Clash of the Titans

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Clash of the Titans

by

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Abstract
My artistic practice utilizes a hybrid of media such as serigraphs, lithographs, hand-made publications, installations, archival documents and video-based works to address master narratives and to challenge historical records. I closely examine the relationship between archived information and redacted histories and its effects on the collective and historical consciousness. I am interested in creating counter-archives to challenge the authority behind archival systems and interrogate their mutability. I also borrow from the same visual language of traditional archival systems to reveal institutional and historical skeletons. Due to my personal research, I have morphed into an archivist myself collecting bodies of hidden and unfamiliar knowledge. In this text, I am using research to amplify willfully omitted histories or alternative knowledge in order to tell a distinctive story.
Introduction
I am an artist and a black man in America; and these two identities are inseparable. I seek to examine racial disparities and inequality because I am forced to traverse through a seemingly dark place. A place where known and unfamiliar histories collide. A place where the wake of my presence renders unfiltered judgement. You fear me, but why? We can both agree that I, and others that look like me are severely misunderstood; historically, culturally and dare I say— spiritually. But carrying this burden grows tiresome. Always moving. Always seeking. Always searching. We are never fixed. Forced to shapeshift in order to assuage the guilt or discomfort of others, putting us in a constant state of flux. We can never rest or just be. We are forever haunted by histories never known, or those yet hard to discover. We are constantly tormented by memories of ancestral brutality yet reminded of these same oppressive systems in the modern world. There is a greater authority over the hidden, but knowing gives one purpose. To erase cultural memory is similar to inflict a wound, but to know in full disclosure is comparative to healing. As Malcolm X states, "If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there’s no progress. If you pull it all the way out that’s not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they haven't even pulled the knife out much less heal the wound."

In the first chapter I discuss the concept of power as an act and the authority behind hidden history. I rely on research and my graphic design expertise to bring willfully omitted information to the forefront. King Leopold II and the Belgium colonialism in the Congo is an example of many discussed in this chapter as it pertains to buried histories. I also investigate the correlation between surveillance, redaction and open access to personal information where artist Hasan Elahi decides to do a self-surveillance project after being put on the government’s “watch list”. Even though he floods the FBI with information about hiscomings
and goings, he still maintains authority of his personal narrative by selectively illustrating the story he offered to disclose—a goal that many of my works discussed in the chapter attempts to achieve.

In the second chapter, I scrutinize the accuracy of historical records and I seek to question the notion behind the secrecy of certain information. The works of Taryn Simon are used as an example because she provides access to truths not typically seen by the general public such as the photograph titled *Imperial Office of the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Sharpsburg Maryland* which shows members of the KKK in full regalia bearing arms. I use Simon's work, recent work of my own and writings from Baudrillard to draw connections between what we perceive as real or fake.

In the third chapter, I critique a larger system involving the archive, as well as its mutability and open access. I discuss my journey as an archivist of unfamiliar information in order to expose and amplify hidden information. I delve into the notion of counter-archives and counter narratives which is the main driving force behind my visual thesis work.
“The feeling of having no power over people and events is generally unbearable to us—when we feel helpless we feel miserable. No one wants less power; everyone wants more. In the world today, however, it is dangerous to seem too power hungry, to be overt with your power moves. We have to seem fair and decent. So we need to be subtle—congenial yet cunning, democratic yet devious.”

Robert Greene
A Desire to Control & Removed Histories
As a black man in America, I watch people wrestle over power. It is comprised of sides engaged in tug-of-war for control and equality. Authority versus citizen or republican versus democrat are more recognizable dividing lines. As an artist, I explore and interrogate identity, racial disparities, erasure, power structures and systems of authority utilizing printmaking, installation, time-based media, artists books and a hybridization of processes. A constant source of material in the development of my work has been my research into hidden histories, my personal experiences and conversations observed on social media platforms and news outlets. I am curious about power and its acquisition, accumulation and preservation. The word “power” is a derivative from the Old French word pouvoir, which is described as the “ability to act or do”. If power is indeed an act, there must be a practitioner—ergo the term ‘the powers that be’. The powers that be can be viewed as mysterious forces that use power to influence and govern the behaviors and experiences of others by restricting access to information and resources.

Consider redaction as an act of power, especially with regards to history and covert knowledge. This is the main reason why themes of exclusion and censorship reoccur within my work. As a printmaker, I find value in the reproducibility of the medium in order to disseminate unfamiliar bodies of knowledge and challenge historical records. As a designer, I rely on the clarity of both message and design in order to create, impact and make a statement. This influences my artistic approach and practice. The message may appear deceptively simple but, many layers of meaning are often intertwined in the exploration of material, size, medium and deployment. In terms of deployment, I draw inspiration from the NAACP’s text-based flag (figure
01) once located outside their headquarters in New York City, which read “A MAN WAS LYNCHED YESTERDAY”. The flag was unfurled anytime they found out about a lynching and the message was clear and unflinching.
In my work titled *know your history* (figure 02) I too, chose to display an acerbic message. I designed and produced a risograph poster that employs vibrant colors in contrast to the dark history of King Leopold II and Belgian colonialism in the Congo. It is visually reminiscent of the posters found in an elementary classroom setting. The layout utilizes bold type, imagery, shards of information and suggested readings to quickly communicate the brutality of King Leopold II. During the 1890s, King Leopold II enforced slave labor on the Congolese people which resulted in an estimated 15 million deaths. I was unaware of this information until recently, myself. I find it quite odd that as a society, we know *all* about Adolf Hitler but King Leopold II and the genocide involving the Congolese people remains extremely
vague. My primary goal behind creating this poster was to spread awareness but the secondary goal was to test the public’s prior knowledge involving this history.

The project blossomed into a social experiment during SLAM Underground: Revolution which is a monthly party held at the St. Louis Art Museum. In order to obtain a poster, I would ask an individual two questions. First, have you ever heard of King Leopold II? Second, do you know what he did in Africa? As it turns out, a small percentage actually knew of King Leopold II and his horrific regime while the vast majority were completely ignorant to it. On the poster, I chose to also include an image of a book as suggested reading in order to amplify information kept out of public view. The book is titled *King Leopold’s Ghost* which was written by journalist Adam Hochschild in 1998.

*King Leopold’s Ghost* provides insight into the atrocities inflicted on the Congolese people and it also investigates the alleged “humanitarian” efforts of King Leopold II. *King Leopold’s Ghost* was rejected by nine publishers before being picked up by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. As public historian Grace Tang asserts, “*King Leopold’s Ghost*, therefore, offers us a meta-narrative on the making and unmaking of white memory and self – a history of Euro/American saviorism and barbarism as told through Christian gospel, the body, and the archives.” Needless to say, this poster was a rude awakening for many of the attendees. Some even expressed their feelings about this piece of history that is new to them and pondered on the reasoning behind its omission from public knowledge.

There’s an interesting scripture in the bible written by Solomon that forewarns anyone on the rocky quest to obtain more knowledge. Solomon writes, “in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” (Ecclesiastes 1:18 KJV) That particular scripture resonated with me and the weight behind that profound message came bearing down when I found out about Ernest C. Withers. Ernest Withers was a black photographer who
documented major milestones within the civil rights movement. One of his most notable photographs was taken during the Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis, Tennessee during the late 1960’s (figure 03). Many of the African American workers fled to the streets with signs emblazoned with the phrase “I AM A MAN” (figure 03) to protest unsafe working conditions and a low pay grade. Ernest Withers was amongst the crowd to document the strike but this story has an unusual plot twist. About a year ago, the New York Times published an article written by Robbie Brown that exposed and tarnished Withers’ legacy as a renowned civil rights photographer. The heading read “Civil Rights Photographer Unmasked as Informer.” This article gave me insight on how pervasive the FBI’s counterintelligence program was regarding the civil rights movement and its leaders. But more importantly, the reasoning behind keeping this well guarded secret piqued my curiosity. It forced me to look at the contemporary piece titled I AM A MAN (figure 04) which was done in collaboration with my wife Danielle McCoy in 2016. It was originally created to serve as an affirmation to the viewer—which is the intention behind the use of mylar as the printing substrate. We sought to appropriate this declaration and source materials of this era since the message is sadly STILL relevant on a multitude of fronts.
When we originally made the work, we were unaware of Ernest Withers and his role with the FBI, but that bridge greatly changes the original meaning and intent. It is now injected with a new layer of contextual symbolism. By trade, Withers was a photojournalist but was his documentation used to bring value to the Civil Rights struggle or did he only intend to provide full disclosure about the movement and any future plans? Despite his duplicitous nature, this is a question neither you or I can answer. Many details of Mr. Withers’s relationship with the F.B.I. remain unknown. The bureau keeps files on all informers, but has declined repeated requests to release Mr. Withers’s files, which would presumably explain how much he was paid by the F.B.I., how he was recruited and how long he served as an informer.
In 2013, Edward Snowden released classified documents that exposed government surveillance programs. I wonder if this considered betrayal or heroism? In both accounts, time is weaponized. In the story about Ernest Withers, time is working for authority, whereas information remained classified for 20 years or more—well after the movement subsided. With regards to Snowden, time is working against the present authority because classified information was revealed as it was happening. Nevertheless, we are only allowed to peruse declassified documents when the veil of restriction is lifted, vital parts are either redacted or missing altogether.

In my work titled *Black Moses* (figure 05), I am triggered by the FBI files kept on Fred Hampton and James Baldwin. This work utilizes redacted files to explore the tumultuous relationship between the FBI and Black revolutionaries. *Black Moses* is printed on white archival stock and the poster weaves photographs of Black Panther Fred Hampton along with fragments of information extracted from his FBI dossier. The work focuses on the illegal surveillance tactics used by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI to track Hampton’s whereabouts, affiliations and involvement with the Panther Party. Hoover grew increasingly fearful of Hampton’s ability to communicate with people of various ethnicities, economic status and background and he sought to silence him by any means. Hampton was eventually murdered in his home in Chicago, Illinois by Cook County Police during a raid. A civil rights lawsuit was filed in 1970 by the survivors and relatives of Hampton. The United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in Chicago stated that the government had withheld relevant documents thereby obstructing the judicial process.
In 1982, the City of Chicago, Cook County, and the federal government agreed to a settlement in which each would pay $616,333 to a group of nine plaintiffs, including the mothers of Hampton and Clark. Instead of focusing on the surveillance of Hampton, I decided to investigate his death for my work *Fear of the Black Messiah* (figure 06). All of the documents concerning his death were part of an FBI cover up to deem it a justifiable homicide. The work reveals incomplete pieces of knowledge to remedy distractions caused by an overabundance of information. I opted for cheap newsprint rather than stark white paper used in earlier prints to reference the non-archival stock used in traditional periodicals. *Black Moses* and *Fear of the Black Messiah* serve to give a
fuller account of what happened and examine those behind the authority of hiding it. What happens when everything is transparent? What if everything that is recorded is made readily available? Does that information, given its open access, still maintain value?

Fig 06.
Kevin McCoy, Beware of the Black Messiah, 2017
Serigraph on newsprint, 5 parts, overall 90 x 24 inches
Courtesy the artist

This issue of open access information in correlation to its value is explored in the works of Bangladeshi-born artist Hasan Elahi. In 2002, Elahi was put on the government’s watch list because of an anonymous tip suggesting he was involved with terrorist activity. He was subjected to a 6 month long FBI investigation which eventually resulted in a dismissal since there was no evidence to support the claim. His interaction with the FBI inspired him to brazenly exhibit bits of his daily activities through his own self-surveillance project titled Tracking Transience. He built a voluminous archive of meals he ate, places he either traveled to or from which included his flight information. Stay v3 (figure 07), is comprised of multiple photographs showcasing a variety of empty beds that Elahi slept in during his travels. The photographs show traces of his presence even though he is
physically absent. Elahi made it very clear that he wanted to be extremely transparent about his
comings and goings to ensure he would not be placed on the watch list again.

![Fig 07.
Hasan Elahi, Stay v3, 2016
Courtesy Grimaldis Gallery](image)

Even though he chose to document everything, there is not much one can gather about him as an individual. The airport images are rather desolate. Bedding and pillows are wrinkled and scattered about in hotel photographs. The pictures of meals are cropped in a way that hide his existence, yet the photographs are shot from his perspective. One could surmise, that it’s his way of regaining authority and power. In Elahi’s self-surveillance project, the viewers are given access to everything, but it is solely at the discretion of Elahi—which is a clever shift in the power dynamic. In a 2014 TED talk, Elahi mentions, “While I’m perfectly fine opening up every aspect of my personal life to the public, I’m still aware that I’m only telling one part of the story. What the viewer doesn’t
see is what’s going on on the other side of the camera — and that’s a very deliberate decision on my part.” ¹¹ He also adds:

There is no need to delete information anymore. So what do you do when everything is out there? Well, you have to take control over it. If I give you this information directly, it’s a very different type of identity than if you were to try to go through and get bits and pieces. ¹²

In the world today, it is not hard for the FBI to track your whereabouts, affiliations, records, etcetera. The constant feeling of being watched reminds me of Michel Foucault’s writings on the Panopticon (figure 08) which was an observation tower encased by a circular building to facilitate constant surveillance. He writes:

Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. ¹³

Foucault’s *Panopticon* philosophy imbued self surveillance but the sheer amount of information shared by Elahi makes him anonymous and invisible yet again.
We are essentially walking archives with the help of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram which offer geo-tagging options when a picture is taken. Even still, we as a society carefully curate what we wish to share, but there is also value in what is hidden for those that have access to it. As Elahi asserts in the TED talk:

Intelligence agencies—and it does not matter who they are—they all operate in an industry where their commodity is information or restricted access to information. And the reason their information has any value, is well, because no one else has access to it. And by me cutting out the middleman and giving it straight to you, the information the FBI has, has no value and thus devaluing their currency. 

Much like Elahi’s work, I too want to regain power by selectively illustrating the story I wish to tell, as seen in *Euphorbia milii* (figure 09). The FBI (under J. Edgar Hoover’s command) used covert surveillance measures coupled with propaganda to spread fear and anger to the white population with two simple goals in mind. First, to discredit an organization, then dismantle it.

One of their most controversial attempts involved circulating the the Black Panther coloring book (figure 09). The book was chock-full of illustrations depicting members of the Panther Party inflicting violence on police officers. In one image, a child is shown bearing arms and shooting the police as an act of non-compliance. I found many illustrations exhibiting similar acts of aggression towards authority. To many people who saw the coloring book, the message is clear. The Panther Party is a dangerous organization hell-bent on using violence as a means for political gain. In actuality, the Black Panther Party had a social welfare program. A typical day in the panther organization started around 5:30 A.M. to serve breakfast to kids under their famed People’s Free Food Program. Nevertheless, upon closer inspection of illustrations in the coloring book, one’s shifts focus to the depiction of the police. This pose was strikingly the same throughout the series of drawings. Authority were depicted as nightmarish hogs slovenly dressed in police uniform. The original artist chose to render authority in such a vile manner,
going as far as inscribing the word “pig” on their badges. In contrast to the original image, I removed the black figures completely in order to shift your gaze to the depiction of the police thereby making them the prominent figure.

My etching scrutinizes how propaganda works to undermine truth.

Fig 09.
Image on the left: Illustration from the Black Panthers coloring book by the FBI for their Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro) / Image on the right: Kevin McCoy, *Euphorbia milii*, 2018
Etching on paper, 11 x 9 inches
Courtesy the artist
Invisible Reality
If a story is not told in its entirety, how can it be considered truthful? In the civil trial involving the slain panthers, information that was buried re-emerged to expose all of the conspirators. In a court setting, a person that is called to testify is ordered to give a full and accurate account while sworn under oath. Is it not perjurious to selectively withhold pertinent details? In the court of law, factual information determines the strength of the evidence and the credibility of the witness.  

A similar degree of scrutiny should be taken into account when reviewing historical records when new evidence is presented.  

Ronald Dworkin speaks in great detail about American artist Taryn Simon and her body of work titled *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*. “Secrecy is an enemy of justice and shame is its ally. We need to see much that we cannot see, and we need to see it as Taryn Simon presents it – starkly, without political gloss.” Her work makes the inaccessible accessible. The work gives us clearance into an unfamiliar world. Her photograph labeled, *Imperial Office of the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Sharpsburg, Maryland* (figure 10), shows members of the neo-nazi group dressed in full regalia bearing weaponry. This picture displays a harsh American reality that many refuse to acknowledge. Those in power of writing histories have constantly chosen to turn a blind eye towards wounds inflicted by our own hands as seen during the *Unite the Right* rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. It is far easier to simply ignore our past than to contend with our own collective discomfort.  

I have been critiquing the American flag for quite some time. I question its meaning, symbolism and the power of its communication. In my work, *Everything is Alt Right* (figure 11), the title text is silk-screened on a standard United States flag. The text is a tint of the flag’s red
color in order to give it atmospheric perspective so that the words appear to float behind the red stripes.

Fig 10.
chromogenic color print
Photograph: Imperial Office of the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Sharpsburg, Maryland
I chose the typeface Kirsty to reference German nationalism. The joints of the font (the place where the stroke and stem meet) are sharp, angular lines closely resembling those of the Iron Cross, a symbol that was adopted by the Nazi party during the 1930’s. The flag was inspired by two crucial acts of racially motivated violence: a peaceful protest that quickly turned deadly during the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017, where motorist James Alex Fields Jr., a supporter of neo-nazi ideology, used his car as a weapon by driving it into a crowd of counter-protestors. Heather Heyer was struck by the vehicle, later dying at the hospital. There were several videos that emerged that captured every moment of the tragic event. After viewing several cell-phone camera videos, I observed the clear lack of concern and the lawlessness that quickly ensued. The police presence during the rally adopted a ‘hands off’ approach when skirmishes between the neo-nazi members and counterprotestors erupted. The
passivity of law enforcement further instigated the violence which was a tacit demonstration of support for the Neo Nazis.

The second act of violence was in Ferguson, Missouri after the killing of Michael Brown where an entirely different system of policing was used. People rallied to bring exposure to the misuse of power and police brutality, however, these protesters were met with large SWAT vehicles, snipers stationed on the roofs of nearby businesses, and they were doused with tear gas or peppered with rubber bullets. Bearing witness to all of this in real time, in my own backyard, was numbing. It was an out-of-body experience. The task of processing it all was daunting but it was inspiration enough to dig deeper. When the protest began in Missouri, the National Guard was called. We were deemed a community needing to be severely policed—which explains the militarization of our local police departments. To make matters worse, the media outlets only presented one side of the story: the riots, the “lawlessness” of the citizens, and the police in response to this rioting. What remained unspoken were the excessive years of brutality, racial profiling and the blind eye taken to citywide issues. The Mike Brown incident caused a significant rupture in the status quo which was impossible to ignore.

Right-winged organizations, such as the Oath Keepers, also took it upon themselves to infiltrate the protest while clad in weaponry. Conversely, the police presence in Charlottesville did not use any force to rectify the tension already brewing. The Unite the Right rally was seen as an act of free speech and therefore was not considered a threat despite the hatred and ideologies shared amongst its swell of supporters. Everything is Alt Right seeks to contend with the nebulous web of authority and the metanarrative dominating a variety of marginalized individuals. It feels as if we have chosen to dwell in an alternate space as far as history is concerned.
Jean Baudrillard distinguishes reality from artificiality by using the metaphor of the spectacle to unpack how we’ve agreed to accept an alternate reality. He speaks of Disney World as an example and other places that intend on providing delight and magic to its patrons. He states:

Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World: Los Angeles is encircled by these “imaginary stations” which feed reality, reality-energy, to a town whose mystery is precisely that. It is nothing more than a network of endless, unreal circulation: a town of fabulous proportions, but without space or dimensions.  

Are we co-facilitators of an illusive world by knowingly choosing to accept artificiality? With the pervasiveness of social media and the internet, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two. Furthermore, one could deduce that there is a connection between the information we receive (as real or reality) and the shaping of the collective consciousness.

This constant oscillation between real and fake occurs within the natural world and humankind’s unstoppable quest to control the natural world. There is and will always be a harmonious dance with everything connected to our world—if left alone. Nature, as defined, denotes that humankind has no hand in eqing that balance. Shows such as Planet Earth provide evidence that our world utilizes some form of restorative order. Without predators, deer have a tendency to overpopulate and they can take a cumulative toll on their landscape. A wildfire may claim several acres of land only for it to return more lush and vibrant than before. The same goes for our weather, ‘April showers bring May Flowers’. The cyclical patterns found in our ecosystems, and in nature, were established well before mankind attempted to modify them.

My first introduction to the subject of weather modification came after reading about an electrical engineer named Nikola Tesla. I learned about his experiments with electrical currents which shed more light on a program and device called HAARP (figure 12). It is an acronym which means The High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program. The HAARP facility and
its high-powered transmitter is a joint effort shared between the United States Air Force and the Navy in an attempt to "manipulate the ionosphere, a layer which begins about thirty miles above earth." The device can also locate underground facilities and disrupt communications to others making it a viable tool to the military. According to an article in the *Anchorage Daily News*, it was reported that “Millions of dollars have gone to Alaska universities to harness the power of the aurora borealis, the electrical energy shimmering in the northern skies…” Where does Tesla fit into the grand scheme of things? The HAARP apparatus is based off of Tesla’s former electrical device named the Tesla coil. In his laboratory in New York, Tesla demonstrated to spectators how this coil worked. He created man-made lightening which rolled over his body without penetrating his organs due to the high frequency of the current.

Dr. Marc J. Seifer has written two biographies on Tesla. During the International Tesla Symposium in 1984, Seifer mentioned the use of lasers and particle beam weapons from Tesla’s research. Particle beam weaponry was kept quiet by the military and its security level was placed above top secret, even former President Jimmy Carter was screened by the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency. The uses by the military related to Tesla’s discoveries or
innovations included earthquake devices and world radars. Seifer concluded, “Great support is lent to the hypothesis that Tesla’s work and papers were systematically hidden from public view.” Tesla is best known for pushing the envelope of science in order to provide free energy but his legacy is overshadowed by his obsessive desire to manipulate nature. This subject is very polarizing given one’s preferred stance, and the general public may not fully know the facts about HAARP or Tesla’s involvement with the modification of weather. Some believe that it is an insidious way of controlling nature while others are quick to label such discourse as “conspiracy theory”.

Chemtrails are another topic not fully discussed due to the lack of access to tangible proof. Chemtrails are defined as cloud-like in appearance with patterns which stretch across the horizon. They are emitted from planes that are equipped with a specific mechanism geared for spraying chemicals at high altitudes. The use of chemical spraying dates back to the mid-1960’s. It was originally used by the U.S. Military during the war with Vietnam. In a program called *Operation Ranch Hand* (figure 13), the usage of chemical spraying was spearheaded by the Chemical Corps. The U.S. Military used the defoliant *Agent Orange* to essentially destroy large swaths of jungle brush that provided cover for the Viet Cong soldiers. Even though there is evidence in an image showing a helicopter spraying chemicals, the picture is subject to question since photographs can be doctored and context changed.
I believe that tangible proof will relieve doubt and separate fact from fiction. In the work titled *Weather Modification, Cloud seeding Weather Modification, Inc* (figure 14), Taryn Simon photographed the nozzle mechanism from inside of a plane used for chemical spraying. Her photographs make the unknowable knowable and she gives access to a much broader audience. Earlier in this text, I explained the motivating factors to investigate a plethora of subjects. Whether the topic relates to FBI informants or chemical spraying, the common thread still remains within my work; to bring to the forefront what is hidden. To be clear, I am not intending to measure our military’s capabilities to fully control our weather. I am using the topic of “chemical spraying” and “weather modification” as one example of hidden information. I am interested in the authority over archives.
Fig 14.
chromogenic color print
The Archive
To me, the archive represents a body of knowledge, a form of historical reportage or an assemblage of documents which are oftentimes tethered to a specific library or institution. Okwui Enwezor, a Nigerian curator and writer describes the archive succinctly in his essay for the exhibition titled *Archive Fever—Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, “The standard view of the archive oftentimes evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets, and shelves laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artifacts ...”  

The word archive in English, comes from the archaic french word *archif* which essentially means records preserved as evidence. However, I question the veracity of archives. Furthermore, I wonder who has the power to decide what is an immutable fact, what is included or excluded, and why?

We covet our institutions and our libraries for their ability to preserve historical data but these repositories are often accessible only to those with great intellectual power and status. My inquiries serve to critique a much larger set of systems involving the archive and its authority. My thesis work seeks to interrogate the restrictive accessibility and mutability of archival systems.

Photographs are the medium that people most associate with archives. As Enwezor asserts:

> Photography is simultaneously the documentary evidence and the archival record of such transactions. Because the camera is literally an archiving machine, every photograph, every film is *a priori* an archival object.

This is why I decided to use Taryn Simon’s work as an example of pictorial proof. If I were to tell you that something exists, you may believe me if I have established some form of credibility with you. However, I’m sure tangible evidence would eradicate all doubt. In her series titled, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, Simon’s photographs are proof of things not publicly known or seen. Conversely, by restricting these hidden bodies of knowledge, you could ultimately manipulate public opinion. There is an abundance of tangible proof for those who seek to unearth the truth but there are times where evidence has undergone curation through
either redaction or obfuscation. My goal is to compile these fragments in order prompt further
questioning and stimulate more investigative work on the subject.

One should look to the western canon as a means of upholding an uncontaminated
image. In America, we celebrate everyone from George Washington to Christopher Columbus
despite their prickly past. The image of Christopher Columbus as an intrepid hero has also been
called into question. Upon arriving in the Bahamas, the explorer and his men forced the native
peoples they found there into slavery. Later, while serving as the governor of Hispaniola, he
allegedly imposed barbaric forms of punishment, including torture. It is clear that history
edifies the victor which then manifests into master narratives.

For the collaborative piece done alongside my wife titled Founding Fathers (figure 15),
the back of a dollar bill was silk-screened on paper but we replaced the images contained within
the great seal with illustrative woodcuts depicting life on the plantation. The editioned works are
part of a communal print exchange that explored the idea of foundations or foundations in need
of repair. George Washington is regarded as our nation’s founding father but his procurement of
slaves is a history not widely discussed. Even though this information is not secret, it is not
retained in the memory of the American public—and to some degree, this is done intentionally.
My practice is mildly similar to that of an archivist. I am borrowing the visual language of the
archival system to reveal institutional and historical skeletons. My personal research combined
with the use of the archive will aid me in constructing my own counter-archives and
counter-narratives.
I spoke about artist Hasan Elahi and his methodology to regain power by offering a full flood of information. Even though the FBI had complete access to his daily routine, much of his personal life still remained a mystery. There was an air of incompleteness because he masterfully curated the narrative he wished to share. My work uses similar tactics to examine the connective tissue between Tesla, his technological advancements and our military and chemical spraying. Most of this information is sourced from a plethora of declassified files found online, which are then sutured together in order to formulate my own archive. My thesis work titled *He that increases knowledge increases sorrow* is comprised of six vintage cardboard file cabinets that are contained within a newly constructed wooden structure made primarily of poplar wood sourced from the WWII era. Each cabinet bears documents and items that appear to be original but are actually facsimiles off-set printed on foil. All of these items are placed
within a plexiglass enclosure to mimic the appearance of archival quality materials and traditional displays. Much like my other work titled *Beware of the Black Messiah* (figure 07), the work *He that increases knowledge increases sorrow* is rendered somewhat incomplete due to its redactive nature. A small chunk of information is made available to the viewer and they are given the opportunity to complete the arc of truth through their own discovery. Each drawer has a label holder with a card that invites the viewer to open each drawer. This may appear unsettling given the museological parameters set forth during the exhibition. The work intends to extend physical access regardless of clearance in order to rupture symbolically the authority and access we assume as part of the traditional concept of archive. As Michel Foucault puts it:

> The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness…  

28

These fragments as well as my work as a whole aim to transcend the archive to bring about awareness. The viewer is invited to engage with *He that increases knowledge increases sorrow* (figure 16) by opening the drawers to unearth truth for themselves but I am also highlighting larger systemic issues around the archive and the concealing of information. It is my hope that viewers will continue to seek truth in other areas well beyond this exhibition.
Fig 16.
Kevin McCoy
He that increases knowledge increases sorrow, 2019
Foil, ink, monitor, cardboard file boxes, Plexiglass, World War II era poplar, fabric, thread
42 x 55 x 25 ½ inches
Fig 16.
Kevin McCoy (detail of drawer)
He that increases knowledge increases sorrow, 2019
Foil, ink, monitor, cardboard file boxes, Plexiglass, World War II era poplar, fabric, thread
42 x 55 x 25 ½ inches
I'm using this quote as a point of access in the conversation of power. As a black man living and enduring American atrocities, the unwarranted bloodshed of black men and women at the hands of authority made me think of this statement. The book itself is a compilation of 48 'laws' sourced from great military leaders and philosophies from the likes of Niccolò Machiavelli and others. I surmise that this book offers some insight for those seeking clarity on how to establish some form of power.

"Power (n.)." Index, www.etymonline.com/word/power#etymonline_v_18595.

Pulling this article into the conversation to reference the scripture "in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."

Ibid


Ibid


Ibid


16 Ronald Dworkin is a philosopher and scholar. He wrote an essay describing the nature of Taryn Simon’s body of work titled An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar. Simon’s work provides access to see what inherently exist that many are not privy to viewing—in this case it’s the Imperial Office of the KKK.


18 Jean Baudrillard is a French theorist. He distinguishes reality/artificiality is his work Simulacra and Simulations. To me, our historical record feels fraudulent because certain histories are purposefully omitted.


22 Dr. Marc J. Seifer, Ph.D., is a writer, university lecturer and also a handwriting expert. He is internationally known as an expert on the inventor Nikola Tesla.


28 Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130
Bibliography


Haas, Jeffrey. *The assassination of Fred Hampton: how the FBI and the Chicago police murdered a Black Panther*. Chicago,


*Jean Baudrillard Simulacra and Simulations* - Semantic Scholar. pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3c0c/cbb2850ab4cd248bbb8c93161d3865869cc0.pdf.


Image List

Fig 01. Kevin McCoy, *Everything is Alt Right*, 2017. Fabric ink, US Flag, t-pins, 3 x 5 feet.
Fig 02. 1936 NAACP Headquarter, 5th Avenue, New York NY.
Fig 03. Kevin McCoy of WORK/PLAY, *know your history*, 2019. Risograph print on found paper, 11 x 17 inches.
Fig 04. Image on the left: Original I AM A MAN poster for the Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis, Tennessee.
Fig 05. WORK/PLAY, *I AM A MAN*, 2016. Silk-screened print on mylar, framed, 23.5 x 30.5 inches.
Fig 06. Kevin McCoy, *Black Moses*, 2017. Serigraphs on paper, 18 x 24 inches.
Fig 07. Kevin McCoy, *Beware of the Black Messiah*, 2017. Serigraph on newsprint, 5 parts, overall 90 x 24 inches.
Fig 08. Hasan Elahi, *Stay v3*, 2016.
Fig 09. Panopticon diagram.
Fig 10. Image on the left: Illustration from the Black Panthers coloring book by the FBI for their Counter Intelligence Program (Cointelpro).
Fig 12. HAARP antennas from the HAARP research facility in Alaska.
Fig 13. Photograph of a helicopter spraying chemical agents such as defoliants in Vietnam.
Fig 15. WORK/PLAY, Founding Fathers, 2018. Silkscreen with chine collé on paper, 9 x 11 inches.
Addendum: Redacted Files
In this addendum, I am sharing some of the redacted files found during the research and production phase of my artistic exploration.
Memorandum

TO: File 100-new
FROM: Legat
SUBJECT: JAMES BALDWIN
   IS - X

On 2/18/65 advised that subject, a well known American Negro writer had arrived at London and was receiving attention by

A check of our files disclosed no information on BALDWIN. I called Paris and they have destroyed reference to him in a Civil Rights case.

stated he would furnish us results of coverage.

ACTION: O & A 100 case. Follow.

CWB: vw
(1)

10-3409
SAC, New York (100-146553) 12/19/67

Director, FBI (62-108763)

JAMES ARTHUR BALDWIN
SM - C

Enclosed herewith for New York is a Xerox copy of a newspaper article which was submitted by Legat, London, concerning subject.

In view of subject's presence in England, New York promptly submit letterhead memorandum concerning his travel.

Enclosed for the information of Legat, London, is New York letterhead memorandum dated October 17, 1966, concerning subject. For Legat, London's, additional information, Baldwin is an author of several books and has been active in the civil rights movement. He is on the Security Index of the New York Office.

Enclosure

1 - London (100-3409) (Enclosure)
Writer seeks penal inquiry

Daily Telegraph Reporter

A CALL for an immediate investigation into America's penal system following the shooting of George Jackson was made in London last night by James Baldwin, the American Negro writer.

He flew from Paris to urge pressure for this by British public opinion and said he was considering staying in London for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square on Monday.

Mr Baldwin, 47, said last night that he hoped Jackson's death would become a rallying point for black people in America.

"He was not murdered on Saturday. He was murdered when he was IRA," said Mr Baldwin.

$70 robbery

Jackson was killed ten and a half years ago, at 14, for a $70 robbery on a "one year to life" sentence that made him eligible for early release, but only if he did not anger prison authorities.

"I am calling on you, as America's ally, to look at us and yourselves, because what is happening in America is happening to you," said Mr Baldwin. He did not believe a gun was smuggled into the prison for Jackson. "I believe he was murdered."

Page 13
The Daily Telegraph
London, England

Date: 8/25/71
Edition: 
Author: 
Editor: 
Title: JAMES ARTHUR BALDWIN
Character: SM-C or Bufle 62-108763
Classification: 
Submitting Office: London

Being Investigated

17 AUG 5 1971
LEGAL ATTACHE LONDON
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

Director, FBI

December 19, 1969

SERGEANT DANIEL GROTH AND OTHERS,
POLICE OFFICERS, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
FRED HAMPTON, MARK CLARK,
AND OTHERS - VICTIMS
CIVIL RIGHTS

The following information is being furnished in connection
with your interest in the captioned matter.

A confidential informant, who has furnished reliable information
in the past, advised our Chicago Office on December 17, 1969, that the
Black Panther Party in Chicago was advising news media that the FBI,
Central Intelligence Agency, local police and State's Attorney's Police
were at 2337 West Monroe, the scene of the December 4, 1969, shootout,
and refusing admittance to Black Panther Party members. Subsequently,
on the same date, James Montgomery, an attorney for members of the
Black Panther Party, contacted our Chicago Office to advise the police
officers at the aforementioned address advised Bobby Rush, Deputy
Defense Minister, Illinois Black Panther Party, that they had a search
warrant for searching the outer halls of the building. According to
Montgomery the officers were asked to leave, which they did; however,
returned shortly and then refused Black Panther Party members access
to the apartment.

At 3:37 p.m., December 17, 1969, Dennis Cunningham, attorney
for the Black Panther Party, telephonically contacted the Special Agent
in Charge of our Chicago Office to advise that attorneys for the Black
Panther Party and victims had decided they did not feel the Justice
Department could help them and were therefore taking the position that
they would not voluntarily cooperate with any FBI investigation. It was
further stated the decision was actually reached on the night of
December 15, 1969, however, Cunningham was "too busy" to contact the
Chicago Office. He commented that undoubtedly the Federal Government
could obtain access to the premises at 2337 West Monroe through legal
action and that "of course they could not prevent that." He said that it is
impossible for the Black Panther Party to voluntarily cooperate."
TO: DIRECTOR, FBI
FROM: SAC, CHICAGO

Enclosed for the Bureau are two copies each of 38 newspaper clippings pertaining to the raid conducted at the Black Panthers headquarters in Chicago by the police assigned to the States Attorney's Office, Cook County, Chicago, Illinois.

A number of these articles ask for investigation by the federal government into this matter. To date this office has received no request for investigation of any kind and these articles are being furnished for information.

Chicago does not contemplate any investigation

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
Memorandum

To: Mr. Callahan

From: [Signature]

Date: 12/24/69

Subject: Sergeant Daniel Groth, et al.; Blair Anderson, et al., Victims; Civil Rights

This is the case involving a raid by the Chicago Police Department on an apartment at 2337 West Monroe Street on 12/4/69 during which two Black Panthers were killed. The Department previously had requested Bureau assistance in preparing items for use by a Federal Grand Jury. Bulletin to the Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division (Mr. Jerris Leonard) dated 12/22/69 confirmed the discussion with Deputy Assistant Attorney James Turner stating that the Bureau would examine the above-mentioned premises and that a diagram of the area involved would be prepared.

Accordingly, on that date Exhibits Section personnel and Laboratory personnel and Special Agents Robert M. Zimmern and [Signature] began work at the apartment. They were informed by Mr. Leonard that in addition to [Signature], he desires if possible:

The building has three levels, with the first being a basement partially out of ground. He also desires to have photographs also remeasured and these will be utilized.

Mr. Leonard advised the Federal Grand Jury is to begin hearing witnesses 1/5/70 and that he desires to have the exhibit material as soon as possible thereafter. Exhibits Section can do this. It is estimated that we could complete by 1/9/70 and by 1/20/70. These dates, of course, are subject to change based upon what

1. Mr. S. [Signature]
2. Mr. R. [Signature]
3. Mr. D. [Signature]
4. Mr. B. [Signature]
5. Mr. T. [Signature]
6. REO 39
7. EX-102
8. 2781 483
9. 6206
10. [Signature]

Continued - Over
Memorandum to Mr. Callahan
Re: SERGEANT DANIEL GROTH, ET AL.;
BLAIR ANDERSON, ET AL., VICTIM;
CIVIL RIGHTS

we find when we get further into it but both items in any event will be
handled as rapidly as possible.

By teletype 12/23/69 SAC, Chicago advised that Mr. Leonard had
advised arrangements had been made for Laboratory employees Robert M.
Zimmers and and Exhibits Section employees to have access to the apartment at 9:00 a.m.
on Monday, 12/29/69.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Exhibits Section prepare the and will depart for Chicago on Sunday
evening 12/28/69 accompanied by Visual Information Specialist who will be needed to take certain measurements with respect to
the apartment.

b1 rule 6(e) F.R.C.P.
ELECTRICAL CONTROL OF THE WEATHER
WILL SOON BE AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT

— NIKOLA TESLA.

"For more than eighteen years I have experimented with the atmospheric effects of electrical discharges of tremendous strength. In my latest plant I expect to get a maximum rate of electrical discharge approximating 1,000,000,000 horse-power. While I am not familiar with the experiments along this line of anyone else, I have no hesitancy in declaring that the next step in the mastery of man over Nature will be the absolute control of the weather."

This statement, made by Nikola Tesla admittedly one of the greatest electricals of the age, when told of the recent experiments looking toward the control of the weather by electricity made by John A. Graham.

"Atmospheric effects, such as Mr. Graham claims to be able to produce," continued Mr. Tesla, "necessitate the production of electrical discharges far beyond any that have yet been obtained by artificial means. That, however, is a mere detail. I am convinced that weather conditions are of electrical origin, and so must be susceptible of electrical control.

"I believe the day is near when man will not only forecast the weather with absolute accuracy, but will control it. Any one at all familiar with the fields opened up by recent experiments with high-tension electrical currents would hesitate to draw the line between the possible and the impossible.

"At present we are at the threshold of an era pregnant with tremendous possibilities. Every new discovery opens up new lines of thought and research; and despite the wonders that have been accomplished during the past half century, the surface has hardly been scratched.

"Of course, every man exploring in an undeveloped field is a butt for the ridicule of a skeptical public. Every announcement of a step forward in the fields of science and invention has been greeted with sneers and unbelief. Public opinion crucified Christ, imprisoned Galileo and branded Columbus a lunatic.

"I know nothing of the experiments of Mr. Graham, but from my own work along similar lines, I am positive that the results he claims are possible of accomplishment and that this great problem will be solved in the very near future."
a young man by the name of BLOYCE FITZGERALD, an electrical engineer, had been quite close to TESLA during his lifetime and in fact was the protege of TESLA. SPANEL said that FITZGERALD was in New York City and would be in contact with him shortly, at which time he would have FITZGERALD call the writer.

At 10:30 p. m., 1/8/43 Mr. FITZGERALD telephoned the writer and stated that he had a great deal of information about TESLA and his personal effects and would like to call at the office and give the writer the benefit of his knowledge.

At midnight, 1/8/43 FITZGERALD came to the office and in a personal interview with the writer gave the following information:

Nikola Tesla, a native of Serbia, came to the United States late in the nineteenth century. While here he became famous for his electrical innovations, inventions and advanced ideas in the engineering field. Tesla was the designer of the generators in the Niagara Falls power plant, and in fact has his name inscribed on the generators in recognition of the fact. To substantiate this FITZGERALD displayed a great number of old newspaper clippings and an album of letters written congratulating Telsa on his 75th anniversary; the letters were from world renowned people, principally those in the scientific field. Tesla, by reason of his wizardry became a consultant to Marconi, Charles Edison, and many others. Tesla's induction electrical motor was sold by him to Westinghouse for $2,500,000.

FITZGERALD stated that of late years he had become a confident of TESLA and knew that TESLA had and was carrying on extensive experiments for transmitting electrical power by wireless and with propelling electrical rays possessing sufficient power to destroy implements of warfare, such as airplanes and submarines. Within the past month TESLA told FITZGERALD that his experiments in this connection had been completed and perfected. FITZGERALD also knows that TESLA has conceived and designed a revolutionary type of torpedo which is not presently in use by any of the nations; it is FITZGERALD's belief that this design has not been made available to any nation up to the present time. From statements made to FITZGERALD by TESLA he knows that the complete plans, specifications and explanation of the basic theories of these things are some place in the personal effects of TESLA. FITZGERALD stated that he knows that there is a working model of TESLA's which cost more than $10,000 to build in a safety deposit box of TESLA's at the Governor Clinton Hotel; and from statements made by TESLA FITZGERALD believes it has to do with the so called "death ray" or the wireless transmission of electrical current.

In past conversations TESLA has told FITZGERALD that he has some 80 trunks in different places containing manuscripts and plans having to do with experiments conducted by him. FITZGERALD knows that TESLA
Nikola TESLA

Whose daring imagination and concrete accomplishments are among the wonders of our age.

By PAULINE KLOPACKA

When Nikola Tesla died in January of 1943 in comparative obscurity in a New York hotel, he owned no more than the few personal possessions that had become dear to him during the 86 years of his life. Yet his influence, so fabulous that its value can never be truly assessed, and his ideas were the most practical of all the world. What price can be put on the work of a man who brought to life the electric power era? The industrial giant that the U. S. is today rests on the riches of brilliant discoveries and inventions in the harnessing and transmission of electricity conceived by Nikola Tesla, who came to this country from the land of the South Slavs when he was 28 years of age.

It was at midnight between July 9 and 10 in 1856 that a son, Nikola, and Ejusda, his wife, in the little Serbian village of Smiljani, in the province of Lika, was born under the rule of the Austrian empire. Tesla’s father, a Serb, a priest of the Greek Church, and his mother, a distinguished Serbian family, came from a long line of inventors. Both father and mother gave to the child a valuable heritage and culture developed and passed on by ancestral families that had been community leaders for many generations.

It was at first planned that he was to prepare for the priesthood but Nikola would have none of it. Physics and mathematics fascinated him. He would be a leader of those favorite subjects. But then he switched to electrical engineering and at the age of 23 a graduate of Prague University—earlier training had been obtained at the Graz Polytechnic in Austria—was set for his first job.

At that time the American Telephone System was brought to Europe and an installation set up in Budapest, where Tesla was a successful applicant for a position.

Three years later, in 1884, he was in London. There were 4 cents in the young immigrant’s pocket when he arrived in New York, but that did not disturb him. He had his name of friends. He would soon get to work.

His confidence was well founded. Within a few years he was counted among the ranking scientists of the country, his discoveries bringing him honor and royalties.

It is interesting to note the description of Tesla at this time by his biographer, J. J. O’Neill in the book, "Prodigal Genius," "Tesla was a..."