Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Editorial

Archives have always been changing, but in recent times the changes have been quite profound and seemingly accelerated, both in Australia and around the world, in theory and in practice. Much of this can probably be attributed, in one way or another, to the ongoing disruptive effects of the Internet and its many derivatives. It is unsurprising then that the online world features prominently in the articles of this issue, shaping and channelling many of the challenges that archivists are contending with in their contemporary practice.

Over the course of the years I have served as the general editor of this journal, a number of important debates have risen to prominence within the Australian archival discourse. One of them has been on the topic of moving practice away from seeing records subjects as third parties, mere objects of discussion and study, to a model where they are co-creators and participants, agents within a model of multiple provenance. While the theoretical underpinnings for this have been well developed for some time, the challenge has been finding ways to implement theoretical insights into practice.

The legacy of the approach which relegated records subjects to objectified third parties has justifiably engendered a long-standing suspicion and scepticism among those subjects when regarding the motivations of collecting institutions that hold archives which document their lives and communities. Thus disenfranchised, records subjects have been reluctant to engage in projects initiated by major archival institutions that seek to improve awareness and discoverability relating to records about them, particularly in the online world of digitised collections and ubiquitous access. One of the main barriers to members of Aboriginal communities feeling like they own a stake in the archives that exist about them and their history is a lack of genuine consultation, often characterised by the predetermined pathways and timeframes in which consultations are conducted. Sophie Nicholls and her co-authors from the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language & MARCS Institute at Western Sydney University, and the State Library of New South Wales Indigenous Services Branch, present the findings of a project of engagement with four Indigenous language groups in their article 'From Principle to Practice: Community Consultation Regarding Access to Indigenous Language Material in Archival Records at the State Library of NSW'. The article, as the authors explain, reports on the 'experience of applying guidelines developed by First Languages Australia (FLA) and National and State Libraries of Australasia (NSLA) aimed at enhancing the rights of Indigenous Australians over records that contain Indigenous language material' (p. X). The engagement and consultation was occasioned by the *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages* project, but its findings have far wider applicability and relevance insofar as they can help inform archival practitioners on how to implement new theoretical approaches to records subjects as lived practices and realities.

Community archives have featured prominently in recent years, both in this journal and in broader archival discussions around the world. This is part of an archival activism that has attempted to generate a more diverse representation and documentation of communities than was hitherto offered by mainstream archival institutions. Expanding the range of evidence about communities being created, collected and preserved is one way that archives can play a greater

role in enabling social memory resources that are not skewed disproportionately toward dominant groups and interests. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Frank Upward's records continuum model, Antonio Rodrigues proposes an archival collecting model for the records generated by South African Portuguese community-based organisations. Qualitative research in the form of interviews with representatives of 19 community-based organisations shaped the findings presented, and the ensuing discussion of the proposed model considers what kinds of processes are required as well as the resources and other factors necessary for such an undertaking. As Rodrigues himself observes, though the model has in mind one particular under-represented community in collecting institutions within the nation of South Africa, it could be adapted for other communities, and indeed beyond the confines of South Africa.

Another approach to broadening the range of the archival record is presented in this issue by Anneli Sundqvist and Lars-Erik Hansen. Their article, 'Memory at Stake – Swedish Private Archives in a Changing Landscape', considers the unique development of popular movement archives in Sweden which resulted in a sector of private archival institutions. As they observe, these private archival collections have constituted 'important complements to the public archives, covering other spheres of society and contributing to preserving the history of everyday life and of the political and social development of society' (p. X). The challenge the authors focus on in this article is what needs to be done in the face of the weakening and dissolution of the social movements and host organisations that gave rise to these archival institutions. In a world of more fluid social and community activism, in which many contemporary records are being created in online and virtual environments, the authors outline some measures that Sweden's popular movements archives can take to maintain relevance and survive, and thereby maintain their unique contribution to the nation's societal memory.

At the recent Australian Society of Archivists Conference in Parramatta, where the theme was 'Forging Links: People, Systems, Archives', a number of papers focused on the need for archives and archivists to make new links and arrangements with groups and individuals that operate outside traditional institutional settings and processes. Tim Sherratt and Cassie Findlay jointly delivered the first of the keynote sessions themed 'Collaboration'. Both presentations were thought-provoking contributions to the ways in which archives can be reconfigured through activism. Sherratt focused on his various experiments hacking the metadata and digitised records of the National Archives of Australia, and thereby the records of federal government agencies, to make them yield unintended insights into governance and decision-making, finding ways to make archives more meaningful and engaging in regard to contemporary political and social issues (the paper has been privately published online at https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.4055013.v2). Findlay addressed the topic of 'Archival Activism' and her paper is presented in this issue. Findlay makes a forceful argument urging archivists to operate more boldly outside the confines of institutional settings, forging links with groups that are under-represented or marginalised. Among the concepts explored is the possibility of archivists developing decentralised forms of trust inspired by the advent of blockchain technologies.

Yet another form of activism features in one of the reviews that appear in this issue. Maryanne Dever reviews Joshua Hammer's *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu*, which tells the story of this West African city and the marvels of its ancient illuminated manuscripts. In 2013 the majority of these manuscripts were saved from destruction by the retreating troops of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb by the courageous actions of Abdel Kader Haidara and the local community to sequester them in various secret locations throughout the city and other parts of Mali. At the time of the retreat, many feared that these collections had been lost forever.

This is my final issue as general editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*. It has been an intense, rewarding and stimulating, even if sometimes exhausting, experience. After eight years in the role, I decided earlier this year that it was time to pass on the baton to someone new who could take the journal into the future. I would like to acknowledge everyone who collaborated with

me during these years, the many authors and referees, editorial board members past and present, particularly Adrian Cunningham, the Reviews Editor, Louise Trott, the Managing Editor of the Australian Society of Archivists, and the late Sigrid McCausland who sadly passed away while this issue was being finalised. I look forward to continuing my service to the journal as a member of its editorial board and to supporting its new editor.

Sebastian Gurciullo