In the broadest sense of the term, data are bits of information gathered to inform historical, social, and scientific processes. Long before the digital era, our data was collected, classified, and analyzed to design governmental policy, influence consumer habits, and establish proper civic behavior and normative gender identities. While scholars have debated the historical roots, uses, and management of data, fundamentally data are the substance of the archive. The ways in which digital and material data are collected, read, and made available has long been a source of debate.\(^1\) Through different modes of reading—against or along

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the grain—feminist and postcolonial scholars have uncovered silenced voices, untangled hierarchies of historical production, scrutinized gender biases, and made visible how certain sexual identities are condemned in traditional archival practices. Others have scrutinized the exclusionary mechanisms of the archive by expanding its limits to include oral traditions and reenactments as powerful and valid archival mechanisms in the process of knowledge transfer from generation to generation. These diverse configurations of the archive have played a critical role in questioning the authority of those who determine what is historically valuable and in dismantling dominant structures that have erased diverse ways of being and oral traditions. Nonetheless, as Kate Eichhorn argues, more remains to be done to understand the role of women as agents of the archive.

[Re]Activating Mamá Pina’s Cookbook is a digital art project that engages with Eichhorn’s interest in understanding the role of women as agents of the archive in our digital era (fig. 1). It proposes digital remediation as a strategy to reactivate forms of domestic writing that have been traditionally excluded from the archive. Specifically, it provides access to a family cookbook handwritten by three generations of women in Guadalajara, Mexico (1885–2014), in the form of digital scans and limited transcribed texts. The site also contains a web adaptation of my four-channel video art installation Remediating Mamá Pina’s Cookbook (2015–16), which includes diverse creative responses to the cookbook (fig. 2). While the project provides some access to the source, it is not meant to be
a complete and accessible database of the cookbook. Rather, it offers traces and fragments for new points of departure, alternative modes of human interpretation and engagement with the digital archive, while questioning understandings of who and what the agents of the digital archive are, as well as its limits, its insufficiencies, and its potential.

The cookbook was handwritten by my great-grandmother Mamá Pina (b. Guadalajara, Mexico, 1885–1976) and was passed on to my grandmother, Gabriela Margarita (b. 1918–1997), and her twin sister, Teresa Marcela (b. 1918–1990), who continued to handwrite recipes in it. Eventually it was passed on to my mother, María Concepción Gabriela (b. 1944), who continued the process. The cookbook also records other forms of writing, such as calligraphy exercises, possibly done by a child in the household. [Re]Activating Mamá Pina’s Cookbook continues with the collaborative method of writing established in the cookbook and suggests ways to continue and reactivate the process digitally.

The website is divided into three sections. The first describes a brief history of the cookbook and the web adaptation of Remediating Mamá Pina’s Cookbook. The second section contains a clickable index of the book (fig. 3). The index is divided into three main categories according to recipe type and other forms of writing included in the cookbook: knitting instructions,
calligraphy exercises, recipes. Through the index, the user can access scans of a limited number of pages from the cookbook, a transcription in Spanish, and a series of creative reactions to the recipes developed by several colleagues whom I invited to respond to some of the recipes in any media format (fig. 4). There is also the option to browse the book in its original order, but not all recipes are transcribed. The third section of the website contains the web adaptation of Remediating Mamá Pina’s Cookbook, a series of videos that can be played simultaneously and have the possibility of live interaction (fig. 5). Each video records acts of remediation that attempt to reactivate the affective traces and lived experiences in the handwritten domestic record, as well as the absences that are introduced as the record is passed down from generation to generation.

FIGURE 4. [Re]Activating Mama Pina’s Cookbook, lightbox with scanned pages and transcriptions.
The first video serves as a navigation device. It shows my hand turning the pages of the cookbook. As the pages turn, links to other videos appear in the pages. The second video shows my attempts to learn the different handwriting styles recorded in Mamá Pina’s cookbook (fig. 6). This video remediates both the handwritten source and the performative act of turning the pages of the cookbook by producing a digital record of these two acts. The third video shows the process of cooking one of the recipes as it is read out loud by my mother via Skype. In this case, the traditional way in which these recipes were cooked in the same kitchen and enjoyed together in the same household is remediated through the use of a digital communication application that enables long-distance cooking (fig. 7).

The fourth video is an interactive channel that invites viewers’ live responses to one of the recipes in the cookbook; viewers are also welcome to write a memory of a personal domestic experience using a mouse or stylus pen (fig. 8). These responses are not recorded, but slowly disappear as the user types or draws onto the image. This interaction mimics the absences inherent in the archival record and questions the stability of the digital in capturing data. The last video documents the collaborations of colleagues who were invited to respond to
the recipes from the cookbook, using a media format of their choice (fig. 9).
A selection of twenty-five recipes were sent to forty people via email without translation or transcription. The responses included digital images, audio

recordings, videos, and documentation of family gatherings and conversations. Edited together in a single channel of video or viewable in individual web pages via a link on the main video, these collaborations reactivate the handwritten record while unpacking its absences, creating new experiences that remediate the recipes.

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NOTES


5. I received the cookbook from my mother in 2014.