# A Living, Breathing Revolution: How Libraries Can Use "Living Archives" to Support, Engage, and Document Social Movements

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## Abstract:

*Where does and should the future of libraries lie?  What were once concrete, brick, and glass structures have since become a third place where community, art, and culture reside.  What is next? The #searchunderoccupy exhibit in the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center in New York City is a "living archive" that visually displays the creative and critical responses of the New School's student community to the Occupy Wall Street movement.  It is composed not only of elements such as video, photographs, audio and performance projects, but also text-based works such as live feed tag clouds, posters, and blogs.  By their very nature, libraries are poised to become forces for social change and using this exhibit as an example, libraries themselves can show the life of their communities by putting their responses on display to support their involvement in social movements, engage others, and document for the future.  There are many iterations of the living archive in libraries such as the digitization of audio-visual materials or allowing people to share their memories, knowledge, photos and opinions through a virtual space.  The closest to the #searchunderoccupy exhibit example is capturing the activities and conversations of designer William McDonough for the Stanford University libraries. Unlike these projects, the New School's method allows for a greater range of self-expression through visual mediums and accounts for the technology of today.  Social media is what has helped spread the social movements of the current generation and with its ever changing nature, this version of a living archive presents a future library full of infinite possibilities.*

**Keywords:** Libraries, Living archive, Occupy Wall Street, Social movements

**Introduction**

> "It is of course generally conceded that the day has gone by when the library can be a store-house of the classics and of standard literature and nothing more...We must remember that the world, politically, economically and socially is traveling at a tremendous rate...With the world of which it is a part moving at this gait, the library must move with it or drop behind." (Imhoff, 1911, p. 2)

Published in a bibliography entitled "The Library and Social Movements: A List of Material Obtainable Free or at Small Expense", these poignant words are the foundation of an opportunity for libraries, in the face of current global social movements to support, engage, and document the social movements occurring in their own communities. This case study focuses on the format of the "living archive". It also uses the #searchunderoccupy exhibit, organized by the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center and The New School in New York City, as a model that introduces an array of visual elements, social media, and a virtual archive into its structure to document social movements. To make a case for how libraries may use this model, a discussion follows of why libraries should be concerned with this topic, previous iterations of living archives, and a description of the model that made the #searchunderoccupy exhibit so successful.

**Why should libraries be involved?**

In 'supporting' social movements, libraries will be continuing their tradition of facilitating the social discourse of the community. As a representative for all types of libraries on a national scale, the American Library Association (ALA) provides evidence of the libraries' interest in being supporters of and contributors to the social rights activities of their communities. The ALA created its Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) in 1970 with the purpose of "making libraries more responsive to current social needs" (Rubin, 2010, p. 66). During the turbulent times of the Civil Rights Movement, the ALA resigned its opinion about providing library services to African Americans (Rubin, 2010, p. 66). It felt that because it was a representative of libraries and librarians across the nation, expressing an opinion on the issue would thereby pass judgment on its members (Rubin, 2010, p. 66). In the 1960s, when the movement had reached a precipice, it became impossible for the ALA to retain its previous position and it took a stand by advocating free library service to all (Rubin, 2010, p. 66). Since its creation, the SRRT as well as the ALA have advocated for the rights of numerous groups and round tables were created to continually address them.

The ALA's 2015 strategic plan supports the transformation of libraries to incorporate the proposed living archive model. The plan's third goal area is transforming libraries. Two goal objectives that are relevant to this project are: to increase recognition of and support for experimentation with innovative and transformational ideas; and to help libraries make use of new and emerging technologies by promoting and supporting technological experimentation and innovation (American Library Association). These exemplify the ALA's commitment to the introduction of new elements into libraries to move toward the concept of the future library. As the previously mentioned bibliography stated, in 1911 libraries were tasked with becoming more than a "store-house" of books (Ono, p.2). Today, that feeling remains and the vague phrase of "more than" has now become more concrete; libraries need to follow the lead of the ALA's objectives and become a "third place". Urban Sociologist Ray Oldenburg describes the "third place" as a place distinct from home and work (Harris, 2007, p. 145).

Quoting Bryson, Usherwood and Proctor (2003), Harris' (2007) article explains that because libraries can be "a meeting place, a learning resource and comfortable and relaxing public space," libraries have the opportunity to become a community focal point. As this central place, libraries are a foundation for the social movements of its community.

**The "Living Archive"**
Presenting the many interpretations of the term "living archive" can show the evolution towards and the foundations of the #searchunderoccupy model. A search through newspaper databases yields references to the term 'living archive' when describing an archive of specialty plants, an individual who has an abundance of knowledge of various past events, or reviving forgotten plays that capture the social issues of their times. In these forms, "living" takes on a more literal sense as it refers to the actual subject or to the liveliness of the medium.

The next version is used by the Brubeck oral history project at the University of the Pacific in California. Dave and Iola Brubeck donated memorabilia relating to their musical lives to the University of the Pacific. Dave commented that the appeal of donating these items was the "university's commitment to treating the material as a 'living' archive" (Pillsbury, 2008, p. 12). The ability for change within the collection is the essence of this archive. From the initial goal of creating an exhibit that would travel through physical spaces to its inclusion in a virtual space and the later additions of the Brubeck's recorded interviews, the fluidity of the collection is what makes it "living" (Pillsbury, 2008, p. 12).

Following this example of fluidity in the collection, many projects have created virtual interfaces that allow more of this. In a 1996 *Library Journal* article, Collins features the internet as a living archive. He stated that the "Web" was "finding a purpose as a place of historical memory" that can "offer permanent access to voices that are forgotten, outdated, or otherwise marginal" (Collins, 1996, 37). This model can be seen throughout many current projects. Whether to celebrate the anniversary of a particular organization or to collect touching memories for advertising, the involvement of interactive comment or submission forms in a website is becoming a common feature. A simple search for 'state fair memories' generates an array of state fair websites where anyone can submit their state fair memories into an online form. NC LIVE, a statewide online library service, is celebrating the organization's fifteen year anniversary by collecting stories and memories from library patrons and staff across North Carolina using the same format (NC LIVE, 2013, para. 1). A similar initiative is the National Public Radio's (NPR) StoryCorps. Individuals can make an appointment to visit the StoryCorps facility and record their story to be archived at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (NPR, 2013).

Another feature of a living archive is the method of capturing events as they occur. Archives may do this in a number of ways, ranging from the storage and provision of video and audio recordings taken at the time of an event, to the constant addition of new information as it is actually happening. At the primary stage of this feature is the collection of the South African liberation struggle, which was presented at the 73rd annual International Federation for Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) conference in 2007 (Matthew, Peters, & Petit-Perrot). Its intent is to digitize and preserve the audio-visual archives on the history of the South African liberation struggle to "create interactive knowledge environments" (Matthew, Peters, & Petit-Perrot, 2007, p. 1). This project digitized past videos of the day-to-day events of one African province as well as other significant events that occurred in additional African countries (Matthew, Peters, & Petit-Perrot, 2007, p. 2). The use of active events, rather than

singular accounts or interviews, is what brings this archival initiative closer to the proposed model.

Taking the element of capturing events even further, and making it specific to libraries, is the current project of the Stanford University Libraries to archive the past and present artifacts of William McDonough (PR Newswire, 2013, para. 1). William McDonough is a leading architect for sustainable development and Stanford University seeks to create a digital archive of his writings, activities and conversations (PR Newswire, 2013, para. 2). His historical collections span more than 40 years of his professional career, but they would also like to continually add his appearances, projects, and tweets to the collection (PR Newswire, 2013, para. 3). The perpetual introduction of new material and the aim to include social media makes this one of the three closest versions of the #searchunderoccupy model that will be mentioned here.

The second, which is not affiliated with libraries, is outlined in the blog, "Arabic Literature (in English)". A post entitled "The Archive of the Revolution: A Living Archive" discusses two projects to archive the Egyptian revolution (Antoun, 2012). The Mosireen film collective has filmed or gathered 1000 hours of footage and is contending with how to organize the vast collection that includes cellular video footage (Antoun, 2012). They are also recording their archival process to tell the story of the archive itself (Antoun, 2012). The second project is part of an initiative from the Egyptian National Archives. The issues facing historian Khaled Fahey are that of ensuring the capability of telling multiple stories and narratives (Antoun, 2012, para. 13). Many of the questions the committee has to answer surround the parameters of the revolution such as when it began and who the actors were. They have decided to continue with the fluid aspect of a living archive and plan to continually revisit the answers they have created.

The final version of a living archive that has been chosen as a foundation leading up to the description of the #searchunderoccupy model is the work of the DOK, a modern Dutch library in the Netherlands. A collaboration with the library, multiple design firms, and national organizations, culminated in the creation of DOK Agora (Boekesteijn, 2010). DOK Agora is a multimedia center exhibit that features stations where users can record their stories and have them exhibited on a 33 x 10 inch video wall (Boekesteijn, 2010). The exhibit has a theme, which changes every three months. This theme stays relevant to the library's population and features related materials from their collections and local archives (Boekesteijn, 2010, para. 2). A grand opening event will open each theme and at the end of the three months, a similar event will highlight the best stories contributed (Boekesteijn, 2010, para. 5). In this format, the exhibit is constructed by the users with all their contributions archived afterwards on the library's website (Boekesteijn, 2010, para. 5). This innovative project represents the epitome of a service to the community; it features their stories and highlights their opinions on and memories of events happening in their neighborhood.

Though there are many living archives that have come before it and have highlighted some successes of this archival imperative, the #searchunderoccupy (#suo) exhibit combines varying forms of visual expression, social media, and an extensive virtual archive that libraries can incorporate. The key characteristic of modern social movements is its changing nature. *Encyclopedia Britannica* outlines, the goals and organization of a social movement are by their very nature subject to ebb and flow. They result from a generally spontaneous grouping of individuals with a loosely organized campaign and the relationships among them

are "not defined by rules and procedures," but by a shared "common outlook on society" (2013). To this end, the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS) is clearly identified as a social movement and one that affected many communities across the world.

According to Radhika Subramaniam, the Director and Chief Curator of the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center, The New School's response to the OWS movement was not to document it, but rather to "respond to the archival imperative that already seemed to be embedded in OWS" and the living archive format was chosen as a way of "contending with the events unfolding day by day". While they were considering the project, the New School faculty and students, many of whom were already involved in OWS, had their own occupation which gave additional meaning to the project (R. Subramaniam, personal communication, April 9, 2013). The result was #searchunderoccupy, exhibited from March 1-April 1, 2012 in the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center in New York City. Its focus was the New School community's response to the OWS movement. An open call for submissions was put out in November 2011 by advertising through student unions, professors and their classes, and social media (R. Subramaniam, personal communication, April 9, 2013). While they initially planned to have a review process, "the curatorial approach was archival and therefore inclusion rather than exclusion was the approach when criteria couldn't be established and the situation was evolving" (R. Subramaniam, personal communication, April 9, 2013). The result was an exhibit and virtual archive where the mediums ranged from video, photographs, audio, and performance projects, and also include text-based works such as live feed tag clouds, posters, and blogs.

Each of the larger categories of the elements listed above demonstrates how libraries can incorporate the living archive model within the purview of the service they dedicate to the members of their community.

**Visual Elements**

Art is very much an important part of social movements, more specifically the OWS movement. It is an important part of expression and learning, and therefore activism. The #suo exhibit featured many forms of visual expression. Each medium created an interactive experience that facilitated learning about the movement, supporting the involvement of the New School community, and engaging others in their conversation.
Lee Gibson is an artist who was invited by the design center's director to submit an installation (Gibson, n.d.). His work acted as the static focal point of the exhibit where visitors could watch video of responses from members of the New School community and learn other facts about the movement.

Photograph by: Chris Hyun Choi

Other installations included a large crossword puzzle where visitors could fill in what they knew and learn about what they did not.  Another was a wooden cutout for visitors to take pictures and insert themselves into a scene of the movement, being taken away by police.
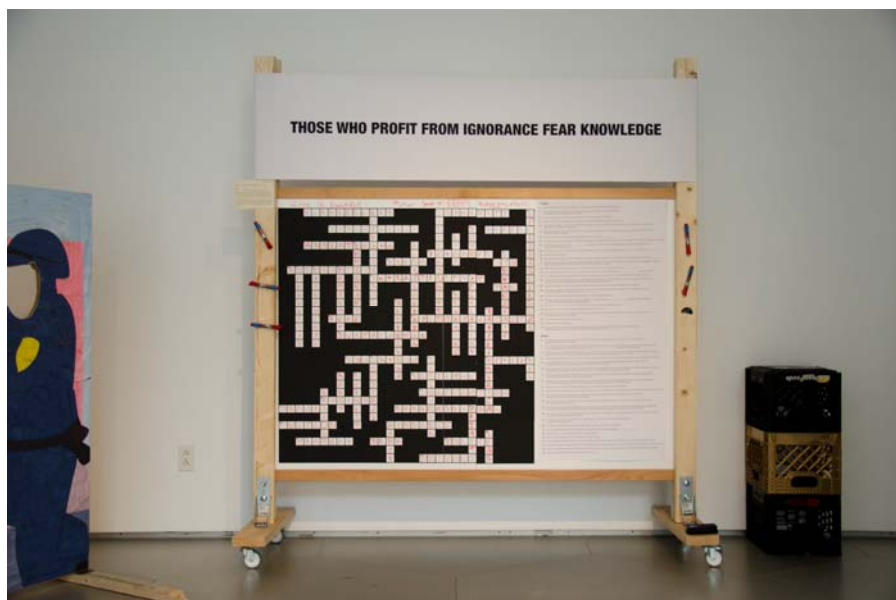
Photographs by: Chris Hyun Choi

The BriCollab Art Collective introduced the performance aspect to the exhibit. Through a "democracy box," members of the New School community recorded their thoughts, comments, and complaints about OWS (Searchunderoccupy). Their voices were edited together and the finished product was reenacted in the exhibit space by volunteer performers (Searchunderoccupy).

In conjunction with these performances and visual displays, the exhibit facilitated teach-ins from The New School professors and workshops such as "free speech with a camera". These endeavors used this artistic initiative as a teaching moment. The manner in which the #suo exhibit inserted many forms of art beyond static elements allows for a larger avenue of self expression for the artists, but it also effectively engages those who enter the space; it engages them in thought and in learning.

**Social Media**

Social media is a burgeoning necessary component of social movements and any living archive would be remiss not to include it. The OWS movement was initiated by a blog post from the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine, "Adbusters" (Ladhani, 2011). It called for people to set up tents and occupy Wall Street. To understand how the #occupywallstreet Twitter hashtag may have increased after the call to occupy, Reuters worked with SocialFlow, a social media tracking agency. Their data showed that the day before the protests on September 17th, it became a trending topic due to the live tweets of the occupation (Ladhani, 2011). Although there is some dissent about the prominence of the role of social media in revolutions such as the "Arab Spring", it is a quick and global way for individuals to organize. It also "enables average citizens to circumvent the gatekeeping of commercial media and traditional channels of political discourse with self-produced content (Aguayo, 2011, p. 363).

Social media has had the biggest impact on the #suo exhibit in the ability to acquire real-time reactions to the movement and within the data mining efforts for their virtual archive. During a 2-day hackathon, participants brought their laptops and accessed survey research data,

audio-video footage, and Twitter activity to collaborate on ways to transform this data into visualizations and data driven interventions (Christo, 2012a).  This event was a collaborative effort between OccupyResearch; DataCenter; and R-Shief Labs - organizations devoted to gathering data from OWS, and the MIT Center for Civic Media (Christo, 2012a).  The results, found at occupydatanyc.org, are visual representations such as word clouds, word nets, stack hierarchies, and matrix charts.  One particular project used Topsy to search for tweets on positive instances of police behavior and police misconduct related to Occupy events.



Photograph from: OccupyDataNYC.org

Another initiative specifically targets using Twitter as a way of mobilizing protest movements.  @OccupyPOPS is a Twitter bot that automatically coordinates weekly mini-occupy movements throughout New York City.  The POPS (Privately owned public space) program is one where the city grants additional floor space to developers as long as it may be for public use (NYC Department of City Planning).  The bot monitors Foursquare and Twitter check-ins and sends a tweet to a user who is near a POPS location.  It requests that the user verify information provided by the city about the space and also to include whether it appears suitable for Occupy.  Not only is this project clarifying data given by the city, it is also using mini Occupy movements to increase the usage of these spaces.

The final element that is advantageous for libraries when incorporating the #suo model is the virtual archive.  When the exhibit ended on March 1, 2012, the activity and discourse continued online.  Occupydatanyc.org focuses on archiving the projects, datasets, tools and scripts, and events and hackathons that began with the #suo exhibit and involve the New School community.  Since the exhibit, numerous hackathons have been held with tutorials on how to aggregate data using mongoDB and on open source mapping.  On March 31, 2012, the Aronson Gallery held a gathering in preparation for OWS Archive Day.  They reviewed the progress made with their visualization projects and reviewed options for further collaboration (Christo, 2012b).  Through the archive, it is clear to see that these initiatives

have gone beyond OWS to include a larger view of consciousness to other events that are affecting the community.  With #occupysandy, its participants used data techniques similar to those employed by OWS to document and track the records of the homes and families affected by Hurricane Sandy on October 29th, 2012 (Rood, 2012).  Each data project documents the products and methods used, which makes the archive a knowledge base for others who wish to mimic their efforts.

**Conclusion**

The modern concept of a library is rooted in providing a service to its community and with constant technological advances and changes to how individuals go about their daily lives, it is imperative for the library to change.  The modern social movement is quick forming, fluid, and vast.  It incorporates strong visuals and social media as well as virtual archival imperatives.  Libraries have an opportunity to do the same to support, engage, and document what is happening around them, to take part in the changes within the lives of their users.  The future library has a finger on the pulse of the community.  The future library looks outside of its walls to collaborate with other agencies and organizations.  The future library embraces all forms of expression and technology to stay current and relevant.

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