

Humans in the Archive
(a play)

created and edited by Samer Al-Saber and Scott Denham

directed by Samer Al-Saber

performed by Esther Geyer, Grace Lauer & Leah Wewoda

written by the humans in the archive

and

Claire Chapman

Breila Fuller

Konrad Hector

Anders Holmes

Grace Isernia

Shen Luo

Eva Schooler

Nina Seijn

Berlin, 31 July 2022

This is the working version of the script about halfway through production. Samer and the actors continued to shape and refine as they rehearsed on Saturday night and Sunday before the performance on 31 July 2022 at 3:00pm at ARTCO Galerie in Berlin.

The texts in part one and three are from the archive, chosen by me to speak to the works I knew Gideon and Eli would be showing.

–SD

Humans in the Archive
(A Play)

SCENE/PART I
Discovering the Archive

*Actors Enter from different places.
 They are discovering the space.
 They are discovering the ARTCO gallery.
 They are discovering the archive.
 They speak in any language they like.
 (The archival materials printed out and
 in the boxes are **here**, some 200
 pages total among the three boxes.
 These are disposable and are for
 use during the performance. They can
 be engaged with creatively—marked up,
 saved, made into icons, whatever—
 later by the audience members.)*

ONE

Excuse me. Excuse me. Excuse me. Excuse me. Have you see this. Did you read this.

TWO

Excuse me. Excuse me. Hear all about it. Excuse me. Excuse me. Hear all about it.

THREE

Excuse me. Where are you from? Excuse me. Excuse me. Excuse me. Didn't I see you last night
 in -----?. Or was it at -----?

*The above lines can be improvised,
 repeated, and prolonged as needed.
 Actor ONE transitions to the actual play.*

ONE

I don't really know how to do this. Nobody knows how to do this.

TWO

Lieber Hans!

Warum hast Du mir nicht geantwortet? hast Du meinen Brief nicht bekommen? Vielleicht habe ich die Adresse nicht richtig geschrieben. Lieber Hans sage mir bitte ob Deine Adresse so stimmt: 162 East 91st Street. Oder is die erste Silbe I statt 1?

1938

THREE

Maybe I do. I don't know. But maybe I do.

TWO

You know as much as I do.

ONE

(In shock)

The journey goes on, past the graves of many German soldiers who lie buried at the road-side under white crosses, some with swastikas, some with Iron Crosses on them....

THREE

(like a professor)

Apparently, even in death there is a difference between those who merely died and others who go straight into.... Heeeeeyyyyyyyyyyy.....

TWO

(With expertise)

Unser einziger Trost ist, dass auf dem Schiff viele Schicksalsgenossen sind, die ebenso wir Du auf dem schnellmöglichsten Wege nach Südafrika kommen wollen.

ONE

(remembering)

Along the road, people have started repairing their houses and much of the wreckage of war has been removed, but enough is left, a few burnt out Tiger Tanks here, a few 88mm guns there...

TWO

(Quickly. Competing)

to remind us that not so long ago bitter battles were fought right here.

TWO

Rosinchen, mein Kleines,

In solch grosse Sorge um Dich, hoffen wir trotzdem, dass eine Lösung möglich sein wird und mein Gebet ist täglich, der liebe Gott möchte uns helfen!
 Bleie gesund mein Kleines, ich denke nur an unser so sehnlichst erwartetes Wiedersehen!
 Und umarme dich herzlichst, küssend, dein
 Muttichen

THREE

(Calmly, with pleasure)

A special exception means that I can write you a letter instead of a postcard, and so first of all, I must talk about aryanisation, and secondly, emigration.

With regards to the first point, I wanted to let you know that a certain director, Mr Wolf, got in touch with me at the behest of Mr. Enke (of the Bavarian Nitrogen Works) to express his interest in being involved as our successor company.

In terms of our emigration, we can expect the authorisation from Pretoria to arrive any day now. Please tell Dr. Kuenzer that we now wish to go ahead with our emigration without delay.
 —a thousand kisses from your Bruno.

TWO

(Like the news)

1938

Lieber Hans!

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ONE

April 13, 1943 New York City

To whom it may concern,

I, Frances Blaisdell Williams, a professional musician residing at 620 West 116th St., New York City have known Mrs. Toni Mühlfelder since October 1938.

(digresses) I think I am related to her.

TWO

No you're not.

ONE

(continues reading) I know that she is politically thoroughly reliable and trustworthy and of a high moral character. She is a believer in the American system of democracy and I am sure that she will be a good citizen of the United States of America.

TWO

Looks like a citizenship reference.

ONE

I am an American citizen by birth, born on January 5, 1912, at Tellico Plains, Tennessee.
Frances Blaisdell.

TWO

(Remembering. Holding back emotion)

Ich besuchte in den Jahren 1930 – 1934 die Volksschule in Dahlem, und daraufhin die Ursalinenschule am Oskar Helenen Heim. Dies was eine Katholische Schule, auf der die meisten Mitschülerinnen mir gegenüber kein Feindschaft an den Tag legten. Infolge der immer intensiver werdenen Nazi Hasspropoganda blieb es jedoch nicht aus, dass eine Anzahl meiner Mitschülerinnen mich anfeindeten, so dass ein weiteres Verbleiben in dieser Schule für mich immer schwieriger wurde.

*Three has been in a corner
Rummaging. Makes noise.*

THREE

Listen to thisssss!!!!

Dear Fritz!

I received your letter. I am not surprised that you lost your job. It is useless to get upset about the situation in Germany. But I thought they would make an exception for you because of your military career and medals.

TWO

(taking on a character)

How do I get myself out of here? To South Africa maybe?

THREE

(Continues to read)

Answering your questions: If you want to come to South Africa, then I will help you with everything.

TWO

Can I bring my family? How can I make this happen?

THREE

(Continues to read)

I would not bring your wife and child on this first trip. Without English it will be difficult to find work fast. But the lack of English shouldn't delay your trip- not even by a week. You will have to learn it here.

TWO

How do I get there?

THREE

(Continues to read)

I would take a steamboat from Woermann or Deutsche-Südafrika-Linie from Antwerpen or Rotterdam to Cape Town. Please telegraph me the name of the ship and the day of your arrival in Cape Town. On arrival in Cape Town a safety deposit of 100 Pounds needs to be paid.

TWO

What about the currency?

THREE

(Continues to read)

I will pay this in Cape Town as soon as I receive your telegram. If you have money left over after paying for all your travel expenses, I would leave it in Switzerland.
Best wishes to you and Lilly,
Your cousin Heinrich

SCENE/PART II FACILITATION

ONE

We might as well be talking about Staten Island and the Statue of Liberty, Berlin. Who are all these people? Syrians, Ukrainians??? How did I get here? Why am I doing this?

TWO
They are us.

THREE
A hundred years ago.

TWO
Look at this PostCard. It's so beautiful.

*Al caro gioninetto Mühlfelder
162 East 91rst street
Nuova-York*

THREE
Someone wrote.

TWO
Someone ran. Ran away.

ONE
Someone killed.

TWO
And was killed.

THREE
Someone lived.

ONE
(Overjoyed)
Someone has secrets!!!

<< Your grandfather's diary here will surely be a disappointment for you. Notwithstanding that we knew this side of our father too: that is this ever so slightly shy man, raised in "Victorian" ways, who never had the courage to shed all this, and always imagined he should live like a proper bourgeois and well-situated husband and father, something he actually *wanted to be*.

The missing, torn-out pages were torn out by your grandfather. Alfred and I were convinced that these were likely the only pages where he was truly honest in expressing his thoughts and feelings, maybe for the only time in his life.>>

TWO
(Angry)

Who are we to even be reading this?

THREE

It's homework!!!

ONE

<<he became engaged with our mother -- completely without expressing any feelings -- only about her dowry -- that stands in contrast to everything we heard as kids in Arnstadt. He was already 34 or 35 -- and his parents had agreed that he should marry -- and because of financial necessities, he had to marry into money. >>

TWO

Stop reading.

THREE

<<The Mendels didn't want our father, first of all because of the "scandal" plus he was too poor and finally because he had sown too many oats for them (our mother was very young), and besides that, none of them ever quite got over the feeling that he just didn't fit in with them there.>>

TWO
(Angry)

I am leaving. This is not right.

THREE

What's her problem?

ONE

We are uncovering aspects of the archive that are way to personal.

<p>I don't want to commodify or take advantage of any person in the archive.</p>	<p>I felt like I was snooping through documents that I had no right to see.</p>	<p>I have come to feel connected to the lives of these family members.</p>
<p>For whom and for what has this work been completed?</p>	<p>Accessing these letters and entries has led me to reflect on the intentionality of its Authors.</p> <p>Our job as archivists should be to find the narrative within what we are given;</p> <p>As the only practicing Jewish person working in the archive seminar, several qualities of their experiences remind me of my own family's story.</p>	<p>To identify the story and connect the dots behind all of the single pieces. I took charge of the task of Cataloguing</p>
<p>I found the documents and photos told their own story—one that I find much more interesting than letters, personally.</p>		<p>I have the basic high-school and entry-level history course level of knowledge on WWII and the Holocaust</p>

<p>So much of history is lost to time, but can be recovered by tangible documents, however when it comes to German-Jewish history those documents are often destroyed as well.</p> <p>By making this record public it will allow other individuals who heard a similar story of their family passed along through generations actually written down.</p>	<p>It is essential to realize that we don't own this history, these lives, or their stories, so I actively choose to not act like this will be published.</p> <p>With this archive, we have documents that tell a common story in German-Jewish history.</p> <p>Toni's documents reveal clear Nazi ideology and policy while highlighting her position as a single mother, Jewish woman, and working mom. Something to point to and say "That is me" and isn't that what we all want when it comes to the stories of our pasts.</p>	<p>This archive reveals the tension between those who fled the Holocaust and those who died in the Holocaust.</p> <p>Personally, I have always loved 16th and 17th-century European history, but as a German student, it is impossible to not have any exposure to the Holocaust or WWII. Can I too feel sorrow for the people they lost too soon?</p>
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<p>The extensive letter collection in the archive documents the ways in which the family responded to and processed moments at the height of human suffering.</p> <p>My most memorable finds within the archive prove to be the documents from Toni Milford on her life in Germany before she immigrated to the US and Alfred Eichberg's photos from his time in WWI. My work cataloguing things has been extremely captivating.</p> <p>I hope that we uncover the story somewhere in a document or letter.</p>	<p>I felt a sort of unease when I started my research, as I felt like I was snooping through documents that I had no right to see.</p> <p>My engagement with both the Milford and the Mendel archive has been primarily centered around reading and describing letters between family members. In light of this, my interest in the archive has been in examining the ways in which trauma is exchanged and documented through letters.</p> <p>How do I relate to their stories?</p>	<p>I quickly overcame this unease, however, when I began to realize just how interesting all of these items in the archive are.</p> <p>I hope that through this archive we can tell the stories that need to be told.</p>
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<p>At first, I wondered if I had the “right” to read these letters or to feel sadness for this family... but yet I am told to help tell their story</p> <p>History is a measure of everyone’s collective experiences.</p> <p>I envisioned the correspondence as a means through which Kenny could materialize and disperse some of his internal struggles. I saw a lot of personal photos and photos that don’t add to the archive, but that might have a lot of meaning for the Milford family, so I don’t see all of what is documented being published.</p>	<p>This history belongs to every Jewish descendant, every culture who survived a genocide, every diasporic family that fought for their right to life.</p> <p>The question of why these documents were produced and saved is central to my own understanding of my role as an archivist and outsider of the family, as well as the ethical question of transitioning the archive from a private sphere to the public.</p> <p>This archive has become so important to me during this class. Being able to get to know these people through their words, objects, and pictures has been monumental.</p>	<p>The ethics of my work in the Milford archive are something that have been at the forefront of my mind.</p> <p>I can completely dig into someone’s life through their passport, workbook, scrapbook, and even grades without considering the implications of being able to search through someone’s life.</p> <p>When transitioning this archive to the public I think that it all needs to be shared.</p>
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<p>Although the subject matter of the archive is deeply personal, I'm comforted by the communication that we have established between ourselves and the Milford/Mendel family.</p> <p>When transitioning this archive to the public I think that it all needs to be shared.</p>	<p>When transitioning this archive to the public I think that it all needs to be shared.</p>	<p>While the definitive answer has been lost with the lives of these relatives, we can be the most accurately guided by the wishes of the living family members.</p> <p>When transitioning this archive to the public I think that it all needs to be shared.</p>
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SCENE/PART III
EXPERIENCE

*Actors line up.
They read as if
the texts have a life of their own.*

TWO
(Announcing)

A Day To Remember August 14, 1945

ONE

Dear Mama,

Well, it's finally here. And really sooner than I would have thought just a short time ago.

At two this afternoon we heard some fellows yelling like mad, but weren't sure if it wasn't just another false alarm. Then came more shouting, and then shots were fired all over the post. Horns started going, after a while sirens, one of our fellows ripped an old air raid alarm loose, and carried it around, cranking like mad. Then another one shot off a full clip of live ammunition from a carbine. Some fighter planes came along and played like puppies all over the sky.

And then it died down, tonight everything is normal.

Got two letters from you today, 7th & 9th. I might write Kaethe tonight; am on guard, since I have to stay up anyway and have access to a typewriter, will get it out of the way.

I notice you feel the same way about the atom bomb that I do. It will be a new source of power. And as you say, maybe they'll be so frightened at the possibility, they won't use it.

Even Hitler and the Japs didn't use poison gas. (Did you read the note in the papers about all the poison gas they had in England 'in case', and they don't know how to get rid of it safely?)

The only thing I'd like you to send me are my glasses. I'll let you know about packages. Also got a letter from Carol today, fairly nice. I guess that's all the news, might write more later, want to get this letter censored tonight.

Many extra special peace kisses
Yours truly, Kenny

TWO
(Announcing)

Vacation.

25 January 1946

THREE

I got back from the Army a while ago after spending three weeks on vacation in Nice and Paris. I could not get back to Germany, but Hans Doctor was there recently. There is not much hope left.

Hans reported in detail on his visit. The house in Sophienstraße is undamaged, Frankfurter Str. 99 is completely destroyed, he could not find anything in the rubble.

When he asked in Offenbach after the Jewish community he went to the residents' registration office, where an official who had been fired in 1933 is now back in his old job and had sorted through the Jewish cards. On all our family's cards are written the words: "sent to the *General Gouvernement*."

In Offenbach there now live 10 Jews.

Yours
Alfred

ONE
(Announcing)

My Autobiography

Sept 15, 1893 to Jan 11, 1963.

TWO

In February 1933 I bought the house Bavariaring 43. The population was not hostile. Business was good. We were asleep and did not want to know.

In 1936 we sent Hans to a school in Florence, he could not stand Germany any more.

On the 10th November [1938], a grey autumn day, we were with Marie Silberthau in “our” Forstenrieder Park. The next morning I was arrested in the business premises and taken to Dachau Concentration Camp. Max Mendel was murdered there. I passed my time there in good health, but I know from my own experience what makes the Nazis tick. When will the world be free from this pest?

In Dachau we were forced to sign documents handing over our private and business fortunes to a Kommissar. We had no rights, and were delivered into Nazi hands.

Then war broke out. For the first time I had a breakdown. I saw no more possibility to get out, caught like a mouse in a trap, me and my family in despair. The connection with Hans in England ceased. Then, *finally* we found out that it was possible to leave via Italy. Hans Mendel in Amsterdam helped us to get a passage via Genua. So we travelled during the war to Berlin to see the Chilean Ambassador, and *finally* we held the stamped immigration visas for us three.

We packed in October 1939.

We arrived in Arica, the first port in Chile. We were shocked by the barren landscape, stones, rocks, no vegetation, sun and flocks of birds circling round the boat. We passed Antofahasta and Coquimbo and, on the third of December we reached Valparaiso.

Our life in Chile started with mixed feelings, who knows what is still going to happen.

We were without work, without knowledge of the language. In order to live we sold part of the items we had brought with us.

Our first job was the baking of what in Germany is called *Berches*, in English *Challa*, the white bread covered in poppyseed, needed on Friday evening to say the prayers over bread.

ONE/TWO/THREE
(Announcing)

Flora.

They cede the stage.