Appendix

DISCIPLINING THE ARCHIVES

In the course of my research for this book, I stumbled across social anthropology's sacred vaults. Deep beneath the old Museum of Mankind in Burlington Gardens, London, passing through a prison-house of locked doors and passageways, lay a dozen grey metal cupboards in a bare corridor. It was not how one imagined a treasure trove to look. The corridor, painted in regulation magnolia and decorated with heating pipes, was a thoroughfare for museum staff. My guide, the archivist, was clearly embarrassed at the impoverished setting for such historical riches. For this was the archive of the Anthropological Institute (later to be granted a 'Royal' charter), founded in 1876. She respectfully approached one of the cupboards with another set of keys from the rusting sweet tin, and gently opened the doors to reveal the pride of the collection, the original Council minute books. Now more than a hundred years old, they had just been rebound in sumptuous red leather. 'Only to be read wearing dust-gloves,' I was told. I murmured my respects.

These beautiful volumes were only the first surprise offered up by this unprepossessing corridor. In the subsequent cupboards were some of the most perfectly conserved archives that I have seen. Each letter, memo or manuscript had been interleaved with acid-free tissue paper, and then inserted, a few at a time, into a protective inert polythene wallet, before being placed in a high-quality acid-free archive box. This history of anthropology would last for ever. Hardly surprising that its guardians felt that it was almost too precious to let scholars get their hands on. 'What if someone', she asked, 'found a letter that would now embarrass its writer, or that might portray them in a negative light?' I was at a loss for words. This was history as treasure: precious, sanctified and guarded. The vault doors were closed once more. There are many shelves of

material that remain to be prepared and catalogued. To their credit, the archivists have are also assembling an impressively detailed and indexed catalogue of the archive, eventually be made available online.

Such dedicated history-making presents contemporary social anthropology with provocative questions. On the one hand, it is flattering for the discipline to realise that the production of ethnography is also the production of history, as the anthropologist George Marcus (1998) notes. By this logic, every ethnographic fieldnote, every personal diary, is potentially a historical document. Yet this challenges anthropologists' strong sense of the private sphere of research. Very few have been willing to deposit such materials in their own lifetimes (Darnell 1995). Will such valuable resources survive?

This particular anthropological archive, in its very perfection, raises difficult questions about the whole purpose of disciplinary archives and their status. Archives are the key portal to historical knowledge, but how much attention do we pay to their organisation? As Derrida notes, 'every archive ... is at once institutive and conservative' (1995, 7). The questions are particularly acute when what is being archived is hidden disciplinary knowledge itself. If a scholarly discipline already acts as a form of living archive – through its published papers, its journals and monographs – what sort of 'meta-reflexivity' is required of those who create this additional level of self-knowledge? As I hope this book has shown, one's understanding of a discipline's public identity is challenged and deepened by the hidden archives of personal correspondence, administrative records, and unpublished work.

The epistemological status of the archive has received little anthropological attention. All too often the archive has been viewed as the province of the historian, umbilically linked to that discipline's sense of identity and expertise. Historians are often not ashamed to display a proprietorial attitude over 'their' archive's contents, occasionally describing the characters 'uncovered' within the archive as 'their tribe' (Bradley 1999). Yet as the concept of the 'archive' expands, it becomes more unstable, and more demanding.

Let us begin with the filing. How many of us, with an eye to our own posterity, view our filing as a significant and important intellectual practice? Do we ever consider that our variously half-hearted efforts at storing and discarding papers might one day be key ledgers in history's accounts? Derrida's work on the archive forces us to attend to the technologies and practices that go unmentioned, and how 'archivisation produces as much as it records the event' (Derrida 1995, 11).

Derrida chooses to focus as much on the power of the archive's organising principles as on its interpretation by the privileged few. Once again warning us against 'originary thinking', he is paying attention to the way that the archive is never simply memory 'as

spontaneous, alive and internal experience' (ibid., 8). Ironically, however, Derrida doesn't engage with the 'originary' thinking practised by archivists themselves. Archival practice does indeed emphasise 'original order' and the principle that the records should be maintained in the order in which they were originally kept when in active use. This risks presuming a moment which it is the archivist's role to attempt to recapture, with the archives faithfully mirroring lived experiences, treating organisations as functional 'going concerns'. Such principles, intended to prevent archivists from indulging in their own transformational re-readings of the archive's order, inevitably have to gloss over the ways in which filing and re-filing are interested and strategic acts. There is rarely one 'original order', particularly when records have been revisited and reappraised, kept or discarded on a whim.

In carrying out this research, I have had the good fortune to not only 'discover' a lost archive (a little less romantic than it sounds), but also to act as an amateur archivist myself. The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) archive that I collected and deposited at the British Library for Political and Economic Studies at the LSE was originally a travelling archive. Few records remain from its earliest years when Edward Evans-Pritchard was its Chair and Secretary-General – he had little time or patience for paperwork. This changed with the appointment of Max Gluckman as Secretary in 1952. Gluckman was one of those invaluably fastidious people who wore his administrative responsibilities with pride. His files were carefully edited, ordered and comprehensive. One of the oldest files in the ASA archive is his doing, carefully bundled and tied together. Treasured letters come first – including a letter from Henry Levi-Bruhl, accepting honorary membership of the ASA in 1947, and a scrumpled, much reread airmail from Radcliffe-Brown in 1954, apologising for his absence from the forthcoming ASA meeting in Durham, as he did not wish to be the 'skeleton at the feast'!

The earliest records of the ASA have been cherished by its officers – collected minutes of committee and business meetings, memos about a planned reader, envisaged journals and the intractable questions of membership criteria. They have also been regularly revisited, with files from the early 1980s occasionally mixed in with those from the early 1950s. They also contain an extensive set of ephemera, from endless letters about subscription matters to chequebook stubs and bank slips.

By 1960, with the appointment of first Steven Morris and then Forge as Treasurer, a pattern had been established for the keeping of administrative records. With the appointment of each new office-holder, the previous incumbent would – perhaps with a sigh of relief – hand over his or her own papers, together with those accumulated

and passed down by his predecessors. The ASA records have never had a permanent home but always been on the move, travelling from one volunteer office-holder to another. As the files were parcelled up and sent separately around the country, two quite separate ASA archives began to develop. The two paper-chasing offices of Secretary and Treasurer produced their own records and their own filing systems. Even the packing and posting were a logistical feat, as by the early 1980s each archive consisted of several boxes' worth of papers. Eventually, John Comaroff proposed that an 'archive' of the earliest papers be created, to protect them and save them from continual transit. They were deposited in a big metal trunk in the basement of the Royal Anthropological Institute, described as the 'official archive' in correspondence between the secretary and chair, but then left, forgotten until recently. This echoes Barbara Pym's comments (1987) about one such academic treasure trove being the 'untidy old cupboard in the librarian's office'.

The fusty minutiae of this sort of administrative history are key to any archive. The documents make most sense when the contexts of their production, use and filing are understood. If there was no single ASA archive, each office-holder made sense of the records for their own purposes. Again and again, the files would have been unpacked, shelved, pruned, and reordered, before eventually being packaged once again and sent on. The complexity of the materials and the history of their production makes decisions over how to archive more difficult and more important. Yet, when I turned to the archiving profession for advice, I encountered a policy of archival realism. Seeking to try and put the materials I was cataloguing in some semblance of 'useful' order, I was firmly discouraged by several archivists. Pointing out the value of archiving principles such as provenance and original order, they felt that the materials, even in their present confused and multiply layered state, reflected the workings of the association, and were best left alone. This neo-functionalist purism at least spared me decisions about the historical significance of cheque stubs or bank paying-in slips.

Such conservatism is supported by current developments in computer searchable databases, which make it no longer necessary to physically order the materials in a logical or intuitive way. Indeed, the archive no longer even needs to be stored in one place. The index now becomes the archive, as it provides 'epistemological order' to the materials catalogued therein. At this point archival politics now focus on the design of such a database, and the way in which the catalogue is put together. To this extent, Derrida's claim that the 'technical structure of the archiving index also determines the structure of the archivable content' (1995, 11) would seem to have some validity. If an entry is not included in an index or handlist, it is no longer in the

archive. The deceptive ease of this form of archiving, indexing and searching can lead to the deposition of more and more materials, but also to the satiating image of this archive as being an ever more complete and total record of a particular institution or history. As I was reminded when doing this research, the archive could only tell one side of the story, and needed to be supplemented by oral histories, interviews and secondary sources.

Controversial initiatives to create online repositories and archives create different problems. The UK Economic and Social Research Council has realised that much qualitative research 'data' is not being 'properly' archived, and was therefore in danger of being lost. A catalogue has been created (www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata), and funded researchers are expected to offer their materials for deposition. However, despite claims (Silverman 1995) that anthropologists have a moral obligation to deposit their field-notes, very little has been deposited. Part of the problem is their ambiguous status as 'data'. If 'fieldnotes' become a recognised part of a research 'public sphere', would they then continue to be used for confessional intimacies or personal asides? Is there no boundary between the personal and professional? Anthropologists, all too aware of the power of hidden and secret social knowledge, are unenthusiastic about depositing such research materials, even if they were to be restricted or closed for years to come.

The official position is rather different. The American Anthropological Association has also adopted a 'Resolution on Preserving Anthropological Records', one part of which states that 'Anthropologists should take steps to care for the unpublished material in their possession and to make arrangements for the appropriate disposition of those materials' (quoted in Silverman 1995, 25). Silverman goes as far as suggesting that, in future, one's failure to make available research materials may well be used as a way of judging one's final results.

Marcus (1998, 57) argues for the multiple potentials of the 'once and future ethnographic archive' in its widest sense. He suggests that, in the 'realist' ethnographic archive of the present, ethnographic monographs act as the primary sources for the comparative work of others, whilst in the 'relativist' archive of the future the 'messy, constructed nature of ethnographic knowledge' becomes more obvious and open to critical reappraisal. It was in the middle of this dilemma, he suggests, that the 'authority constructed in ethnographic research and texts was caught and shredded in the 1980s critiques' (a reference to Clifford and Marcus 1986). Yet he also sees this future potential as key to a revitalised ethnographic project. Not, he hastens to add, in the positivist approach of creating cumulative comparative knowledge, embodied by the Murdock Human Relations Area Files project. Rather, Marcus points out

that anthropological obsession with record keeping, is inspired partly by professional norms and partly by the traveller's desire to register experience and observation. These are our private archives, highly personal, an extension of our anthropological selves, and rarely exposed to others. Once deposited, such personal archives 'become potentially subversive sources in relation to the claim of prestige and authority for published ethnographic scholarship' (Marcus 1998, 53). Here he is thinking of Malinowski's diaries, or the dispute over Margaret Mead's work (Freeman 1996, di Leonardo 1998).

This historicisation of the discipline, through re-studies and the use of personal archives, Marcus suggests, demolishes the authority of published materials as the sole disciplinary archive. This 'reconstituted, more complex and unwieldy' archive challenges the notion of ethnography's 'singular disciplinary achievement', and instead becomes 'a record that cannot be authoritatively ordered for any one particular vision of a discipline's knowledge quest' (Marcus 1998, 57). By this argument, seeing and working with 'field-notes' – such as those of Paul Stirling – provide invaluable insight into the anthropological method, even if the concept of the 'raw' field-note is highly problematic (Sanjek 1990).

For archival enthusiasts like Marcus, the ethnographic archive would enable the discipline to be increasingly opened up as an object for critical historical research, whilst ensuring that it remains a living scholarly community. The deposition of research materials and personal records – even if closed for many years to protect individual confidentiality – might subvert 'official' disciplinary narratives, to the benefit of those seeking to understand the conditions of academic knowledge production. Yet this sort of development may in turn, have its own risks. The very process of deposition, preservation and labelling objects as aspects of disciplinary knowledge can result in their acquiring disproportionate historical significance. This expanded 'ethnographic archive' of diaries, journals and ephemera could, against Marcus's predictions, serve to reinforce disciplinary identity. This sort of warts-and-all archive might paradoxically reassert distinctiveness and difference, objectifying and congealing the discipline as an autonomous and separable intellectual project.

The urge to archive and conserve is an important one. This book depends for its existence on numerous institutional and personal archives, and the guidance offered to me by their archivists. Yet an archive is never innocent, never neutral. The future of the university as a place for critical thinking depends on its students' understanding of and engagement with the conditions, politics and history of academic knowledge production. Such a future depends on the structure and contents of the archives that we deposit, as much as on the way they are read.