Unlocking Hidden Treasures Through Description: Comments on Archival Voyages of Discovery

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Résumé

Après avoir passé en revue une décennie de débats et de travail ininterrompu dans trois continents à propos des normes de description, cet article propose un temps d'arrêt afin de réfléchir sur nos réalisations et de réévaluer nos buts, nos ressources, et nos méthodologies. En recherchant la normalisation, nous nous engageons pour une destination prédéterminée, pour révéler les trésors des archives jusqu'ici inconnus afin de les rendre propres à une utilisation responsable et appropriée. Cependant, nos méthodes actuelles pour atteindre cette destination peuvent ne pas être aussi solides que nous le prétendons. Afin de tirer le meilleur parti de ce processus, nous devons être capables d'adaptation, vigilants envers le dogmatisme, et accepter nos propres marottes. Alors seulement pourrons-nous saisir et exploiter avec optimisme les nombreuses chances qu'offrira le parcours.

Abstract

After reviewing a decade of steady work and discussion about standards for archival description across three continents, this paper urges us to pause for a few moments to reflect on our accomplishments and to reassess our goals, resources, and methodologies. In pursuing standardization, we voyage towards a predetermined "destination"—to reveal the heretofore unknown riches of archives so that they may be made accessible for responsible and appropriate use. But our existing methods for reaching that destination may not be as serviceable as we contend. To make the most of this process, we must be adaptable, alert to dogmatism, and accepting of our own foibles. Only then can we confidently seize and exploit the many opportunities that the unfolding journey will certainly bring.

In analyzing the progress of work towards standards for archival description, I am mindful of the 500th anniversary of the geo-political Voyages of Discovery that

first brought knowledge of the treasures of the New World to the Old, and am tempted to speculate on how the geo-political events of the 1990s may also be judged to have had an impact upon humanity on a scale not dissimilar to those of the 1490s. Lest I get mired in the detail of strict historical comparison, however, I shall simply plant the suggestion of some similarity and adopt only the metaphor of a voyage as a device for this commentary.

Literally and symbolically, all of us have made our journeys to arrive at this point of introspection, and our travels continue. Whether we are talking about descriptive standards, the administration of archives and manuscripts, or our own lives, we are all processing, evolving, unfolding, travelling, and (one hopes) discovering a great deal as we experience our organic "journeys." As with all travellers, we are primarily interested in three things:

– *Where Have We Been?*   What have we learned or accomplished?

– *Where Are We Now?*   What needs, issues, tools, and resources are
                                 present?

– *Where Do We Want to Go?*   What directions and destinations should we
                                 pursue?

Let us address each in turn:

Where Have We Been?

Since 1989, a landslide of articles in *Archivaria*, the *American Archivist*, and recent articles by Adrian Cunningham, Mark Wagland, Graeme Powell, and Mark Brogan in issues 1 and 2 of Australia's new news-journal *Limited Addition* have provided us with a good review of where we have been—explaining the purposes, character, and evolution of Canadian, American, British, European (largely embodied as the International Council on Archives standard ISAD[G]), and Australian (the series-level CRS system) vehicles for facilitating descriptive standardization.[1] While I will not repeat their expositions, several points they and the literature-to-date have made should be emphasized.

First, everyone agrees that we are all voyaging from the known to the unknown, in search of common tools to unlock the value of archival resources. Metaphorically, our common "destination" is to recover/reclaim archival treasures for the enrichment of the wider community.

Second, there has been a decade of extensive and intensive work in pursuit of this goal which has yielded some impressive gains. Foremost, we have made great progress in refining our task, in identifying issues, and in devising and testing descriptive products. In task definition, the work of national and international task forces has been unflagging. In the United States, the inter-professional National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) 1979-1982 and its successor bodies composed of research librarians, archivists, and museum-based information systems professionals shepherded the development of MARC AMC to dominance as the major standard for bibliographic information exchange in the English-speaking world. In so doing, they were able to articulate some helpful guidelines and

broaden the focus to create a "standardization" movement within the whole of archives/records management.[2]

Conceptually, the following initiatives are particularly noteworthy.

1. Targeting of functional areas and activities to be standardized.

Initially, standardization activity centred on improving access to primary materials by adapting library-based tools and methodologies to facilitate communication and exchange of information about archives and manuscripts. This vision was gradually refined to focus on three categories of descriptive standards: those that prescribe *data structures*, the formats, or "packages" that contain informative data; those that provide the rules that govern presentation of the *data content*, the words, terms, or phrases to be entered within the data structure; and, finally, authority standards that control the *data values* or words, terms, phrases that are authorized to be used.[3]

2. More focus and attention on making archives more accessible.

In recent times, the focus has shifted again, from adapting well-established tools to studying the actual use and articulated user needs, initially to improve access to existing materials by improving existing tools and then to use this information to design new, more effective, or "purpose-built" access and retrieval systems for archival materials. Above all, this headlong rush to accessibility must be tempered by the need to describe our existing holdings of records in ways that will preserve their intellectual integrity, represent them accurately, AND promote their accessibility to non-Provenance-literate (or Provenance-illiterate?) users.[4]

Internationally, nationally, and (in some cases) intra-nationally, however, our journeys have had different vessels and chosen different routes, with varying degrees of success.

The first of our voyaging craft, the United States-based MARC Archives and Manuscripts Control (AMC) format with its companion manual *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts* (APPM), were commissioned for service in 1983.[5] In his design, APPM's author Steven Hensen modified a popular, reliable existing craft (AACR2) to accommodate the vagaries of the newly evolved MARC AMC format and set it on its course in a well-marked (pun intended!) channel. Hensen postulated that using the proven MARC family of bibliographic utilities to *communicate* information about archives to all library users would set off a positive chain reaction. In Hensen's thinking, adaptive use of established bibliographic standards should lead to accurate knowledge of archival materials being available to the full range of potential users. This would in turn lead to more and varied usage, which, in time, would nourish a growing interest and wider demand for archives. Thus, in the end, the interactive process would promote greater understanding and appreciation of archival resources, leading to more productive cooperation among the information service professions, records creators, and users—and, presumably, to more resources.

Hensen's vision has been at least partly realized: archival institutions and collections are experiencing unprecedented user demand. However, the extent to which this upsurge is attributable to MARC listings prepared using APPM is untested.

Recent (April/June 1993) electronic mail (e-mail) conversations from the United States-based Archives ListServe discussing collection use before and after reporting of archival holdings of several universities to the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) and to the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) network using MARC AMC, have indicated uneven demand from users.[6]

The largest increase seems to have been generated from in-house users (individual scholars and centralized library system managers) who are down-loading the *archival listings of their own institutions* from the networks and making them available for "browsing" in the local Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs). Complaints about accessing materials on OCLC and RLIN centre on the expense of searching, as well as the need for better standards for indexing, more "archivally friendly" or functional access points, and, above all, improved name and authority control. Some "List-surfers" predict that the user-pays services of both OCLC and RLIN may be eclipsed by the loading of archival finding aids (with or without MARC AMC standards) directly onto the e-mail networks for free access using intelligent searching agents called gophers.[7]

The anticipated indirect benefits of better understanding and more cooperation among professions, users, and creators also remain to be critically assessed. Despite these doubts, the overall impression has been that APPM and MARC have been largely successful in the United States. However, Steven Hensen himself doubts MARC's capacity for further development. The MARC descriptive family is more than twenty years old and very much a product of the technology available at the time; Hensen, therefore sees APPM as having reached its outside limits.[8] To put it in our metaphoric terms, MARC AMC/APPM was designed only for coastal waterways and defined journeys, not for the open seas of exploration on which our profession is now embarking.

The Canadian standard, *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*, on its journey sought primarily to navigate between the shoals of Anglo-French bi-culturalism to regulate archival description within Canadian national waters, and was only incidentally concerned with communicating those descriptions to a wider bibliographic world. Created in consultation with a broad cross-section of the Canadian archival community to assure its acceptance, *RAD* has chosen the "fonds" as its descriptive focus and comprises two parts: general rules for archival description (with variations for differing media), and rules for the creation of primary and additional access points for cataloguing. As with APPM in the United States, *RAD* is based as far as possible on AACR2 and related library conventions. Its creators, too, acknowledge the need for further development. As yet, however, they have not agreed upon any particular direction beyond finalizing and fine-tuning the full set of *RAD*.[9]

The principal criticisms of both *RAD* and MARC AMC/APPM are twofold. First, both standards are based on information modified and interpreted from existing (and far from consistent or accurate) finding aids; they have, therefore, enshrined the imperfect status quo, rather than aspired to formulate "best practices." Second, APPM guidelines, and to a lesser extent those for *RAD*, dovetail with the historical manuscripts tradition of collection management, which dominates practice within academic and research libraries but is less congenially applied within government

repositories, where the public archives tradition holds sway. For example, *RAD*'s examples are overwhelmingly drawn from private fonds; its few government fonds examples are for straight-forward, short-lived, self-contained entities. The significant problems this bias presents are reflected by Canadian struggles to define or delimit their *fonds* concept for application to more complex administrative entities. This effort has involved considerable intellectual effort to avoid confusion with traditional European rules and interpretations of fonds that do not cope well when applied to electronic or bureaucratically complex record-keeping.[10]

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, the MAD team ambitiously designed its own vessel and sought to devise guidelines based on established archival principles and practices for constructing a system of finding aids within individual repositories. The idea behind MAD was to codify and standardize the descriptive process and thereby ensure that the resulting products would be harmonious, but not necessarily strictly uniform. More than descriptive, MAD also incorporated features to meet management requirements. MAD's initial "destination" was to regularize/systemize practice within and among independent repositories. Its creators, however, contend that their craft has the potential for longer and more dangerous voyages. MAD's refit, now under way, aims to create a capacity for sharing/communicating information about United Kingdom archives worldwide and is testing the suitability of various MARC formats for this purpose.[11] This development offers us an excellent opportunity to examine a working hybrid linking standard approaches for the *process* of description with those for the *exchange* of descriptive information.

And so where are we now? What issues, needs, and problems confront us?

The first point to be made is that we have not succeeded in unlocking the full value of archival resources. Although we have worked hard and made genuine progress, we have largely limited our own achievements by building upon existing practice, rather than on what should or might be. Our rather traditional vessels, navigation instruments, and charts have concentrated on *custodial* waters and on *representing/communicating information about records to generalist users*, rather than on identifying and recording information deemed necessary to meet requirements for continuing, effective *post-custodial* management of archives or on *delivering the actual records* (and/or the information locked within them) directly to users.

Exceptions to this statement are the United Kingdom's MAD and the recent work of Terry Cook and David Bearman, all of which shift the standardizing focus from describing products to documenting processes. In MAD's case the process is creating finding aids; in Cook's it is the creator and the process of creation rather than the thing created; with Bearman it is record-keeping as a whole.[12] We will return to Bearman's latest contributions again in answering the question "Where do we want to go?"

Although technologically we can easily solve mere delivery problems, professionally and administratively we face the fundamental challenges posed by the essential nature of unique documentary material. As David Bearman expressed it "archives are *of*, not *about* activity."[13] They are by-products of processes and must be managed as such. Frank Upward has referred to archives as "Records of

Response,"[14] continuous flows of material which draw their *primary* and *evidential* values from the *patterns* they reveal of

* the activities and functions that generated them,
* the decisions and actions of individuals or offices that created and/or used them, and
* the inter-relationships among activities, actions, decisions, and other records sharing a common context.

As documents of response, archives form a tangible, collective memory, which is maintained for selective recall—to establish precedents, to make plans, to assess progress, to account—and to act as the conscience of society. Archives provide unselfconscious evidence of what happened, the sources required to demonstrate fiscal, political, and social accountability, or lack thereof.

Although archives have a secondary *research* or *informational* value for the types of information they record about people, events, places, and activities at particular times, the value of that information—expressed as its accuracy, integrity, and relia-bility—can only be established if one understands its provenance or lineage, i.e., the *context* from which it came.[15] This focus on knowledge of provenance—the cir-cumstances of records creation and subsequent use through to the present—is what preserves the status of archives as evidence and establishes its content as "good information." Thus any document or fragment of information it contains cannot stand alone. Either one, if presented in isolation and/or without knowledge of where it came from, loses its value or, as David Bearman has expressed it, its "recordness," which is its essential and unique documentary authority and mean-ing. Whether our purposes for use be evidential or informational, documents repre-sent instances in a process of unfolding events, not unlike the individual frames of motion picture film. Judged singly, they make little sense in relation to the mean-ing conveyed by the whole.

Archival "recordness" is also a potential obstacle to accessibility. Bodies of records, even individual documents within them, may be inherently confidential or "owned" as intellectual property. Furthermore, the function, activity, or transaction recorded may itself be secret or proprietary. In either case, responsible manage-ment of such materials may require archivists to administer or even impose restric-tions that preclude public access and/or prevent materials from being quoted, copied, scanned, filmed, or published at least for a time.

Even if archival materials are free of such restrictions, their collective composi-tion and one-of-a-kind properties make them less accessible than materials pur-posely created for reading/study. As related bodies of material flowing from events in progress, archives do not lend themselves to item- or subject-based retrieval. Rather, they must be located using combinations of process-oriented access points—names of creators or active participants, relevant functions/activities, types of transactions—within a real time/place matrix.

The point in dwelling upon these issues is to illustrate that standardization of descriptive information about archives communicated and exchanged through common formats will not, in itself, solve the problems of accessibility inherent in archival materials. These barriers to access are not always understood by our

"virtual library"-oriented colleagues, whose palates have been jaded by the "Information Smorgasbord," where all manner of self-contained tasty bytes are electronically spread before the world-wide consumer.

Even more seriously, the need for records and for organized records-keeping as we have known them in the past is being questioned. What do our businesses and organizations really need in terms of documentation in order to function effectively and responsibly? What is it exactly that "records" do for their creators and users that "information" cannot do? Most certainly we are entering an era where cohesive bodies of tangibly recorded evidence of acts or transactions will no longer exist, much less flow into our repositories for indefinite retention. The networked world of independent PC users accessing free-floating databases of information elements to construct unique, perhaps instantaneous or virtual documents in widely dispersed locations, to say nothing of corporate users with scores of applications, a relational database management system, and/or using wide-area corporate networks for communication and decision-making, evokes an archival nightmare, which Frank Burke has labelled "chaos through communication."[16] The long-term intellectual and physical control of record-making within this "information soup" poses the greatest challenge ever for archivists and records managers, a challenge that demands action now, not in the distant future. At the core of that challenge lies description, or more accurately, better *documentation*, for without concise and accurate identification of material from the moment of conception/creation, no one—managers or archivists—will understand enough about the essential character of the material to assess its continuing usefulness.

Where Do We Want to Go?

The bright spot in the midst of all this uncertainty is that we are much, much closer to answering the question "where do we want to go?" than ever before. Although we started from different points with disparate assumptions and methods a decade ago, our explorations so far have created common ground and instilled confidence in ourselves, in our colleagues, and in the very process of discovery. We have learned that progress is not necessarily a forward motion. We are certainly moving away from any prospect of confrontation or competition among descriptive products, professions, and specializations. I believe, as do most of the standards creators, that our finest achievement over the past decade has been this breakdown of barriers and shedding of myopic insularity in favour of efforts to develop a shared, pluralistic vision—an archetypal "field of dreams" where, once again, human aspiration and imagination may make their quantum leaps. This common theme—archival professionals reaching outward to grasp new tools and opportunities for exchange and cooperation—dominated the 1992 Montreal conferences.[17]

What, then, are some of guideposts that we must keep in mind as we devise the strategies and methods to move ahead? I would like to describe six.

1. Incorporate and Communicate "Value-Added" Knowledge About Contextual Links:

Having understood our work and our records as part of a larger evolving process, we must communicate this vital contextual understanding to others. This "value-

added" knowledge, a product of our investigative research and decision-making during archival processing, is frequently categorized and unreported as "management information," to be buried in fields for in-house use only. This essential contextual information must be exhumed and integrated within the "descriptive information" normally communicated to users.[18] If there is a line between "descriptive" and "management" information, it is no more distinct than the divisions between "basic" and "advanced" or between "education" and "training."

2. Promote Archives as Key Resources for Cultural Accountability and Continuity:

The capacity to *construct and transfer* culture has always been respected, even revered (but not necessarily viewed as powerful or well-paid), as an essential social function. There is no future for the past, only in those portions of the past that are selected and kept alive because they are of use in the present. Our culture is and always has been an evolving construct, which is reinvented with each new generation.[19] Critical to the process are the means to record and transfer authoritatively the knowledge of insights and achievements, embodied as archives. Without archives to explain the context and provide meaning, surviving artifacts remain objects for fascination and scholarly conjecture, as extremely expensive cultural conundrums.[20]

Cultural breaks usually occur when competition and replacement triumphs over cooperation and consensus. These periods have resulted in catastrophic, irreparable cultural losses when the archives of devalued communities have been destroyed and the people who remembered them eliminated. We archivists have a primary and primal duty to embed the archival mechanisms for cultural continuity within the structure of our larger societies by preserving representative documentation from the past in accessible forms and implementing schemes to capture and maintain evidence of ongoing achievements.

3. See Standards as Frameworks for Guiding Cultural Processes:

Standards are the building blocks for intra- as well as cross-cultural expression and communication. Without them, even our simplest activities would be thwarted. We use hundreds of standards in everyday life without giving them a thought. For example, language is the product of standardization, as are electrical current, transport, time zones, weights and measures, money, and many, many more. In archival description, as in these other areas, frameworks of standards for expression and exchange must be useful, yet flexible enough to convey meaning within and across cultures and to accommodate a reasonable *variety* of content, form, and approaches. General agreements on direction and pluralistic navigational tools to guide the processes of expression and transfer of meaning are needed.[21] However, these clear-eyed, pragmatic aims are hard to achieve. Why do descriptive standards, in particular, generate so much fuss?

4. Recognize and Channel the Primal Power of Archives:

Often we overlook the emotional power archives possess as the basis of our personal and cultural identities. They are the tool that enables us to prove our physical existence and accomplishments, and communicate our thoughts beyond direct interactions with others. Records support the basic human need to be understood,

which in turn relies upon the accurate expression of meaning through language. In short, records are not only primary, but primal "stuff"; perhaps this is why conveying information about their nature and control evokes such passion.[22] At the heart of our heated discussions lies our need to be fully understood and appreciated. Even small groups of linguistically and professionally homogeneous, respected, well-educated, eminently reasonable people committed to a common vision quickly dissolve into semantic chaos when attempting to moderate among differences in meaning of such terms as descriptive standards, series, fonds, even record.[23] If we are to channel this emotive energy for positive and productive outcomes, we must pay closer attention to anticipating and resolving semantic confusion. We must genuinely "harmonize" and adopt a jargon-free dictionary of data elements and terminology for daily use world-wide—not just give lip-service to the idea. These primary building blocks for standardization must precede the development of more complex entities.

Communicating a clear message about the nature of archives and archives work is also immensely complicated by the multiple views that people inevitably hold of archives and records. Because archives administration is a small, relatively obscure field, most people form their ideas about what archives are and how they should be managed from indirect, rather than direct experience. For example, one may read an article mentioning archives, know someone who works as an archivist, or have seen rather than used some archival material—usually a "famous" or landmark document or collection. Most non-archival information professionals have only limited exposure to archives as research sources or as office records, and would readily admit to knowing only a little about them. Even those with professional credentials and/or experience as archivists are held captive by the archival knowledge base at their time of training and/or by "how things are done" within a particular context of practice.[24] Nevertheless, each of these people, *including and especially ourselves*, will have formed some view of archives and archival work that dominates his/her thinking. These opinions about *what archives are* relate to the purposes that the holder believes archives serve, whether accurate or not. These perceptions of usefulness can be very limited and unwittingly contribute to a mindset that excludes other views. In such cases, to augment the familiar phrases, "there are none so blind as those who will not see; none so deaf as those who will not hear," I would propose to add "there are none so ignorant as those who think they fully understand archives." In an effort to break down these perceptual barriers, I have devised the chart in **Figure 1** to represent the multiple uses of records, particularly of archives, with time frames that expand over time.

Figure 1 *Pluralistic Uses of Records*

USE OF RECORDS/ARCHIVES	USER	TIMEFRAME
USE One: Serve Current Business/ Personal Needs	Internal Creator/Manager	0-7 yrs.
USE Two: Legal and Regulatory Obligations	Internal/ Government Auditor	0-statutes of limitations
USE Three: Social Responsibility/ Accountability	Industry/profession/ other societal "watchdogs"	0-long term
USE Four: Cultural Transfer and Educational Research	Outside Researchers	0 yrs- indefinite*
USE Five: Cultural Symbol/ Talisman**	Society at Large	25 yrs.- indefinite

*This time frame represents the full period of usefulness for cultural and educational research. However, most outside users would not have access to the material until after a closed period of some years. In Australia, that closed period is normally thirty years.

**I am indebted to Terry Cook for his suggestion that I make the symbolic function of archives a separate category, instead of presenting it as part of Use Four.

Thus, the creator of an archival record sees it as a transaction or work facilitator; the manager or auditor, as a document of accountability; the industry/professional/societal "watchdogs," as evidence of a pattern of "best practices" and socially responsible behaviour; and the outside researcher, as an object/commodity (i.e., "good" information to be consumed to serve particular research purposes). Finally, the broader community connects with the symbolic values inherent in archives as gateways to the past, a phenomenon manifest in displaying documentary "treasures." This last view highlights the gradual objectification of the record over time to become a "thing" or cultural research object, a concept with some following within the library and information science community.[25] The important point is that all subsequent views and values of records rest upon the integrity and meaning of the record in USE One being effectively preserved and migrated through time. Thus, records are useless for government accountability, social responsibility, or research if they are not authentic, uncorrupted evidence of their creator's acts/thoughts-in-context. Any and all of these uses or views, however, is valid, appropriate, necessary, and illustrative of the great richness of archives. All views/uses may be held concurrently or sequentially by the same or different users.

The point is that there is no conflict or competition among them; they simply demonstrate the great richness and value of archives as a multi-faceted resource.

The need to understand and protect the myriad capabilities of archives deserves special emphasis, as ignorance of this necessity can threaten the survival of archives as a resource and ultimately endanger societal accountability and cultural continuity. For example, misunderstanding the nature of archives leads to the favouring or promoting of the long-term uses of archives as research objects to the exclusion of other uses. This ignorance (or bloody mindedness) underpins some of the perceived conflicts and differences among the information professions. In particular, I am speaking of a tendency among some academic and research librarians to characterize records as just another form of information, a free-floating commodity to be made as accessible as possible for the widest consumption, and to dismiss those who question such a view as obstructive or quaintly out of touch. The objectification of the record into an individual item or thing to be used, without proper protection, communication, and validation of the essential qualities that imbue it with value—i.e., meaning derived from the interplay among its content, structure, and contexts of creation and/or use over time—is to render it valueless for any purpose. Once the inherent unity of archival structures is broken, regardless of how accidentally or well-meaningly, there is no possibility of repair, no undo button. Moreover, the push to concentrate surrogates of all such "information objects" into a single virtual world archive poses a danger to our knowledge base unequalled since the establishment of its ancient equivalent, the Great Library at Alexandria. Whether its existence will lead to the neglect of repositories holding the original source documents and expose us to catastrophic loss through an exponential head crash cannot be foretold; however, we simply cannot take the risk.

Archivists have been delivering this message over and over again without any great sense of having been heard. It will be a tragedy of incalculable proportions if the so-called "Information Agers," in their enthusiasm to exploit the riches of archives, unwittingly and irreparably destroy rather than share them. However, efforts to correct this record-as-object bias is also dangerous. In focusing too narrowly on protecting organizational Records of Response and their shorter term operational and legal accountability, records managers may destroy records of enduring value, simply because they have served those initial purposes. Similarly, institutional archivists focussed upon the "official record" of government and organizations in society risk neglecting the Records of Reflection—those equally important personal, creative, and/or spiritual expressions by individuals that document the "human-ness" of society.[27] Thus there is great value in all information professionals recognizing and embracing a pluralistic understanding of the *multi-functionality* of records and archives, and in working cooperatively and respectfully with archivists to achieve inherently compatible goals.[28]

5. Reassess, Realign, Reassemble, and Exploit Existing Resources:

A fifth maxim is to recognize the value of deconstruction, reconstruction, and changing perspectives on what has gone before. Many of today's new gee-whiz achievements are products of recycling: they are old pieces, methods, and technologies combined, assembled, or applied in new ways and/or tools created for one purpose and newly applied/adapted to another. Benefiting from past failures and

successes is a good, legitimate, and necessary activity, as is turning crisis into opportunity. The literate world's responses to the crisis of paper deterioration, which has seen new technologies harnessed to preserve selected research materials while increasing their accessibility, attest to the benefits of cooperative exploration and experimentation.

It is this call to reassess, rethink, and realign that has been at the heart of David Bearman's cogent advice to the archival profession. Sanguinely observing that traditional archival methods were not coping with the exponentially increasing challenges of modern documentation, Bearman initiated a series of "think-tank" encounters in the late 1980s to develop new approaches to electronic records management, archival appraisal, and description of unique materials. Australia has provided considerable input into these global contemplations conducted through international visits, conferences, seminars, and communications network exchanges. The current state of Bearman's process-focused strategy examines the status quo and builds upon existing strengths and structures to develop flexible, multi-functional tools and build empowering alliances.

Bearman is primarily concerned about what may be irreparably lost if, in our haste to arrive, we are tempted by mirages, particularly that of declaring the status quo to be standard practice. He is joined by Terry Cook, Margaret Hedstrom, and Chris Hurley in urging us to examine and understand what we are trying to convey through description as an integral part of the standardization process. They believe that we must deconstruct the processes, elements, and structures that comprise archival "descriptions" in order to validate, improve, or discard them in favour of new designs based upon "imagining what is possible" and genuinely needed, rather than just making do. Only when undertaken with care and rigour can the rewards of the descriptive journey be fully realized.[29]

The "existing strengths" referred to are the known power of provenance-based search tools and strategies and the wide acceptance of standards useful for archives work. Examples of the latter include established international standards for bibliographic data and information exchange (MARC, ISBD, SGML), de-facto national standards guiding production of archival finding aids (MAD, *RAD*, Australia's CRS), and standards that operate in record-affecting industries such as information technology (OSI), recording media (paper, film, microfilm, optical disc), recording processes (WORM), and telecommunications (EDI, ISDN).[30] Bearman's idea is to harness, adapt, and link these existing and evolving standards to achieve archival goals.

Bearman's second strategy encourages archivists to make common cause with managers, experts, and regulatory authorities who share a common requirement for accountability and need for timely, reliable evidence and/or "good information" over time. These potential allies include information systems analysts, data administrators, organization risk managers, legal officers, accountants, and auditors—as well as groups representing the end-use research communities and standards bodies.[31]

Empowered through these tools and alliances, archivists can move forward to influence records creation and description for continuing accessibility through

systems design. Concurrently, we can reach out to exploit the descriptive potential of technologies, methods, and expertise developed for purposes quite different (commerce, defence) from archival documentation or later use by researchers.

I believe we archivists have accepted our place in an interdependent world and are joining with others to meet the challenges of modern documentation. Joining in, however, does not mean submerging the distinctive attributes of our profession into some amorphous "information professional." Rather, it makes it more important that we define and articulate those qualities that we can contribute to a pluralistic alliance.

6. Incorporate Change and Value the Process:

The last basic maxim is a reminder that change and process are constant and continuous. We grow and change as we move through our experiences, and so do our records. Our archives are, after all, organic products, best managed by organic methods that reflect the functions, contexts, and circumstances of their creation *and* of their continuing use. Above all, we must see our work as part of an overall process of managing records, which began before our custody and which embraces our decisions and actions as part of the records' continuing provenance. Simply put, our work transforms our archives. Newly accessioned materials are never the same after we have processed them. They are changed in value, if not in substance, by the knowledge that we have attached or added to them. We, too, and our colleagues are changed by our experiences. With this in mind, we must not race headlong towards preconceived goals such as the hegemony of MARC, MAD, *RAD*, or CRS, or dogmatically defend one's own approach against all others, for we will miss the valuable new directions and lessons the process itself will yield.[32]

What lies ahead on our voyage? No one can say; but, provided we keep our guideposts in mind, we can find inspiration in the wisdom of Odysseus so many centuries ago, and which is expressed in a few lines I have adapted from C.P. Cavafy's poem "Ithaka":

When you set out for Ithaka
ask that your way be long,
full of adventures, full of instruction...
Have Ithaka always in your mind.
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.
But don't in the least hurry the journey,

Better it last for years,
so that when you reach the island you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way.

And if, on your arrival, you find Ithaka poor;
she hasn't deceived you.
Ithaka gave you the splendid journey.
Without her you would never have set out.

In pursuing our destination—to unlock the value of our archives through establishing standards of many kinds—we must first understand the multiple "riches" or uses inherent in our "treasures" and create cooperative alliances for protecting and exploring them. In our quest, we shall be most successful if we design flexible vessels that focus upon and incorporate the insights of the *process*—the unfolding journey and the opportunities it holds for us to discover the true nature of our work and of the value of each other's ideas.

Columbus and the other great voyagers ended up in places that they had never envisioned and found riches that they had never imagined. What might be accomplished had they collaborated with their fellow travellers? At this point on our journey, unique opportunities for influence through cooperation are at hand. Working together as a profession, we can devise safe and effective startegies for sharing and exploiting our archival treasures. That is our opportunity and our obligation. Our colleagues know that we control resources of value; they are inviting our involvement. But not for long. The journey draws them. The vessels now leaving the quay have limited capabilities. Together let us fashion one to lead the fleet.

Notes

*   A draft of this paper was first given as a commentary for the session: *MAD, RAD, and APPM: Standard Comparisons* at the Association of Canadian Archivists Annual Conference, Montreal, 11-13 September 1992. The author thanks Terry Cook for his generous editorial assistance in preparing the final manuscript.

1   In particular *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992) and 35 (Spring 1993), and the *American Archivist* 52, no. 4, 53, no. 1 for North American and UK standards. Some Australian views of those products and of Australian Archives' own Commonwealth Registered Series (CRS) system may be found in Bruce Arnold and Hilary Rowell, "The Australian Archives Records Information Service System (RINSE)," *Archives and Manuscripts* 17, no. 1 (May 1989), pp. 25-35; Adrian Cunningham, *Limited Addition* 1 (January 1992), pp. 9-10; Mark Wagland, "The Search for Archival Descriptive Standards: the State of Play in 1992," Graeme Powell, "MARC versus MAD: the Atlantic Rift," Mark Brogan, "Descriptive Standards Revisited: In Search of the Elusive Antipodean Hybrid," all in *Limited Addition* 2 (August 1992), pp. 20-23; 23-24; 25-26. Most recently, Chris Hurley, Australia's representative on the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards, has undertaken to codify existing Australian descriptive practices as a preliminary step to developing a genuine national standard. Presently available only in a draft document entitled *Australian Common Practice Manual (ACPM) version 93.2*, the study will be published as soon as reportable results are available.

2   In the early 1980s, standardization activity in the English-speaking archival world was concurrent in a number of areas. In preservation, the work of the United States Committee on Book Longevity led to agreement on technical specifications for permanent book papers and binding. Standards for archival microfilming were approved and promulgated, as were standards for storage of various media. Professionally, guidelines preliminary to standards were proposed for codes of conduct and ethics (US and UK) and for archival education (US and ICA). By the late 1980s, profession-wide planning tools and certification guidelines, along with revisions of previous ethics and education documents (US, Canada) attested to the emergence of defacto standards of practice in North America. Much work is in progress and much, much more remains to be done.

3   Avra Michelson, "Introduction: descriptive standards and the archival profession," in Avra Michelson, ed., *Archives and Authority Control: Proceedings of Seminar Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, 27 October 1987. Archives & Museums Informatics Technical Report No. 6* (1989), pp. 1-2.

4   Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 123-24.

5   The full citation is Steven Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies and Manuscript Libraries* (Washington, 1983). A second edition was published in 1989.

6   The Archives ListServe is a free information exchange "bulletin board" accessible through most of the international electronic mail networks (Internet, Bitnet, Janet) which link academic and research institutions around the world.

7   "Surfing" is an e-mail slang term denoting regular access to, browsing, and use of List and e-mail services. Net Surfers or List Surfers are persons who access networks or ListServes, respectively. See also Wendy M. Duff and Kent M. Haworth, "Too Big or Not Too Big: Considering the Issues for a Canadian Archives Information Exchange Network," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 275-280. Gophers are off-the-shelf computer programmes that help users to search the networks for particular types of information or documents and acquire them for convenient access. Conversations supporting this view include Larry Lynch, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire 8:40, 5 May 1993; Helen Tibbo, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), 9:33, 7 May 1993; Richard Saunders, Montana State University, 14:18, 6 May 1993; and Judith Turner, Milwaukee Public Museum, 19:53, 7 May and 12:34, 10 May 1993.

8   Steven L. Hensen, "The First Shall Be First: APPM and its Impact on American Archival Description," *Archivaria* 35 (Winter 1993), pp. 64-70.

9   Kent Haworth, "The Voyage of *RAD*: From the Old World to the New," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 5-12; "The Development of Descriptive Standards in Canada: A Progress Report," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 75-90.

10 Terrry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: from Theory to Practice* (Ottawa, 1992). Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems, and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 24-37; Hugo Stibbe, "Implementing the Concept of the Fonds: Primary Access Point, Multilevel Description, and Authority Control," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 109-137.

11 Michael Cook, "Description Standards: The Struggle Towards the Light," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 50-57, and "MAD2 Reassessing the Experience," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 15-23.

12 Cook's essays and articles include: "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," in Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds*, pp. 31-85; and "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems, and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 24-37. The range of Bearman's current views is most succinctly expressed in his articles "Documenting Documentation," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 33-49, and "Record-Keeping Systems," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 16-36.

13 David Bearman, speaking at a seminar on Electronic Records Management, Sydney, 7 June 1993.

14 Frank Upward, "Archivists, Pluralism and Information Policy," *New Zealand Archivist* III, no. 3 (Spring/September 1992), pp. 1-3.

15 Schellenberg has written the best known explanation of the different values of records based upon their use. For an overview, see T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records," in Maygene Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader* (Washington 1984), pp. 57-70.

16 Frank G. Burke, "Chaos through Communications: Archivists, Records Managers, and the Communications Phenomenon," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 154-77.

17 The theme of the XII International Congress on Archives (ICA), 5-11 September 1992 was "The Profession of the Archivist in the Information Age." This meeting was followed by the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) Annual Conference, 12-15 September 1992 on the theme of "Dismantling the Tower of Babel: Developing a Common Language Through Descriptive Standards," and then by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Conference, 11-17 September 1992 with "Archives: A Global View" as its theme.

18 This view is also shared by Terry Cook and was explained more fully during his November 1993 lecture tour of Australia; an article refining his lecture is forthcoming.

19 Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture," *American Archivist* 53, no. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 378-92. David Bearman, "Archival Methods," *Archives & Museums Informatics Technical Report No. 9* (1989), pp. 59-67. Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78-100. Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 34-56. Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination*, pp. 38-70.

20 Archaeology and related fields painstakingly recover and reconstruct contextual information from such mute evidence. For lighthearted speculations about undocumented twentieth-century remains see, David Macaulay, *Motel of the Mysteries* (Boston, 1979).

21 Richard J. Cox, "Standardizing Archival Practices: A Tool for the Information Age" (Montreal, 1992). Published ICA XII conference paper.

22 The vital importance of the symbolic value of archives and the emotional power it wields is the focus of Jim O'Toole's "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," *American Archivist* 56 (Spring 1993), pp. 234-255. Anne MacDermaid's "The Essence of Archival Communication," in Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination*, pp. 232-243 also highlights the dangers of neglecting this important value.

23 Author's private conversation with David Bearman recounting the semantic struggles within his United States record-keeping standards "think-tank" group's may meeting at the University of Pittsburgh, June 1993.

24 Ann Pederson, "Archival Education Preparing the Profession to Meet the Needs of Society in the Twenty-First Century: Writing and Research" (Montreal, 1992), p. 2. Published ICA XII Conference Paper. Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Archival Education Preparing the Profession to Meet the Needs of Society in the Twenty-First Century" (Montreal, 1992), pp. 1-2. Published ICA XII Conference Paper.

25 Boyd Rayward, "Electronic Information and the Functional Integration of Libraries, Museums and Archives," in Seamus Ross and Edward Higgs, eds., *Electronic Information Resources and Historians: European Perspectives* (St. Katharinen, 1993), pp. 227-243. Michael Buckland, "Information as Thing," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science (ASIS)* 42 (1991), pp. 351-60.

26 This view is devastatingly supported in Terry Cook's "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 124-34. As a long-time public programmer myself, I believe that everyone needs an understanding and appreciation of the function and importance of archives in society and access to them for cultural nurishment and protection of personal rights. However, there are appropriate levels of access and use tailored to the level of knowledge, appreciation, and skill of the user.

27 The accountability function of archives is most concisely explained in David Bearman's "Record-Keeping Systems," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 16-36, and is comprehensively presented with case studies in Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping*. Monash Occasional Papers in Librarianship, Recordkeeping and Bibliography No. 3 (Melbourne, 1993). The term "Records of Response" was coined by Frank Upward in his article, "Archivists, Pluralism and Information Policy," *New Zealand Archivist* III, no. 3 (Spring/September 1992), pp. 1-3. Although he uses this term to characterize books and articles in journals as consciously authored works of opinion and interpretation, I have interpreted it as including personal papers and manuscripts.

28 My idea that the concept of the record changes within the minds and according to the work purposes of the user is, I believe, at the root of some of our serious semantic and "world view" problems so cogently described by Sue McKemmish in her paper, "Core Knowledge and Skills for Information Professions—Converging or Diverging: Implications of Diverse World Views," in *Proceedings of the 9th National Convention of the Records Management Association of Australia (RMAA) 8-11 September 1992, Sydney* (Sydney, 1993), pp. 103-114. I also agree with the point raised by Terry Eastwood that the records themselves may be changed by their selection as archives and "pass into a new state with new uses...," a view he mentions is also shared by classic writers T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago, 1956), pp. 11-16, and Elio Lodolini, *Archivistica: Principi e Problemi*, 2nd Edition (Milan, 1985) quoted in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 87.

29 David Bearman, "Multi-Level Description," *Archives & Museums Informatics* 7, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 7-8; Margaret Hedstrom, "Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imagining What is Possible," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 53-63; Chris Hurley, "What, if anything is a function?" *Archives & Manuscripts* 21, No. 2 (November 1993), pp. 208-221.

30 Acronyms not previously explained are ISBD=International Standard Bibliographic Description; SGML=Standard General Mark-up Language; OSI=Open Systems Interconnection; WORM=Write Once Read Many; EDI=Electronic Data Interchange; and ISDN=Integrated Services Digital Network.

31 David Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 33-49 and "Record-Keeping Systems," (Autumn 1993), pp. 16-36, David Bearman, speaking at a seminar on Electronic Records Management, Sydney, 7-8 June 1993.
32 Similar views have been expressed by Terry Cook in his paper, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 24-37.