



The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences by Niamh Moore, Andrea Salter, Liz Stanley, and Maria Tamboukou

Reviewed by *Wayne E. Arnold*



THE ARCHIVE PROJECT:
ARCHIVAL RESEARCH IN THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES by Niamh Moore,
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The relatively recent archival turn—the necessity to enter library archives for research—has resulted in an increased engagement with previously undiscovered materials throughout numerous fields. Emphasizing this turn, the four authors of *The Archive Project* lay out various intersecting theoretical and practical issues—specifically looking at epistemological, ontological, and methodological problems—to provide fellow researchers with a sense of logical and supportive approaches for a broad range of considerations concerning research in archives. The result of these scholars' efforts is a fairly cohesive journey through the field of archival research over the last few decades. With the rapidly changing methods of digitizing archival materials, various debates about practical aspects of gathering, processing, storing, and incorporating material are examined across the six chapters of this collection. The first and the last chapter are written by the group, while the middle four chapters allow each author to present their views by discussing specific collections with which they have worked. The organizational structures of the chapters are focused around women's studies and include archive collections from around the world.

The Archives Project arrives during a period of intensifying interest in the promotion and necessity for researchers to uncover new

materials and provide subsequent additions to scholarly publications. Moore, Salter, Stanley, and Tamboukou intricately detail their individual approaches to equally diverse archival materials. To create cohesion across the material, the brief prologue and epilogue introduce and conclude why the authors have deemed it important to delineate their “tracing” of uncovering, documenting, processing, and then producing applicable information from their corresponding archives. Additionally, the prologue and epilogue are used to directly engage the reader with the personal accounts of authors in each of the chapters as a retelling of lessons learned during their archival research. A significant objective has been to create a workbook through which new research scholars may be guided on how to best economize their time within an archive. The “trace” is a key aspect of the work—it means following a line of guiding principles—delineated in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 to help scholars retrieve the most pertinent information (through various methodologies) latent within the sometimes overwhelming amount of material in a collection. The importance of the archival turn demands groundbreaking scholarship to incorporate undocumented information. In this sense, *The Archive Project* is primarily geared for beginner scholars. The scholars have joined together in this project to reveal their insights gained from decades of experience within archives around the world and to provide a broader applicability of their knowledge. The book further intends to provide an “approach to methodology” (x) through which the four varying but integral styles outline more comprehensive procedures for material collection demonstrating how the archival turn has achieved importance via disseminating fresh material. The inclusion of these four archival scholars, with divergent research in areas of women’s studies, underscores how the archival turn continues to advance varying realms of gender studies.

The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation surrounding the organization of material both by archivists and by researchers gathering new material. Specific library organizational procedures often depend on the content, encompassing time periods, and material types, all of which are becoming more complicated in the digital era. Walter Benjamin, “a master of assemblage” (5), and Michel Foucault (*The Order of Things*) are both esteemed forebearers of categorization, and *The Archive Project* is specifically indebted for its title to Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*. The first chapter is most widely applicable as the authors move through a range of theoretical approaches to archiving, discussing the processes of developing, organizing, and contextualizing archive libraries. Topics branch out from the archival turn to theoretical consideration of genealogy (Foucault), heterotopia (Foucault), rhythmanalysis (Henri Lefebvre), the allure of the

archive (Arlette Farge), and the significance of “dust” settling on these occasionally long-forgotten documents (Carolyn Steedman). There are epistemological, ontological, and methodological problematics within archival work that the authors believe will be elucidated and perhaps expunged through their individual chapters; the groundwork established in the first chapter allows the following chapters to focus more specifically on what they term “a feminist archival sensibility” (ix).

The four central chapters complement each other in terms of authors’ positions and arguments. Chapter 2 is most suited for early career researchers as Liz Stanley offers suggestions for dealing with various issues that arise in the archives. Focusing on archival methodology, one of Stanley’s main discussion points is the importance of writing—from note taking and transcribing in the archive, to writing outside the archive, including everything from book reviews to conference presentations. Collections used to structure the chapter are the Olive Schreiner manuscripts and Whites Writing Whiteness, both located in South Africa. Overall, Stanley demonstrates how she attempted to “make sense” of “the stuff” found in the documents (36). The importance of maintaining organized records of uncovered research data is that there can be misleading or misplaced documents, an issue that can disrupt research progress. Much of this chapter relies heavily on a discussion concerning the archives mentioned above in order to demonstrate various strategies for archival manipulation, thereby achieving the most effective benefits while visiting a historical collection.

Maria Tamboukou incorporates her expertise with materials at the New York Public Library concerning the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Tamboukou describes the library visits that partly required working with microfilm as well as the advantages of being able to take photocopies of the material outside of the library. Time management is imperative for all researchers and Tamboukou gives detailed suggestions to handle both present time and the past in which the materials were originally created. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (1992), Tamboukou explores the concept of “space/time/matter rhythms.” Under this notion, the archive can be “...conceived as an entanglement of space/time rhythms,” where “...the archive extends into the world, both in terms of its immediate locality as well as with reference to its global position” (79). The impact and implications of women trade unionists, Tamboukou argues, does not remain within the archives, but can be tangibly located on the streets of New York City in various aspects. This reality creates a “narrative phenomenon” where the researcher is entangled with the past

and present (85). Tamboukou's chapter deals with the narratives that researchers find within the archival material and how time (past and present) creates various archival rhythms that require the researcher to be aware of the present and the past.

Working with the Mass Observation Archive and the Olive Schreiner Letters Project (both projects are available for viewing online), Andrea Salter, in the fourth chapter, also focusses on the temporal by "reading time backwards." The Mass Observation Project was a fifteen-year project conducted in Britain where ordinary people would record their everyday life and submit their writing to a depository. Salter uses her research with the letters and diaries in these collections to discuss the intricacy of chronology in the archive and the difficulty of dealing with large quantities of data that span long periods. The extensive collection of Schreiner letters (over 5000) and the diaries in the Mass Observation Project required Salter to determine the best place to begin reading. In the chapter, Salter provides an extensive argument for reading the materials in reverse chronology to help ascertain the impacts of particular events as well as hopefully fill in missing information when letters or diaries are conspicuously silent. Like Tamboukou, Salter urges researchers to be conscious of the importance of the past as well as the present, and provides suggestions for dealing with time in a large collection.

In the fifth chapter, Niamh Moore moves beyond the library by incorporating community archive research. Moore specifically discusses a project called Feminist Webs,¹ broadly defined as a variety of women engaged in "the process of creating an archive of feminist youth work (oral histories as well as materials from girls' work groups from over the last 40–50 years) and (re)using this archive in multiple ways" (129). The chapter details the methods which have been used to establish the Feminist Webs and the process of determining what materials should be included and how these should be cataloged and stored. Feminist Webs, Moore explains, is intended to incorporate and engage people working with the archive collection in a manner that removes the rigidity of academia while also encouraging research and a hands-on method of archiving. The chapter is a useful biographical overview of how Feminist Webs was transformed into an organized archival collection.

The culminating sixth chapter connects the ideas articulated across the individual chapters while simultaneously highlighting vary-

¹See www.feministwebs.com/.

ing approaches by celebrating the diversity within archives and the individuality of researchers. Both time and space (referencing Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*) are crucial elements requiring attention when entering an archive library; however, "time becomes the central organizational axis" (157) through which the researcher must, in meaningful terms, encapsulate the data gathered. The chapter turns to a more holistic approach concerning the archivist and the researcher as each serves in various faculties within Foucault's idea of "the author function" (160). The method by which archival material is organized and stored by the archivist becomes just as significant as the scholar combing through the material: both entities, the authors conclude, are manipulating the texts of time. Returning again to a more theoretical evaluation of archives, the authors expound on various perspectives of archives: as institutions, as projects, and as processes. They conclusively state that there is an ethical sensibility required for archivists and researchers to portray the past as accurately as possible; doing so requires archival procedures that ensure veracity in presenting materials within any archival collection.

The Archive Project is intertwined with four mutually compatible opinions about how best to deal with data being sought as well as data acquired from a collection of material. Moore, Salter, Stanley, and Tamboukou are theoretical as well as practical minded researchers, intent on connecting various sides of the archival discussion. The first and last chapters are written in an academic vein, while each author's individual chapter assumes a personal and engaging approach. This publication is a useful guidebook filled with research wisdom from four scholars who have created impressive projects from diverse archives. The book is also a valuable incorporation and application of archival theory, ranging from Foucault's *The Order of Things* to Walter Benjamin's *The Arcade Projects*. Overall, the publication will prove more useful for people who are interested in the specific archives being discussed. It is safe to conclude that this work would benefit new researchers the most who will profit from the hands-on knowledge of these experienced scholars. There are numerous methods discussed and the smoothly incorporated theoretical material and opinions integrate well with the extensive examination of these feminist archive materials. Regrettably, the price for the hardback book makes the purchase rather impractical for personal use; fortunately, the eBook is more reasonably priced. Routledge publications are of high quality, but the price and a limited applicability of the subject behooves some consideration before purchasing *The Archive Project*.

