have an encyclopedic knowledge of this institution's history—but it sure would've made things easier! This is especially relevant and hard to reconcile when one considers the increase in temporary positions for new professionals. It is evident that the "imposter syndrome" experienced by many librarians and archivists is enhanced and exaggerated by the precarious nature of so many archival positions.

I feel I emerged from the multiyear swamp of COVID confusion and I am finally getting my land legs. That first F&M presentation in 2020 ended up going well, and I have since tackled additional projects on the subject. I still feel I over-prepared, and I attribute my success to that hard work—which cleanly falls into the imposter cycle described by Clance, where people experiencing this phenomenon tend to point to the fact that they only achieved their successes through hard work, not ability.[16] Four years into this position, I still constantly learn new things about F&M and all the collections we steward, and I still need to reference our Comprehensive Historical Timeline[17] for reminders on major dates and figures.

However, we all deserve a bit of grace—for ourselves, and for our colleagues. I am grateful to my supervisor and colleagues, who went out of their way to make me feel welcome and empowered during a time where the closest thing we could get to "on-the-job training" was a three-hour Zoom call. A question that lingers is how much is the current state of the field—with the increase in short-term contract positions—putting new professionals at a legitimate disadvantage, and how much is just "imposter syndrome?" I would argue it's quite a bit of both, with the former enhancing the latter.

Archiving Against Professionalism

by Lia Warner

I. Defining Professionalism

This article addresses how historical and moral notions of professionalism in the archival context artificially constrict workers' understanding of their roles with regard to interpretive power and intellectual production, and thus hinder communication of the value and potentiality of the archival endeavor to outsiders. Based on historical analysis of grounding texts of archival theory, engagement with critical theory and the literature of the "archival turn," and recent critiques of professionalism by working

16. Pauline Rose Clance, *The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the fear that haunts your success* (Atlanta: Peachtree, 1985).
17. "Franklin and Marshall College Historical Timeline," Franklin & Marshall College Library - Archives & Special Collections, last modified 2021, https://library.fandm.edu/ld.php?content_id=48242896.

archivists and librarians, I urge archival workers to focus on building collective power in order to redefine the terms of our work and to develop a liberatory archival practice.

My discussion posits professionalism as the dominant framework that archival workers use to make sense of the moral and ethical responsibilities of their work, as well as their collective role within society. I argue that professionalism is just one way of understanding and defining archival work and workers' history, significance, and role. Professionalism in modern archives is a construct that has direct lineage to the original cleavage of archival science from the discipline of history, the intellectual context of which many theorists have identified as the source of positivist archival values such as neutrality, passivity, and formality. In 2002, Tom Nesmith identified these traditional values as "archiving ideology," which is "so deeply ingrained that it has been treated by some archivists as if it were part of the natural order of human recording and communication."[18]

Since then, although the possibility of archival neutrality has been widely refuted in the literature, archival labor and subjectivity is still subsumed beneath professional practices and systems of archival institutions. Ciaran Trace discusses archival process through the lens of maintenance work, integral to a service-based professional practice, but uniquely manifested within the contours of the aforementioned values. Obscured maintenance labor—whether self-effaced or externally-overlooked—is often made visible through processes of repair, when gaps or breakdowns expose unmet needs.[19]

Jennifer Douglas illustrates how self-effacing descriptive practices stem from deeply ingrained professional values haunting modern practice, which include the overuse of passive voice, and the lack of transparency around decision-making or intellectual process. Finding aids, she argues, "mostly fail to convey precisely how these archives came into being."[20] Far from any fault of the archivist, Douglas instead cites, "conventions in archival theory and practice," that encourage presentation of "a more perfect picture . . . consistent with traditional notions of archives as impartial and natural and of archivists as objective and neutral."[21]

By analyzing foundational treatises of archival theory, we identify ideological throughlines that preserve professionalism. The Dutch Manual emphasizes technolo-

---

18.   Tom Nesmith, "Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives," *The American Archivist* 65, no. 1 (2002): 27.

19.   Ciaran B. Trace, "Archives, Information Infrastructure, and Maintenance Work," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2022): para. 39, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2662413907/abstract/C9257A582E234310PQ/7.

20.   Jennifer Douglas, "Toward More Honest Description," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (June 1, 2016): 50, https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081.79.1.26.

21   Douglas, "Toward," 50.

gy, scientific method, objectivity, and standardization; Erik Ketelaar argues that these attributes also "kept Dutch archival theory petrified for a very long time."[22] Despite pioneering archival theory as a realm of inquiry, the Dutch Manual authors avoided "more philosophical and theoretical questions of objectivity in their new conception of the archive," by focusing on the standardization of practices.[23]

Hilary Jenkinson largely reaffirms the Dutch Manual's values. Ridener argues that Jenkinson understood archives as "an artificial memory, paper replacements for memorization and oral transmission of evidence."[24] To that end, archivists were prescribed a narrow, passive role as custodians and protectors of collections; Jenkinson's characterization, "merely to save Archives so important for local history by offering them asylum is a work of piety and usefulness," situated archivists almost righteously.[25] Arguing the gap in public appreciation and understanding of archives could close through creating "an understanding of and support for *archival care of our irreplaceable documentary heritage,*" David Gracy—a major architect of the modern image of archivists in society—espoused Jenkinson's sentiment in a Society of American Archivists (SAA) Presidential Address.[26] I argue that a moral throughline can be drawn from Jenkinson to the present in the stories we tell about ourselves and our work.

Spurred by the uncertainty of "archival futures," and perceived "self-flagellation" in the literature, some archivists urge a return to positivist values, declaring the postmodern branch of archival thought to be spent:

> we need to stop being sheepish and reach a professional consensus that recognises and understands that what we do as guardians of the evidence on which an individual's or societal truth can be established is a valid statement of professional practice and is of substantial value . . . Therefore, our core professional tenets and competencies . . . have a place in the 21st century.[27]

---

22.   Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual," *Archivaria*, April 1, 1996, 35. https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/dutch-manual.html.

23.   John Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory* (Duluth, Minn.: Litwin Books, 2009), 28, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3328219.

24.   Ridener, *From Polders*, 52.

25.   Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London: P. Lund, Humphries & Co., 1937), http://archive.org/details/manualofarchivea00iljenk.

26.   David Gracy II, "Archives and Society: The First Archival Revolution," *The American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 10, https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.47.1.k1637u657v841227; Eira Tansey, "Archives without Archivists," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016), https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A484096660/AONE?u=anon~7653593a&sid=googleScholar&xid=1300ce86 (emphasis added).

27.   Caroline Brown, *Archival Futures* (London: Facet Publishing, 2018), 149, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5627874.

These arguments constitute a pattern of neglect for archivists, subjects, and records that are not and have never been adequately served by values and notions fundamentally tied to a narrow, white, Western documentary tradition.

Fobazi Ettarh's "vocational awe" speaks to the calcifying impact of the moral professional identity of librarians upon individuals, who thus feel compelled to "absolute obedience to a prescribed set of rules and behaviors, regardless of any negative effect on librarians' own lives."[28] Archiving against professionalism includes addressing and deconstructing vocational awe, but identifies the crux of the problem at a different temporal stage. Specifically, this paper drives at the problem of professionalism with the recognition that archival theory and practice continue to be misaligned. We know that archives are not neutral, yet archivists have been unable to meaningfully document and communicate their interventions and assumptions that are integral to archives' formation. Professionalism, thus, commits the future of the archival endeavor to a self-destructive trajectory. Archiving against professionalism—a creative archival paradigm—calls for orienting ourselves to the work with a collective spirit of facilitation and participation in democratic historical consciousness, but more importantly, centering material conditions and labor power as the primary site of struggle for instantiating a just archival praxis.

Looking at the archival endeavor as a project of harnessing worker power, the power of records, and community knowledge towards collective liberation helps us recognize the centrality of archival labor(s) operating outside institutional boundaries and established best practices. Archiving against professionalism and for liberation calls for redefining the scope of archival work, acknowledge and amplify how archival workers drive the intellectual production of archives, and directly and indirectly shape the knowledge that historians and others draw out of the collections. This is important in realizing the democratic struggle for making, "historical consciousness a reality" in our collective life.[29]

II. Since the Archival Turn

The "archival turn," or the turning of critical scholarship from perceiving archives as a source to archives as a subject of inquiry, unfolded as a significant moment in archival studies. It is worth comparing the focus of archival literature and critical scholarship as it relates to archivists' stated mission and labor. Literature emblematic of the archival turn focuses on questions and philosophy of communication, mediation, and understanding.

---

    28.   Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves," January 10, 2018, https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/.
    29.   Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What Is the Goal of a Public Historian?," *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (1981): 48, https://doi.org/10.2307/3377160.

As Kate Eichhorn delineates in *The Archival Turn in Feminism*, texts within this set have vastly different foci, but are drawn together through the way they treat the archive "not as a place to recover the past but rather as a way to engage with some of the legacies, epistemes, and traumas pressing down on the present."[30] Terry Cook argues that, in order to engage the questions that postmodernism has provoked, archivists need an intellectual history of their profession, specifically addressing upon "what basis, reflecting what shifting values, have archivists decided who should be admitted into their houses of memory, and who excluded?"[31] To act upon this question would require archival workers to explicate their role in the construction of the archive, rather than insist upon minimizing it.

Nesmith, Cook, Harris, MacNeil, and many others working in postmodern archival theory have successfully drawn archival theory toward issues of mediation and constructed-ness, and have troubled core principles such as original order, creatorship, and provenance. Jimerson, Caswell, Cifor, Brilmyer, Ramirez, and Berry have further opened critical archival studies that address responsibilities to marginalized patrons and archival subjects. Still, it is imperative that we investigate the reasons for the persistent dissonance between theory and practice.

Addressing this gap, we can turn to Berry's scholarship, which identifies several theoretical and practical factors of "archival stasis." Archival stasis describes "mechanisms of objectivity and uniformity" that normalize and perpetuate practices that obscure or interfere with access and use, yet remain technically compliant with standards. Overcoming archival stasis requires that a practitioner recognize and utilize their agency.[32] Exemplifying this, Berry's *Umbra Search African American History* project uses the new structural possibilities of digital archives to shift the descriptive narrative and framing of African American records away from traditional structures of, "historically privileged White memory-keeping." She notes that this required "descriptive labor that is out of the scope of regular processing."[33] Without a strong base of labor power, or sense of solidarity with other archival workers or subjects, this work can feel impractical. In addition, working within and experiencing the oppressive structures of the untroubled archive places tremendous burden on practitioners who want to do

---

30. Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Namur, Belgium: Temple University Press, 2013), 5, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail. action?docID=1332616.
31. Terry Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (February 12, 1997): 19.
32. Dorothy Berry, "The House Archives Built," *Up//Root* (June 22, 2021): 8, https://www.uproot. space/features/the-house-archives-built.
33. Dorothy Berry, "Digitizing and Enhancing Description Across Collections to Make African American Materials More Discoverable on Umbra Search African American History," *The Design for Diversity Learning Toolkit* (blog), August 2, 2018, https://des4div.library.northeastern.edu/digitizing-and-enhancing-description-across-collections-to-make-african-american-materials-more-discoverable-on-umbra-search-african-american-history/.

this work. As Berry notes, "there is little space for actually acknowledging and understanding the personal harm and alienation our professional standards have inflicted on both patrons and staff."[34]

Indeed, this repressive climate for intellectual production is a product of the self-preserving, pragmatic, institutional tendencies of professionalism that we deal with in our day-to-day. In "The Whiteness of Practicality," Hudson explores how the "imperative to be practical extends beyond the daily implementation of user services and organizational workflows," and observes that "positivist social science research, reflective case studies, standards, best practices, how-to guides and 'cookbooks'" dominate the literature, permeating archivists' intellectual lives as well.[35] The impact of this hegemonic mode of intellectual production is the foreclosure of opportunities for critical reflection:

> it is difficult to undertake the slow, messy practice of unpacking foundational assumptions—and their material implication in the dispossessive violence of existing social, political, and economic arrangements—when one's environment is governed by expectations of efficiency, directness, brevity, speed.[36]

Within the ongoing execution of unquestioned best practices, whiteness as "the production of shared norms underwritten by physical and epistemological violence, a violence invisibilized as a condition of governance," is ingrained into the existential conditions of professional archival and library work, particularly through language.[37] Thus, in order to meaningfully work towards an archival practice that rejects white supremacy, and that recognizes the wholeness of ourselves and the records we hold, we must resist the unspoken and spoken imperative for practicality, unending efficiency, and simple answers to complex issues.

III. Towards Labor

What does the perspective of labor offer archival workers who seek an alternative to professionalism? How can attending to archival labor galvanize the development of our archival practice to be more unified with the theoretical goals of liberatory and democratic archival consciousness? A labor perspective encourages practitioners to think of the archival endeavor outside of the constraints of the institution. Furthermore, replacing professionalism with solidarity severs the moral ties that bind archival

---

34. Berry, "The House," 10.
35. David James Hudson, "The Whiteness of Practicality," in *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science*, ed. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, Series on Critical Race Studies and Multiculturalism in LIS, number 2 (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017), 207.
36. Hudson, "The Whiteness," 212.
37. Hudson, "The Whiteness," 214–16.

practice to counterproductive ideology. Individualized struggle against outdated practices and concepts is ineffective, especially when done within the self-preserving framework of professionalism, where sense of self and sense of disciplinary duty are elided.

One meaningful way to advance this project is to collectively organize and build power as workers. If the pressures of practicality at our institutions are both moral and material, then we must attend to the power that we hold as workers—the power to withhold our labor, to stop the unending churn of the professional machine, and to look beyond our institutions' walls for strategic sites where our work can drive change. As the history of archival labor within large institutions is marred by patterns of worker isolation, contingency, and high turnover, which Eira Tansey traces in her essay "Archives without Archivists," it's clear that any attempt to transform the archival endeavor is connected to the struggle for worker power and control over working conditions.[38]

Caswell, Drake, and Tansey separately urge readers to refocus their attention on the power that they already have. Caswell reflects, "as community-based archival practitioners, we harness our power as archival activists to build liberatory archival imaginaries."[39] While these liberatory imaginaries are certainly directed at collections and users, they can also support archival workers. Indeed, in "Archivists without Archives," an inversion of the title of Tansey's earlier piece, Drake posed:

> Imagine a field of archivists without archives. Imagine owning your labor. Imagine making archives about freedom. Imagine distributing these freedom-driven archives to the public to access free of charge. Imagine a liberated archive. Imagine a liberated future. Give your imagination a Chance.[40]

Recognizing that we have choices and power over where, when, and how we do archival work is at the core of archiving against professionalism. Not only does this concept open our imaginations, but it connects the archival struggle to a wider societal one in an empowering way.

---

38. Tansey, "Archives without Archivists," (2016).
39. Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, by Dominique Daniel and Amalia Levi (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 51, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3328245.
40. Jarrett M. Drake, "Archivists without Archives: A Labor Day Reflection," *On Archivy* (blog), September 2, 2016, https://medium.com/on-archivy/archivists-without-archives-a-labor-day-reflection-e120038848e.

Archival workers co-create knowledge and value with the collections, subjects, creators, donors, users, and communities with which they work. Archival labor thus becomes a tool in people's historical "process of ongoing change, be it incremental or structural."[41] Once the baggage of professionalism is released, I believe we can advance the methods and ideas that make archives a crucial apparatus of democracy, public history, and public memory, and attend to the importance of archival labor and archival workers within processes of knowledge creation.

Feeling What We Teach: Mitigating the Emotional Labor Slide in Affect-Based Instruction
by Anastasia Armendariz

One of my major and most cherished responsibilities in my work with rare books, community archives, and other facets of special collections is teaching primary-source-centered classes for undergraduate students. This piece centers the emotional needs of special collections practitioners who serve as instructors with primary sources, especially as we work to support affective learner responses to the historic materials in our care. To ground us in our terms, "affect theory" as defined by Marika Cifor is a relational "force" that supports fully felt reactions to materials, ideas, or experiences.[42] This is prioritized in the context of the tendency to frame intellectual mastery of content as the primary metric for learning.

Cifor applied affect theory to archival practice. I initially explored how affect theory might serve primary source instruction in a spring 2022 poster session, "The Personal is Primary: Affect Theory in Primary Source Instruction." I found that "the perspectives and positions represented in primary sources are ideal entry points to the relationship building that affect theory invites."[43] Primary source instruction through the lens of affect theory lends itself to reflective practice. Special collections instructors are ready to adapt classroom activities or connect their examples in response to student interests and projects.[44] From planning to presentations to shepherding direct

---

41.   Grele, "Whose Public?," 47.

42.   Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect theory to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16 (2016): 8. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5.

43.   Anastasia Armendariz, "The Personal is Primary: Affect Theory in Primary Source Instruction" (Poster, Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Maryland, College Park, May 11, 2022).

44.   Elizabeth Galoozis, "Affective Aspects of Instruction Librarians' Decisions to Adopt New Teaching Practices: Laying the Groundwork for Incremental Change," *C&RL* 80, no. 7 (2019): 1042, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.7.1036.