



Why ‘radical recordkeeping’?

This issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, centred on the theme of *radical* recordkeeping, was designed with two aims in mind. The first was to present a selection of papers that suggest the creativity, range, and breadth of current conversations in archival scholarship and practice, and that are also linked to radical departures in thinking, in content, and in approach. The second was to connect Australian recordkeeping, past and present, with the growing, diverse scholarship and practice that continues to evolve around records, challenges, and radical solutions.

The idea of a Radical Recordkeeping theme issue for *Archives and Manuscripts* was born from discussions within the Records Continuum Research Group,¹ arising from the need for diverse voices, cases, situations, and conversations on radical recordkeeping that relate to conversations, both new and ongoing, in Australian archival contexts. The term ‘recordkeeping’ is used here in a Records Continuum sense – as an umbrella term encompassing records, relationships, and use from all aspects of creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation. The most relevant submissions to this theme issue were those that considered the complexity of an archive in all its contexts, rather than just the result of or end-point of collection. The term ‘radical’ is a contested one to be used in terms of recordkeeping (distinct from inciting terror), with a working definition, as the concept is emergent. The Guest Editors sought contributions from authors on recordkeeping and radical content (whether it be documenting activism, social movements or extreme views) as well as or alternatively, disruption of traditional recordkeeping paradigms in revolutionary or profound ways using different approaches that inform practice, scholarship and teaching.

In this issue, Cassie Findlay discusses the social and technological advances shaping a new future for recordkeeping, posing both opportunities and challenges. In a post-truth society, information has become weaponised, she quotes, and as a networked society, some individuals and groups are pushing back on surveillance, custody and control of information. As personal data becomes currency, the shift of power to a networked rather than hierarchical model for recordkeeping is provoking new types of recordkeeping tools and strategies (including the use of blockchain). A common connector between the radical ideas presented in this issue is perfectly captured by Findlay:

we must think beyond the institutional, the separate ‘capture’ of records by agents involved in the transactions, and think instead of co-creation and keeping of records using a system that is designed and operated by consensus amongst a family, a community, an institution or a government (p. 186)

Gina Watts uses an example in her article of institutions deleting negative posts on their social media pages, and therefore performing skewed recordkeeping. While the deletion of negative records is not necessarily new, the ability for recordkeepers to find, access, create, capture, and store additional sources and voices continues to grow. Watts suggests that this situation may be mitigated by capturing multiple voices in equal measure on the archival record in various contexts, to ensure social justice. Using Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor’s notion of radical empathy, Watts charges archivists to prioritise the needs of people over institutions and corporate understandings as arbiters of truth in records. Using the recent Women’s March as a global case study, Watts describes the failings of traditional recordkeeping to document nuances found in both the strive toward and contestation of intersectionality and inclusion within the Women’s March

community. For example, how does society capture the voices of feminist critics who did not attend the March, and how can an archivist apply 'ethics of care' principles to relationships in action? How can archivists record the voices of marginalised women, such as transgender or women of colour, 'anticipating their emotional needs as relating to these collections'? (Watts, p. 197)

Community archives are sites of both resistance to dominant archival practices and community empowerment, as examined by Jimmy Zavala. He and his research team found that a number of community archives in Southern California embraced some degree of post-custodial practices that prioritised community ownership, access and trust in preference to assumed custody and control by dominant archival institutions. This radical departure from tradition (in form and content) of a custodial archive is based on solid research in community contexts, and brings forward the agency and resistance inherent in post-custodial recordkeeping models and practice.

Art has long served as an act of resistance, and at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, Lisa Cianci embeds archival concepts and preservation strategies in the pedagogy for emerging artists. Her article focusses not on artwork itself, but on her radical approach of passing on practical expertise to her students in resistance to memory loss, entropy or digitally uncontrolled 'wild archives' where applicable and decided by the student themselves. Acknowledging the concept of an 'anarchive', a radical departure from traditional archives, Cianci considers the challenge of new media and artistic reinterpretation. She posits reinterpretation as a new and radical preservation strategy with artistic and archival agency.

In addition to the peer-reviewed articles accepted for this issue, we have also included two invited essays from Justice Jennifer Coate and Joanne Evans that reflect on the records of children in out-of-home care. Justice Coate, in her 2016 ASA conference keynote presentation, provides an update of the work of the Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in its public and private hearings and outlines the recordkeeping challenges highlighted by this process.

Pertinent to the theme of this special issue, and partly in response to the work of the Royal Commission, Joanne Evans explains the genesis, goals and methodologies of *Setting the Record Straight: For the Rights of the Child Initiative* and 2017 Summit in Melbourne, Australia. She proposes that radical recordkeeping solutions are required to meet those challenges. Radically different from the status quo of narrow, fragmented, and inaccessible records of out-of-home care in Australia, the trans-disciplinary community represented at the Summit aims to provide 'a secure, distributed, networked, digital archive populated by children themselves and by their caregivers, caseworkers, teachers, and health professionals. This would support a child's identity, memory and time in out-of-home care and be accessible throughout his or her life' (Evans, p. 251). Evans goes further in outlining some of the governance issues associated with such an archive, which would stand alongside a formalised charter, a governance capability, and a trans-disciplinary research agenda outlined in a *National Framework for Recordkeeping for Childhood Out of Home Care* by 2020. In her review of the Summit, Nicola Laurent questions whether the absence of politicians and policy-makers from the event will undermine its efficacy in pursuing this agenda. Or, perhaps it is outside of institutionally controlled solutions that radical recordkeeping can truly take place, as defined in some of the cases (outlined in articles by Zavala and others) on community archives?

As the scholarship around community archives and radical reckonings with records and recordkeeping continue to grow, we believe that this set of papers links to past dialogues and provides a window to the future. We hope that as you read these, you think about additional and even more radical ways of approaching, understanding, and contextualising records and recordkeeping.

Endnote

1. Information about the Records Continuum Research Group is available at <https://recordscontinuum.info/> accessed 21 September 2017.

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