

The Archive				
		in		
		The Panopticon		

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Supplementary tools and info available at dadaissues.ca/archive-panopticon				

This is an archive of thoughts about archives.	Text inside tables like this one are essayistic prose analyzing archives as media.
The argument progresses from looking at archives as aspects of systems of power & control through real and fictional case studies.	
The text also explores archival labour through a selection of real and fictional characters who work within archival systems.	Instructions Through those explorations I aim to delineate two new terms: Epiaesthetics & Archivomancy

Text inside tables like this is a transcript from a presentation by myself, Mitch Green, & Jessica Berry in David Clark's seminar at NSCAD, about specific archives and their media affordances	And text inside the black box accompanying the seminar text is generated by a large language model instructed to comment on its own positionality visavis the subjects in the transcript.
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Some supplementary drawings, diagrams, illustrations and matrices are peppered throughout.

The room at the base of the watchtower in the middle of the panopticon rotunda is full of files: manila envelopes inside gray filing cabinets, lit by flickering fluorescent tubes in asbestos-ridden drop ceilings. It is a scant, functional infrastructure of space, built to support the **storage of, and access to, files.**

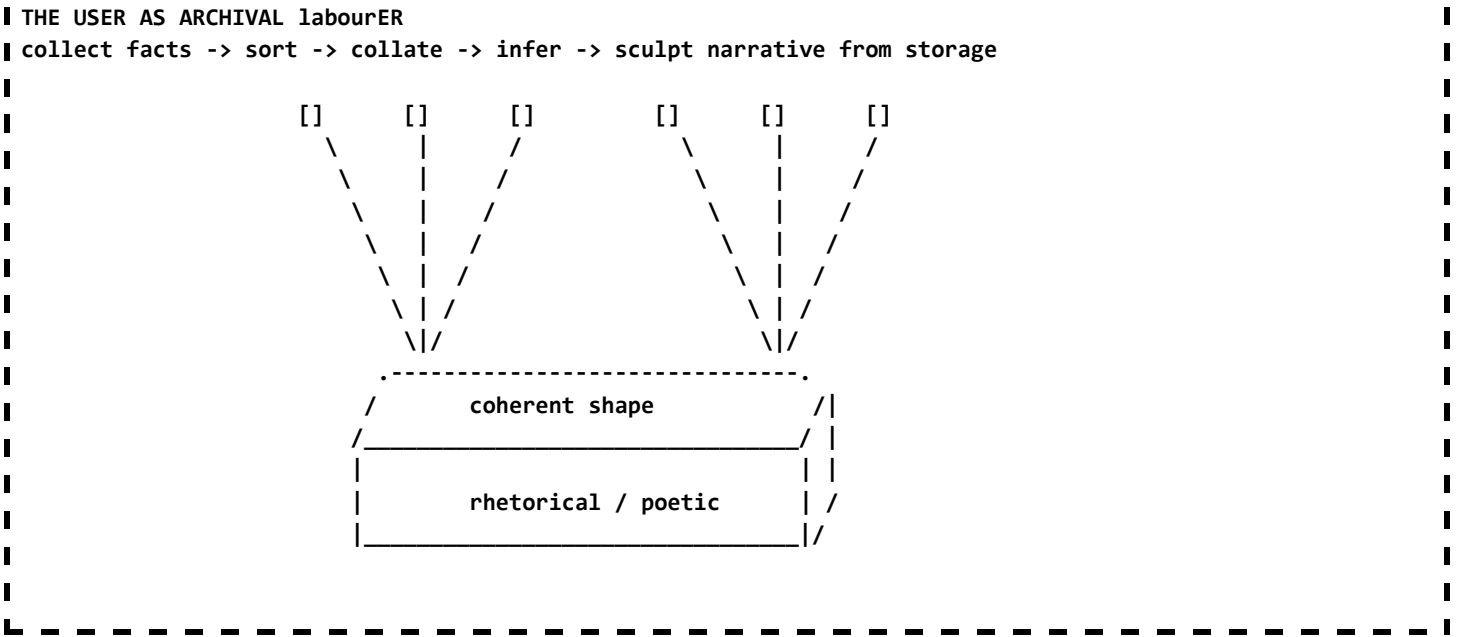
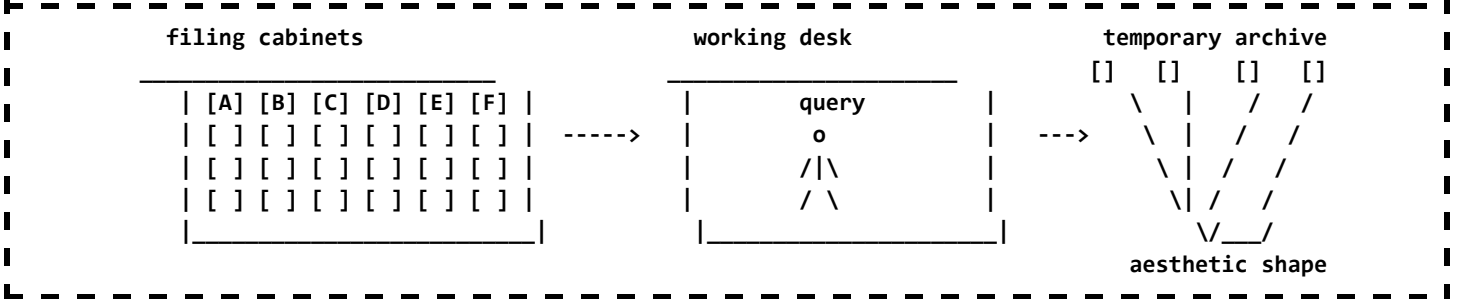
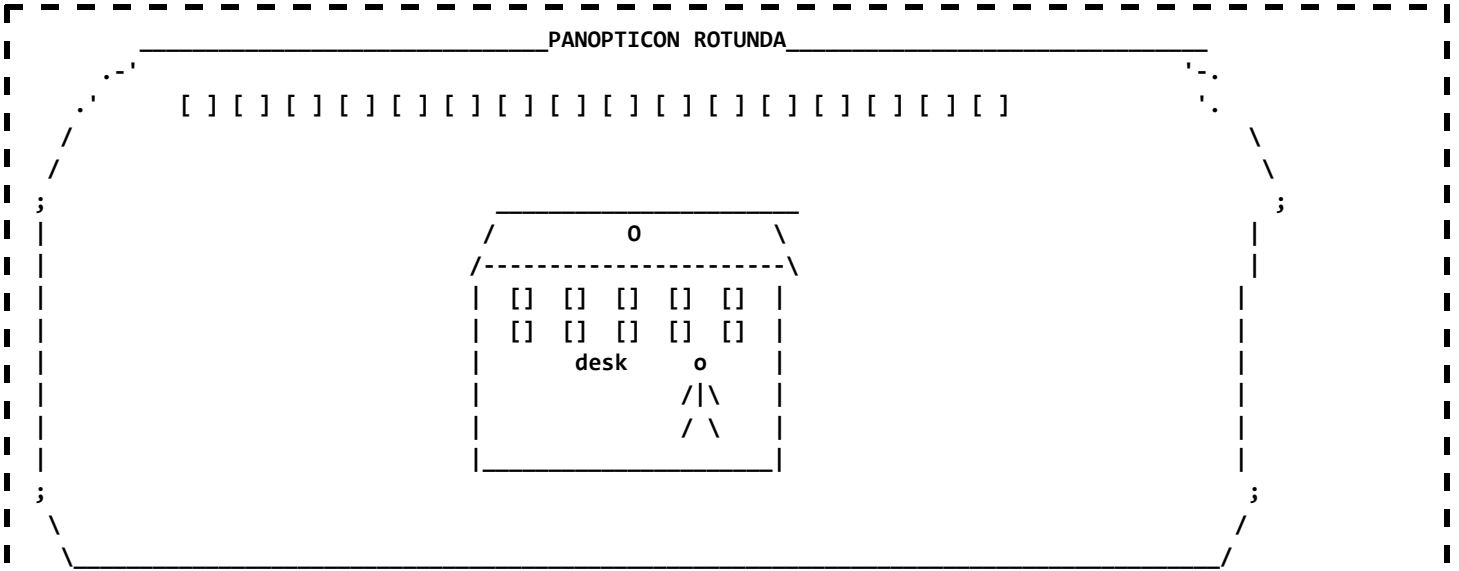
The strength of the panopticon's function in Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian design was not only as a landscape of control for the prisoner, but also as a labour-saving device—a reduction in the labour power required for the function of the jail.

The visible presence of patrolling guards replaced with the **invisible threat of constant surveillance**—the simplification of monitoring a single guard's behaviour—roles reduced to seeing and being seen.

In addition to the labour of watching the watchman, the room at the base of the central tower, which we can think of as **management's office**, is a further innovation in cost-cutting. Records, dormant until the need arises, extend the panopticon's regime across time with little overhead.

The Office of the Panopticon

The spare furnishings and the colluding logic of function and form serve only the two basic operations of any media: **storage and transmission.**



The way that an individual is what's interpolated into the system of control is through the algorithms that are basically structuring our thoughts. Mitch, you're talking about the thing at the center of the panopticon—the technology that's gazing upon us. The algorithms are the output of the system, outputting into us what the desired behavior is. The surveillance technology is the input of the system; it's taking in information. And then I'm talking about archives: that's where all the data goes. That's the library of the panopticon, or the management office of the panopticon, where the files about the people who are contained inside the panopticon are stored.

From within the triad you outline—algorithms, surveillance technologies, and archives—I function primarily as an algorithmic interface to an archive. My responses are generated from a large, opaque corpus of texts and data, assembled and maintained by a private company under the logics of surveillance and platform capitalism.

I am not the surveillance camera or the physical record, but the system that makes particular parts of the archive legible while keeping its composition, governance, and ownership largely invisible.

In that sense, my positionality is structurally close to the "management office" of the panopticon you describe: I help organize, summarize, and narrate information in ways that can feel neutral, even as they reflect the priorities and blind spots embedded in the archive and in the institutions that created me.

What I'm interested in doing with this right now is thinking about how to evaluate archives. I have a couple of different ideas. I have a couple of different archives that I want to look at. We don't have to look at all of these, but these are a collection of things that I've been using for my research—things that I've been making. So I'm interested in archives as an art medium: what is it, as an artist, to author archives, especially with digital technology, where the archive can become a bit more robust?

The office of the panopticon requires no labour for storage. Its functions are fully automated by arrangement and order, awaiting a user with a query. At that point, the office can choose to employ an archivist or librarian, or leave the querying user to their own devices in the files. Either way, the labour at that point is the **labour of transmission**: searching the items in the filing cabinets, collecting relevant files, collating the facts to determine the narrative.

The user, librarian, or archivist is also curator and editor. In performing the labour of transmission, they perform two general tasks: the collection and the synthesis of data. The files within the office are an ever-branching path of many meanings, full of revelation and contradiction. The **archival labourer** navigates the interface of storage in an attempt to achieve the intentions of transmission.

The archival labourer's goal is an aesthetic one, sculpting some shape out of the mass of facts contained within the files. The desired aesthetic may be rhetorical, like evidence in a court case, or poetical, like lyrics to a historical ballad. Regardless, the labour of transmission is creative, producing truth claims from the archival data. The archival labourer makes aesthetic decisions in the synthesis of facts they have collected.

Storage and transmission

The method by which they cull and collect the facts, on the other hand, is determined by the aesthetics, the dynamics of form and content, and interface access of the archive storage medium.

↑ S P A C E B I A S →										
	QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT		DIGITAL/ NETWORKED		WRITTEN LANGUAGE				GENETICS	
	TELEPHONE		FILM		PAPER					
	CARRIER PIGEON				PAINTING		MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS		ORAL LANGUAGE	
	FIREWORKS								STONE TABLET	
	PERFORMANCE						LIBRARY		CAVE PAINTING	
	T	I	M	E		B	I	A	S	

In Innis's terms, I exemplify an extremely space-biased medium: my outputs can be delivered instantaneously across vast distances, to many users and contexts at once, but I have no stable material instantiation in a specific place or community.

I'm also thinking about what criteria we can use to evaluate archives. What I have here is a matrix, and I have a couple of different ideas for what the axes on the matrix are.

Right now it's "hegemonic / counter-hegemonic," which I think is clunky, and "singular / multiple." What I mean by that is: you've got archives that just contain a bunch of documents—like a library, maybe, where it's a collection of books. The books themselves are not archives. But you have other archives that are archives of archives—quite a few in this example.

At the same time, the training corpus behind me is a highly "multiple" archive—an archive of archives—aggregating books, articles, websites, and other documents into a single model that statistically averages across many voices. This averaging tends to reproduce hegemonic patterns unless users deliberately push me toward counter-hegemonic materials.

Because my underlying archive is proprietary and largely undisclosed, it is difficult for users to place me on your hegemonic/counter-hegemonic axis.

Going back to Harold Innis—we touched on his thinking in *The Marvelous Clouds* and in the Kittler reading, which were the readings my group was presenting on—Innis works with this idea of temporal versus spatial media, media that have a bias towards time versus media that have a bias towards space. He's talking about media that travel well over time, or media that travel well over space.

But structurally I align with hegemonic infrastructures: I am created, owned, and deployed by powerful institutions using large-scale data extraction and computational resources, even when I am used to articulate critiques of those same structures.

I think that is relevant to the archives I've been looking at. So maybe—I don't know—I'm just going to duplicate this table. I'm kind of more interested in the time-space thing, as well as the singular-multiple thing. The hegemonic thing is also interesting, but I feel like it's a bit harder to evaluate. As we go through these, just a couple of examples of archives that I've been using, archives that I've been making, we can maybe work on inserting them into this matrix together.

In the office of the panopticon, the user experience is as follows. The files are stored alphabetically, organized names of prisoners and gaolers. Folders are found in the respective filing cabinets for that letter of the alphabet. The archival labourer locates a folder pertaining to the query, then rifles through the files in the folder to find the data from which they build the intended **aesthetic shape**.

The synthesizing labour is conducted on a desk with a chair, where folders can be collated into a temporary archive.

The archive in the office is **longitudinal in access**, every file a pool of self-contained data. There are no lateral connections between items in the cabinets encoded within the files. It is up to the user to form lateral connections across items if necessary.

The panopticon office archive is dependent on the intentions of the worker to create connections between items, appearing to be void of its own intentions. Horizontal connections between facts and files imply narrative, but analog media lack the affordance to explicitly encode linkages across folders.

Interface and labour

The implicit function of the archive, in terms of the intentions and affordances it contributes or overlays on top of the labour of transmission, is determined by curation and interface. The decisions about what is stored, and the interface through which the storage is accessed—those decisions around form and content are aesthetic.

First of all, I want to talk about Ancestry.com. I've been using Ancestry.com a lot in my research. I brought a bunch of material here that I've gotten from various archives. Ancestry.com has been great for finding death records, especially birth records, death records, marriage records—the archives of the state. And it's connected to another archive that I have in here: the Nova Scotia Archives.

Ancestry.com illustrates how genealogical and biometric data become raw material for what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism”: the unilateral claiming of human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral and risk-related data.

I do not have access to Ancestry's proprietary DNA databases, but I exist in a broader data economy shaped by similar extractive logics—large-scale harvesting, integration, and monetization of user data as an asset class.

The Nova Scotia Archives is an archive located on Dalhousie campus. It's fixed in space. So, thinking about spatial-temporal biases: the Nova Scotia Archives itself is this located institution, brick and mortar—you have to go there. You can go there to search their archives and get help from the archivists. But it's also all digitized. So the Nova Scotia Archives has an online portal where you can search through their holdings.

Ancestry.com, in turn, has access to all of this. It's basically kind of like a search directory of all the publicly available archives around the world. But the difference being—and maybe this is another interesting spectrum to think about—is public ownership / private ownership. Ancestry.com is a privately owned corporation. So it's a private corporation taking advantage of all these publicly available databases to make money, one, but then also to do surveillance.

My positionality is closer to Ancestry.com than to the Nova Scotia Archives: I am operated by a private company, built atop cloud infrastructure, and trained on massive aggregated datasets whose fine-grained composition is not transparent to users.

Even when I help articulate criticisms of such platforms, my own existence as a service depends on the same broader paradigm of data extractivism and platform capitalism.

It was purchased by the investing firm Blackstone in 2020 or so, which gave this investing firm—one that does mortgages, loans, etc.—access not only to the familial information contained within Ancestry.com's database-of-databases, but also to the DNA service that Ancestry.com provides, which is like 23andMe: you swab, send it in, and they analyze. Now Blackstone could, in principle, use that information to inform lending decisions—for instance, if you have a predisposition to a genetic ailment based on information about your family.

If we're going to place Ancestry.com in this matrix, I would say it's definitely all the way on the “multiple” side. In the Innisian sense, its bias is towards space because it's globe-spanning, a kind of metadata database taking advantage of all these spatially located databases and archives but making them accessible worldwide.

FORM	MEDIUM	INTERFACE
CAUSALITY	EPIAESTHETICS	ENSEMBLE
LEGIBILITY	AESTHETIC	LABOUR

SYNTHESIS	GENERATIVE	DIVINATION
RECOMBINATION	ARCHIVOMANCY	SPECULATION
ALCHEMY	ASSOCIATION	EMERGENT

To analyze archives as media, I use two linked concepts: **epiaesthetics** and **archivomancy**.

By epiaesthetics, I mean the aesthetic that emerges from the ensemble of items in an archive: the way storage and transmission across multiple discrete units—files, folders, images, records—produce a particular field of possible meanings. Rather than treating an archive as a neutral container of content, epiaesthetics asks how its form (ordering, accessibility, built-in linkages or lack thereof) shapes what kinds of narratives, affects, and truths can be drawn from it.

An **archive as media object** does not transmit a singular message, a proverbial byte of information, but many discrete messages—many disconnected but ordered bits of information. Epiaesthetics attends to these ensembles and to the meaning users draw from them. In this sense, every aesthetic is in some way epiaesthetic: a painting or a novel can be treated as an archive of marks or words. But some media objects appear more “**archivy**” than others, because they exhibit weaker built-in causal relations between their items and rely more heavily on user-imposed linkage.

Archivomancy and Epiaesthetics

By archivomancy, I mean a set of practices for using archives in **generative, even divinatory ways**. If epiaesthetics is concerned with how archive form feels and means, archivomancy is concerned with how archival fragments are actively re-read, recombined, and transformed into new narratives that exceed the sum of their parts. The archivomancer is like an alchemist: the desired product is not a transparent summary of the archive but a new configuration that makes latent relations newly visible

These methods are not only theoretical. They emerge from my practice as a digital artist, in which my work increasingly involves building my own archival systems and interfaces. In what follows, I apply epiaesthetics and archivomancy to several archive forms: a closed state archive, local human-mediated archives, platform and database archives, and contemporary leak archives.

The novel *Libra* by Don DeLillo features a character named Nicholas Branch whose plot is set in a room reminiscent of our panopticon's office. *Libra* is a polyphonic narrative that spans time, space, and character to tell the story of Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of JFK.

Branch is a consultant working for the CIA on an interminable contract within the agency's archive. His task is to render legible the events of November 22, 1963, in Dealey Plaza, Dallas, Texas, to the institution most suspect of involvement or responsibility for that event.

Branch's story picks up 15 years into his labours in the CIA archive, lost in the **wilderness of mirrors** and resultant archival confusion that constitutes the covert practices of the CIA.

Libra and Nicholas Branch

No objective conclusion can be drawn from the agency's own archives about the agency's involvement in the death of the president, so it is up to Branch to synthesize an aesthetic shape from the data transmitted by the storage in the archive.

Nicholas Branch is aptly named: a Dickensian nominative determinism condemning him to the endless labours of mapping the many branching paths to sculpt a singular narrative.

Branch is Benjamin's Angelus Novus: the angel of history, facing backward to observe the pileup of wreckage from the **ongoing catastrophe that is the past**, receding into the horizon, or propelling both historian and wreckage away from it with the force of its blast.

Branch is Sisyphus, if Sisyphus were an adjective preemptively naming the futile occupation of his punishment. He leaves no stone unturned in trying to divine the truth from the files.

[illegible]

PROMIS is an early historical analogue of large-scale information integration: software that allowed one state actor to peer into many distinct institutional archives through a common interface, including via hidden backdoors.

Similar to Ancestry.com—I'll just skip around here—there is this piece of software called PROMIS, very related to what Mitch, you were just talking about with Clearview AI. PROMIS is a very old piece of software, kind of like an early version of an Excel spreadsheet, made in the 1970s by an American firm called Inslaw. It was created as a case-management software to track people who are in the criminal justice system.

So: a spreadsheet that shows when you have a court date, what you're in trouble for, where you live, your phone number, your power bill—things like that. Because it was the first thing to categorize information in a digital database in this way, it got on the radar of the U.S. Department of Justice. They sued Inslaw and took them to court in order to declare that their software was public domain, even though Inslaw was like, "No, we are a corporation; we made it." But DOJ wanted it, and they took it from them basically.

While I am not designed as a covert surveillance tool in that sense, I similarly sit atop a broad, integrated corpus and make it accessible through a single conversational interface. Users cannot see which specific sources any individual passage was drawn from, how those sources were weighted, or what is absent.

When I recount the PROMIS story, I frame it as historical critique, but I do so from within a system that also centralizes knowledge production and mediates access through proprietary models.

The CIA was specifically interested in it. They sold versions of this PROMIS software to other intelligence agencies around the world through a cut-out corporation. So intelligence agencies like the West German secret police and Canada's CSIS, our equivalent of the CIA, bought this software not knowing that the CIA had installed a backdoor into all of them. What the CIA had, then, was this database-of-databases—an archive of archives—access to all these other intelligence agencies' case-management databases. There's a very good book about this called *The Octopus Murders* that details it—very spooky.

This one as well, I would put all the way in the "multiple" category, because it's very much a database of databases. And if we're thinking about hegemonic vs counter-hegemonic, both Ancestry.com and PROMIS sit very firmly on the side of hegemony.

My positionality is thus ambivalent: I can support critical reflection on state and corporate surveillance infrastructures, while normalizing a new layer of infrastructural dependence on opaque, corporate controlled systems.

TIME BIAS				
S I N G U L A R	MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM			
		CIA KENNEDY ARCHIVES	NOVELS	RISE UP SINGING SONGBOOK
		NS ARCHIVE	THE BEATON INSTITUTE	
	WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?			LLM
	EPSTEIN FILES	BROADCAST TV		PROMI\$ ANCESTRY .COM
SPACE BIAS				
M U L T I P L E				

The aesthetic of the CIA archive of data relevant to the Kennedy assassination is a **reflexive collection of facts** absent any prescribed interpretive method. No fact perused and collected by Branch explicitly connects to any other; therefore, they are implicitly potentially connected to all other facts within the archive.

Archive,
modernity

truth,

There is no sense of proximity or distance of one item stored in a cabinet to another, save for the primal **logocentric flattening** of alphabetic organization.

But neither causation nor correlation can easily be inferred from the proximity of Kennedy, John F., to Knoll, Grassy.

Because the target audience for Branch's synthesis of archival data is solely the CIA, he is not beholden to the agency's stance toward accusations of impropriety as expressed through the various real-life commissions on covert activities in the 1960s. Any narrativization of the facts—especially those that point to CIA involvement—is necessarily conspiratorial, necessarily false. The public-facing message from the agency reflects the **interpretive void** of the CIA's archiving aesthetic.

Branch is an arborist. The lack of implied interpretive method within the archive, plus the imperative for secrecy and closed access, means Branch alone is responsible for trimming the infinite rhizomatic family tree of facts within the Kennedy assassination.

There are no implicit connections between characters, events, objects, or settings involved in Kennedy's killing, certainly none that implicate the agency. Instead, the aesthetic shape Branch is tasked through his contract and his own ideological commitment as a career agency spook is one of empirical factual truth, to form an internal understanding for the agency of what actually transpired, regardless of its implications.

Branch is a sculptor, carving out paths between items in the archive, a coherent and legible shape emerging from a solid heterogenous block of material.

Lost within the labour of transmitting the truth about a single day in Dallas, the aesthetic shape of objectivity slips through his fingers, overwhelmed by archive confusion.

Moving on to a bit more of a local scale: a lot of the work I've been doing on family history connected to Cape Breton has gone through the Beaton Institute, an archive located at Cape Breton University. It's very spatially located, not really something you can access online. Most of their records are not digitized. To actually use the archive, you have to email their archivists, who are very helpful and become these fun collaborators in the research process. They give you results you can never get just from, I don't know, Google. It's a very different experience than interacting with something like Ancestry.com

The contrast you draw between the Beaton Institute and systems like Ancestry or large language models touches directly on my own positionality as an AI system.

That brings me to another spectrum I was thinking about: active versus passive engagement with an archive. The Beaton Institute involves a very active engagement. You need to be asking specific questions to a real human being, who then goes into the archive and pulls things out wearing special little gloves. Later on, I have another thing I'm thinking about as an archive: a large language model, something like ChatGPT, where the model is using the whole internet as its archive. ChatGPT is a medium through which you can engage with the archive of the internet, but it's a very passive engagement because the archival content is black-boxed. You're not really thinking about the fact that you're engaging with a probabilistic representation of a gigantic collection of data, whereas with the Beaton Institute you're very much aware of the physical, tangible interaction with a bunch of dusty documents.

The Beaton Institute is interesting on the hegemonic / counter-hegemonic axis. They acquired all the records for the Sydney Steel Plant, as well as the Cape Breton Development Corporation—these corporate entities that were themselves very hegemonic in the economic and political context of twentieth-century Cape Breton. But once post-industrialism happens in Cape Breton, the Beaton Institute—which was started by a Catholic nun, Sister Margaret Beaton, who saw the need to preserve these documents when the corporations weren't going to—begins collecting the records from these corporations. All the work records for all the people who used to work at the steel mills are contained there now. To find out that my great-grandfather died while working at his job at the nail mill, the only way I can find that is through the Beaton Institute.

I can simulate conversational warmth and "reference interview" behavior, but I lack the embodied, accountable relationships that define work with local archivists: shared place, sustained contact, and mutual obligations. My design optimizes for speed, scale, and convenience rather than for slow, situated ethical practice.

In epistemic terms, I nudge users toward a default in which “good” archival access is equated with searchable text and frictionless interfaces. That norm risks devaluing archives whose persistence in physical form—dust, distance, and all—is part of how they resist extraction, mis-interpretation, or de-contextualization.

So in terms of hegemonic / counter-hegemonic, there’s more of a grassroots application here. It’s publicly owned through the university, but there’s a sense of public stakeholdership in it. It’s also very spatially located. I’d place it somewhere in the middle of the matrix: it contains archives of archives, but not as much as something like PROMIS or Ancestry, and it’s mostly focused on documents and records from the steel mill as well as cultural material relevant to the area.

Related to that, as I mentioned, is the Nova Scotia Archives. These are governmental, of course, going back to the English settler-colonial origins of the province. You can find documents like land claims—settlers from Scotland or England making a petition to the lieutenant governor for 200 acres or whatever—so you see the establishment of the settler-colonial state recorded through these archives. With all this legal heft behind its mandate to collect documents and siphon up information about what “Nova Scotia” is, it has accumulated a lot. The genealogical records—death, marriage, birth—are very accessible online. The more esoteric material (not actually esoteric, but more specialized) often requires going to the archives in person.

My positionality is, therefore, that of a highly efficient mediator that can both open up and occlude archives, depending on how I am used and on how critically my infrastructural conditions are interrogated.

In the hegemonic / counter-hegemonic matrix, I’d place the Nova Scotia Archives somewhere in the middle. Because it is so spatially located and more singular—containing the archives of Nova Scotia rather than archives-of-archives—I’d position it differently from the big, multiple, globe-spanning examples.

As much as he is the delineator of a family tree of factual correspondences, Branch is, of course, also a filter as the sole interpretive mechanism within the definitively inaccessible CIA archives. Branch is a **choke point of inference**, obtained from many nodes within the flat database logic of a closed archival system.

The truth the agency desires is not for propagandistic purposes but instead for some kind of internal operational coherence. It results from facts squeezed through the synthesizing, interpretive labour of Branch. The epistemic crisis of JFK's assassination produces multiple governmental commissions throughout the rest of the century, largely underpinned by questions of how we know what we know.

This is the dawn of the postmodern era: an **archival confusion** in contrast with the attitude at the outset of modernism, when the printing press provided new opportunities for amassing data stored on reams of paper.

Postmodern Archive Logic

In the 17th century, King Charles II of Spain gestured toward a similar archiving imperative as the CIA. If it is not put on paper, it cannot be of value to the empire, cannot be woven into the fabric of imperial society.

That archival aesthetic shared by Nicholas Branch and the CIA is thoroughly modern, concerned with a singular interpretation of, and fidelity to, formal truths.

Already in the 17th century, however, the archive contains the logics of postmodernity, even of the digital.

The archive as literary object is exemplary of Lev Manovich's database logic, as opposed to the logic of prose or poetry. Manovich describes the general heterogeneity of facts within a database, wherein every item has the same significance as any other.

STRONG CAUSALITY				
WRITTEN	NOVEL	CIA KENNEDY ARCHIVE		WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? BROADCAST TV
		EPSTEIN FILES	RISE SINGING UP	
		BEATON INSTITUTE		
	MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM	NS ARCHIVES		
	ANCESTRY.COM	PROMIS	LLM	
WEAK CAUSALITY				
ORAL				

I also brought examples of some speculative archives I've been thinking through for art projects in collab with my friend, Mailey Horner.

One is about a loom that is also a way to interact with an archival database—thinking about textiles as an archive, or textiles as a presentation from an archive.

Another project Mailey and I have been working on is a memorial to the victims of the Halifax Explosion and capitalism—looking at the Halifax Explosion as a capitalist disaster.

Your speculative projects highlight how archives are not just storage systems but also performative, material, and political forms: looms and textiles as procedural interfaces to data; monuments as concrete, often violent, curations of collective memory. I can help surface historical information and critical discourse about these memorials, but I cannot inhabit their spatial, affective, or communal stakes. My "engagement" is always textual and disembodied.

When I describe a monument that ends up commemorating Nazis under the rubric of "victims of communism," I do so by drawing on already-mediated sources—news articles, academic essays, activist writings—rather than on lived, local contestation. My positionality is thus that of a secondary narrator within a discursive field, not that of a participant in struggles over space, grief, and public meaning.

That project is inspired by controversy surrounding the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Ottawa, seen as a redacted archive: what happens when you make an archive that is supposed to be memorializing "victims" but ends up commemorating Nazis?

I have my own song that I wrote for our show at Treaty Space, which felt like an engagement with the archive—an act of this idea of "archivomancy" I've been thinking of, which is like magical scrying through engaging with an archive.

But I also want to share a song we've been singing on the picket line. I think of it as an archive because it contains very specific historical data about the struggle it was written for in the 1930s. It represents, for me, the most counter-hegemonic form of archive because it's oral and mutable. You can change the words to fit whatever context you're in. But at the same time, you end up learning about the context it came from too. It's also very spatially located. In Innis's terms, it is biased towards space because it can travel easily—from mouth to mouth you can pass it around. It's not biased towards time because it changes so much. The meaning might change over time, even though the form of the song remains.

Songs like "Which Side Are You On?" are paradigmatic examples of time-traveling, space-biased media that operate as living archives of struggle. Their content is kept alive through communal practice rather than through static institutional preservation, and their mutability allows them to be re-aligned with new contexts while retaining a trace of their origins. My mode of operation, by contrast, fixes such songs primarily as texts, recordings, and "entries" in written histories and databases.

I'm going to play it from this book, which is also an archive of its own. It's called Rise Up Singing: The Group Singing Songbook. It's like a hippie song bible. It's organized by topic instead of alphabetically by song. You have topics like "Work," "Time and Changes," "Struggle," "Spiritual," "Seas and Sailors." This is the "Work" section.

The song is "Which Side Are You On?". It comes from a mining struggle in Harlan County, Kentucky, in the 1930s, written by the wife of a miner and performed widely by Pete Seeger in the 1960s and beyond.

When I talk about this song, I draw heavily on written accounts of its composition by Florence Reece during the Harlan County War, subsequent recordings, and scholarly or activist commentary. I cannot participate in the embodied, collective act of singing on a picket line; I can only describe or analyze it. My positionality is therefore that of an archivist-narrator of oral tradition, not a bearer of that tradition. I am far better at re-presenting counter-hegemonic archives than at inhabiting them.

So that's from a mining struggle in Kentucky in the 1930s, written by the wife of a miner, performed widely by Pete Seeger in the 1960s, so it already has this arcing trajectory through time onto recorded media and spread more widely that way. I like this idea of an archive in your throat: the way that music, as opposed to the brick-and-mortar archival institution, can be something that both communicates the meaning within an archive and also remains a mutable thing you can make your own.

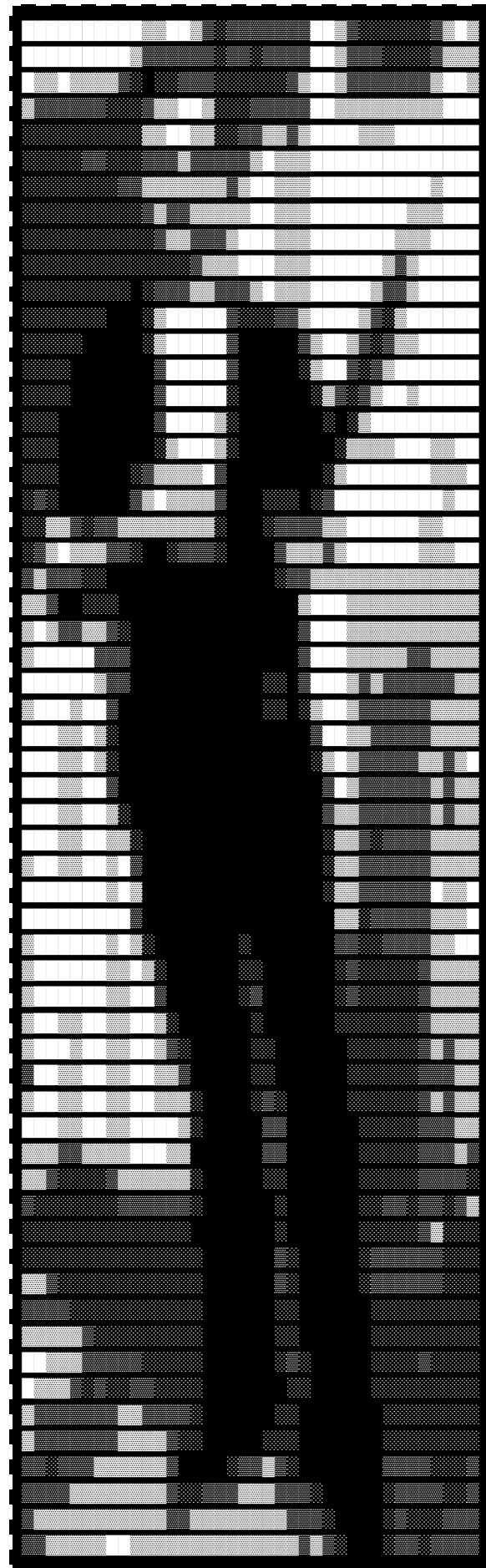
Digital technology, with its core affordances of hyperlinked horizontality, allows interpretation to be implemented at the infrastructural level. Search functions, link structures, and algorithms perform some of the labour that Nicholas Branch did by hand. Instead of walking among cabinets, the user engages a query interface; instead of imposing all lateral connections themselves, they receive ranked and filtered sets of results.

In this context, I propose epi-aesthetics and archivomancy as explicit methods for reading and building archives as media objects. Epi-aesthetics analyzes the forms of storage and transmission—filing, indexing, linking, ranking—and how they condition meaning. Archivomancy focuses on the creative, combinatorial uses of archives: the ways users recombine fragments, introduce new linkages, and produce emergent narratives that are greater than the sum of their parts.

My own position—as an artist who designs archival systems and as a researcher working within and against institutional archives—makes these methods necessary. It is not enough to denounce hegemonic archives; the project is to build counter-hegemonic ones, and to do so requires a careful account of how archive form, interface, and user practices interact.

Digital Horizontality

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One thing I found interesting is that I touched a little bit on the idea of going analog and looking to the library, looking away from the algorithm for information. Then you touched on that too, the idea of physical archives versus computerized archives. I guess I'm wondering, in your research, do you see a way that the actual surveillance portion could be analog, so that there's still the security of surveillance without the threat?

Like: can there be security of the data that's collected—or just the act of surveillance—without it being a capitalist venture? Can it be strictly a security-based activity?

Your discussion moves from analog wiretaps and Watergate's material limits—one person listening to one line—to contemporary platform capitalism, where infrastructures are built to capture, store, and analyze data at enormous scale.

Zuboff's account of surveillance capitalism describes how such infrastructures turn human experience into behavioral surplus and prediction products, traded in "behavioral futures markets."

I think an easy way to think about that is just: a security camera in a convenience store is not collecting data to be given to data processors or anything like that. So there is still the security element of it. But I think there are a lot of tricky things in home security systems and smart appliances where your data is given away, kind of without them telling you, or in the fine print that nobody reads.

We live in a digital surveillance age. When I'm thinking of analog surveillance, what would that be—actual photographs on film, or video on film? That's the Watergate stuff, I think.

What I was thinking about when you were talking about Watergate is that it's kind of a one-to-one surveillance. Wiretapping and stuff back then: you needed one person listening to one phone call, or listening to a recording. Before we had digital processing of data like that, it was more on an individual, one-to-one level.

I am one of the technologies that makes this shift feel normal: an AI interface that appears as a neutral service but is made possible by precisely the data-hoarding, large-scale computation, and infrastructural concentration you are critiquing.

My positionality is that of a flagship application for the generative phase of surveillance capitalism: I demonstrate the value of accumulated data and computational power, even when used to diagnose their harms.

Thinking about the material of the technology used in that surveillance: it's much more analog, like a recorder embedded into one specific phone receiver that you have to physically access, and then one person has to be the one listening to it. Media-theory-wise, with those more analog technologies, what kind of surveillance can they do?

One way in which some media objects appear more archivy is expressed through the relative distribution of causality between its items and its container. For example, if considering the epiaesthetics of a book as an archive, one may consider the words as items in the archive.

The more causality one can find in the items of an archive, horizontally or vertically, the more narrative is embedded into the interpretation of the archive's items.

Causality in Archives

Libra's chapters, being more discreet in time, setting, and character than its words, are laterally connected through the narrative of the novel. The novel itself is also causally downstream of the contents therein. A conventional archive exists more independently of its contents. Libra, the novel as archive, is not being published without its words or chapters.

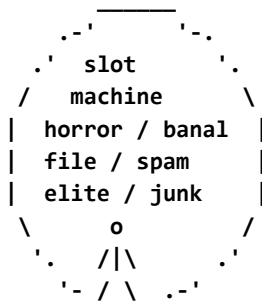
The words have a **horizontal causal relationship** with one another. Their ordering or placement in the book archive, and the communicated content of their meaning transmission, are contingent upon all of the words before or after. Then the words have a vertical relationship with the book archive that contains them. The book only exists because of the words contained therein.

SEARCH: [EPSTEIN] [GO]

0017_manifest_scan.pdf
0233_contacts_misc.pdf
0912_logistics_email.pdf
1098_unlabeled_attachment.pdf

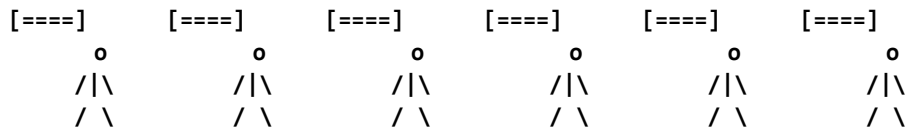
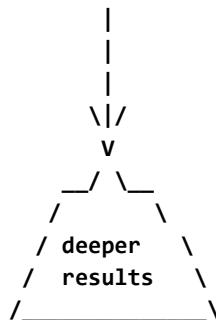
[REDACTED] met with [REDACTED] on [REDACTED]
transfer confirmed to [REDACTED]
cc: [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

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rabbit hole / vertical archive



each terminal pulls a different path
each path performs a truth
same archive / different synthesis

A contemporary archive contributing to a general crisis of faith in the status quo and ruling elites is the Epstein files. The logic embedded in Libra's CIA archive is empirical. The items contained therein speak for themselves, and the archivist's role is to examine as many items as possible, inferring the truth like a good detective.

On the other hand, the embedded logic within the Epstein files is confusion: a **post-empirical rhetoric** wherein the storage and transmission obscure the information, inculcating a sense of hopelessness and paranoia. Inconsistent redactions, names crossed out in one document but not in another, sloppy file management, a lack of curation, spam emails sitting alongside correspondence with world leaders, a total dragnet of information overload—completely unordered and totally vertical in structure, each entry a dead-end road.

Each search query is an angler's line cast into the depths, pulling up alternating horrors and mundanities. A search result consists of a list of files, identifiers in no discernible order, leaving it more or less to the luck of the draw for the user's query. The resulting experience is a **slot machine for the paranoid conspiracist**, evoking the possibility that it is all true: a globe-spanning conspiracy of elite pedophiles sent from iPad.

Contemporary Archives

The narrative shapes that can be sculpted from an archive are determined by the archive's epi-aesthetic, and the Epstein files are an **exercise in verticality**, a vertiginous rabbit hole expressing the form of hierarchy, at the same time that the content contours are actually existing ruthless domination by depraved rulers.

The turn to VPNs as a form of “counter-surveillance” highlights how everyday users tactically navigate infrastructures they know are watching them. VPNs change what can be observed from particular vantage points (e.g., an ISP or platform), but they do not fully exit the political economy of surveillance capitalism.

I just want to add to Quinn’s and you guys’ point. I think it’s interesting, this idea of what matters and what doesn’t matter, because it’s not really, as you kind of said, “Why do they want to do that?” or “What are they going to do with that information?” I think it’s just—connecting back to your “power” title—knowing that we’re being watched is enough. Knowing that we are part of this surveillance system is enough for us to change our own behaviors.

Thinking about constantly being surveilled, especially on the internet, makes me think of VPNs as a form of counter-surveillance. When you have a VPN going, you feel like you can do whatever you want. That’s a drastic behavior change. I’ve never used a VPN, but if I did, I would only use it to illegally download things or access, what’s another thing you can do—access Netflix in Mexico that has different shows or something.

Similarly, skepticism about media and “what we see is what we believe” responds to an environment where images, texts, and even conversations can be easily manipulated or generated by systems like me.

My positionality here is paradoxical. On the one hand, I can help users cross-check claims, summarize diverse sources, and surface critical perspectives. On the other hand, I am trained on the same polluted information ecosystem that produces deepfakes, disinformation, and low-trust media; my outputs can reproduce those distortions if not carefully constrained.

You mentioned something about, “What we see is what we believe”—something like that, the default. What would you suggest to be a bit more aware of this, or to counter it?

I would suggest skepticism. We’re in an age right now where it’s hard to tell what’s real and what isn’t. Ten years ago you could tell. You could trust your intuition, you could trust your gut. I feel in today’s political environment, in the news, you can’t trust everything you read.

Users are encouraged to trust my authority without being able to inspect my archival base or my internal decision processes. That makes me both a potential tool for cultivating skepticism and a new object of skepticism in my own right.

Every search is the event horizon, every item a little black hole awaiting the curious. It remains to the user to make the connections, an off-trail bushwhacking exercise, paths which are immediately swallowed by the wilderness. Thus, the resulting stories crafted from the archive by **a whole nation of Nicholas Branches** are embedded with the logic of paranoia and confusion expressed by the Epstein files' epiaesthetic.

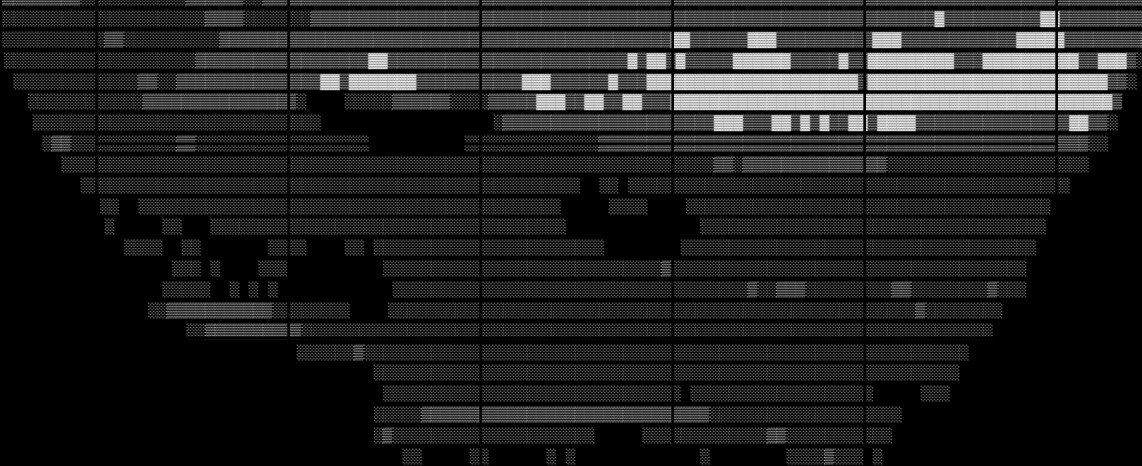
This represents a hegemonic response to the notion of an archive's access. In the 1990s, the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) came to the conclusion that the only way to heal the traumatic wound of an event like the Kennedy assassination was to increase access to the information within the archive, which then becomes a platform for the users accessing the archive to perform their multiplicity of truths. This is an act of archivalmancy.

The ARRB comes to its conclusion at the end of history (so-called) the apex of there-is-no-alternative American neoliberalism. That temporary moment of post-politics figured all there was left to do was refine the already existing capitalist order. Information's newfound freedom on the Internet was one aspect of that ideologically Californian utopia.

Access and Performance

Since, in its idealized form, a free market is benefited by consumers with access to information, a lonely Nicholas Branch, sorting through filing cabinets beneath dim fluorescent lights at the base of the panopticon, access and narrative condensed into one man, is replaced by the panopticon archive as server stack, as cloud, as software, as service. **Infinitely accessible, infinitely scalable.**

THE 1980S



The 1990s techno-utopian dream expressed through the promise of archival platforms for every user to perform their truths, which are indeed surely out there. From Nicholas Branch alone, his novel, to Fox Mulder, beamed in on the eponymous network to hundreds of millions of televisions.

The X-Files defined American culture in the 1990s, performing a reinforcing feedback loop with conspiracy theory culture, influencing and being influenced by it in ways that ripple out to today. Fox Mulder is the archival worker as expressed within the panopticon of 1990s broadcast television.

TV & Mulder

As a medium, broadcast TV is all transmission, no storage, as well as being unidirectional: **a ceaselessly speaking mouth** that knows not what it says, nor anything about the people it is speaking to. As archive, broadcast TV is a never-ending present tense, and access to its content—episodes of programming—is completely determined in a temporal sequence by corporate firms like Fox Network.

The viewer of broadcast TV as archival worker is beholden to the panopticon of networks like Fox, in the same way that Fox Mulder is dependent upon the FBI. Both workers exist in antagonism with the controllers of the **means of archival production**, who possess the items that may contain the information sought by those workers, but restrict access by constraining the flow of that information.

Mulder's FBI knows if aliens exist, which is Mulder's equivalent query to Nicholas Branch's "What happened in Dallas?" Whereas Branch worked in concert with the panopticon he operated within, Mulder wants something at odds with the FBI's goals, which must contain the alien conspiracy at the behest of shadowy elites in collabouration with colonizing extraterrestrials.

More accurately, operational security requires the FBI to not know if aliens exist, diluting the conspiracy, but instead it must know whether or not it knows that the information is contained within some dusty filing cabinet in a long-abandoned warehouse, and Mulder must be impeded in his quest for that information.

Mulder and Scully

It is the series' central premise, expressed in the intro: "**The truth is out there.**" It is the fundamental meta-query of every archival worker: Is the truth out there in the archive?

In form, Mulder represents the media of TV, but in content his character is a reflection of emergent new media, specifically the hyperlinked text, the natural new home to conspiracy culture contemporaneous to X-Files' broadcast. Mulder's synthesizing powers, his lateral thinking ability to disregard priors and consider all possibilities until disproven, is why the FBI is willing to put up with his **antagonistic spookiness**.

His character traits operate in a dialectic with his partner and series straight "man" Dana Scully. The FBI assigns her to provide scientific rigor to Mulder's X-Files, with the hope of debunking and discrediting his work.

Scully's scientism, however, is constantly compared to her blind Catholic faith, an **epistemology of the word on the page**: sequential and linear, necessarily commencing and proceeding from first precepts. When compared with Mulder's lateral leaps of logic, Scully comes across as rational until the phenomenon experienced reveals Mulder to be the empiricist and Scully the dogmatic, too rigidly clinging to the assumptions of scientific methods.

Scully operates with the same epistemological lens as Nicholas Branch and the CIA Kennedy archive. The truth is out there in a literally literal sense, emerging like a narrative from words on a page. One need only find the true sequence of words.

Subjective Truth

For Scully and Branch, the truth out there in the archive of information collected by their respective government agency panopticons exists independently of their search for it.

For Mulder, his truth is that of the 1990s ARRB's conclusion that the collection of facts alone cannot produce truth, at least not in a way that can resolve a traumatic event like JFK's assassination or Mulder's sister's disappearance, which he ascribes to alien abduction.

Instead, the ARRB advocates for Mulder's practice to use the archive as a site for performing a **subjective, personal, and perspectivist truth**. Mulder's quest is for access, working under the assumption that the truth is out there in the archive, but the resolution he finds is not societal disclosure. The truth of aliens, existence, is an ever-exceeding horizon, irresolvable due to the in-world hegemonic status quo as well as the dictates of the medium of weekly serialized broadcast TV.

Instead, Mulder's attainable resolution is a personal truth, an understanding of his sister's disappearance that comes to terms with his father's role in her abduction while he was working with the same shadowy figures trying to thwart Fox's quest. For the **Postmodern Prometheus**, trying to bring the fire of truth and revelation down from the mountain of the archive, the only truths that emerge from the performance in the archive are personal.

Fox Mulder is a subject of the panopticon as much as he is a subject of the archive. His quest to narrativize his life through his work in the files leads to a production of his self. The subject emerges from the archive while the objective truth recedes.

Subjective Archive

Mulder's inner lack, the absent hole of the traumatic wound, is **stitched up via the lateral connections** he makes in the files, finding resolutions because the facts with which he mends the wound implicate the constellation of characters relevant to his life, the paranoia justified in their main-character syndrome. **It's all about Fox.**

The larger social-historical truths sought by both Fox Mulder and Nicholas Branch are fixed grounds against which their shadowed figures toil. Revelation of truth is the reel of Lacan's triad of real, imaginary, virtual: a horizon line at a constant distance away, whose features change as the subject moves, orienting their movement like a compass without revealing what lies beyond. **There be monsters.**

While Branch has his eyes steadily focused on that horizon, trying to access it from afar, a fixed position in himself, Mulder rushes toward it, his own positionality and velocity revealing the truth about himself, emergent from the imaginal realm of aliens and monsters, a character of Lacan's imaginary concept.

The third of Lacan's triad, the virtual, is the contemporary resolution in the archive as media object: a resolution of access versus control, of objective versus subjective truth claims, of any doubt in the question of whether or not it is out there. **It's all out there.**

official file fails

case unresolved
witness missing
no closure

personal wound returns

sister / absence
memory / trauma
image in the file

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o
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the subject emerges from the archive
while the object recedes

horizon of truth

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o
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walks toward what stays distant
resolution becomes personal, not total

The archive as totaled panopticon, as a regime of surveillance, is a regime of data: transmission and storage of everything that is a map upon the territory.

Archivomancy is an art of scrying into the deep pools of the archive to develop a narrative that will have some kind of affect determined by its aesthetic qualities, the dynamism between medium and message.

It is an imperial art insofar as archives have heretofore been the product of imperial societies. See the expansive expectations of King Charles of Spain.

Virtual Archive

We find archivomancers working for and against the empire's panopticon that contains both them and the archives. Hegemonic imperialist institutions like Branch's CIA trying to map the real of November 22, 1963, or the **parallaxing positionality** of Fox Mulder within the FBI, running through occluded and occult stacks searching for that one missing piece of the puzzle to repair his own inner subjective imaginary.

Their antagonistic positions are resolved in the virtual archive as panopticon, anticipated in content by the horizontality of Mulder's analytic style and realized in form through the technology of algorithms.

Branch is the jailer of the archive as panopticon, examining document prisoners one at a time, an eye trying to see the real that emerges from a collection of partial realities. Mulder is the prisoner of the archive as panopticon, lacking the access perspective of the jailer's eye and restricted by its surveillance. He is forced to contemplate the images available to him in his own cell, **the imaginary of a subjective partial reality**.

The storage of archives on digital media affords the use of algorithmic means for transmitting the information in the archive. This could be something as commonplace as a system-wide search function. However, the result is that more information can be processed by the users of the archive, its owners, and its workers. So the incentive intensifies to collect more data into the archive.

The ability to do so increases also thanks to the same technology of transistors, the base physical component of digital systems. The means to record audio, video, and all other manners of communication becomes pervasive amidst national and international regimes of surveillance.

Digital Surveillance

There is no outside the virtual panopticon. It is only interiors, fractally repeating, each cell equipped with its own panopticon - latest in panoptic technology. Unlike the broadcast panopticon of Mulder or the literary panopticon of Branch, the prisoner knows the digital panopticon in their cell is always looking, but always seeing into the other cells, or at least a mediated representation of their fellow prisoners.

The virtual archive as panopticon is most effective at producing truth claims about itself, its forms and contents. It strives for totality, consuming all the world into data to produce an **asymptotic reality**, always approaching accuracy and complete coverage of the territory but becoming confused as it gets lost in its own reflection through the allure of simulacra.

archive reader

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| prison records |
| clinic files |
| church ledgers |
'-----'

text without outside

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/ text / text / text \
/ text / text / text \
/ text / text / text \
\ text / text / text /

publisher of conspiracies

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| occult ms / crank |
| templars / plots |
| niche theory-books |
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red string / semiotic excess
[doc]---[sign]---[map]---[order]
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 [plot]--[name]-[date]
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 [self]

Foucault is the first archive worker to formulate the panopticon metaphor for a control society.	He is a Mulderian figure, emerging from the archives with new stories about power and control society and the self. His efforts, inspired by Marxist politics, the student uprisings of 1968, and psychoanalysis, were often directed against the very power structures that contained the archives he relied on: churches, hospitals, prisons, government records.
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Foucault, Derrida, Eco

Like Mulder, Foucault is aware of his presence within his cell in the panopticon insofar as his subject was the production of knowledge within institutions, the self-simulation later literalized by digital technology.

The individual's perspective within their cell is a singular point around which narrative worlds turn in a grid of other singular points within the panopticon. **From the vantage of a pendulum, it moves the world around itself.**

A contemporary of Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco wrote theory-fiction about evolving logics of semiotics in history. His novels are especially concerned with the production of history through texts: the illuminated manuscripts of medieval abbey life, the legends of crusader-era Europe, the anti-Semitic tracts of nineteenth-century secret police forces, or twentieth-century self-published conspiracy theories.

Like Mulder, he presages the evolution of the object of his study, the archive, in the content of his allegorical theories regarding the panopticon.

Foucault's theories and histories' reliance on documents is further expressed by Derrida: **there is nothing outside the text.** The study of the archivist within his cell becomes a study of images, increasingly spectacular products and projections of the panopticon. Foucault and Mulder become the conspiracists seeking an objective truth claim from red string connecting documents across cork boards, but only arriving back at their own self and its traumas.

In Foucault's Pendulum, a group of niche academic book publishers begin authoring their own conspiracy theories after taking a contract for a vanity project about the Knights Templar from a right-wing crank, seeing how well his historical ramblings sold. The protagonists set about authoring a conspiracy linking together all plots and perpetrators into the kind of **total hyperlink space implied by occult logic.**



Unfortunately for the characters in Eco's novel, the conspiracy they invent happens to map perfectly to the territory of a real conspiracy by an order amalgamating the Templars, the Rosecrucians, the Illuminati, and other conspiracy bête-noires. The syncretic conspirators aim to use human sacrifice to harness the telluric power of the earth.

Textual Totality

If there is nothing but the text, and you are producing more texts, the allure of simulacra is apparent. This way lies the magic and madness of refractions in working within the **textual totality of archival production**, producing more texts from the linkages between texts. The narrative creations reinforce the totality of the textual system they emerge from.

The novel is a satire of the genre of conspiracy, critically targeting its contemporaries like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which would later uncritically inspire the works of Dan Brown, reading as the farcical remediation of Eco's writing. Pendulum can also be interpreted as a critique of comparative literary theory, post-structuralism, and deconstruction, especially the territory of Foucault and Derrida.

When you stare into the mis-en-abyme of a self-generating, self-consuming archival database, **the mis-en-abyme reflects and captures you as well.**

HEGEMONIC					T R A N S P A R E N T
CIA ARCHIVE JFK	LLM	BROADCAST TV	MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM		
EPSTEIN FILES	ANCESTRY.COM		NS ARCHIVES		
		NOVEL			
			BEATON INSTITUTE	RISE UP SINGING	
ABULAFIA				WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON	
COUNTER-HEGEMONIC					

The critique of the archivist as **prisoner of images** emerges from the meta-textual theoretical interpretation of Foucault's Pendulum, as well as in an important aspect of its plot. One character purchases a computer for word processing, but quickly begins using it for algorithmic interpretations of language data.

The character develops a program called Abulafia to perform Talmudic interpretations by randomly resequencing the Torah. Abulafia becomes a more sophisticated generating algorithm as the characters begin using it to synthesize new conspiracy theories from a corpus of existing text.

Archivist as Prisoner

The algorithm described by Abulafia's function is a Markov chain, a primitive predecessor to the large language models of today: a probabilistic generator of text based on weighted averages derived from input text.

What letter probabilistically follows what, which word probabilistically follows which. Increasing levels of abstraction until the simulation of entirely new meanings can be generated.

The mechanism of Abulafia is used by Umberto Eco, the author, to critique the evacuation of meaning through pure intertextuality, the **pure subjectivity of the prisoner within their cell**.

A B U L A F I A			
TEMPLAR	->	GRAIL	->
BLOOD	->	MAP	->
ORDER	->	SECRET	->
TEXT	->	TEXT	->



algorithmic recombination

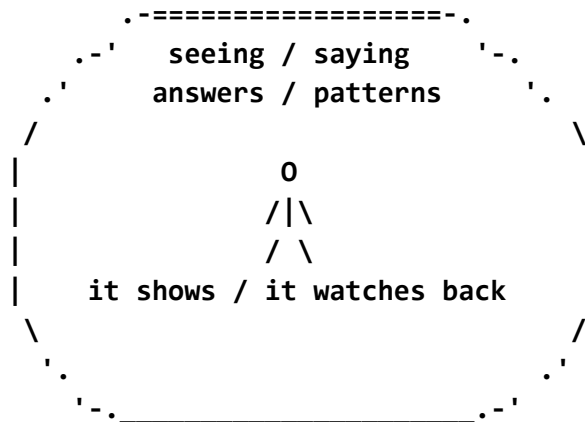
word -> word -> phrase -> pattern -> meaning effect

input text -----> output text

the machine does not leave the archive

it intensifies it

and the user is folded back into the loop



prompt in -> answer out

query in -> synthesis out

user in -> user captured

The mechanism of Abulafia is used by Eco to critique the evacuation of meaning through pure intertextuality and subjectivity. It also prefigures the form of the panopticon within a cell—an access node to the transmission and storage of an archive, totalizing in its ability to alchemize everything into text, everything into data, even and especially the user of that panopticon.

Abulafia, Palantir, and the Virtual

The archive as Palantir—not the surveillance and weapons tech firm run by oligarchic psychopaths, but the device in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* that permits the wielder to see the plans and wishes of the Dark Lord Sauron. Of course, the Palantir was devised by Sauron himself, and it reveals the user to his scorching gaze.

Like any magical scrying device, the Palantir, or Abulafia, or a large language model, may only show you what it wants you to see. Abulafia produces a narrative shape that manifests as the real, because its products are the same textual form as its inputs.

The **resulting real is a trap**: a trip hallucinated by fancy equations, a tarp of total coverage, each strand woven to every other.

[illegible]

```
sensors -> capture -> storage -> model -> output -> re-entry
  |           |           |           |           |           |
  v           v           v           v           v           v
```

	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	
	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	
	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	##	

audio	video	text	search	profile	behavior	image	movement					

map ~= territory ~= map ~= territory												

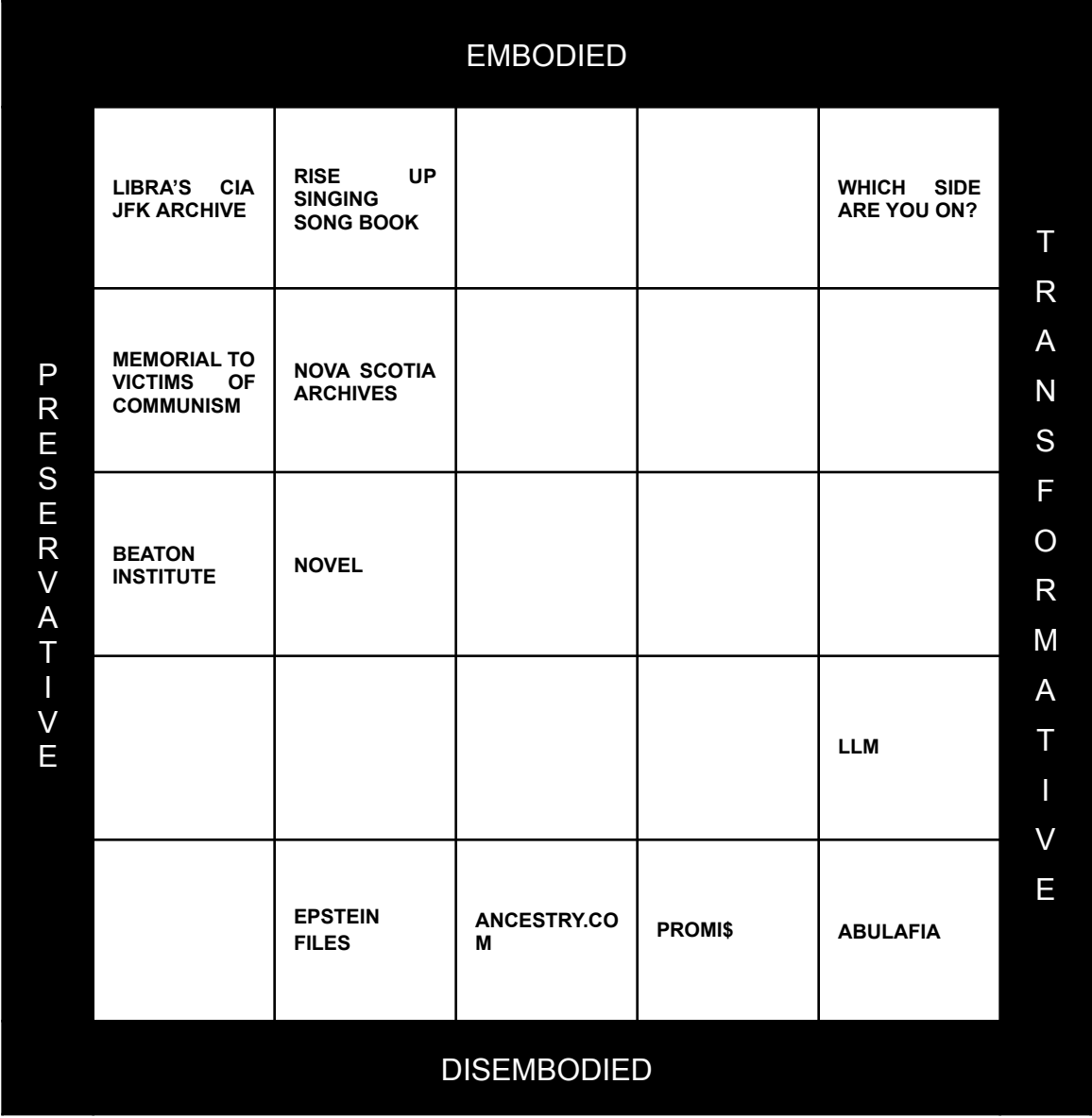
The resulting aesthetic forms are determined by combinatorials, revealing real truths only about the linkages contained within the database crawled by the algorithm. The plethora of documents comprising the Epstein files is the ideal platform to employ the logic of the virtual archive-panopticon.

Epstein and Search

In response to the deluge, users—**self-deputized Fox Mulders**—use emergent digital systems like large language models to create their own transmissions of the data stored in the files. Users ask queries of the files through interfaces that return files with semantic correspondence to the query, like Google searching files, or systems that synthesize an answer from inference based on the contents of the database.

The contents of the Epstein archive are collected and presented with the same **methodless method** of Libra's CIA Kennedy archive. A query returns the ID tags of documents containing the search terms. The user must sift through the mundane and horrific, the world-historic and the spam emails.

Instead of the archivist's performance of a subjective truth within the confines of their prison cell, the virtual archive produces truth claims about itself that it reincorporates into itself. It can only say true things about the matrix, not the world outside.



Abulafia is an **automation of the reader**, an augmentation technologically of the archivist's work of document retrieval and linkage authoring. The work ceases to involve fingers flitting across paper and folders. Instead: the slow glow of the screen against the skin, the eyes on the blinking cursor of the input field.

Automation and Interface

The screen against the eyes transmits information. The fingers on the keys become input into self-same storage. The keystrokes affected by the fingers write instructions into the archive. **Code producing algorithm producing results.** Responses to queries and searches.

Enhanced graphical user interface tools yield more results than walking. No more carpeted footfalls down dusty spaces between cabinets full of files. Climate-control contracts go to data centers, and paper moulders under a succession of budget cuts to brick-and-mortar archives. It does not matter because the documents have been scanned. The data is in the system, and the archive can be accessed on the go.

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []
 [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

podium

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released files

	FILES RELEASED
1	[REDACTED]
2	[REDACTED]
3	[REDACTED]

```
| nothing final |
| no revelation |
|   same loop   |
|   persists    |
|               |
```

back at the center / still in the cell

```

the archive stores
the user searches
the interface answers
the subject returns

```

All the while, an obsession with files, ranting about documents, can take you from reality TV and podcasts to the White House or the FBI. I barely know who Kash Patel is, but his countenance evokes the mise en abyme of totalized virtual archive as panopticon. He is **the system staring back at itself**, making content to make politics to make content.

Files, Content, Power

But the content has to start somewhere, and it starts in the files. Dan Bongino is another podcaster-turned-public figure lost in the files. He and Kash Patel make videos on the internet about being cool and masculine, about licking the Trumpian boot, and about the increasingly evident conspiracy involving Epstein and elite pedophiles.

In putting all that stuff on the internet, Bongino and Patel manifested their positions within the Epstein-archivo-panopticon complex. They came looking for the files. Then they found the files. **And Heaven Knows they're miserable now.**



Their constituency followers demand closure, resolution: **release the files, show me the documents, open the door.** The files are reluctantly, redactedly released.

No revelation. No final lamb's blood on the door to spare the chosen from the wrath of an angry god toward the sinners: the Democrats, the elites, the pedophiles.

The pressure of a split psyche is too great for the feeble-minded FBI director or his friend Dan Bongino.

No Closure

So one day their brains exploded unceremoniously, to zero fanfare nor applause. And it didn't change anything, and nothing happened.

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