

CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue: Tangible Archives

Guest Editors: Jessica Kelly, Gina Pierce and Sue Breakell

This Special Issue seeks to explore the relationship between design and archives, using the lens of tangibility. The tangible, defined as the physical, the haptic, the made, allows us to explore the role of design in making, accessing, navigating, digitizing, researching, and experiencing the archive. There are multiple and varied definitions of archives, and we invite contributions that interrogate the relationships and boundaries of these definitions. This special issue will explore the archive of, as, and in design.

The 'archival turn' in art and design at the beginning of the 21st century saw archives become a source of inspiration and reference for creative practitioners, and theorists, historians and practitioners explored archiving as a methodology. This 'turn' in design has received less scholarly attention than in the field of art where there is a developing field of literature. This special issue will explore the shifting relationship between design and archives. We want to explore the interdisciplinary exchanges between design, critical archive studies, design history and theory. The archival turn opened-up the discussion of the 'object-ness' of archives. In their recent book on materiality in the archive, Sue Breakell and Wendy Russell describe the archive as a unit of creative production and an interdisciplinary space. This Special Issue will build on the idea of the archive as a container of objects (material) and an object itself, shaped by the decisions and practices of creators, stewards and users.

Archives are a way of engaging with forms of knowledge and identity; archives can foster belonging. Yet, through institutions, systems and processes, archives can be structurally and physically exclusionary and inaccessible. Archives can be colonial and patriarchal; but archives and archiving also have an emancipatory potential. This special invites discussions of how thinking about archives through the lens of the tangible can interrogate the power structures within archives, and potentials for disrupting and re-thinking. Informed by Stuart Hall's description of the living archive as an 'ongoing, never finished process of creating', this special issue will explore the tangible practices of making and unmaking archives and how deeper understandings of archive practice can contribute to design history.

This issue wants to consider the role of design, through tangible interventions or experiences, in tackling the lack of equity that persists in the form, content and access to archives, globally. What can design and making contribute to anti-colonial archive practices and queering the archive? What is the place of tangible processes of making and doing in archival studies and practice? We are interested in submissions that explore ways of recontextualising archives and collections and activating them in new ways.

A focus on the tangible archive, includes an interest in touch, in both analogue and digital archives, and the potential of archive materials to evoke sensory experiences that provide a connection to the past. It also draws on theories of affect and its place in understanding experience and emotion within the archive. We invite submissions that explore the affective experiences of archive creators, archivists and visitors. Through paying attention to tangible, sensory and emotive encounters within the archive, we strive for a richer and a more holistic understanding of archives and the material contained within them.

Submissions may explore topics including but not limited to:

- The materiality of objects in the archive.
- The importance of touch in interpreting and understanding archives.
- The archive as object.

- The potential of objects to interpret archival material.
- Interaction with objects.
- Tangibility and digitality.
- The role of interaction and interpretation in opening-up archives to different audiences and to engage with archive material.
- Archives as inspiration for creative practice and practice as a “way in” to the archive.
- Anti-colonial practices and queering the archive through practice.
- Reconfiguring the archive through creative practice and the potential for liberatory and anti-colonial practices in the archive.
- The intersection of critical archive studies and design history and practice.
- Archiving as methodology in design.

Submission

Please submit full papers to Guest Editors by **Monday 30 June 2025**. Articles should be 5,500 words (not including footnotes and captions) and include a brief abstract along with keywords identified, and image copies embedded within text and appropriately placed.

Manuscripts should be sent to tangiblearchivespecialissue@gmail.com

Any questions, please direct to the Guest Editors: Jessica Kelly, Gina Pierce and Sue Breakell
tangiblearchivespecialissue@gmail.com

Timeline for Special Issue:

Deadline for submission of manuscripts: 30 June 2025

Notification of outcome of peer review: September 2025

Submission of revised manuscripts: November 2025

Submission of final special issue to *Design Issues* Editors: February 2026

Please NOTE: Submitted papers will be subject to peer review. The guest editors' final selection for the special issue will be submitted to the Editorial Board of *Design Issues* for the final decision about publication. Please note a Special Issue “Approved Proposal” does NOT guarantee “Special Issue Acceptance.” Editors of *Design Issues* will make a final status determination after the full package submission.