

Introduction to Part II: Bearing Witness in Unsettling Ways

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This special issue of *Across the Disciplines* features the theme of *Unsettling Archival Research Across the Disciplines* and is composed of two parts. Part I, “Unsettling Archival Studies,” showcases scholars who are contributing to emerging scholarship in the archival field and are committed to building critical, decolonial, and community-centered futures for archival management and research. The essays that comprise Part II, “Bearing Witness in Unsettling Ways,” continue in this spirit, focusing on matters of history, memory, language, and/or identity via an ethos and praxis we are calling bearing witness in unsettling ways. The theme of Part II, importantly, asks: What sort of witnessing is demanded in working in and/or with archives? Whether describing hegemonic narratives, settler-colonial narratives, nation-state narratives, public memory narratives, and/or “dominant” literacy narratives, each author, uncoincidentally, illustrates an exigence of and for unsettling, both as an act of seeing and as an act of being and doing. Here, unsettling reflects an ethos and praxis, inextricably connected to the ways in which one chooses to get “caught up” in bearing witness to what is constituted as legible or truth in unsettling ways. In working with “othered” histories, memories, languages, and/or identities—a byproduct of dominant and/or hegemonic discourses that continue to have material, structural, and socio-cultural implications—each of the contributors demonstrates how their methodological choices to practice and apply a decolonial option, revisionist historiography, counter-memory, and/or rhetorical feminism stems from this imperative to bear witness in unsettling ways and to unsettle that which appears as legible or truth.

In 2020, *Rhetoric Review* published a symposium on what is being called “rhetorical witnessing.” In it, Elizabeth Flynn and Ira Allen (2020) call attention to the rhetorical dimensions of witnessing by investigating what it means to be a witness in linguistic and/or visual contexts. They describe the act of “bearing witness” as rhetorical action, because it involves the act of coming to terms with that which will undoubtedly have an impact on the trajectory of one’s process of becoming (p. 369). Bearing witness is also rhetorical, according to Flynn and Allen, opening the potential of and for the transformation of the bodily senses as well as the possibility of and for transformative and responsive acts of seeing, being, and doing. In this act of careful reckoning, of attempting to comprehend the what (happened) and interpret and make meaning of the why (it happened) within the context of the specificities of place and particularities of the situation, a truth-making process occurs. While we recognize and acknowledge this recent contribution to rhetorical listening, the kind of bearing witness we and the authors of this special issue are ascribing to involves both the ethos and praxis of an unsettling witnessing and the actions of unsettling that which is constituted as legible and truth.

For Part II of our special issue, we recognize and acknowledge this call for rhetorical witnessing via our own call for bearing witness in unsettling ways, and turn to Annie Fukushima’s 2019 *Migrant Crossings*, because of its emphasis on “unsettling” and “action.” Here, Fukushima contends, as have Flynn and Allen, that there are different kinds of witnessing. The point is that “we” are not “simply” spectators, similar to how “we” do not simply use rhetoric for the sake of rhetoric. As Ashraf Rushdy 2012 hauntingly reminds us in *The End of American Lynching*, bearing witness implicates and/or indicts “the spectator” for they are “not just guilty

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of looking but also of feeling, smelling, touching, and creating a sound for the spectacle” (p. 57). The essays in Part II of this issue are not interested in simply enacting an ethos and praxis of spectatorship and/or arriving at singular truths. In fact, we the editors and contributors would say there is no such thing as simply being a spectator. An “unsettled witnessing,” promoted by decolonial options, as Fukushima 2019 writes, “is a commitment to witnessing without being settled with what is constituted as legible” (p. 14). It is a politics and practice, she continues, both that foregrounds “the invisible, unknowable, and that which haunts the living” (2019, p. 23) and that which is “informed by the uncomfortable, contending with the contradictions, reconciling difference...that pushes against voyeurism and colonization (2019, p. 14). It is between the hauntings and the act of bearing witness that Fukushima contends with the ways in which witnesses are called to action.

Part II features six articles that use *unsettling* as their primary framework for approaching archival research and bearing witness. Many of these articles also take advantage of the digital affordances of *Across the Disciplines* by including images, audio, and other interactive features. This multimodality allows for a deep engagement with archival materials and methods of textual explication of archives, building community archives, public memory as archives, and literacy narratives as archives.

This part of the special issue begins with Romeo García’s article “Decolonizing the Rhetoric of Church-Settlers.” Building on Tamara N. Rayan’s work on archival imperialism that appeared in Part I, García proposes the building of a decolonial archive and examines one settler artifact, the *Journal of Discourses*, to understand how coloniality is situated and continues to affect the present. García asks us to confront the settler colonialism inherent in many institutions, and presents a decolonial option that can create a pluriversal world. Next, Jessica Pauszek in “From Hope to Reality: Reanimating Community Histories through a Digital Collection” examines the material realities of her work curating a digital archive with members of the *Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers*, a working-class community writing and publishing network. Kristi Wilson’s photo essay, “Counter-Amnestic Street Signs and *in situ* Resistance Rhetoric: Grupo de Arte Callejero,” explores the complexities of public memory spaces and archives through “uncanny” Argentinian street signs that confront passers-by with the country’s history of state violence. Framing the street signs as a form of resistance rhetoric, Wilson pushes us to recognize the danger of amnestic measures and the importance of archiving projects to preserving memory of violence or injustice.

A second photo essay follows: drawing on her street photography in Nepal, author Bibhushana Poudyal, in “The ‘Nature’ of Ethics while (Digitally) Archiving the Other,” emphasizes the importance of community-based collaborative participatory design frameworks in digital archives. Using the concept of pharmakon as a framing metaphor, Poudyal raises important ethical questions about representation in digital archives, concluding that digital archivists must continually work towards an “impossible ethics.” Kelly Gill and Ruba Akkad, in “Reshaping Public Memory Through Hashtag Curation” use one Twitter hashtag, #BeingMinorityAtTCU, to argue that tweets are a valuable form of social activism that speaks back to institutional power and should be archived. Gill and Akkad assert that tweets can “amplify marginalized voices and reshape the public memory of violent institutional racism.” Finally, Kathryn Comer, Michael Harker, and Ben McCorkle’s article “Unruly Practice: Critically Evaluating the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives” analyzes the impact of the Digital Archive of Literacy Narrative’s infrastructure on the “hybrid academic, public, community-engaged” archive. The authors recognize the value in incorporating perspectives from critical archival studies in the creation and curation of digital critical archives.

We view this special issue as only the beginning of unsettling archival research. Moving forward, scholars might want to interrogate commonplaces in archival work from transnational or interdisciplinary perspectives, further investigate digital archive curation and creation, build archival resources with communities or students, collaborate with archivists, or dive deeper into anti-racist or Indigenous approaches. Our hope is that this collection inspires a broad group of researchers and scholars who will carry the goal of unsettling into their future work.

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