

Call for Contributors

Shelf Life: Libraries, Archives, and Collective Grief

Editors

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Rationale

In the wake of tragic events and the eventual removal of memorials—be they ephemeral by design or “permanent” markers that no longer suit contemporary needs—it often falls to librarians and archivists to make sense of the mass of papers, paraphernalia and stories that appear (Maynor 2015). In her case study based article seeking to lay a foundation for best practices in dealing with “archives of grief,” Ashley Maynor emphasizes important questions that need to be considered when dealing with the aftermath of traumatic events, questions that archivists retain a focus on at all times: what audience will be served by keeping objects of grief? What purpose will they serve into the future? As she notes in her work, the role of librarians and archivists in forming these archives is not a topic that enjoys much study in the information sciences literature. With libraries being repositories of knowledge, history, and stories, it seems remiss for this oversight to exist within the field’s body of research. Every time that a memorial develops, we are presented with visceral reminders of the physicality of grief. As contemporary culture continues to become more aware and mindful of death’s presence in everyday existence, it is important to bring a wide variety of academic approaches to the study of death and grief.

In the field of librarianship, the archive is often considered to serve as a memory space with its mission being to organize and memorialize the past and bring attention to the stories that these collections contain. In this way, Erika Doss intimates that the creation and maintenance of an archive serves as a bridge between the living and the dead (Doss 2008). Constructing an archive is not simply the process of collating and labeling boxes and folders; rather, it is the act of selecting and presenting past events in such a way as to bring emphasis to the event as a whole. One of the problems inherent in this selection process is the determination of what gets archived—which objects are deemed worth saving and by what criteria. Depending on who makes these guidelines, entire histories or groups of people can be left behind. This is true, too, of *how* we document the objects in our collections: the metadata we generate to facilitate findability often overlook those considered tangential or subsidiary (see, e.g., Klein 2013). Therefore, archival silences and the untold stories redolent in such gaps is one of the major themes of this collection.

Librarians employ a wide variety of organizational tools and technological approaches to the creation and dispersion of information and their ability to perform traditional research and data

based approaches makes them highly valuable to the intellectual community. For this reason, part of this volume will address the ways in which librarian skill sets can be utilized for nontraditional means of archiving and the ways in which the practice of memorializing can serve a therapeutic function for both individuals and communities. It is the goal of this collection to bring attention to the ways in which librarians and information professionals can contribute further to the scholarship via case studies, theoretical approaches, and recommended paths for future research. Submissions may be interdisciplinary or rooted in the fields of information science, social sciences, and/or (digital) humanities.

Suggested topics may include the following:

- Archival silences
- Archives of grief
- Libraries as memory palaces/lieux de mémoire
- Case studies
- Digital means of constructing memorials
- Community archiving
- What it means to collect objects, thoughts
- Metadata analysis and reparative metadata strategies
- Archiving monuments/memorials
- Librarianship/archiving as grief processing
- Oral history initiatives

Details

Proposals between 250 and 500 words, as well as brief CVs, should be submitted to Kaylee Alexander (kaylee.alexander@utah.edu) & Robert Spinelli (rspinelli@ncis.org) by **July 6, 2024**.

The editors will then review all submitted proposals and notify applicants by **August 5, 2024**. Chapters should be approximately between 5,000–7,000 words and first drafts of completed manuscripts will be due **December 31, 2024**. The expected publication date is in 2026.

References

Doss, Erika. *The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008.

Klein, Lauren F. "The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings." *American Literature* 85, no. 4 (2013): 661–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2367310>.

Maynor, Ashley R. "Response to the Unthinkable: Collecting and Archiving Condolence and Temporary Memorial Materials following Public Tragedies." In *Handbook of Research*

on Disaster Management and Contingency Planning in Modern Libraries, eds. Emy Nelson Decker and Jennifer A. Townes, 582–624. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2016.