

Snapshots of freedom: Street photography in Cape Town from the 1930s to the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I look at the “ordinary” (or “everyday”) archive of the racially oppressed, viewing it as an entry point into apartheid afterlives, while arguing for a rethinking of humanness and freedom after racial oppression. I consider the photographs produced by “Movie Snaps” – a street photographic studio of Cape Town, South Africa, that operated between the 1930s and the 1980s – and suggest that looking to previously marginalised narratives can offer insight into larger questions of self-representation, belonging and freedom. The contents of this article are based on a larger research project on forced removals in Cape Town, out of which several exhibitions and two documentary films have been produced to date.

Keywords: Apartheid, forced removals, photography, archive, freedom, representation.

They just snapped you out of nowhere ... came up to you and said, “Here’s your card! Come and collect it at Movie Snaps” (O’Connell 2015).

Sounds do not disappear, not ever, not really ... What happens when they appear to fade away, like the sounds of the bell from the square, particularly at night, is that they grow very small in order to fit into a hiding place where they cannot readily be found by those who do not know how to listen (van Zyl 2002:39).

Since the emergence of Algerian-born theorist Jacques Derrida’s formative text entitled *Archive fever* (1998), the question of “the archive” has been theoretically debated, with a focus on practices of reading the relationship of the colonial archive to power and on the gaps within the institutional archive (see, for instance, Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid & Saleh 2002). How can the scholar who is interested in the overarching question of life after racial oppression trouble the notion of archive and make room for those

archives that are constructed not by colonial and racial power – such as state archives and museums – but instead by the subaltern, the colonised and the racially oppressed?

In this article, I consider how ordinary street photographs of Cape Town residents taken between the late 1930s and the early 1980s can be read as a response to novelist André Brink's (2003) call for contemporary South Africans to listen to the past and allow it to speak, while thinking through why representations of this kind matter for how freedom is imagined in post-apartheid South Africa.

Archive

In 1994, Derrida presented a paper that was later published as *Mal archive: Une impression freudienne*, the English version of which became *Archive fever* (1998). Here Derrida lays the groundwork for his argument about the nature and construction of archives (van Zyl 2002). Derrida not only discusses what an archive is, how it works, what its roots are and how it may be reconfigured, but also looks at the archive of psychoanalysis, its trajectories and history, and how it is constituted through a particular set of writings, histories and moments.

The archive is considered as a location, and Derrida emphasises that the political power of the *archon*, the house of the magistrates, is essential to its definition. The archive needs institutional authority to shape these traces – the contents of the archive that are the physical remnants of lives lived – which it selects, censors and marginalises, and which can be erased and destroyed. This paradox is central to the archive: it destroys that which it supposedly safeguards. This destruction, this 'burning into ashes the very trace of the past', sums up the archive for Derrida (1994:44). An archive is not about remembering, then, but about forgetting. It is through this 'fever', this 'passion' to destroy or deny, that 'we know that something in us, so to speak, something in the psychic apparatus, is driven to destroy the trace without any reminder' (Derrida 1994:44).

So what is it that has been destroyed, denied or filtered out in the archive of apartheid and its aftermath? More crucial, perhaps, is the question of power, for the archive:

[i]s a place where things begin, where power originates, its workings inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings. ... There, the *archon* himself, the magistrate, exercises the power of procedure and precedent, in his right to interpret them for the operation of a system of law ... In Derrida's description, the *arkhe* – the archive – appears to represent the now of whatever kind of power is being exercised (Steedman 2001:1159).

For Derrida, the *mal* (“fever”) of the archive is in the order and structure of its establishment, it’s beginning, as well as the feverish desire to possess the archive. It is about power, a ‘sickness unto death’ – a desire not just to enter the archive, but also to have and own it (Steedman 2001:1159). As part of a Western obsession with finding beginnings, the drive of the archive is to seek out the beginning of things. “Archive” encompasses all the ways and means of state power. It is substantially more than, and distinct from, a place that merely stores documents. More than what is included in archives, Derrida challenges the reader to consider what is written out of them, and what is left behind. In this regard, he writes that, ‘this subtraction leaves a mark of erasure, a reminder which is added to the subsequent text and which cannot be completely summed up within it’ (Derrida cited by Hamilton *et al.* 2002:9).

The author of these texts, “the archivist”, is the one who gives life to texts and restores their ‘papers and parchments to the light’; as Jules Michelet (cited by Steedman 2001:1171) wrote of his first days in the Archives Nationales in Paris in the 1820s: ‘As I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up’. Whether Michelet was referring to the dust of manuscripts and parchments or whether he was speaking metaphorically is uncertain, but his words prompt an investigation into the notions of authorship, power and death within the archive. As Benedict Anderson observes, ‘the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires’ (Anderson cited by Steedman 2001:1171), and historians and archivists indeed find themselves ‘able to speak on behalf of the dead and to interpret the words and the acts they had not understood’ (Steedman 2001:1171). What does the resulting archive deny and conceal? What are its secrets?

The practice of collecting – by missionaries, travel writers and ethnologists – has produced a vast network of knowledge that currently forms the basis of national (and other) archives, with colonial collections playing a vital role in determining how history is constructed. Premesh Lalu (2007:36) makes the critical point that,

[i]n Southern Africa, the constitutive relations of power and the further exercise of that power was founded and enabled by a vast disciplinary apparatus. Since the nineteenth century, and in some instances much earlier, vast archives of discipline and punishment paint a harrowing picture of the complicity of knowledge in achieving social subjection. The archive was never far from the needs of colonialism ... Whereas in Europe, knowledge of these distant places of empire functioned to normalise power, in the distant places themselves it served to intensify its grip on the subject.

The archive in reconfiguration should not only be about the past, but should ‘also [be] something which is shaped by a certain power, a selective power, and shaped by the future, by the future anterior’ (Hamilton *et al.* 2002:9). How can the archive come to terms

with its archivist, given that it is always considered a site of retrieval, representation, power and history (Lalu 2007:28-29)? The apartheid archive was a site of meticulous record-keeping,¹ but it was also pivotal to the practices of racial subjugation and division, as a cursory visit to any of the South African archives will confirm. There are hundreds of images of “black”² bodies, countless pages of missionary accounts, notes on local languages by anthropologists and travellers that attest to the inferiority and difference of the “black” body, and all these efforts are fundamentally tied up with notions of power and inequality. Any refiguration of the archive that does not take its power distribution into account is doomed to exist only as an academic exercise that maintains the status quo. As Lalu (2007:37) explains:

The colonial archive reflects a particular mode of evidence that is a consequence of the rise of new disciplines in the nineteenth century and the requirements of Empire ... The emergence of the archive in southern Africa did not only emerge with the rise of new disciplines, but also power. In southern Africa, the conditions of conquest were propelled by the will to know and the will to power.

Is the archive able to relinquish its definitions and conceptions of knowledge when focused on one singular event? Can the archive disrupt its idea of temporality and, in so doing, challenge its own power?

Movie Snaps

1. See the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (national.archives[sa]).

2. I have been profoundly influenced by Frantz Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* (1967), and I struggle with racial categories. Having lived my entire life as a “coloured” woman, I refer to racial designations in scare quotes throughout this article as an acknowledgement of the arbitrary apartheid categorisation and hierarchisation of people according to their skin colour.

3. Originally known as “*Wapen Plein*” (Square of Arms), and the site of Jan van Riebeeck's original fort in the 1650s, the Grand Parade has always been closely associated with its immediate neighbour, the Castle of Good Hope. For centuries, the Parade was a place where people gathered to celebrate, protest or seek refuge.

In homes along the upmarket and largely “white” Cape Atlantic seaboard, through to the dusty and forgotten “black” townships of the Cape Flats, hidden in cardboard boxes or displayed in well-thumbed family photo albums, it is possible to find Movie Snaps photographs that speak to the city of Cape Town and its citizens in particular ways. The small photographs (about half the size of a postcard), which are kept safe by ageing owners and handed down as priceless keepsakes, appear at first glance to be banal, but in fact prompt conversations around remembering and forgetting, ways of life in the city and ways of self-representation. The images are often faded, with curling edges, and all have either a serial number or the Movie Snaps stamp on the reverse (or both). Apart from a few, hand-painted colour images, they are all black and white. The Movie Snaps studio, opened by Lithuanian Jewish immigrant Abraham Hurwitz at the beginning of the Second World War, in a nondescript building at the edge of the Grand Parade in Cape Town,³ provides a photographic frame that speaks, on the one hand, about Jewish families in South Africa, and, on the other, about the imminent annihilation and fragmentation of lives through legislated apartheid in 1948 – the ramifications of which are still felt and sustained in contemporary South Africa.

According to Richard Freedman, Director of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, Jewish presence in South Africa dates back to the earliest days of “white” settlement, with records attesting to Jews arriving during the Dutch occupation in the seventeenth century (Freedman cited by O’Connell 2015). The largest wave of immigration came in the late nineteenth century, with approximately 40 000 Jews coming from Eastern Europe, particularly Lithuania (Freedman cited by O’Connell 2015). According to Zelma Singer, the great-niece of Abraham Hurwitz, the Movie Snaps founder was born in Lithuania in 1893, and came to Cape Town via Cork, Ireland, in the early 1930s (Zinger cited by O’Connell 2015). Freedman (cited by O’Connell 2015), makes the important point that Jews, although ‘nominally “white” people’, were still subject to racism in South Africa, in the form of anti-Semitism and xenophobia: ‘They were told that they were coming into this country to steal jobs. These immigrants were mostly shopkeepers, goldsmiths and photographers’. Situated opposite the Cape Town Post Office, a building with colonial and apartheid histories etched on its walls, Hurwitz’s studio and its multi-racial street photographers snapped thousands of people from Cape Town, who, once they crossed the photographer’s chalk line,⁴ were photographed and given a ticket, in the hope that they would purchase their image a few days later from the kiosk. The studio photographers plied their trade on the block surrounding the studio and along Adderley Street, with its statues of the Dutch settler Jan van Riebeeck and Portuguese explorer Bartholomew Dias.

The port city of Cape Town is commonly referred to as the “Mother City”: Jan van Riebeeck set up a refreshment station for passing ships in 1652, and it gradually became a halfway point for trade between the East and the West (Worden, Heyningen & Smith 1998). Cape Town was viewed as the birthplace of modernity in South Africa, and the base from which those endowed with power ruled the country (Pieterse cited by O’Connell 2015). It is a city that has been shaped by waves of regulation, evacuation and displacement, especially around health scares such as the smallpox outbreak in the 1880s and the bubonic plague in 1901 (Smith 1995). The same rhetoric of contamination and control was used to justify the forced evictions of District Six that began in the 1960s. It is against this centuries-old backdrop of segregation that Movie Snaps is imagined, and in turn, imagines and images the city and its inhabitants.

These snapshots show people of all races: women resplendent in tulle dress and flared bell-bottoms, little girls in crisp smocked pinafores, and young men showing off their à la mode fashion sense. They illustrate moments of ordinary living in extraordinary times, given that the photographic studio witnessed the introduction of legislated apartheid in 1948, and the forced removals and city divisions that slowly attended it. The snapshots offer a contrasting view of the apartheid archive, as well as of the preceding decade of the 1930s. Apartheid is usually documented via violence and injury, but these kinds of

4. According to Noor Ebrahim (cited by O’Connell 2015) of the District Six Museum, who was a Movie Snaps photographer, each day the studio photographer would draw a chalk line about six metres from where he would be positioned. He would set his focus, shutter-speed and aperture accordingly, so that he would be able to photograph his subjects quickly.



FIGURE **Nº 1**



Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the Buirski family. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.



FIGURE N° 2

Movie Snaps street photograph of Gairowesha Manuel, 1969 (front and back). From the family of Zaynnonesa Manuel. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

images serve as a strong reminder that apartheid violence, enacted through the expansive mechanisms of the state, could only have been exercised on those who were not considered human. In the Movie Snaps images, it is precisely the framing of the apartheid and colonial subject that now paradoxically provides an avenue into a new archive. In looking at these traces and listening to the muted cries, one may ‘begin to glimpse alternate possibilities in relation to the historically catastrophic event’ (Bogues 2010:58) – possibilities of freeing the spectres and ghosts of “black” and “other” bodies, previously denied and destroyed, into a humanity of equals.

From the early 1960s, the studio, which operated a satellite branch in the seaside suburb of Muizenberg, employed “coloured” photographers. As Noor Ebrahim comments, these photographers were offered jobs despite having no training, and the experience afforded them the chance to hone their skills in the trade (Ebrahim cited by O’Connell 2015). Many of the photographers lived in nearby District Six and, by all accounts, they relished the opportunity to receive skills-training from “white” photographers, secure employment, and gain the minor local-celebrity status that came with being a Movie Snaps photographer. Referring to Hurwitz as “Mr Snaps”, Ebrahim says that he and three of his friends were simply handed cameras and put to work. However, racial divisions were still in play, as

a comment by Lorraine Knight, who worked in the Movie Snaps darkroom for over 20 years, suggests: “‘they’ never came to the back, and we never went to the front’ (Knight cited by O’Connell 2015). Ebrahim stresses that the photographers snapped subjects of all races and genders, and that any biases in subject-selection were financially motivated: ‘I want to tell you [that] we took photographs of people because colour didn’t mean anything to us. We focused on the women as they would be more inclined to pay!’ (Ebrahim cited by O’Connell 2015). Movie Snaps managed, therefore, to capture a cross-section of Cape Town society that showed diversity as well as common interests and practices. As fashion scholar Erica de Greef contends, Movie Snaps subjects blur boundaries, as culture, race and religious differences are almost indiscernible in how people dressed (de Greef cited by O’Connell 2015).

For me, looking at the Movie Snaps images today is much more than an exercise in nostalgia, for these images speak about histories that are currently unrecognised and unexplored. One only has to look carefully at the beautifully hand-stitched dresses and perfectly coiffed beehive hairstyles worn by “coloured” and “black” women to imagine the lives and futures forever destroyed by apartheid legislation, as enacted by the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Movie Snaps of “coloured” and “black” subjects are particularly telling, since they capture the agency of *humans* who carved their own lives and moments of freedom. In so doing, they invite critique of a particular “victim” narrative of the lives of the oppressed. The ways in which subjects are imaged in these street photographs intervenes in the subjugation of bodies and lives that were legislated and classified as non-human. The chalk line that was drawn each morning by the photographer can be seen as a dividing line that would forever change futures and pasts: currently, and depending on their specific racial classifications and experiences, the subjects in these photographs and their descendants most likely sit on opposite sides of history.

The chalk line is felt most intensely in those Movie Snaps images that are found in the homes of Cape Town residents who were forcibly removed, where the subjects are painfully aware of where they came from and where they now are. For these subjects, the images will always be etched with a sense of loss, a sense of a future that never happened and a future over which they seem powerless. As Brian O’Connell, former rector and Vice Chancellor of the historically “black” University of the Western Cape, says,

black and coloured people had to live a particular life, put on a particular mask, accept particular things, no matter how much it hurt them, and the fact that it hurt them is, of course, manifest everywhere. I believe it is an important way of understanding South Africa today. It destroyed males, fathers in particular who found it very hard to be fathers in a loving, caring way (O’Connell cited by O’Connell 2015).



FIGURE **Nº 3**



Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the family of Faizal Allie. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

Memory and its representations now appear inadequate, falling short in the wake of catastrophe. As a mnemonic device, these photographs cannot match the violence of racial oppression they at once attest to and seek to address. The Movie Snaps images offer the chance to revisit that chalk line, and to recognise what it meant to live in a moment when the South African government was intent on dehumanising the majority of its citizens. They offer a glimpse of future possibilities and an opportunity to think through other memories and histories, as many contemporary South Africans continue their urgent quest towards freedom, in the light of past injustices.

Street photographs

As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2009:13) show, street photographers could be found in many European and American cities in the decades between the First and Second World Wars. Eastern-European Jews were photographed as passers-by on the Romanian streets of Czernowitz/Cernauti – the ‘Vienna of the East’ (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13) – by photographers using 2.5” x 3.5” direct-positive paper, which was processed on the spot to produce a print. Hirsch comments that this process, a precursor of instant Polaroid technology, allowed photographers the opportunity to quickly convince passers-by to purchase an image or order enlargements. The images that Hirsch and Spitzer (2009:13) found show Romanian Jews in the years leading up to the Holocaust displaying a ‘sense of confidence and comfort’ in candid, often spontaneous images taken in spaces that were becoming hostile to their presence. The images also show how these Romanian Jews situated themselves in terms of class and cultural and gender norms, with their willingness to be photographed and to purchase the images functioning as a public assertion of their membership in a certain class and level of affluence (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13).

These photographs show that Jewish subjects publically performed their “freedom” by claiming spaces and moving ‘through them, *flâneur* like, glancing about but also ready to be looked at and to be seen’ (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13). Importantly, these pre-war images do not ‘even hint at the existence and rapid and virulent growth of Romanian anti-Semitism and Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s – the increasing restrictions, quotas, discriminatory exclusions, harassment and violence that Jews faced’ (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13).

Two photographs that I find most interesting in Hirsch and Spitzer’s collection are two street images that show Jews wearing the yellow star in 1943 – two years after approximately 40 000 Jews were deported to the ghettos and labour camps (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:22-23). These images therefore depict members of the remaining Jewish

population, who were forced to wear the yellow star, and who faced heightened surveillance and restrictions. Despite these restraints, the Jewish subjects in the photographs appear to stroll freely through the city, even purchasing their photographs as a confirmation of this fact. As Hirsch and Spitzer (2009:22-23) observe, '[t]heir stroll seems "normal", as though the temporal and political moment in which their photos were snapped, and the mark of "otherness" that they were publically forced to display with the yellow star, were hardly relevant'.

These local images suggest a similar place and space to the one claimed by the subjects of the Movie Snaps photographs in defiance of the dictates of their apartheid-segregated city. The Cape Town images speak of life in the city both before and after the implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1950. They reflect a very particular space in the city, with the landmark General Post Office, street vendors, other shoppers, and street and commercial signs in the background. Walking purposefully through the city, as opposed to strolling, "*flâneur* like", the subjects in these photographs bear testimony to Patricia Holland's comment that 'personal photographs are made specifically to portray the individual ... as *they would wish to be seen* and as they have chosen to show themselves' (Holland cited by Bliss 2008:866-867). They speak, in the Holocaust and apartheid contexts, 'of the will to normalcy in times of extremity' (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:16).

The Movie Snaps photographs and Hirsch and Spitzer's images of Jewish subjects have in common a refusal of victimhood on the part of their oppressed subjects, who enact resistance through their confident stride, their firm gaze and the meticulous attention they pay to the clothing they wear for a day out in the city. These images bypass the dominant images of the oppressed in South Africa as "victim" and as "other". While they resemble any of the millions of ordinary photographs found around the world, they are inherently different, because what they reflect are ordinary moments within extraordinary times. These mnemonic street images are haunting. They draw the eye to mothers and grandmothers who took their offspring into a city whose restrictions were blatantly intended to make them feel unwelcome. These women dispelled any notion of the oppressed as victims, and of the oppressed viewing *themselves* as victims.

While oral testimony and diaries record subjective reflections and private experience, photographs taken in urban spaces tend to document public acts and encounters. The incongruity is therefore not in the images themselves, but in the events these images record and evoke in those who look at them – the events of their production, the careful and considered "getting dressed for town", of their purchase, and of the viewer's retrospective looking. Perhaps, ultimately, the images 'speak' more about what one might want and need from the past than about the past itself (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:16).

Disavowed archives

What role do these private family images play in the post-apartheid constitution of the apartheid archive? Do these images show a “normalcy” of lives in a divided city? Do they articulate the fullness of lives lived and of lives still to come? Crucially, why have theorists and archivists largely neglected these images, given their ability to prompt questions around the representation of the past through the capturing of everyday assertions of identity, dignity and affluence?

My questions are echoed in Laura Wexler’s (1999) examination of nineteenth-century photographs of American servants and slaves. In particular, Wexler focuses on the ability of the “black” woman to claim her space in the frame and escape the subjugating white familial gaze, foregrounding herself and disrupting the narrative of the female servant as unable and unwilling to resist. In this analysis, Wexler draws attention to the unwillingness of cultural critics to read and acknowledge the capacity of photographs to embody resistance. Within regimes of colonial and apartheid domination, the domain of cultural production is where a certain contestation, which in itself is political, occurs. Culture becomes critical and central to life and meaning-making (Hall 1982). By considering the subjects in the Movie Snaps photographs who choose to dress “to the nines” and purchase their images, one can begin to think of their performances as a cultural production of contest and a self-representation of humanness.

Thinking about how the archive may be refigured in a post-apartheid context raises the question of whether an archivist is able to renegotiate the power of the archivist as gatekeeper. While this question holds currency, perhaps the emphasis should rather be on expanding the archive beyond an understanding of it as merely a storeroom, imagining it instead as a multiplicity, with an infinite number of narratives, experiences and texts. It could be that, in looking at the “black” body – the site of injury and differentiation – as an archive, one may begin to make some inroads into how a radically different post-apartheid archive may emerge. Moreover, it is in turning to the body and the lived experiences of the oppressed that the archive can be redeemed, becoming a constantly shifting text – at times elusive and ambiguous, but mostly a reminder that there are multiple pasts, presents, contestations and points of view.

As Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michelle Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (2002:7) astutely note, ‘the archive – all archives – is figured’ – a comment that gestures towards the understanding that the archive gives rise to how bodies, lives and power are configured. I believe that these “new archives” of disavowed bodies can challenge certain long-held meanings of life and death, of pasts and futures. First, though, the archive



FIGURE **Nº 4**



Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the family of Ghadieja Samson. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

(and the archivist) must push beyond boundaries, escape gatekeepers and locate those texts, experiences and sounds that belong to those so recently deemed inferior.

Regarding this attempt at reconfiguration, Derrida (cited by van Zyl 2002:39) suggests that 'a science of the archive must concern itself not only with the way in which the archive becomes an institution and the laws that govern this institutionalisation, but also with those who authorize (in both senses) this process'. This is important, for the archive is not only the concern and domain of the academy and the state. The challenge is to acknowledge the everyday practices of the oppressed that have been excluded from mainstream archives. These attempts matter, for not only do they have to do with thinking through ideas of democracy, equality and freedom, but they also force the hand of the supposed will to inclusivity espoused by the neoliberal post-apartheid South African state.

An archive of the oppressed

The archive of the oppressed compels one to recognise the modes of survival of those who were dominated, and to consider how they reconstructed/reconfigured a world for themselves in which they could see themselves as human. These archives provide apertures through which to peer at habits, gestures, movements, moments and sounds, all of which, although at times elusive, transform the idea of the archive as a place to enshrine a dead past into something that speaks of the present. This transformation is particularly evident in those images conventionally considered to be compositionally “poor”, showing perhaps a random hand moving across the frame – photographs that depict natural motion and unguarded moments. A sense of being alive is detectable in the composure, confidence and pride of a young woman with her head thrown back while walking with her beau, as it is in the firm hand-hold and resolute posture of a proud mother walking her young son through a divided city.

If one is to understand how these photographs are significant to a history and a theory of oppression, it is imperative to destabilise dominant and established narratives. It becomes important to rethink – particularly with regard to the photograph – ideas of realism and subjectivity, and western modes of “truth”, history and identity. There is a need to think about the function of the archive, for inasmuch as these images speak about the local, the mundane and the particular, they are also about loss and death, power and empowerment, contestation and affirmation. The archives, in all their renditions and complexities, command a space in the imaging of South Africa, from the early ethnographic images of the colonists to the socio-documentary images of apartheid South Africa that revealed to the world just what the day-to-day atrocities of the system entailed.

These snapshots are not about a single event or a single series of events; they are about life that is ongoing. Photographs given life and narrative, such as these Movie Snaps found in the home, must be considered outside of conventional archives. Indeed, they signal what is missing from the history texts. They are traces of moments that will not dissipate, inviting a reflection on oppression and the after-lives of oppression. It may be that endeavours such as these will not, in the end, fit into the notion of archives, for as Achille Mbembe (2002:19) writes,

[t]he term “archive” first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, by “archives” is also understood a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of “archive” that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there.

Perhaps, then, what is required is to view the everyday practices of the oppressed as a response to Anthony Bogues's (2010) notion of historical catastrophe, where the events of the past reverberate and shape the present. An image of the social lives and vitality of the oppressed challenges the way knowledges of the past are produced. As experiences of the "now", they prompt the telling of different narratives. As Hamilton *et al.* (2002:16) observe, 'alternate visions require alternate archives'. Were these images taken with the intention that, somehow, they might end up not only *in* an archive but also as an archive? Were they meant to be coded, classified, categorised and exhibited according to the criteria of collectors and institutional archivists? Were the photographs and the narratives they contain meant to 'escape the boundaries' of the archive, and the 'status and power that is derived from this entanglement of buildings and documents' (Hamilton *et al.* 2002:16). After making a film and an exhibition about the Movie Snaps studio, I returned the images I had gathered from households across Cape Town to the sanctuary and stewardship of their owners, bolstered by their spectacular power and the unabashed desire of their ghosts to be free.

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