Archival Time & Carnival Time

Investigating the Temporality of Eventfulness

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Events leave traces

An event is something generates new information that changes what happens next.

A trace is something from a prior event or state that remains available after the event and can shape later action.



These can be archives or affordances for other actors, different forms of memory, protocols etc.

Archival & Carnival Interfaces to Traces

Archival interface

Traces can travel across events. It can be retrieved later without recreating the event that produced it.

Carnivalesque interface

Trace is reactivated through recurrence: gathering again, performing again, inhabiting a place, repeating practices and re-entering relationships.

The difference is not what gets remembered, but how the past becomes available to the present.

Daphne: memory was made by repeating the scene

In 4th-century Daphne, near Antioch, Christians and pagans fought over the meaning of the same sacred site.

Gallus moved the relics of the martyr Babylas into a sanctuary dominated by the pagan god Apollo. Emperor Julian later removed the relics and tried to restore the pagan order.

The Christians answered with a procession. During the struggle, Apollo's temple burned. Christians interpreted the fire as the triumph of Babylas. Julian then tried to reclaim Daphne with processions and spectacles of his own.

Mary Carruthers' point is that the processions themselves created public memory: citizens became figures in a mnemonic scene. Meaning was carried by the repeated arrangement of site, route, bodies, images and participation.



"Wouldn't you like my knife, mother" said Archer. Sounding at the same moment as the bell, her son's voice mixed life and death inextricably, exhilaratingly" - ***Jacob's Room, Virginia Woolf***

Defining Eventfulness

William H. Sewell Jr. distinguishes ordinary happenings from historical events.

Most happenings occur within existing structures and reproduce them.



An event is different: it changes the structures that condition subsequent action.



This makes history path-dependent without making it teleological. What happened earlier changes the possible outcomes later — but events can also change the causal rules themselves.

Three features of eventful history

PATH DEPENDENCY

Earlier events change later possibilities.

Sewell's example: Bolsheviks consciously learned from the French Revolution; Chinese Communists later modeled themselves on the Bolsheviks and received direct aid.

TEMPORAL HETEROGENEITY

The same cause can work differently at different historical moments.

Sewell's example: before the Revolution noble status was a prime social asset; by the Terror, the same status had become a powerful liability.

CONTINGENCY

Outcomes are not guaranteed by an underlying historical direction.

1848 Paris: The Mobile Guard and National Workshops end up on opposite sides of the revolution.

event → generates variation / new information

trace → what remains available afterward

eventfulness → how much the event changes subsequent possibilities

Sewellian historical event → an event sufficiently eventful to transform structure

Eventful periods are vortices in historical flow of time

Most of the time, multiple historical currents move through relatively stable channels. In eventful periods, those currents collide and can reorganize the channel itself.



PATH DEPENDENCY = inherited channels ▪ **TEMPORAL HETEROGENEITY = different currents** ▪ **CONTINGENCY = vortex / redirection**

Archival Time

Archival Time is the temporal world produced when traces of prior states remain available across situations and become part of the environment through which the present is interpreted and acted upon.



CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION

Given what has happened, what follows?

CHARACTERISTIC ACCOMPLISHMENT

Continuity.

Carnival Time

Carnival Time is a bounded interval in which accumulated traces temporarily have less authority over what can happen next, and more of the situation's meaning must be produced through present participation.

Carnival is not amnesia. It can be traditional.

CHARACTERISTIC QUESTION

What can happen here?

CHARACTERISTIC ACCOMPLISHMENT

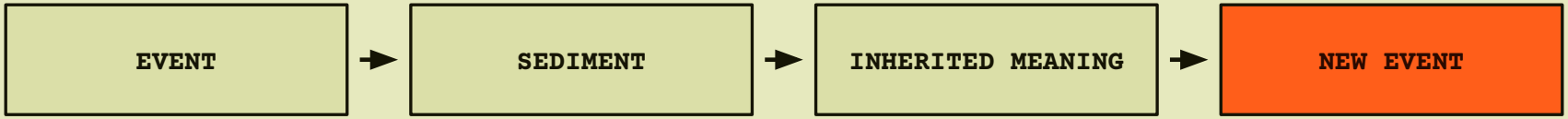
Eventfulness.

ARCHIVAL TIME PRESERVES THE CONSEQUENCES OF EVENTS.
CARNIVAL TIME PRESERVES THE EVENTFULNESS OF THE PRESENT.

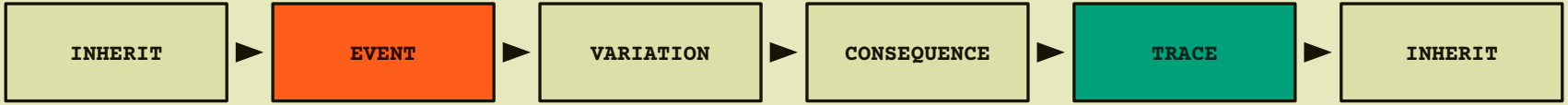
Carnival does not mean low memory

A football club or festival may have enormous historical depth and embodied memory. The archive can make the next carnival more powerful.

At St. James' Park, heroes, stories, monuments and past results accumulate. Chants, routes, bodies, rivalries and rituals reactivate that history in a new event.



Eventful History needs both eventfulness and inheritance



Pure archival time would make every future a continuation of an existing trajectory.

Pure carnival time would produce events whose discoveries disappear with the event.

History requires both: enough eventfulness for something different to happen, and enough inheritance for what happens to matter next time.

When history stops being eventful

An old order can lose its liveness while its buildings, incentives, bureaucracies and categories continue to reproduce everyday life.

The future feels terminal, but no terminal event arrives.

Eventfulness gets displaced into bounded simulations of unmaking: horror, bloodsport, theme parks, fantasies of killing the bank, the state, the bureaucracy, the machine.

The world continues archivally while carnival rehearses endings somewhere else.

AI makes the archive alive

Earlier archives mostly waited to be consulted.

AI can retrieve, compare, infer, summarize, reconstruct and return prior culture while the next event is still forming.

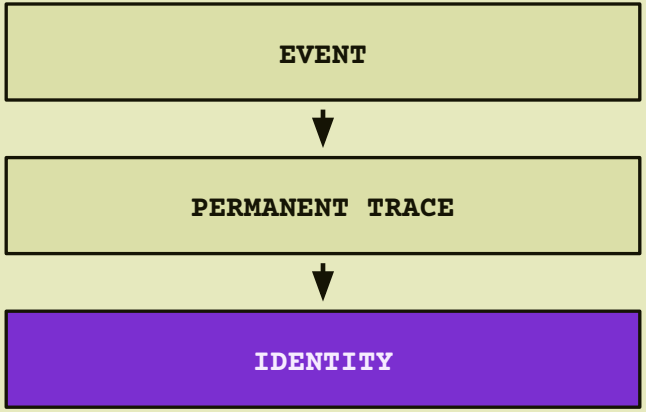


THE TEMPORAL CONSEQUENCE:

the archive moves closer to the event.

Carnival requires an ending

The mask comes off. The crowd disperses. A temporary inversion does not automatically become a permanent description of the participant.



Pre-commodification is premature archivalization

Before a strange idea acquires errors, local vocabulary, embarrassing dead ends, practical tests and peculiar combinations, the machine can tell you what it resembles, what term already exists, what lineage it belongs to and how to articulate it.

An idea can become socially mature before it has been experientially tested.

Designing Archival Time

Goal: make consequences inheritable.

PERSIST

Persistence
— traces survive.

Independent retrieval
— the past is available without recreating the event.

Addressability
— a specific past state can be found.

Attribution
— traces remain connected to identities.

MAKE LEGIBLE

Comparability
— moments can be evaluated together.

Portability
— traces travel between contexts.

Standardization
— memory becomes mutually legible.

Projection
— trajectories can be extended forward.

Archival design increases the authority and portability of the past.

Designing Carnival Time

Goal: protect eventfulness long enough for something different to happen.

BOUND THE EVENT

Boundedness
— a real beginning and ending.

Participation
— meaning cannot be recovered entirely from a record.

Situated memory
— some knowledge remains dependent on people, place and context.

Role looseness
— persistent identity does not govern every interaction.

DELAY THE ARCHIVE

Lossiness
— not everything becomes durable evidence.

Non-finality
— experiments do not immediately become precedent.

Delayed evaluation
— do not classify the event while it is still generating possibilities.

Permeability
— recurrence stays connected to ordinary social life.

Carnival design changes when, where and how strongly the past becomes available.