

Re-exploring the continuum, rediscovering archives

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Knowledge is increasingly touted as the key to achievement of the primary socio-economic goals of societies around the world, and archives hold the most extensive body of largely untapped knowledge resources. Australian archivists have offered the continuum concept to try to close this gap between societal needs and archival potential to help meet them. Yet archives remain unable to play a central role in Australian society or elsewhere. What can be done?

A still largely unexplored dimension of continuum concern is the question of how records may be made useful. Much greater effort to discover new uses of archives may close the gap in a world that does not fully appreciate their utility. This article explores means of doing so. Given the recent extraordinary diversification of uses of archives, such a re-exploration of the continuum can lead to a rediscovery of archives that may carry them the rest of the way toward a central place in their sponsoring institutions and societies, and contribute to the ongoing discussion of the nature of the continuum itself.

Introduction

Knowledge is increasingly touted as the key to the achievement of the primary social and economic goals of societies. The recent meetings of the United Nations-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society are among this view's most prominent forums.¹ How can archives respond to this now widespread idea? Archives hold the most extensive body of untapped knowledge resources. Archivists the world over have tried to close this gap between societal need and archival potential to meet it with, for example, greater investment in public programming and ambitious digitisation programs. And Australian archivists have offered the continuum concept to try to close the gap. Yet archives remain unable to play an acknowledged central role in Australian society or elsewhere. What can be done?

In this article, I revisit the continuum to probe a still largely unexplored aspect of continuum thinking *and* general archival discourse: the uses of archives. Much greater effort to discover new uses of archives may make the difference in the ability of archivists to advance archival purposes in a world that does not yet fully appreciate them.² I would like to explore means of doing so. The time is right, given the recent extraordinary diversification of uses of archives. This re-exploration or revisiting of the continuum could lead to a rediscovery of archives that may carry them the rest of the way toward a central place in their sponsoring institutions and societies. It could also contribute to ongoing discussion of the nature of the continuum.

The continuum and records use

Australian continuum thinkers have seen a 1985 article by Canadian archivist Jay Atherton as support for ideas already in development at that time in Australia. Atherton argued that the relationship between records managers and archivists ought to be likened to a 'continuum' of interrelated duties, rather than the 'life cycle' view, which he felt overemphasised their distinctive roles and thus hindered the greater collaboration between them that modern institutional records required. For Atherton, the point of the continuum – the animating purpose of this closer collaboration – is greater use of the records. 'The function that ties the process together', he wrote, 'is service – to the creators of

the records and all other users, whoever they may be and for whatever reason they may wish to consult the documentation'.³

Although Atherton's notion that service animated the continuum was welcomed in Australia, neither he, nor other Canadians, nor Australians explored that idea much. Australian continuum thinking went in other directions: mainly toward concepts and strategies for capturing and managing records at the initial point of their creation and for describing them across their history. The service that Australia's continuum-oriented archives have offered their sponsors stresses support for better recordkeeping methods, not the uses of the information in records by their creators or others. This led to great emphasis on metadata development, standards, frameworks, and policies, especially for current records management, including the formidable challenge of electronic records. Australia has often led the world in these areas. It is not that archivists in Australia (or elsewhere) have been indifferent to uses of archives. After all, the continuum idea is all about creating, protecting, and describing evidence so that records will be more useful to more people. But the stress has been upon creating and protecting evidence, not finding ways to make it more useful.⁴

When continuum thinkers did turn to the records' uses, they tended to focus on how contemporary or young records could be useful in addressing contemporary issues. That is important, but less attention has been given to a greater challenge – making more useful the older records kept as long-term archives. When some Australian archivists began to take more interest in that challenge and to advocate for more public programming, Helen Nosworthy and George Nichols recalled the resistance to it. Nichols lamented in 2000 that 'Archives still labour under a cloak of invisibility and in many cases revel in it'.⁵

There is fortunately much more attention given today to public programming in Australia and elsewhere. Yet, to take up Atherton's call for a service-oriented approach to records work requires more than better recordkeeping and better public programming, valuable as they are. It involves greater archival investment in developing specific new uses of older records, especially as they are the ones whose utility sponsors of archives and the wider public have the

most trouble appreciating. *Creation* of new uses *can* be a key part of recordkeeping and public programming services, but is not usually seen to be so.

My appeal to re-explore the continuum by revisiting Atherton's service vision comes at a time in Australia when thinking about the continuum is already moving in a parallel direction. There has been recognition that the first three dimensions of the continuum, where younger records and current recordkeeping issues predominate, have received most of the attention in recent years, and that there is a need to attend more fully to the continuum's fourth dimension, where older records take on much greater significance. Glenda Acland notes that there has been 'a relative lack of engagement with this region of the records continuum theory'.⁶ She made this comment as editor of a special issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* devoted to papers on the fourth dimension delivered at the 2004 conference *Archives and Collective Memory: Challenges and Issues in a Pluralised Archival Role*. This is an exciting development in continuum thinking. I welcome it as an admiring critic of Australian archival thinking who has long urged it.⁷ And as Barbara Reed says, this move into comparatively underdeveloped aspects of the continuum means that 'we must open our professional practice to challenge, questioning, and exploration'.⁸

An exploration yet to be taken up directly in this recent emphasis in continuum thinking concerns the uses of archives, whether by their sponsoring institutions or others. It begins with the challenge of persuading records creators to invest significant resources in the long-term archiving of their records. This is so in Canada and in Australia, as Australian Society of Archivists' president Jackie Bettington observes of records management in the Queensland state government. She says, 'Most stakeholders acknowledge that compliance, accountability, and evidence do matter. Few acknowledge the wider societal role records and recordkeeping play, *particularly in the longer-term*, rather they seek first and foremost performance outcomes such as improved efficiency, effectiveness, service delivery and reduced cost margins.' She adds that this 'presentism' in organisations means that 'recordkeeping beyond the first and second dimensions of the continuum is rare' and is 'a serious deficiency requiring exploration'.⁹

Records use and current recordkeeping

I encourage attention to this matter not only to address an underdeveloped dimension of continuum thinking, but to suggest that it may be an additional key to the success of all aspects of the Australian practice of the continuum – or to any collaborative arrangements among records makers, managers, donors, and archivists in any archival setting. As Bettington notes, recordkeeping with current records (or those largely in the first and second dimensions of the continuum) still does not enjoy the status it should despite the great progress that has been made in developing recordkeeping laws, policies, and standards. She says recordkeeping for these records remains consigned to the ‘virtual sewers of the organisation’s technological infrastructure – an unpleasant but necessary part of life’. She argues that this is due to ‘a disproportionate emphasis on recordkeeping for compliance at the expense of recordkeeping for performance’ and that ‘has the effect of reinforcing the isolation of recordkeeping from other business activities and the view that recordkeeping generates costs rather than value’.¹⁰

This attitude seems especially significant for long-term retention of electronic records, a still largely unmet goal around the archival world. Seamus Ross says that the European institutions surveyed by ERPANET report that they do not usually include preservation strategies for electronic records in the specifications for developing or buying new systems.¹¹ And Philip Bantin writes that a 2005 survey of 2,100 American government and other institutions found that 68 per cent did not have a plan for preserving their electronic records and 82 per cent did not have a budget for it.¹²

What can an archival institution do to improve the status of current recordkeeping, especially given its implications for electronic recordkeeping over the long term? In addition to maintaining standards and technical knowledge, a focus on the uses of records may be the additional key element. As Hans Hofman says, ‘As long as the practical integration of *persistence* [of electronic records] into our daily economic, social, cultural and policy issues is not achieved, it will be difficult to raise it and to make it politically appealing and interesting for funding.’ Ross echoes this view by saying that preservation is often seen as costly, and rarely considered in light of its ‘recognisable benefits’.¹³

Archives could do much to develop and explain those important 'benefits' beyond the typically general arguments it usually makes about the value of recordkeeping for efficiency, compliance, and historical value. These usual arguments, as Bettington, Ross, and Bantin imply, take an archive only so far in efforts to archive records. And there is only so far an archive can go in pursuing better current recordkeeping. Archives cannot take matters further in hand and literally create and directly manage current records, although it rightly should have an important influence on their jurisdiction's recordkeeping regime. Neither can archives strengthen the 'performance' and increase the 'value' of current recordkeeping by providing the close analysis of day-to-day work needed to do so across the often massive range of institutional activities. That depth of analysis must inevitably mainly be the job of the many more recordkeepers in organisations themselves, along with the even greater number of records creators, as well as others, including archivists, who may well still have something to offer on that score.

Archivists are better placed to develop uses of information in records older than current ones, as the older records (mainly encountered in the third and fourth dimensions of the continuum) are those that archivists more than any other recordkeepers deal with directly every day. If archivists could help develop such uses, then they might have a better chance of winning acceptance for the strategic importance of recordkeeping, especially for the record of long-term value. If archivists could not only do that for their sponsoring institutions, but also help expand the uses of archives by others, that too might strengthen current recordkeeping by pointing to these wider uses of records as further evidence of the importance of recordkeeping.

Archives and knowledge creation

Underpinning this approach is the idea that has come to the fore in recent years that archival work is a major intervention in records and knowledge creation activities, rather than the mere passive reception of records and knowledge already created, which then only need to be guarded and retrieved across time. Every action an archive takes – from appraisal on through to preservation – shapes significantly what people can know from archival records. As a result, records evolve over time,

especially as archivists and others contextualise and recontextualise them in order to do their work. This reinterpretation of records can open doors to new knowledge, as records are recycled and reused as many times and in as many ways as can be imagined. Records survive *because* they evolve and take on ever-changing new value, not because they are kept inert in their single original meaning. They *must* change to survive, and archivists should be foremost among those who find new ways of using (or changing) them.

Archives are knowledge creation institutions. And archivists are knowledge creators. This obliges them *to create* uses and users much more than they usually do. There is an odd gap in archival literature. While the importance of increasing the use of archives has been emphasised worldwide in recent decades, archivists have not really pursued this priority very much. There have been publications of various kinds on *how* to use (or navigate) archives or *how* to set up reference and public programming services, but not on the many uses of archives and their impact, which can be profound, not only on the direct users of archives but on the many others, sometimes even millions, who have been affected thereby. I cannot think of a single book by archivists (or anyone else for that matter) that examines for either the general reader or archivists the range of uses of archives, or one that aims to stimulate new uses of archives. Archivists have preferred to write about archival theory, concepts, methods, and records, rather than about important specific uses of archives. Archivists have tended to speak to themselves about internal professional matters rather than to their employers and society about how they might actually use information in archives more.

The renaissance in uses of archives

One of the most extraordinary archival developments in our time is the stunning expansion and diversification of uses of older archival records. This renaissance merely begins with the familiar archives user groups: historians and genealogists. There has been a widening array of academic historical uses of archives and an explosion of interest in genealogy, which is now increasingly about how family history dovetails with broader historical developments, and even economic

policy goals centred on genealogical tourism.¹⁴ The growing academic research community is responding to what one observer calls 'the historic turn in the human sciences' and another dubs the 'recent "turn to the archive" in the human sciences'. As an indicator of this trend, in the last decade at least ten journals in the humanities and social sciences have had special issues on archives in relation to their fields.¹⁵ But growing interest in a wide variety of historical information from all kinds of archives reaches far beyond the human sciences to various physical sciences. Archives have recently been used in scientific and medical research into genetics, Alzheimer's disease, climatology, geomagnetism, psychiatry, cancer, and nutrition.¹⁶

Archivists are more familiar with the rising significance of older archival records in various human rights and social justice issues, whether affecting Aboriginal people or various others who have been unjustly or illegally treated – from those subjected to unethical medical experiments to the disturbing number (at least in Canada) of the wrongfully convicted in murder cases.¹⁷ Archivists are also more familiar with the widening cultural role of archives. In recent years many artworks, musicals, novels, plays, and movies have been based on archival research. Some dramatic works have even been set *in* archives and been *about* archivists.¹⁸ The great number of historical documentaries based on archival records, now often aired on specialised history television networks, and the emergence of the Internet as a powerful means of conveying historical documentation and information, also present significant opportunities for archives.

Seizing new opportunities to expand use

This widening use of archives suggests that there is hardly a field of human activity or knowledge that may not be brought into a fruitful relationship with archives. Strangely, however, archivists have thus far not made much of this dramatic opportunity to ensure that archives make a key contribution to the central concerns of their employers and society. What might they do to seize this promising opening? First, archivists should become far more systematic about looking for new uses of archives, especially as they pertain to records in archival control, and the actual and possible interests of employers of archivists

and others. These uses are often reported in the news media. They can also be readily discovered by even fairly casual searching of library databases for the published results of such work.

Institutional records archivists, for example, could combine this literature search with research into their institution's past uses of its own or another records creator's older records. Perhaps a survey questionnaire might be developed and circulated among agency staff members to make them aware of archival research services and invite them to indicate whether they have used them or might do so and, if so, why? The aim would be to develop what might be called a user or research profile for these organisations and (for large institutions) their important sub-agencies. This could contain information on uses of the archives that have been made by its sponsor (or others) along with analysis of suggested or possible uses.

This profile could be the basis of discussions with the institution about whether it might use information in older records more often or effectively, and if so, how it would achieve this. An institutional archive might initiate this discussion by circulating the profile in the sponsoring institution and asking whether it might invite staff who may have used the archives, or who think they might do so, to attend an information session on the types of records and their uses. This might then lead to the creation of an archival research coordinating group in the institution, which would include an archivist. The group might meet a couple of times a year to share information about uses of the archives, field questions about archival records, and explore new possibilities for research. Ideally, the archives would thus be 'in the loop' and might thereby routinely learn about agency initiatives that might have an archival research dimension. The archives could have an opportunity to comment on the availability and value of records for such initiatives in its own or other archives. The results could then be added to the growing agency research profile for future reference down through the years.

Archivists might speak at agency-related professional conferences and management training sessions. New managers might get the archival research profile for their particular areas of responsibility in their orientation packages. Perhaps all new employees would get a

version of it tailored to their part of the institution. This would include information about the recordkeeping services of the archives but, in all of these outreach efforts, the message should be clear: older archives can be very useful to the institution and good recordkeeping for current records of lasting value is the essential prerequisite of that benefit. And so, information on actual and possible uses of particular records should be directed by the archives to various other players – records managers, information technologists, auditors, and lawyers – when they make current recordkeeping decisions, particularly affecting long-term retention.

Institutional archives, like all archives, could also emphasise the uses of archives more prominently and often than they do currently. Archival public programming usually stresses the types of records and interesting categories of information archives hold, but seldom features prominently at web sites (or in other ways) the important uses made of records, or their often profound impact on the institutions sponsoring archives and society. Archives' homepages (and other means of outreach) should constantly highlight important research that has been done at the archives by their sponsors, or anyone else. Researcher profiles and interviews or, perhaps more importantly, those of the beneficiaries of archival research in our communities, could convey the value of the archives to their work and society. This could be enhanced by inviting agency researchers to speak on a regular basis to archival staff, or at meetings at the archives that are open to the public. Awards for significant and imaginative uses of archives (as some archives and archival associations are now offering) can further underscore the importance of creating and recognising new uses of archives.

Institutional archives (especially state archives) as well as archives that focus on personal records, also ought to try to create new users among the general public. This might be done by creating a small staff working group to spearhead a special initiative. The group's mandate should focus on fostering new uses of archives that are tied to contemporary public priorities, such as health care, environmental matters, urban development, or social relations among various ethnic, religious, and income groups, to suggest a few. In other words, the focus should be things that matter to people day-to-day. The group might prepare or

commission a study on how researchers in the selected area (or areas) use and, especially, *could use* the working group's archives. The aim is cultivation of a research community in a given field. An archive might work through the community's associations to offer its members conference presentations on uses of archives (perhaps co-authored with subject experts in the field), workshops on using archives, tours of the archives, and outreach in other ways: through the research community's newsletters, listservs, and professional journals.¹⁹ This emphasis on assistance to a given group (really a pilot project) might be offered for a limited time to kick-start the broader initiative.

The archives could then assess how this pilot project went. Should it be expanded, revised, or maybe discontinued. If it went well, it could provide useful lessons for replicating the initiative with other potential research communities. Publicity about the project would be useful in relaunching it. An archive could then again approach a selected research community, or offer an invitation to research communities to apply for access to the additional introductory services that it is willing to offer for a limited time in order to cultivate new uses of archives.

Archives might also cultivate new uses and indicate that archives are valuable in ways many may not have considered by showing their relevance to a wide range of contemporary public affairs. Some archives do make this role known, but few give it the prominence it deserves. Archival records of all kinds and origins have been involved in addressing major public concerns for many years – whether the Residential Schools matter in Canada, the international hunt for Nazi war criminals, or in the medical and scientific research already mentioned. The *Digital Archives* of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) provides a good example of what might be done by any archive. The CBC makes available at its website about 12,000 television and radio clips from its archives that offer insight into the historical context of many current issues, events, and the public figures associated with them. As many as twenty clips may accompany a particular subject. Some are up to thirty minutes in length. The page devoted to the subject also contains links to related subjects in the digital archives, external websites, and resources for teachers, including more in-depth background reports on the issue. The digital archives has sections (for example) on the Atlantic

seal hunt, trade issues with the United States, Arctic sovereignty issues, such as Canada's claim to Arctic waterways including the Northwest Passage, the marijuana use debate, the development of the Alberta oil industry, the child day care debate, and the ongoing investigation of the 1985 terrorist attack on an Air India plane that killed 329 people, most of whom were Canadians. As the CBC does, such general summaries of the historical context should provide broadly accepted factual information and a balanced introduction to various positions that have been expressed over time on the issues. They are not intended to make the archives a partisan participant in public controversies.²⁰

Professional associations of archivists have a key role to play as well. They can help advance the creation of new uses of archives both within the archival profession and as representatives of the profession on interdisciplinary groups created for that purpose. Archivists' professional associations understandably often organise themselves in committees devoted to internal professional concerns. Their members should also be encouraged to group themselves around outreach to new users. Perhaps associations could designate an executive board member to be specifically responsible for outreach initiatives to new users (I am not aware of any executive of an association of professional archivists that has such a position).

This person could begin by bringing a group together to review how the association's outreach might be reoriented toward greater emphasis on creating new uses of archives. Perhaps a review would recommend a survey of members' suggestions for doing so. Perhaps it would recommend the creation of research sector groups in the association for health care, the environment, engineering, law, culture (such as the film, publishing, and television industries), the media, various academic fields, libraries, museums, historic sites, and galleries, and the records management and information technology communities. These association interest groups should include members of the user communities. The groups could discuss a given research community's existing uses of archives and explore possible new ones. Perhaps a series of reports on sector needs and opportunities could be prepared. The groups could devise conference sessions around these issues at archival conferences and, especially, at the users' conferences. The groups might

offer workshops to new users at the researchers' conferences (perhaps assisting archives that may also be thinking of doing so).²¹

The archivists' association could also seek out more directly contributions to its publications from new users, perhaps offering regular theme issues that could be devoted to a variety of research communities or to specific ones. Archivists, in turn, should seek to publish in the journals of possible new research communities. Theme issues could provide a valuable focus here too for these efforts.

Archivists' associations could also help to form new organisations that might be useful vehicles for collaborative efforts to expand the use of archives. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) of England is one example to consider. It was established in 2000 as a non-departmental public body sponsored by the British government's Department of Culture, Media, and Sport. The MLA stresses the social and economic contribution to society of museums, libraries, and archives, and how they can address public policy concerns. The MLA's ambitious advocacy program, targeted mainly at politicians, policy makers, and funders of archives, museums, and libraries, argues that these institutions contribute far more to societal wellbeing than is grasped by the typically narrow public understanding of their heritage and cultural role, or conveyed by their own often limited presentation of it. The MLA recasts this role more broadly to address public affairs issues and government agendas directly. It maintains that archives, libraries, and museums' support for scholarship and education stimulates the creativity and re-skilling needed in the increasingly knowledge-based economy. This can help drive economic and cultural regeneration in struggling urban and rural areas. It can help reduce various types of social exclusion and crime, improve health care, and foster cultural identity, citizenship, better and more accountable public administration, and democratic participation through e-government.²²

And finally, academics who educate archivists in universities could focus more of their research on the impact of knowledge derived from archival work and research, and the development of new uses of archives. Perhaps a major collaborative (even international) research project could be mounted. It is odd that there has never been a research project like that.

Implications for the continuum

I have suggested that archivists everywhere, not just in Australia or Canada, might achieve their goals of better current recordkeeping, long-term archiving, and integration of archives into central roles in their sponsoring institutions and societies by being much more active in developing new uses for records of long-term value. In the context of Australian archival discourse, this approach could help fulfil the continuum idea by supporting adjustments underway that bring needed attention to issues in the fourth dimension, such as the 'pluralisation' or maximisation of the records' use. This approach could prompt new commitment to long-term archiving from records creators, especially in key areas of concern such as electronic records. Records *use* could help achieve greater records *control*. This rediscovery of archives that were once thought to be of little use could be the fulcrum of a continuum with greater balance and reciprocity among its elements.²³

More focus on use could also help fulfil the continuum idea by broadening and deepening the connections between types of archives, and between archives, libraries, museums, galleries, and historic sites. An archive that focuses on being much more useful to its sponsor and society will reach out to these others to obtain and share information about – and even created by – those for whose records that archive is responsible. New technologies of communication will make possible this wider continuum, one which extends from current recordkeepers to all those who maintain the varied but interrelated record of human experience. Researchers in the digital age will expect such links and gravitate to archives that provide them, or failing that to other institutions that do.

I have described what might be called a knowledge creation continuum, in which archivists use current recordkeeping and archiving means for knowledge creation ends, with those ends now more ambitiously pursued. The difference is between means and outcomes, and those who thrive in the knowledge or information society will likely have to be associated with both. But archives, so long seen mainly as means, need to be associated more with specific outcomes.²⁴ To do so involves a closer engagement with new and old user groups, underpinned by as full a history of the records as archivists can bring to those relationships.²⁵

These are the pathways to new knowledge. They are our best means of navigating the ocean of information to bring new and old users of archives to new uses of records. Mapping them well will be especially important because researchers will explore many of these pathways on their own through the Internet. This is the archival heartland of knowledge creation, as none of our partners on the continuum can or would bring that depth of understanding to the archival record. This is the distinctive value-added, knowledge-driven research that can bring archives to a central place in their sponsoring institutions and societies.

Endnotes

¹ For information on the 2003 and 2005 meetings of the World Summit on the Information Society, available at <<http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/about.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009. See also United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Towards Knowledge Societies*, UNESCO, Paris, 2005, available at <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141843e.pdf>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

² After all, the International Council of Archives was not a formal participant in the 2003 World Summit of the Information Society, where it was only able to distribute a handout of information about archives outside the meeting rooms. And ICA had to lobby to be allowed to submit a position paper on archives for the 2005 summit. The council sees that as 'a small victory', see 'WSIS Summit: ICA gains further visibility for archives', available at <<http://www.ica.org/en/node/760>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

³ Jay Atherton, 'From Life Cycle to Continuum: Some Thoughts on the Records Management-Archives Relationship', *Archivaria* 21, Winter 1985-86, p. 48. For examples of the welcome reception Atherton's article received in Australia see: Glenda Acland, 'Archivist: Keeper, Undertaker or Auditor', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, no. 1, May 1991, pp. 9-11; Frank Upward, 'In Search of the Continuum: Ian Maclean's "Australian Experience"', *Essays On Recordkeeping*, in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years*, Ancora Press, Clayton, Vic, 1994, p. 119; and Frank Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum, Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 25, no. 1, May 1997, p. 32.

⁴ Frank Upward noted the distinction in a comment on Atherton's continuum idea: 'While Jay Atherton's continuum reshuffled the components of the life cycle theories of earlier decades and revitalised them by emphasizing the service components, the carriage of evidentiality across space and time has been the conceptual underpinning for Australian notions of a continuum'. See Upward's, 'In Search of the Continuum', p. 125.

⁵ Helen Nosworthy, 'Reaching Out: A Core Program for Australian Archives', in McKemmish and Piggott (eds), p. 66; George Nichols, 'Cultural Heritage and Archives: The Last Word', in Lucy Burrows (ed.), *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory*, conference proceedings, Australian Society of Archivists' Conference, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 91, 94. See also Paul MacPherson, 'Theory, Standards and Implicit Assumptions: Public Access to Post-Current Government Records', *Archives and*

Manuscripts, vol. 30, no. 1, May 2002, pp. 7–8 for a similar Australian lament about ‘the inferior status of access in our profession’, which he blames in part on an unnecessarily ‘hierarchically prioritised reading of the [continuum] theory’.

⁶ Glenda Acland, ‘Editorial’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 1, May 2005, p. 8.

⁷ See my reviews of Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward (eds), *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping*, Ancora Press, Melbourne, 1993 in *The American Archivist*, vol. 58, no. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 224–25 and of Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, and Frank Upward (eds), *Archives: Recordkeeping and Society*, Topics in Australasian Library and Information Studies, no. 24, Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Australia, 2005 in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 2, November 2005, pp. 172–77. Other similar commentators from outside Australia are: Terry Cook, ‘Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 22, no. 2, November 1994; Terry Cook, ‘Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage’, in Lucy Burrows (ed.), *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory*, conference proceedings, Australian Society of Archivists’ Conference, Melbourne, 2000; and Verne Harris, ‘Record-keeping and Records Continuum Thinkers: Examining a Seminal Australian Text (*Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*)’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 2, November 2005.

⁸ Barbara Reed, ‘Beyond Perceived Boundaries: Imagining the Potential of Pluralised Recordkeeping’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 1, May 2005, p. 193; see also in the same issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* the following related work: Chris Hurley, ‘Parallel Provenance: (1) What, if Anything, is Archival Description?’; Eric Ketelaar, ‘Sharing Collected Memories in Communities of Records’; Michael Piggott, ‘Building Collective Memory Archives’; and Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar, ‘“Communities of Memory”: Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas’. See also elsewhere Adrian Cunningham, ‘Archival Institutions’ in McKemmish, Piggott, Reed, and Upward (eds), *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, and Joanna Sassoon on the history of records and archives in her ‘Chasing Phantoms in the Archives: The Australia House Photographic Collection’, *Archivaria* 50, Fall 2000. That the fourth International Conference on the History of Records and Archives was held in Perth, Australia in 2008 is another significant indication of growing Australian interest in the continuum’s fourth dimension.

⁹ Jackie Bettington, ‘Standardised Recordkeeping: Reality or Illusion?’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 32, no. 2, November 2004, pp. 48, 66 (emphasis added). Lynelle Briggs, Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission, echoed Bettington for the Commonwealth government in August 2007: ‘Employees had mixed views about the success of their agency’s recordkeeping efforts. Many feel that, considering their work demands, they do not have enough time to meet their recordkeeping responsibilities. There was also limited evidence that agencies are dealing with the challenge of electronic recordkeeping effectively’. See ‘A Report on Recordkeeping in the APS’ available at <<http://www.apsc.gov.au/media/briggs310807.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009. For a recent general report on these problems in the Commonwealth government, see *Note For File: A Report on Recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service*, Management Advisory Committee, 8 August 2007, chapter 6, available at <<http://www.apsc.gov.au/mac/noteforfile.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

¹⁰ Bettington, pp. 48, 64.

¹¹ Seamus Ross, 'Approaching Digital Preservation Holistically', in Alistair Tough and Michael Moss (eds), *Record Keeping in a Hybrid Environment: Managing the Creation, Use, Preservation, and Disposal of Unpublished Information Objects in Context*, Chandos Publishing, Oxford, 2006, pp. 122–3.

¹² Philip C Bantin, *Understanding Data and Information Systems for Recordkeeping*, Neal-Schuman Publishers, New York, 2008, pp. 135, 146, 297–301. Recall also Lynelle Briggs's observation on electronic records management in the Australian government in note 9 above.

¹³ For Hofman, see Ross, p. 125 (emphasis added); Ross, p. 118. American archival educator and electronic records specialist Patricia Galloway also notes the centrality of the use issue in her extensive review of international work on digital object preservation. The primary obstacle to progress is not technical but societal: 'The problem is not lack of adequate equipment or algorithms; the real questions are why preserve? what to preserve? and who should do it?' She observes that 'digital preservation has been proceeding quite happily for many decades in areas where answers to these questions are well defined ...' See Galloway's 'Preservation of Digital Objects', *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2004, p. 550. It thus seems all the more important for archival institutions and the archival profession to make pursuit of this key ingredient in past success a much higher priority.

¹⁴ See the Scottish government's 'Scotland's People' web-based genealogical records research service. The program's 'Visiting Scotland' feature urges genealogists not only to 'just learn about your Scottish heritage, live it! Try on the kilt of your clan, touch the walls of your family castle, explore the fields and farms your ancestors once worked and see the very documents that chronicled their lives. Come walk in the footsteps of your ancestors'. See 'Visiting Scotland' on the 'Scotland's People' website, available <<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/help/index.aspx?r=546&975>>, accessed 20 November 2009. The possibility of moving this heightened genealogical interest to a broader pursuit of one's own and one's family's place in related historical developments – a personalised place in history – is evident in television programs such as 'Bloodlines', which appears on Canada's History Television network. See, for example, the episode entitled 'Riel's Ghosts', available at <<http://www.history.ca/ontv/titledetails.aspx?titleid=106721>>, accessed 20 November 2009. Archives would benefit from fostering this personalisation of the past.

¹⁵ See Terence J McDonald (ed.), *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1996; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 2002, p. viii. The journals are: *The History of the Human Sciences* (1998–99); *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (1999); *Historical Geography* (2001); *Canadian Journal of Communication* (2001); *Revue française d'administration publique* (2002); *Poetics Today* (2003); *Canadian Literature* (2003); *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* (2006); *Journal of Canadian Studies* (2006); and *Queen's Quarterly* (2007).

¹⁶ For Alzheimer's disease see, Gari-Anne Patzwald and Sister Carol Marie Wildt, 'The Use of Convent Archival Records in Medical Research: The School Sisters of Notre Dame Archives and the Nun Study', *American Archivist*, vol. 67, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2004; for climatology see: H Hamandawana, F Eckardt, and R Chanda, 'Linking Archival and Remotely Sensed Data for Long-Term Environmental Monitoring', *International Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation*, vol. 7 no. 4, December 2005; and Dennis Wheeler, 'Archives and Climate Change: How Old Documents Offer a Key to Understanding the World's Weather', *Archives*, vol. 31, no. 115, October 2006; for psychiatry and genetics see: AS Bassett and J Husted, 'Anticipation or Ascertainment

Bias in Schizophrenia? Penrose's Familial Mental Illness Sample', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, vol. 60, no. 3, March 1997; see also 'Genetics in Society', available at <<http://www.utpsychiatry.ca/centenary/vignette/Apr08-Vig10-PsychiatricGenetics.pdf>>, accessed 20 November 2009 (I thank colleagues John Court, Archivist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Archives, and Carolyn Heald, Director, Records and Information Management, York University, both in Toronto, for this reference to psychiatric research using archives). For geomagnetism see: the American Public Broadcasting Service program *Nova*, episode entitled 'Magnetic Storm', aired 18 November 2003, transcript available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/3016_magnetic.html>, accessed 20 November 2009; see also, A Jackson, A Jonkers, and M Walker, 'Four Centuries of Geomagnetic Secular Variation From Historical Records', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical, and Engineering Sciences*, vol. 358, no. 1768, 15 March 2000; for nutrition and disease see: *Nova*, episode entitled 'Ghost in Your Genes', aired 16 October 2007, transcript available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/3413_genes.html>, accessed 20 November 2009; see also D Herring and A Swedlund (eds), *Human Biologists in the Archives: Demography, Health, Nutrition and Genetics in Historical Populations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003; for skin cancer research see: K Kojo and others, 'Population Exposure to Ultraviolet Radiation in Finland 1920–1995: Exposure Trends and a Time-Series Analysis of Exposure and Cutaneous Melanoma Incidence', *Environmental Research*, vol. 101, no. 1, May 2006. For a recent discussion of the role of historical information in health care policy formation in Britain, see Virginia Berridge, 'Public or Policy Understanding of History?', *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2003.

¹⁷ For Canadians, the Steven Truscott case is the most high profile murder case of this kind, one that helped bring about the abolition of the death penalty in Canada. Truscott, convicted of murder in 1959 as a fourteen-year boy and sentenced to death, was eventually paroled and in 2007 had his conviction quashed as 'a miscarriage of justice' by the Court of Appeal for Ontario. His decision was based largely on archival records in the Archives of Ontario and other archives. Details of this decision are available at <<http://www.ontariocourts.on.ca/decisions/2007/august/2007ONCA0575.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009. The monetary value of archives to Truscott is the \$6.5 million he received in compensation for his wrongful conviction. For a second recent Canadian wrongful murder conviction case that was overturned on the basis of archival records (in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick), see the story of Erin Walsh in 'Dying Man Granted Acquittal on Decades Old Murder Conviction', *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 March 2008, available at <<http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/story.html?id=ad4711de-d7d6-494b-b79f-5642d91f5641&k=69654>>, accessed 20 November 2009. For a study of an infamous medical experiment see Tywana Whorley, 'The Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the Politics of Memory', in Richard J Cox and David A Wallace (eds), *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society*, Quorum Books, Westport, CT, 2002; for the pursuit of Nazi war criminals, see Terry Cook, "'A Monumental Blunder": The Destruction of Records on Nazi War Criminals in Canada,' in *ibid*.

¹⁸ For novels about archivists see: Martha Cooley, *The Archivist: A Novel*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1998, and Susan Swan, *What Casanova Told Me*, AA Knopf Canada, Toronto, 2004. Sharon Bajer's play *Molly's Veil*, J Gordon Shillingford Publishing, Winnipeg, 2005, which is about the private life of Charlotte Whitton, the first woman mayor of a large Canadian city (Ottawa, 1951–56, 1961–64), is based on Whitton's archival records in Library and Archives Canada, and images of them are projected upon the stage at key moments during the performance. The play *The People's Temple* (2005) is about the

'Jonestown' (Guyana) mass suicide in 1978 and is both based on archival records and set in an archive; and the popular motion picture *National Treasure* (2004) has an archivist in a starring role and is set in the United States National Archives. For a play based on archives and written by an archivist (with David Cheoros and Heather Swain), see Karen Simonson, 'A Marriage of Archives and Theatre: the Inspiration for *Letters From Battle River*', *Archives Society of Alberta Newsletter*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2007, pp. 9–10. The play is about Dr Mary Percy Jackson, one of the first medical doctors to serve in northwestern Alberta in the 1930s. Her personal records are at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. For artwork done using archival maps, see Alan Morantz, *Where is Here? Canada's Maps and the Stories They Tell*, Penguin Books, Toronto, 2002, pp. 208–16. For a sculpture done by mental health patients using early British maps at the National Archives of the United Kingdom, see 'There Be Monsters', available at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/monsters/default.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009. The sculpture is now on display in the foyer of the National Archives. It is another extraordinary and promising example of the use of archives in health care. Canadian Aboriginal artist Robert Houle incorporates archival photographs and texts of treaties signed by Aboriginal people and the Canadian government into his art works. See *Robert Houle: Sovereignty Over Subjectivity*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1999, pp. 14 and 16. This is a catalogue of an exhibition at the gallery curated by Shirley Madill, 7 March – 6 September 1999.

¹⁹ For an example of such outreach through another discipline's journal see archivists Tim Powell and Julia Sheppard, 'Archives and Human Genetics: Saving the Past for the Future', *Human Genetics*, vol. 119, no. 4, May 2006. For ingredients of a model assessment of the relationship between a research community (Australia's historians) and archives, and a call for further study of this association, see Michael Piggott, 'Archives and Australian History', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 90, June 2000.

²⁰ See the CBC's 'Digital Archives', available at <<http://archives.cbc.ca/>>, accessed 20 November 2009. The 'Digital Archives' was awarded the Society of American Archivists' 2008 Philip M Hamer and Elizabeth Hamer Kegan Award for public awareness. Details of these awards are available at <<http://www.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-hamer.asp>>, accessed 20 November 2009. For more on archives and public affairs, see my 'Archivists and Public Affairs: Toward a New Archival Public Programming', keynote address delivered at the annual conference of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand, Dunedin, 28 August 2008.

²¹ One example of this suggestion is the Climate Records and Information Special Interest Section of the Association of Canadian Archivists that was formed in 2007. One of its goals is 'to establish relationships with organizations and entities outside the archival community in order to raise awareness of archival relevance to environmental issues, and provide a basis for partnering'. Details are available at <<http://archivists.ca/content/climate-records-and-information-special-interest-section>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²² See 'Communities', available at <http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/policy_development/communities>, accessed 20 November 2009. For archives in particular see *Archives for the 21st Century* (2009) available at <<http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/strategies/archive>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²³ See Terry Cook's appeal for this vision of the continuum in his 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage', in Lucy Burrows (ed.), *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory*, conference proceedings, Australian Society of Archivists' Conference, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 16–17.

²⁴ The Australian government's head of delegation at the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, Fay Holthuyzen, implied that point in her statement about Australian priorities at the summit: 'The Australian view of the information society is very much a positive one. We see information and communications technologies not as an end in themselves, but rather as the means to some very important outcomes. These outcomes include economic growth and prosperity, and the sharing and use of information to enhance personal expression, knowledge, understanding and social cohesion'. The Australian view was typical of international opinion at the summit. The statement by Fay Holthuyzen delivered at the summit is available at <<http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/statements/docs/g-australia/1.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009. It may be that ICA's difficulty in gaining a hearing at these summits (see endnote 2 above) arises from the assumption that archives are much more about means than outcomes. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is an example of a major archive that is positioning itself to be 'a knowledge institution' associated with certain outcomes in Canadian government and society. The preamble to the *Library and Archives Canada Act 2004* states that LAC 'is a source of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada as a free and democratic society'. In its current strategic vision document LAC says that its 'performance and value must be assessed not on the bases of inputs, activities, and outputs, but on the results we achieve – the impacts for our clients and partners, the positive societal outcomes we achieve for Canadians', in 'Directions for Change', June 2006, p. 23, which can be viewed as a PDF at <<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/012016/f2/012016-1000-e.pdf>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²⁵ That history begins with the comparatively limited metadata around records that records creators and current recordkeepers need for their day-to-day work. It expands in the hands of archivists into much deeper knowledge of the functions, activities, recordkeeping systems, types of individual documents and their categories of information, their media characteristics, custodial and archival histories, the societal contexts wrapped around them, their relationships across space with other records and communications, and the evolution of all of this across time and in relation to the wider body of already accumulated records in one or more archives. This is the spirit of the Australian series system, expanded into the fuller history of records and archiving represented by the International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (ICHORA) held in Perth. The first three ICHORA meetings were in Toronto (2003), Amsterdam (2005), and Boston (2007). The next one will be in London in 2010. Papers given at the first two conferences were published respectively in *Archivaria* 60, Fall 2005 and *Archival Science*, vol. 6, nos 3–4, December 2006. For an important recent companion effort to examine the history of records and archives, see Francis X Blouin Jr and William G Rosenberg (eds), *Archives, documentation, and institutions of social memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2006.