

A SCRIPT FOR AN ARCHIVE:

WOMEN

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Commissioned for *What Is A Living Archive. Curating The
'unruly' materiality of Contemporary Art*, Duncan of
Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee.

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FADE IN

INTERIOR. SCREENING ROOM IN A LIBRARY, SEMI DARKNESS, MORNING.

CAMERA: Wide shot of whole space, black leather sofa and black Ikea coffee table are tightly packed into a small room. Grey painted walls. No windows. Large flat screen monitor mounted to the wall. White Apple mouse hangs near the edge of the table. The cable disappears into darkness. White on black. Yoga mat rolled up and placed in corner, a potted fake orchid on the floor by the leg of the table. Two doors in and out. LIGHTS off.

SOUND: Extractor fan HUMMING loudly.

CAMERA: Cut to close up shot of the mouse hanging over the edge of the table.

SOUND: Door can be heard opening and closing off camera.

CAMERA: Cut to wide shot of whole space.

PROCESS (older woman) enters the room, we can barely see her shadowy outline. She moves with nervous energy. Strip LIGHT flickers into life behind her. The room is illuminated with a harsh green light. She is dressed in jeans and a black jumper, very relaxed almost scruffy. Hair pulled back into a pony tail. She is wearing a face mask. She puts down her bag, and gets out a pack of anti - bacterial wipes. She calmly wipes down the table, and the mouse, then uses the wipe to switch on the monitor. She places the pack of wipes on the table and gets a bottle of hand sanitiser out of her bag. She sanitises her hands and places the bottle on the table next to the wipes. She takes off her face mask. She gets a notebook / pencil out of her bag and places them on the table. She sits down on the sofa and looks around the tiny space. She stares at the monitor, she shakes the mouse.

CAMERA: Close up of PROCESS's hand on the mouse. Strip LIGHT goes off and PROCESS's hand becomes lit by the monitor's glow.

CAMERA: Cut to wide shot of monitor on wall.

ARCHIVE (younger woman) awakes. She is dressed in black. Tailored. Hair neatly brushed. She stares straight ahead at PROCESS. Neat and quietly ordered ARCHIVE is ready. The clock on the wall ticks. It is close to 9.30am. She is available from 9am - 4.45pm, Monday to Friday. At evenings and weekends, she is alone. She is still, blank, until she is asked to show something. It is listed in alphabetical order by artist first name. ARCHIVE sits quietly. Waiting.

CAMERA: Cut to wide shot of ARCHIVE and PROCESS sitting opposite each other.

ARCHIVE: Hello, my name is Archive. Welcome to the REWIND collection.

PROCESS: Hi Archive, my name is Process.

ARCHIVE: Lovely to meet you and thanks for coming to Dundee.

PROCESS: I am excited to be here.

ARCHIVE: Great - are you ready?

PROCESS: Yes.

PROCESS pauses and stares at ARCHIVE.

PROCESS: The thing is I am not sure what to do?

ARCHIVE: Well, this archive is made up digitally remastered versions of video works made between the 1970's and 1990's. There is a list of the artists on the screen in this room. I would suggest you have a look down it, choose a name and click on it with your mouse. You will then open up another menu with a list of video works by the artist you have selected. You can watch them in alphabetical or date order or go randomly through the list. Once you have decided, you can select which one you want to watch by clicking on it. It will load the video up and play it. You can do this over and over again, as many times as you like.

ARCHIVE pauses and stares back at PROCESS.

CAMERA: cut to top of table. We see notebook, pencil, hand sanitiser, and wipes.

ARCHIVE: There is a lot to watch. Do you know which artists or works you want to see?

PROCESS: Yes, I want to watch the video work by women artists.

ARCHIVE smiles.

CAMERA: Pans along the edge of table until it rests on PROCESS's hand on the mouse.

ARCHIVE: We have a few, eighteen I think.

PROCESS: Out of how many?

ARCHIVE: 92, at the last count.

PROCESS: So, a fifth are women?

ARCHIVE: Yes.

CAMERA: Pulls back to show whole space.

ARCHIVE and PROCESS look at each other. A stillness passing between them.

SOUND: Extractor fan HUMMING becomes louder.

CAMERA: Shift of focus to behind PROCESS showing blank grey wall.

PROCESS: Oh, that's disappointing. I thought there was more.

PROCESS looks down at her notebook and begins to write.

CAMERA: Cut to mid shot of PROCESS with notebook. Camera pans across notebook to her hand holding the pencil.

CAMERA: Zooms into pencil until out of focus.

ARCHIVE: There are some that aren't available on this screen. We have 18 artists listed on the website and have an even smaller number available to view.

PROCESS: How many?

ARCHIVE: Eleven - Catherine Elwes, Elaine Shemilt, Elsa Stansfield, Judith Goddard, Katherine Meynell, Madelon Hooykaas, Marion Urch, Pratibha Parmer, Rose Garrard, Tamara Krikorian, Tina Keane, and then three women who made work with men as part of a collaboration - Anne Wilson, Sue Hall, and Wendy Brown.

PROCESS pauses and looks up from her notebook.

CAMERA: Cut to a shot of her feet under the table. They fill the frame, large and out of focus.

PROCESS: Ok, well I will start with Catherine Elwes and work my way through the list.

ARCHIVE: Great, we have 15 works of hers for you to view. I would suggest starting with *The Critics Informed Viewing*. The work is of a woman sitting on a sofa in a living room watching T.V., eating what looks like cheese on toast. The woman is in the foreground with the T.V. in the background. There is a

woman's voice commenting on the images we are seeing on the television. The voice discusses the roles of women and the frustration of the limitations. The camera lens shifts the viewers focus between the T.V. and the woman eating.

PROCESS: Sounds interesting - how long is it?

ARCHIVE: About 26 minutes, how many works do you think you will watch?

PROCESS: I am here all day so I'm guessing I will watch as many as I can in the time I have. What will you do?

ARCHIVE: I will sit quietly and wait until you need me.

PROCESS: O.K. Thanks.

ARCHIVE sits starting at PROCESS, PROCESS stares back.

ARCHIVE places her hands on her lap.

CAMERA: Cut to close up of ARCHIVE's hands on lap and then slowly pulls out to show whole of ARCHIVE.

PROCESS starts to watch the videos.

SOUND: Extractor fans HUMS loudly in the background.

CAMERA: Wide shot of ARCHIVE and PROCESS in the frame together, sitting opposite each other.

PROCESS: I have managed to watch a few works but I am only part way through. Have you watched any of these videos?

ARCHIVE: Yes, a while ago, 2004 I think. When they were first digitised.

PROCESS: They are fascinating.

ARCHIVE pauses.

ARCHIVE: I didn't think they were relevant anymore.

PROCESS: I understand what you mean. I am surprised too but I think they are completely relevant - they seem to connect.

ARCHIVE: Connect, connect to whom?

PROCESS: Connect to us, here and now.

ARCHIVE: Really? To us here and now, in what way?

PROCESS: Well - how we are represented, you know, objectified, loved.

ARCHIVE: Represented..., objectified..., loved..., How do you mean?

PROCESS: Well, how we are turned from a person into an object whose purpose is to be looked at or how we might be described by someone else or written about.

ARCHIVE sits and thinks for a moment.

ARCHIVE: I hadn't thought I could become an object. I'm not sure about that, how would I speak?

PROCESS: Oh, you would have no voice and someone else speaks for you or about you.

ARCHIVE: Someone else speaks for me, about me? Really? You mentioned we - who is this we?

PROCESS: Women.

CAMERA: Pans down the side of both their bodies until we get to their feet. The table is in the centre of the frame.

ARCHIVE: What us? We are spoken about by someone else, without our voices being heard.

PROCESS: Yes.

ARCHIVE pauses and leans back away from PROCESS. She thinks.

ARCHIVE: I need some time to think about that. You also said loved? What do you mean by how we are loved?

PROCESS: Yes - loved. How we are loved. You know, if we behave a certain way or become a certain role, we gain validation, acceptance, love.

ARCHIVE: I am not sure about validation but isn't that what we all want, to be accepted. I think a lot of these women's works speak to that, being acknowledged with our own voice. Accepted for who we are. Love is a whole other thing. I'm just not sure what you mean about the roles?

ARCHIVE crosses her arms over her chest and tilts her head to one side.

CAMERA: Pan slowly up table leg to the mouse. PROCESS'S hands fill the shot, large and out of focus.

PROCESS: Well, the limited roles we find ourselves faced with by media, TV, the internet, social media. In the work, *The Critics Informed Viewing*, the artist uses the mainstream media of television to discuss the roles of women that we witness. She hops from channel to channel - there are only three - discussing how women are portrayed such as female pop singers on Top of the Pops - only the pretty ones being given the close ups; or a female police detective in *The Gentle Touch* being patronised by a male colleague and being represented as someone who can't be relied on; and in another programme called *Magnum P.I.*, where the female character is a woman who is so beautiful she can't be trusted.

ARCHIVE: But this work is from 1982. I know I have been here for a long time, but surely it is different now? Surely television programmes have evolved and women have other roles we can play?

PROCESS: Yes, I thought so too, but this work has made me think about it differently. I actually don't think much has changed for women. Yes, we have multiple channels on TV, Netflix, Amazon Prime, the internet - it's kind of endless, the amount of stuff we can watch, but within this, it is still about surface, women are still objectified, beautified, it's still the pretty ones that get the main frame. TV is still full of programmes where women are sexualised or being patronised, manipulated, or threatened by male characters. Why is TV still doing this?

ARCHIVE: Maybe these TV programmes are a protest? an activist action? A political statement?

PROCESS pauses and reflects.

CAMERA: Slow pan up PROCESS hands, up arm to shot of neck, no face in shot.

PROCESS: I don't think so. I think it is a choice to make these limited roles for women in the media. What is interesting is this video work and the others I have watched enables the audience to see that. It is like the artists are taking the format of a TV programme and unpacking it, playing with time, narrative, sound and image, and then reconstructing it back together in a different way, to show us the reality of how these constructs impact women. These video works become the political act, a social commentary from the period, an act of feminism, questioning the equality of women's roles and rights.

ARCHIVE: So how does that relate to the here and now, women's roles and rights today?

PROCESS: Through the archive, we can compare the then and now of women. We can then use this knowledge, to think about our present, what is different? what have we learned? noticed, observed and how we want the future to be?

ARCHIVE lights up.

ARCHIVE: The future to be, and how would you love the future to be?

PROCESS: well, it would be great to not have these metaphorical frames holding us to our place. Framing our bodies, framing our faces, framing our careers, framing our possibilities. Why can't we have a future where everyone has the same access to opportunities, so we are all judged on our merit not if our face or body fits a particular society's ideal.

ARCHIVE pauses and stretches her arms overhead.

CAMERA: Pan up her arms until her fingers fall out of shot. The CAMERA lens pulsates trying to focus on the semi - darkness

ARCHIVE: The roles, expectations, these metaphorical frames as you call them - I guess I never understood what the frames were doing before.

PROCESS: I think the roles or frames are the way society makes us think about how we view a woman, her body, how we objectify it, objectify her. The commodification of her as a product, how we judge her based on it or how it can be used or become a product to sell, an image. The body isn't active in this role of objectification, it is passive.

ARCHIVE: But we all know it is an image, a photograph, an advert, a fictional constructed narrative, that our bodies are not really passive.

PROCESS: Yes, intellectually we know that but the accumulative effect of these images of women is a message of BE PASSIVE.

ARCHIVE: Yes, I guess so. It sounds like you already know the answers, I am not sure why you are here?

PROCESS: I have come to research the women's work you have. I want to understand about being a woman both then and now, and if the invisibility of our voices was always part of history.

ARCHIVE: O.K. - that's clearer, then I would suggest you watch *Hands*. A work of black and white photographic images piled up like playing cards with white frames layered on top to isolate certain body parts. Come to think of it, there are also other works that build on similar themes and ideas.

PROCESS: Really, which ones?

CAMERA: Cuts to wide shot of space showing PROCESS making notes and ARCHIVE staring straight ahead. They are sitting opposite each other.

ARCHIVE: *Tumbled Frame, Medusa*, they use allegories such as Pandora's box and the story of Medusa to challenge the different characters women can adopt to navigate the world and their relationship to men. The protagonist talks directly to the camera, disrupting our expectation and unpicking the use of mainstream media to connect with their audience via their own voice. Leaving us thinking, how if women listen to and follow their own voice, have a curiosity in the world, they will be punished for not following the patriarchal rules.

PROCESS: Yes, and I guess all these artworks when watched all together, back to back, start to create a crescendo. They build on a common language between them all, that connects these women's voices of the past with our voices of the present. I guess that's what archives can do. They can activate the past from the present and think about a possible future.

ARCHIVE: And how do you think we use this energy of voices, to form an expression of 'woman' in the future?

CAMERA: Slow pan from wide shot into PROCESS's notebook. Words are out of focus.

PROCESS: Well, I'm not sure, maybe at the moment it is enough to notice these voices, and think about how we could use it to break out of these roles that have been created for us.

ARCHIVE: What? mother, wife, victim?

PROCESS: Yes, I thought I had some agency, side stepping these conventions but I see now that am still surrounded by photographs, films, TV, online content, paintings, sculptures of women, posing for history, posing for the viewer, having to make a choice between being the model or doing the looking. It's everywhere. A constant bombardment of look like me, act like me, be like me, be better, be prettier, be sexier: this rhythmic mantra never ends, until I don't even realise, but I

have given in, lost grip of myself and have started to simulate my own reflection so I become more and more like 'her', and less and less like me. Those 'real' women are two - dimensional objects, lit, positioned, poised, staged bodies at the ready. Yet, I am here, I am three - dimensional in space, I am lit by a strip light, hunched, tired, with an endless list of domestic jobs, trying to work. It's a reality that we are constantly pretending doesn't exist, a wilful blindness that enables us to function. Surely there is another voice, another way to be *woman*.

ARCHIVE looks directly at PROCESS.

CAMERA: Head and shoulder shot of the both in profile, facing each other.

SOUND: Extractor fans HUMS loudly in the background.

ARCHIVE: Yes, these women artists were using the medium of video to be equal to men. They were behind and in front of the camera simultaneously, directing their own bodies to represent and blow open the expectation of societies male gaze. Women via the camera looking at themselves by ourselves. The lens became the mirror. We could see our own gaze. So why didn't something change?

ARCHIVE turns her head away from PROCESS and shifts her body, adjusting her weight. She looks down at the floor.

CAMERA shifts to P.O.V shot of PROCESS. We see the monitor and the video player paused on the screen. There is a woman dressed in red holding a white dove.

PROCESS: Because maybe it is in certain men's interest for these roles to continue, women act as the mirror, that amplifies their image and making them twice as large. I guess for most women, this is where we think our power lies, by being the mirror because otherwise, what other options are available, invisibility? silence? The reality is women are the workers, we have been blinded by thinking we don't have a choice, we are like the soldiers in an army, the cannon fodder, there are rows and rows of us in the background, endlessly, we quietly lick the dirt.

ARCHIVE looks up at PROCESS.

CAMERA: Cut back to shot of PROCESS's face. Only half of her face fills the frame. She moves backwards and becomes out of focus.

ARCHIVE: That's so true. But how does that relate to these works?

PROCESS: I guess these works can get us to think more broadly about how archives are constructed; who is missing, who is selecting, and for whom? The visibility of the content of archives is really important. Is this collection of works a mirror of a society that is long past? Or do these works enable us to notice that things maybe have or haven't changed.

ARCHIVE: Changed? What things have changed?

PROCESS: Well our lives as women have changed from the 70's and 80's, our gender is a protected characteristic, there are rights in the work place for transwomen, Section 28 was repealed, we can have mortgages by ourselves, married women are taxed as individuals, we have more equality as part time workers, we have access to free contraception, we have become Lord Mayors, Judges, Prime Ministers, Speakers of the House, there is lots of legislation that has ensured equal rights for all women but I still don't feel equality.

ARCHIVE: And where do you think the equality sits?

CAMERA: Cut to shot of table filling the frame. We see a fake orchid in background.

PROCESS: It is not just in the law but in societies attitudes of women, towards women, the expectations around us and who controls the image of our bodies.

ARCHIVE: Have you got to the video work, *Bedtime Story* yet?

PROCESS: No - what's that work about?

ARCHIVE: I think it might connect with what you are saying. There is a part of it where the female narrator talks about going to a strip club with some men and explains - *I was a man woman - I could see with their eyes but I could feel with her body.*

PROCESS: Yes - that is exactly it - I have been taught to look at myself through the eyes of a man but feel my body as a woman. It is a constant jarring.

ARCHIVE: So which voice is yours?

PROCESS: Pardon?

ARCHIVE: Body? Object? Subject?

PROCESS: I guess all of them. I think I have a choice, that I can create my own role but it has already been decided. I am pinned to my place by my gender.

ARCHIVE: You sound frustrated?

PROCESS: Can you see it in my voice? The politeness of women to behave socially, to be compliant, to be nice, well - mannered, passive, beautiful, ready for 'on - show' is just so tiring. I try to make myself heard but raising my voice doesn't work as no - one is listening.

PROCESS pauses.

CAMERA pans down the leg of the table and across the floor until fake plastic orchid fills the frame. Camera lens shifts in and out of focus.

PROCESS: And how about you? Where is your voice?

ARCHIVE: Well, it is quiet and soft, like a memory buried deep down until I can barely hear it. For 18 years, I have held the voices of these women. I don't need to shout as the audience comes to me. Not many but they do come. So mainly no sound is heard and a stillness emerges. Memories float upwards, I don't know whose they are. Mine, yours, hers? I can remember sitting on the chair in the bathroom watching the lather being made between the soap and the flannel. There is no voice, just the sound of running water. I had never seen woman before. The attention to detail was immense. Overwhelming. Every inch of her surface seemed to be important. I realise I can't stop staring at her. I want to reach out my hand to touch. Numb.

PROCESS looks down.

CAMERA: POV shot of PROCESS view of her feet.

PROCESS shifts her body weight forward and leans into ARCHIVE.

PROCESS: That sounds so familiar, but I noticed a new voice had appeared. She, she, her, she, she, her, her, she, be, be, like, her. It endlessly repeats. It is exhausting.

ARCHIVE: She, she, her, she, she, her, her, she, be, be, like, her.

ARCHIVE leans forward to be closer to PROCESS.

PROCESS & ARCHIVE TOGETHER: She, she, her, she, she, her, her, she, be, be, like, her.

ARCHIVE & PROCESS pause and look at each other.

PROCESS: Yes, that's it. And I knew in that moment, that I couldn't be like her, I wasn't like her, I didn't like how it felt, out of control. There was too much of me, I had to give away. So, I stepped back and turned my head. I can't see her anymore but the voice remained, like a faint whisper, a quiet white noise.

ARCHIVE: And these women's artwork? Are they part of the same voice, telling you how to be a woman; what to say and how to say it?

PROCESS: No, it's great to know that many women have felt this way too, this pressure to conform, to play a series of constructed roles and these works really challenge that - I can build on their action, from woman to woman, generation to generation, in a hope that the collective voice will grow louder and louder, and that as an artist, 'I don't need to be a commodity, that the work is enough'.

ARCHIVE stares at PROCESS and leans back away from PROCESS. She places her hands on her lap and waits.

SOUND: Extractor fans HUMS loudly in the background.

ARCHIVE: So, what will you do now?

ARCHIVE gently reaches out her arm to touch PROCESS. PROCESS moves away at the same time, shifting in her seat and leaning back into the sofa.

CAMERA: View of back of PROCESS sitting on the sofa with the room folding out beyond her. We see ARCHIVE in the background of the shot. The CAMERA shifts focus from PROCESS to ARCHIVE.

PROCESS: I think I need to use my research to raise visibility, gentle challenge, and ask for it to be different. We need to ask difficult questions about the representation of women in archival and collection spaces. Where are we? Why are women's voices being marginalised? When will women's work be valued? What needs to happen for this to change? Currently, we can only see these works by asking permission. Again, we are being held at arm length from ourselves by the constructs of the institutions around us yet without us you would have nothing to paint, frame, sell, own, archive, our bodies give you the power.

CAMERA: Head and shoulder shot of PROCESS and ARCHIVE sitting opposite each other.

ARCHIVE: Yes, but archives in their nature are private spaces.

PROCESS: So, who holds the power to change this?

PROCESS looks directly into the lens. Head and shoulder shot fills frame.

PROCESS: You? Yes, I am talking to you, the curator, the archivist, the director, and the audience, are we complicate if we don't say anything, ask for something to be different? Or is your silence a political act? A silent resistance? Don't you want to be able to be see it, touch it, feel it.

ARCHIVE: Well, as Archive, I hold the work. I have shown you what I have in relation to your request: WOMEN. I have become the mirror for you to see the past and reflect it into the present. What happens next isn't up to me. I don't hold the power of the looking, that sits outside of the archival space itself and belongings in the hands of a few. It is their will that will change it.

PROCESS: I disagree, the power sits in the hands of everyone, we are taught that we have no agency, no voice, but we all hold it. These works where made in a response to who was and still are, holding the power. These works hold up a mirror to who has control over our artworks, our careers, our voice. These women artists were trying to share something of their lived experience, that is still relevant and happening to women today. This is a hidden feminist archive. Its content demands equality.

PROCESS stares down at the floor and breathes out. A long sigh. She leans back into the sofa and crosses her legs.

CAMERA: A wide shot of whole space. Both women lean outwards away from each other.

SOUND: Extractor fan HUMMING becomes loud.

A moment passes.

ARCHIVE: So how can this hidden voice be heard?

PROCESS: I guess through having it accessible online and exhibiting it alongside contemporary works, creating a new context for it. Giving it a new voice.

ARCHIVE: And what would that new voice say about *woman*?

PROCESS pauses.

A stillness passing between them.

ARCHIVE: Just so you know, it is almost the end of the day, your slot finishes in three minutes.

PROCESS: Time just goes when I'm with you. I don't want to leave. Can I book another slot?

ARCHIVE: Yes, send an email. I am not going anywhere. I am here, holding it all together.

PROCESS smiles and looks up at ARCHIVE.

ARCHIVE looks back and sighs. A small smile comes across her face. She leans back further away from PROCESS.

PROCESS picks up her note book and pencil and puts it back in her bag. She clicks on the mouse and lets it go. The mouse pulls back to the edge of the table. She takes out a wipe and wipes down the mouse, the table and switches the monitor off. She stands in darkness for a moment.

SOUND: Extractor fan HUMMING becomes louder.

CAMERA: Pulsates trying to focus on nothing.

Strip LIGHT flickers on and we see PROCESS putting on a mask, picking up her bag and leave the room.

SOUND: A door opens and closes off CAMERA.

LIGHTS turn off.

ARCHIVE is left in the semi-darkness.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS:

'A Script for an Archive: Women' was commissioned for curatinglivingarchives.network as part of 'What Is A Living Archive. Curating the 'unruly' materiality of Contemporary Art', a research project led by Dr Judit Bodor with Adam Lockhart, 2021.

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