

Archives in 3D*

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RÉSUMÉ Le présent article examine les effets que peuvent avoir divers contextes sur les caractéristiques des documents d'archives. Après avoir brièvement défini la notion de contexte, l'auteure propose un modèle d'analyse complexe tenant simultanément compte de ce que les archives sont, de ce qu'elles font et de ce qu'elles représentent pour leurs producteurs. L'application d'un tel modèle sur la définition traditionnelle des archives permet à l'auteure d'identifier des caractéristiques physiques, fonctionnelles et symboliques de la production documentaire et de voir comment ces dernières sont plus ou moins conditionnées par des contextes de consignation, de communication et de mémoire.

ABSTRACT This article examines the characteristics of archives (records) susceptible to modification by changes in context. After briefly defining the notion of context, the author proposes a complex analytical model, taking into account what archives are, what they do, and what they represent for their creators. By applying such a model to a traditional definition of archives, the author can identify the physical, functional, and symbolic characteristics of archives and explore how they have been conditioned by contexts of recording, communication, and memory making.

If they hope to respond to new questions raised by information technology, widespread concerns over privacy, and the phenomenon of globalization, archivists must gain a better understanding of the processes which influence the nature, functions, and values of archives. This article was written with these challenges in mind. By way of a complex analysis of the various processes involved in the production of documents, it highlights the interplay of perspectives within which archives take shape. The exercise shows how the traditional definition of archives is much less static than might be thought at first glance. Archives are a composite, or whole, emerging from a tangle of perpetually interacting parts. Furthermore, this broad definition adapts to the

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cultural contexts in which the document producer and the archivist are located. All of these factors combine to formalize and give meaning to archives. The model resulting from this analysis can serve as a reading grid, permitting a more precise understanding of archival problems within a given context. Such a tool offers new perspectives on questions to which current archival practices do not seem to provide adequate responses. Further theoretical enquiry is essential for the development of archival science. Conceptual approaches specific to a given field bring coherence to that field's functions and professional activities.

The archival community has long recognized that its practices rely on concepts such as the fonds, and primary and secondary values, as well as on general principles like provenance and the documentary life cycle. Nevertheless, understandings of these principles differ depending on the theoretical framework in which they are placed.¹ Likewise, specialists in the field have developed recognized methods and standards: distinctions between fonds and collections, criteria for appraisal, levels of classification and description, etc. But here, too, debates occur between those who favour different approaches. To give a final example, an overview of the existing literature and a glance at archivists' associational activities show that archivists are consistently demanding greater recognition from society. Affirmations of identity vary according to each archivist's frame of reference.² In other words, despite a consensus on practical approaches and tools, archival practice is understood differently depending on the theoretical framework in which it is observed.

Some believe that documents are a medium for transmitting information, that providing access to the contents of those documents is the goal of archival

1 See Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: from Theory to Practice. Le fonds d'archives : de la théorie à la pratique* (Ottawa, 1992). See also the recent work of Sylvain Sénécal, *La lecture et la description archivistique du document* (Ph.D. thesis in semiology, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1998).

2 While analyzing this question, sociologist of professions Denise Couture observes that "des fondements en histoire, on serait passé aux fondements en sciences de la gestion, et en sciences de l'information ou sciences de la cognition. On pourrait donc imaginer la coexistence simultanée de différents types d'archivistes : celui qui se distingue pour la connaissance de la nature même de l'information; celui qui se distingue par la facilité/rapidité avec laquelle il est capable de repérer l'information recherchée par quelqu'un d'autre, celui qui se distingue par sa contribution à la mise au point de systèmes de classification, d'indexation, de repérage 'universels' de l'information sans s'attarder au contenu de l'information." Denise Couture, "La place de la mission dans la définition et l'évolution d'une occupation," *GIRA, 2e Symposium en archivistique. La mission de l'archiviste dans la société. Montréal Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique* (Montreal, 1994). For an example of these tendencies as they have manifested themselves in Quebec, see the various positions defended in *Symposium en archivistique. La place de l'archivistique dans la gestion de l'information: perspectives de recherche* (Montreal, 1990).

science, and that the archivist is a professional intermediary standing between researchers and their sources. From such a perspective, archival science is seen as a sister discipline to library science within the larger field of information sciences. This framework emphasizes the integrity of the contents within a process of transmission and access. Accordingly, the information passes through various phases of transformation in order to be communicated through a particular channel. In the process, regardless of the method or technology employed, the message is altered because the information can be corrupted over time and can change depending on the effects of its various contexts. Archival functions can be explained in terms of this threatened coherence. Archivists first shore up the information by reducing and synthesizing its mass. They eliminate redundancies and select the most significant contents (some call this the 10 per cent principle). They manage and describe the mass of documentation according to the principle of moving from the general to the specific, thereby allowing for comprehensive, rapid, and easy reference. Finally, they streamline the process by means of identification and searching techniques which facilitate consultation.³

Others have developed an approach based on different assumptions. For them, the documents are resources; the control of those resources is an activity akin to managing human, material, or financial resources; and the archivist's role is to contribute to decision-making processes and to developments in the organization's operations. In this approach, archival science is a discipline belonging to the management family. This perspective stresses the management of the documentary content while the corresponding theoretical framework principally focuses on the integration of that content into work processes. The goal is to adapt the use of the documentary medium to the needs and preoccupations of the records creator. On the one hand, the manager optimizes the primary value of the documents by rationalizing their creation according to current work processes: management of forms, uniform classification, etc. On the other hand, secondary values are optimized by recycling inactive documents for new activities: records schedules, selection procedures, rules regarding active and dormant records.⁴

While some branches of information and organizational sciences represent new approaches to defining archival science, for many the discipline remains firmly planted in the field of historical sciences. In this approach, archival doc-

3 For a discussion and an example of this approach as it has been followed in Quebec, see the article by Carol Couture, Jacques Ducharme, and Jean-Yves Rousseau, "L'archivistique a-t-elle trouvé son identité?" *Argus* 17, no. 2 (1988), pp. 51–60. Also, Jean-Yves Rousseau, Carol Couture, et al., *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique* (Sainte-Foy, 1994).

4 For an example of how this approach has been adopted in Quebec, see Michel Roberge, *La gestion de l'information administrative. Application globale, systémique et systématique* (Quebec, 1992).

uments are traces of the past bearing witness to their creators and to the society they inhabited, the preservation and the appreciation of these representations of the past constitute the goals of archival science, and the archivist is a participant in the construction of an historical discourse.⁵ This theoretical framework focuses on preserving the integrity of the meaning contained within the archival heritage. From this perspective, the archivist is responsible for conserving, enriching, and promoting an authentic archival memory in order to respond to the need for references to the past.

This study follows the latter approach.⁶ It holds that archives constitute recorded organic memory (*mémoire organique et consignée*) and reflect the identity of their creators. The contexts in which records were originally produced and later made relevant influence the ways in which they are defined. This approach corresponds to the scientific perspective of complexity and draws, in particular, on the work of sociologist Edgar Morin and those who have pursued or clarified his ideas.⁷

From this perspective, archives are the representations which remain from the process of selecting and managing memory. This memory is not static. Analysis of a society's relationship with its past shows that references to the past are constantly made relevant in the present, due to a system of information which links older and newer documents in an organic and coherent whole. Furthermore, this memory is tangible insofar as it is rooted in the reality of the records creating organization. The central idea is that archives are expressions of memory which cannot be separated from the other systems which surround and define the records creator. The concept of "recorded organic memory" (and not of recorded organic information as put forward in certain approaches developed in Quebec) describes this dynamic and demands a more precise reading of archives' characteristics.

5 For a discussion of this development, see Louise Gagnon-Arguin, *L'archivistique, son histoire, ses acteurs depuis 1960* (Sainte-Foy, 1992).

6 This text builds on Martine Cardin, *Archivistique : information, organisation, mémoire. L'exemple du Mouvement coopératif Desjardins 1900–1990* (Sillery, 1995), as well as on various research articles, including "La dynamique des archives associées ou la toile archivistique institutionnelle," *Archives* 29, no. 2 (1997–1998), pp. 31–43. This conception was also presented schematically in "Les archives : un espace, une pratique, l'expression d'une culture," in *Les archives : un lieu de conservation, de mémoire et d'information. Actes du XXVI^e congrès. Aylmer, mai 1998* (Quebec, 1998), pp. 95–102.

7 Edgar Morin, *La Méthode* (Paris, 1977–1986). The theorist Jean-Louis Le Moigne underlines that Morin is the thinker who presented the concept in its fullest form, but this should not eclipse the theories outlined previously in the synthesis proposed by Morin. J.-L. Le Moigne, *Le constructivisme. Tome 1: des fondements* (Paris, 1994), p. 180, n. 21. See also J. Piaget, *Biologie et Connaissance* (1976), H. Atlan, *L'organisation biologique et la théorie de l'information* (1972), F. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (1979), Stafford Beer, *Platform for Change* (1975).

The Context

Like a cook and a magician evaluating a rabbit, different observers inevitably adapt their perception of things to their own particular point of view and according to their own particular context. The cook will likely see meat and describe the properties of the rabbit's flesh. The magician will accord great importance to the animal's small tail and large ears in assessing its suitability as a prop for his show.⁸ Asked how to care for a rabbit, the cook would recommend keeping it refrigerated whereas the magician would want to keep it warm. This example of two different ways of seeing a rabbit and of ordering the characteristics of the animal points to a fundamental principle: that the definition of an object always varies according to the context of observation, and that there are always many contexts of observation.

These insights lie at the foundation of this paper. The latter is based on the idea that there is no single or absolute definition capable of translating the full archival reality. Rather, I argue that there are numerous ways of viewing archives, just as there are many ways of describing their characteristics. While some definitions may seem contradictory, this is often merely a question of perspective. As the example of the rabbit shows, definitions considered accurate in some contexts are not necessarily relevant in others. Yet one definition does not invalidate the other. Definitions can coexist, shedding light on different aspects of the same object. And so it goes with archives. Different theoretical approaches constitute different points of view, each selecting and describing a certain number of the possible characteristics of archives. It would be wrong to claim that any single definition could encompass all of the possible contexts of observation and characteristics of archives.

This paper seeks to understand how archival reality is constructed through the prisms of a variety of contexts and from a variety of points of view. I begin by briefly discussing the notion of context. Then I use a traditional definition of archives as a starting point for the analysis of various contexts.

⁸ Jenkinson uses the rabbit-from-a-hat analogy when discussing Schellenberg's definition of archives to argue that records were not initially created for the use of scholars, like hats were not created for magicians. He then argues that the secondary use of a thing, such as the use of a record by a scholar or a hat by a magician, "is not part of its nature and should not, I submit, be made an element in its definition, though it may reasonably affect its treatment." Hilary Jenkinson, "Modern Archives: Some Reflections on T.R. Schellenberg," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 1 (April 1957), pp. 148–49. Livelton examines the differences between the definitions of Jenkinson and Schellenberg *in extenso*. As he says, "attributes essential for one purpose of defining a thing are not essential for other purposes." He also observes that "the best procedure for examining a definition is to ask whether it is both true and suitable in its context." Trevor Livelton, *Archival Theory, Records, and the Public* (Lanham, MD, 1996), pp. 72–76. To reiterate, this article is based on the idea that it is possible to assume many contextual standpoints in order to analyse the characteristics of archives.

What is context? The notion of context is like a rabbit, broad and complex in the scope of its characteristics. It gives rise to numerous different scientific definitions. From the outset, it is important to define exactly how context will be used in this discussion.⁹ The philosopher Pierre Lévy describes context as a

9 Claiming to offer a definitive and exhaustive definition of the notion of context would be contrary to the spirit of this text. In fact, the notion refers to a vast and complex literature. To say that context is a collection of elements which produce meaning in no way covers all of its possible implications. In order to arrive at a more satisfactory definition, it is necessary to consider the more positivist, structuralist, and postmodernist approaches which view context as a determined and determining state, as a dynamic social process, and as a symbolic act lying outside of the situation to which it gives meaning. These different approaches are present in the work of authors such as A. Comte, L. Fèvre, M. Bloch, A. Giddens, J. Derrida, and M. Foucault. To offer a critical reading of these approaches would require a lengthy discussion. Consequently, I will simply state that the notion of context as it is used in my own study is defined within the scientific perspective of complexity. Thus, context emerges from the interaction between various kinds of factors (physical, functional, and symbolic). For more on this subject, see the following works dealing with the current state of scholarly enquiry, each of which contains an extensive bibliography. Although these works are in French, the references contained therein mainly point towards English-language scholarship. Also see Michael Brenner, Peter Marsh, and Marilyn Brenner, eds., *The Social Contexts of Method* (New York, 1978) and V.Y. Mudimbe, ed., *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Stanford, 1996).

The perspective of complexity stems from the work of Edgar Morin, *La Méthode*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1977–1991). Morin bases his “Method” on the principle that knowledge of an object is linked to the vision of the observer through a system of observation. The modeling of the context involves constant interplay between physical, biological, and anthropological-social components within a reality-producing system. From this perspective, the context combines facts, structures, and discourse as the parameters which define reality. A critical discussion of this approach can be found in Jean-Louis Le Moigne, *Le constructivisme. Tome 1 : des fondements* (Paris, 1994), and *Tome 2 : des épistémologies* (Paris, 1995).

Le Moigne is a specialist in critical epistemology. His book, *Le constructivisme*, is a useful reference work for anyone interested in the discourse on the foundations of scientific knowledge or in the general theory of knowledge. *Le constructivisme* is based on the idea that “la complexité n’est pas dans la nature des choses (lesquelles ne seraient ni simples, ni complexes ... au mieux indifférentes aux interrogations de l’observateur), elle résiderait dans le modèle que l’observateur se construit du phénomène qu’il tient pour complexe” (vol. 1), p. 175. The author nevertheless denies any claim to have made a “traité du constructivisme épistémologique,” which, like Auguste Comte’s *Cathéchisme du positivisme*, “figerait une entreprise qui ne s’entend que dans sa dynamique culturelle.” Instead, Le Moigne appeals to an active and internal understanding of the ways in which conceptions of reality are constructed and defend themselves through the dynamic of cultural contexts. Le Moigne pursues his arguments on two different levels: the “foundations” of knowledge and the “exercise” of knowledge, that is to say, the ways in which knowledge manifests itself in artistic and scientific fields. In “des fondements” (vol. 1), the author explores the conceptual models with which humans observe reality by referring to authors (contemporary or not) who develop or provide a deeper understanding of them. In the second volume, “des épistémologies,” the author explains the strategies (positivist, empiricist, and constructivist) on which human knowledge is founded in the practice of various disciplines. This includes an epistemological critique of the foundations of organizational sciences (in terms of both “decision-making” and “cognition”), management, communications, computer science, engineering, design, and education.

process of selecting and assembling the images, models, recollections, sensations, concepts, and fragments of discourse with which humans construct relevant and meaningful representations of reality.¹⁰ Context is an agent which gives meaning and coherence to related objects. It selects among various meanings in order to determine which one is best suited to a particular situation. From this perspective, context is more than just a set of external circumstances which explains, after the fact, why an archival fonds exists in one state or another: context directly affects the way we define archives in the present. An observer's particular context causes him or her to select and assemble various characteristics of a document in such a way as to recognize it as an archival document. Overall, it seems essential to integrate more fully the notion of context into the theoretical underpinnings of archival studies.

Developing a Method

A context-based approach demands an analytical model appropriate for characterizing archives. I have developed just such a model through my research on the process of constituting recorded organic memory and through my work on the sound archives of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie urbaine at Université Laval.¹¹ This model is based on the following principles which are drawn from a variety of disciplines.

The scientific method of reading conceptualized by sociologist and political scientist Marc-Edmond Lipiansky lays out the general perspectives from which the identity of an object can be expressed.¹² Lipiansky's model speaks in terms of three axes of representation along which an object is defined, namely the person, the character, and the personality. The person refers to the concrete identity of an object, that is to say, the object as object. This perspective perceives reality by fixing the "way of being" of the object – its age, size, colour, shape, status, etc. – and leads to a factual definition. By contrast, the character refers to the functional aspect of an object, to the object as tool. This perspective defines the object in terms of its "ways of acting," meaning the ways in which it is employed. Focussing on an object's functions, activities, roles, etc. leads to a functional or purposive view. The personality of an object

10 Pierre Lévy, *Les technologies de l'intelligence : l'avenir de la pensée à l'ère de l'informatique* (Paris, 1990), pp. 27–28.

11 "L'accessibilité intellectuelle automatisée : l'exemple du système LEU-CVQ" in *Actes du 28e Congrès de l'AAQ* (Québec, 2000), pp. 186–98.

12 M.-E. Lipiansky, "Identité, communication et rencontres interculturelles," *Cahiers de sociologie économique et culturelle* 5 (juin 1986), pp. 7–49. This model is presented by Jacques Mathieu in "L'objet et ses contextes," *Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle* 26 (Fall 1987), pp. 7–18. I applied it from an archival perspective in *Archivistique : information, organisation, mémoire*.

is related to the conscience and leads to a definition in terms of the object's "way of appearing." In other words, it focuses on principles, values, and ideologies, and leads to a philosophical conception.

The process of representation in a society usually gives more importance to one axis, depending on the context. The person axis defines a thing concretely, the character axis inserts a thing into a system of actions, and the personality axis reflects the discourses to which the thing is bound. For example, an identity card conveys attributes of the way of being, a curriculum vitae accentuates the way of acting, and a eulogy underlines characteristics of the way of appearing. Such processes constitute strategic answers to the needs of an observer who wants to see, perceive, or conceive reality.

However, the sum of all the dimensions of an object can never produce a global reading of it. Rather than a sum of its various dimensions, an object is an emergent whole created by their intersection. The approach to complexity developed by Morin helps to further explain this conception of archives. According to Morin, the knowledge with which humans define reality is always based on a series of physical, biological, and anthropological-sociological dimensions. The combination of these various dimensions provides a picture of the whole which portrays emergent qualities or properties. Morin defines these as "des qualités ou propriétés ... qui présentent un caractère de nouveauté par rapport aux qualités ou propriétés des composants considérés isolément ou agencés différemment dans un autre type de système."¹³ The whole acts on every aspect of an object and shapes it according to its emergent characteristics. Such assertions are commonplace in archival studies, for archivists have long known that the body of documents created by a producer is greater than the sum of the individual documents which compose it.

Morin's approach also reveals that in emergent processes, ways of being, acting, and appearing mutually influence each other. Consequently, a point of view always integrates physical, functional, and aesthetic characteristics.¹⁴ Thus, theoretical insights into organization theory, information and communication studies, as well as human and social sciences can contribute to a three-dimensional conceptualization of the ways of being, acting, and appearing.

Organization theory examines how objects are created, structured, and defined at the crossroads of their ontological, functional, and genetic dimen-

¹³ Morin, *La Méthode : La nature de la nature*, p. 126.

¹⁴ For example, the way of being of the human body is defined not only by its natural physiology, but also by its capacity to assume postures governed by certain cultural standards. The way of acting considers not only functional activities but also the material instruments used (glasses, false teeth, etc.) and rules of etiquette. Finally, the way of appearing is not only based on discourses setting out aesthetic rules, but also on physical marks such as tattoos and hairstyle, as well as observed functional traits such as deportment.

sions.¹⁵ From this perspective, the way of being results from the conjunction of three factors: first, natural characteristics; second, conditions according to which characteristics are organized; and, third, accepted standards for evaluating the normality of the object. Information and communication studies look at how different objects are related, used, and perceived in a system by focusing on the interrelation of technical, pragmatic, and semantic acts.¹⁶ The way of acting results from a combination of the instrumentation supporting the action, the performance of activities, and the regulation defining the limits of the action. The human and social sciences study how objects are identified, integrated, and understood in a society by focussing on the interrelation of events, social orders, and cultural discourse. The way of appearing is revealed through concrete marks and symbols, through ritual activities which bestow

15 J.M. Guiot et A. Beaufruits, *Théories de l'organisation* (Montréal, 1987), p. 250. For a general view and bibliography of studies of organizations, see Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 2d ed. (London, 1997). This work is an excellent critical study of the scientific conceptions of organizations. Morgan states that organizations are complex, ambiguous, and full of paradoxes. Consequently, it is necessary to develop analytical tools which take into account organizations' many aspects (p. 8). Morgan shows how organizations are conceived in various different ways by theorists. He proceeds to synthesize these different viewpoints through a series of metaphors where organizations are seen as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, prisons of the psyche, instances of flux and transformation, and tools of domination. According to Morgan, these metaphors help to decipher the many facets of organizations and they are useful analytical models. Morgan's study refers to some 600 works on the subject (monographs and articles), including 180 translations. The first of the book's two parts introduces the metaphors, discusses their concrete implications for understanding a context of organizational life, and identifies their strengths and weaknesses. The second part contains bibliographical notes on the metaphors presented. The French edition also includes a bibliography of French-language works, and a French-English/English-French lexicon which clarifies expressions which might otherwise confuse the reader.

16 J.-L. Le Moigne, "Communication, information et culture : le plus étrange des problèmes," *Technologies de l'information et société* 1, no. 2 (1989), p. 14. For a general view of works on information and communication, see Daniel Bounoux, ed., *Sciences de l'information et de la communication* (Paris, 1993). This collection contains eighty-five fundamental texts dealing with information sciences and communications, arranged in six main disciplinary groupings: semiology, pragmatics, psychoanalysis, cybernetics, and media studies. It explores the concepts developed by various authors, including, P. John, L. Austin, R. Barthes, G. Bateson, J. Baudrillard, M. Serres, J. Derrida, V. Segalen, F. Saussure, R. Jacobson, C. Levi-Strauss, L. Wittgenstein, P. Watzlawick, A. Koestler, J. Lacan, M. Borch-Jacobsen, A. Moles, W. Weaver, A.M. Turing, N. Wiener, J. von Neuman, H. von Foerster, E. Morin, U. Eco, J. Goody, P. Lévy, and R. Debray; as well as critical analyses of the works of Habermas, C.S. Peirce, and M. McLuhan. This collection of "essential texts" also includes separate bibliographies for each of the main themes. Readers may also want to consult Gilles Willett, *La communication modélisée : une introduction aux concepts, aux modèles et aux théories* (Ottawa, 1992). This study is an intelligent discussion of various theoretical and conceptual models used in the field of communications. Without trying to cover all knowledge belonging to all relevant disciplines, the study focuses on twelve themes deemed particularly relevant to contemporary debates: the phenomenon of communication and the modeling thereof; the notions of the sign,

the object with particular meaning, and through an abstract framework of representation.¹⁷

To summarize, ways of being, acting, and appearing can be understood in terms of the following equations. The symbol “ \cap ” represents the conjunction (and not the mere addition) of the physical, functional, and aesthetic parameters.

	Way of being = nature \cap conditions \cap normality
Object	Way of acting = instrumentation \cap performance \cap regulation
	Way of appearing = mark \cap ritual \cap philosophy

Even if the interaction of the internal properties of the object help shape its several dimensions, it is always defined within the framework of a society whose cultural dynamics also contribute to its definition. The contextual approach developed in the 1980s by researchers at Université Laval’s CÉLAT (called the Centre d’études sur les lettres, les arts et les traditions at that time) enriches this perspective.¹⁸ The contextual approach is based on the concepts

information, and communication; relationships between transmitters and receivers; mass communications; the mass media “machine”; mass communications and persuasion; the processing of information in the context of mass communications; the uses of media and media communication; the effects of media; and communication ethics. In order to illustrate each individual theme, the authors select Canadian, American, European, and Scandinavian models developed by different disciplines, which explain, from different perspectives, the concepts, theories, and practices associated with communication. The authors explain the foundations, the structure of the principal elements and processes, and the characteristics and limits of each of these models in order to promote a better understanding of the underlying theory. The study also includes an annotated bibliography and a glossary.

17 Jacques Mathieu, “L’objet et ses contextes,” pp. 7–18 and “Pour une morphogénèse du passé,” in J. Mathieu, ed., *La mémoire dans la culture* (Québec, 1995), pp. 3–27. For an evaluation of the present state of scholarship on the concept of memory, along with a discussion of its applicability to archival questions, see chapter 2, “La mémoire,” in Martine Cardin, *Archivistique: information, organisation, mémoire. L’exemple du Mouvement coopératif Desjardins, 1900–1990*.

18 This framework of contexts was developed by historians, geographers, ethnologists, linguists, and archaeologists. They have published individual articles relating to specific cultural spaces, cultural practices, and social conceptions of the past, but no synthesis of these perspectives has emerged. As with context, these concepts refer to important debates within individual disciplines. On these questions, I have relied primarily on the work of researchers at Université Laval’s CÉLAT, since their studies constitute scientific syntheses which take into account different analytical perspectives. Furthermore, these studies are oriented towards a paradigm similar to that underlying my own work. Consequently, they have the advantage of presenting a critical reading within a complex perspective. Finally, to the extent that they were produced by an interdisciplinary team, the texts establish links between certain concepts. For example, the concepts of group membership and territory are similar to the extent that they are both symbolic notions. The concept of territory holds that natural space and spatial organization are directly linked to a demand and to a cultural discourse. Similarly, the concept of group membership is based on the fact that the form and strategies of transmission are linked to symbolic actions.

of cultural spaces and cultural practices, and on the process of understanding the past. Each of these concepts or processes is a “network of links” combining and activating different aspects of collective identity in order to produce particular representations. In other words, cultural spaces, cultural practices, and conceptions of the past are contexts in which the ways of being, acting, and appearing are defined.

The concept of cultural spaces is related to how humans define phenomena in their environment. The evolution of the field of geography illustrates how different elements affect this context.¹⁹ At first, geography studied the physical reality of natural phenomena. Physical geography sought out natural laws, while human geography explained their effects on human life. A change occurred when geographers adopted the idea that the ways in which humans structure space also help define geographic phenomena. They began to study urban networks, regional divisions, infrastructures, and spatial organization. In a third phase, geographers began attaching greater importance to the ways in which people appropriate space and lay symbolic claim to it with different signs of ownership. The result was a concept of territory where the individual interacts with geographic phenomena within a cultural system. Ultimately, by developing the concept of cultural space, geographers saw the context of phenomena as a combination of natural determinism, instrumentation, and cultural markers.

The concept of cultural practices is related to the way individuals identify themselves in terms of their achievements. This relationship is illustrated by the evolution of ethnology.²⁰ First, ethnologists studied folklore, “the group of popular traditions which provide people with a national identity.” Folklorists recorded and collected legends, tales, and rites in order to understand the conditions under which traditions were expressed. Eventually, ethnology turned itself to performance, or the way in which tradition is communicated and transmuted in a social environment. They studied the strategies used to integrate tradition into a system of cultural transmission. In a third phase, ethnologists instead focussed their studies on the symbolic actions by which individuals identify themselves as members of a group. Ultimately, the concept of cultural practices established that the context of achievement combines conditions, performance, and ritual.

The concept of “conceptions of the past” refers to the way in which individuals understand objects over time. The evolution of the field of archaeology illustrates the different parameters relevant to this context.²¹ First, archaeologists studied the object itself by listing, naming, and calibrating the artefacts of

19 Serge Courville, “De l’espace au territoire,” in J. Mathieu, ed., *Les dynamismes de la recherche au Québec* (Québec, 1991), pp. 23–44.

20 Lucille Guilbert, “Folklore et ethnologie : de l’identité ethnique à l’interculturalité,” in *ibid.*, pp. 63–91.

21 Marcel Moussette, “Sens et contresens: l’étude de la culture matérielle au Québec,” *Canadian Folklore* 4 (1984), pp. 7–26.

a material culture. This exercise aimed to establish the characteristics of objects: colour, building material, model, etc. With the development of social history, archaeologists began to concentrate their studies on the insertion of artefacts into a social structure. They became interested in how the creation and use of objects produced in a given material culture were regulated. Under the influence of postmodernism, present-day archaeologists prefer to analyse the object in light of cultural sensibilities, and seek to understand the symbolic values embodied within it. Ultimately, the concept of conceptions of the past establishes that the context of understanding combines normality, regulation, and philosophy.

Bringing the exercise to a close, I can now formulate a series of axioms and propose a method of deconstruction to help in analysing archives. The axioms are as follows:

1. An object has ways of being, acting, and appearing which are particular to it. These are the dimensions which must be taken into account when the definition of an object is broken down analytically.
2. An object is not merely the sum of its parts. It constitutes a much greater whole. Thus, not only must one take into account what archives are, do, and seem to be, but also the totality of what these three dimensions create when brought together.
3. Regardless of the angle, an object must always be observed as a three-dimensional snapshot. Depending on the axis of observation, the object's ways of being, acting, and appearing will expose different physical, functional, and aesthetic characteristics.
4. An object always forms part of a social framework which contributes to its definition. Social phenomena, achievements, and understandings always influence the definition of an object's ways of being, acting, or appearing used within a particular society.

Brought together, these axioms produce the following definitional matrix:

Matrix for Defining an Object

Societal Axis / Object Axis	Phenomenon	Achievement	Understanding
Way of Being	Nature	Conditions	Normality
Way of Acting	Instrumentation	Performance	Regulation
Way of Appearing	Mark	Ritual	Philosophy

Each element of the matrix represents one aspect of an object which can be selected and then assembled with others into a mini-network of meanings.

Every time different elements are assembled to form a three-dimensional snapshot, there is a context capable of producing a definition for the object. The object is unique even if the contexts through which it is defined are diverse. The definitional matrix defines the object as it passes through the prism of various contexts. By applying this matrix, the archival object can be deconstructed, that is to say, broken down into its component aspects.

Deconstructing Archives

For the purposes of this exercise, I will work from a traditional definition likely to promote a consensus. I define archives as *a body of documents, gathered by an individual or a public or private entity for the very purposes of its existence and the exercise of its functions, maintained for their testimonial value for the producer or for society in general, and regardless of their age, their nature, their medium, or the way in which they were gathered (organically or automatically).*²² This definition identifies three processes central to the creation of archives, namely, recording, communication, and memory. I will apply the matrix developed above to each of these processes in order to show the various definitions which can result. This application will also highlight the various possible contexts for definition. Throughout the exercise, I will touch on the effects these contexts can have on archives' readability, performance (or effectiveness), and authenticity.

Contexts of the Document as an Object Created by the Recording Process

The traditional definition of archives proposed above states that documents are archives *regardless of their age, their nature, or their medium*. This assertion serves as a reminder of the physical dimension of archives. Archives (records) are tangible objects that can be seen, touched, and destroyed. But the significance of this physical reality varies according to the characteristics imparted by the recording process. The medium, the form, and cultural marks are contexts which define the ways of being, acting, and appearing of a document intended to be the object of a recording process.

The Way of Being or the Context of the Medium

Physically, a document is a set of signals marked on some material by technological means. The combination [material \cap technology \cap signals] determines the context of the medium. The elements come together and combine to estab-

²² Adaptation of the traditional French definition from *Dictionnaire des archives : de l'archivage aux systèmes d'information* (Paris, 1991), and J.-Y. Rousseau et C. Couture, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique* (Sainte-foy, 1994).

lish the document's way of being in the material dimension. The *material* is the physical support which determines the durability or fragility of the document. The *technology* supports the act of recording. It may be manual or machine driven. It determines the size and ease of reproduction of the document, in short, its stability. The *signals* fix ideas by recording them with analog or digital symbols. They make documents more or less perceptible by determining their audibility, readability, palpability, etc. Depending on the characteristics of the medium, documents have a variable degree of durability in space and time.

The Way of Acting or the Context of Form

Letters printed on a sheet of paper are signs expressed through a medium, but they do not necessarily constitute an archival document. To be seen as a document, the object must have certain recognizable formal attributes. These are produced through the context of form. The combination [configuration \cap process of production \cap rules of production] determines a document's way of acting by governing its form.

The *configuration* imposes formal parameters for presentation. It may or may not be conventional, and it may take various forms. It results in ordinary or exceptional documents, and it standardizes document production to various degrees. The *process of production* formalizes documents through a production method. The method, which may be craft-based or automated, gives rise to a variety of forms, including manuscripts, photocopies, and electronic files. It determines whether a document is one-of-a-kind or has multiple copies and to what extent a document can be reproduced or "cloned." The *rules of production* structure the signals by alphabetic, numeric, chromatic, or other codes. The resulting document can require a variable number of intermediaries to be read, thereby affecting the degree to which it is intelligible.

The context of form acts on the document's qualities in several ways. It influences accuracy since the degree to which the document is standardized affects its susceptibility to recording and reading errors. The form also affects performance: the simpler the form, the easier it is to read and exchange the document.

The Way of Appearing, or the Context of Cultural Signs

The medium and the form are not sufficient to distinguish between archives and a pile of paper. Such a distinction can only be made with the help of aesthetic traits which reveal an object's symbolic dimension. It is the context of cultural signs which gives a particular appearance to documents through the combination [signature \cap feature \cap written form], thereby determining the way the recorded object appears to the viewer.

The *signature* is a mark which links a document to its creator. The signature can be individual or institutional, handwritten or printed, and it indicates to what extent the document is customized. The *feature* refers to signs incorporated within the document. A sign or signs may be unique to a particular document or common to an entire class of documents. Such marks include watermarks, colouring, and numbering. These features render the document more or less unique, and may be used to determine its authenticity. The *written form* refers to the outward appearance of the ideas reproduced in the document. Sometimes figurative or abstract, it determines the extent to which a document is readable. Its forms (iconography, cartography, etc.) are governed by typographic conventions (scale, harmonics, perspective, etc.).

The context of cultural signs determines the extent to which a document has a marked character.²³ It determines the effectiveness of archival documentation by establishing a degree of certainty with regards to the recorded representation. The more specific it is, the more effective the document because of the ease of identification provided by the marks present. Similarly, cultural signs play a key role in establishing authenticity: when cultural signs are verifiable, a document is more credible.

The Comprehensive Context of an Object as Created through the Recording Process

Within the recording process, a document can be viewed as the product of several different contexts. These contexts can be laid out in the following manner:

Set of Contexts through the Recording Process

Document	Phenomenon	Achievements	Understanding
Way of being: Medium	Material + or – durable	Technology + or – stable	Signals + or – perceptible
Way of acting: Form	Configuration + or – standardized	Process of production + or – reproducible	Rules of production + or – intelligible
Way of appearing: Cultural signs	Signature + or – personalized	Feature + or – singular	Written form + or – readable

Individually or through their interactions, these sets of contexts accentuate or subdue different characteristics of the document. Furthermore, documents

²³ For a discussion of the importance of cultural signs, see Bruno Lussatto, *La théorie de l’empreinte* (Paris, 1991).

are affected by sets of contexts which influence a given society's recording processes. For example, national policies on privacy, technology, and globalization influence the mediums, forms, and cultural signs associated with documents.

Contexts of the Document as an Object Related to a Communication Process

The traditional definition also states that archives are organically or automatically *gathered by an individual or ... entity for the needs of its existence and the exercise of its functions*. This assertion reflects a pragmatic understanding of archives. Created and maintained with the needs of users in mind, archives support societal expression. Their uses vary according to the communication processes they are called upon to support. Accordingly, the medium, mode of expression, and intention are contexts for defining the ways of being, acting, and appearing of a document designed to communicate.

The Way of Being or the Context of the Means of Communicating

Archives convey messages produced by a series of operations which generate and transmit information through a document. The document's way of being is characterized by the combination [vehicle \cap procedure for communicating \cap message]. This combination underlies the context of the means of communicating.

The *vehicle* is the material means used to convey messages. It may be flexible or rigid depending on how easily its contents can be manipulated. An electronic vehicle is flexible as it can allow for data to be added or deleted easily. The vehicle helps determine the extent to which the information generated is mobile and multi-purpose, as well as the accessibility and flexibility of document production. The *procedure for communicating* refers to the paths taken by the messages. It encompasses the various ways in which humans and machines create and transmit documents.²⁴ It may be simple and direct, or part of a sophisticated and multidirectional network. The procedure determines the extent to which communication is fluid and the elaborateness of the mass of documentation. The *message* refers to the intellectual means of communicating ideas. It may be personal or corporate and it determines how accessible communication is from an intellectual or cultural point of view. The message determines to what extent the document is comprehensible.

²⁴ Abraham Moles defines the word *circuit* as a cycle including four types of processors of information (emission, coding, reception, and reaction) linked by various aspects of communication. See Abraham Moles, *Théorie de l'information et perception esthétique* (Paris, 1972), and Bruno Lussatto, *La théorie de l'empreinte*, pp. 199–215.

The context of the means of communicating affects the performance and effectiveness of documents. It affects performance by determining the efficiency with which the information contained in a document can circulate. Generally, gains in performance mean losses in integrity of information. In fact, systems of communication always combine different types of vehicles. Interfaces perform the coding and decoding operations needed to ensure movement from one path to another. Consequently, the document benefits from the manageability of its vehicle, the fluidity of its communication procedures, and the clarity of its message. However, for information to circulate freely, the communication procedure must include a large number of intermediaries. This makes the information in the document more fragile. Furthermore, the degree of accessibility of the means of communication adversely affects the natural links between documents, which are open to pollution or documentary erosion.

The Way of Acting or the Context of Expression

In order to deliver an effective message, the document must also fit into a material structure, a strategy for action, and a set of concerns shared by all involved. The context of expression, which is defined by the combination [arrangement \cap business procedure \cap classification], helps shape and organize the document's way of acting.

The *arrangement* is the order through which documents form a coherent material whole. It can be organic or artificial, depending on the "naturalness" of the production links. It can either proceed from the general to the specific or adopt a predefined relational configuration. The degree to which the documentary structure is modifiable depends on how easily the arrangement's links can be broken. The *business procedure* is the way of using the documents to carry out business. It varies according to the degree of specialization and complexity of the activities, and consequently it engenders practices of varying degrees of diversification.²⁵ The business procedure determines the extent to which a body of documents is developed. *Classification* is the way the messages are structured in order to produce a coherent discourse. It may correspond to productive functions or to a universal theme. It may be specific or uniform for the various cells of a single organization. The classification determines the extent to which the documents are rationalized.

The context of expression influences the performance of documents in several ways. The more the form of expression is shared, the more the

²⁵ In a general way, documents are developed by organizational systems of direction, resolution of problems, development of know-how, improvement of skills, conviviality, and memorization of experience. Éric Sutter, *Maîtriser l'information pour garantir la qualité* (Paris, 1993).

resulting document is accessible. A rationalized system promotes efficient and reliable sharing of information. This is one of the main arguments invoked to affirm the relevance of document management. Standardizing expression undeniably facilitates the implementation of the communication process. However, while universality of expression promotes greater distribution, it also implies a certain levelling of cultural expression specific to each internal producing cell.

The Way of Appearing or the Context of Intention

Document production requires a semantic act to make it meaningful and relevant in the present. This act confers aesthetic characteristics on the documents, which make it possible to recognize the meanings they convey and express. The context of intention, which results from the combination [design \cap type \cap capacity], affects the document's way of appearing.

The *design* gives to the documents a form that reflects the culture which produced them. It can reproduce the style of relations of an individual in his or her environment, or mirror the configuration of an organizational network.²⁶ The model may be based on the smallest or the largest operational cell and be designed from a maximalist or minimalist point of view. It determines the extent to which the structure of the fonds is comprehensive and customized. The *type* refers to the specificity of the documentary forms produced by the experts charged with the task. The work of these experts produces documentary types (relating to accounting, marketing, commemoration, etc.) which determine the extent to which documents are characteristic of a particular domain.²⁷ The *capacity* marks the documents by giving them a form which corresponds to the primary and secondary administrative, legal, financial, and evidential needs they fulfill.²⁸ In the field of archival studies, this notion is found in concepts of primary and secondary values. The capacity of a document can be more or less specific.

The context of intention influences the performance and authenticity of archives. It guides how documents are created to properly support the creator's function and activities. The clearer the intention of the document, the more specific its scope and the easier it is to distinguish between what is useful and what is merely interesting. Also, the intention affects authenticity since the more delineated the document production is, the easier it is to follow the process of creation and, consequently, to associate a document with its context of creation.

26 For discussion and models of organization, see Henri Mintzberg's works.

27 For example, see Louise Gagnon-Arguin, *Typologie des documents administratifs* (Sainte-Foy, 1999).

28 For a relevant discussion, see *Les valeurs archivistiques : Actes du colloque* (Québec, 1994).

The Comprehensive Context of the Document as an Object Related to a Communication Process

Bringing to a close this second application of the context matrix, I can now sketch out a new definition of the archival document. This time, it is from a more pragmatic perspective.

Set of Contexts through the Communication Process

Document	Phenomenon	Achievements	Understanding
Way of being:	Vehicle	Procedure of communicating	Message
Means of communicating	+ or – usable	+ or – elaborate	+ or – comprehensible
Way of acting:	Arrangement	Business procedure	Classification
Expression	+ or – modifiable	+ or – developed	+ or – rationalized
Way of appearing:	Design	Type	Capacity
Intention	+ or – customized	+ or – typical	+ or – specific

These sets of contexts have various ways of affecting both individual documents and the different ways documents interact with each other. Similarly, the ways in which communication is defined in a given society influence these sets of contexts. Clearly, individualization, computerization, and globalization have powerful effects insofar as they can change the ways of accessing, operating, and distributing sources of information.

The Context of the Document as an Object Created by a Memory-Making Process

Finally, the traditional definition of archives states that they are *maintained for their testimonial value for the producer or for society in general*. This assertion focuses on the symbolic dimension of archives. To be archival, a document must be recognized as authentic testimony. This dimension varies according to the characteristics fostered by the memory-making process. Evidence, reference, and representation constitute contexts for defining a document's ways of being, acting, and appearing as an object of the memory-making process.

The Way of Being or the Context of Evidence

In concrete terms, archives are tangible evidence of the past maintained by a group or an individual through various means. From this point of view, the document's way of being is defined by the combination [producer \cap means of memory making \cap event] underlying the context of evidence.

The *producer* refers to the "natural" underpinnings of the evidence and relates to the concept of "fonds." It determines the origin and the public or private nature of archives.²⁹ The individual or collective producer generates documents which vary in terms of their degree of customization and the degree to which they are identified. The *means of memory making* support the memory-making act. They relate to the ways in which evidence has resisted the scourge of time. They may be intentional or attributable to chance. They make the evidence precarious or controlled. The *event* corresponds to the meaning of documents. It influences the characteristics of their content. The event places the evidence in the collective or individual imagination.³⁰ It may be economic, political, social, etc., and makes document production more or less meaningful for the producer.

The context of evidence influences the authenticity and reliability of archives. The content of controlled, defined, and meaningful documents is rather easily identifiable and easy to evaluate. Any document for which the whys, the hows, and the subject are not known is less credible to the extent that it is difficult or even impossible to evaluate its authenticity. This context – wide-reaching or narrow – influences the reliability of the information, the permanence of the evidence. The more an event is shared, the greater the evidence and the more vivid its memory. For example, documents on the Second World War represent testimony that is not as easy to dismiss as statements about a dispute between neighbours.

The Way of Acting or the Context of Reference

There is a reason for preserving documents. Document production is a framework of reference for maintaining organizations or keeping them up-to-date. Archives exist for the referential role that they play. Accordingly, the combination [institutional framework \cap record-keeping system \cap cultural schema] underlies the context of reference and concretely determines a document's way of being.

29 M. Duchein's criteria for the definition of a producer are formulated from this perspective. M. Duchein, "Le respect des fonds en archivistique. Principes théoriques et problèmes pratiques," *La Gazette des archives* 97 (1977), pp. 71–96, and translated in *Archivaria* 16, pp. 64–82.

30 For an analysis of various types of events from this perspective, see Claire Dolan, ed., *Événement, identité et histoire* (Sillery, 1991).

The *institutional framework* corresponds to the arrangement of cultural institutions dedicated to maintaining and promoting a community's archives. It refers to notions of deposit, networking, and archival services. Its administrative structure may be elaborate or relatively simple. Within a broad institutional space, original documents are united with their archivally-added characteristics. The *institutional framework* determines the scope of archives and consequently the breadth of recorded memory.³¹ The *record-keeping system* relates to the knowledge which structures and formalizes the recorded memory within the institutional framework. It monitors documents throughout their life cycle. It organizes archives in such a way that they are usable and used by the producer. It determines the extent to which documents are active and integral to current activities. The *cultural schema* outline that documents are necessary references within a society. They relate to the ways documents must serve as references to standardize reality, act as instruments for activities, and promote an understanding of the past.³² Schema determine the size of the body of essential, administrative, and historic archival materials. They determine the degree of relevance of documents.

Arguing that the context of reference determines the reliability, authenticity, and performance of archives seems appropriate since the justification of archival intervention rests largely on this argument. In fact, this context determines the "activeness" of the documents in legal, administrative, and historic terms. A tradition of cultural awareness and appreciation makes it possible to maintain important and relevant archives covering the full range of a group's activities. It guides the implementation of a memory-making system that provides relevant, sufficient, rich, and appropriate sources accessible both physically and intellectually.

The Way of Appearing or the Context of Representation

Archives also belong to the world of the intangible. They exist and go on transmitting information from generation to generation because they provide coherent images of social realities. People evoke images of past reality and incorporate them in their current social reality. Of all the dimensions of archives, this way of appearing is the most abstract and the most difficult to

31 I explained the concept of "associated fonds" in "La dynamique des archives associées ou la toile archivistique institutionnelle," *Archives* 29, no. 2 (1997–1998), pp. 31–43.

32 Ethnologist Jean Duberger defines the schema in three fields: pragmatic, customary, and expressive. The pragmatic field combines practices that respond to innate or acquired necessities; the customary field combines practices by which social orders become established; the expressive field relates to practices conceived by intentions and convictions of individuals. See J. Duberger, "Pratiques culturelles et fonctions urbaines," *Folklore canadien/ Ethnologie urbaine* 16, no. 1 (1994), pp. 21–41 and *Grille des pratiques culturelles* (Sillery, 1997).

observe since it is constantly evolving. The combination [belonging \cap recognition \cap social value] drives this context of representation.

Belonging links the production of a given document to a group that claims ownership. It created a specific way of defining records in relation to the social spaces to which they belong – national, provincial, family, etc. *Belonging* determines the extent to which archives are collective. *Recognition* results from the ways a given society attests to the fact that something is meaningful. It is based on official or tacit procedures for affirming the various ways – historically, socially, legally, etc. – that documents can be considered significant. Archives may be considered cultural, secret, admissible as evidence, etc., depending on the criteria for guaranteeing the completeness of the testimony. Recognition confirms the characteristics of documents.³³ The *social value* refers to the importance accorded to the archives. It evolves along with, and is modulated by, movements within society.³⁴ In modernizing their relationship to the past, groups establish, orient, and legitimize the archival value of proof, information, and testimony. Social value determines to what extent documents possess an animated quality.

Together, belonging and the means of recognizing and understanding values symbolically uphold the authenticity of archives. In fact, the importance of documents is not determined by the frequency of their use within the business procedure. Rather, their importance comes from the ways in which they are valued, and from the functional and symbolic images they carry with them into the present.

The Comprehensive Context of the Document as an Object of the Memory-Making Process

Having applied the context matrix from a symbolic point of view, I arrive at a new way of defining archives. Thus, what is referred to as a “document” is an object resulting from the following sets of contexts (see next page).

As explained above, these sets of contexts, which are themselves affected by social contexts – trends towards individualization, globalization, and dependence on technology – determine the quality of archives.

The Comprehensive Matrix for Archival Contexts

Deconstructing archives exposes the diversity of their characteristics and the multiplicity of the “mini-networks” or links which drive them. But such an

33 See J. Mathieu, “L’institution patrimoniale,” in M.-C. Rocher and A. Ségal, eds., *Le traitement du patrimoine urbain : Intégration, intégralité, intégrité. Actes du Colloques Mons-Québec 1996* (Québec, 1997), pp. 209–216.

34 For a discussion using the example of privacy, see Université Laval, *Entre l'éthique et le juridique: l'accès aux renseignements personnels. Actes du colloque* (Québec, 1996).

exercise must not lose sight of the changing character of archives. Archives must be conceived from a comprehensive and complex perspective.

Sets of Contexts in the Memory-Making Process

Document	Phenomenon	Achievements	Understanding
<i>Way of being:</i>	Producer	Means of Conservation	Event
evidence	+ <i>or – identified</i>	+ <i>or – controlled</i>	+ <i>or – meaningful</i>
<i>Way of acting:</i>	Institutional framework	Record-keeping system	Cultural schema
reference	+ <i>or – broad</i>	+ <i>or – active</i>	+ <i>or – relevant</i>
<i>Way of appearing:</i>	Belonging	Recognition	Social value
representation	+ <i>or – collective</i>	+ <i>or – complete</i>	+ <i>or – animated</i>

Archives constitute organic, recorded memory. That is to say, a document becomes archival only when networks of links are present within the matrices described above. Thus, the definition of archives emerges from a context which establishes links between the other contexts.

Sets of Contexts in Complex Perspective

Document	Phenomenon	Achievements	Understanding
Medium	Material	Technology	Signals
Means of communicating	Vehicle	Procedure of communicating	Message
Evidence	Producer	Means of conservation	Event
Form	Configuration	Process of production	Rules of production
Expression	Arrangement	Business procedure	Classification
Reference	Institutional framework	Record-keeping system	Cultural schema
Cultural signs	Signature	Feature	Written form
Intention	Design	Type	Capacity
Representation	Belonging	Recognition	Social value

The application of the definitional matrix reveals that, collectively, archivists possess a universal understanding of archives. This universal understanding highlights the complexity of archives. The problem with the traditional definition is that it expresses only a partial truth, while masking over other characteristics. This traditional definition stresses how archives possess material, functional, and aesthetic characteristics. Above all, it emphasizes the idea of archives as an organic whole. While this may be accurate, it is also vital to explore all facets of archives from all the perspectives of their various contexts.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was not to identify all of the contexts in which archival documents might be defined. Rather, it focussed on a certain number of contexts in order to develop a model which is broadly relevant and which stimulates theoretical reflection. For example, the notions of group and fonds are both defined along the vertical axis as forming part of the memory phenomenon. However, their location on the horizontal axis suggests otherwise. The fonds, which refers to the physical or moral person, corresponds to memory's way of being. Meanwhile, the group seems to be defined in terms of the way of acting, as a "memorizing" cell within an institutional structure. This rapidly sketched-out example needs to be looked at in more detail and verified through an analysis of more literature. Nevertheless, it already shows how the analytical tool described above can provide fresh insights into prevailing conceptions of archival discourse and professional expertise.

Creating such a model inevitably becomes an exercise in oversimplification. Consequently, it cannot hope to provide a universally applicable means of interpreting archives. Nevertheless, it has the advantage of defining archives within a conceptual framework where different linguistic and cultural approaches can meet and interact. After all, the complex study of an object requires that its multiple aspects be named in as precise a manner as possible. And this requirement inevitably raises the question of terminology. I have consulted terminologies used in other disciplines, and I have occasionally retained certain words for lack of better alternatives. Furthermore, my difficulties were compounded by the fact that I normally work in French and had to find adequate translations for the various terms. In light of these problems, I have attempted to be as precise as possible when describing each term's characteristics, in order to clarify its meaning. I am nevertheless convinced that further theoretical discussions will allow for even greater precision, so that the terms better correspond to the dimensions they seek to represent.

Similarly, this model can also provide interesting methodological guidelines for understanding problems related to documents. It provides criteria for evaluating the consequences of introducing new contexts which threaten to

alter familiar ways of recording, of communicating, and of memory making. For example, in this particular study, I focussed on information technology's effects on recorded organic memory within an organization, with interesting results.³⁵ This kind of three-dimensional reading also allows theoretical links to be established between various principles of action specific to different approaches. The theory of information and its techniques for countering the erosion and pollution of documents constitute useful paths to follow when a large number of material characteristics are at play. The same is true for the functional dimensions and the systematic interventions of creation and "recycling," which might be called the ecology of documentary systems. I could also add the symbolic dimensions and the historical methods which ensure the authenticity of archives by way of historical methodologies. They maintain "the knowledge of the provenance of documentation or the origins, original purpose, and organic characteristics of documentation."³⁶

The preceding study will seem less useful to those who are only interested in practical applications, such as criteria for appraising archival fonds. But as I have already explained, my primary goal was not to develop practical tools, but rather to lay the theoretical groundwork for their development. My intent was to expand the archivist's theoretical toolkit by developing an analytical approach founded on a more complex and inclusive concept: recorded organic memory.

35 Gilles Héon, "Les impacts de l'infographie sur la mémoire organique et consignée d'une entreprise : Lacroix Publicité Inc.," *Archives* 26, no. 3 (1995), pp. 41–55.

36 This relates to one of the oldest and most fundamental pieces of archival know-how, since it is at the very base of the archivist's practices with regard to provenance. Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1993), p. 4. From the same perspective, methods making use of diplomatics are also relevant. See Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Metuchen, N.J., 1998).