Stan Ruecker, Milena Radzikowska and Stéfan Sinclair, *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage: A Guide to Rich-Prospect Browsing*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2011. vii + 197 pp. ISBN 978 1 4094 0422 4 (hardback). GB£55.00.

In this age of digitisation and born digital archives, online interfaces to archival collections are becoming ever more important. For many users, archives' websites are their only points of contact. But are they fit for this purpose? Online access is being used to justify the closure and downgrading of reading rooms, even though we know that reading rooms contain a vital ingredient that is lacking in their online equivalents: archivists. Archivists translate users' research questions into archival questions and situate those questions in the context of collections. It is not enough to just throw finding aids and digital material online, attach a search box and expect users to make heads or tails of things. Absent archivists, how can we make archives' websites more effective sites for access?

The authors of *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage* are very well placed to provide insights into this problem. They are responsible for a number of groundbreaking digital cultural heritage projects, many of which are showcased on their Humanities Visualisation website <*http://humviz.org*>. They have particular expertise in the use of computers for literary analysis and have developed Voyant Tools <*http://voyeurtools.org*> – a set of text analysis tools widely used in the digital humanities community.

Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage takes as its starting point the proposition that search alone is not enough and that search interfaces are often adopted unthinkingly when custom interfaces, designed for the particular domain, would be more appropriate. Australian archives must plead guilty here. When we talk about improving online access, we have tended to focus on the need for more content (particularly digitisation) and have largely relied on generic search tools for access. This has been partly driven by the knowledge that most users approach archives with specific research questions in mind (few come to just have a browse), and the primary goal of our interfaces has been to satisfy those questions, with as little friction as possible. The flaw in this logic is that even if we leave aside the needs of browsing users altogether (and we should not), generic search tools often do not do a great job of answering specific research questions either. Many questions simply cannot be answered with keywords. In these cases, knowledge of the scope of collections (for example, 'we hold these key series … ') and the relationships between descriptive entities (for example, 'try looking at the records of this creator … ') is required. This is the knowledge that archivists provide in physical reading rooms. Interestingly, to Rueker, Radzikowska and Sinclair, archives are not unique here. This is actually a general truth that applies across the cultural heritage sector: 'users looking for an understanding of an entire collection and how the various components comprising it interact are not well served by retrieval interfaces' (p. 2).

If search alone is not the answer, then, what is? *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage* offers us the 'rich-prospect browser'. This is not a single interface, but an approach to designing interfaces, based on the idea that you should aim to show *everything* at once. A rich-prospect browser gives users a bird's-eye view of a collection: 'a view of the world where enough information is available for the perceiver to understand the terrain and have a sense of

what it affords, without necessarily seeing all the details' (p. 26). The benefit of this approach is that users get an immediate sense of the contents, relationships and structure of collections. They are no longer just posing questions to a black box.

The rich-prospect browser is particularly suited to collections that have images to represent each item. For example, one of the projects described in the book is a medication browser that presents a thousand photos of different pills sorted by colour and shape. The authors tested this interface on a group of senior citizens and found that rather than being overwhelmed by the display, the test group expressed a feeling of reassurance, based on the knowledge that with all of the information in front of them, they would miss nothing in their search (p. 87). Of course, many archival collections are simply too large to be represented in this way and very few have been comprehensively digitised. There are, however, other ways to show *everything*. Two examples in the book – the Searchling and T-Saurus projects – use thesauri (the Canadian government's CORE subject thesaurus and a UNESCO thesaurus) as visual interfaces to collections (pp. 37, 40). Both these examples provide possible templates for archives.

As an academic work, a primary concern of *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage* is to establish a theoretical foundation for the rich-prospect browser. To this end, the authors draw on theories from diverse fields, including psychology and aesthetics, and propose extensions to these theories, based on the outcomes of their practical research. While archival practitioners may find this aspect of the book of only indirect use, there are interesting insights to be drawn here. The discussion of affordances theory, in particular, is worth following. This is the idea that we do not conceive our actions independently of the environment; that our thoughts and perceptions are fundamentally linked to the possibilities for action (affordances) offered by the various features of our environments. Applied to the design of interfaces, this theory suggests that new interfaces should not be designed solely to meet the current expectations of users, because until a new interface is created, it is very difficult for users to imagine the new possibilities for action that it might offer. We must, therefore, experiment.

One drawback of the book for archivists is that while it is replete with examples of different kinds of rich-prospect browser, none of these case studies are for archival collections. The majority of the cultural heritage sector examples involve literary studies. To get the most out of this book, it is worth reading it in conjunction with archival examples, and, for this purpose, Mitchell Whitelaw's work is ideal. The Visible Archives project that Mitchell Whitelaw undertook at the National Archives of Australia might well qualify as a rich-prospect browser, and his recent keynote on 'generous interfaces' <*http://visiblearchive.blogspot.com.au/2011/12/generous-interfaces-ndf-2011-keynote.html*> makes a great companion piece.

Rueker, Radzikowska and Sinclair define interfaces as 'the mediating software between an application or a data collection and the person using the application or the collection' (p. 161). As archivists, we have been keenly aware of our mediating roles in physical reading rooms. We must also be cognisant of the mediating function of our online interfaces and more active in influencing their design. *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage* does not provide an exact blueprint for archives, but it does challenge us to go beyond search and to seek to create new interfaces that promote fuller

engagement with collections. For this purpose, the rich-prospect browser deserves serious consideration.

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Christopher A Lee (ed.), *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2011. 379 pp. ISBN 1 931666 38 5 (paperback). US$69.95.

Personal papers, personal archives, personal records, personal collections – whatever you call them, these materials have tended to fall between the different collecting and curatorial disciplines and professions. In the digital age, issues around personal collections have become even more complex and more interdisciplinary in nature, as well as steadily more pressing and urgent, as digital formats and services appear and disappear more rapidly. After more than 20 years of discussion in the professional literature – amply demonstrated in this volume's 55-page bibliography – there is still uncertainty about the best way for the collecting professions to define and handle these materials.

This volume offers a valuable and wide-ranging collection of essays which examine conceptual issues, specific genres and types of documents, and the implications for memory institutions. Christopher Lee has assembled contributors from across the professions: archivists, librarians, academic researchers in the fields of recordkeeping and archival systems, and computer science researchers. They include two Australians – Adrian Cunningham and Sue McKemmish – as well as authors from Britain and North America. The absence of non-Anglophone viewpoints, while a little disappointing, is not a serious gap.

The absence of any creators of personal collections is more of a concern; where are the researchers, creative writers and other *collectors* speaking for themselves? This is particularly relevant when several of the contributors attempt to describe and define best practice for personal recordkeeping, notably in Cunningham's 'twelve principles'. Some of the essays include interesting reports on research into the behaviour of individual creators, but the overall perspective is very much that of the professional groups involved.

All the essays are well worth reading and considering, but two raise issues of particular urgency. Catherine Marshall – the Microsoft researcher well-known for her work on personal digital archiving – tackles the question of dealing with materials dispersed across numerous public or semi-public cloud-type systems. If a person's digital collection is spread across Flickr, YouTube, WordPress, Facebook, Twitter and so on, what does this mean for the individual trying to *organise* these materials, let alone for the institutions trying to *collect* them? In a similar vein, Christopher Lee looks at the 'appraisal of materials in the social web' – in what sense can the notion of appraisal be applied to blogs and similar types of output?

It increasingly looks as though the digital age will require a complete rethinking of what it means to collect, select and preserve personal materials. But this process will need to involve more than the updating of archival principles, in order