Minds Alive: Libraries and Archives Now

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Minds Alive, edited by Patricia Demers and Toni Samek, is a collection of essays about the role and value of libraries and archives during a growing digital age. As the world's dependency on all things digital evolves, Demers and Samek view this book as an opportunity to show how libraries and archives can stay relevant and meet users' ever-growing needs. Demers is a distinguished professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta; the first woman president of the Royal Society of Canada, for which she coauthored *The Future Now: Canada's Libraries, Archives, and Public Memory*; and a member of the Order of Canada. Samek is a professor and chair at the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta whose books include *Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibilities in American Librarianship, 1967 to 1974* and *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide*. The authors of the thirteen essays are from university libraries and archives; most are professors at their institutions, but the group also includes the head of a museum library and archives, the project manager of a writing collaboration, and a PhD student. The authors' institutions are situated mainly in Canada and the United States, although some are from different parts of Europe.

This book is divided into five parts. The essays in part one, "Enduring Values," discuss the value of libraries as public spaces and the perception and measurement of that value. In separate essays, Alice Crawford and Marc Kosciejew make similar arguments that the value of libraries is measured more by intangible metrics than tangible ones. Crawford asserts that the general public has an emotional connection to libraries and that they find in the creation of libraries "something we *like*, something we want to fight for when we think we might be about to lose it" (p. 21). Kosciejew argues that public libraries provide communal, cultural, educational, economic, and democratic contributions to society: communal as public places for social engagement; cultural as open spaces for people to explore different ideas, philosophies, and stories; educational as free sources of information; economic as spaces where local companies can access information to strengthen their business and where individuals can search for jobs and benefits; and democratic as places that support the "bedrock principles of democracy, such as expressive freedoms, privacy and confidentiality, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association" (p. 47). In "Academic Library Spaces, Digital Culture, and Communities," Guylaine Beaudry discusses the use of academic library spaces by students and how those spaces should

evolve to match what students need, both in terms of access to technology and physical space (e.g., study rooms). For example, the Webster Library at Concordia University added rooms where students can become familiar with and gain practice using new technologies, such as a web-based software curated by librarians that showcases the library's digital collections. Webster features those same collections on stairwells and employs audio excerpts and digital labels that explain what each work is and where it can be found. Beaudry also notes that "public places have the capacity to transform isolation and self-interest into connectedness and a sense of belonging within communities" (p. 34). One way that Webster Library promotes community at Concordia is through a welcome screen at the library entrance, which displays the number of people who have entered the library that day and is updated with each new visitor. This display also shows other quantitative data, like the number of materials borrowed since the beginning of the school year and the number of people who have accessed the library's website.

In part two, "Public Literacy and Private Oases," chapters by Mario Hibert and Konstantina Martzoukou each look at the notion of libraries' struggle with public versus private, or how libraries can be public entities providing access to vast knowledge but still protect patrons' anonymity. Hibert's piece is unfortunately bogged down with metaphors, analogies, and jargon, which detract from his argument. Hibert cites a "public failure" of libraries to cope with digital literacy demands, such as how to find reliable information online or how to use different computer programs (p. 52). He quotes from Siva Vaidhyanathan's *The Googlization of Everything* when he writes that "'public institutions are relieved of pressure to perform their tasks well'" when Google has so much information readily accessible that it makes people question the point of libraries (p. 52). While I agree with Hibert's assessment that libraries have struggled to stay on pace with Google in terms of digital access, Hibert does not point to any solutions; instead, he quotes so many sources that his essay feels more like a literature review. While Hibert employs a critical tone, Martzoukou has a gentler attitude toward the subject. Like Hibert, Martzoukou points out the chameleon-like work ethic of librarians and writes that "librarians are called to assert their new roles, develop a whole spectrum of new skills and digital competencies, and demonstrate ownership of digital information services via a culture of integration, connectivity, and adaptability" (p. 63). Throughout her chapter, Martzoukou argues that libraries need to bridge the digital divide by helping individuals not only gain technology skills but also "question the existing online 'narrative of our times'" (p. 75). While Hibert conveys the sense that libraries need to change their tactics on bridging the digital divide as soon as possible, Martzoukou puts forth a less urgent call, stating that instead of continuously battling to prove libraries' value over Google, library and information science (LIS) professionals should adapt LIS education and training to allow for more transferable skills, such as "thinking creatively, communicating with impact,

influencing others, leading teams, conducting research and analysis, and solving problems" (p. 84). By so doing, LIS professionals of the future will be able to better defend their roles and find more effective opportunities to serve user needs.

While these first two sections expressively focus on libraries, they still offer takeaways for archivists. Individuals may have more fond memories of going to a library than visiting an archives, but the sense of importance, history, and wonder is still present when one walks into an archives reading room. Like public libraries, the value of archives cannot be measured solely by quantitative metrics because historical materials' value to a community cannot always be measured in numbers. As Kosciejew argues for the value of public libraries, archives also provide cultural and educational contributions to society. Archives protect history, preserve stories of local cultures so they are not lost, and educate users so that these stories are not forgotten.

Part three, "Transformations and Resistance," focuses on the legal and logistical side of the digital world for libraries and archives. Michael W. Carroll writes in his piece, "Libraries' Shifting Roles and Responsibilities in the Networked Age," about the legalities and copyright issues that libraries face with digital materials. For example, he points to licensing concerns for libraries, especially at the conclusion of the license term when libraries could lose parts or all of their remote collections. Carroll also argues for greater coordination between institutions to digitize local collections. He states that digitizing and publishing collections to a collaborative network makes the collections more valuable to the general public because they are more accessible. Also in this section is a case study about the evolution of the interface of the Perseus Digital Library, a collection of Greek and Latin materials. Geoffrey Rockwell et al. argue that studying the history of the interface of a digital humanities project can reveal much about shifting priorities, funding, audiences, and design ideas. The case study also documents the history of the project and the history of computing and user interactions with computer interfaces more generally, which is useful for future collaborators.

Parts four and five of this book are the most relevant for archivists. Part four, "Disciplinary and Institutional Partnerships," focuses on rethinking divisions in the archives profession. Richard Cox revisits an essay he wrote in 1986 about archives and professionalism as digital media continue to grow and evolve. Cox writes that with the emergence of new technologies, information professionals are stretched into new, grayer areas regarding ethics. He also notes that while there was speculation about a convergence among information professionals in the 1980s, a diverse group of library, archives, and museum (LAM) professionals are still discussing a convergence today as they see value and have common interest in the "document." Cox's essay pairs nicely with Brendan F. R. Edwards's case study of the Royal Ontario Museum. Edwards notes that the core mission of museum-libraries and museum-archives is to support the research of museum staff members and volunteers by helping them with museum collections and understanding their

context. He concurs with Cox that LAM professionals need to work together and argues that "museum-librarians and museum-archivists are potentially well situated to navigate the challenges ahead" (p. 167). Edwards and Cox both make interesting points about how the archives profession might evolve to best serve our users and individual institutions and to make information and collections accessible.

Part five, "Curation and Commons," focuses on a topic that is especially pertinent to archives currently: digital curation and accessibility. Seamus Ross focuses on data curation and the need to improve the automation process of metadata. He makes an interesting point about blockchain technology, stating that it has "the potential to reshape archival and library approaches to digital curation" (p. 181). This reminded me of a panel at the 2022 Society of American Archivists' Annual Meeting titled "Centering Refugee and Migrating Voices: Archival Work in Diaspora," which included a discussion on the Rohingya Project, which uses blockchain technology to give refugees the ability to own, manage, and control their personal data. Regarding both physical and digital access, Frank J. Tough documents his challenges when doing research in government archives on Aboriginal populations in Canada. He notes that researchers depend upon government officials to approve their research requests for materials on Aboriginal people and determine that those materials actually have value for their research, which limits access and ties archivists' hands with bureaucratic tape. Tough declares that reconciliation between the government and Aboriginal people is the only way to solve this problem.

Overall, I think *Minds Alive* has value for LAM professionals. The essays provide thoughtful reflections on how our profession can grow and examples of steps that institutions have taken to improve collaborations and make collections more accessible. While the book does focus more on libraries, specifically academic libraries, than archives, there are enough similarities and common challenges between the professions that the authors' messages can be adapted to archival contexts. Demers and Samek did well curating these essays and organizing the content into coherent sections. As a whole, the book is a decent addition to the literature of the LAM profession.

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