

Book Reviews



Performing Archives/Archives of Performance. GUNHILD BORGGREEN and RUNE GADE, eds. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013. 495 pp. ISBN 978-87-635-3750-6.

Performing Archives/Archives of Performance emerged from the 2008 iteration of the annual Performance Studies international (PSi) conference, which was organized by Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, the book's editors. Both editors hold associate professorships in the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Accordingly, the majority of the twenty-five contributors to this collection of essays, including Borggreen and Gade, approach archives from the disciplinary perspectives of art history, visual culture, and theatre and performance studies. Drawing extensively on the work of performance studies scholars Diana Taylor and Rebecca Schneider, who have contested the ephemerality of performance,¹ the contributors investigate artistic, curatorial, and archival practices that value performative modes of knowing and writing histories, such as embodied or living archives, and performances based on archival documents. By foregrounding the actions of agents who continually shape the meaning of archives, the contributors challenge the terms of an archive that would focus solely on material remains and exclude performance from its purview. The slash in the title of the collection evokes this interdependence between performance, or performative encounters with records, and archives in the traditional sense, as aggregations of documents.

Archivaria readers may recognize an affinity between the book's critical orientation and recent archival scholarship. Archival theorists have already advocated archival strategies that would accommodate embodied manifesta-

1 See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

tions of cultures,² and formulations of provenance continue to evolve such that they take into account the various archival interventions that shape the meanings of records, embracing, for instance, custodial in addition to creator histories.³ Nevertheless, archival scholars would benefit from attending to the theoretical and methodological challenges to archiving that have emerged in artistic and art historical contexts. Certain themes that glide throughout the three sections of the collection, entitled “Ontologies,” “Archives of Performance,” and “Performing Archives,” reaffirm the ethical and political significance of continually confronting and questioning the limits of archival endeavours and the values upon which they rest.

The relationship between archives, performance, and futurity resurfaces throughout the volume. Just as archival theorists Eric Ketelaar and Verne Harris have argued that the archive addresses the future, contributors such as art history and performance studies scholars Peter van der Meijden, Tracy C. Davis, Barnaby King, Laura Luise Schultz, and Solveig Gade, identify archives as sites where histories are not simply found, but also created through performative encounters with records. Among the essays that address this theme, the contribution by Heike Roms stands out for effectively balancing performance research with archival studies. Roms, who familiarized herself with archival practices through a research project on the history of performance in Wales, evocatively describes how performances continue to live beyond their apparent end through the ongoing interventions of archivists, scholars, community members, artists, and others. Citing archivist Victoria Lane’s work on Welsh artist Ian Breakwell’s performance piece *UNWORD*, Roms argues that archivists’ affective and intellectual engagements with the collections in their care become manifest in writing and research activities that often exceed the bounds of professional requirements or protocol. Lane, for instance, independently interviewed the artist and his family members, and documented in a body of writings her own ever-changing journey through *UNWORD*. Roms affirms the central importance of such “collaborative archival practices of care” (p. 48) or, in other words, novel documentation practices, in preserving performance histories. Similarly, Rachel Fensham demonstrates sensitivity to the ways in which governmental and institutional policies affect archival practice and research.

- 2 Jeannette A. Bastian argues, for instance, that recurrent cultural festivals such as Carnival in the island communities of the Caribbean constitute a kind of archive. See Jeannette A. Bastian, “The Records of Memory, the Archives of Identity: Celebrations, Texts and Archival Sensibilities,” *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (June 2013): 121–31.
- 3 For a succinct, detailed history of perspectives on provenance, see Jennifer Douglas, “Origins: Evolving Ideas about the Principle of Provenance,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 23–43.

Fensham collaborated with a team of engineers, scholars, and archivists to design a digital “choreographic archive,” with the goal of fostering interdisciplinary cross- and extra-institutional dance research.⁴ The theoretical framework developed to guide the digital archive’s design process reflects Fensham’s conceptualization of dance records. Fensham’s detailed account of the research project may be relevant to archivists working in contexts that do not neatly conform to any given recordkeeping model.

Several papers move beyond the recognition that archives are constitutively incomplete, to insist upon the value of practices that expose the silences that inevitably punctuate archives. Amelia Jones endorses scholarly writing practices and art historical methods that avow the contingency of interpretive and critical practices. She argues that art critics and historians must sustain a tension between the impossibility of fully recuperating performance events and the necessity of articulating performance histories. Her paper might encourage archivists to question their own writing and descriptive practices further, and provoke archival scholars to continuously critique archival principles that presuppose stable interpretative frameworks inflected by class, gender, and socio-cultural conditions. In addition, Emma Willis and Julie Louise Bacon highlight specific performative and artistic practices that might make visible the power structures or mechanisms underlying the construction of archives. Willis, for instance, examines filmmaker Rithy Panh’s documentary *S21: Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, in which the employees of a former Khmer Rouge prison expose, through re-enactments, the machinery that once functioned behind the archival photographs now on display at the site. Similarly, Bacon cites two pieces by artists Gustav Metzger and Alfredo Jaar, respectively, as examples of artistic practices that work with and rely on material, visible representation in order to designate absence. According to Bacon, Metzger’s work *Historic Photographs* demands that spectators contend equally with what the work presents and does not present. Bacon supports her analysis with a critique of the politics of representation; her argument and Marco Pustianaz’s contribution merit further consideration from the perspective of archival studies, as they test approaches to archiving that promote visibility alone as a mode of political empowerment.

Finally, archival scholars with an interest in the convergence of libraries, archives, and museums will discover a wealth of material in a number of contributions that examine the ambiguous status of documents implicated in performance. Annelis Kuhlmann’s case study of the Royal Library in Copenhagen’s commissioned exhibition of curated archival records from the Danish National Archive makes a strong case for the potential of performative activations of archival records to nurture collaboration across professional

4 See the website of the Digital Dance Archives: <http://www.dance-archives.ac.uk/>.

and disciplinary lines. Kuhlmann shows that the exhibition's dramatization of archival materials both displays the mutable function and meaning of records and destabilizes the categories by which documents are classified. Similarly, Rivka Syd Eisner, Paul Clarke, and Louise Wolthers, building upon Rebecca Schneider's theorization of re-enactments as documents, describe how embodied archives and re-enactments that take place within the context of museums trouble the distinction between documents and events, and archival records and art.

This book persuasively demonstrates that contemporary performance-based artistic practices pose critical questions of archives and archival technologies. However, these demands may not reach archival practice and theory until scholars supplement their analyses of performative practices with current archival scholarship. Indeed, many of the contributors compromise their critiques by levelling them solely against a model of the archive that clings to absolute objectivity, pristine authorship, and steadfast authority – that is, a model that many archival theorists have already contested. The scarcity of archival literature in the collection under review calls for archival scholars interested in performance and embodied cultural records to integrate an understanding of contemporary archival principles and practices into critical assessments of the impact of performative approaches to archiving on current archival tenets.

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The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order. KATE EICHHORN. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013. xii, 188 pp. 978-1-4399-0951-5.

Kate Eichhorn's book *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* examines the documentary practices and print culture of the generation of women born during the rise of second-wave feminism. She also chronicles the migration of this material culture – including zines, audio cassettes, diaries, letters, and other ephemera – from basements and storage units to institutional repositories, where they have been catalogued, preserved, and made available to a broad community of researchers. Using a case study approach, Eichhorn shows how young activists and scholars have come to value these collections as vital resources for transformative politics. Cases include the Zine Collections at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in Durham, North Carolina, the Riot Grrrl Collection at the Fales Library and Special Collections