Making Up People: The State, Records and Bureaucracy in José Saramago's *All the Names*[1]

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'Making Up People' examines Nobel Prize-winning novelist José Saramago's novel All the Names. *It examines Saramago's views on the concepts of individuality, selfhood and privacy and how they take shape within the contexts of bureaucratic life and state recordkeeping. The article also reports on a number of recent historical works that have attempted to avert the modern archival and historical impulse to reduce subjectivity to an epiphenomenona of larger social narratives, historical contexts, and state recordkeeping information systems.*

Write it. Write. In ordinary ink
On ordinary paper: they were given no food,
They all died of hunger. 'All. How many?
It's a big meadow. How much grass
For each one?' Write: I don't know.
History counts its skeletons in round numbers.
A thousand and one remains a thousand,
As though the one had never existed:
An imaginary embryo, an empty cradle,
An ABC never read,
Air that laughs, cries, grows,
Emptiness running down steps toward the garden,
Nobody's place in the line.

Wislawa Szymborska, 'Hunger Camp at Jasla'

I am the escaped one,
After I was born
They locked me up inside me
But I left. My soul seeks me,
Through hills and valley,
I hope my soul
Never finds me.

Fernando Pessoa, 'I Am the Escaped One'

Let a man propose an antistatistical idea to reflect individuality and to resist the probabilification of the universe; the next generation effortlessly co-opts it so that it becomes part of the standard statistical machinery of information and control. But could not a more articulate, wilder, euphoric backlash preserve some of the ancient freedoms of chance?

Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, Cambridge University Press, 1990

The recordkeeping profession is made up of individuals who seem fated to labour in the shadow of others - behind the scenes, behind the curtain, behind the camera, so to speak. Our role has been to support the performances of others - lawyers, historians, politicians, other government officials, documentary and feature film makers, novelists, television producers, who frequently ply their craft on a more public stage, where they may make a name for themselves. Partly for this reason, perhaps, many individuals in our community have been drawn to novels, films, and television programs one of whose characters is a recordkeeper of some sort. News of such works is often followed by analysis of whether the author got it right. Did he or she show some knowledge of records and the principles and practices

of recordkeeping? How has the author rendered the figure of the archivist? Did he or she once again confuse archivists with librarians? Did she resort to a canned, stock character - a mousy, bespectacled, slightly eccentric antiquarian oblivious to pulsing life outside the archives' walls, a diminutive creature happily or sullenly toiling in oblivion, in some ill-lit, musty backroom or subterranean world of lofty shelving straining under the weight of aging, dust-coated paper? Or has the author actually taken pains to produce a more rounded character, one that is more than a mere prop for a larger, more significant story? Thus, recordkeepers seek affirmation of their worth not only in such concrete signals as increased annual budgets. Archivists, guardians of records and evidence, often also look for insights into and appreciation of archival work from their representation in works of fiction.

One work of fiction that has drawn some attention from the recordkeeping community recently is Portuguese novelist José Saramago's *All the Names*, which first appeared in English in 1998, and which Elizabeth Yakel recently reviewed for the *American Archivist*. The book centrally concerns the handling of vital records. To what exactly does the 'vital' of vital records refer? Vital for whom? Is it the individual lives, the families, the necessities of state? If all of these, how did this come to pass? Is it really exactly the same kinds of information that are 'vital' for everyone? And what of the lives of those who work with vital records? *All the Names* invites consideration of these and many other questions.

Saramago received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998, the first of his countrymen to do so. Born into a family of impoverished rural peasants, he received little formal education, as he was forced to withdraw from school early to help support his family. Saramago came to writing after holding down many different jobs. A relative unknown outside his country until the early 1980s, Saramago's rate of literary production and reputation began to rise shortly after the fall of Portugal's repressive right-wing regime in 1974, and especially following the publication of *Blimunda and Balthazar* in the early 1980s.

Saramago's novels are marked by the belief that a commitment to social justice must inform one's sense of personal responsibility and guide one's choices in life. Politics and social action have formed an important part of his life. A professed atheist, he has had an affiliation with Communism that dates back to taking out membership with the Portuguese Communist party in 1969. His association with the party prevented him from getting some jobs and cut short his tenure in others. Today, he continues to remain devoted to some form of socialism, and has recently lent his newfound renown to various social justice causes and liberation movements around the world. One individual, upon hearing that he had won the Nobel Prize, described Saramago as nothing more than a 'sanctimonious Portuguese Stalinist'.

Over the course of *All the Names'* 238 pages, Saramago never reveals his principal character's family name. He is simply 'Senhor José'. However, Saramago also makes a point of telling us that Senhor José has indeed inherited surnames from both his mother and father, but that it is not worth mentioning them, for most people he meets ignore them. In fact, no one even uses the 'Senhor', as if he doesn't deserve the respect its use might convey. Thus, Senhor José, like several principal characters in some of Saramago's other novels, is an ordinary, unremarkable man, who, like most people in this world, seems to be passing through life without making barely a ripple on the waters of history.

In fact, none of the novel's other characters bear any name at all, first or last. They are anonymous people, save for their bureaucratic position, profession, occupation, or social role, and their physical appearance: like most of the people we come across in our lives, these are their names - the policeman, the godmother, the little girl, the doctor, the director, the woman, the barber, the mother, the father, and so on.[2]

The story's setting bears few historical markers. There is only enough information to indicate that it takes place sometime during or after the middle of the twentieth century. Nor does the narrative provide any clear sense of the passage of time. There are allusions here and there to 'that evening' or 'next morning'. Whether this story takes place over several days, weeks, or months would require close attention and calculation from those readers who feel the need to escape the novel's twilight zone ambiance. And beyond sketches of the scenes in which the story takes place, the novel provides no geographical orientation. The story is set in a space without place names, and virtually beyond time's reckoning of past and present. Thus, the novel transports readers outside the objective public, chronometric time that physics and history have constructed, and somewhere beyond the mapped territories of geography, setting us down in the personal space and time of Senhor José.

This much we can gather about Senhor José. He is a solitary man; indeed, as it will turn out, he is a lonely man. He is almost fifty-one years old - his age is more significant than his Age. He lives in a modern city, where it seems as if everyone congregates together to live alone. His life is filled with little gratification or purpose. He occupies a flat, a satellite that adjoins the Central Registry, where he is employed as a junior clerk helping to take care of birth records, marriage records, and death records. One gets the impression that he is psychologically dependent on his work, for his bureaucratic position and routine provide him with the comfort and security of a well-ordered, centred universe in which he has a place, a task, and a schedule, which also relieves him, to some extent, of the burden of thinking. In

his spare time, in his little apartment, which is connected by a door that opens to the registry, Senhor José escapes his work with the files of countless faceless souls by collecting newspaper and magazine clippings about the lives of famous people - politicians, generals, bishops, celebrities, and the like.

After some time, a question dawns upon him. It is a question that will disrupt this apparently quiet, well-ordered existence. How can he be certain that the information he has gleaned from the newspapers and magazines about these individuals is reliable? Have the clippings provided him with all the important facts about these people? There is one way to find out. After all, does he not live right next door to the credible sources, the official documents that can confirm with authority whether what he has collected is true or false, and tell him whether he has found everything it is important to know of his celebrities? Indeed, Saramago writes, the Central Registry's documents will confirm not only that these people are 'real', but, more important, that they are 'official'.[3]

Stepping out of his meek clerk's character, so to speak, Senhor José boldly decides to break one of the registry's many rules. Late one night, long after the registry has closed, he opens and steps through the door leading from his apartment to the registry, a door which the registry rules forbid him from using, but which the Director's confidence in his own bureaucratic power and authority dissuades him from bothering to lock.

That evening, Senhor José sets out to find the vital details of a certain renowned bishop. He first goes to the drawers containing the index cards. It is these cards upon which the clerks have carefully recorded the shelf location of each individual's record, lest the file be lost forever. The records are arranged so that the files of the living dwell on their shelves, and those of the dead, in the registry's farthest, darkest reaches, on theirs. He runs through the cards in search of the bishop's. However, following an egalitarian principle of vital recordkeeping, the index cards and files of ordinary individuals are democratically interfiled among those of the famous, frequently occupying a place right next to each other. By chance, he notices the card of a woman, which is stuck to the back of the bishop's.

Senhor José begins to be intrigued by it, unaccountably drawn to the name, which we never learn. Here begins his abandonment of the rich and famous and his book-long obsession to uncover the identity of this unremarkable, ordinary woman. The rest of the book unfolds as a story of mystery. We follow Senhor José's quest for more information about this elusive woman, the kind of important - should one say vital - information about an obscure life that the registry's files could hardly reveal.

Saramago's book juxtaposes several worlds. It ushers us into the world of recordkeeping, a world of shelving, insects, dust, and peculiar smells. It also explores the significance of the registry's light and dark spaces: natural light, a source of life outside the archives, causes death inside the archives. A Conradian-like darkness enshrouds its oldest records, where archivists may lose their way among the labyrinth of shelves, and where researchers may become lost for days among death records.

Ultimately, these poor lost souls may be reduced to consuming these files in order to stay alive until they are rescued - a central symbol of the indispensability of archival records of the dead as a source of vitality for the living. *All the Names* also describes the bureaucratic caretakers, the social world of the archive or registry. Eventually, it explores the different life world outside the records and beyond the registry.

Finally, Saramago also writes about the relationship between Senhor José's public life and his private identity - his life in his flat, where he listens to and converses with the whispering voices of other beings, other Senhor Josés - who provide the companionship of moral conscience, wandering thoughts, daydreams, and conversations with anthropomorphic objects of his imagining. That is, separated by our skins from a realm of public light outside our bodies, is an inner private world of darkness - a realm of inward existence apparently beyond the gaze of public life and public records, an archive of private, secured consciousness. Indeed, these are moments, this is the place, of resistance against the state's, and modernity's, totalising urge to shape the nature of individual identity, and to use the same stamp to identify each individual, which, in effect, erases the individual names.[4]

Saramago's description of the registry is such that it bears a close resemblance to the registry records themselves - almost as if the registry's personnel structure, bureaucratic rules, and myriad protocols of behaviour, and the making and keeping of the files in strict order, mirror each other. For example, the personnel of the registry arrive in the morning and leave in the evening in accordance with a certain order dictated by their position in a hierarchy. The same goes for the registry staff seating arrangements: the lowest rank of clerks is seated in a single row closest to the public service counter, the senior clerks behind them, then the deputy directors. Finally, alone at the peak of the pyramid farthest removed from the public, sits the director, the metaclerk. Without organisational order and bureaucratic authority, there is no records order.[5]

Yet the tidy order and classifications of the archives' records and personnel - at least the pretension - is misleading. It fails miserably to acknowledge and capture

the chaos, complexity, and depth of real life, life beyond archival officialdom. In fact, moments of chance, randomness, and coincidence recur throughout *All the Names*, and serve as counterpoints to the novel's somewhat idealised representation of archives and records bureaucracy as paragons of order and control. Still, one of archives' critical continuing functions is to wage battle against randomness and chance, to ensure that all citizens are present and accounted for, regardless of their location or mobility. This is part of what one sociologist has called the state's 'revolution identificatoire'.[6]

James Scott, in *Seeing Like a State*, has suggested that peoples' names form a vital instrument of state control, that the emergence of the regular use of permanent last names in the early modern period, in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, for example, forms an important episode in the history of the state's efforts 'to make society more legible', as he phrases it, and to arrange the population in a classifiable manner that is more amenable to classic state functions such as conscription, taxation, and the prevention of rebellion.

Vital records serve to authenticate communal membership (citizenship), rights, and entitlements. However, they also serve the cause of population statistics and epidemiology and demographic data. With the advent of data-crunching, pattern-evoking (or pattern recognition) computers, this has never been truer. Vital records form principal state instruments of control against the unwieldiness of randomness and chance identities and individuality. There is no such thing as an individual or individual phenomenon; everything and everyone is computable, that is, part of an underlying statistical reality. Moreover, vital records also represent 'the monopolization of the legitimate means of movement' on behalf of good government, national health, rights and entitlements, public safety and the commonweal. States are both 'sheltering and dominating'.[7] The control of records supports the control of people.

The contrast between the documentary reason and order of the archives and the randomness and chance occurrence of events in the real world emerges into view as Senhor José decides to venture beyond the registry's domain into the city, a world of uncertainty and unpredictability. There, he hopes to meet with various people who may know something about the woman, and lead him to her. An atmosphere of chaos and foreboding creeps into the story as Senhor José leaves behind the archives' controlled environment in search of a woman who he seems to be falling in love with, and wants to meet.

Outside the archives, he experiences a sense of anxiety. It is a kind of anxiety that may accompany newfound freedom from institutional life and culture. This idea is captured well by Saramago in one of his other novels. In *Blindness*, a group of

individuals who have been victimised by a plague of blindness coursing through a city and quarantined by a panicked state finally have a chance to flee the misery of their forced confinement:

> Say to a blind man you're free, open the door separating him from the world, Go, you are free, we tell him once more, and he does not go, he has remained motionless, there in the middle of the road, he and the others, they are terrified, they do not know where to go, the fact is there is no comparison between living in a rational labyrinth, which is, by definition, a mental asylum, and venturing forth without a guiding hand or a dog-leash, into the demented labyrinth of the city, where memory will serve no purpose, for it will merely be able to recall the images of places but not the paths by which we might get there.[8]

Along with smuggling registry index cards and files into his room, Senhor José lies to people about being on an official registry mission to investigate the woman's life, and forges documents vesting him with the authority to do so. All the while he agonises over whether the wording of the forged documents authorising him to conduct his investigation - the diplomatic formulae of authenticity - will be good enough to allay any possible suspicion of his dissemblance. Fearing discovery, he regards with apprehension the numerous individuals he encounters during the course of his search, lest a wrong word spoken here, a bad impression made there, or a chance encounter between two individuals who may each put information about him together betray his illicit mission and spell his doom.

Yet, as the story develops this ordinary man, finding himself in these extraordinary circumstances, manages to set aside his natural timidity; he continues ever more boldly, growing increasingly passionate and, at the same time, indifferent to the prospect of losing his position at the registry. His relationship with this woman has become more important than his connection to the registry. The relationship is no longer official; it has become personal - real.

He also breaks into and spends a night in the unknown woman's school looking for her school files. Here he finds a collection of photographs of all the students. Playing on the relationship between changing human appearance and internal states, and between photographically recorded change and static registry documents, Saramago writes of the school:

> It wasn't like this at the Central Registry, in the Central Registry there were only words, in the Central Registry you could not see how the faces had changed or continued to change, when that was precisely what was most important, the thing that time changes. Senhor José's stomach started to rumble ... Before going down to the kitchen, Senhor José went to the teachers' bathroom to wash his hands, he was amazed by what he saw in

> the mirror, he hadn't imagined that his face could possibly get into this state, filthy, furrowed with lines of sweat. It doesn't even look like me, he thought, and yet he probably never looked more like himself.[9]

Senhor José learns that the woman was a mathematics teacher, in her late thirties and divorced. Eventually, he also learns that she had committed suicide several weeks earlier. The suicide may well be more than a coincidental detail in the book. Long a favoured object of study in the social sciences dating back to Durkheim's landmark study, Michel Foucault has described suicide as an offence against the state's claim of power over death, for the state, through its prohibitions against suicide, aims to control the proper conditions for dying. It may be that suicide here represents an expression of freedom from the state, which, for reasons of state, establishes religiously informed laws that preclude the right to take one's own life.[10] The woman's death raises new questions for Senhor José. Should he discontinue his pursuit of her, now that he has learned of her passing? Is it time to forget about her, to let her go, now that any chance of meeting her has passed? Or should he persist?

According to registry rules, the woman's status has changed; she has migrated from the living to the dead. Yet as the story closes, the director of the registry reminds Senhor José and the rest of the staff of an idea he had announced to them earlier: he had declared that he intended to implement a plan to improve the organisation of the records. His plan called for the integration of the records of the living and the dead rather than continuing the established registry tradition of keeping them apart, in separate locations. The practice of separating them, he explains, only encourages the living to forget the dead, and to pretend that the latter have forfeited their place in the existing - democratic - registry order.

This scene reflects a comment once made by Saramago about how cemeteries are today located in places removed from the daily concourses of the living, just as the files of the dead have their own place in the registry, in the archives, apart from those of the living. In a magazine interview Saramago expressed scorn for commemorative places, places that simply remind the living of their separateness in time and space. Such efforts, he suggests, eventually lose their memorial value and become purely sources of aesthetic pleasure. The methods and practices that result in forgetting the dead the Director seeks to end. To separate the files of the living and the dead, he seems to say, is to consign the latter to oblivion - to exclude them from the social order, to kill them once more, administratively.

Saramago's novel is a cross between Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges. His work has also been associated with Italo Calvino, and the French writer Georges Perec. In addition to the poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) and several other Portuguese

literary figures, Saramago himself also claims the important influence of the self-reflective French Renaissance essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) and the nineteenth-century Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852). In Gogol's novels, such as *The Inspector General* and *Dead Souls*, Saramago undoubtedly found material for his exploration of the encounter between history, state bureaucracies, and ordinary folk. Perhaps most influential was the main character of Gogol's *The Overcoat*, Akakii Akakievich. Akakievich is very much like Senhor José, a low-grade clerk who works in a bureaucracy and does little else. As mentioned earlier, Saramago's vision of the state also appears in *Blindness*, the story of a government's inhumane response to a plague of blindness that spreads terror through a city's population.

From a modern archivist's point of view, Senhor José breaks several sacrosanct rules of archival practice, which, at one point, Saramago explicitly acknowledges. The thing that might strike us as most bizarre is the suggestion that the records of the dead and living be mingled. Before dismissing this as mere records classification fantasy, however, we need to ask, as others have already done, what prejudices lie behind our - the state's - approaches to classification, its handling of case files, and the implications of its appraisal and especially sampling methodologies.

How do we deal with large numbers of files, that is, of people, of individuals? In the age of systems, functional analysis, macro appraisal, and sampling methodologies what has happened to the individual human being in our calculations on behalf of the state? How do we demystify the official record as sealing the fate of individuals? To what do our classificatory assumptions and practices - our habits - blind us, as they inevitably must. What ethics, what religious beliefs, cultural assumptions, and reasons of state underlie our handling of the government's files on the living and the dead?

As Michel Foucault would ask, what other equally significant realities does our structuring of knowledge inevitably prevent us from seeing, even as it effectively preserves for us some other aspect of our condition. How do our scientific classifications obscure from our sight other ways of seeing the world, other ways of regarding people.

As Susan Star and Geoffrey Bowker point out in their book, *Sorting Things Out*, the recordkeeper's ordering of files entails a 'quiet politics of classification'. 'Good, usable classification systems', they write, 'disappear by definition'. 'The easier they are to use, the harder they are to see' and 'Large information systems such as the Internet or global databases carry with them a politics of voice and value that is often invisible, embedded in layers of infrastructure.'[11] Thus, there is much less that is natural and much more that is constructed than we may think about

the architecture, classification and modelling of the information objects in our domain - even the records of what seem like patently natural phenomena such as births and deaths. To illustrate the point, one need only turn to the recent, sometimes quite nasty classification wars in evolutionary biology between those who call themselves cladists and those who call themselves systematicists.[12]

Saramago's work powerfully illustrates some of the deeper - he would undoubtedly say darker - obscuring effects of the modern state's keeping of records. For Saramago's novel is a kind of critical romanticism, the work of a man who is extremely sensitive to the fate of the humble, everyday person. In this and other novels he expresses great concern for the memory of those individuals whose names the signatures of the famous - the artists, generals, politicians, celebrities - have rendered invisible in history's construction of society's great works - the builders of the pyramids, the many assistants who mixed colours and carried paint for Michelangelo, Rodin's 'assistants', the makers of the president's great oratory, the middling shapers of an administrator's policy. The single signature, which presumes an inextricable link between creative credit and public responsibility, the single name affixed to great works is a pretension that effectively obscures traces of all the other names that deserve a place too. This is Saramago's archive.

Archivists might feel unable to accommodate Saramago's demand that we shine a light on all the names. To archivists, shining a light on each of the files of ordinary individuals might seem, to say the least, like an impractical dream. Imagine a documentary exhibition featuring - if that is the right word - all of the birth, marriage, and death records, or all the census records, or at least all the names, in an archives' holdings. In fact, how many documentary exhibitions have chosen to focus on ordinary individuals, that is, on a single ordinary individual?

In his *The Names of History*, the historian Jacques Ranciere has suggested that the methods of many historians, including social historians, today work to repress or expunge the individual action, event and person from history. We have created our own contemporary version of the 'subjects of history':

> The new subject of history, history from the bottom up, is nothing other than all the individuals and groups who died mute, unnoticed, unheard, but whose voices continue to haunt history with their repressed presence.

Whereas kings and ministers once occupied centre stage in our narratives of the past, now it is 'the body of the citizenry', the body of the 'people', 'the masses' who are history's sovereigns, and it is 'the paperwork of the poor' that preoccupies us. The essential materials of history, the names of individuals, disappear into historical analyses. Our interest is no longer in the fate of political regimes. It is a matter of the life and death of the body politic, the people, the anonymous citizenry.

Individuals are embedded in historical patterns, social structures and institutional frameworks. That is, individuals and events are rendered as surface phenomena in 'totalizing discourses', which subsume individuals into some single larger meaning.[13] Even the amateur genealogists today flooding archives often scientifically embed their ancestors in social structures and patterns, and larger historically constructed social phenomena.

The only reason why history and archives exist, at least as we understand the meaning of history today, is because people die. People die, lose their ability to speak and to write, and our job is to postpone the moment of speechlessness. Or at least to interpose our archival methods in order to make the impossible possible by interpreting the meaning and explaining the significance of the words and deeds and events of the ignorant dead, whether they have passed on or, like Senhor José, they are simply absent, or, finally whether they are both dead and absent. Our management of the living and the dead, past and present - and future, and the relationship between them, is one of the most important consequences of our practice for both the living and the dead.

A number of historians have begun to study the significance of recording individual names. They have taken it upon themselves to reverse the process of forgetting the Senhor Josés of the world, to rescue ordinary persons from historical oblivion, which is an effect of historians' structural analysis and archivists' structural and functional methods. French historian Emmanuel Leroy Ladourie, for example, has written about ordinary folk, as has Carlos Ginzberg in *The Cheese and the Worms,* Nathalie Zemon-Davis in *The Return of Martin Guerre,* and Judith Miller in *One, by One, by One: Facing the Holocaust.*

Perhaps most striking among this genre that focuses on ordinary individuals, however, is French historian Alain Corbin's recent work, *The Life of an Unknown: The Rediscovered World of a Clog Maker in Nineteenth-Century France.*[14] Corbin's work, in his words, is a meditation on history's disappeared, on the phenomenon of historical oblivion - just as Saramago's novel concerns the disappearance of an all but forgotten woman and the virtual invisibility of a seemingly insignificant clerk in the discursive space of history and geography:

> My task is piecing together a puzzle ... I hope to reconstitute the existence of a person whose memory has been abolished ... I want to re-create him, to give him a second *chance* ... to become part of the memory of his century.

In this work, a cloggier named Louis-François Pinagot (1798–1876), 'a perfect unknown', is brought back to life, after lying dead, or should one say dormant, among the many names in the local official records and parish registries of the French town of Origny-le-Butin.

As if responding to philosopher Ian Hacking's call (see epigraph above), Corbin sets out to study the life of an individual whose name he aims to choose with perfect randomness from the many names listed in the municipal records of a French town. His method is intimately intertwined with his purpose. In fact, as Corbin tells it, he literally closed his eyes to choose the volume from which he would randomly 'choose' a name. He records in detail how he and the archivist elaborated a means by which to allow a name for the study to emerge from archival obscurity, how this forgotten clog maker eventually became the central character of his study. Corbin states that he wanted to write about an individual whose name appears in no record that was specifically and intentionally interested in him as a person.

Yet, as Corbin shines the light of history on Pinagot, the cloggier inevitably begins to lose his 'Pinagotesqueness'. Pinagot cannot, finally, evade government archives' and history's social scientific impulse and socialising effects. The randomness is an illusion. Archives and history from the bottom rarely alight on the bottom - the single person. Historians aim to end with an understanding of individuals, even famous ones, as they can only be understood historically, as occupying a place on a larger canvas of social structures, patterns, and conditions of historical development, as symbols of class, region, nation.

All selves, all historical selves, in other words, as we archivists know well, are inevitably turned out as public figures, constituted by social forces. Forming a nexus of social forces, the self struggles to assert itself against the forces of community and peoplehood. No inner life dwells autonomously beyond the pale of social and historical conditions, of context, institutional functions, and social community and class. We are, all of us, inevitably, shaped by others, as others are shaped by our presence. 'Evidence of me', as Sue McKemmish has written, eventually becomes 'evidence of us'.[15] One might rephrase this observation to say that under archives' current scientific methods, personal *records*, *records of me* in public archives, attain the status of *evidence* only as 'evidence of us'. 'Evidence of me' cannot exist in public archives.

As Ian Hacking has written, the line that separates representation and intervention is often far from evident. And this seems to go for the keeping of records. *All the Names* raises questions about documentation as both representation and reflection of the world. How do records management practices, including 'best practices', influence our perceptions of the world? Conversely, what contemporary philosophical, cultural, and even religious, and especially 'thanological' assumptions, as well as political and economic means, underlie our avowedly scientific methods of representation. Saramago might be willing to say that as we

capture records, records, including vital records, 'lock us up inside ourselves', as Pessoa wrote, almost as if we experience a certain irrevocability, a form of immobility, silence, and death - an official stamp finality. Every recording is an epitaph. And so Saramago raises many questions about the identities of individuals, the nature and effects of bureaucracies and their records on the fabric of society.

The public archivist's work, and even that of manuscript archivists, contributes to the process of making people, of forming subjects of the state. However, that process begins long before the capturing and appraisal of the record, and the collection and retrieval, and release of the information to bureaucrats, genealogists, lawyers, and historians. It begins with the premises that lie behind the construction of forms, what today we call 'document types' and 'document models', with our approaches to the appraisal of documents and systems, and with the schemas and metadata and classifications and descriptions that we believe will best, that is accurately and completely and credibly, 'capture' and represent - should I say control - a certain authentic reality. The 'reality' which these schema capture, that official stamp, Saramago wants to say, is only one means, one level of access, one means of organising our understanding of individuals and the human condition.

Finally, privacy is one of the major issues that have emerged in the wake of electronic databases and Internet telecommunication. Recordkeepers might easily conclude, therefore, that Saramago's ultimate concern is the protection of individual privacy, and the degree to which individuals are entitled to privacy in the modern age. It may be.[16] One cannot help but suspect, however, that there is something more here. This book addresses the age-old question of the nature - or construction - of the 'self'. The development of the modern form of the state and the social institutions it legitimises and licenses has required and disseminated certain notions of individuality, identity, selfhood, and freedom.

In a sense, the protection of private information that is held in public hands, as important as it is, may yet turn out to be a surface phenomenon. This understandable concern may be obscuring from view a more subtle but equally pressing question: what influence does the modern state's mere construction of vital records infrastructures, along with the creation of other analogous standard forms of documentation, exert on contemporary Western beliefs about the nature of identity, individuality, inwardness, and interiority, on the concepts of privacy as well as selfhood? And how does each of these concepts mesh with the importance of documenting membership in different, sometimes even conflicting, social entities - family, state (citizenry), community, nation and people?

ENDNOTES

[1] This essay is an extended version of a lecture delivered at the School of Information Science and Policy, State University of New York, Albany, on 26 April 2002.

[2] On the evolution of the term 'anonymous' from the narrow early modern reference to an unknown author of a work, to the 'anonymity' of life in the towns and cities beginning in the urban industrial age, see Anne Ferry, '*Anonymity*: The Literary History of a Word', *New Literary History*, vol. 33, no. 2, Spring 2002, pp. 193-214.

[3] Another work (made into a film in 1995) that explores the impact of public documents on official identity is Honore Balzac's *Colonel Chabert*. This rather long short story recounts the experience of a soldier in Napoleon's army mistakenly pronounced dead on the field of battle. After years of wondering and confinements to mental institutions, he realises his fate and understands he must convince the sceptical, incredulous, authorities that he is alive and is who he claims to be, and that, notwithstanding his documented, official death, he remains entitled to the return of his civic status, his property, and his remarried wife, his rights, and his life.

[4] As Hegel seemed to want to say in his writings on the state (*Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of History*) before the state, each individual is different in exactly the same way. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who produced some classic, enduring philosophical critiques of the modern age, complained of how the state creates inauthentic selves through its statistical methods: the single individual 'is a spiritual definition of being a human being; the crowd, the many, the statistical or numerical is an animal definition of being a human being'. Cited in Mark Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1980, pp. 57-9.

Finally, in his seminal work on postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard attacked the state's erasure of individual names even as it seeks to document them:

> 'Under the general demand for slackening and appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror; for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.'

The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984. Stephen Greenblatt examines individuals' strategies for shaping and cultivating privacy, autonomous selfhood, and a sense of interiority during the Renaissance. He furnishes several examples of prominent figures of the period, including Thomas More as government servant, searching for a 'principle of negation' against the growing claims of government, church, and other public institutions on individuals, and the age's 'diminution of self-differentiation and private inwardness'.

He sums up the period's new dilemma of selfhood as a 'dialectic of engagement and detachment', entry into and flight from the civic world, rage against authority and obedience to and identification with authority. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, pp. 45-6, 85, and passim. An excellent source on modern notions of selfhood is *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, Roy Porter (ed.), Routledge, London, 1997.

[5] For a discussion of archival practice and the relevance of the 'power distance index' in different national bureaucracies, see Eric Ketelaar, 'The Difference Best Postponed?

Cultures and Comparative Archival Science', *Archivaria*, vol. 44, 1997, p. 144.

Discussions of selfhood and state bureaucracy have implications for Max Weber's fashioning of the impersonal nature of bureaucrats, in which bureaucracy consists of methods rather than men. However, post-Foucauldian criticism has challenged the conventional reading of Weber's notion of bureaucracy as entailing the suppression of individuality and autonomous selfhood. See Paul Du Gay, 'Office as a Vocation: "Bureaucracy" but not as we know it', *Cultural Policy Paper No. 4*, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, n.d., at *www.gu.edu.au/centre/cmp/research.html*.

[6] Gerard Noirel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, translated by Geoffrey de Forcade, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, ch. 2. Jacques Ranciere alludes to the 'revolution of paperwork', although to describe a different phenomenon, the multiplication of voices in history that supplement the voice of the sovereign, the king. *The Names of History*, passim.

[7] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998. 'The invention of permanent, inherited patronyms was, after the administrative simplification of nature ... the last step in establishing the necessary preconditions of modern statescraft', pp. 64–5. The ascriptions of last names, says Scott, coincided with the development of written official documents. On the State's monopolisation of legitimate movement, see John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, the State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 7 and passim. See also *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.

Of course, Michel Foucault's notions of power, knowledge, and discipline, as described in such works as *Power/Knowledge*, *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of the Asylum*, have in one way or another inspired most of these detailed accounts of the formation of the modern state, which today stands as the exclusive form authorising people to organise themselves politically. States hold authority to grant permission for the legitimate formation of most kinds of social organisations - corporations, clubs, professions, etc. In addition, Weber briefly acknowledged the importance of identification files in serving as the basis of state power. Finally, social theorist Anthony Giddens writes:

> 'Administrative power can only become established if the coding of information is actually applied in a direct way to the supervision of human activities.'

The Nation State and Violence, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, p. 47. A wide range of literature on the significance of network and computer technology for current notions of the self is now flooding the book market. Some of this literature extends Foucault's notion of the government and institutional disciplining of individuals through surveillance. Others focus on the web as a new means of shaping selves, and still others explore the potential of current medical technology to explore (and record) the workings of the self in the brain. See David Lyon, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2001; and Joseph Dumit's web-accessible title on PET brain scanning and the objectification of selfhood. See his 'A Digital Image of the Category of the Person: PET Scanning and Objective Self-Fashioning', in Gary Lee Downey and Joseph Dumit (eds), *Cyborgs and Citadels: Anthropological*

Interventions in Emerging Science and Technology, School of American Research Press, 1998, pp. 83-102.

[8] José Saramago, *Blindness*, translated from the Portuguese by Giovanni Pontiero, Harcourt, New York, 1997, p. 217.

[9] José Saramago, *All the Names*, translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa, Harcourt, New York, 1999, p. 91.

[10] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, New York, 1980, p. 139.

[11] Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999, ch. 1 and passim.

[12] David Hull, *Science as a Process: An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998.

[13] Jacques Ranciere, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, translated by Hassan Melehy, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, pp. 19, 96. See also, Daniel J Sherman, 'Bodies and Names: The Emergence of Commemoration in Interwar France', *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, no. 2, April 1998, pp. 443-66; Thomas Lacquer, 'Memory and Naming in the Great War,' in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John Gillis (ed.), Princeton, 1994, p. 160; Marita Sturken, 'The Wall, the Screen, the Image: The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial', *Representation*, vol. 35, Summer 1991, p. 126. Of course, political philosophers have wrestled with this problem since Plato. Best known for their efforts to shape individuality to fit their theories of the state and public life are Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche. Each addressed the question of how individual identity is mediated by the State.

[14] Alain Corbin, *The Life of an Unknown: The Rediscovered World of a Clog Maker in Nineteenth-Century France*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Columbia Press, New York, 2001.

[15] Sue McKemmish, 'Evidence of Me', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1996.

[16] See, for example, Heather MacNeil, *Without Consent: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information in Public Archives*, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, 1992, a cogent discussion of the balance between private rights and public interest. Increasingly scholars are inquiring into the impact of technology on notions of self, and its effects on the integrity and homogeneity of individual identity. See for example, Kenneth J Gergen, 'The Self in the Age of Information', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2000, pp. 201-14.