

# Personal photographic archives and the recollection of trans masculinities

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## Abstract

The archive as mnemonic device and taxonomic structure plays a significant role in the visualisation of identity. In this chapter, I draw on the personal photographic archives of three trans men to suggest ways of understanding archives as discursive and visual practices through which narratives of self can be brought to the fore and shared. I consider how these participants negotiate the roles of author, archivist and photographer in the creation of their personal photographic archives, and how such archives intersect with discourses on social memory and intersubjective recollection. By considering the act of archive-making as a creative and transformative endeavour, I am interested in how ideas surrounding a trans (gender) self is interpreted, recorded and disclosed. Insofar as the archive facilitates a meeting point between the self and the other, my focus in this chapter is on how trans masculinities are made visible when entering an archival schema.

## Introduction

Creating an archive on the life of a human subject and collecting the visual traces and narratives that such a life produces is not always an easy process. It calls for a sense of purpose and control that, at the outset of such projects, is often more imagined than real. In this sense, to commence is a gesture, like taking a finger and tracing an imaginary circle, and anticipating something arising from this invisible space. Despite the fact that archives are often created and used with the assumption that they can exert control over a given subject matter, my interest in this chapter is on archival gestures that are never completely knowable, traceable or discernible. My interest in the archive as a device and medium for recollection is geared towards forms of personal remembrance that exist outside (or at the edge) of official, institutionalised and/or state-sanctioned archival structures. As an aspect of the knowledge economy, the idea of 'archive' is entrenched by discourses of disclosure and justified belief. At the same time, the archive has also been sedimented in popular rhetoric as synonymous with processes of recollection – as Okwui Enwezor (2008:35) maintains, "so thoroughly has the archive been domesticated that it has come to serve as a shorthand for memory". My focus in this chapter straddles an understanding of archives both as sources of history (or rather, histories), and as a rhetoric of recollection by being concerned with forms of personal and often private archiving through which varying degrees of exposure and authority are granted to the processes and holdings that comprise such collections.

This chapter draws on doctoral research<sup>1</sup> that I conducted into the photographic representation and recollection of trans masculinities (Van der Wal 2013), in which the participating research subjects used narrative accounts to give a sense of their relationship to the medium of photography. As the basis of this research into personal forms of archival recollection, I facilitated a process whereby three trans men were asked to select specific photographs from their personal photographic collections as an archive of their own making. These participants chose to be identified by their personal names – Robert, Munir and Charl – and they also preferred to be acknowledged as trans men, even though they might use other terms to identify themselves in everyday society. They worked for a South African trans advocacy and support group called *Genderdynamix*, where Robert was employed as an advocacy manager. As a professional photographer and a self-identified trans activist, Robert was interested in my research as a tool for creating awareness about South African trans identities, and he was willing to participate by sharing and talking about his personal photographic collection. Robert also identified other trans men whom he knew through *Genderdynamix*, and asked them whether they would be willing to meet with me. Charl and Munir were the first to contact me, and after meeting them and talking about their relationship with photography, I decided to focus on the personal archives of these three participants. The process that informed my selection of these personal archives was, from the outset, an idiosyncratic one – I never tried to locate a specific 'type' of trans person to write on but, as I met each of these individuals and our relationship developed, our conversations started to centre on ideas around trans masculinity as a complex site of empowerment and vulnerability.

During a series of interviews that were conducted over a period of two years (beginning in 2011), Robert, Munir and Charl used narrative accounts to give a sense of their relationship to the medium of photography. These participants were asked to consider their personal photographic collections as archives; that is, as a compilation of records that, in conjunction with their narrative accounts, provide information about their

identities and lives. This project thus presented a platform for imagining and constructing their photographic collections within an archival schema. Firstly, this entailed a process of selecting, interpreting and compiling photographs as the source material from which a life narrative might be read. Secondly, these personal archives facilitated the transference of information from their own possession to a public record. This study thus involved a *procedure of making the private public in such a way that knowledge is preserved for posterity*, with the idea that the selected images and the interviews would be shared with the readers of any published document (be it a thesis or in any other academic publication). In this manner, the idea of 'archive' is constituted in the images and narratives that the participants share with such an anticipated audience and readership, which, in effect, preserves those histories in a public way.

My project, as I explained it to these participants, was concerned with the manner in which they use photography as a vehicle for the recollection of their gender identities, and the manner in which they store, categorise and display (or archive) such photographs. Their responses to this explanation were diverse, both in terms of their relationship to the photographic medium, their own understanding of their roles as archivists, as well as their interpretation of their identities as trans men. During the interviews it emerged that varying degrees of visibility were afforded to the photographs that they chose to discuss – while some images were specifically pointed out for their ability to convey a sense of self that the participants found conducive to creating a personal, social or political identity, the participants did not share other examples out of fear that these images might put them at risk. Affected by shifting states of visibility, the participants' personal archives seemed to sanction certain representations of self, while others were denied exposure.

As the basis of this chapter, it is specifically the former mode of archiving – the act of pushing an image of self to the fore – that is of importance. In this chapter, I draw on particular conversations that I had with Robert, Munir and Charl (2011) during my doctoral research, in which they strategically chose certain images that they found conducive towards understanding their experience of masculinity. While Robert and Munir selected a vast range of images, Charl only chose a few.<sup>2</sup> From this wider selection, each of the participants chose one photograph that they highlighted as being important for the intimacy that this image facilitates within their personal archives. These images were shared for the affecting relationship that they illustrate between a (trans/male) self and a larger archival whole. In the following section, these archives are grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks that speak to an understanding of the intimate, but also precarious nature of such collections. From this basis, the individual archival accounts that were proffered by the three research participants are examined for their visual recollection of identity.

## Participating in an archive: theories on (re)collection

We have archives – we preserve archives – because there is something in them that defies understanding but that we want to grasp (Rapaport 1998:68).

The archive as mnemonic device and taxonomic structure plays a significant role in the visualisation of identity. My contention is that archives provide discursive and visual material through which narratives of self can be

uncovered, traced, erased and renegotiated through intersubjective participation by both the creator and viewer of a particular archival construction. As such, my investigation of the personal photographic archives of the three research participants is concerned with their formation as a space where information is assembled with the idea that it renders something knowable and traceable. Such an endeavour arises from (and responds critically to) an historical understanding of archives in the western world for their role in actively “providing the stuff from which histories are constructed” (Ferreira-Buckly 1999:578). As record-keeping practices and institutions, archives served (and to a considerable degree still serve) as the foundation for collecting and disseminating ‘evidence’, as their imagined ability to accumulate, trade in and, decisively, fabricate ‘truth’ rendered them the utopian “nerve centre for all possible knowledge” (Richards 1992:104). At the same time, photography has also played a central role in archival discourses for disseminating ideas surrounding the ‘truthfulness’ and ‘authority’ of the visual document.<sup>3</sup>

Critical inquiries into the archive as institutional anamnesis characterises contemporary writing, as the various discourses that inform its genesis and genealogy are increasingly viewed with suspicion. Scholars from a wide range of fields have started to destabilise those archival structures that upheld colonialist, positivist and/or modernist preoccupations with taxonomies of ‘authenticity’ and ‘universality’. In a broader sense, such a process of archival reconfiguration is important as it allows for a rethinking of the role of memory, which bears significantly on the contemporary South African context. Colonial discourses and apartheid have left an indelible mark on local processes of mnemonic recollection and, as Kenneth Christie (2000:8) argues, “South Africa is a country where the notion of ‘fractured’ memory is given new meaning. Memory is not fractured here; rather it is splintered, rent apart, torn into a multitude of pieces”. The theme of picking up shards of memory surfaces frequently in writings that deal with South Africa’s fragmented mnemonic relation to its colonial and apartheid past – by using memory as a means of countering silence and amnesia (Brink 1998) and as a tool for opposing grand narratives (Lewis 2000); by disclosing personal memories to the public in order to be held accountable for them (Cassin 2001); or by trying to find shared memories amidst divergent and conflicting histories (Nuttall & Coetzee 1998). These ideas show a concern with recollective/archival processes as vehicles for rethinking South African identities collectively and publically within a democratic framework.

With certain identities being deprived of visual and discursive space for expression, local archiving practices show a growing need for finding documents/images to verify historic existence. One such platform for rethinking memory is provided by the establishment of ‘other’, unofficial archives that feed off the visual and discursive material neglected or censored by normative institutions. This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the South African context where marginalised identities (be they sexual, racial, cultural and so forth) are conspicuous in their radical absence or distortion. On the one hand, such archival enquiries speak of a larger reaction to essentialist claims and acts of censorship that pervade archival institutions – see, for example, the work of Agamben (1999, 2000) and Villarejo (2002), which focuses on processes of erasure and vilification that occur within institutional archives. In addition, there has also been a growing body of archival research and platforms specifically concerned with previously ignored or repressed histories – see the work of Arondekar (2005); Lukenbill (2002); Cvetkovich (2003); Epprecht (2004) and Reid (2005), amongst others, which touch on the absence of lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgendered subjects within the state-sanctioned and/or colonial archive. Such an interest in the discursive and visual erasure of such subjects can also be seen

in the establishment of various 'alternative' archives in South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

While such an endeavour for creating alternative archival bodies speaks to a definite need for critical remembrance and excavation, another framework for thinking about contemporary archive-making practices is a perspective on recollection as shaped by processes of exchange. Here, the idea of social memory as an archival endeavour to trace, record and recount collectively is of value. For Susannah Radstone (2000), social memory points towards an intersubjective relationship that is facilitated through the exchange of memory between different subjects, as it is supported by (inter alia) institutions of recollection, such as archives (see also Fentress & Wickham 1992; Gedi & Elam 1996; Olick & Robbins 1998). Hence, the act of recollection can be seen as a "social bond" (Papoulias 2003:117) through which the exchange of stories of self and other is made possible. This idea also resonates with Jonathan Boyarin's (1994:26) argument that "memory cannot be strictly individual, inasmuch as it is symbolic and hence intersubjective. Nor can it be literally collective, since it is not superorganic but embodied". These viewpoints posit recollection (that is, the process and product of recalling histories and stories) as located somewhere between the subject and the social, the discursive and the embodied.

By seeing recollection as an intersubjective practice, Jens Brockmeier (2010) also posits narrative as a central part of memory making – for him, the act of telling/showing one's story provides the human subject with a means of contextualising memories and ideas of self. Narrative processes of recollection are specifically highlighted by Brockmeier for their potential to disrupt the traditional notion of memory as a storage space – an idea that he labels the "archival model" of memory.<sup>5</sup> This archival model is critiqued for its accentuation of memory "as a static and stable place of storage, where past perceptions and experiences are retained and from where they can be retrieved" (Brockmeier 2010:10). Along these lines, conception of 'the archive' and 'the human' as insular structures is destabilised by emphasising recollection as the basis for intersubjective relationships – the human being does not *recollect* memory, Brockmeier argues, but he/she rather *renegotiates* their sense of history and of self through processes of narrative interaction. Such an idea of the archive as, firstly, an intersubjective practice and, secondly, a space of creative renegotiation/recreation is of central importance to this chapter, and it forms the basis of my discussion of the participants' photographic archives that follows in the next section.

### 'Here I am, this is me' – finding the man in the archive

When confronted with the task of assuming/imagining the role of the archivist, the three participants chose images strategically that spoke of their own interpretation of, and control over, their lives. Hence, these images were invested with the power of framing, through narrative, an account of self that the participants wanted to share and remember *with* an audience. In this creative process of selecting, editing, translating and compiling visual documents, the very practice of archiving emerged as profoundly intersubjective, insofar as it necessitates an understanding of the archive as simultaneously geared towards the self as well as an other – an audience (or even an idea of 'an other') to whom this account of self is directed. The notion of sharing an archive is thus important when reading the selected images – these photographs are meant to be read as vehicles for remembering the self in a specific way.



Robert's, Munir's and Charl's archives are orientated towards an autobiographic presentation of self, as they serve the purpose of lending substance (or proof) of a certain identity. As such, these archives present a conspicuously gendered form of archiving – one that counters (gendered) ambivalence and uncertainty by presenting the subject as *he* emerges from the narratives and photographs. For Robert, the idea of being an archivist resonates strongly with his perceived ability for understanding and utilising visual documents as recollective devices strategically – that is, as media that 'remembers' a particular (masculine) account of self. This act of making an image 'remember correctly' is strongly infused by Robert's perceived capacity to *be persuasive* when framing or fixing the meaning of a given image. As such, the way in which an image is selected, represented and described is of critical value for ascertaining a mode of controlled recollection.

This idea can be seen in one of the images that Robert selected for his archive (Fig. 1). This image, which Robert (2011) calls the "honeymoon" photograph, is the first that he selected for his archive, and he emphasises its value by describing it as a "milestone photograph". The value that Robert attaches to this image is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the way that it is displayed and archived. According to Robert

(2011), this is the only framed photograph that he has in his home, and it stands next to his bed. It therefore occupies a central and coveted position in his living environment. While “it is a little kitsch when people place framed pictures of themselves throughout their home ... this is an image of which I will never tire”, Robert (2011) claims, hence its prominent display.

When discussing this image, he highlights his role in setting it up in such a way that the romantic nature of the event is accentuated. To Robert (2011), the significance of this image lies in the “constructed truth” that it contains. Part of the reason why he appreciates this image is his ability to recognise different frames of reality that informs its meaning<sup>6</sup> – he knows why and how this image was constructed, and which realities are occluded in its construction and its subsequent display. For example, he knows that, despite the affection that this picture alludes to, his wife was “grumpy” and not in the mood for a romantic photograph. To Robert (2011), this image is “filled with irony” and, for all the value that he invests in the romantic aspects that surround this image, part of its personal worth is based on the conflicting realities that he managed to control and manipulate. His role as creator is pronounced as the construction and interpretation of this image is based on an idea of having inside knowledge – of knowing what ‘really’ happened when the photograph was taken, and how a different reality is created when presented to an outside audience. For Robert (2011), the photograph becomes “representative of *the moment*”; yet this moment is based on a suggested reality and an implied reading of the image.

Part of its suggestive value also depends upon the image’s ability to frame him as masculine – as Robert contends, such honeymoon images are linked intricately to a display of masculinity as they allude to the consummation of his role as a man. In this regard, Figure 1 serves a socio-symbolic function, as it references an initiation into his role as husband and, by implication, as man. This demonstration of his masculinity is directly geared towards a future audience – as Robert (2011) argues, this is an image that “you will display ... and you will show ... to your children”. In terms of the anticipated audience of this image, Robert (2011) regards it as a photograph that he will share with anyone – the image is “all-appealing” and its “story” (its representation of the “romantic” moment between him and his wife) can be shared with any person who is interested. In addition to such a general audience, Robert also alludes to children as a possible result of, and future audience for, the union that is depicted between him and his wife. These children would, in effect, also form part of the public audience for whom his personal photographic archive is intended. This reference accentuates an idea of domestic masculinity – of Robert’s role as husband and, possibly, as father – that bolsters and draws from the romance of the depicted honeymoon scene. Its symbolic value as a sign of his masculinity is thus based on its ability to function in a public archive (of being shared with a viewer), and on an anticipated audience’s reading of this image as a sign of masculinity. The historic value of this image is predicted and, to a large degree, projected on to the future.<sup>7</sup>

By sharing this image with an audience, Robert seems intent on raising the spectator’s awareness of the degree to which he is recognised and accepted as a man. Robert appears in control as the image is set on demonstrating his hold over his own masculinity. As he (Robert 2011) contends, he uses images to capture certain aspects to create an archival “safe space” for himself and other trans men – a space of recognition and protection where his experience of masculinity emerges in conjunction with (and despite of) the audience’s knowledge of his transness. Such an archival safe space is strongly geared towards an intersubjective



understanding of recollection, as it necessitates an understanding of the archive as simultaneously directed towards the self as well as an other – an audience to whom this account of self is directed. Here, a system of recollection is facilitated that has a profound social dimension – as this particular image demonstrates, concurrent processes of *sharing and participating* in a sense of self are at play when using photography as an archival document.

The notion of sharing an archive is perhaps nowhere more conspicuous than in Munir's allusion to an archive that is reflected by (and exists within, so to speak) one of his chosen images. Figure 2 is the result of a process in which Munir converted two existing photographs (which were taken at a film festival in Cape Town, with him posing on the right alongside an anonymous female friend) into the current image by inserting these photographs into a digital template that he found on the internet. The resulting image shows the hands of an anonymous viewer who is apparently contemplating Munir's photographs. As suggested in the background, these two photographs form part of the photographic archive of another person, as they were selected (the template seems to suggest) from the box of photographs in the left-hand corner. In this careful blend of 'fact' and 'fiction', of



imagining a personal past within an archival replica, a public/personal meta-narrative is created that speaks of and is geared towards an audience. While this image draws upon a public template (one that is available to anyone who uses the internet, and that other people have most likely also used), the narrative that is created is made personal by the fact that specific images can be inserted into it. This template thus seems to create the opportunity for imagining the personal within a public setting, and of using its frame of generalisation to highlight the individual as a social being. It is, however, important to note that the use of a template in this image is not always conspicuous to the viewer, as it operates (on a technical level at least) in a seamless manner.<sup>8</sup>

On one level, a person is implied, one who is holding these photographs and, in Munir's (2011) words, who is "admiring" them. At the same time, the viewer of this image is implicated by being placed in a position that coincides with the gaze of the portrayed admirer (the template seems to suggest that the position of this admirer is interchangeable with that of the viewer). The hands of the portrayed admirer/archivist act as placeholders as they allow (and urge) the viewer to participate in this archival fantasy. The depicted scene of domesticity (with flowers, perfume bottles and a cup of tea) also seems to speak of such an attempt at inviting the viewer into an environment that is supposedly 'safe' and homelike. In this way, Munir is depicted as a subject who is worthy of admiration, while a viewer is called upon to participate in this gesture of endearment – this portrayal thus involves a form of interpellation that calls into being both the subject and an audience. The emphasis that is placed on sharing an idea of 'archive' thus demonstrates how this image is geared towards not only supplementing and repairing the archive of the subject, but also the archive of an anonymous other. It seems as if this image speaks of a perceived gap that might exist in different archives – be it in Munir's own archive, a family archive, or even a larger archive of public knowledge/acknowledgement.

Similar to Robert's chosen image, Munir's ability to pass (as male) within a photographic archive is particularly pronounced. Munir's archive presents a clearly delineated version of his life as a man, and as such, he chooses not to make any visual reference to a pre-transition or transitioning subjectivity. His interpretation of a masculine, post-transition self is a central theme that recurs throughout his analysis of his archive. When discussing the communicative value of Figure 2, for example, Munir chooses to underscore the ability of the image to convey a masculine version of self. The significance of this image lies in his ability to recognise and assert himself as a man – in his words: "that's me ... a guy standing there because of the slacks and the shirt and the tie, and with a woman on my side. That definitely describes masculinity – I'm like a *man* standing there" (Munir 2011). Munir (2011) makes repeated reference to a feeling of happiness and contentment that pervades his experience of the image and the event that it portrays. Many of these emotions are attached to the "ease" and "comfort" with which he represented himself as male at the event. The certainty with which he identifies himself and the emotions attached to such a form of identification are thus ascribed to his ability to inhabit, display *and recollect* the space of 'man' convincingly and unambiguously. In all, Munir's treatment of this image echoes Robert's (2011) idea of an archival "safe space", as Munir (2011) sees this image as representative of a "comfort zone"; a recollected moment where "I'm at ease and comfortable with myself and the space that I am in".

Charl's archive shows a similar predilection for enabling its subject to find and negotiate a space of safety where he can pass as a man. While his archive contains a photograph of a pre-transition self (Fig. 3), this image is deliberately chosen for its ability to be read as an indicator of his latent masculinity. Charl (2011) places much importance on his ability to pass within everyday society, and his archive reflects a concern with not being read



as trans. As passing is treated as an achievement, and in some cases a necessity, Charl's need to be read as a man resounds both in his contact with people in public spaces, as well as in his presentation of self within his photographic archive. This idea is echoed in Charl's (2011) response to a question about how important it is for him to pass as male in everyday society:

It is very important. For that reason I always get worried when I do decide to shave, I get worried that they might see the feminine coming through. So as far as possible, I shave very seldom, because when you see the beard, you see a male ... Basically I stay in stealth, because I do need to be accepted. I don't often wear casual clothes, because jeans are too unisex, I need to wear something that makes people immediately see me as a male. So people look at me and think that I am very formal, but actually I am not being formal, I'm just looking after myself.

Despite the importance of gearing his archive towards the masculine, one of Charl's most cherished images (and the first one that he selected to disclose to an audience) is Figure 3, which shows him as a pre-transition

subject. This photograph is arguably one of the images that fits most ‘comfortably’ into Charl’s archive insofar as he sees it as an image that captures him at a contented stage of his life and that he chooses to share with an audience for this very reason. It is, in fact, one of the only images that Charl (2011) describes as “precious” and one that he deliberately safeguards. When asked what this image communicates to him, Charl (2011) explains: “I think of all the images that were taken of me, I am at my happiest in this particular photograph, and I think it shows. I suppose for myself, I don’t think that there has been another period like that, ever”. In addition, its power as a visual archive of identity rests on its ability to capture him in a way that he describes as masculine – for Charl (2011), this is a “fairly butch photograph” that supplements his current status as male. As Charl admits, if this photograph presented him in a way that could be read as feminine, it would become a problematic image – one that would probably not be included in his archive.

When presenting this image as part of his personal archive, the intimacy that it evokes (and demands) is crucial for understanding this image – it is a photograph that Charl (2011) often carries around with him; it is “never far away”. Similarly, Robert’s (2011) treatment of his selected photograph suggests a record and repository that is dear and close – it speaks of keeping an image at hand that frames a moment and a life “correctly”. Meanwhile, Munir’s selected image speaks of a wilful construction of archival intimacy by imagining an audience that wishes to invest in him, so to speak, by treating him as worthy of being recollected. The hands that hold his photographs in the created image points towards a desire for being remembered by an other – of someone deeming a life significant enough for it to be recorded, represented and recollected; *to be archived*.

## Conclusion

A common thread underpinning Robert’s, Munir’s and Charl’s narratives is the need for a space of visual reflection where one can be recognised – be it in the act of recognising oneself, or of directing the gaze of an other. Such an act of turning towards oneself bears strongly on the lives of these trans men, as it facilitates a space where they can meet an other (an outsider) and share their life stories in such a way that the act of recollection is conducive towards the gendered lives that they wish to lead. In short, the memories that they share in image and text speak of their desire, and ultimately their ability, to be men. In their personal archives, image and text form a complex relationship, as words become the means for imbuing photographs with particular meanings. In this manner, photography is underscored simultaneously as a referential and conjuring medium, as something that can direct the viewer’s gaze to that which exists, or that which the subject wishes to propose, accentuate or invoke when talking about a particular image. Be it as a tool for recollection or recreation, the translation of photographs into words and the associated instilling of narrative meaning within the photographic image provides a space where the trans subject can potentially negotiate the role of archivist and author.

This act of sharing is situated at the crossroads of the private and the public, and it points towards the transformation of knowledge from the one domain to the other. The very idea of archive stands at the centre of this transformative act, insofar as it facilitates a creative position from which a subject can authorise and remember a given account of self by selecting material strategically from the past. Being in service of a particular vision of the future, this act of selection is as much about remembering the past as it is about allowing the

subjects to emerge as they wish to – to narrate and visualise a particular version of self into being. Robert, Munir and Charl chose to disclose themselves in such a way that their recollection of themselves privileges a certain account of their gendered lives – they remember themselves *as men* and, while the anticipated audience and readership is granted knowledge of their trans status (insofar as they present themselves as trans in the words that they use to describe themselves), the images do not disclose this. The act of archiving one’s own life is thus interpreted in this context as a place where information can be shared in different ways and on different levels, with knowledge of a particular issue (such as transness) emphasised or erased, depending on the desires of the human subject. As such, sharing an archive, allowing a viewer *to see, to read and to know*, is never a gesture of complete admission or comprehension. This act of sharing is an intimate attempt at trying to find a common language to become social, to connect with an other, and to remember together.

## Endnotes

- 1 This research project took the form of a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Visual Arts at Stellenbosch University in 2013.
- 2 During the interviews, Robert shared more than 100 images, which reflected his particular relationship to the photographic medium. As an artist, he specifically highlighted the power of photography to (re)produce an image of self that he finds conducive towards exploring his masculinity. In contrast, Charl only had five images available, which he attributed to his general distrust of the photographic medium.
- 3 The representational value of photography is a much debated subject, especially as it intersects with the domain of archival sciences. See, for example, Sekula (1993); Enwezor (2008); Tagg (1988); Schwartz (2000); and Green & Lowry (2003) on general critiques of the idea of photographic referentiality as it has traditionally been endorsed in archival practices.
- 4 See, for example, the Gay and Lesbian Archives, which is concerned with the heritage and neglected past of South African homosexuals as it strives to be “a permanent institutional home for the wide range of historical and archival material relating to gay and lesbian experience in South Africa” (Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa [sa]), while it also houses a range of material on trans identities. Other examples of the establishment and/or renegotiation of archival structures include Jean Brundrit’s (2008) *Lesbian Story* project, as well as the artwork of Zanele Muholi, which is often read as a visual archive of lesbian experience (Thomas 2010:423). Such responses activate a visual history that simultaneously runs parallel with (as it supplements) and counter to (as it critically addresses the lack within) South African archival structures.
- 5 See also Koriati & Goldsmith (1996) for a critical discussion of what they call the “storehouse metaphor” of memory.
- 6 Robert (2011) strongly accentuates photography’s value as a framing device as he regards the self-reflexive/self-reflective nature of the medium as essential for orientating his own sense of self – as he contends, “I have used photography to find myself”. As a professional photographer and artist, photography is crucial to Robert’s process of creating and archiving a specific version of self.
- 7 Being directed towards the “future anterior”, Jacques Derrida (1998:46) sees the archive as a space that is open to reinterpretation, and can never be closed or finalised. The archive is dependent on and always awaiting the future – the “what is coming” and the “what will have come” (Derrida 1998:46) – an idea that is reflected in the research participants’ interpretation of their own archives.
- 8 When Munir first showed the image to me, I was not aware that it was created from a digital template. It was only when I asked him about the identity of the person whose hands are depicted that my attention was drawn to the way in which this image was produced.

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