Performing Digital – Multiple Perspectives on a Living Archive, edited by David Carlin and Laurene Vaughan, Ashgate, Farnham, 2015, xx + 253 pp., GBP£67.99 (hardback) ISBN 978 1 472429 72 8

The 'living archive' seems like an archivist's holy grail, implying an archive that will evolve, adapt and endure over time. Recently a team in Melbourne built the Circus Oz Living Archive, an online archive that started with the video recordings of 30 years of performances by this seminal Australian performing arts company. This book tells the story of building the Living Archive.

Organised in three parts, *Performing Digital* explains the nuts and bolts of technically making the archive, first setting those decisions in a wider context about the meaning and experience of digital archives, followed up with reflections on using the Living Archive and other digital archives.

The Living Archive is important for archivists as an example of a participatory archive. User contributions are treated as records on an equal footing with the recordings of performances. This demonstrates an equal commitment by the designers to both users and authentic reliable records, a commitment that is followed through in the structure of the online database. Visitors to the website can sign in and contribute their recollections and reflections using the prompts 'I wasn't there but' or 'I was there and'. So in this way, the Living Archive delivers on its promise as a participatory archive. It will continue to take in new recollections from past performers and audiences, and, over time, there will also be recollections and reflections from users of the archive.

There are some affirmations and provocations here for archivists.

Projects like this that invoke 'the archive' seldom include archivists, although interestingly, co-lead David Carlin describes the project as inflected 'with tactical forays into the knowledge domains of adjacent fields', including archival studies (p. 233). But the list of experts on the project does not include an archivist.

So, now to turn to what *Performing Digital* affirms and provokes.

Metadata and user autonomy

It affirms that we can never have too much metadata and that we do need that metadata to be verifiable. Visitors to the database see recollections by others as equally valuable as the video because the metadata provides enough context about the recollection for visitors to decide for themselves what weight to give it.

Archives out of context

In the first section of background and theory, Melbourne media scholar Adrian Miles contributes a chapter that works through properties of 'the archive'. A key idea in this essay is that users may not want the burden of context. While efforts with metadata are critical in the Living Archive, Miles makes the point that users may not want contextual information along with their archival record, preferring instead to use it totally out of context, to circulate in unforeseen and unfettered ways. Miles talks about the strength of the archive as 'a flat field' where many relations are possible (p. 47).

The Living Archive is an example of a participatory archive

Archivists know that participation is important. In articles from 2008 and 2015, Isto Huvila surveyed how archivists have made this postmodern shift to participation.[1] Australian archivists and scholars have written about participation framed as a tool critical to human rights, for instance Sue McKemmish, Joanne Evans and Gavan McCarthy.[2]

The importance of design as part of that solution is not news to us. Digital design doyen Mitchell Whitelaw contributes a chapter on his work making interfaces for collections. Whitelaw lucidly and patiently explains how once a collection becomes a set of data, whether through digitisation or originating digitally, the ways we can represent the data become almost limitless. Whitelaw's chapter sets the scene for discussion of the practicalities of the design choices and the programming issues. Designer Reuben Stanton describes how the digital archive 'reveals' its content through the performance of the software. His solution is to build no fixed link between the content and the view. And these design choices address a key issue in participatory archives, as Greg Rolan wrote in 2016,[3] the issue of who controls the records. Contributions to the Living Archive are moderated but by making the structure of the database reflect the invitation to the community to contribute content, what emerges is a step towards multi-voiced control of the records, putting into practice longstanding ideas in archival practice about extending provenance.[4]

All things are in contact

Performing Digital paints a picture of some of the ingredients we must address to deliver on participation. In chapter five, co-leader and design scholar Laurene Vaughan discusses how technology and culture are intrinsically entwined. Technology prompts us to imagine new things while 'cultural practices manifest new technologies'. She frames the Living Archive as a form of performance, extending 'performers' from the circus ring to encompass the user of the Living Archive who performs through the actions of liking, segmenting and collecting. Vaughan writes:

> The live performer in this context is not the person on stage, but the archive user who controls the keyboard and the mouse. The actions of their searching and viewing, collecting and narrating are their modes of performance. … these practices enliven the material of the archive through actions of use (p. 59)

So also important for participation is helping users make sense of what they find. Chapter three, Ross Gibson's 'A Pulse in the Past', encourages us to deploy technology to offer users insight into knowledge beyond the facts, so we can access and appreciate records 'with the urgency of emotion'. He explores digital's ability to make and show relationships between things, transforming passive repositories so that 'investigators experience how *relationships amongst facts*, rather than just the facts or artefacts themselves' give deep insight (p. 32, emphasis in the original).

The coda in *Performing Digital* takes the form of a conversation between the two lead scholars – former Circus Oz director and non-fiction studies scholar David Carlin and designer Laurene Vaughan. They frame the Living Archive as non-fiction storytelling or documentary, 'a form of a-temporal memoir' (p. 239). This implies that the Living Archive is subjective and personal. In practice the archive is built upon records, with their properties of authenticity and reliability, yet the content of some of those records is subjective and personal.

So the book makes a useful contribution for us as it sheds light on how the Living Archive emerged, an important example for us of a participatory archive that strives wholeheartedly to respond to its community.

Endnotes

1. Huvila, 'Participatory Archive: Towards Decentralised Curation, Radical User Orientation, and Broader Contextualisation of Records Management', Archival Science, vol. 8, no. 1, 2008, pp. 15–36; Huvila, I, 'The unbearable lightness of participating? Revisiting the discourses of participation in archival literature', Journal of Documentation, vol. 71, no.2, 2015, pp 358–386.
2. A Gilliland and S McKemmish, The Role of Participatory Archives in Furthering Human Rights, Reconciliation and Recovery', Atlanti, vol. 24, no. 1, 2014, pp. 79-88; J Evans, S McKemmish, E Daniels & G McCarthy, 'Self-determination and archival autonomy: advocating activism', Archival Science, vol. 15, no. 4, 2015, pp. 337–368.

3.   G Rolan, 'Agency in the archive: a model for participatory recordkeeping' Archival Science, 2016, pp. 1–31.
4.   T Nesmith, 'Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice', *Archivaria*, vol. 60, Fall 2005, pp. 259–74.

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Research in the Archival Multiverse, edited by Anne J Gilliland, Sue McKemmish and Andrew J Lau, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Victoria, 2017, 1064 pp., AUD$/USD$99.95 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 876924 67 6 ISBN (e-book) 978 1 876924 70 6

Research in archival science has grown, matured and diversified as demonstrated in this book, which has been inspired in part by the annual Archival Education and Research Institutes (AERI). This book reflects the diversity and the appetite for a rigorous approach to exploring and evaluating an ever-widening range of research methods applicable in archival research that have been nurtured through AERI.

The 'archival multiverse' is defined in part one as 'the pluralism of evidentiary texts, memory-keeping practices and institutions, bureaucratic and personal motivations, community perspectives and needs, and cultural and legal constructs with which archival professionals and academics must be prepared, through graduate education, to engage'.[1] Looking for other uses of the term 'multiverse' I found Andrei Linde's definition from astronomy and physics – 'the entire ensemble of innumerable regions of disconnected space-time'[2] appropriate to the challenges facing research and publication in archival science. These undertakings are inevitably limited by the language, culture and legislative frameworks in which researchers are situated, their own awareness of and ability to address these limitations, and the vehicles available to them for publishing. However, in chapter six, Frank Upward traces the concept to a coining by the American philosopher William James in 1895 and thence forward through science and philosophy, finally drawing on the idea of eddies in spacetime as a metaphor for exploring the influences, connections and divergences affecting northern and southern archival practice and theorising.

Part two, 'Archival Intellectual Context and Theoretical Frameworks', traces the development of ideas and methods from European, Chinese, North American and Australian perspectives, as well as exploring aspects of memory research, race, sexuality, colonial archives and the silences within them, the materiality of records in networked communication, and the archival turn.

In part three, each chapter provides an overview of the application of research methods in a particular area of interest. These include the use of modelling as a tool for conceptualising research problems, theory building, testing and validating concepts; exploring the diversity of methodological approaches to researching use of archival mediation systems and information retrieval approaches; and analysing archival concepts using speech act theory and much more.