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Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Political Reality

Michael Piggott and Sue McKemmish

Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference, Sydney, August 2002

Abstract

In this presentation, Michael Piggott and Sue McKemmish begin by recapping their 2001 Hobart conference paper, which attempted to draw out the connections between reconciliation and recordkeeping, and explored the implications for recordkeeping processes relating to records creation and capture, description and metadata, appraisal, access and accessibility. They revisit and expand on the issues that emerged from the Hobart paper in light of this year's conference theme, *Past Caring*, and the politics of recordkeeping, arguing that most archival practice is trapped in the third dimension of the records continuum. The presentation challenges archivists working within continuum frames of reference to complement their achievements in establishing accountable recordkeeping regimes in the third dimension by building fourth dimensional frameworks that better enable records to function as accessible collective memory beyond spatial and temporal boundaries.

Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Political Reality

Michael Piggott and Sue McKemmish

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The subject of this paper has multiple contexts, but it originates from a shared interest in the human, social, organizational and political settings of recordkeeping. As well as knowing how trustworthy records should be captured, there must also be understanding of how records are in fact created and managed, and what factors influence these real world behaviours.

The initial version of this paper was presented at the ASA/RMAA joint conference in Hobart last year. That conference had several dimensions relevant to our paper. One was indigenous, which is addressed below. The other was our choice of topic. We believed that, for the historic first joint conference of archivists and records managers, not only should the over-arching concept of “recordkeeping” be stressed, but that both professional communities (and one more than the other, we felt) needed a blunt reminder that there is a lot more to professional toil than practice, developing product solutions and applying standards; that it is anything but politically neutral; and that it does not happen in isolation in one workplace in one country. One or two others on the program, including Verne Harris and Allan Connelly Hansen, also seemed to be trying to say this,¹ the former encapsulating it in his keynote address observation that “recordkeepers cannot avoid deploying archontic power”.

As the flyer for this conference indicated, at the conference in Hobart we attempted to draw out the connections between reconciliation and recordkeeping. In essence, we took a wide definition of reconciliation and argued that creation and capture, appraisal, metadata schema, access policies and practices and many other archival activities were always anything but objective and neutral; we argued this reality raised issues which challenged our theories and principles and were well worth discussing; and we ended by applying the concept of reconciliation to a local indigenous context proposing a resolution for the audience’s consideration. The response to that paper was such that before Hobart ended we had received an invitation to speak in Sydney.² Thus the other principal context is obviously this conference theme, *Past Caring*, which we address in the second half of this paper.

¹ See Verne Harris, “Of Fragments, Fictions and Powers: Resisting Neat Theorising about ‘The Record’”, and Allan Connelly-Hansen, “The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda”, in *Convergence* (Australian Society of Archivists and the Records Management Association of Australia, 2001), pp 11-18 and 139-68 respectively.

² We have thus ignored the organizers’ requirement that presentations “should be new to the audience at the Conference, and not have been previously presented at a Conference with a similar audience”!

For those who were not present or have not read the published version,³ in summary this is what we said.

We started with a concept of reconciliation which referred to that range of processes through which a social or ethnic group, whose members have suffered gross violations of human rights in the past or present, come to terms with those responsible or their representatives/descendants. We noted that records are involved in structures of remembering and forgetting, and play a role in successful reconciliation, defined as involving a genuine attempt to get to the “truth”, followed by acknowledgement of responsibility in a concrete way. Hence truth commissions, royal commissions, judicial investigations, criminal tribunals ... and even indexing projects. And in opposition, such things as denial, shredding, and deliberate non-documentation.

So, the role of records in reconciliation was acknowledged. Our intention, however, was to push beyond this obvious connection to examine the implications in relation to processes of records creation and capture, description and metadata, appraisal, and access and accessibility.

Under creation and capture, we drew attention to situations where incomprehensible and organized cruelty was matched by equally deliberate recording, citing among many examples not only the infamous Khmer Rouge archive at Tuol Sleng, but also the typical Australian Aboriginal affairs agency operating, to use Paul Bartrop’s description, as a “bureaucracy of destruction”.⁴ Inevitably such recordkeeping systems adopt metadata terminology reflecting the ideological assumptions of the relevant political and bureaucratic environment.⁵ Under appraisal, we talked about a race between blanket destruction and, often, blanket preservation or so-called disposal freezes, phenomena which mock both Terry Cook’s plea that it must be the work of sustained research and careful analysis, and Verne Harris’s typing of the end product as a sliver of a sliver of a sliver. Fast track appraisals inexorably leading to destruction was the highlighted feature, however, with the deliberate loss of 44 tons of internal security records ahead of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission being our main example. Equally, the access function is often highly politicized, in circumstances where civil wars are ending, political power changes hands or inquiries are being established. Locally too we have seen funding for reconciliation related archival access projects become a political issue in the response to the recommendations of the 1997 report of the inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.

³ ‘Recordkeeping and Reconciliation’, *Convergence*, op cit., pp 332-41.

⁴ See his “The Holocaust, the Aborigines, and the Bureaucracy of Destruction: an Australian Dimension of Genocide”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, March 2001, pp 75-87.

⁵ In our Hobart paper we might have noted that the best historians have also been alert to the same characteristics in the records themselves. Thus the great Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg’s latest work was described as “especially penetrating on the perversions of language developed in Nazi-speak, as he is on all issues of language use and misuse, along with the uses of silence” and on “opaque administrative terms and acronyms”. See Inga Clendinnen, “Every Single Document”, *London Review of Books online*, vol 24 no 10, 23 May 2002 (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n10/clen2410.htm>).

In the concluding part of the Hobart paper, we returned to each core archival function to canvass aspects in which their application within reconciliation environments challenged us. Deliberate creation of records associated with gross human rights violations – by perpetrator and victim – almost defies understanding, and certainly requires further theoretical and historical study. Our main example of souvenir photos of lynching we would again want to juxtapose with standard explanations for records creation, prompted by the opening of a new exhibition at the Martin Luther King Historic Park, Atlanta.⁶ Under metadata and description, we talked about issues such as the need to “re-describe” and “re-index” time bounded classification systems, and the challenges of documenting records’ context when the circumstances of their creation was so obscene. The implications of adopting standard best practice approaches to appraisal in such situations was also seen as problematic, whether it is appraisers at creation reflecting contemporary community expectations or collecting archives trying to document a representative experience of the Australian multicultural population. As to access and accessibility, the familiar contrast of privacy versus the need to know took on an even more vexed and painful dilemma, underlined by Peter Read’s reflections on invasion of privacy in a good cause, and Dawne Adam’s comment that “while seeing that information is accessible is critical to making perpetrators accountable, its availability can also re-victimize victims”. Where *do* we stand if perpetrators *and* victims want to forget?

Additional to the address proper, however, we did something at the beginning and end which seemed to upset a number of people. We began by acknowledging the traditional owners of that part of Tasmania now so dominated by the Hotel Grand Chancellor. We also expressed surprise that there had been no acknowledgement at the beginning of the conference, opened with such traditional formality by the State Governor, the Honorable Sir Guy Green, AC, KBE, managing only just to refrain from noting what his office represents in the history of indigenous-white relations in Tasmania.

At the end, we tried to move from a generalized and international perspective to an appropriate local focus, inspired by the SAA’s resolution on Kosovo.⁷ Here we did focus on a narrow application of reconciliation, that between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, and urged action on the recordkeeping aspects of the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home/Stolen Generation report.⁸ After stunned silence, a number of mostly supporting statements and an amendment from the floor, the motion was carried. It read:

That this meeting of the Australian Society of Archivists and Records Management Association of Australia strongly supports all recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report and in particular urges all Australian governments and other relevant bodies such as churches to double funding for indexing projects, counselling projects, keeping places and repatriation of relevant

⁶ See http://www.journale.com/withoutsanctuary/index_body.html.

⁷ See the 1999 “Resolution on the Systematic Destruction of Archives in Kosovo and War-Caused Devastation of Archives Throughout Yugoslavia” at http://www.archivists.org/statements/kosovo_resolution.asp.

⁸ Australia, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Canberra: HREOC, 1997), available at http://www.hreoc.gov.au/nat_inq/inq_cont.htm.

records. Secondly, to make any necessary legislative changes. Thirdly we require our Board and Council to proceed with this statement and bring it to the notice of the appropriate organisations and authorities.

The response of the RMAA came within hours. Its President, besieged by delegates who held corporate membership and argued that archivists taking the high moral ground were railroading them into involvement in a political debate, rejected the resolution on procedural grounds. After discussion between the RMAA and ASA, the then ASA president explained that the RMAA had a constitutional problem with motions put without notice but that the ASA did not, and that the ASA would endeavour to convey it to the RMAA under the joint Memorandum of Understanding. This expressed a joint commitment to “maximise cooperation in political lobbying and public policy issues”. At least up to May 2002, for a variety of reasons such as changes of government, letters between the two bodies being lost and infrequent meetings of executives, there has been little action. The ASA has written letters. As for our RM colleagues, particularly those taking the narrow corporatist stance, their heart isn’t in it.

The Victorian Branch of the RMAA however, did seem genuinely interested, and because many of its members were not present at Hobart, invited us to present a summary version of the paper to its November 2001 meeting. This too ended in disappointment. The subject of our talk combined with the meeting venue (the Public Record Office Victoria) prompted additions of other speakers to the program. For a variety of reasons, and despite the presence of Koori representatives, there seemed little understanding and free flowing discussion of the issues we had attempted to canvass.

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This necessary and unavoidably lengthy set of preliminary points now made, we want to revisit our Hobart paper and its aftermath against the *Past Caring: What Does Society Expect of Archivists?* theme of this conference.

Firstly the political dimension. A focus on the politics of recordkeeping is overdue, and we applaud the conference organizers for their judgement. It is part of a growing awareness world wide among archivists. Whereas this has been occasional, noted in passing while the principal focus was accountability, legislation or what makes a compliant recordkeeping culture, now we have entire conferences on the subject,⁹ book length studies,¹⁰ and regular coverage now in the journal literature.¹¹

⁹ In mid 2003, for example, Liverpool University Centre for Archival Studies is organizing a conference on “Political Pressure and the Archival Record”. See http://www.liv.ac.uk/lucas/Political_pressure_files/polpressurehome.htm.

¹⁰ For example, Richard Cox and David Wallace, eds, *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Greenwood Press, 2002). One of the earliest substantial coverage of course was Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping* (Clayton: Ancora Press, 1993).

¹¹ E.g. William Rosenberg, “Politics in the (Russian) Archives: The ‘Objectivity Question’, Trust, and the limitations of Law”, *American Archivist*, vol 64 no 1, Spring/Summer 2001, pp 78-95, and Bruce Montgomery, “The Iraqi Secret Police Files: A Documentary Record of the Anfal Genocide”, *Archivaria*.

Existing attempts to generalize about the political dimension of recordkeeping seem to fall into one of two camps. The first, what William Rosenberg calls “archival politics”, highlights its role in shaping the archive as storehouse of social memory. The Liverpool conference and other indicators of a developing interest in the political also focus on the processes of this shaping. As Rosenberg puts it, even in democracies “questions concerning acquisition, access, preservation, and especially classification (secrecy) of public documents or government records are almost always decided in ways that privilege the state over the public”. Thus “a primary function of state archives and state archivists everywhere has been to preserve and protect dominant political values, ideologies, and interests”.¹² The second kind of articulation looks much deeper, seeing power and political systems against social, cultural and mental frameworks. The writings of social theorists and philosophers have been freely drawn on, including Foucault on the archaeology of knowledge, Derrida on the “archive”, and Giddens on the transmutation of structures, the reproduction of social systems, and the role of recorded information in these processes.¹³

Some doubtless consider all this too theoretical; but certainly the “archival politics” conception, which sees core archival functions privileging the state, is incomplete. An additional articulation of the interplay of records and politics is needed which embraces

52, pp 69-99. A local instance is an article by Chris Hurley on the Heiner affair planned for the November 2002 issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*. A special issue of *Archival Science* on archives and power, edited by Terry Cook, is also planned.

¹² Rosenberg, op.cit.

¹³ In this regard, Tom Nesmith in “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the ‘Ghosts’ of Archival Theory”, *Archivaria* 47, Spring 1999, pp 136-50, points to the writings of the post-modernists on information, the “archaeology of knowledge”, the “archive”, and communication processes (“inscription, transmission, contextualization, and interpretation”), and traces the influence of their ideas on the thinking of Brien Brothman, Richard Brown, and Theresa Rowat (p 143 and endnote 7, p 149). He could have added Bernadine Dodge, Verne Harris, and, with particular reference to evolving records continuum thinking, Frank Upward. Brown first identified the relevance of European structuration theory, especially Giddens’ writings, to recordkeeping in “Modelling Acquisition Strategy at the National Archives of Canada: Issues and Perspectives for Government Records”, a paper delivered at the Association of Canadian Archivists annual conference, Banff, 24 May 1991. According to Giddens, structuration is concerned with “conditions governing the continuity of transmutation of structures and therefore the reproduction of social systems”; see *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). See also Brien Brothman, “Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction”, *Archivaria* 48, Fall 1999, pp 64-89; “The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution”, *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 205-20, and “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice”, *Archivaria* 32, Summer 1991, pp 78-100; Richard Brown, “Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385”, *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997, pp 1-43, and “The Value of ‘Narrativity’ in the Appraisal of Historical Documents: Foundation for a Theory of Archival Hermeneutics”, *Archivaria* 32, Summer 1991; Verne Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Recordkeeping”, available via <http://www.archivists.org.au/>, and “Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa”, *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997, pp 132-41; Eric Ketelaar, “Archivalisation and Archiving”, *Archives and Manuscripts* 27:1, May 1999, pp 54-61, and “The Difference Best Postponed? Cultures and Comparative Archival Science”, *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997, pp 142-7; Frank Upward, “Structuring the Records Continuum: Part One”, and “Structuring the Records Continuum: Part Two”, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 24 no 2, November 1996, pp 268-85, and vol 25 no 1, May 1997, pp 10-35.

the exercise of power *in all contexts*: for example in corporations, religious institutions, trade unions, families and sporting clubs, as well as in governments; and in the absence of archives and archivists. In all these arenas, there is an inherent tendency of the powerful – and of their backers, beneficiaries and bureaucracies – to be self-interested and expedient in preserving position and reputation.

Inevitably, records become politicized weapons and resources in the exercise of and resistance to the use and abuse of power.¹⁴ This political reality is only too well known by opposition party leaders, whistleblowers, investigative journalists and Amnesty International. It goes a long way to explaining such phenomena as leaks, surveillance dossiers, resistance to openness, forgeries, identity papers, shredding, and the pursuit, and masking of the “truth” in the records.

A very recent example illustrates the point very well in the political arena in Australia. In the last federal election campaign, we were told by the government of the day that refugees from Afghanistan in a boat intercepted by an Australian navy ship had thrown their children overboard to force the navy to rescue them and allow them to land in Australia. We were presented with the evidence in the form of a record, a photograph showing children in the water with adults:

In an election campaign being fought in a climate of fear following the terrorist attacks on 11 September [2001] and the arrival of the *Tampa*, here was the issue that could justify the government’s position and help to keep it in office.¹⁵

We now know that the story was not true, that the photograph was actually taken later, when the boat was sinking, after the refugees had been ordered into the water to assist the rescue. We also know that within days of the alleged incident, many knew the story to be untrue, including very senior defence personnel, although the Australian people were not told of this until after the election, months later. The Prime Minister and his senior ministers continue to deny that they were advised that the story was untrue, claiming that there is no record of such formal advice. What better illustration of the statements referenced by Eric Ketelaar in his keynote address, namely the assertion that if something does not appear in the record, it does not exist, and its corollary – it appears in the record, therefore it exists.¹⁶ At the centre of the government’s election campaigning in relation to refugees there was a record, albeit ultimately revealed to be false, a record of an event that did not happen. For a critically important decision-making time, that recording constituted the reality of the event. And that event still exists insofar as that false record engendered the powerfully emotive construct of the children overboard, a construct used to demonise and dehumanize the refugees on the boat, and their countrymen in Australia’s modern day panopticon, under the dome of the desert sky, the detention camp at Woomera. That construct lives on in our national psyche and helps justify the treatment of the refugees and their children. As for the corollary, it does not appear in the record that anyone in the defence forces told the Prime Minister that it was all a lie, and therefore it is asserted that the telling, the advising, did not happen.

¹⁴ Of course many historical and cultural factors will shape the actual manifestations of *realpolitik* approaches to recordkeeping, and the more autocratic the power, usually the more extreme is its exercise.

¹⁵ Patrick Weller, *Don’t Tell the Prime Minister*, (Carlton: Scribe Publications, 2002), p. 2.

¹⁶ Eric Ketelaar, “Empowering Archives: What Society Expects of Archivists”, in this proceedings.

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Secondly, “what does society expect of archivists?” In our view, society expects us to live up to the ASA’s Archivist’s Mission.¹⁷ But whether we are able to fully achieve that is debatable; the catch is in the reference to social memory.

Look at our role in documenting, and establishing uniform standards for documenting, human rights abuses. To date, internationally, that work has been shouldered primarily by non-archivists in non-archival organizations: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Monitor Institute, and the Canada-US Human Rights Information and Documentation Network. Nothing better illustrates the point than the Open Society Archives at the Central European University, Budapest, established in 1995 as a private historical and human rights archives and research institute with an endowment from George Soros. As significant (for our purposes) as the limited initial involvement of archivists is that the initiative for an international Federation of Human Rights Archives and Documentation Centres came from OSA, not CITRA or the ICA. Locally too, we might ask who is working to document the human rights violations in East Timor or the experience of refugees in detention centres in Australia.¹⁸ Activists seem more interested in archives than archivists.

In relation to Australian Aboriginal issues, many archivists have made excellent contributions with the available funding, covering work on protocols,¹⁹ improved accessibility environments, indexing and so on. There is scope for further effort, however, in resolving concerns underpinning requests for the ownership of documents that refer to indigenous Australians, and in the employment of indigenous archivists. Furthermore, we have had zero visibility in the debates about Aboriginal history, despite the fact that the use of archives (by partisan historians on both sides of the debate, and by museum curators) has been central to the discussions.²⁰ Based on our experience with the Hobart motion, we probably also need more effort in enthusing our RM colleagues in supporting indigenous recordkeeping causes.

¹⁷ “Archivists ensure that records which have value as authentic evidence of administrative, corporate, cultural and intellectual activity are made, kept and used. The work of archivists is vital for ensuring organisational efficiency and accountability and for supporting understandings of Australian life through the management and retention of its personal, corporate and social memory.” See www.archivists.org.au

¹⁸ For example see the documentation activities of groups listed under gateway site <http://www.justiceforrefugees.org/>

¹⁹ *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives, and Information Services*, compiled by Alex Byrne, Alana Garwood, Heather Moorcroft, and Alan Barnes for the ATSI Library and Information Resource Network, 1995.

²⁰ References in the Hobart paper (*Convergence*, p 341, note 23) about denial of the extent of frontier violence and the “stolen generation” can now be updated with two opposing articles, the latter especially providing extensive referencing to this on-going debate. See Rod Moran, “Paradigm of the Postmodern Museum”, *Quadrant*, January-February 2002, pp 43-49, and “Indigenocide and the Massacre of Aboriginal History”, *Overland*, no 163, pp 21-39 as well as the very extensive references. On our invisibility, see Dani Wickman’s regret at the absence of archivists at a National Museum of Australia forum on ‘Frontier Conflict’ in December 2001, in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 30 no 1, May 2002, pp 87-89.

To us the problem, put conceptually and deploying the records continuum framework, is that our day to day focus has been mainly on the first to third dimensions; as a profession, we are yet to move beyond this to encompass the fourth dimension where many of the “who cares?” questions arise. In an Australian context, do we care about constructing archives that support democracy? Do we want to build public access frameworks that protect justice, rather than just serve the winners? Let us explain further.

As outlined in the introduction, in Hobart, we discussed how, together with the records they create, describe, contextualise, manage, withhold or make accessible, contemporaneous recordkeeping systems and their contextual and management information (i.e. metadata) evidence the activities of their creators, their values and perceptions of reality. Archival description, and indexing processes, whether they use the language and take on the world view of the records creators, or those of their successors in a later time and place, help build, dismantle and reconstruct structures of remembering and forgetting. Together with appraisal, disposal, and access policies and processes, they play their part in the politics of memory – impacting on what is remembered and what is forgotten. As Margaret Hedstrom so eloquently described it in Perth some years ago, archival imprints on the record leave indelible marks, evidencing the role of recordkeeping, of archival science and practice on constructing interfaces with the past.²¹ In terms of accessibility, the use of European names for Aboriginal people and places as indexing terms in records and archives systems in the past hampers access today for family link-up, land claims and other purposes. In terms of social memory and historical accountability, it is in itself powerful evidence of dispossession and denial of identity. The recordkeeping system in which the only evidence of a child’s removal from her family is not an individual file, or personal dossier, but a passing reference in a Protector’s journal or an entry in a ration book, referring to the child and her “country” by a European name, tells a compelling story about how the records creators and the regime of which they were a part regarded that child. The archival description, indexing and reference projects of today not only provide for greater accessibility, they also tell a story of acknowledgement of identity and rights, of the reconciliation movement of this time and place, and how records managers and archivists are engaging with it.

Verne Harris has challenged what Chris Hurley described as the “cocoon of meaning” that records managers and archivists weave around records. In his paper in Hobart, Harris gave us the enchanting image of an elusive record dancing outside *any* cocoon of meaning. So, the passing journal reference or the ration book entry would become in one sense fragments of a record, no longer linked to the layers of meanings provided by the journal and the ration book, the contemporary recordkeeping systems and their metadata, or the layers of contextualisation and means of accessibility provided by more recent description and indexing processes, but presumably free to tell other stories. Of course they would no longer be able to tell *this particular* story of violation, dispossession, and denial, followed by at least partial acknowledgement and the beginning of reconciliation.

²¹ Margaret Hedstrom, “Interfaces with Time”, Keynote Address to the Australian Society of Archivists 1998 Conference, *Place, Interface and Cyberspace: Archives at the Edge, Proceedings of the 1998 Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists*.

It is the record in the evolving context of the records creators and their successors that tells *this particular* story.

But what of the other stories these records might tell? We would argue that in order to tell any story, records by definition must have *a* context, but *which* of their many contexts should be captured in recordkeeping and archives systems?

Archival science and practice as they have evolved in European/Western traditions, privilege the records creators, their contexts, world views and value systems. Although the records creator is just one of the parties to the transactions captured in the records, current practice tends to treat other parties to the transaction as *objects* of the activities and *subjects* of the record, rather than as parties to transactions, in its appraisal, description and access activities and processes. The notions of ownership, custody, privacy protection and access rights that underpin appraisal, description and access policies are also deeply embedded in European/Western traditions and constructs.

To cast the issue in records continuum terms, many contemporary appraisal, description and access frameworks, standards, policies and processes are trapped in the third dimension. And this holds true for those that have been developed with reference to the continuum model itself. This does not detract from the significance and strategic importance of these initiatives, but it does point to the need for archivists to act as purposefully and collaboratively in the fourth dimension as they have in the third.

Records continuum thinking takes a multi-dimensional view of the creation of documents in the context of social and organisational activity, their capture into records systems, organisation within the framework of a personal or corporate archive, and pluralisation as collective archives. From this perspective, recordkeeping and archiving processes

- create [archival] documents-as-trace of the act in which they participate;
- capture records-as-evidence by linking documents-as-trace to the transactions, acts, decisions or communications they document, related records, and their immediate business or social context;
- organise records-as-evidence by “placing” them in the context of the corporate or individual archive, and managing them in frameworks that enable them to function as individual, group, or corporate memory; and
- pluralise records-as-individual/group/corporate memory by “placing” them into an all-encompassing framework that enables them to function as accessible collective memory.²²

The frameworks provided by the national and institutional standards, policies, and guidelines, developed by the Australian recordkeeping community, are concerned with establishing accountable corporate recordkeeping and archiving regimes in the third dimension of the continuum. These frameworks establish systems and processes for the creation and capture of records in the first and second dimensions which support their

²² As elaborated in Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish, “In Search of the Lost Tiger By Way of Saint-Beuve”, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 29, no 1, May 2001, and other continuum writings by Upward and McKemmish.

evidential quality (“recordness”), as well as their capacity to function as individual, and corporate memory. In the collecting archives area, a continuum analysis of the Australian scene suggests that there are strong third dimensional frameworks in terms of the collection policies of individual institutions. However, there is as yet in practice no coherent or systematic fourth dimension approaches to pluralisation based on functional ideas and purposes that transcend the third dimension boundaries of individuals and organisations. Such approaches and ideas about function and purpose also need to be brought to bear in the other dimensions of the continuum.

Application guidelines for functional analysis and appraisal, as presently embodied in international and national standards, in the policies and practices of lead Australian archival institutions – and indeed of archival programs like macro-appraisal in Canada, and the Pivot initiative in the Netherlands, all take as their main point of reference the mandates of a particular time and place and the world view of the regime in which the archival program operates. So, for example, when analyzing the functions of governments and government agencies in Canada or Australia, the frame of reference is primarily the black letter law and legal mandates of those regimes.

From this perspective, the administration of Aboriginal Affairs, or the protection of Aborigines might be identified as an ambient function of successive Australian federal and state governments. Linked to that might be business functions such as Aboriginal housing, employment and child welfare, and business activities that are associated with the re-location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples to “reserves”, management of their wages in funds controlled by the government, and removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

But what if we took a different point of reference – the perspective of the Aboriginal peoples as parties to these business functions, activities and transactions? And what if we attempted to transcend the third dimensional boundaries that limit functional analysis to consideration of the regime’s mandates and purposes in the regime’s own terms, and took a fourth dimension approach to defining possible ambient functions. We might come up with social functions associated with, at best, institutionalized paternalism and, at worst, repression and abuse of power. We might identify social purposes and functions that endure and are replayed throughout time, e.g. dispossession, slavery, and human rights abuse, and their gruesome, but all too human mandates. Or we might reference the global mandates associated with international courts, labour organizations, and human rights commissions, and that other all too human desire for justice. Then the business functions and activities associated with these ambient functions take on a different hue as, on the one hand, the language of detention/concentration camps, traffic in human beings, exploitation of labour, and institutionalization of child abuse comes into play, and on the other acknowledgement, compensation and reconciliation.

What might be the outcomes of a functional analysis that looked at the current Howard government’s immigration policy and mandates from a fourth dimensional perspective which grappled with broad social functions relating to the exercise and abuse of power in order to stay in power? From this perspective, how might the business functions and

activities associated with refugees be interpreted – might they not be described in the language of demonisation, misinformation, cover-ups, illegal detention and abuse of human rights? And if we used such counter-functional analyses or global, through-time frameworks as the basis of appraisal decisions, and assignment of descriptors in archival systems, how differently might we appraise and describe the records of what in one context might appear to be fairly routine records relating to the implementation of a responsible and accountable immigration policy, but in another might be seen as evidence of abuse of human rights?²³

The continuum offers concepts of transactionality and contextuality that are rich, complex and multi-layered. Transactionality is defined in terms of the many forms of human interaction and relationships that are documented in records at all levels of aggregation. It encompasses individual acts of communication, and social and business transactions of all kinds, the social and business activities or processes of which they are a part, the social and business functions they fulfil, and the social purposes they serve. The concept of contextuality in the continuum is concerned with the record's rich, complex, and dynamic social, functional, provenancial, and documentary contexts of creation, management, and use through spacetime. In continuum terms, while a record's content and structure can be seen as fixed, in terms of its contextualisation, a record is "always in a process of becoming".²⁴ Recordkeeping and archiving processes *fix* documents that are created by social and organisational activity, i.e. human interaction of all kinds, and *preserve* them as evidence of that activity. It does this by *disembedding* them from their immediate context of creation, and providing them with ever broadening layers of contextual metadata. In this way they help to enable the accessibility of meaningful records for as long as they are of value to people, organisations, and societies – whether that be for a nanosecond or millennia.²⁵

In relation to description, the Australian series system and more recent initiatives like the Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema,²⁶ both currently being developed as national standards, set up frameworks for capturing layers of rich contextual metadata, and multiple contexts of creation, management and use. However, most implementations privilege the role of the records creator in the transaction, and represent the records creator's context rather than the contexts of other parties to the transaction. And they draw on functional classification schemes and thesauri developed within third dimension frames of reference.

²³ Particularly so in relation to detention of refugees' children. See the Report of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (Chair Justice Louis Joinet), June 2002. Opinions of course differ: see for example the response of the Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock to the Joinet report (Press Release MPS 46/2002 of 7 June 2002), and for an opposing position by Amnesty International (<http://www.amnesty.org.au/whathappening/children/hrd4-5.html>).

²⁴ Sue McKemmish, "Are Records Ever Actual?" in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives first fifty years* (Clayton: Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994), pp 187-203.

²⁵ These concepts are explored at length in records continuum writings. See most recently, Sue McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice", *Archival Science*, vol 1, no 4, December 2001.

²⁶ Sue McKemmish, Glenda Acland, Nigel Ward and Barbara Reed, "Describing Records in Context in the Continuum: The Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema", *Archivaria* 48, Fall 1999.

In his keynote address in Melbourne in 2000, Terry Cook challenged Australian archivists to revisit the continuum model so that it can better fulfil its potential, in particular by:

- enhancing the “functional/structural/transactional framework that underpins both the records continuum model and [Canadian] macroappraisal strategy”
- building on and extending understandings of evidence and memory by pursuing the pioneering efforts by Brien Brothman, Richard Brown, Terry Cook, Verne Harris, Eric Ketelaar, Tom Nesmith, and Frank Upward to bring into play new insights from other disciplines, such as organisational theory, historiography, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, about the way society and individuals remember and forget, and identity is formed
- exploring the continuum’s fourth dimensional understandings of the pluralised nature of the archive beyond spatial and temporal boundaries
- fully realizing the model’s potential in relation to “the citizen’s impact on, interaction with, and variance from the state”; cross-institutional, and cross-jurisdictional perspectives; and embracing user needs.²⁷

As a profession we have in the continuum a conceptual framework that enables us to take simultaneous multiple views of recordkeeping “realities”. We have descriptive methods and tools in the series system and emerging recordkeeping metadata standards that enable us to go beyond Scott’s original vision of sequential multiple provenance to what Chris Hurley has recently named “parallel provenance”.²⁸ We can represent records from different perspectives, from the point of view of the creator, other parties to the transaction, and other stakeholders, in and through time, from individual, community, corporate and societal perspectives. We have the tools to construct representations of parallel recordkeeping universes – the universe of border protection and prevention of illegal immigration; the universe of illegal detention and human rights abuse. The challenge that Terry Cook poses for us is more a political challenge than a professional one. It is fundamentally about the role of archivists and the archival profession in a democratic society. And the sharp point comes when we consider what, if we presented such parallel views, it would mean for appraisal. Is it time for Australian archivists working within continuum frameworks to take up this challenge, to complement the considerable achievements in establishing accountable recordkeeping regimes in the third dimension by building fourth dimensional frameworks that enable records to realise their full potential as accessible collective memory and “enablers of democratic empowerment”?²⁹ Or are we past caring?

²⁷ Terry Cook, “Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage”, presented at the Australian Society of Archivists National Conference, *Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory, Melbourne, August 2000*, available via <http://www.archivists.org.au/>.

²⁸ Chris Hurley is developing the notion of “parallel provenance” with particular reference to the New Zealand context of the differing perspectives of the New Zealand government and the Maori nations. However this development is closely linked to his writings over many years on archival description, the significance of functions and relationships, and multiple provenance.

²⁹ Adrian Cunningham uses this phrase in “The Soul and Conscience of the Archivist: Meditations on Power, Passion and Positivism in a Crusading Profession”, *Argiefnuus/Archives News* 43/4, June 2001, pp. 167-77, quoted words p. 173.

Discussion Points Raised by “Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Reality”

Eric Ketelaar proposes that a healthy archival system in a democratic society needs a strong, independent professional association to balance the power of archival authorities.

- If this is so, what characterises a strong, independent professional association?
- Is the ASA capable of fulfilling such a role?

The ASA followed up on the Hobart motion by writing letters to all Australian governments. Predictably the responses pointed to all the initiatives taken in relation to the Bringing Them Home report, including the indexing and other projects. No further action has been taken to engage the RMAA in lobbying for the implementation of the Bringing Them Home recommendations, in particular increased funding for archival description and indexing projects, and the employment and education of indigenous archivists.

- What else can be done in relation to realising the substance of the Hobart motion?

At the ASA Conference in 2000, Terry Cook challenged Australian archivists to revisit the continuum model so that it can better fulfil its potential, particularly in relation to fourth dimension concerns.

- How can we complement the considerable achievements in establishing accountable recordkeeping regimes in the third dimension by building fourth dimensional frameworks that enable records to realise their full potential as accessible collective memory, and “enablers of democratic empowerment”? (Cunningham)
- A possible starting point: A disposal freeze on records relating to refugees, including records of outsourced functions, e.g. management of the detention centres.