# Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice

by **BRIEN BROTHMAN***

> There is so much to be said — imitating
> one another: the act of love,
> say, speaking with tongues. Yet it was awhile
> before I saw we gave these words
> to one another and heard our voices
> elsewhere than the places they were
> speaking beside oneself, throwing voices
> away across the room, to other places.
>
> "Ventriloquists," by Eli Mandel

The primary value of poetry, some literary theorists have written, resides in its ability through the use of language to defamiliarize, make distant and strange, those things that seem most familiar to us. Poetry is most interesting and effective, in other words, when it breaks habits of thought, interrupts the automatism of perception, and engenders ambivalence of feeling and ambiguity of understanding about certain types of knowledge or activity that may have rested securely and comfortably in our minds.[1] Though by no means aspiring to poetic eloquence, the intention of this essay is, in a sense, poetic, for it tries to make use of a different language or vocabulary, to deploy different modes of expression, in order to promote or incite fresh perspectives on established archival principles, practices and theories. It examines, sometimes playfully, the terms of archival practice.

Some readers may at times sense an undercurrent of disapproval directed at the current state of archival practice. While there may be strong grounds for expressing such dissatisfaction, it is important to stress now that this is not what is intended, at least not directly. Instead of analysis, this essay offers description, and instead of prescription, it offers interpretation. It does not define or identify a problem, review the inadequacy of current professional techniques and approaches, and propose new solutions. The aim is not to contrive a particular strategy or methodology that will overturn current archival practice and immediately empower the profession with a new kit of tools. Many archivists have already made intelligent proposals that are based on more experience and knowledge than I can claim, for technical-methodological solutions to problems which they have identified in archival practice. Rather, this essay presents alternative

ways of speaking and thinking about current archival theory and practice which may induce archivists either to strengthen the basis upon which current practice rests or to alter their theories.

In part, this essay, in the all-too-brief attention given to issues related to provenance and authorship in the second section, also looks sideways at questions that have vexed intellectual historians in recent years.[2] While other historical sub-disciplines have generally used documents as a means of coming to grips with social, economic or political issues of the past, for intellectual historians it is the very evidentiary status of artefactual documents within historiography that has recently emerged as a dominating concern; for them, in other words, texts have a primary rather than collateral position in the discipline of history. The insinuation of linguistics into their problematic has undoubtedly been largely responsible for this concern, which, in some cases, has subverted the purposefulness of their enterprise. The reverberations of intertextuality, deconstruction, critical theory and post-modernism emanating from the precincts of literary criticism and philosophy, for example, have been keenly felt through part of the historical community, with the result that some have been thrown into a condition of diffidence, even self-reflective paralysis. Intellectual historians, now more than ever, hesitate over their relationship — and that of all historians — to the very materials they use to produce their texts, namely other texts.[3]

This essay therefore "probes" the contours of meaning in current archival language, practice and thought. In doing this, it also impinges on the boundaries of archival jurisdiction. Its primary purpose is not to make incisions, implants or excisions in order to improve the corpus of archival practice. Rather, the approach adopted aims to encourage broader reflection about the cultural meanings of contemporary archival practice and the context within which these take shape and place, as well as contemplation of the particular social role that archives play in society. These matters are notoriously absent from scholarly reflection, both inside and outside the archival profession. The inattention, if not indifference, to archives within the framework of social and cultural criticism among intellectual and cultural historians and other students of culture, who have generally been less neglectful of the evolution and social significance of art galleries, libraries, museums,[4] and other cultural institutions, represents a puzzling and unfortunate omission.[5] This essay tries to help repair this oversight by exploring some intended and alternative meanings of archival language, archival practice and archival theory. The "terms" in the title of this essay refers, then, to the ability of language to generate fresh descriptions of archival practice; secondly, and more important, it claims that this language, rather than merely being reflective of a stable practice, may represent the tensions and negotiations involved in the struggle among some archivists to meet and deal with the information world on archival "terms." Finally, and related to the second point, the "terms of archival practice" also refer to the "ends" towards which archival practice strives, that is, what it defines as its mission. This, too, needs examination.

This essay bears the influence of other archival writing that resulted from serious thought about archival theory and practice. By the time they have finished, readers will recognize in the approach, concerns and style of this essay traces of such archival writers as Hans Booms, Frank Burke, Terry Cook, Hugh Taylor and several others, each of whom has grappled with the nature of the responsibilities archivists must shoulder in modern society. Naturally, some of the arguments they have made appear here. But

more influential, perhaps, than any of their particular arguments has been what they have found it important to argue about. While relying on them for insight and inspiration, this essay tries to incorporate their writing into the prime concern of its own critique: a reflexive examination of the social and historical meaning of the terms of archival engagement. The interpretive results are largely sympathetic if not entirely concordant with current "culturalist" propositions. While culturalist archival writings properly insist that the archivist's leitmotif should be cultural and intellectual, however, I believe that this essential insight will ultimately be strengthened by focusing the avowed need for socio-historical and cultural understanding on archival practice itself.[6]

## 1

My starting point is the concept of *order*. Archives are continually challenged to impose order on the space they inhabit. This order can be physical space in which place must be found for computer tapes, film, maps, photographs and textual files. Or it can refer to an underlying intellectual order in which records are arranged in accordance with certain methodological principles of the profession. Such space/order, however is constantly threatened with disruption. Archives are continually faced with the inundation of their space by what is translatable into the terms of dirt and rubbish.[7] That is, what is most offensive and disconcerting to archivists is information pollution and disorder. In part, therefore, this essay is about archival ecology or environmentalism.[8]

Order means that things are in their proper *place*. The notion of a proper place for the distribution of artefacts in space is a mental construct. For each society or community or culture, in other words, the same positioned object can represent an instance of either order or disorder. Ink that leaves my pen to *form* letters and words on paper, "flows"; ink that leaves a pen and *stains* the paper, "leaks." In the first instance, the ink is orderly, in the second, disorderly. Ink that flows has meaning and order; ink that leaks has neither meaning nor order. Information that "flows" also implies a controlled, ordered, instrumentally intentional process; information that is "leaked" implies loss or lack of control, a breakdown of order (or at least the appearance of it). A "leak," in other words, whether of ink or information, means that the substance has moved into an improper space, along improper lines. It has introduced a state of disorder. Psychiatrists, however, find profound order and meaning in ink blots. Similarly, artists and art connoisseurs may find some significance in seemingly shapeless, unrecognizeable figures on canvas.

Disorder, then, can refer to matter/objects/symbols that are deemed to be out of place. Things that are out of place are often regarded as dirt or rubbish. Rubbish represents something that must be exterminated or *removed from sight* so as not to despoil the intrinsic beauty of order, and the tranquillity that seems to come with it. But that order, that space, signifies a schemata of permanent value, of which rubbish is its polar opposite. A popsicle wrapper is serving a worthwhile purpose while wrapped around a popsicle. It has value until it is removed by someone seeking relief from a hot summer day. Once removed, it loses its space and has no other place in the world. When someone finds it lying on a lawn, the offending remnant is tossed into the trash. The popsicle stick, too, becomes rubbish after the popsicle has been eaten. But this is not always the case. Some children find popsicle sticks useful for building all kinds of things. The sticks are saved from the rubbish category because they continue to have value; they have found a new, meaningful space in the order of the world. The value of the sticks increases commensurately. Growing environmental sensitivity, our fear of the

consequences of water and air pollution, together with our apprehension over scarce resources — our recent consciousness of atmospheric conditions — has created a new order of value. Through our commitment to recycling, for example, we have prolonged the value of certain products or materials that were once routinely consigned to the "garbage" heap. Recycling has redefined — reformed — the structure of "garbage" or "waste."

These examples are not offered to make a point about the anarchical basis of value creation or destruction. On the contrary, individuals are not the ultimate source of value and order creation. The point is that social communities create and destroy value. Rubbish does not have an objective, autonomous existence. Dirt and rubbish are the products of socially determined exclusion, which provide clues about social value. Furthermore, they, as much as what we save, mirror a hierarchy of categories of social values. It is the social process which establishes what has high, enduring value, what is of transient value and what is rubbish. As anthropologist Mary Douglas has written,

> As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread or holy terror . . . . Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative moment, but a positive effort to organize the environment.[9]

For archivists, the principal aim is to achieve a condition of positive order in their domain. This they do through the exclusion of what is deemed to be debris, which constantly threatens to undermine the existing order. Dirt and rubbish continually impinge upon archivists' desire for order and impede their efforts to maintain it.[10] The ordering intention involves the identification of potential sources of disruption and the extirpation of those things that are out of place, or which no longer "fit" within a pre-ordained social/archival order. Once removed from sight, these objects have, in effect, forfeited their place, lost their right to exist and eventually their existence. Records, or information, which archival disposal or destruction eliminates, is deprived of a permanent place in the social order(s).

As they strive to maintain these islands of permanent order, then, archives also create value. Archival appraisal, for example, is not merely a process of value identification, but of value creation or destruction. It entails more than simply identifying archival or historical value that already exists in a document before archivists encounter it. As they make determinations about archival or historical value, archivists in effect create, initiate or perpetuate an axiological commitment which is manifested in the permanence of the order that emerges. Obviously, archivists are interested in determining what has "permanent" value,[11] but the permanance of that value is absolute; whatever criteria are used, it is established during the archival process, not before or after. In principle, regardless of whether or not a set of archival documents is ever consulted, once having been judged to have permanent value, the document's right to a place in the archives and society is irrevocable.

Thus, we arrive at a conclusion that most archivists would endorse: the order that archives create out of all the information they process is an order that embodies society's values. Appraisal criteria and acquisition policies and strategies, or to put it in the context of rubbish theory, destruction strategies, are the instruments of an archival ecology: "the archives beautiful movement." Appraisal and selection aim to achieve this

order through the removal of weeds, as part of the process of the creation of a garden of beautiful flowers.[12] Without this, instead of an ordered Eden, the resulting scene would appear like an unruly patch of overgrown weeds and vines. Beyond the moment of acquisition, however, putting documents into archival containers, placing the containers on archival shelving and abstracting the records in inventories and finding aids constitutes a ministering gesture. As Gerald Ham has suggested, archivists who publish information about records in inventories or finding aids — even about those of dubious archival value — "help to establish their bona fides as legitimate collections."[13] Thus, we are not simply "acquiring" and "preserving" records of value; we are *creating value*, that is, an order of value, by putting things in their proper place, by making place(s) for them. This process underlines the significance of order in archives.

Indeed, the archival principle of order in space is traceable to an eighteenth-century conception of ordering that was embodied in the emerging field of natural history, which Michel Foucault has described:

> The documents of this new history are not words, texts, or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens . . . . It is often said that the establishment of botanical gardens and zoological collections expressed a new curiosity about exotic plants and animals. In fact, these had already claimed men's interest for a long while. What had changed was the space in which it was possible to see them and from which it was possible to describe them . . . . We also know what methodological importance these 'natural' allocations assumed, at the end of the eighteenth century, in the classification of words, languages, roots, documents, records — in short, in the constitution of the whole environment of history.[14]

Archival institutions, then, embody a social vocation to create a special space in which a certain order of values prevails. Those institutions containing archival records occupy a space allocated within and by a surrounding social order. In a more imprudent moment, one might want to suggest that an archival building or, more problematically perhaps, network, is simply the largest archival container, a bounded space the form of which — its exterior physical façade and internal configuration as well as its human, technological and informational content and distribution — reflects our social and cultural values. (David Bearman has suggested, however, that physical space/order is becoming less meaningful in a "non-document" information universe of multimedia and meta-archival networks.)[15]

The ecological metaphor for the human treatment of information is not merely a trope used by poets or essayists, a literary convention for the sheer aesthetic pleasure of invention. Recently, Canada's federal government has issued a "Management of Government Information Holdings" policy. This policy represents an interesting shift in the government's attitude to information. While the terms "information" and the phrase "information system" for years connoted computer technologies (hardware and software), networks and filing systems, this 'techno-mesmerization' has receded before a new, more holistic, conceptualization of information as a "resource," one crossing all media and disciplinary compartments. The choice of the term "resource" to describe information is not a fortuitous one; the effect, if not the intention, is undoubtedly to import into the information domain the growing environmental concern for the

stewardship of "resources."[16] Far from being a casual terminological substitution, the use of "resource" may represent the emergence of a new order of value.

Of paramount importance in establishing the Edenic order in most archives are two central principles, *original order* and *provenance*. What is entailed by the notion of original order? To many archivists, original order connotes a negative intention; it implies a Jenkinsonian sense of personal abstention — a requirement of self-effacement, and, as a corollary, the cession of self to a sympathetic union with the identity of the past.[17] It is the equivalent of the nineteenth-century German idea of an accessible past — "wie es eigentlich gewesen," Ranke being its best known proponent. I shall suggest, however, that it is as problematical for an archives to maintain that it is remaining faithful to *original* order, at least strictly so — to capture this objective part of the past — as it is for historians to claim that their work somehow captures and *re*presents the past, that is, makes it present once more. There are limits to our ability to preserve original order, as there are to our capacity to import the historical past into the present. While there is no time to explore this extremely complex issue in more detail here, archivists will undoubtedly be familiar with the many arguments of German and British philosophers and historians of the nineteenth century, concerning the historian's relationship to the past and its documents. Archival science exhibits a similar desire to extract some kind of objective unadulterated record of the past. Such propensities raise questions about original order (and *respect des fonds*).

There is a small body of writing that challenges the archival canons of original order[18] and record group. By the early 1960s, when the concept of record group was twenty years old, critics were underlining some of its practical limitations for purposes of arrangement and public service.[19] In reviewing the history of the emergence of the record group concept at the National Archives in Washington during the early 1940s, one is struck by the characteristically archival schizophrenia of its development. Paul Ahlberg reminds us, for example, that it "belongs to archival management and not so much to archival theory."[20] While it was meant to respect the principles of provenance and original order, record group arrangement was also introduced as a practical measure designed to impose control and order on a rapidly growing body of documentation through a divide-and-conquer strategy. Archives became engaged in a civilizing mission: the civilization of a documentary wilderness domain.

The pragmatism that underlies the divide-and-conquer strategy (and which potentially mitigates Jenkinson's historical positivism) is embodied in a seemingly innocuous phrase uttered in 1940 by Solomon Buck while serving as a member of the Finding Mediums Committee formed by the Archivist of the United States. This body, whose appointed task was to tackle the problem of finding aids for federal government records, actually originated the term and, arguably, concept of "record group." In speaking about this concept, Buck referred to "the *grouping* of material."[21] The use of the gerund "grouping" represents a significant linguistic choice, for this verbalization of the noun "group" deflects attention from a conception of record group as a stable, essential, natural predicate of creating organizations — its "givenness"[22] — and awakens us to the possibility of conceiving an action process, literally an act of artifice — the creation of a new identity — for the purposes of archival management and order.[23] This hypostatization of the concept "record group" means that record groups are not simply epiphenomena of some other, antecedent, order; they occur as distinct, automonous entities.

The separate departments, organizational units and records-keeping systems found within governments or corporations were not created to accommodate, or in anticipation of, record group schemata. Records creators have not usually perceived their records as forming a part of, or as destined for, a particular record group. Moreover, they are usually oblivious to the principles that guide the ordering behaviour of archives. That record groups and administrative creators should normally coincide may be a desirable criterion of choice, but it is not an inevitable one. If only for heuristic purposes, we should remember that the primacy of structural coincidence at the highest level (i.e., a record group for each institution demonstrating administrative continuity) certainly does not exhaust the alternatives for establishing the identity of records through archival grouping. This professional precept rests on a metonymy: the institution is an individual actor, an author-organizer of text/information, the structural identity of which it is essential to preserve. Our professional wager is twofold: transplanting original records order is essential for preserving the identity of the structure; and secondly, the most important way to conceive of the organization and distribution of social information or knowledge is in accordance with the entities which created (or organized) it. There are at least three questions that can be asked about these wagers: (1) Does creating record groups actually accomplish this work of structural·preservation? (2) Are the structures which archivists perceive those that best capture the reality of the structural/organizational history and, finally, (3) Is this the best way of regarding historical information — these are questions worthy of lively and extended debate. As suggested below, archival organizing simplifies reality, as all such efforts must; it produces a version among other possible versions of the information universe. In doing so, it also veils the complexity of information context and arrangement: informal interorganizational affinities/structures that may exist as a result of shared functions, interests or new communication pathways introduced by social change or technological innovation, for example, should awaken archivists to the possible limits, not to say inadequacies, of the information-organization images and metaphors upon which our methodological principles rest.[24]

Record *grouping*, then, entails a conceptual imposition upon an indifferent documentary universe. It will serve archivists well to remember that documents and record groups have no "natural place."[25] And despite the undoubted conceptual convenience of importing into archival language such naturalizing terms as "organic," which conjure up some naturally evolved adaptive forms of structural-functional integration that lend themselves to practicable archival solutions, original order and provenance are not coincident with any natural informational order, because there is nothing "natural," or law-obeying about classification systems or file order.[26] Information ordering is social, not natural. Archival order does not emerge as a result of some inexorable constraint placed upon us which we are powerless to repudiate. The Edenic order within archives is one that is shaped through the practice of *grouping*. These record groupings are creations; they are, to borrow a term recently coined in the sociology of science, *microworlds* that are demarcated by boundaries of our choosing — individuals, institutional structures, etc. — and which disguise as they conquer a profuse complexity that is also increasing in government and in the world at large. The microworlds that some sociologists and philosophers of science have observed emerging from the scientific laboratory may be appropriate here. Joseph Rouse writes,

> [Microworlds] constitute attempts to circumvent the chaotic complexity
> that so thoroughly limits the natural occurrence of phenomena by

constructing artificially simplified "worlds." In these microworlds there
exist only a limited variety of objects, whose provenance is known and
whose forms of interaction are strictly constrained.[27]

Though not occurring naturally, structure-based record groups are the microworlds that
many archives define. And the resulting Edenic order is not a natural one, a space in
which records have a natural place. Rather, it is the imposed socio-historical order of a
tended garden.[28]

Finally, recent opinion in the archival community that the record group is a limited, or
limiting, concept for informing archival practice, one that must now cope with the many
phenomena associated with electronic information,[29] which have rendered provenance a
less secure, more elusive, locus for acquisition and arrangement, reflects, or at least
seems to correspond with, broader and deeper contemporary cultural and intellectual
currents in which the importance or stability of "subject," author or creator as the
arbiters of discursive unities or continuities has been questioned.[30]

Beyond these abstract metaphysical propositions, however, archivists upset original
order (putting a strict construction on the meaning of original order) every time they
decide to destroy files that formed part of a body of records. Part of the original order
when they were first created, records designated for destruction are now deemed to have
no place in the original order.[31] To keep these records along with others that are judged
to have value, however, destroys archival order. Secondly, we depart from original order
when physically separated records that once belonged to the same registry system are
then brought together in a single place. Despite the physical separation and, sometimes,
the relative autonomy and physical compartmentalization of files, archivists will
routinely place them in a single series. Such organization implies an original physical
and intellectual "order" that actually never existed. Rather, in these two instances, the
process caters to institutional requirements for a serviceable, idealized archival
intellectual order rather than original order. It may be helpful, therefore, to make a
distinction — a conceptual one, at least — between *original order* and *archival order*.

Finally, the most basic disruption of original order, of course, is the removal of the
records from the originating site of provenance and their placement in archives. And
once records are transplanted from their native homes, archival arrangement also
necessarily distorts original order in more subtle ways. In the first place they become
archival. The assignment of record group numbers, volume numbers, and inventory
designations and descriptions as well as other archival adornments to permanently
retained documents also serve to transfigure, if not to transform, the record. To repeat
an earlier point, such operations can be said to effect an elevation of the records to
almost mystical archival status while tending to diminish the vitality that once
permeated the record.[32] Archival practice, in other words, remains an art.[33]

## II

"What is it you're after . . . stimulants, Depressants, Psychomimetics? 'Uh,
information?' Slothrop replies."

Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

It is implicit in what has already been said that the sheer volume of records/information
in this "age of abundance"[34] has furnished an important impetus for an archival initiative

which is forced to confront possible archival disorder, disruption and disintegration. Thus, archivists have traditionally thought of themselves as being on the side of order, on the side that aims to minimize the threat of information pollution or chaos that these huge amounts of documentation threaten to visit upon us. This has been the line followed so far in this essay and there is certainly a basic soundness in this affirmation. I want to contemplate another rather perverse possibility, however: archives are also effective participants in the process that foments the disorder which they continually feel compelled to resist. The reason for this is rooted in the fact that archives do not live in hermetic isolation from the rest of the world, for they do not transcend the social and cultural forces that have shaped our modern, information-hungry, knowledge-based (or is it knowledge-basing) society; they, too, are positioned within — determined by — the web of information production, exchange and circulation. Archives constitute a web within a web.

The situation of archives is a paradoxical one. The order they seek to achieve creates conditions that foster the habit of information use. The effects that archival order intends and promises — and often delivers, the desires to which it caters and gives satisfaction, in other words, act as spurs to the escalation of information demand and expectation, which precipitates in turn the constant creation of the circumstances that threaten this beneficient order: vigorous acquisition and inadequate attention to instruments of control. The very effects that archival order tenders actually sustain the spectre of archival disorder. Archives are principal participant shareholders in a documentary/informational mentality, a mentality that endorses the stockpiling of information for life purposes: they are the sites of memory, or memorialization, that protect and empower. Archival space is not merely a realm of potentiality, of latent interpretation, and movement toward truth.[35] First undergoing an interpretation through archival grouping, the documents — the pieces of information — subsequently sit in their assigned place awaiting the call of historians and other researchers, who once more reorganize the information for their own purposes.[36] The archivist-historian relationship is a thaumatropical one. Archivists do historical work of sorts and historians do archival work of sorts.

The dynamic process in this relationship is a self-perpetuating one: documentation is always in need of support from additional documentation. Administrators and policy-makers, historians and social scientists, and society in general, are entangled in this practice, live by this law, so to speak, and archives depend upon it.

Archives actively promote the documentary model in society.[37] Moreover, they have often fostered the democratization of the documentary model and the intensive use of records. No longer is access to and use of archives restricted to the state or specialist historians. As one historian has written,

> Mais l'ambition nouvelle des archivistes est que la masse des documents réunis par eux ne serve pas seulement à l'historien spécialiste, mais soit aussi mise au profit pour développer dans la population scolaire le gôut de l'histoire et dans le public en général la culture historique.[38]

The modern archival concern with public service — some have even referred to "marketing" — reflects democratic political and economic realities as well as institutional and professional interests. Thus, outreach programmes, exhibitions, commemorations of events and personalities all aim to promote documentary consumption.[39]

Interestingly, some historians have disclosed their concern about the abundance of historical information. Pierre Nora, for example, has written of the "mémoire enregistreuse, qui à délègué à l'archive le soin de se souvenir," which has fostered a society that lives in "la réligion conservatrice et dans le productivisme archivistique." Memory has become "la constitution gigantesque et vertigineuse du stock matérial."[40] Twenty-five years ago, before we became fully aware of the electronic/information revolution which was encroaching upon us, Elizabeth Eisenstein wrote about what she termed "the present predicament" which she traced to the "knowledge industry":

> It is not the onset of amnesia that accounts for present difficulties but more complete recall than any prior generation has ever experienced. Steady recovery, not obliteration, accumulation, rather than loss, have led to the present impasse. . . . I shall explore the possibility that the present historical outlook is less directly conditioned by what has happened in the world outside the library and the schoolroom than by what has been happening within it. In doing so, I hope to illustrate an aspect of the impact of a revolution in communications that began five centuries ago and is still gathering momentum. I hope also to show that available means of communication have to be considered when examining historic consciousness in any era.[41]

From a radically different perspective, and with completely different preoccupations, Dominick LaCapra, an American intellectual historian, has also voiced reservations about positivistic history, complaining of the excessive influence of the "documentary model" of knowledge in historical practice. Devotees of this model exhibit a preference for "seemingly direct informational documents such as bureaucratic reports, wills, registers, diaries, eye-witness accounts and so forth." In this way, "a restricted documentary or objectivist model takes what is in certain respects a necessary condition or a crucial dimension of historiography and converts it into a virtually exhaustive definition." This, LaCapra pointedly characterizes as a "fetish" for archival research the predominant goal of which now is the discovery of some "'unjustly neglected' fact, figure, or phenomenon, and dreaming a 'thesis' to which his or her proper name can be attached."[42]

These admonitions form exceptions which prove the rule. Archivists' observations that most historians have an insatiable appetite for every scrap of paper, that they regard most documents as having some redeeming historical value, are probably not far off the mark. Thus, the hunt for new documents — fresh material, as the comedians say — holding out the titillating possibility of new approaches and discoveries rather than the re-reading and reinterpretation of old, familiar documents seems to be the ruling preoccupation of most contemporary historians. This sounds similar to the observation in some studies of the history of scientific method and process, which suggest that knowledge is not cumulative. Once a new theory or paradigm emerges, the data that supported the superseded theory is ignored or discarded. Are historians similarly increasingly prone to abandon forever previously useful, or used sources of information and move on to new kinds of documentation as new approaches, concepts, methods or paradigms take command of the field of historical inquiry? Has it also become a pattern among historians, for example, for a document or text to be consulted once and then avoided by other historians who seek to establish their own distinctiveness by searching for other, undiscovered documents that promise to deliver a different, prize-winning

interpretation? If so, are archives increasingly sites for the acquisition of documents, each of which is being consulted with less and less frequency? Is there any truth in the generalization that even the "most important" documents are rarely consulted more than once? Are we facing and fostering a community of consumers whose main concern is the location of the revolutionizing document that was overlooked — the new look — or ignored by everyone else in the field, the situation of an infinite number of unique consultations? And if so, what does this imply for acquisition strategy — or for deaccessioning?

The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard has placed the contemporary drive to documentation within a larger phenomenal context, which he calls the "fatal strategy" of modern society. This strategy excludes the benign constraints intrinsic in the "dialectical mode," such as reconciliation, synthesis and equilibrium, in favour of radical antagonisms, an "ascent to extremes" which are noticeable in the incidences of "infinite proliferation" symptomatic of our "hyperdeterminacy" and "hyperfunctionality." More darkly, Baudrillard finds in cancer, a disease of (cell) overproduction, a suitable symbol for the "hyperactivity" of modern society.

> This is the true behaviour of the cancerous cell (hypervitality in a single direction), of the hyperspecialization of objects and people, of the operationalism of the smallest detail, and of the hypersignification of the slightest sign: the leitmotif of our daily lives. But this is also the chancroid secret of every obese and cancerous system: those of communication, of information, of production, of destruction.[43]

The bloated significance of signs, of communication and information, Baudrillard contends, is traceable to the obsession with determining causes, with locating origins, which, therefore, results in the obliteration of finalities. And it is the obliteration of finalities that produces the documentary mentality: for every document found, there are always others that empower their discoverers either to undermine or to engulf the earlier one in new causes: one document always needs, points the way to or pre-emptively explains others.[44] And so goes the historian's quest for the document that will reveal the undiscovered cause — Marc Bloch somewhere referred to "la hantise des origines" — and which will undermine a previous account of genesis. Reflecting this situation, Baudrillard says, is

> the hypertrophying of historical research, the delirium of explaining everything, of ascribing everything, of referencing everything . . . All this becomes a fantastic burden — references living off one another and at the other's expense. Here again we have an excrescent interpretive system developing without any relation to its objective. All this is a consequence of a forward flight in the face of the haemorrhaging of objective causes.[45]

Whether or not one agrees with Baudrillard's rather bleak post-modern epidemiological portrait of alienation and decentring, it is interesting to note that the computer industry's self-styling inadvertently confirms Baudrillard's diagnosis (though not his prognosis) of hypervitality: in recent years, with the advent of *Hyper*text, the information revolution once again seems on the verge of being catapulted into yet another phase. This concept promises interactive textuality and indefinitely expandable linkages ("connectivity") with other texts and databases through modems and other forms of telecommunications, during the act of text creation. The vision of Ted Nelson, the prime mover behind the Hypertext concept, has been described as follows:

>    Hypertext could apply to scholarship as well as poetry. The rate and
>    volume of scientific publication have overwhelmed the capacity of our old
>    print-era technology. . . . With a hypertext system, each scientific
>    document could have links to its intellectual antecedent and to documents
>    regarding related problems. The entire body of relevant scientific literature
>    could be collapsed into each individual document. The links would function
>    in the same way as footnotes, but with immediate access to the cited
>    material, as if each footnote was like a window or door into the cited
>    document.[46]

This "hypertextual" symptom is undoubtedly part of what troubles Baudrillard when
referring to the "hypervitality" of information and the "hypertrophying" of historical
research. It is also probably close to what Dominick LaCapra finds disconcerting in the
documentary model of history.[47]

## III

Some may argue that it is not the archivist's primary responsiblility to address the
question of whether the various themes explored in the previous sections concerning
order, provenance and authorship, as well as hyperactivity and documentary and
information frenzy, have any major implications for archives. Yet it is difficult to see
how archivists who take seriously the archival enterprise of establishing and maintaining
an order of value in their domain can ignore these tremors. How can archivists dismiss
writings about the creation of an order of value, whether it stems from original order, is
the order that provenance has always tendered, or is the order that in the past has
predictably emerged from placing values on records, in whatever medium, for their
uniqueness or originality, or for the purity of their authorship. Surely, the challenge
contained in these recent literary, sociological and philosophical analyses of
contemporary society must be met in order to reformulate and strengthen, if not to
revise, the slender layer of theory, and the considerable body of methodological writing,
upon which modern archival practice rests. To do so, archivists must establish a certain
distance from the information universe — of which, albeit, they have indubitably
become a part. However, this must be the view from another perspective, not the
difference of an unattainable objectivity. The prospect of enhanced professional
development, status and profit, as well as fears of marginalization, have induced many
individuals to frame archivists *within* information management terms:[48] archivists are
encouraged to emigrate from what Hugh Taylor has termed the "historical shunt"[49] to
the new world of information specialism. By doing this, it is suggested that our
professional incomes, security and stature stand to grow in the years to come. At the
same time, in light of this ever-increasing integrative power("linkages") of electronic
communication which Michael Heim has described, the preservation of archives as a
"centre" of unique interpretive knowledge and expertise, rather than as an
undifferentiated site within a larger electronic/information circuit, is becoming more
problematical. The imperceptible erasure of the boundary separating archivists and
information management portends the relinquishment, not to say the desertion, of our
cultural prospect; it means a shift in focus from cultural practice to administrative
practice. Such a strategy may not prove fatal to archives as a *profession*; it will be fatal
for archives as a cultural *discipline*.[50]

Let the reader not misunderstand. This is not a sermon exhorting archivists to
succumb to technophobia and steel themselves against the encroachment of an

information or cognitive revolution raging outside their walls — the revolution has already breached these walls. On the contrary, it is the responsibility of archivists to confront this historical and undoubtedly historic moment with a thoroughly critical cultural purpose. This obligation entails an incorporation of the information society/ knowledge industry, including its principal actors (administrators, archivists, librarians, managers and technologists), its techniques (methods, strategies and technologies), as well as its concepts, ("decision support systems," "management information systems," "data administration" and, most recently, "information resource management"), and its increasingly amorphous geography (centres — "mainframes," databases vs. margins — "distributed data processing," "local area networks") into an archival world view or perspective. Archivists must continually meet it on, or translate it into, archival *terms*. I believe that the principles, practices and theories that have so far informed archival science are being challenged as they never have been before. The situation of archives may be compared to that of medicine. Advances in life and medical technology have drawn physicians, philosophers, politicians and theologians into questioning — retrospectively and prospectively — crucial assumptions that have guided medical practice, including the meaning and value of health and life. Similarly, the proliferation of information and communications technology is compelling us — or it should be — to reassess the meaning of our most secure principles, including the meaning of the terms original order, provenance, record and archives.

For archivists to abstain from cultural awareness and criticism is tantamount to professional irresponsibility. It amounts to a shirking of the unique and positive task that each generation of archivists has, or should have, of continually replenishing its intellectual resources and reaffirming its cultural station. Several archivists have already made eloquent arguments in favour of cultural endeavour as a primary rather than merely residual or ancillary role for archivists. Some proposals for archival research and scholarship have properly insisted on the need for archivists to understand the practices of other people — administrators and records keepers, for example[51] — while others have continually refined and adapted archival practice itself. The above observations can be reduced to the following axiom: those who encourage archivists to enter into a more intimate relationship with the domain of administration and management of information are establishing or maintaining a distinction that makes no difference; those who are seeking to reserve a historical-cultural role for archivists wish to maintain a distinction that carries a difference. Those who have stressed this need to foster research, however, have thus far failed to articulate or to situate the cultural embeddedness of archival practice in such a way as to sharpen and strengthen its critical purpose and position. As long as they remain blind or indifferent to this task of self-examination, archivists will continue to be threatened with the sapping of their cultural vigour and sense of purpose, and their energy will be drawn increasingly from the charge emitted by the electronic/information management circuit.[52]

Finally, their adherence to concepts such as original order, provenance and *respect des fonds*, which are themselves historical creations of a historically self-conscious age, logically commits archivists to the belief that their own practice, however defined, like all human action, faithfully reflects its time, and can only be grasped within the context of its historical culture. It is odd, therefore, that archivists have so far generally averted their gaze from archives' own cultural history, from the temporal contingency of their adopted practices, and proceeded almost exclusively from a spectatorial vantage, as if

they transcended culture. Perhaps this is because archivists have habitually thought of themselves as neutral catalysts, as supporters and servants — as mere instruments — of putatively authentic culture-creating disciplines.[53] Archives, in other words, have been too much regarded as culturally transparent sites rather than as constituents or objects within a larger, historically characterizable structure which both determines and is determined by archival practice through a dynamic of negotiated social and cultural relations.[54] Such disciplinary perspicacity, however, requires that archivists continually engage in critical cultural self-analysis. Archivists, particularly public historians, must come to grips, for example, with issues related to the writing of administrative history. Beyond understanding that administrative theory and practice are evolving social and historical phenomena about which historians have argued for many years,[55] archivists must turn this historical consciousness of this historical approach to — administration upon themselves. Tom Nesmith has offered the fundamental insight that the archivist's mission is to study and understand the history of the record.[56] If we wish to entrench this as our work, we must continually meditate upon our own archival practice, which forms an integral part of that record. The history of the record does not stop at the portals of archives. Archives are participants in that history.

## IV

This essay has tried to do three things. None of them, as stated in the introduction, aimed at overturning current archival practices and strategies. Rather, the purpose was to compel archivists to focus on the historical and cultural experience and sensation of practising archives. Some people would call this the study of the relationship between the word and the world. It forces us to look at who we are by turning our attention to when, where and why we do what we do (practice) and to how, what, where and why we write about it (discourse).

In the first instance, this essay engaged in a heuristic exploration of the relevance of recent anti-humanist thought about information, knowledge and communication and, therefore, about archives. Notwithstanding the reference in the previous section to the archivist's need to understand the "actors" (authors) in the information universe, I tried to discredit (not to deny) a key notion in archival practice: provenance/record group.[57] The epigraph for this article, Eli Mandel's poem "Ventriloquists," evoked the problem for us. Here is a poet, a member of one of the most creative of the arts, who, implicitly at least, is expressing scepticism about, or contemplating, the status of creativity, originality and authorship in human communication; even the poetic voice — the supposed paragon of original insight and expression — in which we all at one time or another speak and write, does not seem to elude Mandel's observation. Creativity, originality and authorial identity — all become exposed to the ambiguities, not to say illusions, perpetrated by a kind of social ventriloquism. Secondly, this essay also re-examined the notion of *original* order. It did so by considering this principle in the light of some problems which are of concern to literary and social theorists as well as historiographers and philosophers of history, who have included in their analyses and interpretations some controversial theories about the status of texts and archives, documents and, more generally, information in the historical and culture-creating process.

The final point of the essay, which actually encompasses the first two, is that archives should be regarded as a proper object of historical and cultural analysis, whether such

work be undertaken by archivists or other scholars. It is a plea for enhancing the historical and cultural consciousness of our own position. What has been presented is one gloss on the cultural significance of archival practice.

## Notes

\* I am grateful to Terry Cook for providing valuable comments and suggestions on a later draft of this article.

1 Victor Shklovsky, ed., cited in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory. A Reader*, by K.M. Newton (New York, 1988), pp. 23-24. In broader terms, art attempts a "radical critique of representation — of the conventions that have become a second nature, by which we see what we see, by which we conduct the business of life . . ." Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness. The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven, 1980), p. 112.

2 For earlier considerations of the importance of intellectual history for archives, see Terry Cook, "Nailing Jelly to the Wall: Possibilities in Intellectual History," *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 205-18; and Cook, "Leaving Safe and Customed Ground: Ideas for Archivists," in *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-86), pp. 123-28.

3 See, for example, John Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," in *American Historical Review* (1987), pp. 879-907, and David Harlan, "Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," in *American Historical Review*, 94, 3, (June 1989), *passim*. For a materialist critique of the recent emphasis on the importance of language in historical analysis, see Brian D. Palmer, *Descent Into Discourse. The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia. 1990), *passim*. For a literary critique of this academic trend, see James Battersby, "The Inevitability of Professing Literature" in Richard Fleming Payne, ed., *Criticism, History and Intertextuality* (Lewisburg, 1988), pp. 61-76.

4 One historian, however, has recently complained about the virtual absence of any serious self-examination of museum practice among museums professionals. See Thomas J. Schelereth, *Cultural History and Material History. Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Ann Arbor, 1990), pp. 306ff. For a Canadian account, see Archie F. Kay, *Beyond Four Walls. The Origins and Development of Canadian Museums* (Toronto, 1973).

5 This seems to be true, at least of contemporary historians in general studying modern history, including Canadian historians. Maria Tippett's book on the history of Canadian culture, for example, gives considerable attention to institutions such as art galleries, museums and musical conservatories, but makes only one passing reference to archives. See her *Making Culture. English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto, 1990). The neglect of the social and cultural significance of archives can also be inferred from reviews of intellectual and cultural history literature. See, for example, Maria Tippett, "The Writing of English-Canadian Cultural History, 1970-1985" in *Canadian Historical Review*, 67 (1986), and A.B. McKillop, "Culture, Intellect, and Context: Recent Writing on the Cultural and Intellectual History of Ontario," in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 24, 3, (Autumn 1989).

One recent exception to this observation is a study, which considers the important role of archives on the eve of the French Revolution as "ideological arsenals" deployed to legitimize preferred loci of political power — whether the parliament, the supreme court or the monarchy — by marshalling arguments based on truth-determining historical documents. See Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution. Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 2.

As for archival literature, much of the North American writing on archival history and practice is descriptive or hagiographical in flavour. Historical analyses often remain within the confines of administrative chronologies, or statements of evidence for the importance of archives *for* rather than *as* cultural history. This is the perspective of Royal Commissions, task forces and other government investigative reports and studies. See, for example, the Symons Commission Report and the Wilson Report. Also, T.H.B. Symons, "Archives and Canadian Studies," in *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83), pp. 58-69, and Ian Wilson, "'A Noble Dream': The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," in *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 16-37.

There are a number of exceptions, however, which in a limited way do treat archival practice as a proper object of historical and cultural analysis and interpretation. See James O'Toole, "On the Idea of Permanence," in *American Archivist*, 52, 1, (Winter 1989); Maynard Brichford, "The Provenance of Provenance in Germanic Areas," in *Provenance*, 7, 2, (Fall 1989), pp. 54-70; Richard Stapleton, "Jenkinson and Schellenberg: A Comparison," in *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 75-85; Robin G.

Keirstead, "J.S. Matthews and an Archives for Vancouver, 1951-1972," in *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-87), pp. 86-106; Carman Carroll, "David W. Parker: The 'Father' of Archival Arrangement at the Public Archives of Canada," in *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 150-54. Finally, see the chapter on "On the Value of Archival History in the United States," in Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Analysis. The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J., 1990), pp. 186, 328. Also, see various writings by Ernest Posner, Hugh Taylor and Hans Booms. Even these, however, are largely internal histories that ignore the larger social, cultural and intellectual context.

6   Terry Cook does hint at this need in his writing. See "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," in *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), p. 46.

7   On the sociology of rubbish see Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory. The creation and destruction of value* (Oxford, 1979). Interestingly, the metaphor of dirt, garbage and excrement have also been invoked in assessments of the very notion of historicity. See Geoff Bennington, "Demanding History," in *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, ed. Derek Attridge et al. (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 18-19.

8   Hugh Taylor has written an article concerning "information ecology." It will become clear in the following pages, however, that his meaning of the phrase differs from its use here. See Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology: Archives in the 1980s," in *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 25-37.

9   Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1984), p. 2. On the importance of the destruction of information for the shaping of historical consciousness, see Hans Kellner, "Time Out: The Discontinuity of Historical Consciousness," in *History and Theory*, 14 (1975), p. 295.

10   Of course, physical deterioration of records is also a threat to archival order. Dust, humidity, temperature fluctuation and improper illumination, for example, have no place in archives.

11   O'Toole, op. cit., *passim.*

12   Writing about "the mass of records" which need new archival strategies, Gerald Ham suggests that archivists have traditionally been "uncommonly introspective, preoccupied with our own *garden*, and too little aware of the larger historical and social landscape that surrounded it": "Archival Strategies in the Post-Custodial Era," in *American Archivist*, 44, 3 (Summer 1981), p. 207 [emphasis added]. While there is certainly some truth in Ham's assertion, I would suggest that his choice of the term "garden" is a perhaps inadvertant affirmation that in some instances archives have constituted not merely a place of introspection but of conscious demarcation, which is not the same thing. At least today, the isolation or insularity of archives intentionally posits an opposition between a domain of order and an information universe in the external world the complexities of which archivists at least suspect and which they also perceive as threatening to archival order in theoretical and physical space. The conventional life-cycle analogy which places archivists on the far end of a continuum may be more apprpropriate, for it retains a sense of distancing, which is what Ham observes, while at the same time realistically recognizing the integration of archives into the outside world.

13   F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," in *American Archivist*, 47, 1, (Winter 1984), p. 16.

14   Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1973), p. 131.
        It may be interesting to note in passing the important connection made between order, space and efficient memory in classical and early modern treatises on mnemonics. Memory could be strengthened, it was thought, by associating specific images in the mind with particular rooms or nooks of a building — which might be a real or imagined palace or church. These structures, fictive or real, would serve, in effect, as "storage spaces." Cicero, for example, emphasized that the key to this type of memory system and other mnemonic methods was the relationship between place and order: "... persons desiring to train this faculty [of memory] must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it." An early modern scholar spelled out similar rules for developing an effective memory: those things are better remembered which have an order in themselves; those things that a man wishes to retain in memory he should consider how to set in order, so that from the memory of one thing he comes to another; of those things which we wish to remember, we should place in certain places images and similitudes. And Cicero adds that the places are like tablets, or paper, and the images like letters, and placing the images is like writing, and speaking is like reading. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London, 1984), pp. 2, 87 and *passim*; and Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (London, 1983), p. 2 and *passim.*
        On the distinction between memory and history, however, see Pierre Nora et al., *Les Lieux de Mémoire I: La République* (Paris, 1984), pp. xvii-xxv. (I wish to thank Tom Nesmith for bringing this work to my

attention.) See also Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989); Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (London, 1979); or Michael Clanchy, "'Tenacious Letters': Archives and Memory in the Middle Ages," in *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 115-25; and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, Trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), p. 107 and part II, *passim*.

15    David Bearman, "Multisensory Data and its Management," in *Management of Recorded Information. Converging Disciplines*. Proceedings of the International Council on Archives' Symposium on Current Records. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 15-17 May 1989. Comp. Cynthia Durance (Munich, 1990), *passim*. See also Terry Cook's forthcoming essay, *The Concept of the Archival Fonds*, Occasional Paper No. 3 (Ottawa: Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, Bureau of Canadian Archivists), part 5.

16    Interestingly, Taylor invokes the agricultural anachronism of husbanding: "the records and the information they contain must be husbanded with the greatest of care if there is to be a fertile crop of knowledge . . .". Taylor, "Information Ecology: Archives in the 1980s," p. 37.

17    Against the dangers of 'presentism', Sir Hilary Jenkinson urged that archival practice must involve a conscious effort to reflect faithfully record-creating institutions and their times and not current research interests: "In relation to his charges the Archivist should be a modern only in so far as strictly modern questions of buildings, custody, and the like are concerned: for the rest he should be all things to all Archives, his interests identified with theirs, his period and point of view theirs." See Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London, 1966), p. 124. In other words, Jenkinson seems to be saying that archivists must strive to ensure that archival practice, the treatment of the records, ensures that the records objectively reflect their times. See also note 54, below.

18    Frank Boles, "Disrespecting Original Order," in *American Archivist*, 45, 1 (Winter 1982), pp. 26-32.

19    Mario D. Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept: A Critique" in *American Archivist*, 29, 2 (April 1966), pp. 229-40; Peter J. Scott, "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment," in *American Archivist*, 29, 4 (October 1966), p. 502. See also Michel Duchein, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respect des Fonds in Archival Science," in *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 68-81. More recently, David Bearman and Richard Lytle have also discussed the limitations of the concept of record group. See their "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," in *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 19-21. Finally, Terry Cook makes a cogent case for the abandonment of the record group concept in *The Concept of the Archival Fonds*, part 4.

20    Paul Ahlberg, "The Record Group Concept in Contemporary Archives," in *IASSIST Quarterly*, 13, 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1989), p. 5.

21    Buck's exact statement is as follows: "What I am proposing is a grouping of material in which consideration would be given not only to the principle of provenance but also to convenience in arrangement and description." Cited in Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept: A Critique," p. 231.

22    It is interesting to note the several renderings of the French term "donné," which can translate into "given" or "information" or "data." See Michel De Certeau in note 33 below.

23    Some twenty years earlier, Sir Hilary Jenkinson noted the emergence of the need for "archive-*making*" rather than simple "archive-keeping." In other words, Jenkinson anticipated a need to move from the traditional concern with the "preservation of Archive quality" to a point far beyond it: archivists might be constrained "to try to consider the possibility of creating [archive quality]: that is to say, we have to try to balance between the desire to provide for the needs of the Future and a determination to copy the impartiality of the Past; to lay down lines for Archive-making to follow now, while excluding any possibility of what should be Archives becoming propaganda for posterity. This problem, and that of bulk, . . . if not new is at least very much intensified in our time": Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, pp. 156-57, 190 and Part IV, *passim*.

24    See Bernward Joerges, "Images of Technology in Sociology: Computer as Butterfly and Bat," in *Technology and Culture*, 31, 2 (April 1990), pp. 203-27; Gareth Morgan, "Paradigms, Metaphors and Puzzle Solving in Organizational Theory" in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25 (1980), pp. 605-22; Morgan, "More on Metaphor: Why We Cannot Control Tropes in Administrative Science," in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28 (1983), pp. 601-07; and Craig Pinder and V. Warren Bourgeois, "Controlling Tropes in Administrative Science," in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 27 (1982), pp. 641-52.

25    The phrase "natural place" is Oliver Wendell Holmes's. See "Archival Arrangement — Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels," in Maygene Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds. *A Modern Archival Reader. Basic Readings in Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, 1984), p. 162. Holmes's article is conceptually confused when discussing the replication of original order. He alternately uses words such as "natural," "logical," "rational" and "orderly" to characterize the original organization of records. For

example, Holmes seems to be saying that an apparent lack of order in a body of records is equivalent to a lack of original order. But are the two equivalent? One might contend that deficiency of organizational effort or skill in the creating agency is not the same as absence of original order. The original order is there in the apparent disorder. On this point see Duchein, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems," p. 78, where Duchein cites exceptional cases in which archival arrangement ought to override the principle of original order, that is original "disorder."

26  See Jonathan Pepler, "The impact of computers on classification theory," *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 11, 1 & 2, (1990), p. 28 for a discussion of archival "artificial classification" which "does not flow naturally from the records themselves." See also Cook, *The Concept of the Archival Fonds*, part 4.

27  Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power. Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca, 1987), p. 101. The concept of microworld first appears in Bruno Latour and Steven Wilgar, *Laboratory Life. The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, 1983), ch. 4.

28  If they have any validity, these paragraphs tend to mitigate one of the the strongest formulations of the argument for structural-provenance coincidence, which was enunciated by the Dutch archivists Muller, Freith and Fruin in 1898. Using the language of logical inevitability, they wrote, "It is, therefore, not so much preference for this system that impels us to recommend it, as the consideration that the archivist who calmly thinks out his plan in advance and wishes to carry it through consistently will actually be forced to adopt ours." S. Muller et al., *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York, 1968), pp. 56 and ch. 2 *passim*. It should be pointed out, however, that our intention here is not so much to displace the Dutch approach as to offer for consideration a "soft" argument in place of the "hard" and inflexible version of the information universe that the Dutch basis of archival arrangement entails. (When Michel Foucault "suspends" our discursive unities, discursive formations, discursive strategies and discursive regularities, he does so not to reject them definitely, but to enable us to get behind the manner in which knowledge (discourses) becomes divided up and configured in accordance with disciplines, institutions, traditions. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge, passim.*)

29  See Cook, *The Concept of the Archival Fonds*, part 4.

30  For example, this notion has emerged as a prominent theme in recent writing in philosophy, literary theory and criticism. In his analysis of the theme of cybernetics in literature, David Porush observes that one of the principal features of novelist Thomas Pynchon's works is that "everything is connected. Hence, a tug given to the visible threads — and which threads are visible depends on the position and experience of the observer, the light in the room — quickly unravels an apparently infinite and subterranean yarn": David Porush, *The Soft Machine. Cybernetic Fiction* (New York, 1985), p. 116.

The problem of authorship extends to textual literature as well. The "subterranean yarn" points directly to deconstructive textual criticism's insistence on the interminable deferrals, supplementarity and baroque intricacies of discursive practice and documentary authorship, originality and meaning — and provenance. See Gregory L. Ulmer, "On Writing: Derrida's Solicitation of Theoria," in *Displacement. Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick, (Bloomington, 1983), p. 47. In a similar vein, Roland Barthes refers to the "dèja lu" of intertextuality. See Jonathon Cullers, *The Pursuit of Signs. Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 102.

The endless interlacing that some literary theorists have recently posited for the texts of literature — and some believe that all writing and all life is subject to literary status — is perhaps most apparent, and arguably most characteristic, of communication in modern bureaucracies, where the proliferation of electronic computing and communication technologies has accentuated and promoted labyrinthian networks and lineages that have made the tasks of acquiring and appraising information increasingly difficult for archivists. Computing has seemingly spawned a complexity of information and organization while empowering us with just enough intuitive knowledge to glimpse this complexity without truly understanding its nature. One of the few attempts to explore the possible relationship between electronic communication and deconstruction is Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information. Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Chicago, 1990). See pp. 124-28 and *passim*. Finally, partly in response to the phenomenon of the "subterranean yarn," a new discipline called the science of complexity has begun to take shape. See Heinz Pagels, *The Dreams of Reasons: The Computer and the Rise of the Sciences of Complexity* (New York, 1988), and Paul Winter, "How to deal with complexity," in *Computing Canada*, 16, 12, (June 1990), p. 26.

Along similar lines, another cultural critic, sociologist Jean Baudrillard, has noted the disappearance of personal identities and thus, authorship, in the maze of information communication networks. Now, we are merely receivers and purveyors of information who have instant access to evreything. The loss of self in this circularity means that humans sitting at computer terminals with their illusory sense of local sovereignty are actually merely nodes in a global network. In essence, each individual in the information universe has

become a "pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks": Jean
Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (Paris, 1988), p. 27. Jean-François Lyotard similarly discusses
"nodal points" in a communication system, but allows individual agents a small measure of influence in the
network of information: *The Post-Modern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington,
(Minneapolis, 1984), p. 15.

    For an account of the problematical relationship among the information revolution, modern
bureaucratic structures and traditional archival principles, for example, see David Bearman and Richard
Lytle's timely article, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," pp. 18-27. Bearman strikes a similar tone
in his more recent essay, in which he refers to the new phenomenon of "'unauthored' information" and the
emergence of "polyarchy" over "mono-hierarchy" associated with the rise of electronic information
networks: Bearman, "Multisensory Data and Its Management," p. 111. (Daniel C. Calhoun considers
similar notions of "hierarchical" vs. "diffuse" models of communication in a broader socio-historical
context: see "A Question of Convergence: Neural Networks and the History of Information," in *Journal of
Interdisciplinary History*, 21, 2 (Autumn 1990), *passim*.) Along similar lines, Gerald Ham has, in effect,
alluded to the death of the subject in modern communication: "[M]odern telecommunications have
brought about the death of . . . intimate recorded communication and reflection." Gerald Ham, "Archival
Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," p. 12. Also, Tom Nesmith has noted
the declining importance of personal collections, which reflects the disappearance of biographies and the
emergence of more anonymous social history: Tom Nesmith, "Archives From the Bottom Up: Social
History and Archival Scholarship," in *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982), *passim*.

    Finally, Michael Heim has observed that the electronic linkages of word processing effects "the
networking of all symbolic life in a homogeneous information system; the linkage of computerized writing
leads to a kind of psychic proximity that can endanger the privacy and the intimacy of thought." Heim later
elaborates on what he must ultimately regard as an assault on creative individuality:

> [D]igital writing supplants the framework of the book: it replaces the craftsman's care for resistant
> materials with automated manipulation; deflects attention from personal expression toward the more
> general logic of algorithmic procedures; shifts the steadiness of the contemplative formulation of ideas
> into an overabundance of dynamic possibilities; and turns the private solitude of reflective reading and
> writing into a public network where the personal symbolic framework needed for original authorship is
> threatened by linkage with the total textuality of human expressions:

Michael Heim, *Electronic Language. A Philosophical Study of Word Processing* (New Haven, 1987),
pp. 126 and 191.

    It is for this reason that Ham may be right when he suggests, "While documents may be unique, very little
of the information they contain is unique," and when Margaret Hedstrom wonders about duplication or
"redundancy" foreshadowed by the rising number of data sharing arrangements, particularly among
public institutions. See, Ham, "Archival Choices," p. 17, and Margaret Hedstrom, "Is data redundancy the
price archivists will pay for adequate documentation," in *IASSIST Quarterly*, 13, 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 24-
30.

    On the importance of understanding bureaucracy, see Michael A. Lutzker, "Max Weber and the
Analysis of Bureacratic Organization: Notes Toward a Theory of Appraisal," in *American Archivist*, 45
(Spring 1982), pp. 119-30. On the unprecedented "complexity of the documentation landscape," see
Margaret Hedstrom, "Is Data Redundancy the Price Archivists Will Pay for Adequate Documentation" in
*IASSIST Quarterly* 13 (Spring 1989), pp. 24-30, and Margaret Hedstrom, "New Appraisal Techniques:
The Effect of Theory on Practice," in *Provenance*, 7, 2 (Fall 1989), pp. 5-6, 19. An early foray into the
challenges posed by contemporary organizational and informational complexity is Ham, "Archival
Strategies in the Post-Custodial Era," p. 207 and *passim*.

    As a counterpoint to the above views of authorship, see Luciana Duranti's multipart series,
"Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science," in *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 7-27; 29 (Winter 1989-
90), pp. 4-17; and especially 30, (Summer 1990), pp. 4-20. Duranti offers an interesting and all-too-rare
analysis of the relationship among action, intentionality and record creation. Her heavy emphasis on
juridical status and legal competence, however, though offering a salutary reminder of the medieval roots
of the definition of the persona, does not address the increasingly problematical nature of the social act of
authorship or origination, action versus structure, in the parlance of social theorists. Ultimately, her
perspective overestimates the power of individual intentionality and being as opposed to social and
discursive determination.

31   On this point, see T.R. Schellenberg, "Archival Principles of Arrangement," in Maygene Daniels and
     Timothy Walch, eds. *A Modern Archival Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*
     (Washington, 1984), p. 153.

32   On the mystical effects of archival practice, see O'Toole, op. cit. p. 17; and Cook, "Information to
     Knowledge," p. 46. On the aesthetics of old age relics and documents, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a
     Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 4. For an interesting discussion of the "entropy or loss of order
     which affects a collection of objects," the impossibility — and undesirability — of recovering the "original
     system or code," and the guidebook's (read inventory's) confrontation of this threat, see Stephen Bann, *The
     Clothing of Clio. A study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France*
     (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 77-78 and ch. 4 *passim.*

33   Historian Michel De Certeau also seems to allude to the transformative significance of archives in the
     history creation or writing process:
     > En histoire, tout commence avec le geste de *mettre à part*, de rassembler, de muer ainsi en "documents"
     > certain objets répartis autrement. Cette nouvelle répartition culturelle est le premier travail. En réalité
     > elle consiste à *produire* de tels documents, par le fait de récopier, transcrire ou photographier ces objets
     > en changeant à la fois leur place et leur statut. Ce geste consiste à "isoler" un corps, comme on le fait en
     > physique, et à "dénaturer" les choses pour les constituer en pièces qui viennent combler les lacunes d'un
     > ensemble posé a priori. Il forme la "collection." Il constitue des choses en "système marginale" comme
     > dit Jean Baudrillard; il les exile de la pratique pour les établir en objets "abstraits" d'un savoir. Bien loin
     > d'accepter des "données," il les constitue. Le matériau est crée par les actions concertées qui le découpent
     > dans l'univers de l'usage, qui vont le chercheur aussi hors des frontières de l'usage et qui déstinent à un
     > réemploi cohérent. Il est la trace des actes qui modifient un *ordre* reçu et une vision sociale. Instauratrice
     > de signes offerts à des traitements spécifiques, cette rupture n'est donc pas seulement ni d'abord l'effet
     > d'un "régard." Il y faut une opération technique.
     >
     > Les origines de nos Archives modernes impliquent déjà, en effet, la combinaison d'un *groupe* (les
     > érudits), de *lieux* (les "bibliothèques") et de *pratiques* (de copiage, d'impression, de communication, de
     > classement, etc.). C'est, en pointillés, l'indication d'un complexe technique, inauguré en Occident avec
     > les "collections" rassemblées en Italie puis en France à partir du XVe siècle, . . .:

     Michel De Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris, 1975), p. 84.

     Booms writes of the "constitutive act" of archivists, which may be related to one of Jurgen Habermas'
     central concepts, "knowledge-constitutive interest." Further on, Booms writes: "Yet, historians have never
     considered it significant that, besides the workings of chance, the way in which archivists design, mould,
     and shape the documentary record might also have an effect on the 'historical picture.'" Hans Booms,
     "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources" in
     *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 76 and 81.

34   The theme of documentary abundance is a basic assumption that permeates archival thought and writing.
     Nancy E. Peace, ed., *Archival Choices. Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance*
     (Lexington, 1984). See also Gerald Ham, "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of
     Abundance," in *American Archivist*, 47, 1 (Winter 1984), pp. 11-22. Also Booms, "Society and the
     Formation of a Documentary Heritage," pp. 76-77.

35   See note 42 for Michel Foucault's view of the limits of the power of documentation in the writing of history.

36   On the interpretive presence of archives, see note 33.

37   With a different intention George Bolotenko has stated the genesis of this attitude in the nineteeth century:
     "Modern archives and archival practice arose in nineteenth-century Europe contemporaneously.
     Whatever harm historians originally may have done the record, they fixed the contours of archivy by
     publicizing the value of the historical record, making it a *desiderata* [*sic*] in the European intellectual
     matrix": George Bolotenko, "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well," in *Archivaria* 16 (Summer
     1983), p. 23. (Jenkinson had similarly used the term "desiderata" in his *A Manual of Archive
     Administration*. See p. 157.)

38   Robert-Henri Bautier, "Les Archives," in *L'histoire et ses méthodes*, ed. Henri Marrou. Encyclopédie de la
     Pléiade (1961), pp. 1159-60. American political historian John Lukacs has also noted the direct
     relationship between the growth of democracy and documentary abundance and importance. See
     *Historical Consciousness, or the past remembered* (New York, 1985), pp. 53ff.

39   One of the most outspoken proponents of user-driven acquisition and appraisal is Elsie T. Freeman. See
     her "In the Eyes of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View" in *American
     Archivist*, 47, 2, (Spring 1984), pp. 111-24.

40   Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, p. xxvi.

41   Elizabeth Eisenstein, "Clio and Chronos: An Essay on the Making and Breaking of History-Book Time,"
     in *History and Theory*, 6, 1 (1966), pp. 39-40. Like Eisenstein, Michel De Certeau also traces the growth of
     archives back to the invention of the printing press:
     > Liée d'abord à l'activité juridique, chez des hommes de plume et de robe, avocats, bourgeois d'offices,
     > conservateurs de greffes, l'entreprise fait expansionniste et conquérante dès qu'elle passe entre les mains

de spécialistes. Elle est productrice et réproductrice. Elle obéit à la loi de la multiplication. Dès 1470, elle s'allie à l'imprimerie: la 'collection' devient la 'bibliothèque' . . . Ainsi la collection, en produisant un boulversement des instruments de travail, rédistribue les choses, elle rédefinit des unités de savoir, elle restaure un lieu de recommencement en construisant une "gigantesque machine". . . qui rendra possible une autre histoire.

De Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, p. 85. Closer to home, Canadian economic and communications historian, Harold Innis, noted that our sense of time was being disrupted by the deluge of modern scientific information and the bias of the media. See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History. Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900* (Toronto, 1986), p. 190.

42    Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 18-21. LaCapra's criticism elaborates on a similar observation made by Hayden White some twenty years earlier: With the increasing professionalization and specialization of history, "ordinary historians have become wrapped up in the search for the elusive document that will establish him as an authority in a narrowly defined field." Hayden White, "The Burden of History," in White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 28.

Michel Foucault implies that archival records represent an ambiguous, perhaps illusory, power of supplementarity. They seem to offer historians the promise of entry beneath the surface that is an individual's published work, to the discovery of the true meaning underlying all his writing — the real, essential and intentional person. The question is, when does one stop? When can one conclude that "the record is complete" (my quotation marks):

The establishment of a complete *oeuvre* presupposes a number of choices that are difficult to justify or even to formulate: is it enough to add to the texts published by the author those that he intended for publication but which remained unfinished by the fact of his death? Should one also include all his sketches and first drafts, with all their corrections and crossings out? Should one add sketches that he himself abandoned? And what status should be given to letters, notes, reported conversations, transcriptions of what he said made by those present at the time, in short to that vast mass of verbal traces left by an individual at his death, and which speak in an endless confusion so many languages . . . In fact, if one speaks, so indiscriminately and unreflectively of an author's *oeuvre*, it is because one imagines it to be defined by a certain expressive function. One is admitting that there must be a level (as deep as it is necessary to imagine it) at which the *oeuvre* emerges, in all its fragments, even the smallest, most inessential ones, as the expression of the thought, the experience, the imagination, or the unconscious of the author, or, indeed, of the historical determinations that operated on him. But it is at once apparent that such a unity, far from being given immediately, is the result of an operation [that is] interpretive:

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), p. 24. For an intriguing discussion of this problem in a direct archival context, see Pamela Banting, "The Archive as Literary Genre: Some Theoretical Speculations," in *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-87), pp. 119-22.

43    Jean Baudrillard, "Fatal Strategies" in *Jean Baudrillard. Selected Writings*, Mark Poster ed. (Stanford, 1988), p. 189. Baudrillard's epidemiological metaphor is not as radical as it might seem. We need only recall the appearance of terms such as "bugs" and "virus" in computer terminology. Similarly, philosopher William Barrett, like Baudrillard, writes of our enormous "curiosity for information," which is reflected in the "mountains of memoranda and documentation accumulated on the most trivial subjects," and wonders whether this amounts to an advance in our knowledge: *Time of Need. Forms of Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (Middletown, Conn., 1972), pp. 207-08.

In a direct archival context, Gerald Ham has made a rather vague, inadvertent, but similar allusion to the fatal strategy and the documentary mentality when he writes, "the requirements of a litigious society for seemingly *eternal evidence*, and the response of bureaucracy to the needs of technological society guarantee continuing proliferation and decentralization" (Emphasis added.) Ham then goes on to make the point that archives have benefited from this situation by increased resources and the growth and maturation of the profession. Ham, "Archival Strategies in the Post-Custodial Era," p. 210. Ham's reference to the litigious society is important in light of the 500-year-old link that many have made between archives and law.

44    See Foucault, note 42.

45    Baudrillard, "Fatal Strategies," p. 189. With regard to this obsession, Foucault writes of "secret origins": *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 25.

46    Michael Heim, *Electronic Language. A Philosophical Study of Word Processing* (New Haven, 1987), p. 270, n. 33. The appearance of journals such as *Computers and the Humanities* seems to lend some support to the apprehensions that Heim, Baudrillard and LaCapra have expressed, or, at least, to the observations they have made.

The not-so-distant future also promises the emergence of "hyperactive" networks, or an "information infrastructure" that will rival in scale and importance earlier national infrastructures in transportation (roadways), energy (electrical power) and communication (telephones). Its most important visionary and promoter is Dr. Robert Kahn, an American scientist who is now President of the non-profit Corporation for National Research Initiatives (NRI). Kahn has recently received $15.4m of funding from the National Science Foundation to finance various networking research projects. One scenario that NRI has in mind is
> a library system that would be computerized and connected but would not exist in one centralized computer. Instead, the nation's information would be located in widely separated specialized data bases, which would range from yellow-page type information stored in phone company computers, say, to geological fault figures stored in an oil company or university mainframe ... A new class of sophisticated tools will have to be developed and used such as knowledge robots, 'knowbots,' as Dr. Kahn calls them. These otherwordly creatures will have ravenous appetites for information. They will be sent on fact-finding missions for humans, travelling at almost the speed of light to the appropriate electronic destination and searching through appropriate data bases. Prototype knowbots have already been designed by scientists at Dr. Kahn's NRI and put to work, experimentally:

"Creating a Giant Computer Highway," in *New York Times*, 2 Sept. 1990.

All of this, however, seems to have been foreseen by "cyberpunk" novelist William S. Burroughs in the early 1960s: "A writing machine that shifts one half one text and one half the other through a page frame on conveyor belts — (The proportion of half one text half the other is important corresponding as it does to the two halves of the human organism) Shakespeare, Rimbaud, etc., permutating through page frames in constantly changing juxtaposition the machine spits out books and plays and poems — The spectators are invited to feed into the machine any pages of their own text in fifty-fifty juxtaposition with any author of their choice any pages of their choice and [are] provided with the result in a few minutes." William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (New York, 1987), p. 65.

47 As is well known, the documentary mentality in historical practice dates back to the rise of scientific positivism in German history in the nineteenth century, which "revolved around critical examination of sources, research in archives, delight in details and deliberate abstention from concern with the present." Thomas Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London, 1982), p. 134. See also Booms, "Society and Documentary Heritage," p. 83.

48 Richard Kesner, "Automated Information Management: Is There a Role for the Archivist in the Office of the Future?" in *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), p. 163. See also Richard J. Cox, "Textbooks, Archival Education and the Archival Profession," in *Public Historian*, 12, 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 73-81.

49 Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology: Archives in the 1980s," pp. 25-37.

50 This argument converges with those of others who have already defended the cultural role of archivists. See Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge," *passim* as well as p. 29, n. 2, and *passim* for a summary of some key contributions to the debate.

51 Two outstanding examples of this kind of work are Bill Russell, "The White Man's Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914," in *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 50-72; and Terry Cook, "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1956," in *For Purposes of Dominion: Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow*, eds. Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison (1989), pp. 13-31.

52 On the importance of the relationship between "information environments" and historical culture, see Robin Neill, "Rationality and the Information Environment: A Reassessment of the Work of Harold Adams Innis," in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 22, 4 (Winter 1987-88), *passim*.

53 On the role of archives in "supporting and servicing arts, culture and heritage," see William Smith, "The Applebaum-Hébert Report: An Introduction," in *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 96-97. In fact, the cultural role which Smith is claiming for archives is rather ambiguously expressed. In connection with this point, see also note 5 above.

54 I have been arguing that the ethos of neutrality is a particularly strange one for archivists to embrace. It is so because, depending upon the period of the documents that the archivist must consider, Jenkinson's proposal, for example, (see note 17) amounts either to a tautology or to a paradox. In effect, his was a call for a transhistorical archival practice, one in which archivists bracket their historical position. In so doing, they resist susceptibility to the vicissitudes of contemporary interpretive context. As an archivist, however, Jenkinson would surely have been compelled to deny, almost as an article of professional faith, that such an elusion was possible for records-creating members of society. Yet, at the same time, in proclaiming this methodological neutrality, he was excluding archivists from the realm of interpretive-historical-presence. (On the notion of an 'absent present' recorder of observations, see Stanley Raffel, *Matters of Fact. A sociological inquiry* (London, 1979), pp. 25ff.) In this way archivists would be able to capture in pristine condition the historically contingent expression that awaits future generations in the record.

Booms' critique of "structure" and "function," and his notions of "social process" and "contemporary evaluation," in his essay "Society and Documentary Heritage" are brilliantly suggestive. His writing serves to provide a broader, more cogent framework for the discussion of appraisal that recognizes the importance of debates among philosophers of history and social theorists for the problem of determining archival value in an age of documentary abundance. While clearly more sophisticated and sensitive than Jenkinson in his treatment of appraisal objectivity, however, he does not completely succeed in establishing the basis for such objectivity — nor does he claim to do so. Like Jenkinson he ignores the implications arising, on the one hand, from the evaluation of contemporaneous records and, increasingly rarely now, the appraisal of records from another time. In addition, he fails to circumvent the paradox of claiming objectivity for archivists. Booms, "Society and Documentary Heritage," p. 104.

Are not archival practices conditioned by those very same historical contingencies that the records themselves attempt to preserve? Could it be otherwise? When archival practice is applied to *contemporary* records, do not both the records and the practice reflect, broadly speaking, similar cultural circumstances? And, again, when archival practice confronts records from other *historical* periods, whatever meaning "other" has in the context of contemporary historical discourse, is it really possible to escape our own cultural presuppositions? Are the practices we adopt not to some extental so influenced by the same time-bound cultural factors that our professional creed teaches us, shape records? Surely, archival practice is constrained by these same contextual limits, and though never entirely determined or overdetermined by them, our methods, even the range of our choices, are to some extent culturally proscribed. If we do not believe this, then why are we practising archives? More to the point, why do so many take pains to preserve records in accordance with the principles of provenance and original order?

In this connection, German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer raises the problem of synchronicity and diachrony: how is the meaning of "contemporaneity" to be determined? Where are we to draw the line by which we can distinguish between our past and our present? Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method.* 2nd ed., rev. (New York, 1990), p. 395.

55    See, for example, Roy Macleod, "Statesmen Undisguised" in *American Historical Review*, 78, 5, (1973), pp. 1386-1405. Of course, there is also literature on the historical growth of the bureaucratic phenomenon.

56    The classic statement of the "history of the record" argument is Nesmith, "Archives From the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *passim.*

57    See Cook, *The Concept of the Archival Fonds*, for a discussion of the relationship between provenance and record group.