

Chapter 4

Opening Pandora's Box: What is an Archive in the Digital Environment?

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In his 1955 presidential address to the Society of Archivists, Hilary Jenkinson speculated on the future of archives in England. Reflecting on a half-century working with records interrupted by two world wars, he was alive to the impact that new technologies were having on the conduct of business, 'equipped with telephones, motor cars and aeroplanes we are getting back to the oral, substituting it for written communication'. He challenged those who argued that such developments made 'it necessary to revise our views about the nature and treatment of Archives'. Perceptively he observed that

... the mere manufacture of documents is only one element in the creation of Archives: another and much more potent one is their preservation for reference; that is to say their substitution not merely for the spoken word but for the fallible and destructible memory of the people who took part in whatever the transactions may have been that gave rise to them. *Recordari* still means, as it meant in the twelfth century, to remember. So long as memory is a necessary part of the conduct of affairs so long will it be necessary to put that memory into a material form, and so long as that is necessary so long will you have Archives, whether they take the form of writing on paper or parchment or palm leaves by hand or that of steel tape (shall we say) engraved by mechanical means with microscopic grooves which enable you to reproduce at will the voices of men who forgot or have been themselves forgotten (Jenkinson 1980, 321-2).

Despite all the welter of developments in information and communication technologies that have taken place in the succeeding half-century, this prediction remains a valid defence of the archive against those who might wish either to appropriate its functions or, as in Jenkinson's day, to substitute some other definition. Rooted as his thinking was in medieval history, he had no difficulty in admitting to the archive other forms of recording than paper; for him the act of archiving was in recording or preserving the 'Documents in the Case', whatever the form, and communicating them to the 'student public' (Jenkinson 1980, 323).

Such an emphasis on inscription and preservation was to be echoed by Michel Foucault some years later in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in rather more convoluted language: 'The archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escapee; it is that which at the very root of the statement event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of *enunciability*'. Foucault

insisted that the archive does not ‘unify everything that has been said in the great confused murmur of a discourse’, but ‘differentiates discourses in their multiple existence’ (Foucault 1989, 146). Derrida, writing forty years after Jenkinson, shared much the same perspective, albeit with at times a radically different gloss: ‘there is no archive without consignment in an *external place* which assumes the possibility of memorialisation, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpresion’ (Derrida 1998, 11). At much the same time Brown and Davis-Brown argued that inscription was fundamental to the concept of the archive and the library: ‘Only with the advent of writing, and hence the textual embodiment of a shared memory exterior to particular minds and performances, can archives and libraries be thought of as specific spaces for storing important documents’ (Brown and Davis-Brown 1998, 18). Eric Ketelaar commented:

Archives are memory because they are evidence. They are not only evidence of a transaction, but also evidence of some historic fact that is either part of the transaction itself, or that may be traced via the transaction, or that which is otherwise embodied in the record, or in the context of the archiving process (Ketelaar 2006, 188).

The evidential fiduciary function of the ‘archive’ is fundamental to compliance with international regulation and rule of law or more sinisterly, as in Travis Holland’s novel *The Archivist’s Story*, to support the actions of a totalitarian regime (Holland 2007). Holland’s archivist, Pavel Duborov, was charged with cataloguing the confiscated papers of Russian poets, playwrights and authors during the Stalinist purges and then destroying them after their creators have been killed. Gordano, which claims to be ‘the leading email, calendaring and collaboration messaging suite’, advises its customers that ‘email archiving has particular application for organisations that need to comply with regulatory obligations such as Sarbanes-Oxley’ (Gordano 2007). In both these examples the archive is transient, destroyed when its purpose is fulfilled, whereas in most definitions it enjoys a permanence with ‘potentialities’ that ‘awaits a constituency or public whose limits are of necessity unknown’ (Osborne 1999, 55).

The evidential view of the archive has been criticized in the intervening half centuries by those, including Ketelaar, who consider it to be rooted in a positivist and constructivist approach to the past which they deftly seek to replace in a digital environment with a postmodern perspective that take ideas from both Foucault and Derrida. In a remarkable flight of rhetorical fancy, Hofman considers ‘the archives can be seen as a node in a web of relationships with respect to records, clustering records into larger meaningful whole and embodying them on the one hand, and as a building block in collective memory on the other’ (Hofman 2005, 154). Galin and Latchaw argue that the concept of the archive has been destabilized by ‘the emergence of large-scale, widely accessible digital databases of print documents’, and are drawn to Foucault’s metaphor of *heterotopia* to describe certain digital archived spaces because of the fruitful ways it ‘reflects and subverts current economic and cultural assumptions about academic publishing’ (Galin and Latchaw 2001). This chimes with notions that ‘as the backdrop to all scholarly research stands the archive’ or a body knowledge, which in itself is open to positivist accusations (Velody 1998, 1). There is long pedigree to such a definition to be found in titles of many journals that

begin with '*Archif*' or '*Archiv*' or 'Archive' that date back to the nineteenth century. Ketlaar considers: 'A digital document is not a thing in and of itself. ... [It is] no more than an interpretive moment in a never-ending conversation with the texts' (Ketlaar 2006, 190). Terry Cook interprets this 'new paradigm' as

... a shift away from viewing records as static objects and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts: a shift away from looking at records as the passive products of human or administrative activity towards considering records as active agents themselves in the formation of human and organisational memory; a shift equally away from seeing the context of records creation resting within stable hierarchical organizations to situating records within fluid horizontal networks of work-flow functionality (Cook 2001, 4).

The sociologist Mike Featherstone goes further, with 'a powerful counter-image of the archive: the archive as the repository of material which has only been loosely classified, material whose status is as yet indeterminate and stands between rubbish, junk and significance: material that has not yet been read and researched' – Foucault's great confused murmur of discourse (Featherstone 2006, 594).

In this utopian narrative, an archive is less like the *archivium*, or house, [Derrida's external place] and more like a city that continually expands and grows, that contains numerous pathways. In this dream, new technologies play a central role as the means by which all documents might be put on-line, linked by a vast hypertextual network (Sawchuk and Johnson 2001).

From such vantage points the archive becomes a global contingent collection of unstable 'texts' with questionable 'evidential' value that can be deployed in competing narratives – a 'repository of meanings' (Bradley 1999, 118). The 'text' itself within this digital archive not only becomes fluid, but ceases to be bounded by the written or even spoken word. As a consequence 'the adequacy, propriety, truthfulness of the materials, entities and objects that constitute an archive cannot be judged by their appearance in the archive as such. Only those who work in and around the archive can undertake such claims' (Velody 1998, 12). In some senses this is true of the Internet Archive that acts as a vast safe depository of digital objects – 'We will archive the site you have submitted and you will be able to view it in the wayback machine within 6 months' (Internet Archive). This led Taylor from this perspective to enquire, 'Do we possess the archive or does it possess us?' (Taylor 2002, 246). All users of archives, such as Fergus Roland in A.S. Byatt's novel *Possession*, have experienced such a transition, and even archivists can in a sense become the archive, scrupulously in the words of Sebastian Faulks lunatic archivist trying 'not merely to transcribe, but to redeem' (Byatt 1990, Faulks 2006, 185).

Such a redefinition of an archive represents a return to the cabinet of curiosities or *wunderkammer* of the Enlightenment, before information was differentiated by curatorial practices. In Susan Sontag's novel *Volcano Lover*, largely about Sir William Hamilton's life in Naples, the rocks that he collected patiently and with much physical effort and at times danger from Mount Vesuvius formed an archive, a subset of his extensive cabinet of curiosities of paintings, objects from antiquity, and so on (Sontag 1992). In her description of a visit by the poet Goethe and the artist

Tischbein to Hamilton's collection, their immediate reaction was 'there seemed no method or organization in it'. In a privileged visit to the cellar storerooms, she reported Goethe's amazement at finding an 'entire small chapel', 'two ornate bronze candelabra which he knew had to have come from the excavations at Pompeii. And many objects of no distinction whatsoever' (Sontag 1992, 143). In the *wunderkammer*, just as in the digital environment, the 'text' seems to cease to be bounded by the written or spoken word. It can be pretty much anything, as Jim Blackaby and Beth Sandore observed from their separate perspectives of the US Memorial Holocaust Museum and the Oregon Historical Society: 'Ever wish you could put your fingers on all of the information about a specific topic in a museum, regardless of whether it was drawn from the objects collection, exhibit catalogues, the library's holdings, or the prints and slides collection?' (Blackaby and Sandores 1997). Although such a statement confuses the mechanisms for resource discovery with the location and curation of objects, it draws attention to the fragility of boundaries when objects are reduced to strings of bit stream.

Buckland has observed:

One can enumerate different types of digital documents and this is necessary because of the need to specify standards in order to achieve efficiency and interoperability. But if one seeks completeness, the process becomes arbitrary and intellectually unsatisfying because it is not clear where the frontiers between documents and non-documents should be (Buckland 1997a; 1998, 1).

In his thought-provoking article 'What is a "digital document"?' and another paper he drew attention to the documentation school of the early twentieth century that had its origins in the library profession, some of whose members argued that three-dimensional objects could be documents, if, as Otlet opined, 'you are informed by observation of them' (Buckland 1997a; 1998, 3, quoting Otlet 1934). For Briet a document was 'evidence in support of a fact' in 'any physical or symbolic sign, preserved or recorded intended to represent, to reconstruct or to demonstrate a physical or conceptual phenomenon' (Buckland 1997a; 1998, 3, quoting Briet 1951, 7). This is a definition that would have contented Sir William Hamilton: the specimens of rock he patiently collected and recorded would be considered documents, while those he left on Vesuvius would not – 'there was moral in these stones, these shards, these dimmed objects of marble and silver and glass: models of perfection and harmony' (Sontag 1992, 26). Although Briet failed to be explicit about when an object could be considered to be a document, Buckland identified four criteria:

1. There is materiality: Only physical objects can be documents,
2. There is intentionality: It is intended that the object be treated as evidence;
3. The objects have to be processed: They have to be made into documents; and, we think,
4. There is a phenomenological position: The object is perceived to be a document (Buckland 1997a; 1998, 4).

This implies 'binding', either internal or external and possibly of different strengths, that allows objects to be recognized as documents and by implication the privileging

of content either implicitly or explicitly – the stones left behind on Vesuvius or the documents we intentionally destroy. As Buckland pointed out, later thinkers glossed such a materialistic categorization with a more metaphysical definition. For Barthes the external bindings were stripped away as the objects became ‘vehicles of meaning’ in themselves; in other words the content became the context (Buckland 1997a; 1998, quoting Barthes 1998, 5). The documentalist perspective speaks to the digital environment and provides helpful guidance in defining what might constitute an ‘archive’ that is more aligned with our contemporary usage than a definition that restricts contents to the written word.

If we accept (and some do not, as we shall see) that all documents are records of something then it follows that they all have different degrees of bindings to support their authenticity and veracity. A treaty between nations will be bound by a complex and iterative process of drafting and redrafting and by signatures of heads of state and their witnesses and the application of seals. The Scottish Declaration of Arbroath of April 1320 declares its authenticity with a mass of appended seals. The process of binding evidence for use in legal proceedings is intricate, involving careful cross-referencing and an abstraction that may distort the original, which in itself raises interesting questions about authenticity and veracity. As Syme has shown brilliantly in his painstaking analysis of the evidence compiled by Edward Coke to secure the convictions of those charged in the rebellion by Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, in 1601, ‘although the original examination is not literally erased, the words and symbols added to the document modify the prior inscriptions, altering their meaning as well as their physical form’ (Syme 2007). Such sophisticated procedures are not required or even desirable for letters between friends, but in the analogue world there are processes of binding associated even with these records, such as headings (address, date and so on), salutations and valedictions, and externally covers with address, sometimes closed with seals and franked postmarks from which the content can easily become detached if the envelope and content are separated. Sir William Hamilton’s specimens were in all probability numbered (internal) and registered in a catalogue (external), as was the case with much administrative paper until very recently. Such binding on what could be assumed to be trivial records still supports authenticity and veracity, crucially so in bookkeeping systems that depend on the ability to trace and verify the evidence for every single transaction however small. The foundation of all bookkeeping systems are invoices and receipts for payments for goods or services. These are known as vouchers precisely because they ‘vouchsafe’ the probity of the transaction recorded. These are often recorded on nothing much more than scraps of papers, but they embody a well-understood process with a description of what the transaction involved and the names of the parties. Although forgery and deception are always possible, only in unusual circumstances such as the century after the Norman Conquest in England may they be the ‘rule rather than the exception’ (Clanchy 1979, 248). Nevertheless for a forgery to be successful, it must mimic the bindings or processes that endow authenticity. As the diplomatist Duranti explains, establishing the veracity of a document is a reactive not a proactive process:

In both cases, affixing personal seals to the records and preserving them in a secure place would not alone have been sufficient to ensure that the actions and obligations to which the records relate would have been considered valid in the future. Such measures would have guaranteed to posterity the authenticity of the records, but not their reliability (Duranti 1995, 6).

The painter James McNeill Whistler wrote to his mother on 26/27 September 1876:

I come to wish you many happy returns my darling Mother and to assure you of my fond affection and my great wish to be with you this day! Really I have continually promised myself a rest with you at the sea side dearest Mother for I did so enjoy the wee little visit of the while ago but I have not managed it yet! Never quite able to get off Matters at home are [p. 2] getting better I have managed to pay off many of my debts and am making careful economies so that soon, with my new works I hope to be in comparitively in smooth water ... (Whistler, 2004, 06564).

This perfectly authentic letter is a deceit, for on the very day of his mother's birthday Whistler held a grand dinner party at his home for which the menu survives in his own hand (Whistler 2004, 06854). In the digital environment much of the necessary binding for documents such as these is held externally in the shape of metadata that is often not completed at the time of creation or becomes detached.

Much of the contemporary debate about the ontological status of the 'archive' by archivists fails adequately to explore the criteria and binding attributes that objects must satisfy for inclusion that are assumed in every iteration, even when the archive is taken to be the whole content of the Internet. If they do, it is from a narrow archival perspective that accuses others of appropriating the archivist's vocabulary, which, as we have seen, has been going on for a very long time. The documentalist position may appear to be analogous to that of Hartland, McKemmish and Upward in a chapter on documents in the book *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* – 'Unless we allow ourselves to become fixated upon paper as the physical storage media for a document, the web of documents in which we live can be seen to encompass many different documentary relationships, both serendipitous and constructed' (in McKemmish et al. 2005, 76). In their subsequent discussion, however, they adopt nine analytical perspectives for documents: form, format, medium, context, authority, content, purpose, technologies and accessibility. By confusing ontological status with taxonomy, as many in the information professions do, they inhibit rather than help our understanding. Form, format, medium and technologies are attributes that assist in classification (taxonomy that some information professionals choose to call ontology), whereas context, authority and purpose are ontological characteristics in the philosophical meaning of the term that help us to decide if an object conforms to the criteria set for the phenomenological properties of a document (ibid. 81). Even when Hartland et al. do consider ontological characteristics, they retreat into taxonomy. Purpose is defined not, as might be expected, as it relates to intention, but described in two analytical examples as 'aide-memoire, evidence of social status, and memorialisation of a family occasion'. This confusion that Buckland addressed directly is obvious in their declaration that: 'We can't exploit or value a document if we don't know what it is and identification of genre, a sub-genre and a form are a

starting point' (ibid. 86). Much of the thrust of their argument is to draw a distinction between a document and a record of a transaction. In a subsequent chapter on records, Reed contests that:

Records are different from other information resources because of this transactional aspect, which makes it important to identify the characteristics that must be present to ensure that records are reliable and authentic. The transactional aspect also makes it necessary to develop techniques for ensuring that records are created and managed in ways that assist in maintaining these characteristics (Reed 2005, 102).

This leads Hartland et al. to the surprising conclusion that storing authoritative transactional records so that they can be accessed are (*sic*) 'the essence of recordkeeping processes, storing them for as long as required is the essence of archiving processes' (ibid. 89). This looks like nothing more than special pleading for 'professional' intervention, predicated on a taxonomical muddle that does not get us as near understanding what an archive might be as the documentalist school.

Brothman, an archivist, in a perceptive essay, suggests the growing interest by archivists in the relationship between records and evidence over the last fifteen years 'exemplifies a complex politics of temporality ... Underlying these efforts to fix these two concepts' semantic value and relationship are manoeuvres to bolster professional identity and to establish the nature of our social commitment' (Brothman 2002, 312). He challenges the archival profession to make its epistemological mind up: 'It remains moot, therefore, whether archivists are in the business of taking measures to preserve records as vessels reliably carrying intended *meaning* or in the business of evoking and then proficiently capturing *incontestable organizational truthfulness* of fact as expressed by injecting "recordness" in "information" systems' (ibid. 326). As I have argued elsewhere, the latter endangers the fiduciary function of the archive (Moss 2005a). Brothman warns: 'Once questions of evidence predominate as primary preoccupations of the archival profession, issues of truth, truthfulness, and proof come to displace concerns about meaning, understanding and interpretation. And so archivists have been crossing several lines, without adequately recognizing that they have done so' (Brothman 2002, 330). Taken together with the outputs of our contemporary audit culture in which, as Strathern puts it, the 'ought' becomes 'is' (Strathern 2000), the danger is that the archive becomes, as Brothman cautions, what the archivist wants it to be (Brothman 2002, 331). This is Derrida's vision of the *archon* (the archivist) – 'The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only assume the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrata. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence' (Derrida 1998, 2). This is a long way from Jenkinson's timeless *Recordari* – to remember that equates with much modern usage of the term 'archive' where the actions of the recorder (archivists) are both participatory and passive. It would be inconceivable that an archive of scientific data could have an archivist with 'hermeneutic right' as well as 'competence'. I will return to this conundrum.

Archivists' attempts to intervene in the process of creating records are a defensive reaction to the collapse of the curatorial boundaries implicit in the digital environment where traditional library objects elide with what were conventionally

thought to be unique documents. When we view a document online, whether it be an image, a text or piece of music, we are looking at an object held uniquely on a server by a provider. The provider may have back-up copies for practical or security purposes, but access is very different from the analogue manuscript and print culture. Before the invention of moveable type users had to travel often long distances to view an 'original' manuscript, or copies had to be laboriously transcribed. With the invention of moveable type many copies could be printed and distributed widely (Burke 2000; Headrick 2000). In the digital environment many users view unique objects, original manuscripts if you like, from anywhere in the world providing they have the connectivity. We can view digital surrogates of Domesday Book held at The National Archives at Kew, or, as I write, images taken on mobile devices of the Saffron Revolution in Burma on blogs from a country where news reporting is severely circumscribed, or broadcasts using similar technology by the most wanted man in the world, Osama bin Laden. Although analogous to an analogue documentary world, digital distribution has the significant differences in its potential to generate multiple copies of documents that, rather than having to be selected for preservation, have to be selected for destruction and, in the way that it privileges content, to generate collections that we might in the analogue call archives. This does not, however, negate the Briet/Buckland criteria for a document apart from its materiality, but as Allison, Currall, Stuart and I have argued the bit stream does have reference (Allison et al. 2005).

If the archive in our digital environment has in effect become a *wunderkammer* of unique objects that can be viewed simultaneously and many times in every part of the world, how does this plurality chime with the analogue equivalent? The content of most paper-based archives is heterogeneous, with perhaps the exception of large homogeneous datasets with strict rules for accession, for example a census – and even here there can be room for doubt (Higgs 1989). In such cases, they rarely constitute the whole archive but form part of a larger whole. They certainly contain plenty of documents that can only be loosely described as transactional records and they contain documents in many formats reflecting available technologies, as Jenkinson implied in 1955. They perform many functions, as Hofman describes in a chapter on archives ranging from the archives of a nation to that of a family or an individual (Hofman, 2005). Their content reflects long chains of intention to preserve evidence, concluding with final selection or appraisal by the archivist that admits them to the archive. From this viewpoint the 'archive' is just another collection, an arbitrary metaphor for a collection of collections sharing common criteria for a document and specific purposes, defined in the analogue by a curatorial imperative that no longer applies in a digital environment. Lagoze and Fielding consider as 'a collection as logically defined in a set of criteria for the selection of resources from the broadest information space' (1998, sec. 3). These may be value-laden, as Derrida would claim or, as Latour is careful to point out in his discussion of collections as 'centres of accumulation', neutral (Latour 1990). They do not have to be one or the other.

The concepts that underpin collections have been explored by Currall, Stuart and myself in two papers (Currall et al. 2004; 2006). In these we argue, drawing on the ideas of Lee and Miksa, that there are, at least two perspectives of what a collection might be (Lee 2000; Miksa 1998). The developer perspective sees the collection in

terms of selection and control, whilst the user perspective sees the collection in terms of resource discovery and access. 'In private collecting, these two perspectives are embodied in the one individual, the collector, but where collections are developed and maintained by one party for the benefit of others the role of collector and user may become widely divergent' (Currall et al. 2006, 102). A good example might be the decision of the National Library of Australia only to archive blogs 'when they support the high priority category of academic publications' (Phillips 2003). Another might be the way in which information professions 'allocate individual objects and the collections to which they belong to hierarchies with explicit taxonomies' (Currall et al. 2004, 141). We concluded that from the developer or provider perspective there is a 'pressing need to create taxonomies and associated rules and standards to allocate names to objects for the simple reason that "privileging of the better and, by default, the non-privileging of the rest, remains a significant needed service"' (ibid. 144; Buckland 1997b, supplement to Chapter 6, 6). Mbembe makes much the same point: 'Archives are the product of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public space, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations' (2002, 20).

If the term 'archive' is collapsed into 'collections', as would seem to be the case in our contemporary usage, and we agree that complaints by archivists about appropriation will fall largely on deaf ears, the question remains if there is anything about archival collections as a genre within a wider taxonomy that is distinctive. Jenkinson by 1955 was working to a very plural concept of the archive that functions to link memory to the record and to the conduct of affairs in the widest sense, which must subsume as a particular genre the fiduciary juridical function of some archives such as the Public Record Office. The fiduciary juridical function is in some respects about registration and reference that is an attribute common to many collections that lack any particular legal protection. Even what appear to be the most haphazard collections, such as that of Sir William Hamilton or Sir Walter Scott's antiquary Johnathan Oldbuck or the Internet Archive, are not simply contingent (Scott 1816). They embody an intention and logic, albeit temporal and culturally specific. There are many examples of collections that possess a quasi-juridical function that are curated in such a way to hold and manage contents fiduciarily in the discharge of their responsibilities. An herbarium contains specimens of plant life that can be used to identify other specimens. A dictionary, which is a form of collection, contains lists of words and their meanings that can be used to corroborate definitions. Picture galleries and museums not only serve to educate and entertain, but also as reference for other objects. The majority of archives serve as registers and works of reference, whether explicitly juridical or not. Jenkinson himself observed this when he defined archives in 1947 as 'Documents accumulated by a natural process in the course of the Conduct of Affairs of any kind, Public or Private, at any date: and preserved thereafter for reference, in their own Custody, by the persons responsible for the Affairs in question or their successors' (Jenkinson 1980, 237). As O'Neill and Strathern argue, fiduciary action requires more than the observation of auditable criteria – procedures that conform to rules and regulations – it demands responsible behaviour if trust is to be maintained (O'Neill 2002, Strathern 2000). Such collections must not just be

securely held, all the surrounding processes must be above reproach so the content can possess a canonical authority. This is a long way from the postmodern position that so problematizes any body of knowledge that truth becomes unknowable.

In these circumstance what might distinguish an archival definition of the archive apart from other collections is not that it holds transactional records, but the fiduciary protection it affords both depositors and users. For depositors it provides back office support to front office actions, providing the records are maintained in such a way that their content can be subsequently validated. The transmission of documents or records to secure storage where access is supervised protects the authors from future misrepresentation as well as allowing them to be held to account. As both Brothman and I have suggested, for the archivist to become involved in the process of creation jeopardises the fiduciary function of the archives (Brothman 2002, 326; Moss 2005b; Moss 2006) and dangerously confuses the front and the back office. It is for the executive to control the process of creation and selection within the framework of risk that will involve back office consultations, but not control. If this is so, archivists have a case for differentiating some archival collections from other collections in substance as well as degree. The curators of herbariums, the editors of dictionaries and the curators of galleries and museums are implicitly involved in collection development as in some of their activities they are archivists. However, when their function is defined as a public archive (*cimiliarchio publico*), their duty, at least in Western democratic cultures, is to preserve records for the benefit of the whole community, which has rights of access, and users can have confidence that when they consult archives they are what they purport to be, at least what they purported to be when they were selected for permanent preservation (Clanchy 1979, 163). In this regard archivists occupy a critical juridical role in establishing or, as Jenkinson put it, record the truth that must be protected by the rule of law. In Evans's words, they record that 'it really happened, and we really can, if we are very scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out how it happened and reach some tenable though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant' (Evans 1997, 253). Jenkinson, in a lecture at University College London, was emphatic about the duty of the archivist: 'His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the Conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his charge; his Aim to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge (Jenkinson 1980, 258). Without such a creed the archivist is powerless to defend the archive when governments seeks to pervert it, as in Stalinist Russia, or deliberately do not tell the truth, as would seem to be the case in the conduct of the war in Iraq by the US (Chandrasekaran 2006). The neo-conservatives have cynically manipulated postmodern thinking to assert 'truth is not salutary, but dangerous, and even destructive to society – any society', and we could substitute 'archive' for 'truth' (Drury 1997, 1). In other words, if truth is unknowable, there is no need to tell the truth. This is made all the more easy in a digital environment where context is often absent and the processes involved in creating documents in the analogue built up over centuries have been abandoned, making it difficult to assert with any confidence that an object was intended to be treated as evidence (Moss 2005b). As I have argued, the public archive protected by the rule of law must always have the potential to be subversive, to collect the soldier

blogs that provide a different perspective on events in Iraq, or even to preserve records in defiance of executive instruction (Moss 2005a; Moss 2006).

Acceptance that the public archive has a duty to capture and care for documents that tell the 'truth' does not in itself resolve a relativist critique of the archive, nor Cook's view that 'there has been a collective shift from a juridical-administrative justification for archives grounded in the concepts of the state, to a socio-cultural justification for archives grounded in wider public policy and public use' that reflects widespread hostility to Federal government in the US, allied to a long-established historical manuscripts tradition (Cook 1997). The tension between the individual life experience and the whole is a necessary characteristic of the archive, exemplified by the popularity of family history that I have explored (Moss 2007). Justice Albie Sachs of South Africa, in an interview with Henry Kreisler of the Institute of International Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, explored poignantly the interplay between the individual intensely subjective experiences and the those of the group. Sachs responded to a question about his recovery from the bomb attack that left him blind in one eye and with only one arm:

You still have those moments of unconsciousness fading in and out. Communicating with them, hearing a voice. Telling oneself a joke that, as it happened, revived me from fainting again. And that slow, long recovery that's very personal. But then also the knowledge that I'm part of a community, a group, that what got me there wasn't just a purely personal idiosyncratic thing. That I'm in history. There are thousands of others out there crying for me, laughing for me, cheering me on. I'm doing it for them. It's about something. It's about the world out there. It's not about becoming famous or becoming rich or being powerful or enjoying sex. It's about who you are in the world. And that was very, very sustaining (Kreisler 1998).

In Sachs's perception the two narratives are complementary; the one does not in any sense negate the other. Himmelfarb argued that, although historians are prepared to admit a 'relativistic' relativism in the interpretation of sources, few are willing so to problematize them that 'truth' becomes unknowable:

Where modernism tolerates the obstacles in the way of objectivity as a challenge and make strenuous effort to attain as much objectivity and unbiased truth as possible, postmodernism takes the rejection of absolute truth as a deliverance from all truth and from the obligation to maintain any degree of objectivity (Himmelfarb 1999, 74 and 82).

Ironically she has Republican sympathies and yet this encapsulates for me the approach historians should adopt to the 'archive' of the war in Iraq. I want the truth to be knowable. Far from 'meta-narratives' precluding 'other' narratives, this approach demands their exploration and the archive to sustain them. This is what the philosopher Ricoeur termed the 'historian's spontaneous "realism"', based on the continuum 'of activities of preserving, selecting, assembling, consulting, and finally, reading documents and archives, which mediate and, so to speak, schematize the trace, making it the ultimate presumption of the reinscription of lived time (time with the present)'. This is where, as Duranti argues, verification takes place. For Ricoeur it was the hermeneutic 'use of documents and archives that makes the trace an

actual operator of historical time' that enabled 're-enactment', the exploration of the 'pastness of the past', which he describes as 'the telos of the historical imagination, what it intends, and its crowning achievement' (Ricoeur 1985, vol. 3, 183–4). The complex interrelationship of reading text in the present and imagining the past as it actually happened, '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*' as Ranke put it, reaches fulfilment for Ricoeur in the refigured past (Ricoeur 1985, 185, quoting Ranke 1824).

Such complementarity is much more intellectually satisfying than the binary opposition of much postmodern deconstruction. As Ricoeur expresses it, 'The conflict between explanation that connects things together and the horror that isolates ...' (Ricoeur 1985, 188). Although Cook defends postmodern deconstruction against the charge of 'endless relativist critiques', Ricoeur's approach fits better his enthusiasm for its consequences for the 'archive' – it is 'about constructing, about seeing anew and imagining what is possible when the platitudes and ideologies are removed' (Cook 2000, 22). From an archival perspective reinscription is self-evidently a user activity, external to the 'archive' if it is to discharge its fiduciary curatorial responsibilities, but re-enactment and participation in the process of refiguration are not. I am convinced Jenkinson was careful to draw a distinction between the archivist and historian, and is what Eastwood is getting at when he reaffirmed Jenkinson's definition of the archivist as 'a keeper and protector of the integrity of evidence and a mediator of the many interests vested in the positive act of its continuing preservation' (Jenkinson 1980, 258; Eastwood 1993, 237). MacNeil is emphatic:

Archival custodianship has always been linked inextricably to the protection and safeguarding of evidence. Physical ownership of the records is merely the means by which, historically, archivists have assured that protection. The advent of information technologies does not change the substance of our custodial responsibility; it simply changes the means by which we exercise it (MacNeil 2007).

Of course, archivists possess fictive imaginations with which they explore the 'pastness of the past' when they appraise, catalogue and describe their collections in the present. It would be strange if it were otherwise; it is what after all enables subversion, such as Holland's archivist, Pavel Dubrov's removal of one of Isaac Babel's unpublished stories and hiding it in his basement store:

Back among the shelves, Pavel wonders: How long would it take to destroy all of this? Every file, every folder, down to the last story, the last poem. He lays a hand against one of the boxes, feels the manuscript in it shift when he pushes against the cardboard, as if someone living lay inside asleep, dreaming. He moves on to another box, then another, letting his hand rest a moment on each of them. *The magnificent grave of the human heart* (Holland 2007, 50).

Such transcendence echoes the re-enactment of Jules Michelet: when wandering 'in those solitary galleries' of the archives, there came to him 'the whispers of the souls who had suffered so long ago and who were smothered now in the past' (Michelet 1974, 11–27, quoted in Steedman 1998, 69). Such re-enactment can be observed amongst those who encounter the 'archive' – a photograph of a grandfather murdered by the Nazis, of whom no other picture survives, in the newly-opened Holocaust

archives, or more prosaically the excitement of unravelling from documents the jigsaw pieces of a narrative – the ‘enduring passions that researchers develop with the contents of buff folders’ (Hamilton et al. 2002, 16). This is perhaps what Derrida had in mind when he described the archive as ‘a responsibility for tomorrow’ whose meaning will only be known ‘in times to come’ (Derrida 1998, 36).

We are now nearer an understanding of why the particular archival definition of an ‘archive’ might be worth defending against its contemporary plural usage that has become synonymous with a collection, a body of knowledge or a bunch of stuff. Pursuing Ricoeur’s line of thinking, curators of other collections, as we have seen, are engaged in the process of reinscription. It is what makes their collections what they are and differentiates them from the archivist’s definition of an ‘archive’, which, as I have argued, is as more about the function and activity of preserving the ‘Documents in the Case’, than the ontological status of the ‘documents’ themselves that is shared with other collections. There is then no contradiction between the static and dynamic perceptions of the document. They complement one another in a perpetual hermeneutic spiral. An archive in this sense can be and often is a *wunderkammer*, but it is emphatically not a *wunderkammer* ‘of material which has only been loosely classified, material whose status is as yet indeterminate and stands between rubbish, junk and significance: material that has not yet been read and researched’ (Featherstone 2006, 594). It is a place of ‘dreams’, of re-enactment for both the user and the archivist (curator), who together always are engaged either passively or actively in the process of refiguration that is never ending.

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