

The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society. JACK GOODY. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. xvii, 213 p. ISBN 0 521 33962 6 (pa.).

Archivists need to understand the impact of the media of record on the individual and on society in general, if they are to grasp the meaning and implications of their work at a deeper level. Documentary appraisal requires that we constantly ask ourselves “What is really going on here?” as opposed to acceptance of what appears to be happening on the surface of the documents under review. As with other professions, we have searched for insight far beyond the borders of our discipline as they were once defined; on our journey we have come to value the work of those who have studied modes of communication over time.

Harold A. Innis in his *Empire and Communications* (1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951) recognized, as an economist, the role of staples in the world of soldiers, merchants, and bureaucrats which included materials on which information was recorded. He focussed on the relation between technology and power, including the monopoly of knowledge which early writing made possible, and came up with his thesis that the ancient media of literacy were either space or time “binding” according to its portability. Anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Carpenter have helped us understand how the pre-literate mind approaches knowledge, awareness and understanding. Eric Hewelock, Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, from a background of literature and languages, have examined the various forms of literate understanding and related them to the orality which lay within and beneath. All these scholars dared to become generalists in the sweep of their reading. Anthropologist Jack Goody is such another.

We are particularly indebted to Goody for *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society* as he clammers with us through the social structures which have been erected as a result of literacy, and views their long-term effects on the organization of society, so that we now better understand their functions and the human environments which create the record.

As part of our trade we are all, for example, surrounded by lists in one form or another and Goody points out that, at the dawn of literacy and numeracy in the Ancient World, these non-syntactical forms involved in record keeping were quite foreign to the syntax of speech and “had a feedback effect on other uses of language and possibly on language itself” (p. 54) much as telegraphese created the headline in the nineteenth century. As with clay tablets, the automated record was first used primarily for accounting and lists rather than continuous text but the need for rigorous procedural standards has already affected the nature of the record quite profoundly.

For archivists, Goody’s most useful chapters are “The State, The Bureau and The File” and “The Letter of the Law” in which he repeatedly quotes from M.T. Clanchy’s *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*. At every turn Goody compares the emerging literate structures of the ancient world, Greece and Medieval Europe with the dialectic between colonial bureaucracy and pre-literate processes and procedures which shall survive in Africa and which he studied extensively. In this way, he may with others help us to be more sensitive to non-literate and non-textual forms as we tread uncertainly in a world less dominated by text, the book, and the written document.

According to Goody, "writing was not essential to the development of the state but of a certain type of state, the bureaucratic one." The technologies of writing changed forever the way in which information was presented, meaning was perceived, and society fashioned. We now seem to be entering a comparable period in which automation seems to be effecting just as profound a sea change revealing many of the characteristics of an emerging neo-orality drawing upon "automated" memories incapable of thought and judgement but of immense range and power. Is the story, which Goody tells, being played backwards from literacy to a modified orality? If so, there may be valuable clues in this book with regard to our future role as archivists and the societal role of the documents in our charge.

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Image Storage and Retrieval Systems. MARC R. D'ALLEYRAND. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1989. 246 p. ISBN 0-07-015231-4.

Marc R. D'Alleyrand's *Image Storage and Retrieval Systems* will appeal to archivists for three reasons.

First, this book covers alternative technologies which can be used to make collections more available to clients of archives.

Secondly, D'Alleyrand describes the process used by many organizations implementing imaging systems. Understanding how these systems are designed will help archivists decide if the information in these systems is historically valuable and what information was available to decision makers. Insight into the trends of information system design and implementation will make it easier for archivists to design systems to emulate these environments for clients of the archives. Knowing what information was in a system is not very useful if one doesn't know the context of how that information was used. This book will allow archivists to better understand the context of the use of information they are acquiring by knowing more about information system design.

Thirdly, archivists may be interested in how different information systems evolve from the traditional paper- and microfilm-based systems to the electronic imaging systems now being used in government and the private sector. Why did organizations adopt these systems? The effects can be profound for these organizations — companies or governments can profit significantly or fail miserably when implementing new information systems. These effects themselves will be of interest to future historians researching the beginning of the Information Age. Reading D'Alleyrand's book may be able to help you offer theories as to why particular systems failed or succeeded.

D'Alleyrand describes this book as "a new approach to records management." At first, I could not see what was so new about this book. The book described most of the processes I and many others have followed in designing and implementing systems. However, I realized that the novelty may be in using electronic imaging and not so much the approach. The method proposed for developing systems could be used for any kind of information system. It is quite conventional as compared to Information Engineering and using Computer Assisted Software Engineering tools as a