

Workshop Proposal // “Archiving America/American Archives”

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Workshop Title // “Planetary Archives in the Anthropocene”

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Recent years have seen increased attention to the planetary framework as a critical episteme to reflect on the complexity of the manifold social, political, cultural and ecological dynamics of modernity. As a counterpoint to the totalizing conception of the global, the planetary offers “incitements for thinking about our planet across a vast range of timescales, fields of vision and trajectories” (Clark & Szerszynski 3) and embraces experiences and perspectives that are “speculative and experimental,” that “engage in multiple temporalities and epistemologies,” that are “polyvocal and collective” (Härting & Meek 18). In this sense, the planetary attempts to bring “as equitably as possible everybody, every person and every text, every archive and every memory in the sphere of care and concern” (Mbembe). The enormous potential for cultural critique and social change implied here by Mbembe matches the capaciousness of the concept - a capaciousness that necessarily also creates room for blind spots and blank spaces.

Building on Mbembe, our panel centers the notion of the planet as an archive in and of itself that has the potential to bring into view the anthropocentric entanglements of “the history of the planet, the history of life on the planet, and the history of the globe made by the logics of empires, capital, and technology” (Chakrabarty 1), and as such, is an invaluable gauge for the depth of the human impact on our planetary ecology. Simultaneously, we encourage caution and critique that pays specific attention to the abovementioned blind spots rendered (in)visible in the vastness of the planet-as-archive. Considering the anthropogenic polycrisis through the framework of the planet-as-archive reveals not only the scope of the crises of the planet and the “collapse of the established separation of geosphere, biosphere, technosphere” (Avanessian & Falb 26), but also underscores the centrality and simultaneous fragility of archival practices and the precarity of the preservation and fostering of knowledge in and on the Anthropocene in face of fast-paced, expansive and even “weird” planetary changes (cf. Almeida & Hoyer 3, cf. Turnbull et al. 1220).

Examples for these planetary archives range from the melting ice cores at our planet's poles, thru civilization preserving “black boxes” to the “lunar anthropocene” beyond Earth’s orbit, all of which serve as a testament to the crisis they document by underscoring the **paradoxical position of the planetary archives** that simultaneously make tangible, are implicated in and are threatened by the Anthropocene and its conditions (cf. Almeida & Hoyer 3). If, as Samantha R. Winn argues, the Anthropocene is not just a mere challenge to archival practices, but is a “progressive and possibly terminal illness for the contemporary discipline of archives” (“Dying Well in the Anthropocene”), it forcefully poses the question of **what exactly constitutes an archive** in times of expansive planetary disaster, decay and destruction?

We therefore ask contributors to reflect on what it means to **relate to the planetary archive**, i.e., being “subject to the cosmos, wandering like a planet” (Neyrat 109). How is the **materiality of planet** experienced, particularly **its radical otherness**, its “cosmological excess irreducible to our local, social, ecological, and geological incarnation” that leaves us “always in a state of deterritorialization, of delocalization, of overflowing borders” (ibid.)?

Moreover, how can **archival infrastructure** designed to document the polycrisis or safeguard knowledge beyond it be reconceptualized to also **foster thinking about our planetary futures** “as equitably as possible,” to evoke Mbembe again, and beyond the rhetoric of utopia and dystopia (cf. Chakrabarty 8)? How may these practices decenter the dominant **continuities of** colonial, imperial, and capitalist accumulation, exploitation, and **dispossession** and instead **center**, for example, **queer and intersectional conceptions of planetary futures** that aim to contribute **agency** more justly across different human actors? And how may these practices also contribute to deconstructing the division between the **human, non-human and the more-than-human** in a way that does not merely exchange “one kind of universalism for another” (Batzke, Hess and Espinoza Garrido 6)? What are the ways in which this reciprocal relationship between the planet-as-archive and the expansive crises it negotiates in turn **challenge the planetary framework**?

We invite prospective panelists to address these, and related, questions about **Planetary Archives in the Anthropocene** and submit their proposals to svenja.engelmann-kewitz@tu-dresden.de, dominik.steinhilber@uni-konstanz.de, jens.temmen@hhu.de and florian.wagner@uni-jena.de.

Confirmed Speaker

Kylie Crane (Rostock): “Material Archives, Future Artefacts, and other Anthropocene Matters”