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## Review: The Anarchivist: History, Memory, and Archives

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***The Anarchivist: History, Memory, and Archives.*** By Geof Huth (New York: AC Books, 2020. 145 pp.).

Combining prose poetry, memoir, photography, and reflective statements on archival theory and practice, *The Anarchivist* defies easy categorization but will teach and delight archival insiders. Geof Huth engages with contemporary archival issues, offers a view into his own experience and philosophy, and reveals his craftsmanship as a creative writer and visual artist.

This compact, mostly glossy volume is built on nineteen vignettes featuring stylized archival photography which contributes meaningfully to Huth's writing. It is tempting to imagine using *The Anarchivist* as a seminar textbook, but in effect it is an art book, a somewhat decadent statement on practice, an homage to the concept of record, and a necessary refutation of the notion that archivists are historians cloaked a little differently.

The themes Huth explores in his chapters include custodial considerations; preservation and conservation; the distinction between evidence, objects, and records; and the politics of historical memory and its poignant and sometimes worrying silences. Huth's career with the New York State Unified Court System is also a subject of the book, as the visual and literary content primarily examines materials held within the New York County Clerk's Division of Old Records, an affiliated unit (5).

The photographic content of *The Anarchivist* exhibits similar variety to the chapter discussions themselves and is thematic. Perhaps the best way to consider the images is in light of Huth's chapter "Stuff and Non-Stuff," which explores the notion that according to context, purpose, and application "Almost anything . . . can be a record [or] . . . certainly could be records," including "recordlike stuff or non-stuff . . . marginalia . . . found objects . . . poems . . . paint" (44-5). So images of gloves and glove designs by Valerie Fuchs, examples of period handwriting, forms and styles of binding together documents, the processes of document degradation, even accumulations of dust come under Huth's lens and are brought to the reader for consideration as stuff and non-stuff, record or not record.

Despite his explanation of the book's title in the Author's Note, it is difficult not to wonder why Huth positions himself as an "Anarchivist" when in fact most of his views are by now mainstream across the humanities and social sciences and in information science. In fact, this book essentially summarizes the state of the profession after the several decades long, multifaceted paradigm shift which has transformed all affiliated disciplines throughout the world of galleries, museums, libraries, and archives.

The chapters of *The Anarchivist* all begin with an epigraph quotation from an influential thinker in archival and cultural studies—bell hooks, Arlette Farge, and Tom Nesmith to name a few—such that Huth reveals some of his major influences and traces of the path of inquiry which has resulted in the book at hand and which have been collected in the Twitter feed of the podcast *An Archivist's Tale* (5).

Sometimes a slim volume nicely distilled proves more instructive and compelling than a more extensive study, and *The Anarchivist* is such a book. The individual vignettes are superbly instructive toward particular ends and each explores its subject in a unique mood, ranging from the amusing exploration of the stuffed remains of Jumbo the Elephant in “An Archivist’s Tail: Archives as Symbol” to the grim but necessary discussion of near-silenced records of crime and punishment—the punishments seeming largely to be the crimes—in association with the Slave Revolt of 1712 and “The Provision and Omission of Justice in Early New York.”

In his overall method, Huth emerges as an *artchivist* actively reimagining establishment values, more than as any sort of anarchist, archival or otherwise. Where this book—and Huth—really seem to break the rules and defy convention is in the sense of being equally comfortable, proficient, and philosophical discussing and doing both art and archives almost as a single expressive form. In this sense Huth’s work is a radical departure from the usual fare in the literature of archival theory and practice: this book is indeed a unique, challenging, and worthwhile reading experience and thought experiment.

*The Anarchivist* is a complex literary artifact, theoretically refined, visually engaging, a little whimsical, and a record of Geof Huth’s sublime way of seeing things.

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