

Recordkeeping informatics for a networked age, by Frank Upward, Barbara Reed, Gillian Oliver and Joanne Evans, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Victoria, 2018, xxv, 288 pp., AU\$49.95 (paperback), 978-1-925495-88-1; free e-book, 978-1-925495-90-4

Information-philosopher Luciano Floridi once coined the neologism *OnLife* to characterise our current way of life in what he calls a hyperconnected reality. In his attempts to understand the impact exercised by ICTs he stresses the importance of concepts, since concepts mediate our understanding of the realities surrounding us. When reality changes dramatically as it is happening nowadays, 'we are conceptually wrong-footed' and we need to update our conceptual framework.¹ This is exactly where the book *Recordkeeping Informatics* brings us. In the world of 'nanosecond archiving', 'cascading inscriptions', 'cyber-physicality', 'Internet of Things', and 'cloud-computing', motion is the only constant. These are some of the keywords the authors Upward, Reed, Oliver and Evans use to characterise today's information world. This ever-moving data world dominated by ICTs leads to many legal, ethical and political challenges and dilemmas which are investigated and discussed on many platforms. A generic question which is behind almost all of these issues is how authoritative and evidential information can be secured in this chaotic networked information age. There comes in recordkeeping.

The four authors, all from Monash, have studied and discussed this issue for the past ten years. Last year their long-awaited book was released after they had already published various interim results of their project in 2009, 2010 and 2013.² The book describes and analyses the major challenges posed by the technical developments that enable us to record instantly and infinitely even the smallest details of man, machine and nature (referred to in the book as 'cascading inscriptions' and 'nano-second archiving') which have a disruptive effect on the dominant idea of archiving based on managing records as well-arranged and properly described end products. The authors show why there is an urgent need for a new disciplinary basis for archiving in the 21st century, since the networked age challenges the dominant contemporary working methods of the profession. The underlying question the authors address is what meaningful archiving in such a dynamic networked data-world could look like. To this end, they unfold a new disciplinary basis that they have named with the term 'recordkeeping informatics'. In the preface, the authors invite readers to shape the archival future with the help of their ideas.

It is an intriguing and inspiring book, but at the same time not always easy to understand. I am enthusiastic about many of the ideas and perspectives the authors sketch, but also critical about the way they chose to write it down in a sometimes unnecessarily complicated way. But it is definitely a must-read for everyone who is concerned with the future of archiving. It deals with many different aspects of changing information reality, is based on important (sociological) theories, and is very critical of the prevailing perspective of records management. The authors despise the still dominant 'records mind' which focuses on the management of records as end products and which turns archivists in meaningless janitors. They promote the 'recordkeeping mind (that) puts the process ahead of the thing' (p. 57). In short, the book stimulates critical disciplinary self-reflection and offers many ideas (not ready for use recipes) for meaningful fulfilment of recordkeeping in today's dynamic information world.

Clearly understanding the mindset of the authors requires quite some prior knowledge, such as the meaning of informatics. Informatics is the discipline that deals with the question in which ways information is represented, how information is processed by people, organisations, machines and systems and how information is exchanged. Informatics thus covers a broad field and can be approached from many different angles. In this book, informatics is studied from the perspective of recordkeeping, the discipline that deals with how a person,

organisation or society can access information for accountability and evidence. Recordkeeping is therefore much more than 'end product' management. Recordkeeping is primarily concerned with the question of which information is required for accountability and evidence, and how systems, activities and processes should be organised and managed to protect and operationalise these values.

In the fluid, distributed and networked information world of the Internet of Things, cascading inscriptions, cloud computing and big data, it is extremely relevant to develop adequate and ethical forms of authoritative information resource management to prevent that the productive power of ICTs induces chaos and to secure the function of records as being evidence. Recordkeeping informatics provides a methodical framework for authoritative information resource management. The presented framework consists of two building blocks and three facets of analysis which are inextricably bound up with each other. Recordkeeping informatics is based on continuum thinking (paying attention to the converging whole, future-oriented use and interests of different stakeholders) and metadata (which is the vehicle for communication in and beyond organisations), while the question of how the building blocks are designed depends on the results of a coherent analysis of three facets: the bundles of activities (business processes), information culture and the requirements for the accessibility of proof of action. Another important feature of the framework is that it will help build what the authors have named a 'recordkeeping single mind'. A fragmented approach to various recordkeeping functions, for instance resulting in different access frameworks, leads to further marginalisation of the discipline and profession. As the authors have written elsewhere, '[t]he recordkeeping single mind will put the creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation of recorded information about our actions ahead of the record or the archive as an area of study'.³

The authors lean heavily upon the concepts and ideas of the British sociologist Giddens and on the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Simply put, the ANT provides insight into how people, objects and technology interact. The ANT shows how objects (such as the TV, computer, smartphone) influence people's behaviour. These interactions influence the way in which organisations, groups and societies (social systems) can survive in space-time. Sociologist Giddens has emphasised that control over storage and use of information is a crucial factor in perpetuating social relationships and social structures in space-time. A key issue in our hyperconnected networked age of cascading inscriptions is to find out how 'authoritative information resource management' can be structured and organised. Giddens has stressed that information is not only an allocative resource but also an authoritative resource, which refers to the power to organise relationships between people and organisations. One of the main messages of the book is that authoritative information resource management is a crucial condition for keeping social structures in both time and space. That social structures and information are tightly connected is evident if we just keep in mind the undermining role that fake news can play in a society. Simply relying on filter technology (retrieval) is not enough to separate data sludge from the good oil. Proactive methods, such as recordkeeping informatics, are essential to be able to build systems with which 'authoritative information resources' are available. They are essential to maintaining meaningful social structures.


Unfortunately, the book has a number of major shortcomings which, in my opinion, would have been avoidable with some extra efforts. No matter how valuable the ideas are, the form in which they are presented is not very inviting for readers to perform the 'archival dance' of the 21st century, as the authors like to call it. The terminology they use will scare many readers, especially since it often remains vague what the authors mean by the (for most readers) probably many unfamiliar terms and concepts. And this is regrettable and was

avoidable, since the book builds on the authors' previous publications, which are often much clearer in explaining the terminology and concepts. A list of the terminology they use with a clear reference to the articles in which these were discussed would not only have been helpful, but is indispensable. Another disappointing deficiency, in particular for a scholarly publication, is the poor annotation, the lack of an index and the absence of a comprehensive list of references. Then it would for instance also have been immediately clear that the literature used, with a few exceptions, predominantly dates from before 2015, which is a bit remarkable for such an advanced topic.

To conclude, in terms of content it is a valuable book which should have been given more attention before it was sent to the publishing house. This missed opportunity is likely to have a negative effect on reception and immediate impact of these important ideas among practitioners. Nevertheless, the book deserves to be read and the ideas to be digested and translated into practical solutions.

Notes

1. Luciano Floridi (ed.), *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era*, Springer, Dordrecht and London, 2015, p. 3.
2. Gillian Oliver, Joanne Evans, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward, 'Achieving the Right Balance: Recordkeeping Informatics', Part 1, *IQ: The RIM Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2009, pp. 18–22; Part 2, *IQ: The RIM Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2010, pp. 42–45; 'Recordkeeping Informatics: Re-figuring a Discipline in Crisis with a Single Minded Approach', *Records Management Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2013, pp. 37–50.
3. Gillian Oliver, Barbara Reed, Frank Upward, and Joanne Evans, 'A Background Paper for a Conversation on a Single-Minded Approach to Recordkeeping Informatics', International Council on Archives Congress, Brisbane, 20–24 August 2012, available at <<http://ica2012.ica.org/files/pdf/Full%20papers%20upload/ica12Final00200.pdf>>, accessed 11 September 2019.

Charles Jeurgens
 University of Amsterdam
 K.J.P.F.M.Jeurgens@uva.nl

© 2019 Charles Jeurgens
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2019.1668993>



A history of archival practice, 1st Edition, by Paul Delsalle, translated and revised by Margaret Procter, Routledge, New York, 2017, 246 pages + 27 B/W Illus., AU\$210 (hardback), ISBN:9781317187875

We are all familiar with the paper deluge of the late 20th century, but did you know that in the 18th century there was a similar spike in the creation of paper (vs. parchment) records and that it was caused by the mass uptake of underwear? Or that Jean Nicot, famous for introducing tobacco to France, was keeper of the archives of the French court? These gems (p. 75 and p. 132), and many others besides, can be discovered in *A History of Archival Practice*, Margaret Procter's revised and translated edition of Paul Delsalle's 1998 classic, *Une histoire de l'archivistique*.