

Abstract to the session “Archives, Accountability, and Democracy in the Digital Age”

Until lions have their own historians: the Digital Information Virtual Archive (DIVA) and the attempt to archive subaltern histories

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Henry Kissinger's famous statement that "history is the memory of states" masks via naturalization the fact that any such "history" reinscribes power relations within that state. Many scholars have elaborated the relationship between state power and hegemonic discourse. More pointedly, some have identified the central role academic enterprise, including historiography and archiving, plays in the construction of this hegemonic discourse (Anderson 1991, Gal 1991, Subaltern Studies).

Saloni Mathur (2000) argues that social science should concern itself with reconceptualizing archiving in a way that addresses or at least acknowledges primary divisions of power. Practically, this manifests in three interrelated approaches:

1. utilizing established techniques to archive materials kept outside the hegemonic discourse of history (Bellagamba 2006; Geisman 2006; Isaacman, Lalu, and Nygren 2005),
2. providing an alternative interpretation of the elements celebrated in hegemonic discourse (Kolsto 2006), and
3. laying bare the contestation between hegemonic and counter discourses (Meltzer and Thorne 2007).

San Francisco State University established the Digital Information Virtual Archive (DIVA) with the goal of creating a flexible system of online archiving available to publics normally excluded from the historical record. Located in a non-elite institution servicing mainly working class communities, communities of color, LGBT communities, and other subaltern social groupings, DIVA facilitates the creation of archives which collectively address the three approaches listed above.

This talk describes both the theoretical argument behind the design of DIVA and early attempts to put this theory into practice.