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Archival Readiness

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ABSTRACT This article explores the challenges of engaging historically excluded communities with archives and archival discourse, focusing on people and communities experiencing homelessness. Positioning the phrase *literal homelessness*, which is used in the United States to determine eligibility for an annual census of people experiencing homelessness, as representative of ongoing exclusive and non-collaborative forms of recordkeeping, the author proposes a concept that she calls *archival readiness* to move toward archive making, rather than archive taking, with historically excluded communities. Using her experiences as a part-time staff member in a temporary emergency shelter that was established during the COVID-19 pandemic, she shows how archival readiness, based on ongoing relationships among archivists, researchers, community organizations, and individuals, would increase the likelihood that shelter guests would participate in archiving. Exploring how homelessness creates challenges for the development of inclusive institutional and community-archiving praxes, she argues that while archival readiness would not solve each of these challenges, it could enable historically excluded communities to participate in generating other approaches. The author enacts archival readiness by sharing three records from the shelter and her interpretations of them, introducing forms of information about shelter living that is not collected in official data that tracks "literal homelessness."

RÉSUMÉ Cet article explore les défis de l'engagement des communautés historiquement exclues avec les archives et le discours archivistique, en se concentrant sur les personnes et les communautés itinérantes. Posant l'expression « itinérance littérale », utilisée aux États-Unis pour déterminer l'admissibilité à un recensement annuel des personnes en état d'itinérance, comme représentative des formes exclusives et non collaboratives de tenue de documents, l'auteure propose un concept qu'elle appelle « préparation archivistique » pour tendre vers la création d'archives, plutôt que la collecte d'archives, avec les communautés historiquement exclues. S'appuyant sur son expérience en tant que membre du personnel à temps partiel d'un refuge d'urgence temporaire créé pendant la pandémie de COVID-19, elle montre comment la préparation archivistique, fondée sur des relations permanentes entre archivistes, chercheurs, organismes communautaires et individus, augmenterait la probabilité que les clients du refuge participent à l'archivage. Explorant la manière dont l'itinérance crée des défis pour le développement de pratiques d'archivage institutionnelles et communautaires inclusives, elle soutient que si la préparation à l'archivage ne résoudrait pas chacun de ces défis, elle pourrait permettre aux communautés historiquement exclues de participer à faire émerger d'autres approches. L'auteure illustre la préparation archivistique en partageant trois documents du refuge et ses interprétations de ceux-ci, introduisant des formes d'informations sur la vie en refuge qui ne sont pas collectées dans les données officielles qui documentent « l'itinérance littérale ».

Every year, cities across North America conduct point-in-time counts of people experiencing homelessness, accumulating data that helps to allocate funding and other resources to areas with the greatest identified need. During this count in the United States, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) tracks what it calls "literal homelessness," a term defined by at least one participating US-based organization as "liv[ing] in a place not meant for human habitation" and by another as being "on the street."[1] This definition of literal homelessness does not include "persons who are 'doubled-up' or who are temporarily residing in institutional settings, i.e. hospitals, jails, treatment facilities [or] foster care."[2] The language of the Canadian government is only slightly less ambiguous; rather than tracking "literal homelessness," the government's point-in-time website explains that the count includes "individuals and families who are staying: in shelters [,] transitional housing, or who are 'sleeping rough'."[3]

Though an annual count provides an important record that shows rising or falling trends of literal homelessness or of those who are sleeping rough, this authoritative record also shapes understandings of what homelessness is and of

1 Interestingly, I cannot find the term *literal homelessness* on HUD-related websites, despite several organizations across the United States citing HUD as the source for the term. For example, an explanation of the point-in-time count through the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Center on Children, Families, and the Law posts that "the Point-in-Time only counts people who are literally homeless according to HUD's definition"; the DC-based Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness notes on a slide deck that "a complete count of HUD-defined 'literally homeless' families and individuals" includes those who are unsheltered, staying in emergency shelters, and staying in transitional housing; and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance in Vermont posts, "The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers individuals and families 'literally homeless' when they live in a place not meant for human habitation (such as a tent, a vehicle, or on the streets), or in an emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or in a hotel paid for by a government or charitable organization." University of Nebraska–Lincoln, "Point-in-Time Count (PIT)," University of Nebraska–Lincoln Center on Children, Families, and the Law, accessed September 10, 2021, https://ccfl.unl.edu/community-services-management/reports/pit; Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, "2020 Point-in-Time Count: District of Columbia Continuum of Care," Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, June 10, 2020, https://community-partnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PointinTime2020.pdf; Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, "Point in Time Count of Homelessness," Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, accessed September 10, 2021, http://www.cchavt.org/point-in-time-count-of-homelessness/.

2 Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, "2020 Point-in-Time Count: District of Columbia Continuum of Care."

3 Employment and Social Development Canada, "Everyone Counts: Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts in Canada," Government of Canada, March 22, 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/resources/point-in-time.html.

who people experiencing homelessness are.[4] People left out of this definition are systematically left out of the count and, potentially, left out of future funding, resources, and social visibility. In what ways does a single understanding of homelessness prevent other definitions? How does this dominating definition disregard other forms of marginalization that may intersect with homelessness, such as those experienced by members of racialized groups, sexual and gender minorities, and people who are disabled?[5] As part of a community that endures stereotypes and extreme marginalization, people experiencing short-term and/or chronic homelessness are spoken for in official records by their inclusion or exclusion from definitions that are imposed by others.

Like other historically excluded communities, people experiencing homelessness are rarely provided the opportunity to speak for themselves – either from the past through archives or in the present by contributing to policy-making that directly affects them.[6] This community is also largely absent from academic archiving discourse: at the time of writing, searching for "homeless" and, separately, "shelter" in the online platforms for the *American Archivist*, *Archivaria*, *Archival Science*, and *Journal of Western Archives* produced zero articles whose subjects readily addressed these topics, and an MLA International Bibliography search of "homeless*" AND "archiv*" brought up only seven hits, none of which addressed how experiences of homelessness might be archived. Stuart Hall's assertion that archives must be "committed to inclusiveness" because they are "not inert historical collections" emphasizes the need to include experiences of homelessness in archives; Hall writes that archives "always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another."[7]

4 The National Law Center's HUD point-in-time report in 2017 details the many ways in which this method leads to an inaccurate count. Darrell Stanley, *Don't Count on It: How the HUD Point-in-Time Count Underestimates the Homelessness Crisis in America* (Washington, DC: National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017), https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HUD-PIT-report2017.pdf.

5 People who are thus marginalized frequently self-identify using affirmative acronyms such as BIPOC – for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour – and the evolving LGBTQIA2S+ – an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, and other identities.

6 Rather than using *unhoused* to describe this population, as many organizations and writers do, I continue to use *people experiencing homelessness* to emphasize the potentially temporary status of this label. Further, I appreciate how this longer phrase demands space on the page for a community that is so rarely given space in academic discourse.

7 Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (2001): 92.

With little material to work with in the archives, how will people in our future's present be able to ask the past about homelessness? How might we better understand homelessness if we were able to ask our past about how homelessness might impact our future?

In this article, I locate experiences of homelessness in archiving discourse as central to questions about historical exclusion from archives.[8] I write from the perspective of a former part-time supplemental staff member in the Denver Coliseum, an event centre that was repurposed as a temporary emergency shelter for women and trans folx experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. This role exposed me to starkly different pandemic experiences than those I witnessed elsewhere, and this difference energizes my interest in the inclusivity of historical records. I position the notion of literal homelessness as an analog for the challenges of not only defining homelessness but also archiving homelessness: I argue that homelessness poses particular challenges for archivists and community archiving projects due to the sometimes extreme instability and transience of hypothetical participants as well as complex, dynamic, and sometimes contradictory relationships with homelessness as an identity within this community. In other words, I theoretically explore how attempts to archive homelessness make visible challenges, and perhaps limits, in current praxis by archivists and communities who value archival inclusion of marginalized communities.

I propose a new convergence and extension of existing methods to activate what I call *archival readiness*: an ongoing practice that would increase engagement from people experiencing homelessness and other historically marginalized communities in archival processes. First, I show how archival readiness responds to the challenges that homelessness poses to inclusive archiving in both institutional and community-based settings. Then, as an enactment of archival readiness, I share three records from my own experiences at the Coliseum as examples of what could hypothetically be archived, bringing more nuanced perspectives about homelessness into archiving discourse. I conclude by returning to the idea of literal homelessness to engage it with Stuart Hall's

8 I share Randy Williams and Jennifer Duncan's use of the phrase *historically excluded*, rather than *underrepresented* because, as they argue, it "more accurately reflects the centuries-long exclusion of many voices, both purposely and unknowingly, from archival collections." Randy Williams and Jennifer Duncan, "Voices from Drug Court: Partnering to Bring Historically Excluded Communities into the Archives," *Journal of Western Archives* 10, no. 1, (2019): article 8, 2.

concept of living archives, suggesting that just as homelessness makes visible the limits of both institutional and community archiving, so does it somewhat ironically exemplify the concept of a living archive.

I. Archival Readiness: Archive Making, Not Taking

In April 2020, the City of Denver converted the Denver Coliseum, an event centre more accustomed to hosting wrestling matches and high-school graduation ceremonies, into an emergency shelter for women and trans folx experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Newspaper articles occasionally posted updates about the shelter's existence, but there were several other unprecedented news items to pay attention to, so future researchers will have little material to help them understand what it was like for guests to live in the Coliseum during the pandemic. At least once, a newspaper reported a traumatic event as having occurred in the Coliseum that had in fact happened at the shelter for men on the other side of the interstate; while this confusion about location might have seemed like a typo to outside readers, to people living inside these shelters and to their loved ones, this headline could cause serious confusion and concern.[9] Further, because this error remains uncorrected at the time of writing, anyone in the future searching for information about the pandemic in Denver might easily conclude that men lived in the Coliseum for the entirety of the pandemic – a subtle but important erasure of women and trans folx's experiences.[10]

People living in the Coliseum during the pandemic had knowledge and expertise that would have helped design the structure's transformation into a temporary emergency shelter had they been asked to contribute. The Coliseum

9 This incident occurred at the National Western Complex. Ryan Osborne, "Man Stabbed to Death at Denver Coliseum, Police Say," *Denver Post*, June 16, 2020, https://www.denverpost.com/2020/06/16/man-stabbed-death-denver-coliseum/.

10 When the Coliseum opened as a shelter for women and trans folx, men were offered cots in another entertainment venue, the National Western Complex. In early August 2020, when the city's contract with this second venue expired, planners moved men into the Coliseum, finding a variety of other options for women and trans folx. Donna Bryson, "Women's Shelter at Denver's Coliseum Closing, Men in the Nearby National Western Complex Moving to the Coliseum or Elsewhere Next Month," *Denverite*, July 22, 2020, https://denverite.com/2020/07/22/womens-shelter-at-denvers-coliseum-closing-men-in-the-nearby-national-western-complex-moving-to-the-coliseum-or-elsewhere-next-month/.

was staffed 24/7 through a collaboration between the city, various organizations already supporting this community, and volunteer agencies, all of whom participated according to their own understanding of the term *shelter work*, which created a sometimes-confusing inconsistency regarding rules and their enforcement. While this inconsistency frustrated me, I spoke with many shelter guests who were unphased: they possessed a form of shelter literacy that made it possible for them to navigate the grey areas, blind spots, and shift changes of shelter living, and to anticipate what this new collaboration would create. Shelter guests shared with me knowledge about society that is unlikely to enter official records; this included stories about experiences with ableism, racism, sexism, and domestic violence. Many people living in shelters also have knowledge of our society's incarceration system and/or its inadequate response to supporting people with addiction or their families. People at the Coliseum and other shelters possess advanced literacy in some of our society's greatest injustices but also in our most commendable humanity, as staff and guests working and living in shelters support each other and show kindness in extraordinary ways, particularly during a crisis within a crisis, such as homelessness during a pandemic.

Despite the importance of Coliseum guests' knowledge, which might not only inform policy makers but also make visible forms of discrimination and injustice, this knowledge rarely leaves the community. Mark Cave remarks on the fleeting interest in crises of those who are on the outside looking in: "Our attention to these events is held, but not for long. Our thoughts are consumed by daily routine or captured by the next headline. What remains when the cameras turn away, and reporters go home, are individuals and communities in the process of redefinition, forever changed by the event."[11] This "process of redefinition" that can shape entire communities also shapes the society that surrounds those communities. Cave writes that "exploring the process of this change in a single life or the life of a community can tell us a great deal about who we are and who we are likely to become."[12]

Researchers and archivists responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with local- and national-level projects inviting individuals and communities' diverse

11 Mark Cave, "What Remains: Reflections on Crisis Oral History," in *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis*, ed. Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

12 Cave, 1.

experiences into various collections, many of which welcome in material from historically excluded communities. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) website provides wonderful platforms for archivists to share resources, information, and ideas about collecting material during emergencies and during COVID more specifically. The site includes a crowd-sourced list of opportunities to contribute material about pandemic experiences, most of which – though not all – invite participants to upload, email, or hashtag their contributions. Despite these multiple points of entry to archival participation, those living and working in the Coliseum and other emergency shelters were and are unlikely to contribute to such projects. First, the increasing reliance on technology for participation in public discourse and historical records is a barrier to North American society's most vulnerable populations. For the first several weeks of its operation as a shelter, the Coliseum did not have Wi-Fi for guests, and after Wi-Fi was available, not every guest had a device. Though access to technology is an important factor that continues to significantly affect whose experiences are preserved in archival collections, this article focuses on a challenge that precedes and follows technology: even with steady access to the Internet, how would anyone who is not already involved in archiving or public history know to look at the SAA resource list or have an instinctual desire to archive their own experiences?[13] Populations that have been historically excluded from academia, archiving, and its digital shift are unlikely to encounter these resources by chance, and this unlikeliness perpetuates the division between those who do and those who do not contribute material to archives and/or public records.

I propose that what I call archival readiness – an ongoing process of relationship building among archivists, scholars, community organizations, and individuals – could increase the likelihood that people living in the Coliseum would contribute to historical records. Archival readiness could begin through any number of relationships – whether through outreach efforts, coincidence, or instigation by a community member – and travel through any number of paths toward expanding the process of archive making, as opposed to archive taking, into historically excluded communities, whose members could become archive makers. Archival readiness works toward raising the likelihood that someone

13 For example, despite working among relevant materials for months, I was unaware of this resource until a reviewer of this essay suggested that I explore its sources, for which I am grateful.

living in the Coliseum – as a representative of other guests in other shelters in other cities during other emergencies – might not only contribute material but also initiate its entrance into archives and archival processes.

This concept builds on and extends work already underway by archivists in institutional and community settings; focusing ongoing and isolated efforts into a larger movement would accelerate the impact. For example, when considering specifically how archivists might make stronger efforts to "kee[p] pace" with growing Latinx populations, Tracy B. Grimm and Chon A. Noriega recommend that archivists seek "working relationships" with organizations in forms of "cosponsorship from within the community," so that professionals "support a methodology that calls for assisting community organizations and individuals to care for their own history."[14] Similarly, when Rodney Carter explores strategies that archivists might use to engage historically excluded communities, he includes "outreach programs" on his list: by "engaging in dialogues with community groups," he suggests, "those not currently represented in the archives could be alerted to what these institutions can offer, which may include space in the archives for the records of the group, the organization of oral history projects, or advice and assistance in establishing their own archives."[15] Nancy L. Godoy-Powell and Elizabeth G. Dunham perhaps get closest to enacting archival readiness after observing a disproportionate lack of Mexican American material in Arizona archives. Rather than simply asking the Mexican American community for material, they created archiving workshops in locations accessible to those communities, focusing on the "preservation of Latino archives" while distributing "Archive Kits" with bilingual informational brochures and supplies.[16] These workshops gave local Mexican American communities "equal ownership of the material and [a chance to] share stewardship responsibilities" as well as the resources to potentially participate in future archival projects.[17]

14 Tracy B. Grimm and Chon A. Noriega, "Documenting Regional Latino Arts and Culture: Case Studies for a Collaborative, Community-Oriented Approach," *American Archivist* 76, no. 1 (2013): 95–112, 101, 107.

15 Rodney G.S. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 215–33, 231.

16 Nancy L. Godoy-Powell and Elizabeth G. Dunham, "21st Century Community Outreach and Collection Development: ASU Chicano/a Research Collection," *Journal of Western Archives* 8, no. 1 (2017): article 4, 16–17.

17 Godoy-Powell and Dunham, 16–17.

The work of scholars, archivists, and community members to include the knowledge of historically excluded communities in historical records faces a long and established tradition of archive taking. The imposed and vague terms used in the point-in-time counts represent one of many recordkeeping systems that gather information *about* a marginalized community, rather than documenting experiences in collaboration with its members. For example, in 1960, Vaughn Bornet examined the relationship between paperwork and the praxis of social welfare, arguing that this paperwork would help future historians tell "the emotional story" of "social welfare [as] an area of national significance."[18] Bornet suggested that archivists and researchers interview "key executives in agencies and government bureaus," as well as social workers, in order to understand the origins of this corpus and how to preserve it.[19] Notably, Bornet makes no call for interviews with or contributions from people signing these forms, those served by social programs. Similarly, Marie Allen's 1997 article detailing the successes of the first paperless food stamp program, which started in Tennessee in 1994, celebrates the collaboration between local and state levels of government and archivists in launching the new program. How much more efficient could the program have become if they had invited into the conversation recipients of food stamps?[20]

This authoritative record created about people experiencing poverty and/or homelessness, paired with relative inattention in academic inquiry to relationships between archives and homelessness, signals an acute need for material and knowledge contributed by people with lived experiences of homelessness. Ciaran Trace emphasizes that records are rhetorical and that the act of preserving records "involves the manipulation of . . . background expectancies in order to make accounts of what happened persuasive and justifiable."[21] She argues that "what records represent is a persuasive version of the socially organized character of an organization's operations, regardless of what the actual order is,

18 Bornet defines *social welfare* as "special services supplied and material assistance given by all or part of society to a human being thought to be in need." Vaughn Bornet, "The Manuscripts of Social Welfare," *American Archivist* 23, no. 1 (1960): 33–48, 33.

19 Bornet, 46.

20 Marie Allen, "Crossing Boundaries: Intergovernmental Records Cooperation, 1987–1997," *American Archivist* 60, no. 2 (1997): 216–33, 227–28.

21 Ciaran Trace, "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (2002): 137–59, 151–52.

indeed perhaps independently of what the actual order is."[22] If the only records that exist for the Coliseum are those contributing to the history of the responses and efforts of the City of Denver during a crisis, researchers two generations away might learn of uncomplicated and smooth transitions from event centre to shelter and back to event centre. In this sense, Trace continues, records are not "descriptive or passive containers" but rather "proactive agents"; and yet, she notes, "the record has become naturalized and thus invisible, an assumed backdrop rather than active agent."[23] The social marginalization of homelessness in the present will be normalized when the present becomes the past.

Crisis conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which widen social disparities involving access to safety, security, and participation, make the backdrop of records that Trace describes even more "invisible." To my knowledge, there were no extant relationships between guests staying at the Coliseum and local archives projects before or near the beginning of the pandemic, and attempts to create such relationships during the pandemic would have been nearly impossible. Physical access was restricted to essential staff and volunteers, and guests had only sporadic access to Internet after the sudden and indefinite closure of public libraries. Further, any reparative or community-based archives project conducted in collaboration with former Coliseum guests after the fact might find few participants. Due to the transient situations of many people experiencing homelessness, former guests are now spread throughout the city, state, or country; of those remaining in the area who might be reachable, many might be hesitant to speak with researchers, for reasons that I address below, among others. The aim of archival readiness, then, is for people from within historically excluded communities to already be in relationship with scholars, archivists, and other archive makers, and to perhaps be archive makers themselves, when a crisis occurs.

Just as a majority of the people living in the Coliseum will not set foot in archives, an equally large majority of archivists will never set foot in an emergency shelter; the distance between institutions and historically excluded communities is more likely to expand during an emergency than it is to shrink. But what if archives workshops similar to those of Godoy-Powell and Dunham took place in shelters? Practicing archival readiness, archivists might partner with shelters

22 Trace, 152.

23 Trace, 143, 159.

not only to make archive projects available for shelter guests, so that guests could choose to participate on their own terms, but also to empower shelter guests to create their own forms of archives. A culture that makes exposure to archives and their historical importance available by providing opportunities to participate would offer people experiencing homelessness the tools to record how an emergency such as COVID-19 affects their community. If the barriers between professional archivists and community scholars were already lowered – if relationships were already established – then the range of people who consider themselves to be archive makers would expand along with the kinds of materials that are collected in archives.

II. Archive Making about Homelessness: "They Don't Know That That's Not Me"[24]

Since the archival turn away from positivist methods toward postmodern interrogations of the biases inherent in archival processes, archivists and scholars have been developing methods to create inclusive acquisition, visitation, and interpretation processes in institutional archives.[25] From Michel Foucault's identification of archives as power systems to Achille Mbembe's description of the archive as "not a piece of data, but a status," archives have been acknowledged as sites of decision-making and archivists as decision makers.[26] Randall Jimerson writes that "decisions that archivists make in acquisition reflect their personal

24 Eryka, "Eryka's Story," oral history interview by Alison Turner and Blake Sanz, *When You Are Homeless* (podcast), October 2019, https://whenyouarehomeless.com/erykas-story/.

25 Jonathan Furner describes the movement between positivist and postmodernist approaches to archival work as a "pendulum" moving back and forth for the last 500 years. He presents a form of middle ground for postmodern-leaning archivists, who recognize the "necessarily subjective nature of any historian's perception of reality, selection of evidence, and representation of the facts" while also, in practice, researching and writing "as if their goal is to get closer to a (if not the) truth, and to persuade their peers not only of the validity of their arguments but also of the truth of their conclusions." Jonathan Furner, "Conceptual Analysis: A Method for Understanding Information as Evidence, and Evidence as Information," *Archival Science* 4, no. 3–4 (2004): 233–65, 244.

26 Foucault suggests that documents created by power systems simultaneously marginalize people without power while allowing them a presence that they might not otherwise have in archives. Michel Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men," *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 76–91, 79. Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 19–26, 20.

interests and values, and in turn shape the record of the past that will survive for future research."[27] In other words, who archives affects what is archived.

Many archivists respond to these concerns through theory and praxis. For example, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins calls for traditional and academic repositories to operate as "reparative archives," in which practitioners in authoritative spaces not only notice the "marginalization or absence of the oppressed" but respond to it with "targeted efforts to increase the diversification of collections and to advocate for and promote those collections for utilization within scholarly spaces."[28] Researchers attempt to fill archival absences by entering the spaces where historically excluded communities are comfortable and welcomed, using methods such as community-based participatory archiving (e.g., Ana Roeschley and Jeongyhun Kim's Mass. Memories Road Show archive project, in which the researchers travelled to various towns to engage local community members); photovoice projects (e.g., Sarah Johnsen, Jon May, and Paul Cloke's project in England, in which they gave disposable cameras to people experiencing homelessness and asked them to meet a second time to describe the photos they captured); and oral histories (e.g., Saint Catherine University's Voices of Homelessness Oral History Project).[29] Oral histories are a particularly exciting way to supplement conventional records as they provide information that is unique among archival material, sharing what Alessandro Portelli calls "the speaker's subjectivity," including "not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."[30] Perhaps more importantly, Cave argues that oral histories allow participants who are "left traumatized" by crisis to "make sense in what remains," benefiting not only present and future understandings of the range of experiences during a

27 Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009), 301.

28 Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 4, 6.

29 Ana Roeschley and Jeonghyun Kim, "'Something That Feels like a Community': The Role of Personal Stories in Building Community-Based Participatory Archives," *Archival Science* 19, no. 1 (2019): 27–49; Sarah Johnsen, Jon May, and Paul Cloke, "Imag(in)ing Homeless Places: Using Auto-Photography to (Re)examine the Geographies of Homelessness," *Area* 40, no. 2 (2008): 194–207.

30 Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998): 63–74, 67.

crisis such as the pandemic but also the recovery processes of those whose experiences were particularly traumatizing.[31]

In addition to addressing the imbalances of perspectives in institutional archives by deliberately acquiring missing materials, institutions focus on improving physical (or virtual) access to collections, acknowledging a history of equally imbalanced archive users. Many archives that are within institutions continue to function as spaces of exclusion under a form of "house arrest."[32] Randy Williams and Jennifer Duncan share some of the reasons that this might be the case. They write,

> It is hard for historically excluded voices to make their way into an archive. Even when invited to participate, it can be intimidating as "the establishment" is rarely seen to care about or treat excluded communities with respect. And, more simply, university campuses and other cultural institutions are hard to navigate, often having perceived and real rules that are off-putting and with easily overlooked barriers, such as difficult parking accommodations.[33]

Barriers to archives might be physical, psychological, and emotional.[34] The records themselves, and the way that they are described and preserved, may be a source of trauma to visitors for any number of reasons. Nicola Laurent and Kirsten Wright's curriculum to help archivists employ trauma-informed approaches encourages an understanding that "every interaction with someone who has had a trauma experience can either cause further harm or lead to healing."[35] They suggest that conventional archives might create comfortable

31 Cave, "What Remains," 11.

32 Through the etymology of the word *archive*, Derrida shows how those who "guard" the archives are also those with "the power to interpret the archives"; he argues that this kind of power puts archives under a form of "house arrest." Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2–3.

33 Williams and Duncan, "Voices from Drug Court," 7.

34 Although historically excluded communities experience much greater barriers to entry, they are not the only ones affected by limited access to archives. Steven Maynard, an associate professor, experienced many forms of restriction to historical records of the Toronto police department. See Steven Maynard, "Police/Archives," *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 159–82, 179.

35 Nicola Laurent and Kirsten Wright, "A Trauma-Informed Approach to Managing Archives: A New Online Course," *Archives and Manuscripts* 48, no. 1 (2020): 80–87, 83.

and welcoming reading rooms and consider the ways that archive visitors' interactions with staff, security, and the rhetoric of descriptions of material might impact their experiences.[36] Perhaps more than anything, people who are not already interested in the historical potential of archives might not think to enter them at all. In the workshop project described above, in which Godoy-Powell and Dunham brought archive kits to Mexican American communities in Arizona that were not affiliated with academia, Godoy-Powell and Dunham learned that "the vast majority" of participants were "unfamiliar with the terms 'archives' and 'archivist.'"[37] Why would it occur to someone who has never spoken to an archivist to donate their material to an archive?

Inclusion-oriented archivists and scholars also consider ways to involve donors of material in other stages of the archiving process, including description and interpretation of that material. Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan suggest that archivists enact what they call "representative collecting," an approach that "avoid[s] exhibiting the 'other'" by engaging participation with marginalized communities, preserving material and narratives that are "spoken directly by traditionally marginalized communities, embedded within the local experience, practice, and knowledge of that community."[38] Specifically, they explore ways that archivists might practice appraisal, arrangement, and description in ways that are "designed to respect the knowledge systems embedded within community contexts."[39] Joanne Evans and her co-authors frame inclusion of participants as "archival autonomy," which they define as "the ability for individuals and communities to participate in societal memory, with their own voice, becoming participatory agents in recordkeeping and archiving for identity, memory and accountability purposes."[40] Similarly, Sue McKemmish and her research team explore how collaborative archive making requires institutional interrogation of long-standing power systems. They argue that what they call "participatory recordkeeping" in Australian out-of-home care services requires "the explicit

36 Laurent and Wright, 83.

37 Godoy-Powell and Dunham, "21st Century Community Outreach and Collection Development," 16.

38 Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (Spring 2007): 87–101, 90.

39 Shilton and Srinivasan, 92.

40 Joanne Evans, Sue McKemmish, Elizabeth Daniels, and Gavan McCarthy, "Self-Determination and Archival Autonomy: Advocating Activism," *Archival Science* 15, no. 4 (2015): 337–68, 347.

articulation of the colonial power embedded in existing frameworks, processes, and technical systems."[41] They assert that the experiences of those who have left the care system are "site[s] of expertise" and that these perspectives should be "privileg[ed]" over "entrenched recordkeeping rhetoric that continues to perpetuate emotional dispossession and political disempowerment." In other words, they explain, their approach "consciously choos[es] . . . to place the psychosocial function of recordkeeping ahead of its transactional utility."[42]

i) Sharing Authority in Institutional Archives

These congruous concepts of representative collecting, archival autonomy, and participatory recordkeeping contribute to an epistemological shift among archivists and researchers that seeks not new forms of information and material, because this information and material are not new to the communities experiencing them, but new collaboration methods for interpreting that material. Roeschley and Kim describe this epistemology as "sharing authority," or "changing the power dynamics during the processes of appraisal, arrangement, and description."[43] Daniel Kerr, who conducted hundreds of interviews with people experiencing homelessness in Cleveland, provides an early model for sharing authority in oral history projects. Part-way through the project, Kerr started bringing a TV and VCR to public places so that people within the community could hear the recordings, which made the project "explicitly . . . a collaborative one," he explains, because storytellers were also "active participants in the formation of a collective analysis."[44] Further, through collaboration with one of the community members, Kerr redirected his interview protocol away from participants' "life history" and toward "what [participants] felt the historical causes of homelessness were and what they thought could be done about the present situation."[45] Kerr argues that this shift "brings the interviewee

41 Sue McKemmish, Jane Bone, Joanne Evans, Frank Golding, Antonina Lewis, Gregory Rolan, Kirsten Thorpe, and Jacqueline Wilson, "Decolonizing Recordkeeping and Archival Praxis in Childhood Out-of-Home Care and Indigenous Archival Collections," *Archival Science* 20, no. 1 (2020): 21–49, 27.

42 McKemmish, Bone, Evans, Golding, Lewis, Rolan, Thorpe, and Wilson, 28.

43 Roeschley and Kim, "Something That Feels Like a Community,'" 30.

44 Daniel Kerr, "'We Know What the Problem Is': Using Oral History to Develop a Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness from the Bottom Up," *Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 27–46, 28, 30.

45 Kerr, 34.

into the process of analysis."[46] His work suggests that when historically excluded communities are provided access to resources, they are able to mark the historical record via their own methods and interpretations.

The other forms of inclusive archive making described above can also engage donors of material in its interpretation. The photovoice project introduced earlier subverted a "reliance on researcher-generated images" because participants were given the opportunity to explain their choice of images.[47] Similarly, in Roeschley and Kim's process of gathering photographs from community members, each image was paired with the donor's description, allowing community members "to shape the archival record with documentation of their personal experiences and relationships."[48] Recording narratives about an artifact or record is an act of shared authority that allows donors to contribute context, a step conventionally taken by professional archivists.

Those taking these exciting approaches to including marginalized communities in institutional archives face particular challenges when collaborating with people experiencing homelessness. For example, while the photovoice project in England resulted in much to celebrate, including the news that all participants "without exception, enjoyed the experience," it also encountered obstacles.[49] Several cameras were lost, follow-up interviews were described as being "extremely difficult" to coordinate, and many participants were never seen again after the initial visit; the researchers described their failure rate as "high."[50] The project design depended on participants having a level of stability in their lives that allowed them to return for a second session of interviews; honouring such an agreement could be difficult when location within a city depended on available shelter beds or a job became suddenly and inflexibly available. Further, many people living in shelters have only a few belongings with them and may not be carrying photographs or artifacts to donate. Similarly, while oral history recordings with people who lived in the Coliseum would be a worthy and important project, the participants could only be those who remained in the area

46 Kerr, 34.

47 Johnsen, May, and Cloke, "Imag(in)ing Homeless Places," 195, 198.

48 Roeschley and Kim, "'Something That Feels Like a Community,'" 28.

49 Johnsen, May, and Cloke, "Imag(in)ing Homeless Places," 195, 198.

50 Johnsen, May, and Cloke, 203, 205.

of the Coliseum months later and were reachable by hypothetical researchers – a sample that in many ways would not represent the diverse population that converged in the Coliseum.[51]

Additionally, the tension between the needs of the future, to access a more accurate understanding of the past, and the needs of the present, for privacy, increases in shelter settings. Projects aiming to more fully document the experiences of individuals in historically excluded communities often ask to make people's locations and living situations public. Mary Kay Quinlin, Nancy MacKay, and Barbara W. Sommer explain that, unlike in interviews conducted for research in the social sciences, in which anonymity of participants is a "key element," the names and biographical information of oral history participants are important for the context of the interview.[52] However, Johnsen, May, and Cloke note that even when consent is given for such projects, it may be complicated by a number of factors, including substance abuse, trauma, or a current desire that conflicts with future desires to "dissociate" from a "homeless past" after becoming more "integrated into 'mainstream' society."[53]

Many shelters for women and trans folx, including the Coliseum, operate under privacy protections responding to histories of violence against women, which might impede archiving projects initiated from outside the community. If someone came looking for a guest at the Coliseum, no matter if they claimed to be their child or to have their medication, staff could neither confirm nor deny that the person was or had ever been a guest there. It is possible that even if the sought-after guest were there, staff might not know from the census, a spreadsheet tracking little more than who had which cot number. This was a living document whose iterations were not preserved, recording neither the number of times a particular guest might have left and come back nor the full length of any guest's stay. On the census, guests could provide whatever name they desired, which would be printed on a photo ID card that was then scanned with each

51 Oral histories are also notoriously underutilized as sources in research and academic writing – doomed to a status that Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes describe as "marginal" so that narratives from many oral history projects join the "thousands of tapes lying unused in drawers and archives." Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, "Building Partnerships between Oral History and Memory Studies," in *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008): vii–xvii, vii.

52 Mary Kay Quinlin, Nancy MacKay, and Barbara W. Sommer, *Introduction to Community Oral History* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013), 27.

53 Johnsen, May, and Cloke, "Imag(in)ing Homeless Places," 205.

entry; it is likely that many guests used invented names. Some guests expressed concern over their identities to the extent that they asked staff to never say their names out loud. If preserved, this census would maintain privacy, but it would not tell future researchers much about who was in the Coliseum or how that experience impacted its guests and staff.

While privacy measures are vital to the present, they can contribute to absences in the records of the past. Returning to Bornet, in his advice for organizations serving clients in vulnerable situations, he writes that "the needs of privacy must take precedence over the desire of the public to know."[54] Jimerson agrees that if the "requirements" for records in institutional archives have "been met," the records "can and should be destroyed" in order to maintain "economy and efficiency of recordkeeping" and to "protec[t] the organization from unwarranted information disclosure."[55] However, when such records leave the only archival trace of a temporary emergency shelter during a pandemic, this respect for privacy simultaneously creates an erasure of the people whose privacy is so important. Bornet writes that "one can only hope that archivists will be vigilant to avoid needless revelations from the private lives of obscure people."[56] Obscure, according to whom? Needless, according to whom? When the privacy of guests is maintained year after year without other forms of archival engagement, the record offers only an absence of the perspectives and knowledges of entire communities.

ii) Community Archiving: "I Never Realized How Homeless I Was"[57]

Participatory archiving, photovoice projects, and oral histories are developing methods that archivists and researchers use to include into the record the knowledge of historically excluded communities; another vital way for historically excluded communities to enter archives is for them to create them on their own, outside of institutions, through a practice most commonly known as community archiving. Andrew Flinn and his co-researchers emphasize

54 Bornet, "The Manuscripts of Social Welfare," 39.

55 Jimerson, *Archives Power*, 12.

56 Bornet, "The Manuscripts of Social Welfare," 44.

57 Lucky, "Lucky's Story," oral history interview by Alison Turner and Blake Sanz, *When You Are Homeless* (podcast) October 2019, https://whenyouarehomeless.com/luckys-story/.

that community archives "offer an important and empowering assertion of community resistance to otherwise exclusionary and (often) marginalising dominant narratives."[58] Alycia Sellie, Jesse Goldstein, Molly Fair, and Jennifer Hoyer define community archives as spaces that prioritize "the notion of access and shared ownership over a collection" with "the community's best interests as priority"; they argue that, while community archives share the goal of institutional archives to preserve their materials, "the standard intent of long-term preservation is tempered by the belief that the materials should first and foremost be accessible to those who are represented within them."[59] Community archiving does not shift toward a sharing of authority but originates from that shift.

Community archives have been explored by many scholars as sites and processes that validate the identities and presence of marginalized communities. For example, Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez argue that community archives can create "representational belonging" to "empower" those who are marginalized by mainstream media.[60] Providing for example the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), they show how community archives can be a form of political protest – "an attempt to seize the means by which history is written and correct or amend dominant stories about the past."[61] They categorize community archives users' relationships with community archives with three statements: (1) epistemologically, community archives assert, "We were here"; (2) ontologically, they affirm, "I am here"; and (3) socially, they say, "You belong here."[62] Another study, of five community archives in Southern California, finds that users of community archives "felt a deep sense of responsibility to their community's archive" and that the site allowed participants to "continually define" and "anticipate future shifts in the boundaries of their communities."[63] The potential benefits from community

58 Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9, no. 1–2 (2009): 71–86, 83.

59 Alycia Sellie, Jesse Goldstein, Molly Fair, and Jennifer Hoyer, "Interference Archive: A Free Space for Social Movement Culture," *Archival Science* 15, no. 4 (2015): 453–72, 455.

60 Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 56–81, 57–58.

61 Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, 62.

62 Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, 75.

63 Gracen Brilmyer, Joyce Gabiola, Jimmy Zavala, and Michelle Caswell, "Reciprocal Archival Imaginaries: The

archives, then, include the ability to address what Carter describes as "the need to assert a strong identity in the face of the power structures that attempt to stamp them out."[64] These benefits could have provided a powerful way for people living in the Coliseum and other shelters to not only leave their own records but also find sources of support when encountering bureaucratic and social marginalization.

However, the potential benefits of community archiving become more complicated with communities experiencing homelessness. In contrast to the term *literal homelessness*, which I interrogate throughout this article, people experiencing homelessness represent extraordinary diversity, as the population includes people with dominant identities and those with other and sometimes intersecting marginalized identities, including people from BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and disabled communities; formerly incarcerated people; and people with experiences of addiction. People experience homelessness in starkly different ways, to the extent that some do not identify as homeless at all. A guest living at the Coliseum told me that she rejects the label *homeless* and prefers, instead, *nomad*. She and I spoke regularly as we both stood in the open garage door by the laundry table, the only place on the bottom floor of the Coliseum where the sun came in. She was quick to add that identifying as a nomad does not necessarily mean that this is a lifestyle of choice. Would she choose to participate in a point-in-time survey attempting to fit her into its own definition or a community archive created by and about those with potentially drastically different experiences of "homelessness"?

Oral histories about homelessness show the different ways in which a person may (or may not) identify with a hypothetical "homeless community." A woman named Marissa describes the mentorship she provided to the people she calls her "drag daughters" after they come out as trans. She says, "I was mentoring them and I had my own place, so sheltering them and feeding them and showing them that they're worth it and you go out there and try."[65] Marissa describes community members, helping each other through experiences of homelessness, whose trans identities are likely prioritized over their changing identities as

Shifting Boundaries of 'Community' in Community Archives," *Archivaria* 88 (Fall 2019): 46.

64 Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid," 221.

65 Marissa, "Marissa's Story," oral history interview by Alison Turner and Blake Sanz, *When You Are Homeless* (podcast), October 2019, https://whenyouarehomeless.com/marissas-story/.

people who are homeless. A woman named Lucky, who explains that, after being homeless, she understands people using drugs in ways she never did before, might consider her identity as a drug user as more important to her identity than homelessness. She explains:

> Some of them [people using meth on the streets] may be using it for the same reasons I'm using it. It's because of the trauma they went through in their life and they're trying to numb some pain. . . . So I just feel like now whoever is using this drug or whoever is out here on the streets, we're like-minded, most of us. That's how I look at us now.[66]

Both Marissa and Lucky identify with "homelessness" only as a characteristic that is inextricable from other parts of their identities. By contrast, Eryka, a trans woman experiencing homelessness, feels little connection of any sort with those around her. Eryka separates herself from others experiencing homelessness, particularly people whose behaviour she does not agree with. She explains:

> I see a lot of disrespectful acts. Like I don't understand why if you're digging trash out of a dumpster you can't pick up that bag you just dumped out on the ground before you leave. Like, it takes two second, man. . . .
> They [people who are not homeless] don't know that that's not me.[67]

Eryka wants to distance herself from the "homeless" community (i.e., to emphasize that "that's not me") more than she wants to find a shared identity with them. Rather, her identity, in this sense, aligns more with the people she imagines watching homelessness from the outside.

Further, some people who have experienced homelessness do not consider themselves "homeless" until reflecting on it afterwards, and this would make them unlikely to participate in a community archive about the experience (yet, ironically, perhaps more likely to participate in research labelled from the outside as a project about homelessness). A woman named Helen, for example, says that "I until recently didn't know that homelessness meant that you didn't have

66 Lucky, "Lucky's Story."

67 Eryka, "Eryka's Story."

your own home, it [can mean] that you were staying at someone else's home. I didn't know that it was actually a form of homelessness, but I learned about the different forms of homelessness. And I'm like, 'Oh I guess I have been homeless I just didn't know it.'"[68] Similarly – yet coming from very different experiences – Lucky explains why she didn't realize she was homeless at the time: "I was staying in and out of really nice hotels because of the money that I was making. So I never realized how homeless I was 'cause I was ordering room service."[69] While any community based on identity experiences fluidity, a community of people experiencing homelessness is constantly in motion.

Cristine Paschild's push against the prioritization of identity in institutional archives also challenges the celebration of identity in community archives and provides a theoretical framework for the above statements by Marissa, Lucky, Eryka, and Helen. Paschild critiques archival work with immigrant communities, in which selected issues affecting a few members of the community become representative of the whole.[70] Organizing collections around one form of identity, Paschild argues, can "distract community institutions from pragmatic evaluation of sustainable practice and can inadvertently mire archivists in a marginalizing rhetoric that blurs the issues at hand."[71] Lumping the four voices of Eryka, Lucky, Helen, and Marissa, above, into a "homeless community" might erase all of the nuance that even the short excerpts here reveal.[72]

Shaunna Moore and Susan Pell offer a slightly nuanced framing of community archiving that perhaps more accurately describes communities of people experiencing homelessness; "autonomous archives," they explain, are created and maintained by "emergent publics."[73] Autonomous archives, like community

68 "Helen," oral history interview by Louise Edwards-Simpson, November 14, 2012, Voices of Homelessness Oral History Project, Saint Catherine University, transcript and audio, 13–14, https://sophia.stkate.edu/scuvoh_audio/9/.

69 Lucky, "Lucky's Story."

70 Cristine N. Paschild, "Community Archives and the Limitations of Identity: Considering Discursive Impact on Material Needs," *American Archivist* 75, no. 1 (2012): 125–142, 133.

71 Paschild, 125.

72 I make this statement conscious of my own irony. I helped to record three of the four oral history narratives cited in this article in an oral history project produced as a podcast miniseries whose title, *When You Are Homeless*, includes the word *homeless* and thus potentially contributes to forms of external erasure of the narrators' other identities.

73 Shaunna Moore and Susan Pell, "Autonomous Archives," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 4-5

archives, exist outside of government institutions and use archiving as a way to "critique dominant narratives of official history"; however, rather than being based primarily on identity, autonomous archives are "tied to specific issue-event contexts of public formation and witness groups' struggles to establish themselves within cultural and political forums."[74] Moore and Pell write that "the boundaries between established community archives and autonomous archives are fluid, as groups and their heritage become more or less solidified, recognised and institutionalised over time."[75] Moore and Pell explore for example the "Friends of the Woodward's Squat" in 2002, in which people experiencing homelessness and advocates squatted in a vacant Vancouver department store for 92 days, an event known as "Woodsquat."[76] The Woodward's Squat Archive collected "written, oral, graphic and photographic records, along with media representations and responses from the municipality," all of which, the authors argue, have "the capacity to ward off social amnesia" about the event itself and the conditions that created it.[77] Searching for this archive in summer 2021 shows a website that functions as an archive of photos and media about the event as well as a link to a pdf version of an edited collection of participants' writing during and about the event.[78]

This website is an exciting example of a record marked with the voices and work of Woodsquat participants; however, Moore and Pell explore Woodsquat as an autonomous archive among examples of archives created by groups that each "actively asserts that land is central to its identity and understanding of its history."[79] This is *not* the case for people living in the Coliseum, a structure whose purpose as a shelter was from the beginning marked as *temporary* and from which many guests desired to remove themselves more than to (re)claim the space. While I do believe that a form of community formed through the Coli-

(2010): 255–68, 257.

74 Moore and Pell, 257–8.

75 Moore and Pell, 257–8.

76 Moore and Pell, 259.

77 Moore and Pell, 259.

78 Debbie Krull, "The Woodward's Occupation & Woodsquat: Then," Woodsquat (blog), November 9, 2010, https://woodsquat.wordpress.com/.

79 Moore and Pell, "Autonomous Archives," 260.

seum's repurposing as a shelter, the people who lived there for periods from one night to four months are unlikely to feel that it is "central" to their identities – or even a part of their identities at all. Community archiving that is based on an identity depends on participants' positive affiliations with that identity, which is not necessarily the case for many people experiencing homelessness.

III. Three Records of "Purpose"

As an illustration of archival readiness, I share three records that represent a portion of my daily experience as a part-time member of the shelter staff in the Coliseum. I am not an archivist, and I was not positioned in the Coliseum as a scholar or researcher, so these records are not offered in response to a request from an outside institution but from within. These records provide a different kind of information than that found in a census, point-in-time statistics, or newspaper snippets – all examples of what Michelle Caswell might call "information objects," which she defines as "not necessarily related to nor . . . products of activities."[80] Records are distinct, Caswell argues, because "they may also serve as evidence of action."[81] Similarly, Trace's distinction between the *use* and *purpose* of records emphasizes the spirit behind my choice to share these records: Trace writes that the use of records "allows an organization to carry out its daily business," whereas their purpose "acknowledges that records are created in anticipation of future as well as current uses . . . and that these other uses are . . . more than the purely technical."[82] Accordingly, I share a selection of my associated memories with each image in hopes of both exceeding any technical use for such records and practicing a form of "shared authority" as I interpret the material that I contribute. However, because I am an academic interested in archiving and not part of a historically excluded community, these examples can only gesture toward archival readiness. I do not attempt to speak for shelter guests nor to equate my 10 hours each week at the Coliseum with the experiences

80 Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Literature* 16, no. 1 (2016), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7bn4v1fk.

81 Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives."

82 Trace, "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened,'" 153.

of guests sleeping on one of 300 cots in the arena. Rather, I intend these records to inspire interest in the many other forms of material and the stories they tell about temporary emergency shelters.

FIGURE 1 *Photo of Saturday lunch at Denver Coliseum shelter, July 2020.*

i) Photo of Saturday Lunch

Guests staying at the Coliseum were offered three hot meals each day. Twenty minutes before each meal, guests needed to vacate the makeshift cafeteria so that the tables could be "sanitized" with the ubiquitous chemical used throughout the shelter. When the meal was announced over a loudspeaker, guests lined up six feet apart, stepped into one of half a dozen portable hand-washing stations

that wrapped around the room, then arrived at the buffet of food warmers, with its rotating line-up of volunteers. When servers arrived behind the buffet lines, a printed-out photograph showing what the meal should look like waited for them (see figure 1). The menu varied each day but was repeated every week: this photo shows Saturday lunch, which was the same as the previous Saturday's lunch and would be the same the following Saturday. (One day, after months without them, the pickles in this picture were added to the Saturday lunch menu, causing excitement among those of us serving the meal and the guests picking up trays.)

When I see this photograph, I remember 90-degree days and the feeling that being asked to wear a hairnet on top of the masks and gloves was sometimes too much. I remember struggling to lift the pans of chicken breasts, made off-site, from the large, rolling cupboard in which they arrived. I remember the time we opened the rolling cupboard and the pan of chocolate pudding spilled over – a thick lava of sugary goo covering the walls and door, then dropping to the floor. I remember seeing towers and towers of Styrofoam trays and wanting to stop other volunteers from using an entire Styrofoam tray when a guest wanted only a bag of chips.

ii) Morning Showers Sign-Up Sheet

Twenty yards from the food-serving line, four detachable trailers of showers were parked behind thick black curtains. Each trailer had several shower cabins, for a total of 19 showers, including two that complied with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. The showers "opened" for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, during which time a staff member or volunteer sat at a table with a handwritten list and unpredictable bins of hygiene products that depended on donations. Staff and volunteers wrote each guest's name on the list next to a stall number (see figure 2) and tracked the time, as they were tasked with keeping showers under 15 minutes long. Some staff filled only odd-numbered showers in the morning and even-numbered showers in the afternoon in order to preserve water pressure; some let guests pick which showers they wanted; others started at number 1 and filled the showers down the line. There were no limits regarding who could shower or how many times; the showers operated on a first come, first served basis, with no questions asked.

Looking at this list, I remember how long the line would stretch in the morning – chairs spread six feet apart, for social distancing, for the length of the main hall. I felt nervous when the line was that long, and I wrote hurriedly in fear

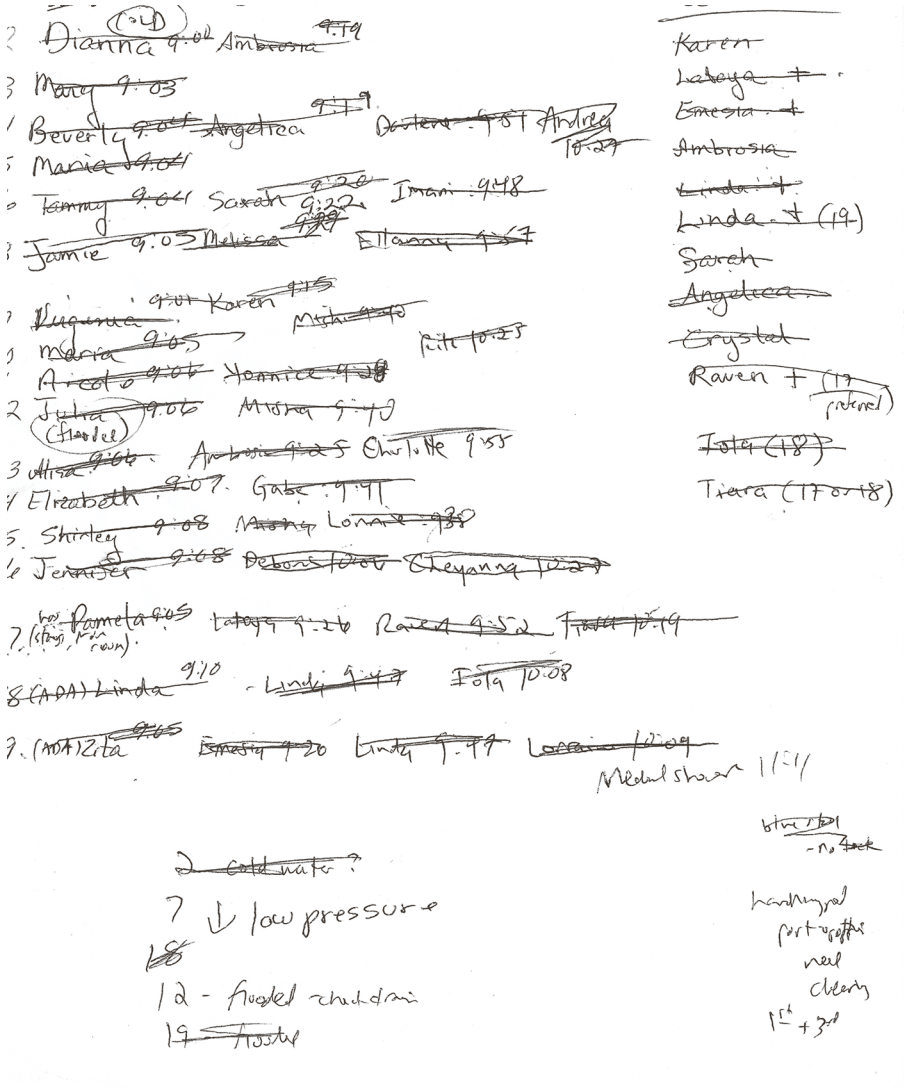

FIGURE 2 *Handwritten shower sign-up sheet, July 2020.*

that people would get angry at the wait. I remember hoping that no one would go over time because of how uncomfortable it was to knock on a trailer door and ask a guest to finish while other people showered to the left and right. And I remember how patient so many guests were with my slowness, when I wrote down the wrong shower number, or when I pointed in the wrong direction.

iii) Transportation via Golf-Cart Tracking Sheet

The Coliseum has two floors but no elevator. Some guests could not walk down or up stairs for reasons that were temporary or chronic. Others could not make their own way to the health clinic, which operated out of a room in the men's emergency shelter a quarter mile away, on a road patched together by jagged sidewalks. When these guests needed transportation, they would tell a staff member, who would use a staticky walkie-talkie system to call the runner. The runner met the guest in a golf cart, asked them to keep their mask up over their nose if it was not there already, and headed off to the guest's destination. The tracking sheet (see figure 3) is from one of the days that I was the runner and thought to record the trips (a recording that was not at all required and that I hid from my co-workers, knowing how strange it was to record this). I tracked trips "up to down," "down to up," "to St. Street" – using shorthand for the name for the clinic – and "from St. St" – back from the clinic. Though it does not come through in the reproduction, the pages I wrote on are watermarked with the same chemical used on the cafeteria tables, which was frequently sprayed on the golf cart's seat and steering wheel.

Being the runner was a pleasure. It meant working in fresh air instead of within concrete walls, and on the drive down, there was a postcard-perfect view of the mountains. Best of all, on transportation rides, it was possible to have conversations with guests that were both more relaxed and more personal than they could be inside. It was in the golf cart that a guest told me that her son was living in the men's shelter, and, on holidays, if they had the money, they rented a hotel room – the only way they could spend time together. It was in the golf cart that guests who seemed irritated in the long lines for food, laundry, and showers informed me of the chronic pain they had in their lower backs, which made standing in line one of the most painful positions possible. It was in the golf cart that a guest tried to get out when we were moving – suddenly panicked about not knowing where she was. It was in the golf cart that a guest told me she was on her way to a job interview for a position she knew she would get and wanted.

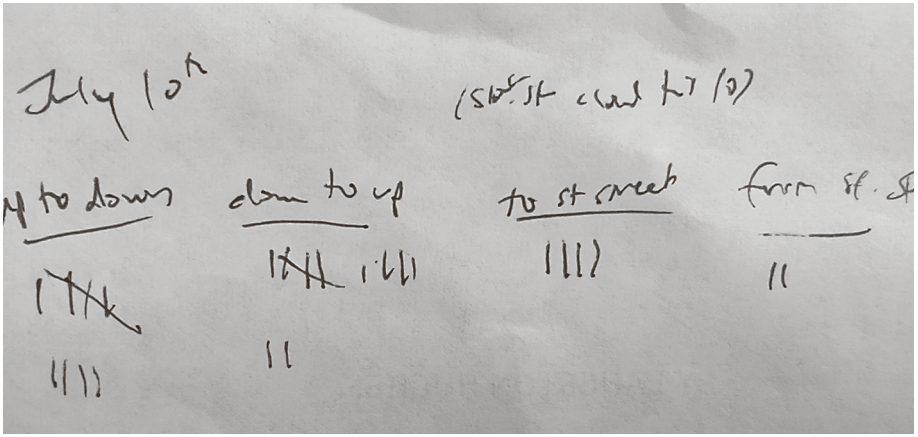

FIGURE 3 *Runner's golf-cart tracking sheet, July 2020.*

While my memories, paired with each record, expand the information researchers might glean about this temporary emergency shelter, the memories of a guest encountering the images would likely be very different. Some guests were thrilled by the food and thanked and praised the servers as if we were the cooks. Other guests complained of diarrhea or constipation, along with general physical unwellness. Some people requested particular showers, exercising knowledge of water pressure, water temperature, and other factors that – having never used the showers – I could not predict. One guest informed me that 15 minutes was not enough time to find the right trailer and then the right stall in the right trailer, remove clothes, set up hygiene products, and dry off and dress after showering. In other words, she made visible the difference between the "15-minute shower" that planners and decision makers likely imagined and the lived experience of that policy.[83]

In addition to potentially providing different interpretations of the above records, guests or other staff might contribute other material that they feel represents the daily experience of living in the Coliseum during the pandemic.

83 This is not to say that staff at this shelter were cruel or unthoughtful about details such as the length of showers; to the contrary, most staff gave several minutes of leeway, particularly for guests who physically needed more time. From what I observed, daily rules about things such as shower procedures were determined with the best interests of guests in mind. A 15-minute limit for the shower was set not to assert authority or to decrease comfort but to ensure that as many people who wanted to shower in a single day would be able to.

This might include the notices informing guests that buses would be charging fares again, after several months of being available without cost; internal notices about free COVID testing; notices of new shelter policies; and the notice staff placed on the cot of every guest when they learned that everyone would need to move out as early as the following week. I do not have a copy of that last slip of paper, but I have my memory of it: I remember that it assured guests that there would be a spot for everyone and that the language was sympathetic – that it acknowledged that change was hard and noted that staff were available to talk about anxiety. Only then did it state that, currently, those running the shelter did not know where people would be going – only that it would be one of three different locations. This note could have shown future researchers, archivists, and activists how tenuous shelter guests' experiences were; it could have shown how staff communicated with guests, using a trauma-informed approach and care.

The records that I share contribute to the historical memory of the Coliseum's transformation during COVID-19, but they are not enough. What did other people living and working in this shelter pick up and save from their time there? What stories would they tell about those objects? How would the combined perspectives of more than one person have made the complexity of this space more visible? If staff or guests in the Coliseum had attended a local archiving workshop in a previous shelter, or if they had encountered an archivist or researcher at an outreach event, would they have thought to pocket – and eventually share – slips of paper the way that I did?

IV. "Literal Homelessness" and Living Archives

Even if archival readiness were in full operation, with researchers supporting organizations and providing workshops, resources, support, and flexibility in collaborations with people experiencing homelessness, no single record would represent the fullness of a place like the Coliseum. Collaborative archive making with members of any historically excluded community is inherently selective; as Dominique Daniel observes, "choosing specific individuals to participate in the appraisal and arrangement of archival materials will inevitably eliminate

others who might have acted differently."[84] The people in the Coliseum who might have had previous access to workshops or archive-making projects – and who, hypothetically, would be more likely to participate in archive making about the Coliseum, whether through community archiving or by donating material to institutions – would not necessarily be representative of Coliseum guests. The complexity of this space would perhaps be better communicated creatively, such as through fiction or memoir, though these modes would still share one perspective out of many. Jessie Speer's study of memoirs written by people with experiences of homelessness shows that the genre can "present a crucial source through which to examine homelessness as both an intimate and structural phenomenon, and to understand lived experience across multiple contexts."[85] However, this wonderful "crucial source" is available only to people with the time, stability, desire, and patience to write memoirs. Who writes a memoir, and who does not? Who is comfortable releasing their name and location for an archiving project, and who is not? Who joins in on collaborative projects with the confidence that their opinion is important, and who – having been told for a lifetime that no, it is not – does not participate?

Archival readiness could not have engaged every subcommunity and individual within a place like the Coliseum; it works toward giving every individual access to engagement. Just as Coliseum guests could choose their names on the census, contributors to archiving projects can choose what they do and do not contribute. Carter reminds readers of feminist approaches that explore archival silences as spaces that are not necessarily negative, noting how "invoking silence can be a strategy used by the marginalized against the powerful."[86] The importance of archival autonomy, the term that Evans and her team use to describe a person's ability to become a "participatory agent" in archive making, moves in two directions, respecting people's decisions not to contribute as much as making it possible for them to do so.[87]

84 Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives," *American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (2010): 82–104, 99.

85 Jessie Speer, "'A Collection of Stories, Poetry and Theories': Homelessness, Outsider Memoirs, and the Right to Theorize," *GeoHumanities* 5, no. 2 (2019): 326–41, 331.

86 Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid," 217.

87 Evans, McKemmish, Daniels, and McCarthy, "Self-Determination and Archival Autonomy," 347.

Archival readiness in spaces where people are experiencing temporary or chronic homelessness, in all of its complexity and variation – sometimes alongside other forms of marginalization and/or instability – would help to provide more nuanced forms of information about homelessness beyond authoritative records such as point-in-time counts. Stuart Hall's description of a "living archive" as a collection "whose construction must be seen as an on-going, never-completed project" that "contradicts [any] fantasy of completeness" is particularly relevant when exploring ways to bring homelessness into the archives.[88] If homelessness as an identity is never "literal" but always in flux, if the word itself can be rejected as much as embraced and imposed as much as re-claimed, if it is as temporary for some as it is ongoing for others, perhaps "homelessness" serves not only as a challenge to archival processes but also as an accurate metaphor for a living archive. Hall argues that inclusion or, in his words, "heterogeneity" and "the multiplicity of discourses," in practices such as "criticism, history and theory, . . . personal story, anecdote and biography" are the "'texts' which make the archive live."[89] Perhaps, in the case of homelessness, a living archive is less about archivists consciously deciding what kinds of material are missing and more about engaging as many people as possible with lived experiences to bring their own materials into its movements.

One day, the woman in the Coliseum who had shared her preference for the word *nomad* simply was not there anymore. I asked staff and guests if they knew where she had gone, and no one did. Unless I had spent every moment in the Coliseum with a tape recorder, it was unlikely that this woman's statement would enter any "official" record. Archival readiness does not answer all the questions about how to include the perspectives of people who are unlikely to donate an oral history interview, unlikely to write a memoir, and unlikely to participate in research. What archival readiness could do, however, is make it more likely for some of these questions to be answered by people from within the community rather than imposed from the outside. What archival readiness could do is include people from historically excluded communities in the process of archiving so that they might suggest new possibilities.

88 Hall, "Constituting an Archive," 89, 91.

89 Hall, 92.

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