

Articles

Touchstones: Considering the Relationship between Memory and Archives

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RÉSUMÉ Ce texte examine le lien entre la mémoire et les archives en explorant les concepts de la mémoire individuelle et collective et en analysant les processus associés à la création, la saisie, la sauvegarde et le repérage des souvenirs. L'auteure sonde la métaphore des archives comme mémoire, puis elle lie notre perception de la mémoire à une connaissance de la création, de la préservation et de l'usage des documents et des archives. Elle montre que la mémoire individuelle et collective ne représente qu'un fragment des événements d'une vie donnée et elle considère les réalités émotives, temporelles et politiques qui influent sur ce dont on se souvient et comment l'on y parvient. Elle conclue que les documents et les archives ne sont pas d'eux-mêmes des « souvenirs », mais qu'ils sont plutôt des balises sur lesquels l'on peut retrouver, préserver et articuler des souvenirs.

ABSTRACT This paper considers the relationship between memory and archives by exploring the concepts of individual and collective memory and by examining the processes involved with creating, capturing, storing, and retrieving memories. The author considers the metaphor of archives as memory and relates our perception of memory to our understanding of the creation, preservation, and use of records and archives. She demonstrates that individual and collective memory represent only a fragment of life events and she reflects on the emotional, temporal, and political realities that affect what we remember and how. She concludes that records and archives are not in themselves “memories” but only touchstones upon which memories may be retrieved, preserved, and articulated.

Archivists often draw on the metaphor of memory to explain their mission. As Barbara Craig has suggested, the allusion provides “a convenient shorthand” to explain the nature of archival work and the place of archives in society.¹

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¹ Barbara Craig, “Selected Themes in the Literature on Memory and Their Pertinence to Archives,” *American Archivist*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002), p. 280. In her essay, Craig

Despite their appeal, however, neither the metaphor of archives as memory nor the relationship between the nature of memory and the nature of archives has been probed in depth. As archivists such as Craig Brien Brothman, Terry Cook, Margaret Hedstrom, and Eric Ketelaar have noted, we tend to make assumptions about the meaning of the word “memory,” using the term strategically but perhaps not critically in the quest for increased understanding of, and support for, the archival endeavour.² Proposing that archivists develop a “memory-based approach to record-keeping,” Brothman has called for a “rigorous clarification of a concept of memory” and a better understanding of its relationship to history and archives.³ Hedstrom has suggested that archivists need to achieve “not only a more refined sense of what memory means in different contexts, but also a sensitivity to the differences between individual and social memory.”⁴ In a quest for that better understanding, this essay considers the concepts of individual and collective memory and their relationship with archives. Can the way we create, store, and retrieve memories be compared with the way we capture, preserve, and make available records and archives? Are archives, in fact, our memory?⁵

The Metaphor of Memory

Man is a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind.

W.H. Auden

In the metaphor of archives as memory, we see our memories as being “of the past,” and we see archives as evidence of that same past. Similarly, we imag-

cites several notable articles by archivists on the topic of memory; for her complete list of references, see especially her footnote no. 1, p. 278. See also Brien Brothman, “The Past that Archives Keep: Memory, History, and the Preservation of Archival Records,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), esp. pp. 50–51.

2 See, for example, Brothman, “The Past that Archives Keep,” pp. 50–51. See also, for example, Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 17–63; Margaret Hedstrom, “Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past,” *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos. 1–2 (March 2002), pp. 31–32; as well as Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” *Archival Science*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 2001), pp. 131–41 and “The Archive as a Time Machine,” in Proceedings of the DLM Forum 2002, Barcelona, published in *INSAR European Archives News, Supplement VII* (Luxembourg, 2002), pp. 576–81.

3 Brothman, “The Past that Archives Keep,” p. 72.

4 Hedstrom, “Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past,” pp. 31–32.

5 In this paper, I intentionally focus on the traditional, classical, “Western” sense of archives as documentary records: as tangible, physical evidence. As I acknowledge in the paper, archives are not the only tools used by individuals and societies to remember. But the focus of this discussion is on the relationship between memory and archives, not an investigation of all the different methods by which we make and keep individual or collective memories.

ine that our memories rest in some particular “place” in our minds: Cicero’s “the treasure-house of all things” or St. Augustine’s “inner chamber, vast and unbounded.”⁶ Similarly, we keep the records of the past in a place: a repository, a storehouse, an archives.

Within this place in our mind, it is essential to organize our memories of the past. As Bartolomeo de San Concordio proposed in the fourteenth century, “those things are better remembered which have order in themselves.”⁷ Modern-day psychologists accept the same notion. Daniel Schacter remarks that memory itself is “part of the brain’s attempt to impose order on the environment.”⁸ Alan Baddeley suggests that

the secret of a good memory, as of a good library, is that of organization; good learning typically goes with the systematic encoding of incoming material, integrating and relating it to what is already known.⁹

Archives too are organized and controlled. Muller, Feith, and Fruin – authors of the Dutch archival manual – emphasized provenance and original order as tools for contextualizing and ordering records of the past, once they are disconnected from their time of creation.¹⁰ The American archivist Theodore Schellenberg argued that archives “should not resemble goods on the shelves of a country store, without order and without control of any kind excepting that in the mind of the storekeeper.”¹¹

Every change in technology redefines notions of memory, and the computer is the latest, and perhaps the most dramatic, challenge to the idea of memory, and archives, as ordered and preserved accumulations of the past. In the world of computers, there is no “logical” order to information. A computer’s “memory” can be found in an internal storage area, on a hard disk, on a data tape, a CD, or a floppy disk. It can be transmitted physically, on chips, or virtually, through electronic transmission, e-mail, file transfer protocol, and so on. That

6 Quoted in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London, 1992 [orig. pub. 1966]), p. 66. See also *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, translated, with an introduction and notes, by John K. Ryan (New York, 1960), Book 10, p. 238.

7 Quoted in Yates, *The Art of Memory*, pp. 97–98.

8 Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* (New York, 1996), p. 52.

9 Alan Baddeley, “The Psychology of Remembering and Forgetting,” in Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford, 1989), p. 55. For an exploration of other aspects of the metaphor of memory, see also Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, 2000); Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent (Cambridge, 2000); and Michael Gazzaniga, *The Mind’s Past* (Berkeley, 1998).

10 See S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, trans. (1940) Arthur H. Leavitt (New York, 1968 [orig. pub. 1898]).

11 T.R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York, 1965), p. 80.

same “memory” can be copied and downloaded, posted to a Web site, or stored on a remote server. Memory can be kept anywhere; it can be kept everywhere. Information is “created” anew whenever needed, by pulling together the bits and bytes of data, words, and ideas, to construct an “answer” to the question put to the computer.

As philosopher Mary Warnock has argued, the computer has not entirely eliminated the “metaphorical element” of place in words such as “store” or “location.” But technology does blur the lines between “here” and “there” and “then” and “now.” As psychologist Endel Tulving has observed, the tendency to link memory with information storage, with a randomly accessible and ever-present electronic “place,” has altered our understanding of the nature of remembering. As a result, memory is no longer seen as “a single measurable capacity,” stored away for later retrieval.¹²

The computer’s ability to save, or lose, information at the touch of a button has also prompted the redefinition of archival work away from the past toward a continuing present. With the emergence of computer technologies, the traditional archival paradigm of the “life cycle,” wherein records move from past to present and from place to place in an orderly manner, has been disturbed. The emerging vision is of a “continuum,” in which the care of archives is not just the protection of documentary evidence of the past but a timeless endeavour to manage not just the residue of society’s documentary record but the process of its creation. As Sue McKemmish has argued, a continuum approach removes the divide between records and archives and between past and present, allowing users to “reconstruct recordkeeping systems in their legal, functional and organisational contexts at any given point in time.”¹³

The association of memory, archives, and computers has shifted the perception of archives from one metaphor – as memories of the past, kept in clear order in a particular place – to another metaphor – as information, stored randomly but retrievable instantly through the magic of electronic alliance. And so archivists sit uncomfortably on the horns of a dilemma of symbolism and imagery. In a society driven by instant communications and the globalization of information, to sustain a seemingly outdated metaphor – of archives as memory, and memory as past and place – is to risk professional marginaliza-

12 See the discussion in Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London, 1987), p. 9. See also Endel Tulving, “Episodic Memory and Common Sense: How Far Apart?,” in Alan Baddeley, John P. Aggleton, and Martin Conway, eds., *Episodic Memory: New Directions for Research* (Oxford, 2001), p. 272.

13 See Sue McKemmish, “Are Records Ever Actual?” (1998), accessible through the Monash University Records Continuum Research Group Web site at: <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/sm_cktrc.html> (accessed 6 February 2006). This article was first published in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives’ First Fifty Years* (Clayton, 1994).

tion. But to accept the refashioning of archives as computer memory, and so ever-present and ever-changing, is to reduce the intellectual complexity of archival work to the storage and retrieval of digitized bits of raw data.

It is not sufficient, however, simply to dismiss as irrelevant the metaphor of archives as memory. Underlying the metaphor is an ongoing belief in a relationship between what we keep and what we remember. Archivists must look more closely at the nature of memory and search for connections with the world of archives. What is memory? How do we remember? What do we remember and why?

The Nature of Individual Memory

Memory is like a purse, – if it be over-full that it cannot shut, all will drop out of it.
 Thomas Fuller

Memory has been defined as “the faculty of mentally retaining impressions of past experience,” “the ability to remember,” and “the ability to take in and store information and retrieve that information for later use.”¹⁴ Philosopher John Sutton proposes that memory is “a label for a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which humans and perhaps other animals retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes.”¹⁵

There are three stages to memory. First is the acquisition of information, which involves our *sensory memory*. Everything we perceive through our senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch enters our sensory memory. As we stand at the edge of the surf, we feel the sunlight on our face and the sand between our toes, smell the freshness of the air, hear the seagulls crying, and – once we brave the cold water – taste the salt in the ocean, and we know we are at the beach. While we experience all these sensations at once, they remain with us for only a couple of seconds. Our *short-term memory* captures selected information from those sensations and holds that information for a brief time: as short as a half a minute. We may capture the smell and taste of the salt water but we may not register the sound of the birds. Ultimately, we preserve only fragments of the whole experience in our *long-term memory*, retaining it in our minds for as little as a few minutes or as long as our lifetimes.¹⁶

14 See for example the general definitions in sources such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1973) and the *Penguin English Dictionary* (2000).

15 John Sutton, “Memory,” entry in the on-line *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available on-line at: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/memory/>> (accessed 6 February 2006). See esp. p. 1.

16 Consider a more prosaic example. We may look up a phone number in a directory and transfer the sight of the numbers to our short-term memory, where we hold the numbers long enough to make our call. Neurologists suggest that we can usually hold about seven items at a time in our short-term memories: just enough, ironically, to retain the digits in a typical phone number.

There are two kinds of long-term memory: *procedural* and *declarative*. Procedural memory, also known as tacit knowledge or implicit knowledge, is our memory for skills and procedures. We use our procedural memory to remember how to swim in the ocean, or how to hold a golf club, operate a can opener, use a keyboard, or drive a car. Procedural memory allows us to “know how” to do something.¹⁷

Declarative memory is our memory for facts; it enables us to “know that.” Declarative memory – so called because, unlike procedural memory, it can be “declared” or explained – is again divided into two components. *Semantic memory* refers to our knowledge of the meaning of words and how to apply them, and to our capacity to recall information about the wider world. Our semantic memory is what allows us to know that a dog is a dog, not a cat; that the ocean we are standing in is the Pacific, not the Atlantic; or that the capital of Austria is Vienna. We may not remember when we first learned to distinguish cats and dogs, or when we learned the relative locations of different oceans, but we have absorbed and retained the facts.¹⁸

Episodic memory is the remembrance of personally experienced events or experiences – episodes in our own lives. We may vividly recall that day at the beach; it might have been our first visit to the ocean or the last day of our summer holiday. Similarly we may remember our graduation ceremony at high school, our driving holiday through the Rocky Mountains, or the banquet we attended at our international professional conference. We may recall not only the events themselves but also our feelings and emotions about them. We may remember how nervous we were when we stepped on stage to receive our graduation certificate; our sense of wonder at the spectacular mountain vista on our drive; or the pleasure of our conversation with colleagues at the dinner. Episodic memory is, in effect, our ability consciously to reflect on our life and recall experiences and emotions from our past.

Many psychologists offer a more nuanced analysis of episodic memory and associate it with another type of individual memory: autobiographical memory. Some theorists have suggested that the temporal duration of episodic memory is short while that of autobiographical memory is long, and that our memories of events are strengthened by repeated remembering, sometimes called “post-event rehearsal.” The more we recount the stories of the past, the clearer our memories seem. We may not remember events accurately, however, and the process of repetition can introduce interpretations and variations that skew the original reality. As discussed below, we must acknowledge the

17 For more on the concept of procedural memory from philosophical and psychological perspectives, see, for example, Warnock, *Memory*; Schacter, *Searching for Memory*; and Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, 2000 [orig. pub. 1949]). See also Sutton, “Memory.”

18 For a more detailed discussion of semantic and episodic memory, see, among others, Tulving, “Episodic Memory and Common Sense: How Far Apart?”

fallibility of, and difference between, “knowing” and “remembering.” Regardless, our brains follow the same intricate neurological path to capture memories: from sensory to short term to long term.¹⁹

Individual Memory and Archives

The past is hidden in some material object ... which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not.

Marcel Proust

Memories, then, are created through a specific cognitive process. We receive sensory information; we store that information in our minds; and we retrieve that information when we wish to recall that particular memory, be it procedural, semantic, or episodic. An immediate parallel emerges with archives. Just as we capture, store, and retrieve memories, we acquire, preserve, and make available archives.

There is also an etymological connection between records and memory. The word “record” derives from the Latin *recordari*: from *re* for restore and *cor* (from *cordis*) for heart: to recollect, to think of, to recall “by heart.” To remember – to “record” – was originally an activity of the mind, a process of memory. And memory – *memoria* (mindful) – is the capacity for remembering: remembrance, record of the past, tradition, history. As Michael Clanchy suggests, writing about society’s transition from oral to written, the term “record” evolved from the notion that the spoken word served as witness or “record” to the idea that a written document could serve as evidence, as a “record.”²⁰ It is no wonder we associate records so closely with memory.

As Clanchy notes, “a document could indeed make time stand still, in the sense that it could pass on a record of an event to remote posterity.”²¹ Information and communications technologies – from ink and parchment to cameras, tape recorders, e-mail, and the Internet – bring with them the capacity to capture external information or evidence in order to “save a memory.” We can fill photo albums with pictures of our trip to the beach or to the Rocky Mountains; we can hang our high school certificate on our office wall; we can keep the conference program to remind us of the banquet. But are these records, in fact, our memories?

To answer that question, we need to look more closely at the relationship

19 See Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, esp. pp. 72–97; and Tulving, “Episodic Memory and Common Sense: How Far Apart?,” pp. 269–87, esp. pp. 270–71. See also Warnock, *Memory*, p. 9.

20 Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London, 1979). See, for example, pp. 56–57.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

between records and memory. We must look to the world of psychology, philosophy, and the mind and consider five issues: the process of remembering, and the inherent selectivity of that process; the fact that records and archives are triggers to memory, not memories themselves; the place of emotion in memory and its absence in records; the role of the present in remembering the past; and finally the difference between remembering and knowing, a difference essential to our sense of records as “memory” or as “evidence.” Let us consider each of these issues in turn.

We do not simply copy experiences into a place in our mind and recall them later in their entirety. Memory is a process. As historian James Fentress and anthropologist David Wickham suggest, “our memories no more store little replicas of the outside world made out of ‘mind stuff’ than do the backs of our televisions.”²² Rather, we retrieve bits and pieces of data from our minds and reconstruct these into an imagined “whole.” As psychologist Ulric Neisser has suggested, we reconstruct a past event the way a paleontologist reconstructs a skeleton from fragments of fossil. “Out of a few stored bone chips,” Neisser argues, “we remember a dinosaur.”²³

These bits and pieces of memory are called “engrams”: the “stored fragments” of an episode. More scientifically, they are the “transient or enduring changes in our brains that result from encoding an experience.”²⁴ When awakened, these engrams generate a recollection. The smell of apple pie might bring forth the memory of our grandmother’s kitchen, were we lucky enough to have a pie-baking grandmother. The sight of a fancy dress in our closet might bring forth memories of our high school graduation. The mention of a person’s name might create a recollection of a friend seen at the conference. Just as the scent and taste of the madeleine brought a flood of memories to Proust, a fragment of sensation can create an entirety of recollection.²⁵

22 James Fentress and David Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992), p. 31.

23 Quoted in Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 40.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 6. The neuroscience involved with understanding the nature of engrams and the process of encoding is entirely beyond the scope of this paper or, indeed, my own neurological capacity. Those readers interested in more information on neurology and memory would be well advised to start with the likes of Schacter, Tulving, Gazzaniga, and others cited here.

25 See Sutton, “Memory,” p. 7. Marcel Proust’s famous story of how the taste and smell of a madeleine led him to write about a lifetime of recollections has become something of a cliché among psychologists and philosophers interested in memory. Indeed, journalist A.J. Leibling poked a bit of fun at Proust’s expense when he wrote in the *New York Times* that “the Proust madeleine phenomenon is now as firmly established in folklore as Newton’s apple or Watt’s steam kettle. The man ate a tea biscuit, the taste evoked memories, he wrote a book. This is capable of expression by the formula TMB, for Taste > Memory > Book.” See A.J. Leibling, “Just Enough Leibling,” *New York Times*, 26 September 2004 at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/26/books/chapters/0926-1st-liebling.html?ex=1098244800&en=88ebc3d369184b95&ei=5070#>> (accessed 16 February 2006). For Proust’s story, see his *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris, 1987).

The process of remembering, then, relies on the discrete acts of creation, storage, and retrieval: the creation and storage of an engram and its subsequent retrieval when triggered into action. Here, the parallel with records and archives is striking. Just as engrams are formed, stored, and retrieved, records are created, stored, and used. Many records are created to document actions and transactions, to communicate ideas and information, to confirm agreements and understandings. But only some are retained. Others are discarded, just as we “discard” some of our memories, either by not encoding them firmly in our minds or by not retrieving them over time.

There are divergent theories about the longevity of our memories. One holds that we retain all memory engrams in our minds, waiting only for the right cue to bring forth the memory. Nothing is lost since everything can eventually be retrieved somehow. Another theory suggests that if engrams are not “exercised” and used, they gradually blur and diminish. Since we cannot possibly use and reuse every engram in order to keep it intact, eventually our unused engrams are “weeded out” of the brain and lost forever.

Another theory, closely associated with the work of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, holds that some memories, particularly more unpleasant ones, may in fact be “repressed”: banned from conscious awareness and only brought forward from the depths of our unconscious through an intensive process such as psychotherapy. While there has been much discussion in recent years of “false” and repressed memories, the growing consensus among scientists and psychologists today is that, in fact, we cannot recall a “true” memory – of an event or experience that actually happened – unless we have created and stored the engram that contains the essence of that which we wish to remember. At the very least, Freud created confusion by not differentiating between the unconscious decision not to create a memory and the conscious act of repression.²⁶

The theory that we can “keep” every memory is comforting indeed. And the notion that we might be hiding some memories deep in our unconscious also allows us the illusion of cerebral totality. It seems more realistic, though, to think that we simply discard from our minds that information which we do not

²⁶ See Schacter, Tulving, and Baddeley, who have all considered the topic of memory and the longevity of engrams; they have also touched on issues of Freudian analysis. It is here that I must note, in the interests of full disclosure, that I was raised by a vigorously anti-Freudian child psychiatrist, Dr. Thomas P. Millar, who, in addition to writing dozens of professional papers on the topic of psychoanalysis and the notion of repression, authored a satirical novel, *Who's Afraid of Sigmund Freud?* (Vancouver, 1985), nominated for Canada's Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 1986. While I strive to remain open in my consideration of Freudian issues, my biases are part and parcel of my own “memory” and have not, it seems, been repressed.

need. As Daniel Schacter argues, forgetting is an “adaptive” feature of memory. Engrams that are never used are best dismissed.²⁷

Similarly, it seems logical to argue that the disposal of records, like the disposal of memory engrams, is essential to keeping order in our minds and in our lives. Our memories, and the records that remain of past events, are both only fragments of a vanished whole. Our entire past life is not preserved in our brains, and the records we keep only capture a portion of our experiences.²⁸ But to equate records with memories – to suggest that records are memories – is to conflate two separate phenomena. Records are not memories. Rather, they are triggers or touchstones that lead to the recollection of past events. And there is not a one-to-one relationship between the record kept and the memory it stimulates.

Consider this psychological experiment. If asked to recall a memory associated with a word – in this case “table” – someone might remember sitting at his family’s dining table at Christmas, with his grandparents and other relatives, eating a traditional holiday feast. His may be the memory of a particular Christmas Day or it may be the memory of Christmases over time, at the same table, with his family. The word “table” generated the recall of a memory.²⁹

Should that rememberer look at a photograph of a Christmas dinner in his home, he will see the table and perhaps recall the sights and sounds and smells, just as he did when he heard the word “table.” This time, the photograph is the trigger that generates the memory. It is tempting, then, to argue that the record “is” his memory, for reminder and recollection come together so closely. But the record is not his “memory” any more than the word “table” was his memory. Rather, the record is a memory cue, prompting a series of recollections.

27 See, for example, Schacter’s discussion on pp. 80–81 of *Searching for Memory*. Warnock raises an interesting philosophical question in *Memory*, p. 60, asking whether by forgetting an act we cease to be responsible for it. An intriguing example worthy of consideration involves the claim by U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1986, in what became known as the Iran-Contra scandal, that he had not been informed of the operation to sell weapons to Iran. His denial of knowledge came despite the fact that an entry in his personal diary stated that he had in fact agreed to the sale. At the time and for some years after, Reagan’s motives were questioned as political and underhanded. The suggestion was often made that he must be lying: how could he forget such an important act, especially since he had created a record that “proved” his involvement. One must, however, revisit the issue of the fallibility of Reagan’s memory in light of his diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease, which took his life in 2004.

28 Verne Harris has written most eloquently on this concept of the limitations of records and archives; see, for example, “The Archival Sliver: Power Memory and Archives in South Africa,” *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos. 1–2 (March 2002), pp. 63–86.

29 In *Searching for Memory*, Schacter discusses an experiment wherein he presents three words and asks the subject to recall a memory associated with each word. One of the words is “table,” which is used by way of example here. The other two are “hurt” and “run.” See his explanation of the experiment starting on p. 73.

And there is no guarantee that the photograph will bring forth memories of any particular Christmas dinner, not even the one depicted. The rememberer may find himself recalling another holiday, thinking about a person in the photograph, or reflecting on another event somehow related to the image in hand. Or he may not remember that event at all; his brain may not have formed or retained the engrams required in the first place to capture that event in his long-term memory.

Someone else seeing that photograph, someone who was not present at the event itself, is seeing evidence of the event, but she is not experiencing a memory of the event. The photograph is proof that at some time in the past the family depicted in the image had Christmas dinners, or at least the dinner shown in this photograph, in a particular house, at a particular table. The photograph provides the framework for a semantic memory: the knowledge that this event took place. But the person looking at that photograph, not having been at that table, will not carry an episodic memory of that dinner. Without the original experience in her own mind, no manner of cue will make the outside observer “recall” the event. Further, looking at the photograph may trigger a completely different memory, such as a recollection of her own family celebrations, at Christmas, or Hanukkah, or Ramadan.³⁰

Records are not memories, but we often create or capture records in order to secure a piece of evidence that allows us to recall an event. On a personal level, records are often created or kept during ceremonies (holiday celebrations, rites of passage, and so on) or in order to memorialize events we deem important. The very process of recording can be a ritual that serves memory making. As argued by Eric Ketelaar, the decision to document an event not only records that event but also “occasions” it.³¹ When archivists look at evidence, we must consider not just the artifact and the administrative context of its creation but also the emotional or political impetus behind the process of documentation.

But records are also created and used as safeguards against fragile and unpredictable recollections. It is here that the consideration of memory slips from individual to collective remembering. If we could all rely on our memories to recall accurately our experiences, decisions, or agreements, we would not need to create records. But we do not always trust our memories and, more to the point, we do not always trust each other.

A contract, for example, is a legal agreement that ensures both parties will follow a particular course of action. It is an aid to memory, but it is also an antidote to false remembering. The contract is a tool for semantic memory. It

30 Or she may think of a something that seems wildly irrelevant – a political event, a china pattern, or the need to phone her brother and wish him happy birthday. The leapfrogs made by the human brain are miraculous in their complexity.

31 See Ketelaar’s discussion in “Tacit Narratives.”

allows us to know facts and decisions. The evidential role of the contract, however, does not stop the negotiators from looking at the document and recalling not just its purpose and meaning but also their own episodic memories: of late-night meetings, the signing ceremony, or the friendships formed during the negotiations. But the contract does not exist in order to generate that episodic memory; it exists as external proof of an agreed-upon arrangement. If either party fails in its obligations to the other, the contract will be held up as evidence of the breach. The contract may “remind” the individuals of many things, but its primary purpose is to “remind” the two parties of their respective commitments.

Sitting by itself on a shelf, the document generates no emotion. Like the fallen tree in the forest, its sound may only be heard when someone is there to hear it. A death certificate is a statement of fact, created to confirm reality, not beget sentiment. But reading the death certificate of a beloved grandmother, a newborn baby, or a newlywed on honeymoon will each give rise of different emotional responses. And the association of the reader to the deceased – from stranger to kin – will change the reaction yet again. Thus the record ultimately serves many purposes and facilitates many responses, some evidential and some psychological. We must understand the symbolic context surrounding the creation and preservation of the record, but we must also acknowledge the gap between the record, the event, and the emotion.³²

Unlike the object itself, our memory, especially our episodic memory, is laden with emotion. Psychologists and neurologists have long argued that we recall more readily something meaningful to us than something of no emotional consequence. We remember our grandmother and her pies because we felt an emotional attachment to her. We feel significantly less attachment to our drive to work, a task relegated to our “habit” memory. A copy of our grandmother’s death certificate may generate a significant emotional response; a report on highway construction near our office may produce no such reaction.³³

Our present circumstances will also affect how we remember the past. The engrams may be intact but the “interplay between past and present” can modify the details of our remembering.³⁴ Memories are generated when we encounter a trigger: an object, a scent, a word, a document. To remember, we must be living in the present, so we can compare a moment in the “now” with

32 On the symbolic meaning of records and archives, see James O’Toole’s discussion in “The Symbolic Significance of Archives,” *American Archivist*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 234–55.

33 See Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, pp. 45–46. Of course, we may find that, after we have retired, a drive along the same route we followed each day for years may generate all manner of emotions and memories about our working lives. In that instance the trip is the “memory cue” or trigger for both semantic and episodic memories, but it is still not the memory itself.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

a moment in the “then.” Therefore, the conditions and realities of the present cannot help but shape and fashion what we remember and how.³⁵ But unlike the magical portraits and paintings in Harry Potter’s world, records themselves – as evidence frozen in time – are not changed by the present. It is our interpretation of those records that can change, sometimes dramatically, depending on our present circumstances. It is for this reason that archivists strive to protect the authenticity and contextuality of records, so that the past is not continuously altered to accommodate changing sensibilities.

Consider, for example, our memories of Christmas dinners. Perhaps Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter joined us year after year, but then they divorced and Uncle Peter never came to the table again. When we look at the photograph and see Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter, our memory of that pre-divorce dinner may be coloured by subsequent events. Perhaps our recollection of that Christmas dinner now contains more negative than positive emotions. We may recall disagreements or stony silences rather than laughter and fun.

But we cannot change the fact that Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter are in the photograph, sitting next to each other, and perhaps looking quite happy. The photograph – the record – does not tell us what emotion to experience. Our memory of the evening and of subsequent events affects our reaction to the image. One can argue, then, that the record is either a reality check or a falsehood. Perhaps Aunt Mary and Uncle Peter were happy that year and their troubles came later. Or perhaps, as we so often do in family photographs, they were putting on a “brave face” for the camera, creating a fiction for posterity.

Our level of “trust” for the record is inextricably linked to the contextual information available: factual *and* emotional. We must ask why the record was created, and why it was kept. The “truth” – if it can be found – rests somewhere within and among the intermingling of that photographic image with the memories of the participants and observers and the other available evidence, from divorce proceedings to personal letters to family stories.

A more significant and tragic example of the bias of the present can be found in the recent attempts by revisionist groups to invalidate the existence of the Holocaust. Many people seem to want to deny the legitimacy of, if not the actual existence of, the catastrophic events of World War II, by questioning the memories of survivors and refuting the validity of archival evidence. In this case, the records remaining from that time serve as an antidote to attempts to reinterpret historical events. The impulse of Jewish communities around the world to preserve information about the Holocaust, even if the collections are not “original records” but reproductions and transcripts and publi-

35 See Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 198. The authors argue that it is equally true that the present can be interpreted through the past: “the images, habits, and causal motifs that structure social memory provide a grid through which the present can be understood in terms of the remembered past.”

cations, is compelling proof of the desire to protect the remembrance of the past from falsification. In this sense, archives are assuredly not memory but rather the means of protecting their reality from injudicious and dishonest editing.³⁶

As we consider the relationship between individual memory and archives, however, we must also consider another neuropsychological wrinkle. How much do we actually “remember” and how much do we think we “know”? Which of our memories are episodic and which are semantic? The fact is, we simply cannot remember something we did not ourselves experience. Equally, we cannot share anyone else’s episodic memories. Records can help us “know” but they won’t necessarily help us remember.

Eighteenth-century German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe recounted a story of a time in his childhood, shortly after the birth of his sibling, when for some unknown reason he gathered up the family china and threw it, piece by piece, from a window in his house down to the street below. Putting aside the issue of his internal motivations, Goethe’s puzzle in later years was in deciding whether he actually “remembered” the incident or whether he had instead constructed a “memory” after hearing members of his family repeat the story over the years.³⁷

If we had documentary evidence – a record – showing a youthful Goethe hanging out his window, merrily winging plates and cups to the ground below, we could “prove” that the event happened. But the existence of that evidence does not necessarily mean Goethe would remember the event any better. He may not have created an engram for the memory: he may have been too young or the event may not have registered as significant to him (important though it must have been to his dish-deprived mother). The fact that he “remembered” it so well suggests that it became part of his autobiographical memory: his episodic memory rehearsed and refined through repeated tellings. The veracity of his memory is questionable without external evidence, but the significance of his knowledge of the event, as one of the Goethe family’s shared stories, cannot be dismissed. It is in this transition from remembering to knowing that we move from the realm of individual to collective memory. It is a move that involves sharing our inner thoughts with others, creating stories from memories, and preserving, interpreting, and mediating external evidence – documents, artifacts, architectural sites, geographic places – to create a factual basis for individual memories and to communicate those recollections, and the emotional resonance they carry, outside of our single selves to our wider com-

36 For a discussion of the preservation of Holocaust memories, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993).

37 See Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, pp. 22–23; Warnock, *Memory*, pp. 38–39.

munity. And it is here – finally – that the relationship between archives and memory gains strength.

Archives and Collective Memory

If it were not for the visions afforded by memories of one's own life, one would not be able to understand the lives of others.

Mary Warnock

Records and archives are among countless different devices used in the process of transforming individual memories into collective remembering. Records, along with stories, artifacts, songs, rituals, traditions, and myriad other non-documentary touchstones, are used to shape memories into narratives and to transform information and recollection from the individual to the collective. Records and archives are not memories, and by themselves they do not imbue us with knowledge. But they are a means by which we gain knowledge of ourselves and our society, leading ultimately, one hopes, to greater understanding, compassion, and wisdom.

Psychologists define semantic memory (our knowledge) and episodic memory (our remembrances) as declarative memory because they can be declared or articulated. And it is the articulation of memory that extends it from the personal to the collective. In the transition from personal to communal, a memory does not transmit its full emotional resonance, but it can bring forward shadows of feeling, sufficient perhaps to generate a sense of empathy in the recipients. Social memory, therefore, is articulate memory: memory that is structured, framed, organized, and used by and for the benefit of a community.

Goethe's story of winging dishes from the window has become part of his identity. The original motivation for his behaviour – perhaps stemming from his less-than-joyous reaction to the arrival of a new sibling – has been transformed over time, as (we hope) that sibling became someone very dear to him. The story, retold and refashioned in the light of subsequent family events, became part of the collective memory of Goethe and his family. Any documentary residue – a painting, a diary entry, a letter – not only confirms the facts but also “memorializes” the event, allowing for continual revisiting and reinforcement.

Just as Goethe's story helps define him both as an individual and as part of his family, our recollection of our grandmother and her pie, of a family Christmas dinner, or of our high school graduation, may all become memories that are transmitted and shared. The programs, letters, diaries, photographs, reports, and other records we retain are touchstones, and we return to them when we wish to resurrect and pass on our memories. That sharing of evidence and memory not only shapes our sense of ourselves as individuals but also gives us a place in our family and our community.

And since we live in communities, we experience events as part of a collective. We may choose to share our individual memories with that wider group, commemorating our memories (from the Latin *com memorare*: “to remember together”) by extending them outside of our individual minds. But the terms “social memory,” “public memory,” “collective memory,” and “community memory” have all come to refer to a sense of shared knowledge or experience, even if we acknowledge the impossibility of transmitting particular episodic memories, complete with emotions and sensations, from one person to another.³⁸

At its heart, social memory can be defined as “an expression of collective experience.”³⁹ In the ideal world, social memory is a way for members of a society to see into the minds and lives of others, so that we can offer empathy and understanding and develop a sense of collectivity. Social memory can help foster harmony and unity. As sociologist Marie-Claire Lavabre argues, collective memories create and support homogenized representations of the past, reducing diversity and creating a shared sense of identity.⁴⁰ Sociologist Barbara Misztal has also emphasized the social functions of collective memory, defining such memory as “the representation of the past, both that shared by a group and that which is collectively commemorated, that enacts and gives substance to the group’s identity, its present conditions and its vision of the future.”⁴¹

The notion of collective or social memory was first articulated by philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1926, when he suggested that a group has as much capacity to “remember” as an individual, and that collective memory was the framework within which individual recollections were created and maintained.⁴² Many sociologists have rejected the social determinism behind Halbwachs’ vision, especially since it did not allow much room for individual agency. Halbwachs is acknowledged, however, as one of the first to examine in depth the collective dimensions of memory.⁴³

Halbwachs’ error may have been in anthropomorphizing societies: attributing to groups certain qualities that in fact can emerge only from individual

38 Given the different interpretations of the concept of memory, James Young has suggested that the term “collected memories” might be more appropriate than “collective memory.” See Young’s discussion in *The Texture of Memory*.

39 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 25.

40 See Marie-Claire Lavabre, “For a Sociology of Collective Memory,” available on-line at: <<http://www.cnrs.fr/cw/en/pres/compress/memoire/lavabre.htm>> (accessed 6 February 2006).

41 Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead, 2003), p. 7.

42 See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, 1992). Halbwachs’ work was originally published in German in 1926.

43 See Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, esp. pp. 3–6, for a discussion of Halbwachs’ ideas.

action. As Fentress and Wickham suggest, no group remembers “spontaneously and collectively,” not families or communities or nations. Individuals within a society must come together, consciously and deliberately, in order to create shared memories. It is this conscious effort that lies behind the social impulse to create museums and historical societies, to preserve and restore archaeological sites, to pass on stories and dances and rituals, and to keep records and archives.⁴⁴

The choice of memory tool depends on a society’s technology, language, and sense of values. In one culture, society may rely more on oral traditions, songs, or poetry to construct social memories. In another, society may instead emphasize the preservation and display of archival materials or artifacts. A society with a heavy investment in digital technology will fashion its memories, and its memory institutions, differently from a society that does not place as much emphasis on such tools. Similarly, a society that places great value in the art of storytelling may approach the preservation of “memories” differently from a society that ranks the written above the oral. As Fentress and Wickham argue, “the transmission of articulate memory depends ... upon the way in which a culture represents language to itself.”⁴⁵

Archives are just one of many tools societies use to create, sustain, and share memories; they are “vehicles of memory,” particularly important in those societies more dependent on writing than on orality, or images, or rituals for the transmission of information and ideas. Misztal suggests that “as the ‘pastness’ of the past depends upon a historical sensibility, this can hardly begin to operate without permanent written records.”⁴⁶ But it is not the mere existence of records and archives in storage vaults that captures memory. Rather, it is their selection, preservation, and articulation that allow them to serve society as clues to remembering and knowing. As Ketelaar suggests, using the metaphor of archive as “time machine,”

44 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 127.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 45. There is an enormous body of literature on the relationship between technology and culture and on the role of technology in the transmission of knowledge. Authors from Marshall McLuhan to Michel Foucault to Jacques Derrida have tackled this subject, and there is not room in this short paper to consider the wide range of theories and philosophies that have been posited. The reader is encouraged to look at some of the core literature in the field, from before and after the emergence of the postmodern “era,” from McLuhan’s seminal 1964 work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York), to Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), to Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1974). Beyond that, one can go in numerous directions for more on the topic, in disciplines from anthropology, sociology, linguistics, history, or communication theory. *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge, 1987) is one of Jack Goody’s many contributions to the debate on language and culture. Marc Bloch, Harold Adams Innis, Claude Levi-Strauss, Walter Ong, and Michael Carrithers have also offered critical analyses of the topic over many decades.

46 See the discussion in Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, pp. 12–13 and 22–24.

archiving – all the activities from creation and management to use of records and archives – has always been directed towards transmitting human activity and experience through time and, secondly, through space.⁴⁷

The act of creating social memory is the act of creating, capturing, preserving, and sharing the tangible objects: the touchstones, vehicles, and triggers that help us to remember and to know.

If archives are to be compared to memory – if the metaphor of archives as memory is to retain any authority – then we must accept a critical archival reality. If records and archives are touchstones that allow us to communicate individual memories and so share those memories within society, those records and archives must be managed so that they can be articulated, mediated, and *used*. The foundation of individual memory is that it is created, stored, and *retrieved*. Social memory is formed from the retrieval and *articulation* of individual memories. The foundation of archives, then, must be that they are records acquired, preserved, and *made available*. A central role of the archival institution ought to be to seek out the records of its society and make those records accessible so that the society may use them not just to document events but also to interpret, shape, and articulate memories.

The Politics of Memory

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

Milan Kundera

The question arises, then, what society? The danger in using archives as tools to support social memory is that the selection of records for retention is, and always has been, and always will be, subjective. Who in society decides what will be kept? Who decides what will be destroyed? If social memory is forged and fashioned through a process of pick and choose, then the vehicles of memory will be subject to the inevitable partiality and bias of those in society with the power to do the picking and choosing.

Archivists have long struggled with the implications of appraisal – and the consequences of selective retention and destruction – on the preservation of a “balanced” record of society.⁴⁸ The fact is, archivists simply cannot know what records will trigger what memories; if there is no one-to-one relationship between touchstone and remembrance, then we must turn to our society for

47 Ketelaar, “The Archive as a Time Machine,” p. 4. See also Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, esp. pp. 49–51 about the transmission of social memory.

48 See for example the seminal discussion by Kenneth E. Foote in “To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture,” *American Archivist*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 378–92.

guidance, recognizing all the while that (a), everyone's present reality affects their sense of the importance of the past; and (b), archives are not just tools for memory but antidotes to forgetting. The politics of memory demand that archivists acknowledge the absence of objectivity and the impossibility of "one truth," and that we are ever-vigilant in the quest for inclusion and honesty in the preservation of society's documentary memory. Thankfully, there is no "scientific" cure for the unavoidable fallibility of human decision making – one of the wondrous ambitions of life is to overcome our frailties. That said, archivists and societies can and should take precautions against reckless abuse or willful neglect.

For instance, archivists must always seek to understand the sociopolitical underpinnings of archival change. If a portion of one society rejects a particular method of capturing and preserving memory triggers – be they oral, or written, or digital – then that fragment of society may choose to establish a different method and, perhaps in so doing, create a new social structure. As Fentress and Wickham suggest, the decision by one community to capture its memories separately from others is "one of the most effective recourses any social group has to reinforce its own social identity in opposition to that of others."⁴⁹

Canada's "total archives" tradition is not an entirely archival endeavour but rather an archival manifestation of a sociopolitical reality, in a country that believes in its collective responsibility to help its citizens foster a sense of identity. Similarly, the emergence of different record-keeping traditions in English and French Canada is not simply a sign of archival incongruities but rather a consequence of the same sociopolitical realities that allowed for the peaceful divergence of two cultures within the same jurisdiction.⁵⁰

But sometimes the divergence is less peaceful, in which case archivists, and society, must strive to support the creation of opposing or complementary forms of remembering and the continuous protection, during times of political change, of the evidence of the past. In South Africa, the establishment of the South African History Archive offers an example of a non-governmental institution created in an environment of political conflict, that exists to preserve archival evidence outside of a state-controlled environment specifically in order to combat the censorship and control exhibited by the state sector.⁵¹

49 Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 114.

50 For more on the concept of total archives, see Laura Millar, "Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 103–46, and "The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), pp. 46–65. For an English-language discussion of archival approaches in Quebec, the reader may be particularly interested in *Archivaria* 59 (Spring 2005), offering "Québec's Perspective on Archival Science."

51 For information on the South African History Archive, see the official Web site at: <http://www.wits.ac.za/saha/overview_01.htm> (accessed 2 February 2006).

In the ideal world, this blending of the perspectives of different cultures would be achieved through harmony, not conflict. In New Zealand, for example, two seemingly opposing groups – the Maori and the government – have come together to establish specific archival services for the country's aboriginal people, addressing specific Maori concerns such as language and traditions, genealogy, and land rights.⁵² The archival goal, ultimately, is to recognize the dynamic nature of individual and collective memory and facilitate the preservation of memory tools and triggers to support the perspectives of all stakeholders. It is not for one society to dictate the archival or record-keeping approaches of another (which is perhaps one reason it has proved so difficult to establish international norms for archival activities such as classification, or appraisal, or description). The appearance of new and different memory institutions is a process archivists should celebrate and support.

Cultural relativism only goes so far, though. As documented by agencies such as the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), attacks on libraries, archives, and museums during times of war are deliberate and detestable attempts to eradicate a community's sense of identity and self. The destruction of cultural institutions in Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan are only the most recent disasters arising from an attempt by one sector of society to control the tools and touchstones of memory. Equally devastating have been wartime archival losses in countries such as Bosnia and Cambodia, and the totalitarian control over records and archives seen throughout history in places such as Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe, Communist China, or the Soviet Union.⁵³

The real danger, then, to the preservation of the “vehicles of memory” is not that institutions of memory in different societies keep more oral or more writ-

52 Details of the Archives New Zealand method of providing service to Maori can be found at the official Archives New Zealand Web site at: <<http://www.archives.govt.nz/services-tomaori.php>> (accessed 6 February 2006).

53 See the reports and analyses on the Web sites of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) at: <<http://www.ifla.org/>> and the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) at: <<http://www.ifla.org/blueshield.htm>> (both accessed on 6 February 2006). The ICBS site includes specific statements on archives and records in Iraq (<<http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/admin/icbs-iraq.htm>>), and also Afghanistan (<<http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/admin/icbs-afghanistan.htm>>). The destruction of cultural resources in Bosnia is discussed in Andras Riedlmayer, “Libraries Are Not for Burning: International Librarianship and the Recovery of the Destroyed Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” presentation to the 61st IFLA General Conference, August 20–25, 1995, available on-line at: <<http://forge.fh-potsdam.de/~IFLA/INSPEL/61-riea.htm>> (accessed 6 February 2006). For information on Cambodia, see Peter Arfanis, “Archives at Risk in Cambodia: The National Archives of Cambodia and the Role of the Foreign Advisor,” paper presented at the Australian Society of Archivists annual conference, Brisbane, 29 July 1999. Available on-line at: <<http://www.camnet.com.kh/archives.cambodia/English/archrisk.htm>> (accessed 6 February 2006). Much has been written on German archives in World War II. An interesting

ten records or focus on stories, or rituals, or documents, or digital records. The real danger comes when a society – whether a nation-state, a tribe, an ethnic group, a city, or a family – is not allowed to establish and sustain openly accessible memory institutions that serve to protect and articulate the evidence and information it considers valuable for, and relevant to, its own identity. Societies must be allowed the freedom to create or acquire the “raw” elements of memory, preserve them – whether in archives, or museums, or heritage sites, or storytelling groups or memorials or other institutions – and then share them publicly through interpretation and mediation. And as societies shift, and grow, and change, they must be free to shape and reshape their institutions accordingly, adding to the complexity of their individual and collective sense of self, while respecting the reality of past social and political constructions.

Seeking Continuity

Death does not exist; people only die when we forget them.

Isabel Allende

Individual memory is created as sensations become information and information becomes recollection. Sensory memory leads to short-term memory, which leads to long-term memory: our brains create engrams, we exercise them through remembrance, and we dispose of those we no longer need. We then rehearse and recall those most significant to us, leaving us with a mental collection of impressions and reminiscences, of semantic, and episodic, and autobiographical memories. The physical, tangible records we create and archives we keep – intentionally, to memorialize an occasion, or incidentally, as a byproduct of life’s events – can become tools we use to help us remember and to help us share those memories with others.

And so, at last, records and archives find their place in the process of memory: as evidence, as memory triggers, as touchstones – acquired, preserved, articulated, and mediated by society in order to contribute to the construction of collective knowledge, identity, and, perhaps, wisdom. Our individual mem-

recent article is by Klaus Oldenhage, “Prosecution and Resistance, Compensation and Reconciliation: Two Repressive Systems in a Country. The Case of German Archives,” *Comma*, no. 2 (2004), pp. 75–80. Also of interest is the 2004 issue of *Comma* (nos. 3–4) which focuses on “Archives of Central Europe.” See also the work undertaken by the Open Society Archives, a non-government archival institution based in Budapest, Hungary, that aims to preserve documentary evidence of the Cold War – a period of totalitarian control where many records were created but few, perhaps, were accessible to those beyond the narrow circles of government. See: <<http://www.osa.ceu.hu/>> (accessed 6 February 2006). A valuable starting point for analysis of Chinese archives is the 1999 issue of the International Council on Archives’ journal *Janus* (no. 2), that consisted entirely of articles on Chinese archives. Similarly, Russian archives are the focus of the 2002 edition (nos. 3–4) of *Comma*, the successor to *Janus*.

ory gives us our personal past, and our shared past gives us our collective identity. It is by preserving and fostering our memories that we can build the foundation we need to look to the future and see our connections with the larger world.

Archivists should celebrate the creation of each new institution in society that captures, preserves, and makes available records and archives – and oral histories, and artifacts, and songs, and stories, and works of art, and other vestiges and relics: all symbols of society’s desire to articulate its memories and safeguard its identity. We should also realize that the items that we collect and manage are not memories but are tools used to support the creation, preservation, and resurrection of individual memories and, more importantly, their articulation as part of a shared identity. We should look to the creators of those tools – the holders of those memories – for guidance in their interpretation, mediation, and articulation, so that we may bring those individual memories into the light and share them for the benefit of all members of society.

Artist Ben Freeman suggests that our documentary “memory” – the evidential residue of our lives – is “a crying out to the future to say that we did exist and that we were important.”⁵⁴ People can live on in our memories, and so can communities. Societies only die when we forget them. We lose our community, and something of ourselves, when we do not transfer “memories” forward through both preservation and articulation.

In the inevitability of death and in the recognition of our own human limitations, perhaps we have a chance, through the transmission of the evidence of individual memories and their construction as part of collective identity, to achieve a spiritual continuation in the memories of others. Ultimately, perhaps, it is through acknowledging the finality of our human life cycle that we can truly imagine the existence of a continuum.

54 Quoted in Schacter, *Searching for Memory*, p. 306.