

REVIEW ESSAY

Elisabeth Kaplan, Editor

Selected Themes in the Literature on Memory and Their Pertinence to Archives

Barbara L. Craig

The Book of Memory: A Study of Medieval Culture

By Mary Carruthers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. xiv, 393 pp. Index. Cloth (out of print). \$59.95. ISBN 0-521-38282-3. Paper. \$28.00. ISBN 0-521-42973-0.

How Societies Remember

By Paul Connerton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. vi, 121 pp. Index. Cloth. \$55.00. ISBN 0-521-24948-1. Paper. \$19.00. ISBN 0-521-27093-6.

Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind

By Douwe Draaisma. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xiii, 241 pp. Illustrations. Index. Cloth. \$30.00. ISBN 0-521-65024-0.

Social Memory (New Perspectives on the Past)

By James Fentress and Chris Wickham. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1992. xii, 229 pp. Index. Cloth. ISBN 0-6311-6618-1. Paper. ISBN 0-6311-6619-X. (Out of print.)

The Collective Memory

By Maurice Halbwachs. Introduction by Mary Douglas. Translated from the French by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yasdi Ditter. New York: Harper and Row, 1980. vi, 186 pp. Paper. \$5.95. ISBN 0-06-090800-9. (First published in France in 1950.)

History as an Art of Memory

By Patrick H. Hutton. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1993. xiv, 229 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$23.00. ISBN 0-87451-637-4.

History and Memory

By Jacques LeGoff. Translated by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. xxiii, 265 pp. Index. Bibliography. Cloth. \$44.00. ISBN 0-231-07590-1. Paper. \$20.50. ISBN 0-231-07591-X.

Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory

By Deborah Lipstadt. New York: Plume Penguin Books, 1994. xxi, 278 pp. Index. Cloth. \$24.95. ISBN 0-02-919235-8. Paper. \$15.00. ISBN 0-452-27274-2.

Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past

By Pierre Nora. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press. Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions, 1996. Cloth. \$45.50. ISBN 0-231-08404-8. Vol 2: Traditions, 1997. Cloth. \$45.50. ISBN 0-231-10634-3. Vol. 3: Symbols, 1998. Cloth. \$45.50. ISBN 0-231-10926-1.

Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language

By Paolo Rossi. Translated and with an introduction by Stephen Clucas. London: The Athlone Press, 2000. 2nd edition. xxviii, 333pp. Index. Appendices. Cloth. \$32.00. ISBN 0-22672-826-9.

Theatres of Memory

By Raphael Samuel. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture. London: Verso New Left Books, 1994. xiv, 479 pp. Index. Illustrations. Cloth. \$65.00. ISBN 0-86091-209-4. Paper. \$23.00. ISBN 1-85984-077-9.

Assassins of Memory: Essays in the Denial of the Holocaust

By Pierre Vidal-Naquet. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. Index. xxv, 205 pp. Cloth. \$34.50. ISBN 0-231-07458-1. Paper. \$22.00. ISBN 0-231-07459-X.

The Art of Memory

By Frances A. Yates. London: Pimlico, 1994. Index. 425 pp. Paper. \$24.95. ISBN 0-7126-5545-X. (First published by Routledge & Kegan Paul in 1966.)

At some point in their careers, all archivists will probably be grateful for the useful comparison between archives and memory. Faced with the inevitable question—"Just what is an archives and what do archivists do?"—the ready equation with memory quite magically transforms a puzzled look into a smile of understanding. The anxious archivist is reprieved from the

task of making explanations that are hopelessly difficult without a common background to summon. We frequently use the power of metaphor to leap awkward barriers of definition. The human capacity to remember words and things, information and actions, and then to recall these for contemplation or for adjustment, is understood universally to be our memory. Parts of it may be hidden from us, to be recalled unselfconsciously, perhaps by sights or in settings or by an aroma, like Swann, in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, who was transported back in time by a memory summoned by the taste of a biscuit dipped in a sweet decoction of flowers. Most often it is through conscious effort that we summon ideas and words, and with them the disturbing emotions that can accompany memories—pleasurable floods of happiness or perhaps rushes of anger that come unbidden with the recollection of events. We share a common understanding about our memory: it is the remembrance of the past, its aromas and gatherings, its happy times and moments of bleak despair.

Archivists sense that memory is a powerful concept for justifying their mission. Part of the attraction lies in the evident aptness of the analogy; nevertheless, perhaps surprisingly, most of the details of this comparison have yet to be worked out. Up to now we have been grateful for such a useful metaphor and have trusted that its implications are self-evident by the context in which it is employed. The grounds for this trust are now being explored: many have begun to ask questions about the archivists' role in arbitrating the claims of conflicting perspectives.¹ Compared to the depth and long history of inquiry into memory by philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and psychologists, discussions of its specific manifestations in archives are recent, and much of the discussion is by people with no first-hand experience with archival work.² However, the novelty of connecting archives with memory is, of course, in one important respect, misleading.

"The horror of that moment, I shall never never forget it," said the King in Lewis Carroll's quixotic tale, *Through the Looking Glass*. Perhaps the king was so affected that he was convinced that the memory would be indelible. However

¹ Recent work by archivists has touched specifically on the concept of the archive as a form of social memory. Particularly useful discussions from different perspectives are provided by the following: Jean-Louis Roy, "Managing the Memory of the World" *Archivum* 39 (1994): 83–95; Brien Brothman, "Where's Home?: Documenting Locality at the Dawn of the Electronic Age" *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 151–57 and "The Past the Archives Keep: Memory, History and the Preservation of Archival Records" *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001); Richard Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory and Its Impact on Archival Programming" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 122–35; Theresa Rowat, "The Record and the Repository as a Cultural Form of Expression" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 198–204; Barbara L. Craig, "Looking at Archives from a Bird's Eye View: Flights of Fancy, Recreation or Re-creation?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 194–97; Robert McIntosh "The Great War, Archives and Modern Memory" *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 1–31; Verne Harris, "Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa" *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997): 132–41; Terry Cook "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives" *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 14–35; and Heather MacNeil, "Trusting Records in a Postmodern World" *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 36–47.

² See the theme issues of the journal *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (November 1998) and 12 (May 1999), which were devoted to archives.

the Queen, with perhaps more experience, was skeptical: "You will . . . [forget] if you don't make a memorandum of it!" Freud, too, often distrusted his memory: "When ever I . . . [distrust my memory] I can resort to pen and paper. Paper then becomes an external part of my memory . . . safe from possible distortions to which it might have been subjected in my actual memory."³

All archives originate in the conscious act of memorializing some thing by the giving, receiving, and keeping of documentary records. The remembrance of documents, used either by us or by our successors in the generations to come, is one skein in the vast tapestry of memory that embraces groups with what they share and what they contest. The importance of memory in our culture was recently underscored by numerous public events held in Europe and North America throughout 1994, 1995, and 1996, commemorating the end of World War II. These ceremonies confirmed a resilient public memory of the war that extends beyond the generation that experienced it. Public parades on VE and VJ days, special community events for veterans and their families, and television histories of the war were a celebration for most and a provocation for some because these events restoked sensitive political issues related to war responsibilities.⁴

The attentive reader and viewer will detect a role for archives in national memorial events, documentary films and books, and, ubiquitously, on the Biography and History television channels. Notes in texts and credits as trailers to films are terse recognition of the profound role of archival materials in history products. As the providers of images, text, language, and voices from the past, archives have a palpable quality of authenticity. This has a powerful influence on popular public memories of events in the recent past and, more generally, on the public's perceptions of history in general. The archives' role in shaping a public's memory can only become stronger. New generations, with no personal recollection of events can only experience the past indirectly. Their understanding of it will be shaped by community traditions and memories, nourished largely, it seems, by a growing buffet of popular historical books, films, and television programs. All of these venues sell views of the past: some are offered as history, some as experience, and some as the truth. All of these commercial products will draw, in some way, upon archival materials. No archives will be untouched by the reuse of its materials for public consumption and performances beyond its control. The passing of a generation that experienced the traumas of both World Wars and lived to bear witness to the horrors it experienced in concentration and death camps emphasizes one finality—that

³ Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon a 'Mystic Writing-pad'" quoted in Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

⁴ In Canada, considerable public debate was generated by the television series "The Valour and the Horror" exploring Canada's role in World War Two and the experiences of its serving forces. First aired in 1992, the series consisted of three two-hour films that combined journalism, dramatic re-enactments and documentary film.

our personal memory, with all its subtlety nurtured by recollection of direct experience, will pass irrevocably with our death.

As a result, social memory, that which we share with communities of experience and history, eventually is elevated to a commanding position because it exceeds and transcends the life of any given individual. Consequently, the notion of memory is not private and simple, but rather extraordinarily complex. What is memory? Is it recollection or is it remembrance? Is it the well-spring of reflection and imagination? Is it the ground we contest in struggles for dominance—of peoples, politics, and ideas? Is it natural to us as beings or is it better seen as an artifice, constructed much like we would build any other social structure? The issue of what should receive priority in our belief—personal witness or documents—is a vital question for archivists. The inherent tension between these two fundamental ideas of memory is provided by Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Assassins of Memory: Essays in the Denial of the Holocaust*, and Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. These volumes address many of the arguments and prejudices embodied in Holocaust denial, especially the use of documents to support claims that are disputed by the evidence of the personal experiences and the memory of those who were affected. Both books raise the important issue of the relationship between personal experience and its retelling as the remembered witness of events, and the memory embodied in documentary evidence.⁵

The personal and social processes of making some things memorable and the instruments of this remembrance are topics on which there are many perspectives. Historians are prolific contributors to the growing discourse on memory, but they are not the only occupants of the turf of memory studies. Cultural anthropologists, critics of art and literature, poets, novelists, and, inevitably, philosophers all have particular concepts of memory. Perhaps it is memory as a physical phenomenon, or as psychology; perhaps as a psychic place, or as a cultural space; perhaps as a political agenda or as a special social geography. But overall, and perhaps most tellingly, these conceptual differences highlight the complexity of memory, which is not a unitary thing. There are personal memories, group memories, memories of tribes and localities. In fact, memory has multiple and conflicting manifestations that jostle for accommodation and recognition.

The concept of memory should have special resonance for archivists, and not only because it is a convenient shorthand to explain the purpose of archives to audiences unfamiliar with our work. The memorial metaphor is a powerful

⁵ In addition to the volumes by Vidal-Naquet and Lipstadt, readers should also consult Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). Evans does not address the conflict between memory and history but focuses on the manipulation and distortion of documents by David Irving, the plaintiff in a lawsuit in England. Irving's writ alleged that he was defamed by Lipstadt. Evans did research for the solicitors for Lipstadt's publisher, Penguin Books. He also appeared as an expert witness in the trial. The book is about the suit, its allegations, the evidence, and the trial.

conceptual lens through which to view archives, as documents and as institutions, and to understand the inevitable and the potential effects of our professional economy on both. Presumably archivists have their own definite ideas about the memory embodied in archives—how it is formed and used, and how it is related to personal experience and to public credos. These ideas, as yet only just beginning their welcome appearance in our literature, might be enhanced by considering some of the recurring themes in the broader area of memory studies and research. I have chosen to reflect briefly on three ideas of memory: that it is a special place or a location; that it is a thing or object that can be measured and managed; and, that it is a process or activity, akin to a technology, machine, or performance. These ideas are quite obviously related, and it is the nature of that relationship that should be of interest to archivists. The works referred to in this review are texts that usefully introduce the broad area of memory studies. But they are only a few of the key sign posts in a vast landscape whose exploration, not unexpectedly, has a history as long as human memory!

Memory begins in human psychology, that which defines our personhood, perhaps even our sense of being a separate and distinct person. Memory has a social role as well, shaping our sense of the group through its shared experiences. Because of memory's importance to our humanity, thinkers of many hues seek to understand it. Personal memory, the nature of its existence in the mind and in the body, and the process of memory formation and recollection, are interconnected problems that engaged ancient thinkers as much as they intrigue contemporary ones. Philosophers, human psychologists, and their many offsprings, such as cognitive psychology, neuropsychiatry, biology and computer engineering all ask: What is memory? and, perhaps more importantly, in the light of what it is, How does memory work?

An enduring idea of memory likens it to a box or storage area or some like structure, which corresponds to the idea of a special container located in a place. According to this view, memory has a location in the mind, one that occupies a space and is the site of the memorial process. There are variations on this general theme. Plato, in *Theatetus* (368 B.C.), asks the reader:

Imagine . . . that our minds contains a block of wax . . . [a] gift of the Muses' mother, memory . . . whenever we wish to remember something . . . we hold this wax under the perceptions of ideas and imprint on them as we might stamp the impression of a sealing ring.⁶

St. Augustine, in referring to memory in his *Confessions*, described a vast landscape whose endless fields and deep caves he could neither visit nor catalogue.⁷ The Aristotelian psychology of human memory conceived it in terms of a blank tablet that received the impressions of experience. These were stored as an

⁶ Benjamin Jowett, ed. and trans., *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953), 294–95.

⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1961), 194–95.

archives that was revisited. Aristotle also distinguished memory from recollection; the latter being largely dependent on the association of ideas.⁸ Descartes saw memory as having a dual nature, part physiological, or “animal,” and part intellectual.⁹ Recent research into the physiology of the brain, using Post-Emission Tomography, scanned specific sites in the brain to record physiological activities when the mind was thinking and remembering.¹⁰ Ancient writers and modern scientists agree that humans need to have a healthy memory in good working order if we are to pursue a normal personal and social life. Damaged memories, those that are dysfunctional or in some way injured so they are unable to work, affect our concept of time and our ability to remember and recollect ideas and thoughts, habits and people, places and things. Remembering has its complement in forgetting. Both are opposites on a balance wheel, which keeps the machine of remembrance in fine tune. Any alteration to the balance of this polarity affects our minds and our physical well-being. “I sit beside my lonely fire/And pray for wisdom yet:/For calmness to remember/Or courage to forget,” wrote the poet Charles Hamilton Aidé, who understood that both qualities of memory are important but are not achieved without a struggle. Whether memory and its alter ego, the “forgettery,” are conceived as places of storage or as chemical triggers, scholars have been seeking to understand their power and their pathologies. Modern communications technology gives a new edge to memory, from its analog in computers, to the idea of memory control, damaging loss of information and deep social anomie.

Ancient thinkers and modern researchers alike distinguish memory from recollection. At the same time, they emphasize that both are intimate and that their relationship is not only reciprocal but also necessary. The ancient view of memory was much influenced by its role as a store for accumulated knowledge. Texts were expensive and not widely distributed nor easily duplicated so that the power of memory to recall was cherished as an indispensable skill in science, law, the professions, and the church. Mnemonic schools flourished. Each promoted a view of memory and touted the virtues of special mental exercises that supporters claimed would enhance a person’s mental powers. Many of these systems involved techniques for classifying information and indexing remembered things. Modern research into memory and how it works is largely grouped into two areas of special interest. The brain’s chemical and electrical channels of memory are studied by the hard sciences, while memory’s social and interpersonal roles are the particular concern of those in the humanities and social science. From the archivists’ point of view, historians of literacy and

⁸ “On memory and Recollection” in *Aristotle Book VIII, On The Soul, Parva Naturalia, on Breath*. Translated by W. S. Hett. (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1936).

⁹ John Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) is a valuable discussion of memory in philosophy, historiography and linguistics.

¹⁰ See Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind and the Past*. (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

texts, cultural anthropologists, and art historians occupy an important niche in memory studies because they investigate the nexus between memorial ways and the idioms and conventions of texts and visual representations.

Memory formation and its role in culture and history have been subjects for extended exploration and study since the late nineteenth century, although modern interest has surged in the last twenty years. For the purposes of this essay, it is important to acknowledge the seminal work of Dame Frances Yates, who inaugurated the scholarly interest of this generation in memory, its meanings, forms, and mechanics. Her original and unique volume, *The Art of Memory*, first published in 1966 and followed by numerous reprints, is an extended treatise on the workings and uses of memory as developed by the ancients, and later by medieval and late-Renaissance philosophers. Yates combined history, textual criticism, and art to analyze memory as a method, as a means of retrieval, and as an arbiter in learning. It was her insight into the role of memory in literature, science, and knowledge that established the commanding position of the memory metaphor. Her unusual approach rehabilitated the metaphysical side of early science and revealed the importance of memory in pedagogy, and ultimately, in knowledge production. Yates resurrected the magical side of early science and, along the way, exposed the richness in the history of the concept. All contemporaries are Yates's successors, even if most have taken exception to her particular enthusiasms and conclusions. Her book still has the power of originality. Its sheer inventiveness coexists happily alongside profound erudition and a wide knowledge of texts. A companion volume is the second edition of Paolo Rossi's *Logic and the Art of Memory*, first published in Italy in 1982. Rossi's interests in Renaissance philosophy and the scientific method, among other interests, are parallel to those of Yates, but his discussion of ancient and renaissance texts and ideologies is more cautious in its claims. As a result, Rossi's discussion of history and traditions is more nuanced. His approach is less that of a convert to a new vision, and more that of a knowledgeable and contemplative observer of a natural history of ideas.

Even the study of fossils . . . can teach us how ideas that were once vital and living can become culturally extinct, and how the present can carry the past within it, without anyone being aware of it.¹¹

Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory: A Study of Medieval Culture*, shares Yates's and Rossi's interest in memory as a method of knowledge formation, but includes evidence from the practice of reading as well as from the texts themselves. Her focus is on the relationship between reading and thinking in the medieval world. Carruthers' knowledge of medieval society and the nuances of its languages is profound. Her focus on the text as object is broadly conceived,

¹¹ Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory*, 2nd ed., trans. Stephen Clucus (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), xxi.

integrating these with material culture and with reading. Carruthers argues that memory and recollection were moral activities. From these deep wells the mind drew its own readings of authoritative texts to demonstrate prudence in judgment rather than novelty by innovation. Memory emerges as the condition for acts of imagination, not just the source for serried recall of a rote type. She is skeptical of the rift between the memorial and the logical, arguing that thought and argument were constructed in the same way by oral cultures and by those that give special faith to written texts. Carruthers uses the luxurious evidence provided, perhaps paradoxically, by books. Her focus is on texts (particularly as objects that were integrated with the process of memory building and knowledge production through glosses), those in the book and those virtual glosses made by the mind on its store of remembered texts and ideas.

The themes of memory mechanisms, knowledge formation, and cultural sustenance, pursued by Yates, Rossi, and Carruthers for the ancient and medieval world, are taken up by Jacques Le Goff and Patrick Hutton, but in relation to the discipline of history as it has been developed since the seventeenth century. They are especially interested in the relationship of the memory shared by groups about their collective experiences to the practices of historical research and writing. What is the connection between history and memory? Are these reciprocal or not? What distinguishes the methods and practices of one from the other? What does memory do for society and what is history's role? Le Goff's volume, originally prepared as separate essays for publication in Italy in 1977, and later collected for this volume in 1986 (Italian), 1988 (French) and translated into English in 1992, is a multi-faceted reflection on the connections between memory and history. LeGoff explores the roles of narrative history in memory making and the moral obligations of the historian as a memorialist to pursue a larger "truth" about the past. Hutton's volume locates the roots of contemporary interest in memory and pursues the connections between history and memorial recollections and practices. His volume is the most comprehensive historical review of the re-emergence of memory into contemporary society and history. Moments of repetition in acts of remembrance are among the areas he points to for further study.

Both ancient thinkers and modern science seek memory in a place and a location, the one using the analogy of a store, the other describing webs of circuitry or chemical reactions through receptors. Is there a connection between a physical, or geographical location and remembering and memorializing? The answer seems to be "yes." The influences of place and of situated performance on remembering as a process are problems that interest historians, anthropologists, and psychologists. Two volumes by historians provide contrasting approaches to examining the relationship of memory to location. The three-volume book of essays prepared by scholars of French history and edited by Pierre Nora focuses on post-revolutionary France. These essays restore the fullness of the physical contexts in which national

experiences first were formed and later recalled for continuing use. Raphael Samuel's volume, by contrast, is a poetic and imaginative exploration of "landscapes" conceived as places or "theatres" whose structures we invest with meaning. Samuel is less interested in received national history and its sources in memory and more in the multiple connections of people to their landscapes and townscapes. These are not neutral backdrops for self-conscious activities, but participants with us in structuring and restructuring the typical, common, and unique activities of daily life and life-course rituals that were internalized as a form of play script.

Memory as places where information and knowledge are stored or from which ideas, concepts, and knowledge are recalled is paralleled by the equally resilient theme of memory as a mechanism that fixes items for later recall at will. Both concepts are mutually supporting—you need the space for storage and the mechanism for placing memories in the store correctly and for getting these back clearly and in a useable form. This brings us to the idea of memory as a construction or a "work in progress" and not as a thing received. Exponents of this social idea emphasize the role of the group in shaping each person's memory and recollection. Time, in the form of chronology, knits the fabric of shared experiences into a common memory or history.

Aristotle claimed,

It is impossible to remember the future, [which is an object of conjecture or expectation . . . [and that] all memory . . . implies a lapse of time.

Aristotle drew distinctions between memory and recollection and further located both as dependent upon our innate sense of time. But the Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* had another view. "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," she declared to Alice on the subject of human memory.

Just how are the parts of time knit into a fabric of memory and recollection? Is the process one that we can analyze? Or is it driven by other, more powerful, engines, by commanding ideas or paradigms, for example?

Collective Memory, by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, first published in 1950, but written earlier, is the pioneer study in the workings of group memory. Halbwachs was a follower of Durkheim and was inspired by Bergson. The ideas of both can be detected in his argument that memory cannot be separated from the conditions in which it is formed and recalled. This leads to a conclusion that the past only exists in recollection mediated by the experiences of the group. The existence of an objective past independent of ourselves is an illusion. Nevertheless, the illusion is strong and persistent. It is nurtured by our ability to articulate, more or less accurately, what comprises the past and to agree on some of its major components. We may sense that we are the creators and proprietors of our personal memories, but Halbwachs argues

that this sense of possession is misleading. Personal memory is mediated by the spaces and places in which people interact. For Halbwachs, written texts only have supporting roles in the ongoing drama of memory, which he concluded was a “script” written by contemporary social interaction.

Halbwachs’s ideas were foreshadowed in print by the pioneer English psychologist, Frederick Bartlett, whose *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (1932), connected individual memory to that of the group. The process of memory, for Bartlett, involves schema, details, and attitudes.¹² Remembering is an active process of reconstruction that is shaped by schema that direct recall to things that we have concluded from personal experience—we organize or classify experience into typical schema and then use these schema to pattern memory. *Social Memory*, by the anthropologist James Fentress and the historian Chris Wickham, discusses many of Halbwachs’ concepts of the “collective,” but situates these in concrete social practices and activities that reflexively shape individual memory and shared remembrances. Their book distinguishes between memory as action and memory as a form of representation. Fentress and Wickham are not interested in their relative truths, but rather in understanding their social meaning, which is not related to truth but to belief and usefulness. Their rich book emphasizes the importance of context-dependency in the transmission of memory. Paul Connerton’s *How Societies Remember* further develops the role of traditions in social memory by focusing on the importance of performance as a form of ritual assurance. His particular interest is exploring how practices that are not written or “inscribed” are transmitted to new generations.

Halbwachs’ interest in memory as social theatre continues to be pursued by scholars in a number of directions: some working to classify memory into its semantic, sensory, and factual parts; others investigating its history and its workings in literate, oral, and non-industrial cultures; still others following its iconography; and finally, a growing group exploring the memorial role of the new heritage industries. The social aspect of memory has expanded to become a large territory with provinces for specialists in neuroscience, anthropology, and psychology. In this crowded room, space has been made for discussion of the archives, as a metaphor for knowledge, as an adjunct to power, and as a particular form of memorial inscription. However, only a few have begun to explore the archives as it is shaped by those that build its internal structures. The area is wide open and inviting. The language of ancient and modern memory that uses the analogies to information storage, retrieval, and use suggests, ultimately, that we might find it useful to explore the archival ideas inherent in that language, and, reciprocally, the sources of the language we

¹² See Frederick Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932) A very useful discussion of Bartlett and his ideas is provided by Akiko Saito, *Bartlett, Culture and Cognition*. (Psychology Press, 2000).

use in our lexicon of technical terms.¹³ There is no better place to begin than with Douwe Draaisma's *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, an unusual volume that explores the representation of memory from the point of view of the metaphors employed for it. Although Draaisma's interest is in the use made of these metaphors for memory, each one taps ideas that were abroad in society about human physiology, scientific knowledge, computation, imagery and recording, and artificial thinking machines.

The idea that archives are a physical space for memory and a site in which it is recalled, or "made" in the social-construction sense, has the potential to profoundly affect our services to users. While it is a commonplace truth that "you can't turn back the clock," an archives brings together a physical space with documents that, in a mimetic way, gives us the potential to do just that—to turn back the clock. Time, space, and process are focused in archives and achieve there a form of relativity that users can experience. From their point of view, the activity of meditation upon a subject or idea, like religious or spiritual exercises, may be entirely consonant with visiting the archives as a place and using it as a surround for active reflection and thought. Recollection has many manifestations and these affect us in different ways. Perhaps most commonly, in relation to ourselves, memory creeps upon us as a nostalgia. But it also may be structured as reminiscence, when time and change has created a sufficient difference for there to be a contrast upon which to reflect. Memory also may be used dispassionately to search for the knowledge it contains and the truths it may hold. Archives unite the contrasting parts of memory that, at one and the same time, can appear as both thought and feeling.¹⁴

The usefulness of the memory recalled by archives is affected by two conditions: the qualities of the documents as credible evidence and the transparency of the contextual envelope that encloses them. Together these work to transmit clear intent that provides a stable foundation on which users can begin to create their own meanings. The importance of clearly marked contextual boundaries is particularly striking the further back in time we explore. Archives are eventually removed from the supports to understanding that come automatically

¹³ The uses of language in archival work has been perceptively and suggestively explored by Brien Brothman, particularly in "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice" *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1991): 78–100 and "Brothman on Authorship: (The Author Responds)" *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992): 4–7. Language also features largely in discussion of archives by Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, Heather MacNeil, and Bernadine Dodge. From among their many illuminating contribution to the literature, I recommend Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatic: New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, Md. and London: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998); Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies" *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 232–52; Heather MacNeil *Trusting Records* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000); and Bernadine Dodge, "Across the Great Divide: Archival Discourse and the (Re)presentations of the Past," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 16–30.

¹⁴ The implications of place, time, and experience are discussed in preliminary but highly suggestive ways by Bernadine Dodge, "Places Apart: Archives in Dissolving Space and Time" *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997): 118–31, and "Across the Great Divide," Verne Harris "On (Archival) Odysseys," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 2–13 and Brien Brothman (by implication) in "Where's Home?". No one yet has tackled the implications of the emergent electronic economy on use and the user's experience and needs.

from a shared experience with their creators. Once time has divorced us sufficiently from the past, a territory that the historian David Lowenthal has called “a foreign country,” a cultural context can only be one that is reconstructed or reconstituted in some way. Among the materials required for it are accurate descriptions of sources and a variety of complementary records. These twin supports provide knowledge of the form and genre in which documents appeared, of their language and its usages, and in particular, of the recordkeeping systems and conventions that shaped a group’s documentary habits. All of these pieces of information vicariously reconstruct a virtual group memory that we can join. The archivist and the user both have jobs in this rebuilding.¹⁵

This leads us to consider the selection of archives in the light of memory as a conceptual ideal. Memory highlights anew the tension between two ideas of the archivist. At one end is the keeper who preserves the memory formed by others in documents, maintaining their qualities as useful sources intact. At the other extreme is the documenter who inscribes memory and actions by actively documenting ideas, institutions, and groups according to a contemporary plan or interpretation. These distinctions highlight a central problem in the selection of archives, that of declared roles in their accumulation and, as a consequence, of the dependencies these create. In dealing with the moral obligation we have to dependents, including our successors in the profession and our users, appraisal emerges as the foremost responsibility of the archivist. Our efforts to develop appropriate methods and frameworks for appraisal, reflected in discussions of documentation strategies, functional analysis, and macro-appraisal accompanied by disposition plans, manifest our sensitivity to the importance of archives in making public memory and in its nourishment. A memorial model for acquisition has the potential to complement the documentation model by providing us with a holistic framework in which to adjudicate institutional and cultural roles, which at times may be in conflict.¹⁶ There are several possible levels of conceptualization in this model, allowing it to be flexible in the areas it can embrace and the methods it can accommodate. The memorial model has particular pertinence to our ideas about the archivist’s responsibility for acknowledging those with no documentary voice. Nevertheless, regardless of what theory an archives or archivist adopts to ground their methods, especially those for appraisal, the act of selection gives archivists an important role as a cre-

¹⁵ The processes of cultural production seems to offer a useful avenue for archivists to explore, allowing for perspectives from the point of view of producer and consumer.

¹⁶ Many archivists have endeavored to develop metaschemes that we might employ as organizing ideas for the nature of archives and their role in society. These include: social utility in democracy, (Terry Eastwood, Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward); archives as a narrative on the meaning of bureaucracy (Rick Brown and, to a lesser extent, Brien Brothman); archives as storytelling for moral reinforcement or community bonds (Verne Harris). Terry Cook, Bernadine Dodge, Brien Brothman, Tom Nesmith, and Joan Schwartz have suggested that re-representation and electronic connections may provide opportunities for both heavy-handed censorship and more democratic access to archives that may allow people to consume culture without mediation of commercial industries. See, for example, Bernadine Dodge, “Across the Great divide: . . .”

ator or author of their archives. Decisions of choice need to be explicit. Once these have been declared, they become part of the larger memorial process, as the archivist's florilegia, in this case not on individual documents, but more profoundly, on the large archival "text" we shape in appraisal. These texts, like any other, are then available for critical assessment by others.¹⁷

A memorial ideal and its potential models return us to the centrality of memory and witness in documents. Archives are objects formed by a will to action and given their special qualities by being "used" in a certain way and in certain circumstances. They are objects at the borders between personal and social memory. As a result, they are rarely stable or fixed. The essential duality in archival documents, being things that not only "say" but also "do," spans the gulf between meanings that are declared and those that are implied by the contexts beyond the text. Documents always participate in a technique or a manner of doing as a part of a specific material culture and social practice. They are presented to us in several dimensions, in their material substance, in their aesthetic qualities, in their formal composition, and (especially) in their rhetorical effects. None of these can be fixed, but are subject to continuing interpretation in the light of experience. Documents also are integral parts of larger cultural communities, those of explicit ideas and actions, implicit assumptions, and available technologies, which are joined in the concept and system of recordkeeping. The nature of documents as information objects cannot fully be grasped without placing them within a series of increasingly wider contexts, of communications, competencies, and intent, which comprise their totality, much like the layers of skin in an onion—peel away these layers to get at the heart and eventually you have nothing left. But the layers, taken together, constitute the nature of the object. These layers, the assumed, the declared, and the practical, comprise a large part of the memory that is bound up in the document.

The origin of archives as written acts for remembrance is the reason for their immediate usefulness and later, for their timelessness as cultural sources. Documents, like beads of water on a web or the pulses recorded by Post Emission Tomography, are each like the other but at the same time are distinct in the space they occupy and in their relationship to the others. The unique meaning of documents in context underscores the importance of provenance conceived as richly as possible, as source, as transmission over time, as locations, and as the locus of all of these aspects. Archival documents are something more than two-dimensional containers of information from the past. Because they bind people to intentions and actions, archives, in their natural state, are a large-scale map of society's documentary relationships as these are woven over time. The archivist's role is to ensure that archives remain true to the realities of their witness so these can be used in the courts of history and public memory.

¹⁷ Over the centuries archivists have composed a polyphonous descant on the themes remembered in archives. The active pursuit of archival history is one way to explore these historical sonorities.