

final article which built on the preceding articles to present a comprehensive new paradigm for archival reference service, but evidently Dearstyne was not given the opportunity to read his colleagues' work, so this was not possible. Despite these (perhaps inevitable) limitations, this volume is a good source of ideas for building better, more exciting, and truly relevant reference services.

Susan Hart

British Columbia Information Management Services

Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory, 1951-1990. PETER BISKUP, KATHRYN DAN, COLLEEN McEWEN, GREG O'SHEA, and GRAEME POWELL, eds. Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, Inc., 1995. viii, 230 p. ISBN 0-947219-08-0.

The purpose of republishing the sixteen papers contained between the covers of this volume, Robert Sharman makes clear in his introduction, is to "inform both Australian and overseas readers of the problems and issues that have troubled Australian archivists over the last fifty years and of the contributions they have made to archival theory" (p. 12). While no problem exists with the first part of that promise, as to Sharman's claim about archival theory, which is also boldly declared in the book's subtitle, there is but a minor issue. Apart from Australian archival icon Ian Maclean's pair of interpretive expositions on the work of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and others (1959, 1962), little in this collection actually theorizes about the nature and analysis of archival material – that is, about *what* archives are per se. On the contrary, *Debates and Discourses* is primarily concerned with archival methods and practice – about *how* archivists preserve and communicate the *what* – and in this regard, Sharman's promise indeed bears out, which is not to diminish the efforts of the editors in producing this book. Thoughts about the treatment of archives and the application of this thinking in particular instances are the meat-and-potatoes of archival science, which underscores the importance and usefulness of compilations like these: to introduce or reintroduce archivists to the seminal writings of a discipline that, as all others, matures through well-informed debate.

And debate the Australians do. That they do not have a monolithic archival culture is best represented by the five articles that follow the reproduction of Peter Scott's first published explanation of his "series system" method, which originally appeared in 1966. Included in the book are two pieces – one by K.A. Green (1967) and another by Colin Smith (1986) – that support Scott's approach, and two others – one by Kenneth Polden (1968) and the other by Gerald Fischer (1973) – that prefer more traditional methods. Scott's 1974 response to Fischer also appears among these pages, but excluded is the more detailed, five-part *Archives and Manuscripts* article on the topic published by Scott and co-authors in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which, being quite lengthy, is perhaps deserving of its own monograph.

Though the varying opinions regarding the series system dwell on the treatment of public archives in the light of administrative change, the handling of private archives is also the subject of differing perspectives, with Graeme Powell's (1976) contribution countered by the musings of Christopher Hurley (1977). Bridging the public and private domains is a paper by Peter Crush (1989), which considers the terms "archives" and "manuscripts" and whether the use of different words warrants a concomitant difference in the treatment of the phenomena they describe.

The functional aims of the archivist are very well-attended to in this collection, including discussions of important ideas that underpin archival activities, such as the concept of authenticity, on which both Paul Hasluck (1951) and Robert Sharman (1971) comment. As to the activities themselves, these are mulled over in general terms in a second article by Fischer (1979), but for those interested in more specific treatments of archival roles and responsibilities, the article by Averil Condren (1985) on the problems with the finding aid as a communicative tool and Glenda Acland's (1991)¹ vision of the archivist's niche in today's market provide provocative points of departure.

It is interesting to note that, although the contents of this volume have been presented above according to themes, the pieces actually appear chronologically in print, often with an individual paper making reference to one or more preceding it, their interrelationships arising naturally and creating a nexus much like the archival bond connecting records. The presentation of the selections in their "original order," if you will, is also indicative of the degree to which traditional maxims occupy the Australian archival mind. Indeed, what is so striking about *Debates and Discourses* is not so much about how *different* the Australians are, but rather about how archivists around the world are basically so *similar*. Almost all of the authors appeal, in some way, to the methodological principle of *respect des fonds*, which includes within its meaning the ponderables of provenance and original order, and this appeal only helps to show that it is a truly universal, shared "fact" of archival existence, as Michel Duchein so aptly put it in *Archivaria* in 1983. Now, at a time when much of the archival debate, particularly as it pertains to electronic records, threatens to polarize irrevocably the discipline's disciples into regional or institutional sects, it is heartening to know that archivists, no matter where they are in the world – even those deemed "antipodean" – have much more in common with which to face the future than their divisive discussions may sometimes otherwise indicate.

Note

¹ Glenda Acland's article, though published in 1991, was presented a year earlier, and therefore the editors chose to use 1990 as the closing inclusive date noted in the book's subtitle.