

Counterpoint

Archives and the Intangible*

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RÉSUMÉ Le domaine des archives a toujours eu une affinité avec les objets. La nature des objets en question, documents, photographies ou artefacts, déterminait leur place au sein de l'institution archivistique ou les reléguait à un centre d'entreposage hors-site ou à une autre institution, comme un musée ou une bibliothèque. Mais les récents changements sur le terrain ont nécessité un réexamen du « statut de l'objet » (« *objecthood* ») archivistique, des archives comme endroit créateur de la signification (« *a meaning-forming place* ») et des principes de base servant à l'acquisition archivistique et aux stratégies d'évaluation. Le programme de l'UNESCO pour la protection du patrimoine culturel intangible donne un exemple des efforts contemporains pour archiver non seulement ce qui est culturellement éphémère, mais aussi ce qui est fondamentalement intangible. Comme tel, il contribue à une réflexion sur les prémisses sous-jacentes de la préférence pour les objets et de leur valorisation par les archives, tout en proposant des cadres de travail permettant aux archivistes de re-conceptualiser leur rôle dans la préservation de ce qui a une valeur culturelle, peu importe sa forme physique.

ABSTRACT The realm of archives has always had an affinity for objects. Whether those objects were records, photographs, or artifacts determined their locus within the archival institution, or whether they were relegated to some distant storage facility or an affiliated place, such as a museum or library. But today's altered landscape has necessitated a rethinking of archival "objecthood," of the archives as a meaning-forming place, and of the basic tenets of archival acquisitions and appraisal strategies. UNESCO's Program for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage provides an example of contemporary efforts to archive not only the culturally ephemeral, but also the quintessentially intangible. As such, it contributes to a reflection on the underlying premises of the archives' preference for and elevation of objects, and suggests frameworks by which archivists may re-conceptualize their roles in preserving culturally meaningful expressions regardless of physicality.

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Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.

Walter Benjamin

In 1998, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created its international *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, a program intended to ensure the protection and revitalization of intangible forms of cultural heritage. While UNESCO had focussed efforts on cultural heritage since its 1972 *Convention for the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage*, the 1998 *Proclamation* expanded its interest to embrace objectless cultural expressions, those manifestations intrinsically tied to their creators, such as traditional performances, ritual celebrations, and storytelling. While sites and objects chosen for protection via the 1972 Convention had been relatively easy to catalogue and safeguard, UNESCO's recent guardianship of oral and intangible heritage proves considerably more taxing, and raises enormous challenges to traditional archival assumptions. It renders legitimate the safeguarding of those cultural manifestations that defy the traditional archives' notion of enduring value and simultaneously lends credence to a transmutation of the archive, suggesting ways by which archivists may reconceptualize their roles in preserving culturally meaningful expressions regardless of either the physicality of the expression or of the archives itself. Additionally, it challenges contemporary archivists to redefine the overall responsibilities and missions of cultural memory institutions.

Archives & Objects, Meaning & Significance

In our minds we have been collecting records as physical objects when we ought to have been collecting records for the information they contain.

Timothy Ericson¹

Archival history has been closely interlinked with the history of power, the record serving as validation and enduring protection of legal or official authority, a legitimated truth. The privileged objects of the archival profession have traditionally been paper records, those textual artifacts deemed of value by a first generation of creators and by a second generation of archivists. It has been a given that the archives' notion of "enduring value" connoted a *document*, a printed or handwritten record. Even images were subjected to this hierarchy: the metaphysical sublimation of text over image has been a lingering tendency within the archives.² More markedly, these text-objects came to not only

1 Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), p. 70.

2 See Hugh Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987/88), p. 13: "These records have been the mainstay of our

approximate events, happenings, stories from the past, but also to verify them, serving as *representations* (representative proofs) as much as documentations.

Archivists contributed to the elevation of this phenomenon, for their acquisition criteria were often rooted in an acknowledgment of the historian's cause. Whereas eighteenth-century historians strove towards *vraisemblance*, their nineteenth-century descendants claimed *vérité*, a direct connection between object and meaning, "in which the representation *was* the thing that happened."³ Historical narration itself, privileging the authority of the archive, frequently linked documents chronologically as though they "scientifically" verified or even constituted the events themselves.⁴ The German archivist Hans Booms' conception of the archives as mirroring societal values was illustrative of this mindset⁵; Terry Cook's macro-appraisal approach and Helen Samuels' documentation strategy were its inheritors.⁶ The rich narrative component of archival storytelling, evident in acquisition policies, finding aids, and institutional websites, has been the archive's mode of establishing a relationship between the past and the present.⁷

Memory and history have been the archive's *raison d'être*. Indeed, the archive's close ties with history – as a "house of memory" – sustained the elevation of the textual object, for *history* itself is conceptually bound to the written record. As early as the late fifteenth century, Middle English usage defined *history* as the "[written] records of past events." Document-based historical methods have been perceived as allowing for a "more scientific view of the

archives and libraries and we have until recently tended to 'read' other media in textual terms." More recently, see Barbara Craig's *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice* (Munich, 2004), emphasizing the increasing hybridization of formats, but also privileging text materials: "even if we were inclined to do so we can no longer ignore our audiovisual heritage because it is so thoroughly interconnected to our textual materials," p. 168.

3 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002), p. 76.

4 For an elaboration on historical-writing and representation, see Alan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital," in Patricia Holland, J. Spence, and S. Watney, eds., *Photography/Politics: Two* (London, 1986), p. 154.

5 Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69–107, translated from "Gesellschaftsordnung und Überlieferungsbildung: Zur Problematik archivarischer Quellenbewertung," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 68 (1972), p. 3–40, by Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhower. The article was based on an address Booms delivered at the opening of the German Archives Conference in 1971. See also Maynard Brichford, "Academic Archives: Überlieferungsbild," *American Archivist*, vol. 43, no. 4 (Fall 1980), pp. 449–60.

6 Terry Cook, "Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis: Documenting Governance Rather than Government," *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 25, no. 1 (April 2004), pp. 5–18; and Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Lanham, MD, 1988), pp. 1–29 and 253–68.

7 For a proposed restructuring of this relationship, see Brien Brothman, "The Past That Archives Keep," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), pp. 48–80.

past,”⁸ by providing evidence of historical events and people that can frequently be schematized into a linear conception of time, into a story.

Compounding matters, the archives consists of documents carefully selected for inclusion, but also a wide variety of materials – a “mad fragmentation”⁹ – that ended up in the archive in some altogether different and often haphazard manner. Despite the rich assortment within such a memory institution, archival acquisition strategies have privileged medium over message. As Timothy Ericson has lamented, “a typical acquisition policy begins by enumerating the types of objects (personal papers, letters, diaries, corporate records) we wish to collect,” rather than the content or information these objects reference.¹⁰ Certainly, many archival institutions have responded to such criticisms by establishing post-custodial collection development policies grounded in thematic rationales as their principal criteria, but more times than not, the format or medium retains its status at the secondary level of the policy (i.e., “This collection consists of printed materials, manuscripts, & etc.”).

The contemporary plight of television series, electronic files, films and photographs within archival institutions demonstrates that Michael Buckland’s “information as thing” era is not quite upon us.¹¹ What is valued most in archival institutions is the record/document that *records information* pertaining to a whole array of societal functions, concerns, and actions *in textual form*.¹² As Lisa Klopfer has recently articulated, the practicing archivists who embrace the relativity of “recordness” and the corresponding notion that records exist in many formats, are amongst the minority.¹³ UNESCO itself has traditionally privileged text, despite its claims to the contrary, evident in its own 1991 identification of the archive as: “recorded information, records, documents” and its definition of the document as “a single archival record usually a typescript or manuscript item or a product of a word processor.”¹⁴

Such medium-specificity has been ideologically applied to *all* archives, whereby records in a given medium were perceived to have an essential nature, and an assumed meaningful relationship to social history. From the standpoint of the traditional archive, the physically intangible had no “enduring value” and therefore was not considered in the appraisal process. But this ontological assumption may no longer be considered valid in the realm of a

8 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

9 Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, p. 68.

10 Ericson, “At the ‘Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction,’” p. 71.

11 Michael Buckland, “Information as Thing,” *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 42 (1991), pp. 351–60.

12 Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives,” p. 13.

13 Lisa Klopfer, “Oral History and Archives in the New South Africa: Methodological Issues,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), p. 115.

14 UNESCO, *UNESCO Archives Finding Aids* [ARC.91/WS/2] (Paris, December 1991), pp. 25–26.

wide variety of new formats and media, and subsequently the archival profession has come to reconsider its basic premises. Medium-based taxonomy, while it may have served the memory institution's storage purposes and the nineteenth-century historian's conception of the world, was inherently reductivist, often severing the object from the meaning(s) that drove its creation, that which its creator(s) envisioned for it when it was brought together with other objects. Perhaps most significantly, medium-based reassignment to differing storage spaces guaranteed that new meanings would be generated according to empiricist frameworks, suggestive of historical connection and causation. Severing objects from one another based on their format assured that they would be conceived of as markers of historical "events," representations divested of the messy imbrications that may very well have been part and parcel of their creation. The archives' object-text then represented a context to which it no longer connected; in replacing old meanings with new, the archives became "a kind of 'clearing house' of meaning."¹⁵

The traditional function of the archives has been viewed comparably to that of the medieval reliquary: fundamentally, to protect and house; but symbolically to venerate. Frequently, the archives consisted of remnants of the past, serving as the physical container of the dead's remains.¹⁶ The documents and artifacts of the archive were decontextualized from their original function and use, and were reconfigured to serve a new generations of users.

While many archivists have perceived the archives as an empiricist institution, in which its contents are *consigned* – unified, identified and classified – under a hermeneutic authority, that very consignment "liberates" their meaning from their original.¹⁷ This contradictory nature of the archives results in "a whole world, a social order, [which] may be imagined by the recurrence of a name in a register, through a scrap of paper, or some little piece of flotsam."¹⁸ Precise consignment, abundant disorder and immeasurable potential meanings coexist in the archives.¹⁹ Similarly, autonomy and imbrication simultaneously thrive: the archives promotes the autonomy of the medium-specific object, yet alternately promises that same object's interconnectivity with broader social dynamics.²⁰ This sort of dualism permeates the archives, and affects the archivist's notion of use values as much as it does meaning.

15 Sekula, "Reading an Archive," p. 154.

16 Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archives and Its Limits," in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town, 2002), pp. 21–22.

17 Sekula, "Reading an Archive," p. 156, impacted by Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996).

18 Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, p. 81, influenced by the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, 1969 [orig. 1964]) and by Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'archive* (Paris, 1989), p. 59.

19 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 11.

20 This is a phenomenon Hal Foster has also observed in certain forms of contemporary art his-

University of Texas-Austin geographer Kenneth Foote has stressed that archives “are important resources for extending the spatial and temporal range of human communication.”²¹ While the archival extension of the object’s cultural significance and even its temporality seem inherently desirable, archiving some *thing* alters the thing itself:

In an archive, the possibility of meaning is “liberated” from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context.²²

Archival transformations both elevate and destroy, especially evident with respect to the object’s value in the archive: the creator’s values diminished; the archives’ use-based values elevated. *Creation-value* may be conceived of as the creators’ purpose(s) in creating such cultural expressions and objects; *use-value* refers to the perceived ways in which these items will be called forth by future users. *Creation-value* and *use-value* have been largely mutually exclusive. Indeed, the American archives’ taxonomies are predicated on use-value, despite aspirations of preserving creation-value. The archivist begins to “tell” the collection’s story with a keen interest in engaging an anticipated audience: only through a retrospective analysis of a collection may a sequence of objects be manipulated in such a way as to become meaningful.

An implication of the archivist’s tendency to privilege use-value over creation-value has been that within archival memory institutions, the academic historian’s mindset has been accorded imbalanced significance. Paintings and sculptures donated to American historical societies bear this burden: no longer considered as aesthetic works, their use-value exists solely as historical objects. This is a different phenomenon than the sort of time-based reassignment that happens to such things as medallion coins in art museums, wherein their aesthetic value reigns supreme, their fiduciary use-value long vanished. The devaluations and reassignments associated with aging are one thing; the conscious archival reassignments associated with processing collections another. The nature of the object has been irretrievably impacted by its relation to some other archived objects, by virtue of the institution’s codification and classification: “the object is turned away, abducted, from itself, its inher-

tory: “The Archives without Museums,” *October* 77 (1996), p. 103. Foster specifically cites Michael Baxandall’s *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford, 1972) and Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, 1990) as evidencing history conceived not as *Zeitgeist*, but as social construction.

21 Kenneth Foote, “To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture,” *American Archivist*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 378–92, as reprinted in Randall Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago, 2000), p. 30.

22 Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” p. 154.

ent value, and denuded of its defining function so as to be available for use as a sign.”²³ In the archives, the new meaning tends towards *synecdoche*, when the part comes to represent the whole; *metonymy*, when one entity comes to stand for an associated one; or *metaphor*, when two dissimilar entities are compared. Synecdoche is the dominant tendency of the archives.²⁴

With such an enduring and passionate relationship with the textual object as the primary mode of establishing meaning, it is no wonder that contemporary archival institutions have been struggling with new media formats that are inherently more ephemeral. Oral histories, email correspondences, relational databases, and geographical information systems have been subject to varied analyses calling for a reconception or “reinventing” of the archives. David Bearman’s early stress on the **context** in which documents are created as the basis by which archivists may understand their **content** resonates more emphatically now than when first expressed.²⁵ Indeed, it provides the conceptual underpinning of such projects as UNESCO’s ambitious program to safeguard intangible cultural heritage.

UNESCO’s Intangibles Program

UNESCO has defined intangible heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”²⁶ Its

23 Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 111.

24 This “synecdochal” impulse is not confined to the archive. See, for example Craig, *Archival Appraisal*, p. 9 on *Documents as Triggers*: “Selective shaping of our remembered past is often supported by physical, tangible documents, helping us to recall, peacefully and at leisure, the events we cherish or people we knew.”

25 See, for example his works from the early 1990s: “Multisensory Data and Its Management,” in Cynthia Durance, ed., *Management of Recorded Information: Converging Disciplines* (Munich, 1990), p. 111; and “Archival Principles in the Electronic Office,” in Angelika Menne-Haritz, *Information Handling* (Munich, 1993), p. 193; as well as Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom, “Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records,” in Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies*, pp. 549–68. For a retrospective reflection on Bearman’s importance within the realm of archival theory, see Terry Cook, “The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique,” *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997), pp. 15–37.

26 UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) [hereafter *Convention*], available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>, p. 3. Additionally, UNESCO’s *Proclamation Programme* includes an expanded definition of oral and intangible heritage, conceived by a team of international experts, which reads: “peoples’ learned processes along with the knowledge, skills and creativity that inform and are developed by them, the products they create, and the resources, spaces and other aspects of social and natural context necessary to their sustainability; these processes provide living

ephemerality is the source of its vulnerability. The importance of these expressions is intrinsically tied to their creation and their transmission, which are both often fixed in duration and limited in geographic scope. UNESCO's attempt to safeguard and revitalize oral and intangible heritage is both a recognition of its essentiality for cultural diversity and identity, as well as an acknowledgment of globalization's threats to its survival.²⁷

In inaugurating its 1998 *Proclamation*, UNESCO moved beyond its earlier emphasis on preserving historic physical monuments to encourage creators of such oral and intangible cultural expressions to participate in the "management, preservation, protection, and promotion" of their endeavours. Bolivia first raised the issue in 1973, but UNESCO's departure from its established mission was officially introduced at a conference in Marrakech in 1997, the "International Consultation on the Preservation of Popular Cultural Spaces," organized by the education and information-sharing organization upon the prompting of the Spanish expatriate writer Juan Goytisolo and leading Moroccan intellectuals. Goytisolo, who claimed to have learned colloquial Arabic from the "illiterate storytellers" of Marrakech's Jemaa el-Fna Square, sought international recognition to preserve this vital cultural space, that did not meet the prescribed definition of a World Heritage site.²⁸ In part due to Goytisolo's efforts, Jemaa el-Fna became UNESCO's first designated *Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

The 1998 *Proclamation* introduced humanity's oral heritage as a vital component of cultural anthropology, thereby expanding UNESCO's organizational mission beyond the safeguarding of monuments and natural formations accorded universal human value. It defined its new program's primary objectives as:

- to raise awareness and recognize the importance of oral and intangible heritage and the need to safeguard and revitalize it;
- to evaluate and take stock of the world's oral and intangible heritage;
- to encourage countries to establish national inventories of the intangible heritage and provide legal and administrative measures for its protection;

communities with a sense of continuity with previous generations and are important to cultural identity, as well as to the safeguarding of cultural diversity and creativity of humanity." Formerly available at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.phpURL_ID=21427&URL_DO.

27 For more information, see UNESCO, *Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage Information Kit* (17 October 2003), available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001412/141247E.pdf>.

28 UNESCO, "Brief History," available at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=29915&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html; and Maya Jaggi, "Scourge of the New Spain," *Guardian Unlimited* (12 August 2000), which can be seen at: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/internationalwriting/story/0,6194,353291,00.html>.

- to promote the participation of traditional artists and local creators in identifying and revitalizing the intangible heritage. The Proclamation encourages governments, NGOs and local communities to identify, safeguard, revitalize and promote their oral and intangible heritage. It also aims to encourage individuals, groups, institutions and organizations to contribute to its management, preservation, protection and promotion.²⁹

These goals are largely archival, despite the seeming “non-archivability” of that which the *Proclamation* seeks to protect.

Indeed, Articles 12 and 13 of UNESCO’s corollary 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* require State Party participants to inventory proposed intangible heritage, as well as to develop management and documentation strategies for the safeguarding of such intangibles.³⁰ The underlying assumption for UNESCO’s *Proclamation* corresponds to that archival responsibility Hans Booms referred to as *überlieferungsbildung*, the passing down of cultural history, of civilization.³¹ While the traditional definition of *archives* considered it a repository/place of documents and records (building), and an *archive(s)* as historical records or documents (objects), today’s archival realm has considerably expanded, evident in the vast array of materials selected for inclusion within such places.³² However, it should be noted that as far back as the seventeenth century, English-language use allowed for the term *repository* to serve both as “a place, room, or building” within which *objects* were contained; as well as “a place or thing within which *something immaterial*” existed.³³

Perceiving the role of the modern archives as *überlieferungsbildung* requires an acceptance that not all cultural phenomena produce artifacts, that the archivist must broaden his/her conception of “archivability” (and “recordness”) in order to ensure the survival of vital cultural manifestations. Such a rethinking of the archives has ramifications far beyond the safeguarding of

29 UNESCO, *Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* (1998) [hereafter *Proclamation*], available at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2226&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

30 UNESCO, *Convention*, p. 7.

31 Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage,” pp. 69–107; and Brichford, “Academic Archives,” pp. 449–60.

32 I disagree with the notion espoused by authors such as Mbembe (“The Power of the Archives and Its Limits,” p. 19), that there cannot be a definition of archives “that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there.” The digital realm has begun to change, and will ultimately transform the archive to be something other than that which is a physical container/locus. Even conceiving the Internet as a potential archival “building” – an architectural records repository – the fluidity of the virtual realm will promote the dissolution of linear and concrete linkages between an archival “container” and its “contents.”

33 “Repository,” etymology in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2nd edition (1989).

oral and performative traditions: UNESCO's emphasis on working with intangible heritage creators and community leaders to identify and safeguard their expressions should resonate with any contemporary archivist coping with theoretical and practical considerations related to digitization, electronic records, and ephemeral artifacts created in a variety of different media and formats.

UNESCO's *Proclamation* honours both expressive forms and the spaces associated with their creation, celebration, and performance. Since its inception, one hundred *Masterpieces of Intangible Heritage* have been announced. Amongst expressive forms selected include: Georgian Polyphonic Singing (Georgia), the Transverse Trumpets of the Tagbana Community (Ivory Coast), and Vedic Chanting (India); amongst performative spaces include those of the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of the Congos of Villa Mella (Dominican Republic), the Sosso-Bala in Nyagassola (Guinea), and Jemaa el-Fna Square (Morocco). Such intangibles share fluidity and ephemerality, embodying the creative processes by which living communities voice their identity and diversity. The Gbofe, the Transverse Trumpets of the Ivory Coast's Tagbana Community, for example, are primarily played at rituals in the village of Afoukaha. Their uniqueness rests on the fact that when these trumpets of ranging sizes are sounded together, they aurally replicate words of the Tagbana language, which female choirs then translate into song. Morocco's Jemaa el-Fna Square, on the other hand, the entrance into Marrakesh's medina, serves as a "cultural crossroads and a symbol of the city's identity."³⁴ A vital market and entertainment space since its development in the eleventh century, Jemaa el-Fna overflows with performers such as fortune tellers, fire-eaters, and snake-charmers vying for the spectator's attention. The performative strategies employed are inherently dynamic, the performers' cosmopolitan narrative techniques admixtures of tradition and ingenuity. The vital factor in determining whether an oral or intangible cultural heritage may be officially inscribed with the international designation is its "representativeness," an ambiguous term which UNESCO has left to its future Intergovernmental Committees to define.³⁵ Candidates must simultaneously demonstrate their "outstanding value as masterpieces of the human creative genius" and the imposing risks to their survival due to "processes of rapid change, urbanization, or acculturation."³⁶

Recognizing that not all oral and intangible cultural expressions are geo-

34 UNESCO, "The Cultural Space of Jemaa el-Fna Square" (2001), available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/masterpiece.php?id=14&lg=en>.

35 UNESCO, "Frequently Asked Questions" (2003), available at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=16429&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=-512.html.

36 UNESCO, "Selection Criteria" (2001), formerly available at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21427&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#obj; now available at: http://www.cha.go.kr/english/world_heritage/masterpieces.jsp.

graphically delineated, former UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Mats-uura, referring to intangible heritage as a “melting pot for creative expression and a driving force for living cultures,” emphasized the cross- and multinational variations of peoples’ learned processes and creative endeavours. Multi-national expressions have also been accepted as *Masterpieces*, including Shasmaqom Music, the Oral Heritage of the Zápara People, and Baltic Songs and Dance Celebrations. These selections share their acceptance as vital to popular and traditional activities or expressions. They differ – forms versus spaces – in their degrees of intangibility (their physicality or lack thereof). Both essentially lack a classifiable and storable object.

In this sense, UNESCO’s proclamation serves as a future historian’s dream “of bringing to life those who do not for the main part exist, not even between the lines of state papers and legal documents, who are not really present, not even in the records of Revolutionary bodies and fractions.”³⁷ At the same time, it defies the archival tradition and its reverence for the object.

For the contemporary archivist considering the selection of intangible cultural manifestations within its institutional mission, creation-value (more broadly conceived than provenance) must be accorded a greater significance. Such intangibles frequently carry creation-values that are immediate and spontaneous, performances of short duration; at the same time, for them to endure, measures must be taken to sustain them. Whereas traditional provenance was largely grounded in notions of ownership and original order, an emphasis on creation-value empowers communities to participate more actively in the appraisal process. Creation-value should permeate the archives’ codification/representation of the cultural manifestation. This thinking places a significant burden on the archives to work closely with creators and community leaders to ensure that *their* immediate and long-term purposes present themselves within the appraisal process. Such a shift is in keeping with that already underway in the archival profession, as Terry Cook has asserted:

All these changes move the theoretical (and practical) focus of archives away from the record and toward the creative act or authoring intent or functional context behind the record. This new paradigm for archives replaces the profession’s traditional intellectual focus on the physical record – that thing which is under our actual physical custody in archives – with a renewed focus on the context, purpose, intent, interrelationships, functionality, and accountability of the record, its creator, and its creation processes, wherever these occur. Because this suggested focus goes well beyond drawing inspiration for archival activity from the study of records placed in the custody of an archives, it has been termed a postcustodial mindset for archives. Such a postcustodial paradigm for archives, let it be quickly stated, does not mean abandoning archival principles or no longer acquiring records, but rather reconceiving traditional, Jenkinsonian guard-

37 Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, p. 70.

ianship of evidence from a physical to a conceptual framework, from a product-focused to a process-oriented activity, from matter to mind.³⁸

Put in other terms, the archive's reshaping may best be envisioned not by utilizing history as its guardian discourse, but by employing anthropology. The latter evidences – as Hal Foster has elucidated – a similar conceptual split between autonomy and relationship, between the singular and the referential, that one may chronicle in the modern archives.³⁹

Historically, the archivist and the anthropologist have experienced similar conceptual challenges, for in striving to explicate humanity, to narrate it, to represent it; they have both employed objects as vital storytelling instruments. For the archivist, those objects have largely been documents; for the anthropologist those objects have frequently been artifacts and photographs. Indeed, the early twentieth-century French ethnographer's quandary might as easily be framed by the modern archivist:

How should we proceed so that the documents (observations, objects, photographs), whose value is tied to the fact that they are things taken from life, may retain some freshness once confined within books or locked up in display windows ... An entire technique of presentation must intervene as a follow-up to the techniques of the collecting, if we want to keep the documents from becoming merely materials for a ponderous erudition.⁴⁰

In both milieus – archival and anthropological – the individual object has been conceived of simultaneously as discrete (autonomous) and as symbolic (referential). Hal Foster has chronicled this dualism. Unlike the archival profession, which in the United States has largely been driven to compromise theory for the sake of storage and use, anthropology has developed the conceptual means to reconcile its dualistic nature.

Archives and the Intangible

Man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer.
Martin Heidegger⁴¹

38 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.

39 Foster, "Archives within Museums," pp. 106–7.

40 Denis Hollier, "The Use-Value of the Impossible," in Carolyn Bailey Gill, *Bataille: Writing the Sacred* (London and New York, 1995), p. 137, cites Michel Leiris, "Du musée d'ethnographie au musée de l'homme," *La nouvelle revue française* 299 (August 1938), p. 344.

41 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in William Lovitt, ed., *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York, 1977), p. 26.

We are unable to relive duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness ... Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are. To localize a memory in time is merely a matter for the biographer and only corresponds to a sort of external history, for external use, to be communicated to others.

Gaston Bachelard⁴²

The evocation of anthropology as a reconciler has already been shaped in the realm of contemporary installation art, where artists such as Tacita Dean and Sam Durant have demonstrated “an archival impulse”⁴³ by transporting lost historical information into the present, allowing for both the inclusion of intangibles and objects into a physical framework based on meaning over medium, on context over an image/word dichotomy. One may perceive this impulse as an anthropological tendency in contemporary art, but essentially it is a paradigm formed in the ethnographic museum of the nineteenth century, a contemporary (and competitor) to the historicism that informed the development of the modern archives.

Following the traditions of such legendary early modernists as Alexander Rodchenko, Kurt Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp, these contemporary artists have embraced an archival collections-creation sensibility and defied the traditional archives’ reverence for the textual object. Both Dean and Durant incorporate collections of media – films, photographs, sound recordings, text – and evidence what Foster has referred to as a will “to connect what cannot be connected.”⁴⁴ While Dean’s work, such as her 1994 film *Girl Stowaway* (which emerged from her recovery of a photograph of an early-twentieth-century Australian girl who stowed away on a ship bound for Great Britain) attempts to allegorize archival work, Durant’s employs archival compilation within staged theatrical spaces in order to present the archives as essentially entropic and disruptive, meaning simultaneously created and lost. Both Dean and Durant reflect the archive’s informational and evidential values, and attempt to reconcile its autonomous and referential characteristics.

For the contemporary archivist grappling with developing institutional policies related to cultural intangibles, art works such as those realized by Dean and Durant present contemporary creative endeavours by which to create narratives based on an interweaving of objects and intangibles. Their reordering of the archive, framing it by creation, context and meaning rather than by medium, embodies the spirit by which one may reconceive the archives to allow for the inclusion of both tangibles and intangibles. Although such works maintain the

42 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York, 1964), pp. 8–9.

43 See Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004), especially pp. 3–4.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

“inescapable materiality”⁴⁵ long associated with the archives, they have been able to elevate obsolete moments of human creative activity into new meaning-laden contexts, thereby simultaneously safeguarding the past and disseminating its significance into the present, albeit in works of fixed duration.

Archivists may be loathe to seek inspiration from realms such as contemporary art, even when it references archival practice. And one may certainly iterate the multiple ways in which Dean and Durant’s working contexts differ from those that archivists face. However, creative measures that incorporate objects and intangibles in order to transmit meaningful stories should serve as catalysts for the archives’ reconfiguration. They additionally suggest means by which archivists may develop new narrative strategies that are based on information that has been created by a variety of makers, in a variety of formats. They may also illustrate the ways in which creators/artists themselves seek to develop meaningful stories, which may or may not be dependent on traditional historical practices.

For contemporary archivists grappling with intangibles, strong relationships with their creators are essential. Creators and community leaders must be part of the acquisition process, but they must also serve as advisors – determining the ways in which their impermanent endeavours, related spaces and artifacts will be managed, stored, documented, and promoted or represented beyond their creation-site(s). Cultural memory institutions may consider developing rights management protocols, whereby the creators/community leaders would retain intellectual property rights over subsequent representations of their cultural heritage manifestations.

UNESCO’s *Presentation of the Masterpieces Proclaimed in 2001, 2003, and 2005*, envisioned as world maps with links to its first forty-seven (2001 and 2003) and its later forty-three masterpieces (21 November 2005) provides such a model.⁴⁶ For example, UNESCO’s representation of the Kutiyattam – which was accepted as a World Masterpiece in 2001 – defines the considerable risks to its sustainability, and the measures that local and international groups are developing to archive this vital cultural heritage.⁴⁷ The site includes a narrative synopsis of Kutiyattam’s importance, while the site’s digital “diaporamas” clearly ground intellectual property rights with the creators, the École Margi de Kathakali et de Kutiyattam.

45 Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits,” p. 19.

46 UNESCO, *Presentation of the Masterpieces Proclaimed in 2001 and 2003* (2003), presented 47 masterpieces at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/masterpiece.php?lg=en>. On 21 November 2005, UNESCO announced 43 additional masterpieces, mapped at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/>.

47 UNESCO, “Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theatre,” in *Presentation of the Masterpieces Proclaimed in 2001 and 2003* (2003), available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/masterpiece.php?id=10&lg=en>.

Kutiyattam is the Sanskrit Theater performed in Kerala, the southwest province of India, which dates back some two millennia. It is the only form of ritualistic theater in India that allows for the performative collaboration of men and women, who act together while accompanied by percussionists. Over time, this cultural form has synthesized classical Sanskrit traditions with comedic local Malayam theater, resulting in a codified expressive language that emphasizes eye movements and complicated gestures which are the secret purview of families that have passed on the acting techniques in master/student relationships. The Kutiyattam's intricacy and long duration (a performance may last up to forty days) have been detrimental to its survival, for younger generations, who lack the traditional patronage associated with the Sanskrit Theater, have not had the means by which to learn the complex codes and contribute the time required for its rites.

At the heart of UNESCO's action plan is the coordination between creators and archivists to maintain the complex and precise codes essential to the Kutiyattam:

There are five institutions responsible for handing down the tradition, including the Margi Centre, which is the co-ordinator of the network and has set up a training program. The creation of an archive is planned in order to preserve the actors' manuals and audiovisual documents of the performances, and a series of documentary films on the masters of this theatre form. The institute is also seeking to attract new pupils and to make a wider public aware of the Kutiyattam codes.⁴⁸

In such a fashion, creators select and assist in the documentation of their creations, as well as develop means by which their performances and spaces may be passed on generationally, attempting the *überlieferungsbildung*. The archiving of the actors' manuals and the recording of Kutiyattam performances only addresses a portion of the UNESCO *Proclamation's* scope: to contribute to the management, preservation, protection, and promotion of cultural heritage intangibles.⁴⁹ Rather than singularly relying on synecdoche to document the Sanskrit Theatre, contributors expand the scope of representation beyond creation-value and use-value, to include its hopeful perpetuation into the future. Widening the sphere of the Kutiyattam with international colloquia, publications, and the organization of a public festival in Bombay, the five local institutions responsible for the UNESCO safeguarding not only

48 Ibid.

49 UNESCO, *Proclamation*, formerly at: http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21427&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#obj; now at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001225/122585e.pdf>.

steer⁵⁰ the intangibles' archiving, but disseminate its cultural significance. Such holistic concern in intangibles is vitally necessary for their cultural preservation and enduring vitality. They are not attempts to freeze time, to amass remains of the past, but, rather, to document cultural manifestations that are inherently dynamic and subject to change, whilst assisting in a wider diffusion of their cultural importance and significance. Accepting cultural transformation as part of the human condition, Juan Goytisolo, one of the catalysts for the promulgation of UNESCO's *Proclamation*, expressed that "the vitality of a culture is in its capacity to assimilate foreign influences; culture that's defensive and closed condemns itself to decadence."⁵¹ International efforts to archive intangibles within the UNESCO framework should ensure that the cultural forms and spaces they document employ representational strategies that both allow for and articulate the dynamic transformations that these intangible cultural manifestations engender.

The Cologne-based art critic Tom Holert refers to Tacita Dean's time machine-like artistic endeavours as "refictionalizations" of histories: they are stories woven together by the artist's encounters, interests, and serendipity.⁵² As a narrative agent, Dean has been able to transcend the ephemeral nature of her selected media with installations that are both sublime and meaningful, weaving aural and visual memories together into rich narratives associated with ocean transport, seaside landscapes, and tales of lost sailors. Exposing the vicissitudes of cultural memory, the failure of public archival institutions, her installations present a means to both acknowledge the mediating factors that inform the archives, and create "new orders of affective association."⁵³ Because Dean largely incorporates obsolete technologies (such as 16-mm film) as the means of creating her installations, her works share, with both intangible cultural heritage and electronic records, a requirement for long-term care in order to sustain them. Dean's work consciously employs degeneration and entropy and presents an allegory of both memory and impermanence; cultural intangibles and electronic records are essentially degenerative and entropic, they are notoriously impermanent – momentary and transitory, subject to change, alteration, gradual disappearance, or dramatic destruction.

The archives' old institutional suppositions regarding value and permanence have been re-examined in the postmodern era.⁵⁴ A shift from a media-

50 "Steering," as framed by Bearman and Hedstrom, "Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records," pp. 549–68.

51 Jaggi, available at: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/internationalwriting/story/0,6194,353291,00.html>.

52 Tom Holert, "Tacita Dean: Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona," *ArtForum* (Summer 2001), available at: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_10_39/ai_80485042.

53 Foster, "Archival Impulse," p. 21.

54 Mark A. Greene, "The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age," *American Archivist*, vol. 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002), pp. 42–55; Tom Nesmith, "Seeing

based hierarchy of use-values and records conceived as legitimated truths to a more holistic (non-media-based) contextualism and relativism in the appraisal process is deemed necessary. The self-critique that disciplines such as anthropology and contemporary art have developed are attractive means by which both to preserve cultural traditions as they may have been perceived at a given point in time, and also reflectively (on the part of the archivist) to assess in a reasoned fashion the limitations and promise of the recently acquired collection, the mediating factors that permeate both the *fonds* and the archives. Pronounced collaborations between archival institutions and creators of intangibles (including electronic records) in defining the collections' value⁵⁵ to society/cultural history should strive to render an external memory, outside the archives' physical place:

If effectual reality is no longer conceived as actual (as in the metaphysical tradition that survived until the advent of mass-media society), but as virtual (as in the society of information technology), the entire humanist world vision that conferred upon the subject its ontological meaning collapses ... What is essential does not issue from the inwardness of the soul, but from the outwardness of writing, of the book, of the computer.⁵⁶

Archival records conceived as “extensions of human memory”⁵⁷ should not be shielded within reliquaries, but require exteriority in order to survive.

Hugh Taylor, the progenitor of the “total archives” concept, predicted such a notion of the archives over twenty years ago. Calling for a “new tribalism,” in which “the capacity to access information will equate to ‘immediate sensory reading of the environment’ and the documentary heritage of the past,” Taylor saw in non-literate communities a model for achieving a non-fragmentary cultural heritage.⁵⁸

As in the current attempts to document and preserve the Kutiyattam Theater, an archives' responsibility should not be principally to an object, but instead, to the safeguarding of that which is culturally meaningful. That responsibility may manifest itself in myriad forms, many of which will be essentially transformative, frequently located outside of the archives proper.

Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist*, vol. 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002), pp. 24–41; Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 2000), pp. 3–24.

55 I think it is important to consider creation-value, performance-value, use-value, meaning-value as all elements of the archives' value, no single form more important than the other.

56 Mario Perniola, *Enigmas*, trans. Christopher Woodall (London, 1995), pp. 65–66.

57 Bruce Dearstyne, *The Archival Enterprise: Modern Archival Principles, Practices, and Techniques* (Chicago and London, 1993), p. 1.

58 Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives,” pp. 118 and 127.

When archival institutions take on accession and appraisal strategies divested of medium-specificity, they face the burden of maintaining that which transcends permanence. Only through meaningful collaborations between the creators of oral and intangible cultural expressions may the archives adapt to the requirements of such safeguarding.⁵⁹ Intangibles and electronic records defy the importance of the autonomous object and the archives' traditional employment of synecdoche as its fundamental symbolic trope, requiring archivists to question their basic tenets.

Aristotle insisted that narratives have a middle: the archives has traditionally focussed on the ends. It has been primarily a narrative of death and to a lesser degree of birth, yet it need not be so. One might, as the Dutch semiotician Mieke Bal has done, consider acquisitions as a regenerative cycle, closing one narrative, opening another: "rendered in this way, the process of amelioration takes place at the intersection of the private and the public, psychic and historic existence, and the episode contributes to the shaping of this subject as much as the subject shapes the episode."⁶⁰ Conceiving of the archivist as a narrative agent – "refictionalizing" information in a manner akin to Tacita Dean or Sam Durant – one envisions the future archives as a dynamic story, replete with both creative and degenerative elements, porously manifesting itself outside of some physical container to be reshaped and redefined by those who listen and gaze.

59 Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage," p. 104: "we believe that only the society from which the material originated and for whose sake it is to be preserved can provide archivists with the necessary tools to assess the conceptions by which they bring the past into the present."

60 Bal, "Telling Objects," p. 114.