Open to the public: Strategies for a museum archive

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Over the past several years, we have witnessed a number of exhibitions that dealt with the topics of archiving and documentation. These exhibitions have not only investigated new ways of presenting documentary materials in the museum space, but also offered different working tools for the audience to relate to them, and questioned the status of the archival object itself. One example is the nomadic exhibition *re.act.feminism* (2009 to 2013), which compiled photographs, videos and texts from 189 feminist performance artists, displaying them in different spaces and institutions across Europe. Visitors were invited to view the documents and to work with them in the exhibition space.[1]

At the same time, archiving has also become a topic for the art institutions themselves. Museums and galleries started to consider the organization, documentation and accessibility of their past activities and exhibitions. Institutions such as MACBA (Museu d’Art Contemporani) in Barcelona and Haus der Kunst in Munich can be named as examples for this development. While Haus der Kunst opened its historical archive that covers the period from 1933 to 1945 for public consultation, MACBA has begun to offer access to recent exhibition documentation. These collections can be accessed by staff members, researchers, scholars and the general public.[2]

How could a contemporary archive in an art institution be organized, what can or should its parameters be? The Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona shows how an interactive archive of visual and performance art can play a dual role; the archive both renders the institution’s past more accessible to visitor groups, and, while doing so, also raises the question of exhibiting archives in the museum space. During a short research stay in Barcelona in May 2014, I was introduced to the specifics of this programme to organize the museum’s archive material, which I will examine in this text.

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies, founded in 1984 by Antoni Tàpies and opened in 1990, is a museum for contemporary art that combines the heritage of Tàpies with varying exhibitions. Considering itself as “a research centre across disciplines”[3] the Fundació claims to “set up cooperative ventures with experts in different fields of learning” and to accompany exhibitions with symposia, lecturers and publications.[4]
Especially under Laurence Rassel, director since 2008, the Fundació Tàpies has put the emphasis on widening traditional exhibition formats and looking for new ways of interacting with the public.\[5\]

The archive of the Fundació is open to public consultation since 2009, and aims to systematically document all the exhibitions of the past 20 years as well as the administrative life of the institution. It contains collections of texts, images and audiovisual material, organized into 52 exhibition dossiers to date. Laurence Rassel describes the archive’s inventory:

“The types of documents in the archive include photographs, technical drawings, floor plans, loan forms, curatorial statements, catalogue proof readings, press clippings, restoration and conservation reports, correspondence, conference recordings, [...] These are collected as ‘physical traces’, ‘leftovers’, marks of existence of what we define here as events, events that are happening in time and space in the Fundació.”\[6\]

These “leftovers” make visible all that is necessary to set up an exhibition. Texts, photographs and audio from 10 exhibitions have been digitalized so far and are accessible for public consultation since 2012 via the project Combined Arts, an online platform, and in a physical space in the Fundació building. The goal of the programme is to establish ...

“a platform for collective work that will allow the Fundació to relate to its visitors, researchers and collaborators, and to share, disseminate and update the contents that the museum has generated through all its functions and activities. Combined Arts will also be a project of reference in the development of digital platforms for access to cultural contents through the processes of direct participation by the visitors.”\[7\]

The website is still not completely developed but allows registered visitors to interact by tagging photographs or posting comments.\[8\] The physical workspace in the museum, however, is already completed. There, visitors can consult the full contents of each dossier, including items not yet online. The Fundació Tàpies follows a precise scheme for archiving each exhibition, one which was designed by a company commissioned in 2007. The firm took the museum’s existing work flows as a starting point and set up a scheme with several categories for each registered exhibition, including provenance, date of registration and a short description of each record.\[9\] When I consulted photographs and press releases for a number of past exhibitions during my stay in Barcelona, Núria Solé Bardalet, archivist in the Fundació, explained that the database is organised by exhibitions, while the storage of the
material, on the other hand, is by document types, with separate locations for papers, print photos and digital ones. Each catalogued exhibition dossier indicates where the material is located: “We developed a typology of documentation”, Solé Bardalet underlined in a short interview. She further outlined the educational programme Open Source Prototypes, related to Combined Arts. In the frame of this programme the Fundació Antoni Tàpies invites groups of visitors to work with the archive and create interventions in or outside the museum space.[10] “Open Source Prototypes” intends to make different groups of people familiar with the archive. Therefore it not only actively invites scholars but also groups such as an amateur drawing association, or technicians employed in Barcelona’s city hall.

Archive Concrete

I want to refer to two examples from Open Source Prototypes that show how different groups worked on archive material. The Fundació offers a systematic framework for using “old” documents to create “new” outcomes.[11] In this way, the educational programme also enlarges the archive by including new creations as they are made.

Open Space Prototypes also provides a space for the newly established interventions in the form of exhibitions or performances based on the work in and around the archive. The two exhibition examples I chose show how the institution engages in setting up exhibitions based on archive material in its own space (Ausencia_Archivo) and in other spaces in the city of Barcelona (On Mediation).

Ausencia_Archivo (Absence_Archive)

The first major project in the frame of Open Source Prototypes was the exhibition Ausencia_Archivo, which was shown in the Fundació Tàpies in June 2013 (4–9/6/2013). On the website of the Fundació we find a short description of this collaborative project between the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and EINA, University School of Design and Art.[12] Núria Solé Bardalet mentored the intervention and provided the students with material covering different exhibitions related to the theme “absence”, the topic they chose to work with. The students then worked over a period of two months on the relation between the concept of absence and the archive, investigating such questions as:

- How can we identify the concept of absence in the archive?
Every archive is incomplete: in which sense and why?

How does this affect our reading and the interpretation of documents? [13]

Dossiers that were consulted included a number of different exhibitions, selected for varying reasons.[14] The exhibition *The End(s) of the Museum*, for instance, was chosen not only because it problematized the disappearance of the museum as an institution, but also for its lack of existing archival material. Indeed, it is one of the few Fundació exhibitions for which the documentation has been lost.

"Of course, a reflexion on the possible disappearance of the museum cannot be separated from an examination of its aims and purposes, its ends [...] *The End(s) of the Museum* does not pretend to imagine a museum of the future, nor to recall nostalgically what the museum once was or might have been. Instead it is a sustained theoretical and critical inquiry into the genealogy of the museum."[15]

A group of students interested in the difficulties of international communication – as a result of language or different cultural backgrounds – studied correspondences between Spain and Japan, including emails, letters, and faxes, that preceded an exhibition of Antoní Tàpies in Japan. This became the starting point for their work, titled *12 Reasons to go to Japan*. They filtered out sentences that reflected communication difficulties, such as apologies for misunderstandings, and wrote them on postcards then placed in the exhibition space. Those cards, located at the sides and on the steps of the stairways, could be taken home by the *audience*.
The seven installations and interventions that were created on the basis of the archival material were exhibited in the margins of the institution; areas of passage and transit were used, where the artwork is normally not present, such as stairs and corridors. This idea had already been used within the exhibition *The End(s) of the Museum* by Bill Fontana to present his sound installation *Time Fountain* (1995).

In the catalogue to the exhibition we can find the following quote:

"This staircase is not normally used as an exhibition space; it is only a vertical passage. When the visual art museum becomes the site for a sound sculpture, such spaces are more interesting than the normal galleries"[16]

One important goal of the project was to confront the archive with the work of the students and to ensure at the same time that knowledge does not only stay in the frame of the university, but comes into contact with the professional world. A short video and some texts on the *Open Source Protoypes* blog explain expectations and ideas from the participants’ point of view.[17] Along with the description of *Ausencia_Archi* on the website we can find an image gallery of the exhibition’s results. This documentation (text, image, video), while slim, adds another layer to the programme. Although it might not be easy to reconstruct the intervention itself without having participated, the documents still give an insight into what
the work was like. At the same time, these online materials contribute to the proliferation of discourses around the “archive itself” and around “working with the archive”.

**On Mediation**

In May 2014 the Fundació Antoni Tàpies engaged in another cooperative project as part of *Open Source Prototypes*. With the University of Barcelona (Department of Art History) the exhibition *On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira* – part of the three-part exhibition-cycle *On Mediation* – was developed and shown in the gallery space of Sant Lluc.[18] Sant Lluc is a centre for artistic practice in Barcelona with a small Modernist collection, an exhibition space for changing exhibitions, and the possibility to take different public art classes.[19] Project documentation is not yet on the Fundació’s website, but newspaper articles and online summaries describe the intervention.[20] These sources show how work with archive material may expand to other spaces, outside the museum and the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. The exhibition dealt with current urban problems in Barcelona, starting from the idea that those problems are not very different from the situation of the city in the 1990s: Housing difficulties, real estate speculation and the privatization of common goods, all problems that have existed from before. To draw this connection, *On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira* combined material the students of DEIÀ created, drawing on the Fundació archive, and new works by contemporary artists.

For the work with the archive the students used correspondences and press articles concerning three different exhibitions shown in the Fundació in the 1990s: Krzysztof Wodiczko. *Instruments, Projections, Vehicles* (1992); Hans Haacke. *'Obra Social'* (1995); Craigie Horsfield. *The City of The People* (1996). They then filtered out citations by Wodiczko, Haacke and Horsfield, who had each commented on the city’s situation during their respective shows. One group of students, for example, examined the exchanges between Hans Haacke and Fundació director Manuel J. Borja–Villel, as well as the research documents Haacke had put together on real estate speculation and the city of Barcelona. Excerpts from these documents thus became part of the exhibition. Furthermore the students worked with press articles on the exhibitions of Wodiczko, Haacke and Horsfield in order to highlight the media attention they had at the time. Citations of those articles were part of the exhibition as well.
Next to those archive materials, *On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira* displayed works of contemporary artists who deal with the city’s current difficulties, and who criticize current political tendencies. These works problematized the concentration of capital, the decay of the public sphere and migration politics. In total, the exhibition consisted of five projects done by seven artists, two of them “duo collectives”. The collective Enmedio presented...
documentation of an action from 2012. The work showed portraits of people who could not pay their debts to the bank and were evicted from their houses. Each portrait was accompanied by a short explanation of their present living circumstances. Besides these pictures were postcards addressed to the bank with a longer biography of each person and the proclamation "We are not numbers".

Another work, a photo series (2013) by Adrian Melis, consisted of sixteen images that depicted houses expropriated by banks. Each photograph bore the date of eviction and the name of the bank, the house's new owner.
On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira shows how archival material can be made productive for an exhibition, while combining such reformulations with new artistic works. Citations and press quotes were used to re-actualize the critique on urban policy formulated by Wodiczko, Haacke and Horsfield in the 1990s and this message reinforced the new works exhibited in parallel. Furthermore the exhibition proves in which ways the archive can be engaging for a wider circle of recipients. The fact that the show took place in another venue in Barcelona underlines this idea.
Archive Circuit

With its participatory programmes and with its archive, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies places the emphasis equally on the artwork – no longer considered as the sole producer of knowledge – and its documentation. Thus the archive becomes another “epistemological centre” of the institution.[22]

“An exhibition can never be read as a single text. There is always a plurality of texts which have to be disclosed as well, thus functioning as a sort of text parallel to the work of art itself. The museum or gallery, its history, its collection, its building, the way the objects are displayed and labelled, the explanations, even the traffic flow are all part of the message sent to the viewers attending an exhibition.”[23]

The documentation of an exhibition, including the administrative files that are needed for its set-up, also gives insight into the institution itself, its proceedings and curatorial concepts. An archive with an open, transparent access for visitors, and participatory programmes to engage them, might serve as a tool to multiply discourses and create different forms of knowledge around archiving and the archive itself. The way the Fundació guarantees open access has a circular structure. Documents that are used by the visitors create new archive material – as we saw – in forms of exhibitions or interventions. This then becomes part of the institution and may be used as an archival source. The exhibition as a “temporal event” [MACBA Study Center 2014: 9] has a limited radius of reach. Documentation and open access can ensure that a wider public can discuss it, beyond its original presentation.

In the programmes initiated by the Fundació, the “online space” of the archive does not replace its actual “physical space”. Working with “real” material – paper, documents and photos – evokes a different materiality and is another way to make the reality of the archive visible. The fact that the Fundació actively includes the physical space of the museum into the work on archive material is an innovative way to encourage its visitors to appropriate these documentations. It might also be seen as link to the present development of an increasing number of exhibitions dealing with archiving, as described in the beginning of this text.

Rather than considering archival materials as documents of the past, they can instead be starting points for an actualization of former readings, allowing the emergence of new interpretations. Archiving needs no longer be reduced to the narrow idea of how close the documentation is to an “original” exhibition. Rather, the focus may lie on today’s use of the
archive which is another way to confront visitors with an art institution and vice versa: "What
good is an archive that is not used?"[24]

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the Catalan/Spanish texts, to Christian M. Alonso for information around the exhibition On Mediation
2: Barcelona Inspira and to Eric P. Morrill for the English corrections.

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performance–based art (HMT Leipzig/HZT Berlin). In her research she focuses on performative
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Her soli and group pieces were presented at Roter Salon/Volksbühne Berlin (Trois Voies), Ballhaus
Naunynstraße (Mj'a sin–Verflechtungen) and Tanzfabrik Berlin (iz–le) a.o. The solo On Speeches was
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Currently she dances a.o. in Collective Jumps by Isabelle Schad.

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Gruppenstücke wurden u.a. im Roten Salon der Volksbühne Berlin ("Trois Voies"), am Ballhaus
Naunynstraße ("Mj'a sin–Verflechtungen") und der Tanzfabrik Berlin ("iz–le") gezeigt. Das Solo "On
Speeches" war im Mai 2014 Teil der Ausstellung "Flamme Éternelle" von Thomas Hirschhorn am Palais
de Tokyo/Paris. Derzeit tanzt sie u.a. in "Collective Jumps" von Isabelle Schad.
re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive, the second part of the project, travelled as an exhibition from Berlin (Akademie der Künste), to Roskilde (Museet for Samtidskunst), Gdansk (Wyspa Institute of Art), Tallinn (Tallinn Art Hall), Barcelona (Fundació Antoni Tàpies) and back to Berlin (Akademie der Künste). For more information see the exhibition website [http://www.reactfeminism.org](http://www.reactfeminism.org) (28/3/15). Other exhibitions to be mentioned here are Moments. A History of Performance in 10 Acts (2012, ZKM Karlsruhe) and MOVE. Choreographing You. Art and Dance Since the 1960s, (first shown in London in 2009). Moments put the focus on re-enactments of historical performances in the museum. Instead of exhibiting archival documents, performers presented their view on the history of performance via appropriations and reformulations of key works. MOVE focused on the connections between visual art and dance. The installations in the museum space were designed for active audience participation. re.act.feminism and Moments have been investigated in the frame of the research project “Records and Representations: Media and constitutive systems in archiving performance-based arts”. For further information see [http://hzt-berlin.de/?z=5&p=101&lan=en](http://hzt-berlin.de/?z=5&p=101&lan=en) (28/3/15), and Barbara Büscher’s 2014 text Archiv Werden: Das Projekt ‘re.act.feminism’. Demonstration eines Zugangs zu Performance–Geschichte”, [http://www.perfomap.de/map5/instabile-ordnung-en/archiv-werden](http://www.perfomap.de/map5/instabile-ordnung-en/archiv-werden) (28/3/15). In his lecture “D’un moment l’autre : à propos de l’événement–performance et sa matérialité contemporaine” given during La Permanence at the University of Rennes, Franz Anton Cramer analysed the relation between appropriation, re–enactment, witnessing and documentation in the exhibition Moments. [Cramer 2014]

The archive of the Haus der Kunst opened in 2005. Since 2014 the historical collections are integrated permanently in the museum space. See: [http://www.hausderkunst.de/en/research/history/historical-archive/](http://www.hausderkunst.de/en/research/history/historical-archive/) (20/4/15) MACBA’s archive is open for public consultation since 2007 and is complemented by an artists’ archive: [http://www.macba.cat/en/archive-library](http://www.macba.cat/en/archive-library) (20/4/15) Additionally, in 2007 the MACBA Study Center (CED) was founded “with the idea of promoting and enriching the role of the Museum as an agent of research, linking its exhibitions with the study and production of knowledge in the field of contemporary art. CED compiles, organises, conserves and diffuses MACBA’s documentation.” [MACBA Study Center 2014: 10]. The investigation of these kind of archives is another field of research of the above mentioned project “Records and Representations”. (footnote 1).


In the brochure We Open 03/2010 (see footnote 3) that was published after Rassel took over the directory, the curatorial focus of the Fundació is emphasized: “The contemporary experience of art, an experience that no doubt includes but does not limit itself to contemplation of artworks, should help relate the works, to a whole network of events, learning activities and transformations, and create new forms of interaction with the public, new ways of sharing experiences and concepts through a variety of actions and activities (...) In order to develop new mechanisms of interpretation, interaction and participation, a new experience of art must be activated that will not limit the critical reading, and will not reduce the process of acquiring knowledge to a single physical or virtual visit." We Open 03/2010.


[9] The scheme is only accessible in the physical archive of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies.

[10] Open Source Prototypes is thought and developed in a collaborative way. The project is curated by Oriol Fontdevila and coordinated by Linda Valdés. A description to “Open Source Prototypes” can be found on the website of the Fundació Tàpies: “To that end, the historical archive of the institution can be used as a tool for collaborative working processes, such as the development of autonomous projects, while the Fundació itself can be used as a working environment, an object of research and a possible space for interventions.” http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/spip.php?rubrique1083 (19/1/15)

[11] See the description in the above mentioned brochure “We Open” (footnotes 3 and 5): “(T)he Fundació offers a new way of relating to contemporary art, a sphere of visibility for past and current projects, and a re-presentation of objects in different formats, that will allow varied audiences to consult, comment and appropriate its contents and create new ones.” We Open 03/2010. Brochure Fundació Antoni Tàpies, http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/IMG/pdf/Brochure.pdf (20/1/15)


[18] The curatorial team that prepared On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira consisted of Christian Alonso, Ana Isabel Caijao, Rosa Cruz, Julia Keller, Irene Llàcer, Raquel Machtus, Ada Sbriccoli, Arola Vall, Celia Yonamine and was coordinated by Christian Alonso in the frame of the seminar On Mediation/1, an activity organized by the research group AGI (Art Globalization Interculturality) of the University of Barcelona. For more information see: http://onmediationplatform.com/es/barcelona-inspira (19/7/15).

[19] For more information see http://www.santlluc.cat/index.php?lang=cat&sec=Portada (20/4/15). Sant Lluc was founded in 1893 by leading figures of Modernism, such as Antoni Gaudí, Alexandre de Riquer, Josep Llimona a.o. and has promoted this spirit and direction of artistic work until today. In a statement on the institution we can find the following description: “The Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluc is
an association funded (sic) by a group of artists in the acme of the Modernisme. It was born with polemic intentions toward bohemian artists, which were more individualist and ideologically groundbreaking. [...] After the modernist period, Sant Lluc maintained its central role in the artistic environment, gathering prominent artists and fostering young creators as Miró or Perejaume. Our association has always been engaged with the arts in a broad sense [...] With its life and still sessions, its painting, molding and engraving and photography rooms, its excellent models and the more than 40 hours a week of pose, Sant Lluc is a unique space for art and drawing.” Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluc, Visitor information.


[21] Email correspondence with Christian M. Alonso, curator of the exhibition.


references:


Exhibition *Tour-isms. The Defeat of Dissent*,
Exhibition *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*,
Exhibition *Tàpies’ posters and the Public Sphere*,
Exhibition *The End(s) of the Museum*,

**Links to the exhibition On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira**

Marc Grèbol: Què inspire, Barcelona? [Barcelona], 16.06.2014,
Programme Sant Lluç,

Press Release to On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira,

Exhibition Hans Haacke. 'Obra Social',
Exhibition Craigie Horsfield. The City of The People,
Exhibition Krzysztof Wodiczko. Instruments, Projections, Vehicles,

**Images and sources**

**Image 1/2/3:** *12 Reasons to go to Japan* (part of *Ausencia_Archivo*), URL:
https://www.pinterest.com/fundaciotapies/absència_arxiu/

**Image 4:** The installation *No Es* (part of *Ausencia_Archivo*), dealing with the coincidence of oppositions
(and the absence of sameness), refers to archive material of the exhibition *Obra Social* of Hans Haacke
that took place in the Fundació in 1995. URL:
https://www.pinterest.com/fundaciotapies/absència_arxiu

**Image 7:** The work *No somos números* by the collective Enmedio (On Mediation 2: Barcelona Inspira), URL: http://www.nuvol.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/inspira-3.jpg

**Image 8:** Adrian Melis *Time To Relax*, URL: http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-WAKGLWBO8qE/UmI8V-IhoBl/AAAAAAAAAnO/XelWbHITia/s1600/DSC_6802.jpg

**Image 9:** Adrian Melis *Time To Relax*,
URL: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-bkaPSco8UXe/Uml8QVt2zI/AAAAAAAAAnU/P6_7PCxM1bY/s1600/DSC_6785.jpg