

The Records Continuum and the Concept of an End Product

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Between 1975 and 1988 **Frank Upward** worked as an archivist, data manager, information manager and recordkeeping systems analyst in government positions and as a consultant. Since then he has lectured within archives, records, information management, and knowledge management specialisations at Monash University. As an academic he is best known for his work on accountability and recordkeeping in the early 1990s (with Sue McKemmish) and as a records continuum theorist whose model of the records continuum is widely used by teachers and by practitioners in many different archival cultures. He is currently attempting to extend the cross-cultural strength of explanations of the model by looking at how it can be read using perspectives from the metaphysics of spacetime continuum theory, the need for a stronger conceptual base to archival activities built out of diversity and how justice can be served by the way public access operates across the records continuum.

Some archivists in Australia whose particular functioning leads them to see public access mainly in terms of access to an end product have had nervous reactions to newer archival theories dealing with the formation of archives. Within those approaches, at least within continuum theory, records are always in a state of becoming and never in a final state of being. For evidence of that uneasiness one only has to read Paul Macpherson's article published in Archives and Manuscripts in May 2002. In that work Macpherson claimed to show, amongst other things, that in their implicit assumptions some records continuum theorists leave public access to 'post-current government records' out of the continuum. I was extensively cited in order to demonstrate his case. This article is a response and will argue that it is an 'end product' view of public access that is outside continuum theory.

Introduction

Paul Macpherson's article 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions: Public Access to Post-current Government Records' that appeared in the May 2002 edition of *Archives and Manuscripts* set out statements on public access such as the need to see it as a multi-faceted part of the records continuum. Instead of expanding upon this basic idea in operational terms Macpherson preferred to work theoretically, basing his article in part around the idea that 'despite records continuum thinking explicitly defining recordkeeping as capturing, maintaining and delivering authentic and reliable evidence of transactions over space and time, some continuum theorists have implicitly seen a disjunction between the business use of records and the cultural use of archives'.¹ More than half the article is directed at showing that three 'continuum theorists' – Chris Hurley, David Bearman and me – undervalue the reference and access function to 'post-current government records', an unusual phrase which is not explained. We leave such access out of the records continuum. The article is on shaky grounds from the start as I am the only one of the three who is clearly a continuum theorist, but as it is my work that is cited the most this is hardly a fatal flaw.

Within the story Macpherson tells in the article our contributions to archival discourse operated as a hegemony in Australian and international records management standards which show a similar absence. Just to state the task – to create Australian and international standards for public access to 'post-current government' records within a records management standard – is to point to its difficulty given the number of conflicting archival access regimes that would have had to be covered even in Australia and the need for a records management standard to cover company records as well as government ones. The records management standards Macpherson refers to provided strong endorsement of regulatory regimes, and it is hard to imagine what else could have been done until archivists construct their own standard and give it common presence.

I will not be referring to the standards issue in this article. My focus will be on my own work and the implicit assumptions Macpherson claims to find in it. These seem to consist of something like the following:

- I create a separation between business use of records and their cultural values,

- I leave culture and reference and access out of the records continuum (although not out of my model of the records continuum),
- I locate access to collective memory narrowly,
- I have helped establish a hierarchical and mentally limiting way of thinking about archives based on contextuality and transactionality,
- I assume that recordkeeping systems 'will automatically meet the pluralised collective memory needs of communities and societies',
- I assume, like Bearman and Hurley (the major explicit references to their work), that reference and access functions can be passed over to librarians, and
- all of these assumptions can be demonstrated by looking at the words with which I surround my records continuum model.

Many of these alleged assumptions do not sit well with the archival mission statement at the head of the Australian Society of Archivists' journal which includes the need to manage and maintain various forms of memory in support of understandings of Australian social life. If such assumptions are held by an educator involved in programs accredited by the Australian Society of Archivists (as I am) or if they have been held by the many archivists in Australia who have been involved with the development of records management standards the critique has a very harsh edge to it.

In this article I will try to set the record straight in relation to my own work and in the process hopefully clarify a few elements of my records continuum theorising for others. In particular I want to challenge the notion present in Australian writings, including Macpherson's article, that the records continuum represents lines of action through to an end product in the custody of an archives. I assume that continuum theory, in its spacetime conceptual base, opposes the concept of an end product and that is what I tried to present via my records continuum model.

The academic words that surrounded my model during my first presentation of it

Paul Macpherson in his search for assumptions in my work attempts to look at the words with which I surround my records continuum model, but at least in a literal sense this is not apparent. When I first presented it in a two-part article in *Archives and Manuscripts* I surrounded the model with a slice of Jean Francois Lyotard (a few comments on the postmodern condition) and a solid slab of Anthony Giddens's sociological structuration theory, both of whom Macpherson ignores.² I used Lyotard to point to the need to think through, within, around, across, up, down and every which way in relation to our archival activities ('ana' based thinking), suggesting that the model could help in this process. At the time I was particularly interested in Giddens's structuration theories and their similarities with spacetime continuum theories hence the more solid slab of his work. His theories involve the study of expanding, stable and collapsing complexes of the relationship between action and structures for action. The first dimension of the records continuum model is a region of action surrounded by regions that influence action or are influenced by it, as is the region of immediate contexts of creation in Giddens's theories of spacetime distancing. As I pointed out Giddens emphasises the role of the storage of recorded information in social formation processes. His view of storage is similar in many ways to views of access in archival theory. It is comprised of processes of information representation, recall and dissemination. If a reader is looking for where I discuss access in my work, look in particular at my references to logical models for archival operations and my use of the word storage.³

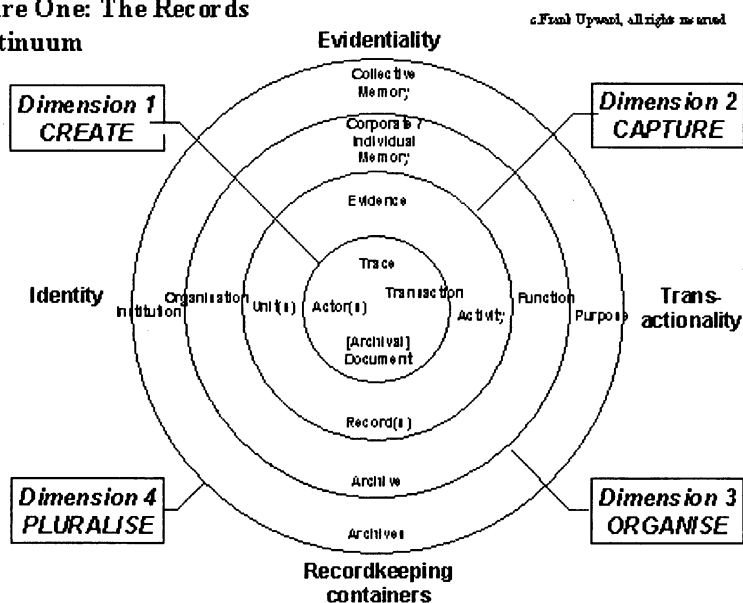
As an isolated piece of writing the presentation can be criticised for failing to communicate to my audience. One has to look at the specificity of occurrence of the articles to have any idea of what I was attempting. My colleague Sue McKemmish was presenting the model as a component of her conference papers and within her explorations of personal papers. Given the clarity of McKemmish's introductory explanations for a professional audience (including the spacetime component of the model, and the way the model handles diversity within the archival profession) I felt that I could avail myself of the luxury of doing something different.⁴

Locating access – my Records Continuum model as Rorschach test

The model I am referring to in this article is widely available in the literature, but because I want to encourage readers of this article to use it interactively it is re-presented here as *Figure One*. Macpherson has his own things to say about models including that they 'should not be given status as an ideology to limit, invalidate or circumscribe thought'⁵ but that is a model as topography, as the re-writing of statements into an epistemology. The records continuum model, however, as Terry Cook once noted, is like a plastic template.⁶ It is topological, an invariant logical shape which can be placed over different epistemologies, over different applications, and as such is more likely to point to how particular complexes of the continuum in spacetime (not the template itself) can circumscribe thought.

The Records Continuum - a spacetime model⁷

Figure One: The Records Continuum



It contains five continua brought together into one model. Four of them relate in interconnected fashion to accountability and in particular to questions of:

- who did what insofar as it can be identified in records (identity and transactionality),
- what traces, evidence and memory is there of this within the records continuum (evidentiality), and
- how information is stored in recorded form (recordkeeping containers).

These matters of accountability are set within a process continuum relating to the stretching of documentation through space or time. The creation zone is the only zone of action. Actions, including the actions of archivists, return us to this zone within transaction cycles.⁸ The other dimensions of the model are regions of influence and a locus for systems that serve purposes of records capture, organisation and pluralisation. Time as a separate dimension is absent from the model. The four processes can be studied in any era, along with the impact of spacetime upon them, including whether the records have continued to be recursively managed across the thresholds, have stalled beneath a threshold, or have fallen back.

Those interested in using the model should not be overly concerned with defining the terms I use. Defining is usually topographical, and would circumscribe the use of the model itself. Use your own understandings or a dictionary, and you will locate yourself somewhere near the term. A continuum is a blurring of point. Near enough is as near as we can agree to get outside of the analysis of particular applications. Within particular complexes of the records continuum (the applications not the template) one can discuss the way archivists and others have defined the terms or ignored them in their thinking or operating, and that is where the ligatures on discourse operate and can be identified, not in the model itself.

Because of its invariant nature the model can operate as a Rorschach test. There is one model, but a myriad of responses to it. Perhaps readers of this article might like to take an element of the test. Look at *Figure One*, and ask yourself where public access to collective memory is located.

You could give many answers. Some of the answers I could construct from the responses to the model I have had from others include:

- Public access to collective memory is located at the collective memory point. (I usually guess that continuum thinking is very challenging to a person who answers that way. The model is a relational one and isolating points from each other is not continuum thinking.)
- Public access is multi-dimensional operating in any region external to action and therefore public access to collective memory can occur in relation to all points in the second, third and fourth dimension. (I would usually see this response as one of a sophisticated thinker who understands that the first dimension is not fully accessible. It is very difficult to dig into the action region. As Jacques Derrida points out, documents seldom speak to us in the nude, but as Michel Foucault argues, at least we can explore how memory operates within how the document has been captured within recordkeeping processes and we can dig up evidence of how it has been archived within discursive formations.⁹)
- If you said that public access to collective memory is in the action dimension because that is the only place where any action including the action of accessing something takes place you are highly logical and also running the risk of being left in a Derridaen quandary. Public access can only occur in the region where there is seldom any real possibility of access. The trace itself does not exist and knowledgeable public access to collective memory will be a rare experience (although subjectively, of course, anyone can claim to be in tune with it).

Collective memory affects every point in the model including those of action. The answers that can be given in response to the question of where to locate public access to collective memory can be very confusing. All the model does is set up the topology, the template, for answers and reveals some of the complexities in the question.

In fact the question is one Macpherson asks and I would not. The pragmatic question that can be asked and answered is where one would

locate public access to the document, the record, the archive and the archives and that is the way I view the public access function, not as access to collective memory. The support question, which I would ask, is to what extent do recordkeeping containers contain accessible collective memory? This is where one can begin to wax philosophical. On the recordkeeping axis, however, one is dealing with concrete particulars and where to locate the containers is not such a brain-teasing question.

Macpherson asked the question on my behalf; and in attempting to answer it as I would answer it suggested (at least in terms of my Rorschach test) that I might be someone who finds relationally based continuum thinking difficult. He claims that 'in this version the conceptual location of access to collective memory is on the evidential axis in the fourth dimension of the model'. Macpherson goes on to claim that 'Upward describes this dimension as being for "building, recalling and disseminating collective memory (social, cultural or historical) "'¹⁰

I certainly did not say what the fourth dimension is 'for'. That is a matter of purpose; purposes are multiple and purpose is a separate point in the continuum, one which relates to the other points. Any reference to what something is 'for' has to relate to an application of the template, a complex of the spacetime continuum, not the continuum template itself. In the passage from my work which Macpherson cited, the application purpose, the way I was using the model, was to explain a multi-dimensional approach to recordkeeping systems analysis for records in any era. Macpherson's description of what I wrote rips one layer of the analysis out from the four tiers of my integrated account.¹¹ The question has to be asked - who is removing the social, cultural or historical from the records continuum? Issues of creation, capture and organisation also have social, cultural and historical significances. Indeed I call the fourth dimension a plural one, not a social one, precisely because calling it social would be denying the social and cultural aspects of the other dimensions. Yes, the fourth dimension is the locus of pluralising systems and these involve building, recalling and disseminating collective memory, but it operates in combination with the other dimensions (spacetime continuum fashion) not purposively separated from them except in Macpherson's account of my words.

Contextuality and transactionality: Mentally limiting or culturally liberating?

Macpherson argues on my behalf often, making assumptions about my assumptions. He repeatedly refers back to the model without giving my words any chance of making sense. As an example of this he indicates that 'in the model, records are defined by contextuality and transactionality'.¹² By introducing contextuality and transactionality, Macpherson is referring to something Sue McKemmish and I wrote in the opening paragraphs of a book that was published more than three years before the model was developed to publication stage. We were describing (not defining) the archival document (not the record, but documents which all have the potential to become records, part of the archive and archives). We were presenting a through spacetime view of documents rather than a view of documents as an end product. Our concern was the ongoing contextuality and transactionality of the journey that archival documents can undertake. There is no reason to assume this does not include their continuing journey in a reference room. Public access is part of that journey no matter where it occurs. At that time our view of that journey emphasised the 'continuum of processes involved in managing the record of a transaction so that it maintains its evidentiary qualities'.¹³

Much of this has found its way into my model, but what does it mean? Macpherson argues that our emphasis upon contextuality and transactionality 'mentally limits the legitimate use of the record to purposes linked to these transactions and their context'.¹⁴ I would like to think Macpherson does not want to turn reference rooms into regions of non-transactionality but that can be a consequential result of what he is arguing. Transactionality refers to qualities that are present in a cycle of use and each use of the record via a reference room keeps the record on its journey. Such uses, of course, are also business uses. What such business uses can be said to be is the business of the client and also the business of the reference room.

Contextuality is a trickier word and I for one (perhaps too much under the influence of Michel Foucault) have tried to stop using the root term 'context' as unthinkingly as I may have done in the past. Context has two major shades of meaning in the English language. One involves close connections between words and text and can lead to linear connections between ideas. It is likely to produce a developmental view

of discourses [X said this, and Y made a statement that worked within the context of the statements by X]. Macpherson's endorsement of the records continuum can be put in the context of the first Australian version of the records continuum in which the records continuum deals with government records and leads up to an end product in archives. That is the records continuum as linear ideology and can limit further explorations of it. The second major 'meaning' of context in the English language is that which surrounds and influences something. This takes us into the mysteries of explanations of action within interiorities that cannot be accessed.

I much prefer a word Chris Hurley uses regularly, 'ambience', for both meanings of context precisely because it combines diminution of certainty with environmental or ecological sensitivities and changes in that environment. But in relation to 'contextuality and transactionality' within a joint use I would now use the phrase Foucault uses in his writing – specificity of occurrence. You may not have any certainties about the interior 'context' of documents, but archivists can document its exteriority by which Foucault, as I have already indicated, means the way it has been recorded as a monument (a representative object minus *connaissance* of its interiority) and how this monument has operated within a discursive formation.¹⁵ You do this by examining the occurrences surrounding the recordkeeping processes and the actions involved in producing and maintaining the ideas in the document. In Hugh Taylor's terminology, you look at the very act and deed,¹⁶ or in process terminology, at the action and its deeding to the future, even when (like Michel Foucault) you are studying the history of ideas within different cultures and are writing for the most part about literary documents. All documents, not just narrowly defined business records, within the template view are potentially archival documents, as the model indicates clearly enough by its use of a square bracket around the word archival as a qualifier for the word document in the creation dimension. The very process of communicating them makes them transactional and how this can be seen as 'limiting' is outside my understandings.

The emphasis upon actions and upon specificity of occurrence in the manner of Foucault far from being restrictive has proved to be liberating, at least for cultural historians. Transactional records provide ways of looking at what people were doing rather than saying and writing.

Foucault turned the study of literary documents on its ear, using archival method as a way of looking at all recorded information from a transactional perspective. In a forthcoming work I comment on the pro-Foucault testimony of Paul Veyne, an historian of early Rome in the following way:

Paul Veyne, one of the historians who internalised Foucault, put this in very concrete terms. You do not look to explain Roman gladiatorial contests in terms of the love of bread and circuses (as he had once done). You study the specificities of occurrence of the acts, resisting the temptation to work from the precept that the acts can be generalised across time in terms of constants in human nature. You ask yourself different questions [when you are studying the 'very act and deed'] such as why did gladiatorial fights only take place within the Roman Empire?¹⁷

All recorded information, even books and journal articles, is transactional. Communications are meant to do business with others, and we need to look at the specificity of occurrence of the acts themselves within the communications using archival method. That is where evidence resides (in recordkeeping evidence) not in the document itself, or at least that is the argument within Foucault's formative approach to culture now often seen as a dominant mode for cultural studies amongst historians in our times. As Miri Rubin has recently argued, cultural studies have undergone resurgence because they 'have been remade as exciting new areas by those able to probe their "cultural" making' in the manner of Foucault (and others).¹⁸

Macpherson gives one example of what he means by post-current government records in his article and it provides a stark contrast to Veyne's conversion to Foucault's style of cultural studies. Macpherson argues that:

Records created by governments, if they are retained, are, in the end, retained solely because citizens want them kept so that they may use them. All records eventually lose all business and evidential use. No surviving record from the Roman Empire has any current business or legal-evidential purpose or utility. Yet there are very few people who would argue for the destruction of any of those records. They are

valued. People want to use them. They are kept, and cared for and documented, solely for purposes of access to the information and cultural resource that they contain.¹⁹

It would be comforting to be able to hold Macpherson's faith in citizens' demand, but in fact whether records survive, particularly older Italian ones, has been a matter of whether they have survived citizen demands to destroy them, and whether they survived at the hands of new governors or during times of conflict. One of Caligula's first acts, for example, was to destroy records relating to his enemies in an act of reconciliation. Wars and changes of government have meant that no government fonds (archival resource) have survived from this era.

More critically Macpherson's statement eliminates subtleties in terms of business and evidential use. The specificity of occurrence of the uses of records whether it is the historical legacies of the actions of the agency that created them or the business use of an historian using the records for evidential purposes in their study of 'culture' are absent. The formative uses of the record are overpowered by the notion of an end product in custody. Even the evidential interests of those who in Acland's words manage records as relics are hidden from view.²⁰ Some relics are constantly being tested and judged for their evidential value. Italians and others for example have passionately and inconclusively analysed Christian relics of wood and cloth over the centuries, including (a little less inconclusively) tracing out their provenance. The few surviving accounts of Julius Caesar's assassination, (manuscripts written some time after the fact not government records except insofar as cultural heritage legislation can make them so) are constantly being re-explored as evidence, more recently for example using archaeological evidence and surmises about the nature and provenance of a post-mortem document that apparently once existed.

It is an unusual example to give within an argument about my 'implicit assumptions' which are alleged to include creating a disjunction between business and cultural uses of records. It seems to illustrate precisely such a disjunction in its manner of expression. I would like to think my implicit assumptions are very different. Records, young or old, have information attributes and are always produced and maintained in culturally identifiable environments (ecologies, if you prefer). Every use of a record is a business use. Historians use records of any age for the evidence they provide. That is part of their business. If archivists are to

provide reference rooms and other public access services they need to be constantly aware of the shifting values and multiple uses involved in public access, the transaction cycles these uses often start up, and the need to provide documentation and advice that help users understand the specificities of occurrence in spacetime (the contextuality and transactionality in a previous argot) relevant to the material they are consulting.

I cannot unpack my assumptions about the relationship between culture and evidence as easily, other than to state the obvious – the concepts from a continuum theory perspective are far more interconnected and blurred than Macpherson's example accommodates. For me the most persuasive account of this relationship can be found in Ernest Gellner's book, *Culture and Reason*, something of a landmark work in 'postmodern' theorising. Gellner brought together (in a simplifying way) the growing critique of Cartesian rationalism occurring in the 1980s. He argued that our reasoning is encased in our cultural environment and we cannot hope to find 'sweet reason' until we realise this. He also argued that there is only one strut remaining undisturbed from the Cartesian edifice and that is the importance of evidence (in Gellner's case, evidence of the influence of our cultural background on our ideas). I also assume that most historians (if not archivists) will be aware of the trends in their profession and how studies of culture were in trouble for a while because of the over-referential use of the word 'culture' and how an emphasis upon cultural making – using evidence of the processes of archiving and recordkeeping – has revitalised them.²¹

Recordkeeping evidence

From a continuum perspective culture is not a near or far-away phenomenon. It is both, and in Foucault's theories it is useful to juxtapose the near and far. It is something best studied in its making or in its operation, no matter what era is being studied and you need evidence to study it. Many types of evidence can be used. Some literary critics and philosophers use the evidence in the words themselves and their inability to transfer meaning; others look for evidence in the semiotic and hermeneutic meanings of words and text. Macpherson portrays an archivist's interest in evidence as legal and quasi-legal. I am sympathetic to any critique of this. It has dominated archivists' views of evidence for too long within a narrow legal-administrative discourse as Terry

Cook regularly points out.²² It subordinates the archivist to another professional perspective that is not really our own. The writers Macpherson assails, Bearman, Hurley and me, are interested in recordkeeping evidence (and its relationship with legal and quasi-legal evidence and other forms of evidence) not with what Macpherson abbreviates as legal-evidential views.

Recordkeeping evidence is era independent in every sense except whether it existed in the first place or has survived. Its survival can last moments or millennia. The development of concepts and methods in the 1990s for dealing with it is, for me, an exciting development, full of promise for the future of the archival profession. For Macpherson to not even discuss recordkeeping evidence suggests he has little concrete understanding of the significance to archivists of more than a decade's work in the area, work which while it emphasises electronic recordkeeping processes can, in spacetime continuum terms, also provide templates that are era independent. Through the concentrated study of recordkeeping evidence archivists have at last begun to strengthen their own voice. It is only a beginning and if an end product view of public access prevails within the archival profession it will also be a temporary ending.

Recordkeeping evidence is a category of evidence in its own right with indelible links to culture both in terms of its creation and its use. How was the record formed? How was the record treated in terms of its evidential qualities throughout spacetime? What does it actually tell us about the actions of those who created it and of the archivists who continue to form the evidence within their systems? How is it continuing to be formed, no matter how old it is? These concerns can be contemporary and ancient. Just as Luciana Duranti explores how the archives were formed in the Roman Archivum²³ why should not archivists be used in support of commissions of enquiry exploring how the intelligence agencies in the United States and Great Britain built up such a feeble archive, full of distortions about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. If it is because recordkeeping evidence has been subordinated to the legal-evidential use then that situation needs to be changed to match our times. The niceties of legal systems are not worrying the United States much in their war on terror but they are beginning to get their noses rubbed into the very poor quality of their own recordkeeping evidence within their intelligence systems.²⁴ This

lack of evidentiality and its impact upon the world will still be present in two thousand years time, and surviving records, if there are any, will provide evidence of the cultures that produced the very acts and deeds.

Librarians and end product views of reference and access

I have been puzzled as to where one of Macpherson's assumptions about my assumptions comes from. Because of my attitude to 'contextuality and transactionality' I am supposed to assume that 'recordkeeping systems in which records are created that capture, maintain and deliver authentic and reliable evidence of transactions over space and time will automatically meet the pluralised collective memory needs of communities and societies'.²⁵ This is an assumption that goes so far against my own grain (as indicated by my earlier discussion on the complexities of collective memory) that I could not possibly hold it. It can deliver more authentic and reliable archival documents and these can come to be held in archives. I *have* written about self-managing communications both in terms of current applications of modern technology and possible applications but I am hardly on my own or delving into continuum theory here. As Macpherson points out much metadata research is directed at such applications. In my work the words are never directed at collective memory however, so much as at the storage of recorded information.²⁶

I have only come across the notion of automating collective memory in exchanges with librarians (although I assume such a proposition also exists in science fiction). Librarians, more generally than archivists, have built their discourse during the twentieth century around ideas that their holdings contain collective memory in accessible form, around end products and client demands for such products, and around systems that with varying degrees of comprehensiveness manage the fullness of their holdings. There the pragmatics of the recordkeeping container, the book or other publication as an end product, allows for such an approach more readily. All these librarianship discourse elements are strongly present in Macpherson's article. I have no problem with this presence, having gradually come to accept Schellenberg's mid-1960s argument²⁷ that archivists have a lot to learn from librarians, just as I believe librarians have much to learn from the formative approach to recorded information proposed within continuum theories. Yet Paul Macpherson seems to have gone so native that he wants to reject his

own library background (while clinging on to the most basic elements of its discourse). He begins his article with what seems to be strong opposition to librarians working in archival reference rooms. He sets out statements by Bearman and Hurley about passing the reference and access function over to librarians as if that is an indication of their disrespect for cultural and social goals.²⁸ No attempt is made to evaluate the skills and knowledge of librarians or to use archival skills and knowledge and place Hurley and Bearman's comments within the specificity of their occurrence.

I am linked with the Bearman and Hurley comments even though I have never written on the topic. If I had, I would probably have pointed out that in small institutions it is impossible to separate out the function in the manner suggested by Bearman and Hurley. I would agree with them, however, that the client-centred and product-directed approaches of librarians can be effective in reference rooms, seemingly contradicting myself and the theme of this article. There may be no end product in a continuum, but just as we can still use Newton's theories to measure an apple falling from a tree (even though continuum theory points to the basic flaw in Newton's calculations) the end product approach still has relevance to reference room activities. The problem for me with librarians in reference rooms is whether they will be able to discuss with clients the rich provenance-based relationships in records, and the specificity of occurrences that produced the records and have been involved in their management? Can they, in other words, handle recordkeeping evidence across the records continuum, and convey information to clients about relevant occurrences during the long journeys records can take?

Culture, reference and access, and the records continuum in Australian thinking and operating

Apart from the above words I have never written upon the subject of librarians in archival reference rooms. Macpherson links me with Bearman's and Hurley's view not by my words but by the way we are all represented by him as writers who ignore cultural goals. A much-

distorted citation of my work is used to make the link tarring Hurley and Bearman with a misrepresentation of my words.

In 1994 I wrote about the search for the records continuum in Australia during the late 1950s through to the mid-1960s. I pointed to the importance of two of Australia's most remarkable archivists, Ian Maclean and Peter Scott, who set down the foundations of a continuum approach within the Commonwealth Archives Office, well before the descriptive tag 'continuum' was ever used. Near the end of the article I started to draw some conclusions from this period of search. I used Maclean's after-the-era summation written in 1992 in which he argued that events from earlier times had led up to:

what is nowadays sometimes called the 'continuum of (public) records administration, with its emphasis both on administrative efficiency and *also* the safekeeping of a cultural end product'.²⁹

Maclean as far as I can tell was not endorsing or opposing this view of the continuum, just describing it. Again as far as I can tell, Paul Macpherson from his words fully supports this end product view of the reference and access function within a continuum approach to government records. When I was writing about the search this reductionist view of the continuum was still the dominant one in Australia, although it was being challenged by some of us. As a complex (a particular application of a continuum template) it certainly involves a continuum mode of operation linguistically derived from the notion of continuity which is strongly present in the first continuum approach in Australia (as it is in many other archival concepts, including life cycle ones). But there are also obvious theoretical mismatches:

- it contains the notion of an end product
- it leaves out business records and personal papers, and
- it has no theoretical view of spacetime, containing only a continuous view of the life of records when any practicing archivist knows there are a host of specific occurrences that can interrupt that continuity.

It was with a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the linear approach to a continuum of government records that I noted that:

One can question whether the continuum approach developed in the Archives division adequately served social goals and ask whether a national archives institution should also serve cultural goals outside the continuum.³⁰

In other words the search for the continuum was far from over in 1994. The end product and government-based view of the continuum needed questioning for their lack of consideration of social and cultural goals. Macpherson used ellipsis to claim that what I actually wrote was that:

One can ... ask whether a national archives institution should also serve cultural goals outside the continuum.³¹

My questioning of the narrowness of an end product approach to a government administrative-cultural continuum became evidence that I question the inclusion of cultural goals within a records continuum approach! Macpherson having deleted words that do not suit his argument then puts words into my article that do not exist, claiming that I was asking about cultural goals that would 'normally be today described as public access or reference or access, or access and information provision'. Maclean does not use the term public access and nor do I, so where does this massive slide in Macpherson's argument come from? I was writing about cultural goals beyond those of government administration-cultural end product continuity and cannot see how the issue of public access was being specifically raised in any way within my words or those of Ian Maclean so the source is presumably in Macpherson's own assumptions.

I deliberately left my comment vague; although not so vague that others have not understood it or that Macpherson's distortions of my words are not obvious. When I wrote the Maclean article I knew that new approaches to the records continuum were emerging but their shape was not clear enough for me to mention them in an article that was already too long. For example, within my own direct experience at the time Sue McKemmish and I within courses at Monash University were beginning to model the records continuum in ways which aimed at recommencing Australian records continuum theory from its Maclean-Scott commencements. We were broadening it so that it:

encompassed government, business and personal archives (with the Commonwealth Records Series system as our clue that such breadth could exist - ie in practical terms the

breadth was already there in Scott's system. The problem was simply that not enough was being made of this breadth within our discourse.)

- accommodated the archival function of advice on and regulation of recordkeeping processes; a somewhat neglected function in archival literature until the 1990s although it had been strongly present in US discourse in the 1930s and 1940s through writers like Margaret Cross Norton and Ernest Posner,³²
- could be used to discuss recordkeeping and archiving practices within any past or present ways of thinking or operating (ie within any spacetime complex of the organisation and management of recordkeeping and archiving processes), and
- recognised that records were entities that were always being stretched spatially and temporally within spacetime through their use, and through the actions of archivists (as McKemmish wrote at the time, records were always in a state of becoming³³).

There is much that is worthy in Australian government administrative – end product continuum practice, but there has to be more to records continuum theory than a linear journey of government records to an impossible point in a continuum, an end product. Macpherson might be satisfied with such an approach as it suits what seem to be his notions of the cultural and social goals of archivists. I was not. In 1994 it struck me as the continuum theory you have when you are not imbibing continuum theory. It was the words Macpherson misrepresents, more than any others I have written, that turned me from a continuum operator with an interest in the history of the Australian archival profession's thinking and operating into an aspiring continuum theorist.

Conclusion

It was a surprise to me to find my attitudes to public access across the records continuum being questioned by Macpherson. I know where my work on continuum thinking and operating is heading and it is towards the importance of justice to archival activities developing the simple

idea of Jean Francois Lyotard about how to combat terror in society. Throw open memory banks and databases,³⁴ which in many ways is the reverse of current strategies. It is an argument that will obviously need careful construction if it is to be taken seriously although the essence of the workability of such a strategy (the use of watchdog agencies) is already present in one of the earliest joint statements by Sue McKemmish and me.³⁵

That relates to the Lyotardian interests in my work which Macpherson chooses to ignore despite claiming to look at the words surrounding my model. I assume all archivists are involved in public access issues no matter what their particular function, something I made clear enough (in my own mind anyway) by taking a storage-based logical view (information representation in records, recall and dissemination) of archives when I first presented the model – the Giddens component of my surrounding words.

I would not expect any exploration of my words to prove that I am desperately trying to restrict and limit archival discourse. Macpherson gets my ‘implicit assumptions’ very wrong and in the process drives continuum theory back into an end product rut. I know how eclectic the records continuum model is and how it accommodates diversity including different ways of viewing reference and access activities, but then so too should anyone who has read Sue McKemmish’s accounts of the model in her articles and conference papers. Its ability to cope with diversity is unlikely to have been the result of a mind that was somewhere else at the time.³⁶

Endnotes

1 Paul Macpherson, ‘Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions: Public Access to Post-current Government Records’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 30, no.1, May 2002, p. 6.

2 My initial presentation was in ‘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. 11–35. Part One starts off with references to Lyotardian postmodernity (for ‘children’, ie readers with open minds), presents the model in only a few pages, and near the end starts exploring structuration theory which is looked at in detail in Part Two.

3 Frank Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum, Part Two' sets out a sociological emphasis upon storage as the foundation of access, especially in its discussion of memory traces.

4 For an example of McKemmish's explanation (in English) see Sue McKemmish, 'Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A Continuum of Responsibilities', in PJ Horsman, FCJ Ketelaar and THPM Thomassen (eds), *Naar een nieuw paradigma in de archivistiek*, Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 1999.

5 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 8.

6 Terry Cook, 'Final Commentary Session of the Appraisal Seminar', Monash University, Melbourne, 16 March 1999, p. 2 (personal copy).

7 The only difference to the model as published is that I now label it specifically a spacetime model. I thought initially that it was apparent that the model is not era-specific. It can be read into any era, but its spacetime nature seems to escape some readers and commentators, so I have made it more explicit.

8 For an explanation of transaction cycles see David S Kaufer and Kathleen M Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change*, Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, New Jersey, 1993.

9 For a discussion of the issue of interiority and exteriority within archival theory see the discourse between Verne Harris, 'On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in "Evidence of Me"', and Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish, 'In Search of the Lost Tiger by Way of Sainte Beuve: Reconstructing the Possibilities in "Evidence of Me"', jointly published in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 25, no. 1, May 1997, pp. 8-21, 22-43.

10 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 8.

11 The four-dimensional approach to recordkeeping analysis and its 'any era' application will be explored in a forthcoming publication: Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward, *Recordkeeping in Society*, Charles Sturt University and the Recordkeeping Institute, chapters four to seven.

12 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 8.

13 Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward (eds), *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability through Recordkeeping*, Ancora Press, Melbourne, 1993, p. 1. Archival documents found their way into the model with the use of a square bracket around the word archival, indicating that all documents in accordance with 'the continuum of processes' (represented by the dimensions) are potentially public documents. Some but not all will become available to multiple users in public fashion.

14 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 9.

15 Comments on Michel Foucault in this article are drawn mainly from Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge reprint, London, 1995.

16 Hugh Taylor, "'My Very Act and Deed': Some Reflections on the Role of Textual Records in the Conduct of Affairs', *American Archivist*, no. 51, Fall 1988, pp. 456-69.

17 Cited from the account in chapter 8, 'Archival Science and Diversity', in McKemmish et al., *Recordkeeping and Society*, forthcoming. See also Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, c1984.

18 Miri Rubin, 'Where is Cultural History Now?', in David Cannadine, *What is History Now*, Palgrave Press, 2002, pp. 80-94.

19 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', pp. 13-14.

20 Glenda Acland, 'Managing the Record rather than the Relic', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 20, no. 1, November 1992, pp. 57-62.

21 Ernest Gellner, *Reason and Culture: The Historic Role of Rationality and Rationalism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992 (see particularly the concluding pages).

22 See for example, Terry Cook, 'What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift', *Archivaria*, no. 43, Spring 1997, pp. 17-63.

23 Luciana Duranti, 'Archives as Place', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 2, November 1996, pp. 242-55.

24 The poor quality of evidence within US information systems incidentally was a major theme in the work of David Bearman. See his book *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations*, Archives and Museum Informatics, Pittsburgh, 1994.

25 Paul Macpherson 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 9.

26 Frank Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum, Part Two', contains a number of actual and potential scenarios. My interest in self-managing communications was sparked initially by the work of David Bearman and the ongoing papers of the Pittsburgh Research project in the 1990s and it is related to metadata research. There is nothing fanciful about the process. It already exists within electronic commercial procurement processes for example. The storage of archives is an archival task in itself, relationships with collective memory involve many complex issues that are often of peripheral interest to archivists in their storage tasks. For a slightly wry treatment of the relationship between archivists and the memory industry see Michael Piggott, 'Recordkeeping and Memory', in *Recordkeeping and Society* (forthcoming).

27 Theodore R Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1965.

28 David Bearman cited in Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 6.

29 Frank Upward, 'In Search of the Continuum', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum*, Ancora Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 126.

30 *ibid.*

31 Paul Macpherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions', p. 7.

32 For the US formative perspectives of Norton see Margaret Cross Norton, *Norton on Archives*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1975.

33 Sue McKemmish, 'Are Records Ever Actual', in McKemmish and Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum*, pp. 187-203.

34 This plea comes in the last few paragraphs of Jean Francois Lyotard's best-known work, *The Postmodern Condition* (various editions).

35 Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, 'The Archival Document: A Submission to the Inquiry into Australia as an Information Society', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 21, no. 1, May 1993, pp. 17-32.

36 I hope in due course to publish further on the public access function. This is not an issue to be thrown away loosely within linear bilge about current and post-current records. It requires a lot of accompanying strategic and organisational thinking if the case for a continuum approach is to be widely understood and followed.