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**Attention, Agency, Affect
In the Flow of Performing Audiences**

Edited by C. Maria Laudando and Anna Notaro

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Marco Pustianaz, Giulia Palladini, Annalisa Sacchi, eds., *Archivi affettivi. Un catalogo/Affective Archives. A Catalogue* (Vercelli: Edizioni Mercurio, 2013), 117 pp., ISBN 978-88-98269-01-3

Reviewed by **Emilio Amideo**

Affective Archives is neither a collection of essays, nor a typical edition of conference proceedings. Though the subtitle – a catalogue – hints at its typographical structure, as does the choice of the editors to define themselves ‘curators’, it does not provide the reader with a satisfying definition. Certainly, it is a piece of work that neither wants to be defined, nor confined, and comes closer to a performative record of a series of events which took place between 2010 and 2011 in Vercelli, Turin and Utrecht and the relations they generated amongst its participants and non-participants. Marco Pustianaz, Giulia Palladini and Annalisa Sacchi, as the editors/curators of *Affective Archives*, imagine the possibility of creating – or better continuously recreating, in accordance with the Derridean concept of *différance*, with its duplicitous meaning of multiplying interpretations from the excesses produced by difference and deferring in time – an ‘affective archive’. Their aim appears at first glance nonsensical. How can one make an archive of something as immaterial as affect? Is not the archive, with its connection to presumed ‘origins’ as the etymological Greek root *archè* suggests, something inextricably connected to the preservation, classification, interpretation of (material) documents? Surely the interiority of emotions or perceptions has nothing to do with the exteriority of the archival monumental apparatus. Yet, this is exactly the challenge that they take on, and to reach their target they necessarily have to hybridise and contaminate the common notion of the archive format. Hybridity and contamination seem to be the leitmotifs of *Affective Archives*. From the alliterative title, with its ‘almost but not quite’ connection between the terms ‘affective’ and ‘archive’, to the subtitle ‘a catalogue’ consistent with the authors’ choice to be defined ‘curators’ and the typographical format chosen for the publication, from the structure of the book/catalogue which interpolates recorded fragments of the performances onto different types of texts to include panel descriptions, abstracts, a manifesto, images, open calls, self-reflective essays, even a contract, to the decision of including a DVD containing the para-documentary video of the Sicilian collective canecapovolto meant to further hybridise the created performative archive. In the Prologue the curators state:

We are particularly attracted by the way canecapovolto disintegrates the archive by injecting parasitical matter. The more the ‘original’ archive is affected by other image banks, the more hospitable it looks: affection and infection, like remembering and dismembering, operate as an ambivalent pharmakon, at the same time salvage and poison. (106)

The creation of an affective archive, therefore, requires an infection, a contamination, even more a paradigmatic shift from the archival modality linked to the past to the relational modality mainly compromised with the future. The

archive, Derrida suggests in *Mal d'Archive*, more than the past, should take into account the yet to come, because what an archive means is only knowable in the time to come.¹ That is why the three curators ask the (relational) contribution of people from different backgrounds – artists, theorists, academic and non-academic audience – they invite a contamination of their proposed archive, and above all they ask for its future reactivation: “by addressing the idea of affective archive we believe we are opening up the potential of a future salvage of its traces: of evolution, transformation and multiplication” (13).

The catalogue of *Affective Archives*, like the research cluster it was meant to record – which took place in Vercelli at the Università del Piemonte Orientale “Amedeo Avogadro” and in Turin in collaboration with Teatro Stabile di Torino in 2010 – is structured around four main panels, each representing a performance. The three curators, in fact, ask four artists – Claudia Castellucci/Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Cesare Pietroiusti, Massimo Bartolini and Lois Weaver – to create four performative frames into which the contributions fall and that eventually create the four conference panels, with the aim of disrupting the conference genre by hybridising the usual duality between artistic practice and academic discourse. From Claudia Castellucci’s frame on *ekphrasis*, with its focus on the pedagogical experience involving the participation of an expected and a non-expert audience, the concepts of ‘passing’ and ‘passers-by’, and above all the reference to the hydroponic thinking echoing both Deleuze’s and Guattari’s rhizomatic thinking and Glissant’s poetics of relation, the catalogue moves on to Cesare Pietroiusti’s frame involving a performance of the artist in which he chews a 500 euros note to investigate artistic and economic connections combining handcraft and installation, and which envisages the participation of seven ‘forgetters’ invited to provide the audience with strategies aimed at forgetting the event. Massimo Bartolini’s frame on ‘traces’ revolves around the dialectics of presence/absence and involves the installation of a radio broadcast (Marco Pustianaz is the presenter) transmitted through loudspeakers placed on a raft floating in Vercelli’s ENAL swimming pool, an example of Fascist architecture which seems to emphasise, through a haunting historical parallel, the distance and urgency of listening. Lois Weaver’s last frame contemplates the possibility to archive the panel through a recorded card game in which the players are the speakers (who have previously written their contributions on thirteen cards with which they will play in turn) and the respondents, who are required to write down their own observations on the different steps involving the card game. The catalogue includes also “Affective Archives Affect Memory”, the panel proposal for the 2011 Performance Studies International Conference which took place in Utrecht, and where the three curators proposed a memory experiment involving the re-staging – in the form of an uncanny double – of their own former presentations at Vercelli with the addition of two scholars who were absent at the first series of events: Jill Dolan and Freddie Rokem, who were asked to performatively remember their absence. A DVD containing the para-documentary video by canecapovolto completes the edition. It mainly revolves around issues

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive. Un'impressione freudiana*, trans. by Giovanni Scibilia (Napoli: Filema, 2005, orig. 1995), 45-48.

surrounding memory – “the holes in our memory are as important as the blank spaces in our archives” reads the opening sentence – and proposes video recordings of the performances/panels dismantled and recomposed together with footages belonging to different historical archives and sound recordings, giving the archive a haunting feeling – especially towards the end when the video starts rewinding while images in black and white and negatives appear on the screen, and the spectator listens to wind chimes before reading the closing sentence, “you are now the main forgetter of this document”.

The experiment that Pustianaz, Palladini and Sacchi propose in *Affective Archives* is relevant and consistent with the attempt to undo the violence of the common notion of archive, with its focus on individuality and appropriation, through a collective and necessarily fragmented and/or multifaceted participation in the archiving process, that is to say through an experience which is truer to a pluralistic and non-centralised notion of archive. Their practice is not exempt from risks. In the attempt to collectively record an event or a performance, in effect, something gets inevitably lost, the recording is not as meticulous, accurate or, more to the point, univocal. Just as in the process of remembering, memory is sometimes distorted – a fictive narrative takes the place of the factual event to fill the gaps inevitably left blank – so this work offers the imaginative possibility to endlessly create and recreate a narrative which from its very inception was never ‘original’. It is there, in the act of recreating, in that performative collective gesture, that the affective part of the archive resides – an archive which is inconstant, but which does not succumb to the monolithic and appropriating violence of the One. *Affective Archives* is a persuasive work in the context of contemporary Performance Studies and remains authentic to its relational nature through the pursuit of what Glissant would call a “pensée de la trace” or trace thought,² meaning, in this particular case, the ability to bypass the systemic nature of the archive and build on the traces left by the processes of memorialisation to create something new, which is collective, participated and erratic in its being.

Has the experiment truly worked? Only time can tell. After all, as Derrida suggests in *Mal d'Archive*, the disclosure of the true meaning of an archive is bound to its future.

² Édouard Glissant, *Poética del diverso*, trans. by Francesca Neri (Roma: Meltemi, 1998, orig. 1996), 13-15.