

Due to the nuance and complexity of this film, *Solitary Land* would be best suited for small seminars and upper division classes. The content raises interesting questions for courses on colonialism, history and the archives, Latin America, and Oceania. *Solitary Land* will generate stimulating conversation about the legacies of ethnographic film in the construction of place, and the slots (Trouillot 1991)—or even prisons—people on film come to occupy as their images circulate in the world.

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# Fugitives in the Archives

Curated by Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, November 2, 2018–January 1, 2019, Pocket Gallery and Lightbox Gallery, Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC.

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In December 2018, I visited *Fugitives in the Archives*, created by Kate Hennessy and Trudi Lynn Smith, at the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. As artists-anthropologists, Hennessy and Smith's collaborations are proof of the experimental, creative, and critical work taking place in archives and collections and the importance of art-based research in, and through, Canadian memory institutions. As I moved through the gallery, surrounded by images taken of objects from the British Columbia Provincial Archives, my thoughts became colored and anchored by their presence. *Fugitives in the Archives* became a catalyst for bigger questions about how we engage with the materiality of the past, the space between art and anthropology, and what it means to embrace impermanence.

For the *Fugitives* project, Hennessy and Smith document and creatively engage with the processes of what they term *anarchival materiality* or “the generative force of entropy in archives” (Smith and Hennessy 2018, 130). In this volume and elsewhere, they have written about the history of the object artworks featured in the exhibition and how the notion of fugitivity has come to structure their research-creation (Hennessy and Smith 2018; Smith and Hennessy 2018). While working in the archives of Chicago’s Field Museum, they discovered the imprint of pastel drawing left on the manila folder in which it had been kept. From this encounter, they began talking with archivists in other institutions, including the British Columbia (BC) Provincial Archives (connected to the RBCM), about these archival material transformations, archival accidents, and the processes by which objects become fugitive.

With this exhibition, Hennessy and Smith bring visitors into contact with various preservation and protection techniques used to battle chemical transformations and decay and the resistance against these forces that archivists enact for these collections to be preserved for future use through their best “practices of care” (Smith and Hennessy 2018, 52). Using ethnographic interviews, they capture oral histories of archivists who are themselves the keepers of the oral histories surrounding fugitive collections. In doing so, the *Fugitives* project brings forward how institutional collections are built and cared for, and how the human propensity to collect and archive is driven by very personal relationships between people and things (Edwards 2005, 2012).

*Fugitives in the Archives* is a reminder that institutional collections, however permanent as imagined in their design, are never static. As institutional policies change, so do the methods by which collections are cared for, the values that guide institutional conservation and preservation work, and the access to collections provided—or, conversely, not provided—to communities from outside the institution. When new people take over positions, the collections are revalued differently and individual objects may transform into fugitives based on the decision of a single person (and their values and agenda for a collection). Though archives strive to be in the forever business, this exhibition highlights how fugitive objects sit outside of the structures of order: They refuse in a very material sense to be classified, collected, and contained. Fugitives in archives are misfits who do not fit into the established norm, yet their place outside of order positions them in a new category of care, and as this exhibition so wonderfully demonstrates, through their shared fugitivity they have become a new, quirky collection worthy of attention.

Working from a makeshift studio space in the BC Archives, Hennessy and Smith transformed the collection of archival oddities into works of art. The exhibition contains images of six objects inside the Pocket Gallery and another seven photographs on the wall just outside the gallery in light-box frames. Placed on a white backdrop and photographed at a high resolution, the objects stand out with still life qualities, as if to be discovered for the first time. With certain images, the viewer is inserted into the very properties of archival materiality that have rendered them fugitive, such as the abstract designs of yellow paper burn or the tangibility of magnified scratches on a live bullet. Up close, the viewer comes into contact with evidence of the personal, like the shape and creases of wallets left behind from the bodies that once carried them. The photographs bring a heightened awareness to the unintended material trail we leave behind as we move through living.

As I stared at the gooey mess of entropy captured in the images of cellulose nitrate, I drifted between the space of the digital and the analogue. The degradation of images made with cellulose nitrate material is a process that unites archivists, early ethnographers, and filmmakers in their shared perplexity of how to preserve images that are destined to degrade through the entropy of chemical reactions. In this capacity, the exhibition highlights the links that exist among early salvage anthropology, art, and archives as films that once may have appeared unrelated now collectively degrade over time. This is exemplified by the ten-minute experimental video made by Hennessy and Smith included in the exhibition. They create *To the Burning World* as a remediation of Kelly Duncan's 1978 film *To Build a Better World*, a 16mm promotional film made to highlight the lucrativeness of British Columbia's lumber industry at the time. In their film, Hennessy and Smith take fugitive film footage from the provincial archives and play with how a chromogenic (full-color) film has faded into magenta. Sitting in the center of the exhibition is a case containing Duncan's original 16mm film, and the presence of the reels alongside the entropy of nitrate captured in the photographs across from the case sparks questions into what constitutes materiality in the time of the digital.

We have yet to fully grasp the consequences of the massive amounts of digital material currently being produced and stored on servers, resulting in electronic waste piling up in locations where vulnerable communities are left to sort through the digital detritus of capitalist consumption. *Fugitives in the Archives* prompts the reminder that media is currently being created at such a fast pace that we do not know the outcome of this production. This presents interesting concerns for

memory institutions: What information is currently being missed from entering into archives in a time of high volumes of digital clutter? How do archives battle the digital abyss that, at times, seems infinite? This further fuels the question: As artists and academics, what traces do we leave behind with the work we do?

With the exhibition at the RBCM, as opposed to an art gallery, *Fugitives in the Archives* also raises issues about the contested history of museum and archival collecting in Canada. The Pocket and Lightbox Galleries at the RBCM were created in response to the need to make public institutional work more transparent. The galleries sit across from the café and general seating and relaxing area adjacent to the main entrance of the museum, which positions both galleries as free to the public. The galleries are intended to function as spaces to engage with the process of museological and archival work and to make provincial government museum and archive institutional practice more visible, accountable, and present. In this way, the exhibition complements other recent work undertaken by the RBCM. For example, their Repatriation Department recently published the *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook* (Collison et al. 2018) and have accelerated their initiatives to return belongings to Indigenous communities (see Theodore 2019; Thomas 2019). *Fugitives in the Archives* illuminates the work—often the very silent, unseen work—of storing, classifying, and deciding where something fits, or does not. Through recording the oral narratives of several archivists who care for these collections, Hennessy and Smith capture important personal insights into the experiences of doing archival and collections work. In doing so, the exhibition successfully provides a space for corporeal and sensorial experiences with the archives held by the province—that is, experiences where we are able to engage with public institutions using more than just the visual, to a place where we learn to use our bodies, as Tanana Athabasca scholar Dian Million (2009, 54) argues, to *feel* archives.

In Canada, there is a growing body of community-engaged, collaborative, and participatory arts-based research seeking to decolonize, reimagine, and reconstitute public institutional practice through embodied, sensorial, and creative methods (see, e.g., Conrad and Sinner 2015; Hill and McCall 2015; Robinson and Martin 2016). In this capacity, the *Fugitives* project is also part of a series of creative interventions by scholars, artists, and community activists that serve as important sites of rupture in Canadian memory institutional practice. Here, I am thinking of the 2018 album by Jeremy Dutcher from the Tobique First Nation that recently was awarded the prestigious Canadian Polaris Prize. For *Wolastoqiyik*

*Lintuwakonawa (Our Maliseet Songs)*, Dutcher incorporates wax cylinder recordings taken in 1907 from his ancestors now held in the sound archives at the Canadian Museum of History and, through his own operatic scores, speaks back to them in their shared Wolastoqiyik language. These ruptures also provide a critical working space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations. For example, in their work as members of the Ethnographic Terminalia Curatorial Collective (Hennessy and Smith are members of the collective with Craig Campbell, Stephanie Takagarawa, and Fiona P. McDonald), they collaborated with artist and musician Geronimo Inuitq and curator Tarah Hogue to organize the first exhibition of the *ARCTICNOISE* project in 2015, where Inuitq remixed the Igloolik Isuma Archive held by the National Gallery of Canada, an archive of sounds and video recording taken in his northern territory of Iqaluit (Hennessy et al. 2018). Projects such as these are working against what Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson argues as “hungry listening,” a practice whereby the simultaneous consumption and erasure of Indigenous art forms through the colonial process at once produces archives and collections of Indigenous belongings such as music, while concurrently banning and shaming Indigenous cultural practices through government policy (Robinson 2020).

The work of Hennessy and Smith, I would argue, is also in line with a growing collective practice of working in galleries, museums, and archives in Canada. As researchers, artists, and educators, our methods are deeply informed by the colonial “pulse” (Stoler 2009, 49) that runs through the infrastructure of Canadian memory institutions. The inclusion of an image of “Trapline Records” in the exhibition is a good reminder of this. The box contains records of correspondence between an Indian agent and the government of Canada arguing for the rights to trapping territory for the Haida, thus establishing Haida claims to land at a time when British Columbia was being heavily settled by non-Indigenous people. For some reason, the “Trapline Records” had been slated as anarchival and the box was put out in the garbage, where it was rediscovered (Smith and Hennessy 2018). *Fugitives in the Archives* is a visceral reminder of how archives are tied to the land and the vital way that Indigenous oral narratives are providing community input and response to the colonial record that exists in settler-state archives (Hunt 2016). The “Trapline Records” also prompts these questions: How often were archives such as this thrown away? What other records of Indigenous lives have been “misplaced” or tossed aside during the building of the project that is the Canadian nation-state?

In this capacity, the “sense of archives” that Smith and Hennessy refer to (2018, 56) could also include the embodied sense of responsibility we carry, or should carry, as Settler scholars when we work in, and through, colonial collections and institutions—including museums, galleries, archives, and universities. This is especially the case given the release of the “Calls to Action” in the Final Report from Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) into the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, where numbers 67–70 specifically call on museums and archives to decolonize their institutional practice and provide better access to their collections. For many Settler scholars and artists working in Canada today, our practice is also greatly influenced by the teachings we receive from Indigenous colleagues, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, students, and community activists. We are informed by the history of cultural discrimination, segregation, and violence that have created institutional policies toward Indigenous peoples as well as toward other early settler communities of color in Canada. We are informed by new ways of working in solidarity, in partnership, and with intention. We are informed by place.

In a time of academic precarity when many social sciences, arts, and humanities departments struggle to maintain departmental funding, the work of Hennessy and Smith inspires me to think how anthropology can keep moving into the future to build the anti-colonial, inclusive, and creatively driven pedagogies that we need to make change in our current time. The *Fugitives* project more generally, remains rooted in the very foundations of visual anthropology and ethnography, while demonstrating the possibilities of experimentation and collaboration. Their work is unfixed and flexible; artistic and anthropological; archival yet futuristic. This exhibition illustrates the never-ending possibility to reinvent the work of anthropology in order to be present. After all, for many of us in the discipline, it is in fact the fluidity of disciplinary structure, that is, the impermanence of disciplinary structure, for which we have come to embrace anthropology.

These lessons in impermanence are perhaps the most striking takeaway from spending time with *Fugitives in the Archives*. A constant, subtle reminder flows throughout the exhibition that calls our attention to the fact that despite all efforts, memory institutions and the objects, things, official documents, belongings—the materiality of lives once lived now stored in these institutions—cannot be controlled forever. There is decay, degradation, chemical reactions, and disappearance. The exhibition is a good reminder of the impermanence of control. As I watched *To the Burning World* with the purposeful looping created by Hennessy and Smith of men cutting

down old-growth forest in British Columbia, I am confronted by the irony of the perceived foreverness of resource extraction in Canada: the illusion that industrial-scale taking from land is both lucrative and limitless. We have now entered a place where much of the old-growth forest on the West Coast of Canada has been destroyed and where industrial resource development has clearly brought negative impacts to the health and well-being of people, particularly to Indigenous communities. I am reminded here that despite our best efforts to control, at some point, all things, objects, and people fall back into the land. With this exhibition, Hennessy and Smith successfully create the analogy between fighting entropy in collections and the resistance to change we perform over our bodies and the bodies of our loved ones. *Fugitives in the Archives* serves as an important reminder that our actions have consequences and that we too are impermanent.

Yet, rather than leaving this exhibition feeling morbid or depressed by this reality, I left with a strange sense of freedom. In response to the idea of a burning world, I wonder if we lived everyday embracing more fully our own impermanence, would we choose to live differently? Embracing impermanence means accepting the reality that nothing is perfect or controllable. Embracing impermanence means taking less for granted, acknowledging our relationships with each other and with the land as relationships that we may not have forever. The impermanence of living in a burning world makes me think, perhaps we need to work harder to build community, to work creatively in collaboration, to work in relation and with intent. Embracing impermanence makes me mindful of the footsteps we leave behind with the work we do.

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