Focusing the Archival Gaze: A Preliminary Definition and Model

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Abstract
Over the past several decades, authors from within and without the archival profession have applied poststructural theories to the Archive and archives. Several authors have used the term "archival gaze," but the phrase has been neither defined nor thoroughly interrogated in the published literature. We seek to understand what makes a gaze archival, and what the implications for archival practice are. We will present on research in progress intended to articulate a definition and model of the archival gaze. Drawing on diplomatics, poststructuralism and Gaze theories (including Mulvey and hooks), this research explores the dynamics of power present in the archival gaze. To do so, we propose three layers of gaze analysis: content, documentary and archival. Within these layers, we examine the flow and manifestation of power between four actors (defined in relation to the record: subject, creator, viewer and archivist), and the information activities that this power enables. We will present our definition and model and discuss the results of our research so far.

Disciplines
Archival Science

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Focusing the Archival Gaze

A Preliminary Definition and Model

Kimberly Anderson and Harrison W. Inefuku
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Archival Gaze

Overview
Gaze Theories

• Male Gaze (Mulvey) - The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure ... women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (p.837)

• Imperial Gaze (Kaplan)—A gaze structure which fails to understand that [...] non-American peoples have integral cultures and lives that work according to their own, albeit different, logic. The imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central. (p. 78)
"Gaze" in Archival Literature

• **Archival Gaze (Anderson, 2007):** archival records are also a kind of spectacle, encouraging temporal pleasure in which the people caught in the archival records are spread before the researcher in the present, who subjects them to interrogative research. The historical subjects are made to re-perform snippets of activities and moments from their lives under scrutiny so that the viewer/researcher can observe and draw conclusions from this performance. (p. 38)

• **Official gaze (Wilson and Golding, 2016):** the sense of relentless and censorious scrutiny under which every facet of life, however trivial, was conducted...A key operational facet of the Care regime’s official gaze was the routine compilation of records. (p. 95)
Archival Gaze (Gallen, 2008): Does the notion of the 'male gaze', spectatorship for the pleasure of men, have a cousin in the 'archival gaze' of historian fetishists? (p. 46) The gaze itself is an important yet often unexplored concept when dealing with exhibition of information such as archives. (p. 65)
Archival Gaze

A definition
## Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaze</th>
<th>Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessor</td>
<td>Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recipient/Viewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archivist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Preliminary Definition

The archival gaze **fixes** an act, and in doing so, **assigns** the act with a sense of permanence and historicity. The archival gaze **reinforces** societal power dynamics between the originator of the gaze (the records creator) and the object of the gaze (the subject(s) of the record).
Ingredients for the Archival Gaze

• Observation of an act (the power to look)
• Fixity and intention of permanence (the power to document)
• Mediation and sense of historicity
Mechanisms: At, Through, and With

**AT**
The uninvited gaze at a powerless object

**THROUGH**
The gaze at a powerless object through the uninvited adoption of a powerful actor's gaze

**WITH**
The invited gaze
### Mechanisms: At, Through, and With

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Awareness of audiences</th>
<th>Intentionality of documentation</th>
<th>Willingness to be Archived</th>
<th>Authority bestowed by archives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THROUGH</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITH</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example One

Stasi Archives
Stasi Archives

Manifestations and Characteristics of Youth Culture in the GDR

- Built on reports submitted by Informal Collaborators (IMs) reporting on alternative youth cultures in the 1980s.
Example Two
Louisa Carson and "African-American" subjects
African Americans

MS 307  Golemba, Beverly E.

MS 314  Carson, Louise A. and Lucia St. John Cook

Music

Political action groups (local / state / regional)

Religion

Rural communities / families / women / education

Underground Comix

Weed Science

Women agriculturalists

Women (social networks / societies / clubs)

World War I

World War II
Some interesting entries of Cook's diaries were made in 1850-1851 when Cook describes her journey alone from Farmington, Iowa, to Arkansas to teach. Cook discusses meeting African Americans on her trip, her teaching experiences, and educational differences between the North and the South.
Louisa Carson’s Voyeuristic Record

- Blacks have no agency
- Louisa expresses agency through documentation of these others
- She sees herself being seen and has the power to make that "seeing" become a gaze through the power of archival documentation
- The archival gaze is assumed by the viewer in the archives
- The Iowa State archives selected this diary as evidence of Black experience in an act of voyeurism
Reproduction of the Archival Gaze

Whites more powerful than Blacks

Carson wields the archival gaze

Archive positions Carson’s archival gaze as representative of blackness

Viewer assumes Carson’s archival gaze

Within the archive, there is a constant reproduction of Carson's archival gaze – both in the photomechanical reproduction of Carson's diary, but also through viewers' adoption of Carson's archival gaze.
Conclusion
Analysis

Stasi
• The Stasi was an agent of the state
• The Stasi’s archival gaze is designed to reflect and reinforce societal power dynamics

Carson
• Carson is not an agent of the state.
• Her archival gaze, as shaped by her lived experiences, reflects and reinforces societal power dynamics
Resistance

• **Oppositional Gaze (hooks)** - Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. (p. 116)
Leaders of AACR, LACCHA, and LAGAR on Orlando & archivists’ role in creating a more diverse society

Aaisha Haykal, Harrison W. Inefuku, George Apodaca, Margarita Vargas-Betancourt, Lisa Calahan

Take a moment to be aware of how your personal biases and privilege might be reflected in what and how you collect [...] To quote the May 2011 SAA Core Values of Archivists, “Archivists embrace the importance of identifying, preserving, and working with communities to actively document those whose voices have been overlooked or marginalized.” **But you cannot document those who are overlooked and marginalized if you cannot see us, or cannot confront your own biases.**