



Subjunctive Archives

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What can “belonging” mean when the archive—as both a physical repository and a cultural memory—refuses one, one’s experiences, one’s past and future? Focusing upon the 18th-century British possibilities and legacies for Black British history and subjectivity, I argue that Enlightenment archives proliferate what Lisa A. Lowe teaches us is the founding condition of modern, Western liberalism—the implicit hierarchy between modern liberal subjects, and those “that are forgotten, cast as failed or irrelevant.” I present the device of the “subjunctive archive” as a strategy for our own ethical engagement with the western Enlightenment as an artifact of history and an ongoing present, drawing upon the work of contemporary British filmmaker Hope Pearl Strickland. In *I’ll Be Back!* (digital, 16mm, 10 minutes and 54 seconds, 2020), Strickland cinematically reimagines colonial archives in Haiti, Great Britain, and Sierra Leone. In the process, Strickland’s film produces a subjunctive archive. By challenging us to imagine both what might have been and what might be, the subjunctive archive models a critical praxis that cultivates belonging.