Counterpoint

Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections

KATIE SHILTON and RAMESH SRINIVASAN*

RÉSUMÉ La théorie archivistique s'est longtemps servie de principes conçus pour préserver la valeur contextuelle des documents. Les auteurs pensent que les pratiques traditionnelles de l'évaluation, du classement et de la description peuvent être reformulées comme des processus participatifs et axés sur la communauté. Ceci peut permettre au contexte d'être articulé de façon significative dans les archives de communautés traditionnellement marginalisées. Ils croient que ce processus peut mener vers la création de centres d'archives plus pertinents au point de vue culturel (« *culturally relevant* ») tout en permettant aux communautés minoritaires de partager leurs expériences avec un plus grand public. En s'ouvrant à un plus grand éventail d'outils pour inviter les communautés marginalisées à participer au processus de préservation, les archivistes peuvent sauvegarder les connaissances locales tout en créant des archives qui font appel aux notions de la représentativité et de l'autonomisation.

ABSTRACT Archival theory has a long history of utilizing principles designed to preserve contextual value in records. We believe that traditional practices of appraisal, arrangement, and description can be rearticulated as participatory, community-oriented processes. This can enable context to be represented meaningfully in archives of traditionally marginalized communities. We believe this process can help build culturally relevant records repositories while enabling marginalized communities to share their experiences with a wider public. By broadening their traditional tools to actively engage marginalized communities in the preservation process, archivists can preserve local knowledge and create representative, empowered archives.

Sources of power are derived from the capacity of cultural institutions to classify and define peoples and societies. This is the power to represent: to reproduce structures of belief and experience through which cultural differences are understood.

Ivan Karp[1]

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1 Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London, 1992), pp. 1–2.

The "power to represent" has been wielded by information institutions throughout history, and the manifestations of this power have helped to build societal definitions of culture.[2] Among the information institutions responsible for the "power to represent" are the institutions of preservation that we know as archives, manuscript libraries, and special collections. As McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland and Ketelaar write,

Frameworks for the selection, collection, arrangement and description, preservation and accessibility of archives are ... closely linked to societal processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, and the power relationships they embody.[3]

Archivists choose which records to preserve and discard, using the power of appraisal to consciously or unconsciously assert chosen narratives as truth while ignoring or reframing others. And through arrangement and description of their acquisitions, archivists impart or relay narratives and knowledge structures to explain the relationships among records in a collection.[4]

This assertion, ignoring, or reframing of narrative that accompanies archival processes is inevitable. Even a diverse team of archivists cannot possibly choose all documents, describe all knowledge in a collection, and represent all truths and experiences.[5] Many archivists are concerned, however, with creating strategies for representative documentation: as Couture writes, "archival appraisal ... must ultimately offer comprehensive evidence of societal actions and conditions."[6] But too often, archival collection policies do not represent society's diversity of racial and ethnic communities.[7]

Instead, memory institutions have ignored experiences outside of the history of the powerful, creating collecting gaps within archives, as Howard Zinn argued decades ago to the Society of American Archivists.[8] Alternatively,

2   Ibid.; Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar, "'Communities of Memory': Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas," *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 1 (May 2005), pp. 146–74.

3   Ibid., p. 1.

4   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.

5   Timothy L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 66–77; Ericson, "To Approximate June Pasture: The Documentation Strategy in the Real World," *Archival Issues*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1997), pp. 5–20.

6   Carol Couture, "Archival Appraisal: A Status Report," *Archivaria* 59 (Spring 2005), p. 84.

7   Salvador Güereña, *Archives and Manuscripts: Historical Antecedents to Contemporary Chicano Collections* (Santa Barbara, 1999), http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/arcman.html (accessed 18 April 2006); William T. Hagan, "Archival Captive – The American Indian," *American Archivist*, vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1978), pp. 135–46; Ian Johnston, "Whose History Is It Anyway?" *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 22, no. 2 (October 2001), pp. 213–29; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory."

8   Howard Zinn, as related by F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist*, vol. 38, no. 1 (January 1975), pp. 5–13.

archives have appropriated the histories of marginalized communities, creating archives *about* rather than *of* the communities, as Hagan addressed in the case of Native Americans.[9] In these cases, archivists have created further damage by applying arrangements and descriptions of the "other" to form incomplete and decontextualized representations of cultural groups.[10] Although both Zinn and Hagan addressed this subject in the 1970s, Johnston points out that little has changed in the last thirty years.[11]

Leaving marginal voices out of the historical record creates what Mitra describes as systematic disenfranchisement: "Instead of speaking, the dispossessed are often spoken for, where the existing systems of expression have unquestionably constructed the marginal."[12] Such construction of "mainstream" and "marginal" within powerful preservation institutions produces distorted narratives, affecting an understanding of the history and social reality of marginalized peoples.[13] As an example, Boast, Bravo, and Srinivasan write of the cultural knowledge lost when an Inuit artifact is imported to a museum exhibit and interpreted by a curator. With importation, exhibit, and interpretation comes diminished understanding of the "richly situated life of objects in their communities and places of origin," due to "loss of narrative and thick descriptions when transporting them to distant collections."[14] Such narrative and thick descriptions are embedded in the local knowledge structures surrounding records and objects of memory,[15] and archivists who hope to create socially representative documentation must consider these knowledge architectures, or risk the loss of this contextual knowledge.

Beyond the harm to an archivist of lost contextual knowledge and a consequentially distorted historical record, marginalization of the dispossessed within traditional repositories of historical memory robs communities of their cultural identity. As Karp writes:

What is at stake in struggles for control over objects and the modes of exhibiting them, finally, is the articulation of identity. Exhibitions represent identity, either direct-

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9   Hagan, "Archival Captive – The American Indian."

10 Ibid.; Steven D. Lavine, "Museum Practices," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London, 1991).

11 Johnston, "Whose History Is It Anyway?"

12 Ananda Mitra, "Marginal Voices in Cyberspace," *New Media & Society*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2001), p. 31.

13 Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection," *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos. 3–4 (September 2002), pp. 221–38.

14 Robin Boast, Michael Bravo, and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Return to Babel: Emergent Diversity, Digital Resources, and Local Knowledge," *The Information Society* ([in press] 2007).

15 James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in James Clifford, *Routes: Travel & Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 188–219; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory"; Helen Watson, *Singing the Land, Signing the Land: A Portfolio of Exhibits* (Geelong, Victoria, 1989).

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ly, through assertion, or indirectly, by implication. When cultural "others" are impli-
cated, exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps most significant, who we are not.[16]

To the goal of representative collecting, then, archivists must add a
complementary goal: to preserve the articulation of community identity.
Archivists can achieve this goal and avoid exhibiting the "other" through the
preservation of what we define as empowered narratives: records and histories
spoken directly by traditionally marginalized communities, embedded within
the local experience, practice, and knowledge of that community.

Fortunately, archivists are in possession of a number of tools to aid in the
preservation of empowered, contextualized narrative and thick description to
avoid marginalizing cultural identities. Archival theory has a long history of
understanding and achieving the preservation of the contextual value of
records. The foundations of anglophone archival theory articulated by
Jenkinson and Schellenberg stress the evidential value of records, and the
importance of techniques to preserve context and therefore evidential value.[17]
Archivists continue to strive to preserve contextual and evidential value as
they conceptualize and plan for retention of digital records in the changing
archival environment of the twenty-first century.[18] And importantly, some
archivists are beginning to reconceptualize the field's understanding of
appraisal and tools of arrangement such as provenance and original order.[19]

In this spirit, we suggest that archival principles traditionally employed in
the service of both appraisal and arrangement and description can use partici-
patory processes to facilitate the preservation of representative, empowered
narratives. Re-envisioning archival principles of appraisal, arrangement, and
description to actively incorporate participation from traditionally marginal-
ized communities will not only allow these communities to preserve empow-
ered narratives, it will allow archivists to move towards the long-debated,[20]

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16 Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," *Exhibiting Cultures* (see note 10), p. 15.

17 Hilary Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," *Contemporary Review* 165 (June 1944), pp.
    355–61; T.R. Schellenberg, "Archival Principles of Arrangement," *American Archivist*, vol.
    24, no. 1 (January 1961), pp. 11–24.

18 Anne J. Gilliland, Nadav Rouche, Lori Lindberg, and Joanne Evans, "Towards a 21st Century
    Metadata Infrastructure Supporting the Creation, Preservation and Use of Trustworthy
    Records: Developing the InterPARES 2 Metadata Schema Registry," *Archival Science*, vol.
    15, no. 1 (March 2005), pp. 43–78; InterPARES Project, "The Long-Term Preservation of
    Authentic Electronic Records: Findings of the InterPARES Project" (2002), http://www.inter-
    pares.org/book/index.htm (accessed 27 June 2006).

19 Terry Cook, "Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,"
    Archival Science 1 (2001), pp. 3–24; Tom Nesmith, "Reopening Archives: Bringing New
    Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005), pp. 259–74.

20 Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, "Et Tu Schellenberg? Thougths on the Dagger of American
    Appraisal Theory," *American Archivist* 59 (Summer 1996), pp. 298–310; Helen Willa
    Samuels, "Who Controls the Past?" *American Archivist*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Spring 1986), pp.
    109–24; Samuels, *Varsity Letters* (Metuchen, NJ, 1992).

and still unrealized,[21] goal of representative collections. A key component within this shift will be to expand appraisal, arrangement, and description into tools designed to respect the knowledge systems embedded within community contexts. This may allow archivists to not only create representative archives, but also to move beyond objectification and aid understanding of local knowledge and marginalized narratives. An exploration of tools of appraisal, arrangement, and description will help develop a theoretical framework of participatory archiving. Further, we will suggest ways to conceptualize how this theoretical framework might be utilized through the practice of participatory design.[22]

The Power of Participatory Appraisal: Responding to the Documentation Gap

When archivists choose to preserve one memory, they forfeit the resources – human, physical, and financial – to preserve another.[23] According to Bowker, scarcity of preservation resources necessitates diligent attention to preserving a wide diversity of memories, a "spread" of diversity to best represent "life on earth."[24] Precisely because archivists cannot afford to collect everything, those with a mandate to preserve cultural history (and we would argue that most archives, by virtue of being institutions of cultural memory, have *some* mandate to collect multicultural history)[25] must be aware of the need to collect diversely should they hope to come anywhere near representing diverse societies.

However, the archival profession has practiced the opposite of diverse collecting, instead undervaluing and misidentifying marginalized community records. McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar acknowledge "a lack of recognition or acknowledgment in western archival science and practice of the legitimacy of local and indigenous forms of recordkeeping and memory preservation."[26] This problem of appraisal continues: scholars have recently characterized the United States' National Archives' response to collecting "social history" as "piecemeal," and have continued to lambaste the archival

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21 Johnston, "Whose History Is It Anyway?"

22 A. Crabtree, "Ethnography in Participatory Design," in R. Chatfield, S. Kuhn, and M. Muller, *Proceedings of the 1998 Participatory Design Conference* (Seattle, 1998), pp. 93–105; Doug Schuler and A. Namioka, *Participatory Design: Principles and Practices* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1993).

23 Ericson, "At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction."

24 Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), p. 207.

25 Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," in *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam, 2003), pp. 14–25; Terry Cook, "Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage," paper presented to the Australian Society of Archives Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2000.

26 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, p. 2.

profession for failing to recognize the importance of, for instance, ethnic collections.[27] The longstanding archival undervaluing of multicultural narratives, and even more complex problem of a lack of recognition of what constitutes a localized record,[28] has created a persistent gap in documentation of the meaningful narratives of a host of peoples.[29]

The need to reevaluate archival appraisal strategies to encompass the value and diversity of multicultural records has been approached in a variety of ways. Archivists such as Johnston have called on "activist archivists" to take a facilitative role in appraisal and acquisition of marginalized narratives.[30] Alternatively, members of marginalized groups have taken preservation into their own hands, building archives and museums devoted to community history.[31] Oral historians, artists, social leaders, and systems designers have begun to actively record the documentations of marginalized communities that have gone missing in the historical record.[32] The diversity of this wealth of documentation is reflected in an increasing range of settings associated with preservation, spanning indigenous museums and archives, community centres, and increasingly, grassroots digital spaces.[33] Reconciliation between community efforts and the preservation resources of information institutions can allow communities, archival institutions, and larger publics to learn and gain reciprocally in the creation of a collective memory that acknowledges multiple cultural contexts.

For archivists to achieve this reconciliation of efforts, Johnston's argument for archival "activism" cannot just occur on behalf of groups (acquiring so many Asian American collections, for example), but alongside groups. As part of the appraisal process, cooperation between creator communities and archivists affords the opportunity to actively learn which community repre-

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27 Johnston, p. 214.

28 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory."

29 Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism," in *Exhibiting Cultures* (see note 10), pp. 1–9.

30 Johnston, p. 227.

31 Dorothy B. Fujita-Rony and Anne Frank, "Archiving Histories: The Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine," *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1 (July 2003), pp. 153–64; Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Carl Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the 'Other': A Study of the Mission, Scope, and Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles," *The Public Historian*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall 2004), pp. 49–71.

32 B.H. Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History: A National Agenda," *American Archivist*, vol. 54, no. 4 (Fall 1991), pp. 494–501; Ramesh Srinivasan, "Indigenous, Ethnic, and Cultural Articulations of New Media," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 (2006) pp. 497–518.

33 Loukaitou-Sideris and Grodach, "Displaying and Celebrating the 'Other'; Ramesh Srinivasan, *Weaving Spatial, Digital and Ethnographic Processes in Community-Driven Media Design* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). For examples of grassroots digital spaces, visit Tribal Peace: http://tribalpeace.org/

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sentations hold the most cultural value. There may be culturally differentiated understandings, for example, of what constitutes a record. For the Yolngu (Aboriginal) peoples of Australia, cultural memory may be created during a performance.[34] We will also explore an example of Native American artworks that represent narratives to their creators later in this article.[35]

For the archivist, successful appraisal decisions rest on understanding the value of particular narratives and records to a community. In a sense, this is an expansion of arguments developed since the time of Booms, paraphrased by Couture, that "the archivist must have a thorough knowledge of the institution and/or person who created the records," and that the archivist should "appraise records by using a scale of values contemporary to the time of creation of the records."[36] In order to gain "thorough knowledge" of how to appraise community records, archivists must have participation from experts: the community members responsible for record creation.

Examples such as the founding of the Southeast Asian Archives at the University of California (UC), Irvine illustrate the success of appraising a community collection in cooperation with community members. The archivist at UC, Irvine actively consulted Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian community members to incorporate the goals and visions of the Southeast Asian community, allowing the Archive to collect the narratives most valuable to the community itself.[37] Similarly, the collections of the Chicano Studies Archives at the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of California, Santa Barbara were direct results of the demands of Chicano students and scholars during the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, collecting the narratives considered important by activists from the community.[38] By approaching appraisal in collaboration with community members, archivists are given the chance to assess the value of community records as the community understands them – the first step in a participatory model for multicultural archives.

Archival Arrangement and Description: Participation and Empowered Narrative

The archivist who has acquired multicultural narratives must now explore

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34 Helen Verran, Michael Christie, Bryce Anbins-King, Trevor van Weeren, and Wulumdhuna Yunupingu, *Designing Digital Knowledge Management Tools with Aboriginal Australians. Performative Knowledge Making*, http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/pdf/DDKMT-AA.pdf (accessed 25 October 2006).
35 Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones"; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, "Communities of Memory."
36 Couture, "Archival Appraisal: A Status Report," p. 90.
37 Fujita-Rony and Frank, "Archiving Histories."
38 Güereña, *Archives and Manuscripts*.

methods of arrangement and description that resist objectification and instead actively empower the records, projecting voices spoken by and for the community that reflect the original context and knowledge structures of their community creation.

Archival practices of arrangement and description that focus on document creators and context of creation can be particularly useful when considering empowered preservation. Traditional archival arrangement and description have the potential to accurately represent creators and make community knowledge architectures explicit, because they privilege document creators and their use of records over the use of the material by others.[39] While archivists have periodically argued for new arrangement and description schemes – for example, subject-based arrangement – to privilege the record user, creator-centred principles of arrangement and the resulting description by provenance and original order have dominated archival practice for decades.[40] Provenance arranges and labels records according to either who created them or, in more recent archival thought, the functional context of their creation, both practices highlighting notions of authorship and context of creation.[41] Original order stipulates archivists respect the intellectual "archival bond" imposed on a collection of documents by their original creator or functions of creation.[42] Traditional applications of provenance and original order are therefore firmly based on the habits and practices of the record creator.[43]

The reason, as Mary Jo Pugh once observed, that "the archivist is as responsive to the needs of the creator of the record,"[44] is the archival paradigm of the preservation of context. Archivists have long recognized that documents lose elements of their meaning if separated from the context of their creation.[45] From this tradition stems the argument that archival principles meant to preserve context and privilege records creators can become tools to preserve traditionally marginalized historical documentation within its critical context, facilitating understanding of community narratives over time.

Using archival arrangement and resulting descriptive practices to preserve

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39 Thomas Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, ed. Tom Nesmith (Metuchen, NJ, 1993), pp. 1–28.

40 Cook, "What is Past is Prologue."

41 Ibid.; Peter Boticelli, "Records Appraisal in Network Organizations," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000), pp. 161–91.

42 Luciana Duranti and Heather MacNeil, "The Protection of the Integrity of Electronic Records: An Overview of the UBC-MAS Research Project," *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996), pp. 46–67; Oliver W Holmes, "Archival Arrangement – Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," *American Archivist*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 1964), pp. 21–42.

43 Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada."

44 Mary Jo Pugh, "The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist," *American Archivist*, vol. 45, no. 1 (Winter 1982), p. 34.

45 Cook, "What is Past is Prologue."

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contextual value *as the community understands it* allows historically marginalized communities to speak, not be spoken for. Clifford gives a powerful example of the ways in which Western arrangement and description remove context from Native American records when relating a participatory process of description undertaken for the Northwest Coast Indian Collection at the Portland Museum of Art.[46] Non-native museum curators hoped that consultation with Tlingit tribe members would enrich descriptions of the origins and uses of artifacts included in the museum's collection. Tlingit community members, however, understood their objects as records, as *aides-mémoires* for histories and narratives from the communities: context never before articulated in the Museum's displays. The Tlingit complicated the notion of contextual value, re-centering descriptions on narratives more important to the community than the functional or artistic qualities of the museum objects.[47] In Clifford's example, curators' functional descriptions of objects displaced the voice of the Native community. Community explorations of the narratives surrounding each object, in contrast, brought out embedded context and cultural architectures related to each record.

Involving community members in archival arrangement and description could help acknowledge and preserve context and embedded knowledge architectures in the self-documentations of historically marginalized communities in at least two ways:

- Allowing the community's understanding of document authorship and the circumstances that led to record creation to form the basis for provenance groupings and authorship descriptions;[48]
- Preserving the habits, practices, preferences, or even beliefs of the record creators through arrangement and resulting descriptive categories that preserve the links that each record has to other narratives within the community,[49] to create an organizational structure that resonates with the knowledge architectures of specific communities.[50]

The tools used to preserve traditional conceptions of archival context can be broadened to include not just literal definitions of provenance and original order formulated over the last one hundred and fifty years,[51] but expanded understandings of arrangement and description according to knowledge structures and cultural ontologies: the dynamic structures underpinning and linking

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46 Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones."
47 Ibid.
48 Boticelli, "Records Appraisal in Network Organizations."
49 This link between records is what Duranti and MacNeil refer to in the electronic environment as the "archival bond." Duranti and MacNeil, p. 53.
50 Boast, Bravo, and Srinivasan, "Return to Babel."
51 Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist."

beliefs, knowledge, and realities.[52] Meaningful representation of traditionally marginalized groups relies not just on so many records or collections existent in an archive, but also the arrangement, structuring, and labelling of the archive in ways commensurate with community knowledge.[53] Such a structure can be captured through methods of participatory design, a movement within information technology research that positions users as the designers of their own systems.[54] By conceptualizing archival arrangement and description as a system that can be cooperatively designed, community members and archivists together can create definitions of arrangement that resonate with community understandings and knowledge.

Preserving records in a system that acknowledges the context of community knowledge avoids distorting marginalized voices and enables community records be more fully understood by a wider public, as in Clifford's example of the complex historical narratives associated with Tlingit objects.[55] In arranging and describing community narratives through participatory definitions of provenance and original order, archivists have the opportunity to consider, apply, and describe the community ontologies and knowledge structures relevant to questions of record authorship, context of creation, and relationships between records.

Understanding Authorship and Function: Participatory Provenance

One element of participatory arrangement and description is to understand record authorship, and therefore arrangement and description by provenance, to be a culturally-constructed phenomenon. In Western archives, authors are understood to be either individual or corporate; arrangement by provenance is dictated accordingly. But examples of divergent, culturally-specific definitions of authorship that could affect provenance decisions in archival settings can emerge through participatory decision making. In work conducted by Srinivasan, members of the Kumeyaay, Luiseno, Cupeno, and Cahuilla tribes in San Diego County made decisions about provenance based on a complicated, inter-tribal network of authorship to shape the organizational structure of

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52 Ramesh Srinivasan and Jeffrey Huang, "Fluid Ontologies for Digital Museums," *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, vol. 5, no. 3 (May 2005), pp. 193–204.

53 Ramesh Srinivasan, "Knowledge Architectures for Cultural Narratives," *Journal of Knowledge Management*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2004), pp. 65–74; Ramesh Srinivasan and Katie Shilton, "The South Asian Web: An Emerging Community Information System in the South Asian Diaspora," *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference on Participatory Design: Expanding Boundaries in Design* (Trento, Italy, 2006), pp. 125–133.

54 Judith Gregory, "Scandinavian Approaches to Participatory Design," *International Journal of Engineering Education*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2003), pp. 62–74.

55 Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones."

the Tribal PEACE online communication hub.[56] McKemmish et al. discuss post-colonial societies such as Australia where discussions among previously colonized peoples have helped to illuminate "parallel provenance," the existence of dual, parallel record-keeping systems created by the colonizer and the colonized.[57] And Verran et al. describe Australian Yolngu communities where researchers have cooperated with communities to discover that authorship is less the point of community performance narratives than is their functional provenance, the performative conditions of their creation.[58]

In these settings, notions of authorship embedded in records' unique ontologies are unlikely to have been identified without the participation of the community.[59] Such attention to cultural definitions of provenance will ensure that records that belong together, whether by personal or functional provenance, are grouped together, physically or through descriptive practices such as metadata application. Such contextual groupings, just as in traditional notions of *respect des fonds*, allow for others to understand what Oliver W. Holmes referred to decades ago as "the logic and meaning" that provenance had to the creator[60] – in other words, the community functions, context, and knowledge architectures into which the representation is embedded.

Understanding the Links between Narratives: Participatory Ordering

Equally relevant to the preservation of community narratives is the archival concept of original order. According to Jenkinson's classic formulations, keeping records in their original order preserves "every element in [the documents], every quality they possessed when they came to [the archivist]...."[61] As a broader concept for preserving authenticity, original order has been explored in a variety of contexts, ranging from Duranti's "archival bond" to relate documents within an electronic preservation system,[62] to alternative museum displays recreating the original order of artifacts.[63] Original order may be thought of as a relationship between records and the knowledge architecture in which they were created. By performing archival processing in which record creators participate in "ordering" records within ontologies of

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56 Srinivasan, "Weaving Spatial, Digital and Ethnographic Processes."

57 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar, p. 4.

58 Verran et al., *Designing Digital Knowledge Management Tools*.

59 Srinivasan, "Weaving Spatial, Digital and Ethnographic Processes."

60 Holmes, "Archival Arrangement."

61 Jenkinson, p. 359.

62 Duranti and MacNeil, "The Protection of the Integrity of Electronic Records."

63 See explorations of the Kwagiulth Museum and Cultural Centre in Cape Mudge Village, British Columbia and the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia in Lavine and Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism."

cultural knowledge, archivists ensure that the creator's ordering preserves context and evidential value.

Although an original order among a group of video files, oral histories, or digital files created by individuals or organizations within a community may be difficult to initially discern, elements of participatory design can again facilitate a process to capture meaningful order among narratives.[64] The active design of archival ordering and resulting description by community members and individual record creators can be used to create structured relationships between records based upon the creator and community's habits, practices, and preferences, and reflecting both community and individuals' architectures of knowledge. In Srinivasan's work on the design of the Village Voice online agora, for example, members of the Somali diasporic community in Boston built an archive of community narratives, choosing to relate their narratives in fluid, community-chosen ontologies structured to articulate larger community realities.[65] Village Voice allowed community members to add context to their representations through indigenous decisions about elements of the documents' ordering, such as assignment of topics for each record and establishment of intellectual links between records.

The Participatory Archiving Model

Participatory archiving encourages community involvement during the appraisal, arrangement, and description phases of creating an archival record. A visual model of this three-step approach is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Participatory Archiving

64 Gregory, "Scandinavian Approaches to Participatory Design."
65 Srinivasan and Huang, "Fluid Ontologies for Digital Museums."

During 2007, we will test our expanded definitions of participatory valuing, appraisal, arrangement, and description through the participatory design of The South Asian Web, a cooperative communication hub and digital archive for the South Asian diasporic community in Los Angeles.[66] As participants interact to build a Web portal to share cultural, economic, educational, and other information, they will be asked to create, upload, and share documentations of their heritage and identity. Our participatory archiving methodology will build on steps explored by Srinivasan in both the Village Voice and later Tribal PEACE projects,[67] including:

- The authorship and digitization of records by diverse South Asian community members. We will not seek to define "records" or content to be included; these appraisal decisions will be left up to the participating community members. We will use connections with local South Asian institutions to seek participants of many ages, and of diverse geographic, economic, and religious backgrounds;
- The organization of a series of formalized focus groups and informal community meetings to view material as it is added to the online archive;
- During these discussions, rotating focus group leaders, drawn from within the community, will prompt discussions of arrangement of the materials by asking community members to identify authors, functional creation processes, and connections between materials. The facilitators will record notes summarizing the key issues and topics discussed so that all can see them;
- The focus groups will be asked to come to consensus regarding the common definitions of provenance and original order of the materials being discussed. These focus group agreements will form the basis of what will become our *community ontologies*.

Once a map of community ontologies is created, an online organizational system for our archive can be built. Future online participants in The South Asian Web can use the community ontologies as a jumping-off point to arrange and describe their uploaded representations and records. And through an ongoing, iterative, and emergent ontology-building process, wherein participants are asked to identify connections between their records and the records of others, future participants can continue to revise the community ontologies as the community itself changes over time. The methods of online interaction to identify topics and connections will be similar to those found in work on grassroots cataloguing, folksonomies, and social tagging, where

66 Srinivasan and Shilton, "The South Asian Web."
67 Ramesh Srinivasan, "Ethnomethodological Architectures – the Convergence between an Information System and the Cultural Landscape," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* ([in press] 2007).

users are asked to directly engage in describing a resource.[68] The South Asian Web will test our hypothesis that arrangement and description can incorporate participatory definitions of provenance and order, and provide a chance to explore practical implications of the participatory approach presented within this paper.[69]

Of course, we cannot proclaim that there are no risks associated with the participatory model which we propose. Participatory approaches to archiving are likely to be time-consuming, requiring patience and an extended commitment by archival staff and community representatives alike. Community members do not always agree, and decisions on such difficult matters as authorship and relationship between narratives are not always easy to reach.[70] And at a time when archival backlogs have risen to problematic levels, expenditures of greater amounts of time for appraisal and processing warrant serious consideration.[71]

Our methodology is particularly labour-intensive, and we recognize that it is outside of the scope of most archival institutions. However, we believe that as we explore the participatory process which we have outlined, we will be able to distill the process, finding ways for practicing archivists to incorporate participatory methods into their appraisal and processing decisions. And we hope to encourage others to explore methods for building scaleable and sustainable participatory archives. Ultimately, we believe that the rewards for communities and archivists, from the exploration of community identity to the preservation of a truly progressive understanding of our diverse history, outweigh the costs that participatory measures entail.

Conclusion

Newer forms of electronic archiving restore the deep link of the archive to popular memory and its practices, returning to the non-official actor the capability to choose the way in which traces and documents shall be formed into archives, whether at the level of the family, the neighborhood, the community or other sorts of groupings outside the demography of the state.

Arjun Appadurai[72]

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68   Boast, Bravo, and Srinivasan, "Return to Babel."
69   Srinivasan and Shilton, "The South Asian Web."
70   Srinivasan, "Weaving Spatial, Digital and Ethnographic Processes."
71   Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Pragmatically Revamping Traditional Processing Approaches to Deal with Late 20th-Century Collections," *American Archivist*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005), pp. 208–64.
72   Appadurai, p. 18.

In a climate where the conscious and unconscious choices of official actors within archives have created collective memory that may fail to account for the diverse and rich contexts and realities faced within different ethnic and cultural communities, "returning to the non-official actor the capability to choose" holds incredible potential for the preservation of meaningful cultural narratives. Our ongoing research will determine how a simple and straightforward methodology based upon participatory appraisal to recognize and value diverse cultural records, and participatory arrangement to preserve cultural knowledge architectures, can be applied to diverse media forms and culturally-specific conceptions of the record.

Record creators have always chosen, on some level, to represent themselves through personal and organizational choices about what is saved or discarded or through resulting organization by habits, practices, and preferences. Participatory archiving asks that these choices be made explicit and transparent, to further the understanding of the ontologies behind the collection and to let the creator own the choices they have made, ensuring that they speak with their own voices, and empowering their representation into the future.