

## **Cultural Archives: Encountering the Limits of Access and Agency**

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This thesis investigates the evolving practices and politics of knowledge preservation by examining the archive as both a discursive structure and a physical site, where rules and practices mediate public access to collections of cultural knowledge. Signaled by my use of the term cultural archives, the scope of my investigation extends beyond traditional repositories to include libraries, museums, and digital projects as I recount and encounter past and contemporary moments of archival transparency—instances where increased access and visibility allow individuals greater agential capacity in re-collecting a preselected body of knowledge. Through the consideration of three projects—the Brücke Museum’s 2021 Werner Düttmann. Building. Berlin exhibition and its autonomous audiowalk programming; the Sitterwerk Art Library and its dynamic ordering system; and the online archive for the Kunsthalle Bern—this research presents an assemblage of cultural archive institutions with experimental digital counterparts, along with relevant discussions exposing the tensions between access and preservation, and the space in between both where knowledge is produced. Central to my analysis is how decisions of selection, categorization, and distribution of knowledge function to reproduce exclusionary hierarchies. By engaging with alternative archival structures and navigating their limitations, this research contributes to a growing body of transdisciplinary scholarship advocating for more relational, transparent, and accidental archival spaces—spaces that embrace the kinetic potential of radical access and the emancipatory power of interpretive interference.