

# How do 'exiles' mediate memories of a homeland through acts of 'archival art' and writing?

## 1. Concepts

In Theodor Adorno's 'Minimia Moralia', he writes that for the exiled artist, "writing becomes a place to live". I examined how manifestations of archival processes in the artistic output of 'refugee' communities shapes their experience of exile.

**EXILE** : a state or condition... of prolonged absence from one's native country or a place regarded as home, endured by force of circumstances.

**ARCHIVE**: a collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people'

**ARCHIVAL/ART**: work that seeks to make (often lost or displaced) historical information physically present, usually displayed via installations based around these found images and texts

## 2. Critical Engagement

Throughout the process of investigating this 'mediation', I relied heavily on writings by Hal Foster, Jacques Derrida, Sarah Callahan, Edward Said and Theodor Adorno to direct the critical current of my argument. The integration of their work into mine represents, I believe, a further manifestation of engagement with the archive, by enacting collaging processes redolent of archival methods.

## 3. Research Methodology

In undertaking this project, I concluded that the best way of engaging with and handling the politically and ethically charged nature of my query was through implementing the methods embodied by the very artists I was researching – and as such, the project stands as an example of what Benson has referred to as 'creative' or 'practice-led' criticism, where the traditional essay form is disrupted by found material, memories, and quoted texts. This methodology does not seek to simply describe or analyse the discourse around archival art, but rather adds to it.

## 4. Case-studies

The following represent the examples of 'archival art' created either by exiles, or engaging directly with the intrinsic links between the exile and the archive, which I used as case-studies

- shilpa gupta : 'for in your tongue, I cannot fit'
- Edward Said 'reflections on exile' / Mahmoud Darwish 'On Fifth Avenue he Greeted Me'
- Edmund de Waal 'the library of exile' / Paul Celan 'totdnauberg / the mountain of death'

## 5. Conclusions

If exiles yearn for a connection to homeland, perhaps the only effective mediation they can find is through acts of archival art and writing, and these are enacted through what I have found to be a tripartite form; mobile museums which embody the experience of exile, fictionalised installations which interrogate the relationship between the exile and the viewer, and poetry which offers up utopic and hopeful reimaginings and afterlives for previously marginalised and censored individuals. And, as I have evidenced through this piece of work, as viewers and readers we can productively contribute to these dialectics of mediation through producing our own work that relies on the archives of others, interconnecting and interweaving their methodologies. The horror and ruin that Derrida suggests the archive cannot 'forestall' is a misidentified issue – we should hope not to forestall, but rather to continue to re-examine and recontextualise the fragments left behind by this ruination.



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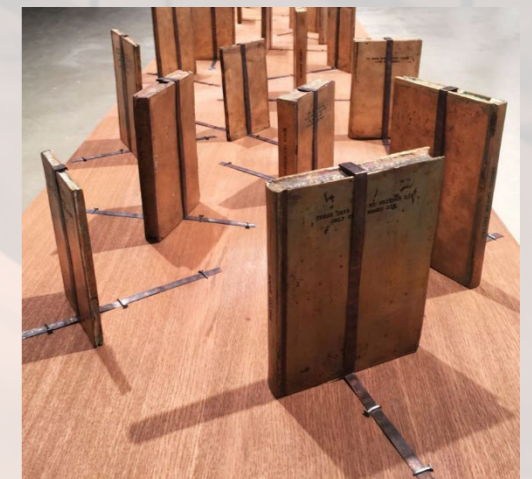
Supervisor : Dr Jane Partner



Edmund de Waal 'the library of exile'



Heidegger's 'Hutte' in the Black Mountain



Shilpa Gupta 'for in your tongue I cannot fit'