

Each chapter relies on an analysis of primary sources, including paper ephemera from the anti-government demonstrations and interviews with youth activists. The analysis of the different spaces in which the youth activists operated opens the way to a multifaceted discussion of youth activism rich in details and nuances. Unfortunately, the author does not venture into a related discussion of the dispersed nature of the archives or the concept of archive as a place.

Activist Archives is an important contribution to the fields of urban ethnography and youth studies and to the history of youth radicalism in Indonesia. It presents readers with some examples of previously unstudied archival materials which deserve more attention from archivists.

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The Silence of the Archive, by David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson, Principles and Practice in Records Management and Archives series (Series Editor: Geoffrey Yeo), Facet Publishing, London, 2017, 224 pp., GBP£64.95 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 783301 55 3

The Silence of the Archive is a fascinating book that explores ‘the causes, responses and implications’ (p. XXV) of silences in the archives. Silences are a worthy topic since ‘an absence is not nothing, but is rather the space left by what has gone ... the emptiness indicates how once it was filled and animated’ (Steedman as quoted on p. 105). The silence of the archive can take the form of ‘the absence of records from public view, the absence of certain details in records ... or the absence of records altogether’ (p. XV), writes Anne Gilliland; the record ‘may be silent on the salient facts, or it may obfuscate, mislead or flat out lie’. On the other hand some silences are ‘tacit agreements ... designed to leave unsaid or let slip away things that may be too painful’ (p. XVI).

The book is directed at ‘archivists, records managers, researchers and records creators’ (p. XXV), and anyone interested in the study of archives. All three authors – Simon Fowler, Valerie Johnson and David Thomas – have worked at the National Archives, UK and at various UK universities, and collectively have expertise in digital preservation, history, teaching, research and archives. The passion and creativity of the authors is most evident when they discuss themes related to their own work, and these are also the best chapters. Fowler, Johnson and Thomas each authored two chapters within the main body of the text, with Thomas also authoring the introduction and conclusion.

In the first two chapters (‘Enforced silences’ and ‘Inappropriate expectations’), Simon Fowler examines the following: the content of the archive and of the records extant; the impact the powerful have in influencing the archives; and, to a lesser extent, archival practices regarding acquisition and appraisal. Fowler argues that silences brought on by archival practice could be avoided by including better contextual and descriptive metadata within collections, which also ensures transparency around archival terminology and processes. Paraphrasing Tom Nesmith, Fowler writes: ‘it is essential to describe appraisal decisions’ (p. 56), and, according to series editor Geoffrey Yeo, ‘descriptions should give credit to ... [all] who have intervened in shaping collections over time’ (p. 57). These are not new ideas but nor are they yet common practices, as many archives sustain processes, systems and practices founded on old paradigms.

In the chapter ‘The digital’, David Thomas shines a light on the issues faced by archivists and researchers owing to decentralisation and technological change, changes in which most archivists have inhabited a largely passive role. Some archives are actively engaging users in appraisal and archival documentation through such measures as inviting users to contribute to archival description. However, the lack of engagement by the profession as a whole with technologies and other methodologies (including evidence-based practice with records creators, archive users, IT staff, web designers and usability experts) which could expose archives more in the digital environment has meant that ‘in effect, archives are silencing themselves’ (p. 72). The profession has not been able to harness opportunities afforded by the digital revolution; or, as Cassie Findlay has written, ‘to think of new and purely digital ways of delivering authentic and accessible records in what is now a post-paper world’ (p. 155).

All is not lost though. As Anne Gilliland points out in the introduction to the text, silences are not necessarily ‘absolute or forever’ (p. XVI), and the archive is not a static thing; ‘with every interaction and use, the archives is in a sense renewed and re-created’ (Eric Ketelaar as quoted on p. 113). In the chapter ‘Dealing with the silence’, Valerie Johnson contemplates themes of renewal and recreation through stories of restorative justice and archival activism. She discusses Anna Funder’s writing about victims’ use of the Stasi files ‘the Puzzle Women’ (p. 104); Verne Harris on the submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; and, Monteith’s creative application of speech act theory to allow silent voices to speak, or acknowledge and memorialise absences.

‘Archival users are often frustrated or disappointed by the silences, or given to archival fantasies’ (p. XV). The chapter titled ‘Imagining archives’ explores themes of fantasy, forgery and falsity in the archive through cases such as the Hillsborough tragedy investigation, and what David Thomas describes as ‘the imaginal world of Shakespeare’ (p. 125). The final two chapters (‘Solutions to the silence’ by Valerie Johnson and ‘Are things getting better or worse?’ by David Thomas) go back ‘inside’ the archive to review transformative archival models such as community archives and other participatory, collaborative and co-creative approaches to archiving that allow room for multiple voices and experiences.

This book is firmly focused on the record – its creation, capture and how it is used. More detailed analysis of curation or documenting relationships and context (‘locating the records in time, space, place and authorship’),¹ areas where the archival profession could make a significant contribution, are largely overlooked. Having said that, it is an excellent base from which to study the theme of silence as there are plenty of references for those who wish to follow up on topics of interest more deeply. This makes it a good book for students although at AUD\$125 they might prefer to borrow it from the library.

Endnote

1. Jeannette Bastian, ‘Records, Memory and Space: Locating Archives in the Landscape’, *Public History Review*, vol. 21, 2014, pp. 45–69. ISSN 1833-4989, available at <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/phrj/article/view/3822/4604>, accessed 26 April 2018

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