

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Queering Archives: Historical Unravellings, Radical Histories Review Special Issue**, edited by Daniel Marshall, Kevin P Murphy and Zeb Tortorici, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, Fall 2014, Issue 120, 232 pp., \$14 (paperback). ISBN 978 0 822368 25 0

Editors Daniel Marshall, Kevin P Murphy and Zeb Tortorici's introduction to *Queering Archives: Historical Unravellings* posits that 'in a catalog of queer archives you can find not only a listing of current gay and lesbian archives around the world but also a listing of those gay and lesbian archives that "no longer exist" and, most bewitchingly, a listing of those archives that "never existed"' (p. 1). The Foucauldian conception of the archive proposed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), as not a body of documentary evidence nor the institutions that act as its custodian but 'the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events' (p. 129), is used as both a touchstone and a problematic in this volume. This special issue of *Radical Histories Review* explores the ways in which LGBTQIA history and experience have been and continue to be negated or silenced by archival institutions, and ways in which we may reimagine archival hegemony to better encompass voices from the margins.

The 12 essays are loosely grouped in four chapters, with a great deal of overlap in between. Approaches range from interpretations of traditional archival sources including state archives and university libraries, to a broadening of the definition of 'archive' to include documentation of bedside tables and everyday living conditions. The first chapter, 'Queer Archival Pasts', explores how archives, their selection, omissions and interpretation construct our understanding of queer legacy and identity. 'Archiving Disorder' then considers the kinds of archives resulting from the migration of queer and marginalised communities, whether by the state in the form of traditional records such as migration documentation or by the communities themselves. 'Exhibiting Archives/Archiving Exhibits' focuses on artistic interventions and constructions in queer archives. Finally, 'Classifications and the Limits of the Archive' critiques the trustworthiness of the archive as an institution which is often interpreted as a repository of historical truth.

A thread that reappears throughout the essays is how archives do, or do not, cope with the nature and excesses of queer history and experience. Abram J Lewis's account of transgender activist Angela Keyes Douglas and the chaos of her life and work attempts to push against efforts to rehabilitate the image of queer activists and instead embraces the eccentric and paranoid nature of Keyes' life and archive as key elements of its queerness. Marc Stein's research regarding the periodical *Drum*, 'the self-described "gay Playboy"' (p. 53), a key 1960s homophile publication, further underscores this point. Stein states *Drum* is frequently omitted from studies of the pre-Stonewall gay movement in favour of more respectable publications and groups due to its sexual radicalism, despite having a substantially larger reach than other homophile publications at the time. Stein posits that queer representation within the archive should not omit the elements which made those lives queer.

It should be noted that the archive presented here is frequently the historian's or sociologist's concept of the archive, where the archivist is conspicuously absent. Martin F Manalansan IV's essay 'The "Stuff" of Archives' identifies this as 'an idealized, pristine archive that systematically stores, retrieves and communicates information about the past' (p.

103). While Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996) and Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) are referenced throughout, little archival theory is ever touched on despite the extensive body of literature that expands upon these texts by theorists such as Verne Harris, Eric Ketelaar and Michelle Caswell. While this publication is clearly aimed at historians, it is disappointing that the boundary between the humanities and archival science seems so impassable. In a description of the apparent chaos of an apartment inhabited by a group of undocumented immigrants, Manalansan unknowingly explores archival issues around original order and the importance of preserving relationships that are not at first glance evident. Perhaps an unexpected area where this publication may be valuable to archivists is in identifying potential blind spots with regards to humanities research in the archive.

Ben Cowan's essay "A Passive Homosexual Element": Digitized Archives and the Policing of Homosex in Cold War Brazil' states that he was unable to retrieve all relevant digitised police records relating to homosexuals from the Brazilian National Archives using the single search term 'homosexual', and acknowledged that his 'methodology and use of digitized materials, imposed manifold and perhaps not wholly knowable limitations' (p. 199). This poses the question, how accountable are archivists to make researchers aware of limitations such as the fallibility of OCR and the overwhelming ratio of records that remain undigitised or described as aggregate? How do we burst the preconception in the humanities of the 'ideal archive' (p. 102)? In the final essay, 'Archiving Peripheral Taiwan', Howard Chiang expresses: 'If our approach to archival comprehension does not presume a complete, definitive, or successful disclosure of validity, then a queer unknowing of sorts proves to be conducive to a much richer set of possible answers' (p. 206). We need to draw back the curtain if historians and archivists are to speak the same language.

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**The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy**, by Sven Spieker, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2017, xiv + 219 pp., AUD \$35 (paperback), ISBN 978 0 262533 577

Archivists sometimes labour under the impression that they are the only people who have a meaningful understanding of archives. *The Big Archive* should go a long way towards dispelling such views, although I suspect readers committed to a position of archival exceptionalism will find much to dislike here.

This is an ambitious and largely satisfying volume that ranges across an impressive density of ideas and has a broad philosophical reach. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the question of how archives are constituted at the nexus of form, content and encounter, Sven Spieker presents a persuasive case for use of the archive as an actual, conceptual or implied medium in twentieth-century art practice. Within this text the archive is presented as a visual analogue which represents the various epistemological, spatial and temporal destabilisations of the nineteenth-century administrative bureaucracy. In the process we are given an engaging, albeit circumscribed, history of the recording and ordering of knowledge in the lead-up to European modernism, and a considered cross-reading of some key archival tenets (in particular, the