In Search of the Lost Tiger, by Way of Sainte-Beuve: Re-constructing the Possibilities in 'Evidence of Me'

Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish

Frank Upward is a senior lecturer in the School of Information Management and Systems at Monash University in Melbourne. He teaches subjects in information management and archives and records. He has been an educator for 12 years and before that had extensive experience as a consultant, an information manager, a records manager, and an archivist. He has postgraduate qualifications in history and education from Melbourne University.

Sue McKemmish is an Associate Professor in the School of Information Management and Systems at Monash University, where she teaches records and archives programs, and researches the nature of records, the role of recordkeeping in society, records continuum theory, and recordkeeping metadata. She directs the Records Continuum Research Group and the Monash Enterprise Information Research Group. Before joining Monash, Sue worked with the National Archives and the Public Record Office Victoria. She has published widely and is a Laureate of the Australian Society of Archivists.

We are indebted to Verne Harris whose evocative article in this issue has stimulated this re-construction of the possibilities in 'Evidence of Me...'. In responding to 'On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in "Evidence of Me"', we will deal with archival science as professional theory for a 'known' group, archivists. 'Evidence of Me' endorses, but is not confined to, the telling of stories, the 'petit recits' in a Lyotardian sense. It had a particular professional audience in mind, and a particular way of integrating the stories it tells, both of which tend to disappear from view in Harris' deconstruction. The manner of integration is metanarrative based, drawing on post-structural and post-functional perspectives from a continuum framework, and using recordkeeping theory. Within its structuring approach, the small stories

can become professional metatext. It is these meanings we wish to re-construct. We will be exploring the present which is always present in witnessing, but absent in evidence, the trace which does not exist, the document that never speaks nakedly to us, and how this can be managed within professional theory by concentrating on the way recordkeeping objects are structured by process. In this account, process, metaphorically, is the archivist's 'tiger'.

Narrative and the music of the continuum

> If I got up for a moment and drew back my curtains to put myself in tune with the light, it was as a composer, who hearing in his head the symphony he is writing on paper scarcely needs to strike a note in order to make sure he is in tune with the real pitch of the instruments.
>
> Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, from 'III, The Days'

Marcel Proust, a generally celebrated French literary philosopher, was in tune in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Remembrance of Times Past*), or so the story usually goes. Everything else was trial, test, draft, including *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (*By Way of Saint-Beuve*), from which the opening quote to this article was gleaned. For those who want to get some useful glimpses of French literary philosophy over the last fifty years, and the postmodern strands of it which have influenced Anglo-American thought in particular, it is not a bad start to go via existentialism and Proust, as an easy way of encompassing structuralism and its significance in French twentieth-century thinking. That, to a modest extent, is where this article begins.

In this response to Verne Harris' Derrida-style deconstruction of 'Evidence of Me...', we do not want to detract from or disrespect Harris' drafting of his extended reading, for much of what he writes challenges us. But initially, we want to draw attention to the music of the infinite, of the continuum, to indicate how 'Evidence of Me...' is the work of a composer who is in tune with the continuum, and to suggest that because Harris does not hear that music resonating in the text, his attempt at an extended reading is at times discordant.[1] From that starting point, the continuum as an existential entity, we also touch on the nature of 'Evidence of Me...' as an exercise in postmodern narrativity, the formation of theory for a profession, the post-functionalist/ post-structuralist approach to witnessing and recordkeeping as a form of witnessing, and the role archivists play in search of the lost tiger.

Harris sees 'Evidence of Me...' as moving 'beyond the margins' of archival discourse into what was then virgin terrain in that discourse. He aims at a further opening up of personal recordkeeping spaces 'beyond the margins' – especially those marked, but not fully explored, or missed by McKemmish.

The approach is warranted in terms of general metaphysics, but we will be arguing that the article he is considering is an exercise in professional knowledge formation, not general metaphysics. Harris moves into some of the personal recordkeeping spaces 'beyond the margins', eg in passages on the connection between the event and the trace, and on mourning evidence. He marks for us, though does not himself move into, spaces not explored in 'Evidence of Me...', eg questions of whether there are specificities in the realm of recordkeeping behaviour relating to gender, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation, and issues relating to orality and oral forms of records. He points out that there are broader relevant discourses that McKemmish did not tap, and spaces McKemmish 'declined' to enter. A clash of personal styles is evident in that McKemmish's writing shows a preference for a particular type of *narrative form*, letting the points she is making emerge from the stories. Harris is operating in structural mode, favouring a 'spelling out', a 'probing beyond the surface layers' of the points that McKemmish, in structuring mode, makes through the insights and multiple layers of meaning of the stories she tells or recounts.

Harris' exploration of the spaces McKemmish *does* enter is evocative but somewhat limited. 'Evidence of Me...' resonates with understandings of recordkeeping in society from a continuum perspective. It uses the then still evolving records continuum model[2] to structure its exploration of issues relating to personal recordkeeping, identity, and memory, and the role of archivists in transforming records as a form of 'evidence of me' into part of the 'evidence of us', an aspect of collective identity and memory, which Harris recognises but does not deconstruct. We are not certain whether it is possible to deconstruct a continuum given its nature as a merging of points (it would seem to defy the Derridaen tactic of isolating words[3]), but for now it is worth repeating the paragraph that Harris also identifies as a quintessential one in the article:

> Those of us who, like Mike Langford, accumulate our personal records over time are engaged in the process of forming a personal archive. The functionality of a personal archive, its capacity to witness to a life, is dependent on how systematically we go about the business of creating our records as documents, capturing them as records (ie ordering them in relation to each other and 'placing' them in the context of related activities), and keeping and discarding them over time (ie organising them to function as long-term memory of significant activities and relationships). Archivists, in particular collecting archivists, are in part in the business of ensuring that a personal archive considered to be of value to society at large is incorporated into the collective archives of the society, and thus constitutes an accessible part of that society's memory, its experiential knowledge and cultural identity – evidence of *us*...[4]

Very early on, then, in 'Evidence of Me...' the beat is established in a passage that provides a preliminary reading of personal recordkeeping in terms of the dimensions of the continuum (outlined in the Appendix).

McKemmish uses the continuum as metanarrative to give coherence to the many small stories she tells. 'Evidence of Me...' is an exercise in postmodern narrativity. An elementary view of the postmodern condition is that it is an age in which there are many narratives. Jean-Francois Lyotard described the postmodern age in terms of European history since the 1950s as 'a general situation of temporal disjunction, which makes sketching an overview difficult'.[5] That was his temporary view, but in his career he has expended considerable effort writing about narrative and discourse in a hidden dialogue which subverts Marxism as metanarrative and promotes it as small stories, *petit recits*. In *The Postmodern Condition*, for example, he analyses pre-modern narrative forms, and their role in holding social groups together, and goes on to contemplate the fragmented and diverse way this now occurs, even within scientific communities. The unifying narrative methodology that once established customary knowledge within societies, including Marxist thought, is now found in the *petit recits*, holding smaller groups together, and operating in patchwork fashion. There are many more forms of being in society than there were in 'pre-modern' times, and many more stories to tell. In this sense Lyotard's view of *petit recits* can be seen as an extension of the emphasis in existentialism upon the individual and their responsibilities and freedoms.

The narrative form whether *petit* or meta shares the same characteristics. It is used to work out ways of discussing and transmitting a group's competencies, its purport, its meanings. Through narrative we are able to convey our identity to ourselves and discuss it with others. It provides models for integration, criteria for competence. It follows a rhythm and has a metre. Rules are set out which define the pragmatics of its transmission, and it can accommodate a great variety of language games. Or at least that is how Lyotard describes the form, allowing for our mis-statements of his view.

If we enter the kinds of corridors Harris' article opens up through recordkeeping spaces, are we doing so in tune with a metanarrative, or do we accept the postmodern condition, diagnosed within a structuralist approach as the small stories of modern existentialism within communities undergoing temporal disjunction? 'Evidence of Me...' has many of the features Lyotard identifies as characteristics of narrative. Its objective, however, is not with the small stories per se, but with their existence within a metanarrative, forming theory for a profession, for customary knowledge. So, it tells many stories, but the rhythms of each story are the rhythms of the continuum.[6]

The continuum of content

> If the *continuum* has a grain, unexpected and mysterious as it may be, then we cannot say all
> we want to say. Being may not be comparable to a one way street but to a network of multilane
> freeways along which one can travel in more than one direction; but despite this some roads
> will nevertheless remain dead ends. There are things that cannot be done (or said).
>
> Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*, from section 1.11,
> The Sense of the *Continuum* (The italics for the continuum are Eco's.)

The Australian archival profession, in gradually building its metanarrative around the continuum over the last forty years, has been following an intellectual trend of some depth. The continuum has emerged in many areas of thought and has become a metanarrative of its own, a possible counter to the angst of the *petit recits*, to fragmentation and disarray. Eco's recent explorations are but one example of many within metaphysics, including the work of David Lewis commencing in the late 1960s, the exploration of possible worlds in Alvin Plantinga, and the work of educators such as Michael Loux.[7] For all the attention it has received the continuum remains 'italicised' except within the physical and mathematical sciences, a word with meanings that are still being explored.

We would hope we could enjoin Harris (and others) to be part of that exploration, but in doing so we have to warn that Eco's concern with the continuum of content, with the infinite possibilities of text, is a valid one. What we can say is unbounded. It can take off in many directions but we need to avoid dead ends. In the McKemmish article, the continuum has a rhythm to it, something existential which enables us to grasp the significances of the continuum as an entity (although it eluded Harris). Harris believes it has a recordkeeping framework. In actuality it has a grain provided by recordkeeping theory, and observable within a continuum framework. That recordkeeping theory provides some control over the lanes in which we can travel and over what we can and cannot say as a profession.

If we look at what we can say differently from others, then as a professional group with a professional knowledge of recordkeeping objects, we should be able to make statements about the interplay between recordkeeping objects and their evidential qualities, the identity of those who created them, and the social, business and other processes that brought them into being, at least in so far as those processes are reflected in recordkeeping processes. The objects of archival practice, and the processes of recordkeeping that construct them, are areas where we should be able to claim competence. In communicating this, 'Evidence of Me...' draws upon a concept of records developed by Upward and McKemmish in 'The Archival Document'[8] and extended in McKemmish's 'Are Records Ever Actual?'[9]

The concept of archival documents distinguishes records from other forms of recorded information by their ongoing participation in social, business and other processes, broadly defined, ie by their transactional and contextual nature. Their evidential qualities are seen as integral to their 'recordness', and to their intents, multiple purposes, and functionality in terms of governance and accountability, their role in the formation of individual, group, corporate, and collective memory and the shaping of identity, and their value as authoritative sources of information. The concepts of transactionality and contextuality, as further developed in the records continuum, are complex and multi-layered. Transactionality is defined in terms of the many forms of human interaction and relationships that are documented in records of all kinds at all levels of aggregation. The concept of contextuality is concerned with the record's rich, complex, and dynamic social, functional, provenancial, and documentary contexts of creation, management, and use through spacetime. In the records continuum model framework[10] these concepts find expression in a range of continua: the evidential continuum: trace, evidence, corporate and individual [whole of person] memory, collective memory; the continuum of recordkeeping objects: [archival] documents, records, the corporate and individual archive, and the collective archives; the continuum of identity: actor, work group/unit, organisation/corporate body, and institution; and the continuum of transactionality: act, activity, function, purpose.

The records continuum model's approach to the roles individuals may play along the identity axis of the model encompasses their roles as actors in social and business acts, units in social and business activities, legal entities with social and business functions, and social entities with institutionalised social purposes. The continuum concept of transactionality encompasses individual acts of communication, and social and business transactions of all kinds, the social and business activities or processes of which they are a part, the social and business functions they fulfil, and the social purposes they serve. Like the recordkeeping object and evidentiality continua, these are broad taxonomies, masking many other terms and near synonyms lurking in their midst, but each is locatable within the process continua of creation, capture, organisation and pluralisation, the framework rather than the grain, represented as dimensions in the model. The grain within this framework is provenance, the vehicle for narratives about who did what within an emphasis upon recordkeeping processes and recordkeeping objects.

The grain, as described, is not operating within a dichotomy between the personal and the corporate. 'Evidence of Me...' was written for the May 1996 special issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* which focused on personal recordkeeping, while rejecting the dualism encapsulated in the title of the

Australian journal in favour of a more holistic approach to corporate and personal records. It does not see the archivist who looks after personal archives as a separate species. Such an archivist is not our equivalent of the platypus for early nineteenth-century natural scientists, a species which cast doubt upon their existing taxonomy of knowledge. Archivists looking after personal records can be found in all recordkeeping spaces, and not necessarily in the streams of 'dysfunction' or 'otherness' where Harris' approach seems to cast them. Archivists in government institutions or working for businesses are concerned with personal records, regional archivists with the recordkeeping of the individual people in their region. Libraries and museums collect personal records and increasingly are recognising the need to employ archivists to manage them. Harris has written most of his critique assuming that there is a boundary between personal recordkeeping and corporate recordkeeping, and that in this he is following McKemmish, but this is not the view that McKemmish takes.

Witnessing, function, structure and the continuum

> Recordkeeping is a 'kind of witnessing'. On a personal level it is a way of evidencing and memorialising our lives – our existence, our activities and experiences, our relationships with others, our identity, our 'place' in the world.[11]

The McKemmish article, by concentrating on witnessing, extends the account of records outlined in the previous section. 'The Archival Document' characterised records in terms of their transactionality and contextuality; 'Are Records Ever Actual?' explored the related notion that records are 'always in a state of becoming'; and the modelling attempted to produce a single representation of the ideas being developed. There is no distinction made in any of this work between personal and corporate records. Personal archives had always been 'present', but the exploration of their presence in the recordkeeping spacetimes of the continuum, and of recordkeeping as a form of witnessing, are fresh.

'Evidence of Me...' weaves together stories that tell about witnessing in the broad sense with stories about the particular role of recordkeeping as a form of witnessing. Harris appears to be uncomfortable with a number of aspects.

One of his concerns is what he reads as an attempt to squeeze 'witnessing' into 'the claustrophobic space of recordkeeping functionality'. He defines the 'category' of witnessing extensively as 'a terrain without horizon, always stretching beyond evidencing and memorialising, embracing (without hard boundaries between them) interrogating, constructing, resisting, imagining, narrating, fabricating, hiding (from), forgetting, healing, and so on (and on)'. He acknowledges the breadth of McKemmish's ideas about 'witnessing', which

are expressed by reference to Giddens' 'ongoing "story" about the self', Swift's man as 'the storytelling animal' sustained by the 'comforting trail-signs and marker-buoys of stories', and Edmund White's 'instinct to witness'. But asks: 'Why should the capacity to witness through personal records depend on the degree of functionality?' He believes that:

> The notion of recordkeeping functionality works against McKemmish's broad understanding of witnessing in records. It pulls her towards a privileging of 'evidencing' over other dynamics, and towards a narrower representation of evidence as an authentic, reliable 'capturing' of process.[12]

Here, Harris appears to be working within a particular construct of customary knowledge rather than deconstructing the text. He uses the quote which begins with a reference to Mike Langford, cited above (see page 24), to raise questions about dysfunctionality in recordkeeping[13], and an otherness amongst those who deal with personal archives. He makes it clear that the notion of function, functional requirements, and an emphasis upon system, order and business give him a feeling of claustrophobia. This concern, for him, is suggestive of the way recordkeeping theory can represent a narrowing of scope for archivists. Harris, argues that 'witnessing can only be squeezed into the claustrophobic recordkeeping space at a price'. He writes:

> But she does not explore what is for me by far the most interesting dimension – the resistance to functionality in this domain. What underlies these resistances? Why do even archivists resist 'system' and 'order' and 'business' with their personal archives. What is this 'dysfunctionality' saying to us?[14]

Let us first of all make an argument which is no defence against the charge of excess functionalism within a recordkeeping approach. It is clear what the dysfunctionality is saying to Harris, but to us Harris is living in a parallel universe with which we are unfamiliar. In our universe, such archivists do not oppose system, order and business. They are involved with personal archives because it is connected to their business. They do not store papers in disorder by choice but because their ambition to collect often exceeds their capacity to process. Far from ignoring system, archivists looking after personal archives have long been interested in standardised description processes across institutions. As members of the archival profession in Australia they have played a leading role in standardisation.

However, simply extending the 'functional' aura is not a real defence. A more serious question is whether 'Evidence of Me...' is in any way functionalist in Harris' sense simply because it respects the notion of functional requirements for recordkeeping. This raises all sorts of intellectual debates, including what is wrong with being a functionalist, but that is not the issue here. Functional requirements developed as a technique within structural systems design, and

as such are part of a functional-structural mix developed in the information systems profession. Moreover, 'Evidence of Me...' is written within a structuring mode which is in tune with the interaction between action and structure, not a functional one, and it is this issue we want to explore rather than to debate the merits of structural and functional approaches which would seem to us to be a dead end.

'Evidence of Me...' aimed to open up wide ranging and fundamental questions about 'evidence of me' and 'evidence of us', with reference to how our lives are individually and collectively witnessed. The term 'evidence of me' was drawn from the writing of novelist Graham Swift (in *Ever After*) and it is used in the article as a synonym for the personal archive in the broadest sense. This is not incompatible with the extensive meanings ascribed to 'evidence' by Derrida, who refers in *Archives Fever* to what he terms 'dramatic evidence' as 'dramatic proof, mark, clue, dramatic testimony, in the broad sense of the word "testimony", one could even say archive'.[15] 'Evidence of Me...' places recordkeeping, as a form of witnessing, within this more extensive context. It is concerned with defining the particular role records play as one form of 'evidence of me', and their relationship with other forms of witnessing. It is also concerned with collective archives as an aspect of 'evidence of us' in the extensive sense, and the way in which they constitute a form of collective memory.

The article, again echoing understandings drawn from continuum perspectives, proposes that the distinctive contribution records make in witnessing to our lives lies in their documentation of activities and experiences *in the context of our relationships* with others. It is in this way that they help to form our identity by 'placing' us in the world, in spacetime.

Harris reads into the movement in the text between evidence/memory in an extensive sense, and recordkeeping as one form of evidence/memory (among many), a narrowing of scope, a concern with the 'claustrophobic space of recordkeeping functionality'. He concludes that his reading of the article in terms of Derridaen thinking opens huge, vertiginous intellectual chasms under McKemmish's account of personal recordkeeping. He points to how she risks marginalising orality, and claims she subsumes remembrancing to recordkeeping.

For example, Harris points to a narrowing of the scope of the text in a passage that, he claims, describes how Patrick White moved from being a 'remembrancer' to a 'recordkeeper'. But this passage is actually about how White moved from being a destroyer of records to a keeper of records. Within the boundaries of his own spacetime, White had maintained a 'narrative of self' through his own prodigious memory and in the literary forms of his

novels and plays. In this dimension White did not move from being a remembrancer to being a recordkeeper; remembrancing remained a key part of his personal recordkeeping.

The point of this passage in 'Evidence of Me...' is to explore the interface between two recordkeeping spacetimes, the dimension of the personal/corporate archive/memory and the dimension of the collective archives/memory. This passage is to do with institutionalising 'evidence of me' – the whole me, evidence as memory – with the process of transforming it into 'evidence of us', ie moving it beyond the boundaries of individual spacetime. It is about White recognising the significance of other forms of recordkeeping, and engaging in processes that enable the movement of 'evidence of me' through spacetime. He had once insisted on the burning of his manuscripts and letters, feeling that looking back was morbid, and that in terms of moving the 'evidence of me' beyond the boundaries of an individual life, only his novels should survive. But later in life, he came to value the 'evidence of me' present in the 'other voices' of his letters, and he quite deliberately became involved in their 'pluralisation'. And of course the passage is also fundamentally about the archival endeavour and the professional role of archivists in institutionalising the archive. Harris' reading of this passage locates it within a recordkeeping vs remembrancing dichotomy. However, in the continuum recordkeeping as a form of witnessing embraces aspects of remembrancing and orality, while being embraced by them. Remembrancing and orality also embrace forms of witnessing other than recordkeeping.[16]   In this example, Harris misses the rhythms of the continuum in the text. The rhythms of the continuum are powerfully evident in Richard Holmes' reflections on biography. Holmes, biographer of Robert Louis Stevenson, Shelley, Coleridge, and others, has discussed biography as 'a kind of pursuit, a tracking of the physical trail of someone's path through the past, a following of footsteps'.[17] He writes incisively about how, when a biographer goes beyond the physical presence of the subject to his or her place in the 'web of other people's lives', the notion of the 'single subject of biography' becomes a 'chimera'.[18] His insights on how 'biographical evidence is witnessed' are particularly relevant to our understanding of the role of recordkeeping as one way of constructing identity and forming memory, and of the nature of personal records (indeed all records) in terms of both their contextuality and transactionality. Referring to his 'pursuit' of Stevenson, he writes:

> The truth is...that Stevenson existed very largely in, and through, his contact with other people; his books are written for his public; his letters for his friends, even his private journal is a way of giving social expression – externalising – his otherwise inarticulate thoughts. It is in this sense that all real biographical evidence is witnessed... The more closely and scrupulously you follow someone's footsteps through the past the more

conscious do you become that they never existed wholly in any one place along the recorded path. You cannot freeze them, you cannot pinpoint them, at any particular turn in the road, bend of the river, view from the window. They are always in motion, carrying their past lives over into the future. It is like the sub-atomic particle in nuclear physics that can be defined only in terms of a wave motion. If I try to fix Stevenson in his green magic dell in the Lozere, or his whitewashed cell at La Trappe, or under his chestnut tree below Mont Mars; if I try to say – this man, thinking and feeling these things, was at this place, at this moment – then at once I have to go backwards and forwards, tracing him at other and corresponding places and times – his childhood bedroom at No 17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh, or his honeymoon ranch at Silverado, California.[19]

For Holmes, biography can only be captured – brought alive in the present – through placing its 'single subject' in relationship to other people. His approach is not functional (the whole individual as co-extensive with the parts), or structural (the trackable individual as the focus), nor is it a simple structural-functional mix. Like McKemmish, Holmes is in structuring mode. The way that recordkeeping witnesses to our lives is by evidencing, accounting for, and memorialising our interactions and relationships, thus 'placing' us in the world. But, as with Holmes' biographical subjects, records too are like the sub-atomic particle, only definable in terms of a wave motion – never existing in all their complexity in any one place or time, and only definable in terms of their multiple and dynamic documentary and contextual relationships. This kind of understanding of the nature of records as 'always in a state of becoming' is present in the music of the continuum as played out in 'Are Records Ever Actual?' and 'Evidence of Me...'.

The continuum takes us beyond the conventional binary oppositions of function and structure. Another example: at one point, Harris pursues his aim of a further opening up of recordkeeping spaces by posing the following questions: 'What of the possibility that a poem about a life can carry far more meanings than a whole archive of personal records?' and 'What does that say about the value of evidence in records?'[20] He then says: 'Questions not posed. A narrowing of a scope'. In fact there is an extensive passage in 'Evidence of Me...' which canvasses different approaches to this very issue – including the Harris-like view of Ted Hughes that wife Sylvia Plath's true self is only present in her final poems, and Patrick White's earlier conviction that only his novels 'counted' (a view he later revised). Harris is arguing that a single bit may tell us more than the whole, essentially a structuralist/deconstructive approach. A structuring approach presents a different perspective, which is present in Janet Malcolm's conclusion that the story of Plath's life can be heard through the interplay of the many different voices present in her poems, novel, letters, and journals. The intention of this passage from a continuum perspective is to open up questions about the nature of records as evidence/memory 'of

me' and 'of us', and the particular way in which they witness to a life and interact with other kinds of witnessing.

A further example shows the difference in perspective between Harris' approach and the post-structural, post-functional view present in the structuring approach of the article. Harris points to the privileging in McKemmish's article of the question: 'What factors condition recordkeeping behaviours?' In his view, McKemmish fails to address the related question of: 'How does recordkeeping condition a life?' We would argue that McKemmish does address this issue, particularly in her references to Giddens' view that: 'The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual "supplies" about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.' In her comments, McKemmish questions the role that recordkeeping plays in keeping a particular narrative going, for example, the role of keeping a journal in 'sustaining an integrated sense of self'. She notes with reference to Giddens' view of how the 'process of mutual disclosure' is associated with intimate relationships in the modern age, that 'one dimension of this process can be the writing and keeping of letters'. She cites Malcolm on 'letters as fossils of feeling', Swift in a passage that provides the title of the article, 'keep them, burn them, they are evidence of *me*', and Tolstoy's view that 'the diaries are me'. All touch on structuring something which is multi-faceted and interactive – in this mode, there is no privileging of one question over another.

A final example relates to Harris' view of the research agenda that ends McKemmish's article as modest. It is modest only in terms of what immediate actions are possible. From a structuring perspective, which includes the setting up of future actions, there is nothing modest about questions like: what is the significance of bearing witness to the cultural moment to the construction of individual identity; what role does personal recordkeeping play in forming collective identity and memory; what is the role of personal recordkeeping in our society and the 'place' of the personal archive in the collective archives; how can we understand recordkeeping as a social system; how do recordkeeping processes and systems become institutionalised in our society; and what are the functional requirements for postcustodial archival regimes that can ensure that a personal archive of value to society becomes an accessible part of the collective memory.

If this agenda is read structurally it may seem to be functional, directed at a cohesive whole. Within the structuring rhythm of the article, however, it is purposive, not functional, and the purpose is to influence future recordkeeping actions.

Genesis, evidence and ash

> There is nothing outside of text, of 'trace'; everything is always already outside of text. 'Evidence' must always be mourned, for its preservation carries the very possibility of its reduction to ashes. 'Evidence' must always be mourned, for it *is* the ashes of the 'always already outside'.
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> Harris, referring to Derrida and Krell, p. 18.

Harris's article opens an evocative line of thought about witnessing in the way he draws attention to 'evidence as ash', an opening that we explore briefly from a continuum perspective in what follows.

The heart of Krell's evidence as ash conundrum is the opposition between interior and exterior. Within Eco's continuum of content, however, Krell's statement is little more than a postmodern riddle with an infinite number of small stories that can be told under its banner, and many potential restatements. It leaves us directionless on a multi-lane freeway. Within continuum theory, the trace, the internality, is brought into a merging structure with the exteriority of evidence and memory. Creation, genesis, is tied in to, not separated from, the ash within an ongoing making of the record. As archivists, we have our own 'interiority' in creating objects, whether they are documents, records, the archive, and the archives or other objects situated somewhere within that continuum including a series. We are creators as well as keepers, undertakers and auditors – to extend the terms of the crucial debate initiated by Glenda Acland over a decade ago.[21] Our own actions are in turn disembedded from their context, becoming ash within such routines as the construction of finding aids, or more rarely within properly maintained records of the actions we have taken. The task within electronic recordkeeping, well enough understood within the profession, is to transfer our actions into systems routines that control creation, and disembed (capture) the actions represented in data and documents within records, the archive and archives.

In the writings of Cook, Nesmith and others, the archivist most definitely has an interior world of action and creation, a world which stretches the record through spacetime. Like everyone else historical recordkeepers participate in the world of action, of the interior. For Cook, the role of recordkeeping professionals is an active one of participation in record and archive creating processes as 'active shapers' of the archival heritage, 'intervening agents' who need to be conscious of their own historicity in 'the archive-creating and memory-formation process'.[22] Tom Nesmith has also written eloquently about the 'ghostly' interventions of archivists, Geary's 'phantoms of remembrance', in creating and shaping the record – through their role in appraisal, description, and access – often invisible, or at least unacknowledged, participants in societal and organisational processes of remembering and forgetting.[23]

From a continuum perspective the interior is not in opposition to the exterior. Trace, that paralogical thing that does not exist because it is always present, needs to be given shape as evidence and memory. With no apologies to John Wayne's scriptwriter, 'an archivist's gotta do what an archivist's gotta do'. We do not need to apologise to Derrida either. He has a structuring view of the 'archive' complementary to our own, as represented in other writings. In *Archive Fever*, he comments that: 'Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation'.[24]

It is the disembedding role of the archivist's work that is the locus of provenance. It is the point where we act to record something, or encourage others, including systems, to act to record. Thus when Harris argues that: 'Perhaps "provenance" does not "lie" in any particular "locus" (cf. pages 35-6 of "Evidence of Me...") - perhaps it is - and always was - shattered and shattering', we would reply that such a view is cutting against the grain of the continuum from a recordkeeping perspective. Provenance can certainly collapse in on itself, spacetime continuum fashion, but promoting black holes is not the role of archivists. What we would say is said in McKemmish's work elsewhere. The record is in a constant state of becoming. Provenance is continually being remade. It is multifaceted. It is heavily influenced by our frameworks for the archive and the archives, and is dependent upon action. The creation/capture threshold operates within structuring processes but it is the intersecting point between the interior and exterior. It is a moving point in spacetime, a re-maker of ash from the re-made trace. An archivist's recursive actions reverberate through spacetime. Nesmith writes about a record being:

> ...an evolving mediation of understanding about some phenomenon - a mediation created by social and technical processes of inscription, transmission and contextualisation

and archives as:

> ...an ongoing mediation of understanding of records (and thus phenomena) or that aspect of record making which shapes this understanding through such functions as records appraisal, processing, and description, and the implementation of processes for making records accessible.[25]

This brings us almost back to where we began - in search of the lost tiger, the processes that structure recordkeeping objects.

If you separate time and space and remove genesis then the archivist is not creative. She is working in the crematorium, the handler of ash. If you accept the central premise of the continuum, that it involves a union of space and time, the archivist becomes the producer of trace, of the archival trail, with all the limitations and possibilities that the trace imposes and carries with it.

Reprise

> You can't explain this to your kids. Why did this happen? I had nobody ... I've had my secret all my life. I tried to tell but I couldn't.
>
> > Confidential Evidence, No. 533, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1997[26]

> For ages I despised my parents; how could they just dump me in this Home? I hated them for what they were – Koories. I therefore hated Koories. I hated myself because I was a Koori.
>
> > Confidential Evidence, No. 154

We would like to conclude this response with an extended re-telling of the Michael Long *petit recit* in 'Evidence of Me...', making its metatext component a little more obvious. It is a story about a prominent Aboriginal person, respected by many, crying at the time he opened an exhibition prepared by the National Archives of Australia. Harris rightly chastises McKemmish for making only a passing reference to 'what is a rich tapestry', and hopes that McKemmish was not suggesting that Aboriginal people need (white) institutional intervention in order to help them remember and evidence their pasts. But an extended reading of the passage about Long in tune with the continuum suggests Harris' concern with the possibility of McKemmish's political incorrectness is unfounded. Long's tears indicated that he has been part of an initial forgetting. In continuum terms Long had lost his archive; he had little idea what his family had been through. And he was not alone. The Bringing Them Home Inquiry provided an opportunity for members of the 'stolen generation' to tell their stories. Many did so for the first time. Some had never told their families – the pain, the shame they felt was too overwhelming.

Significant numbers of the 'stolen generation' believed that their mothers had voluntarily given them up or abandoned them. They, like many other Australians, black and white, did not know that the systematic removal of part-Aboriginal children was for seventy years of the 20th century a government policy aimed at assimilation, nor were they aware of the pressure that was put on Aboriginal women to sign away their children. They carried not only the pain of their removal, but the shame as well – not their shame, the shame of a nation. Significant numbers of witnesses at the Bringing Them Home Inquiry remain anonymous. They told of fractured lives and of despair, and of secrets they could never share with their families. The National Archives exhibition, *Between Two Worlds*, referenced in 'Evidence of Me...', told the interwoven stories of individual Aboriginal people and the actions of successive governments which pursued policies of removal.[27] The institutional action of

the National Archives, its creative act in assembling the exhibition in close consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, helped to regenerate a story for Long, for many other Aboriginal people and for the Australian community – and it is his-story, their-story, our-story. The visitors' books of the exhibition testify to the effect that the exhibition had on those who saw it. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians literally wrote paragraphs, even pages of their responses to the exhibition. There are negative and denying reactions to the stories it tells. There are expressions of grief, sorrow, anger and regret. Many, like Long, were profoundly moved. A continuing theme was – we didn't know – that this was happening, that this was government policy. For some it was a transforming experience, typified in comments like: 'This has changed my sense of what it is to be an Australian'.[28]

The exhibition did not speak 'nakedly' to Long and others. 'The trace itself does not exist', as Derrida points out, and who are we to debate the issue within a story. The same documents speak very differently to different observers. Documents seldom speak 'in the nude' to us (Derrida again). The documents presented in the exhibition were clothed by an institution outside of Long's culture, but that is part of the story, a story of the suppression and repression of an archive, and its re-impression in the mind of Michael Long and others (Derrida yet again). There is some optimism, some joy, in Derrida's archive fever. We should not be too dismayed at archivists doing their job effectively simply because of their exteriority to Aboriginal experience. Preparing the exhibition is an interior experience, part of the multi-lane freeway of being. In looking at the Aboriginal story over the last few hundred years in Australia no one can deny the multiplicity of narratives. The white is a presence in all of them. Aboriginal culture is not a museum piece in the antiquated sense in which the word 'museum' was once used. The stories within it, and the stories of other Australians, are changing, and they can be set to the music of the continuum. Aboriginal culture has its own continuum of content, but part of the juridical environment for that continuum, part of what can be said and not said, is that things are no longer black and white. The Aboriginal experience, in many different ways, is 'evidence of us'. To imagine it as evidence of 'them', would be to establish an unbearable binary opposition, another dead end.

We could, of course, continue on with this article and re-tell a similar story about the continuum, Patrick White's homosexuality, and 'evidence of us...'

Appendix

Upward's explanation of the dimensions of the records continuum model, is widely available in the literature, but is re-presented below to indicate the music and grain of the continuum.

The dimensions of the records continuum model[29]

1D Create

The first dimension encompasses the actors who carry out the act (decisions, communications, acts), the acts themselves, the documents which record the acts, and the trace, the representation of the acts.

2D Capture

The second dimension encompasses the personal and corporate records systems which capture documents in context in ways which support their capacity to act as evidence of the social and business activities of the units responsible for the activities.

3D Organise

The third dimension encompasses the organisation of recordkeeping processes. It is concerned with the manner in which a corporate body or individual defines its/his/her recordkeeping regime, and in so doing constitutes/forms the archive as memory of its/his/her business or social functions.

4D Pluralise

The fourth dimension concerns the manner in which the archives are brought into an encompassing (ambient) framework in order to provide a collective social, historical and cultural memory of the institutionalised social purposes and roles of individuals and corporate bodies.

ENDNOTES

1 Sue McKemmish, 'Evidence of Me...', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1996, p. 29. 'Evidence of Me...' was also published by invitation in the *Australian Library Journal*, vol. 45, no. 3, August 1996, pp. 174–87. In his article Harris does not reference any of McKemmish's other work or any writings that explore the continuum, present the records continuum model, or discuss the social/structuration theories that underpin it.

2 Frank Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum Part One: Post-custodial Principles and Properties', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 2, November 1996, pp. 268–85 and 'Structuring the Records Continuum, Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 25, no.1, May 1997, pp. 10–35.

3 The opening sentences of *Archive Fever* ('Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word archive – and with the archive of so familiar a word.') typifies the Derridaen technique. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996. It can be argued that from this beginning he uses a continuum of content approach to derail communication about the archive, and make its meanings uncertain. The continuum of content is discussed in the second section of this article.

4 McKemmish, 'Evidence of Me...', p. 29.

5 The brief account of postmodernity and narrativity is drawn from Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester University Press, 1997, reprint, pp. 1, 18–23. For a broader overview of his career writings, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Toward the Postmodern*, edited by Robert Harvey and Mark S Roberts, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1993.

6 Harris argues that archivists must engage with the 'archive' in Derrida's extensive sense, and we would agree, but not if Harris were to argue that the Derridaen 'archive' is co-extensive with our professional terrain. Wherein lies the significance of Derrida's ideas to the archival profession? As philosophy? As social theory? As constituting a theory for the archival profession? Or, as part of the broader philosophical and theoretical context for the formation of a theory for a profession? We would argue that Derrida's approach to 'archive' does not form the basis for constituting a theory for the archival profession. It forms part of the wider philosophical and theoretical context for the formation of that theory. Our philosophising/theorising for a profession needs to engage with Derrida's deconstruction of the word 'archive' amongst many other approaches. Our professional terrain is not co-extensive with the 'archive' in Derrida's sense, but with recordkeeping spaces that are encompassed by it, with recordkeeping as one form of 'witnessing', among many others. Continuum perspectives on recordkeeping, echoed in 'Evidence of Me...', relate to the formation of theory for the archival profession within the broader context of postmodern intellectual currents, including currents about the nature of theory itself.

7 Loux discusses the continuum in an unresolved fashion, and the work of Lewis and Plantinga, in chapter 5 of Michael J Loux, *Metaphysics, A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998. The book provides an introduction to contemporary approaches to Aristotle's 'object-oriented' metaphysics.

8 Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, 'The Archival Document: A Submission to the Inquiry into Australia as an Information Society', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, no. 1, May 1991, pp. 17–32.

9 Sue McKemmish, 'Are Records Ever Actual?' in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years*, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, Clayton, 1994, pp. 187–203.

10 By way of qualification, it should be stated that continuum perspectives on the transactional nature of records, and the richness, complexity, diversity, and idiosyncrasies of the contexts in which records are created, managed, and used cannot be fully represented in a model, but this does not detract from its significance and strategic importance to practice. Models can never fully represent the dynamic, complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic nature of records, and their rich webs of contextual and documentary relationships in and through spacetime. Within these limitations, what the records continuum model is reaching towards are ways to represent the continuum as richly and extensively as possible. Thus the records continuum

model is a tool for perceiving and analysing complexity, providing multi-dimensional views of recordkeeping and archiving, 'at the point of creation, within groups, at organisational and interorganisational levels'. Elsewhere Upward argues that the model can provide a way of 'patterning' the knowledge of a community of practice that is relevant across cultures and can persist over long periods of time. See his 'Modelling the Continuum as Paradigm Shift in Recordkeeping and Archiving Processes and Beyond – A Personal Reflection', *Records Management Journal*, vol. 10, no. 3, December 2000, pp. 115–39. Terry Cook endorses this view in a recent paper, in which he states that the records continuum model 'is the world's most inclusive model for archives' with 'sufficient vision and theoretical integrity, it seems to me, so that archivists of 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'.

After suggesting some enhancements and advocating further explorations of the model, including its understandings of memory and evidence, its fourth dimensional perspectives on the pluralised nature of the archive beyond spatial and temporal boundaries, and its sensitivity to the marginalised, Cook concludes:

> 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 pluralisation that societal and thus cultural values will influence appraisal and, indeed, all aspects of record-keeping.

(Terry Cook, 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage', presented at the Australian Society of Archivists National Conference, *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory, Melbourne, August 2000*, available at *www.archivists.org.au.*)

The sensitivity of Cook's reading and his identification of areas for further exploration are appreciated, although we may not agree with all of his particular suggestions for enhancement.

11 McKemmish, 'Evidence of Me...', p. 29.

12 Verne Harris, 'On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in "Evidence of Me"', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 2001, p. 12.

13 Working within a world of binary oppositions functionality cannot be conceptualised as encompassing dysfunctionality. This is not so in the continuum.

14 Harris, p. 12.

15 Derrida, p. 75. See also the reference to this part of the text, and the translation issues raised by it, in the Translator's Note, p. 107. In his article in this issue, Harris perhaps implies that 'Evidence of Me...' should have been informed by the insights of *Archive Fever*. However it was not generally available in Australia in English translation until after 'Evidence of Me...' was written. The most recent works of Brothman, Nesmith, and Harris are examples of archival writings informed by *Archive Fever*, eg Brien Brothman, 'Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction', *Archivaria*, no. 48, Fall 1999, pp. 64–89; Verne Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist

Formulations on Archives in South Africa', *Archivaria*, no. 44, Fall 1997, pp. 132–41; Tom Nesmith, 'Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the "Ghosts" of Archival Theory', *Archivaria*, no. 47, Spring 1999, pp. 136–50.

16 In addition to the writers referenced herein, there is a vast memory metatext in other fields that is beyond the scope of this article. In the records and archives field, in spite of the rhetoric about memory, and with some notable exceptions (eg Cook, Nesmith, Brothman, Brown, Harris), there has been little systematic exploration of the specific role recordkeeping and archiving plays in constituting personal, corporate, and collective memory. What are the operative relationships between remembering and forgetting, and recordkeeping and archiving? How do the recordkeeping and archiving professions contribute to the corporate memory of an organisation or the collective memory of a society? What role do they play in transforming personal memory into collective memory? What is the relationship between recordkeeping and archiving, and other 'inscribing practices'? What is the relationship between oral records and written records? What is the relationship between personal and corporate records and other forms of 'memory stores' (ie social and organisational action-structures of all kinds, eg living memory, learned behaviour, gender and other roles, rituals, ceremonies, oral tradition, stories, memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, genealogies, histories, scholarly writings, mass communications, music, paintings, sculpture, literature, dance, film, artefacts, and the built environment)? How might the answers to these questions inform our thinking and be translated into practice? What is the relevance of the memory metatext and *petit recits* of other disciplines to our own field? Can we really hope to identify and carve our way through such a continuum of content, with all the contradictions our findings will bring, and if so how? Is the growing spread of the continuum as a construct for metanarratives the answer to this problem?

17 Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer,* Flamingo, London, 1995, p. 27. We are grateful to long-time colleague Michael Piggott for drawing attention to Richard Holmes' writing and our ongoing dialogue about personal recordkeeping.

18 In the same way in the continuum, the pursuit of meaning through deconstructive techniques which isolate words becomes a chimera.

19 Holmes, pp. 68–9.

20 Harris' question about the 'value of evidence' seems, paradoxically, to come from within its own binary opposition (structure as opposed to function) as our examples illustrate. It is paradoxical in that Harris is a strong opposer of such oppositions, rejecting, for example, the metaphor of evidence and memory as 'two sides of the one coin'. Harris praises McKemmish for writing 'outside the evidence/memory dichotomy', and depicting the record as 'at once evidence and memory', but is concerned with what he sees as her priveleging of evidencing. Certainly 'functional requirements for evidence' privilege evidence – that is flagged by their very nature – but are they privileging evidence over something else? Within a structural/functional dichotomy they would be privileging evidence over the constituent elements, the structural bits, but is that relevant to a continuum framework where no element is privileged except in the context of particular tasks. In his paper to the ICA Congress in Seville on what he terms the 'recordkeeping paradigm' in the broader 'recordkeeping discourse' (with the briefest of references to the continuum), Harris mounts a similar critique. He assumes that those that operate within the 'recordkeeping paradigm' accept binary oppositions between evidence and memory, and does not consider the possibility that some of those following the recordkeeping tradition may be working within similar intellectual currents to him. He produces a structuralist critique that makes fine sense within the structural/functional opposition he presents but does not address

continuum theory. See 'Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from the Global Periphery' (September 2000), available at *www.archivists.org.au*. It should also be noted that, as is evident from discussion of this paper during December 2000 on the aus-archivists listserv (the listserv archive is available at *www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/asa*), many Australian readers interpreted his use of the term 'recordkeeping paradigm' as referring to the whole of what in Australia is identified as continuum thinking, recordkeeping theory and practice, and the records continuum model. Although a clarification from Harris, posted to the listserv on 12 December, indicates that he was using the term much more narrowly, we believe it is unfortunate that the paper itself, like his article in this issue, does not engage with continuum concepts or the records continuum model – a significant omission given its subject matter and the references to Australian approaches within it.

21 The debate was sparked by a pioneering article by Glenda Acland about the role of the corporate archivist: 'Archivist – Keeper, Undertaker or Auditor?', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, no. 1, May 1991, pp. 91–5.

22 Terry Cook, 'What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift', *Archivaria*, no. 43, Spring 1997, p. 46.

23 Nesmith, pp. 136–50; the Patrick Geary reference, quoted by Nesmith, is from *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium*, Princeton, New York, 1994.

24 Derrida, fn 12, p. 4.

25 Nesmith, pp. 145 and 146.

26 The Commission listened to 535 personal stories of forcible removal and had access to another 1000 in written form. In telling their stories some referred to government records relating to their removal. Decades later, in letters on file telling stories of their mothers' heartbreak, and desperate efforts to get their children back, some of those who had been removed discovered for the first time that they had not been abandoned or voluntarily given up.

27 In Terry Cook terms, it witnessed to 'sharp points' of interaction between marginalised individuals and the state. Cook introduced the notion of the 'sharp points of citizen–state interaction' as a focus for appraisal in his exploration of macro-appraisal theory: 'Mind Over Matter', in Barbara Craig (ed.), *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A Taylor*, ACA, Ottawa, 1992, pp. 38–70. In this case many of the Aboriginal people involved were so marginalised by the state that citizenship was denied to them.

28 The visitors' books analysis was undertaken by Catherine Nicholls as a component of her research for a Master of Information Management and Systems (Honours) thesis at Monash University (submitted 2000).

29 This statement of the dimensions of the records continuum model is drawn from Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum Part One'.