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# Yishu

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INSIDE

Special Issue: The Atlas of Archives

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Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art

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Cover: Chen Zhe, *Towards Evening: Six Chapters*, 2017, installation view, *Any Ball*, Central Academy of Fine Art Museum, Beijing. Courtesy of the artist.

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Pan Lu

## Archival Flows: Fragment, Material, and Memory in/through the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum



Posters for Asian Artists Exhibitions, Fukuoka Art Museum, 1979, 1980. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.

### Prelude

“The Simple—the Being itself—is the temporal-spatial flow of all beings: the coming and going, appearing and disappearing, arriving and departing of beings; the emerging and lingering and passing away of all that is. And we—*Dasein*—are carried along this flow, temporally stretched out in our own peculiar way between birth and death. Being itself is *phainesthai*, the temporal shining-forth of beings.”

—Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (2010)<sup>1</sup>

In May 2016, I brought with me many questions on my journey as researcher-in-residence at Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (FAAM). Soon after I began to work on the topic of art and visual archives in Asia, I realized that FAAM had to be on my list of investigation as it is the earliest and remains the world’s only art museum that exclusively collects and exhibits modern and contemporary Asian artworks, with most of the collected works by non-Japanese artists. But what is modern (近代 in Japanese, 現代 in Chinese) and contemporary (現代 in Japanese, 當代 in Chinese) Asian (アジア in Japanese, 亞洲 in Chinese) art? How are the works in this collection found and selected? Why in Fukuoka? What was the impulse behind the archiving of Asian art at this institution when no other museum in Japan was doing it? What are the relationships among FAAM’s curators, its exhibitions (permanent, temporary, and Fukuoka Triennale), and its archives?

To find the answers to these questions, I spent a long time before my departure reading FAAM’s history, its exhibition catalogues since 1979, interviews with curators and their statements and writings, theoretical



writings on Asia and (pan-) Asianism, the history of exhibitions and urban development in the postwar Japan, etc. Before FAAM's official establishment in 1999, the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM), the so-called "parent museum" of FAAM, had held Asian art shows every five years since 1979, a time when contemporary "Asian" art (with or without Japanese art) had neither major market appeal nor a culturally important concept. In Asia, the prevailing referential system was still based on the East-West binary. The pioneering practices of FAM, whose motivation remains somehow little known, can be understood in terms of the Japanese economic boom taking place at the time and the huge national/municipal investment in cultural infrastructure; the fad of Expos in 1970s and 1980s Japan,<sup>2</sup> Fukuoka's strategy of branding itself as a nodal point for intercultural exchange in Asia, and Japan's "new" interest in the depoliticized cultural "Ajia" as destinations of consumption.

Bangladesh traffic art and Chinese calendar poster. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.



The idea of Asia also continues to be ambiguous, unavoidably evoking Japan's own history of colonization of Asia (*ajia*), which was led by, but did not necessarily include, Japan.<sup>3</sup> FAAM now claims Asia as "twenty-three countries and regions eastward from Pakistan, southward from Mongolia and westward from Indonesia," but it is constantly reconsidering "the boundary of Asia through exhibitions and the expansion of the collection."<sup>4</sup> Another consequence of this normative ambiguity is the definition of art, which has long been dominated by Western standards, aesthetics, and techniques. Since the nineteenth century, almost all Asian countries have faced struggles between traditional/national and modern/Western.<sup>5</sup> Apart from inheriting FAM's collection from its earlier years, the new collection of FAAM also boldly challenges the boundaries of art that are limited to artworks by "artists" (subjectivity) or the Western idea of "fine art" (techniques and professionalism). FAAM's collection includes works by craftsmen (Chinese paper-cuts) and other producers of visual artifacts (the Bangladesh rickshaw with hand-painted film posters), as well as printed matter (posters from the Chinese Cultural Revolution or calendar posters from Shanghai and Hong Kong) and works that previously lay outside the realm of "fine art" (export paintings in the Canton system).<sup>6</sup>

It then occurs to me that the process of researching FAAM, its history and archives, is indeed an encounter with a contemporary history of knowledge formation about art, archives, and curatorship in Asia. I thus narrowed down the major purposes of my stay at FAAM: I was not planning to explore the content of the archive as external temporal proof of an event or historical happening—more than fifteen years ago, another Chinese art researcher, Feng Boyi, did this with materials he found at FAAM about avant-garde Chinese art and artists, and the findings finally formed an exhibition in 2001 at FAAM titled *Towards the 1990s: China Avant-Garde Documents Exhibition*—rather, I am more interested in what an archive consists of: who and what forces formed the archive? How does the archive (symbolically) speak to the production of certain knowledge? And what is the temporality of the archive—that is, what does the archive have to do with the past, the present, and the future?

It turned out that in my one-month stay I encountered many unexpected situations that inspired me to move beyond these abstract questions: there was affective communication with the curators and artists with a mixture of English, Japanese, and Chinese language; the touching, moving, and smelling of archived objects; and, finally, creating my own archive through an exhibition. The presumption of myself as a researcher was also ruptured through those experiences. Thus this essay is not only a reflection on my experience in Japan but also a methodological endeavour to conceptualize an “art archive.” In the following, I will focus on the idea of “flow,” which my final project at the end of my residency—*Archival Flows: A 90-Minute Exhibition*—was based on. This project, which consisted of an exhibition, a talk, and a sharing session, highlighted the dynamic nature of an archive and its various dimensions. The idea of “flow” for me relates to the flow of time, ideas, memory, materials, etc., and proposes a kind of being better characterized as “becoming-being,” or in Japanese, 存立, which forms itself in the joint flows of the abovementioned entities, the Husserlian “time-objects,” which refers more to a processual existence in the fluidity of time (*Zeitobjekte*).<sup>7</sup> Using FAAM as a starting point, the research *per se*, as well as the final event doesn’t aim at providing a one-way report of my findings but, instead, serves as an active construction and reconstruction of the archival flows I discovered.

### Mvt. I. The Flow of Archival Fragments

In general terms, FAAM’s archive consists of seven parts: the collection of artwork, artists’ (and researchers-in-residence’s) materials, documentary photographs, other collected materials (for example, record cards, positive film, preservation reports, etc.), library materials, moving images, and newspaper and magazine coverage on FAAM.<sup>8</sup> While for many researchers, the collection of artwork, the library, and the artists’ materials may be of higher importance, I was strongly drawn to the archive of documentary photographs, which comprises records and documentation of the field trips by FAM and FAAM’s curators.

Archival image of Khien Yimsiri's sculpture *Musical Rhythm* (1949) and the sculpture on display at the Fukuoka Art Museum. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.



For me these photos, usually seen only as documentation for administrative and recording purposes, provide a time tunnel for me to see the process of how “the new” was born. Apart from the photos of artists the curators met and artworks they saw, there are also random shots of, I suppose, things or scenes they perceived to be interesting or unfamiliar—their subjective impressions during the trips. Some of the earliest images, from the late 1970s, showed the *genba*—the original sites where the Japanese curatorial delegates first landed in Indonesia, India, the Philippines—and their first encounter with artworks that later became part of the permanent collection of FAAM.

However, what struck me further were the more random images that were ambiguous in meaning. In one image, translator Ise Momoyo was looking down at goods on a blanket in a Nepali market. Two hawkers, kneeling down before her, were staring back at the camera with uncertainty. The triangulated gaze among the one who held the camera, the woman, and the two hawkers symbolizes an intriguing moment representing Japanese curators encountering “Asia” in the 1970s. The woman’s peaceful downward gaze was “destroyed” by the look back from the hawkers. I was also, for reasons unknown, drawn to an image where five Japanese visitors are seen sitting on two rickshaws in New Delhi. A young man stands between the two rickshaws, with both hands on his waist, gazing out of the frame with a look of slight anxiety. In the left rickshaw, one man is looking at his notes while in the right one, two of the visitors, together with the rickshaw driver who is sitting with his legs on the riders’ seat, are looking into the camera. The image offered me a vast space for imagination and interpretation—the tension between the young and the old, the anxiety caused by the sense of waiting for no known reason, the hierarchy between the visitors and the visited. Later I learned that the three men who sat in the two rickshaws were important figures who played an important role in bringing to FAAM its new orientation toward Asian art.<sup>9</sup> Better than many “useful” or informative



Momoyo Ise, translator, at Kathmandu Bazaar, Nepal, December 1978. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.



Left to right: Momoyo Ise, Koike Shinji, Shibata Katsunori, Adachi Jyo, rickshaw driver, and Terada Takeo, Shantiniketan, New Delhi, India, March 26, 1978. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.

images, I found these two images tell a vivid story of the status quo and challenges of the field trips at that time: what was Asia for a new generation of Japanese? Is Asia ready to talk back? Can representational forms of cultural technology and art reveal who we (Japanese) are and who Indians, Filipinos, or Indonesians are? With a less confident “Imperialist eye,” the Japanese curators were searching for a new way of positioning themselves, Japan, and art in Asia.

In *On the New* (2015), Boris Groys argues that the new is premised neither on the creation of something completely different nor on the identification of the Other.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the new is a cultural economic phenomenon that can be largely manifested in the change of value of particular artworks or theories and how their documentation in corresponding media is integrated into cultural archives. The new is essentially the result of spatial flows of works and theories from the heterogeneous profane world—that is, from outside of the archive into the archive. The photos I found provided me with the context from which numerous objects, artworks, and artifacts were transposed from the everyday spaces they originated in to FAAM’s collection, that is, the creation of an archive of “contemporary Asian art.”



However, to a museum visitor, the artworks are presented decontextualized and appear ahistorical and, thus, atemporal. For me, it was these images that revitalized and reenacted the invisible flows between the outside world and the archive. More than the final collection of artworks, the images communicated in a “real” way how the archive was developed.



Slide archiving, c. 1980s.  
Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art  
Museum Archives.

## Mvt II. The Material Flow of the Archive

The materiality of the archive is essentially a testimonial to time and events. Kuroda Raiji, the chief curator of FAAM, mentioned in my interview with him that he was deeply inspired by Takeuchi Yoshimi’s note on documentation: “Documentation is a means of struggle. The enemy does not make documents.”<sup>11</sup> The dimension of time in an archive is heterogeneous. This is not only because the curators’ field trips brought back to the museum “living” entities from the outside world and symbolically suspended the time flow of their life by storing them in the archives until they were exhibited, but also because the materials carry with them their own memories. From a perspective of media archaeology, memory is not monopolized by human subjectivity. As Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka claimed: “media in its various layers embodies memory: not only human memory, but also the memory of things, of objects, of chemicals, and of circuits.”<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, media itself also constitutes an archive, “as a condition of knowledge, but also as a condition of perceptions, sensations, memory, and time.”<sup>13</sup> In the archive at FAAM, my attention was also drawn to the shifts in media for recording field trips, performances, talks, and other events. The way the photos, negatives, contact sheets, slides, 3-inch disks, CDs, DVDs, are stored, categorized, and displayed shapes another narrative of FAAM’s exploration into Asian art. Included in this are how the visual technologies and machines of FUJI, Konica, Minolta, or Kodak that Japanese curators were using since the 1970s—with their specific colour range, sharpness and chemical composition, as well as the thickness and polish of photo papers—frame the visual history of their trips as I see them today.

The early archival photo folders contain more random, flawed (underexposed, overexposed, unfocused) images, and some images have

begun to fade. These conservation oversights also disclose a history of trust we have had in the stability of photographic materials. One's memory mutates along with the material mutation of the archive—the colour of a painting in a photograph not defined, it changes with the colour of the photographic reproduction; for example, the sunshine in Taipei feels warmer on Kodak than on Fuji. After all, while the categorizing and storage tools promise an “eternity” of conservation, the fate of the contemporary archive is not too different from that of other industrial products, with their innate obsolescence, planned or otherwise.<sup>14</sup> This obsolescence is not only declared in the expiry dates of materials, or by their natural decay, or even by their self-destruction, as some films would literally catch fire from chemical changes after a certain number of years (this is the “archive fever”!), but is also accompanied by the decay of the technologies that makes them visible—the mechanical slide projector that no longer works, or discs for which one can no longer find a proper drive. If flow can be defined as a *Zeitobjekt* (time-object) that constantly constitutes itself in its time-space, the flow of the archival images' physical and chemical existence proffers a parallel line of our cultural past to the narrative of the images.

### Mvt III. Curator as Archive, Memory Flows

To understand more about the archives at FAAM, I conducted interviews with almost every curator in house. In Japanese, there are two terms that are translated into “curator”: independent curators or those who work for private art institutions are called キュレーター, the *katakana* of curator based on its English pronunciation. The other term is 学芸員 (*gakugeiin*), which is defined as a qualified professional, a quasi-civil servant who works for their entire life in the same museum. The *gakugeiin* have to have their corresponding qualifications and are responsible for curating, research, investigation, collection, exhibition, conservation, and administration of the museum objects. At FAAM, a municipally funded art museum, the *gakugeiin* are not only curators but also archivists, researchers, and administrators. Talking with *gakugeiin* about their multiple roles at FAAM opened up a new space for my research: I was expecting to be better informed about the archives. It turned out that the FAAM curators are themselves the most intriguing archives. All their experience and memories are invisible in both the archival and exhibition spaces, but they exemplify a “living archive” of information about the museum and about what it means to be a *gakugeiin*.

Their stories about entering FAAM, the experience of field trips, and their opinions about FAAM's archives reveal diverse perceptions, sensibilities, and sentiments about being a *gakugeiin*. In the opinion of Kuroda Raiji, FAAM's art historian *gakugeiin*, FAAM is producing an archive but not using it. The reasons the archive is not being paid much attention are multiple: as with many art museums, the collection of artwork is the main mission, and as Japanese art museums are run like a kind of “industry,” when something like an archive can't generate profits, it is little cared for except by specialists. Kuroda doesn't think the status quo is necessarily a bad thing because the producer of the archive is the user of the archive. The anthropologist *gakugeiin*, Igarashi Rina, said she was a bit uncomfortable with the power of

the curator. For her, being a curator grants her the power to turn everyday objects into artworks—for example, rickshaw paintings from the streets of Bangladesh—simply by bringing them into the exhibition space. The moving image *gakugeiin*, Matsuura Jin, showed me many fascinating photos of the video art exhibitions and film festivals he curated during the 1980s, saying that at that time, film, video, and performance were not considered art and thus they were not commonly exhibited in art museums. He was also the “zombie-maker” who rescued the decaying media from totally dying by copying them to different formats or digitizing them. The China expert *gakugeiin*, Rawanchaikul Toshiko, talked about the changing idea of what constitutes Asia—noting, for example, FAAM’s inclusion of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau in the list of Asian regions since 2003—and the still-existing taboo of curating exhibitions related to World War II in Asia and Japanese colonialism. The outreach-in-charge *gakugeiin*, Nakao Tomomichi, shared with me that his constant “distraction” from art and exhibitions to the outside world actually gave him more inspiration to achieve what he said is most important thing for a curator—that is, to “grasp what our Zeitgeist is a little ahead of the public.” Yamaki Yoko, the archivist *gakugeiin*, talked about the difficulty of categorizing many of their archival materials. No one really knows what will possibly be useful in the future, she notes: thus she preserves almost everything she can access or is given.

#### Coda: The 90-Minute Exhibition

“The most informative archive is the one which does not produce what we are looking for exactly.”

—Wolfgang Ernst, “Archival Times:  
Tempor(e) alities of Media Memory” (2010)<sup>15</sup>

After reviewing the archival materials, researching particular artworks in the collection, talking with curators, and touching the materials and technical equipment, I felt an urgency to create an opportunity to visualize the archival materials beyond the written histories and theories, the archive storage space, and the museum space. I thought that putting them into a new context and space might bring them back to life again. This is the major reason I chose the form of an exhibition-talk-sharing for my final project. The event was held in an independent art space, Art Space Tetra, located close to FAAM.

Photo wall at exhibition  
*Archival Flows*, Art Space  
Tetra, Fukuoka, June 22, 2016.  
Courtesy of Pan Lu.



The event consisted of three major parts. First, the exhibition. I created a photo display with both a thematic thread and a visual black line along the wall featuring one visual object from the archive that I asked each curator to select. Above this line were

images I selected from the album of photos that were shot by the curators during the same trip as ones they chose, and below the line were street views of cities I chose from the same period but from other Asian countries. What I was doing here was to rearrange fragments from the archive, which



Random photos from Fukuoka Art Museum field trips. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.

will always remain fragmented, blending them with the subjectivities and consciousness of different individuals. The collaboration between FAAM curators and myself, with my own subjective choice of contextual images, presents a real world outside of the archive and art—and that real world consists of the places where the archived art was actually created and found. More importantly, the images also show how everyday objects “flow” into the archive and become a part of established cultural memory.



I also set up a slide show of images I took the day before the exhibition. Having received permission to use film negatives I found in the archive that had an expiry date of more than twelve years earlier, I projected my 2016 images of Fukuoka streets onto what were now considered pieces of “trash” within the archive but that still retained reasonably pretty sharp colour and a warm analog touch.

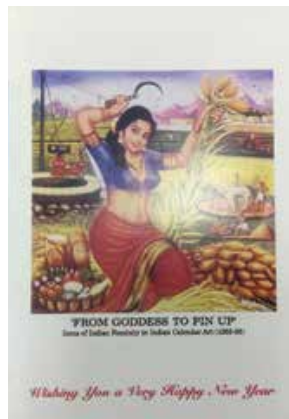
Random photos from Fukuoka Art Museum field trips. Courtesy of Fukuoka Asia Art Museum Archives.

Meanwhile, none of the components included in the exhibition was original: the photos were reproduced images from both slides and negatives; the DVDs were converted from VHS; slides were made from the long-expired films. I don’t think the printed images and materials themselves have to be original to maintain their authenticity, and many of the artworks in FAAM’s collection also question the idea of art by blurring the line between the original and the copy. Yet the materiality of each medium may be unique and represent on different levels different kinds of memories; again, the archive is not only about the memories of human beings but also memories of the materials, objects, and chemical circuits.

After giving a brief guided tour of the exhibition, the curators who contributed their selected object began to talk about the stories behind the object or image. Rawanchaikul Toshiko’s choice was a photo of her visit to Fang Lijun’s studio-bedroom in Yuanmingyuan village in 1994. Kuroda Raiji spent considerable time in the archive looking for a particular invitation card for an exhibition—the card, according to him, became the key for



Kuroda Raiji's selection for *Archival Flows*, invitation card for *From Goddess to Pin Up: Icons of Indian Femininity in Indian Calendar Art (1955-95)*, 1998. Courtesy of Kurdoa Raiji.



Kashio Saori's selection for *Archival Flows*, brochure for FAAM's grand opening, 1999. Courtesy of Kashio Saori.



Nakao Tomomichi's selection for *Archival Flows*, hand painted advertisements for false teeth, Pakistan, 2000. Courtesy of Nakao Tomomichi.



Igarashi Rina's selection for *Archival Flows*, sitting by the sea with a Sri Lankan artist, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2004. Courtesy of Igarashi Rina.



Rawanchaikul Toshiko's selection for *Archival Flows*, Fang Lijun's studio, Yuanmingyuan Village, Beijing., 1992. Courtesy of Rawanchaikul Toshiko.



him to open a new world of Indian contemporary art. Igarashi Rina took out of her drawer a photo showing her and a Sri Lankan artist sitting and chatting by the sea. Nakao Tomomichi selected a photo of hand-painted advertisements of false teeth in a Pakistani market, where he was shocked by the absence of women there. Kashio Saori, the youngest curator at FAAM, selected the introduction brochure of FAAM when it was inaugurated in 1999 and explained how she was touched by the celebratory design when she first encountered it. Matsuura Jin produced especially for the exhibition a video that was transformed to DVD from a VHS video tape he made before FAAM was opened. It recorded the construction of the building of FAAM and the reactions of the curators when they saw the half-completed structure that would later become their place of work. All these stories were not only unknown to the audience who attended the event, but also largely unknown among the curators themselves.

The seemingly ordinary images and objects that previously lay silent in the archives were immediately reinvigorated. With the storytelling—partially objective, partially subjective—the objects connected the curators' memories and the archive's "memory." These archival images pushed the curators to refresh the real, extensive archive through their own memories and experience. The storytelling from the curators also provided hints about what a curator is, what his or her role is relative the outside world, the exhibition, and the archive, as well as to

cultural memory. The curator is the one who takes care of the collection and the person who can reawaken the "dead" in the archive. This is also why I was especially interested in the so-called "poor images" or "banal images" that seem to defy any fixed narrative about field trips or research practices.

To conclude, I would say the newness of the archive is fundamentally not about how much difference as a specific comparison it can generate, but about to what extent it can represent the outside world. Researching the archive was not about the encounter between an exploring subject, me, and



Story sharing by FAAM curators Matsuura Jin (left) and Kashio Saori (Right) at *Archival Flows*, June 22, 2016.

the waiting-to-be explored objects. It was a process of an intersubjective dialogue between past and present, self and other, history and narrative, body and consciousness.

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#### Notes

1. Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 142.
2. See Yoshimi Shunya, *The Politics of Exposition*, trans. Su Shuo-bin et al. (Taipei: Socio Publishing, 2015), and *World Expo and Postwar Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd., 2011).
3. In the seminal text of Asianism written by Okakura Tenshin (also known as Okakura Kakuzo), *The Ideals of the East*, he begins with the claim that “Ajia (Asia) is One” (アジアは一つである). His definition of *ajia* is a national concept, based on cultural, religious, and geographical interconnections. See also Okakura Kakuzo, *The Ideals of the East* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920).
4. See the FAAM website, “About FAAM”: [http://faam.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/eng/about/abt\\_index.html/](http://faam.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/eng/about/abt_index.html/).
5. See Ushiroshoji Masahiro, “The labyrinth of Searching for the Self,” 101–103, and Kuroda Raiji, “Japan, Asia (I): To Encounter with ‘the Modern,’” 103–106, in *Asian Art: Collection and Activities of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Press, 1999).
6. See the FAAM website, “Principles of the Collection”: [http://faam.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/eng/collection/clt\\_index.html/](http://faam.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/eng/collection/clt_index.html/).
7. Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 44–45.
8. Yamaki Yuko, “The Fukuoka Art Museum Archive,” in *The 4th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale 2009*, exhibition catalogue (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2010). I count the museum’s collection of artwork as a part of its archive.
9. According to Matsuura Jin, the man in the middle is Katsunori Shibata, nicknamed “Mr. Asia,” who did a lot of initial research about Asian Art for FAM. No one knows where he is now. The man on the left who is taking notes is Shinji Koike, an academic and later president of the Kyushu Institute of Design. The others are art historians Jyo Adachi and Takeo Terada and local interpreter Momoyo Ise.
10. Boris Groys, *On the New* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2014).
11. Interview with Kuroda Raiji, June 7, 2016.
12. Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka, “Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method,” *Leonardo* 45, no. 5 (2012), 424–30.
13. *Ibid.*, 427.
14. As Hertz and Parikka quote Jonathan Sterne: “The logic of new media does not mean only the replacement of old media by new media, but that digital culture is programmed with the assumption and expectation of a short-term forthcoming obsolescence. . . . New media always becomes old.” *Ibid.*, 425.
15. Wolfgang Ernst, “Archival Times: Tempor(e)alities of Media Memory,” lecture at the National Library in Oslo, October 6, 2010, on occasion of the book presentation of Eivind Røssaak, ed., *The Archive in Motion. New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices* (Oslo: Novus, 2010).