

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 at 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

principles of provenance and original order) from an external perspective. Laying at the outset a series of threads – time, trust, transference – that provide a cohesive line of reference throughout (as variant refrains rather than didactic themes), Spieker successfully demonstrates how creative work renders visible the oscillations archives entertain between narrative and contingency; measurement and manipulation; deferral and return.

The author is an academic with expertise in modern and contemporary art and literature, and a particular interest in issues related to documentary and knowledge production in art. As such, he approaches the archive from a humanist background rather than a professional one. The book manoeuvres primarily from an art-historical space and its emphasis is directed by a theoretical interest in archival ideas over any sustained attention to their practical application. Readers seeking practical recordkeeping guidance are unlikely to find much of immediate interest here. This is not to discount the significance of the volume to the archival discipline, which is evident in a central thesis that clearly encapsulates contemporary archival concerns: ‘Archives do not record experience so much as its absence; they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place, and what is returned to us in an archive may well be something we never possessed in the first place’ (p. 3).

Spieker’s opening chapters demonstrate a necessary understanding of the historical context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century archives and their technical apparatus as functioning mechanisms for the regulation of information, and the book as a whole presents a strong line of archival enquiry and some wonderfully diverting footnotes. Despite this, an archivist readership may be disappointed that it makes comparatively little use of recent scholarship from within the archival field, although many of Spieker’s observations would find ample support in this regard. While generalist enough to be accessible beyond the academy or art school, the text assumes at least a passing familiarity with the twentieth-century canon of psychoanalytic, poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers, and the central chapters are undoubtedly smoothed by some knowledge of key movements and figures of the 1920s artistic avant-garde. Superimposing the question modernism poses of what to do with art (or, what art does) beyond the representational and symbolic fields onto the archival domain allows Spieker to transition freely between aesthetic assumptions and administrative implications of the archive. The choice of creative works appears fairly arbitrary on first encounter, but aptitude emerges with distance. It is a risky enterprise in praxis, and Spieker does well to both lead to, and leave open, the question of whether such effects are the result of accident, design or cognitive function.

Having explored the historical archive as container and classifier of knowledge, and explicated a set of modernist responses which reframe the process(ing) of the bureaucratic archive as profoundly interruptive, the final chapters of the book extend the continuity of Spieker’s thesis into the present day and corral an unexpectedly tidy conclusion. This final section considers examples of contemporary art that are no longer disrupting fixed archives, but directly insinuating archival motion. Rather than perceiving the archive and its objects as a form of technical memory moored by rational foundations, these works bear implicit reckonings of the archive as permanently active and relatively authentic. Revisiting the familiar case for interventions in an archive being ‘less exceptional intrusions than an integral part of it’ (p. 187), the closing chapter leaves us with artist Sophie Calle in the Freud Museum, and her possibilities for archival assembly as resistance, return and reflexion.

At the last, an epilogue presents a façade of empty boxes. The archive, Spieker insists, is more than its infrastructure.

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Agents of Empire: How E.L. Mitchell's Photographs Shaped Australia, by Joanna Sassoon, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2017, x + 260 pp., AUD\$44.00 paperback, ISBN 978 1 925333 73 2

Agents of Empire: How E.L. Mitchell's Photographs Shaped Australia is a fascinating biography of commercial photographer Ernest Lund Mitchell, intertwined with a detailed examination of how his photographs, particularly of Western Australia and Queensland, were used to promote Australia to the Empire. The work is based on author Joanna Sassoon's PhD thesis and journal articles.

Joanna Sassoon has extensive experience and knowledge in managing archival photographic collections and is an internationally respected historian and archivist. She brings both a historian's perspective and an archivist's focus on context to her examination of E.L. Mitchell's photographs. The work features extensive reproductions of the photographs under discussion, which allows the reader to appreciate the knowledge and analysis that Sassoon brings to bear on her analysis. Sassoon considers: the content of the photographs; their role in creating a sense of 'social harmony, economic stability and Australia's connections to the British Empire' (p. viii); how they were circulated and made accessible; and finally how their 'archival afterlives' are influencing views of twentieth-century Australia (p. ix).

Agents of Empire is divided into three parts:

- (1) Production – provides a narrative of the life of E.L. Mitchell, the places he photographed in Queensland and Western Australia, and the aesthetic and visual literacy to 'paint a reassuring picture of progress, order and consensus' (p. 45).
- (2) Reproduction – charts the use and distribution of Mitchell's photographs, their inclusion in official/government photographic collections and loss of context 'to become symbols and stereotypes of "Australia" for audiences across the world' (p. 170).
- (3) Preservation – details the organisation, dispersal, preservation and partial loss of Mitchell's archive.

'Preservation', and the chapter on 'Afterlives', intrigued me and reinforced the fundamental importance of context to our work. Sassoon explores Mitchell's recordkeeping, his organisation and arrangement of the commercial photographic collection, including the storage of the most valued Western Australian negatives in 'butterboxes' (p. 228), and Mitchell's own appraisal and dispersal of parts of the collection.

Sassoon reminds us that for photographs and photographic collections to function as accurate and authentic evidence, and not just content or images, the photograph or photographic collection needs to be connected to contextual information. Sassoon details