

## 5 The Archive and the Informational Sublime

Arnold Dreyblatt

The previous chapter considered the archivalist strategies surrounding the personal archive, in particular artists' ambivalent standpoints to the personal archive, to lifelogging and to the QS movement. Rancière's claim that archivalist art 'forms an inventory of traces of history', testifying to 'a history and a world in common', meanwhile, is examined in the work of the American Berlin-based artist Arnold Dreyblatt.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter considers the uses of historical traces and inventories in Dreyblatt's large-scale installations in the light of the sublime. The sublime often characterises the moment of the archival discovery or revelation, a situation which can be related to Dreyblatt's own discovery of the text which was to inspire his archivalist works, *Who's Who in Central & East Europe* (1935). At the same time, it is implicated in the dynamic of incommensurability, awe and incomprehension which marks the sublime in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* as 'the irreducible and heterogeneous presence at the heart of the sensible' (p. 19). In what follows, I argue that these two modes, which I shall refer to as the archival sublime and the informational sublime, are both consequences of unresolved debates on the archive and the limits of representation. This chapter evaluates both their relationship and their refraction through the lens of archivalist practice.

### Out of the Archives: *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*

The archive characterises much of Dreyblatt's work, from the multimedia opera *Who's Who in Central and East Europe* 1933 (1991) to the *Reading Projects* (1991–2005) and *The Memory Project* (1998). While *Who's Who* draws upon and remediates an archival text with enduring significance for Dreyblatt's art, *The Memory Project* produces something like an archival record of earlier works such as the *Reading Room* or *Reading Projects*, which themselves create what Dreyblatt has called a 'temporary functioning archival system'.<sup>2</sup> Here, the observer is invited to actively participate in the experience of the archive: having entered the reading room, she is able to consult a catalogue, to request documents and to view the results of earlier searches on screens. She must know what she is looking for beforehand, and fill in forms by hand in order to call up materials and take responsibility for

consulting them. The work has been staged in a range of cities since 1995, including a very large installation as part of the Bern Biennale in 2001 as *The Reading Room*, a ten-day interactive performance-installation in which 348 inhabitants of Bern took part. Electronic data from *The Reading Room* were displayed as part of *The Memory Project*, so that the record of the earlier piece became part of the fabric of the latter. Both works, meanwhile, arise from *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*, which inspires the format of *The Reading Room* and provides the text for *The Memory Project*. The engagement with the sublime in works such as these arises principally from their scale, and the corresponding dwarfing of the single observer within the large systems they create, an effect which is both mimicked and modified in the enormous data streams which characterise works like *The Great Archive* and the *Wunderblock*. Before scrutinising the dynamics of scale in Dreyblatt's work, though, I consider another context in which the presence of the sublime is equally felt: that of the text which underpins the majority of Dreyblatt's later output, *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*.

Dreyblatt's diverse statements on his work are unanimous in positioning his discovery of this text as the watershed moment to which his later artistic production owes its genesis:

In 1985 I found a copy of *Who's Who in Central & East Europe* (ed. Taylor, 1935) in a used bookstore (Byyoglu Kitapçılık Ltd)—near the Galanta Tower in Istanbul. The 'finding', dissection and reconstruction of this 'Memory Text' has focused and fine-tuned my attentions into an obsession over the past decade. In attempting to 'read' this work in countless meanings, renovating its sense to 'make it new', a seemingly endless array of projects and ideas has been spawned.<sup>3</sup>

Dreyblatt refers to the book as a 'found artefact' which would later become the organising principle of a range of installations and performances concerned with memorial traces and their technological articulation (p. 93). The book is very rare, and is probably the last such work to be published until the late 1980s; according to Dreyblatt, the first comparable volume to emerge after the Second World War is Strynowski's *Who's Who in the Socialist Countries of Europe* (1989).<sup>4</sup> In this, the 1933 text is pregnant with what is perhaps the greatest blank space in European cultural memory: its repertoire of short biographical entries on notable persons in the Eastern Europe of 1933 bears silent witness to the catastrophe that was to befall so many during the war years and the Holocaust. The absence at the heart of the book, we learn, inspires the manner of Dreyblatt's later engagement with its fragmentary structure:

As I first began randomly to turn the pages of this book, I found myself entering a complex network of personal and collective myth construction: a geopolitical memory of Central and Eastern Europe put together as if

a puzzle were made from thousands of individual fragmentary stories, revealing an image of a vanished world captured at a critical point in time, which only a few years later would all but cease to exist. (p. 93)

The original text, in English, comprises short entries concerning individuals, some apparently written in haste, and some in the first person. The impossibility of ever following all of the various trails of this *Who's Who* looms large, and inspires their belated presentation as 'hypertext multimedia opera', a form which both allows for richer indexing of the entries and paradoxically highlights their relative inconsequentiality.

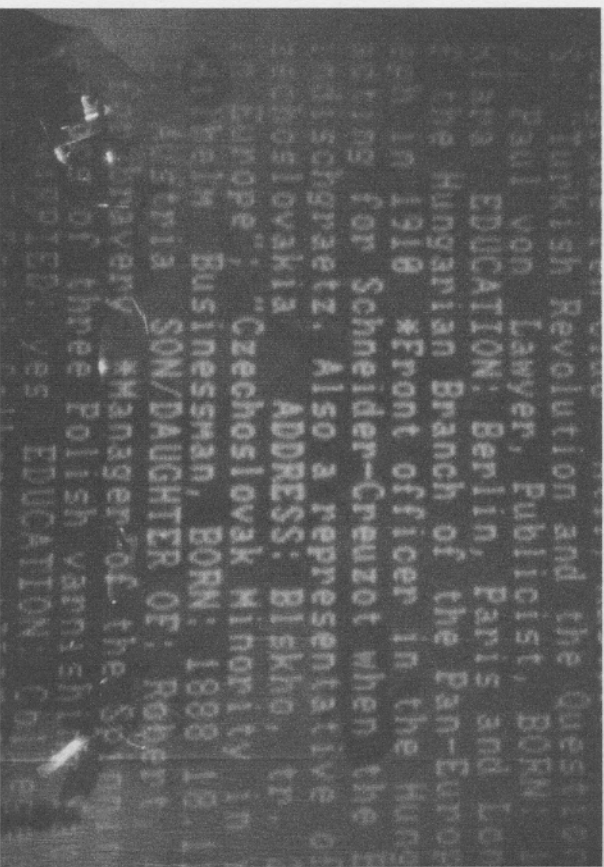


Figure 5.1 Arnold Dreyblatt, *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*, hypertext multimedia opera, Gasteig, Munich, 1991. Photograph: Dirk Bleicker

The name 'Camille, Vitez Aggházy, Budapest', for example, can now be linked to the professional context of 'museums', but produces only the short entry 'founded the Royal Hungarian War Museum in 1918 Corresponding intensively with all war museums of the world!'.<sup>5</sup> The statement's energetic expression testifies both to the project's totalising ambitions and their negation, underlined by the reader's knowledge of the destruction wrought upon the world's museums a short time later. The simultaneous openness and radical closure of the 1933 *Who's Who* leads Dreyblatt both to an 'obsessional' redeployment of its data in a 'seemingly endless array of projects and ideas' and to an attitude of almost religious reverence. As Dreyblatt comments, 'for me this book is a "found artefact" and I have treated it as a canonic and authoritative text: a "given" or "closed" text to which no commentary or

interpretation may be added'.<sup>6</sup> The 'Ur-Text' of the 1933 *Who's Who* suggests both hermetic closure and authority and, at the same time, a vast array of links to be followed by the latter-day reader.

As Dreyblatt himself acknowledges, the selection of text fragments which features in his 1991 *Who's Who* creates a 'simulation of a "guided tour" through chosen paths in an architecture of biographical information:

I have largely concentrated my selections on the forgotten lives and the 'no longer famous'; (though perhaps individual names might be familiar to East European specialists), whose forgotten voices call out to us now, both singly and in polyphonic chorus as an individual and a 'collective' identity and fate.<sup>7</sup>

For all that the 1933 text forbids commentary or interpretation, its use is highly selective, and the terms according to which the reader negotiates the *Who's Who* are idiosyncratic. As well as the more neutral 'beginnings' and 'lifelines', the categories of 'minorities', 'briefly mentioned' and 'vanities' all bear the mark of Dreyblatt's post-hoc revisitation of the *Who's Who* in the 1980s. The *Who's Who*, then, is instrumentalised to Dreyblatt's vision of the collective fate of those referred to in its pages, and the apparent freedom of its hypertext navigation in fact conceals a 'simulation' of a reading of the original. The work recalls the thrust of Boltanski's *Lycée Chases* works, alluding to the 1931 school leavers' photographs of a largely vanished generation of young Jewish adults. Where Boltanski represents the loss of individuals through extravagantly blurred enlarged photographs, though, Dreyblatt's project presents a genuine biographical repertoire, albeit one which is positioned on the fault line between documentation and simulation.

Dreyblatt's discovery itself remains a fixed point in the endless reconfiguration of *Who's Who* across installations, texts and performances, and is discussed in his foreword to the online and printed editions of Dreyblatt's *Who's Who in Central and East Europe* 1933, in interviews and in the two 1997 articles in which he reflects on the trajectory of his work.<sup>8</sup> This, for Dreyblatt, is a story which must be told in order to explain his work's preoccupation with 'memory: what we choose to forget, what we choose to remember and the how, why, and where of storage and memorializing'.<sup>9</sup> In documenting his working processes and, most of all, the discovery of *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*, Dreyblatt's work intersects with a range of texts in which historians, since the late 1980s, have considered the experience of archival work as well as documenting its products.

### The Archival Turn and the Allure of the Archive

Writing in 2011, Carolyn Steedman notes the relative lack of visibility of the 'archival turn' within History as a discipline, paradoxically characterising the archival turn as 'a road not taken, to that utterly ordinary place of work

we are always already in'.<sup>10</sup> If historians are always already 'in' the archive, in that the working practices of many are significantly shaped by archival research, accounts of historians' experiences in the archive are far less common. It is in this context that Steedman signposts the work of Arlette Farge, whose *Le Goût de l'archive* (1989), recently translated for an Anglophone readership as part of the very archival turn to which Steedman refers, offers a remarkable account of the 'passion' of archival research.<sup>11</sup> Farge radically decentres the subject of archival research, beginning her text with a grammatically feminine subject which turns out to be 'une liasse', a bundle of documents. There is a provocative play between the 'elle' of this inscrutable bundle and that of chapter 6, 'Elle vient d'arriver' ('She Has Just Arrived'), which turns out to refer to the female researcher.

The chapter is concerned with the detail and materiality of the historian's encounter with the archive and its bureaucracy: upon arrival, she is asked for a card which she does not possess and is sent back to another room to obtain a pass attesting to her absence. These, then, are the minutiae of the visit to the archives or, in French, 'aller aux archives'. *Le Goût de l'archive* details the allocation of places in the reading room, the checking of catalogues, the filling-in of forms and even the distracting sounds of one's neighbour's cough or of the clicking of high heels on parquet (p. 49). The latter is ascribed once more to 'elle', the chapter's unnamed female protagonist, although it is unclear whether this is the same 'elle' we have followed since arrival in the archive. Although the chapter (and indeed the book) operates under the sign of the third person, a degree of identification with the female researcher is likely in 'Elle vient d'arriver', as we empathise with the researcher's tribulations in the face of archival bureaucracy. The account of the arrival in the archive ends with the 'brief frisson' which reminds the researcher, as she returns to her place, that 'she has come here to consult a manuscript' (p. 49; translation slightly modified). The ensuing section break is immediately followed by the description of a woman walking past in heels: 'the way her old-fashioned high heels hammer the floor, always sticking between two uneven boards, she has to be doing it on purpose' (p. 49). The passage once more turns on the indeterminacy of the subject, which is one of the central strategies in Farge's rich account. This 'elle' could refer to the researcher we have been observing throughout; or, equally, it could reflect one of the shifts in viewpoint subsequently made in order to survey the full range of the fauna of the archive, including the unnamed man who is noisily playing with his signet ring, the young woman who rifles through the fifteen-volume works of an unnamed philosopher or the grey-haired man snuffling at a nearby table.

One of the paradoxes of the book is the combination of its acute interest in the researcher's experiences with its third-person mode of address. The first person is never used and, for Philippe Carrard, the strategy is part of a self-conscious play with historiographical convention: 'genres in which the researcher tells of the manner in which he or she pursued his or her enquiry,

such as memoirs, journals or prefaces, do not simply authorise the use of the "I"; they make of it the norm'.<sup>12</sup> In breaking with the convention, Farge is critical of the assumptions informing the memoir and the *journal intime* and, in particular, of ego history. In a 1988 article, Farge comments that the volume *Essais d'ego-histoire*, far from breaking with the 1970s and 1980s, was part of the 'most peculiar tendency in which popular memoirs, narratives of women, of deviants and those on the margins of society, and then biographies of famous men succeeded one another'.<sup>13</sup> For Farge, the tendency is fundamentally conservative, seeking to 'reassure' the reader that the individual is of interest to the discourses of history.<sup>14</sup> Carrard's analysis brings important insights to bear upon the text displayed on the back cover of the French original, which appears to clarify the book's biographical underpinnings: 'this book, informed by eighteenth-century manuscripts, describes the work of a historian who bears the passion of the archive within her'. As Carrard argues, the text 'appears to announce a personal narrative', even a life-writing project:

Arlette Farge will describe the documents which, for her, have so much 'taste', but she will also speak of herself in telling the story of her work. Now a reading of the text shows that the paratext [the cover text] must be taken literally on this point: *Le Goût de l'archive* does describe the 'profession' of the historian, but it describes only this profession and not Arlette Farge as an 'individual'.<sup>15</sup>

The cover text crudely identifies the 'elle' of *Le Goût de l'archive* with Farge herself, suggesting that the archival 'tastes' and passions described therein quite simply belong to the book's author. Farge, however, is at pains to stress that those passions themselves bring about a complex engagement with the archival past, 'between understanding and reason, passion and disorder' (p. 123). Part of that engagement is the dynamic of identification and uncoupling with the elusive 'she' who threads her way through the book, never named and never biographically determined. For all that one might suppose that 'Elle vient d'arriver', with its focus on the female researcher, offers a way of reinscribing the activities of women historians within official discourses of history, Farge frustrates the reader's attempt to locate the book's female subject. By offering a series of possible referents for the 'elle' announced in the book's first sentence, and refusing to disclose the personal history of the author which the book's cover advertises, she argues for an alternative historiography which will consistently subject the category of the individual to scrutiny.

### The Reality Effect and the Archival Sublime

The disorientation wrought by Farge's slippery archival subjects resonates with two further aspects of *Le Goût de l'archive*: the encounter with materiality and the moment of the archival discovery. The early part of the

researcher's encounter with the archive is bound up with a materiality that has little to do with her research: the ephemera of coughs, scrapes and voices which the historian negotiates even before coming into contact with the manuscript. The 'frisson' which reminds her of the task at hand is pregnant with a sensuality which arises from frustration, but which also characterises the encounter with the archive in all its plenitude: 'the archive is difficult in its materiality' (p. 4; translation modified). The material aspect of the archive, for Farge, is felt both in tactility and in immense scale: the archive is 'excessive and overwhelming, like a spring tide, an avalanche or a flood' (p. 4). The individual historian pales into insignificance: he (the researcher is briefly gendered male at this point) speaks of 'immersion' and even 'drowning' in the huge 'natural flux' of the archive. Archival collections, stowed away underground, are compared to 'the hulking masses of rock in the Atlantic, called *basses*, that are visible only twice a year, during the lowest tides' (p. 4). The phantom geography of the archive is charged with the researcher's knowledge of his minuscule presence within it: this is a 'landscape of catastrophe' (p. 51; translation modified). Here, Farge has returned to the phenomena of the reading room, where 'the slightest unusual allure, a gesture which usually has no significance (a neighbour nervously twisting an ugly red-dish lock of hair) stands out in such relief as to border on the fantastic'.<sup>16</sup> This overwhelming contrast, the failure of the imagination to encompass an 'immense universe' (p. 117; translation modified), equally characterises the archival discovery, a moment compared to 'the essence of things and beings' (p. 8). The discovery is at the heart of Farge's book, and is infused with the 'sensation of apprehending the real'.<sup>17</sup>

This is perhaps the best-known aspect of Farge's book, leading later critics such as Marie-Pascale Huglo to focus upon 'the emotional shock of the researcher who, by means of the archive, thinks she has "touched" the real'.<sup>18</sup> Farge in fact roots the researcher's overwhelming experience of the archive in a particular intuition of the real derived from the vividness and scale of the archive:

Unsettling and colossal, the archive grabs hold of the reader. With a sudden harshness it opens onto a hidden world where rejects, wretches and ne'er-do-wells play their parts in an unstable and living society. As soon as you begin to read, you are struck by an impression of reality that no printed text, no matter how unfamiliar, can give. (p. 5)

In the original French text, the reader's compelling encounter with the past is framed not simply as the experience of the real, but of an *effet de réel*.<sup>19</sup> Literally an 'effect of the real' or 'reality effect', the term refers to Roland Barthes's narratological essay of 1968 'L'Effet de réel', a move which significantly recontextualises the researcher's discovery. Barthes famously discusses narrative details which are treated as 'filling' (catalyses), which are 'superfluous' in relation to narrative structure or, in a still more extreme

case, 'notations which no function (not even the most indirect) can justify'.<sup>20</sup> Barthes' examples include the barometer in Madame Aubain's household in Flaubert's *Un Coeur simple*, an object which plays no obvious role in the plot, and no direct narrative function. In aligning archival research with Barthes' reality effect, Farge implies that its processes and discoveries may be just as coded as those of narrative fiction.

The indeterminacy surrounding the spectral subject of the text thus spreads to the referential function of *Le Goût de l'archive* which, as Michael Sheringham argues, entertains a complex relation with truth-telling:

Farge's vindication of the archive as the locus of a particular encounter with the real constantly focuses on the notion of the trace as constituting an 'excès de sens' that cannot be readily assimilated to narrative or discursive order, and yet can provide a kind of evidence of the past that cannot simply be brushed aside. In her view, the truth value of the archive does not derive from its use as evidence, its role in the construction of hypotheses about past events.<sup>21</sup>

The power of the archival trace, as Sheringham continues, 'is related to the disruptive character' of 'the archive' (my emphasis) in the singular, as it commonly appears in English: "'[t]he archive" ['the archive'] always entertains an infinite number of relations to the real'.<sup>22</sup> This multiplicity of relations is key to Farge's account, I suggest, as 'les archives' coalesce into a single entity while the individual researcher morphs between genders into an open-ended series of subjects.

The dilemma of scale felt here is central to the archival sublime, and the individual's struggle to get to grips with the immensity of phenomena constitutes an unresolved, heterogeneous relation. That relation, too, is glimpsed in Steedman's reference to the archival sublime in 'After the Archive', where 'it has to do with the sublime moment (the moment of supreme satisfaction) of finding something from the past'. However, as Steedman acknowledges, 'the sublime moment occurs when the historian knows that it (whatever it is) cannot be found, for it was never there in the first place'.<sup>23</sup> Steedman attributes the term to the economic historian Emma Rothschild, in whose account the archival sublime subsists as a fantasy, 'the sentiment of being able to "touch the real world"'.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, the archival sublime is invested in the impossibility of the discovery as well as its pursuit, and in an undecidable relation to the real.

Alice Yaeger Kaplan, too, casts the archive as a 'realm of passion' rendered meaningful by the powerful undertow of the life stories of its researchers.<sup>25</sup> For those researchers, 'even the smallest result is "a bit of truth"', even though Kaplan argues that such 'truth' does not belong to the realm of fact: 'usually there is no mother lode, no original manuscript to be retrieved—the gold is all in the dust' (p. 116). Randolph Starn, meanwhile, attributes the relation to archival institutions themselves, whose conservation of documents

across the centuries may make of them 'the temple of fact, objectivity, and omniscience' or, equally, 'the factory of deceit, distortion and prejudice' due to the fakes and forgeries they periodically harbour. As Starn argues, 'truth-telling and fiction-making are both persistent truths about archives'.<sup>26</sup>

### *Unrecorded Lives and the Infinite Archive*

One of the most compelling collections of 'tropes of the archive as truth' in Starn's account is Danilo Kiš's story 'Encyclopedia of the Dead', in which a Serbian academic visits an archive containing vast registers of the lives of the dead. The academic is able to learn intimate, previously unknown details concerning her dead father's life because the encyclopedia catalogues his experiences in immense detail as part of its vast repertoire of 'otherwise unrecorded lives'.<sup>27</sup> As Starn notes, this 'perfect archive turns out to be a dream' (p. 389); its perfection lies in the fantasy of completion which it bears within it. As in Sheringham's reading of Farge, or Kaplan's judgement that 'an archive can be anyplace, but for the archive to be, there should be too much of it, too many papers to sift through' (p. 103), the archival sublime turns on excess and disorientation. Kiš's encyclopedia gestures towards the infinite scale with which both the archive and the sublime are associated, and its uniqueness comes from the fact that it documents *otherwise* unrecorded lives, perfectly complementing and exceeding the entirety of documentation so far created in that other world beyond the archive's confines.

The idea of the infinite archive has given rise to various reflections in recent years, many of them concerned with the vertiginous rate of production of electronic books and documents and the concomitant difficulty of making an exhaustive reading of anything. Faced with 'an archive that is instantly accessible, machine-readable, growing exponentially and constantly being reordered', William J. Turkel, Spencer Roberts and Kevin Kee describe the Borgesian situation whereby 'as one begins to learn about anything, the amount of new information on that subject will accumulate faster than it can be read or understood'.<sup>28</sup> David F. Bell, meanwhile, posits the infinite archive as the logical result of the embedding of archival practices in modern life: the archive is 'not infinite now simply because contemporary technologies make us dream of recording everything, but because events are always already available only in the form of an archive—a trace that is constitutive of the event'.<sup>29</sup> Since, following Pierre Nora, archiving is at the heart of our experience, archiving itself must loom large within the archival record of that experience.

In further acknowledgement of the infernal logic of the archive, Kiš added a postscript to the publication in book form of 'Encyclopedia of the Dead', noting that 'about six months after the dream, and shortly after the story had appeared in print, a Yugoslav magazine published the following item under the title "Archives": East of Salt Lake City, deep in the Rockies' granite bowels, lies one of the most unusual archives in all the United States'.<sup>30</sup> Kiš

subsequently describes a high-tech underground storage facility in which the names of eighteen billion people, living and dead, are stored on 1,250,000 microfilms. Nightmarish though it is, the fantasised archive is in this case real, referring to the Mormon Genealogical Archives in Salt Lake City, Utah. As Julia Creet notes:

Kiš leaves it up to us to note the uncanny correspondences between the archive nightmare and the stolid reality of the Mormon Genealogical Archives. The Mormon Archive, with its goal of becoming the most complete genealogical record in the world, partakes physically and psychologically of the same fantasy as Kiš's *Encyclopedia*. Housed in a closely guarded rock-bound tomb, gathered by an army of anonymous archivists infinitely accumulating the records of the willing and the unwilling, the living and the dead, the archive arrests the lives it records, holding them for retroactive rebaptism in the name of resurrection.<sup>31</sup>

The logic of the uncanny, as Creet suggests, creates a compelling link between the scenario evoked by Kiš and the Mormon archive, and a large part of its unsettling impact arises from the post-hoc mode of reference to the Mormon archive in the 'Postscript'. In claiming that the magazine article appeared shortly after the story's publication, Kiš' narrator perpetuates the uncanny chronology of the story itself, in which the researcher's consultation of the Encyclopedia culminates in a vision of a flower which, according to the caption, is one of those obsessively drawn by her father in his later years. The researcher does not recognise the flower, which does not correspond to her memory of her father's drawings: 'even they can make a mistake', she concludes (p. 65). Just before waking up, however, the researcher reads the end of the entry, which claims that D.M. (her father) took up painting at the time at which his first symptoms of cancer appeared. Having copied the flower, she is able to show her drawing to her father's doctor, who confirms that the flower in question closely resembles the sarcoma from which D.M. suffered.

Even though the Encyclopedia has been revealed to be a dream, the flower crosses the boundary into the real. In a similar way, the belated publication of the magazine article on the real Mormon archive appears as though it is summoned up by the account of the dream in Kiš' narrative. Kiš deliberately heightens the effect, suggesting in the Postscript that the Serbian academic who travels to the Swedish archive is real, and that she 'awoke one day, not without a shudder of amazement, to find that her most intimate nightmares were etched in stone, like a monstrous monument' (p. 193). Such a 'monument' troubles the separation of the 'real' archive from the archival sublime, with its overwhelming and incomprehensible scale. The appearance of the monument in Kiš's text further links the encyclopedic archiving project to that of the Mormon archive. The encyclopedists, the anonymous 'they' whom the

academic mentally reproaches, are guided by principles which sharply recall those of the Mormon religion:

That may give you an idea – some idea, at least – of the copiousness of the information included in *The Encyclopedia of the Dead* by those who undertake the difficult and praiseworthy task of recording – in what is doubtless an objective and impartial manner – everything that can be recorded concerning those who have completed their earthly journey and set off on the eternal one. (p. 43)

The encyclopedists' belief in resurrection, disclosed in the main text of the story, not in the Postscript, suggests that the Mormon subtext has been present all along, and that the uncanny echo of the concerns of 'Encyclopedia of the Dead' in the magazine article is instrumentalised by Kiš in the book's paraxential matter in order to create a reality effect. Belief in resurrection through baptism is one of the principal motivations of the Mormon genealogical project and, as Samuel M. Oterstrom notes,

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints members are required not only to participate in certain religious ordinances such as baptism for themselves, but they are also asked to share their beliefs with non-Mormons and pursue genealogy in order to identify ancestors who were not Church members, often because these ancestors lived before the founding of the Mormon faith in 1830.<sup>32</sup>

The project is bound up with the imperative to baptise the unconverted dead by proxy and to posthumously 'seal' family members to one another, thereby securing their place in the celestial chain. Such imperatives are accompanied by a range of other duties, including the compilation of a family Book of Remembrance and, as Spencer W. Kimball, a former Church President, notes in 1975, the recording of individuals' own life histories: 'We urge our young people to begin today to write and keep records of all the important things in their own lives and also the lives of their antecedents in the event that their parents should fail to record all the important incidents in their own lives'.<sup>33</sup> Kimball's exhortation to express 'your true self' in a personal journal arises from the logic of supplementarity seen in Kiš: youths and parents must both keep journals in case one or the other fails to record important details. Just as the *Encyclopedia of the Dead* supplements documentation in the world outside the archive, so here a mass of journals will complement each other in order to create an exhaustive, patchwork rendering of the self.

One of the obvious difficulties arising from such a vast network of texts is that of redundancy, as details are repeated across journals. The same issue occurs much more prominently, meanwhile, in genealogical research: as Donald Akenson notes, as early as the first decades of the twentieth century, 'the authorities had a fear (unexplained, at least publicly) of doing

temple-work twice or more for the same individual'.<sup>34</sup> Various measures were adopted as a result, including ticking-off names against a master genealogical register and, later, the creation of a huge card index system listing the names of every individual put forward for a votive ceremony. The elimination of duplication is a recurrent concern, and one whose technological resolution had already been imagined by the Mormon author Nephi Anderson in 1912:

As temples multiply, and the work enlarges to its ultimate proportions, this Society, or some organization growing out of this Society, will have in its care some elaborate, but perfect system of exact registration and checking, so that the work in the temples may be conducted without confusion or duplication.<sup>35</sup>

The genealogical project attempts to create Anderson's vision of exact registration and the elimination of all duplication with the technology of the day. From 1982 onwards, computers have been used to store data from micro-filmed records, initially using the IBM 30–81, then one of the most powerful computers available.<sup>36</sup>

Anderson's 'perfect system' is later echoed in the 'very difficult undertaking' announced by Church President Gordon B. Hinckley in 2005 which, through 'complex technology' would eliminate duplication of records, and perhaps refers to the FamilySearch Family Tree web application, then in development, whereby users can consult very large, unified databases of interlinked genealogical information.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Anderson's comment also exemplifies the gesture towards the ideal which is, equally, made in the archival sublime. The 'perfect system', like the perfect archive imagined by Starn, is a technological fantasy, an image of perfect and instantaneous archiving which cannot be realised in the material world. That fantasy, as we shall see, continues to shape contemporary archival art. The engagement of Arnold Dreyblatt's work with the Mormon genealogical projects is in fact twofold: in its pre-occupation with the idea of the perfect archival system; and in a series of engagements with real technologies which approximate, to varying degrees, the seamless registration, storage and retrieval of archival data imagined by Anderson. First, though, I shall consider the more direct interest which Dreyblatt takes in the Mormon archive in the 1990s, and the durable traces which that interest leaves in his installation work of that period.

### From *The Church and the Machine* to Hypertext

Arnold Dreyblatt has reflected upon his interest in Mormon genealogy and, in particular, the Granite Mountain Records Vault, the archive Kiš refers to in 'The Encyclopedia of the Dead'. Dreyblatt places 'the Archive and Library of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints' at the head of the list of 'archives [which] have been inspirational for my work'.<sup>38</sup> Speaking to

Hannah Hurtzig in 1994, too, Dreyblat describes the Mormon archive in familiar terms:

The full archive is kept in a specially climate-controlled building in the mountains outside Salt Lake City, with doors that close in the event of an earthquake or nuclear war. Multiple copies are kept for all eternity. If one is interested in personal data collection and what remains of all the individuals that have lived on earth, this is the ultimate creative work!<sup>39</sup>

The interview significantly contextualises the thread of archival activity which runs through most of Dreyblat's installation work. In particular, the monumental scale both of the Granite Mountain archive and of the Mormon genealogical enterprise appears to inspire Dreyblat, and may offer insights into the gigantic scale of works such as *The Great Archive* which draw in more depth upon digital technologies. Dreyblat's comments suggest that archiving is itself to be seen as 'creative work', a view which is ambiguously explored in *The Church and the Machine*, installed at Galerie o zwei in Berlin from May to June 1993.

*The Church and the Machine* is unique in Dreyblat's work in its explicit depiction of the Granite Mountain Records Vault and use of documentation relating to Mormon genealogical research. The piece consists of a series of laminated digital prints suspended on wires in close proximity to one another and juxtaposed with video. As a result, the viewer must stand relatively close to the prints in order to study them, suggesting that each is a document which must be subjected to detailed scrutiny before moving on to the next. The effect, which is already reminiscent of archival research, is heightened in Dreyblat's description of 'a robotic Mass Storage System in which files are ordered and physically moved by a robot monk-librarian and an American church-sect which is pursuing an extensive worldwide archiving project collecting and storing personal data'.<sup>40</sup> The prints consist of photographs and diagrams of the mass storage system imagined by Dreyblat and of documentation of the Granite Mountain archive and related texts such as extracts from speeches by prominent Mormons.

The piece is remarkable for its juxtaposition of the Granite Mountain material with the 'robotic' system and, as we shall see, with the archival repertoire of *The Great Archive*, itself derived from *Who's Who in Central and East Europe*. *The Church and the Machine* is relatively unusual in Dreyblat's work in its deployment of the 'analogue' archival system in which the texts and images reach the viewer by means of wires mounted high on the gallery wall. In this, it recalls the *T Documents* and the Reading Projects, in which the consultation of paper documents is prominent in spectatorship and, to some extent, *Register* (2007), in which scrolling data is projected onto the drawers of a huge card catalogue. *Register* speaks to the affordances of digital and analogue archiving, and to the progressive obsolescence of the

latter in a way which recalls Dreyblat's comments on his experiences in the British Public Record Office in London in early 1993:

I was struck by the meeting of 'high-tech' with the antiquated mounds of decaying paper file folders. Through a complicated bureaucratic system of monitors, runners, helpers and guards, digitally ordered files (often on parchment) were 'dug up' in an unseen underground chamber, and then gradually transmitted with a human conveyor belt to the reader above, whose clip-on remote beeper notified him that the file had arrived.<sup>41</sup>

Dreyblat's Public Record Office research shortly preceded the making of *The Church and the Machine* and, as he explains in the *Performance Research* questionnaire, inspired the Reading Projects, that is, *Memory Arena* (1995–96); *The Memory Project* (1998) and *The Reading Room* (2001). Each of those works transgresses the reading room's fundamental rule of silence, as readers (researchers) read aloud from the documents they consult. If, as Farge says, 'the silence of the reading room is more violent than the clamour of any school playground', Dreyblat makes a sudden incursion into the conventional territory of the archive by means of the live voice.<sup>42</sup> These works tread the fine line between the deteriorating matter of the analogue archive and the predominantly digital delivery of later works such as *The Great Archive* and *The Wunderblock*.<sup>43</sup> Rather than an analogue/digital dichotomy, though, in a much broader sense the works 'underscore the contingency of collecting and archiving', to use Thomas Fechner-Smarsly's expression.<sup>44</sup>

Fechner-Smarsly's immediate subject is Dreyblat's *Artificial Memory* (1999), exhibited at the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart, but the piece's concerns with the material support of the archive, and the constraints and possibilities of that support in archivalist installation, resonate with Dreyblat's earlier *The Church and the Machine*. *Artificial Memory* foregrounds an ancient form of text storage, the scroll, in a way which makes the reader acutely aware of storage technology. The text is easily legible, but is displayed horizontally, instead of vertically, so that we have to travel the full eighteen metres of the scroll's length in order to finish reading the line of text. In *The Church and the Machine*, meanwhile, the 'robotic Mass storage system' represents a fantasy of transcendence, in which the system of runners, helpers and guards in the Public Records Office is replaced by an entirely mechanised archival apparatus. At the same time, the system's materiality is reinscribed in the work, whose own apprehension is dependent on the clunky system of laminated plates on aerial wires. Fechner-Smarsly's essay, whose epigraph is itself taken from Kis' 'Encyclopedia of the Dead', is at pains to emphasise Dreyblat's engagement with contingency, which is manifested both in the textual open-endedness of *Artificial Memory* and in text-image relations. For Fechner-Smarsly, Dreyblat's images, which are

relatively rare, are either documentary in function or serve to 'interrupt the linear flow of text like additional punctuation' (p. 23). The relation of interruption or interference, which is also seen in *The Church and the Machine* is, for Fechner-Smarlsy, what W.J.T. Mitchell calls 'imageretx, a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval'.<sup>45</sup>

On first viewing, *The Church and the Machine* does not display the 'absolutely endless lines' of *Artificial Memory*, or the profusion of possibilities which makes of hypertext arguably the key discovery of Dreyblatt's artistic career.<sup>46</sup> The procession of plates produces something which is transparently *not* the perfect archive imagined by Anderson or KIS; the piece, instead, renders archival storage in all its contingency, as plates must be laboriously shifted along lines, viewed and then moved out of the way once more. The laminated plates, too, juxtapose text and image in a relatively illustrative manner, as extracts from Spencer W. Kimball's speech at the opening of the Washington, D.C., Mormon temple are followed by images of the Granite Mountain Records Vault. Once more, though, the juxtaposition is bound up with a dilemma of scale. It becomes clear that the symbolic value of the Mormon genealogical project is in part derived from the sheer immensity of the Granite Mountain archive, which is indeed, in KIS' phrase, a 'monstrous monument'. The vault itself is commonly denoted by its immense proportions, sealed with Mosler doors weighing fourteen tons and lying seven-hundred feet beneath the mountain's surface.<sup>47</sup> The potency of the vault arises both from the unparalleled scale of its holdings and from the enduring power of the mountain as a signifier of the sublime, as in Kant's reference to 'the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above the clouds' in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.<sup>48</sup>

It is this sense of immense scale and immeasurable natural force, too, which leads to Dreyblatt's heartfelt exclamation concerning the Mormon genealogical enterprise: 'I'm in awe of this work'.<sup>49</sup> The sensation of awe signposts the engagement with the sublime which is felt in *The Church and the Machine*, both in structural terms and in the work's dialogue with the hypertext dynamics of later installations. *The Church and the Machine* is unusual in Dreyblatt's work in the schematic representation of the mass storage system it offers and, equally, in the enlarged, grainy black-and-white photograph of the Granite Mountain archive. Such presentation, in which images are largely allowed to speak for themselves and their relation to text is not notably problematised, goes against the grain of works like *Who's Who* and *Artificial Memory*. The image of the mountain juxtaposes the tiny space occupied by visitors' cars with the immensity of the mountain and, by extension, the vault. Its vision of scale is paradoxically circumscribed both by the size of the plate, which is half the size of the majority of the plates, and by mode of reference, which allows the entrance tunnels of the mountain complex to stand, metonymically, for the vault itself. Despite the work's utopian vision of a robotic, autonomous archive, the viewer is kept at arm's length, and access to the archive, or the vault, is finally withheld.

Such a strategy was to return, although in radically modified form, in Dreyblatt's later work and, in particular, in *The Great Archive*, a work which brings a particular vision of the sublime into contact with the technologies of archiving in especially provocative ways.

### *The Great Archive and the Sublime*

For all the frustration wrought by the apparatus of *The Church and the Machine*, the work makes one further, formal gesture towards the ideal archive. The piece directs the viewer's gaze through the archway which separated it, in Galerie 0 zwei, from the other major work of the exhibition, *The Great Archive*. *The Great Archive* consists of a large cabinet, around four feet high, which displays an immense mass of text via a number of horizontal glass panels.

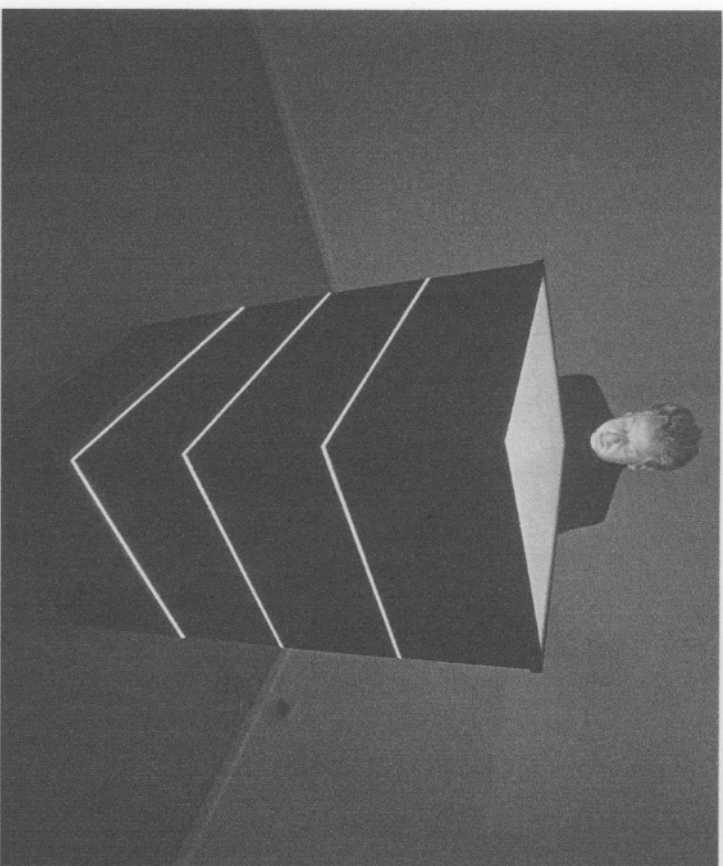


Figure 5.2 Arnold Dreyblatt, *The Great Archive*, 1993. Wooden boxes, inscribed Plexiglas, illumination. Stadlgalerie Saarbrücken, 1993; Photograph: Tom Gundelweim.

The work signals Dreyblatt's investment in ways of transforming and viewing text in installation work which radically redefine the contingencies of the printed text. Dreyblatt's discovery of *Who's Who* in *Central and East Europe* is followed by the realisation that 'in its strict alphabetical form,



without indexing, this book would remain lifeless and incomprehensible.<sup>50</sup> Dreyblatt goes on to describe the discovery of the 'new model' of hypertext and its manifold navigational possibilities:

In attempting the creation of a new structure with which to process the biographical information, I gradually realized that what I had been searching for was not merely an indexing system, but rather a completely new model for organizing the text. The fundamental experience for me, when my approach to this text was initiated, was that of manually and randomly turning the pages of the book. As my attention would form chance associations between fragments of text on adjoining pages, my roving eye would dart in all directions: there seemed to be endless points of relation between personal and historical micro-historical details. Surely no story or fragment was more important or poignant than any other. Here was a world without foreground or background, that seemed to exist in many dimensions and multiple layers. One would repeatedly fall upon points of communality between personal histories, all interconnected in place, time, or theme.<sup>51</sup>

Dreyblatt's investment in *Who's Who* arises from reading, and from the discovery of the printed book which subsists like a sacred artefact on the margins of his art, and yet it leads to a series of works in which the laborious turning of pages is reconfigured into 'endless points of relation'. Dreyblatt's comments are born of the archival sublime, and of the sensory overload of the moment of discovery; that moment's 'passion' is then transmuted into a disconcerting, multidimensional world.

Not only does Dreyblatt recast the alphabetical entries of *Who's Who* into the hypertext architecture of the online *Who's Who in Central and East Europe 1933*, or of the 'hypertext opera' of the same name, but the viewing relations of the work are further remediated in *The Great Archive*. As we look down into the cabinet, the text shifts in and out of focus between horizontal layers: there is a multiplicity of trails to follow, and the attempt to focus on any one fragment of text lasts only for a moment before the fragment blurs. *The Great Archive* revisits the experience of navigating through the online *Who's Who*, where the enormous array of potential trails often leads to reduced attention to individual entries and a series of rapid changes of subject; in so doing, it mimics the hypertextual archive in analogue form. *The Great Archive* is not itself a new media work: although it resembles a computer monitor, it is in fact a box containing horizontal glass sheets which are physically inscribed with text and lit from below. To view the work is to enter into a shifting universe in which biographical information becomes a tantalising lure: even as we struggle to read the entry on Jakob Kauffmann, for example, the text is shifting out of focus and directing us to one of the other plates.

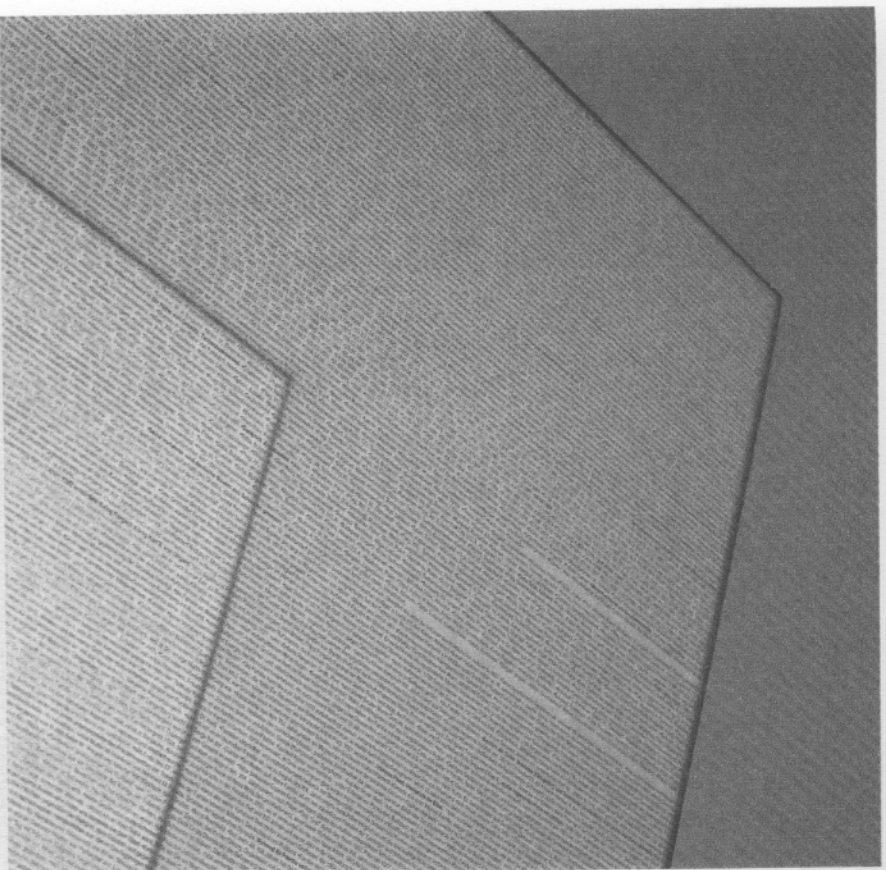


Figure 5.3 Arnold Dreyblatt, *The Great Archive*, 1993. Wooden boxes, inscribed Plexiglas, illumination. Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, 1993; Photograph: Tom Gundelweim.

The thrust of *The Great Archive* is the contingency of archival knowledge, and the tenuousness of the 'world in common' in Rancière's account of the inventorial. As in *Who's Who*, such a world, whose contours are the legacy of the First World War (or 'the World War', as it is referred to in the 1933 *Who's Who*), and which lies 'between the more Asiatic Soviet Russia and the big Western European States', is no sooner glimpsed than it has disappeared, annihilated by the Holocaust and the Second World War.<sup>52</sup> The extreme fragility of the world of *Who's Who* as a subject of knowledge is most graphically illustrated in *The Great Archive*, where the disappearance of the names of individuals soon to be lost to human history is evoked not only through their submersion in a vast textual repertoire but also in their literal disappearance from the viewer's optical field. It is this approach which Dreyblatt, speaking of the elaboration of a solo exhibition at Galerie o zwei in 1992,

defines as 'text as image', or 'the moment where the text jumps perceptually back and forth from meaning to pattern, map, landscape and space':

Very early on I became fascinated by the perception of figure and ground in a textual field. I tend to present enormous amounts of textual material in my work, which can never be grasped as a whole. Our perceptual apparatus needs a branch to hold onto, we grab a fragment, a name, or a phrase, which is then lost as we are forced to let go of the branch. We find ourselves in the forest again, but only until one's attention roams again. It is this process of finding and loss, and the associations that connect these locations, which is at the centre of my work.<sup>53</sup>

*The Great Archive* is one of the most important instances of the vertiginous alteration between perception and loss which Dreyblatt describes, a 'mechanism' which is 'functional and perceptual as well as metaphorical' (p. 64).

The choice of the tree, the branch and the forest as metaphors recalls both database structures and Kant's theory of the sublime. In the 'Analytic of the Sublime', the tree serves as a marker of scale, a familiar unit by which larger objects can be represented and understood: 'a tree judged by the height of man gives, at all events, a standard for a mountain'. Such an operation, at the heart of Kant's 'mathematical sublime', 'represents our imagination in all its boundlessness' as, by understanding relations of proportionality between larger and larger phenomena, the apparently uncompassable scale of those phenomena gradually pales into insignificance.<sup>54</sup> In Dreyblatt, however, the capacity of the imagination to process the phenomena which, in a flood of half-glimpsed images, it perceives, is very much open to question.

Dreyblatt's comments have a second important resonance: with the discussion of 'imagetext' in W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994), a work whose publication closely follows the first installation of *The Great Archive* in 1993.<sup>55</sup> If Mitchell's discussion of the imagetext as a form of memorial technology is germane to Dreyblatt's practice, it also signals a broader concern with pictorial and linguistic discourses which reorients our consideration of the sublime in significant ways. In the section of *Picture Theory* concerned with 'metapictures', Mitchell quotes at some length from Foucault's comments in *Les Mots et les choses* (1966) on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and the 'infinite relation' of language to painting which it implies.<sup>56</sup> For Foucault, the relation is infinite because, famously, it is one of incommensurability: 'it is in vain that we say what we see' (p. 9). Foucault's vision informs that of Mitchell's book and, via Magritte, further 'call[s] into question the relation of language to image as an inside-outside structure' (p. 68). If, for Foucault, the linkage between image and text in Magritte signals 'an uncertain, foggy relation', Mitchell reads this as the 'sublime landscape' which emerges from Foucault's performance of a series of text-image relations, successively geometrical, catastrophic and, finally, negative ('an absence of space').<sup>57</sup>

Dreyblatt's work, meanwhile, performs a similar relation between text and image, as figure continually disappears into ground and text becomes image. Indeed, Fechner-Smarsly explicitly compares the primarily text-based 'universe of memory' which Dreyblatt creates to Mitchell's conception of 'the composite imagetext structure of memory [...] that endures all the way from Cicero to Lacan to the organization of computer memory'.<sup>58</sup> For Fechner-Smarsly, 'the texts, in interplay with the media and their staging, are the images, script images in a sense' (p. 22): the attenuation of words' conventional signifying capacity, in Dreyblatt, reconfigures them as a particularly disconcerting form of imagetext.

The dominant experience of *The Great Archive* is one of huge perceptual disorientation, as individually apprehensible units of text are subordinated to the overwhelming mass of visual signs. The work's engagement with the sublime, I suggest, lies both in its subversion of Kant's mathematical sublime, which affirms the intellect's mastery over phenomena, and in a particular engagement with technology. Mitchell's work points to both forms of engagement, briefly acknowledging the specific emergence of imagetext as 'computer memory' and, at the end of *Picture Theory*, linking the discussion of the representational regimes of image and text to the aesthetic sublime. The sublime dilemmas of scale of *The Great Archive*, meanwhile, are implicated in the technological model which it so insistently invokes, that of hypertext.

Hypertext informs Dreyblatt's work to varying degrees and is frequently present as an organising principle which calls into question archival epistemology: while a number of works are created for the Internet, or give rise to Internet-based versions, in other cases hypertext is a privileged means of addressing historical memory and archiving. Dreyblatt is not so much concerned with the digital sphere in itself as with the capacity of hypertext to expose contingency and to create huge networks of relations between data and between media. The shutting between foreground and background in *The Great Archive* is both a literal effect in viewing the work and a statement of the relation between knowledge and loss, recalling the claim, at the end of *Picture Theory*, that 'what lies "beyond" representation would thus be found "within it"' (as the "black hole" of the image is found within the ekphrastic text)' (p. 419). The 'black hole' of *The Great Archive*, the disappearance of text, itself expresses the reconfiguration of text/image relations and, symbolically, the work's central message of the loss of the generation of 1933. For Mitchell, to consider what is 'beyond representation, different from it, or antithetical or other to it' is, too, to invoke the 'tradition of the aesthetic sublime, which posits a realm of absolute negation, of radical otherness and unknowability' (p. 419). If for Mitchell the 'sublime, located in pain, death, transcendence and the unknowable, is precisely the unrepresentable' (p. 419), the sublime aspect of Dreyblatt's work is bound up with the specifically technological modalities of the unknowable.

### The Database and the Computational Sublime

In creating a 'world without foreground or background', Dreyblatt's work associates the problem of unrepresentability with a specific form of information technology: that of the database. Dreyblatt's remediation of the text is informed by a vision of a humanity under threat, in which 'surely no story or fragment was more important or poignant than any other'.<sup>59</sup> I suggest, however, that the work's vision of uniformity institutes a changed relation between the ethical and the informational which is triangulated by the sublime. Although the original *Who's Who* is concerned with the 'prominent people' of Eastern Europe in 1933, Dreyblatt's reimagining of it deliberately focuses on the lives of the obscure.<sup>60</sup> In the preface to his *Who's Who*, Dreyblatt comments 'I have largely concentrated my selections on the forgotten lives and the "no longer famous"'.<sup>61</sup> The claim is not as transparent as it might appear: Dreyblatt's *Who's Who* refers to authors such as Karel Capek and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, whose reputation extends across subsequent generations and, still more strikingly, figures such as the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. The latter trio, though, is only present insofar as each touches on the lives of other individuals mentioned in the text: in Dreyblatt's *Who's Who*, Ferdinand, Hitler and Mussolini grace only the category 'Briefly Mentioned'. Such strategies indeed remove the distinction between foreground and background, restoring to our field of vision the lives of individuals who occupied only the margins of Eastern European public life of 1933. Like Bolanski's preoccupation with the lives of 'unknown' individuals, as in the anonymous photographic portraits of Jewish school leavers from 1931 in the Lycée Chases works made in the 1980s, obscurity itself becomes an epistemological strategy. As the memorial trace of many of the victims of the Holocaust has largely disappeared, works such as these take the 'unknowability' of the victims' lives as the basis of their own working methods, positioning their epistemological aporia at the centre of their form.

The disappearance of foreground and background takes on another, informational sense, however. As items within an alphabetical list of biographical entries, all of the individuals in the original book literally inhabit a world without foreground or background, as terms in an informational repertoire. For Lev Manovich, the database is not only an omnipresent archival technology but one of the privileged forms which characterise new media objects. In this it is differentiated sharply from narrative forms such as the novel and narrative cinema: the database, like many new media objects, does not tell stories. Instead, databases constitute 'collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other'.<sup>62</sup> The architecture of Dreyblatt's *Who's Who* is precisely that of the database which, as Manovich states, 'represents the world as a list of items, and [...] refuses to order this list' (p. 225). Each individual, however famous or obscure, is simply an informational entry in the database, available for selection by the reader but no more

prominent than any other entry. As well as this surface-level manifestation of the database, the work was in fact constructed as a database, as Dreyblatt describes in 'The Hypertext Bible':

In the beginning I started to work with index cards, which was probably similar to the way the book was originally constructed. While I was struggling with these index cards, the idea of organizing the material by computer was suggested to me by a friend. The 765 biographies which I chose were transcribed from paper book to data base program, within the structure of categorical 'fields'. The data base was then transferred into a 'Hypertext Program', an information architecture was programmed in which fragments from each biography could be stored and linked to each other.<sup>63</sup>

If Dreyblatt's discovery of the printed book *Who's Who* is a watershed moment in his career, the transformation of its contents into a database represents a second key milestone in the progression towards *The Great Archive*. Although it generates 'narrative' connections, the database, itself a non-narrative collection of data, lies at the heart of the work, and inspires Dreyblatt's practice. The primacy of the database in Dreyblatt's work sheds further light on a number of the projects we have so far considered. The developments concerning the personal archive discussed in Chapter 4, in particular, owe a great deal to the database: the collection of personal data seen in the Quantified Self movement is predicated on databases, and attempts to create personal libraries such as Memex and MyLifeBits are themselves databases. It is increasingly clear, then, that Dreyblatt's work reflects implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) on these archival technologies, and that the uses of the database in *The Great Archive* speak directly to recent debates on the relation between the database and creative practice and, equally, between data and the sublime.

The work of Alan Liu, in particular, evaluates the implications of Manovich's observations on the database. In *Local Transcendence* (2008), Liu's history of the database adds to the familiar reference points of Bush's Memex and Bell's MyLifeBits that of E.F. Codd's article 'A Relational Model of Data for Large Shared Data Banks' (1970). Codd is instrumental in the development of the relational database, which subsequently replaced earlier 'hierarchical or network paradigms, according to which information was logically organized in single-root or multiroot tree structures such that finding anything required traversing a so-called pointer (like running one's index finger down a branching diagram) to the appropriate logical location'.<sup>64</sup> Data are classed in terms of their relation to a logical set and, by parsing and cross-referencing data tables, the data required can be extracted efficiently. As Liu continues, database structures have the power to shape historical discourses and discourses of transcendence: 'history manifests and sublimates in databases' (p. 240).

Dreyblatt's *Great Archive*, then, is bound up with a cultural history in which, for Manovich, the database constitutes a particular way of viewing the world, or 'cultural form' (p. 219). Such a view is further developed by Jos de Mul: 'in a world in which the computer has become the dominant technology, everything – genes, books, organizations – become a relational database. Databases are onto-logical machines that transform everything into a collection of (re)combinatory elements'.<sup>65</sup> *Who's Who* exemplifies such a database culture, and indeed Dreyblatt's body of work as a whole must rank as one of those most thoroughly imbued with the form and operations of the database. As de Mul argues, database culture addresses the sublime in unprecedented ways, as the 'database also transforms our experience of the sublime'. De Mul, following Manovich, suggests that the sublime is now bound up with the combinatorial logic of the database, as the recombination of terms gives rise to a dizzying array of permutations. The famous example of Borges's library of Babel or, equally, that of the three-billion nucleotides of the human genome, produces an astronomical number of combinations, which the imagination struggles to process.

This is a sublime concerned not with the immensity of physical forms and of the forces of nature, but with the multi-dimensional form of hyper-text and the vast, insidious presence of data in our world. For de Mul, the 'awesome powers' of our experience of data bring about a transformation of Kant's dynamic sublime, which represents 'a power that has no dominion over us' (§28, 260), and yet is associated by de Mul with technology as 'a force that controls and threatens us'. For all the ambivalence of the Kantian sublime itself, this changed relation to human understanding represents a fundamental shift. If the forms of the sublime which the database and database culture create constitute a threat to understanding, rather than ultimately affirming it, the implications of archivalist works like those of Dreyblatt, in which informational repertoires occupy a cardinal position, must be reassessed.

It is in response to such a situation that Jon McCormack and Alan Dorin use the concept of the computational sublime to refer to 'the instilling of simultaneous feelings of pleasure and fear in the viewer of a process realized in a computing machine'.<sup>66</sup> As in de Mul's account, the particularity of the computational sublime lies in both the vastness of its data and in the sur-rendering of agency through the 'duality' of technological mediation. The computational sublime, then, recalls Kant's mathematical sublime but significantly reconfigures Kant's view of the superiority of the human intellect. What is less clear, though, is the precise standpoint of contemporary database culture, and its artistic manifestations, to the computational sublime. While Dreyblatt's work suggests a vision of a shared humanity which can be salvaged, at least in the form of remembrance, from catastrophe, the sublime entertains a much more complex relation with destruction, and the relation of the visual art of database culture to the sublime is ambivalent. While Lev Manovich sees in data art an 'anti-sublime', for others, including the artist

Lisa Jevbratt, the dynamics of art predicated on the visualisation of large arrays of data are closely aligned with the sublime: 'the datasets we are looking at now, data generated from looking in and down at us, the earth and our technologies, are of no less dimension, vastness and grandeur than the "datasets" that were the subject of the classical sublime'.<sup>67</sup>

Jevbratt's data art itself has much to say about implications of the sublime for archival knowledge. Jevbratt's *1:1* (1999) consisted of a database containing the IP addresses of all the hosts on the World Wide Web and, secondly, of a number of ways of visualising the database. The project was subsequently remade as *1:1(2)* in the form of a second database of addresses generated in 2001 and 2002. *1:1(2)* incorporates interfaces which allow the viewer to compare the two databases, thus constituting a meta-database. Much of the impact of the piece lies in its scale: the visualisations have often been turned into very large, billboard-size prints which assail the viewer with long, thin horizontal blocks of colour. For Manovich, though, it is the *reduction* in scale of the data in relation to its referent which makes for the predominant effect: 'Jevbratt's *1:1* reduces the cyberspace – usually imagined as vast and maybe even infinite – to a single image that fits within the browser frame'. Instead of the vast scope of the internet itself, 'the macro and the micro, the infinite and the endless are mapped into manageable visual objects'.<sup>68</sup> This, then, is a return to the Kantian mathematical sublime, where nature's immensity can be apprehended by means of progressively larger objects which the intellect appraises in turn. According to Jevbratt, the overwhelming experience of the sublime can in fact enhance our capacity for understanding: 'under the right circumstances, drawing on sensations of the sublime, people can, when faced with huge quantities of data, be mobilized to make intuitive understandings of the data' (p. 7).

In Liu's work, meanwhile, Jevbratt's *1:1* is a privileged example of the 'data pour', a procedure which exemplifies the 'aesthetics of data transcendence' emerging from the database era. The data pour refers to 'the location on a page where an author in effect surrenders the act of writing to that of parameterisation', although there are also visual analogues.<sup>69</sup> In the most literal examples of data pours, 'the author designates a zone where content of unknown quantity and quality—except as parameterized in such commands as "twenty items at a time" or "only items containing "sick rose"—pours into the manifest work from databases or XML sources hidden in the deep background' (p. 59). Liu takes *1:1* to be 'the epitome of the data sublime' (p. 77), aligning the archive as a repertoire of the said ('a portrait of the internet in toto' (p. 77)) with the sublime as a force which overwhelms the intellect. Such a version of the sublime, however, is not exclusively identified with new media technologies, and Liu finds further examples of the data pour in J. M. W. Turner's *Light and Colour: The Morning after the Deluge* (1843); a passage from William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and an image by Marcos Novak.

Dreyblatt's work makes manifest data's failure to signify: the names and addresses of the 1930s *Who's Who* constitute a never-ending data stream issuing from a deep, unseen background, overwhelming the viewer's senses with the enormous cultural lacuna created by the disappearance of the generation murdered in the Holocaust. As in Liu's reading of the sublime aesthetics of data transcendence, the ability of reason to master the material is highly questionable, in contrast with the Kantian sublime. Instead, reason and imagination are equally powerless faced with the Holocaust, and can only apprehend it by means of a discourse which testifies, in part, to its own incapacity. The archive, in Dreyblatt, is the location of this discourse, with its provisional and highly contingent promise of sense-making. In this, the archive is once more situated at the interface between the material and the informational, and at the confluence of history, memory and trauma. The latter possibility subverts all of Dreyblatt's work, preoccupied as it is with the disappearance of communities and generations and, with them, the ever-receding prospect of a common world. Dreyblatt's archivalist work is finally underwritten by a pervasive sense of loss which, like a null value, spreads ever further through its retrofiores.

## Notes

1. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 55.
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