

## Urban Studies Research Methods: Culture

### A Few Ways (Out of Many) to “Do” Research on Urban Cultures

#### Archival Adventures

Are you working on a project that focuses on sound in the city? Visual culture? Theater? Archives are wonderful places to excavate hidden histories, examine precious and provocative cultural objects, and mine the historical record(s). Here are just a few examples of the types of archives you might consider visiting if you’re researching migrant, theatrical, sonic and/or visual cultures linked to urban life:

#### East Coast:

- **Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies:**  
IJS is the largest archive of jazz and jazz related materials in the world. Over 100 distinct ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS comprise personal papers as well as archives of record companies and jazz-related institutions and organizations spanning from 1920 to the present. The Institute maintains over 100,000 commercial and non-commercial SOUND RECORDINGS, a collection of more than 30,000 PHOTOGRAPHS, a collection of ORAL HISTORY MATERIALS, most notably the Jazz Oral History Project of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), as well as over 6000 BOOKS, a collection of jazz PERIODICALS, and RESEARCH FILES including clippings from newspapers and general interest publication, press releases and publicity materials, and correspondence.
- **Museum of Chinese America**  
Founded in 1980, the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) is dedicated to preserving and presenting the history, heritage, culture and diverse experiences of people of Chinese descent in the United States. The greatly expanded MOCA at 215 Centre Street is a national home for the precious narratives of diverse Chinese American communities, and strives to be a model among interactive museums. The Museum promotes dialogue and understanding among people of all cultural backgrounds, bringing 160 years of Chinese American history to vivid life through its innovative exhibitions, educational and cultural programs. MOCA welcomes diverse visitors and participants to its broad array of exhibits and programs. MOCA’s expansion accommodates its range of visitors which include: New Yorkers, domestic and international visitors, neighborhood residents, students and school groups from local and regional schools.
- **The Fales Library, Special Collections, New York University (features “The Downtown Collection,” the “Riot Grrrl” Collection, the Food & Cookery Collection)**  
The Downtown Collection at the Fales Library: The Downtown Collection, which began in 1993, is an attempt to document the downtown arts scene that evolved in SoHo and the Lower East Side during the 1970s through the early 1990s. During this time, an explosion of artistic creativity radically challenged and changed tradition literature, music, theater, performance, film, activism, dance, photography, video, and other art practices. Some characteristics that these artists share include work that was extremely collaborative, multidisciplinary, multimedia, and non-hierarchical. These artists questioned traditional artistic and cultural assumptions at the most basic levels. The goal of the Downtown Collection is to comprehensively

collect the full range of artistic practices and outputs, regardless of format. This research collection, built on a documentary strategy, supports the research of students and scholars who are interested in the intersection of the contemporary arts with other forms of cultural and artistic expression. The Downtown Collection includes the personal papers of artists, filmmakers, writers and performers; archives of art galleries, theatre groups, and art collectives; and collections relating to AIDS activism and off-off-Broadway theater.

- **The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**

The NYPL Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center houses one of the worlds most extensive combination of circulating, reference, and rare archival collections in its field. These materials are available free of charge, along with a wide range of special programs, including exhibitions, seminars, and performances. An essential resource for everyone with an interest in the arts — whether professional or amateur — the Library is known particularly for its prodigious collections of non-book materials such as historic recordings, videotapes, autograph manuscripts, correspondence, sheet music, stage designs, press clippings, programs, posters and photographs.

- **The Paley Center for Media**

The Paley Center for Media, with locations in New York and Los Angeles, leads the discussion about the cultural, creative, and social significance of television, radio, and emerging platforms for the professional community and media-interested public. The Paley Center's permanent media collection contains nearly 150,000 television and radio programs and advertisements, available both in New York and Los Angeles. The online database offers synopses, along with production credits for the programs.

- **National Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.**

A diverse and multifaceted cultural and educational enterprise, the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) is an active and visible component of the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum complex. The NMAI cares for one of the world's most expansive collections of Native artifacts, including objects, photographs, archives, and media covering the entire Western Hemisphere, from the Arctic Circle to Tierra del Fuego. The National Museum of the American Indian operates three facilities. The museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., offers exhibition galleries and spaces for performances, lectures and symposia, research, and education. The George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC) in New York City houses exhibitions, research, educational activities, and performing arts programs. The Cultural Resources Center (CRC) in Suitland, Maryland, houses the museum's collections as well as the conservation, repatriation, and digital imaging programs, and research facilities. The NMAI's off-site outreach efforts, often referred to as the "fourth museum," include websites, traveling exhibitions, and community programs.

- **The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is one of the world's leading research facilities devoted to the preservation of materials on the global African and African diasporan experiences. A focal point of Harlem's cultural life, the Center also functions as the national research library in the field, providing free access to its wide-ranging noncirculating collections. It also sponsors programs and events that illuminate and illustrate the richness of black history and culture. The Research and

Reference Division contains more than 150,000 volumes and 85,000 microforms. Primarily in English, they also include works in a variety of African and European languages. The division's collections offer more than 6,000 serials, including 400 black newspapers and 1,000 current periodicals from around the world. The Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division contains more than 3,900 rare books, 580 manuscript collections, and 15,000 pieces of sheet music and rare printed materials. The Art and Artifacts Division houses one of the most comprehensive collections of black artists' work in a research center. The Photographs and Prints Division includes collections of images from mid-18th-century graphics to contemporary documentary and art photographs. The more than 500,000 items include portraits of many prominent 19th- and 20th-century black artists, political figures, actors, musicians, athletes, and social activists. The Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division offers a broad range of audiovisual documentation of black culture including music, oral history recordings, motion pictures, and videotapes.

## Midwest:

- **Mapping the Stacks: A Guide to Black Chicago's Hidden Archives**  
Scholars agree that Black Chicago decisively shaped 20th century African American and American culture. Home to the most advanced, Black-owned mass media network in the U.S. by mid-century, Chicago not only thrived as a mecca for the literary arts and sustained a cutting-edge visual arts scene, but Black Chicago transformed the blues, gospel, and avant garde jazz music as well. Mapping the Stacks (MTS) aims to identify and organize uncatalogued archival collections that chronicle Black Chicago between the 1930s and 1970s, in order to increase their use by researchers and the general public. We work with varied kinds of artifacts: literary manuscripts and visual illustrations; rare books and home movies; correspondence and photographs; ephemera and tape-recorded sound. Go to: <http://mts.lib.uchicago.edu/>
- **The Motown Museum, Detroit, MI**  
Home to an extensive array of Motown artifacts, photographs and other memorabilia, the Museum's mission, which is presented below, is to preserve the legacy of Motown Record Company and to educate and motivate people, especially youth.
- **The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland, OH**  
The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum has opened its Library and Archives to the public, granting scholars and fans alike access to over 200 archival collections, including the personal papers of performers, radio disc jockeys, photographers, journalists, critics, historians, poster artists, collectors, fans, and fan clubs. The strength of the Rock Hall's archival collections currently lies in hundreds of boxes of music business records from record executives, artist managers, labels, historic venues, recording studios, specialists in stage design and lighting, and long-running concert tours. The collections also contain important individual items, such as personal letters penned by Aretha Franklin and Madonna; handwritten working lyrics by Jimi Hendrix and LL Cool J; and rare concert recordings from CBGB in the 1970s. The Library and Archives also houses a growing library collection that includes thousands of books, sound recordings, and video recordings. The state-of-the-art facility is housed in a new four-story, building located on the Metro Campus of Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, approximately two miles from the Museum.

## West Coast:

- **Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA**

Since its founding in 1984, the Contemporary Jewish Museum (CJM) has distinguished itself as a welcoming place where visitors can connect with one another through dialogue and shared experiences with the arts. Ever changing, the CJM is a non-collecting institution that partners with national and international cultural institutions to present exhibitions that are both timely and relevant and represent the highest level of artistic achievement and scholarship.
- **Latino Museum of History, Art & Culture @ the University of Southern California**

The Latino Museum of History, Art and Culture is the first museum in the United States dedicated to presenting the contributions of Latino culture. It sponsors several exhibitions each year and actively acquires artwork and publications related to its mission. Recent acquisitions include six drawings produced by Chicana artist Judith Hernandez between 1974 and 1982, two prints by Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg, and a painting by Paul Sierra. The museum's archival collection is designed to constitute a tremendous resource for Latino history as recorded in print and to document Latino views on politics, social issues, and other topics of interest. At present, the archival holdings primarily consist of Latino magazines published in the greater Los Angeles area and across the United States. Many of these publications date back to the 1970s, with some dating to the 1930s. The archival collection will expand by between four hundred and one thousand volumes annually. Issues of Con Safos, a Chicano art magazine published in the 1960s and 1970s, were recently added to the collection, as was the Kirk Whisler National Association of Hispanic Publications (NAHP) Collection, which comprises eighteen hundred magazines and other publications produced between 1930 and the late 1980s.
- **The Margaret Herrick Library @ The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences**

The Margaret Herrick Library is a world-renowned, non-circulating reference and research collection devoted to the history and development of the motion picture as an art form and as an industry. Established in 1928, a year after the Academy was founded, the library moved to its current Beverly Hills location in 1991.
- **The Experience Music Project Museum, Seattle, WA**

EMP is a leading-edge, nonprofit museum, dedicated to the ideas and risk-taking that fuel contemporary popular culture. With its roots in rock 'n' roll, EMP serves as a gateway museum, reaching multigenerational audiences through our collections, exhibitions, and educational programs, using interactive technologies to engage and empower our visitors. At EMP, artists, audiences and ideas converge, bringing understanding, interpretation, and scholarship to the popular culture of our time.