

# The Figure of the Archive: Research Seminar

Date Wednesday 1 October 2025  
Time **15.00-18.00** CET  
Facilitator Prof. Mick Wilson  
Hosted at HDK-Valand  
Locatuion Online ZOOM <https://gu-se.zoom.us/j/67039090921>

## Contributors include

- [Marc Johnson](#), PhD researcher Film and Media, SKH, Stockholm, Sweden;
- Dr. Arash Deghani, Postdoctoral Researcher, [CEAC - Center for the Study of Contemporary Arts](#), Univeristy of Lille, France.
- Dr. [Karl Logge](#), independent researcher, Sant'Antioco, Italy;

## Schedule

**15:00** Welcome and introduction: Introduction to the figure of the archive and different ways in which the idea of the archive has functioned in recent cultural practice.

**15:15** Mark Johnson, PhD Researcher

**15:45** Dr. Arash Deghani

**16:15** break

**16:45** Dr. Karl Logge

**17:15** Closing discussion and sharing of references. Notice the second seminar in the series in Spring 2026.

**18:00** End

## About this Seminar

The focus is on the archival as research construct in current artistic research and related areas. The goal of the event is to consider *the figure* of the archive as it functions in a range of current artistic research projects and the different political readings of this figure within these research undertakings.

The archive has been a central figure and pre-occupation over several decades for both the organizational infrastructure and the practical production of contemporary art. Indeed, it might be argued that the archive has become the enabling and the limiting horizon of many cultural practices. It often seems that all forms of collection, all forms of memory work, and all forms of programme are only conceivable through some appeal to the figure of the archive. Even the desire for alternative cultural politics, including decolonized and counter hegemonic practices, seem to predicate themselves on alternative archival models and archiving otherwise. See for example:

- <https://www.decolonisingthearchive.com/>
- <https://dpe.tools/resources/instituting-from-archives>

In this online workshop we will explore the reasons for this ascendancy of the figure of archive, the different ways in which it has been experimentally re-constructed, and the wider contexts of current archival impulses across contemporary art. The session will also promote the sharing of bibliographies and practical exemplars by currnet and recnty comoleted doctoral researchers.

# Invitation to the Speakers

The invitation to our speakers has been simply to share with us an account of their research and the role of the archive within their research practice. In each case the speaker is using an image, idea or figure of the archive that is in some sense more than just the literal repository of documents and files within a formal institutional archive. The invitation to the speakers is to provide us with an opportunity to understand some of the different ways in which the figure of the archive is operating within different research processes. As part of the workshop we will also be sharing a set of references and sources that different participants have found useful in different ways. The details of this resource will be shared during the workshop itself.

This event is intended for PhD students primarily, with some places for masters students. This seminar is also a session within the doctoral level course “Theoretical Constructs in Artistic Research”.

## Context

Adina Arvatu has noted that the “figure of the archive has immense cultural and methodological significance in what we, in our posthuman(ist) age, still call ‘humanities’: Foucault and Derrida ... contributed largely to this significance. They thematized the ‘archive’ (in the singular) and endowed it with an unmistakable (yet often misunderstood) figurality.” (\*) In this research seminar we focus not on the humanities per se but rather we consider some of the different ways in which the archive functions as a *figure* within specific artistic research projects. In approaching the archive as a figure, we are drawing upon a wide range of recent approaches to *figuration*, such as that outlined by Donna Haraway in a recent interview where she described how:

“Figuring is a way of thinking or cogitating or meditating or hanging out with ideas. I’m interested in how figures help us avoid the deadly fantasy of the literal. Of course, the literal is another trope, but we’re going to hold the literal still for a minute, as the trope of no trope. Figures help us avoid the fantasy of ‘the one true meaning’. They are simultaneously visual and narrative as well as mathematical. They are very sensual.” (\*\*) In this seminar four researchers working across film, art, and craft traditions will present the different ways in which the archive is a figure that is operative within their current work. Based on these four examples we will then try to identify some of the ‘sensual’, ideational and affective affordances of ‘the figure of the archive’ as a construct used within artistic research processes.

## Supplementary information

(1) In taking the imaginary as an object of analysis or as a process for study, “figure” is a construct that is used to indicate the clustering of a set of images, narrative elements, motifs and constellations of idea/image/story fragments that while not settling into the categorical fixity of a concept, nonetheless operate as a recognizably consistent element – with multiple variants- across texts, sites, utterances.... “Figure” is a term originally produced within rhetorical analysis, however, it has evolved with psychoanalytical and other ways of thinking about meaning making in the 20th C.

The archive is a potent “figure” in the contemporary imaginary, one that arguably has achieved a certain hyper-currency since the 1970s and especially from the 1990s onward in cultural practice and discourse.

1. “The figure of the archive has immense cultural and methodological significance in what we, in our posthuman(ist) age, still call “humanities:’ Foucault and Derrida -whether considered independently of each other, or together, as I am trying to do here-contributed largely to this significance. They thematized the “archive” (in the singular) and endowed it with an unmistakable (yet often misunderstood) figurality. Granted, their “archives” do not quite cut the same figure. Nor would that be interesting, if that were the case”

“Succinctly put, Nora’s point is that at the same time that history as a discipline became more critical of its archival practices, society as a whole was seized by anarchival frenzy bordering on compulsive hoarding.”

Adina Arvatu “Spectres of Freud: The Figure of the Archive in Derrida and Foucault”, citing Pierre Nora, general editor’s introduction’ to *Les lieux de memoire*

2. “Figuring is a way of thinking or cogitating or meditating or hanging out with ideas. I’m interested in how figures help us avoid the deadly fantasy of the literal. Of course, the literal is another trope, but we’re going to hold the literal still for a minute, as the trope of no trope. Figures help us avoid the fantasy of ‘the one true meaning’. They are simultaneously visual and narrative as well as mathematical. They are very sensual.”  
(Donna Haraway in interview)

3. “We aim to address how figures, figuring and configuration provide a way to study complex, contemporary problems and processes that require interdisciplinary approaches. We outline how individual contributions make use of figures, figuring and configuration. We demonstrate what is at stake in the analysis of figures, the practice of figuring, and the compositions of configuration.”

“Long into the medieval period, *figura* signified ways of knowing that connected signs to material and historical life.”

“Although Auerbach did not intend his methods to be either sociological or political, thinking with figures has accompanied a variety of approaches in the social sciences, the humanities and political practice. For example, Georg Simmel’s sociology used the figures of the stranger, the poor and the adventurer to illustrate a more general condition, whereby “each person is called to realize his own, his very own prototype”  
(From the intro to the volume *Figure: Concept and Method*)

\*Adina Arvatu “Spectres of Freud: The Figure of the Archive in Derrida and Foucault”, citing Pierre Nora, general editor’s introduction’ to *Les lieux de memoire*.)

\*\* Martha Kenney and Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Donna Haraway in conversation with Martha Kenney”, *M+ Magazine*, 2023. URL: <https://www.mplus.org.hk/en/magazine/donna-haraway-critique-anthropocene-capitalocene/>, accessed 8/6/2025

## Bios of speakers

### Marc Johnson

March Johanson is a French-Beninese award-winning visual artist and filmmaker whose work has been shown extensively around the world. Important individual exhibitions include The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti-Shrem Museum of Art (2017), UC Davis, United States (in collaboration with the Kramlich collection); La Maréchalerie, Contemporary Art Center (2016), Versailles, France, and The Zentrum für Medienkunst, (Werkleitz Gesellschaft e.V.), Halle, Germany. Marc Johnson participated in Manifesta 13 (2020), the Sundance Film Festival (2016, 2018), the Biennale of Moscow for Young Art (2017, 2018), The Berlin International Film Festival, Berlinale Shorts (2015), the Yvonne Rainer Project at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume (2014), Ligne of Chance at Fondation Ricard in France (2009), and more than 50 International Film Festival worldwide. Major group exhibitions include “OLHO“, Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; “constellation\*s, new ways of living in the world“, arc en rêve centre d’architecture, Bordeaux, France; “trans(?)duction“, CNEAI= Centre National Edition Art Image, Chatou, France and “ATM tempo I/II/III“, Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo, Japan. He received the LVMH Young Artist Award in 2009, was awarded the Best Short Film Award from the Las Palmas International Film Festival de Gran Canaria in 2016, the Cornish Family Prize for Art & Design Publishing from the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 2017 and the Best Short Film Award from the 10th Annual Milwaukee Film Festival in 2018 and receive the i-Portunus, European Commission’s mobility scheme for artists in 2019. He is currently in the final year of his doctoral studies at SKH, Sweden. (See <https://www.uniarts.se/english/people/co-workers/marc-johnson/> and <https://marcjohanson.fr/> )

## Dr. Arash Dehghani

An artist-researcher, Arash Dehghani is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at CEAC, having completed his PhD studies in Arts Plastiques at the Université de Lille, France in Spring 2025. The focus of his artistic research has been on the archive and histories of marginality in Iran. His scholarship includes essays and introductions to two volumes he edited, *Archive and Photography*, Akshaneh Press, Tehran (2020) and *Visibility and Photography*, Akshaneh Press, Tehran (2021). He is the recipient of multiple international grants and fellowships including: Adlerbertska Hospitiestiftelsen, Sweden; Barrande Fellowship, Czech Republic; Interreg project TRANSUNIV grant, Belgium; Bourses de mobilité internationale de recherche of Fondation, I-SITE ULNE, France.

His PhD was an artistic research project investigating the “oil encounters” in Abadan, a refinery and port city on the southwestern border of Iran. Through this project, a fictional world is invented to describe, scrutinise, narrate, dismantle and reimagine the petroleum landscape of Abadan. In recent decades, interdisciplinary research across the fields of arts, environmental humanities, sociology, ethnography, human geography, and cultural studies have addressed fossil fuels beyond their role as means of energy, focusing on their social and cultural values and meanings. Critically engaging with these works, this thesis centres on the “oil encounters” in the Abadan petroleum landscape. The focus on these encounters challenges two predominant perspectives: first, the extractivist worldview, which reduces petroleum to merely a resource or property of a political territory (i.e., national, colonial), or a fuel/commodity within the petro-capitalist global system; and second, the overarching narratives of transition that disconnect how we know oil from when and from where we know oil. The fictional world of this research was not formulated in advance as a protocol for research operation. Instead, it emerged as an unexpected outcome of a self-reflective approach that evolved throughout the research process, shaped by two primary concerns: a) To think and act within the “context” of the research task. It considers the failures, possibilities, limits, detours, and risks of conducting research under the politically and culturally unstable conditions of contemporary Iran, where field research is perilous and archives are inaccessible and riddled with silences. b) To construct a heterogeneous narrative of the petroleum landscape, intertwining diverse encounters and conflicting imaginaries of oil. A narrative capable of capturing the nuanced uncertainties, opacity, and uncanniness of oil's presence in the landscape.

The storyline of this fictional world follows Iman Tanhaei, an Iranian doctoral student researching history, and his friend, Scheherazade Moayedi-Bjorge, a Norwegian-Iranian scholar. Tanhaei embarks on a quest to trace his family history within petroleum archives, ultimately reaching the lands of oil. Amid a political uprising leading to a revolution, Tanhaei disappears. Moayedi-Bjorge returns from exile, discovers his unfinished project, and works on it to publish his findings. The strategies and techniques of fiction such as author surrogate, verisimilitude, interior dialogue, frame story, using multiple perspectives and non-linear temporality allow me to evoke the stories, memories, anecdotes, tales, images, imaginations, and sensory experiences of the inhabitants as the elements in the narrative of the petroleum landscape. However, the fictional world functions not only to describe the encounters and imaginations that petroleum has formed but also to propose a different mode of imagining being in the world of petroleum. It invites the reader to actively engage with multiple characters, events, and conditions.

## Dr. Karl Logge

Karl Logge completed his doctoral thesis *MAPPING, WEAVING, WEIRDING: Rethinking the radical to weird design* in 2022, supported by an Australian Post-graduate Award under the supervision of Prof. Craig Bremner. This study involved working both independently and remotely whilst based in Europe over the major duration of these studies, and draws extensively from his practice as it spans artistic modes of production and sustainable and redirective design futures.

Karl Logge is part of an artist duo, together with Marta Romani, and their projects bring together community-driven processes, site-specific research and materially driven experimentation tied to the

timeless gestures of spinning and weaving. Originally from Sydney in Australia and Brescia in North Italy, they now live and work on the small island of Sant'Antioco in Sardinia where they absorb the knowledge maintained by the master weaver Chiara Vigo. Working through colour, time and repetition their immersive practice includes gathering plants and producing dyes using traditional techniques, spinning different fibres with the 'fuso' and using found and collected materials to build their looms and tools.

They expand on the radical and localised aspects of their practice by engaging with rural, regional or remote contexts, contemporary art institutions and networks, and various festivals to produce immersive experiences that make visible a knowledge-in-action whilst engaging and contributing to the life of the communities that host them. Using a mix of live-art, installation and participatory or co-creative exchange, they explore how the fundamental acts of ancient weaving create connections between various cultures, times and spaces, through works that unfold within a complex entanglement of ecology, culture, landscape, memory and sustainment. They produce interactive workshops, expanded tapestries, site-specific interventions, delirious archives, imaginary landscapes and crafted objects-spaces. Their combined presence enacts and embodies different forms of knowing and unknowing through the transformation of elemental material, sound, visions, symbols and everyday objects. In this way weaving operates as a material space of care, as well as a means of developing a shared territory of continuity, exchange and encounter that can rewild and regenerate a deep time connection with the natural world, different energies and forces.