

Conceptualizing 21st-Century Archives. ANNE J. GILLILAND. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2014. xii, 322 pp. ISBN 978-1-931666-68-8.

Conceptualizing 21st-Century Archives is a fascinating and unusual book that distills more than two decades of archival education and research by the author, Anne J. Gilliland. Partly a history, partly a conceptual framework, partly a synopsis of practice and standards, the book acts as a textbook for graduate students, a means by which mid-career archivists can update themselves, and a vehicle for opening up a conversation about archival values with other communities of practice, especially in the digital domain.

Anne Gilliland is well known internationally as one of our leading archival educators. She is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles's Department of Information Studies, where she is also the director of the Center for Information as Evidence and of the MLIS Specialization in Archival Studies program. One of her enduring legacies is the Archival Education and Research Initiative (AERI), funded over several years by the Institute of Museum and Library Services to support doctoral development in archival studies, including doctoral scholarships across a consortium of universities in the United States. The annual summer school (now in its seventh year) attracts more than 100 archival doctoral students and faculty and is known around the world as a powerhouse of archival thinking. Some of that innovation and breadth of research by a new generation of scholars, combined with the wisdom and depth of conceptual thinking of an established scholar, is reflected in this book.

The particular impetus for the book comes from the digital turn and the myriad consequences of that for archivists, records managers, scholars, and institutions. Gilliland seeks to examine the intersection between archives and technology over time in order to understand the recent position and provide some pointers for the future. The book is structured around thematic areas in archival science, some more focused on accounting for the historical developments and some describing current preoccupations. It is not a straightforward history, but sets its reflection on concepts and concerns into a historical framework.

The introduction establishes a broad frame of reference for the book, including the traditional archival paradigm, technological developments that have fundamentally changed society and the way people live, and the reimagining of the community and the personal in an increasingly global world. There is a positive bias toward participative and consultative approaches for archives and the significance of recognizing multiple epistemologies and ontologies. Gilliland notes, for example, that supposed international records management and archival description standards are in fact nothing of the sort, but are "strongly rooted" in a small number of European, North American, and Australian historical contexts. She does not ask us to abandon

archival ideas, but rather to reconceptualize them to take account of a wider range of realities. This chapter provides a nice overview of archival research and conceptual developments in community archives in particular, leading to the metaconstruct of the “archival multiverse,” which enables us to move from a single cultural paradigm to one with multiple narratives.

Chapter 2 seeks to reframe the archival in a digital age, and examines issues around archives and power, pluralism and activism, human rights, and the significance of the archives and archivists in these debates. Does the “digital” archive affect these concerns, and how does the loss of materiality change archival engagement? Gilliland shows some shifts in archival activities since the 1970s and suggests that they are linked to the digital turn: clearly this is a critical factor, and it results in the need for archives to find more effective ways to redefine and redesign their practices and priorities.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a historical overview of archival arrangement and description, including the early-20th-century links with the documentation movement and the divergence from library practices. These chapters are essentially about the archival history of the USA, although, as Gilliland discusses, the early archival pioneers, Leland and Jameson, looked to continental Europe for inspiration. The seminal International Congress of Libraries and Archives in Brussels in 1910 and the foundational *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* by the Dutch trio Muller, Feith, and Fruin¹ provided important starting places for American archival practice. For a long period in the mid-20th century, the USA evolved its own archival and bibliographic practices. Chapter 4 traces the history of descriptive standards and automation, including MARC AMC, *APPM*, and EAD, bringing us to the more international approaches of the early 21st century and the need to be more flexible and less bureaucratic. Chapter 5 follows up this history with an exploration of where we are now, in a networked world of search, tagging, and metadata. How should descriptive metadata be created and captured, and should archivists still be concerned to represent context in a fractured and granular world of digital information? Are users interested in searching for a specific bit of data, or do some still want to research using archives in context? How, in an era of austerity, can archivists do more processing with fewer resources? These are all theoretical issues, which Gilliland usefully highlights, although in many cases the practical consequences and answers are not yet clear to the profession.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide a parallel account of the historical developments in computing and machine-readable records and research in electronic

1 S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, 2nd ed., trans. Arthur H. Leavitt, with new introductions by Peter Horsman, Eric Ketelaar, Theo Thomassen, and Marjorie Rabe Barritt (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003).

records management, which set the frame for Chapter 8. Chapter 6 describes early computing applications in archives, the development of “electronic records archivists,” who worked initially with social science data and went on to consider the need to capture evidential records, that is the move from “data-centric” to “record-centric” approaches. The chapter concludes with an analysis of some of the issues around the digital transition, such as managing sensitive records, accountability in conflict situations and the use of technology to annotate records digitally, especially by “citizen archivists.” Chapter 7 provides a succinct history of research projects in electronic records management from the early 1990s onwards, and has several useful tables that summarize the projects and their outcomes. Conceptual concerns that arose in this field of research were many and various (problematizing the record, moving away from custody, functional requirements, authenticity of digital records, investigating metadata), which illustrates how dynamic a field it was. Chapter 8 sets out the current and emergent areas of research that build on the electronic records research. Digital archaeology and digital forensics, personal digital archives and social media, cloud and mobile computing are all covered, but, as Gilliland points out, there are still gaps in key areas such as digital recordkeeping policy and economic cost modelling.

Chapter 9 presents a useful overview of recordkeeping models, which I would hope is extremely familiar to archivists, but it is needed here for the readership outside the archival domain. Chapter 10 draws together some threads with an eye on the future: born digital, data archives, digital repositories, digital preservation to digital curation, and a complex future of “multi-professional, community and individual stewardship.” The chapter considers some of the many interactions between disciplines, which are needed to deal with this complexity and the shifting and disappearing boundaries between communities of practice. What do archives look like without physical boundaries – do they remain individual institutions? How should archivists interact with others, including digital humanists and digital curators? The book concludes with a reminder that the central focus is on archives and archival ideas and the shifts in archival discourse, rather than on technology and the digital, and that the archival paradigm is increasingly diverse. Archivists therefore need to approach their work conceptually and innovatively in order to thrive in a “post-physical world.” At the end of the book, Gilliland returns to that archival touchstone, evidence, as the indissoluble essence of the record and restates this critical archival value.

Although the book claims to be “glocal,” and in some ways universal or international, it is inevitably framed by US archival history and practices more than those of another country; as it is published by the Society of American Archivists, this is both inevitable and appropriate. This limits its value to those from other countries and cultures, perhaps, but it also illustrates the difficulty of being truly global and the necessity of being rooted in

individual communities in order to respond to their particular nuances and characteristics. Most of all, I hope that this book is read not only by archivists but also by those many other communities of practice, including digital preservation and curation, with whom we need to find common approaches and shared conceptual understandings.

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