The Disappearing Child: Observations on Oral History, Archives and Affects

Abstract:

This article reflects on the relations between archives, power and oral history by explicitly calling on a dynamic, relational idea of power as capacity: power to do, to affect and be affected by. It draws on ideas from affect theory, particularly the concept of the assemblage, to explore the circulation of affects across the practices, processes and products of oral history-based research. It situates the interviewees, interviewers, the memory story, public historical discourses and narratives, interview situations and locations, archival documents, archives as institutions and research outcomes – among other things – as component parts of an oral history assemblage, each with the power to affect and be affected by each other: the archive is just one element among many. Two case studies illustrate these processes, both based on interviews with women who were children in France during the Second World War. Archives are shown to have the power to make children disappear, as people and as children, but are also part of what enables them to reappear inside more complex assemblages which include oral history and oral historians.

Keywords: affect theory, history of childhood, assemblage, France, intersubjectivity

Biography: Lindsey Dodd is Senior Lecturer in Modern European History at the University of Huddersfield, UK. Among other things, she is author of a forthcoming book on feelings, affects and emotions in memories of Second World War childhoods.

The relationship between power and the archive is often conceptualised in the Foucauldian sense, that is, in terms of the power such institutions exert over the knowledge they contain and generate. That power tends to be seen as allied to hegemonic interests. Scholars of archiving practices are concerned with the issues of exclusion, silence and marginalisation that this engenders. Peters and Besley write that although archives present themselves as 'value-neutral document environments' they are 'deeply implicated in knowledge politics or what Foucault calls power/knowledge'.[1] Schwartz and Cook agree: 'archives have always been about power', they write, and point to archives'

> power to make records of certain events and ideas and not of others, power to name, label, and order records […], power to preserve the record, power to mediate the record, power over access, […] over collective memory and national identity.[2]

Scholars also acknowledge Derrida's influence on understanding archives as contingent, 'shaped by social, political, and technological forces', rather than as objective repositories.[3] Part of this wielding of power comes down to judgements made by archives and archivists. Marika Cifor notes that collection practices reflect 'who or what is of value', and echoes Verne Harris's point that this is not just a question of identifying value: collecting generates 'archival value'.[4] Those things deemed 'worthy of memory in society (and archives) have traditionally been surrounded by truth, order, evidence, and value'.[5] Thus archives have power not only over which items are preserved, but also over how those items are perceived, empowered and instrumentalised. But there are problems with viewing archives solely as political agents with power *over*. Not only does the trope belie the range of archival practices which actively challenge their own power *over*, but this concept of power is too static and structural. I will instead reflect on a dynamic, relational idea of power as capacity: the power to do, to affect and to be affected by.

---

[1] Michael A Peters and Tina Besley, 'Digital archives in the Cloud: collective memory, institutional histories and the politics of information', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol 51, no 10, 1020-1029, p 1024. The concept of power/knowledge is found across Foucault's work. The research for this article was partly funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Care for the Future/Labex 'Passés dans le présent' joint funding initiative (AH/N504579/1), and partly completed while resident at the Collegium de Lyon (France).

[2] Joan M Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, records, and power: the making of modern memory', *Archival Science,* vol 2, no 1, 2002, 1-19, p 5.

[3] Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the archive from across the disciplines', *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, vol 4, no 1, 2004, 9-25, p 12, with reference to Jacques Derrida (translated by Eric Prenowitz), *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

[4] Marika Cifor, 'Affecting relations: introducing affect theory to archival discourse', *Archival Science*, vol 16, no 1, 2016, 7-31, p 13, citing Verne Harris, 'The archival sliver: power, memory and archives in South Africa', *Archival Science*, vol 2, no 1, 63-86, p 84.

[5] Schwartz and Cook, p 11.

I want to think specifically about the position of archives inside an oral history assemblage, a term I will explain below. How do archives affect oral history and how are they affected by it? I seek to position archives inside a broader relationship to the practices, processes and products of oral history-based research. There have been hesitations, particularly among historians, about using the terminology of affect studies, but Harding and Pribham make it clear that 'affects are key to the ways power is constituted, circulated and mobilised'.[6] Affects and power are tangled up because affects *are* power. The capacity of one thing to affect another – to render it somehow different in reality or perception – is power. Drawing on the Spinozan thinking which underpins much of affect studies, we can see things – institutions, buildings, records, oral histories, publications, archivists, cultural narratives and so on – as constantly 'entering into combinations' with each other. Brent Adkins explains that 'entering into some combinations increases one's ability' to affect and be affected, and 'entering into other combinations decreases one's ability'.[7] In this article, the question is not a moral one, of whether archives wield good or bad power. The aim is to observe a circulation of affects which is, therefore, a circulation of power, and to think about what it does.

Even more specifically, in light of my research on children in France in the Second World War, I want to question what this circulation of power does to children. Although oral history and life story techniques frequently invoke interviewees' childhoods, scholarship which theorises the specificity of childhood memories is less common.[8] Here, I use the cases of two women who were girls during the war,

---

[6] Jenny Harding and E Deirdre Pribham, 'Losing our cool? Following Williams and Grossberg on emotions', *Cultural Studies*, vol 18, no 6, 2004, 863-883, p 873.

[7] Brent Adkins, *Deleuze & Guattari's* A Thousand Plateaus. *A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p 96.

[8] Oral historians have long been interested in childhood as a dimension of life often absent from paper archives. A thorough review is impossible here. Among pioneering work, Paul Thompson's 'The Edwardians' (< https://port.sas.ac.uk/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=1319 > accessed 19 March 2021) offers insights into Edwardian childhoods. Recent issues of this journal show just how many scholars draw on memories of childhoods, but rarely is their specificity examined, e.g. as per Liam Cullinane's '"The man was the fella that went out to work": men, women and work in Cork, Ireland, 1945-1990', vol 46 no 2, 2018. Childhood memories are central to research on the family. A notable example is across the 'Australian Generations' project (< https://www.monash.edu/arts/philosophical-historical-international-studies/australian-generations> accessed 19 March 2021; see also e.g. Alistair Thomson, '"When's Dad home?" An oral history of inter-war Australian fatherhood', *Oral History*, vol 47 no 1, 2019). Scholars of totalitarianism and of the Second World War use oral history to analyse the instrumentalization of the young. Work includes Cathy Frierson, *Silence Was Salvation: Child Survivors of Stalin's Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015, and my own. Frances Davey and Joanna Salapska-Gelleri bring cognitive science to bear on the interpretation of American wartime childhoods ("We hung around the radio with great interest": Accessing childhood recollections of World War II through interdisciplinarity, *Oral History Review*, vol 47, no 1, 52-72, 2020). Much Holocaust-related oral history evokes childhood; Rebecca Clifford's *Survivors: Children's Lives After the Holocaust*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020, is a strong account of remembering, silencing, forgetting and never-having-known.

Simone Courant and Nancette Blanchou, to explore how archives as records, and the archive as an institution, make children disappear. And yet when archives enter into combination with oral histories, they affect and are affected by those oral histories. Does the child reappear? Maybe. But the key, rather, is to be open to these processes of transformation, and recognise their capacity to affect research outcomes. This is particularly important when working on children in the past, given that archival records have typically privileged not only white, masculine, elite perspectives but also 'adult perspectives over youthful ones'.[9] Some scholars of childhood see children as a subaltern group because of their subordination to adult power. Kristine Alexander describes them as 'a colonized group, frequently seen as primitive or not fully realized, who are more often spoken for and about than they are allowed to speak'.[10] She adds that 'this is especially true of girls', who, historically and actually, tend to be 'marginalized, spoken for, and acted upon'.[11] Evidently, when childhood is recounted in an oral history interview, it is done so by an adult (usually) to an adult. But oral history, as it is mostly understood, never really gets back to the past. The voice of the past is the voice of its own present. What interests me here, though, is thinking through two disappearances: of the child as a person (a feeling, thinking, agential, connected human), and of the person as a child (a young human). These disappearances occur inside the affective relations between archives and oral histories.

Of assemblages and affects

What, then, is an assemblage? The term comes from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, was elaborated by Manuel DeLanda, and has since been employed across disciplines.[12] I find it a valuable way of thinking about history and oral history as dynamic, contingent, open-ended processes situated inside everyday realities.[13] Assemblages are relations of things to each other which 'emerg[e] in unpredictable ways around actions and events'.[14] 'In assemblages', writes Deleuze, 'you find states of things, bodies,[15] various combinations of bodies, hodgepodges; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole

---

[9] Kristine Alexander, 'Can the Girl Guide speak? The perils and pleasures of looking for children's voices in archival records', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, vol 4, no 1, 2012, 132-145, p 132.
[10] Alexander, p 134.
[11] Alexander, pp 134, 135.
[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (translated by Brian Massumi), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988; assemblages are found across Deleuze's work. Also, Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, New York and London: Continuum, 2006.
[13] See e.g. Keith Jenkins, 'Nobody does it better: radical history and Hayden White', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol 12, no 1, 2008, 59-74.
[14] Nick J Fox, 'Emotions, affects and the production of social life,' *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 66, no 2, 2015, 301-318, p 306.
[15] Body is not intended here in an anatomical sense, but as any material object.

regimes of signs […]'.[16] Anything – or any *thing* which affects or is affected by another thing – can enter into an assemblage, the elements of which are heterogenous.[17] These elements come into alliance through their affective relationship to each other 'which changes their states, and their ability to act'.[18] Assemblages are dynamic, undergoing a 'continual surge and restructuring of constituent relations'.[19] In an assemblage '[e]verything is situated in an objective zone of fluctuation'; there are no subject-object relations, only object-object relations.[20] That is, all the elements of the assemblage have the potential – the power – to affect and be affected by each other. Power and impact are not predetermined by hierarchisation, structure or subjectification. Nick Fox remarks that assemblage thinking 'enables a shift in attention from what a body or a thing *is*, to its capacities for action and desire, what it can *do*.'[21] Assemblages are useful tools for thinking about society because of their ubiquity and expansiveness, as well as their intricacy and delicacy. For Manuel DeLanda, 'every aspect of life can be understood as an assemblage, at sub-personal, interactional or macro-social levels'.[22] If one chooses to use this conceptual tool, it follows that oral history can – or must – be an assemblage

In the oral history assemblage, heterogenous elements come together: interviewee, interviewer, a research project, utterances, an assertion of the self, a storytelling, a flow of mind-images articulated as memories, public discourses, temporalities, gestures, emotions, places, objects, institutions, and more. Things come together, in this particular way, at this particular moment. They affect and/or are affected by each other. As Kathleen Stewart writes, 'the ordinary throws itself together out of forms, flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost and found'.[23] At least three temporal planes combine: the happening past, the recounting of the memory story and the listening encounter. The final two may be simultaneous, but not when archived oral history is reused. No assemblage is ever stable. It is always in a state of process, of becoming (something else). Thus to think about oral history as an assemblage is to understand the contingency of oral history in a radical way. The assemblage contains pasts, presents and futures, including

---

[16] Gilles Deleuze (translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina), *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, p 177, cited in Yannis Hamilakis, 'Sensorial assemblages: affect, memory and temporality in assemblage thinking', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal,* vol 27, no 1, 2017, 169-182, p 172.
[17] Emma Waterton and Jason Dittmer, 'The museum as assemblage: bringing forth affect at the Australian War Memorial', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, vol 29, no 2, 122-139, p 123.
[18] Fox, p 306, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, p 257.
[19] Waterton and Dittmer, p 124.
[20] Fox, p 306.
[21] Fox, p 305, drawing on Gilles Deleuze (translated by Martin Joughin), *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, New York: Zone Books, 1990, p 218. Emphasis in original.
[22] DeLanda, 2006, p 5, in Fox, p 306.
[23] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects,* Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007, p 29.

virtual futures; it contains people, objects, places, memories, discourses, affects; there is a microphone, a recording device. Maybe there is a house, a hotel, a village recalled, an archive, records, a ticking clock, a computer screen. Photographs. A journal article published years later. Food, weather, mood, feelings of awkwardness or relief. To think about oral history as an assemblage is to recognise the 'ordinary affects' shaping how 'things throw themselves together'.[24] It could always have been different.

Archives are affective spaces. Scholars have commented on the embodied experience of doing archival research, as dust, and as physical and emotional stimulation.[25] Lynette Russell reminds us that 'archives can be tactile, visceral, aural and olfactory'.[26] Records are likewise affective in their content and their silences. Ann Cvetkovich has written influentially of 'archives of feeling'.[27] Of course, affect goes beyond physical experience and emotional response. It is 'the encounter of bodies with bodies and particular objects'.[28] Listening to oral history in an archive lacks the romance of the crumbling, tobacco-scented document, but it is still an affective encounter. In a cubicle, plugged into a computer, affect reaches out, in sounds beyond the recorded words, grandchildren playing, the roar of traffic, flies buzzing, chest thumped, bangles clanking. We listen in place. At the Maison d'Izieu, I listened to the stories of Jewish refugee children who had stayed at this children's home which was raided by the Nazis in April 1944, a hundred metres from where I sat.[29] They spoke of how cold it was, of cracking ice to wash outside, while I sweltered in a forty-degree heatwave. At the Centre de l'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation I watched a video interview of a man painfully recounting the torture of his father.[30] I was in a building that had formed part of Klaus Barbie's former headquarters; Barbie was nicknamed 'the Butcher of Lyon'. In the walled medieval town of Beaune, I heard claustrophobic stories of the German occupation, of marching boots, curfews and patrols. It rained solidly, I was unwell, and, with nowhere to go when the archives closed for lunch, I walked the same cobbled streets. To work in an archive, on audio or paper, is a sensory and

---

[24] Stewart, 2007, p 30.
[25] E.g. Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002.
[26] Lynette Russell, 'Affect in the archive: trauma, grief, delight and texts. Some personal reflections', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 46, no 2, 200-2007, p 205.
[27] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling*, Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003.
[28] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p 4.
[29] The Maison d'Izieu sheltered Jewish child refugees in France from April 1943. It is now a museum-memorial. See www.memorializieu.eu/en/visit/presentation-of-the-maison-dizieu/, accessed 14 October 2020.
[30] Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation (Lyon), HRT130: filmed interview with Paul Maubourg, 24 November 1992.

embodied experience in time, place and space, where feeling, mood and knowledge enter into combination with records and their interpretation.

Affect goes largely unmentioned in oral history scholarship, despite its evident presence.[31] Early practitioners, concerned with revealing hidden (minority/subaltern) histories, needed legitimacy for their findings for activist or scholarly purposes.[32] Legitimacy lay in what was *there* in the spoken words: what could be represented, analysed or communicated. Indeed, oral history is still usually constituted as language. This is particularly the case when it is transcribed and/or coded. Much current oral history is rooted in the structuralist and post-structuralist paradigms of discourse and narrative which 'elevate[...] language and social structure over biology'.[33] And while Portelli's influential thinking about 'what makes oral history different' foreshadowed affective modes of engagement, in many projects and practices since, sociological or social history frameworks dominate, often resulting from disciplinary imperatives (e.g. around sampling, representativity, conclusiveness, knowledge, language and identity).[34] Oral historians frequently invoke the intersubjective relationship between interviewee and interviewer, but generally understand subjectivity as (pre)determined by aspects of identity such as class, sexuality or gender. An affective analysis might instead see 'knowledge as external to the subject and located in affect', that is, in the relations between heterogeneous elements in an assemblage, of which interviewer and interviewee are but two.[35] Furthermore, oral history is usually understood as diachronic, or, at most, trichronic. It is about *then* from the perspective of *now*, sometimes including *in between*, whereas the assemblage is multitemporal, involving 'contingent co-presence of diverse temporal moments'.[36] Finally, although the 'post-positivist paradigm' took oral historians 'beyond facts to their meanings', it nonetheless assumes

---

[31] Recent examples in this journal of affect-driven research include Amy Tooth Murphy, 'Listening in, listening out: intersubjectivity and the impact of insider and outsider status in oral history interviews', *Oral History*, 2020, 35-44; John Gabriel and Jenny Harding, 'Re-imagining Islington: Work, memory, place and emotion in a community oral history project', *Oral History*, vol 48, no 2, 2020, 43-56; Amy Starecheski, 'South Bronx soundwalks as embodied archiving practice', *Oral History*, vol 48, no 2, 2020, 102-112; and Leyla Vural, 'Potter's field as a heterotopia: death and mourning at New York City's edge', *Oral History*, vol 47, no 2, 2019, 106-116.
[32] See, e.g. Sherna Berger Gluck, 'Has oral history lost its radical/subversive edge?', *Oral History*, vol 39, no 2, 2011, 63-72.
[33] Fox, p 304.
[34] See Kevin P Murphy, Jennifer L Pierce and Jason Ruiz, 'What makes queer oral history different', *Oral History Review*, vol 43, no 1, 2016 on the relevance of Portelli's 1979 essay 'What makes oral history different', republished in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1991.
[35] Adkins, p 202.
[36] Hamilakis, p 173. Portelli's idea of 'uchronic dreams' goes some way towards thinking about potential but unlived futures, although there is more to say (Portelli, 1991, 99-116).

meaning as an out-there reality, discernible to knowing researchers.[37] But, Kathleen Stewart argues, 'the world is not already laid out on the table, with the only task left being an evaluative one'.[38] Any meaning we generate, any conclusion we draw, must recognise that we do so from inside an assemblage, as an affective object, affecting and affected by other constituent elements. Thus 'in the world that affect proposes', oral history can be thought differently.[39]

Two girls, three women

The remainder of this article draws on the stories of two women who were girls in France during the Second World War. I am the third woman: I am in this assemblage, affecting and affected by the stories, archives and research outcomes. In this section, I outline the happening pasts of the two girls, Simone and Nancette, the recording of their memory stories, and the listening encounters I had with them. In the final sections, I discuss two disappearances: of the child as a person in Simone's case, and of the person as a child in Nancette's.

Simone Courant was born in 1935 and lived in the working-class Paris suburb La Plaine Saint-Denis with her mother and two older brothers. As Simone's mother worked long hours in a factory, after school the children 'lived out on the streets', scavenging and begging food.[40] Little Simone was sometimes parked at the cinema by her brothers in front of films too old her. The family lived in a state of disorder; things were rather 'bohemian', but not without love. For Simone, 'it was distressing because she was a little girl, and she lived in fear'. In particular, the frequent sirens and air raids affected her: 'the bombing, the bombs, all of that, in her head, it was awful'.[41] In April 1943, a deadly American air raid on the industrial suburbs of Paris compelled the authorities to close schools and evacuate all children.[42] Train convoys left the capital across the next two years. Simone arrived with her brother in the village of Saint-Marc-à-

[37] Portelli, 1991, p 2. Alistair Thomson, 'Four paradigm transformations in oral history', *Oral History Review*, vol 34, no 1, 2007, 49-70.
[38] Kathleen Stewart, 'In the world that affect proposed', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol 32, no 2, 2017, 192-198, p 194.
[39] Paraphrasing Stewart, 2017.
[40] Interview with Yolande Demassias and Eugène, recorded by Lindsey Dodd, 5 July 1917 (not publicly archived). Yolande Demassias is Simone Courant's daughter; Eugène is Yolande's father and Simone's widower. All quotations across this section are Yolande Demassias's words, except where specified. All interview extracts across the article about Simone Courant derive from this interview.
[41] Comment made by Eugène.
[42] See e.g. Lindsey Dodd, 'The evacuation of children inside wartime France', *Nottingham French Studies*, vol 59, no 2, 2020, 159-173.

Loubaud in the rural Creuse *département*[43] in May 1944. She was nearly nine years old. She was billeted with an unmarried woman, Lucienne Cancalon, and her elderly mother. At the end of the war, it was decided Simone should stay in the countryside. A bond had formed, even though Lucienne apparently 'had little maternal instinct'. Simone maintained contact with her own mother too. She integrated well into the village:

> she was adopted, emotionally, by everyone […]. She had really good friends, and everyone here loved her. [With other children] she'd go and fetch the milk in the evenings, she'd look after the cows with Édith […], and over there, Pierre and Milou, who treated her like their little sister.

Simone eventually married a local boy, Eugène, settled, and had her own family in Saint-Marc-à-Loubaud. When she died in 2010, her funeral was well attended 'because she was very, very loved', and even the local parliamentary deputy sent his condolences.

Nancette Blanchou's parents ran a large farm in the Dordogne. Born in 1936, Nancette was the eldest of three children. The family's agricultural workers always ate with the family and 'with so many people around the table, it was wonderful, a really lovely atmosphere […]. We had a good life'.[44] In September 1943, a fortnight before Nancette's seventh birthday, two young men knocked at the door, asking for her father. They said they wanted to join the resistance.[45] Her mother told them to come back later. But the young men were Milice agents, paramilitaries of the collaborationist French government.[46] Later they returned with German police and soldiers and surrounded the house. The children were sent to the bottom of the farmyard. There, Nancette watched:

> Mum […], at some point, she tried to run away. And the Germans fired at her, and, well [she sighs], they didn't hit her, but after that they started to take her away – , and because she didn't want to leave her children, she grabbed hold of the gate […] They slammed the gate on her fingers. Mum was screaming that she wanted her children […]. It's a cry that I'm unlikely ever to forget. [Her

[43] A *département* is a large administrative district headed by a Prefect, the appointed representative of central government. Each department hosts a state-run archive, the *archives départementales.*

[44] Archives départementales de la Dordogne, 14AV 61: interview with Nancette Blanchou, 28 September 2009. See http://memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/temoignages-audio/1008-temoignages-integraux/52-jean-dolet-blanchou-resistant-deporte-nancette-blanchou.html, accessed 14 October 2020. All interview extracts with Nancette across this article are taken from this interview. On the function of happy memories, see Carrie Hamilton, 'Happy memories', *New Formations*, vol 63, 2007/8, 65-81.

[45] See e.g. Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance*, London: Faber and Faber, 2015.

[46] Created in early 1943, the Milice became the main organ of Franco-German collaboration, tracking down resisters, Jews and those evading forced labour.

voice is quiet; she sounds resigned; her voice trembles a little; she swallows.] It was – [sighs], it was very hard.

His family threatened, Nancette's father gave himself up. He was later tortured and deported for his resistance activities. Her mother was arrested and imprisoned. She was released mentally and physically ill. One day, news arrived that Nancette's father had died in Mittelbau-Dora camp:

> Mum screamed. She fell to the ground, she became hysterical. And for a child to see her Mum like that, on the ground – [she pauses] […]. After that, Mum went downhill. She, pfffffff – , she kept trying to commit suicide – . […] I followed her around everywhere, I was so [she emphasises the word] afraid, and as soon as I lost sight of her, I was beside myself with worry. […W]e had to take a knife away from her, I had to take her barbiturates off her, I took the knife, […] because – [she sighs] – she wanted to slit her wrists. [She sighs again.]

Nancette's mother went to live with her own mother, and died of tuberculosis in 1950. The three children were raised by their paternal grandparents. Nancette later married, became a nurse and raised a family.

The two memory stories were recorded in very different contexts. I have never met either woman, but they both have a vivid presence for me. In spring 2017 I was interviewed by a French regional newspaper about my research into child evacuees from the Paris region to the Creuse. I invited potential interviewees to contact me. Yolande Demassias, Simone Courant's daughter, got in touch about her mother. As part of my research trip, I went to Saint-Marc-à-Loubaud in July 2017 and recorded an interview with Yolande and her father Eugène, Simone's widower. It is a story about Simone. Had she told it herself, it would have been different. Indeed, it is possible, even probable, that she would not have chosen to be interviewed. We recorded in Yolande's home office, across the lane from her father's house, which Simone had inherited from Lucienne Cancalon. The interview was an hour and twenty minutes long. Prior to my visit, Yolande sent me some pages she had written about her mother's and Lucienne's lives, narrativised for her own descendants. I also searched the material I had collected at the Archives départementales de la Creuse a year before, and found Simone Courant mentioned in a list of evacuees remaining in the Creuse in 1945. Two days before the interview, I returned to the archives and searched the thousands of *fiches d'évacuation* (evacuee registration forms) for Simone Courant. I shared the *fiche* I found with Yolande by email. The memory story about Simone, then, is part of an assemblage of knowledge, people, memories, institutions and more.

Nancette Blanchou was interviewed by the Archives départementales de la Dordogne in partnership with another state-sponsored regional organisation, the Centre départemental de la Mémoire (the Departmental Memory Centre). Conscious of the decreasing number of eyewitnesses to the Second World War, the archive had collected memories of resistance to the German occupation in the Dordogne. Eighty-six people were interviewed and the collection totals over 176 hours of recording.[47] According to the comprehensive website Mémories de Résistances (Memories of Resistances), 'social science' methods were used, including a semi-structured format with themes broadly defined in advance.[48] Along with the interviews, the website presents timelines, archival documents, and photographs of relevant locations in the present-day Dordogne. Of the thirty-four interviews currently available online, five are with women.[49] A disclaimer on the introductory webpage states:

> […] it is essential to note that these interviews took place more than sixty years after the end of the war and that the memory of the people interviewed could have altered.[50]

In summer 2016, I wrote to 200 French archives asking whether they had any sound archives pertaining to children's lives during the Second World War. I was directed to Nancette Blanchou's interview. An hour and forty-two minutes long, the interview was recorded in La Coquille. The male interviewer's name is not given. The interview is titled 'Jean Dolet Blanchou, Résistant déporté [deported resistant] – Nancette Blanchou', and accompanied by a photograph of Nancette's father Jean. The recording is presented both in entirety and divided into unedited tracks, each with a heading. A précis of each track and further information are available by clicking 'find out more' buttons.

I first listened to Yolande and Eugène speak about Simone Courant in Saint-Marc-à-Loubaud on 5 July 2017. It was the second interview I conducted in the Creuse during that research trip. On a hot summer day, I drove deep into the hilly countryside. I arrived an hour late, my SatNav confused by how slowly I was driving on winding narrow roads. Maybe the Parisian evacuees came this way too. I felt like I was driving in a cloud of butterflies. I pulled up outside an imposing house. Yolande was waiting, greeting me

---

[47] 'Mémoires de Résistances en Dordogne', at http://memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/1000-memoires-de-resistances-de-la-dordogne.html#c1089, accessed 14 October 2020.

[48] As elsewhere, France has its own methodological evolution, allied to ideas of oral archives and oral sources, and tending to prefer these terms to any translation of oral history. Ariane Mak noted in 2019 'the success of the "oral archives" concept and its deep impact on the way the field has established itself in France' ('France: Oral history conference', *Oral History*, vol 47 no 2, 2019, p 21).

[49] The male dominance reflects the greater number of men in active forms of resistance and the value given to that kind of work.

[50] 'Préamble', at http://memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/temoignages-audio/1038-preambule.html, accessed 14 October 2020.

kindly and enthusiastically. Eugène, in the traditional blue overalls of a country man, was more reserved. Yolande pointed to the fine house as where her mother grew up – Lucienne's house – but led me across the lane to her own home, an elegant barn conversion. Eugène was anxious; he had once had his words misconstrued by a journalist. In the early part of the interview, his eyes brimmed with tears as he spoke of his wife. My questioning was largely unstructured. I had broad themes I wanted covered, but Yolande and Eugène spoke as they wished. Afterwards we had tea and cake in Yolande's kitchen. I have relistened to the interview several times since, and Eugène's emotion is always moving. I produced an affective transcript for my own use – detailing more than words, but not all the words – in autumn 2017, and returned to it when drafting my book across 2018-19 as a resident research fellow in Lyon.

Although I had known about Nancette's interview since 2016, I did not manage to listen to it – again producing an affective transcript – until autumn 2018. I was newly arrived in Lyon, and completing the final few transcripts of the 120 interviews I was analysing. Nancette's interview brings to my mind, simultaneously, not only her clear, warm voice, her parents' arrest viewed from the bottom of the hot farmyard, but also the fellows' office of the Collegium de Lyon where I was working on it. A fairly ugly room in a fairly ugly building, flickering fluorescent lights as the nights drew in, but also the excitement of being there, of new people and new ideas. I was very moved by Nancette's story. I liked her humour and humanity. It reminded me of an oral history I had listened to in Mâcon in 2016 with a woman whose father had been deported in similar circumstances.[51] And so Nancette Blanchou and Simone Courant, two girls, two women, exist inside complex assemblages. Far from being extraneous, their constituent elements cannot help but affect what is in the memory stories, what parts of the happening past got told, and how I listen to them and bring them into my research.

The disappearing child I

The archival record of Simone Courant's arrival in the Creuse enacts the disappearance of the child as a person: a feeling, thinking, agential, connected human. My work follows paths laid by scholars of childhood studies who see children as 'meaningful persons and meaningful actors'.[52] The archival record, Simone's *fiche d'évacuation*, reflects what 'someone decided […] was worth counting and how to count it', or here, worth noting and how to note it.[53] As Mary Jo Maynes remarks, 'our image of the past is driven by the

[51] Archives départementales de Saône-et-Loire, 14NUM [non coté]: interview with Marie-Madeleine Viguié-Moreau, undated.
[52] Jones, p. 174.
[53] Manoff, p 14.

agendas and perspectives of the record keepers in the past'.[54] Simone's *fiche d'évacuation* is unusual.[55] I have studied hundreds of these documents.[56] On printed cardboard templates, unknown hands recorded, usually, the child's name, date of birth, address in Paris, date of arrival in the Creuse, address in the Creuse and the name of the foster family. There is a space for any changes of address, and at the bottom – and left blank on the vast majority of these forms – the headings: 'behaviour – character – aptitudes – observations'. On Simone's form this section is completed. Someone thought her worth noting. The comments read: 'good – meek – unremarkable – poor/needy [*nécessiteux*]'.

Frozen in four adjectives, the sense of Simone as a person in progress, moving through the world with a past and a future, has gone. In her encounter with the bureaucracy of the state, Simone is characterised as a problem; a meek problem, but a problem nonetheless. Her arrival in the Creuse is the result of an ideological child-saving impetus, of national solidarity and 'return to the land'.[57] However poor, needy and unremarkable Simone was, she was deemed worth saving. She is, in Michael Rothberg's term, an implicated subject.[58] Across 1943/1944, thousands of Jewish children were loaded onto other trains in Paris with the complicity of the state, and taken to other destinations, never to return. Thousands more had to hide, became orphaned and lost their identities. These four adjectives emerge from a situated gaze upon this child and fix her in time. But when the archive and the oral history come together, something of the person remerges.

'What matters', says Brent Adkins of the assemblage, 'is the affects it causes to flow'.[59] Those adjectives are not without truth. Yolande described her mother's childhood: 'she was always a good girl, obedient and submissive'. And when she arrived, she was evidently impoverished: 'she came from poverty. She had lice, was covered in them, in her hair'. The oral history brings multiple gazes upon Simone – mine, a daughter's, a husband and widower's, of Lucienne her foster mother, her brothers, the villagers, the coach driver who deposited her in Saint-Marc. There are multiple trajectories, which include as they must her marriage, motherhood, her heart condition and her death. The adjectives aroused indignation; they seemed inadequate and disparaging. They created a sense of expectation about what I wanted to know, how I

[54] Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a category of historical analysis: history, agency, and narratives of childhood', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, vol 1, no 1, 2008, 114-124, p 117.
[55] Archives départementales de la Creuse (ADC), 288W 47: Fiche d'évacuation, Simone Courant.
[56] 8,500 children from the Paris region were evacuated to the Creuse through this initiative. Thousands more went elsewhere. The *fiches* are organised alphabetically and fill (to bursting) fourteen boxes.
[57] The Vichy government promoted national solidarity (between desirable citizens), and rural relocation as a moral cure for the ills of urban cosmopolitan living.
[58] Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.
[59] Adkins, p 156.

focussed on what I heard, what I hear now and what matters to me. They made sense to Yolande as observations, but they demanded explanations.

The Simone who arrived in the Creuse was a bombed child. Bomb trauma barely featured in official thinking of the time in France, and there was little psychological interest in children who had lived through multiple air raids.[60] But Eugène was emphatic: 'she was traumatised practically all her life by that, oh, yes yes yes, she often spoke about it'. She was also exhausted. The train journey from Paris to Guéret could take nearly twelve hours.[61] Children were woken several times en route. Usually, the whole convoy was given a medical check in Guéret on arrival, spent a night there, then went by coach to different villages. In tears, Eugène described what his wife and mother-in-law had later told him:

> She was completely lost, and there [in the village square], the coach driver said 'Does anyone know who's taking this little girl, otherwise I'll take her back?'

Yolande added that Simone had her hair cut short and was wearing a sailor suit. The authorities had not known whether she was a girl or a boy and so had looked in her underwear. Simone was nearly nine years old, but that this happened – 'it was humiliating for her', Yolande said – suggests how bewildered, sleepy or dumbstruck the child must have been. An important part of the telling of Simone's history, which also featured in Yolande's written account, was that when she awoke at Lucienne's house she asked 'Madame, is it morning or night?' Recording this child's character and aptitudes in the days or even weeks after these disorientating events would be to record their impact on her. Yet Simone's aptitudes proved to be more remarkable than her *fiche* suggested. Despite a difficult time at school – 'a refugee, her poverty, her headlice', said Yolande, earned the teacher's dislike – she left aged fourteen with the highest mark in her leaving certificate.

To make Simone reappear is to complicate her. She was not just a meek and needy child, nor just a saved child. Nor did saving her make her life one of ease. Simone hated to talk about her past. She burnt her old photos. She loved Lucienne, but always felt indebted to her. She gave enormously of herself to others, but struggled to get close to people. She lived the rest of her life in Saint-Marc-à-Loubaud but, said

---

[60] Lindsey Dodd, *French Children Under the Allied Bombs, 1940-1945: An Oral History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.
[61] ADC, 9BIB 129/74: The *Courrier du Centre* reported on 22 April 1943 that the evacuee train left Paris at 19.30 and arrived in Guéret at 06.23, making several stops, the most recent at 04.00. Simone's journey may have been similar. Yolande and Eugène believed Simone had travelled by coach. However, the eighteenth convoy of children to the Creuse left Paris on 19 May 1944 (Archives municipales de Boulogne-Billancourt, 6H 19), and Simone's *fiche d'évacuation* is dated 20 May 1944.

Yolande, 'when people asked her if she was from here, she'd say 'Oh, no, no, no, I'm not from around here. I'm from the city […]. I'm Parisian'. The archive affects the oral history. Yolande and I had both seen the *fiche d'évacuation* before the interview. It established expectation and caused affect to flow. The archive provides one of many gazes on Simone, responded to by Yolande and by me. The archive confirms parts of the story, and generates intensities in the telling and interpretation. But the oral history affects the archive too. Of course, it does not alter what is written on the paper. But the oral history reflects back the selective child-saving gaze of 1943. It also reconstrues childhood poverty – *nécessiteux* – as a complex lifelong shame. 'Mademoiselle L. Cancalon' gets a face, a house, a son-in-law, a grand-daughter and descendants. The archival record 'may not be different in terms of substance or subject, but it is profoundly different in terms of terms of the affects that it causes to circulate'.[62] Somewhere in this assemblage, a person reappears.

The disappearing child II

In Nancette's case the archives enact the disappearance of the person as a child, a young human. The interview was recorded by an archive of the state as part of a series about French resistance, and its title is 'Jean Dolet Blanchou – Résistant déporté [deported resistant] – Nancette Blanchou'. Nancette's father's name takes precedence. The keywords given are:

> Arrest, social insurance, occupying authority, bombing, expression of protest, the Milice, political militant, mobilization, pacifist movement, Communist Party, rural population, propaganda, radio, French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO).[63]

Only Nancette's father is pictured. This is a good example of a hegemonic process in action. Keywords reflecting Nancette's experience might include children of resistants, bereavement and war orphan. Archival categorisations 'have difficulty adequately chronicling many affective experiences', which are thus rendered invisible.[64] Archival value is given to the man, the hero and the martyr, over the child and women (Nancette and her mother). Peters and Besley highlight that 'the records of the State create a shared cultural framework for collective memory'.[65] A heroic, masculine French resistance was at the heart of post-war Gaullist conceptions of national identity, and find an echo here.[66] The impacts of that heroism on

---

[62] Adkins, p 262, writing here of Theseus's ship, but the point applies to this document.
[63] See http://memoires-resistances.dordogne.fr/temoignages-audio/1008-temoignages-integraux/52-jean-dolet-blanchou-resistant-deporte-nancette-blanchou.html, accessed 14 October 2020.
[64] Cifor, p 15.
[65] Peters and Besley, p 1024.
[66] See, e.g., Henry Rousso (translated by Arthur Goldhammer), *The Vichy Syndrome*: *History and Memory in France since 1944*, Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991.

the child generation, as pride and loss, are not part of collective memory. Decisions about who to interview, what to focus on, where to seek interviewees, how to catalogue, what metadata to include all create archival value. This is 'reified through subsequent archival functions' such as dissemination through public-facing websites such as Mémoires de Résistances.[67]

Nancette's interview exists because of its extrinsic value to the archive. Her words are propelled outwards, through Jean Dolet Blanchou, towards a national history. The dominant regime of memory around the heroic resistance is centrifugal, tugging at the narrative and affecting the interview. Introducing her background, Nancette says 'I'm […] the grand-daughter of peasants, militants, and my parents were communist militants'. Her mother and father were both politically engaged. A few seconds later the interviewer reformulates her words: 'your father was a communist militant, that's right, isn't it?' His concern for Jean Dolet Blanchou edges Nancette's mother out of the frame. But Nancette insists on her mother: she is the daughter of two parents. Later the interviewer remarks: '[So] that event, the arrest of your father […] as you said earlier […] shaped the rest of your life'. But Nancette had also vividly described her mother screaming for her children, her hand crushed in the gate. She replied: 'Yes. Or, at any rate, I believe so. I wanted to care for other people. […] Even though I grew up surrounded by love, when you've lost your dad and your mum, you're missing something'. Nancette does not forget that she lost both of her parents that day. There is an inherent conflict at the heart of every interview.[68] The interviewer wanted to collect a memory and Nancette wanted to tell her story. This dynamic causes affect to flow, shaping content. For me it created a powerful intensity around the fate of Nancette's mother. And it illuminated the intrinsic value of a story about love, loss, parents and children.

The interview is clearly the story of a child. Ostensibly about Jean Dolet Blanchou, it says less about his contribution to leftist rural politics, progressive farming or resistance than the impact of his death on his daughter. Losing her parents changed how Nancette behaved and how she saw herself as a child:

> I'd been a carefree little girl […], I became a little adult. [She pauses.] […] Who, afterwards, could never be understood by grown-ups, because I had certain attitudes that weren't normal, you know. […] I wanted to do grown-up things, I wanted to take the reins of the house, to replace my Dad, to replace my Mum […]. The adults still saw us as children. But we weren't children anymore.

[67] Cifor, p 14.
[68] Ronald Grele, 'History and the languages of history in the oral history interview: who answers whose questions and why', University of the Witwatersrand, *History Workshop*, 146, 1990, 1-35, p. 26.

The story highlights a complex process of bereavement for a child which is both public (for a war hero) and private (for a daughter), and stretches into her near and further futures. When the war ended in 1945, the family were still without news of him. The church bells rang in celebration, but what they signalled to Nancette was that 'I still hadn't got my Dad back. […] I'd got my Mum back, but I didn't have my Dad'. Years later she visited Mittelbau-Dora with a man who had been there with her father. It helped her come to terms with his death:

> So I got to go to Germany, to visit Dora with them. And that! That, for me, was really something extraordinary. To be able [she emphasises the words] to go there. I can never thank them enough.

The content of this oral history interview reveals a child's experience of having parents in the resistance, a child's response to loss, and a child's trajectory beyond the war. This is Nancette's story through and through. The child reappears. Or rather, she was there all along, but hidden by what others valued more.

Again what matters are the affects which flow when the oral history and the archive come together. The archive wields power over an oral history which it recorded, catalogued and disseminated. But without the archive, it would not exist. The archive itself is affected by dominant tropes in French collective memory of the Second World War and the vectors of that memory. The Mémoires de Résistances website orientates users' perspectives on its interviews. Interviewers used 'social science' methods, while interviewees' memories are styled as unreliable. But the oral history also affects the archive. It shines a light on the dominant regime of memory – heroic, masculine, martyred – in action, exposing the archive's positioning. The disappearance of the child sensitises us to specific processes of marginalisation, here of female and youthful perspectives. In doing so, it urges me to call them to attention.

Life goes on

Making use of assemblages and affects in relation to archives and oral history does not negate the Foucauldian power/knowledge problematic. But reconceiving power as the capacity to affect and be affected is a productive new perspective. The aim of this article was to bring the affective flows around archives, oral histories and research into better focus using two examples. I tried to attune myself differently to oral history as a process embedded in the everyday realities of my research. I wanted to observe phenomena in action. This drew attention to the contingency of each interview as an assemblage, fleetingly coming together in this or that way, a product of multiple relationships of diverse bodies - people, memories, places, objects, discourses, institutions - held in tension by affective forces. Assemblages help us to visualize these elements as a connected, unstable, temporary whole, allied for a moment but constantly on

the move. They give me a way to evoke the sense that the past, the story and the interview were always on the brink of being, or having been, something else. Assemblages do not just permit all of this open-ended messiness; they understand it as the way of things.

Had I decided to conclude that archives have power over their records, that written archival records are reductive, and that children and women are marginalised by power I would not be saying much that was new. Likewise, if I were urging practitioners of oral history always to expose in this much detail the affective worlds proliferating around each memory story, our research outcomes would soon get clogged up.[69] Archiving recordings is a vital part of the recognition and valuing of human life, endeavour and difference. But oral sources, or oral archives, are not oral history. Oral history is a process which takes many forms. In my experience, it is always something of an adventure. What gets drained of life in the 'curious vampirism' of the quest for objectivity (or categorisation and searchability) is a contingent set of encounters, part of a 'wiggling world', which did not begin when someone pressed on, nor end when they pressed off.[70]

To do their job, archives must stem the flow of life. The ontological status of any archive is *this is*.[71] Accessions are labelled, categorised and thus rendered fixed and complete in themselves. Oral history is a process of fixing too. A flow of mind-images – remembering – becomes speech, a digital file, a website. The ongoingness of everyday life is arbitrarily sliced into discrete moments. But memories are made of feelings that are volatile and shifting, their expression contingent on an assemblage of heterogenous elements, and listening is affective, intensive and open-ended. As researchers or archivists, we could choose to see ourselves as standing on the bank watching the river go by.[72] Or recognise that we are, and have always been, in the water, flowing along with the rest.

---

[69] Stewart (2007, p 42) writes: 'little worlds proliferate around everything and anything'.
[70] John D Dewsbury, Paul Harrison, Mitch Rose and John Wylie, 'Introduction: enacting geographies', *Geoforum*, 33, 2002, 437-440, p 437; Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An inventory of shimmers', in Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham NC & London: Duke University Press, 2010, 1-25, p 4.
[71] See the chapter/plateau '1227: Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine' for a discussion of flow, fixity and research practices (Deleuze & Guattari, pp 351-423).
[72] Deleuze and Guattari, p 372.