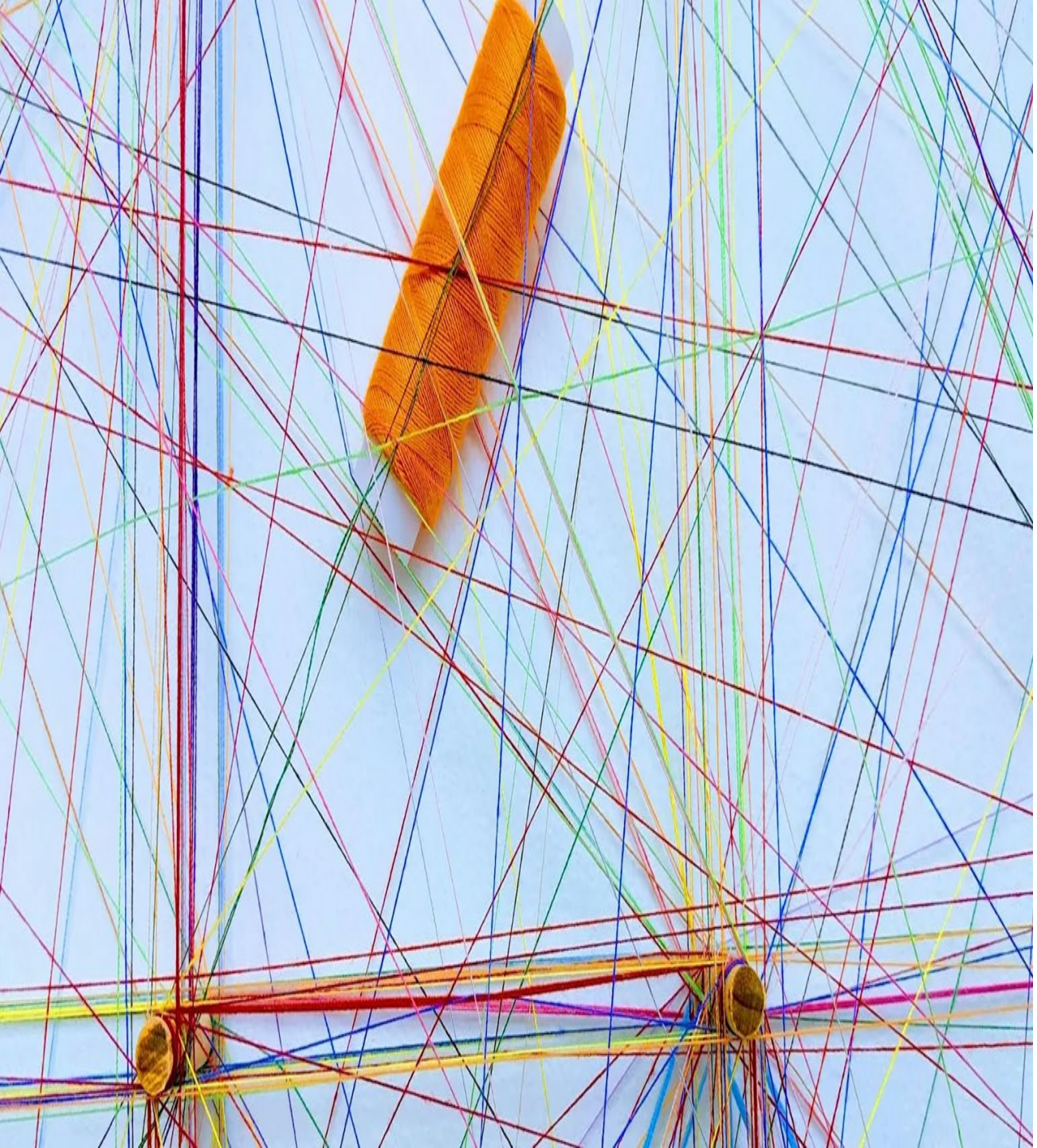

From Open Data to Feminist Archiving:

Rethinking Research Data Practices

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THE CHALLENGE 1

How can we develop forms of openness that are ethically robust, socially inclusive, and responsive to diverse research practices?

THE CONTEXT

- Researchers are increasingly expected to make research data available for reuse
- Rapid expansion of:
  - funder mandates: UKRI, Wellcome ….
  - new policies and governance documents: UNESCO Recommendations; CAHSS Open Research Policy
  - new modes of research governance (e.g. data management plans; open data training)
  - new digital infrastructures (e.g. library data repositories)
- The promise: greater transparency, accessibility, and value from publicly funded research

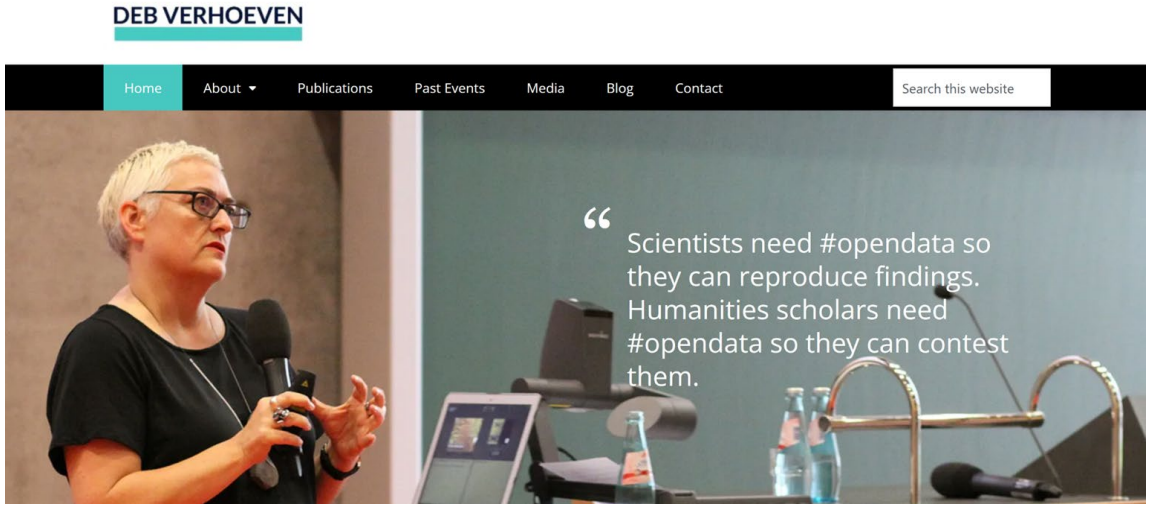
SOME (ACKNOWLEDGED) TENSIONS

- not enough engagement from humanities and social science researchers with the open agenda
- not enough qualitative data in data repositories
- that reproducibility and replication are not necessarily the ways qualitative researchers think about data

SOME (UNACKNOWLEDGED) TENSIONS

– different models of knowledge and knowledge generation

- repository systems often prioritise standardisation and interoperability
- while qualitative researchers have long emphasised that data are produced through relationships, interpretation, context, and ongoing ethical responsibilities



UNACKNOWLEDGED TENSIONS CONT'D

What social scientists do with data/stories



THE RISKS

- qualitative and critical social research poorly supported in repository infrastructures
- qualitative data risk becoming marginal in the evolving public archive despite their importance for understanding social life, inequality, memory, and lived experience
- qualitative perspectives are underrepresented in debates that shape the future of open research

THE CHALLENGE 2: Reimagining Openness

- The challenge is not openness itself, but the narrowness of many existing conceptions of openness
- Debates frequently move directly to policies, mandates, and technical solutions without first addressing fundamental questions about **what openness means, who it is for, and how it should be enacted across different forms of research**
- Consequently infrastructures and governance frameworks can become misaligned with how data are generated, interpreted, and cared for in practice and how data might be (re)used

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS RESOURCE

In a policy environment where openness is treated primarily as a technical problem, rather than a social, ethical and interpretive one, we position qualitative research:

- not as resisting open data agendas
- but as a conceptual resource for reimagining openness
- not simply as access and reuse
- but as meaningful, ethical and socially accountable, as a practice of care

THE SOCIOLOGIST'S CUTTING ROOM FLOOR



HOW DID WE GET HERE?



- Browse our archive
- Clayoquot Lives
- Clayoquot Summer '93
- Accessibility statement
- Cookies and privacy

Clayoquot Lives is an online archive of materials related to the 1993 Peace Camp in Clayoquot Sound, Canada.

In the summer of 1993, thousands of people came to Clayoquot Sound (pronounced "klak-wat"), on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, Canada to protest the clear-cut logging of temperate rainforest. Clayoquot Sound is the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations.

Local environmental organisation, The Friends of Clayoquot Sound, set up a peace camp based on the principles of non-violent civil disobedience, with daily workshops teaching consensus decision-making and the practice of non-violence, to support activists in early morning blockades of the logging road into Clayoquot Sound.

During Clayoquot Summer '93 over 800 people were arrested in one of the largest acts of non-violent civil disobedience in Canadian history.

The *Clayoquot Lives* archive includes 30 in-depth oral history interviews with activists connected to the 1993 peace camp, as well as photographs and other historical documents. Clayoquot was much in the news at the time, and this archive offers unprecedented insight into how this campaign emerged and how a seemingly small place loomed large in efforts to reimagine a more sustainable world, in ways which transformed forest politics in Canada and beyond, and changed the lives of those who were involved.

The Clayoquot Peace Camp was often described as informed by ecofeminist principles and practice - even the Vancouver Sun ran a story 'Eco-feminists Run 'Peace Camp at Clayoquot Sound'. This archive focuses on highlighting the ecofeminist dimensions to the activism.

To find out more about the campaign we suggest that you start out by exploring our interactive map, and then browse through our collections to learn about the people behind this powerful campaign.

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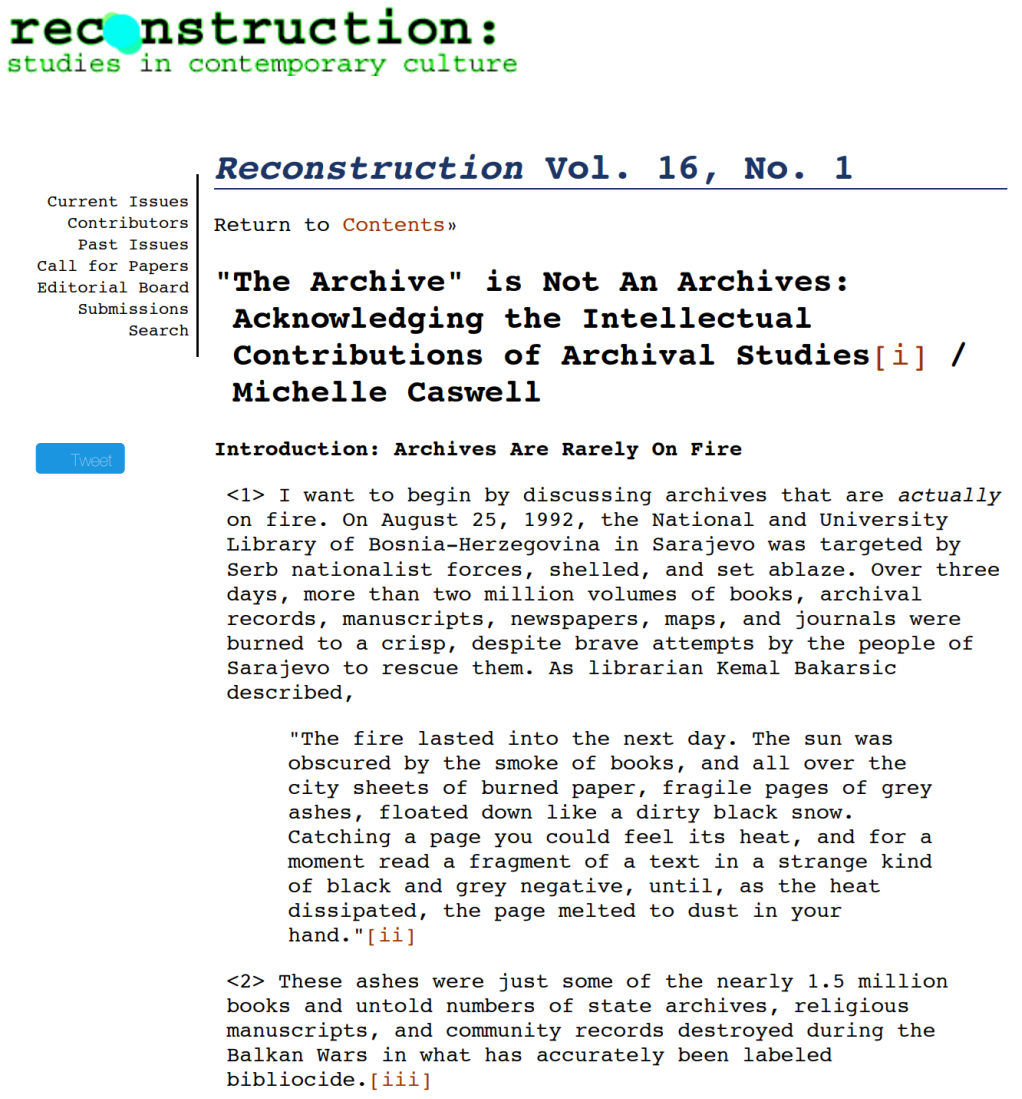
https://clayoquotlives.sps.ed.ac.uk/

Opportunity 2: Critical Archival Studies

A NEED FOR NEW CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ‘OPEN DATA’ WHICH ARE MORE ALIGNED WITH THE COMMITMENTS OF HASS RESEARCHERS



reconstruction:
studies in contemporary culture

Reconstruction Vol. 16, No. 1

Current Issues
Contributors
Past Issues
Call for Papers
Editorial Board
Submissions
Search

Return to Contents»

"The Archive" is Not An Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies[i] / Michelle Caswell

Tweet

Introduction: Archives Are Rarely On Fire

<1> I want to begin by discussing archives that are *actually* on fire. On August 25, 1992, the National and University Library of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo was targeted by Serb nationalist forces, shelled, and set ablaze. Over three days, more than two million volumes of books, archival records, manuscripts, newspapers, maps, and journals were burned to a crisp, despite brave attempts by the people of Sarajevo to rescue them. As librarian Kemal Bakarsic described,

> "The fire lasted into the next day. The sun was obscured by the smoke of books, and all over the city sheets of burned paper, fragile pages of grey ashes, floated down like a dirty black snow. Catching a page you could feel its heat, and for a moment read a fragment of a text in a strange kind of black and grey negative, until, as the heat dissipated, the page melted to dust in your hand."[ii]

<2> These ashes were just some of the nearly 1.5 million books and untold numbers of state archives, religious manuscripts, and community records destroyed during the Balkan Wars in what has accurately been labeled bibliocide.[iii]

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS IN ARCHIVAL THEORY

1. **Record**

   evidence of human activity that cross space and time. They can take a wide range of formats: analog or digital, material or immaterial

2. **Provenance**

   the origins of records: who created them, why they were created, and the contexts from which they emerged

3. **Value/Appraisal**

   the significance archivists assign to records when making decisions about what should be preserved

4. **Representation**

   the ways archivists describe records so users can find and understand archival materials (metadata, catalogues, inventories, databases, etc.)

“OPEN” DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN ACCESSIBLE

- What ends up in the public archive?
- What can be found in the public archive?
- Who is the public? Accessing, navigating, finding, filtering is hard to, even for a researcher
  - Systems require sign-ins or permission requests
  - Systems are not intuitive
  - Categories are not 'exploration' friendly -- How to find anything when having to put yourself into a 'thematic' box?

REFRAMING OPEN DATA

open data describes the end product, not how (or why) we got there

critical feminist archival studies can help us account for that process

FROM OPEN DATA TO FEMINIST ARCHIVING:
Reimagining data sharing for the humanities & social sciences

- we are working on getting funding for a project to work with archival theorists, archivists and repository specialists - to build new formulations of open data which are more consistent with the commitments of the social sciences and humanities by drawing on the fields of critical archival studies and community archiving
- and which should be useful for everyone - all data is contextual, has relations etc

When archiving is approached, not as a box into which to deposit data, but rather as a method for organising and preserving data, and critically for building connections between data, and between data and people and communities, it opens up new ways of understanding the potentials of sharing data for research.



OUT OF THE (ARCHIVE) BOX:
FROM CAT CHAOS TO (HARAWAY'S) CAT'S CRADLE



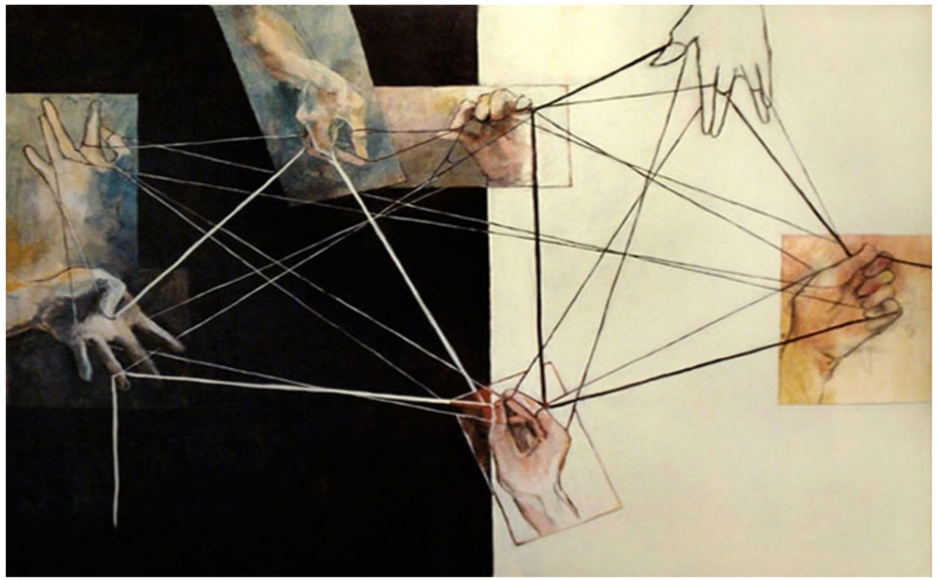


Figure 2: Baila Goldenthal, *Cat's Cradle/String Theory*, 2008. Copyright Baila Goldenthal.

Publications

(2026 forthcoming) ‘Open data from black box to cat’s cradle: Un/doing sociological practice through DIY Academic Archiving’, *Sociological Research Online*

(2024) ’DIY Academic Archiving: mischievous disruptions of a new counter-movement’. *New Frontiers in Communications*; Special Issue: Feminist Fabulations in Algorithmic Empires, 9:1374663.

(2024) ‘ Fashioning DIY Digital Archives: Unsettling Research Methods to Centre Garment Workers Voices’. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 11(1), 183-193.

(2021) ’Towards an Inventive Ethics of Carefull Risk: Unsettling Research Through DIY Academic Archiving’. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 36(108), 180-199.

TWO WORKSHOPS

Critical Approaches to Open Qualitative Data: Archiving, Practices and Possibilities

Thursday 25 June, 10 AM - 4 PM

The workshop explores critical, creative and practice-based approaches to archiving and sharing qualitative data in the humanities and social sciences

https://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/event/critical-approaches-open-qualitative-data

Reanimating Data: Creative methods to working with archived qualitative interview data

Wednesday 24 June; 1:15 PM - 4 PM

In this PhD workshop, we will explore creative ways of working with qualitative data, beyond usual ideas of secondary analysis, working with a feminist interview archive generated by Sue Sharpe in 1979

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/revisiting-working-mothers-feeling-backwards-in-order-to-think-again-tickets-199001947394?aff=erellivmlt

Thank You