

Book Review

Scrapbooks, Snapshots and Memorabilia: Hidden Archives of Performance, edited by Glen McGillivray (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011)

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Editor Glen McGillivray has compiled this collection that features twelve case studies examining the nature of the archive; and, in particular, the challenges that performance and theatre studies researchers face when they conduct archival research. The *AusStage* database project was the impetus for this anthology, as many of the authors in *Scrapbooks* were involved in establishing the online resource designed to help researchers research live performance in Australia. The authors write evocatively of being in '[s]ummer's great room' (McGillivray, 21), of being 'captives of the archive' (Casey, 30), and how in 'the empty house' (Card, 129), they search for the 'accidents of survival' (Hall, 105) that leak from 'battered suitcases' (123).

The book's introduction is comprehensive, outlining the multiplicity of experiences and issues associated with the archive. As McGillivray notes, it is a place to store, to mark, to register, and to preserve. It is both open and closed, private and public. It is the silent witness that often lies buried to the world. The archive can activate both a corporal and temporal exchange. It is always incomplete, holding fragments of the past, chosen mostly at random. Yet there are limits to what can and is archived, mostly determined by the capacity and resources of archivists, be they personal or institutional.

In *Scrapbooks*, issues of power resonate. Many contributors draw on the work of Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* (1995) and his concept of the archive as authoritative and authorised. The archive is principally a place, which can be either private or institutional. Custodians of an archive have authority over what material is included and what is excluded. This collection of papers unpacks these issues, sometimes in surprising ways such as in John Bennett's chapter on the British theatre archives and the growing influence of the academy and of the media to redefine notions of power and place. For Bennett, '[c]ontemporary British theatre has a strong and well-regarded regional presence but this has only been achieved by conscious and concerted struggle against hierarchical perceptions of London as the arbiter of dramatic standards' (85). In Australia on the other hand much of the theatre that takes place outside the main stage or metropolitan centers is often viewed by local archivists as the 'forgotten sphere of cultural repertoire' (Arrighi and Watt, 81). No such ideological rebellion like that taking place in Britain currently exists in Australia. There is no need however for regional and central binary perceptions to get in the way of good storytelling and those stories that unravel throughout the book are engaging and informative.

Whilst Amanda Card, Maryrose Casey, Lisa Warrington, Tom Burvill and Mark Seton, as well as McGillivray, provide a rigorous critical engagement with the subject of the archive, others turn to storytelling as an investigative method. I was especially drawn to the historical narratives such as Catherine Haill's story of Ms. Gabrielle Enthoven and her personal crusade to provide a

permanent home for her theatre collection. An amateur actress, 'Ms. Enthoven was a private collector who saw beyond her time and who, for the rest of her life, with a break during the second World War, continued to work unpaid on her collection at the [Victoria and Albert] museum' (111). Then there is Kim Durban's account of the Women's Director's Group, founded by the late Ewa Czajor in Melbourne in 1984. This is a tale of Durban's search for a 'litany of hidden, locked away and inaccessible documents [that] suggest loss but also, like the last gift retained by Pandora, hope, stored beneath chaos' (192). There is also Eileen Curley's tale of Rita and Alice Lawrence, two New York sisters who 'staged amateur theatricals in the 1880s and 1890s and kept five scrapbooks about their productions' (230).

In his introduction, McGillivray sums up the book's collection as 'revealing of entrances to back stages we didn't know were there, even though they were there all along' (28). This reminds me of something said at a recent workshop I attended exploring the Aboriginal history of the Sydney Harbour area. It was during a discussion on the way some Aboriginal communities in Australia are currently in the process of (re)discovering, and (re)engaging with language. One workshop participant, Nardi Simpson, a founding member of the music group Stiff Ginns, said that she felt many people still held the belief that since colonization many Aboriginal languages have been lost. She explained that this implies a kind of carelessness. Nardi likened this situation to that of looking for keys. When you go looking for them sometimes you can't see them even if they are sitting right under your nose smiling as you walk by. 'Language,' she said, 'is like those keys. Just because you can't see them doesn't mean they aren't there.'

A similar viewpoint is presented in Warrington's thought provoking piece on documenting site-specific work. Of all the contributions, I found Warrington's perspective on the contemporary archive, especially in relation to the field of performance studies, the most interesting. In 'Performance as Palimpsest' she considers the archive as comprising of individual trace memories of specific sites. For Warrington, traces of previous memories can intrude and even interrupt one's perception of a current experience (207). Such a task will always be affected by multiple layers of memory that act to conceal things. Sometimes you find what you are looking for, and sometimes something else is revealed.

Not explored in this collection is the current practice of ethnographic documentation and archiving of field research in the area of performance studies. When conducting fieldwork observations much 'stuff' is collected such as research journals, video footage, photographs, and interview material. As a researcher I am often concerned about the storage of and access to such data. So too it seems are the students and lecturers from York St John University in the UK who consider the academy as a valuable contributor to the performance studies archive. More than just a consignment, 'in an educational context, within the academy, the catalogue document is also used to further explicate the work made' (154). For many of the students 'the archive provides [them with] access to [the] thinking and doing at the time of creation' (155). What is documented within the academy has teaching and research applications. It can also have practical functions in areas such as marketing, recording, auditing, funding, and career development.

What this book does highlight is the pressing reality that performance studies scholars are not only archaeologists uncovering and discovering things, but also anthropologists documenting and interpreting the social and cultural. They are, in many cases, also artist archivists. What this means is that ultimately the academy will need to consider the many issues associated with the performance studies archive discussed in this collection. Certainly this book is a platform for these discussions to take place.

McGillivray has compiled some insightful, engaging, and surprising examples and stories that provide a deep consideration of the many issues and challenges that artists, scholars, and students may face when embarking on archive-making, and on archival research.

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