

analysis, genealogy avoids imposing a preestablished meaning on a text and instead allows meaning to emerge from the text itself. The difference between documentary and genealogical approaches, therefore, is less one of archival practices than one of orientation to documents and history.

Finally, some political theorists find their archive in space, architecture, and the built environment. Built structures serve as an archive in both the traditional and metaphorical senses insofar as they are collections of artifacts to be interpreted and

*A new “archival sensibility” has produced new conceptions of the archive; new practices of archival research; new perspectives on the evidentiary power of archives; new forms of historicity and orientations to past, present, and future; new ideas about the ends of archival work; and new challenges for practices of archiving and archival research in a digital age.*

a medium that “shapes what is salient within our visual and auditory field, habituates us to circulate in certain ways, affects who we are likely to encounter as we go about our daily affairs, and imparts meaning to what we do together” (Bell and Zacka 2021, 2). As Bernardo Zacka suggests in his contribution, the architectural features of bureaucratic institutions can be read not only with an eye to functionality and aesthetics but also for deeper insights about competing rationalities of welfare capitalism. To reveal these insights, archival work takes the form of an immersive observation that foregrounds the situated experience of the researcher and the people inhabiting spaces. This is a simultaneously descriptive and hermeneutic ethnographic practice that “interprets [ordinary people’s] interpretations of the social world” (Herzog and Zacka 2019, 764).

The distinctions suggested in this Spotlight introduction among documentary, digital, genealogical, and ethnographic approaches are not intended as a comprehensive system of pure types but rather as a preliminary heuristic device that may be useful for methodological self-reflection. Along with its immense benefits, archival work also poses difficult challenges. As Nancy Luxon and Kevin Olson describe in their contributions, archives are incomplete, partial, and limited and they contain silences. How can we discern such silences and what can be inferred from them? How can we respect the foreign context of a historical document while also making it relevant for our present? Whose history and present are we concerned with exactly? What types of translation, transcription, and transposition are necessary and possible? How are we to identify what is salient for our inquiries from the mass of available data? How do features of the researcher mediate access to and engagement with the archive? Moreover, for whom is this work? How we answer these questions depends on our particular understanding of and approach to archives, as well as on the ends to which we enlist them. These brief reflections can serve as a first step toward possible answers.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

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#### POLITICAL THEORY, THE ARCHIVE, AND THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY

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Political theorists are familiar with the problem of authority. We know better than to claim, say, that Hobbes is right *because he is Hobbes*. But is the line so easily drawn? After all, *he is Hobbes*. It is a natural hazard of standing on the shoulders of greats that we peer down and behold their greatness. In graduate school, the problem manifests as nagging insecurity. We want to do exciting and novel readings of texts, but the path is treacherous—it is natural to wonder: *Am I missing something?* The issue emerges early on. The first time I read Hobbes was as an undergraduate; naturally, I assumed he was brilliant—otherwise, why would I be reading him in a freshman-year philosophy lecture?

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In fact, authority presents two discrete problems: the first is putting thinkers on a pedestal (i.e., “the Hobbes problem”); the second is borrowing their gaze—what I like to think of as “the Marx problem.” Something is progressive if Marx said it; to be progressive is to think like Marx. “Such and such contemporary case is an example of what Marx once critiqued,” we might confidently claim, with the implication being that what makes

emerges: of an organization which, by 1989, was struggling to comprehend why so many people were trying to escape. This is manifested clearly in interrogation reports compiled later, after individuals were apprehended and brought back to the GDR.

The following example is perhaps illustrative. M was captured trying to flee to Austria on May 16.<sup>3</sup> However, unlike so many others who were dissatisfied with the GDR, M had been a devoted

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the case important is the linkage with Marx—as though there were a transitive nature to argumentation. This is different than the Hobbes problem, but there is feedback between the two: to look at the world through Marx’s eyes is to replicate his gaze. At one point, it is difficult to know if we are doing so because Marx was right or simply because he was Marx.

So, how do we break this cycle? What tools does a researcher have to counter this wall of authority? One answer is the *archive*—understood here in the historical sense, as an official deposit of information—which can be used as a foil against the hegemony of rote application or received wisdom. I illustrate this point with an experience from the Stasi Records Archive (*Stasi Unterlagen Archiv*) in Berlin as it relates to the writing of Hannah Arendt.<sup>1</sup>

In her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951/2017), Arendt made a now-famous claim about loneliness: namely, that totalitarian states—defined by extralegal violence and indoctrination—separate people from one another, ripping apart the fabric of society and rendering citizens unable to organize politically. This makes people turn inward, cowed by fear of persecution, forced into a state of collective isolation in which they no longer share their experiences. *Loneliness* is the term Arendt used to describe this phenomenon: the special type of solitude where we feel alone, even when surrounded by others; where we lose the sense that we are part of a common world. This, Arendt wrote, is “among the most radical and desperate experiences of man” (1951/2017, 624).

During my research, I turned to Arendt because her argument in *Origins* fit well with the nature of authority in the former East Germany (i.e., the German Democratic Republic, or GDR), where citizens were lorded over by the ever-watchful eyes of the state security services (the Stasi), infamous for infiltrating social units and destroying the trust people had in one another. Indeed, Arendt’s conception of totalitarian isolation confirmed precisely our priors about the GDR.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in this case, following the Arendtian line too closely—especially if reliant on secondary sources about the GDR—would have meant missing out on the potential for critical engagement with the subject material, both empirically and theoretically. This is where the archive comes in.

One of my objectives in the *Stasi Unterlagen Archiv* was to chronicle Stasi attempts to stop would-be refugees from escaping the GDR, especially via Hungary. (Beginning in May 1989, the Hungarian government had pioneered reforms to the Iron Curtain, making it potentially easier for people to cross.) At first glance, these files tell the story of a ruthless and well-oiled operation—almost all attempts were stymied, at least in the beginning—precisely the vision we have of the Stasi. However, with time, another portrait

citizen. As a kid, he had been a socialist pioneer; he recently had begun working as an engineer. This generated a puzzle for the Stasi. Why would a man like this try to flee? The dossier does not say. M lived a very private life; whatever discontent he felt, he kept to himself. This is illustrative of the type of place the GDR had become, so effective at driving people inward, away from the public sphere and into their private sanctum. That M’s intentions went unnoticed was thus not simply a failure of the system but also, paradoxically, evidence of its success.

This is Arendt’s loneliness *par excellence*. For a researcher like me, trying to forge such a connection, the pursuit could have ended there. Yet, the further I dug into the archive, the more complex and multifaceted the story became. In fact, M was lonely, in the Arendtian sense. However, in spite of this, he did ultimately pursue freedom—*thinking* freedom and *acting*, as Arendt would have it. How can we explain this? Part of the difficulty is that M’s loneliness did not derive from actual state power but rather from the lingering hold of that power on the imaginary. By 1989, the Stasi edifice was collapsing beneath the weight of its investigations. What I was finding was less a reflection of state authority than the shape and contours of its disappearance.

In the archives, the problem of what the Stasi *did not* know is everywhere present. Many of the East Germans I interviewed during my research gave me permission to examine their personal files. This required substantial paperwork but, after the signatures were acquired and the forms submitted, I found almost nothing. This is shocking: these people were *refugees*, there should have been a considerable paper trail; but name after name produced only slender folders (or no files at all). This is the non-story of the archive: what state power did not or could not understand. Perhaps this is simply reflective of state decline. However, there are many more elegant stories embedded here too: of nameless bureaucrats choosing not to flag these vulnerable individuals; the everyday morality of looking the other way.

Returning to Arendt: What can we say about loneliness? In some sense, East Germany had become a society riddled with loneliness, but this experience took root in many different forms (some conformed to the Arendtian conception, others did not). As such, the sociological structure of the late-GDR, and the moral and political relationships that the system engendered, was something altogether discrete—certainly from the priors about the GDR with which I began my research (and which the simple application of Arendt’s text would have confirmed) but also from the systems that Arendt analyzed.

The point here is not to critique Arendt’s conception of loneliness, but rather to highlight a problem in the way that we political theorists use texts as authorities. I so easily could have

taken Arendt's ideas (attaining credibility by dint of her authority) and grafted them onto familiar depictions about the GDR. This scholarship would have met the demands of our discipline, in which relying on secondary historical sources is a norm—we are not, after all, historians. Indeed, I was on my way to doing just this, had the evidence from the archives not stopped me in my tracks. In this case, the archive freed me from the received wisdom about Stasi rule and from adopting wholesale the Arendtian gaze—thereby helping me develop a gaze of my own.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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#### NOTES

1. This research is part of a book project (Longo 2023). The archival material cited here is adapted from that text.
2. For a popular history of East Germany, see Hoyer 2023.
3. Stasi record: MfS HA IX 25364.

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#### ANARCHIVES: THE LABADIE COLLECTION

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In 1938, Agnes Inglis, founding curator of the Labadie Collection of Radical Literature at the University of Michigan, wrote to labor organizer, Fred Beal, about tracking down the history of a man who had been active in the Chartist movement: "...and I found a

*Anarchists created many narrative trails to preserve their movement's work for the future and to keep their histories from being written exclusively by their enemies.*

little old trunk of this man....And in that trunk were things! They made a story!" (Inglis to Beal 1938, 1). The gentleman in question was John Francis Bray, whose relatives in Pontiac, Michigan, had contacted Inglis regarding an old trunk of political materials. Inglis made her way to Pontiac, perceived the story that was waiting to emerge from the things, and arranged to bring the materials back to Ann Arbor, where they became part of the large and growing collection that has become one of the most extensive archives of anarchist materials in the world.

Cleverly nicknamed "anarchives," collections of literature, correspondence, and memorabilia of the anarchist movement have been created all over the world. The Labadie Collection initially was assembled by Detroit anarchist printer, Jo Labadie, whose wife Sophie painstakingly preserved and organized the material. Jo had donated his cherished library in 1912, and some years later asked his friend Inglis to see what had become of the material.

Agnes obliged. Finding the boxes untouched, she essentially launched an anarchist incursion on the University of Michigan library. Poaching furniture and supplies from other offices and mobilizing her radical networks, she worked there for 28 years until her death in 1952. She "was able to establish her own collection development program" (Herrada 2017, 152) because she was already a respected activist, having set up lectures for Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman when they visited Michigan, worked with the Detroit branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and participated in campaigns for the release of Russian anarchists arrested during the debilitating Red Scare following World War I. Other anarchists were willing to overlook the Labadie's connection to the state because they trusted Inglis to enable the movement's legacy to be expressed in its own terms. As University of Michigan student Arthur John (1941–1942, 33) wrote, "Like a stone cast into a pool, her efforts caused perceptible ripples in an ever-widening circle of anarchists, libertarians, free thinkers, and radicals of one stripe or another."

With characteristic modesty, Inglis often referred to her work of curation as a supporting role, not an active contribution, to the anarchist movement. Yet that view undervalues the making of archives—preserving and organizing material is a type of political action. Inglis made her way through mountains of information, charting paths and observing or producing connections so that—as she had exclaimed about the Chartist find in 1938—things could tell their stories. She eventually came to see, rightly, that her contribution was not only making a record of the movement but also fully participating in the movement. Anarchists created many narrative trails to preserve their movement's work for the future and to keep their histories from being written exclusively by their enemies. Much of this work was accomplished by women who found or inherited collections, realized their value, and stepped into the collecting networks to add to the public preservation and circulation of the movement's histories. These collectors acted as unofficial archivists, selecting the material that beckoned and often bringing some initial organization to it before sending it to Ann Arbor.

The work of archivists can be seen as "hinge moments" in the life of the anarchist movement. In *Turning Archival*, Marshall and Tortorici (2022, 16) adopted this concept to speak about "multiple different starting points" in queer studies, "where the idea of teleological development and universal paradigm shifts have been problematized by scholars pointing to the performative interplay of multiple simultaneous epistemological formations." The hinge moments within anarchiving emerge around shared understandings of how significance emerges in relation to other artifacts and events. In the temporal practices of states, anarchism literally is located outside of time, in a world of chaos or naiveté, where there is no proper order (Johnson and Ferguson 2019). Anarchivists' hinge moments turn their—and our—attention to a distinct temporality, one in which scholars and activists discern not a lack of order but rather a different order: that is, a participatory order based on mutual aid and shared struggle to create the world they sought by