REFIGURING THE JANUS GLANCE: THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONING AND UNLEARNING IN AN UNREFLEXIVE DISCIPLINE

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Samuel Taylor Coleridge recommended never worrying about the future – it arrives soon enough. I am inclined to agree. In my experience indulging in crystal ball gazing is a guaranteed recipe for future embarrassment. Having been asked by the Emmett Leahy Awards Committee to share my vision for the future of digital recordkeeping, I am therefore going to foreswear any predictions of what the future might look like and focus instead on assessing where we are at today, identifying some of my more serious discontents and exploring some philosophies and strategies that I believe will help us collectively to grapple with the challenges and shortcomings with which we are faced. Ultimately the aim is to build a better future, but before we can do that we need to agree on where we need to be going.

I will use the licence of a white paper to range across the breadth of my many professional interests and preoccupations over the past twenty years or so, reassessing and re-evaluating those interests and concerns from the vantage point of 2011 while also attempting to make some sense of it all. As such, this paper cannot be limited to the narrow topic of digital recordkeeping. Nevertheless, as everything in modern recordkeeping is inextricably related to everything else, all of the topics that I will traverse have resonance for the issue of the future of digital recordkeeping.

If I have one simple message to take into an uncertain future it is this: While a deep knowledge of the theory, practice and history of our discipline is essential, the tendency to operationalise this knowledge as rigid rules and

implacable certainties too often becomes a straightjacket that constrains innovation and questioning, blinds us to the opportunities and realities of today, and risks making us either utterly irrelevant or the unwitting agents of powerful and more self-aware interests in society. Questioning and a willingness to unlearn have to be as much a part of our professional toolkit as all of our scientific certainties about evidence, authenticity, standards and processes. Above all we need to keep sight of <u>why</u> we do what we do, rather than obsess to the point of crippling perfectionism about how we do what we do.

Far too much of our recordkeeping theory and practice is a hermetically sealed and self-referential discourse. When other ideas have been invited in they have generally been from other positivist disciplines such as information technology and business administration. While more socially aware disciplines such as anthropology and philosophy have been sent into an epistemological spin in recent decades, the recordkeeping discipline has, by and large, continued to trundle along largely untroubled by any signs of existential doubt. Fortunately, there are signs that this is all changing, with the writings of Verne Harris, Brien Brothman, Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz causing some rumblings, at least in academic circles if not in the world of the average practitioner. It is time for the questioning and unlearning suggested by Harris, Brothman, et al to move out of halls of academia and the pages of scholarly journals and into our professional practice – a practice that still seems resolutely grounded in the mindsets of nineteenth century Europe.

Intellectual control of records, description, metadata and access: from harnessing the power of provenance to harnessing the wisdom of the crowd

I begin this overview of my recordkeeping preoccupations with what is probably the bedrock of our professional practice – establishing intellectual control over records using systems that document the relationships between

records and the context of their creation and use – their provenance. We do this because we need to know what records exist, why they exist, how they come into existence, how they relate to each other and how to find them when we need them. Traditional records management systems achieve this through the deployment of classification schemes and file plans to help provide evidence solutions for organisations. Traditional archival systems provide means by which recordkeeping systems can be carried forward across time and different domains of use in ways that preserve the meaning and authenticity of the records in question, to serve the needs of both creating organisations and wider society for the retention of valuable corporate and social memory. Records continuum theory argues that all of these activities and objectives should be pursued simultaneously through seamlessly interrelated systems of intellectual control.[1] In the digital world this is all achieved through the capture and management of recordkeeping metadata.

I have spent a considerable proportion of my professional life developing and using standards and other tools for the intellectual control of records. As an Australian my thinking has inevitably been shaped by the work of Peter Scott, Ian Maclean and Keith Penny, the inventors of the Australian 'series system' at what was then the Commonwealth Archives Office (now National Archives of Australia) in the early 1960s. Scott and his colleagues struggled to apply the descriptive rules set out in the 1898 Dutch Manual of Muller, Feith and Fruin[2], in an environment of constant administrative change in the Australian Government. Their breakthrough was to abandon the use of the record group or *fonds* as the locus of intellectual and physical control of records. They did this because the tendency for records to have multiple-provenance meant that it was more often than not impossible to split records into neatly self-contained and mutually-exclusive record groups based on an assumption of

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[1] Adrian Cunningham, 'What's in a Name? Broadening our Horizons in the Pursuit of a Recordkeeping Profession That Cherishes Unity in Diversity', *Archives and Manuscripts: Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 2001, pp. 110-117.

[2] See the latest edition, S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, Archival Classics Series, 2003.

single unitary provenance. Rather, using Margaret Cross-Norton's precept of 'records follow function',[3] they decided to focus their intellectual control regimes at the series level, while also documenting provenance relationships between records series and successive (or indeed simultaneous) records creators through the mapping of descriptions of records series to separate descriptions of different records creating entities.[4]

While the so-called series system has since been adopted by many archives in Australia and New Zealand and some archives further afield, it was not until 2007 that a guide to implementing the series system was published by the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA). *Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australasian Practice* was developed by the ASA's Committee on Descriptive Standards, of which I was Chair. Originally it was our intention to develop a formal codification of the Series System – a national standard for archival description if you like. The finished product carries some resemblance to a formal codification, but really is more of an implementer's handbook. Either way, it was long overdue, as all that was previously available to practitioners were some desultory references in the first two editions of the ASA's textbook *Keeping Archives* and a number of fairly dense articles in the archival literature written by Scott or one or other of Scott's acolytes.

The job of developing the ASA Guide to the series system came after a number of years of involvement in developing and/or revising international archival descriptive standards through the International Council on Archives' Committee on Descriptive Standards, together with their accompanying encoding standards for machine interchange of descriptive data, EAD (Encoded Archival Description) and EAC (Encoded Archival Context). The

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[3] Thorton W. Mitchell (ed.), *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, Archival Classics Series, 1975, p. 110.

[4] Adrian Cunningham (ed.), *The Arrangement and Description of Archives Amid Administrative and Technological Change: Essays and Reflections by Peter J. Scott*, Brisbane, Australian Society of Archivists, 2010.

main objective here, one that was only partially achieved, was to make these various standards hospitable to the theory and practice that underpins the Australian series system. The second editions of ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF), together with the emergence of the new ICA standard for describing functions, ISAF, reflect years of patient argument, discussion and persuasion. While there remain some unresolved illogicalities and inconsistencies in the largely unarticulated conceptual framework that unites the ICA's family of archival descriptive standards, the utility of creating and maintaining separate but interrelated descriptions of records and records creators and other contextual entities has now been firmly established. Given the levels of hostility and incomprehension with which this not especially radical idea was first greeted, and indeed still is in some quarters, this is no mean achievement.[5]

The confluence of Australian records continuum and series system theory also manifested itself during this same time in the development of metadata frameworks and standards for recordkeeping. As the Director responsible for recordkeeping standards and policy at the National Archives of Australia I oversaw the development of metadata standards for both resource discovery and recordkeeping at the NAA until 2005, and also had the pleasure of participating in two significant collaborative research projects on metadata with Monash University.[6] This work has in turn led to the development, very ably coordinated by Hans Hofman of the Netherlands, of the International Standards Organization's family of standards for records metadata, ISO

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[5] Adrian Cunningham, 'Harnessing the Power of Provenance in Archival Description: An Australian Perspective on the Development of the Second Edition of ISAAR (CPF)', *Journal of Archival Organization*, vol. 5, no. 1/2, 2007, (this issue of *JAO* simultaneously published as *Respect for Authority: Authority Control, Context Control and Archival Description,* Haworth, Binghampton NY), pp. 15-31. See also: Adrian Cunningham, 'Six Degrees of Separation: Australian Metadata Initiatives and Their Relationships with International Standards', *Archival Science*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2001, pp. 271-283; and Adrian Cunningham, 'Dynamic Descriptions: Recent Developments in Standards for Archival Description and Metadata', *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2001, pp. 3-17, available at: http://www.archivists.org.au/recent-developments-standards-archival-description-and-metadata
[6] See: http://www.infotech.monash.edu.au/research/groups/rcrg/projects/spirt/index.html and http://www.infotech.monash.edu.au/research/groups/rcrg/crkm/index.html

23081, as well as a second generation of recordkeeping metadata standards issued by various public records institutions in Australia and New Zealand.

While there is much to applaud in all of this research and standards setting work – and certainly we are much better equipped as a profession now than was the case fifteen years ago – it is only the end of the beginning, not an end point in itself. It is one thing to develop and issue standards, it is quite another to have them understood, appreciated and implemented. That is a journey that has barely begun. Moreover, we need to develop metadata regimes that are open to the multiplicity of contextual linkages and perspectives that can exist for any body of records. The danger here is in assuming that only one context or one perspective matters and thus designing systems that explicitly or implicitly privilege only that viewpoint. Standards are important for promoting better practices and for enabling machine processing and sharing of data, but it is vital for the standards to be open, flexible and hospitable - not closed, inflexible and authoritarian. We are only just beginning to come to grips with the implications of crowd-sourcing, user-tagging, content mash-ups and parallel provenance for our intellectual control regimes.[7] A further generation or two of more open and hospitable descriptive standards is needed before we can claim to have regimes that are genuinely in step with 21st century community expectations and that enables the underutilised potential of our information assets to be unleashed.

Digital recordkeeping: easier said than done

At the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists I spoke at a session that also featured fellow Emmett Leahy Award winner, Canadian John Macdonald, and NARA's Lisa Weber – both veterans of digital records management struggles dating back twenty years and more. The three of us

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[7] Adrian Cunningham, 'The Government 2.0 Taskforce 2009: Recordkeeping issues and opportunities', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 38, no. 2, November 2010, pp. 20-36.

chose to consider why it is, after so many years of digital records research and standards development, that most organisations around the world are still struggling to implement sustainable and cost-effective digital recordkeeping regimes and, more to the point, what we should be doing to address these failings?

There are of course no easy answers to these questions. We all acknowledged that, while it is all very well and good to develop standards and frameworks, it is another thing altogether to get these standards and frameworks implemented. Our track record of implementation success is patchy at best, notwithstanding the fact that there are a number of exemplary success stories that can be pointed to.

One of the problems we identified is a lack of clarity and consensus about what success should look like and what our role is in helping organisations achieve this success. John Macdonald quoted something I had said in a different context to argue that 'success will consist of a situation whereby most organizations have cost-effective and user-friendly capture, management of and access to authentic digital evidence of their decisions and activities for as long as that evidence is required'.

I would like to endorse something that Chris Hurley said at a Records Management Association of Australasia Convention in 2004 when he asked the question 'What, if anything, is records management?' and answered that we should be the providers of evidence solutions to organisations.[8] In my SAA paper I argued, *inter alia*, that part of the reason for our patchy record of electronic recordkeeping implementation success is our tendency to obsess about process and to demand levels of control and perfection that are both

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[8] Chris Hurley, 'What if Anything is Records Management?', available at: http://www.infotech.monash.edu.au/research/groups/rcrg/publications/ch-what.pdf

unrealistic and counterproductive.[9] In the words of session chair, Minnesota State Archivist Bob Horton, 'we have seen the problem and the problem is us!' I called for more flexibility, more risk management and greater levels of tolerance for uncertainty and imperfection. Lisa Weber put this more elegantly when she used Buddhist metaphors of suffering, impermanence, karma, egolessness and nirvana to argue that we need to find a middle path. This resonated strongly with me, as I have often recited the mantra that in recordkeeping there are 'many pathways to nirvana'.

I think it is no exaggeration to say that implementing sustainable approaches to digital recordkeeping in organisations is the major challenge facing our profession today. Our very future and relevance depends on how well we deal with this challenge – for make no mistake, organisations will have to solve it with or without our help. And if they do it without our help we will be consigned to a marginalised future as mere curiosities and antiquarians.

At the SAA session mentioned above John McDonald and Lisa Weber concluded that the digital recordkeeping 'glass is half full' and considered what should be done to help fill it further. In preparing for the session Bob Horton engaged the three of us in an interesting series of email exchanges. Bob argued quite starkly that the glass maybe half full, but it has a hole in it! There is more than a grain of truth in Horton's bleak self-assessment of our position. We have been researching and talking about electronic records for more years than most of us can remember. We have developed truckloads of standards, manuals, tools and guidelines. Yet, with some notable and commendable exceptions, most organisations either completely ignore this guidance or they make lousy jobs of implementing them. A recent survey conducted in the Australian government revealed a depressingly large proportion of agencies that have no digital recordkeeping systems in place

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[9] Adrian Cunningham, 'Good Digital Records Don't Just 'Happen': Embedding Digital Recordkeeping as an Organic Component of Business Processes and Systems', *Archivaria* 71, Spring 2011 [in press].

and no plans to address their absence. Meanwhile, the 'paper mountain' of records being printed to paper from born digital systems grows larger and larger. And this is not for any lack of data. There are petabytes of data clogging up data centres and storage area networks all over government. In other words there are plenty of digital record-making systems – the problem is that there are precious few digital recordkeeping systems. The petabyte mountain has grown because of the belief that 'storage is cheap'. But if you don't know what data you have got, and don't manage it properly, then you will have very little chance of finding what you need when you need it and you will be paying ever escalating bills to store a whole lot of valueless data just in case there is something in the data 'slagheap' that you might really need some time.

This is an unsustainable situation. Sooner or later organisations are going to realise that it is unsustainable and they are going to do something about it. In most cases this will probably involve getting rid of the data slagheaps, thus losing the high value records along with all the rubbish. When they have realised what they have lost in terms of vital records and wasted money, organisations might then turn their minds to creating a better future that does not repeat the mistakes of the past. We have to make sure that we are part of that future and not blamed for the mistakes of the past and the present.

What then does the future hold? Maybe the reality will be one of slow incremental progress of two steps forward, one step back? Maybe we need to lower our expectations so that we are prepared to accept 'good enough recordkeeping' instead of best practice recordkeeping – as 'good enough recordkeeping' surely would be better than the chaos we see at present? We need to be able to describe what success looks like and be flexible (not rigid and prescriptive) about how organisations can attain that success. Success may involve the use of a dedicated Records Management Application or Electronic Document and Records Management System, but in many

(probably most) cases it won't. It seems to me that good digital recordkeeping is best carried out by the same software applications and business systems that are used to perform business processes and in which the records are actually created not in other applications that are disconnected from core business processes. Embedding good recordkeeping functionality in these systems requires good advocacy and liaison skills and the ability to be flexible. Ultimately, we need to focus less on process and more on outcomes.

It is important to take account of the findings of the recent University of Northumbria research project on this topic – the Ac+ERM (Accelerating the rate of positive change in electronic records management) project, which concluded that the main barrier to good electronic recordkeeping was a cultural one.[10] Good recordkeeping has to be valued by the culture of people and their organisations. At best it is usually seen as worthy, but dull. At worst it is seen as difficult, dispensable, complex and boring.

This challenge brings to mind Malcolm Gladwell's tipping point paradigm.[11] Gladwell suggests that tipping points can happen because of the 'power of the few'. Maybe what we need is someone or something that can be a cultural game changer for recordkeeping – someone or something that can seize the zeitgeist, galvanise attention and make recordkeeping culturally important. To compare out situation to the music scene over the past 50 years, I am reminded of how John Lennon once said that 'before Elvis there was nothing'. Similarly, before the Sex Pistols rock music had got fat, obtuse, pompous and boring. While the Sex Pistols self-destructed fairly quickly, no one can gainsay that they did not fundamentally change the music scene forever. They were game changers. Similar things could be noted about the impact of Nirvana in the early 1990s. Maybe we need the power of the few in recordkeeping?

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[10] See http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/ceis/re/isrc/themes/rmarea/erm/
[11] Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Little, Brown and Co, 2000; See also Kate Cumming and Cassie Findlay, 'Digital Recordkeeping: Are we at a tipping point?', *Records Management Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2010, pp. 265-278.

Maybe we need our own Johnny Rotten or Kurt Cobain to explode into our world and change things forever by daring to be different and daring to take a fundamentally different and courageous approach to things that are too stale and too familiar? For continuing to be worthy but dull is not going to shake up the cultural barriers that seem to be getting in the way of good digital recordkeeping.

Digital preservation/digital archiving

Until such time as more than the current small proportion of organisations are doing good digital recordkeeping, I cannot help but wonder if our profession's focus on digital preservation is a case of putting cart before the horse. There is a widespread and very understandable push for custodial institutions to create 'trusted digital repositories' almost as a 'build it and they will come' leap of faith. In fact many of the digital archives that have been established are struggling to attract transfers of born-digital records from creating organisations, mainly because the born-digital records living in creating organisations exist in a state of anarchy. In most cases it is all but impossible to sift the archival value material from the rest, much less attach to it some quality contextual recordkeeping metadata. So, rather than debase our 'submission information packages' and 'dissemination information packages' by subjecting them to a regime of 'garbage in, garbage out', most digital archives are filling up with digitised copies of legacy born-analogue material, because at least we are able to identify what is valuable with the born-analogue and such material is likely to have some half-decent metadata.

In fact, digital preservation – narrowly defined – is pretty much a solved problem, notwithstanding the fact that we need more scalable and deployable end-user tools. My only real hesitation in making this statement is the knowledge that we have not yet come fully to grips with the implications of the reality that there is no such thing as a lossless migration, yet we have to

migrate digital records in order to preserve them. A good start, though, would be at least to recognise that loss does occur with migration and applying some intellectual rigour to determining what losses are acceptable according to some agreed and explicit criteria, even though certain losses may be unavoidable.[12]

What is not a solved problem, though, is digital archiving. Just as archiving involve a much wider range of activities than preservation, so too does digital archiving involve a much wider range of activities than digital preservation. Moreover, it does not just happen within the confines of custodial programs. Digital archiving, the long-term management of digital records, needs to happen everywhere, because most born-digital records with long term value will never darken the doorstep (or threshold) of a custodial institution.[13] Sadly, at the present time digital archiving is not really happening anywhere, even in those institutions that have shiny new 'trusted digital repositories'. That is because digital archiving should happen across the entire records continuum.

If record-making systems are not accompanied by good recordkeeping systems, then digital archiving is effectively a non-starter. As I have argued elsewhere,[14] the problem with the otherwise very useful Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model[15] is that it assumes that nice 'submission information packages' are out there in producer-land and that they only have to be found, described and ingested into our digital repositories. Yet, what we know about the state of digital recordkeeping in most organisations refutes this assumption fairly comprehensively. And

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[12] Geoffrey Yeo, ''Nothing is the same as something else': significant properties and notions of identity and originality', *Archival Science*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 85-116.

[13] Adrian Cunningham, 'The postcustodial archive', in Jennie Hill (ed.), *The Future of Archives and Recordkeeping: A reader*, London, Facet Publishing, 2011, pp. 173-190.

[14] Adrian Cunningham, 'Digital Curation/Digital Archiving: A View from the National Archives of Australia', *The American Archivist*, vol. 71, Fall/Winter 2008, pp. 530-543.

[15] Consultative Committee for Space Date Systems, *Reference Model for an Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Blue Book*, 2002, available at http://public.ccsds.org/publications/archive/650x0b1.pdf . Also ISO 14721: 2003.

where there are good recordkeeping systems our archival programs need to be reinvented from top to bottom as digital archives. This means that all our archival processes have to be oriented towards digital archiving, and not just our digital preservation teams, as is currently the case in almost all archival programs.

Whither appraisal?

Of all the fields of recordkeeping endeavour appraisal is probably the one that enjoys the lowest level of international professional consensus. This lack of consensus encompasses our views of what it is, why we do it, how it is done, who should be consulted/involved in the process, how we should document and account for our decisions, and even whether or not we should do it at all – in other words pretty much everything. Australian recordkeepers encountered this problem ten years ago when working with the International Standards Organization to convert the Australian Records Management Standard (AS 4390) into an ISO Standard (ISO 15489). When it became clear that the rest of the world could not countenance the AS 4390 definition of appraisal, the word was dropped from the international standard, thus leaving a gaping hole in the final document.

Nor is this just a problem of competing national views in a global context – witness a recent protracted and rancorous debate that took place over developing and finalising the Australian Society of Archivists' 2007 position statement on appraisal.[16] Considering the absolute importance of appraisal decisions, the social and political power wielded by the archivists who make those decisions and the societal implications of supposedly scientific and objective value systems and epistemologies, this lack of consensus should be a major concern. What is more alarming, though, is the widespread lack of awareness that we even have a problem with appraisal.

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[16] See http://www.archivists.org.au/sitebuilder/about/knowledge/asset/files/4/appraisalstatement[1].pdf

Functions-based appraisal is becoming increasingly commonplace. More fundamentally, appraisal is increasingly regarded as a process of proactively identifying needs for records, rather than retroactively deciding which records from a pre-existing body of records should be selected for archival preservation. Appraisal should be a process combining functional analysis, work process analysis, risk analysis, historical analysis and stakeholder consultation to determine recordkeeping requirements. In other words the results of appraisal are as likely to be applied prospectively for records that do not yet exist as they are to be applied retrospectively to records that may already exist and may be brought into archival custody.[17]

I propose five guiding principles that should underpin any approach to appraisal, which I define as the process for identifying the needs for records:

1. Appraisal helps determine both what records need to be made and how long records need to be kept. It necessarily involves assessments of the risks associated with not making and keeping certain records.

2. We cannot keep everything forever. Therefore appraisal is vital in making the best use of scarce resources.

3. When doing appraisal it is vital to understand, respect and document the context of records - the events, activities, phenomena, places, relationships, people, organisations and functions that shape them and that give them meaning and value.

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[17] Michael Piggott, 'Appraisal: the state of the art', Paper delivered at a professional development workshop presented by the Australian Society of Archivists South Australia Branch, 26 March 2001. Available at: http://asa.oxideinteractive.com.au/appraisal-state-art-26-march-2001 ; and Barbara Reed,'Diverse Influence: An exploration of Australian appraisal practice, part one', *Archives and Manuscripts: Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists*, vol. 31, no. 1, May 2003, pp. 63-82.

4. Archival value is not an absolute state - rather, it is relative, contingent and dynamic. Views on value depend upon perspective and can change over time.

5. In conducting appraisal power is wielded in constructing societal memory and identity. Recordkeeping professionals therefore have a responsibility to consult affected communities and to be hospitable to alternative views in recognition of the fact that significance decisions inevitably privilege some memories and marginalise or exclude others.

The last of these principles raises the vexed question of community consultation, or to put the issue into Web 2.0 terms, crowd-sourcing input into appraisal decisions.

While regulations and professional policies and procedures can introduce some degree of certainty and rigor into the appraisal process, the process itself is nevertheless unavoidably subjective. In this post-modern world we can no longer tell ourselves, if indeed we ever did, that the process of appraisal and selection of records for long-term retention is a completely scientific and objective one. So, while we can draw upon a considerable body of professional theory and practice in devising and implementing records appraisal regimes, we must readily admit that we do not have a monopoly on wisdom in the appraisal process.

Indeed, I would go further. It is self-evident that records destruction is the ultimate denial of access. In the case of public records, the power to decide what records should be kept and what should be destroyed is nothing less than a sacred trust that society through its law-makers has bestowed upon recordkeepers. If records appraisal is the most important and the most difficult aspect of the recordkeeping mission, then it is a responsibility that society as a whole has a stake in and has a right to be consulted about.

During the 1990s public records institutions in Australia adopted the appraisal methodology recommended in Standards Australia's *Australian Standard Records Management*, AS 4390 – 1996. AS 4390 recommended that appraisal commence with an analysis of the functions and activities of organizations and the need for and uses of records that document these functions and activities. In other words, the locus of appraisal is the function rather than the record. In most cases, once functions and activities have been appraised and records creation and retention criteria have been determined, it should be possible with good systems design to make a determination about how long a record should be kept before the record is even created. This is not to say that retention periods cannot be reassessed at some subsequent time. As appraisal occurs in a changing government and social environment it needs to be dynamic. Nevertheless, the AS 4390 approach is certainly preferable to the usual methodology of retrospectively appraising mountains of legacy records, very often on the basis of an inadequate knowledge of the context in which the records were originally created and used. By appraising the function rather than the record, large quantities of records can be appraised more cost-effectively and with greater intellectual rigor and consistency.[18]

While we must strive to make appraisal methodologies about as rigorous and objective as possible, there is no avoiding the fact that value judgments about the long term significance of records documenting certain functions still need to be make. This is where community input into the appraisal process is so important. While it is impossible to predict what values society in the future may place on particular records, we have to do the best possible job of determining the values that today's society feels are important to be reflected in the recorded legacy of governance and other human activity.

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[18] Adrian Cunningham and Robyn Oswald, 'Some Functions are More Equal than Others: The Development of a Macroappraisal Strategy for the National Archives of Australia', *Archival Science*, vol. 5, nos. 2-4, 2005, pp. 163-184.

In the words of Terry Cook 'Archives are dynamic, contested and mediated sites of power, ideology and memory in society'.[19] We must recognise this and be very aware that the process of selecting our societal memory is an especially contested and value-laden activity. We can never get this important job absolutely 'right' – for there are no absolutes in this area. But with sincere and well-directed community consultation, we should aim to get it as 'right' as possible. Only then can we hope to acquit our sacred trust for the benefit of future generations in a professional and accountable manner.

Personal recordkeeping: the half that is too often never told

For the first fifteen years of my career I worked with personal records, before I made the switch to a public records institution. It seemed self-evident to me that such records were as worthy of attention from recordkeeping professionals as their much more widely discussed public records equivalents. Yet, the topic has often struggled for airtime, indeed often even legitimacy, in our discourse. In Australia and the United States I suspect that this is because they are largely the responsibility of libraries rather than archival institutions, the mandates of which usually focus exclusively on public records. Perforce, personal records have sometimes acquired the unjustified stigma of not being 'real records'. Fortunately, we have the counterbalancing tendency of the Canadian 'Total Archives' model, which places private records on the same level as public records and posits archival programs that integrate strategies for managing both categories of record. Nevertheless, even in Canada my sense is that resourcing priority is still given to public records, with private records having to make do with the crumbs from the table.

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[19] Terry Cook, 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage', in *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory, Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, Melbourne, 17-19 August 2000*, pp. 8-21.

Compounding the problem is an inclination, at least in Australia, towards reticence on behalf of those records professionals who work with private records. By and large, one rarely hears from this group of practitioners in the literature and at conferences. Perhaps they sense their 'non-U' status? Maybe they just prefer to get on with their jobs without engaging in the cut and thrust of professional debate? Either way it is a great pity, as there is much of interest in the work to discuss and the work itself is both tremendously challenging and tremendously important to society.

During the 1990s, and somewhat less often since then, I have done my best to help redress this imbalance and also to encourage personal records practitioners to engage in the wider recordkeeping discourse.[20] I have also taken 'mainstream' records professionals to task for their occasional myopia and arrogance in relation to the private/personal half of the recordkeeping universe.[21] In fairness, though, my own attempts to explore issues and strategies associated with personal records have almost always been met with interest and support from the mainstream of the profession, so perhaps the sense of marginalisation experienced by private records professionals is nothing more than a self-perpetuating legacy? Perhaps the problem is not a narrow and intolerant mainstream, but rather the timidity of those on the periphery who prefer to suffer under some imagined persecution complex in preference to taking the risk of sticking their heads above the parapets?

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[20] Adrian Cunningham, 'The Archival management of personal papers in electronic form: some suggestions", *Archives and Manuscripts: the Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists*, vol. 22, no. 1, May 1994, pp. 94-105; Adrian Cunningham (ed.), 'Personal Recordkeeping: Issues and Perspectives', theme issue of *Archives and Manuscripts: Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1996.; Adrian Cunningham, 'Icons, Symbolism and Recordkeeping: The Eddie Mabo and Lindy Chamberlain Papers in the National Library of Australia", *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, vol. 28, no. 2, June 1997, pp. 103-110; Adrian Cunningham, 'From Here to Eternity: Collecting archives and the need for a national documentation strategy", *Lasie*, vol. 29, no. 1, March 1998, pp. 32-45; Adrian Cunningham, 'Waiting for the Ghost Train: Strategies for Managing Electronic Personal Records Before It Is Too Late", *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference,* vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 55-64, available at: http://www.rbarry.com/cunningham-waiting2.htm ; Adrian Cunningham, 'Collecting Archives and the Australian 'Series' System', *Limited Addition: Newsletter of the ASA Collecting Archives Special Interest Group*, no. 15, January 2004, pp. 2-7.

[21] Adrian Cunningham, 'Beyond the Pale? The 'flinty' relationship between archivists who collect the private records of individuals and the rest of the archival profession", *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1996, pp. 20-26. http://www.netpac.com/provenance/vol1/no2/features/paleconf.htm

The good news is that things do seem to be changing. In recent years there has emerged a growing body of case studies and research on managing electronic personal records, including the highly significant Paradigm research project in the United Kingdom.[22] There are also two recently published monographs on the topic that go a long way towards filling what has for too long been a yawning gap in the literature. [23]

Recordkeeping and indigenous peoples: being hospitable to the 'other'

The epistemological and conceptual roots of the recordkeeping profession lie solidly in European soil. The marginalisation of personal records by mainstream archival discourse is trivial in comparison with the marginalisation experienced by indigenous peoples at the hands of European colonial and settler society and its recordkeeping agents and notaries. The foundation concept of provenance, for example, seems irredeemably hostile to indigenous knowledge systems, privileging as it does the notion of individual rather than collective ownership of knowledge. Similar criticisms can be levelled at most archival access regimes, which are often oblivious to indigenous cultural sensitivities. Perhaps the greatest inhospitality of all is our Eurocentric privileging of written documents over oral voices - even in places where indigenous societies are, above all else, oral societies.

To its credit, the profession in Australia and New Zealand has responded admirably to the challenge of making recordkeeping more hospitable to indigenous perspectives and knowledge frameworks. This process gained serious momentum during the early 1990s[24] and coalesced around the

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[22] See http://www.paradigm.ac.uk/

[23] Elizabeth H. Dow, *Electronic Records in the Manuscript Repository*, Lanham, Maryland, The Scarecrow Press, 2009; and Cal Lee (ed.), *I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 2011.

[24] Adrian Cunningham (ed.), Archives and Aboriginal Australians theme issue of *Limited Addition: Newsletter of the Australian Society of Archivists Collecting Archives Special Interest Group*, no. 4, December 1994.

development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Library and Information Resources Network (ATSILIRN) Protocols.[25] In 1996 the Australian Society of Archivists adopted a Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.[26] Around the same time as it created an Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group. Professional conferences now routinely include indigenous welcomes to country (in New Zealand, Māori pōwhiris) and acknowledgements by speakers of traditional land owners. Each ASA conference features at least one session dedicated to indigenous issues through the Loris Williams Memorial Lecture, in memory of a sadly deceased pioneering indigenous archivist. Indigenous training scholarships have been sponsored for a number of years now, while cultural awareness training for recordkeeping professionals is actively encouraged. Archival institutions with significant indigenous holdings now more often than not have formal memorandums of understandings with indigenous communities, supported by appropriate governance and consultation arrangements. Significant research projects such as Monash University's 'Trust and Technology: Building an Archival System for Indigenous Oral Memory', 'Pluralizing the Archival Paradigm Through Education', and the 'Koorie Archiving System' have substantially enhanced our understanding of how recordkeeping may be reinvented to respect and accommodate indigenous concerns and perspectives. The emerging concept of 'parallel provenance' also promises much in this context.[27]

While there is much that still remains to be done, the result of all of the above activity is that in both Australia and New Zealand the recordkeeping

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http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/protocols.atsilirn.asn.au/index6df0.html?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=0&Itemid=6

[26]

http://www.archivists.org.au/sitebuilder/about/knowledge/asset/files/4/policystatementonarchivalservice&a&tsipeoples.pdf

[27] Chris Hurley, 'Parallel Provenance (If these are your records, where are your stories?)', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 1, May 2005, pp. 110-145 and vol. 33, no. 2, November 2005, pp. 52-91. Also available at: http://infotech.monash.edu/research/groups/rcrg/publications/parallel-provenance-combined.pdf

profession has moved from being perceived with mistrust as a manifestation of enemy white power structures to being perceived as a friend and an ally in the quest for self-determination, respect and cultural continuity. The archive has become a liminal space, in which received Eurocentric professional wisdoms are challenged and in some cases turned inside out. Letting oral voices loose in the archives can empower indigenous peoples to resist the Western modernist cultural hegemony.

The rest of the recordkeeping world has, however, been slow to address these issues, notwithstanding the 2003 publication by the International Council on Archives of a theme issue of its journal *Comma* on Archives and Indigenous Peoples.[28] The archives profession in North America has, though, developed its own version of Australia's ATSILIRN Protocols for services and collections relating to first nations.[29]

In conclusion: searching for a higher purpose

Do we want to stay stuck in the nineteenth century, in danger of becoming irrelevant historical curios in a post-modern world; a profession that clings desperately to a myopic belief in the myth of 'natural, organic, neutral and objective scientific impartiality'? In the words of Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, recordkeeping systems are "active sites, where social power is negotiated, contested and confirmed". Schwarz and Cook argue that "… through archives, the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalised."[30] Through their contingent and interpretive selection, description and management of records we wield enormous power over the construction of memory and identity. Usually missing or marginalised in

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[28] Verne Harris and Adrian Cunningham (eds), Archives and Indigenous Peoples theme issue of *Comma: International Journal on Archives*, 2003:1.

[29] *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, 2007. Available at: http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html

[30] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 1-2, 2002, p. 1.

recordkeeping metanarratives are the less powerful in society, such as women, manual workers, oral cultures, indigenous peoples, local communities, families and minority groups. To quote Ann Laura Stoler quoting Foucault, the archive embodies "the law of what can be said".[31] Through their exclusions and "codes of concealment" archives confirm the views of the powerful about what is entitled to count as knowledge.

For the most part, however, recordkeeping power has gone unrecognised or denied. We must not simply recognise the power that records wield, but explore the implications and consequences of our being active intermediaries rather than passive custodians. From there the main challenge is then to develop strategies for ensuring that the power is used transparently and is accountably based on explicitly stated values.

Is all this post-modernist hand-wringing just a passing fad or is it a 'great wrecking ball … knocking down years of professional knowledge, values and expertise …and leaving us in a state of professional paralysis?'[32] I agree with Elisabeth Kaplan, we must learn to not only learn to live with, but in fact celebrate uncertainty. There will be anxiety, as there is with any uncertainty. Better that though than the mood of smug self-congratulation that has been too much a feature of archival discourse in the past. We must recognise our own subjective and complicit role in the power dynamics of recordkeeping, memory formation and storytelling. We must articulate our values and state our biases. As Verne Harris says, '… one cannot keep one's hands clean'.[33] Above all, we must not only help to hold others accountable, we ourselves have to be accountable for our own performances.

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[31] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 1-2, 2002, p. 94.

[32] Elisabeth Kaplan, 'Many Paths to Partial Truths', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 3-4, 2002, pp. 218-219.

[33] Verne Harris, 'Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 1-2, 2002, p. 85.

We must never lose sight of the higher purpose that guides why we do what we do. We should not just be the sum of our standards, frameworks and processes. We should guard against the situation that Joan Schwartz warned us against years ago whereby 'we make our tools and our tools make us'.[34] I have never been able to get excited by the Jenkinsonian precept that our primary role is the 'physical and moral defence of the record'. That is not a role that would make me want to jump out of bed every morning for another day of fighting the good recordkeeping fight. While a Jenkinsonian defence might be a partial means to an end, it is not to my way of thinking a higher vocation.

For me, a higher purpose unites the vital importance of public records as enablers of democratic engagement, accountability and transparency together with the vital importance of both public and private records as sources of cultural and societal memory and identity. The pursuit of these higher purposes requires us to take a broad perspective on the nature and significance of our work together with an openness to, respect for and intellectual curiosity about related professions and disciplines, other perspectives, other cultures, other knowledge systems and other world views. Unquestionably we need our standards, tools, frameworks and manuals – heaven knows I have helped write plenty of them over the years – but they are only tools with all their flaws and contingencies, they are not holy writ.

Above all else we should not be so cowed by the apparently implacable scientific certainties of our calling that we subjugate our essential humanness underneath inherited layers of artificially constructed theory, practice and professionalism. There are times when we must listen to our soul and our conscience, even if this means that we must occasionally question or put aside the relentlessly positivist dictates of our professional calling. Similarly, we

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[34] Joan M. Schwartz, 'We make our tools and our tools make us": Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomatics', *Archivaria* 40, Fall 1995, pp. 40-74.

should not lose sight of those things that probably first attracted us to records work – that sense of connecting with the wonderful depth and richness of human experience in all its complexity and contrariness by preserving and providing access to its documentary residue; the sense that somehow the spirits of human beings now departed can yet resonate through the written artefacts of their lives; the belief that we can discern the motivations and innermost thoughts of groups and individuals through the evidence of the conduct of their affairs that they consciously or sub-consciously set aside for future reference.