



When I was invited to contribute something made with my archive to The Archive Hotel, I was wondering what this supposed archive of mine was or looked like. I felt accused of possessing something, that I didn't know I possessed. I have to confess that the word 'archive' confuses me a lot. It's one of those words that seem so simple, yet is hard to define. Or at least for me. What I do know is that the word triggers different stories which formulate a context in which to think about the idea of an archive:

1. Freud wrote in a note in 1925 about his distrust of memory. He used the metaphors pen & paper and chalk & slate. The first one enabled him to externalize his memory. It thus became untouchable for the deformations that it would endure in his memory.

The only problem was that the sheet of paper could become full and it was impossible to erase the ink once it was on the paper. On the other hand, he saw chalk and slate. They were also able to externalize memory, but they differed fundamentally on two levels. The slate could be used again and again, it was limitless in use. However, once the slate was full, an old note had to be erased for each new one.

Freud talks about externalizing memories into an object. About translating an experience or observation into something which is separate from it. This object has a certain relation to what it depicts or contains, but nevertheless follows its own rules and laws.

2. In 1968 the Polish professor and archeologist Kazimierz Michalowski was head of the Nubian Plan. This plan was initiated as a reaction to the building of the Aswad-

am. The Nasser Lake threatened to make the Ramses II temple of Aboe Simbel disappear underwater. The plan consisted of moving the temple, which was sculpted out of a mountain, 200 meters further. There they built two giant hollow concrete domes that were covered with natural stone. The temple itself was cut into blocks and rebuilt in this new mountain. The entire operation took 10 years to complete and was the first achievement of Unesco World Heritage.

The story of Aboe Simbel starts with an object. It is the object which is already the externalized form of a memory of Ramses II, like with Freud's note on memory. But in this case the object itself is recontextualized. It's rescued from (natural) deformations. A memory is externalized into an object, then this object is rescaled and rearranged and by doing this contains a new memory.

3. On 9 March 1886 the first drawing of a sunspot was made by Eugene Spee in the Royal Observatory of Belgium. To this day, these drawings are still made by hand on a daily basis. Although various cameras and satellites are capable of observing these phenomena, this habit is still adhered to. Its scientific value lies not so much in its accuracy, but in the fact that it is the longest continuous series produced by the Observatory.

What I like about this story is how the drawings of the sunspots were a way to study and analyse a phenomenon. But at a certain point they became objects that were being studied as objects themselves, rather than for the observations they contained.

4. In Karl Ove Knausgard's book 'Father' the following passage appears: "Understanding the world requires you to keep a certain distance from it. Things that are too small to see with the naked eye, such as molecules and atoms, we magnify. Things that are too large, such as cloud

formations, river deltas, constellations, we reduce. At length we bring it within the scope of our senses and we stabilize it with fixer. When it has been fixed we call it knowledge. Throughout our childhood and teenage years we strive to attain the correct distance from objects and phenomena."

I think Knausgard's passage says a lot about what happened in Aboe Simbel. Not only was there a desire to keep the temple, but also to rescale it in a certain way. The division of the temple into blocks made it manageable, but also introduced a human scale.

5. The Royal Belgian Observatory has one of the most beautiful archives I know. In addition to the hand-drawn sunspots, there is also an archive of starry skies. Drawings of constellations that no longer exist, constellations that now look different or of the different polar stars that have been observed in the past.

This archive tries to fix or capture something. And in the act of doing this, the thing that is being archived disappears. The archive becomes a metaphor. It becomes an object that shapes a desire. A desire to understand, cherish or preserve.

But I would like to end with an excerpt of Lucretius, written in the first century BCE, stating: "Remember that the whole universe has no bottom and thus no place where the ultimate particles could settle; (...) the ultimate particles are allowed no rest anywhere in the unfathomable void."

I think an archive may have the ambition to be this bottom, an ultimate container to give objects and observations a place to rest.

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