
Book Reviews

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Information Retrieval Design: Principles and Options for Information Description, Organization, Display and Access in Information Retrieval Databases, Digital Libraries, Catalogs, and Indexes. By James D. Anderson and José Pérez-Carballo. St. Petersburg, Fla.: Ometeca Institute, 2005. 617p. \$60 softbound (ISBN 0-9763547-0-5).

Anderson and Pérez-Carballo have provided an engaging and thorough discussion of information retrieval (IR) system design concepts that will prove useful to information science and library science professionals. The authors approach this endeavor with significant practical and research experience in this field, experience that is evident throughout their incisive discussions of IR design concepts and theory, much of which they've applied to the text itself as an example of how those concepts might be applied to a book and its accompanying index.

IR databases as defined in this book range from databases presented online and through CD-ROMs, indexing and abstracting services, print, library catalogs (online and card), bibliographies, and indexes (including those in the backs of books). The design concepts presented throughout the book are addressed as they apply to each of these types of IR databases. One of the strengths of this book is the selection of IR database examples that are then followed and built upon throughout the book, with each chapter's design concept applied to that example.

The book is in two parts. The first part contains an introductory chapter that is an excellent description of the issues addressed by the book. It includes a lengthy section highlighting and defining many of the most important terms and concepts addressed throughout, followed by a discussion of the difficulties that the information community has experienced in attempting to determine a standard for indexes and filing, and finally the types of documents that would be described in an IR database.

The second part contains twenty chapters, each of which addresses an IR design concept or issue and decisions that must be made regarding that issue. The discussions in the first few chapters addressing the subject scope of the database, the documentary scope, and the documentary domain (the territory from which documents are obtained for the database) are particularly incisive. Discussions regarding display media, documentary units (degree of analysis), and indexable matter are also quite useful for the IR database designer.

Of particular interest to library professionals or educators are lengthy and thorough discussions of analysis and indexing methods, exhaustivity and specificity, and syntax

and vocabulary management. The three chapters addressing these concepts form a substantial core of the book and provide many insightful perceptions that will prove helpful to the practitioner. Chapter eight, addressing analysis and indexing methods, provides a thorough examination of human indexing methods, emphasizing that human indexers rarely agree on what is important about a text or what to call it, and cites the large literature on indexer inconsistency. The authors follow with a detailed description of automatic indexing methods, focusing primarily on language texts.

Chapters nine and ten address exhaustivity and specificity, respectively. The discussions of exhaustivity, the level of detail applied to the descriptions of topics, and specificity, "the degree of correspondence between an index term or descriptor and the topic or feature to which it refers" (185), will seem familiar to the library professional. Included in these discussions is an analysis of precision and recall, the definitions of which are useful measures for evaluating the quality and usefulness of an IR database. Precision is defined as the number of relevant documents retrieved divided by the number of all documents retrieved; recall is defined as the number of relevant documents retrieved divided by the number of relevant documents in the database.

Syntax, discussed in chapter twelve, is a common concept for the cataloger as applied to Library of Congress Subject Headings. However, the extensive discussion of syntax supplied here as applied in many types of IR databases will prove illuminating and useful. Syntax, as defined in this book, "refers to patterns or rules for putting words together to create texts for messages in a language" (205). The discussion includes comparisons of precoordinate and postcoordinate syntax, such as Library of Congress Subject Headings, Medical Subject Headings, and others familiar to library professionals. Lesser-known syntax include string syntax, such as rotated term syntax, faceted syntax, and others. While not commonly applied in library catalogs, discussions of alternative methods of building indexes and index entries will be of interest to librarians.

Chapter thirteen, addressing vocabulary management, forms another substantial portion of the book. It describes a variety of problems relating to vocabulary as a part of any IR database and follows with an analysis of the research on vocabulary management issues. It then presents a series of solutions to those problems, exploring each of those solutions in depth. These solutions range from providing syndetic structure to indexing thesauri and searching thesauri (for the end-user). Final chapters address the use of surrogates

(such as catalog records), displays, and the search interface, among other issues.

Overall, this book provides a thorough examination of the issues surrounding the design and creation of IR databases, whether they be an online catalog, a full-text indexing and abstracting service, or an index in the back of a book. It is a substantial contribution to the literature of both library and information science, and would be an excellent choice as a textbook for either of those fields.—*Rebecca L. Mugridge (rlm31@psu.edu), Pennsylvania State University, University Park*

No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal. By Richard J. Cox. Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Scarecrow, 2004. 303p. \$49.50 softbound (ISBN 0-8108-4896-1).

Richard J. Cox forthrightly alerts the reader that “this is not a primer on archival appraisal, but it is a set of chapters reflecting my own wrestling with the challenges and contradictions (and there are both) of the archival function of appraisal” (12). He also disclaims any coverage of the practical aspects of doing appraisal, leaving it “to others to try the write the basic, how-to manuals on appraisal” and a “workable set of principles for archival appraisal” (12). We are left with the redundant and repetitive ruminations of a prolific writer demonstrating a vain exercise in publishing his collected writings on one topic. Arranged by order of their writing, the chapters reflect the evolution of Cox’s thinking about appraisal over a seven-year period. Of the ten chapters, five appeared in print as journal articles between 1997 and 2002, and three are conference presentations from 2002.

The major themes running throughout the book focus on appraisal as the crucial practice for avoiding the collecting mentality of most everyone in and out of the profession, and the need for archivists and records managers to engage in appraisal before records leave the office of origin. Cox argues that archives do not just happen, but that they are willfully created by archivists during the appraisal process and through collecting documentary evidence, by the creators of records, and by other individuals and institutions.

Cox knows what he does not like and dismisses authors with whom he disagrees. He comes off as full of himself, quoting his own work as authority for current claims. He worked as an archivist for sixteen years, 1972–1988, and then began teaching. As a non-practicing archivist for the last seventeen years, Cox has no hands-on experience with changes in the profession. When he rails against archivists soliciting and accepting donated collections as not proactive appraisal, one wonders if he understands the politics involved in donor relations at the higher levels of administration. In his perfect world, archivists should encourage organizations to establish and maintain their own archives rather than donating them to an existing repository, but Cox

does not address how to do this kind of advocacy or acknowledge the practical aspects that some organizations just do not care about their history.

Among the redundancies, Cox posits that the general public does not really know what archives are (true), refers continually to archivists’ and the public’s opposite reactions to Nicholson Baker’s diatribe against microfilming and discarding old newspapers in *Double Fold* (and his own rebuttal book), and denigrates the memorialized collecting of memory and artifacts following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center as more akin to scrapbooking and time capsule creation than archival appraisal.¹

Despite these faults, Cox does provide provocative ideas for the profession to consider in rethinking appraisal. One only wishes that he had taken the time to sort out his ideas, write the book from scratch rather than cobble together his timeline of thoughts, and give us some forward-thinking notions of what new directions archivists should take appraisal. While Barbara L. Craig introduces appraisal and gives sound explanations of theory and practical advice, and Frank Boles provides a review of diverse theories and offers a guide to the process, addressing several issues including reappraisal, Richard Cox aims to get archivists thinking about appraisal and “reconsider what it is that they are doing or at least to ask if their efforts are working” (193).² As a provocateur, Cox is at his best in prodding archival professionals, whether they agree or disagree with him, to think rather than continuing to do the same work by rote or because that’s the way it’s always been done.

This book received the 2005 Waldo Gifford Leland Award from the Society of American Archivists. The award encourages and rewards writing of superior excellence and usefulness in the field of archival history, theory, or practice. As such, *No Innocent Deposits* deserves a place on libraries’ bookshelves, especially those lacking the journals from which these chapters emerged. Cox likes to shake the archival tree, and in this book he certainly will garner attention when the apples land on archivists’ heads. Some will accept the fruit as an enlightening gift, some will take a bite and spit out the sour piece, and others will leave the apples to rot on the ground. Whatever the outcome, Cox will have succeeded in raising the profession’s awareness of the need to rethink appraisal.—*Susan Hamburger (sxh36@psu.edu), Pennsylvania State University, University Park.*

References

1. Nicholson Baker, *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (New York: Random House, 2001); Richard J. Cox, *Vandals in the Stacks? A Response to Nicholson Baker’s Assault on Libraries*, Contributions in Librarianship and Information Science No. 98. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002).