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Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? Situating the archive and archivists

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Introduction

This chapter examines archives and archivists in the context of past, present and future. It foreshadows many of the themes discussed elsewhere in this book – the growing influence of postmodernism on the profession pervades many of the chapters here, the interconnectedness of creator, user and archivist (see, for example, Breakell [Chapter 2], Theimer [Chapter 7] and Flinn [Chapter 8]), as well as the need to balance the ‘traditional’ skills with recent developments in digital technology and the place of the archivist within these changes (see, for example, Duranti [Chapter 4], Ketelaar [Chapter 5], Cunningham [Chapter 9], Convery [Chapter 10] and Cox [Chapter 11]) and the growing interest in the notion of archives from outside the discipline (Buchanan [Chapter 3]). It explores the broad movement within archives from the positivist outlook, which highlighted the impartiality and transparency of the archivist, through more recent reactions to the postmodern turn in archives which has enabled us to challenge this positivist ideology and question the role of archives, archivists, users and creators in new ways, and concludes by looking at the future challenges and directions for archivists.

In the shadow of Jenkinson

Recently the subject of the archive has moved from obscurity to prominence in both the academy and society at large. This interest has not come from inside the discipline but rather from outside. Tom Nesmith has characterized this as bringing archivists ‘to a major turning point in

the intellectual history of their profession' (2005, 260) and indeed archivists in Canada, Australia, South Africa and latterly America have taken up the challenge of the fundamental reconstruction of both the archive and the archivist's identity. Within the profession in the UK there are certain noises in this direction but these are deafened by the resistance to what is seen as a dangerous threat to the sanctity of the epistemological bedrocks of our archival practice and the traditions that were inscribed by Hilary Jenkinson (1965) in his 1922 *A Manual of Archive Administration*.

Hilary Jenkinson's ideology fixed the archivist's 'career as one of service His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence The good Archivist is perhaps the most selfless devotee of 'Truth the modern world produces' (quoted in Cook, 1997, 23) and contended that archives 'themselves state no opinion, voice no conjecture; they are simply written memorials, authenticated by the fact of their official preservation, of events which actually occurred and of which they themselves formed a part . . . [which provide] an exact statement of the facts' (Jenkinson, 1965, 4). If we isolate the terminology of this ideology we can reconstruct the persona of the Jenkinsonian archivist (and his supporters) as follows: unobtrusive, passive, invisible, disinterested, neutral, tacit, objective and innocent, and his or her role as servant, guardian and custodian. These are the necessary preconditions of the person who will provide the physical and moral defence of the archive in order to maintain its impartiality, authenticity, immutability, reliability, evidentiality, integrity, truth, authority, accuracy, order, uniqueness and trustworthiness.

Jenkinson presents a methodology where selection is made by creators and archivists are relegated to voiceless custodians. The archive is presented as a naturally occurring phenomenon that archivists inherit. They do not provide interpretation or interfere with its original order or provenance as this would lead to contamination of its integrity. Kaplan (2002, 215) has remarked that 'this is positivism in a singularly unreflective cast' and Terry Cook (2008) has demonstrated how the contextual influences of Darwinian evolutionary theory and positivist historiography were instrumental in formulating Jenkinson's position. This positivistic outlook, with its emphasis on logic and scientific rationalism, is problematic for archives because its universalizing and 'natural laws' have led to the assumption that 'the meaning of the word "archives" is simple, stable, and uncontested . . . [and that] archives reflect reality' (Harris, 1997, 133). This notion of archives as

a stable, fixed, uncontested *reality* is the one area above all others that postmodernism has forced the profession to confront.

Elisabeth Kaplan (2002, 210), in response to such issues, questions why the profession is so intellectually isolated and in doing so highlights one of the most important features of where we have come from. In essence, her analysis points to Jenkinson's regressive positioning of the archivist as someone who would perform a passive role 'without external interests'. Kaplan demonstrates Jenkinson's reactionary position by placing him against his contemporary equivalent in the field of archaeology, Bronislaw Malinowski, who published his *Argonauts of the Pacific* also in 1922. In contrast to Jenkinson, this proposed a progressive approach in which the archaeologist would become an active 'participant observer'. This shift in focus is essential to an understanding of where the field of archival theory has been heading for the past 20 years. We have witnessed a shift away from the view of the archivist as a passive observer and neutral custodian, to a position where we recognize that the archivist shapes the archive every bit as much as the creator, for example, in our collecting policies, appraisal actions and the language of our finding aids.

Jenkinson's shadow has purveyed the whole field of archival education and practice in the UK for nearly a century. His positivist ideology has been naturalized and given rise to its mistaken identity as the traditions of practice. As Nesmith (2002, 27) has argued, it is 'so deeply ingrained that it has been treated by some archivists as if it were part of the natural order of human recording and communication'. It is at this juncture that a seeming polarization emerges in the profession between those who engage with theoretical concerns presented by postmodernism and those who see those concerns as irrelevant to the day-to-day practice of archives and nothing more than 'much ado about shelving' (Roberts, 1997). Similarly, in a short piece on archival education that appeared in *ARC Magazine*, the Society of Archivists publication, Richard Hunt (2009, 10), then a student on a UK archive course, described the 'descent of spirits at the impenetrable mass of writing by postmodernists on recordkeeping, all of which seemed to proclaim the end of a career which for us hadn't even begun' and later the revival of spirits after being 'reassured' by several Society of Archivists (now Archives and Records Society) members '(who should probably remain anonymous) that they never paid any attention to postmodernist theory or the continuum at any point during their careers'.

This polarity is in fact illusory, and even Jenkinson saw the necessity for a theory which informed practice, and many of those in the profession who have engaged with postmodernism stress that: ‘theory and practice are not opposites . . . but integrated aspects of the archivist’s role and responsibility’ (Cook and Schwartz, 2002, 171).

Jenkinson’s paradigm persists and has enjoyed a resurgence in what has been termed a neo-Jenkinsonian approach. Luciana Duranti (1994, 343), one of its most important advocates, speaks of a betrayal of responsibility if the archivist does not act with ‘impartiality . . . and as objectively . . . as possible’. She has identified four characteristics of archives as: impartiality (inherent truth); authenticity, through unbroken custody; naturalness; and interrelationship. These reveal the nature of archives as evidence in a fiscal and legal sense. This position is echoed by other theorists who have reinscribed the values that Jenkinson espoused as a touchstone. Michael Moss (2008, 81), for example, suggests that it is an archivist’s obligation to maintain objectivity and voices his desire that ‘I want the truth to be knowable.’ This notion of what truth and whose truth is explored more fully in the following section.

If archivists are to have a role in Nesmith’s intellectual changing point in the profession we have to regard Jenkinson as an important pioneer who shaped our thinking but need to discard the straightjacket of his positivist framework. His work should be seen in the context of the time – the first part of the 20th century – when it was written. Rather than cling onto its empiricist agenda and attempt to mutate its relevance to our present situation we should allow ourselves to be open to new conceptualizations of the archive. In the UK we are already very late on the uptake. Postmodernism is nothing new, and in fact some would argue that it is already over (see for example Alan Kirby (2009)), but its impact on the traditions and fundamentals of the archive profession are still to be explored. It is no accident that postmodernist theory, and particularly the rise of the different concepts of what an archive can be, developed at the same time as electronic technology. The latter is an area keenly recognized as requiring a response from archivists but this is usually dealt with more in terms of business management than for any philosophical implications it might have. A memory crisis prompted by the anxiety of digital amnesia is precisely the place where philosophical concepts of the archive have been harnessed and contested. Our voice needs to be added to the

discourses that are defining our discipline's ontological status, such as history and literary and cultural theory, otherwise we risk becoming an irrelevant voice on the periphery of a much wider debate. The remainder of this chapter explores recent challenges to this positivistic outlook.

Challenging the positivist framework: the development of postmodernism in archives

Postmodern influences

There are many ways in which the revision of old paradigms has been suggested from inside the profession. The tenor of these represents archives through postmodern discourses and this has had an important impact on both theory and practice. However, before proceeding it is necessary to examine here the reason for the shift from Jenkinson's positivist view of archives to more recent debates about the nature of archives, and the archivist, in the light of postmodern questioning. How and when does the shift take place from an overly determined view of archives to one which opens up the archives to questions of truth, fragmentation and instability?

Defining postmodernism is not easy. Even Charles Jencks, widely considered the 'founder' of the term (although, in true postmodern style, even this is debated), described postmodernism as 'a sinuous, even tortuous path. Twisting to the left and then to the right, branching down the middle, it resembles the natural form of a spreading root, or a meandering river that divides, changes course, doubles back on itself and takes off in a new direction' (1986, 2). Almost all definitions of postmodernism accept that it is a slippery concept and one that is not easy to pin down. Indeed, the fundamentals of postmodernism change according to disciplinary boundaries, concerns and conventions. At its heart, however, postmodernism can be said to represent a shift away from the Enlightenment ideal of human progress. It rejects the notion of a unified view of society progressing towards one all-encompassing end. This is why postmodern perspectives of archives conflict with Jenkinson's positivist viewpoint. Seen through the lens of postmodernism, Jenkinson's 'Truth' becomes a series of contingent 'truths'. His view of archives as a place where meaning can be found, becomes a contested space where meanings

are hidden, subverted, altered and absent. It takes what was once regarded as a 'fixed', stable entity, and questions its reality and even its singularity.

In terms of archives, the most useful place to start to offer any definition is with the now oft quoted Jean-François Lyotard. In his work *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge*, Lyotard famously declared the postmodern to be an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984 [1979], xxiv). In this statement, Lyotard asserts that postmodernism rejects a totalizing view of the world in which we can seek reassurance in the answers provided by grand over-arching concepts, such as religion, suggesting a move from the meta- to the micro-narrative, where the world is viewed as a series of contingent 'truths', rather than as an overarching 'Truth'. This concept is particularly important for archives, as explored in the section which follows, as, if archives hold no "Truth", what exactly is their purpose and function? Surely archives, seen from a Jenkinsonian standpoint, must have a single, objective truth if we are to be able to use them as a window on the past. What postmodernism does is take that window and make it opaque rather than transparent. It is easy to see why archives have viewed postmodernism with some distrust and, possibly, some dismay.

With its emphasis upon communication in particular, it is not surprising that postmodernism has impacted on archives. Postmodernism challenges our assumptions about what we can know about our environment through our communication with it. For the postmodernist, images, texts and language are all signs to be interpreted and interrogated, none of them maintain a stable, static, meaning. This has given rise variously to notions such as the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1967) in cultural studies, whereby authorial context is considered a limiting factor in the interpretation of the text, and Baudrillard's evocation of the hyper-real, where the artefact comes to stand for a totalizing picture of a reality that never existed (Poster, 1988). In a discipline which is predicated upon writing, this questioning of how language and writing convey meaning, and our role in it, is crucial if we are to understand the nature of archives and archiving, the place of archives in cultural theory, and the role of archives as memory spaces.

Leading on from this difficulty in communication, by far the most influential impact on archives currently in terms of postmodernist thought is the work of Jacques Derrida. Despite earlier writings on the notion of

the archive, it was the deconstructionist's publication of *Archive Fever* which really caught the attention of the archive field. Derrida (1998, 17) argues that societal communications are not fixed but constantly changing processes. He refers to this as *archivization* which 'produces as much as it records events'. Nesmith (2005, 262) has demonstrated how this inflects on our understanding of the record which becomes 'an evolving mediation of understanding about some phenomenon – a mediation created by social and technical processes of inscription, transmission, contextualization, and interpretation'. The archival document is not, therefore, a static and stable construct, but rather a fluid concept which changes according to the interactions of archivists and users.

What does archivization mean for archivists? Nesmith notes in particular how postmodernism has helped us to realize the archive, not as an unmediated 'truth' space, but as a place where records are made and re-made by archivists. Citing the example of Douglas Brymner, Nesmith notes how his unimpeded arrangement and selection of material held at what is now the National Archives of Canada was seen by Brymner as having quite a minor impact; he was 'like a mere clearer of land rather than a productive farmer' (2002, 32). Nesmith goes on to note how 'This perfectly captures the tension within the central archival professional myth: enormous power and discretion over societal memory, deeply masked behind a public image of denial and self-effacement' (2002, 32). This is what Derrida unmasks through his deconstruction of the archive. The Jenkinsonian notion of the archivist as 'impartial custodian' is no longer valid; the traditional footing on which the archival profession has for so long been based is not as stable as it once was (or rather, never was anyway). It is perhaps no wonder that archive students question what they are doing on the course when postmodernism has already appeared to render their profession without foundation. The answer, of course, is that being aware of these issues, and the role that we as archivists play in the co-creation of records, through our selection and cataloguing, *strengthens* our position.

Creating order from chaos

The lights that such concepts throw on who we are as archivists dispel numerous myths suggested by positivist ideology. One of the most

compelling is the role that archivists have in relation to the archives in their care. As the archive is seen as part of a process, its archivization recognizes the archivist as an active participant. There is a shift from a passive and objective status towards an acknowledgement that the subjectively motivated actions of the archivist have a critical role in the construction and creation of archives to the extent that their interpretations make them another author of the records' constantly evolving meanings. Nesmith (2002, 27) has commented that 'contrary to the conventional idea that archivists simply receive and house vast quantities of records, which merely reflect society, they actually co-create and shape the knowledge in records, and thus help form society's memory'. Cook (1997, 46) also argues that 'Archivists have become . . . very active builders of their own "houses of memory". And so, each day, they should examine their own politics of memory in the archive-creating and memory-formation process.' The archive as a site where power is 'negotiated, contested [and] confirmed' (Cook and Schwartz, 2002a) implicates the archivist in this process and holds them accountable for their participation.

The way in which the archive has moved from the passive noun to the active verb of archiving can be illustrated through some of the hidden aspects of our practice. For example, the simple act of packaging archival material in order to increase its long-term preservation shows how we dramatically transform its physical character and alter the experience of engaging with the material. When a new archive arrives it might be housed in anything from plastic bags to old suitcases. As we take the documents out of these unsuitable containers, perhaps seeing them for the first time, we might compare this to the feelings Walter Benjamin describes when he is unpacking his library:

The books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order. I cannot march up and down their ranks . . . I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join me among the piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again . . . so that you may share with me a bit of the mood . . . of anticipation.

(Benjamin, 1992, 61)

This is an unseen aspect which the archivist is privy to and from this

disorder we construct the ‘mild boredom of order’. The difference between the states gives us two startlingly contrasting images and demonstrates the way that the archivist actively shapes the archive from piles of ‘stuff’ to a neatly regulated order in acid free boxes and folders.

This physical control of archives is reinforced through the means by which we intellectually control them. The methods we use to, for example, describe archives are ostensibly within the bounds of objectivity and facts in which all documents are accorded equal status. Here the fixedness of language of the positivist discourse is made concrete. There must be no passion, no feeling, no hint or impartiality in our descriptive mechanisms. All the knowledge and subjective values the archivist acquires during this process are eradicated so that the documents are treated with the same enervating rhetoric which mimics the style found in the paradigm of the dictionary or encyclopedia. This objectivity persuades the user of the authority of the information it imparts and the voice of the archivist slips into the background as an anonymous interlocutor between the archive and the researcher. Duff and Harris remind us that ‘Description is always story telling – intertwining facts with narratives, observations with interpretations... archivists tell stories about stories, they tell stories with stories’ (2002, 276). Rendering our descriptive aids as objective can be seen as just another fictionalization which precludes potentially important information that the archivist has discovered through their cataloguing and research.

Archives and context

The nature of contextual knowledge about records has always been a feature of the profession but this has been given a new prominence in relation to postmodern insights. Context has traditionally been perceived as a fixed relationship between the creator and the records, and between the records themselves. Nesmith (2005, 260) has argued that postmodernism has ‘encouraged the view that context is virtually boundless. This expansive conception of context draws heavily on cultural and societal dimensions of context . . . [and] rather than a single appropriate context, there are various contextualities which are relevant to archival work’. This challenges our describing practices and encourages us to encompass a broader view, turning away from the description of records

as finite objects towards an attempt at describing the various processes of becoming that the document engenders subsequent to its initial inscription. In what could be termed a biography of the document, Nesmith (2005, 273) proposes sets of contextual essays which would ‘get behind . . . the less visible and complex histories that produce and shape the evidence they may bear’. In addition, the technology of Web 2.0 provides the opportunity for finding aids to become interactive and collaborative, which provides a new realm of contextualities.

Archives in the expanded field of contextuality has had an impact on other fundamentals. Eric Ketelaar (2000, 322) notes how this affects the basis of the principle of provenance which changes it from being ‘defined by stable offices and roles to one of dynamic process-bound information’. By broadening the notion of provenance so that it encompasses a societal dimension the complex identities and multifaceted interactions which go towards its formation are highlighted. In a similar way the traditional conception that archivists must preserve the original order of an archive becomes defunct. The fluid nature of *archivization* suggests that the forms of archives are constantly shifting, and rather than working on the idea that when an archive comes into a repository its order represents that of its original state ‘we should speak of the received order of the records’ (Nesmith, 2005, 264).

Archives and truth

If we examine the concept in which the archive is depicted as a locus of ‘truth’ the first thing to question is *whose* truth is being represented? Whilst archivists seem happy to accept that the content of documents do not necessarily represent ‘the truth’, if we go a step further and question the actual ‘truth’ of the artefact this offends the notions of authenticity which many archivists see as their duty to defend. If we take a wider view, out from the individual document, to its contextual *raison d’être*, this raises a whole set of questions about why such documents were made, for whom, by whom, why a particular medium was used, who kept it and for what reasons. Rather than being a conduit of ‘truth’ the document is inflected with a whole range of positions which situate the artefact within a socio-cultural framework, which, in turn, colours its politics. Postmodernism has exposed the power systems which sit tacitly behind such concepts (White,

1973). This is not to say there is no such thing as truth but that there are many possible truths and that these are contingent. It is through this contingency, through an archives' contextuality (which can be endless), that we should locate its meaning. As David Bearman pointed out twenty years ago:

The truth is not an absolute, but a contextual reality. The past is not a given, but a mutable creation. There is no law in history to select the forces of causality – causality is an intellectual tool we use to make sense of too much evidence. The pasts we construct are all discussion with the present, axes in today's intellectual battles, not monuments to some fixed reality.

(Bearman, 1989)

Truth has traditionally been captured by the archivist through our guiding principles of *respect des fonds*, original order, and provenance, and yet in recent years each of these has been 'unpicked' as the repercussions of postmodernism have been felt in the profession. The first, for not representing the 'whole' of a body of records at all, and the second and third for failing to maintain any meaningful link between creator and records. Cook and Schwartz (2002b, 174) note how 'from the archivist's "inside" perspective, archival records are still seen, ideally, to reflect an "original order" in order to reflect better some reality or "Truth" about the records' creator'. In practice, however, these fundamental principles remain, they continue:

Because these routine practices have thus been valorized and interiorized through 'social magic' as badges of professional identity, the resulting archival performance 'sustains belief in its own obviousness' . . . as something natural, normal, and unquestioned (175).

The continuum

The shift in the position of where we were to where we are is most notable in the two models which have been developed to explain the temporal and spatial properties of record operations: the life cycle model and the records continuum. If we critically examine the life cycle model which incorporates three classical stages of birth, life and death, it becomes apparent that it is based on Judaeo-Christian models of the life ritual. The record is born, either

analogue or digitally, has its useful life and at any point can be destroyed. If it is kept it then goes into a latent phase where it is stored and might sometimes be referred to, which might be analogous to Purgatory. Finally its historical relevance is assessed, in a day of judgement, usually by an archivist, and it is either discarded or destroyed and consigned to hell or has an after-life in the stasis of archival heaven. The life cycle model is a linear one in which records progressively work through usefulness until they degrade into uselessness and death which becomes synonymous with the archive. As such it only offers one temporal dimension of existence for the archive.

If we move to the model of the records continuum, developed in the 1990s in Australia, this proposes a system that is at once compatible with postmodernist thinking and with the iterability inherent in the digital environment. Records do not simply go through a life cycle from creation and currency through to inactivity and the archive; rather they move in and out of ‘currentness’, having qualities both current and historical from the moment of their creation. This allows the records to become disembedded and carried forward into new circumstances where they are re-presented and used. The records continuum model suggests a continuous time/space construct in which temporalities are not linear. Upward (1996) emphasizes the fluidity and interactions of the complex: ‘No separate parts of a continuum are readily discernible, and its elements pass into each other.’ The place of the document in this is based in an act and is a prosthetic representation of that act. Its form and modes of communication are established by its content, structure and context. Upward (1996) goes on to explain that ‘The record is a memorialized [disembedded] form of the document usually linked with other documents. It should have additional layers of context to those present in a document, and may be a surrogate record of that document. It is this additional information about context which is the key to “disembedding” the document from its narrower contexts of creation and carrying it through time and space as a record.’ This accords with the coordinates of network information architectures.

Where are we going?

The final section of this chapter explores the question ‘where are we going?’ We have now moved out of Jenkinson’s positivistic shadow into a

view of archives as a contested space where we have begun to question the fundamentals of our professional discourse. It is a space that should not be seen as daunting, or one for unravelling the work of the archivist, as Hunt feared, but rather as a space for exploring the nature of what we are and what we do. Rather than view postmodernism as a force that has unravelled the 'truths' we always accepted about archives, we should view it rather as an opportunity to celebrate, as Cook has postulated, our professional rebirth.

The aura of the archive

To examine why it is important that we find an architecture for framing archives that is commensurate with the digital environment we need to look at what makes an archive an archive starting from the concept of the uniqueness of the archival document. As long as the idea of uniqueness is embedded in the archival document it carries with it a simultaneous desire for its transformation through its reproduction. Some archives, such as photographs, have a built-in reproducibility and digital technology has increased the transmutability of the archive through copying and virtual dissemination. In the first part of the 20th century the technology of mechanical reproducibility produced a crisis in artistic practice. Walter Benjamin (1992, 215) designated an aura to an original artwork that was diluted through mechanical reproduction and caused a tremendous shattering of its context. At the time that Benjamin was developing this theory he was in correspondence with André Malraux. Malraux accepted that reproducibility eroded originality but he contended that it simultaneously constructed a 'museum without walls' that indefinitely expanded the concept, producing a virtually endless museum.

Archives have not suffered the same fetishization of the original item as artworks except in rare cases, through extreme age or the designated 'beauty' of documents that often includes art as an integral aspect of its form. Value has traditionally resided in the importance of the informational content of the item rather than its aesthetic form and as such archives have seamlessly crossed this shift into different forms, especially in the digital realm. The dissolution of the aura of the archival artefact in cyberspace (more than any mechanical reproduction which came before) marks a destruction of the contextual values of records on

a potentially endless scale, which in effect produces a desire and demand for the archivist to provide a greater contextuality.

The impact of the digital age on archives has, according to Cook, provided the conditions for archives without walls. This new space remodels the archive as a hub in which digital records are left outside in their originating systems capable of being reproduced or repeated within different contexts (Cook, 1994, 314). The archive without walls is part of a wider shift in archival thinking, defined as ‘postcustodialism’, in which the archive of the future is not tied to the physical limits of the repository building but can exist also in the infinite iteral space of the web. Postcustodialism also encompasses a mindset which shifts ‘from the physical to a conceptual framework, from a product-focussed to a process-orientated activity, from matter to mind’ (Cook, 1997, 48).

As storage and the form of the records becomes an intangibility, which are characterized as existing ‘within the clouds’, the evanescence of the digital archive has given rise to discourses on place. Duranti has argued that the physical place of archives is an absolute necessity if archivists are to continue the tradition of recordkeeping practices and maintain the integrity of the archive. She posits an evocative image where documents only become part of an archive if they cross the ‘archival threshold’. The concept of the threshold has been defined by Foucault (1972, 14) as a site of discontinuity and rupture in which boundaries are contested. When a document crosses the archival threshold it is transformed from what was possibly an ordinary entity outside of the archive to something which has essential value in the construction of collective memory that requires preservation. This rupture, Duranti contends, demands a physicality of place:

It is essential that the archival institution establish an architecture in which the records of all creating bodies, once received, can be put into clearly defined and stable relationships, and in which their broader context can be identified and the associations among the records never broken The abandonment of the connection between archival documents and a central official place of preservation under a distinct jurisdiction would imply the impossibility of exercising precisely that guardianship so dear to Jenkinson’s heart, the moral defense of archives, not only by the archivist but also by the people.

(Duranti, 2007, 464–5)

What will this architecture of the future repository look like as it takes on the new possibilities offered by the digital realm? Does it have to exist within Duranti's actual building or can it operate in relation to the virtual as Cook suggests? If we go back to Malraux, and the context of the translation from his original French to the English of the 'museum without walls' we see that in the first instance Malraux defined it as '*le musée imaginaire*' and it is from here that we might take a cue. The architecture of the new archives is still to be determined and is the stuff of imagination. Perhaps we can make suggestions for this new imaginary space based on concepts, visions and fantasies. What form would it take, for example, if it was a space that embraces the multiplicity which is inherent in web-based technology? How would it look if it was reformulated not just as written records but also as live memory? This approach is one that is embedded in the model of the records continuum.

The material to the immaterial

If the site of archives as live memory, in the conceptualization of a new imaginary archive, causes uneasiness or incredulity we have only to remind ourselves of the relatively short space of time in which the written record (which is already semantically consigned to the past as a fixed entity) has enjoyed currency. M.T. Clanchy (1993, 294) has demonstrated that 'there was no straight and simple line of progress from memory to written record. People had to be persuaded – and it was difficult to do – that documentary proof was sufficient improvement' on oral testimony. Duranti (1994) disclaims that oral testimonies have any place in archives, viewing them as interpretative in that they do not exhibit the strict characteristics of archives based on the evidential authenticity she accords to written records. Culturally we have come to assume the pre-eminence and immutability of the written word. The slippage between the oral and written traditions activated the passage between nature and culture; between the real and the symbolic. However, Clanchy reminds us that the oral was supplanted by the written record and thus points to the potential impermanence of this hierarchy.

The point at which Duranti rejects oral testimony from her archival threshold proves critical in establishing the limits of her model which are ultimately confined to written records. The oral and the written are the two

systems which represent the way in which society and culture has produced memory-structures through the immaterial and the material. The conventional institutional archive has privileged and been founded upon the written. Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer (2003, 4) have argued: ‘Next to these stiff and stable archives there have always been flexible and unstable archives of what one can call “immaterial information” that followed a different rationality – the labyrinthine, fuzzy logic of oral culture, that is, a culture without written records.’ It is the unstable, immaterial archives of oral culture which represent the antithesis to Duranti’s classical archives and are therefore designated as non-archival and have to be resisted else they dissemble the fundamental essence of archives.

However, the digital environment is already undoing this classical notion of archives. Duranti’s response to the challenge of the digital is to employ the discipline which has legitimated written records and is postulated in her book *Diplomatics: new uses for an old science* (1998). Here she determines that the electronic environment exhibits characteristics which find all their roots and equivalence in analogue records, and that through the application of diplomatics we can comprehend, order and make sense of the digital. But does it all fit that neatly? How can what is essentially an analogue artefact correspond in identical fashion to what is an expanded field of interconnectedness in the virtual realm? How does this take account of the multimedia nature of the digital in which the visual not only has parity but dominates the written? How does this account for the dynamic and fluid characteristics of electronic records rather than their stability? If we attempt to fix such modes will we not see, right that at the point of order, the archive slipping away? (Derrida, 1998)

It has been argued that technological changes are much closer in character to the oral than the written. As Mulder and Brouwer define:

What used to be material archive-systems have become immaterial information-banks. Unlike classical archive forms, recent digital databases need not be ordered linearly – grid-like and hierarchically. They are made accessible through complex linking technologies which no longer work linearly . . . but as random and non-linear . . . Flexibility and instability have become technical qualities instead of problems to be controlled. Digital archives are unstable, plastic, living entities, as stories and rituals were in oral cultures.

(Mulder and Brouwer, 2003, 5)

The rhizomic character (where we view archives as networks, rather than as hierarchical structures) of the digital has the potential to construct new identities for archives and in order to get to these we have to introduce redefinitions that venture ‘into the undefining of archives’ (Hamilton, Harris and Reid, 2002, 16). This undefining requires what Ketelaar (2000, 323) has called a ‘shift in focus from skills to attitudes’. This is not positing that we return solely to an oral tradition but rather that we see a system which embraces such forms of archive within it. Nor does it suggest that we abandon Duranti’s insightful studies of diplomatics but that we see the written as just one textual inscription in the multimedia environment of the virtual realm. Digital culture represents the shift in which the two memory-structures intersect and requires a fresh look at the neglected qualities of the immaterial.

Conclusion

Returning to Jencks to conclude this chapter, his notion of ‘double coding’ is an intriguing one for archivists, both in terms of how we think of ourselves, our work, our archives and our users. Jencks proposed that postmodern architecture could be recognized by its use of what he termed ‘double-coding’:

the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects. The point of this double coding was itself double. Modern architecture had failed to remain credible – and partly because it didn’t make effective links with the city and history. Thus the solution I perceived and defined as Post-Modern: an architecture that was based on new techniques and old patterns. Double coding to simplify means both elite/popular and new/old and there are compelling reasons for these opposite pairings.

(Jencks, 1986, 14)

For archives the notion of double-coding opens up new ways of thinking about what we are doing and where we are going. We see this very much in our everyday work as archivists – an ISAD(G) (General International Standard Archival Description) compliant catalogue speaks to archivists very differently to how it speaks to the users. Open that catalogue up for

user-annotation via Web 2.0 technologies and the new techniques and old patterns, central to Jencks's argument for double-coding, become apparent. Additionally double-coding is a useful metaphor for developments in archive theory itself. Moving out of the shadow of Jenkinson has afforded us the opportunity to re-think much that has previously been taken as given, and yet we continue to carry that tradition with us. The conflict between new and old ways of viewing archives should not see us separate into our individual camps – that is the very nature of the postmodern archive.

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