

## REVIEWS

## Reviewing the Past

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Books are never past, and for that matter, neither are their reviews. We sometimes return to books, and sometimes we change our minds about them. And sometimes we learn new things from them, or realize that important voices are missing. We also sometimes reevaluate or review older works that have been there all along. For example, *The New York Times Book Review* recently featured a review of a republished book by Goliarda Sapienza, *Meeting in Positano*, which was originally written in the 1980s and published in Italy in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Sapienza's novels, which center on women's experiences and agency, encountered obstacles to publication and broader acceptance. Book critic Parul Sehgal recently "reviewed" *The New York Times Book Review* at its 125th anniversary, critically examining its legacy and inclusivity (or lack thereof).<sup>2</sup> Sehgal's review of the *Book Review* reveals valuable insights, but also points to disturbing trends about voices that have been overlooked and ways that the *Book Review* needs to be more inclusive. Likewise, it can be important to return to past works for review to create a more inclusive, global, and multicultural reviews section.

Among the ten reviews in this issue of *American Archivist* is Shirley Franco's review of José Maria Jardim's *Transparência e opacidade do estado no Brasil: Usos e desusos da informação governamental* (*Transparency and Opacity of the State in Brazil: Use and Misuse of Governmental Information*). This book was originally published in 1999, and Franco makes a compelling case for looking back at this work on government transparency and responsible recordkeeping. Other reviews also consider archival publications in the broader global context. Diana E. Marsh reviews *Archival Returns: Central Australia and Beyond*, a compilation edited by Linda Barwick, Jennifer Green, and Petronella Vaarzon-Morel, which presents essays on respectful return and repatriation of archival materials to Aboriginal people in Australia's Northern Territory. This issue also includes a review of a German volume, Christian Keitel's *Zwölf Wege ins Archiv. Umriss einer offenen und praktischen Archivwissenschaft* (*Twelve Ways to the Archives: Outlines of an Open and Practical Archival Science*). Katharina Hering's review considers this volume within the history of German archival practice and how it converges with North

American practice. Archives are, of course, part of the broader global landscape of cultural heritage and are thus subject to the political and economic whims of those who hold power over preservation and conservation, which Lauren Van Zandt examines in her review of Lynn Meskell's *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace*.

Several recent publications encourage archivists to reflect on the inclusivity of our practices and the ways we engage with the institutions and communities with which we work. In looking more critically at how social justice should inform archival practice, Carli V. Lowe assesses *Archives and Special Collections as Sites of Contestation*, edited by Mary Kandiuk. Lowe draws a comparison between the volume's "inspirational and practical information" and the guidance offered by the "best kinds of cookbooks." It is also important to examine the history of archives—how they are established, maintained, and grow over time—as K. J. Rawson notes of Rebecka Taves Sheffield's *Documenting Rebellions: A Study of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives in Queer Times*. An archives itself has a past, and one that is worth documenting along with the records it holds. Brian M. Watson's review of Jamie A. Lee's *Producing the Archival Body* follows this thread further to examine a book that itself reevaluates archival practice and the archival body of literature.

Francis X. Blouin Jr. explores the retrospective volume on Terry Cook and his profound impact on archival theory and the profession. *"All Shook Up": The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook*, edited by Tom Nesmith, Greg Bak, and Joan M. Schwartz, "calls us to see in the work of the archives—our work—tremendous possibilities, deeply complex questions, true interdisciplinary issues, challenging political entanglements, and a heritage of cultural activism." Finally, Harriett Green assesses Ted Underwood's *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change*, which provokes new questions about the relationship between digital scholarship methods and archives and libraries.

These reviews all engage with the past in some sense—and not just the past as constituted through the records that are the subjects of these books—through reevaluations of past books, practices, ideas, and archival theorists. We are all connected to near and distant pasts in the archival literature that we continue to shape and be shaped by.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anna Momigliano, "Once Too Radical for Italy, Goliarda Sapienza Is Belatedly Getting Her Due," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/13/books/review/meeting-in-positano-goliarda-sapienza.html>, captured at <https://perma.cc/WC2P-3P8E>.

<sup>2</sup> Parul Sehgal, "Reviewing the Book Review," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/books/new-york-times-book-review-history.html>, captured at <https://perma.cc/ZC6P-QWFL>.