

## **Remediating photography in community archives and the question of epistemic reparations**

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### **Abstract**

Community photographic archives are distinguished by their bottom up and inclusive approaches, which are rooted in participatory archiving methodologies, including open source access and grassroots contributions (Ruchel-Stockmans 2022). These archives constitute new intermedial networks, in which historical and analogue vernacular photography is reshaped into novel assemblages. In the context of a digitally interconnected environment, characterized by heightened connectivity and accessibility, digital community archives hold the potential to forge a more diverse and inclusive understanding of the past and foster broader participation (Azoulay 2019). This includes the amplification of marginalized perspectives, notably those of African American communities. Using Fortepan Iowa as a case study, a digital photographic archive to which Iowans can upload their private photographs, this paper aims to examine the affordances and challenges of the community archive in shaping a diversified view of history. We will argue that an intermedial perspective can shed light on how the transfer of photographs from an analogue format and a private sphere into a digital heritage environment reconfigures these personal souvenirs into catalysts of collective memory. Drawing from a social justice and epistemic reparations approach (Caswell & Punzalan 2016; Lackey 2022), this research seeks to uncover how social exclusion can be resisted or—sometimes inadvertently—perpetuated. As such, this paper aims to contribute to a critical understanding of the possibilities and challenges which community photographic archives face to surpass historic prejudice and construct a more diverse understanding of the past.

### **Keywords**

Community archives, vernacular photography, analogue photography, digital archives, epistemic reparations, social justice

## **Bio**

**Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans** is assistant professor in contemporary art, photography and lens media at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). After studying philosophy and art history in Cracow, Poland, she completed a PhD in art history at KU Leuven, Belgium. Currently, she leads a team of international researchers exploring vernacular lens media archives at the peripheries of Europe. She publishes on photography and art theory, media archeology, documentary practices, postcolonial theories, visualizations of grass-roots protest movements, as well as East European cultures, history and representations. Her book *Images Performing History* appeared in 2015 in Leuven University Press.

**Zoë Kennis** is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Art Sciences and Archaeology at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). She is participating in the Talent for Research extracurricular honours program, designed to immerse exceptionally gifted students in academic research within a professional setting. Guided by Professor Ruchel-Stockmans, her research within this program delves into vernacular photography within community archives.

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