themes explored more fully in the book. Like all good histories, the exhibition urged visitors to use their imagination to recreate another world, in this case Weill's of avant-garde art, which included not only the usual suspects but also those outside the mainstream. As such, the exhibition and its accompanying book, in giving us a glimpse into Weill's worldview and her fierce backing of emerging artists, offered a much more diverse representation of the Parisian art world of the first half of the twentieth century than is usually found in texts and exhibitions about the period.

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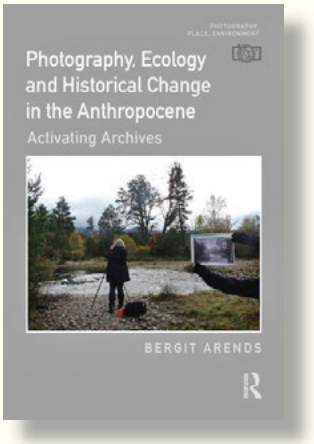
1 Sylvie Patry et al., "Paul Durand-Ruel, an 'Unrepentant Risk-Taker,'" in *Discovering the Impressionists: Paul Durand-Ruel and the New Painting*, exh. cat., ed. Sylvie Patry (London: National Gallery, 2015), 14.
2 Hans Albert Peters, "Alfred Flechtheim zu Ehren," in *Alfred Flechtheim: Sammler. Kunsthändler. Verleger*, exh. cat., ed. Hans Albert Peters (Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, 1987), 9: "Auch Kunsthändler machen Kunstgeschichte..."
3 Berthe Weill, *Pow! Right in the Eye! Thirty Years Behind the Scenes of Modern French Painting*, ed. Lynn Gumpert, trans. William Rodarmor (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 148. Weill's memoir was originally published as *Pan!... dans l'oeil...ou trente ans dans les coulisses de la peinture contemporaine 1900–1930* (Paris: Librairie Lipschutz, 1933).
4 Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Manchester University Press, 1995).
5 Ezra Mendelsohn, "Should We Take Notice of Berthe Weill? Reflections on the Domain of Jewish History," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 1 (1994): 22–39.
6 Marianne Le Morvan, *Berthe Weill, 1865-1951: La petite galeriste des grands artistes* (Paris: L'Écarlate, 2011). See also Le Morvan's recent *Berthe Weill, Marchande et mécène de l'art moderne (1865-1951): Biographie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2025).
7 Weill, *Pow! Right in the Eye!*, 37.



Bergit Arends
Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene: Activating Archives

Routledge, 2024
190pp., 8 colour & 31 b/w illus.
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Karla McManus

In the last five years, multiple exhibitions, monographs, and edited collections have addressed the topic of ecocritical approaches to photography and art history, and Bergit Arends's *Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene* contributes to this growing area of research.[1] In this book, Arends addresses how contemporary art photography has helped to visualize the Anthropocene, defined broadly as the current period in which human-driven forces have propelled major changes to the climate and large-scale alterations to the natural world. The fifth book in the "Photography, Place, Environment" series from Routledge, Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene, this book uses artistic case studies to explore the relationship between contemporary photographic practices and historical archives that address the environment. Arends argues that photographers are drawn to revisiting historical records of the environment (or "archives," as she calls them), both photographic and written, to make ecological ideas of the past relevant by placing them in dialogue with contemporary thinking. Arends sees these artistic responses as "re-performances" of archives, which she roots in a series of epistemological strategies used by artists for developing

contemporary meaning through reflections on the past and objects from the past. This idea is explored through four case studies.

In her introductory first chapter, Arends outlines key points in the development of ecological awareness in the arts and sciences as well the concept of the Anthropocene. While a general audience might find this introduction helpful, most readers of this very specialized book will, I suspect, already be familiar with these broad strokes in the development of ecocritical thinking. Arends then goes on to define her main theoretical contribution, the concept of "re-performance." Re-performance is critical to Arends's project, and the term is presented in each chapter as a way to discuss the use of archives by contemporary artists as a form of embodied re-creation. She defines re-performances as "engagements with and interpretation of material archival objects as well as performative and processual actions, including walking, seeing, using equipment and technology, engaging in dialogues with collaborators and publics and stillness" (30). Re-performance does not claim authenticity. Instead, it suggests the deliberate and self-reflexive use of historical records to make something new through a subjective and selective appropriative process. As a result, this concept is steeped in the language of contemporary art theory rather than environmental sciences or even photographic or archival studies. This theoretical approach is Arends's most interesting contribution and offers readers an innovative way to discuss artistic engagements with archival and historical records.

Chapter Two, the first of the four case studies, takes a look at the thesis project of Vietnamese photographer Nguyen the Thuc. A former international student at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig in the 1970s, the Thuc documented the erasure of a local village near Leipzig, which was demolished to make way for an industrial-sized brown-coal mine. In 2014, this project was contrasted with the work of Leipzig photographer Christiane Eisler in an exhibition entitled *Freundschaftsantiqua*, which highlighted social documentary narrativity and offered a glimpse into changes in social documentary photography since the 1970s. This case study is an example of a curator-driven reappraisal of a historical project, as the show was part of a series of exhibitions to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Academy of Fine Arts. The two projects were displayed together to offer insight into the region through the different approaches and experiences of two very different photographers. Yet the projects were linked by Eisler's revisiting of the same landscape the Thuc had once photographed. Disappointingly, for Arends, she was unable to contact Nguyen the Thuc or discover his whereabouts, which would have been valuable to the discussion of what inspired his project as an international student in a politically complex time and place. This chapter explores the value of reappraising historical images—in Arends's terms, an "archive"—in a very traditional sense, through a form of curatorial revisiting of a past project.

Perhaps the most complex—dare I say problematic—thread in this book is the very broad and uneven approach that Arends takes to the concept of the archive. Arends's definition of the archive is rooted in an ephemeral and conceptual framing rather than in physical materials. She defines the archive as "both organizational space and as metaphor for memory and epistemic productivity" (6). To Arends, the archive can be a historical repository, loosely understood, institutionally collected or not, that is undisciplined and human-made. It can also be the earth itself, as a kind of repository of the environment, and the human body, made up of memories and processes. Yet there is a tension in her text between the practical, material objects that make up the archive, which she clearly refers to and relies on for her case studies, and the diffuse Foucauldian conception of the disciplinary archive that shapes social and epistemological relations. For example, Arends's understanding of the archive includes written accounts by historical figures, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, which focus on Mark Dion's *A Yard of Jungle,* performed and documented for the Arte Amazonas exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio in 1992, and Joy Gregory and Philip Miller's collaboration on the multimedia installation *A Little Breeze* from 2021. In both these cases studies, the archives are not discussed solely as traditional holdings of an institution or of a particular society. Rather, they are described as published written accounts by, respectively, early twentieth-century field biologist and photographer William Beebe, who worked in the Amazon, and seventeenth-century medical doctor and naturalist Sir Hans Sloane, who was employed in colonial Jamaica. While Arends might loosely call these primary published sources "archives," I would not categorize them in

this way because, as publications, they went through a different process of creation and circulation than individual objects of history that would be found in an archive. Did the artists in question actually visit the archives of William Beebe and Hans Sloane to gain firsthand inspiration from the unpublished materials of these men? This is somewhat unclear, and so we are made aware through this omission that Arends's concept of the archive is, to a certain degree, subjective and haphazard. Further, this question doesn't seem to be important to Arends, who instead focuses on how the artists used the published accounts to explore the history of colonial and imperialist environmental thinking. Arends herself includes references to archival materials she consulted (she divides her bibliography into archival and published sources), but these are limited to museum and gallery archives that she accessed for her analysis, not the original source materials that inspired the artists. As a result, a conflict arises: archive are valorized conceptually but minimized materially and methodologically.

The one exceptional case is in Chapter Three, which explores a project that Arends herself helped to instigate and most clearly articulates the way that she is using the idea of re-performing the archive. As curator of contemporary art in London's Natural History Museum, she worked on a collaboration between photographer Chrystel Lebas and botanist Mark Spencer, who considered the Sir Edward James Salisbury Collection of glass negatives and photographs in the British and Irish Herbarium. According to Arends, each specialist brought their own insight and background to reconsider the glass plates, which were made in Scotland during the first third of the twentieth century, and to revisit the landscape where the photographs were first made. The project was later exhibited as *The Sir Edward James Salisbury Archive Re-visited: Observing Environmental Change in British Landscape* (2011–ongoing). Arends was closely involved in the project and had the opportunity to participate both in fieldwork and archival study. Her in-depth understanding makes this chapter the richest in the book for its consideration of how re-photography can produce important insight into a place and its history. It should be noted, however, that Arends doesn't refer to this project as re-photography, a term that is commonly used in the sciences and in photographic circles to refer to the re-photographing of a place from the same vantage point at a later time. Instead, she prefers the terms re-visit and re-perform. Arends may have chosen these terms because Lebas was not able to always identify the exact location of the original photographs. More importantly, Arends seems intent on positioning Lebas's photographic practice in the world of art, not science.

Arends's *Photography, Ecology and Historical Change in the Anthropocene* is an engaging but uneven account of a series of contemporary art projects that explore the human relationship to the earth through the diffuse concept of archival containment. While presented as a study focused on photography, many of the examples discussed, I would argue, are essentially socially engaged artworks, especially the work of Mark Dion and, to some extent, the work of Joy Gregory and Phillip Miller. Arends's sources and references are broad and varied, including much recent work from the environmental humanities and cultural geography, but she does not heavily engage with photo studies scholarship, which would have offered rich material related the idea of the archive as artistic inspiration.[2] It should also be noted that the poor quality and small size of the book's reproductions were not helpful in illustrating the examples being discussed. From a methodological perspective, Arends's most important contribution is the idea of "re-performance." This concept works best in her case studies that explore the idea of the artistic appropriation of historical ideas to re-perform past ideologies for new eyes.

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1 Recent publications include: Siobhan Angus, *Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography* (Duke University Press, 2024); Conohar Scott's *Photography and Environmental Activism: Visualising the Struggle Against Industrial Pollution* (Routledge, 2022), from the same series that includes Arends's book. Even more recently, see Michelle Henning's *A Dirty History of Photography: Chemistry, Fog, and Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 2025).

2 Some recent examples of photo studies that address the importance of the archive include: Sara Callahan, *Art + Archive: Understanding the Archival Turn in Contemporary Art* (Manchester University Press, 2022); Jane Birkin, *Archive, Photography and the Language of Administration* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021); and Aileen Blaney and Chinar Shar *Photography in India: From Archives to Contemporary Practice* (Routledge, 2020).