

ideas presented in several other essays in which remarkable archival thinkers, such as Jennifer Meehan, Robert Horton, Elisabeth Kaplan, Rand Jimerson, Frank Boles, Elena Danielson, Rachel Onuf, and Paul Lasewicz, build on their work in exciting and productive ways.

Reading this volume start to finish gives a sense of professional renewal, and the coeditors and authors have made a seminal contribution to the archival profession. The book brims with pragmatic solutions to act on our theories, introduces us to the work of writers from any number of related disciplines, and provokes us to consider and reconsider how we think about and act upon the values of archives and archivists. We miss the voice of Mark Greene, but its echoes can be heard throughout these pages. The book also leaves us with an inescapable conclusion: it is time for SAA to reconsider and revise its “Core Values of Archivists.” Like Greene’s original address and article, this volume can serve as an inspiration and starting point for that work. I cannot think of a better way to pay ultimate tribute to Mark Greene.

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Harvard University

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- ¹ Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (2009): 17–41, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.72.1.k0322x0p38v44l53>.
- ² The full values statement is available at <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics> and is also reprinted in its entirety as an appendix in the book being reviewed.
- ³ I should declare my biases. The coeditors of *Archival Values: Essays in Honor of Mark A. Greene* are long-time friends and former colleagues. The same can be said of many of the contributors, and I knew and loved Mark Greene, who most readers will know suffered an untimely death in 2017. My thinking in accepting this assignment was that my proximity to the people and the inspiration behind this book would give insight worth sharing, but, of course, readers of this review will have to make up their own mind. Mark Greene would have expected nothing less than full critical engagement from the reviewer of this book, friend or foe.

The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation

By Trevor Owens. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. 240 pp.
Softcover and EPUB. \$34.95. Softcover ISBN 978-1-4214-2697-6;
EPUB ISBN 978-1-4214-2698-3.

Trevor Owens, head of digital content management at the Library of Congress, has written a book about digital preservation. In it, he diagnoses the digital preservation field with a case of misguided thinking. Too many of its

practitioners, he maintains, have oriented their compass to the false north of jargon-laden technical frameworks while placing undue faith in software-based solutions to their problems. Without rebuking the field too harshly for having followed a path of “over-diagrammification” (p. 80) and “technological solutionism” (p. 192), Owens suggests it is high time for us to leave said path behind. After all, the infamously illegible diagrams of digital preservation and the peculiar lingo required to decode them have already intimidated too many cultural heritage professionals into inaction. Or, stated plainly, “Highly technical definitions of digital preservation are complicit in silencing the past” (p. 7).

The alternative, Owens posits, is conceiving of digital preservation as craft, which he understands as a set of practical approaches to stewardship grounded in general understanding of the nature of digital content. His notion of craft will be appreciated by those of us who have found a breath of fresh air in the National Digital Stewardship Alliance’s “Levels of Digital Preservation,”¹ a progression of easily understood measures that any cultural heritage organization can take toward sound digital preservation practice. Indeed, Owens played a key role in creating the levels, lending weight to many of the positions he takes on how the field of digital preservation ought to change the way it thinks about itself.

Owens is particularly strong when defining what digital preservation is and is not. His book’s introduction and its “Sixteen Guiding Digital Preservation Axioms” (pp. 4–9) would make excellent reading for anyone seeking an intelligent summary of the field’s practical limits. For example, regarding the assertion that what digital preservation lacks is its own killer app, Owens writes that “For many executives, policy makers, and administrators new to digital preservation, it seems like the world needs someone to design a super system that can ‘solve’ the problem of digital preservation. The wisdom of the cohort of digital preservation practitioners in libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions of cultural memory who have been doing this work for a half a century suggests this solution is an illusory dream” (p. 2). He then goes on to tell us why, insisting that “A repository is not a piece of software” (p. 4), but rather a service built of policies, financial resources, and ongoing staff commitment, with software platforms playing a supporting role.

This overview of digital preservation is followed by a series of chapters on theory and then craft, and a final chapter of meditations on the future. In presenting his ideas, Owens’s prose is not outright postmodernist, but he is comfortable with ambiguity and insists more than once that we need to accept the messiness of digital content as one of its bedrock elements. Indeed, those seeking a cookbook for digital preservation ought to look elsewhere, with Owens opining we are ill-served by such “how-to” compendia, not only because in our swiftly changing technological environment they go quickly out of date, but more

importantly because “Digital preservation requires the work of craftspeople who reflexively approach digital preservation problems in situ and develop approaches that match the resource, material, and conceptual constraints of a given setting” (p. 73). There is no instruction manual for digital preservation; “The answer to nearly all digital preservation questions is, ‘it depends’” (p. 7).

Taken broadly, Owens’s positions on theory and craft stand on a basis of conventional discourse, modified by subtle but significant innovations. His theoretical approach considers three points of view or “frames” through which to view digital content, these consisting of their artifactual, informational, and folkloric qualities. The analysis of digital storage devices as physical artifacts will be known to most readers, as will that of digital content’s informational basis as strings of zeros and ones, but digital media’s folkloric quality, while prevalent in discourse on networked digital culture in the humanities and social sciences, is underrepresented in much of the digital preservation literature. In emphasizing that digital preservation is about social phenomena as much as it is about technology, Owens encourages preservationists to take the cultural role of digital media into account when considering strategies for curation. One should not, however, mistake this for Owens discouraging in his readers an understanding of technology. Rather, he stresses the importance of comprehending the technical foundation of digital preservation, while insisting that other levels of equal or greater importance exist, which we underestimate at the peril of the collections we steward.

With respect to digital preservation as craft, Owens takes a bit of a clear-house approach to communicating his concept, pairing ideas with representative examples of work from the field. He identifies his craft’s chief elements as multimodal access and use, arranging and describing, managing copies and format, preservation intent, and collection development. None of these will be new to readers familiar with prior writings on digital preservation, but Owens’s emphasis on access sets him apart from much of the field’s conventional wisdom about the efficacy of so-called dark archives and digital preservation siloes, not to mention the idea that institutions providing access to content should do so in more ways than one.

Among his recurrent themes, Owens contends that historical practices developed for paper-based collections do not fully apply to digital content and that habits of mind inherited from long-standing traditions of conservation and archival arrangement and description are ill-adapted to the complexity of layered digital systems. He finds that archivists occupy a better starting position than most when meeting this challenge, because they “have been dealing with complex hierarchical relationships, aggregations of records, and massive scales for a long time” (p. 74). Delving deeper into archival discourse, Owens emphasizes the utility of a “More Product, Less Process” approach to providing access to

digital records and also spotlights lessons learned from the ethics and organization of community archives as relevant to large-scale digital preservation efforts. Looking ahead, he suggests that archival theory and practice must evolve to meet the demands of digital content stewardship, likely by assimilating affordances offered by text indexing and mining, while striking a balance with the need to respect individual privacy, intellectual property laws, and cultural norms.

To his credit, Owens writes of preservation less like an academic bent on waging a campaign in favor of his own point of view, than a scholar-practitioner guiding his colleagues in the direction he believes they ought to go. As a result, he does not stake out his own territory so much as define a common ground for those who would seek to work upon it. He writes as an understated leader, building on ideas and examples that have proven themselves, discarding those that have not, and nudging the field in the direction of its next evolutionary step. On the whole, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation* excels as an example of how to effectively suggest that a nascent professional field correct its course without utterly shunning its brief past. Should this book find traction as I expect it will in educational programs in library and archival science, it will help drive the profession of digital preservation in a thoughtful, pragmatic, and most welcome direction.

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University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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¹ Initially published in 2013 (Megan Phillips, Andrea Goethals, Jefferson Bailey, and Trevor Owens, "The NDSA Levels of Digital Preservation: An Explanation and Uses," National Digital Stewardship Alliance, 2013, https://ndsa.org/documents/NDSA_Levels_Archiving_2013.pdf), the NDSA Levels are currently undergoing review and will be made available in an updated version soon.

Photographing Tutankhamun: Archaeology, Ancient Egypt, and the Archive

By Christina Riggs. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018. 272 pp. Softcover, EPUB, and PDF. \$26.95US, £13.99UK. Softcover ISBN 978-1-3500-3851-6; EPUB ISBN 978-1-3500-3853-0; PDF ISBN 978-1-3500-3854-7.

The fascination that surrounds the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun, the discovery of his tomb in the Valley of the Kings, and the treasure discovered therein does not seem to abate. Indeed, the "boy-king" continues to