada," *Archivaria* 75 (Spring 2013): 77–96.

8   Andrew Flinn, interview with the author, 20 February 2012.

operates differently in various contexts and for various groups. In this article, I argue that autonomous archives reaffirm the archive as a key site of knowledge and power,[9] yet at the same time subvert its role as a tool of domination and control. As such, autonomous archives help to explore the potential for radicalizing the politics of the archive, focusing on it as a space of empowerment and where the collectivizing of knowledge is practised.

To make such a claim, I discuss a case study of an autonomous activist archive, drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork at the 56a Archive. The 56a Archive[10] is situated in the 56a Infoshop, an anarchist social centre in the Elephant and Castle area of south London, England, a neighbourhood that has been traditionally working-class and ethnically diverse. The Archive gathers documents from anarchist and radical social movements, collecting a history of ongoing resistance in the neighbourhood, the city, and internationally. Part of its collection includes a Gentrification Archive, which has been central in the recent mobilizations by activists fighting against regeneration projects in the neighbourhood. While there are many interesting stories held (and not yet told) in the 56a Archive, I focus on the *form* and the *use* of the archive by activists, not its content. This is an approach that reads the archive ethnographically[11] in order to highlight the context in which the archive is produced and in which it takes effect. An ethnographic approach enables a critical exploration of the formation of the archive as a historically, socially, and spatially constructed phenomenon. In this case, the 56a Archive emerged from a particular radical politics, and is connected to its particular neighbourhood, which has been faced with the marginalization and displacement of many of its long-term, low-income residents through urban regeneration. Ethnographies, because they engage with a subject over time, can capture the use and activation of archives as they unfold. Working within the 56a Archive over the course of 18 months, I was able to see not just the organization of the collection and its everyday operations, but also how activists used the space and the holdings to understand and actively intervene in the gentrification of the Elephant and Castle neighbourhood. The following archival ethnography

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9   Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.
10   56a Infoshop Archive, accessed 24 April 2015, http://www.56a.org.uk/archive.html.
11   On approaching the archive ethnographically, see Michael Lynch, "Archive in Formation," *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 65–87; Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance"; Catherine Trundle and Chris Kaplonski, "Tracing the Political Lives of Archival Documents," *History and Anthropology* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 407–14; Danielle Cooper, "Rainbow Flags and Donor Tags: Queer Materials at the Pride Library," *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 1–20. On activating archives, see Rachel Daniell, "Engaging Archival Power: Creative Time's 'Social Practices Archive' and the Living as Form Project," *e-misférica* 9, nos. 1&2 (Summer 2012), accessed 24 April 2015, http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-91/daniell; Alycia Sellie et al., "Interference Archive: A Free Space for Social Movement Culture," *Archival Science* (April 2015), DOI 10.1007/s10502-015-9245-5.

thus looks at the particular formation and activation of this Archive as a space and as a set of practices, in order to access a different story of archival power. I argue that, if the politics of the archive reflects configurations of knowledge-power, then the activist archive points to its radicalization in the mobilization of information in projects of empowerment and self-determination. Moving from practice to theory to politics, this article starts in the 56a Archive, goes next to the archival literature to map discourses of archival power, and lastly arrives at a rethinking of the radical politics of the archive.

The Formation of Autonomous, Activist Archives

The archive lies at the heart of the information society, and as such activists of all stripes are increasingly recognizing the archive as a key resource in cultural and political struggles. At times, groups struggle for inclusion within institutional archives (e.g., government, university, professional organizations)[12] or seek to recover hidden histories within the documents.[13] At other times, the strategy that groups use is to collect and care for the documents themselves, away from and outside of official institutions.[14] Academics, many of whom are engaged with these activist archives and part of the movements producing them, have brought increasing visibility to these forms of archives.[15] Reflecting their various analytic emphases, these archives have been termed "grassroots archives,"[16] "independent community-led archives,"[17] "activist

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12 When using the term "institutional archives," I draw from K.J. Rawson, who describes these archives as having a "focus on efficient access" to records, following professional guidelines within their organization systems and typically holding their collections in closed stacks. See K.J. Rawson, "Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics," *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 136.

13 See, for example, Stuart Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage,' Re-Imagining the Post-Nation," *Third Text* 49 (Winter 1999–2000): 3–13; Andrew Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151–76; and Trundle and Kaplonski, "Tracing the Political Lives of Archival Documents."

14 See, for example, Rawson, "Accessing Transgender"; Shauna Moore and Susan Pell, "Autonomous Archives," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 4 (2010): 255–68; and Flinn, "Archival Activism."

15 For examples of authors who self-identify with the community represented in the archives they study, see Elizabeth K. Keenan and Lisa Darms, "Safe Space: The Riot Grrrl Collection," *Archivaria* 76 (Fall 2013): 55–74; Jessie Lymn, "The Librarian-As-Insider-Ethnographer," *Journal of Library Innovation* 4 (2013): 1–9; Cooper, "Rainbow Flags and Donor Tags"; Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 123–53; and Sellie et al., "Interference Archive."

16 Rawson, "Accessing Transgender."

17 Flinn, "Archival Activism"; Anne Gilliland and Andrew Flinn, "Community Archives: What Are We Really Talking About?" (keynote presented at the CIRN Prato Community Informatics Conference, Monash Centre, Prato, Italy, 28–30 October 2013).

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archives,"[18] "autonomous archives,"[19] and "radical archives."[20] These archives share the characteristics of functioning apart from institutional archives; being independently created, controlled, and maintained; serving as the primary material resources for marginal groups to write their own alternative and counter histories; and providing spaces from which to engage in broader discourses. For groups seeking to politicize their social identities and publicize collective issues, the archive is also a tool that informs their social justice struggles.[21] Archives are spaces in which collective knowledge and memories of political struggles can be cultivated and mobilized for use in contemporary campaigns. Such autonomous, activist archives are key sites for bridging the past, present, and future for social movements. However, the significance of these archives does not lie only in their use in constructing (and intervening in) social history that challenges official narratives. These are living archives,[22] which operate as spaces of experimentation and collaboration in which emerge alternative archival practices. These in turn create, organize, and support different, and often collectivized, knowledge claims. Thus the formation and activation of activist archives may be viewed as one strategy, among others, to challenge and transform hegemonic political power and open up alternative collective possibilities.

The Formation of the 56a Infoshop Archive[23]

Come to our next 56a ARCHIVE worknight: 3rd TUESDAY of the MONTH 7–9pm. No experience needed. Just willingness to shuffle papers and sort leaflets. Get to know the archive!! Meet the nerds at 56a. Be a nerd yourself! Drink tea, file and destroy capitalism (slowly)!! See you there.[24]

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18   Aritha van Herk, "Ardently Archiving," *Topia* 20 (2008): 155–66; Sellie et al., "Interference Archive."
19   Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives."
20   Kim Schwenk, "Another World Possible: Radical Archiving in the 21st Century," *Progressive Librarian* 36/37 (June 2011): 51–58.
21   See, for example, Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives"; Schwenk, "Another World Possible"; Wendy M. Duff et al., "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 317–48; and Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*.
22   Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (Spring 2001): 89–92.
23   I volunteered at the 56a Archive between 2011 and 2013. I was primary involved with the Archive Nights, which I helped organize for a year. I was also involved for a short time during the fall of 2011 with the Southwark Notes Archive Group (SNAG). The experience of volunteering with 56a Archive, plus discussions with Chris (an organizer of the 56a Archive and SNAG; surname withheld by agreement), serves as the basis for the present observations about the formation and activation of 56a Archive and, beyond it, autonomous archives.
24   56a Infoshop, "Archive," accessed 24 April 2105, http://www.56a.org.uk/archive.html (emphasis in original).

Born out of an ethic and a commitment to horizontal knowledge exchange and collective learning, the 56a Archive is a product of its ever-evolving activist archival processes and reflects the autonomous politics of the space in which it resides. The 56a Archive is part of the 56a Infoshop, a "volunteer-run, 100% unfunded DIY-run social centre in Walworth, South London."[25] The Infoshop began as a squat in 1991; yet since 2003, it has been a tenant of the local Southwark Council.[26] Occupying a single room between a food co-operative and DIY bike shop, 56a operates as a bookstore, selling books, zines, and T-shirts; however, its key function is that of a social centre, being an autonomous space that serves as a resource for local people and campaign groups to meet and develop projects. The formation of the Archive was one such project.[27]

The 56a Archive started a few years after the Infoshop, inspired by a collective member's visit in 1995 to Epicenter Zone, a radical bookshop in San Francisco.[28] Seeing its racks filled with books and pamphlets that people could read and discuss, Chris, now an organizer at the 56a Archive, initiated a similar project. Since then the Archive has grown thanks to the collection of publications and ephemera coming through 56a – magazines, journals, zines, pamphlets, flyers, maps, and more – as well as donations people bring in "from under their beds."[29] Two decades on, the Archive contains over 70,000 items that document radical politics from the 1980s onwards. Apart from the books sold at 56a, the materials literally cover all available shelf space on the walls that line the Infoshop. The documents collected in the 56a Archive are available primarily in hard copy, though some of the collection is available digitally. Its online presence includes the Archive's website, a Library Thing page that links to some of its book titles,[30] and the affiliated blog, *Southwark Notes – Whose Regeneration?*, which hosts some of the Archive's documents related to gentrification (discussed later in the article).[31] Access to the majority of the material in the Archive thus requires making one's way to the Infoshop.

25   56a Infoshop, accessed 24 April 2105, http://www.56a.org.uk/.
26   Stories from Radical Social Centres in the UK and Ireland, "Local Tradition, Local Trajectories and Us: 56a Infoshop, Black Frog and More in South London," accessed 24 April 2015, https://socialcentrestories.wordpress.com/2008/04/24/local-tradition-local-trajectories-and-us-56a-infoshop-black-frog-and-more-in-south-london/.
27   This history draws from an interview with Chris, a long-time collective member of 56a, who is a key initiator and maintainer of the Archive.
28   Chris, interview with the author, 10 April 2012.
29   Ibid.
30   Library Thing, "Member: 56a Infoshop," accessed 24 April 2015, http://www.librarything.com/profile/56aInfoshop.
31   *Southwark Notes – Whose Regeneration?*, accessed 24 April 2015, http://southwarknotes.wordpress.com.

As stated on the website, "We hope that people will come by to read it or to use it to research radical writing (towards action!)."[32]

The Archive is collectively "owned" by those involved in 56a and, like the Infoshop, it is unfunded and run exclusively by volunteers, who are driven by an interest in archiving and/or the Archive. As such, it is a participatory archive that depends on, and develops according to, people's contributions and collaborations. No one has formal archival training, and there is no formal induction for volunteers. Volunteers largely participate through the Archive Nights, which have been held regularly since 2008. The intention is for this group to manage the Archive's infrastructure and take responsibility for filing documents. The Archive Night was the primary means through which I was involved. During the Archive Nights, we sorted through documents, mapped the Archive (essentially trying to update the catalogue by listing the stated contents of all the file folders), and attempted to make space for more material to go out onto the shelves (a daunting task as there was always a vast backlog). As is the case with all collective projects, levels of participation and commitment to the Archive Night vary over time. While I was at 56a, there were two or three volunteers attending regularly, though there would be evenings when five or six people would show up, and others when no one did. However, people use and engage with the Archive outside of the Archive Nights; some of these instances will be discussed later in the article. Aiming to be a resource for local and affiliated communities, the formation of the 56a Archive encourages research for social action, reflecting its radical politics. Its collectivist and activist approach to archiving provides an example of radicalized archival power, and these practices help to reimagine the politics of the archive.

Mapping the Politics of the Archive

Like all politics, the politics of the archive is rooted in power. The power of the archive has come under increasing scrutiny over the past couple of decades, an issue discussed by scholars in archival and cultural studies as well as the field

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32 56a Infoshop, "Archive." Though not all necessarily aimed at research for social action, recent academic papers drawing from the 56a Infoshop and Archive include Andre Pusey, "Social Centres and the New Cooperativism of the Common," *Affinities: Theory, Culture, Action* 4, no. 1 (2010), accessed 24 April 2015, http://journals.sfu.ca/affinities/index .php/affinities/article/view/31; Catharina Gabrielsson, "Squatting My Mind – Towards an Architectural Ecosophy," *Ecology Field*, 4, no. 1 (December 2010): 163–87; Nicholas Thoburn, "Communist Objects and the Values of Printed Matter," *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 1–30; Gilliland and Flinn, "Community Archives"; Rhiannon Firth, "Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy? Ideas for Praxis Inspired by the 56a Infoshop Map Archive," *Interface: A Journal For and About Social Movements* 6 (May 2014): 156–84; Michelle Kempson, "'My Version of Feminism': Subjectivity, DIY and the Feminist Zine," *Social Movement Studies* (August 2014), DOI 10.1080/14742837.2014.945157.

of archival practice, and by those working within community archives.[33] While archival power, and its consequences, has been articulated differently across these fields, it has most commonly been attributed to control of records, which serve as the evidence through which collective histories are told and the knowledge upon which futures are planned and constructed. Yet it is not just the content of archives that is identified as powerful. So are the very practices of archiving. Thus, to understand the power of the archive, attention must be paid to the archive as a space and as a set of practices. By mapping conceptions of power in the existing discourses on the politics of the archive, I suggest that there has been a tendency to focus on archival power as domination. By viewing power instead as multiple, relational, and situated, archival power is shown to take on different attributes, depending on the context and the actors involved. This, in turn, helps us to see the radical potential in the politics of the archive.

The archive as a space of power resides in its being a site and institution for housing records. Representing a key discourse in the cultural studies approach, Jacques Derrida identifies the archive as a place of power by etymologically situating it as the house of "the *archons*, those who commanded," both in looking after documents and interpreting them in the first instance.[34] The archive as a location of power is also articulated in the field of archival studies. Randall Jimerson, in his 2005 presidential address to the Society of American Archivists, describes the power of archives as analogous to that of the temple, the prison, and the restaurant.[35] Each designates a specific place that carries out certain social and political functions. The temple is a site of authority and immortality, corresponding to archival practices of appraisal and selection. The prison is a place of surveillance, access, and control, corresponding to archival practices of ordering and description. The restaurant, like the archives, is a space of mediation and interpretation. Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook similarly attribute the power of the archive to its role as an institution,[36]

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33 From cultural studies see, for example, Thomas Osborne, "The Ordinariness of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 51–64; Mél Hogan, "Dykes on Mykes: Podcasting and the Activist Archive," *Topia* 20 (2008): 199–215; and Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*. From within the field of archival studies see, for example, Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 171–85; and Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." From activists see, for example, Sinead Earley, "Archival Activism: From House of Amnesia to House of Memory," *Activism and the Archives*, accessed 24 April 2015, http://archivalactivism.wordpress.com/blog/; and #jez3prez and atchu, "On the Question of the Anarchives."

34 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.

35 Randall C. Jimerson, "Embracing the Power of Archives," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/ Summer 2006): 19–32.

36 In addition to discussing the archive's institutional role, Schwartz and Cook also examine the archival power of records and archivists themselves. With such a nuanced approach to

stating that institutions "wield power over the administrative, legal, and fiscal accountability of governments, corporations, and individuals, and engage in powerful public policy debates around the right to know, freedom of information, protection of privacy, copyright and intellectual property, and protocols for electronic commerce."[37]

These authors, when considering the archives as a site of power, are concerned with a politics of the archive that revolves around its materiality – the physicality of the archive and the records it holds. This partly involves questions about whose and which materials are preserved, but it is also about the power associated with ownership, control, and access to records, and the archivist's role as a gatekeeper in granting or restricting access to it. As Schwartz and Cook help to explain, those who hold the records "wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies."[38] Here it is articulated that the archive holds power because the information it contains can be (and often is) used for the control and management of others. This particular aspect of power held (often) by institutional archives (e.g., government, university, professional organizations) has been forcefully critiqued, particularly by scholars studying colonial archives, for the exclusion and marginalization faced by groups on the periphery.[39] While these critiques have often focused on the records (or lack thereof), the actual space of archives can be alienating and exclusive. Investigating the archive's accessibility through the experience of transgender researchers, K.L. Rawson describes how the everyday space of the archive (e.g., its bathrooms, images, conversations) can make it either more or less welcoming. Rawson argues that "environmental accessibility can shape the way entire groups of people encounter an archive, or are excluded from using it altogether."[40] As places where records are physically controlled, the institutional aspect of the archive can be a barrier for some potential users, hindering access to materials that have the potential to be used to write their histories and strengthen their contributions to policy debates.[41]

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archival power, Schwartz and Cook's work has been a vital bridge between discussions of archives in cultural studies and archival studies.

37   Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," 2.
38   Ibid.
39   See, for example, Hall, "Constituting an Archive"; Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance"; Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1–2 (2005): 10–27; Ieuan Hopkins, "Places from Which to Speak," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 29, no. 1 (April 2008): 83–109.
40   Rawson, "Accessing Transgender," 129–130. In additional to physical accessibility, Rawson identifies social and intellectual dimensions of access to the archive.
41   The location of the archive can also be exclusive for those with limited money to travel, and for those who are often subject to more intense surveillance practices because of appearance and perceived background. See, for example, Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives."

Archives thus express an "exercise of power – power *over* information and the power *of* information institutions."[42] In this sense, archives are positioned as spaces with the power to exclude, both discursively and physically.

Within these spatial approaches, power is predominantly conceived of as *power over* others, as a form of domination that controls, restricts, or prevents their actions. This emphasis can be seen in, for example, Joan Schwartz's description of archives as

spaces where archivists and their institutions exercise power – power over what is and isn't selected for permanent retention …; power over the way records are described and over the systems of description which privilege some information and some media, and marginalize others; power over what is copied, scanned, and made available on-line; power over the choice, content, and presentation of everything from finding aids to thematic guides to virtual exhibitions to children's programming.[43]

Having power over someone or something is a possessive notion of power, as something one has or does not have, as something that can be given and also taken away. This possessive notion of power extends to places; some places hold power, others do not. For many critics, the archive's power (over people, places, things) is centralized in dominant institutions that occupy the place of official keepers (and interpreters) of the records, "the archons," who have the power to take initiative, to make decisions, to influence, to control – in a word, to command. While efforts have been made to redistribute the power of archives,[44] it is not something that can be removed or eliminated altogether, as is sometimes hoped for through professional practices of neutrality, objectivity, and impartiality.[45] Rather, as Cook and Schwartz assert, the politics of the archive requires acknowledging archival power, not obscuring it, in order that it can be "shared," "refocused," and "held accountable."[46] From this perspective, archivists hold the institutional power of archives and they must take responsibility for their actions by recognizing their power and by being transparent in their archival practices (of appraisal, selection, description).[47] As Jimerson puts it, "Our challenge is to embrace the power of archives and to use it well."[48]

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42   Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," 9.
43   Schwartz, "'Having New Eyes,'" 8.
44   See note 7 for discussion of debates about the redistribution of archival power within the field.
45   Cook and Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance"; Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory."
46   Cook and Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," 185.
47   Ibid.
48   Jimerson, "Embracing the Power of Archives," 28.

Attention to the ethics of archival practices carries with it another notion of power – one that is performative.[49] As a performance, power is not held, but is manifest in actions and in sets of practices that are contextual, situated, and relational. It highlights the agency of both archivists and users to differently negotiate and navigate spaces of the archive. As such, power flows in multiple directions, and domination always has the potential to be met with resistance.[50] A performative notion of power repositions it as productive – it does stuff in the world. Depending on the actors involved and the context, power does not just restrict, control, and dominate; it also enables, creates, and transforms. In this regard, archival power is associated with empowerment and self-determination, and potentially available to a plurality of archival users and archives. The critical issue in an active notion of power is thus the ability to initiate, participate in, and affect collective decision-making processes. In terms of the archive, this points to debates about the relationship between users and archives, and about who manages collections, how, for whom, and with what effect.

The desire to reshape the politics of the archive has led to a call for more collaborative and participatory forms of archiving. Andrew Flinn, for example, recommends that professional archivists work with community archives to "care for their collections in the context in which they were created and collected,"[51] rather than necessarily bringing community records into institutional archives. He describes this as a form of archival activism that "seeks to open up their services to a more participatory approach where different methods of custody and management, and different views of archival practices, and of collection and values are considered and embraced."[52] Starting from the perspective of independent, community-led archives, Flinn affirms the power of the archive as a space. Yet he decentralizes that power, seeing it made manifest outside and beyond official archival institutions, and he envisages archivists using their power to facilitate the archival projects of others. Jessie Lymn similarly calls for the decentralization of archival power to knowledge workers already operating within alternative archival spaces. She suggests that when the collections of marginalized communities are acquired by institutional archives, those who are a part of the community are the best situated to "negotiate the politics of representation and identification,"[53]

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49 On the performative power of archives, see Cook and Swartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance"; Trundle and Kaplonski, "Tracing the Political Lives of Archival Documents."

50 The notion of power as practised, productive, and relational draws on the work of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1990 [1978]).

51 Flinn, "Archival Activism," 15.

52 Ibid.

53 Lymn, "The Librarian-As-Insider-Ethnographer," 7. For the relationship between community

particularly in appraisal and description practices. This would help to build more reciprocal relations between archives, records, and communities of users. Isto Huvila describes a collaborative action research project that attempts to put these theories into practice in the construction of a participatory digital archive. As Huvila explains, "The principal implication of assuming the notion of a participatory archive is the reconfiguration of responsibilities between curators, users and the general public"[54] that results in a "decentralized curation, radical user orientation, and a contextualization of both records *and* the entire archival process."[55] This participatory approach privileges archival processes that generate collaborative knowledge systems. Flinn, Lymn, and Huvila are calling for alternative archival practices that decentralize archival power and expertise through collaborative projects that restructure relationships between archivists and users, records and their originators, and archives and communities.

Besides decentralizing archival power, these descriptions of participatory archives highlight that the production of knowledge, and its authorization, is critical to the politics of the archive. Power is produced in and through knowledge practices,[56] while power also works to maintain and authorize knowledge claims. The use of archival records to make claims (be they political, social, cultural, economic) in public discourses is often premised on the assumption that they will have greater authority, credibility, and legitimacy because of the social status conferred upon archival materials. Flinn describes the social construction of archival power in his research on community archives, drawing attention to the "symbolic significance, and explicit value judgements being made when such collections are designated ('constituted') by their custodians as archives."[57] Claiming the title "archive" can give greater authority and credibility to a group's materials and, by extension, their knowledge claims. Yet because power is situated, varying in content and by contexts, the politics

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records and archives, see also Kate Eichhorn, "D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production since 1990," *Women's Studies* 39, no. 6 (2010): 622–46; Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives."

54 Isto Huvila, "Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralized Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualisation of Records Management," *Archival Science* 8 (September 2008): 33.

55 Ibid., 25.

56 This notion of knowledge/power draws from Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge* and from Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 575–99. These authors emphasize that the relationship between knowledge and power is unwritten and supported by discursive practices that structure what is and is not possible to state. As applied to social movements, see Cindy Patton, "Refiguring Social Space," in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 216–49.

57 Flinn, "Activist Archives," 6.

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of the archive often lies in the ability of different agents and collective actors to enact archival authority effectively and to be granted public recognition. The creation of more archives may intensify struggles over what constitutes an archive, and the advantages gained through the name "archive" may well decrease. The ability to claim archival authority thus in part evokes questions of origins and authenticity of records, and whether they can operate as credible and reliable evidence, be it to build a case in courts or to write cultural histories. Yet it also has an epistemological dimension, pointing to the truth function of the archive.[58] Drawing from Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge,* Ann Stoler describes how the archive has moved from a material space to a figurative space of power. As she explains, "the archive is not an institution, but [according to Foucault] 'the law of what can be said,' not a library of events, but 'that system that establishes statements as events and things,' that 'system of their enunciabilities.'"[59] Here the power of the archive is in its ability to determine what sources count as knowledge and the technologies used to determine truth. This brings attention to epistemological questions of "how people imagine they know what they know and what institutions validate that knowledge, and how they do so."[60] Practices of archival power thus include the authorization of truth claims, which extends to the authority of the speaker. It is this authority and credibility that matter in political contests of knowledge.

Recognizing archival power as both a space and a set of practices highlights the importance of considering context within debates about the politics of the archive. The power practised at, within, and through the archive is multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory. As Schwartz and Cook argue,

archives have the power to privilege and to marginalize. They can be a tool of hegemony; they can be a tool of resistance. They both reflect and constitute power relations. They are a product of society's need for information, and the abundance and circulation of documents reflects the importance placed on information in society. They are the basis for and validation of the stories we tell ourselves, the story-telling narratives that give cohesion and meaning to individuals, groups, and societies.[61]

However, just as groups claim archival power, it can be undermined and contested by others, suggesting that there is no final authority or truth held by the archive, but a series of practices, deployments, and strategic uses of archival knowledge in social and political spaces. The politics of the archive can therefore be seen in the practices of producing knowledge and claiming authority and credibility, and both of these practices are supported

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58   Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," 91–94.
59   Ibid., 94.
60   Ibid., 95.
61   Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," 13.

by the privileged, social space of the archive. The next section explores how particular activists harness archival power. The case of the 56a Archive shows how a radical politics encourages alternative archival practices that in turn decentralize archival power by collectivizing knowledge production and transforming the Archive into a social space of empowerment.

Archival Activism: Knowledge Production and Political Practices

At the core of the 56a Archive is the anarchist politics of the Infoshop. 56a aims to be an autonomous space for the cultivation of a radical politics based on collective action and self-determination. It seeks to transform hierarchical forms of power into horizontal and collaborative ones. This starts in part with producing knowledge through local, experiential, and collective understandings of one's contexts, needs, and resources. Here knowledge is approached socially, collectively, and strategically – not as an individualized possession or as a way to hold authority over another. These politics are reflected in the archival practices used at 56a, including how it selects and catalogues its materials and how the Archive is activated in an anti-gentrification campaign. In both of these practices, one sees the complicated relationship between knowledge production and archival power.

Spaces of Collectivized Knowledge Production

The anarchist politics of 56a influences its alternative archival practices. As a collective project that continues to unfold, the Archive is not subject to set policies and procedures, and because of this, its formation is organic more than ordered, emergent more than institutionalized. This is reflected in both its selection and cataloguing processes. Being less ordered, I suggest, encourages (and requires) alternative forms of knowledge production.

Generally, there are not formalized selection and cataloguing processes at 56a. Among the collective members, there is a commitment to non-censorship of ideas, so similarly the selection process aims to keep a record of all issues and activities associated with 56a. In principle, everything that comes through the Infoshop, as well as those things that are of interest to members, ends up in the Archive. However, the actual practice is more haphazard and incomplete. 56a is a social, activist hub in the neighbourhood. It is also connected to national and international anarchist, squatter, and social centre networks. Many people come through 56a, and because it is an activist hub, a significant amount of material is distributed through the Infoshop. Preservation of these largely ephemeral materials is a matter of various 56a members knowing (and remembering) to put one of each zine, flyer, poster, magazine, and so on into general collection boxes, where they await sorting and eventual placement into

a document folder on the shelves.[62] Other times materials produced through events or workshops are added to the Archive, creating specialist collections, such as its Gentrification Archive and Map Archive.[63] Even within these more contained collections, the cataloguing of materials in the Archive resists fixed categorization. There are not definitive means for classifying, ordering, or cross-referencing the materials. Rather, folder boxes are labelled with broad subjects, such as "Queer," "Anarchism," and "Zapatista," and then based on the discretion of the volunteer archivist, the papers, magazines, and even books are sorted into the folder box (each full and overflowing). The subject headings emerge contextually, often as the product of conversations among those present in the Archive. And they can change. Sometimes decisions about how to file a document are made somewhat arbitrarily because, for example, there is space in one box as opposed to another. While a listing of various subjects is kept (last detailed in 2005), it is described as the "user-unfriendly 56a Infoshop Archive Subject Listing."[64] With the list out of date and far from complete, being able to locate all the material on a particular subject can prove difficult, particularly if the topic covers potentially more than one theme (e.g., Marxism, feminism, anti-capitalism), and whether a particular flyer or poster exists in the Archive is essentially unknowable in advance of finding it oneself. These selection and cataloguing processes that form the 56a Archive reflect its character as a participatory, collective project: it grows and is maintained through the initiative and work of volunteers, and while it is greatly valued by members and its users, it lacks resources for improvement or development (such as the capacity to produce finding aids or catalogues of its collections). These are limitations that many community archives face. However, 56a's commitment to an alternative, horizontal organizational form also partially explains its reluctance to formalize and standardize its categorization of materials. These politics have resulted instead in archival practices that are subjective, contingent, dynamic, and shifting according to who is currently working in the Archive.

62 The work of filing material largely falls on the shoulders of volunteers during Archive Nights, and it is a daunting project. While participating in the Archive Nights, I found that it was at times difficult to get materials out on the shelves, as they were already filled to capacity. There are ongoing conversations about how to create more space in the Archive; however, the issue has yet to be resolved because of the desire to keep all the current materials in the limited space of the Infoshop.

63 These collections emerged out of the "Festival of Mapping," held in 2005 (see 56a Infoshop, "Map Room," accessed 20 May 2014, http://www.56a.org.uk/maproom.html, and Firth, "Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy?"), and "The Siege of the Elephant: A One-Day Convergence," held in 2012 (*Southwark Notes*, accessed 25 April 2015, https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/where-we-are-coming-from/the-siege-of-the-elephant-a-one-day-convergence).

64 56a Infoshop, "Welcome to Your User-Unfriendly 56a Infoshop Archive Subject Listing," accessed 20 May 2014, http://www.56a.org.uk/archivelist.html.

Such unruly archival practices can be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, the lack of a standardized archival order, particularly in terms of systematic cataloguing and finding aids, hinders access to the content of the Archive (especially for professional or academic researchers who are used to more institutional, and resourced, archives).[65] It also lacks transparency in its cataloguing practices, which can further frustrate access to its records. On the other hand, these ordering practices represent a different understanding of "access" and engagement with the space of the Archive, which need to be considered on their own terms. Access to the Archive is immediate. It is physically located within the community of its users, and all the materials are readily available for use within the Infoshop. Collective members and visitors alike can simply pull folders off the shelves and look through the materials (and, lacking an archivist's mediation, could potentially change their archival order in the process). With an archival logic that can best be described as a "focus on discovery,"[66] the 56a Archive prioritizes and demands a reading practice that is more exploratory, serendipitous, and time intensive, rather than research guided by the quick and efficient location of a known and desired record. 56a's archival order juxtaposes and brings together documents representing various themes, ideas, events, and topics, which in turn encourages an understanding of how divergent issues and struggles intersect each other and, perhaps, a more holistic approach to the Archive's collection.[67] These archival affinities also have the potential to extend to the various users of the Archive. As explained by members of the Interference Archive (IA), an activist archive in Brooklyn, New York, activist archives "function at the intersection of multiple and diverse communities, connecting disparate nodes within a broader network of social actions and creating a new community in and through the process of building and maintaining the archive."[68] As such, archives like 56a have the ability to operate as a "free space,"[69] where different movement actors come together and where alternative social practices can emerge.

65 For myself, while I was involved at 56a, I always wanted to impose a more formalized sense of order on the organization of the Archive, something that it always seemed to resist.

66 Rawson, "Accessing Transgender," 136. Rawson further challenges the notion that the potential frustration felt by researchers in grassroots archives is only negative, arguing that it might result in forms of deferred satisfaction.

67 Kate Eichhorn terms this phenomenon "archival proximity," described as "the uncanny ability to occupy different temporalities and to occupy temporalities differently," which she discusses in the context of unexpected affinities between second- and third-wave feminisms that have emerged in the archive. See Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, 61.

68 Sellie et al., "Interference Archive," 13.

69 Ibid.

Articulating a sentiment similar to "free space," Rhiannon Firth, reflecting on her work with its Map Archive, describes 56a as a "public place."[70] The term "public" can be applied to the 56a Archive in a number of ways. First, it is public in the sense of being open access,[71] rejecting notions of institutional control or permission. Here access (as already discussed) indicates the user's ability to handle and use the materials directly. As Chris explains, this immediacy and the orientation toward participation and open access aim at "collectivizing the archive for transfer of knowledge."[72] Making the materials available for those engaged in contemporary struggles can help develop strategic thinking and advance radical knowledge within movements. It also encourages a sense of collective ownership of the Archive. As Firth explains, with "the nature and the ethos of the archive practice, created by multiple anonymous participants for public access,… formal notions of individual ownership and control would not seem to apply."[73] The 56a Archive is thus also public in the sense of belonging to the commons, with its more open and shared understanding of ownership. It is intimately connected with the communities from which its materials emerge and which it represents. The Archive is a public, common resource for those in the neighbourhood and who are a part of its various activist networks. As 56a explains, they archive because "we are not sure if anyone else has a collection of this stuff. We keep all this stuff as a valuable part of the movement's social history. It probably functions as a useful educational tool as well."[74] That 56a Archive collects the materials of the movements it is a part of emphasizes the familiarity between the users and the Archive. Yet the 56a Archive goes beyond simply collecting the radical history in which it is embedded. Grounded in notions of education and social action, it is there to be used in the present, reinforcing the wish for the Archive to serve "research [for] radical writing (towards action!)."[75] The 56a Archive is thus public in another way – in its world-making possibilities.[76] As I have discussed with co-author Shaunna Moore elsewhere, autonomous archives are a resource and space for the formation of publics, having creative and political potential: "As world-making, publics bear witness to the building of communities in common, and public spheres are always spaces of agonistic

70 Firth, "Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy?," 163.
71 56a Infoshop Archive.
72 Chris, interview with the author.
73 Firth, "Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy?," 163.
74 56a Infoshop Archive.
75 Ibid.
76 This notion of public comes from Hannah Arendt's discussion of action in public as the possibility of bringing new worlds into being with others. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 189. It is also developed in the conceptualization of counterpublics by Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," Public Culture 14, no. 1 (2001): 49–90.

struggle over the actors to be included and the methods for determining the past, present and future of shared places."[77] Archives like 56a are critical for alternative and political communities. They serve as a space to build collective identities and solidarities and to author alternative discourses, while also being a platform in which to engage in broader discourses.

The 56a Archive was formed as an outward-facing resource – as a shared project and a collective responsibility. The Archive is a site of self-educa-tion and archiving is a social practice. The material and social aspects of the 56a Archive reinforce its politics, particularly the collectivization of know-ledge. Research and education (which is to say knowledge production) are not conceived of as individualized or private. They are collective and public. In this context, archival research includes the conversations and information sharing that goes along with being in a space that fosters learning together. As Chris explains, the 56a Archive is "socializing what is going on … [and] creat-ing some sort of dynamism, which is the politics of the archive. The archive is political in itself. It is a site of those interactions, and this network."[78] The creation of a radical archive is therefore not an end point but a free and public space. It is a means by which to connect with other people and to engage in politics, bringing other worlds into being through collective action. With an emphasis placed on self-education and social action, the 56a Archive is future-oriented. As Chris posits, the role of 56a Archive is "to inspire, isn't it? Just from the mere fact that there's a collection of people that did things and the fact that you found information that's useful."[79] Such a perspective shifts the purpose of the archive from recollection to aspiration[80] and encourages archiv-al activism. Archival activism encourages the archive to be activated as a space and resource for social justice campaigns and produces alternative forms of knowledge for social action. As is discussed in the next section, anti-gentrifica-tion activists have used multiple forms of archival activism in their campaigns.

Archival Activism in Gentrification Struggles

At 56a, events and groups have formed around and out of the Archive. A recent example is the Southwark Notes Archive Group (SNAG). Emerging in the fall of 2011, SNAG formed alongside a number of local anti-gentrification

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77   Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives," 256.
78   Chris, interview with the author.
79   Ibid.
80   This phrasing is taken from Arjun Appadurai, who, in relation to diasporic archives, writes, "All documentation [is] intervention, and all archiving [is] part of some sort of collective project. Rather than being the tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory. Thus the archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection." See Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," in *Information is Alive*, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAI Publishers, 2003), 16.

campaigns that were protesting the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle neighbourhood. In particular, groups were contesting the redevelopment of the Heygate Estate[81] and organizing around a community consultation process with the local Southwark Council and the private development company Lend Lease. One of SNAG's tactics was to turn to the archives.

SNAG takes its name in part from the online blog *Southwark Notes – Whose Regeneration?*,[82] to which it contributes. *Southwark Notes* is a digital offshoot of the Gentrification Archive at 56a, which collects documents related to gentrification in Southwark (and elsewhere), including council documents, media clippings, and activist materials from the 1970s to the present. *Southwark Notes* hosts digitalized historical materials, provides social and political analysis of them, and reports (and tweets) news of what is currently happening in the area. It has tracked gentrification in Southwark over the years and campaigns against it, becoming both a digital archive of, and a platform for, local actions. *Southwark Notes* gives a voice to local discontent in the Elephant and Castle area, helping to publicize anti-gentrification campaigns and building momentum and publicity around them. SNAG describes itself as "keeping active within various groups and campaigns in the ongoing struggle whilst keeping an eye on the history (the mistakes and successes) and the big picture (globalisation, financialisation and all that!)."[83] SNAG's embedded form of archival activism simultaneously documents and analyzes its campaign, creating a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between knowledge production and social action.

Through these practices, SNAG has developed forms of activist archiving that simultaneously read from the Archive and return to it. Drawing from 56a's Gentrification Archive, SNAG members used the recent history of gentrification in the area to contextualize and strategically resist redevelopment schemes. From the Archive, they read council, community, and academic documentation of the regeneration process that started in the late 1990s, alongside the documents from the current consultation process. This allowed

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81   Built in the 1960s, the Heygate Estate was a massive 22-acre council estate, with 1,100 flats, located close to central London. Redevelopment of the Heygate started in the late 1990s and has continued, contentiously, to the present. The sheer scale of the project has made it subject to public attention, while the displacement of its approximately 3,000 tenants and the gentrification of the Elephant and Castle neighbourhood have been met with protest and concerted resistance by local residents and housing activists. On the history of regeneration in the area, see James DeFilippis and Peter North, "The Emancipatory Community? Place, Politics and Collective Action in Cities," in *The Emancipatory City: Paradoxes and Possibilities*, ed. Loretta Lees (London: Sage, 2004), 72–88. For a contemporary, community viewpoint, see Heygate Was Home, accessed 26 April 2015, http://heygatewashome.org.

82   *Southwark Notes*, accessed 26 April 2015, https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com.

83   *Southwark Notes*, "Siege of the Elephant," accessed 26 April 2015, https://southwarknotes .wordpress.com/where-we-are-coming-from/the-siege-of-the-elephant-a-one-day -convergence.

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them to track the often drawn-out and convoluted redevelopment processes, and to challenge politicians and private developers during public consultations. In addition, they grew the Archive through soliciting and documenting local memories of regeneration in the area, mapping relations of power, and finding discrepancies and gaps in the official record. Besides producing knowledge, this practice served to cultivate and mobilize community memory in SNAG campaigns, and helped to build local support and participation within it. Both of these strategic archival practices point to the centrality of contested knowledge claims within gentrification struggles and how the Archive can be mobilized around them. The 56a Archive was thus a key site to build and amplify the voices of activists and to lend historical (if not legal) credibility and authority to their work. One specific way in which SNAG used the Archive was by organizing gentrification walks, placing it in direct proximity to political action.

SNAG has held gentrification walks periodically over the past five years.[84] The first walk was called "Gentrification at the Elephant and Castle," held 2 October 2011. This walk, like ones that were to follow, involved identifying and discussing key sites of gentrification in the Elephant and Castle area – those that have been developed and those about to be developed. At various sites, the group would stop to discuss issues involved in gentrification, covering topics such as displacement of residents, architectural separation of social and private housing within the same development, global aspects of local redevelopment and gentrification, community consultation processes (past and present), and local organizing and resistance. Documents from the Archive served as evidence, grounding the anti-gentrification walk. Furthermore, through the discussions and participation of the walkers, new knowledge and experiences were generated, shared, collected, and fed back into the Archive. The Archive was thus a featured element of the gentrification walk and, as stated on the event poster, the aim was "working towards setting up an active research project based out of the Archive."[85]

SNAG activated 56a's Gentrification Archive at the beginning of the October 2011 walk by taking it out of the building and setting up the various document folders and books on a table outside. The participants assembled around the Archive to discuss gentrification, its history in the area, its present manifestations, and experiences of it. While the organizers shared information about gentrification, the walkers were also invited to discuss their knowledge

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84 Posters of the various walks can be found at *Southwark Notes*, "Southwark Notes Walks," accessed 26 April 2015, https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/where-we-are-coming-from/southwark-notes-walks.

85 *Southwark Notes*, flyer "Sunday October 2nd Gentrification at the Elephant and Castle," accessed 26 April 2015, http://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/where-we-are-coming-from/southwark-notes-walks.

and experience of it. In this way, there was no hierarchy of expertise; rather, understanding gentrification was established as a shared project that incorporated the Archive and went beyond it. At the same time, the Archive was extended beyond the building to function as an open space that connected people, collectivized their knowledge, and mobilized it for action.

Taking the Archive out on the street, literally, was significant both strategically and symbolically. Creating a temporary space for the documents outside the building served to publicize the Archive; people passing by could learn about it and possibly seek it out in the future. It made the Archive more accessible, not just physically but also intellectually as it was experienced in use. In that way, the Archive was presented as something that is part of the everyday and available for deeper exploration. Reflecting on the greater significance of this repositioning of the Archive in connection to radical politics, Chris states that "if [radical politics] doesn't move to where other people are and create interest, it isn't worth it … it must go out, it must be tested, and come back. I think the Archive can do that. That's the experiment with SNAG. When we moved [the Archive] outside the building, it was really symbolic."[86] The Archive was mobilized, reaching outside itself. It was neither static nor the holder of some fixed truth, but movable and open to greater inclusion and multiple understandings. This walk was successful, with about 20 people attending, but its significance for thinking about archival activism extends beyond the attendees. The gentrification walks created temporary spaces in which to teach and learn about redevelopment in the area, while the documentation of these walks on *Southwark Notes* and in the 56a Archive serve as a more permanent means to share information between groups working on anti-gentrification campaigns in London and elsewhere.

Building this collective knowledge about regeneration in the area was a key aim of the walks and a strategy to develop actions against gentrification. As an organizer asked at the beginning of the October 2011 walk, "Why does regeneration seem inevitable, as if we can have no say in it? Having a say is what we are about; hence this walk. Having a say means understanding what is happening in our area and sharing histories, strategies, knowledge, et cetera."[87] In this sense, knowledge of the past and present are understood as critical in order to have a voice in the neighbourhood. This was particularly important during the council-led community consultation on the regeneration of the Heygate Estate. The walk was a means by which to cultivate and mobilize collective knowledge about the neighbourhood, which could then be used in the consultation. It ensured that more people could speak knowledgeably about the regeneration project and would also be able to call local politicians

86   Chris, interview with the author.
87   "Introduction Notes," personal communication with SNAG, 2 October 2011.

and the private developers to account for the discrepancies in the information used to justify the displacement of long-time residents and the demolition of the Heygate Estate. In this sense, they were bringing archival power to their political actions.

SNAG's activation of the Archive in its gentrification campaigns points to ways in which knowledge production is connected to and reinforces politics (of the archive and beyond). SNAG used the 56a Archive as a physical space to come together and to access materials in order to learn collectively about what was happening in the area. Of course, individuals could each read all the documents on the past and current consultation processes in the Elephant and Castle area, books on gentrification, case studies of other regeneration projects, and so on. However, gathering in a form of collective self-education redistributed the work of research and analysis, and allowed for not just personal understanding, but also a social process of knowledge production. Practically speaking, it sped up the processing of information (not everyone needs to read every book or report), and also enabled the knowledge to be applied and tested quickly in the context of a time-sensitive campaign against gentrification. Moreover, beyond the practical considerations, learning in this way counters individualized and privatized forms of education by socializing knowledge and repositioning it as a collective and political project. In this case, it connected the past to the present and the future, mobilizing a historically grounded understanding of the events in social actions and campaigns.

By collectivizing knowledge, SNAG has worked to alter relations of power in their campaigns. There was no need for a single spokesperson and more people were able to participate actively in the local cultural, social, and political processes that affected them. As Chris explains, "That's why SNAG is so great. It's using the archive and it's involved in the everyday life that affects everyday gentrification."[88] Bringing the Archive into the everyday life of its potential users was a recurring activist archival practice at 56a. Developed first with its Map Archive, collected during the Festival of Mapping co-hosted at 56a in 2005, the Archive has been taken out of the building, going on "travel outings."[89] These outings publicize the Archive and, like the gentrification walks, also bring new materials and users into the Archive, creating relationships and dialogue. Archival activism thus turns archiving into an alternative practice of collective knowledge production and creates a network of movement actors. As Firth explains, "The [56a Archive] itself has acted as a pedagogical and utopian-performative device, by making local knowledge (developed in the festival and the archive project) mobile to wider spaces and movements through the network form and bonds and practices of

88   Chris, interview with the author.
89   Firth, "Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy?," 176.

affinity."[90] The prominence of the Archive in SNAG's campaigns is indica-
tive of the significant role it plays in strategic knowledge production, while
also highlighting that politics includes a struggle over information and the
ability to claim authoritative and effective knowledge. This reaffirms that the
Archive is much more than a place to put documents in the hope that they find
meaning in the future. It can be an open and active repository that feeds into
social action and is fed by it. Furthermore, embedding archiving within activ-
ist practices creates a legacy of social action as it is enacted. In this sense, a
relationship between archiving, collective knowledge production, and politics
becomes visible and, as such, can be subjected to critical examination and,
when required, changed.

Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive

The 56a Archive is helpful for thinking about the radical political potential
of archives in struggles for social justice. Guided by anarchist principles
and practices, the 56a Archive uses archival power to open up possibilities
of empowerment and self-determination. In the case of 56a, archival power
reflects a symbiotic relationship between the activist archive and archival
activism. It shows that the archive has a strategic role in the pursuit of social
justice given its position within knowledge production practices. What can be
learned from this case is how activist archives and archival activism produce
knowledge that is (at its best) collective, critical, locally embedded, empower-
ing, and formed through and for action. These priorities can also guide the
politics of the archive, to encourage the creation of spaces and sets of practices
that are (again, at their best) active, participatory, experimental, and oriented
toward a community of users. This study of activist archives highlights the
relationship between knowledge, power, and politics, suggesting that radical-
izing the politics of the archive requires radicalizing knowledge production
itself. The resurgence and increased visibility of activist archives stress the
continued importance of archives in an era saturated with information; and
archival activism points to more democratic ways to wield power, making it
more inclusive, less hierarchical, and able to be shared by all.

The politics of the archives is embedded in the larger politics of society.
As such, lessons learned from autonomous, activist archives can help inform
broader projects of democracy and social justice. In particular, they demon-
strate that politics is underwritten by knowledge, and the archive is central to
both. With knowledge practices reflecting political practices, and vice versa,
a politics of equality, democracy, and justice requires that these same values
guide the production of knowledge and the archive that supports it. Activist

90   Ibid.

archives and archival activism are therefore not just needed to radicalize the politics of the archive. As democracy requires informed citizens, the archives of radical groups can offer alternative perspectives, knowledge, and inspiration when official politics threatens to be undemocratic. Activist archives can help to revitalize democratic politics by offering alternative discourses and practices to communities and, more broadly, by keeping the public at the forefront of democracy.

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