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Editorial

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One of the most persistent challenges that face everyone working in archives today is the question of relevance. The question emerges in any number of ways, and was explored at length at the 2013 Australia Society of Archivists conference in Canberra which pondered the future of the profession. The question was also central to last year's July special themed issue of the journal, 'Reinventing Archival Methods', guest edited by Cate Cumming, Cassie Findlay, Anne Picot and Barbara Reed.

Unsurprisingly, the relevance of archives has also emerged in relation to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Sadly, this is not the first time that a royal commission or inquiry has been charged with investigating the welfare of children. As Kim Eberhard observes in her timely article, 'Unresolved issues: recordkeeping recommendations arising from Australian commissions of inquiry into the welfare of children in out-of-home care, 1997–2012', in the past 24 years there have been 80 inquiries into various aspects involving the welfare of children. For practical reasons and the purposes of this article, Eberhard narrows the field to 8 inquiries to analyse the recordkeeping implications raised in the reports produced by these inquiries, and the extent to which they have been addressed.

Eberhard observes that one of the difficulties encountered in her analysis was having to decipher the recordkeeping implications in recommendations, as if the commissioners were unaware that they were addressing a field of established professional practice and discourse. Whatever the reason for this may be, Eberhard argues that this lack of understanding indicates the continuing need for strong advocacy about records and recordkeeping, observing that 'commissioners have been confronted with the centrality of records to their inquiries, and that a *lack* of records has been the most critical factor leading to recommendations concerning recordkeeping in both public and private sectors' (p. 6).

In 'Towards Archive 2.0: issues in archival systems interoperability', Greg Rolan tackles the problem of relevance by identifying the barriers built into the systems that archives use for making their holdings visible and accessible. In a world where web-based interconnectivity should entail a seamless exchange of information across jurisdictional and organisation boundaries, archives are lagging behind. Those in the community who lack the knowledge to negotiate their way through these boundaries may effectively be unable to access the records they require, whatever their research purpose. Rolan advocates for the creation of an Archival Commons, reporting on a research project that investigated how it might be possible to create such an all-encompassing entity based on the development of a web-based application programming interface (API) that would enable archival system interoperability. What Rolan proposes would conform with the Australian Series System, and could provide a pathway for addressing some of the crucial recommendations raised in inquiries seeking to redress social injustice.

Also thinking about the role of records in redressing social injustices, Livia Iacovino in her article 'Shaping and reshaping cultural identity and memory: maximising human

rights through a participatory archive' uses international and national human rights instruments as her point of departure to explore the implications of conceiving of rights to records through the prism of cultural rights and more specifically the concept of cultural identity, both in its personal and collective dimensions. The right to preserve evidence of cultural identity, Iacovino observes, must also be balanced against the right to be forgotten, particularly in situations where hurt or harm may be inflicted on those concerned. The obvious tension in these principles requires the implementation of new mechanisms and approaches in archival regimes. Iacovino proposes some ways to achieve this through online interaction in participatory archive models, whereby participants can act as record co-creators, not just passive record subjects. The creation of virtual spaces allow for annotation of the 'official' record and as an avenue for the maximisation of rights to be negotiated. Iacovino urges policy makers in Australian archives and other jurisdictions to consider the warrants that she argues already exist for changing their relationship with record subjects, particularly in situations that involve critical social justice implications as with the Aboriginal community.

Lisa Sisco explores the challenges faced by archivists and other professionals charged with the preservation and provision of access to braille and other tactile print records in her article 'Braille preservation: recognising and respecting archival materials produced by and for the blind'. Observing how little has been written about this topic and the consequent lack of knowledge and understanding about these collections, Sisco concludes by urging information professionals to 'be cognisant of how the blind and visually impaired express themselves so that repositories will protect and maintain these records both nationally and around the world' (pp. 25–6). Without this basic understanding of the culture of those who use braille and other tactile systems, professionals may end up tending to view records in these formats as mere transcriptions of originals that exist elsewhere. Sisco's article is an attempt to engender a better understanding so that the measures professionals enact do not end up undermining the integrity of records that preserve evidence of a shared cultural history and identity. The detailed preservation guidelines, policies and procedures, Sisco notes, will be part of a future study.

Does the concept of 'original order' still make sense in an electronic world? Jinfang Niu in 'Original order in the digital world' aims to answer this question through a systematic explication of the multifarious orders implicit in electronic records. The framework employed by Niu has two main dimensions: a vertical dimension which encompassing 'abstract conceptual order, order on the user interface of application software, and order in storage' (p. 62). The horizontal dimension of the model encompasses the relationships between paper and electronic portions of a recordkeeping system, the relationship between electronic records and their metadata, the relationship of different electronic records, and the relationships between multiple versions, copies or captures of electronic records. Niu advocates for a translation of the principle of original order that makes sense in the digital world, one that is no longer primarily concerned with physical order on storage media, but instead attentive to the conceptual order of electronic records, and ultimately, an approach which can accommodate the reality of dynamic recordkeeping systems which have no original order as such.

Among the many reviews in this issue of the journal is Cassie Findlay's review of *Preserving Complex Digital Objects*, which provides us with a glimpse into the stakes associated with preserving and documenting the myriad digital objects that have emerged as a product of widespread information technologies and their application in almost every form of present-day activity. It is good to know that work is being done to preserve cultural artefacts such as video games, visual art, 3D modelling, visualisations,

and simulations. These cultural artefacts reflect the rise of computers and associated information technologies that began in the twentieth century, a major cultural phenomenon that continues apace in this century. The impact of these technologies on the social fabric cannot be underestimated – they have ushered changes which we are still undergoing and which have literally changed (and are still changing) everything. Among the challenges and opportunities that Findlay identifies is a familiar one: that the work of archivists and recordkeepers seems to have been overlooked by those working in related disciplines associated with these technologies and the complex digital artefacts that need to be managed.