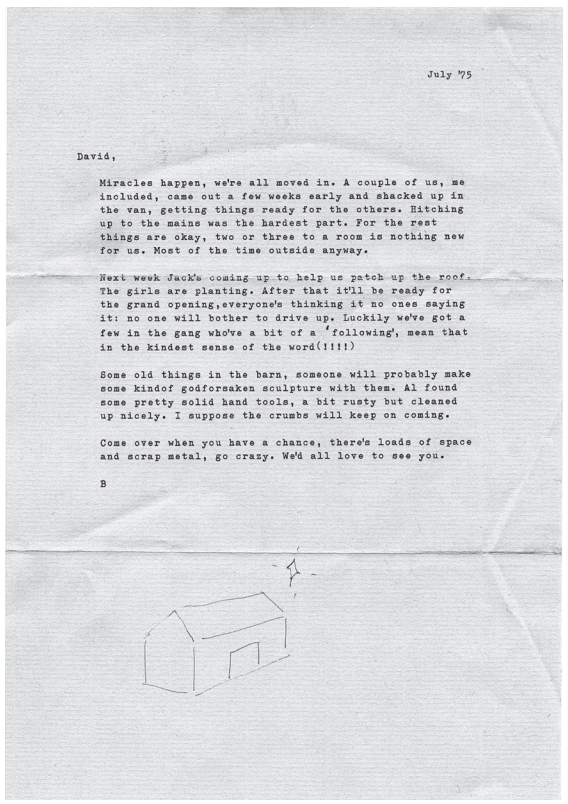
↑fig. 1 Epna promotional material: *8 New York Artists of Interest*, 1976, 21×29.5. Inv. no. E03.03, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



July '75

David,

Miracles happen, we're all moved in. A couple of us, me included, came out a few weeks early and shacked up in the van, getting things ready for the others. Hitching up to the mains was the hardest part. For the rest things are okay, two or three to a room is nothing new for us. Most of the time outside anyway.

Next week Jack's coming up to help us patch up the roof. The girls are planting. After that it'll be ready for the grand opening,everyone's thinking it no ones saying it: no one will bother to drive up. Luckily we've got a few in the gang who've a bit of a 'following', mean that in the kindest sense of the word(!!!!)

Some old things in the barn, someone will probably make some kindof godforsaken sculpture with them. Al found some pretty solid hand tools, a bit rusty but cleaned up nicely. I suppose the crumbs will keep on coming.

Come over when you have a chance, there's loads of space and scrap metal, go crazy. We'd all love to see you.

B

←fig. 2 Author unknown [signed "B", possibly Bo Natt, to "David"], letter, 1975. Inv. no. E01.03, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

↑fig. 3 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.18, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

FREEDOM FROM TIME: FORGETTING EPNA, 1975-1978

Maja Klaassens

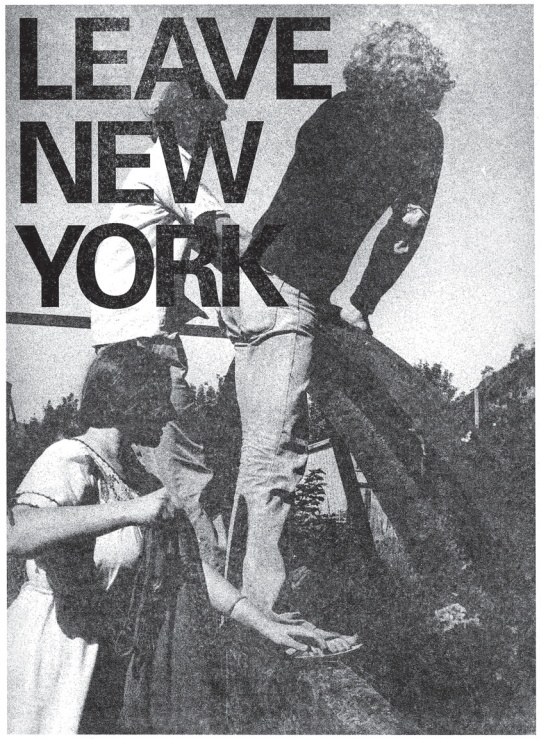
In archives, there are many paths that lead researchers into minefields of speculation. Identifying and categorising a piece of ephemera can be an aggressively opaque undertaking, yet it can also provide firsthand understanding of all that stands behind new historicism and its critique of the disciplines' constructed nature. In her article "Archival Remembering Exhibitions" (2012), Reesa Greenberg reminds us of "the common acknowledgement that an archive is always partial, both in quantity and in perspective."[1] How can this awareness apply to an archive that is not only partial, but almost impossible to confidently situate within its cultural and art historical context? This very question is posed by a haphazard archive left behind by Epna, an American artist initiative which operated out of a repurposed barn in Upstate New York between 1975 and 1978. While the exact location of this property is unknown, it appears to have also been the site of both exhibitions and cohabitation for a number of artists previously based in New York City. Performing a conscious urban exodus, Epna's traces have become defined by their opacity, resulting in the sensation that some things were designed to be forgotten, regardless of the labour involved.

Epna leaves behind a semi-legible archive: photographs, letters, postcards, posters, small objects, drawings, and a diary authored by "J", one of the initiators. This collection of ephemera is currently held in the Netherlands at *The Archives*, a private collection of artist books and ephemera belonging to Peter van Beveren.[2] While we can pick out individuals within the archive ("J", Helen Gray, Joseph Frank, Nino Sandroni, Natalie Clarke, Bo Natt, Frederik de Hoog, Richard (Dickie) Smith, "H", and Fran Kemper), the documents alone are insufficient to concretely identify Epna's participants, or trace among them their collaborators, visiting artists, benefactors, and audience. What quickly becomes apparent when investigating Epna is the way much artist labour dissolves in time, and when devoted to exodus and a disavowal of 'legacy', how traces can emphasise rather than negate invisibility as a conceptual foundation. Epna does not therefore typify an underrepresented project worthy of remembrance, but rather exposes the tension between the canonically invisible nature of so-called mediocrity and an impressive indifference to visibility and impact.

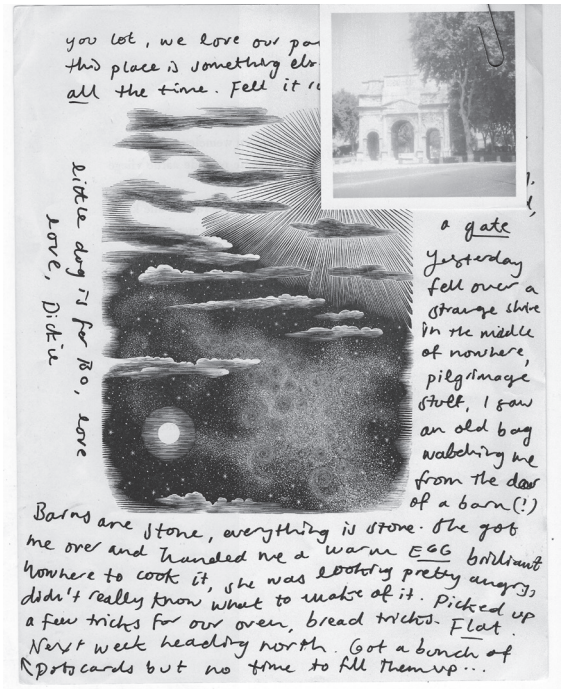
Epna is but one of many group projects that arose in New York City in the 1970s. Collectivity was a recurring feature of artistic practice at the time, a lingering result of the multifaceted (and visible) counter culture of the 1960s, and the diverse collective practices which emerged from it.[3] A number of groups to emerge in the 1970s directly engaged with issues such as race and

1
Reesa Greenberg, "Archival Remembering Exhibitions," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 1, no. 2, (2012): 162.

2
Van Beveren's personal ties to several artists involved with Fluxus provides a possible impetus for his acquisition of the archive. Items of modern and contemporary ephemera are often donated or purchased in bulk, making provenance difficult to trace and resulting in much of the donation having been kept in storage until recently.

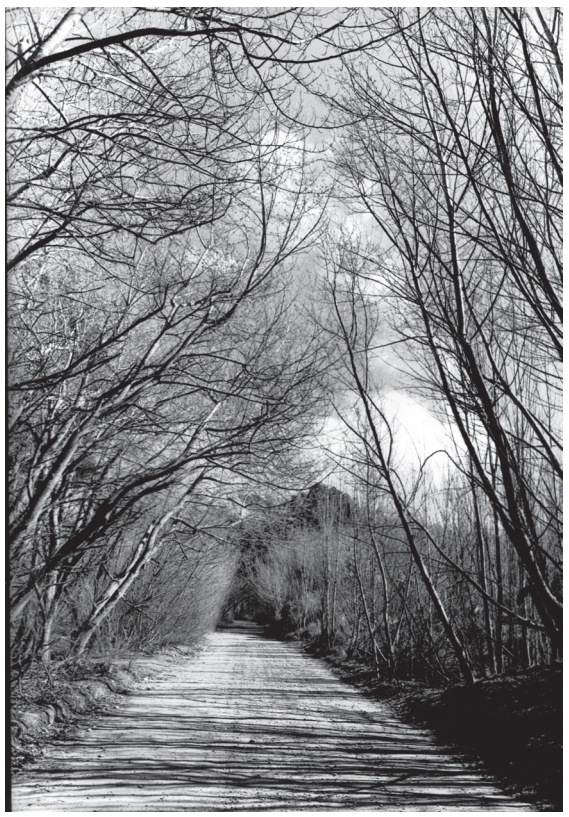


↑fig. 4 Epna promotional material: *Leave New York*, 1975, 28 × 42 cm. Inv.no. E05.01, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



↑fig. 5 Richard Smith [signed "Dickie", to "You lot"], letter with attached photograph, 1978, 23 × 29 cm, marker on found print and photograph. Inv.no. E01.09, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

↑fig. 6 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.14, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



→fig. 7 Photographer unknown [annotation "our road"], ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.21, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

gender-related underrepresentation in the arts, the Vietnam War, environmentalism, urban housing, and rental issues.[4] They formed collectives and co-ops, many of which were linked to the SoHo district, a derelict industrial area of New York City, which had become the site of artist occupation and eventual gentrification from the 1960s onwards.[5] Despite the active scene and a number of alternative art spaces — amongst others, co-op 55 Mercer Gallery, 112 Greene Street, and Food, an artist-run restaurant — for many artists living and working illegally in SoHo lofts urban sanitisation and lack of funds were local symptoms of much wider economic issues plaguing the city.[6] In the summer of 1976, Paul Thek wrote in a letter that "[...] NYC seems more than ever totally OVER. A city that feels totally dead now, and as if it doesn't even know enough to lie down."[7]

Epna was not the only urban exodus project emerging in response. Fluxus artist George Maciunas (alongside his SoHo 'regeneration' projects) attempted to start Fluxus colonies in the British Virgin Islands and New Marlborough, Massachusetts, inspired by Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. While both colonies failed to attract artists, a planned barn renovation provides a notable parallel with Epna, whose barn appears in many of the available sources as the project's locus.[8] Urban and rural artistic collectivity was not necessarily disconnected, as evidenced by Food, which was at times supplied by commune farms.[9] Epna approached their Hudson Valley location not only as a site of cohabitation and collective labour (both artistic and agricultural), but also as a destination for New Yorkers, thereby maintaining a connection with the city and its artistic circuit.

Though often perceived as a homogenous hippie phenomenon, rural communes of the 1960s and 70s represented a range of alternative lifestyles, spanning religious sects, socialist utopias, to environmental activists.[10] While the material we have from Epna does not indicate an explicit political agenda, certain ideologies are implied through adopted agrarian structures and anti-urbanism, as well as the presence of collective production, highlighting Alan W. Moore's statement that "most artists' collectives formed up behind social movements; they were produced as a result of them and were influenced by them."[11] Epna's print campaign "Leave New York", exhibition posters, and numerous snapshots appear to document a conceptual and chronological trajectory away from the city from April 1975 onwards.[12] But Epna was not just a dramatic escape, many items within the archive highlight the very real labour involved in maintaining their rural community. Letters and photographs document extensive

3
In a relevant example of this diversity, Alan W. Moore contrasts the "warm and cool, experiential and productivity, time-based and material" characteristics of the Grateful Dead and Andy Warhol's factory. Alan W. Moore, "Artists' Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975-2000", in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945,* eds: Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 194.

4
Ibid., 197-199.

5
Roslyn Bernstein and Shael Shapiro, *Illegal Living: 80 Wooster Street and the Evolution of SoHo* (Vilnius: Jono Meko Fondas, 2010), 65.

6
Ibid., 157.

7
Paul Thek quoted in: Harald Falckenberg and Peter Weibel, eds. *Paul Thek: Artist's Artist* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 596.

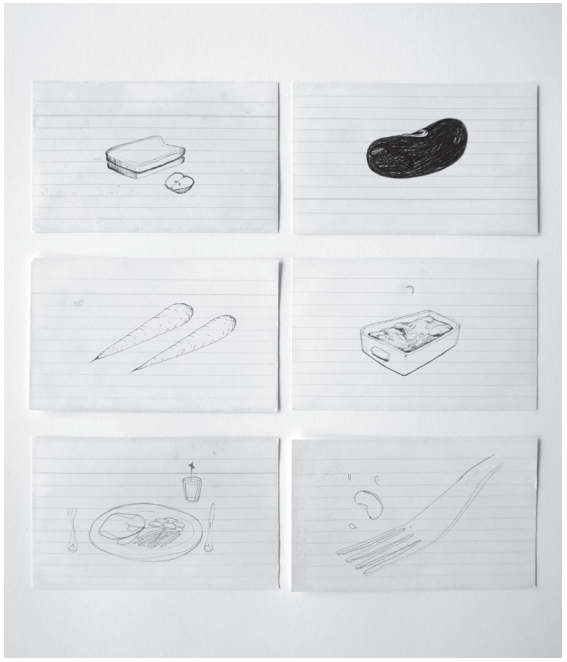
8
Bernstein and Shapiro, *Illegal Living*, 64, 70.

9
Moore, "Artists' Collectives," 202.

10
For a more comprehensive overview, see: Vivien Greene, "Utopia/Dystopia," *American Art* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 1-6.

11
Moore, "Artists' Collectives," 193.

12
Author unknown [signed "B", possibly Bo Natt], letter, April 1975. Inv.no. E01.03, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



←fig. 8 Artist(s) unknown, food drawings, ca.1975-78, ballpoint pen and graphite on index cards, 13 × 8 cm. Inv.no. E02.04-09, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

→fig. 9 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.05, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

↑fig. 10 Photographer unknown [annotation "P blowing the horn"], ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.15, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

renovations, a series of drawings on index cards record over sixty meals prepared and served by Epna members, and much of "J's" diary is dedicated to agricultural notes. Such traces remind us that "the presence of artistic collectives is not primarily a question of ideology; it is the expression of artistic labour itself."[13]

Epna allows glimpses into the conflicts which go hand in hand with collective artistic labour. Frustrated anecdotes recounting "stolen" ideas and misplaced recognition reiterate the tensions inherent to collectivity, and evidence the adoption of certain ideologies and the structural patterns which work against them. The lack of photographic documentation of exhibitions makes a discussion of both authorship and the art produced at Epna impossible. What remains instead are traces of internal political debates (often gendered) pertaining to division of labour, wherein artistic production appears entirely entangled with everyday operations. Parsing out exactly how tasks were divided, and on what grounds, is impossible, in part due to the opacity of the members' identities within the archive. In fact, the obscurification of the individual can even be found in Epna's promotional material, wherein faces of artists appear to be censored behind typography or through cropping. Nonetheless, this impression of Epna as an aggregate of semi-anonymous figures does little to hide the fact that while "many artists have striven for utopian ideals while working in collectives," Epna was politically flawed, illustrative of the common, if not inevitable, reality of collectivity.[14] Much of Epna's conflict can be summed up by a poignant line in Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!": "After the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"

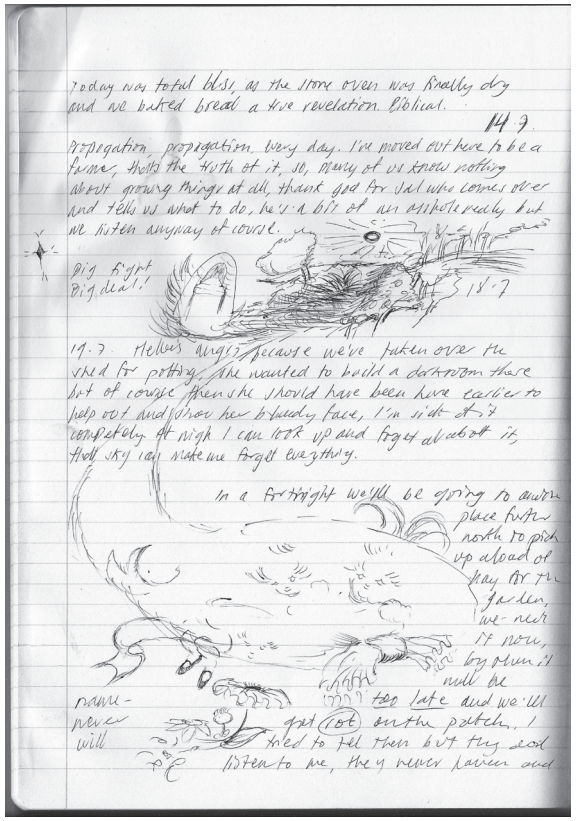
Despite a lag of fifteen years between the founding of Epna and the publication date of Susan Sontag's 1962 essay "Happenings: A Radical Art of Juxtaposition," the Epna archive includes a typed and annotated copy. While there are similar quotations in "J's" diary (often tongue-in-cheek), Sontag's essay operates almost manifesto-like within the context of the archive as the only full document of its type. Does it refer to specific event(s) at Epna or a more foundational interest? The idea that happenings were an exclusively urban phenomenon was already challenged by both Sontag and happening devotee Allan Kaprow. Furthermore, a number of "avant-garde happenings" at New York's Chelsea Piers in the 1970s (involving artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark) illustrate the fact that artists were working with the ephemeral ideology inherent to happenings well beyond the time period we tend to associate them with.[15] In any case, the presence of this transcript could help explain both the fragmented nature of the archive and the significant lack of photographic documentation of the exhibitions that may (or may not) have occurred, given that "the Happening has no plot, no story, and therefore no element of suspense (which would then entail the satisfaction of suspense)."[16] In one paragraph (demarcated in the Epna transcription), Sontag states:

13
Moore, "Artists' Collectives," 193.

14
Greene, "Utopia/Dystopia," 2.

15
Susan Sontag, "Happenings: A Radical Art of Juxtaposition", in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* [1961], (London: Penguin, 2009), 269; Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2017), 115.

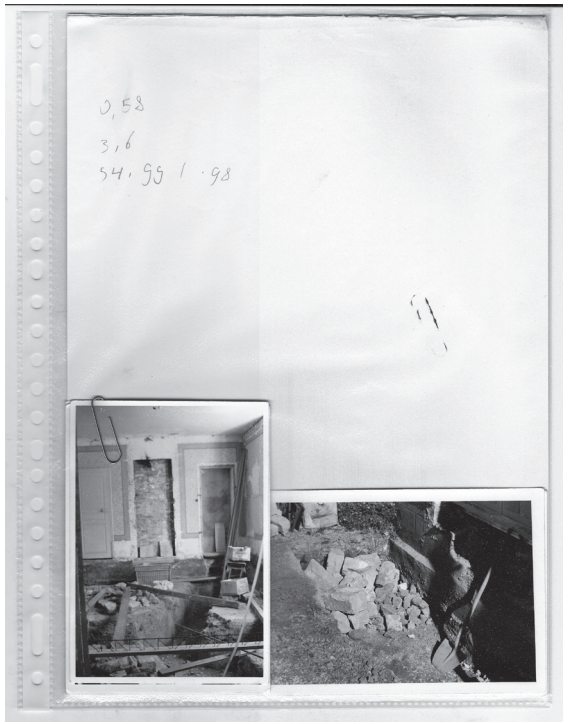
16
Sontag, "Happenings," 266.



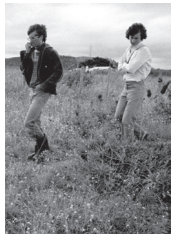
→fig. 11 Author unknown ["J"], diary page with drawings, 1976, ballpoint pen on paper, 21 × 29.4 cm. Inv.no. E01.01, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

←fig. 12 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.10, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

←fig. 14 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.17, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



→fig. 13 Photographic documentation of barn renovations (interior and exterior) in file with measurements and other notes, ca.1975. Inv. no. E01.10, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



→fig. 15 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.09, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

> The Happening operates by creating an asymmetrical network of surprises, without climax or consummation; this is the logic of dreams rather than the logic of most art. Dreams have no sense of time. Neither do the Happenings. Lacking a plot and continuous rational discourse, they have no past. As the name itself suggests, Happenings are always in the present tense [...] One of the ways in which the Happenings state their freedom from time is in their deliberate impermanence.[17]

Sontag's quip "freedom from time" (double underlined in the transcription), appears again in both the diary and a drawing, implying an interest which draws parallels between both an urban and temporal exodus. If we set aside the troubling romanticism underlying the conflation of these two notions, and confront the conundrum embodied by the existence of this archive in the face of this exodus, we arrive at what, in my opinion, lies at the heart of Epna: traces can enhance invisibility, rather than contradict it.

Rather than argue this point by pinning down each component of Epna (the Foucauldian archive as a network of relations), perhaps a more productive method would be to look outside it. The remains of Epna are strangely reminiscent of Andy Warhol's "Time Capsules": over 610 nondescript boxes filled with haphazard and obsessively collected ephemera, both personal and professional, document and object. In the Epna "capsule," we find a silver ring, two small stones (one carved with a teardrop and the other flecked with mica, or fool's gold), a nickel dated 1964 and a penny dated 1976, a bone-handled fruit knife, dried flowers, a large pink heart-shaped Venetian glass bead, and a bean, amongst other seemingly sentimental detritus. There is no mention of any of these items elsewhere (besides a tenuous link to the mica in a letter: "Annie found gold, out the back").[18] Some items, such as the fruit knife and bean, could relate to Epna's garden. Others, such as the glass bead, encourage only speculation: a love token, a lucky charm, or a souvenir from Italy (one artist sent postcards from Naples). While Warhol's art historical status aids in tracing certain objects he included (his mother's clothes, for example), the objects we find from Epna are not only difficult to trace — tracing them is ultimately unnecessary. Like the photographs, they exude storytelling without a story, intimacy without relationships, references without referent.

In his biography of Warhol, Wayne Koestenbaum identifies the capsules as a "disappearance trick," a method of "emptying space while filling it."[19] If, like a Warholean capsule, we view Epna as "flirt[ing] with nothingness," several other examples begin to surface, prompting questions about both what is present and missing.[20] One diary entry explains a number of much older photographs of farm animals and machinery included in the archive:

> Of course John is in love with the barn pictures, which we aught [sic] to use for the lot of us, for posters and so on,

17 Ibid.

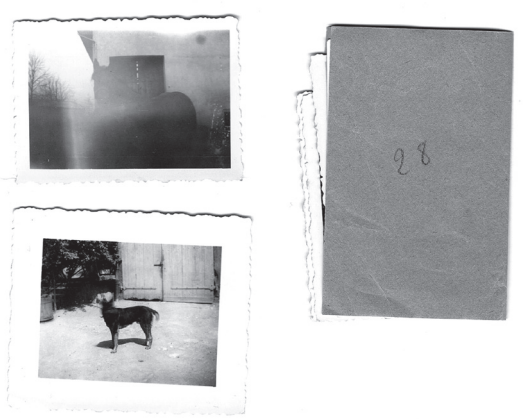
18 Author unknown [signed "Helen"], letter, ca. 1976. Inv.no. E01.05, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

19 Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (London: Phoenix, 2001), 146.

20 Ibid., 145.

→fig. 16 Glass bead, mica, stone carving, and storage envelope. Inv.no. E04.07-10, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

←fig. 17 Photographer unknown [annotation "pit stop '77"], 1977. Inv.no. E05.03, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.



←fig. 18 Photographer(s) unknown [referred to as "barn pictures" in Inv. no. E01.01]. Inv. no. E04.03, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

> but he filched the best for himself simply because he got there first while we were renovating, a bloody typical move undoubtedly no one will say anything about.[21]

These "barn pictures" found on the property constitute rejected, unusable leftovers, the best of which exist only as something that was, in the view of the author, a loss representative of ideological weakness. The inclusion of the remaining "barn pictures" casts the Epna archive in a different light: as a repository where the insignificant takes as much space as the significant, rendering both indiscernible.

After visiting Warhol's Time Capsules at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Olivia Laing asks:

> What were the capsules, really? Trash cans, coffins, vitrines, safes; ways of keeping the loved together, ways of never having to admit to loss or feel the pain of loneliness. [...] What is left after the essence has departed? Rind and skin, things you want to throw away but somehow can't.[22]

If forgetting is part of Epna, then remembering is as well. It is important to reiterate that "fragmentation was a standard and almost mandatory trope of 1970s art [...]."[23] If we assume (the operative word) it was an artist who compiled this archive — the author of the diary, for example — it is important to approach the memory function as fragmented or even selective. This can aid in understanding why the emotional layers within Epna, observable through the aforementioned tensions surrounding labour and authorship, as well as many intimate references to interpersonal relationships within the group (some sexual), take precedence over documentation of what the group actually produced artistically. As Charles Green notes, "the organisation of memory — of thoughts stored in the mind — into retrievable form was a real and pressing issue for early 1970s artists [...]."[24] A crucial aspect of memory function, fragmentation is one of the defining characteristics of the Epna archive. Undated diary entries, letters without envelopes, unsigned drawings, illegible handwriting, and promotional material without address, all emphasise the impression that the "evidence" in question was either intentionally left incomplete or the project itself held ephemerality at its core. Perhaps Epna should hold the art historical trophy for the longest and most elaborate happening ever conceived.

Zeroing in on the Sontag essay transcription in order to situate Epna shows how easy it is to pull apart a "time capsule" and put it back together in a way that feels legitimate, or at least as legitimate as (someone's) memory. As Rosalyn Deutsche notes, "art history purports to simply discover, rather than to construct, the objects it studies — art, the city, society."[25] If all

21 Author unknown [signed "J"], diary entry, ca. 1975. Inv. no. E01.01, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

22 Laing, *The Lonely City*, 274.

23 Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 82.

24 Ibid., 84.

25 Rosalyn Deutsche, "Alternative Space", in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism, a Project by Martha Rosler,* ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 46.

←fig. 19
Photographer unknown [annotation "at Epna"], ca.1975-78. Inv. no. E05.16, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

↑fig. 20 Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.20, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

↑fig. 21 Epna promotional material: *Leave New York,* 1975, 10 × 15 cm. Inv.no. E05.01, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

→fig. 22
Photographer unknown, ca.1975-78. Inv.no. E05.19, The Archives: Peter van Beveren Library, The Hague.

historical narratives are semi-fictional, what exactly is the acceptable ratio between verifiable events and speculation? In a case like Epna, is it even responsible to assert that Epna existed? We cannot deny the possibility that Epna is, in fact, a constructed text, a hypothesis underscored by Hal Foster's "The Archival Impulse," wherein he observes that artists "not only draw on informal archives but produce them as well, and [do] so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found, yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private."[26] Alternatively, it is equally likely that mediocrity, or a failure to have "impact," could lie behind the absence of Epna in literature addressing the collective projects of their contemporaries. In his introduction to *Tell Them I Said No* (2016), Martin Herbert makes the crucial observation that when it comes to art-world exits, "the more unassuming leaver's names are lost to history."[27]

Moore points out that "artists' collectives do not make objects so much as they make changes. They make situations, opportunities, and understandings within the social practice of art."[28] These abstract nouns cannot vindicate Epna, but they do provide space for the project to exist in a state of speculative divergence: the ultimate "freedom from time." Institutions increasingly propose the visibility of archive material as integral to understanding historical exhibitions as legitimate sites of artistic impact, "insisting that they be seen."[29] In writing this essay, I implicitly insist Epna and their exhibitions are seen, but with this I want to highlight the unstable notions of visibility and invisibility: as framing devices, and as a reality of artist labour. Returning again to Sontag, it can be argued that Epna, like a happening, follows the "logic of dreams." By this I refer, on the one hand, to its extratemporal nature and the implied mutual exclusivity of reality and fiction; on the other, to the way it seems to exist solely for those who dreamt it. In the same way our own dreams are endlessly, indulgently fascinating, Epna is a historical project that remains largely self-referential, expanding internally upon itself. Recounting your dream to someone is often an archival impulse: the urge to make something wildly intangible concrete by forcing it into language, and storing it inside whoever is in front of you. It should be conceded that this is often met with a kind of politely disguised disinterest.

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Maja Klaassens (NZ, 1989) is an artist and writer. She obtained a MA in Contemporary Art History at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and a BFA at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. Her research explores the intersections between literature, film, and contemporary art, with particular focus on narrativisation and memory.

26
Hal Foster "The Archival Impulse", *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 5.

27
Martin Herbert, *Tell Them I Said No* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 14.

28
Moore, "Artists' Collectives," 216

29
Greenberg, "Archival Remembering Exhibitions," 175.