

“May They Reminisce Over You”: Toward Community-Based Archival Storytelling

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Memory workers, inside and outside of archives, increasingly seek to confront the ongoing legacies of oppression and colonialism within the institutions in which they work--to question and reframe whose stories are best told and from what perspective users are encouraged to approach them. This paper proposes community-based archival storytelling as a framework building on community-based research methods and emerging theory concerned with archival storytelling. Community-based archival storytelling, through shifting approaches to description and access, seeks to transform the dominance of provenance and the boundaries of engagement with communities connected to archival holdings. The paper situates the intervention within critiques of Library and Information Studies (LIS) practices and argues for a conception of ritual/rupture. For a case study, this article explores the author's design of a proposed community research project of a collection at La MaMa Archives. It argues for transforming the process of digitizing cultural heritage into an opportunity to reshape the collection in accordance with principles of participatory archiving. It theorizes methods of engaging and partnering with Jeannette Bastian's

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“community of records” connected to different performances held by La MaMa, taking up the call by Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish to “reposition the subjects of records and all others involved or affected by the events documented in them as participatory agents” (Bastian, 2003; Gilliland & McKemmish, 2015). By taking up the call for participatory archives, it advocates for the benefits of the practices of reminiscing and oral history to complement web-driven or more technologically oriented solutions often linked with participatory efforts. Anticipating the needs of the artists and community elders implicated within and involved as co-creators of these records, it integrates aspects of emerging models of continuum informatics and participatory appraisal with the professional practices of oral history and reminiscing work. It examines possibilities for integrating Leisa Gibbons Mediated Recordkeeping model with Jeffrey Dean Webster’s Heuristic Model of Reminiscing.

Introduction

“I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me/ To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes” (Sweet Honey In The Rock, 1993, pt. “Wanting Memories”).

In writing her theories regarding community-based research, Maori scholar of Indigenous Education Linda Tuhiwai Smith framed her work through a visit in 1996 from Black activist, singer, and historian Dr. Bernice Reagon Johnson.¹ Both Smith and Johnson came to the encounter after years of navigating what Black Feminist sociologist Patricia Hills Collins calls “outsider within status,” (Collins, 2008, p. 14) existing at the intersection of epistemological traditions of resistance and activism with academic training and research accomplished within institutions hostile or inaccessible to the communities in which they were raised. Navigating Smith’s home prompted Johnson to define “her own community as one held together by song rather than by territory” (Smith, 2012, p. 129). Bridging the space between their different traditions as women, scholars, and activists came through sharing of stories and songs. What might LIS practices look like if designed to support their needs as researchers and users; as people committed to liberation and celebration of communities defined through land and song?

Smith shares the encounter as preface to articulating her view of community-based research, a practice she credits with emancipatory potential for not only Indigenous communities but also all communities confronting colonial legacies of domination and erasure. Smith argues that

¹ Throughout this article, as I name a new theorist I also name race, nationality, and Indigenous community as part of the context of the position from which they speak. This convention is meant to destabilize and provoke--in some cases it honors a community or group identity the theorist would claim themselves, in other cases it’s a more awkwardly applied fit. It is imperfect and contingent, as is all classification, and I welcome critical engagement. Its theoretical intent is two-fold. First, it is an attempted counter to the naturalization and universality of whiteness [in the words of white Jewish US American Studies scholar George Lipsitz (1995) “the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name”) studied by scholars in Critical Race Theory, Black feminism, womanism, and most recently by The Racial Imaginary Institute. (See: Collins 2008, Harris 1993, Lipsitz 1995, Honma 2005, Dyer 1997, hooks 1997). Second, national context is also an acknowledgment of the Archival Multiverse, which is perhaps an inadequate shorthand, but encourages reader to realize archival concepts and terms do not perfectly map onto each other across national borders (McKemmish 2016). For example, my cohort in library school often had no sense of the Australian valence of the term recordkeeping.

allowing definitions within community research to emerge from within the community is fundamental. As a result, no single model contains all examples, with projects spanning research independent of formal training and academics partnering from within outside institutions. Smith does outline a few priorities common to most community-based research projects—namely that “the process is far more important than the outcome” and that they “are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate...lead[ing] one small step further towards selfdetermination” (p. 130-131). In this article, I argue if LIS practitioners re-imagine our institutions and practices through community-based modes of archival storytelling, we open up spaces for healing institutional legacies of domination and erasure. Community-based archival storytelling links Smith’s reading of community-based research methods with emerging archival theories of storytelling such as work by white US museum anthropologist and practitioner Diana Marsh et al. (2015), white US archival educator and theorist David Wallace et al. (2014), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research focused on health and families Lynore Geia et al. (2014), Wiradjuri research and educator of equity in health professions Karen Adams and white Australian archives researcher focused on Koorie knowledge Shannon Faulkhead (2012). This article connects in a complementary way with Marsh et al. (2015), by taking up some of their questions of how stories transform internal and external perceptions of institutions and by looking not at their focus on how stories can serve as metrics of impact, but on how storytelling can act as part of description and access. Their findings of how “singular stor[ies]” allowed museum professional to “re-envision the work of the museum” (p. 349) captures the type of transformative moments that this article seeks to center through storytelling practice. They also provide further context for the case study presented as to how digitization can open up new conceptions and modalities within an institution.

I advocate community-based archival storytelling remains attuned to an interlinked practice of ritual/rupture, presenting a research design linked to an audiovisual collection held by La MaMa Archives as one step toward this agenda. As a case study, La MaMa Archives, located in New York City, presents rich grounds for exploring the potential of community-based archival storytelling. The archives exists within an institution more invested in sustaining community and less interested in nostalgia than most. Since it was founded by Black director Ellen Stewart in 1961, La MaMa ETC (Experimental Theater Club) has been heralded as birthplace of off-off Broadway, playing a vital role in the history of avant garde performance, queer theater, and helping launch the careers of a diverse group of playwrights, directors, and performers. For years the La MaMa mission statement explicitly placed priority on artists as community members and on their development creatively, not simply on the outcome of producing works. In the words of a New York Times profile, “La MaMa has been a home to, and a champion of, brash, venturesome artists” (Schaefer, 2017). The archives remain only part of an organization continuing to embody its mission of supporting new artists and new works, rooted in a vision of theatre that mirrors the goals of community-based research.

LIS, Property, and the Limits on the Category of Human

“For one who legally cannot own her body, what does it mean to own records?” (Drake, 2016).

Before addressing the potential of community-based archival storytelling within the field of LIS, it is important to provide a brief introductory analysis of the ongoing legacies of colonialism and domination within LIS institutions and professions. I will offer a brief sketch, gesturing toward a few writers who have undertaken the historical and theoretical project of outing white supremacy and colonialism within our field.

Pascua Yaqui Tribe member Marisa Elena Duarte and Tlingit Nation member Manuela Belarde-Lewis emphasize a working definition of colonialism, emanating from their perspective as Indigenous LIS scholars and foregrounding colonialism as both a set of historical legacies and an ongoing project. They name the process of colonization as both “socioeconomic policy” and “expansionist ideology,” defined for them as a “set of relationships in which one social group continually and habitually profits by exploiting the living environments, bodies, social organization, and spiritualities of another social group” (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 681). Important to them is the word “habitually,” rather than an episodic form of exploitation, and also that colonialism is a productive process, one that justifies the superiority of the dominant group by creating structures and systems designed to perpetuate and normalize the exploitation. They identify four overlapping mechanisms by which it operates: 1) lumping diverse First Nations groups into a single class deemed sub-human and deserving of suppression and genocide; 2) Settlers stealing and building on Indigenous land; 3) building institutions that support the creation of a subhuman class and Settler control of land; and 4) organizing hegemonic forms of knowledge that mark Indigenous epistemologies, autonomy, spiritualities, and ways of life as inferior or marginal (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 682).

Two points of the above set of definitions can work well as bridging concerns across theorists and critical traditions. The first is the question of who counts as fully human and the second is whose conceptions and forms of ownership are recognized, protected, and enforced. Smith and self-described “archives nihilist” and Black liberatory memory worker, Jarrett Drake, both craft their interventions around the limits of discourses of the “human.” Smith notes that much of scientific and Western academic research purports to be on behalf of the improvement of all “mankind,” seeing no need to justify its efforts with more specific and tangible results. She voices the cynicism of many Indigenous communities that research will lead to improvement in their lives, as “science has long regarded, indeed has classified, [Indigenous communities] as being ‘not human’” (Smith, 2012, p. 122).

Drake links ownership and the status of human together in his critique of provenance as central to archives, arguing provenance “reflects the limitation of state regimes in the West to recognize fully the human rights of Indigenous americans, Black people, women, and gender non-conforming people” (Drake, 2016). Historicizing its emergence as a principle “in the West at a time when most people were structurally if not legally excluded from ownership; ownership of their own bodies, minds, labor, property, and records” (Drake, 2016). He questions why the single principle of provenance remains central to archives, concerned with

organizing our records and collections in accordance with Western notions of intellectual, legal, and cultural ownership.

Reading Drake's analysis of provenance in conjunction with Duarte and Belarde-Lewis's definition of colonialism, its centrality reveals aspects of how LIS perpetuates imperialist structures. Provenance acting as a foundational principle shows how two of the four mechanisms—building institutions and organizing hegemonic forms of knowledge—operate within archives. The “set of relationships” they name as oriented toward profit through economic and intellectual exploitation apply to enshrining a notion of provenance that links ownership to creation and limits efforts to recognize multiple creators, with different stakes in a record. The creation of systems that normalize the relationship of exploitation speaks to why dominant groups, such as the majority cis het white people of European descent who have filled generations of LIS positions are resistant to questioning provenance. Normalization for those receiving the material, intellectual, physical advantages of settler colonialism and white supremacy means that dismantling those systems will remove benefits that are both highly personal to dominant groups and yet also largely invisible to us. Unexamined dominant group entitlements can feel like personal loss when they have been considered a natural part of our lives and our profession. Dismantling colonial systems requires vulnerability on the part of established institutional practices and the most privileged LIS professionals who may be ill-equipped to recognize our own habits and reliance on systems enshrining our cultural expectations and ways of being.

White Canadian archives theorist Wendy Duff and white South African archives theorist Verne Harris cover well another dimension of the ways archivists serve as agents of larger power structures and how our individual choices impact the extent to which colonial systems are perpetuated. For archivists, “[p]ersonal histories, institutional cultures, gender dynamics, class relations, and many other dimensions of meaning-construction are always already at play in processes of records description.”(Duff & Harris, n.d., p. 275) They frame the description process contained within archival description, as well as cataloging dimensions of other LIS professions, as storytelling—arguing that “[a]ttempting to deny it, by insisting that they merely marshal facts rather than construct a narrative with a selection of facts, or by insisting that they are merely a conduit for a story which tells itself... makes them vulnerable to the dangers of story” (Duff & Harris, n.d., p. 277). The danger they warn against is that of the big story or hegemonic narratives supporting colonialism, that prevent the room for multiple perspectives or for non-dominant groups to speak from their own vantage point. Duff and Harris call for individual archivists to make transparent the ways storytelling occurs within systems, taking responsibility for our part in the systems of colonization that are cited from Smith, Duarte, Belarde-Lewis, and Drake above.

Ritual and Rupture Within Community-based Archival Storytelling

“Ritual is an action word” (David Hammons, quoted in Jones, 2017, p. 224).

As LIS professionals we work with collections and materials from across the world and hailing from different time periods. Once materials and records are in the control of our institutions we set the terms of use, how they can be experienced and by whom. We can speak of the rituals of the reading room, the visiting researcher, and the processing archivist. In a

keynote at the first Diversifying the Digital Historical Record forum, Drake (2016) outlined a few of these—the silence users must maintain in our libraries and reading rooms; the solitude of individual researchers making meaning on their own; the surveillance systems we replicate, requiring official government documentation be provided, credentials representing approval in university systems, tracking modes of use in ways that mirror the surveillance law enforcement inflicts on colonized communities and activists. In his essay most directly addressing the work of archives, Black Caribbean cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (2001) contended “heterogeneity, the multiplicity of discourses, not only of practice but of criticism, history and theory, of personal story, anecdote and biography, are the 'texts' which make the archive live” (p. 92) and provide the means of communities understanding themselves. While he acknowledges the important continuities of story, tradition, and ritual these texts can provide, he advises “each archive must produce not only the continuities... but also chart the paradigm shifts, the moments when the pattern or 'period' breaks, when there is rupture” (Hall, 2001, p. 92).

White library scholar and queer theorist Emily Drabinski also stresses the importance of moments of rupture. In her essay *Queering the Catalog*, she employs a queer theoretical lens to argue that efforts to decolonize library records and the Library of Congress Subject Headings cannot rely on a permanently achieved correction of violent language or legacies. Instead of envisioning a moment where the rituals of description and discovery escape permanently the legacies of oppression and colonialism, Drabinski (2013) argues:

In defining the problem of classification and cataloging queerly, the solutions themselves must be queer: built to highlight and exploit the ruptures in our classification structures and subject vocabularies, inviting resistance to rather than extension of the coherent library systems that a critical cataloging movement for correctness upholds. (p 96-97)

Practices of rupture require a refusal to move only toward smoother and more orderly rituals and systems in LIS institutions. Movement toward community-based archival storytelling does not mean ever reaching a point where colonialism is fully corrected from the record, nor a profession free of conflict, disagreement or politics.

Nkisi, Ritual/Rupture & the Making of Homeplace

“There is also a little old lady who has the greatest flower garden in the world, and if you could steal it away from her and take it to an art museum, it would be a hit” (Jones, 2017, p. 104).

If the space of archival storytelling is built through a balance between the practices of ritual and rupture, the more fitting expression is not either end on its own, but the integration of the two as a cycle of ritual/rupture. If processes of healing and self-determination can happen within the space of storytelling, perhaps another way of naming this space is home. As Duarte and Belarde-Lewis put it, “[s]torytelling draws visitors into the deep domain knowledge they need to make sense of discrete documents and artifacts, even those they may see elsewhere” (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 699). Ritual/rupture as a paired phrase serves also as a reminder of their caution that the jagged edges of colonial trauma cut each of us

differently. The traumas of slavery, genocide, patriarchy, rape culture, and settler colonialism impact those directly affected and those shielded from the systems through privilege or fortunate circumstance differently, even in the same moment. In speaking on knowledge and memory work done in partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, they warn that it can re-inscribe colonial power relations with non-Indigenous folks forcing Indigenous people again to act in the role of “mute noble listeners, while metabolizing the pain of recognizing that much of [their] ways of knowing have been lost, subjugated, censored, and stolen from [their] communities” (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 679).

In writing on the use of ritual within the work Black Los Angeles artists during the 1960s and 1970s, Black art historian and curator Kellie Jones turned to Black Feminist scholar bell hooks and her understanding of homeplace as a site of resistance. Hooks' pairing of homeplace with resistance parallels ritual/rupture and positions the tensions between opening trauma and healing from it as a connected practice. She defines homeplace as a domain where “politicization of memory” occurs, a place where one “distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks, 1990). Hooks named as a form of homeplace the aesthetics of yards and gardens within Black homes in the South, a subject the Black Los Angeles based artist John Outterbridge touches upon in the quote above. Jones also links Outterbridge to the theories of white art historian specializing in African aesthetics throughout the diaspora, Robert Farris Thompson. Thompson reads in the work of Southern Black artists, people viewed by traditional art historians as folk/outsider artists, a translation of the Kongo sculptural practice of *nkisi*—a practice of community warding involving wrapped “pouches of medicinal and ideographical avatars of healing” (Jones, 2017, p. 223). Outterbridge saw his work as director of Watts Tower Arts center as a form of art practice, constructing a community homeplace through art and in order to train new artists and facilitate arts practice. Thompson saw these yards built up through sculptures and mixed media work as creation of *nkisi* in physical and community space, enabling healing through the wrapping of it within story and art. In a lecture at UCLA, Duarte advised to the LIS students in the room that we cannot expect the mere presentation of records, materials, objects to communities will grab their attention or create a meaningful moment of exchange. Instead, Duarte (2017) implored us to “wrap them in story.”

I propose we are still very ill-informed and ignorant of the potential and pre-existing rituals of the objects and materials we preside over. The colonialist legacy insures most of our institutions have records from more communities and cultures than our staff and consultants understand. At the same time, we often know which cultures are experts in their use and choose not engage with those experts or to frame their own expertise. Even with materials connected to the culture from which an institution originates, we still have much to learn.

Toward Models of Imagining and Community-based Research

“How many of the catalogers at the Library of Congress have ridden horseback with Jicarilla Apache ranchers to check their fences, herded their cattle, or even attended their Go’jiaa ceremony in the fall” (Chester, 2006, p. 20).

White Canadian archives theorist Wendy Duff and white South African archives theorist Verne Harris argue that storytelling plays an inevitable role in our work as LIS professionals. They also call for new modes of storytelling as a site for intervention into colonial projects and traditional abuses of power. I draw on Duarte and Belarde-Lewis *Techniques of Imagining* and Smith's articulations of an Indigenous research agenda as comparative models for community-based archival storytelling, acknowledging its origins as a solution specifically addressed toward working with Indigenous communities and First Nations governments. I begin by making a case for this translation and adaptation, rather than relying on the privilege of presumed universality as an LIS practitioner benefitting from white privilege—seeking to avoid replicating the colonial project of delinking Indigenous knowledge and ideas from the people, communities, contexts from which they emerge.

I have written elsewhere on the value of Tahltan Nation member and Communications scholar Candis Callison's reading of Derridean translation. In conducting ethnographies of various communities connected to the Arctic, Callison invoked the power of Derridean translation between settler colonialist scientific approaches to researching climate change and the types of data generated by traditional knowledge practices within Inuit communities in the region. Callison sees the Derridean conception of translation as one where each "translator must assure the survival, which is to say the growth, of the original, which insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and to grow" (Callison, 2010, p. 107). Translation is mutually transformative, a relationship established which entangles the two bodies of knowledge from that point forward and establishes a responsibility to the ongoing survival of each way of knowing. Much of our current discussions within the realms of social justice center on the violence of cultural cooptation, leaving less room to understand the ways translation between different cultural understandings can also enable the exchange and evolution of ideas that allows traditions, like language, to remain mutable and alive. In this article, I undertake translation between the theories of Smith, Duarte, Belarde-Lewis, Jarett Drake, Duff, Harris, Emily Drabinski, Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Kellie Jones and David Hammons—among others. It is no coincidence that these theorists and artists are largely queer women, African-American and British Caribbean, and Indigenous. All of these identities link the theorists to communities who are not excluded from archives, but have largely been included primarily as the objects of study for those researchers and users prioritized by archival principles and systems. Just as the scientists who collaborated with Inuit researchers found themselves to rely on subjective and intuitive methods in their practice, I propose that LIS professionals trained in traditional archival methods will find not that we have kept archives formal, impersonal, and free of community-based storytelling, but rather that we have made archives that make certain types of communities at home and comfortable.

I have more particular reasons for looking to Indigenous models, beyond espousing a more general politic that those who have been deemed not human and colonized are the most aware of how the systems of the colonizer operate. I enter the study and practice of archives from a foundation as a community organizer and a teaching artist, which is to say, I am invested in how archives can serve and support communities and assist communities in developing themselves. More than adopting the rhetoric of empowering underrepresented communities as users, my professional aim is to build community sovereignty. In the United States, while there are immigrant and political groups who have sought to (re)build sovereignty within a country that has never fully recognized them as its own, Indigenous communities exist as First Nations people demanding their already existing sovereignty be recognized. I say this

not to valorize those First Nations that have existed uninterrupted, nor to wade into debates on blood quantum or federal recognition. I also am not saying this to place First Nations peoples in a place of superiority. Rather, I argue the practices and traditions of sovereignty are longer standing and more clearly articulated within traditions of Indigenous knowledge, in a way that many other communities have developed in parallel ways, but with less time and opportunity to have made their values and principles known. The precedent of negotiating with Indigenous nations through Memorandums Of Understanding from LIS institutions is mixed and still emerging, but provides examples of LIS institutions forced to acknowledge multiple sovereignties on US soil and destabilized from dominant aspects of the legacy of settler colonialist assumptions. For one that might doubt these types of exchanges can set the balance of power within many institutions and archives off kilter, I would urge they read through years of discussions within the Society of American Archivists debating whether archivists as a profession should adhere to the established Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (“Protocols for Native American Archival Materials,” n.d.). When Smith (2012) distinguishes the Indigenous research agenda as having goals voiced in terms “such as healing, decolonization, spiritual recovery...seem[ingly] at odds with the research terminology of Western science” (p. 122) this holds true for community-based research agendas as well. As Smith (2012) notes, “[r]espectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community development.”(p. 125)

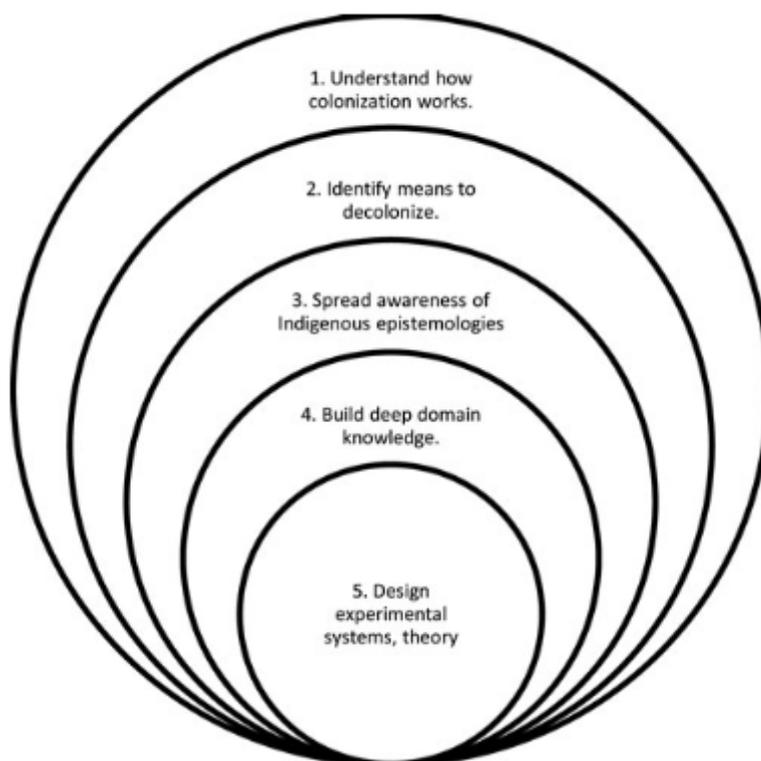


Figure 1: Stages in Techniques of Imagining (Duarte and Lewis, 2015, p. 688)

Translating Belarde-Lewis and Duarte’s Techniques of Imagining to other types of communities does not require drastic shift of the different stages. Decolonization is not exclusively a concern for Indigenous communities, so the initial stages of understanding colonization and identifying means of decolonization remain important to community-based

LIS processes. For the following stages, spreading awareness of community epistemologies and developing deep domain knowledge may involve less formalized traditions than those practiced in Indigenous communities, but the daily, lived experiences of local communities require similar investment from LIS professionals to understand and incorporate into our work and systems. The fifth stage of designing experimental theories and systems already occurs within efforts to envision participatory approaches to archiving and appraisals, but often as part of efforts lacking the foundation of the other stages, leaving them shallow efforts lacking an understanding of what forms of engagement will hold community participation long term—exemplified by the rapid rise and fall of museum efforts to crowdsource cataloging through online tagging projects. Rather than systems rooted in new digital technologies or interfaces, I advocate for experimenting with the integration of familiar and well-honed practices of storytelling and community engagement into the unfamiliar and previously unwelcome domain of LIS institutions. The case study offered in the second part of this article builds on digital reminiscing approaches toward this very end.

As a precondition for undertaking all of the stages, LIS professionals will have to decide where we want our own work and the work of our institutions to align. Healing and supporting community sovereignty is not the mission of all LIS institutions and are objectives not meant to be politically neutral or amenable to all communities equally. The perception of objectivity and neutral institutions acting on behalf of universal principles exists as the result of settler colonialism and its obscuring of the ways our field already act on behalf of certain communities and epistemologies. Outing the legacies of violence and oppression through which our institutions were built and from which we still operate requires a rupture or break from business as usual. Professionalism and the habits of etiquette make these conversations difficult to initiate, as the illusion of neutrality allows our traditional routines and practices to be understood as nonpolitical, while critique of them as violent and colonialist reads as political and biased. As Duff and Harris note, while all archival description exists in the realm of storytelling, archivists risk being swept up in the big story of settler colonialism only when we think we are not telling stories in the first place.

Case Study: La MaMa ETC & The Limits of Archival Description

“[O]ur interest has been in the people who make art, and it is to them that we give our support...and whatever else we have that they can use to create their work” (“Mission + History | La MaMa,” 2016).

The case study focuses on a proposed research design connected to a collection of performances from critical years in the theater’s history. I outline the nature of the collection and the descriptive difficulties posed by it. I continue on to highlight how the digitization of the collection provides opportunities for transforming the records along participatory lines. I end by proposing the project incorporate community-based archival storytelling, drawing on practices from reminiscence and oral history.

The 170 performances documented in the La MaMa collection of interest highlight major limitations in traditional approaches to archival description. While La MaMa Archives has successfully secured a series of grants to inventory and begin digitizing the vulnerable magnetic media the performances are captured on, talking with white Jewish US archivist and

historian Rachel Mattson, project manager, quickly reveals the lingering problems they hold for catalogers seeking to describe them. Leaving aside the technical issues of deteriorated media and tapes illegible to even the discerning eye due to being originally filmed in low light conditions the PortaPak camera was ill suited to capture, the nature of the original performances poses two daunting challenges: material requiring deep domain knowledge to be understood and material unsuited or intentionally at odds with traditional classification schemes (Mattson, 2016).

The tapes document performances between the years of 1972 and 1980 and feature productions by the Native American Theater Ensemble, Pan Asian Repertory Theater, the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, and includes early work by Candy Darling, Adrienne Kennedy, and Cecil Taylor (Mattson, 2015). Mattson (2016) explains that, despite her ever-deepening subject knowledge from processing other archival material from that period and her access to relevant research materials, after viewing many of the works she remains at a loss for generating even a basic through narrative for the performance. A significant number of the performances are the only of their kind or created to be different at every staging, lending them both historic importance and a lack of other works to use for a comparative framework. Mattson expressed that Osvaldo (Ozzie) Rodriguez, Latinx playwright, performer, and founder/director of La MaMa Archives, could contextualize the works with which she struggled because of his continuous history of involvement as a creator and supporter of the La MaMa community, but that he would have neither the inclination nor the time to devote to that effort (Mattson, 2015). White archives theorist and former territorial librarian of U.S. Virgin Islands Jeanette Bastian's double understanding of "community of records" speaks to the issue here. She notes that community is not just a "record-creating entity" but also "a memory frame that contextualizes the record that it creates" (Bastian, 2003, p. 3). Absent the contextual frame a community provides, an individual can find it close to impossible to reconstruct the absent context or interpolate themselves into it on their own.

The challenge of fitting the works into existing classification schemes manifests at two levels of priority. The first level comes from a lack of existing thesauri and controlled vocabularies suited to the needs of the multiple alternative theatrical traditions documented on these tapes in mind, with little subject terms appropriate to these canons. More troubling than vocabularies lacking granularity and scope, many of the performances and performers are members of communities and cultures who have experienced and continue to experience oppression perpetuated by hegemonic systems of language and naming. As has been written about extensively by a range of critical classification theorists including white librarian Sanford Berman (1972), white LIS scholar Hope Olson (2011), Drabinski (2013), Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015), widely used classification systems like the Library of Congress or the Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus can perpetuate violent, hateful, and hegemonic language used by dominant groups to exclude oppressed and marginalized communities from social norms and societal protections. For example, Mattson (2015) points to the problems implied in characterizing a performance as "queer theater," raising the question of whether the presence of queer performers automatically designates it as "queer theater" and exposing queer theater as a form anachronistic to the performers conception of the work in its original time. Indigenous and Black Arts theater pieces present similar problems. Mattson has chosen to conform the record to LOC to insure the collections will eventually be able to be integrated into national and international catalogs like WorldCat, facilitating discovery and compliance with grant funding aimed toward the goal of increasing the number of users able to access the

collection records. These performances fall into what white Canadian archives theorist Rodney Carter (2016) calls “archival silences” or “the distortions, omissions, erasures, and silences in archives” (p. 2).

Digitization as a Vehicle for Participatory Archiving

While the performances offer compelling description challenges as cultural heritage, they also present an opportunity to generate and develop models for community-based archival storytelling. As the tapes are transferred into digital collections, they enable interventions beyond simply providing an access copy available to a wider audience. As a condition of the specific funding streams received for their digitization efforts and as a by-product of the process itself, La MaMa Archives digital collections provide different access points and opportunities for programming with the material contained within them. Their grants received for this effort, beginning with involvement in the CLIR Hidden Collections program, ask La MaMa to model a replicable approach to digitization for similar institutions (Mattson, 2016).

Once the 170 performances started to migrate from magnetic media into a series of digital files, they were brought into conversation with a different set of records models. For archivists invested in the concerns of community archives, the introduction of digital and electronic records into these models has resulted in greater inclusion of community knowledge and pluralisation. Both the Records Continuum Model (RCM) and the Digital Curation Centre’s digital curation lifecycle model emphasize collective memory/community participation as a dimension. In her work on YouTube, white Australian archives theorist Leisa Gibbons augments RCM to create a mediated recordkeeping (MRK) model built around continuum informatics [see Figure 2]. MRK maps well onto the digitization of cultural heritage, offering productive points of overlap with the concerns of participatory and community archives (Gibbons, 2015).

folksonomies and tagging rather than older forms of narratives and storytelling. While these theories provide underlying concepts to support engaging the artists and elders within the La MaMa tapes' performances as "participatory agents," they leave something to be desired in terms of methods for dealing with their holistic needs as agents within a participatory process.

Setting the Stage for Oral History and Reminiscing

As methods of enacting participatory processes at La MaMa, oral history and reminiscing provide productive traditions of practice. Justifying the use of an oral history methodology for research on the Arts-In-Correction collection at UCLA, Japanese-American information professional Kyoki Aoki (2012) frames oral history as a "challenge [to] the notion that there is a singular—textual—method to describe and preserve the history and culture of an individual, family, community, or society" prioritizing "not just the articulation of events and facts but how they are remembered by the participants and not simply memories of an event but also community memories" (p. 41). As a tool for deriving context for La MaMa's performances, oral history facilitates the goals of participatory appraisal to capture individual and community understandings. Resonating with RCM's contention that "an archival document exists differently in spacetime and can never be experienced in all its complexity by a witness at any one point," oral history allows an aggregation of individual perspectives toward a picture of collective memory. Oral history practices endeavour to simultaneously reconstruct the community conception of the original performance and capture the shifts in community context within the present moment. It also provides a practice rooted in collaboration and mutuality (Upward, 2011, p. 203).

Reminiscing work, despite a history dating back to the 1960s and the field of psychology developing the concept of life review, remains more ambiguously defined by its different communities of practitioners (Bornat, 1989; Thiry, 2013). Reminiscing suffers from its use by medical and social science fields, which seek to support it by claiming benefits for patients that remain yet unproven through clinical experiments, rather than the more straightforward ways oral history has been put to use by historians, archivists, activists, and writers. The practice of reminiscing or life review overlaps with oral history as a movement, as white British historian Joanne Bornat (1989) has traced over her career. Reminiscing also provides a greater range of forms, including more object and event-oriented modes of recall, as well as greater emphasis placed on theorizing the benefits and incentives for elders to participate in the process. Reminiscing draws on different social science theories of identity formation and maintenance, but most applicable to La MaMa is its use of white Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman's conception of "the play of life." Goffman's theory is marked by a series of performances of self and Continuity Theory, which more closely map onto MRK and RCM as they represent life as a series of successive stages continuously re-defined in terms of their relationship to each other. Goffman (1959) calls researchers attention toward the audience, both intended and present, for an act of reminiscing, framing the performance as negotiated to meet the demands and expectations of perceived audiences of reception. Reminiscing read through the lens of Goffman adds an important dimension to understanding the impact of reception beyond the dynamics of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. In the following section, the practical implications for the project are raised.

Community-based Archival Storytelling as a Form of Transmission

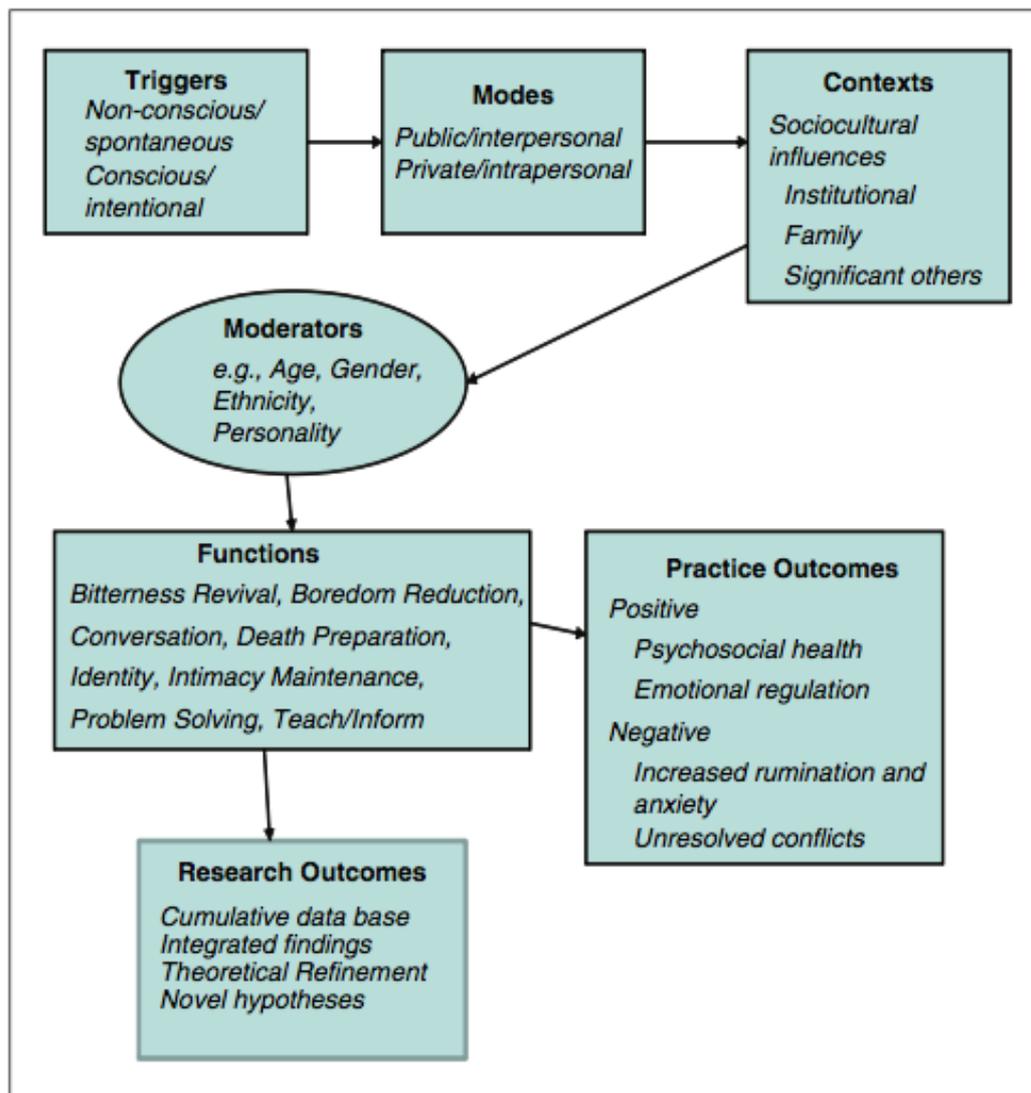


Figure 3: Heuristic Model of Reminiscing (HMR)

Examining the particular qualities of the “communities of records” connected to documented performances at La MaMa, this article envisions a process guided by two operating assumptions. The first assumption is that participants will be driven by an interest in revisiting an old performance in the form of a video and a desire to transmit memories surrounding their own involvement or involvement of friends from that time. The second assumption is that given the skewing of participants with firsthand memory of the performances toward elders and performers, though not necessarily technology-phobic, they will be less inclined to share through complicated digital interfaces. Both operating assumptions support a vision of the project rooted in community-based archival storytelling. Oral history and reminiscing are fields that offer practices of collaborative storytelling addressed to the concerns embedded within both assumptions.

A few developments already support the first assumption. In discussing some of the initial impact of undertaking the digitization, Mattson shared that, as word slipped out about the project within the larger La MaMa community, she began to be approached by people who

were witnesses or performers of shows documented on the tapes. People begin to advocate for their tapes to jump forward in the queue for digitization. La MaMa also hosted an event screening highlights of the already-digitized pieces, with numbers of attendees rivaling, even outperforming presentation of some new works. Mattson recounted institutional surprise that people would be interested in seeing documentation of old works (Mattson, 2016). Both developments could be characterized as nostalgic, as seemed the implication of the attitude of staff outside of the La MaMa archives, and could be viewed as selfish, or an unhealthy desire to relive glory days on the part of people wanting to see performances with which they are personally connected. The reaction within La MaMa ETC mirrors the shifts in how psychology and social sciences viewed old age that Bornat (1989) credits as part of the foundation that enabled reminiscence to grow as a field. She notes how western medical professionals and care providers tended to view elders' desire to reflect on their past as an unhealthy or solipsistic desire to return to moments long gone. She quotes Rose Dobrof, a NY social worker, reflecting on her training that taught elder residents telling stories of Ellis Island and arriving as children was at best "an understandable but not entirely healthy preoccupation with happier times" brought about by the nearness of death and their own poor health. At worst " 'living in the past' was viewed as pathology—regression to the dependency of the child, denial of the passage of time and the reality of the present, or evidence of organic impairment of the intellect." Bornat sets this up as an illustration of the fundamental change represented by Robert Butler's development of the concept of "life review" as a valuable stage for phases of a person's life. (p. 18)

At this point in the field, reminiscing offers several taxonomies of the reasons people reminisce—Chinese Canadian clinical psychologist Paul Wong and American clinical psychologist Lisa Watt (1991) offer six: integrative, instrumental, transmissive, narrative, escapist, and obsessive; white Canadian psychologist Jeffrey Dean Webster (1993) provides eight: bitterness revival, boredom reduction, conversation, death preparation, identity, intimacy maintenance, problem solving, and teach/inform. A community-based archival storytelling project would appeal to several of these impulses: transmissive, narrative, conversation, and teach/inform. While those are the modes specifically engaged on behalf of the archives, the drive to participate and the likely benefits will emerge from all of the modes. A challenge of the project will be curbing trends toward bitterness revival, boredom reduction, and the obsessive as they can lead to unending or destructive cycles of engagement that can overly tax staff and volunteer energy while yielding diminishing returns for the archives. Those are the areas where questions of accountability on the part of archives will arise, as they can constitute painful or traumatic outcomes for the participants. La MaMa would want to identify sources of psychological support to refer people to in that eventuality and the project should be shaped to steer participants toward the transmissive and teach/inform modes. Oral history practice also helps here, as it more evenly balances the interest of a project in the topic it is exploring with the responsibility to respectful collaboration with the interviewee.

The second operating assumption, that participants will have a preference for processes foregrounding non-technological aspects, has also partially borne out in efforts already undertaken by the La MaMa Archives. Mattson co-hosted a Wikipedia edit-a-thon, hoping to engage existing community knowledge and enthusiasm surrounding La MaMa in a web-based process akin to what Shilton and Srinivasan (2007) envision as "an ongoing, iterative, and emergent ontology-building process" (p. 99). Mattson found a lack of excitement or

investment in the process, which can be attributable to many potential causes, but she attributed it, at least in part, to a generational and disciplinary divide leaving out older community members. An edit-a-thon also failed to offer modes of engagement compelling to theatre and performance worlds. Wikipedia forces users to enter into a pre-existing information architecture, so it also lacked the participation of community members as epistemic partners in the design.

In designing the project as a reminiscing process from the onset, Webster's (2010) Heuristic Model of Reminiscing (HMR) offers a structuring device and conceptual framework for modes of engagement (see figure 3). HMR considers every reminiscing event as beginning with a trigger, which the literature outlines as connected to artifacts with affective dimensions like pictures, keepsakes, or linguistic triggers within a conversation. While not discussing the potential of the moving image, viewing of the digitized tapes seems an appropriate form of a hermeneutic trigger. HMR suggests the importance of creating a variety of entry points for participants, incorporating a variety of reminiscing styles and individual preferences. HMR holds potential for mapping well on the goals of community-based research to facilitate moments of reflection and self-determination. While a traditional oral history approach might involve allowing a participant to view a tape on their own to prime them for a follow up session or series of sessions, HMR encourages offering opportunity to record reminiscing event during the viewing as well as after. It also suggests the power of hermeneutic triggers experienced in different contexts such as hosting public viewings of the performances, allowing opportunities to share after the event, one-on-one, or with the audience already in attendance. Factors such as the other people in the room and whether a community member prefers to perform for an audience can prime different forms of reminiscence. Each form of entry point for participants can open up subsequent collaborations leading to other modes of sharing. Elizabeth Thiry, an American white computer scientist focusing on Human Machine Interaction for elders (2013), found in her dissertation work, "participants reported that the stories they shared take different forms depending on the audience" and the relationship with the people present (p. 49). Reminiscing has less of a bias toward individual interviews, so a mix of reminiscing and oral history can help test what modes of engagement are most successful. The attention to social networks and audience facilitates experimenting with enlisting friends or old collaborators as means of activating alternate modes of reminiscing. Thiry presents a productive example of a scenario-based research design that can potentially be applied to this project. She also notes the need for systems that can re-calibrate for diminished or different audio sensory perceptions among elders, which digitization can facilitate much more easily than viewing the original magnetic media on an unforgiving analog video set-up (Thiry, 2013). She also shares that people prefer different forms of communication, suggesting aside from recording interviews and events, some participants might prefer engagement mirroring more traditional modes of cataloging or providing new written records to be collected.

The outputs of the storytelling will most immediately take the form of new records, mostly video, able to be part of description and curation efforts with the digital collection. Digital oral history increasingly provides powerful and accessible software for segment-level indexing and linking between different archival holdings such as OHMS—which also comes with a network of open source developers geared toward GLAMR uses (Boyd, 2013).

Conclusion

“I reminisce for a spell, or shall I say think back...

I reminisce so you never forget this/ The days of wayback, so many bear witness.” “They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)” by Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth as transcribed in Common, D, & Jr, 2011, p. 773).

Beginning by linking Smith’s reading of community-based research with developments in archival theory surrounding storytelling, particularly Marsh et al. (2015) in their examination of storytelling surrounding digitization of cultural heritage, this article proposes practices of community-based archival storytelling. Community-based archival storytelling, like community partnerships, cannot be defined as a single prescriptive approach, but seeks to open up a set of practices that remove provenance and colonialist legacies of description from the center of our institutions. As first steps toward imagining what this looks like, I propose the approach should be attuned to ritual/rupture and transform institutions starting with description and access. A case study of digitized cultural heritage at La MaMa Archives highlights how oral history, reminiscence, and the newer records models of Gibbons Mediated Recordkeeping Model and Webster’s Heuristic Model of Reminiscence are rich sites for research into the practice of community-based archival storytelling.

This article represents my own first steps as an early-career archivist and memory worker to employ techniques of imagining toward an ethic of community-based archives. I come to LIS practice most fundamentally as someone drawn to the keeping of community and generational stories. I hope to join and be joined in grappling with the questions of transmission and ritual from the vantage point of those of us whose institutions, trainings, collections, and callings bring us into memory work. The research and theory presented here was motivated by a sense of responsibility to the people and communities whose living memories must be mediated through archives. Going forward, I aim toward playing my part in broadening the conversation between knowledge traditions and practitioners. I end again with song. Black and Jewish historian of African-American foodways and the Old South, Michael Twitty (2017) writes on his transformation as a historical interpreter and practitioner of ancestral cooking. I am motivated to take up the turn into experiential knowledge embedded around objects and the texts (recipes, songs) evoked in his words.

You have to know a lot of songs to cook the way our ancestors cooked. The songs are like clocks with spells. Some enslaved cooks timed the cooking by the stanzas of the hymns and spirituals, or little folk songs that began across the Atlantic and melted into plantation Creole, melting Africa with Europe until beginnings and endings were muddled...Before I started cooking this way, I didn’t know that you *had* to sing, and that it wasn’t a pastime. Every tool you touch becomes a scepter, and the way you start and finish the task opens and closes the doors of time... The songs are where the cooking begins—because it must. (p. 3)

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