

MUSINGS FROM THE LIST 2021 - 2024

They say that doctors and lawyers must first acquire the knowledge but that they Learn their trade by doing. I believe the same is true of knowledge-workers (incl. archivists). [Wilma Radford](#), my professor of librarianship at UNSW, used to say that after seven years the reference librarian hears no new queries.

Not to say they go on giving the same answers though.

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Knowledge must not defer to Belief and when a brave bearer of Knowledge (cradling the Future in his arms) breaks through the artificial boundaries of Belief he can change the world.

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In *The Giver*, Jonas is the apprentice Receiver of Memory: *From the Ashes of the Ruin, the Communities were built. Protected by the boundary of memory. All memories of the past were erased. After the Ruin, we started over, creating a New Society, one of Truth, Equality – Rules were the building blocks of that equality ... use precise language, wear your assigned clothing, take your morning medication, obey the curfew, never lie ... We lived in a world where differences weren't allowed ... I'm asked if I should apologise for what I did. [I'll let you decide](#) ...*

Jonas becomes a living Record. He is given new Rules that apply to him alone:

1. Report directly to the Receiver of Memory for your training.
2. From this moment you are exempt from all Rules governing rudeness. You may ask any question.
3. Aside from your daily medication, you may not receive other medicines, especially those for pain.
4. You may not discuss your training with anyone – ever.
5. You may lie.

These are selected postings to the Google Groups [Archives-and-Records-Australia List](#) largely between June 2021 and January 2024. Edited comments made by other listers that form part of my thread of argument are <<**emboldened and shown in parenthesis with embedded links back to the List Archive**>>. Minor corrections have been made to spelling and grammar and, in a few cases, for sense.

What a Difference a Word Makes

Arguments over words and meaning; tolerance vs virtue; misinformation and re-interpretation; virtue vs knowledge. Australia Day discussed. Cultural cancellation and deplatforming. The ethical dimensions of interpretation (historical and archival).

Neglecting Libraries and Archives

Under-funding and the bane of “efficiency cuts”. A national cultural policy that doesn't understand the difference between “national” and “federal”. NAA's national responsibilities discussed and the loss of a national voice for archives to government following the demise of the Australian Council of Archives. Of the future of Trove, leaky roofs, and other matters. How fares recordkeeping under the arts & culture policies of our political parties? Which are “Australia's national cultural institutions”? The metrics of success or failure in the cultural sphere. Good recordkeeping isn't sexy.

Indexing

Discovering knowledge, organising memory, recordkeeping, and artificial intelligence.

Knowing What We Know

Misinformation & disinformation, Aristotle, archivists, and truth.

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Will the Centre Hold?

What is the relationship between the archivist and society: aloof objectivity, balance, or involvement; a commitment to [values](#) or to [knowledge](#); [disinterest](#) or [allegiance](#)? Are we wedded to [historism](#) or do we allow ourselves the indulgence of [interpretation](#) and, if so, how may we judge (in order to describe and explain the meaning of the records in our charge)? If we do not judge records by the [mores](#) of their own time, can we really judge them by those of our own? Can our “values” ever be independent of those of our milieu? Is our democracy being killed by social media and do we owe fealty to whatever is taking democracy’s place? Can we submit our judgement to the commands of the State or to the sway of the illuminati? Can the case be made that our judgements should be about form and structure but never about content? *Dark Emu* discussed.

Postscript

Plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose.

Miscellanea

Odds ‘n’ Sods that may inform, arouse, amuse, or offend.

2021 August 4: Last post cont’d

More on the King’s Two Bodies

2022 May 27: New to My Website

Electronic series; Scaleability; the Canonisation of Peter Scott

2022 June 1: re Scaleability

Charles Dickens’ approach to social justice

2022 June 1: Machinery of Government Changes

Archives Act moved from Attorney-General to Communications & the Arts

2022 June 9: So it goes

ABC abolishes librarians and archivists

2022 July 21: Statistics

NZ Statistician’s “independence”

2022 Aug. 21: Governor-General kept no record of swearing in Morrison on three different dates

Governor-General kept no record of swearing in Morrison on three different dates

2022 Sep. 13: Continuity and change

How can archivists position themselves in a changing world?

2022 Oct. 8: RiC 0.2

Commentary on online video posted by EGAD

2022 Oct. 11: In the archives

Peri, the petrified cockroach

2022 Oct. 22: Frontier Wars

Australian War Memorial struggles to confront our history

2022 Nov. 4: How do you identify? cont’d

Place of archivists in a Classification of Occupations (ANZCO)

2022 Dec. 1: Spike Milligan Archive

An unexpectedly good recordkeeper

2022 Dec. 9: “Compelling Force” – Hidden in plain sight

UK hides records of torture in Kenya for 40/50 years

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2022 Dec.28: Hardy tree

Reflections on memory and “living archives”

2022 Dec. 31: Leadership vacuum in NSW

After-shocks of merger of SRO into Museums of History

2023 Jan 16: Ronald Blythe 1922-2023

Remembering *The Age of Illusion*

2023 Jan. 31: Indexing

It started out with indexing and ended up being about AI

2023 Feb. 2: Strewth!

Australian slang

2023 Feb. 28: Systems

Finding complexity in economic systems

2023 March 3: Roman Recordkeeping

Roman Record Keeping and Communications (2017)

2023 March 7: The edge of memory

Oral traditions and the transmission of memory

2023 May 10: MHR – a small victory cont’d

Centralised health records – how Government overcame the setback after all

2023 May 19: Authenticity cont’d

Non-Indigenous hands in the production of Indigenous art

2023 June 3: Miss Marple – a critical thinker

Politicians leaving themselves “wiggle room”

2023 June 3: Documenting Australian society cont’d

Adjuncts to federated access (SNAC; VIAF)

2023 June 6: Toxic assets yet again cont’d

The ghost of Leopold II

2023 June 14: “Palace Letters” repercussions: equality, accountability, history, transparency

Definition of “Commonwealth records” – squabbling over the property test

2023 June 18: Daniel Ellsberg (1931-2023)

A tribute

2023 July 7: More from Robodebt

The effect on recordkeeping of government privatisation and outsourcing

2023 Aug. 28: The cost of recordkeeping

A “poor recordkeeping experience” in the way businesses record public information

2023 Sep. 5: A book about books

Advertisement for *Papyrus* (a history of the book and the fight for its survival)

2023 Sep. 7: Special access, privacy, and indigenous records

Aboriginal sovereignty and controlling access to “public” records

2023 Sep. 18: Reconciliation, memory, and forgetting

Britain’s new *Legacy Law*, controlling memory, healing ... and enacting totalitarianism?

2023 Sep. 25: “The perfect combination of art and science”: mourning the end of paper maps cont’d

Mapping the ocean floor

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2023 Oct. 7: Happy Polling Day

Designing ballot papers

2023 Nov. 6: Archives and Australia/PNG

Repatriation of Papua New Guinea archives (1970s)

2023 Dec. 4: David Bearman (1950-2023)

A tribute

2023 Dec. 19: Prudence or Insanity?

Digitisation and destruction of historic wills in the UK

2023 Feb. 1: New to My Website

Finis

2020 June 11: What a Difference a Word Makes

There is uproar over use of the word "[occupation](#)" to describe the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Meanwhile, Saudi school children will now be taught to regard Ottoman rule over the peninsula as an "[occupation](#)" rather than an outpost of the caliphate. The word "[racism](#)" is to be re-defined in Merriam-Webster. The term "[Israeli cuisine](#)" is condemned as a form of cultural appropriation. Meanwhile [statue rows](#) are breaking out all over, [even here](#) (unsurprisingly, some would say).

If meaning and memory are being suffused within an homogenized reimagining, the struggle to understand our past becomes submerged within a struggle to understand our present. Ah ha, I hear you say, 'twas ever thus. I am not sure, however, that [ideological intent](#) (the weaponization of facts and artefacts or, in the alternative view, their reconceptualization, hardly their neutralization) was ever so overt or that self-consciousness has always been so aggressively over-borne by self-righteousness.

[Revisionism](#) can mean opposing thesis with antithesis in the hope of reaching synthesis as the next step along the road to understanding. Custodians of meaning and memory have an especially difficult path to tread because we are simultaneously looking for understanding ourselves and trying to help others to do so. Is it possible that our own voyage of discovery becomes an obstacle to serving others in theirs? Jenkinson, I think, would say yes.

I have told before how I once had a row with Sue McKemish and Marg Burns over introduction of the word "[patriarchal](#)" into a description of executive government in 19th century Victoria. My objection then was that the word was anachronistic (belonging to the 20th century and out of place when documenting a colonial administration) but *Merriam Webster* claims it was used as far back as 1632. I think of it now (and possibly then at a subconscious level) as being a dispute over reinterpretation.

I think this problem (supposing you agree with me that it is a problem) is more acute now than it was then and from retirement I congratulate you all for living in interesting times.

<<**Michael Piggott: Coincidental to Chris' reflections on words and their shifting meanings and uses, I've recently happened upon the term "sousveillance" as explained by Ethan Zuckerman drawing on its coining by inventor Steve Mann. See "Why filming police violence has done nothing to stop it" in the "MIT Technology Review". The piece is also fascinating in illustrating the importance of the social context of recordkeeping. [Or should that be "record keeping", or even "record-keeping"].>>**

2020 June 12:

You don't have to agree with Howard/Abbott rhetoric about black-armband history to feel unease about the revisionism being expressed during the current excitement vented on

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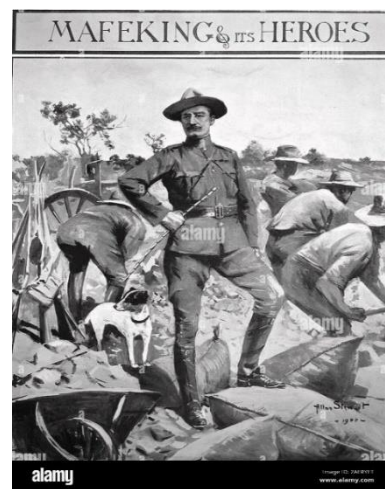
cultural artefacts like [GWTW](#) and *Birth of a Nation* or on statuary like that of [Baden-Powell](#) or [WSC](#). Why these? Why now? Of course, it's being driven by pent up frustrations and long standing rage over systemic racism and murder, by un-righted wrongs, and by the persistent evasions of over-bearing power. Those immediate causes are prompting an upsurge of long-held grievance that is over-flowing into a kind of solidarity movement amongst those who are sympathetic. It's become a vehicle for expressing various discontents that is sweeping up many from the usually disorganised (and often apathetic) mainstream and from the commonly quiescent amongst the affluent. Will it last? Who knows? I'm reading Rapport's [1848](#) which tells how liberal and nationalist elements initially prevailed and then fragmented, turned to in-fighting, persecuted minorities, and finally prompted a reaction from the respectable against the outrages of the most extreme elements. Will there be a reaction now? Will apathy and disorganisation return?

I'm troubled by the enthusiasm because I doubt its intellectual integrity and I grieve that skepticism is not the norm. The well springs of rage are genuine enough but the focus is distorted. You may dismiss me for not understanding the connection between a statue and oppression, but I might just as well dismiss you for not understanding the difference. There are no revisionist doubts being vented now that aren't already known (or knowable). We've always known (or at least have no good reason not to) that books and films distort and misrepresent the past.

- We know that Churchill was an enthusiastic supporter of terror bombing, first [against Iraqi tribesmen](#), then against [Germany](#) and (if he'd been able to) against the [Irish](#).
- We know that Baden-Powell [starved the blacks](#) in Mafeking to feed the whites and there is evidence he [covered up violence](#) against blacks in Rhodesia.



Young Winston Churchill



Baden-Powell

And many, many more.

Why do we have to wait for an upsurge of outrage for myths and distortions to be finessed? Why are skepticism and a sense of proportion so conspicuously absent from the common sensibility and from our education systems? Should our everyday work of keeping memory and materials be based on a transitory, passionate [ideological commitment](#) or on an enduring passion for [empirical truth](#)? Now, there's a dichotomy for you – one that is quite possibly false.

And now, here's something from the odd sock drawer:

Russia said it would launch a criminal investigation on Friday after Czech officials removed [a statue of a Soviet-era general in Prague](#). The bronze statue of Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev was taken down last week to make way for a World War II memorial, prompting

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the Russian embassy to protest. City officials in the Czech capital said the statue would be moved to another site. Removal of Soviet statues by Western-leaning countries once loyal to Moscow often sparks outrage in Russia as a visible sign of its waning influence. On Thursday, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu wrote to his Czech counterpart Lubomir Metnar asking him to hand over the statue to Russia ...

Prague district 6 mayor Ondrej Kolar told the Czech CTK news agency that Konev's statue would be placed in a "museum dedicated to the history of the 20th century in Czechoslovakia." Pro-Russian Czech President Milos Zeman echoed Russian outrage over the move as "an abuse of the state of emergency," referring to a government-imposed lockdown due to the coronavirus. The statue was first put up in 1980, seven years after Konev's death.

A nice illustration of the difference between publicly flaunting toxic assets and hiding them discretely away. And how depressing that a memory institution is used for the latter purpose..

<<Mark Brogan: The post modernists amongst us will no doubt revel in the notion of false dichotomy. But as a profession, we stand for the integrity of memory. What precisely should ASA be doing in response to the current crisis in memory caused by the destruction and desecration of monuments? Afterall, it's a small step from this to the sanitisation of documentary memory. The ASA Advocacy Committee could take a position. But it needs to be guided by what members want.>>

Yeah. Winston Smith is alive and well. How can I sanitise memory, let me count the ways.

- Pressure groups organized around political correctness and religious conservatism [lead textbook publishers to self-censor](#). Such self-censorship ultimately results in dry, unenlightening textbooks. Lifeless material draws education away from more developed forms of teaching history. This study demonstrates how textbook publishers' censoring textbooks fosters a teaching of history that degrades knowledge and promotes specific ideologies.
- If you're unfamiliar with "[historical nihilism](#)" here's a little background. It's China's term for public scepticism about the Communist Party's version of past events. It's an expression that has been getting a lot of play in China in recent years, since the Party launched a campaign against historical nihilism – basically, against anything critical of the Party's legacy, its past leaders or its leadership.
- ... the opponents of free speech can [drown out ideas and language they don't like](#) by using robotic tools, fake accounts, or teams of real people operating multiple accounts. They can flood the information space with false, distracting or irrelevant information so that people have trouble understanding what is real and what is fake.
- Hundreds of teachers and students are engaged in protests against the new school board's proposal to form [a review committee](#), tasked with ensuring curricula focus on topics that promote patriotism, respect for authority and free enterprise. More specifically, the committee will identify and weed out materials that "[encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law.](#)" ... [The New York Times reports](#) one student saying, "You can't erase our history. It's not patriotic." Some see banning topics that "encourage or condone civil disorder" as akin to relegating iconic figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and César Chávez—as well as less well-known crusaders for justice—to the margins of our national memory. Others are asking how any U.S. history class *cannot* involve nuanced engagement with the civil rights movement, labor movements and other pivotal events in the long march for justice.

etc. etc. etc.

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Our focus (I think) should not be on controlling or correcting how information is used or misused but on the integrity of sources. That is what we stand for, isn't it? Standing up for open-ness is all well and good but I think a stand against censorship, partiality, distortion, and suppression is even better and right up our alley. Or should be. Can it happen to us? It already has. Look back at earlier threads on toxic assets.

2020 June 13:

<<Andrew Waugh: Statues are never historical *evidence* - at least not in the way that the posters in this list seem to think – and it follows that their removal is not destroying history ... At best they are historical evidence that a group in society considered the event worthy of commemoration. They are a symbol for the values and beliefs of that group. As a symbol to one group it is inevitable that they are an anti-symbol to other groups that do not share those values and beliefs ... it is notable that while groups are willing to quietly acknowledge that the person or event commemorated *may* have had bad aspects, it is essentially impossible to get these bad aspects even *mentioned* on the plaques at the site, let alone have a balanced view of the person or event. The commemorative symbolism is current and potent ... I see no problem whatsoever with their removal. If the statue has artistic merit, it could go into an art gallery. If you want to preserve the historic evidence of the symbolism (not of the event itself), a representative example or two could go into a museum. The rest can be destroyed ... This is perfectly in accordance with our values and practices as recordkeepers and archivists. We destroy at least 95% of all records created when they outlive their purpose. Even records that have made it into archives are subject to reappraisal and can be deaccessioned.>>

<<Statues, and other commemoration sites, are invariably erected later than the event they commemorate. At best they are historical evidence that a group in society considered the event worthy of commemoration. They are a symbol for the values and beliefs of that group.>>

They are that but they are also a memory of the past. No different (in essence) to any other (a book, a play, a TV show). This “poster to the list” has never thought of them any other way (or suggested otherwise, I believe). I think this point is facile. Statues aren't history, they are (to use Andrew's own term) commemorations. The history involved here is not the seed event(s) but the battle over memory of them.



Genghis Khan Memorial



Captain Cook Memorial

We cannot comfortably design a better system for documenting the number of heads being processed through the gas chambers as if good recordkeeping (in a technical sense) can be divorced from the uses to which it is put. We cannot forget that Trotsky was airbrushed out of a photograph or that Winston Smith was an archivist.

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<<it follows that their removal is not destroying history>>

I would use the word “reshaping history” rather than “destroying history”. I can’t see how removing a statue is materially different to controlling other interpretations of history by proscribing the contents of text books, drowning out contrary discourse, howling down or bowdlerising unwelcome interpretations, or withdrawing an episode of *Fawlty Towers*. The only possible moral difference is between the motives of those who celebrate slavers and those who decry them. The question for us, therefore, is what motives and values should we bring to the making and keeping of records of slavery. It is a question of how we stand professionally in relation to culture wars because, as Mark says, if we stand by today, tomorrow they may come for us. We don’t erect statues to Adolf Hitler but the [rehabilitation of Genghis Khan](#) is going gang busters. As recordkeepers do we care? If we do, [what are the limits?](#)

You’ll notice that I slyly slipped in *Fawlty Towers* onto my list – an artefact rather than a commemoration.

<<As a symbol to one group it is inevitable that they are an anti-symbol to other groups that do not share those values and beliefs. The iconography, for example, of the Captain Cook statues has been well covered in *The Conversation*.>>

That’s no reason to take sides. Whatever we think personally, our professional stance must be as agnostic as we can possibly be towards cultural values and beliefs. Even those of us arguing for a more socially responsible use of records on behalf of the marginalised and downtrodden have never suggested tampering with the record (at least not so I’ve heard). Remaining agnostic is uncomfortable and unpalatable to many of us but I can’t see how we can do our job any other way and I’ve yet to hear a convincing argument on how we can combine curatorial integrity with other values and beliefs. Cold-bloodedly separating them is impossible. We’re human after all. But that is no reason not to try. There are limits, as I indicated at Winnipeg in 2001, so it is a matter of where those limits lie.

<<That this symbolism is current, not just historical, is shown by the fury generated when the symbol is damaged, removed, or even suggested for removal.>>

Doesn’t recognising that the symbolism is current make it even more urgent that we reject it in our work? If we subscribe to contemporary bias how can we recognise and deal effectively with historical bias except in ideological terms?

<<it is essentially impossible to get these bad aspects even *mentioned* on the plaques at the site, let alone have a balanced view of the person or event.>>

I agree, Contextualisation for the purpose of “balance” is just a mealy-mouthed way to reinterpret history. I’m all for contextualisation (I’m the Description Guy, after all) but this is a discussion about the **purpose** of contextualisation.

<<This is perfectly in accordance with our values and practices as recordkeepers and archivists. We destroy at least 95% of all records created when they outlive their purpose. Even records that have made it into archives are subject to reappraisal and can be deaccessioned.>>

And we worry about this, don’t we? Does our selection fairly represent the past is a totally different question to should we reshape the archive to better reflect contemporary values and beliefs. How can we reshape and explain the material to better reflect what they mean? Our descriptive and appraisal practices are continually influenced by our perception of the changing values of society (then and now) but the paramount determinants of our practices must be recordkeeping values not cultural ones. One purpose of our contextualisation is to amplify the bias of the records-maker not to smother it.

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So far, this has all been about self-conscious bias. I'm waiting for someone to post about the recordkeeper's unconscious bias.

<<Michael Piggott: Regarding Chris' last sentence (recordkeepers' unconscious bias), I highly recommend Ciaran Trace's "What is recorded is never simply 'What Happened': record keeping in modern organizational culture", [Archival Science 2\(1\): 137-59](#). The entire piece in effect is about unconscious bias, her examples mostly drawn from police recordkeeping, a highly topical issue. It opens with an LAPD arrest report of the subduing of Rodney King in 1991. Many Australian reports (including royal commissions and coronial inquiries) into aboriginal deaths in custody have revealed the same reality. >>

2022 June 14:

<<Andrew Waugh: Two interpretations of the practice of removal of commemorations from The Conversation

- <https://theconversation.com/public-sculpture-expert-why-i-welcome-the-decision-to-throw-brisbolls-edward-colston-statue-in-the-river-140285>
- <https://theconversation.com/Friday-essay-taking-a-wrecking-ball-to-monuments-contemporary-art-can-ask-what-really-needs-tearing-down-140437> >>

Whence comes the idea that offending statuary should be consigned to museums? Are they less offensive when put in a vault or display space in a memory institution rather than left in the open? Should we be offended because it shows people believe that what goes on in our space doesn't really matter? Should we invite attack so we can validate ourselves with the thought that a museum is as important to people as a public square? Perhaps we soon will be.

Churchill told the [Palestine Royal Commission](#) that he did not admit wrong had been done to Native Americans or aboriginal Australians as "a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place".

In the context in which those words were spoken, Jewish displacement of the Palestinians should be seen as equally offensive. But it's not. Outrage too is discriminatory. Voices are being raised that spreading the focus of fury will "decentre" black-on-white oppression. Dissent among the dissenters. Are any values (established or insurrectionary) stable and enduring? Of course not.

What then do we stand for – continuity or change? Universal values or exceptionalism? If we stand aloof, we detach our work from its social context. If we do not, we must explain and relate our work (in some way or another) to current controversies – we must join the fray, take sides, and (maybe) cease to be safe spaces. I am frankly amazed that GLAM institutions that house the most enduring memories haven't yet been targeted. Ethnic cleansing is much more focused – they go for libraries, archives, and museums first.

So, should we embrace "heritage laws" that protect us and what we curate from the fury? Or, should we (bravely) proclaim that we are seamlessly part of our society and that toxic assets we hold should be treated no differently to any others and they should not be specialy protected? What rationale would we use to justify special treatment?.

<<Andrew Waugh: The thing that sticks in my craw is "Whatever we think personally, our professional stance must be as agnostic as we can possibly be towards cultural values and beliefs." IMHO, this is where we diverge ... No. As a memory professional I'm not going to be agnostic towards the cultural values and beliefs of slavery, for example. Or racial suppression. Or genocide. This absolutely does not mean that I think that we should destroy the memory artifacts that document the history of abhorrent practices. That would, of course, sanitise history and mean that the people and societies that practised these practices would get off scot free ... But when applied to commemorative objects in situ this ignores the fact

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that the objects are not in the past. They are in our present ... They are not just an historic view of a person or event, but a current view as well ... The key here is that by removing the commemorative object from its situation, we are changing it from being a commemoration to being evidence of commemoration.>>

I suppose it could be argued that artefacts in public places are provocatively commemorative – intended to glorify and endorse – whereas those kept in memory houses are more reflective, innocently straight forward, inclusive and nuanced – not celebratory at all – and, what is even more important, are seen as such by an otherwise infuriated populace. And, even better, it's OK to be condemnatory. Indeed, that is what you do seem to be arguing. That's fine, so long as our "evidencing" doesn't inflame anyone who is likely to attack us, I suppose. So, we're safe. We can transport toxic assets into a more rarefied context. We can take sides. We can even assume a moral posture. So long as we don't alienate people like us, maybe? But no! There is a long chronicle of controversial exhibitions in [art galleries](#) and [museums](#) (many about controversial sponsorship) but others include-

- Deaccessioning white, male artists to diversify a collection
- Removing the figure of a "comfort woman" featured in an exhibition dealing with censorship in Japan (no less!)
- Unapologetic celebration of Belgium's colonial legacy
- Banning the term "[Golden Age](#)" when describing 17th century Dutch commerce
- Sanitising [torture](#) in a Washington museum

Indeed, there's an online thesis that argues: [museums and controversy, you can't have one without the other](#). I think this all means that GLAM has street cred, after all. It gets worse for us when a house of memory is perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be [taking sides](#) in contemporary controversy or pushing a party line. We may take comfort from the thought that traditionally users of archives are fewer and less bolshie. The Internet may change that. I'm not deprecating your ethical standards, Andrew, but I can't see how attacking slavery in a house of memory is materially different from attacking it in the street. My question though is this. When we are attacked, how do we defend ourselves? By saying we took no line or by saying we took the correct one?

2020 June 15:

<<IMHO, this is where we diverge>>

If we're swapping humble opinions, here's mine: an agnostic account of the facts of slavery is far more devastating than a passionate denunciation. But this too is just another personal opinion (mine in this case) and nothing to do with curatorial integrity. It would (if correct) be an incidental consequence of curatorial integrity, not its purpose.

You may say that Harriet Beecher Stowe proves me wrong, but what made [Uncle Tom's Cabin](#) an effective diatribe was not its moralistic preaching (of which there is much) but the artfully contrived [appearance](#) that it gave a factual account of the condition of anti-bellum slavery in the South. It was then and has since been denounced as a falsification of slavery, defended by HBS herself as having been based on the testimony of former slaves, sneered at by critics for being "sentimental", and condemned for promoting racist stereotypes (affectionate, dark-skinned mammies, pickaninnies, and dutiful, long-suffering retainers). It has been through the furnace of the whole range of moral relativism, revisionism, and cultural tribalism, in fact. It has even been nominated as one of his good-bad books by George Orwell (no less). To my mind, however, its power over the many, many readers it affected in its time came not from what it is but from what those readers believed it to be – quite simply, true.

We need to position ourselves on the right side of history (or, at least, give the appearance of doing so) without being too blatant about it. So, maybe both sides of this are proved right in the end. To be effective, stick to the truth. If you can fake that, you're home.

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<<Michael Piggott: ... Recalling something from the time I was at the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA), I got to know slightly Charles and Primmie Bright who were the then Melbourne links to the extended and renowned Bright family and to a number of extensive collections of business and family papers, the jewel in one sense being the papers of Gibbs, Bright & Co founded by Charles Edward Bright and whose father Robert was a slaveowner (“His father was a slaveholder who was compensated £8,384 by the British government for 404 slaves upon the abolition of slavery. Bright would benefit from his father’s estate”). The current family never denied this connection, in fact have supported the listing and digitization the many family related collections, and nor has the Archives. It noted there were slave registers in its 1983 published Guide to Collections and almost celebrated them in 2016 in “A fortune built on slavery”, an article by archivist Millicent Weber for “The Conversation”. In fact, UMA has further slave related material, readily discoverable by doing a simply search of the UMA Archives online catalogue on “slave”. So, no passionate denunciation, just acknowledging it happened (“The insight the collection provides into slavery and the sugar trade is a disturbing reminder of the atrocious violations of basic human rights that funded colonial expansion”), pointing out there is documentation here in Australia whereas you might expect it to be in the UK. [Of course, our Prime Minister and his young tech savvy advisers seem not to know this, yet it takes 10 seconds searching to discover the truth ... as it does that the HMB Endeavour didn’t circumnavigate “Australia”.>>

<<Joanna Sassoon: There is an interesting database out of UCL relating to the legacies of slave ownership. And a \$660,000 project in Western Australia building on the project at UCL. Western Australian Legacies of British Slavery . This project aims to bring Australia into the global history of slavery by exploring the legacies of British slavery in Western Australia. Through developing innovative methods for biographical research and digital mapping, it will trace the movement of capital, people and culture from slave-owning Britain to WA, and produce a new history of the continuing impact of slavery wealth in shaping colonial immigration, investment, and law. Expected outcomes of this project include enhanced capacity to build international disciplinary collaborations, new research methods, and a major national online exhibition. Benefits include a radically new perspective on Australian history and abolition in the present, with major public outcomes.>>

2020 June 16:

<<Mark Brogan:

Statues are never historical *evidence* - at least not in the way that the posters in this list seem to think – and it follows that their removal is not destroying history.

Statues erected to individuals seem to me to be artifactual evidence of beliefs held at a particular time about the subject’s role in historical events. As such, they are evidence of individual or collective interpretation of the role of an individual in historical events. Purging of a nation’s disagreeable monuments can never amount to destroying history, since they are not history, rather they are artifactual evidence of belief at a particular time. Acknowledging that statues constitute a kind of evidence and that archivists see themselves as players in the evidence and memory game, we have to ask ourselves, should we engage with this debate or remain on the sidelines? Do we have skin in the game? Purists will say no, because ours is a concern with documentary memory. But this is a little tricky, since we have flirted with objects as important to our mission through notions of ‘places of creation’. Also spill over effects from the culture wars over memory and memorialisation are already with us. In WA in 2018, it was revealed that the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages was redacting certificates, without consulting affected individuals, to remove ‘offensive’ racially charged terminology. The WA Government argued that that this was being done in the interests of avoiding ‘distress’ to indigenous people, the main category of affected individuals. The practice came to light after an indigenous man, Garry Smith, protested the issue and went public accusing the Government of expunging his

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identity as an indigenous person, by removing the term Aboriginal from certificates. Through its President, ASA Inc. lodged a protest with the WA Government. It was supported by the History Council of WA. This case is notable not just because it is specific to our domain, but also because it shows that assumptions about how indigenous people view the evidence of system racism is more nuanced than we think. The act of expungement was viewed in this instance, as 'whitewashing'. Setting aside the intellectual complexities of the case for and against the retention of artifactual evidence of oppression, there are other reasons why removal and expungement may be a bad idea and archivists should engage. Specifically, in the UK removal has galvanised right wing extremists posing a threat to civil order and public safety. The potential for this to happen in Australia should not be under-estimated. On 14 June, ABC's Background Briefing delivered a frightening expose of Australia's racist, growing radical right. Archivists have been working with sensitive evidence of colonial oppression for many years and have methods and approaches that are of value in the context of the current debate and that are accepted by First Nations Peoples. Communicating them, would seem like a sensible option at this point in time.>>

<< Acknowledging that statues constitute a kind of evidence and that archivists see themselves as players in the evidence and memory game, we have to ask ourselves, should we engage with this debate or remain on the sidelines? Do we have skin in the game? Purists will say no >>

Speaking as purist. I trust people understand (even if they will not allow) the distinction between personal values and professional values. Which is what I take this thread to be about. I share my interior life with my friends, not with my peers. Perhaps that's why I have so few friends. My little joke about faking truth would be deplorable in any other context. And, as it happens, I don't think we should fake the truth even on professional grounds – too much danger of being found out (a utilitarian reason rather than a moral one).

<<But this is a little tricky ... spill over effects from the culture wars over memory and memorialisation are already with us ... Archivists have been working with sensitive evidence ... for many years and have methods and approaches that are of value in the context of the current debate ...

Communicating them, would seem like a sensible option at this point in time>>

Agreed. Wholeheartedly. A big hurrah for that. But first we need to be sure (very, very sure) that we have a professional consensus (or as near as all get out) on what these methods and approaches are. And for my money, communicating them would be anything but remaining "on the sidelines".

<<Andrew Waugh: No. We absolutely should not make decisions about what we do based on fear of the ultra right wing doing their nana. Yes, the white majority should not be deciding what the indigenous community wants or needs – this includes unilaterally removing commemorative objects. I would hope that any changes that take place in a spirit of consultation and listening. This is especially the case given that it is unlikely that any community will speak with one voice.

Yes, I agree that commemorative objects provide evidence of community views at the time they were erected, not of history per se (*). But I think that the dimension that's overlooked in this debate is that *they are not just historical objects*. They are still commemorative objects today, and their continued existence reflects current community views. This is made even more obvious by the clash between different groups in society over the objects; if they didn't have current value as symbols, no-one would care if they were removed or left.

Chris gently mocked my suggestions about what could happen to the objects without really engaging with the symbolism. The key, for me, is to reduce or eliminate the commemoration while retaining the evidence of the commemoration. As Chris points

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out, the objects may be as offensive even though they are held in a gallery or museum (and not necessarily on public display) rather than in their original commemorative setting. I think not. As I hope Chris would agree, it's all about context. I think it's essentially impossible to recontextualise a commemorative object in its original commemorative setting. You have a chance to do so if you change the setting.

If you want to drag this subject back to the archives, I would suggest the correct parallel is that commemorative objects equate to archival description. Archival description is an interpretation of the records from a particular view point at a particular time. Archival description is certainly a record in its own right – a record of the archives. But I hope no-one would argue that an archival description, once written, can never be superseded or changed to reflect a better understanding of the records. In the same way, I see no reason why commemorations should be static.

(*) I should note that this view is absolutely not shared by most commentators – see Boris Johnson, for example. For these commentators, changing or destroying a commemoration is changing or destroying history. They see no difference between the symbol and the thing.>>

2020 June 17:

<<Chris Gousmett: Could I point readers who may be interested to an article I wrote in 2017 concerning controversies over a memorial in Lower Hutt, NZ, relating to an action in the Land Wars in 1846? This memorial has had its share of criticisms over the years although these seem rather minor compared to what is now ensuing in the USA and UK as well as becoming a major issue in NZ. This covers some of the issues around whether memorials which are now seen as inaccurate or offensive should be modified or removed. I also address briefly the issue of Confederate memorials which were being fought over at the time the article was written – and are now being fought over again.>>

2020 June 23:

<<Andrew Waugh: From a museum professional with specific professional experience on putting confederate statues in a museum...>>

2020 June 24:

<<Andrew Waugh: The History Council of Victoria is hosting a webinar on 'Public Monuments, Contested Histories' on 14 July from 1700-1830 ... >>

2020 June 26:

<<Andrew Waugh: I'm sorry, Chris, I meant to respond earlier. I wanted to thank you. It's rare that we've got such a detailed examination of the history of a commemoration. In my view, your examination of the historical nature of this commemoration shows exactly why they need to be thought about.

First, the meaning of the battle to the contemporary white locals (and their descendents – for nearly 80 years after the event) is odd. Consider. The original commemorative marker was removed from where the fallen soldier's comrades had placed it and 'stored in the chapel'. That it was removed suggests, to me, that at some point the land on which it was situated was reused for some other purpose – hardly the action of a community that considered the grave and memorial significant. The location of the graves of the fallen soldiers has been comprehensively 'forgotten' – even to the extent that the sergeant's grave, in a cemetery, is not documented. The mass grave of the other ranks is thought to be on the local golf course, but no one has cared enough to do any investigation. This, to me, suggests that the contemporary locals wanted to forget the battle (at best), did not consider it significant enough to remember (at worst), or considered the deaths of soldiers to be irrelevant (the contemporary sentiments of Kipling's Tommy spring to mind).

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Second, the current commemorative marker was erected nearly 80 years after the event specifically in the context of remembering the dead New Zealand soldiers of the first world war. The original idea of simply re-erecting the original commemorative marker was quickly replaced, mainly due to objections from a historical society (did they consider that the memorial stone shouldn't be moved from where it was stored in the cemetery chapel? Where is it now?). The new marker was specifically of the form and type used for WWI memorials, and the War Graves Division that was established to erect WWI memorials was involved and partially funded the memorial. It's very hard to go past the obvious symbolism of commemorating British New Zealanders who died defending the Empire from the enemy. In this case, of course, the enemy was the original inhabitants of the land. Even then, it is notable that no unveiling of the monument occurred. Plans for a significant event – even involving the GG – kept falling through for trivial reasons, a fact which suggests there was still, in the '20s, ambivalence about the event and its memory.

The commemoration does not mention the Maori fallen. Your careful work in the files shows that there were no records of any deaths, and why this was so (the Maori took their dead and wounded with them). The files also show that, in the face of this archival silence, no one thought to simply ask the Maori community whether anyone had died, and if they were willing to share any details about them. It's hard to escape the conclusion that faced with the accusation that the memorial was one sided, they came up with an easy answer that supported the status quo, and avoided having to ask, and answer, hard questions about the form of the memorial.

In a similar vein, when tasked with the accusation that the inscription was biased, the files show that the answer was that the mayor simply asserted that he had had a 'long association' with local Maori people, and that no-one had complained to him. The files show that no one thought to consult with the community about what they thought. Again, a simple, easy answer that supported the status quo. And an answer that was just accepted without question.

This is one memorial, but it raises questions about the changing nature of memory to community over time - the community at the time of the event and during living memory afterwards, the community at the time the memorial was raised, and the community today. What is being commemorated here, and why?>>

<<Chris Gousmett: Thanks for that response. There are certainly unasked questions which we could now no longer find answers for. A couple of comments: I assumed that the original stone on the sergeant's grave was moved after the cemetery fell into some disrepair. This cemetery (Bolton St) was later the cause of great controversy when graves and grave markers were moved to make way for a motorway (1960s).

The original stone eventually was relocated to the council yards in Lower Hutt, then re-erected in the graveyard of the Anglican church of St James. This church burnt down around 1948 and in the work to clear the site the grave marker was damaged and then disposed of. A new stone was then made with the same text, this is set into the ground (like other contemporary grave markers - it is still an active burial-place) in the St James churchyard and is still evident. See footnotes 8 and 11 for details ...>>

2020 June 28:

Anything but neutral

... How can institutions whose leadership is often overwhelmingly White rethink their staffing, collections and exhibitions, much less move toward more truly equitable governance? Or, some ask, should museums continue to exist in anything like their current form? ... "This is an historic moment -- a pause and reflect moment for individuals and institutions," said Makeba Clay, the chief diversity officer at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, ... "The systemic and unrelenting injustices against members of the Black community have existed for hundreds of years and continue to

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exist all around us, including in our museums. We know we have work to do and that means being actively anti-racist -- not passively non-racist." ... her message is that it's not enough to "amplify" voices and messages, art institutions must take action ... Clay also said that art does not exist outside struggle. That while it can be used for "constructive discourse, building empathy and creating community," art also "can confront current issues and topics that aren't neutral." Adding: "What appears like radical action is exactly what museums need to pursue to prove that they have a valuable role to play in this national discourse."

Becoming sites for debate

Last Friday Jill Snyder, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland (MoCA), stepped down from her role after 22 years as the gallery's executive director. The resignation was announced in the wake of a controversy surrounding the cancellation of an exhibition by artist Shaun Leonardo, whose "The Breath of Empty Space," which deals with police brutality against Black and brown boys and men, was due to launch at MoCA this month. The decision to cancel the exhibition was made in February this year [and] the museum sent a statement of apology to Leonardo, in which they say, "we were not prepared to engage with the lived experiences of pain and trauma that the work evokes," ... MoCA followed this up with an apology to Leonardo ... which states: "[R]egretfully we did not engage Mr. Leonardo in creating space for dialogue and debate. We did not expand the conversation within our community... We failed. We are learning now." ... What follows is an edited account of Shaun Leonardo's recent experiences and thoughts on the need for institutions to do better, shared during a conversation with CNN's Ananda Pellerin.

... Over the last decade there has been a rise in exhibitions that show work by Black and brown artists at major art institutions. This, I say, is the easy part. The difficult part for institutions is to do what's necessary to hold BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) audiences with care ... So much of that responsibility is shifted onto artists who are propped up as the voice, as the commitment to these difficult dialogues, while the institutions do not truly push themselves to change ... a White institution can't enter a true and difficult relationship with the Black and brown community until they understand their whiteness and their privilege within that dynamic, not to mention the historical complexity of how we have all arrived at this moment ...

Institutions have to do two things: they have to do the internal work of assessing what it means to be an institution with gatekeeping power, and secondly, they need to confront their resistance to making room for Black and brown leadership, so those voices are already present within ... if museums resist contending with the power that they hold, we should no longer rely on them to curate the spaces for these kinds of experiences. Putting a painting on the wall is not enough. What feels different in this moment is that museums are now competing with one another in terms of what they're going to commit to. The earlier messaging around inclusivity and anti-racism was empty -- a continuation of the lip service we've seen over the past decade -- the "we will do better" that is never delivered ... We must all stay tuned to see how the institutions act in the coming years. And we all must interject when they don't. Beyond this, what I hope is that the role museums play will shift. That they will become sites for debate -- places of constructive interpersonal conflict meant not to reap immediate resolve, but to enter into complexities of thought and emotion that the rest of the world will not allow. That accountability is what I want from museums. And as an artist, this is what I'm committing to when I work with these institutions.

Contextualising slavery

The demand from BLM on houses of memory is essentially to buy into the race relations trauma of the U.S. and to incorporate slavery into a narrative of White oppression there that extends beyond 1865. This narrative, while not untrue and certainly not irrelevant for

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those living there, has a complexity of focus and of purpose (ideological, political, and moral) which can be sustained only by constraining the historical (and current) facts about slavery within tightly defined parameters to uphold a particular view of the present and to avoid "de-centring" the Black struggle.

- The North American [slave trade](#) was a sub-set of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade which was itself a sub-set of African slavery carried on by non-Whites.
- [Chattel slavery](#) was abolished in the modern world largely through the efforts of Whites, one reason Black leaders wanted to raise [African American regiments](#) in the Civil War (so emancipation would come partly through their own efforts).
- Slavery in the U.S. gave rise not only to oppression but also to the [politics of violence](#).
- Viewing [race-relations](#) **solely** through the prism of post-colonialism is a distortion.

Slavery in Africa

Slavery [in historical Africa](#) was practiced in many different forms: Debt slavery, enslavement of war captives, military slavery, slavery for prostitution, and criminal slavery ... Slavery for domestic and court purposes ... Plantation slavery also occurred ... Slave relationships in Africa have been transformed through three large-scale processes: the Arab slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade, and the slave emancipation policies and movements in the 19th and 20th centuries ...

Slavery South of the Equator

During the Atlantic slave trade, [Latin America](#) was the main destination of millions of African people transported from Africa to French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies. Slavery's legacy is the presence of large Afro-Latino populations.

Slavery in Australia

Chattel slavery was never implemented in Australia and slavery was never legally sanctioned. Groups used as [effective slave labour](#) include convicts, Indigenous Australians, coolies from China and India, and Pacific Islanders. Legal protections varied and were sometimes not enforced. This all came as [a surprise](#), apparently, to our PM.

Beyond Emancipation

It would be going too far to say that the [attention given to the U.S.](#) (not just in matters of race relations) is a distortion - but it is always an imbalance. The post-emancipation story, though similar elsewhere, is [varied](#). Should an American house of memory uphold or challenge [exceptionalism](#)?

Slavery today

[Modern slavery](#) is the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain. Modern slavery is all around us, but often just out of sight. People can become entrapped making our clothes, serving our food, picking our crops, working in factories, or working in houses as cooks, cleaners or nannies.

[Mauritania](#) is one of the last countries in the world where people are still born into slavery and literally owned by other people, facing a lifetime of abuse and forced labour.

2020 June 29:

Contextualising civil rights

I am not alone in seeing BLM in a [wider context](#) beyond the borders of the U.S. or that the connections between [BLM and slavery](#) are complicated. But leaving slavery and the rest of the world aside for a moment (as if that is ever possible) how can BLM be fitted into the story of prejudice and persecution within the U.S? I would, even so, want to compare and contrast what goes on there with the experience in the two neighbouring countries – Canada and Mexico.

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There is a long history of troubled relations with “minorities” including Asians, Irish, and Jews. Historically, religion provides one dimension of the prejudice. The British settlers fled their homeland not to escape religious persecution but to impose their own. “Others” who are Protestant (e.g. Amish, Hutterites, et al.) are (now) seen as quaint rather than threatening (or maybe just too few to worry about). But Blacks are overwhelmingly Christian, so it can’t only be that.

A race-relations quadrangle exists in the U.S. formed by Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and First Nations. Mathematically, this gives rise to six axes of (possible) prejudice. BLM focuses on Black/White. Each axis represents group relations that differs in many particulars from the others. White/First Nations, for example, is a story of displacement, depopulation, and dispossession whereas White/Black is a story of importation, subordination, and exploitation. Do these differences mean that we can understand each only in its own terms and separately from the others or must we also look at them together in order to understand each of them properly as expressions of larger themes beyond the particularity? These stories focus on oppression by Whites (displacement, subordination) and what has been and is being done by one group to another but that may be an unbalanced way of understanding relations between them.

Unsurprisingly, I think that institutions with gatekeeping power (as Mr Leonardo calls us) should reach their own conclusions and not simply subscribe to the views of their BIPOC audience - which is not what I understand him to be saying by the way (and I agree with him that we must contend with the power that we hold). And I am not so naïve as to suppose that we can “contend” by simply lecturing others about curatorial integrity. My conclusions, inter alia, are that Black/White racism in the U.S. cannot be properly understood removed from its broader context and that context includes tension along all six axes – including (notably) [Black/Hispanic relations](#). Police violence against Blacks is of a piece with [violence against Hispanics](#) and the two can be understood as part of the same prejudice rather than simply as two different and unrelated things.



Black Lives Matter



Africa Museum

The custodial challenge is (predictably) becoming more urgent and the focus is (equally predictably) turning our way. We are being asked to “confront current issues and topics that aren't neutral”. When I speak of custodial agnosticism, I do not mean indifference (much less neutrality) towards what Verne Harris has referred to as the [call for justice](#). What I am concerned about is the integrity of the record and (yes) objectivity in the ways we think about it. I long ago argued that we cannot detach ourselves from our own social context and I hold to that. The challenge lies in figuring out **how** to relate and (if we are to maintain our own values intact) not simply to succumb.

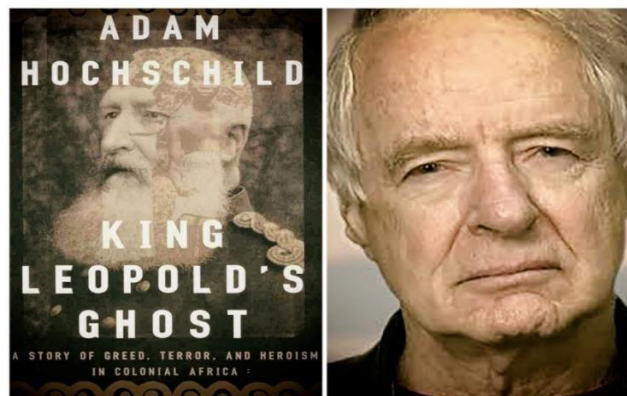
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2020 July 1:

The [Africa Museum](#) is a near perfect instance of a house of memory that has already had to “contend” with facts concerning its [subject-matter as well as its own history](#). It may still have a way to go before appeasing the spirit of Joseph Conrad.

The **Royal Museum for Central Africa** or RMCA ... colloquially known as the **Africa Museum**, is an ethnography and natural history museum situated in Tervuren ... just outside Brussels. It was built to showcase [King Leopold II's Congo Free State](#) in the [1897 World Exhibition](#) ... After his [Congo Free State](#) was recognized by the [Berlin Conference](#) of 1884–1885, [King Leopold II](#) wanted to publicise the [civilizing mission](#) and the economic opportunities available in the colony to a wider public, both in Belgium and internationally ... The museum stores archives documenting its own institutional history, as well as archives of private businesses, organizations, and individuals ... The publicly accessible museum itself only represents 25 percent of the activities which the museum covers ...

It had been called a museum that "has remained frozen in time" as it showed how a museum looked like in the mid-twentieth century. No mention was made of the savage excesses and pillage during Belgium's colonial era. *The Guardian* reported in July 2002 that, after initial outrage by Belgian historians over [King Leopold's Ghost](#) by [Adam Hochschild](#), the state-funded museum would finance an investigation into Hochschild's allegations. The resulting more modern exhibition "The Memory of Congo" (February–October 2005), tried to tell the story of the Congo Free State before it became a Belgian colony and a less one-sided view of the Belgian colonial era. The exhibition was praised by the international press, with French newspaper *Le Monde* claiming that "the museum has done better than revisit a particularly stormy page in history...[it] has pushed the public to join it in looking into the reality of colonialism."



It seems that this and other Belgian memory-houses are still ahead of [public opinion](#), which may ultimately prove less resistant to Hollywood razzamatuzz than to cultural re-interpretation .

... debate over [Leopold's] legacy has remained muted in Belgium, where hundreds of roads are named after the king along with memorials dedicated to his memory and glory. Now, under pressure from a growing movement that believes Belgium needs to confront its past, attitudes in the corridors of power are starting to change. As part of a belated reckoning with its colonial history, museums are showcasing sins that were previously overlooked, the tone of history books in school is shifting and, in a development unthinkable until recently, cities have started to remove street signs commemorating Leopold II and openly denounce his legacy ...

While some municipalities are holding out, the reappraisal offers further evidence of a sea change in how the colonial history is viewed. Those resistant to change are likely to come under more pressure when a Hollywood film, based on [Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*] ... is released ... Earlier this year a UN working group concluded in its preliminary report that, nearly six decades after the newly named DRC gained independence from Belgium, many of the country's institutions remained racist and the state needed to apologise for the sins of its past as a step towards reform ...

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2020 August 9:

Educators from around the [US] have been [reflecting on what they teach and how they teach it](#) in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the national protests that followed. Some lessons up for reconsideration: the dismissive take that it was simply "the norm" that Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned slaves in the late 1700s and language around Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America ... Additions to history classes might include lessons on intersectional figures, such as Bayard Rustin, the Black man who organized the 1963 March on Washington but was largely shunned in the civil rights movement because he was gay ...

Adina Goldstein, a seventh-grade social studies and English teacher in Philadelphia, said she had been thinking about how to turn her social studies class into more of an ethnic studies course to reflect more African American and Latin American history. That would, in turn, reflect the identities of the majority of her students. Goldstein, who is Chinese American and Jewish, said she recently spoke with a former African American history teacher, who said "something really insightful to me: 'We teach what we know.'" ...

Anton Schulzki, a high school teacher in Colorado Springs, Colorado, said the state recently held a virtual conference at which dozens of social studies teachers discussed changing their approaches to their curricula to move beyond their own biases ... "There's a decided push for us to really begin to re-examine our own biases and how we approach things in our classroom. There's a push among a lot of teachers, period, across the country to really examine how we approach things," said Schulzki, who is president-elect of the National Council for the Social Studies ...

2020 August 15:

... if museums resist contending with the power that they hold, we should no longer rely on them to curate the spaces for these kinds of experiences ... (Shaun Leonardo)

Another [example](#) of contending with both content and context -

Magnum Photos, one of the world's most celebrated photographic agencies, is to re-examine the content of its archive of more than 1 million images after accusations it made available photographs that critics said may show the sexual exploitation of minors ... As of Friday the Magnum archive was offline. An agency spokesman said: "Like many in the photographic industry, we are re-examining our past archives as we are aware there is material that may be inappropriate. Magnum has accumulated almost 1 million images over its 73-year history and we are committed to making this a comprehensive process." ...

While photo essays documenting sex workers and sexual exploitation have a long history in journalistic reportage photography, Magnum admitted it had been caught out, both by the **presence of some images** [my emphasis] in its archive, and by **the way they had been labelled in search terms** [my emphasis again] accessible to the wider public ...

What is the difference, I wonder, between a search term (merely) and one that is "accessible to the wider public". Should finding aids be more widely redacted? A further distinction is being made between content and the circumstances of creation-

... The criticism reflects a wider debate in the photographic industry over images, including some by celebrated photographers, which have been overtaken by a changing ethical landscape, not least over recording images of subjects seen as having been exploited ...

... Paul Lowe, who teaches documentary photography at the University of the Arts London and has written about the ethics of photojournalism, as well as being a well-known documentary photographer, suggested there were still questions to be answered for all photo agencies. "Any image that is currently available through any of the reputable agencies' websites has gone through process of control. Older images have been digitised

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and some sort of vetting has taken place. “An individual has decided that it’s appropriate for the agency archive and what key words should be attached to it. No image is there by accident.” He said the key issue related to consent. “What does consent and informed consent mean in photography? I think that’s key. Even if a subject gives consent, does that mean you can do whatever you want with images that are problematic? “I think the whole photographic industry, across the board, are questioning their assumptions, not least the power structures and inherent way that photography has predominantly reflected male gaze, which leaves it very open to very strong arguments of exploitation.”

2020 August 26:

Some Readings

Curatorial Activism

No doubt many listers are already familiar with this work. I’ve only just come across it. Seems relevant to what we’ve been discussing in this thread.

“Curatorial Activism” is a term I use to designate the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether—and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.

Code of Ethics for Curators

Issued by American Association of Museums Curators Committee (2009). States, inter alia Curatorial work is guided by the following values:

- To serve the public good by contributing to and promoting learning, inquiry, and dialogue, and by making the depth and breadth of human knowledge available to the public ...

... curators must establish intellectual control of the collection under their care ... Curators must commit themselves to developing the museum collection and interpretation of its objects with a respect for the needs of all potential patrons ... When preparing interpretive material, curators have a responsibility to an object’s creator(s) and culture of origin. When possible and appropriate, they accurately and respectfully represent the creator’s perspective, the object’s historical and cultural context, and the object’s history of use ...

Statement of Curatorial Values

Issued by Australian National Film and Sound Archive (n.d.). States, inter alia

Curators are bound to respect the diversity of ideas, values and beliefs in the community, and should not impose their own in deciding which works are to be collected. They are responsible for developing a collection that draws on and represents the diversity of cultural, political, social, religious and other ideas of individuals and groups in the past and present society, not just the dominant ideas of their time.

Should museums remain impartial? (2020)

... Is it the duty of museums to take a stance, or should we expect galleries and other cultural institutions to remain impartial on the subjects dominating our society? ... museums are not neutral by default. In most cases, neutrality requires more effort than asserting a clear view and, in the view of some, neutrality is an impossibility altogether – at odds with the human nature behind each and every exhibit created ... The question surrounding neutrality in museums is a complex one. So much so that the question itself isn’t really “should museums be impartial?” but “can museums be impartial?” ... Democratic cultural spaces are made by aiming for neutrality, but by recalibrating the balance of power and giving voice to those who would otherwise struggle to be heard. Through social conscious exhibitions and outreach efforts, many museums are already playing their part in this, giving voice to what’s important to their audience.

I can’t help feeling there’s a “not” missing in the 2nd last sentence quoted

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2020 September 14:

Displaying human body parts has long been a hot topic for curators. Now, [an Oxford museum](#) has revised its practices –

For almost 80 years, the shrunken human heads at Oxford University's [Pitt Rivers Museum](#) have fascinated and appalled visitors ... But under a major revamp to address the museum's problematic colonial past, the heads ... have been removed from display, along with 113 other human remains, including decorated skulls, scalps and Egyptian mummies. When the Pitt Rivers, one of the world's most important ethnological museums, reopens later this month ... visitors will instead encounter an ethical display of its collection. This will address how exhibiting human remains has "reinforced racist and stereotypical thinking" of other cultures, portraying them as "savage, primitive or gruesome", said the museum's director, Dr Laura Van Broekhoven.

Van Broekhoven said most of the human remains removed from display came from India, Tibet, Malaysia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, [Ecuador](#) and the Solomon Islands. Staff at the museum are reaching out to indigenous communities around the world to see whether they think the human remains removed from display, and hundreds more in its archives, should be repatriated to their country of origin, be redisplayed in a more respectful and accurate manner, or stay in storage.

Marenka Thompson-Odlum, a research assistant at the museum who [reviewed the labelling of objects](#), said many human remains were originally collected and exhibited by anthropologists who believed in now-debunked, racist scientific theories ... For example, archival records about 52 hair samples from the indigenous Ainu people of Japan exoticised their long hair and their beards. "They were termed 'the hairy Ainu' to explain that they were more 'barbaric' or 'savage'," said Thompson-Odlum, who added that the documents suggested some of the museum's samples were obtained by forcibly cutting Ainu people's hair ... Three of the Pitt Rivers' heads are thought to be authentic, with the other four believed to be forgeries made from corpses stolen from morgues and hospitals, a practice fuelled by demand from foreign collectors between the 1870s and 1930s...

How far should this approach go? Will Egyptian mummies disappear from museums around the world? Who would be consulted about them and to whom would they be repatriated?

What is interesting here (for me) is that they are turning the display inside out. Instead of adopting a scholarly, objective tone – presenting the artefacts (possibly fallaciously) for informative purposes – they are turning the spotlight onto the ethics and integrity of curatorial practice and putting that on display. How far should curators go in contextualising curation itself for our users?

How far should apprehended bias on the part of the curator be acknowledged and whose apprehension should be preferred? When do legitimate doubts about our own prejudices begin to undermine confidence in our ability to discern the truth?

2020 September 18:

<<[Michael Piggott: Bias, truth, objective tone, human remains. Sounds like the Australian War Memorial to me.](#) Earlier this week, [William De Maria wrote](#):

Then there is the Memorial's unapologetic distortion of our military history. There is no critical examination of the pointlessness of so many aggressive engagements Australia has been involved in and of the shameful things done by Australian soldiers on the battlefield. Consider the historical distortions in the Afghanistan War Exhibition, which go well beyond how museums and memorials in the other Coalition allies portray their presence in that war. The US Veterans History Museum starts its exhibition with these words: "The United States has been stuck in an unwinnable quagmire in Afghanistan for years." Then there's this contemplation of the British intervention from the National Army Museum in Chelsea:

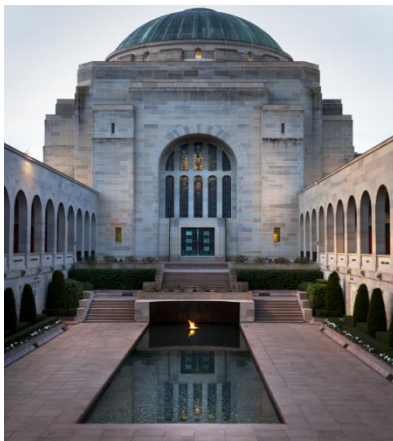
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“The war in Afghanistan spanned the tenures of three prime ministers and cost the lives of 453 British service personnel and thousands of Afghans. What was accomplished after 13 years of conflict, which included eight years of heavy fighting in Helmand, *still remains open to debate.*” (my emphasis added).

At the peak of the British input to the Afghanistan War, there were 137 UK bases and about 9,500 British troops in Helmand Province alone. At the height of the fighting, more than 600 flights a day used Camp Bastion’s 3.5-kilometre runway. Similarly, the Danish War Museum’s exhibition *A Distant War – A Danish Soldier in Afghanistan*, avoids the Rambo script in favour of showing visitors a young Danish soldier’s journey from the safety of his childhood bedroom to distant Afghanistan, through Camp Bastion, the Green Zone and Gereshk then home via Tune Airport. And this one was mounted without jiggling the donation tin in front of arms dealers.

This level of honesty is unimaginable at the Australian War Memorial. A visit to its Afghanistan exhibition is like a trip to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang, North Korea, where the curators leave nothing to chance that a different perspective could emerge.

Making all this worse is the Memorial’s morally contaminated relationships with arms dealers.>>



2020 September 25:

Now, here’s a word (two words actually) that might make a difference – “culturally competent”. It is a term used in health and welfare and it means, according to [one source](#) –

- open attitude (being prepared to expose yourself to diverse ideas and alternative viewpoints)
- self-awareness (turning a flashlight onto your own culture, beliefs, values, and background in order to more objectively explore what you may subconsciously be bringing to every interpersonal interaction),
- awareness of others (recognizing that all individuals are uniquely programmed with their own background, worldview, beliefs and values, and that while these may not match up with your own, they are equally valid and valuable)
- cultural knowledge (acquiring information about others’ values, norms, and beliefs, an information base from which you can engage in your own conversations and inquiries)
- cultural skills (asking more informed questions, adapting your communication style to different individuals, groups, and cultures, using active listening skills, establishing relationships based on mutual trust, clearly identifying areas of conflict or concern and recognizing their impact, making clear requests of others, implementing processes that promote organizational cultural competence and inclusion).

These are interpretations from a guidebook on medical practice, but the term is used [more broadly](#) and at one level it could serve in meeting our cultural challenge in areas like reference and access, selection and display, and description.

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Knowledge (of oneself and the situation) is always to be valued. But (there's often a but, isn't there) some of this is tosh, viz. "other beliefs and values ... are equally valid and valuable". Must I accept Donald Trump's beliefs and values as equally valid and valuable as my own? This is the kind of cultural relativism that portrays the death and terror inflicted by Vikings and Mongols in terms of moral equivalence. Conversely, there is moral relativism too in failing to acknowledge the horrors of colonialism or the crimes of Governments today (U.S. in Iraq and Australia in East Timor). Adjusting Australian history to take account of the Aboriginal experience is not about subscribing to an alternative worldview (though it may be prompted by that). It is about abjuring relativism and correcting error. I am still surprised when those deploring bias upbraid objectivity, as if there is any other basis for detecting it.

The underlying theme seems to be that cultural competence supports sympathetic and positive inter-personal dealings based on acceptance of differences. That is not dissimilar to what underlies the challenge to us as curators and guardians of memory to engage with difference. But our role goes beyond inter-personal dealings, does it not? We also deal in objectivity and truth (not just objectivity in dealing with our own subconscious but also in dealing with reality outside ourselves). And this objectivity sometimes leads us to disagreeable conclusions and to inconvenient truths. In our search for those inconvenient truths, it is sometimes necessary to reject the idea that all views and values are "equally valid and valuable".

<<Michael Piggott: ... in a recent issue of [Archival Science](#), referencing Kirsten Thorpe's research, Sue McKemmish and seven co-authors point to:

"the central role of Country in the management of records and stories ... They are "living archives" transmitted and accessed through storytelling and performance ... I suspect most archivists pay this thinking mere lip service. If we truly agree ... what are the implications, the logical next steps, the alternative world views which needs embracing? ... what about hugely significant Indigenous cultural sites? Not "in scope"? >>

2020 September 26:

How do we decide what is "in scope"? In my view (not shared by all) we follow the evidence and not a theory in order to get there. Above all, we archivists locate truth in particularities not in generalities, truths that are derived from observation rather than idealisation. We follow the compass and not the map. And then, in ways mysterious and wondrous to behold, the particularity - when properly contextualised - reaches out into a richer and broader understanding of reality than can ever be obtained by adhering to a line of interpretation derived from ideological preconceptions.

I first learned that *Benito Cereno* was based on actual events when I assigned the novella for a seminar I taught on American Exceptionalism. That class explored the ways an idea usually thought of exclusively in terms of the United States – that America had a providential mission, a manifest destiny, to lead humanity to a new dawn – was actually held by all the New World republics. I began to research the history behind *Benito Cereno*, thinking that a book that focused narrowly on the rebellion and ruse could nicely illustrate the role slavery played in such self-understandings. But the more I tried to figure out what happened on board the *Tryal*, and the more I tried to uncover the motives of those involved ... the more convinced I became that it would be impossible to tell the story – or, rather, impossible to convey the meaning of the story – without presenting its larger context. I kept getting pulled further afield, into realms of human activity and belief not immediately associated with slavery, into, for instance, piracy, sealing, and Islam. That's the thing about American slavery; it never was just about slavery ... The different routes that led all those involved in the drama to the Pacific reveal the fullness of the paradox of freedom and slavery in America, so pervasive it could trap not just slaves and slavers but men who thought they were neither. Greg Grandin [The Empire of Necessity](#)

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2020 October 2:

What makes cultural misappropriation (theft) different to common or garden larceny? Napoleon and Hitler were responsible for the theft or attempted theft of thousands of cultural objects, some of which now reside in museums maintained by the heirs of the plunderers (e.g. [The Louvre](#)). Once the dust has settled, people seems fairly relaxed over leaving stuff pillaged from institutions where it is but less so about artefacts stolen from individuals (viz. [looted Jewish property](#) from WW2). But different attitudes seem to be applied now to artefacts in state-owned institutions (less so in private collections) with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds to the victims. Hence the idea of cultural “repatriation” as distinct from restitution – since many of the objects in dispute cannot be demonstrably shown to have been stolen and in some cases (e.g. Egyptian mummies) restitution of cultural rights rather than property rights is the only coherent basis for action. Activists in France are [on trial](#) for trying to do something about it

Five activists have gone on trial in Paris for trying to remove a funeral staff from France’s pre-eminent indigenous art museum as part of a campaign to pressure the government into restituting items they claim were stolen. Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza, 41, led the operation at the Quai Branly museum last June, condemning “the pillage of Africa” ... “We had no intention of stealing this work, but we will continue as long as the injustice of pillaging Africa has not been remedied,” Diyabanza told AFP ahead of the trial ... Diyabanza himself sued the French state after his arrest in June, accusing it of “theft and receiving stolen goods” in amassing a huge collection of native artworks beginning in the colonial era. However the presiding judge told the court: “We are here to judge an infringement, not to judge history.”

... French officials condemned the stunt, which followed president Emmanuel Macron pledge, shortly after his election in May 2017, to look at the [restitution of African cultural treasures](#). France has since returned a ceremonial sword to Senegal and promised to return 26 dozen works to Benin – including a royal throne – that were seized by French troops in the late 19th century An expert report commissioned by Macron in 2018 counted some 90,000 African works in French museums, but suggested a “circulation” of some works between museums rather than an outright return, saying not all were pillaged or stolen. “Macron has acknowledged the pillaging, but he’s the one who decides how many works are returned, and whether or not there should be a property transfer – it’s an insult for us,” Diyabanza said.



Quai Branly museum



Strehlow Research Centre

How confusing! There’s poor old Macron burbling on about property transfer whereas the activists (no doubt) would say they want to restore cultural rights – not property rights. And what about stuff that was gifted but people now challenge the legitimacy of that. Isn’t that an issue with [Strehlow](#)?

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The issue of repatriation of archives from colonial powers is lively (especially when the former colonies didn't have the same jurisdictional boundaries as the independent nations that succeeded them. And repatriation isn't new - the [Vatican had to struggle](#) to get its archives back after the Napoleonic Wars.

2020 October 6:

<<Andrew Waugh: ... I'm struggling to see what the problem with this is. A large reason for archival documentation is so that the users can judge what the records are telling them ... How much more important is this context in a museum setting? In a museum the objects in a collection are individually selected from a humongously large pool of potential objects. I would consider the reasons a collector collected a specific object to be consequently very important ... (I remembered to finish this draft when reading this [opinion piece](#) where Tristram Hunt essentially asks the same question and answers it using, IMHO, strawman arguments.)>>

<<CH: What is interesting here (for me) is that they are turning the display inside out. Instead of adopting a scholarly, objective tone – presenting the artefacts (possibly fallaciously) for informative purposes – they are turning the spotlight onto the ethics and integrity of curatorial practice and putting that on display. How far should curators go in contextualising curation itself for our users? How far should apprehended bias on the part of the curator be acknowledged and whose apprehension should be preferred? When do legitimate doubts about our own prejudices begin to undermine confidence in our ability to discern the truth?>>

<<AW: I'm struggling to see what the problem with this is ... I would consider the reasons a collector collected a specific object to be consequently very important in understanding what the object is and what it represents.>>

Coming Clean (no problem): IMHO custodians of memory – archivists, curators, librarians – need to be aware of their own motives and possible biases. They need to overcome their biases as far as possible and strive for objectivity, knowing they will never wholly succeed. I see no problem in disclosing our assumptions, practices, and motives (to the extent that we can objectively discern them). Nor do I see a problem in disclosing our own struggle, our own doubts and uncertainties. As to the perils of collection, I have long argued that archivists too have a special (and much neglected) duty to say much, much more in the finding aids about the appraisal process that led to the formation of the archives that the user sees. I have told the story before how, when I was on assignment at PROUK (now National Archives), an archivist there said to me that they didn't keep control records (registers and indexes) because they didn't want the public knowing what had been destroyed.

Curatorial Tone (bit of a problem): I don't think we've yet found our "curatorial voice" in the postmodern age. Adopting a curatorial tone of impartiality, based at least on an aspiration to be impartial, was once deemed to be a virtue. Custodians don't tamper with the records. They are inviolate in our hands and can be relied on to the extent that our integrity can be relied upon to ensure the "preservation of the chain of evidence". The belief that we can be trusted is an important tool in our box. The tone we adopt to uphold that belief sustains the trust of our clients in us (or so we would like to believe). Of course, nowadays, we understand about subconscious bias and that the archivist's own actions mean we are -makers as well as -keepers of records. Acknowledging that while at the same time establishing a basis on which to claim professional integrity (supposing you think that is a valuable quality to have or at least to portray) is, therefore, a bit of a problem.

Apprehended Bias (quite a problem): Add to all that the pressures now bearing down as a result of culture wars. The very idea of impartiality is scoffed at. Identity bias (racial, social, cultural, religious, ideological, etc.) is assumed. Apology or correction is demanded. The question is: how does the custodian deal with it? To what extent should

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our presentation acknowledge apprehended bias that we do not believe we have? Should we acknowledge it, yield to it, succumb to it, or combat it? How we would go about any of these alternative responses is a whole other discussion. And then, how do custodians keep their responses (whichever ones we choose) in proportion? Should we take account of the most deserving alternative views or the loudest? The culture wars evolve and move on. What is admired today is condemned tomorrow and (more subtly) what is ignored today becomes a hot issue tomorrow, If we must keep on adjusting to changing perceptions (which I don't say we shouldn't) how do we balance the integrity of our own interpretations against the interpretations that others would have us make.

Adjusting our practices to satisfy the ideas of others, rather upholding the integrity of our own, could be seen as falsification of the evidence no better than forgery. Acknowledging other ideas while defending our own is one thing. Subscribing to contested ideas in the culture wars makes us culture warriors – the object of disdain to one or more parties. It would be nice to think (As we once did) that we can curate without interpretation – but we can't. My question therefore comes down to this:

how can the archivist or the collector contextualise themselves in terms other than their own to disclose their “understanding [of] what the object is and what it represents” or even comprehend fully “the reasons a collector collected a specific object” except by asserting what they believe to be true and what acknowledgement should be made of understanding they believe to be false?

It was all so much easier when science, medicine, and professional expertise of all kinds weren't being denounced in the Age of Post-Truth. Ah, well!

2020 October 7:

Some of the issues we have been discussing in this tread are interwoven into the theme of a Canadian conference to be held next year. **Date:** May 27-29, 2021

Location: Edmonton, Alberta (online if necessary)

Conference Theme – Archives in Interesting Times

We are witnessing turmoil around the globe, including a pandemic, economic struggle, climate change and the Black Lives Matter protests. Archives are not isolated from what is happening and there has been much stress to archives as a result. Our profession is challenged by funding cuts which are especially prominent in our oil and gas-based economy in Alberta. The pandemic has also contributed to a lack of revenue, but of significant note, the pandemic has changed our work. In addition, we are still seeing natural disasters affecting our facilities as climate change is increasingly becoming an issue. There has been a rise in the outcry against social injustices which has made archives re-examine their colonial-based policies in hopes for new policies that are more inclusive. Our holdings bear witness to some of these social injustices. Keeping in mind the tornado of events that are changing our professional life, ASA's 2021 Conference looks at our profession in interesting times. We welcome proposals that could include but are not limited to topics such as:

- Changes in archival policy over the years in Canada and Alberta
- Particular phenomena to which archives lend perspective (e.g. COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu)
- Resiliency in Archives
- Emotional labour within the archival profession
- Building partnerships with other organizations
- Community engagement
- Sharp contraction in funding (cuts or reallocation in funding)
- People retiring and not being replaced (lack of succession planning and funding going to other areas of operations)

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- Waning and waxing of support for archives within organizations
 - Funding
 - Advocacy work
 - Promotion
- Natural disasters
- Change in public perception by the public and their use of archives
 - Impacts of increased advocacy and social media presence
 - Increase in communities' need for archives and therefore a larger market for them opening up
- Changing technology – though this is always something archives are managing, what are these interesting times now allowing?
- What are the benefits and challenges that these interesting times and working from home or decreased public in the reading room provided to the field?
 - Projects on the backburner have been brought forward due to working from home
 - How has working from home changed the focus of work?
 - Changing nature of work

We are interested in reflecting upon how archives have changed during challenging circumstances and societal trends as well as how archives have provided context for these issues.

2020 October 27:

Back to statuary for a moment, Mary Beard (academic tv presenter on Roman history) gives [her views](#).

The Romans had many ways of dealing with the statues of those they no longer wanted to honour. Some they (or their enemies) destroyed ... But the Romans were much more imaginative than that. It was common practice to give a makeover to a marble head and to change the image of one emperor you didn't like into that one you did (or, to put it another way, to save money by recycling the old guy into the new). And occasionally you could even change one god into another just by changing the statue's label.



Mary Beard



Geta Cancelled

So where does this leave us in our current statue wars? Let me offer just a few observations.

1. There is no one (or almost no one) who thinks that there are no exclusions at all for statues that belong in the public realm. There would, I imagine, be very little public debate about the taking down of a statue of Goebbels or Jimmy Savile ... but we disagree on where we draw the line

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2. It goes without saying that one can deplore the actions of the person portrayed in the statue, while not wanting to remove the object itself from public view ...
3. Too much of this debate has traded on a view of history that divides it into goodies and baddies ...
4. Much of this comes down to our understanding of the function of public statuary, and I hope that, when Sadiq Khan's new commission to look at the diversity of London's statuary (and more) gets under way, they will consider not just who is worthy to be commemorated, but what public sculpture is *for* ...
5. And as a parting shot, I bridle a little at the repeated suggestions that these statues belong in a museum ...

How wrong can you get?

(Me speaking now)

Totally agree with no.5. Meanwhile, I have always been amused by two statues in central London. One is of Oliver Cromwell outside Parliament. Why would anyone want to put it *there*? He's the only man who ever shut the place down. The other is nearby: Boudicca stands triumphant in her chariot, looking out over the Thames! Isn't she the one who burnt Londinium to the ground and brutally slaughtered everyone in sight? There's also one of her in Colchester apparently. Even curiouser.



Oliver Cromwell



Boudicca

<<Michael Piggott: Our governments don't erect statues anymore, nor unlike Sadiq Khan in London, do they establish commissions to check existing statues' diversity. Nor do our cultural institutions usually chose exhibition themes as challenging and politically pointed as say the BL's Windrush: Songs in a Strange Land. But here in Canberra anyway, they're pretty quick to tell cultural intuitions to keep it vanilla. Last week the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister told the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House to stop generating discussion about the status of Australian democracy as if it were a thinktank (see "Morton's message to MOAD: stop doubting democracy", Canberra Times, 25 October 2020, pp 1, 6). Another quote: the Minister said "you should go to the Museum ... to be educated, inspired and engaged", and visitors "should leave with a greater appreciation of and affection to [sic] Australian democratic systems, which we should be all proud of". Meanwhile our public broadcaster continues to annoy ministers for its presumed political bias, and to have its annual budget cut. It's Media Watch program ran a fascinating item on the state of Australian democracy during the week called Clive's death tax, which concluded "there's no national law that demands political advertising be factual - although South Australia and the ACT do have some rules. And we're unlikely to see one in the future". I felt inspired and proud.>>

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2020 November 7:

Impartiality vs Objectivity; Balance vs Opinion

Where were you when a US president stood up and claimed his own country's election was corrupt – and media organisations simply cut him off because he had no evidence for any of his mad, rambling allegations? ... while there is no question that Trump's comments and indeed behaviour over much of the four years should have been called out long ago, there are still huge questions over journalists' relationships to neutrality and balance – and how time-stretched journalists can get this wrong ... true impartiality allows reporters to say that politicians are lying if there are facts and evidence to prove it. Such calls are essential not just for democracy but the future of journalism, even if a combination of financial, political and technological pressure has made them harder ... While US broadcasters are being celebrated, though, it seems wise to consider what the consequence of an increasingly opinionated journalism could be. Surely the endgame is Trump TV ... For Trump, said to be confused and upset by the loss of his biggest cheerleader in Murdoch, his own channel would be the perfect answer. In the UK, we have GB News and the proposed new Murdoch TV channel to look forward to.

Newly licensed ventures have seen how LBC has challenged the UK's public service television impartiality requirements by showing political balance across the whole day rather than one opinion or show at a time. This is akin to the US model where for every CNN for those who have hated Trump for years, there is a Fox News host slavishly promoting his every view. Given this, it would be wise if all those in the UK pumped by the passion and enthusiasm they can see on US TV reports and exasperated by an overly cautious BBC are careful what they wish for. Populist media, like populist politics, can be a dangerous game.

Substitute *collecting for reporting* and *culture wars for populism* and where does that leave us? An anti-slavery museum "balanced" by one celebrating colonialism perhaps?

2020 November 15:

Conflicted Memories

Whereas Remembrance Day in Britain prompts a united sense of national pride in military service, and respect for the sacrifices of those who fought in both world wars, Germany's commemoration of the war dead is much more cautious and complex. Military service in 20th Century Germany is associated with profound shame - focused above all on the victims of Nazi military aggression and the Holocaust. Reinforcing that is a belief that the ground for Germany's Nazi catastrophe was laid by the militarism of the Prussian state that unified the country in the 19th Century and led it into World War One. It was this militaristic state that built the Neue Wache or "new guardhouse", a classical building on the famous central Berlin street of Unter den Linden, which is now at the heart of the annual day of mourning.

Built in 1818, it was originally intended to celebrate the success of war in building national identity by liberating Germany from Napoleonic rule. And later military triumphs - especially over France in 1871 - were crucial landmarks as Prussia and Germany became a great European power ... An annual day of national mourning - the Volkstrauertag - was first held in the 1920s. And there was discussion about creating a place of national memory similar to the Cenotaph in London. But the re-opening of the Neue Wache as a "Memorial Site for the Fallen of the World War" in 1931 revealed sharp divisions within German society ... After the Nazis took power in 1933 they replaced the day of mourning with a day of commemoration of heroes, the Heldengedenktag. The Neue Wache was now used for their glorification of war - an echo of Prussian militarism in a new fascist style.

Twelve years later ... with the Neue Wache now located in Soviet-occupied Germany ... it was described as a memorial to the "victims of fascism" ... After the GDR collapsed in 1989 and Germany reunified, the Neue Wache was changed once again, finally taking on the

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form and purpose that it has today. This time the focus was on a sculpture from the 1930s by the artist Käthe Kollwitz installed in one of the building's chambers, depicting a woman holding a dead child. Her sculpture was seen as finally turning attention away from military memory towards all the victims of war and tyranny ... Kollwitz's sculpture is meant to represent not only a mother's grief at the loss of her soldier son but also all those non-soldiers caught up in the horrors of war - especially Holocaust victims but also less well-known sufferers, such as the German women [who suffered mass sexual violence at the end of WW2.](#)



Modern debate about the Neue Wache has also involved another question - whether as part of the restoration of Berlin's Prussia-era architecture, its statues of famous generals should be restored to their original positions in or near the building. And that is part of a larger problem. Where does modern emphasis on remembering the victims of war leave the memory and reputation of those who served in the German armed forces?

... Remembering soldiers lost in WW2 has been especially sensitive ... These lost soldiers could not be commemorated in public as heroes, as the German military were more and more associated with the brutal conquests and war crimes committed by the Nazi regime ... It was widely claimed that Nazi war crimes had been committed by the SS and other elite units, while the mainstream Wehrmacht army had - like most of the German population - remained ignorant of and uninvolved in the Holocaust ... But then a 1990s travelling exhibition called The Crimes of the Wehrmacht showed how the army had often been complicit in atrocities. This challenged the myth of the "clean Wehrmacht" ... Today's Germany has tiptoed only very slowly towards becoming a more "normal" military power, with the Bundeswehr deployed abroad ...

The charity responsible for German war graves, the Volksbund, founded in 1919, still organises many of Germany's commemorations of the war dead including the national day of mourning. Since the end of the Cold War its work has also included the highly sensitive task of recovering soldiers' remains and maintaining German military cemeteries in parts of Central and Eastern Europe where the most terrible Nazi crimes were committed. The Volksbund stresses what it sees as its educational role ... Individual grief at the loss of family members, including millions of soldiers, is real enough. But the memory of the vast numbers of other victims of Germany's wars will always be present too.

PS. And here in Australia, there is conflict of sorts over whether or not AWM should do something about "frontier wars". The [official position appears to be](#) "As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial's official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war

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or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day."

<<Alan Ventress: I thoroughly agree with this analysis of conflicted memories. Cautious and complex sums it up. I lived in Hameln an der Weser for 3 years between 1968 and 1971 as part of the British Army's contribution to NATO as a corporal in the Royal Military Police. What memorials there were to the fallen were subdued and almost hidden from view. I particularly recall one such memorial on a hill overlooking the town commemorating 3 soldiers who died, i quote, for the whole of Germany in April 1945. Another memorial at a mass grave for slave labourers on the outskirts of the town was unknown to the locals and many did not want to know about the sins of the Nazis. The exception being some senior officers in the German police who were proud of their service in the SS and not at all contrite.>>



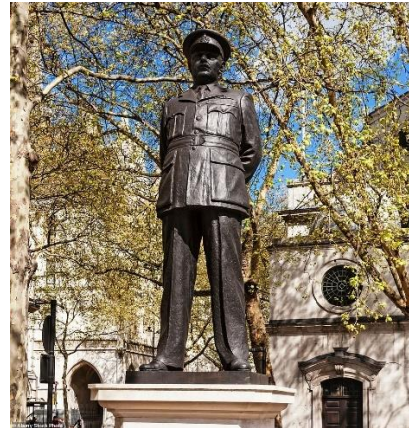
<<Andrew Waugh: PS. And here in Australia, there is conflict of sorts over whether or not AWM should do something about "frontier wars". The official position appears to be "As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial's official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day." Semantic nonsense, of course. If they wanted to they could just as easily argue that this definition includes the deaths of indigenous people defending their country from invasion. I would assume, under this definition, the dead of the Boer war prior to federation are not memorialised in the AWM. They could not have been Australians as Australia did not exist. If the AWM does include the Boer war dead, then they must be retrospectively including people who, today, would be counted as 'Australians'. In which case, the death of the indigenous people would be included as "Australians who have died... as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service." Unless, of course, this argument is a version of 'terra nullus'. Deaths of indigenous people during the invasion don't count as they did not have a 'country' or a 'government' to define them as being on active service.>>

<<Joanna Sassoon: Never forget that Britain's role in shaping remembrance is also complex and cautious ... It was only in 2012 that the British erected a national memorial to those who served in Bomber Command and this was preceded by a long period of preferring to forget rather than choosing to remember.

This official trying to forget continues with Bomber Command and other casualty records from WW2 remaining restricted, housed in the iron grip of the MoD although being transferred to the UK National Archives at a glacial pace after being vetted and currently inaccessible even for children of the deceased ... This is in contrast to Australia's view on access to WW2 records and the millions currently being spent digitising them and making them freely available ... so, it remains in the imperial balance between forgetting and remembering, your main hope in trying to

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work out what happened to your deceased military relative in Britain is that they went down with an Australian, as a carbon copy of reports that are restricted to british eyes is often on deceased Australian's files. Such is life.>>



<<a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service>>

I assume the 1980 Act makes statutory provision for defining “Australians” for the purpose of memorialisation, but until 1948 (at least) such a concept was itself cautious and conflicted in such a way that soldiers from Australia actually fought during the two world wars as British subjects. According to [Wikipedia](#) –

Until the passing in Australia of the *Nationality Act 1920*, Australia's nationality law, like that of other [Commonwealth countries](#), was governed by the English common law concept of a [British subject](#) ... The idea that there was such a thing as an Australian legal nationality, as distinct from a British one, was considered by the High Court of Australia in 1906 to be a "novel idea" to which it was "not disposed to give any countenance". That was as a matter of law, but in 1913 and 1930 Australian journalists considered that there were such things as Australian nationality and citizenship. The [British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914](#), an act of the Westminster parliament, codified the common law rules. Australia followed this with the enacting of the *Nationality Act 1920*, which came into effect on 1 January 1921 and codified the concept of a British subject in Australia. In general, the principles of the 1920 Act and subsequent amendments followed United Kingdom legislation, although there were some differences that could lead to a person being a *British subject* solely under Australian law. The 1948 [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) decided ... that the United Kingdom and the self-governing dominions would each adopt a separate national citizenship, while retaining the common status of British subject ...

Of course, Aborigines (and Torres Strait Islanders) didn't become Australian citizens until after the 1967 Referendum. Whether or not they were “Australians” before that is a more vexed question. But I think I am correct that Aboriginal soldiers served in both World Wars.

The British [memory of the terror bombing](#) of Germany in WW2, referred to by Joanna, is a superb example of conflicted memory. American recollections do not (apparently) travel in parallel - possibly revealing cultural differences. Some Americans are more ambivalent, however, over use of the A Bomb. The picture is further complicated by the participation of significant numbers of Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders in the British bombing offensive. So, this is our issue also.

Relative to most other European countries the United Kingdom enjoys a secure, positive memory of World War 2. At its simplest, the narrative goes: the Germans started it and the British, with their allies, won. However damaging to British relations with other European states since 1945, this account has proved remarkably durable. Not for the British the ‘divided memory’ of Italy or the Vichy syndrome of France or the ‘historians’ dispute’ of Germany; Britain’s dominant memories of World War 2 are unified, straightforward, and patriotic. Within this serene landscape, the combined bombing offensive against Germany,

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and specifically the part played by Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force (RAF), form an exception. Memories of Bomber Command are unusual in being both complex and volatile. They are complex because they concern inherently difficult questions – the effectiveness and the morality of strategic bombing in World War 2 – and because they have involved different ‘levels’ of memory – the official, the academic, the popular, the local – rather differently. A cohesive national myth of the bombing campaign, comparable (for example) to the British myth of the Blitz, the German bombing of British cities in 1940-1941, is impossible. Memories of the bombing offensive, moreover, are volatile because they have shown significant variance over time ...

The development of British memories of the bombing offensive since 1945 can be set roughly into three periods: relative quietism from the war until the early 1960s; two decades of scepticism from then until the early 1980s; and, since then, the slow growth of acceptance and memorialisation. However, these divisions are approximate and ragged, and, because memory operates at so many different levels, they are far from uniform ...

Official distance from the offensive is also reflected in policies of memorialisation. Battle of Britain Day, on 15 September, celebrates Fighter Command’s achievement in blocking the Luftwaffe’s offensive against the RAF; there is no Bomber Command equivalent. Public money financed neither the statue of Harris, unveiled in 1992, nor the Bomber Command memorial opened in Green Park, London twenty years later. Official reluctance to celebrate the bombing offensive may be explained by the distaste referred to by Frankland, and by the perceived need for good relations with the Federal Republic of Germany within the context of the Cold War and, from 1961, of Britain’s rapprochement with Europe. Hostile reactions in Cologne and other German cities to the unveiling of the Harris statue suggested that despite the involvement of the Royal Family in the opening ceremonies, governments had every reason to keep them at arm’s length. ‘Forgetting’, the title of the final chapter of Patrick Bishop’s popular history *Bomber Boys*, therefore appears accurate in relation to government. Not so in the culture of schoolboys. They were treated, in the comics of the postwar generation and in the cheap and accurate plastic kits on sale from the 1950s, to a continuous celebration of World War 2 in which the bombing war played a prominent part ...

The bombing war has remained the most contentious aspect of Britain’s World War 2 record, but not because it was ‘forgotten’, an expression better reserved for much of the war in the Far East. It has been contentious above all because of the gulf between the exceptional courage of the young men who served in Bomber Command and the horror that they inflicted on the German civilian population. To celebrate the bravery of the aircrew is to belittle the suffering of the civilians who died; to state clearly that the bombing offensive violated the laws and norms by which civilised human beings wage war diminishes the courage of the aircrew. The extraordinary difficulty of straddling this gulf explains the unease even of some of the aircrew themselves. The difficulties are compounded, as Süss observes, if the international context is taken into account. Germans seeking to promote a sense of national victimhood have seized on the Official History and the more sceptical British accounts. And the efforts at reconciliation coming from British churches run the risk of establishing a moral equivalence between the two belligerents ...

2020 November 16:

<<Michael Piggott: Good point re American ambivalence Chris, an excellent instance being the Enola Gay case: *Enola Gay* became the center of a controversy at the Smithsonian Institution when the museum planned to put its fuselage on public display in 1995 as part of an exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.^[41] The exhibit, *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Cold War*, was drafted by the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum staff, and arranged around the restored *Enola Gay*.^[42] Critics of the planned exhibit, especially those of the American Legion and the Air Force Association, charged that the exhibit focused too much attention on the Japanese casualties inflicted by the nuclear bomb, rather

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than on the motives for the bombing or the discussion of the bomb's role in ending the conflict with Japan.^{[43][44]} The exhibit brought to national attention many long-standing academic and political issues related to retrospective views of the bombings. After attempts to revise the exhibit to meet the satisfaction of competing interest groups, the exhibit was canceled on 30 January 1995. Martin O. Harwit, Director of the National Air and Space Museum, was compelled to resign over the controversy.

And there's much more to say about the War Memorial and 'frontier wars' commemoration, including the fundamental pre-requisite of Indigenous community consultation before the Memorial decides to reverse its current interpretation of its Act, but, for the moment, don't forget the Aboriginal Memorial at the National Gallery: The Aboriginal Memorial is an installation of 200 hollow log coffins from Central Arnhem Land. It commemorates all the indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land.>>



2021 February 12:

A useful reflection on the nature of the memory of colonialism. Positing that:

The complex events we recall and commemorate during this time are integral to the story that has shaped our nations, in all their diversity. They are, however, events to be remembered and understood, respecting the fact that different perspectives exist. In doing this, we can facilitate a more authentic interpretation ... This journey of ethical remembering [allows] us to examine the nature of commemoration itself and how it might unburden us of history's capacity to create obstacles to a better, shared future ... I have given the title Machnamh 100 to a series of reflections which examine the period 1920-1923, including the war of independence, civil war and partition. "Machnamh" is an Irish word encompassing reflection, contemplation, meditation and thought ...

I love the phrase "history's capacity to create obstacles". The author (currently President of Eire and identified as the President of Ireland) argues:

In my work on commemoration, memory, forgetting and forgiving I have sought to establish a discourse characterised by what the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney calls "a hospitality of narratives", acknowledging that different, informed perspectives on the same events can and do exist. The acceptance of this fact can release us from the pressure of finding, or subscribing to, a singular unifying narrative of the past.

As ever, a reflective study (of the context of anything) spills over into ever-expanding vistas:

It may be fruitful to consider the relationship of what has been titled – and not without dissent – the "European Enlightenment" within the project of imperial expansion for an understanding of how the mask of modernity has been used for cultural suppression, economic exploitation, dispossession and domination ... Those on the receiving end of imperialist adventurism were

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denied cultural agency, assumed to be incapable of it, and responsible for violence towards the “modernising” forces directed at them ... What our current reflection consists of, I suggest, is not the offering of a set of competing rationalisations for different kinds of violence. Instead it is about understanding the contexts in which they occurred ...

Back in the 1970s while I was studying in London, it seemed (to my limited colonial understanding) that prospects for the reflective study of imperial history were promising and available sources plentiful. But, as the article points out, there is:

... a disinclination in both academic and journalistic accounts to critique empire and imperialism ... a reluctance in former imperial powers to engage now with their imperialist past and to examine that past with descendants of those previously colonised, many of whom still live with the complex legacies of that colonialism ...

In any case, the entire question of discovering and shaping a contextual understanding of the (re)sources to support such a study, other than those left by the imperialists themselves, remains open.

PS. Just finding the right word is, of course, part of the problem. This author describes the 1916-1921 period in Ireland as a “War of Independence” – not a term everyone would use. On my shelves, books about the 1642-1660 period in Britain and Ireland refer to it variously as “The Great Rebellion” (following Clarendon) or “The Great Civil War” (following Gardiner) and many of the lesser authors (who seldom use the word “Great”) are confused about whether it was an English event, a British event, or a British/Irish event.

PPS. “Ireland” is the English language form of “Eire” (without the accents). It could be said to be proper usage in an English language newspaper if one disregards the many respectful uses of indigenous language by English speakers around the world (not least by Australians and New Zealanders).

2021 February 22:

.. and speaking of truth, statues, and such, consider these gems –

Gavrilo Princip

... Princip is portrayed in the history books of the various countries of former Yugoslavia either as a terrorist or as a rebel with a cause – reflecting contemporary divisions in a region still recovering from the more recent conflicts of the 1990s. While they were part of Yugoslavia, children in all these countries were taught the same history. Now they all have their own versions of the truth, shaped by the more recent wars, and are passing it on to the next generation ... In ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is [now] no commonly held view either about Princip or about the origins of the first world war ...

These divisions are also reflected in the rival commemorations that will be held in Bosnia. A series of events will be held in Sarajevo, including exhibitions, concerts and a meeting of young peace activists from around the world. Bosnian Serbs will hold their own events in the eastern town of Visegrad, organised by film director Emir Kusturica, while a statue of Princip is due to be erected in Serb-run eastern Sarajevo ...

Violet Gibson

On 7 April 1926 an Irish woman stepped out from a crowd in Rome and fired a shot at one of the 20th century's most infamous dictators. One bullet grazed the nose of Benito Mussolini, but the Italian leader survived the assassination attempt Now, nearly a century later, moves to put up a plaque in Dublin are gathering pace After some time in an Italian prison, she was deported to England ... She was subsequently kept in St Andrew's Hospital, a mental asylum in Northampton, until her death in 1956. In the days

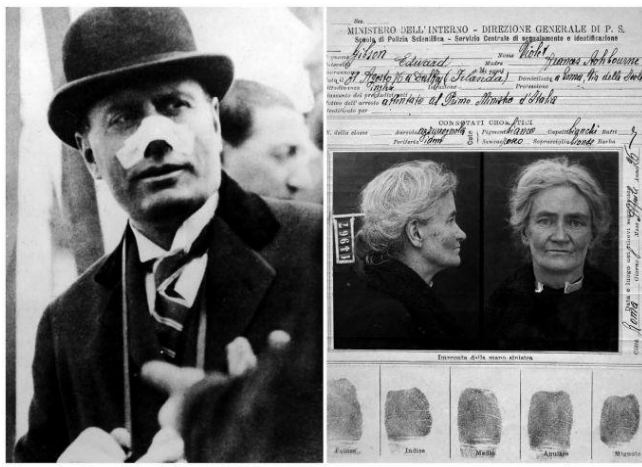
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following the attempted assassination, the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State W.T. Cosgrave, wrote to Mussolini to congratulate him on his survival ...

Dublin City Council has now passed a motion which has given initial approval to put up a plaque dedicated to her in the city ... "It suited both the British authorities and her family to have her seen as 'insane' rather than as political," the motion [states]



Gavrilo Princip Statue



Violet Gibson

“Stern Gang”

Lehi ... was a Zionist paramilitary organization ... that used terrorist means in its actions. Its avowed aim was to evict the British authorities from Palestine by resort to force, allowing unrestricted immigration of Jews and the formation of a Jewish state, a "new totalitarian Hebrew republic" ... Lehi and the Irgun were jointly responsible for the massacre in Deir Yassin. Lehi assassinated Lord Moyne, British Minister Resident in the Middle East, and made many other attacks on the British in Palestine. On 29 May 1948, the government of Israel, having inducted its activist members into the Israel Defense Forces, formally disbanded Lehi, though some of its members carried out one more terrorist act, the assassination of Folke Bernadotte some months later ... After the assassination, the new Israeli government declared Lehi a terrorist organization, arresting some 200 members and convicting some of the leaders. Just before the first Israeli elections in January 1949, a general amnesty to Lehi members was granted by the government.

In 1980, Israel instituted a military decoration, an "award for activity in the struggle for the establishment of Israel", the Lehi ribbon. Former Lehi leader Yitzhak Shamir became Prime Minister of Israel in 1983.

Ghenghis Khan (1)

... Genghis Khan had been revered for centuries by Mongols and certain other ethnic groups such as Turks ... In 1962, the erection of a monument at his birthplace and a conference held in commemoration of his 800th birthday led to criticism from the Soviet Union and the dismissal of secretary Tömör-Ochir of the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee. In the early 1990s, the memory of Genghis Khan underwent a powerful revival, partly in reaction to its suppression during the Mongolian People's Republic period ... In Mongolia today, Genghis Khan's name and likeness appear on products, streets, buildings, and other places. His face can be found on everyday commodities, from liquor bottles to candy, and on the largest denominations ... Major Genghis Khan statues stand before the parliament ... There have been repeated discussions about regulating the use of his name and image to avoid trivialization ... As of 2012, [Mongolian President] Elbegdorj issued a decree establishing Genghis Khan's birthday as a

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national holiday ... In Inner Mongolia there are a monument and buildings dedicated to him ...

The conquests and leadership of Genghis Khan included widespread devastation and mass murder, and he, along with the Mongols in general, perpetrated what has been called ethnocide and genocide ... Iranian historians from the time of Mongol occupation, describe the Mongol invasions as an catastrophe never before seen. A number of present-day Iranian historians ...have likewise viewed the period initiated by Genghis Khan as a uniquely catastrophic era. Steven R. Ward writes that the Mongol violence and depredations in the Iranian Plateau "killed up to three-fourths of the population... possibly 10 to 15 million people. Some historians have estimated that Iran's population did not again reach its pre-Mongol levels until the mid-20th century." .../

cf. Alexander the Great, Atilla the Hun, Charlemagne, Tamerlane, Francisco Pizarro, Napoleon, Shaka, etc. – conquerors all.



Lehi Memorial



Ghengis Khan Memorial

Ghengis Khan (2)

A French museum has postponed an exhibit about the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan citing interference by the Chinese government, which it accuses of trying to rewrite history The museum's director, Bertrand Guillet, said: "We made the decision to stop this production in the name of the human, scientific and ethical values that we defend." It said the Chinese authorities demanded that certain words, including "Genghis Khan," "Empire" and "Mongol" be taken out of the show. Subsequently they asked for power over exhibition brochures, legends and maps The museum branded it "censorship" and said it underlined a "hardening ... of the position of the Chinese government against the Mongolian minority" ...

2021 February 23:

... and on it goes

Moscow will this week vote on whether to reinstate a statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet security services, on the spot from which it was torn down during the collapse of the USSR. The monument to Dzerzhinsky, an architect of the Bolsheviks' murderous Red Terror, dominated the square outside the headquarters of the Soviet KGB, now the FSB, in central Moscow until 1991. Crowds cheered as it was removed by cranes following a failed coup. Since then, the statue has been on display at an outdoor "museum" of Soviet monuments, including busts of Lenin, Stalin and Brezhnev, in a park in the Russian capital.

But Moscow authorities announced they would reconsider the fate of the "Iron Felix" monument with an online vote ... Police meanwhile cleared a memorial to opposition leader Boris Nemtsov from a bridge where it has stood since his murder in 2015, reportedly over

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fears that supporters of Navalny could rally there. Eight people who had come to lay flowers there were arrested.

<<**Michael Piggott: This widening survey is inching towards mention of a regime that, for example, knows exactly what to do with people taking an unhealthy interest in the, ahem, "June Fourth Incident" and how to correct museum labels and certainly knows how to encourage Chris back onto the right path for his unsound comment at the end of his last most interesting post, viz: "No doubt such musings would be seen as a veiled power play." Meanwhile, the Australian Opposition Leader - yes Virginia, we have an Opposition Leader - gives a speech at the War Memorial.**

His written speech for the memorial went further, acknowledging the Indigenous resistance fighters of the frontier, too. But when he spoke at the AWM the critical words about frontier war were (unintentionally, he says) omitted.

And on it goes.>>

<<**how to encourage Chris back onto the right path>>**

I'm unreconstructed.

I know I'm unreconstructed.

I mean to go on being unreconstructed.

I like it.

The Dzerzhinsky affair provides another reason for not consigning disgraced statuary to museums. They might come back! Hadn't thought of that one. The Romans did it better, they had *Damnatio memoriae*.

2021 February 24:

Things people say

Australia's peak national library bodies want to see the federal government adopt a policy and strategy for combating misinformation and disinformation among individuals of all ages. The Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA), National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) and National Archives of Australia all spoke of the looming threat of misinformation and information warfare the country was facing at a nationhood committee hearing on Friday morning. ALIA chief executive Sue McKerracher said access to the internet was crucial for the nation but so was a strategy to ensure Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret that information ...

"I'd like to see a recommendation that the federal government work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance to develop a national policy strategy, a framework and action - a call to action - for media literacy." ... National Archives director-general David Fricker added that his agency, which collects and stores a number of critical government records, played an important role in stamping out misinformation by holding onto records that might otherwise be destroyed ... "Only the National Archives ... actually stops people, government officials, from destroying records and without that role, many records would be destroyed before they ever saw the light of day." ... Mr Fricker said those in Parliament could work to support government institutions and experts in order to ensure trust in facts wasn't being eroded ... "[A debate about] whether the Bureau of Meteorology, you know, can be trusted or not, is running at the moment. And I think, I think there is a role for Parliament and a role for government to actually be a bit more supportive of institutions."

Liberal senator and committee chairwoman Amanda Stoker pushed back on Mr Fricker's assertion, stating uncritical acceptance of experts in government institutions wasn't the solution either. "There's something compelling about the alternate argument that says we can't have uncritical acceptance of everything that comes from experts in a government department, simply because that's the title they hold," Senator Stoker said. "There's a balancing exercise."

Senator Stoker asked Ms McKerracher what sort of approach would be needed to tackle misinformation if it were to be adopted as a policy. There were already a number of literacy and educational programs the libraries had in place, such as the Be Connected and Tech

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Savvy Seniors programs, Ms McKerracher said, but what was missing was a co-ordinated, federal approach ... "What we're looking for is a national kind of guidance for this that then can be divided up between states and territories, but it has that linked, connected ... not people duplicating, overlapping, arguing about the right way to do it. "A real national approach to this."

I hadn't realised that what was missing was a co-ordinated federal approach, that governments are motivated by tolerance and the search for Truth, or that they practice what they preach. As to the [June Fourth incident](#) -

tolerance of injustice and distorted information is an act of encouragement and complicity. Such tolerance allows authoritarian regimes to transgress any red lines. This is exactly what happened after "June Fourth", when the west bought into the excuse that Chinese society would [become more democratic](#) after it became richer.

Tolerance and understanding live at the personal level and inform society's values. God forbid that either are ever shaped by the hand of governments. It has to be the other way around. Good governments arise (if at all) from the shared values of their citizens and of the society they govern. Totalitarians believe otherwise. Education to encourage critical thinking (rather than media literacy) – ensuring "Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret ... information" – yes, that I can see might be helpful. But when has our teaching ever been about critical thinking and when would parents and ideologues ever permit it to be? And how likely is it that the downtrodden, dispossessed followers of populist demagoguery or the critical theory activists inspired by their mission to change the world would take any notice?

2021 February 26:

The Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA), National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) and National Archives of Australia all spoke of the looming threat of misinformation and information warfare ... access to the internet was crucial for the nation but so was a strategy to ensure Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret that information ...

But what sort of strategy? The State cannot stymie the evil of misinformation and it cannot establish a Ministry of Truth. Information warfare can only be won by boots on the ground in the culture wars. People, not Policy. Culture cannot be planned "because it is also the unconscious background of all planning" (T S Eliot). But I agree that the State can help People to get on their feet ("to read and interpret") - without having control over where that will lead. A bureaucrat's nightmare. And "uncritical acceptance of experts in government institutions" wouldn't be any part of that (where did Senator Stoker get that idea?)

If I ruled the world, [critical thinking](#) would, as I've said before, be central to education – not what to think, but how to think. There are [plenty of courses](#) (some good, some lousy) set up to do this. But my starting point would be with language (I think Orwell and Don Watson would agree). Giving students permission to despise weasel words and phrases and the confidence to make judgements – just the mental organ (in the words of Kingsley Amis) that makes you say *This is bloody good* or *This is piss*.

In *The Dragons of Expectation*, Robert Conquest gives some wonderful examples of the "stupefying" use of English, "grotesque vocabulary held together by a tangled syntax, if such it can be called" –

Untenable words taken from "a book about Byron by a Professor of English at a great university": *behaviourly, factive, reportorial, factiveness, attitudinal, suppositional, contextualised, interiorised, postcivilised, episodically, audience problem, postpubescent, postmythic, iconograph, variant phase*. [I think I could forgive *contextualised* and *episodically*.]

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Worthless word conglomerates identified by Clive James when "reviewing an otherwise deplorable book": *non-cognitive structural features, universalistic social psychological processes, a cognitive model of ontology, ideational formations.*

Esoteric language used in a book about Homer: *Developmentally the Achilles complex is like a running spiral arrested after its first circuit, where, having doubled back upon itself, it dissects itself at a point only slightly in advance of its origin, The Bride transmits her desire to the suitors through a triple network of 'ciphers' which are set in a nebulous cloud of 'blossoming', and which sort the alphabetic units emitted by a 'letterbox', [T]his chapter is devoted to the narrative situation of complex narrator-text or embedded, focalization, NF1 [F2Cx]. There is embedded (or secondary) focalization when the NF1 represents in the narrator-text the focalization of one of the characters.*

These examples are drawn from academic works. Open any newspaper or journal or turn on a radio or TV and enough vulgar instances of reported speech will be supplied to keep a critical thinking course going for many, many months.

Forgive my banging on about this. The COVID Experience is making me crazy. I'm thinking too much. Someone needs to tell me to shut up.

<<Michael Piggott: ... Triggered by Chris' ALIA/NSLA/NAA quotes from their evidence to the curious Senate's 2019 inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy, I decided to look at the submissions such bodies made to it. A couple of gems from the NSLA submission:

- -"As custodians of national, state and territory collections, our collection development policies are designed to address historical bias and to ensure that we continue to collect in a way that reflects population changes, including new migrant communities".
- -"The ethos that drives NED and indeed all NSLA collecting activity is to represent Australia as we are, not as we might wish to be perceived. Our preparedness as a nation to collect and preserve the less palatable aspects of our history and culture is one of the clearest demonstrations of confidence in our national identity and in our democracy".

And in recent press commentary about the evidence given to the inquiry, this quote:

- -"Only the National Archives ... actually stops people, government officials, from destroying records..."

ALIA and NSLA also like to quote surveys saying they are among the most trusted Australian institutions. So these statements must be correct, yes? Yet reading sentences like to three quoted, one wants to shout "Oh, really?? Are you sure??" They're not so much Robert Conquest's stupefying use of English as slippery plausible self-serving easily illustrated half-truths which will never be subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny. >>

<< not so much ... stupefying use of English as slippery plausible self-serving easily illustrated half-truths >>

Developing bulls^^t detection skills is, of course, the next stage in learning how to think critically.

2021 February 27:

I can't help myself-

To enlarge on Michael's theme (not suggesting he would agree with me on this) let us consider what the librarians and archivists might have said to the Senate's 2019 inquiry into nationhood, national identity, and democracy. We proclaim ourselves to be (inter alia) on the side of truth and open-ness. How if people like Sue McKerracher and David Fricker said that governments, in the service of democracy, should be less secretive and more truthful with people? How if they had supported the idea that the interests of the nation are advanced when folk can reach "evidence-based judgements on the world in which they live"? They couldn't say that to the people who employ them, of course. And there are

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nuanced arguments for upholding security. But there's nothing nuanced about avoiding the issue altogether on such a subject as that. Here is what a [journalist](#) might have said.

The 10-year campaign by the US [government](#) to criminalise reporting critical of its actions has failed in rather peculiar circumstances, with the unexpected decision by the court in London [to reject](#) the US demand for [Julian Assange's extradition](#) [now under appeal]. Judge Vanessa Baraitser gave as the reason for her decision Assange's mental health and possible suicide risk, not freedom of expression or evidence of a politically inspired persecution by the Trump administration ...

Had the US succeeded in extraditing Assange to face 17 charges under the Espionage Act of 1917, and one charge of computer-hacking, he could have been sentenced to 175 years in prison. His conviction would have had a devastating effect on freedom of the press, because what he was accused of doing is what every journalist and news outlet does or ought to do: find out significant information, which may or may not be labelled secret by self-interested governments, and pass it on to the public so they can reach evidence-based judgments on the world in which they live.

I followed the extradition hearings day-by-day last September, and there was nothing that Assange and WikiLeaks disclosed that I and any other decent reporter would not have revealed ... extracts from the US government files were published by *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde* and *El Pais*. They were described as the greatest scoop of the century, akin to Daniel Ellsberg giving the Pentagon Papers to the press in 1971.

The most famous item was film taken by a US military helicopter in Baghdad in 2007 as it opened fire on a dozen Iraqi civilians, including two local journalists working for Reuters, killing them all. The Pentagon claimed that the targets were "terrorists" and had refused to release the video, despite a Freedom of Information Act request. I was in Baghdad at the time and the journalists there suspected what had really happened, but we could not prove it in the face of official denials.

It was the contents of the Apache helicopter video and thousands of other reports that so shocked a US military intelligence analyst called Bradley Manning, who later changed her name and legal gender to Chelsea Manning, that she handed the great cache of classified documents over to WikiLeaks. Despite claims to the contrary, the electronic files did not contain the deepest secrets of the US government, but they did reveal what it knew about its own activities and that of its allies. This was often deeply embarrassing and wholly contrary to what American governments had been saying to their own people and the world.



Assange

Snowden

Manning

Baghdad 2007

A US official explained to me at the time that the files – 251,287 diplomatic cables, over 400,000 classified reports from the Iraq War and 90,000 from the Afghan War – were filed on a system known as SiproNet (Secret Internet Protocol Router Network). This was designed to give wide access to useful information to hundreds of thousands of US government personnel. My diplomatic friend explained that with so many people able to read the files, the US government was not so naïve as to put its deepest secrets in it.

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I was surprised 10 years ago by the outrage of the US and allied governments at the disclosures. An early claim that Assange and WikiLeaks had endangered the lives of US agents lost credibility when it was revealed in 2013 that a task force of 120 counterintelligence officers had failed to find a single instance of anybody who had died because of the WikiLeaks disclosures. Nevertheless, this charge was brought up against Assange by the lawyers for the US government at the extradition hearings that began last September.

The anger of the American and allied governments had little to do with the precise level of secrecy of the files that were disclosed. Many of the facts were already known or suspected by journalists. But the keeping of secrets – and their disclosure by the authorities themselves in their own interests – is an instrument of power that those possessing it will fight hard not to lose. Hence the dogged determination with which Assange has been pursued ever since.

The campaign to discredit him had much success. The newspapers that once feted him as the source of their scoops swiftly distanced themselves from him and from WikiLeaks. This had much to do with his status as a rape suspect in Sweden, though these allegations had nothing to do with the extradition hearings. I have a sense that the mainline establishment newspapers that had published the files were taken aback and intimidated by the explosive reaction of the American governments and its allies.

The majority of these publications consequently ignored or played down the Assange extradition hearings. The challenge to the freedom of the press was self-evident, as was the danger to journalists truthfully reporting facts, any one of which might be deemed a secret by the US government. They too could have faced espionage charges on exactly the same basis as Assange.

Yet much of the media remained silent or made nit-picking attacks on Assange's personality, despite the seriousness of the case. The failure of the attempt to extradite Assange – if confirmed on appeal – gets them off the hook and they will no longer have to take a stand. This is one of the most worrying aspect of the case – the willingness of the media to stand to one side during one of the greatest attacks on press freedom in modern history.

PS It should be remembered that the prosecution of Assange was begun by Obama - a secrecy obsessive if ever there was one.

2021 March 18:

Another [example](#) of contested memory

A baleful silence attends one of the most talked-about figures in British history. You may enthuse endlessly about [Winston Churchill](#) “single-handedly” defeating Hitler. But mention his views on race or his colonial policies, and you'll be instantly drowned in ferocious and orchestrated vitriol ... Many people want to know more about the historical figures they are required to admire uncritically ... Yet providing a fuller picture is made difficult. Scholars who explore less illustrious sides of Churchill are treated dismissively ...

In response to calls for fuller information about its founder, [Churchill College, Cambridge] set up a series of events on [Churchill, Empire and Race](#)... Even before it took place, the discussion was repeatedly denounced in the tabloids and on social media as “idiotic”, a “character assassination” aimed at “trashing” the great man. Outraged letters to the college said this was academic freedom gone too far, and that the event should be cancelled. The speakers and I, all scholars and people of colour, were subjected to vicious hate mail, racist slurs and threats. We were accused of treason and slander. One correspondent warned that my name was being forwarded to the commanding officer of an RAF base near my home.

The college is now under heavy pressure to stop doing these events. After the recent panel, the rightwing thinktank Policy Exchange, which is influential in government circles – and claims to champion free speech and controversial views on campus – published a “review”

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of the event. The foreword, written by Churchill's grandson [Nicholas Soames](#), stated that he hoped the review would "prevent such an intellectually dishonest event from being organised at Churchill College in the future – and, one might hope, elsewhere".

It's ironic. We're told by government and media that "cancel culture" is an imposition of the academic left. Yet here it is in reality, the actual "cancel culture" that prevents a truthful engagement with British history ... Critical assessment is not "character assassination". Thanks to the groupthink of "the cult of Churchill", the late prime minister has become a mythological figure rather than a historical one. To play down the implications of Churchill's views on race – or suggest absurdly, as Policy Exchange does, that his racist words meant "something other than their conventional definition" – speaks to me of a profound lack of honesty and courage ...

To say nothing of his notorious military misjudgements ("alleged" of course) : e.g. [Gallipoli](#), [Norway](#), [Greece](#). [Churchill said history would be kind to him because he intended to write it himself.] Why is it so difficult to look facts in the face, eschew black-or-white (hero-or-villain) interpretations, and make judgements free of emotional or ideological commitments. Because we're human, I suppose. But you don't have to deny that humanity if you seek, as Acton urged when he railed against dogma, to overcome it. And is it not becoming to simply shrug the shoulders and demolish the aspiration to be objective ([critical librarianship](#)) in order to clear the way for dogmas of one's own,

PS. I see that populist responses to the report on war crimes in Afghanistan is now being framed (e.g. by Alan Jones et al) as supporting our veterans.

<<Brigid Cooper: On a much more local and small-scale note, I am involved in planning for the commemoration of my local parish's 50th Anniversary. One of the founding parishioners has written a history booklet. We are currently grappling with telling the story of the 22 years that a now-convicted child-abusing priest spent at the parish. He was well liked, talented and, as with any Catholic priest, the centre of activities, celebrations and, of course, photographs. Turning the narrative around and making the story about events and parishioners, instead about the leader is hard for a generation who were trained to see no faults in their priests.>>

Purely by chance, I am (re)reading *1940: Year of Legend, Year of History* (1966) by [Laurence Thompson](#). Last night, as I nodded off, my eye fell on this passage dealing with Churchill's accession to the Prime Ministership:

For a moment it is possible to catch a glimpse of Churchill as he was on this day of assuming power, before the mists of legend engulf him along with Alfred who burnt the cakes but beat the Danes, Bruce and his unconquerable spider, all the other figures of a history blocked out for him in strong, certain masses of black and white in a way only possible to one almost totally immune from the disadvantages of education.

Hmmmm. "...only possible to one almost totally immune from the disadvantages of education...". It may have been possible to write that in 1966 – not so sure about today.

2021 March 29:

Assertions that we are prisoners of our own identity and forbidden from comprehending any broader experience gives rise to the cultural crime of "[appropriation](#)", delegitimising and devaluing thought that belongs to someone else. It is represented as theft of an experience, an idea, or an understanding that is someone else's property by virtue of their birth or allegiance (a privilege conferred by race, gender, and even by character or personality).

... the writers' association [PEN](#) is being drawn into dispute over a declaration claiming the right of authors to imagination, allowing them to describe the world from the point of view of characters from other cultural backgrounds. At issue is a charter manifesto, [The Democracy of the Imagination](#), passed unanimously by delegates of PEN International at

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the 85th world congress in Manila in 2019. A year on ... PEN's US arm, PEN America, has not endorsed the manifesto, which includes the principle: "PEN believes the imagination allows writers and readers to transcend their own place in the world to include the ideas of others."

While welcoming the commitment to freedom of expression, officials at PEN America indicate that aspects of the declaration might be perceived as straying into the contentious territory of cultural appropriation ... While accusations of misrepresentation are often made in social justice activism, only rarely have they extended into the realm of the imagination ... The manifesto ... may only serve to establish that freedom of expression is an area of increasing dissension. In 2015, PEN America was met with dissent ... over its decision to give its Freedom of Expression Courage Award to Charlie Hebdo. More recently, members of PEN's LA arm staged a protest over an invitation to Julian Assange to speak on press freedoms.

According to Chiari Bottici, author of *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* and professor of philosophy at the New School in New York, the manifesto is beset with problems. "Imagination is the faculty to imagine what is not there, to give us the capacity to put ourselves in other people's shoes, but it is also what enables us to lie, and even purports such massive collective lies such as racism, sexism, classism, and thus even fascism ... a lot of racialised and sexed people have been unable to inhabit 'their own space' because they have been overwhelmed by the ideas and worldview of others ..."

How horrible it is for someone to claim ownership over the space in which another thinks and feels, to privilege their own insights not by facts and argument but by claims to virtue based on birth and experience, what James Madison pejoratively called "[the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind](#)." It is one thing to argue, as did Madison, that thought is a person's "most sacred property" and to dispute strenuously with others you disagree with but just as personal liberty stops (as has been said) at the end of the other guy's nose, it must surely stop at the edge of another person's mind. It could be argued (probably has been) that archival description (and memory work more generally) involves an imaginative understanding of the world and that this fight is ours also. But how much more is at stake for us in our endeavour to get at the facts and to wrestle with accuracy unencumbered by this sort of nonsense.

<<Michael Piggott: Had to smile at PEN America's thinking that aspects of the PEN International's declarations such as imagination allowing writers and readers transcend their own place in the world including the ideas of others "might be perceived as straying into the contentious territory of cultural appropriation". Might be perceived? What fertile imagination! Talk about an own goal. As for "cultural appropriation", one of the best local examples involved [Helen Dale](#). It was a perfect storm culture wars controversy attracting terms like literary hoax, holocaust denial and ideological conformity. As for whether archivists and others in memory institutions need to be alert to the issue, I'm not sure, and probably like Chris hope - just for a change - others might post comments. Incidentally, the 1994 multi-award-winning book which started Dale's rise to fame/infamy, *The hand that signed the paper* which she published as Helen Demidenko, is [catalogued](#) by the NLA using this false name and Dewey numbers and subject terms assuming it to be fiction.>>

2021 March 30:

<<Jeanette Bastian: ... I am wondering whether 'cultural appropriation' is more a matter of intent than anything else. While I don't think any of us can really walk in another person's shoes, certainly we can imagine that walk - and as long as we acknowledge that 'imagining' is what we are doing, rather than passing it off as the real thing isn't that at least one difference between fiction and non-fiction. I suggest that 'appropriation' is an issue for archivists particularly in terms of Collections. Collecting records from a particular ethnic or other community without their

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involvement and permission and then touting this collection as an example of the 'diversity' of the Archives might be considered appropriation.>>

<<Andrew Waugh: I think it's a little more nuanced than that. While I don't think that authors should be restricted to writing books (or characters) that reflect their own lived experience, I also think that there is a less pleasant underbelly to the authors' arguments ...

- The first issue is that there is no way that an author, or most of their readers, would have any way of knowing whether their imagination was sufficient ... given that the authors, the publishers, and the readers generally share a common background (in Australia, they are usually all white, middle class, and middle aged), it's not obvious why their shared judgement about emotional truth is at all likely to reflect that of a person from a different background ... I can certainly understand why a community would be angry about someone from outside their community telling their stories badly ...
- The second issue flows on from the first. Authors write books to make money ... I can well understand the anger in various communities about such privileged authors monetising the community's stories ...
- Cynically, I can't help feeling that there is a final issue. There seems to be a strong element of self interest in the position of some of the authors. If it becomes the norm in literature that you're expected to have experienced the life you focus on in your work, the literary opportunities for white, middle class, authors are going to be restricted.

Like many 'cancel culture' panics this is being framed from the perspective of the privileged ... if you're an author telling someone else's story then you might have to get used to being criticised if your imagination doesn't cut it, or just because you're presuming to tell the story at all ... And I should have said that the issues here have exact parallels in the work of archivists, as has been long pointed out. Archivists in, for example, a government archive are writing archival descriptions about records created by people who are just like them. In many cases this doesn't matter (describing railway records, for example). In other cases it may matter a lot.>>

<<Mike Jones: Well said Andrew ... these issues are not just about the individual, or the right to imagine things about which one has no direct experience. It is about privilege and the functioning of power—which voices are published and promoted, and who is excluded as a result. Perhaps an interesting archival example is to consider LGBTIQ+ archives or trans archives. I would argue the most effective examples of these archives around the world were founded and are largely run by members of the communities who are the subjects of the archives. If anyone were to claim that any archivist could just as easily write the acquisition policies and retention and disposal schedules for these organisations and build their archival holdings for these communities, provided they were diligent, objective, and perhaps imaginative enough to do so is a position some might take, but I can't see much evidence of this being the case in practice.>>

<<Archivists ... are writing archival descriptions about records created by people who are just like them. In many cases this doesn't matter (describing railway records, for example). In other cases it may matter a lot>>

Quite so. When I am describing records of the Aboriginal protection system (including children being removed from their parents), I am indeed describing records created by people just like me. Well, maybe not just like me because the past is a foreign country. But such records are about people who are very much not like me. That's their parallel provenance. derived from those Aboriginal people who created the records in another sense (being parties to the activity which gave rise to their formation). That's why people (not just Aboriginal people) who are subject of the pressure of involvement with the records-maker (or who are descended from them or who identify in some other way) will tell you that such records are their records, part of their heritage.

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How deficient would your description be if it reflected the purpose of the activity depicted in the records solely from the point of view of the government whose programme it was, taking at face value their rationale and justification at the time – since abandoned (and maybe apologised for at a later time). And wouldn't it be just as wrong to swallow uncritically their subsequent explanations and rationalisations (and, yes, their apologies too). And what about the voice of those good, well-meaning people who fostered the stolen children? You can see another point of view, a different experience, in the puzzled faces and pained tones when they are interviewed on TV and accused of cruelty. Who speaks for them?

Well, my answer (it will surprise no one to hear) is not us. It's not our job to take the point of view of anyone involved in the activity (governments, Aborigines, foster carers, activists, the children themselves or their families) but to depict it as accurately as we can.

People say to me that this is heartless, that we have a duty to empathise with injustice (in effect, to take sides). I think that is too heavy a burden for the humble descriptive archivist or maybe just something that interferes with our single-minded purpose to get at the truth and let others make their judgements based on our best endeavours to give them the means to do so. Let us be clear. This involves separating, so far as we can, our professional technique from our humanity. If we submit that technique to the claims of empathy, we sacrifice judgement for feeling.

From that perspective (and I know this view is not widely shared) it is not difficult to resist charges of appropriation since the basis for such charges is a false one – viz. that in order to get at the truth of something you have to be something you are not (and never can be). That the mind cannot comprehend someone else's experience is obvious enough. But why should their experience give rise to judgement that is any truer than mine? But the cancellation doctrine goes further than that, doesn't it? It denigrates and delegitimises my judgement in favour of that of someone else. And it does so, not on the basis that it is a better, truer, more accurate analysis, but because of who that person is. I think that deferring to someone else's judgment in those circumstances is demeaning to them and shameful to me.

2021 March 31:

<<Let us be clear. This involves separating, so far as we can, our professional technique from our humanity. If we submit that technique to the claims of empathy, we sacrifice judgement for feeling.>>

Does this, then, mean there is no place in description (and memory work more generally) for morality and feeling? Of course not. How could anyone suppose that judgement can be devoid of either. That's not my point at all. I'm with Acton – judgement is the antithesis of "neutrality", analysis must reach a conclusion. What is at issue here is how to make judgements, by whom they can be made. and the distinction between technique and values.

<<If I ruled the world, [critical thinking](#) would, as I've said before, be central to education – not what to think, but how to think. 26 Feb., 2021>>

[“Nerd immunity”](#)

How many conspiracy theorists does it take to change a lightbulb? ... it takes only a dozen anti-vaxxers to spread dangerous misinformation to millions of people. According to a report from the NGO Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), up to 65% of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter can be traced back to [just 12 people](#). Although Facebook has disputed the report's methodology, the 12 have been nicknamed the “disinformation dozen”, and include Robert F Kennedy Jr, the nephew of John F Kennedy ... Free-speech issues aside, banning people from tech platforms is a game of whack-a-

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mole. As long as the incentive structures for spreading false information remain in place, more conspiracy theorists will pop up ... They have nifty ways to hijack your attention, but they can't wave a magic wand and force you to believe that Bill Gates engineered the pandemic so that he can implant trackable microchips in people ... Misinformation is never going to go away; it isn't just a Big Tech problem, it's an education problem. Instead of just yelling at tech companies, politicians should be focusing on what Taiwan's digital minister calls "[nerd immunity](#)" – the government should be investing in education so people have the skills to identify fake news.

Finland, which was rated Europe's most resistant nation to fake news last year, is [one model of how you do this](#). In 2014, after an increase in disinformation from Russia, the government embedded media literacy in the national curriculum. Starting in primary school, kids learn the critical thinking skills needed to parse the modern information ecosystem. Students learn how easy it is to manipulate statistics in their maths lessons, for example. They learn how to distinguish satire from conspiracy theories in their Finnish lessons. They look at how images can be used for propaganda in art class. And this sort of education isn't just given to children: Finnish civil servants, journalists and NGO workers are also trained in digital literacy skills ...

Banning a few anti-vaxxers from Facebook may have short-term benefits but if we want to build healthy societies in the long-term we have to prioritise education and develop nerd immunity.

<<... these issues are not just about the individual, or the right to imagine things about which one has no direct experience. It is about privilege and the functioning of power ...>>

We are [prisoners of identity until we transcend it](#) and we begin that journey with a proper understanding of difference.

The question of difference as it relates to the nature and implications of the historical encounter between Indic and Western cultural and intellectual traditions under the British Empire can be broadly approached in two ways: difference as identity and difference as thought. In the discourse of difference as identity, the notion of difference functions as the basis of cultural and national identity. In the discourse of difference as thought, on the other hand, difference functions as a marker of the nature and specificity of thought, its origin and historical significance. The crucial difference between the two approaches is that difference as thought goes beyond identity in its claim to universality and truth.

2021 April 3:

Facts are stubborn things

Is a transcendent reach beyond identity and towards independence of mind an abnegation of faith or is it rather a commitment to [universality and truth](#) that refuses to be shackled by "social context" (past or present)?

Rooting around the basement of my family home in Mannheim, south-west [Germany](#), some years ago, I discovered evidence that in 1938 my grandfather had taken advantage of antisemitic Nazi policies to buy a small business from a Jewish family at a low price ... After the war [a survivor from the family] wrote asking for reparations, but my grandfather refused to face up to his responsibilities.

I was shocked ... "I used to tell my father: what upsets me is not that you've done the Nazi salute ..., it's that even today you still don't recognise the atrocities of the Third Reich and your own responsibility." Testimonies are less reliable than documents. They are filtered through experience and emotion, sadness and anger, but also love and loyalty. I had to confront them with historical facts. How far was it possible not to be a Nazi under the Third Reich? ... If conceiving of Auschwitz was difficult, it was still impossible to have "seen nothing, heard nothing" ... I also took into account the psychosocial mechanisms that form

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social and individual attitudes: conformism to moral standards, fear, opportunism, as well as political and ideological manipulation ...

Eventually I came to the conclusion that my grandfather was not blind to the immorality of his actions. He was enabled by the legalisation of the looting of Jewish property, but he acted from an opportunism that was his own ... Beyond the complexity of historical contexts and the grey areas of any human endeavour, there are actions that were as wrong yesterday as they are today. Taking refuge in moral relativism while facing the shadows of history is an easy escape, but it leads to a dead end. Yet how many countries are [stuck in denial](#) under the pretext that they refuse to judge their imperial past by today's standards? ...

The millions of Europeans who directly and indirectly benefited from the slave trade while keeping a Bible by their beds were not ignorant or unenlightened. They were simply opportunists and hypocrites, bigots betraying their God when it suited them ... Throughout this dark history, voices, especially those of the enslaved and colonised themselves, were calling out these immoral double standards.

If Britain and other nations want to come to terms with their past, they need to accept a minimal consensus: slavery and colonialism cannot be explained by the "social and moral standards" of a different age ... Such consensus wouldn't "cancel" the debate; instead it would depolarise it. It would open the possibility for fruitful dialogue and help overcome the old victim-versus-perpetrator dialectic, replacing it with a culture of honesty and responsibility ... reading German historian Norbert Frei, I understood that the fact that we cannot know what we would have done "does not mean that we do not know how we should have behaved".

2022 December 22:

Thought we might get back to this one eventually (I say "we" because this thread attracted few participants).

The unenlightened are going nutty over the [Cambridge Dictionary](#) redefining "man" and "woman" to provide for gender diversity, raising the interesting issue of whether it is a dictionary's job to describe or prescribe - to approve usage or try to tame it. Should a dictionary follow a shift in usage or lead it? It is clear a dictionary must portray the language as she is spoke (what else is there to base a definition on unless you're a [grammarian](#) - a "wise man, person who knows Latin, or magician"?), but is this definition shift accurate? Are the Cambridge scholars implying that common usage of these terms does now (where it didn't before) generally acknowledge diversity or that it may (that all do, most do, or some do & some don't)? Or, have they become Culture Warriors urging that it should cf. Pronoun Wars?

Do **our finding aids** portray things as they are, as they seem to us, or as they seem to some folks (but not necessarily everyone)? Should we try to [stand aloof and be "objective"](#), acknowledge the tension and try to be "[balanced](#)" or even corrective. [enter the fray](#) and take sides, or offer [parallel views](#) as best we can and cop it from everyone? Happy the archivist (if any) who has not grappled with these issues.

2023 January 9:

[When is "respect" intolerance? When is "diversity" subjugation? When does "harm" suppress debate? \("Respect ... should have superseded academic freedom" Chilling.\)](#)

<<**Do our finding aids portray things as they are, as they seem to us, or as they seem to some folks (but not necessarily everyone)? Should we try to [stand aloof and be "objective"](#), acknowledge the tension and try to be "[balanced](#)" or even corrective, [enter the fray](#) and take sides, or offer [parallel views](#) as best we can and cop it from everyone?**>>

It is a beautiful painting found in a 14th-century Persian manuscript ... It shows the Prophet Muhammad receiving his first Quranic revelations from the angel Gabriel ... Last

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October, an instructor at Hamline University, Minnesota, displayed the painting during an online class on Islamic art. The instructor (who has not been named) had warned of what she was about to do in case anyone found the image offensive and [did not wish to view it](#). No matter, a student complained to the university authorities. David Everett, Hamline's associate vice-president of inclusive excellence, condemned the classroom exercise as "undeniably inconsiderate, disrespectful and Islamophobic". A letter written by Mark Berkson, chair of the department of religion, defending the instructor and providing historical and religious context for her actions, was [published on the website of *The Oracle*](#), the university's student newspaper, and then [taken down because it "caused harm"](#). The instructor was ["released" from further teaching duties](#).



It is a depressing but all too familiar story. From *The Satanic Verses* to the Danish cartoons to *Charlie Hebdo*, the last decades have spawned a succession of often murderous controversies over depictions of [Islam](#) deemed blasphemous or racist. What is striking about the Hamline incident, though, is that the image at the heart of the row cannot even in the most elastic of definitions be described as Islamophobic. It is an artistic treasure that exalts Islam and has long been cherished by Muslims. Yet, to show it is now condemned as Islamophobic because... a student says so. Even to question that claim is to cause "harm". As [Berkson asked in another \(unpublished\) letter](#) he sent to *The Oracle*, after his first had been removed: "Are you saying that disagreement with an argument is a form of 'harm'?"

That is precisely [what the university is saying](#). "Respect for the observant Muslim students in that classroom should have superseded academic freedom," wrote Fayneese Miller, the university's president, and Everett in a letter to staff and students ... Universities should defend all students' right to practise their faith. They should not allow that faith to dictate the curriculum. That is to introduce blasphemy taboos into the classroom. Hamline has effectively declared whole areas of Islamic history beyond scholarly purview because they may cause offence ... As Audrey Truschke, associate professor of South Asian history at Rutgers University, [observed](#), Hamline's action "endangers... professors who show things in class, from premodern Islamic art to Hindu images with swastikas to *Piss Christ*".

One can only wonder that the university bureaucrats who declared representations of Muhammad to be proscribed by Islam did not ask themselves why, if this was true, there were figurative Islamic paintings to show the class in the first place? There has developed a historical amnesia about the many Islamic traditions, especially Persian, Turkish and Indian, which have celebrated portrayals of Muhammad; portrayals found in manuscripts, paintings, postcards, even in mosques. While there have always been debates on this issue within Islam, the strict prohibition on picturing Muhammad is primarily Sunni and relatively recent. The growth of Wahhabism, a fundamentalist strand of Islam that developed in the 18th century and came eventually to be the ideological cement of modern Saudi Arabia, has been particularly important ... Even so, Gruber observes, as late as 2000, a senior Saudi-based legal scholar [recognised certain portrayals of Muhammad](#) as both

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“permissible and laudable”. Only in the wake of 9/11, and the emergence of more fundamentalist forms of Islam, did the absolute prohibition of images of Muhammad become more widely accepted.

The actions of Hamline University are a threat not just to academic freedom but to religious freedom, too. They implicitly disavow the variety of traditions that constitute Islam and condemn those traditions as in some sense so bigoted that they cannot be shown in a class on Islamic art history. University bureaucrats are, as non-Muslims, taking part in a theological debate within Islam and siding with the extremists. That is why, the historian Amna Khalid observes, [Hamline] have “flattened the rich history and diversity of Islamic thought” and “privileged a most extreme and conservative Muslim point of view”. In an age in which there are demands for the syllabus to be “decolonised”, she adds, “Hamline’s position is a kind of arch-imperialism, reinforcing a monolithic image of Muslims propounded by the cult of authentic Islam”. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of Hamline’s action is the use of the language of diversity to eviscerate the very meaning of diversity ... Too many people today demand that we respect the diversity of society, but fail to see the diversity of minority communities in those societies. As a result, progressive voices often get dismissed as not being authentic, while the most conservative figures become celebrated as the true embodiment of their communities ... Both bigots and liberals erase the richness and variety of Muslim communities ...

Diversity used to mean the creation of a space for dissent and disagreement and tolerance the willingness to live with things that one might find offensive or distasteful. Now, diversity too often describes a space in which dissent and disagreement have to be expunged in the name of “respect” and tolerance requires one to refrain from saying or doing things that might be deemed offensive. It is time we re-grasped both diversity and tolerance in their original sense.

2023 January 21:

<<if you're an author telling someone else's story then you might have to get used to being criticised if your imagination doesn't cut it, or just because you're presuming to tell the story at all. Andrew's Waugh 30 May, 2021>>

Andrew’s comments about the perils of imaginative literature also apply, it seems to me, to the work of historians and descriptive archivists, Indeed, Mike Jones said as much on 30 May 2021:

If anyone were to claim that any archivist could just as easily write the acquisition policies and retention and disposal schedules for these organisations and build their archival holdings for these communities, provided they were diligent, objective, and perhaps imaginative enough to do so is a position some might take, but I can't see much evidence of this being the case in practice.

What is the difference between ease and accuracy? Would anyone dare argue that diligence and objectivity might produce a better result (however defined) and not just an equivalent one? Who owns rights over the use and interpretation of ideas? Is there ever a settled view or just the latest one awaiting revision? Doesn’t a community claiming ownership over its own past fortify separation at the risk of subverting empathy? Possibly another example of “history's capacity to create obstacles” (see 12 Feb., 2021). Might not a better argument be that community involvement is an antidote to neglect by diligent, objective, imaginative outsiders?

The jostle around use and interpretation is well illustrated by the term [Holocaust](#) which has been broadened from ethnically-based slaughter (Armenians, Jews, Roma, Kurds) to include widespread killing that is not specifically genocidal in nature (although the geo-political dynamic means it is often ethnically focussed). [Asian Holocaust](#) has been applied

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to Japanese crimes against civilian and military personnel during (and in the period leading up to) WW2.

The Asian Holocaust

A few days ago, China [announced](#) that it would re-write its school textbooks to add 6 years to a war it fought with Japan in the 1930s and 40s. Rather than listing the war as lasting “from 1937–1945,” the new books would describe the conflict as spanning 14 years, from 1931–1945 ... the news is a reminder that Japan raped, tortured and murdered tens of millions of people in what’s [become known](#) as “the Asian Holocaust” — something that textbooks in Western countries barely even mention at all ... *New Visions* 17 Jan., 2017

These matters are especially fraught with disputes over terminology, facts, and interpretation. The term is now increasingly applied to any large-scale [massacre](#) (an indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of many people). Wikipedia’s attempt to [rank](#) them demonstrates (to my mind) the perils of comparison.

- The list doesn’t go further back than 1755, with two odd exceptions (the [Sack of Carthage](#) 149 BC and the [Asiatic Vespers](#) in 88 BC). This leaves out Sicilian Vespers, Genghis Khan, Indigenous North Americans, decimation by disease of South America’s indigenous people, the Huns, the Vikings, Spanish Inquisition, St Bartholomew, North Korea, and many worse exterminations attributed to the Romans (*they create a desert and call it peace* in the immortal words of Tacitus).
- Boundaries are slippery and likely disputed. Nazi killing of Jews is separated on the List from massacres in Eastern Europe generally - with Poles, for no apparent reason, also separated out. [Tasmanian Aborigines](#) are listed but not Aborigines generally during White Settlement.
- Estimated deaths range from a top of 4.2–7.0 million down to 400-1,000 on the List raising the contrast between quantity and texture. The Shoah, for example, is estimated (according to the List) to have eliminated two-thirds of European Jews whereas the much smaller (est, 1,900) [Mori Genocide](#) is said to have eradicated 95%. Which is worse: the bigger or the more extensive?

This slipperiness may arise from projection of current political and/or ideological interest in aligning the past with later, anachronistic concerns. The definitions become very slippery indeed when a distinction is made between [crimes against humanity](#) (e.g, persecution, enslavement, suppression) and the more specific notion of [war-crimes](#) (which revolves around what is lawful when you kill people in battle). Topically, the [Holodomor](#) is estimated to have cost between 3.9 and 5.0 million lives – cf. Robert Conquest [Harvest of Sorrow](#), an example where a community sought an outsider to speak for them:

In 1981, the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute approached Conquest with the project of a book on the 1932–1933 famine. The Ukrainian National Association, a New Jersey-based ethnic fraternal group with a [hard-right](#) tradition (its newspaper [Svoboda](#) was banned by Canada during World War II for its pro-German sympathies), sponsored the work with a \$80,000 subsidy ... In accepting the sponsorship, Conquest was perceived as being in the pocket of the Ukrainians. In response to those claims, Conquest stated: "I did not do the book specifically on the Ukraine. About half the book is on the non-Ukrainian side ... The sponsors made no attempt whatever to suggest what I should write ...

The [United States Congress](#) promoted awareness of the [Holodomor](#) and set [U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine](#), which was authorized in 1985 ... The commission conducted archival and oral history research under a \$382,000 congressional appropriation, leading to a final report conclusion in 1988 that "Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against the Ukrainians in 1932–1933." ... *The Harvest of Sorrow* had a clear moral intent, namely that if the older Soviet leaders were direct accomplices in an artificially contrived famine and the younger leaders today still justify such procedure, then it followed that they

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might be willing to kill tens of millions of foreigners or suffer a loss of millions of their own subjects in a war ...

2023 January 23:

<<The State cannot stymie the evil of misinformation and it cannot establish a Ministry of Truth. Information warfare can only be won by boots on the ground in the culture wars. People, not Policy. Culture cannot be planned “because it is also the unconscious background of all planning” (T S Eliot). But I agree that the State can help People to get on their feet (“to read and interpret”) - without having control over where that will lead. A bureaucrat’s nightmare ... CH 26 Feb., 2021>>

Only just caught up with this [article](#) in *The Guardian* from last June:

[A] survey by the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi) found that current students are more likely to support measures that restrain freedom of speech or expression on campus, and approve of removing offensive materials and memorials, compared with their predecessors ...

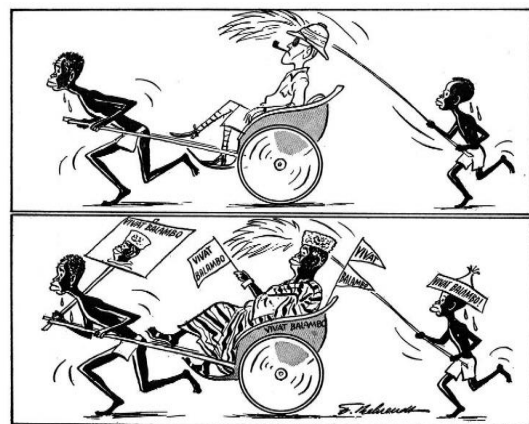
No surprises there. It needs no survey by Hepi to tell us this. What I found interesting was in the tail end of the article:

The survey revealed little interest in banning political parties or organisations from campus ... There was little support for banning mainstream political parties, with 11% wanting a ban on the Conservatives, 5% a ban on Labour, and a further 5% a ban on the Liberal Democrats.

Mainstream political parties may have become so bland that there is little motivation left to silence them. If young British intellectuals are anything to go by, it may be that social issues are becoming more important to them than political ones. Perhaps this is a by-product of their being more continuously engaged with social media than in occasionally participating in the ballot– replacing interest in politics with a thirst for [social control](#). One is almost tempted to think of bread and circuses and a disenfranchised Roman populace.



Cancellation



De-colonisation

Growing support for “measures that restrain freedom of speech or expression” is likely to be very much concerned with “having control over where that will lead”. A social solution to a political problem that needs no Ministry of Truth, albeit one that is a nightmare for free-thinkers. As ever, the US (where social conflict leeches back into political toxicity) seems to afford an exception to the rest of the Anglo-Sphere.

2023 January 26:

Australia Day Reflection

<< While our memories are imperfect and can shape states in unpredictable ways, they substantially inform our views and what we believe to be “truth.” Memory, therefore, is one of the best, yet underappreciated, tools that we have for post-conflict reconciliation >>

MUSINGS FROM THE LIST 2021 - 2024

<< **The complex events we recall and commemorate during this time are integral to the story that has shaped our nations, in all their diversity. They are, however, events to be remembered and understood, respecting the fact that different perspectives exist. In doing this, we can facilitate a more authentic interpretation ... This journey of ethical remembering [allows] us to examine the nature of commemoration itself and how it might unburden us of history's capacity to create obstacles to a better, shared future ... Quoted in this thread on 12 Feb., 2021>>**

Where is the dividing line between memory-induced reconciliation and sectarianism? Between bringing-togetherness and dividing-from-each-otherness? Between moving on and looking back? As custodians of memories (just some of them, not all) these are questions for us. Northern Ireland used to be the by-word for [sectarian violence](#) based on historical differences and remembered grievances. This has now (happily) subsided there into mere political bitterness but within a still [fragile context](#). The assault on Australia Day here began in 1938 with the first [Day of Mourning](#). It was [celebrated](#) then

You came here only recently, and you took our land away from us by force. You have almost exterminated our people, but there are enough of us remaining to expose the humbug of your claim, as white Australians, to be a civilised, progressive, kindly and humane nation,

and [opposed](#) then

The most effective way to help the aborigines was not to weep and bemoan the past, but to act in the living present. The time was past to talk of the segregation of the aborigines. They should come more fully into the national family

in terms that echo some of our present debates but without the capital "A".

The transition from humbug to enlightenment was always going to be intense but not necessarily violent. It is unlikely that racial [sectarianism](#) will overtake us here in Australia any time soon (it might disrupt the Cricket) but am I alone in wondering if a more modest backlash may arise when assertion prods complacency too far?

Historical acceptance is one of the [five dimensions](#) of reconciliation. Acceptance would mean all Australians acknowledge this nation's history of injustice, colonisation, dispossession, displacement, exploitation and violence against First Nations people ... The topic of Australia's difficult history is also often rebutted as First Nations people's failure to move on and simply "[get over it](#)" ... Research has [found](#) non-Indigenous people can feel Australia's tainted history is at odds with their own faith-based values or cultural world views (for example, not to be rude or to speak out). This can lead to a kind of [culture shock](#), bringing another barrier to learning about the cultural politics of this country. Culture shock can lead to people feeling their identity is under attack when being educated. This can lead to defensiveness, feelings of guilt and culpability, animosity and [fragility](#).

... In 2020, Australian National University researchers [tested](#) more than 11,000 Australian participants for implicit, unconscious bias. This research found 75% of participants held a negative or unconscious bias against Indigenous people. This correlation between negative bias could mean the development of racist attitudes, which is in stark contrast to the utopian initiatives of Reconciliation Week ... Addressing racism within Australia is not just a cognitive exercise. True change requires constant education, critical reflection and self awareness. When we ignore engaging with emotive content and fundamental learning, we are ignoring the very real human suffering occurring within this country. Reconciliation becomes nothing more than performative allyship, enacted one week of every year. [Bindi Bennett](#)

I am reluctant to apply the term "cognitive exercise" to any part of the Australian consciousness but it seems to me that the elites (of which we are part) are well away down the path of "engaging with emotive content" and that a bit more cognition might not go amiss. Our shrines of memory (holding on to many of the sources) are all doing their bit with [Diversity Plans](#) and [Displays](#). It remains to be seen [whether the fair-dinkums will follow](#) when they are required to move on from their default position of amiable-feel-good-

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virtue to “feeling their identity is under attack when being educated” (when it comes down to a choice between empathy and lamb chops). Beware of prodding “unconscious bias” too far, perhaps? And I fear [David Unaipon’s](#) plea for [assimilation](#) “into a national family” is a lost cause.

If the non-indigenous are to collaborate on the road to reconciliation it involves honestly placing “injustice, colonisation, dispossession, displacement, exploitation and violence” alongside [health](#), [education](#), [housing](#), [booze](#), [domestic violence](#), [child abuse](#), [incarceration](#), [street violence](#), and so on – the whole damn’ thing - and not inviting derision by obsessing on trivial matters like anniversaries. Reconciliation’s foundations should be built on the serious issues, not the cosmetic ones. Nothing wrong with make-up – so long as you don’t mistake it for the real thing. And when you start probing some of the serious issues (such as booze, juvenile crime, and domestic violence) you begin to uncover social problems in this country that go well beyond the indigenous community. Turns out some of them aren’t just Black Problems after all. How’s that for assimilation? As always, the key questions are [how to link the past to the present](#) and [whether the past is a yoke or a springboard](#).

But I seriously doubt that the dreadful statistics apply to all indigenous people anyway. If you exclude the fully or partly [integrated](#) (those employed in or running businesses, working 9 to 5, living in towns and cities, elected representatives, professionals and tradesmen, actors, musicians, and writers, service personnel, [advisors](#), and all the [activists](#)) you are left with those still enduring the [legacy of reserves and missions in camps and on the outskirts of rural townships](#) and (more hopefully) in [homelands and outstations](#) and that is where the horror is to be found and must be dealt with. And if that distinction is not being made in the data, then the metrics are even worse than they appear. But we are often invited to think in stereotypes (especially by some politicians, activists, shock-jocks, and commentators who have few qualms about speaking for indigenous people as a category) - the notion that indigenous Australians are all one undifferentiated group, who think alike, and to whom the same generalities, norms, nostrums, and platitudes can be applied, shrugging off this lazy approach with modifiers such as “some” or “typically”. The ludicrous idea that the health issues facing my Aboriginal neighbour in suburban Narara are the same as in the townships. So like a crusade. So insulting!



Thoughtful proponents of reconciliation understand that it is [too blunt](#) an instrument (“interpretation of the concept continues to be debated, as well as its usefulness in making real improvements to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”). When you only have a hammer, everything is a nail. Celebration, empathy, and mourning are easier to handle but they only take you so far. The truth is more complicated. As the many links embedded in this post tend to show, those complications are being explored and set forth and, so far as I can judge, the websites of our memory houses mostly make an honourable contribution with [contextualising narratives](#), [research guides](#), and [discovery aids](#). The

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archivist (I have always believed) works out from the particularity and avoids [generalised or stereotypical narratives](#). There lies our professional advantage.

Our Canadian cousins are [treading the same path](#): 69% “believe King Charles III should advance the cause of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples” while a mere 54% “believe Queen Elizabeth II’s passing should have been observed and marked with a full holiday for everyone”. Glad to see they’ve got their priorities straight over there. I can’t believe anyone would ask those questions, let alone answer them, except as an exercise to demonstrate how vacuous the vulgar mind can be.

PS Central Coast Council is observing Australia Day so my daily early morning visit to the [hydrotherapy pool](#) has been disarranged today. Hmmmph. Doesn’t happen on [Reconciliation Day](#). And I see that double demerits will apply, so that might be another reason for scrapping this holiday.

2023 January 27:

Australia Day may mark [the 1788 landing](#) of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove or in the alternative view [the day we ceased to be Britons](#) (the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* which came into force on 26 January 1949). Either way, it is clear that it has now become (surprisingly perhaps) something else. It has become a day-off but also (for many) a day of celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be - in all our mongrel diversity. This may be down in part to enthusiasm expressed by many of post-war and more recent immigrant and refugee origin.

Indigenous protest objects to this, wants us to feel bad about it, wants us to apologise. I hope not all indigenous people feel that way because it sends an awful message (intentionally or not) that indigenous people don’t want to be part of us, that they want separation and division. And I can’t see how that can be any part of reconciliation. Somehow (I don’t know how) our indigenous past has to become part of our national story - I don’t know how but, even at the risk of ideological conflict, I believe our houses of memory have to find that tone as many are trying hard to do (I believe).

As I’ve said, I think bickering about an anniversary is trivial. And there might be trivial reasons for changing the date – not wanting the inconvenience of a holiday that may fall mid-week for example, but I suppose what makes it less trivial are the ideological implications (intended or not) – that indigenous people demand “other-ness” (a word I don’t use), that they seek confrontation and exceptionalism instead of diversity and understanding – irreconcilable because no apology will ever be enough.

<<Andrew Waugh: I'm sure, Chris, that you are aware that things can be symbols for multiple ideas. Even if it was true that January 26 has now become "(for many) a day of celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be - in all our mongrel diversity," this does not mean that it cannot also be a symbol for the invasion of indigenous Australia. Indeed, the very debate over the meaning of January 26 is symbolic about the refusal of white Australia to acknowledge the history of Australia. The very insistence that Australia Day is about a "celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be" is notably a refusal to consider Australia's history ... And so "bickering" about the date is not "trivial". It actually goes to the heart of white Australia's acceptance of its black history.>>

<<David Povey: ... I assume you mean Black pre-history, that is the period before the keeping of records, as the keeping of records is necessary for something to be "history" ... Whether White Australians choose to celebrate Australia Day on January 26 is a matter of little concern to most residents of remote Australia - although one women said when asking me for a pair of thongs - "You stole the whole fucking country, and you won't even give me a pair of thongs!".>>

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2023 January 27:

*This is a war. A war that was declared on our people over 200 years ago ... It's a day to remember the murders and ***** massacres of my people ... I think it's important to get the voice in Parliament ... No, I'm Treaty first, and I always have been ... We don't want to celebrate it and I don't think that anyone should ... A Referendum is not for us, it's not for you ... This is the voice [and] they don't want to hear it because we live in our truth ... I think we all need to come together and fight until we achieve that ... I'm going to support them no matter what they want ...*

Protesters gather across Sydney and Melbourne ...

Neither you nor I, Andrew, can speak for indigenous people. I prefer to analyse what I see as the part indigenous voices do/ought/might play in the process of reconciliation and how we may reciprocate – not to imagine what they think or to try to speak for them - not even to endorse or condemn what I think they think - but to have a view (certainly) on how those voices which are being raised support or subvert the reconciliation process. You seem to think that taking sides is necessary, but I believe that taking sides is counter-productive. But at the same time judgement is needed. Reconciliation can't be about winners and losers. White Australia has to change (surely) but also (maybe) Black Australia must change also. I can't see how being a microphone for the rhetoric and playing the blame game (if that's all it is) helps.

But it's not all rhetoric. Indigenous people are not all of one mind as the video shows. Your temperate account of a position that may or may not be held by some in the indigenous community is a plea for me to sign on to a position that you are imagining is theirs. As you say "Change the Day" is symbolic and yielding the Day would certainly have a significance for some people that I simply don't think it has. But it's become a totem that is invested with a significance that is passionately felt but which I think would deliver very little. I'd prefer to ask questions about what really matters. Without in any way denying the place of memory, I would like to go beyond denouncing the past in order to keep on fixing the present. You seem to be saying that we can't do the one without first doing the other. One of the "multiple ideas" voiced yesterday is that nothing has changed and that is plain wrong. The focus should be on how to make things better not on blaming every unsolved problem on "the refusal of white Australia to acknowledge [our] history". And, if I may say so, I don't think all White Australians are of one mind about that either.

I'd prefer to engage directly with the people for whom you are claiming to speak, only a fraction of whom we see on the streets, and when I do I'll be giving back my view in what should be a dialogue, not a rant. A dialogue might lead to understanding (but not necessarily to agreement). A rant demands winners and losers and if you think that is the path to reconciliation you're probably not alone, but I think you're wrong. Of course, all this is hypothetical; at my age I won't be in dialogue with anyone but I'm dreaming now about how reconciliation might occur.

Since I believe the issue is trivial, if giving up the Day would help I for one would happily do so. But if you believe that would bring us into more harmonious relations with the angry people we see on the streets, again I think you're wrong. If you're right and giving up the Day would help, let's do it and not bicker about it. But let's not indulge in deceptive fantasies either about what would result. A judgement about that depends on a nuanced understanding of what indigenous people want (and I'm not sure that those the Government is listening to about The Voice are much better than you or I at understanding that). Be that as it may, I also believe that White Fellas (like you and me) are entitled to have views of our own that may not align with what Black Fellas think and that reconciliation, while it involves trying to understand each other and trying to tolerate each other does not necessarily involve agreeing with each other.

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2023 January 28:

Is reconciliation beyond the archivist's purview? Is it any of our business? Because our environment is made up of "multiple views" (an idea I'm not uncomfortable with) should we simply accept that the divide between the clowns and the ranters may be unbridgeable (understanding that theirs are only two "views" amongst the multiplicity) and proceed as if reconciling them is no business of ours? Or, as Andrew seems to be suggesting, take sides and help one side or another prevail?

Andrew speaks of the "refusal of White Australia to acknowledge the history of Australia". On the contrary, I see evidence of that acknowledgement everywhere, especially in our houses of memory. Yet it makes no difference, it seems, to the ranting and the clowning. The gap there doesn't close, it widens. Should we care about that? Provided we are acknowledging that hitherto unacknowledged history it isn't that enough? What matters what others may do? What more can be asked of us? More of the same I suppose.

Memory is never uncontested and maybe this historical battlefield is one we should navigate as we do (or ought to do) any other. Have faith in the record, tell the truth, fill in the gaps, and let others decide what to make of it. Not a doctrine I hear much repeated amongst archivists nowadays. I speak now not of our political posture, what we must do to survive and get along, but of what we believe.

2023 January 29:

<<[Andrew Waugh](#): ... I would hope that histories draw on a range of evidence from a variety of disciplines. For the history of indigenous Australians pre settlement, I'd expect histories to primarily draw on archeological evidence and oral history ...>>

The [National Museum](#) and other memory houses are taking a wide view of [sources](#), as you would expect. I have some sympathy for AWM which has a long-standing focus on documents (incl. film and images), artefacts, and some oral history but, if they're going to deal with Frontier Wars from now on, they'll have to move with the times, Leaving aside the divisions between pre- and post- European contact (which as Ketelaar and others remind us began in the early C17th not the late C18th) we know that [archival views](#) have also evolved, to some extent at least. There is still a divorce, albeit an increasingly murky one, between [evidence](#) and [knowledge](#) (between "[sources](#)" and "[resources](#)"). What price [Bruce Pascoe](#)?

The traditional distinction between [primary and secondary](#) sources is still made and the [defining characteristics](#) enumerated for intending scholars. [J M Ward](#) would be pleased ("*all research students should be chained to a desk in Fisher Library for three years*" – apocryphal). Takes me back, so many years ago now, to my time in Fourth Year History when, under Ward's leadership, we discussed dangerous ideas not shared with other undergraduates. What is the value of Shakespeare's [History Plays](#) as historical sources? Were they about Plantagenet History or Tudor History? What regard should we have for the [Speeches](#) in Thucydides (which are generally accepted not to have been verbatim)? We didn't discuss [Indigenous Knowledge](#) (bit avant-garde for the Sydney University History Department in the 1960s) but no one would have stopped us if anyone had thought of it – even though the Anthropology Department was just down the hall. But those seminars, in their limited way, were certainly about teaching us to consider "[alternative ways of knowing](#)" outside the narrow boundaries of our discipline.

I am reluctant to use the term record in this context because that leads back to the hoary old question *what is a record?* But Andrew can take heart, I think, that the common view of [historical source](#) is now a more expansive one.

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2023 February 10:

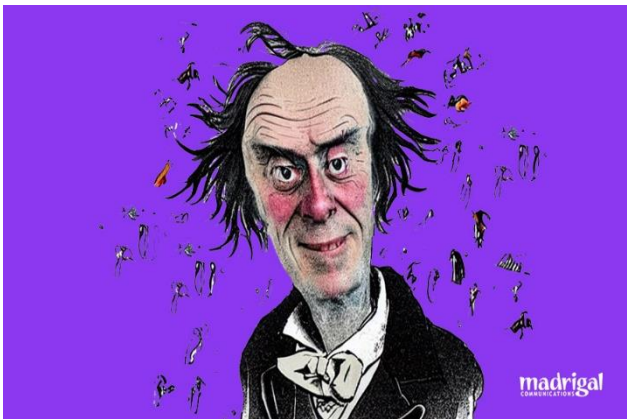
Here's an [example](#) of identity politics of which I was unaware (culpable ignorance on my part, I guess). As the article exemplifies, identity is almost always bound up with [memory](#) (false or otherwise) –

70% reject the idea that historical discrimination contributes to current challenges faced by Black Americans.

All about words or all about attitudes?

They are trying to [revise Roald Dahl](#) to make him inoffensive. Familiar territory for the [Blyton banners](#):

To address criticisms levelled at Blyton's work, some later editions have been altered to reflect more politically progressive attitudes towards issues such as race, gender, violence between young persons, the treatment of children by adults, and legal changes in Britain as to what is allowable for young children to do in the years since the stories were originally written (e.g. purchasing fireworks); modern reprints of the Noddy series substitute teddy bears or goblins for [golliwogs](#) ... [The Faraway Tree's](#) Dame Slap, who made regular use of corporal punishment, was changed to Dame Snap who no longer did so, and the names of Dick and Fanny in the same series were changed to Rick and Frannie. Characters in the [Malory Towers](#) and [St. Clare's](#) series are no longer [spanked](#) or threatened with a spanking, but are instead scolded. References to George's short hair making her look like a boy were removed in revisions to [Five on a Hike Together](#), reflecting the idea that girls need not have long hair to be considered feminine or normal. Anne of [The Famous Five](#) stating that boys cannot wear pretty dresses or like girls' dolls was removed ...



If Dick and Fanny are offensive, what is achieved by renaming them Rick and Franny? Why not Liam and Taylor? Thomas Bowdler “lent his name to the English verb **bowdlerise** which means 'to remove words or sections from a book or other work that are considered unsuitable or offensive'. The derivative noun is **bowdlerism**. Some examples of alterations made by Bowdler's edition:

- In [Hamlet](#), the death of [Ophelia](#) was called an accidental drowning, not a possibly intended suicide.
- "God!" as an exclamation is replaced with "Heavens!"
- In [Henry IV, Part 2](#), the [prostitute Doll Tearsheet](#) is omitted outright, the slightly more reputable Mistress Quickly retained.

Prominent modern figures such as [Michiko Kakutani](#) (in the [New York Times](#)) and [William Safire](#) (in his book, *How Not to Write*) have accused Bowdler of changing Lady Macbeth's famous "Out, damned spot!" line in [Macbeth](#) to "Out, crimson spot!"^[20] But Bowdler did not do that. [Thomas Bulfinch](#) and Stephen Bulfinch did, in their 1865 edition of Shakespeare's works.”

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The issue for us is how to deal with words and/or attitudes deemed offensive in our handling and descriptions of the records that embody them. Our choices include: suppression (access closure), redaction (black-out), contextualisation (in description), etc. (not yet alteration of the record itself, I trust, but when archives become exhibits - who knows?). The indefatigable [Tim Sherratt](#) has had great fun with our kind of bowdlerisation – viz. closed access - e.g. [diy-redactionart](#) (“I started off trying to automatically find redactions in ASIO files, I ended up finding art”). A subtle form of suppression would be confining our use of descriptive metadata to contemporary acceptable language thereby hiding the records from searchers familiar with authentic terminology of the past who looked for records using those forbidden terms but leaving the censorious untroubled.

Charles Dickens bowdlerised himself in relation to [Fagin](#) in later editions of *Oliver Twist* and made amends by introducing [Mr Riah](#) into *Our Mutual Friend*. To say nothing of Shylock (cf. John Gross [Shylock](#) 1994)

2023 February 26:

For there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

*... we repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. We were not aware that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved. We had no respect for traditional wisdom or the restraints of custom ... John Maynard Keynes, *My Early Beliefs* (1938)*

Archival descriptions do not have the status of literary texts (still less of scripture or the pronouncements of J M Keynes from an age that pre-dates social media democratisation), but [these issues](#) apply nevertheless. Does cultural sensitivity trump accuracy? When does fact become opinion? Or, opinion become fact for that matter? When does Dogma prevail over Ethics (*pace* Lord Acton)? When does accurate description yield to an obligation to provide "conversation tools ... to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time."

Consider how far the description of any body of records dealing with indigenous life and accounts given of it in the record (invariably by White observers) has to deal with the issues raised by the [Pascoe Thesis](#) (and disputed by others). Does the archivist accept Pascoe's revisionism (lauded in Parliament no less by our current PM and Foreign Minister), blend it into our descriptions of the historic records and incorporate that view, do we mention and endorse it as a “contextualisation”, do we mention and rebut it as a falsehood or dubious at best, or do we just say nothing as if it hadn't even been raised? Apparently, it's being taught in schools and universities as authoritative, so the idea that those using the records haven't heard of it is likely to be fanciful. More broadly, in a post-Truth Age, can we make, as we once did, broad assumptions about both a scholarly and even a vulgar consensus over unstated observations that are nowadays culturally challenged – a consensus that meant we didn't have to be explicit in our descriptions about what was generally accepted as given and that we could safely ignore flat-earthers and those who think surveillance balloons come from outer space?

What can you do with college graduates who've never heard of the French Revolution?

... In Australia, the [publishing] industry has long wrestled with how to handle books deemed to be outdated, with high schools decolonising their collections, audiobook producers editing classics and booksellers arguing for content warnings. Professor of Education at the University of Technology Sydney Rosemary Johnston said Australia had a history of editing children's books – most notably the Billabong books by Mary Grant Bruce, which were changed to remove controversial depictions of Aboriginal people, and

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Chinese and Irish immigrants ... Johnston said ... “It’s really nuanced ... We want that freedom of expression and to maintain the integrity, but we don’t want to publish anything dangerous that would impact a child’s life.”

... President of the Australian School Library Association Natalie Otten said there was a big debate on how to teach context on controversial titles without offending. “Considering the context of the time in which the material was first published can support learners to think about the content and its relevance in today’s world,” Otten said. “Rather than ‘banning’ books that are outdated, they can be used as rich conversation tools with learners to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time.”

2023 March 20:

Attribution wars

Aussie or Kiwi?: Phar Lap, Russell Crowe, Pavlovas. And what about that great line of English writers and dramatists: Swift, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Moore, Wilde, Shaw, et al?

Questions of attribution are constantly under review by art scholars, but rarely are they so topical or heated as institutional efforts underway in the US and in Europe to reclassify art once described as Russian as Ukrainian. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has quietly changed the name of an 1899 painting by the French Impressionist [Edgar Degas](#) from Russian Dancer to Dancer in Ukrainian Dress. The Met also holds works by Arkhyp Kuindzhi and Ilya Repin, a 19th-century painter who was born in what is now [Ukraine](#). The artists were previously listed as Russian and are now categorized as Ukrainian. But seascape painter Ivan Aivazovsky, whom the Met had also changed from Russian to Ukrainian, was abruptly relisted as Armenian on Thursday, after an outcry from New York’s Armenian community ...

... The reattributions in New York follow moves at the [National Gallery](#) in London last year to change the name of another of Degas’ dancer series from Russian Dancers to Ukrainian Dancers ... Similar decisions have been made regarding other artists ... The moves are described by some as part of an effort to correctly attribute the contribution of Ukrainian artists to art history. But they have also been denounced by others ... In a statement, Max Hollein, the director of the Met, said: “The Met’s curators and experts are continually researching and examining objects in the collection in order to determine the most appropriate and accurate way to catalogue and present them ...

... The question of whether Degas considered his subjects Russian or Ukrainian has also come into question. By some accounts, the Russian attribution was given by his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who bought one of the series from the painter in 1906 ... The dispute ... could now travel farther into literature ... Russian poet Alexander Pushkin’s African ancestry, Mikhail Lermontov’s Scottish ancestry and German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s birthplace in Königsberg, now Kaliningrad, once a German city but later part of the Soviet Union and now of the Russian Federation ... One person involved in the campaign told the Guardian that they had heard some institutions had come under pressure to maintain Russian attributions from the wives of oligarchs who sit on museum boards ...

“As with so many rational decisions, making it more accurate also brings confusion,” notes Charles Stuckey, who has served as curator in major US museums including the [Art Institute of Chicago](#). “Museums change titles of their works all the time based upon investigations,” Stuckey said. “The timing is suspicious. Are they just doing this at this particular time?” ... “It has to be backed up by some kind of rationale to make the change. The field is already very familiar with situations like this because of reattributions of old master art. It does slightly complicate research but so what?”

2023 May 4:

<<As with so many rational decisions, making it more accurate also brings confusion, notes Charles Stuckey>>

Love it.

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How clever is that?

Here's an example of how to confuse with accuracy and avoid inflaming differences with words. I don't usually associate our Prime Minister with cleverness (have you ever heard him say anything of substance?) but I imagine he has clever people to feed him lines. In a reported interview with the egregious Piers Morgan, his advisers have excelled themselves:

- “The New Zealand Prime Minister, Chris Hipkins, was asked to define a woman and he said, ‘Well, people identify for themselves’. He couldn't answer. It was excruciating, to watch ... What is a woman, Prime Minister?” he asked.
- Mr Albanese replied: “An adult female.”
- Morgan: “How difficult was that to answer?”
- Mr Albanese: “Not too hard. I was asked during the campaign, actually. But I respect people for whoever they are. And it's up to people to be respectful ...

Female adj

1. a(1) : of, relating to, or being the sex that typically has the capacity to bear young or produce eggs

b: having a gender identity that is the opposite of male

I'm surprised that Morgan, who is appalling but not stupid, didn't spot the sleight of hand. The term obviously now has two meanings: one based in biology and the other based in identity. The term “adult female” could mean either. No one's offended, not even dictionary writers. Perhaps that is the right way to deal with identity-fanatics: use carefully chosen words to baffle them with ambiguity, deprive them of nits to pick, turn the tables on them by choosing those terms they themselves have decided to squabble over without indicating which alternative meaning you subscribe to.

Bravo, Albo!

2023 May 6:

<<... I imagine he has clever people to feed him lines
... No one's offended, not even dictionary writers ...>>

But not clever enough ...

... his response quickly led to intense debate online, with some accusing the Prime Minister of not acknowledging transgender women in his statement. Trans activist and blogger Eleanor Evans said Mr Albanese used the question as an opportunity to “drop anti-trans dogwhistles while umming and ahing about ‘respect’”. “All through this he couldn't even bring himself to say the word ‘trans’,” she tweeted. Political reporter Amy Remeikis accused the PM of “legitimising” a “hateful question” ...

making it more accurate also brings confusion

- confusion noun ... disorder; upheaval; tumult; chaos (*The army retreated in confusion*), lack of clearness or distinctness (*a confusion in his mind between right and wrong*), perplexity; bewilderment (*The more difficult questions left us in complete confusion*), embarrassment or abashment (*He blushed in confusion*).

2023 May 24:

<<Archival descriptions do not have the status of literary texts (still less of scripture or the pronouncements of J M Keynes from an age that pre-dates social media democratisation), but these issues apply nevertheless. Does cultural sensitivity trump accuracy? When does fact become opinion? Or, opinion become fact for that matter? When does Dogma prevail over Ethics (*pace* Lord Acton)? When does accurate description yield to an obligation to provide "conversation tools ... to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time.">>

Consider collective nouns

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As I decline into senility, I am finding time to reflect on the errors of my past. One that I have come to dwell upon is the casual use of the collective in archival description. Over the years, I have used them a lot without much reflection. They clarify, they “smooth” the data by bringing focus to the confusing complexity of what is being described. They assist understanding (I convinced myself) by obscuring individual differences in the service of meaning – highlighting the wood and obscuring the trees. A good thing, surely. But an old man’s wariness of identity wars has now given me pause,

... a new appreciation of how history is decided ... in individual hearts and minds. The Civil War had fascinated me since I was a teenager but most of the books about it seemed to dwell on whose cavalry went charging over which hill ... Or else they treated American society as a collection of broadly defined groups – “the North”, “the South”, “the slaves” – each one mechanically obeying a set of sociological and ideological rules. I realized I already knew from my own experience that this isn’t the way history works. On September 11, 2001, I had observed how everyone I knew responded to the terrorist attacks in his or her own way. The response didn’t derive simply from whether someone was liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat. They also depended on a whole complicated set of personal convictions, fears, character traits, religious beliefs. They depended on where people came from, where they lived, and where they had travelled ... And all these complications influenced not just ordinary people but also those I knew who worked in the media and in government ... the startling events in New York and Washington hadn’t simply changed the course of future history, they had shaken up old categories and assumptions. In a way, they had changed the past just as much as the future; rewritten not only our expectation of what was to come but also our sense of what had gone before ... Adam Goodhart *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (2012)

One of the things that irks me about The Voice debate – many things irk me about it but this is high on the list – is how so many speak as if Aborigines (and Torres Strait Islanders) are a collective: one group, a homogenous, single identity, of one mind and one voice. There are, surely, many Voices – not just one – defined by situation, heritage, language, experience, location, kinship, and so on. One fault line in that divide is between the marginalised, the integrated (that’s integrated not assimilated), and the activists. It seems to me that the activists (pro and con) are giving me their opinions and I don’t think I’m hearing from the diversity of opinion that common-sense tells me must exist, especially amongst the marginalised.

2023 May 27:

Pronouns

The pronoun wars have been raging around us for at least five or six years now. Like so many toxic developments, this sickness was incubated in the university ... The malady quickly spread, however. Back in 2018, we had occasion to note how the pronoun wars had infected Williams College, always a reliable litmus paper for academic fatuousness, and since then the practice of people “declaring” their pronouns and making up ever more extravagant alternatives for the usual vocables (he, his, she, hers, etc.) has spread far and wide. A couple years ago, the metastasis looked complete, with employees at many businesses—especially “soft” ones like publishing and anything to do with the arts, media, or education—routinely including their “preferred” pronouns in the signature block of their correspondence. The nadir came when the Biden administration added a menu of pronoun choices to the White House website and announced that government employees would be encouraged to pick their own pronouns. Earlier this autumn, the State Department issued an enthusiastic tweet about a glorious new holiday: “International Pronouns Day.” ...

For “at least five or six years”? You bet. Thus, from *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* by H W Fowler 2nd edition (1965), first published in 1926.

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Number

11. Pronouns and possessives after *each, every, anyone, no one, one*, etc. ... *Each* and the rest are all singular; that is undisputed; in a perfect language there would exist pronouns and possessives that were of as doubtful gender as they and yet were, like them, singular; i.e., it would have words meaning him-or-her, himself-or-herself, his-or-her. But, just as French lacks our power of distinguishing (without additional words) between his, her, and its, so we lack the French power of saying in one word his-or-her. There are three makeshifts: first, *as anybody can see for himself or herself*; second, *as anybody can see for themselves*; and third, *as anybody can see for himself*. No one who can help it chooses the first; it is correct, and it is sometimes necessary, but it is so clumsy as to be ridiculous except when explicitness is urgent, and it usually sounds like a bit of pedantic humour. The second is the popular solution; it sets the literary man's teeth on edge, and he exerts himself to give the same meaning in some entirely different way if he is not prepared to risk the third, which is here recommended. It involves the convention (statutory in the interpretation of documents) that where the matter of sex is not conspicuous or important the masculine form shall be allowed to represent a person instead of a man, or say a man (*homo*) instead of a man (*vir*). Whether that convention, with himself or herself in the background for especial exactitudes, and paraphrase always possible in dubious cases, is an arrogant demand on the part of male England, everyone must decide for himself (or for himself or herself, or for themselves). Have the patrons of *they* etc. made up their minds yet between *Everyone was blowing their noses* (or *nose*) and *Everyone were blowing their noses?* ... (p.404)



they, them, their

1. *One* etc. followed by *their* etc. ... Undoubtedly grammar rebels against *their*; and the reason for using it is clearly reluctance to recognize that, though the reference may be to both sexes, the right shortening of the cumbersome *he or she, his or her*, etc., is *he* or *him* or *his*, as *his* and *him* are used with a boldness surprising in a government department in *There must be opportunity for the individual boy or girl to go as far as his keenness and ability will take him*. Whether that reluctance is less felt by the male is doubtful; at any rate the OED quotes examples from Fielding (*Everyone in the house were in their beds*), Goldsmith, Sydney Smith, Thackeray (*A person can't help their birth*), and Bernard Shaw. It also says nothing more severe of the use than that it is 'Not favoured by grammarians'. In colloquial usage the inconvenience of having no common-sex personal pronoun in the singular has proved stronger than respect for the grammarians, and the one that is available in the plural is made to serve for the singular too. But in prose their disfavour is not treated so lightly; few good modern writers would flout them so conspicuously as Fielding and Thackeray ... or as Ruskin in *I am never angry with anyone unless they deserve it* ... (p.635)

How strange that something once regarded as a "bit of pedantic humour" might nowadays be imposed on one (or on anybody) as a form of humourless bullying. Our pronoun zealotry differs from that of the past only in the fanaticism and invective with which it is enforced. One wonders how the grammar check in Word is handling all this.

In his Introduction to the second edition, Ernest Gowers remarks:

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... It is not that all Fowler's opinions are unchallengeable. Many have been challenged. It is not that he is always easy reading. At his best he is incomparable. But he never forgot what he calls 'that persistent fellow the critical reader' who is 'not satisfied with catching the general drift and obvious intention of a sentence' but insists that 'the words used ... must actually yield on scrutiny the desired sense'. There are some passages that only yield it after what the reader may think an excessive amount of scrutiny – passages demanding hardly less concentration than one of the more obscure sections of a Finance Act, and for the same reason; the determination of the writer to make sure that, when the reader eventually gropes his way to a meaning, it shall be, beyond all possible doubt, the meaning intended by the writer ...

The present conflict (these things invariably blow over eventually) seems irreconcilable between [demands for respect](#) and [objections to enforcement](#).

2023 August 1:

Lies, damn lies, and reinterpretation

“After all,” said the Duchess vaguely, “there are certain things you can’t get away from. Right and wrong, good conduct and moral rectitude, have certain well-defined limits.”
“So, for the matter of that,” replied Reginald, “has the Russian Empire. The trouble is that the limits are not always in the same place.”

I'm often surprised by the people other people choose to marry and the things other people choose to care about – tulips, the Trinity, pronouns, that sort of thing. Statues (and other artefacts commemorating the past, such as cottages) have been coming in for a lot of attention. Historical records too. In Hobart, they're deplatforming [William Crowther](#) (an appropriate term since they seem to be leaving the plinth behind). Got me wondering why. Is it because he stole a head and misused it or because the head he stole was Aboriginal? Would it make a difference if the body part had been non-Aboriginal – as, apparently, were those taken by Crowther's son (Edward, who stole non-Aboriginal heads but who doesn't have a statue)?



Is it about what Crowther did or what he represents (to us and to those we don't like and want to discomfit)? Is the focus on provenance (a narrow view of the artefact's place in the historical process) or ambience (a larger understanding of its place within a network of relationships)? What kind of malefaction leads to *damnatio memoriae*? For that matter, what perceived virtues lead to enduring commemoration? How are *damnatio* and commemoration related to [historical negationism](#)? The Crowther Affair is (according to Hobart City Council) unashamedly an act of “reinterpretation”, replacing a wrong or limited view with one they obviously believe to be worthy. It reflects today's view that yesterday got it wrong (and, by implication, that today has got it right). But is there ever a final word? Will tomorrow's view be different and tomorrow's “reinterpretation” seek to refine or even extinguish today's verities?

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It is dreadful to think that other peoples' grandchildren may one day rise up and call one amiable. There are moments when one sympathises with Herod.

Some issues:

1. How valid is the contention that reinterpretation is a recalibration of the grand narrative rather than just a passing fancy? Have zealots lost sight of the original meaning of “the history of the present” by disavowing the genealogy of ideas in favour of overthrow and triumph? Was Hegel, rather than Nietzsche, a truer expositor of the fluidity found in the genealogy of ideas in opposition to the certainty of ideology? Does the evolution of history ever come to a full stop?

Fukuyama argues that history should be viewed as an evolutionary process, and that the end of history, in this sense, means that liberal democracy is the final form of government for all nations. According to Fukuyama, since the French Revolution, liberal democracy has repeatedly proven to be a fundamentally better system (ethically, politically, economically) than any of the alternatives, and so there can be no progression from it to an alternative system.

2. What role do artefacts (and historical records) play in working through current issues (e.g. reconciliation)? Are statues simply commemorative? Are records simply evidential?

The lord mayor, Anna Reynolds, described it as a practical and meaningful step to reconciliation and part of a broader national conversation. “(This) does not change history. The records, the books, the articles, the stories all remain unchanged,” said told the meeting. “We don’t want to celebrate a time in our history when scientists and doctors wanted to prove theories of European superiority (and) wanted to rank people by their race. “It was an appalling tradition.” ... Reynolds said the statue would be conserved and potentially reinterpreted. The meeting was told preliminary discussions have been held with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

3. Is it all about power? Who decides which interpretation prevails? Is it about who owns the record or who owns the meaning of the record?

Museums and other cultural institutions ... are publicly trusted sources of information and knowledge ... the Australian Museum’s executive leadership team and Trustees [are] providing First Nations peoples with a platform to be heard and rebalance the narrative ... it is important that First Nations peoples control how our cultures, experiences and world views are interpreted in museums.

4. What room is left for nuance and contestation? Are our interpretations binary alternatives (yes/no, on/off, right/wrong) or parallel views (“more than one provenance at once”)?

Alderman Simon Behrakis voted against the statue’s removal, saying history should be preserved “warts and all”. “That statue didn’t go up celebrating the horrors and appalling acts committed. It celebrated a man’s contribution to the state,” he said. “Removing the statue does sanitise history. We don’t learn anything from history if it is hidden away.”

5. Is provenance about “ownership, custody or location” whose primary purpose

... is normally to provide contextual and circumstantial evidence for its original production or discovery, by establishing, as far as practicable, its later history, especially the sequences of its formal ownership, custody and places of storage. The practice has a particular value in helping authenticate objects ... The term refers to the individuals, groups, or organizations that originally created or received the items in an accumulation of records, and to the items' subsequent chain of custody. The principle of provenance [is] a major strand in the broader principle of respect des fonds) stipulates that records originating from a common source (or fonds) should be kept together ... The authority of an archival document or set of documents of which the provenance is uncertain (because of gaps in the recorded chain of custody) will be considered to be severely compromised ...

or, is it about retrospective exegesis rather than historical origins? What, if anything, **cannot** be assigned as provenance? Are there any allowable limits in the

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identification of [Parallel Provenance](#) or are the [boundaries of Ambience](#) like those of the Russian Empire?

2023 August 2:

<<Is the focus on provenance (a narrow view of the artefact's place in the historical process) or ambience (a larger understanding of its place within a network of relationships)?>>

I've been chastised for this. I had hoped, by now, that a fuller [explication](#) was unnecessary. If not, here it is:

Provenance and Ambience are scaleable. Bearing in mind that "creation" is a much more complex concept than traditionally supposed in archival thought, you can have Provenance residing in the creator-of-the-fonds, creator-of-the-series, creator-of-the-file (item), creator-of-the-document, creator-of-the-keystroke, creator-of-the-artefact, etc., etc., etc. For each of these, there will be a corresponding Ambience: ambience-of-the-creator-of the fonds, ambience-of-the-creator-of-the series ambience-of-the-creator-of-the-document etc., etc., etc. It is still an open question (in my view) whether it is mechanically possible to relate Ambience (of the Creator) to the Record or Ambience (of the Creator) to the Function; it is certainly possible to do so imaginatively and it would be desirable to be able to do so in reality. No real-world system could, of course, possibly hard-wire in all the possible relationship-types, but it should be possible to build a system flexible enough to allow users to pick and choose.

Conceptually, therefore, an Ambience-to-Provenance relationship is part of the demonstration of traditional archival thinking about the internal structure of the Doer. Corresponding demonstrations are possible for the internal structure of the Document and the Deed. The unresolved question, to my mind, at least so far as any real-world descriptive system of which I am aware, is whether Document, Deed, and Doer are bedrock concepts with no possibility of relationships being made (systematically) between the entities composing their internal structures – e.g. Person<to>Action. Such relationships would be highly desirable and I would be surprised if someone isn't already doing it but I am out of things now so I just don't know.

PS (sigh). Yes, it goes w/o saying that any of these relationships can be multiple (many-to-many) rather than singular. It's the skill of the descriptive archivist in crafting the relationships, not the rules under which they are displayed, that matters most - hence the significance of finding Truth (incl. parallel truths) amongst lies, damn lies, and reinterpretation, and the significance of having a view about the limits of the Russian Empire.

2023 August 10:

Diversity used to mean the creation of a space for dissent and disagreement and tolerance the willingness to live with things that one might find offensive or distasteful. Now, diversity too often describes a space in which dissent and disagreement have to be expunged in the name of "respect" and tolerance requires one to refrain from saying or doing things that might be deemed offensive. It is time we re-grasped both diversity and tolerance in their original sense. [Kenan Malik](#)

Is it the job of a house of memory to uphold "diversity and tolerance" and, if so, in what sense of the meaning of those terms?

[Museum of Pop Culture airbrushes J K Rowling out of Harry Potter exhibition](#)

A Seattle Museum has airbrushed JK Rowling from its hall of fame and Harry Potter exhibition ... [for] holding 'super hateful and divisive' opinions ... The museum still has Harry Potter memorabilia on display but any mention of the author of the franchise has been airbrushed ... Its exhibitions project manager Chris Moore ... accused the author of using 'racial stereotypes', 'fat-shaming' and a 'lack of LGBTQIA+ representation' in the books ... A MoPOP spokesman said ... ' MoPOP ... stands with nonbinary and transgender communities.

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In an increasingly divided world, pop culture can unite, inspire, and spark important conversations ... in our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, we strive to elevate those that are left out of the mainstream ... by amplifying voices and stories that are not always seen on museum walls.' ...



Jonas: That's death.

Giver: He doesn't know what he's doing.

Jonas: Doesn't know what he's doing? He killed him!

Giver: But he doesn't know what it means. Just like you didn't ...

Jonas: How can he not see that the baby isn't moving? Doesn't that tell him that something is wrong? ...

Giver: Your friend Fiona ... she will soon be trained to release as well.

Jonas: That's a lie! She'd never do that. If Fiona understood ...

Giver: We are the only ones who understand it.

Jonas: Then it's our fault. You and me and all the Receivers back and back and back ... There has to be a way to show them. To give them a memory so they can understand.

★

★

★

★

Jonas: I wish I had been there when the memories returned. They were the Truth. The Elders with their Rules are the Lie. So, I do not apologise ... From far behind me, from the place I had left, I thought I heard music too. Perhaps it was only an echo. But it was enough.

The Giver

Do nonbinary and transgender communities actually demand that of us – to erase people and facts from museum walls, from collections, from the record? Or, are activist curators mis-applying “woke” ideas to suit their own prejudices? Woke was originally about heightening awareness, not about suppressing knowledge of those you disapprove of, but under the impulse of critical theory it becomes something else.

By 2020, many on the political right and some in the center in several Western countries began sarcastically using the term as a pejorative for various leftist and progressive movements and ideologies they perceived as overzealous, performative, or insincere. In turn, some commentators came to consider *woke* an offensive term that disparages persons who promote progressive ideas involving identity and race. Since then, derivative terms such as *woke-washing* and *woke capitalism* were coined to describe the conduct of persons or entities who signal support for progressive causes rather than working toward genuine change.

Zealously taking sides makes us activists in that struggle. It gives us a purpose, but is it the right one? If we are to be activists, what should we be activist about? How do we decide which side to take? How do we judge the effect of what we are doing? Fundamentally, what is our role? Who is it that we “unite” and “inspire” when we stand with “communities” on one side in a culture war? Is that the way to “spark important conversations” in an increasingly divided world? Or, are we simply indulging in performative activism and feeling

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virtuous about it? Are we helping anyone other than ourselves? Yes, reply the activists, basking in the gratitude of hitherto marginalised communities, but what those communities really need to hear is not that we are on their side but that truth is on their side (or not, if uncomfortably that turns out to be the case) and that we can be trusted to help them find it.

In a larger sense, then, what is the struggle that we should choose to be activists in? Do we have an archival theory to put up against the more domineering demands of critical theory? Is our ethos no more inspiring than a concern for “content to be exploited or context to be illuminated”? Or, as [Terry Eastwood](#) argues, is our mystery (the essence of who we are and what we are trying to do) that we are a “knowledge-building” discipline -

... the theory consists of ideas about the object under contemplation, the method consists of ideas about how to proceed in contemplating the object, and practice consists in the application of theory and method to extend knowledge ...

Of course, archivists are not excused from having a social conscience, and I have no doubt that a great deal of worthwhile work is being done with engagement between houses of memory and the hitherto marginalised, but I don't see anything to admire in the words and actions of Chris Moore.

2023 August 17:

<< **If we are to be activists, what should we be activist about?
How do we decide which side to take?>>**

*[They say, best men are moulded out of faults,
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad.](#)*

In 2020, Princeton [expunged the name](#) of Woodrow Wilson, the University's former President (and the 28th POTUS), from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and Wilson College.

... The university's board of trustees found that Wilson's “racist thinking and policies make him an inappropriate namesake for a school or college whose scholars, students and alumni must stand firmly against racism in all its forms,” ... The decision in June [2020] contrasted with a vote by Princeton trustees in 2016 to keep Wilson's name on campus buildings and programs, despite student protests that led to a review of his legacy there.

But, oh! what a tangled web -

... a new Princeton residential college will be built and named after Mellody Hobson, a prominent Black alumna ... Last year [2019], Princeton honored Ms. Hobson with the Woodrow Wilson Award, the university's highest honor for undergraduate alumni. During her acceptance speech, Ms. Hobson reflected on her experiences as a Black student at Princeton and remarked that receiving the Woodrow Wilson Award as a woman of color “requires some cognitive dissonance,” The Daily Princetonian reported ... Ms. Hobson studied at the school of international relations and public policy, then named after Wilson ...

The [Award](#), Princeton explained, cannot be renamed because it-

... unlike either the College or the School, is the result of a gift. When the University accepted the gift, it took on a legal obligation to name the prize for Wilson and honor his “conviction that education is for ‘use’ and ... the high aims expressed in his memorable phrase, ‘Princeton in the Nation's Service.’” The University will continue to recognize extraordinary public service by conferring the award as currently named. The award explicitly honors specific and positive aspects of Wilson's career, and it, unlike the School or the College, does not require students to identify with the Wilson name in connection with their academic or residential programs.

No need for any “cognitive dissonance” after all.

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Reducing Wilson's [legacy](#) to just one thing is clearly disproportionate; it says more about the critics' lack of judgement than it does about him (though it probably doesn't help that Richard Nixon was a fan, apparently). Memorialisation in a statue or building requires that a binary view be taken of the subject. Was he a "great man" or a villain? Should he be acclaimed or [debased](#)? Erecting a statue (or naming a college) literally casts a judgement about an historical figure in stone (or, at least, in bricks and mortar) but one can take some comfort in observing the [fluctuating fortunes](#) of those who must submit to the fickleness of scholarship. Historical evaluation requires a more subtle balancing of the good with the bad than can be had from a statue. Wilson can be [condemned](#) for more than just racism – why stop at [grubby politicking](#) and not add [responsibility](#) for WW2 and the current world order?



In Praise of Old Nassau

It is sometimes said (mistakenly) that villains must be judged according to their own time and mores and not ours. [Joseph Conrad](#) had a more subtle and insightful take on this-

... the most terrifying reflection (I am speaking now for myself) is that all these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general – of the normality of their place, and time and race.

Archivists have a huge stake in the debates over [historicism](#) – e.g. whether or not “every argument or idea [is] completely accounted for by its historical context, as opposed to assessing it by its merits”. Do we appraise according to the values of the time in which records are created or our own (or, even more daringly, according to our anticipation of those to come – those which will displace ours). Or, do we believe in universal, timeless values that we are fortunate enough to have recognised? Statue suppression (like historical appraisal) involves assessing merit out of context (beyond the normality of their place, and time and race). But simply reducing our understanding of the past to a reflection of our own periodic frenzies can't be right either.

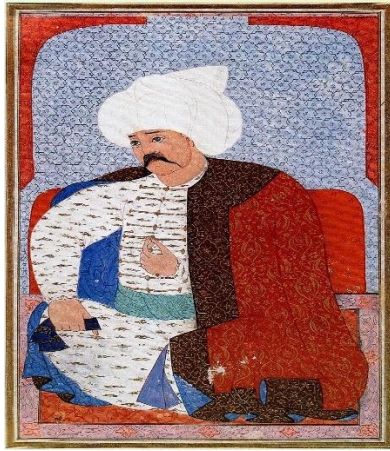
There are, of course, those (living or dead) so far beyond the pale of admiration that one would not dream of erecting a statue to them - Hitler, Genghis Khan, Selim the Grim, Malcolm Turnbull, Patricia Karvelas, etc., etc – but, for the rest of us, to arrive at a true appraisal you have to take the good with the bad –

Use every man after his just desert, and who should 'scape whipping?

To what extent, then, is archival appraisal like memorialisation rather than nuanced historical judgement? After all, records can't get more cancelled than being appraised as non-permanent and consigned to total obliteration.

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PS There are, in fact, statues erected to Genghis Khan, including [quite a big one](#) in Mongolia I believe. For that matter, Selim the Grim can be found memorialised amongst the [Fethiye Statues](#). And, I suppose, Malcolm Turnbull gets a portrait in Parliament House. One can only hope, however, that Patricia will eventually slide into well-merited oblivion but maybe not if the others are anything to go by.



Selim the Grim



Patricia Karvelas

2023 August 19:

An article about all this in the [Conversation](#). The editors found it a “nuanced argument push[ing] past the facile culture-war framing that serves only to polarise and pre-judge.” I found it indecisive and unconvincing. Judge for yourself. Some snippets-

This year, there has been some controversy about the rewriting of passages from authors such as [Roald Dahl](#), [Enid Blyton](#), [Ian Fleming](#) and [Agatha Christie](#) with the aim of removing potentially offensive material. Some publishers have also adopted the precautionary measure of adding content warnings and disclaimers to books by [Ernest Hemingway](#), [Virginia Woolf](#), [Raymond Chandler](#) and [P.G. Wodehouse](#) ... Those who would clean up the classics, and their conservative opponents, are entangled in a moral battle which encourages the application of the same ethical criteria to books that might be apply to elected officials or ministers of religion ... if book-talk most easily rises to the level of public discussion when it involves a simple moral controversy, then we are inexorably incorporating literature into the sepia mass of monetised cultural gruel of which our society appears increasingly to comprise ...

... a moral judgement has the power to bestow a final endorsement or condemnation, meaning one can avoid what [Keats](#) described as [negative capability](#): “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”. A capacity to cope with the unpleasantness of irresolution could be taken as a mark of maturity. The desire for certainty, for a world of unambiguously demarcated ethical boundaries of the kind found in much young adult fiction, could be described as a reassuring childish fantasy ... The best literature can be spiky, ambiguous, difficult, cruel, strange, unpredictable, hectoring and unpleasant. It is not the job of a book to ease the life of its reader. Reading a good book might mean having a terrible day, a day in which you are scared, sad, distressed ... there is nothing wrong with trying to avoid offence ... any social interaction requires us to calculate what it is permissible to say, and there are many remarks we refrain from making for fear they might hurt ... [but] ... Any argument that treats literature as fundamentally therapeutic, self-improving or society-improving, risks reducing literature to self-help ... To approach literature as a machine for self-improvement is to share ground with the bad-faith arguments of those who justify their bigoted moralising by referring to the cultural achievements of Western civilisation ... no book will condemn or redeem us ... because books do not exist without readers, and each reader is an unpredictable variable ...

So, if not on moral terms, how might we defend literature? We can liken it to conversation. A conversation can be morally nourishing or deadening. It is neither good nor bad.

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Conversations are surely responsible for some of history's worst atrocities, along with its most wondrous achievements. And clearly we cannot stop having conversations, whether we wish to or not ...

My own view is that both imaginative literature and historical understanding unavoidably involve moral judgements. Otherwise, how could a "conversation" be morally nourishing?

2023 August 23:

Reverting to the first post in this very long thread ("There is uproar over use of the word "[occupation](#)" to describe the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453"), there an [article](#) in *Al Jazeera* deploring the lack of interest in Ottoman history amongst Arab scholars (and the lack of skills they need to do so) –

... Nation-building took place as a narrow ethno-religious understanding of nationhood came to dominate the region, sidelining multicultural identities that had been the norm for centuries. Former Ottoman officials had to reinvent themselves as Arab, Syrian, or Lebanese, etc national leaders in the face of French and British colonialism ... These visions of an ethno-national future necessitated the "forgetting" of the recent Ottoman past. Narratives of imagined primordial nations left no room for the stories of our great-grandparents and their parents, generations of people that lived part of their lives in a different geopolitical reality, and who would never be given the space to acknowledge the loss of the only reality they understood ...

... We need to reclaim Ottoman history as a local history of the inhabitants of the Arabic-speaking-majority lands because if we do not claim and unpack the recent past, it would be impossible to truly understand the problems that we are facing today, in all their temporal and regional dimensions. The call for local students of history to research, write, and analyse the recent Ottoman reality is in no way a nostalgic call to return to some imagined days of a glorious or harmonious imperial past. In fact, it is the complete opposite. It is a call to uncover and come to terms with the good, the bad, and, indeed, the very ugly imperial past that people in the Arabic-speaking-majority parts of the Middle East were also the makers of. The long and storied histories of the people of cities that flourished during the Ottoman period, like Tripoli, Aleppo, and Basra, have yet to be (re)written.

... We must ask ourselves why is it that researchers from Arabic-speaking-majority countries frequent French and English imperial archives, but do not spend the time or the resources to learn Ottoman-Turkish in order to take advantage of four centuries worth of records readily available at the Ottoman imperial archives in Istanbul or local archives in former provincial capitals? ... Millions of records in Ottoman-Turkish await students from across the Arabic-speaking-majority world to take the plunge into serious research that uses the full range of sources, both on the local and imperial levels ... the number of local historians and students with Ottoman history-related disciplinary and linguistic training, in cities such as Doha, Cairo, and Beirut, which have a concentration of excellent institutions of higher education, is alarmingly low; some universities do not even have such cadres ...

When studying at UCL in 1974/75, I observed how the English archives students needed language and diplomatic skills that we, the overseas students, were spared. It was around this time I disgraced myself by remarking that *once you've seen one illuminated manuscript you've seen them all*. Goes back to the time, I suppose, when Latin was the [lingua franca](#) in Europe.

Even after the fall of Western Rome, Latin was the common language of international communication, science, scholarship and academia in Europe until well into the 18th century, when other regional vernaculars (including its own descendants, the Romance languages) supplanted it in common academic and political usage, and it eventually became a dead language in the modern linguistic definition.

... and, for those of us old enough to remember, when you could walk into a Catholic church anywhere in the world on any Sunday and [follow what was going on](#). In high school, I had coaching in Latin from the local parish priest and I was much-criticised in

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class for my use of [ecclesiastical Latin](#). It mattered not because I was a lousy Latinist anyway. Has anyone ever done an audit on what languages there are to be found in Australian archival and manuscript repositories?

2023 September 1:

<<In Hobart, they're deplatforming [William Crowther](#) (an appropriate term since they seem to be leaving the plinth behind). Got me wondering why ... Is it about what Crowther did or what he represents (to us and to those we don't like and want to discomfit)?>>

At least one descendant thinks she's being guilted for her ancestors' bad deeds. A British ex-MP is [trying to erase](#) an academic reference to her descent from slavers. The arguments used to justify the erasure are fascinating:

- concerns that the ex-MP is being "singled out"
- "factual inaccuracies" (e.g. the ex-MP no longer lives in Wales)
- breach of privacy and the right to be forgotten
- ignores position of 19th century women (lack of agency)
- "ongoing data breaches" that compromise her personal safety

The reference to her is apparently contained in a footnote and the irony is that if she didn't make an issue of it, the notoriety would probably be much less. Should a person be ashamed and distressed because of what someone else did to those now dead? Is guilt inter-generational? Is reparation for [historical injustice](#) different from reparation [to living victims](#)? Is inherited guilt (or shame) another dimension, perhaps, to the [trauma-informed approach](#).

<<Should a person be ashamed and distressed because of what someone else did to those now dead?>>

The King never dies; corporations never die; but people do. [Transgenerational trauma](#) (applied culturally) seems to be based on the proposition that a family never dies, a culture never dies, and a race never dies (with the attendant consequences) and on the argument that [responsibility for historical wrongs](#) lingers on. I am of Celtic origin (partly), so on that basis I have a living grievance against the English, the Danes, and the Saxons. As for the Italians – Wheeew! That theory would also justify two thousand years of anti-semitism based on [Matthew 27:25](#).

PS For a relationships tragic like me, the idea that everything that has gone before continues as part of the present is a beguiling one.

The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion [Albert Einstein](#)

The past exists only in our memories, the future only in our plans. The present is our only reality [Robert M Pirsig](#)

<<[Andrew Waugh](#): ... Personally, my view is that an appropriate treatment of Crowther's statue would be to roughly remove the head and place it in a museum dealing with Australia's treatment of Indigenous peoples with an appropriate contextual description ... it's worth noting how commemorations are created. Some person or group of people, for their own purposes, decide that something is worth commemorating. They have enough power to enact that decision, including commanding enough resources (money) to make the commemoration ... Your position seems to be that, someone having created the commemoration, everyone coming after that is bound by the decision. Even if the community subsequently decides that, really, the person or event should not be commemorated ... >>

<<Your position seems to be that, someone having created the commemoration, everyone coming after that is bound by the decision.>>

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Not my position at all.

I believe interpretation (all interpretation, including statues, and hence all archival description) should be provisional, contested, and nuanced – rejecting the binary in favour of multiplicity. I don't believe in censorship and erasure because it is they that are trying to bind me (and everyone else) to a decision taken by those who think they have the right to the final say (or, as we used to have it, who think they have God on their side).

You can't contest something that isn't there anymore (or is now headless).

<<Indeed, it is quite possible that erection of the statue was deliberately undertaken as a 'final' comment by his family or friends on his community standing despite the scandal of desecrating a dead body. Hobart society was very small.>>

According to the Hobart City councillor who opposed the removal (Louise Elliot), the statue was raised by public subscription to which “the whole Tasmanian community” donated -

Councillor Elliott told Andrew Bolt that the former Tasmanian premier was adored by the community and the removal of his statue would set a “dangerous precedent.” “Dr Crowther was loved by the whole Tasmanian community, not just Hobart, he was loved because he provided medical care for free regardless of who they were or class,” Ms Elliot said.

<< I don't believe in censorship and erasure because it is they that are trying to bind me (and everyone else) to a decision taken by those who think they have the right to the final say (or, as we used to have it, who think they have God on their side)>>

How's this for a bit of contestation?

... Identifying the villains of history is part of a growing movement of 'decolonialisation' sweeping Australia which aims to rid the country of all statues or memorials associated with deeds or words now deemed to dishonour Australian identity. Statue-toppling protesters have decreed that Australian history has to be corrected – an exercise they like to describe as 'truth telling' – and the stigma of colonialism eradicated ... decolonialisation activists reject the notion of empirical truth and instead see history as a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives. For the decolonisers, knowledge is always culturally conditioned by power, and truth is a subjective, 'felt' experience. However, when it comes to handing out moral judgments, decolonising activists do find the idea of objective standards of truth useful, after all. In fact, they assert that their 21st century assessment of moral truth is absolute, eternal, and binding on all past ages ...

It is said to be about freedom –

Decolonization is about “cultural, psychological, and economic freedom” for Indigenous people with the goal of achieving Indigenous sovereignty -- the right and ability of Indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems.

and about reappraisal –

Decolonisation is not simply the relocation of a statue or an object; it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of empire in museums – from their creation to the present day. Decolonisation requires a reappraisal of our institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches to all areas of museum work.

but also to be a “new form of Western elitism that risks turning campuses into ideological boot camps” –

*... Is it the work of the colonised, or is it in fact the work, once again, of the colonisers?
... “Decolonising” is not the same thing as diversification. It goes beyond the proposal that academic staff widen the range and viewpoint of their reading lists, or teach about racism and empire more ... Neither do decolonisers just say that we should ask questions about*

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where, how or for whom knowledge is produced. Scholars have been doing so for years. The decolonising movement is a more far-reaching, stark attempt to transform consciousness itself. Its proponents urge teachers to recognise that knowledge can only ever be a product of power relations, that the Enlightenment tradition is defined primarily by its complicity in empire, and that as a way of thinking and educating, it is culturally specific to a privileged Western overclass. Further, as disciplines from political science to archaeology to mathematics are historically implicated in imperial oppression, they are forever tainted and complicit in racial inequality now, and must be overhauled – or dismantled. In order to disrupt inequitable power relations, we thus need different kinds of knowledge ...

and way out there is *The Ideology of Tyranny: Bataille, Foucault, and the postmodern corruption of political dissent* –

"The Ideology of Tyranny traces the contemporary jargon of political correctness and the so-called 'politics of diversity' so prevalent in the academic and administrative discourse of the United States to the fantastic sociology of an obscure French pornographer, Georges Bataille (1897-1962). The celebration of violence sung in his works, re-elaborated in abstract form by the late followers of Bataille, has led to the creation of a peculiar talk emphasizing difference, antagonism, intellectual despair, and a profound political conservatism. As the so-called Left has lately come to adopt this troubling gospel of divisiveness, the consequence for a wholesome culture of dissent in our society have been a disastrous paralysis of its critical and moral faculties in the face of a new dawn of never-ending wars."--BOOK JACKET.

<<... decolonialisation activists reject the notion of empirical truth and instead see history as a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives ... when it comes to handing out moral judgments, decolonising activists ... assert that their 21st century assessment of moral truth is absolute, eternal, and binding ...>>

I think the shallow extremism of “decolonialisation” begets an equally shallow and equally extreme reaction and that the clash between them takes us further than ever from the truth. That’s also more-or-less what I think about The Voice. Ideology has never appealed to me.

There’s definitely an obstacle in developing a brand for yourself that people can rely on when you’re so eclectic [Fred Durst](#)

Or a brand that people can even understand, it seems. When I was younger, free speech was a left-wing issue, now it belongs to the right. Very strange - but not too upsetting for an old archivist sliding into his dotage who has never deviated from his passion for free speech regardless of the ideological ramifications. The only ideological connection I see is with [freedom of thought](#).

I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

I’m more upset these days by my unending war with the packaging industry (and car parks). Over the years, people with seriously fretful faces (or do I mean fretfully serious faces) or else with faces empurpled with rage have tried to convince me of the underlying logic of their positions on what I insist on regarding as eclectic issues. I could never see it. Soon, however, when I stand before God (if there is a God) I shall expect Him to explain it all for me – but He’d better expect a few probing questions. That’s all I’m saying.

Parallel provenance, I believe, is about understanding truth in different ways – *rejecting the binary in favour of multiplicity*. It’s not about displacing one “truth” with another. The danger is that insistent [eclecticism](#) used as *a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives* can itself be mistaken for just another ideological position unless it is tempered with good humour and a sense of proportion –

A wonderful thing about true laughter is that it just destroys any kind of system of dividing people [John Cleese](#)

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A well-balanced person is one who finds both sides of an issue laughable.

HERBERT PROCKNOW

Perhaps I know best why it is man alone who laughs; he alone suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

2023 September 12:

<< I believe interpretation (all interpretation, including statues, and hence all archival description) should be provisional, contested, and nuanced.>>

But maybe it would be better to put [some self-imposed limits](#) on one's beliefs.



[He's back](#)

The *Guardian* [reports](#)-

A bronze statue of “Iron Felix” Dzerzhinsky, the ruthless founder of the Soviet secret police and [architect of the Red Terror](#) that followed the 1917 revolution, has been unveiled at the headquarters of Russia’s foreign spy service ... After the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, his statue was toppled to cheers in Poland and as the Soviet Union itself crumbled in 1991 [a monument to Dzerzhinsky outside the KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow was toppled](#) amid rejoicing by many ... For some Russians, the return of Dzerzhinsky to such a public pedestal is an indicator of the repression they say prevails in wartime Russia – and the extent to which the country has abandoned its post-Soviet pivot towards the west.

“Dzerzhinsky is a symbol of repression and lawlessness,” Nikita Petrov, a historian at the Memorial human rights group which won a share of the Nobel peace prize in 2022 a year after being banned and dissolved in Russia, told Reuters ... As Lenin’s and then Stalin’s secret police chief from 1917 until his death in 1926, Dzerzhinsky led the campaign of intimidation, arrests, violence and executions which became known as the “Red Terror” ... “The image of the chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission has become one of the symbols of its time, the standard of crystal honesty, dedication and loyalty to duty,” [Sergei Naryshkin, the chief of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), successor to the KGB’s famed First Chief Directorate] said. “He remained faithful to his ideals to the end - the ideals of goodness and justice” ...

2023 October 23:

<< *My own view is that both imaginative literature and historical understanding unavoidably involve moral judgements.* 19 August, 2023>>

Leaving aside who is responsible for the more grotesque form of “terror” – Hamas or Israel – the standards by which a moral judgement (or moral judgements) can be made and whether moral distinctions are even allowable are dealt with in a little book from ten years

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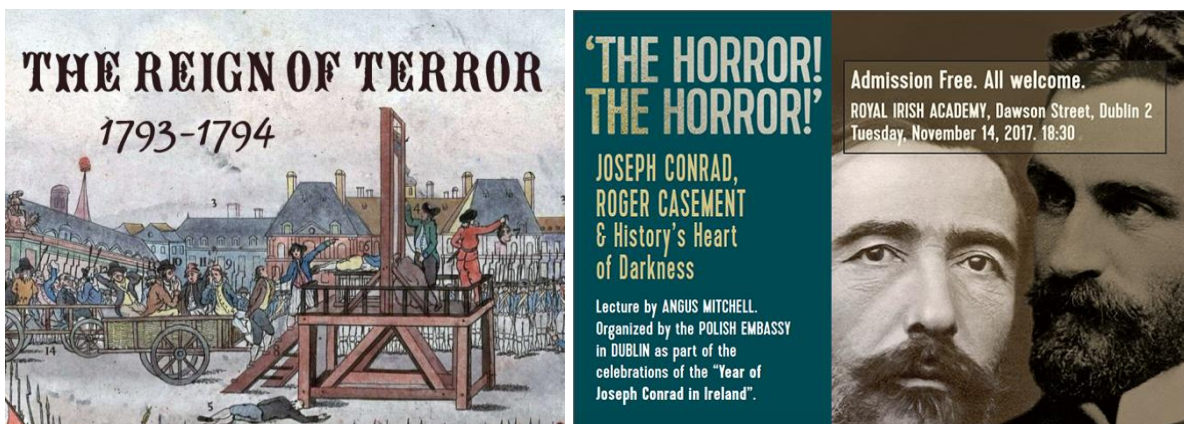
ago by Sophie Wahnich entitled *In Defence of the Terror*. The definite article grounds her analysis in a specific time and place but she offers generalised conclusions. Should historical judgements be timebound or timeless? They must be both, of course, whether applied to events, people, statues, records, finding aids, referenda, etc. etc. Wahnich tries (in my view unsuccessfully) to distinguish between “revolutionary terror” and “terrorism”. Her thesis seems to be that the horror is OK provided it is motivated by intentions and directed towards goals you approve of.

The words "terrorism" and "terrorists" were coined in the wake of the French revolution to describe the "men of blood" who established and exercised the mechanisms of fearsome repression ... "Did you want a revolution without a revolution?" Robespierre sharply remarked. In her provocative essay, Sophie Wahnich has new things to say about the difference between today's terrorists and their nominal 18th-century predecessors ... Her premise is that dismissive disgust at blood spilt and life lost is an edifying but overly simplistic and apolitical response to revolution past and present ... "The violence exercised on 11 September 2001 aimed neither at equality nor liberty. Nor did the preventive war announced by the president of the United States."

According to Wahnich, there is an analogy to be drawn between 1793 and 2001, in the way the French revolutionaries and the Americans responded to "being in fear" by seeking common resistance to the enemy through anger, courage and justice. But ... "the Americans, despite what they say, do not live in a time of foundation, and we have not finished observing the forms of dread that the American response has provoked – the dread of a violence that is not foundational but policing, and recently also preventative." The French revolutionaries, in contrast, did live at a time of foundation ... which, Wahnich argues, could not be secured without heroism in the face of profanation. On her account, the price of the Terror was "a sacred transaction in which the foundation of values required the death of men" ... Being frightened of terror and terrorism and refusing to think carefully and accurately about the topic are not the same thing ...

Some of the reviewers on [Good Reads](#) quote Mark Twain

"There were two 'Reigns of Terror,' if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the “horrors” of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe, compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves." (Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court).



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Twain reminds us that abiding horror is to be found in “heartless cold blood [lasting] a thousand years” and not just violently in “hot passion [lasting] mere months”. I prefer his sensibility to Wahnich’s. It reminds me a little of Conrad: “*The horror! The horror!*” And the horror is all around us – Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Rohingya, the Uyghurs

2022 September 16: Neglecting Libraries & Archives

“History is the most dangerous product which the chemistry of the mind has concocted. Its properties are well known. It produces dreams and drunkenness. It fills people with false memories, exaggerates their reactions, exacerbates old grievances, torments them in their repose, and encourages either a delirium of grandeur or a delusion of persecution. It makes whole nations bitter, arrogant, insufferable and vainglorious.” Paul Valery

An odd piece of writing in SMH this morning entitled *The real ‘history war’ is the attack on our libraries and archives* by Michelle Arrow and Frank Bongiorno.

Chronic under-funding:

Fair enough. Neglect and “efficiency” cuts are a woeful and depressing tale. Many years ago, while at PROV I was so fed up that I substituted the phrase efficiency cuts for the politically correct “efficiency savings” in a ministerial submission. To my surprise and delight it went all the way to the top before someone spotted it and rebuked me for it.

... Our national cultural institutions are threadbare, worn thin by decades of funding cuts, reductions in staff, and disintegrating buildings. They no longer have sufficient staffing and funds either to preserve, or to make accessible, the collections that they maintain on behalf of us all. Labor’s introduction of so-called “efficiency dividends” in the late 1980s laid the foundations for the present crisis, but the Coalition inflicted deeper funding cuts over the past decade...

Mis-allocation of resources:

AWM redevelopment; ‘nuf said. But woe betide the GLAM-orous when they become involved in the debate over how resources are to be allocated across the sector (as between one federal institution or programme and another, as between State and Federal, as between Government and Community).

While the National Library has been unable to repair its roof, there is bipartisan political support for an unnecessary and extravagant extension to the Australian War Memorial, which will cost more than \$500 million (and counting).

Ideology or neglect?

The argument then becomes weird. The article seems to be linking these funding issues with what the authors portray as the ideological obsessions of the Coalition (throwing in some sniping about climate change for good measure). But they make clear (correctly) that Labor is just as much to blame for the chronic under-funding. So, is the indifference ideologically motivated or what?

For Scott Morrison, Tony Abbott and their ministers, Australian history was a tool in a larger political project to stifle dissent and insist on a single legitimate point of view – their own... [The decay] is the result of decades of underfunding and a casual, negligent attitude to cultural heritage on the part of too many governments

Or is it a great, post-truth conspiracy to make “war” on history?

Do we really want to endorse the idea that there is good history and bad history? Good science and bad science? News and fake news? Are these concepts useful in the search for truth or do we accept Valery's view that history is merely a "mechanism for denying or rationalising away the relevance, significance or importance of opposing evidence or logical argument."

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History wars were part of an attempt to paint historians as out of step with the community, or even as enemies of the nation. Yet as the tide washes out on the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison era, it is clear that the real history war is the long war on our libraries and archives. Its full effects are only now hitting home...Scratch a tyrant or bully, and you'll usually also scratch someone producing, or sponsoring, fake history of some kind or doing their best to erase those parts of the past that don't suit their purposes in the present....

Why does it matter?

Almost parenthetically, an argument is made (weakly, I thought) for why these cultural materials, in the original, matter – or should matter. But it is unclear (to me) whether the authors really think it only matters until they are digitised. The linkage between preserving original evidence and upholding freedom seems to be based on the rather too comfortable assumption that truth and enlightenment follow the study of the past.

Special collections are the jewel in the crown of any library. They are one-off manuscript materials, unique and invaluable. We cannot understand the history of Australia without them. We must all be able to have confidence that they are safe in the institutions our governments have established, with our consent and money, to care for them...Most of this material is not digitised; researchers cannot simply move their work online. If researchers cannot consult original documents, with their own questions to answer, historical understanding stagnates. It should be a matter for national shame that it has been allowed to come to this...It is among the duties of government to secure Australians' democratic right to their cultural heritage and to their own people's stories...Our prime minister promised to end the climate wars. Let's hope he is equally committed to ending the war on history.

2022 September 18:

<<Mark Brogan: Do we have a war on history or a war on memory? I think we have a war on memory. Systematic neglect or destruction of recorded memory creates the cognitive foundations of tabula rasa, where false memory can be embedded and perception shaped. Sadly, in terms of the modified two-party system we have in Australia, the war on memory is bi-partisan and expanding.>>

2022 September 24:

Efficiency cuts are only part of the problem, but I am reminded by [this article](#) of the most intelligent thing I ever heard said by a consultant. Over the years, I've endured more reviews than most and this one was in NZ where we were enjoying a brief honeymoon in the first years of the newly elected Labour Government (they spell it with a "U" over there). They'd approved a new building for Auckland at the political level but we still had to go through the Budget approval process. This involved preparing a Business Case for Cabinet and we contracted to have this done for us by consultants who were (we were told) experienced in navigating through the approval process. The consultants looked us over and said:

With these Business Cases, Finance usually requires that we look for offsets to trade against new expenditure and this involves looking at activities that can be given up or done more inexpensively. But in your case, the greatest part of the money you spend doesn't go on making things happen but on preventing things from happening, so there's really nothing to look at.

Of course, Archives NZ was (and for all I know still is) poor as a church mouse to start with so there wasn't much left over after running the buildings and just keeping the place open. But I found this insight (after all the nonsense I'd heard from other consultants over the years, to say nothing of accountants) very refreshing.

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PS. It was only when I became involved in management that I began to appreciate the **difference between accountants and economists**. Regrettably, small-ticket items like archives only get to deal with accountants.

2022 December 29:

Beautiful icons?

<<... Our national cultural institutions are threadbare, worn thin by decades of funding cuts, reductions in staff, and disintegrating buildings. They no longer have sufficient staffing and funds either to preserve, or to make accessible, the collections that they maintain on behalf of us all. Labor's introduction of so-called "efficiency dividends" in the late 1980s laid the foundations for the present crisis, but the Coalition inflicted deeper funding cuts over the past decade...>>

Library budgets are constantly being cut; in New York, Mayor Eric Adams has proposed draconian, multimillion-dollar year-over-year reductions to the public library system's operating costs, the kind of drastic withdrawals of support that will inevitably force some locations to close...The public library makes a proposition that's still radical: that learning, knowledge and curiosity are for everyone, and that the annals of history, literature, science and art might not be just an indulgence of the privileged, but an entitlement of citizenship.

We are not alone.

<<... Almost parenthetically, an argument is made (weakly, I thought) for why these cultural materials, in the original, matter – or should matter. But it is unclear (to me) whether the authors really think it only matters until they are digitised. >>

Place vs accessibility? Availability vs monumentalism? Conservation vs contextualisation? Should contracting resources be assigned to upholding archives, galleries, museums, and libraries as places of resort or to programmes for making them more available? For the time being at least, it's both of course (until the unlikely day when everything is digitised or, at least, all that matters). But that glib response simply pushes the question on to the one about what proportion of contracting resources should be assigned to each.

If access to our collected heritage is "an entitlement of citizenship", how if the majority of citizens aren't interested? As Sir Humphrey Appleby once **remarked**, it's important to know that they are **there**: *It is not to be given to what the people want: it is for what the people don't want but ought to have!*

Many years ago, in the days of B&W television, in one episode of an ABC Arts programme the host was showing a modernist painting that was totally black. The artistry, apparently, lay in the shading that the artist had used. Seemingly without any sense of drollery, the host was saying earnestly: *I only wish you could see this in colour*. Don't know what made me think of that.

2022 December 31:

New national cultural policy announced

[Arts Minister Tony] Burke revealed details of a new national cultural policy, to be released on 30 January ... The policy has five pillars: to put "First Nations first", find a "place for every story", ensure the "centrality of the artist", "reach the audience" and ensure "strong institutions". Burke said funding for collecting institutions such as the national museum, gallery and archives, and Trove will not be contained in the policy, promising "major decisions" to correct "systematic underfunding" but suggesting these would wait until the budget.

This foreshadows that a "new national cultural policy", insofar as it applies to "collecting institutions such as the national museum, gallery and archives", will continue to be federal not national. The vast area of archival activity undertaken by state, local, and non-government bodies will remain outside the scope of federal funding. The Commonwealth's

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focus will, it seems, still be on those few programmes for which it is responsible directly - not national at all. This can, of course, be defended on the grounds that the Constitution does not assign such a responsibility to the Commonwealth Government. But, when it wants to, the federal government can adopt a national rather than a federal role.

Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs)

The Australian federal system is notable in the degree to which the national government can influence the spending and policy priorities of state and local governments. An important instrument in this is the much-used power, under section 96 of the Constitution, whereby the Commonwealth can make conditional grants of money to the state and territory governments. These have become known as specific purpose payments (SPPs) for programs in a wide range of areas. The states administer these payments which, in most cases, are subject to conditions (so-called conditionality) that the Commonwealth specifies. In 2006-07, the Commonwealth spent almost \$29 billion or about 11 per cent of Commonwealth government expenses on SPPs ... A key move by the Commonwealth ... occurred in 1923 when the Commonwealth Parliament passed the Main Roads Development Bill which granted the states money that they could use only on the development of main roads. This was the Commonwealth's first foray into the provision of SPPs that were subject to conditionality. With the failure of a Victorian High Court challenge against the legislation, SPPs became part of the Commonwealth-state financial relationship although, for many years, they were a relatively small proportion of section 96 grants. However, since the Whitlam Government's (1972-75) deliberate decision to use such grants to impose major policy change on the states, successive Commonwealth governments have increasingly done the same ...

For the Commonwealth to say that the States should be responsible for their own recordkeeping programmes (of which the administration of state archival "collections" is just one part) would be fair enough. But this would not preclude the Commonwealth from having a national archives policy rather than a federal one whereby direct funding and/or SPPs could be used to rationalise spending on the sector rather than simply on NAA and AWM. Archivaly, having "a place for every story" would certainly seem to span state and institutional boundaries. It's just a question of mindset.

Don't hold your breath though.

<<Adrian Cunningham: Michael Piggott has some cogent commentary on this in Honest History from a few weeks ago...>>

And it is good to remind ourselves from time to time that the Commonwealth, through provisions in the *Archives Act*, has statutory authority to exercise "national functions" in relation to the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" under s.3(2) and 5(2)(a), as in the nation, and "other archival resources relating to Australia" under s.5(2)(b) - beyond NAA's remit to look after Commonwealth Government records. Never used, always spurned, perpetually ignored. But they're there.

2023 January 1:

<<Andrew Waugh: That's considerably limited in scope. Section 2(g) specifically excludes State records from "the archival resources of the Commonwealth [consisting] of such Commonwealth records and other material as are of national significance or public interest," and section 8 explicitly states that the NAA has no power over the custody of State records. Beyond this the archival resources of the Commonwealth must satisfy a two part test (section 2). While you could read this part expansively (anything of public interest relating to the history of Australia), the wording overall would also support a more restricted reading that restricts the NAA to material that was of national importance (a well defined concept in heritage) and that concerned Australia as a whole, or the Commonwealth government specifically.>>

<<That's considerably limited in scope>>

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Yes, deliberately so. If, by "scope". you mean taking custody or assuming management of resources, I agree. It was designed that way to obviate the apprehensions of "competition" from other archives and libraries and, specifically (of course) the state archives programmes. NAA was not designed (in the drafting of the Act, at any rate) as a policy department; it is operational. It cannot (on that reading) be the vehicle for a national archives policy. But it can operate as an instrument for such a policy if it existed.

These provisions were intended to allow NAA to provide support and leadership of which the National Register was a specific example mentioned in the Act (never implemented, apart I'm told from sticking a label on what they already had). Other than that, my recollection is that none of us involved in the drafting expressed any clear views on what kind of national activity might be undertaken (you might search out the Second Reading Speech, which is somewhere about in cyberspace, in which some specific examples may be given).

Just off the top of my head, I would regard participation in (the now defunct ACA - Australian Council on Archives) as an example where NAA could have done more (as NLA did in fostering AACOBS in its early days) Sponsoring a federated gateway (cf. my modest proposal) would be something else along these lines. Taking a lead in surveying needs across the sector and advising the Commonwealth on funding and other initiatives at the national level could have been undertaken.

Instead, NAA joined with the other government archives to kill off the ACA, thereby ensuring that the collective voice heard by government(s) was a lop-sided, top-heavy, and self-interested one (I refer to COFSTA). Some of the things ACA was doing before it was killed off that COFSTA continues (e.g. statistics) would certainly qualify and these provisions underpin co-operation as much as leadership. The aspiration (at least on my part and I believe others) was for NAA to be doing (or co-ordinating, or co-operating in) things nationally that no single institution or programme could. This could be helping and supporting others in doing the things they were doing anyway, possibly developing infrastructure that was necessarily collective in nature, and looking at the needs of archives broadly. NAA could plausibly argue that participating in COFSTA does all this but I can remember back to the days when NAA would only join us as an "observer" on STAG (the COFSTA's predecessor).

We drafted the functions to operate concentrically

- Most narrowly, **Commonwealth records** (for which NAA had overarching responsibility for management and/or custody)
- More broadly, **Archival resources of the Commonwealth** (for which NAA was not responsible but had a special interest because they were of national scope and significance)
- Broadest of all, **Other archival resources** (local in scope and significance but also important)

The drafting was intended to ensure that NAA could act only in a limited way in these two latter areas (and that no bean counter could ever say that cooperative or collaborative action was beyond NAA's powers) and do so without interfering in the activities of those to whom responsibility for management and custody belonged. It is, of course, the case that NAA is not obliged to act on these powers, so it is a missed opportunity rather than a dereliction. The National Register is a different matter.

I am prepared to admit that my judgement of NAA's performance of its national functions (or lack of it) may be a trifle harsh. But that was peripheral to my main point which was that if Tony Burke wanted to look at a truly national archives policy (instead of just making it a question of funding for the national institutions in the Budget) there is a basis for doing so.

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PS. I have since come to believe that if we'd provided more aggressively for federation of the Commonwealth, Territory, and State archives programmes that could have made it harder for the amalgamations that have occurred (or been threatened) in several of our jurisdictions - cf. NSW, NT, Tas. It would never have flown back then (even if I'd thought of it) but there were subsequently a couple of attempts at joint facilities.

2023 January 2:

<< **We drafted the functions to operate concentrically**>>

The [Explanatory Memorandum](#) (EM) for the 1978 Bill is online. The EM for the Bill which later became the 1983 Act may also be somewhere (geez, they're hard to find) but I don't believe the sections on "national functions" changed materially (but I am open to correction on this because I haven't checked the wording of the 1978 Bill against the 1983 Act)

Clause 3: (contd)

Under sub-clause (2), the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" are defined to include Commonwealth records and other material – except for exempt material" or material more properly the concern of other Governments – which are of national significance or public interest. It will be a function of the Archives to encourage and foster the preservation of all of the archival resources of the Commonwealth and to take into its custody that part of the archival resources of the Commonwealth which it is its function to preserve and maintain. A wide definition of the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" has been proposed because of the difficulty of defining – in legal terms – the differences between the areas of operation of the Archives and those of other custodial institutions concerned with collecting and preserving the same kinds of material (e.g. libraries and museums) whose collecting policies in the past have sometimes resulted in the deposit of official records out of official custody. It is intended that the Australian Archives established by this legislation should assume a national responsibility for developing and encouraging the preservation of all archival materials in Australia without in any way interfering with the autonomy of other archival or custodial institutions. It is not intended that the Archives will seek to have the custody and management of archival material which is more properly the concern of other institutions. By law, the Archives will be limited in this respect to material which is essentially of national or Commonwealth concern and as a matter of policy it will confine itself to material which is closely associated with the operation of Government and therefore likely to include or be related to records deposited with the Archives by Commonwealth institutions.

Clause 5:

Sub-clause (2) outlines the functions of the Archives which are as follows:

Under sub-clause 5(2)(a), the Archives is responsible for ensuring the conservation and preservation of the archival resources of the Commonwealth, which are its special concern. In the exercise of this responsibility the Archives need not take into custody all material that is part of the archival resources of the Commonwealth provided it is satisfied that the material is being or can be adequately preserved or is more properly housed elsewhere.

Under sub-clause 5(3)(b), the Archives is given a wider responsibility to encourage and foster, by offering advice and other assistance, the preservation of other archival resources relating to Australia which, while not part of the archival resources relating to Australia, it is nevertheless in the national interest to have preserved. It will not be the Archives role to seek the custody of such material but to advise on its preservation and, as requested, assist other institutions for that purpose.

Interesting that when I wrote that I had not yet acquired a repugnance for "collecting" and "custodialism" and also how very physical our view of archiving was back then.

<<[John Waddingham: The explanatory memorandum for the 1983 Act.](#)>>

2023 January 7:

From the [Guardian](#)

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The future of Trove, the National Library of Australia's expansive public digital archives, is in doubt with just six months funding left, with the library's director general revealing that it is facing "very, very big decisions" in the next few months, if the government does not step in with funding ... Last week, [the arts minister, Tony Burke](#), publicly indicated that Trove's future will not be addressed in the federal government's new cultural policy, which will be announced on 30 January ... The National Library and its Trove service is one of six national Canberra-based cultural institutions that have been struggling to do more with less over a period of more than three decades, when the government introduced the concept of efficiency dividends to government-funding bodies in the late 1980s ... In his address last Friday, Burke said there was "a lot of outcry at the moment and justified outcry" about funding of Canberra's collecting institutions, saying it was due to "systematic underfunding that has happened for a long period of time". "There will be major decisions that the government will take in dealing with those challenges," he said.

2023 January 20:

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese [has thrown a lifeline](#) to Australia's national cultural institutions, bluntly acknowledging the financial crisis facing our largest galleries and museums and telling ABC radio listeners that some are currently "starved of funds". "We will deal with this as part of our budget processes," he said this week, when pressed about ongoing concerns for organisations like the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the National Film and Sound Archive ...

Perhaps NAA shouldn't get excited about being over-looked in this list. After all, it's "going to be hard" for the Government and the only thing being promised, after all, is "consideration". The last time I looked, consideration costs a government nothing. If they are going to make hard promises to actually do something, perhaps they'll wait to the last year of this term of government. Then it will be an election promise and we know all about those. But they could still be in office for two terms ... maybe the last year of their second term.

[The PM continued] "this is something that the government will give consideration to in the lead-up to the May budget." ... [Last July] arts minister Tony Burke was frank about the problem stating institutions like this had [suffered from a "decade of neglect"](#). But he also said it was "going to be hard" to adequately address everyone's concerns given broader budgetary pressures.

If they are serious about "addressing" everyone's concerns, surely the place to start would be the promised National Arts Policy where foundational questions such as *what's more important* would have to be "addressed". But we're told the Policy won't be doing that. So, on what basis will they be "addressing" the competing claims since they can't "adequately address everyone's concerns"? Whoever makes the most noise? Whoever has the most influential friends? Whoever can tell the saddest tale of woe? Flip of a coin? It can't be on a policy-based assessment of significance or worth. I wasn't always this cynical. Really, I wasn't. Mind you, I wouldn't like to be the minister promulgating a policy that "addressed" relative significance and worth. Would you?

<<David Povey: In my mind's eye I see a CEO from the NLA or NFSA blowing their chest out, and "proudly but not arrogantly" letting the minions know that they are "being considered for enhanced funding" as soon as the forthcoming budget. As an "outward facing" CEO, this consideration by government is a significant achievement for the organisation and will almost certainly result in the enhancement of the CEO's status. This CEO status enhancement will come at the cost of the loss of one conservator and a stay on ordering Japanese washi, subsequent on "the failure of the government to increase funding" in the May budget. Further consideration of an increase in budget for "digital services" in FY2024/5 is however a "priority for government". The enhanced CEO has moved back to Finance where she takes up an Assistant Secretary position. That, Mr Hurley, is what is known as a "Win/Win". (Unless you're a conservator or need washi for urgent paper repairs).>>

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2023 February 25:

Richard Glover [makes a plea](#) to save *Trove*

The funding for Trove runs out at the end of June. The National Library says that without additional funding, they “will need to cease offering the Trove service entirely.” ... Trove is crucial for professional historians, but it’s also a trapdoor through which anyone can tumble and learn something new. Try it yourself and see why it so desperately needs to be saved.

2023 March 10:

Wondering what the contending parties in NSW have in mind after the forthcoming election for the Arts sector (within which, to my great disgust, official recordkeeping seems to have been submerged)? You won’t be able to find out much (at least I couldn’t).

- **Liberals** are mostly on about performing arts, museums, facilities, sport, and the fish market (god-save-us-all!).
- **Labor** will “take a whole-of-government approach” [say again?], moving focus “beyond the major cultural institutions in the city’s east to the broader creative businesses right across the city”, and charting a “path to growth for the sector which does not rely solely on public sector funding and support.” [And they say they’re opposed to privatisation].
- **Nationals** “support funding local art groups to encourage diversity, expression of culture, exploration of the latest ideas and to help with the attraction of performances.”
- **Greens** will “invest a greater share of the arts budget on regional and rural arts and on First Nations art ” (Note: nothing is said about r/keeping in a separate section on [Democracy, Ant-Corruption & Integrity](#)).
- **One Nation** Hard to say but possibly “Abolishing all forms of political indoctrination in NSW education, especially transgender ideology and Critical Race Theory” or “abolishing woke-PC programs and employment quotas in the NSW public sector, putting these funds into improved hospital services around the State.”
- **Shooters & Fishers** ... also hard to say: they “respect common sense in the execution of our rights and truth in government” and they “honour our Australian way of life including our ancient heritage, western culture, and pluralistic democracy” (and [accessibility to fireworks](#)).

Nothing that I could find that suggests any concern with recordkeeping, standards, accountability, etc. or an understanding of or concern with integrity (apart from fatuous platitudes or the Greens drooling over ICAC, political donations, and other hot-buttons) nor with the connection between integrity and r/keeping. To the extent that it is (or was) a professional objective of ours to get this on the political radar, we haven’t done so well (it seems to me). Reviewing the recent scandals, it seems that when r/keeping comes in at all we are locked into the role of being pawns in gotcha-moment sensations that quickly fade and do nothing to cement abiding notions of support for routine good practice.

For those of a more mercenary bent, I could find nothing about funding except for suggestions of moving money away from established institutions. I’m all for expanding state support towards non-government and community archives but I fear this is more about glitz than substance.

PS For the sake of tidiness: I overlooked the [Animal Justice Party](#) which holds “positions” on issues that aren’t animal-related. They have positions on

- **Corruption** : supports “the efforts of integrity and accountability agencies that oversee our democratic processes”
- **Democracy** : supports “the rule of law, the principle of responsible government, and the separation of powers”

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*When I mount the scaffold at last these will be my farewell words to the sheriff:
Say what you will against me when I am gone, but don't forget to add,
in common justice, that I was never converted to anything. H L Menken*

2023 March 11:

Perhaps the state of government recordkeeping in NSW is so excellent that there is no need for political parties to have a policy or even to mention it any more. Political commitment to integrity in recordkeeping is now a given in the Premier State, is it?. In that case, if it's so uncontroversial, why shouldn't ASA and RIMPA get together and use that excellence as the basis for developing a model recordkeeping policy to assist parties of all persuasions in ALL jurisdictions (Commonwealth, State, and Territory). Look at NSW! If they can do it there, why not everywhere? Saves you the trouble of thinking it through or arguing about it. Here you go, just subscribe to this model policy that commits you to upholding the same superb levels of accountability they've reached in NSW. What!? You won't do that? Well, what does that say about you?

Be proactive. Go to them. Go for them. Don't wait for them to come to us. Lots of other interest groups do that. Why not us? Come to think of it, giving them all a model government recordkeeping policy might not be such a bad idea even if the NSW integrity model isn't all it's cracked up to be. Why wait for the politicians to tell us what they're prepared to do? Why not tell them what we expect them to do?

A lot of attention has been given to "[integrity agencies](#)" in NSW – independence, funding, role, powers and responsibilities. The records authorities would not ordinarily be regarded as one of them (because recordkeepers don't have an enforcement role and standard-setters cannot be auditors) but they have been periodically recognised as ancillary – [poor recordkeeping attracts corruption like flies to a carcass](#). And so, a model government r/keeping policy would make that connection and ask political parties to commit to some of the same guarantees for the r/keeping mechanisms.

But all that would require some kind of consensus on our part as a profession (are we still that?) about what a model r/keeping policy for government ought to look like – a consensus that would be doubly difficult to recognise when tangled up in an Arts Policy. But, first things first, could we even get agreement amongst ourselves? I once thought so.

2023 March 24:

It seems a pity, if archives & records **must** be lumped in with the Arts, that NAA doesn't even get a mention in [an article](#) like this:

... The [NGA's] lifts need urgent replacing, the roof membrane and skylights leak in a downpour, and the air-conditioning is clapped out. Some \$265 million in urgent repairs are needed to bring the 40-year-old building up to standard. Come July the gallery is facing a looming budget cliff ... Unless a funding solution can be found, the gallery has warned it will need to cut staff, some 50 positions over three years, close its doors two days a week and possibly impose ticketed entry. The National Library of Australia, the nation's repository of the published word, has been caught in the same financial crunch and has a building also in need of multimillion-dollar investment. Funding for its digital resource, Trove, runs out on June 30 and without additional government support the popular archive could cease operations altogether ...

"Governments have stonewalled these institutions for years and Anthony Albanese and Tony Burke need to show some sensitivity to these huge issues despite the competing claims for government money," says former arts administrator Michael Lynch. "One of those idiot submarines would fix all the dilemmas of the national institutions and generate a huge amount of interest in what they can do. Where is the advocacy for these institutions?" ... investment in federal cultural institutions has been half-hearted,

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inconsistent and of a drip-feed nature with serious consequences for the ability of these bodies to weather economic storms, [former Australian Film Finance Commission and Foxtel boss Kim Williams] says. Williams blames a prejudice, what others might call a consequence of the culture wars, in which spending on the arts has been cast as an elitist pursuit.

Hmmm? Trading off forward defence for cultural survival. Let the arts thrive within fortress Australia. The only thing we have to worry about then is civil war of a cultural kind. Seriously?

... The NGA's particular struggles date to the late 1980s when national collecting institutions became subject to public service-wide annual savings cuts, known as an annual efficiency dividend. The Rudd government imposed an additional 2 per cent efficiency dividend on the institutions soon after it came to office, forcing savings of close to \$20 million to be found by the collecting institutions. The Rudd impost was temporary, but soon after it returned to its previous level, the Abbott government ramped the dividend up again, doubling it from 1.25 per cent to 2.5 per cent in its brutal first budget and keeping it there for five years ... Months before its 2022 election loss, the Morrison government commissioned KPMG to review the financial sustainability of all cultural institutions. The findings have never been released but are said to paint a dire picture of financial distress. The think tank, A New Approach, funded by 11 philanthropic foundations, found a 4.9 per cent decline in arts and cultural funding in the 10 years to 2017 for each Australian across three tiers of government, with a marked 18.9 per cent decline in federal spending.

It would be great to know if these metrics include the cultural aspects of r/keeping. Probably not. How depressing – to be regarded as cultural collections and then not counted.

Budgets have likely worsened since then, says Williams. “The so-called efficiency dividend would have done its dirty work, and more, and inflation has cut in so it's been a full-frontal attack on the intellectual and creative life in Australia ... The efficiency dividend must go because the majority of costs in these areas of endeavour are in people and therefore the efficiency dividend basically says you have to do the same amount of stuff with fewer people.” [Former arts administrator Michael Lynch] agrees there is no place for efficiency dividends in the funding mix for the NGA or any national cultural institution. “It's a bullshit concept,” he says ...

Professor Peter Stanley, who worked at the Australian War Memorial for 27 years and then spent six years at the National Museum, says the collecting institutions face three challenges: the cumulative impact of efficiency dividends, the need to spend money on buildings falling into disrepair and the competing need to spend money to keep growing their visitor numbers ... “All of them are fearful that if their visitor numbers, physical and digital, fall that they won't be worth funding. In order to meet those expectations, they take money away from their fundamental research and preservation roles ... Stanley says there is an unjustified imbalance in funding ANZAC commemoration, militarism and the War Memorial that “demonstrates Australians don't look at their history and culture in an equitable way”.

I suppose that in a climate of crisis it can't be expected that there would be useful debate over prioritisation for funding within the Arts sector, even one so parochial as funding for federal programmes merely. Probably just as well because I can't see us doing well in such a debate, even if we were considered at all.

Former arts minister Paul Fletcher has consistently defended the Coalition's record while being quick to point out that Labor has had two opportunities to fix these budget issues, most recently when it launched its National Cultural Policy. For his part, Albanese has acknowledged the national galleries and museums have been “starved of funds”, and has blamed “a decade of neglect”. Burke has assured the leaders of collecting institutions the government is listening.

So, that's all right then.

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Now for a feel-good story. Apologies if this is not news for you but that's no reason not to feel good about it anyway. When I travel down to Sydney I try to spend a few hours at [SMSA Library](#). Sometimes I go down just for that (and an opportunity to visit Abbey's Book Shop). I like reading the newspapers and journals I don't subscribe to myself, like [The Oldie](#). They have just celebrated their 190th anniversary. How about that!



How this place keeps going I have no idea but I'm glad it does. Makes up for neglect in other spaces. The Melbourne equivalent is the [Atheneum Library](#) to which I belonged when I lived there. The [mechanics' institutes](#) were once a big deal and to be found all over.

2023 March 30:

Once again, NAA misses out on both [cash and recognition](#) as a “national cultural institution”. Perhaps because they're a federal cultural institution, and not a national one. Or, perhaps because they're selling themselves as something else now when all that culture seems to get is Mr Burke's "consideration". I suppose it doesn't matter much if *The Guardian* doesn't include them amongst "Australia's national cultural institutions" but I am pleased they're not listed amongst "the country's national collecting agencies" - unless, of course, that's how they wish to see themselves now. in which case they have my sympathy. As I read the national cultural policy, it's national in focus and not federal, so maybe NAA has no hope there either. The words, of course, aren't important until perception becomes reality.

The Australian War Memorial received more funding than the rest of Australia's national cultural institutions put together, in the last two years of the Coalition government ... The Australian War Memorial is undergoing a major refurbishment, with \$500m allocated by the Morrison government, topped up with a further \$50m in March 2022 ... Over the same time, the country's national collecting agencies – **the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Museum of Australia, the Australian Maritime Museum and the National Film and Sound Archive** – collectively received \$400m from the Coalition government, as efficiency dividends saw budgets slashed over successive years. The national collecting institutions were not included in the \$300m national cultural policy [announced by the arts minister, Tony Burke](#), in January.

Burke indicated at the time that additional support for the national cultural institutions was being considered for the May budget ...

2023 April 1:

<<It seems a pity, if archives & records must be lumped in with the Arts, that NAA doesn't even get a mention in [an article like this](#)>>

Perhaps this is why.

I came across this [2022 Report](#) from an outfit calling itself the [Office of the Arts](#) (D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Communications and the Arts) – no Oxford comma. It measures

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(or claims to measure) the “impact of our national cultural institutions”. It provides lots of juicy metrics and has no hesitation in proclaiming which institutions they are:

The National Cultural Institutions are:

- [Australian National Maritime Museum](#)
- [Bundanon Trust](#)
- [The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House](#)
- [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia](#)
- [The National Gallery of Australia](#)
- [The National Library of Australia](#)
- [The National Museum of Australia](#)
- [The National Portrait Gallery](#)
- [The Australia Council for the Arts](#)
- [The Australian Film, Television and Radio School](#)
- [Screen Australia](#)

By which, of course, they mean the federally funded ones and not, for example, the [National Gallery of Victoria](#), the [Australian Museum](#), et al. It seems an odd mix of doers and collectors. I’m all for metrics but these metrics seem to be a little bit crazy. How can you combine data from all these programmes and the different institutions (and the diverse materials in which they deal) to aggregate figures for the number of “objects” held, available, displayed, digitised, etc. How can you compare visits to these institutions and other activities undertaken in relation to performance, paintings, museum objects, books, film, photos, sound recordings, etc., etc., as if they’re all just things with like properties?

This has the smell of a bureaucracy in search of a purpose. I don’t wish to sound unkind but, if Mr Burke is looking for money to fund the institutions, he might start by abolishing this lot and using the money saved to mend the [Gallery’s roof](#). Maybe he wouldn’t then have to give up a nuclear submarine to pay for it (as some well-meaning idiot has suggested).

2023 April 3:

Somewhere, in the dark recesses of their minds, I imagine the politicians and mandarins who have been inflicting “efficiency savings” on our cultural institutions must see a connection between budget cuts and improved productivity. Of course, the cuts always seem to come **before** the improved productivity, just as coal and gas are being dispensed with **before** the green infrastructure is ready to replace it. Ah well! It’s an insane world.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man never is but always To be blest. The soul, uneasy, and confin’d from home, rests and expiates in a life to come (Pope).

Thus [Ross Gittins](#) last Saturday:

The Productivity Commission’s five-yearly report on our productivity performance ... has one important thing to tell us: ... productivity improvement has slowed [and] it will probably stay slow ... Everyone thinks they know what productivity means, but they often don’t ... The report says that over the past 20 years, the rate of improvement in productivity has slowed in all the rich countries, but with Australia slowing more than most ... most improvements in the productivity of labour come from advances in technology [and] giving workers more education and training ...

... industries that produce *goods* ... can, and have, hugely increase[d] their productivity by mechanising and computerising. Same in utilities, transport and communications. In the production of *services*, however, it’s much harder ... As [Baumol](#) famously remarked, it takes an orchestra just as long to play a symphony today as it did in 1960 – or 1860 ... Which means the productivity of labour is sky-high in the goods sector, but not great in the services sector ... Despite their low productivity, employers in the services sector have to pay higher wages to stop their workers moving to higher-paying jobs in the goods sector ... in rich, high-productivity

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economies such as ours, labour is the more expensive resource, and capital the less expensive resource ...

So, maybe the real problem for us is that we are on the “services” side of the equation and productivity improvement is harder for us to achieve. Mind you, with privatisation, most of government now is services (how unlike the doers of the colonial pioneering days when government did things). Many government agencies endure a few years of efficiency and then morph into something else and begin the dance all over again, but our cultural institutions endure and just get smaller and smaller but never seem to disappear (just as in [Zeno’s paradox](#)).

I haven’t read the detail of this week’s announcement about new funding for Trove. Is it to be one-off or recurrent? Does it pay for systems and capital or for people to keep it going? Governments find it more palatable to put money into buildings and capital than paying the staff needed to make use of them.

2023 April 4:

<<**[Mike Jones](#): The Trove funding announced is \$33 million over the next four years, then from 2027 \$9.2 million ongoing indexed funding after that. The library has said that this will "will allow the National Library to continue to provide this essential service, enrich it with new content, and stabilise and secure the platform, in line with the Trove Strategy" but the specifics around how it will be spent, what is allocated to people versus technology is as far as I know still to be determined. It's also not clear whether the NLA more broadly is going to get a funding boost to deal with staffing issues, building works, and so on. It's interesting to note that, though several arts organisations were excluded from the efficiency dividend as part of the latest arts and culture policy, at this stage the NLA and other national institutions (including NAA as far as I am aware) are still subject to this. Finance Minister Katy Gallagher has come out this week and confirmed that Labor remains committed to the efficiency dividend for 'properly funded' institutions, which makes one wonder whether, after the latest push back up the hill, we will once again find ourselves sliding slowly back toward the bottom. I guess we'll know more after the May budget.>>**

Lifeline for Trove

- **Is it to be one-off or recurrent?**
... The pre-budget announcement on Monday pledged [\$33m] emergency funding over the next four years ... plus an additional \$9.2m in ongoing annual funding ...
- **Does it pay for systems and capital or for people to keep it going?**
“... the Government is ... committing to providing \$9.2 million in indexed ongoing annual funding beyond the forward estimates ... This funding is consistent with the Government’s commitment in [Revive](#), our national cultural policy, to support our national collecting institutions to digitise and provide broad public access to their collections.” [Hon Tony Burke MP](#)

Interesting that, [contrary to earlier indications](#), the Minister is now coupling funding for core business in at least one of the national collections with the National Cultural Policy. But “consistent with” is scarcely a reversal of the former position. They’ve provided \$199m over four years for “greater strategic oversight and engagement” and some money for outreach by the National Gallery (but not as yet a new roof).

2023 April 6:

<< **[I came across this 2022 Report from an outfit calling itself the Office of the Arts \(D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Communications and the Arts\) – no Oxford comma. >>](#)**

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This interesting website has other rewarding pages, like [this one](#) which claims to reveal the level of "government cultural funding and participation" across the nation and in each State and Territory.

- In 2020–21, the estimate of total expenditure on cultural activities, funded by the three tiers of government, was \$7,708.0m. This amount includes \$514.4m of targeted COVID support funding for cultural and creative organisations and infrastructure, businesses, individuals, support programs and initiatives. The Australian Government targeted COVID support funding was \$232.6m, and State and territory government targeted COVID support funding was \$281.8m. The \$7,708.0m in funding for cultural activities from the three tiers of government comprised:
 - \$2,967.0m (39% of total) from the Australian Government
 - \$2,955.2m (38%) from state and territory governments
 - \$1,785.8m (23%) from local governments.
- The Australian Government allocated more than double the funding to Arts activities, compared to Heritage activities (72% and 28% respectively). The five categories with the highest expenditure by the Australian Government in 2020–21 was:
 1. Radio and television services—\$1,418.1m
 2. Other museums and cultural heritage—\$482.9m
 3. Film and video production and distribution—\$159.8m
 4. Archives—\$140.7m
 5. Music—\$132.4m.The five categories with the highest expenditure by State and territory government in 2020–21 was:
 2. Other museums and cultural heritage—\$505.5m
 3. Libraries—\$451.6m
 4. Art museums—\$414.0m
 5. Arts education—\$176.2m.

2023 April 10:

They said it. [From SMH](#)

Sydney's musicians, galleries, museums, restaurants and theatres will be at the forefront of a new national and global tourism rebrand as the Minns government takes its lead from federal Labor and commits to "bringing cultural vibrancy back to NSW". The state's tourism pitch to international and interstate visitors will shift focus from the icons of the harbour, Bondi Beach and Sydney Opera House to experience-based tourism under the watch of incoming Arts and Tourism Minister John Graham. "As soon as you do that, tourism becomes an arts and culture story," Graham told *The Sydney Morning Herald*. NSW will also get its own arts and cultural policy by year's end, similar to that launched by the Albanese government in January ...



Tourist dollars are where the arts are, and my arts are experience-based.

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Graham, who also manages the roads' portfolio, spearheaded a parliamentary inquiry into the state's music and arts economy post-introduction of lockdown laws, and like federal minister, Tony Burke, is known as a strong advocate for live music ... Labor's pre-election promises on arts and culture were relatively modest but targeted: matching \$160 million in funding to upgrade three western Sydney arts venues ... and a pledge to spend [\\$103 million to double the number of suburban and regional live music venues in four years](#) ... The new minister met with the leaders of cultural institutions and Destination NSW, the government's tourism agency, the day before Cabinet's formal swearing-in last week. The state's aspirations for arts and culture had been set too low, he said, and Labor would seek to broaden traditional definitions to include creative industries such as gaming, design, and architecture ...

2023 April 20:

Budgets out of control, bulk billing all but dead, NDIS ripped off and dysfunctional, policy mismatches (e.g. immigration/population "policies" vs infrastructure), energy security in peril, defence needs outstripping resources, flashy short-term fixes vs boring long-term hard-slog, policy decisions to "save" health, education, and aged care by funding for more trained staff who simply don't exist, etc. etc. etc. What hope have cultural institutions (whichever they are) for reparative or even sustainable funding in this situation, with their long-term agendas and needs? Well, we have one abiding competitive advantage – we are so small by comparison that we make no difference one way or the other re the biggies.

Think of budgets as Venn Diagrams or representations of planetary space. The big blobs are health, education, welfare, transport, defence and so on. Our (diminishing) share is like a tiny moon drifting across the surface of Jupiter. Unfortunately, this also means that our needs never make it to the high table where the big decisions are made – our needs will be referred to a sub-committee. But there are more profound (and more depressing) lessons to be learned from a consideration of how big government works. Here is an analysis of some of the reasons the US (and its allies including Australia) failed in Afghanistan: reasons that point to the pattern in which complex democracies fail on many fronts and with which any thinking middle-level manager, still working or from retirement, will be familiar.

... [in 2005-2008] the effort was under-resourced. Iraq was the principal reason why ... But another problem - one more endemic to Washington's culture of warfare – had to do with how funding decisions are made and how slowly the American government is able to change course ... when funds are available departments are urged to spend quickly to clear the books; when requesting funds, the justifications and paperwork to get what one needs will seem without end ... the process of budget allocation and management in Washington was disconnected from operations in the field ... By 2007, the coalition was losing the war ... President Bush in mid-February [promised] funding ... The problem was that budgeting procedures were simply too slow to have the necessary effect ... [his speech] contained major increases in economic aid and a giant jump in security funding [for which the author of this analysis and colleagues on the ground had been arguing for years with a growing sense of urgency] ... But funding only began to reach the field toward the end of the year ... once the funds arrived, they came with demands to spend quickly, which led to the flawed decisions and inadequate oversight. Tripling the funds in an account can happen with the stroke of a pen; expanding programs responsibly is far more complex ... [remember our own [home insulation programme](#)] ...

This feast-or-famine quality ... is yet another attribute of how Washington goes to war, and it stretches far beyond Afghanistan [add the Trump factor and this is a truly frightening conclusion for a close ally]. As George F Kennan once famously explained ... The United States ... is like a "*prehistoric monster with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin; he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath – in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but once he grasps this he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary, but largely wrecks his native habitat.*" This is what happened in Afghanistan in 2007; but the tool the dinosaur ... used was not its

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teeth or its tail – it was its credit card.

Ronald E Neumann “Washington goes to war” in [Our Latest Longest War](#) (2017) edited by Aaron B O’Connell (pp.55-58)

When I was new to management, I made the fatal error of believing what I was told when I asked how to get budget requests through. Eventually, I reached the only sane conclusions:

- Don’t believe that the obstacles put in your way are reasons, they are pretexts.
- Don’t believe that logic or sense will win an argument - when you confront them with facts they can’t refute, they will turn away with a pained expression and start talking about something else.
- Never underestimate their capacity to avoid doing what they don’t want to do and their ingenuity in not doing it.
- Never suppose that a decision in your favour will come with the support you need to make it work.
- Never assume that the powers that be have brains.
- Never believe that you are operating in an orderly and integrated environment (unless you’re Victorian and your head-of-government is named Andrews who, we are told, has tentacles everywhere).

PS. For what it’s worth, here are three other life-lessons I’ve learned:

- Never eat on anything that moves or floats.
- Never embark upon a land war in Asia.
- Never let the bastards get you down.

2023 April 27:

Culture Clash ("history is boring")

On the other hand, they could love you to death When lamenting government neglect of publicly funded GLAM collections, it might do to be careful what we wish for. The continuing controversy over the Powerhouse Museum – its relocation to Parramatta and a refocus away from its “traditional” role (the Powerhouse dropped ‘museum’ from its name in February this year) – might not be about cost-cutting after all, according to some insiders, but rather about losing your soul by appealing to a Government’s wish to use its cultural assets to support tourism and to appear glitzy and “with it” (how that phrase dates me). Familiar territory for critics of the AWM extravaganza.

Staff and former board members at Sydney’s Powerhouse allege the museum’s collections have been neglected and put at risk of damage, as Australia’s flagship science and technology museum undergoes a controversial \$500m conversion into a commercially driven creative arts and events space [alleging] that objects in the museum had been placed at risk during major modifications to exhibition spaces and at parties and events held at the site ...

The Powerhouse’s new direction – fashion and design over science and technology, and moving away from the family market – is well under way. Its current exhibitions include Unpopular, about the 1990s alternative music scene; a Carla Zampatti fashion retrospective; an exhibition featuring new Australian designers; and Absolutely Queer, which shines a spotlight on Sydney’s leading LGBTQI+ creatives. While the former power station in Ultimo became home to the Museum of Applied Arts and Science’s extensive science and technology collection 35 years ago, the Powerhouse no longer has a curator of transport and engineering, or aviation. In February, “museum” was formally dropped from the institution’s title ...

Questioned in budget estimates last September, the Powerhouse’s chief executive since 2019, Lisa Havilah, put forward a business case for the Ultimo and Parramatta operations combined at \$38.8m in commercial revenue per annum by 2028 – \$10m more than the National Gallery of Victoria, which is currently the most visited museum in Australia. Kylie Winkworth, who sits on the board of the National Trust (NSW) and is a member of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, a group fighting to save the Ultimo site as a museum, said she believed the business

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case showed that the museum's management and trust no longer regarded the Powerhouse as a public museum and it had already transitioned into a "commercially focused events business with some museum exhibitions fitted in around gaps"...

A survey of Powerhouse staff completed in late 2022 found that two-thirds of respondents believed the museum was no longer providing a good experience to visitors ... with more than two-thirds of staff saying they believed no action would be taken by management on the survey results. The Powerhouse spokesperson said a presentation was provided to all staff "identifying priority areas to address and areas of improvement" after the survey results came out, and a new position of employee experience manager had been created ... "All the performance metrics indicate that the [Powerhouse] museum's focus on creative industries, fashion and design is a recipe for fewer exhibitions of limited appeal, declining visitors and collapsing education outcomes," Winkworth said ...

[An] anonymous former Powerhouse employee [said] they believed "there has been a major focus on the latest, the hippest, the fashionable. The core audiences of family, schools and older visitors have been mostly neglected. Long-term dedicated, professional staff have been ignored and sometimes scorned." [alleging further] that, in the years up to the end of 2018, they had personally heard members of "the past and current executive" who publicly supported the decision to move the museum, make comments in private including "most of the collection is uninteresting", "history is boring", "community consultation is a waste of time; we're just ticking the boxes" and "we'll use the Boulton and Watt engine to run a designer brewery" ...

The state's aspirations for arts and culture had been set too low, he said, and Labor would seek to broaden traditional definitions to include creative industries such as gaming, design, and architecture ... Incoming NSW Arts and Tourism Minister, John Graham.

<<**Never eat on anything that moves or floats. Never embark upon a land war in Asia. Never let the bastards get you down.**>>

And here's another piece of practical advice resulting from an unfortunate experience in the laundry just this afternoon-

Always check for face-masks before running your clothes through the machine.

2023 April 28:

The ASA has usefully gathered together [media releases](#) from six national (i.e. federal) cultural collections who have benefitted from a pre-Budget announcement of increased funding of \$535.3 million (over four years, so no more whining until after the next election) and this is in addition to the rescue package for Trove. Have you ever known so many pre-Budget announcements? In summary-

- **NAA** (\$36.5m) *preservation and digitisation ... advancing data and cataloguing systems.*
- **National Film & Sound Archive** (\$unspecified) *digitisation and accessibility*
- **National Library** (\$unspecified) *core operations, building maintenance, expanded storage*
- **National Museum** (\$78.3m) *operations, capital works, increased storage*
- **Museum of Australian Democracy** (\$37.9m) *building works, historical interpretation, collections, exhibitions and digital engagement programs*
- **National Gallery** (\$119.1m) *operational issues and capital works*

The \$535.3 million goes to **nine** "National Collecting Institutions" (as is made clear in the release on the Gallery's website). The other three are: Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon Trust, and the National Portrait Gallery of Australia.

2023 April 29:

What [they said](#) about it all [**my emphases**]. The Albanese Labor Government will

- secure the future of Australia's most cherished cultural and historical institutions ...
- restoring them as a **source of national pride** ...

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- guarantee **ongoing, indexed funding** ...
- establish **clear line of sight** over future capital works and improvements ...
- ensure Australia has a **strong cultural infrastructure** - which is a key pillar of *Revive*, the Government's new National Cultural Policy ...

These institutions ... play an important role in **truth-telling for First Nations** people and in fostering international cultural exchange.

- Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said:
... 'These are special places ... They **preserve, protect and celebrate** Australia's stories and history ...
- Arts Minister Tony Burke said:
... Government delivers strong core funding and **philanthropists** take them to the next level [???
- Minister for Finance and Senator for ACT Katy Gallagher, said:
... The Institutions are often the gateway to **attracting visitors to the Canberra region** and are a key driver of the ACT economy, so this funding will ensure local jobs and the tourism sector are supported into the future ... [Ah! How gratifying - she's able to be "national" and parochial in the same breath.]
- National Gallery Council Chair, Ryan Stokes AO added:
... The National Gallery is home to **the most valuable collection of art in Australia** and the world's largest collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

There you have it: pride, sustainability, truth-telling, partnerships, Canberra-tourism, triumphalism. I'll have to go back and read [Revive](#) more closely to see where it says that a "strong cultural infrastructure - which is a key pillar of *Revive*, the Government's new National Cultural Policy" specifies that supporting the federal institutions financially (but not others around the nation) was intended. To be fair, the Maritime Museum is located in Sydney, so that's all right then - not parochial at all.

Pillar 4 [Strong Cultural Infrastructure] begins-

These institutions are spread across all tiers of government, the not-for-profit sector and private/commercial sectors, as well as embedded within geographic, cultural, professional and social communities. [so far, so good but that doesn't mean what you might think]. The centrepiece of the National Cultural Policy will be establishing Creative Australia (a restored and expanded Australia Council for the Arts) ...

- **Actions (p.70)** : ... address underfunded areas like youth arts ... establishment of a dedicated First Nations-led Board to invest in, create and produce, from 2024, First Nations works of scale ... develop a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy, and promote best practice cultural protocols, self-determination and cultural safety training across arts and cultural organisations ... establishment of Music Australia, to support the Australian music industry to grow ... establishment of Writers Australia to provide direct support to the literature sector ... establish a Poet Laureate for Australia ... provide advice on issues of pay, safety and welfare in the arts and culture sector ... investment in a works of scale fund, to support the commissioning of new Australian artistic works of scale.
- **Actions (p.72)**: ... a triennial State of Australian Culture Survey ... intergovernmental meetings between Commonwealth, state and territory cultural ministers, and the Australian Local Government Association ... research on the national qualitative, quantitative and economic impact of music festivals ... Update the methodology used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Cultural and Creative

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Activity Satellite Accounts to better capture the contribution of the cultural and creative sector ...

- **Actions (p.74):** ... create synergies between public and private partnerships, as well as government and philanthropic investment ... incentivise philanthropic support for the arts ... support more small and medium arts organisations and drive the development of new artistic works of scale.
- **Actions (p.77):** [**my underlining**] Share the national collection by establishing a program of long-term loans of works from the National Gallery of Australia's collection to regional and suburban cultural institutions across Australia ... Digitise at-risk First Nations cultural material to preserve them for future generations

... Update **Significance 2.0 : a guide to assessing the significance of collection** (first published in 2001) to help collecting organisations and professionals and the broader public to determine the significance of cultural and heritage objects ... **Modernise the Archives Act 1983 to enhance the National Archives of Australia's ability to manage government records and information that reflects the digital age** ... Modernise the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986, to streamline and simplify processes for the protection of both Australian and foreign movable cultural heritage.

2023 May 3:

What is the ethos of recordkeeping? To celebrate or to plod? How do we make ourselves valued? Is good r/keeping about maintaining well-ordered systems or uncovering sensational failings? Is good archiving about more (or less) than benign festivity, tourism, pride, celebration, entertainment, triumphalism, and cultural virtue?

Systems aren't sexy

... no matter how often they are restated (far from often enough), the details of the Post Office scandal are so incredible as to be almost literally impossible to believe. Put as sparsely as possible, [736 subpostmasters and postmistresses](#) were prosecuted for theft, fraud and false accounting in their branches, between 2000 and 2014. Yet they had done nothing wrong, The fault was with a new computer system designed by Fujitsu and forced on to them by Post Office management – a system that top brass allegedly knew was faulty ... People's lives were ruined ... Many were imprisoned ... Tech was trusted over humans with unblemished records. As things stand, more than a year into the belated inquiry, not a single person has been held to legal account ... The grim saga rumbles on, with comparatively little coverage given its scale and significance ... [59 of the victims have died](#) before the end of the inquiry, while some victims were only allocated [£1,000 in legal aid](#). The Post Office has spent £100m on City lawyers.



Why did it take so long for mainstream media to pick up the Post Office scandal?

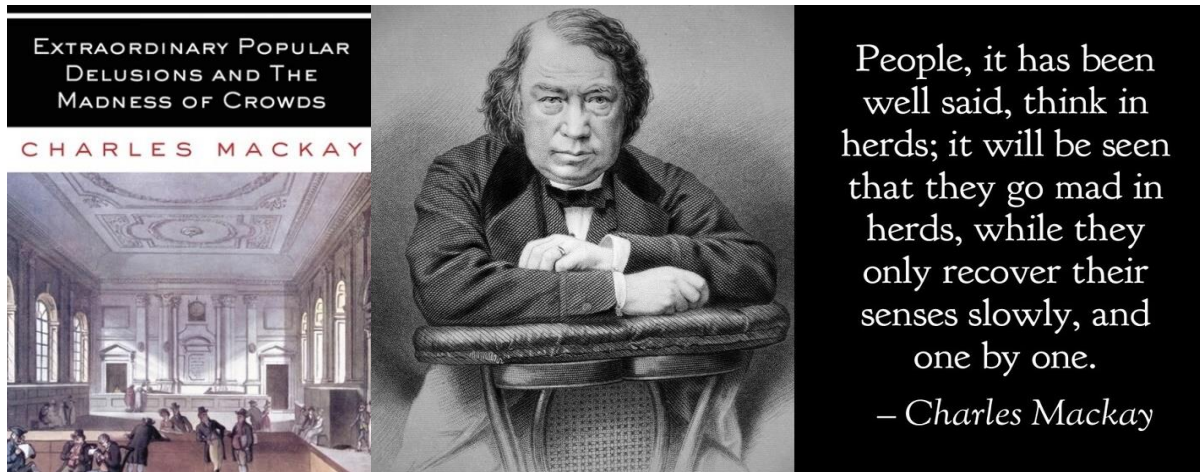
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But you have to wonder whether the Post Office story is somehow not sexy enough for much of a chatterati who prefer their scandals to unfold over a feverish day on Elon Musk's platform, and not in unloved inquiry rooms ... Alas, the Post Office scandal has never truly seemed to stir the souls of those who regard a day spent online dragging this or that user as activism well spent ... I appreciate it is far, far more difficult to "cancel" the iniquitous systems that led to the Post Office horror than it is to "cancel" someone in public life who you think has said something unacceptable – but it does very much need doing ... Getting caught up in endless cycles of "calling out" might work to punish individuals for their individual infractions, but it doesn't change the bigger, more significant problems, and anyone who thinks it does is kidding themselves.

Is sensationalism a conspiracy? I don't think so. It's about laziness and cultural vacuity (too many virtues, perhaps, rather than not enough).

Or allowing themselves to be kidded by people who have a vested interest in them not changing things. I know some politicians and some pundits bang on disparagingly about the "woke mind virus" or whatever, but I often think they must be secretly thrilled with the virtue games ... It really couldn't suit them more. How much better to have people sidelined into endless 24- or 48-hour online meltdowns, in which they are either pitted against one another litigating the narcissism of small differences – the dream! – or obsessing about one person's transgressions and leaving iniquitous and dysfunctional systems free to sail on regardless ... My theory is that if you give people absolutely no economic power, they will use what little power they have to lash out in one way or another, and it's pretty hard to blame them for that ... I don't believe that getting angry on [Twitter](#) particularly helps ... or that sitting in judgment on every passing infraction is anything other than a hiding to nothing. It is not effecting change – it is the illusion of effecting change ...

I'm sorry, but the idea that [wokeism](#) is a capitalist conspiracy strikes me as far-fetched. It is defined as sensitivity "to social and political injustice". This author is clearly sensitive to an injustice and therefore, by definition, woke - but that does not make her the dupe of capitalism. A better understanding of the nature and sources of popular sensitivities would derive from a reading of [Charles Mackay](#).



Her gripe is that not enough people share her sensitivity on her issue and focus instead on trivial sensationalism. But she would not have a gripe if her sensitivities were popular. Our gripe is that not enough people value archives (for the right reasons). Not sure we agree amongst ourselves what the right reasons are but, in any case, what can we (should we) do about that? Go on plodding or try to be more popular (assuming we could figure out how)? Or just keep on complaining? We cannot kid ourselves that how we present our archives doesn't influence how they are understood and perceived and so, unavoidably, we must choose a pathway to achieving our particular mission: [rationalism](#), [empiricism](#), or [argumentum ad populum](#)?

Perhaps worthiness (dull but safe) is the way to go. And claiming to uphold democracy doesn't hurt, I suppose.

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<<Andrew Waugh: Well, the journalist is right about one thing. The description of the (British) Post Office scandal is correct, and IMHO it is indeed a scandal. The management of the British Post Office prosecuted and had imprisoned its own subagents for fraud when the problem was the inaccuracies of its own accounting system. In prosecuting the agents, the Post Office relied on a legal principle that a computer system doing the job it was developed for would be assumed to be working correctly. The person accused of fraud, in this case, had to first prove that the system wasn't working correctly. Of course, they had no access to the internal evidence about the system's accuracy. Joseph Heller invented a term for this trap. Internally, the Post Office knew full well that the system was NOT operating correctly. A longer, and very interesting, analysis can be found in the Digital Evidence and Electronic Signature Law Review. In essence, it is very similar to the Robodebt and Windrush scandals. One thing that has been noted about the Robodebt scandal, even by the Commissioner, is how little society cares. Only a few activists pushed for an investigation. Even during the public investigation, when the public servants and politicians concerned were making the most damning admissions, they were largely ignored by journalists and editors. This is essentially the point the journalist here is expressing about the Post Office scandal. For some reason, these maladministration scandals are not considered newsworthy. And it's worth asking why not.>>

<< One thing that has been noted about the Robodebt scandal, even by the Commissioner, is how little society cares. >>

And I think you could say much the same of the Banking Royal Commission.



<<Andrew Waugh: Incidentally, the referenced paper has quite a lot to say about records and recordkeeping. Consider this quote...

One of the possibly surprising features of these miscarriages of justice is that, in almost all cases, the only evidence against the defendant in question was an alleged 'shortfall' shown in the Horizon computer system –computer printouts, if you will. If you remember only one thing from this talk, bear in mind that writing on a bit of paper in evidence is only marks on a piece of paper until first, someone explains what it means and, second, if it is a statement of fact, someone proves the truth of that fact. The simplest explanation for the Post Office scandal is that documents generated by the Horizon computer system were routinely treated by lawyers and judges as though statements of fact that were true, without bothering to consider how their veracity should be established. It was taken as given that what a computer record showed was correct. The shallowness of this approach, at all levels, is seriously reprehensible.>>

<<without bothering to consider how their veracity should be established>>

Anyone who has been involved in private sector corporate recordkeeping knows this to be true. In discovery, dealings with regulators, and in presenting written evidence to commissions of inquiry, the corporation must attest that the documents are authentic and accurate. Even tightly controlled regulatory systems (some, not all) often focus on what

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needs to be kept rather than on how it is to be kept. Corporate recordkeeping is often in such disarray that the documentary “evidence” has to be reconstructed from dubious caches found in left-over storage scattered about in disaggregated systems. In the case of discovery, some hapless individual has to attest, on behalf of the corporation, that the documents are a true and accurate record – knowing full well how unreliable the sources are and hoping they won’t be challenged. And they aren’t because content (not context) turns out to be king after all.

Bearman once predicted that r/keeping would come into its own when lawyers began testing the veracity of digital documentary evidence and expert witnesses (like us) could [tear them to shreds](#). But it hasn’t happened.



Two years after the banking royal commission, memories are fading and momentum is falling for Kenneth Hayne's fix

2023 January 31: [Indexing](#)

Went into Sydney yesterday and disgraced myself once more at the excellent [Abbeys Book Shop](#). Picked up a title I wasn’t looking for that others may not know about either:-

Dennis Duncan *[Index, A History of the](#)* pb Penguin 2022

I didn’t find the contents lived up to the title but it provided an enjoyable 40 minutes on the train back to Gosford before turning to some of my other purchases. I spent many hours in 1969 swotting the *[ALA Filing Rules](#)*. Duncan did succeed in bringing back some of the memories, e.g.

Letter-by-letter: Newman, Paul / newspapers and news-sheets / *New Tenures*
Vs

Word-by-word: *New Tenures* / Newman, Paul / newspapers and news-sheet

I once had a twenty-minute lecture from Peter Scott about what he called lexicographical order (by which I think he meant word-by-word but I stopped listening after the first five minutes). I’ve always had an interest though (*[Teacher to Young Self](#)* in the middle of a two-hour tutorial on a hot afternoon in 1969 at the Kensington campus: *Mr Hurley, if you ask one more question, I’ll scream!*). I used scan indexes in reference works for fun (I have strange ideas of fun) – the *White Pages* Telephone Directory, for example (do they still have those?) to see what principle governed the arrangement of entries.

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The next book I opened was Don Hollway [*At the Gates of Rome; the Fall of the Eternal City, AD 410*](#). Going first to the index, I found little nourish my interest (books have short indexes) but these entries provided some grist:

Julian, Emperor 68
Julian Alps 100,198
Julii 65
Julius 59-60, 61
Julius II, Pope 247

From the mists of memory, I'd say the second (Julius/Julius II) is an example of the nothing-before-something rule. The first (Julian, .../Julian Alps) probably has something to do with the comma giving priority despite the fact that it appears to violate nothing-before-something (but this is all very hazy for me now). There's lots of rules about punctuation to say nothing of numerals and those danged foreigners – "de" "D" "von" etc. And then the question in history books of alphabetising the sub-entries or arranging them chronologically (or else in the order in which they appear in the text).

I thought about becoming an indexer in retirement. I was enchanted many years ago by this from Michael Roberts [*The Early Vasas, A History of Sweden 1523-1611*](#) (1968)

Vasa, Cecilia: loses hair, 104; and reputation, 207; involved in plots, 248; her dowry unpaid, 309

It's the "and" that is genius. Authors and editors usually leave the index to the last minute and often don't check. Being an indexer might not have worked for me – too much opportunity for mischief.

My PC returns lots of results in alphabetical order and I've sometimes wondered (not enough to find out) what rules apply. There's probably some standards (*the great thing about standards is that there's so many to choose from*). In books, most people don't seem to care whether there's a Name Index separated from a General Index (or even Place Index) or all in one.

<<Kim Eberhard: Thank you Chris! I chuckled out loud at the Vasa, Cecelia entry! I encourage you to take up indexing in retirement; your 'mischief' would be very welcome. I too enjoy perusing indexes (but not for the same reasons); I wonder how many of us will admit the same?>>

2023 February 1:

<<My PC returns lots of results in alphabetical order and I've sometimes wondered (not enough to find out) what rules apply. >>

In case anyone else is interested and knows as little as I do about it, it turns out that IT folk have their own perspective on indexing which is not just about analysing content (abstracting) and then organising data of uniform value (filing). Most of the articles I found seem to be about how search engines decide **what to display** (essentially a back-office process) rather than **how to organise** the displayed data for the user to scrutinise. The underlying purpose is to rank hits in the order **deemed most relevant** to the user's query. I suppose that's why I get a zillion results and only ever scan the top two or three pages.

[Techopedia Starts off with a traditional definition but quickly moves on to "similar uses" in IT](#)

In general, indexing refers to the organization of data according to a specific schema or plan. In IT, the term has various similar uses including, among other things, making information more presentable and accessible. One example of indexing is the legacy Microsoft Indexing Service, which maintained an index of files on a computer or in an operating system environment. Another example is database indexing, which involves creating an index for a database structure to help expedite retrieval of data. One common type of indexing in IT is called "search engine indexing." Here, IT tools aggregate and

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interpret search engine data, again, to streamline data retrieval. This type of indexing is also sometimes called Web indexing. IT experts explain that indexing helps to make searches less labor intensive — without an index, the search engine would have to search every document at its disposal equally, whereas with an index, much of this work is eliminated.

Search engine indexing

Search engine indexing is the collecting, [parsing](#), and storing of data to facilitate fast and accurate [information retrieval](#). Index design incorporates interdisciplinary concepts from [linguistics](#), [cognitive psychology](#), mathematics, [informatics](#), and [computer science](#). An alternate name for the process, in the context of [search engines](#) designed to find [web pages](#) on the Internet, is [web indexing](#). Popular engines focus on the [full-text](#) indexing of online, [natural language](#) documents. [\[1\]](#) [Media types](#) such as pictures, video, [\[2\]](#) audio, [\[3\]](#) and graphics [\[4\]](#) are also searchable. [Meta search engines](#) reuse the indices of other services and do not store a local index whereas cache-based search engines permanently store the index along with the [corpus](#). Unlike full-text indices, partial-text services restrict the depth indexed to reduce index size. Larger services typically perform indexing at a predetermined time interval due to the required time and processing costs, while [agent](#)-based search engines index in [real time](#).

How computers link search queries to data content

Indexes are a powerful tool used in the background of a database to speed up querying. Indexes power queries by providing a method to quickly lookup the requested data. Simply put, an index is a pointer to data in a table. An index in a database is very similar to an index in the back of a book.

How search engines display websites after they have been “crawled” [basically, reviewing content and using it to rank the site when a search is made]

Indexing is where the ranking process begins after a website has been crawled ... essentially ... adding a webpage’s content to Google to be considered for rankings. When you create a new page on your site, there are several ways it can be indexed. The simplest method of getting a page indexed is to do absolutely nothing.

And then there’s automatic indexing

Automatic indexing is the [computerized](#) process of scanning large volumes of [documents](#) against a [controlled vocabulary](#), [taxonomy](#), [thesaurus](#) or [ontology](#) and using those controlled terms to quickly and effectively index large [electronic document](#) depositories. These keywords or language are applied by training a system on the rules that determine what words to match. There are additional parts to this such as syntax, usage, proximity, and other algorithms based on the system and what is required for indexing.

Assigning terms (metadata) to lots of “documents”

Automatic Indexing is the process of assigning documents with search terms for search and retrieval purposes. This process in searches is widely used today to lessen the time of the search. It uses a computer to scan a large volume of documents against a dictionary, rather than manual indexing which makes use of manpower due to manual typing.

Or, indexing just one document

An index can usually be found at the end of a document, listing the key words and phrases in a document, along with the page numbers they appear on. There are two steps involved in creating an index: defining which words you want to appear in the index and then inserting the index. See also [Using Content Analysis](#)

And no doubt much else besides. Things were simpler back in 1969 but maybe not all that different. I can remember, when I worked at NLA, a large area called the [National Union Catalogue of Monographs](#) (NUCOM) where they were inter-sorting copies of 5x3 catalogue cards sent in from libraries all around the country and “normalising” them by deciding which entry to file them by because different libraries catalogued the same title under different main entries. So far as I can tell, NUCOM [doesn’t exist anymore](#) but its ghost probably resides in various online initiatives.

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Dennis Duncan has this to say: ... The subject index has dominated all but the earliest chapters of this history; by contrast our twenty-first-century Age of Search is, in effect, an age of automated concordance (P.233) ... Once our indexing information – heads, locators – can be ‘read’ by machines, then it doesn’t much matter whether it is stored on punch cards, magnetic tape or integrated circuits. The indexer’s job has been distilled to its analytical essence; the drudgery – the shuffling and copying – has been delegated to the machine (pp.244-245) ... Ultimately ... what both inclusion and exclusion methods produce is a scaled-back concordance. The terms of the index are taken directly from the text; nothing appears in the former except in the precise form in which it appears in the latter (p.247) ... [But can Informatics, e.g. [content analysis](#) applied to search, [overcome these limitations](#)?] A good subject index can only be the product of a good indexer, an expert reader who knows something about the subject in hand ... A specialist indexer knows that it can be helpful to tag a concept even if it is not explicitly named ... they know that, thanks to metonymy, sometimes a reference to ‘Number Ten’ or to ‘Downing Street’ belongs under *Johnson, Boris*, and sometimes it doesn’t ... The limitations of *unimaginative indexing* ... become starkly apparent if one tries to locate the parable of the prodigal son ... using a Bible concordance, The parable does not contain the words *forgiveness* or *mercy*, or for that matter *prodigal* (pp.259-260)

<<Andrew Waugh I'm sure you ... will find [this](#) interesting ... It's an explanation of the recent advances in AI that led to ChatGPT and Dall-E. Not at all technical. It will amuse you, I'm sure, to learn that the first key insight was in indexing (words in text to facilitate automatic translation, then elements of pictures). The concept of auto-classification has just moved a large step nearer with this technology, though it will take a far cleverer person than me to work out how.>>

2023 February 2:

Up to Newcastle this morning. This from the *Newcastle Herald* (p.12).

Brace yourself for the AI revolution

Then an article about pros and cons and at the end: EDITOR’S NOTE: This was not written by ChatGPT.

Some of the pros: highly cohesive, human like responses; can write an essay or a novel based on a short prompt; formulate responses for service centres; create marketing material or press releases; write editorials or news items.

Some of the cons: the knowledge is static and doesn’t access new information (ChatGPT is stuck in November 2022); sometimes “makes up facts”; right now there’s still a place for quality control, credibility, and fact-checking.

Wonder if they need to update the laws of libel and copyright?

Please yer honour. I didn't libel the gentl'man. It was me computer!

<<Richard Lehane ... and ChatGPT is already [making records](#) (Microsoft just announced a new premium version of MS Teams that uses Chat GPT to sit in the background of virtual meetings to take minutes ("intelligent recap"), to do lists, personalized highlights and various other things.)>>

2023 February 10:

Alan Kohler has [this](#) to say (inter alia)

Everybody is having a lot of fun at the moment playing with ChatGPT – asking it to explain itself and say whether it’s going to take all of our jobs, as well as asking it to write columns and essays ... There’s a new version of ChatGPT coming soon, expected to be vastly superior to this one ... And then on Tuesday Google launched its own conversational AGI service to [compete with ChatGPT, called Bard](#) ... Australia has joined something called the Global Partnership of Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), which came out of the G7 and has 15 members ...

... I don’t think that artificial intelligence will be controlled or regulated and we need to prepare

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for the consequences ... A pioneer of the generative AI behind ChatGPT, Queensland-born Stanford University professor Christopher Manning, told the *Financial Review* this week that people will need to adapt to a world in which misinformation and false images are rife ... it should be regulated, but it won't be. It's already too late.

All this is a long way from indexing.

2023 February 11:

[The Guardian](#) is not impressed:

... in the profit-driven [competition](#) to insert artificial intelligence into our daily lives, humans are dumbing themselves down by becoming overly reliant on “intelligent” machines – and eroding the practices on which their comprehension depends. The human brain is evolving. Three thousand years ago, our ancestors had brains that were larger than our own. At least one explanation is that intelligence became increasingly [collective](#) 100 generations ago – and humans breached a population threshold that saw individuals sharing information ...

This socialisation of synaptic thought is now being tested by a different kind of information exchange: the ability of AI to answer any prompt with human-sounding language – suggesting some sort of intent, even sentience. But this is a mirage. Computers have become more accomplished but they lack genuine comprehension, nurtured in humans by evolving as autonomous individuals embedded in a web of social practices ...

... Chatbots sound more authoritative, but they are not more truthful. Prof Marcus points out their errors, or [hallucinations](#), are in their “silicon blood”, a byproduct of the way they compress their inputs ... Journalists, politicians and poets might be very concerned about the “[semantic](#)” aspects of communication, but not so much AI engineers. They look at the information in a message as a measure of the system's disorder. That's why AI risks [creating](#) a new class of weapons in a war on truth ... The danger is not machines being treated like humans, but humans being treated like machines.

The Internet could be regarded, I suppose, as the ultimate example of collectively sharing information. What the author seems to object to is the absence of cognitive intent in the process of formulation.

A disconnect of AI from intent might, however, be a good thing. We might be safer from misinformation if “untruthfulness” and “hallucinations” are an unintended consequence – a “byproduct” of systems that mimic human behaviour without cognitive ability. What I'm still unclear about when it is claimed that AI could be an assault on truth is whether there is potential for wilfully designing or using Chatbots to deceive and manipulate – a new kind of deliberate fake news. There's a whiff of that in some of the articles but I can't see anyone coming out and saying it or explaining how it would be done (although the articles that link it all to national security come closest). In terms of online opinion and incitement that we're already dealing with, it's a problem we already have – how to authenticate what you are given.

2023 February 12:

[Meanwhile ...](#)

... This week, Australia's government-owned postal service sounded an alarm for letter writing after reporting a \$190m loss in its letter business over a six-month period. Every year it is costing [Australia Post](#) more to deliver fewer letters as a growing population demands more delivery points ... The postal service expects the “unstoppable decline” will gather pace, making letters a peripheral form of communication by 2030 ... Rewind three decades, and the letter delivery business was booming. In the 1990s, letter volumes grew in tandem with Australia's economic progress, increasing by 5% a year, according to an analysis of Australia Post financial reports.

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Mail volumes hit a high point of well over 5bn in 2007-08 when the basic postal rate was 50c. But the global financial crisis and the surge in popularity of text messaging and public webmail services like Hotmail prompted an irreversible change in behaviour. Australians switched to convenient and cheaper communications. Letter volumes at Australia Post have fallen ever since, diving to just 1.6bn in 2021-22 ...

Postal services around the world are grappling with the same problems; some have been privatised amid heated political debate, while others are reducing the number of days they deliver letters ... domestic letters now contribute less than 20% of revenue to the postal service, making it more fitting to describe Australia Post as a parcel and services company that also delivers letters ... Australia Post describes the current state as “unsustainable” ...

Peter Slattery, a research fellow at Monash University, says he sees a future role for physical letters even if more generic correspondence goes digital. “Both in the business world and the personal world, letters will be associated with high-value, selected communication and more of the mass communication will switch to digital,” says Slattery, who writes on behavioural science ... Letter volumes also get a boost during elections and national events like the census ...

Some fear the transient nature of digital communication means future generations will miss out on having documented insight into the minds of notable figures, such as the thoughts contained in archived love letters from [Johnny Cash to June Carter](#), [Napoleon to Josephine](#) and [Elizabeth Taylor to Richard Burton](#).

If the letters are written by AI anyway, what will it matter?

2023 February 22:

An index analyses content and assists readers by anticipating what they will look for and how they will formulate their queries. So far as I can make out (and I know next to nothing about this and would appreciate enlightening criticism from those who know more) search engines “push” results based, inter alia, on algorithms that match your request to a “user-profile” built up over time. Conspiracy theorists posit that this is (or can be) done with evil intent from commercial, ideological, or goodness-knows-what motivation on the part of the tech giants. In the US section 230 of the weirdly named *Communications Decency Act* shields the tech giants from liability for content they host and/or recommend. Now, the US Supreme Court is [deciding](#) whether this shield should be breached on the argument that the algorithms, make the platform owners, as well as the authors, responsible for guiding users towards harmful content (however defined) and therefore liable for the consequences (whatever they may be). Do guns kill people or do people kill people?

... YouTube’s parent company Google is being [sued by the family of Nohemi Gonzalez](#), a 23-year-old US citizen who was studying in Paris in 2015 when she was killed in the coordinated attacks by the Islamic State in and around the French capital. The family seeks to appeal a ruling that maintained that section 230 protects YouTube from being held liable for recommending content that incites or calls for acts of violence. In this case, the content in question was IS recruitment videos ... In the case of *Twitter v Taameneh*, family members of the victim of a 2017 terrorist attack allegedly carried out by IS charged that social media firms are to blame for the rise of extremism. The case targets Google as well as Twitter and [Facebook](#).

... The supreme court is being asked in this case to determine whether the immunity granted by section 230 also extends to platforms when they are not just hosting content but also making “targeted recommendations of information”. The results of the case will be watched closely, said Paul Barrett, deputy director of the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights ... “This case could help determine whether the major social media platforms continue to provide venues for free expression of all kinds, ranging from political debates to people posting their art and human rights activists telling the world about what’s going wrong in their countries.” ...

Holding tech companies accountable for their recommendation system has become a rallying cry for both Republican and Democratic lawmakers. Republicans claim that platforms have suppressed conservative viewpoints while Democrats say the platforms’ algorithms are

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amplifying hate speech and other harmful content ... Evan Greer, a free speech and digital rights activist, says that holding companies accountable for their recommendation systems could “lead to widespread suppression of legitimate political, religious and other speech” ... “The truth is that Section 230 is a foundational law for human rights and free expression globally, and more or less the only reason that you can still find crucial information online about controversial topics like abortion, sexual health, military actions, police killings, public figures accused of sexual misconduct, and more.”

In other words, as I read it, when the platforms ***analyse content and assist readers by anticipating what they will look for and how they will formulate their queries***, they become co-conspirators. I suppose the only real difference between an index and a search engine is the “profiling”. But, while an indexer knows nothing about the reader at an individual level, culturally he makes all sorts of assumptions and shapes his work accordingly.

2023 February 24:

Everything you need to know about section 230

and

More than you probably ever wanted to know about section 230

Since we don't have a right to free speech in this country (but lots of law abridging it) it remains to be seen whether the US Supreme Court decision when it is delivered will have implications for us. The *Wikipedia* article refers to cognate Australian law:

In *Dow Jones & Company Inc v Gutnick*, the High Court of Australia treated defamatory material on a server outside Australia as having been published in Australia when it is downloaded or read by someone in Australia.

Gorton v Australian Broadcasting Commission & Anor (1973) 1 ACTR 6

Under the *Defamation Act 2005* (NSW),^{s 32}, a defence to defamation is that the defendant neither knew, nor ought reasonably to have known of the defamation, and the lack of knowledge was not due to the defendant's negligence.

Australian judges mostly like to push (or is it pour) new problems into old bottles, so goodness knows what they would make of an issue like this. This is all about liability for someone else's content on your server. Not very relevant to us? What happens if we point users of our website (deliberately or algorithmically) to relevant content on another website deemed to be harmful. Vicarious liability anyone?

PS There's a lovely journalism story from the 1960s (I think) about a fresh young reporter excited to be given the job by his editor of writing a feature article on free speech. *Oh, yeah?* says the crusty old hand in the corner. *Well, if you find any, let me know.*

<<**Andrew Waugh** I thought that point had been well settled in Australia. As part of the Dylan Voller defamation case, the High Court "found the media outlets could be held liable for comments by third parties on their Facebook pages" ... This horrified the media companies, and is the reason why comments were suddenly turned off in many media websites. The previous Australian government rushed to prepare the "Social Media (Anti Trolling) Bill 2022". This would have made the (Australian) person maintaining or administering a social media page *not* the publisher of other people's comments on the page. The publisher (i.e. the entity on the hook for defamation) would be the company that provided the social media page (e.g. Facebook). However, the company would always have defence - they would not be guilty of defamation if they promptly gave the defamed person the identity of the person who authored the content. This bill never became law and lapsed when Parliament was dissolved in April 2022. The current government hasn't moved in this space.>>

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2023 February 25:

<< I thought that point had been well settled in Australia. As part of the Dylan Voller defamation case, the High Court "found the media outlets could be held liable for comments by third parties >>

That seems to be about liability arising from merely distributing ("publishing") or contributing to the distribution of the harmful content - against which 230 protects them in the US. The attack before the US Supreme Court looks like a craftier approach to get around 230 - viz. a different kind of liability based not on "publication" but on "pushing". You may be protected there from liability arising from your passive role in providing access to forbidden fruit but when you actively intervene to (helpfully?) guide the user to it they seem to be arguing that you incur a greater liability from which 230 does not protect you. At least that is what the cases seem to me to be about.

The fact that Australian courts don't even offer protection for "publication" still leaves open the question how they would deal with additional liability arising from a successful action here based on this new argument before the American court (it seems to me).

In a funny way, it's kind of like the difference between a book with an index and a book without one. Libraries, I believe, used to put obstacles in the way of accessing their smut collections - sometimes by cataloguing them in Latin (or is that an old wives' tale?). And the provision of Internet access through public libraries [raises even thornier issues](#) for them

Even though most school children are regularly blocked from browsing X-rated Web sites in class, they can access pornography on the Internet in the most public of places: the local library ... given a choice between censorship and unfettered access, most libraries have chosen not to use special software that would block unwanted material ...

The [American Library Association](#) policy on Internet access, which was endorsed by many librarians in the Bay Area, leaves it up to parents to decide what materials their children can see. "In a library, our role is to make information available. But you have to choose what you want to access ..." The library association, online services like America Online and a host of civil liberties groups are trying to invalidate Internet anti-porn rules in the federal Communications Decency Act drawn up by Congress and signed by President Clinton last year ...

"The [San Francisco Public Library](#) does not monitor and has no control over information accessed through the Internet. . . . As with other library materials, restriction of a child's access to the Internet is the responsibility of the parent or legal guardian." ... Pornography is available online at the [San Jose Public Library](#) ... but the staff will ask you to clear the screen of any graphic material that might interfere with "maintaining a reasonable and comfortable environment for the public," a spokesperson said ...

2023 March 4:

Perhaps I'm naïve, but I find the [doom-saying about AI](#) a bit over-the-top. What they're saying is that sources may not be what they seem and that AI makes the detection of fakery harder than before. But this is what we've always known: don't take content on face value, rely on provenance and context.

It has taken a very short time for artificial intelligence application ChatGPT to have a disruptive effect on journalism ... What these systems are incredibly good at is emulating human prose, and predicting the "correct" words to string together ... For the purposes of journalism, they can create vast amounts of material – words, pictures, sounds and videos – very quickly. The problem is, they have absolutely no commitment to the truth. Just think how rapidly a [ChatGPT](#) user could flood the internet with fake news stories that appear to have been written by humans.

Well, [humans](#) are pretty good at doing that too.

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... In terms of journalism, many newsrooms have been using AI for some time ... Felix Simon, a communications scholar at the Oxford Internet Institute, has interviewed more than 150 journalists and news publishers for a forthcoming study of AI in newsrooms. He says there is potential in making it much easier for journalists to transcribe interviews or quickly read datasets, but first-order problems such as accuracy, overcoming bias and the provenance of data are still overwhelmingly dependent on human judgment. "About 90% of the uses of AI [in journalism] are for comparatively tedious tasks, like personalisation or creating intelligent paywalls," says Charlie Beckett, who directs a journalism and AI programme at the LSE. Bloomberg News has been automating large parts of its financial results coverage for years, he says. However, the idea of using programs such as ChatGPT to create content is extremely worrying. "For newsrooms that consider it unethical to publish lies, it's hard to implement the use of a ChatGPT without lots of accompanying human editing and factchecking," says Beckett ...

... Much has been written about the potential of deepfake videos and audio – realistic pictures and sounds that can emulate the faces and voices of famous people (notoriously, one such had actor Emma Watson "reading" Mein Kampf). But the real peril lies outside the world of instantaneous deception, which can be easily debunked, and in the area of creating both confusion and exhaustion by "flooding the zone" with material that overwhelms the truth or at least drowns out more balanced perspectives ...

As well as worrying about the dangers and how to control the phenomenon, perhaps trying to assist ourselves to develop better "[nerd immunity](#)" would help.

PS. On the other hand, perhaps naivete lies in trusting that people want to be un-deceived about what they [believe](#) (or, more accurately, what they want to believe) – not to be confused with [self-deception](#) which is entirely different or with [hoaxes](#) (e.g. drop bears).

The [Dominion Case](#) is a current example that suggests the thirst for Truth is thwarted by confusion of mind and wishful thinking.

Did Fox News actively promote the [conspiracy theory](#) that implicated Dominion Voting Systems in a "massive fraud" that supposedly denied Donald Trump a second term? Or did Fox merely report what the president and his representatives were saying? Those questions are at the heart of the [defamation lawsuit](#) that Dominion filed against Fox in March 2021 ...

... the fact that Fox News reporters were [appropriately skeptical](#) of those claims does not absolve Fox of liability for the [credulous reception](#) that Giuliani and Powell received on shows such as *Lou Dobbs Tonight* ... Dominion argues that Murdoch, who was privately [calling](#) their story "really crazy stuff," nevertheless decided not to intervene because he was worried about alienating Trump supporters ... producers and executives ... knew or should have known those claims were false and had the power to stop hosts like Lou Dobbs from continuing to promote them. They chose not to do so, Dominion argues, because they were afraid of losing viewers to right-wing competitors ...

... Dominion tells a plausible story, backed by internal communications, that Fox continued to host "crazy" conspiracy theorists because it had a financial interest in doing so. Viewers were angry after Fox News called Arizona for Trump, and executives were alarmed by their disenchantment and their flight to Newscom and One America News Network. In short, Dominion says, Fox favored profits over truth ...

Some people want to be deceived and are neither hood-winked nor led into it by others ("I am their leader, [I must follow them](#)"). Even with good-will, is it ever possible to find a way to [sort out fact from fiction](#) within the fog of perception to one's own satisfaction, let alone the satisfaction of others?

2023 April 19:

For those not on the Canadian List, Mark Hopkins has posted a link to an [article](#) about historical research incorporating AI.

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Historians have started using machine learning—deep neural networks in particular—to examine historical documents ... [they] say the application of modern computer science to the distant past helps draw connections across a broader swath of the historical record than would otherwise be possible, correcting distortions that come from analyzing history one document at a time. But it introduces distortions of its own, including the risk that machine learning will slip bias or outright falsifications into the historical record. All this adds up to a question for historians and others who, it's often argued, understand the present by examining history: With machines set to play a greater role in the future, how much should we cede to them of the past? ...

2023 March 4:

<< **The Dominion Case is a current example that suggests the thirst for Truth is thwarted by confusion of mind and wishful thinking.>>**

At least we can now put [a price on un-truth](#) - \$1.17 billion it seems.

2023 May 21:

<<**That seems to be about liability arising from merely distributing ("publishing") or contributing to the distribution of the harmful content - against which 230 protects them in the US. The attack before the US Supreme Court looks like a craftier approach to get around 230 - viz. a different kind of liability based not on "publication" but on "pushing". You may be protected there from liability arising from your passive role in providing access to forbidden fruit but when you actively intervene to (helpfully?) guide the user to it they seem to be arguing that you incur a greater liability from which 230 does not protect you. At least that is what the cases seem to me to be about.>>**

The Supreme Court [unanimously sided with Twitter, Google, and Facebook](#), finding in a pair of decisions on May 18 that the Silicon Valley giants are shielded from liability for content posted by users Big Tech and its supporters had been deeply concerned that the court could eviscerate Section 230 of the federal Communications Decency Act of 1996, which generally prevents internet platforms and internet service providers from being held liable for what users say on them ... Chief Justice John Roberts said that despite any algorithm YouTube may use to push users to view videos, the company is “still not responsible for the content of the videos ... or text that is transmitted.”

The Supreme Court's new 38-page decision ([pdf](#)) in *Twitter Inc. v. Taamneh*, court file 21-1496, was written by Justice Clarence Thomas ... Thomas wrote that the plaintiffs sought to hold Twitter, Facebook, and Google “liable for the terrorist attack that allegedly injured them,” but the court concluded that “plaintiffs’ allegations are insufficient to establish that these defendants aided and abetted ISIS in carrying out the relevant attack.” The connection between the online platforms and the nightclub attack was “far removed,” he wrote ...

The “plaintiffs asserted that Google had knowingly permitted ISIS to post on YouTube hundreds of radicalizing videos inciting violence and recruiting potential supporters to join the ISIS forces then terrorizing a large area of the Middle East, and to conduct terrorist attacks in their home countries,” according to the family’s petition. Because of the algorithm-based recommendations, users “were able to locate other videos and accounts related to ISIS even if they did not know the correct identifier or if the original YouTube account had been replaced.” Google’s services “played a uniquely essential role in the development of ISIS’s image, its success in recruiting members from around the world, and its ability to carry out attacks.” The original complaint filed in the case added that “Google officials were well aware that the company’s services were assisting ISIS.”

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2023 May 24:

<<Perhaps I'm naïve, but I find the [doom-saying about AI](#) a bit over-the-top. What they're saying is that sources may not be what they seem and that AI makes the detection of fakery harder than before. But this is what we've always known: don't take content on face value, rely on provenance and context.>>

Reporting in the *Weekend Oz* (20-21 May, pp.1 & 7) has the Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA) warning that students face a “dystopian future” as a result of the transformation of knowledge by AI.

[The] Chief Executive David de Carvalho has called for greater focus on “facts and truth” in teaching ... students needed the “knowledge and wisdom” to detect lies, error, bias and deep fakes generated by AI. The role of teachers as “authoritative sources of information, knowledge and wisdom” needed urgent buttressing.

No disrespect, but I never took any of my teachers as “authoritative sources” for anything. The ones I respected helped me think and look about for myself.

“In addition to reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy ... ethical understanding, personal and social capability, intercultural understanding and critical and creative thinking are going to be more and more important”

Crumbs! Anything else? Creative thinking. HmMMM. Who knew?

UTS industry professor Leslie Loble ... called for urgent controls over the use of AI and for children to be taught to question and control it. “The time is now to set standards ... You cannot assume these (AI) tools are accurate” ... Emeritus Professor Cheryl Praeger, one of Australia's leading mathematicians [said] students would need strong skills in critical and logical thinking to determine flaws in AI generated solutions ... “Students ... really need to be able to discern and critique the logic of something ...”

If education hasn't been teaching them **that** up to now, it's a bit late isn't it?

And predictably, The Australian has revealed left-wing political bias in Google's AI chatbot, Bard, which praises Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese as a “man of the people” while labelling Liberal leader Peter Dutton as “controversial”. Strewth!

A British teacher has been [banned from teaching](#) after complimenting his class by saying “Well done, girls!” when they did good. The grip that [left-authoritarianism](#) seems to have on education now is such that I doubt [critical thinking](#) is going to get much of a show. The balance between conformity to and delivery of orthodox opinions and the encouragement of inquiring minds has always been a hard one to find and the triumph of dogma has been a long time coming. It's generational, they say, and it's been developed in students at university who have themselves become today's teachers. What's encouraging is how many [good teachers](#) seem to balk at it.

What I hate most about left-authoritarianism's subversion of the ABC and other media outlets – they're not in thrall yet (maybe the *Guardian*) but they're certainly deferential – and what I hate most about it is that they're beginning to make Sky-After-Dark look good (well, better anyway).

2023 May 25:

Another take on AI from [Alan Kohler](#), arguing that we are in dire straits because productivity (the thing that drives prosperity and keeps the lid on inflation) is in free fall. He thinks this is because workers (us) are demoralised and that AI might save the day. Kohler says no one really knows why productivity is falling (here and elsewhere) and this is only his best guess. Seems a bit fanciful to me. I am still unclear, perhaps because everyone seems to be unclear also, whether AI is predicted to be **doing** the work or just **helping** to do the work.

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Between March and December last year, Australian productivity – GDP per hours worked – actually declined 4.1 per cent. Taken from before the pandemic, it has been flat ... During the late 1980s and '90s, productivity growth peaked at 3 per cent a year. Over the past 30 years it averaged 1.6 per cent; in the past 20 years, just 1.2 per cent, and ... it has been zero lately, and then negative ... The reason labour productivity (GDP per hours worked) has been flatlining is because workers don't care any more. The decline in productivity growth over the past two decades has coincided with a decline in real wages and a rise in the difficulty of getting a pay rise ... it is an ironic, unintended consequence of the competition reforms during the 1980s that produced such high productivity growth at the time ... after a while the fun wore off, especially as it became clear they were getting nowhere against China and the hard work was not resulting in higher salaries, and with house prices rising they were falling behind ...

Having declined steadily for decades, productivity growth suddenly collapsed during the pandemic and then went negative last year for two extra reasons – the advent of working from home and the sudden drop in real wages as a result of the spike in inflation, followed by the rise in interest rates coupled with higher rents and house prices that are now rising again ... I think the only hope for improving productivity will be generative artificial intelligence ... Goldman Sachs recently predicted that AI would at least partially replace two-thirds of all jobs ... If AI can be used alongside human beings and make their life easier, then human happiness and productivity could both rise. Statistical productivity, minus human happiness, will rise if another Goldman Sachs' prediction comes true – that AI will actually replace 300 million jobs worldwide. As long as the work done by AI machines is not counted in the ABS's "hours worked", then the GDP per hour of toil by the few humans that are left will increase a lot. Those displaced will of course have to go on welfare and blow out the budget deficit again ...

Geeze, this is a long way from the filing rules but, if classification lies at the heart of **our** [mystery](#), I imagine that AI might be quite good at it -

"The librarian was explaining the benefits of the Dewey decimal system to her junior-- benefits that extended to every area of life. It was orderly, like the universe. It had logic. It was dependable. Using it allowed a kind of moral uplift, as one's own chaos was also brought under control. 'Whenever I am troubled,' said the librarian, 'I think about the Dewey decimal system.'

'Then what happens?' asked the junior, rather overawed.

'Then I understand that trouble is just something that has been filed in the wrong place. That is what Jung was explaining of course--as the chaos of our unconscious contents strive to find their rightful place in the index of consciousness.'

– **Jeanette Winterson, [Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?](#)**

And the work of the archivist, if Sir Hilary is to be believed, has always been (like some say AI may be) about **helping** rather than **doing**:

*"The Archivist's career . . . is one of service. He exists in order to make other people's work possible, unknown people for the most part and working very possibly on lines equally unknown to him, some of them in the quite distant future and upon lines as yet unpredictable. His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his charge; his Aim to provide, without prejudice or thought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge." - **Sir Hilary Jenkinson in his published address "The English Archivist: A New Profession" p. 38.***

2023 May 27:

Urgent! Urgent!! Urgent!!! Are "they" coming to get us?

The *Guardian* columnist, [Jonathan Freedland](#), who certainly thinks AI is about **doing** and not just about **helping**, seems to believe that it may be an even greater threat to human civilization than pronouns:

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... new technologies often freak people out at first ... Better, surely, to focus on AI's potential to do great good ... typified by [this week's announcement](#) that scientists have discovered a new antibiotic, capable of killing a lethal superbug – all thanks to AI [but] it's not just lay folk like me who are scared of AI. Those who know it best fear it most ... Geoffrey Hinton, the man hailed as the godfather of AI for his trailblazing development of the algorithm that allows machines to learn [has] resigned his post at Google ... confessing regret for his part in creating it ... In March, more than 1,000 big players in the field ... issued [an open letter](#) calling for a six-month pause in the creation of “giant” AI systems, so that the risks could be properly understood.

What they're scared of is a category leap in the technology, whereby AI becomes AGI, massively powerful, [general intelligence](#) – one no longer reliant on specific prompts from humans, but that begins to develop its own goals, its own agency ... As [Yuval Noah Harari warned](#) in a recent Economist essay, “People may wage entire wars, killing others and willing to be killed themselves, because of their belief in this or that illusion”, in fears and loathings created and nurtured by machines. More directly, an AI bent on a goal to which the existence of humans had become an obstacle, or even an inconvenience, could set out to kill all by itself. It sounds a bit Hollywood, until you realise that we live in a world where you can email a DNA string consisting of a series of letters to a lab that will produce proteins on demand: it would surely not pose too steep a challenge for “an AI initially confined to the internet to build artificial life forms”, as the AI pioneer [Eliezer Yudkowsky puts it](#). A leader in the field for two decades, Yudkowsky is perhaps the severest of the Cassandras: “If somebody builds a too-powerful AI, under present conditions, I expect that every single member of the human species and all biological life on Earth dies shortly thereafter.”

... AI is learning so fast, how on earth can mere human beings, with our antique political tools, hope to keep up? That demand for a six-month moratorium on AI development sounds simple – until you reflect that it could take that long just to organise a meeting ... This is yet another challenge to democracy as a system, a system that has been serially shaken in recent years. We're still recovering from the financial crisis of 2008; we are struggling to deal with the climate emergency. And now there is this. It is daunting, no doubt. But we are still in charge of our fate. If we want it to stay that way, we have not a moment to waste.

This all goes a good way beyond helping us to compile an index. Someone who knows more about this stuff than I do please tell me this is all nonsense.

2023 May 28:

**<< Someone who knows more about this stuff than I do
please tell me this is all nonsense. >>**

Wikipedia (god bless 'em) hazards [an answer](#), albeit a cautious one:

Many scholars believe that advances in artificial intelligence, or AI, will eventually lead to a semi-apocalyptic post-scarcity economy where intelligent machines can outperform humans in nearly, if not every, domain. The questions of what such a world might look like, and whether specific scenarios constitute utopias or dystopias, are the subject of active debate.

I would love to see **an** archives conference (and attend it for that matter) in which there was “active debate” (haven't seen that for a while in my chosen profession, possibly because I no longer mix in the right circles) on the likely/possible effects of AI on our work both conceptually and functionally. Meanwhile (nudge, nudge) I would love to have registered with **the** forthcoming archives conference in Melbourne and have received a receipt for payment of my registration fee (which I've had to ask for, so far without success - how [dystopian](#) is that?).

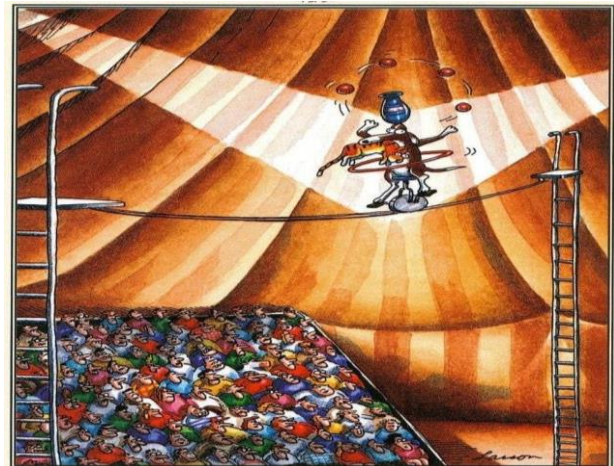
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Naturally sceptical of either utopias and dystopias, I am glad I am retired and in any case probably won't now live long enough to have to deal with either of them r/k-wise (AI inspired ones, that is, [there's still plenty of others to go around](#)).

High above the hushed crowd, Rex tried to remain focused.

Still, he couldn't shake one nagging thought:

He was an old dog and this was a new trick.



<< Naturally sceptical of either utopias and dystopias >>

How could I have done that? Fowler would not have approved.

2023 May 29:

If the first AI-generated finding aid has not yet made its appearance, can it be delayed much longer? In the last little while, a deluge of on-line articles has come to the top of any Google search for the risks and benefits of AI:

- [Do the benefits of artificial intelligence outweigh the risks?](#) (*The Economist* – Sep., 2018)
- [Ethics of AI: Benefits and risks of artificial intelligence](#) (ZDNET – Apr., 2021)
- [Benefits & Risks of Artificial Intelligence](#) (*Future of Life* – Nov., 2015)
- [Pros and cons of AI: is Artificial Intelligence suitable for you?](#) (*Data Conomy* - Aug., 2022)
- [Opportunities and risks of ChatGPT in medicine, science, and academic publishing: a modern Promethean dilemma](#) (National Library of Medicine – Feb., 2023)
- [Risks and remedies for artificial intelligence in health care](#) (Brookings – Nov., 2019)
- [How do you balance the benefits and risks of AI for your personal and professional goals?](#) (Linkedin – n.d.)
- [The Risks and Benefits of Using AI to Detect Crime](#) (*Harvard Business Review* – Aug., 2018)

etc., etc., etc. And these are just from the first page of results. Note: lots of these are not part of a recent “deluge” but go back many months, years even, and this search has pointed to results which are almost exclusively social rather than technical.

An article in the *Weekend Oz* (Do the dangers of AI risk smothering its benefits?) has the now familiar catalogue of perils (real or imagined) including the alarming bon mot that “AI has the knowledge to pass a medical exam”. This article focuses on the response of politicians and education bureaucrats which predictably involves meetings and the development of “guidelines” (god save us all). But buried in the dross are some revealing nuggets – expert opinion coming to the view that the answer may involve changing teaching methods and nurturing good teaching aspirations (how to know rather than what to know). Music to the ears of one who has always believed, ever since flirting briefly with becoming a teacher, that critical thinking lies at the basis of good pedagogical method.

It needs no politicians nor guidelines to tell us this: supervised exams, oral tasks/assessments, “a push away from recall and facts and ... towards process and comprehension, towards understanding and use of information”, knowing “what’s true and real”. How sad that these remedies are seen as innovative.

The underlying theme (relevant, I suggest, for both education and archival description) is that **we** must be in charge, not the machine. If concerns about AI (whether justified or

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misplaced) get educators (and archivists) to focus on truth, facts, and critical thinking and away from critical theory and social justice for a bit, that is all to the good say I. Of course, educators (and archivists) can whittle and chew gum at the same time, so they can go on doing both. It's not a social conscience that I object to; what I object to is the behaviour of some of those with one.

PS. I can't help reflecting that a good deal of this alarm echoes what I can recall of the time when the Internet became a standard educational resource. That's how old I've become.

2023 May 30:

<<Andrew Waugh: (Anyone reading this should take Arthur C. Clarke's strictures on elderly scientists saying things won't work...) ... LLM (Large Language Models) generate text by first taking what they've already written and calculating what the next most likely word will be. Randomly (based on a preset probability) it doesn't chose the absolutely most likely word, but one of the very likely words ... But very little real world non fiction writing is like that, and certainly not writing finding aids. Each finding aid is unique and the details in it depend on the context ... I expect this to be a fundamental limitation of LLMs, because they have no real world knowledge. They're just stringing together words that sound right. The domains we have to watch is where following the facts are not important ... entertainments aren't constrained by facts, and humans love to be entertained ... More darker would be conspiracy texts - there are lots of examples of those on the Web and they can be completely unmoored from reality. Perfect for generation in bulk by ChatGPT.>>

2023 May 31:

<<Chris Gousmett Thanks Andrew, right on the button. The fears about AI waging war on humanity and wiping us out fundamentally misunderstand what AI (specifically LLMo is capable of doing ... If we can't discover how and why the results are created, then what trust can we have in what is produced?>>

2023 June 3:

Do we really need another threat to humanity?



2023 September 28:

Merriam-Webster has identified 690 [new words](#). Apparently, they do this annually. This latest batch includes a new meaning for an old word related to AI:

hallucination *noun* ... **3** : a plausible but false or misleading response generated by an artificial intelligence algorithm

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and, not unrelated to some of the commentary about AI:

edgelord *noun, slang* : someone who makes wildly dark and exaggerated statements (as on an internet forum) with the intent of shocking others

You do have to wonder about the [shelf-life](#) of some of the new words on offer. Many of them seem (to me) to belong to one or more sub-cultures. But that may simply be because I'm old. Are "[square](#)" (8) and not "[hip](#)" (adjective) [passé](#) now?

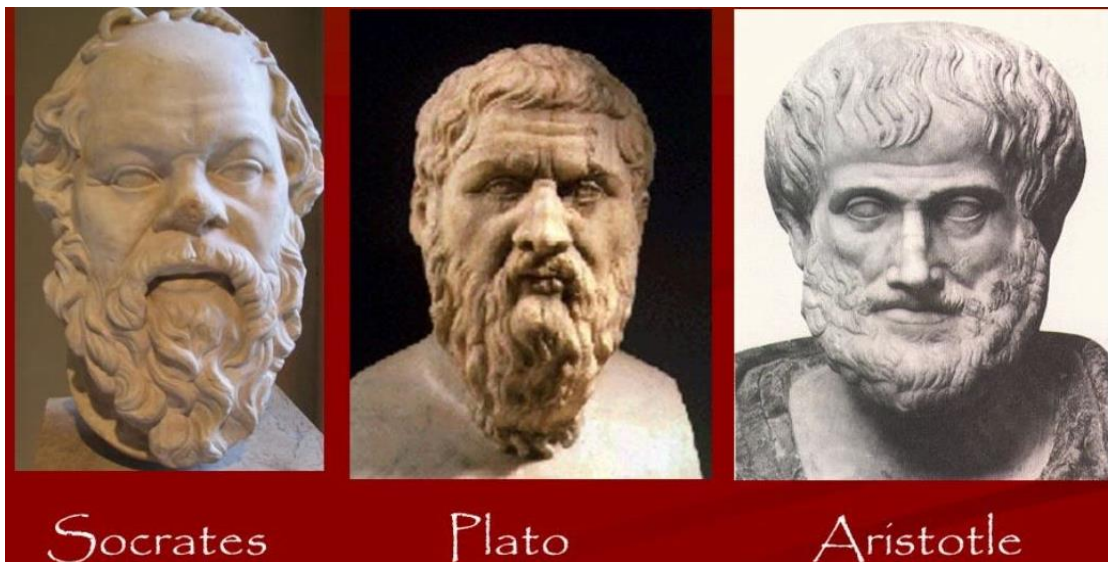
2023 June 28: [Knowing What We Know](#)

New book by Simon Winchester ([The Map That Changed the World](#), [The Professor and the Madman](#), etc. etc.) is sub-titled *The Transmission of Knowledge: From Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic*. I purchased this expecting to read a lot about libraries and possibly even about archives & records. Alas, the index has nothing about archives and only one reference to records:

In four quite separated places around the planet, and over an extended period of over two thousand years that began around 3400 BC, the craft of writing was invented. Until recording equipment came along, speech vanished into the air, lingering only in the fugitive vaults of memory and in the oral traditions of some indigenous peoples, but writing enabled the retention of records ...

This reflects what we now regard as a somewhat old-fashioned view, consistent with his use of "BC" instead of the modish "BCE". There is rather more about libraries and museums. He gives space to fake news and censorship, but fails (in my view) to confront the emerging toxic issue of "misinformation" which is getting a good run in The Voice debate, in which it is seemingly being confused (in the addled mind of Linda Burney and Mark Dreyfus) with [disinformation](#). It's terrifying that these muddle-headed clowns are now proposing [a Bill](#) to control it without (seemingly) understanding the difference.

But I digress. Until the last chapter of [Winchester's book](#), I didn't feel I'd had my money's worth. Then, in the last few paragraphs, he redeems himself (for me):



[Aristotle] believed that Plato took too otherworldly an approach to knowledge, that he laid down his dictates as a priori propositions, basing them not on evidence or experience, but on supposition, analysis, and deep thought. Plato was a superb thinker, detaching himself from the harsh realities of the outside world ... When he travelled ... he appears to have met only with other philosophers and engaged himself in high-minded discussions without once ever getting his hands dirty, as it were.

Aristotle did otherwise. He travelled widely and wildly, learning as he went ... about biology, physics, logic, astronomy, weather forecasting, geology, and countless other disciplines,

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each to be on his return home the subject of anything from a monograph to a pamphlet to a major work, each organized and categorized with a meticulous care and a librarian's mind. Nothing was too small or too great to rouse his curiosity. Sir David Ross, the Scotsman who devoted his entire academic life at Oxford to the study and translation of Aristotle, pointed to two abiding characteristics – his love of order and tidiness, and “a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction – in the theory of knowledge he is neither a rationalist nor an empiricist, recognizing the parts played by both the senses and the intellect.” He is, in short, as well-rounded, multidimensional, clever, knowledgeable, curious, and inspired a person as ever lived.

We know more now but Aristotle's stature rests not on what he knew but upon his way of knowing. As one who has long held that archivists who are true to their calling must be Aristotelians and not Platonists, these words left me with warm inner glow.

2023 June 30:

<<It's terrifying that these muddle-headed clowns are now proposing a Bill to control it without (seemingly) understanding the difference>>

I once remarked that totalitarians are notoriously good recordkeepers, the point being that r/keeping is a tool that can be used for good or evil. Recordkeeping, it seems, will lie at the heart of the proposed regime. I wonder what my old friend Aristotle would make of it.

... Minister for Communications Michelle Rowland said: “Mis and disinformation sows divisions within the community, undermines trust and can threaten public health and safety” ... Under the proposed legislation, ACMA would be granted the power to compel digital platforms to maintain records related to misinformation and disinformation. Moreover, these records would have to be handed over upon request. ACMA would have the authority to request a “code of practice” for the industry, outlining strategies to combat misinformation. Companies failing to adhere to this code could be subject to penalties of up to \$2.75 million or two per cent of their global turnover, whichever is higher. Finally, ACMA would be able to establish and enforce its own industry standard. Violations of this standard could lead to companies being fined up to \$6.8 million or five per cent of their global turnover. ACMA's powers would extend to various online platforms, including social media, news-aggregators, and podcasts ... it would not have the authority to remove individual pieces of content, and the new powers would not apply to professional news content

“Mis and disinformation sows divisions”. It seems then that the government thinks that contrasting misinformation and disinformation is a distinction without a difference since both are intended (apparently) to be covered by the same regulatory regime. This will be a regime that does not monitor individual instances of forbidden content but intimidates those who purvey it into caution and self-censorship using the power to enforce “standards”. It seems that the enforcement will come when a breach of standards is identified and persistence in purveying State-disapproved speech is punished.

The distinction between mis- and dis- information is intent and that is not unrelated to the distinction between opinion and fact. I may be mistaken in my opinions or deceitful in misrepresenting the facts. The grey area is where I mistakenly give out false facts (insofar as that can be determined in a postmodern world) without intending to deceive. But honest opinions can also “sow divisions ... undermine trust and ... threaten public health and safety”. So what? If there is any slender justification for a State apparatus to suppress the expression of ideas (I don't think there is), it cannot simply be to protect us from division, uncertainty, and hurt (associated with hyper-ventilation about “harm” “unsafe” and “offence”) but only to protect us from falsification (deliberate or otherwise) that is deemed detrimental in some substantial, specified way. Political suppression of any kind begins with censorship and ends in repression. Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries of tyrants ever since Robespierre. This lot doesn't even have the imagination to change the

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language. I would not wish to suppress any kind of information, but the case is otherwise when those who **are** willing to set up such an apparatus can't see the distinction.

The mark of a mature, psychologically healthy mind is indeed the ability to live with uncertainty and ambiguity, but only as much as there really is. Uncertainty is no virtue when the facts are clear, and ambiguity is mere obfuscation when more precise terms are applicable. Julian Baggini

Obfuscation is the obscuring of intended meaning in communication, making a message confusing, willfully ambiguous, or harder to understand.

The danger comes, then, when governments think they can regulate obfuscation. In The Voice debate, Anthony Albanese has refused to admit that a reasoned opposition is OK and he vilifies those of us he disagrees with as dishonest, fearmongers, chicken littles, and heartless racists. And he seems to think that putting “some” before such a vile torrent of abuse makes it OK. Geez, it's not even witty. Not my Prime Minister. Such a man is quite capable of setting up a State apparatus to suppress contrary opinion, one that will not distinguish between dissent and deceit, one that will not distinguish between falsehoods and obfuscation, one that will end up controlling thought. The worry is that a majority of our elected representatives may agree with him.

If you think the State should interdict opinion and you won't even admit to a distinction between misinformation and disinformation, then you also are of that number, above all if you trust the likes of Albanese, Burney, and Dreyfus to decide where to draw the line.

“It is simply not good enough for Linda Burney to say in the parliament the Voice will not make representations on Australia Day and she ruled out other matters that we questioned her on as well,” [Deputy Liberal Leader Sussan] Ley told reporters on Wednesday morning. “She's now being contradicted by experts, including those on the ‘yes’ campaign and her own Referendum Working Group. They've taken a completely different position. They're right, Linda Burney is wrong. “She needs to come into the parliament, and she needs to correct the record.”

In response to the question would The Voice be able to advise on Australia Day, Burney (instead of answering the question) said it would not be “required” to do so. Is that misinformation or disinformation? What do you think? However harmless Michelle Rowland seeks to make it sound, the system is coercive (someone will have to interpret the codes, determine breaches, and impose multi-million fines) and, without censoring content in particular cases, that power will prompt self-censorship through intimidation. Under that methodology, whose idea of mis/dis-information will prevail? Will it be reportage of Linda Burney's error of fact (elaborated in the *Conversation* article)? Will it be our Prime Minister sowing division by abusing the nearly 50% of us who now say we are voting No? I don't think so.

Anyway, however this turns out there could be jobs for recordkeepers in it.

2023 July 1:

You may think I'm too hard on Albo. If I am, it goes back to *Rats in the Ranks* (1996), a gem of a documentary in which he has a walk-on role. Leichhardt Council is electing a mayor. The unaligned incumbent, Larry Hand, best described as *flash as a rat with a gold tooth*, is manipulating and conniving to get himself re-elected. All the other councillors are nondescript beyond belief and seeing them squabbling over nothing is hilarious. Labor councillors, all four of them, have (god-save-us-all) broken up into factions (two each). Unable to decide on a candidate, they roll the dice but the losing faction rats. An apparatchik from Head Office is called to a meeting at a Leichhardt Café to sort it out. That's Albo. When he sees the cameras, he refuses to join them and they retire to the shadows so all we see are silhouettes muttering in the dark.

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That's the impression I've retained of him as he has risen to prominence – a grubby little fixer lurking in the shadows of a back street in Leichhardt.

<<“**Mis and disinformation sows divisions within the community, undermines trust and can threaten public health and safety” Michelle Rowland**>>

<<**Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries of tyrants ever since Robespierre.**>>

Virtue : *What is the goal for which we strive? ... We wish an order of things where all low and cruel passions are enchained by the laws, all beneficent and generous feelings aroused; where ambition is the desire to merit glory and to serve one's fatherland; where distinctions are born only of equality itself... In our country we wish to substitute morality for egotism, probity for honour, principles for conventions, duties for etiquette, the empire of reason for the tyranny of customs, contempt for vice for contempt for misfortune, pride for insolence, the love of honour for the love of money... that is to say, all the virtues and miracles of the Republic, for all the vices and snobbishness of the monarchy ... What is the fundamental principle of democratic or popular government – that is to say, the essential mainspring upon which it depends and which makes it function? It is virtue ... the first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror... The basis of popular government in time of revolution is both virtue and terror. Terror without virtue is murderous, virtue without terror is powerless. Terror is nothing else than swift, severe, indomitable justice – it flows, then, from virtue.” Maximilian Robespierre*



Maximilian Robespierre



Michelle Rowland

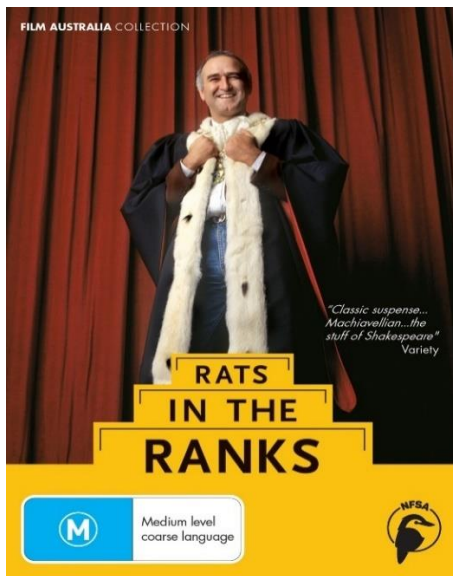
Public Safety: With Robespierre at the helm, the Committee of Public Safety ... responded with terror against the Revolution's enemies, making certain crimes capital offenses, and giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest “those who by their conduct, relations or language spoken or written, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty.” By this decree, more than two hundred thousand citizens were arrested ... An estimated ten thousand died in jail. The tribunals found seventeen thousand guilty, mostly for charges of armed rebellion. A guilty finding typically resulted in being sent to the guillotine. In addition to the mass imprisonments and executions, the committee explored other ways to sow fear and control counterrevolutionaries. The committee authorized local authorities throughout France to create small military forces to patrol the countryside ... In addition, the committee put aside a new democratic constitution that the convention had recently drafted, which had incorporated popular demands for equality and various rights. Without these rights in effect, the convention continued to rule with an absolute sovereignty more strict and rigid than that of the old monarchies. The Reign of Terror was an assault on the people of France, The committee enforced a terrorist mentality on the France's citizens. The Law of Suspects,

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which had the intent of defending the nation through legal recourse, ironically tried to make terror lawful.

<<**Adrian Cunningham: 'Rats in the Ranks' is indeed a great documentary ... it shows up just how craven and unbecoming is the conduct of local politics ... But to be fair to Albo, somehow he was given the thankless task of trying to sort out the 'storm in a teacup' issue involving ALP factions in Leichhardt ... The role he played in that grubby little affair does not make me think any less of him ... Time will tell what kind of PM he will be - though compared to most recent occupants of that office, he does not have to be very good to be considered one of the best.>>**

As one currently being vilified by this man as dishonest, a fearmonger, a chicken little, and a heartless racist, I may be forgiven for taking a less kindly view of “the kind of PM” he has become. At the risk of stirring up another storm in a teacup, I would point out that Albo was rather more involved. His participation in this “grubby little affair” resulted from his being the ALP’s assistant general secretary at the time and he is described in the 2006 *SMH* [article](#) as Larry Hand’s “old mate”. Early on, before the shadowy meeting on the streets of Leichhardt, the documentary shows mayor Hand (who seems to have been a member of the Labor Party at one time and was still in contact) speaking with Albo on the ‘phone as he (Hand) attempts to manipulate the Labor vote in his (Hand’s) favour and then “leaking” the substance of that discussion as an unattributable quote to a reporter. Still, no indication that Albo was assisting Hand to Labor’s detriment (or anyone else’s) so fairly innocuous by comparison with some of what goes on in Canberra, I agree. I think Aristotle (who had a sense of proportion) would concur.



Meanwhile, as an illustration of just how treacherous this mis/dis information issue can become, Cambodia’s “strong man ruler” Hun Sen, accused by Facebook of “inciting violence against political opponents on his profile page”, has had to explain (and then withdraw) an apparent threat to close the platform down. He has closed his own account and moved to other platforms, his supporters “urging” other Cambodians to shun Facebook and follow their leader:

Amid Hun Sen’s public shunning of the platform, his political loyalists also called for a ban with supporters of the prime minister sharing on social media an image of the Facebook logo overlaid with a prohibited sign – a red circle with a diagonal red line inside. Cambodia’s Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications also on Friday told online gateway operators in the country to share Hun Sen’s new Telegram and TikTok accounts. The ministry, in a separate announcement on Friday evening, called for an end to public and private partnerships with Facebook, citing “political interference” ... A Phnom Penh University student who declined to be named for fear of retaliation said their student

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association called a meeting on Friday and told students to “spread the word” about following Hun Sen’s new social media accounts. Student association members were also told to monitor other students’ social media activity. “If students weren’t following the accounts”, the student said, association members were told to “follow up and ask them why”.

2023 July 2:

It’s paranoia day! I agree with Adrian thus far: I do not see Albo as insignificant, cuddly, bland, or harmless. I think he’s dangerous. I don’t regard Oliver Cromwell as an admirable man either (“a brave bad man” [Clarendon](#) called him) but I am beguiled by one of his most famous [quotations](#):

I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.

This is not something I would think it worth my while saying to our Prime Minister (nor to Cromwell for that matter once he thought God had told him what to do).

<<Virtue and public safety have been the catch-cries of tyrants ever since Robespierre.>>

While I am still able to without constraint, I take the essential ingredient in both the quotations I have used, throwing light upon the mentality of the likes of Robespierre and of Michelle Rowland et al, to be the linkage of **righteousness** with the **damnation of dissent**.

Virtue: ... *the first maxim of our politics ought to be to lead the people by means of reason and the enemies of the people by terror...*

Public Safety: ... giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest “those who by their conduct, relations or language spoken or written, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty.”

... the Parliament [could not base legislation upon its own declaration that a fact exists](#). This fact must be determined to exist by a court. As one Judge said, just because Parliament says something is a lighthouse does not make it a lighthouse. It is up to the Court to decide this. Parliament had, in essence, simply declared the Communist Party to be guilty of subversion in the Act’s preamble. This was unconstitutional.

Albo’s pernicious draft legislation delegates to [ACMA](#) (Nerida O’Loughlin, Creina Chapman, James Cameron, Anita Jacoby, Anna Brakey, Catriona Lowe and their minions)



the power to declare something to be a fact – what is mis/dis information, who are the “enemies of the people”, what is dangerous “language spoken or written”, what postings to this listserv might run foul of standards promulgated by these thought police.

Identifying enemies of the people is not unlike the attempt of the Menzies Government to give itself the power to simply declare who is a Communist. I’m no lawyer and it may be drawing a long bow, but I like to think that such an unfettered power conferred upon mere bureaucrats to simply declare what is so, potentially subjecting their targets to financial penalties and (what may be worse) to silence, will run foul of the precedent upholding the rule of law and “the rights and liberties of those facing the law” when such a power was abrogated to itself by the government and was declared unconstitutional in 1951.

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There were [two questions asked](#) of the High Court: Did the validity of the *Communist Party Dissolution Act 1950* (Cth) depend only on the truth, or otherwise, of the ‘facts’ asserted by the nine recitals that formed the preamble of the Act? If that was not the proper test for the Act’s validity, was the Act invalid under some other test?

... the parties argued whether the validity of the Act depended only on the truth of the ‘facts’ asserted in the preamble, and whether evidence could be adduced by both parties to prove or disprove these ‘facts.’ This might seem a strange issue to be debating, but it is actually very important. This is because it is really a debate about the relative power of Parliament and the judiciary. If the validity of the Act depended only on the truth of the preamble, then Parliament would be free to determine the limits of its own power, and the High Court would be reduced to being a minor branch of the federal government, unable to function as an effective check on the power of the legislature or the executive. If the Parliament said that the Australian Communist Party was a threat to the security of Australia, that would be that, and the High Court would not be able to challenge the validity of the Act ...

Of the seven judges who heard the case, a majority of five answered the first question above ‘no,’ but answered the second question ‘yes,’ saying that the validity of the *Communist Party Dissolution Act* was not simply a matter of determining whether the asserted facts were correct; whether or not those facts were correct, the Act still had to fall within one of the enumerated powers of the Commonwealth. Since it didn’t, it was invalid ...

Despite the atmosphere of distrust concerning communism, and the clear democratic mandate granted to the incoming Menzies government to take strong action against suspected Communists, the High Court refused to withdraw from its role as protector of the constitutional order, and, perhaps more importantly, the rights and liberties of those facing the law.

Albo’s legislation, if passed, will operate through penalties and intimidation (aka “voluntary compliance”). Penalties, I suppose, will go through a court process but intimidation is more insidious and probably can’t be litigated (perhaps by design). ACMA is already well versed in [the art of intimidation](#) and has an established track record – through investigations, negotiations, findings, infringement notices, remedial directions, enforceable undertakings, etc.

A [significant amount of our work](#) is aimed at encouraging voluntary compliance ... Where appropriate, we encourage and assist self and co-regulatory compliance initiatives by industry sectors. These initiatives range from industry-initiated self-regulatory codes of practice to co-regulatory codes developed and registered under legislation ... The appropriate enforcement response may involve us commencing civil litigation or referring a matter to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution of an offence. For certain contraventions, we have the power to commence civil proceedings to obtain, among others, civil penalty orders, injunctive relief and orders to enforce an enforceable undertaking. The laws we administer also create several offences. The office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions prosecutes these offences. The decision to refer a matter to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution of an offence will be made by the ACMA considering the facts and the Prosecution Policy of the Commonwealth.

The court may deal with prosecutions of offences, but beyond non-compliance the essential ingredient of such an offence can only be at bottom a determination by bureaucracy under a delegated power from the Parliament deciding what is in fact mis/dis information. How would a court deal with that? But who will have the will, the stamina, and the resources to fight such decisions?

- [First](#) they convince you that freedom is impractical. *"It's nice in theory, but not realistic."*
- Then they convince you that freedom is insensitive. *"I love liberty too, but I also love people."*
- Then they convince you that freedom is immoral. *"You're being selfish by putting your individual rights before this person's pain."*

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- Then they convince you to sacrifice your freedom on the altar of the greater good. *"Give us the power to legislate your behavior and dictate your decisions. We promise to use that power in a way that benefits everyone. You can trust us. We know what's best."*
- Then they destroy the world and pin the blame on you. *"This would've never happened had you given up your freedoms earlier. It's your fault for being so selfish."*

And the cycle is repeated from age to age with each new generation being duped into believing that authoritarianism was the sort of thing that could only go wrong during more primitive times.

2023 July 3:

Thought control is not unrelated to limitations on [protest](#) ...

The 57-country-strong [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation \(OIC\)](#) said international law and other collective measures are needed to prevent future incidents involving the desecration of the Quran ... after the holy book was [burned and defiled](#) in Sweden ... Last week, Salwan Momika, a 37-year-old Iraqi who fled to Sweden several years ago, tore up and lit pages of the Islamic holy book on fire. The desecration occurred on the first day of the [Eid al-Adha holidays](#) ... Swedish police granted permission for a protest to take place, saying freedom of expression is guaranteed under the country's constitution. But after the burning, police charged Momika with agitation against an ethnic or national group ... In approving the permit for the protest by the Iraqi refugee, Swedish police said that while it "may have foreign policy consequences", the security risks did not mean the application should be rejected. The United States also [condemned the burning](#) but added that issuing the permit for the demonstration supported freedom of expression ...



... or [revision of memory](#) ...

Dutch King Willem-Alexander has formally apologised for the Netherlands' involvement in slavery, saying he felt "personally and intensely" affected ... The slave trade brought vast riches to his ancestors ... In December, Prime Minister [Mark Rutte apologised on behalf of the Dutch state](#). The monarch acknowledged the apology saying "a start has been made" but also there was "still a long way to go" ... Since the [Black Lives Matter movement](#) emerged in the United States, the Netherlands has embarked on an often difficult debate about its colonial and slave-trading past that turned it into one of the world's richest countries ... While some European leaders have apologised for their country's colonial past, others have refused to take that step.

In January, French President Emmanuel Macron stated he will not "[ask forgiveness](#)" from Algeria for French colonisation, but hoped to continue working towards reconciliation. "It's not up to me to ask forgiveness, that's not what this is about, that word would break all of our ties," he said in an interview. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also rejected calls to apologise and offer reparatory justice for victims of the British slave trade and imperialism, saying the attempt to "unpick our history" was not something the government would "focus its energy on".

In this country, our houses of memory use, inter alia, RAPs ([reconciliation action plans](#)). These are usually positive and forward-looking (celebratory and constructive) rather than

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apologetic and atoning. But the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) Protocols (first released in 1995) cut closer to the bone (and to thought control or reconstructing the “narrative” if you prefer) when it comes to the handling of materials in our care:

historical exclusion from libraries; the offensive nature of much of the material about Indigenous people in library collections and archives; subject headings that described Indigenous peoples and cultures in ways that had little to do with how Indigenous peoples described themselves, and which demeaned Indigenous peoples and cultures; access issues for Indigenous peoples and materials; and general Indigenous service issues. [*Reconciliation in Australia: the role of the academic Library in empowering the Indigenous community*](#) (p.6)

The ATSILIRN [Protocols](#) make for interesting reading, especially if you try to place them into contending libertarian and progressive frameworks:

2. Content and perspectives: ... *Major institutions have a responsibility to ensure that their collections are comprehensive, inclusive and reflective of all perspectives ...* [This seems to be about enhancing and correcting existing “colonial” bias rather than suppressing what is “offensive” and simply imposing approved viewpoints. But who knows? See 7 below.]

3. Intellectual property: ... *Develop professional recognition of cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and consult with appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples on their application ...* [Part of the [re-imagining of provenance](#). But yet to see anything like this in our archives laws].

5. Description and classification: ... *the use of outdated, inaccurate or value laden terms ... obstructs access ... Use national Indigenous thesauri ... retrospectively re-cataloguing items recorded with unsuitable subject headings ... [introduce] classificatory systems which describe items by their geographic, language and cultural identifiers ... opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe and annotate material that relates to themselves and their communities.* [It would be interesting to know what progress our archives are making. In addition to their RAPs, are any of them including progress reports in their annual reports on specifics like this?]

7. Offensive: ... *Libraries, archives and information services need to recognise that their collections may contain materials that are offensive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such materials may be racist, sexist, derogatory, abusive or offensively wrong. Many examples are of a historical nature but some are contemporary. Libraries, archives and information services have a responsibility to preserve and make accessible the documentary record but must also respond appropriately to the existence of offensive materials ...* [ditto].

11. Copying and repatriation of records: ... *Archives and libraries often hold original records which were created by, about or with the input of particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A community may place tremendous importance on particular records and request copies for use and retention within the community. Some records may have been taken from the control of the community or created by theft or deception ... Agree to the repatriation of original records or the provision of copies to Aboriginal and Islander communities as may be determined through consultation. Seek permission to hold copies of repatriated records but refrain from copying such records should permission be denied.* [Much of this going on?]

Some of these sensitivities are on display in [section 2.1](#) of the *Stolen Generations Reparations Steering Committee (Vic) Report*, March 2022. Section 2.1, dealing with “The archived history ...”, is severely (and, in my view, admirably) objective; “balanced” because it does not engage our judgements or sympathies (not saying this is always a good thing). Elsewhere, sympathy and understanding of the Indigenous experience is well displayed. This *Report* is about wrongs being righted but it is not “reflective of all perspectives”. It doesn’t, for example, reflect the perspective of well-meaning foster-carers or consideration of the political justifications for removal. Perhaps in an instrument of reparative justice it doesn’t need to but the basis in [child welfare](#) for a policy of removal remains an issue for us to this day. We do it more sensitively now, but it is [still done](#) and some would argue [not well enough](#).

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2023 July 5:

<<Albo's legislation, if passed, will operate through penalties and intimidation (aka "voluntary compliance")>>

If you approve of interference in our ways of knowing by conferring on a tribunal representing the righteous power to damn dissent, be careful what you wish for ...



The virtue of that power depends on your ideas about what is righteous. The onslaught of right-wing partisanship on SCOTUS is the culmination of over 30 years of [politicisation](#) beginning with “borking” by Kennedy and Biden in 1987. SCOTUS has been political virtually from the days of [Marshall](#) but never [so bad](#) as now (Roosevelt’s attempted stack came close). It is said that after 1987 [McConnell](#) made it his life’s mission to visit revenge on the Democrats by swinging the Court his way.

Politicised institutions are a threat to us all. In an imperfect world, this danger is ever with us but it is most dangerous when they control thought by [forcing](#) “platforms into line where self-regulatory codes and practices have failed” and it is unclear on what basis it is concluded that it “would appear to be focused on misinformation shared socially, rather than professionally – for example, conspiracy theories – rather than information that is accidentally incorrect despite a publisher’s best intentions.” The breadth of the definitions (to say nothing of the confusion over dis- and mis- information) gives no such assurance.

ACMA is no innocent, non-partisan instrument of good. It is at war with the platform providers and eager to extend its control. It has been calling “for more powers to regulate misinformation and disinformation [since] its June 2021 assessment report [[pdf](#)] on the opt-in voluntary codes managed by the platforms’ association the Digital Industry Group Inc (DIGI).” They are not umpires, they are players.

... Communications Minister Michelle Rowland's proposed framework strikes a balance [?] between DIGI’s [Digital Industry Group Inc.] demands and ACMA’s demands ... DIGI’s codes could remain if ACMA does not overturn them [and] rejecting ACMA’s calls to apply the regulations to traditional news providers and to expand ACMA’s information-gathering powers to the contents of private messages ...

One of ACMA’s demands granted by the bill is overturning DIGI’s opt-in model for the codes; this means that the ACMA’s powers would extend beyond the eight signatories of the voluntary codes - Adobe, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Redbubble, TikTok and Twitter ... DIGI has campaigned against the government registering mandatory codes by trying to demonstrate that its voluntary codes have successfully incentivised the eight signatories to build robust systems and measures for combatting misinformation and disinformation ...

The bill suggests giving ACMA the power to create “codes” for specific companies that repeatedly fail to deal with misinformation and disinformation, and register industry-wide “standards” when codes are found ineffective ... A [statement explaining the bill](#) [[pdf](#)] declares that making these powers available to ACMA would “incentivise and strengthen the voluntary framework.” ... A freedom of speech safeguard outlined in the

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summary of the draft bill aims to ensure ACMA "would have no role in determining truthfulness, nor will it have a role in taking down or requesting action regarding individual pieces of content."

That alleged "safeguard" will need to be examined very carefully.

... Another safeguard that the draft bill included to prevent ACMA's powers from impinging on freedom of speech was rejecting the ACMA's call to apply regulations to news providers ... This was despite ACMA arguing that the media exemption creates "potential loopholes for bad actors and less reputable news sources." ... "We do not agree that the existence of other industry codes absolve platforms of any responsibility to address seriously harmful news content posted on their services... This position is consistent with the view taken by the European Commission."

Similarly, as a safeguard to protect privacy, the draft bill said that ACMA's information-gathering powers would not extend to private messages ... This was also a rejection of a power ACMA asked for in its [submission \[pdf\]](#) to DIGI's review of its codes. ACMA argued against exempting messaging services because they "continue to be a source of news for many of their Australian users... Telegram, for example, allows for 'supergroups' of up to 200,000 users."

They are active self-promoters (they saturate the first few pages of a google search) and their preferred methods are [velvet-gloved intimidation](#). Like members of SCOTUS, they are appointed by the government of the day and their agenda obviously includes getting even more extensive powers into their hands. Their existing powers over broadcasting have been pretty consistently exercised [politically](#) (not in ways that most of us would disapprove of, except for the precedent that it sets in giving such power to such people). If you suppose that can't change with a simple change to the composition of the tribunal, look at SCOTUS.

ACMA and the Human Rights Commission (re 18C) are careful not to court public outrage by punitive measures. Their goal is submission not punishment – and who can bear the cost of fighting them? Our ultimate protection is to deny the power of thought control to a tribunal.

PS. Sorry, I seem to have omitted to make the link to Jeremy Nadel in [IT News](#) (28 June, 2023).

2023 July 9:

<<Andrew Waugh: The terms disinformation and misinformation are an excellent example of using spurious dichotomies to control the narrative. In my view the government is quite correct to ignore the distinction ... As you quite rightly point out, the difference between misinformation and disinformation is intent ... The magician's trick here is that it is difficult to prove intent ... The practical effect of making a distinction between misinformation and disinformation is to make the knowingly spreading of false information invisible ...>>

It is absolutely necessary for the government's purpose that ACMA should not be required to do so.

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

Unless you believe that, there is a difference to be made between facts and opinion. Facts (however defined) may be intentionally or mistakenly erroneous. Fact-checking is a defensible exercise but it is constrained by some reference to objective reality (supposing you believe in some such notion). Suppressing mistaken facts may be argued to have a worthy purpose, but on any conceptual, legal, or moral plane, the distinction between evil and innocent intent is worth making – if only in mitigation.

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Opinions, on the other hand, aren't mistaken - they are simply arguable. Arguing with an opinion, while it may be constrained by the rules of logical discourse, cannot be referenced to objective reality. Identifying opinions you disagree with as erroneous in order to suppress them annihilates, as you argue it should, the notion of intent. You can't fact-check an opinion, you can only disagree with it (and suppress it if you have the power to do so). Suppressed opinions are, in the eyes of the [suppressor](#), necessarily mistaken intentionally. There can be no mitigation because righteousness demands demonization of wrong-doers for their evil opinions. Theologically, you can't do wrong without the intent to do so. You can't have an innocently mistaken opinion in the eyes of the virtuous.

giving power to local revolutionary committees to arrest "those who by their conduct, relations **or language spoken or written**, have shown themselves partisans of tyranny or federalism and enemies of liberty."

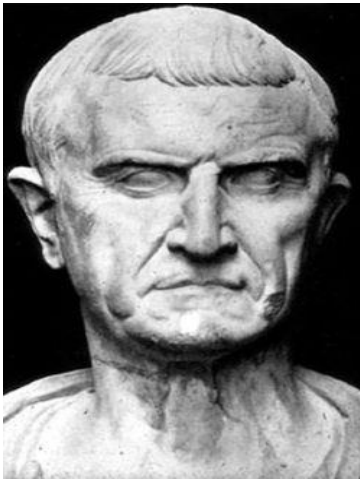
In the context of The Terror, "federalism" was a belief in devolution or local democracy which would have resulted in loss of power by the centralized committees in Paris. You could lose your head for it (or even being suspected of it) and many did. If you are going to have the government suppressing online content, I would have thought the distinction between the power to suppress erroneous fact and the power to suppress (supposedly) erroneous opinion was worth making. But, hey, that's just me.

2023 July 10:

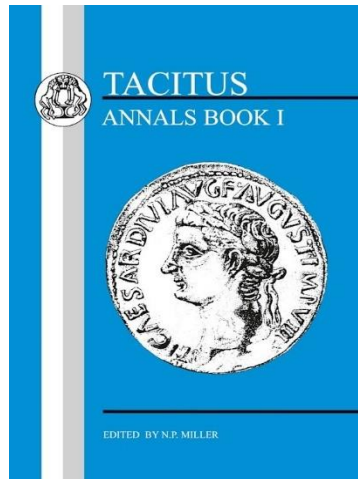
Uncomfortable Truths and Unintended Consequences

We should have lost memory as well as voice, had it been as easy to forget as it is to keep quiet. [Tacitus](#)

Tacitus is one of my favourite historians: *They create a desert and call it peace; when the state is most corrupt, then laws are most multiplied; everyone would have gone on saying what a great Emperor he'd make if only he'd never become one.*



Emperor Galba



Tacitus



Malcolm Turnbull

That last always reminds me of Malcolm Turnbull.

Social media, here and overseas, and mainstream media for that matter, are already "[self-censoring](#)" even w/o the kind of statutory powers Albo wants to confer on ACMA (and that ACMA desperately wants to have). This and similar regimes deliberately create uncertainty in the publishers and platform providers who then self-censor detrimentally (in a climate of fear beloved by all authoritarians). Recent examples of self-censorship (or, in the alternative, bias) include:

[Facebook](#) will [allow](#) users to praise the Azov Battalion ... in contradiction to the social network's policy banning support for "dangerous individuals and organizations." ... to "allow Facebook users to obtain information about the forces' military activity" and "ensure that

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news coverage of the conflict can continue to be shared on the platform," ... Facebook also made an exception to its hate speech policy to [allow](#) statements like "death to the Russian invaders" and calling for violence against Russian president Vladimir Putin and his ally, Belarussian president Aleksandr Lukashenko. The change only applies in several countries in the Caucasus and Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia, where Facebook is currently banned ... these actions by Facebook, along with decisions to ban propaganda from only [one side in the war](#), demonstrate that decisions that *should* be made on some kind of objective principle are instead being made on the basis of team sport ...

[Facebook](#) expanded an unprecedented campaign to police falsehoods early last year by banning what it called "debunked claims" about the virus. Among them: The claim that covid was "man-made" and had leaked from a lab in Wuhan, China ... a view that was partly vindicated when China's lack of transparency prompted prominent scientists to declare the lab-leak theory "viable" and demand further investigation. In May 2021, barely three months after it imposed the ban, Facebook backtracked: "In light of ongoing investigations into the origin of Covid-19 and in consultation with public health experts," the company said, "we will no longer remove the claim that Covid-19 is man-made from our apps." ...

Questions about adverse effects of COVID vaccines raised by [researchers](#) and [victims](#) alike have been suppressed on public health grounds (not in front of the children). But [orthodox opinion](#) rejecting these claims as misleading are plentiful. Even then, the platforms [get hit for allowing](#) anti-vaxxers to speak. Questioning the COVID vaccines, which were necessarily rushed through development and testing, is not the same as opposing all vaccination, though it is often misrepresented that way.

And it doesn't take long for it to leech into "traditional" news reporting:

Starting in the early 1990s, when journalism went online, [censorship followed](#). Filtering, blocking and hacking replaced scissors and black ink. Some governments barred access to Web pages they didn't like, redirected users to sites that looked independent but which in fact they controlled, and influenced the conversation in chat rooms and discussion groups via the participation of trained functionaries ... The Edward Snowden leaks made clear that the internet is a tool for peering into the lives of citizens, including journalists, for every government with the means to do so ... the Obama administration's authorization of secret wiretaps of journalists and aggressive leak prosecutions has had a well-documented chilling effect on national-security reporting ... Journalists legitimately fear being swept up in this electronic dragnet. But frequently they are its specific targets. China has hacked foreign journalists' email accounts, presumably to vacuum up their sources, and broke into the servers of leading US newspapers. The NSA hacked into Al Jazeera ... It is little wonder why governments would pursue a strategy of weakening print and broadcast companies if it meant journalists moved to a platform the state can control and monitor ...

The double standards of the powerful are not suppressed:

... [US President Joe Biden](#) recently called out Russia for its arrest and detention on espionage charges of the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is stationed in Moscow. On April 29th, Biden attended the annual White House Correspondents' Dinner, where he denounced Russia's actions and stated that "journalism is not a crime." US Senate leaders echoed this sentiment in rare bipartisan fashion. Yet, Biden's own administration, like Donald Trump's before him, continues to doggedly pursue the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange under the Espionage Act. Assange has languished in a British prison the past four years—all for publishing factual documentation of US war crimes and misconduct that span nearly two decades ...

The most serious consequence of suppressing some content is that we lose faith in the rest. We can no longer know if we are getting the whole story, based on a reasonable judgement that the news sources we rely on are trying their best to get it for us. This is the position I've now reached with the ABC (I never thought I'd say that). It's not just that they are unbalanced (in my judgement) but they just don't seem to run news anymore that is unhelpful to their ideological slant. For hard news now (and I never thought I'd say this

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either), I go to Sky (Australia) and to Sky (UK) – despite their names they are different beasts - and to Al Jazeera. There are many reasons why the public is losing faith in “news” but the spectre of censorship is one of them:

... This survey finds that the public is fairly split on whether social media companies should engage in this kind of fact-checking, but there is little public confidence that these platforms could determine which content should be flagged ... Overall, a majority of Americans (66%) say they have not too much or no confidence at all in social media companies being able to determine which posts on their platforms should be labeled as inaccurate or misleading, with 31% saying they have a great deal or some confidence ... Americans by and large believe social media companies are censoring political viewpoints they find objectionable. Roughly three-quarters of Americans (73%) think it is very or somewhat likely that social media sites intentionally censor political viewpoints they find objectionable, including 37% who say this is very likely ...

<<Theologically, you can't do wrong without the intent to do so.>>

Someone has told me they find this comment puzzling. I'll try to make it simple:

- Opinion can't be fact-checked,
- It can only be suppressed because it is sinful,
- Intent (awareness) is an essential ingredient of sin.

2023 August 29:

<< AW: Spreading of false information has lots of dimensions, and most of them are a continuum. You can divide this space in many ways and at many points. For example, is the material demonstrably false? Does the person or organisation benefit (e.g. profit) from the spreading of the false information? There are lots of other dividing points. >>

<<CH: ... there is a difference to be made between facts and opinion. Fact-checking is a defensible exercise but it is constrained by some reference to objective reality (supposing you believe in some such notion) ... Opinions, on the other hand, aren't mistaken - they are simply arguable. Arguing with an opinion, while it may be constrained by the rules of logical discourse, cannot be referenced to objective reality>>

... but by some reference to apprehended bias it seems -

Facebook has suspended an Australian fact checking operation ... The powerful RMIT Factlab operation ... will be banned from judging what is true or false on social media while Meta and the International Fact Checking Network [IFCN] probe its operation. Sky News Australia's investigation, dubbed The Fact Check Files, revealed the university's fact checking director Russell Skelton was campaigning for the Voice and re-sharing slogans and images created by Labor's Indigenous Affairs Minister Linda Burney. Skelton's team was responsible for several misleading fact checks against Sky News Australia which led to a censorship of journalism related to the Voice referendum ...

... Another RMIT fact checker, Renee Davidson, also put the University in jeopardy of breaching impartiality clauses in the IFCN's Code of Principles by labelling Opposition Leader Peter Dutton a fear-mongering racist on her personal social media account ... An audit of RMIT Voice fact checks showed the 17 Voice checks between May 3 and June 23 this year were all targeting anti-Voice opinions or views ... Meta CEO and Founder Mark Zuckerberg had made promises to governments globally that the fact checking industry was both independent and overseen by the IFCN. However, The Fact Check Files investigation revealed Meta had a direct commercial relationship with RMIT which allowed it to pocket up to \$740,000 a year in payments.

Sky News host Peta Credlin was targeted by RMIT Factlab for her coverage of a Uluru Statement to the Heart document which was released under a public Freedom of Information Request. Skelton's fact checking team ruled it was false to declare that the

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Uluru statement was longer than one page, and used quotes from one of its authors Professor Megan Davis as evidence. However, those quotes from Professor Davis were inconsistent with her earlier comments which stated the document was much longer than one page ... Debate around the length of the Uluru document became political with Labor arguing it was just one page while the Coalition disagreed. As a result of RMIT Factlab's false fact check, Australians on Facebook were stopped from hearing the debate. The fact check also had the chilling impact of limiting the reach of all of Sky News Australia's journalism. This meant important news, debate and even live press conferences streamed to the platform were blocked to the world.

Another misleading fact check related to former Liberal MP Nicolle Flint, who weighed into a controversial United Nations Declaration On the Rights of Indigenous People. In a live interview on Sky News Australia Ms Flint argued implementing the declaration legislatively could lead to Indigenous Australians having their own independent political system. Her opinion on a speculative future event, of which no legislation existed, was deemed false by fact checkers. This was a breach of the IFCN rules which state a fact checker cannot deem opinions to be false

We shall see if ACMA is empowered to deem opinions to be false under Albo's mis/dis-information law. There is no little irony in RMIT's response: "... it stood by its staff and claimed they had freedom of speech on social media."

2023 September 14:

How much can we rely on what we read in books? All the kerfuffle over The Voice referendum has called to mind a bit of mis/dis-information to be found in Bill Bryson's entertaining book about Australia entitled *Down Under* (2000); it has also appeared under [other titles](#). In Ch.15, dealing with N.T., he writes-

All Australians are required by law to vote in federal elections, including residents of the Northern Territory. However, since the Northern Territory is not a state it has no seats in Parliament. So the Territorians elect representatives who go to Canberra and attend sessions of Parliament (at least that's what they say in their letters home) but don't actually vote or take part or have any consequence at all. Even more interestingly, during national referendums the citizens of the Northern Territory are also required to vote, but the votes don't actually count towards anything. Seems a little odd to me ...

Bryson's book is highly amusing but more than once I found his "facts" to be wrong and he too often succumbs to the temptations of oddity and whimsy. Now, I wouldn't have the temerity of RMIT or ACMA to set myself up as a fact-checker but here is what the [Australian Electoral Commission](#) (AEC) has to say about referenda -

Votes cast outside of the six states, such as from the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory, are counted towards the National Majority but not towards any of the state counts.

Up to a point, Bryson is correct about the oddity of [representation of the Territories](#) in federal parliament -

Currently, the two Northern Territory Senators represent the residents of the Northern Territory as well as the Australian external territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The two Australian Capital Territory Senators represent the Australian Capital Territory, the Jervis Bay Territory and since 1 July 2016, Norfolk Island ... [In the Lower House] Parliament granted a seat to the Northern Territory in 1922, and to the Australian Capital Territory in 1948; these territorial representatives, however, had only limited voting rights until 1968 ...

But regarding the impotence of the Territory representatives in the Lower House, Bryson is [dead wrong](#) -

Although voting restrictions were initially imposed on these representatives, these restrictions were gradually removed.

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PS. On the subject of oddity and whimsy, consider [Mt Athos](#), the Greek peninsula dedicated to the monastic life. Women are banned. Even female animals are banned; but not female cats (it's a question of mice apparently). Here's the thing: Mt Athos is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Go figure.



No one knows, incidentally, why Australia's spiders are so extravagantly toxic; capturing small insects and injecting them with enough poison to drop a horse would appear to be the most literal case of overkill. Still, it does mean that everyone gives them lots of space.

— Bill Bryson —

AZ QUOTES



2023 October 6:

Did you know that this is [Banned Books Week](#)? The ALA (US) is promoting it. Tomorrow (7 October) has been declared [Let Freedom Read Day](#). They suggest taking one action from a list that includes

- Check out a banned book from a library
- Buy a banned book

Love it. This all about resisting a [US phenomenon](#), viz. religious/right-wing attacks on books they don't like -

... the skyrocketing number of legislative proposals targeting LGBTQ people and especially, transgender and nonbinary youth. Like bills targeting health care, drag performance, pronouns and public spaces, book bans ... aimed at limiting the rising visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ youth, and removing parents' rights to make private health care decisions for their families, or determine what their own children can read. According to the [American Library Association](#), 2022 saw 1,269 documented demands to pull titles from library shelves, nearly doubling the 729 challenges in 2021, an astounding 713% increase from the previous year. The vast majority of these bans target books by and about LGBTQ people and all people of color.

Ideas they don't like really. The American intelligentsia (unsurprisingly) seem less concerned about suppression of one kind or another coming from the other direction (identity, decolonisation, etc. etc.) Here in Australia we get it from [both directions](#)

I'm not really a big fan of "days of". You know, international day of the turnip, that sort of thing. Yet I was interested to see that this week we celebrated "hug a librarian day" ... Books are under attack from populists and dilettantes on both the Left and the Right. In recent weeks we've had the kerfuffle over [Roald Dahl](#), with censorious publishers in a lather at the prospect of little ones reading the word "fat". Quelle horreur! Old Roald may have been a nasty antisemite and an appalling husband, but he was a wonderful writer. Leave his books alone, I say. At the same time Northcote High School was [culling Australian history books](#) from its library that were, wait for it, "old". The real reason was that they minimised the horrors of colonisation for Indigenous people ... ([Matthew Bach](#), former Vic Shadow Minister for Education).

Actually, I'd be surprised if they don't have it from both directions in the US also – witness the [cancellation](#) of J K Rowling by Chris Moore at the Seattle Museum of Pop Culture.

All censorship is bad, so let's see what happens now with [Albo's Misinformation Bill](#).

2023 November 3:

... Of course, governments don't lie, they produce propaganda. And policies and laws have been imposed to combat what's commonly termed fake news, which have reined in digital

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platforms, mainstream and nonmainstream media players and individual social media users. Indeed, since February 2021, the [Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation](#) (the DIGI Code), a voluntary set of standards developed on request of our government, has been in place and major digital platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been complying with it. So, this begs the question as to whom the government is targeting with a new set of laws it proposes to empower the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) – the statutory body that monitors communications and media – with, especially as they won't apply to professional news ... Well, whilst the ultimate determiner of truth isn't being legislated, the entities these new laws will apply to are digital platform services, which include content aggregation services, connective media services, media sharing services or, somewhat liberally, “a digital service specified by the minister” ... could it simply be that the government of what the [New York Times](#) [described](#) as “the world's most secretive democracy”, is seeking to empower itself with a means to lean on digital platforms that are running defensible dissenting political information that only harms the validity of its own lies? [Sydney Criminal Lawyers](#)

“And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down, and you're just the man to do it, do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake!” [Robert Bolt](#), [A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts](#)

What intrigues me most is how obtuse support for this Bill is. Misinformation, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. [Nerida O'Loughlin and her cronies](#) can be relied on to behold it in ways pleasing to one side. But a tool that empowers them to exercise their biases can just as easily be used, if they are replaced by those with a different set of biases, to please the other. So, be careful what you wish for.

Politically motivated numeracy and other forms of biased evaluation show that people reason their way into or out of a conclusion even when it offers them no personal advantage. It's enough that the conclusion enhances the correctness or nobility of their political, religious, ethnic, or cultural tribe, It's called, obviously enough, the myside bias, and it commandeers every kind of reasoning, even logic. Recall that the validity of a syllogism depends on its form, not its content, but that people ... judge an argument valid if it ends in a conclusion they know is true or want to be true ... Keith Stanovich finds it in every race, gender, cognitive style, education level, and IQ quantile, even among people who are too clever to fall for other cognitive biases ... The myside bias is not an across-the-board personality trait, but presses on whichever trigger or hot button is connected to the reasoner's identity. Stanovich relates it to our political moment. We are not, he suggests, living in a “post-truth” society. The problem is that we are living in a myside society. The sides are the left and the right, and both sides believe in the truth but have incommensurable ideas of what the truth is. [Steven Pinker *Rationality: What it Is; Why it seems Scarce; Why it Matters*](#) (Allen Lane, 2021).

Times change. Yes, they surely will.

2023 November 5:

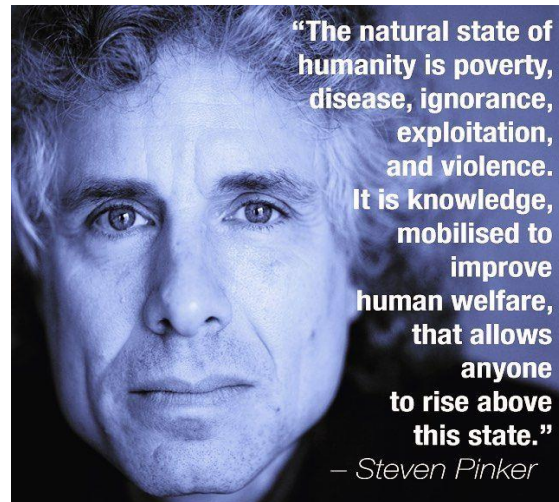
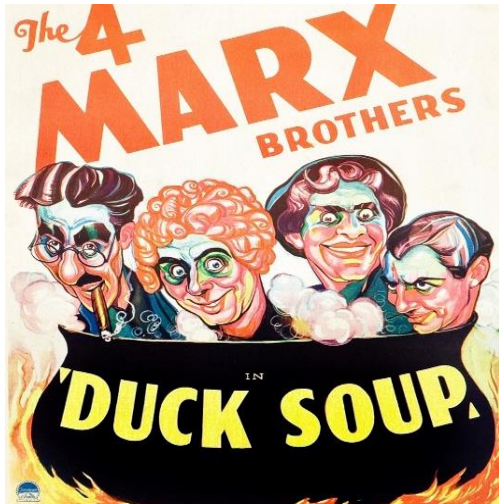
<<**We are not, he suggests, living in a “post-truth” society.
The problem is that we are living in a myside society.**>>

If archival description, lying at the heart of the work itself, is at the mercy of belief (the myside bias) and cannot rely on rationality, what are the implications? As a young archivist, I suppose I assumed (without thinking much about it) that I wrote objectively for scholars to help them reach objective conclusions - eschewing interpretation of my own. Interpretation was their job. On mature reflection, I saw that interpretation, without having to abandon the goal of objectivity, was a necessary part of description. “Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold,” as [Lytton Strachey](#) has it. But such a belief still assumes a rational response from those for whom one writes.

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Pinker provides examples of myside bias that are essentially along a political axis-

In *Duck Soup*, Chico Marx famously asked, “Who ya gonna believe, me or your own eyes?” When people are in the throes of the myside bias, the answer may not be their own eyes. In an update of a classic study showing that football fans always see more infractions by the opposing team, Kahan and collaborators showed a video of a protest in front of a building. When the title labeled it a protest against abortion at a health clinic, conservatives saw a peaceful demonstration, while liberals saw the protesters block the entrance and intimidate the enterers. When it was labeled a protest against the exclusion of gay people at a military recruiting center, it was the conservatives who saw pitchforks and torches and the liberals who saw Mahatma Gandhi.



... opinions that go against the scientific consensus, like creationism and the denial of human-made climate change, may not be symptoms of innumeracy or scientific illiteracy. Kahan has found that most believers and deniers are equally clueless about the scientific facts (many believers in climate change, for example, think that it has something to do with toxic waste dumps and the ozone hole). What predicts their belief is their politics: the farther right, the more denial.

What then should guide description if we think our audience is irrational? Would it not be madness to appeal to reason where it doesn't exist? Must description be shaped by the response we expect - the myside beliefs of those we are writing for – rather than a rational exposition of the truth we aspire to convey? If Pinker is correct and myside is today essentially a political division, unless the archivist is submerged in the politics of one side or another, he must consciously choose which bias to appeal to. On what grounds? Should our descriptions challenge the prejudices of our chosen audience or cater to them?

The answer must surely be that it remains our job to interpret and present the record objectively and truthfully, with a mature understanding of complexity and the inter-connectedness of things, as if our audience is rational (even if we begin to entertain suspicions that they aren't). Pinker points to a ground where the forces of reason and irrationality do battle. Perhaps archivists have always taken sides in such a battle. Perhaps that is what Terry Eastwood meant when he said that we are knowledge-workers concerned with more than “content to be exploited or context to be elucidated” (*Archivaria* 37, Spring 1994). Of course, a belief that one is taking the side of reason against bias and simply not bothering with the left/right divide at all might be seen as too smug by half.

PS. I wonder if Strachey had in mind Proverbs 2:4 (*search for wisdom as if it were money and hunt for it as if it were hidden treasure*) or Tolstoy (*Truth, like gold, is to be obtained not by its growth, but by washing away from it all that is not gold*).

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2023 November 10:

<< **The sides are the left and the right, and both sides believe in the truth but have incommensurable ideas of what the truth is.** >>

Because I donated to the recent “No” campaign, I now receive emails from [Advance Australia](#). Their latest illustrates the myside thesis perfectly:

We didn't ask for this, but they're the ones who tried to divide us down the middle. And there's no escaping the reality of what they've turned our country into. **Australia is now about them versus us.** On one side, the political, media and corporate elites. Labor, the Greens, the Teals, the 'Liberals for Yes'. The ASX-listed companies, the universities, the mainstream media, the woke bureaucrats. On the other side: the ordinary hard working Aussies like you who are just trying to do their best to make a living.

This approach will fail (I hope) because it is so obviously polemical (just like the “Yes” campaign itself). Because I think the referendum was unwisely divisive, I obviously don't believe we should be reacting now to that error by choosing sides in the wake of its defeat. But I don't get a sense of thoughtful reflection about what it all means from either side. Maybe that doesn't matter. The operation of [social constructionism](#) is more subtle, measured, imperceptible - less hectoring.

Predictably, [history](#) is one of the battle-fields in the Advance campaign(s).

... [dumbing] down maths, science, reading, civics and [throwing] out the best of western culture, Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage and ... mainstream values – and [indoctrinating] children to become political activists ...

I think that the emphasis on [social virtue](#) rather than [knowledge](#) has taken education off the rails (e.g. decolonisation) but I hear the same, shrill god-is-on-my-side certainty in this back-to-basics nonsense.

The referendum forced unthinking, benign, well-meaning mainstream Australia to take sides on indigenous affairs (unwillingly, I thought). How strange will it be (albeit unlikely) if the push to regulate misinformation likewise thrusts [epistemology](#) into the mainstream? The good news is that, if it does, mainstream has a very short memory.

2023 November 11:

<< **It's enough that the conclusion enhances the correctness or nobility of their political, religious, ethnic, or cultural tribe,** >>

The other side. For reasons known only to God and the activists, I also get emails from GETUP. Here's something of theirs from a recent missive:

... **despite the result, our movement gave it our all.** We organised and worked alongside communities to tell stories of leadership and knowledge – stories the 'no' campaign tried so hard to bury with their lies and fear-mongering ... Our movement turned out in greater force than the 2022 Federal Election – a testament to who we are and the values we strongly hold ... There's much work ahead of us. Some of the forces behind the 'no' campaign will only be emboldened by their success – especially Opposition leader Peter Dutton who has become increasingly brazen in his racist rhetoric. Amplified by the Murdoch Press and the disinformation on social media, Dutton has polluted our politics and created an environment where lies, misrepresentation – and yes, racism – go unchecked ... But the GetUp community has shown time and time again the changes we can achieve when we come together and stand up for our values. So that's what we will do, Chris. PS. ... But this is long-term work that requires stable, ongoing funding. [Chris, can you consider chipping in today to power GetUp's crucial work?](#)

So much for reconciliation. GETUP and ADVANCE will probably never reconcile but the rest of us can. Even if we don't agree with each other we can ignore both of them and take a stand in the sensible middle. Or, is that the sensible muddle?

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I wish I was as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything ([Lord Melbourne](#))

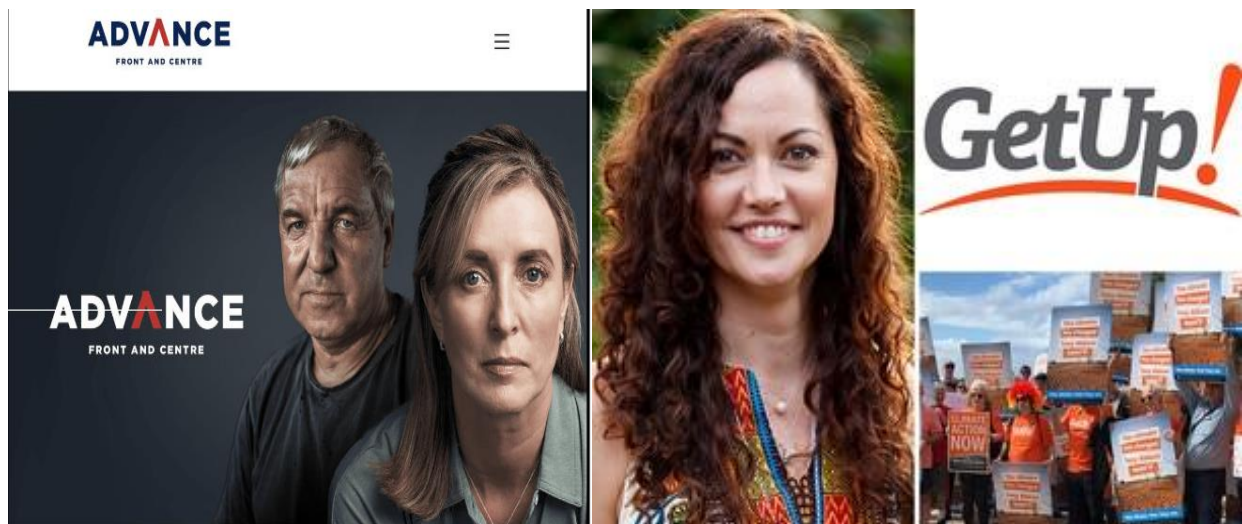
It's not what these people believe that's their problem - it's the way they believe it. Aristotle would understand: *his love of order and tidiness, and "a sort of inspired common sense which makes him avoid extremes in any direction"*. What we know is an emanation of how we know it. Temperance can also be virtuous.

2023 November 19:

The Archivist's career is one of service. His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence. His Task, the Conservation of Evidence attaching to the documents committed to his charge. His Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge. [Hilary Jenkinson](#).

It is useful to reflect from time to time on the kind of dangers posed by prejudice and afterthought to the recordkeeper's Task. In *The Conversation*, Hugh Breakey [reviews](#) Yasha Mounk's new book, [The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time](#). According to Breakey, the book

... argues that the new identity-focused ideology is not simply an extension of prior social justice philosophies and civil rights movements; on the contrary, it rejects both ... To critique this perspective, Mounk must first name it. He settles on "identity synthesis", in an attempt to avoid the more common but contentious term "identity politics". His term refers to its synthesis of a range of intellectual traditions, including [postmodernism](#), [postcolonialism](#) and [critical race theory](#). These theories focus on ascriptive categories such as race, gender and sexual orientation ...



The way I know both ADVANCE and GETUP are cranks is their demand, couched in generalities, that I join them in **everything** they believe in. Because, they say, I belong with them. They can't possibly know if I will agree with them about any particular issue, but it doesn't matter. They have, both of them, substituted "values" for thought. The record (whether contemporary or historical) will tell its own story and its truth (not our values or those of anyone else) is what the recordkeeper tries to seek out. Our values, such as they are, drive us to that - not to find evidence upholding "values" but to get at the evidence. Unpredictably, the record may turn out to uphold one "side" or the other. More likely, the record will uphold neither, telling a tale that does not align exactly with what either side wants to believe. And contested interpretation(s) should be about what the record says not about what value proposition it upholds (in the opinion of the beholder).

According to Breakey, Mounk distils the identity synthesis into seven core themes.

1. *Scepticism about objective truth*: a postmodern wariness about "grand narratives" that extends to scepticism about scientific claims and universal values.

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2. *Discourse analysis for political ends*: a critique of speech and language to overcome oppressive structures.
3. *Doubling down on identity*: a strategy of embracing rather than dismantling identities.
4. *Proud pessimism*: the view that no genuine civil rights progress has been made, and that oppressive structures will always exist.
5. *Identity-sensitive legislation*: the failure of “equal treatment” requires policies that explicitly favour marginalised groups.
6. *The imperative of intersectionality*: effectively acting against one form of oppression requires responding to all its forms.
7. *Standpoint theory*: marginalised groups have access to truths that cannot be communicated to outsiders.

A recordkeeper (in my view) could do a lot worse than make these seven themes a template of how not to go about our work. According to [Wikipedia](#), ADVANCE

... promotes family values, free markets, [meritocracy](#), business, a [Judeo-Christian](#) heritage, a strong defence force and national borders. The group believes that anthropogenic climate change is a "hoax", with current national director Liz Storer describing the teaching of the [predominant scientific view](#) as "the other side of the story being shoved down their throats. It's already happening. The left have infiltrated our education systems..."

But this familiar agenda of grubby particularities wants interpretation such as Mounk provides for identity synthesis of the underlying “values” of (for the want of a better term) [populism](#). It cannot serve the recordkeeper as a corresponding template for warning signs of intellectual landmines to be avoided. No matter, archivists in western democracies are more likely to become beguiled by the other. It would be interesting, however, to review what prevailing value-orthodoxies (if any) pose threats to recordkeeping in non-western countries. They must exist if you follow Pinker and put all this down to politics. But if, in the alternative view, value systems are culturally and socially grounded (or, heaven forbid, based in religion) the story may be otherwise.

2023 November 19:

<<**[Andrew Waugh](#): I don't understand archival theory talking about 'truth' at all; certainly not as something that recordkeepers (or archivists) seek out. The characteristics of good records are authenticity, reliability, and integrity, and even then it's more hope than certainty. Truth is something that the users of our records seek ... We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions. And which questions can be asked, or answered, has implications for people today ... It is consequently worth questioning why archivists and recordkeepers make particular decisions about the retention (and its shadow, disposal/destruction) of particular classes of records.**>>

These distinctions are too fine for me, I'm afraid.

- [truthfulness](#): the quality of being honest and not containing or telling any lies
- [authenticity](#): the quality of being real or true
- [reliability](#): the quality of being able to be trusted or believed because of working or behaving well
- [integrity](#): the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change

Any words can, of course, be invested with professional meanings and thus converted into terms of art to prove any conclusion you choose. If archivists choose to reason their way out of truthfulness by adopting specialised definitions of authenticity, reliability, and integrity to mean something else, a simple syllogism will do the job. But archivists may, in the alternative, assign a professional meaning to "truth" and say that the record is true

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when its authenticity, reliability, and integrity are established and defended. This is not to say that its contents are therefore true (that is, truly, for others to determine) but only that it can be trusted in the context of the meaning that the archivist strives to discern and describe. What worth will that meaning have if it is not true (even if it is only understood to be true more in hope than certainty)?

We are not alone in wrestling with these questions:

... documentary evidence has been recognised by most legal systems and scientific researchers as a highly reliable conduit to the truth, because, placed in its contexts (be they administrative/judicial, provenancial, procedural, documentary or technological), it shows the relationship between a fact to be proven and the fact that proves it. Lately, though, the public appears to disregard this fact infrastructure in favour not only of information coming from more easily accessible sources, like social media, but also of its own feelings and opinions ...

... Records and archives professionals have in the past provided a reasonable guarantee of the accuracy, reliability and authenticity of the documentary evidence for which they are responsible. However, the phenomena described above have been so highly politicized that reliance on records and archives as primary sources of evidence seems hopelessly mired in partisanship, while it becomes increasingly unclear who is responsible for the truthfulness of information circulated through the news or social media, which we know to be filtered in order to reinforce members' beliefs and those of their friends. Contributing to this situation, the creation and maintenance of records is falling victim to politicians and administrators who fear being held accountable for their actions ...

... Most of the literature emphasizes the important role of critical thinking and media/information literacy in fighting misinformation, and argues that librarians and other information professionals have the key responsibility of serving as impartial mediators, educating the public on how to think critically about information presented to them and understand the inherent and explicit biases of those who create and disseminate information, and promoting the importance to democracy of facts and evidence ... The literature acknowledges that any collection is "filtered," but argues that the ethics and professional skills of information professionals mitigate the risk of extreme bias.

... what can records and archives professionals do? The obvious answer is: re-establish the lost trust in the fact infrastructure provided by archives. What does trust involve? ... InterPARES Trust (ITrust), an international multidisciplinary research project focused on the trustworthiness of records in the cloud environment, defines trust as "confidence of one party in another, based on an alignment of value systems with respect to specific actions or benefits, and involving a relationship of voluntary vulnerability, dependence, and reliance, based on risk assessment." Substantially, trust involves acting without the knowledge needed to act, by substituting the information that one does not have with other information, e.g. the testimony of witnesses, oral tradition, records, or archival institutions

... To counteract misinformation and disinformation and make again of records and archives the centerpiece of what the public will regard as the best evidence of facts and actions and the most effective instrument of accountability, records and archives professionals must do much more. They need to develop tools to "nudge" people towards their infrastructure for documentary truth (recordkeeping and preservation systems), even if it means slicing and dicing the related information for targeted audiences, just like Facebook does. They have to create different blueprints for characterizing their infrastructure to potential users, just like Google does. Finally, they need to design and implement capabilities enabling people to easily trace, access, and assess records in context click after click, fast and easily, just like Wikipedia does. Most importantly, they need to do all the above ethically, on the basis of a true understanding of the facts and of a willingness to let them speak for themselves ... What is relevant to professionals in the digital online environment is rather "responsibility," which can be enforced through legislation and regulations. A "duty to document" one's action, ensconced in legislation, might be able to do just that, to require administrators of all kinds, including records managers and archivists,

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to record all their actions and decisions, especially when it comes to providing access to the information they hold in trust. Only then will the public rediscover that records and archives are the necessary instruments for unveiling and denouncing misinformation and disinformation and get to the truth.

Luciana Duranti [Of Truth, Evidence, and Trust: Records and Archives in the Era of Misinformation and Disinformation -- pre-print \(2020\)](#)

PS The *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic) was the first archival legislation in Australia to impose on government officials a duty to “cause to be made and kept full and accurate records” (s.13)

2023 November 20:

<<Any words can, of course, be invested with professional meanings and thus converted into terms of art to prove any conclusion you choose ... archivists may ... assign a professional meaning to "truth" and say that the record is true when its authenticity, reliability, and integrity are established and defended ...>>

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’ [Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass](#)

<<... They need to develop tools to “nudge” people towards their infrastructure for documentary truth (recordkeeping and preservation systems), even if it means slicing and dicing the related information for targeted audiences, just like Facebook does. They have to create different blueprints for characterizing their infrastructure to potential users, just like Google does. Finally, they need to design and implement capabilities enabling people to easily trace, access, and assess records in context click after click, fast and easily, just like Wikipedia does ... >>

In the US, they have an online tool (at a price) called [TruthFinder](#)

...You can search for nearly anyone in the United States by name, phone number, address, or email address. In minutes, TruthFinder crawls through billions of public records from all over the United States and compiles this information in one easy-to-read report. You can access contact information, criminal and arrest records, assets, bankruptcy information and liens, licenses, social media profiles, location information and history, and other public records through TruthFinder ... When you activate a search, TruthFinder pays a fee to access these databases and then pulls all of the data about your search subject out of the database and into one digestible report ... TruthFinder is legit. We have thousands of positive reviews and an A+ rating from the BBB ... TruthFinder aggregates public records from federal, state, county, and city databases ... To access this prior to websites like TruthFinder, you would have to travel to a courthouse, request a file, and wait for an administrator to find it. And that’s just one record! ... TruthFinder provides detailed information in our people reports and [Dark Web Monitoring](#) to our members. Dark Web Monitoring scans the Dark Web in search of your personal information (i.e. emails, passwords, Social Security numbers, etc). If you find your information online, it’s possible you were targeted in a data breach — and you can take steps to protect your data before it’s auctioned off to an identity thief online. So you’re a lot safer using TruthFinder than you are without it! ...

<< We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions. >>

Not sure it would be all that easy to “nudge” people to the truth about climate change.

2023 November 21:

Users of TruthFinder are invited to trust aggregated results on the basis of two assurances:

- The information is sourced from reliable origins (public records)

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- The gatekeeper can be trusted to relay it honestly (“Truthfinder is legit”)

This effectively eliminates interpretation on the part of convinced users. It works because the data and the results are both formatted (“structured” I believe the IT folk say) so the record, i.e. the information derived from the record, speaks for itself (or as near as all get out). The content requires no context on the part of an optimistic consumer.

But as a rule unstructured records don’t speak for themselves. They have to be interpreted. It is the users’ job to interpret the content (as best they may) and to evaluate the reliability of sources in which it is found but it is our job to discern and defend (i.e. interpret) the “truth” of those sources whose content they are interrogating. Trustworthiness and contextual meaning are our business. Earning the users’ trust in that role (as truth-tellers ourselves) and by extension their trust in the sources we sustain is much more intricate than crawling the net or just aiding or hindering in some passive and minimalist way.

PS Bearman used to argue that his idea for an MEO (metadata-encapsulated-object) provided for a kind of record that could speak for itself – i.e. one that carried its own “description” along with it. I disputed this with him, arguing that no record stands alone, that no record can be wholly self-referential as to its relationships with events, circumstances, and other records or with contextuality. Hence the abiding need for recordkeepers. However much is inscribed there always remains some ambient symbiosis. Taxonomists live in the vain hope that some universal codification of meaning (and some standardised ordering of relationship-types) can eliminate further interpretation. I hold to the other view although I concede that technology (or even advances in non-technological methods) may and do change the way in which we satisfy this abiding need – but without eliminating it altogether.

2023 November 22:

<<We have a minor and partial power over disposal and access to records, and hence our decisions can aid or hinder the answering of particular historical questions>>

<<Earning the users’ trust in that role (as truth-tellers ourselves) and by extension their trust in the sources we sustain is much more intricate than crawling the net or just aiding or hindering in some passive and minimalist way>>

Lest anyone suppose that fake news is a recent phenomenon, consider the rise of the political newsletter in 17th century England. They have continued (more or less, in one form or another) ever since – partial, partisan, and opinionated. And the political newsletter continued an even earlier [polemical tradition](#) from the field of religion. There is a [direct line](#) to Sky-After-Dark and weapons-of-mass-destruction.

One example is [Mercurius Civicus: London’s Intelligencer, or, Truth impartially related from thence to the whole Kingdom to prevent miſ-information](#). The [genre](#) reached a frenzy at the turn of the century, engaging the talents of luminaries such as Swift, Defoe, Addison, and Steele.

... Pamphlets such as the Royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* and the Parliament-supporting *Mercurius Britannicus* brought the conflict into print by aiming to score propaganda victories ... *Mercurius Civicus* was a London newsbook published between 1643 and 1646 ... its author is uncertain, although he is widely believed to have been Richard Collings ... whilst Collings spent much of his time attacking the Royalist paper *Mercurius Aulicus*, there was no love lost between him and his fellow Parliamentarian authors. Usually he merely accused them of inaccuracy, but he went as far as charging Humphrey Blundon and his *Speciall Passages* with Royalist sympathies ... Neither was Collings averse to including his own editorial on a variety of subject matter. In particular he was prone to outbursts of religious diatribe against Catholics and non-conformists ... However he declared that ‘I delight not to rake in the Dunghill of their errors. I shall therefore leave them to be corrected and suppressed by lawfull Authority’ ...

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Newspapers are generally classed as ‘ephemera’: their existence is fleeting and the survival of a particular edition is not guaranteed. We owe the survival of a large swathe of 1640s news output to [George Thomason](#) (d.1666), who began collecting printed items as England, Scotland and Ireland fell into a state of war in the late 1630s and early 1640s, and continued collecting throughout that decade and into the Interregnum ... his collection was at risk of destruction by the authorities on numerous occasions ... After his death the pamphlets made their way through the hands of various caretakers and collectors ... Eventually in the eighteenth century it was purchased on behalf of [George III](#), who donated it to the [British Museum](#), where it stayed until [transferred to the British Library](#) in the 1970s.



... the newsbooks have never been easily available outside academia ... only being available in libraries or repositories where membership/prior booking/readers ticket is required ... poor print quality often makes them difficult to decipher with the human eye, and the age and inconsistency of the fonts makes them impossible to reliably OCR ... there are no indices ... spellings are so variable that the task of indexing could not be done by machine ... In recent years the problem of newsbook access has been somewhat alleviated by microfilm copies being made and distributed to major world libraries in the 1970s, and more recently, [PDF](#) copies of the filmed documents being made electronically ... However, as only visitors to a major national library ... or individuals with a university or research library membership, can access these electronic copies, gaining access for research purposes is still a major hurdle for the majority of non-academic researchers ... Complete transcription from the originals was the only practical route to republication, but this offered the opportunity to add explanatory footnotes and, for the first time, an index ...

Knowing the source and knowing about the source are subtle and interconnected matters. Can “historical questions” be neatly parcelled up into distinctions between the role of the curator and the role of the historian? If we could all agree about the answer to that question, or even agree about the question itself, probably. Otherwise ...

2022 November 9: [Will the Centre Hold?](#)

I was speaking some years ago with a North American archival educator who asked rhetorically *What can you do with college graduates who haven't heard of the French Revolution?*

A [Conversation](#) article asks whether social media is (are?) killing democracy and they reach the predictable conclusion that to safeguard democracy social media must be regulated by “voters and elected policymakers, not a small clique of super-

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rich individuals”. But suppose it’s the ignorance of those using social media (the voters themselves) that’s also at fault, that social media simply provides a means whereby people can actually say what they really think and do what they really want (as democracy always promised they could). Suppose social media isn’t causing the ugliness but simply releasing the dark underbelly of human nature that was always there but hitherto revealed only in times of turmoil and revolution?

What is the connection between knowledge and reason, between ignorance and ugliness? Can archivists who’ve never heard of the French Revolution uphold civilisation (assuming that is any part of our role)? Is it evidence or ideology that prevails? Bit of both, I suppose. In his latest book ([The War on the West](#)) Douglas Murray writes (pp.79-81)

... the assault on the West's history succeeds because it speaks into a vacuum of vast historical and contemporary ignorance ... A poll of young British people carried out by [Survation](#) in 2016 found that 50 percent had never heard of Lenin, while 70 percent had no idea who Mao was. Among sixteen- to twenty-four-year-olds, who had all grown up after the fall of the Berlin Wall, 41 percent had positive feelings about socialism, while just 28 percent felt the same sentiments towards capitalism. One possible reason for this is that 68 percent said they had never learned anything in school about the Russian Revolution ... A poll carried out in 2020 found that almost two-thirds of Americans between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine had no idea that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust ...

Can’t speak to the accuracy of these figures and, of course, well-educated toffs are just as capable of ignorance as the downtrodden (witness Sky-After-Dark). It’s reminiscent of the argey-bargy over gun control. Do guns kill people or do people kill people? Does social media kill democracy or do people kill democracy? Can archives help if those using archives aren't bound by the evidence they provide?

2022 November 25:

Further to this –



In the *Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade, Brigid O’Shaughnessy(aka Ruth Wonderly) and Joel Cairo are spinning tales to mislead each other and the police. The police challenge Cairo (played by [the inimitable Peter Lorre](#)) to respond to Spade’s yarn. “Well, I don’t know what to say.” Try telling us the facts, the police reply. Cairo looks up, puzzled and disbelieving, “Facts?!” Next morning, after a night in the lock-up, Cairo says he wishes Spade could have come up with a more plausible story. “If I’d told a sensible story, we’d have all ended up in jail.”

Three uncontroversial points sum to a paradox: 1) Almost every democratic theorist or democratic political actor sees an informed electorate as essential to good democratic practice. Citizens need to know who or what they are choosing and why – hence urgent calls for expansive and publicly funded education, and rights to free speech, assembly, press, and movement. 2) In most if not all democratic polities, the proportion of the population granted

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the suffrage has consistently expanded, and seldom contracted, over the past two centuries. Most observers, and I, agree that expanding enfranchisement makes a state more democratic. 3) Most expansions of the suffrage bring in, on average, people who are less politically informed or less broadly educated than those already eligible to vote.

Putting these three uncontroversial points together leads to the conclusion that as democracies become more democratic, their decision-making processes become of lower quality in terms of cognitive processing of issues and candidate choice. The paradox is both historical – why *have* democracies expanded the franchise to include relatively ignorant voters? – and normative – why *should* democracies expand the franchise to include relatively ignorant voters?

The article addresses both questions ...

“In a random telephone survey of more than 2,000 adults, conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory at Northern Illinois University, 21 percent of the respondents said they believed that the sun revolved around the earth; an additional 7 percent said they did not know which revolved around which” (Halpern 1997). A long list of studies shows that Americans in the 1950s thought the Bill of Rights was written recently by Communists, that 40 percent do not know the name of the vice president, that few can name their own Representative in Congress, that many believe that more of the federal budget goes to foreign aid than to social security, and so on. Jennifer L Hochschild [*If democracies need informed voters, how can they thrive while expanding enfranchisement*](#) (read on)

Hochschild illustrates one of her propositions by stating, inter alia, that “In the absence of adequate information neither passion nor reason is likely to lead to decisions that reflect the real interests of the public.” This should warm the hearts of information professionals like us. My problem is persuading myself that adequate information would be all that effective in leading reason to triumph over passion. Most of the evidence seems to point the other way. Climate Change, Frontier Wars, Vaccination, Presidential Elections - adequate information is not lacking but it is either ignored or disputed. Factoids from the Internet are used willy nilly to uphold every conceivable position and inflame almost every political and ideological argument. The information we curate is not like a truth-pill. The ability to honestly analyse and evaluate the information is beyond our power to confer.

Another possibility would be to deny the ignorant a vote (or any capacity to do harm, other than invading Congress and shooting up pizza joints). Another way of suggesting that harm comes from the (mis)use made of knowledge – not from its (in) accuracy.

- Roughly a third of American voters think that the Marxist slogan “From each according to his ability to each according to his need” appears in the Constitution. About as many are incapable of naming even one of the three branches of the United States government. Fewer than a quarter know who their senators are, and only half are aware that their state has two of them ...
- It would be much safer, Plato thought, to entrust power to carefully educated guardians. To keep their minds pure of distractions—such as family, money, and the inherent pleasures of naughtiness—he proposed housing them in a eugenically supervised free-love compound where they could be taught to fear the touch of gold and prevented from reading any literature in which the characters have speaking parts, which might lead them to forget themselves. The scheme was so byzantine and cockamamie that many suspect Plato couldn’t have been serious ...
- A more practical suggestion came from J. S. Mill, in the nineteenth century: give extra votes to citizens with university degrees or intellectually demanding jobs [CH: God forbid!] ...
- In 1855, Connecticut introduced the first literacy test for American voters. Although a New York Democrat protested, in 1868, that “if a man is ignorant, he needs the ballot for his protection all the more,” in the next half century the tests spread to almost all parts of the country. They helped racists in the South circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment and disenfranchise blacks, and even in immigrant-rich New York a 1921 law required new voters to take a test if they couldn’t prove that they had an eighth-grade education. About fifteen per cent flunked. Voter literacy tests weren’t permanently outlawed by Congress until 1975, years after the civil-rights movement had discredited them ...

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- David Estlund, a political philosopher at Brown ... tried to construct a philosophical justification for democracy, a feat that he thought could be achieved only by balancing two propositions: democratic procedures tend to make correct policy decisions, and democratic procedures are fair in the eyes of reasonable observers...Estlund coined the word “epistocracy,” meaning “government by the knowledgeable.” ... As a purely philosophical matter, however, he saw only three valid objections. First, one could deny that truth was a suitable standard for measuring political judgment ... in debates over contentious issues, such as when human life begins or whether human activity is warming the planet, appeals to the truth tend to be incendiary. Truth “peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate,” Hannah Arendt pointed out ... The second argument against epistocracy would be to deny that some citizens know more about good government than others ... The third and final option: deny that knowing more imparts political authority. As Estlund put it, “You might be right, but who made you boss?” ... By the end of Estlund’s analysis, there were only two practical arguments against epistocracy left standing. The first was the possibility that an epistocracy’s method of screening voters might be biased in a way that couldn’t readily be identified and therefore couldn’t be corrected for. The second was that universal suffrage is so established in our minds as a default that giving the knowledgeable power over the ignorant will always feel more unjust ...
- Jason Brennan, a political philosopher at Georgetown, has turned Estlund’s hedging inside out to create an uninhibited argument *for* epistocracy. Against Estlund’s claim that universal suffrage is the default, Brennan argues that it’s entirely justifiable to limit the political power that the irrational, the ignorant, and the incompetent have over others ... Brennan suggests that since voters in an epistocracy would be more enlightened about crime and policing, “excluding the bottom 80 percent of white voters from voting might be just what poor blacks need.”
Caleb Crain [*The case against democracy*](#)

<<**Andrew Waugh: Australia has had four expansions of the suffrage:**

- **Lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18**
- **Enfranchising indigenous Australians**
- **Granting women the vote**
- **Eliminating the property qualification**

I'll let you argue that extending the franchise to any of these groups damaged Australian democracy.>>

Not my argument. Jennifer Hochschild is making a link between expanding the franchise and a resulting "lower quality in terms of cognitive processing of issues and candidate choice". Take it up with her. All of the quotes address the wider issue of voter ignorance as a threat to democracy. It is only Hochschild who links that ignorance to expansion of the franchise. Whether voters are more ignorant than before and if so what causes that and what are the results is the common thread. I would say that passionate ignorance is today to be found, in the English-speaking world at least, amongst all strata of society including (some would say mostly) amongst the educated elites.

I would be prepared to argue that damage is occurring as a result of ignorance but also as a result of much else beside and (harking back to the *Conversation* piece) that is wrong to see the rise of unreasoning passion as the result solely of the instruments by which it is expressed (viz. social media). I think ignorant people are to blame not just the tools they use. I don't think education is the answer if, as some ideologues argue, it simply means indoctrination with approved or preferred "knowledge". As I've indicated elsewhere, my idea of education involves development of critical thinking to assist people in reaching their own conclusions. People reaching their own conclusions is a fair description of social media craziness but I don't think they can be "educated" out of false conclusions or bullied out of them either for that matter (e.g. pronoun wars, identity wars, history wars, and so on).

This is ultimately a social issue so, like my old friends Charles Dickens and George Orwell, I think the answer is a moral one, not a structural one. I think the baby boomer generation (to which I belong) has seen a loosening of custom which formerly lay alongside

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democratic government, some of it good some of it corrosive. But perhaps this is just an old man's fear of change.

The connections between passion, knowledge, and truth are complex and can't really be dealt with in a list posting (hence my attempt to cross-reference the writings of others). Our issues, which I take to include evidence, fact, and memory can't be separated from the question these writers raise concerning the state of democracy. As I said in Winnipeg many years ago, the ethos of recordkeeping and the role of the recordkeeper are not inherent, they derive from the context in which we operate.

2022 November 26:

<<**I would be prepared to argue that damage is occurring as a result of ignorance but also as a result of much else beside**>>

- **Democratic backsliding**, also called **autocratization**, is the decline in the democratic characteristics of a political system and is the opposite of democratization. [Wikipedia](#).
- Turning and turning in the widening [gyre](#) / The falcon cannot hear the [falconer](#);
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere [anarchy](#) is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.
- *All happy families are alike, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way* (Tolstoy)

It may be that every functioning democracy is like every other and that every failing democracy fails in its own way. Leaving aside collapse engineered by external forces or resulting from internal divisions, how are we to judge failure (or impending failure)? It is probably necessary to distinguish the failure to meet the definitional requirements of a liberal democracy (e.g. autocratization in [Russia](#) supported, apparently, by a majority) from majority rule that fails to satisfy minority aspirations (e.g. UK's persistent [Scottish problems](#) and the question of [Palestinian Independence](#)). If I am correct that recordkeeping takes on the colour of its context, then it's important to know if our context is failing.

One way to know that (not necessarily the best or one which I would endorse) is how the governed perceive the case to be,

- Anger at political elites, economic dissatisfaction and anxiety about rapid social changes have fueled political upheaval in regions around the world in recent years. Anti-establishment leaders, parties and movements have emerged on both the right and left of the political spectrum, in some cases challenging fundamental norms and institutions of liberal democracy... ideas at the core of liberal democracy remain popular among global publics, but commitment to democracy can nonetheless be weak ... Across 27 countries polled, a median of 51% are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in their country; just 45% are satisfied ...
- The results highlight some key areas of public frustration: Most believe elections bring little change, that politicians are corrupt and out of touch and that courts do not treat people fairly. On the other hand, people are more positive about how well their countries protect free expression, provide economic opportunity and ensure public safety ... among the factors studied, dissatisfaction with democracy is related to economic frustration, the status of individual rights, as well as perceptions that political elites are corrupt and do not care about average citizens. Additionally, in Europe the results suggest that dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working is tied to views about the EU, opinions about whether immigrants are adopting national customs and attitudes toward populist parties ...
- Overall, populist party sympathizers tend to be unhappy with the way their democracies are working ... Nearly six-in-ten Swedes with a favorable opinion of the Sweden Democrats are dissatisfied with the current state of democracy, compared with only 17% of those who see

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the right-wing party negatively. Similarly, 69% of Germans with a positive view of the right-wing AfD are dissatisfied, while just 37% hold that view among Germans who rate AfD negatively. The same pattern is found among those who sympathize with left-wing populist parties in some nations. For instance, six-in-ten who have a favorable view of La France Insoumise are dissatisfied with how democracy is working, compared with 47% of French people who see the party negatively. Interestingly, those with favorable opinions of two European populist parties are more satisfied with how democracy is working: the UK's right-wing, pro-Brexit UKIP and Greece's left-wing Syriza.

Pew Research Center [Many across the globe are dissatisfied with how democracy is working](#)

Another way is by evaluation against defined criteria

Democracy is in crisis. The values it embodies—particularly the right to choose leaders in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—are under assault and in retreat globally ... For the 12th consecutive year, according to *Freedom in the World*, countries that suffered democratic setbacks outnumbered those that registered gains. States that a decade ago seemed like promising success stories—Turkey and Hungary, for example—are sliding into authoritarian rule. The military in Myanmar, which began a limited democratic opening in 2010, executed a shocking campaign of ethnic cleansing in 2017 and rebuffed international criticism of its actions. Meanwhile, the world's most powerful democracies are mired in seemingly intractable problems at home, including social and economic disparities, partisan fragmentation, terrorist attacks, and an influx of refugees that has strained alliances and increased fears of the “other.”

Freedom House [Democracy in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis](#)

<<Andrew Wilson: Using data from the US as a guide to anything anywhere else in the world is problematic, to say the least.>>

- Australia [is] the sixth most accurate country on the Ipsos “Index of Ignorance”. Ipsos’ latest “Perils of Perception” survey highlights how wrong the public across 40 countries is about key global issues and features of the population in their country ... India receives the dubious honour of being the most inaccurate in its perceptions on these issues, with China and the US also high up the list. The Netherlands is the most accurate, followed by Great Britain, with South Korea in third. [Perils of Perception ...](#)
- ,, the standing of democracy amongst Australians — presumably including that of Australian democracy — is not overwhelmingly positive. In the latest authoritative [Lowy Institute Poll](#) of Australian attitudes towards democracy, it is troubling that 30% of 18-29 year-old citizens surveyed believed a non-democratic system is preferable to a democratic one under some circumstances, while 55% believed democracy is preferable regardless of circumstance. This is a contrast to those 60 years and over surveyed, only 15% of whom believed a non-democratic system might be preferable, while 72% believed democracy was always preferable. The overall numbers for all surveyed was 22% and 65%, respectively. The lower regard for democracy amongst younger Australians is reflected in previous polling going back to 2012 ...
Most Australians are famously disinterested in politics and contrast their general disinterest in politics favorably with the passionate and intense American debates about the state of U.S. democracy ... This more flippant attitude to politics means that Australian democracy is far less partisan and divisive than in a country such as the United States. However, there are downsides. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a widespread Australian ignorance about the structure and workings of its democracy ...
[The risks to Australia's democracy](#)
- This thesis is focused on Australian citizens who were not interested in politics during the period 1987- 2016 using data primarily from the Australian Election Study (AES) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) ... The findings of this thesis suggest that there are at least twenty percent of Australians who are politically uninterested who lack the motivation to garner rudimentary political knowledge. They do not understand how our system of government works and cannot take information shortcuts to vote according to

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ideology or atomised issues. Lower socio-demographic individuals are generally the most uninterested, yet they are also the section of society that require more from government in relation to benefits and programs ... They are also more likely to swing from one party to another at different elections and more likely to simply not care who governs. The broader polity is therefore affected by major political parties rationally focusing on uninterested swinging voters in order to attract their attention. The result is that ephemeral or fringe issues hijack political debate. Greg Kramer [*The Apathetic Country*](#)

2022 November 30:

<<**Suppose social media isn't causing the ugliness but simply releasing the dark underbelly of human nature that was always there ... Does social media kill democracy or do people kill democracy?**>>

... Merriam-Webster, America's oldest dictionary publisher, has just chosen "[gaslighting](#)" as its word of the year ... Gaslighting is the act or practice of grossly misleading someone, especially for one's own advantage. "In this age of misinformation - of 'fake news', conspiracy theories, Twitter trolls, and deep fakes - gaslighting has emerged as a word for our time," Merriam-Webster said in a statement on Monday ... as Merriam-Webster notes, while the term referred primarily to psychological manipulation in the 20th Century, its modern use is driven by "the vast increase in channels and technologies used to mislead" people, especially in personal and political contexts ...

2022 December 1:

<<**to safeguard democracy social media must be regulated by "voters and elected policymakers, not a small clique of super-rich individuals"**>>

<< **he was not a hole-and-corner soul-saver, the kind of well-meaning idiot who thinks that the world will be perfect if you amend a few bylaws and abolish a few anomalies**>>

Would regulation by voters and elected policymakers in place of a small clique of super-rich individuals actually improve matters? The Internet was once touted as a way of escaping from regulation and government control. What happened? Is oppression by a majority less baleful than the caprice of a clique? Can truth be established by ballot?

Are the motives of voters and elected policymakers less suspect, less tyrannous, less dangerous to democracy? Are their intentions, biases, and beliefs less harmful? Would their regulation (whatever that involves) make things better or worse or would it make no difference at all? What can I expect from regulation by voters and elected policymakers? I am absolute for free speech but I know this is a minority opinion not shared by a majority of voters or by elected policymakers. Very much so if you exclude the sophists who weasel out of difficulty with the formula: *I support free speech but ...* People who oppose discrimination (as I do) are expected by many voters and elected policymakers to oppose vilification also (as I do not). Some voters and elected policymakers don't see a difference between vilification and discrimination and advocate "control" to eliminate both. But how does this safeguard democracy (freedom, fairness, toleration, etc.)?

If I say that God hates you and you're going to Hell, that's vilification (a form of free speech); if I refuse to bake a cake to your specification, that's discrimination. It's easy to see the difference unless you've got scrambled eggs for brains. But would voters and elected policymakers see it? I don't vilify people (at least not in my own estimation) because that's how I was brought up, but others don't do so under statutory compulsion. Which is more righteous? As the price of living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other, I know I must accept (unwillingly) socially sanctioned abridgements to free speech such as libel, vilification, sedition, blasphemy, copyright even. I oppose the *Religious Discrimination Bill* (which allows the religious to both vilify and discriminate) but not necessarily for the same reasons as most voters and

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elected policymakers. I oppose it because I think everyone should be free to vilify and no one should be free to discriminate. But I and others who oppose that Bill for different reasons might have to consider that accepting it (unwillingly) is the price of living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other.

Online it won't be arguments about vilification vs discrimination that have to be dealt with but rather about the harmful (e.g. [misleading](#) or [inflammatory](#) information) vs the vile (e.g. incorrect, hateful, or disputed opinions). Not even the small clique of super-rich individuals has been able to avoid [dealing with that](#). If voters and elected policymakers take over this role, they will have to develop norms for what is misleading that are acceptable to the majority and they will be tempted to extend their control over dissenting opinion simply because it is distasteful to the majority. If the editors of Merriam-Webster are right and social media tools amplify the problem of misleading information, then controlling the tools may have to be accepted (unwillingly) as the price we pay for living in a civilized society etc etc. But don't suppose that you can tame human nature by taming Twitter. That's all I'm saying. And beware: accepting compromises as the price of living in a civilized society etc etc because that is also the excuse needed by every totalitarian regime that's trampling on democracy and human rights.

The [gun control](#) analogy may disturb, but I hold to it. The American Second Amendment is based on a quaint 18th century idea that "a well regulated Militia [is] necessary to the security of a Free State". Whatever merit there may have been (or is) in such a notion, I doubt the Founders intended to ease the way for solo psychopaths to purchase battlefield weapons over the counter and use them to massacre school kids. If it's people who kill people (not guns) then gun control is very much about compromising a principle so people can live in a civilized society etc etc. Comparisons are sometimes made between murder rates and gun control in [Canada](#) and the US. Gun ownership and control are different in those two places, but I expect (as Andrew Wilson suggests) another difference is that Canadians live on one side of the border and Americans on the other.

From our perspective, misleading information is like a record: it may be purposefully or accidentally misleading. It may originate with reliable-sources, deliberate-deceivers, or self-deceivers but these distinctions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and they may be distinctions without a difference since they do not conclusively establish either truth or falsity. Whatever the intention of the originator (the record-maker) it is the job of someone else (the record-keeper) to understand it.

Another thing we know is that a false record (allowing for context and meaning as well as content) can be as illuminating as a true one. The [Donation of Constantine](#) tells us nothing about true title but a lot about the Papacy's territorial ambitions and world view. Trump's twitterings say as much about the character of the man as his rantings from the podium and yet despite this documentary evidence nearly half of the American electorate voted for him in 2020 – depressing, but good to know all the same. Morrison's I-know-better-than-you defence does nothing to augment the record but tells us a lot about him.

The hard part is knowing how to tell fact from fiction but it involves judgement as well as regulation. Relying on a majority to do this indulges the fiction that the majority is a single, homogenous, unchanging entity/identity to whose wishes dissenters (perceived as a different single, homogenous, unchanging entity/identity) must always defer. But it is not so. Apart from those enslaved to dogma and ideology, if you're in the majority on one issue you're sure to be in the minority on another. Deferring to the majority on principle and without qualification or exception is just another form of tyranny against which democratic freedom must (somehow) be protected. Perhaps that's what those 18-29 year-olds who didn't believe in democracy in all circumstances had in mind (but I doubt it).

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But, they ask, isn't vilification harmful. Indeed? It's difficult to find an argument for this proposition that does not almost at once slide [into conflating mere vilification with incitement](#) to do harm. Putting up with offence is another price we pay for living in a civilized society in which differences are settled without murdering each other. "Woke" has been weaponized, but depending on your view-point, it is weaponized by:

- those [opposed to social change](#) to deride and demean the enlightened, or
- the enlightened as a tool to [bully and suppress](#) those they disagree with.

Those without perspective will unavoidably give (and take) offence. Avoidable hurt felt by the weak, the downtrodden, and the inarticulate is bad and should be avoided but (so far as I can see) many of the a-woke are neither weak nor downtrodden nor inarticulate and use wokeness as a political cudgel to silence their opponents and [pursue political agendas](#).

Unfortunately, the unintended consequence of culture wars can be disengagement: "never again use his voice ["in an official capacity" to comment about a political issue](#)" so the ultimate resolution around a peace table is that everybody loses.

Unless someone gives me some push-back on this soon, I'm going to get away with it.

[Speaking of which](#)

Foreign individuals, companies and governments are expected to be banned from donating or campaigning for either side during the [Indigenous voice to parliament](#) campaign ... The proposed reforms to the Referendum Machinery Act will also include donation disclosure rules, and public funding for campaigns to mitigate misinformation around the voice and referendum process ... Current referendum laws require the government to produce and mail information pamphlets to voters, containing 2,000-word essays from those in favour and those opposed to the referendum change. That provision would be scrapped ... "The government believes campaigns in the voice referendum should be organised and funded by the Australian community," ... During a speech at the National Press Club in October, [Attorney-General] Dreyfus called Australia's referendum processes "very antiquated", and said foreign funding of the referendum was "a concern". "I can't think of a reason why there should be overseas funding permitted for campaigning in this referendum," he said ... In an interview with the ABC's 7.30 program on Tuesday, [Indigenous Australians Minister] Burney said the government's decision to not fund either side of the campaign was "prudent". "We will be using public funds to fund a civics campaign, so people know about what referendums are... We will not be using public funds to fund a yes or a no campaign," she said. "We believe those campaigns can raise their own money, through private means." Burney said there was "enormous support" for the voice referendum in the corporate sector, among unions and in the community.

So, this is what government regulation of debate looks like:

- Ethnically biased (foreign voices forbidden because there is "no reason" to let them speak - too bad for Nigel Farage);
- Issue-free (generic civics lessons in place of an issues debate until challenged);
- One-sided (private funding from corporates and unions for "yes" vs funding for "no" from ?????). I'm assuming that the ban on "foreign ... companies" does not extend to Australian corporates and unions, said to be enormously supportive of "yes";
- Thought-controlled (campaigns to mitigate misinformation - as defined by government);
- Partisan (how can you publicly fund a campaign to mitigate misinformation without taking sides?).

One advantage of the current law is that corporates, for example, would not have to support the "no" case publicly; would they (or individuals for that matter) dare to knowing their financial support would be publicly disclosed in an atmosphere of "enormous support" for the other side? But we are probably losing little since I don't see this government being capable of overseeing the preparation of a fair "no" case anyway.

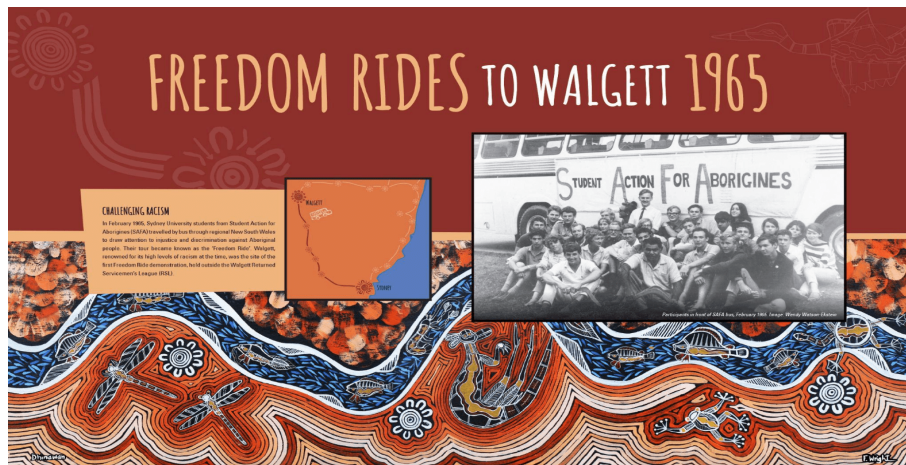
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2022 December 4:

On my recent visit to Sydney, a friend told me that my contributions to this thread indicate my view on the substantive issues and not just (as I had intended) on the process for dealing with them - most recently re The Voice. Unless the referendum machinery changes are going to abolish the secret ballot, I have every right to tell you to mind your own business. But, disappointed rather than surprised, I don't mind saying that, supposing I'm still alive, I will be voting "no". And I don't have to await the detail (the proponents certainly aren't doing so). The proposition is racist in its essence and no amount of detail is going to change that. In 1967, Australians [voted to become one nation](#). It was one of the first times I had a chance to cast my ballot. Now, scarcely 50 years later, we are being asked to vote to become two again. It's very sad.

I'm told I don't understand. I do understand but I disagree. Similarly, I am told that our approach to archiving must redress our inherent social and racial bias and I am all for correcting error where it can be found. I am told that error can be calibrated in terms of our social, racial, and gender identity and that I reject absolutely. I'm told I can't know what Aborigines want, so I guess I have to be the one to make the point that what Aborigines want (assuming that all Aborigines want the same thing) isn't all that matters. I am told that I can't imagine what Aborigines have to endure and that is true. I am told that nothing has changed since 1967 and that I can say is untrue.

When I was a lad living in the bush north of Walgett, I saw some of what Aborigines had to endure up close and personal. To take just one example: on rare visits into town we went to the cinema (the flicks) in an old fashioned theatre with stalls and a balcony. Aborigines sat below and Whites sat above. No questions, no mixing whatsoever, and no protests that I knew about. There were two pubs: Abos went to the rough one and it was Whities only in the posh one. This was in the mid-1950s for goodness sake. I learnt a lot more sitting with Aboriginal shearers on our property around the camp fire at night. I was back in Sydney when things actually began to change after Charlie Perkins and the [Freedom Rides](#).



Not saying things became perfect after that (nor are they now, far from it) but dealing with it is a social and a political issue not a constitutional one.

All this may seem a long way from recordkeeping but our professional ethics and behaviours are social constructs, not just a bloodless intellectual exercise, and the tension between attempted objectivity and social mores abides. From my own experience, was it right in the 1980s to regard the word "patriarchal" in a finding aid as a loaded term? Was its use an accurate description of historical events (illuminating for those we were trying to assist) or an unhelpful expression of contemporary prejudice (obscuring the truth we were trying to convey)? The least convincing argument made in favour of that term was, at the

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time, that most of those working on our finding aids were women. In the Woke Wars, the tensions are equally apparent:

- The unenlightened vilify the unrighteous
- The a-woken hound the unenlightened
- The bullied unenlightened cry “vilification”

The hard-line unenlightened want freedom to speak in opposition and protection from bullying, the uncompromising a-woken want to denounce wrong and to suppress it with impunity by any means. Many of the unenlightened and many of the a-woken are much nicer than that, of course. I’d prefer it if everyone was nicer to each other (and Tiny Tim got to live) – but they aren’t. “God bless us, every one” doesn’t cut it but it’s madness not to dream. At the raw edge of extremism. each side claims the freedom to do right, damns the other, and claims protection from abuse. A clash of absolutes like this can’t be resolved (except when drunk or in a Dickens novel).

Of course, there’s always the totalitarian answer – suppression and submission.

The other answer, outside of intoxication or fiction, clearly lies somewhere in between – unsatisfactory, faltering, uncertain, qualified, ambiguous, mealy-mouthed, troubled answers, but ones we can live with without murdering each other. And the poor old archivist who tries to live out that grey answer (left of the black and right of the white) may end up being vilified by both sides.

2022 December 7:

<< our approach to archiving must redress our inherent social and racial bias and I am all for correcting error where it can be found.>>

... so long as it does not involve substituting one error for another. I flatter myself that [parallel provenance](#) is one way we archivists can (partly) overcome [perception bias](#) - cf. [Cartographers for Social Equality](#). I think Word Wars are sometimes a projection of bias, though often intended to overcome it by being “respectful”. You may not have noticed, but I am not a respectful person. I’m with Dorothy Parker:

“They say of me, and so they should, / It’s doubtful if I come to good.

.....
*But I, despite expert advice, / Keep doing things I think are nice,
And though to good I never come / Inseparable my nose and thumb.”*

Not deferential either. I accept that words can be inflammatory but being precious about them can also be an obstacle to understanding. I don’t much care about terminology, so I say Aborigines rather than First Nations (because of when I was born, I suppose) but if I were doing it, I’d say: “Old Australians”, “Introduced Anglo-Celts”, and “New Australians” and I could live with “Anglo-Celtic Invaders” if anyone thinks it matters. But even the terms “Old” and “New” are loaded from an Invader’s view-point.

It doesn’t do to confound difference and separation. Acceptance of difference (good) can be healing. The end game of separation (bad) is malice, conflict, war, and oppression.

Examples along the continuum of conflict (territorial, racist, religious, etc.) range from discontent to slaughter: UK (English, Irish, Scots, Welsh), Ireland (Catholic vs Protestant), Belgium (Flanders & Wallonia), Spain (Basques & Catalans), [Macedonism](#), Ukraine ([Russophones](#) & [LGBT](#)), Russia ([almost everyone](#) they don’t like), Cyprus (Turks vs Greeks), Israel (Palestinians), Middle East ([Christians](#)), Rwanda (‘nuf said and very nearly the [whole of Africa](#)), China (Tibetans, Uyghurs, [et al](#)), Canada (Quebecois), [Myanmar](#), India/Pakistan (Kashmir), Indonesia (Aceh & West Papua), the Kurds, Ceylon (Tamils), South Yemen, US (Blacks & Latinos), [the poor bloody Armenians](#), and so on and on and on It’s a fragile world.

Australia and New Zealand, both of which have had to deal with the Old, the Introduced, and the New, have done not so bad as some (bad historically, not perfect now, could do

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better, a lot better, but OK in comparison). Accepting difference is part of doing better. Separatism can't be. But Western Australia remains a worry.

2022 December 19:

From the [Guardian](#)-

- Eric Gill was one of the most celebrated British artists of the 20th century ... But after his death, details emerged of his grotesque sexual conduct ... and there has been increasing clamour since for his work not to be shown ... Now ... Gill's home-town gallery [Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft in East Sussex] has apparently begun a campaign to distance itself from the artist ... none of his substantial body of work in its collection has been on display for most of 2022, and he is now described as one artist "among many others" the museum features when previously he was "central" ... As recently as February last year, the museum was still asserting its intention to continue to be associated with Gill – "we absolutely condemn Gill's abuse of his daughters with no attempt to hide, excuse, normalise or minimise, yet we also have a duty to protect, display and interpret the artwork we hold in our collections". However, since then ... without making any public announcement, it has for most of 2022 removed all trace of Gill, his work remaining in storage ... The museum told *The Observer* that it is trying to find new ways to "give visitors a clearer picture of the core Ditching narrative ...".
- Journalist and author Alex Larman said: "The news that the Ditchling museum is removing Gill is both depressing and predictable ... it would be a shortsighted act of folly for the museum to attempt to airbrush the village's most famous inhabitant from its cultural history ... Nobody should defend Gill's personal actions ... But many great artists throughout history – from Caravaggio to Gauguin – behaved despicably, and it seems to me to be barking up the wrong tree to attempt to make an example of Gill" ... But Margaret Kennedy, who founded the Minister and Clergy Sexual Assault Survivors (Macsas), and has campaigned to have Gill sculptures removed from Westminster Cathedral since 1998, approved of the move ...



George Orwell argued that Charles Dickens' appalling treatment of his wife Catherine was no more relevant to an understanding of *David Copperfield* than the second-best bed was to an understanding of *Hamlet*. So, does that imply that no behaviour on the part of the artist is so awful that it should affect our appreciation of his work? I think it does but that is very different from letting an appreciation of the work soften our judgement of the artist. It's harder for collectors and museums (who tend to be effusive and celebratory) than for archivists who coldly curate in a more dispassionate manner (or so I believe they should) to keep toxic evidence without regard to the moral status of the records or of their creator.

But, of course, we can't be neutral about the evil that the stuff we hold embodies.

1. What do we do about records of torture that may be useful in medical research ?
2. How do we present records that may be deeply offensive and hurtful to people whose lives are/were affected (to say nothing of the effect they may have on us)?

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3. How do we avoid becoming embroiled in controversy (not being celebratory would be a start) even assuming we want to avoid it?
4. Should we be calculating and adopt a curatorial stance that best helps our brand (and budgets) or one that assumes a cloak of impartiality as honest brokers to all parties (in hope that will fend off attack and not enrage our masters)?
5. Should we be prompted by what is right or by what we can get away with or by what we are told to do?
6. Do we agree with Larman (that if Adolf Hitler had been a great artist and not a drab one his [paintings](#) should be admired) or with Kennedy (questioning [Rembrandt's artistry](#) according to his attitude towards slavery)?

2022 December 29:

Think again

<<Acceptance of difference (good) can be healing. The end game of separation (bad) is malice, conflict, war, and oppression ... Examples along the continuum of conflict (territorial, racist, religious, etc.) range from discontent to slaughter>>

A war is raging that has cost more than an estimated [600,000 lives](#) ... It has lasted two years and is happening today, yet the chances are you don't even know where it is. Though it is far deadlier than the war in Ukraine, the western media have mostly ignored it ... The question remains, how did the international community ignore hundreds of thousands of people dying? ... When all is said and done, our global consciences must reckon with the fact that, while this human bloodbath happened, we chose not to watch.

And just to prove the author's point, I overlooked this one in my catalogue of woe on 7 Dec.

2023 February 13:

Insightful article by John Sylvester in *SMH* at the weekend re Alice Springs (which for my money is not unique, just more obvious because of the high concentration of Aboriginal fringe-dwellers to be found there). Can't find it online. Here are some grabs:

"It has been on the slide for 12 to 18 months, particularly since Stronger Futures finished" --- Several human rights, legal collectives and Aboriginal support groups submitted ... that the laws were discriminatory. (They were, as they were aimed at one group). In July, Stronger Futures lapsed, with NT Chief Minister Natasha Fyles saying it was a race-based policy that her government would not support.

Perhaps, like The Voice (another race-based policy), Stronger Futures should have been embedded in the Constitution where brain-dead governments couldn't touch it.

- *"There are rivers of grog. In 20 years I've never seen anything like it" --- "The majority of the kids are on the street to get away from the alcohol and violence" – kids are taken home and returned to abusive conditions while reports to Territory Families ... result in little action --- young offenders have often lost connection with traditional culture ... "They are trying to outdo each other ... to stream online" ---*
- *"Many of the kids have foetal alcohol syndrome and hearing loss ... through constant infections. Their speech and learning abilities are stuffed from an early age" --- "Young white males are watching racist influencers and Aboriginal kids are doing weird shit to get likes" --- there are 11 Aboriginal liaison officers at the Alice Springs Hospital "... They are the glue that holds the place together, yet they are the lowest paid" --- "There is anger and hatred to white people ... They know they are going to jail and they don't care because they have no future" ... Well-meaning, paternalistic policies have been disastrous ... [adding] bedrooms to houses to allow for larger family groups [to] the verandah, the one area people liked ... people had to walk through a bedroom to get to the next one, adding to assaults ... "When women said men followed them ... and locked the door to assault them [the policy makers] removed the doors. Now the kids won't shower or go to the toilet indoors" ---*

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- *Many from the right want the kids ... locked up and taken from dysfunctional families. Many from the left rail against laws that treat Indigenous people differently ... everyone agrees that what is in place now is not working ...*

And the kicker comes at the end:

- *But they all have one thing in common. They are the decision makers, and they are all White.*

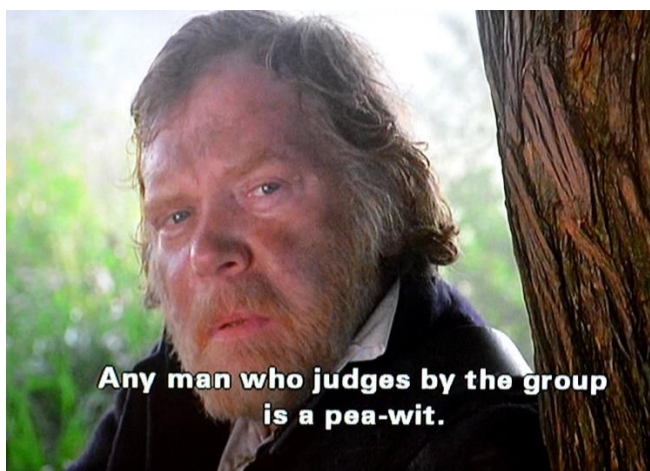
So far as I can tell, decision-makers in our houses of memory are making genuine efforts to involve Indigenous voices. I am too far out of it all now to know whether this is effective or mere tokenism or to judge whether they are listening to the right mix of voices. But even if they are, the dilemmas don't end there.

<<Is a transcendent reach beyond identity and towards independence of mind an abnegation of faith or is it rather a commitment to universality and truth that refuses to be shackled by "social context" (past or present)? 3 April 2021>>

What is the link between abnegation of faith, universality and truth, and respect for social context? And thus to the abiding question -

<<Should [archivists] try to stand aloof and be "objective", acknowledge the tension and try to be "balanced" or even corrective, enter the fray and take sides, or offer parallel views as best we can and cop it from everyone? 9 Jan., 2023 >>

All forms of identity thinking are different because what each of them is **about** is different and if we approve of what this one or that one is about we are beguiled into abandoning observation and judgement. But they are also all alike because there is no difference in what they **are** - every single one of them (right or left and everything in between) incites division in preference to respect for difference. I'm with [Kilrain](#):



Michael Pascoe



... Any man who judges by the group is a pea-wit. You take men one at a time ... Equality? What I'm fighting for is to prove I'm a better man than many of them. Where have you seen this "divine spark" in operation, Colonel? Where have you noted this magnificent equality? No two things on Earth are equal or have an equal chance. Not a leaf, not a tree. There's many a man worse than me, and some better... But I don't think race or country matters a damn. What matters, Colonel ... Is justice. Which is why I'm here. I'll be treated as I deserve, not as my father deserved. I'm Kilrain ... And I damn all gentlemen. There is only one aristocracy... And that is right here." He tapped his white skull with a thick finger ...

The only group we should aspire to is the society in which we live (with all its pleasures and all its pains; with the obligations and the freedoms it confers) - but on what terms? Kilrain's? [Jim Chalmers](#)? [Plato](#)? [Foucault](#)? How many archivists these days, I wonder, think that question is settled? If we subscribe to universality and truth, the only fight we should take sides in is for difference and against division. If we give our allegiance to

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anything, the only thing in which we should trust is understanding not belief but it is an allegiance that is not worth having absent perspective and judgement.

Michael Pascoe has [written](#) about this:

- *The privilege of journalism is its licence and duty to question and observe in order to interpret and report. Over time that should mean you learn a bit about people, systems and the world – the better to filter fact from fake, the better to inform ... Keeping perspective means seeing both the good and the bad, not being carried away with fad and fashion, keeping an eye on the bigger picture, on the possible ... Kev O'Donohue was [my] deputy chief of staff and cadet counsellor, experienced, charitable and wise ... Michael, he said, don't be cynical. Be sceptical, you have a duty to be sceptical, but don't be cynical. If you're cynical, you can't recognise good when you do see it.*
- *... people are overwhelmingly good. Margaret Thatcher was totally wrong – there is 'Society' and it is magical in what it achieves and can achieve. It is Society, all of us, that makes everything possible, including the mega-rich who seem to think it's all their own work. In reply to a tweet about the abandonment of COVID transmission suppression, [Professor Brendan Crabb](#) wrote: "I often face libertarians who I suspect are not sufficiently aware of how reliant they are on co-operative society for all of what they have and do." To which someone added the adage that libertarians are like house cats: Absolutely convinced of their fierce independence while utterly dependent on a system they don't appreciate or understand ...*
- *... Healthy, optimistic scepticism helps dismiss the chancers and charlatans who strut our stage, the substance-free windbags forever grabbing headlines. Keeping perspective on that big picture reduces the noise, whether it's from warmongers talking their own book, ideologues pushing narrow barrows, or the hacks only focused on political advantage. (Did someone mention #RoboDebt?)*
- *You might notice there seem to be a few veteran journalists concentrating more on that big picture, offering perspective ... The venerable [Ross Gittins](#) who has been at this a bit longer than me hones in on it ... Colleague [Alan Kohler](#) is in those very trenches ... concerned with the heritage we provide our children, our children who are our legacy ... So that's the core lesson I've learned over half a century in journalism. But, being honest, there's been something else as well: If it's the job you're meant to do and you're a little lucky and work at it, it's the only thing worth doing ...*

What I find odd in all this is that (like so many ideas that were about when I was young) "[libertarian](#)", which used to be about the call to freedom espoused by cranks on soap-boxes in the Domain on Sunday afternoons, is now about cranks preaching social disunity on TV.

You live long enough and you see everything.

2023 February 15:

PS It wasn't John Sylvester it was [John Silvester](#).

I'm not against race-based programmes *per se*, I'm just opposed to putting race back into the Constitution. [Closing the Gap](#) is a race-based programme into which we are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars and I'm in favour of that - even though it is being trashed (sadly) every time a Voice proponent tells us nothing else has worked.

What I like about it, firstly, is that that they are evidence based. They measure everything and use metrics to chart progress and failure and, when there isn't enough data to do the metrics, they say so. Secondly, it's not a project. They don't just try and then say "job done" and move on. It's about progress, it's hard, they fall short, but they keep trying. It's a process. I like that.

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PPS

<< I am too far out of it all now to know whether this is effective or mere tokenism or to judge whether they are listening to the right mix of voices >>

Perhaps our archives could get together (unhappily they have no collective voice any more since they killed off the Australian Council of Archives) and organize a closing-the-gap-for-archives: set targets, measure results, and report back collectively. Might be a bit more convincing than back-slapping themselves in annual reports and at conferences.

2023 April 10:

First there was this

... many of the characteristic doctrines of postmodernism constitute or imply some form of metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical relativism ... Postmodernists deny that there are aspects of reality that are objective; that there are statements about reality that are objectively true or false; that it is possible to have knowledge of such statements (objective knowledge); that it is possible for human beings to know some things with certainty; and that there are objective, or absolute, moral values. Reality, knowledge, and value are constructed by discourses; hence they can vary with them. This means that the discourse of modern science, when considered apart from the evidential standards internal to it, has no greater purchase on the truth than do alternative perspectives, including (for example) astrology and witchcraft. Postmodernists sometimes characterize the evidential standards of science, including the use of reason and logic, as “Enlightenment rationality.” ... Thus postmodernists regard their theoretical position as uniquely inclusive and democratic, because it allows them to recognize the unjust hegemony of Enlightenment discourses over the equally valid perspectives of nonelite groups. In the 1980s and '90s, academic advocates on behalf of various ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious groups embraced postmodern critiques of contemporary Western society, and postmodernism became the unofficial philosophy of the new movement of “identity politics.”

And then there was this

The United States is a grim warning of what happens when a society dispenses with the idea of truth. Fragmentation, paranoia, division and myth rule – democracy wilts ... the culture of truth denial is no accident; it was a key stratagem of the US right as it fought to build a counter-establishment in the 1970s, 80s and 90s that would challenge and even supplant what it considered an over-dominant liberal establishment. Unalloyed facts, truthful evidence and balanced reporting on everything from guns to climate change tended to support liberals and their worldview. But if all facts could be framed as the contingent result of opinions, the right could fight on level terms ...

What is interesting is that this commentator, like many other like-minded lefties, cannot seem to realise that the evil of right-wing relativism is just as bad as (and derives from) the evil of left-wing relativism. Postmodern insights into the fragility of human-constructed realities are like arsenic - useful in subtoxic doses. But once the ideological left began using postmodernism in a non-philosophical sense as a basis for crusades undermining the idea of Objectivity in order to attack what they disapproved of, the right thought they could play that game too. We should not confuse Truth and Fairness because, unfortunately, in a postmodern world, everyone is allowed to believe that his opinions are True: *I am fair-minded, you are biased, he is a raving looney.*

For years, the right had a target in its sights, rather as the British right today has the BBC – the 1949 Fairness Doctrine. This required American broadcasters to ensure that contentious issues were presented fairly; that both sides to any argument had access to the airwaves and presented their case factually ... Finally, in 1987 the doctrine was ruled unnecessary because it obstructed free speech. Within months, *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, the ultra-rightwing talkshow platform, was being nationally syndicated as the scourge of the liberal elite ...

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I doubt that fair-minded Truth has prevailed without challenge or set-back throughout the last 200 post-enlightenment years, but these days it seems to have to deal with an irrationality that infects both right and left and which (in my view) risks endangering our work when, as some seem to argue, it should be applied to what we do - when purposes “ranging from decolonization to postcolonialism, feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, and deconstructionism” displace the postulates of our profession.

2023 April 11:

Objective adj.: *antonyms and near antonyms* – partial, biased, partisan, unjust, inequitable, deceptive, arbitrary, dishonest, unreasonable, deceitful, prejudiced, one-sided, ex parte, parti pris, unconscionable, distorted, unsympathetic, colored, unfriendly, jaundiced, warped.

Postulate: something taken as being true or factual and used as a starting point for a course of action or reasoning.

<<What, then, are the postulates of our profession?>>

Laura A Millar *Archives: Principles and Practices* 2nd edition

... the central principle of accountable and trustworthy archival service must be to make certain that archives are captured and protected with their evidential value intact, and then to ensure that those archives are made available as fully as possible, so that they may benefit the widest possible constituency ... The archivist will protect the integrity of the archives in her care, doing everything possible to maintain their value as documentary evidence ... striving to protect the content, context and structure of archives during any work to arrange, describe, preserve or provide access to holdings ... The archivist will maintain impartiality and transparency in all her duties ... While one can acknowledge the postmodern argument that all actions taken by anyone in society are inherently subjective, on an individual level the archivist needs to act on the basis of institutional need and priorities, not personal inclinations ... (pp 93-95)



Laura A Millar



Cartographers for Social Equality

These postulates must be observed in contested space -

... The philosophy of postmodernism was seen as a reaction to the certainty and authority associated with modernist perspectives, which themselves were a shift away from the belief in reason and rationalism that were hallmarks of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism emphasized differences instead of similarities, conflict instead of consensus and doubt instead of truth ... Drawing on the writings of Derrida and others, postmodern archival thinkers questioned the idea that archives could be innocent by-products of life and work, as had been assumed by Jenkinson, Schellenberg and others. They also argued that archival materials did not tell only one ‘story’ but could be interpreted in different ways depending on the audience ... Postmodernism encouraged archivists to shed their role as guardians or gate keepers, instead placing the archivist in the position of steward, a person whose job was to manage a fluid documentary resource on behalf of everyone in society and not

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impede the path for those seeking documentary truth(s) in archival holdings. Many embraced this more direct role, seeing archival management as a mechanism for supporting social justice, by helping to protect the archives not just of the agents of power but also of the marginalized in society ... The drawback to postmodernism ... was the danger that archivists would feel either paralyzed – unable to make a decision because there were too many variables – or excessively empowered – moving beyond ‘objectively’ managing the records that society created to actively helping to create records in the first place ... The argument for decolonization is that traditional approaches to archives and history (even postmodern approaches) have been patriarchal and imperial, driven by the elite in society and not representative of the concerns of minorities or the marginalized. Those who advocate decolonization believe that archivists have to redress this wrong ... (pp.43-44)

But don't postmodernists claim that, by telling not just **one 'story'** they come nearer the Truth? Indeed they do, and they won't get an argument about that from the father of [parallel provenance](#). But parallel provenance is about seeing the same Facts from different views (cf. [Cartographers for Social Equality](#)) not about twisting the Facts themselves. It's how Facts are treated that's the problem.

[Baffle gab](#) is a word you wish got used more often.

2023 April 16:

I have been asked (challenged really) for examples of left-wing post-truth baffle gab to lay alongside right-wing [postfactisch](#). I have before referred to the *Dark Emu* saga and will do so again, now. The most shameful specimens may be found in the idea that focussing on “the history of the present” justifies distortion of the past, in the Australian Museum's assertion that “distorted history” doesn't matter if it leads to “new knowledge”, in the idea that virtue trumps truth (no pun intended), that facts can't be distinguished from opinion, and the despairing lament that facts aren't important unless they work (in a democracy now crippled by technology and populism).

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

Dark Emu exposed:

... [Readers] were captivated by his story ... that the Australian Aborigines were not “just” a hunter-gatherer society when the British settled Australia in 1788, but they were in fact, as the Judges of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards claimed “..liv[ing] sophisticated lives...[in an] Aboriginal democracy [that] created ‘the 'Great Australian Peace' on a continent which was extensively farmed, skilfully managed and deeply loved.” ... let the reader decide as to whether Mr Pascoe :

*“...puts forward a compelling argument for a reconsideration of the hunter gatherer label for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians...[where] the evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing - behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag.” - from *Dark Emu* dust jacket blurb;*

or whether his arguments fail to overcome the accepted, Australian belief of :

*“They [the Australian Aborigines] are, of course, **nomads** – hunters and foragers who **grow nothing, build nothing, and stay nowhere long**. They make almost no physical mark on the environment...They move about, carrying their scant possessions, in small bands of anything from ten to sixty persons...Their tools and crafts, meagre – pitifully meagre – though they are, have nonetheless been good enough to let them win the battle for survival, and to win it comfortably at that. With no pottery, no knowledge of metals, no wheel, **no domestication of animals, no agriculture**, they have still been able to people the entire continent...” - W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming & Other Essays*, Black Inc Agenda, 2010, p 64,65 & 70 – **(our emphasis)** ...*

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Debunking *Dark Emu*

- ... First published in 2014, *Dark Emu* has won some of the nation's richest and most prestigious literary awards ... Indigenous academic [Marcia Langton](#) called it "a profound challenge to conventional thinking about Aboriginal life on this continent" and "the most important book on Australia" ... Last year, Labor senator Penny Wong declared that Pascoe had helped free Australians from an "underlying supremacism". A children's version has been published and a documentary film is being made. At the same time, Pascoe ... has been targeted by conservative commentators and media who have questioned both his version of history and his Aboriginality ...
- ... It is into this fraught arena that Sutton and his co-author, archaeologist Keryn Walshe, now step with *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The Dark Emu Debate* ... In page after page, Sutton and Walshe accuse Pascoe of a "lack of true scholarship", ignoring Aboriginal voices, dragging respect for traditional Aboriginal culture back into the Eurocentric world of the colonial era, and "trimming" colonial observations to fit his argument. They write that while *Dark Emu* "purports to be factual" it is "littered with unsourced material, is poorly researched, distorts and exaggerates many points, selectively emphasises evidence to suit those opinions, and ignores large bodies of information that do not support the author's opinions" ... Australian National University anthropologist [Ian Keen](#) has said that Pascoe's evidence for Aboriginal farming is "deeply problematic", although he also believes that some of the criticism has been used to support a racist agenda. Christophe Darmangeat, a lecturer in social anthropology at the Sorbonne in France, wrote that in *Dark Emu* Pascoe mixes "perfectly proven elements, others possible but more doubtful, others very improbable, and finally frank fabrications, firing on all cylinders by handling concepts and facts with a disarming casualness" ...
- Sutton and Walshe acknowledge *Dark Emu* has made some positive contribution. But the world of 1788 that Pascoe created in *Dark Emu*, Sutton says, was "a reimagination, not a discovery" and "agriculture" was not the way of the Old People – who had their own complex philosophy and practice – but "the badge of their conquerors" ... Admirers of *Dark Emu* invariably refer to Pascoe's persuasive use of the journals of explorers such as Thomas Mitchell and Charles Sturt. Sutton is less enamoured of them, questioning both the reliability of journals written by Europeans who encountered Aboriginal people only transiently and who were "the forward scouts for the army of land-hungry farmers who would come in their wake", and Pascoe's sharp editing of them ... Pascoe records Mitchell's astonishment on coming upon a large, deserted village during his Australia Felix expedition, which he estimated housed "over 1000" people. This, says Sutton, is "pure fiction". "All Mitchell says is that his party 'noticed some of their huts'; there is no mention of anyone counting anything."
- ... And if Aboriginal people were farmers as Pascoe contends, Sutton asks, where is the evidence for it in Aboriginal languages, as there is evidence in Torres Strait languages? ... Aboriginal people knew about farmers, Sutton and Walshe write, from their trading interactions with Torres Strait gardeners and Macassans and Baijini from the Indies, but chose not to emulate them, for reasons that were cultural as well as practical. Economics without religion was "inconceivable" to the Old People, they write. "Gathering and hunting and fishing were not just economics: they were the Law."
- ... The decision to not adopt horticulture and agriculture was not a failure of the imagination, Sutton writes, "but an active championing and protection of their own way of life and, when in contact with outsiders, a resistance to an alien economic pattern".
... **Pondering why** *Dark Emu* was so well received, Sutton and Walshe write that its success appears to indicate a profound lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people and history, "or an unconcern with facts and truth themselves, or a combination of these things"
... "As far as we can tell, no journalist or book reviewer covering the *Dark Emu* story has interviewed senior Aboriginal people from remote communities where knowledge of the old economy is retained at least by some, and practised in an adapted way by many," they write. "Nor do members of the media appear to have spoken to any of the anthropological specialists who have learned from Aboriginal authorities and from the vast literature on their traditional ways of life ... This journalistic abandonment of the academy, if that is what it is, seems to be symptomatic of a break from the past – a past in which professional

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knowledge and lay knowledge were more distinct, and the distinction more respected. The authority of the academy has slipped. Much worse than that, the authority of Aboriginal knowledge-holders has been ignored yet again.” ...

Not limiting the “representation” of Aboriginal people

... Sutton and Walshe want to strip the debate of any contemporary meaning, and return our thoughts to the facts of what went on before their own ancestors arrived on the scene to record, in English using foreign concepts, the truth about what they want to call hunter-gatherer societies or now, the “Old People” ... Sutton and Walshe state their intention to “avoid identity politics and racial polemics”, instead claiming to offer their critique in the spirit of debate. However, they are clearly on the side of academic anthropology and archaeology — and the past — while Pascoe’s work is focused on the history of the present ... Through his writing and speaking appearances, Pascoe has made the deep ancient past and the present intelligible and imaginable for a wide audience ...

More than facts are at stake

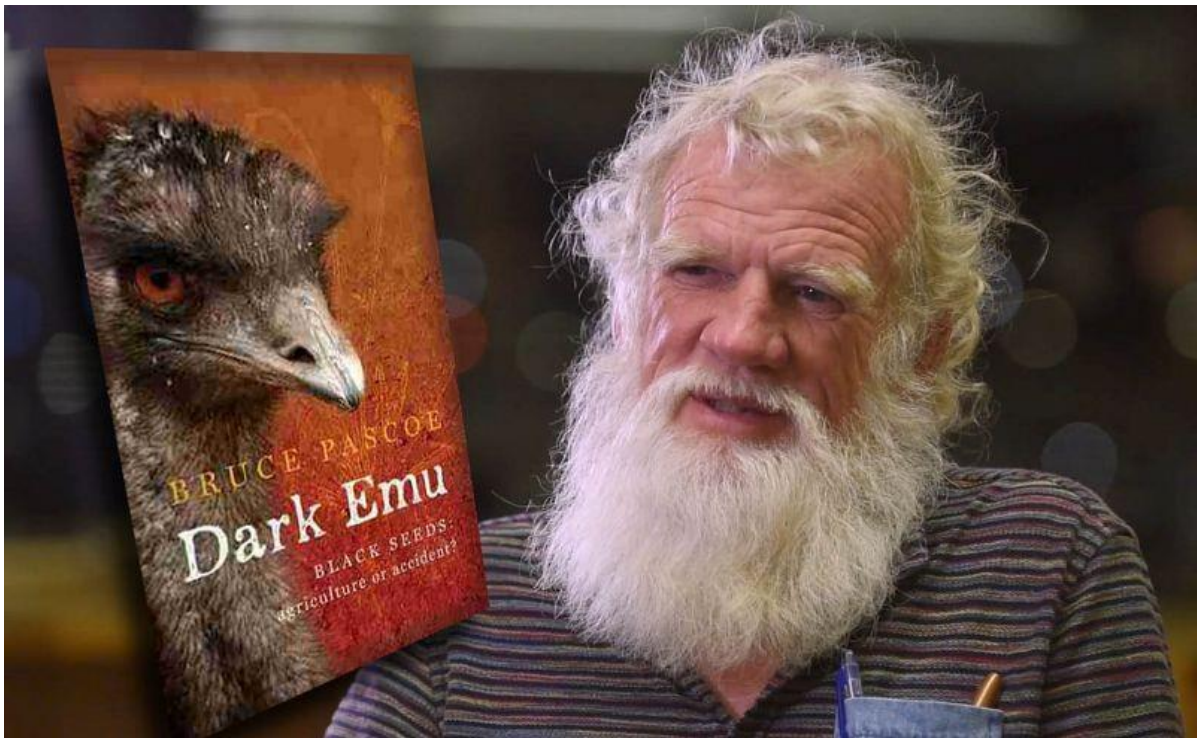
... Pascoe doesn’t regale his audience so much as woo them with parables ... As the session came to an end, the audience rose to its feet in rapturous applause ... At face value, this is a dispute about historical “facts” and the source, use and interpretation of evidence. But of course, given the popularity of both Pascoe and *Dark Emu*, and the widespread historical illiteracy regarding Australia’s First Nations people, much more is at stake ...

New Knowledge

... While the *Dark Emu* presents a passionate polemic with distorted history, it also projects into the future. This new knowledge, that Pascoe outlines in his book, will enrich us all. It will compel us to respect indigenous cultures as our own ...

The official view

... Bruce Pascoe’s award winning non-fiction book *Dark Emu*, published in 2014, is a monumental work of scholarship that disproved the long-held myth that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were nomadic hunter gatherers before European colonisation ...



And predictably

Author Bruce Pascoe says it’s not a bad thing that academics are engaging with and debating his wildly successful but controversial book *Dark Emu*, following damning accusations his work was “littered with unsourced material” ... Professor Pascoe was forewarned about the story’s publication and was sent it, but said on Saturday he had not

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yet read it. The criticism could be put down to “differences of opinion” about the facts, he said, and that was OK. “I think what is happening, and I’m saying this without having read the [whole] book or the [*Good Weekend*] article, is that we’re having a difference of opinion about history,” he said. “We’re looking at the same facts and we’re having a difference of opinion about the facts. That’s not a bad thing. I think Aboriginal people have been wanting to have this discussion for 250 years, so I think it can only be positive.”

Distinguishing between fact and opinion

A fact is based on observation and research. It is something that can be proven true or false. An opinion is based on one’s feelings and thinking. It is something that cannot be proved true or false.

- *Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.* **John Adams**
- *There are no facts, only interpretations.* **Friedrich Nietzsche**
- *What is called "objectivity," scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation) imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, firmly established, or rooted in a network of conventions ... and yet which still remains a context.* **Jacques Derrida**
- *Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please.* **Mark Twain**
- *In our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence. A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence.* **David Hume**
- *Truth is simply a compliment paid to sentences seen to be paying their way.* **Richard Rorty**
- *Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this.* **Thomas Huxley**
- *Prejudice is a great time saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts.* **E. B. White**
- *Facts are to the mind what food is to the body. On the due digestion of the former depend the strength and wisdom of the one, just as vigor and health depend on the other. The wisest in council, the ablest in debate, and the most agreeable companion in the commerce of human life, is that man who has assimilated to his understanding the greatest number of facts.* **Edmund Burke**
- *If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.* **C. S. Lewis**
- *Facts don't care about your feelings.* **Ben Shapiro**
- *A truth that's told with bad intent beats all the lies you can invent.* **William Blake**

2023 April 18:

The book and Pascoe himself are not important. They are yesterday’s trash. What gives them “significance” (over-used word) is the reactions of the book’s defenders – academicians, some of them, deriding and trying to dethrone what they see as the stuffy old-fashioned academy (“academic anthropology and archaeology”) with ideas about discourses, dethronement of “Enlightenment rationality”, and the idea that truth “is a matter of interpretation”. And some of our core institutions are singing from the same song-book – the [Australia Council of the Arts](#), the [Australian Museum](#).... What I would call activist postmodernism (as distinct from the philosophical kind) and what Acton would

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have called dogma is replete with irony: they deride others for arguing for what is true but regard their own “theoretical position as uniquely [inclusive](#) and democratic”.

What is the difference between reducing truth to an interpretation and simply denying it? What is the point of knowing the facts if they get in the way of belief? [Douglas Murray](#) asserts that *the assault on the West's history succeeds because it speaks into a vacuum of vast historical and contemporary ignorance*. But what kind of defence would better information be for the downtrodden if the elites simply insist that truth is just a matter of interpretation? What kind of “success” or pushback is possible in that intellectual wasteland? *There are some ideas so absurd that only an intellectual could believe them* [George Orwell](#).

I became aware, working at Monash for a year, of the truth of the aphorism that academic debate is ferocious because there is so little at stake. But there is something at stake here for **us** because our core values honour (or should do) facts, truth, honesty, and evidence and also, for that matter, a hatred of ignorance and the tyranny of elites who can simply deny facts when they are confronted by them (and that includes government and corporate malfeasance as well as elite arrogance). Standing up for those things may put us on the wrong side of current intellectual trends, and it may take courage and the risk being cancelled, but I believe we have no choice. I once told Verne Harris that what he and McKemish and Upward were bickering about was not (thank God) any concern of mine. He was outraged and I was wrong. He was outraged because I was indifferent to what he regarded as an important intellectual development of our time and I was in fact indifferent because I didn't think it mattered.

But it does matter. Whether publicly or silently muttering dissent as we get on with our business, we have to choose – and I fear that some of us have chosen wrong.

... what counts as truth is a matter of interpretation ... democracy stands for a world beyond truth and post-truth ... democracy supposes that no man or woman is good enough to claim they know the truth and to rule permanently over their fellows and the earthly habitats in which they dwell. [John Keane](#)

John Keane is a professor at my old alma mater (U. of Sydney). I feel ashamed.

[What is the difference](#) between the “truth” of what we observe and the truth in our description of it (the relationship, that is, between language and reality)? Here is what the English philosopher [J L Austin](#) has to say:

The truth or falsity of statements is affected by what they leave out or put in and by their being misleading, and so on. Thus, for example, descriptions, which are said to be true or false or, if you like, are “statements”, are surely liable to these criticisms, since they are selective and uttered for a purpose. It is essential to realize that “true” and false’, like “free” and “unfree”, do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right and proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions.

Have you heard of “valorizing terminology”?

Valorize, valorized, valorizing transitive verb

1: to enhance or try to enhance the price, value, or status of by organized and usually governmental action *using subsidies to valorize coffee*

2: to assign value or merit to: VALIDATE

It is all part, according to National Archives (US), of what is known in “the larger archives profession” as [reparative description](#). This includes: **transparency** (e.g. distinguishing between language original to the record and that supplied by archivists), **language** (e.g. harmful terminology, valorizing terminology, under-description), **institutional change** (becoming deliberative and thoughtful), **collaboration** (with the marginalized

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and acknowledging past wrongs), **iterative/reflective** (an ongoing process, not a one-time project), **leadership** (learning from marginalized communities who have led the way).

I couldn't work out if valorized terminology is meant to be a good thing (something to be injected to improve descriptions) or a bad thing (something outdated to be rooted out), but I'm guessing both. No doubt the uncertainty on my part is because of senile confusion and because I am so far out of things now that I can't keep up with the new developments in "the larger archives profession". Or possibly because I am just not equal to the intellectual pressure of the critical archiving debate. Is there a debate or is it now orthodoxy that accuracy is enhanced by inclusion and respect?

*"making it more accurate also brings confusion"- I just love [that thought](#).
[Language] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.*

Accurate adjective

- 1: free from error especially as the result of care
- 5: tending to hit the intended target.

PS. Ironically, what Harris, McKemish, and Upward were bickering about (it seemed to me at the time) was not the merits of postmodernism but who understood it better.

PPS. Of course, as [Shock-and-Orr](#) demonstrated in the Banking Royal Commission, records can be an antidote against truth-denial ("*may I show you a document?*"). It was a [famous victory](#) but what good has come of it all? "*Why that I cannot tell,*" said he, "*But 'twas a famous victory.*"

2023 April 19:

A now for something related but different: **accuracy** - of records no less. The *Weekend Oz* has a [story](#) (I've only seen it there) about a spat over temperature data gathered by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM). The Bureau has (reluctantly) released data that shows differences between temperatures being gathered by a relatively new method ("probes") and those recorded by older mercury thermometers – giving higher readings and possibly feeding climate change agendas. Manna from heaven for climate deniers I imagine. Newness (the last thirty years) is a relative concept in scientific circles. A lot of scientific thought is based on "smoothing" data to achieve clarity by ignoring insignificant differences and sharpening classificatory boundaries that are, in fact, blurred. The argument here is that the differences, though minor, are significant.

- A dispute over how the Bureau of Meteorology records daily temperatures is hotting up, with the release of more than 1000 pages of data that show new probes can record different temperatures to mercury thermometers in the same location at the same time ... Given that even small variations in temperature recordings can have an impact on the long-term record, accuracy is vital. The main issue is how well temperatures recorded by new technologies can be compared to earlier methods to establish a continuous record In response to questions from The Weekend Australian, the bureau said it "verifies temperature probes to ensure that they are within specification" ... [scientist Jennifer Marohasy] said analysis of the Brisbane airport data proved the BOM claim that the new probes had been specially developed to measure exactly the same temperatures as the mercury thermometers was wrong ... Dr Marohasy said the difference in readings between probes and mercury thermometers was significant ... "This has implications for the artificial generation of new record hot temperatures", she said.
- The other key issue was that Brisbane Airport parallel data showed a dramatic change in the difference between the mercury and probe temperature readings after December 2019. "It is important to know whether this average difference of 0.35C had been caused by a recalibration of the probe that is the official recording instrument at Brisbane Airport", she said. Dr [John] Abbot [who gained access to the data under FOI] said ... "The public is

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constantly being told of impending global catastrophe should temperatures rise by more than 1.5C. Discrepancies of more than 0.5C because of instrumentation differences are therefore very significant ... Given the importance of reliable continuous records, it is important to know whether these instruments are recording the same temperatures, or not. The parallel data so far made available constitutes only a small portion of what the BOM holds. It is important to extend the analyses to longer periods and for other geographical locations.” ...

- Dr Marohasy said the data represented just three of the 14.5 years (January 2008 to July 2022) of parallel data that the bureau held for Brisbane Airport. “It is also just a fraction of the 760 years of parallel data the bureau holds for 38 different locations spread across the landmass of Australia,” she said. Probes in automatic weather stations began replacing mercury thermometers across Australia and the world 30 years ago ... Most meteorological offices tried to achieve equivalence between the probes and mercury by averaging instantaneous recordings from probes over 1-5 minutes ... The bureau has claimed in correspondence with Dr Marohasy that it never averaged measurements from probes ... Dr Marohasy said the lack of numerical averaging despite the use of probes made the BOM measurements unique in the world. She said equivalence was important for the construction of reliable historical temperature datasets, for understanding temperature trends and for knowing whether a record hot day as measured automatically by a probe - really was hotter than what might have been read manually from a mercury thermometer.

Coda: I think the word *significant* is over-used. The latest *Peninsula News* has a [story](#) about a tree in Woy Woy that Council has officially declared a “significant tree”. What on earth would the criteria be? It’s quite a young tree, having been planted only last year. One hopes that, when it grows up, it will have morphed from significance to magnificence. It bothers me that much-loved trees near me may be treated with indifference for want of significance.

2023 April 21:

<<The Bureau has (reluctantly) released data that shows differences between temperatures being gathered by a relatively new method (“probes”) and those recorded by older mercury thermometers – giving higher readings and possibly feeding climate change agendas. Manna from heaven for climate deniers I imagine ... The argument here is that the differences, though minor, are significant>>

More on what the records say and how they are used:

- ... Those records say Australia has warmed by 1.4C since 1910 ... As a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science of human-caused global heating, the bureau’s temperature record might be seen as ground zero ... Despite multiple reviews, reports, advisory panels and peer-reviewed studies rejecting claims that its temperature record was biased or flawed, [Dr Ailie Gallant, of Monash University] says the “harassment” of the bureau has continued ... [An] independent expert panel reported for three years from 2015 and ... backed the bureau’s methods, despite “unsolicited submissions” which they said “do not provide evidence or offer a justification for contesting the overall need for homogenisation and the scientific integrity of the bureau’s climate records.”
- ... Former bureau boss Rob Vertessy, who left the agency in 2016, has said ... “The answers [from the reviews] should have been very clear,” ... “There was always a close to zero chance that the bureau had deliberately introduced a warming trend.” ... Dr Greg Ayers, a former director of the bureau and leading CSIRO atmospheric scientist, has written four peer-reviewed papers testing claims made by sceptics. “There’s a lot of assertion [from sceptics] but I haven’t seen much science,” said Ayers. “If you are going to make claims then we need to do peer-reviewed science, not just assertion.” ...
- One longstanding bureau critic is Dr Jennifer Marohasy of the rightwing Institute of Public Affairs ... has claimed the bureau’s practice of taking automatic measurements from the final second of each minute breached guidelines from the UN’s World Meteorological Organization, which recommends temperatures should be averaged over a minute [and

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that] the bureau's methods contradict guidance from the WMO, despite previous studies arguing the contrary ... Dr Anthony Rea, a director at the WMO, says ... "No measurement is perfect, the bureau's temperature measurements included, but we all know there are multiple lines of evidence proving that global temperatures are rising, from satellites to ocean buoys to deep sea profilers. All evidence points in the same direction." ...

2023 May 9:

<<... a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science ... >>

In the 21st-century media, the intensity with which an opinion is held has come to serve as a proxy for its value in a debate. The more ardent the feeling the more deserving it is of attention ... A handful of online fulminators will suffice for the threshold of newsworthy outrage to be met ... There is no harm in having steadfast beliefs. The danger comes when opinions are held with such intensity that criticism is construed as treason and reasonable challenge denounced as heresy. Rafael Behr [Politics: A Survivor's Guide: How to Stay Engaged without Getting Enraged](#)

<< ... we all know there are multiple lines of evidence proving that global temperatures are rising, from satellites to ocean buoys to deep sea profilers. All evidence points in the same direction ...>>

This would seem to be an argument for the veracity of the temperature records based on the [coherence theory of truth](#)

... truth [is] a property of whole systems of propositions that can be ascribed to individual propositions only derivatively according to their coherence with the whole ...

It remains epistemologically an appeal to veracity over opinion. If Behr is correct, however, maybe we should move away from the consensus that [Richard Firth Green](#) identified (not with unqualified approval) as having processed from reliance in truths residing in people (and culminating in a reliance on documents) –

In the late fourteenth century the complex Middle English word "trouthe," which had earlier meant something like "integrity" or "dependability," began to take on its modern sense of "conformity to fact." At the same time, the meaning of its antonym, "tresoun," began to move from "personal betrayal" to "a crime against the state." In *A Crisis of Truth*, Richard Firth Green contends that these alterations in meaning were closely linked to a growing emphasis on the written over the spoken and to the simultaneous reshaping of legal thought and practice. According to Green, the rapid spread of vernacular literacy in the England of Richard II was driven in large part by the bureaucratic and legal demands of an increasingly authoritarian central government. The change brought with it a fundamental shift toward the attitudes we still hold about the nature of evidence and proof—a move from a truth that resides almost exclusively in people to one that relies heavily on documents ...

and now to be going back to a situation where “dependable” opinion and belief matter more than “conformity to fact”. When un-reason prevails, moderate dealings with one's fellows, a personal rather than a civic virtue (as Behr seems to be suggesting, albeit one with social benefits), and not an appeal to evidence or coherence becomes a more desirable path to follow in the discernment of truth (or, at least, a more profitable one). And truth then becomes a social commodity (?) and the postmodernists win the debate. I can't help feeling that moderation (much as I admire that virtue) is a fragile weapon in the battle against un-truth.

2023 May 11:

<<... reliance in truths residing in people [where] “dependable” opinion and belief matter more than “conformity to fact”>>

Perhaps this leads on to a kind of paradox: the most dependable opinions, even those we disagree with, are held by those with a high regard for conformity to fact. [Chesterton](#) might

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approve of that – “a paradox is two facts that stand on opposite hilltops and across the intervening valley call each other liars” (Carl Sandburg).

The Language Police by Diane Ravitch

... Ravitch maintains that “censors on the right aim to restore an idealized vision of the past, an Arcadia of happy family life” [and] censors on the left believe in an idealized vision of the future, in which there is no dominant group, father, race, or gender.

Left-wing censorship

For many years, the left identified censorship as a conservative concept ... Many believed that the slogans of the leftist revolt in Paris in May 1968 (the famous "Il est interdit d'interdire", it is forbidden to forbid) represented the true nature of the left ... However, the true nature of the left had been clearly exposed a century earlier, when Karl Marx formulated his idea of a "dictatorship of the proletariat" that would subjugate all of society to tight control by the state ... the first thing that the Lenin dictatorship did in Russia was to pass a press censorship law ... In Spain, after the arrival of the Second Republic in 1931, one of the first things the left did was pass a "Law for the Defense of the Republic" which established prior censorship ... the attempt to limit freedom of expression on social networks by the left is not something new or something that contradicts the ideological tradition of the left ... The only novelty is the excuse used to justify this censorship. In the past they called you an "enemy of the people", now they accuse you of "hate" ... the justification for censorship is to identify anything that disagrees with the left as "hate speech" ... in an intellectual attitude charged with arrogance and at the same time weighed down by ignorance ...

“It is hateful and mean”

“A lot of these books are being banned in order to rewrite history, to make claims about who should be allowed to exist publicly in our society and whose stories should be whitewashed. It’s about not having to face that history.” ... According to data compiled by the American Library Association, book bans are currently at record levels in the US. The organization documented 1,269 “demands to censor library books and resources” in 2022, by far the highest in the 20 years the ALA has monitored book banning ... 90% of these demands were efforts to ban multiple books, an enormous escalation over 2021. This comes on top of efforts by Republican politicians such as Ron DeSantis, who has stripped Florida public schools of books with themes involving LGBTQ+ individuals or subjects like racism ... “It’s a naked attempt to build a political coalition around ideas that feel uncomfortable; they tried with critical race theory, any now they’re trying with LGBT stories.” ...

Yes, the Left Should be Worried about Censorship

... Many conservatives feel that their opinions are being stifled on the internet due to left-leaning bias within social media companies ... However, while these private companies are acting well within their rights, their platforms are critical areas for public discourse ... By deciding who can and cannot speak, social media can effectively control the public narrative on many discussions ... it is a massive overreaction to call this extreme censorship ... what would the alternative option even be? Would we rather have social media sites with no terms of service? Or have the government play a role in these forms of media? ... These are complicated questions to which we are still developing the answer. Ultimately, the more pressing issue is the growing aversion to open discussion. Across social media, advocating for an unpopular standpoint or even just asking a question can garner massive amounts of hate, even if there was no malice intended. Such reactions ostracize opposing viewpoints and push people to congregate within echo chambers that magnify hate and mute dissent ... blocking out entire belief systems forces people to speak only amongst themselves, and thereby become more entrenched in what they believe ... There will always be those who don’t listen, but we must strive to curb the trend of polarization ...

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Self-censorship in universities

Critics claim that universities have become political monocultures, hostile to those who challenge the merits of contemporary “progressive” thought. They warn of an academic culture where viewpoint discrimination is rampant and academic freedom is threatened. Others have been skeptical, arguing that fears over cancel culture and political homogeneity are overblown and are merely right-wing talking points ... Canadian universities are, like universities in the U.S. and the U.K., politically homogenous institutions whose lack of viewpoint diversity contributes to serious problems on campus including a weakening of support for academic freedom, a hostile climate for those who disagree with left-leaning values, and significant levels of self-censorship ... [Our] survey shows that fully 88 per cent of professors identify as “left-leaning” and voted for left-leaning parties in the 2021 federal election ... This political homogeneity is a significant problem ... Studies show that homogenous decision-making bodies make poor decisions because they operate on incomplete information, silencing (often unintentionally) those with diverse viewpoints ... Fully 57 per cent of right-leaning professors report that they self-censor to avoid professional harm. Even amongst left-leaning faculty, 37 per cent self-censor ... although most professors value academic freedom, a substantial minority — roughly one-third of professors — admit that they would support cancelling a colleague if that colleagues’ research conflicted with certain contemporary social justice values ... At a time when political polarization and social media algorithms diminish trust in institutions, Canadian universities need to be part of the solution — modelling intellectual humility and genuine acceptance of all forms of diversity, especially viewpoint diversity. *National Post*

2023 May 12:

And while we’re on the subject, should our interpretation of the record, from whichever hilltop we choose, [confront or conform](#)?

When [Barry Humphries died last month](#), the ABC kicked off the 7pm news with his obituary ... I braced myself for the part where it would be made clear that ... a couple of things he said late in his life did not meet the exacting moral standards of the national broadcaster. The reprimand was duly delivered courtesy of a young comedian who gravely told the camera that it was a pity that Humphries, in his declining years, “lost his ability to read the room” ... notice that we’re talking about *the* room. The definite article seems important ... The injunction to read *the* room ... implies that the whole world is one big room now ... the people who instruct us to read the room don’t see it as a problem ... to them, there’s only ever one opinion in this giant global room that’s acceptable – which happens to be the opinion they hold themselves ...

In truth, Humphries did not at any point “lose his ability” to echo orthodox opinion. He never wasted a minute of his adult life trying to do that. His whole career was based on being a minority of one ... [he] spent his career bridling against Australian groupthink and complacency ... In the 1970s he created a dodgy union official named Lance Boyle. “While performing him,” Humphries recalled, “it was amusing to scan the stalls” for scandalised left-wingers. “Their poor little pinched faces always fell most entertainingly when they realised that the odious operator on the boards was one of their own.” ... Read the room? Read a book ...

A few days after Humphries died, [Jerry Springer fell off the twig too](#). Now there’s a man you could never accuse of failing to read the room. Springer gave the American public what it wanted; and America became a much worse place as a result. Humphries was a kamikaze contrarian ... to honour his dissident spirit, I think Australia should be the first English-speaking nation to stop saying “read the room.” It’s a dictum for moral hacks – a philistine import from the same country that gave the world Springer. It’s a recipe for dud art, a mantra for people who are afraid to think for themselves, and want the rest of us to stop thinking too ...

Those amongst us who read the room entertain fantasies of belonging to and being empowered to speak for oppressed minorities. However satisfying confrontation might be

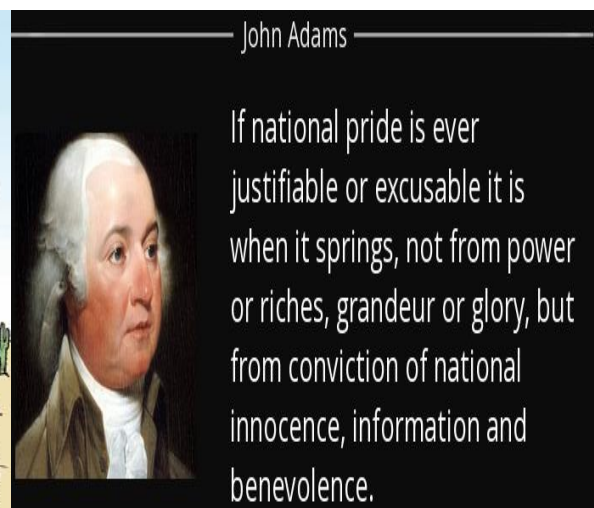
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to the “kamikaze contrarian” in all of us (or, I hope, in most of us) in order to prick that bubble of self-delusion, the entertainment value derived from dismaying their “little pinched faces” would be a parallel temptation to misinterpret the record, and so must be avoided.

And, paradoxically, doesn't increased funding now seem to depend, amongst other things, on upholding “national pride” (however defined) – hardly a role for those who believe they align with and speak for minorities, still less for anyone hoping to uphold truth. A contrarian might say that the role of our archives is to buttress national understanding and self-awareness, but I guess that might not be reading the room too well. The consolation is that our interpretations of the record and our efforts to assist the interpretations of others probably have much less influence than we suppose.



National Pride: the pride or sense of esteem that a person has for one's nation and the pride or self-esteem that a person derives from one's national identity. National pride is related to feelings of patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is love of one's country or dedicated allegiance to same, while nationalism is a strong national devotion that places one's own country above all others.



2023 May 13:

Friday essay: cancellation or conflicted joy – grappling with the work of our ‘art monsters’

... From the outset, the question of “do we separate the art from the artist?” opens up other, more interesting questions – like, who is this “we” that proposes such a separation is possible, or desirable? ...

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We (whoever we are) are not just an audience sitting in contested space and developing an ethical response involving appreciation or denunciation; we are not critics or philosophers debating social issues; we are (in some complicated way) involved in their preservation and presentation, and a role that involves some kind of responsibility for their continued existence (a form of “creation”).

And “we’ve” been here before.

Much ado about toxic assets.

So, what is the problem? ... What we do with them? Who it is who does something with them? How we describe and present them? The political fall-out of dealing with toxic materials? The kind of materials involved (stamps yes, uniforms no)?

Old, damaged, or untruthful.

Critical theory is the idea that everything is built on power structures to sustain the hegemony of the "privileged" over the "rest" who are oppressed ... According to critical theory, there is then no "neutral" position and any claim to neutrality is simply a smokescreen to conceal your privileged position. The problem with "critical theory" is that it can identify genuine problems, but is incapable of providing any solutions, since changing the way things are done means power and control, especially control of the new ideas, which then produces a new set of the "oppressed" who rise up against the change.

2023 May 21:

<<... Those records say Australia has warmed by 1.4C since 1910 ... As a target for those with an often visceral distrust of the established science of human-caused global heating, the bureau’s temperature record might be seen as ground zero ... >>

Another focus for unnecessary disputation about the science (and illustrative of the poisonous admixture of fact and opinion) is our own Great Barrier Reef. Do the records in fact show whether it is “healthy” or “dying” and do they disguise how those facts are being interpreted and understood. Are they even being compiled correctly? A recent report from the [Australian Institute of Marine Science](#) with the headline *Highest coral cover in central, northern Reef in 36 years* has prompted a frenzy of climate denial.

What the records say: The northern and central Great Barrier Reef have recorded their highest amount of coral cover since the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) began monitoring 36 years ago. Published today, AIMS’ [Annual Summary Report on Coral Reef Condition for 2021/22](#) shows another year of increased coral cover across much of the Reef ... However, average coral cover in the southern region (from Proserpine to Gladstone) decreased from 38% in 2021 to 34%.

What the records mean I: [AIMS CEO Dr Paul Hardisty](#) said the results in the north and central regions were a sign the Reef could still recover, but the loss of coral cover in the southern region showed how dynamic the Reef was ... Dr Hardisty said the increased frequency of mass coral bleaching events was “uncharted territory” for the Reef, with this year’s bleaching event the fourth in seven years and the first to occur during a La Niña ... “Every summer the Reef is at risk of temperature stress, bleaching and potentially understanding of how the ecosystem responds to that is still developing. “The 2020 and 2022 bleaching events, while extensive, didn’t reach the intensity of the 2016 and 2017 events and, as a result, we have seen less mortality. These latest results demonstrate the Reef can still recover in periods free of intense disturbances.” ... The 36-year-long dataset of [AIMS’ Long-Term Monitoring Program \(LTMP\)](#) is the largest, longest, and most comprehensive information source on the health of the Great Barrier Reef. It helps determine long-term trends in the condition of coral communities across the Reef ...

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What the records mean II: The release of the Australian Institute of Marine Science's [Annual Summary Report on Coral Reef Condition for 2021/22](#) has exposed a major scandal in Australian environmental management – not only has the reef recovered from damage 10 years ago, but it is at record levels ... the recovery ... underway since around 2012, has not been celebrated by AIMS ... [There is] a graph of Great Barrier Reef coral cover, teased from the AIMS data by Dr Peter Ridd. It shows a steady decline in coral cover from around 25 per cent to 10 per cent in 2012 and then a relatively steady increase to around 35 per cent over the next 10 years ... What this graph shows is that from around 2016 coral cover was at levels not unusual for the recorded history of the reef, and that from 2017 they were mostly well-above it ... The really stunning thing about this graph is that the reef saved itself before any of the loony god-complex schemes hatched by environmentalists have had any chance to be implemented ... [Spectator Australia](#)

The critique offered in *Spectator* goes beyond an examination of the recorded data to alleged flaws in the methodology, neglected ways of measuring the Reef's health, and even the motivations behind compilation and use of data derived from the allegedly flawed methodology. How can non-experts deal with all this? Perhaps -

<<When un-reason prevails, moderate dealings with one's fellows, a personal rather than a civic virtue (as Behr seems to be suggesting, albeit one with social benefits), and not an appeal to evidence or coherence becomes a more desirable path to follow in the discernment of truth (or, at least, a more profitable one). And truth then becomes a social commodity (?) and the postmodernists win the debate. I can't help feeling that moderation (much as I admire that virtue) is a fragile weapon in the battle against un-truth.>>

"We" are experts in records and recordkeeping, not adjudicators as to their veracity. It is not (in my view) our job to battle against un-truth or arbitrate [correctness](#), except in the most egregious circumstances, but we cannot avoid interpretation of some kind or another – it is inherent in everything we do (contextualise, contextualise, contextualise). That is not at issue. The issue is: how are we to do it? And, of course, we will disagree amongst ourselves about which circumstances are so egregious that we must speak but it may be easier for us to discern [authenticity](#) if we develop our ability to sniff out the [tendentious](#).

2021 August 4: [Last post cont'd](#)

<<[David Povey](#): ... I have been working on a collection that brought to mind Hurley's posts on the King's two bodies ... It has been some time since we discussed the strange nature of kingship ... >>

2022 September 10:

Anne Twomey's [article](#) in *The Conversation* dealing with the "legal and constitutional consequences" of the Queen's death is a nice illustration. The answer is that [nothing changes](#) because "demise of the crown" means (paradoxically) that "upon the death of the monarch [the] Crown transfers automatically to the monarch's heir."

The only way to achieve a similar result in a republican system (as in the US) is for there to be a Vice-President and an established [order of succession](#). But that only provides for incapacity or death in office of an elected head of state during their term in office – not for a seamless transition to a successor (by means of election or appointment) upon expiry of the president's term.

Where a monarchy is not hereditary (e.g. Holy Roman Empire) the identity of a new head of state cannot be known pending election and/or coronation, hence the need for the two bodies doctrine separating the office from the person of the occupant so there may be continuity during an interregnum. If Australia becomes a republic, there will need to be enacted new constitutional provisions replacing the existing mechanism of inheritance

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with one providing for the process of succession to ensure that the “[King’s Peace](#)” does not expire (similar to the ceremony of swearing in a new president in the US).

PS. In 2018, it was [agreed](#) that Charles will also succeed as Head of the Commonwealth but I can’t find out if this is a doctrine for future application or just a one-off.

2022 September 11:

<<[Chris Gousmett](#): I would argue that in every case the office is separate from the person holding the office. What differs between the different offices is the manner in which a person is appointed to occupy the office. It may be by election (presidential election, the Holy Roman Emperor) or by inheritance, as with the Queen and Charles. The recognition of this distinction is often signaled by the words "in his/her private capacity" thus indicating rights, possessions, actions, etc. pertaining to the person of the office holder but not the office itself. One way to explain this distinction is to consider what might happen if the monarchy were abolished. The person of the monarch continues, the office they formerly held is extinguished and King Charles III, for instance, would become Mr Charles Windsor, private citizen. There are also the occasional situations where the monarchy is shared, as with William and Mary. This was not the case with Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, since on their marriage there was a dynastic union of Castille and Aragon, but these kingdoms remained legally separate and were not formed into a unitary state until the eighteenth century. Similarly James I was simultaneously king of Scotland and king of England, but he was king of Scotland (one office) prior to becoming king of England (a second, distinct office). So the office is always separate from the officeholder.>>

2022 May 27: New to My Website

These are some odds-n-sods I have discovered while cleaning out my hard drive. Can’t be sure they haven’t been incorporated somewhere in longer essays already uploaded. Duplication can’t do any harm I suppose.

» [Electronic Series \(2002\)](#)

Why I wrote this or for whom it was intended escapes me now but it doesn’t appear anywhere else on this website so far as I can tell (although I fear it may be buried somewhere in one of the longer essays). Its matter is along the same lines (or, at least, in the same pumpkin patch) as [The Hunting of the Snark: Searching for Digital Series](#) (2011) so, although this piece was written several years earlier, I have attached it as an addendum to the later work. Thematically, it is also congruent with the multi-part [Relationships in Records](#) (2001–2004), alas unfinished, and my essay on the Series in the [Encyclopedia of Archival Science](#) (2015). Taken together, they open a door to a theme I always hoped to explore further and it is one of my major regrets that I never have.

The argument concerns the ethos of the record and, by extension, that which differentiates an archive from a collection or from toilet paper for that matter. An instant Document arises from a connection with an event or circumstance of which it is evidence – that is its purpose. It is capable of being put to other uses (as an historical artefact, for example, or a promotional gimmick) but that is not what a record is for. Putting it to another use may obscure the purpose for which it was created but it cannot change it. That shared purpose is what binds instant records together as a sequence or series – even if they are not kept together physically (cf. dockets and computer records) or even purposefully and even if as estrays the chain is broken. That shared purpose establishes a relationship between them and an intellectual structure that is a defining characteristic of the record.

But that structure (between instances) cannot be found solely in the relationships (based on a shared common purpose) that subsist between instant records. What also binds them together is the relationship that these instant records have with the accumulation (series/fonds) to which they belong – even in the curious case of Robinson Crusoe’s Diary

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where the instance and the accumulation are one. It is a relationship that can be shared with no other artefact outside of the accumulation even if the content matter is the same (or even identical as in the case of a replica). A land title is a singular proof of ownership and the collective (register of titles) shares the same purpose consolidated by the authority and assigned responsibility of the “collector”.

What makes a Series, then, is not the accumulation (collection) of like instances but the shared purpose subsisting between the instances and the accumulation. This is what differentiates an archive from a collection, the ethos or purpose of which is to bring together instances indiscriminately or on the basis of whim as to the common purpose shared between the instant records and the Series to which they belong, a recordkeeping purpose that is in operation before any process of collection begins. (Note: This is a distinction between the essence of the Archive and the Collection, not between the roles of Collectors and Archivists).

This contextuality (the purpose shared between the instant record and the collectivity) is further enhanced by relationships with Agents (Doers) and the Activity (Deed) that is the embodiment of that purpose. But the term “purpose” is misleading. Paradoxically, these seemingly contrived recordkeeping alignments are what the old books meant by “naturalness” which need not result from a purposeful intent at all on the part of the Doer – hence what I have called the accidental record. Note: The distinction between the “natural” archive and an “artificial” collection has been explored by Geoffrey Yeo in "[The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection](#)" *Archivaria* 73 (2012) 43-80.

» [Scaleability \(2002\)](#)

How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death?

Nearly two hundred years ago, Charles Dickens (one of my favourite authors) wrote a novel called [Hard Times](#) (1854). In it he devastatingly satirised regard for data without understanding:

"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them.

"Respect for Facts ("[mere facts](#)") would appear to be a hallmark of [archival thinking](#) but it is understanding we really need. Dickens “did not decry the wholesale usage of statistics ... [but] how this information can be subjected to perversion and abuse, for purposes of subjugation and creating statistics that are class-biased”.

[Bounderby] now stepped forth. A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was ... in his way (and in most other people's too) a professed pugilist ... He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. And he had it in charge from high authority to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth ... "You are to be in all things regulated and governed ... by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact ..."

Dickens was [not against factual knowledge](#) but rather:

against statistics as a form of social knowledge, a way of knowing which necessarily constitutes the object of its knowledge - in this case the working class and their conditions of life - in particular ways and which thereby dictates particular approaches to it. It is statistics as what Michel Foucault would call a disciplinary technology of knowledge, as a mechanism for moral and political surveillance and restraint.

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I do not think it fanciful to liken this to our corrective idea that evidence and interpretation cannot easily be separated and that objective Truth can be abused. Indeed, that idea has become common place. In none of his books does Dickens look to Dogma, Institutions, or Systems for an answer. Not only are factories and trade unions portrayed as instruments of oppression but also [workhouses](#), [schools](#), [the law](#), [bureaucracy](#), [mobs](#), the [weight of evidence](#), [creeds](#), [theories](#), "[smelly little orthodoxies](#)", [families](#) even. The corrective lies not in an orthodoxy of our own but in diversity rather than homogenisation and that is where we too must find it, even if the orthodox hate us for it.

In simple terms, that means our view of the case must self-consciously encompass the multiplicity of change and perspective. The whole purpose of archival description is to make the facts being observed submit to an understanding of their meaning – a true understanding but one which may involve dissonance or contestation (the "[Grey Zone](#)"). The Grey Zone is [not a comfortable place](#) – disinformation and deception abound alongside the dialectic. Dogmatists want us to take sides:

... Dickens conveys that organized labour was so much self-deceiving agitation, which in passing squashed the rights of individuals ... He knew that it was not so, for the above eye-witness account was his own, from his article "On Strike" ... The more we find out what actually happened at that time, the more we realize that militancy was a lifeline – a well-spring of hope, a channel for popular energies, as well as an indispensable lever ... if one tried to imagine the great industrial novel that never did get written, one might suggest that the masters cried out to be satirized, the mass of the people to be presented with clear-eyed realism. (David Craig, Introduction to the Penguin edition).

But that is not at all what Dickens was about. In the [article referred to](#) (relating to the Preston Strike of 1853/1854) he declined to choose: "Masters right, or men right; masters wrong, or men wrong; both right, or both wrong; there is certain ruin to both in the continuance or frequent revival of this breach" and he predictably concluded:

... into the relations between employers and the employed, as into all the relations in this life, there must enter ... something of mutual explanation, forbearance and consideration ... otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten to the core and will never bear sound fruit ...

For all the ferocity of his life-long attacks on Dogmatism in all its forms and on the suffering it begets, Dickens longed for "an era of its being quite settled that the national dustmen have only to do with one another, and owe no duty to an Abstraction called a People ..." (Hard Times, Book III, Ch.9).

The phenomena we describe (the entities) are not self-explanatory and how we portray and juxtapose them either illuminates or obscures their meaning (sometimes both) – never more so than when we show them standing in relationships with each other. This memorandum was prepared, at their request, for the ASA Descriptive Standards Committee twenty years ago. It was an early warning of the folly of building relationship data into the attributes assigned to descriptive entities.

*I wouldn't say a word that could be reckoned as injurious,
But to find a mother younger than her son is very curious,
And that's the kind of mother that is usually spurious,
Tara-diddle, tara-diddle, tol-lol-lay.*

My spelling of "scaleable" has been objected to. It is an [allowable variant](#) and the criticism (you will not be surprised to learn) has made me stubborn.

» [The Canonisation of Peter Scott \(2019\)](#)

In preparation for a recent I-CHORA Conference in Melbourne, I was involved in a discussion amongst a group of Australian and New Zealand archivists (some young, some

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venerable) dedicated to articulating and handing on our shared understanding of what I continue to call (notwithstanding a certain amount of carping) the Australian (“Series”) System. We felt a need to explain it better and to provide a springboard for further development by a new generation of archival thinkers. It was thought this could begin with conference papers and grow into a book, but no book has appeared so far as I know. My view was (and is) that we first need to establish a Canon rather like the 4th century Christians did when forming the New Testament – approving some things and discarding others. But what to approve, and what to discard, and who is to do it?

2022 June 1: re [Scaleability](#)

I am told that Dickens’ approach to social problems is not “practical”.



Let my old friend [George Orwell](#) respond to this:

... in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word, Dickens is not a ‘revolutionary’ writer. But his position here needs some defining. Whatever else Dickens may have been, he was not a hole-and-corner soul-saver, the kind of well-meaning idiot who thinks that the world will be perfect if you amend a few bylaws and abolish a few anomalies ... The truth is that Dickens’s criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. Hence the utter lack of any constructive suggestion anywhere in his work ... There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown, or that he believes it would make very much difference if it were overthrown. For in reality his target is not so much society as ‘human nature’ ... His whole ‘message’ is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent ... It seems that in every attack Dickens makes upon society he is always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure. It is hopeless to try and pin him down to any definite remedy, still more to any political doctrine. His approach is always along the moral plane ... the strongest single impression one carries away from his books is that of a hatred of tyranny ... it is not at all certain that a merely moral criticism of society may not be just as ‘revolutionary’ – and revolution, after all, means turning things upside down as the politico-economic criticism which is fashionable at this moment. Blake was not a politician, but there is more understanding of the nature of capitalist society in a poem like [‘I wander through each chartered street’](#) than in three-quarters of Socialist literature. Progress is not an illusion, it happens, but it is slow and invariably disappointing ...

Consequently two viewpoints are always tenable. The one, how can you improve human nature until you have changed the system? The other, what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature? ... The central problem – how to prevent power from being abused – remains unsolved. Dickens, who had not the vision to see that private property is an obstructive nuisance, had

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the vision to see that. 'If men would behave decently the world would be decent' is not such a platitude as it sounds. ... A good-tempered antinomianism rather of Dickens's type is one of the marks of Western popular culture ... The ordinary people in the Western countries have never entered, mentally, into the world of 'realism' and power-politics. They may do so before long, in which case Dickens will be as out of date as the cab-horse. But in his own age and ours he has been popular chiefly because he was able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man ... Dickens voiced a code which was and on the whole still is believed in, even by people who violate it. It is difficult otherwise to explain why he could be both read by working people (a thing that has happened to no other novelist of his stature) and buried in Westminster Abbey ... in the case of Dickens I see a face that is not quite the face of Dickens's photographs, though it resembles it ... He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is generously angry – in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.

Grasp that and you have the reading. I do not recommend Dickens as a guide for dealing with social issues (though you could do a lot worse) but as an example of how to approach an understanding of them. A moral sense is indispensable to the observation and description of facts but meaning remains elusive. Multiplicity, of which scaleability is merely one aspect, is how we archivists are able to perceive, if we choose, two or more “tenable viewpoints” – which is just another way of reaching out for objectivity. Which is the more “realistic” basis for action? Conclusively adjusting a society corrupted by human frailty, employing hard facts combined with a belief in perfectibility to do so, or provisionally treating society’s problems and well-meaning efforts to overcome them as both being equally corrupted by flaws in human nature?

“When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams – this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness – and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!” [Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra](#)

2022 June 1: Machinery of Government Changes

<<[Tim Sherratt: In case you missed it, the Archives Act is back under Communications & Arts, after many years with A-G. I wonder what this means for the NAA?](#)>>

21 June, 2022: The alignment of NAA within the [Administrative Arrangements Order](#) of 1 June gives a hint of the new Government’s attitudes.

Attorney-General responsibilities include: Privacy; Freedom of Information; Fraud and anti-corruption policy; Whole of government integrity policy and activities; Copyright.

D. of Finance responsibilities include: Public data policy and related matters; Whole of government information and communications technology; Information and communications technology procurement policy and services.

D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts responsibilities include: Content policy relating to the information economy; Cultural affairs, including movable cultural heritage and support for the arts; Classification; Management of government records; Old Parliament House.

If I’m not mistaken, “classification” is weasel-speak for censorship. Legislation administered includes: *Archives Act 1983; Australia Council Act 2013; Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983; Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973; Australian National Maritime Museum Act 1990; National Film and Sound Archive*

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of Australia Act 2008; National Gallery Act 1975; National Library Act 1960; National Museum of Australia Act 1980; National Portrait Gallery of Australia Act 2012; Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Act 2013; Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986; Public Lending Right Act 1985; Screen Australia Act 2008. AWM, as usual, is assigned to Defence.

Under the *Archives Act 1983*, NAA is not designed as a policy department. The implication, though this was not much thought about at the time of drafting, was that it would be operational - leaving archives policy (and, more broadly, information policy) to others. In the teeth of opposition from the then Public Service Board (and Treasury to a lesser extent), we did manage to get a species of guidance and standards in. Interestingly, at that time (the 1970s), Attorney-General's which had not historically been much interested was becoming so because of its new interest in FOI and, while not an ally, saw the PSB/Treasury approach to information as retrograde. My impression was that the gnomic Prime Minister's Department (a long-term but tepid patron of the Archives) wasn't much interested in this aspect of the matter but this probably had more to do with the fact that they didn't especially want anyone else involved in high-level policy on anything.

There is nothing that I can see reflecting the national responsibilities assigned to NAA by the *Archives Act*. The emphasis is on an alignment with GLAM. NAA's role in internal housekeeping is reflected in the unusually prominent space given to it in [the guidance](#) on MoG put out by D. of Finance.

NAA supports the implementation of MoG changes by:

- permitting the transfer of custody or ownership of records outside the Commonwealth where appropriate
- providing advice on policy, mechanisms and standards for the transfer of information, records and data between entities.

What is interesting in the Finance Guidelines is the second bullet point which describes a policy role that is reflected in neither the *Archives Act* nor (so far as I can see) in the new MoG Order. It reflects, I imagine, a perception of itself that NAA has worked very hard over the years to establish for itself within the public sector and in which the new Government displays no apparent interest.

2022 June 9: So it goes : ABC abolishes librarians and archivists

Archivists and librarians at the ABC are in shock after management unveiled plans to abolish 58 positions and make journalists research and archive their own stories. Reporters and producers working on breaking news, news programs and daily programs like 7.30 will have to search for archival material themselves and will be expected to log the metadata of any new material into the system ...

Reporting in [The Australian](#) is that the 58 will be replaced by 30 new jobs. If they were spinning it, this could be represented as a restructure rather than a massacre. Interestingly, I haven't been able to find any of this on the ABC's own news site – something for Media Watch to look into, perhaps.

... ABC management said the broadcaster was transforming into a digital-first media organisation and new technology had enabled more efficient content collection and management. "This means some roles are no longer required but also provides opportunities to develop new skills and create new and evolved roles," the ABC said in a statement on Wednesday. "The ABC is proposing to remove approximately 58 roles and introduce 30 new roles...Approximately 90 per cent of ABC audio and 35 per cent of its videotape collection was converted into digital files last year ...

.....

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Sound libraries will no longer add new commercial music releases to the music bank and producers must access music for programs themselves...

A further four positions will be made redundant in TV post-production as the roles are being replaced with automatic services. The proposal for post-production says that manual quality checking of a program by ABC specialists “to ensure it meets ABC broadcast standards” will now be automated...

The ABC said the redundancies came about as a part of the broadcaster’s transition to digital and on-demand services, and to improve workflow and efficiency... “In 2021, approximately 90% of our audio and 35% of our video tape collection was converted into digital files. More than two million content assets are now available to content makers at their desktops via the ABC’s Content Digital Archive (CoDA).”

The ABC is proposing to introduce 30 new roles, including “content navigators” who will work in newsrooms to assist journalists with using the digitised ABC archives. The gutting of the archive staff follows the [dismantling of the ABC’s historic sound and reference libraries](#) in 2018...

2022 June 10:

<<Joanna Sassoon: Here is a [short article](#) about the axing of archivist and librarian jobs at the ABC. More than two million content assets are now available to content makers at their desktops via the ABC’s Content Digital Archive (CoDA). The ABC is proposing to introduce 30 new roles, including “content navigators” who will work in newsrooms to assist journalists with using the digitised ABC archives.>>

I know nothing of the design and functionality of CoDA but I’m guessing that it is in its essentials the same as IT’s approach to recordkeeping. And we all know how that turned out. It’s about liberating “users” and not constraining them (ubiquity vs structure). Who knows whether or not the job description for content navigators picks up the superseded roles of archivists and librarians outlined in the article Joanna has called to our attention but, in a digital environment, a need for assistance to make systems work would be regarded as a hallmark of poor design.

We should not pine too much for a continuing role as gatekeepers. For thirty years, it has been apparent that digital systems would, for better or worse, replace the need for our “assistance” and we haven’t prepared for it very well. The mania for digitisation of content, all very well in its way, does nothing to make the transition needed in methods (as Bearman urged us to do so many years ago). Valiant efforts to develop metadata schema, functional requirements, and standards were helpful up to a point but they are only mechanical – not much use without the will and the skills to make them work effectively.

Of course, I don’t have THE answer in relation to designing digital recordkeeping (including digital archiving) except to say that no one person could (or should) be expected to and that we haven’t made as much progress as maybe we should have. An heroic, continuing, collaborative effort is needed but whether or not the fruits of such an effort would be adopted in the big bad world is very much open to doubt. We know a lot more now about “user” behaviour and our systems need to adapt to that (but not necessarily surrender wholly to it). Users will do what they want to do, not what we want them to do. We can learn from Google, Wikipedia, etc. about how to prompt, entice, and fool “users” into following correct pathways and to accept (if not to understand) structure. And there are those amongst us who welcome “user” freedom as a liberating pathway to enlightenment (ubiquity). As I have said [elsewhere](#), there need be no conflict between them. But there is, alas.

I said recently [on the List](#) that facts without understanding are worthless. We are in the understanding business and if our role and function were to perish altogether, it has

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always been my melancholy belief that the human instinct for understanding would persist and reassert itself in ways we cannot yet imagine. Melancholy maybe but also hopeful, I guess.

2022 July 21: Statistics

When we were in the initial stages of drafting the new NZ archives law, we had some interesting discussions with Statistics NZ about the extent to which their agency should be subject to the provisions of the legislation – the usual “special case” arguments (whether to exclude them totally from the scope of the legislation or to bring them within the ambit of the Act and then make appropriate and necessary exclusions within its framework and the mistaken view that coming under an Act assigning responsibilities to an Executive Agency, viz. Archives, was tantamount to submitting to “control” by the Executive). It was always my position here and in NZ that it was better for the specials to be included and their position made explicit and provided for rather than left to ad hoc arrangements (on the argument that regulated protections are safer than unregulated practice). But I understood and admired their motivation to uphold the integrity of the census data.

Now (irony of ironies) comes news from the NZ List of moves to remove the Statistician’s “independence” in deciding what data to gather and how (and by whom) it will be used. I don’t know the etiquette of copying their postings so I’ll simply give the embedded links for those interested:

- [News report](#) (Statistics experts fear law change may lead to unregulated data sharing)
- [NZ Council for Civil Liberties](#) (Analysis)
- [NZCCL](#) (Guest post)

The NZ List is easy to join and often has some interesting discussion (somewhat more weighty than I’ve seen on this bulletin board for a while). The NZ postings also mention the [Australian Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022](#) about which I’ve seen no mention - let alone discussion - on this List (but maybe I missed it). From my own paranoid perspective (national security over-reach, misuse and restriction of information, assaults on free press, etc.) it got me wondering about the governance of our own ABS. Their web site is [re-assuring](#):

The legislative framework, organisational structure, planning and quality management practices of a statistical agency all affect the ability of a statistical program to meet user needs efficiently and effectively... The Census and Statistics Act 1905 (the CS Act) provides the Australian Statistician, who heads the ABS, with the authority to conduct statistical collections and, when necessary, to direct a person to provide statistical information. The CS Act imposes obligations on the Statistician to publish and disseminate compilations and analyses of statistical information and to maintain the confidentiality of information collected under it...To ensure the ABS' impartiality and independence from political influence, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 (the ABS Act) sets out the Australian Statistician's independence...

I hope it may be so.

2022 August 21:

G-G kept no record of swearing in Morrison on three different dates

<<**Mark Brogan: Readers of this list are no doubt following the intrigue surrounding Scott Morrison's secret ministerial commissions during the term of the Morrison Government. Over the past few days, attention has turned to recordkeeping and the 'omission' of any reference to these secret commissions in Governor General, David Hurley's, diary.**>>

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2022 August 22: Lots of juice in this one.

What is the “diary” referred to?

There is an online “[program](#)” but it is hardly a diary – just a list of meetings and events, more like a [journal](#), I’d say, than [logs](#), [war diaries](#), etc. and a world away from [personal diaries](#) and narratives. I would be doubtful that there isn’t a more complete record of comings and goings, conversations and exchanges, and (most importantly) actions (including swearing and removal of ministerial commissions). The “program” is for public access but that is not to say that a more complete official record was not kept. The journalists are pointing to what has been made public but that hardly justifies the headline that no record was kept.

So, the issue they should be focussed on is whether some at least of the G-G’s actions (such as the swearing in of ministers) **should** be made public – more-or-less at once, I suppose. That, I imagine, is an issue that any inquiry would need to look at. The question that would arise would be whether there are any circumstances in which secret or undisclosed meetings, conversations, exchanges, etc. could take place and, if so, should a record be kept anyway even if not disclosed immediately.

The same issue arises in respect of ministers, agency heads, and (perhaps even more importantly) ministerial advisers. With a few exceptions, you can safely disclose what was done w/o disclosing the nature of what took place however much secrecy hounds like Morrison and Obama dislike it.



Scott Morrison



David Hurley

PS. Purely as a curiosity: what is the process for withdrawing a prime minister’s commission or the ministerial commission of any other minister (secret or otherwise)? There is an [online example](#) (Julia Gillard’s letter resigning as PM and recommending Kevin Rudd’s appointment following the 2013 counter-coup). Reading the runes, that letter suggests that it would have been customary for Gillard to resign on her own behalf and on behalf of her entire ministry but she states explicitly that she does not do so because “Mr Rudd may wish current Ministers to remain in office.” This suggests that Morrison may have had to send a similar letter following the recent election result resigning his commission and those of his ministers when recommending the appointment of Anthony Albanese in his place. Would such a letter have had to stipulate that he was resigning from his “secret ministerial appointments” as well. If so, where is that letter and what does it say?

PPS. Taking that line of speculation, a step further, would there have had to be a letter advising the G-G to appoint Morrison to his “secret ministerial appointments” in the first place? If so, where is that letter and what does it say?

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.....

A spokesman for the Official Secretary has made a [statement](#):

A spokesman for the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor General told 7.30: "There is a difference between the Governor-General swearing in a minister to hold office and approving an existing minister to administer a department ... The instances in question are examples of the latter."

So far as the paperwork is concerned, this appears to be a distinction without a difference. Whether it involves appointing a minister or conferring administration of a minister's powers, it beggars belief to suppose that the G-G's approval would not be obtained (and subsequently withdrawn) on the basis of written advice tendered with reasons. If such matters are settled on the basis of a handshake (if not with a wink and a nod) maybe it is time to abolish the G-G's Official Secretary and institute more mature procedures.

The meticulous annotation as to time received on the Rudd letter in the correspondence, I referred to above suggests that there must have been procedures for documenting these approvals. You can't do things of high import and then be unable afterwards to say when, how, and why. It is relevant to ask what reasons were given to the G-G and alarming if there were none. Barnaby Joyce is suggesting that constitutional propriety doesn't matter to ordinary folk standing at an IGA checkout. The checkout metaphor puts me in mind of Horace Rumpole's complaints about his wife's expenditure on Vim (a cleaning agent). "You'd miss it if it wasn't there, Rumpole," Hilda replies. You could say the same about a lot of other things, constitutional propriety among them, that we take for granted and don't think much about until they're gone.

2022 September 13: Continuity and change

Forgive my continuing to post after bowing out (seemingly) from the List in July, 2021, but I am moved to share this "big think" analysis (as Terry Cook used to call them) from "fund manager (and Sinophobe) Mike Mangan" repeated in an [article](#) by Michael Pascoe. Harking back to some of my own [recent comments](#), I note that this analysis of the decline of the US as a great power is almost entirely structural, rather than social or moral.

Why should this be of interest to us? Well, as old men do, I've come to [reflect](#) on our social context. If, as many of us seem to believe, our work cannot be isolated from that context, it behoves us to understand it and to place our efforts and our values proportionately within it.

The thesis here is that the US (and, I suppose, by extension the whole Anglo/European capitalist system) is irreversibly in decline based on what is ultimately a moral judgement after all (viz. that it is beyond the system's capability to repair itself). The possibly more dubious conclusion is that we are all less safe as a result. My own view is that (historically) collapse of some kind or another is more likely to be a positive step towards progress (not away from it) but who knows? For us there are two issues, as I've indicated before:

- a) How to maintain enduring memory within a changing context without isolating ourselves (on the one hand) or betraying the evidence (on the other)
- b) More mundanely, how to position ourselves for survival in a changing world.

Reading this analysis, I am left wondering – in relation to (a) – whether we need to rebalance turbulence with social harmony in our thinking and – in relation to (b) – how our memory institutions fit with the unexpected (by me) public musings over continuity and change following the death of EIIR. Here is the Mangan analysis of what ails America. I've no way of verifying the data's accuracy. Enjoy. Pascoe says he has edited and added to the list:

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1. Trickle-down economics. It never trickled down; it just boosted asset prices
2. TBTF (too big to fail) Bailouts. Post-GFC response exacerbated inequality. If you keep your profits and socialise your losses, you have a magical business model
3. Zero interest rates and QE. Central bankers have been saving speculators since the 1987 crash. These policies debase ‘fiat’ currency and also exacerbate inequality by favouring asset owners over wage earning plodders
4. Unsanctioned market rigging: Since the GFC, investment banks paid nearly \$US460 billion in fines and restitutions. They’ve pled guilty to involvement in the drugs trade, WMD, bribery, trading with the enemy and funding terrorism. They’ve been caught in more than 900 other cases where criminality couldn’t be proved beyond reasonable doubt, so fines and restitutions were the only sanctions. You could count on one hand the number of prison sentences handed down for this massive crime wave
5. Gun violence. In 2022 America has averaged [about two mass shootings a day](#)
6. Police violence. The [cops average more than 1000 kills per annum](#)
7. Opioids. [More than 100,000 lives lost per annum to opioids](#) since COVID, roughly double the 2015 rate
8. Alcohol. Deaths related to [alcohol consumption](#) spiked 25 to 40 per cent since COVID
9. Mass incarceration: America’s [two million convicts](#) is one of the largest prison populations in the world. It’s also one of the largest in history. Nearly a quarter of Americans have a criminal record. [Nearly a third have a relative touched by their prison system.](#)
10. Food insecurity. The richest country on Earth has more than 10 per cent of its population, or [about 38 million Americans – including 12 million children](#), facing daily food insecurity
11. Negative net wealth. [About 13 million American households](#) or 40 to 50 million Americans live in households that owe more than they own
12. COVID failure. America has 4.5 per cent of the world’s population, but 15 per cent of official global COVID deaths.

PS. If (like me) you don’t know about QE, it means [Quantitative Easing](#).

2022 October 8: RiC 0.2

Those not on the ICA List who have 45 mins to spare should check out the video recently posted there by EGAD. It outlines the latest stage in the development of the international descriptive standards. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHG_pupre8w

They are following the pathway indicated in earlier iterations but this time they are setting out more clearly (I think) and at long last a clear conceptual understanding, including –

- Status Quo [from which they are departing]: ISAD/ISAAR/ISDF are mono-hierarchical, unintegrated, and outdated [all bad things]
- Core Concepts: Entities, Attributes, Relationships + Extensibility, also Scaleability, but they don’t call it that [all good things]
- Distinguishes between Physical and Intellectual characteristics
- Relationships: Down in number to 78 [!] but now “categorised” into 13 groups. [The analysis of relationships is still polluted by alignment of some relationship-types with entity-types but they’re learning]

They seem (to me) to be well on the way to coherence and flexibility (two good things). Conceptually, this is where we should have been twenty-five years ago. Alas, that only gets us up to the starting gate. As EGAD seem to be well aware. Issues of implementation and integration of archival description with the larger digital universe are yet to be solved.

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RiC still has the smack of custodialism about it (probably unavoidable at this stage). As it develops, the standard may work for established archival institutions (I hope it does) but it also has to provide for recordkeeping outside of the archives (or, to put it another way, for the time when archives becomes part of the recordkeeping process, if it ever does). And, what's more, I can't see much joy here for the barefoot archivist.

Still, a lot to like in this.

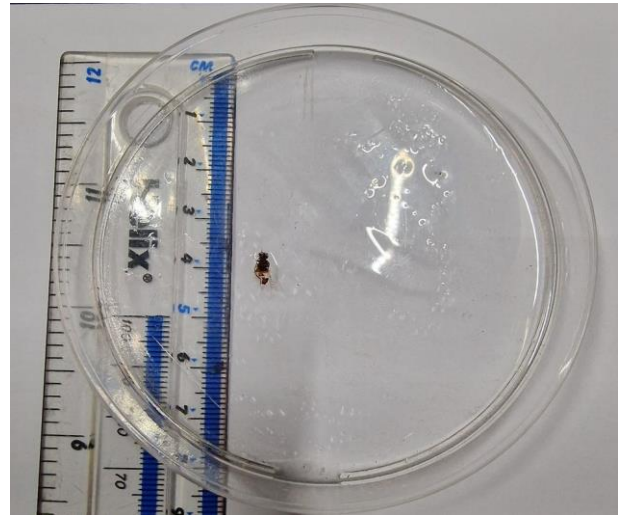
2022 October 11: In the archives

Eighteenth-century cockroach found in slave-trading ship ledger

Insect's journey probably began in west Africa on vessel that sailed from La Rochelle in 1743 to Guinea



The mummified cockroach was discovered by a National Archives specialist. Photograph: National Archives



From [The Guardian](#): An 18th-century cockroach named Peri, discovered in the ledger of a French slave-trading vessel, has become a surprise addition to the [National Archives](#) after the book was opened for the first time in more than two centuries ... “When it got shut in the book it created a microclimate that was perfect for preservation ... And it’s male. And we’ve named him Peri. When we opened it, we exposed it to the elements, so [there was] a race to get it analysed and placed in nice housing to protect it.” Peri, now pinned and mounted in a box with a Perspex lid, will have his own reference number, and will be kept in a drawer available to order up for anyone wishing to inspect him further in a special room at the National Archives...

2022 October 12: <<Peri, now pinned and mounted in a box with a Perspex lid, will have his own reference number>>

Nice metaphor for the Life Cycle - *If it stops moving, accession it.*

2022 October 22: Frontier Wars

Not so long ago, the Australian War Memorial held that Frontier Wars weren't its business (see [my post](#) of 15 Nov., 2020) -

“As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial’s official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day.”

Those with a taste for irony will be amused by reporting in the *Weekend Oz* (available in print on p.3 of today's edition and to online subscribers only) about a barney that has broken out between AWM, Returned Soldiers' League (RSL), and the National Museum (NMA) over AWM's [reversal](#) of this policy to give “a much broader, much deeper depiction and presentation of the violence committed against Aboriginal people”).

- Greg Melick for the RSL (“inundated with phone calls from concerned veterans”) objects to the change and thinks this subject is the proper province of NMA (“it was

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a story that should primarily be told by the National Museum rather than the War Memorial ... go and try to find the frontier wars in the National Museum – good luck if you can find it”). There’s a hint that some AWM supporters are miffed that part of their \$550M windfall should be spent on this.

- Mathew Trinca for NMA, while claiming to have honourably covered the topic for several years (“We have been telling the story of frontier conflict and violence ... for more than two decades”), denies that it has sole responsibility (“he did not believe the National Museum had a greater responsibility to tell the story than did the AWM”).
- Brendan Nelson for AWM says (in effect) *don’t worry, we’re doing something but it won’t be much* (“the expansion of the focus on frontier wars in the enlarged memorial would be only ‘modest’ ... we will professionally and sensitively ... set the context for their service to and suffering for Australia (But) it will be of modest dimensions, It will also complement the full story ... that is the responsibility of the National Museum of Australia.”) One wonders whose PR advice he’s taking.
- Peter Stanley, former principal historian with AWM says “that if there was only a ‘modest’ expansion ... it would be an insult to First Nations people.”

So far as I can see, no one is objecting to NMA’s treatment of the subject. They are not even bickering about whether the story should be told, but rather about whose responsibility it is. For now at any rate, it’s all about the teller, not the tale. Very odd.

2022 November 4: How do you identify cont’d

Reporting the results of the 2021 Census, the B. of Statistics still uses the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations](#) (ANZCO). For those of us who haven’t kept up with the latest updates to this useful tool, here is an extract showing where we fit –

2. PROFESSIONALS

22 Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals

224 Information and Organisation Professionals

.....
2242 Archivists, Curators and Records Managers

224200 Archivists, Curators and Records Managers nfd

224211 Archivist

224212 Gallery or Museum Curator

224213 Health Information Manager

224214 Records Manager

.....
2246 Librarians

224611 Librarian

2247 Management and Organisation Analysts

224700 Management and Organisation Analysts nfd

224711 Management Consultant

224712 Organisation and Methods Analyst

2022 November 6: Heard the term “[feminised workforce](#)” used (a lot) on *Insiders* this morning. Does this term accurately include us? Anecdotally, “women in cardigans” is how archivists, curators, and librarians (records managers even) are sometimes described. What are the metrics?

Does anyone know if the Census or any other source provides data on the gender breakdown within our occupation categories?

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A breakdown by educational/training would also be interesting (if available).

2022 December 1: Spike Milligan archive

<<**Joanna Sassoon**: In contrast to some of the chaos that surrounded the tapes of the Goons, here is a lovely piece about Spike Milligan's archive. But there was nothing anarchic about his archive, which he kept neatly organised.>>

2022 December 2: Nearly every day, I drive across the Spike Milligan bridge at Woy Woy. His parents lived here and he thought the name was funny. He enjoyed wandering the surrounding hills and looking at Aboriginal rock paintings. There's more family-related stuff held in the local history collection.

2022 December 3: Milligan called Woy Woy the world's only example of an above-ground cemetery where if you plugged your electric toothbrush into the socket all the town lights would dim. People up this way are wary of walking backwards for Christmas but some (including me) like being here anyway –

I made one of my increasingly rare drives to Sydney yesterday (I usually go by train) and I was astonished to find the whole city has become a car park intersected by drag racing.

He was a better recordkeeper than I. Somewhere I have a couple of boxes with almost all the Goon Shows on tape – cassettes (alas) which are now probably unplayable and I'm not sure I even have a machine anymore capable of doing so.

Spike Milligan - From Woy Woy to Wagga Wagga



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PS ... and we are home to [one of the world's great festivals](#).

Tea Cosy Expo set for long weekend



The display at last year's expo

2022 December 9: “Compelling Force” – Hidden in plain sight

Al-Jazeera has been running and re-running [A Very British Way of Torture](#) (next viewing: 11.00pm tonight, Friday 9 December). At the top of the programme is a statement to camera by David Anderson (Professor of African History, Warwick University):

When the British decided to leave Kenya in '63, they took with them more than 1,500 government files – all marked “Top Secret”. Over the next 40/50 years, these documents were spirited away and hidden in a facility called Hanslope Park, linked to GCHQ, which was used by MI5 [and] MI6 – hidden in plain sight. And, when you tried to request these documents, you were told that they didn't exist ...

In 2013, British Foreign Secretary, William Haig, [acknowledged](#) that torture had taken place but said the British Government was not responsible. Responsibility lay, he said, with the Colonial Government in Nairobi – which no longer exists. Paradoxically, it could be argued that responsibility then passed to the current post-colonial Kenyan Government. Perhaps not, but the instruments of the policy were mostly native Kenyans (under British control and direction) and Mau-Mau victims were mostly black as well.

Commissioner of Police, [Arthur Young](#), resigned, stating that his efforts to deal with torture had been obstructed at the highest levels. His resignation letter was (partly) suppressed for the next 50 years. Here, Attorney-General Dreyfus is still [pursuing whistleblowers in court](#) who exposed wrong-doing by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan and in the ATO. Typically, Governments are less concerned with pursuing those who do wrong than in punishing those who expose it.

2022 December 28: Hardy tree

Gravestone-encircled 'Hardy Tree' falls in London

The tree became a powerful symbol of life among death after the novelist and poet stacked gravestones around its base in the 1860s



☛ The gravestones at the base of the Hardy Tree in Old St Pancras Churchyard in London.
Photograph: Jerome Flynn/Alamy

“Beauty lay not in the thing, but in what the thing symbolized.”

– [Thomas Hardy](#), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Now no matter, child, the name: / Sorrow's springs are the same.

Nor mouth had, nor mind, expressed / What heart heard of, ghost guessed:

It is the blight man was born for, / It is Margaret you mourn for.

– [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#) *Spring and Fall*

I will refer to these processes and practices as *living archives* – practices and environments that connect the organisation, curation and transmission of memory with present-bound creative, performative, and participatory processes (Living Archives, [2018](#)). The quintessence of these practices does not stand necessarily in the use of archival records strictly defined; nor are they driven uniquely by archival institutions and stakeholders. Rather, at the core of living archives is the performative celebration of the past through contemporary acts of creation and transmission. Living archives marry the archival and the artistic by recording and tracing the past with contemporary creative practice. The archival component points, here, to a concern with memory, memory sharing, and ways of bringing memory into a space of presence (and co-presence) through the mediation of memory texts. According to Ketelaar ([2005](#)), memory texts are ‘cultural tools’ (Wertsch, [1998](#), [2002](#)) that mediate meaning-making, knowledge and memory transmission, and which can encompass equally physical objects, texts in literal sense, but also monuments, buildings and even human bodies.

– [Amalia G Sabiescu](#) *Living Archives and the Social Transmission of Memory*

2022 December 31: Leadership vacuum in NSW

<<[Adrian Cunningham](#): See this [interesting news](#) from NSW. The much-debated merger of the NSW State Archives into the Sydney Living Museum formally starts tomorrow, but has no CEO. Adam Lindsay has been acting in the role and has also been a major advocate for the merger. But he was not offered the role during a recent recruitment exercise, so he has announced his departure. Meanwhile, the search for

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a CEO continues, while State Librarian John Vallance will act as CEO - presumably doing all the jobs (a busy man!) ... Interesting times in New South Wales!>>



Adam Lindsay



John Vallance

From SMH 19 Sep., 2022

Does anyone know what the arrangements for r/keeping governance are in NSW as of 1/01/23?

A full merger of Sydney Living Museums and the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA) was subject to an upper house inquiry in 2020. That inquiry recommended the functions of SARA be split. The collection of 14 million records, going back to the early days of European settlement, was to be merged into the Museums of History, and its record-keeping functions preserved in a smaller authority.

Will there now be a separate SRO as recommended?

If so, will governance of state records held by MoHNSW be subject to its jurisdiction?

Further to this, have the new arrangements:

- Repealed or amended the [State Records Act](#) 1998?
- Abolished the State Records & Archives Authority (s.63) or modified its jurisdiction?
- Ensured that the management of the state archives “collection” (ghastly term) is subject to Part 2 of the Act?
- Or, in the alternative, ensured that SRA (if it still exists) continues to have the management of the “collection” while it remains within MoHNSW?
- Or, established MoHNSW as a place of deposit under the jurisdiction of SARA? (s.36)
- Or (insult to injury), established MoHNSW as a “State collecting institution”? (s.5)

When we were drafting the Act, John Cross always argued for the preservation of the Authority in preference to vesting the statutory powers over state records (including the “collection”) in the hands of a statutory officer. Perhaps this is the kind of situation he had in mind.

On 2 October 2022, [Government News](#) announced:

The NSW government has created two new agencies which it says will strengthen custodianship of and access to the state’s historic collections. Legislation for the establishment of NSW Museums of History, which will see a merger between Sydney Living Museums and the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA), passed parliament last week ... “(The legislation) will see the NSW State Archives and Sydney Living Museums brought together to create a flagship body, Museums of History NSW ...” arts minister Ben Franklin said. Museums of History NSW will be led by a CEO appointed by the minister, and guided by a board of 11 members responsible for strategic direction.

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... The Act also provides for the creation of State Records NSW as a separate and dedicated agency for recordkeeping standards, regulation, advice, education and policy, with new monitoring powers to ensure good record keeping practice. Staff resources and budget will be transferred across from SARA, and a new board will be appointed.

... The [Museums of History Act 2022](#) and the State Records Act legislation will be effective from 31 December 2022.

So, in response to some of my own questions, does this imply (it's a government announcement so comprehensibility is not its strong suit):

- There are two Acts now, but I couldn't find an amended *State Records Act*. The amendments are in fact embedded in the new *MoH Act* (see below).
- SARA is merged, wholly or partly, into MoHNSW (but may arise like the phoenix as the new SRNSW (?))
- MoHNSW becomes the new SARA in respect of the "collection" and presumably for future accretions as new deposits are made (?)
- A new SRNSW becomes responsible for r/keeping generally (?)

The r/keeping authority established in 1998 was seamless in its jurisdiction over all state records regardless of whether they were in custody or not. It would appear that the seamless r/keeping regime is now sundered in twain but, if so, will the standards established by new SRNSW apply to the "collected" state archives as they would to any other public office or place of deposit? Obviously, these questions can only be answered after a close reading of the new legislation. Has anyone who is not a partisan of the new arrangements already done this – so I don't have to bother? From a cursory reading of the new Act

- Section 23 assigns to MoHNSW "functions under the State Records Act 1998 ... (a) records management services, (b) assuming control of State records that are not currently in use, (c) recovering estrays and other State records, (d) facilitating public access to State records, (e) copying and publishing State archives, (f) exercising a right of the Crown as the owner of copyright subsisting in a State archive." [CH: Gee, what's left?]
- Schedule 4 (Amendment of State Records Act 1998) has replaced MoHNSW for Archives Authority Pt.4(5) and made other changes to the definitions that need close analysis in conjunction with the 1998 Act (which is still, for the moment, available online apparently unamended - grab it while you can) and there is a new section 5 (Application of Act to State Collecting Institutions) stating, inter alia, that "If a provision of this Act would otherwise require Museums of History NSW to enter into an agreement with, or obtain the consent of, Museums of History NSW, the agreement is taken to have been entered into, or the consent obtained, without further steps needing to be taken." 5(6).

Assuming all this means (as indicated in the announcement of 2 October) that there are, in fact, now two separate authorities, it is unclear to me what the role and responsibility of State Records NSW is to be and what jurisdiction the State Records Authority, if it still exists, has over MoHNSW in respect of managing the "collection".

2023 January 19:

<<[Kate Curr: John Vallance was the Headmaster at Sydney Grammar, not Sydney State High](#), >>

2023 January 27:

From SMH:

The Museums of History, the Perrottet government's newest flagship cultural institution, has been hit by two early board departures after a sudden leadership change overshadowed the organisation's first days. *The Sydney Morning Herald* can reveal that two likely board

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appointees, both leading philanthropists, withdrew their names in the [aftermath of the sudden resignation of Adam Lindsay](#) – the former head of Sydney Living Museums (SLM), who had been a frontrunner to lead the new organisation ...

The Museums of History is the result of a merger of 12 museums and the state's \$1 billion archives. Its creation on January 1 constitutes one of the state's biggest cultural reshuffles in more than 20 years. But the museum's board will convene with only nine of the 11 members the government confirmed, after two recent departures ...

Speaking for the first time since his temporary appointment, [State Librarian] Vallance told this masthead he had no "grand ambitions" to make the role permanent ... "One of the things I'm wanting to be careful about is to balance the need to make all the official records accessible to the public without dumbing it down – that kind of Disney-fication you see around the world," he said ...

All this takes me back to my time in Victoria around about 1990 when they tried to merge PROV into what I think was called something like Archival Heritage (establishing or bringing on board some glitzy functions – including a proposal for an Archives Tram - to obscure, they were too insubstantial to submerge, the State's archival programme because they were finding the r/keeping functions uncomfortable). If I'm hazy it's because almost all hint of its existence, and the controversy that surrounded it, is invisible on the Internet. You can find a most obscure reference to it on LinkedIn

Loretta Hambly

Victorian Government - various positions 1983 - 1991 · 8 yrs 1983 – 1991

Keeper of Public Records - Requested by Minister to introduce a 'new culture and charter' for the Public Records Office ...

When this failed, PROV was linked administratively with a unit brought across from the Arts Department responsible for municipal library funding. I made oblique reference to all this in one of my [presentations](#)

Meanwhile, the statutory position of Keeper was occupied by acting arrangements for the next two years before it was finally filled just before the 1992 election

but you will find no reference to this episode (that I could find) in PROV's [authorised history](#). I hope the hard copy Annual Reports survive for that period to give at least a sanitised version of this sorry tale but [digitised copies](#) only seem available from 2007/2008.



Loretta Hambly



Jock Phillips

A similarly obscure episode occurred to me when I was in New Zealand and they tried (ultimately without success) to merge National Archives NZ (as it then was) into a Heritage

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Group along with a [Dictionary of Biography](#), an [Encyclopedia](#), and other odds and sods. There's also very little evidence for this online -

Jock Phillips

... Moving to the [Department of Internal Affairs](#) in 1989, Phillips was Chief Historian (1989–1997 and 2000–2002) and General Manager, Heritage (Acting) (1997–2000) ...

To lose one Archives to Heritage, Mr Hurley, may be regarded as a misfortune – but to lose two looks like carelessness (John Cross)

2023 April 26:

Just caught up with these [foreshadowed changes](#) to the management arrangements for NSW State Records, now submerged, alas, within Museums of History.

The State Library of New South Wales's state librarian and chief executive has signalled he will retire ... Dr John Vallance, who served as principal of the prestigious Sydney Grammar School for almost two decades before the Liberal government appointed him to one of the state's most senior public service positions, told library staff in an email dated 14 February that he would leave "sometime in July or August" to concentrate "on my own work". The email also said his interim position as acting CEO of Museums of History, the new flagship cultural institution created by the Perrottet government, was concluding in June "and there is no plan to extend that" ...

Easy to miss because the article is about something else entirely (viz. SLNSW staff anger over acquisition of Jacinta Price portrait by controversial artist).

You will recall that Vallance was made acting CEO of Museums of History after the resignation of Adam Lindsay (then head of Sydney Living Museums) who was expected to be appointed to the newly created position.

2023 January 16: [Ronald Blythe 1922-2023](#)

He is being [remembered](#) (justly) as a [writer about nature](#) (*Akenfield*). But my favourite is *The Age of Illusion* – not necessarily the best history of the period (Britain between the Wars) but hilarious all the same. I kept it by me through four years at University (along with a few others I turned to for light relief to get me by when studying became too much of a chore).

The chapter (Ch. 8) on the [Rector of Stiffkey](#), pronounced Stewky, is a gem.

... When human conduct reaches a certain point the ordinary laws cannot apply. Where one insists on applying them there is set in motion a comic process in which retribution slips on its own banana-skin, as it were. For Church and State to conspire together so elaborately to exact a penalty from the Rector was a hopeless gesture from the very beginning. That much is plain now ... When the trial opened, on March 29th, Stiffkey was as notorious as Babylon and its incumbent as celebrated as Al Capone ... Nobody present that cold March afternoon dreamed that they would still be present in June. Nobody guessed that the thin line between jurisprudence and entertainment was to become invisible. Nobody mentioned lions ...

The chapters on Bodyline (Ch. 7) and the Jarrow March (Ch. 9) are equally good – the one farcical and the other full of pathos. Having taken *The Age of Illusion* down from the shelf on the occasion of its author's death, I can't help sharing a few more extracts that take me back to when I first read it and a time when I was young.

From Ch.2 (The Salutary Tale of Jix)

... D.O.R.A. was the Defence of the Realm Act, though the rather grand patriotic title and its spinsterly abbreviation seemed to have nothing in common, the one suggesting halberds and the other pins. In 1922 D.O.R.A. was enthroned as the Big Auntie of England. The politicians, the bishops and the sermonizing generals all declared that they regretted having to trouble her, particularly so soon after her untiring and selfless labours during the war to end all wars, but

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they had no option. The country was going to pot ... A new morality campaign was put into action. The forces of reaction swept to the colours. The police were alerted, vigilance committees sprang up and the popular press gave a great rich sigh of pure pleasure as it saw stretching before it a decade of state-subsidized prurience ... The young people listened to all this with amazement. It was like being lectured on the preciousness of one's pearl of greatest price by one's rapist. Very soon they found they were not able to listen to such talk any more, partly because they found it indecent and partly because they were too busy dancing ...



From Ch.7 (Fall from Grace)

... half-way through the match the Australian Board of Cricket Control sent the Committee of the M.C.C. a cable accusing the English team of un-sportsmanlike tactics. If a cable had arrived at Lord's accusing the English Eleven of cannibalism it could scarcely have produced greater horror. When the full nature of the charge was understood England drew back in stunned silence, while *The Times* cleared its correspondence columns of all extraneous matter and waited for the deluge ... Wisden, in the exalted language taken for granted by cricketers, says, 'the plan of the campaign was to reduce Bradman to mortal limits'. To the crowd which watched it looked more as if Bradman and his colleagues were to be reduced to mortal remains ... The elaborately chivalric structure of the game momentarily rocked and looked as if it was about to cave in, and for a fraction of time it seemed that from these sublime ruins there would emerge a knock-about summer pastime which would be so obviously 'not cricket' that another name would have to be invented for it ...



From Ch. 10 (Jarrow)

... Jarrow is unique among all the inhabited places of England in that at two distantly separated dates in its history it became identified with the ultimate light and some of the worst darkness known to the human spirit. In the eighth century it was the fulcrum which Bede used to preserve art, literature and Christianity when Britain and all northern Europe were temporarily

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blacked out by the barbarians. It was the chink in the darkness through which the divine light never ceased to stream ... Jarrow during the Dark Ages had Bede and the first stained-glass windows in Britain; Jarrow during the nineteenth century, when the churches were packed to the doors, had Charles Palmer and the first British armour-plate industry ... To this belching enterprise, from all over the North and from Ireland, came the 'hands', the faceless labour, in their thousands. In 1851 the population of Jarrow was 3,500, and in 1921 it was 35,000. All these people lived in stinking darkness, near sickness and obscene poverty. Yet when the Slump hit Jarrow in the early thirties and Palmer's was liquidated the fearful human dereliction which followed caused people to look back to these days with longing ...

This is a great book.

2023 January 18:

PS ... and if you want a [connection](#) with our world:

He was the reference librarian at Colchester Public Library during his twenties. It was whilst working there that he read extensively and began to enter the literary world, writing essays, poetry and short stories, and where he founded the Colchester Literary Society.

2023 February 2: Strewth!

Just caught up with Phillip Adams' column in the latest *Weekend Australian Magazine*. It's about Australianisms. For those of you who wouldn't touch a Murdoch paper to wrap self-respecting fish in, here are a few samples:

drongo (Australian for fool or dill), *go and stick your head up a dead bear's bum* (thrust your cranium up the sphincter of a deceased bruin), *couldn't pull the skin off custard, a few roos loose in the top paddock, about as useful as a chocolate teapot, wouldn't know a tram was up him until the conductor rang the bell, face like the northern end of a south-bound camel, don't come the raw prawn with me, happy as a bastard on Father's Day, he's been doing that since Jesus played full back for Jerusalem, as flash as a rat with a gold tooth.*

And if you don't think Phillip Adams and Rupert Murdoch is an odd pairing *you need a good kick up the clacker.*

2023 February 28: Systems

"Money," said John Kenneth Galbraith, "is funny stuff." I've never understood it. This post has nothing to do with r/keeping – unless your employer is reliant on public funding, I suppose (and your salary also, to say nothing of my superannuation). It is about systems, specifically about public finances. Ross Gittins has provided an admirably lucid explanation of [the difference between monetary policy and fiscal policy](#) and how the moving finger, having writ, moves on:

If you don't like what's happening to interest rates, remember that ... relying primarily on "monetary policy" – manipulating interest rates – is just a policy choice we and the other advanced economies made in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the arrival of "stagflation" – high unemployment and high inflation at the same time – caused economists to lose faith in the old way of smoothing demand, which was to rely primarily on "fiscal policy" – manipulation of taxation and government spending in the budget ... Whereas back then we were very aware of the weaknesses of fiscal policy, today we're aware of the weaknesses of monetary policy, particularly the way it puts a lot more pain on people with home loans than on the rest of us. How's that fair?

... It's worth remembering that the change of regime was made at a time when Thatcher and other rich-country leaders were under the influence of the US economist Milton Friedman and his "monetarism", which held that inflation was "always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon" and could be controlled by limiting the growth in the supply of money. It took some years of failure before governments and central banks realised both ideas were wrong.

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They switched back to the older and less exciting notion that increasing interest rates, by reducing demand, would eventually reduce inflation. There was no magic, painless way to do it.

... The sad truth is that measures to strengthen demand by cutting interest rates, or cutting taxes and increasing government spending, are always popular with voters, whereas measures to weaken demand by raising interest rates, or raising taxes and cutting government spending, are always unpopular ... using monetary policy to get to the rest of us indirectly via enormous pressure on the third of households with mortgages shares the burden in a way that's arbitrary and unfair. What's more, it's not very effective. Because such a small proportion of the population is directly affected, the increase in interest rates has to be that much bigger to achieve the desired restraint in overall consumer spending.

But if the economic managers used a temporary percentage increase in income tax, or the GST, to discourage spending, this would directly affect almost all households. It would be fairer and more effective because the increase could be much smaller ... Another possibility is Keynes' idea of using a temporary rate of compulsory saving – collected by the tax office – to reduce spending when required, without imposing any lasting cost on households ...

2023 April 12:

The Lamington

Ross Gittins has another piece about economics that admirably illustrates the glorious complexity in the way that systems work – the intricate inter-relations between the component parts, not unlike railway signalling systems, with many illuminating parallels for those interested in organisational behaviour. [This time also pertinent to our personal finances and not just the nation's].

... This is a story about the misleadingly named Low and Middle Income Tax Offset, known to tax aficionados as “the LAMIngTOn”. It began life as stage one of the three-stage income tax cuts announced in the budget of May 2018, to take effect over seven years. The previous government kept changing the amount of the offset – a kind of tax refund – over the years ... in last year's pre-election budget, it was decided to increase it by \$420 to “up to” \$1500 a year ... This meant more than 10 million taxpayers – almost 70 per cent of the total – got a rebate on top of any other refund they were entitled to ... If it were to be continued for another financial year, a decision had to be made. Morrison and Frydenberg's last budget contained no such decision ... Decisions not to do things don't have to be announced, and this one wasn't ... You really had to be in the know to realise that this constituted a decision to *increase* the tax 10 million people would pay in 2022-23, by *up to* \$1500 a throw

... the last-ever lamington, for 2021-22, was served up between July and October last year ... the only way many lamington eaters will get a hint that they paid a lot more tax in the year to June 2023 is when, some time after July, they notice that their refund cheque is a lot smaller than last year's and wonder why ... I don't disagree with the two-party cartel's decision to be rid of the lamington. It was a stupid way to cut tax, born of creative accounting. But when they tacitly collude to conceal [as] they've done, it's supposed to be the media's job to point it out ...

I'm no economist, but I would have thought that, in view of his earlier strictures about handling inflation by over-reliance on interest rates, he'd be in favour of an effective tax increase at this time that would “directly affect almost all households [and] be fairer and more effective because the increase could be much smaller”.

2023 March 3: Roman Recordkeeping

I don't get *A&M* any more so I can't be sure if this title has been noted in the book review columns, If not, some may be interested

Paul Chrystal, *Roman Record Keeping and Communications* (2017)

The assumption is that most of what we know about the Romans and their history comes from Roman and Greek historians ... the reality is that there are many other primary sources which combine to give us the composite picture we have today of the Romans and their world ... they developed and perfected records and record-keeping and other methods

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of information storage and communication. It is the Roman preoccupation with record keeping and dissemination that informs the picture we have today of Roman civilisation ...

I've made the link to the Booktopia site, but most other vendors say it is out of print and unobtainable. I think it was Andrew Waugh some years ago who warned that some sites allow you to order even when they are unable to supply. Can't remember if Booktopia was one.

<<[Andrew Waugh: For those interested, it seems relatively easy to obtain through ABE... It's always worth checking the web sites of the sellers directly. Note the prices are in US dollars. My experience is that shipping from the UK is relatively good \(about 2 weeks\), but shipping from the US is horrifically slow and expensive.](#)>>

2023 March 7: The edge of memory

Patrick Nunn *The edge of memory: ancient stories, oral tradition and the post-glacial world* (2018)

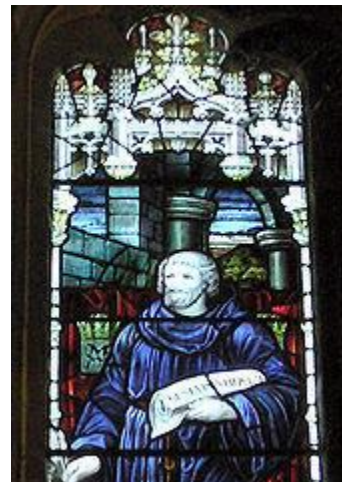
I bought this a year or so ago and laid it aside unread (as you do). Picked it up again the other day and leafed through it. The central thesis (indeed practically the only thesis) is: ... *recent research has demonstrated with a high degree of plausibility that humans can pass on memories for several thousand years without the assistance of literacy ...* (p.205). There wasn't, it seemed to me, much forensic examination of the particular memories described (many of them Australian) to support this general idea. But I didn't do a page-by-page examination – when you've read the same point made over and over, you tend to lose interest. Nor could I find much comparing oral and written accounts of the same phenomena (reasonable enough since most of the oral examples have no written accounts to compare them with). All this took me back (as many things do now that I'm old) to a book I read with great enjoyment many, many years ago -

Duncan Grinnell-Milne *The killing of William Rufus: an investigation in the New Forest* (1968)

It explores the circumstances of the King's death and compares written and oral traditions, including the tale that the central tower of Winchester Cathedral collapsed just 12 months after the King's body was buried there "as a sign of divine displeasure". As the monkish chronicler, William of Malmsbury, wryly remarked: *it would have collapsed in any case, even had he not been buried there, because it was badly built*. One theme is the authenticity of the Rufus Stone:



Rufus Stone



William of Malmsbury

It is hard to understand how anyone can still manage to swallow whole that ancient piece of political propaganda which Cobbett, in his *Rural Rides*, was the first to expose and which Wise so expertly contradicted ... "Many populous towns and villages and thirty-six parish

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churches destroyed and consumed by fire”, so runs a medieval account frequently quoted ... to which Orderic Vitalis added “sixty parishes” laid waste ... Odd ... that the contemporary Anglo-Saxon chronicler, who knew the Conqueror personally and never spared him when it came to listing his evil actions – or those of his son, Rufus, for that matter – does not once refer to any supposed devastation in the area of the New Forest ... one may search the scanty records from long before the afforestation decree of 1079 to the Domesday survey of 1086 and never find a whisper concerning those legendary population centres ... The truth is that they never existed ... for the good reason that the people to fill them did not exist. The soil proves that, because ... the soil of the New Forest ... is and always has been as unproductive as any in all the south of England ...

Does the Rufus Stone really mark the site of the King’s death, within a few feet either way? Can it be *proved*, with a degree of certainty demanded by historians? ... First, the documentary evidence. Of this there is very little ... it can be regarded as certain ... that the King was [not] killed ... in any other of the numerous forests of southern England, as is sometimes suggested ... and, second, that because of the time-factor ... the place where he was killed lay not more than twenty miles from Winchester ... If thereafter the early chroniclers fail to point to the exact spot it is almost certainly because, even if they knew it, they did not know how to identify it ... When it comes to a pinpoint location ... it has to be admitted that there is no early documentary evidence whatever. Nothing can be found other than oral tradition ...

... This is no ordinary tradition ... it has the strength of simplicity ... it states, clearly and as a fact, that the Rufus Stone marks the spot where stood a certain oak-tree ... It goes without saying that those who handed down this tradition ... were men of the Forest, as unchanging as their native wilderness ... just how many men, in the Malwood Walk succession, would be required to cover the considerable distance of eight centuries? ... the men in the chain were not required to pass the message down to the 20th century, but only to the 18th, to the year 1745 when the Stone was set up in place of the ancient oak ... the probability [is] of an oral tradition ... passing on ... from man to youth ... a lad who, grown to manhood, would in turn pass on his lore to the next boy-apprentice ... From sixty years to sixty years across the centuries, from an eye-witness surviving into the later years of the 12th to a young man in the early years of the 18th century would require rather more than ten men. Say ten men and a boy ...

... [And] there must have been many more than one line of ten men ... from all the men of the Walk ... who, in the evening of August 2nd 1100, saw the King’s body at their feet, there may well have come a dozen lines of men to receive and to pass on the simple statement if fact: ... that here had occurred the one notable event in English history of which they had personal knowledge ...

Descriptions of archives cannot rely merely on the internal evidence of the records. You have to go to external sources: official publications, legislation, directories, etc. but also to contemporary accounts (e.g. diaries, newspapers) and even later histories. Judging the authenticity and reliability of these sources is always an issue. When we were registering government functions at PROV back in the 1980s, we were frequently stumped for information (especially as the description approached recent times and the sources became fewer and the noble clarity of 19th century administrative prose degenerated into self-serving sludge which was seldom informative and often incomprehensible). We had to find oral testimony from officials and make a determination about how much weight to give it and how to source it.

<<**Chris Gousmett: The story of the death of William Rufus is central to the Tudor mystery novel by C J Sansom, Heartstone. An interesting take on the story and the uncertainty of the location is covered.**>>

2023 May 10: MHR – a small victory cont’d

Once, there was bickering over the My Health Record. Now, [increased funding for it in the Budget](#) scarcely seems to raise an eyebrow.

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- A modernisation of My Health Record that will create a new national repository to share patient data across "all health care settings" \$429 million (2023-24 to 2025-26)

A good example of how, once something that is controversial is established, it becomes part of the furniture.

2023 May 19: [Authenticity cont'd](#)

The National Gallery of Australia has commissioned [an independent review](#) of an upcoming exhibition following allegations that non-Indigenous arts workers contributed to works by Aboriginal artists. An [investigation](#) published by the Australian newspaper alleged that white workers had interfered in the making of black art in APY Art Centre Collective studios. Following the allegations, the National Gallery of Australia said it would review the provenance, authorship and the extent of the "hand of assistance" of artworks in a major exhibition featuring work from the APYACC ... In a statement, the APYACC strenuously denied that any of their artists were compromised ... Beverly Knight, the director of Alcaston Gallery, said she "was shocked by the level of assistance" but stood by the artist ... "I have been in hundreds of studios all over the world with assistants even doing all the work under direction," she said ... The Art Gallery of South Australia ... said they would not be conducting a review into the provenance of the collective's work ... The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia also said it stands by the works in its collection, which have been done by 12 artists in the collective ... Claire Summers, the executive director of the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation, said she was concerned by the allegations but was also worried about other issues in the industry. She said artists were being used by "unethical actors" ...

JOURNALIST: ... [Can I ask you about your comments](#) in *The Australian* today regarding the APY Centre Collective and the calls from the NT Arts Minister calling their actions cultural theft and corruption. You've indicated you're open to an investigation. What are you proposing please?

BURKE: ... *The National Gallery of Australia has commissioned a review ... When that comes down, we'll have more facts than we have at our disposal at the moment ... I won't be telling First Nations artists whether or not they are allowed to be assisted ... and I won't be telling any creators what they can and can't create ... What matters is to make sure that people have creative control ... I certainly have no intention of implying a standard and set of rules around First Nations artists that are not applied to any other artists in the world or throughout history.*

According to [reporting](#) in last *Weekend Australian* (13-14 May), p.19 "Ministers canvass action over pain of an industry's art break", there has been growing confusion and concern over the matter.

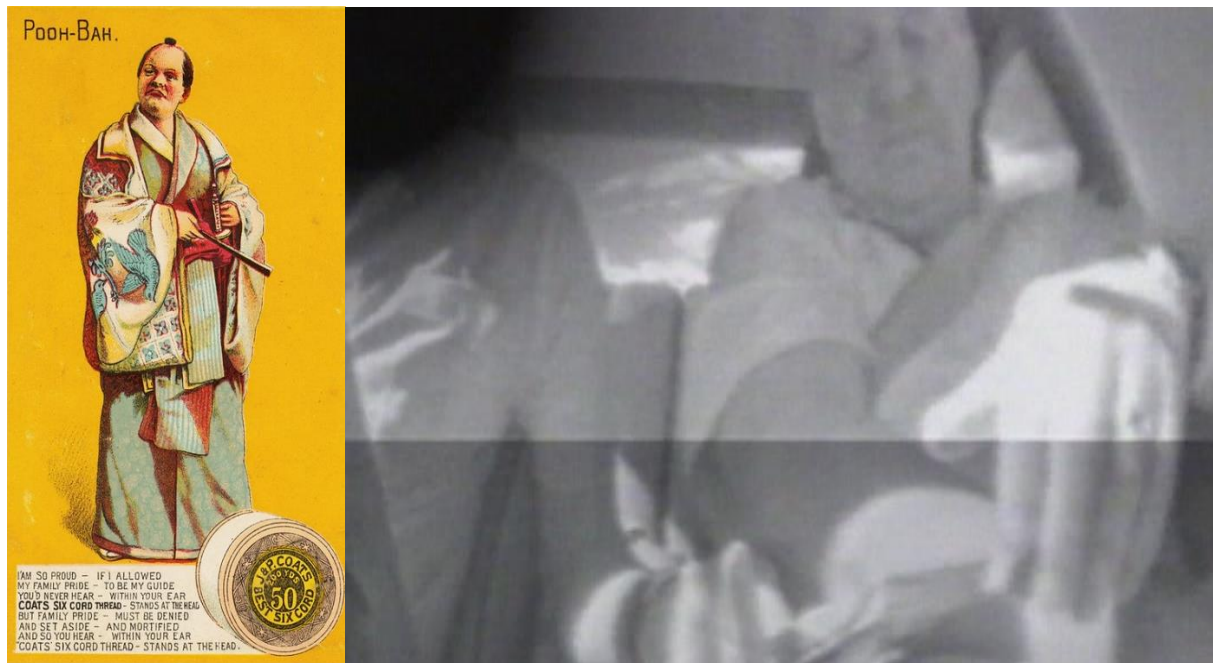
The [Pooh-Bah Defence](#) ([merely corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative](#)):

APYACC has backed and filled, initially denying the charges and, when confronted by incontrovertible evidence, went from saying White staff "never" painted on the canvasses and there was "no intervention" to "background wash". Many artists (e.g. Michelangelo, Rubens) have used assistants. Galleries often distinguish between "School of..." and "Work of ..." (admitting involvement by acolytes but seldom acknowledging it in the descriptions). This is, presumably, what Burke means by "rules ...that are not applied to any other artists in the world or throughout history."

The [Bad Apple Defence](#): ([The bad apples metaphor originated as a warning of the corrupting influence of one corrupt or sinful person on a group: that "one bad apple can spoil the barrel". Over time the concept has been used to describe the opposite situation, where "a few bad apples" should not be seen as representative of the rest of their group. This latter version is often used in the context of police misconduct](#)):

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It seems, *pace* Burke, that Aboriginal art is regarded as being different by many, not least by Aborigines themselves – “*The practices that allegedly took place in the APYACC’s studios ... are not common in the sector, or acceptable*” ... “*This is all about the APY ... and its management – not the sector. There is nothing similar anywhere else. It is essentially a publicly funded commercial gallery – and there’s something rotten about it*”



And the impact has been felt across the sector – “[*It has*] gone off a like a nuclear explosion in the industry” ... “*This is the most anticipated story of the decade*” ... “*The revelations stopped me (for the time being) going ahead with the purchase of an Aboriginal artwork, as I need to be assured about authenticity*” ... “*I usually sell about half ... before a show opens. This time I haven’t sold any. I’m absolutely horrified*” ... “*weekend sales had dropped from a high of \$33,000 ... to a low of \$500*” ... “*These stories are hurting us – our artists, our families, our future*” ... “*Those who have been most impacted ... need to be able to share their experiences and this can only happen in a controlled, transparent, and safe environment.*”

Predictably, it is seen (by some) as being merely about cultural (mis)appropriation-
NT Arts Minister Chansey Paech described white people painting on Indigenous canvasses as “corruption” and “cultural theft”.

Well, for us (I would hope) this story is not so much about cultural appropriation as about validity. What it shows (to me) is that corrupting the source cuts two ways. First, it undermines faith in the artefact itself, when you can no longer trust that the record is genuine, it can no longer serve its primary purpose as evidence of fact. Second, it annihilates the character of the sentinel, when the watchman is no longer accepted as a guarantor of authenticity then the recordkeeper’s troth is worthless.

When you cease to uphold Truth, anything may be a Lie.

We understand that how we describe and present the records can alter their meaning as powerfully as any act of destruction or concealment. But how if we believe that records have no meaning apart from our description and presentation? Our choice (and, based on that, our reputation as sentinels) seems to lie in deciding what we believe the purpose of recordkeeping to be

- discovering, honouring, and protecting their meaning precedent (their original meaning if you like) or
- applying an understanding consequent upon and derived from our interpretation of that meaning.

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... there has been an explosion of efforts to examine the ways in which records and archives serve as tools for both oppression and liberation ... we broadly define critical archival studies as those approaches that (1) explain what is unjust with the current state of archival research and practice, (2) posit practical goals for how such research and practice can and should change, and/or (3) provide the norms for such critique. In this way, critical archival studies, like critical theory, is emancipatory in nature, with the ultimate goal of transforming archival practice and society writ large ... critical theory gives us an analysis of power in all its forms that is crucial to understanding the context of record creation, of archival functions, of the formation of archival institutions, of archival outreach and use and advocacy, of who becomes archivists and how and why, and of how we define and teach and practice core concepts ... As archivists and archival studies scholars, we can intervene and trouble and even sabotage some of the key ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical theory. This intervention could simultaneously explain and critique the core tenets of archival studies – notions of record, of provenance, of value, of representation, to name a few – that takes a long view of how potential evidence gets transmitted across space and time ...

Truth may well lie in between, but there is every difference in the world between pursuing Truth and pursuing an Agenda. There are two abiding questions:

1. Without a regard for and dedication to authenticity (whatever that implies) how can we balance what a record means and what it says?
2. How can we separate making and keeping “good” records in a technical sense from the uses to which they are put?

We cannot comfortably design a better system for documenting the number of heads being processed through the gas chambers as if good recordkeeping (in a technical sense) can be divorced from the uses to which it is put.

2023 June 3: Miss Marple – a critical thinker

”It's very dangerous to believe people, I haven't for years.”

– Agatha Christie, *Sleeping Murder*

We kept our word. Shame about the fly screens.

After the Minns government won the New South Wales election, Norrie May-Welby finally invested in a mod con to her home that would seem humdrum to most: she bought new fly screens. This, she thought, was the end of seven years spent waiting for the day she would be relocated from her home at Waterloo South public housing estate. But now, May-Welby is one of more than 3,000 residents awaiting answers after a string of conflicting Labor messages has left them confused about the future of the estate. “They told us they would protect our homes ... I thought OK I can breathe a sigh of relief; I can throw out my packing boxes; I spent \$500 on new fly screens for the side of my house. “What a waste of money that’s turned out to be.” Residents say they feel misled by Labor ahead of the election, and in limbo as they await news of the estate’s future ...

[Housing Minister] Jackson has assured residents the redeveloped estate will remain in government hands, with a higher proportion of social and affordable housing than the previous Coalition’ government’s privatisation plan. But tenants say they are frustrated and confused because Labor’s pre-election commitments led them to believe that ending privatisation meant the site would no longer be redeveloped ... May-Welby said she felt duped by a letter and texts tenants got from Ron Hoenig, the state MP for Heffron, in the lead-up to the election urging tenants to send the Liberal party a message – “Hands off Waterloo” – by voting Labor ... Minns has maintained the government’s plan to push ahead with the redevelopment is not privatisation and in line with its election policies. “They seem to be trying to say it is not privatisation because it’s only partial privatisation,” May-Welby said. “For them to equivocate and say that’s not privatisation, that’s outrageous.”

In March, the City of Sydney councillor Linda Scott posted “a huge announcement” to her Facebook account: that Labor would end the sale of public housing. “If you live in public housing,

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Labor will protect your home,” Scott, a Labor party councillor, wrote. “Your home will not be sold, and you will not be relocated.” ...

Geoff Turnbull, the spokesperson for community group REDWatch, said the problem was the government was “putting out these one liners” to tenants without explanation. “I think what happened is they were quite happy to be ambiguous and for people to make from that messaging what they wanted to,” Turnbull said. “Understandably those who read those pre-election messages are pissed off and in part because there’s all of a sudden this wiggle room around when it is a sale and when it is not.”

2023 June 3: [Documenting Australian Society](#) cont’d

A Saturday reflection

Because I am out of things these days, I must be forgiven if I draw attention from time to time to things everybody already knows about anyway. In 2014, I referred to SNAC ([Social Networks and Archival Contexts](#)) in my [presentation](#) to ASA/ARANZ Conference in Christchurch (Figure Ten). A little later a friend asked me if I’d ever heard of it. Yes, I said stuffily, *and I approved of it*. And she had been in that audience!!! So much for the imperishability of authorship.

SNAC is collaborative, open-ended, and its not one of those projects people have to fret over until it is top-heavy and collapses. It does what it can, and does it very well.

[It] is a free, online resource that helps users discover biographical and historical information about persons, families, and organizations that created or are documented in historical resources (primary source documents) and their connections to one another. Users can locate archival collections and related resources held at cultural heritage institutions around the world. **SNAC is an international cooperative** including, but not limited to, archives, libraries, and museums, that is working to build a corpus of reliable descriptions of people, families, and organizations that link to and provide a contextual understanding of historical records. A complete list of SNAC Cooperative members can be found [here](#).

The list of members includes mostly research collections but also Archives nationales de France, Arquivo Nacio al, Brasil, Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, New York Public Library, Utah State Archives. Nothing from Asia, the Pacific, or Australasia that I could see. It may be to "help users" but it is compiled by describers and could obviously also be useful for our work.

Having despaired of anyone showing interest in the [Modest Proposal](#) (let alone taking me up on it) I would just like to say that SNAC could, in my view, be used to achieve many of its purposes. It seems to me that it would also be a useful framework tool in the hands of those folks I hear about periodically from over the horizon nattering about [Documenting Australian Society](#). The great thing about SNAC is (so far as I can see) that participation **wouldn’t** need meetings, plans, collaboration, sponsorship, or direction (all those things that seem to stand in the way of getting anything done and things I tried to wring out of the *Modest Proposal*). If they’d have us, some of us, even one of us, of could just sign up and get things going – it would only take one to kick it off. **No one has to decide what the framework will be and, as it grows, a network of relationships is built up.**

Inauguration rather than innovation for once. We have, of course, online resources already such as ADB but this could be a big, juicy one for us all to help build as well as use - one that would also include data on corporations and could include individuals beneath ADB's notice. It should be of interest (if it isn't already) at least to those of us with a taste for that sort of thing. Please explore.

2023 August 1: Another resource that some archivists may not be aware of is [VIAF](#) (Virtual International Authority File). Well-known to librarians et al.

2023 June 6: [Toxic assets yet again cont'd](#)

From SMH:

The [ghost of Leopold II](#) still looms large over [Brussels] ... parks, avenues and buildings bear either Leopold's name or honour the generals he sent to far off lands as part of his ambitious plans for his kingdom and its modest capital ... [he] took control of the Congo during the 19th-century scramble for Africa. His ruthless and bloody plundering in the region has ever since left a stain on Belgium's reputation. Until a sharper focus over the past two decades, many Belgians had remained ignorant of their country's harsh colonial rule over several African nations ... Slave labour was used to harvest products including rubber. The proceeds laid the foundation for the modern-era prosperity of Belgium ... But now Brussels, having endured mass protests as part of the Black Lives Matter movement three years ago, is intent on correcting and contextualising its history as the government embarks on a world-first program to decolonise its public spaces ... "The whole idea of this is let's recognise the past, let's embrace it and don't fall into the trap of individually blaming citizens. It's a collective responsibility of the past. And so, we have collectively to recognise it as a society."

Belgium only began to seriously confront Leopold's regime after the publication in 1998 of Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* ... Hochschild shocked the world with the horrific figure of 10 million Congolese dead in a "forgotten holocaust" – a figure some historians continue to dispute. Early reports of the horrors prompted the emergence in the 1900s of the world's first international human rights campaign. Among those to join the campaign was Mark Twain [and] also led Joseph Conrad to set *Heart of Darkness* there ... In April 2019, the Belgium government apologised for the kidnapping, segregation, deportation and forced adoption of thousands of children born to biracial couples during its colonial rule. Last year King Philippe of Belgium expressed his "deepest regrets" ... but the royals remain split and have ruled out reparations. The king's younger brother, Prince Laurent, has refused to concede that any blame should be attached ...

A working group that began efforts in 2020 ... has proposed universal guidelines that can be adopted by other cities, amid the fallout in the US over statues of Confederate generals and in the UK over statues of slave traders ... Included in the final report on the issue were plans for King Leopold in the Place du Trone ... The group suggested several options, including concealing the statue with a structure that provides information on Belgium's colonial history, and removing the figure entirely and storing it in a depot full of similar symbols. A more radical solution suggested it could be melted down and re-forged as a memorial to victims of colonialism ... Another artwork, a bust of Lieutenant-General Emile Storms, was quietly removed from a park last year in the city's Square de Meeus under the pretext of restoring the public gardens. It will return to public display but not in its original place or state. Storms, a soldier, explorer and official for the Congo Free State, is notorious for the killing of Lusinga Iwa Ng'ombe, a Congolese chief who was robbed, murdered and beheaded by the colonial general in 1884. His skull was taken as a personal trophy.

Belgium has an estimated 4500 statues, street names or other public reminders of the colonial era. Removing them all would be an enormous task, but [Pascal Smet, Minister for Culture & Heritage] says it would also risk wiping out the past when the country should instead be engaging with it. "If you throw them away then you throw history away. It is important, at least for me, that you contextualise history," ... Smet's plan does not recommend tearing down all statues ... Some monuments could be removed to museums or a statue park, similar to existing "graveyards" of Soviet monuments in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, and in Tallinn in Estonia. Other monuments could be renamed or put in context with information plaques ... [Georgine] Dibua Mbombo, who runs Bakushinta, a group dedicated to promoting Congolese culture in Belgium ... told local reporters that

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agreeing on how to contextualise works that glorify a colonial past was not simple, and that putting up information panels or QR codes was not a solution because she was unconvinced that people read them ...

2023 June 14: “Palace Letters” repercussions: equality, accountability, history, transparency cont’d

Clinton’s Socks

A 2012 court case denying access to White House audiotapes kept in former President Bill Clinton’s sock drawer after he left office could help the Trump legal team in its battle to retrieve records that the [FBI](#) seized from Mar-a-Lago this month. The 10-year-old court ruling, issued by U.S. District Court Judge Amy Berman Jackson, rejected arguments by a conservative watchdog group that sought access to dozens of tapes recorded by Mr. Clinton and historian Taylor Branch during his administration. Judge Jackson ruled that the tapes belonged to Mr. Clinton, even though the discussions included a broad range of presidential matters. The court ruled that the National Archives and Records Administration had no power to “seize control of them” because Mr. Clinton had used his authority under the Presidential Records Act to declare the recordings part of his personal records.

When we were discussing the “Palace Letters” on this List, no one (so far as I can recall) referred to this US case dealing with the status of official records taken by former office-holders. I didn’t even know about it. Our courts (ultimately) determined that letters between G-G Kerr and the Palace were “Commonwealth records”. The Socks Case went the other way.

Notice one significant difference – the Palace Letters were already in NAA’s custody (deposited there by Kerr, or at any rate by the Official Secretary, in the belief that Kerr retained access control) but Clinton’s recordings weren’t under NARA’s control. The point of the Socks Case was to obtain a court order bringing about a “return” of the tapes and submission to archives law. The Australian judges were aching to determine that the Palace Letters were official but were compelled, by the wording of the *Archives Act*, to decide on “ownership” of material in NAA’s custody. The case did not touch on the application of archives access law to official estrays outside custody of NAA or a “Commonwealth institution” - bearing in mind that the *Archives Act* specifically excludes material held by National Library or AWM from the access provisions.

On 3 Jan., 2021, Michael touched on the implications of the Palace Letters. Surely one such implication is that the precedent applies only to material in NAA’s custody and that the intentions of the original drafting (intended to give personal depositors and unfettered discretion to control access) are well and truly blasted. This original drafting was subverted by changes to the final Bill to exclude “Commonwealth records” from that discretion – thereby vitiating the whole purpose of the provision (as originally drafted) and giving Hocking a cause of action.

But how if the estrays go not to NAA but into some other custodial institution (e.g. the Mitchell Library)? They would then be official estrays out of official custody and the Palace Letters judgement, against NAA, would have no effect. It would then be a matter of NAA’s powers to recover them but, irony of ironies, NAA has virtually no powers to recover official estrays. We deliberately avoided drafting such powers on the argument partly on the difficulties of doing so and preferring a policy of encouraging voluntary donation in preference to compulsion. One inducement to depositors was to leave them in control over access. Then that whole policy was trashed by the last-minute amendment withholding from depositors control over access to Commonwealth records amongst material in their hands. This opened the whole question to litigation (which the original drafting was intended to avoid).

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The result is that intending personal depositors (i.e. intending depositors of official estrays) who do not wish to surrender access control have simply to deposit them anywhere else except NAA (indeed, are almost compelled by the faulty drafting to do so) without much fear of having to face legal action of the kind now being faced by Trump. Unlike some of the State Archives, I believe NAA does not seek return of estrays under legal compulsion. I am open to correction on this and they may, for all I know, seek to do by persuasion. It would be interesting to see the outcome here of legal action to compel return of Commonwealth official estrays for the purpose of subjecting them to access law.

PS. The Commonwealth has from time to time sought to wrest control over official estrays using legislation other than the *Archives Act* but (to the best of my recollection) with mixed results.

2023 June 15:

<<Adrian Cunningham: My reading of the High Court's majority judgement in the palace letters case is that the Court decided that the records were the property of the Commonwealth because they were always managed/stored by the official Office of the GG, until they were then transferred to the NAA's custody - and, as such, remained the property of the Commonwealth. At no time were they ever in the personal possession of John Kerr ... The key takeaway for me is that the core precedent established by the Court ruling is not that all vice-regal letters are Commonwealth records ... rather that all records continuously managed, stored and controlled by an official office of the Commonwealth (as opposed to an individual person) are Commonwealth records. Custody by the NAA appears to be regarded as part of this continuum of official ownership ... I think Chris is probably right though that a transfer of records to a State Library or other non-Commonwealth institution could constitute a transfer of ownership. But a court might also rule such a transfer to have been illegal - in the absence of any case law all we can do is speculate ... So, the High Court ruling, while helpful in providing some clarity in some limited circumstances, still leaves us guessing about the true legal status of most of the instances of 'official' records being treated as the personal property of former office holders ... Archives Act muddies the waters in a very unhelpful manner. Just change the Act!>>

<<Rather than waiting for years for more expensive and rancorous court cases to provide more clarity that may or may no ever come, wouldn't it be easier to simply change the Archives Act to get rid of the ownership-based definition of Commonwealth Record?>>

No question.

Other jurisdictions have provisions (of one sort or another) for replevin (of one kind or another). Obviously, consideration was given to including such provisions in the *Archives Bill*. The argument raised in opposition was that the Commonwealth (unlike the States) is constitutionally bound to acquire property “on just terms” – cf. *The Castle*. To proceed to the recovery of estrays, we would have to first establish that the material was in fact Commonwealth property. Otherwise compensation would have to be paid “on just terms”, at least for that portion of a body of estrays that could not be proven to be Commonwealth property.

To settle the issue, if ownership was disputed in a particular case, it would become necessary to establish (to be able to establish during litigation if the claim was resisted) whose property the estrays are. That would get us back to the point where we started, viz. to a property test.

To say nothing of the difficulty of establishing ownership in court over material whose provenance and chain of custody was uncertain. The history of the Palace Letters was well known and that matter had to go all the way to the High Court for settlement. The chain of

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custody with many estrays is unclear and often betrays evidence of such carelessness on the part of the Administration that a court might very well rule that they had been abandoned (bad “vibe”).

So, the practical benefits of not using a property test, it was argued, would be negligible.

... and now an example that is unfolding on this very day of letters written to a former PM concerning public business that are being deposited in the National Museum not NAA. Maybe official estrays, maybe not. That’s the trouble: even when property rights are not in dispute, the question of what is official and what is personal remains doubtful. Over several years (as I’ve explained before) it was part of my job to lay out for eminent nobodies examples to illustrate the difficulty. One and all, they decided which was which. Trouble is that no two of them ever decided the same way. Wonder who controls access in this case?

<<Adrian Cunningham: If the property based definition of Commonwealth record were replaced with the kind of definition used elsewhere for public records, then from time to time someone might opt to say, ‘actually I believe that I own that thing that appears to fit the definition of Commonwealth Record and if you want to take it from me you will have to give me fair compensation for seizing my property’. If and when that happens, then some legal process would be required to determine ownership and, where necessary, appropriate compensation. I strongly suspect, however, that such instances would be extremely rare and may in fact never happen ... Clearly, it is better to say from the outset that any record created in the course of official business is a public record - thus removing doubts over the overwhelming majority of cases and saying that any questions of ownership that may arise over the remaining 0.0001% of cases can be resolved later if and when they arise ... Nothing I have ever heard or read makes me want to change my opinion that the property based definition of Commonwealth record is a very bad thing that should be ditched as soon as possible. The fact that it has stood for 40 years is 40 years too long, in my opinion. >>

2023 June 17:

<<the fear of hypothetical and extremely unlikely challenges on the property question seems to me to be a poor justification for a provision in the Archives Act that has caused so many other real and non-hypothetical problems>>

It is poor drafting etiquette to place before Parliament a Bill known to be in violation of the Constitution and just hope no one will notice. Not unheard of, of course, viz. banking nationalisation and Communist Party dissolution.

<<and extremely unlikely challenges>>

On a less elevated plane, a successful challenge to poorly drafted replevin provisions only needs to happen the first time. After that, they would be un-usable and of no practical use

<<Adrian Cunningham: Would it really be unconstitutional to have a law that said that any record created by a Commonwealth employee or office holder in the course of performing official duties is a Commonwealth record and the property of the Commonwealth?? It may not be possible to apply such a provision retrospectively, but at least if we stopped the problem occurring in the future that would be a very good thing. Alternatively, could such a provision be included in oaths of office when people are appointed and in Commonwealth employment contracts?>>

<<Would it really be unconstitutional to have a law that said that any record created by a Commonwealth employee or office holder in the course of performing official duties is a Commonwealth record and the property of the Commonwealth??>>

Possibly not.

"Commonwealth record" means:

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- (a) a [record](#) that is the property of the Commonwealth or of a [Commonwealth institution](#);
or
(b) a [record](#) that is to be deemed to be a [Commonwealth record](#) by virtue of a regulation under [subsection](#) (6) or by virtue of [section 22](#);
but does not include a [record](#) that is [exempt material](#).

"record" means a document, or an [object](#), in any form (including any electronic form) that is, or has been, kept by reason of:

- (a) any information or matter that it contains or that can be obtained from it; or
(b) its connection with any event, [person](#), circumstance or thing.

Note: For the [definition](#) of **document**, see [section 2B](#) of the [Acts Interpretation Act 1901](#).

The idea of "official record" is foreign to the *Archives Act*. It would have to be introduced. You would first have to develop a new definition of official record or a replacement definition for Commonwealth record: e.g. "official record of the Commonwealth". Next, you would have to draft provisions for dealings in official records of the Commonwealth. You couldn't easily just substitute the new definition for the old throughout because most of those provisions are drafted to apply to dealings between NAA and C'wealth agencies. Any Commonwealth record (as already defined) that is in the possession and under the control of the C'wealth or a C'wealth institution would be subject to the existing provisions of the Act anyway so not much would change - but new provisions or revised provisions would be needed for official records in custody that weren't C'wealth property (see below). And another whole new set of provisions would need to be drafted to cover handling of official records out of custody.

"Official records" in custody

So, what additional provisions would you wish to have governing official records in custody that are not deemed as property ... etc. that you do not already have? This is essentially the issue that underlay the Palace Letters Case though it was never made explicit owing to the peculiarities of the existing definition. Such provisions applying to "official records" that are not indisputably the property of the Commonwealth may well run foul of the just terms provisions in the Constitution. Asserting control over any material (including records) is in essence asserting the benefit of ownership - property rights under another name. You can't just define away ownership rights w/o either being able to establish ownership (property) or else providing for compensation (as provided for in the Constitution). This would be complicated and give rise to disputation if the *Archives Act* included provisions recognising and providing for acquisition of privately owned "official records" in C'wealth custody. Unavoidably, you'd end up disputing the very property rights you are anxious to annihilate as well as legitimising the idea of private property in C'wealth custody (and needing to define the circumstances in which that could arise). Also giving such material a market value, tax status, etc. and providing an inducement to litigate. I can't see an objection to your suggestion but you'd have to check with the constitutional lawyers on that. I'm not sure, however, that you'd be very much better off because resistance to NAA's exercise of ownership rights over official records that are not also C'wealth property could still be based on the claim of property acquisition w/o regard to just terms. No mere archives law can trump the Constitution.

Official records" out of custody – estrays/replevin

The Palace Letters, as I understand it, had never been out of official custody. So replevin was never the issue. The circumstances in which official records may be found out of official custody are of endless variation ranging from theft, espionage, et al to carelessness on the part of the C'wealth itself. To turn your argument about infrequent application on its head, my understanding is that the State Archives which have them use such powers sparingly and usually quietly. I've no idea how often they are resisted. In Victoria, at least in my time, the power of compulsory acquisition allowed PROV to impose limitations on

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trade in prescribed records (but did not forbid such trading) and allowed PROV to acquire the records at agreed compensation during any subsequent transfer of ownership (or not, until such time as it intervened at its pleasure during any subsequent trade to acquire the records at what would effectively be market value). Again, we would need to consult the lawyers about the feasibility of such provisions in the C'wealth Act. Be that as it may, the policy course chosen in the original Bill was persuasion rather than compulsion.

PS. Just so I'm clear, I'm not a fan of the property test. I hate it. Always have. But I accept (unhappily) the difficulty of the alternative you propose.

**<<most of those provisions are drafted to apply to dealings
between NAA and C'wealth agencies>>**

PPS I should, of course, have said “between NAA and C'wealth agencies and the public”. Reverting to Michael's original post and the implications for “equality, accountability, history, transparency”, the consequences of establishing the concept of “official records” in the *Archives Act* would have to include consideration of the public's right to see NAA take effective control over such materials out of custody (regardless of ownership and even if they had already been placed with another collection) at least in order to enforce the public's access rights under the Act as well as (what would then be NAA's job) to satisfy the public's concern in protecting official records out of custody in the interests of equality, accountability, etc. How NAA could be empowered to pursue official estrays out of custody for this purpose (not necessarily by taking possession since the existing access provisions apply regardless of where C'wealth records are housed) but by taking control over access arrangements at least would be a biggie. Bearing in mind that archival access is not just about who gets to see what but also about restricting access where necessary (e.g. security, privacy, cultural sensitivity, etc.) according to C'wealth law and policy and subject to appeal through C'wealth tribunals. The consequences of NAA assuming access control over "official records" deposited in (say) the Mitchell Library under open access arrangements agreed with a depositor and then closing them under C'wealth access policy (or, for that matter, enforcing open access to the official records in violation of such agreements where non-disclosure had been agreed with the depositor) would, I suppose, be newsworthy.

The alternative would be to exclude official records out of custody from the access provisions - which would make a lot of this debate pointless. But that would, in fact, bring us back close to the original drafting - viz. letting the donors decide and what a bitter irony that would be.

2023 June 18:

<<Andrew Waugh: TBH, I think the 'property' definition of records is simply an instance of the tail wagging the dog. You're tying yourself in knots to deal with a situation that, given the vast number of Commonwealth records, is actually quite rare. What would be wrong with:

- **Defining Commonwealth records along the lines suggested by Adrian**
- **Using this definition to define the duties of public officers (and agencies) in creating, managing, and retaining public records**
- **Using this definition to define the duties and powers of the NAA**
- **Stating any required exemptions and special processes to points 2 & 3 for Commonwealth records that were never owned by, are no longer owned by, or are not in the possession of the Commonwealth**

The last would, of course, be the place in which details of due compensation for resumption of private property would be covered. I can't help but feel that the core problem here is the implications of the continuum model and parallel provenance. There's no underlying concept that Commonwealth records could be both Commonwealth records and some other records.>>

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2023 June 18: [Daniel Ellsberg \(1931-2023\)](#)

We, who are committed to the importance of making and keeping fact-based records and who uphold giving the public access to Truth – subject to legitimate restrictions but unimpeded by devious false-flag appeals to secrecy and privacy - should remember him. Ellsberg was both a creator of records and a champion for their release. And [this obituary](#) contains a warning about how fickle popular and political support for our values can be and suggests we should be wary of fluctuations in both populist and mainstream enthusiasms.

... contrary to popular belief, the “Plumbers”, the criminal unit set up in the basement of the White House and currently [the subject of an HBO miniseries](#), was not formed to break into the vaunted Watergate Hotel. No, it was created to discredit Daniel Ellsberg ... Ellsberg’s impact can be even found in the draft impeachment articles against Nixon ... Article 2, section 2 of the charges read:

“[Nixon] has, acting personally and through his subordinates and agents, in violation or disregard of the constitutional rights of citizens, authorized and permitted to be maintained a secret investigative unit within the office of the President, financed in part with money derived from campaign contributions, which unlawfully utilized the resources of the Central Intelligence Agency, engaged in covert and unlawful activities, and attempted to prejudice the constitutional right of an accused to a fair trial.”



Every word of that refers to Daniel Ellsberg. To this day, there’s no evidence Nixon directly ordered the Watergate break-in, but there is direct evidence the White House tried to destroy Daniel Ellsberg through multiple illegal means ...

... Ellsberg’s memoir about his foreign policy career, his personal transformation, and the Pentagon Papers saga, [aptly titled Secrets](#), details this incredible story and so much more – including the nationwide manhunt for him that lasted almost two weeks, where the FBI could not catch him. He infuriated the feds by continuing to distribute more of the classified Pentagon Papers to newspapers around the country and appearing on national television with Walter Cronkite. (The Pentagon Papers [also led to the most important press freedom decision](#) in American history, and paved the way for the Guardian and others to be able to publish the Snowden disclosures.)

[Secrets is absolutely engrossing](#) and it was released to universal rave reviews – yet it flopped. It happened to be published in the fall of 2003, a few months after the start of the Iraq war, at the peak of this country’s unhinged patriotic fervor. He would later lament that none of the networks would invite him on television to talk about it. Apparently, no one wanted to hear about a dissenter attempting to stop a war built on lies in George W Bush’s post-9/11 America ...

2023 June 19:

<<... how fickle popular and political support for our values can be and suggests we should be wary of fluctuations in both populist and mainstream enthusiasms ...>>

If “our values” rest on anything those foundations are rules-based and evidence-based. How can leaking records in violation of law and trust be incorporated into them (or, at least, aligned to them)? Can there be a struggle between respecting the rules and respecting the evidence? Can any such struggle be resolved by respecting something else as well? Is there a tension (a conflict even) between passivity and [activism](#)? Verne Harris has suggested, I think, that passivity (in the belief that professional values in themselves embody sufficient virtue) is the [role of a pawn](#).

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In other professions, the rules are qualified by dedication to a “higher purpose”. In medicine, it is patient well-being (do no harm) that may lead the practitioner to violate government secrecy laws. In law, it is an obligation to the justice process (if necessary, despite the client’s wishes). In engineering, it is the safety of structures used by the public (regardless of cost). In religion, it is the sanctity of the confessional. For us, it was once described to me in a job interview by the late Frank Upward as “our secret purpose” – something we do not necessarily share with our employers, something in us that they cannot own.

For me it is easy to admire the revelation of secrets that conceal crime (Ellsberg, [Vanunu](#), Koh, [Wigand](#), Manning, Assange, [Snowden](#)). That very much aligns with my personal standards. For others maintaining trust in us (beyond mere loyalty and in the service of trustworthiness at many levels) has a greater appeal. But I believe, wherever we stand, we cannot simply subscribe wholly to one or the other – passivity **or** activism (keeping faith with our trust or making better records to count the heads as they pass into the gas chamber).

Our personal standards (whatever they may be) cannot be the basis for resolving the dilemma since our differences at that personal level are un-resolvable (as they should be). We must be able to draw back and agree that our professional values cannot rest simply on passivity **or** activism or be resolved at the personal level. Our professional values must settle, in some unsatisfactory and complicated way, somewhere in between and we should learn how to be able to agree about that – even if we cannot agree on exactly where. But I challenge you to find, anywhere in the codes of ethics or other prognostications put out by our professional bodies, anything that articulates such a settlement, or even acknowledges that a conflict exists. Perhaps Frank was right and it must remain our secret purpose.

PS Of course, it is also dedication to a higher purpose that leads the spy to betray his country.

2023 July 7: More from Robodebt

<<[Andrew Waugh: Recommendation 23.8: Documenting decisions and discussions The Australian Public Service Commission should develop standards for documenting important decisions and discussions, and the delivery of training on those standards.](#)>>

2023 July 8: Better recordkeeping can’t overcome the flaws (subservience rather than free and frank advice) in public service culture [discovered here](#), flaws that have developed over many years. But this we already knew. Poor public policy comes from demanding data that gives you the result you want rather than the one you need. You can run that template over almost all our politics now. Regrettably, for the public service going along and not properly documenting politically unwelcome information, not simply poor r/keeping, is the heart of the problem. I’m old enough to know from personal experience that it was not always thus. It was never perfect, far from it, but I have seen it get worse in my lifetime. And this ethical failure is not confined to the public sector (as the Banking RC showed).

... public servants giving evidence to the commission have faced claims of dishonesty, “reconstructing” events and deliberately withholding relevant documents. The commissioner, the former Queensland supreme court chief justice Catherine Holmes SC, will have to consider whether ... public servants were “recklessly indifferent” given the countless legal warnings they received. Reckless indifference is a key feature of the civil tort of misfeasance in public office ... the robodebt scheme had been implemented not because internal lawyers got a legal question wrong, but because their advice had been flagrantly ignored ... Officials told the royal commission of a culture of fear and pressure ... The senior counsel assisting the commission, Justin Gregory KC, suggested Morrison’s signal to the department may have been so strong as to revive what might otherwise have been a dead

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budget proposal ... [one witness] essentially broke down under questioning, dramatically conceding ... she had breached the public service code of conduct because she “lacked courage” ...

2023 July 9: A [not unrelated issue](#) is the hollowing out of the public service and its replacement by consultants and external providers. They now account (apparently) for 37% of C'wealth government "employment". Labor is promising reform; we shall see. Like the ambiguous position of advisers, the r/keeping responsibilities of these external players, with regard to public accountability, appear to be murky.

... The federal government released the findings of the Australian public service audit of employment on Saturday, which examined the hiring practices and associated costs of 112 public service agencies, excluding the CSIRO, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and parliamentary departments. It found the equivalent of nearly 54,000 full-time staff were employed as consultants or service providers for the federal government during the 2021-2022 financial year – the equivalent of 37% of the 144,300-employee public service. The audit also found outsourced service providers made up nearly 70% of the \$20.8bn total spending on external labour, while more than a quarter of it went to contractors and consultants Katy Gallagher, minister for the public service, said the outcome of the audit showed the former Coalition government was “plugging gaps” in the public services with their “arbitrary cap on the number of government employees”, and creating a “shadow workforce” ...

In light of the revelations about failures in public service integrity in Robodebt, I would be more reassured if Labor focussed on that rather than the concerns of the CPSU.

... “Labor is committed to rebuilding the APS, its capability and ensuring that jobs that need to be done are delivered, where appropriate, by public servants.” ... In 2021, the Community and Public Sector Union told a senate inquiry into the capability of the public service that labour hire and external contracting was used for day-to-day public service work due to government policies meaning agencies were unable to directly employ staff. Labor promised during last year’s federal election campaign to abolish the staffing cap on the public service and conduct the audit of employment if it won government, with the view to reducing government reliance on labour-hire or external contractors. The policy has been long-held by the party ...



Consultants are essentially unregulated. We rely upon them to say when there is a conflict of interest. Who decides what is a conflict of interest? They do.

2023 July 21:

<< A [not unrelated issue](#) is the hollowing out of the public service and its replacement by consultants and external providers ... Labor is promising reform; we shall see. Like the ambiguous position of advisers, the r/keeping responsibilities of these external players, with regard to public accountability, appear to be murky>>

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From *The Conversation* (21 July, 2023)

This week the Albanese government produced a detailed breakdown of the A\$3 billion it plans to save over four years by cutting the use of outsourced labour and consultants ... There's nothing wrong with moderate use of consultants and contract labour. It's been done by both sides of politics for decades ... The concern is the extent to which core public service functions – policy advice to ministers and delivery of welfare programs – have also been outsourced ... It is true that the public service does not always live up to its legislated standards, as has been found to have been the case with Robodebt. But it can be held accountable when it fails. Accountability mechanisms for private consultants and contractors are weak by comparison, with failings often obscured by a veil of “commercial in confidence”.

In *The Conversation* in June, Richard Mulgan expertly analysed the findings of the audit of employment Labor commissioned shortly after taking office. He listed three reasons why public servants like using consultants:

- they allow governments to bury advice they don't like
- they help persuade ministers who distrust the public service. This is especially important with Coalition ministers.
- they maintain a revolving door for public servants to leave their job, collect their super and continue working on the same issues.

There is a fourth, more venal, reason – the millions of dollars consultants spend each year entertaining public servants ...

2023 July 22:

<< **Accountability mechanisms for private consultants and contractors are weak by comparison, with failings often obscured by a veil of “commercial in confidence”**>>
Further to this – there were two good pieces in last week's SMH News Review.

Tony Harris (former NSW Auditor-General) To be frank, our public service is far from fearless: ... Commissioner Catherine Holmes' royal commission report found that the conditions that led to robo-debt applied to several agencies, not only Services Australia ... the APS Commission neglected its very purpose by not identifying how the disempowering of the public service had undermined its ability to tell ministers that robo-debt was unlawful. Indeed, you won't find the word robo-debt in its reports, but you will be told, in every report, that the Commonwealth public service is characterised by high integrity. Similarly, you won't find in its reports a study of “sports rorts” ... And the APS Commission did not mention the 2018 Moss Review, which found the Agriculture Department fraudulently altered veterinarian assessments to avoid its legal responsibility to report abuse in the export of live sheep ...

These are not the only examples of APS Commission negligence. Though past public service commissioners, including Andrew Podger and Peter Shergold, have frequently written and spoken of serious limitations on the ability of Commonwealth public servants to provide frank and fearless advice, recent State of the Service reports have ignored the issue. And we have seen this year, thanks to the Commonwealth Audit Office, that officers in the Department of Health assisted the Morrison government by knowingly allowing grants under the \$1.25 billion Community Health and Hospital Program to be made in breach of guidelines – and unlawfully. The department again was too weak to tell ministers that what they wanted was illegal ... The Australian Public Service is not independent of the ministry, but royal commission and other evidence shows it needs better protection from a government culture where deception, unrestrained self-interest and secrecy have undermined a once great public service.

Tony Wright (couldn't find it online) Mandarins got squeezed out and the public got the pips: ... They had been what was known as permanent secretaries ... Theirs was an era that flourished postwar under Robert Menzies, when ... many kept their positions for decades. That was never going to continue unchallenged once ... Whitlam ... Fraser ... Hawke ... and Paul Keating came along ... Hawke abolished the word “permanent” from secretary positions in 1984 ... In 1994, Keating ... removed tenure from departmental

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secretaries and replaced the system with contracts ... In a single evening [John Howard] sacked six departmental secretaries [in 1996]. Soon, he got rid of 30,000 public servants. Many of them gained new jobs with “consulting” firms ... that charged massive sums to develop new ways of delivering what had been the task of government-employed servants ... If we are to search for clues to how parts of Australia’s public service ... became so bastardised that a royal commission would be required ... It’s worth knowing the history ... Abbott ... got enthusiastic support for bending public servants to his will ... Over the years, some senior public servants learnt to understand that if they wanted to keep their jobs and prosper, they needed to fall in line ...

For better or worse, there’s no going back to the 1960s. Labor says it will save \$3 billion plus on consultants (seriously?). I think that’s bull and it’s the wrong issue (like getting rid of Phil Lowe is going to fix inflation). If the work that’s been outsourced is going to be done now by public servants, it’s still going to cost heaps (making a discount, perhaps, for entertainment expenses). It’s not who does the work that matters but how those undertaking it and the political masters they answer to are governed – and that includes r/keeping.

And now we have “[unpersons](#)”

Two public servants adversely named by the robodebt royal commission have been [quietly scrubbed](#) from organisational charts, including the former top lawyer at Services Australia who had spent months assisting the commission. Annette Musolino, who was general counsel at the Department of Human Services (DHS) at the time of the unlawful debt recovery program and later chief operating officer of the department, renamed Services Australia, is on leave. Both Musolino and Russell De Burgh, an assistant secretary in the prime minister’s department, have been removed from official organisational charts ...

Services Australia declined to answer questions about whether Musolino had been suspended. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet would not comment on De Burgh’s employment status ... Guardian Australia does not suggest that Musolino or De Burgh have breached the code or are currently suspended ...

2023 August 28: [The cost of recordkeeping](#)

[It ain’t cheap \(it seems\)](#)

- The Albanese government is abandoning an attempt to modernise the way businesses record public information such as the identity of company directors, after a review found the Coalition-era project would run more than \$2bn over budget. The assistant treasurer, Stephen Jones, is now considering the review’s call to instead spend a further \$515m returning registry functions to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission and investing to improve data integrity in other ways.
- The program ... aimed to improve a “poor digital experience” for 3 million companies and 6 million non-company Australian Business Number (ABN) holders, and to minimise fraud and business misconduct, including registration of fictitious characters as office-holders on the companies register. But the program ran into trouble due to a “significant underestimation of program complexity”, the review said ... “The review concludes that the [program] should be stopped, as the economic benefits from the program do not justify the level of additional expenditure required.”

... at least, if it ain’t done properly.

2023 September 5: [A book about books](#)

As a regular user of Abbeys online, I now receive their Book Butler messages, suggestions they have obviously made based on a profile they have developed of me (unasked) derived from previous purchases. Not sure how I feel about that, but I thought others might be interested in their latest suggestion if they don’t know about it already -

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Blurb: Long before books were mass-produced, scrolls hand copied on reeds pulled from the Nile were the treasures of the ancient world. Emperors and Pharaohs were so determined to possess them that they dispatched emissaries to the edges of the earth to bring them back. In *Papyrus*, celebrated classicist Irene Vallejo traces the dramatic history of the book and the fight for its survival. This is the story of the book's journey from oral tradition to scrolls to codices, and how that transition laid the very foundation of Western culture. And it is a story full of heroic adventures, bloodshed and megalomania - from the battlefields of Alexander the Great and the palaces of Cleopatra to the libraries of war-torn Sarajevo and Oxford. An international bestseller, *Papyrus* brings the ancient world to life and celebrates the enduring power of the written word.

No doubt this is available from many different suppliers. Don't know if it's any good (overuse of the word "celebrate" is a bit of a worry). The decolonisers, I suppose, would want me to note (doctrinally) that paper was developed in East Asia.

2023 September 7: Special access, privacy, and indigenous records

When we were drafting the Bill for the *Archives Act* (C'wealth), cognate with the Bill for the *Freedom of Information Act*, I tried (with little success) to get others involved in the policy process to understand and accept the defining difference between **FOI access** (given to a single applicant upon request w/o establishing a right of access for anyone else) and **archival access** ("publicly available" under s.31 to all in advance of any request). The difference wasn't denied, but no one seemed to think it important (certainly not the FOI zealots). The basic principle was that archival access was available in the "open access period" subject to exemptions (knowable and specified) – viz. the "exempt records" (s.33). Pre-privacy, the exemptions mostly aligned with the FOI exemptions because we didn't want to create a possibility that, after thirty years, archival access would be more restrictive than access available under FOI. On the Senate Committee investigating both Bills, Senator Gareth Evans found this highly risible. Since that drafting phase a number exceptions (as distinct from exemptions) such as security and census have been introduced.

The *Archives Bill* also included (s.56) the concepts of

accelerated access: (general release before thirty years), and

special access: access to closed records (exempt records) withheld from general release but made available to some but not all at the discretion of the Archives.

Special access was the pet of Thea Exley's (senior Archives staff). It gave Archives a discretion based on special circumstances. I was never convinced of the need for it. The closed period (conceptually) did not preclude the Commonwealth from giving access to persons at any time for any reason it darn well pleased. Special access for an individual could be handled under FOI and special access for a class of persons could be at an agency's discretion. The chief argument for it was to provide privileged access to closed records in the open period but it all became mixed up with the idea that records in Archives' possession (as distinct from those in the open access period regardless of custody) needed different access arrangements. The Commonwealth access regime applies regardless of custody but the diehards had difficulty accepting the implications of this. In the final drafting (after my time, I think) special access became bureaucratised – ministerial discretion, arrangements approved by PM, specified in regulations, in writing, made available to the Council.

56(2) The Minister or a person authorised by the Minister may, in accordance with arrangements approved by the Prime Minister, cause Commonwealth records to be made available to a person in such circumstances as are specified in the regulations notwithstanding that the Commonwealth records concerned are not otherwise available for public access under this Act.

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56(4) *An arrangement approved by the Prime Minister under subsection (2) shall be recorded in writing, and the Minister shall cause a copy of the arrangement to be made available to the Council.*

None of it necessary for granting of access apart from the Act (in my view). The crucial point is that in its original conception special access was seen as a privilege outside of public access and not as a restriction.

At the recent ASA Conference, we saw two examples of restricted access:

NFSA's involvement with the [Strehlow Collection](#) which is subject to sensitivities around access to material dealing with secret business. These were arguably never public records, and are, in any case, now provided for legislatively so access is determined by the owners – effectively the [Research Centre Board](#).

Records of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. These were retained under State control after 1967 whereas similar records (e.g. from Victoria) were transferred to C'wealth control and became Commonwealth records. The NSW APB records are presumably State records under the NSW Act, being a case where records did not follow function.

The NSW APB records along with “the Chief Secretary records relating to Aboriginal affairs”) spanning the period from 1890 to 1969 appear to be managed under an access regime administered by a government agency (the [Family Records Service](#)) which provides special access rather than public access.

Due to the personal and sensitive nature of information contained in these records, many of the records are closed to public access.

The whole purpose of the Family Records Service, it appears, is “to help Aboriginal people in New South Wales to access records pertaining to themselves”, people described at the Conference as “survivors and their descendants”. This agency's purpose could also be described, derogatively, as hindering access by anyone else. What I couldn't find online was an indication of when these records might be made available for research without restriction under public access rules (i.e. for those who are **not** “survivors [or] their descendants”). It's the same question that arises with privacy. When does privacy expire? Is there a right of privacy for the dead? When do records subject to privacy restrictions become available for public access?

In this case, however, the issue is complicated by notions of “sovereignty”, very much on display at the Conference, which (on one point of view) disrupt - deliberately so - the “colonising” imperium of White access rules. It might (I don't know) be that Aboriginal ideas about access are timeless whereas White ideas are timebound, making something like a thirty year rule meaningless. Ultimately, these notions are a parallel provenance issue. But they go beyond merely attributing multiplicity in creation to the consequent issue of control. Does parallel provenance applied to Aboriginal records (however conceived) imply joint control over access? Or, are the access restrictions based on consideration for Aboriginal sensitivities rather than a recognition of authority. Where is the control located? Are the sensitivities individual, familial, or collective (i.e. racial)? Does it imply joint control over custody or disposal as well? In NSW, do the same principles apply to records dealing with Aborigines which are **not** those of the APB or the Chief Secretary between 1890 and 1969?

Is Aboriginal sovereignty in fact a denial rather than an affirmation of parallel provenance and an assertion that it annihilates the access, custody, control rights of the White co-creators, temporarily or in perpetuity? The NSW arrangements appear to fit within the apparatus of Crown control over access to its own records but there

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are hints that some of those involved have wider views on this question and that some even feel there is no issue at all because it is already resolved in favour of Aboriginal sovereignty. But, if so, I can't find it thus openly set down anywhere (it was presented at Conference as an accomplished fact). The rationale may, of course, be set out somewhere that I am just not aware of. Apparently, the next Conference will be about access and it might be useful to have a session on this and the extent to which any principle(s) regarded as settled in one jurisdiction is/are applied in the others.

PS. A frequently heard complaint is that agencies lose interest in records once they are transferred. The archives' ambition to become responsible for administration of access (in my view) exacerbates this. Leaving responsibility for access administration with agencies subject to rules administered by the archives authority (as we tried to do with the NSW Act), including access to historical records inherited by them functionally if not physically, would raise their level of interest considerably. And, yes, someone (probably the archives authority) would have to assume responsibility for administering access over functional orphans but these wouldn't be so very many ([What, if anything, is a function?](#) after all). Setting up a system for assigning historical functional responsibility to current agencies would be very appealing to a functions geek like me.

PPS. Happily, as a retiree, I no longer have to deal with these issues. I can simply sit back and ask difficult questions.

Power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot throughout the Ages

<<**Andrew Waugh: Just today, the Guardian reports the results of a ground penetration survey at an Aboriginal Protection Board run home in NSW that identifies potential grave sites... It might be that NSW had good reason not to pass the records of the Protection Board across to the Commonwealth in 1967. Further, I'd note that limiting access to records to survivors and descendents makes it difficult to get an overarching view of Protection Board actions over time, even for the indigenous community. You can only look at the records through the pinhole of your own family, and it would be difficult to determine if what happened to your family was part of a policy (official or unofficial) because you can't easily compare it with what happened to others. But I would think that indigenous sovereignty over indigenous records precisely means indigenous control over access; how can control ultimately be shared?>>**

2023 September 18: [Reconciliation, memory, and forgetting](#)

There is [widespread criticism](#) of Britain's *Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill*. Much of the [adverse comment](#) focuses on the amnesty clauses.

Prof. Laura McAtackney [argues](#) that the Bill's immediate purpose (to end "investigations, inquests, and trials" and to grant "conditional" immunity) is an impediment to memorialisation (how the violent past is remembered) and to the use of records as part of that memorialisation which (she argues) is an attempt by the State to control history.

It is ... important to understand why this amnesty is being imposed ... it is essentially being used to address Conservative party angst about ongoing investigations, inquests and trials of British soldiers who were involved in shootings and killings that were largely underinvestigated during the conflict. This wider context of non-consensual imposition as a mechanism to prevent justice being served is key to considering the viability of the wider provisions of the legislation, especially in terms of how the past is remembered or 'memorialised' moving forward.

... if the provision to create an academic report was included in the legislation it should follow that the government would provide access to their papers – indeed it was speculated

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the legislation may facilitate the early opening of state archives to allow for the proposed report to be written. Such a response seems fanciful when the wider context is examined ... many of the features of the Bill [are] being marked by inbuilt political interference – including the lack of transparent process for academic appointment, lack of any reference to state papers and ultimate reporting duties to the Secretary of State [that] do not bode well for the independence of the role.

There is significant space provided for the assessment and creation of oral history, which is an important form for democratising knowledge on the recent past, but hardly one that is currently neglected and its provision does not crossover into the section on the 'Academic Report'. In effect, oral histories are seen as one form of knowledge creation and the academic report is viewed as a separate (generally more official) one. However, the Academic Report section provides no mention of historical documentation created and maintained by the British state, never mind provisions for accessing them, to enable this output to be created. It is almost as if the state is writing itself out of those histories other than controlling how they are to be written.

Many commentators and academics have already questioned how fair and open such a process and outcome could be in terms of memorialising the past. A response from legal scholars based at Queen's University Belfast earlier this year particularly highlighted 'efforts to privilege work on oral history, memorialisation and academic research on the conflict is, in our view, designed to provide legal and political cover . . . [and] if enacted such proposals could do untold damage to the credibility of such work as a smokescreen for impunity'.

This is at a time when we consider what is simultaneously happening at The National Archives at Kew in London. It was reported in 2019 that the National Archives had greatly extended the closure period for the files related to state-perpetrated violence against civilians during the conflict, especially victims of plastic bullets fired by the police and/or the British Army ... From such a context, it is clear that an independent writing of the history of the Northern Irish Troubles focused on multi-sources and methods cannot be expected, access to state papers is not indicated, and at best this endeavour will deeply skew what we know about the past from the British government's side ...

It is paramount that those of us who work with the past, and especially the politics of memory and heritage, highlight the significant problems with this legislation and do not allow it to make claims of respectability by creating palatable histories from partial records that hide the actions of the commissioning state.

2023 September 20:

<< palatable histories from partial records that hide the actions of the commissioning state >>???

All men having power ought to be mistrusted. [James Madison](#)

Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past. [George Orwell](#) (1984)

The [Legacy Law](#) has now received Royal Assent. Can a State controlled apparatus arbitrate truth, adjudicate memory, or be allowed to tell us what is or is not mis/dis-information? The UK Government has a view:

... the bill is an attempt to draw a line under the events of the past. Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said ... the bill offers "a real opportunity to deliver greater information, accountability and acknowledgement to victims and families, moving away from established mechanisms that have left far too many empty-handed". The legislation will lead to the establishment of an Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR). The aim of this new organisation is to help families find out more about the circumstances of how their loved ones were killed or seriously injured. Self-confessed perpetrators who provide a truthful account of their actions to the ICRIR can be

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granted immunity from prosecution. Mr Heaton-Harris said the commission is part of a move to "build a legacy process founded on integrity, expertise and fairness".

Virtue is not always amiable. [John Adams](#) (9 Feb., 1779)

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts. [Proverbs 4:23](#)

2023 September 21:

<<a real opportunity to deliver greater information, accountability and acknowledgement to victims and families, moving away from established mechanisms>>

... and here in Australia, the virtuous are hot to confer on [Nerida O'Loughlin](#) and her accomplices the [power to suppress](#) "professional news content":

The Albanese government has been urged to remove the "professional news content" exemption from its crackdown on misinformation on social media, amid concerns that news coverage of the voice and Covid has spread false information and lies. [Senator] Hanson-Young said misinformation was a "growing threat to our democracy, whether it's spread via large social media platforms or by large multinational media corporations, like the Murdoch media" ... the Albanese government will need the minor party's 11 Senate votes to pass the bill ... [Media law academic Michael] Douglas said the exemption of professional news content "lacks a coherent basis" ... [MP Zali Steggall] says "Mis[information] and disinformation shouldn't be permitted in any format. Consistency is important."

Totalitarians, fearful of diversity and difference, always think "consistency is important" and they won't be satisfied until we all think as they do. God forbid!

In the broadest sense, [totalitarianism](#) is characterized by strong central rule that attempts to control and direct all aspects of individual life through coercion and repression ... Totalitarianism is often distinguished from dictatorship, despotism, or tyranny by its supplanting of all political institutions with new ones and its sweeping away of all legal, social, and political traditions ... The totalitarian state pursues some special goal ... Whatever might further the goal is supported; whatever might foil the goal is rejected. This obsession spawns an ideology that explains everything in terms of the goal, rationalizing all obstacles that may arise and all forces that may contend with the state ... Any dissent is branded evil, and internal political differences are not permitted ...

2023 September 25: **["The perfect combination of art and science": mourning the end of paper maps cont'd](#)**

[There's life in the old dog yet](#)

For 400 years British hydrographers have made paper charts of the world's seas and oceans. Each one captures the detail of coastlines, bays, straits, or channels. A document like this brims with information, noting the sea's depth at various locations, the position of rocks, or places where vessels can't drop anchor ... Every day, staff at the UKHO [UK Hydrographic Office] make corrections or improvements to some of the [3,500 charts](#) they maintain, such as adding the location of hazardous new wrecks and submarine cables or even changes to coastlines. A weekly bulletin communicates adjustments to shipping vessels worldwide and crew members must then get out a pen and manually correct any outdated paper copies. Yet the last of these weekly updates is on the horizon. The UKHO is gradually [preparing to drop its paper chart service](#) and switch to digital-only versions, which would be accessed via Electronic Chart Display Systems on ships ... The digital transition will bring to an end the tradition of hand-drawing hydrographic charts, then designing them on computer software before being printed. More recently, the UKHO started sending electronic copies to customers who could print the charts themselves.

It turns out that quite a lot of ships still need paper charts. Due to maritime regulations, vessels must carry some form of chart and, despite the availability of electronic versions –

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which don't have to be manually updated every week – paper charts continue to be used as backups, or, in some cases, the only such resource on board. The Royal Yachting Association has also said that despite the withdrawal of the UKHO paper charts, it will continue to [teach navigation techniques that use them](#). Paper, it seems, still rules the waves.

... A 2,000-year-old tradition, real paper made from trees is still considered crucial to countless businesses and government systems globally, despite [the environmental impact of producing it ... A study published in 2021](#) indicated increased brain activity is associated with remembering information once it has been written down by hand, as opposed to recording it on a smartphone or tablet ... "The mind better grasps elaborate, complex, deep arguments that run over several pages of paper," says [Richard Harper, an expert on human computer interactions at the University of Lancaster], noting that when you have something particularly nuanced and elaborate to say, putting it down on paper may be a good idea ... Much like the UKHO, lots of organisations attempt to go largely or exclusively digital only to encounter hurdles. The US government [is due to go paperless but it is taking longer than expected](#). Last year, the National Archives and Records Administration found a third of the sprawling federal government had still not adopted e-records and the Administration was forced to extend the deadline for this by 18 months, to 30 June 2024.

Paper also plays a role in more clandestine sectors of government. In the UK, for example, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) [keeps thousands of secret paper files on its personnel in a vault in its basement](#) while the MI5 security service [states on its website](#): "Paper files remain important to MI5." Russia's Federal Guard Service (FSO), which is responsible for security at the Kremlin, reverted to using typewriters in 2013, [reportedly to prevent computer leaks](#). Separately, the logistics industry has long relied on paperwork for documenting the transit of goods, leading to hefty paper trails and sometimes inefficient processing. [Although that is starting to change](#), it's notoriously difficult to do away with paper records in this sector, [say industry insiders](#). The healthcare industry has a historical reliance on paper too. From prescriptions to [hospital documentation](#), paper has persevered well into the 21st Century. To take one example, the majority of care homes in south-east Scotland still use paper-based management systems, [according to a study published last year](#). Even when hospitals switch to digital, they may be faced with the burden of [storing historical paper documents relating to patient care off-site](#). Within the European Union there are [11 countries that still use paper for medical prescriptions](#) rather than digital systems. In the US, paper stubbornly remains in use in some parts of the healthcare system despite attempts to modernise – [96% of hospitals and 78% of physicians](#) were found to use electronic health records in 2021.

Paper is still considered the backup medium whenever electronic systems fail – which, naturally, they do. In the aftermath of [a cyber-attack on a small Alaskan community](#) in 2018, municipal staff quickly switched to paper forms and typewriters when their computers went offline. Even Wikipedia, a gigantic online resource continually updated and edited by people all around the world, has [an emergency plan called the "Terminal Event Management Policy"](#). During some potential future apocalyptic turn of events such as "imminent societal collapse" or "an imminent extinction level event", Wikipedia's millions of editors would be tasked with printing out various pages of the online encyclopaedia for posterity – because paper, ultimately, is considered reliable ...

2023 October 3: [How records are made](#)

... Cloaked in ocean, the seafloor has resisted human exploration for centuries ... We have only just begun to map, much less explore, this enormous subsea world ... In 2023, Seabed 2030 announced that its latest map of the entire seafloor is [nearly 25% complete](#). The data to make the world's first publicly available map is stored at the International Hydrography

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Organization (IHO)'s [Data Centre for Digital Bathymetry \(DCDB\)](#) in a government building in Boulder, Colorado.

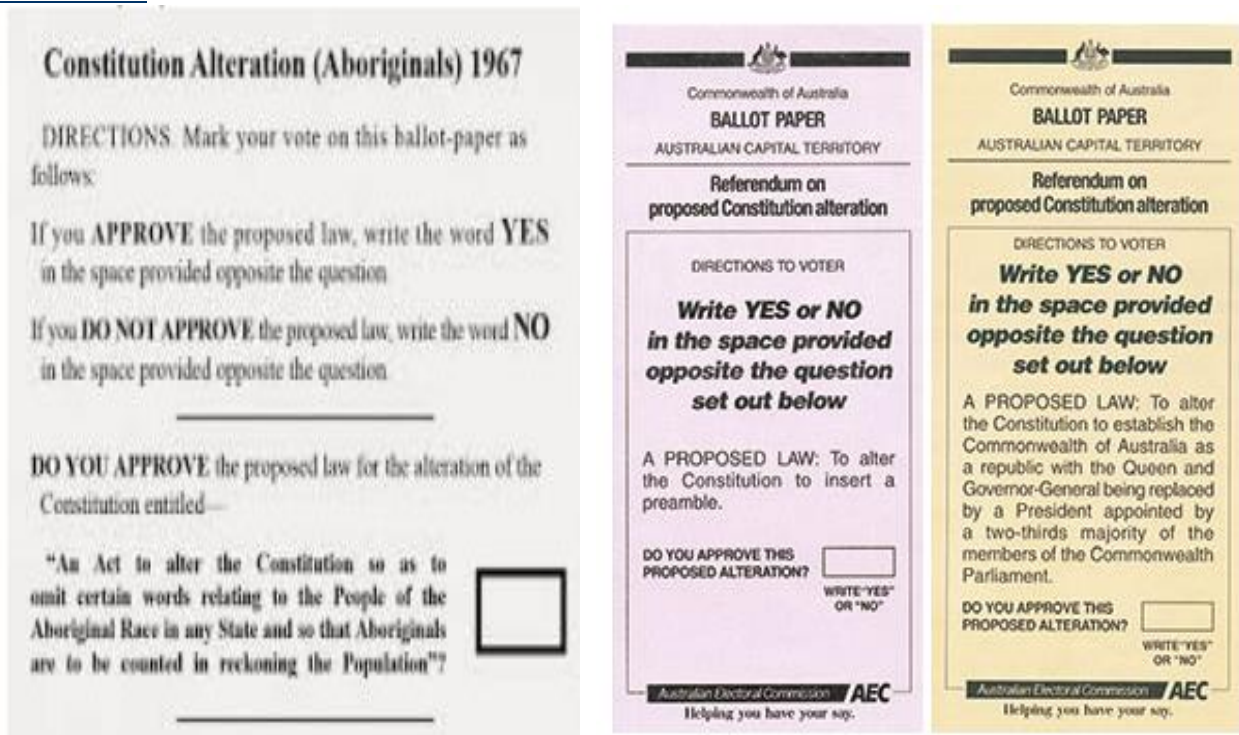
So far, the DCDB holds over 40 compressed terabytes of seafloor data. The biggest contributor is the US academic fleet: [17 research vessels](#) owned by American universities which constantly circle the globe studying the deep ocean. Other contributors include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) fleet, the Geological Survey of Ireland, and Germany's Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency. The biggest users are scientists all over the world who rely on the data to conduct research.

Seabed 2030 has made extraordinary progress by asking countries and corporations to share maps with the DCDB. But unfortunately, the map is not growing quickly enough. Between 2016 and 2021, the map leapfrogged from 6% to 20%. Since then, the pace has slowed. In 2022, it reached just 23.3% complete; in 2023, 24.9%. The ocean mappers came up with a new plan: crowdsourcing. "Crowdsourced bathymetry came about a few years ago when the IHO was saying: 'At this rate, we're never going to map the whole darn ocean; we need to start looking outside the box,'" says [Jennifer Jencks](#), the director of the DCDB and the chair of a crowdsourced working group at the IHO ...

2023 October 7: [Happy Polling Day](#)

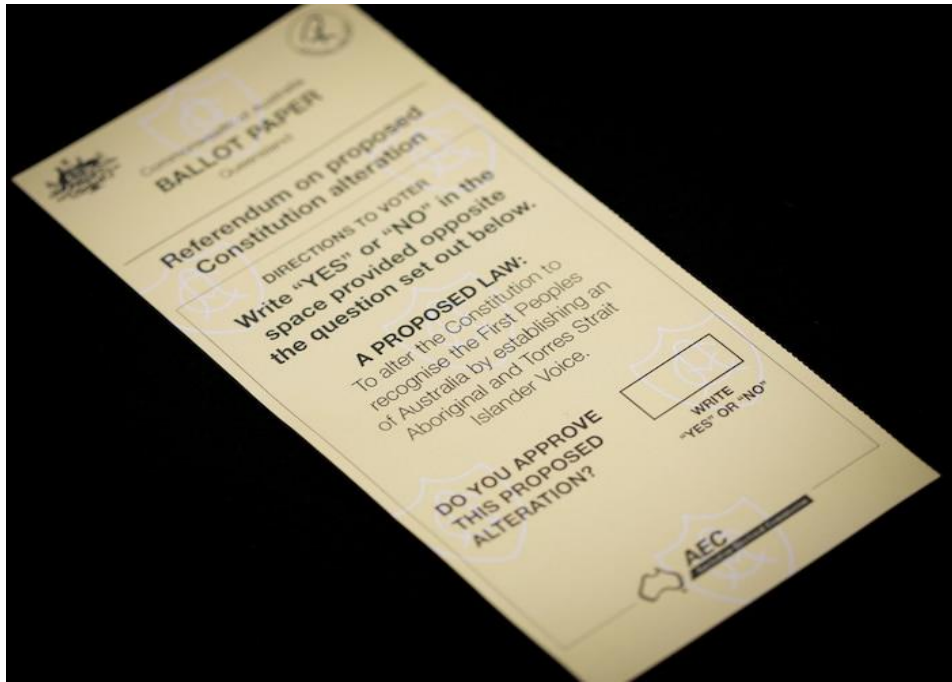
I've already voted in the referendum. When you're my age, you vote early if possible in case you're not still around on polling day. In the midst of all the bile and vitriol that has been engendered, the Electoral Commission's design of the ballot paper has been criticised as "rigged". I think it's advantageous to "Yes" but given a choice of explanations between malice and stupidity, it's usually safer to prefer the latter. AEC and its defenders have argued from precedent. Lawyers and politicians always think stupidity is defensible if there's precedent for it.

The [1967 referendum ballot](#) had only one box as did the ballot in the [1999 republic referendum](#).



The 2023 design also [has one box](#) with the option to write "Yes" or "No".

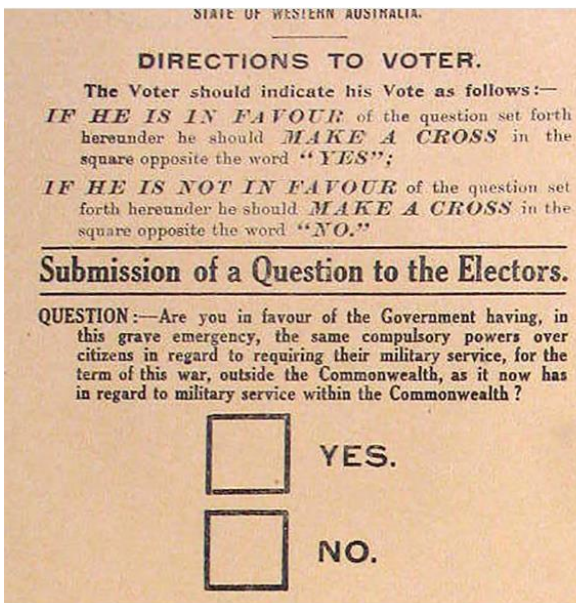
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Ticks will be accepted apparently (indicating “Yes”) but crosses (indicating “No”) will be rejected. Leaving aside the problems this creates for the illiterate and those w/o English language skills (to say nothing of senile decay, a condition for which I am developing greater sympathy), the question whether or not this design rests on precedent puts the issue into our domain. So, what’s the answer? The question may be moot because AEC has confirmed that if you vote (fraudulently) more than once (and you are not detected) both votes will have to be accepted. God forbid we ever travel down the [voter fraud](#) road that the US is on. That’s why AEC has to be so careful – not just to be but also to appear to be.

NAA has kindly put up on its website the [1916 conscription referendum](#) ballot paper. It has two boxes, one for “Yes” and another for “No”.

The 2014 [Scottish Independence](#) referendum ballot has a similar design with two boxes. The UK’s 2016 [Brexit referendum](#) has a somewhat more elaborate two-box design also.



The 1938 [Anschluss referendum](#) had a slightly less subtle approach. In case all this is Greek to you, here’s [another example](#) that may clarify things.

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ΔΗΜΟΨΗΦΙΣΜΑ

της 5ης Ιουλίου 2015

ΠΡΕΠΕΙ ΝΑ ΓΙΝΕΙ ΑΠΟΔΕΚΤΟ ΤΟ ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΣΥΜΦΩΝΙΑΣ, ΤΟ ΟΠΟΙΟ ΚΑΤΕΘΕΣΑΝ Η ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ, Η ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΗ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΕΣ ΝΟΜΙΣΜΑΤΙΚΟ ΤΑΜΕΙΟ ΣΤΟ EUROGROUP ΤΗΣ 25.06.2015 ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΤΕΛΕΙΤΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΔΥΟ ΜΕΡΗ, ΤΑ ΟΠΟΙΑ ΣΥΓΚΡΟΤΟΥΝ ΤΗΝ ΕΝΙΑΙΑ ΠΡΟΤΑΣΗ ΤΟΥΣ:
ΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΟ ΕΓΓΡΑΦΟ ΤΙΤΛΟΦΟΡΕΙΤΑΙ «REFORMS FOR THE COMPLETION OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM AND BEYOND» («ΜΕΤΑΡΡΥΘΜΙΣΕΙΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΟΛΟΚΛΗΡΩΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΤΡΕΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΕΡΑΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ») ΚΑΙ ΤΟ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟ «PRELIMINARY DEBT SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS» («ΠΡΟΚΑΤΑΡΚΤΙΚΗ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΗ ΒΙΩΣΙΜΟΤΗΤΑΣ ΧΡΕΟΥΣ»).

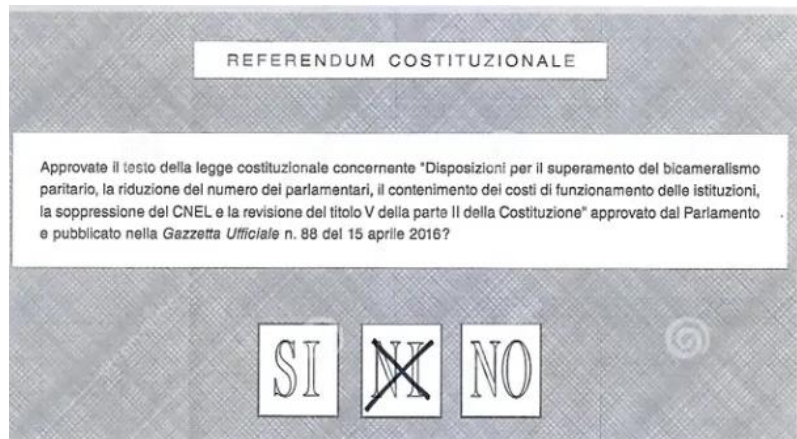
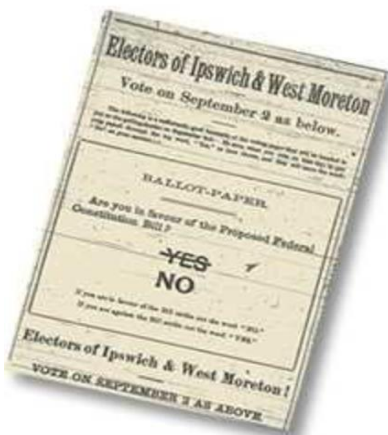
ΔΕΝ ΕΓΚΡΙΝΕΤΑΙ/
ΟΧΙ

ΕΓΚΡΙΝΕΤΑΙ/
ΝΑΙ

Interestingly, “precedent” seems to prefer crosses to ticks in some of these cases.

Electors in Ipswich and West Moreton were offered a [cancellation method](#), with both “Yes” and “No” written on the ballot and you crossed out the one you disapproved of. Or, were you being asked to highlight the one you favoured?

One more example, [which may be a joke](#), has boxes for “Yes”, “No”, and “Maybe”!



<<[Andrew Waugh: A Twitter thread from an historian with an interest in political arcana on how choice selection in Australian referenda has changed - and why...>>](#)

2023 November 6: [Archives and Australia/PNG](#)

<<[Andrew Waugh: Australian archivists - particularly Chris - may find this article on the fate of the archives of PNG interesting. The Australian agency \(Department of External Territories\) had decided to steal 'sensitive' records from PNG archives. I use the word steal deliberately - formal legal advice on the ownership of the records was requested from the Attorney General's department. Draft advice came back adverse, with a hand written top cover from the author suggesting they ignore it. It was not finalised.>>](#)

Yes. I was there at NAA (then CAO) at the time and even nominally in charge of the section (Context Control) responsible for handling the PNG records due for repatriation. But I had very little involvement – it was very much Peter Scott’s baby (assisted by Hilary Rowell). My recollection is that, whatever was happening higher up the food chain, CAO’s involvement was based on an honourable commitment to returning the archives in their entirety. So far as I am aware there was no process of extraction but I couldn’t swear to it.

Our concern was to microfilm the archives so a complete filmed copy remained in Canberra. There may have been a muted concern about their safety once they left our

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shores (a “racist” concern some would argue). That meant they had to be arranged and described first and the filming process funded and overseen. Some of them were in German and hand-written in Gothic cursive script. Peter the linguist was in his element.

We were in the midst of implementing the Australian (“Series”) System and PJS was determined (and you had to work with him to know how determined he could be) that the A&D would be impeccably done according to that System before filming. It led to delays but the intent was impeccably correct: to preserve the integrity of the archives and hand them over fully arranged and described. As a closed archive it represented an almost irresistible temptation to show off.

Peter’s devotion to the doctrine that records follow function was strong. At the same time (mid 70s), we were already identifying (by the use of series prefixes – CRS A, B, C, D, etc.) which NT material would go when the Territory achieved independence and which would stay. He took an equally strong line (without result) on colonial records (e.g. naturalisation) that **should** have come to the Commonwealth after federation but didn’t because some States held on to them whereas others had handed them over with the result that the whereabouts of 19th century naturalisation records, etc. are (to this day) unpredictable.

I am speaking here from a worm’s eye view, not on the plane of high policy covered by the article. There are some references to NAA material in the article but I can recall a mountain of files dealing with all this in the CAO registry. Perhaps there is more to this story that could be told but not (alas) by me.

2023 December 4: [David Bearman \(1950-2023\)](#)

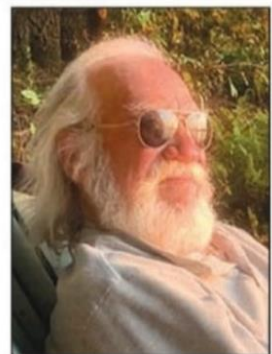
<<[Adrian Cunningham: ... I learned from Laura Millar last week that David Bearman passed away in Canada in September ... Bearman first visited Australia in 1991 ... He was a frequent visitor here over the remainder of that decade ... It would be no exaggeration to say he exerted a seismic impact on our discourse and practice - which today would be totally different had he never visited.](#)>>



I can only speak for myself, but David’s impact on my life in archives was certainly seismic. For me, there is before Bearman and after Bearman. Like Aristotle, it was not **what** he thought but **how** he thought it that made the difference. The ideas kept coming - Terry Cook said that David could change his mind over lunch.

David Bearman

David Bearman died peacefully, on September 13, 2023, at Kingston General Hospital. David found home on Grindstone Island in Big Rideau Lake, after an international career exploring strategies to ensure technology served cultural heritage. On Grindstone, with family, friends and a few lucky colleagues, life slowed down, thoughts ran deep, and everything tasted better. David is survived by his wife, Jennifer Trant, his siblings Richard (Karen), Peri (Harrie Sloodbeek), and Peter (Alessandra Nicifero), his daughter (Amanda, mother Toni Carbo), his grandchildren (Jacob, Bianca and Marcella), Jennifer’s mother (Sheila Trant), her siblings Tim, Jody (Glen Albert), and Mary (Stephen Barrett), and his many nieces and nephews. He was pre-deceased by both parents, Dorothy and Sidney Bearman. David’s love of the lake manifested itself in support of the Big Rideau Lake Association (BRLA), the Rideau Lakes Environmental Foundation (RLEF), and the Rideau Waterway Land Trust (RWLT). David asked that he be remembered with donations to the Rideau Waterway Land Trust: see www.canadahelps.org/en/pages/in-memory-of-david-bearman/ or their web site at www.rwlt.org. Development threatens the places that we love, and RWLT preserves special landscapes in our local area for those who come after us.



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Like many others back then, I was anguishing in a muddle-headed way about e/recordkeeping (people were actually talking about setting up museums of technology).

His core message (for me) was drawn from systems analysis: first, figure out your requirements; second, figure out the methods needed to achieve them; third, be adaptable when implementing the methods. Some people thought he was about destroying archival principles but he was telling us how to save them by adapting to change. It's a lesson I've never forgotten.

Things will have to change if they are to stay the same ([Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa](#))

And he taught us not to fear technology. He told us that what we needed to know wasn't all that hard and that what we had to teach was pretty wonderful.

Vale

2023 December 19: [Prudence or Insanity?](#)

On the NZ List, [Russell Clarke](#) has drawn attention to a dispute in the UK over digitisation of [historic wills](#). The [article](#) canvasses opposing opinion:

“Sheer vandalism” and “insane”. This is how leading historians on Monday described government plans to destroy millions of historical wills ... dating back more than 150 years in an effort to save £4.5m a year. But Tom Holland, the classical and medieval historian and co-host of The Rest is History podcast, said the proposal to empty shelves at the Birmingham archive was “obviously insane”. Sir Richard Evans, historian of modern Germany and modern Europe, said “to destroy the original documents is just sheer vandalism in the name of bureaucratic efficiency”... The government is proposing to keep the originals of some wills of “famous people” – likely including those of Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens and Diana, Princess of Wales – but others would be destroyed after 25 years and only a digital copy would be kept ...

... The proposal comes amid growing concern at the fragility of digital archives, after a cyber-attack on the British Library left the online catalogue and digitised documents [unavailable](#) to users since late October ... “My real anxiety is that if everything is digitised, somebody pulls the plug,” said Holland ... Hardware goes out of date ... he said. Access to original documents was vital as “the physicality of the evidence matters ... it is an important part of the material culture”. Evans ... said the idea that officials can choose which wills to keep because, in the words of the MoJ, they “belong to notable individuals or have significant historical interest”, is “the typical arrogance of bureaucracy”... “You can see the indent of the pen and if the writer is excited or tense. There are minute details on the page which digitisation [can't capture] ...

Will Iredale, a second world war historian, and author of *The Pathfinders*, said: “There's nothing like getting your hands on the original documents ... How can you trust whoever is digitising them has scanned them correctly and you are seeing the entire document ... Justice minister, Mike Freer, said: “We want to make it as easy for amateur and professional historians alike to access these documents. Digitalisation allows us to move with the times and save the taxpayer valuable money ... the MoJ [claimed] that once digitised, access requests will be serviceable much more quickly. But the Society of Genealogists is “seriously concerned” ... “We are advocates of digitisation but not at the cost of destroying originals,” she said. “In any digitisation projects mistakes get made. We don't know what further information could be gained in the future from the original documents. There could be somebody in there who did something extraordinary.”

There are four strands to the argument (as detailed in the *Guardian* article) – and many more that the article does not canvass.

The Emotional Argument

The thrill of handling the original. 'Nuff said. There's no argument against that. Whatever turns you on, I suppose.

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The Technical Argument

Exposing the records to hazard, the critics allege, by reducing them to unreliable digital format – the untrustworthiness of the process and the fragility of digitally stored materials. This is good push-back against those idiots who believe digital materials are safe and inviolate. Like any other medium they are open to hazard. But, as we well know, the originals are equally at risk – fire, flood, attack, etc. etc. (the whole range of risks we have to deal with alongside risks to which digital materials are prey) and, in the case of NZ, earthquake and tsunami as well. The other strand to this argument is that digitised assets are easier to handle, access, and distribute (which is undoubtedly true). Then there is the matter of forensics (pressure points, “minute details” which digitisation can’t capture, etc.).

The Recordkeeping Argument

The idea that officials can choose which wills to keep because, in the words of the MoJ, they “belong to notable individuals or have significant historical interest”, is “the typical arrogance of bureaucracy”. Should a bureaucrat (i.e. us) be empowered to decide what is “significant”? Like many other archives authorities, NAA’s “[framework](#) for disposing of records of archival value in its custody following digitisation” proceeds on the basis that the “creator” (whose role in a custodial world is assumed by the archivist) determines issues relating to “disposal of records of archival value in its custody following digitisation to an agreed standard.” Such practices by our archives authorities (they can hardly be termed policy) are weak on records that are not determined to be of “archival value” (whatever that means) and are not “in custody”. These policies also tend to be weak on their connection with [electronic transactions laws](#) which should, in a right-thinking world, subordinate archival disposal frameworks so that those frameworks are represented as exceptions rather than sovereign. To say nothing of the [abolition](#) of the “original document rule” in evidence laws. Debate over the question of archival authority over disposal (the “god-archivist” syndrome as Barbara once described it) is a long and bitterly contested one.

The Financial Argument

I have remarked before about the [difference](#) between accountants and economists. As set out in the article, and leaving aside the quaint notion of keeping **both** originals and the digitised copies, this boils down to the difference between “savings” for their own sake (the accountancy argument) and “savings” for a purpose (the economic argument). Accountants just want to put any money saved into the kitty. Economists assume that finite resources are allocated for a purpose and ask what is the best way of allocating them. The economic argument is complicated by assumptions that must be made about opportunity cost within the boundaries of a closed system. Are we talking about the best way of allocating finite resources available just to preserve wills? Or is it about re-allocation of resources expended on all registration documents (deeds, probate, BDM, land title, etc.)? Are we constraining the economic argument by reference to MoJ or across the whole of government? The variables change depending on which boundaries you choose.

PS. A variation can be rung on the “quaint notion of keeping both” by developing an argument that we are keeping the originals (for whatever reasons) and also digitising them as an enhancement to accessibility. Accountants would be sceptical and economists indifferent to that argument.

2023 December 28: [When is enough too much?](#)

... in the years since it was salvaged, the 17th-century Swedish warship Vasa has gone on to become [one of Sweden’s most popular tourist attractions](#). The vessel, however, now faces a fresh challenge to its survival as its conservators warn it is at risk of collapse if it does not get a new 150m kroner (£11.8m) support structure ... Since it was raised from the protective brackish waters of the Baltic in 1961, it has had an active afterlife and attracted more than 1

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million visitors a year ... the wood of the ship [is] already starting to fracture ... “In the end, the ship would collapse.”

... perhaps the most challenging element of the renovation process, due to start in the spring, is that all of the work needs to be carried out while keeping the ship completely still. They also plan to do it, bit by bit, while keeping the museum open ... But the project is coming at a substantial cost, which the self-funded museum is appealing to donors and sponsors to finance. The museum’s director, Jenny Lind, said ... Vasa ... is one of a kind ... “To be able to see it like this in reality is unique because not everyone can dive direct and see [the wrecks] for themselves.”

It’s a variation, in our terms, of [managing the record or preserving the relic](#)? And about prioritising spending on cultural resources (the economist's question). Also, the issues of what to do with “originals” once they’re digitised. In the British wills debate, the question being asked by historians is whether, once you’ve extracted all the knowledge, there still remain physical features that later scholars may want to examine.

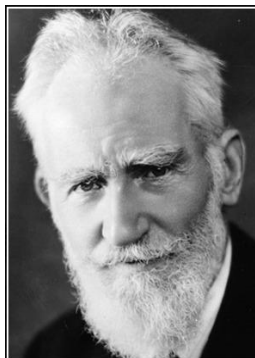
PS When I was a member of the ICA Commission on Descriptive Standards and we met in Stockholm, I joined the others in a special out-of-hours tour of the Vasa exhibition arranged by [Jan Dahlin](#) that included an actual walk on the deck – no special shoes or anything!

PPS Whether the source of funding is public or private is secondary from an economic point of view. It's all about allocation of resources. Occasionally, I [donate](#) to the preservation of [Chartres Cathedral](#) - once seen, never forgotten - and that's donation money I can't send to help deserving students (at least, I hope they're deserving) at Sydney University (my alma mater).

2024 February 1: [New to My Website](#)

As I grow older, I notice changes. Physical changes, of course – weakening eyesight, wobbly knees, hearing loss, mobility issues, unsettled bowels and bladder, irregular heartbeat. One word we old folk wish got used less often is “irreversible”.

The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the God of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and in short you are for ever floored. ([Mr Micawber](#))



It is the inefficiency and sham of...
our schools... that save us from
being dashed on the rocks of false
doctrine instead of drifting down
the midstream of mere ignorance.

— George Bernard Shaw —

AZ QUOTES

I live in a house full of books, many of them unread or barely skimmed. Yet, increasingly, I find myself curled up with one I read many years ago – a familiar old friend. I call this bibliographical reflux. Meanwhile the mind, possibly in preparation for eternity, also enervates, dwelling more on useless, timeless, existential questions.

1. Is it possible to eat honey without getting sticky?
2. What’s the difference between a nook and a cranny?
3. How many children had Lady Macbeth?

That sort of thing.

Having promised to quit the List, after a brief pause, I went on chattering for nearly three more years. The themes are (like old, familiar books) not new but the tone of these twilight tweets is mellow, reflective, somewhat dark. Mostly they deal with [who](#) we (archivists) are;

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what we (archivists) think we're doing; whither we (archivists) are drifting. They say many of them are inappropriate on a List about archives-and-records. This is incomprehensible. We work within a society that struggles with contending views about Knowledge, Memory, and Belief. We cannot detach ourselves from that struggle (should not try to do so). It contextualises all we do however hard we try to be objective. The mind may despair, but the heart (thank God) remains optimistic –

New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colours of my life were changing (Charles Dickens *David Copperfield*)

PS. The answers to the questions posed above are: 1) No. 2) Essentially, one is a corner and the other a crack. 3) It doesn't matter.

PPS.

1. What is the difference between “jingling” and “jangling”? cf. *The Invisible Man*.
2. Do baked beans count as vegetables in a balanced diet?
3. And (the biggie) how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

Archives-and-Records-Australia List June 2021-January 2024

Threads include:

- What a difference a word makes (strife over words and meaning; substituting virtue for thought)
- Neglecting Libraries and Archives (under-funding and the bane of “efficiency cuts”)
- Indexing (discovering knowledge, organising memory, recordkeeping, and Artificial Intelligence)
- Knowing What We Know (misinformation, disinformation, Aristotle, archivists, and truth)
- Will the Centre Hold? (relationship between the archivist and society)
- Miscellanea (a mixed bag that may inform, arouse, amuse, or offend)
- Postscript (dark thoughts)

All the best

Chris Hurley

www.descriptionguy.com

K.450 rocks

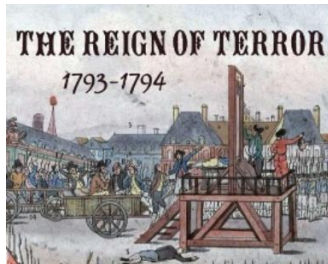
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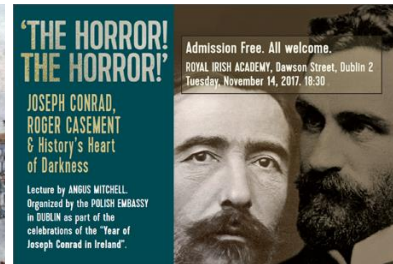
Maximilian Robespierre



Michelle Rowland



Virtue



Knowledge

If Conrad is correct, passionate Belief springs from “*the normality of ... place, and time and race*” (what Hannah Arendt called *the banality of evil*). But suppose that all Beliefs - despotic or dulcet according to the feckless whims of time - spring from a common, concordant source: the abiding human instinct for severe dominion over others and the suppression of difference. Then, however mildly or harshly Values manifest themselves, they are, in some fundamental way, always the same and Memory has, after all, no power to change us.

I could never see why people were so happy about Dickens's A Christmas Carol because I never had any confidence that Scrooge was going to be any different the next day. Karl Menninger

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[Belief](#) has its attraction (what [Yeats](#) called its *terrible beauty*) and it has many guises but always without understanding or pity until it is constrained by Truth. We need to find the source of that Truth not only in the Record but also in Ourselves.

What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches. [Karl A Menninger](#)

But, for [some teachers](#), Values trump Knowledge:

At a session I attended, the teacher-presenter, feeling she was among like-minded people, declared: 'I'm a raging leftie. I make no secret of it'. She also confessed that: 'I lose sleep over the political landscape.' ... This teacher-presenter, who later told us she is part of an organised group of feminist educators, suggested that she wanted to have an influence on her students' perspectives: 'So, when my students do vote, it's a good vote'. To her, this would be so 'Australia will be saved!' Part of her solution involved instructing her students to watch news and current affairs programmes on the ABC.

In a seminar that was supposed to be about instructing teachers on how to teach students how to analyse an argument, what this teacher-presenter was passionate about instead was influencing the ideology of her students rather than focusing on helping them to analyse with precision, reason soundly, and express themselves effectively in sentences that correctly employ a capital letter and a full stop. Listening to this lecture, I paused in my note-taking and looked around. There was not a murmur of criticism from the teachers present. If there was dissent (and I wished there was) it was undetectable. All the interactions at that seminar between this teacher-presenter and the teachers present were agreeable ...

The intolerance of the politically correct Left towards ideas other than their own has limited the subject matter that can be taught, learned or explored in high school. This intolerance has also inhibited the ways topics relevant to political correctness can be discussed or analysed. This ideological bias has also impacted significantly on assessment by influencing what is rewarded or not rewarded. What is routinely praised and rewarded in high school is student work that expresses opinions that reflect the ideological bias of the vast majority of teachers. Biased assessment that favours what is politically correct and left-wing is one of the defining features of this education system.

Mark Lopez (cf. [School Sucks](#))

So it goes

For me, [this phrase](#) does not, as many believe, endorse resigned indifference; it expresses impotent rage. But then, in my heart and in my mind, I am an Alien living on the planet [Tralfamadore](#). And, so I am repeatedly told, a contrarian.

Though you might not think it, as a child I was generally docile and biddable. I was, after all, living on the planet Tralfamadore and the affairs of earthlings were of small moment. When I was about six, my (very much) older brother brought home his first girlfriend (at any rate, the first we were allowed to see). For days, I was nagged mercilessly about how I had to be on my best behaviour, which is pretty much what I was planning to do anyway. But the nagging stirred up the Irish in me and when that happened I could be very, very naughty. Had they known me better they would have realised what a perilous road they had chosen. When the day came, I went outside as instructed, turned on the garden hose, and sprayed them through the window as they sat at tea and cakes.

The critics seem surprised when I react to being called a contrarian as if it were an appreciative criticism rather than a pejorative one. Just being contrary, I guess.

I would **like to believe** that [celebrating differences](#) need not "spring from a common, concordant source." But then there's this:

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On a day early in the school year, initiate a discussion about being caring and open-minded. Set up some ground rules to create a safe environment where children can take risks. These rules can include:

- All ideas are acceptable — there are no right or wrong answers.
- Everyone may respond differently because we're all different, with different experiences and thoughts.
- No judgments (either agreeing or disagreeing) are allowed.

Ughhh!

“By the end of the day your class will have gained three important things: a greater insight into their classmates, a better understanding of diversity, and a terrific bulletin board,” says Boles.

Celebration of difference is soon hijacked (in a muddle-headed way) by ideologues who can't wait to [celebrate diversity](#) :

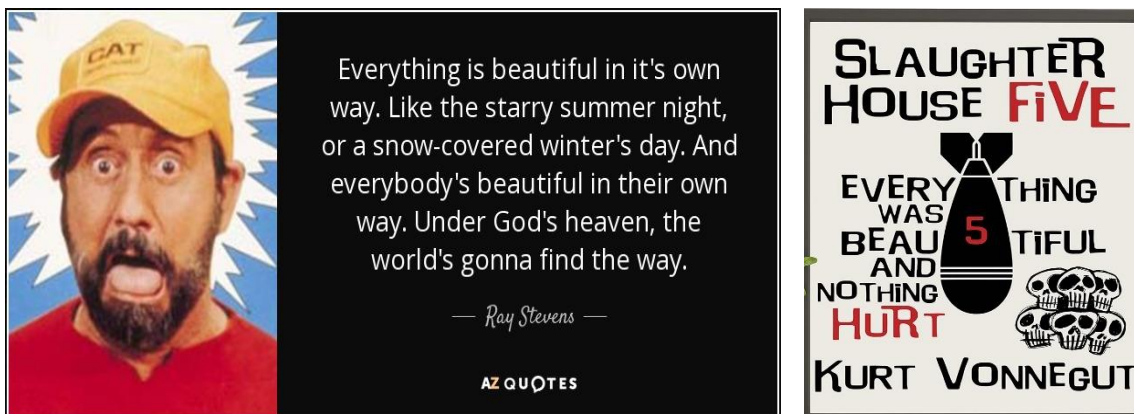
We have different backgrounds and life experiences, but we all believe in our shared values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity ... We've come a long way as a nation but there is still much more work to do. We've grown and we're increasingly not afraid of having difficult conversations about our past, present and future, of questioning our ways and acknowledging our mistakes, and finding new ways to live better, in harmony. We're working together to ensure diversity and equity are part of our everyday reality ...

It's hilarious watching politicians trip over themselves trying to square the circle of cant by respecting diversity while simultaneously celebrating “shared values”. [Harmony](#) is about both diversity and inclusiveness, it seems:

Harmony Week is an opportunity to reflect upon and celebrate our diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives ... Harmony Week is about inclusiveness, respect, and creating a sense of belonging for everyone. It is about bringing people together ...

From far, far in the past, I hear the strains of one of the most nauseating pop songs ever:

[Everything is beautiful \(in its own way\)](#)



Not the same as “[everything was beautiful and nothing hurt](#)”. Not by a long shot.

In "Slaughterhouse-Five," Kurt Vonnegut's use of the phrase "Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt" reflects the protagonist's attempt to find solace in the face of the atrocities of war and the trauma he experiences. It's a recurring refrain throughout the novel, serving as a coping mechanism for the character to find beauty and peace in a world filled with pain and suffering. Vonnegut's writing often explores the absurdity of human existence, and this line encapsulates the struggle to find meaning and beauty in a seemingly senseless and brutal world.

<< **All ideas are acceptable — there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone may respond differently because we're all different, with different experiences and thoughts. No judgments (either agreeing or disagreeing) are allowed. Ughhh!>>**

People who teach kids like that should be held criminally liable.

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In Sydney yesterday, picked up [*The Canceling of the American Mind*](#) by Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott. Quite a good analysis of cancellation as a phenomenon practised by both Left and Right. Identifies it as a new phenomenon and blames social media as a significant cause rather than simply an instrument. I don't really agree with either of those conclusions but the argument is worth following (if only for the examples cited). I couldn't help wondering if the title was a take-off of Allan Bloom's [*Closing of the American Mind*](#) (1987).

In Yasha Mounk's [*The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time*](#) (cf. Nov. 19) seven core themes of what he calls the identity synthesis were identified

1. *Scepticism about objective truth*: a postmodern wariness about “grand narratives” that extends to scepticism about scientific claims and universal values.
2. *Discourse analysis for political ends*: a critique of speech and language to overcome oppressive structures.
3. *Doubling down on identity*: a strategy of embracing rather than dismantling identities.
4. *Proud pessimism*: the view that no genuine civil rights progress has been made, and that oppressive structures will always exist.
5. *Identity-sensitive legislation*: the failure of “equal treatment” requires policies that explicitly favour marginalised groups.
6. *The imperative of intersectionality*: effectively acting against one form of oppression requires responding to all its forms.
7. *Standpoint theory*: marginalised groups have access to truths that cannot be communicated to outsiders.

I commented that “A recordkeeper (in my view) could do a lot worse than make these seven themes a template of how not to go about our work.” Although many disagree, I believe that these contemporary cultural challenges face us too and cannot be dealt with by the archivist's usual amiable evasion. In that spirit, Jonathan Haidt (in the foreword to [*The Canceling of the American Mind*](#) offers three Great Untruths from an earlier book ([*The Coddling of the American Mind*](#)) on which he collaborated with Lukianoff:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: *What doesn't kill you makes you weaker ...* If you shield your child from all dirt, germs, and viruses, you block the development of the immune system and condemn your child to a lifetime of auto-immune diseases. And if you shield your child from all risk, teasing, and exclusion you block the development of normal social and emotional skills and condemn your child to a lifetime of ... social incompetence.
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: *Always trust your feelings ...* [this] is the opposite of the fundamental insight of Stoicism, Buddhism, and many other ancient traditions ... To take your own feeling of anger as evidence that somebody harmed you is one of the major cognitive distortions ...
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: *Life is a battle between good people and evil people ...* It is part of humanity's evolved tendency toward tribalism ... The last thing we need, in a complex multiethnic liberal democracy, is for educators to teach young people to divide everyone up into groups and then teach them that some groups are good, others are bad.

No.3 is very similar to Pinker's myside bias. So there we have it: the danger that [*Celebrating Differences*](#) (*all ideas are acceptable ... no judgements*) will morph into [*Unintended Consequences*](#) (*a game of mutual provocation and reciprocal outrage*). It's the paradox of the human condition: if we don't watch out we end up hating those we disagree with, even if it is a disagreement over tolerance and acceptance.

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<<People who teach kids like that should be held criminally liable>>

... because it substitutes exhortation for persuasion, belief for understanding. Because there are right and wrong answers. Because judgements derive from thought as well as experience. Because, instead of nurturing developing intelligence, those people try to beguile the young with good feelings. Because it is the intellectual equivalent of “just say no to drugs” (or “just say no to pre-marital sex” for that matter). Pedagogically, it would be harmful, if it was not so futile. Based in lessons learned from actual experience of intolerance and division, the moral heft of tolerance and acceptance derives from hard-won insight, from an understanding of the **essence** of their goodness, not from the worship of totems, set up in opposition to facile **concepts** and to those you demonise for personifying them. The lie at the heart of the proposition that “all ideas are acceptable” is the acknowledged fact that some of them aren’t.

Nearly every day, I visit the Leisure Centre at Woy Woy. On weekends, they have Fuss-Ball: little kids, no higher than your knee, running about after balls that are almost as big as they, dressed in red-and-white uniforms with New Age names lettered on their backs: Hayley, Leo, Riley, Rocky, that sort of thing. They run about with the kind of sideways waddle you have to be very young or very old to perfect. Every now-and-then, one will take an almighty swing at a ball, miss it completely, spin like a top, and fall face-down flat to the floor. It’s hilarious to watch and (in an Age of Coddling) gratifying that they have permission to make that kind of contact with a hard wooden surface. At that age, they are almost unbreakable, it seems.

We all have to experience intolerance and division and we all have to learn how to comprehend and deal with them. Even kids. Especially kids – there few more savage arenas than the school-yard. I have never subscribed to the view that parents have the primary responsibility for social learning. Parents are often part of the problem. Mostly, kids will learn from their peers. Teachers can only open up possibilities, often possibilities that parents don’t approve of (a difficult and dangerous task). Those possibilities can (unfortunately) include an escape into a world of fantasy or (more responsibly) into one of understanding – what it means and how to deal with it on a realistic level.

All my adult life, people have been telling me that cognition doesn’t work with non-academic kids. As if thought and understanding were limited to the intellectually gifted. Well, I’ve stood in front of class-rooms in which many of the un-gifted sat. And I can tell you this: exhortation to virtue and denying them the power of judgement doesn’t work either.