

the seeker. The seeker of the answers to the great questions of life – what are we here for? What is it all about? Clark is the emblematic man needing to believe in an age that lost its belief. His life is this struggle.

As with his life, so, too, with his history. Clark approaches history not as an academic historian seeking the neat and tidy run-of-the-mill historical explanations (economic, demographic and geographic, and so on) of what happened; he is seeking answers to the question of what Australia is for. What has Australia meant? What is Australia? And to get the answers, he goes beyond the documents and into – to use a suitably Clarkian expression – the heart of man. And what archive has the heart of man? Art. So Clark's inspirations were artists – Dostoevsky, Lawrence, White, Nolan – more than historians. Therefore, Clark's history is perhaps best seen less as an historical endeavour and more as an artistic work. It is for this reason that I think it will be read, and, where it is read, so, too, should this biography.

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Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund (eds), *Better off Forgetting? Essays on Archives, Public Policy and Collective Memory*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2010. xvii + 242 pp. ISBN 978 1 4426 4167 9 (hardback) CAN\$55.00; ISBN 9781442610804 (paperback) CAN\$24.95.

Both the synopsis on the inside front cover and the blurb from Ken Rasmussen of the University of Regina on the back cover of *Better off Forgetting? Essays on Archives, Public Policy and Collective Memory* gave me pause before I read this collection of essays. Both incorporated statements along the lines of 'no longer the preserve of historians and academics, archives are increasingly tools for accountability'. Surely our Canadian colleagues have not only recently been struck by this aspect of recordkeeping? Records are, indeed, first and foremost about evidence and accountability; it is what guides all aspects of our work. It was a concerning start to my exploration of this look into archives and their uses in Canadian society and beyond.

The essays are organised into five sections: 'The history of funding', 'Access and privacy', 'The digital age', 'Accountability and the public sphere' and 'Resources for the present'. The authors are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities, including Australia's own Tom Adami, who has been working in Africa with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and, more recently, the United National Mission in Sudan. Some of the heavyweights of the Canadian archival profession are present, in the form of Terry Cook, Terry Eastwood and Tom Nesmith, and there are a sprinkling of non-archivists, including a former *Wall Street Journal* foreign correspondent (Robert Steiner), an assistant professor of art history (Mona Holmlund) and a lawyer teaching at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law (Doug Surtees).

The essays contained in part 1, 'The history of funding', make all too familiar reading. Here are the perennial problems of securing adequate funding for archives, placed in the context of competing with other institutions in the 'GLAM' sector and the role of bodies like the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA). Of course, these are all familiar themes for Australian readers, if a little depressing for us, given the demise of the Australian Council of Archives some years ago. The CCA is described by Marion Beyea as having been 'a central and important force in the Canadian archival system'. She is not an impartial observer, having served as its founding president, but she does support this assertion with some hard data, demonstrating its success in its roles of securing grants and disbursing funds for non-government and provincial archives, helping to establish higher education courses for archivists and professional development training – all of which have proved invaluable complementary activities to those offered by the professional associations and Library and Archives Canada. However, it is not all happy news, Beyea noting that the CCA is in dire need of additional funding to continue its important work.

I approached the essays on access and privacy with great interest, being in the midst of planning a panel discussion on these very themes. Nor was I disappointed, particularly with Jo-Ann Munn Gafuik's essay, 'Access-to-Information: A Critical Analysis'. Munn Gafuik opens her essay by arguing that there has been a global shift to transparency and the increased flow of information, but noting that some commentators see a pattern of resistance and feeling that true 'freedom of information' is a public myth. Her aim in the piece is to:

explore the inherent tension between public expectations of transparency on the one hand and concerns about governability on the other, and examine the challenge of balancing the duty to disclose with the need to protect privacy.

She covers this important subject matter exceptionally well, not shying away from the big questions: to what extent are we, as citizens in a democracy, prepared to accept 'the necessary lie'? Or, on the other hand, to participate more fully and truthfully in public affairs? What are appropriate boundaries of personal privacy? And, interestingly, to what extent does transparency exercise a chilling effect on record creation and recordkeeping in public administration and politics? In addressing this last question, Munn Gafuik cites an interesting study from 2000, conducted by the national archives and commissioned by the Access to Information Act (ATIA) Review Task Force, which involved an assessment of recordkeeping practices in seven areas of Canadian government. The report found that the ATIA, rather than having a negative impact on recordkeeping, appeared to improve it in some aspects. This bears out the view of many transparency advocates who argue that there is a continued need for records to be created to allow organisations to get on with their business, regardless of access laws or expectations that their contents may be made public. With the expectation of openness, there is, at least, the hope that the business will be conducted more in conformity with the public's expectations of principled governance. What is perhaps more concerning is the increased privatisation of government business, without addressing compromises to citizens' information access rights. Munn Gafuik concludes her excellent essay by calling on archivists to exploit some of our core skills to assist the public in navigating the far greater breadth

and variety of information now available to them; by advising on matters such as record context, authenticity and credibility. Offering this type of interpretive role is, she argues, one of the ways we can help to decipher meaning and maximise the impact of government transparency.

The two essays in 'The digital age' chapter concern the impact of technology on the use and understanding of digital archives by historians and others, and the methods and costs of digital preservation. Both highlight the fact that for those of us working in the digital archives area, there are assumptions long-held in day-to-day archives work that require questioning, not only from a policy or procedural point of view, but from the more prosaic perspective of properly staffing and resourcing archives. In 'Search vs. research', by Robert Cole and Chris Hackett, the authors explore what the advent of the semantic web, an increased availability of digitised and born digital archives and the use of full-text searching might have on research methods and outcomes for users of archives. In 'Preserving digital history', InterPARES participant Yvette Hacker provides an overview of the challenges and progress of digital preservation for archives, with an interesting reflection on the problem of born digital personal archives for collecting institutions and the difficulty of early intervention.

In a sense, parts 4 and 5 of *Better off Forgetting?*, 'Accountability and the public sphere' and 'Resources for the future', are similarly themed and could perhaps have been combined. The essays here concern the role of archives and archivists in contributing to public debate, democracy, human rights and reconciliation. What is particularly interesting is that we have a mix of perspectives presented, from noted archivists, including Terry Eastwood and Tom Nesmith, to those working directly with records with immense power to bring justice and reform (Tom Adami and Martha Hunt, on the role of archives in reconciliation in areas affected by armed conflict) and, also, the record users' perspective on information that can hold the powerful to account, from journalist Robert Steiner. These are all excellent essays, but, for me, Eastwood's examination of the archivist's role in seeking to somehow manage, if not always successfully ensure, accountability of power, as told through the events of Heiner, the Jamaican banking collapse and the search for Nazi war criminals in Canada, stood out. Eastwood echoes Chris Hurley's and others' long-standing questions about our 'paradox of obligation' – that, in appraisal, access and many other aspects of our work, we operate without fully understanding or acknowledging our highest aims and to whom we are ultimately accountable. This is an important discussion that, in this time of the 'democratisation of information', is only going to become more pressing for us to address.

This is a fascinating and rewarding collection of essays. In the interests of keeping this review reasonably concise, I have had to omit much that I would have liked to discuss further: Terry Cook and Bill Waiser's 'The Laurier promise', which discusses Canada's 'census wars' – of which we know something here in Australia – and Robert Steiner's discussion of the use of archives to counter the 'literal disintegration of meaning' in political communication and journalism, are particularly interesting. Despite my early misgivings, I found that the collection serves its stated purpose of exploring 'archives, public policy and collective memory' really well and in a manner that is immediately relevant to my professional experience. As an avid Tweeter, I found myself frequently with the urge to Tweet interesting observations, insights and intriguing references from *Better off Forgetting?* and being

annoyed that it was only available in hard-copy, so I could not share it. This is no doubt a very 2012 predicament and, while not a particularly serious-minded compliment, it is an authentic one.

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