

Editorial

This is a special issue¹ of *Archives and Manuscripts* enclosed in a special wrapping. This year the ASA proudly commemorates this journal's fiftieth anniversary, with the November issue providing more detailed coverage of this significant milestone. For May a special theme issue on *Collective Memory*² is presented. This issue concentrates on revealing the possibilities and power of the pluralising region or fourth dimension of the records continuum. But what is this 'pluralised space'?

'The fourth dimension as a pluralised space is one where our knowledge of events (in our case, reflected in records) is communicated to a social group, creating a shared experience and knowledge across a community'.³ There has been, to date, a relative lack of engagement with this region of the records continuum theory exacerbated by assertions that the records continuum devalues the 'cultural' dimension of recordkeeping. The aim of this special issue is to challenge both the imagination and traditional practices of recordkeepers, to open up this area for discussion and debate by highlighting key issues for continuing exploration, and to foster further engagement with the ongoing rearticulation of professional responsibilities and activities.

The idea for a theme issue on collective memory arose out of a three day intensive seminar, *Archives and Collective Memory: Challenges and Issues in a Pluralised Archival Role* held in Melbourne in August 2004 by The Recordkeeping Institute and the School of Information Management and Systems at Monash University. The challenge for both the seminar and this special issue was, 'to seek to open up the records continuum theory, and particularly its fourth dimensional spaces, as an area of creativity, discussion, debate, diversity and unresolved issues for further exploration'.⁴ One of the aims in the seminar was to sharpen our perspectives of the term 'memory' and begin differentiating more profitably between the notion of the singularity of memory in ourselves, and notions of its plurality within communities.⁵ The seven articles brought together for this special issue are not simply a record of the authors' seminar presentations but rather take forward issues raised during discussion sessions and afterwards in an attempt to engage the broader profession in this discussion and sharpening of our perspectives

of memory. My hope is that collectively this set of articles, which includes two forthcoming partner articles, takes readers on a journey through their imagination to envisage new ways of approaching their professional responsibilities and activities. And renewed by that journey, they travel beyond imagination to participate in the continuing rearticulation of our professional responsibilities.

Barbara Reed begins the exploration with a very approachable, illustrated explanation of how to use and read a records continuum roadmap. From a single, fictional, but readily understood case study written in her signature style, she weaves multiple parallel readings of the records continuum model to illustrate its capacity to support 'different interpretations, simultaneously, depending on the context'. All models, as representations of ideas, things, people and relationships have limitations: it is the interaction of the intended audience with the model that is critical. This article provides a platform for such interaction, necessary before additional layers are added in the subsequent articles. Barbara leaves readers with a clear message that the records continuum theory and model are not a 'straightjacket for linear application of records theory within a government arena' but rather 'a vibrant and dynamic tool and method of thinking that challenges all archivists to engage on a broad social canvas'.

Building on this foundation Eric Ketelaar provides readers with the 'memory' foundation central to the issue theme. In many ways memory seems to have become the new 'black' of cultural heritage. But what is its significance for archival science and archival activity? Eric draws together pertinent concepts from a range of literature as the basis to refine what memory means in different contexts, exploring the politics and sensitivities involved as individual memory, family memory, organisational memory and social memory evolve into collective memories. He postulates, 'Could we use the concept of a "community of records" in making the fourth dimension of the records continuum model more vigorous and its impact on shaping the three other dimensions more productive?' He touches on the concept/notion of a 'memory continuum' as he sketches the canvas of an archival memory landscape - one of 'sharing collected memories in communities of records'.

Michael Piggott's excursion takes readers into the area of 'Building Collective Memory Archives' or societal memory banks. He departs

with an examination of the archival appropriation and use of the term 'collective memory' and its confusing contraction to simply 'memory' for a range of variant meanings such as collective, social, cultural, historical, corporate or organisational memory. He questions if this use provides an appropriate way for differentiating archivists' societal role if libraries and museums also say they support society's memory. From an acknowledgement that there has been little systematic exploration of the specific role recordkeeping and archiving play in constituting collective memory, he travels a path through two, third dimension case studies to consider 'How are collective memory archives to be understood, to be built, collectively?' His arrival at the fourth dimension surveys 'ways collection policy frameworks might be coordinated in Australia, including memory inspired recordkeeping', challenging both the extension of professional imagination as well as sounding a call to action.

The plural region of the records continuum is 'an area of competition', a political place that archivists are drawn into at institutional level. The archival responsibility is to promote the 'apolitical social role of the plurality of memory as it can be found in recorded information'. Frank Upward addresses this area of competition in his two part article 'Continuum Mechanics and Memory Banks' which explores models for continuum mechanics that bring archivists 'closer to a better understanding of information systems and to a more multi-faceted approach to our memory banks'. In Part 1, in this issue, Frank brings together and places four continuum models – Records Continuum, Information Continuum, Publication [Access] Continuum and Information Systems [Data] Continuum – explaining the foundation for continuum mechanics. He examines four facets of memory within recorded information: 'recording of information as evidence, its management as information, its pushing and pulling out into public domains, and its existence within information systems as instruments of power in society'. He emphasises the need for 'more synergy between the cognate disciplines concerned with the recording of information': disciplines that currently are conceptually 'poles apart'. In Part 2, 'The Making of Culture', which will appear in the November issue, Frank extends the topology established in Part 1 to look at the role of archivists in cultural enshrinement, introduces a Cultural Heritage Continuum and concludes with some comments on the cognate disciplines approach which he has presented over both parts.

Chris Hurley explores and reconceptualises the traditional archival view of provenance in a two part dissertation on 'Parallel Provenance', the first of which 'What if Anything is Archival Description', appears in this issue. He argues that 'the internationally standardised idea of archival description is too narrow to document the *formation* of records and the *functions* or processes in which they took part'. He asks us to consider, against existing practices that exclude contested narratives, 'What Story Should We Tell?' His discursive account leads readers on a progress, identifying different types of provenance and the approaches from which they arise, interweaving his argument with fascinating illustrations, analogies and real institutional examples to clarify his points and exemplify the key issues for discussion and resolution. How will we refine provenance and how will we deal with the politics of the ambience in which all archival programs are trapped? Can 'different points of view (different narratives concerning the events and circumstances that records document)' be contextualised 'into a single ambient description that does not detract from, but rather enriches, the evidential meaning of the records we are describing?' In Part 2, 'When Something is *not* Related to Everything Else', which will appear in the November issue, Chris explores the nature of parallel provenance more deeply, asking 'To Whose Stories Should We Listen?' and further debunking the acceptability of the 'doctrine of the single point of view' and the 'cabbage patch school of archives'. The message is very clear, 'different perspectives ... contrasting, conflicting even, but none the less authentic' are needed 'to provide (or, at least attempt to provide) the whole contextual meaning ... of records.'

The challenges and implications for archival research and education agendas, and for archival science itself, from 'global archival frameworks of the kind imagined in the pluralising fourth dimension of the records continuum model' are addressed in "'Communities of Memory": Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas'. As befits an article dealing with issues arising from an increasingly globalised world, a trio of globalised archival educators, Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland and Eric Ketelaar have authored this enlightening and outreaching contribution which examines 'how to build archival systems ... that operate and inter-operate effectively worldwide, but respect and empower the local and indigenous'. The authors recognise the intricacies of 'grappling with complex insider-outsider issues' with their article 'inevitably framed in terms of a particular world view', but with the

purpose of fostering engagement with the local and indigenous to develop 'richer understandings of different worldviews'. How do we conceptualise communities from an archival perspective? How do we engage communities outside the mainstream? How do we move beyond the 'one size fits all' approach of western archival science? The critical issues that arise from considering the challenges different memory and evidence paradigms pose to western archival science are examined and exemplified with the implications for both research and education clearly enunciated. These implications are far reaching, going to the heart of existing archival practices. The authors provide both an ambitious and comprehensive agenda on which to proceed as well as envisaging how emerging understandings might address the challenges and evolve archival science.

Barbara Reed anchors the issue theme with her thought provoking and provocative article, which after some angst we titled, 'Beyond Perceived Boundaries: Imagining the potential of pluralised recordkeeping'. This very approachable article is compelling reading for all recordkeeping professionals. It makes crystal clear why 'all society is involved and all recordkeeping professionals involved in the social and collective space'. The pluralising domain is not the exclusive province of traditional archival institutions and the archivists who work within their custodial boundaries. 'It is not an area restricted or bound by time limitations and therefore not restricted to considerations of records designated in linear or life cycle thinking to be archives by the virtue of the fact that they are non-current, or located in an archival institution, or available to the public after a period of access restriction'. Barbara spells out the social role of recordkeeping, questioning traditional archival models and envisaging alternatives in shaping collective memory.

The purpose of this concluding article is to highlight the critical issues and opportunities that arise from imagining and implementing new ways of viewing recordkeeping roles and responsibilities in the pluralising domain, and to bookmark these areas for further, concentrated attention. It explores the current professional position synthesising issues for ongoing attention, enunciates the critical messages to be brought to the table and, we hope, stimulates readers to engage with the theme and participate in the processes of rearticulation.

This special issue is a contribution to the professional debate on the need 'to start addressing the power imbalances in our memory banks'.⁶

It highlights the mood of the decade to move beyond accountability to justice. 'To successfully engage with the fourth dimension of the records continuum theory, we must open our professional practice to challenge, questioning and exploration'.⁷ We ask each reader to consider how they might contribute to this responsibility. We invite and look forward to further debate, discussion and action.

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Theme Editor

Endnotes

1 My thanks go to all the cast involved in the production of this theme issue especially to *A&M* Editor Katherine Gallen for her support, patience and expert sub-editing. To the authors not only for their splendid contributions published in this issue but also for their willingness to add another task to their busy professional lives as well as their acceptance of the challenge to push the theme so much further than was first envisaged. To the more than a dozen referees from Australia and beyond who willingly agreed to be part of the review processes and engaged enthusiastically with the theme. Particular thanks to Michael Piggott for his wise advice and to Barbara Reed for her sustaining enthusiasm and collegial support, as well as for taking on the tricky task of writing the concluding article.

2 In his article in this issue Eric Ketelaar deliberately chooses to use the plural 'collective memories' rather than 'collective memory' to underscore the point that 'There is no single collective memory. Even if members of a group have experienced what they remember, they do not remember the same or in the same way'. His point very much goes towards our understanding of the term. In this issue (as with the seminar which inspired it) I have used the term existing in records continuum language which in my eyes has not been limited to a singular view.

3 Barbara Reed provides this succinct summary in her concluding article in this issue.

4 Barbara Reed, who had a significant role in organising the seminar and taking the issues forward to publication, provides this explanation in her concluding article.

5 Frank Upward makes this observation in his article in this issue.

6 Frank Upward in his article in this issue.

7 Barbara Reed leaves readers with this message in her concluding article in this issue.