

## *Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies*

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This essay is a work of deconstruction, of a sort. It will dismantle an edifice of ideas to see of what it is really made, and whether it will stand up to close scrutiny by the archival discipline. Its immediate impetus is the argument of Brien Brothman's article, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," and the ensuing exchange of letters on diplomatic concepts between Luciana Duranti and him.<sup>1</sup> From my point of view as an educator of archivists, Brothman raises a matter of the first water for archival studies. To extract what it is will require some rather extensive recapitulation of the essence of his argument. I take issue with him because I think Brothman's contentions have been made in more or less the same way by several archivists in Canada for too long. They ought to be sharply challenged because they lead archivists almost entirely in the wrong direction in their scholarship. To maintain some semblance of order, I have consigned examinations of ideas other than Brothman's to the notes, each of them addressing matters of principle or matters relevant to the counter-argument.

The first step in the deconstructive technique is to try to understand Brothman's intention. On the face of it, we have his statement that "the intention of the 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" (p. 78). Language or vocabulary different from what, he does not tell us; from the language of archival science, I shall argue.

What, then, are the terms of his promotion or incitement, and how does he play with the terms of archival practice? He gives us more insight into his intention when he says, "The approach adopted aims to encourage broader reflection about *the cultural meanings of archival practice* [emphasis added] and the context within which these [meanings] take shape, as well as contemplation of the particular social role that archives play in society" (p. 79). He also wishes to redress a lack of attention to archival institutions in the literature of intellectual and cultural history by focusing "socio-historical and cultural understanding on archival practice itself" (p. 80). By contrast, my goal is to shed a little understanding on the general nature of archives in order to expose certain, apparently widespread misconceptions.

We can take it from Brothman's statements that, by adopting the stance of an intellectual and cultural historian, he intends to give us a fresh perspective on ideas about archives (his principles and theories), about archival practice (which he sandwiches between principles and theories, as if we go from principles to practice to theories), and about archival institutions. It is not clear whether he takes it that theory animates practice, as his title and the phrase "the terms of archival practice" suggest, for he concentrates on methodology, rarely goes into theory in any depth, and, when he does, exhibits a poor grasp of it.

Thus, the first step in understanding Brothman's complicated discourse requires clarifying relationships among archival theory, methodology and practice. If we take theory to be the analysis of ideas, then archival theory is the analysis of ideas about what archives are, their essential characteristics and common properties. Theory is necessarily abstract, generalizing, and logical in its development. Its product is understanding of the nature of things. Archival methodology acts as a bridge between theory and practice. It consists of ideas *based on theory* about how to treat archival material, and rules of procedure for their treatment. So ideas about what the material is are theoretical; ideas about how to treat the material are methodological. The results of the application of methodology in the treatment of archival material constitute practice. It is of course possible to test ideas of either a theoretical or a methodological cast by empirical study, whether those ideas are enunciated or not, but that does not mean — as is often supposed — that observing the results of practice is sufficient to establish whether either sort of idea fits the nature of the thing being explained. To do so necessarily reckons with theory and method independently of practice.

Theory, methodology and practice together constitute archival science, the pure side being theory, the applied side comprising methodology and practice. The whole is cut of one cloth, the object being to treat archives in consonance with their nature. By contrast, the concept of archival studies encompasses all studies which increase knowledge of archives and their treatment from any perspective which is of use to the archivist. Such studies go beyond the domain of archival science. For example, the theory and method of the study of law, management science or library and information science may be applied to aspects of archival science. The same is true of the history of archives and the history of archival institutions. Many such studies may need to be informed by an understanding of the nature of archives, but, even when they do, their perspective and methods distinguish them from archival science proper. They are therefore auxiliary to archival science, to be drawn into it as need be. Finally, archival scholarship comprises the results of all the studies generating knowledge about archives. For example, even certain instruments of archival practice, such as the description of archives in finding aids, generate and communicate scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

Bearing these relations in mind, we can examine Brothman's particular point of view. He adopts the historian's perspective in his aim to expose "the cultural meanings of archival practice." He hopes that his essay will "induce archivists either to strengthen the basis upon which current practice rests or to alter their theories" (p. 79). The implication is that something may be awry with one or the other. If that is true, then there are two logical possibilities. Either practice is faulty, misaligned with theory, in which case there may be something wrong with methodology, the bridge between the two; or the theory (ideas about the nature of archives) may be wrong, not in consonance with the nature of things. By adopting the attitude of the historian of ideas about archives,

Brothman wishes to have his reflections lead us to change either theory or methodology, and, consequently, practice. To repeat, it is impossible, even nonsensical, to quantify practice in the absence of some firm understanding of the ideas on which it is based and expect to make any rational judgements about how to change it. Words are the vehicle for expressing ideas, so, as Brothman correctly perceives, close attention to language is a requirement of any exposition of theory and method, i.e., the terms of practice. What, then, is his argument, and in particular how does he use words carrying meaning in archival science? Disclaimers such as that he has no "new kit of tools" (p. 78) for us (as if that were remotely the question) do not excuse him from understanding the meanings with which he intends to play in order to make us see things in a new light.

Brothman starts with some perceptive and playful remarks about order as the elimination of dirt and rubbish so as to make us see that acquisition for appraisal and selection anoints some records and dismisses others, the whole process being socially determined. He then launches on a reflection of the meaning of the act and results of appraisal. He says that "archives [i.e., archival institutions] also create value" (p. 81). Although he begins by speaking of archival institutions in order to apply the insights of intellectual and cultural history to understand, as it were, institutional behaviour, he necessarily shifts to consideration of practice to see what animates it, and so must enter into the terms of archival theory and method. He continually moves back and forth from considerations of archival documents to reflection on the meaning of the total results of how archival institutions treat them, to suit the needs of his musings about cultural meaning such that only the most alert and careful reader can penetrate his ideas. This shifting perspective can be seen in its effect more clearly by comparing it with that of an historian of science like Thomas Kuhn. It is as if Kuhn were to employ his study of how the scientific world revolves in order to promote or incite changes in the theory and methodology of physics. It is perhaps an occupational hazard of historians to give in to the temptation to draw lessons from their histories, to enter some present-day controversy or another. Brothman's lessons, his normative statements, are so carefully disguised that it takes some excavation to reveal them as the buttresses of his argumentative edifice.<sup>3</sup>

Brothman enters the fray by direct assertion about archival theory and method in the following statements, which are crucial to his whole argument:

As they make determinations about archival value or *historical value*, archivists in effect create, initiate or perpetuate an axiological<sup>4</sup> commitment which is manifested in the permanent order that emerges. Obviously, archivists are interested in determining what has "permanent" value, but the permanence of that value is absolute; whatever criteria are used [to create value], *it is established during the archival process, not before or after*.... Thus, we arrive at a conclusion most archivists would endorse: the order that archives create out of all the *information they process* is an order that embodies society's values [emphases added] (p. 81).

He then goes on to argue that the cardinal archival "principles of original order and provenance"<sup>5</sup> are employed to identify groupings of records in a manner which assumes that those principles can be applied to capture an objective part of the past: "Archival science exhibits a ... desire to extract some kind of objective unadulterated record of the past" (p. 83). He wonders whether the structures perceived in this process of identification are "those that best capture the reality of the structural/organizational history"

of the creator; whether the precepts of archival science provide “the best way of regarding historical information” (p. 84). He thinks not. There is no natural<sup>6</sup> place in the order of things in which to put groupings of archives. Any number of “versions of the information universe” is possible. The processes of arrangement and description “cater to institutional requirements for a serviceable, idealized archival intellectual order rather than original order,” which Brothman distinguishes from the order archivists bring to the material in their institutions (p. 85). All the institutional operations to achieve administrative and intellectual control tend to “diminish the vitality [and what are the qualities of this vitality, this living thing: this organism, is it?] that once permeated the record [and how is it vitiated?].” From all this, Brothman infers that “archival practice, in other words, remains an art” (p. 85).<sup>7</sup>

What does the last statement mean? Does it mean that archival institutions such as the National Archives of Canada, where Brothman is employed, are dedicated to some artistic endeavour? That, once established, such institutions transform the practical documentary manifestations of the conduct of public and private affairs into artistic objects, which are managed according to the aesthetic principles of artistic theory and method? Perhaps. After all, Brothman does develop a sense of archival value as something artfully wrought by the artistic archivist-creator-of-value. Alternatively, the assertion may be simply that the theory, method and practice of archives are not based on general principles and rules which can apply to the analysis and treatment of all archives regardless of time and place. Or it may be another of those periodic assertions, in a vein similar to those made by John Roberts, that archivists may have to think in order to do their job, but that their pretensions to theory and method are unfounded.<sup>8</sup> Because that which really counts is the value the objects have to persons who use them for scholarly research, archival theory preoccupies itself with the ways in which the archival document is reformed in the image of its “processors” and their value-laden exercise called archival practice.

The second section of the article argues that because archivists in their work of appraisal, arrangement and description form and present the archival sources of history in necessarily interpretive ways, through the imposition of values or the making of value judgements, “the archivist-historian relationship is a thigmotropic one. Archivists do historical work of sorts and historians do archival work of sorts” (p. 86). The third section supports “arguments in favour of cultural endeavour as a primary rather than merely residual or ancillary role for archivists” (p. 90). What does this mean? Brothman replies that “the archivist’s mission is to study and understand the history of the record” (p. 91). He also sternly warns archivists that “to abstain from cultural awareness [how can one do that?] and [self-, literary, socio-historical?] criticism [of what: theory, method, and practice, or the subjective judgements constituting the art of it all?] is tantamount to professional irresponsibility [if one accepts his terms of argument, not doing what he advocates is forbidden]. It amounts to a shirking of the unique and positive task which each generation of archivists has [like each generation of historians writes history anew, each generation of archivists rewrites archival theory, is that it?] or should [this word indicating an undisguised normative statement] have, of continually replenishing its intellectual resources [i.e., come up with new animating ideas to orient everything in a different direction?] and reaffirming [that which he has affirmed first in order for us then to reaffirm its cultural station]” (p. 90). One begins to see that this is not argument, but rather monumental question-begging which verges on stern sermonizing.

Readers of this journal have been presented by Brothman with this — nothing short of breath-taking — proposition: that the archivist is a historian of archives who, by reflection on the cultural meaning of archival practice, can “sharpen and strengthen its critical purpose and position” (p. 90) in order to “foster research” (*passim*). The reason archivists do things is to foster research, and therefore everything they do ought to be regarded critically in that light and from that perspective. Brothman’s contention is a far more subtle statement of the assertions of George Bolotenko which caused so much agitation in these pages several years ago.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the exchange at that time did not nail the particular jelly of those assertions effectively to the wall.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, however, the archival ideas at issue are not jelly-like; they can be nailed down sufficiently for the purposes of the archivist, and not uncritically, that is, not without skilful analysis and judgement of the merits of those ideas for the archivist’s purpose. Indeed another, quite different view of the matter is happily available to readers who have trouble breathing the air of these rarefied admonitions. It may be recommended to them in the following terms.

In the theoretical terms of archival science, archives are not historical sources — neither from the point of view of the purpose they were created to serve, nor from the point of view of the essential characteristics with which purpose endows them (their nature is indeed socially determined, but by the purpose for which they were generated and in which context they are understood by archival science), nor from any other point of view one can imagine so long as one’s focus is the nature of the thing at its origin. Because Brothman’s focus is not on that nature, but rather on the relationship between the historian and his sources, and ultimately — although he does not declare his intention in this regard — on certain problems of arriving at knowledge of the past, what he says is relevant only obliquely to considerations which are important for building the knowledge of the archivist. It is worth examining in some detail why.

At the outset of his argument, Brothman sets a trap for his readers. He deftly presents them with an unexamined assumption. Archivists determine historical value, he asserts; do they? If we define historical value as the capacity of archival documents to serve the needs of historical research, then he has said that archivists determine the value of archival documents for the purposes, or to serve the needs, of historical research. That will come as a surprise to historical researchers. Surely, only they can determine the value of documents for their purposes. Indeed, Brothman’s exposition shows that historians and other scholars who use and interpret archival documents are sensitive to the need to approach them in a critical spirit, bearing their original purposes in mind. The question is whether their purpose and critical spirit is in any way part of the archivist’s purpose and spirit.

Brothman proposes that the two are essentially the same; he presents us with his particular example of a thaumatrope, a card, as he would have it, with the image of the historian on one side and the archivist on the other — which, when twirled rapidly, makes the two images appear combined. A thaumatrope is a device used to illustrate the permanence of visual impressions; an apt trope indeed for Brothman to use, for it is a sleight-of-hand impression on which he plays. Because historians use archives for scholarly investigation, the purpose of archivists is to determine historical value; they establish it during the process of taking documents into archival custody and organizing them in the repository. The archivist substitutes for historians (all scholarly users, let us generously grant Brothman) in order to determine their sources (to “create value” for them).

In other words, the nature of the thing changes as it crosses the threshold of the archival institution. It now has a new nature and a new place, and serves a new purpose different from that for which it was created. The archivist becomes an agent for carrying out the new purpose, and so must make a close study of its critical dimensions and adjust archival theory and method accordingly, as part of the artful historiographical exercise. All his disclaimers aside, that is what Brothman's argument amounts to.

It is possible to follow another path, however, one more in consonance with the nature of archives. It leads to a quite different conclusion, namely, that the discipline of the archivist is sharply distinct from the historian's, as well as that of any other scholar-user of archival documents. The purpose of the archivist, and therefore of the social role of archival institutions, is to preserve the integrity of archival documents as faithful and trustworthy evidence of the actions from which they originated. It is precisely the value of the documents as established before they come to the archives which the archivist is entrusted to protect. It is a general value which all the documents possess. It pertains to no single purpose for which they may be used but equally to all purposes. The fact that creators or custodians determine to keep some and eliminate others only means that archivists must be sensitive to the needs which archival documents serve, and impartial — not partial to any one of them — in their work.

That would appear, however, to be entirely too self-effacing a purpose for Brothman. His historian's critical suspicion of the relations among fact and act and document, his sense of the epistemological difficulty of coming to any determination of past fact and act and event, and his captivation by the niceties of textual criticism get in the way of his accepting any such discipline. The point is that archivists cannot, by an act of value judgement, assess or determine the significance of the facts and acts which are bound up in the nature of the archival documents which they treat and which they assume the responsibility to preserve on behalf of society. The discipline is entirely wholly intertwined with a concern to understand how archival documents came into being and to preserve the integrity of those documents which it is determined will continue to be needed. Archivists go about their primary<sup>11</sup> task of protecting the integrity of archives in order that the facts and acts of the matter can continually be referred to in a trustworthy manner for any and all purposes. The archivist is not a processor of information, as Brothman suggests, but a keeper and protector of the integrity of evidence and a mediator of the many interests vested in the positive act of its continuing preservation. What is perhaps most disturbing is that Brothman finds this mission, as opposed to the mission of the archivist as historian of cultural meaning, to be intellectually unworthy of being pursued because of its simplistic notion of objectivity, its uncritical naivety. If that were true, however, then archivists' claim to have any intellectual viability on their own account would be unfounded.

Brothman takes issue with archival science for trying to create for archives the status of objective representations of the past, in relation to which the archivist adopts a neutral attitude by being, in Jenkinson's words, "all things to all Archives, his interests identified with theirs, his period and point of view theirs" (n. 17, p. 94, and n. 54, p. 99). One has to look elsewhere for Jenkinson's answer to Brothman's critique of archival science. It comes in the particular — far more subtle than Brothman seems to think — construction which Jenkinson puts on the word "truth." It is a very precise and guarded usage, which makes Jenkinson out to be anything but the foil Brothman takes him to be, of the accusation that archivists "resist susceptibility to the vicissitudes of the

contemporary interpretive context” (n. 54, p. 99) — in other words, deny that they have any interpretive problem at all. I submit that they do not deny but merely circumscribe it. There is no interpretive problem in the archivist’s relation to the qualities of archival documents or to the information which they bear, but there is in the archivist’s relation to the task of making them substantively known. That is, to the extent that the archivist works to make archives known, there is no escaping the conundrums of interpretation; that is not all that must be grasped, however, in order to see why Brothman grandly overstates his case.

In his theoretical exploration of the definition of archives, and discussion of the quality of impartiality, Jenkinson makes it clear that, “with one partial exception,” the research purposes to which archives are put

will not be the purposes which were contemplated by the people by whom the Archives were drawn up and preserved. The single partly exceptional case is the one where they are examined for the light they throw upon the history of one branch or another of public or private Administration — the branch to which they themselves belong. Provided then that the student understands their administrative significance they cannot tell him anything but the truth.

A note on the text quoted makes it clear that “the proviso, of course, is sometimes a large one.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, whether large or small, the proviso is always necessary and vital. However, Jenkinson’s “significance” of the document is not the same as significance for the interpreter of it, for one interpreter’s significance is another’s inconsequence when it is a matter of assessing the value of the information in the document for the purpose at hand. Jenkinson instead refers to precise understanding of the processes governing the way the office conducts its business and creates its records. That understanding is needed in order to prepare anyone to evaluate the document as evidence of the action or transaction from which it originated — to see its truth, if you like. Jenkinson’s footnoted example of the receipt rolls of the Exchequer makes it clear that to know what a document states, even in these strict terms, means knowing how the office generating the document created and organized its records. Possessing that knowledge, one cannot go wrong as to the foundation for one’s interpretation of the evidence, which is the only sense in which the archivist would wish to speak of truth when guiding researchers to the documents. The dynamic to be uncovered and explained in this particular construction of truth is the connection of the documents to the facts of the administrative context of the acts or actions which brought them into being — and strictly no more.

General archival theory sets out the concepts which guide analysis and explanation of the way organizations and persons generate and organize their memory in order to conduct business. The explanation can never be completely objective, for the archivist cannot escape the consequences of being the explicator and having to exercise judgment, such as how to select and present the facts of the matter. The results appear in descriptions of archives or in special archival studies of how administrative documentation came into being, the structures it has assumed and the interrelations of those structures. There are parallels in the analysis of the activities engaged in by private persons as they generate archives.<sup>13</sup> The whole exercise steers quite clear of interpreting the information in the documents or its value for any purpose other than the archival one at hand. All efforts of archival science to come to grips with interpretation arise in relation to the need to explain how a particular archives came into being and the structures it presents,

so that it can be seen in its true light — that is, in the best way to make it understandable in those terms to every user. How that is to be done is the realm of the archivist's theory and methodology — to which, what Brothman has to say, if it is all regarded with a hard critical eye, may bring profit. Any interpretive exercise is fraught with traps for the scholar, especially when the day-to-day purpose of the scholarship is to produce economical statements of complex matters in the description of archives in finding aids and databases. It profits not, however, to have the difficulties discussed in lofty isolation from chapter and verse of the precise questions at issue *de rigueur*. Brothman's injunction to archivists to accept his reflections on their merit as penetrating reflections, which they often are if taken in isolation, does not prevent us from identifying his failings or asking him how his ideas can be turned to the benefit of the work, to something substantive in the archivist's lexicon of the theory, method and practice of archival science.

The result of the scientific study of any particular archives reveals its historical origins and make-up as it has been handed down to the archivist, but in strict terms which preclude evaluating the documents as to their significance for any particular purpose or for their cultural meaning. Historical investigation of how a particular archives, or a part of it, came into being is not a matter of answering grand questions as to the effects of change in communication on the course of history, or any other effects of that character. Precise study of the evolution of an organization's or person's archives may of course touch on changes in society which affect creation and preservation of documents over time, not in order to assess the grand meaning of the process in fruitless terms — fruitless given the objective at hand — but rather in order to explain the character and make-up of the particular archives in question in terms which preserve it as the foundation for interpretation of the actions from which it arose. That is the archivist's contribution to human understanding. Within that compass, the archivist's understanding may be extended as far and as deep as it can be.

Moreover, what is available from the archival document is strictly limited. Much of what Brothman says strains against the limits of archives. It is just these limitations which give archival science its unique character. As scholars search to explain grander and grander structures (a very good thing), the ethic to which Brothman subscribes would exhort archivists to climb on board dragging their limited archives along in order to make them into something new, grander, less limited, things to be viewed anew by the archivist with profit in light of every passing intellectual trend. Happily, such trends do not determine the nature of archives, so there is not much to worry about in Brothman's exhortations. The persons who make and use archives on a daily basis, and need them to carry on with their lives, constitute a force to defeat such misguided propositions. All the talk about document "glut" and silly historians haring after the virgin find, the hitherto unknown — to scholarship — document, is irrelevant, and rather an insult to historians, none of whom Brothman cites as actually holding the views which he ascribes to them (pp. 87-88). No part of archival doctrine disdains advances in scholarly knowledge. On the contrary, the best way to ensure that advance is to defend the integrity of archives from unwarranted assault, even, perhaps especially, from misconception generated within the archival profession.

Those who come to archives with purposes detached from those which generated them, who do not seek evidence but rather information, who want to be informed of something which interests them — such as to pick a topic out of the air — discursive styles, may not care a whit about Jenkinson's carefully qualified truth, because the purpose



in mind makes it an irrelevant consideration. In fact, so far as I can tell, much of the scholarly debate about textual criticism seems to be between those, like many whom Brothman cites, who do not care at all about the archivist's terms of reference, who are prepared to construct (or rather deconstruct) a picture of the document shorn of its context — certainly in the sense in which the archivist understands that word — and those who reserve some measure of meaning to revealing and understanding the immediate context.

So it is that archivists practise an exact contextual science, the opposite being for them utter nonsense. What is more, because the kinds of queries which researchers bring to archives, and the purposes behind these queries, are both innumerable and unpredictable, as Jenkinson wisely saw, it is impossible for archivists to gauge in any reliable and generalized way the value of the information in archives, beyond recognizing the capacity of archival documents to provide information about the persons, places and subjects of which they speak. All informational uses are, in Margaret Cross Norton's insightful phrase, "so much velvet," the unintended outcome of preservation following probative<sup>14</sup> rhythms.<sup>15</sup> Organizations and persons keep the evidence they need in order to carry on their affairs, and the rest — usually a great deal — is surfeit. It is disturbing to hear archivists like Brothman speak as if it were their task to intervene in this process in order to turn it to some other account, but the idea — it must be admitted — is now thoroughly ingrained in a great many minds by the distortions brought about by the concept of the "historical repository" dedicated to the goal of self-consciously documenting society.<sup>16</sup> Brothman sets out a very good picture of the contradictions of the self-consciously constructed "historical repository," but it is ironic indeed that the exercise does not lead him to see that the status quo is falsely based. Instead, he advises us to draw a false analogy between the work of the archivist and the discoveries of the textual critic of deconstructionist and relativistic leanings. Thankfully, archives do not fit the mould he casts for them, and archival institutions do not have the role he assigns to them; he merely sees what the consequences would be if we were to preserve archives having their scholarly interpretation uppermost in our minds.

What Brothman does not see is that preservation of archives produces the same result, in and by any organization, in any kind of repository, as long as their integrity is not impaired. That is the catholicity of archival science. It can be applied anywhere, at any time and in any setting with the same trustworthy results — though not, of course, with ease or in splendid isolation from political, economic and social considerations, which is no more than to say that between theory and practice much intervenes to give character to every society's preservation of archives. If Brothman were simply wishing to illustrate that archivists need to be aware of all the factors which intervene — many of them, alas, to impair the integrity of archives — then we might grant him greater credence. That is not the case. Rather he uses his essay to argue in favour of a wrong-headed view of the nature of archives, and therefore of an equally wrong-headed view of the role of archivists and archival institutions.

So, after some necessary digression, let us return to the concept of impartiality. We have got so far as to be able to define impartiality for Jenkinson in terms faithful to his understanding of the concept. That is what one does in order to establish the basis of the science. One first analyses ideas — in this case, using Jenkinson's as a starting-point — about archives in order to make them clear. Then one turns those ideas into the best expression of the concept that can be formed. If one does so, then one can say

that impartiality is the quality of archives deriving from the fact or circumstance of their creation as means of carrying out activities, not as ends in themselves, and therefore inherently being capable of revealing the truth about those activities. Archival documents are unselfconscious, so to speak, about how posterity will use them. That seems true enough, no matter how greatly the creators of them may have been conscious of themselves as marching through history. Historical consciousness, to the extent that it affects the archival record, is but part of its context. How and why social memory is complex, active in the present and actively aware of the future in any given circumstance will be up to future scholars to determine. This inherent capability of impartiality does not mean that archival documents are impartial in the ordinary sense of the word, that they tell a transparent truth obvious to everyone and admit to no bias, for ordinary mortals create them. The archival concept of impartiality does not negate the necessity of interpretation on the part of anyone seeking the truth from the document. It is one expression, the one which archivists use, to characterize the faith that knowledge of past actions, whether those of yesterday or long ago, is possible. Civil society depends on that faith in innumerable ways, and therefore readily applies it to archival documents, so long as they can be guaranteed trustworthy (that is, retain their inherent qualities unimpaired). Impartiality is one of the inherent archival qualities, and it is tied to one of the greatest potentialities of archives. Turning that potentiality to good account is not the business of the archivist; of course, assisting others to do so is. That potentiality is archival value, if anything is. It does not equate with value for the purpose of writing history, however, as Brothman contends. (See also the discussion of probative value below and in note 14.)

At this point, Brothman's exchange with Duranti intrudes. Duranti's articles on diplomatics are offered up as counterpoint to a view of provenance as authorship which he presses on us as part of his argument — one which I intentionally did not go into in the above recapitulation.<sup>17</sup> In his article, Brothman accuses Duranti of overestimating "the power of individual intentionality and being as opposed to social and discursive determination" (p. 96, n. 30). Duranti defends the viewpoint of diplomatics by pointing out that the whole of the theory assumes precisely that archival documents are determined by the social system in which they are created. All the concepts of general diplomatics aim to explain how that is so, to give us terms of analysis for understanding the genesis and structure of any archival document in any social system. It is not a matter of stressing one aspect of the document over another in some interpretive way. The diplomatic notion of will is not individual intentionality, as Brothman suggests, but rather is tied to the purpose which brought the document into being, and therefore also to the effects which the document had on the practical affairs of which it formed a part, in the context of that purpose. The aim of general diplomatics as expounded by Duranti — she is far too modest when she says that she is merely a conveyor of long-standing ideas, for she gives them fresh expression and applies them to modern conditions, which is just what needs to be done and has not been done by anyone else — is not to assess the meaning of those effects but to elucidate their general character.<sup>18</sup> The theory says nothing about whether or to what degree any particular intention was realized, or what in the larger sense may have motivated the action giving rise to the document, or what its effects were beyond its capacity to achieve the ends for which it was created.

It is no part of the aim of diplomatic theory to investigate human intentionality and the vagaries of authorship in the terms in which Brothman would have it address them.

What the intention of any author of any archival document may have been in constructing the text in the way he or she did would be the historian's or literary scholar's conundrum to solve — perhaps by employing, in part, the concepts of diplomatics. Diplomatics is, after all, an auxiliary science of history when it is used by the student of history to determine the value of documents as historical source, but the archivist uses it for quite a different purpose. Similarly, how any particular text fits into discursive styles and so on — Brothman's discursive determination, I suppose — would be the task of scholars armed with their own agenda, theories and methods in mind. We would no more expect them to assume the stance of archival science than they would expect us to adopt theirs; although we might well find junctures for our thus separate discourses, Brothman does not elucidate any of great consequence for archivists.

By his very standpoint, and by his effort to import concepts from other disciplines into archival science without understanding some of its fundamental principles, Brothman fails to make a convincing argument. Readers should not fear that they need to stay awake nights in order to puzzle out for themselves “the best way to regard historical information” (p. 84). That task, however important it may be to other purposes or interesting for the historian or librarian to ponder, is not directly or instrumentally part of the purpose and mission of archivists, and therefore is not of their science. One also need not worry over all the alarms which Brothman sounds about appraisal, arrangement and description. Because his perspective, the very intention of his argument, is so skewed to begin with, none even of his insightful statements can lead clearly to any sensible reassessment of theory and practice. That is a much more arduous task than Brothman seems to think it is. It is the task of archival studies and archival scholarship — one only made more difficult by the kind of mischievousness which Brothman and his sympathizers would promote and incite in the archival profession and among students of archival science — to understand the nature of archives specially determined at their origin, and to protect the qualities with which they are endowed universally by nature.

Brothman's Letter to the Editor in the Summer 1992 issue of *Archivaria* speaks almost entirely from the perspective of the historian's use of diplomatics. The historian uses diplomatics as a tool of interpretation, but the archivist uses it for its value for understanding the universal characteristics of the archival document. Indeed, archival science is in part built upon the theory which Duranti expounds. Long ago, the conceptions of diplomatics, often thought of as an auxiliary science of history, made their way into archival science, making either diplomatics or history an auxiliary of archival science. In this respect, Brothman's quarrel with the uncritical tenor of the precepts of diplomatics is also a quarrel with the basis of archival science, with its view of the nature of archival documents, with the universalizing tendency of its theory, and with the rigour of its forensic discipline.

The additional error occurs when Brothman tries to puncture what he supposes to be “the traditional primacy in diplomatics of official, legally constituted documents” (Letter, p. 6). The diplomatic concept of juridical system merely recognizes that the practical affairs of humanity in every realm are subject to law. Law goes far beyond what the statutes say, to permeate every aspect of life. Law, then, has a direct and vital bearing on the nature of archival documents. Therefore, archival science must confront immediately how law both directly and indirectly cultivates archival characteristics of the document. Diplomatics aims to identify the relevant legal expression of the social

circumstances bringing any document into being and therefore explaining its meaning, if the meaning sought is strictly limited to that which the document had in the context of the purpose which generated it and the effects it was intended to have.

Moreover, the law is not at issue in the way that Brothman suggests. The diplomatic and archival aim in understanding the law is not to verify the authenticity of documents, even less to imply anything about their truth. In archival science, authenticity is the quality of archival documents to bear reliable testimony to the actions, procedures and processes which brought them into being. It is impossible, then, for archivists to verify a quality which exists in the nature of all archival documents. The task to which archival science applies itself, therefore, is to secure the conditions under which that quality can be depended upon. That is all which the judge or historian who would authenticate a document, in order to establish that it is what it purports to be for the legal or historical purpose at hand, wants or needs from archival science. An archivist who appreciates that truism would not accuse diplomatics or its expositors of being uncritical. (S)he might indeed praise it and them for analytical clarity.

The insult in any case is bound up with the error. In his letter, Brothman does not demonstrate *how* the diplomatic concept of authorship is flawed. Instead he launches on a vaguer account of his own understanding of authorship. It is not clear who the diplomatists to whom he alludes along the way are, for he cites none of them. From what he does say, it seems clear that they were not writing treatises on general diplomatics but rather applying, and indeed going beyond, its prescriptions to interpret the historical or other significance of archival documents. Brothman's purpose in all this is to engage in another language game, once again to assert that the notion of authorship in diplomatics is out of line with modern textual criticism, yet everything he says is beside the point. He cannot properly engage with archival science or diplomatics because, given his viewpoint, he seems bound to misunderstand the fundamental concepts of either. He certainly misrepresents them.

Then, near the end of the letter, sensing that his response hardly comes to grips with diplomatics, Brothman excuses himself on the grounds that his comments "derive from [Duranti's] article's lapses in conceptual clarity or consistency, wavering as it sometimes does, implicitly at least, among normative affirmation, social theory, historical analysis and scientific formulation" (p.7). Actually, so convoluted is the syntax of Brothman's sentence that I had to read it several times in order to discover whether those severe judgements referred to Duranti's multipart series of articles or were an apology for his own, so well do they seem to fit his — except for the part about scientific formulation — and so ill hers. As it stands, his statement is unfounded and rude. He should either provide Duranti with chapter and verse of her "uncritical invocations of authorities and evidence" (p. 7) and with the sources for his statements about diplomatics so that she can try to defend herself against the imputation that she misrepresents it, or he should apologize to her. The one action is required of the scholar, the other of the gentleman. Finally, I find it passing strange that the award of the 1991 Lamb prize to Brothman was referred to just below the end of his letter, as if to lend the wretched thing the authority and dignity it so evidently lacks.

I hope that I have now made clear why it is so important to challenge the idea that archival knowledge is founded on historical knowledge. Archivists do not act as historians. Archivists do act as students of the originary nature of archives in order to find ways

to protect the evidence of human action. Archivists properly leave questions of the meaning of the intelligence or information communicated by the archival document to posterity to investigate. Meanwhile, they serve the purposes of the here and now in any way they can once the primary task is accomplished. Archivists ensure the legitimate<sup>19</sup> preservation of evidence first, and then and only then do they serve demands for the intelligence associated with that evidence. Harsh as the archival discipline is for people who have grown accustomed to thinking of themselves as partners in the historiographical enterprise, it is the philosophical and scientific ethic of archivists, the logic by which they live, even if — as seems to be the case all too often — they have not yet had the opportunity to learn it.

### Notes

- 1 The article is in *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78-100, and the letters are "Brothman on Authorship: The Diplomatic Perspective," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 4-5 and "Brothman on Authorship (The Author Responds)," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 4-7. Because of the frequency of citations to Brothman's article, I have simply placed the page number at the end of each quotation.
- 2 I am indebted to Trevor Livelton's careful unravelling of these relationships in his "Public Records: A Study of Archival Theory" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1991), pp. 10-13. It is also noteworthy, in view of the later discussion of the relationship between archival science and diplomatics, that he defines "discipline" as "a form of study with a distinct methodology used to gain knowledge" (p. 14). The argument, then, is that archival studies is a discipline equal in dignity to others. Archival studies as a discipline comprises archival science at its centre and auxiliary studies applying the perspective or methods of other disciplines towards building knowledge about archives. In this configuration, historical studies can only be auxiliary to archival science, and as this essay proceeds we shall see why. So, by definition, archival studies are interdisciplinary. For a somewhat less methodical discussion of the make-up of archival studies in a practical situation, see my "Nurturing Archival Education in the University," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1987), pp. 246-52. Only when more full-bodied opportunities for the development of archival studies exist in almost every country in the world shall we be able to say that the discipline flourishes. Arguments for the historical basis of archival study, or for integrating it into a larger documentary science of one kind or another, deny it the autonomy which it requires in order to grow and develop as other disciplines have done.
- 3 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. enl. (Chicago, 1970), with "Post-script 1969" replying to critics of the first edition published in 1962. Kuhn was criticized for making normative statements about science, for saying how scientists should operate. He defends himself in terms which are instructive in the context of the issues at hand.

Every disciplined body of knowledge has a history. The history of archival science goes back several centuries, as demonstrated in Luciana Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," *Records Management Quarterly* 23 (July 1989), pp. 3-11, and (October 1989), pp. 3-11. Even the precepts of the more modern development of archival science began with the formulation of administrative rules for the treatment of archives in Europe in the late eighteenth century. Thorough-going investigation of the evolution of archival ideas greatly benefits archival science, and is probably best thought of as part of it when analysing those ideas in a theoretical way. These days the philosophy and history of science are closely intertwined with its progress, whatever one takes that to mean. One such study in the archival realm is Rick Klumpenhower's historical inquiry, "Value Concepts in Archival Science" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), which examines ideas about appraisal in the English-speaking world and several countries in Western Europe since the nineteenth century. He concludes from his analysis that archivists' search for value standards has thus far failed to illuminate appraisal. Klumpenhower's study may fruitfully be compared with a pure theoretical treatment of the same subject in Jane Turner's "A Study of the Theory of Appraisal for Selection" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1992). She concludes that the probative value of archives, not

informational value, is central to archival appraisal. I develop an exposition of probative value as I go along, and in particular in note 14, *infra*.

In a way, Peter Russell nips at the edges of the same conclusions in his "The Manx Peril: Archival Theory in Light of Recent American Historiography," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 124-37, but can never quite bring himself to grasp them. He begins by making the remarkable claim that "archivists want a consensus across the research communities they seek to serve on what sort of records will be most useful, not merely now but in the future." He then uses an account of the relativist/objectivist debate in American historiographical circles as a stepping-stone to consideration of appraisal and its value standards or concepts. Like the historians whom he examines, most of the archivists he surveys renounce certainty in favour of faith that a better process can be worked out — an attitude which Klumpenhouwer notes is particularly strong in the American literature. Russell concludes that "we cannot search for and keep what everyone wants" (quite true), and therefore that appraisal may be "entirely and perhaps exclusively subjective" (how one proposition follows from the other is not clear); he then asks, "Why should public money be spent to preserve a set of documents that have clear significance only to those few who are employed to choose them?" (p. 135). There is a ready answer to all his querulousness: archives are not preserved primarily for the information they record, but for their value as evidence of actions and transactions. Appraisal solely of informational value for historical research purposes will of course be as subjective in the hands of the archivist as selection of evidence is in the hands of the historian. Both escape the dilemma of subjectivity, if at all, by appeals to the understanding of evidence and to the extent that their methods of weighing it are based on rational principles.

As to the expenditure of public money, that has to be aimed to a public good, or some interest of the public. Archives are a public good; they are objects which are a permanent and reusable source of communal memory of past actions. Archives are vehicles also of accountability, which it is in the public interest, not simply the historian's or — heaven forbid — the archivist's to preserve. That is why public money is spent to preserve archives. Actually, the question is how best to determine which needs for which evidence of which actions endure ought to continue to endure, and so ought to absorb some of society's attention in order to be made enduring. The theoretical aspect of appraisal is about working out such fundamental ideas, turning them to methodological account, and striving to make of the process and its results the best that can be. To end, as Russell does, wondering whether archives exist is at best lacking faith in the foundations of historical and archival knowledge, and rather self-defeating.

Another point in this regard is that the theory of appraisal is best seen as separate from the theory of the nature of archives, but dependent for its starting-point on that general, overarching theory. For some exploration of the relationship between the general theory and appraisal theory, see my "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 71-89.

One begins to see that historical study of theoretical and methodological ideas cannot even begin until those ideas are understood. Archival science is therefore prior to, and in large measure determinative of, the quality of any history of archival ideas. That is not to say that only archivists can examine the history of their science. After all, Kuhn shows that scientists are not very good historians of their own science, and even present it in a manner not in accordance with what they actually do. However, Kuhn restricts his normative statements (what scientists ought to do) to reflection on what they actually do, its variance from what they say they do, and to identification and implicit approval of whatever factors cause a discipline to develop. Kuhn's are a quite different sort of normative statement from the kind that Brothman employs. Kuhn examines how the intellectual and practical aspects of scientific endeavour evolve; Brothman merely offers his opinion of how he thinks archival scholarly endeavour should proceed. A discipline is not built by forever trading opinions of what it ought to be or might be, or by dwelling on insoluble problems in ways that do not advance it. Normative statements have their place, but a steady diet of them leads to scholarly dyspepsia, to a surfeit of prescription over investigation.

- 4 This term derives from axiology, which is the branch of philosophy dealing with values. By using it to modify commitment, Brothman seems to wish to convey the sense that the actions committed during appraisal are value-laden, and therefore to be explored axiologically. Any such study necessarily begins with the question of whether value is inherent in archival documents. No philosophical exploration of the value of archives can proceed to discover their value for either primary or secondary

purposes until it has extracted a sense of their generalized, universal value. Brothman's error is the philosophical one of not separating the general and inherent value of archival documents from the everyday values which researchers ascribe to them in the course of using them. This error is so widespread, even among archivists, that most theoretical inquiries start on the wrong foot and then immediately stumble and fall down.

For instance, that is the reason why Schellenberg's definition of archives is theoretically flawed. He builds into his definition the element of value and use of archives for research purposes, but he arrives at this conclusion on pragmatic grounds. "It is quite obvious," he says, "that modern archives are kept for the use of others than those that created them, and that conscious decisions must be made as to their value for such use ... obviously for research use." Schellenberg distinguishes archives sharply from records, the properties of which he is disinclined to explore as Jenkinson did. That is why Jenkinson is a theorist and Schellenberg a methodologist. Whereas Jenkinson generalizes his discussion of the nature and value of archives, Schellenberg steadfastly maintains that the only important question is to devise methods of treatment which work for the particular records which one is aiming to turn into archives in order to be used for research purposes — a view very close to Brothman's. Carrying on with his axiomatic argument, Schellenberg puts it this way:

It is obvious, therefore, that there is no final or ultimate definition of the term "archives" that must be accepted without change and in preference to all others. The definition may be modified in each country to fit its particular needs. The definition that is adopted should provide a basis on which archivists can deal effectively with the materials produced by the government they serve. A definition should not be accepted that will vitiate their [archivists'] effectiveness. A definition evolved out of a consideration of medieval materials will not fit the needs of archivists dealing mainly with modern records. The converse of the statement is also true.

Schellenberg is quite willing to accept that archivists need rules of procedure; he is not willing to base those rules on ideas about the universal properties of archives or to examine his own basic ideas about archives, which he presents as self-evident truths. The point may be summed up thus: exploring the nature of archives and defining their essential characteristics cannot take into account — does not include — consideration of their value for any particular class of use, of which scholarly research is but one. Rather, theory begins with an elucidation of the properties of the archival record and with any generalized value it possesses inherently by its nature. The whole of Livelton, "Public Records" proceeds from that theoretical stance, and thus he is able to demonstrate at length just why Schellenberg's ideas, which are commonly used as the basis of North American archival practice, are fundamentally unsound. Livelton's work will soon be published by the Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press. For Schellenberg's ideas, see *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956), particularly the chapter on the nature of archives, pp. 11-16, and the quotations at pp. 14 and 15. Jenkinson's are discussed in some detail elsewhere in this essay. My essay "How Goes It with Appraisal," to be published in *Archivaria* 36, analyses the philosophical complexity of appraisal. That the matter is not only of theoretical concern is demonstrated by Victoria Bryans, "Canadian Provincial and Territorial Archival Legislation: A Case Study of the Disjunction Between Theory and Law" (MAS, University of British Columbia, 1989), which shows how the dichotomy between records and archives makes its way into Canadian archival legislation and complicates the proper care of government records.

- 5 Brothman makes a commonplace but erroneous separation of original order from provenance. The classification of documents in an organization or agency or by individuals is part of their identification with that organization, agency or person. The essence of the process of archival arrangement is to identify the external structure of the archives transferred by the competence given to the organization or agency or by the functions/activities of the individual person, on one hand, and the internal structure determined by the way the administration or the person orders documents, on the other. Of course, any number of socially determined factors can affect internal structure, but the whole aim of archival science is to see that they do not do so at the hands of the archivist. Archival science does not make "original order" some sacred cow. It works out rules to identify and then reveal external and internal structures in as much of their socially determined glory as can be, in order to contribute to the understanding and effective use of archives as continuing evidence of the activities of which they are and forever will be a part, at least in so far as the science of the matter is concerned. On this score, there is still no better starting-point than the "moral defence" of archives developed by Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (Oxford, 1922), pp. 66-106.

Brothman's confusion arises when he intrudes the notion of order into the concept of value. One moment order is place and structure, then it is value. There is a connection between order and value, of course, and Brothman has inadvertently hit upon the issue behind it: Does selection from among the documents in an archives impair the integrity of the whole? The answer must be no, so long as nothing is done which does not work in the best way possible to effect good memory preservation for the creator, and — it may be added — as an outgrowth of it for the continuing purposes of society. The point is that there is not some radical break when consideration of value for historiographical purposes takes over. If there is, that integrity, making the memory of actions the best that it can be, is compromised both intellectually and practically. Jenkinson's arguments to this effect, though somewhat dated by the advance of planned disposition, are still a useful corrective to the unbridled assessment of "historical value": *Manual*, pp. 128-33 and 166-67.

- 6 In archival terms, natural is not opposed to social. Quite the opposite in fact; it refers to the way in which records are accumulated in the course of the conduct of affairs, and therefore to a quality of the product of a universal social exercise. Naturalness is one of the essential qualities of archives. It expresses the idea that archives are determined by the requirements of the conduct of affairs. It is the spontaneous accumulation of records by their creator, spontaneous in the sense of not contrived outside the direct requirements of the conduct of affairs — not, lest it be thought by our player with words, magically generated or anything of the sort.

A great many documents do not have this quality of naturalness. Archivists often have to ponder long and hard to determine where to draw the line between the two, especially in the electronic environment, but obviously one cannot draw the line if one does not grasp the concept. For instance, the federal Public Records Order of 1966 struggled with the concept. The Order put "working papers" outside the definition of record, much to the chagrin of archivists who appreciated the concept of naturalness, even if they did not know it by name; who had to explain that what the official regarded as working papers were in fact records worthy of continued preservation. Here we have a theoretical construct which could have guided a better methodology (a better definition of "record") and made for better practice. Judgement is still needed to apply any given concept, but first each concept must have some clearly articulated basis in theory as the foundation for the work.

- 7 This sentence is an example of a disguised normative statement. Brothman is asserting, not rigorously demonstrating, that archival practice ought to be regarded as an art. The word "remains" cries out for some account of the genealogy of the idea that it is an art, but our intellectual historian gives us none. His assertion merely tries by its firm emphasis to persuade us that it is/ought to be an art. My own statements in this essay of what archival science is may sometimes be of the same order, as a consequence of their being counter-assertion. It is up to readers to decide which of us better supports his assertions. One would prefer not to go about matters in this way, but two can "play" with words to fashion normative statement. To some extent the normative mode is difficult to avoid in archival science, because the precepts rule the practice, and it is so easy to do things wrong from ignorance of the precepts, as all archivists know. However, there ought to be no place for normative statements in the realm of pure theory, where it is simply a matter of rational analysis of ideas.
- 8 John W. Roberts, "Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 66-74; "Archival Theory: Myth or Banality," *idem* 53 (Winter 1990), pp. 110-20. On the point at issue, Roberts says, "Above all, it should be remembered that archivy *per se* is a fairly straightforward, down to earth service occupation; it is not a liberal science, and it is not to be confused with the cultural and historical treasures held by archival repositories": "Much Ado About Shelving," p. 74.

The title of the second of these articles is enough to indicate the tenor of Roberts's dismissal of archival science. That he was asked to expand on the first article in a professional forum reflects well on the American love of free speech, but little else. That no archivist in the United States has risen to challenge him roundly reflects, I hope, the ridiculousness, and not the acceptance by his colleagues, of his haughty and unfounded assertions. His articles are two particularly *outré* examples of a wayward way with words leading to nullity. What good can possibly come from arguing that archival theory is necessarily either chimerical or mindless, except perhaps the author's enjoyment of the sound of his own bombast and the feeling of superiority that seems to accompany it?

- 9 George Bolotenko, "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 5-23, and the responses to it in the next two issues. Bolotenko argues —by stringing together



quotations to support his contention — that the study of history is the foundation of the work of the archivist. For Bolotenko himself, the structure erected on the foundation is made of “the relatively straightforward theoretical and practical apprenticeship into archivy” (a term which thankfully did not catch on). The idea that one can learn archival theory by apprenticeship would seem to be something of a contradiction in terms, in the sense that pure theory (bearing in mind the relations between it and other aspects of archival science) is consideration of ideas for their own sake, and therefore fits poorly with notions of intellectual apprenticeship.

In Bolotenko’s opinion, the basis of the archivist’s discipline is historical. He is particularly aroused, often to flights of rhetorical high dudgeon, by arguments to the contrary, and accuses archivists of contriving to have an identity crisis by ignoring their roots in the historical discipline. Along the way, he attributes a “bingo theory” of the making of the archivist to Margaret Cross Norton, who somehow by her simple exposition of the administrative basis of much of the work of the archivist, has spawned a “tradition of unschooled Nortonites.”

It is beyond me how the gentle Norton becomes the evil genius plotting the demise of the historian-archivist. After all, Ernst Posner, whom Bolotenko quotes approvingly several times, says that he was Norton’s “admirer and devoted friend.” He speaks of her “theoretical insight” and of her writings as “the first American manual of archives administration”: Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton/On Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management*, foreword by Ernst Posner (Carbondale, 1975); Posner quotes on pp. vii and viii. Bolotenko offers no sense of the context of Norton’s writings, neither the institutional context in which Norton worked, nor how her writings were often speeches which she delivered to audiences who knew nothing of archives and associated them with the fund of historical information in general. Indeed, the worst of much that is bad about Bolotenko’s article is that he regularly forgets the first rule of the professional historian — namely, to probe beneath the surface in order to understand the wider context and approach the past as a quest to understand it on its own terms — not as fodder for contemporary concerns, not as an arsenal of contrary opinion to fuel polemical argument. It is rather a sad spectacle to observe someone who lays such great claim for the value to the archivist of the historical discipline to go so resolutely about subverting its precepts.

I have learned much from Margaret Cross Norton, and so might be one of her unschooled followers; I would like to dedicate this essay to her memory. One thing is perfectly clear from reading Norton. She had no identity crisis. She was an archivist through and through, and proud of it. Is that what is so annoying to Bolotenko? Whose identity crisis is it? Who knows — perhaps the problem is that too many of us have fallen into the job without the proper intellectual and psychological preparation for it.

- 10 The jelly-nailing metaphor, which readers will realize I have borrowed for my title, alludes to Terry Cook, “Nailing Jelly to a Wall: Possibilities in Intellectual History,” *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 205-28. Like jelly, ideas are slippery things — in the hands of some people more than others, no doubt. The same author’s “Clio: The Archivists’s Muse,” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 198-203 contains ideas which Cook has since extensively developed in his writings. The assumption in the title is of course that the archivist’s inspiration is history: “Let archivists yield to the charms of the muse of history” (p. 203). The seduction appears to be fairly successful in Cook’s case. He argues that “clearly the three primary functions of any archives — acquisition, custody and public service — rely heavily on archivists maintaining a sound knowledge of the academic field to which the records relate. Anything less means archivists are working in a vacuum” (p. 202). I suppose he might agree that we can establish *prima facie* that it is impossible to operate in any way in the world in the absence of ideas. The question, however, is whether the ideas of historical theory and method are the foundation of archival practice.

Cook tries to tell us that they are when he says that records relate to academic fields. That is a rather grievous expression of an all too common mental slip, a fault in logic. Even allowing for his mental slip and choosing for him a possibly suitable example, we may all take a little amusement in Cook working up a sound knowledge of physics before tackling the records of the National Research Council. It is precisely the impossibility or impracticality of any given archivist being prepared beforehand for every body of records which he or she may encounter over a career which recommends archival science over specialized “subject” knowledge. For that reason alone, the archivist must obviously seek the advice of the persons who created and used the records or who otherwise have the knowledge which the archivist may lack in order to understand certain aspects of them. With

this assistance and knowledge of the methods of learning about archives, the archivist goes about building understanding of every particular archives, and then passes it on to those who need it.

The arguments which I have been challenging are all based on this self-same mental slip, and down a slippery slope indeed does it take those who make it. Just how far can be seen in Cook's most mature expression of the concept of the archivist acting as historian in his monograph *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A RAMP Study* (Paris, 1991), where he employs a Kuhn-like concept (note 2, *supra*) of judging the variation between an agency's statement of intent and what it actually did as a concept of appraisal; also in *The Appraisal of Case Files: Sampling and Selection Guidelines for the National Archives of Canada*, prepared by Terry Cook [5th draft, revised], approved by the National Archivist for the purposes of external consultation, 24 September 1992, in which the concept is expressed as follows (p. 11):

Interactions of citizens and organizations with the state are worthy of documentation (and thus archival retention) at the hard-copy case file level

*where there is evidence in such files of significant changes, variations, and distortions between the original targets, goals, and expectations and the actual results or operations of a given policy and programme,*

*and*

*where the agency allows the citizen sufficient latitude to express his or her opinions.*

It is from such variations that ongoing policy development and programme modifications originate. Thus, *ipso facto*, in this approach, the archivist must first determine the operating culture of an agency, and its policies and programmes, by looking at the sources which reveal it, before trying to judge the significance of the case files concerning how they may or may not reflect or vary from that operating culture [emphasis and layout as in the original].

Brothman might tell Cook a thing or two about how difficult it is to discover the intent of a social construct, such as a government agency, or determine something as difficult as whether its actions lived up to its ideals. Certainly, Cook calls for archivists to analyse records in order to make historical judgements. If such thinking catches on, it will destroy any integrity appraisal has. If appraisal is essentially an outgrowth of the socially determined process of preserving the records people which need to carry on their activities, to have adequate memory of them, then it would appear that the matter is too important to leave to persons who have their eye at most only inadvertently on that goal.

The goal of appraisal always has been dictated by the very process of preservation, decisions being made — more or less frequently, as is deemed necessary — over the course of the existence of archival documents as to which of the actions “remembered” in the documents still reverberate in the lives of persons associated with them; the association can go very far indeed. The worst of it is that Cook claims the process for his own ideological purpose: to show where the state, in his terms, has failed in its relations with its citizens by careful selection of records demonstrating failure, through historical detection of “variation” and “distortion” of the higher aspirations of the exercise of sovereign power. Acting in Olympian fashion on behalf of society, the appraisal archivist interprets the aspirations of society and ensures that documents are preserved in order to provide evidence of how well they were selected.

One wonders whether any organized human endeavour escapes failure in Cook's terms, let alone whether it is the archivist's role to detect and “document” the extent of it. The aim is wrong-headed. Surely, during the process of selection, it is not the archivist's task to determine whether government programmes fail more or less on the grounds located by Cook. Such pre-Cooking of the future historian's evidence can only lead to archival selection being the proper subject of the philosophy of history and not archival science. If that is what Cook wants — to have his ideas of appraisal turned into part of the historian's science — he should say so, for then we should indeed have historians take the exercise over for their own purposes, hardly making of it Brothman's “socially determined” process, unless of course we say that historians are the proper determinants, the funnel through which society learns how it determines itself. In fact, Cook does see archivists as vehicles for expressing the spirit of the age, as prime movers of, and in their appraisal actions actually belonging to the historical record. “Archivists will make their appraisal choices, but then future historians will assess such choices as prime evidence of the historical consciousness of the period in which the archivist lived.” Such

expropriation of a supposedly socially determined process will, if successful, undermine the very scholarship it professes to support. What begins for Cook as an attempt to discern how archival matter speaks of the mind behind it, by slips and slides of logic, becomes the mind of the archivist determining the historical record, the meaning of the determination of which future historians will, in Cook's favourite word for this kind of exercise, "debate": Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 68, n. 40.

These, then, are the consequences of Cook's advice not to "forget the historical basis upon which so many archival functions must rest" ("Clio: the Archivist's Muse," p. 203). Again we have a dubious structure of woolly argument erected on historical foundations. It is just possible, however, that — like Kuhn's scientists — our historical foundationists do not do what they say they do, or what they say we ought to do, or what archivists at the National Archives of Canada will actually come to do. That will only be discovered by close study of appraisal actions by a future Kuhn of archival science. Until then, it seems that we still have some pondering to do.

Cook also speaks approvingly of Bolotenko's persuasive argument "that history above all should define the archivist" in his General Editor's Introduction to Number 16 of this journal. In fact, this happy band of archivists who press historical knowledge on us as the foundation of archival work speak approvingly in print of the writings of one another regularly, as if to build greater momentum for their ideas about history and archives by constant repetition and mutual reinforcement of them. It is tiresome to be referred back and forth among the same ill-supported contentions.

- 11 Perhaps the most grievous of Brothman's errors is that he cannot see the distinction between the archivist's primary and secondary duties. That, of course, is why he is so willing to implicate the archivist directly and instrumentally in the purposes of the historian. To distinguish the duties which come first from those which come second is not to say that the former are more important than the latter. So long as the integrity of the materials is protected, the use of them knows no bounds, certainly none of the archivist's making. The proviso is an important one, for the archivist strives always to protect the physical and structural integrity of the materials in the interest of *all* researchers, before serving the interests or needs of any one of them.
- 12 Jenkinson, *Manual*, p. 12. Of course, it was Jenkinson who said "the archivist should not be a historian," that is, should not *think and act as* a historian, which is to say nothing about the part historical knowledge plays in the archivist's science. It is the failure to distinguish between archivists' need to know about the past and to act on the basis of an understanding of the nature of archives which leads opponents of the autonomy of archival studies to their erroneous position. Historians of all people ought to know that, for history is often accused of being an amalgam of other scholarly knowledge and modes of investigation. The matter is discussed very nicely by G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London, 1969), pp. 36-56, where he begins a section on "rivals" to history with the statement: "Autonomy is not the same thing as exclusiveness or self-sufficiency." He then goes on to say that "borrowings can be nothing but fruitful," surveys the kind of "analogical error" Brothman commits, and concludes that only by maintaining its integrity from assaults against its autonomy can the discipline profit from other knowledge.

That self-regulating but not self-sufficing mechanism of scholarly discipline operates to produce autonomy. The mechanism works, but it needs constant vigilance against those who would assume borrowing means dependency, or autonomy means narrow-minded independence. Retaining the distinctions and building upon the interdependencies of disciplines become political problems as disciplines try to make their way in the academy. The politics of the matter more than anything else explain the retardation of archival science in North American universities. Without a full measure of autonomy and support for it from those who would sponsor the archivist's discipline in the university, the odds are very heavily stacked against the development of full-scale archival studies programmes to meet the profession's needs.

Of course, neither is the archivist a species of librarian. Arguments that library science provides a basis for archival work, or that archival science is a subset of some larger documentary or information science, are as wrong as those that argue for historical science as its foundation. Archival science uses historical knowledge, as many disciplines do, and it deals with documents, as library science does, but it uses history for its own special purposes and studies in its own special way documents very different from those for which library science was developed. Even though archival science

has important relationships with both historical science and library science, archivists who privilege the one or the other relationship because it is their background display obvious prejudice, only fuel the fires of emotional and unproductive controversies and betray and undermine the autonomy of their own discipline.

- 13 Victoria Blinkhorn. "The Records of Visual Artists: Appraisal for Acquisition and Selection" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), uses archival theory to examine how visual artists generate their fonds and what structure they assume. Frances Fournier, "Faculty Papers: Appraisal for Acquisition and Selection" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990), does something similar for university professors, who, even though they hold juridical position and therefore generate archival documents as part of the archives of the university where they work, are perhaps best regarded as persons who generate a fonds from their manifold professorial activities. These studies also show how the general theory of the nature and structure of archives informs the theory of appraisal.
- 14 "Probative" means affording proof or evidence. It can also mean serving or designed for testing or trial. Lawyers use the term "evidentiary" to indicate the sense of the word "probative" in legal proceedings. Historians and others might use the word "evidential." In archival science, however, "evidential" has a special meaning, established by T.R. Schellenberg in the term "evidential value." "Evidential value" means the capacity of archival documents to provide information about their creator's activities, a notion different from probative value, which speaks to the capacity of all archival documents to afford proof or evidence of action, not to the information which they contain relative to any particular purpose. Such precise distinctions are needed to avoid logical traps and dead ends. For an exploration of legal value in terms of archival science, law, and diplomatics, see Heather Heywood, "Appraising Legal Value: Concepts and Issues" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990).
- 15 Thornton W. Mitchell, *Norton/On Archives*, p. 251.
- 16 The recent concept of "documentation strategy" proceeds from the assumption that it is the archivist's task to engineer a comprehensive record of the past. The notion that the archivist is a kind of social engineer of the sources of history is a subtext of much recent North American archival discourse. A proper view of the nature of archives, however, leads one to a radically different conclusion about the role of the archivist. The difference between the two is a little like moving from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomy, from the historiographical uses at the centre to the original purpose and structure at the centre of the universe of archival theory and practice. So ingrained is the former orientation that it would seem to be an enormous task to retool thinking to the latter. A "Copernican" education for every archivist would be a good start.

The strangest thing in all of this is that the view of archivists as engineers of the documentary record of the past does indeed make their knowledge a combination of that of the historian with that of the librarian, for it involves some assessment of historical information and its organization to facilitate research, just as Brothman argues. There is then no place or possible claim for a separate discipline or profession of archivists. So the views of archivists such as Brothman are anti-archival. They undermine alike a proper conception of archives and the development of the profession.

- 17 Luciana Duranti, "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 7-27; Part II, 29 (Winter 1989-90), pp. 4-17; Part III, 30 (Summer 1990), pp. 4-20; Part IV, 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 10-25; Part V, 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 6-24; and Part VI, 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 6-24.
- 18 The quest to understand in abstract and general terms the forms, patterns and relationships making up the structure of archives is almost completely foreign to the history of the profession in North America. Elsewhere, I argue at some length that Europeans have been unifiers in search of universalized theoretical threads to stitch together their discourse about archives, whereas North Americans are diversifiers seeking to justify their pragmatism and empiricism: Terry Eastwood, "Unity and Diversity in the Development of Archival Science in North America," in Elio Lodolini, ed., *Studi sull'Archivistica* (Rome, 1992), pp. 87-100.

The search to elucidate the general characteristics of archives, to define what unifies all archives, is the starting-point of the theory and therefore the science. If one does not take such a view, then only a pragmatic approach is possible. That is the irony of the arguments of archivists such as Brothman. They are never able to erect anything substantial on their historical foundation, because they

do not believe that general rules to explain archives can be discovered and used as the basis of practice. They therefore make appeals to the art of it all, or ridicule the very idea of archival theory.

- 19 I.e., legitimate in the sense of lawful. The archivist is the agent of the law to ensure that records which have been generated are faithfully preserved and disposed of according to due process, and also duly regarding the rights and obligations, and mediating the interests of the persons associated with their creation and use. The first consideration is always probative. Do the records serve as proof of action which is still required to administer affairs? The second is, whose rights and obligations are affected by decisions about disposition? The third is, how does one mediate among competing interests or valuations when taking disposition actions? The goal is to protect the records which a society will need to maintain its existence. Solutions arrived at along these lines ensure the continuing legitimacy of archives as faithful witnesses to the social system in which they were created. Any other solution denatures the documents, and transforms them for use towards purposes not sanctioned or determined by society's legitimized processes. Of course, among the interests to be mediated is the interest of the state, often described as the national interest or the public interest. The susceptibility of notions of national or public interest to appropriation for some special interest makes the role of the archivist as impartial servant of the record one of great, but little understood, societal importance. It seems unlikely that this role will be better understood so long as archivists speak about themselves as creators of archival value and organizers of historical information, instead of protectors of evidence and agents of continuity. It seems rather important for archivists to decide on which side of the fence they sit. For me, there is no doubt that "the moral defence of archives," in Jenkinson's memorable phrase, would appear to be the only proper ethic for archivists to adopt in a democratic society ruled by law.

Heather MacNeil, "In Search of the Common Good: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information Held in Public Archives" (MAS Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987), pp. 140-45, discusses the question of ethical destruction to safeguard the interests of the subjects of records — one case in which the mediative may overrule the protective and preservative ethic. Sanctioned destruction in order to protect the interests of the subjects of records, however, is quite a different matter from unsanctioned destruction of records needed to account for actions.