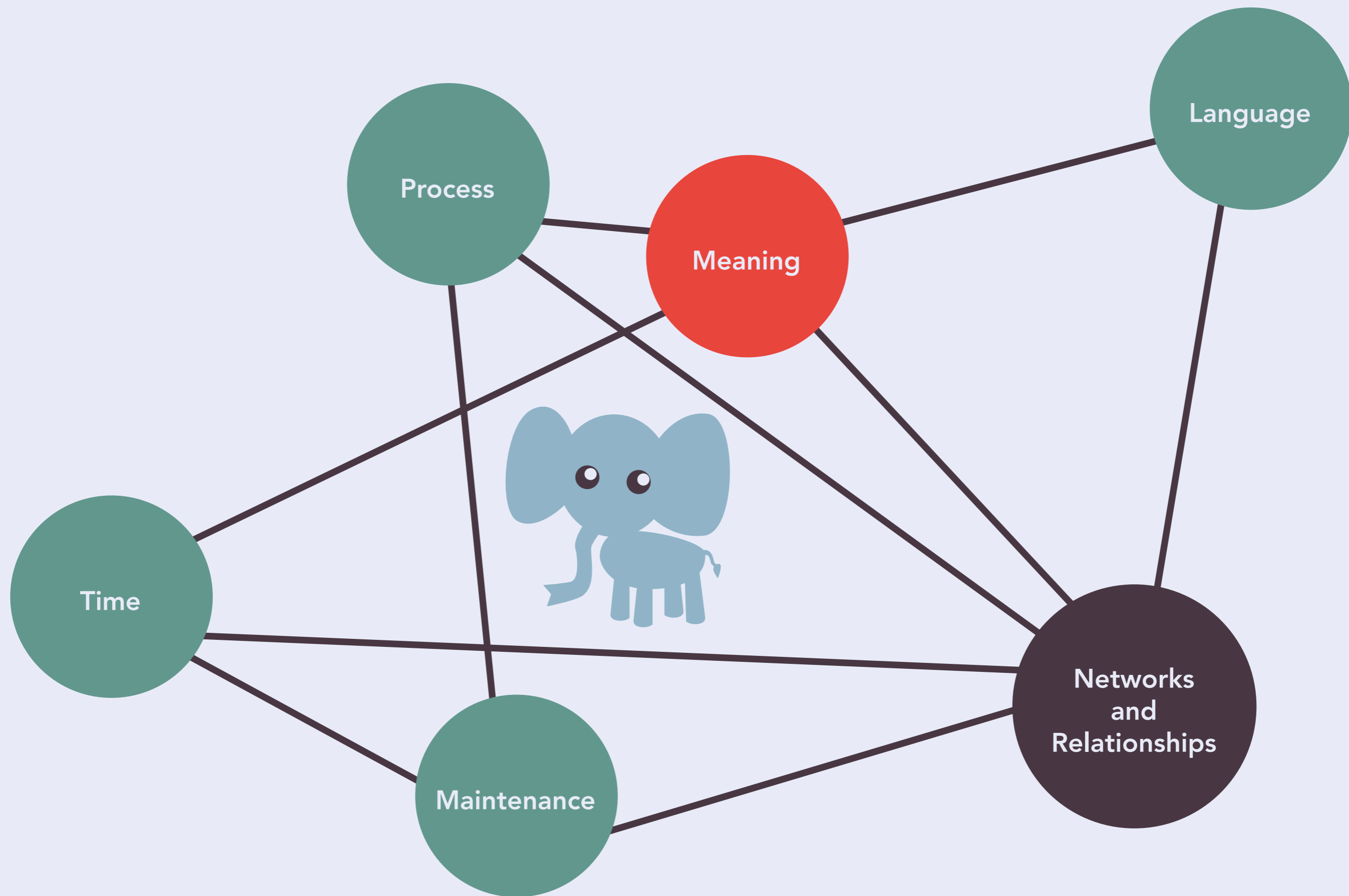


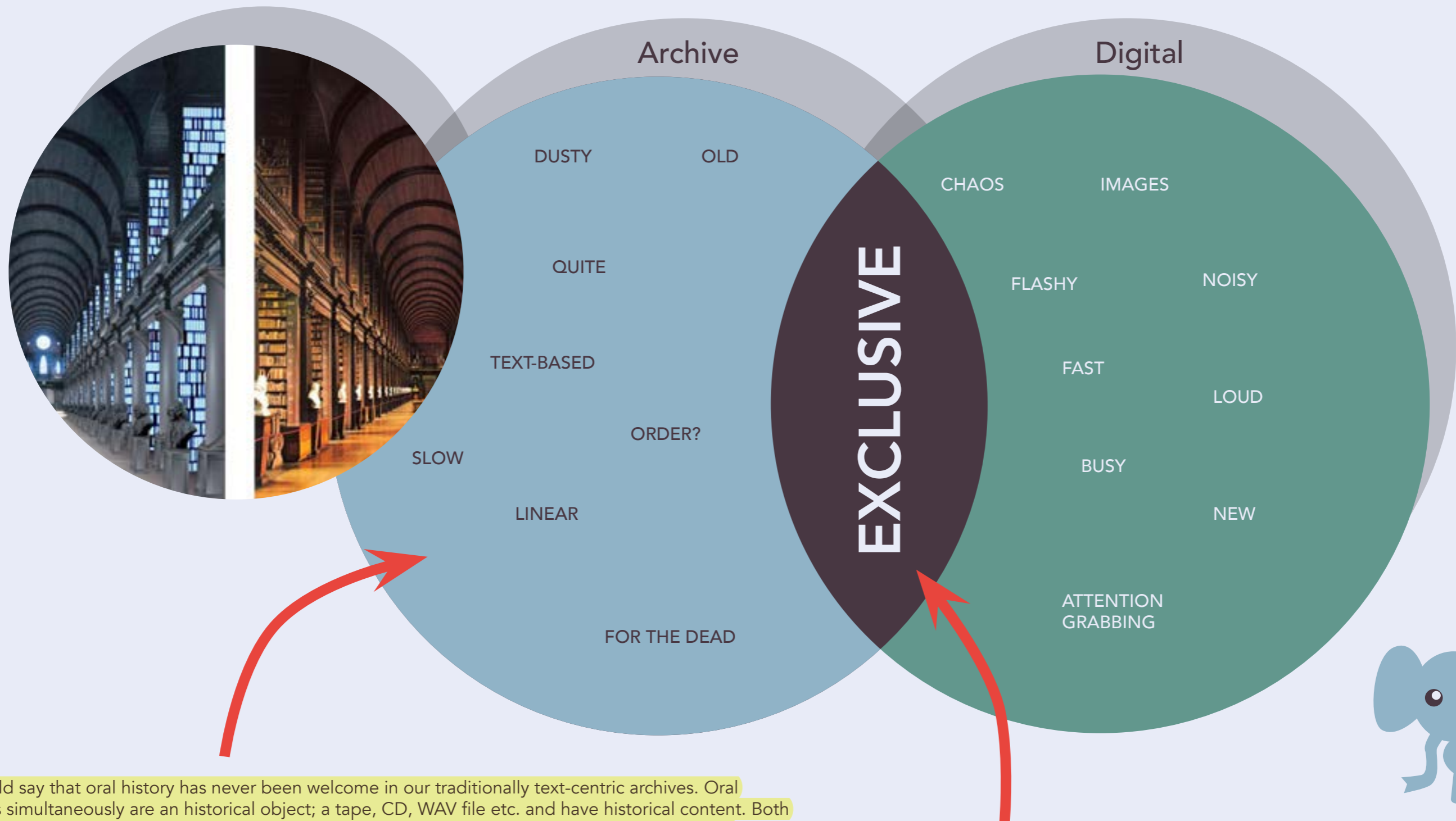
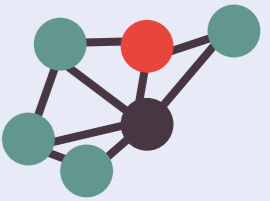
# Alien in Residence

Welcome to the Alien in Residence report. I, Hannah James Louwerse, am an alien who is currently in residence at the Oral History Unit, by this I mean that I am [not an oral historian](#). This is a summary of my experience and work so far. It is not a linear document you can bounce about using the various links in the pages and using the network page, which is on page two. The symbol to the right can be found on each page, if you click it it will take you back to the network page.






# The Bi-Lingual World of 21st Century Archives

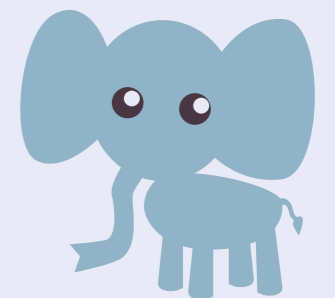


You could say that oral history has never been welcome in our traditionally text-centric archives. Oral histories simultaneously are an historical object; a tape, CD, WAV file etc. and have historical content. Both the object and the content are unstable. If we fail to preserve the object we could lose the content, but if we extract the content via transcript some people believe we lose some of the more nuanced contents of the oral history. This brings up all sorts of issues around how and where to store the recordings, especially if they come with any additional forms or other types of meta-data that also require different storage.

In addition, GDPR has made archivists fearful of oral histories, because the person who gave the oral history might still be alive or have living relatives. Archives do not want to be responsible for granting access to material and then having that material misused or unfairly represented. This puts serious barriers for reusing oral history material. 

So not only do archives struggle to facilitate the storage of oral histories but recent developments in data protection have also made it difficult to reuse the recordings that are in the archive.

Both the archive and the digital are very exclusive spaces. People feel they cannot enter an archive because it is only for the silent scholarly types. Similarly, the rise of the digital has split the world into those who do have access and those who do not. This is evident by the differing levels of WiFi access and built in obsolescence that causes many expensive devices to stop working within the larger digital framework. There are also barriers for those who are not "digital natives".



# Changing the language and meaning of oral history archives via design-driven innovation, love, and technological epiphanies

WARNING:  
Technology is alienating (see language)

**Step one:**  
Identify current meanings  
(see [language](#))

What does archiving actually mean?  
Collection?  
Maintenance?  
Interpretation?  
Distribution?  
Facilitation?

What does reuse actually mean?  
Editing?  
Interpretation?  
Maintenance?  
Updating?  
Adapting?

What does oral history actually mean?  
Collection?  
Interpretation?  
Filling the gaps?  
Handling memory?  
Collaboration?

The steps between  
step one and two  
aka the process

Who actually comes in contact with the archives?  
(click me)

What do they need?

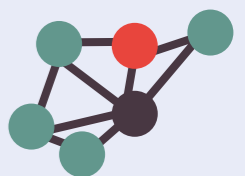
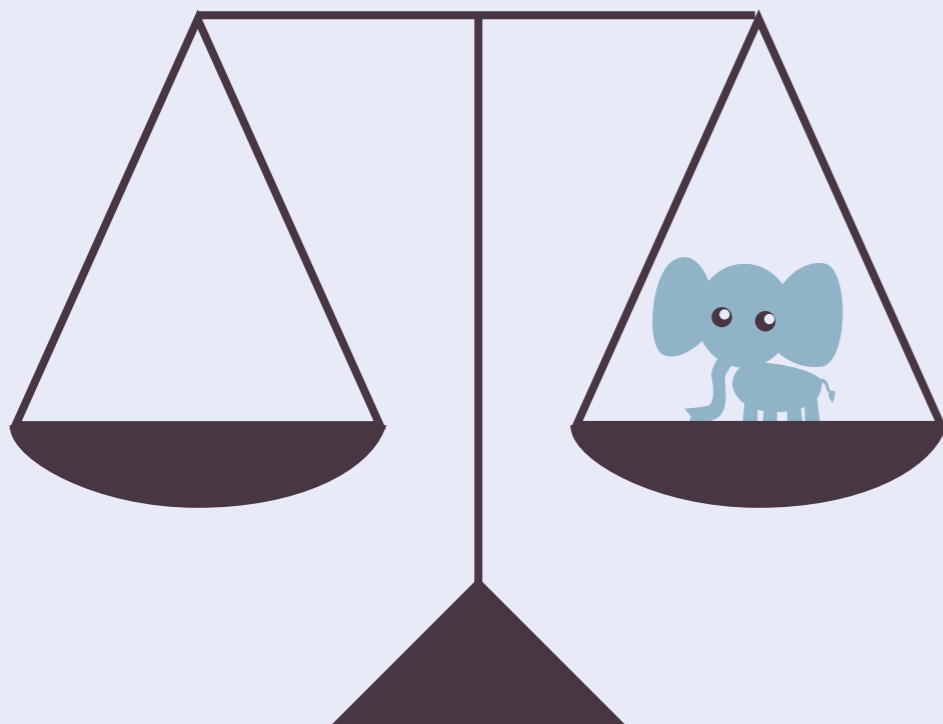
**Step two:**  
Create new meaning  
(see [slow scholarship](#))

## It is *need* not *want*

In his book *Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas*, Roberto Verganti expands on his idea "innovation of meaning" by focusing more on humans and their feelings. In one chapter he discusses the different approaches; user-centred design or creative problem solving, and design-driven innovation or innovation of meaning. Creative problem solving focuses on how a user interacts with an existing product and then tries to smooth out the faults that come to light through this observation. You give people what they want. This is a perfectly noble pursuit and very necessary in some fields, but as Verganti points out we currently do not lack ideas and solutions. Our problem is we keep working within the parameters of old language and meaning. In the case of oral history archives this means that we are repeatedly giving people **what they want i.e. better and more efficient cataloguing systems**. These new cataloguing systems however are expensive and difficult to maintain especially if you have not been trained in computer and software maintenance (see [maintenance](#)). Verganti refers to this as "technological substitutions", frequently updating the technology but not the meaning. However, as an alternative to user-centred design Verganti offers the idea to give people what they need, not want. This is at the heart of innovation of meaning.

In order to achieve innovation of meaning one starts with oneself. This is the opposite of the user-centred design where you start with the user and work from the outside in. You start with yourself, working from the inside out, thinking about what you want and what you love. Just like a parent with a child, you do not give them what they want but you give them what you think they need to grow into an upstanding member of society - you see the bigger picture. With innovation of meaning you do the same, because as Verganti says if you do not love it then how are you going to make others love it.

For me the pursuit of innovation of meaning turns collaboration into a delicate balancing act. Hand over the reins too much and I risk following the well trodden path of user-centre design. Close myself off too much and I will not be trusted - "who is the strange telling us our archives don't work." One must have buy in when you propose a new idea. I must be open to criticism but also know when to stand my ground.



Slow ← a new meaning?

## Technology

The field of oral history archiving cannot keep up with technology, which is why we should not be driven by it. We need to be driven by humans otherwise we will always be the mp3 player and never the iPod.

## Humans

We need to be driven by humans, by things we love like the Italian Verganti, a self-confessed lover of love, says we should.

## Ethics

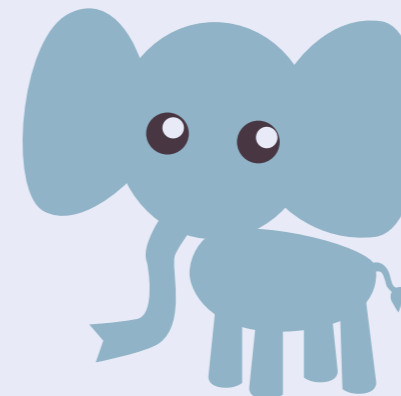
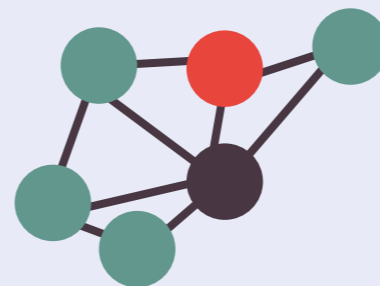
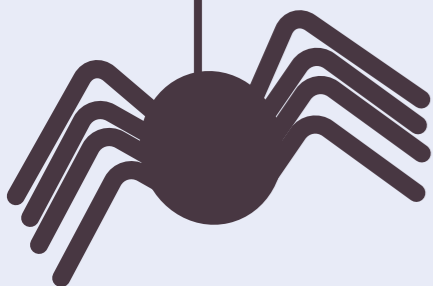
So what do humans love? Well if the pandemic has taught us anything it is that humans love other humans and they love talking to those humans, and humans also really like to make things. Let us bring these two things together and say that humans really like making things together. History has proven that we are quite good at working together sometimes and that a lot of our best ideas come from when we are working together. Media theorist Steven Johnson in his book, *Youtube video*, and *Ted talk*, uses the example of the coffee houses of the Enlightenment and the Parisian saloons of Modernism as spaces where good ideas have been made through the bringing together of people and their "hunches". Johnson talks about how it is unusual to suddenly come up with an idea, instead we are more likely to walked around with half an idea or hunch for a long time until we meet someone who has the other half of the idea. This attitude of slowly doing research or coming up with ideas collectively is supported the paper, *For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University*, where about a dozen or so female scholars from different neo-liberal universities in the USA discuss the idea of slow scholarship being far more fruitful than the current situation in universities where there is a focus on quantity not quality. Research and scholarship are slow pursuits and so is searching through an archive. But things like limited funding pushes people into working faster and shorter projects. Even when you do get the chance to collaborate with people in the same space it is often not for a very long time and at the end you must have a result - a kind of "drive by collaboration." Within archiving, the invasion of the digital and the obsession with digitizing is also pushing archival research away from a slow approach to research to the faster option of "just Googling it".

Nevertheless I believe there is one space on the internet that does capture some of that slow scholarship - Wikipedia. Wikipedia is a space where everyone and anyone can come together and write about anything. The information on pages is built up over time, references are collected along the bottom, and it is constantly edited. It might not be a perfect example of slow scholarship but it does capture some of its principle that of slow and collective work. Now, I am fully aware of Wikipedia credibility as a source. However, considering that we now live in a post-truth world and we are currently reflecting on our colonial past and national narrative, we might be working out that truth is a difficult thing and maybe Wikipedia is not as bad as we initially thought. True or not it has not stop people using it. Wikipedia has an established function in society as a good starting point for further research. It is a gateway to the incomprehensible amount of information in the world.

What Wikipedia is able to do is capture the dialogue surrounding certain topics and always leave room for something new. This idea of having an open dialogue is something that Liz Sevceko is trying to emulate with her *International Coalition of Sites of Conscience*, a network of historic sites that foster public dialogue on pressing contemporary issues. In a paper Sevceko discusses this endeavour of making heritage sites into open spaces for discussion, where a site's team continuously reflects on the history of the site constantly looking for new perspective and ideas. However, to set up something as ambitious as a space where people are allowed to debate fact, we need to gain trust, which a lot of institution are currently struggling with.

The reason for this crisis in trust is not only because the world is going through a phase of distrusting experts, but also because of the various crimes of data mismanagement and violations of privacy. In the world of today data is the new oil and everyone is scared of GDPR. This is the world we live in and this world was built by Silicone Valley. However, the subsequent result of this new world is that people are really struggling to trust any institution that handles personal information or data, this includes universities, museums, and archives. This is not helped by the fact that these types of institutions are more likely to draw attention to the handling of personal information by the means of excessive form filling making everything feel more "official" and then scare everyone. We need to regain trust and, I believe, offer people an alternative to the shady data handling of Silicone Valley.

This is Anansi the trickster spider and sometimes god of all knowledge, whose stories were part of an exclusively oral tradition. Spread across the world during the transatlantic slave trade, Anansi's stories evolve over time changing and adapting to teach contemporary lessons of wisdom. Like this spider's stories, our stories and history are also always changing. It changes slowly through the collective.



## note

side

Possible new meaning that I love:

"I am a detective"

During my first oral history interview with Elspeth she talked about why she was part of the volunteer research group at Seaton Delaval Hall. She told a story about her journey searching an original map of the hall and gardens that was worthy of a podcast. She spends her free time in the archive because it makes her feel like a detective.

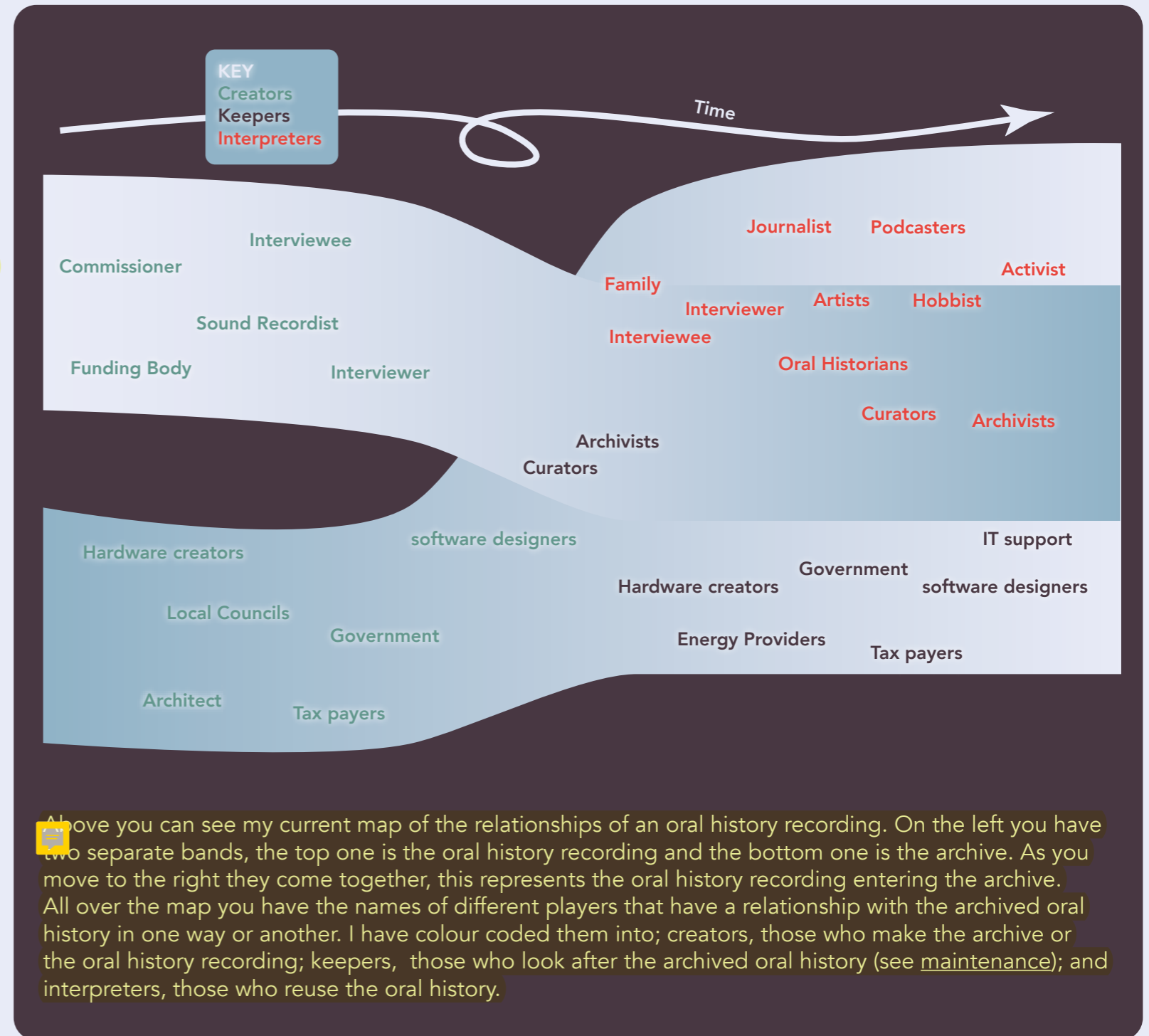
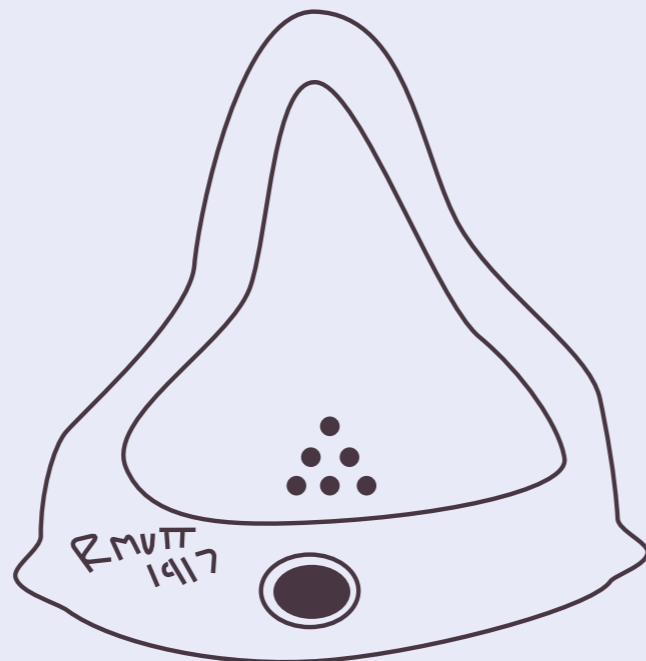
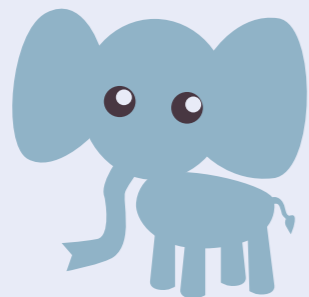
I related to this feeling of curiosity and mystery solving. Funnily enough it is the same feeling I have when I play video games, especially open world video games.

# Relationship Status

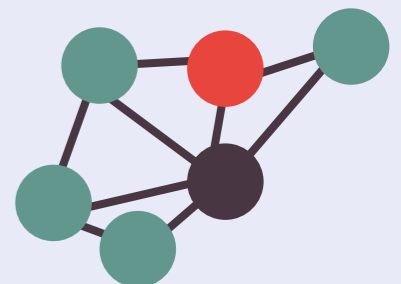
At Goldsmiths nothing ever goes unnoticed during a Fine Art crit. If you display your artwork on one of the studio desks because you have not built a plinth then people will talk about it. If you wedge your laptop behind the TV screen that is showing your video art and there is a wire dangling from it, people will talk about it. They will also discuss at length why you decided to show your work on a TV instead of the overhead projector. And if you use tape to mark the space around your artwork so that no one will step on it, the debate that will ensue is worthy of BBC Question Time.

This might sound like your classic pretentious art school activity, however it is undeniable that an artwork is a product of materials, space, time. Why did you make it from this material? Why did you put it in this part of the room? Why did you make it at this time, in the place? Everything about the artwork lives in relation to everything else in the world. Take for example Duchamp's Fountain, first it was a urinal, then it was an provocative artwork because it was placed in a specific space. This idea is not limited to art. From an IKEA chair to an oral history recording, everything is a product of relationships and these relationships can radically change over time. An example of time affecting the network of relationships surrounding an object could be the tulip. A symbol of the Dutch, yet originally from Turkey, the tulip briefly became insanely valuable during Tulip Mania in the 17th century until everyone came to there senses. A more recent example would be a digital archive, which before the pandemic was pretty useful, though nothing like the "real thing", however now it is completely essential.

The world changes a lot and therefore so do our relationships, in order to survive we need to accept this fact and build it in to our system this includes our digital systems. During a [webinar run by Not-Equal network](#), Prof Irina Shklovski from University of Copenhagen presented a paper called *AI as Relational Infrastructure*. Shklovski discussed how our current approach to digital systems is a more "whack-a-mole" approach and how we should recognising the relationships that build AI systems. Shklovski states that "models are typically build with the assumption of an unchanging world", which she points out is a bizarre attitude to have. People explicitly create new models to bring about change, but are surprised when the world changes. What we are therefore looking for is an acceptance that things are always changing and then building something that leaves room for all these changes, making it easier to live and work in this world.



Above you can see my current map of the relationships of an oral history recording. On the left you have two separate bands, the top one is the oral history recording and the bottom one is the archive. As you move to the right they come together, this represents the oral history recording entering the archive. All over the map you have the names of different players that have a relationship with the archived oral history in one way or another. I have colour coded them into; creators, those who make the archive or the oral history recording; keepers, those who look after the archived oral history (see [maintenance](#)); and interpreters, those who reuse the oral history.



### Smart Guide to Climate Change

Climate > News

INDEPENDENT PREMIUM

# How using the internet damages the environment

Analysis: The IT industry has a carbon footprint the same size as the entire airline industry

Andrew Griffin

1 comment



YALE Climate Connections

ARTICLES RADIO PROGRAM TOPICS ABOUT CONTACT

NEWSLETTER

ENERGY

# The internet's big carbon footprint need not doom the climate

Efficiency and renewable energy can help make the internet more sustainable.

Share your feedback to help improve our site!

#### More Stories

Alex Murdaugh turns himself in amid botched murder, insurance fraud plot



### Is watching Netflix bad for the environment? Scientists take a deeper look at data centers

ELIZABETH WEISE | USA TODAY

If you're concerned about climate change, should you feel guilty about hanging out online? Maybe not.

It's been widely reported that data centers, the nondescript buildings that house the servers that keep our phones and computers buzzing with cool stuff, could gobble up enormous amounts of electricity over the coming decade.



# Why your internet habits are not as clean as you think



(Image credit: Getty Images/Javier Hirschfeld)



## Support the Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

Subscribe

Contribute

Search jobs Sign in

News

Opinion

Sport

Culture

Lifestyle

UK World Coronavirus Climate crisis Football Business Environment UK politics Education Society Sci

Opinion Climate crisis

This article is more than 3 years old

## Our phones and gadgets are now endangering the planet

John Harris



The energy used in our digital consumption is set to have a bigger impact on global warming than the entire aviation industry

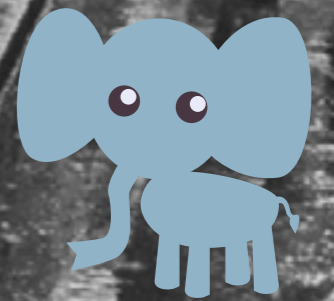
Tue 17 Jul 2018 06:00 BST



1032



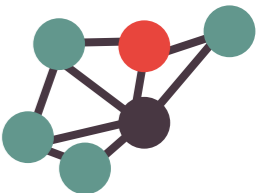
# It's all about the cleaners



I always get frustrated when I clean my fridge. There are so many little ridges that stuff gets into. I even have to have the door of my fridge open a certain way, which is not logical in the day-to-day but is the only way I can make sure that I am able to take out the shelves to clean them properly. This is an example of people designing a product without thinking about maintenance. The designers were not thinking about the cleaners when they were creating my fridge, they were thinking about the users. In a capitalistic and consumer driven world this is not surprising. We want to sell products to the users and cleaners are not important. After all cleaning is a women's job and so is inevitably dismissed. However cleaners are extremely powerful, if cleaners go on strike you have a big problem. 🗑️

The artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles highlighted the important role cleaning and maintenance play in the upkeep of our institutions, when she cleaned a museum as a piece of performance art. Ukeles' Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! was referenced by Charlie Morgan the Oral History Archivist at the British Library in his article When The Crisis Fades, What Gets Left Behind?. In the article Morgan writes that as a society we are focused on creation and undervalue maintenance. This focus has led everyone including archives to become obsessed with collection. This obsession however completely ignores the fact that at some point all this archive material needs to be tidied up. 🗑️

My work is about getting people to reuse oral history, to give purpose to the storing of recordings, but I must never forget about the cleaners, who in this case are the archivists. They have to do all the cleaning themselves. 🗑️ When I had a chat with an archivist at Tyne and Wear Archives they told me that the majority of their job is not archiving. Instead they spend most of their time doing things like building management, storage management and currently managing Covid-19 safety measures. All things that they were not trained in. I believe that this current move into the digital just adds another job to the job list. Managing a digital catalogue or any digital system also requires maintenance and cleaning and not that many people know how to do this (see [language](#)). Our society would not function with our cleaners no matter which sector you work in, if they stop working we are in serious trouble.





# Bibliography

Botsman, R. (2017) *Who can you trust?: how technology brought us together—and why it could drive us apart*. Penguin UK.

Johnson, S. (2011) *Where good ideas come from: The seven patterns of innovation*. Penguin UK.

Morgan, C. (2021) *When The Crisis Fades, What Gets Left Behind?* Available at: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/general-interest/when-the-crisis-fades-what-gets-left-behind/> (Accessed: 21 Sep 2021)

Mountz, A. et al. (2015) "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University" in *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*. 14(4), p. 1235 - 1259

Sevcenko, L. (2010) "Sites of Conscience: new approaches to conflicted memory." in *Museum International*. 62(1-2), p. 20-25

Shklovski, I. (2021) "AI as Relational Infrastructure" in *The Evolution of Social Justice in the age of Networks and Machine Learning*. Not-Equal Network

Thelwell, E. (2012) *Fact check: Is Wikipedia a reliable source?* Available at: <https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-is-wikipedia-a-reliable-source> (Accessed: 21 Sep 2021)

Ukeles, M.L. (2018) *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"* in *Journal of Contemporary Painting*. 4(2), p. 233-238

Verganti, R. (2009) *Design-Driven Innovation: Changing the Rules of Competition by Radically Innovating What Things Mean*. Boston: Harvard Business Press

Verganti, R. (2016) *Overcrowded: Designing Meaningful Products in a World Awash with Ideas*. Cambridge: The MIT Press