

# Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms

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**Abstract** This essay argues that archival paradigms over the past 150 years have gone through four phases: from juridical legacy to cultural memory to societal engagement to community archiving. The archivist has been transformed, accordingly, from passive curator to active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator. The focus of archival thinking has moved from evidence to memory to identity and community, as the broader intellectual currents have changed from pre-modern to modern to postmodern to contemporary. Community archiving and digital realities offer possibilities for healing these disruptive and sometimes conflicting discourses within our profession.

**Keywords** Archival theory · Paradigm shifts · Evidence · Memory · Professional identity · Community archiving

In today's globalised, multicultural society, it remains a critical task in both academic research and public discourse to question historical and cultural myths and re-evaluate traditional paradigms....The deconstructionist and interdisciplinary enthusiasm of the last decades has challenged the founding epistemological myths as well as the methodologies of traditional academic disciplines. But does this paradigm shift run the risk of creating a new academic orthodoxy?... Will myth-breaking emerge as a destructive or founding gesture?

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This published call for papers is for an international conference on “Myth-Making and Myth-Breaking in History and the Humanities.”<sup>1</sup> It applies equally to archives and archivists, and the central nostrums of our own professional orthodoxies, and how these define our identity and our role in society. Such rethinking, as advocated in the above epigram, was anticipated, in fact, by an international conference of archivists, historians, artists, philosophers, literary critics, museum curators, and others, hosted by the University of Dundee in December 2010. Sponsored by the Centre for Archive and Information Studies, the Dundee conference had as its theme, “Memory, Identity, and the Archival Paradigm.” And no few speakers demonstrated that terms like memory, identity, and archive are now seen both as problematic and, as used in much archival literature, as ill-defined, not only when taken in isolation, but also and especially when considered together and used in combination, let alone in shaping an all-embracing archival paradigm.<sup>2</sup>

Many historians, to take but one example, are asserting that identity in the past is shaped by common or shared or collective memory animating invented traditions, and that such identities, once formed or embraced, are not fixed, but very fluid, contingent on time, space, and circumstances, ever being re-invented to suit the present, continually being re-imagined.<sup>3</sup> As influences of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation make their varying impacts felt, related groups in society shape their identities anew, seeking in the memory of past triumphs or abuses, traumas or achievements, very powerful ammunition to justify and strengthen their identity formulation, and re-formulation, to serve the needs of the present. It is this *process* of memory-making and identity formation that has attracted the attention of many scholars in the past decade, more so than the final *product* of memory or identity: the statue, the historic site, the archival document.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cited from an online call for papers for the forthcoming (at the time of writing) “Myth-Making and Myth-Breaking in History and the Humanities: An International Conference, University of Bucharest, 7–8 October 2011,” accessed 8 May 2011, at <http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=183204>.

<sup>2</sup> I want to acknowledge Pat Whatley and Caroline Brown of the Centre for Archive and Information Studies at the University of Dundee, and their able team of assistants, for conceptualizing this conference, and to thank them especially for many gracious kindnesses and much warm hospitality, amid then unexpected brutal winter conditions. This essay is a reworking of my opening keynote address given at the conference. My thinking on many of these issues owes much to three archival kindred spirits, Anne Lindsay, Tom Nesmith, and Verne Harris, and I acknowledge as well close readings and helpful comments from Rachel Jones and Eric Ketelaar, to all five of whom I am grateful and indebted for a much improved text. I am alone responsible, however, for all interpretations advanced and any errors committed. I am not responsible for my footnotes being cast in the APA “in text” format, which is imposed on authors by this publisher, contrary to archival scholarship standards in English elsewhere, and inimical to the narrative flow of my prose.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview analysis (and case studies) of the themes of this identity literature, see the editors’ “Introduction,” in Bradbury and Myers (2005). For an influential early work on traditions invented or reshaped to construct a usable past to serve the present, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

<sup>4</sup> The literature on “memory” is vast. As but one good example of an entire book devoted to just the secondary academic writing on the subject, see Misztal (2003). For an admirable analysis of thirteen of the more prominent titles and especially noteworthy in terms of their archival implications, see Craig (2002). In addition to works that I cite later in this essay by Michael Clanchy, Patrick Geary, Frances Yates, and Matt Matsuda, two excellent sources that have much influenced me in offering stimulating overviews of the fields of memory and identity are Hutton (1993), especially Ch 1, “Placing Memory in Contemporary Historiography”; and Gillis (1994), particularly his sweeping introduction, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship”; and Lowenthal magisterial and pioneering work (1985).

In this fundamental rethinking within the academy and in society, what roles do the archive, or archives, or archivists, play in such memory and identity processes? For some archivists, memory and identity are concepts not very relevant to archives, or to archival theory or practice, even though we speak often of “collective memory” made manifest through archives, of archives as “houses of memory,” and so on. Archives have traditionally been about acquiring, describing, and preserving documents as evidence, protecting their impartiality through the archivists’ self-conscious stance of neutrality and objectivity. Concepts like memory, identity, and community may well be outcomes of the use of archives by a growing range of researchers and citizens, but, so the traditional view holds, these outcomes do not—and should not—impinge on archival processes directly (see Piggott 2005).

Perhaps, however, we archivists need to be more self-conscious about the distinction, in *our* field, and in *our* work, between our many processes of archiving and our end product, the archive. Perhaps in such processes, we embed our own identity and our own collective memory and mythologies. Perhaps in defining and carrying out these processes, we have found our sense of community as like-minded professionals. The border between impartial archives, on the one hand, and researcher or societal interpretation of the archive, on the other, may well be a good deal more porous and interactive than often supposed. That ambiguity should be recognized, and embraced, as the desirable path for archives in the twenty-first century. As a result, archives as concept, as practice, as institution, and as profession may be transformed to flourish in our digital era, especially one where citizens have a new agency and a new voice, and where they leave through digital social media all kinds of new and potentially exciting, and potentially archival, traces of human life, of what it means to be human, to which trace we as archivists, historians, researchers of all kinds, have rarely had such sustained access before.<sup>5</sup>

Although I have used the word “paradigm” (with due apologies to Thomas Kuhn) in no less than three article titles over the years and again in the title to this essay to reflect the title theme of the Dundee conference itself, “paradigm” implies a formal (or at least recognized and acknowledged) system, or mental model, of attitudes, beliefs, and patterns about some phenomenon. And that makes me moderately uncomfortable for some of the sweeping, broad-brush assertions I am making here about four successive archival paradigms over the past century. Perhaps these “paradigms” are better styled as *frameworks* for thinking about archives, or archival *mindsets*, ways of imagining archives and archiving. I want to explore the shared memories that we have as archivists, our identity, our sense of community, as we increasingly interact with external communities in our contemporary society, both real physical communities in our neighbourhoods and cities, and online virtual communities with social media now reshaping our world, its governance, its communication and record-making patterns, and its identity-

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<sup>5</sup> On the intricate and fascinating influence of the nature of recording media on shaping the very tropes and possibilities of memory, see Williams (2009).

formation processes. How do we imagine ourselves? How have we imagined ourselves? What paradigm or framework should encompass and animate our ideas and work and mission as we now imagine together our archival future?

Such imagining of communities, especially within the context of identity, memory, and records, or the archive, invokes the name of Benedict Anderson, and his very influential book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Imagining in Anderson's sense is about creating a shared view of some phenomenon that its adherents can embrace as their own, whether as citizens of a nation, in Anderson's example, or of some smaller community, even members of a profession. Andersen says this of the nation as an imagined community, "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." He continues that "it is imagined as a *community*" because, despite inequalities and difference between internal regions, components, or individuals, all members feel an overarching "comradeship" of belonging. These imaginings are naturally historical in part, but also must have an "emotional legitimacy" in the present. Imagined communities were initially "the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they become 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations." (Anderson 1983, pp. 4, 6–7, original emphasis)

Along the same lines as Anderson, American historian and legal specialist, Norman Cantor, notes that there are traditionally two ways of addressing our shared imaginings in terms of the law. One is narrow and internal: it demands that one write simply about the law in the past, and how the law has changed from its origins to become what we have today, by studying the thoughts of great jurists. The result is an imagining that is "highly technical," with a "focus on the operations and techniques of the legal profession." The other approach, and the one Cantor favours, imagines the law "interactively with present-day concerns and within the contexts of past culture, society, and politics...." While he concedes that this might be dismissed pejoratively as "social constructivist or relativist"—dare I add "post-modernist"—Cantor sees the approach more positively as "sociological and cultural," suggesting that these imaginings are best seen as "historical sociology." (Cantor 1997, p. xv)

What then is the "historical sociology" of archives, and archivists, and how may we "imagine archives" in the same way as Cantor suggests? What deeper memories and shared identities might allow archivists to feel part of a community, whether they work in public- or private-sector archives; with photography, maps, or government records; in a large national or small local institution; alone, with other archivists, or in alliance with librarians, museum curators, or records managers, working as line archivists, archival managers, archival educators, archival writers? What have been, what are now, and what might be the inspirational bonds and intellectual possibilities that give meaning to our community? What makes us all archivists? Archivists are not archivists because they do the same things in different places (appraise, acquire, process, describe, preserve, make available), or because

they or others find what they do to be “valuable,” but because what they do has its own societal significance and impact, its own community of meaning, its own transcendence beyond the mundane to the ideal, the individual to the communal. And how in such commonality of community do we reconcile evident differences, often fundamental, about the core values of the archival endeavour? For community is also about displacing old myths as much as constructing new ones, about embracing a future as much as defending a past.

By exploring, as so many papers did at the Dundee conference, archival and media history; the social, cultural, and political factors that determine archival choices; the broader philosophical, psychological, aesthetic, and mythical concepts relevant to remembering and forgetting; and linking these to present-day concerns around technological determinism, media power, public accountability, Aboriginal consciousness, even spiritual ennui, we have the opportunity as a profession to precipitate that moment of “spontaneous distillation” that Benedict Anderson suggests can provide definition, emotional resonance, and deeper meaning for members of any “imagined community,” including the archival community. “Only by exploring and extending our professional reach to the limit of our integrity,” archival theorist Hugh Taylor has asserted, “...will we escape that backwater which, though apparently calm and comfortable, may also be stagnant with the signs of approaching irrelevance.” (Taylor 1993, p. 220) As Taylor urges, we need ever to seek to turn our complacent backwater into a dynamic community of social meaning relevant to our contemporary society, and *its* many internal communities, just as the archival community has, as this paper will show, its own internal communities of assumptions, ideas, and activities, wherein unity and diversity need to be reconciled.

More than professional unity and integrity are at stake; this process touches important ethical concerns for how archivists interact with their societies. Eric Ketelaar reminds us that archives are now becoming “spaces of memory-practice, where people can try to put their trauma in context by accessing the documents, not primarily seeking *the* truth or searching *the* history, but transforming their experiences into meaning.” (Ketelaar 2009, p. 120) Archives that are so embracing of memory and open to such meaning-making, Ketelaar tells us, “may constitute a healing ritual. Archives as a space of shared custody and trust.” Such a shared past, and public trust, “is not merely genealogical or traditional, something which you can take or leave,” a cultural sideshow or nostalgic trip to the past. Ketelaar continues: “It is more: a moral imperative for one’s belonging to a community. The common past, sustained through time into the present, is what gives continuity, cohesion and coherence to a community. To be a community... involves an embeddedness in its past and, consequently, in the memory texts through which the past is mediated.” (Ketelaar 2005, p. 54)<sup>6</sup>

And that vision brings me, by a long and circuitous introduction, back to the central competing dichotomy in mythologies of the archival profession, evidence versus memory, our guardianship role, in the Jenkinsonian sense, of the archival product, the evidence, on the one hand, *versus* our interpretive or mediating role, on

<sup>6</sup> On the archivist, ethics, and society, the most eloquent advocate has been Verne Harris; see the collection of his principal statements (Harris 2007) and his fine essay updating these ideas (Harris 2011a).

the other, as manifested in all of the many archival processes, the memory-making. This dichotomy between evidence and memory has fuelled controversies in recent years that have divided archivists over such fundamental functions as appraisal and description; over approaches to such seemingly contentious issues as electronic or digital records, documentation strategies, and reference and outreach activities; or, more basically, over the nature of archival education and thus the very characteristics of what makes an ideal archivist at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This evidence-memory dichotomy—a kind of fractured schizophrenia—precludes a holistic identity within the archival profession and therefore inhibits presenting a coherent and convincing message to our many actual and potential publics, or even to our sponsors. It blinds us equally to possible synergies between these apparent dichotomies and across their paradigms.

The central mantra of archives has traditionally focused on evidence. Here is the great English archival pioneer, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, describing the ideal 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... the good Archivist is perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces....” (Jenkinson 1947, pp. 258–259) Our central professional concepts of *respect des fonds*, original order, and provenance were designed precisely in order to preserve records as evidence of the functional-structural context and actions that caused their creation. Following these core principles and related procedures, archivists hope to reflect or, where necessary, recreate, as transparently as possible, among records transferred to the control of an archives, the order and character of the records as they were with their original (and subsequent) owners. Such transparency, it is alleged, allows records to serve as trustworthy evidence of the facts, actions, and ideas of which they bear witness, to which they are, in short, the evidence. Strict adherence to these principles would allegedly also eliminate, or reduce to a bare minimum, any interference by the archivist in the evidence-bearing characteristics of archives, thus safeguarding the documentary “Truth” of the modern world, as Jenkinson put it. Within this framework for the archival mission, the archivist is seen as neutral, objective, impartial, an honest broker between creator and researcher, working (again, quoting Jenkinson) “without prejudice or afterthought.”<sup>7</sup>

This focus of the archival pioneers also mirrored earlier concerns of writers on diplomatics, who devised rules of micro-level document analysis to detect forgeries masquerading as genuine records. But this emphasis on evidence does not rest solely on either the diplomatic roots or the pioneering texts of the archival profession. David Bearman entitled his collected essays, *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations*. This collection included analysis of the landmark University of Pittsburgh project, the world’s first to articulate the functional requirements necessary for evidence-based and authentic recordkeeping in a digital world. (Bearman 1994, 2006) The University of British

<sup>7</sup> On Jenkinson more broadly within the context of the evolution of modern archival theory, see Davies (1957), Cook (1997), and Eastwood (2003).

Columbia electronic records project (and the InterPARES projects following it) similarly had as its central goal the development of strategies for the preservation over time of “authentic” and “reliable” computer-generated records, these being the twin watchwords of high-quality evidence, of trustworthy “records” as contrasted to decontextualized information or transient data.<sup>8</sup> The Australian focus in the 1990s on transparent accountability throughout a continuum of good recordkeeping activities in order to safeguard evidence of transactions has a similar emphasis.<sup>9</sup> And the 1997 strategic plan for the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington bore the telling title, *Ready Access to Essential Evidence*.

But beyond evidence, archives also preserve memory. And they create memory. Legislation, official mission and mandate statements, annual reports, and speeches of senior archives officials continually refer to the archival role in preserving the “collective memory” of nations, peoples, institutions, movements, and individuals; or they refer to appraising, selecting, acquiring, and then preserving records of “significance,” or of “value,” or of “importance” which, put another way, means preserving those worth remembering, worth memorializing. From this perspective, then, archives are constructed memories about the past, about history, heritage, and culture, about personal roots and familial connections, and about who we are as human beings; as such, they offer glimpses into our common humanity. Yet memory is notoriously selective—in individuals, in societies, and, yes, in archives. With memory comes forgetting. With memory comes the inevitable privileging of certain records and records creators, certain functions, activities, and groups in society, and the marginalizing or silencing of others. Memory, and forgetting, can serve a whole range of practical, cultural, political, symbolic, emotional and ethical imperatives and is central to power, identity, and privilege.<sup>10</sup>

Ever since American archivist T. R. Schellenberg faced the appraisal issue squarely in the mid-twentieth century in response to an avalanche of over-documentation in all media, archivists have known that they must determine the tiny sliver of records that will be preserved in an archives, and then grant explicit authority to destroy (or benignly neglect) the rest. The resulting need for the archivist to research and understand the complex nature of the functions, structures, processes, and related contexts of creation and contemporary use of records, and to interpret their relative importance as the basis for modern archival appraisal (and for all subsequent archival functions), undermined the traditional notion of the

<sup>8</sup> For a summary statement, see Duranti and MacNeil (1996); for more detailed suggestions of how reliable and authentic records may be created and maintained, see Duranti et al. (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Of many possible references for continuum thinking, see the most recent summary by its originator (Upward 2005); and on the accountability emphasis, see McKemmish and Upward (1993). In fairness, in light of South African and Canadian critiques, among others, Australians have more recently broadened the more pluralistic possibilities of the continuum; a fine example of such expansive thinking is Reed (2005).

<sup>10</sup> In addition to a vast field of scholarship by others (alluded to in note 4 above) and many individual articles by archivists, see in support of these assertions the analyses by archivists in four recent key works: Cox and Wallace (2002), Procter et al. (2006), Jimerson (2009), and Harris (2007). More than anyone else, save Jacques Derrida who inspired him, Harris has injected this “power” perspective into the archival discourse; his most recent statement is Harris (2011b).



impartiality of the archivist as neutral guardian or objective keeper of evidence. More recently, archivists' growing involvement "up front" in computer system design, to ensure that the properties of reliable evidence will exist for the most important electronic records, represents a similar mediative role. Archivists inevitably will inject their own values, experiences, and education, and reflect those of various external pressures, into all such research and decision-making. They will also do so by their very choice, in eras of limited resources, of which creators, which systems, which functions, which programmes, which activities, which ideas and discourses, and indeed which related records, will get full, partial, or no archival attention in all archival processes, from system design requirements to appraisal and acquisition, from description in all manner of finding aids to preservation choices, from types of reference services provided to document selections for exhibitions, publications, and digitization for web postings.

Archivists have thus changed over the past century from being Jenkinson's passive keepers of an entire documentary residue left by creators to becoming active shapers of the archival heritage. They are, in Nancy Bartlett's phrasing, continual mediators between past, present, and future, between creators, records, and researchers. (Bartlett 2006)<sup>11</sup> Archivists, with colleagues in museums, galleries, libraries, and historic sites, are the leading architects in building society's enduring memory materials, all while attempting to preserve records as untainted evidence.

These archival emphases centred around the concept of "memory" are not merely the reflections of those growing numbers of archivists who have been exploring the implications of the postmodern revolution for their profession's mission in society. Nor is it, as some "pro-evidence" archivists like to imagine, another manifestation of the supposed archival aberration caused by the French Revolution, when state archives abandoned their allegedly original juridical calling and linked themselves with nationalism and national culture, Romanticism and its idealization of the past, and the nineteenth-century rise of history as an academic discipline, and as a cornerstone of national identity. In reality, archives long before 1789 were themselves hardly a legal-juridical enclave jealously guarding evidence. Recent scholarship shows that, in the ancient world, the medieval church and state, and in modern Europe, to say nothing of times of war and battles for personal reputation, archives were driven by the need to commemorate, to celebrate, to symbolize, to legitimize those in power, and to marginalize or efface or colonize their opponents, as much as they were by any need to preserve, without mediation or interference, transactional documents as unsullied evidence.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence and memory have evolved, then, in archival discourse in a kind of creative tension, each worthless without the other despite the contrary implications they seemingly have for the archival endeavour. Without reliable evidence set in

<sup>11</sup> On the mediating interpretive role of archivists and the complication of information technology in that process, see Hedstrom (2002).

<sup>12</sup> For a mere flavour, see on medieval archives and their purposes, (Geary 1994, pp. 86–87, 177, and especially Chapter 3: "Archival Memory and the Destruction of the Past," and Geary 2006; Clanchy 1993; and Sickinger 1999). On war, see Winter (1991), especially the section: "Falsifying the Record;" and on using the record (including its archiving processes) in the battle for military reputations, see Cook (2006).



rich context, memory becomes bogus, false, wishful thinking, or is transformed into imagination, fiction, ideology. Without the influence of and need for constructing memory/story, assigning value, determining priorities, evidence is useless, irrelevant, and unused, or buried in a vast sea of transient data. Without acknowledging the mediation and intervention of the archivist in the construction of memory based on documentary evidence, the claims for that evidence of impartiality and objectivity, of being a mirror of “Truth” to reveal the past as it really was, must ring hollow at best. How may memory and evidence be reconciled? How may we find an identity from these twin legacies moving forward?

One scholar of memory, Matt Matsuda, posits that memory itself was transformed in the nineteenth century to reflect modernity’s Hegelian awareness of progress or, conversely, decay, as process over time, especially when considered through the organic metaphors of Darwinian biology. “The intrusion of this hereditary and species memory into the traditional memories of rhetoric and language is a defining characteristic of the late nineteenth-century mnemonic universe, and the biological-evolutionary reading of life histories had ideological dimensions implicated in the degenerative and regenerative anxieties of the period. As memory becomes the inheritance of an organism,” Matsuda continues, “questions arise: which memory ‘inheritance,’ which characteristics—moral, racial, sexual—would define the most progressive of groups, peoples, or states?” Memory thus was “not a passive or reactive faculty of storage and retrieval,” as in the well-known examples of such ancient and medieval mnemonic devices as memory theatres and memory palaces—and in some neo-positivist archival thinking today—but rather memory is “that which *acted*,” something organic and alive, something as much present as past. (Matsuda 1996, pp. 8–9)<sup>13</sup>

There are rich implications here for archives, when one reflects that archivists developed their classic nineteenth-century theoretical foundations in the midst of that Hegelian-Darwinian excitement. Think how classic archival principles of provenance and *respect des fonds* are infused with Darwinian metaphors of *natural* accumulations of records, as well as with references to the *organic* character of archives, to records as the *lifeblood* of organizations, to records transferred to archives as a *residue* deposited, as it were, from the bureaucratic river at the delta of archives; think of Jenkinson referring to the “original stock” of record classes continuing to “throw out fresh branches,” while others “die out,” or comparing the archivist—when building the “backbone” of a “skeleton” for archival arrangement—to doing work similar to a palaeontologist. (Jenkinson 1937, pp. 28, 105–106)

From the vast universes of human records, perhaps those tiny fragments now preserved in archives may be characterized as the survival of the fittest? But if so, then as Matt Matsuda says, “questions arise.” Who determines what “fittest” means. With Jenkinsonian *laissez-faire*, and traditional appraisal strategies, the “fittest” would clearly be limited to survival of the memory of the most powerful in

<sup>13</sup> Matsuda builds on the classic pioneering work of memory scholarship by Pierre Nora, Jacques LeGoff, and David Lowenthal in the 1980s. On the fascinating range of mnemonic devices and the practices and changing perceptions associated with them in the Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance worlds, see Yates (1966), which may be considered the foundational text of modern memory studies.

society, of the official line, of the residue of juridical administration, as historians and others are showing now in many past contexts. Yet archivists know that society—even within the realm of government and institutional records themselves—consists of many other dimensions of human experience that should form part of our archival collective memories. In private life, non-governmental public spheres, and local communities, archivists know too that memories are selective, designed to shape identities, form narratives, tell stories, to reinforce identity in the present in ways that are essential for living life today as for understanding the past.

As Matsuda notes, such memory formation is necessarily problematical; it raises questions indeed. “The past is not a truth upon which to build,” he observes, something to be found, or retrieved or recalled from some mnemonic device or place (including archives), “but a truth sought, a re-memorizing over which to struggle.” This very struggle, this sense of contested memories, of differing constructions of the past, of continual mediation and shifting foci of what is fit to survive, is the foundation of identity formation, including the identity of archivists themselves. By definition, Matsuda asserts, such struggle concerns “active, creative, contested memories.” (Matsuda 1996, pp. 15, 206, *passim*) Such contingent perspectives are, of course, at the very centre of postmodernist thinking. By implication, they reject the positivist, scientific rationalism that underpins classic archival theory, and shows such theory to be problematical, to say the least, in its traditional articulation and application.

The modern conception of memory, therefore, is not something static, not something in the past, not a synonym for “history,” and certainly not fixed categories or compartments to aid in memorization or factual recall. Rather, modern memory is an organic dimension of living, an animating series of tools that humans use to make some sense of a rapidly accelerating world of the present day. From this perspective, the concepts and practices of evidence, testimony, witnessing, and records can no longer be seen as inanimate characteristics or neutral repositories of past acts and historical facts, which a fickle and varying memory subsequently exploits. Rather, evidence, testimony, and records are themselves social and political constructs, each subject to mediation, interpretation, bias, and power relationships. Evidence and memory are not opposites, therefore, but friendly cousins. Evidence itself, for example, has hardly been any more fixed over time than has memory. Testimony given as evidence by women, in nineteenth-century courts of law in some countries, was prohibited or discounted by social convention.<sup>14</sup> Oral traditions, the core evidence of events in Aboriginal societies, were only accepted as legal evidence in Canada as recently as 1998, in a landmark decision of the Supreme Court of Canada.<sup>15</sup> In medieval England, by contrast, oral testimony was initially paramount, and written documents were considered hearsay, or second-best, evidence. (Clanchy 1993, Ch. 8) In the second half of the twentieth century, first microfilmed records, then computer-generated records, were initially not accepted in court as evidence, or were given little weight as evidence, until years of legal

<sup>14</sup> The provocative work of Shapiro (1996) focuses on courts brushing aside female testimony—both oral and written evidence—that clashed with cultural norms, see especially Ch. 2; also Matsuda (1996), Ch. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010.

debate established the conditions necessary to consider such records as reliable (see Chasse 1984, 1985). Archivists themselves, from several perspectives and traditions, have recently also challenged the straightforward, legalistic, and traditional archival definitions of evidence based on strict provenance, where trustworthy records were only those arising from a demonstrable connection between an act, a document, and a creator (office or individual).<sup>16</sup> In short, “evidence” has been, and remains, one critical dimension of our assessment of the value of documents and of archives, but evidence itself has been contingent in time, place, technology, ideology, and power. There is a memory, then, of evidence itself.

Let us then look at that continuing memory-evidence tension within our profession, and consider briefly the four paradigms or frameworks about archiving that have formed our own interior memory, that have been part of our evolving identity since the archivists emerged as a profession in the Western World during the nineteenth century, when government archives became public institutions available to citizens of the modern nation state.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps in understanding the historical evolution of these tensions, we may arrive at a more holistic paradigm for the future.

I want to suggest that since the later nineteenth century, archival identity has shifted, or has been in the process of shifting, through four such paradigms or frameworks or mindsets, as it has struggled, and still struggles, with this memory-evidence tension.<sup>18</sup> I am calling the four frameworks: evidence, memory, identity, and community.<sup>19</sup> It is important to emphasize that these four accumulate across time; they do not entirely replace each other. Traces of what went before linger in successive mindsets, and sometimes form discursive tensions in our professional literature and in our practices. Let us now turn briefly to the characteristics of these four paradigms.

<sup>16</sup> See Brothman (2002) for an incisive critique, as well as Meehan (2006). This new complexity of provenance, and thus the proper grounding for contemporary evidence, has been called, by various archival writers, postcustodial or postmodern or functional; or as ambient or societal or virtual provenance; or described as a search for pattern recognition and narrative cohesion in the records-creation processes. In all these cases, provenance is transformed from its structuralist origins to a series of iterative and ongoing discursive relationships centred on functions, activities, processes, societal forces, and the personal interactions and organizational cultures that collectively cause records to be created, within and across constantly evolving organizational and personal lives, offering multiple perspectives and many orders of value, rather than one fixed order.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to discount earlier archival and recordkeeping endeavours going back centuries in the state, churches, courts, businesses, and leading noble and merchant families, nor the efforts of enthusiastic private collectors of manuscripts, all of whom had their own mindsets and presuppositions about “the archive.” That must remain, alas, beyond the scope of this essay, as must archival traditions not manifested in or translated to the English language.

<sup>18</sup> For a complementary analysis of archival phases, but extending back to ancient civilizations and oral cultures up to the present digital age, see the broad contextual patterns of an evolving archivy in Katz and Gandel (2011).

<sup>19</sup> For the first three paradigmatic phases that follow, I have not footnoted my assertions for two reasons. First, in terms of evidence and memory, the first two phases, which tease out further the ideas advanced earlier in this essay, these have already been footnoted on the preceding pages. Secondly, for all three phases, I am summarizing, if in a rather new light, perspectives on the history of the evolution of archival ideas that I have published elsewhere, with very extensive footnotes; for the main works (and their sources), see Cook (1997, 2000, 2001, 2005a, b.).

## **Evidence: pre-modern archiving—the custodian-archivist guards the juridical legacy**

Following in the aftermath of the French Revolution, archives emerged as public institutions of the nation state. Their records were accessible to citizens for research, or at least to scholarly elites among the citizenry. Begun in European countries, the archival awakening spread eventually in their overseas dependencies or former colonies. Most of these archives focused on the older official records of the state, and so the initial role of the professional archivist became defined as guardian or keeper of the juridical evidence of government agencies. Principles like provenance and original order were developed in France and Germany, and codified in the famous Dutch Manual of 1898 and the writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson in the 1920s and 1930s. These principles were designed so that archival records were arranged, described, and maintained to reflect the context of their creation, rather than rearranged (as earlier) by subject or theme or place, thereby destroying their contextual validity and meaning in favour of their informational content. In this new contextual approach, the properties of records as evidence of actions could rightly be (re)established and defended.

The archival records of the state were themselves not chosen to serve history or historical themes, for any appraisal or destruction of records by archivists was viewed as un-archival. Such intervention by the archivist would inject an inevitable subjectivity, Jenkinson recognized, into what he took to be the essence of archival work: guardianship of “Truth” in records through unaltered and unmediated and unbroken context. Archives thus became defined as a descriptive science whose purpose was to illuminate that contextual origin of records, so that their properties as evidence would not be tainted. Any appraisal or selection of records, increasingly necessary as the volume of government records grew rapidly in the early twentieth century with much more state intervention in human social life, was delegated to the state administrators, not the archivist, who must always remain objective and impartial. Not surprisingly, the resulting archives chosen by state officials favoured the senior policy records of the state, the actions of the elite, the story of national and international activity rather than local or regional or social programmes. The emphasis was also overwhelmingly on textual records, and the volumes of records under archival custody, until well into the twentieth century, were small and manageable, dating from the medieval and early modern period of European history. More recent records remain under the control of the many agencies of government.

The description of records in archives closely followed their arrangement into fonds, these fonds being designed to reflect the original ordering of the records from their place or person of creation. For government or state records, that meant linking them to the office of origin, to the place where the record had been created and the arrangement in which it had originally been filed. This gave meaning to the records by illuminating its context of creation in a particular place and time, according to a clear legal competence or mandate. In a world of simple hierarchical organizational structures, where each office had a distinct and unique function, and the records were linked to this function, and the volume of records was relatively small, this approach was feasible. For centuries-old earlier records, a document-by-document

analysis, using such tools as diplomatics and palaeography, discerned these contexts and informed a micro-level of archival description.

Private records and personal archives were not part of this tradition, remaining the purview of enthusiastic collectors, those antiquarians gathering documentary remnants of a distant past, or collections deposited by their owners/donors in libraries or special research institutes. In most Western countries (Canada was an exception), curators of private-sector and community records did not define this first archival paradigm or contribute to the principal texts articulating evidence-based custodianship; the state archivists did. Indeed, leaders of the state archives tradition, such as Jenkinson, saw such collectors and collecting activities as distinctly un-archival, as amateur rather than professional, as (in term of this essay) too memory focused and too subjective in deciding (i.e., appraising) which private collections and their creators should be approached for the acquisition of their records. There was no continuing accumulation of a residue of records with private individuals, who, after all, die and end their lives as records creators, as there could be with the ongoing bureaucracies of government, church, and business.

The first archival paradigm was centred, then, around guardianship of this “natural” residue as evidence, and the principal professional focus of the archivist, as impartial custodian, was on arrangement and description to put that juridical residue in context for use and understanding by posterity as authentic and reliable documentary sources.

*Evidence* was the key concept of the first paradigm, as described in considerable detail earlier in this essay, as well as this shorter section. This concept dominated professional discourse until the 1930s and continues to the present as an important archival concern.

### **Memory: modern archiving—the historian-archivist selects the archive**

With two world wars, the Great Depression, and numerous new social programmes, the records of the state exploded in unprecedented volumes and forced a reshaping of the first archival paradigm. The records universe of large organizations was transformed from limited to immense, from much older documents organized in careful registries to vast accumulations from much more recent dates, existing in multiple orders, and disorders, and numerous locations. Selection of the records was required, to reduce the vast totality produced to the 3 or 5 % to be retained as archives. The resulting archive, retained by archives, was no natural residue therefore, but a deliberate and conscious creation by the archivist, who made that critical selection decision. Appraisal thus became the defining characteristic of this second paradigm, articulated most prominently by T. R. Schellenberg and soon spread internationally, with various enhancements, to become accepted practice.

Trained in academic history, the archivist tried, following Schellenberg, to reflect in the records chosen as archives their actual or anticipated uses for academic research, primarily by historians. Seen variously as “historian-archivists,” or “handmaidens of historians,” the archivist in this second paradigm discerned appraisal values primarily through the trends in historical writing, and then acquired

records as archives to reflect or reinforce those historiographical patterns. Archival records gradually broadened in coverage as historical research itself changed to focus on “history from the bottom up,” on the lives of people in factories, farms, and families, rather than those primarily of the famous and influential; and on the social, cultural, economic, and scientific activities of the state as much as its constitutional, legal, military, and foreign relations spheres. Case files dealing with individual citizens and groups were towards the end of this period considered as much potential appraisal targets as policy records of senior officials.

The archivist thus became an active selector of the archive, if through the filter of academic history, and thereby consciously created public memory. Far from neutral and objective, and guarding what was inherited or received, the archivist determined what would be received by archives, with inevitable subjectivity entering that decision-making process.

And so too with description. The keeping and describing of records as individually controlled documents in centralized registries, replicated in the archives’ own information systems, became impossible with the large physical extent of most modern archives. So did item-by-item descriptive “calendaring” (or summaries) of the contents of individual documents. There were millions of documents now in even a moderate-sized archives, and only limited (if gradually increasing) numbers of archivists to deal with these rapidly growing and ever-larger collections. Description therefore focused more and more on higher levels of files, series, record groups, archive groups, and fonds, not individual documents. Analysis of these larger entities required interpretative intervention by archivists to create and then highlight the importance of the records contained therein for research purposes. Often a one- or two-page series description in an archival finding aid or inventory might relate to a thousand boxes of records, with literally millions of pages of individual documents. Extrapolating from such immense volumes which themes, actors, activities, locations, and policies or ideas should be included in the series description for researchers, and which not, was a major act in archival interpretation. Nor were these higher-level descriptive entities themselves without controversy, as archivists did historical research into the contexts of records creators to try to allocate files and series to the best or most appropriate such entity, when often more than one would qualify. The alleged “purity” of the archival fonds as an integral organic whole was increasingly challenged in working reality, however much the evidential rhetoric lingered from an earlier period.

In this second memory-focused paradigm, private and personal archives were brought increasingly under the purview of the professional archivist, often in archival units found within national, state, or university libraries, museums, or special documentation centres—and only rarely, save in Canada with its “total archives” tradition, within national, state, provincial, or local archives devoted to government or official records. Many university archivists, often feeling pressure from professors to build relevant specialized documentary collections to support academic programmes of study, or following their own historical predilections, concentrated more on the “collecting” of private “manuscripts” than acquiring (and managing) the “official” record of the university administration itself. Deciding which records creators in various fields were most important to “collect” was

obviously an act of subjective appraisal. Holdings of both state and private archives also broadened noticeably at this time from primarily written text to include photographs, sound recordings, maps, architectural records, and moving images (film, television, animation), further emphasizing the cultural heritage and memory dimension of archives as institutions, as contrasted to their administrative role. With the emergence of this much stronger private-sector archiving presence, a dichotomy emerged, with the American archival profession actually labelling this the Private Manuscript Tradition and the Public Archives Tradition (see Gilliland-Swetland 1991). A similar division could be observed in all countries not following a “total archives” approach.

At the same time, archivists became more attuned to managing their collections in planned and strategic ways, paralleling the development in the mid-century years of modern records management as a separate (and closely allied) profession. Manuals of recommended archival and records management procedures were published regularly by archival professional associations and by national archives to achieve consistency of practice. Computerized automation of finding aids and other archival processes was gradually adopted to attain greater efficiency. And reflecting the first paradigm’s lasting focus of evidence, an emphasis emerged on developing and implementing (though rarely policing) standards, thereby seeking consistency and accountability in archival and records management work. Such emphases mirrored not only trends in modern business and government in the mid-century years, but a lasting concern to ensure, as far as possible, the evidence-based characteristics of records in modern circumstances.

The second archival paradigm was distinctively concerned, then, with appraising records as historical sources, with the historian-archivist subjectively creating a cultural memory resource rather than guarding an inherited juridical legacy of evidence. This memory resource was managed more efficiently for the ever-larger holdings using modern business tools and processes, as well as reflecting detailed research by archivists into the history of records and their creators in order to support the new approaches to appraisal and description. The resulting archive was, of course, still evidence of human and organizational activity, but the context in which that evidence was now created, appraised, acquired, described, and understood had been transformed.

*Memory* is the key concept of the second archival paradigm, which flourished from the 1930s to the 1970s, before showing its weaknesses.

### **Identity: postmodern archiving—the mediator-archivist shapes the societal archive**

From the 1970s onwards, the archivist as professional expert emerged. While often rooted still by education in academic history, archivists developed their own identity through creating postgraduate-level education programmes in Archival Studies at universities, establishing flourishing journals for archival scholarship, and creating professional associations that advocated for archival issues, trained archivists, and fostered professional activity and honoured excellence. In this new identity,



archivists increasingly embraced insights from many other disciplines and from many of types of users other than just academic historians, and thus became experts, in their own right, in the character and nature of records and archives, and their creating contexts.

This reality, combined with critical or postmodern theory, transformed the paradigm again, as archival holdings and activities, as well as the profession itself, came to reflect society more directly, in all its pluralism, diversity, and contingent nature. There was no “Truth” to be found or protected in archives, but many truths, many voices, many perspectives, many stories. Appraisal was now based not on anticipating historical research trends or the societal values articulated in retrospect through historiography, but rather on reflecting the functions and activities of society itself, based on research by archivists into the features, characteristics, and ideas of society worth preserving as documentary memory. Whether this research occurred through macroappraisal for government or similar institutional records or the documentation strategy for private-sector records, appraisal theory, strategy, and methodology attempted, when choosing records to become archives, to reflect “the broad spectrum of human experience,” not just that of the records creators nor select groups of elite users. The focus in appraisal shifted to documenting citizens as much as the state, margins as much as the centre, dissenting voices as much as mainstream ones, cultural expression as much as state policy, the inner life of human motivations as much as their external manifestation in actions and deeds.

By the last third of the twentieth century, government administrations were no longer characterized by mono-hierarchical Weberian structures, however complex these had evolved to be, that remained relatively stable. Now government administration and the functioning of the state existed in immense sprawling bureaucracies, often not only with very large headquarters’ operations, but also with scores or hundreds of regional and local offices, all three levels being continually reorganized, with on-going mergers, new programmes added, or old ones taken away, in whole or part, where a single document or file could thus over time have multiple and uncertain provenances. With the advent of the personal desktop computer and digital communication networks, and in time even more mobile computing devices (laptops, smart phones, tablets), many organizations became virtual to a significant degree, with related records ever more transient and disconnected, rarely linked clearly to a single office or responsible centre of creation. The record itself, now overwhelmingly electronic and computer-generated in a digital age, was also much more fluid and transient, undermining many traditional perspectives on evidence as being tied to a stable documentary medium.

As Peter Scott of Australia first demonstrated, and very powerfully, such constant administrative change significantly challenged archival descriptive thinking (Scott 2010). Traditional definitions of provenance, original order, and the resulting archival fonds, let alone descriptive architectures which archivists presented to researchers, were quite inadequate to represent the new record-making and record-keeping realities. Descriptive practice did not immediately follow suit, but the need for change was evident to many archival theorists. And gradually models for description became more fluid, rather than the classic hierarchical approach, now adopting multiple ways of seeing and viewing archival holdings rather than only one

“original order.” The Australian series system, now being imitated elsewhere much more easily in computer-based networked environments, is a fine example of casting description as multiple relationships (many-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many) between creators and records, rather than forcing this relationship, as traditionally, into a top-down one-to-many mono-hierarchical pyramid.

Coupled with movements for greater accountability and transparency in government, promoted by new freedom of information legislation, archives became increasingly linked to justice and human rights. Archival records have been used to expose past injustices, whether apartheid abuses in South Africa, the Heiner Affair in Australia, the tainted blood scandals in Canada, or maltreatment of unwilling syphilis patients in the United States. Recordkeeping systems are now consciously designed to prevent future abuses and to promote better accountability for public affairs and governance through creating and maintaining better records, especially in a digital world. Illegal destruction of records is often exposed where such action denies justice. Truth and Reconciliations Commissions, first in South Africa, and now in numerous countries, have been established in part to create archives in order to promote the very healing and memory work referenced earlier in relation to the work of Eric Ketelaar. Archival web sites appeared where citizens seeking knowledge about themselves, and their communities, could have much easier access to the holdings of established archives.

Yet ironically, as archivists were more confidently finding their own voice as societal agents, as social activists for memory-meaning, adopting a flexible, fluid, and pluralistic mentalité mirroring the values of postmodern society and the possibilities of digital technology, they were also developing more sophisticated means by which archives were managed, and evidence protected. Here, rigid consistency of professional practice was sought, primarily though developing and promulgating models and standards based on best methods that had evolved, from those for archival description (ISAD-G) or digital records metadata (MoReq2), from guidelines for the best acid-free containers to optimum storage environments, from design specifications for entire archives buildings to models for all archival digital preservation processes (OAIS) or standards for all records management activities (ISO15489). Such work revealed the continuing concern for evidence among this third memory-dominated and identity-formation paradigm. As a result, between the poles of evidence and memory, there was sometimes considerable tension in professional discourses, between ever more sophisticated and complex modernist techniques for evidence protection reflecting a culminating expertise in that regard and ever more contextualized and contingent postmodern ideals in turn reflecting contemporary societal values.

Advocates of evidence as the desired professional direction, focusing on standards and metadata models, were emphasizing control through a single method, or suite of methods, that (some irony here!) ultimately involved an imposition of the archivist’s expertise on records, records creators, and records users. Most basically, this imposition defined (or tried to) what a record is, what kinds of recordkeeping systems produce records worthy of archival retention, how the record should be described, how and where it should be preserved, and how access to it should be controlled. Evidence advocates in this recent period of the third paradigm found

inspiration in (and continuity with) the spirit and often the words of Jenkinson, in the notion of archives primarily as a descriptive science (including now “up front” metadata description for digital records as they are being created), and in the concepts of system-design precision required for computer systems and inherent to digital information technology.

Advocates of memory as the desired professional direction focused more on appraisal, and the many interpretive and research-based decisions archivists made in every archival function, and emphasized that these mediations required attitudes and strategies that were more pluralistic, encompassing, flexible, enabling rather than formulaic, allowing (indeed, encouraging) multiple viewpoints and multiple relationships to be seen among records and their many contexts. Memory advocates found their inspiration in the spirit of Schellenberg, in the idea of archives as primarily about values, choices, and making decisions, and in the critical theory concepts of postmodernism and deconstruction, and the liberatory possibilities (and realities) of a digital information society. Such advocates see certain pro-evidence standards as inappropriate impositions upon the working-place and social reality of many records creators and many kinds of records, and thereby de facto creating first- and second-class archives, or, worse, excluding vast categories of information resources (and their creators) from archives entirely, an act of professional hubris for deeming *them* not worthy of meeting *our* standards.

Both advocates struggled for ascendancy in defining the archival identity, of what it meant and means to be an archivist, how she or he should be educated, what should be the primary emphasis of his or her work. The literature abounds with labels reflecting determinations of whether the archivist was keeper, undertaker, or auditor; monk, knight, or artist; curator, manager, or activist; editor, translator, or advocate; of whether archivy was art or science, modern or postmodern; of whether the archival profession itself should be populated with archivists, or with recordkeepers (in alliance or merged with records managers), or with informational professionals (in alliance with librarians, and possibly museum curators).

The archival profession, collectively, thus suffers from an identity crisis, despite many archivists with very strong senses of their own identity in terms of the professional direction and definition they think right. If archivy is an “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s sense, it is one that, in its diversity, now is more fractured than pluralistic, more prescriptive than holistic in conception. How these strands of evidence and memory may be reconciled requires, in my view, a much more active engagement by the profession in the society and communities it serves, an external reorientation towards hospitality rather than an inward isolating gaze.

The third archival paradigm was distinctively focused, then, on archives as a societal resource, one that was discerned, appraised, acquired, and described by archivists as records experts, in their own right, for a wide range of uses, a societal resource that increasingly respected the pluralistic and ambiguous nature of the postmodern and digital world rather than the monolithic patterns that had dominated earlier mental frameworks. Archives also moved from being a cultural and heritage resource underpinning the academic elite to becoming a societal foundation for identity and justice. The archivist’s own identity was anchored in being the expert

leading society to find its identity through shared memories grounded in more sophisticated conceptions of evidence, the three paradigms thus uneasily culminating, if not integrating, by the early twenty-first century.

*Identity* is the key concept of the third paradigm—the search for the archivist’s own identity as a conscious mediator aiding society in forming its own multiple identities through recourse to archival memory and as an active agent protecting evidence in the face of the blistering complexity of rapidly changing societal organizations and digital media.

### **Community: participatory archiving—the activist-archivist mentors collaborative evidence- and memory-making**

And now a fourth archival mindset is on the horizon, one not yet a fully formed paradigm to be sure, but certainly there is a sense of changing direction once again being felt by our profession in the Western world. New societal and communications realities are everywhere being manifested. With the Internet, every person can become his or her own publisher, author, photographer, film-maker, music-recording artist, and archivist. Each is building an online archive. So, too, are countless non-governmental organizations, lobbying groups, community activists, and “ordinary” citizens joining together, in numerous forums, to share interests reflecting every possible colour, creed, locale, belief, and activity, actual or hoped for. And they are creating records to bind their communities together, foster their group identities, and carry out their business. Archivists thus have the exciting prospect of being able to document human and societal experience with a richness and relevance never before attainable, and with it the opportunity to blend our past foci on evidence, memory, and identity into a more holistic and vibrant “total archive.”

Some prominent archival voices are accordingly calling on archivists to give up their recently hard-won mantras of expert, of control, of power, and, instead, to share archiving with communities, both actual communities in our cities and countryside and virtual communities united by social media in cyberspace. There is simply too much evidence, too much memory, too much identity, to acquire more than a mere fragment of it in our established archives. Furthermore, removing such archives, such memory, such evidence, from the originating communities to our archives may be problematic and undesirable for several reasons. Two archival commentators put it this way:

...the act of recovering, telling and then preserving one’s own history is not merely one of intellectual vanity; nor can it be dismissed—as some still seek to do—as a mildly diverting leisure activity with some socially desirable outcomes. Instead the endeavour by individuals and groups to document their history, particularly if that history has been generally subordinated or marginalized, is political and subversive. These ‘recast’ histories and their making challenge and seek to undermine both the distortions and omissions of orthodox historical narratives, as well as the archive and heritage collections that sustain them. (Flinn and Stevens 2009, pp. 3–4)

In this new world, the old paradigm can no longer hold wherein archivists appraised and acquired records of enduring value, and brought them into the physical custody of the archival repository for processing, description, and preservation, and eventually reference. In some traditional definitions, records are not even granted status as archives unless they cross the threshold of the archives, to be owned and managed and controlled by archivists within formally established and recognized archival institutions. Yet many community archives are distinctly uneasy about turning their archives over to state or other archives which represent (and are sponsored by) governments or other institutions of power that previously excluded them as unimportant or, worse, in some cases actively discriminated against and persecuted members of these communities. Moreover, the records in community archives are not just archival resources, but part of the identity of those communities—there is an “identity provenance” that gives them significant meaning as autonomous archives, even if the mainstream archives (and its sponsor) have had positive past relationships with a particular community:

In the case of those groups whose origins and motivations are rooted in the new left, anti-racist or identity politics of the 1960s onwards, the autonomy imperative may be driven by a political and ideological commitment to ideas of independent grassroots organizations, self-help and self-determination....The collection, creation and ownership of resources that challenge, correct and re-balance these [past mainstream archival] absences and partial narratives were and are often viewed explicitly as counter-hegemonic tools for education and weapons in the struggle against discrimination and injustice. (Flinn and Stevens 2009, pp. 6–7)

In this new digital, political, and pluralistic universe, professional archivists need to transform themselves from elite experts behind institutional walls to becoming mentors, facilitators, coaches, who work in the community to encourage archiving as a participatory *process* shared with many in society, rather than necessarily acquiring all the archival *products* in our established archives. We archivists need to listen as well as speak, becoming ourselves apprentices to learn new ways (and, sometimes, very old ways) that communities have for dealing with creating and authenticating evidence, storytelling memory-making, documenting relationships that are often very different from our own.<sup>20</sup> Aboriginal or indigenous people have especially rich traditional cultures in this regard from which we could learn much, as do some women’s and ethnic communities’ perspectives around story, memory, and evidence. If our community interaction is not sensitive to these other ways of archiving that challenge some of our evolved notions of evidence and memory, there is a danger of undermining the power of their archive, thereby neo-colonializing their memory and evidence to our mainstream Euro-North American-Australian standards. Sensitivity to communitarian perspectives, in short, as Geoffrey Yeo notes, “may oblige archivists to revisit traditional perceptions and

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<sup>20</sup> The term and role in this context of “archivist-as-apprentice” come from Patricia Galloway, and I think it is particularly apt; see Galloway (2009, p. 81).

extend their understanding of records to encompass new forms of evidence and more fluid manifestations of human memory.” (Yeo 2009, p. x)<sup>21</sup>

The community archival perspective of this fourth paradigm does not stop with encouraging community archives to keep their archives to serve their own and, eventually, society’s interests in having expanded, vibrant, usable, and contextualized records for memory and identity, by sharing expertise and knowledge in both directions. Archivists can also engage interested members of the community in interactive dialogues with mainstream archives and their holdings. Participatory description of mainstream archival holdings through online tagging and commentary by users and community members, in early experiments, has suggested that by such means, records can come into sharper focus and clearer context, adding valuable information that archivists would not have the time or contacts or knowledge to unearth—to say nothing of building enthusiastic support for archives through such welcoming attitudes (Yakel 2011; Huvila 2008). Another initiative is to rethink appraisal and acquisition in terms of creating a virtual, inclusive, “total” archive for a country, province or state, or similar jurisdiction, one held by many archives and libraries, including community archives, but unified in conception and comprehensiveness. Canada is now moving to make “total archives” more than rhetorical flourish or institutional aspiration, but actual operational reality, within a pan-Canadian national collaborative stewardship network to appraise, acquire, and preserve the nation’s documentary heritage, whether published or unpublished, analogue or digital, text, graphic, or sound. As the Librarian and Archivist of Canada has recently written, “We are beginning to understand that the construction and constitution of the civic goods of public memory are a collective, social responsibility requiring broad participation across all sectors.” (Caron and Brown 2011, p. 20)<sup>22</sup>

Community-based archiving involves, some authors suggest, a shift in core principles, from exclusive custodianship and ownership of archives to shared stewardship and collaboration; from dominant-culture language, terminology, and definitions to sensitivity to the “other” and as keen an awareness of the emotional, religious, symbolic, and cultural values that records have to their communities as of their administrative and juridical significance. These changes challenge us to stop seeing community archiving as something local, amateur, and of limited value to the broader society and to start recognizing that community-based archiving is often a long-standing and well-established praxis from which we can learn much—this is not about professional archivists jumping to the rescue, but drawing on rich

<sup>21</sup> For specific suggestions for how archivy might be theorized anew, to its considerable enrichment, see the stimulating essay by Flinn (2011). He has been an early and prominent voice in bringing the community archives perspective to the attention of the profession, and this most recent work summarizes his earlier writing on this subject.

<sup>22</sup> This collaborative network is now the formal policy and active programme of Library and Archives Canada to research and launch discussions with partners across Canada. In October 2010, the National, Provincial, and Territorial Archivists Conference, representing all the major government archives of Canada, all with full “total archives” mandates to collect government and private records in all media, endorsed “the development of a Pan-Canadian strategy, involving the broader heritage community, that is, libraries, archives, and museums, and based on a collaborative or joint partnership model, to sustain our documentary heritage into the future.” (Canadian Council of Archives 2011).

traditions to broaden our own concepts of evidence and memory, and thus enrich our own identity as archivists, transformed to be relevant actors out in our society's communities more than proficient professionals behind the walls of our own institutions. Community archiving, as concept and reality, evidently makes us think differently about ownership of records, replevin, oral and written traditions, the localism-globalism and margins-centre nexus, multiple viewpoints and multiple realities about recordkeeping, and so much else, including evidence, memory, and obviously identity, and, depending on our responses, around deeper ethical issues of control, status, power, and neo-colonialism.<sup>23</sup>

Is the archival profession ready for such a radical re-imagining of its purpose? Archival educator Rand Jimerson astutely responds: "Based on the evidence of a growing movement for documentation of marginalized groups... the answer surely must be that we had better get ready. Changes have already come, and more are on the way. If archivists do not engage these discourses and movements, we will lose yet another opportunity to make positive contributions to society." (Jimerson 2010, p. 690)

The challenge is to achieve more democratic, inclusive, holistic archives, collectively, listening much more to citizens than the state, as well as respecting indigenous ways of knowing, evidence, and memory, than occurred in the first three paradigms. For records still acquired by mainstream archives as the new pan-Canadian stewardship framework anticipates, and Helen Samuels' documentation strategy long ago articulated, appraisal and acquisition would be collaborative and cooperative, and so too would be description and preservation, in order to find the best location for preserving the best records with the fullest context. Beyond what established archives themselves acquire, however, there are vast numbers of records remaining in communities that shed important light on society. Rather than taking such records away from their communities, the new model suggests empowering communities to look after their own records, especially their digital records, by partnering professional archival expertise and archival digital infrastructures with communities' deep sense of commitment and pride in their own heritage and identity.

*Community* is the key concept, then, of the fourth archival paradigm now coming into view, a democratizing of archives suitable for the social ethos, communication patterns, and community requirements of the digital age.

## Conclusion

Paradigms can be destructive or enabling. Archival paradigms have ranged through four phases: from juridical legacy to cultural memory to societal engagement to community archiving. The archivist has been transformed, accordingly, from passive curator to active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator. The

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the essays in Bastian and Alexander 2009 volume already cited, for an excellent outline of the many theoretical, research, and strategic opportunities that community and indigenous archiving offers to the archival profession, see McKemmish et al. (2005).



focus of archival thinking has moved from evidence to memory to identity and community, as the broader intellectual currents have changed from pre-modern to modern to postmodern to contemporary. Of course, there is overlap. Strands from all four mindsets are interwoven. This discussion is about emphasis, not rigid definition. In each new phase, aspects of its predecessors often remained strong. Patricia Galloway reminds us that, despite its merits in terms of community archiving, “the postmodern cultural arena... does not wholly displace premodern and modern practices, just as modern culture has not wiped out premodern practices. People don’t cease.” she continues, “to be capable of the construction of oral narrative when they become literate, and some have even pointed to the increased importance of sound and visual media as a sort of return to repressed orality with modalities that ‘oral cultures’ are especially capable of exploiting.” She notes that the official, administrative, and business records of a community may well be treated, if it so chooses, by “modern” methods and practices—the community de facto acting like a mini-state—whereas its cultural, operational, heritage, and oral-visual information resources may be better approached with pre-modern (meaning oral, pre-literate) and postmodern perspectives (Galloway 2009, p. 81). In community, then, we archivists may find a new identity that reconciles our twin missions of evidence and memory.

And by so doing, we may better understand and thus enrich our own sense of being a community of archivists. That community should be one capable of embracing differences rather than founded on either a single animating mythology *or* the exclusion of those different and “other,” whether evidence advocates downplaying memory and dismissing its advocates as un-archival mediators or, vice versa, memory advocates dismissing evidence guardians as narrowly legalistic. By anchoring its increasingly diverse activities and approaches through an engagement with lived communities and their evidence-memory-identity practices, archival practice (and identity) can itself remain plural and diverse without becoming simply fractured into disconnected camps or riven by struggles for supremacy of one school of thinking versus another. Community archiving, as a model, offers much to archivists, even as archivists have much to offer to community archiving.

As this essay has argued, a key part of being a community with a history *is* the embedding of differences within that community as it evolves over time. That is our reality as archivists. Not only are the paradigms open-ended, overlapping, and constantly evolving, the community of archivists that has emerged through these different and overlapping paradigms is itself bound together as a community by the symbiotic interaction of continuity and disruption, continually constructing and deconstructing our mythologies. This process may lead to an increased capacity in our archival community to harbour plurality, diversity, and difference (both in terms of our own divergent practices, across space, time, and traditions, and in terms of the very different social and cultural communities with which we engage).

To return to the opening epigram of this essay, we can view our paradigms and mythologies as bastions of identity, in which case we become defensive and they rigidly destructive, or we can see them as liberating, authorizing us to develop new directions in light of the astonishing challenges to archiving today from theory, technology, and society, and the expectations and demands each occasions. Seeing

archival paradigms as changing through time, as each era interprets anew evidence and memory, and thus redefines archival identity and its relationship with social communities, liberates us to embrace new directions yet again for the digital era. The alternative, as Hugh Taylor warned us, is to become fossils floating in stagnant backwaters of irrelevancy.

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