

Special Issue
Archives and AI: Theories, Methodologies, and Practices

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The editors of this special issue invite technical and professional communication (TPC) scholars, teachers, and practitioners to re-engage with *archives* as they are reconfigured by automation and algorithmic culture. Three key questions shape this project: (1) What praxes and methodologies are needed in our field’s pedagogy and research in relation to archives, their automation, and digital aggregations? (2) How might re-theorizing the archive in TPC help us reimagine the future of its development and use? (3) How might TPC practitioners disrupt the colonialism and violence of archiving, and build new decolonial repositories for the field?

As TPC scholars have indicated, archives are essential to research and pedagogy (Agbozo 2023; Ditlevsen 2012; Durack 2001; Fiss 2021, 2020; Geisler et al. 2001; Johnson et al. 2008; Malone 2019, 2015; Olman 2013; Walker 2016; Walwema, Colton & Holmes 2023). Researchers highlight the need for more “repositor[ies] of artifacts” that could be “source[s] of analytic materials” (Agbozo 2023, p. 381) and reservoirs for pedagogical documents (Fiss 2021, 2020). Using archives, Malone (2015) uncovered how women technical communicators advocated for the sustenance of the profession by establishing organizations in the 1940s and 1950s. These documents helped us to understand the work of these women as well as the nature of the field at that time. Likewise, Fiss (2020) used the archive to uncover how rhetorical techniques such as ridicule were deployed to argue for TPC educational opportunities in the 19th century. Walwema, Colton, & Holmes (2023) also recently discussed how the *Green Book* guided African Americans in their travel across the country safely without stopping over at places where their human rights could be violated without consequences—recasting the limits of certain approaches to the discussions of ethics. Thus, archives are central to research, history, and pedagogy, among other concerns in TPC. As such, Agbozo’s (2023) invitation to the field to revisit the question of archives is an important call, especially at this moment of quotidian surveillance easily blurring public and private spheres and documentation. Despite the centrality of archives to our field, TPC has yet to pay critical attention to how these repositories are constructed, curated, and constrained together with how the contents are accessed, reconfigured, analyzed, and used in research and pedagogy. Complicating this problem is the upsurge in machine learning.

With the emergence of automation, institutional and private archives are transformed into digital data, especially from the 1990s onwards. Contemporary born-digital materials are largely stored in digital archives. Digital repositories are theoretically available to more users than physical archives. Like physical archives, digital repositories are also constrained by how and who

mediates between the materials and the machines. As Colavizza et al. (2021) indicated, digital archivists must “learn to make use of machine reasoning for appraisal and selection and to assess the assessments of machines” (p. 2). After depositing these materials, algorithms take over and transform them. The tension between the politics of choice and access is further complicated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a memory institution. A simulation of human intelligence through machine learning, AI has become tools for content curation and management. Therefore, we invite TPC scholars, teachers, practitioners, and advocates to (re)examine the field’s relationship with archives and AI. Submissions could document new, renewed, critical, and ethical approaches to archives, from practical and/or theoretical vistas. We invite contributors to consider such questions as, among many possible others:

- How has TPC historically approached the connections between the field, AI, and archives?
- How does TPC define and use the term *archive* taking into consideration size, qualification, authority, ownership, etc.?
- How could the field redefine its relationship with archives and what new archival practices could we adopt to guarantee access and equity?
- How do we currently use archives in TPC? What alternative uses are possible?
- What research challenges should be addressed to realize an effective digital archive (e.g., digital rights management, clear depiction of AI-generated content, version control, effective metadata structures, long-term preservation, and interoperability)?
- What are the potentials for building open collaborative archives? Which kinds of ethical heuristics could guide the process? How do we leverage AI in this effort?
- What applications are useful for computational analysis, and the organizational structure of TPC archival materials (e.g., DITA, HTML, CSS, ArcGIS, Juxta)? What can we learn from other fields like Digital Humanities?
- How could archival materials be repurposed for classrooms, user experience labs, writing centers, and the workplace?
- What inventive practices and methods are needed in our field’s pedagogy and research in relation to archives, their automation, and digital aggregations?
- How might critical approaches to TPC archiving inform our understanding and teaching of digital content management and strategy?
- How do/could practitioners navigate these relations between AI and archives in workplace contexts?
- How might re-theorizing the archive in TPC help us reimagine the future of its development and use?
- How might TPC practitioners disrupt the colonialism and violence of archiving? What new decolonial repositories are possible for the field?

Please email 500-word proposals to G. Edzordzi Agbozo (agbozog@uncw.edu) and Godwin Y. Agboka (agbokag@uhd.edu) by **April 15th, 2024**. We also welcome questions and project ideas as you prepare your proposal.

Timeline

- Proposals due: April 15, 2024
- Proposal acceptances by: May 1, 2024
- Manuscripts due to special issue editors (to be sent out for review): August 15, 2024
- Accepted manuscripts due to TCQ editorial team: February 20, 2025
- Publication: July 2025

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