

2019

The Doorway from Heart to Heart: Diversity's Stubbornly Persistent Illusion

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Recommended Citation

Baxter, Terry (2019) "The Doorway from Heart to Heart: Diversity's Stubbornly Persistent Illusion," *Journal of Western Archives*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol10/iss1/4>

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Cover Page Footnote

This article was adapted from a presentation given at the 2014 Canadian–American Archival Conference, Bellingham, Washington, April 17, 2014.

The Doorway from Heart to Heart: Diversity's Stubbornly Persistent Illusion

Terry Baxter

ABSTRACT

Archivists have been working to diversify the archival endeavor for 35 years. On the face of things, this work has had limited success. Perhaps archivists should recognize that diversity is already in place and their role is in hiding and revealing that diversity. They should also recognize that their power flows from community and connection, not from control.

The trail to this article began, as many things do, with a search. I revere the writings of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī. In much the same way as Vietnamese poet Ho Xuan Huong, he uses the imagery of love to reveal profound spiritual and political truths.

I have always loved Rumi's quote "They say there is a doorway from heart to heart, but what is the use of a door when there are no walls?" In my mind, it gets at the notion that we want to connect with other people, but struggle to do so because our preconceptions about how that connection needs to be made keeps us from seeing that those preconceptions narrow our opportunities, and in fact become barriers to connection.

I've seen the quote on Pinterest, Tumblr, blogs, personal websites, Facebook profiles—it is so ubiquitous that I imagine there are still Myspace accounts proudly displaying it. But when I tried to source it, you can guess what happened. Of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of iterations of this quote on the Web, exactly zero were sourced. Oh, but I'm a *real* archivist, friends. I didn't stop there, but instead read Coleman Barks' *The Essential Rumi* from cover to cover on the blue line ride from Gresham to Hillsboro, Oregon. Again nothing.

In fact, it took almost three years of peripatetic searching to turn up the actual source of the quote. After a desperate plea for information, a friend identified it with a variant translation.¹ The quote is part of the following quatrain:

1. Terry Baxter, Facebook post, May 14, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/terryx666/posts/10156298586052403> (accessed January 24, 2019).

With the Beloved's water of life, no illness remains
In the Beloved's rose garden of union, no thorn remains.
They say there is a window from one heart to another
How can there be a window where no walls remain.²

So how does this short tale of research woe and fortune relate to the diversity of the human record? First, I had what purported to be a quote, decontextualized from the voice that purportedly spoke it, and recontextualized by a thousand other voices, including mine, to mean what we wanted it to mean but using someone else's image to give it authority. It doesn't mean my interpretation, or history, was wrong. We just don't know. Second, the sourced poem was there all along, lying among all the other variations. It didn't need to be created, just identified and revealed.

I have heard several colleagues use imposter syndrome in the last few months to describe their participation in various professional settings. I understand their sensibilities to some degree. One of the perks of being a grizzled archivist is the opportunity to share work with comrades who have contributed so much to the profession. It is humbling to work with such dazzling minds and bright hearts. To dream of being archivists in these times takes courage and determination.

My true imposter feelings relate to the subject of diversity. My first foray into this subject, as an archivist anyway, was in 1988 as a member of the Oregon Secretary of State's diversity committee. Since then I have advocated, written, chatted up strangers, bored my kids and their friends, worked on a variety of professional groups, and harangued the guys I hoop with about the need for more diversity—in the world in general, but in the archival profession and the human record specifically.

Even so, I understand that this work has come from, in a term that pops up everywhere, a place of privilege. As my friend and colleague Jenny Mundy told me—“your privilege portfolio is very full.” While I don't believe that this invalidates my commitment or work, it does encourage a close look. Discussions about diversity are always highly contextualized and I often find myself drifting dangerously close to work to help *them*, some poor outlier community in need of some sort of shining knight, instead of work to help *us*, the broader society or culture. Valuing diversity is not some sort of archives scouts merit badge. It is as central to the archival endeavor as appraisal or description and perhaps more important than either.

Diversity, as a concept, has evolved in the 40 or so years that archivists have shown an overt interest in it. Its early incarnations were tied to the classifications and quotas of affirmative action. We believed that we needed to make the demographic composition of archival institutions look more like the societies in which they existed by creating representative ratios of protected classes of people. While this was a laudable, and maybe more importantly, a measurable activity, it was a crude tool at best. It assumed uniformity among members of protected classes and was often seen

2. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Rumi—Thief of Sleep*, trans. Shahram Shiva (Prescott: Hohm Press, 2000), 24.

by opponents as arbitrary and unfair. In fact, some members of protected classes became increasingly wary of definitions and standards imposed by outsiders without meaningful consultation with the affected groups.

As diversity efforts began to take hold, the definition and conceptualization of diversity expanded. Diversity was no longer seen as a requirement—something that needed to happen because it was the right thing to do—but as an inherently useful attribute of communities. Definitions of diversity began to focus not so much on fair representation of protected classes of people but on the sense that all people have differences and that these differences have value to groups and organizations.

Recent literature has begun to refocus archival thinking from diversity to inclusion.³ This conceptual evolution reframes the conversation from the existence of diversity towards action aimed at the removal of barriers to individuals' participation in whatever group, activity, or service interests them. It operates from the premise that it is a false position to consider groups of people have the authority to *allow* other people to participate in societal structures.

Diversity and inclusion are related but not interchangeable. Diversity tells you that there are 157 official styles of beer.⁴ Inclusion means that Historical Beer and Wild Beer are just as welcome in your refrigerator as India Pale Ale. Many of the discussions archivists have around the subject of diversity are less about the numbers of diversity and more about how we use those numbers to develop more inclusive systems and processes.

We archivists have been chasing diversity for some time now. Whether it is in the archival record, among archivists, or among the users of archives, we are constantly trying to diversify our professional world. Elizabeth Adkins described the timeline for our diversity efforts in her presidential address and subsequent *American Archivist* article "Our Journey Toward Diversity—and a Call to (More) Action."⁵ This article laid

3. Representative recent works as specific examples of an increased focus on inclusion include: Mary Caldera and Kathryn Neal, ed., *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2014); Dennis Meissner, "Bare Necessities," *The American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 6-18; and Chris Taylor, "Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion," *The American Archivist* 80, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 19-29. The growing body of archival literature created by or discussing work with community archives is also very inclusion focused. See: Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 56-81, and DocNow, <https://www.docnow.io/> (accessed January 24, 2019).
4. Brewers Association, "2018 Brewers Association Beer Style Guidelines," <https://www.brewersassociation.org/resources/brewers-association-beer-style-guidelines> (accessed January 29, 2019).
5. Elizabeth Adkins, "Our Journey Toward Diversity-and a Call to (More) Action," with an Introduction by Bruce Bruemmer," *The American Archivist* 71, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 18-20. Adkins' work exhaustively describes the archival literature dealing with diversity and archives up to 2007. It is a must-read when trying to understand the history of the archival profession and its relationship to diversity and inclusion.

out the 2007 archival diversity landscape, primarily in the United States, and some ideas on how to improve it. She made the case that there has been progress in the last 35 years but that there is a long way to go before we have a diverse profession and a diverse record.

Adkins discusses four areas in which to consider diversity. The first is the archival profession. This relies primarily on interpretations of A*Census data, now 15 years old.⁶ The second is in professional associations and comes from what data organizations might keep. The Society of American Archivists (SAA), for instance, purposefully limits the collection of many types of demographic data. The third is the archival record itself. And the fourth is the users of archives.

While there has not been an exhaustive analysis of the first two categories, much of the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the United States has centered on them, especially the diversification of the archival profession. There has certainly been *more action* related to diversity since Adkins' remarks, at least from professional associations like SAA. In addition to key goals included in its strategic plans, SAA has partnered with the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) to provide a series of diversity scholarships under a broadening Mosaic Program.^{7,8} The last 15 years has focused a tremendous amount of professional energy in diversifying the archives profession.⁹

And the result? Granted, 15 years is not a long time, but our profession remains persistently white. The number of archivists who identify as Black, Asian, Native American, or non-white Hispanic remains abysmally low compared to the general population. We are increasingly gendered. Women archivists outnumber men at least three to one and evidence indicates that that imbalance is increasing. We are also a highly educated field. Nearly 90 percent of North American archivists have Masters

6. Society of American Archivists, "Archival Census & Education Needs Survey in the United States," Society of American Archivists, <https://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/acensus-archival-census-education-needs-survey-in-the-united-states> (accessed January 29, 2019). In 2017, the Women Archivists Section of the Society of American Archivists published the results of a survey of 2,170 archivists that compared demographic data collected in the A*Census "Women Archivists Section/SAA Salary Survey (2017)," Society of American Archivists, <https://www2.archivists.org/aboutarchives/resources/factsandfigures/wars-saa-salary-survey> (accessed January 24, 2019).
7. See, especially goals one and four of "SAA Strategic Plan 2018-2020: Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Strategies", Society of American Archivists, adopted November 2017, http://files.archivists.org/governance/strategicplan/Goals_and_Strategies_November_2017.pdf (accessed January 24, 2019).
8. Association of Research Libraries, "ARL/SAA Mosaic Program," Association of Research Libraries, <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/arl-saa-mosaic-scholarship-program#.Wx6ozmMh3cs> (accessed June 28, 2018).
9. For instance, the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums was incorporated in 2010 (<http://www.atalm.org/>). On the educational front, see Mary Pugh, "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," *The American Archivist* 74, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 69-101; and Alex H. Poole, "Pinkett's Charges: Recruiting, Retaining, and Mentoring Archivists of Color in the Twenty-First Century," *The American Archivist* 80, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 103-134.

degrees, primarily in library and information science. It certainly looks bleak on the professional diversity front, comrades.¹⁰ But hold hope, there may be a different door to archival diversity.

The remainder of this article focuses on the last two categories Adkins mentioned: diversity in the archival record and diversity in the users of archives. This is not because the first two categories are less important. In fact, the contrary is true. Without a diverse pool of archivists, working in organizations and associations that recognize and value that diversity, our profession will remain only partially actualized and will face increased marginalization in a world that is becoming less homogeneous every day. I also believe that as we concentrate on the record and the users, we may begin to see the face of our profession change as well.

Adkin's call was for more action related to diversity in the archival profession and in the archival record. It is telling that she did not call for more diversity. I believe that many of our efforts regarding diversity are bogged down in the sense that we need to have some sort of linear, chronological record of advancement or improvement, that we will at some time *create* a more diverse profession or record. It appears to me that we seem to believe that if we can add just a few more types of users, make some different types of records available, just convince some more underrepresented groups to hire on as archivists, we will at some point achieve diversity.

Part of the title of this article comes from an observation from Albert Einstein. In a letter to the family of a close friend who had recently died he noted, "Now he has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That means nothing. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."¹¹

Freeman Dyson, physicist and noted disrupter, commented on this in *Disturbing the Universe*: "He [Einstein] also understood that this division is as illusory in human affairs as it is in physics. Einstein's vision reinforces the lessons I have learned from Barbara Tuchman's distant mirror and my own. The past and the future are not remote from us. The people of six hundred years back and six hundred years ahead are people like ourselves. they are our neighbors in this universe. Technology has caused, and will cause, profound changes in style of life and thought, separating us from our neighbors. All the more precious, then, are the bonds of kinship that ties us together."¹²

10. For numbers and trends to chew on, see Robin H. Israel and Jodi Reeves Eyre, "The 2017 WArS/SAA Salary Survey: Initial Results and Analysis," Society of American Archivists Women Archivists Section, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/WArS-SAA-Salary-Survey-Report.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2019). For a bleak assessment of library diversity initiatives see April Hathcock, "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS," In the Library with the Lead Pipe, October 2015, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/> (January 24, 2019).

11. Albert Einstein quoted in Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (London: Basic Books, 1981), 193.

12. Dyson, 194.

If I were to try and pass myself off as a theoretical physicist, things would escalate quickly from imposter syndrome to straight-up imposter. I majored in physics my first two years in college but quickly realized it was a field for people with bigger brains than mine. But my layman's read on this is that the diversity of human life and experience that we are looking to *build* through chronological time already exists. While chronological time is a real phenomenon, the way we perceive time is an illusion. Only the present is real. The past is just recorded memory. The future does not exist. Every part of human diversity exists, complete, in this very moment.

I'll have to confess here my unfettered optimism. I believe that our species will be here millennia from now, that we will have peace, that we will be unified in mission and purpose, and that we will have learned love and respect for all of our comrades. That dream is not some mansion at the end of a pilgrim's progress, but exists now, a consequence of and coexistent with our present lives.

As a secular person, it is sometimes difficult to find meaning in a world in which your individual time is so short and finite. My own method of finding meaning is to see myself as a single but necessary link in the human chain. When I think of my own personal heroes—Muhammad Ali, Red Cloud, Kate Theimer, my grandpa Robert Reeves to name a few—I believe that they are the result of 10,000 generations of linked lives, every single one of those lives necessary in the existence of those heroes. And of me. And that I am, along with each of you, absolutely necessary for the generations to come.

So this might sound like the pipe dreams of some archival naif. First, guilty as charged. But second, stay with me as I believe that this conceptualization can have deep meaning for archivists.

If you accept that human diversity already exists, fully expanded and without need for creation, what exactly do we need to do? It might appear that the work is already complete and we just need to relax, chase some Internet kittens, and let things unfold as they should.

Physicist John Wheeler noted that "Time is what prevents everything from happening at once." (The second half of his statement "Space is what keeps everything from happening to me." is also delightful.) Another way of looking at this is that time contextualizes events. If there was no time, all we would have is a group of events without any way of seeing how they might relate to each other.

In her blog post "The Future of Archives is Participatory: Archives as Platform, or A New Mission for Archives," Kate Theimer proffered a mission for archivists: "Archives add value to people's lives by increasing their understanding and

13. John Wheeler quoted in John Archibald Wheeler, "Information, Physics, Quantum: The Search for Links," in *Complexity, Entropy and the Physics of Information*, ed. Wojciech H. Zurek (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 10.

appreciation of the past.”¹⁴ In a similar way to how time contextualizes physical events by placing them in an organized sequence, archivists contextualize the memory of physical events by organizing archives to reveal their traces and sources.

One of the issues surrounding the archival endeavor is our apparent need to control the archive. We often desire that we can use our expertise to select archives that will end up as a perfectly arranged collection, properly housed and labeled, completely described, maybe cataloged if you have a librarian's inclination, and accessible through strictly coded EADs. I'm just poking a little fun. There's nothing wrong with doing our work well. But underlying important literature like Light and Hyry's "Colophons and Annotations," Jimerson's *Archives Power*, Kaplan's "We Are What We Collect," Harris' *Archives and Justice*, Christen's "Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation," and Hughes-Watkins' "Moving Towards a Reparative Archive" (among many others) is the clear notion that we create archives, and consequently corral memory and history, through a series of professional decisions and actions. Put another way, diligently doing our work means we are constantly fighting *against* the full diversity of the human record.

How can this be? It doesn't make sense that we archivists would both be obsessed with all sorts of diversity and yet subverting the very thing we desire. Perhaps we should look at some of the reasons we believe a diverse archival record is needed.

Diversity is more interesting than homogeneity. One of the first reasons I became involved in diversity was very selfish. A monochromatic world bored me. I'm not sure whether it was some inherent twitch in my own brain or spending a good portion of my youth living in Penang or having an assortment of unconventional friends, but the world of 1970s and 1980s Oregon (and the broader United States) appeared pretty bland. When I became an archivist, I brought this sensibility to my work, making sure that things that I believed would spice up the dominant narrative were preserved, maybe even highlighted. While I still believe that a diverse human record is more interesting than a homogenous one, I no longer believe that the satisfaction of my, or anyone else's, aesthetic needs is the central reason for preserving and revealing a diverse human record.

An un-diverse human record is unfair. My son has one of the highest fairness indexes of anyone I know. Everything he sees is viewed through the lens of fairness. I did not use the classic parental trope "well life's not fair" with him. Not because I'm opposed to parental tropes ("because somebody has to be in charge" was one of my favorites) but because I wanted him to hope that while life is certainly not fair, we can work to make it more so. So when I asked him as a youth what he thought about the fact that the rich and powerful make history while we hear nothing about poor and marginalized groups, he was rightfully angry. That the unfairness of an un-diverse human record even registers with a middle school boy on the way to soccer practice is

14. Kate Theimer, "The Future of Archives is Participatory: Archives as Platform, or A New Mission for Archives," *ArchivesNext*, April 3, 2014, <http://archivesnext.com/?p=3700> (accessed January 24, 2019).

a significant indictment. But again, upon reflection, I do not believe fairness is the central reason for our work. There has to be something more.

A diverse record is a just record. This is certainly a compelling argument. The existence of multiple voices in the human record is more likely to present a history or a result that respects the rights and obligations of all parties involved. Take the story of Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Park told in *A Misplaced Massacre*.¹⁵ If tribal groups had not maintained the right to have their story heard, in the face of the mainstream scientific and historical community, the accurate story of the Sand Creek Massacre would have never emerged. A just result would not have occurred in this situation without the inclusion of all of the records and stories involved. I would not argue that this is a not a compelling reason for a diverse human record. In fact, we'll return to justice and archival activism in a little bit. But I do believe there is a more central reason.

I'm not trying to say any of these reasons are wrong. It's more like this is an episode of Family Feud and Richard Dawson is looking for the top answer to "Why Do We Need a Diverse Human Record?" It's not "because it's interesting" (even though it is). It's not "because it's fair" (but it is). It's not "because it's right" (again, it is). So what is the top answer, at least in my very humble opinion? Survey says, "because it will connect us to each other and to ourselves in meaningful ways."

The end game for diversity is 7 billion stories, each of them compelling, each of them unique, each of them vital to the world to come. Add to this the 100 billion or so people that have died. Without some way of providing meaning to these stories, they just sit there like a dumpster full of unlabeled photographs.

We currently use records to tell the stories of these lives. Records contextualize moments in these lives and archivists contextualize these records so that we have an understanding of how the moments, lives, communities, and peoples are connected—both in this moment and through time. Records are the way that we commune with the dead.¹⁶ That has not always been so and may not always be so. The methods for documenting this long chain of humanity have changed through history and will probably change again. But for the time being, that is the method that we use and archivists are central to it.

So why is diversity so important to these connections? What does it matter that more stories are told? Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie noted, "Stories matter. *Many* stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but

15. Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

16. Frank Boles, "But a Thin Veil of Paper", with an Introduction by Danna Bell-Russel, *The American Archivist* 73, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010): 17-25.

stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”¹⁷ When we meet someone and listen to their stories—whether in person or through some sort of record—it becomes increasingly difficult to dehumanize them. We may not like or agree with them, but we see each other as human people with needs and desires just like ours.

Jonathan Haidt is one of several researchers who increasingly see diminishing returns in the use of information to persuade belief. When confronted with evidence that contradicts strongly held beliefs, people retreat further into those beliefs. What does seem to have a persuasive effect on people is observing or hearing stories from those whom we have a connection.¹⁸ If we can use archives to introduce more voices to the conversation, we not only increase opportunities for people to build deeper individual connections, but we create an interpersonal communication infrastructure that is based on listening and sharing, instead of on right-wrong binaries. We can use the diversity of archives to build collaborative systems to replace the often zero-sum systems in place right now.

Humans also have a deep-seated need to order and find meaning in their own lives. In the Declaration of Independence this is called the “pursuit of happiness.” Psychologists call it “self-actualization.” Lifestyle coaches call it “empowerment.” Inclusion, in its broadest meaning, is about the removal of barriers to participation. As we continue to work to reveal the diversity of the human record, both in content and in media, we are removing barriers, both real and imagined, to people’s participation in whatever aspects of society and community they desire. As Jarrett Drake states in his fiery “Liberatory Archives: Towards Belonging and Believing”: “You, as current and future memory workers in this space of liberatory and community archives, have the ability to use your talents, your skills, and your humanity to create spaces for transformation to occur.”¹⁹

Three major groups are essential to the archival endeavor: people that create archives, people that maintain archives, and people that use archives. Throughout the history of our profession, we have focused our activities on the first two categories. Recently that has begun to change.

As archivists have begun to look to the centrality of the user, we have also begun to examine the nature of our work and mission. This is happening in a number of ways, but centers on a mission to use creative ways to get more records into use by

17. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” TEDGlobal 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (accessed January 24, 2019).
18. Elizabeth Kolbert, “Why Facts Don’t Change Our Minds,” *The New Yorker*, February 27, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds> (accessed January 24, 2019). See also, Jonathon Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (New York: Pantheon, 2012).
19. Jarrett Drake, “Liberatory Archives: Toward Belonging and Believing (Part 1),” On Archivy, October 22, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-1-d26aaeboedd1> (accessed January 24, 2019).

more people. Some of this is technology-driven. Digitization, Web-based access and delivery systems, social media pointers and promoters are all increasingly proven ways of making archives available to users who may feel uncomfortable working in reading rooms or who may just not know about the variety of resources available in an archives.

Some of the changes are in the nature of our interaction. I was at the opening party for the Oregon Hops & Brewing Archives, established by Oregon State University in 2013 to document a key industry in Oregon.²⁰ The party, held in the historic Mission Theater, was light on theory and jargon and heavy on beer samples, video, and presentations by pioneer craft brewers. The audience was not full of the usual suspects. Brewers, hops growers, and marketers mixed with historians and archivists. Northwest hipsters dropped in to see what the party was all about. But all the while, the message coming from Tiah Edmunson Morten, architect of the archives, was that this stuff is important, you all are important, and that the archives community, the craft brewing community, the beer drinking community, and other interested people can work together to enrich each other's lives.

It is in our self-interest as archivists to create as broad a community of users as possible. We have traditionally suffered in outreach efforts because we have been supported by seemingly narrowly defined communities. As we expand the types of people that use archives, we not only expand the base of interested communities, but we expand our role as connectors of communities. We are no longer seen as just keepers of stuff but as people who can hook communities up with other people who share interests, resources and energy. As our focus expands from the small pile of archives in our control to the resources and people outside our control, our work increases in complexity, but also in importance.

So how is it even possible for our small band of archivists, maybe 10,000 strong, to manage the diversity of 100 billion plus stories? If we are truly committed to preserving a fully diverse record and making it available to a diverse audience, the task seems hopeless.

Let me suggest that we are not in this endeavor alone. I think we often focus our efforts on the narrow door that is "professional" archives. We do not apprehend the fact that there are all sorts of people contributing to the preservation of a diverse human record who are not archivists, or at least not archivists in the way that we trained and specifically-educated people see that word. There are thousands of dedicated and passionate people and groups who believe that their story matters and that professionals either don't know enough about it, don't care enough about its preservation, or both. Take the Lesbian Herstory Archives. The following is from the history section of their website:

20. Oregon State University, "Oregon Hops & Brewing Archives," OSU Libraries Special Collections & Archives, <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/ohba.html> (accessed January 24, 2019).

At one meeting in 1974, Julia Stanley and Joan Nestle, who had come out before the Gay Liberation Movement, talked about the precariousness of lesbian culture and how so much of our past culture was seen only through patriarchal eyes. Deborah Edel, Sahli Cavallo and Pamela Oline, with histories ranging from lesbian-feminism to political lesbianism, joined in and, thus, a new concept was born—a grassroots Lesbian archives.²¹

They also maintain a list of principles that are illuminating:

Principles. *Many of the Archives' principles are a radical departure from conventional archival practices. They are inclusive and non-institutional and reveal the Archives' commitment to living history, to housing the past along with the present. Among the basic principles guiding the Archives are:*

- *All Lesbian women must have access to the Archives; no academic, political, or sexual credentials will be required for use of the collection; race and class must be no barrier for use or inclusion.*
- *The Archives shall be housed within the community, not on an academic campus that is by definition closed to many women.*
- *The Archives shall be involved in the political struggles of all Lesbians.*
- *Archival skills shall be taught, one generation of Lesbians to another, breaking the elitism of traditional archives.*
- *The community should share in the work of the Archives.*
- *Funding shall be sought from within the communities the Archives serves, rather than from outside sources.*
- *The community should share in the work of the Archives.*
- *The Archives will always have a caretaker living in it so that it will always be someone's home rather than an institution.*
- *The Archives will never be sold nor will its contents be divided.²²*

Many community archives do not equate themselves with “professional” archivists or archivist organizations. They see them as tools of the dominant cultural narrative and distrust them to either collect and care for their records or to interpret them as authentically as they can do themselves.

21. Lesbian Herstory Archives, “History & Mission,” Lesbian Herstory Archives, <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html> (accessed January 24, 2019).

22. Ibid.

If we are serious about revealing the diversity of archives, I believe that we must not just learn to coexist with community archives and archivists, but embrace them as equal partners in the immense job of preserving and sharing the full diversity of the human record. This will take flexibility with both theory and practice and a willingness to build long-term relationships based on mutual respect that value the community over the stuff.

At an event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Cascade AIDS Project archives, I was helping their volunteer archivist, Allan Giles, put up a poster display. My eyes widened as he began thumbtacking decades old posters to the board. Allan, a professionally trained archivist, brushed aside concerns. “These archives display their marks with pride,” stated Giles. “They are meant to be used and touched. They are how we connect with people.” I wouldn’t tack up my own archives, but I checked my attitude and dove in to help. The display was a huge hit, resonating with everyone who viewed it.

As successful as these efforts are, we are sort of fooling ourselves right? We’re a tiny profession, relatively speaking, and can’t hope to hook all these records up with all these users. Even with more commitment from individual archivists. More funding from institutions. More focus by professional associations. More partnerships with community archivists. More collaborations with associated professionals. Do we really have an illusion that we can fully represent the diversity of our species, now and through time?

In the short chapter *Parenthesis* in the novel *History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, Julian Barnes tackles the concept of truth:

“[L]ove is our only hope.... What I’m hoping for is the right comparison. Love and truth, yes, that’s the prime connection. We all know that objective truth is not obtainable, that when some event occurs we have a multiplicity of subjective truths which we assess and then fabulate into history, into some God-eyed version of what ‘really’ happened. This God-eyed version is a fake—a charming, impossible fake, like those medieval paintings which show all the stages of Christ’s Passion happening simultaneously in different parts of the picture. But while we know this, we must still believe that objective truth is obtainable; or we must believe that it is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can’t believe this we must believe 43 percent objective truth is better than 41 percent objective.”²³

Barnes is challenging us to grind, to get in the mix and work, even if our result isn’t something grand, to make the world even a little more truthful than it was yesterday. I believe that our diversification of the human record and of the people that use them makes the world a more truthful place.

23. Julian Barnes, *History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 243.

All human beings have the responsibility to work as best they can towards a better world. Archives are the tools we've chosen to do that. The sense that archivists (any more than any other human beings) can remain neutral with regard to their work and the people they are connected to is mistaken.²⁴ Archives have no intrinsic value apart from their usefulness to the human beings that create, manage, and use them. It is up to us all to make archives work for truth, justice, and liberation.

So what do we make of our stubbornly persistent illusion?

Our human brains seek to impose order on what they perceive as random. We do not have the capacity to just look into a cloud of images and understand their relationships. I'd say the simple answer is that the archival endeavor, much like time does for physical events, allows us to organize, contextualize, and reveal diverse human connection in a meaningful way.

When asked by science writer Marcus Clown to write a note to his mother encouraging her to learn more about physics, physicist Richard Feynman wrote her a note saying, "Tell your son to stop trying to fill your head with science—for to fill your heart with love is enough!"²⁵

As we expand the archival record and the people that use them, we are connecting hearts to hearts. In one way, you could see inclusion in archives as a manifestation of love. We are removing barriers to participation in life with each other, removing barriers to our recognition of a shared past and to dreams of a common future. We are using archives to create an environment that supports individual and community self-actualization.

But as Kate Theimer pointed out, in his later writings Abraham Maslow pushed his hierarchy of needs beyond self-actualization to transcendence—the furthering of a cause beyond yourself.²⁶ As we expand archives to include everyone's stories, the connections no longer fit through that small door. We see the human record for what it is—wall-less, expansive, fully connected. Transcendent.

24. For an early debate on archival activism and social justice see Mark Greene, "A Critique of Social Justice as an Archival Imperative: What is it We're Doing That's All That Important," and Rand Jimerson, "Archivists and Social Responsibility: A Response to Mark Greene," *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 302-345. Also see Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 339-356.

25. Photograph of note published in Christopher Sykes, *No Ordinary Genius: The Illustrated Richard Feynman* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1996), 161.

26. Theimer.