

Google comes to *Life*: researching digital photographic archives

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**Abstract:**

*When Google announced in November 2008 that it was to host online one of the world's largest corpus of photographic images thanks to its collaboration with the Life magazine picture collection, it also said something, almost incidentally, about the state of the archive in the digital age. This essay examines the meeting between the archive and technology that the Google publicity announces by focusing on a relatively minor subset of the Life images digitised as a result of this partnership. It does so by foregrounding 'user-builders' and their roles in both making meaning from digital archives and making digital archives meaningful.*

**Keywords:**

Google; stock photographs; phenomenology; digital archives; *Life* picture collection; user-builders; popular archives

When Google announced in November 2008 that it was to host online one of the world's largest corpus of photographic images thanks to its collaboration with the *Life* magazine picture collection, it also said something, almost incidentally, about the state of the archive in the digital age. While boasting of the millions of images that would be available for viewing in accordance with the company's audacious "mission to organise all the world's information and make it universally accessible", the publicity also sounded the end (or at least the purported limitations) of the offline archive. "Only a small percentage of these images have ever been published", the press statement read, "The rest have been sitting in dusty archives in the form of negatives, slides, glass plates, etchings and prints" (cited in MacAskill, 2008). With the advent of the internet and Google (as a search engine, a verb and a global corporation), the archive as it has been known comes to look inefficient, inactive, indifferent, inaccessible, anti-democratic and in need of a spring-clean. The online form, by contrast, promises something better, something

more alive, liberal and effective, and as a result begins to shift what is meant by, what comprises, and who can assume access to 'the archive'.

This essay seeks to examine the meeting between the archive and technology that the Google publicity announces by focusing on a relatively minor subset of the *Life* images digitised as part of this partnership. It aims to introduce into the contestable break between online and offline archives on which Google's claims rest the question of 'user-builders' and their roles in both making meaning from digital archives, and making digital archives meaningful. It also develops out of a paradox we find ourselves in as researchers in the age of digital humanities; our work increasingly depends on the capacities Google affords but at the same time involves a critique of those very facilities that make the work possible.

The pictures in question are those taken in 1960 by a *Life* staff photographer, James Burke. They feature a small expatriate artistic colony on the Greek island of Hydra that includes a young Leonard Cohen, authors Charmian Clift, George Johnston, Axel Jensen, Redmond Wallis, Tore Pedersen and Gordon Merrick, and painters Nikos Ghikas and Dimitri Gassoumis. Unlike other *Life* photographers such as Margaret Bourke-White, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa and W. Eugene Smith, whose reputations continue to enjoy considerable cultural currency, Burke is not so well-known. This may be because most of his work was undertaken in central Asia. Among other assignments for *Life* he was one of the first to photograph Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay on their return from the summit of Mount Everest in 1953. In early October of 1964 he was photographing in the Himalayas when, as Australian novelist George Johnston wrote of his friend in the novel *A Cartload of Clay* (1971), "he made a careless backward step while focusing his camera and lost his footing and fell headlong into a vast and deep abyss where the grey snout of a glacier groaned and creaked and mumbled". It was,

Johnston added, “the right ending for Jim” (Johnston, 1971, 100). The pictures taken on Hydra in 1960, which we are interested in for the purposes of both this essay and the social history of the Hydra artistic community we are undertaking, were not published during Burke’s lifetime,<sup>1</sup> but they have recently been posted on the Google-*Life* website archive and included in the Carlyle Group-owned Getty Images ‘bank’.

We found the Hydra images in these archives, consisting of over 1,500 black and white photographs (although not all photographs appear in both archival sets), as part of our search for illustrations for a book on Australian literary culture that we were then editing. Subsequently, we have set out to write a book on the expatriate community captured on still film, with the photographs as the thematic and methodological centrepiece. Part of our research involves face-to-face interviews, and we have embedded Burke’s photographs as a fundamental part of the oral history methodology we have deployed (Freund and Thomson, 2011). The photographs are conceived as social documents and as a means of ‘remembering’ that both constructs and reveals the past. Their use in this way enables us to reflect on how it is that Burke’s photographs are received in a contemporary context, and how it is that the ‘gap’ between their taking and reception gives rise to particular accounts of the artistic community. Without these images, and without us having come across them in their electronic form, we would not be carrying out the project in its current shape.

In our capacity as book editors, our attentions were caught initially by the images of the Australian writers (and wife and husband) Clift and Johnston. Their time on Hydra has a mythical-like quality in the annals of Australian

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<sup>1</sup> Burke’s notes on the project are in the physical *Life* Picture Collection archive. Regina Feiler, the Director of the collection, relates in personal correspondence that he “chose to do the assignment ... to highlight expat writers and artists living in this area [Hydra], for the time being, unassumingly”. (2013, private correspondence).

literature, a myth that started to build after they both skipped away from what they saw as the cultural backwater of Australia in the 1950s, leaving behind former spouses, children and relatively successful journalistic careers. As befits myth, their time on Hydra is not comprehensively documented, nor has it been fully interrogated, although Clift did write of her family's time on Hydra in the autobiographical travelogue, *Peel Me a Lotus* (1959), which described how she and Johnston purchased a house on Hydra; how she gave birth there to the couple's third child; and how the community of expatriate writers and artists began to build around them. *Peel Me a Lotus* played no small part in enlarging the personal and professional reputations of Clift and Johnston who were at least as well-known for their tempestuous private lives as they were for their creative endeavours. Leonard Cohen's appreciative apprehension of the couple – "They drank more than other people, they wrote more, they got sick more, they got well more, they cursed more and they blessed more, and they helped a great deal more. They were an inspiration" (cited in Knuckey, 1972, 10) – offers a generous version of the story attached to the couple and their role on the island.

The friendship that developed between Clift, Johnston and Cohen on Hydra is one under-recorded element of the myth. And while the relationship had been reported in biographies of all three, there were, as far as we were aware, no photographs that documented it. Until, that is, we started Googling. It was a casual search for 'Clift Hydra' that led us to the first of Burke's remarkable photographs.

Clift and Johnston's biographers refer to Burke in passing – Johnston saved his life in Tibet in 1945 when both men were working as war correspondents – but no mention is made of his trip to Hydra or the photographs he took there (Kinnane, 1986, 62). Yet, at the same time we discovered these photographs, and therefore a unique window on a period of Australian

literary expatriatism ripe for further research, we also discovered that we were by no means the first to come across the images. The (to us) irresistible image of Clift photographed at night, sitting on a well-top beneath a tree outside Duskos Taverna in mid-song, accompanied by a guitar-strumming, tie-wearing Cohen and encircled by other members of the Hydra artistic community smoking and drinking and humming along – a picture that eventually made its way into our previously mentioned book – was also featured on a handful of websites, Facebook pages and blogs curated either by Cohen fans or people with an interest in Hydra.

To say that we 'discovered' these images, then, would be a sleight-of-hand. ('Discovery' carries a particular charge for humanities scholars in Australia; its implications and assumptions are all-important. The major national funding body, the Australian Research Council, runs a highly competitive grant system called "The Discovery Projects scheme", the title privileging and giving shape to projects that involve finding, detecting, unearthing. Underwriting and motivating discovery is funding). It would be more accurate to say that we came across them serendipitously in the course of searching for something that we did not yet know existed, in an online archive of which we were unaware. But, had our search terms been different, presumably we could have found them elsewhere. After all, we were just 'browsing', a term that, to our ears at least, does not suggest the same authority, the same claim to standards of academic rigour, that 'researching' is asked to carry. (We can imagine the Australian Research Council querying a request for thousands of dollars to enable extended internet browsing in the office while smiling more favourably on funding requests to undertake offline archival research in the United States. Digital archives have implications not only for how research is done but how that research might be recognised as such and funded). Perhaps this is why a reading of Harriet Bradley's compelling account of her archival undertakings, a narrative with which we

might have expected to have many things in common, started to make us vaguely uneasy, if not more than a bit fraudulent.

Bradley, writing of what she nominates as “the seductions of the archive”, in contradistinction to Thomas Osborne’s apprehension of the archive as “dry” (1999, 52), focuses on four different archival forms: the Bodleian Library; the records of Leicester; the archives of oral histories she creates as part of a project on trade unions and gendered workplace relations; and what is left behind in the wake of her mother’s passing. While by no means intended as a compendium – Bradley introduces her work with the recognition that the “archive can take many forms” (1999, 107) – the electronic age does not seem to have touched Bradley’s experiences of the differing archives she relates. Unlike our experiences of Burke’s images that appear on our computer screens, Bradley’s phenomenological account of archives is grounded in the world of tangible objects, three dimensional storage space, and moving bodies as she handles letters and records, sorts out her mother’s notebooks and photographs, speaks face to face with labourers. All we have done is sit. She researches in the archive, we browse on the computer; the depth-surface binary of which we have grown wary has nevertheless worked its way into the very value-laden language available to speak about archives and technologies.

As we read her essay, on another continent in a former British colony, Bradley’s account of walking “each day through Oxford streets from Nuffield College to the various sections of the Bodleian Library” (1999, 108) appears at this distance, and on our part, like some kind of guilty, and prohibitively expensive (given the cost of international travel and a falling Australian dollar), fantasy. It also seems to be speaking of and valuing forms of exclusivity, whether by simply having the time and resources to devote to the practice of research, or by virtue of access to privileged halls of learning well-

stocked with the accumulated documentation of generations. In our postcolonial context, we are taught to be suspicious of the idea that the former centre of Empire might pose as a much-desired source of knowledge, but this promise of discovery of hitherto unknown details is one that arguably continues to structure and direct a lot of research in the Humanities. Including our own. We want to know, to find out, why Burke was on Hydra; why he took the photographs; who is pictured in them; the relationships between those photographed and Burke, to each other, to the people of Hydra; what they were doing there; how long they were there; what they did while they were there (apart from ride donkeys; drink and smoke, write and paint, all of which the photographs evidence). We also want to know about things that are less easy to divine from the images; what the people pictured in them thought about each other, their lives, the work they had before them, the places they had left, and the place where they found themselves. And in interrogating these images – taken one day, likely forgotten the next, locked away in a 'dusty archive' for half a century, now digitised and accessible online – we also inevitably asked the question, what are the photographs 'doing' now? It is this latter question that leads us in other directions, away from origins and single explanations, towards meditations on the limits of interpretive frames, of archives, of how different meanings are generated and repeatedly reconstituted in the gaps between reality, representation and reception; towards musing on how (particular conceptions of) archives have come to shape and authorise as proper, authentic and fundable certain academic endeavours, and the extent to which the archive and its affects have been transformed by its emergence in online form.

Perhaps it is anxious self-justification, but we feel that both activities – browsing on the internet, conceived of as an uber-archive (at least that is what we will tell our respective Deans, archive as alibi, if questioned about the extensive electronic trail to Hydra we have left in our wake; what we

have told the Australian Research Council in our efforts to access research funding) and visiting archives, handling material objects, are not opposing undertakings and can more or less, depending on the circumstances, take us on the same trajectory; that of finding (out).

Finding, of course, is hardly an innocent practice, bound up as it is with assumptions of possession and tied to epistemological quests; the very substance of academic work. And so far we have been writing of Burke's photographs as though we found them fully-formed. This is not the case. The front page of the *Life* photo archive hosted by Google organises searches for images by decades and themes (people, places, events, sports, culture). Type 'James Burke' into the search engine option embedded on the same page and multiple images of Madhubala, the popular Hindi movie actor of the 1950s and 1960s, sit alongside pictures of Clift and Johnston's children playing on Hydra and fetishistic photographs of women wearing high heels, among many, many others. Click on the images and some very brief metadata appears. It is not immediately clear what principles of 'organisation', which Google promised in its publicity, are at play. The effect is disorienting for anyone carrying in their heads a model of an archive that includes tropes such as 'management,' 'catalogue', or 'provenance', but it is also thrilling in its potentiality and apparent open-endedness. It is as though this is both an archive without an archivist, and an archive without limits; in which the only obvious structure is that which is seemingly imposed by the haphazard conjunction of search terms, and in which the concept of something being 'in' an (or the) archive is erased by the possibility that there may nothing that is beyond its reach. While this state of affairs might be interpreted charitably as being in line with the self-professed vision of the Google-*Life* service as a democratic online archive, it might also account for why the archive is accorded here an agency; a self that it might be able to profess.

When typing 'James Burke Hydra' into the Getty Images website, the other major online archive in which the Burke photographs appear, sixty-one of Burke's images are retrieved. This seems to be the total number of Burke's Hydra photographs included in Getty Images, and they give the impression of a random selection. Additionally, the photographs have metadata applied quite inconsistently, although they are all allocated a number of 'keywords'.

For example, an image of Charmian Clift shopping at an open-air market bears the following keywords: "Arts Culture and Entertainment; Buying; Cross Section; Females; Finance; Greece; Group of Objects; Hydra; Merchandise; Street market". These keywords obviously answer to a commercial imperative and the logic of the marketplace for stock images, and have no relationship to the social history of Hydra, the person photographed, or the circumstances in which the photo was taken. Some photographs are also accompanied by an additional caption that does provide supplementary (and sometimes useful) information. The photograph referred to above is provided with these details: "Mrs. George S. Johnson (L) buying items at a market. (Photo by James Burke/Time *Life* Pictures/Getty Images)". While accurate in one sense, this caption is also misleading (or of no use) to those who conduct a search for 'Charmian Clift', although in captions accompanying other photographs Clift is identified by her own name. For us as researchers, the captions are plagued by both inaccuracy (individuals misidentified; names mis-spelt); or frustratingly incomplete (the same individuals identified in some photographs, but labelled as unidentified in others). Somewhat unfortunately, when Burke himself appears in one of the photographs he is described as "unidentified", his association with the photograph only retained because he is listed as the photographer, another noticeable error.

These are, however, archives that have not been produced with the researcher and his or her needs in mind. The shift of the archive from principles based on curation and scholarship, to those of abundance and commerce, have wrought substantial changes to key factors on which the archive has long relied for its authority. These include an erosion of the accuracy of the intellectual infrastructure (metadata) that has hitherto constituted a reliable component of historical evidence; and the erasure of the expectation of privileged access that ensured archived documents retained a status akin to 'private' records.'

Burke's photographs, on the other hand, which may have once been images that belonged to private experience, now definitely exist publicly within these two vast online image archives, from which they can be almost instantly transferred to and actively shared via social media and online sites. In making that point though, it is also useful to remember that any distinction between private and public photographs is not fixed or free from historical determinations. As Roland Barthes has noted, and social media such as Facebook and Instagram count on, it was the very invention of the camera that allowed the unprecedented publicity of the private (1981, 98).

Once we got over the initial displeasure at seeing 'our' photographs being used elsewhere – a hangover of colonial-hued scholarship that now knows, or should know better, the perils of presuming to plant proprietorial flags in the fragments of history – we were struck, and intrigued, by how these photographs were mobilised, archived and read differently to our comprehension, and valuing, of them. We slipped gleefully into scholarly-detective-mode, selecting Clift and Johnston as our focus. We downloaded to our laptops every Hydra image by Burke we could find, which meant scrutinising in zoom-mode many photographs that, on first blush, seemed to be duplicates but on a closer inspection could be shown to be shots taken in

very quick succession. We became well-acquainted with certain donkeys that appeared in a number of pictures; our familiarity with particular buildings, laneways, boats, and clothing grew as we accumulated information by careful cross-referencing of images married to a growing body of secondary information. We then represented our acquired knowledge in the many titles we gave to the computer files and sub-files into which we have (loosely) curated the images – ‘Houses’, ‘Café Katsikas’, ‘Dock’. We worked out by various means who was who in the pictures and excitedly emailed our discoveries back and forth – it’s Katerina Paouri, the wealthy patron of the island’s arts and artists!; that cannot be Angela Goschen!; look, here is a photo of Burke himself!

This practice of classification and imposing of some system of ‘external’ order is common to most (or all) attempts to manage photographs. As Susan Sontag has argued, the desire to schematise information or data through the act of archiving finds a willing ally in the photographic image which is eminently malleable in its capacity to produce fragmentary representations of multiple narratives:

Through being photographed, something becomes part of a system of information, fitted into schemes of classification and storage which range from the crudely chronological order of snapshot sequences pasted into family albums to the dogged accumulations and meticulous filing needed for photography’s uses in weather forecasting, astronomy, microbiology, geology, police work, medical training and diagnosis, military reconnaissance, and art history. [...] Reality as such is redefined — as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance. (1979, 156)

So we set about, as user-builders, creating our own archived reality, with each image representing a point in a discontinuous narrative of a time, a place, a person, or a number of people. We interpreted, and in a number of cases misinterpreted; we arranged, and as knowledge grew we re-arranged. Individual images remained fixed and frustratingly taciturn, but the archive itself was alive, flexible, and eventually began to make itself heard. And despite our quite rapid learning about Hydra in 1960 what we still do not know continues to motor a trail of questions we follow. With the results of our initial investigations recently published (Genoni and Dalziell, 2014) Burke's photographs constitute for us a work-in-progress, 'a project'.

Others, however, have regarded the images as an *aide-mémoire*. The Facebook page "Hydra Once Upon A Time", for example, features regular posts of pictures (not only those taken by Burke, but select images of his have appeared frequently since they were made available through Getty Images) featuring aspects of Hydra and its inhabitants that then invite comment, conversation and reflections. A posting (28 October 2013) of a Burke image prompted one Facebook contributor, who lived on Hydra in 1960, to write "Help me with the names of this lovely couple from New Zealand. Its [sic] out of my head" – a question to which we, having never been to Hydra or met the people involved, were able to provide the answer. On other websites, such as the Cohen fansite "Heck of a Guy", Burke's photographs are oriented by its user-builders towards the telling and retelling of Cohen's biography. Here the photographs are valuable curiosities documenting an origin story of what in retrospect is the beginning of Cohen's life as a musician and songwriter. The photographs are posted alongside hyperlinks to other webpages, other photographs; they are framed by and are prompts for paragraphs of text-based details and comment. These images become nomadic, alighting in new contexts, new archives, where they accumulate a range of data and stories. Frequently the inaccurate metadata they carry in their archive of origin is

repeated across multiple sites; sometimes errors are corrected, although in a way that it is unlikely to amend the original source; and other times more incorrect information is generated as people, places and dates are wrongly identified. Either way the consequence is a sometimes-bewildering array of possibilities as a single image comes to represent multiple 'realities'.

Such an evolving set of outcomes is achieved by means of 'poaching' in the information common in a way that Michel de Certeau would understand that everyday practice of creative consumption by user-builders (1984, 174). A cultural community is constructed, or what Michael Lynch has nominated a "popular archive" in the digital context, one that is "subjected to mass visitation, reproduction and dissemination", but seemingly not copyright (1999, 76).<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the administrators of, and contributors to, the websites featuring the Burke photographs are not mindful of their 'sources'. They routinely acknowledge Getty Images and the Google-*Life* archive; the images they display often feature the *Life* digital fingerprint, an element that is deleted from the image when the file, and the rights to reproduce, are purchased from Getty Images. This raises the question, without offering any straightforward answers, as to what and who constitutes and contests publication in the digital world, keeping in mind that it continues to share space with analogue records. If nothing else, the question itself suggests a time in which archives, once in a state of "house arrest" under the guardianship of the magistrates, as Jacques Derrida puts it (1996, 2), are now post-custodial in both the legal sense of that term and the response of archive practice and theory to digitisation, which recognises that information is not necessarily dependent on some physical form (Cook, 1993).

It is this emphasis on the decentred consumption, reproduction and circulation of the digitised Burke photographs that offers a critical reflection

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting account of intellectual property politics, see Striphas and McLeod (2006).

on the value and role of online archives that Google's publicity sets up, and invites a rethink of the claims made therein. Noting that different people put the photographs to different uses, and derive from the same images competing meanings, is hardly surprising and there would be little point in mentioning it if not for the glimpses it can afford into the historical contexts and publics of Google's claims as an archive that might otherwise be sidestepped. Of course, the statements Google advances are inescapably hyperbolic and headline-seeking, and so are not attuned to nuance. Yet, apart from the self-serving binary that is called upon to promote some innate value of the result of the Google-*Life* partnership, there is a forgetting, or fudging, of sorts necessary to uphold the zeal to organise and archive the world's information, or the world as information. Despite the account of itself, Google is not, after all, the first to have such determination. As Patrick Joyce has detailed in relation to the emergence of the idea and institution of the public library in nineteenth century Britain:

The idea of the free library was central to the new vocabulary of the social that the archive engineered, especially the meanings of 'public'. Prior to 1850 existing libraries were not funded from the public purse and had an attachment to different groups, communities and organizations. New meanings of 'public', which were developed through the idea of the free institution, meant not only public funding (however limited at first) but also above all the idea of a subject that was not attached to different bodies, or to the market, which was a domain in which earlier notions of the public were rooted. This subject was constituted by the institution of the archive itself, and called into being legally through the 1850 Act. That subject was demos, the library being opened to one and all. (1999, 39)

As Joyce points out, however, this making of the public archive and ‘the public’ springs from a tension within liberalism between its disciplinary impulses and its aspirations to individual freedoms and betterment; the public archive was largely geared “to civilize the working class by giving this class access to the public realm, and so constituting it as demotic” (1999, 39). Some one hundred and fifty years later, with the online image archive seemingly unanchored from the political expressions of any one nation-state, Google’s publicity is silent on the issue of class. Yet, it does appear to share with the nineteenth-century public library the idea that archives, in principle, are imperative to the formation and maintenance of a liberal democratic society; or, more precisely, that access to these archives, where knowledge is ideally rendered transparent, is equitable and universal.

And this is where Google comes up trumps and is determined, by its selected parameters, to be not only the ‘true’ archive of the day but the true ‘archive’ of the day, insofar as Google’s claims rests on an idea of the archive that pre-dates digitisation and which imagines the archive to carry certain desirable values and cultural authority. This turn is interesting, given that the internet arguably intensifies the looseness around distinctions between the archive, repository, database and library that has distinguished discussions offline about what it means to collect and access stuff. Google’s partnering with the *Life* magazine collection prompts ongoing interrogations of what the critically distinguishing features of an archive are, and who gets to decide which repositories of information are to be anointed as ‘an archive’. It also raises the issue as to which archives, recognised as such, are promoted over others, how and why, and the effects that ensue from such processes. The double-branding by *Life* and Google of this particular photographic archive arguably generates and guarantees more hits than one that does not have such high-profile sponsors; it also marks out archival proprietorship while proffering free content provision and advocating universal access. So, perhaps

the question of what an archive *is* is no longer pertinent, not the question to ask given what it *does*. The relations of power that the archive is produced by and perpetuates might be more pressing if it is nothing less than the organisation of the ‘world’s information’ at play and at stake. Further, it also points to the willingness of global corporations to appropriate the air of permanence, authority and institutional approbation that archives continue to carry in order to exploit the attendant spirit of liberal democracy. What Google brings to the mix is the promise of ubiquity, a value close to the heart of liberal democracies, speaking as it does to both the openness of the state and the rights of citizens.

While such liberal democratic notions of universal access and undoctored information have by no means always been achieved in practice,<sup>3</sup> accessibility to the archive comes to mark Google’s benevolent success and apparent superiority to offline archives insofar as the accumulation of information presumes to lead to universal access. Just how those who do not have the physical means, infrastructure or knowledge to come into contact with such information, either as producers or consumers, is not of concern; nor is the issue of power. Perhaps, more precisely, what underwrites Google’s conception of itself as the Ur-archive is a teleological (if not technologically determinist) view of the history of the archive, a narrative that needs to be told because the archive is considered central to the upkeep of democratic society. (And contemporary archivists are required to be thoroughly versed in ever-changing protocols including “Z39.50, the Open Archives Initiatives Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) and Search/Retrieve via URL (SRU)” (Stevenson, 2008, 93)). In decreeing the dusty demise of the offline

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Fultz’s work (2006) on the establishment of ‘black public libraries’ in the south of the United States of America underscores that ‘the public’ was not a (race-)neutral category and that libraries are not accessible by all in certain historical and cultural contexts. For a recent account of archival ‘management’, and the restrictions it can entail, see Kristin R. Eschenfelder (2008).

archive and its own online ascendancy, Google also marks out significant historical as well as ethical distance between it and those magistrates, the *archons*, who, as Derrida reminds us, spoke the law and officially guarded documents deemed important in their homes (1996, 17). These power-wielding magistrates were not on Facebook.

Yet it is on Facebook, among other online social media, that many of the Burke images (re-)appear. Notwithstanding that Facebook, as an information-procuring and peddling tool, might well have many things in common with Derrida's magistrates when it comes to power, Google's more general ambitions to organise the world's information, of which the Burke photographs are but a near-negligible component, renders the public not in need of civilising by means of knowledge-acquisition but as consumers of information. Moreover, this information is no longer housed (a comfortably domestic metaphor) or stored (a more impersonal term, bound up with capitalist accumulation) in a physical place, "that place where the past lives" as Carolyn Steedman calls it (2001, 70), although there is no reason to suppose that the past cannot live as well online, in bytes. Barring a technological apocalypse, one of the more pervasive features attributed to that which is posted to the internet is permanence, which then raises the issue, for another paper, as to what such apparent permanence does to (ideas of) the past: if technological means render (representations of) the past easily retrievable in a present made eternal. As we have discovered, once digitised the traces of the past are transferable to any number of contexts as nomadic fragments.

Perhaps this transferability is no more apparent than in the so-called stock photographs that online archives such as Getty Images specialise and trade in as part of a multi-million dollar industry. Stock images, if not by their very 'nature' then by the open-ended purposes to which they are intended to be

put, are asked to do everything and nothing. Eschewing specificities, stock images are necessarily both polysemic and prosaic so as to be deployed in multiple contexts. Online picture archives such as Getty Images increasingly demand and create demand for such images which, as Paul Frosh has suggested, see extended into their very form, indeed their very digital nature as it turns out, archival principles. For Frosh, the stock photograph in the digital age is the image-commodity par excellence; it can be thought of as a crafted collection of “info-pixels” whose constituent parts can not only be pulled apart and reassembled but are specifically designed for such purposes (2003, 186). At the same time, these global online archives, or ‘banks’, have been busy buying up (the rights to) offline visual archives such as the *Life* picture collection, selectively digitising them, including the Burke photographs, and commercialising the results as visual content.

In a perverse way, we wonder if this state of affairs is not the archive’s revenge on the photograph. In his essay on photography, which was published in 1927, well before the advent of digital technology, Siegfried Kracauer, one of modernity’s most prescient and perceptive commentators, observed around him what he determined to be a “flood” of images in the form of “the weekly photographic ration” (1995, 58). These diluvian circumstances constituted an “assault” that “sweeps away the dams of memory” (1995, 58). While not named as such, it is not beyond possibility that the dams Kracauer had in mind were archival in intent and form, assailed particularly by “the invention of the illustrated magazines [which] is one of the most powerful means of organising a strike against understanding” (1995, 58). The increasing dominance of not only the photograph but also its reproducibility, for Kracauer, damaged the very possibility of knowledge and left people duped, no longer “see[ing] the very world that illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving” (1995, 58). Getty Images wringing

the last vestiges of content from the image would come some way to squaring off the contest between the photograph and the archive that Kracauer relates.

Yet, Kracauer was no fan of the capitalist culture the illustrated magazines embraced, and of which Getty Images is very much a part. The sheer volume of images made available by Getty Images would have to be Kracauer's nightmare writ large. He would surely shudder in the face of Burke's two-page spread contribution to the 10th of October issue of *Life* titled "The Perils for Spike-heeled Girls" (1960, 14-15), which features pictures of women's lower legs stumbling through the streets of New York in high-heeled shoes. Kracauer's conception of the 'dams of memory', moreover, would not, could not it seems, be extended to the prospect that photographic archives might be possible, desirable, necessary, especially on the scale and with the speed online formats afford. Nor could he abide, presumably, the claim now made of *Life* magazine, namely that *it* is no less than the chronicle of the twentieth century, the dam of modernity and memory (Doss, 2001; Kitch, 2005). The boundless transmission of images that Kracauer fantasised about in relation to such picture magazines, and more specifically to an imaginary giant film that was able to present "temporally interconnected events from every vantage point" (1995, 59), appears all the closer with the advent of the internet, mobile devices, and online micro-blogging platforms and social networking sites such as Tumblr and Instagram.

Kracauer's concern lies in how the presentation of the world in image was apparently a pale substitute for, and withdrawal from, the world and its history that should otherwise be shored up, protected, in the memory dam-archive. As a result of an investment in its apparent transparency, its close relationship with the real and its relative distance from individual experience, the mass image masks its own status as a representation and naturalises the social order it helps to construct. Yet, Burke's Hydra photographs, possibly

originating as a project for the quintessential American photographic magazine *Life* (the genre which was Kracauer's *bête noire*), now digitised and available for online viewing and purchase everywhere (or so the democratic/free-market model of the online archive would have it), push at the historically and ideologically specific assumptions Kracauer makes about the social functions of photographs and archives. As observers and user-builders of this phenomenon we are left asking what people do with such photographs and the archives in which they are gathered.

If for Kracauer the image drives away ideas and for Frosh the stock-image archive replaces content with info-pixels so that the image slides from the distinctive to the emblematic (at best), then for us at least (and we do not think we are entirely enveloped in a fog of false consciousness), Burke's archived Hydra photographs do not easily fit these accounts of either the photograph or the digital archive of images. Notwithstanding our awareness of the capacities of Photoshop to alter images and our tutored suspicion of lingering positivism, we note, as an example, the photographs Burke took one evening of Clift and Johnston and friends at the dinner table in their Hydra house. They are there passing plates, feeding children, pouring wine, making conversation in photographs that are also marked by the trace of the photographer's thumb blurred across the lens as the shutter clicked. Burke's errant pre-digital digit serves as a narrative prompt to tell the stories not necessarily or only of the moment 'captured', but also of the gap between it and our moment of viewing, a lapse in time that necessarily entails accounting for its archival frames. So often the role of the archive has been assumed to be one of telling and preserving the provenance of the object stored; the advent of the online archive reinforces the need for the stories of archives themselves to be recognised.

It is because Burke's images have found themselves in the Getty Images and Google-*Life* archives, not despite this fact, that they appear to us as they do. Alongside pictures of boab trees and shimmering oceans and gleaming mountain tops that are found in the Getty Image archive, amidst the seeming randomness of the Google-*Life* displays, the specificities of Burke's photographs come to look all the more specific (if the shots of donkeys in Hydra alleys are discounted; we can imagine these pictures easily placed today in travel brochures). Yet, it is also because they are posted in these archives that such particularities are extended, as the engagement with and reframing of the images by the public archives of "Hydra Once Upon A Time" and "Heck of a Guy" attest. The images proliferate and various stories are generated about and around them; it is these very differences and divergences that underscore that meanings do not reside in one place that might go by the name of 'the archive'. While such circumstances may have been true before Google and *Life* paired up, it seems important to reiterate that point so that the democratising impulse Google-*Life* claims for itself as an electronic archive of superior value is interrogated, and not seen as its prerogative alone.

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