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REVIEW OF LAURA ENGEL, *WOMEN, PERFORMANCE AND THE MATERIAL OF MEMORY: THE ARCHIVAL TOURIST, 1780-1915* BY LAURA ENGEL (BASINGSTOKE: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2019)

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Laura Engel's book *Women, Performance and the Material of Memory: The Archival Tourist, 1780-1915* is set against the historical backdrop of rapid imperial expansion, political change and the growth of industrialization in Britain and the United States of America. The case studies include Elizabeth Inchbald's pocket diaries; Sir Thomas Lawrence's portraits of the Siddons Sisters; Countess Blessington's use of the trope of magic lanterns in her writing; waxworks and silhouettes by women artists like Madame Tussaud, Isabella Beetham and her daughter Jane Read; and Amelia Watson's photography '...of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation'. These case studies provide us with a sense of a history of the development of image-making apparatuses.¹ However, this book does not provide a comprehensive historical account of the development of image-making apparatuses themselves. Rather, these apparatuses serve as props to trace 'the representations of embodied presence in varied formats', which can then be used to translate that sense of embodiment to the viewers, while pondering over how it resonates with us today.²

Engel adopts tools of material culture analysis and performance studies for archival research by invoking the image of the researcher as an 'archival tourist'. She argues that imagining the researcher's encounter with archival objects through the lens of tourism allows for developing a strategy to envision their role in investigating and recovering the past as an act of scholarly performance. In focusing on traces of embodied presence of women artists in the material of the archives, Engel raises important questions about the need to historicize and recognize the role of the archivist or scholar performing archival research.

Drawing on Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz's call to acknowledge archival practice as a form of performance, she argues that the figure of the 'archival tourist' helps us recuperate the embodied performance and presence of women artists in the material of archives, while being conscious of the need to historicize and recognize the performances of the archivist or the scholar performing archival research. The 'archival tourist', thus, reminds us of the boundaries between

¹ Laura Engel, *Women, Performance and the Material of Memory: The Archival Tourist, 1780-1915* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 15.

² Engel, *The Archival Tourist*, p.15.

the ‘materials of the past and the desires of the present’.³ Through the figure of the ‘archival tourist’, Engel is able to tap into what Jamie Lee suggests is the ‘longing for belonging in the archival body of knowledge’.⁴ This figure of the ‘archival tourist’ allows her to provide a more nuanced understanding of the archival records and their affects. It promotes generative understandings of potentially ‘meaningful progressions of time and the rhythms of everyday embodied existence within the archival material’.⁵

By connecting archival research with performance, Engel’s methodological innovation allows for the archive ‘to represent more than the materials in the box, and potentially make space for beginning to imagine the intangible performances surrounding historical materials’.⁶ Drawing on Griselda Pollock’s concept of the ‘virtual feminist museum’, Engel makes a persuasive case for envisioning the ‘interdisciplinary relationship amongst archival materials’ that helps us ‘imagine them in spatial, theatrical, and visual proximity to one another’.⁷ She argues that this ‘re-enactment of the archives will help account for the embodied traces of the past by providing an accessible, thought-provoking map for the audiences’.⁸ She further invokes Allan Sekula’s concept of the ‘shadow archives’ to highlight how the works of art as archival objects that are analyzed in the book capture the invisibilized labour and forgotten existence of women artists from the eighteenth century.

The book is divided into six chapters and an epilogue. Elizabeth Inchbald’s pocket diaries serve as the book’s first case study, where Engel examines excerpts from these from between 1780 and 1820. She theorizes the significance of pocket diaries as ‘embodied archives’, which is to say that these are objects that hold information ‘that is literally and figuratively tied to the body’.⁹ The pocket diaries contain records of Inchbald’s labour and management of her career as an actress, playwright, and a novelist later in her life. Engel argues that these pocket diaries are a repository of archival evidence that document her thought process. They also give us a glimpse of the unusual and complex ways in which her ‘private and public lives were inextricably linked’.¹⁰ Engel’s attention to the traces of material culture in Inchbald’s daily entries sheds light on the different iterations of her embodied existence through a period of time. Engel juxtaposes these

³ Engel, *The Archival Tourist*, p.11.

⁴ Jamie A. Lee, ‘Be/longing in the Archival Body: Eros and the “Endearing” Value of Material Lives’, *Archival Science*, vol. 16, issue 1(2016), 33-51, (p. 33).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p.3.

⁷ Ibid, p.12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p.16.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.33.

pocketbooks as embodied archives with Sir Thomas Lawrence's portraits and sketches of Inchbald, to connect her intangible image in the diary to 'the tangible object of her portraits'.¹¹ This enables Engel to stage a cross-temporal re-enactment where, for a moment, 'the past reaches forward to the present'.¹² Sir Thomas Lawrence and his art also provide a link to the second and third case studies involving the Siddons Sisters and Margaret, the Countess of Blessington.

The second case study uses intimate letters and portraits to re-enact the complicated love affairs between Sir Thomas Lawrence and the daughters of the actress Sarah Siddons, Maria and Sally. Engel has also explored the romance captured in these intimate letters in a journal article titled *The Secret Life of the Archives: Sally Siddons, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and the Material of Memory*. In the article, Engel uses the language of performance to study an extraordinary letter from Sally Siddons to Sir Thomas Lawrence. The letter in question mentions two different pieces of jewelry: 'a ring in the shape of a lover's knot that she purchased for Lawrence' and a locket containing Lawrence and her mother's strands of hair, 'which he apparently commented on during a clandestine encounter' alongside a portrait of her by the latter from 1797.¹³ This extraordinary letter invokes her desire and affection for him. As an archival tourist herself, Engel uses this juxtaposition to trace Sally Siddons' 'embodied performance of writing'.¹⁴ The chapter in the book, however, uses a wider range of narrative and visual materials surrounding the two sisters to capture the unique dynamic between the tangible and the intangible. Engel uses Rebecca Schneider's concept of 'performing remains' to locate the traces of embodiment that were once present.¹⁵ She also uses Hanneke Grootenboer's theory of 'intimate vision' to argue that 'the visual, narrative, and theatrical archival material produced from the intimate encounters between Lawrence, Sally, and Maria Siddons create an unusual circumstance where we might be able to trace trajectories of desire through gazes captured in tangible forms'.¹⁶

Continuing with her exploration of the connection between tangible archival record and the intangible traces of embodied existence, Engel turns to Margaret, Countess of Blessington's work *The Magic Lantern; or Sketches of Scenes in the Metropolis* and a range of objects relating to her life, as her third case study. In this chapter, she uses the theatrical event of the 'auction' to theorize the ways in which 'objects act as souvenirs and as conduits to embodied experience'.¹⁷ In

¹¹ Ibid, p.33.

¹² Ibid, p.38.

¹³ Laura Engel, 'The Secret Life of Archives: Sally Siddons, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and The Material of Memory', *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, vol. 4, Issue 1, Article 2 (2014), 1-17 (p. 7).

¹⁴ Engel, *The Archival Tourist*, p.13.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.53.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.58.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.17.

order to flesh out her methodological tool further, Engel combines a reading of the scene of auction from Blessington's *The Magic Lantern* with a journal account by an 'American Traveller' recording his experience of the auction of Gore House (the countess's home). Using the trope of the magic lantern and its ability to generate affective responses by conjuring and projecting scenes of past life, she compares the narrativization of an imagined auction scene in Blessington's book with that of an actual event to ponder the connections between tourism, auction, souvenirs, archives and ghosts.¹⁸ She argues that, much like tourism, auctions offer a semblance of lived life through the artefacts displayed. It allows the tourist to touch a slice of the intangible lived life captured in those souvenirs purchased at the auction.

Engel carries the notion of affective experiences of archival materials further into her fourth case study, where she studies the silhouette work of Isabella Beetham and Jane Read alongside the waxworks of Madame Tussaud. In her analysis of the silhouette art by Beetham and her daughter Read, she argues that viewing it 'connects the observer directly to the moment of the object's creation'.¹⁹ Despite their perceived incompleteness and haunting presence, the tiny details in the works of silhouette evoke 'a material sense of the sitter's presence and embodied reality'.²⁰ Engel further carries her analysis of the 'technologies of presence' to her study of the waxwork of Marie Tussaud.²¹ This allows her to explore the ways in which these meticulously crafted three-dimensional waxworks capture the immediacy echoed by the silhouette, while at the same time 'creating the uncanny experience of capturing something embodied for the viewer'.²²

Engel's use of the concept of 'technologies of presence' shows through her discussion, in the next chapter, of Amelia Watson's post-Reconstruction photographs from her tours to the American plantation, where the actress Fanny Kemble wrote her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*. In this chapter, Engel explores the very tangible presence of former slaves alongside the equally tangible absence of Kemble herself. She uses the term 'plantation tourism' to describe Watson's visits. Commenting on the nature of voyeurism that shines through Watson's tourist scrapbook, Engel argues that the latter's encounters with the former slaves in the plantation echo 'the tourist's quest for obtaining and appropriating foreign goods and information'.²³ In discussing the different photographs and notes from Watson's interviews with descendants from the plantation on St. Simons Island (off the coast of Georgia), she reveals the

¹⁸ Ibid, p.17.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.18.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p.108.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, p.142-3.

continued presence of ‘shadows of the past’, ridden with the legacies of transatlantic slavery in the landscape of post-Reconstruction America.²⁴ The concept of the ‘shadow archive’ also appears in her analysis of how unacknowledged African American servants appear in one of the last photographs of her Chicora Wood album. This further bolsters her argument about the continuing presence of the colonial legacies of transatlantic slavery into the contemporary moment.

The epilogue looks at the interactive exhibit of a day in the life of Empress Elisabeth of Austria – ‘The Sisi Experience’ – at Madame Tussaud’s in Vienna. Engel also analyses a major exhibition of American silhouettes – *Black Out* – at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Through a discussion of ‘The Sisi Experience’ alongside an analysis of *Black Out*, Engel returns to the central concern of ‘what it means to translate embodied encounters across time periods’ and the many ways in which identities either materialize or remain invisible in these archival objects.²⁵ Through her well-crafted analysis of the different case studies, Engel provides new creative strategies for archival researchers to be mindful of the ‘presence (or absence)’ of the otherwise marginal women authors, composers, artists, actresses, photographers and even more marginal exoticised and racialised household help/servants. The book thus adopts interdisciplinary strategies to account for and rectify the arduous relationship that women artists have had with the archives. However, it is worth mentioning that Engel also makes a point of raising important questions about the entanglements of colonialism and slavery, rendered visible through the vignettes of the ‘shadow archive’ in her analysis of the presence of unacknowledged African American servants in Watson’s album of Fanny Kemble’s Georgian Plantation. While helping us locate the presence of these marginal women in a range of archival objects, Engel’s strategy also makes us mindful of the myriad ways in which their presence can be ‘mediated through diverse forms and translated through alternative formats’.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid, p.149.

²⁵ Ibid, p.19.

²⁶ Ibid, p.159.

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