

Counterpoint

Media Myopia

The tyranny of the medium is alive and well.¹ Woe betide the poor heretic who, nailing his theses to the archives door, asserts that provenance is central to archives, that the collecting of media records is a means to rather than the goal of “total archives”, that media isolation will lead inevitably to separate archives rather than total archives. Such a lost soul will be branded, as I have been at the hands of Andy Birrell,² a textual traditionalist, an image-illiterate barely within the pale of archival civilization. In this outcast state, I have derived much consolation by the meditations of the Sound archivists, members of Birrell’s own media church who, like me, have lost their faith.³ Nevertheless, like the ancient crusaders constantly challenging the persistent infidel, the fervid missionaries ever spreading light into even the darkest corners of the world, I must again descend into the fray, for Birrell’s creed is the real archival heresy and mine the true orthodoxy.

Indeed, only an act of faith could lend credence to Birrell’s attack on me, for his rebuttal is an agile — and transparent — feat of mental juggling. Although he defends the status quo against suggested changes, I am labelled the tyrant of tradition. Although he encourages the isolation of one archival medium from another at a time when technology and legislation are rendering inter-media barriers meaningless, I am the traditionalist for wanting to remove such barriers.

Although I forewarned of the possible future takeover by other cultural agencies of certain media aspects of archives — a prediction now powerfully illuminated by the publication of the National Librarian’s imperial designs — Birrell assigns me to the oblivion of a traditionalist out of touch with present and future archival realities. Although I have published articles in the field of Canadian intellectual history, he primarily dismisses my comments as the work of a linear traditionalist unschooled in the

1 For the opening shot in this debate, see my “The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on ‘Total Archives’”, *Archivaria*, 9 (Winter 1979-80): 141-9. I wish to stress again that the opinions presented in this and the present piece are mine alone and not those of the Public Archives of Canada.

2 Andrew Birrell, “The Tyranny of Tradition”, *Archivaria*, 10 (Summer 1980): 249-52.

3 Ernest J. Dick, Jacques Gagné, Josephine Langham, Richard Lochead, and Jean-Paul Moreau, “Total Archives Come Apart”, *Archivaria*, 11 (Winter 1980-81): 224-7. Unless otherwise necessary for clarity, all future quotations from these three articles will be made in parentheses in the text.

subtleties of intellectual history.⁴ While I based my judgements on the archival priority of serving as efficiently as possible the parent or creating institution and Birrell casts his lot with the cultural custodians of museums and galleries, I am the traditionalist and he the modernist.

While I was attempting to move the archival clock forward to meet pressing new needs, Birrell accuses me of turning the hands back to yesterday. Such is the burden of Birrell's rebuttal, one marred only by being based on a monumental misreading of my original article and animated by a keen desire to defend vested media interests. Let me, therefore, focus a larger lense in a further attempt to cure such media myopia as now dims the vision of the total archives concept in Canada.

1. *The principle of provenance*⁵

Birrell does not question my definition of the principle of provenance as based on quotations from Schellenberg and the Association of Canadian Archivists. Rather, he asserts that provenance is "relatively unimportant" when dealing with non-textual media, that the principle is really an antiquated "echo of a distant war" between libraries and archives (p. 249). He repeats Schellenberg's assertion that provenance may be applied with "considerable latitude" to cartographic (and presumably other visual) records (p. 249). In this game of quotations from Schellenberg, let me toss another back at Birrell, relating once more to the role of cartographic archivists:

Textual material, such as surveyors' field notebooks, mathematical computations, statistical tables, and map project files, *is best kept near the cartographic material to which it relates*. Aerial photographs, the basis of modern mapping, are most conveniently used by persons trained in geography and photogrammetry *in close proximity* to maps of the areas photographed. Maps that are illustrations in books or that are interfiled with textual records *are ordinarily not the direct concern* of those responsible for separate bodies of maps and cartographic records. In the interests of their better preservation and *only* when adequate cross-references can be made should such maps be brought into the cartographic section of a repository.⁶

4 I have no desire to reproduce my *curriculum vitae* here but, should any doubts remain in the matter, readers are referred to my recent article: "Nailing Jelly to a Wall: Possibilities in Intellectual History", *Archivaria*, 11 (Winter 1980-81):205-18.

5 I intend to deal with Birrell's four main points, in the order he advanced them. As an aside, he also accused me of the use of false analogy. I dispute the charge. To me it is still analogous (I did not say exactly equal) if in return for photo-archivists rejecting pictures of federal agricultural scientists because the images were neither aesthetically pleasing nor the work of photographic pioneers, personal letters by Karsh or Notman were rejected by manuscript archivists because they were produced on typewriter using a very common script. In both cases (i.e., an analogy), the information presented on the surface of the document would have been sacrificed because it did not also sufficiently illuminate the history of the medium itself. To this Birrell adds the *non sequitur* that "all archival media are concerned primarily with the product of the mind behind the instrument, not with the mute instrument that was used, be it pen, typewriter, paintbrush, press or camera." (p. 251). And does he not think there was a collective mind behind the evolution of the textual medium? From the first stirrings away from the oral tradition in the early Middle Ages to the electronic office of the 1980s, the evolution of the written word from carved wooden sticks to computerized word-processors has mirrored collective values (or "the mind behind the instrument") toward information, administration, evidence, law, government, memory, and much else. (See for example M.T. Clanchy, "'Tenacious Letters': Archives and Memory in the Middle Ages", *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81): 115-25.

6 T.R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York and London, 1965), p. 303. Emphasis added.

This extract points exactly to the central argument of my original article: that it is the essence of the record and the context of its creation by the original agency, rather than the medium in which it is cast, that must remain paramount to the archivist.

When Birrell — and even Schellenberg in, one suspects, a moment of weakness — deny the importance of the principle of provenance to non-textual archival media, they are simply wrong. Provenance is not the echo of some distant war. It is the central core of the archivist's craft. Records, I must remind Birrell, have evidentiary as well as informational value. Jenkinson's words still ring true: "no Archivist . . . could possibly allow full Archive value to documents which have been violently torn from the connexion in which they were originally preserved, a connexion which in nine cases out of ten is important, if not vital, for the full understanding of their significance."⁷ Remove the context of a record, obscure its origins, confound its relationship to its creators and you will have destroyed its evidentiary value. As any Indian claims researcher would testify, a single map removed from its context has little legal value; restore that map to the file of which it was originally a part, prove therefore that certain lines or markings added to the map were made by a specific surveyor, establish the date of the additions, link them to explicit instructions from the Surveyor General, and presto! you have demonstrated a link between the little red lines on the map and government policy, which in turn may or may not render that government culpable for certain obscure changes of an Indian reserve's boundary. Remove the context and such evidentiary value is effectively lost.

To an archivist, this sense of context is everything. Provenance is not a throwback to the past; rather, it is what distinguishes us *now* from librarians, gallery and museum curators, and antiquarian manuscript collectors. Individual stray items removed from their context, no matter how great their informational value, cannot be "a fit inmate for a National Archive Establishment."⁸ Birrell, of course, is too good an archivist not to recognize this for, after arguing that provenance is not important for non-textual media, he curiously reverses himself to agree with my quoted assertion that the functional integrity of a record must take precedence over its form, adding only that this need not preclude separation by media (p. 250). Here we pass from the realm of theory to practice. While it is true that media separation *need* not blur the functional integrity of the total records of an agency or individual, there is growing evidence that such separation *does* just that. In summary, then, Birrell's theory that provenance is relatively unimportant is just plain wrong, while his later assertion that provenance is not at all threatened by media separation denies (without proof) the examples which I (and now the PAC Sound archivists) advanced to the contrary. And if Birrell agrees that functional integrity must take precedence over form, then why does he defend the internal structure of archives whereby the medium format is clearly the central organizational principle, whereby the form in which the record is cast clearly does take precedence over the functional integrity of that record to the total mass of documentation created by its parent body?

2. *The nature of history*

When Birrell in the core of his reply mocks my restricted, traditionalist view of historical and media significance that would supposedly deny any role to cultural and intellectual history, when he ascribes to me a penchant of equating historical "reality" with bare "facts", he kindly asserts "that Cook surely cannot himself believe what he writes." (p. 250). What I have trouble believing is that Birrell read what I wrote! In the first place, I need no lectures on the value of intellectual history or the mental filters

⁷ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London, 1922, 1937, 1966), p. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

through which human perceptions are formed. Not only has my entire career as a professional historian been devoted to the field of Canadian intellectual history, but I have also recently asserted in this journal that intellectual history is “the most distinctive . . . [and] by far the most significant” part of all human history, that “intellectual history utilizes approaches to documents and to the past that transcend the literalist, one-dimensional perspective”, and that it is the distinction between “political, economic, or social objective reality and the subjective filter of ideas, values, and assumptions through which that reality is perceived (and often altered, embellished, warped, and misinterpreted) that lies at the core of intellectual history.”⁹ In the second place, in my original article, I could hardly have leaned over backwards any more that I did to stress the value of new media records: I wrote that the concept of total archives “has flowered into a rich growth encompassing every possible medium”, “all fields of historical inquiry and research have been greatly enhanced by the availability of the new media”, “the greater aesthetic and visual appeal” of the new media “has allowed archives to reach out through exhibitions and publications to a much wider audience”, and “it is *not* the sheltering of various media under the total archives umbrella that threatens provenance, but the manner in which the various media are organized within archives.”¹⁰ The Sound archivists certainly had no trouble interpreting the meaning of such phrases: “It is important to underline that there is agreement [between Birrell and Cook] that all media should be preserved; the question is how they should be organized once inside the confines of an archive.” (p. 224). The Sound archivists also, however, repeated my crucial qualifier (which Birrell seemingly missed) that discretion must be exercised in the collection of such media records by drawing a firm line between documentary and aesthetic art (whether a photograph, painting, drawing, print, film, or — stretching the sense slightly — a map).

In this context it is, to say the least, very naughty for Birrell to twist such assertions into a statement that I would deny to Picasso’s “Guernica” a significant place “as historical evidence outside the confines of art history. . . .” (p. 250). Of course it has such a place. Where Birrell and I part company is at my insistence that the abstract or non-representational works of Picasso — or any other artist — have no place in an archives. To assert otherwise eliminates the distinction between archives on the one hand and galleries, museums, film boards, and artificial collections on the other. This is certainly unwise at a time when cultural agencies are competing more and more for ever-diminishing resources. It is also unhealthy for archives because it elevates an aesthetic over a documentary approach to records, it stresses the individual collectible item over the series of organic records functionally related to the parent body, and it reduces the archivist to a curator. For archives, Jenkinson warned, “there must be no selecting of ‘pretty’ specimens.”¹¹

The specific example of the work of Karl May is instructive. This artist’s works including scenes in Mexico, Peru, and Polynesia were acquired by the Picture Division (PAC), a glossy catalogue prepared and published, and a substantial exhibition researched and mounted. Birrell defended¹² this acquisition as documenting the mind of a German ethnic in Canada after the Second World War. That it clearly does, yet because the subjects of the works themselves obviously do not document the history of Canada — Peru rather stretches “national historical significance” — I assert again that such work has no place in a Canadian archives. If May’s work is any good aesthetically

9 Cook, “Nailing Jelly to a Wall”, pp. 206-7.

10 Cook, “Tyranny of the Medium”, p. 142. Original emphasis.

11 Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, p. 41.

12 He did so in his oral presentation of his rebuttal at a meeting of the Eastern Ontario Archivists Association on 16 January 1980, but not (significantly?) in his printed version. I delivered my original paper at the same session.

or technically as artist *qua* artist, then it would find its own way into the National Gallery or similar institution. And if it is not, then why does the national *archival* institution have it? Similarly, when I and, as I have since learned, other archivists are told by members of Birrell's own National Photography Collection that photographs which other divisional archivists are proposing to transfer to the Collection are not really wanted because the images are neither aesthetically pleasing nor the work of significant photographers, even if the subjects represented clearly document a fragment of Canada's past, then archival standards are being unacceptably overturned. I do not deny (despite Birrell) that abstract painters or *avant-garde* photographers produce works which reflect the cultural and intellectual climate of their era. I do deny that the surface imagery of such works fall into the documentary tradition and under the proper purview of archives. The line here cannot of course be rigid. Some artist's collection may well contain both representational and abstract works and it would not be wise to divide such a collection between galleries and archives, although having said that it must be noted that the acquisition of individual works or small groups of an artist's works, rather than entire collection of his life's *oeuvre*, is more the norm. Other collections may be gifts or bequests which rather tie an archives' hands. Nevertheless, the basic question remains concerning the central *focus* of a media division's active acquisition policies: is the primary emphasis on documenting the historical mandate of the archives and its parent body or is it on documenting the history of the medium itself: its aesthetics, techniques, practitioners, and evolution? If it is the latter, then the total archives concept is being sacrificed to separate media archives. (And even if it is the former, even if the various media divisions are strictly adhering to what I am calling the documentary rather than the aesthetic tradition, the isolation engineered by the present organization by medium still results in a very great lack of coordination between divisions on acquisition strategy, finding aids, inventories, publications, exhibitions, public service, and access control.)

This conflict of the aesthetic *versus* the documentary traditions within our "total archives" may be ascribed wholly to the administrative division of archives by medium. Quite frankly, some new media divisions have become intoxicated with the particular mystique of their own medium and cut off from the central coordinated focus (should it be defined) of archives as a whole. They develop such a zeal for collecting and exhibiting every possible aspect of their special medium and its practitioners — aesthetic and technical as well as documentary — that they lose the vision that "total archives" first and foremost means total holistic history. The National Photography Collection's exhibition policy thus asserts that "NPC exhibitions will normally have as their themes some aspect of the history of Canadian photographic aesthetics or technologies or of the careers of Canadian photographers or of the development and use of photography in Canada." The ideal of documenting all aspects of human endeavour at every level of society irrespective of medium is relatively forgotten. In practical terms, this means that the imbalance whereby more than forty staff members of the PAC are devoted to the twin media of film and photographs, for example, while fewer than five are devoted to documenting explicitly the media of music, literature, theatre, sport, advertising, and journalism should be self-evident and rectified, but it is not.¹³ The unproven assumption that photography as a medium influenced more Canadians and captured more of Canadian history than did the media of literature or journalism is simply unquestioned. The result, quite aside from the waste of talent, effort, and money, is the concomitant failure to document great gaps in Canada's past.

13 The argument will of course be made that the history of theatre or sport *is* documented by photographers. The reply must be that such documentation is only incidental and implicit, that such subject criteria (remember the radio station and agricultural scientists examples) are clearly subordinate to documenting the aesthetic and technical aspects of the medium or the careers and *oeuvres* of leading photographers.

I refute entirely the indictment that I am a hopeless traditionalist unschooled in intellectual history and an image-illiterate unappreciative of the documentary value of non-textual records; rather, would I claim to be a realist wanting to delineate archives from other cultural institutions and to make “total archives” more effective in documenting “total” history. If Birrell’s accusation of narrowness of vision applies to anyone, it is to those media archivists who have elevated the all-media definition of total archives from a means into an end.

3. *The “exclusivity” of textual records*

To suggest that my “solution” of having multi-media, *fonds*-oriented archivists replace media specialists would only apply to records having a textual origin simply misreads my original article, a mistake which the Sound archivists did not make. Their example of the multi-media records from a radio station (pp. 224-5) or mine of the various media that might belong to a Yousef Karsh (p. 148) obviously do not have textual records as their central focus. What these collections of, respectively, sound recordings and photographs do have is related textual and other media records connected to them that are too easily dispersed, dismissed, or forgotten in archives organized rigidly according to media. “Very few institutions or individuals”, the Sound archivists correctly point out (p. 224), “create only sound recordings, or textual records, or photographs, or maps.” For the multi-media records created by most agencies and individuals — whether photographers, journalists, broadcasters, theatre companies, labour leaders, surveyors, or government departments — their acquisition, control, and reference according to Birrell’s criterion of media-first is artificial. The records were not created that way; they should not be maintained archivally that way.¹⁴ Whether the records were primarily textual or non-textual in origin matters not a whit. For the archivist, to restate the ACA definition, what matters is that “the functional integrity of records has precedence over the form they take.”¹⁵ The challenge facing Canadian archives is to develop the reference systems and archival administrations that will cross artificial media lines to recreate this essential, original, functional integrity of the records of the agency or individual involved. Let us not shy away from an admittedly awesome task: to use Birrell’s example, there are 30,000 negatives from the Geological Survey of Canada, and (he might have added) there are also half a million pages of surveyors’ notebooks, some 25,000 pages of Directors’ letterbooks, many thousand maps, numerous sketches and drawings by surveyors, and over 220,000 pages of subject files (this being a small record group!). Can Birrell seriously argue that this huge corpus of records — and probably triple that amount not yet acquired by the PAC — can have its functional integrity best preserved when handled by four separate media archivists working in isolation one from the other?

4. *The archivist’s clientele*

Birrell’s final point concerns the users of archives. Noting “that most traditional historians, because of their bondage to textual literacy . . . are quite simply at a loss to know how to use non-textual records as primary sources”, Birrell claims that “there is probably very little overlapping in the clientele of the textual, visual and computerized

14 By this I do not deny that some media records are “created” physically in isolation from others within, for example, government departments. My point is that all records in every medium are “created” for some purpose or function by the person or agency creating the records. It is this sense of function, of organic unity of purpose and administrative mandate, that is lost when the archival records of the individual or agency are divided into isolated media divisions.

15 Association of Canadian Archivists, *The Symons Report and Canadian Archives*, Occasional Paper No. 1 (n.p., 1978), p. 5.

media.” (p. 251). Here I think Birrell is right in describing the present situation, but wrong in ascribing the reason for it to researchers’ lack of imagination and wrong in accepting the status quo as desirable. Surely if archivists have little idea of what goes on from one medium area to another, it is unlikely that many researchers will be able to transcend the administrative barriers imposed on them by archives and develop a pan-media view of their subject. Yet some historians are gradually doing just that.¹⁶ And others are being thwarted from doing so because of the media isolation in our archives.¹⁷ Is not the obvious answer to organize our archives to encourage “overlapping” by researchers, so that all the rich media sources we hold may be utilized fully? How can we fairly complain of media narrowness among historians when our internal organizations promote nothing else? Birrell’s notions on our clientele, like much else, will lead inevitably to “separate archives” rather than “total archives”.

Not surprisingly, therefore, I do not find Andy Birrell’s four main points of rebuttal very persuasive. On provenance, intellectual history, textual records focus, and clientele, he has either been simply wrong, misread my original article, or skirted the many real problems and examples I raised. While he grants that I “accurately pinpointed several problems” (p. 249), the whole burden of his reply is that things should stay as they are. The crisis which I (and now the Sound archivists) indicate is sending archives in all directions for each of acquisitions, custodial control, public service, access, relations with other cultural institutions, and the role of the “compleat” or total archivist is not apparently disturbing enough to Birrell to alter one iota of archival administration based upon media separation.

Three new developments have occurred since I wrote my original piece which reinforce my concern over media specialization, and which may serve to undermine Birrell’s sense of complacency. The first was the publication of *The Future of the National Library of Canada*.¹⁸ In a breath-taking presumption of imperial grandeur, the National Librarian

16 See the examples from Doug Owram’s *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900*, cited in my “Nailing Jelly to a Wall”, p. 217.

17 A recent example starkly supports this assertion, in addition to those advanced by the Sound archivists and me previously. The August-September 1980 issue of the *Canadian Geographic* contains an exciting archival odyssey, “Classic photos of Indians and Eskimos, 1902-04”, by the magazine’s editor, who chronicled his step-by-step search to verify the photographer involved and why some of his prints wound up in the Queen’s University Theological College. One stop on his journey brought him to the National Photography Collection (PAC) where he gained valuable information on the photographer, A.A. Chesterfield, and on another collection of his work at the Queen’s University Archives. What he did not get from the NPC, however, was a reference to the millions of pages of federal government files on the North held by another division in the same building! Upon the appearance of the article, which invited readers to forward additional information, I consulted the relevant indexes and, sure enough, in the records of the old Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior there was an application by Chesterfield to join the Eastern Arctic Patrol of 1935 as a “photographer-writer”, which also included a summary of his career and experience. This application contained information not only useful concerning circumstances surrounding the original Indian and Eskimo photographs, but also on Chesterfield’s interests in the 1930s and the government’s reaction to him. So long as our archives are organized to discourage “overlapping” by our clients from one medium to another, such inadequate reference service to our “total” holdings is bound to occur daily. (David Maclellan, “Classic photos of Indians and Eskimos, 1902-04”, *Canadian Geographic*, 100 (Aug.-Sept. 1980): 58-65. A follow-up piece is William C. James, “Chesterfield, a pioneer photographer revealed”, *Canadian Geographic*, 100 (Dec. 1980-Jan. 1981): 44-45.)

18 National Library of Canada, *The Future of the National Library of Canada*, (Ottawa, 1979).

proposed that jurisdiction over, among other things, unpublished government reports and the entire National Map Collection should be transferred from the PAC to the National Library. The basic PAC response — after appropriate nods to its history, traditions, good service, and fine reputation in these areas — was that government reports and maps were an integrated part of a “total archives”, that they could not be removed from the context of the other records (also stored in the Archives) with which they had been created without destroying their provenance and evidentiary value, that all government archival media were placed under the jurisdiction of the Dominion Archivist by the Public Records Order and the Access Directive, and that the Federal Archives and Manuscript Divisions would quite rightly withdraw the thousands of maps transferred from their own collections to the National Map Collection should that division be removed from the Public Archives of Canada. In other words, when under threat of outside attack, the Archives stressed the ways in which all its media are integrated parts of a unified whole, of how no single medium can be removed from the Archives without renting the provenance of such records. Yet, if behind the rhetoric of “total archives” we are actually developing a reality of “separate media archives”, do we not make ourselves vulnerable to raids of empire-builders in other cultural institutions? Indeed, the National Librarian himself also briefly questions whether, in addition to maps, the PAC’s collections of manuscripts, films, photographs, and paintings, drawings, and prints would not more logically fall under the purview of his own institution, the National Gallery, the National Museums, or the National Film Board (revamped as a separate national *cinemathèque*).¹⁹ In this context, it seems perfectly clear that every move away from the tightly integrated “total archives” vision the Sound archivists and I have enunciated, every move to media isolation and “separate archives” within the PAC, every move away from the documentary tradition of archives to the aesthetic standards of galleries, is a move towards the eventual realization of the National Librarian’s prognostications. It should not be necessary to underline the fact that the National Librarian’s proposals are really only an extreme version of the media separation which Birrell defends. If such separation is the best way to acquire, preserve, and make available archival records, then let’s have the courage to follow the logic through to its albeit extreme conclusion and accept the National Librarian’s report; and if that report is unacceptable for the violence it would do to provenance and total archives, let us not condone a pale version of it within our own archives.

A second observation relates to the information revolution taking place in the Government of Canada specifically and generally in society. New legislation and technologies are fast rendering irrelevant the media barriers Birrell defends. The Access to Information and Privacy bills, with related chapters of Treasury Board’s Administrative Policy Manual, seek to control *information*, no matter what form or medium it may be in. Canadians using the Personal Information Bank indexes or the forthcoming Federal Information Registers will want all the information irrespective of its storage medium on, respectively, themselves or some particular subject. Accordingly, government departments are beginning to store and index such information as an integral unit. The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has even gone so far as to change its administrative structure to bring all information gathering, indexing, and dissemination activities under one umbrella: records management service, manuals and forms, audio-visual services, and information and document control services. Birrell’s defence of separating the records of a department by medium flies in the face of this growing integration of information into centralized systems of control. And what will he do when new technologies combine our present media? Already maps and textual records are appearing on computer tapes with runs of regular machine readable data. More astonishingly, the technology now exists to create laser discs storing together photographs, film, sound recordings, maps, and textual

19 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

records. Are we to physically sever such an integrated laser disc into its various media components? Or are we to create a ninth media division for laser records, and then a tenth and an eleventh as information technology soars in the years ahead? Surely, the rational approach is to preserve *all* the information which is created by a single agency — whether textual, cartographic, photographic, machine readable, or laser disc — as a single integral unit with our archives under the control of a single archivist. Not to realize the growing irrelevance of medium format will put archivists out of step with the information and records management revolutions going on around us and hinder (to put it mildly) a coherent approach by archives to information control and preservation. Indeed, archives may even forfeit the right to participate at all in these dynamic changes.

Finally, a recent study in the Federal Archives Division (PAC) has disturbing implications regarding another facet of the total archives concept.²⁰ Few archivists would argue with the wisdom that an archives should control the total life cycle of the records of its parent or sponsoring body. Such archival control is not, however, being achieved at the national level. Indeed, it does not overstate the situation to declare that the federal archival record is in a state of crisis. The acquisition activities of the PAC have mainly been concentrated on the operational records of the major federal departments (i.e., those in Schedules A and B and Branches Designate of the Financial Administration Act). Even here, the results are unhappy: only 20 per cent of the offices of these agencies are well documented, 49 per cent rate as fair or poor, and fully 31 per cent are not documented at all in the holdings of the Federal Archives Division. This, however, is the good news! Beyond the realm of operational records, there is at best only scant coverage of the records of the offices of ministers, deputy ministers, and assistant deputy ministers — in other words, the most important records relating to policy. As well, the archival records of hundreds of regional and field offices across Canada have barely been touched, even though with decentralization regional offices are more and more formulating policy and operating autonomously rather than merely implementing directives from Ottawa. Only four of the 379 Crown corporations which the government owns outright or in which it is a major shareholder have been the object of formal acquisition agreements. The more peripheral Crown corporations, plus numerous small boards and commissions, are similarly overlooked. There are numerous reasons for this sorry state of affairs, everything from weak legislation to poor filing systems, from outdated records schedules to the lowly status accorded to records managers and archivists within the federal hierarchy. The bottom line remains, however, that the Public Archives of Canada is only fulfilling its first responsibility of preserving the archival record of the Government of Canada in a most haphazard manner. And yet, if the priorities and administrative structures of the PAC remain focused on media, little hope for *internal* remedial action can exist. Substantial human and material resources are channelled to meet the self-defined priorities of the media divisions rather than the overall responsibilities of the institution as a whole to its parent body. How else to explain the curious imbalance whereby twice as many archivists are devoted to the collection of film, maps, and photographs, despite these media being in the final analysis peripheral to the legislated mandate of almost all federal agencies,²¹ than are devoted to looking after the entire textual record of the Government of Canada. The imbalance created by the solidification of media empires ultimately rests on the view that historical or cultural criteria are more important to archives than archival and legislative ones. It betrays a strong inclination to “the most pernicious part

20 Bryan Corbett and Eldon Frost, “Public Records Division Acquisition Methods”, (Ottawa: Federal Archives Division, December 1979). Copy in possession of the author.

21 The CBC, National Film Board, the Canadian Government Travel Bureau, and aspects of Energy, Mines and Resources and the National Research Council are a few obvious exceptions.

of the Schellenberg doctrine, i.e., that archives are records removed to a cultural institution, after selection solely on grounds of historical merit. Yet . . . [one] cannot really believe, for example, that the Vatican preserved its archives, not to extend and sustain the privileges and powers of the Church Universal, but to enable Ranke to write *The History of the Popes*.²² It is a bit “like producing a rabbit from a hat and then saying that that is what hats are intended for. . . .”²³ Well, as hats were not invented for the comfort of rabbits, neither were archives designed for aesthetic-oriented, media-centred collecting at the expense of the full and efficient preservation of the official records of the archives’ parent body. In relative terms, separation by media elevates the rabbit and practically discards the hat. In this era of information revolution when the federal government will demand more and better service from its own archives, an inability to cope with the burgeoning federal record could well spell the PAC’s own doom.²⁴

In the light of all the conditions and examples the Sound archivists and I have advanced, it seems clear that some change is necessary in the way the total archives concept is administered. I previously suggested two methods by which this could be accomplished, and since the appearance of my original article three others have come to mind. The first, readers may recall, was to maintain the present divisions based on medium, but to impose upon them from a higher level a much tighter adherence to the priorities of the institution as a whole and to *enforce* through the formal establishment of appropriate mechanisms inter-media coordination of acquisition, finding aids, and public service. In many ways, this proposal would be a band-aid approach: ameliorating the problems created by media separation rather than attacking their cause.

The second “solution” would organize archives so that multi-media, *fonds*-oriented archivists are responsible for *all* the records created by an individual, institution, or agency, in both the public and private spheres. The merits of (and problems with) this approach I outlined in my original article, but I would add here that the organic integration of the total archives of an individual or agency in such a manner would enable us better to deflect raids by other cultural agencies, to cope with the information revolution, and to adhere more closely to collecting records that document first our parent institution and then “total history”, rather than the total history of a particular medium.

Because it is in the market-place, a third solution cannot be overlooked. The National Librarian’s ultimate proposal would strip from the control of archives private manuscripts, maps, photographs, films, and painting, drawings, and prints. While this might solve our present media problems by shifting them to another institution, no archivist could accept the renting of the provenance and control of records that would result. If I complain about the separation of archival media within one institution, readers need not stretch their imaginations unduly to guess my reaction to its separation between four or five separate institutions.

22 S.C. Newton, “The Archivist as legislator”, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 4 (October 1973): 658.

23 J.H. Hodson, *The Administration of Archives* (Oxford, et. al., 1972), p. 12. The phrase is specifically designed to characterize Sir Hilary Jenkinson’s view that in the first instance archives must not be defined by the research use made of them.

24 Already the spectre has been raised of parts of the PAC being placed within the Department of Supply and Services, much like NARS in the United States falls (to its regret) under the General Services Administration. As well, some departments are already thinking seriously of creating their own archives to administer records of permanent and/or historical value. Who could blame such departments should the PAC be unable itself to provide adequate archival services? And yet, how can the PAC accept such a development and truly remain the national archives?

A fourth proposal would divide archival work within our institutions into two major administrative streams. In addition to branches or divisions being devoted to records management and administration/technical services, a government records branch would exist independently from a private archives branch. At the PAC, for example, the government records branch would consist of the Federal Archives Division; the Machine Readable Archives Division; most of the Government Cartographic and Architectural Records Section of the National Map Collection; from the Manuscript Division the Prime Ministers Records Section and most of the French, British, and pre-Confederation government records sections, as well as portions of public affairs figures' papers; and the photographs, films, and sound recordings created by government agencies now kept by the National Photography Collection and the National Film, Television and Sound Archives. Everything else would remain in a private or cultural archives branch. Such a division would lessen tension between the aesthetic, cultural approach to archives and the archival, legislative one and, at the same time, reduce the power of the present media divisions and better focus the priorities of an archives regarding its responsibilities to its parent institution.

A fifth proposal envisions a functional reorganization of archives. The present media divisions would be reduced to rumps (four or five persons each at the PAC) responsible solely for the special storage, conservation, and circulation which each medium requires. In their place would be three very large divisions devoted to acquisition, finding aids, and public service, each oriented to the preservation of information and to the integration of all records, irrespective of medium, emanating from one agency or individual. These three divisions might well be doubled to six, two for each function: one for the government/parent body side and one for the private/cultural side of the archives in question. Conservation would be another logical functional division coming under such an administrative umbrella, as would records management and general administration. While the functional approach has very serious drawbacks,²⁵ such a reorganization would no doubt tightly integrate the principal functions of archives and instantly end the tyranny of the medium.

I do not, of course, personally advocate all five solutions. Some are obviously mutually exclusive; others might generate as many problems as they resolve. But in one of these five possibilities, or a combination of them, probably lies the means by which "total archives" can in future be made again an administrative as well as a rhetorical reality. These five possibilities may also provide a basis for a continuation of the debate on total archives. In that regard, let us hear from archivists outside the PAC. I have been told by some archivists from institutions of smaller scale, such as the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, that my observations on media isolation ring true. I also know that the Provincial Archives of British Columbia is doing innovative custodial work to bridge the barriers between various media divisions. But if the debate continues, let us be absolutely clear what we are debating. We are *not* disputing the value of the new media *nor* are we dismissing the significance of intellectual and cultural history. Rather, we are discussing the best means of organizing archives to ensure the collection of all the recorded information generated in the first instance by the archives' parent body and then by related private individuals and associations. When such collection has as its first priority and focus the medium of the information rather than the organic body which created that information, the result almost inevitably will be *separate* media archives rather than *integrated* total archives. I can do no better then recite the "*Chief Principle*" of Sir Hillary Jenkinson:

25 I alluded to these in "Tyranny of the Medium", p. 146-7.

If by our account of the Evolution and Transmission of Archives we have accomplished anything, we should have made it clear that *the only correct basis of Arrangement is exposition of the Administrative objects which the Archives originally served*; we need hardly stop therefore to say that such a basis cannot be found in the subject interests they may possess for modern students, in chronology, or even in the form in which they are cast.²⁶

And if that makes me a “traditionalist”, then I am proud of it.

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26 Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, p. 97. Original emphases.

A Defence of the A.C.A. Copyright Committee

In her recent article on copyright,¹ Gina La Force makes a number of criticisms of the A.C.A. Copyright Committee's *Response* to the Keyes-Brunet Working Paper. Some of these comments are fair but many are not. La Force certainly does not understand what the A.C.A. Committee was attempting to do, and in several places she does not seem to understand the basic situation concerning copyright in Canada.

The objective of the A.C.A. *Response* was to comment on those aspects of the Keyes-Brunet Working Paper that presented the most serious problems for archivists.² A basic principle of lobbying is that comments should be brief and to the point, because the reviewing committee will probably not have time to read a voluminous study. It is therefore surprising to read La Force's comment, “. . .one twelve-page paper is not sufficient to alert the Canadian archival and scholarly communities to the implications of revision.”³ It was never intended to do so. At another point, La Force implicitly criticizes the A.C.A. Committee for failing to comment on theories that Keyes and Brunet did not advance. (See her comments on the possible broadening of the definition of “publication”.⁴) Towards the end of her article, she states, with apparent amazement, that the A.C.A. *Response* is just what its title says it is, “a reaction”.⁵ Surely the consumer has no complaint if the product is exactly what it claims to be, and nothing more.

La Force complains that the A.C.A. *Response* was “hastily prepared, inadequately researched, and at times, weakly argued.”⁶ No one would deny that it was hastily pre-

1 Gina La Force, “Archives and Copyright in Canada: An Outsider's View”, *Archivaria* XI (Winter 1980-81): 37-51.

2 The brief was written by a committee consisting of Laurenda Daniells of the University of British Columbia Archives, Jean Dryden of the Provincial Archives of Alberta, and myself. Most of the final writing was done by me, and I am responsible for the shortcomings of the brief.

3 La Force, 39.

4 La Force, 40.

5 La Force, 50.

6 *Ibid.*