Articles

What We Talk About When We Talk About Original Order in Writers' Archives[1]

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article suggère que bien que la discussion au sujet du principe du respect de l'ordre d'origine et son application aux archives personnelles a été à la fois enrichie et complexifiée depuis quelques années, il existe toujours une grande confusion à la fois avec le sens de ce principe (c.-à.-d. ce qui constitue un ordre d'origine) et son importance (c.-à.-d. ce que l'on pense que l'ordre d'origine va communiquer). En se concentrant sur le sens et l'importance de l'ordre d'origine dans le contexte spécifique des archives des écrivains, cet article s'inspire des entrevues avec des archivistes et des bibliothécaires qui travaillent avec des archives littéraires et sur la recherche en archivistique pour conclure que les archivistes se doivent de mieux réfléchir à ce qu'ils veulent communiquer par rapport à l'ordre et à son importance, tant dans leurs discussions théoriques que dans les instruments de recherche qu'ils créent pour représenter les fonds d'archives.

ABSTRACT This article suggests that although the discussion of the principle of respect for original order and its application to personal archives has been both enriched and complicated in recent years, considerable confusion remains concerning both the meaning of the principle (i.e., what constitutes an original order) and its significance (i.e., what it is that an original order is thought to communicate). Focusing on the meaning and significance of original order in the specific context of writers' archives, this article draws on interviews with archivists and librarians who work with literary archives and on archival research to argue that archivists need to think more carefully about what we convey about order and its significance in both our theoretical discussions and in the finding aids we create to represent fonds.

> "I would say that original order needs a good philosophical
> discussion in *Archivaria*. What is it? What do we mean when
> we talk about original order?"
> – Jean Tener[2]

Introduction

The Society of American Archivists' "Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology" defines original order as "the organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records."[3] This definition, in its brevity and conciseness, might suggest an assurance on the part of the compiler of the glossary of the concept's straightforwardness and of its acceptance by the archival community. Or perhaps it was hoped that a simple and succinct definition might conceal, or at least downplay, the long history of debate and discussion surrounding the principle's real meaning and its application to different types of records.

One of these debates centred on the question of whether the principle should apply to personal archives. For example, in 1968 Graeme T. Powell argued that the concept of original order was not generally applicable in accumulations of personal records for a variety of reasons, including the fact that personal archives creators do not tend to consistently keep records in organized filing systems; that filing, when it does occur, is frequently only done shortly before records are donated to a repository; that records may have been arranged for the first time, or rearranged, by someone other than the creator; and that an arrangement original to the creator "would only really be interesting if a man had a deep interest in classification."[4] Powell's arguments have been countered several times since they were published,[5] and the idea that original order can and should be applied to personal archives is widely

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2   Jean Tener, interview by author, Calgary, 9 July 2010, digital recording. I would like to thank Jean Tener and the twelve other archivists and librarians who consented to be interviewed by me and allowed their comments to be published: Kathy Garay, Catherine Hobbs, Heather Home, Richard Landon, Michael Moosberger, Monique Ostiguy, Tony Power, John Shoesmith, Carl Spadoni, Apollonia Steele, Shelley Sweeney, and Jennifer Toews.

3   Society of American Archivists, "Original Order," in "A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology," comp. Richard Pearce-Moses, accessed 13 April 2013, www2.archivists.org /glossary/terms/o/original-order.

4   Graeme T. Powell, "Archival Principles and the Treatment of Private Papers," in *Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory, 1951–1990*, ed. Peter Biskup et al. (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, 1995), 134–35. This article was first published in *Archives and Manuscripts* 3 (May 1968).

5   See, for example, Chris Hurley, "Personal Papers and the Treatment of Archival Principle," in *Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory, 1951–1990*, ed. Peter Biskup et al. (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, 1995), 143–58.

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accepted in the archival community. Nevertheless, it is my intention to argue in this article that, while the discussion of original order in personal archives has been both enriched and complicated in recent years (and particularly in recent issues of *Archivaria*),[6] considerable confusion remains concerning both the *meaning* of the principle (i.e., what constitutes an original order) and its *significance* (i.e., what it is that an original order is supposed to communicate). Here, this confusion is considered in the specific context of writers' archives, and the discussion in the sections that follow draws on conversations with archivists and librarians who work with literary archives and on research in the archives of several well-known authors.

Talking with Experts

This article reports on some of the findings of my doctoral dissertation, completed in 2013. The dissertation, titled "Archiving Authors: Rethinking the Analysis and Representation of Personal Archives," focuses on the nature of writers' archives (their contents, and the ways in which they have been shaped over time both by their creators and by other interested parties) and on the ways they are represented through archival arrangement and description. For the dissertation, I interviewed thirteen Canadian archivists and librarians who work with literary archives.[7] During the interviews, discussion focused on how each interviewee understands the nature and treatment of writers' archives: what they consider to be part or not part of the archive; what types of negotiations are involved in the acquisition of writers' archives; how decisions about archival representation are made and documented; and how traditional archival principles are interpreted. Although our conversations covered a broad range of topics and ideas, in this article I focus specifically on how interviewees talked about original order.

As I conducted the interviews, listened to and transcribed them, and studied them to identify trends, themes, and concepts, I was struck by the number of different types of order that were identified, and by the number of these orders that were described as being in some way original. Interviewees spoke of the order found in filing cabinets in home offices or in piles on the chairs

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6   See, for example, Heather MacNeil, "Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order," *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 1–24; Jennifer Meehan, "Rethinking Original Order and Personal Records," *Archivaria* 70 (Fall 2010): 27–44; Carolyn Harris, "Paper Memories, Presented Selves: Original Order and the Arrangement of the Donald G. Simpson Fonds at York University," *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 195–217.

7   See note 2. For my dissertation, I also conducted extensive research in the archives of several authors, including Sylvia Plath, Marian Engel, L.M. Montgomery, Alice Munro, Douglas Coupland, Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Atwood, and Margaret Laurence. Although in this article I focus primarily on the conversations I had with literary archivists and librarians, in places I also draw on my research in the archives of these writers.

and floors of the rooms in which writers worked; of packing and shipping orders; of custodial orders created following the death of an author; of the order they *believed* was the creator's original order; of original *disorder* (of varying degrees); and of multiple types of order and disorder overlapping each other. The discussion that follows is loosely organized around three big questions that emerged from my iterative analysis of interview transcripts. First, should original order be understood as a physical order or as a more logical or intellectual order? Second, if original order is understood as a physical order, which physical order – or *orders* – should be considered original, and which should be preserved? And finally, what is it that we believe is captured in an original order, and how do we articulate that to researchers and to ourselves?

What Is Original Order?

The first two of the three questions listed above have to do with what we understand original order to be: is original order a physical order that records assume over time, or is it a logical order that corresponds more closely to ideas about how record creation occurs? If original order is a physical order, is it, as is traditionally accepted, the last order the archive assumed in its creator's care, or is it the order in which the archive is eventually received by the archivist? Are there other orders that might be considered original? How do we decide?

   Peter Horsman, writing about the evolution of the concept of respect for original order leading up to its codification in the Dutch *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, explains that prior to the compilation of the *Manual* there had been "intense discussions" about how and what kinds of rules to implement for the inventorying of state archives. Samuel Muller, one of the eventual compilers of the *Manual*, and another state archivist, Th.H.F. van Riemsdijk, swapped experience and opinions in a series of letters that show their differing perspectives on what constituted an original order. For van Riemsdijk, "the original physical arrangement as established by the original registry [system] was the key defining criteria." Muller's understanding of original order, however, was "more conceptual than physical," based on his belief that the original order corresponds to the administrative structure of the creating body and not necessarily to the structure of its filing system.[8] Muller prevailed, and Section 16 of the *Manual* states: "the original organization of an archival [fonds] must naturally correspond in its main lines to the old organization of the administrative body that produced it."[9]

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8   Peter Horsman, "The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or the De-discovery of the Archival Fonds,"
     Archivaria 54 (Fall 2002): 9.
9   S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of
     Archives*, 2nd ed., trans. Arthur H. Leavitt (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003),
     56–57.

Horsman argues that, for years, interpretation of this section led archivists to neglect original physical order in favour of an inferred logical order based on knowledge of the administrative structure of the creating body.[10] From its very beginnings, then, the principle has confounded archivists on this point.

It is not difficult to find examples of writers' fonds whose arrangement reflects an inferred logical order. For example, writers' fonds are often arranged into series according to the genre of the record, with separate series designated for correspondence, writings, notebooks, diaries, etc. Series or sub-series might also be designated for genres of writing (novels, short stories, poetry, etc.) or for particular works,[11] and in relation to other roles the writer fulfilled; for a writer who was also a university professor and who participated actively in the Writers' Union of Canada, there may be specific series related to each of these roles. Of course, it is possible that the writer maintained his records in this order as he used them, but some archivists I spoke with explained that this type of arrangement scheme has typically been used in cases where material received is in considerable disorder, or where a writer's own order is not thought to be helpful for research purposes.[12]

The archivists interviewed expressed varying degrees of approval (or disapproval) for this type of arrangement formula, which is, after all, based not only on accessibility criteria, but also on assumptions and beliefs about how writers and writing work. However, no matter how well they felt a logical order of this type represented a writer's life and work, they rarely expressed the belief that such an order *strictly* corresponded to an original creator's order. Instead, this type of logical order was largely understood as the archivist's "best guess" at what a creator's original order might have been. Archivists arranging records in series corresponding to types of work and the various roles of the writer are essentially using the principle of respect for original order as a "conceptual framework," an approach that Jennifer Meehan has recently advocated: inferring and/or imagining the relationships between records and activities and delineating series accordingly.[13]

10 Peter Horsman, "Dirty Hands: A New Perspective on the Original Order," *Archives and Manuscripts* 27, no. 1 (May 1999): 42–53.

11 When archivists arrange writers' material by genre of writing (e.g., novels, short stories, poetry, research, notes, journals, etc.), it is often because they understand writing in different genres to be akin to performing different activities; that is, writing poetry is considered to be a different type of activity than writing in a journal or writing a short story.

12 Kathy Garay, interview by author, Hamilton, ON, 31 October 2010, digital recording; Carl Spadoni, interview by author, Hamilton, ON, 7 May 2010, digital recording; Apollonia Steele and Jean Tener, interview by author, Calgary, 9 July 2010, digital recording; Tony Power, interview by author, Burnaby, BC, 29 July 2010, digital recording; Michael Moosberger, interview by author, Halifax, 11 June 2010, digital recording.

13 See Meehan, "Rethinking Original Order and Personal Records."

When archivists or librarians arrange writers' records in these types of logical schemas, they usually begin by assessing the physical order of the materials received, gleaning what they can about the internal structure of the records (i.e., the organization of the records by their creator), and comparing this with what they know about the records' external structure (i.e., the activities and roles of the creator).[14] If the received physical order of the materials corresponds to the archivist's understanding of external structure, she may determine that the archive arrived in its original order and will preserve it; if the received physical order of the materials does not correspond to the archivist's understanding of external structure, it is that understanding that is identified as the original order, and the materials are physically rearranged to reflect it. In either case, the identification of original order depends on the archivist's knowledge about the life of the creator.[15]

A second type of original order identified by interviewees is original creative order. Many archivists spoke to me about trying to recreate a writer's creative process through arrangement and description, rather than focusing on the kind of logical order described above. For these archivists, original order in a writer's fonds corresponds most closely to the order in which individual notes, sketches, and drafts were created during the process of writing a poem, a short story, or a novel. Some writers' papers arrive at the repository in this order, and interviewees provided examples of writers whose archives clearly reflect their creative process, either because it seemed natural to them to store their records that way or because they had a sense of the value of their papers and assumed that it was the creative process that future researchers would hope to find in them.[16] However, many of the interviewees also spoke of writers' papers arriving in trunks or garbage bags, with very little or no discernible order. In other cases, the materials might arrive packed in boxes and files

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14 For a discussion of the external and internal structure of a fonds, see Terry Eastwood, "Introduction," in *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice/Le fonds d'archives: de la théorie à la pratique*, ed. Terry Eastwood (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists); and Terry Eastwood, "Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000): 93–116. For a discussion of the process of inference that occurs as archivists work from internal to external structure and vice versa during arrangement activities, see Jennifer Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description," *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 79–85.

15 Several interviewees acknowledged this process: John Shoesmith, interview by author, Toronto, 27 August 2010, digital recording; Spadoni, interview; Jennifer Toews, interview by author, Toronto, 10 May 2010, digital recording; Garay, interview.

16 Heather Home, interview by author, Halifax, 10 June 2010, digital recording; Monique Ostiguy, interview by author, Ottawa, 7 July 2010, digital recording; Toews, interview by author; Catherine Hobbs, interview by author, Ottawa, 6 July 2010, digital recording; Power, interview.

but in such a way that it was obvious to the archivist that she was looking at a packing or shipping order rather than a creative order.

Two of the archivists interviewed spoke at length about their efforts to restore an original creative order to significantly disordered groups of records. Both Kathy Garay and Jean Tener had to do considerable rearrangement work – both physical and intellectual – in order to reconstitute what they believed to be original creative order in the archives of Marian Engel and Alice Munro, respectively. The first accession of Munro's archives arrived at the University of Calgary in a trunk and a suitcase.[17] In a letter accompanying these, Munro warned Tener: "The disorder is total."[18] Tener found, after going over the material several times, that the disorder was not as complete as Munro had made it out to be; however, though some complete manuscripts were found together, a lot of the material was "scattered" and "disorganized," and Tener explained that she "had the sense that [Munro was] sort of going through the house and saying 'Oh, yes, they'd like that,' and that went in [the trunk]; 'Oh, oh,' and that went in [too]."[19] Tener spent more than a year "going over and over and over" Munro's manuscripts and correspondence,[20] using any physical clues, such as pagination and type of paper, ink, or font, as well as any available dates and internal clues, such as names of characters and story lines, to attempt to reconstruct the order in which she believed Munro had written and accumulated different drafts.

Garay followed a similar process to bring order to Engel's archive, which arrived at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in boxes and garbage bags, and which Garay described as having no discernible prior order.[21] In both these cases, the archivists determined that the order of the material as it was received was not original and did not need to be preserved. The received physical order could provide clues about the manner in which materials were created, but the task of the archivist was to attempt to recreate – both physically and intellectually – the original creative order.[22]

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17 University of Calgary Libraries, Special Collections Division, "Archival Introduction," in *The Alice Munro Papers, First Accession: An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Libraries*, comp. Jean M. Moore and Jean F. Tener, ed. Apollonia Steele and Jean F. Tener (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1986), xxix.

18 Quoted in Jean Tener, "The Invisible Iceberg," in *The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*, ed. Judith Miller (Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo Press, 1984), 38.

19 Steele, interview; Tener, interview.

20 Ibid.

21 Garay, interview.

22 It must be noted that in the finding aids for both the Alice Munro Fonds and the Marian Engel Fonds, the archivists state clearly that the order encountered by researchers has been imposed on the records, that it is an archivist's order and is based on the archivist's closest approximation of original creative order.

Other archivists I spoke with placed more emphasis on the significance of the physical order of the archive at the moment they first encountered it, believing this order to correspond more closely to their understanding of original order. In some cases, this first-sight physical order is necessarily a packing or shipping order; in other cases, archivists have access to a writer's workspace and are able to view documents on shelves and in filing cabinets, on desktops and floors, as the writer uses and accesses them. This type of original physical order, Catherine Hobbs explained, is "the locus of our being able to interpret work patterns. Original physical order retains physical evidence of how an individual lived and worked," and therefore needs to be preserved and contextualized rather than re-imagined.[23] Whereas several interviewees explained that they often found it necessary to "separate and sort" the archives of "people who mix everything together – a few pages of their draft, some grocery receipts, some letters,"[24] those who equated original order with a first-sight physical order identified something valuable in the mix.

The archivists I spoke with who held this view of original order tended to preserve the physical order of the archive as they had received it and to lay over this order what we might call an archival order. The Douglas Coupland Fonds is a good example of this approach.[25] In the finding aid to the fonds, the processing archivist explains that he has maintained the physical order of the records as received as closely as possible, and alerts researchers to the presence in the accession file of an inventory that arrived with the first accession of material, as well as a record he made of each file's location within the boxes received. In this way, the archivist explains, the researcher has access to the "original order" of the fonds. The material is listed in the inventory both physically (through a box-file list) and intellectually, in series determined by the archivist and "based loosely on the arrangement of Coupland's projects" on his personal website.[26] The finding aid reflects an understanding of original order that is based on the physical placement of records, on the final spot at which they came to rest before arriving at the archives rather than on a more logical or intellectual understanding of the processes that led to the creation of Coupland's works. These processes are nevertheless represented by the archiv-

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23 Hobbs, interview.

24 Toews, interview. However, Toews also mentioned cases in which she would not want to physically rearrange a received order; for example, if records have been obviously arranged by the creator, Toews tends to retain the creator's order unless it seems as if it would be exceedingly difficult for researchers to navigate.

25 I discuss original order in the Douglas Coupland Fonds in some detail in Jennifer Douglas, "Original Order, Added Value? Archival Theory and the Douglas Coupland Fonds," in *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation*, ed. Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead (London: Ashgate, 2013).

26 Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia Libraries, "Douglas Coupland fonds Finding Aid," comp. Stephen Russo (March 2009), 6.

ist in the series he has created to help provide access to the varied materials; however, these series are not identified as a recovered original order but are explicitly represented as the archivist's creation, and the physical order of the materials as they were received is repeatedly identified as the *original* order.

Although it might seem as though these two views – of original order as an encountered physical order or as an imagined or inferred logical order – exist in opposition to each other, during the interviews I conducted I noticed a regular slippage from one position to the other and back again. In particular, it seemed almost impossible for the encountered physical order *not* to be described using the word "original," even when the archivist doing so leaned overall toward the idea of original order as logical. A further complication arose when archivists discussed the different types of physical orders they might come across: a more or less intact and organized filing system packed in banker's boxes for shipping; a snapshot of a workspace at the time of the archivist's appraisal visit; a seemingly disordered or randomly ordered bunch of files and loose papers packed haphazardly in boxes and bags; a secondary order imposed by a subsequent custodian of the material; and so on. All of these were described as being in some way "original." A packing order is understood in some way to be an original outcome of the creator's packing activities, and a custodial order an original outcome of an interested relative's, friend's, executor's, or previous archivist's handling of the archive. Each of these so-called "original" orders was thought to carry with it its own particular significance; each was, to use Heather MacNeil's phrase, "an embodied argument about the changing meaning of the archive."[27]

Traditionally, the original order of a body of records is understood to be "the last arrangement the documents had before finishing their usefulness for the last administrative body which actively used them."[28] However, as many archival theorists have begun to argue, and as the archivists and librarians I interviewed described, a body of records may assume a number of different orders during its active life and then again in the hands of subsequent custodians; whereas many of these orders might previously have been disregarded in favour of the last active creator order, archivists are now beginning to contemplate the significance of different orders over time to the overall meaning and context of a fonds. The notion of originality is complicated by the recognition of a variety of significant orders, and the decision to name the last useful order as the "original" one appears somewhat arbitrary.

27 MacNeil, "Archivalterity," 17.
28 Peter Horsman, "Taming the Elephant: An Orthodox Approach to the Principle of Provenance," in *The Principle of Provenance: Report from the First Stockholm Conference on the Archival Principle of Provenance, 2–3 September 1993* (Stockholm: Swedish National Archives, 1994), 58.

What Does Original Order Reflect?

> "What does [original order] reveal. [Pause] I'd like to
> know what it reveals…"
> – Carl Spadoni[29]

As they discussed the different types of order that struck them as significant in archives, interviewees often seemed to struggle with articulating exactly *what* that significance was. In particular, the significance of the first-sight physical order seemed difficult to specify. I heard explanations such as "You may not be able to really explain it in a sentence, but it's something kind of intangible,"[30] and "[It's] how the mind works – *maybe*."[31] My intention in repeating these statements in this context is not to criticize the professionals who made them, but to call attention to the difficulty we still have, as a profession, in expressing what we think order – of whatever type – *means*.

In classical archival theory, arguments in favour of respect for original order enforced the connection between the order of records and the nature of their creators. Because Muller, Feith, and Fruin viewed the archive as "an organic whole, a living organism, which grows, takes shape and undergoes change" in accordance with the growth, development, and change that take place within the administration that creates it, they understood the archive to also be "always the reflection of the functions" of that body.[32] Giorgio Cencetti made similar and explicit claims about the very close connection between an archive and its creator:

The archive reflects its creator or, more exactly, *is* the creator itself, in the sense that the original order of the archive … is the manifestation of the administrative structure, the history, and in some way, the very "essence" of the records creator.[33]

Although many archivists who write about personal archives stress the differences between them and organizational archives, the arguments made in favour of respecting found orders in personal archives are in some ways quite similar to those made by Muller, Feith, and Fruin and other classical theorists. The classical archival idea that the original order of a body of records is significant because of the way it reflects the "essence" of its creator is also suggested in the argument that the order of an individual's records is

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29   Spadoni, interview.
30   Toews, interview.
31   Ostiguy, interview.
32   Muller, Feith, and Fruin, 19.
33   Maurizio Savoja and Stefano Vitali, "Authority Control for Creators in Italy: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 1–2 (January 2008): 123.

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significant because it "grew out of the mental life of the individual" and "can demonstrate [his or her] thoughts and actions."[34] This argument was echoed by several of the archivists and librarians I interviewed, some of whom proposed that a writer's "personality" might be reflected – at least in part – in her fonds.[35] In her interview, Hobbs cautioned against reading into her articles on personal archives a "categorical" statement about the ability to access personality through the fonds:

[In my articles, what I've said is] that personality will affect, the individual will affect their recordkeeping, will affect their archives; it's not the same thing as saying you're going to get the personality out, [that] if you squeeze the fonds, you're going to understand personality….[36]

Hobbs also explained that she understands arrangement and description as "an act of interpretation of how I see that individual's life, … as a narrative about that individual's life," and one of her primary focuses in working with donors and with their archives is to discover how the archive "relates to the psychology or development of the individual."[37]

Hobbs's colleague at Library and Archives Canada, Monique Ostiguy, takes a similar view. She described her work on the Gérard Leblanc Fonds, explaining that his was a fonds that at first seemed to be extremely disorganized and which, therefore, offered a "good example of the challenge of keeping the original order of a fonds in order to show his writing process [and] the creative evolution of his writing." As Ostiguy worked her way through the disorder, she began to find connections between materials and to feel that there was in fact "some kind of order" present. The order she found was, she explained, "very close to his mind, which was really eclectic: he was gay, he smoked a lot of pot, he did drugs, he lived in Moncton, but also Montreal, New York, and Europe, he lived everywhere…"[38] I asked Ostiguy an admittedly leading question: did she feel that, because as archivists our focus is on recordkeeping, we might be according too much significance to order or disorder and what it reveals about an individual? Although she thought there was some merit to this idea, Ostiguy also felt that "people have different mindsets" and that these are "reflected in the organization or disorganization of their archives."[39]

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34 Catherine Hobbs, "Reenvisioning the Personal: Reframing Traces of Individual Life," in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 228.
35 Steele, interview; Shelley Sweeney, interview by author, Winnipeg, 19 May 2010, digital recording; Monique Ostiguy, interview.
36 Hobbs, interview.
37 Ibid.
38 Ostiguy, interview.
39 Ibid.

On the other hand, there were interviewees who expressed skepticism concerning the ability of the archive to reflect – to whatever degree – its creator. Jean Tener, for example, stated that she would be "very wary about trying to draw conclusions about … the writer's personality from the papers," adding "it's too easy to make up personality."[40] Several interviewees suggested that the order of the archive might indicate whether a writer tended to be tidy or not, but reiterated that the order of the archive as first encountered by the archivist may bear little resemblance to the archive as it was used by the writer.[41] It also must be asked to what degree tidiness (or lack thereof) correlates to other personality traits; in other words, how much can we infer about a writer's personality or "mindset" based on the degree of order or disorder in his or her papers? Garay described the archives of poet Susan Musgrave, who, Garay says, "gives the impression of being sort of a woodland sprite, a bit of a witch," and who on her personal website emphasizes the unconventionality and rebelliousness of her past and development as an artist.[42] Musgrave's archives, however, arrive at McMaster "totally pristine … in bright red folders, neatly labelled – first draft, second draft, etc." Garay explains that while the archive "tells us" that Musgrave is "well organized, that she has time to be well organized, [and] that she has a fairly firm sense of her own importance or, at the least, of the value of her papers," there is a "nice contradiction" between its tidiness and what Musgrave's public knows of her life and personality.[43]

Implications for Archival Theory

The discussion of original order in the interviews conducted reveals a lack of consensus on the interpretation and significance of the principle of respect for original order in writers' fonds and, perhaps, in other types of fonds as well. We are indeed in need, as one interviewee suggested, of a "good philosophical discussion"[44] about our understanding of the principle: of its strengths and limitations, of what we think it represents or should represent, and of how we want to communicate that to researchers.

As noted in the previous sections, the archivists and librarians I interviewed identified a wide range of orders as original, sometimes even describing more than one order in a single fonds as being in some way the original order. An obvious problem presents itself here: while we may agree that the different orders a body of records assumes over its lifetime are all significant, we cannot

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40   Tener, interview.
41   Sweeney, interview; Power, interview; Steele and Tener, interview.
42   "About the Author Susan Musgrave," on Susan Musgrave's website, accessed 26 September 2012, www.susanmusgrave.com/aboutsusanmusgrave.html.
43   Garay, interview.
44   Tener, interview.

logically conclude that each is original. Furthermore, as has been pointed out by critics of the principle, such as Brien Brothman[45] and Heather MacNeil,[46] to pinpoint the one order that could be called original is a task fraught with difficulty. The order in which materials are received by a repository may provide evidence of a certain phase of records creation, but, as many of the interviewees noted, received order often reflects a packing order, and a packing order is rarely original in the sense that archivists intend that term: "Quite often," one archivist explained, "[writers] just dump things into boxes…. There is so much dislocation in sending materials."[47] The reconstruction of a creative process by an archivist, even when it is based on internal evidence and completed with the utmost attention and caution, is not original either. Even the snapshot order taken by an archivist lucky enough to visit a writer's study and see the work in situ is only original for a moment.[48]

What archivists need are more ways to talk about order in records. We need to admit the possibility of moving beyond original order, not only to acknowledge that a group of records will assume different arrangements over time, but also to name and theorize these orders, and to make them more explicit in our descriptions for our users. Original order is like the Holy Grail to archivists: we feel compelled to seek it and it consistently eludes us. Worse, our compulsion – and professional responsibility – to identify original order is leading us to identify as original a variety of other orders that we sense are significant but for which we have no language or theory to name or describe. We must begin to question in earnest what kind of information about a fonds – information that might help researchers better understand the total context of the records within it – is lost as a result.

Tom Nesmith has suggested that it "seems time to dispense with the traditional concept of original order" and to focus on what he calls "received order." Because it is difficult for anyone to identify with certainty the original order of a group of records, Nesmith argues that it is better to represent the records in the way in which they are received at the archives.[49] A focus on "received order" acknowledges, therefore, the common difficulty of interpreting and applying the principle of respect for original order, but it does not necessarily solve the problem of identifying and describing the *type* of received order the archivist encounters, and nor does it account for situations when, as Hobbs and Ostiguy described in interviews, the archivist has privil-

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45 Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Terms of Archival Value," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 78–100.
46 MacNeil, "Archivalterity."
47 Sweeney, interview.
48 Ostiguy, interview. This is a point that Ostiguy made several times.
49 Tom Nesmith, "Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 264.

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eged access to a writer's workspace and habits and, therefore, a closer view of what we still might want to call original order. An alternative approach might be to work as a community to more carefully identify and designate the *range* of orders we either encounter or create. For example, in a case like the Douglas Coupland Fonds, we might want to indicate to researchers that the fonds has been maintained in its received order, which reflects the order in which it was packed by its creator's partner,[50] and that an archival order, corresponding to the archivist's understanding of the creator's activities and work patterns, is also represented in the finding aid.

Just as we need more ways to talk about order, we need also to better articulate what we think – or hope – different orders communicate and why they are significant. The safest approach here, however, might be to admit our limitations, to accept the inevitable gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between archives and creators. As archivists, we may feel that there is, in the order we find in an individual's archive, something personal, something revealing of that author's character or psychology; however, we must also be careful not to overstate our abilities to know a creator and to show what we know through arrangement and description. While it is certainly true that to varying degrees "personal archives arrangements are meaningful because their physical and intellectual arrangement can demonstrate thoughts and actions,"[51] the difficulties of interpreting the psychological context of recordkeeping must also be acknowledged. In "Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers' Archives," Heather MacNeil and I outlined some of the difficulties involved in determining an author's character from her archive;[52] these difficulties were also explored in depth in my dissertation and include the active, often controlling, and sometimes nearly deceptive role of the archiving "I"; the effect of other interested parties on the eventual contents and shape of the archive; the banality of some of the intentions that form the archive; and the archivist's limited view of the creator's life. Each of these factors also affects our ability to read and interpret order in archives.

For example, in the Margaret Atwood archives, what archivists might want to call original order (i.e., the final order the papers assume before being transferred to the archive) is not solely a product of Atwood's efforts; her personal assistants play an important role in opening files and determining

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50   A note included with the first accession of the Coupland Fonds, explaining how it had been packed and sent, is written by David Weir, Coupland's partner, and refers to Coupland in the third person; it seems likely that Weir had a significant role in arranging the material to be sent to the repository.
51   Hobbs, "Reenvisioning the Personal," 228.
52   Jennifer Douglas and Heather MacNeil, "Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers' Archives," *Archivaria* 67 (Spring 2009): 25–39.

what belongs in each one. In this case, then, it would be difficult to draw firm conclusions about Atwood's thinking or psychology based on the order of her archives. A similar problem arises in the Douglas Coupland Fonds: boxes to be sent to the archives appear to have been packed by Coupland's partner, David Weir, to whom also belong many of the items found in the fonds.[53]

Another significant factor complicating the ability of order in an archive to attest to its creator's psychology or character is the common – and perhaps, in the case of well-known literary figures, almost inevitable – archival effect: the creator's knowledge that his or her papers will one day be housed in a public repository affects the way the creator treats them. Tony Power, the librarian with responsibility for the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University's Special Collections and Rare Books in British Columbia, suggested to me that in the literary archives he works with there is "no pure creator's order," that order is always influenced by contact with or awareness of the archival repository and its practices. For this reason, Power was wary of drawing too many conclusions about the nature of the relationship between the creator and the arrangement of his papers.[54] In his case, Power was referring to writers' awareness of how archives are typically treated at SFU. Two authors whose archives are housed there have taken to producing finding aids for each accession they ship, and have learned how to do so through familiarity with the shape that earlier accessions assumed under archival care; certainly, in these cases the "coaxing"[55] effect of the writers' knowledge of archival principles and practice has had a profound impact on the "original order" of their work.

Awareness of the archive also causes some authors to review their archive carefully and to separate more personal items from the material they send to a repository; this type of removal not only disturbs the order of the records, but also renders more difficult a personal reading of them and of their subsequent order.[56] Awareness of the archival value of their papers may also cause some individuals to order them specifically for the repository. Several interviewees

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53   See note 50.

54   Power, interview.

55   *Coaxing* is a term used by life writing theorists Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson to describe the effect that individuals other than life writers themselves have on the creation of autobiographical and biographical texts. I use the term in a similar fashion to call attention to the creative effect individuals other than the traditionally named creator of an archive can have on its accumulation. See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001), 50–56.

56   The efforts made by Alice Munro and by Marian Engel to keep personal material out of their archives are discussed in Douglas and MacNeil, "Arranging the Self." JoAnn McCaig also discussed Munro's attempts to keep her archive at the University of Calgary focused on her professional rather than her personal life. JoAnn McCaig, *Reading In: Alice Munro's Archives* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002).

referred to cases when writers had embarked on reorganization projects (or, sometimes, made first attempts at organization) prior to donating or selling their archives.[57] In a study of Sylvia Plath's poetry drafts, Tracy Brain describes a particularly interesting example of a writer's awareness of the archival value of her manuscripts. Brain argues that Plath was "shrewd about the fact her papers could end up in literary archives," and suggests that Plath understood the way in which the dates inscribed on her papers, as well as their physical order, could "tell a compelling story" about the way she wrote her poems. Plath was, Brain argues, manipulating the drafts of her *Ariel* poems to "create an impression of concentrated intensity" surrounding their creation.[58]

Another type of archival effect whose significance cannot be overlooked is the type described by Brien Brothman, Heather MacNeil, Ala Rekrut, and others, who have explored how archivists themselves impact the final shape of a fonds;[59] whether or not the archivist engages in extensive physical and intellectual arrangement of an archive, his effect on its found order cannot be avoided. In addition to the types of physical alterations noted by Rekrut and Brothman – the transfer of materials to uniform-looking acid-free folders and boxes – one of the most obvious archival interventions is the archivist's creation of the hierarchical fonds-series-file archive structure.

In many of the interviews I conducted, participants described the process of identifying series. In most cases, interviewees seemed to agree with Michael Cook's assessment that series can be identified on the basis of several different kinds of similar characteristics and that the archivist will know a series when she sees one.[60] Ostiguy explained that often when she begins to work with a fonds she has difficulty identifying series, but as she develops a greater degree of familiarity with the material, series will "emerge by themselves…. Sometimes I am completely amazed." Ostiguy also suggested that another archivist might not see the same series she sees; although she emphasized the natural way that series appear to her out of accumulations of records in varying degrees of order or disorder, Ostiguy nevertheless understands the series

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57   Ostiguy, interview; Shoesmith, interview; Steele and Tener, interview; Sweeney, interview.

58   Tracy Brain, "Unstable Manuscripts: The Indeterminacy of the Plath Canon," in *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath*, ed. Anita Helle (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 27.

59   Brothman, "Orders of Value"; Heather MacNeil, "Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor," *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 264–78; Ala Rekrut, "Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 11–37. There is a growing literature on the "archivist's effect"; for additional examples particularly focusing on arrangement and description, see also Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," *Archival Science* 2, no. 3-4 (January 2002): 236–85; and Elizabeth Yakel, "Archival Representation," *Archival Science* 3, no. 1 (January 2003): 1–25.

60   Michael Cook, *The Management of Information from Archives*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing, 1999), 111.

as "an invention of the archivist," and she therefore appreciates that the same series might not appear to different archivists.[61]

Ostiguy's view of the series is somewhat contradictory: she believes that the series is both a naturally occurring phenomenon and an archivist's creation. Interestingly, several other interviewees held similar seemingly contradictory views.[62] For example, Shelley Sweeney stressed that the series is "completely artificial," but went on to say that, while in rare cases a writer might identify large subdivisions of records in his or her own archive, more often the series is "just something that you recognize in the papers, that's inherent in the papers – or you create your own series."[63] Heather Home described the series as "somewhat natural" to the records, but added "that's the structure that we're putting on top of records"; identifying series involves "creating a structure above what the record is and trying to place [the record into that structure.]"[64]

The sense of the series as both natural and artificial speaks, I think, to the normalization of the idea of the series within archival discourse. Series are a fundamental component of archival arrangement, and archivists have grown accustomed to identifying and describing them. Furthermore, and in a circular kind of argument, series *have* to be understood as emerging organically from larger aggregations because they are believed to reflect the creator's original order. In recent years, however, several archival theorists have pointed out that identifying series is less an act of recognition than it is an act of invention.[65] As Home put it, series sit "behind the materials";[66] they only assume their full form in the hands of the archivist, and must therefore be more accurately described as being formed and shaped, not merely found, by the archivist. The structure that is created above the records is informed by the archivist's knowledge of the records, but it is equally informed by the archivist's expectations of what an archive should look like and how it ought to be represented to researchers.

In her interview, Hobbs described the series as "an imposition," explaining that she does not think the fonds of individuals are "so discretely" arranged in aggregations that meet the archival definition of series. "I'm much clearer that I know what's in the file versus what the series is," Hobbs explained, and added that, while she has "an aptitude" for making series, she is "not sure

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61 Ostiguy, interview.
62 I want to reiterate that my purpose in calling attention to these "contradictory" statements is not to criticize the archivists who make them, but to highlight a shared difficulty within the profession.
63 Sweeney, interview.
64 Home, interview.
65 See MacNeil, "Archivalterity"; Douglas and MacNeil, "Arranging the Self"; Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole."
66 Home, interview.

that [to do so] is entirely honest about people."[67] It is this question of honesty that interests me in particular. As an organizing principle, the series undoubtedly helps archivists make sense of and provide access to larger aggregations of records. It must be recognized, however, as Hobbs does, that that is the primary function of the series, and of intellectual arrangement more generally. Brothman is right to argue that original order cannot reflect the past back to us,[68] and one of the reasons this is so is that original order is in large part the archivist's invention. What honesty is there, then, in the claims archivists make about original order? Perhaps the most ethical route for archivists engaged in arrangement and description is to admit that the concept of original order is an archival construct, that the order in which we present material to researchers is always necessarily an archival order. Honesty requires that we call an archival order an archival order and account for what we have done to make it so.[69]

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67   Hobbs, interview.

68   Brothman, "Orders of Value." Brothman's central argument against the principle of original order is related to the argument against the positivist historian's belief in an "accessible past," and he stresses that "it is as problematical for an archives to maintain that it is remaining faithful to original order … as it is for historians to claim that their work somehow captures and *re*presents the past" (p. 83).

69   There are several ways of making archival description more honest about order. To discuss these in detail would require more space than I have in this article, but some of them can be briefly outlined here. For example, the addition of colophons and/or footnotes has been suggested by some archivists as a means of accounting for processing decisions and acknowledging the archivist's interpretive role in arrangement. Other archivists have stressed the significance of custodial history and archival history, more broadly interpreted, and have advocated placing increased emphasis on these elements in standardized descriptions. Making non-confidential information in donor files available to researchers might also contribute to better understandings of order in archives. In my dissertation, I argue for a much greater emphasis to be placed on record arrangement in description, through the explicit description of orders found in received archives and of the ordering activities of different individuals, including creator(s), any custodians or other interested parties, and archivists; this can happen through the improved use of existing descriptive elements, the creation of new ones, and/or the use of "parallel texts," in which archivists are able to expand on aspects of an archive's development and evolution over time, using more space than is typically expected in standardized description, and possibly in a more "creative" manner. See Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, "Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid," *American Archivist* 65, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 223; Meehan, "Making the Leap from Parts to Whole," 88; MacNeil, "Archivalterity;" Heather MacNeil, "Trusting Description: Authenticity, Accountability, and Archival Description Standards," *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 3 (September 2009): 89–107; Geoffrey Yeo, "Custodial History, Provenance, and the Description of Personal Records," *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 50–64; Kristan Cook and Heather Dean, "Our Records, Ourselves: Documenting Archives and Archivists," in *Archival Narratives for Canada: Re-Telling Stories in a Changing Landscape*, ed. Kathleen Garay and Christl Verduyn (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 60–61; Gabrielle Dean, "Disciplinarity and Disorder," *Archive Journal* 1 (April 2011), http://archivejournal.net/journal/2011/04 /archeology-of-archival-practice/ (Last accessed 17 September 2012); Athanasios Velios,

Conclusion: Accepting the Limits of Archival Theory and Understanding

In "Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order," MacNeil argues that the "privileged status of original order needs to be reconsidered."[70] I agree with this assessment and suggest that part of this reconsideration must involve more precise identification and definition of the different types of order that manifest in archives over time, and the development – or improvement – of means for explaining the significance of these to researchers. The discussion in this article demonstrates how tenuous one of archival theory's most carefully defended principles appears under close examination. It suggests that archivists must begin to admit more openly and widely the limitations of both the intellectual premises on which the principle of respect for original order is founded and our own abilities to meet the expectations the principle sets up for us. The promise of original order is overshadowed by so many factors: the difficulty of determining when an order is original or which of several orders should be identified as original; the difficulty in expressing what original order can communicate about personal archives' creators; and the impossibility of preserving an original order intact – should we succeed in identifying one – as we carry out our archival functions. In her interview, Hobbs made the important point that archivists "are the first literary interpreters" of materials in writers' fonds;[71] with this responsibility in mind, we need to think more carefully about what we convey about order and its significance in both our theoretical discussions and in the finding aids we create to represent literary fonds.

Jennifer Douglas recently completed her doctoral studies at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. Her dissertation, "Archiving Authors: Rethinking the Analysis and Representation of Personal Archives," considers the nature and treatment of writers' archives and interrogates the application of long-held archival principles in such archives and in personal archives more generally. Douglas has published articles on writers' archives and arrangement principles, on the principle of provenance, and on medieval women's letter writing. She is currently researching online grief communities and how they function as archives, and is teaching archives courses at the University of Victoria and at the University of British Columbia.

"Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, no. 2 (October 2011): 260–61.

70   MacNeil, "Archivalterity," 24.

71   Hobbs, interview.