

# Articles

## The Archivist, the Letter, and the Spirit

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**RÉSUMÉ** Après un examen rapide des pratiques d'acquisition qui ont précédé le postmodernisme, du futur immédiat de l'archivistique et d'exemples de progrès réalisés par quelques collègues nord-américains, on tente de suggérer ici qu'il serait insuffisant de s'appuyer que sur la raison en matière de gestion des documents au cours du prochain millénaire. Il n'est pas possible de développer une vision holistique de nos responsabilités en matière de patrimoine documentaire sans une dimension spirituelle dépassant l'embrouillamini de la pensée individuelle. Cela peut se faire grâce à la méditation et au silence et en croyant que notre contexte ultime est celui du Créateur par lequel toutes les formes de vie sont inter-reliées et communiquent dans le Cosmos. C'est dans ce contexte que nous devons prendre des décisions comme archivistes et être guidés de diverses manières. On ne doit pas chercher à comprendre les preuves consignées de manière trop littérale puisqu'elles peuvent connaître d'importantes distorsions dans le temps. La Bible donne un bon exemple de ce danger. Sans doute, faut-il s'attarder davantage au mythe, dans le plein sens du terme ; à ces mythes de notre époque qui peuvent avoir une influence considérable sur la société et sur nous-mêmes. Ne sont-ils pas une forme ultime de documents dans ce contexte social ? Une base spirituelle dans nos vies est susceptible de radicaliser la profession à l'intérieur des structures institutionnelles.

**ABSTRACT** After a brief glance at acquisition practices prior to the post-modern era, the possible archival future in the near future, and examples of remarkable advances made by some of our North American colleagues, an attempt is made to suggest that reliance on reason alone may be insufficient for our approach to the management of records in the next millennium. A fully holistic view of our responsibility for documentary heritage cannot be achieved without a spiritual dimension beyond the teeming thoughts generated in the mind by the ego, through meditation and silence in the belief that our ultimate context is the Creator, whereby every form of life is interconnected through communication within the Cosmos. It is in this context that we must make our decisions as archivists, for which we will receive guidance in a number of ways. We should be wary of literalism in understanding our recorded evidence, which can in the short and long term be seriously distorted over time. The Bible is a good example of this danger. We need, perhaps, to give more consideration to myth in its true sense, including the myths of our own time, which can have a massive impact on society, which includes ourselves. Are these myths a powerful form of ultimate record in the social context? A spiritual grounding in our lives may help to radicalize us as a profession within the structure of our institutions.

So that you know where I am coming from, I am a Christian and an Anglican; but this will certainly not be a sermon despite the barely concealed text in the title, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," from the King James version of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Closely related to this aphorism is the dictum of Stéphane Mallarmé: "To define is to kill, to suggest is to create." My theme is to suggest that we may be able to deal with the "technological imperative" more effectively through the insights of a spiritual approach, whatever the tradition, as we seek a reality beyond the material "real."

From the beginnings of literate society to the present, the technology of utterance upon the ancient media of record up to, and including, paper has cast the archivist in the role of keeper and remembrancer, controlling the record for the security of content in the context of creation. In more recent times, we have helped to decide what shall survive out of what has survived by means of piecemeal appraisal based on an arbitrary evaluation drawn from our own limited reason. This reason has in turn responded to the tenets of scientific reductionism and includes a rather narrow view of what constitutes the needs of historians, and those of a general public bent on supporting, for the most part, a triumphalist view of progress at both national and local levels, from sources clearly defined within a hierarchy of relationships which we call "provenance."

There was something very reassuring about ranges of shelving filled with the records of government, and other institutions approved or at least tolerated by society, together with individuals who have made their mark in a generally acceptable manner. Here, so we believed, was solid material evidence of "acts and deeds" under our control at the service of the user, albeit through our idiosyncratic retrieval systems, our limited concept of description, and our insatiable, joyful thirst for acquisition. We were mostly "establishment" people with a conservative cast of mind, in more senses than one, when it came to deciding what constituted our documentary heritage.

Given the accepted norms of the recent past we have not done too badly; at least we have clearly exemplified these norms in the records which surround us as the evidence believed to be important in our time. How will posterity view these accumulations and what of the future? Prior to the emergence of the historian writing from the archival record in the early nineteenth century, the old keepers kept in reasonably good order what was necessary for daily business—the rest was left to the mercy of a not very enlightened neglect.<sup>2</sup>

As we know, all this is now changing rapidly. In 1992, the International Council of Archives meeting in Montreal attracted associations of archivists from across North America. The Society of American Archivists assembled a number of experts charged with the task of mapping trends over the next thirty years, under the clever and ironical title of "20/20 Vision." However, insights into what lies that far ahead may lack clarity. According to Ronald Weisseman, "The fundamental task of the archivist is to manage meaning rich information,

not simply to store or classify raw bits of data.”<sup>3</sup> Luciana Duranti quite correctly countered by stressing our role as keepers of impartial evidence, not just information.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, meaning cannot be left entirely to the historians; in our role as appraisers, we must try to understand the role of the documents in terms of their purpose and impact on the users (which include us) as we strive, in Weissman’s words, “to uncover patterns and to wrestle creatively with ambiguity,”<sup>5</sup> which matches McLuhan’s remarks about perceiving patterns in information fallout.

The emerging documentary database model offers essentially “views” as opposed to file systems: “As a data object is changed all views based on those data change to maintain currency across data and documents.”<sup>6</sup> Without safeguards which formerly resided in a concrete sheet of paper, impartial evidence will be at risk. Massive additions to our comfortable rows of boxed accessions will be coming to an end as we face information overload with its characteristic ambiguity and incompleteness. The more we know and have on record, the more we will worry about what is missing, unless we control destruction as Duranti insists,<sup>7</sup> rather than resorting to record compression, which for the user puts the “over” into “overload” and renders the sum total incomprehensible. In the context of the documentary inheritance, arrival at the truth will remain, as always, asymptotic, just beyond our grasp, whatever the quantity of information. Over all this broods Heisenburg’s uncertainty principle, as when the archivist responds to the need for the appraisal of records, as Terry Eastwood proposes,

on the basis of an analysis of the use to which they are put by the society that created them all along the continuum of their existence – an existence, after all, determined, continued and terminated on the basis of usefulness ... appraisal must be undertaken with closest attention to the immediate social context of creation.<sup>8</sup>

Eastwood goes on to say that “appraisal calls forth one’s knowledge of the world.”<sup>9</sup> This is nicely expanded upon by Ramon Gutiérrez in his “20/20 Vision” paper in which he shows how the physical appearance of human beings was once seen in “immutable” rational categories and how science has helped deconstruct such attitudes into “culturally constructed systems of signs, symbols and meanings.”<sup>10</sup> As archivists, do we not have other blind spots now that Afro-Americans and women have been removed? Can we recognize significance through signs, systems, and meanings in our documents? A study of diplomatics certainly helps us to recognise executive process within social systems which are more technological than we imagined.<sup>11</sup>

Thanks to Ursula Franklin<sup>12</sup> and others, we now have a concept of technology which stretches far beyond the mechanical. Peter Lyman includes not only “rule governed social forms such as bureaucracies and corporations” but also

“the scholarly and scientific disciplines themselves ... They are tools for the organisation of knowledge workers, their thought and the information they produce.”<sup>13</sup>

Examples from *20/20 Vision* were chosen in part because the authors included many who were not archivists, but were prepared to explore with us the extraordinary complexity of future information and knowledge. Many of our professional colleagues, especially in Canada, the United States, and Australia, have also in their various approaches provided valuable and practical insights into this complexity and our role in dealing with the problems as we struggle to recognize almost limitless interrelations between our archival sources.

This new expansion may have grown out of, or revisioned, the debate in which we sought to identify our roles as “hyphenated archivists” groping for a less narrow definition of our profession.<sup>14</sup> Terry Cook and Tom Nesmith, meanwhile, had begun to lead us out of our “taxonomic thinking,” to use Cook’s phrase. Nesmith asked, “Can we not also begin to provide insights into the evolution of society throughout the study of communication? Why are records like they are?”<sup>15</sup> The task of bringing all these professional strands together points to a more holistic, multi-disciplined, and, above all, uncertain future.

At a slightly later date, David Bearman, who, significantly, was not an archivist by profession, and could therefore appraise us from the outside, wrote: “Occasionally a major technological revolution introduces new forms of communication, and with them new cultural definitions of the information content they convey.”<sup>16</sup> Recognizing new “cultural definitions” takes us far beyond the evidential and information values of Schellenberg and those happy taxonomic days of the 1950s, though these values should not be entirely ignored. Margaret Hedstrom saw the 1990s as a time for “reinvented archives” as institutions whereby “electronic records can be a vehicle for archives to move from rowing to steering, towards more enterprising and customer driven approaches to service delivery and towards empowering others to take action in a decentralised records management environment.”<sup>17</sup> Empowerment is a term which grew out of the women’s movement and has more to do with the heart than the head, and as such is another sign of a new approach. Terry Cook points out that there is no such thing as neutral data. The mind and the ego are always present as we seek to probe the collective minds behind the records. Appraisal should, therefore, be inviting “spirit and nature, mind and matter.”<sup>18</sup>

We have to stretch the mind to its limit as we stumble over separate linear categories to achieve cultural understanding across society as a whole. Attention, rather than mental dexterity, is required for this. Brien Brothman asks us to reflect on how our culture affects archival practice, which likewise is not neutral.<sup>19</sup> Richard Brown asserts that our preconceived notions of structural functionalism as applied to the public archives has given it a false sense of order and enduring knowledge which “block and filter out the elements of complica-

tion, discordance, chaos, disruption and disorder” requiring a new hermeneutic approach.<sup>20</sup> So much in our archives is people-centred that Candace Loewen has declared that we need to search not only for records of value to humans, but also to the planet as a whole.<sup>21</sup> If all this was not enough, Joan Schwartz relates “visual literacy” to the study of diplomatics and implies that every medium of record contains signs which must first be understood before the context comes fully into focus.<sup>22</sup>

These examples from current archival wisdom in the post-modern mode require of the mind a discipline and imagination which challenges both hemispheres of the brain. The use of pure mind will not be enough without a spiritual awareness which stems from the ground of our being in all of us. Through religious faith and/or sheer intellectual endeavour coupled with a sensitive understanding of fellow human beings, some of the authors quoted above may make their way to a threshold beyond classical humanism in preparation for the “ecozoic” age which is presently emerging, and which Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme have so eloquently celebrated in the context of the universe story.<sup>23</sup>

I hope that the preceding observations have shown that many of the old archival certainties, norms, and values have now been replaced by uncertainty and ambiguity. This, along with deconstructed technologies and prejudices embracing social organization have resulted in a vaguely felt “fuzzy logic” whereby patterns emerge, as it were, out of chaos theory in the manner of Mandelbrot’s fractals. Meanwhile we continue to arrange and describe the ship’s logs on the *Titanic* while others rearrange the deck chairs.

Is there another approach, less dependant on the mental conflicts and paradoxes which assault us daily, which will help us find our way through change, while at the same time mastering the discipline required by digital processes without becoming a slave to them? Arthur Kroker offers us hope when he asserts that “At work in the Canadian mind is, in fact, a great and dynamic polarity between technology and culture, between economy and landscape.”<sup>24</sup> For Canadians,

technological society jeopardises at a fundamental level the received traditions of western culture ... The Canadian discourse is, then, a way of seeking to recover a voice by which to articulate a different historical possibility against the present closure of the technological order.<sup>25</sup>

This understanding is in contrast to the United States, which Kroker sees as the “spearhead of modernity” and the technological imperative with all its implications.

As archivists, we are coming to understand more fully the meaning of documentary relationships in all their richness. If we take the universe and its Creator, or the scientific concept of the “Big Bang” theory as the beginning of

cosmic evolution, then cosmogenesis, the creation moment, becomes the ultimate context of all matter as it moves down through the galaxies, nebulae, planets, and stars to life in all its forms on our own planet; all creation is connected in various ways in a marvelous spatial balance. Out of the formation of new entities has emerged information resulting in communication and memory.

Communication is offered both by way of genetic coding through the evolution of all life forms and the cultural coding of self-reflective human beings through experience and education in its broadest sense. This brings us to memory, which works across all life. There is a sense in which a tree must remember to balance its member branches to survive during growth. Brian Swimme, a scientist specializing in mathematical cosmology, uses a Socratic format to explain in non-technical terms how, in the context of the cosmos, the specialized hoof of the mountain goat evolved over millennia: "the hoof is the memory of the ancestral tree. It didn't show up accidentally; it was shaped by the experience of millions of goats. The point is, matter remembers the elegant hoof."<sup>26</sup>

And so on to memory in the formation of humans via information as evidence of experience and action in genetic coding, modified in the course of time by the cultural coding of the hunters and gatherers. The distinction between the codes becomes clearer over the millennia, and for memory we come to rely on the written and printed word: "Archives are the only evidential window we have on the action oriented past in relation to one another and the events in the world,"<sup>27</sup> writes Eastwood. He goes on to remind us that,

we remember in order to survive because all present actions are shot through with the process of making sense of past experience, which is the only guide we have to future action for controlling events and making things in our environment somewhat predictable.<sup>28</sup>

This in effect is what Swimme is saying about "the elegant hoof" and genetic coding.

With this kind of background, the great body of pre-literate, aboriginal wisdom everywhere, which recognizes a creator, a Great Spirit, takes shape and meaning for us through the oral myths and tales as interpreted by the elders. Truth is conveyed through myth as it was in the Homeric epics and as it is in the Bible, not through historical, chronological accuracy and words to be taken literally, but as wisdom related to the cultural coding prevalent at the time of their creation, a cultural memory beyond time, which must be reinterpreted by each successive generation to preserve its deeper spiritual meaning.

Transmission through writing and printing, coupled with the authority of organized, institutionalized religion, which also grew in part out of these technologies, caused the great oral traditions to be "frozen." The Bible became

a book to be ultimately held in one's hand, embodying the Hebrew tradition over thousands of years and subsequent Christian origins. The text teems throughout with apparent inconsistencies, contradictions, and unlikely miraculous events that have also been subject to errors inherent in copying and translation across three or more languages. In spite of such a record, there are those who believe that the text of the King James Bible of 1611 is the inerrant Word of God.<sup>29</sup> Bishop John Spong will have none of this.

Central to Spong's approach is a recognition of the use of a form of *midrash* by the Jewish authors of the Gospels, a Jewish tradition whereby "everything to be venerated in the present must somehow be connected in a new context. It is the affirmation of a timeless truth found in the faith journey of a people so that this truth can be experienced afresh in every generation."<sup>30</sup>

The midrashic form gives the impression of biographical, eyewitness accounts in a chronological order, whereas, in fact, many passages are drawn and adapted from the Jewish scriptures, which help to describe and illumine people and events that bear witness to timeless truth. Spong also provides evidence that suggests that the order of the gospels is designed to provide readings which harmonize with the Jewish calendar and liturgical year, since the earliest Christians were Jewish.

After the first century, Christianity spread to Hellenized Jews and Gentiles. An understanding of the midrashic form was lost, giving way to a literal linearity which has dominated western culture. This is a remarkable example of how the provenance of earlier sources, their context, and the significance of order within the content can suggest a wholly different reading while preserving past and present truths seen in a different way—truths which cannot rely on literal certainty. Archival materials, especially images, teem with this kind of ambiguity. Folklore, likewise, attributes to its heroes actions performed by another because these illustrate the nature and character of the hero. There is a danger that our extensive accumulations of interviews with First Nations people may suffer the same fate as the Gospels referred to above, and be treated literally, frozen in time on tape. It is essential that this material be made constantly available to the communities to which the tapes relate so that a living continuity of understanding can be maintained.

On the issue of certainty, Bishop Spong may have a message for archivists when he writes:

In our contemporary world we have dedicated enormous energy to developing the technology that will enable us to freeze moments of history in their objective purity. Instant replay is a secular form of a liturgy. Like all liturgies, its purpose is to freeze objectivity so that we will not lose contact with it. Television, film, tape recorders, photographs – all become the tools of our obsession as we seek to stop the constant flux beneath our feet, to capture, relate to, and use objective reality to create a new security. It is a passionate human quest that will never succeed.<sup>31</sup>

As archivists, we too must abandon literal certainty at times in our search for meaning in records, in particular those which are non-textual. Even legal texts, drafted with the concept of certainty in mind, yield to interpretations, as every lawyer knows. Can we live with uncertainty in a digital and virtual culture exhibiting some of the qualities of neo-orality, where truth is located in myth?

The great truths, preserved in literary amber, are still there. Some are self evident; theologians and other scholars are gradually revealing others through form criticism and the findings of related disciplines. Nevertheless, for all its great spiritual value, the Bible has, at times, been misused in good faith down the years and, in consequence, has become one of the most socially destructive books of all time. This is a tragedy of global proportions and a preeminent example of the need to understand the meaning and context of the record in a literate society, especially when literacy is coupled with a new technology. It is not without reason that we speak of computer "literacy."

Along with the sacred texts of other religions, the Bible is divine evidence for believers which can be made a great deal more relevant to our daily work and lives as archivists if the creational context is kept in mind and all life is seen as emergent and interconnected. The great mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen believed this, in contrast to the polarity of the human being in conflict with the rest of nature. Fritjof Capra observes that "the concepts of science show strong similarities to the concepts of the mystics ... The philosophy of mystical traditions, the perennial philosophy, is the most consistent philosophical background to modern science."<sup>32</sup>

Matthew Fox in his book, *The Reinvention of Work*, makes the case for a return to a lost spirituality which is not related to one religion. Work, for him, is "the expression of the Spirit at work in the world through us ... at the level of service to the community,"<sup>33</sup> the "Great Work," as he calls it. The long established way of seeing the world no longer functions, and it is the desacralization of work at the heart of our alienation which is central to our problem. As E.F. Schumacher once said, "We in the West are clever aliens on this planet. We are now far too clever to survive without wisdom."

That word, wisdom, has been appearing more frequently in archivists' writings. The search for a lost spirituality has also resulted in a widespread interest in meditation whereby the perception of work as a secular and sometimes unpleasant necessity can be transformed by direct access to the love of God and the sharing of that love with others. All work has an element of drudgery, not least our profession, which is sometimes made unbearable for want of meaning in the midst of unrest and change throughout our repositories. Too often we work for outside rewards alone, or from an outside threat which is the death of work.<sup>34</sup>

Richard Klumpenhouwer, partly in the spirit of play yet revealing valuable insights as this approach often does, has recalled that,



Education and religion have, historically, intertwined one another, and ... a kind of religious culture still pervades the University. ... I began to see my MAS education as a kind of quasi-religious initiation into an archival culture and, at the same time, a process of revealing and defining archival culture as a personal identity.<sup>35</sup>

Klumpenhouwer then goes on to emphasize that the course left no firm foundations or “genetic imprint” as with more established professions, apart from certain principles. In short, through tensions and “creative theorising” as “more ritual than catechism,”<sup>36</sup> the graduates found themselves as archivists through arguing over the right questions, which is what a journey of discovery is about. He ends by saying:

I have had the opportunity to climb the mountain of archival exploration, to talk about, feel and participate in archives as a powerful expression of humanity, and to be and become part of a larger mission, a community, a professional culture that believes in archives. In the end, it is a faith based on identity with something bigger than yourself. And if that is not religion, I do not know what is.<sup>37</sup>

The gift of creativity and imagination, such as Klumpenhouwer reveals in his article, can help us break out of a sterile career culture based on a life of things and busy-ness. Archivists by the nature of their work are surrounded by hundreds and thousands of “things” in the shape of documentary artifacts quite apart from all the bureaucratic busy-ness which hinders our simplicity. There is much here that the mind desperately needs to “let go” regularly if we are to understand and experience the nature of a reality beyond the external and the concrete. Fox has termed this the “Inner Work” which many experienced meditators are sharing as a “way” and not a “product.”

Religion can “bind us back” to our common origins as revealed in the new scientific creation story, and a creation myth as in the book of Genesis, away from a paradigm which pits us against the environment and against other humans as we chase after an infinitely expanding frontier where technology will “do it for us.” We are deeply troubled by the digital impact. A kind of creative relief may be found through more attention to the “Inner Work” as a way, which is not so much a linear route as a process, a transcendent relationship which has everything to do with clarity and simplicity in a silence which quiets the teeming thoughts generated in the mind by the ego. This is not easy. For instance, many who work in large cities now seek this silence at lunch time either for peace or for strength.

Meditation is analogous to space, which creates power through the absence of continuity. One thinks immediately of the space between wheel and axle, between words on a page, of the white space which dramatizes graphic design, or the perfectly timed pause in a speech. The discipline of meditation has

ancient roots and is common to most religions, or no religion at all. According to Dom John Main, “In meditation we discover both who we are and why we are; we are not running away from ourselves we are finding ourselves; we are not rejecting ourselves, we are affirming ourselves. We seek not just to think about God but to be with God.”<sup>38</sup>

By contrast, Michael Heim, in his “philosophical study of word processing,” discusses meditation as one “compensatory discipline” among others: “to counter a ubiquitous technostress it is useful, then, to draw on pre-technological cultures as their teachings become available.”<sup>39</sup> This, surely, is just meditation as therapy—although it is none the worse for that. Consequently, Heim believes that

any references whatsoever to inner psychic life runs counter to the pragmatic automation of writing and to the construal of language as information code to be manipulated. Inner life easily becomes a mere obstacle in the world of total management. But in the best analysis full human presence of mind is crucial for any endeavour.<sup>40</sup>

This is clearly one approach to meditation; but it seems to me rather arid and negative, a brief respite from the technological imperative.

Being grounded in a reality beyond the fragmented, contingent hustle of our lives may well radicalize us out of previously accepted social norms, and perhaps the norms of our profession. As archivists we may find ourselves at odds with, for instance, standards of acquisition and appraisal which fail to make an appropriate contribution to environmental studies, which is probably the most urgent priority today. It will take a great deal of imagination and insight to link Fox’s “Great Work” to the necessary documentary sources in both the public and private sectors; but every imaginable kind of evidence shows that human beings are now responsible for the survival of the greater part of the natural world and that we are failing in this task.<sup>41</sup> “Environment” is a poor term in this connection as suggesting the natural world *around* us, whereas *we* are part of the problem. Perhaps the term “cultural ecology,” with its implied contradictions, would be more appropriate.

The manner in which a radical approach to our profession can be inhibited by pressures of one form or another is clearly examined in a paper which was read by Howard Zinn, Professor of Government at Boston University, at the 1970 Society of American Archivists Conference in Washington. Radical in the style of the Vietnam War era, and himself a veteran of that conflict, he created a storm of controversy within the Society. The editor of *The American Archivist* at that time refused to publish the paper, which, of course, made it required reading for those of us who were known as the “activist archivists”!

Zinn’s main point is that

Professionalism is a powerful form of social control. By professionalism, I mean that almost total immersion in one’s craft, being so absorbed in the day-to-day exercise of

those skills, as to have little time, energy or will to consider what part those skills play in the total social scheme.<sup>42</sup>

He defines social control in this context as “maintaining things as they are, preserving traditional arrangements, preventing any sharp change in how the society distributes wealth and power,” and leaving little time for reflection on what the social machine is designed for as we apply our specialized skills to one small corner of it. Archivists tend to perpetuate the status quo in the name of neutrality. For Zinn, rebellion was not the politicizing of a neutral craft, but the humanizing of an inevitably political craft,<sup>43</sup> as revealed in our acquisition and appraisal policies.

It may be argued that this whole paper is irrelevant, that we can have an ontological understanding of the spirit beyond the letter without spiritual belief; but there are, perhaps, some who may relate to the point of view developed in this paper and find it helpful. One way or another we must try to recognize the illusory nature of archives as repositories of truth waiting only to be uncovered. Heather MacNeil asserts that what distinguishes archives is the fact that they are the most impartial expression of socio-economic values, although not the most truthful or objective.<sup>44</sup> Words point towards the truth; they are not in themselves the truth.

Perhaps as archivists we should learn to cultivate more impartiality in the way in which we allocate space and resources to neglected sources of records which we should appraise for what we need to know to ensure our survival, both globally and locally. MacNeil raises this question by asking “what balance needs to be struck between the preservation of individual and collective memory?”<sup>45</sup> This is not Zinn’s false impartiality of avoidance, but a call for radical thinking and subsequent action by our Association as a group. A conference is needed in the near future combining the theme of environmental records with this kind of balance federally, provincially, and locally, within the context of a global problem which the ICA should also take up. Thus armed, we may be the better equipped to deal with the tension involved in “thinking globally and acting locally.”

To return to the subject of archives and illusions, we must above all avoid falling into the trap of literalism, which has haunted the Bible, especially where a medium of record is new and unfamiliar. We are now learning how to interpret the meaning of photographs,<sup>46</sup> film, and maps as a function of appraisal and public service. The fact that the digital record gathers in all previous media (as printing once did) and dumps them onto a screen, will require the ability to read these records as a totality, and not individually. We have to avoid an archival fundamentalism which refuses to recognize that new forms of communication, both technically and semiotically, change the meaning of the content. Not only that, but our assumptions about our own practices may need re-assessing followed by the abandonment of “dead certainties.”<sup>47</sup>

Brien Brothman’s often playful deconstructions, in the manner of Derrida,

may irritate some, but “Derrida himself has invoked the term ‘solicit,’ derived from the Latin term denoting a shaking or disturbing of omnipresent structures to describe his deconstructive reading practice” as a way of undermining complacency.<sup>48</sup> If again we take deconstruction too literally and heavily, we begin to see it as destruction, which it most certainly is not. By analogy, it lets in a kind of meditative light and space where, as we have seen, new insights may occur.

Brothman’s discussion about archives, myths, history, and mythistory<sup>49</sup> suggests that we perhaps claim too much for archives, as MacNeil warns, and that ultimately the majority of human beings will continue to identify with the great myths good and bad, among them Luke Skywalker, heir to the “hero with a thousand faces”<sup>50</sup> in *Star Wars* on the one hand, and Darth Vader caught up in the myth of progress on the other. Well-written history, no matter how scholarly and accurate, nearly always awaits the revisionist, which is quite proper, but both versions are, sadly, very forgettable and scarcely ever reach the general public, save in popular generalities which are the raw material of myths. Ultimate reality, as has already been suggested, lies beyond our grasp without a loving relationship with God.<sup>51</sup>

The celebration of our history will continue in one form or another as one valid expression of our heritage; but perhaps in the end Bearman is right when he emphasizes that, as we refashion our society, archivists should concentrate on the records of the immediate past to serve the present.

We are presently at a crossroads: either immensely powerful interests now driving an obsolete and discredited modernism will render the planet uninhabitable, or we will recognize the organic context of our lives and recover a sense of community that is in harmony with the “story of the universe.” Public and corporate records will be absolutely vital as a means of increasing credible benchmarks towards ecological recovery and an ongoing accountability. The records of those who have striven to effect these changes will reveal not only successes and failures, but also the processes and modes of their activism for the guidance and understanding of their successors. Communities will cease to be more or less passive consumers of individualism and begin to share the warmth, passion, wise strength, and forms of spiritual growth already evident in hundreds of micro-gatherings of people determined to effect profound change. The records of this renaissance, with antecedents in, and continuities with a remote past now being revealed,<sup>52</sup> will become immensely precious and central to historical research in national, regional, and community archives, using media of record that will help to reduce the problems of space and retrieval.

If community archives are going to proliferate as the local repositories of the future, we have to consider what is a community and what are its boundaries.<sup>53</sup> To begin with, they are likely to emerge as the result of special circumstances;

but as the pattern becomes more generally accepted, then clusters of such archives will appear, each with its sense of place and space. If we look at the boundaries of the mandates of national, provincial, and municipal archives, they are quite clear: boundaries of power and authority determined by treaties and legislation. On the map, most of them are straight lines, which bear little relationship to the land they divide; they are the result of political decisions. Now consider the way in which the territory of native peoples has been determined over time with reference to mountains, rivers, watersheds, wildlife, forest, soil, and coastline, the weather, and other natural resources which provide food, clothing, and shelter. All this gives them an abiding sense of place, in contrast to our tradition of movement, mastery, exploitation, and excessive consumption, with all the familiar threats to life that this implies.

We too can develop this same sense of place through the concept of bioregionalism, in which all forms of heritage resource can be appropriately accommodated. Kirkpatrick Sale, a leading exponent of bioregionalism, writes "Every place has a history, a record of how both the human and natural possibilities of the region have been explored and this must be studied with new eyes."<sup>54</sup> These eyes will determine local resources that have been abandoned, and will discover new ones derived from the land and the people who live there, as we seek to refashion our mindset and lifestyle in terms of sustainability, using local resources to their utmost.

First we must think in terms of our bioregion, its extent and its boundaries, and this will require not only those maps produced by government and industry, but citizens exploring and making an inventory of the resources of their district, city, or whatever, and mapping them as a means of empowerment and persuasion in the drive to make our place more habitable—"reinhabiting space," as it is called.<sup>55</sup> All this information, including oral history, folklore, and the archives of families, businesses, and institutions will find a natural home in the community archives where all can feel and experience a dynamic heritage experience in which they can be personally involved, and which will be passed down to their descendants. There will, of course, be mobility, though less perhaps than at present; families will bring their own heritage with them, if not through their records, at least through their memory, and this will become part of the local heritage. I am thinking in particular here of immigrants to Canada.

There will, of course, be districts made up of many communities and then larger ecoregions embracing districts, until the entire land mass is covered by this natural configuration—but that is a long way off. The exciting thing is that communities can start now to prefigure this future, to stake out their boundaries and compile their inventories, since they have at present no statutory authority and no conflict with existing political institutions until their findings translate into political action.<sup>56</sup>

## Notes

- 1 II Corinthians 3:6.
- 2 Discussed more fully in Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 25–37.
- 3 Ronald R.E. Weissman, "Archives and the New Information Architecture of the Late 1990s," *American Archivist* 57, no. 1 (Winter, 1994), p. 20.
- 4 Luciana Duranti, "Commentary," *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 5 Weissman, "Archives," p. 21.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 7 Duranti, "Commentary," p. 38.
- 8 Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 83.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 10 Ramon Gutiérrez, "Decolonising the Body: Kinship and the Nation," *American Archivist* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1994), p. 91.
- 11 It is so typical of a fragmented approach common to all professions that we tend to polarize points of view. All this is done in good faith defending the "right." But, in the matter of appraisal, are we striving for synthesis or supremacy? Logical and empirical decisions that have been documented arise out of practical experience. This fact helps us recognize that we are dealing with artifacts which were created for a specific purpose and cast in a diplomatic form to serve that purpose and render it useful for the present and the future. Both polarities around the broader issue of classic philosophical rationalism versus post-modern analysis recognize the value of use, but not necessarily in the same terms. Wisdom grounded in an understanding of social change which incorporates accountability at the local level should be recognized as an element in macroscopic realities. As in the natural world, can we settle for a "balanced turbulence"? Perhaps this is an issue requiring a holistic solution beyond opposing points of view which are so much a part of our literate culture of individualism.
- 12 Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* (Toronto, 1990). See also Hugh Taylor, "Chip Monks at the Gate: the Impact of Technology on Archives, Libraries, and the User," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), pp. 173–180.
- 13 Peter Lyman, "Invention the Mother of Necessity: Archival Research in 2020," *American Archivist* 57, no. 1 (Winter 1994), p. 125.
- 14 The debate took form, for the most part, in a series of articles in *Archivaria* culminating in Hugh Taylor, "Through the Minefield," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86), pp. 180–185.
- 15 Tom Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982), p. 26.
- 16 David Bearman, *Archival Methods, Archives and Museum Informatics, 1989*, p. 55.
- 17 Margaret Hedstrom, ed., *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 18, 1993*, p. 98.
- 18 Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1991), pp. 38–70. The title may be seen as somewhat misleading. Cook is offering an alternative to the Cartesian philosophy of mind over matter.
- 19 Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78–100.
- 20 Richard Brown, "Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p. 138.
- 21 Candace Loewen, "From Human Neglect to Planetary Survival: New Approaches to the Appraisal of Environmental Records," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), p. 91.

- 22 Joan Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 40–74.
- 23 Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaming Earth to the Ecozoic Era* (San Francisco, 1992). This is recommended reading to grasp in lay terms the context and development of our planet whereby the universe from the "big bang" onwards tells its own "story" of evolution through time within a cosmic setting. Berry is a priest and geologist who calls himself a geologian, and created the term "ecozoic." Swimme is an astrophysicist and cosmologist.
- 24 Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal, 1984), p. 8.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 26 Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon: a Cosmic Creation Story* (Santa Fe, 1984), p. 100.
- 27 Terry Eastwood, "How Goes it with Appraisal?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn, 1993), p. 112.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 29 For an introduction to this problem, see John Selby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (San Francisco, 1991). This is a very controversial book among Anglicans, but contains a popular summary of the difficulties encountered in the Bible in terms of accepting it as literally the words of God, and Spong's solutions based on the meaning behind the words and other evidence from the midrashic tradition. See also his *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes* (San Francisco, 1996).
- 30 J.S. Spong, *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?: A Bishop's Search for the Origins of Christianity* (San Francisco, 1994), p. 8.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 32 Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco, 1988), p. 36. Source not cited.
- 33 Matthew Fox, *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (San Francisco, 1994), p. 5.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 35 Richard Klumpenhower, "The MAS and After: Transubstantiating Theory and Practice into an Archival Culture," *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995), p. 89.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 38 John Main, O.S.B., *Word into Silence* (New York, 1980), p. 4. One facet of meditation is *apoteia* in the stoic sense of freedom from domination and control by the voice of the ego, thereby reducing it to silence. This is far removed from the intellectual detachment of the Western mind and the modern meaning of "apathy."
- 39 Michael Heim, *Electric Language: a Philosophical Study of Word Processing* (New Haven, 1987), p. 236.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 41 Candace Loewen, "From Human Neglect to Planetary Survival: New Approaches to the Appraisal of Environmental Records." This article examines our plight, the fragmentary, piecemeal appraisal, the contributions of philosophers, feminists, and historians to the problem, an appraisal of the Atomic Energy Control Board, and holistic survival values. So far as I know this excellent article is the first of its kind. See also, Hugh Taylor, "The Totemic Universe: Appraising the Documentary Future," in Christopher Hives, ed., *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice* (Vancouver, 1990), pp. 15–30; and, Hugh Taylor, "Recycling the Future: The Archivist in the Age of Ecology," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 203–213.
- 42 Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives and the Public Interest," *Boston University Journal* 19 (Fall 1971), p. 38.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

- 44 Heather MacNeil, "Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms," *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994), p. 13.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 46 Joan M. Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us.'" This is an admirable, ground-breaking addition to the work of Luciana Duranti. See endnote 22 for bibliographic information.
- 47 Brien Brothman, "The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), p. 208. Brothman quotes this phrase in relation to archives as sign, "in Simon Schama's wonderfully ambiguous sense—a site of dead certainties."
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 50 This is also the title of a work by Joseph Campbell, who was consulted by George Lucas in the making of the *Star Wars* trilogy. Luke Skywalker was the mythic hero.
- 51 This I believe as a meditator in the tradition of the fourth century John Cassian, the teacher and inspirer of St. Benedict, which the late Dom John Main has spread around the world through his workshops and tape-recorded talks. In order to make these reflections on spirituality in our profession as inclusive as possible, I have avoided discussing Christian beliefs and have referred to the Bible only as an example of the inherent dangers of literalism in dealing with a record of this kind.
- 52 For example, the Celtic world, with its remarkable fusion of pagan, and later Christian, spirituality with ecology, stands in contrast to the dichotomies bequeathed to us by Greece and Rome. For an excellent overview in a series of symposium papers, see Robert O'Driscall, ed., *The Celtic Consciousness*, (New York, 1981).
- 53 The remaining paragraphs in this article are taken from my unpublished commentary on the session, "Reconsidering Acquisition: The Total Archives Concept," ACA Conference, Ottawa, 1994.
- 54 Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: A Bioregional Vision* (Gabriola Island, B.C., 1991), p. 45.
- 55 Doug Aberly, ed., *Boundaries of Home: Mapping for Local Empowerment* (The New Catalyst Bioregional Series No. 6) (Gabriola Island, B.C., 1993). This was enthusiastically reviewed by Denis Wood in *Cartographica* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1993), for which Ed Dahl was Review Editor.
- 56 To end on a personal note, this will be absolutely my last "stand alone" article to be published, and I would like to thank all my professional colleagues for their interest and support spanning forty-eight years. You have all be very patient! Once again, my warmest thanks to Jane Turner, Archivist of the University of Victoria, for her input digitally and critically; and to Terry Cook for very helpful criticism and suggestions.