The Big Archive: Art From Bureaucracy by Sven Spieker. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008. 219 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-19670-6.

Sven Spieker's *The Big Archive: Art From Bureaucracy* is less about archival repositories than it is an art history book about archives as an inspiration for a motley crew of twentieth-century artists and commentators. The latter are strange bedfellows, but united by a particular interest in the very notion of the archive and its assumptions about the ability to organize the past into linear coherency for the present and future. Spieker argues that, contrary to the belief that archives capture history in a well-ordered manner, they are rather sites of chaos and contingency, with the presupposition of the rationality of linear history haunted by the specter of entropy and disorder.

The archivist's worst nightmare: the accumulation of bureaucratic detritus that resists archival ordering, with chaos ensuing. Despite the archivist's most earnest efforts to sort and file the records, the sheer volume of records, by default and left unto themselves, will just become piles of paper. The archivist's strategy: the Sanctity of Original Order and the Principle of Provenance (PP), keystone concepts in archival theory that can be traced to the Privy State Archive in Berlin. Spieker takes these concepts as his point of entry for the simple reason that they exemplify the logic of archives: preservation of the order of records and their chains of custody.

The Big Archive works well as a companion piece to *The Archive*, a collection of pivotal essays that draw the relationship between the concept of the archive and commentary provided by modern art (Merewether, 2006).[1] Those familiar with the history of archival theory will recognize the names that Spieker references: American archivist T. R. Schellenberg and the Dutch archivists Muller, Feith, and Fruin. Departing from this starting point, Spieker then invites some unlikely characters into the discussion. The first is Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud and the archive have met before, in Jacques Derrida's (1996) reading of Freud and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.* Spieker asserts that while Freud invoked archaeology as a metaphor for the task of the psychoanalyst, the metaphor of the archive is more apt. He shows that the administrative archives and the "psychic archive"—the latter comprised of inscriptions on the conscious and the unconscious—converge on two fronts. First is the materiality of the trace: memory relies on the "breaking of a pathway" that leaves a trace in the unconscious, similar to archival records existing as traces of historical past. Second, both are spaces of consignment, whereby the storage location of traces is topologically distinct from other spaces (i.e., the archival repository is distinct from other spaces, and the unconscious is a space distinct from the space of the conscious).

The archive is predicated on the notion of time, the assumption being that time progresses in a linear fashion, thereby opening avenues of archival possibility. Tarrying with modern artist Marcel Duchamp, Spieker claims that Duchamp's readymades often comment on contingency, chance, and time as a series of intervals (as opposed to continuous linearity). The Duchampian statement on time and its elements of contingency and discreteness anticipate Spieker's interpretation later in the book of the archive as a kind of database, characterized as an aggregation of movable signifiers that may be recombined and recast. Here Spieker substitutes disorientation, shock, and nonlinearity for the Principle of Provenance and Sanctity of Original Order as the logic of the archive.

Surrealism is often associated with psychoanalytic discourse because both are interested in what lies beneath narratives of consciousness. Spieker asserts that the link between archivization (the potential for an event to be archived, oftentimes through the traces left behind) and psychoanalytic concepts can be traced back to early Surrealism's interest in office technology, such as index cards, typewriters, writing utensils, etc., and the mechanization of the writing process. Particularly, the ambition of early Surrealism was to "assemble an archive of unconscious facts, an ambition that disavows, in the spirit of Duchamp, both the rationalizing impulses…and the PP-based archive with its appeal to origins and the archivization of contingent time" (p. 88). The Office of Surrealist Research, headed by Andre Breton, sought to develop an "archive of the unconscious." In doing so, the Surrealists created a bipartite archive, one that collected documents of social life and the manuscripts of the Surrealist research office, and one that collected documents and transcripts of dreams (and thus, the unconscious). The primary organizing system for the Surrealists was the index card and mechanical computation. At the heart of the Surrealists' notion of archiving was the attempt to discover order in chaos (rather than impose it, as archivists do), and to detect the emergence of organization in the din of the unconscious's cacophony. However, Spieker contrasts this with architect Le Corbusier's perspectives on archiving, which were characterized by an interest in efficiency and guarding against forgetting. Le Corbusier was interested in freeing modern man from the constraints of clutter; by maximizing efficiency, modern man could devote his attention to the pursuit of the sublime and the beautiful. Thus, Le Corbusier's project was the attempt to master the archive, and subdue it into submission by implementing the hyperrationality of the filing cabinet.

Arguably, two of Spieker's most salient points for archival professionals and students of archival studies are the concepts of the trace and archivization. Whereas the trace refers to the inadvertent object birthed from the event, archivization refers to the potential for the trace to be captured and archived, the "creative phase before capture" (Ketelaar, 2001). Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar further adds another possibility, yet another "moment of truth" that occurs in

archivalization, which is the "conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving" (2001, p. 133). *Archivalization,* while not discussed by Spieker, adds yet another dimension to augment the richness of the discussion in *The Big Archive.* These elements—Spieker's focus on the trace and archivization and Ketelaar's *archivalization* neologism—introduce a fissure in archival discourse by including theoretical perspectives that are critical and different than how archives are popularly talked about in the profession. As Spieker describes the "archive at play," the trace and its possibility for archivization enters the realm of playful possibility, pointing to the conditions for historical discovery that are random as well as that which exists beyond the walls of the archive.

The Big Archive is not a manual for those interested in learning how to become archival professionals; rather, its merits lie in its ability to present a compelling set of tropes to contextualize the archive. In introducing his critical insight into the archive and the assumptions that guide our imagination of constitution of the archive's *modus operandi*, Spieker ultimately questions the logic of the archive. A mere review of *The Big Archive* is far too cursory to adequately capture the subtleties and nuances of Spieker's ambitious critique of the archive. If the archive is, as Derrida claimed, the site of commencement and commandment, of origins and authority, then what is one to make of Spieker's argument that the rational and well-ordered archive is in actuality marred by its predisposition to disorder? Perhaps the greatest contribution of *The Big Archive* is the expansion of the archival profession's field of vision, and the opportunity for us to reflect on our professional goals. If the archive is not merely a compendium of recorded texts, but also includes broader theoretical concepts like metapsychology, critical theory, and historiography, then the boundaries of our professional practices and standards are also challenged. By thinking beyond the imagined boundaries of the repository walls and the assumption of bureaucratic order, Spieker prompts us to ponder the possibilities of the archive, the spaces beyond the archive itself, and this "beyond" as an archive unto itself.

Notes

[1] *The Archive* gathers many of the works referenced by Spieker in *The Big Archive*, namely Freud, Alan Sekula, Walter Benjamin, and others.

References

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Reviewer

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