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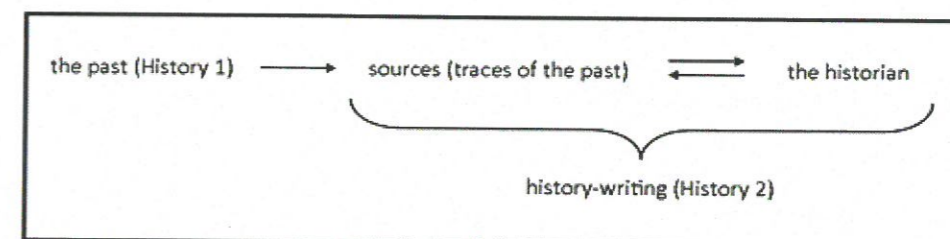
### HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE COLD WAR

Historians traditionally differentiate between 'the past' [history 1] and 'history' [history 2] that is history-writing or the historians reconstruction of the past. When historians write history-books in which they reconstruct the past they will utilize archival records, newspapers, books, memoirs and arte-facts including buildings. In fact whatever trace, manufactured, printed or written down, left over from that past which the historian is inquiring into, may serve as a source for the historian – even lies told may in this sense serve as a historical fact or historical documentation.

The Hayden White debate in the 1980's, where Hayden White paralleled literary writing and historical writing and argued that historians rely on literary tropes and genres to create narratives - without a narrative no history-writing, according to Hayden White - upset many historians mainly because Hayden White used the word 'fiction' when he talked about history [history 2]. Hayden White questioned

the possibility for writing an 'objective' in the sense neutral and non-partisan history, and by this challenged the idea of writing truly scientific history in the traditional, positivistic sense of objective and scientific history dating back to the late 19th century where History as a science was founded. Hayden White's main contribution to the discussion about the nature of history, *Metahistory*, was in fact published as early as 1973, and *The Historical text as Literary Artefact* in 1974, but Hayden White was not really broadly debated before the 1980's, when he became part of the postmodernist turn in History.

Like a number of other humanistic and social sciences the historical science would never today claim to be scientific in the classical, positivistic sense of 'scientific'. All (or nearly all) professional historians will today acknowledge that different histories of the past can be reconstructed and, besides, that people themselves in their own memory also construct different



versions of the past. Nevertheless all professional historians will also claim that it is not only possible, but also that professional historians are obliged to differentiate between what is a documented fact and what is just individual memory, tell-tales, myth or pure lies, and stick to valid sources when they write history. It is worth mentioning that Hayden White never argued that facts did not matter, what he argued was that because history-writing is also story-telling (a narrative) it will eventually borrow from literary writing and use some of the same artistic effects as novels or plays. Historians of older generations would argue that if you know your skill as a historian and handle the sources (documents) in the prescribed ways it is possible to reconstruct the past as it was ('wie es eigentlich gewesen'). What Hayden White questions is this original late 19th century notion of the possibility to reconstruct the past as it was. What we have left of the past will always and only be traces, and we will never be able to reconstruct the

past as it was (and that the whole idea about reconstructing the past as it was is a fiction).

It is the job of archivists, librarians and museum curators to preserve records and arte-facts and thereby document the past. Like architects archivists have their methods and rules of thumbs to go by, besides regulations and prescriptions deduced from the public laws governing the field (that differ substantially from one country to another). The art of the archivist is to preserve the records which are of historical interest and let the rest be discarded – it is not possible to save all records or traces of the past, not even in the modern, digital world where archival records take up less physical space than they did until a few years ago, where records mainly consisted of words written on pieces of paper.

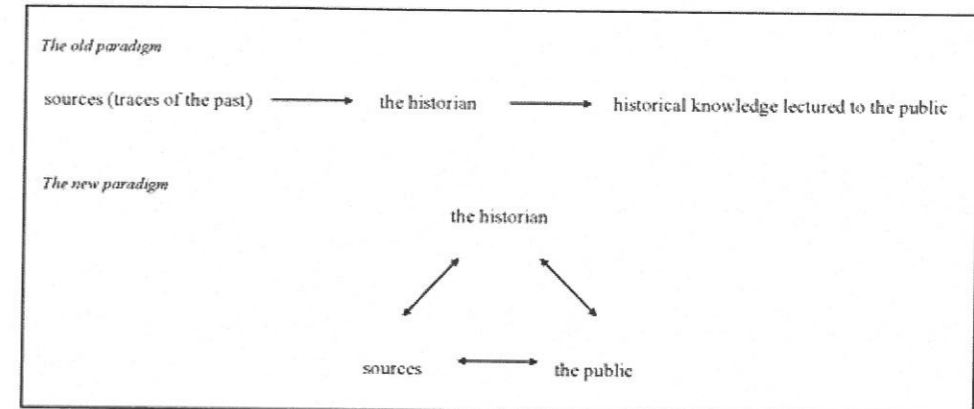
Terry Cook, an internationally renowned Canadian archivist and historian, has walked further down the post-modern road in the sense that he not only questions the objectivity of the historical



narrative, but also the very idea of 'a fact'. In his essay *Evidence, memory. Identity and community: four shifting archival paradigms* (2013) where he sums up many years' writing about archival theory, Terry Cook argues that four shifting archival paradigms may be discerned. The four paradigms should not be seen as mutually exclusive where every new paradigm substitute an old one, but more as layers, each new paradigm pointing at new concerns for the professional archivist. The oldest paradigm or framework for thinking about what archivists do evidence dates back to the foundation of History as a science in the 19th century. Documents or records were basically seen as objects to be found or unearthed (like other scientists found their objects of study in nature) and thereafter kept and preserved. Documents of historical importance were typically treaties and other juridical documents pertaining to the existence of the nation-state. The role of the archivist was to collect, describe and preserve records or documents as evidence 'protecting their impartiality through the archivists' self-conscious stance of neutrality and objectivity' (Cook, 2013, p.97). Trustworthy records were records where a connection between an act (cf. a political decision), a document and a creator (office/institution or individual) could be established with certainty.

As the bulk of records grew, appraisal (what to preserve in archives and what to discard) became from the 1940's and onwards the central skill of the archivist. The ideal of the archivists' neutrality and objectivity did not change, but the archivist was as active selector of archival records through the process of appraisal cast in a new role as creator of public memory. It has of course never been up to the individual archivist to make individual choices. What was of historical relevance was determined by what the historical profession saw as relevant for academic research. The Danish Arkivloven and the regulatory framework and guidelines issued by Statens Arkiver which has the authority to issue guidelines for public archives in Denmark still reflects the role of the archivist as the creator of public memory and appraisal as a cornerstone in archival praxis.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of the post-modern society and within the historical profession of postmodern theory – there were no longer a 'truth' to be found in the archive, but many truths, many voices, many stories. The traditional national history-telling, where the creation of the nation-state and the fate of that nation-state was the self-evident object of history-telling, was challenged from various camps in the 1960's and 1970's and



The figure illustrates the difference between an old and a new/future paradigm where the historian no longer is seen as the only authoritative teller of the past and both choice of sources (what traces of the past to preserve) and choice of stories to be told are made or created in a dialogue with the public

in the wake of the break-down of the historian's old role as teller of the story of the fate of the nation, historians and archivists deliberately took on a role as identity-creators and proponents of the different groups in society they thought most important to commemorate. The break-up in agreement among professional historians about what was the most important part of the past to be remembered and remembered for what, was accompanied by a break-down of the old Weberian order in state bureaucracies and from the 1980's spurred on by more or less constant re-organization of the public sector and not least the it-revolution. The old idea of trustworthy records as records where a clear connection could be established between act, document and creator crumbled with the advent of it-technology where it became more difficult to ascertain and document simple and basic facts such as what is an original. The modern archivists

have of course worked hard to impose order in the digital era, but it isn't easy and it is still debated how it can and should be done.

This has led archival theorists like Terry Cook and others to suggest a whole new way of appraising and preserving records in the digital era and thereby create a new role for the archive and the archivist. What he suggests is that archivists (and historians) have to accept that documents or records are created not found. That documents are basically created not found has to some degree been acknowledged since appraisal became a cornerstone of archival praxis, but the implications of this did not become truly visible as long as the members of the historical profession among themselves did agree on criteria for what documents were of historical importance and which ones not. According to Terry Cook archivists should, instead of using their expertise to judge what

to preserve in the archives and what not (whereby archivists also decide what future history it will be possible to write), use their expertise to qualify and participate in communal historical activities and enter into a dialogue with people's memory.

It is still important to safeguard documents, photos and other traces of the past as evidence, but, and this in Terry Cook's main point, it is neither possible nor desirable to let historians alone determine what is of historical value. If there is no 'truth' to be found in the traditional positivistic sense of truth, but many truths, the role of the archivist should change accordingly. "Without acknowledging the mediation and intervention of the archivist in the construction of memory based on documentary evidence, the claims for that evidence of impartiality and objectivity, of being a mirror of 'Truth' to reveal the past as it really was, must ring hollow at best. How may memory and evidence be reconciled? How may we find an identity from these two legacies moving forward?" (Cook, 2013, p. 103). Terry Cook never uses the concept co-creation, but he comes close in his vision of how historians/archivists and people in the future together may create archival records to document the past.

The point with this quick tour through

shifting paradigms of archival theory and praxis is to point out that the question of 'evidence' or historical documentation of course still is relevant. It is – also in the post-modern world – of relevance to be able to establish whether something is a fact or not, and it is still possible as well as necessary to do this on micro-level in the good old-fashioned way by studying the individual document (record), decide whether it is trustworthy or maybe a forgery etc. (on the net a discussion has emerged here in December 2013 about whether a document, which seemingly is a US State Department record, saying Hitler was buried in Madrid, is true or not. This is the sort of discussion which ultimately may be concluded with a 'true' or not true', fact or forgery). But besides discussions like this about whether a document is true or not a discussion of historical documentation will also always be a normative discussion about the guiding principles for what to document and what traces of the past to preserve.

The past seems to matter to all human beings, and I would advocate in line with Terry Cook that archivists and historians, besides writing history themselves, take upon themselves the obligation to further and act as guides in a humanistic

and democratic dialogue with the past. That the expertise of the historians/archivists should be used to preserve archival records and arte-facts that document human experience and create a dialogue about what is important to remember and document.

What are the implications of this for historical documentation of the Cold War? First of all evidence is still important – and so are memory. Memory to some degree differs from history (history 2) because memory is about the way we choose to live with the past, it influences the way we perceive ourselves and how we (re)act and is therefore just as much about the present as the past. Memory as part of the present is alive.

With relevance to the history of the Cold War, a history full of controversies and still not fully documented, I would suggest that we when we discuss historical documentation

- Should preserve records and arte-facts that allow us to visit the past and write history (history 2) in all its complexity and so that different histories can be told.

- The more contested and the more dissonant the heritage we want to document is, the more detailed documentation we need, in order to

preserve as richly documented a past as possible. Detailed and rich also in the sense that we need to document as many different voices as possible.

There are numerous examples of buildings, statues and other physical arte-facts being torn down in processes of regime change as a symbolic 'killing' of an old regime or other kinds of power games. But we have also examples of regime changes where memories and documents from the past have been utilized in a reconciliation process. It is of importance to processes of reconciliation that all parties are allowed a voice, just as it is of importance perhaps especially to very visible arte-facts like e.g. buildings that some kind of reconciliation with the past takes place in order to preserve also buildings and other very visible arte-facts as traces of the past and possible historical documentation for future generations of what the Cold War was about.

## References

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- Terry Cook, *Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms*, *Archival Science*, Vol. 13, pp. 95-120, 2013.