Book Reviews

Installation Art and the Practices of Archivalism. DAVID HOUSTON JONES. New York: Routledge, 2016. xii, 197 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-77742-2.

For anyone interested in the intersection of art and the archive, David Houston Jones' *Installation Art and the Practices of Archivalism* presents a thoughtful and sober contribution to the discourse at the convergence of these two disciplines. As suggested by the title, the text provides in-depth analysis of installation art that falls under the banner of what Jones terms "archival-ism" – that is, work made by artists for whom "archival practices guide their enquiry, whether through the instrumentalization of archival media or the appropriation of techniques derived from archival activity" (p. 3). Looking to artists who explicitly depict the archive or use archival materials, as well as those who engage with the archive on a conceptual level, Jones surveys a dizzying array of major works, including those by Atom Egoyan, Christian Boltanski, Arnold Dreyblatt, Silvia Kolbowski, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Miroslaw Balka, Wafaa Bilal, and many others. He then situates this analysis within the discourses of philosophy, archival theory, art theory, and art criticism, weaving together insights from theorists like Jacques Derrida, Pierre Nora, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, and Michel Foucault with those of art critics and curators like Hal Foster and Okwui Enwezor.

In his examination of "archivalist" artistic practice, the author takes up a recent trend in scholarship, criticism, and curation, whose initiation is often attributed to Hal Foster's 2004 identification of an "archival turn" in artistic practice. Describing this turn, Foster writes, "Archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end, they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favour the installation format as they do so."[1] Yet for all of the recent interest in "archivalist" art over the past decade, a serious, scholarly study of this primary instantiation of it

1   Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (2004): 4.

– namely, as installation art – has not been conducted. Indeed, similar analyses either survey the broad range of artistic responses to the archive or pay particular attention to alternative manifestations of this archivalist impulse – in the realms of film or photography, for instance.[2] Relative to these works, Jones' text is thus singular in its focus on the installation format. Yet it is also remarkable for its range of scholarly, philosophical, and artistic references, for the exhaustiveness of its research, and for the depth and gravity it brings to bear on interpretations of works of art.

This skillful handling of the subject is supported by Jones' multidisciplinary expertise. Jones, an associate professor of French Literature and Visual Culture at the University of Exeter, conducts research touching on fields as diverse as Beckett studies, medical humanities, and archive studies, and on subjects like trauma, testimony, and the body. In *Installation Art and the Practices of Archivalism*, this interdisciplinary perspective manifests in Jones' seamless exploration of artworks that deal with topics as varied as war, trauma, health and medicine, theatre, and technology. This diversity is reflected in the structure of the work, which is organized into five main chapters based on the author's observation of five types of artistic responses to the archive: the intermedial, testimonial, relational, personal, and monumentalist. Incorporating artists that fall into each of these categories, Jones' analysis brings together artistic projects concerned with concepts as divergent as biological data collection (in his chapter on the personal archive), archival technology and nostalgia (the intermedial), the archive as evidence (the testimonial), archival connections and dialogues (the relational), and the archival sublime (the monumentalist).

This adept and cohesive handling of such a broad and varied field of artistic endeavour constitutes one of the work's major strengths. Yet it is also strong for the thoughtfulness it brings to bear upon specific concepts relevant to archival discourse. One such concept is the linguistic notion of deixis – an idea closely related to indexicality – in which a speech act depends on an external referent for its meaning. In his analysis of the concept, Jones takes up artworks, particularly those of artists like Miroslaw Balka and Silvia Kolbowski, that use the archive to point to past persons or events that are often untraceable or unrepresentable owing to neglect, deliberate erasure, or trauma. In so doing, Jones provides a fresh account of the archive's persistent appeal to *something else,* to something beyond the record held in hand or

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2   For texts dealing with similar subject matter, see, for example, Sue Breakell, "Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive," *Tate Papers* (Spring 2008); Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2008); and Judy Vaknin, Karyn Stuckey, and Victoria Lane, eds., *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist* (Oxfordshire, UK: Libri Publishing, 2013).

viewed on screen – a historical event, for example, or an aspect of a person's life or personality. Most compellingly, Jones' analysis points to the archive's often equally persistent failure to ever reach its final "truth-bearing" referent. In this way, Jones highlights a key operative in the functioning of all archives and builds on a particular interpretation of the Derridean "archive fever" – that is, one fuelled by a never-ending search for a receding referent.[3] Yet his concept is also more practically useful as a concise way for archivists to think through the profession's ever-increasing dependence on hypertextuality and its continuing move toward linked data. In reading Jones' analysis of deixis – particularly his concern with "failed deixis" – it is difficult to avoid connecting the notion to issues of digital preservation and web archiving, activities that not only concern the preservation of documents, but also the links and references *between* documents. This analysis – and the connections it engenders – gains further strength through its placement within a larger discussion of the "epistemological fragility" of the past and the shifting (and shifty) role archives play in our processes of knowing (p. 54).

This latter thread runs throughout Jones' analysis, in the second half of the book, of new media theory and new technologies of the archive, an analysis that constitutes another of the work's major strengths. Within this discussion, he looks to artists like Christian Boltanski, Laurie Frick, and Wafaa Bilal, who push the epistemological limits of selfhood through archival and biomedical technologies that allow for the collection of an increasing range of personal data. In Bilal's *3rdi* project, for example, a camera surgically affixed to the back of the artist's skull took photographs every minute for one year. Jones' linking of such practices to the "real-world" phenomenon of lifelogging and its concomitant Quantified Self movement is particularly useful for the parallels it draws between the artists' concerns and contemporary processes of self-archiving that will increasingly affect the nature of the personal archive. Like Jones' consideration of deixis, this discussion gains strength from its consistent return to the question – ever present in the archive – of just how "quantifiable" or knowable the self – and indeed the past – truly is. Yet it is perhaps most practicable for the urgent questions it inspires in the archivist about how we might contend with and preserve the flood of data – bordering on the sublime – generated as practices of self-measurement become more and more minute. This inquiry reaches an inspiring zenith in the latter half of the text, as Jones ultimately pushes us, perhaps disconcertingly, to consider the ethical ramifications of forms of data collection that near a level of granularity so fine as to approach a type of replicated selfhood. How these questions are answered will affect not only archival ethics, but also our notion of archival

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3   Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowiz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

appraisal. It is a discussion that introduces a new sense of scale to the idea of the personal archive and forces us to examine what forms of data are valuable and meaningful to our understanding of the life of a records creator.

For all its strengths, however, Jones' text prompts one criticism. In his introduction, Jones explicitly states his desire to avoid the charge levelled by Lisa Darms against Okwui Enwezor's 2008 exhibition, *Archive Fever,* that "the show was a successful reflection of the art world's interpretations of the archive as theory, [yet] it is difficult for the archivist to recognize his or her own practices (and agency) within it" (quoted in Jones, p. 2). In spite of Jones' explicit intention to, as he writes, "connect meaningfully with the 'real' archive and the discourses that surround it" (p. 2), the practising archivist will at times, like Darms, strain to locate her daily practice under the weight of Jones' largely theoretical analysis. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule – in the glimpses Jones gives us into the Mormon Genealogical Archive, say, or in his discussions of digital versus analog technologies (and related questions of preservation) in his look at Atom Egoyan's *Steenbeckett*. But readers should expect the text to enhance their theoretical, rather than practical, understanding of the relationship between art and archives.[4] Meanwhile, in reaching this new understanding, the reader would in many cases benefit from advanced knowledge of subjects like literature, art history, and theatre. This latter observation is not a criticism of the work, whose high level of discussion belies Jones' expert handling of his subject and the rigour of his research, but rather indicates the book's intended reader, who is perhaps more likely to be the humanities scholar than the practising archivist. While the book will thus appeal to those interested in and already invested in the intersecting discourses of art and archives, it may not hold wide appeal for the general archival community.

In spite of this, the text raises valuable questions for the archivist, artist, historian, and theorist about why, how, and what we archive at a time of increasingly accessible archival technologies and a wide-scale compulsion to document all aspects of our lives. While such questions are not in themselves new for archivists, Jones looks at projects whose status as art allows them to safely enact extreme, even dystopian, archival practices, and he provides a *Black Mirror*–like glimpse of the perhaps unsettling "real-world" practice of (self-)archiving, whose normalization seems just around the corner. Perhaps this is the real value of Jones' work for the archivist. By analyzing the archive through the lens of art – an endeavour granted near-infinite licence owing to its positioning in the realm of play – Jones' text allows us to see plainly the

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4   For a more practical perspective, readers may prefer Vaknin, Stuckey, and Lane, *All This Stuff*, to which Jones pays homage in his introduction. This text is divided into three major sections, approaching the archive from the perspective of the artist, historian, and archivist.

larger philosophical, technological, and ethical issues and opportunities, both enchanting and disturbing, that are facing archives in the present and (frighteningly near) future. For these reasons, the text is not only essential reading for those interested in the intersection of art and archives, but is also a rich site for reflection on the nature and capacities of archives in contemporary society.

Catherine MacArthur Falls

Module 8: Becoming a Trusted Digital Repository. STEVE MARKS. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2015. xxv, 68 pp. ISBN 1-931666-84-9.

Steve Marks has accomplished something that very few people in the world have: he created a Trusted Digital Repository (TDR) that met the criteria of the Trustworthy Repositories Audit & Certification (TRAC). It was the first repository in Canada, and one of only six in the world. Because of the significance of this task, this publication is important to consider: the author went beyond theorizing how a TDR could be created and actually achieved it.

Marks undertook this task when he was the digital preservation librarian at the Toronto-based Scholars Portal, a service of the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL): the Scholars Portal e-journals database TDR passed the very stringent Centre for Research Libraries (CRL) audit and obtained the rare certification in February 2013.[1] To pass the audit and be granted certification, a TDR must demonstrate compliance with the TRAC criteria and the strict "gold standard" of ISO 16363, Audit and Certification of Trustworthy Digital Repositories. Marks defines this ISO as "an internationally recognized set of criteria that can be used to measure the credibility of repositories' specific preservation programs and services" (p. 2).

The book is published by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and is part of its Trends in Archives Practice series. I applaud SAA for creating this series: the books are well priced, short (around 100 pages), and available in print, EPUB, and PDF formats. Marks contributed this publication to the series in 2015 in order to share with the archival community his knowledge of TDRs and his experience with audits.

The book starts with a note written by editor Michael Shallcross, who provides a short, helpful explanation of why ISO 16363 is important for archives. The introduction by Bruce Ambacher focuses on the history of trustworthiness and the development of the ISO standard. While well written and interesting, Ambacher's chapter might be too detailed for some readers,

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1   Marks has since moved on to become the digital preservation librarian at the University of Toronto Libraries, Information Technology Services.