

**Colloquium “Archives, Bodies and
the Ethics of Possibility”**
12th February, 2021 – 14h00-16h30

Opening and introduction by the organizers (14h00-14h15: 15 min.) (Lasse et al.)

1. Archives: The Cultural Biography of their Things and its Limits (14h15-14h55: 40 min.)

Initial input (14h15-14h20: 5 min.) (Paco)

Arjun Appadurai’s intervention (14h20-14h35: 10-15 min.)

Question and Answer Round with Participants (14h35-14h55: 15-20 min.)

2. The Archivist Bodies (14h55-15h35: 40 min.)

Initial input (14h55-15h05: 5-10 min.) (Elizabeth)

Arjun Appadurai’s intervention (15h05-15h20: 10-15 min.)

Question and Answer Round with Participants (15h20-15h35: 15 min.)

3. Towards and Ethics of Possibility (15h35-16h15: 40 min.)

Input (15h35-15:45: 5-10 min.) (Andrea)

Arjun Appadurai’s intervention (15h45-16h00: 10-15 min.)

Question and Answer Round with Participants (16h00-16h15: 15 min.)

4. Conclusion (16h15-16h30: 15 min.)

Final words by Arjun Appadurai (16h15-16h25) (10min)

Final comments by participants (16h25-16h30: 5 min.)

The following pages contain a brief description of each of the thematic blocks listed above together with the leading questions we have prepared for you. We also included a list of related texts in case any of our colleagues are interested in further reading. We will not ask you to comment on the work of other authors, but we thought the list could also give you an idea of how we are reading your work.

Introduction by the organizers

We will briefly introduce the structure of the session. Following your approach to the economic theory of value from an anthropologic perspective and your closing arguments about an “ethics of possibility” in *The Future as Cultural Fact*, we divided the session in three blocks that will deal with the cultural biography of things within community archives, the conceptualization of human and non-human bodies as archives, and the methodological implications of moving towards an ethics of possibility. We will explain this structure in 5 minutes and then move immediately to the first block.

1. Community Archives: The Cultural Biography of their Things and their Limits

Our first thematic block, which will discuss the possibilities and the limits of community archives, will be introduced by Paco Reyes who will prepare an input of 5 minutes about his [own research](#). Arjun Appadurai has pointed out that community archives serve as a great tool for the construction of identities and as vehicles for fostering the capacity of aspiration. Trafficking things and stories of communities creates feelings of empathy and anger over wide cultural distances. These global discursive flows enter the circuits of religion, migration, and commerce of diasporic communities, promoting a sense of belonging capable of fostering historical processes such as nationalism, or circuits of human circulation.

He will then formulate a few leading questions for you. You will have 15 minutes to respond. Here are some of Paco’s questions:

- In an era of accelerated digitization in which the archives of different communities are preserved on the Internet, what are the risks for objects with a high cultural biography in terms of cybersecurity?
- What should be the limits of diasporic community archives in their role as educators and designers of national identities?
- How can scholars actively collaborate in search for a sustainable ethic of value that underlies community archives?

Related readings:

- Mbembe, Achille (2002). “The Power of the Archives and its Limits”, en Carolin Hamilton, Verne Harris (et. al.) (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London.
- Kopytoff, Igor (1986). “The Cultural Biography of Things: commoditization as a process” in, Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 2.

2. The Archivist Bodies

Our second thematic block will focus on the conceptualization of human and non-human bodies as archives. Following Prof. Appadurai, it is locally and in the bodies of agents where the negotiations of values, desires, memories and aspirations happen and are mediated. Expanding the locality of the archive and its temporality, it could be argued, that it is in the bodies, both human and non-human, where the archives are located and where the future is being performed. The block will be introduced by Elizabeth with an input of 7 minutes based on her [own research](#) in the Atrato river.

Here are some of Elizabeth's questions:

- You have said that “[l]ocalities [...] are temporary negotiations between various globally circulating forms. **They are not subordinate instances of the global, but in fact the main evidence of its reality**” (69). Could we approach these localities, expanding your concept of the five “scapes” with that of *Bodyscapes* proposed by the researcher Rodrigo Parrini, in which in the body is where these *glocal* negotiations are expressed?
- What are the potentialities and the limits of approaching the bodies of humans and no-humans as living archives where the future is being performed?
- Which are the methodological implications of moving from the mediated materialities of the archives to the bodies as living archives inhabited by places, violence, moments, memories and affects?

Related readings:

- Parrini, Rodrigo (2010): *Bodyscapes: Globalization, Corporeal Politics, and Violence in Mexico*. In: *Social Text*, No. 104, pp. 67-89.
- Taylor, Diana (2003): *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

2. Towards an Ethics of Possibility

Our third and final thematic block will address some of the ontological and epistemological implications of moving towards what you have called “an ethics of possibility”, that is, “[...] those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what I have called the capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship.” The block will be introduced by Andrea with a 7-minute input in which she will introduce your argument regarding the “ethics of possibility”, with an emphasis on the challenges brought forth by climate change and the so-called Anthropocene, which are at the core of her [research](#).

Afterwards, you will have 15 minutes to respond. Here are some of Andrea's questions:

- From a methodological perspective, what does it mean to move away from the ethics of probability for those Social and Natural Sciences that rely heavily on statistical methods?
- What do you think are the possibilities and the limitations of academic activism?
- The German literature scholar Eva Horn has said that the importance of a concept like the Anthropocene (and its counterparts) lies in its ability of portraying the "present as rupture". This sense of rupture comes both from the suggestion that we are entering an epoch and a planet that no human being has experienced before, and from a new way of conceiving human time in relation to geological time. Without going into the discussion about the Anthropocene, what do you think are the implications of this sense of rupture when thinking about the future in terms of possibility, considering that the dynamics of imagination, anticipation and aspiration are largely linked to past experiences?
- How do we study and propose new horizons of (human) hope in a moment that has called into question the human-nature divide underlying most of our disciplines, without losing sight of the non-human and of the many different ways of living as humans in this planet?

Related readings:

- Stengers, Isabelle (2015): *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. Trans. Andrew Goffey. Open Humanities Press.
- Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne (2015): "Thinking the Anthropocene", In: *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*. London/New York: Routledge.

Since this is our last session together, we would like you to end the session with some final remarks (10-15 min), followed by a brief round of final questions or comments by our colleagues.

We thank you kindly for taking the time to read our proposal and are looking forward to our coming session.

Best regards,

Andrea, Elizabeth and Paco