

Call for Proposals: *Rhetoric Review* Symposium on Emergency Archives: Investigating Rhetorical (Im)Possibility, Action, and the Impact of Precarious “Preservation” Under Crisis

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The ongoing—and now significantly escalated—genocide of Palestinian peoples by the Israeli government has been uniquely, painfully, and steadfastly documented and shared for far-flung viewers to instantaneously bear witness to atrocities that might otherwise remain unfathomable to the international community. Palestinian peoples have been recording their own intensified annihilation in a brave, painstaking, persistent, and not-always-intentional manner. These acts of documentation have not only subverted social media censorship, corporate media blackouts and misrepresentations, and white-washed sanitizations of the violence for the rest of the world, but have also highlighted the imperative need for a shift in how we approach, act upon, experience, and learn from archives born out of emergency. While the context and material conditions of this shift are horrific and incomprehensible, such a reorientation is necessary in a world repeatedly and increasingly under crisis.

This *Rhetoric Review* symposium on emergency archives takes inspiration from the Palestinian peoples as well as other individual and grassroots forms of preservation that have been used to combat oppressive forces, build intersectional social movements, and work toward a more just and equitable future. Noteworthy examples include George Holliday's recording of four police officers beating Rodney King; public documentation of the Arab Spring in Egypt; the #BLM movement; Darnella Frazier's filming of George Floyd's murder by police; documentation of the life-death experiences of people during COVID-19; numerous public recordings of student-led protest in Bangladesh that ousted Sheikh Hasina; and the Alt National Park Service's proactive efforts to record government websites on climate change before Trump takes office. From phone-captured videos of state-sanctioned violence to collaboratively managed physical archives in extra-institutional spaces, these instances render visible how community members make use of whatever tools, time, and skills are available to create emergency archives.

As we theorize them, emergency archives take three distinct but overlapping forms: 1) archives constructed during emergency; 2) archives used in times of emergency; 3) archives that call us to act without delay. Inherently action-oriented, emergency archives are born of circumstances that demand our immediate attention and response. Reflecting the French etymology of the word “emergency,” these repositories challenge extant conditions by “bring[ing] forth, bring[ing] to light” the inequities that persist in the world around us, compelling us toward justice-driven solidarity work. Illustrative of what KJ Rawson calls the “rhetorical power of archives,” these collections persuade us to a particular interpretation of the events they document (20).

Antithetical and alternative to the narratives of institutional archives in this discourse, emergency archives emerge directly from moments, experiences, and locations of crisis. In this way, they necessarily subvert the inequities in archival history that Howard Zinn famously highlights in his acknowledgement that, “the most powerful, the richest elements in society have the greatest capacity to find documents, preserve them, and decide what is or is not available to the public” (20).

As scholars working at various intersections of English Studies, Rhetoric and Composition, and Library Science, we recognize a heightened need for cultural knowledge and heritage preservation as we collectively face the consequences and future of genocide, war, climate crisis, and ideological debates impacting the safety and autonomy of millions. And we recognize an equally dire need for new and extra-institutional modes of storytelling. We've witnessed archives of necessity emerging across the globe as forms of resistance against both violent narratives and violent actions, many of which are generated, preserved, and made accessible in real-time, serving as in-the-moment documentation of war, environmental devastation, attempted genocide, and dramatic losses of civil and bodily rights. And they often exist on web platforms, which are both highly accessible and inherently vulnerable.

For this symposium, we invite contributions engaged in creating and managing, teaching with/about, responding to, interacting with, or thinking deeply about emergency archives and the conditions from which they emerge. We encourage collaborative and/or interdisciplinary projects that explore distinctions between "traditional" and grassroots archives, push the boundaries of academic and activist orientations to memory work, and challenge understandings of what an archive can mean, do, and require in worlds marked by crisis. Our team — comprising teachers, researchers, memory workers, community collaborators, and "traditional" librarians/archivists — recognizes that we do not have final answers to these pressing questions. Through this symposium, we are eager to invite and engage in collaborative, contingent, and perhaps open-ended and contradictory dialogues. We welcome projects and genres that resonate with the questions and anxieties that accompany our collective inquiry into the profound role of emergency archives in times of turmoil and injustice.

Potential Questions Include, But Are Not Limited To:

- What novel forms do emergency archives take? In what places do we see them emerge? And how do they circulate?
- How might political and regime shifts happening globally affect and/or precipitate the need for extra-institutional archives and archives of emergency?
- While many mainstream institutional archives are "at once an instrument of oppressive power," how can decolonial emergency archives function as "a potential weapon of liberatory struggle" (Harris 2)?
- How can emergency archives be envisaged as a space for "the reconstruction and the restitution of silenced histories, repressed subjectivities, subalternized knowledges and languages" that bring "to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics" (Mignolo 453)?
- How can emergency archives disturb and disrupt the collective memories imposed by discourses manufactured, disseminated, and amplified by exploitative dominant systems?
- In what ways have emergency archives been threatened, bowdlerized, censored or otherwise harmed or destroyed?
- What are the implications of climate catastrophe on our current systems of preservation, emergent and otherwise? What can both institutional and grassroots archivists learn from

emergency archives to better prepare for increasingly unknown and devastating weather patterns?

- How can grassroots, community-built emergency archives, storytelling, and memory work help reshape transformative archival theory, philosophy, and praxis?
- What is the role, if any, of the “traditional” or “institutional” archivist in the maintenance and amplification of emergency archives? And if there isn’t, what can that tell us about the state and role of archival repositories?

Submission Information:

Please send roughly 300-word proposals to emergencyarchives24@gmail.com by Jan 20 2025 [originally Jan. 13, 2025]. Final manuscripts, including references and footnotes, should not exceed 4,000 words. Final submissions are editorially reviewed, not peer reviewed.

Timeline:

Jan. 20: Proposals Due [originally Jan. 13, 2025]

Feb. 10: Invitations Sent

May 12: Article Drafts Due

June 14: Feedback Returned

Aug. 11: Revised Articles Due

End of Sept. 2025: Full Manuscript Submitted

Jan. 2026: Symposium Published

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