

Beyond Perceived Boundaries: Imagining the potential of pluralised recordkeeping*

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This article explores the recordkeeping landscape to challenge traditional archival understandings of the notion of collective memory, thus unlocking the recordkeeping possibilities of the pluralising, fourth dimension of the records continuum. It highlights some of the issues and opportunities that arise from imagining and implementing new ways of viewing recordkeeping roles and responsibilities in the pluralising domain. Its purpose is to bookmark these areas for further, concentrated attention as well as to provide a basis for engaging the broader recordkeeping community in the process of rearticulation and enrichment of fourth dimensional recordkeeping.

Introduction

The articles offered in this journal all have a common origin in a seminar on Collective Memory offered in August 2004 and open to the general recordkeeping community. At that seminar we deliberately set out to explore and expand on areas particularly relevant to the fourth dimension of the records continuum, the notion of pluralisation – that label associated with the fourth dimension, and what collective memory involves for recordkeepers. One of the outcomes of the seminar was the production of an action agenda, which was spontaneous and represented the enthusiasm of the seminar participants. This article attempts to bookmark some issues that need further work, many of which were raised directly or indirectly at the seminar. It attempts to highlight areas of the recordkeeping landscape that are just waiting for further discussion and consideration.

The records continuum and the fourth dimension

The records continuum theory and the proponents of that theory in Australia have been accused quite publicly of disrespecting or devaluing the cultural dimensions of recordkeeping.¹ This charge has been consistently denied by those accused of it. The uniform response is that the theory is embracing and inclusive, equally capable of enabling exploration of the collective memory and cultural dimensions of recordkeeping as enabling exploration of other dimensions of application. However equally consistently there has been a call for further exploration and development of the power of the records continuum thinking in the fourth dimension. Michael Piggott and Sue McKemmish clearly issued the challenge:

... there is as yet in practice no coherent or systematic fourth dimension approaches to pluralisation based on functional ideas and purposes that transcend the third dimension boundaries of individuals and organisations. Such approaches and ideas about function and purpose also need to be brought to bear in the other dimensions of the continuum.²

It is true that in practice most of the active engagement with the theory has been in applying the thinking to define strategies for organisational recordkeeping. Organisational recordkeeping focuses on perspectives

derived from the first to third dimensions of the records continuum model, while being informed, but not removed from, the concerns of the fourth dimension. Such strategies are appropriate for implementation in organisations or individual workplaces. Work such as development of standards on records management, or development of methodologies such as the DIRKS methodology as the basis for both records classification and appraisal, while deriving from, and informed by, the fourth dimension of the continuum, is focused inwards for application in the inner dimensions of the continuum. The adoption of the records continuum theory as a theoretical basis for such strategies seems to have resulted in the conclusion that the theory therefore fails to cater for issues deriving from the social, cultural or collective dimension. In fact this argument is quite easily repudiated even by a cursory glance at the requirements to ensure that the regulatory and social environment of application is clearly identified as a prerequisite for any further action. Similarly, the process of standardisation is, in itself, a reflection of a fourth dimensional activity, and inevitably it involves compromise across different social environments. Standards should always be dynamic from formation, developing to further articulation as acceptance allows.³

In the critique of the records continuum theory there has been an interesting lack of engagement by Australian archivists who purport to represent specifically the issues reflected in the fourth dimension of the continuum. Is this a result of the disputed assertion that the records continuum theory is a firm, fixed and unchallengeable set of prescriptive statements, or is it lack of engagement? Is it generational change? The seminar and this resulting journal issue are both attempts to respond to these questions. Our challenge is 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.

What is a pluralised space?

The fourth dimension as a pluralised space is one where the knowledge of events (in our case, reflected in records) is communicated to social groups, creating shared experience and knowledge across communities. 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. This type of reading narrows the focus of the fourth dimension and fails to grasp the reality that social influences, expectations and the increasing engagement of all societies' members in issues of recordkeeping, particularly about themselves or their particular concerns, reverberate throughout all dimensions of the records continuum, critically affecting the creation, capture and organising of records.

Records are always created in the first dimension of the records continuum, the locus of all action. They are created with the requirements and constraints of each of the other dimensions of the continuum clearly affecting their creation and subsequent management. All records exist in each of the dimensions simultaneously, and we actively choose when to apply the specific characteristics of the dimensions both during creation as well as once creation has taken place. The choices are reflected in rules, software and processes that we apply. Movement from one dimension to another takes place dynamically, iteratively and potentially recursively. The distinctions between the dimensions and the point at which records move from one to another are not hard and fast, but dictated by circumstance and context. Even when fixed boundaries are introduced, for example in a software application we may choose to define business units as second dimensional entities, we need to acknowledge that this is a construct actively chosen to suit specific implementation practicalities rather than inherent in the records continuum theory. Thus records may or may not cross thresholds between dimensions; they may or may not cross such thresholds at different times or multiple times, as determined by a particular course of actions and by decisions on how to interpret or depict such actions. In this, the fourth dimension is no different from other dimensions of the continuum.

The pervasive nature of the pluralising of records is perhaps most easily demonstrated through the role of the media in publicising records or record content. Such pluralising happens regularly and reading the front page of any newspaper with a recordkeeping eye will almost always elicit a record story. Headline news as I write is the leaked legal opinion submitted to the British government on the legality of going to war in Iraq without a second UN resolution.⁴ Here an issue of considerable

and ongoing social concern is explored publicly through examination of documents which, in a linear consideration of the records world, would not be considered as part of the pluralised dimension until it had progressed logically through its allotted processes to an archival repository. Yet here it is, critically informing social opinion and clearly located in the collective memory of not one, but many societies.

Records such as this *are* in the pluralised space, yet they are not under the control of an Archives. They are records critically involved in the transaction of business. They may, or may not, reach the portals (physical or virtual) of what we traditionally think of as an Archives. What does this notion do to our consideration of the pluralising dimension? It poses a fundamental challenge to the view of some recordkeepers or archivists who would claim an exclusive right to a social or collective perspective of the fourth dimension. Pluralising records and archives does not necessarily restrict considerations to the role of what we might traditionally regard as an Archives – that is, an organisation or part of an organisation not immediately connected to the creation and management processes of the records which is deemed responsible for the continued management and preservation of a selection of records. It is this interpretation of archives which is immediately thought of when discussing the fourth dimension of the records continuum model.

However, all society is involved and all recordkeeping professionals involved in the social and collective space. As Frank Upward explained it once:

If I need a blood transfusion, I am for the moment, a major stakeholder in the quality of blood-bank recordkeeping processes. It is irrelevant whether I have access to the records, or even 'value' them. My needs are part of the multiple uses of such records. In a democracy we are all stakeholders in recordkeeping, whether we value records or not.⁵

All records have this potential to be part of the collective memory from the time of their creation, regardless of whether the event that they reflect happened last week and is still the subject of ongoing action or ten years ago and initial action has ceased, and regardless of where that record physically exists. Records created in every time period, from

contemporary to incredibly aged, can be introduced as part of our immediate collective memory, for example, the current recreation by optical scanning of the audio recording of the assassination of John F Kennedy made by police motorcycle audio equipment on the scene.⁶ A record will always exist in all dimensions simultaneously. However, as recordkeepers working in specific organisational contexts, we choose in practice to impose a particular dimensional perspective that informs the means of managing and organising records. The fourth dimension is not always the domain of safe places of storage and management within custodial walls where things adhere to rules laid out by professional practice, procedure and precedent.

The fourth dimension and archival systems

If, as we expect, the role of an archival institution is focused on managing perspectives from a fourth dimensional view, can we explore what options might exist for management systems that embrace and exploit this simultaneous coexistence of records in multiple dimensions over time? Explored elsewhere is the notion that insights gained from operating archival systems, conceptualised as cross organisational systems, may have considerable relevance to chain management and cross organisational electronic service delivery systems during the transaction of current business.⁷ But beyond this, can we think about how recordkeeping systems might be more proactive about documenting the fourth dimension aspects of records regardless of the physical location of the records?

Rather than an archival system, which has perhaps a meaning inscribed by usage as the system employed by a single archival institution to describe its physical holdings, we might refer to such systems as archiving systems. An archiving system might be defined as one that deals with records from a pluralised perspective, in a social or collective space, or a space that embraces the notion of records 'belonging' to more than one organisation. It might be a system responsible for the description, management and location of those records regardless of physical surroundings, and regardless of the age or continuing transactionality associated with the original creating intent of a record.

The Australian 'series' system, referred to in this article as the context relationships system,⁸ was a pioneer in enabling the incorporation of

documentation about records which were not held within the archival institution, perhaps never to be within physical custody of the archival institution, but still a critical part of the archive of the federal government. This 'archiving' aspect of the system has been neglected in recent decades for emphasis on the 'archival',⁹ but the context relationships system has the capacity to re-incorporate such a perspective. Its capacity to manage dynamic representations of records in variety of contextual readings or relationships makes it quite a different tool from that mechanising lists or passive finding aids, which are inevitably tied to the archival descriptive practices of the past. Given the widespread adoption of the context relationships system across many Australian archives and other organisations, operating in various government and private jurisdictions,¹⁰ we have the opportunity to explore different ways of presenting archives and records to an internet audience. The stalled initiative of the National Online Archival Network would be a perfect vehicle for Australian practice to explore the possibilities of a more integrated, responsive and comprehensive role for all records, in contrast to the simpler, passive EAD (Encoded Archival Description) based approach common to international projects to date.

The elegant and flexible context relationships system is also capable of enhancement, needing no conceptual redesign, to embrace multiple simultaneous views of provenance, description and interpretation, by weaving different relationships between record entities and provenance entities. Within the boundaries of archival institutions, discussion has been initiated already about the capacities of archival systems to encompass multiple interpretations of a record. As Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott have highlighted, records relating to an individual asylum seeker may be seen as a part of a business activity of 'border protection' while an alternative reading may see them as evidence of 'human rights violation'.¹¹

If we begin to enable alternative readings to coexist within our archival systems, can this thinking also be encompassed within other dimensions of recordkeeping activity? Is a key feature of an archival system that which enables it to operate across individual organisations? What role might there be for an extension of this thinking, to bring an exterior view into an archiving system? This would involve recognising and documenting in organisational systems a view which is inherently

exterior to the ways that those outside the immediate context of business approach records in such systems?

Within organisations, recordkeepers privilege the recordkeeping view of the parent organisation. This is inevitable and appropriate as we are employed to do just that. However we know there are other interpretations of the same process and the same records occur from different perspectives (the view of the bank customer is different from the view of the bank; the view of the detainee is different from that of the Department of Immigration and so on). It may be that our archival/archiving systems¹² are the appropriate locus of such alternative viewpoints or interpretive paths. Such thinking would not displace or supercede a perfectly legitimate organisational interpretation of role, but begin to enable alternative readings of processes to coexist. Archiving systems can be conceived as locator mechanisms or managers of meaning for records wherever they reside and however old they are. Such is the potential of distributed networked systems, an area that has received as yet little professional attention beyond a translation of our current, essentially passive, practices into the internet environment.

While some of this may sound far beyond the archival systems that we have traditionally operated, we should bear in mind that the electronic environment involves a transmutation into new and emerging areas perhaps unforeseen at the beginning of a transition to electronic functionality. We should at least be prepared to open up our thinking to possibilities.

It may be that alternative voices cannot find expression within the active transaction of business, but if the notion of different roles and responsibilities is at least acknowledged as a possibility, this may begin to impact on our conduct of recordkeeping processes as an always present social activity. Chris Hurley has discussed the collaborative nature of online banking systems, being contributed to actively by both organisation and customer simultaneously but representing significantly different viewpoints on the process.¹³ In a similar manner, the role of the patient in health records may be undergoing a change. In an online environment, patient contributions to their health records through monitoring of chronic disease and recording of observations or test results, leads to a quite different view of creation and ownership of records.¹⁴ While there is some indication that such radical shifts are being limited for reasons primarily of legal liability, both these examples

may be a pre-figuring of a significant social shift in recordkeeping roles to which as records professionals we need to be alert.

Recordkeeping and the social role

At the very least, an active embracing of a social or collective role must alert all recordkeepers to the inherently contested and political nature of description processes. Language is not neutral. It reflects the time and place of the description, a realisation that is not restricted to archivists alone.¹⁵ Managing meaning, language and contested interpretation in the depiction of activities, functions and purposes must be more seriously considered throughout the existence of records.

Acknowledging the political dimension of recordkeeping has not been particularly prominent in Australia. Eric Ketelaar has written about the exercise of various dimensions of power within records, recordkeeping and society. In demonstrating the social impact of records, including the paradoxical use of the same records as both instruments of repression and also of re-connection, he urges:

Files created under unprecedented circumstances or in an extraordinary era – such as during or after a war, revolution, natural or man made disasters, political or economic crises – have to be appraised differently from those created in the course of ‘normal’ human business.¹⁶

In our present implementations, this perspective is able to be implemented only at the end point, after such crises have passed, circumstances have altered, or stable periods of reflection are again possible. How well do we or can we reflect issues of social controversy while they are being played out? We might undertake research into such trends. With our accumulated knowledge of the history of the twentieth century, we have ample scope for hypothesising on events or circumstances that might provide triggers or alerts to particular action. For example, one such general rule of thumb might be that all records relating to people detained against their will or without their consent should immediately be targeted for long term retention.¹⁷ Other such rules of thumb could be defined. Monitoring techniques and alert triggers might be defined that enable early detection of the possibility of such events. Disposal freezes or other professional tactics might be proactively introduced at the first indication of a likely critical social

event for which recordkeeping will play a vital role, both for individuals and social groups.

While we might be able to identify these triggers and tactics, it is essential that a professional mandate for such action be established. Individuals operating in such territory are inherently vulnerable. A broadly accepted and endorsed professional statement of responsibility established well away from the particulars of any individual case would be required to provide such a mandate.¹⁸

We can explore how far this social role extends. Our professional claim, to being one of the facilitating professions in the preservation of collective memory, falls flat without some appropriate social engagement. Consider the example of our museum curatorial and our historian colleagues. Their capacity to interpret our past has been publicly contested with what can only be seen as an ideological agenda. The active public debate over the interpretation of our past in the 'history wars' of recent years, both in Australia and the United States, provides a fascinating body of literature exploring the various political and interpretative roles of our cognate disciplines. But where is the archival profession's engagement in such debate? The charged debate about interpretation of our collective memory and events of the past has been conducted almost entirely without an archival voice, and certainly not a coherent response from our professional body. Was not the attempt at the historical shunt evidenced in the Heiner case an instance of an archival parallel to such a debate?

Why are recordkeepers so reluctant to have a public voice: reluctant to articulate a professional view that might be at odds with an employer view? Might the capacity to effectively separate these roles - as a professional and as an employee while enabling expression of both, be regarded as a hallmark of a profession? Again, a strong externally validated mandate from our profession is essential, as Chris Hurley constantly advocates.¹⁹

Political spaces are not arenas in which archivists are comfortable operating. Yet without such active engagement with the dynamics of the shaping of our collective memory can we really be seen to be acting on fourth dimensional perspectives, respecting and revelling in the cut and thrust of a social agenda? Exploration of the role of archivists in this debate on the shaping of history is overdue, whether that be from

the 'handmaidens of history' view or an examination of a more activist role we have with our descriptive practices contributing to the creation of the record and its context.

The fourth dimension and collecting archives

We have a vibrant and important tradition of collecting archives in Australia, but we lack the 'total archive' approach of Canada. Our collecting institutions are often under the umbrella of other organisations and periodically subject to hostile environments which place their existence under threat.²⁰ If that were not enough, we also lack a coherent national framework for collecting records from non-government agencies which must lead to a piecemeal and fragmented record.²¹

Archivists know this and have called for action to establish a coordinated approach to collecting from at least the 1980s onwards. Such appeals can perhaps be traced to Baiba Berzins' ASA Presidential Address of 1986 where she advocated 'a network and a variety of institutional, personal and community archives throughout this country',²² through Adrian Cunningham's concerted efforts during the late 1990s,²³ and most recently to Sigrid McCausland's consideration of the records of protest organisations:

... several variables are at play here, including archival policies and resources. Ambivalent attitudes to collecting institutions by creators, different histories of recordkeeping and different perceptions by activists of the need to transfer their records to local or distant institutions ... As we move away from the comfort zones of custodial collecting and describing physical holdings of paper records, archivists need to have strategies for documenting today's and tomorrow's evidence of the activities of a wide range of institutions in our society, not just for the records of government.²⁴

We can explore the overwhelmingly governmental orientation of appraisal methodologies and outcomes. Beyond the continuing call for coordination of documentation by non-government archives, we can explore the role of the collecting archives in providing a counterpoint to the 'official line' of government archives and in devising strategies to more actively engage with the documentation of dissent. This has been

a theme of many collecting archives, such as Melbourne University or the Mitchell Library over many years, so it is not a new role that is being suddenly articulated. If such a socially exposed role were to be undertaken, what would this do to the viability of collecting archives operating at odds with current politics and funding priorities?

In any event, to actively capture the records of social dissent may involve far more aggressive contact with short lived and fragile community alliances. We can explore different models of community engagement, from The Rainbow Archive of the Mitchell Library (under-documented in our literature), the role of the Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts (RAAM), the clearing house approach of the CHART (Clearing House for Archival Records on Timor, 1974–1999),²⁵ the special collection approach of the Eros Foundation Archives²⁶ and the different models adopted by specific communities such as the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, or the Estonian Archives, to name just two.²⁷

Given that some, or perhaps many, community groups are anti-authoritarian, in protest about something or engaged in engendering social change, would the involvement of an archival institution as one of the institutions of power in our society, actually act as a counter influence on the intent to protect and capture? We know that there is an amazing desire to archive (just try searching for anything using the word archive on Google and the sense of the breadth of the word in current usage is revealed). We also have reasonably strong evidence through our collecting archives, that social groups are committed to a sense of their own identity and that identity is critically linked to their specific views, be they political or social.

What alternative models of deposit and control for records of such groups might be devised? Why not experiment with a virtual 'space' established by an archival collecting institution and made available for organisations and individuals to self archive their electronic records? Layers might be established in such a space – an initial registration space where there were no limits placed on what could be deposited for storage, with access controls defined by the group. Groups and individuals could choose to use the 'archive space' as their current storage – for a fee less than an internet provider, or in return for some future rights to retain the material in a growing institutional archives – and link their current work to that space. An initial guarantee of some protected and secure storage would be gained by the group/individual

with no guarantees of long term retention. The archives may choose or not choose to incorporate the offerings into their long term managed archives. Agreements equivalent to donation agreements might be devised. Transfer of ownership or custody into a more refined space which guaranteed protection for the long term would take place at some future time using a version of appraisal and a targeted strategy to suit the institution.

Or we could push this even further and think about what shared control to all the recordkeeping processes might be like, if we enabled those depositing electronic records in such spaces to be partners in the management of all recordkeeping processes. What types of systems of mutual obligation might be needed to make this a reality? What types of shared responsibilities for management and control might be possible? Already in discussion within the archival and broader information communities is the notion of adding user generated metadata to formal descriptive metadata.²⁸ Such user generated metadata might provide alternative pathways to describe different points of view, as discussed earlier. Alternatively they could offer critiques of the formal descriptive language. More radically, users could offer different versions of events to supplement the official, mainstream or privileged story.²⁹

Technologically such a scenario is feasible and partial precedents for this approach are emerging in operations such as Flickr³⁰ or The Internet Archive.³¹ Flickr is an online photo management and sharing application which not only allows members to share their photographs but also to issue permissions for others to organise their photographs, including adding searchable comments, notes and tags. The Internet Archive, an astoundingly ambitious project established in 1996, is a not-for-profit organisation with the mission of preserving the web by taking regular snap shots of websites and is now incorporating a range of digital format material. The approach of the Internet Archive is to trawl and pull back into its management domain material available on the web. It also might act as something of a test case for appropriate agreements, as it is currently embroiled in a legal action with the plaintiff contending that The Internet Archive's possession of its superceded web pages is unauthorised and illegal.³²

So while such approaches are increasingly technologically possible, procedurally it is a different matter. Would this type of thinking, initially appealing to groups to offer sustainability of a collective memory for

social identity, be viable or adopted? Would it assist as a strategy in ensuring proactive capture and management of electronic records? Would community groups be attracted by such a proposition?

What is an archival role in the shaping of collective memory?

That archivists are reluctant to be seen as active participants in the shaping of collective memory has many reverberations. One claim which might be made is that without active engagement we are actually not undertaking a role in the social or collective memory. That it is a role left vacant. As asserted above, most of the policies, strategies and standards that have been articulated in the last few years have emanated from the institutions that would position themselves in the fourth dimension as a matter of definition. But in reality, if the policies, standards and strategies are really aimed at regulating the recordkeeping framework, are they not more appropriately located in the third dimension of the records continuum?

How might our professional practice be altered by an active examination of the role of the fourth dimension, including fourth dimensional considerations arising while records are active agents of business?

Classification and description

As archivists we have a particular role to ensure that records are able to be used by people external to the processes of creation and management. Through our contextualisation using provenance and functional explanation, we actively provide interpretations of events and related records. These inevitably reflect the interpretation of events according to the institutional setting of the archivist and the personal beliefs held. Until recently however, we have been told by our professional training that we do this objectively and neutrally. If the postmodern environment provides us with nothing else, it has completely dismantled the notion of an objective, neutral archival role in perpetuating records meaning. That such a role was always a fiction is being examined by the historians of our profession, an emerging field of study.³³ By defining and providing contextual documentation that is (and must be) imbued with the values of our social context, we are in fact determining the stories that can be told. We are choosing the terms by which records can be referenced and this is inherently political. Being inherently political is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is dangerous if we do not recognise

that the words, language and tools that we provide have these traits; if we sweep under the carpet acknowledgement of the political interpretation embodied in our descriptive language throughout all recordkeeping activities in all dimensions of the continuum. This is beginning to generate some professional discussion by colleagues such as Tom Nesmith, Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, Eric Ketelaar, and closer to home, from archivists such as Joanna Sassoon.³⁴

Appraisal

Linking the concepts of the analysis, the interpretation and the expression of functions with the notion of archivists/ recordkeepers as active participants in shaping our collective memory, cuts to the very heart of functional appraisal. It might be that our current methodologies lack a means of articulating purpose, that aspect of the transactional axis which exists beyond function. There is very little in our literature that attempts to delineate this territory, notwithstanding the explorations of ambient function undertaken by Chris Hurley.³⁵

Establishing good priority statements for those records that are targeted for long term retention is a step that is already underway. Such statements are archival equivalents to our library colleagues statements of collecting policies – but our tools are also focused on records creation, capture and organising behaviours (ie first, second and third dimensions in addition to fourth dimension). As one who has experience in aligning appraisal recommendations to some of these publicly stated appraisal priorities, targets, or (more misguidedly) collecting policies, at present it is clear that they are of very limited use in actually assisting in the shaping of collective memory. It is possible to produce quite self-serving justifications for continuing retention using these broad statements. So, more work is needed by the profession to attempt to delineate the recordkeeping role in relation to social or collective memory. This is not to dismiss out of hand the initiatives to articulate appraisal priorities, merely to suggest that there is room for improvement. It is work in progress.

Functional appraisal when occurring at the social level is more commonly known as macro appraisal, a technique articulated by Terry Cook and the basis of practice in both the National Archives of Canada and the Nationaal Archief of the Netherlands. The National Archives of Australia has recently released for public comment the results of their

analysis of functions and activities which will be used as the basis of macro appraisal.³⁶ The analysis provided is very much a product of a particular point of view – that of the government, an instrument of power in our society. It has limited engagement with the concept of ‘purpose’ as something perhaps sitting above the analysis of government as an institution, looking directly at the relationship between it and the society it interacts with. There is nothing wrong with the view implicit in the National Archives’ analysis. It is perhaps inevitable. However care should be taken to contextualise the analysis and to make clear the biases from which it is coming. It is not neutral, either politically or socially. If we pretend otherwise we will be doing our professional practice and our external user base a strong disservice. We must exercise continuing care in ensuring good documentation of our analysis and actions, clarity of purpose and that a consciousness of the situated nature of our decision-making is acknowledged. However, if we acknowledge this, we empower our external users to ‘read against the grain’. The decision to destroy something and therefore the absence of records about particular events in the future can be equally as revealing as the existence of records in another context.

In electronic records management, the linking of appraisal decisions to the point of capture of the records is largely the norm. We must redefine the workings of appraisal to actively engage with issues of pluralisation of the record while it is nominally within the domain of active business. The pluralising of a record alters the story the record tells. The pluralising trail, that is the way the record reached the fourth dimension, the impact it had in that pluralised arena and the events further precipitated by its pluralisation, critically affects the story of a particular record. How well do we reflect this in our appraisal work? In reality, the pluralising of a record will create new trails of action (and records) both within an organisational domain and beyond. It also creates new trails of recordkeeping processes – for example, once made public, regardless of the mechanism employed, there is little point in restricting access to a record, regardless of age.

Access

Access to third parties not immediately connected to the transaction of business is a recordkeeping process no longer restricted to the provision of third party access to an ‘archival’ record from within the boundaries

of control managed by an archival institution. Indeed the last 25 years in Australia have considerably redrawn the role of access through legislation such as freedom of information, privacy and data protection. Third party access occurs throughout the life span of a record. However it can be argued that third party access as a process is no longer the single preserve of recordkeepers with compliance officers, Freedom of Information officers and legal officers often being entrusted with these tasks. Access is a significantly different process than it once was, which might be characterised as a discretionary privilege to be granted upon application until the access provisions in archival legislation enabled a broader 'right' of access. The gradual change in access, often taking place in response to specific challenges (eg privacy legislation) has also created a framework for access which is not coherent, with individual pieces of legislation being cobbled together as required. The lack of a coherent access framework makes for confusion with some organisations being subject to frankly contradictory legislative provisions. At some time in the future reknitting the access framework into a coherent whole is something to be lobbied.

The changes to the access frameworks have also altered the nature of rights granted, particularly to individuals. Legislation such as privacy and data protection has granted new rights to individuals to be actively connected to the management of records about themselves. As yet, the direct results of this are mainly in the arena of access – who can see, what use can be made and according to what rules personal information will be able to be made available to third parties. Implicitly there is an involvement or vested interest by individuals in the way records about them are managed to ensure their own rights are addressed.

Additional recordkeeping roles and relationships

Is it likely that additional roles and relationships will emerge which affect the rights of individuals over records? Given the electronic environment it is worth speculating that some of the implied management rights may be exercised more fully. Already this can be seen at a micro level where an individual might request the destruction of information about themselves maintained in a business process.³⁷ Beginning to push at the inherent or potential rights of others in records, challenges the notion of recordkeeping as existing within the domain of one single entity. Recordkeeping of this kind becomes a dynamic

relationship to be managed across time. The privilege granted to an organisation in recordkeeping practices is so inherent in the processes of recordkeeping to be almost universally unchallenged. But what if we begin to acknowledge different types of relationships within the records? How might we reconsider recordkeeping processes to value and manage the rights of others inherent in the record? Within an organisation this might mean respecting different interpretations of the content of a record or different interpretations of a process. If we acknowledge the possibility of different roles and rights in a record's existence and management, we might also have to provide means of managing records to actively acknowledge these parallel rights. This begins to lead to a far more complex appreciation of layers of recordkeeping rights, not to supplant the traditional, but to enhance the record throughout all dimensions of the continuum.

Challenging, questioning and exploring

Many of our recordkeeping processes have already been rearticulated to ensure that they are expressed as recurring events, undertaken multiple times during the existence of a record, each time bringing in slightly different contexts of business and different considerations of space and time. Providing new ways to imagine and implement a fourth dimensional role for recordkeeping is another view with which to enrich processes already undergoing significant rearticulation. The canvas is vast, the opportunities wide. To successfully engage with the fourth dimension of the records continuum theory, we must open our professional practice to challenge, questioning and exploration.

Endnotes

* Many of the ideas contained in this article derive from discussions held during the three day intensive seminar presented by The Recordkeeping Institute and School of Information Management and Systems, Monash University, 'Archives and Collective Memory: Challenges and Issues in the Pluralised Archival Role' August 2004. Participants in that seminar were: Glenda Acland, Cathy Ashton, David Bloomfield, Kim Burrell, Joanne Evans, Sue Fairbanks, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, Bernadette Golding, Trevor Hart, Chris Hurley, Eric Ketelaar, Tony Leviston, Sigrid McCausland, Julie McCormack, Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, Fiona Ross, Peri Stewart, Deb Stumm, Frank Upward, Rachel U'Ren and Stephen Yorke. The contribution of these individuals is

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1 For example, Verne Harris 'Law, Evidence and Electronic Records. A strategic perspective from the global periphery' paper presented to ICA Conference, Seville, August 2000, available via <<http://www.archivists.org.au/sem/misc/harris.pdf>>, Mark A Greene, Frank Boles, Bruce Breummer, Todd J Daniels-Howells, 'The Archivist's New Clothes; or the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions and Recordness' <<https://idea.iupui.edu/bitstream/1805/42/4/ManifestoFinal.pdf>>, Terry Cook, 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage', presented at the Australian Society of Archivists National Conference, *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory, Melbourne, August 2000*, available via <<http://www.archivists.org.au>>, Paul Macpherson 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions: Public Access to Post-current Government Records' *Archives and Manuscripts*, May 2002, vol. 30, no. 1.

2 Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott 'Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Political Reality' in Susan Lloyd (ed) *Past Caring: What does Society Expect of Archivists?* Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Sydney 13-17 August 2002, pp. 109-22 <<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/piggottmckemmish2002.pdf>>.

3 In fact a process of revision of the *ISO 15489, Records Management Standard* is currently underway.

4 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/vote_2005/frontpage/4491105.stm>.

5 Frank Upward 'Functional Analysis, The Continuum and Census Returns' unpublished draft, 1997.

6 Michael Janofsky 'Audio Scans Could Solve JFK Murder Mystery' Sydney Morning Herald, 4th August 2005 <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/08/03/1091476498743.html?from=storylhs>>.

7 Sue McKemmish, Barbara Reed and Michael Piggott, Chapter 7 'The Archives' in McKemmish, Piggott, Reed and Upward (eds) *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 2005.

See also the outcomes of the research project 'Electronic Health Records: Achieving an Effective and Ethical Legal and Recordkeeping Framework', Australian Research Council, Discovery Grant, 2002-2004, Administering Institution: Deakin University, Chief Investigators: Associate Professor Danuta Mendelson, School of Law Deakin University, Dr Livia Iacovino, School of Information Management and Systems Monash University, Associate Professor Bernadette McSherry and Moira Paterson, Faculty of Law Monash University. Research Associates Barbara Reed and Hans Hofman, Records Continuum

Research Group, School of Information Management and Systems Monash University.

8 Here we enter into tricky territory of terminology – the archiving control system implemented at the Commonwealth Archives Office, the brainchild of Peter Scott, was for years referred to as the CRS or Commonwealth Record Series system. As the concepts of the system design were transferred beyond the national archival authority, the short term ‘series’ system was generally used. As Peter Scott himself acknowledged, and Chris Hurley has consistently argued, this is a misnomer, as the system doesn’t actually mandate control at the series level. Chris’s renaming referred to the ‘Australian’ system, and while apt, recently there has been dispute with this naming at the international level with Wendy Duff and Verne Harris claiming that because the system is implemented in jurisdictions other than Australia, such naming is inappropriate (although one could wonder at the deliberate lack of attribution). See Footnote 11 of their article ‘Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings’ *Archival Science* vol. 2, 2002, pp. 263-85. Notwithstanding, I believe we need another label and here I’m testing out the ‘context relationships’ label.

9 An archival system has an institutional descriptive focus while an archiving system looks to a more embrative documentation of records in all spaces.

10 For a listing of archives that have adopted the Australian ‘series’ system or variants of it, see Australian Society of Archivists Descriptive Standards Committee *Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australian Practice*, 2005 (forthcoming).

11 op.cit. Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott.

12 That is, a system bringing an inherently exterior point of view, whether it be a system with an institutional descriptive focus (an archival system) or one that looks to a more embrative documentation of records in all spaces (an archiving system).

13 One of many of Chris Hurley’s thought provoking contributions to the *Collective Memory Seminar* op.cit.

14 This issue emerged following the discussions held in relation to Plenary Session three ‘A Changing Paradigm’ focusing on medical records presented at the Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference 2002. It is also a prominent design principle of the ambitious electronic health records project, *HealthConnect* see <<http://www.healthconnect.gov.au>>.

15 For example see (eds.) John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *Regimes of Description in the Archive of the Eighteenth Century*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005 and G Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: what categories reveal about the mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

16 Eric Ketelaar 'Archives and Societal Power' *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* p. 286.

17 This rule was offered by Bernadette Golding at the Seminar as a working rule of thumb operating within the Public Record Office Victoria.

18 This issue is discussed in much greater depth by Chris Hurley in Chapter 9, 'Recordkeeping and Accountability' in McKemmish, Piggott, Reed and Upward (eds) *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 2005.

19 Chris Hurley 'Ethical Dilemmas in Records Management' April 2004 <<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/0406RMethicsCH.pdf>>.

Chris Hurley 'Archivists and Accountability' Paper presented to the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, 16-18 September, 2004 (publication pending).

20 There are many examples but one of the most prominent recent ones is the threat of closure a few years ago of the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour at the Australian National University.

21 This issue is further discussed in Michael Piggott 'Building Collective Memory Archives' in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.

22 Quoted in Sigrid McCausland 'Voices of Opposition: Documenting Australian Protest Movements' in *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol. 29, No. 2, November 2001.

23 Adrian Cunningham, 'From Here to Eternity: Collecting Archives and the Need for a National Documentation Strategy' *LASIE* Vol. 29 No. 1, March 1998 or 'Collecting Archives in the Next Millenium' ASA Conference Proceedings Adelaide July 1997.

24 op.cit. Sigrid McCausland p. 58.

25 See <<http://www.timorarchives.info/about.htm>>.

26 Craig Brittain 'Sex and Politics: The Eros Foundation Archives' in *What Does Society Expect of Archivists?* Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Sydney 2002.

27 Some of the thinking involved in identifying and invoking alternative models are further discussed in Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland and Eric Ketelaar "Communities of Memory': Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas' in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.

28 From an archival perspective, an early version of this type of thinking was raised in Barbara Reed 'Archives of the New Millennium: Exploring Archival Issues of the early 21st century' Keynote address to 23rd Annual Conference of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, July 1999<<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/brep2a.html>> and has

been further discussed in Eric Ketelaar 'Being Digital in People's Archives' *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol. 31, No. 2, November 2003, pp. 8-22.

Recent explorations of user generated metadata in the internet environment include:

Tony Hammond, Timo Hannay, Ben Lund and Joanna Scott, Nature Publishing Group, 'Social Bookmarking Tools, Part 1 and 2, Dlib, April 2005 <<http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april05/04contents.html>> and

Adam Mathes, 'Folksonomies - Cooperative Classification and Communication Through Shared Metadata' December 2004, <<http://www.adammathes.com/academic/computer-mediated-communication/folksonomies.html>>.

29 See further, Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland and Eric Ketelaar 'Communities of Memory: Pluralising Research and Education Agendas' in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.

30 See <<http://www.flickr.com>>.

31 The Internet Archive <<http://www.archive.org>>.

32 Tom Zeller 'Technology: Keeper of Expired Web Pages is Sued Because Archive was used in Another Suit' *New York Times*, 13 July 2005. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70915FA3E540C708DDDAE0894DD404482>>.

33 Witness the growth of interest in this area by conferences such as I-Chora International Conference on the History of Records and Archives, and locally by initiatives of Michael Piggott, Rosemary Collier and David Colquhoun and colleagues to introduce the first History of Archives and Recordkeeping Seminar at the 2005 ASA/ARANZ Conference.

34 Tom Nesmith's writings in *Archivaria* attest to his continuing exploration of this topic, Wendy M Duff and Verne Harris 'Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings' *Archival Science* vol. 2, 2002, pp. 263-85, Eric Ketelaar, Chapter 11, 'Records and Societal Power' in (eds) S McKemmish, M Piggott, B Reed, F Upward *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, 2005, pp. 294-95 and Joanna Sassoon, 'Phantoms of remembrance: libraries and archives as 'the collective memory' *Public History Review* vol. 10, 2003, pp.40-60.

35 Chris Hurley 'Ambient Functions - Abandoned Children to Zoos' *Archivaria* no 40, Fall 1995. Also available at <<http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/ambientf.htm>>.

36 See <<http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/disposal/appraisal/macro-appraisal.html>>.

37 Consider the case provided by Inge Bundsgaard: 'Very recently I was contacted by a woman who demanded that I order a file concerning her divorce destroyed. Apparently she and her husband had gone through a very messy divorce procedure. Afterwards they had been reconciled before the divorce had been formally confirmed. But still a file had been created at the divorce court. In her opinion, she and her husband clearly had the right to demand such a file, concerning only themselves, destroyed in order to protect their privacy'. Inge Bundsgaard 'The Question of Access: the right to social memory versus the right to social oblivion' *Comma*, 2002, 1-2 <<http://www.ica.org/biblio/Bundsgaard%20Eng.pdf>>.