



On Method

THE MAKING OF A LIVING ARCHIVE

Sparknow was commissioned by ADB in early 2009 to conduct a legacy stories project that would provide ADB with a series of assets, including an audio composition, a publication, a series of reusable podcasts, a training program for narrative practitioners, and an embryonic core team of trained practitioners to carry on with the work. Olivier Serrat was the task manager.

For the publication, Olivier asked for a slice of the memories and reminiscences of the organization that would open up new ways for ADB to see and hear itself, and provide new spaces in which hidden and forgotten stories could be told and shared with a wider audience, including the Association of Former Employees of ADB.

We took this challenge to work with ADB to forge an embrace between narrative and analysis, between what is written and what is spoken. In short, to repair the often-ruptured connections between people in an organization and the sometimes impoverished artifacts through which an organization renders itself in written words.

The story began in November 2008, when two of the Sparknow team arrived in Manila at Olivier's request to inquire into ADB's use of narrative and identify promising areas where narrative could be applied to bring the experiences and memories of the organization alive. When we returned in March 2009, we decided to map the course of ADB's history through personal recollections to find clues about where to look. Long tables were laid out in ADB's library with a timeline by decade. We asked people to plot their own personal turning points, and those they felt to be turning points in ADB's longer history.

In March 2009 and later in June 2009, we conducted 22 interviews to add to the 11 interviews conducted in November 2008. All interviews were recorded with a main interviewer and a second to take notes. Two additional interviews were later conducted by an ADB narrative practitioner. The process yielded 39 hours of interviews.

The interviews were all transcribed and dropped together with the voice files into a narrative database specifically developed for Sparknow, called *kobble*. *Kobble* allows us to fragment voice and text while allowing the fragments to stay connected to the source material. In parallel, we had created a keywording schema that allowed four Sparknow researchers to trawl and sift the materials, looking for themes, patterns, gaps, insights, and anecdotes. We ended up with over 400 fragments, 55 sets, and 240 keywords that were used more than once.

FOUR OTHER THINGS WERE GOING ON AT THE SAME TIME

First, we were thinking and rethinking chapter headings and sequencing that were emerging from the materials. We imagined the journey the reader might want to take through the materials, how he or she might want to piece them together and place themselves in relation to them. Coming at them in their own time and on their own terms, rather than having the stories thrust at them. This also led us back to the original research interviews from November 2008 which, although not conducted in the same manner, also held some important stories and insights. Of course, as we had been interviewing for something different, this was a bit frustrating, because in many cases we could hear the anecdote behind what was being said.

How we wished we had more time to gather: double the length of the interviews, twice round the same interviewee—a chance as narrative practitioners to share our listening with each other and find the probing places where a story was lurking behind someone's tongue, not quite ready to come out. Polished stones, small stories with surprise and beauty do not drop out on a first encounter. There is archaeology, a careful digging, a brushing down and dusting off, a slowness of

savoring and encounter, an intimacy. We got downhearted, and then would go back and look again, and find something new, a tiny entry point that allowed us to play with the material in new ways.

When directing Shakespeare, the great director Peter Hall always starts by sitting down and writing out the whole play longhand to get the skin of it. Sometimes the work we were doing to sift and shape and craft the unrefined materials felt almost physical.

Second, we were researching proverbs and folklore from ADB member countries, knowing that the structures of oral histories alone might not provide enough grammar, as it were, to invite the reader into a relationship with the materials.

Meanwhile Carol was reading *Towards a New Asia* by Takeshi Watanabe, recommended by Xianbin Yao, the sole copy, a 1977 reprint in English from the original Japanese unearthed by Albert Atkinson, then librarian. We wanted a fix on the history and origins of the Bank, and we wanted a feel for tone of voice.

Third, David, the sound artist who had crept round ADB headquarters recording ceremonial drums that are not normally played and footsteps and tea trolleys, had started work on a composition in sound that would splice small slices of voice together with found sound and music, to create a soundscape of the Bank at work. He had also paid a flying visit to Cambodia to collect voices and sounds from the field to add to our eclectic collection of sounds from the Bank and Manila. The sequencing of the audio composition and of the publication, while echoing each other, could not be the same. They needed somehow to resonate and reinforce without mirroring. We also knew that sometimes one, sometimes the other, could make a stronger point, making the most of the different possibilities of the different media.

Fourth, we were talking with designers and printers and arguing robustly, hotly, over coffee on the 6th floor of the Royal Festival Hall

on the South Bank of the River Thames at meeting after meeting about the kind of design and production values that would lightly hook both products together, while creating space between them, that would render lyrical and beautiful, without whimsy or cuteness. Two of us had a particular interest in the manifestos of Italian Futurists from the early 1900s, and in the *parole in libertà* (words in freedom) experiments in typography that originated there. We decided that *parole in libertà* rather than woodcuts or illustrations or photographs would, subliminally, provide a way through the materials that would allow them to breathe, and offer inspiration to the reader. This also allowed us to play with form; both in this tradition and in the more recent methods in narrative research which, for example, explore the possibilities of playing transcripts back in poetic structures rather than in prose.

And then the task of sitting down and crafting a first draft. This was followed by detailed and demanding marginalia and annotations, taking the bones of the collection, rattling them a bit, and suggesting how to reset the pieces to make a stronger skeleton. Then days and days of redrafting, nipping and tucking, re-sequencing, bridging, re-clustering, looking at the light and shade that each extract shed on the ones around it, at echoes forwards and backwards that would provide new gateways and pathways. We made an important decision, quite late on, to show people by their initials rather than by their whole names, emphasizing the collective over the individual. Was this the right decision, or would the reader keep flicking backwards and forwards, irritated by not remembering who was who? We went back to names, then back again to initials, a bit unsure of the best way. Olivier drew the line.

And finally, what to call it? The title of the first draft was blunt, stating right up-front that it was a living archive of memories. And after some debate with our sponsor we went away racking our brains. We wanted something that would highlight the lyricism we found in the stories. Here were people who worked hard but still found time for joy and

laughter, people who still took time to notice the poetry around them. We had been listening to the audio composition that was to be entitled *Beyond: Stories and Sounds from ADB's Region*. We went back to our sponsor, and after further discussion settled on *ADB: Reflections and Beyond*. It felt right as that linked the publication with the audio composition in just the right way, and described the journey of the book. Reflections of ADB from its yesterdays.

Here then is a volume whose size and weight belie the efforts that went into its construction, not least of all from staff of ADB's Knowledge Management Center. A memento to accompany ADB personnel old and new, trigger more memories, and open new futures...

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