

## Bewitching memory: essays on the notion of dis\_archive in education research

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This text is part of ongoing doctoral research. It is, therefore, an essay on the notions of dis\_archives presented in the research. This composition is inspired by Conceição Evaristo's spells and Saidiya Hartman's escapes from traditional notions of what is understood, organized and valid as a memory/archive. This is an attempt at entanglement amidst the imp-possibilities of archival statements about gender and sexuality dissent, therefore the object of this work is to propose a brief notion of dis\_archive, which is in development, and spread some provocations of how some archives can cross the trans senses/experiences.

**Keywords:** Archive. Dis\_archive. Memory. Trans.

### Enfeitiçar a memória: ensaios sobre a noção de des\_arquivo na pesquisa em educação

### Resumo

O presente texto, parte da pesquisa de doutorado em andamento, é um ensaio sobre as noções de des\_arquivos que estão sendo desenvolvidas nessa investigação em andamento. Esta composição é inspirada pelos feitiços de Conceição Evaristo e pelas fugas de Saidiya Hartman (2020) às noções tradicionais daquilo que é compreendido, organizado e validado como memória/arquivo. O objetivo deste trabalho é propor uma breve noção de des\_arquivo, ainda em construção, numa tentativa de emaranhamento em meio às im-possibilidades de enunciados arquivísticos sobre dissidências de gênero e sexualidade, suscitando provocações de como alguns arquivos podem atravessar os sentidos/experiências trans.

**Palavras-chave:** Arquivo. Des\_arquivo. Memória. Trans.

## 1 Introduction

In August 2024, I attended a class by Professor abigail Campos Leal, PhD in Philosophy, as part of a course offered on learning to listen (*com*) Conceição Evaristo. On that occasion, abigail offered a journey through the possibilities of listening (reading) to

Conceição Evaristo. One of these *escutas* (Portuguese for "listenings"; used here to evoke a deeper, embodied form of attentive reading and presence) explored how Conceição's writing lives and constructs alternative possibilities of the world, resisting colonial logics through a kind of spell against the marks of forgetting produced by colonization. If colonization is a forgetting machine, as abigail puts it, Conceição conjures an enchantment capable of making memory exist. Through her writings, which become true literary spells, Conceição Evaristo teaches us how plundered memory can become a living writing, putting into play the very notion of memory itself.

Along the paths I've taken so far in the construction of my dissertation, I have encountered some questions about memory, such as: how to re\_think the meanings and compositions of memories? How to re\_think the itineraries of dissident memories?

If Conceição Evaristo, with her literary spells, presents routes of *escrevivências* (a neologism by Evaristo combining "writing" and "experiences of living" — especially from a Black female perspective), then Saidiya Hartman, in turn, displaces descriptive and analytical notions of archives to tell and represent, through counter-histories of the present, the lives of the unnamed and the forgotten. In this process of undoing the colonial machinery that produces forgetting, Hartman considers loss and respects the limits of what cannot be known (Hartman, 2020).

These are two Black women who have felt — and still feel — the marks and pain of a slavery process that has not ended. They not only break with hegemonic logics of memory preservation but also produce, outside the colonial logic of forgetting, other ways of inscribing themselves in this world — inscribing their ancestries and others who could never speak for themselves. These two women narrate im\_possible stories, which re-assemble the history of slavery and the open wounds left by colonization — wounds that still burn.

Feeling the effects of this spell) conjured by Evaristo — which seems to resonate in order to make us reflect on the very idea of memory that confronts us — it becomes possible to think of a kind of re-elaboration of the past, grounded in what is lived in the present, and how these movements can influence the future. At the same time, we rarely

think about forgetting — about forgotten moments, people, objects, places. The colonizing machine of forgetting has been, and still is, successful in stripping us of the right to memory.

In the text *Venus in Two Acts*, the North American professor and writer Saidiya Hartman urges us to reflect on im\_possible stories — those recorded in the archives of the slavery period. These archives, marked by extreme violence, document people whose lives were treated as commodities, identified through insults and crude jokes. In this sense, Hartman (2020, p. 15) states that “the archive, in this case, is a death sentence, a tomb, an exhibition of the violated body, an inventory of property [...]”.

After the restlessness provoked by reading Hartman (2020), I find myself profoundly affected when reflecting on the dissidences present in the archives I have accessed—newspapers, clippings from digital media, etc. — as presented in *foto\_des\_arquivo 1* (photo\_dis\_archive 1). This archival violence seems to operate in a manner very similar to what Hartman (2020) describes in her text. Although the contexts and times differ, the maintenance and operation of the archival machine function in the same direction, as the violences, jokes, and forms of estrangement not only operate the machine of forgetting but also position sex-gender dissidences in spaces of nonexistence.

Inspired by the spells of Conceição Evaristo and by the counter-histories of the present offered by Saidiya Hartman (2020), I have been re\_thinking traditional notions of what is understood, organized, and validated as memory/archive. I would like to entangle myself in the im\_possibilities of archival enunciations about gender and sexuality dissidences. Thus, the aim here is to sketch an essay on the notions of dis\_archive (*des\_arquivo*), a proposition under development in this dissertation, articulating this notion with other ways of composing the concepts of memory and archive. To do so, we will confabulate with the theoretical perspectives of Sam Bourcier (2005), Saidiya Hartman (2020), abigail Campos Leal (2021), among others.

To make the paths of this dis\_archival route viable, we will begin by sketching the notions of *des\_arquivo* and the meanings they mark in their compositions. In the next route, we will explore the notions of self\_dis\_archiving, in dialogue with Artières (1998) and his

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Starting from the many places that have been conceived, (re)constructed, and produced for the elaboration of an archive, I would like to mobilize the idea of *des\_arquivo*. It is important to highlight that, when embarking on this endeavor, I drew inspiration from several sources. One of them was the **Arquivo das Transmasculinidades Negras**

(@transencruzilhadas<sup>1</sup>), in which the creator, Bruno Santana, builds a digital archive on Instagram of living Black trans men, thereby operating in a dissident manner in relation to traditional archival thinking.

My interest in this theme deepened even further when I encountered the stories that compose *image dis\_archive 1*. In research settings and on social media, I came across newspaper clippings that addressed the "strangeness" and "abnormalities" of "women" who wished to "become men" or "women" who lived as "men."

In trying to understand the new directions I wanted to give my research — especially after reading Sam Bourcier, Saidiya Hartman, abigail Campos Leal, among others — I began to grasp some dimensions of how archives can function. I realized that all things, in some way, end up becoming archives. They are not only found in collections or memory centers; archives are also on our desks, in our drawers. From the moment we arrive in this world, we are registered in archives.

Certainly, I noticed that traditional notions of archive would not fit the research proposal I have been developing. Therefore, I distance myself from the idea of the archive as something whose function is merely to catalog what happened, preserving, storing, and/or privileging documents (Derrida, 2001).

According to Aquino and Do Val (2018, pp. 45–46), archives are always connected

to the notion of heritage, the construction of social identities, and the strengthening of memory mechanisms. The archive can be understood both as the institution responsible for safeguarding documents and as the set of texts selected, organized, and preserved according to a specific logic of truth (Aquino; Do Val, 2018, p. 45-46).

Therefore, Sam Bourcier (2005), French activist, sociologist, and queer theorist, in *Sexpolitiques – Queer Zones 2*, argues that the archive represents access to the past and is associated with the demand for truth, with the identification of acts and facts. Often, it temporally structures existence (life/death), which can make the archive genuinely an archive. According to Bourcier (2005), these conceptions of archives tied to death are forms

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<sup>1</sup> Access link: <https://www.instagram.com/transencruzilhadas?igsh=YTdjdTf3ZDh2eHhz>



of legitimization and valorization of the past.

Understanding the archive as a historical-social technology implies recognizing its role in the construction and maintenance of power over what will or will not be known about the past. It also involves the power to determine what will be excluded from memories (Schwartz; Cook, 2004, p. 16). In other words, we are talking about a machine of forgetting. According to Leal (2021, p. 156), it is essential to problematize the constitution of our archives, as "they have been colonized by an Eurocentric demand, which, in the end, obliterates our geo-history and undermines our resistance."

This dimension of forgetting will be discussed by Professor abigail Leal as part of the inheritance left by the system of colonial racialization, which operates with the strategy of deleting memories and sparing white people from any reparations in the face of the horrors promoted by colonialism and racism (Leal, 2021). In this way, this mode of operation through the forgetting and erasure of archives is also a result of this colonial and racist system, which manipulates its gears to obliterate the memories and recollections of sexual and gender dissidences.

In an attempt to excavate memories, re-locate stories, and re-remember moments that were, in some way, violated by silence or the machine of forgetting, I would like to propose the idea of a *dis\_archive*.

Inspired by the undisciplined stance urged by Jota Mombaça (2016) in *Rastros de uma submetodologia indisciplinada*, the thinker announces an undisciplinary principle, disloyalty to the norm. I would like to propose a theoretical-methodological smuggling in dialogue with Mombaça (2016) to think about a *dis\_archive* research, we will be disloyal to the traditional, conservative modes of constructing and producing archives.

The *dis\_archive* research aligns with the insubmissions proposed by Mombaça (2016), as it seeks to excavate/disrupt the archives of theoretical production, the erased/silenced memories from the pages of history, "hacking the tympani of scientific listening to let pass, through them, noises previously ignored; and privileging unauthorized authorships, bringing visibility to contexts of disputes around questions of who and how to speak" (Mombaça, p.345, 2016).

In the theoretical smuggling trail proposed by Mombaça (2016), understood by the author as a radical fragmentation of theoretical circuits, while also connecting to the world via the web and reduced to specific production axes. In the research developed by the author, the sharing circuits were blogs, open archives by people from various places around the world, conveyed through the internet. Inspired by theoretical smuggling, I will steal the idea of the archive to (re)think theoretical strategies and methodological procedures of a *dis\_archive*.

Next, we will briefly present part of the methodological *dis*-paths of a *dis\_archive* research. It is important to highlight that there is no fixed, closed way to think about *dis\_archive*; there are no limitations, no full stops, no beginnings, middle, and ends. *Dis\_archives* are thought of in a circular way, and it is crucial to emphasize this because there are no linear methodological steps — starting one stage does not mean the end of another.

## 2.1 *DIS\_ARCHIVE*: other ways of constructing memory

The idea of a *dis\_archive* initially arises as a way to deviate, to escape, from the possibilities of creating different itineraries to compose archives. If everything around me can be an archive — including me, my body, my memory, the news on websites, blogs, photos posted on social media, the posters on university walls, this cluster of things circulating daily in our lives — then I started gathering all these things in the RAM<sup>2</sup> memory of my computer, specifically in a folder named ORLANDO, with screenshots, photos, and references to news I accessed while navigating this great archival collection that is the internet, as well as things that came to me as well.

I have been maturing and am still in these processes of study for my doctoral research. In this essay, we explore the notions of archive through the maps of gaps, in dialogue with the thinking developed by Sam Bourcier (2023) in *The Politics of Archive*. In

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<sup>2</sup> RAM is the computer memory that temporarily stores the files you are working with.

this text, the author develops some ideas about the archive, the first of which is as follows:

The first thing to do, perhaps, to change our view of the archive is to perceive its biopolitical dimension and see it as a continuum. If we do not start from the omnipresence of the archive in our lives, we do not understand its reach, the division of its flow, the will to control it fuels, and its biopolitical fiber (Bourcier, 2023, p. 25).

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According to Bourcier (2005), creating a living and productive archive would, paradoxically, weaken our resistance to the virtual archive and the need to build new archives. It would be important to invest in the very incompleteness of the archive. Bourcier (2005) proposes an approach to living and speaking organisms, not with the goal of making them sign deposit authorizations, but of involving written, visual, and auditory archives as an escape from the predictable zones of silencing.

In light of this provocation from Bourcier (2005), I began thinking about how I could dis\_organize the files that were piled up in ORLANDO, in a way that I wouldn't reproduce the same logic proposed by traditional archives — storing and piling them in inaccessible places.

In the **first cycle of dis\_archive**, I went to ORLANDO and selected files with reports that dealt with the National Identity Card, at a time when we were fervently discussing the topic. Along with Philippe Artières' (1998) discussions in *Archiving One's Own Life*, I began reworking the notions of auto\_dis\_archive while also rediscovering my domestic archives.

Thus, the process of de-composition in dis\_archive can also stem from an experiment with sources you have or do not have access to. The composition of a dis\_archive is neither closed nor fixed, nor does it aim to be; it is creative. The composition of a dis\_archive is not only in the production of images originating from sources, but in the sounds those images can produce. It resides in meanings, in written and linguistic production, in the crossroads that promote the encounter of many places: creative trails, pathways ruined by the machine of forgetting, roads of the arts — including transarts and transpoetry (Santos, 2022) — and various paths of im-possibilities. It is important to state



that *dis\_archive* is not the antonym of archive; it is dissident. *Dis\_archive* is a circular movement in time and space; it is not bound to the past and can draw on the present and the future to memorialize.

## 2.2 Dispersion of memories

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An analysis that marks the researcher's involvement with the "object of study," going against the supposed neutrality of scientific knowledge, which seems to speak not of subjects, but of objects, images, and dominant narratives produced from a colonial point of view (Mombaça, 2015).

In an attempt to escape the traditional ways of socializing our research and archives, how could we envision research and archives that are not kept away, covered in dust, or restricted to the privileged access of certain groups? What are the strategies for sharing our research beyond academic archives?

I have been experimenting — still timidly — with alternative strategies for socializing the research, first through a profile created on Instagram, @des\_arquivomemorias, and by turning the *foto\_des\_arquivo* into *lambes* (wheat-paste posters) and placing them in public spaces. *Image\_dis\_archive 1* from this text is already circulating on social media via @des\_arquivomemorias and will soon be present in other spaces as well.

## 3 (Re)assembling oneself: composing *auto\_dis\_archives*

In these encounters with archives, I began observing and recognizing those that make up my life, my daily routines: the archives I produce about myself and my trajectories. Reflecting on them — and on how I might organize them to shape the process of research — I started calling this movement *auto\_dis\_archive*. These compositions are part of the broader idea of the *dis\_archive*; thus, an *auto\_dis\_archive* is a *dis\_archive* traversed by subjectivities, ways of experiencing/living the world.

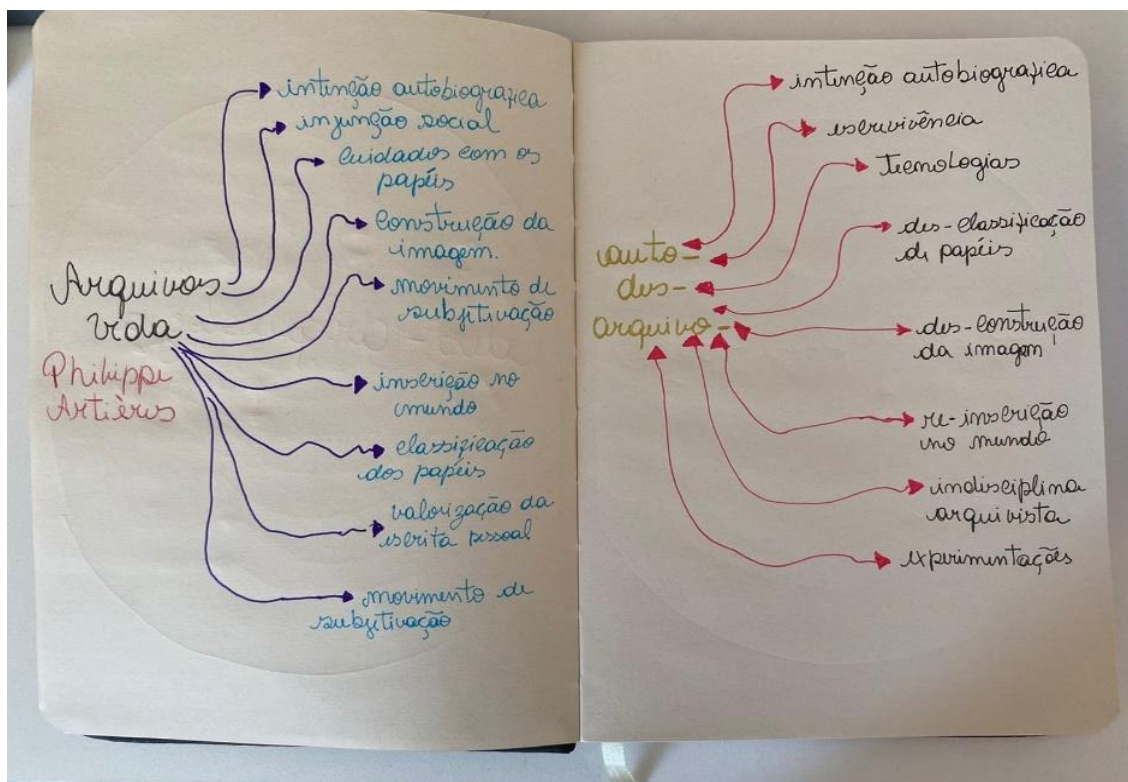
Building on the reflections of Philippe Artières, a French historian who dedicated his research to what he termed "minor archives" — referring to ordinary archives such as autobiographies, graffiti, medical reports, etc. — I gradually developed the concept of *auto\_dis\_archives*.

Artières (1998, p.11) introduces the notion of "Archiving One's Own Life" and argues: "to archive one's own life is to look in the mirror, to contrast the social image with the intimate image of oneself, and in that sense, the archiving of the self is a practice of self-construction and resistance." In the self-archiving practices proposed by Artières, the first commandment is: "thou shalt archive thy life," through countless practices, such as writing diaries, storing papers in a folder, drawer, or safe. In this act of archiving our lives, Artières (1998, p.11) emphasizes that there is no random process: "we make a pact with reality, we manipulate existence: we omit, erase, cross out, underline, highlight certain passages."

It seems that the French historian suggests that the practice of archiving oneself is a process of composition shaped by time and space. Over time, some things stop being relevant enough to keep, while others acquire value and become little treasures. It's been 27 years since Artières (1998) wrote about archiving one's life. Letters are no longer in fashion, paper correspondence is losing ground to digital exchanges, and photo albums now reside in the cloud. Still, I find it worthwhile to smuggle Artières' ideas into the discussion around *auto\_dis\_archives*.

In the practices of archiving the self, what the author defines as an "autobiographical intention" emerges, in which normative and procedural elements give way to a movement of subjectivation. Since the eighteenth century, according to Artières (1998, p.13), the power of writing has entered our daily lives to the point of being everywhere: "to exist, one must inscribe oneself: in civil records, in medical files, school files, bank accounts."

Figure 1 — Image dis\_archive 2.



Source: Author's composition (2024).

It is worth reflecting on this in light of the times we live in, especially when considering the reality of trans people and the confrontation with the **cistemas** (systems) of inscription and operation in the world. We are inscribed into this world according to our genitals, documents, medical records, school records, among others. But what happens when you do not recognize yourself in that set of inscriptions that were established for you? The inscribed archive is not just a record—it is the legitimization of the **cistema** (system) for our existences.

A recent example was the debate over Brazil's new national identification document, the *Carteira de Identidade Nacional* (CIN), which will replace the traditional *Registro Geral* (RG). This decision was made in February 2022, still during the administration of former president Jair Bolsonaro. Among the proposed changes were the

inclusion of the “sex” field and the “social name,” preceded by the legal name. In October 2022, the *Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais* (ANTRA) and the *Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Intersexos* (ABGLT) filed a civil public action against the CIN.

In May 2023, under the current administration of President Lula, the *Ministry of Management and Innovation in Public Services* (MGI) announced that the fields would be removed from the CIN, following a request from the *Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship* (MDH). However, in December 2023, the government reversed the decision and chose to maintain the “social name” and “sex” fields (Agência Mural, 2023). A preliminary injunction granted by the Federal Court in May 2024, issued by Judge Mateus Pontalti of the 13th Civil Court of Brasília/DF, ordered changes to the layout of the CIN. In other words, in the presentation of personal data, the “sex” field was to be removed, leaving only the name field (Bomfim, 2024)

The entire dispute surrounding the distinction between social and legal names and the exposure of the “sex” field only reinforces how *cistemas* (systems) of documentation and registration fail to address the specific realities of trans people in Brazil. The display of the legal name on the CIN represents a complete disregard for the right to one's name and, as such, is a transphobic measure. This debate lays bare the multiple layers of access denied to trans people across various sectors of society. Not to mention how deeply problematic the inclusion of the “sex” category is. Here, there's room for numerous discussions, but let's start with the most basic: if we consider that this category corresponds to genitals, what information does that actually provide? What I can see so far is the categorization of people based solely on their genitalia.



Figure 2 — Image dis\_archive 3.



Source: Author's composition (2024).

According to Artières (1998, p. 13), there is no escape: the well-adjusted individual must organize their documents — passport, proof of residence, phone records, civil registry, diploma. “We must, therefore, maintain our archives with care; not only must we not lose our papers, but we must also prove that they are well organized. They must show coherence with the norm.”



Thus, it is possible to notice the relationships that Artières establishes with domestic archives, which, for him, form part of the archives of the self, highlighting the importance, care, and management of these documents. In this sense, the French historian's remarks about how archives influence processes of social integration and exclusion draw my attention—such as medical and domestic documents, which can prevent someone from receiving proper healthcare. “To be well integrated socially, to continue to exist, it is necessary to constantly present papers, and any violation of this rule is punished” (Artières, 1998, p. 13).

While reading Artières (1998), I decided to take a look at my own domestic archives and found what looked like a mountain of papers from the process of requesting name and gender changes in my “official” documents. I began to wonder: what weight do these documents still carry in my life? I keep everything in a box, inside a folder, buried under other folders, hidden from everyone — not as a treasure, but as an archive.

In my case, I keep these documents out of fear that I may need them one day, whether to defend myself or for some other reason I cannot yet foresee. No matter how many times you update your name, request changes, open support tickets, send emails, or call the toll-free number, there is always someone — or some institution — that insists on bringing the old name back. It's exhausting: a huge drain of energy, full of unnecessary exposure and constant embarrassment.

According to Artières (1998, p. 21), “the individual must maintain their personal archives in order to have their identity recognized. We must control our lives. Nothing can be left to chance.” This statement provokes me to ask: who truly has the right to have their identity recognized through archives? And who is actually in control of our personal archives?

Here, I find myself in disagreement with Artières (1998), because for trans and travesti people, there is no full control over our lives, nor is there any assurance of our existence based on the “official” ideas of archive. There are no guarantees of our identities when it comes to domestic, administrative, or any other kind of records. Even after the legal rectification process, documents do not ensure that our identities will be respected.

Although this is a right recognized by the Brazilian State, it still does not offer real guarantees.

The ongoing negotiations surrounding the National Identity Card (CIN) exemplify this issue: even though the State acknowledges the use of a social name, these constant back-and-forths reveal how systems of control operate to reinforce prejudice and the marginalization of our existences

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Figure 3 — Image dis\_archive 4.



Source: Author's composition (2024).

Since the first time I began thinking about archives for research, I've been concerned with how I was going to *dis-organize* everything: my *auto\_dis\_archives*, which begin in my *escrevivências* — in the notebook pages where I construct my ideas, my lack of ideas, notes, and photographs, as well as how I make sense of each process involved in what I read and write. The photographs of the notebook also compose my

*auto\_dis\_archive*.

An *auto\_dis\_archive* opens *un-paths* toward another mode of conducting research, shaped by experiments in/with the world. What is out there that might fit in here? What is in here that might fit out there? What can my senses experience? Which images mark me the most? What words will pierce through me?

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These questions (dis)orient me in the commitment to not follow the rules, triggering other ways of thinking/doing archives — a kind of archivist indiscipline, especially in how archives are composed and organized. In this light, I will smuggle in Artières' (1998) notion of **autobiographical intention**, which, for the author, refers to the desire to assemble an image of oneself through the arrangement provided by one's own documents (Vieira, 2023).

This archivist indiscipline provokes two other movements: **the *de\_classification* of papers and the *de\_construction* of the image**. Traditionally, there are many established ways to organize and preserve archives, through techniques and protocols that ensure their care and maintenance. However, the proposal here is to take the documents out of drawers, boxes, and other compartments. The *de\_classification* of papers involves rethinking, organizing, and composing documents that traverse past, present, and perhaps future. The *de\_construction* of the image flows alongside this movement, allowing us to imagine other ways of composing archives with images.

Our domestic archives, in general, include photo albums that tell a bit of our memories. But what about those who don't have such memories? How can we think of an *auto\_dis\_archive* that also accesses a place many of us — trans and *travesti* people — never had? Through *dis\_archives*, it becomes possible to dream, to sketch, to assemble, to paste, and to use technologies as tools to access a past and a future — a space where we might re-inscribe ourselves into the world, where our stories do not remain locked in drawers, where the headlines speak of victories instead of violence or death. We will dare to re-create other worlds.

Figure 4 — Image dis\_archive 5.



Source: Author's composition (2024).

#### 4 Final considerations

The *dis\_archive* here is conceived as a space for experimentation. As I practice my processes of excavation and discovery through the *dis\_archives*, I also inscribe myself within them, I *auto\_dis\_archive* myself. These experimentations have allowed me to read differently, to listen, to look around more attentively, and to engage my senses more intensely.

I have come to feel the importance of the practice of listening in order to understand the *dis\_organization* of the *dis\_archives*, as I was encouraged to do by Professor abigail Campos Leal in the course mentioned in the introduction: to learn how to provoke the sense of listening. One must truly listen — read by listening, write by listening, hear by listening, feel by listening, do activism by listening, conduct research by listening.



And why is this important to this research? Because *dis\_archiving* is not merely about gathering references, collecting sources, or pasting things onto a page. It is also about enabling the *feel/thinking*. The experience of listening — and here I do not refer only to hearing — allows us to access other worlds and even imagine them.

If life can be understood as an experience of archiving or perhaps of autobiographical *dis\_archiving* — as the composition of a living archive or *dis\_archive* — then it is within this context that a confluence of "ethical, political, ontographic, epistemological, etc. thought may emerge" (Leal, 2021, p. 76). If life is this entanglement of archiving and *dis\_archiving*, I would like to listen once more to Professor abigail, when she states: "Here I radicalize the necessity of the gesture! To cross over Western metaphysics and its white colonial logic, it is necessary to put the body and life on the line!" (Leal, 2021, p. 76).

In this context, it is urgent to put body and life into dispute in order to dismantle the forgetting machine. It is imperative to question hegemonic forms of archive construction, which sovereignly produce truths, and to pursue a radical approach to composing other memories, produced from our *feel/thinking*.

Thus, according to abigail Campos Leal (2021, p. 76), "it is necessary to recognize the body and life as legitimate archives from which it is possible to produce, create, fabulate, speculate, diagnose, and, ultimately, to think!" Therefore, I believe that *dis\_archival* productions may contribute to building an ethical\_theoretical\_epistemic practice, in which the enchantments of memory, the counter-histories of the present, the *auto\_dis\_archives*, and so many other possibilities re\_elaborate strategies of re\_inventing modes of archiving and remembering. It is not only about surviving but about creating conditions for "fertilizing life beyond-life, life entangled in things" (Mombaça, 2021, p. 19).

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