

Archives of the Body—The Body in Archiving is a research project conceived by Hanne Loreck and Vanessa Gravenor, consisting of a symposium, an exhibition, and a film program which took place in April and May 2024 at the HFBK Hamburg. *Archives of the Body—The Body in Archiving* resulted in a digital publication and contains contributions by: Edna Bonhomme, Serafima Bresler, Luzia Cruz, Ulrike Gerhardt, Laura Gómez, Vanessa Gravenor, Annika Haas, Ute Kalender, Takeo Marquardt, Katrin Mayer, Zofia nierodzińska, Sarah Salavanpour, Kristina Savutsina, Daniel Suárez, Vera Tollmann, and Samo Tomšič.



Archives of the Body
<https://archives-of-the-body.hfbk.net/>

In relation to the human body, the archive as a form of organization can be understood as the techno-media arsenal that has historically shaped bodies and subjects and continues to shape identities, modes of action, power relations, and communities. The archive functions as an epistemological regime. It consists of systems of representation, discourses, institutions, conventions, practices, and cultural agreements. It determines which bodies, genders, and sexualities become visible and which do not, which count culturally, socially, and economically, and which are considered useless. After all, bodies are not simply given but are produced through processes of description, molding, modeling, imitation, and representation. The body is never a singularity. Some bodies were granted the status of political subjects, which was denied to other bodies (cf. Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Achille Mbembe). In this sense, the archive gathers different documents and data-sets that have shaped concepts of the body at different historical moments, ensuring that the norm is derived from the average and distinguishing the normal from the pathological. It is noteworthy that the evaluative differentiation between the normal, the normality, and the abnormal around 1850—around the same time as the invention of photography—followed the conception of nature and the natural a century earlier. Scientific disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and sociology, as well as aesthetic productions, have drawn and continue to draw on established parameters of physical, mental, and psychological health and conforming social behaviors, reproducing and idealizing them both deliberately and implicitly. Anatomy, *race*, gender, sexuality, as well as physical, psychological, and social abilities/disabilities of a subject were most clearly defined in taxonomizing ethnic, colonial, racializing, or classifying (analog) photographs of bodily, physiognomic, and gender measurements. Such taxonomies continue in biometric data collection. Even with so-called AI, these frameworks are by no means obsolete, since their algorithms depend on pre-normalized visual data (cf. Louis Chude-Sokei).

With digital media, the understanding of the archive as a structured collection and organized inventory at a specific location has shifted and become fluid with the verb *to archive*, meaning to store and evaluate the data constantly produced by users. Regarding the development of media, the (analog) documentation of results (known as records in the scientific or medical context) seems to have been replaced by algorithmically controlled image diagnosis. But is that true? Just think of how shocking the first X-ray images were, with their visual revelation of previously invisible structures, such as skeletons or lungs, without physical, medical intervention. At that time, an innovative technology created a new dispositif of the body insofar as the body's interior and surface were no longer categorically separated but had to be understood as respective interfaces between inside and outside, representation and production. The triangulation between body, world, and (optical) technologies is thus not only an achievement of the digital age. However, digital technologies have increased the speed of mutual feedback and its consequences. The experience of the sick individual being abstracted into a sum of pixels in automated diagnostic imaging procedures is in tension with the demand to think of a collective body, also for the psychomedical view of the body. Its conditions are again certain 'critical' abstractions. Conceived as a social, cultural, and political, in short, planetary whole, this common body must encompass subjective and collective actions together with their underlying structures in such a way that its inherent inequalities—economic, social, gender, sexual, ethnic and skin colour-related—are no longer implicitly embodied by the universalized white, male, Western subject.

For our project, the archive is to be understood in its general sense and not as a concrete institution at a specific location. Rather, the archive encompasses the documentary and the projective, the physical and material of alphanumeric and photographic, video, and sound recordings, as well as the virtual and imaginary of the algorithm. An established manual such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (in its 2022 revised edition of 2013, the DSM-5-TR) as a globally recognized directory of mental illnesses and anxiety disorders, even more than its classification system, must relate to the findings of the young leading discipline, neuroscience

(Catherine Malabou, Marie-Luise Angerer). The recent psychopathologies are also related to the pessimistic prediction of a “new necropolitical alliance between colonial patriarchy and new pharmacopornographic technologies,” toward which the medicalization of so-called “psychiatric pathologies” is already heading today (cf. Paul B. Preciado).

Neuroscientific approaches have become indispensable in relation to concepts of the body and the subject, since the brain and computer are considered structurally similar in terms of collecting, networking, and connecting. We ourselves constantly archive our every participation or movement, from eating and sleeping habits to heart rate (cf. Orit Halpern), using smart records. With the promise of optimization, this data, which conveys the impression of individual statistics, is scientifically, technically, commercially, or communicatively evaluated and utilized. As has been discussed in the wake of Covid-19, a higher resolution of data would possibly also mean more effective management of pandemics.

The publication *Archives of the Body: The Body in Archiving* aims to critically examine both the psychophysically and mentally “informed organ” called the “body” and the “data body” (cf. N. Katherine Hayles, Colin Koopman) from a cultural-historical and current perspective, in terms of which archives have enforced certain body images and discourses. We will ask how the body—as an individual and transgenerational long-term repository of often invisible injuries from disasters such as radioactive contamination, war, authoritarianism, flight, and migration—is depicted and how it becomes audible. We will also debate what alternative scientific approaches are available, as well as what a subversive fictionalization and virtualization of the body, its organs, and functions can achieve, as well as the recognition of its ghosts (cf. Avery Gordon). In relation to the political, philosophical, and ethical concept of vulnerability (cf. Judith Butler), injuries appear differently as physical lesions and as psychological traumas, when we currently witness wars and totalitarian movements: violence and hatred that inscribe themselves into individual bodies as pain, suffering, and wounding, destroying them and at the same time being ‘archived’ in the communal body. An archive understood in this way, with its personal and official documentation, also adds to various public and secret historical databases of the military-medical complex.

Archives of the Body: The Body in Archiving is not about advocating cultural pessimism regarding digital technology and AI, nor algorithmic determinism, but rather about configuring a potential for political and aesthetic resistance and activism against the dominance of the normal, and thus the normed and normative, from within the archive. On the scientific side, for instance, there is neurodiversity. Instead of the previous assessment of developmental disorders, it now recognizes variations in brain development, and a new understanding of the fragile semantics, for example of aphasia and its implication in trauma (cf. Catherine Malabou).