

Slow Violence, Double Binds, and Archival Workers' Climate Advocacy

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Outline

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Research problem



Left: Boxes of archival documents on shelves at York University Libraries, Toronto, Canada by Smallison via [Wikimedia Commons](#), CC BY-SA 4.0. **Right:** Orange, smoky sky in the Bay Area (Palo Alto) above palm trees and a building by Evan Baldonado via [Wikimedia Commons](#), CC-BY-SA 4.0.

Research problem



Photograph of flood in Colorado State Archives stacks, December 27, 2022, provided to Colorado Public Radio by the Colorado Department of Personnel and Administration

Research problem



Amy Hanada, Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Hawaii energy team member, checks an occupancy sensor with a data logger Apr. 11 in building A4 at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. (U.S. Navy photo by Denise Emsley, NAVFAC Hawaii Public Affairs Officer/Released) via [Wikimedia Commons](#), CC-BY 2.0.

Research problem



Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) pipes by Aidan via [Wikimedia Commons](#), CC-BY 2.0.

Research problem: **How do climate, environment, and ecology shape archival workers' experiences, practices, and perspectives on the future?**

Main argument: **Forms of slow violence produce double binds, which catalyze archival workers into an enunciatory community of climate advocates**

Theoretical framework: **Slow violence**

“a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011)

Theoretical framework: **Double binds**

Contradictory communications (“injunctions”) that can’t be resolved or avoided
(Bateson et al. 2001, Fortun 2002)

No existing ethical referents (Fortun 2002)

Theoretical framework: **Enunciatory communities**

Advocacy formations that manifest through how they make claims about harm, culpability, restitution (Fortun 2002)

Enunciatory communities must “dream up” their own future ethics (Fortun 2002)

Methodology: **Research questions**

How do archival workers engage with climate, ecology, and environment?

- How do slow violence and double binds shape these engagements?

What are archival workers' norms and expectations for making change?

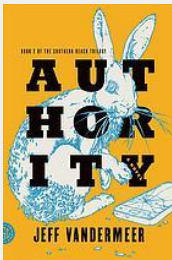
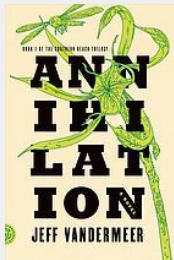
- To what extent and in what ways do they act in community?

Methodology: **Critical literature review**

Professional & research literature on archives, records, climate, environment, and ecology, 1963-2023

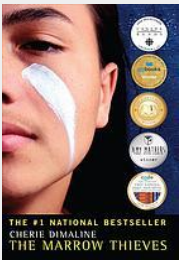
| Research stage | Citations |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Literature search (44 sources) | 10,500 |
| Inclusion & exclusion criteria (6) | 738 |
| Deduplication | 705 |
| Critical appraisal (10 steps) | 611 |
| Citation-chasing etc. | 686 |
| Final bibliography | 686 |

Methodology: Climate fiction study



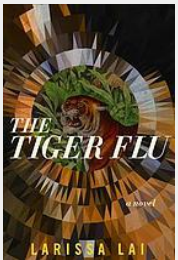
unstable environment, organizations

Southern Reach Trilogy (2014)



water wars, neo-colonial dispossession

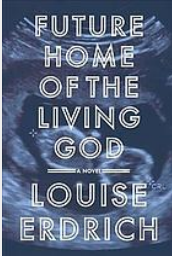
The Marrow Thieves (2017)



beginning anew

The Tiger Flu (2018)

Cli fi timeline
1980s-2165



polarization, violence,
resistance

*Future Home of the
Living God (2017)*



living, governing,
organizing in the
aftermath

New York 2140 (2017)

Methodology: Interview study

Archival workers participating in climate-related activities

- April 2020 - April 2022
- Iterative consent
- “Intensive interviewing” (Charmaz 2014)

| Research stage | Participants |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Invitation | 226 |
| Demographic survey | 14 |
| Preliminary interview | 16 |
| Post-interview reflection 1 | 8 |
| Follow-up interview | 7 |
| Post-interview reflection 2 | 5 |
| Consent to analyze data | 13 |

Methodology: Interview study

Watersheds:

- Middle Ohio
- Upper Yadkin
- Lake Washington
- Charles River
- Middle South Platte-Cherry Creek
- Southern Long Island
- Coyote
- Connecticut River
- Narragansett Bay
- Bald Eagle

| U.S. Census region | Participants |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Northeast | 8 |
| West | 3 |
| Midwest | 1 |
| South | 1 |

Methodology: **Interview study**

Time in the field: 7.5-15 years (average = 11)

| Gender | Participants |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Women | 8 |
| Men | 4 |

| Race / ethnicity | Participants |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| White | 10 |
| Black | 1 |
| Jewish | 2 |
| Latinx | 1 |

Methodology: **Interview study**

Archival activities: appraising, acquiring, accessioning, records retention, processing collections, metadata, digital stewardship, teaching, reference

| Employment Type | Participants |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Permanent | 10 |
| Term-limited | 9 |
| Volunteer or unpaid internship | 10 |
| Paid internship | 7 |

| Organization Type | Participants |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| College or university | 12 |
| Community archives | 3 |
| Government archives | 2 |
| Public library | 1 |

Key finding: **Resource constraints catalyze the repair of archival work as a form of climate advocacy**

Repair of archival work: **Archives literature**

“In Rikuzentakata the photographs were left on the road where there would have been houses so that people could come back to find them.”

“Where possible, the faces of people were left on the print so that it would be possible for the family to identify them.”

“The local people were able to identify the owners while they were treating the photographs. This could have happened only in an intimate community.”

Shiraiwa 2013

Repair of archival work: **Climate fiction**

“‘Hello, my relatives,’ he says. ‘Every week from now on, we meet, same time and same place. Over the next month you will see this map change. The green parcels can already be colored in—changed directly from green to purple. We have secured state land. The yellow is what we are working on now, and I think we are being reasonable. We're not taking back the whole top half of the state, or Pembina, Ontario, Manitoba, or Michigan, all our ancient stomping grounds. We're just taking back the land within the original boundaries of our original treaty.’”

Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*

Repair of archival work: **Interview study**

“But I think it also means inviting those folks who have been most impacted by climate change, who maybe have different ideas than I do about the causes and impacts of climate change, inviting them to come into our archive and say, ‘take a look around for the things that you think best represent a correct narrative of how this all happened.’ What things would they point out in our archives that we might not have identified as being part of this story?”

Jen Hoyer, interview participant

Implications: **Norms for archival climate advocacy**

Using the knowledge base

- Sufficient knowledge exists for climate action, but
- Addressing material conditions is necessary for action

Building power

- Alliances across policy spheres (Obach 2010), mass organizing & structure testing (McAlevey 2016), capacity-building, re-purpose networks, labor advocacy, mobilize alternative “languages of valuation” (Martinez-Alier 2002)

Embracing affect

- What moves people? What expands their capacity to act?

Learn more 

Download & read: [Archival Workers as Climate Advocates](#)

Use & reuse: [Open bibliography for critical literature review](#)

Join & organize: [Green New Deal for Archives, and Archival Workers](#)

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