

Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage

by Terry Cook

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The theme of this year's conference is "Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory."¹ Most of the interesting sessions ahead of us deal with the cultural, heritage, and historical dimensions of archives, and other cultural institutions, and with the related theme of improving interactions with our many users, traditional or web-based. Most users see archives primarily as the essential source for learning about Australia's heritage, or about their own identity as individuals, families, and groups within the larger historical patterns of their communities, regions, and country. Archives for them are about remembering the past in order to better enjoy the present and thereby envision a brighter future. There is a stimulating array of topics and speakers planned for us to explore these issues today and tomorrow, and I for one look forward to hearing them all.

This thematic focus on the cultural and historical dimensions of archives represents a clear change from the predominant themes of recent ASA conferences, however, or, indeed, from the prevailing national discourse about archives for which Australians are best known internationally. That national discourse focuses, as have recent conferences, on record-keeping issues, often equated closely with what traditionally has been called records management in government institutions and business corporations. Part of that record-keeping discourse has included facing the difficult challenges of capturing electronic records in meaningful context, with appropriate metadata, from the whirlwind of computerized information sweeping across our organizations. Another part has concentrated on developing industry-wide job and training competencies for records-keepers who work in modern organizations -- and it **is** record-keepers they want, not archivists. Another part has been focusing on the status of documents as reliable and authentic evidence of transactions and thus as the underpinning for accountability in public life and for democracy itself. Another orients archival appraisal away from saving records for history to ensuring that important business functions are identified (or appraised), so that reliable records may be created as evidence of those functions. And overriding this predominant discourse, at least here in Australia, and anchoring it in theory and vision, has been the model of the records continuum, which both summarizes the many dimensions of record-keeping in institutional life and lends legitimacy to the definition of the archivist as record-keeper. This new archival discourse is not unique to Australia, of course, although I think it has its most complete and sophisticated articulation here. But many leading international archival theorists also advocate the same record-keeping ideals for the archivist of the future.

In this predominant record-keeping discourse, in Australia and abroad, there is virtually no attention paid to personal or private or family or group archives. They have been cast “beyond the pale,” as Adrian Cunningham and I have both asserted,² into that cold, dark place where private manuscripts, and the archivists who care for them, seem to have been relegated by the mainstream public records archivists of Australia, and by the archival educators and theorists who support them here and abroad. There seems little space in this new discourse that is dominated by talk of business transactions, evidence, accountability, metadata, electronic records, and distributed custody of archives, for the **traditional** discourse of archivists centered around history, heritage, culture, research, social memory, and the curatorial custody of archives -- **whether** these latter relate to personal records **or** to public or institutional archives. Record-keeping by archivists, some assert, is a business activity, not a cultural pursuit. Archives exists from the moment of creation in business processes, not as cultural assets. A continuum of interests join records creators, records managers, and archivists.

Those archivists so politically incorrect as to defend the heritage or cultural purposes of archives are seen as somewhat passé, as wanting to turn the clock back to a quieter time when archivists waited passively at the end of the life cycle for records to arrive at the archives when their creators no longer needed them -- or were dead. Such archivists are supposedly more comfortable mounting pretty exhibitions or interacting with scholars writing history than they are with aggressively formulating policy at the cutting edge of computer technology and organizational change.

These traditional historical or cultural archivists, no doubt covered with a thin layer of dust, when not having high tea with influential donors, just don't get it. They prefer managing relics to records,³ with the implication that perhaps they themselves are relics in a profession now dynamically adapting itself to the information age. Mergers of the archival and records management associations are even bruted about, which would truly leave manuscripts archivists not just beyond the pale, but out in the cold, and obviously further devalue the heritage and cultural role of public records archives.

This divisive tone in the archival profession is especially strident in North America, where some advocates of the new approaches have called traditional archivists, and this in writing: obsolete, stupid, psychologically deficient victims of self-delusion, and mentally incompetent.⁴ But one Australian archivist **has** compared the state of professional intelligence of traditional archivists to those who believe babies appear automatically in cabbage patches.⁵

Now perhaps I have overdone this a little for effect, and certainly there is always the danger of creating straw figures when doing this kind of labelling, or when dividing ideas too simplistically into opposing dichotomies. But if my account may not be the full reality, it certainly is the perception of that reality among significant numbers of archivists viewing Australian archivy from both sides of the ideological fence, and whether here at home and abroad.⁶

I sensed from afar in Canada, and have since had confirmed in discussions over the past five weeks with Australian archivists, that the focus of this ASA programme is a deliberate attempt to give voice to the cultural and heritage dimension of archives, to bring them back from beyond the pale and thus to try to re-balance the record-keeping discourse of the past decade. So-called traditional archivists are asserting that they do know the proper causality of cabbages and babies! They know too that the title of your much-respected journal is, after all, already nicely balanced as *Archives and Manuscripts*, and should **not** be retitled *Archives Really Meaning Records Bearing Evidence of Business Transactions, and Those Pesky Manuscripts Better Left to Librarians Anyway so We True Archivists Can Link Arms with Records Managers in Common Cause as Record-Keepers!*

My message this morning has three stark points: 1) the archival profession is threatened, at least in the English-speaking world, with serious schism, a schism that is already engendering within the profession personal animosity, incompatible working and research agendas and, at a deeper and more foundational level, incompatible educational programmes and work competency descriptions; 2) should such schisms successfully fragment the archival whole, it will be our clients, our records, and our broader mission in society that will suffer, as well as society's knowledge of the past and its understanding of itself; and 3) it need not be this way.

My argument today is an inclusive one that I hope will suggest a commonality of mindset and strategic interest to all archivists, and especially so in Australia. I say especially in Australia because what you have done here in the past has the potential, in my view, for leading the English-speaking archival world out of its impending crisis. That involves rethinking aspects of the records continuum as a unifying vision for all archivists. That is why I have entitled my opening address slightly differently from the conference theme; my title is "Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage"

I want to touch on three large themes in exploring this topic against the background that I've just painted: 1) the distinction of evidence versus memory, and the need for a renewed balancing of the two concepts; 2) the corollary contradiction of the central tenets of archival theory and appraisal theory, and some related discussion of appraisal itself; and 3) a brief reconsideration of aspects of the records continuum model in light of these issues and the information culture in which we live, as a means of building a bridge across the growing archival chasm.

The most fundamental division about the purposes, orientation, and, indeed, very nature of archives, as institutions and as records, and thus about the mission of archives in society, rests on an unresolved tension between the concepts of evidence and memory. The central myth of archives has traditionally focused on evidence. The great archival pioneer, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, writing early in the century, described the ideal archivist, albeit in the gendered language of his time: "His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the Conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his charge; his Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of

Knowledge....”⁷ That quotation appears in no less than four of his publications, so presumably Sir Hilary thought it important.

The central archival concepts of *respect des fonds*, original order, and provenance, first defined in France and Germany in the nineteenth century, extolled by Jenkinson, and followed by every major textbook writer since, were articulated to preserve records as evidence of the functional-structural context that caused their creation.⁸ Such context in turn legitimized the related records as genuine, legitimate evidence of something real, something that could be trusted by historians and others, as a single scrap of paper floating in a vacuum without such context could not be trusted, and indeed might be a forgery, unauthorized copy, or altered version. Such transparency of context thus allows records, it is alleged, to serve as trustworthy evidence of the facts, actions, and ideas to which they bear witness. In so far as this ideal of having authentic and reliable records as evidence motivates modern record-keepers, or indeed all archivists, they are neo-Jenkinsonians. This is well and good, and efforts to adapt these principles to computerized records are necessary and laudable. I will state this just once, but note it well: my remarks here (and elsewhere) are not **against** records managers or a record-keeping agenda – as I have contributed to it enough myself; rather, they are designed to expand its horizons and inclusiveness.

Yet there are other implications of this evidence focus. Strict adherence to guardianship of original evidence also aimed to eliminate, or reduce to a bare minimum, any interference by the archivist in the evidence-bearing characteristics of archives, in order to safeguard the documentary “Truth,” as Jenkinson put it, and with a capital “T”. In this version of the archival mission, the archivist is seen as neutral, objective, impartial, passive, an honest broker between creator and researcher, never choosing or selecting records, but only inheriting them from creators as a “natural” residue, working as Jenkinson said “without prejudice or afterthought.”

This emphasis on evidence does not rest solely with either the diplomatic roots or the pioneering texts of the archival profession. David Bearman, as the key thinker about archival preservation of electronic records, and a critical early influence here on developing Australian record-keeping concepts, entitled his 1994 collected essays, *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations*, and renamed at its conclusion the landmark University of Pittsburgh project on the functional requirements for record-keeping in an electronic world, as the functional requirements for evidence.⁹ The University of British Columbia’s electronic records research project has as its central goal developing strategies for the preservation over time of “authentic” and “reliable” computer records, these being the twin watchwords of high-quality evidence, of trustworthy “records” as contrasted to decontextualized information or transient data. And United States National Archivist John Carlin’s 1997 strategic plan for the National Archives and Records Administration bears the title, *Ready Access to Essential Evidence*.

But archives also preserve memory. Back to John Carlin’s phrase, the key word becomes “essential” and, by implication, how to determine what small portion of the total evidence is “essential.” Archival legislation, official mission and mandate statements, archival annual

reports, and speeches of senior archives officials the world over continually refer to the central archival role in preserving the “collective memory” of nations, peoples, institutions, movements, and individuals; or they refer to preserving those records having “significance” or “value” or “importance” which, put another way, means preserving those worth remembering, or, again, what is “essential” evidence in Carlin’s phrase *versus* what is not. Archives in this focus are a source of memories about the past, about history, heritage, and culture, about personal roots and family connections, about who we are as human beings and about glimpses into our common humanity through recorded information in all media, much more than they are about narrow accountabilities or administrative continuity.

Yet memory is notoriously selective -- in individuals, in societies, and, yes, in archives. With memory comes forgetting. With memory comes the inevitable privileging of certain records and records creators, and the marginalizing or silencing of others. Ever since archivists began in the 1940’s to face the appraisal issue squarely in a century of massive volumes of over-documentation in all media, most of the world’s archivists have accepted the responsibility of having the major hand in choosing the tiny sliver of records that will be preserved beyond short-term administrative uses, and then in many jurisdictions authorizing the destruction (or at least benign neglect) of all the rest. By so judging the relative importance of records, archivists inevitably will inject their own values, thus transforming themselves from Jenkinson’s passive keepers, guardians, or custodians of an entire documentary residue left by creators to becoming themselves creators of social memory through the active formation of the archival heritage. Postmodern philosophical and historical studies of the archive in recent years only underline its contested nature as mediated sites of power, ideology, and memory.

In this formation of collective memory, the public record archivist shares much common ground with the private manuscripts collector. Both mediate the past through the present for the future. Both are preserving memory, whether of individual or corporate creators. And both require evidence, whether on a personal level as “evidence of me,” as Sue McKemmish has intriguingly explored,¹⁰ or on an institutional level, as the new record-keepers have so well justified.

Evidence and memory. Are they an irreconcilable dichotomy? Or perhaps they exist as two sides of the same archival coin, in creative rather than destructive tension, each worthless without the other despite the fundamentally contrary implications they have for the archival endeavour? Without reliable evidence set in context, to be sure memory becomes counterfeit, or at least is transformed into forgery, manipulation, or imagination. Without the influence of and need for memory, evidence is useless and unused. Without acknowledging the mediation and intervention of the archivist in the construction of memory based on documentary evidence, the claims for that evidence of impartiality, objectivity, and “Truth” ring hollow at best, as professional arrogance at worst.

The nature of evidence, historians are beginning to suggest, is itself determined by time, place, and social mores, rather than by some set of universal criteria or diplomatic formulae.¹¹ The front-page headline in *The Canberra Times* last week for the court decision that denied the lawsuit of two of the stolen generation children said the following: “No truth and justice,

just law and evidence.”¹² Something for archivists to ponder. There is, in short, more to public administration, legal affairs, archives, history, and society than evidence, critically important as that undoubtedly is. The new interdisciplinary field of law and literature is instructive in this regard: it is an attempt not to merge the two, let alone obliterate one in favour of the other, but to seek useful cross fertilization for both, even though one (law) is formulaic, analytical, and a system of social control judged by ethical and social science criteria, and one (literature) is anti-formulaic, narrative, and a system of imaginative creativity judged by aesthetic and humanist criteria.¹³ May not evidence and memory be considered by archivists in the same generous and fertile way?

The relationship between archival theory and appraisal theory, which is my second point, is really a corollary of the distinction between, respectively, evidence and memory. Archival theory is derived from the characteristics of records. As noted already, in the classic archival texts, archival theory focused on the organic character and evidential properties of records and their context of creation and contemporary use. In this, the pioneering theorists quite naturally reflected their own preoccupation with arranging and describing older records of uncertain provenance, complex formats, and arcane classifications that had been inherited from earlier periods of information scarcity. These theoretical concepts around evidence became the very core of archival thinking and professional identity, as they consciously formed the historic distinction between archives and libraries. These concepts evolved, it must be remembered, before the current era of information overload when archivists either perceived or had forced on them the need to choose which records would survive rather than simply inherit all surviving records.¹⁴

Such classic **archival** theory has no direct relevance, however, to **appraisal** theory, which concerns the value of records, the reasons or principles why some records are judged to be important and thus preserved by archives, and others are judged not to be important and thus destroyed. The inherent nature of records does not help determine **which** records, of the billions and billions created each day, actually have long-term, enduring, or archival value. All records by definition bear evidence to some degree of their creator’s acts and transactions, thoughts and feelings, and all have an original order and context. But that being said, one is not left much further ahead in defining issues of value or importance or significance, or any of the other terms used in appraisal to distinguish what is kept and what is destroyed. What differs and is important, is not the evidential and contextual nature of the record, but the relative importance of the various and differing contexts of the acts and transactions, or at a higher level, of the functions and programmes or activities, or higher still, of the community or societal expectations, that caused the record to be created.

In the office of a school headmaster, records may be created for the implementation of a major revision of the curriculum and for the ordering of pencils, but clearly one function generates records of long-term importance and the other does not. That in a nutshell is the reason for functional macroappraisal: determining which functions, work processes, activities, or individuals are likely to produce records of enduring value and which are not – rather than

reading directly (in larger jurisdictions) billions of records or tens of thousands of series to try to gauge their potential historical research values.

Comparing archival theory and appraisal theory, then, is a bit like comparing apples and oranges. Going further and expecting them to be consistent or integrated is like comparing apples and Elvis. And yet the confounding of archival and appraisal theory is what sometimes goes on, explicitly and implicitly. The most strident neo-Jenkinsonians in Canada, for example, deny to archivists a significant role in appraisal at all, as that would threaten, just as Jenkinson claimed, the alleged objectivity of the record and of the archivist, beyond of course making interventions to ensure that all records created bear the properties of good evidence as demanded by classic archival theory, now updated for an electronic era; or else the neo-Jenkinsonians insist that appraisal be limited to assessing the long-term needs of the records creator or the internal uses of records by the creator.¹⁵

A kinder and gentler version of such neo-Jenkinsonianism is evident in some readings here in Australia of the AS 4390 Records Management Standard. One prominent advocate, who indeed has also tried to build bridges across the evidence-memory chasm, nevertheless states that “a key element of this system was a rejection of the traditional North American division between the work of records managers (who work with current records) and archivists (who work with non-current or historical records). Intrinsic to the Australian system is the philosophy that if archivists are to have historical records to preserve they first of all have to ensure that the current records are properly created and maintained.”¹⁶ While no one will disagree with the second idea that historical records to be of any use must have the qualities of reliable evidence that comes from proper creation and maintenance (that is the **archival** theory part), the first idea is much more problematic and in my view leads to bad appraisal (that is the **appraisal** theory part). The AS 4390 Standard itself is more harsh; it defines appraisal as “the process of evaluating business activities to determine which records need to be captured and how long the records need to be kept, to meet business needs, the requirements of organizational accountability, and community expectations.” As Stephen Yorke notes, the standard goes out of its way to set forth the criteria for appraising the first two – business needs and organizational accountability, but is silent on the third. While Yorke rightly notes that the broader community’s expectations of archives are impossible to articulate with verifiable precision, he concludes, with much justification in my view, that these expectations extend considerably beyond the needs of the creator for administrative uses or for the public to hold the creator accountable for its actions.¹⁷ A narrower interpretation yet is that the “community expectations” clause amounts to archivists ensuring that reliable recorded evidence exists for holding public institutions accountable — here archival theory based on evidence almost vanquishes appraisal theory focused on memory from the field of appraisal itself!

The focus of appraisal on the record-keeping needs of the creator and on issues of public accountability, and the assertion that there is no essential “division” between the work of records managers and archivists, devalues the cultural and heritage dimensions of archives. This neo-Jenkinsonian approach inevitably will privilege the needs of business or government in terms of the issues that get addressed, the allocation of resources, and the long-term survival of records. These enduring records that survive will not reflect “the broad spectrum of human experience,” in Gerald Ham’s lovely phrase¹⁸ – that is, the records society needs as its richly

textured collective memory — as much as they will the narrow needs of the records creator based on risk avoidance, market opportunities, or desires to avoid embarrassment or accountability. We need as a profession to remind ourselves continually of the fate of records left to White House presidents and Soviet commissars, South African apartheid police forces and Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia, rogue Queensland politicians and the American Internal Revenue Service, among many others on a sordid list of record destroyers for selfish ends.

In France, the approach of several decades of having senior archivists assigned to government departments to work in such an integrated way with records creators has broken down simply because, not surprisingly, the smaller group is co-opted by the much larger host group. While many records managers would no doubt welcome the education, skills, abilities, and enthusiasm of archivists as common record-keepers, who will do the so-called traditional work that archivists have done in appraisal? Who will speak independently on behalf of society and interpret its cultural and heritage needs? Certainly not the hard-pressed records managers, who furthermore do not have the education, knowledge, and research skills necessary to do it even if they wanted to, and who are captive employees often of powerful interests not keen to respect society's wishes or basic accountability. Certainly not the new record-keeping archivists, as they are now too busy doing so-called traditional records management work, and, as a result, presumably their education and employment competency standards will gradually change to focus on record-keeping, information management, and information technology, rather than on the research content and methodologies that come from studying Australian history and culture, political science, sociology, cultural anthropology, philosophy, and various media studies, thus in time rendering them (like their records manager allies) unable to do the research and analysis necessary to appraise "the broad spectrum of human experience," nor perhaps have the independence of action to resist the record destroyers. I will return to this point regarding "research."

The National Archives of Australia offers a more expansive vision. As one enters the main reference area, there is an extensive, attractive, and very useful series of "Fact Sheets" on archival terms and related regulations, service procedures and costs, and sources guides of principal series for various research topics. Among the first category, Fact Sheet No. 4, dated March 2000, caught my eye. It is entitled "What are archives?" **That**, as Hamlet mused, is the question! Archives are defined as "records that are preserved permanently because of their enduring value." But the next heading on Fact Sheet 4 is more interesting: it asks "Are all records archives?" Admirably free of bureaucratic dissembling, the answer is stark and clear: "No. All archives are records, but not all records become archives. Government agencies, individuals and organisations create and accumulate records.... Many of these records are destroyed once their usefulness for current purposes ceases. Those that are preserved because of their enduring value are called archives."¹⁹ The critical phrase is "all archives are records, but not all records become archives." "All archives are records" equates with evidence, Jenkinson, record-keeping, and archival theory, **but** "not all records become archives" equates with memory, Shellenberg, societal values, and appraisal theory. Archivists make sure as far as they can that reliable records exist rather than decontextualized information or fleeting data, but they also choose a very small portion of such records as archives. These are both essential

tasks for the profession, the one is record-keeping or record management in orientation and one is cultural and historical in focus. Why must one be in the ascendancy? Why must one be seen as traditional or even wrong-headed?

I want to return to the notion I mentioned of research by archivists, for I believe that a revitalized research agenda has the potential to be at the heart of a unifying purpose for the profession, **and** because its complexity is sometimes not well understood, thus making it easier to dismiss its importance when defining educational standards or employment competencies. To identify the small archival portion from the immense larger records universe to which the National Archives Fact Sheet 4 refers, archivists undertake original research to discover the historical and contemporary functions and structures, and key individuals, that or who may be considered either representative of the whole or, conversely, special or outstanding in some way. Whether within governments, corporations, or the larger Australian society, these functions, structures, and individuals are always changing and evolving over time and space, which changing trends archivists also need through their research to identify and evaluate. Archivists do this research in advance of general published historical knowledge, for historians are dependent in producing such knowledge on the prior work of archivists. Once appraisal and acquisition targets are developed based on this research, additional research into the history of the actual targeted individuals, groups, associations, communities, and institutions is required in order to determine which records in the most appropriate medium will best document that individual or institution's activities, including interaction with other individuals, groups, and institutions. Here research into communication patterns and the nature and characteristics of recording media is also required, as well as research into organizational culture and information systems. New insights from organizational theory suggest that the functional-structural-transactional framework that underpins both the records continuum model and macroappraisal strategy, with obligations in both cases to Anthony Giddens,²⁰ will need to be expanded to include new insights into how radically changing organizations now work, including how formal memory products like documents and records interact with or exist sometimes entirely separate from informal but effective organizational memory strategies and learning systems, and how these in turn are affected by different managerial styles, collaborative workplace discourses, and social networks animating organizational behaviour.²¹ Along these lines, one study of organizational culture has recently led two social scientists to conclude:

Organizational records, like any product of a social process, are fundamentally self-conscious and self-interested.... Records are not neutral, factual, technical documents alone, although when serving legitimate ends they must appear this way, and when serving illegitimate ones even more so. They are designed ... to produce an effect in some kind of audience.²²

That's a long, long way from Sir Hilary! This complex array of contextual factors of both traditional and new organizational theory will naturally influence the nature of the records being created, and thus become factors that the archivist must research carefully in order to determine the significance or value of the records of a particular organization or creator or function or activity.

To knowledge gained by researching all these factors, the archivist also adds (from the fourth dimension of the records continuum) a perspective based on the pluralized nature of the archive **beyond** the context of the immediate creator, no matter how complex that immediate creation context may be, as just indicated. This broader pluralized dimension focuses first and foremost on citizen's impact on, interaction with, and variance from the state; it is especially attentive to the voices of the marginalised; it is sensitive to how organizational records complement or supplement personal and family records; it encompasses cross-institutional and cross-jurisdictional perspectives; and, of course, it is infused with considerations that cross time and space and encompasses needs of users of archival records. As postmodernists both within and outside the archives are noting in an increasing chorus, in this environment, archives are dynamic, contested sites of power in society, and always have been.²³ Do we use the power entrusted to us by society to reflect its broad spectrum of human memory or do we privilege the official narratives of the state and the powerful in society?

The macroappraisal approach I've pioneered directs archivists to think in terms of documenting the process of governance, rather than of governments governing or corporations operating.²⁴ "Governance" includes cognizance of the dialogue and interaction of citizens and groups with the state, the impact of the state on society, and the functions or activities of society itself, as much as it does the inner workings government or business structures. I commend to your consideration the concept that the archivist in appraisal, and all subsequent actions, should focus on the records of governance, not just government, when dealing with institutional records.

If this perspective is embraced, it will complement very nicely the work of archivists dealing with personal papers or private "manuscript" archives with that of government or institutional archivists. In this regard, the macroappraisal methodologies of the institutional archivist have a direct bearing on building a similarly comprehensive documentation strategy for the collecting archives of Australia.²⁵ In what Adrian Cunningham has called a voyage "from here to eternity," collecting archivists have the exciting opportunity before them, to say nothing of the need, in a way quite analogous to institutional archivists, to research and then plan their appraisal and acquisition work to be part of an integrated national documentation strategy for the nation; and to add their research, insights, and collections as an equal partner to the virtual whole of governance to form a "total archives" for Australia with their partner archivists in institutions and governments, and thereby enhance immeasurably Australia's collective memory and heritage.²⁶

I think that in these three appraisal ideas – the archival construction of collective memory, the inclusive notion of governance taken in its broadest sense, and the expansive view of a revitalized research agenda for archivists -- there are common concepts, a common strategic focus, and a common inspiration for archivists of **both** institutional and personal archives, and of **both** the evidence and memory professional foci. While their strategic means for achieving these goals necessarily will vary, the ends are the same and complementary. "Remembering" for the individual is, after all, both internal and external, personal and institutional, private and public. "Remembering" for the institution, new research is showing, is likewise much more

personal and local than corporate and formal, much more social and interactive than hierarchical and static.

So it should be collectively for archives, which are created to help society remember its past, its roots, its history, which **by definition** combines recorded evidence of both the private and the public, the institutional and the personal.

In light of the above arguments, I want to revisit, if briefly and by way of conclusion, the records continuum. In my view, the records continuum model articulated by Frank Upward and his colleagues is the world's most inclusive model for archives, but one that is misinterpreted by both some of its advocates and more of its critics.²⁷ Yet it has sufficient vision and theoretical integrity, it seems to me, so that archivists all stripes, jurisdictions, and mind sets, in archives large and small, corporate and collecting, may find a challenging and respected role for their part of the total archival mission in Australia, or indeed in any jurisdiction.

If this is true, then the continuum may serve as the unifying bond to heal the threatened schism in archives. After all, it includes both evidence and memory on one of its axis, those two uneasy sides of the archival coin. And its pluralizing of memory through societal archives in the fourth dimension of the continuum model, beyond the purview of the institutional or corporate archive in the third dimension, indicates societal-based appraisal at work as I have described it. In short, it does not deny cultural, historical, or heritage roles to archivists, but on the contrary sees these as a critically important parts of record-keeping, while respecting as well the vital records management role of creating and maintaining current records in rich context. The continuum model also encompasses movement across space and time, recognizing that archival records and their metadata are continually shifting, transforming, and gaining new meanings, rather than remaining fixed, static objects, and that this also occurs in the purely archival fourth dimension. It thus includes the postmodern insight that archival metadata “must go beyond issues of reliability and authenticity to consider connectivity and context, use and power.”²⁸ The most inclusive metadata model anywhere from Monash University,²⁹ that not coincidentally incorporates continuum thinking, likewise focuses not just on authenticity and reliability in dimensions one and two for records, but recognizes that **all sixteen key elements** of the continuum — four dimensions across four axes — reflect “value added” research knowledge of the archivist, that is continually changing, both collapsing and expanding time and space across the four dimensions, to create a series of rich interconnections and contextual relationships that would make even Peter Scott very proud.

So what’s wrong? I would suggest that the continuum has been misunderstood because of professional rhetoric and work strategies, rather than by any inherent conceptual flaw -- although the model as drawn can encourage such misinterpretation. The vast majority of record-keeping focus and archival literature world-wide has been on the activities in dimensions one and two of the continuum: creating reliable documents as authentic recorded evidence. This is the UBC and Pittsburgh projects, for example. This is the talk about

merging records managers and archivists. This is the fear that continuum application in real life if not in theory would turn archivists into records managers writ small. It is true that there is some more expansive talk of preserving corporate memory, which is dimension three of the continuum, but dimension four concerning societal or collective memory is almost absent in the literature, and sometimes, as I noted earlier, dismissed as obsolete or wrong-headed. Moreover, there is in the continuum model of four dimensions -- shown as four concentric circles going from the individual action, actor, and document in the centre to pluralized societal archives at the outer rim, the **implication** at least of a centre-outward movement, with the records management work firmly at the centre as a priority (as most literature would suggest as well) -- as a kind of shining sun (it **is** a lighter colour) while societal archives are relegated like Pluto to the dark outer rim of the records universe. This is a false reading, for societal values and community expectations of dimension four do have -- or should have -- a major impact on shaping the three inner dimensions. The fluidity and connectivity of the model would be better understood, I think, if there were directional arrows along each of the four axes, pointing from the centre outward **and** from the outer societal values inward. That, after all, is consistent with Giddens' structuration theory that underpins the model. And perhaps the continuum model need a fifth dimension, or at least a deeper reach for dimension four, to encompass private-sector personal, family, and group records, as a way of recognizing the "total archives" nature of the governance ideal. While its functional and structural axes, called transactional and identity respectively, need to be adjusted as I suggested earlier to account for new organizational theory and behaviours, that is a matter of enhancement, not a fundamental flaw. More serious is the evidential axis — the name privileging "evidence" is indicative of the problem — where evidence and memory sit uneasily together: evidence in the inner core, memory in the outer rings, as if the latter is only a subset of the former rather than memory needs often having a determining influence on the nature and kind of evidence created. There may need to be separate memory and evidence axes, or else their mutual interdependence made clearer on a single axis.

These suggestions aside, the critical importance of the continuum rests on five factors: 1) its conceptual interaction of the sixteen levels and axes too often viewed in archival circles as separate and static; 2) its insight that these complex relationships are fluid, multiple, and simultaneous across time and space, not sequential and fixed; 3) its reconciliation (with some adjustments as suggested) of evidence and memory; 4) its potential for imaginatively incorporating private-sector manuscripts with institutional archives; and 5) its assertion through pluralization that societal and thus cultural values will influence appraisal and, indeed, all aspects of record-keeping.

But let us not forget in advocating **any** logical or conceptual model that there needs to be some space for serendipity, chance, emotion, passion, individuality, and idiosyncrasy. A model should aim — and be used — not to produce automatons all marching along like robots, but to encompass diversity within a broad unity of vision and purpose.

William J. Mitchell, media and IT guru at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has observed about photography, which is applicable to all archival media of memory, and indeed to museums, galleries, historic sites, and other cultural heritage endeavours, that “we make our tools and our tools make us: by taking up particular tools we accede to desires and we manifest intentions.”³⁰ enhance What intentions and desires do we archivists have?

That question itself is essential cultural. Steven Lubar, a specialist in the culture of information technology for the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, reminds us, and indeed all heritage professionals, that “we must think of archives as active, not passive, as sites of power, not as recorders of power. Archives don’t simply **record** the work of culture; they **do** the work of culture.”³¹

If the records continuum is **our** culture, **our** tool, let’s make sure it **works** for **all** of us, and thus manifests comprehensively and inclusively **all** archivists’ intentions as society’s remembrancers.

Notes

1

The paper represents the text as delivered as the opening keynote address at the annual conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, in Melbourne, on 18 August 2000. It is printed here with only slight changes to transform it for a reading audience, but it retains intentionally its conversational tone. I have also added some suggestive (rather than exhaustive) endnotes.

I wish to express again here, as I did in Melbourne, my appreciation of the very real honour of being asked to deliver a keynote address to the ASA. I have much admired -- though not uncritically -- Australian archival thinking on my three extensive trips to this country, and have much profited from reading its archival literature and interacting personally with many of its archivists. Indeed, my own ideas and writing have been much influenced by Australian archival concepts. I have even added post-graduate seminars at the University of Manitoba devoted exclusively to Australian archival thinking. In fact, for the hour duration of this address, I would much rather have been listening to an Australian speaker than to the sound of my own voice! This may have been even more true for those who were among two groups of archivists with each of whom I was privileged to spend a week in March 1999 and who all heard some five presentations from me as well as much additional informal chatter: for them, since as there are only so many ideas in my head, some of what follows may have a familiar ring, but I trust the bell tolls in a somewhat different context.

Australians are rightly famous for their friendly hospitality, and I have had a large measure of that from Lucy Burrows of the Conference Committee. It is not easy making initial arrangements with someone 15,000 kilometres away who travels too much with uncertain e-mail connections, but she did everything for my personal arrangements with great efficiency and wonderful generosity. I also wish to thank as well the Commonwealth Government for sponsoring my attendance from my temporary home in Canberra to journey to Melbourne. I have also appreciate and acknowledge the sage advice I received in preparing this address from

Glenda Acland, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, Steve Stuckey, and Frank Upward, none of whom are responsible of course for the opinions and heresies herein expressed.

2

See Adrian Cunningham, "Beyond the Pale," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996). He was responding to an observation I made in Australia in 1993; see Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (November 1994): 322. I have extended this critique considerably in Terry Cook, "The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique," *Archives and Museums Informatics* 11 (1997).

3

Glenda Acland, "Managing the Record Rather Than the Relic," *Archives and Manuscripts* 20 (May 1992). Several continuum advocates liken their conversion to moving from a flat-earth to round-earth perspective; once you know the world is round, you can never go back to the flat-earth paradigm, which likewise carries the implication that those who do not join with them are the archival equivalents of pre-Copernican scientists! I have contributed to these rhetorical divisions with such phrasing as "electronic records, paper minds" (see note 2).

4

These charges, and many more like them, are detailed, with full documentation, in the forthcoming article by Mark Greene, Richard Pifer, Frank Boles, Bruce Bruemmer, and Todd Daniels Howell, "The Archivist's New Clothes; or, the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions, and Recordness," which no archivist should miss reading, and reflecting on, no matter which side of the rhetorical fence she or he sits.

5

. See Chris Hurley's 10 January 1997 posting to the Aus-Archivists Listserv, in which he has this to say about traditional archival thinking: "Records appear before the appraisal archivist like babies in cabbage patches." This is "flat earth" indeed!

6

Perhaps there is too much labelling in the profession, for whatever good strategic reasons; perhaps there is too much black-and-white dichotomizing when the world really operates in nuance shades of grey; perhaps as a profession we need to search for what unites us as archivists at fundamental levels rather than what divides us because of particular working or record-creating circumstances. Yet maybe we need to see the starkness of the black and white before we can appreciate the nuances (and attractiveness) of the grey?

7

Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London, 1968, a reissue of the revised second edition of 1937), 149-55, 190. "Memoir of Sir Hilary Jenkinson," in J. Conway Davies, *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson, C.B.E., LL.D., F.S.A.* (London, 1957).

8

On the history of archival ideas and major changes in these during the twentieth century, see Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift" *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997).

9

For a critique of David Bearman, and *inter alia* of other record-keeping thinking, but within an overall positive and supportive appreciation of his contribution to archival thinking, see Cook, "The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique;" and more harshly, see

Greene, et al., "The Archivist's New Clothes; or, the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions, and Recordness."

10

See Sue McKemmish, "Evidence of Me," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (May 1996).

11

See for example Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York and Oxford, 1996). For an extended appreciation of this theme (and book) that space here does not allow, see Terry Cook, "Archives, Evidence, and Memory: Thoughts on a Divided Tradition," *Archival Issues* 22 (1997).

12

The Canberra Times, 12 August 2000, C1.

13

See Richard A. Posner, *Law and Literature: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge MA and London, 1998). His book is the principal text, from its original edition in 1988 onward, in a growing number of courses that explore the interaction of law and literature, and the lessons each has for the other. The author is a senior judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals and senior lecturer in law at the University of Chicago.

14

For more discussion of the evolving historical context of archival theory as the profession's metatext along these lines, complete with full references, see Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas."

15

For the first point, see Luciana Duranti, "The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994). This was starkly rebutted by Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, "Et tu Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory," *American Archivist* 59 (Summer 1996). On the second point, see Terry Eastwood, "How Goes it with Appraisal?," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), as one of several examples.

¹⁶16. Adrian Cunningham, "Ensuring Essential Evidence: Changing Archival and Records Management Practices in the Electronic Recordkeeping Era," *Provenance: The Web Magazine* 2 (Spring 1997), as found at www.netpac.com/provenance/vol2no2/features/evidence. I owe this citation to Mark Greene, et al., "The Archivist's New Clothes; or, the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions, and Recordness."

17

The AS 4390 Standard as quoted by Stephen Yorke, "Great Expectations or None at All: The Role and Significance of Community Expectations in the Appraisal Function," *Archives and Manuscripts* 28 (May 2000): 24. For his useful analysis, see throughout, pp. 24-37.

18

F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader* (Washington, 1984), 326, 328-29, 333 (first published in 1975); and his "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 207.

19

National Archives of Australia, Fact Sheet 4 "What are archives?" (March 2000). I might add that **no** North American life cyler would be unhappy with that definition. While I do not count myself a life cyler, having written the policy for the National Archives of Canada for partial distributed custody for electronic records and developed macroappraisal as a "up front" strategy during the active life of records, I do observe that some Australians have a rather stereotyped view of the life cycle, perhaps as a way of emphasizing the contrast with

their continuum model. Yet even in its classic mode in the United States of T.R. Schellenberg and his National Archives' Washington colleagues like Philip C. Brooks, archivists following the life cycle still worked closely "up front" with records managers. Furthermore, by inventing records scheduling, or sentencing, they did not sit back passively and wait for records to be sent to the archives for selection; appraisal occurred as part of the scheduling approval process. The life cycle posits that records go through different phases or cycles; the dimensions of the continuum imply very much the same thing. The status of a record (and its metadata) in dimension four of the continuum is radically different than it is in dimension one. As I will note later in this paper, the continuum has many advantages over the life cycle or other archival models in being less linear, less uni-directional, more fluid, more comprehensive. Continuum advocates might better focus on the real differences with the life cycle rather than on a stereotype that in working reality rarely occurred.

20

For Giddens and macroappraisal, see Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara Craig, ed., *The Canadian Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992); and Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92); and his "Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995). For Giddens and the continuum (sometimes stimulated by these earlier Canadian works), see Frank Upward, "Structuring the Records Continuum. Part One: Post-custodial principles and properties," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (November 1996); and his "Structuring the Records Continuum. Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25 (May 1997).

21

On organizational memory beyond formal recordkeeping, see as an example E.W. Stein, "Organizational Memory: Review of Concepts and Recommendations for Management," *International Journal of Information Management* 15 (1995); and Eric W. Stein and Vladimir Zwass, "Actualizing Organizational Memory with Information Systems," *Information Systems Research* 6 (June 1995). On management theory, organizational characteristics, and records, see Victoria Lemieux, "Applying Mintzberg's Theories on Organizational Configuration to Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998). On the new, networked, collaborative organizations and their impact on records, see Peter Botticelli, "Records Appraisal in Network Organizations: Preliminary Observations from an NHPRC Study," *Archivaria* 49 (forthcoming). On the different social characteristics based on a kind of organizational anthropology and how these affect behaviour, including memory, and thus recordkeeping, see Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY, 1986). She writes (p. 72) that information is not "forgotten randomly" in organizations; "The strengths and weaknesses of recall depend on a mnemonic system that is the whole social order." This takes the contextuality of records well beyond the traditional physical artifact and its immediate creator.

22

John Van Maanen and Brian Pentland's 1994 analysis of the Rodney King beating evidence, as brought to my attention by Chris Halonen, archival doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto, in his thesis research.

23

For a summary, see Terry Cook, "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts," *Archival Science* (forthcoming fall 2000). The first mention of postmodernism (at least in English) by an archivist in an article title was by Terry Cook, in "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," in *Archives and Manuscripts* in 1994. The themes were continued in his "What is Past is Prologue," already cited. Two pioneering postmodern archivists before Cook were also Canadian, Brien Brothman and Richard Brown.

Among other works, see Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991); "The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993); and his probing review of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, in *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), which ideas are very much extended in his "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999); and Richard Brown, "The Value of 'Narrativity' in the Appraisal of Historical Documents: Foundation for a Theory of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991); "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," already cited; and "Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997). Two recent and incisive analyses are by Preben Mortensen, "The Place of Theory in Archival Practice," and Tom Nesmith, "Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the 'Ghosts' of Archival Theory," both from *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999). Other Canadian archivists reflecting postmodernist influences, at least in published form in English, include Bernadine Dodge, "Places Apart: Archives in Dissolving Space and Time," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997); Theresa Rowatt, "The Records and the Repository as a Cultural Form of Expression," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993); Joan Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995); and Lilly Koltun, "The Promise and Threat of Digital Options in an Archival Age," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999). Non-Canadian postmodern archivists include Eric Ketelaar, "Archivalisation and Archiving," *Archives and Manuscripts* 27 (May 1999); and Verne Harris, "Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997); as well as his complementary "Redefining Archives in South Africa: Public Archives and Society in Transition, 1990-96," *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996); and his and Sello Hatang, "Archives, Identity and Place: A Dialogue on what it (Might) Mean(s) to be an African Archivist," *ESARBICA Journal* 19 (2000). So too do some of the writings, implicitly at least, of Americans Margaret Hedstrom, Richard Cox, and James O'Toole, and Australians Frank Upward, Sue McKemmish, and Barbara Reed. Planned symposia and publications scheduled for the next year to investigate archives and the construction of social memory will do much to expand the numbers and nationalities of archivists involved in considering the implications of postmodernism for their profession. For a fine appreciation of the significance of Derrida on archives and archivists, see Steven Lubar, "Information Culture and the Archival Record," *American Archivist* 62 (Spring 1999).

24

The first published statement was by Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study With Guidelines* (Paris, 1991). See also the works by Cook and Brown in note 20 above. There is a growing list of published case studies implementing macroappraisal concepts and strategies. For an excellent overview, see Danielle Wickman, "Bright Specimens for the Curious or The Somewhat Imponderable Guided by the Unfathomable: Use, Users and Appraisal in Archival Literature," *Archives and Manuscripts* 28 (May 2000).

25

On the documentation strategy, see Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986); and her "Improving our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-

92). There have been several case studies of its implementation; for the most detailed, see Richard J. Cox, *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscript Curators* (Metuchen, NJ, 1996).

26

Adrian Cunningham, "From Here to Eternity: Collecting Archives and the Need for a National Documentation Strategy," *LASIE (Library Automated Systems Information Exchange)* 29 (March 1998).

27

For the continuum's classic articulation, see Frank Upward's two articles already cited in note 20. For how continuum thinking pervades many aspects of Australian archivy, see as well Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Clayton [Melbourne], 1994), especially Frank Upward's "In Search of the Continuum: Ian Maclean's 'Australian Experience' Essays on Recordkeeping." For an interesting extension of some of this thinking, see Chris Hurley, "The Making and the Keeping of Records: (2) The Tyranny of Listing," *Archives and Manuscripts* 28 (May 2000).

28

Lubar, "Information Culture and the Archival Record," 22.

29

See the comparisons to other models in Barbara Reed, "Metadata: Core Record or Core Business," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25 (November 1997).

30

As cited in Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats."

31

Lubar, "Information Culture and the Archival Record," 15, original emphasis.