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**The Fantasy of the Corroborative and Transformative
Archive: The Authority of Archival Beginnings.**

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15/01/2010**

**This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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ABSTRACT

What is the nature of the archive in the 21st century? What is the role of the archivist in a postmodern, electronic environment? To attain any absolute answers would be beyond the ability, or diplomacy, of any individual. Yet there are some questions, and subsequent dividing lines, which can be brought to the fore:

- Is the archive a resting place for non-current records, a repository that provides the connection between inscription and preservation in order to ensure the veracity of the record as an authentic and reliability piece of evidence?
- Should the archivist be distinct from the records manager?
- Is the historical canon, if permitted to even use the term, a construct of the archive? If the answer is in the affirmative then does this legitimise the archivist in imparting overt value to a record/collection?
- Is the archivist a custodian and keeper?
- Should the archivist interact with wider societal needs and concerns?

The ideal and idea of the archive and the archivist has become virtually unrecognisable from its early 20th century construct as questions such as these have been debated in the journals of archival science. The antiquated Jenkinsonian world-view has been dispensed with. The moral and physical defence of the archive is unsubstantial. Ensuring the preservation of the record and making it available to the public does not provide the archivist with a presence. Rather, the authority of archival beginnings has become the dominant, over-arching ideology.

Through the advocacy of records continuum theorists and the proponents of postmodernism, we are to “stop rowing, start steering”. In order to be accountable, transparent, open, and representative, the archival profession is to control context and master reality. The archive is to define its own truth criteria. The archivist is an agent of accountability. The archivist is to openly negate his/her independent, neutral, non-political, non-ideological role:

(1) There is an archive fever of audit culture. This is in response to the rise of the ‘consumer’ – “There is a risk, we’ll take care of it”. Continual monitoring, evaluation, and targets results in the record being a self-reflexive construct. Audit trails create a sense of truthfulness to the facts and of closeness to past reality. These perspectives have entered the archive. Perceived recordkeeping failures have made the archive unaccountable to wider society. The ‘right’ records are not reaching the archive. Records therefore must be programmed in advance by archivists working as records managers to produce acceptable outcomes. The archivist shapes the creation of the record. Archiving is auditing the recordkeeping systems of a record creating body. Archiving is the “active production of objectively truthful documents”.

(2) Postmodernism sanctions a creative reconstruction of the past. The archive is to “fabricate metaphors...[tell] imaginings of history”. The archive overtly interprets the record and creates interfaces that reflect this interpretation and subjectivity, reifying cultural essentialism to appear representative of all elements of society. The archivist becomes a conscious participant in the construction and advancement of meaning. The perception of the user towards the records is moulded. The archive becomes a means of memory rather than memory itself.

This thesis takes on what the author perceives as certain often rhetorical excesses of the records continuum theory and those of postmodernism. It engages on their terms, with their arguments, and with the interdisciplinary nature of today’s archival thinking. It shows that ‘traditional’ archival concepts and values are just as necessary and relevant today as in the supposedly homogenous and positivist society in which they arose. This thesis thus upholds the Jenkinsonian ideals for archives. However, it recognises the difficulty of achieving them, and that the proponents of postmodernism examined here do not intend to dispense with rigorous reasoning, balanced analysis, and truth seeking in favour of unrestrained ‘anything goes’ interpretations of records and archival concepts. Indeed, the author himself draws on leading postmodern thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida to develop his own socio-political analysis of audit records produced in the ‘audit culture’ of the past few decades. In so doing, the author hopes to show how postmodern analysis can be done in the spirit of the Jenkinsonian commitment to protection of evidential values through truth seeking.

That said, the author believes that the archivist does not create life but holds the materials within its institution in a coma, awaiting the user to awake them from their perpetual slumber. This is a true re-assertion of archival value and responsibility. In caring more for a record’s corroborative power and transformative effect we have got too interested in the way we deliver what we do at the expense of what we deliver – engineering over content. Yet by acting responsibly the archive broadens perspectives and enlightens the individual. This is the responsible archival performance worth pursuing.

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PART 1 – THE ARCHIVE?

CHAPTER 1 – Archival Science and its Emergent Discontents

Take me way back...Help me to understand.¹

Van Morrison

In the beginning, the Gods did not show to man all he was wanting; but in the course of time, he may search for the better, and find it.²

Xenophanes

Archival documents are the only evidential window we have on the action-oriented past, because they arise in the course of acting in relation to one another and to events in the world. Archival documents do capture a moment in time, fix and freeze it, as it were, in order to preserve some sense of it for future reference, some sense of the unique character of the actions and events from which the documents arose.³

Terry Eastwood

¹ Van Morrison, 'Take Me Back', *Hymns to the Silence*, (September, 1991)

² Xenophanes, translated by K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, 1966) p. 235

³ T. Eastwood, 'How Goes It With Appraisal', *Archivaria* 36 (1993) p. 112

Traditional notions of evidence and the archive

Van Morrison, in the stream of consciousness lyrics for 'Take Me Back', laments for a previous time:

I've been feeling so sad and blue,
I've been thinking, I've been thinking, I've been thinking,
I've been thinking, I've been thinking, I've been thinking,
Ah there's so much suffering, and it's
Too much confusion, too much, too much confusion in the world

Take me, do you remember the time darlin'
When everything made more sense in the world (yeah)
Oh I remember, I remember
When life made more sense
Ah, ah, take me back, take me back, take me back, take me back,
Take me back (woah) to when the world made more sense.⁴

It would be understandable if many day-to-day practitioners of the archival craft longed for the times - one may take licence to claim simpler times – before terminology and ideas such as accountability, openness, transparency, and representation entered the professional arena. Such demands are far from the archival world encountered when Sir Hilary Jenkinson joined the staff of the United Kingdom Public Record Office in 1906 and ended his service there in 1954.⁵ Although he did not become Deputy Keeper until 1947, in 1922 he published his *Manual of Archive Administration*, a work which was conceptually rooted in an environment where, as John Cantwell writes in his study of the Public Record Office:

The power possessed by successive deputy keepers during the first 120 years of the Public Records Office's existence...was still decisive, and the arrangement of this work in the order of their administrations was almost automatic. Equally important was the absence of any great themes of policy apart from the constant quest for better and more secure accommodation for the records.⁶

As Lord Mackay of Clashfern, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain between 1987-1997, states in his Foreward to this history of the PRO:

Much of this history concerns those people and how they discharged their duties in ensuring the preservation of the records and in making them available to those members of the public who were interested in them.⁷

Whilst this contained description of the day-to-day operations of the PRO is too simplistic to be truly representative, for Jenkinson there was an archival imperative of preservation and access

⁴ Van Morrison, 'Take Me Back'

⁵ J.D. Cantwell, *The Public Record Office 1838-1958* (London, 1991)

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. ix

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. v

that was concentrated around the physical and moral defence of the archive.⁸ In his *Manual of Archive Administration*, Jenkinson provides an extensive picture of the many facets contained within such concepts, concepts which have subsequently filtered down the archival line and which generally continue to be recognised and practised today. To provide an initial summary of the ‘Physical Defence of Archives’ Jenkinson quotes Arthur Agarde⁹, who wrote in 1610 that: “There is fower-fould hurte that by negligence may bringe wracke to records; that is to say Fier, Water, Rates and Mice, Mislacinge”.¹⁰ In keeping with its precept Jenkinson’s physical defence of the archive seeks to ensure that the records are protected against physical dangers. Today this finds expression in the British Standard BS5454:2000 that specifies a set of ideal conditions for the storage and exhibition of archival documents which is used as the benchmark when assessing archival environmental conditions.¹¹ By the moral defence of the archive, Jenkinson was focusing on the specific archival practices that ensured the record was maintained as an authentic, reliable, and usable record of evidence in order to preserve its long-term ability to function as “that which makes evident or manifest; that which furnishes, or tends to furnish, proof; any mode of proof; the ground of belief or judgment; as, the evidence of our senses; evidence of the truth or falsehood of a statement”.¹² Indeed, the Latin roots of the term *evidentem* is “perceptible, clear, obvious”.¹³

In a Jenkinsonian archival world evidence is the base from which an understanding and belief that facts speak the truth can flourish. This process is founded on an assumption that

⁸ H. Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* 2nd ed., (London, 1966) pp. 44-123

⁹ Arthur Agard (and there is a discrepancy here between Jenkinson and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography spelling) was a 16-17th century archivist and antiquarian who “concerned himself as much with the safe keeping and good order of the records as with their contents. At the same time his mind ranged over those contents, over changes in handwriting, over the origin and meaning of technical terms that had fallen into disuse, and over the history of the government of England before and since the conquest. Those interests led him to make inventories and abstracts of records, and to seek to impose order in their keeping. He graphically described the principal enemies of archives as fire, water, rats, and mice, and, in some respects the most troublesome of all, misplacement. Fire could be avoided by forbidding the use of naked lights, though lanterns might be permitted; protection against damage by water required careful maintenance and regular inspection; rats and mice might be frustrated by strong boxes. Misplacement, however, was of two kinds. There was the ever-present risk of returning records to the wrong shelf or strongroom, but there was also the danger that records removed for reference elsewhere, even by duly attested warrant, might never be returned. Records can be at risk from their custodians’ colleagues”. G.H. Martin, ‘Arthur Agard’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* available at http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/206?_fromAuth=1 (accessed 20/09/08)

¹⁰ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 45

¹¹ For a summary of professional practice see ‘Environmental Management’ on the National Archives website, available at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/environmental_management.htm (accessed 20/09/08)

¹² evidence. (n.d.). *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*. from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/evidence> (accessed 20/09/08)

¹³ evident, *Online Etymology Dictionary* available at <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=evidence&searchmode=none> (accessed 20/09/08)

knowledge of past events, of states of affairs, and of knowledge of the world, can be confirmed and certified by extracting inferences from evidence which the inquirer has collected for that purpose. This has been articulated in archival literature by Heather MacNeil, the foremost archival theorist with an interest in legal notions of evidence. MacNeil writes that the:

...twin notions of records as evidence and of evidence as inference were absorbed into the rationalist tradition of legal evidence scholarship that began to take shape in the eighteenth century, and into the positivist tradition of historical scholarship that emerged during the nineteenth century.¹⁴

This led to a philosophical ideal of truth from which emerged a new philosophy of rational belief based on probability:

Assent to any proposition was to be based on the strength of the evidence, that is, on the strength of the connection between the proposition to be proved and the material offered as proof; and there was a new emphasis on the grading of evidence on the scales of reliability and probable truth. Hence, the truth of any proposition could be established by reasoning from the relevant evidence, with reason operating within a framework of inferences, generalisations, and probabilities.¹⁵

Of course this ideal did not spring fully-formed but had its origins over many centuries of evidence-based development, including the concept of the jury. In her *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama*, Lorna Hutson, Berry Professor of English Literature at the University of St Andrews, suggests that the expanded participation in this institution, the jury, diffused through English culture certain analytical and quasi-scientific “habits of thought and practice”. She cites in support of this claim King James I’s encouragement of jurors to undertake a “wise sifting and examination of the fact”, and Sir Francis Willoughby’s urging of them “not to look upon evidences only, but to look into them”. Jurors were being

¹⁴ H. MacNeil, ‘Trusting Records in a Postmodern World’, *Archivaria* 51 (2001) p. 39. See also H. MacNeil, *Trusting Records: Legal, Historical and Diplomatic Perspectives* (Dordrecht, 2000) pp. 1-31.

¹⁵ H. MacNeil, ‘Trusting Records in a Postmodern World’, *Archivaria* 51 (2001) p. 38. John Locke, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, writes that: “Probability, then, being to supply the defect of our knowledge and to guide us where that fails, is always conversant about propositions whereof we have no certainty, but only some inducements to receive them for true. The grounds of it are, in short, these two following:

First, The conformity of anything with our own knowledge, observation, and experience.
Secondly, The testimony of others, vouching their observation and experience. In the testimony of others, is to be considered: (1) The number. (2) The integrity. (3) The skill of the witnesses. (4) The design of the author, where it is a testimony out of a book cited. (5) The consistency of the parts, and circumstances of the relation. (6) Contrary testimonies”. J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1993) p. 384

instructed to incorporate into their deliberations “evidential concepts” such as “likelihood...probability, and...the corroboration of circumstances”.¹⁶

The drive to infer necessitates that the archivist fulfils Jenkinson’s moral defence of the archive, as in the words of Jeremy Bentham, the 18th century philosopher and jurist:

Evidence is a word of relation; it is of the number of those which, in their signification, involve, each of them, a necessary reference to the import expressed by some other; which other must be brought to view at the same time with it, or the import cannot be understood.¹⁷

This is effectively a call rooted in the need to preserve authentic records in a manner that maintains their contextualisation. Bentham continues in his *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* to state that:

Hence arises another natural and proper object of the legislator’s care, viz. guarding the judge against the deception liable to be produced by fallacious evidence.

Subordinate to this object, are the following two: - 1. To give instructions to the judge, which may serve to guide him in judging of the probative force of evidence. - 2. To take securities that the evidence itself shall possess as great a degree of probative force, in other words, shall be as *trustworthy* as possible.

The properties, which constitute trustworthiness in a mass of evidence, are two: correctness and completeness.¹⁸

One of the cornerstones of ensuring the trustworthiness of a record through its origins and authenticity has been the branch of study known as diplomatics. The link between the legal environment and diplomatics has been expressed by Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil where they write, using a previous quote of Duranti’s, of the diplomatic definition of an archival document as “the written evidence of a fact having a juridical nature,

¹⁶ L. Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 2007) pp. 76-77

¹⁷ J. Bentham, *Rationale of Judicial Evidence* (London, 1827) p. 17

¹⁸ Bentham continues: “The property that presents itself in the first place as desirable on the part of an aggregate mass of evidence, is, that, as far as it goes, it be correct: that the statement given in relation to the matter of fact in question, be as comfortable as possible, at least in respect of all material circumstances, to the facts themselves. In proportion as it fails of possessing the perfection of this property, in the same proportion will the mass of evidence fail of attaining the maximum of trustworthiness: in the same proportion will be the danger of deception and consequent mis-decision on the part of the judge.

First desirable property in an aggregate mass of testimony, *correctness*.

Another property, the desirableness and essentiality of which is no less obvious on the part of an aggregate mass of testimony, is that of being *complete*: that the statements of which it consists comprehend, as far as possible, and without omission, the aggregate mass of all such facts, material to the justice of the decision about to be pronounced, as on the occasion in question really had place”. *Ibid.*, p. 29

compiled in compliance with determined forms, which are meant to provide it with full faith and credit”.¹⁹ They then proceed to state that:

Thus, a record presents three fundamental requisites. It is written, that is, affixed to a medium in an objectified and syntactic (i.e., governed by rules or arrangement) way; It has a relationship with a fact taken into consideration by the juridical system within which it is produced; It is compiled in a pre-established and controlled form aimed to ensure its trustworthiness.²⁰

For MacNeil, Duranti, and Eastwood this triumvirate of guardians, which are deduced from examinations into the internal and external features of a document, protect the records legal and historical truth.

As Michael Clancy expertly disclosed with regards to England, the truth of written evidence began to take precedence over the twinned truths of orality and memory in the Middle Ages.²¹ The primacy of writing, as evidence, rests upon the understanding that, in theory, laying down events in the written form should ensure the objective of providing a sense of fixity, of a repetitive reoccurrence of meaning over and over by freezing facts in the present. The famous passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* points to these very qualities even though Plato is actually espousing his mistrust of the new ‘artificial’ memory:

You know, Phaedrus, that’s the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter’s products stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing for ever.²²

Kenneth E. Foote, Professor and Chair of the Department of Geography at the University of Colorado, has written that “their [records] durability defines them as communicational resources that can be used to transmit information beyond the bounds of interpersonal contacts”.²³ This is premised upon the extraction of certain properties from the flux of the flow of time and the subjective experience into the fixity of the spatial form. Walter Ong, in his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, expressed the idea that the invention of printing embedded the

¹⁹ L. Duranti, T. Eastwood & H. MacNeil, *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records* (Dordrecht, 2002) p. 9

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²¹ M. Clancy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford, 1993)

²² Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d, (Cambridge, 1952) p. 158

²³ K.E. Foote, ‘To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture,’ *American Archivist* 53 (1996) p. 379

word in space.²⁴ This was achieved by conventionalising space right out of existence in so much as the physical dimensions of the book are rendered functionally invisible. The same process of spatialisation is at play with the convergence of diplomatics and the record, most visible in the predictable and recognisable form of the letter where the architecture of the record is essential, the “rules of representation, which are themselves evidence of the intent to convey information”.²⁵ As Duranti states:

We recognise a church as such because it has a shape or physical form exhibiting certain conventional elements or features such as a bell-tower, but we identify and understand the full meaning of a particular church, its cultural context, from the way those conventional elements are expressed in its architectural design, that is, from its intellectual form.²⁶

However whilst the record, as an embodiment of a fact, has the function of converting the present into the permanent, the occurrence of creation does not ensure the continuing veracity of the record and it is here that the archive enters into the discourse. Jenkinson observed this point:

...the mere manufacture of documents is only one element in the creation of Archives: another and much more potent one is their preservation for reference; that is to say their substitution not merely for the spoken word but for the fallible and destructible memory of the people who took part in whatever the transactions may have been that gave rise to them. *Recordari* still means, as it meant in the twelfth century, to remember. So long as memory is a necessary part of the conduct of affairs so long will it be necessary to put that memory into a material form, and so long as that is necessary so long will you have Archives.²⁷

There is, therefore, a strain of conceptual thought that links diplomatics, Jenkinson, and the legal concept of evidence in the attempt to ensure that records retain their integrity and trustworthiness through being reliable and authentic. By so doing the records can fulfil their function as a natural by-product of administration, the untainted evidence of acts and transactions. As Muller, Feith and Fruin stated in their 1898 *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*:

An archival collection is the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials, in so far as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or of that official.²⁸

²⁴ W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 2002) pp. 123-129

²⁵ L. Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (London, 1998) p. 41

²⁶ *Ibid.*,

²⁷ H. Jenkinson, ‘The Future of Archives in England’ in R.H. Ellis & P. Walne (ed.), *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chicago, 2003) p. 322

²⁸ Muller, Feith & Fruin defined ‘officially’ in the following manner: “Only official documents, i.e., those received or produced by administrative bodies or officials ‘in their official capacity’, belong to the archival collection. Documents received or produced by members of an administrative body or by officials in

Jenkinson matches this description in his definition of a document:

A document which may be said to belong to the class of Archives is one which was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors.²⁹ (Jenkinson's italics)

To return to Jenkinson's moral and physical defence, the purpose of the archive is therefore to ensure that the record remains a reliable and authentic piece of evidence. The notion of reliability is connected around the act of creation whereby it is:

...taken to refer to the authority and trustworthiness of records as proof and memory of the activity of which they constitute the natural by-product. A reliable record is essentially one having the capacity to stand for the facts it is about.³⁰

Authenticity, by comparison, is linked more towards preservation. Determining a record's authentic nature entails tracking it to its creation and determining whether any alterations have been made on its journey to the archive. To declare a document authentic means to say that it is precisely as it was when first transmitted or set aside for preservation, and that its reliability, or the trustworthiness it had at that moment, has been maintained intact:

It [authenticity] is contingent to the facts of creation, maintenance and custody. Records are authentic only when they are created with the need to act through them in mind, and when they are preserved and maintained as faithful witnesses of facts and acts by their creator or legitimate successors. To hold authentic memorials of past activity means creating, maintaining, and keeping custody of documents according to regular procedures that can be attested.³¹

From these understandings were derived principles and techniques designed to ensure that texts be understood in terms of their networked and evolutionary relations to one another. Records as evidential objects with a shared provenance are a family with a connected genealogy contingent upon that which enshrines it, its contextualisation. Archival techniques such as provenance, original order, and the chain of responsible custody are the means to preserving evidential value.

The Principle of Provenance: The principle of provenance is one that seeks to tie the archive directly to the creating body. According to the John Curtin website:

*another capacity, which are often found in an archival collection, do not belong to it". S. Muller, J.A. Feith & R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (Chicago, 2003) p. 13.*

²⁹ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 11

³⁰ Duranti *et al.*, *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records* p. 6

³¹ T. Eastwood, 'What is Archival Theory and Why is it Important?' *Archivaria* 37 (1994) p. 127

This fundamental principle of grouping requires that records be organised and maintained according to their transactional origin or source. In short, records originating from one office or individual form a distinct body of material, which is to be kept separate and inviolate. It must not be intermingled with records of other 'parentage'.³²

The parentage referred to can be widely divergent: for example provenance can be expressed with regards to an institution or governmental body, an individual or a family. The issue of provenance can also be thought of with regard to an authority which has ceased to exist. In this instance the archive may be transferred to the successor authority. As the Curtin website proceeds to explain:

Records from the same origin came to be known as 'fonds' and the principle as *Respect des Fonds*, reflecting its French popularisation and as *Provenienzprinzip* in German. The thinking behind this principle reasons that for records to serve as evidence, they must be traceable to their source and be shown to reflect their contexts of origin/creation and initial or primary use.³³

The Principle of Original Order: The Principle of Original Order holds that records will be maintained in the same order and with the "same designations they received in the course of the business of their office of origin and primary use".³⁴ This is the principle behind the understanding of Muller, Feith, and Fruin that the archival collection is a natural occurrence, an organic whole. They wrote that:

...an archival collection is an organic whole, a living organism, which grows, takes shape, and undergoes changes in accordance with fixed rules. If the functions of the body change, the nature of the archival collection changes likewise. The rules which govern the composition, the arrangement and the formation of an archival collection, therefore, cannot be fixed by the archivist in advance; he can only study the organism and ascertain the rules under which it was formed. Every archival collection has, therefore, as it were, its own personality, its individuality, which the archivist must become acquainted with before he can proceed to its arrangement.³⁵

This is closely connected with the arrangement of the collection which must be systematically viewed as a whole, a grouping, as opposed to the archivist seeking to impose some sort of artificial classification by splitting the collection up thereby rendering the logical and intricate relationship between records, the web of relations, as difficult to discern. In preserving the

³² 'Basic Concepts and Principles of Archives Management' available at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/society/archives/management.html> (accessed 19/06/2008)

³³ *Ibid.*,

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ Muller, Feith, and Fruin write with regards to an organism: "At least an organism which has lived, for the archivist generally receives the archival collection into his custody when it is dead, or at any rate only the parts of it which must be considered as closed". Muller *et al.*, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* p. 19.

original order of the records, the archive is playing the part in establishing and retaining the authenticity and integrity of records as evidence of work processes and activities in context.

The Chain of Responsible Custody: The Chain of Responsible Custody was forwarded by Jenkinson as a central tenet of his physical and moral defence of archives. The evidential integrity of the records could only be achieved when there could be traced an “unblemished line of responsible custodians”.³⁶ This faultless lineage is, in Jenkinson’s view, a reasonable guarantee that the records have been kept without damage, alienation, improper or unauthorised alteration or destruction. What we see in this conceptualisation of Jenkinson’s is the key archival function as traditionally understood – the connection between the record and the place, the inscription and the preservation.

The positivity of the discourse

Hugh Taylor writes that:

From the beginnings of literate society to the present, the technology of utterance upon the ancient media of record up to, and including, paper has cast the archivist in the role of keeper and remembrancer, controlling the record for the security of content in the context of creation.³⁷

Evidence for such a statement has been provided by Ernst Posner and Maria Brosius through analysis of record-keeping in the ancient world.³⁸ However, perhaps the key archival theorist in this regard is Luciana Duranti who is strident in her documentation and support for the linkage between evidence, archive and place. She uses the Roman world to illuminate her outlook, where her vision is to establish “where our Western modern civilization has taken it [the given place of preservation] from, what its meanings and implications are, and what the consequences of its abandonment might possibly be”.³⁹ Duranti posits her belief that:

The origin of our concept of archives as a place is in Roman Law, which is the foundation of the *ius commune* or common law of Europe, and has permeated all the juridical outlook of Western civilization. In the Justinian Code, which is the *summa* of all Roman law and jurisprudence, an archive is defined as *locus publicus in quo instrumenta deponuntur* (i.e., the public place where deeds are deposited), *quatenus incorrupta maneat* (i.e., so that they remain uncorrupted), *fidem faciant* (i.e., provide trustworthy evidence), and *perpetua rei memoria sit* (i.e., and be continuing memory of that to which they attest.)⁴⁰

³⁶ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 11

³⁷ H. Taylor, ‘The Archivist, the Letter and the Spirit’ *Archivaria* 43 (1997) p. 2.

³⁸ E. Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Massachusetts, 1972) & M. Brosius (ed.), *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2003)

³⁹ L. Duranti, ‘Archives as a Place’ *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (1996) p. 243

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

For Duranti the:

Archival threshold is the space where the officer of the public authority takes charge of the documents, identifies them by their provenance and class, associates them intellectually with those that belong in the same aggregation, and forwards them to the inside space.⁴¹

Therefore, for Duranti, acceptance into custody is more than a declaration of authenticity. It is taking responsibility for preserving that authenticity, and it requires taking the appropriate measures for guaranteeing that authenticity will never be questioned, measures that go much beyond physical security. The identification of the documents, the assignment to them of an intellectual and physical place in the archive, that is, their location and description in context, by freezing and perpetuating their interrelationships, ensure that possible tampering will be easy to identify. Thus, in the traditional notion of the archival world, the twinned elements of inscription and preservation are what the French philosopher Michel Foucault stated as the “positivity of a discourse” that “characterizes its unity throughout time, and well beyond individual oeuvres, books, and texts”.⁴²

Disinterestedness

At the root of a traditional understanding of the archives is a notion of ‘disinterestedness’. This concept is a key element in Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness is one of the axioms, if not the central defining principle, of modern Western aesthetics from the 18th century onwards. Indeed it feeds directly into the emergence of modern archival discourse around the beginning of the 20th century. The notion of disinterestedness stemmed from a move away from the religious/spiritual/moral experience, which was the main purpose of art, to the study of an object for its own sake. Within Kant’s description of beautiful art there is a paradox in that:

...beautiful art is a mode of representation which is purposive for itself and which, although devoid of [definite] purpose, yet furthers the culture of the mental powers in reference to social communication...

In a product of beautiful art, we must become conscious that it is art and not nature; but yet the purposiveness in its form must seem to be as free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature.⁴³

Kant is providing a formation that we in the archive world can understand as the non-contaminating witness in that the object/record is purposeful yet appears without purpose, a realm that is removed both in creation and subsequent interpretation from the external elements, the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244

⁴² M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1989) p. 142

⁴³ I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* (New York, 1951) pp. 148-149

political, moral, social, and religious. As J.H. Bernard writes, in his introduction to the 1951 Hafner Library of Classic edition of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*:

As to *relation*, the characteristic of an object called beautiful is that it betrays a purposiveness without definite purpose. The pleasure is *a priori*, independent on the one hand of the charms of sense or the emotions of mere feeling...; and on the other hand is a pleasure quite distinct from that taken which we feel when viewing perfection...⁴⁴

Similarly Ronan McDonald has written that: "In its very self-containment and purposelessness... art [gives] us intimations and shafts of illumination of the transcendent and divine world".⁴⁵ For someone like Jenkinson there would be a clear analogy here with regards to the archival relationship with the evidential record – studied for its own sake, purposive without a purpose, natural to its users, and giving us intimations into a past now gone. The archivist in the traditional manifestation of the role is deemed to be removed from the subjective and cultural experience, not beholden to moral or political relevance or the whims of the day. It is an occupation that exists to ensure that the archive serves as trustworthy evidence of the facts, actions, and ideas of which they bear witness but which is accessible to the expectant user who receives drafts of illumination where "in the beginning, the Gods did not show to man all he was wanting; but in the course of time, he may search for the better, and find it".⁴⁶

A static entity without change?

Running contrary to such traditionalist discourse it has become widely argued in archival literature that "nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive'".⁴⁷ It is evident that the long-established demarcation lines of the archivist have become blurred. In one sense there is the broadening scope of the record-creating environment – when one has thought of the archive the term has invariably been associated with the written form of documentation. In today's society the definitions surrounding the terminology of 'record' have been expanding. With the emergence of electronic records definitions, both of the record and of the archive, have been adapted to include new media and new documentary forms: there are hypermedia documents, dynamic documents, and e-mails to name just a few. Certainly electronic media eases and accelerates the processes around the creation of the modern record, the ubiquitous and essential nature of which has been described by, amongst others, David Levy and Sue McKemmish.⁴⁸ Therefore our

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xviii

⁴⁵ R. McDonald, *The Death of the Critic* (London, 2007) p. 58

⁴⁶ Xenophanes, translated by K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, 1966) p. 235

⁴⁷ J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (London, 1995) p. 90

⁴⁸ "Individuals keep records of their activities and interrelationships with other individuals and organisation. Accounts, receipts, cheque butts, bank statements, payslips, income tax assessments, share certificates, personal computer spreadsheets and word processing files, contracts and guarantees all arise

modern era has prompted records professionals, as well as information technologists, to question the traditional notions of the record: What is a digital record and how is it authenticated? How will we manage this new type of record? What steps do we have to take to ensure long-term preservation?⁴⁹ Whilst these questions are undoubtedly crucial for the continual efficient and responsible operations of the archival profession, these issues are of a highly functional sort that fail to delve amongst the broader theoretical concepts that electronic record-keeping has brought forth and that underpin precisely what it is that archivists do. As such these broader notions are of a type that have the potentiality to alter radically the terms upon which the archive rests – for example, how do archivists and records managers interact with society? Should archivists continue with their custodial model upon which many of its archival foundations are built? More specifically, in the literature of those who view themselves as the arbiters of change, is an understanding that the emergence of the digital record has brought with it a seismic shift in archival practice.

It is worth stating that the archival community has never been a static entity without change, but that the accelerating pace of development post World-War II has exposed the fault-lines more explicitly. The area where adjustment has been most evident is in the domain of archival appraisal. In the custodial model records of continuing value are transferred to archival repositories once they are no longer required by the creator for their day-to-day business. There they come under the guardianship of archivists whose role for many years was depicted as that of a neutral, impartial custodian responsible for preserving complete, closed, static sets of records,

from our financial and legal relationships as consumers of goods and services, employees, shareholders, beneficiaries of public services and taxpayers. Birth, death and marriage certificates, passports and visas, statements of educational qualifications, plans, titles, wills, deeds and employment histories document our status, property rights and other entitlements. Letters, records relating to our membership of unions, clubs and societies, diaries, photographs, home videos, bus tickets, postcards and invitations document our experiences, support our memories, go towards forming for each of us a history of a life, but some – our personal archives – we continue to value more highly for these purposes.

Similarly, organisations of all kinds – governments, businesses, community groups, churches, clubs and societies – keep records of their interaction with each other and with individuals. Employee dossiers, client records, accounts and salary databases, share registers, policy and precedent files, the agenda, minutes and papers of decision-making or deliberative bodies and processes, drafts and internal memoranda, annual reports, taxation returns, project or research and development files, maps, plans, and contracts all document an organisation's legal and financial obligations and entitlements as an employer, provider or receiver of goods and services, debtor or creditor and owner of property. They also document processes showing how transactions take shape, record administrative activities and business dealings, and account for the actions of the organisation. As with personal records, organisational records may be of short- or long-term value to the organisation that created them. Those of continuing value form the organisation's archives". S. McKemmish, 'Introducing Archives and Archival Programs' in J. Ellis (ed.), *Keeping Archives* (Melbourne, 1993) pp. 2-3; D. Levy, *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (New York, 2001)

⁴⁹ For an extensive examination of these, and other emergent issues surrounding the records-creation/keeping environment see R. Cox, *Managing Records as Evidence and Information* (London, 2001)

neither taking away from nor adding anything to the archive once in their care. Although this is based upon a somewhat false premise – the United Kingdom Public Record Office was involved in a huge winnowing operation in the 1850s-1860s⁵⁰ and Jenkinson himself was not blind to the realisation that the sheer scale of the created documentation was simply too vast to allow the record to accumulate in the archive without archival responsibility, at some level, for appraisal⁵¹ - this doctrine of the ‘traditional’ model has become the prevailing understanding of Jenkinsonian thought. In recent years Luciana Duranti has taken up the baton from Jenkinson in defending the organic nature of records as received from an institution or person in order to protect their independence from the adverse and unwelcome judgement of the archivist who could skew the historical narrative in any direction as a result of their retention policy. As Duranti states, “attributing value to that evidence would mean to renounce impartiality, endorse ideology, and consciously and arbitrarily alter the societal record”.⁵² However Duranti has been fighting an increasingly lonely intellectual battle and manning the barricades against practices that have been common since the middle of the 20th century as archivists have been drawn into the appraisal of records for permanent preservation.⁵³ This has been a result of the ever-enlarging volume of

⁵⁰ See Cantwell, *The Public Record Office* & C.A.F. Meekings, ‘King’s Bench Files’ in J.H. Baker (ed.), *Legal Records and the Historian* (London, 1978) pp. 97-139

⁵¹ “Such activities reflect the addition of a new series of Archive problems to the enormous stock of fresh experience which faced us. The fact is that the enormous stock of fresh experience which has been accumulated during the War and which will be material for the work of the future historian, not to mention students in other branches of learning, is hidden in a mass of documents so colossal that the question of their housing alone (apart from those of their handling, sifting and use) presents quite novel features...The questions raised already by the introduction into administration of new methods of communication and of recording (the telephone, for example, and typewriter) become now pressing...it is largely the addition of this abnormal mass of new Archive matter to our existing collections which compels us to face the fact that we must make at any rate a beginning of settling our Archive problems, old and new, if we are to deal satisfactorily with the present and safeguard the future of research work”. Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 20

⁵² “[T]he question remains: if the archival profession has a responsibility to preserve an integral and complete societal archives, how can it reduce such archives to a manageable size without wounding its integrity and completeness of meaning? Of course, discussing the how means moving from the realm of theory to that of methodology. Thus, it is sufficient to answer: not by attributing externally imposed values, but by carefully defining archival jurisdictions and acquisition policies and plans, and by remembering that archivists are mediators and facilitators, custodians and preservers of societal evidence, not documenters and interpreters, or even judges, of societal deeds. Why not? – one might ask. Because the archival profession has a vital responsibility to future generations, that of letting them understand and judge our society on the basis of the documents it produced. To be documenters of society is in conflict with such responsibility. All archivists, whatever the archives in their care, accomplish the cultural function of protecting the existing evidence of past cultures for future cultures to interpret, absorb, and creatively renew. Attributing value to that evidence would mean to renounce impartiality, endorse ideology, and consciously and arbitrarily alter the societal record”. L. Duranti, ‘The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory’ *American Archivist* 57 (1994) pp. 343-44

⁵³ Michael Moss, James Currall and Susan Stuart provide a summary of the divergence between libraries and archives in this regard when they write that: “In the library world Lee sees a collection as ‘intermediated’ by professionals and intended for a user community or communities. This is not far

records created due to the rapid development of technology. The precipitous evolution of technology has spawned metamorphic changes:

Since the time of the Sumerians, documents and their supporting technologies have continued to evolve on an unprecedented path...it took at least 50 million years for society to progress from spoken language to writing; about 5,000 years from writing to printing; about 500 years from printing to the development of sight-sound media (photography, the telephone, sound recording, radio, television); and yet fewer than 50 years from the first of the sight-sound media to the modern computer.⁵⁴

Too many records and not enough archival storage facilities necessitate hard choices - a fact recognised by Jenkinson's successor in the pantheon of archival theorists, the American T.R. Schellenberg. Schellenberg is closely linked to an understanding that the assessment of a record's value cannot be confined to its primary evidential value but that it also contains cultural and historical-research purposes which should be considered as part of the selection criteria.⁵⁵ In Schellenberg's view such secondary values were not the preserve of the creating agency, who were only concerned with the relevance of the record to its on-going, primarily administrative, current activities. Hence it was necessary for the archivist to consider the lasting documentation to assess it for its cultural values.

Such developments were, however, played out in the same ball-park as the ideal of archives as trusted systems and archivists as trusted third parties who were, through their professionalism and training, independent neutral impartial archival practitioners. The theories of post-modernism and the records continuum seek to strike this particular theoretical ball out of the discursive arena.

Postmodernism and the archive

One element in which the archival community was relatively static was in regards to the status of evidence. The archive dealt with the rules of preserving evidence but did not enter into an analysis of evidence - quite simply why theorise on the nature of evidence when the nature of evidence is clear? The record contains facts which have an objective existence in the physical world, through a process of inference the facts can be reconstructed through the assumption, shared with the historical methods of the modernists, that there is a clearly delineated thread that

removed from the appraisal of records to form an archival collection, except that in the library context the collection usually represents aggregation whereas in the archival it is a process of reduction. A collection in the library world is built up by aggregation of individual objects, separately described. In the museum and archive world, a collection is a set of related objects which are frequently not individually described". J. Currall, M. Moss, & S. Stuart, 'Privileging Information is Inevitable' *Archives and Manuscripts* 34 (2006) pp. 99-100

⁵⁴ Z. Liu, 'The Evolution of Documents and its Impact,' *Journal of Documentation* 60 (2004) p. 279

⁵⁵ See T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* (Chicago, 1975)

hangs between the past and the record, and the archival duty is to preserve that evidence as a trustworthy entity. However over the past 30-40 years evidence as a natural understanding of reality has been attacked by a disparate body of thought known as postmodernism which has questioned the objective reliability of the historical record and the “subtly dead, muffling hand” of history.⁵⁶ As historian Robert Danton puts it, “hard facts have gone soft” as the ability of evidence to act as a stable referent has been critiqued.⁵⁷ As a consequence the positivist belief in evidence has begun to look somewhat out-of-date as this new scholarship on the nature of evidence has arisen.

What form does archival postmodernism take? Two major critiques, paralleling those mentioned above, have permeated through archival postmodernism.⁵⁸ Firstly, in the words of Mark Greene of the University of Wyoming:

The archival paradigm rejects this increasingly untenable belief in the objectivity and truthfulness of any form of documentation, including transactional records...that, in fact, there is no universally valid conception of “truth” that transactional records or other forms of documentation can transmit, only multiple truths. While the notion that a single capital T-truth does not exist is an uncomfortable one for many people, many of us *do* accept that meaning (and memory and need and value) are relative and subjective concepts. They exist in the eye of the beholder rather than in an objective definition like transactional evidence.⁵⁹

This leads into the undermining of the delineated thread that hangs between the past and the record. Naturally it would be problematic, to say the least, for the archivist to deny such a concept out-of-hand but archival postmodernism tends to concentrate on the social contingency of the record. The thread that does exist is a product of a social process which is invariably favourable to a certain conceptualisation of power (white elite males) and therefore the record is a dynamic entity dependent upon these power plays, “a constituent agent in the reconstruction of a

⁵⁶ J. Updike, http://www.penguinclassics.co.uk/nf/shared/WebDisplay/0,,214908_1_0,00.html (accessed 15/06/08)

⁵⁷ “HARD FACTS HAVE GONE SOFT: there is no denying it, no matter where you took a stand during the last decades while the waves of relativism swept over the intellectual landscape. Historians may still favour metaphors like digging in the archives, but who believes in quarrying out nuggets of reality? Words like “facts” and “truth” make us uncomfortable and stir the urge to run for protective covering. If you are writing a biography, begin it with disclaimers. An introduction should surround the subject with a warning: we can never know the “real” Virginia Woolf or Teddy Roosevelt, and any reader who suspects the writer of unsophistication should be made to enter the book”. R. Darnton, ‘How Historians Play God,’ *Raritan* 22 (Summer, 2002) p. 1

⁵⁸ Some of those who have commonly been placed under, or have avidly appropriated, the term post-modernist in the archival community are Richard Brown, Terry Cook, Verne Harris, Margaret Hedstrom, and Tom Nesmith.

⁵⁹ M. Greene, ‘The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age’ *American Archivist* 65 (2002) p. 52

conception of the real”.⁶⁰ This has been articulated by Terry Cook – the foremost and most impressive proponent of archival postmodernism - in the following terms:

...facts in texts cannot be separated from their on-going and past interpretations, nor author from subject or ever-changing audiences, nor author from the act of authoring, nor authoring from broader societal contexts in which it takes place. Everything in records is shaped, presented, represented, re-presented, symbolized, signified, constructed by the writer, the computer programmer, the photographer, the cartographer, for a set purpose. No text is an innocent by-product of administrative or personal action, but rather a constructed product – although that conscious construction may be so transformed into unconscious patterns of social behaviour, language conventions, organization processes, technological imperatives, and information templates that links to its constructed nature have become quite hidden.⁶¹

The second main component of archival postmodernism centres around the notion that the archival duty is simply to preserve evidence as a trustworthy entity in a neutral, objective fashion. For archival postmodernists this cannot be achieved and therefore they have sought to deconstruct and expose the archive as a conservative agent of normalisation that objectifies records and reifies value by acting as a legitimating authority with the power to dispense status and create the historical canon. For example, ‘facts’ are actively manipulated by the archivist in the many techniques of archiving – during the appraisal process the archivist is a core cog in the interpretation, subtraction, selection, and reformulation of the preserved record. Therefore the appraisal process is an active process whereby the record is created rather than selected, provenance is an artificial contextualisation, and so on.⁶² So whereas the archivist was concerned with preserving evidence, the postmodern archivist is concerned with the *analysis* of evidence or, what Jennifer Meehan has termed, an *archival* concept of evidence.⁶³ This concept lies at the heart of the following statement from Tom Nesmith:

A record is a meaningful communication, which means it consists of a physical object, plus an understanding, or representation of it. Some of what makes a record meaningful is inscribed within it, but often much of

⁶⁰ J. Chandler, A. Davidson & H. Harootunian , ‘Editors’ Introduction’ in J. Chandler, A. Davidson & H. Harootunian (ed.,) *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice and Persuasion across the Disciplines* (Chicago, 1994) p. 5

⁶¹ T. Cook, ‘Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives’ *Archivaria* 51 (2001) p. 25

⁶² Take this statement from Linda Hutcheon: “All documents...used by historians are not neutral evidence for reconstructing phenomena, which are assumed to have some independent existence outside them. All documents process information and the very way they do so is itself a historical fact that limits the documentary conception of historical knowledge...the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted”. L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York, 1988) p. 122

⁶³ J. Meehan, ‘Towards an Archival Concept of Evidence’ *Archivaria* 61 (2006) pp. 127-146

what makes it intelligible is not. Thus most of a record's 'recordness' lies outside its physical borders within the context of interpretation.⁶⁴

In and of itself there seems nothing dramatically subversive about this statement. However the consequences of Nesmith's argument are revealed later in this article when he also writes that archives are:

...an ongoing mediation of understanding the records (and thus phenomena), or that aspect of record making which shapes this understanding through such functions as records appraisal, processing, and description, and the implementation of processes for making records accessible.⁶⁵

It would appear that Nesmith, as with the other postmodernists, equates a record's evidential value with the interpretation of the record and evidence rather than from the container of the actual record itself. As Meehan suggests:

...the capacity of records to serve as evidence stems not from the supposedly inherent nature of records, but rather from the very processes that treat and use records as evidence, that invariably involve the analysis and creation (more than mere identification) of the relationship between records and events.⁶⁶

This results in the conception of the archivist, as outlined by Cook, who concentrates on:

...the context behind the content; on the power relationships that shape the documentary heritage; and on the document's structure, its resident and subsequent information systems, and its narrative and business-process conventions as being more important than its informational content.⁶⁷

The records continuum

The records continuum has a lineage stretching back to the work of Ian MacLean,⁶⁸ through the Commonwealth Record Series System of Peter Scott,⁶⁹ and into the conceptual flourishing under Jay Atherton⁷⁰ who brought the term into concrete usage through the separation and distinction

⁶⁴ T. Nesmith, 'Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the "Ghosts" of Archival Theory', *Archivaria* 47 (1999) p. 144

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145

⁶⁶ Meehan, 'Towards an Archival Concept of Evidence' p. 141

⁶⁷ Cook, 'Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth' p. 25

⁶⁸ M. Piggott & S. McKemmish (ed.,) *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Sydney, 1994)

⁶⁹ In the 1960s Scott implemented the Commonwealth Record Series System which took the series, rather than the fonds, as the highest archival level. See P. Scott, 'The Record Group Concept: a Case for Abandonment' *American Archivist* 29 (1966) pp. 493-504

⁷⁰ J. Atherton, 'From Life-Cycle to Continuum: Some Thoughts on the Records Management-Archives Relationship,' *Archivaria* 21 (1985) pp. 43-51

from the records life cycle.⁷¹ In its recent theoretical form it is heavily linked to the records continuum model of Frank Upward which emerged from his following musings:

As a result of my interest in the concept of the postcustodial archives I began to ponder whether the continuum might be more than a new move in an established game. What will recordkeeping and archiving processes be like when the location of the material matters less than its accessibility, when records no longer have to move across clear boundaries in space or time to be seen as part of an archives, and when an understanding that records exist in spacetime, not space and time, is more intuitively grasped by any practitioner? Such a scenario calls for the invention of new rules within a new game, and will result in a significant re-patterning of knowledge.⁷²

This “spacetime”, this “new game”, is conceptually rooted in the electronic environment. It is viewed potentially as a “technologically driven paradigm shift within all information management and systems practice”⁷³ to combat the issue that:

...records created and maintained in electronic form are continually at risk of inadvertent or intentional alteration, and such alteration may not be readily perceptible. The authenticity of electronic records is threatened whenever the records are transmitted across *space* (i.e., when sent between persons, systems or applications) or *time* (i.e., either when they are stored offline, or when the hardware or software used to process, communicate, or maintain them is upgraded or replaced.)⁷⁴

As a response to this unstable record-keeping environment, the Australian records continuum theory divides into two sectors – the conceptual and the practical. Theoretically there are 2 main drivers pushing the divergence away from a linear life-cycle model:

- a unified and homogenous system for the management of records (including archives) in any format throughout their lifetime, however long or short that lifetime is;
- the synchronic existence of a record or an acculturation of records in more than one ‘dimension’ of context and use, rather than the diachronic movement of a record or

⁷¹ The records life-cycle represents the three stages of the record – active, semi-active, and inactive. This corresponds to the initial use by the creator, the transfer for potential use to a records centre, and the final transfer to the archive.

⁷² F. Upward, ‘Modelling the Continuum as Paradigm Shift in Recordkeeping and Archiving Processes, and Beyond – a personal reflection’ *Records Management Journal* 10 (2000) p. 119

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 115

⁷⁴ H. MacNeil *et al.*, ‘Authenticity Task Force Final Report’ in *The Long-Term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records: Findings of the InterPARES Project* (2001) Available from http://www.interpares.org/book/interpares_book_d_part1.pdf (accessed 10/03/06)

accumulation of records through one discrete and compartmentalised life-cycle stage after another.⁷⁵

Due to the inherent instability and intangible nature of the record-keeping environment in the electronic arena, which leads to these theoretical principles, the records continuum expands these ideas to, in practice, posit the notion that the separation of professional activities between the records management sector and the archival sector undermines the continual ability of record-keepers, in whatever form, to preserve the documentation. Therefore archives and records managers should effectively come together as one to not only preserve the records but ensure that, pre-creation, there are processes and procedures in place to create, capture, and contextualise the relevant documentary base through the establishment and design of record-keeping systems. Hence the succinct definition in the *Australian Standard* for records management as follows: "... a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation, in the design of recordkeeping systems), through to the preservation and use of records as archives."⁷⁶ This is mirrored by Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish in a more explicitly archival sense:

An understanding of the archival document which encompasses both current and historical documents directs attention to the continuum of processes involved in managing the record of a transaction from system design to destruction or select preservation...Within this approach, documentation of a transaction is archival from the time the record is created and the archival document retains evidential value for as long as it is in existence...⁷⁷

So the records continuum, as it has emanated from Australia, is a model that, through its integrated time-space dimensions and its compression of the records management and archival components, emphasises "overlapping characteristics of record-keeping, evidence, transaction and the identity of the creator".⁷⁸ This feeds into possibly the most overt symbol of continuum thinking, the notion of post-custodialism where for:

...late modern societies the externalities of place are becoming less significant day by day. In the virtual archives the location of the resources and services will be of no concern to those using them, and records

⁷⁵ S.J.A. Flynn, 'The Records Continuum Model in Context and its Implications for Archival Practice' *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 22 (2001) p. 83

⁷⁶ AS3490-1996 (Standards Australia, 1996), p. 7

⁷⁷ S. McKemmish & F. Upward, 'The Archival Document: A Submission to the Inquiry into Australia as an Information Society,' *Archives and Manuscripts* 19, (1991) p. 20

⁷⁸ R. Pearce-Moses, 'SAA: A Glossary of Archives and Records Terminology' *The Society of American Archivists* available at http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=2380 (accessed 23/06/08)

authentication processes will have to be implemented in accordance with new strategies which take into account new realities.⁷⁹

Records continuum proponents see the transfer of records from the creating agency to the archive as unnecessary. By involving themselves in the context of creation the archivist can ensure relevant contextual information is attached to the recorded information so as to allow it to permanently remain active within the creating body.

The Archive?

T.R. Schellenberg had a lofty ideal for the archivist:

The archivist's job at all times is to preserve the evidence, impartially, without taint of political or ideological bias, so that on the basis of evidence those judgements may be pronounced upon men and events by posterity which historians through human fallings are momentarily incapable of pronouncing. Archivists are thus the guardians of the truth, or, at least, of the evidence on the basis of which truth can be established.⁸⁰

This chapter has presented the basic theories that underpin both the records continuum and postmodernism in order to show the emergent conceptualisations of what the archive is, or should be, in the twenty-first century. Presented in such terms they are somewhat abstract developments, devoid of practical implications, however, as chapter 2 will document, the notions that underpin the above quotation from Schellenberg are a considerable distance apart from those who, in the words of Michael Moss, criticise the evidential paradigm and "consider it to be rooted in a positivist and constructivist approach to the past which they deftly seek to replace in a digital environment with a post-modern perspective".⁸¹ Indeed through postmodernism and the records continuum theory this idea, and the core tenets that surround it, have been undermined, in some sectors of the profession, to be replaced with a culture of interpretation.

⁷⁹ F. Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum – Part One: Postcustodial Principles and Properties' (1996) available at <http://www.infotech.monash.edu.au/research/groups/rcrg/publications/recordscontinuum-fupp1.html> (accessed 13/02/07)

⁸⁰ Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, p. 236

⁸¹ M. Moss, 'Opening Pandora's Box - What is an Archive in the Digital Environment?' in L. Craven (ed), *What are Archives?* (Ashgate, 2008) p. 72

CHAPTER 2 – The Accountability Fervour of Archives

The *space of flows* and *timeless time* are the material foundations of a new culture that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation: the culture of real virtuality where make-believe is belief in the making.⁸²

Manuel Castells

⁸² M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. 1 The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed.,) (Oxford, 2000) p. 406

The broader intellectual climate

It may be surprising that the records continuum theory and the theory of postmodernism, within an archival context, should be lumped together in this manner, collectively characterised as critics of the evidential paradigm who “seek to replace it in a digital environment with a postmodern perspective”. Certainly one would not expect proponents of the records continuum theory to be labelled disparagers of the evidential paradigm. In their discourse the convergence of the records management and archival spheres of the recordkeeping profession is a conceptual and practical drive necessary to secure the evidence base as reliable, authentic and complete. In addition it would be intellectually bankrupt to state that these two theories were involved in an archival lovefest. Rather the continuum school of archival theory is held to be the descendents of Jenkinson in that their goal is to ensure and privilege elements such as authenticity, reliability and completeness over postmodern imperatives of access and use. In much archival literature this has been portrayed as the split between archives as evidence and archives as memory or, to make the distinction more distinguishing, the recordkeeping and archival paradigms. This potential antipathy between theoretical constructs is a divergence in conceptual outlook about what it is that archivists actually should be doing and to whom are they answerable – who are their constituents. For somebody on the more postmodern side of the equation, such as Jennifer Meehan, the recordkeeping paradigm is a “narrow conceptualisation that inextricably links the notion [evidence] with legal rules, accountability, and corporate memory”⁸³. In a similar vein Terry Cook writes:

There seems little space in this new discourse that is dominated by talk of business transactions, evidence, accountability, metadata, electronic records, and distributed custody of archives, for the traditional discourse of archivists centred around history, heritage, culture, research, social memory, and the curatorial custody of archives...⁸⁴

Foregoing the fact that there must be a query with Cook’s conceptualisation of the ‘traditional’ discourse of archivists, it is clear that there is a difference of foundational outlook between postmodernism and the continuum. Cook himself draws attention to the counter-argument:

These traditional historical or cultural archivists, no doubt covered with a thin layer of dust, when not having high tea with influential donors, just don’t get it. They prefer managing relics to records, with the implication that perhaps they themselves are relics in a profession now dynamically adapting itself to the information age.⁸⁵

⁸³ Meehan, ‘An Archival Concept of Evidence’ p. 127

⁸⁴ T. Cook, ‘Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage’. Paper delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Melbourne, (18th August 2000) available at <http://www.archivists.org.au/sem/papers.html> (accessed 17/09/08)

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

Despite these conceptual differences there are, in actuality, a number of theoretical similarities that underpin the discourses of each. As Sue McKemmish has outlined:

The broader intellectual climate in which records continuum theory and the records continuum model have emerged is post-modern philosophical, sociological, and historiographical thinking, particularly about the nature of theory itself. There is a range of metatexts from related fields of particular relevance to continuum theory, including the writings of philosophers and social theorists like Foucault on the archaeology of knowledge, Derrida on the “archive”, and Giddens on structuration theory, that form part of the broader intellectual context...⁸⁶

From the postmodern side Cook has urged archivists to “liberate themselves from the constraints of the ‘custodial era’ with its focus on physical groupings of records, and to embrace instead the implications of the ‘post-custodial’ era with its conceptual paradigm of logical or virtual or multiple realities.”⁸⁷

Virtuality: the endless perpetuation of the present

In reality such coalescence should not be surprising. Postmodern and records continuum theories did not flourish in a vacuum, propagated by academics theorising in a void. The changing attitude and social environment began in the 1960s. This period, tinged with the nihilism that emerged from the Vietnam War and the aftermath of 1968 (for example student revolutions and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy) had its origins on the precipice of two revolutions that would rid the world of the post-Second World War ‘Fordist Regime of Accumulation’.⁸⁸ The demise of Fordism arose from the mutually implicating dynamic of neo-liberalism and a revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICTs), the stepping-stones of which formed the basis for what we understand as globalisation. In the 1970s these developments radically altered the nature of Western economics and society through cracks appearing in the façade of the Enlightenment project, of which David Harvey has written so eloquently in this lengthy paragraph:

⁸⁶ S. McKemmish, ‘Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice’ *Archival Science* (2001) p. 347

⁸⁷ T. Cook, ‘The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions’ *Archivaria* 35 (1993) p. 25

⁸⁸ This term, used by Frank Webster to describe the settlement from 1945-1973, was recognisable from the following key features: “(1) Mass production of goods was the norm. (2) The predominant group in employment were industrial workers. (3) Over these years mass consumption became the norm, facilitated by (relatively) high and increasing wages, decreasing real costs of consumer goods, full employment, the rapid spread of instalment purchase and credit facilities, and, of course, the stimulation that came with the growth of advertising, fashion, television and cognate forms of display and persuasion. (4) The nation state was the locus of economic activity and within it sectors were typically dominated by a cluster of national oligopolies. (5) Underpinning much else was an acknowledged role for planning, most vividly manifested in the growth of the Welfare State, but also expressed in a broad consensus on the legitimacy of state involvement in the economy”. F. Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (London, 1995) pp. 138-140

Enlightenment thought embraced the idea of progress, and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espouses. It was, above all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralisation of knowledge and social organisation in order to liberate human beings from their chains. It took Alexander Pope's injunction, "the proper study of mankind is man," with great seriousness. To the degree that it also lauded human creativity, scientific discovery, and the pursuit of individual excellence in the name of human progress, Enlightenment thinkers welcomed the maelstrom of change and saw the transitoriness, the fleeting, and the fragmentary as a necessary condition through which the modernising project could be achieved. Doctrines of equality, liberty, faith in human intelligence (once allowed the benefits of education), and universal reason abounded. "A good law must be good for everyone," pronounced Condorcet in the throes of the French Revolution, "in exactly the same way that a true proposition is true for all." Such a vision was incredibly optimistic. Writers like Condorcet were possessed "of the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institution and even the happiness of human beings".⁸⁹

The tidal wave of neo-liberal globalisation, the early effects of which have been termed "time-space compression",⁹⁰ and the insertion of networked ICTs into every sphere of social life transformed the fundamental dimensions of human existence where:

Localities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places. Time is erased in the new communication system when past, present, and future can be programmed to interact with each other in the same message. The *space of flows* and *timeless time* are the material foundations of a new culture that transcends and includes the diversity of historically transmitted systems of representation: the culture of real virtuality where make-believe is belief in the making.⁹¹

The soothing balms of modernism, the resolute belief in progress, a discernible past and an optimism surrounding the future, is shaken under these developments by what Anthony Giddens labels "time-space distanciation" where-by the increasingly fast-paced nature of modern life is "disembedding" us by collapsing time/space coordinates:

The disorientation which expresses itself in the feeling that systematic knowledge about social organisation cannot be obtained, I shall argue, results primarily from the sense many of us have of being caught up in a universe of events we do not fully understand, and which seems in large part outside of our control.⁹²

⁸⁹ D. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1990) pp. 12-13

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁹¹ Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol.1* p. 406

⁹² A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1990) pp. 2-3

These ICT networks now function as a form of artificial temporality in that humans exist in a virtual realm of time and space. There are at play two separate forms which contribute to the radical transformation of temporality in society, those of simultaneity and timelessness. By sitting in-front of my computer screen, I can now access information from virtually any nook and cranny of the globe almost instantaneously, I can partake in computer-mediated communication with like-minded individuals in real-time dialogue, compressing cultural separation and being enabled by an immediacy to events and our reactions to them. In addition allowing the user the ability to pick-and-mix their way through the morass of information at one's disposal permits the creation of a temporal collage where the traditional narrative techniques of a beginning, middle and end are thrown into flux through the timelessness of, for example, hypertext.

It is evident that the emergence of ICTs permits a new cultural context where the minds and memories of the individual are no longer shaped by a linear modernist progression. Sociologist Carmen Leccardi has analysed the dynamics of this type of acceleration in modern society which culminates, for Leccardi, in a “detemporalised present”⁹³ which involves a reduction from wisdom to mere information. Whereas one may believe that there should be a correlation between the availability and speed of information networks and a more informed citizenry, Leccardi believes that the ubiquitous nature of this technology actually leads to a loss of present space for the reflexive action that has a temporal connection to the past and to the future. This is also the cultural theorist, Paul Virilio's, diagnosis. He writes of the “time of an endless perpetuation of the present” in which “contemporary man no longer arrives at, achieves, anything” beyond a tightly coordinated and rather mechanical “total performance syndrome”.⁹⁴ For Virilio the present is reduced to an electronic present, a vacuous “all-powerful and all-seeing now” whose “pitiless nature is incommensurable with the nature of the age-old localisation of the *hic et nunc*”⁹⁵ – the here and now. The implications of this loss are similar to those suggested by Anthony Giddens where he notes, in *The Consequences of Modernity*⁹⁶, that risk intensifies and transcends the boundaries of social or economic positions so that the fear of issues such as weapons of mass destruction, environmental catastrophe or the rise of immigration, create unacceptable horizons of fear for people who no longer find recourse in community, their neighbour or God, take no responsibility for their life or for the future, and suffer from existential

⁹³ C. Leccardi, ‘New Temporal Perspectives in the “High-Speed Society”’ in R. Hassan & R.E. Purser (ed.), *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society* (Stanford, 2007) pp. 25-36

⁹⁴ P. Virilio, *Open Sky* (London, 1997) p. 143.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁶ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* p. 125

angst. These are symptoms of a culture of unhappiness that certain theorists believe has overtaken modern society.⁹⁷

This type of society suffers from an historical amnesia. It is no surprise, therefore, to witness that in the throes of postmodernism history is no longer a reconstruction of events premised upon facts that have occurred in our lives. Instead it becomes a continuous game of memory juggling in which the concept of historical causation, normatively developed through a linear historical narrative, is undermined by a suspicion of time as even and regulated. This is a position drawn from Einsteinian physics which, in its very basic formulation, suggests that space-time can curve – for example, it can curve back upon itself allowing time travel. This is a development which has been a commonplace in literature for some time. BS Johnson, in the 1960s, took to cutting holes in the pages of his novels and insisted that his publishers package them as unbound pages in a box.⁹⁸ In historical writing the recognition that history is shaped by the present-day is not a new development – in the Italian Benedetto Croce’s famous phrase “All history is contemporary history”.⁹⁹ It follows from this that “when we study history we are not studying the past but what historians have constructed about the past”.¹⁰⁰ Yet the attack on sequential time is something altogether more subversive as the repercussions for historical research are legion, as the whole conceptualisation of meaning becomes hazy or dismissed as an instrument of Western control and oppression. This is a process inherently suited to the tidal waves of information fragments typical of our kind of society which stimulate a style of thought that is less reminiscent of the supposedly strict, logical, linear thinking characteristic of industrial society. Instead of ordering knowledge in tidy rows, the information society offers cascades of decontextualised signs more or less randomly connected to each other. There is a clear analogy between the hypertextualisation of our society and deconstruction, where one text dissolves into another and where meaning and interpretation are construed on the basis of all the other texts and words encountered. Cultural life is then viewed as a series of texts intersecting with other texts, producing more texts, and whatever we attempt to convey in meaning we either cannot mean or cannot attain. The medievalist Gabrielle Spiegel noted that “if texts – documents, literary works, whatever – do not transparently reflect reality, but only other texts, then historical study can scarcely be distinguished from literary study, and the ‘past’ dissolves into literature”.¹⁰¹ For

⁹⁷ Although his protagonist issues are different Oliver James documents a belief in the gradually increasing nature of unhappiness in society. O. James, *Britain on the Couch: Why We’re Unhappier Compared With 1950, Despite Being Richer – A Treatment for a Low-serotonin Society* (London, 1998)

⁹⁸ J. Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of BS Johnson* (London, 2004)

⁹⁹ B. Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty* (London, 1941) p. 19

¹⁰⁰ K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London, 1991) p. 47

¹⁰¹ G. Spiegel, ‘History and Post-Modernism’ *Past and Present* 135 (1992) p. 197

example on-line access offers the student a means of 'doing' history that becomes a case of cutting and pasting from the vast data stores of information to create subjective, personal narratives of history. As the urban theorist Manuel Castells wonderfully documented, we today have a culture "at the same time of the eternal and the ephemeral":

It is eternal because it reaches back and forth to the whole sequence of cultural expressions. It is ephemeral because each arrangement, each specific sequencing, depends on the context and purpose under which any given cultural construct is solicited. We are not in a culture of circularity, but in a universe of undifferentiated temporality of cultural expressions.¹⁰²

Truth and truthfulness

Such notions have undoubtedly influenced the conceptual shift in thinking from the past waiting to be explored in the archives to a focus upon the self-reflexive nature of knowledge construction. Construction of texts and illusions of authenticity have become a feature of the societal and, more specifically, the political framework where there is an uncomfortable dualism in operation that manifests itself as the necessity of mastering reality for those in positions of, what we can loosely term, power. At the root of the duality are two prominent veins of thought that have been encapsulated by Bernard Williams in his book *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* which concerns itself with finding out the truth and then telling the truth.¹⁰³ The paradox is that in the current intellectual climate we are less inclined to believe in an objective truth and come to see the pursuit of truth as a quixotic enterprise. Yet on the other hand we still have an "intense commitment to truthfulness" and are keen ourselves to see through things so as to guard against the risk of being fooled.

Logic dictates that we seek to understand why society would fetishise truthfulness when truth is a contested concept. One may say that in practice the public currently operate in an intellectual purgatory, their souls wedged between modernism and postmodernism. For example, our desire not to be deceived manifests itself in a pervasive suspicion about those in authority whose accounts we hold to be biased and self-serving. In 1977 the major American pollster Daniel Yankelovich noted that:

We have seen a steady rise of mistrust in our national institutions...Trust in government declined dramatically from almost 80% in the late 1950s to about 33% in 1976. Confidence in business fell from approximately a 70% level in the late 60s to about 15% today. Confidence in other institutions – the press, the military, the professions - sharply declined from the mid-60s to the mid-70s. More than 61% of the electorate believe that there is something morally wrong in the country. More than 80% of voters say

¹⁰² See Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. 1* p. 462

¹⁰³ B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (New Jersey, 2002)

they do not trust those in positions of leadership as much as they used to. In the mid-60s a one-third minority reported feeling isolated and distant from the political process; by the mid-70s a two-thirds majority felt that what they think ‘really doesn’t count.’ Approximately three out of five people feel the government suffers from a concentration of too much power in too few hands, and fewer than one out of five feel that congressional leaders can be believed. One could go on and on. The change is massive.¹⁰⁴

Due to this lack of trust we portray an eagerness to create transparent appearances in order to penetrate the façade and witness the structures and motives that lie beneath the surface. This is an intensification of the deeply rooted concept of Cartesian perspectivalism in Western discourse – the link between cognition and truth, what we see and what we know. Richard Rorty discussed this concept in his *Philosophy and the Mirror in Nature* where:

...in Aristotle’s conception intellect is not a mirror inspected by an inner eye. It is both mirror and eye in one. The retinal image is *itself* the model for the “intellect which becomes all things,” whereas in the Cartesian model, the intellect *inspects* entities modeled on retinal images. The substantial forms of frogness and starness get right into the Aristotelian intellect, and are there in just the same way they are in the frogs and the stars – *not* in the way in which frogs and stars are reflected in mirrors. In Descartes’ conception – the one which became the basis for “modern” epistemology – it is *representations* which are in the ‘mind’.¹⁰⁵

This is representative of modernist thought in that it conforms to a scientific world-view which was “situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher”.¹⁰⁶ One of the pervasive examples of this visual paradigm in modern society is that of the surveillance state, the ubiquitous nature of which was summarised in the *Surveillance Society Report* produced by the Surveillance Studies Network for the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas:

We live in a surveillance society. It is pointless to talk about surveillance society in the future tense. In all the rich countries of the world everyday life is suffused with surveillance encounters, not merely from dawn to dusk but 24/7. Some encounters obtrude into the routine, like when we get a ticket for running a red light when no one was around but the camera. But the majority are now just part of the fabric of daily life. Unremarkable.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ quoted in S.M. Lipset & W. Schneider, ‘The Decline in Confidence in American Institutions’ *Political Science Quarterly* 93 (1983) p. 380

¹⁰⁵ R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979) p. 45

¹⁰⁶ M. Jay, ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity’ in S. Lash & J. Friedman (eds.), *Modernity and Identity* (Oxford, 1992) p. 181

¹⁰⁷ D.M. Wood (ed.), *A Report on the Surveillance Society* (September 2006) p. 1 available at http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/practical_application/surveillance_society_full_report_2006.pdf (accessed 17/06/08)

This visual drive as a paradigm of knowledge is a core component of the ‘information society’ where the ‘consumer’ is the central figure in the 21st century, a symptom of the demise of the interconnected networks through which trust was dispersed – whether that is the community, the family, a religious institution, or civic society. This figure of the consumer has marked a shift from passive recipient to active choice maker in relation to service provision. As Tony Blair remarked in his 2001 Labour party conference speech: “This is a consumer age. People don’t take what they’re given. They demand more”.¹⁰⁸ This active consumer demands that modern public services, to take one example, be accountable which tends to mean flexible and adaptive rather than monolithic and operating a one size fits all policy.¹⁰⁹ A key element of this is that they require evidence upon which to base their informed choices, stemming from a belief that if everything can be seen then complete knowledge can be ascertained in the manner of the individual inquisitively peering through the peep-hole to view the solitary image within. From such evidence an intelligent decision can be made. Records, as a natural form of evidence, have become a central element in providing visible proof that organisations and services are accountable to the consumer. As John McDonald put it, expressing the link between records and accountability: “Without records, there can be no demonstration of accountability. Without evidence of accountability, society cannot trust in its public institutions”.¹¹⁰

However, the certainty of such Enlightenment evidential values bounces against the modern values of scepticism and cynicism where ‘truth’ is rendered suspiciously ideological or unreliable. Any account given, whether through accountability networks or not, is rendered questionable. As a simple preservation strategy for those dispensing information, or being held

¹⁰⁸ ‘Part two of the speech by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at the Labour Party Conference’ *The Guardian* (2 October 2001) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/oct/02/labourconference.labour7> (accessed 02/02/08)

¹⁰⁹ Albert Meijer describes accountability thus: “1) Trigger. There is an event that triggers the accountability process. For legal accountability the trigger may be that a citizen sues a government organisation for an inadequate decision, or alternatively, a process of political accountability may be triggered by press coverage or a disaster. 2) Accountable person. Someone is accountable or is held accountable for what has happened. In some cases a minister may be held accountable by Parliament, in other cases the director of a government organisation will have to account for a decision to a court of law. 3) Situation. There is an action or situation for which the person or organisation is accountable. A minister may have to explain why a certain decision was taken or why a disaster was not prevented. 4) Forum. There is an accountability forum to which a person or an organisation is accountable. This forum may be Parliament, a court of law, the media, citizens, peers or scientists. 5) Criteria. Accountability processes require that criteria are applied to judge an action or situation. These criteria may be derived from the law but also from political standards. Parliament will apply other criteria than courts of law. 6) Sanctions. In some cases sanctions may be imposed on the person or organisation”. A. Meijer, ‘Accountability in an Information Age: Opportunities and Risks for Records Management,’ *Archival Science* 1 (2001) pp. 362-3

¹¹⁰ J. McDonald, ‘Archives at Risk: Accountability, Vulnerability and Credibility,’ Paper given at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference (1999) available at <http://www.archivists.org.au/events/conf99/keynote.html> (accessed 26/08/08)

accountable, it becomes essential to lay down a version of your truth, something which one can use as a tool of political rhetoric and alter as the exigencies of the cause require it. As Harvey states:

In this environment there can be no difference between truth, authority, and rhetorical seductiveness; he who has the smoothest tongue or the raciest story has the power. Postmodernism comes dangerously close to complicity with the aestheticising of politics upon which it is based.¹¹¹

We therefore create the conditions for the personalisation of politics rather than a concentration on policy; the dominance of the charismatic and consummate political operator, the Blair or Clinton, who can sway an audience with language couched in eloquence and sincerity. And so the cycle perpetuates as an intellectual climate of cynicism pervades. The concept of facts becomes nothing more than a tool to be used, manipulated, and dispensed with, an effect of the rules of discourse visible on both sides of the Atlantic that freely dispenses with the notion of evidence, of an objective reality out there through which government functions and can be independently checked and verified. In an article for the *Spectator* magazine, respected political columnist Peter Osborne wrote about Prime Minister Tony Blair that: “It is as if he [Blair] has departed on an epistemological adventure of his own, as if truth for the Prime Minister boils down to little more than what he believes or says at a particular moment”.¹¹² This was most evident when Blair stated to Jeremy Paxman on the eve of the Iraq War that he “may be wrong about this but it’s what I believe”.¹¹³ This astonishing epistemological shift and, frankly, contempt for the workings, manifestations, and institutions of the British government and her subjects is compounded when one considers that Blair’s partner in the Iraq war, the United States of America, was being led by an ideological group dubbed the neo-Conservatives who purposefully rejected the Enlightenment values upon which Blair supposedly rested. Speaking about Leo Strauss, one of the key figures in neo-Conservatism, Irving Kristol said that “what made him so controversial within the academic community was his disbelief in the Enlightenment dogma that ‘the truth will make men free’”. Kristol himself postulated that:

There are different kinds of truth for different kinds of people...There are truths appropriate for children; truths that are appropriate for students; truths that are appropriate for educated adults; and truths that are appropriate for highly educated adults, and the notion that there should be

¹¹¹ Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* p. 117

¹¹² P. Osborne, ‘What’s Truth Got To Do With It? *The Spectator* (30 April 2005) p. 31

¹¹³ *Ibid.*,

one set of truths available to everyone is a modern democratic fallacy. It doesn't work.¹¹⁴

Secrecy is something that the neo-Conservatives inherently understand from the philosophy of Strauss.¹¹⁵ Strauss's concept of hidden meaning suggests that political life may be closely linked to deception. Indeed it suggests that it is the normal state of affairs, a necessity. While professing deep respect for American democracy, Strauss believed that societies should be hierarchical – divided between an elite who should lead, and the masses who should follow. Kristol, and other neo-conservative followers in the United States, including his wife and historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, tacitly concede that they use religion and creationism in this manner in order to keep the populace effectively in religious bondage.¹¹⁶

Context control

The neo-Conservative creed of truths for different people was central to the invasion of Iraq. The construction of a reality base from which to launch the campaign of Shock and Awe was intrinsic to the beginning of the campaign where there was a clear disuse or distortion of records and evidence. To take one example, the Bush administration claimed that Iraq was able to import uranium from Niger despite the CIA reporting in February 2002 that the sources were not deemed credible and that documentation to support the claim were forgeries – one was even signed by a minister who had been out of power for 11 years!¹¹⁷ According to Chaim Kaufmann the Bush Administration made four main arguments to persuade the public of their case against Saddam Hussein:

- (1) he was an almost uniquely undeterrable aggressor who would seek any opportunity to kill Americans virtually regardless of risk to himself or his country;
- (2) he was cooperating with al-Qa'ida and had even assisted in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States;
- (3) he was close to acquiring nuclear weapons; and
- (4) he possessed chemical and biological weapons that could be used to devastating effect against American civilians at home or U.S. troops in the Middle East.¹¹⁸

Kaufmann goes on to assert that threat inflation:

...can be defined as (1) claims that go beyond the range of ambiguity that disinterested experts would credit as plausible; (2) a consistent pattern of worst-case assertions over a range of factual issues that are logically

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Brian Doherty, "Origin of the Specious", *Reason Magazine*, (July 1997) <http://www.reason.com/news/show/30329.html> (accessed 27/06/08)

¹¹⁵ See L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1965)

¹¹⁶ Doherty, 'Origin of the Specious'

¹¹⁷ C. Kaufmann, 'Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War' *International Security* 29 (2004) p. 26

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6

unrelated or only weakly related—an unlikely output of disinterested analysis; (3) use of double standards in evaluating intelligence in a way that favours worst-case threat assessments; or (4) claims based on circular logic, such as Bush administration claims that Hussein’s alleged hostile intentions were evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) whose supposed existence was used as evidence of his intentions.¹¹⁹

The Administration was guilty on all four counts in their campaign of context control. This was not manipulation by bureaucrats pulling levers behind the scenes but a concerted campaign from the top officials for political capital. The flailing rhetoric on the connection between Hussein and terrorism was on display in a speech by George Bush in October, 2002, where he stated that “we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud”:

Over the years, Iraq has provided safe haven to terrorists such as Abu Nidal, whose terror organization carried out more than 90 terrorist attacks in 20 countries that killed or injured nearly 900 people, including 12 Americans. Iraq has also provided safe haven to Abu Abbas, who was responsible for seizing the Achille Lauro and killing an American passenger. And we know that Iraq is continuing to finance terror and gives assistance to groups that use terrorism to undermine Middle East peace. We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy - the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We have learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making, poisons, and deadly gases. And we know that after September 11th, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America. Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists. Alliances with terrorists could allow the Iraqi regime to attack America without leaving any fingerprints. Some have argued that confronting the threat from Iraq could detract from the war against terror. To the contrary, confronting the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning the war on terror...They forged documents, destroyed evidence, and developed mobile weapons facilities to keep a step ahead of inspectors.¹²⁰

Kaufmann quotes an intelligence official stating: “You certainly could have made strong cases that regime change was a logical part of the war on terrorism, given Baghdad’s historic terror ties, but that didn’t have enough resonance. You needed something that inspired fear”.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

¹²⁰ Speech in Ohio, October 2002. Transcript available online at http://www.nar-sil.org/war_on_iraq/bush_october_7_2002.html (accessed 20/02/07)

¹²¹ Kaufmann, ‘Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas’ p. 9 It must be remembered that this campaign actually succeeding in persuading the American people: “The Bush administration’s

The subversion of truth as a concept sees it used as a tool of contextual control in today's media world where accountability acts as an over-lord to all public systems and bodies. To maintain legitimacy it becomes essential to assert control over the image. Hence the perception of evidence and the record as little more than sign systems and, therefore, the legitimation of an overt context control to use the written word in whatever form deemed adequate for present purpose. It is a dream of context control that attempts to shut down questioning by asserting a singular meaning in order to prevent the flux and instability of interpretation. This dream relies on reductionist scientific knowledge, command and control, and terms such as efficiency. It seeks to ensure that by pulling the lever of the slot machine the jackpot shall be obtained every time, a process to which Richard Sennett remarked:

The canon of exhaustion of evidence is a peculiar one; it seems tied to an increasing miniaturisation of focus, so that the more we 'know' about a subject, the more details we know. Anaesthetisation of the intellect is the inevitable product of this form of proof...¹²²

There is a risk, we'll take care of it

A Baconian system of reference insists that nature is constructed upon the basis of the accumulation of facts even if this means that our treasured dictates, wisdoms, whims, and systems are compromised and eventually broken with.¹²³ Sadly such an honourable principle holds no stature in an environment where consumption rather than production, the privileging of the image, is central and facts can be cast aside when they prove to be an inconvenience. In the representation of the world that is shrinking through human action lies what philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis defined as the "capitalist imaginary"¹²⁴ which crushes down upon creativity and the spirit of individuality in favour of a domination of nature through rational, conventionally capitalist, control. As we have seen, from the mid-twentieth century onwards the dominating vision of the future as an open field of possibilities tends to fade away little by little. The diffuse

effort to shift the main issue in the Iraq debate from containment of potential regional aggression to deterrence of direct attacks on the United States was more or less completely successful, so much so that public debate in the months before the war includes few dissents from the proposition that Hussein was intensely motivated to attack Americans if he could. Polls in late 2002 showed that 70–90 percent of the American public believed that Hussein would sooner or later attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction. Between 45 percent and 66 percent also believed that he had assisted the September 11 attackers. The administration's WMD claims were also widely accepted. Pre-war polls showed that 55–69 percent of Americans believed that Hussein already possessed WMD, and better than 95 percent believed that he was building them. In one poll, 69 percent believed that Iraq already had nuclear weapons, and in another, 80 percent thought this likely". Kaufman, p. 30

¹²² R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, (Cambridge, 1977) p. 43

¹²³ The Baconian method was an early proponent of what we would today consider to be scientific empiricism. In *Novum Organum*, Bacon advocates the methodical observation of facts as a means of studying and interpreting natural phenomena.

¹²⁴ C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, 1987)

contemporary feeling of living in an era of uncontrollable risks and equally important uncertainties can be interpreted on a general level as a signal of this transformed experience of the future.¹²⁵ For Giddens,¹²⁶ the notion of risk becomes a core component of a society whereby the present becomes “all there is”, transforming itself in the dimension that Agnes Heller defines as the “absolute present”,¹²⁷ and corresponds to the warning from Paul Virilio that the benefits from the ever-accelerating pace of the informational and communicational environment will be offset in other areas. As Virilio cautions: “What will be gained from electronic information and electronic communication will necessarily result in a loss somewhere else.”¹²⁸ What this amounts to, according to David Shenk, is a “memory loss”, an inability to digest and remember information coming at us increasingly thick and fast – where contexts, instances, events, histories, our cognitive basis for self-reflection, seem to “vanish in a sea of data”.¹²⁹ Think of certain events that have thrown the British population into a hysterical panic over the last few years – the Potters Bar train crash in 2002 becomes a symbol of the dangers of rail travel when, by consensus, it is one of the safest modes of transportation; panic buying at petrol stations after rumours flew in 2005 of shortages; the abduction of Sarah Payne in 2000 leads to vigilante attacks on suspected paedophiles, people who share the same name as a paedophile, or even had the occupation of paediatrician, and the perception that it is irresponsible to let your child out of sight as such incidents are on the rise. These are all instances in our society of a dominant idiom, a risk culture that colonises the future and fetishises the present.

This all combines to formulate a culture that is consumed with the present and which is open to, or indeed creates, the notion that governability equals controllability of the present, that government is all about context control or the mastering of reality. When money is spent we

¹²⁵ U. Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge, 1999)

¹²⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* p. 111

¹²⁷ A. Heller, *A Theory of Modernity* (Oxford, 1999) p. 7

¹²⁸ P. Virilio, ‘Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!’ available at <http://www.nicoladoering.de/Hogrefe/virilio.htm> (accessed 11/09/08)

¹²⁹ D. Shenk, *Data Smog* (London, 1997) p. 48. In his novel *Slowness*, Milan Kundera put across the same sentiment when he wrote that “the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting” - “By slowing the course of their night, by dividing it into different stages each separate from the next, Madame de T. has succeeded in giving the small span of time accorded them the semblance of a marvellous little architecture, of a form. Imposing form on a period of time is what beauty demands, but so does memory. For what is formless cannot be grasped, or committed to memory. Conceiving their encounter as a form was especially precious for them, since their night was to have no tomorrow and could be repeated only through recollection.

There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. Consider this utterly commonplace situation: a man is walking down the street. At a certain moment, he tries to recall something, but the recollection escapes him. Automatically, he slows down. Meanwhile, a person who wants to forget a disagreeable incident he has just lived through starts unconsciously to speed up his pace, as if he were trying to distance himself from a thing still to close to him in time”. M. Kundera, *Slowness* (London, 1996) pp. 34-35

expect to see instant results; when an instance occurs that is out of the ordinary we expect government to take immediate action - governments must be visibly seen to be continually alleviating present-day risk. Admittedly this is not a new development. One of the defining characteristics of the second half of the twentieth century has been the rise of the state that inserts itself *ad nauseum* into the lives of its subjects and the regulation of day-to-day life. In the words of the great English historian A.J.P. Taylor: “Until August 1914, a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life, and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post-office and the policeman”.¹³⁰ Individual responsibility has diminished, to be replaced by the over-bearing state. Indeed this is at the core of the risk communication literature in that it seeks to reassure a panicked public that there are state or corporate authorities that have the expertise to take care of some problem: ‘There is a risk, but be reassured that we are taking care of it.’

Archives is politics

It is clear to see the connections between the culture of virtuality and the records continuum – Castell’s theory regarding the ‘space of flows’ and ‘timeless time’ as well as Giddens’s notions of ‘time-space distanciation’ could have come straight from the articles of Upward. In addition it is not difficult to locate postmodernism in the discourse of virtuality. The era of the archivist, the informed arbiter and knowledgeable keeper whose judgement and professionalism operated as a guarantor of the evidential foundation upon which society rests, has seemingly been cast adrift by an activist citizenry that has laid claim to produce and evaluate its own cultural consumption. Rather than being passive receivers of top-down, sanctioned representations of knowledge we are avid consumers of images that we piece together in any way we choose and which make up our reality. Mark Poster puts it this way:

Individuals are now constituted as subjects in relation to these complex information systems: they are points in circuits of language-image flows; they are, in short *textualized agents*. Their perceptions are organised by information machines. Their sense of time is edited and recombined by systems of digitised sequencing: real time on tape, movies on demand, fast forward, instant replay, pause, slow motion. ... Their knowledge is stored in electromagnetic archives that render reproduction literally immaterial, instantaneous ... Individuals who have this experience do not stand outside the world of objects, observing, exercising rational faculties, and maintaining a stable character. The individuals constituted by the new modes of information are immersed and dispersed in textualized practices where grounds are less important than moves.¹³¹

¹³⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965) p.1

¹³¹ M. Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges* (New York, 1997), p. 45.

Virtuality feeds the understanding of both the records continuum and postmodernism that archivists should “liberate themselves from the constraints of the ‘custodial era’ with its focus on physical groupings of records, and to embrace instead the implications of the ‘post-custodial’ era with its conceptual paradigm of logical or virtual or multiple realities”.

Yet there is a further dimension that both conceptualisations have embraced and that is the political framework and discourse. For Verne Harris, a postmodernist who rejects the tag, the “archive *is* politics” – not that it is political, but that it is politics.¹³² As we have seen, recently it has appeared as if our political framework has been based around the argument that it ought to be the aim of politics to remove all sources of discontent, invariably resulting, as Friedrich von Hayek, a leading 20th century economist and political philosopher, understood, in it being “the responsibility of government to see that nobody is healthier or possess a happier temperament, a better-suited spouse or more prospering children, than anybody else”.¹³³ This is directly correlative to the rise of a reductionist understanding of accountability, the sense that one must be accountable by seeking to close down the exposure to risk or discontent.

In a postmodern sense the need to be accountable is fairly evident. Corrective action must be taken to ensure that the malpractice of archiving, which results in the distortion of social memory as certain sections of society and certain institutions are privileged more in the recorded information, is reversed. For Terry Cook the notion of accountability has to be taken right to the steps of the archive itself:

Archives of the state are not just repositories of historical sources for researchers to use in understanding the past; they are also political manifestations of and active agents of the dominant culture of society. Archives are not merely scholarly playgrounds for their staffs and researchers; they are also bastions of social memory and national identity.¹³⁴

Indeed accountability has become a key concern in postmodern archival literature, most visibly the perceived drive to open up the archive to boost transparency. It has become a widely held doctrine that we should add our CVs to collection lists, outline our political orientation, or document every decision we take.¹³⁵ This is opposed to the traditional, professional quest of the

¹³² V. Harris, ‘Archives, Politics and Justice’ in M. Proctor, M. Cook & C. Williams (ed.) *Political Pressure and the Archival Record* (Chicago, 2005) pp. 173-184

¹³³ F. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London, 1960) p. 93

¹³⁴ T. Cook, ‘“A Monumental Blunder”: The Destruction of Records on Nazi War Criminals in Canada’ in R. Cox & D. Wallace (ed.) *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Connecticut, 2002) p. 38

¹³⁵ “This leads directly into my third example of postmodern archival practice, and perhaps the most important practical lesson: archivists as a profession would be much more self-reflective and transparent about what they do. As concrete examples, I suggest that, for government and institutional records,

archivist which was to protect the voice of the records creator through the ages by placing the historical record at the forefront for interpretation rather than the subjectivity of the archivist. As the modernist poet T.S. Eliot wrote: “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality”.¹³⁶ However such a position is understandable when considering the reasoning behind theorists like Cook’s belief that transparency equals exposing the self to intense scrutiny – it stems from a belief that the traditional demarcation lines between society and science are being transgressed. The perception is that boundaries and barriers must be knocked down in the manner of scientific operation so that the dam that separates the two concepts is broken down and rather than communication being uni-directional, a process of reverse flow begins to operate. Helga Nowotny has directly related these developments to those previously discussed:

The unprecedented level of education in our societies, the pervasiveness of modern information and communication technology, the realisation that the production of uncertainty is an inherent feature of the co-evolutionary process mean that Society is moving into a position where it is increasingly able to communicate its wishes, desires and fears to Science.¹³⁷

These conjunctions, she argues, are transforming the epistemology of the sciences from one based “on a very clear separation of science from society” (Mode-1)¹³⁸ - a one-way communication with science speaking to society – towards one (Mode-2) – in which society is

archivists should consider placing “negative” entries in fonds and series descriptions, showing to researchers thereby all the series, in all media, from all locations, that the archives did *not* acquire from a particular records creator, alongside the ones it did acquire. For private-sector or thematic archives, the question expands to why some creators were chosen and others not; archivists should in such archives create lists of all the possible individuals, groups, and associations falling within the acquisition mandate of their institution, contrasted with the much smaller list of those fonds appraised as archival and actually acquired. For both institutional and personal records creators, the archivist should then explain the following in writing: why that choice was made; which appraisal criteria were used; which concepts of value or significance were choices based on; which methodologies were employed; and which of the archivist’s personal values were reflected in decisions taken. If postmodernism draws attention to the marginalized, what could be more marginalized in an archive than the non-archive that archivists have either authorized for destruction or decided at the least not to acquire?...I believe that appraising archivists should themselves be formally documented and linked to these same appraisal reports and descriptive entries, with a full curriculum vitae placed on accessible files, complemented by autobiographical details of the values they used in appraisal and that they reflected in description. All these new transparencies would be reflected in, or linked to, the formal descriptive tools that the postmodern archivist makes available to their various publics”. Cook, ‘Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth’ pp. 34-35

¹³⁶ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ *Perspecta*, 19 (1982) p.39

¹³⁷ H. Nowotny, ‘Interdisciplines: Rethinking Interdisciplinarity: The Potential of Transdisciplinarity’ available at <http://www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity/papers/5/printable/paper> (accessed 10/02/05)

¹³⁸ “Mode-1 epistemology is based on the idea of discrete areas of specialization structured on a model of communication that really has only two elements: the first one is that all research must be communicable in a form that can be understood by one’s colleagues; and the second one is that it can attract a consensus, even if a limited one. Embedded in this model is a notion of reliable knowledge which comprises a whole series of relatively separate decisions about the integrity of a certain set of scientific findings, the limits of the integrity being dependent on the limits of the consensus achieved”. *Ibid.*,

speaking to science as much as science is speaking to society – that “makes it harder to say where science ends and society begins”¹³⁹:

The single epistemological ideal of a neutral ‘view from nowhere’ has been replaced by multiple views, with each situated somewhere. The research process can no longer be characterised as an ‘objective’ investigation of the natural [or social] world, or as a cool and reductionist interrogation of arbitrarily defined ‘others’. Instead it has become a dialogic process, an intense [and perhaps endless] ‘conversation’ between research actors and research subjects...¹⁴⁰

Hence the democratization of objective critical standards has prompted a mentality away from the role of the critical arbiter in deducing value. This is hardly a surprise in an environment where the people on the ground are today the people who believe they are writing the first draft of events,¹⁴¹ or that those in their bedrooms are those who are blogging or up-loading their own music for the perusal of their peers. A robust recent indictment of the very notion of value – in this case value in the arts but applicable to evidential value and the current critique of those in power – is John Carey’s *What Good are the Arts?*¹⁴² where he takes a book to re-iterate the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham. Bentham wrote that:

The utility of all these arts and sciences, - I speak both of those of amusement and curiosity, - the value which they possess, is exactly in proportion to the pleasure they yield. Every other species of pre-eminence which may be attempted to be established among them is altogether fanciful. Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnish more pleasure, it is more valuable than either. Everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished only by a few.¹⁴³

Carey assaults the notion that value can ever be anything other than an individualist or subjective trait, instantly wiping away centuries of artistic standards where Shakespeare, Da Vinci, Beethoven are held in the pantheon of artistic greatness and superiority.

The separation of our culture in niche markets and conceptualisations of the long tail have accentuated this process where cultural or knowledge-based goods are customised to the individual by ideology, culture, taste, lifestyle.¹⁴⁴ As Françoise Sabbah wrote in 1985:

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴¹ One of the unforgettable images of recent years was the shaky footage of police storming the Virginia Tech university building. This documentation was not the work of traditional news crews but was recorded by student Jamal Albarghouti on his mobile phone. This was the overt emergence of a news phenomenon where-by this clip was sent to CNN, which placed it online – where it was watched by millions – and quickly ran it on air.

¹⁴² J. Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* (London, 2005)

¹⁴³ J. Bentham, *The Rationale of Reward* (London, 1825) p. 206

¹⁴⁴ C. Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand* (London, 2006)

In sum, the new media determine a segmented, differentiated audience that, although massive in terms of numbers, is no longer a mass audience in terms of simultaneity and uniformity of the message it receives. The new media are no longer mass media in the traditional sense of sending a limited number of messages to a homogeneous mass audience. Because of the multiplicity of messages and sources, the audience itself becomes more selective. The targeted audience tends to choose its messages, so deepening its segmentation, enhancing the individual relationship between sender and receiver.¹⁴⁵

Members of the public have exploited such technological advancement to by-pass the traditional archive and to create personal or community spaces to inform, educate, or simply to invite one another to partake in voyeuristic pleasure at their information, history, or decadence. In addition the whole means by which to disseminate and access documents that would have previously been contained within an institutional or archival fortress has undergone a radical alteration due to the time-space compression and distanciation, meaning that the record can be accessed at the behest of the user. The authority of the arbiter of knowledge, the privileger, is undermined to such an extent that we could prophesise a radical shift in power relations, a process significantly exposed in the Hutton Inquiry when the executive was held to account by dramatic cross-referencing and the reflexive interplay between testimony and media reception.¹⁴⁶ There can be no question that this has fed into how records are received:

...a community of records is not only multi-representational but also non-hierarchical in the sense that while it might present multi-tiered up and down layers within a provenance of the whole, each layer also has a parallel and horizontal dimension, that is, no expression of a community is privileged over another because each in some way relates and adds value to the whole.¹⁴⁷

This creates a sense of all knowledge being available and the particularities of the archive as being rather quaint in a world in which the representations and the productive transmission of all the facts of the world to, potentially, all the people of the world are played out through information and communication technologies. The prevailing view in the archival community appears to persist in the fatalistic acceptance of 'inevitable trends' in the manner represented by McDonald:

Unavoidably, the critic occupies a hierarchical role: someone who knows more about an artform than we do; whose opinion or interpretation is worthy of special regard. Evaluation of the arts has been dispersed, beauty

¹⁴⁵ F. Sabbah, 'The New Media', in M. Castells (ed.), *High Technology, Space, and Society* (London, 1985) p. 219

¹⁴⁶ see The Hutton Inquiry Website available at www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk (accessed 12/03/07)

¹⁴⁷ J.A. Bastian, 'Reading Colonial Records Through an Archival Lens: The Provenance of Place, Space and Creation' *Archival Science* 6 (2006) p. 281

emphatically ascribed to the 'eye of the beholder', not the expert critic or the aesthete. This hierarchical aspect has fallen victim to wider shifts in social relations, away from deference and authority.¹⁴⁸

In light of such discourse the postmodern archival concentration upon the archivist *shaping* the meaning of the record/collection develops further into a culture of interpretation. In this culture the archivist should abandon a focus on the record for an absorption on process, of the historical and ideological contexts that lie beneath. For Cook: "Using remorseless logical analysis, postmodernists reveal the illogic of allegedly rational texts. The context behind the text, the power relationships shaping the documentary heritage..."¹⁴⁹ For Meehan:

Therefore, an archivist cannot identify these relationships and come to an understanding of the context and provenance of a particular body of records merely through a study of the records and/or documentation about the creator as sources from which to glean important contextual information. Rather, archival analysis involves a further process of using the gathered information to infer facts and draw conclusions about context and provenance.¹⁵⁰

The effects are those described by French historian and publisher Pierre Nora:

Adopting such a view opens the way to a new kind of history: a history less interested in causes than in effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interaction of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and re-emergence of their significations; less interested in "what actually happened" than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on.¹⁵¹

In a similar vein, the records continuum is pre-occupied with accountability. For example, in his article 'Recordkeeping and Accountability,' Chris Hurley quotes with approval the following statement:

When we campaign for greater access to information we must at the same time campaign for improved records management. There seems little point in having access to information that is chaotic and unreliable. Clearly there needs to be systematic, complete, and dependable record keeping...Old records may be so chaotic as to render rights of access highly time consuming, if not wholly fruitless. Indeed, in Mexico, where a freedom of information law was enacted in April 2002, a report stated that "public records, transcripts and notes from important meetings have been

¹⁴⁸ McDonald, *The Death of the Critic* p. vii

¹⁴⁹ T. Cook, 'Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts' (2000) available at <http://www.mybestdocs.com/cook-t-postmod-p1-00.htm> (accessed 3/02/06)

¹⁵⁰ Meehan, 'An Archival Concept of Evidence' p. 143

¹⁵¹ P. Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, vol. 1* (New York, 1996) p. xxiv

purposefully kept from public view, leaving almost no official record of how key decisions have been made. In many cases, official records have been destroyed or taken home by officials when they left office”...[Therefore] a clear duty must be imposed on the providers that information be complete, coherent and understandable by its target audience.¹⁵²

His Australian counterparts Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward advance the insertion of the record-keeping function visibly in the political process:

Effective creation and management of the archival document to ensure its integrity and validity is a precondition of an information-rich society and underpins public accountability on the part of both government and non-government organisations, FOI and privacy legislation, protection of people’s rights and entitlements, and the quality of the archival heritage.¹⁵³

Here there is an explicit correlation between records, evidence, and accountability with regard to the promotion of good governance equalling good practice. In Australia the notion has arisen through their concern with a host of record-keeping scandals¹⁵⁴ where such misuse of records represents an ‘anarchic power’ according to Michael Lynch, senior lecturer in Human Sciences at Brunei University: “a relative power characterised by control over the drafting, destruction, and dissolution of records to enhance the equivocality of interpretations and accusations”.¹⁵⁵ Records which hold the essential evidential qualities of integrity, completeness, reliability and authenticity, are essential for both the accountability of the institution internally and for being accountable to the wider public with regards to action taken. However archiving, in continuum literature, has shifted in response from the preservation of primary, non-current records to that of an auditor of the record-keeping systems of a record-creating body to ensure that the creator can be sufficiently accountable – the archivist is a risk-manager for record-keeping propriety, a trained team of intellectual collectors that focuses upon abstract systems. In other words the archival concern is no longer with the record as a trustworthy guarantor of continuing evidential value but also with processes and systems.

Such a conceptualisation is clearly visible in the statement of intent within the Australian Society of Archivists journal *Archives and Manuscripts* where it is the archivist’s mission to

¹⁵² J. Pope, ‘Access to Information: Whose Right and Whose Information?’ in R. Hodess (ed) *Transparency International: Global Corruption Report 2003 – Special Focus: Access to Information* (London, 2003) p. 19 quoted in C. Hurley, ‘Recordkeeping and Accountability’ in S. McKemmish, M. Piggott, B. Reed, & F. Upward (ed.,) *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* (New South Wales, 2005) p. 223

¹⁵³ McKemmish & Upward, ‘The Archival Document’ p. 19

¹⁵⁴ See especially the work of Chris Hurley on the Heiner Affair. C. Hurley, ‘Records and the Public Interest: The ‘Heiner Affair in Queensland, Australia’ in Cox & Wallace (ed.,), *Archives and the Public Good* pp. 293-310.

¹⁵⁵ M. Lynch, ‘Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails’ *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) p. 71

“ensure that records which have value as authentic evidence...are *made*, kept and used” [author’s italics]. Such a statement is contrary to accepted archival principles but is intrinsically bound to the belief that archives, as enablers of democratic transparency and accountability, cannot ignore the issue of archival accountability and transparency. The result is an argument that the archive exists to ensure authentic and reliable records are not only held in the archive but are actually created, personified by Australian archivist Glenda Aclands’ statement that:

While archivists have a duty of care to the records in their custody, there also exists a duty of care to ensure that adequate records exist and are properly maintained and managed.¹⁵⁶

From this, she says:

...it follows that archivists should assume the position of managers of corporate behaviour towards archival information resources, regulating the disposition of information just as auditors and personnel offices manage behaviour towards other corporate assets. If archivists don’t assume this role they could be considered derelict or inept.¹⁵⁷

Acland is touching upon another aspect to this drive to prove one’s legitimacy within society and it is that the archivist, in the opinion of many continuum theorists, has no presence in their traditional guise as keepers of records at the end of their active life-cycle.

It would still not be expected that a culture of interpretation would emerge from the records continuum, despite the prominence given to such doctrines. For example Richard Cox has complained that the arguments for archives as preservers of transactional authenticity:

...have been less frequent and often lost beneath the other argument that archives are primarily cultural resources, akin to museum objects benefiting the education of the public and other resources to be used for the study of specialized scholars. While these latter roles are real and beneficial, they are less socially relevant than the value of archival records for accountability and evidence.¹⁵⁸

Yet consider this statement from Sue McKemmish:

This [archival thinking] now is linked to post-positivist and interpretivist research paradigms, and to ideas about ‘archival science’ that are akin to Geertz’ belief that the goal of anthropology is to act as an “interpretative science in search of meaning, not an experimental science in search of laws”. It is very different from the positivist notions about the existence of immutable, autonomous “universal principles that go beyond any particular

¹⁵⁶ G. Acland, ‘Managing the Record rather than the Relic’ *Archives and Manuscripts* 20 (1992) p. 59

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁵⁸ R. Cox, ‘Putting the Puzzle Together’, quoted in M. Greene *et al.*, ‘The Archivist’s New Clothes; or, the Naked Truth about Evidence, Transactions, and Recordness’ available at <https://idea.iupui.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/1805/42/ManifestoFinal.doc?sequence=2> (accessed 18/08/08)

historical, legal or cultural context” that are present in the writings of Duranti and Eastwood...¹⁵⁹

As shall be documented, the continuum model is very similar to postmodernism in seeking to coerce or expose the ideological and historical context through the issue of metadata.

Part I conclusion

Where does all this accountability fervour actually take the archive? This shall be the question that is at the core of this thesis - the archive, by focusing upon a reductive accountability doctrine, is engaging in a culture of interpretation that sees the archive as a tool for corroboration and transformation. This conceptualisation takes the archive beyond the archive, potentially into unrecognisable territory that could not be termed archival in a traditional sense of the term. What are the practical effects of the archival embracing of the sentiments found in Verne Harris who, taking inspiration from Michel Foucault (quoting and expanding him), writes: “‘The archive is first the law of what can be said.’ And *when* it can be said, *how*, and *by whom*”?¹⁶⁰ Harris’s digressions on the nature of the archive sit squarely in Foucault’s conceptions of disciplines as discursive formations or systematic conceptual frameworks that define *their own truth criteria*. It is the belief of this thesis that the archivist is, under the influence of records continuum theory and postmodernism, being led towards dictating the records that are being created through an analysis of the adequacy of system design and record-keeping processes and dictating the subsequent narrative that is presented to the individual through:

...the revolutionary capacity and speed of information technology, to transmit information in all media to geographically, socially, and culturally dispersed audiences, presents archives with the power to make records accessible to a public that is itself empowered by that very access. The electronically augmented power of archives to provide access to the record also amplifies archives traditional power to mediate access to the record. Through descriptive practices and system architecture, through selection - at all levels - for on-line access, and through production of virtual exhibitions, archives wield the power over what will be known about what has been preserved.¹⁶¹

As stated previously this is representative of a “conceptual shift in thinking from the past waiting to be explored in the archives to a focus upon the self-reflexive nature of knowledge construction”. Construction of texts and illusions of authenticity has become a feature of the archival environment where “make-believe is in the making”. Therefore chapters 3 & 4 will document the detrimental and subversive effects that occur when the archive is beholden to an

¹⁵⁹ McKemmish, ‘Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice’ p. 348

¹⁶⁰ Harris, ‘Archives, Politics and Justice’ p. 175

¹⁶¹ T. Cook & J. Schwartz, ‘Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance’ *Archival Science* 2 (2002) p. 15

accountable framework that they see as providing a means of re-asserting legitimacy in the wake of the emergence of virtualism that has undermined the role of knowledgeable arbiter; when the archive seeks to reveal something about the ideology of the society, organisation, government, that produced it, to do political work with the text and to reveal the covert operations of power and privilege lurking behind it.

However the object of this thesis is not to critique every element of records continuum and postmodern thinking. Indeed some of the results that have originated in response to specifically postmodern doctrines have been beneficial in awakening the archival community from their practical and theoretical slumber. The subsequent chapters utilise concepts that are stalwarts of postmodern literature – when Foucault and Derrida, for example, discuss the power-knowledge axis it is difficult to argue, indeed both chapter 3 & 4 specifically reinforce portions of their arguments. Where there is divergence is in the archival response to their concepts and in their own concept of the archive, where the archive in both regards manoeuvres itself into unrecognisable territory that loses touch with a more fundamental concept than that of power or accountability – that of responsibility. Marilyn Strathern has provided a crucial distinction for us between accountability and responsibility:

Accountability rendering an account to those to whom one is accountable, manifest in the self-evident efficacy of audit, and responsibility, which is discharged to those in one's care, whether students or colleagues or the wider society.¹⁶²

Admittedly responsibility is a concern for which little interest is heeded today, especially in modern political life where concepts such as duty and honour are paid lip-service by profession politicians who aim for career advancement. This is represented in the dilution of ministerial responsibility. Cabinet ministers were once held to be responsible for the departments they were paid to be in control over and therefore were held accountable to the general public for the actions of employees beneath them in rank. For example in 1954 Sir Thomas Dugdale, the Minister of Agriculture, resigned over a claim by a landowner of unfair treatment at the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Crown Lands Commissioners. Contrary to wartime promises concerning procedures for resale, they held on to 72 acres of his land that had been compulsorily purchased for £12,000 by the Air Ministry in 1937. A public inquiry was set up that was severely critical of official procedures and practices. Sir Thomas – who said he had nothing to do with the original decisions – nevertheless took the decision to quit stating:

¹⁶² M. Strathern, 'Abstraction and decontextualisation: an anthropological comment or: e for ethnography' available at <http://virtualsociety.sbs.ox.ac.uk/GRpapers/strathern.htm> (accessed 15/07/08)

I, as Minister, must accept full responsibility for any mistakes and inefficiency of officials in my department, just as, when my officials bring off any successes on my behalf, I take full credit for them.¹⁶³

Today New Labour presides over a policy that starts from the premise that the Minister should never resign under virtually any circumstances until an independent inquiry has analysed the facts and has cast its judgement. The distinction between responsible and accountable was evident in the United Kingdom with the Hutton Inquiry where Prime Minister Blair was held to have passed the test of accountability in that Lord Hutton effectively exonerated him. He did, however, fail the responsibility test in that he simply could not take public opinion with him.

In many cases such inquiries do a valuable service in that they coagulate evidence or expose weaknesses or failures that may have been suspected but were almost impossible to prove. Yet they can also act as circular processes of deception, almost self-sustaining in their conclusions. In a 2007 article for *Global Society*, James Handmer and Paul James made this very point regarding *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Report to the President of the United States*¹⁶⁴:

Commissions of inquiry are used this way, particularly by setting the terms of inquiry so that it does not undermine the process of risk communication itself. For example, the 2005 United States Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission report found “no indication that the intelligence community distorted the evidence regarding Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction”. None of the analysts interviewed would acknowledge that political pressure skewed their judgement of the material. Rather, the report found that the problem was lack of evidence and how it was treated. The implication of the report’s recommendations thus predictably became that we need more *rationalisation* of the agencies of data collection, bringing them under the newly created Director of National Intelligence, more systematic *codification* of material, and increasing analytical *objectification* in dealing with the material that has been gathered.¹⁶⁵

Yet the general public are complicit in this, they need outside bodies to verify what they already know. When, in 2005, Lord Hutton produced his report it did not satisfy the public who, after having viewed the Inquiry through extensive media coverage, having formed an opinion through their own intuition, or having read the proceedings and evidence on the Hutton Inquiry website, concluded they had been taken into War on a false premise. In 2009 it would not be sensationalism or hyperbole to assert that, in the eyes of the general public, it has become even

¹⁶³ C. Turpin, *British Government and the Constitution* (Cambridge, 2007) p. 573

¹⁶⁴ ‘The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction’ *A Report to the President of the United States* (March 31, 2005) available at http://www.wmd.gov/report/wmd_report.pdf (accessed 06/07/08)

¹⁶⁵ J. Handmer & P. James, ‘Trust Us and Be Scared: The Changing Nature of Contemporary Risk,’ *Global Society* 21 (2007) pp. 127-128

clearer that systemic failures took place in the run-up to the War. This is public consensus. Yet this is not enough. The general public need an official inquiry to pronounce it true, to assign blame, to hold someone to account – the very same public having failed in its opportunity to take responsibility and cast their vote to remove those who they blame. And so it was announced that another official inquiry would be held in the United Kingdom.¹⁶⁶ We always need to out-source our responsibility to a body, government or institution that can be held to account or to whom we can blame for not holding *us* to account.

However this should not negate the importance of the archival responsibility which is rooted in the moral and physical preservation of the record and in the archival fiduciary function. As Michael Moss states:

...records are preserved for the benefit of the community, which has rights of access, and users can have confidence that when they consult them they are what they purport to be, at least what they purported to be when they were selected for permanent preservation.¹⁶⁷

Today the responsibility of the archive is uniquely threatened by the culture of reductionism and interpretation that has arisen. Admittedly, records continuum and postmodernism theorists may come at this culture from different angles and practicalities. Indeed, despite their conceptual similarities in places, in practical terms they probably are representative of modernist and postmodernist views on organisation:

In the modernist model, organization is viewed as a social tool and an extension of human rationality. In the postmodern view, organization is less the expression of planned thought and calculative action and a more defensive reaction to forces intrinsic to the social body which constantly threaten the stability of organized life.¹⁶⁸

Yet together they move the focus of archival science “away from the record and toward the creative act or authoring intent or process or functionality behind the record”. They represent the statement from Jean Baudrillard that:

...nothing will be left to chance...the generalised deterrence of chance, of accident, of transversality, of finality, of contradiction, rupture, or complexity in a sociality illuminated by the norm, doomed to the descriptive transparency of mechanisms of information.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ ‘Iraq War inquiry to be in private’ (15 June, 2009) available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8100432.stm (accessed 12/07/09)

¹⁶⁷ M. Moss, ‘Archivist: friend or foe’ *Records Management Journal* Vol. 15 (2005) p. 104

¹⁶⁸ R. Cooper & G. Burrell, ‘Modernism, Postmodernism and Organizational Analysis: An Introduction’ *Organization Studies* 9 (1988) p. 91

¹⁶⁹ J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, 1994) pp. 34-35

PART II – CORROBORATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 3 – The Archive Fever of Audit Culture

Perhaps we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge' relations are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.¹⁷⁰

Michel Foucault

¹⁷⁰ M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London, 1977) pp. 27-28

Section 1

Economising on trust

In the United Kingdom the New Labour government that took office in 1997 under Tony Blair implicitly understood the culture previously documented. ‘Reality’ for New Labour heavyweights Alistair Campbell, the Director of Communications and Strategy for New Labour between 1997 and 2003, Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson was an effect created by communication and therefore either by the manipulation of the media or the manipulation of the people by a complicit media. This was the packaging of politics framed in a display of listening that treated sections of the public as focus groups to pin-point that risk, that concern, and then to announce a stream of ‘new’ initiatives and ‘new’ policies that would eradicate it. This fed directly into a system of government that;

(1) held parliament in contempt, perhaps most visibly exemplified by Blair in 2007 when he was absent from the British parliament when it finally got its first full opportunity to discuss Iraq post-invasion, a decision which led the *Independent* to write that:

Tony Blair's absence was an act of contempt to the House and an expression of total disregard of the British public. His excuse, given through Margaret Beckett, his Foreign Secretary, was that he preferred to wait until the completion of Operation Sinbad to secure Basra over the coming weeks, or months. But this is to add insult to injury. It is precisely now, when we are embarked on a policy of aggressive disengagement and handover, when the US President has committed himself to fresh troops in a "new strategy" and when Iraq is descending rapidly to civil war that Parliament should be debating policy and the future of British troops there, not when one ground operation is completed and the Prime Minister can come to the Commons with claims of security gains which only time can test.¹⁷¹

(2) That downgraded Cabinet and ministers. The archetypical system of British parliamentary government was described by the Cabinet Secretary Sir Richard Wilson:

The power is formally vested in secretaries of state, who run departments. You have a Cabinet at the top of the government who collectively reach decisions – with the Prime Minister as chairman of the Cabinet and the person who makes the key appointments.¹⁷²

The demolishing of practices enshrined for centuries in our democracy was exposed by the Butler Report in an example of where out-sourced inquiries can root out practices hidden from public view. Lord Butler said that ministers outside a “small circle” were given oral briefings in the run

¹⁷¹ ‘Leading Article: A Display of Contempt for Parliament and the Public’ *Independent* (25 January 2007) available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-a-display-of-contempt-for-parliament-and-the-public-433541.html> (accessed 17/07/08)

¹⁷² P. Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class* (London, 2007) p. 122

up to the Iraq war but denied access to detailed papers written by officials¹⁷³; and (3) sneered at a civil service that was only 'fit for purpose' in a time that had now passed. Gradually the concept of civil service neutrality that was rooted in the constitutional doctrine of affiliation to the Crown rather than to the governing political party was eroded. As Peter Osborne comments, by 1999 there were only 2 out of 17 directors of communication in Whitehall who were still in their posts from New Labour's election in 1997.¹⁷⁴

The widespread emergence of governance is conceptually similar in that it is intrinsically centred on principles of risk, what constitutes risk, and what regulatory frameworks should be implemented in order to combat risk and ensure compliance. Governance, traditionally the means through which corporations were controlled, really acts as a buffer against the deception of the consumer or client by formalising relations and clarifying expectations so that the consumer or client can, as John Thompson has put it, economise on trust. Thompson, however, sees such planning to facilitate trust as problematic:

In conditions of deepening distrust, legislators may be inclined to produce more formal procedures in the hope of restoring depleted stocks of trust. Some of these procedures may indeed help, and may create, greater openness and accountability of government. But there is the risk that these new procedures will only create further levels of bureaucracy and inefficiency...and set in motion a process that may exacerbate rather than alleviate the problems they were intended to address, and hence contribute to a culture of deepening distrust.¹⁷⁵

Thompson is describing a paradoxical situation where we rush to respond to perceived instances of bad practice by seeking to rectify the gaps that allowed such malfeasance to occur. Hence the notion of economising on trust is hedged in ambiguity, not least because the measures designed to make trust less of an issue in day-to-day life actually create the conditions for the regular exposure of what would be deemed, by the diktat of governance, deficient practice. This is a point also made by Frank Clarke and Graeme Dean where they refer to governing as controlling or *steering* and by Onora O'Neill in her BBC Reith Lectures of 2002:

...plants don't flourish when we pull them up too often to check how their roots are growing: political, institutional, and professional life too may not flourish if we constantly uproot it to demonstrate that everything is transparent and trustworthy.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Lord Butler, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (14 July 2004) available at <http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/deps/hc/hc898/898.pdf> (accessed 09/06/07)

¹⁷⁴ This process is described in the appendix to P. Osborne, *Alistair Campbell and the Rise of the Media Class* (London, 1999)

¹⁷⁵ J. Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 254

¹⁷⁶ O. O'Neill, *A Question of Trust* available at www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/ (accessed, 07/02/05). F. Clarke & G. Dean, *Indecent Disclosure: Gilding the Corporate Lily* (Cambridge, 2007) p.7

This is found in new legislation, regulation, and controls which:

Require detailed conformity to procedures and protocols, detailed recordkeeping and provision of information in specified formats and success in reaching targets. Detailed instructions regulate and prescribe the work and performance of health trusts and schools, of universities and research councils, of the police force and of social workers. And beyond the public sector, increasingly detailed legislative and regulatory requirements also bear on companies and the voluntary sector, on self-employed professionals and tradesmen. All institutions face new standards of recommended accounting practice, more detailed health and safety requirements, increasingly complex employment and pensions legislation, more exacting provisions for ensuring non-discrimination and, of course, proliferating complaint procedures.¹⁷⁷

Audit culture

These regulatory and prescriptive technologies of control – O'Malley describes technologies as “any set of social practices that is aimed at manipulating the social or physical world according to identifiable reason”¹⁷⁸ - are symptomatic of what has been termed an audit culture in which the response to volatility is an attempt to provide a sense of fixity through the recording of the present.¹⁷⁹ In the United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister from 1979-1991, was the initiator. In her desire for centralised control, and also because of her suspicion of the Local Authorities, Thatcher moved the practice of audit into efficiency and delivery through the creation of an Audit Commission – for example, in Education, standards were to be set through the national curriculum with testing and the Audit Commission would check they were being achieved. By increasing central control the issue of accountability is actually passed on to the headmaster and the school in question as they have the responsibility to meet the standard and target. This was intensified in 1992 when transparency was added to the heady brew with the publication of the school results. However Tony Blair and the New Labour government really took up the baton with regards audit. In 2000 Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott could claim

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁸ P. O'Malley, 'Risk and Responsibility' in A. Barry, T. Osborne, & N. Rose (ed.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London, 1996) p. 205

¹⁷⁹ The term audit has emerged from its conceptual foundations as a statement of account in the past couple of decades to reach a situation today where-by it is central to the notion of policy, accountability and government. As Colin Leys has written: “[There is] a proliferation of *auditing*, i.e., the use of business derived concepts of independent supervision to measure and evaluate performance by public agencies and public employees, from civil servants and school teachers to university [faculty] and doctors: environmental audit, value for money audit, management audit, forensic audit, data audit, intellectual property audit, medical audit, teaching audit and technology audit emerged and, to varying degrees of institutional stability and acceptance, very few people have been left untouched by these developments”. C. Leys, *Market-driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest* (New York, 2003) p. 70

that local government and transport had 2,500 targets alone to meet.¹⁸⁰ At the centre of this was the Audit Commission whose budget rose from £15m and 524 staff in 1984 to £220m and 2,356 staff two decades later to become the auditor of all audits.¹⁸¹ The depth, and indeed the incredible bureaucratic incompetence, of these devices and institutions is described by Sir Michael Barber, one-time head of Tony Blair's Delivery Unit in Downing Street:

Government was, of course, littered with inspection and review processes. For organisations such as Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary, the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission, this was core business. The approaches these organisations took varied, but they all shared one important flaw from a Delivery Unit point of view: they were far too slow. Ofsted, for example, would review the implementation of a policy in October but not publish its report on it until the following April or May, by which time, of course, the world had moved on. Similarly, the Audit Commission wrote superb investigative reports but took two years to complete them. Two years! That's an age in this period of extraordinary rapid change. For the Delivery Unit, I wanted an approach which was much faster and, since we did not plan to produce reports for publication, we did not need to dot every I and cross every T. The conceptual breakthrough for me came in a conversation with someone who had worked on Audit Commission reports. "After how long", I asked him, "did you know 90 percent of what was in the final report?" "A month," he replied.¹⁸²

How very true the words of Chris Dandeker are when he cogently observed that "the age of bureaucracy is also the era of the information society".¹⁸³

Audit has been a central political technique to align truthfulness and visibility – the audit is construed as a democratic force against the evils of producer interests, a representative for the consumer. This is achieved, however, by normative practices where the consumer is a single entity operating in a rational universe where everyone desires the same things and outcomes. Indeed Daniel Miller has called audit a manifestation of virtualism in which activities are decontextualised for the purposes of quantification, output disembedded from the complexity of organisational life. He puts this in the larger context of political and economic shifts where, he argues, the consumer is silently transformed into a virtual consumer:

The paradox is that, while consumption is the pivot upon which these developments in history spin, the concern is not the costs and benefits of

¹⁸⁰ S. Jenkins, 'Brokenshire's Bathboard' *Times Literary Supplement* (4 April 2008) p. 7

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸² M. Barber, *Instruction to Deliver: Fighting to Transform Britain's Public Services* (London, 2007) p. 151

¹⁸³ C. Dandeker, *Surveillance, Power and Modernity : Bureaucracy and Discipline from 1700 to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 1990) pp. 1-2

actual consumers, but of what we might call virtual consumers, which are generated by management theory and models.¹⁸⁴

And so:

In place of a society of citizens with the democratic power to ensure effectiveness and proper use of collective resources, and relying in large measure on trust in the public sector, there emerged a society of 'auditees', anxiously preparing for audits and inspections.¹⁸⁵

Power/knowledge

Unquestionably this culture of audit functions as a technology of power that uses the mirage of scientific authenticity to alleviate the human aversion to risk. As such it manifests itself as a case study for Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse and the intimate relationship between knowledge and power, which he actually terms power-knowledge:

Power produces knowledge...power and knowledge directly imply one another...there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.¹⁸⁶

Foucault saw discourse as a system of representation in that the rules and practices of the game form the superstructure from which statements and knowledge can emerge. This he termed an 'Archaeology of Knowledge' in that it is a discourse which is the determinant of what can be voiced. It is a discourse which is controlled, selected, organised, and distributed and so, crucially for Foucault, nothing can be conceptualised or spoken outwith the discourse.¹⁸⁷ It produces a language that defines our knowledge and the objects that constitute its make-up. Therefore there are discursive formations that sustain regimes of 'truth' through which knowledge has the authority to not only make itself heard but to make itself the 'truth'.

One of the most famous conceptual images of Foucault's power-knowledge theory is that of the Panopticon, borrowed from Bentham, where an inspection regime is a panoptic process.¹⁸⁸

Foucault conceptualised this process as thus:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation

¹⁸⁴ D. Miller, 'A Theory of Virtualism' in D Miller & J Carrier (ed.), *Virtualism: A New Political Economy*, (Oxford, 1998) pp. 204-5

¹⁸⁵ Leys, *Market-driven Politics* p. 70

¹⁸⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p. 27

¹⁸⁷ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

¹⁸⁸ see J. Bentham, 'Panopticon (Preface)' in M. Bozovic (ed.), *The Panopticon Writings*, (London,1995) pp. 29-95 & Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so. In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. In order to make the presence or absence of the inspector unverifiable, so that the prisoners, in their cells, cannot even see a shadow, Bentham envisaged not only venetian blinds on the windows of the central observation hall, but, on the inside, partitions that intersected the hall at right angles and, in order to pass from one quarter to the other, not doors but zig-zag openings; for the slightest noise, a gleam of light, a brightness in a half-opened door would betray the presence of the guardian. The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.¹⁸⁹

Hence the exercise of panoptical power is an exercise in total surveillance so that, through the threat of continual monitoring and evaluation, the dominating power can be secure in the knowledge that the subject will come to so alter their behaviour, their responses, and their manner that they will function in the precise manner of the disciplined subject whether the guards are in the watchtower or not as “the reflexive subject is caught within tightly fixed parameters that appear to render opposition futile”.¹⁹⁰

The archive fever of audit culture

One of the central modern political technologies Foucault touched upon in his later years was the concept of neo-liberal governmentality and the rationality that underpinned it, a continuation of his body of work on the technologies of the self and the technologies of domination in which “...the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination”.¹⁹¹ In this perspective of power-knowledge a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge which simply re-presents the governed reality. It is not an exterior instance but an element of government itself which helps to create a discursive field in which exercising power is “rational” and where the logic of audit is irresistible. Therefore Foucault’s concept of governmentality

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* pp. 201-202

¹⁹⁰ C. Shore & S. Wright, ‘Coercive Accountability: the Rise of the Audit Culture in Higher Education’ in M. Strathern (ed.) *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy* (London, 2000) p. 78

¹⁹¹ M. Foucault, ‘About the Beginning of the Hermeneutic of the Self’ M. Blasius (ed.) transcription of two lectures given in Dartmouth on the 17th and 24 November 1980 in *Political Theory* Vol. 21 (1993) p. 203

suggests that it is not only important to see if neo-liberal rationality is an adequate representation of society, but also how it functions as a “politics of truth”, producing new forms of knowledge, inventing new notions and concepts that contribute to the “government” of new domains of regulation and intervention – power is not only a negative concept for Foucault but a creator, a productive force that brings into being new forms of discourse.

Foucault’s discussion of neo-liberal governmentality shows that the so-called “retreat of the state” is in fact a prolongation of government, a trick of the mirror that asserts its centralised tentacles of power through a conceptual model of decentralisation that seeks to take the politics out of politics. One can gain autonomy so long as autonomy is exercised in a manner sanctioned by central government. This involves a transferral from formal to informal technologies of government and the appearance of external observers of standards and performance – the Audit Commission and Ofsted for example - that are suggestive of a new form of governance apparatus that enshrines the tablets of accountability and transparency for the consumer. Yet the trick is an optical illusion, a piece of conjuror’s magic – for centuries the consumer has flocked to see the magician saw their assistant in half without questioning the process of how. Audit functions along the same path. Audit is a panoptical technology of power where the practitioners to whom power is ‘devolved’ become auditable selves, operating in a mode of conscious subversion that is ever more aware of the need to ‘perform’ in relation to the expectation of the illusionist who dictates the prescribed pattern of events. The process resembles Mark Greenberg’s description of having a camera trained on him:

I sat there woodenly, anticipating each click, watching Marion’s eye roll out at me and then retreat behind the lens. Aimed at me, the camera seemed a machine that must be resisted. Spontaneity seemed impossible. My lips were glued grimly together, and I felt unable to part them, let alone alter my expression or make it come alive.¹⁹²

¹⁹² M. Greenberg, ‘Freelance’ *Times Literary Supplement* (February 8, 2008) p. 16. Mark Olssen has exposed the dividing lines between liberalism in its classical manifestation, and neo-liberalism which is worth quoting in its entirety: “Whereas classical liberalism represents a negative conception of state power in that the individual was to be taken as an object to be freed from the interventions of the state, neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state’s role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. In classical liberalism, the individual is characterized as having an autonomous human nature and can practice freedom. In neo-liberalism the state seeks to create an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. In the classical model the theoretical aim of the state was to limit and minimize its role based on postulates which included universal egoism (the self-interested individual); invisible hand theory which dictated that the interests of the individual were also the interests of the society as a whole; and the political maxim of laissez-faire. In the shift from classical liberalism to neo-liberalism, then, there is a further element added, for such a shift involves a change in subject position from ‘homo economicus’, who naturally behaves out of self-interest and is relatively detached from the state, to ‘manipulatable man’, who is created by the state and who is continually encouraged to be perpetually responsive. It is not that the conception of the self-interested subject is replaced or done away with by the new ideals of ‘neo-liberalism’, but that in an age of

The prescribed set of policies and procedures that function as a form of targets through which financial gain will follow serves to eliminate the sense of the spontaneous or a mode of individuality in a panoptical functioning that turns the recorded present into an archive of past repetitions. This is conceptualised as a means through which to gain control over future presents – the audit shapes all that it comes to bear upon in that it bears witness to the fact that, in Derrida’s phraseology, “this was there”.¹⁹³ This is the archive fever of an audit culture which is suffering from an obsessive-compulsive recording disorder in order to assert its presence against the destructive hand of time, and uses records as a corroborative power in the battle for legitimisation and control. It actively encourages “the ritualisation of performance and tokenistic gestures of accountability – such as rigid paper systems and demonstrable audit trails – to the detriment of real effectiveness”.¹⁹⁴

Michael Power, whose work on the audit society has done much to raise the awareness of the practice of audit, has written that:

Auditing is a process of operationalising the accountability of an agent to a principal where the principal can’t do it alone and where trust is lacking...Much of the audit explosion presumes that teachers, social workers etc., can’t be trusted – with often, or sometimes, perverse effects...Audits [can] create the distrust they presuppose and...this in turn leads to various organisational pathologies...Where the solution to these pathologies of distrust is yet more and better auditing, yet more guardians of impersonal trust, then one has the audit society in a nutshell.¹⁹⁵

The constitution of presence is all too visible in the creation and act of recording, a process that Derrida refers to as an artifactuality as audit (Derrida uses the media) creates what is seen as reality rather than relying on a reflection of the real world and real processes. This clearly threatens the natural occurrence in favour of a “centralising appropriation of artifactual powers for ‘creating the event’”,¹⁹⁶ a process that compromises one of the core tenets of evidential trustworthiness, the non-contaminating witness, which is rooted in the understanding of the deep bond between the passing of informational content through time and the actual accuracy of that information. In other words there is an intimate connection between the observer and the event, and the observer and the recording, in order to deduce from the record what took place:

universal welfare, the perceived possibilities of slothful indolence create necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, ‘performance appraisal’ and of forms of control generally. In this model the state has taken it upon itself to keep us all up to the mark. The state will see to it that each one makes a ‘continual enterprise of ourselves’ ... in what seems to be a process of ‘governing without governing’. M. Olssen, ‘In Defense of the Welfare State and of Publicly Provided Education,’ *Journal of Education Policy* 11 (1996) p. 340

¹⁹³ J. Derrida & B. Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (Cambridge, 2002) p. 94

¹⁹⁴ Shore & Wright, ‘Coercive Accountability’ p. 81

¹⁹⁵ M. Power, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* (Oxford, 1997) p. 3

¹⁹⁶ Derrida & Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* p. 5

To be an observer is to be present, to 'be there'...However, although the observer must be concretely present, he is not supposed to make a difference. The contact of observation must be direct and unidirectional in that the contact flows from event to observer, so that the record can be direct and unencumbered by the observer's opinion...The achievement of the observer is the achievement of absence through presence. The responsible observer is one who can make what he observes responsible for what he observes...record users can know the event through the record because, since the record has not been affected by the observer, it becomes unnecessary to understand the observer in order to understand the record. The record speaks for itself.¹⁹⁷

This is rooted in the Cartesian model of the mind principle. Reality is separate to the mind and harks back to the level of permanence, and the potentiality of objectivity, accorded to and within the written form so long as the distorting influences do not intrude. In this conception, therefore, truthfulness is guaranteed by process and the record embodies the action. Yet the very act of recording is 'formatted' and 'initialised' by the act of audit, a recursive performative act which is a signifying process:

...which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse...For a performative to work, it must draw upon and recite a set of linguistic conventions that have traditionally worked to bind or engage certain kinds of effects.¹⁹⁸

The practical effects that the performative nature of audit has initiated have been wide-ranging. In the following two mini-sections, this thesis will document two separate examples of the malignant impact of audit upon the education and health sectors and, more specifically, the nature of performativity performing. It is the intention to explore in slightly differing manners the standardisation/commodification of knowledge and the subversive effect of transparency that is inherent in the outcomes of an audit culture steered by a centralising power produces.

Education

Britain has witnessed a shift in higher education. Rather than the university being viewed as a breeding ground for those intellectually superior individuals to flourish and produce thinking that

¹⁹⁷ S. Ruffel, *Matters of Fact: A Sociological Inquiry* (London, 1979) pp. 23. Hegel similarly characterised this as non-reflective writing. By this he meant: "the influences that have formed the writer are identical with those which have moulded the events that constitute the matter of the story. The author's spirit, and that of the actions he narrates, is one and the same. He describes scenes in which he himself has been an actor, or at any rate an interested spectator. It is short periods of time, individual shapes of persons and occurrences, single, unreflected traits, of which he makes his picture. And his aim is nothing more than the presentation to posterity of an image of events as clear as that which he himself possessed in virtue of personal observation, or life-like descriptions. Reflections are none of his business, for he lives in the spirit of his subject; he has not attained an elevation above it". G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956) p. 2

¹⁹⁸ J. Butler, 'A Careful Reading,' in S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, N. Fraser, (ed.) *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, (New York, 1995) p. 134

would advance their subject, profession, and nation in some manner we today witness a ‘mass’ higher education most visibly codified in the target of New Labour to send 50% of school leavers on to higher education. Arbitrary targets such as this are nothing more than a piece of indelicate social engineering and the consequence of these developments has been the undermining of the university itself. The traditional bastions of academic learning in Britain are held either in contempt or, at the very least, suspicion for their supposed elitist aspirations. As a result the concept of managerialism has infiltrated university institutions reflecting, according to Martin Trow of the Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of California, that:

...people on the whole in government and business rather than in the universities themselves, have no such trust in the wisdom of the academic community, and are resolved to reshape and redirect the activities of that community through funding formulas and other mechanisms of accountability imposed from outside the academic community, management mechanisms created and largely shaped for application to large commercial enterprises.¹⁹⁹

Trow continues to assert two principles that lie behind what those proponents of such a policy would see as the implementation of accountable governance structures into the university. Firstly, there is an overt lack of trust on the part of government in universities, resulting in Sir Ron Dearing’s unintentionally perfect analogy for governance – “the greater the trust, the greater the accountability must be”.²⁰⁰ This precise lack of trust then seeps into the second issue which is that there is a need to create:

...a ‘bottom line’ that performs the function of a profit and loss sheet for commercial business...the withdrawal of trust in the universities by the British government has forced it to create bureaucratic machinery and formulas to steer and manage the universities from outside the system.²⁰¹

Most visibly this is witnessed through audit whereby the government, backed by bureaucratic agencies, create criteria for performance management. One of these specific technologies has been the linking of quality and research to funding. This understanding connects with Jean-Francois Lyotard’s conceptualisation of performativity which he held as a cost-benefit calculus. Indeed he actually posed the question of how knowledge would be transformed by the demands of performativity.²⁰² In 2003 Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, explicitly linked knowledge to wealth creation whilst naturally couching it in the language of academic freedoms:

¹⁹⁹ M. Trow, *Managerialism and the Academic Profession: Quality and Control* (London, 1994) p. 14

²⁰⁰ quoted in Barber, *Instruction to Deliver* p. 21

²⁰¹ Trow, *Managerialism and the Academic Profession* pp. 14-15

²⁰² see J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, 1979)

...we have to make better progress in harnessing knowledge to wealth creation. And that depends on giving universities the freedoms and resources to compete on the world stage. To back our world class researchers with financial stability. To help turn ideas into successful businesses. To undo the years of under-investment that will result in our universities slipping back.²⁰³

However when the realms of finance are inserted outwith their natural domain into the academic sector, the understanding of knowledge for its own sake is rendered redundant to be replaced with the timeless functionality of questions such as what use is it? How does it enhance performance?

Research Assessment Exercise

In oral evidence taken before the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Parliament Robert, Lord May of Oxford, a member of the House of Lords, President of the Royal Society, and fellow and former professor at Oxford, gave this testimony:

There is a more fundamental point underlying this. Any system of distributing the money, whether it is the expert peer-reviewed direct costs of grants or the infrastructure costs, anything, other than just giving it out on a per-capita basis, needs rules. And the rules will govern behaviour. There is no avoiding it. There is an interaction between how we do these things and the behaviour we promote. The current system – there is no need to go into the details – but underlying it is one really big problem which is, because it evaluates at the level of departments, it does demonstrably inhibit collaboration and indeed one of the things we want is to see a whole diverse, but connected, system of research councils, institutes, industry and universities, and this RAE that focuses narrowly on the bureaucratic end of it is a problem. The ultimate problem, however, is to recognise that you cannot get away from there being a game, unless you just give the money out per capita, so you need to think both of what you are trying to achieve and how to do it, and then to think very carefully about the unintended consequences of the games we play. One of the obvious consequences of doing this is what we see in the universities day by day, as the ratio of administrators to active faculty grows. It is not just the funding councils, but the universities themselves react. If you go back and contrast a university department of 30 years ago when people's main activity was teaching and competing for research grants, and look at the amount of bullshit and paperwork which afflicts their daily lives today, it is a disturbing trend.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Department for Education and Skills, 'White Paper on the Future of Higher Education,' (London, 22 January 2003) available at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/hegateway/strategy/hestrategy/> (accessed 16/04/07)

²⁰⁴ Oral Evidence taken before the Science and Technology Committee on 19 May 2004 in House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, *Research Assessment Exercise: a re-assessment* (23 September 2004) available at <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmsctech/586/586.pdf> (accessed, 24/09/08). Of course, not everyone views the process like this. Michael Barber writes: "Not everyone in the public services likes league tables, but I love them. I have spent much of the last decade advocating them, usually in front of sceptical or even hostile audiences of headteachers. They make the evidence about performance public, they focus minds on the priorities they encompass, and they make sure, in whatever system they are applied, that something is

In these circumstances the higher education sector in Britain is contained by the buzzwords of performance and economic rationalism, and the Research Assessment Exercise is a central tenet of the ideology that is currently driving the managerialism of university life today. The Research Assessment Exercise is a peer review exercise to evaluate the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, the purpose of which is to assess the publication output of UK academics and departments in order to distribute public research funds, of which the RAE is the sole determinant.²⁰⁵ However much many academics might attempt to find a sheltered space away from the howling winds of the exercise and remain immune to its chills, the prospect of non-compliance is virtually impossible as institutions and departments have no choice but to conform to the government agenda. The publication of league tables directly impacts on an institution's reputation, which then drives not only its funding but the depth and quality of student applications. As Shore and Wright have stated:

Some universities have prepared for audit by appointing new 'quality assurance officers' and creating special 'monitoring committees' to bring their procedures into line with the anticipated standards demanded by external assessors.²⁰⁶

The result of this is a host of self-referential paper trails and structures designed to be audited by bureaucratic enforcers, where-by records "once measured in pages is now measured by weight: teaching audits, research audits, audits of courses that may receive grants".²⁰⁷

The degree to which this subverts the true academic purpose of free and enlightened intellectual inquiry is apparent. The knowledge required to attain expertise - the element of experimentation, of taking one's time to analyse and draw from the wealth of wonder produced

done about the individual units at the bottom of the league table – whether they are schools, hospitals, police forces or local authorities. This is why I never accepted the idea put forward by many in education that, once we had a measure of value added or progress, this should replace the raw data. I have always advocated the publication of both indicators. The value-added figures show what contribution individual schools are making, which is important; the raw figures reveal where the biggest challenges are in achieving universal high standards and focus the system on those challenges, which is even more important. By laying bare the problems, league tables drive action. The fact that school failure has been much reduced (though there is still a lot more to do) and that the gap between the lowest-performing schools and the average has been narrowed owes a great deal to league tables. In fact, there is no more powerful driver of equity". Barber, *The Invention of Delivery* pp. 96-7

²⁰⁵ Information on the previous RAE's in 1992, 1996 and 2001 can be found at <http://www.hero.ac.uk/rae/> (accessed 12/06/08)

²⁰⁶ Shore & Wright, 'Coercive Accountability' p. 63. For a wonderful example of the competition between universities that occurs and the practices that inhere within that competition see D. MacLeod & L.E. Major, 'The Race is On' *The Guardian* (21 November 2000) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2000/nov/21/highereducation.researchassessmentexercise> (accessed 27/01/06)

²⁰⁷ Miller, 'Virtualism' p. 201

from our forebears - cannot be ascertained by questions, boxes to tick, by being confined to strict procedures. Production best suited to the factory line eliminates the element of pure research in the manner of mediocrity found by Hector Berlioz in 1828 when he composed an experimental cantata for the Prix de Rome examination. Whilst the examiners had dully compiled a box-ticking set of movements the players were required to write, Berlioz had been presumptuous enough to interpose a slow movement where he believed the text demanded it:

Suddenly one of the musicians gets up and says “Gentlemen, before we go any further I must tell you that in the second part of the work we have just heard there is some very fine orchestration.”... “What on earth are you babbling about?” retorts another musician. “Your pupil hasn’t kept to the instructions. He’s written two *agitatos* instead of one, and in the middle he’s stuck in a prayer that has no business there. Our regulations can’t simply be disregarded like this. We must make an example of him.”²⁰⁸

This absurd example of the bureaucratic straitjacket is an example of audit culture in operation and the same prescriptive doctrines remain fully functioning today. As Marilyn Strathern noted, in the academic space there is a need to take one-step back from the tumultuous flux of time and to engage in a pursuit that relies on conditions for consideration, analysis, thinking:

In teaching there must be a lapse of time – the process [of learning] is not one of consumption but one of absorption and reformulation. In research, time must be set aside for all the wasteful and dead-end activities that precede the genuine findings. Both require otherwise non-productive periods. Yet there is almost no language in the audit culture in which to talk about productive non-productivity.²⁰⁹

Therefore through this compression of time performativity compresses the freedom and space for a researcher to throw themselves unambiguously into a world which we may not even be aware of. The type of thinking that ushered in the philosophy of Plato, the sun-centred Copernican Theory of the Universe, Cartesian Cogito or the Theory of Universal Gravitation,²¹⁰ is to be replaced by relevance and direct results that can be sold to the government and the people as evidence of university efficiency.²¹¹ We enter into a circular universe where knowledge in this

²⁰⁸ D. Cairns (ed.) *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz* (London, 1969) pp. 117-118

²⁰⁹ A. Giri, ‘Audited Accountability and the Imperative of Responsibility: beyond the primacy of the political’ in Strathern (ed.) *Audit Culture* p. 179

²¹⁰ ‘Blue-Sky Thinking: 10 Ideas that Changed the Course of History’ *The Observer* (22 June 2008) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/jun/22/philosophy.plato> (accessed 29/08/08)

²¹¹ Nowotny succinctly outlines these results: “As a result of these and other trends, the research that is variously described as ‘pure’, ‘blue-skies’, fundamental or disinterested, is now a minority preoccupation – even in universities. In Britain, Research Councils and RAE panels now include ‘user’ representatives alongside more traditional scientific peers. Detailed impact studies and lengthy evaluations have become routine. ‘Knowledge’ is now regarded not as a public good, but rather as ‘intellectual property’, which is produced, accumulated, and traded like other goods and services in the Knowledge Society. In the process, a new language has been invented – a language of application, relevance, contextualisation, reach-out,

environment becomes commodified, and the commodification constitutes the re-conceptualisation of what knowledge is created and how it is produced. No longer does the university constitute a model of intellectual enquiry and of ideas that seek out the 'truth' but, in the idolisation of the present, seeks outcomes and applications that disregard the inherent virtues of disinterestedness. It becomes clear that the Research Assessment Exercise is an exercise in box ticking and self-referential paper trails of policies and procedures rather than a true measure of research quality.

Health



The Culture of Targets

Professor Allyson Pollock, of the International Public Health Policy Centre at the University of Edinburgh, wrote in 2004 that:

Much of the stress and distress felt in hospitals by the late 1990s resulted from the Labour government's attempt to produce a sort of 'great leap

technology transfer, and knowledge management". N. Nowotny, P. Scott, & M. Gibbons, 'Re-Thinking Science: Mode 2 in Social Context', *Minerva* 41 (2003)p. 185

forward' in efficiency through the publication of performance 'league tables' backed by the threat of 'naming and shaming', and the ultimate weapon of sending in what the press liked to call 'hit teams' to take over the management of 'failing' hospitals. Productivity and efficiency were condensed into 'targets' which were used to whip NHS chief executives into making ever-greater efforts to act like businessmen.²¹²

Over the past twenty years the National Health Service within the United Kingdom has undergone a series of radical administrative reforms centred around the introduction of managed market doctrines into a public sector organisation which essentially meant developing systems of incentives for enhanced performance, whilst still allowing centralised control and regulation to ensure that the market didn't fail and that cost-effective service provision was provided.²¹³ This re-alignment of thought was initiated under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. In 1983 the Griffiths Report was published within which Roy Griffiths and his team bemoaned the lack of clear management levels within the health service. The report stated that:

The NHS does not have the profit motive, but it is, of course, enormously concerned with control of expenditure. Surprisingly, however, it still lacks any real continuous evaluation of its performance against criteria such as those set out above. Rarely are precise management objectives set; there is little measurement of health output; clinical evaluation of particular practices is by no means common and economic evaluation of those practices extremely rare. Nor can the NHS display a ready assessment of the effectiveness with which it is meeting the needs and expectations of the people it serves. Businessmen have a keen sense of how well they are looking after their customers. Whether the NHS is meeting the needs of the patient, and the community, and can prove that it is doing so, is open to question.²¹⁴

It also noted that "if Florence Nightingale were carrying her lamp through the corridors of the NHS today she would almost certainly be searching for the people in charge". So began 20 years of reports and white papers that sought to focus upon the consumer and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the health service through the rationality of managerialism, a management revolution according to Klein which saw the implementation of the 'general manager,'²¹⁵ at the core of which was the transparent communication of performance codified in league tables and Michelin-star style allotments designed to control the labour intensive processes of health sector practitioners.²¹⁶

²¹² A.M. Pollock, *NHS Plc: The Privatisation of Our Health Care* (London, 2004) p. 117

²¹³ *Ibid.*,

²¹⁴ Department of Health and Social Security, *The NHS Management Inquiry* (The Griffiths Report), (London, 1983)

²¹⁵ R. Klein, *The New Politics of the National Health Service* (Harlow, 2001)

²¹⁶ Department of Health, *Promoting Better Health* (London, 1987); Department of Health, *Working for Patients* (London, 1989); Department of Health, *New NHS: Modern, Dependable* (London, 1997);

This form of performativity publicises practices and implements procedural issues that structure the day-to-day conduct in the health sector in a manner popularised in the 1930s by the Soviet Union who, during their five-year plan, aimed to increase investment by 228 percent, industrial production by 180 percent, electrical generation by 335 percent, and the industrial labour force by 39 percent.²¹⁷ Results are specified in advance by the setting of central targets which can be measured by outside forces and are reinforced by carrots and sticks and feedback mechanisms. At the centre of this policy in the English system of health provision was the concept of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) where financial allocations were allocated to spending departments from the Treasury. This led to the Star Ratings in which provider institutions such as the hospital were allocated an overall rating, from zero to three stars, through an independent inspectorate (after 2004) based upon success in reaching pre-ordained targets (see page 77 for figures from the Healthcare Commission for the financial year 2004/2005). According to a New Zealand Treasury Paper of 2006, although there were around 40 performance indicators in operation in practice there were 9 key indicators most of which related to waiting times and financial stability. From this there were 3 waiting times targets that were given prominence:

- Percentage of A&E patients seen within 4 hours of attendance (2003-2005 target was 90% and 98% in 2005);
- From 2002 75% of category A ambulance calls were to be responded to within 8 minutes;
- Maximum waiting time for first elective hospital admission of 18 months in 2001, 15 months in 2002, 12 months in 2003, 9 months in 2004, and 6 months in 2005 (3 months for outpatients).²¹⁸

The benefits that could be accrued from a successful institutional reduction in waiting times could be, according to Gwyn Bevan and Christopher Hood:

- reputational (the “shame or glory accruing to managers on the basis of shame or glory.”
- bonuses and renewed tenure for managers

Department of Health, *Making a Difference: Strengthening the Nursing and Midwifery and Health Visiting Contribution to Health and Healthcare* (London, 1999); Department of Health, *The NHS Plan: A Plan for Investment, A Plan for Reform* (London, 2000)

²¹⁷ G.L. Freeze, *Russia: A History* (Oxford, 1997) p. 295

²¹⁸ N. Mays, ‘Use of Targets to Improve Health System Performance: English NHS Experience and Implications for New Zealand’ *New Zealand Treasury Working Paper* (July 2006) available at <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/wp/2006/06-06/twp06-06.pdf> (accessed 15/02/08)

- increased financial applications dependent on measured performance
- earned autonomy to high performers.²¹⁹

It is not the preserve of this thesis to discuss the success of otherwise of these measures, but to discuss the potentiality for the distortion of records creation as a result of them. Performance data, as well as being a measure designed to raise standards in the health service, was unquestionably a political measure designed to open up the health service to a degree of accountability and transparency so as to offer the consumer the fullest element of choice possible. League-tables and star-ratings compressed information into tight easily digestible bundles that the public, and the media, could package and comprehend. However introducing governance measures such as targets rests upon an assumption; if the true aim is indeed to raise health care standards in all areas rather than in those that result in the loss of political capital, then it must be assumed that the data being collected is an adequate and accurate representation of the situation on the ground. There are immediate grounds for suspicion in a culture and environment that privileges the short-term and the ‘quick-win’ and where the manager, as the manager of the health organisation, is directly responsible, with his or her job, when targets are not met. Therefore the act of recording is susceptible to the practice of gaming as a response to preordained and externally imposed targets. In the economist Charles Goodhart’s eponymous law: “Any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed on it for control purposes”.²²⁰ This is a reactive subversion whereby the focussing on one target dilutes the quality in another area.

In 2003 a report by the Audit Commission exposed the subversion of practices as Chief Executives resorted to creative recordkeeping. In their summary of findings they state that:

- There was evidence of deliberate misreporting of waiting list information at three trusts. These have all taken prompt action to investigate and deal with the issues identified, including suspending staff.
- In a further 19 trusts, auditors found evidence of reporting errors in at least one PI. Altogether, they found evidence of reporting errors in 30 percent of PIs.²²¹

According to the report, these practices “arose from system weaknesses caused by inadequate management arrangements for recording data, and ineffective or poorly integrated IT systems”. It

²¹⁹ G. Bevan & C. Hood, ‘What’s Measured is what Matters: Targets and Gaming in the English Public Health Care System’ *Public Administration* 84 (2006) p. 519

²²⁰ C. Goodhart, *Monetary Theory and Practice: The UK Experience* (London, 1984) p. 96

²²¹ Audit Commission, ‘Waiting List Accuracy: Assessing the Accuracy of Waiting List Information in NHS Hospitals in England,’ *Audit Commission* (London, 2003)

Distribution of performance ratings in each sector of the NHS (%)				
	3 Star (last year)	2 Star	1 Star	0 Star
Acute & Specialist	42% (44%)	31% (34%)	22% (17%)	5% (6%)
Ambulance	42% (32%)	19% (35%)	29% (19%)	10% (13%)
PCT	19% (15%)	52% (60%)	27% (21%)	2% (5%)
Mental Health	25% (18%)	54% (46%)	14% (28%)	6% (8%)
Overall	28% (25%)	44% (49%)	24% (21%)	4% (6%)
Net Change	+3%	-5%	+3%	-2%

Actual number of trusts with each performance rating					
	3 Star (last year)	2 Star	1 Star	0 Star	Total
Acute & Specialist	73 (76)	53 (58)	38 (29)	9 (10)	173
Ambulance	13 (10)	6 (11)	9 (6)	3 (4)	31
PCT	58 (45)	157 (181)	81 (63)	7 (14)	303
Mental Health	21 (15)	45 (38)	12 (23)	5 (7)	83
Overall	165 (146)	261 (288)	140 (121)	24 (35)	590
Net Change	+19	-27	+19	-11	

Healthcare Commission, 'Star Rating Show NHS Improving against Tougher Targets' (27 July 2005) available at http://ratings2005.healthcarecommission.org.uk/more_information.asp (accessed 12/07/08)

may be unsurprising that they prescribed functional deficiencies but they do state further on in the report that: “In extreme cases, waiting list information may be deliberately manipulated by hospital staff in order to report a more favourable waiting list position than is really the case”.

This fails to correspond to the deliberate gaming described by Allyson Pollock:

Waiting lists became a political issue, so in some hospitals patients waiting for surgery were asked to let the hospital know in writing when they would be on holiday. The administrators would then remove them from the lists for this period, or even deliberately plan their admission for that period so that when patients phoned to say that they could not come in they would be dropped from the waiting list. Other hospitals created new waiting lists – waiting-to-get-on-the-waiting-list lists. Money was diverted into meeting centrally imposed targets and away from dealing with the problems trusts actually faced.²²²

This is complemented by Michael Barber, the very man who drove the regime of targets from the Delivery Unit: “hospital performance on A&E did not feature in the published hospital star rating, so senior managers often neglected it”.²²³ Perhaps the most insightful report on the distortion of record-keeping practice came in a National Audit Office investigation in 2001 where they found that:

Nine NHS trusts inappropriately adjusted their waiting lists, three of them for some three years or more, affecting nearly 6,000 patient records. For the patients concerned this constituted a major breach of public trust and was inconsistent with the proper conduct of public business... The adjustments varied significantly in their seriousness, ranging from those made by junior staff following established, but incorrect, procedures through to what appears to be deliberate manipulation or misstatement of the figures.²²⁴

In the realm of A&E waiting times, Bevan and Hood document five types of gaming distortions within this record²²⁵:

- A study of the distribution of waiting times in A&E found frequency peaked at the four-hour target.²²⁶

²²² Pollock, *NHS Plc* p. 117

²²³ Barber, *Invention of Delivery* p. 165

²²⁴ National Audit Office, *Inappropriate Adjustments to NHS Waiting Lists* (London, 2001) available at http://www.nao.gov.uk/publications/nao_reports/01-02/0102452.pdf (accessed 17 March 2007)

²²⁵ Bevan and Hood, ‘What’s Measured is what Matters’ p. 531. See also J. Gubb, *Why are we Waiting: An Analysis of Waiting Times in the NHS* available at www.civitas.org.uk/nhs/waitingtimes_Jan_08.pdf (accessed 17 March, 2008)

²²⁶ In 2000 the NHS Plan stated: “By 2004 no one should be waiting more than four hours in Accident and Emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge.” Department of Health, *The NHS Plan. A Plan for Investment. A Plan for Reform.* (London, 2000)

- Surveys by the British Medical Association reported widespread practice of the drafting in of extra staff and the cancelling of operations scheduled for the period over which performance was measured.²²⁷
- A fourth practice was to require patients to wait in queues of ambulances outside A&E Departments until the hospital in question was confident that that patient could be seen within four hours.
- A fifth gaming response was observed to the so-called ‘trolley wait’ target that a patient must be admitted to a hospital bed within 12 hours of emergency admission. The response took the form of turning ‘trolleys’ into ‘beds’ by putting them into hallways.

As Bevan and Hood state in regard to the lack of systematic audit investigations from central government on how certain targets were being met:

That ‘audit hole’ can itself be interpreted by those with a suspicious mind as a product of a ‘Nelson’s eye’ game in which those at the centre of government do not look for evidence of gaming or measurement problems which might call reported performance successes into question.²²⁸

The production of organisational efficiency

The culture of audit is a product of a system that consumes the present, that sanctifies the image, and that lacks space for reflexive action. Rather it colonises discourse and renders administration as the dominant force as human problems and individuality are made anonymous. The game of the day is a mastering of reality with the record a pawn in the wider nexus of the centralised authority, where accountability and audit represent powerful technologies of control, “a collection of systematic tendencies,” that:

...dramatises the extreme case of checking gone wild, of ritualised practices of verification whose technical efficacy is less significant than their role in the production of organisational efficiency.²²⁹

²²⁷ “Two thirds of accident and emergency (A&E) departments in England put in place temporary measures during a recent monitoring week so that they appeared to meet the government’s waiting time target of four hours, a BMA survey has found. Preliminary results from the first 100 A&E consultants from a total of 500 who were sent a questionnaire showed that more than half (56%) had used temporary medical and nursing agency staff to reduce patient waiting times during the monitoring week. One in four consultants (25%) reported that their departments had allowed staff to work double or extended shifts at this time. Nearly one in six (14%) survey respondents said that routine surgery had been cancelled to make extra beds available to admit patients arriving through A&E departments”. S. Mayor, ‘Hospitals take short-term measures to meet targets,’ *British Medical Journal* 326 (2003) p. 1054

²²⁸ Bevan and Hood, ‘What’s Measured is what Matters’ p. 530

²²⁹ Power, *The Audit Society* p. 14

While those within the Delivery Unit at No. 10 Downing Street believed they were decentralising power and democratising the availability of knowledge it could be argued they were simply replacing one set of overlords, the professional experts in each profession, with another – themselves. Yet accountability is no longer the servant to greater openness that it implies, but the tool through which greater ideological control, based upon instrumentality, is being exerted. Instead of making providers accountable to citizens, the new regime made them accountable to ministers and the burgeoning bureaucracy of performance management. Inspection is increasingly concerned with compliance rather than what works, and compliance becomes evidence of success with the record performatively “constituted by the very expressions that are said to be their results”.²³⁰

²³⁰ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion* (London, 1990) p. 25

Section II

Agents of accountability

The previous section concentrated upon the understanding that the power-knowledge relationship is camouflaged by technically instrumental relations of efficiency. In our absolutist grounding in the present our values, our desires, our needs are refracted through the technicist prism which detaches us from the naturalness that stems from being, rather than from an obsession with getting. At the root of this is a fundamental split between an accountability nexus and a responsibility nexus. Today members of the professions believe, through choice or political necessity (in the case of the political class or for professionals because it is forced upon them by the political class) that their core objective is to achieve and pass the test of accountability – no doubt by pledging themselves to, and passing, performance measurement tasks or markers and in so doing achieving a measure of legitimacy in the wider public domain or through a superior financial settlement. There is a sense in this culture that extensively producing an accountable and transparent demeanour can serve to pacify a public that will accept no less, that inquiry can be deterred in this process rather than actively promoted. We have witnessed how this can affect the truth criteria. It should be noted that this is not uniformly the case for centralised authorities who seek to render an account of success and legitimacy through ritualised practices of verification. In 2007 the United States failed to meet 15 of its 18 Congressionally mandated political and military goals in Iraq, according to a Government Accountability Report.²³¹

This has a clear impact upon the creation and the meaning of records, and on the archive.

As Strathern writes:

Audit's rituals of verification complicate the description of what it is that the archive does...Helping/monitoring people to help/monitor themselves demands a kind of reflexivity – people come to see themselves through and beyond the eyes of the auditor.²³²

This reflexivity presents distortions within the record where the meaning is shaped by the enactment of the audit process itself, knowledge becoming objectified where:

It has become reified as a thing which sits outside the circle of its production, abstracted from the identity of the person who knows and beyond the social setting that first gave meaning to that knowledge. This means that knowledge is dependent on abstract systems of knowledge acquisition and teams of intellectually trained collectors.²³³

²³¹ United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, *Securing, Stabilizing and Rebuilding Iraq* (Washington D.C, 2007) available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d071195.pdf> (accessed 27/09/08)

²³² M. Strathern, 'Accountability...and ethnography' in Strathern, *Audit Cultures* p. 283

²³³ Handmer & James, 'Trust Us and Be Scared' p. 124

This feature of audit culture was a focus of Michael Power's work on the audit society where, as he describes:

...[t]he abstract system tends to become the primary external auditable object, rather than the output of the organisation itself, and this adds to the obscurity of the audit as a process that provides assurance about systems elements and little else.²³⁴

This is central to the work of David Bearman who sees the archivist in a steering role, concerned with the locus of records systems:

The author argues that record-keeping systems - rather than fonds, record groups, or record series - should be accepted as the fundamental locus of provenance. Record-keeping systems are preferred to these other concepts because they have concrete boundaries and definable properties, solve the problems identified with the concepts of fonds, record groups, and series in Canadian, American, and Australian archival practices, and give archivists new tools with which to play an active role in the electronic age. In addition, the focus on functional requirements for record-keeping systems allies archivists with auditors, administrative security personnel, freedom of information and privacy officers, lawyers, and senior managers - all of whom have a responsibility for corporate memory and its management. The author argues that this alliance is both strategically critical and intellectually desirable.²³⁵

Bearman believes that by focusing upon outcomes over outputs, by inserting the archivist into the design stage of record-keeping systems, the archivist can work to enhance and secure the archival bond.

The archival bond

The archival bond, historically, is separate from the responsibility inherent in the role of records manager. Under the linkage between inscription and preservation the archival bond is rooted in the interrelationships between records and the context we seek to preserve through archival techniques like provenance and original order. It is:

The relationship that links each record, incrementally, to the previous and subsequent ones and to all those which participate in the same activity. It is originary (i.e., it comes into existence when the record is made or

²³⁴ Power, *The Audit Society* p. 85

²³⁵ D. Bearman, 'Record-Keeping Systems' *Archivaria* 36 (1993) pp. 16-17. He goes on to state that "Record-keeping systems are a special kind of information system about which archivists should be experts. As the name suggests, record-keeping systems keep and support retrieval of records, while information systems store and provide access to information. Record-keeping systems are distinguished from information systems within organizations by the role that they play in providing organizations with evidence of business transactions (by which is meant actions taken in the course of conducting their business, rather than 'commercial' transactions). Non-record information systems, on the other hand, store information in discrete chunks that can be recombined and reused without reference to their documentary context".

received), necessary (i.e., it exists for every record), and determined (i.e., it is characterised by the purpose of the record).²³⁶

It is indeed central that the contextualisation of a record is a continual linking of arms through its whole life cycle – the very moment when a record is entered into a recordkeeping system and conditioned by its determinant position in a records file or supplied with a unique identifier, it thereby takes on an existence outwith the constraints of its internal constitution. As is stated in ISO-15489, the records management standard for the control and capture of records:

Paper-based systems contain metadata about the records that are often implicit and can be deduced by anyone using the records. In paper-based systems, the structure of the record does not need to be specified, as is immediately apparent to the user. The content of the record is defined through a number of complex factors, including the implementation of system controls, but it is also implicit through physical location and placement with other documents.”²³⁷

Therefore the function of a record-keeping system is to ensure that records essential for an institutions on-going administrative, legal, and evidential purposes are created, captured, and available for use. As David Bearman himself recognises in a 1993 article:

While they may also be able to retrieve records for informational purposes, they are designed for operational staff, not for archivists or researchers, and thus are optimised to support the business processes and transactions of the creating organization rather than generic information retrieval.²³⁸

Whilst Bearman sees this as perfunctory for archival intrusion in systems design and the creation of the record this does not, or should not, actually alter in an electronic environment so long as the profession does not descend into a technological determinism that transcends archival principles. In stating this position, an advocate cannot submit to the conceptual blinkers. An information manager today simply does not have what could almost be seen as the independent regulator of the traditional back-and-front office distinction that formalised the roles, the responsibilities, the processes, and the functionality of any efficient record-keeping system and offered a barrier away from the individual records creator to a comprehensive system of creation and capture.²³⁹ However as the work of Duranti, MacNeil, and Eastwood insists, the legal conceptualisation and terminology surrounding evidence is still premised upon the

²³⁶ The InterPARES Glossary available at http://www.interpares.org/book/interpares_book_q_gloss.pdf (accessed 12/03/08)

²³⁷ International Standards Organization, ISO 15489-2. Information and documentation — Records management — Part 2: Guidelines (Geneva, 2001)

²³⁸ Bearman, ‘Record-keeping systems’ p. 17

²³⁹ B. Reed, ‘Records,’ in McKemmish *et al.*, *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* pp. 101-130; B. Craig, ‘Rethinking Formal Knowledge and its Practices in the Organisation: The British Treasury’s Register between 1900 and 1950,’ *Archival Science* 2 (2002) pp. 111-136

trustworthiness of the record – the reliability, identity, and integrity of the documentary base.²⁴⁰ The InterPARES Authenticity Task Force drew an explicit connection between diplomatics and the electronic environment:

Viewed from the perspective of contemporary archival diplomatics, an electronic record, like its traditional counterpart, is a complex of elements and their relationships. It possesses a number of identifiable characteristics, including a fixed documentary form, a stable content, an archival bond with other records either inside or outside the system, and an identifiable context. It participates in or supports an action, either procedurally or as part of the decision-making process (meaning its creation may be mandatory or discretionary), and at least three persons (author, writer, and addresses) are involved in its creation (although these three conceptual persons may in fact be only one physical or juridical person).²⁴¹

The means through which we achieve such trustworthiness of our records base is the matter of considerable debate in archival literature. Under the continuum approach the role of the archivist becomes that of steering, where the delineating points between records managers and archivists evaporate. The underlying ideology behind this is exemplified by archivist Dan Zelenyj and it is worthwhile including the whole quote as it rare to find, from my perspective, such a succinct example of complete misguidedness:

In this most recent manifestation of recorded information, where records and data exist only in ‘virtual’ format, it becomes increasingly evident that archivists must concern themselves more with the analysis and management of functions and processes than with physical records. This necessitates an interventionist approach wherein the archivist acts as a record-keeping system creator and/or auditor in order to ensure the integrity of electronic records from systems design stages onward. Such an approach fits very well with the archival practitioner’s classic concern with

²⁴⁰ Duranti *et al.*, *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records* and MacNeil *et al.*, *Authenticity Task Force Final Report*

²⁴¹ MacNeil *et al.*, *Authenticity Task Force Final Report*. To take one example of these, documentary form, the Task Force writes that: “*Documentary form* is defined as the rules of representation according to which the content of a record, its immediate administrative and documentary context, and its authority are communicated. It possess both intrinsic and extrinsic elements.

Intrinsic elements are the discursive parts of the record that communicate the action in which the record participates and the immediate context. They fall into three groups: (1) elements that convey aspects of the record’s juridical and administrative context (e.g., the name of the author, addressee, the date); (2) elements that communicate the action itself (e.g., the indication and description of the action or matter); (3) elements that convey aspects of the record’s documentary context and its means of validation (e.g., the name of the writer, the attestation, the corroboration).

Extrinsic elements refer to specific, perceivable features of the record that are instrumental in communicating and achieving the purpose for which it was created. For electronic records these include: overall presentation features (e.g., textual, graphic, image, sound, or some combination of these); specific presentation features (e.g., special layouts, hyperlinks, colours, sample rate of sound files); electronic signatures and electronic seals (e.g., digital signatures); digital time stamps; other special signs (e.g., digital watermarks, an organisation’s crest or personal logo)”.

context, but more significantly, underscores a forgotten truth inherent in the archives profession's traditional core ideas about the nature of records: from a functional perspective, archival records, and archival activities, encompass the totality of the records continuum from creation onward. Thus, examination of the nature of records in general, and electronic records specifically, demonstrates that the line separating records management and archival functions (concepts which are themselves already ambiguous) is practically invisible. This highlights the artificiality of the original split between archivists and records managers. In a nutshell, archival functions and records management functions are one and the same.²⁴²

In this understanding the truncation of record-making from record-keeping and the distinction between current and non-current records removes the archivist from an influential relationship, a mutually dependent partnership coinciding with the ongoing operations of creating offices and the alluring scent of organisational and managerial efficiency. The eroticism of power and influence can never be ascertained without the confirmation of others and rather than having an orientation towards economy and efficiency in the present we are caretakers of 'old stuff,' the material no longer required for the regular rolling of the wheels of business functions. For some this is a derisory life and existence:

The out-of-sight-out-of-mind isolation of repositories diminished managers' use of the archives and, correspondingly, their understanding of the value of them as essential corporate resources. This downward spiral has been termed the 'Cycle of Impoverishment', a vortex wherein marginalisation results in fewer resources, undermines morale and degrades services. Often archival programs are lumped together with cash-strapped museums, historical societies, libraries and galleries as not-for-profit 'culture and heritage' bodies competing for decreasing public and philanthropic dollars. In worst-case scenarios, such archival operations may mirror the stereotype of an irrelevant 'boneyard of information' and be closed down.²⁴³

One can smell the whiff of disappointment in Pederson's words, the wilderness of the dusty, claustrophobic archival stacks. This mirrors David Gracy's lament that 'non-current' as a term for archival records equates to *unimportant*.²⁴⁴ Such a perennial sense of inadequacy has been intensified in the twenty-first century with the feeling that what the archivist does is antiquated,

²⁴² D. Zelenjy, 'Archivy *Ad Portas*: The Archives-Records Management Paradigm Re-visited in the Electronic Information Age' *Archivaria* 47 (1998) pp. 66-67 Ian MacLean wrote that "To the question – What should be the relation between the archivists and records managers? – it seems to me they are or should be the same people." I. Maclean, 'Australian Experience in Records and Archives Management', *American Archivist* 22 (1959) p. 417

²⁴³ A.E. Pederson, 'Professing Archives: A Very Human Enterprise' in S. McKemmish *et al.*, *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* pp. 58-59

²⁴⁴ D. Gracy, 'Archivists, You Are What People Think You Keep,' *American Archivist* 52 (1989) pp. 72-78

out-of-step with the vibrant all-consuming present. Therefore the archival profession, so the argument goes, must cast aside the painfully insignificant mask of irrelevance and proudly proclaim our intrinsic importance. We must become a master of all trades, the auditor and the information technician, by removing our professional eye from the world of paper and records to the expansive information society. We must become part of day-to-day administration. We must become an avid player in the political process of policy-making. We must become an active gatekeeper involved in the processes and routines of electronic systems, the deployment of metadata and the system functionality involved in continually rendering a record in a way that maintains its essential characteristics, its 'recordness.'

The active production of objectively truthful documents

This argument that is presented is a deceptive one – it couches the archivist in the language of the neutral, third-party expert, the outsider upon whose shoulders the future of accessible, readable, contextual records and their preservation depends. It appears so natural as a result of the challenges faced from the electronic environment. In actuality, the archivist and the archive is involving itself in a panoptic performativity that reduces the process of records creation to a box-ticking exercise, in processes that create the records that the archivist wishes to see or that authorises the archivist to see an auditee role for itself that would ensure accountable practice is carried out by others. Here we can analyse two examples of where this applies in practice.

(1) In the archival environment this is most visibly perceived through the question of metadata, usually defined as data about data but better represented by Adrian Cunningham's definition of "structured information that describes and/or allows us to find, manage, control, understand or preserve other information over time."²⁴⁵ Metadata is an insurance policy against malpractice or mistreatment of the record – it ensures its trustworthy status as an accurate and complete representation of the past. Metadata, as a tool for trustworthy and evidential records, is a core component of the creation, management, and preservation of all records – file titles and dates, for example, are perennial features. However ISO-15489 has set out the separation between the paper and electronic environments when it comes to metadata:

The extent of the metadata attributed to electronic records is greater than that required for paper records, as there is very little that can be implied in electronic systems and all the metadata implicit in paper-based records are made explicit.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ A. Cunningham, 'Six degrees of separation: Australian metadata initiatives and their relationship with international standards,' *Archival Science* 1 (2001) p. 274

²⁴⁶ International Standards Organisation ISO15489-2 Clause 4.1

The records in the electronic environment have three core components that, whilst the same as for paper records, have distinctive features: those of content – the information it presents or contains; the medium and the structure; and the context which relates to the business operation from which it is a result. These are slightly different in digital media because firstly they can move across space and time, and secondly an electronic record does not actually exist bodily – it is a sequence of 0s and 1s. However, arguably, the underlying principles and processes should be the same. The business operation to which the records relate should drive the way e-records are created and managed. In the continuum environment this is far from the case with the emergent influence of the archivist in the midst of organisational records creation. For example in a 2005 paper Sue McKemmish, Joanne Evans, and Karuna Bhoday outlined the type of archival world that may be applicable across the board in a number of years. They state that it is possible to re-imagine archival systems of the future that:

- Manage the records of multiple groups and individuals beyond the boundaries of the personal or corporate archive;
- Represent multidimensional contexts of creation, capture, organisation, and pluralisation - juridical, organisational, functional, procedural, technological, and recordkeeping;
- Provide multiple views of parallel recordkeeping universes;
- Continuously and cumulatively weave relationships between records and related people, organisational structures, functions, and activities to assist in preserving their evidential value and enable multiple access paths to records and their meanings;
- Keep records relating to all recordkeeping and archiving processes persistently linked to the records they form and transform. Such archival systems would have great potential utility in relation to the preservation and accessibility of electronic records of continuing value, as well as to the management of current records. The locus of the archives system might exist as an interface to archival records held by an archival institution, but it might also link to all records, publicly available or not, of continuing value or not (of continuing value), still maintained in the recordkeeping systems of individual agencies. In this sense, the collective archives could be preserved and made accessible in virtual space. Custodial arrangements

and issues of where the record is physically located would cease to be of prime importance.²⁴⁷

This vision is utopian at best, manifestly unrealistic at worst as it completely fails to take into consideration the potential opposition that would come from record creators and stakeholders towards an archival system that exists as an interface to “all records, publicly available or not, of continuing value or not (of continuing value), still maintained in the recordkeeping systems of individual agencies.”

Further it is a radical subversion of traditional archival outlook. Crucially a core and essential component to these extravagant new systems of archival design would be:

...emerging metadata management frameworks and schemas that specify the types of standardised information or metadata that integrated archiving and recordkeeping processes operating within broad archival frameworks would need to capture in order to fulfil these multiple purposes.²⁴⁸

They proceed to write that:

Metadata schemas provide semantic and structural definitions of metadata, including the names of metadata elements, how they are structured, and their meaning. Archival descriptive standards and control system specifications can be envisaged as traditional forms of recordkeeping metadata schema.²⁴⁹

One could spend an eternity digressing and drawing out the numerous facets that are mistaken in the plans of the continuum theorists as documented here. Whilst, admittedly, this did occur before in the United Kingdom where file titles were subsumed into the catalogue the key issue in continuum thinking is the permeable boundaries between the records manager and the archivist and the subsequent intrusion of archival elements, such as description, in the make-up of a metadata schema:

The manual descriptive processes of current archival control systems tend to be limited to documenting and privileging the role of the records creator. With automated metadata capture, there is the potential for digital records to come under the control of institutional archives with a richer metadata record incorporating metadata about other parties involved in the transactions the records document in electronic form. The availability of this metadata, along with networking technologies, paves the way for records to be more easily linked to and described in alternative contexts. Scenarios of metadata re-use in such an environment would see the archival control system having search interfaces to exploit the detail of the metadata record in order for records of relevance to be discovered, as well

²⁴⁷ J. Evans, S. McKemmish & K. Bhoday, ‘Create Once, Use Many Times: The Clever Use of Recordkeeping Metadata for Multiple Archival Purposes’ *Archival Science* 5 (2005) pp. 17-18

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20

as mechanisms to allow for the harvesting of metadata for (re-)use in other gateways. Within these gateways harvested metadata relating to the records and their documented contexts could then be augmented with globalised views.²⁵⁰

The globalised views advocated in continuum-oriented discourse is an outlook where-by the archivist clearly inserts his/her world-vision into the contextualisation of the record:

...if we used such counter-functional analysis or global, through-time frameworks as the basis of appraisal decisions, and assignment of descriptors in archival systems, how differently might we appraise and describe the records of what in one context might appear to be fairly routine records relating to the implementation of a responsible and accountable immigration policy, but in another might be seen as evidence of abuse of human rights.²⁵¹

Inserting such an overt ideological position as human rights abuses into the framework of an immigration policy is a clear contravention of accepted archival practice and takes the archive into a culture of interpretation that Jenkinson warned against.

The problem here is a duality, a paradox that we have previously witnessed in the audit culture. On the one hand we want truthfulness, on the other we no longer believe in truth and so rhetoric and contextual control flourishes. Only in this instance it is the archivist who seeks to position themselves as the masters of reality. We are in the business of ensuring that authentic and reliable records are made, of setting up the process, procedures and conditions for the “active production of objectively truthful documents”.²⁵² This is a phrase that could summarise the record-keeping element of an audit culture. This is precisely the outlook behind the culture of targets and measurement – the active production of objectively truthful documents. This is evident in metadata for archival description where certain sectors of the archival profession believe it should act as experts and ensure that certain metadata elements are in-built to the electronic record-keeping system that would facilitate the technique of archival description. As Margaret Hedstrom writes:

Automated systems can capture not only information about the creator of the record and its content, but also a complete history of its creation and use. Given both technical and resource limitations, archivists must determine what we want systems to document and how much descriptive data is enough... as descriptive practices shift from creating descriptive information to capturing description along with the records, archivists may

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21

²⁵¹ M. Piggott & S. McKemmish, ‘Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Political Reality’ available at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/piggottmckemmish2002.pdf> (accessed 7 December 2006)

²⁵² B. Brothman, ‘Afterglow: Conceptions of Record and Evidence in Archival Discourse’ *Archival Science* (2002) p. 332

discover that managing the metadata is a much greater challenge than managing the records themselves.²⁵³

In traditional archival parlance the records that the archive seeks to preserve at the end of their active life-cycle are those that are free of the contaminating witness, those not designed for posterity, those that carry information and evidence about business operations, those that are an accurate reflection of the creator and of the context of their own administrative organisation/institution and use. By contrast when the conditions of the context of their creation are manipulated by unwarranted interference so that the creative act is restricted as to evidence only the straitjacket that made the record possible, it becomes conceptually impossible to see the materials which originated to reflect the world that exists out there because that world has been performatively shaped *by the archivist* – this is different from being performatively shaped by, say, government in the audit culture as, providing something can be deduced about its use, this can be analysed as an example of such conduct of affairs, *embedded* in the complexities of organisational life. Heather MacNeil, in her concern for evidence and the legal understanding of the record, has raised such concerns. She claims that adding what she believes to be ‘artificial’ metadata, i.e. that which is superfluous to the needs of the creator, violates the future conduct of the records creator and so impinges upon the evidential value of the record that is created:

Viewing metadata systems as tools for achieving archival purposes, rather than as tools for achieving the creator’s purposes is dangerous because it encourages us to, in effect, privilege potential secondary use of metadata over their actual primary use: in so doing, we could reshape such use for purposes other than the conduct of affairs of which they are part.²⁵⁴

As the previous quotation about human rights exposed, secondary use and overt distortion is at the conceptual forefront of such issues and inserts self-consciousness into the act of records creation. If the impartiality of metadata is compromised then the premise behind the preservation of evidence is defeated. As Hayek wrote:

There can be no greater impediment to the progress of science than a perpetual and anxious reference at every step to palpable utility. Assured that the general results will be beneficial, it is not wise to be too solicitous as to the immediate value of every individual effort. Besides there is a certain completeness to be attained in every science, for which we are obliged to acquire many particulars not otherwise of any worth. Nor is it to be forgotten, that trivial and apparently useless acquisitions are often the necessary preparatives to important discoveries.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ M. Hedstrom, “Descriptive Practices for Electronic Records: Deciding What is Essential and Imagining What is Possible”, *Archivaria* 36 (1993) p. 59

²⁵⁴ H. MacNeil, “Metadata Strategies and Archival Description: Comparing Apples and Oranges”, *Archivaria*, 39 (1995) p. 27

²⁵⁵ F. Hayek., *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (London, 1988) p. 41

(2) The prevailing news of the last few years in Britain has been of a culture of either record-keeping confusion or of ingrained malevolent practice, a coven of secret meetings, hushed telephone calls, and records deletion that fails to concern itself with the creation of a paper trail. This was exposed in Britain by the Hutton Inquiry which provided a “unique and disturbing insight into the processes and working methods of the government of Tony Blair”.²⁵⁶ When questioned during Lord Hutton’s Inquiry into the death of David Kelly, the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, made this extraordinary and disturbing statement about minutes of meetings:

Yes, I thought I might be asked that question because it may seem odd to people from outside, so I looked through the diary for the two weeks of the period we are talking about and the usual pattern is about three written records for 17 meetings a day is sort of the average you get to because there is no purpose served by minutes unless they are either recording people visiting from outside, the president of Nigeria, or something like that, or if they are action points that need to be taken forward, something on school funding for example.²⁵⁷

Powell went on to admit that e-mails “that people sent to each other after meetings” were effectively the only record. Michael Moss documents other abuses of power:

Although Powell was able to produce relevant e-mails, he was forced to confess that no one was responsible for logging (registering) transactions so that, as Butler discovered, members of the Cabinet and senior Civil Servants had no means of knowing if they had taken place....At face value there can be little confidence that these, often highly revealing, e-mails would ever have been filed. This is not to say files do not exist, they must, but critical documents will be missing, as Butler observed, and since they were not logged or minuted in the first place there will be no way of knowing if they ever existed, unless the internal evidence of other documents suggests as much.²⁵⁸

The danger of e-mails have been highlighted by the Jo Moore and Martin Sixsmith ‘burying bad news’ e-mail on September 11 and by New York attorney-general, Eliot Spitzer, who discovered abuses on Wall Street by showing that Henry Blodget of Merrill Lynch had described a company,

²⁵⁶ M. Moss, ‘The Hutton Inquiry, the President of Nigeria and What the Butler Hoped to See’ *English Historical Review* 120 (2005) p. 577

²⁵⁷ Hutton Inquiry web site, ‘Hearing Transcripts,’ (18 August 2003), morning, para. 95

²⁵⁸ M. Moss, ‘The Hutton Inquiry’ pp. 579-580. There is a wealth of sources illustrating recordkeeping abuses. See T. Blanton, *White House E-Mail: The Top Secret Computer Messages the Reagan/Bush White House Tried to Destroy* (New York, 1995); Cox & Wallace, *Archives and the Public Good*; Lynch, ‘Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails’

that the investment bank had publicly recommended, as a ‘piece of shit’. This led the *Financial Times* to advocate the benefits of paper which can “be burnt”.²⁵⁹

The mindset of the archivist as ‘auditor’, in the classical meaning of the word, is to confront these malpractices and to insert the activist archivist directly into the centre of this discourse in a classic enactment of the archive forwarding the accountable signs of truthfulness over the allocation of breathing space for the record to emerge and free-thinking to flourish. This is exemplified in this statement by Chandler in regard to the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation collection, the public availability of which generated debate about corporate accountability and kicked off tobacco litigation:

...the release of the documents has fostered debate among archivists about the future of corporate archives and the preservation of business records, the provenance of research copies in faculty files, archivists accountability to their profession and their institutions, and the tension between the archival profession’s avoidance of political advocacy and the profession’s responsibility to promote the public’s right to know.²⁶⁰

For example, almost in unison the archival community saw as its duty to its customers that it should raise its voice and exclaim the merits of Freedom of Information. Professor Zinn of the United States would have archivists “take a stand for the opening up of all public records everywhere, at once, to anyone who wanted to see them for any purpose”. Archivists, who settle for anything less, he charges, are willing “instruments of social control in an essentially undemocratic society...”²⁶¹ We see the same rationale behind Verne Harris’s ‘capitalistico-techno-mediatic hegemony’ which almost seems mired in left-wing paranoia. Yet this act of potential transparency is not as clear-cut as it might appear. To take one example, in 2008 it became clear that for the first time we would be able to see who said what around the Cabinet table in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The decision followed a request under the Freedom of Information Act for a copy of Cabinet minutes and records relating to two meetings held between 7th-17th March 2003 where the Attorney General’s legal advice was considered.²⁶² The Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, said that the discussions must be made public because of their gravity and controversial nature and in his decision to release he specifically linked publication to transparency, decision-making, and showing public participation in

²⁵⁹ ‘Haunted by e-mail’ *Financial Times* (24 January 2004) p. 10

²⁶⁰ R.L. Chandler, ‘Lighting up the Internet’ in Cox & Wallace (ed.,) *Archives and the Public Good* p. 135

²⁶¹ H. Zinn, ‘Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest,’ *Boston University Journal* 19 (1971) p. 44

²⁶² *Information Commissioner Office*, ‘Information Commissioner Orders Release of Cabinet minutes relating to invasion of Iraq’ (26/02/08) available at http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/pressreleases/2008/cabinet_minutes_dn_260208.pdf (accessed 27/02/08)

government action. Never before have documents of this nature been released early enough for some members of the Cabinet to still be in office in the current Cabinet. This has lead Lord Heseltine, the former Deputy Prime Minister, to state that:

The consequences in my view would be bad and much better avoided. The first thing is that people will tailor what they say to the record that could be published in the near future. There are all sorts of interests which affect people in these matters which might be taken into account and I think what will happen is that you will get many more meetings taking place in private without records and probably without civil servants and deals stitched up before the Cabinet met and to an extent that happens anyway but I think it would accelerate and that would be a bad thing...by-passing the record that would be made in Cabinet discussion.²⁶³

The collective decision-making underlying collective political responsibility is the hallmark of British Cabinet government. It obviously requires consultation and it obviously requires privacy for the process if differences between ministers are not to become known too soon, thereby destroying the collective responsibility that is fundamental. In other words, consultations between ministers, both in Cabinet and outside, must have privacy. Such an opinion was backed by British civil servant Sir Richard Mottram.²⁶⁴ In February 2009 Jack Straw, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, vetoed the publication of the minutes by utilising a clause in the Freedom of Information Act.²⁶⁵

Hence as James Currall and Michael Moss have suggested, FOI is not a natural, unquestionable benefit in archival terms:

Freedom of Information legislation and the advancing audit and compliance culture, enabled by Information and Communication Technologies, is making information created as a by-product of internal process, much more discoverable globally.²⁶⁶

In this environment any institution or organisation worthy of the name will no doubt feel that exposure to risk must be constrained, which may result in enforced destruction and heightened secrecy to contain contingent liability. Freedom of Information regulations can only be as effective as powerful – and semi-powerful – people want them to be, and all too often the desire is to make them as weak as possible. Certainly one must be sceptical when the body that brought about its implementation (Parliament) begin proceedings to considerably dilute its terms and accessibility and when there is a steady stream of stories that suggest means by which the

²⁶³ Today Programme, *Radio 4* (27/02/08) 7.50-7.57 am

²⁶⁴ World at One, *Radio 4* (27/02/08) 1-1.30pm

²⁶⁵ 'Straw vetoes Iraq minutes release' *BBC* (25 February 2009)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7907991.stm (accessed 28/04/09)

²⁶⁶ M. Moss & J. Currall, 'We are archivists, but are we ok,' *Records Management Journal* 18 (2008) pp. 69-91

executive is attempting to subvert it.²⁶⁷ David Lowenthal, professor emeritus at the Department of Geography, University College London, has summarised this very point:

FOIA specifies so many exemptions – as of May 2005 only eight of nearly five hundred prior publications on releasing information to the public had been repealed – that they serve as an excuse for not providing much of anything. And the FOIA is so costly to invoke that some predict “the endemic culture of secrecy will become yet more entrenched” and it could become costlier yet as new proposals have been set forth to include the worker costs of time spent. To evade disclosure, mountains of old records hastily trawled through are destroyed in case someone might ask to see them; future “officials will simply avoid putting things in writing.”²⁶⁸

Paul Kelly, a member of the Mike Harris government in Ontario (Canada’s most populated province) from 1995 to 2002, writes that:

Having worked in the Harris government for its entire reign for two cabinet ministers through four different ministries – with access to four cabinet committees as a Senior Policy Advisor – I can assure you that I was the very model of FOI efficiency.

I kept no records. If you had come to my office – which was about 18’ by 24’ – you would have wondered if anyone worked there at all.

...There were no stacks of paper on top of the desk and there were no briefing notes or binders. It was empty. It was legendary in fact.

As someone with an extensive background in politics, I subscribed to the G. Gordon Liddy M.O. – be prepared to be shot on a street corner at any time. Carry all your information in your head, that way no one can get at it.²⁶⁹

FOI will not be of much use in record-keeping conditions such as these where secrecy is the key and records simply do not exist.²⁷⁰ However an archival discourse that seeks to be assertive is less

²⁶⁷ In the United Kingdom this was visible in 2007 with government desire to water-down the legislation, citing cost as the motivation. In 2008 there was been a concerted attempt by the government to deny access to MPs expenses which eventually failed and they were released in the summer of 2009.

²⁶⁸ D. Lowenthal, ‘Archival perils: A Historian’s Plaint’ *Archives*, XXXI (2006), p. 55

²⁶⁹ P. Kelly, ‘Information is Power’ *Open Government: A Journal on Freedom of Information* 2 (2006)

²⁷⁰ There are further examples of legislation and regulation causing reactions intrinsically opposed to those intended. One effect of the Sarbanes-Oxley act is the forcing of companies to waive the privilege that normally protects communication with lawyers – including those between whistle-blowers and in-house lawyers. The crux of the problem is a 2003 policy (known as the “Thompson memorandum”) which sets forth nine factors for prosecutors to consider when deciding whether to indict a company. These are partly based on the company’s co-operation with the government and willingness to disclose wrongdoing. In many regards the best way to prove co-operation is to waive attorney-client privilege, and give the government all the information it needs to make its case. Companies have little choice but to turn over the information: an indictment is tantamount to a death sentence. Who would choose to retain the smoking gun in such conditions? Edwin Meese III quotes Judge Lewis Kaplan, of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, who delivered the rulings in *United States v. Stein et al.*, a case that concerned the Justice Department’s investigation into the tax shelter abuses of KPMG. Kaplan addressed the American Constitution itself by suggesting that the Thompson memorandum violated the Fifth and Sixth Amendments: “Those who commit crimes – regardless of whether they wear white or blue collars –

concerned about the record than with being the director of events.

The malevolent and subversive gatekeeper

The issue of archival independence is arguably the most crucial preserve of the archival profession. It defines us and it defines the assurance that the user has that they can investigate a record that will be trustworthy when it crosses the archival threshold. The guarantee of independence and authenticity is a privileged resource in a world consumed with government, 24-7 media, and authorities which they can no longer trust. It is our most valuable attribute and we should heed lessons that can be learnt elsewhere before we rush headlong into a mission for overt influence that can lead to insidious pressures being put upon us as a profession. In the private sector the issue of auditor independence has become a key issue. In 1976 the Metcalf Commission reported that there was an alarming lack of independence within, and public protection for, the audit profession. This led to extraneous pressures whereby “accounting firms have often cut costs to the point where the integrity of the audit is impaired”. This was summarised by the chair:

The system begins with the corporate managers and directors, whose actions are to be audited, going out and choosing the auditor. They hire the independent audit firm, determine the fees to be paid and have the power to fire the auditor for any reason. The independent audit firm often provides tax and management consulting services to the same corporation it audits. Can we really expect an audit firm to remain independent when its audit fees, and perhaps substantial consulting fees, are directly related to pleasing the corporate managers being audited?²⁷¹

There are analogies that can be derived from the private sector. For example, even though the auditor is employed by the institution/corporation, its responsibility should always be to the shareholders and investors. In *United States v. Arthur Young & Co.*, the accountants, a unanimous Court found that:

By certifying the public reports that collectively depict a corporation’s financial status, the independent auditor assumes a public responsibility transcending any employment relationship with the client. The independent public accountant performing this special function owes ultimate allegiance to the corporation’s creditors and stockholders, as well as to the investing public. This ‘public watchdog’ function demands that the accountant maintain total independence from the client at all times and

must be brought to justice. The government, however, has let its zeal get in the way of its judgment. It has violated the Constitution it is sworn to defend”. E. Meese III, ‘The Thompson Memorandum’s Effect on the Right to Counsel in Corporate Investigations’. See also Memorandum from Larry D. Thompson, Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice, to Heads of Department Components and United States Attorneys (January 20, 2003) available at http://www.usdoj.gov.dag.cftf/business_organizations.pdf (accessed 12/09/08)

²⁷¹ M. Shear & S. Turley, *Current Issues in Auditing* (London, 1997) pp. 19-20

requires complete fidelity to the public trust.²⁷²

As a normative description of best practice this is an evocative portrait of professional propriety. However, as an empirical statement it completely disregards the realities on the ground and the pressures that lead us to question whether one can ever really trust an auditor that is there to call its paymasters to account. The example of Arthur Andersen is grist to the mill. There were allegations that Enron had falsified records, resulting in reporting healthier balance sheets than were justified²⁷³ and that Arthur Andersen had provided dubious retention schedules that would cover the matter up, premised upon an e-mail from Nancy Temple (an in-house lawyer for Andersen) to Houston practice director (Michael Odom) stating that:

It might be useful to consider reminding the engagement team of our documentation and retention policy. It will be helpful to make sure that we have complied with the policy.²⁷⁴

At Andersen, the documentation policy called for destroying many audit-related records once they were no longer needed; this meant disposing of drafts, personal notes, and other papers not necessary to support the audit report, leaving behind just the paperwork that supported the accounting judgements ultimately reached. Andersen employees working out of Enron's headquarters began shredding papers and deleting computer files. Andersen was indicted and in 2002 was found guilty of obstruction of justice and charged with criminal intent when it allowed many of Enron's accounting papers to be destroyed. As John C. Coffee, of the Columbia Law School, states Andersen, which in the 1960s was identified as the very paragon of professional virtue:

...subsequently closed its doors less because of its criminal conviction than because it had come to have 'negative' reputational capital. Its clients shed it to avoid that taint, and even the subsequent reversal of its conviction could not restore its once illustrious brand name.²⁷⁵

The simple question that has to be posed is why would the archival community see this discourse of power relations, into which the gatekeeper has to be a participant, as its domain? Why, in Acland's words, would it be alright to posit itself in the undesirably conflicting position

²⁷² Quoted in J.C. Coffee, *Gatekeepers: The Professions and Corporate Governance* (Oxford, 2006) p. 4

²⁷³ "Misleading reporting of financial outcomes has been at the centre of the numerous inquiries into and prosecutions for corporate wrongdoing. Inappropriate disclosures have been noted. Earnings management practice were alleged to have facilitated companies like Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Vivendi, Waste Management, Sunbeam, Disney and the like in the US to meet analysts' quarterly earnings predictions, to have underpinned many of the analysts' questionable 'buy' recommendations uncovered by Attorney-General Eliot Spitzer, and to have assisted the alleged tactics of some, like the US analyst guru, Jack Grubman, to push up WorldCom's share price". Clarke & Dean, *Gilding the Corporate Lily* p. 11

²⁷⁴ L. Fox, *Enron: The Rise and Fall* (New Jersey, 2003) p. 271

²⁷⁵ Coffee, *Gatekeepers* pp. 3-4

of, let's say, government behaviour? It is visible that there have been attempts to undermine those traditional institutions that act as guarantors of accountability, that provide the traditional routes through which to ascertain legal recourse or best practice. For example, in 2006 Prime Minister Blair gave a speech in which he attacked what he perceived as the expectations gap between the criminal justice system and the public's expectation of it (note here the implicit consumer, 'there is a risk and we'll take care of it' aspect to such a statement).²⁷⁶ Conceptually lying underneath Blair's thinking is a belief that the rules of the game have changed in a 24-7, terrorist threatened environment where constant attention and changing circumstance necessitate a rule by executive fiat thereby undermining the traditional separation of executive and judicial powers. This has led Peter Osborne to describe the government's anger towards the judiciary as being "some of the most bitter and ferocious attacks by the executive upon the judiciary since the battles of the 1620s which established the modern basis of English common law".²⁷⁷ Osborne states that in 1997 the constitutional historian Rodney Brazier could only cite one previous example of a government minister attacking the judiciary outside of the Houses of Parliament and that was a minor incident regarding Michael Foot when he was Lord President of the Council. This reflected a tacit understanding that the independence of the judiciary was to be respected and was a critical implement in the British conceptualisation of democracy and confidence in the criminal justice system. After 1997 ministers blatantly disregarded such principles. This is, perhaps, most evident when Dr John Reid, then Home Secretary, accused the judiciary in 2006 of hampering the 'life and death' battle of terrorism (which apparently is from 'fascist individuals', according to Reid).²⁷⁸ More specifically Reid accused the judiciary of caring more for the rights of terrorists rather than public safety, prompted by a case a week earlier where the Court of Appeal had said that control orders which were used to monitor the movements of six terrorist suspects violated their human rights. In principle one may say that Reid is right and yet it was a government, which he was a part, that implemented into law the very Human Rights Act that obligated the judiciary to reach this decision.

Were this a one-off example of government seeking to extend its ability to control reality then it may be appropriate to disregard it as a symbol of New Labour practice. This, of course, is far from the case as we have already seen in the discourse surrounding context control and, specifically, in the audit culture with the National Health Service and the Research Assessment

²⁷⁶ 'Blair Attacks the Justice Gap,' *BBC* (23 June, 2006) available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5108158.stm (accessed 2/07/08)

²⁷⁷ Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class* pp. 176-7

²⁷⁸ 'Reid Attacks Judges who Hamper 'Life and Death' Terrorism Battle' *Independent* (10 August, 2006) available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/reid-attacks-judges-who-hamper-life-and-death-terrorism-battle-411252.html> (accessed 1/06/08)

Exercise. For example, in terms of general principles there is an intimate connection between the civil service of the United Kingdom government and the archival community. The civil service in its traditional manifestation is a profession that is envisaged as neutral guarantors of due process, independent of political concerns or beliefs. Indeed the 2006 Civil Service Code states:

As a civil servant, you are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition and are expected to carry out your role with dedication and a commitment to the Civil Service and its core values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. In this Code:

- ‘integrity’ is putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests;
- ‘honesty’ is being truthful and open;
- ‘objectivity’ is basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence; and
- ‘impartiality’ is acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well Governments of different political persuasions.²⁷⁹

There is, of course, an irony that this specific version of the Code was introduced by a government that has initiated the demise of cabinet government and conducted subversive record-keeping practices – both of which are at the heart of traditional government and civil service conduct. In addition New Labour made a concerted attack on the very integrity and independence of the civil service. Michael Barber detailed the thinking behind processes he was heavily complicit in:

While the civil service was not party political, it was heavily influenced by the various lobby groups who competed for influence in the department, which thus tended to see issues from the producer angle. This in turn led to a tendency to see problems rather than opportunities, and to favour incrementalism rather than discontinuous change.²⁸⁰

This has led to a situation described by Osborne whereby:

Cabinet Secretaries have seen their role reduced to assistants and even at times apologists for the Political Class. Again and again they have been pressured into carrying out furtive political favours for the Prime Minister of the day, causing an enormous long-term loss of authority.²⁸¹

In principle the archival community should be uniquely sensitive to the dangers surrounding conflicts of interest and the subversion of the record that can ensue from such power relations. Yet the continuum model shows no sign of self-restraint as the literature has encouraged archivists to become internal consultants delivering advice to their paymasters, believing that a metamorphosis of their profession should be in progress that would transform

²⁷⁹ ‘Civil Service Code’ available at http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/Assets/cs_code_tcm6-2444.pdf (accessed 12/08/09)

²⁸⁰ Barber, *The Invention of Delivery* p. 33

²⁸¹ Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class* p. 114

them from keepers of dead records into information service professionals. There is a further warning from the post mortem report by the WorldCom committee of independent directors who reached a conclusion that “Andersen’s audit approach...limited the likelihood it would detect the accounting irregularities.” That ‘approach,’ in its view:

...focused heavily on identifying risks and assessing whether the Company had adequate controls in place to mitigate those risks, rather than emphasising the traditional substantive testing of information maintained in accounting records and financial statements.²⁸²

In other words they favoured systems over content, outcomes over outputs.

²⁸² Coffee, *Gatekeepers* p. 41

CHAPTER 4 – A Means of Memory, Not Memory Itself

To be free means to be lacking in constitutive identity, not to have subscribed to a determined being, to be able to be other than what one was.²⁸³

Ortega y Gasset

We co-exist immanently, within the same discursive space but without mutual comprehension, lacking the shared cultural apparatus necessary to sustain sociability. We are in the same boat pulling against each other and causing great harm to the material shell that sustains us.²⁸⁴

Susan Buck-Morss

²⁸³ J. Ortega y Gasset, 'Man has no Nature', available at http://fs6.depauw.edu/~jeremyanderson/teach/101_ortega.html (accessed 28 March 2008)

²⁸⁴ S. Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London, 2003) p. 6

The imaginings of history

In the 1990s Pierre Nora, the French historian and publisher, compiled a mammoth collection of historical writings (seven volumes and some 5600 pages),²⁸⁵ that sought to show the history of France as a study in mythic or nostalgic associations that came to establish a collective French identity. Such a project stemmed from his belief that the act of memory, those recognised set of processes through which present-day societies gain a sense of the past, was no longer in existence – “Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists”.²⁸⁶ For Nora:

The less memory is experienced from within [i.e. as the active memory of a specific community], the greater its need for external props and tangible reminders of that which no longer exists except *qua* memory – hence the obsession with the archive that marks an age and in which we attempt to preserve not only all of the past, but all of the present as well. The fear that everything is on the verge of disappearing, coupled with anxiety about the precise significance of the present and uncertainty about the future, invests even the humblest testimony, the most modest vestige, with the dignity of being potentially memorable.[...] What we call memory is in fact a gigantic and breathtaking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember, thereby amassing an unfathomable collection of things that we might someday need to recall.[...] As traditional memory has vanished, we have felt called upon to accumulate fragments, reports, documents, images and speeches, any tangible sign of what was – as if this expanding dossier might some day be subpoenaed as evidence before who knows what tribunal of history.²⁸⁷

The archive was symptomatic of an exercise “in nostalgia, sad and lifeless”,²⁸⁸ yet modern memory “is first of all archival. It relies entirely on the specificity of the trace, the materiality of the vestige, the concreteness of the recording, the visibility of the image”.²⁸⁹ This is a process borne from the dust and grime of the 19th century when pre-modern relations between family, community, neighbour began to dissolve completely. The ideology may have been put to monstrous use but one cannot argue with the power and insightfulness of Fredrich Engel’s description of the masses in his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*:

A city like London, where one can roam about for hours without reaching the beginning of an end, without seeing the slightest indication that open country is nearby, is really something very special. This colossal centralisation, this agglomeration of three and a half million people on a single spot has multiplied the strength of these three and a half million inhabitants a hundredfold...But the price that has been paid is not

²⁸⁵ P. Anderson, ‘Union Sucree’, *London Review of Books*, 26 (23rd September, 2004) available at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n18/print/ande01.html> (accessed 13/03/2006)

²⁸⁶ Nora, *Realms of Memory* p. 6

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

discovered until later. Only when one has tramped the pavements of the main streets for a few days does one notice that these Londoners have had to sacrifice what is best in human nature in order to create all the wonders of civilisation with which their city teems, that a hundred creative faculties that lay dormant in them remained inactive and were suppressed...There is something distasteful about the very bustle of the streets, something that is abhorrent to human nature itself. Hundreds of thousands of people of all classes and ranks of society jostle past one another: are they not all human beings with the same characteristics and potentialities, equally interested in the pursuit of happiness?...And yet they rush past one another as if they had nothing in common or were in no way associated with one another. Their only agreement is a tacit one: that everyone should keep to the right of the pavement, so as not to impede the stream of people moving in the opposite direction. No one even bothers to spare a glance for the others. The greater the number of people that are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs.²⁹⁰

According to Caroline Steedman we can witness the emergence of a “commodification of longing and nostalgia” through the historical novel that sought to re-assert bourgeois society in the wake of the alienation, depersonalisation, and urbanisation inherent in the industrial revolution. For Steedman:

Longing for the past was expressed in many ways in the first half of the 19th century: records and documents were preserved and catalogued; the Archive was born; museums, collections, historical pageants and antiquarian societies came into being...²⁹¹

These institutions represent the image of how the past became lost in its own preservation. Books, records, emergent technologies such as photography, served as memory technologies that drew on aspects of the visual and spatial to function as a repository for memory. The archive was the place where memory was constrained, to materialise when retrieved in written form.

Nora’s neo-liberal project instead celebrates the invented traditions, those sites, rituals, and events that contemporary societies, disconnected as they are by globalisation and the advance of mass culture, can simulate to return to that which the pre-modern community had experienced as spontaneous, collective, and ritualistic.²⁹² As Nora wrote, “*lieux de memoire* exists because there are no longer any *milieux de memoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday

²⁹⁰ quoted in W. Benjamin, ‘On some motifs in Baudelaire’ in *Illuminations* (London, 1992) p. 163

²⁹¹ C. Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester, 2001) p. 91

²⁹² Nora draws from geographical places (Reims, Paris, the pre-historical caves of Lascaux), historical figures (Joan of Arc), monuments and buildings (Versailles and the Eiffel Tower), literary and artistic objects (Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* and Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*), and emblems, commemorations, and symbols (the French flag, the ‘Marseillaise’).

experience”.²⁹³ *Lieux de memoire*, in recognising them as ‘invented traditions,’ purposefully sanctions a creative reconstruction of the past through simulation as modern society fails to live within real memory. Nora explicitly addresses, and lightly justifies, such an enterprise:

The central point, the goal, is to reinterpret the history of France in symbolic terms, to define France as a reality that is entirely symbolic, and thus to reject any definition that would reduce it to phenomena of another order. Adopting such a view opens the way to a new kind of history: a history less interested in causes than in effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interaction of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and re-emergence of their significations; less interested in “what actually happened” than in its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on.²⁹⁴

Perry Anderson expressly links Nora’s project to that of President Mitterand²⁹⁵ and one can see echoes in the United Kingdom with Prime Minister Gordon Brown seeking to create a mythical *Gemeinschaft* which exploits the past in order to stabilise a tumultuous present. Brown calls for a return to pride in Britishness and British symbols in order to alleviate the perceived rupture and discord that lies at the heart of British national identity, although his tend to be rather abstract principles of freedom, justice, and democracy - the very uniqueness of which can be questioned and hence undermined as not particularly or singularly British.²⁹⁶

As the example of Nora makes clear, there is an obvious connection to the work of the historian, and indeed the archivist, here. Nora’s project was conceptually developed in his understanding that the job of the historian, rather than being rooted in the documentary record with a vision as an arbiter of historical accuracy and truth, was in fact to “substitute for imagination” and bring the past to life.²⁹⁷ Verne Harris, the South African archivist, has quoted the writer Andre Brink who argues, in a book entitled *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, that “the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors – that is, tell stories – in which, not history, but imaginings of history are invented”.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ Nora, *Realms of Memory* p. 1

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv

²⁹⁵ Francois Mitterand was President of France from 1981-1995.

²⁹⁶ “But when people are also asked what they admire about Britain, more usually says it is our values:- British tolerance, the British belief in liberty and the British sense of fair play”. see ‘Full text of Gordon Brown’s Speech’ *The Guardian* (27 February 2007) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/feb/27/immigrationpolicy.race> (accessed 15/07/08)

²⁹⁷ Nora, *Realms of Memory* p. 6

²⁹⁸ V. Harris, ‘The Archival Sliver: A Perspective on the Construction of Social Memory in Archives and the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy,’ in C. Hamilton (ed.), *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, 2002) p. 149

Archives and Memory

For Sir Geoffrey Elton the undermining of the science of history led to the spectre of relativism. Elton acidly remarked that to the “disciples of total relativism, history matters only insofar as it contributes to their own lives, thoughts and experiences”.²⁹⁹ There would be no surprise for Elton that such a process would have resulted in the type of view expressed by Parekh:

Liberal beliefs and values have no authority over non-liberal members of society. The only reason for asking non-liberals to respect these is that they represent the beliefs and values of the majority, a form of moral positivism that violates their integrity and makes a falsely homogenised majority the arbiter of moral values.³⁰⁰

In this relativistic view of morality the search for the universality of morality, or at least moral values, is deemed to be a fruitless exercise as moral values are embedded within cultures that exist in self-contained vacuums. And so whereas the traditional drive for equality was premised upon an equality before the law of all individuals, so that a homosexual black woman should have the same rights as a heterosexual white man, the inspirational concepts behind such movements like the civil rights campaign of the 1960s are displaced by the hermetically sealed box of separate cultures who brook no criticism from those who do not conform to their very-own universal criteria.

It is in this regard that postmodernism lapses into essentialism at every opportunity. Hayek posed the question of whether anybody can:

...conceive of a collectivist programme other than that in the service of a limited group, whether collectivism can exist in any other form than that of some kind of particularism, be it nationalism, racialism, or class-ism.³⁰¹

Postmodern becomes an -ism, just another ideology cloaked in freedom but which becomes a totalisation. Of course postmodernists will have a stock reply – postmodernism calls into question a metaphysical essentialism and the representational theory of language that accompanies it, that is, the view that there are distinguishable and definable ‘things’ out there, ‘natures’ which exist independently of us. Yet it is the hermetically sealed box of the postmodern that lies behind the absolutist concepts described by Seligman:

The politics of gender and of sexual preference, the whole multicultural agenda and the very strong feelings it evokes both among its adherents and its more conservative opponents, points, I would claim, to a re-emergence of group identities that take the place of those individual identities that we

²⁹⁹ G. Elton, *Return to Essentials: Some Reflections on the Present State of Historical Study* (Cambridge, 1991) p. 43

³⁰⁰ B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Hampshire, 2000) p. 105

³⁰¹ F. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London, 1944) p. 107

had come to equate with the progress of modernity. Ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference, 'new age,' and so on, are not simply separate interests akin to corporate groups acting in the public arena. Nor are they simply what is so tellingly termed 'lifestyles.' They are rather lifestyles which represent a mode of identity contrary to those classical ideas of the individual that we associate with bourgeois political forms and that were indeed essential to that mode of social organisation.³⁰²

Indeed such relativism is conceptually identical to the neo-liberal project produced by Pierre Nora, even if they veer off in separate directions, in that they are expressions of disillusionment with the structure of a society that has waved goodbye to ties of memory and familiarity based traditionally in the community. As such, interaction fails to be maintained on the assumption of linked associations and so we find recourse to Nora's *lieux de memoire* of the nation-state or the *lieux de memoire* of the group premised on the most "pre-modern of terms possible (i.e., on the ascriptive or primordial bases of gender, race, and ethnicity)".³⁰³ The sexual, racial, and social roles in this reading are no different from that of the previously critiqued national identity whereby identity is constructed or performed within a prevailing culture and the identity or culture takes on a mnemonic capacity of its own. Henceforth we should not consider that the individual is permitted to, for example, create a record as an expression of the individual but rather that the author is a cipher for social norms, attitudes, assumptions, and ideologies and that it is these that should be critiqued. It is a necessary consequence of this view that a person is respected only as a member of the group, that is, only in so far as he/she works for the recognised common end, and that he/she derives their whole dignity only from this membership. Unsurprisingly this is not the prevailing view. Rather, it is deemed that in a world that positively rejoices in the emergence of every type of fragmented and de-contextualised information imaginable, we can now partake in a pick-and-mix of designer histories:

For viewed not in its traditional guise as a subject discipline aiming at a real knowledge of the past, but seen rather as what it is, a discursive practice that enables present-minded people(s) to go to the past, there to delve around and reorganise it appropriately to their needs, then such history...may well have a radical cogency that can make visible aspects of the past that have previously been hidden or secreted away; that have previously been overlooked or sidelined, thereby producing fresh insights that can actually make emancipatory, material differences to and within the present – which is where all history starts and returns to.³⁰⁴

³⁰² A.B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (New Jersey, 1997) p. 155

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 154

³⁰⁴ Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* pp. 80-81

In this positive version of the effects of postmodernism culture aids development by enabling the individual to:

...make intelligent judgement about what is valuable, suggests worthwhile roles, provides them with meaningful options, guides their decisions concerning how to lead their lives, provides a secure background necessary for developing their capacity for choice, and in these and other ways constitutes the inescapable context of their freedom and autonomy.³⁰⁵

Such spiritual raising has borne witness to a raft of postmodern specialists in 'theory' whether it be that of "feminist theory, postcolonial theory, 'other' theory, critical race theory, queer theory, communicative action theory, structuration theory, neo-Marxism theory...any kind of theory, every kind of theory".³⁰⁶ This opening up of a space for the legitimation of subjects previously not deemed the preserve of serious academic study found its zenith from the 1960s onwards with the rise of the cultural studies industry which sought to critique power in relation to their impact on cultural practices. There is no doubt that such discourse had an impact upon the archival profession. Recent developments in the archival discussion demonstrate a fascination with popularised notions of identity, particularly gender and ethnic identity that coalesce around Foucault's notion of genealogy where he demands that we pay attention to what he calls subjugated knowledges.³⁰⁷ There is little doubt that the motives within the archival community are honourable in this regard – they seek to rectify what they see as past blemishes in their midst, primarily bias in their selection policies, and to restore an authenticity, i.e., a 'real' identity, to the archival documentary heritage that has been sorely missing. As historians during the last four decades turned their attention towards issues of power, under-represented minority groups, gender, race, and related concerns, they discovered that these topics were not so easily studied through existing documentation. This was wonderfully documented in a lecture by Matt

³⁰⁵ Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* p. 100

³⁰⁶ N. Cohen, *What's Left?: How the Left Lost Its Way* (London, 2007) p. 98

³⁰⁷ Foucault has two things in mind according to Jenny Edkins of the Department of Politics at the University of Wales. She writes that: "First, the rediscovery of what he calls 'historical contents'. By this he means a re-discovery of the history of struggle and conflict that the systematising thinking that goes along with the search for cause and effect disguises. Linear narratives of cause and effect superimpose on a messy victory a retrospective story, produced in the main by the political victors. Recovery of the detail of events, detail which demonstrates that the outcome was hardly ever as inevitable as it might appear in retrospect and that struggles contain violence and illegality that are later disowned or suppressed. The re-discovery of the history of struggle takes place through exacting, meticulous historical scholarship. Secondly, he includes the marginal knowledges, in other words, knowledges that have been disqualified or regarded as insignificant. These are in a way a form of popular knowledge, but not a general common-sense knowledge in the Gramscian sense, but in some ways quite the opposite: a "particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it". J. Edkins, 'The Local, The Troubling, and the Global' *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9 (2006) p. 505

Houlbrook, lecturer in 20th Century British history at the University of Liverpool and author of *Queer London, Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis 1918-1957*. Discussing the possibilities offered by the National Archives in the United Kingdom for the study of gay and lesbian history Houlbrook documented the hardships faced in recovering the experiences of gay men and women and the frustrations that are a daily hazard for the researcher. To take one example:

...the organization of the online catalogue means that it contains an implicit homosexual blindness, particularly given the dispersal of the archive. The starting point for any research at the National Archives is the online catalogue. Yet for researchers working on gay and lesbian history, searching the catalogue is of limited use. Using the catalogue, files containing gay and lesbian material are not identified under the existing index to the collection.

* Homosexuality = nothing.

* Search under sex = sex discrimination / sexual abuse / sexual behaviour

*Refined under sexual behaviour = only one series of files HO 345 Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution.

Clear that work needs to be done on rethinking organisation index in order to reflect current interests of historians– TNA are working with the Hall-Carpenter Archive on this.

The second common form of searching PROCAT - for keywords contained within file titles or descriptions - presents further problems. Searching under the term 'homosexual' identifies fifty-five files; "lesbian" only two.

*BT 31/2653/14111 [No. of Company: 14111; Steam-ship Lesbian Company, Ltd.](#) 1880

*JA 1/44 [Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association: report and correspondence](#) 1998

Take, as an example, one of the most productive sources I've worked on over the past five years – basis of article; which cannot be located using these straightforward search forms:

*CRIM 1/638 [Defendant: Salmon, Austin and \(33\) others](#)
[Charge: Conspiracy to corrupt morals, keeping disorderly house](#)
Session: 1933 Feb 7

*CRIM 1/639 [Defendant: Salmon, Austin and \(33\) others](#)
[Charge: Conspiracy to corrupt morals, keeping disorderly house](#)
Session: 1933 Feb 7

*CRIM 1/640 [Defendant: Salmon, Austin and \(33\) others](#)
[Charge: Conspiracy to corrupt morals, keeping disorderly house](#)
Session: 1933 Feb 7

This is the prosecution that followed from a police raid on a drag ball in Holland Park Avenue (case I'll talk about later). Mass of information on queer life – how men dressed, talked, what they did and where. Includes also a dress worn by one of the arrested men AND a flyer / poster circulated to advertise the event. Again – none of this is immediately apparent. None of this is obvious from the file

description. And certainly this file couldn't be found easily by the new researcher.³⁰⁸

The archive is, in this line of thinking, an institution in which wider societal memory concerns or relations are played out and it is indeed true that the relationship between archives and memory represents the life-blood of the profession. The very nature of archive techniques and processes are analogous to the metaphor of memory by Saint Augustine where memory acts as a storehouse for sensory and intellectual impressions that are preserved for re-use when recalled:

...I enter the fields and spacious halls of memory, where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them from all manner of things by the senses. There, in the memory, is likewise stored what we cognate, either by enlarging or reducing our perceptions, or by altering one way or another those things which the senses have made contact with; and everything else that has been entrusted to it and stored up in it, which oblivion has not yet swallowed up and buried.

When I go into this storehouse, I ask that what I want should be brought forth. Some things appear immediately, but others require to be searched for longer, and then dragged out, as it were, from some hidden recess. Other things hurry forth in crowds, on the other hand, and while something else is sought and inquired for, they leap into view as if to say, "Is it not we, perhaps?" These I brush away with the hand of my heart from the face of my memory, until finally the thing I want makes its appearance out of its secret cell. Some things suggest themselves without effort, and in continuous order, just as they are called for – the things that come first give place to those that follow, and in so doing are treasured up again to be forthcoming when I want them. All of this happens when I repeat a thing from memory.³⁰⁹

The relationship between the archive and memory has been reflected in the space allocated in archival journals to the relationship between archives and power, remembering and forgetting.³¹⁰ Whilst memory "comes with synaptic sparks, lit-up neurones, a small fire observable in the brain," forgetfulness is the "nothingness where dread lies" when "cells fail to ignite and nothing happens".³¹¹ Of course, in the brain and the archive this sense of forgetting does not need to represent a foreboding of permanent amnesia as "we erase most of what comes before us as a matter of course, and that without this mechanism we would be living in a tedium of trivial recollections".³¹² Indeed it is thought that in the archival environment around only 5 per cent of

³⁰⁸ M. Houlbrook, 'Lost in the Archive: A Postmodernist Speaks' Unpublished paper sent in private communication. Paper delivered at the Liverpool University Centre for Archives Studies (June 7th 2006)

³⁰⁹ Saint. Augustine, *Confessions* in A. Outler (ed.) *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion* (Philadelphia, 1955) p. 208

³¹⁰ Any study of the three main theoretical archival journals will prove the point – *Archivaria*, *Archival Science*, *Archives and Manuscripts*

³¹¹ M. Greenberg, 'Freelance' *Times Literary Supplement* (5 December 2008) p. 16

³¹² *Ibid.*,

documentation is ever retained. However the link between preservation and memory is a cornerstone of Jenkinson's 'Origin and Development of Archives and Rules for Archive Keeping', which is the heading of Part II in his *Manual of Archive Administration*. The first statement of that section reads:

(a) *Primary Division of Archives*. The starting-point of the compilation of Archives in early times is an easy thing to imagine or even in the case of ancient collections to see in action. The official or responsible person – let us call him the Administrator – who has to preside over any continuous series of business functions, the manager of a small estate at one end of the scale, the controller of a kingdom's finances at the other, relies for the support of his authority on memory: so soon as writing becomes general in use he adopts the preservation of pieces of writing as a convenient form of artificial memory; and in doing so starts a collection of Archives.³¹³

We see from these quotes of Saint Augustine and Jenkinson the centrality of memory not only to the individual but also to society. People, governments, institutions cannot function efficiently unless people within them have a certain capacity to remember things that happened previously. In the evidential paradigm, many types of operations and functions within society depend upon a storehouse for memory preservation. In the modern age memory, albeit something distorted, is essential to corporate bodies, bureaucracies and governments in seeking to conduct their day-to-day business and to ensure that they are meeting their legal and compliance obligations. If we take government, for example, employees need to guide their conduct upon what has originated previously and to act based upon the understanding that what action is undertaken will be remembered and borne in mind in future transactions. Without this memory-dependent faculty in society, the foundations upon which consensual relations and Rousseau's social contract in the West are premised - the law, property, business, trade - would fail to exist and society as we understand it would collapse.

This administrative-memory function was transformed, towards the end of the twentieth century, into a socio-cultural justification for archives rooted along postmodern lines. According to Terry Cook:

...the principal justification for archives to most users and to the public at large rests on archives being able to offer citizens a sense of identity, locality, history, culture, and personal and collective memory.³¹⁴

It is this understanding that has, as a theoretical model, aided in the shifting of the archival tectonic plates from its evidential prism to that of a central component in cultural studies. It is, in

³¹³ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 23

³¹⁴ Cook, 'Archival Science and Postmodernism'

this reading, no longer acceptable for the archival documentary residue that is retained to be concentrated around those powerful record creators whose records we are more liable to come into contact with – the emergence of accountability, whether that of the public or that of history and posterity, demands more. This is not a doctrine through which the archive has been oblivious too until only recently. For example thirty years ago Howard Zinn raised the notion of the ‘activist archivist,’ urging archivists “to compile a whole new world of documentary material about the lives, desires and needs of ordinary people”.³¹⁵ In 1975 F. Gerald Ham, President of the Society of American Archivists, continued this theme in his address to the annual meeting, delivering a damning rebuke of the profession and the entire process through which archivists document society. The archivist’s primary responsibility, he suggested, was to “provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time. But why must we do it so badly?” Rather than continuing to “document the well-documented”, thereby producing “a biased and distorted archival record”, he argued, archivists needed to “hold up a mirror for mankind”:

If we are not holding up that mirror, if we are not helping people understand the world they live in, and this is not what archives are all about, then I do not know what it is we are doing that is all that important.³¹⁶

A cursory look at some archival literature and statements that purport to conceptualise the archival mission show that the archival community has taken this discourse very much to heart, so much so that the articulations on the subject conjure a utopian vision of total knowledge. A little over twenty years ago, George Bolotenko wrote:

It has been said before, but bears repeating: the preservation of documents and manuscripts is the preservation of the collective memory of society, the *summa* of the human past.³¹⁷

To postulate the archive as the font of all societal knowledge is an extraordinary and fool-hardy extravagance. And yet twenty years later an expansive use of our capacity to satisfy all memorial inquiries persists and remains one of our most popular explanatory tools. The United Kingdom government, when establishing a common infrastructure in 2001 for museums, libraries and archives, described in a “language of purpose” the role of archives to be “the nation’s memory, reflecting our history and national identity”.³¹⁸ This is somewhat ironic given the United Kingdom government’s own attitude to record-keeping practice. However this archives-is-memory equivalence features most strongly among those who describe with approval the

³¹⁵ quoted in F.G. Ham, ‘The Archival Edge’ *American Archivist* 38 (1975) p. 5

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

³¹⁷ G. Bolotenko, ‘Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well’, *Archivaria* 16 (1983) p. 6

³¹⁸ *Re:Source news* 1 (2001) p. 1

archivist's role within the new postmodern paradigm as active shapers and 'co-creators' of collective and corporate memory: "Given this perspective, we may say that archives are the manufacturers of memory and not merely the guardians of it. It is not that archivists do not tell the whole truth about reality. It is that they *cannot* tell it".³¹⁹ Hence in this analysis traditional and core archival activities such as acquisition, classification, and preservation are tarred as undeniably 'political' activities, no matter the discipline and professionalism of the archivist. In this discourse the record is always in a state of becoming, where contexts are always infinite.³²⁰ Such ideas fit intimately with Michael Ondaatje's novel *Divisadero* where Anna warns that the "raw truth of an incident never ends".³²¹ She later compares memory to a villanelle that refuses to move forward in a linear development, "circling instead at those moments of emotion".³²² It is these concepts of memory which have become prevalent in archival discourse and that has resulted in core archival techniques coming under sustained attack as not fit for purpose:

Archival science and practice as they have evolved in European/Western traditions, privilege the records creators, their contexts, world views and value systems. Although the records creator is just one of the parties to the transactions captured in the records, current practice tends to treat other parties to the transaction as objects of the activities and subjects of the record, rather than as parties to transactions, in its appraisal, description and access activities and processes. The notions of ownership, custody, privacy protection and access rights that underpin appraisal, description and access policies are also deeply embedded in European/Western traditions and constructs.³²³

The archivist as 'culturer'

Taking the spectre of accountability to the door of the archive, as the cultural relationship with memory seeks to, inserts the archive into the notions of risk and its variant attachments. This preoccupation with memory is a consequence of the altered state of temporality, a reaction to the acceleration of time that erodes distance and blurs the territorial and spatial coordinates in an age of globalisation. As Muller writes, "the recovery of 'memory' aims at a temporal re-anchoring and even the much-talked about 'recovery of the real'".³²⁴ Muller further expands this concept to include the conceptual project of neo-conservatism whereby memory is a form of "comfort" and

³¹⁹ R. Harvey-Brown & B. Davis-Brown, 'The Making of Memory: the Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of National Consciousness' *History of the Human Sciences* 11, (1998) p. 22

³²⁰ see S. McKemmish *et al* , *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*

³²¹ M. Ondaatje, *Divisadero* (London, 2007) p. 1

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 136

³²³ Piggott & McKemmish, 'Recordkeeping, Reconciliation and Political Reality'

³²⁴ J-W. Muller (ed.,) *Memory and Power in Post-war Europe : Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge, 2002) p. 15

“cultural compensation”.³²⁵ Clearly, this is analogous to the neo-liberally described project of Pierre Nora, yet in sanctioning recourse in a pre-modern type of memory these projects embrace the relativistic element of memory as a selective process that is germane to the present situation and needs of the individual, group, or society in question, a process that “can be disputed and assured simultaneously; elements of memory can exist in multiple contexts at the same time”.³²⁶ Yet whilst the ideology of postmodernism equates the retraction to essentialist doctrines as an exercise in liberation, the exaltation of memory is a considerably more fragile and self-doubting process that has social, cultural, and ontological effects. Zygmunt Bauman captured this well in the following quotation that deals with the convergence of neo-liberalism and the ICT revolution:

...rather than homogenising the human condition, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial distance tends to polarise it. It emancipates certain humans from territorial constraints and renders certain community-generating meanings exterritorial – while denuding the territory, to which other people go on being confined, of its meaning and its identity-endowing capacity. For some people it augurs an unprecedented freedom from physical obstacles and unheard-of ability to move and act from a distance. For others, it portends the impossibility of appropriating and domesticating the locality from which they have little chance of cutting themselves free in order to move elsewhere. With ‘distances no longer meaning anything’, localities, separated by distances, also lose their meanings. This, however, augurs freedom of meaning-creating for some, but portends ascription to meaninglessness for others. Some can now move out of the locality – any locality – at will. Others watch helplessly the sole locality they inhabit moving away from under their feet.³²⁷

In this climate the sense of dislocation and disorientation can become overwhelming to the extent that identity becomes, essentially, an exercise in turning inwards, of insularity, and of continual questioning of the world that exists outside and for which you feel contempt due to the lack of an adequate response to perceived grievances:

Since fraternal feelings are immediate and strongly felt, how can others not understand, why don't they respond in kind, why won't the world bend to emotional desires? The answer to these questions can only be that the world outside the community is less real, less authentic than the life within. The consequence of that answer is not a challenge to the outside, but a dismissal of it, a turning away, into the watchful sharing with others who ‘understand’. This is the peculiar sectarianism of a secular society. It is the result of converting the immediate experience of sharing with others into a social principle.³²⁸

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16

³²⁶ A. Menne-Haritz, ‘Archival Training in a Changing World,’ *American Archivist* 63, (2000) p. 344

³²⁷ Z. Bauman, *Globalization* (Cambridge, 1998) p. 18

³²⁸ Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* p. 311

The sociologist and psychoanalyst Jeffrey Prager has explored the way citizens make use of culturally available “categories of experience” through which they mix the personal narrative with some grand themes of “estrangement or discrimination, recognition or redemption,” connecting “himself or herself to a particular kind of living in the present”. They categorise themselves in the politics of victimisation and regret. By appropriating a category (African-African for example) it “often takes the first step in situating oneself in a whole story of one’s past, linking past experiences to one’s present-day distress”. Such narratives, Prager argues, “are not solely of the individual’s own making, but reflect substantial borrowing from a culture that has perfected various tales of victimisation”.³²⁹ This roots memory in the injustices littered to ‘their’ people throughout the passage of history - it is through this process of grievance utterance that the more fundamentalist elements within identity-led communities come to the fore as they have a tendency to shout the loudest and indulge in a continual hyping-up of emotions, emitting a parochial and particularist vision of the world which shelters beneath the baby blanket of community.

When, in the 1980s, there was a concerted drive towards the commercialisation of culture, driven by government under the aegis of the management of the public, this placed tremendous pressure on archives, indeed all cultural institutions, to tell an ‘acceptable’ story. In the process this necessitated a re-appraisal of some core tenets of the curatorial professions. Primarily the policies in place for accepting, and finding, collections became more difficult and the ambiguities surrounding the role of culture and the archive, especially around representativeness, were heightened and questioned. At the core of the soul-searching was the question of how the archive could serve all sectors of the public and adapt to new and changing needs, an issue the profession is still debating today. Previously in this thesis we saw Verne Harris pose the notion of *Archives as Politics*. In the same article he proceeded to pose the following questions that get to the root of the rise of culture, the fragmented identity, and the place of the archive within:

What do recordmakers make of a society (and this is true of all societies) to be documented in the context of multiple cultures positioned and oriented by the exercise of power? What is the responsibility of recordmakers in face of a deeply cultured record? What do recordmakers do with their own agency as culturers?³³⁰

³²⁹ J. Prager, *Presenting the Past: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Misremembering* (London, 1998) pp. 4-6

³³⁰ V. Harris, ‘A World Whose Horizon Can Only Be Justice’ in V. Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago, 2007) p. 255

In the archival domain he has provided one of the most heartfelt and emotive responses to the question of the ‘other’ and how the archive comes to deal with the issues, difficulties, and suspicions. Harris asks “where should our politics be taking us?”:

The “where?” question moves us irrevocably outside conventional disciplinary or professional boundaries. We are talking about a call, or a calling, that must come (structurally, logically) from beyond any rational demarcation...I believe that the call of justice is the highest calling.³³¹

This thing called justice:

...can[not] be knowable. Like democracy, it must always be coming. It is a phantom, at most “a relation to the unconditional that, once all the conditional givens have been taken into account, bears witness to that which will not allow itself to be enclosed within a context.” The call of justice resists the totalisation of every such enclosure. It resists, if you like, what is traditionally regarded as the fundamental archival impulse – contextualisation. It is open to the future and to every “other.” It respects – gives space to, looks again at – “radical otherness.” In the powerful formulation of Levinas: “the relation to the other, i.e. justice.”

I am *not* suggesting that the call of justice undermines archival endeavour by destroying the conceptual foundations of contextualisation. I *am* arguing that justice requires us to re-imagine archival contextualisation. Conventionally understood, contextualisation has to do with the disclosing of all relevant contextual layers. That is to pin down meaning and significance. But context is infinite, ever-changing, and permeable to “text,” so that contextualisation can only ever be about a preliminary and highly selective intervention, in which pinning down is not a possibility. The most that we can aspire to is an opening of contextual richness, and concomitantly, an opening to richness in meaning and significance. An approach that is about opening, in my view, respects the call of justice. Justice resists pinning down, totalising, signing off; justice embraces openness, a welcoming of what is coming, hospitality to what is beyond the limits of understanding. In a word, we must engage context, but let us do so knowing (and acknowledging) its horizon of impossibility.³³²

Harris also argues that if records are to serve us in arriving at justice, we have to concern ourselves with questions about the effect of our actions on the truth-telling capability of records. The call for justice, he says, is “a call which demands that we ask ourselves what truths we are telling by our actions, and ... how these truths connect to ‘the truth’”.³³³ For Harris this is heavily linked to the notion of accountability – “the giving of account”³³⁴ – and listening:

...to every “other.” For justice is the relation to “the other”. So, the inventory is endless – colleagues, communities, users, potential users,

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 257

³³³ V, Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from the Global Periphery,” *Comma* 1–2 (2001), p. 33

³³⁴ Harris, ‘A World Whose Horizon Can Only Be Justice’ p. 257

employers, lawmakers, governments, funders, forebears, descendants, strangers (especially strangers), and so on, an on.³³⁵

Harris's call for justice is undoubtedly inspirational and could be the sort of thing the staid archival profession professes to need to reinvigorate a repressed work-force. At its core, I do believe, is the true focus of politics – the “creative conciliation of differing interests, whether interests are seen as primarily material or moral”.³³⁶ The concern, however, is that the concept of justice cannot function in line with postmodern and poststructuralist thought³³⁷ without rupturing the consensual bonds of society in that “a just society can be no more than the sum of ascriptions of justness which people calculate from the realisation of their interests in relation to those of others”.³³⁸ One postmodernist author, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, has recognised that the deconstruction of everything to text and discourse has rendered obsolete the notion of society and social justice:

Rhythmic time – the time of experiment, improvisation, adventure – destroys the historicist unity of the world by destroying its temporal common denominator. In rhythmic time mutual reference back and forth from one temporal moment to another becomes impossible because no neutrality exists between temporal moments; on the contrary, each moment contains in specific and unique definition. Each “time” is utterly finite. The founding agreements that we take for granted in modern historical narratives do not form in postmodern time, just as the common medium of events that we call history simply does not exist in postmodern narratives. In Robbe-Grillet's 'Jealously', for example, the reader is confined to the present tense and thus to a continuous present that constantly erases past and future. No serenely neutral (“Nobody”) narrator recollects, from an unspecific fictional future, a meaningful history of events. Gone are the linear coordinates that make possible the description of a stable objective world; pattern is always emerging and dissolving without certain foundation or even intelligible residue...This fatal disappearance of historical values in postmodern writing has been taken by many as a tragedy for moral life. After all, without the power to compare ourselves across space and time, what becomes of the generic “human” solidarity with which we confront the material universe? Without consequences, what becomes of self-control or of power over circumstance? How can there be regularities or laws prevailing among events and persons when those events and persons are separated by essential difference or finitude and not merely by accident in the neutral, bridgeable media of time and space.³³⁹

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258

³³⁶ B. Crick, *Essays on Citizenship* (London, 2000) p. 36

³³⁷ Harris is an admirer of Derrida and a proponent of deconstruction.

³³⁸ Eastwood, 'How goes it with Appraisal' p. 114

³³⁹ E.D. Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (New Jersey, 1992) pp. 53-54

Justice, in a postmodern universe, can be conceived of and decided only within the confines of some local determinism, some interpretative community, and its purported meanings and anticipated effects are bound to break down when taken out of these isolated domains, even when coherent within them.

This is not recognised in an archival community that sees its work as being about the building of a coherent reflection of ‘reality’ through a notion of cultural authenticity. In such a climate of relativism and reality construction it is no surprise that the image of archives as dust-ridden stacks and socially inept archivists has been replaced (in theory) by shiny new transparent buildings and flashy, good-looking at-your-personal-service TV genealogists. No bad thing. Yet the corrosive side of this particular coin is that the Archive is now an experience. At the 2008 *Philosophy of the Archive Conference* in Edinburgh Dr Nick Barrett, a genealogy expert with an extensive background in television, explained that television as a medium uses archives to meet their needs rather than showing them as they really are - documents that appear in programmes are chosen for their aesthetic appearances, ‘experts’ are avoided in case they get in the way of the story and of course the best story is selected.³⁴⁰ There is no point in decrying this development as it chimes with the current pattern of archival development, for example with regards to tourism strategies, and is certainly currently in vogue with under-represented groups.³⁴¹ However this ‘customer-focused’ outlook could have serious implications for the more research-led community. As Michael Moss writes:

...the danger for academic historians is that the enthusiasts, who contribute a large part of the external income, will drive the market. Already, collecting policies and cataloguing priorities are being influenced by their needs.³⁴²

In 2009 this issue came alive on the Archives-NRA JISC list-serv in reaction to proposed changes at The National Archives of the United Kingdom. TNA proposed to make savings of 10% to its operating budget, most of which was focused upon its users of historical records. One participant stated that the “current CEO has made it abundantly clear that she is interested in ‘information management’ rather than the organisation’s statutory duty towards the historic records”.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ N. Barrett, ‘Memory, History and Social Networks’ Paper given to *The Philosophy of the Archive Conference* (10 April 2008).

³⁴¹ For an analysis of tourism with regards to Scotland and its parochialism and romanticisation see H. Little, ‘Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever: Coming home to Scottish Archives’, *Archivaria* 64 (2007) pp. 89-112

³⁴² M. Moss ‘Archives and the Historian,’ in M. Bentley (ed.,) *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997) p. 970

³⁴³ The proposals included closing to the public on Mondays (a 16% cut in opening hours); 35 staff redundancies across the organisation of which 12 (34%) are known to be in a specialist Advice and Record

This is far from particular to the archive. In 2007, a year in which the Arts Council saw its budget rise, it launched an attack on the Northcott Theatre in Exeter. This was an institution that:

...has long been treasured by its own audience, by the artists who work there and by the touring companies who visit. Capacity houses fill it, and the audience has been nurtured by a diverse and intriguing body of work into being one of the most shrewd, catholic, and generous congregations any company could wish to play.³⁴⁴

However in a clear example of the worst excesses of social engineering the theatre was told, in that magnificent phrase reminiscent of the ethos of Soviet targets, that its audience was too static – which if we think of the archival world essentially means too white and middle-class – and that it should re-direct its attention from the text, the story, and the actor to “circus skills, street theatre, and training”.³⁴⁵ Similar sentiments are evident in the National Trust for Scotland who recently described the Battle of Bannockburn as “two kings jostling for position”, rather than as a battle between Scotland and England. David R. Ross, Convenor of the Society of William Wallace, summed up the feeling of many when he stated that:

It is political correctness because they are scared of offending anyone from England who might come to their visitor centre. They were also scared that English people attending the re-enactment might feel isolated.³⁴⁶

This is symptomatic of a culture that with the rise of accountability has made cultural industries that accept public monies from the government duty-bound to find ways of reconciling their role as arbiters of knowledge to that of being outlets for community-led memories, a commitment rooted in political, multicultural, strategies that have a vision of justice for the other.

Hence archives now take into account different user expectations and offer participatory entry routes through a variety of differing methods including overt interpretation devices. These are reminiscent of other cultural collecting institutions such as museums and art galleries where there has been a history of active interpretation through the role of the curator. The curator has a determining role in the creation of the political economy of art, the exhibition, where-by signification is constructed and maintained:

Knowledge section; and withdrawal of microfilm series from open access in the reading rooms. See www.jiscmail.ac.uk/archives/archives-nra.html (11 September 2009)

³⁴⁴ D. Dromgoole, ‘Where’s the Magic Gone?’ *Sunday Times Culture* (March 2, 2008) p. 18.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁴⁶ M. McLaughlin, ‘700 years on, still battling over Bannockburn,’ *Scotsman* (25 June, 2007) available at <http://heritage.scotsman.com/scotland/700-years-on-still-battling.3298507.jp> (accessed 12/02/08)

Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions – especially exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and administer the cultural meanings of art.³⁴⁷

This performative aspect to the exhibition presents a novel aesthetic experience as a substitute for an ambulatory contemplation of autonomous objects, severed from any context and cumulatively mounted, situating the spectator through the organising and choreographing of space, the particular hanging display and narrative on offer. Despite being overtly narrative in concept, the museum exhibition is an attempt to transcend power relations and the straitjacket of the linear historical narrative. Commemorative exhibits are conceived less to impart information about events than to stimulate a corresponding feeling or experience in museum visitors. Hilde Hein reports that many visitors to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., report feeling a sense of dread and oppression from the moment they enter the building and are herded into the elevator and down narrowing corridors from which there seems to be no escape. This sensation is the effect deliberately crafted by the museum's designer, Ralph Appelbaum, who wrote: "It is the act of controlling a few hours of someone's time and setting them up to receive a certain experience".³⁴⁸

Such visions are not so far from the outlook of Jean-Pierre Wallot where he states:

Bearers of proof, information, and evidence, archives therefore act as revealers of culture – that is, of the 'additional spirit' that give meaning and identity to human communities.³⁴⁹

Thus, archives play a commemorative role essential to the advancement of society, for all human groups must select that which they deem worthy of remembering, integrate it into what they think and say, adjust it to their present situation, and use it to define their future.³⁵⁰

For a former Chairman of the International Council on Archives he is prone to cavalier flourishes of rhetoric on the role of archives. We 'act as revealers of culture'? 'Human groups must select that which they deem worthy of remembering'? Here we enter into a malevolent gatekeeper/interpretative role directly related to our archives-as-memory paradigm, as exemplified by Patrick. J. Geary's research on memory and oblivion at the end of the first millennium. Geary explains that the increasingly important nature and understanding of the archive in the 11th century created the paradoxical conditions for the destruction and re-shaping

³⁴⁷ R. Greenberg, B.W. Ferguson & S. Nairne, 'Introduction' in R. Greenberg, B.W. Ferguson, & S. Nairne (ed.), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London, 1996) p. 2

³⁴⁸ H. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington DC, 2000) p. 65

³⁴⁹ J.P. Wallot, 'Limited Identities for a Common Identity: Archivists in the Twenty-First Century' *Archivaria* 41 (1996) p. 25

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4

of collections. One of his main examples is the archive of the great Benedictine abbey of St. Denis in the Northern suburbs of France which allows us to:

...observe the process by which a rich archive, reaching back to the dawn of institutional archival formation, was systematically pillaged and destroyed in order to build from its fragments a more useful and appropriate past.³⁵¹

He also offers us the wisdom of Arnold of St. Emmeram who compared the sorting through the past to the “process of clearing the arable, cutting down groves once sacred to the gods so that the land could be made useful for the process”.³⁵²

Specific to the archival community, such notions have been discussed by Elisabeth Kaplan.³⁵³ Her concern focuses on the philosophical dilemma faced by American Jews at the close of the 19th century, a period of flux for Jewish identity due to a confluence of political, social and economic conditions that had left American Jews feeling distinctly uneasy about their acceptance as Americans. In 1892 they decided to form an American Jewish Historical Society which was designed to establish an organisation dedicated to collecting and publishing “material bearing upon the history of our country”. “The objects for which this society is organised”, they continued, “are not sectarian but American”. However the minutes of the meeting, an 85-page record, reveal that there were tensions between, as Kaplan puts it, “the construction of particular forms of identity and the sublimation of others – and the role of archives in these processes”. The proposed Jewish Historical Society was the means by which the founders believed they could fuse Jewish ideals and American values into a homogenous whole that would aid the perception of an acceptable American-Jewish public identity. But for the traditional archivist here lies problems. Kaplan states that “constructed carefully, an American Jewish Historical Society could not be accused of unpatriotic intentions or fostering ‘clannishness’ or dual loyalties”. She also writes:

Those gathered at the Jewish Theological Seminary on 7 June 1892 were united in their conviction that an American Jewish historical society that collected the evidence of American Jewish history was the means by which to project to other (newly immigrated) Jews and to the general public a positive image of American Jewry. But the founders of the AJHS were not united in their conceptions of just what the content of that image should be, or precisely how it should be presented. Ironically, this lack of consensus was accompanied by the stated imperative that to the public the endeavour should appear unified. Its function, after all, was to create and project a

³⁵¹ P.J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance* (Princeton, 1994) p. 107

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 166

³⁵³ E. Kaplan, ‘We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity’ *American Archivist* 63 (2001) pp. 126-151

cohesive and confident image. Therefore all hints of controversy were edited from the published version of the minutes.

Through a subversion of the historical documentary heritage – this historical society would be inherently reflexive in that outcomes dominated - these American Jews believed that the power of the record could work to tackle the issues they found railed against them and would propel them onwards to a more amenable future. Therefore there was, according to Kaplan, a clear vetting of certain disagreeable subjects that would raise the spectre of the dangerous Jew – issues such as Zionism, socialism, and documentation on recent immigration before 1900 are not contained within the archive.

Analogous to the audit culture that creates rather than reflects, such a process is one of audit where the archive is constructed and audited to ensure that identities are created where identities may not exist and to initiate the coordination of alternative publics. The framework of morality and politics represents the difference between counterpublics and the way of viewing the past rather than the accuracy of the historical vision. Many members of marginalized ethnic and minority groups have responded to their perceived, and often real, exclusion and taken preservation into their own hands, building archives, museums, community centres, and grassroots digital spaces devoted to creating distinct documentation, interpretation, and exhibitions of their culture and community history. Andrew Flynn documents, and enthusiastically celebrates, the emergence of these types of community archives in Britain which has not had the collecting ethos of the American manuscript tradition. He mentions, for example, the Black Cultural Archive in Brixton, which was established in 1981 to “collect, document, and disseminate the culture and history of the peoples of Africa and Caribbean ancestry living in Britain” and the Hall-Carpenter Archives “which was set up in the 1980s to document gay and lesbian activism and life”.³⁵⁴ These developments in the 1980s were not random but part of a concerted pattern where minority history became increasingly assertive, a manoeuvre grounded not in empiricism but in partisanship. Zygmunt Bauman goes so far as to argue that postmodernity represents “the age of community”, with “the lust for community, the search for community, the invention of community, imagining community”.³⁵⁵ Under such a lens there is clear potentiality for notions of community that are whitewashed and represent un-interrogated reconstructions of the past, presenting a world that never was, a utopia that has never been

³⁵⁴ A. Flynn, ‘Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges’ *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28 (2007) p. 157

³⁵⁵ Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, 1991) p. 246

actualised but whose form lives long in the memory. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris & Carl Grodach, professors of Urban and Public Affairs, have stated that:

Ethnic museums exist within a local context, at the same time that they are expected to promote and create a specific cultural context. They are often vested with a larger role than that of purveyors of ethnic culture. As community-based institutions, they are frequently expected to contribute to community building and sustainability. Their mission is often described as social, educational, and political, in addition to cultural. At times, ethnic museums are even described as “advocates for ethnic communities, often becoming directly involved in community development, political action, and protest.” Thus, ethnic museums are expected to provide a new form of community space, at the same time that they are assuming a greater variety of functions than mainstream museums.³⁵⁶

These spaces primarily exist to further and affirm the historic contributions of minority peoples, a promotion and a celebration designed to instil pride in the members of the ethnic group. *Museum in Black*, for example, wants to “teach the younger African-Americans to be proud of who you are, where you are from, and what you are about”.³⁵⁷

It is difficult to criticise a process in which responsible, active citizens take an avid role in the production and dissemination of historical material. It is indeed easy to comprehend community’s perseverance and therefore its adaptability – as Zygmunt Bauman states “community is a warm place, a cosy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day”.³⁵⁸ Yet particular versions of history are carried forward by certain communities that use these materials for their own gain, exploiting cultural goods as a means of demarcation. Should communities wish to search out these spaces in society then there is nothing that can, or should, be done to oppose them. However, traditionally, the non-activist archive with regards to a collecting policy has not set out to nurture such intellectual structures:

Archives have consciously avoided the suggestion that we push a particular point of view. We assert that we don’t tell the stories: we provide the raw materials for people to construct their own stories. In our core mission, we are not a venue for people to see something, as a tourist or a visitor sees an exhibit; we are there to facilitate the work of research. In some cases like genealogy, the research is a leisure activity rather than a vocation, but fundamentally, our clientele (we call them ‘users’, not ‘visitors’) is there for active work, not passive viewing.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ A. Loukaitou-Sideris & C. Grodach, ‘Displaying and Celebrating the ‘Other’: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles,’ *The Public Historian*, 26 (2004) p. 35

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59

³⁵⁸ Z. Bauman, *Community* (Oxford, 2001) pp. 1-2

³⁵⁹ L.J. Stout, ‘Reimagining Archives: Two Tales for the Information Age’ *American Archivist* 65 (2002) pp. 12-13

Of course we engage in outreach programs in which the manner of a quick, too-the-point presentation to a select audience in order to entice them towards the archives necessitates that we portray a selective appreciation of the historical narrative and take on the part of the storyteller. However we tell ourselves that we are doing this for the good of the archive. The marketing of our product means getting across the wide variety of records that we have at our disposal and the many uses to which they can be put. Yet as we have seen, questions of access and inclusion have become prevalent. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) publication, *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*, stresses how important it is, in the government's eyes, for archives to become "inclusive and accessible organisations".³⁶⁰ It specifically identifies "acquisition, exhibition, and cataloguing policies which do not reflect the needs or interests of the actual or potential audiences" as possible causes of social exclusion. The report states that archives should actually be attempting to "reflect the cultural and social diversity of the organisation's actual or potential audiences". The result has been that the relationship between archivists and their users has become more symbiotic, in that the archive begins to shape services to specific needs and expectations.

Putting certain aspects of cultural life 'on display' should pose acutely challenging questions for the archival community. It has become apparent from the discourse that the archive is today seen, in various circles, to be unable to step aside from the criticism of its activities as overtly political – its classification of records for example, no matter how scrupulous, is held to be political. Hence, by implication, archives play a considerable part in conferring a sense of civic identity on social congregations. Verne Harris has succinctly summed up the developments in this area:

The record invites us to acknowledge that its meanings and significances are located in the circumstances of its creation and subsequent use. In other words, context rather than text is the determining factor and we recordmakers should be *the* experts in context. However, even if we believe this, we are faced with daunting problems. Context is always infinite, and ever changing. So that, in the words of Derrida: "No context is absolutely saturable or saturating. No context can determine meaning to the point of exhaustiveness." So, what layers of context do we disclose? How do we disclose them? Here, without thinking very hard, we are deeply into the politics of archival description.³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ *Department for Media, Culture and Sport*, 'Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All' (2000) available at www.culture.gov.uk/pdf/social_change_1-11.pdf (accessed 24 March 2007)

³⁶¹ Harris, 'A World Whose Horizon Can Only Be Justice' p. 260. Terry Cook has written in this manner that "Archivists would ask what is presented in finding aids as a monolith and what is suppressed, and why, and then act to correct the situation. Archivists would engage openly with their clients and respect their

As a response to the emergence of such discourse the profession has developed subtle, seemingly acceptable practices that seek to satisfy the same premise of providing a variety of entry points. In practice the archive has begun to address itself cognitively to different audiences by drawing on the cultural nature of some of their resources to, first of all, select them and then to present them in a non-contextual, linear manner ascribing to a culture of interpretation. Therefore the semiotics of display is evident as the record becomes performance and entertainment. The National Archives in the United Kingdom is a prime example of this trend. In recent decades developments in computer and network technology has offered archivists many new means of making their holdings accessible to remote users and of making this information electronically searchable. There is nothing inappropriate in that, far from it, but most developments have been premised upon Web 1.0 thinking whereby the archive dictates to the user. The National Archives has been a pioneer of a host of archival interfaces through its website which have variously centred around an identity framework and it has been a key player in cultural projects such as Black History Month and British Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans History Month with many other such examples involving taking documents and digitising them outwith their contextual framework.³⁶² In pressing to reach out to existing users and to create new ones, too frequently archives are opting for the neatly packaged information product, the story, relating to essentialist doctrines of identity and in doing so they are contributing to what Jean-Francois Lyotard has called the commodification of knowledge,³⁶³ becoming part of a consumer present that seeks ready-made histories and identities that forego balance and contextualisation. This is a clear balkanisation of the record, and inserts the archive into the heart of identity politics, perversely indicating that men and women do not have the ability to transcend their circumstances and culture.

An interesting example of the distortion of archival practice that results from such developments was provided in a *Journal of the Society of Archivists* article in 2007 entitled

needs, rather than forcing them to accept professional metanarratives of how records should be described. Descriptive architecture based around the fonds would be exploded for complex institutional records-creating settings from its relatively flat, mono-hierarchical, and static fixation on a final creator into much richer, multi-relational, many-to-many contextual linkages. As archivists understand better the complex arrangements of modern records and the organizational (and personal) cultures that produce them, postmodern descriptive systems would move away from the monolithic legacy of past archival theory, from “the old fashioned ‘one-thing-one-entry’ approach” if they are intent on “satisfying researchers’ needs to understand the historical context of records, the activities that generated them, and the information they contain.” Cook, ‘Fashionable Nonsense’ p. 32

³⁶² For an overview of the ideas behind many of these schemes see R. Hasted, ‘Social Inclusion at the National Archives’ available at <http://www.history.ac.uk/education/conference/hasted.html> (accessed 26 September 2006)

³⁶³ see Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

'Colliding Worlds in the Curatorial Environment: The Archivist and the Activist'³⁶⁴ which documented a collaboration to 'humanise' an archival collection of African plantation workers, plantation owners, and their children on a Jamaican sugar plantation in the context of Black History Week for a university exhibition. The idea was for images from the collection to be displayed with interpretative text, which had been approved by academics, to put the collection into a "clear neutral historical context". However, the University of Exeter's Equality and Diversity Officer "judged the text to be implicitly racist in its approach and inappropriate in terms of the themes and philosophy behind the celebration of British History Month as well as the university's stated policies on inclusion and diversity". One of the results was as follows:

Records, such as those in the Gale Morant collection, are, like all archival materials, written from a particular point of view, at a particular time, by a particular person, for a particular audience. These specific records were written as economic reports for the plantation owners, and in many cases in the Americas these were absentee landowners. These accounts are not 'neutral' or 'value free'. They explicitly list the economic value of people of African origin to the people of European origin who ran the plantations to make profits. Thus one may read that a woman called Belinda is aged 40 in 1782 and listed as 'worth £50'. But by 1829, when she is 88 years old, she is listed as 'superannuated' – pensioned off and no value is listed. Why the difference? What is a human worth?

The guest curator recognised that reducing people to mere economic value in this way could invoke strong feelings, including discomfort and anger, for those viewing any exhibition on the subject of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

...Lucy MacKeith (curator) feels strongly that merely displaying such records as they stand repeats and intensifies the racist beliefs of that period. She does not believe that such racist materials can be presented using 'simple and neutral interpretative captions', as was the original intention in the first exhibition text draft. The work of a curator – in the interests of good scholarship, underpinned by values of equality and diversity – is to contextualise the material presented in an exhibition. So how can the value-laden records held in archives be used to rehumanise our knowledge of those black people who contributed so much to British wealth and who are an important part of our shared history?³⁶⁵

This is a betrayal of archival principles where the order of things is made dynamic, mobilised strategically in relation to the more immediate ideological and political exigencies of the particular moment and it also ignores that there were also black plantation owners. The archivist becomes a curator, an artist, in that they become a central player in the broader stages of identity politics, rather than a knowledgeable, behind-the-scenes arbiter. Like the recent scandal

³⁶⁴ C. Berry & L. MacKeith, 'Colliding Worlds in the Curatorial Environment: The Archivist and the Activist' *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28 (2007) pp. 139-149

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2

involving the BBC where a huge outcry was heard over the misleading editing of the trailer for RDF's documentary for the BBC about the Queen, such story-centred exhibits tend to privilege the story over the record, leaving the archive as little more than a stage which manifests transformative experiences. The record in this environment is little more than a prop in a grand postmodern narrative which leaves the record unable to speak for itself. It values the record more for its corroborative power than for its authenticity and provenance - than on its ability to function as trustworthy evidence. The true measure of authenticity under such a system is experiential – has the archival poetics of representation narrated upon the individual and affected their very manner of looking. Yet how the user-centred archive comes to adequately measure this is highly questionable. Catherine Nicholls, in an article on Australia's 'Two Worlds' exhibition,³⁶⁶ mentions user evaluation in regards to visitor statistics³⁶⁷ and visitor books for feedback purposes. Would large numbers of visitors/users and positive feedback legitimise the archival experience?

An answer can only be subjective but seeing these principles as the Holy Grail and therefore formulating an aesthetic experience manoeuvres the user inwards rather than outwards – the experience becomes solipsistic in the manner outlined by Didier Maleuvre when he quotes Ernst Bloch explaining that:

For without distance, right within, you cannot experience something; not to speak of representing it, to present it in a right way – which simultaneously has to provide a general view. In general it is like this: all nearness makes matters difficult, and if it is too close, then one is blinded.³⁶⁸

This is similar to Walter Benjamin's concept of aura where he links with writers who have focused on the inadvertent appearance of memories – in cases where they catch us unawares, in response perhaps to some accidental external stimulus.³⁶⁹ Aura, for Benjamin, is connected to this sense of distance and presence in that memory traces arise unbidden, locating the past in the present almost in the manner of an epiphany. Benjamin contrasts the *memoire pure* to that of the *memoire involontaire* – the voluntary memory and involuntary memory of Marcel Proust which conceptually is similar to Nora's archival and true memory. Proust explains how he fails to adequately remember the town of Combray, in which he spent part of his childhood. His voluntary memory can provide facts and information but no realm of depth and experience to soothe the soul. This alters when his *memoire involontaire* is stimulated into action by the taste of

³⁶⁶ C. Nicholls, 'Exhibiting Evidence: A Case Study,' *Archivaria* 55 (2003) pp. 27-42

³⁶⁷ over 500,000 people visited the exhibition.

³⁶⁸ D. Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford, 1999) p. 152

³⁶⁹ see Benjamin, *Illuminations* pp. 152-196

a kind of pastry called Madeleine which transports him back to the past and offers a token of something real that extends beyond appearances. In summing up, Proust writes that the past is:

...somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us), though we have no idea which one it is. As for that object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it.³⁷⁰

Whereas this surfacing of the unbidden memory trace produces an impression of a depth to the experience, of the past in the present, the process of conscious reflection dissolves any impact of an incident by allocating it “a precise point in time” and giving it “the character of having been lived” – that is, turning it into “an experience”.

Some may see the institutionalised record as having been imposed upon. However the record within the archive continues to have aura insofar as it continues to be associated with the sense of the unique and the authentic, of the unknown quality that permits memory traces to be stimulated through the unknown inferences, opinions, and interpretations that can be elicited from it – as Benjamin wrote “When...something inanimate returns our glance with its own, we are drawn initially into the distance; its glance is dreaming, draws us after its dream”.³⁷¹ This record may lie untouched and un-used for many years but through its unique set of attributes and its unique identifier it is alive with potentiality for the individual. This is contrasted with the utopian closure upon what the record and the individual can be in current archival thinking where the only role left for the archivist is to become, as Michel Foucault insisted, an archaeologist of the past, digging around for its remnants and assembling them subjectively side by side in the archive of modern knowledge, to become a storyteller, a ‘culturor’.³⁷² Experience is winning out over the thing, the record.

Establishing boundaries and building bridges

Some see the cultural experience as something to be celebrated or as an innocent by-product of globalisation, computer technology, and postmodern discourse. However, it is precisely because the record is framed not just by its material enclosure in the archive, or even by its own composition, but by what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “webs of significance” that makes these issues play outwith the archival institution and therefore so important:

The world in which we live, in which everything makes sense to us in the context of everything else, is what anthropologists call a world made of “webs of significance.” By being socialised in these particular webs of

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154-5

³⁷¹ U. Marx, G. Schwarz, M. Schwarz, E. Wizisla (ed.) *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs* (London, 2007) p. 45

³⁷² Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

significance, we have been socialised even to find pleasure in things other cultures do not find pleasure in, and pain in things other cultures do not see pain in.³⁷³

Cultures can define the world through categorisation and methods of understanding, and the individual can be suspended into it due to cultural narratives shaping the subjectivity of men and women. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag wrote “Photographs objectify. They turn an event or person into something that can be possessed”.³⁷⁴ Well, words do too. Narratives that enter into the public sphere shape us and viewing identity as performative means that identities are constructed by the “very expressions that are said to be [their] results”.³⁷⁵ This is a very postmodern account that in its conceptual drive finds expression in the work of Judith Butler who argues that the very understanding of belonging to a sex or gender (and we can add here an ethnic minority) is a problematic notion as gender is an effect performatively produced. Gender is, she has written:

A construction that conceals its genesis, the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions.³⁷⁶

Identity is the effect of performance.³⁷⁷ Therefore why does postmodern interpretation lead us, as a society and in the archive world, to indulge in labelling especially when it is a central tenet of the law (and liberalism) that constitutional protection inheres in the individual and that the respect of individual rights is coterminous with a free, civilised, and prosperous people. The individual is cast as the autonomous, rational human whose free will is paramount – in the American Constitution the individual is guaranteed, among other things, freedom of speech; freedom of religion; protection of economic liberties; rights to fair procedures, and the equal protection of the laws.³⁷⁸ This philosophical view of society is closely aligned with the anti-discrimination principle, and one can see the advantageous reasoning underlying such ideas when considering *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*, where Austro-Hungarian Gregor von Rezzori presented the disquieting idea that the philo-Semite and the anti-Semite have something in common (the

³⁷³ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, 1993) p. 5

³⁷⁴ S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London, 2003) p. 72

³⁷⁵ see Butler, *Gender Trouble* pp. 3-44

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140

³⁷⁷ Elizabeth Kaplan has written “With the intellectual focus on identity politics, essentialist perspectives, which reify identity and regard it as an intrinsic, immutable, perhaps even genetic, have for the most part given way to variations of anti-essentialism – identity as social fiction, no less ‘real’ for those who subscribe to it, but constructed culturally, for political and historical reasons”. Kaplan, ‘We are what we collect’ p. 145

³⁷⁸ R.H. Fallon, *The Dynamic Constitution: an Introduction to American Constitutional Law* (Cambridge, 2004)

narrator is both): a belief in a collective Jewish nature, a Semiteness.³⁷⁹ Identity politics suffocates the individual in descriptive narratives that are as universal, essentialist, and castrating as the modernist project against which its proponents rebel. In the words of Laura Downs: “It shares with its enemy an implicit grounding in a traditional metaphysics of Truth, the unchanging and eternal giver of categories; and of the self-enclosed, self-reflecting subject”.³⁸⁰

Unquestionably we persist in labelling of all sorts because it is a basic way of imposing order upon the public and it contains clues as to how a particular communication should be read. Yet the preposterous nature of labelling has been summed up by Philip Roth, possibly America’s greatest living novelist:

I know exactly what it means to be Jewish, and it’s really not interesting. I’m an American...America is first and foremost...it’s my language. Identity labels have nothing to do with how anyone actually experiences life...I don’t accept that I write Jewish-American fiction. I don’t buy that nonsense about black literature or feminist literature. Those are labels made up to strengthen some political agenda.³⁸¹

Roth is connecting here with the principle that we, as individuals, cannot avoid the passage through more than one community of ideas and principles, and have difficulty with the consistency and continuity of our identity over time. Hence it can be stated with some confidence that labels by which the self becomes contained are creations that permit a simplification of thought – we can think about without having to think through. This is, in itself, a recognition of the visual paradigm, a consequence of which is the prominence of a culture of rights assuming a primary status and taking precedence over the good in politics as consensually recognised where justice is a neutral concept. As John Gray states:

Now if, as the truth of value-pluralism implies, hard cases undecidable by general principles are pervasive in questions having to do with liberty, then there seems a natural presumption in favour of dealing with such questions by political reasoning, which is inherently and avowedly inconclusive, and which admits of compromises and of provisional settlements that change over time and which vary from place to place, rather than by legal reasoning – especially that species of legal reasoning that invokes grand jurisprudential or moral theories of the sorts that value-pluralism subverts. If the truth of value-pluralism is assumed, such that there are no right

³⁷⁹ G. von Rezzori, *The Memoirs of an Anti-Semite: A Novel in Five Stories* (London, 2002)

³⁸⁰ L. Downs, ‘If “Woman” is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Home at Night: Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (1993) p. 418

³⁸¹ ‘It no longer feels a great injustice that I have to die’ *The Guardian* (14 Dec, 2005) available at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,,1666780,00.html> (accessed 10 January 2008)

answers in hard cases about the restraint of liberty as political, and not as theoretical or jurisprudential questions.³⁸²

Thus Gray observes that:

...the end result...is not the simple transposition of political life into legal contexts but rather the corrosion of political life itself. The treatment of all important issues or restraint of liberty as questions of constitutional rights has the consequence that they cease to be issues that are politically negotiable and that can be resolved provisionally in a political settlement that encompasses a compromise among conflicting interests and ideals. In conflicts about basic constitutional rights, there can be no compromise solutions, only judgments which yield unconditional victory for one side and complete defeat for the other.³⁸³

This draws society into the nexus described by Derrida where-by identities are anchored in a “metaphysics of presence” which can only define identity in relation to difference and where meaning is carried forward to an encounter with the definable ‘other’ against which one’s own identity is certified. For Roth, this identity is something that becomes apparent through the external decreeing of otherness, the labelling of difference, by fellow citizens rather than through an internal awakening, making the individual something that they are not. In *The Plot Against America* he engages in the ‘What If?’ school of history where-by the aviation hero and rabid isolationist Charles A. Lindbergh is elected president in 1940 leaving American citizens who happened to be Jews fearing the worst after a series of anti-Semitic remarks. The narrator, Philip, states that:

Israel didn’t yet exist, six million European Jews hadn’t yet ceased to exist, and the local relevance of distant Palestine (under British mandate since the 1918 dissolution by the victorious Allies of the last far-flung provinces of the defunct Ottoman Empire) was a mystery to me. When a stranger who did wear a beard and who never once was seen hatless appeared every few months after dark to ask in broken English for a contribution toward the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, I, who wasn’t an ignorant child, didn’t quite know what he was doing on our landing. My parents would give me or Sandy a couple of coins to drop into his collection box, largess, I always thought, dispensed out of kindness so as not to hurt the feelings of a poor old man who, from one year to the next, seemed unable to get it through his head that we’d already had a homeland for three generations. I pledged allegiance to the flag of our homeland every morning at school. I sang of its marvels with my classmates at assembly programs. I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without giving a second thought to my affinity for the Fourth of July fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-header. Our homeland was America.

³⁸² J. Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake* (London, 1995) p. 74

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 77

Then the Republicans nominated Lindbergh and everything changed.³⁸⁴

The identity perspective becomes the vehicle through which the self and the other are established. This is extended to the realm of language where-by once we label individuals by certain terms, and these may be derogatory or simply rooted in otherness, we actually change the way we think about them. Identity politics, with its appeal to the authenticity of experience, is thus an inherently self-reflexive act that cloaks the true self in the sheath of negative differentiation rather than as simply a form of competition for scarce resources.³⁸⁵

Identity is therefore borne of an anaesthetising fictionalisation that needs a regular fix of coercive storytelling to make it into a reality, another indication of Foucault's 'politics' of truth that rules the epistemic conditions that make it conceivable to distinguish between true and false statements:

Everything that is sufficiently and suitably enunciated is in practice accepted as an enunciation of knowledge...any knowledge that is sufficiently and suitably expressed (deployed) has a progressive tendency to establish itself as the only knowledge there is. And any discourse initiated outside the dominant body of knowledge turns out to be so very difficult to think and articulate that it almost seems unheard-of, simply because it is unheard.³⁸⁶

David Lowenthal's discussion of this phenomenon as Heritage is persuasive:

Heritage brings manifold benefits: it links us with ancestors and offspring, bonds neighbours and patriots, certifies identity, roots us in time-honoured

³⁸⁴ P. Roth, *The Plot Against America* (London, 2004) pp. 4-5. Over one hundred pages later, Philip discusses the unforeseen and how it impinges upon the individual: "A new life began for me. I'd watched my father fall apart, and I would never return to the same childhood. The mother at home was now away all day working for Hahne's, the brother on call was now off after school working for Lindbergh, and the father who'd defiantly serenaded all those callow anti-Semites in Washington was crying aloud with his mouth wide open – crying like both a baby abandoned and a man being tortured – because he was powerless to stop the unforeseen. And as Lindbergh's election couldn't have made clearer to me, the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studies as 'History,' harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the silence of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic." pp. 113-114

³⁸⁵ Of course, competition for resources is inherent in society and there was a rather amusing example in 2007 where-by the new Equalities Commission was under fire from the competing interest groups who believed their interests should not be lumped into a singular organisation with other 'disadvantaged groups': "Those who root out disadvantage for a living are not slow to spot disadvantage when it comes their own way. So the birth of the new amalgamated equalities commission, which opens its doors in October, was always going to be painful. The existing quangos that deal with race, gender, disability – as well as lobby groups representing the new 'strands' of sexuality, religion and age – dug in for concessions (on its remit and the transition timetable) to ensure the new body would pay sufficient heed to their own particular cases. Heated micro-politics have been a distraction from getting on with delivery". *Guardian editorial*, (8 August 2007) p. 26

³⁸⁶ G.C. Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London, 1990) p. 53

ways. But heritage is also oppressive, defeatists, decadent. Heritage by its very nature excites partisan extremes...glamorises narrow nationalism...[justifies] jingoism...Heritage passions...play a vital role in national and ethnic conflict, in racism and resurgent genetic determinism.³⁸⁷

This heritage addiction does not necessarily need to be destructive. For Hugh Trevor-Roper the Scots are in a class by themselves when it comes to creating a fictitious past and this is often of a romanticised nature. He writes that in Scotland:

...the whole troupe of primitive Scottish kings, so happily refloated and redecored, would sail in their newly gilded ship, to the accompaniment of flutes and hautboys, like Cleopatra on the Nile, down the sacred river of tradition, while devout cheers arose from either bank: from Left and Right alike. For did they not prove that the Scots – the authentic Scots of Dalriada, the sole ancestors of modern Scotsmen – were an ancient and civilised people, Athens and Sparta combined, as famous for literature and philosophy as for valour in war; that they had brought the wisdom of Egypt and Greece to the far West; that they had been an aristocracy, a *Herrenvolk* in their country, living free of themselves, and subjecting the miserable Picts to their rule; that they had resisted and defeated the all-powerful Romans who had enslaved the miserable Britons south of the wall?³⁸⁸

Yet heritage, Lowenthal has argued, “is a declaration of faith in the past – a prejudiced pride in the past is not the sorry upshot of heritage but its essential aim”.³⁸⁹

Often there are divisive, often violent, repercussions from the embracing of heritage. Eric Hobsbawm is eloquent on this issue:

History is the new material for nationalist, or ethnic, or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction...If there is no suitable past it can always be invented. The past legitimises. The past gives a more glorious background to a present that doesn't have much to show for itself.³⁹⁰

Here heritage, or collective memory, is simply used as a modern social science term for what we traditionally know as myth and tradition and sometimes these can have horrific effects. Genocide atrocities that took place in the 1990s, whether it be in Rwanda or in the Balkans, are not events constructed in a vacuity. Rather the atavistic drives are laboriously constructed intellectually so as to submerge the doctrines of hate into the psyche of the participants. They no longer have to ponder the relevant merits and righteousness of what they are doing; their country, their ethnic people, are put upon, downtrodden, oppressed, and therefore my neighbour is no longer my

³⁸⁷ D. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, 1996) p. ix

³⁸⁸ H. Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (London, 2008) pp. 29-30

³⁸⁹ D. Lowenthal, 'Fabricating Heritage,' *History and Memory* 10 (1998) pp. 5-24

³⁹⁰ R. Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (London, 2006) p. 12

neighbour but rather the enemy and as my enemy they are an accomplice to the crime. The role that the archive can play in this process is evident in the acts of ‘memoricide’ that have regularly been visible during various historical periods, such as the targeting of museums, archives, and cultural institutions that accompanied the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and elsewhere. For example the truth contained in documents was blown up as the Serbians understood that:

...the first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then you have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was.³⁹¹

The historic archives in the fortress town of Karlovac was shelled by Serb forces.³⁹² The National and University Library of Bosnia was reduced to a shell, prompting a plaque to be placed on the boarded up exterior that read:

On this place Serbian criminals on the night of 25-26 August 1992 set on fire the National and University Library of Bosnia-Herzegovia. Over 2 million of [sic] books, periodicals and documents vanished in the flame:
Do not forget:
Remember and Warn!³⁹³

Dr Kermal Bakarsic, the then Librarian of the National Museum in Sarajevo, described the destruction of the National Library:

All over the city sheets of burning, fragile pages of grey ashes floated down like dirty black snow. Catching a page, you could feel its heat and for a moment read a fragment of text in a strange black and grey negative until, as the heat dissipated, the page melted to dust in your hand.³⁹⁴

Thus the archive becomes a crucial weapon in ethnic struggle, as Wolfgang Ernst notes in his discussion of the politicisation of German archives when he quotes the statement by the head of the Bavarian archival administration, Knopfler, at the 1936 Congress of German Archivists:

There is no practice of racial politics without the mobilisation of source documents informing us on the origin and development of a race and people...There is no racial politics without archives, without archivists.³⁹⁵

Northern Ireland provides a perfect illustration of these issues, soaked as it is in notions of ‘two communities’ - for example community, and cross-community, is consistently used in

³⁹¹ Quoted in Bevan, *Destruction of Memory* p. 25

³⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 36

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁹⁵ W. Ernst, ‘Archival Action: The Archive as ROM and its Political Instrumentalisation under National Socialism’, *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) p. 26

relation to identity in the Good Friday Agreement.³⁹⁶ While the Agreement seeks to use the language of diversity, the proliferation of ‘community’ discourse exposes the fact that it is a political peace treaty between the Unionists and the Nationalists who claim the right respectively to represent the Protestants and the Catholics. The stultifying effects of this reification of culture, propagated by central government and the Agreement’s supposed pluralist doctrine, was outlined in a Panorama programme in 2008 for the BBC, where the introduction stated: “The lengths we’re going to too keep two communities apart. You’ve heard of religious schools, but Protestant and Catholic bus-stops anyone?”³⁹⁷ Within the program Michael Doherty, Director of the Peace and Reconciliation Group, stated that the only thing that has changed in the conflict was the violence – reconciliation was still a distant dream. This had manifested itself, according to the program, in the management and institutionalisation of sectarian difference rather than the removal of segregation. For example:

- 17 peace walls had been put up, extended, or heightened since the Good Friday Agreement;
- On one street there were segregated bus-stops, for the same bus, at a distance of 150m;
- Post Offices, Health Centres, Benefits Offices, Schools, and Leisure Centres were some of the services duplicated for Protestant and Catholic communities at an enormous expense to the British taxpayer.

The stipulations for voting in the Assembly are quite astonishing in this recognition of two communities, where-by if you are not designated Unionist or Nationalist you are effectively deemed irrelevant:

The tests of cross-community support were defined by the Agreement thus: *parallel consent* requires a majority of those present and voting (N55), including a majority of both self-designated ‘nationalists’ (N22) and ‘unionists’ (N30). The implication of the Agreement/Act is that if this test should fail to be met, the alternative test, *viz. weighted majority*, would be applied. This requires 60% of those present and voting (N65), including 40% of both nationalists (N17) and unionists (N23).³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Northern Ireland Office, *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland* (London, 1998).

³⁹⁷ Panorama, ‘Divide and Rule’ BBC programme aired on the 7th April 2008.

³⁹⁸ R. Wilford & R. Wilson, ‘A Democratic Design: The Political Style of the Northern Ireland Assembly,’ *CAIN: Democratic Dialogue* (2001) available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/papers/audit.htm> (accessed 01/07/08)

Indeed the elected politicians are asked on taking up their seat at Stormont to declare themselves as Unionist, Nationalist, or other. Only 9 are declared as other.³⁹⁹ This is a political carve-up which forgoes the political leadership to create another kind of political culture in Ireland, a true citizenship. As Simon Thompson has put it:

What this shows is that parity of esteem is designed to operate as part of a political strategy designed to secure civil peace in Northern Ireland. To be specific, it is part of a political project of cultural engineering (or, more precisely, re-engineering) which is designed to create and sustain two moderate political blocs, both of which accept the legitimacy of the political practices which have helped to shape them.⁴⁰⁰

Thus the parity of esteem doctrine is actually a cultural container.

The failure of this policy in ‘community’ terms is exposed in the fact that fences between the communities are still going up. The Irish past is not past at all, but is actively – even malignantly – alive within the present. The interpretation of the past has always been at the heart of national conflict in Ireland and “Ireland”, one political scientist discovered: “is almost a land without history, because the troubles of the past are relived as contemporary events”.⁴⁰¹ Tribal divisions go back hundreds of years and stories that are passed down through the generations are part of the DNA of each community, or the myths of each community, whereby social experiences are made meaningful - one has to say politically meaningful. Thus the loyalist cause revels in a proliferation of date fetish – the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and The Battle of the Boyne in 1690 for example – which underline “the durability of ethnic antagonism in Ireland, the unchanging threat posed by Roman Catholicism and the ultimate assurance of providential deliverance”.⁴⁰² The assertion of territorial dominance is fulfilled by Protestants through the marching season, the controversial nature of which has often resulted in violence.⁴⁰³ These bonds become so naturalised that it seems individuals inherently have a community gene. For example, Dominic Bryan, of Queen’s University Belfast, writes of a meeting of the Community Relations Council in Belfast early in 2004 when he was listening to what he describes as a very good and positive presentation by a group of Protestant community workers who were from a rural town where the Protestant population is the minority. In arguing for further funding, one of the workers said that “we need to teach young people their identity”. The identity referred to was that of a

³⁹⁹ Panorama programme

⁴⁰⁰ S. Thompson, ‘Parity of Esteem and the Politics of Recognition’ *Contemporary Political Theory* 1 (2002) p. 216

⁴⁰¹ I. McBride, ‘Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland’, in I. McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001) pp. 1-2

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*,

⁴⁰³ see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1418070.stm (accessed 19/08/08)

particular community, a 'local' 'Protestant' 'community', in which these young people apparently live. And the young people seem to live there in ignorance of their 'true' communal identification, which they have, apparently, yet to be taught.⁴⁰⁴ This is a zero-sum game and therefore the citizens of Northern Ireland have been spoon-fed their history since birth, appropriated discourse - messages of a distant past are internalised so that values and assumptions rest upon religious affiliation. This has been summed up by a Republican mural which chillingly proclaims "History is written by the winner," a quote from a Queen's University of Belfast history lecturer later gunned down by loyalists.⁴⁰⁵



As Gerry Slater of the Public Record Office of Ireland comments in his analysis of this mural, we see the open book labelled 'Irish History' above which is the mask of Irish revisionism and the gaunt face of the personification approach to Irish history. It expresses a view that only those who are of the community can write the history, and shares conceptual similarities to Edward Said's *Orientalism*⁴⁰⁶ in that there is a narrative of victimhood, a comfortable explanation of the powerful oppressing the put-upon. In Said's case his placing of the blame for a region's disasters

⁴⁰⁴ D. Bryan, 'The Politics of Community' *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9 (2006) p. 603

⁴⁰⁵ G. Slater, 'Archives Amid Division: The Northern Ireland Experience,' Paper presented at Liverpool University Centre for Archive Studies (2005) available at www.liv.ac.uk/lucas/slater.doc (accessed 28/08/08)

⁴⁰⁶ E. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, 1978)

on the imperialism and racist mentalities of the West denies an autonomy to the individual Arab and lets those natives who have oppressed their people off the hook.

This is history as myth, as the deliberate fabrication of un-truths without any pretence of neutrality or attempt at accurate representation. It is all too easy in this environment to understand how individuals can slide into the negative stereotype and the demonising mythology when we are denied the insight into difference that flows from a representative understanding of history. One British Muslim, who came close to becoming a terrorist, gave this damning indictment on multiculturalism:

...the result of 25 years of multiculturalism has not been multi-cultural communities. It has been mono-cultural communities. Islamic communities are segregated. Many Muslims want to live apart from mainstream British society; official government policy has helped them do so. I grew up without any white friends. My school was almost entirely Muslim. I had almost no direct experience of 'British life' or 'British institutions'. So it was easy for the extremists to say to me: 'You see? You're not part of British society. You never will be. You can only be part of an Islamic society.'⁴⁰⁷

The terms of culture have been so reified in essentialist terms that the social bond is a misnomer today as the individual is a martyr to the power relations, to the dominance of systems of oppressors. The self is no longer seen as an agent for change or for responsibility but is a product of discursive structures and disciplinary regimes. The archive is a central cog in this perpetuation, acting as memory itself.

⁴⁰⁷ Cohen, *What's Left?* p. 378

PART III – CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 5 - A Professional and Responsible Archive

For someone to be professional means they 'profess' that they are trustworthy, possess appropriate specialist knowledge and skills, and aspire to excellence in performing their work. Professions and professionalisation promote distinctiveness and reliability amid the homogenising complexity and interdependence of modern life.⁴⁰⁸

Morris Cogan

⁴⁰⁸ M.L. Cogan, 'Toward a Definition of Profession' *Harvard Educational Review* 23 (Winter, 1953) pp. 33-50

A principle of credibility

In 1972 J.H. Hobson posed the following questions for the archival profession:

As might be expected in a new profession like archives, its members are rather self-conscious, constantly asking themselves and each other, what are archives? What is an archivist?...Where is he going?...What sort of relations should he have with his employer, with his public, with historians? How much of a historian is he himself?⁴⁰⁹

There can be no disputing the merits, nor the durability, of these questions. Nor should archival practitioners bemoan the vigour with which they are currently argued over in our professional journals. Unfortunately if you discuss certain concepts with sectors of the archival profession, certainly in the United Kingdom, one does indeed see a longing for the quieter days when great themes of theory were absent. Archival *science*, if it seeks any rights to actually label its conduct with the term, cannot hide beneath a parapet from which it never raises its collective head to view the wider expanse – whether it is in the form of economics, technology, or the structure and make-up of society and societal needs. By expanding into new territory and other disciplines the internal development of archival science can achieve a continual sense of renewal, can embrace new techniques and technologies, and can maintain (or obtain depending on your theoretical viewpoint) an optimum level of professionalism. I enter the world of archival literature having learnt a great deal from those in our field who, for example, have advanced archival postmodernism and understand that as a body, as a collective archival unit, we are linked despite our degrees of intellectual separation. In addition, I believe fully the truism that even those archival practitioners who deny theory operate nonetheless from a theory - indeed my conception of the archive is a theory rooted in the best means by which we can respond to current developments and provide a service that I believe is needed, and desired, by the general public in order to show the legitimacy and accountability of the archival profession. However it is a theory that diverges conceptually from that of postmodernism and the records continuum for whilst all sides would agree that there are past traditions worth preserving, foremost among them for this thesis are many nineteenth and twentieth century research methodologies and their subsequent adaptation for archival practice. It is the understanding of this thesis that a sense of purpose and responsibility must accompany such developmental archival discourse as has been discussed and too often the language that permeates archival literature seeks to remove the profession from the domain of scientific and historical enquiry.

Scientific and historical discourse, in all its varieties, rests upon a set of techniques appropriated in order to proclaim with a measure of validity an *approximation* of the truth and an

⁴⁰⁹ Quoted in Bolotenko, 'Archivists and Historians' p. 7

accurate representation of the world. This forms the positivity of this discourse. Whereas the harder sciences of biology, physics, and chemistry base their empirical method upon the performance of experimental tests by several independent experimenters and properly performed experiments, the archivist seeks to perform a variety of tasks that enable the evidence to reveal to us perceptible matters of fact. This is who we are and what we do – the archive is a conduit through which authentic and reliable records of evidence are used to deduce what has happened. These tasks are rooted in provenance, original order, and the continuous line of custody – the privileging of the creator and the connection between the inscription and place. For the historian these authentic and reliable records are the major source of information from which the process of footnotes and bibliographies emerge to form the canon of evidence methodology. For the genealogist they are the lifeblood of generations past. For local citizens they are rooted in the mentalities of their place, they symbolise the blood, sweat and tears of their predecessors and the persecution and turmoil they suffered – the local archive is their own private collection. Francois Chatelet, the historian of philosophy and political philosophy, wrote that:

It is indispensable that the past, which is held to be real and decisive, be studied rigorously insofar as past times are considered as having a claim of our attention, insofar as a structure is assigned to them, insofar as their traces are visible in the present. It is necessary that every discourse concerning the past be able to clearly show why – on the basis of which documents, and what evidence – it proposes a particular sequence of events, a particular version, rather than another. It is especially important that great care be taken in dating and locating the event, since the latter acquires historical status only to the extent that it is determined in this way.⁴¹⁰

It is into this canon that the archive should see itself, functioning “as a principle of credibility” that operates as a bottom-line resource in the carving-out of claims to disciplinarity.⁴¹¹ And yet for records continuum and postmodern theorists this is viewed as simply not good enough in the modern age, as a backward and outmoded tradition with dangerous consequences for the profession. Before specifically analysing the subject of the records continuum and postmodernism, as per chapters 3 and 4, it is necessary to critique the base upon which they rose, ideas introduced in chapter 2. From virtuality and its surrounding discourse emerged three key statements: (1) The notion of the automatic link between creator and meaning is dead; (2) Virtuality and the space of flows means ‘history’, or historical enquiry, is a matter of cut-and-paste; (3) The archivist as privileger is a thing of the past. For this thesis these concepts, although they have a measure of validity when viewing the wider expanse of societal developments, are

⁴¹⁰ quoted in J. Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York, 1992) p. 11

⁴¹¹ Osborne, ‘The Ordinarity of the Archive,’ p. 53

headed in the wrong direction when it comes to archival practice and historical/scientific methodologies.

Although not advocated by archival practitioners, some see emerging from the culture of virtuality a radical overhaul of how we find and locate our knowledge. Ronald Day, in *The Modern Invention of Information*,⁴¹² documents an idea in Paul Otlet's book, *Monde*, where the "ultimate problem of documentation" is envisioned: the creation of a technological device that would unify information but also transform it in such a way as to present it in the most "advantageous" manner to each viewer. Day provides a summary of Otlet's ideas that are worth detailing at length:

The final goal of such a project would be the presentation of all the "facts" of existence to all the people – a sort of Hegelian vision of absolute being with information playing the role of Hegel's notions of truth. Epistemic "transformation," here, ends with a form of total representation. History, for Otlet, was a progressive movement of ever-accumulating knowledge and clarity; what was lacking was a device for the storage, retrieval, and communication of this progressive store so as to bring the fruits of reason to all the citizens of the world. Otlet's multimedia device would present to each person, in the comfort of his or her own armchair, something like the omniscient vision of the world by God. At one stroke, this device would solve the problem of science (to rationally represent all things in the world), the problem of technique (to rationally organise all the knowledge of the world), and the problem of society (to make available to each person all the knowledge of the world.) For these lofty ends, Otlet envisioned a multimedia device that, "acting at a distance...would combine the radio, x-rays, cinema, and microscopic photography," projecting the information of the world onto an "individual screen." Such a device would provide each person with a true and complete picture of all knowledge in a manner that would be most true for each person, thus eliminating conflicts over differing interpretations and providing the grounds for "true" conversation.

It does not take a stretch of imagination to connect such ideas to the World Wide Web - it is evident that there is an underlying sense of liberation that lies beneath the idea of all knowledge being accessible and which underpins the multimedia computer of today. As Jim Blackaby and Beth Sandore observed from their separate perspectives of the US Memorial Holocaust Museum and the Oregon Historical Society:

Ever wish you could put your fingers on all of the information about a specific topic in a museum, regardless of whether it was drawn from the objects collection, exhibit catalogues, the library's holdings, or the prints and slides collection?⁴¹³

⁴¹² R.E. Day, *The Modern Invention of Information* (Illinois, 2001) pp. 19-20

⁴¹³ J. Blackaby & B. Sandore, 'Building Integrated Museum Information Retrieval Systems: Practical Approaches to Data Organisation and Access,' (1997) (available at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw97/mw97wed.htm#13> (accessed 17/0708))

This is a legacy of the vision of a global community made present on a personal computer screen.

Therefore this is an age that supposedly lionises technical services and technicians, the people who make this possible, over cultural mediators. This led the sociologist Mike Featherstone, in 2000, to pose the following set of questions:

Can the expansion of culture available at our fingertips be subjected to a meaningful ordering; or is the desire to remedy fragmentation to be seen as clinging to a form of humanism with its emphasis upon cultivation of the *persona* and unity which are now regarded as merely nostalgic as we begin to explore post-human forms?

If we are faced by a vast unbounded sea of data, how will navigation be managed and legitimated? Will disintermediation, the direct access to cultural records and resources from those outside cultural institutions, lead to a decline in intellectual and academic power or will the increased scope and complexity overwhelm the untutored user and lead to greater demands for reintermediation, involving the context framing and mapping skills of cultural intermediaries?⁴¹⁴

Logically following such questions through from one side sees the cultural producer merely creating raw materials (fragments and elements), and then leaving it open to consumers to recombine those elements in any way they wish. The effect is to break (deconstruct) the power of the author to impose meanings or offer a continuous narrative. Each cited element says Derrida:

...breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality.⁴¹⁵

Continuity is given only in 'the trace' of the fragment as it moves from production to consumption. The effect is to call into question all the illusions of fixed systems of representation which eventually leads the archive towards:

...a repository of material which has only been loosely classified, material whose status is as yet indeterminate and stands between rubbish, junk and significance: material that has not yet been read and researched.⁴¹⁶

This is all reminiscent of Foucault's great confused murmur of discourse. Foucault presents his readership with this determination by contrasting the 'utopia' and 'heterotopia', two alternative ideas of location. Whilst the 'utopia' is an ordered universe the 'heterotopia' is a dramatically more subversive device:

⁴¹⁴ M. Featherstone, 'Archiving Cultures' *British Journal of Sociology* 51 (2000) p. 166

⁴¹⁵ quoted in Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* p. 51

⁴¹⁶ M. Featherstone, 'Archive' *Theory, Culture & Society: Problematizing Global Knowledge: Special Issue* 23 (2006) p. 594

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this ‘and’ that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together”...[heterotopias] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences.⁴¹⁷

The form of the archive is considerably altered in this state. As Sawchuk and Johnson write:

...an archive is less like the *archivum*, or house [Derrida’s external place] and more like a city that continually expands and grows, that contains numerous pathways. In this dream, new technologies play a central role as the means by which all documents might be put on-line, linked by a vast hypertextual network.⁴¹⁸

From such vantage points the archive becomes a global contingent collection of unstable ‘texts’ with questionable ‘evidential’ value that can be deployed in competing narratives by a productive user rather than the passive reader.

And yet even in our hypertextual age of cut and paste, surf and spin, as a society we cannot resist the track back to authorial origin: in Scotland, one of our capital city’s most successful tourist experiences is the Edinburgh Literary Tour. The Edinburgh Book Lovers Tour describes its purpose as “starting outside the Writers’ Museum this tour takes you through Edinburgh’s closes, and through time, as you walk in the footsteps of literary greats such as Scott, Stevenson, and Burns”.⁴¹⁹ Such jaunts can be cast aside with disparaging comments of a light-hearted tourist jape but behind this venture lies – admittedly by some degrees of separation – what Philip Larkin described as the ‘magical value’ of an author’s manuscript. Here, as he put it in an essay for fellow librarians, we see “the words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this particular miraculous combination”.⁴²⁰ The public may find their authentic writer in the original manuscript or in the places in which they were composed. Roland Barthes is one who railed against such a practice:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire’s work is

⁴¹⁷ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London, 1970) p. xviii

⁴¹⁸ K. Sawchuk & S. Johnson, ‘Editorial/Introduction’, *Canadian Journal of Communication* 26 (2001) pp. 187-188

⁴¹⁹ Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature, ‘Literary Tours’ available at <http://www.cityofliterature.com/ecol.aspx?sec=3&pid=120> (accessed 30/09/08)

⁴²⁰ Quoted in ‘Manuscripts Matter: Collecting Modern Literary Archives’ available at http://www.literary.org.uk/pdfs/Manuscripts_Matter.pdf (accessed 30/09/08)

the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.⁴²¹

However such ruminating did not trouble the commercial boom in the genre of literary biography which, as Ronan McDonald states, "was a remarkably successful niche publishing phenomenon in the 1990s".⁴²² Recently, Scottish historiography has seen the publication of *Scotland: The Autobiography* where the power of the human voice is overwhelming in the evocative nature of the primary source.⁴²³ Failing that, autobiography is at the root of the modern obsession with self-identity experienced on a daily basis with the rise and flourish of the genealogical industry and the self-obsession of MySpace and Bebo whose whole premise revolves around offering a self-narrative to a wider audience. The power of autobiography is also visibly witnessed in the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?*. Jeremy Paxman and John Hurt were visibly shaken by what the records evidenced about their family histories. Paxman was reduced to tears when he was exposed to the hardship his great grandmother experienced bringing up eleven children on her own in a one bed tenement flat in Glasgow. Hurt was visibly annoyed that a family myth of Irish heritage was exposed as a fallacy. Indeed as Hannah Little has written "one could perhaps say in common sense terms that within modern Western society there exists a craving for the authentic self that acts to compensate for the perceived loss of 'true' self in public life".⁴²⁴

In addition there is little doubt that certain aspects of the internet lend themselves to the suggestion that dilation, in this case, is also dilution.⁴²⁵ Like those phone-in polls so beloved of television and radio, a product of an audit culture that privileges accountability over responsibility as so visible witnessed in the recent United Kingdom scandals,⁴²⁶ this supposed 'power to the people' maxim promotes a culture of the banal, a perpetuation of the facile, a haven for the morally deficient, and the proliferation of inaccuracy. This is not to deal in absolutes – there are many benefits from the rise of this phenomenon and numerous sites are professional, accurate, and responsible guarantors. But ease of access, for all its benefits, can imperil reliability. Gertrude Himmelfarb warns that:

⁴²¹ R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in S. Heath (ed.), *Image Music Text* (London, 1977) p. 143

⁴²² McDonald, *Death of the Critic* p. 114

⁴²³ R. Goring (ed.), *Scotland: The Autobiography* (London, 2007)

⁴²⁴ Little, 'Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever'. See also Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

⁴²⁵ see McDonald, *Death of the Critic*

⁴²⁶ See Ofcom Content Sanctions Committee Adjudications available at http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/obb/ocsc_adjud/ (accessed 06/07/08)

...democratization of the access to knowledge should not be confused with the democratization of knowledge itself. And this is where the Internet, or any system of electronic networking, may be misleading and even pernicious. In cyberspace, every source seems as authoritative as every other. As that child on TV put it, “lots of people” will profess to have the answer to his question’.⁴²⁷

For all the supposed emancipation implicit in the pronouncement ‘we’re all archivists now’, the loss of critical authority, of knowledgeable arbiters with some influence on public attention, actually diminishes the agency and choice of the user and by analysing such issues the archive should learn not to despair. The more information there is, the less any of it matters. Ubiquity is the mother of indifference. Graphic designer and architect Richard Saul Wurman coined the term *information anxiety* and defined it as a condition “produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. *Information anxiety* is the black hole between data and knowledge”.⁴²⁸

In contrast to a state of ignorance about something, it is also possible to have too much information. According to Everett Rogers, *information overload* “is the state of an individual or system in which excessive communication inputs cannot be processed, leading to breakdown”.⁴²⁹ Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson quote a participant in the *Repository of Public Knowledge Project* as saying:

What I tend to think about this question is that if you think of libraries, museums and archives, the mass of choice that is within them, is actually disempowering, and therefore as indicated earlier, to have somebody mediate it...so I actually think that people get fed up with making choices, and that in some areas of life they do want others to make the choice for them.⁴³⁰

In a similar vein Susan Greenfield, the neuroscientist, explicitly linked such concepts to narrative when challenging her fellow peers in a debate in the United Kingdom House of Lords in 2005 to consider:

When you read a book, the author usually takes you by the hand and you travel from the beginning to the middle to the end in a continuous narrative of interconnected steps. It may not be a journey with which you agree, or one that you enjoy, but none the less, as you turn the pages, one train of thought succeeds the last in a logical fashion. We can then compare one narrative with another and, in so doing, start to build up a conceptual

⁴²⁷ G. Himmelfarb ‘Revolution in the Library’ *Library Trends* 47 (1999) p. 615

⁴²⁸ R.S. Wurman, *Information Anxiety* (New York, 1989) p. 34

⁴²⁹ D. Case, *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs and Behaviours* (London, 2002) p. 98

⁴³⁰ B. Usherwood, K. Wilson & J. Bryson, ‘Relevant Repositories of Public Knowledge? Libraries, Museums, and Archives in the ‘Information Age’ *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 37 (June 2005) p. 96

framework that enables us to evaluate further journeys, which, in turn, will influence our individualised framework. We can place an isolated fact in a context that gives it a significance. So traditional education has enabled us to turn information into knowledge. Now imagine there is no robust conceptual framework. You are sitting in front of a multimedia presentation where you are unable, because you have not had the experience of many different intellectual journeys, to evaluate what is flashing up on the screen. The most immediate reaction would be to place a premium on the most obvious feature, the immediate sensory content, the "yuk" and "wow" factor. You would be having an experience rather than learning. The sounds and sights of a fast-moving multimedia presentation displace any time for reflection, or any idiosyncratic or imaginative connections we might make as we turn the pages, and then stare at a wall to reflect upon them.⁴³¹

Admittedly these are different times from the days when the pathways to information gathering were fairly homogenous as with the radio or daily newspaper. However in his iconoclastic history of science, *The Shock of the Old*, David Edgerton warned readers not to engage in a technologically determinist view that human needs and desires alter with new technology – in our modern age the live music event has become the main source of revenue generating income for artists as the demand is so high, photography did not end painting nor film with television.⁴³²

Humans still need to be directed, they still need mediators. Currently, on the Web, Google performs that very function by, just as the archivist does, privileging certain pieces of information over others. As Moss, Currall and Stuart state:

The search engine will, at most, index less than 50 percent of the material that is available on the Web and that proportion will not be a random selection geographically or culturally, as a result of intentional or unintentional aspects of the criteria used to decide what pages to index. The criteria used to match our query to candidate results, and then to order them by some relevance ranking, introduces further elements of privilege into the links that we actually follow as a result of the search...Although the way such algorithms work is a commercial confidence, there is no doubt that they privilege information by, for example, ranking results by the popularity of sites or the number of links pointing to it.⁴³³

Jimmy Wales, co-founder of Wikipedia, admitted as much:

People think of search as some kind of computer function but it's really editorial – it's journalism. If I type 'Martha Stewart' into a search engine

⁴³¹ S. Greenfield, 'We are at risk of losing our imagination' *The Guardian* (April 25, 2006) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2006/apr/25/elearning.schools> (accessed 29/08/08)

⁴³² D. Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old* (London, 2006)

⁴³³ Currall *et al.*, 'Privileging Information is Inevitable' p. 103

and I get 10 results back, those results are an editorial judgement whether or not it's made by a computer.⁴³⁴

In a world of virtuality, risk, and contingency there is still a place for taxonomy and order, for the mediator and knowledgeable arbiter.

The enacted fantasy

Despite this the belief that the archival profession suffers from an accountability or legitimacy gap in its more traditional form persists. Indeed both the records continuum and postmodernism almost revel in a derision of traditional archival practice which is held to be evidence of an almost genteel amateurism that fails the exigencies of modern times. Terry Cook writes that:

...the on-going denial by archivists of their power over memory, the failure to explore the many factors that profoundly affect records before they come to the archives, and the continued assumptions by many users of archives that the records presented to them are not problematic, represent a prescription for sterility on both sides of the reference room desk.⁴³⁵

Someone like Frank Upward is, as a rule, a fan of flourishing, flowery language. Indeed he can get positively abrasive asserting that those who don't join him in that great leap forward of post-custodialism are sitting in their metaphorical pipe and slippers, wedged to their armchair and comfort zone:

These thoughts are the product of the practical consciousness of people still playing the Newtonian game. They are arguing that archivists and records managers have their own spaces and times to play in, and please don't blur the boundaries.⁴³⁶

Therefore at the core of this thesis is the dispute over what kind of profession we wish archival science to be in this age of information overload and virtuality, of electronic records and the rise of the consumer. Just what sense to make of this informatisation and the discourse of accountability (and subsequently performativity, audit, and representation) is highly debatable. Some see the emergence of a professional, proactive, representative archive; to some it represents the emergence of an activist auditee role of the archive and the archivist; others, such as MacNeil, Eastwood and Duranti persist with emphasising the legal rules of evidence and an archivist role rooted in conventional principles.

Yet it is surely appropriate to see the consequences of audit, in its managerialist mode of functioning, as coterminous, rather than opposed, with the doctrine of postmodernism where-by it

⁴³⁴ Quoted in 'Wikipedia aims to roll over Google' *Times Online* (September 2, 2007) available at http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/media/article2367254.ece (accessed 19/08/08)

⁴³⁵ Cook and Schwartz, 'Archives, Records and Power' p. 2

⁴³⁶ Upward, 'Modelling the Continuum' p. 119

becomes impossible to separate oneself from the event or action because everything is dictated by power - by the need to understand power, to contradict power, to expose power, to hold power accountable. As Foucault wrote:

These 'power-knowledge' relations are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.⁴³⁷

In an archival context this quote from Cook and Schwartz describes the emergent archival relation with such power/knowledge discourse:

...various postmodern reflections in the past two decades have made it manifestly clear that archives – as institutions – wield power over the administrative, legal, and fiscal accountability of governments, corporations, and individuals, and engage in powerful public policy debates around the right to know, freedom of information, protection of privacy, copyright and intellectual property, and protocols for electronic commerce. Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies. And ultimately, in the pursuit of their professional responsibilities, archivists – as keepers of archives – wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use.

...When power is denied, overlooked, or unchallenged, it is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. Power recognized becomes power that can be questioned, made accountable, and opened to transparent dialogue and enriched understanding.⁴³⁸

To contrast this quotation with that of T.R. Schellenberg on the role of the archivist illustrates the divergence in conceptual outlook:

The archivist's job at all times is to preserve the evidence, impartially, without taint of political or ideological bias, so that on the basis of evidence those judgements may be pronounced upon men and events by posterity which historians through human failings are momentarily incapable of pronouncing. Archivists are thus the guardians of the truth, or, at least, of the evidence on the basis of which truth can be established.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* pp. 27-28

⁴³⁸ Cook and Schwartz, 'Archives, Records and Power' p. 2

⁴³⁹ Schellenberg, *Modern Archives* p. 236

In taking the Cook and Schwartz line many archival theorists are following the lead of philosophical theorists such as Derrida and Foucault who, as we have seen, can conceive of the archive in a form that is considerably beyond what one would hope any practicing or theorising archivist could desire if they see their ends and responsibilities as archival. In a more concretely postmodern sense they visibly seek to undermine traditional scientific and historical methodologies. To follow Foucault and Derrida is to look for the roots of knowledge in power relations and for the tactics of power immanent in various forms of discourse. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault explores the concept of the ‘non-locus’ and through the theme of ‘discontinuity’ conceives of terms around which such discourse can take hold – those of “threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation”.⁴⁴⁰ Foucault asks, “what would be the effect of the historical methodologies concerning themselves with discontinuity rather than continuity”. And one of the answers that Foucault finds fits nicely into the box labelled interpretation. For Foucault what he terms the ‘space of dispersion’ focuses upon defining the series in contrast to the traditional historical practice of causality:

...in its traditional form, history proper was concerned to define relations (of simple causality, of circular determination, of antagonism, of expressions) between facts or dated events; the sense being known, it “was simply a question of defining the positions of each element in relation to the other elements in the series. The problem now is to constitute the series; to define the elements proper to each series, to fix its boundaries, to reveal its own specific type of relations, to formulate its laws...”⁴⁴¹

Think about the terms used here – ‘constitute’, ‘define’, ‘fix’, ‘reveal’, ‘formulate’. This is something we witness today in the archival community, not only from the records continuum which we shall come to, but from the Canadian school of ‘Total Archives’ – most visibly in the theory of macro-appraisal for which Terry Cook, the postmodernist, is an advocate.

Macro-appraisal starts from the premise that appraisal has a political dimension, at least in the case of public records. Essentially, Cook’s argument is that the essence of government in a democratic state is the interaction of citizens and organisations with the state. The evidence of this interaction is worth preserving and this evidence is more valuable when results deviate from intentions, when citizens are not merely passive recipients of government services but voice their opinions about the decisions governments make and their effects. Appraisal is the means to do this and he expressively takes appraisal as his first example of postmodern archival practice:

⁴⁴⁰ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* p. 6

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

Macroappraisal focuses on governance rather than the structures and functions of government *per se*. Governance emphasizes the dialogue and interaction of citizens and groups with the state as much as the state's own policies and procedures; focuses as well on documenting the impact of the state on society, and the functions of society itself; encompasses all media rather than privileging written text; searches for multiple narratives and hot spots of contested discourse between citizen and state, rather than accepting the official policy line; and deliberately seeks to give voice to the marginalized, to the "Other," to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate, which is accomplished through new ways of looking at case files and electronic data and then choosing the most succinct record in the best medium for documenting these diverse voices.⁴⁴²

In response to criticisms from Terry Eastwood, Cook stated that the policy of macro-appraisal was based on "...which related records gives the best, most succinct, most focused evidence of the record creator's essence".⁴⁴³ Yet in stating that the policy "deliberately seeks to give voice to the marginalized, to the 'Other'" Cook is clearly inserting a notion of ideological value into the equation, which is to say biased in favour of particular prefixed ideas of what is valuable to society.

The author Julian Barnes, in a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*, explains that in the 5th volume of the correspondence of the 19th century French writer Gustav Flaubert there is an example of the author using realism as a springboard:

...assisting the imaginative leap towards the final aim: 'beauty'. He explains the matter – while disguising it as a straightforward request for information – to his most gifted pupil (and family friend) Maupassant. He is writing *Bouvard et Pecuchet* and needs a sheer chalk cliff for a scene in which his two protagonists, after a discussion about the end of the world, are to be panicked by a sudden rockfall. It must be a particular kind of cliff, with horizontal layers of flint. He has searched for what he wants without success near Le Havre; but Maupassant, who knows the stretch of coast between Bruneval and Etretat, might be a more successful location scout. This may look like a Realist having a landscape researched for him, the more so when Maupassant comes back with what Flaubert admits is "perfect information". But perfect information is not the same as what he requires: "This is my plan, and I cannot change it. Nature must lend itself to my plan".⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Cook, 'Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth' p. 31

⁴⁴³ T. Cook, "'Another Brick In The Wall': Terry Eastwood's Masonry and Archival Walls, History, and Archival Appraisal' *Archivaria* 37 (1994) p. 100

⁴⁴⁴ J. Barnes, 'Gustav Flaubert's Last Letters,' *Times Literary Supplement* (March 12, 2008) available at http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article3537862.ece (accessed 21/09/08)

What is being conveyed is the primacy of the writer's conceptualisation – reality takes a back-set. The same essence is at work for documentation strategies where reality is subsidiary to the archivist's conceptualisation. Nature must bend to whoever is actually carrying out the appraisal. Cook is essentially asking the archivist to conduct an audit of institutional records for cultural ends, to *create* a representative record. Macro-appraisal, with its cultural overtones, and other documentation strategies fall into the cultural trap of the moment where the invention, the story, the overt construction is ushered in. This clearly removes the concept of an archival collection away from the 'organic' of Muller, Feith, and Fruin, and the 'natural process' of Jenkinson by seeking to skew the appraisal policy for cultural benefits.

Of course the continuum also fits into Foucault's conception. From an analysis of the audit culture it appears apparent that archival principles have been thrown out in a drive to professional rationalism, to 'importance,' as we become just another functional branch of an informational universe that leaves the real world "shaped by the very idea of recording it...It is not that records record things but that the very idea of recording determines in advance how things will have to appear".⁴⁴⁵ This distortion is determined by a neo-liberal 'decentralisation' which seeks to present an image of a depoliticised process whereby the record can be utilised through the existence of, and importance placed upon, targets and performance measurement without the government actually participating in the process. In actuality the central force is creating facts which professionals then have no option but to achieve and they are subsequently recorded and treated as facts, as something that can be presented as evidence of success. It is a circular process of deception and of the subversion of records creating practice. In a specifically archival sense audit culture enables a drive towards the perfect records system that embodies a shift from archival custodianship to record/evidence construction in which the archive enacts processes conceptually rooted in the domain of the bureaucrat:

All bureaucracy can be seen as an attempt to create a method for the reduction of contingency, imperfection, and error, an attempt which is represented in the bureaucrat-as-user's effort to reduce his participation in the reading of the record.⁴⁴⁶

Systems that seek to monitor authenticity, integrity, and reliability during the process of record-making contain a powerful stench of disciplinary power in which the demands of accountability are diffused and felt prior to the act of creation rather than after. An awareness of the presence of perfect record capture, maintenance, and retrieval mechanisms becomes cause rather than effect of action, origin rather than supplement, temporally primary rather than secondary. For Bearman

⁴⁴⁵ Raffel, *Matters of Fact* pp. 48-49

⁴⁴⁶ L. Duranti, 'Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science (Part II)' *Archivaria* 29 (1989) p. 11

and Hedstrom the ends take precedent over the means, outcomes over outputs. In an age and culture which values accountability the archivist, in this reading, must prove to the discerning consumer that it is avidly contriving to ensure the right records are reaching the repository and to diminish the risk of anarchic power overriding their documentary base:

If all these measures (volume of records accessioned, numbers of researchers, or the percentage of holdings described in national networks) rise, year after year, but the evidence of important events and decisions in the organizations served by archives remain undocumented or inaccessible, then archives are failing to accomplish their purpose. If new record keeping systems are being implemented which increase the insecurity of records, rather than assure their security, then archives are failing to ensure the keeping of adequate documentation.⁴⁴⁷

These systems therefore must be designed so that:

Documentation of manuscripts begins with the identification of collecting priorities, research on people, associations and events which played a role in history and which might have generated records. When it acquires a function, an organization establishes procedures for activities that will accomplish it and implements information systems to support it. If we understand these activities, procedures and information systems, it is possible to identify records which will be created and their retention requirements before they are created, because their evidential value and informational content are essentially predetermined.⁴⁴⁸

Hence extravagant claims are made for recordkeeping systems that will, through the archive being a dominant player at the design and creation stage, eliminate recordkeeping scandals, provide a full and comprehensive documentary heritage for the consumer, and “make and keep records an unmediated condition of truthfulness incontrovertible to a degree that transcends historical contingency”.⁴⁴⁹

There is either an intellectual failure or the collective turning of a blind-eye to the possible effect of such disturbance to the record-keeping environment, to the discouraging of records creation, thus limiting the ability of archives to provide reliable evidence of actions and transactions. The impact of this change is not to be underestimated by archivists. In emphasizing the performance the profession is contributing to the production of a fabricated reality that reflects the performative gaze the archival community desires. Appearance and impression become the dominant factors within the performative regime, an enacted fantasy judged by the demands of accountability. The same premise lies behind French theorist Jean Baudrillard’s

⁴⁴⁷ D. Bearman & M. Hedstrom, ‘Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options’ (1993) p. 89 available at http://www.archimuse.com/publishing/elec_prgmstr/elec_prgmstr_Bearman.pdf (accessed 08/03/06)

⁴⁴⁸ D. Bearman, ‘Documenting Documentation’ *Archivaria* 34 (1992) p. 39

⁴⁴⁹ Brothman, ‘Afterglow’ p. 326

statement that:

There is no escape from this race to the real and to realistic hallucination since, when an object is exactly like another, 'it is not exactly like it, it is a bit more exact.' There is never similitude, any more than there is exactitude. What is exact is already too exact, what is exact is only what approaches the truth without trying.⁴⁵⁰

Brien Brothman, one of the only perceptive critics of such developments, posed the challenge for the archival profession to make its epistemological mind up in the following regard:

It remains moot, therefore, whether archivists are in the business of taking measures to preserve records as vessels reliably carrying intended *meaning* or in the business of evoking and then proficiently capturing *incontestable organizational truthfulness* of fact as expressed by injecting "recordness" in "information" systems'.⁴⁵¹

It is in fact evident that for the sectors of the archival profession the enduring archival dilemma of neutrality has been discarded for an overt subjectivity where:

...records will be preserved which serve the needs of the present, are moved forward into the future, and are so programmed in advance by archivists working in close cooperation with administrators and other professionals to focus on outcomes⁴⁵²

The archaeologist archive

Similar to Foucault's discourse is that of Jacques Derrida's who, in *Writing and Difference*, describes a rupture, a disruption:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.⁴⁵³

Language invading 'the universal problematic' undermines the linkage between the role of historical investigation to the understanding of the past. In fact, the technique of a historical narrative used by historians – by such weighty practitioners as Leopold von Ranke, Sir Geoffrey Elton, Richard J. Evans – is inherently anti-intellectual, according to the postmodern critic Sande

⁴⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* p. 107

⁴⁵¹ Brothman, 'Afterglow' p. 326

⁴⁵² Bearman & Hedstrom, 'Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records'

⁴⁵³ J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago, 1978)

Cohen. Historians, he says, “use narration in order to deflect thinking,” and he condemns their “outrageous recreation of tutelary narration” where “the reader is not even allowed to *think*,” as:

...by imposing the form of story, academic history reproduces a culture of common language, common society, or common reality in the face of uncommon language (codes), class society, and uncommon realities (chasms between cultural worlds).⁴⁵⁴

Cohen’s point is a common postmodern line of thought – that academic historiography is intrinsic to a power relation that “is part of the overall requirement for cultural stability and sustains a future organised, in advance, as the neutralisation of existing contradictions...” For postmodern advocates the underlying premise is that the history of thought that emerged from modernism has promulgated false unities and discursive totalities in which the archive is complicit. It is this that underpins the archival shift from history to memory, from evidence to culture and to the understanding that the archivist should interpret the documentation at their disposal to reveal narratives. What do I mean by interpret in this regard? The most overt understanding of interpretation is that it is rooted in communication, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural heritage to the public through first-hand involvement with records, as per chapter 4. This is similar to the conceptions of Derrida, and those archival practitioners like Verne Harris who advance deconstruction as constructive to the archive, as: “To retrieve or deconstruct is, not to destroy, but to shake loose from a text its essential tendencies which the text itself conceals”.⁴⁵⁵ In other words it seeks to reveal narratives and alternative meanings. Yet there is an even more subversive aspect of deconstruction where Derrida proclaims “invent in your own language if you can or want to hear mine; invent if you can or want to give my language to be understood”.⁴⁵⁶

Where does all this interpretation for the archive lead? Chapter 4 described some of the more pernicious effects around invention with identity politics and essentialism. It is visible that the reification of culture⁴⁵⁷ is one that contributes to the erasure of a viable, open, and discursive

⁴⁵⁴ S.M. Cohen, *Historical Culture: On the Recording of an Academic Discipline* (Berkeley, 1986) p. 16

⁴⁵⁵ J.D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York, 1982) p. 247

⁴⁵⁶ J. Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford, 1996) p. 57

⁴⁵⁷ This concept is especially prevalent in the work of Berger and Luckmann. They state that “Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanised world. It is experienced by man as a strange facticity, an opus alienum over which he has no control rather than as the opus proprium of his own productive activity”. P.L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London, 1967) p. 106

public sphere⁴⁵⁸, an erasure that has profound implications for the political health and future of harmonious relations. To make culture and its manifestations, such as texts, the objects of certain kinds of general claims – especially those involving arguments or grounded assertions – is to presuppose a form of essentialism and to employ language as representation. When the advancement of a professional discourse revolves around a rhetorical reification of culture, when it assumes the over-arching obligation to disseminate a language that leads to such a reification and which results in types of histories being included, and on the flip side some excluded, then one must question the claims of that profession to be acting in a responsible manner.

In 1994 Mary Lefkowitz wrote an article in which she attacked a book by George G.M. James entitled *Stolen Legacy* in which the author offered a “new philosophy of redemption for black peoples”.⁴⁵⁹ His message argued that the black people of North Africa, the Egyptians, were the true authors of Greek philosophy. The root of Lefkowitz’s concerns, outwith the blatant revisionism on offer, is that it is simply wrong to seek to empower a certain community which identifies with the culture of Africa when the evidence shows so blatantly (because of the chronology) that Aristotle could not have stolen his ideas from the library at Alexandria. The obligation to seek the facts and tell the truth overrides all other concerns. Yet this does not sit today with the argument of the neo-conservatives who, following Strauss and Kristol, support the attacks on evolutionary biology in order to bolster popular morality and preserve social order – Kristol’s truths for certain people. In this case attacking Darwin serves to sustain what Plato regarded as a “Noble Lie”.⁴⁶⁰ Yet surely the archive should not be involved in this type of translation and this should affect the archival dilemma – is the record to be studied for its own sake, or does the record serve as stimuli for a wider, more encompassing cultural experience? Preservation or story? The emergent archive in the nineteenth century “treated cognition as

⁴⁵⁸ Webster quotes that the public sphere is taken to be “an arena, independent of government (even if in receipt of state funds) and also enjoying autonomy from partisan economic forces, which is dedicated to rational debate (i.e. to debate and discussion which is not ‘interested’, ‘disguised’ or ‘manipulated’) and which is both accessible to entry and open to inspection by the citizenry. It is here, in this public sphere, that public opinion is formed”. Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* p. 101

⁴⁵⁹ M. Lefkowitz, “The Myth of a “Stolen Legacy”” *Society* (1994) p. 27

⁴⁶⁰ Doherty, ‘Origin of the Specious’. For the general good, Socrates contrives “a fairy story like those the poets tell...some magnificent myth that would carry conviction to our whole community”. He means to persuade the populace that they had been “fashioned and reared in the depths of the earth, and Earth herself, their mother, brought them up into the light of day; so now they must think of the land in which they live as their mother and protect her if she is attacked.” Few would believe this myth right away, but Socrates hoped to “succeed with the second and later generations”. Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth, 1974)

distanced, impersonal, and exclusively rational”.⁴⁶¹ Subjectivity was to be removed in the consideration of the artefact, as Kant’s philosophy of ‘disinterestedness’ showed. As Hein states:

This idealisation does not entail that the pursuit of knowledge have no emotive significance; a passion for wisdom is always in order. But its intention is to detach cognition from personal interest in order to connect it with the intersubjective conditions of reality.⁴⁶²

Yet the record becomes a means to an experience which enhances its unreality. By so doing wider questions emerge that throw into doubt the whole archival enterprise; with government/funding issues so prevalent is it too far-fetched to suggest that the archive could be carrying out whitewashed auditing of the record to present the accessible face of minority experience? Developments at least open the archive up to the question that it is serving an ideology in the manner described by Hannah Arendt where the idea, the ideology, becomes “an instrument of explanation” where history:

...does not appear in the light of an idea...but as something which can be calculated by it. What fits the ‘idea’ into this new role is its own ‘logic,’ that is a movement which is the consequence of the ‘idea’ itself and need no outside factor to set it into motion...As soon as logic as movement of thought – and not as a necessary control of thinking – is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a premise.⁴⁶³

Specifically the issue is the switch from evidence to memory for whereas the practice of history involves searching, researching, and the art of inquiry, memory is subjective, an unreliable partner open to the whims and sweet words of the cad. Memory is not a copy, retained in the storehouse of the memory awaiting selection; it is a reworking, a patchwork quilt of bright colours. Memory, in Frederic Charles Bartlett’s view, “is hardly ever exact, [...] and it is not at all important that it should be so”.⁴⁶⁴ This is true but should not be a central concept for the archive whose *raison d’etre* is the fact, the perpetuation of the exact and its continual preservation down the ages. In one of his last books before his premature death, WG Sebald broke the silence in Germany about the Allied bombardment during the Second World War, an event that:

...seems to have left scarcely a trace of pain behind in the collective consciousness, it has been largely obliterated from the retrospective understanding of those affected, and it never played any appreciable part in the discussion of the internal constitution of our country.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ Hein, *The Museum in Transition*, p. 79

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶³ H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1967) p. 317

⁴⁶⁴ F. Bartlett, *Remembering: a Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge, 1995) p. 213

⁴⁶⁵ W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London, 2003) p. 4

Sebald reveals that he borrowed the title from the scientist Solly Zuckerman, who once told him that he was going to write about the bombing of Cologne for Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*, and that he was going to call his essay, "On the Natural History of Destruction". Zuckerman failed to see the project through and confessed that he could no longer remember in detail what he wanted to convey. He could no longer recall anything except the spire of "the blackened cathedral rising from the stony desert around it, and the memory of a severed finger that he had found on a heap of rubble".⁴⁶⁶ Hence we can say memory fades, the archive remains and that archives are a means through which memory can be activated or found. It is not memory itself. In making the switch to a memory culture away from historical methodologies the archivist has moved from a knowledgeable arbiter to that of cultural broker where-by their role is to explicate the cultural grouping within the record and the discrimination that emerges from it, to stress a form of public programming and performance. The results of this doctrine when taken to its logical, and somewhat surreal, conclusion has been described by American historian Frank Ankersmit:

...the naive faith in the text itself being able to offer a solution to our interpretation problems became just as absurd as the faith in a signpost attached to a weathervane. The paradoxical result of all this is that the text itself no longer has any authority in an interpretation and that we even feel compelled to advise our students not to read Leviathan independently; they are better off first trying to hack a path through the jungle of interpretation. To put it in a nutshell, we no longer have any texts, any past, but just interpretations of them.⁴⁶⁷

The rule of law

Carolyn Steedman, author of *Dust*, has shown how Derrida conceptualised the archive as intrinsic to this discourse of power/knowledge through the archival participation in the authority of beginnings:

In the opening passage of *Archive Fever* Derrida presents his readership with the image of the *arkhe*, as a place where things begin, where power originates, its workings inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings. In the brief account of the operation of the Greek city-state...he pointed to its official documents, stored in the *arkheion*, the superior magistrate's residence. There, the *archon* himself, the magistrate, exercised the power of procedure and precedent, in his right to interpret them for the operation of a system of law. In Derrida's description, the *arkhe* – the archive – appears to represent the *now* of whatever kind of power is being exercised, anywhere, in any place or time. It represents a principle that, in Derrida's words, is "in the order of commencement as well as in the order of commandment."⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32

⁴⁶⁷ F. Ankersmit, 'History and Postmodernism' *History and Theory* 28 (1989) p. 137

⁴⁶⁸ C. Steedman, 'Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust' *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001) pp. 1159

Various archival writers have used Derrida's formation to equate that the archive has a central formulation in the power-knowledge axis. In the recordkeeping field we can turn to Verne Harris for a sceptical take on the role of politics in this sphere. For Harris:

Ultimately there is no understanding of the archive without understanding of politics. But, as I have argued elsewhere, politics is archival, and the archive is the very possibility of politics. I submit that the elites that oversee Derrida's "capitalistico-techno-mediatic hegemony" – and this could easily be true of all elites – draw their power primarily from their control of contexts. They are the ultimate purveyors of context. They create contexts, destroy them, promote or discourage them, co-opt or discredit them. And they are primarily interested in recordmaking as an instrument in the exercise of power.⁴⁶⁹

That there is a power/knowledge axis is indisputable. Indeed Chapter 3 exposed the dream of controlled transparency, the transparency of the archon, and the pernicious effects that can accrue. For some in the archival world the way to counter the power/knowledge nexus should be a reliance upon an individual's inner sense of morality, of justice, which should take precedence in order to create a documentary base that is representative of human experience. At the 2009 *Society of Archivists Conference* Randall Jimmerson, Head of the Graduate Archives and Records Management Programme at Western Washington University, presented just such a view in a paper entitled 'Archivists and the Call of Justice'.⁴⁷⁰ Jimmerson identified three key areas – accountability, openness and social justice – which the archivist should promote through the work we do in order to further a drive towards a better society. Personal morality is central to this vision. Indeed Jimmerson advocated personal freedoms for all peoples. In many regards, in the broad scope of the objectives, these are noble aspirations. Indeed, in the archival world, such thinkers are to be congratulated as being pioneers that have ushered in some deep thinking regarding the gap between the *is* and the *ought* in archival repositories. For those suspicious of the advocacy of personal morality as a framework for archival practice it still must be conceded that, invariably, the truth that is presented in the archive is a truth that represents the way the world is which, inevitably, shadows power. This is perhaps the distinction between truth and morality – truth represents the world as it is whereas morality is a drive towards the way the world ought to be. As Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 documented, the archival response to such power/knowledge notions has corresponded to the ideas of Foucault where he shifts the archive from a passive 'reactive' institution rooted in custody, the place, and dusty old end-of-lifecycle

⁴⁶⁹ Harris, *Archives and Justice*, pp. 167-168.

⁴⁷⁰ R. Jimmerson, 'Archivists and the Call of Justice' Paper given to the *Society of Archivists Conference* (1 September, 2009)

records to that of a 'proactive' institution where the authority of archival beginnings is key, where the archive is involved in the order of commencement, defines the "system of enunciability"⁴⁷¹ of a statement/event, and becomes "the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events".⁴⁷² Thus the concept of an archaeology of knowledge in which the archivist burrows to ascertain the prevailing rules of discursive formations. As Cook and Schwartz state approvingly: "Cultural theorists, most notably Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, see the "archive" as a central metaphorical construct upon which to fashion their perspectives on human knowledge, memory, power, a quest for justice."⁴⁷³

For the archival community one would imagine that the debate is rather clear-cut. Few activities seem more inconsistent with the norm of detachment that is usually associated with archival professionalism than the use of terms such as 'constitute' and 'reveal'. Since when have archives sought to define the creation and the shape and text of a record pre-creation? Since when have archives sought to openly challenge that record as a created entity to "reveal the illogic of allegedly rational texts"? Yet in travelling down the path of morality we enter the world of reality creation in a similar vein to the neo-conservatives. The neo-cons in America, who no doubt many in the postmodern archival camp would profess to be misguided at best in their policies (and in their morality), have utilised such thinking to assert that "truth is not salutary, but dangerous, and even destructive to society – any society". And just like the postmodernists, history for the neo-cons is above all a morality tale of simplicity. In an article in the *New York Times* in 2004 Ron Suskind provided an extraordinary example of this mindset:

The aide [to George W. Bush] said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality -- judiciously, as you will -- we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do".⁴⁷⁴

Events in Iraq have certainly proved the danger of this type of philosophy that distorts reality and Susan Neiman provides a further example in her book *Moral Clarity*. Writing with regards to

⁴⁷¹ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* p. 129

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*,

⁴⁷³ Cook and Schwartz, 'Archives, Records and Power' p. 4

⁴⁷⁴ R. Suskind, 'Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush' *New York Times Magazine* 17 October 2004 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html> (accessed 10 March 2008)

conditions faced by women in the 1960s and 1970s, and their subsequent attempts to alter perceptions, she states that:

When I began graduate study in the late 1970s, one well-disposed advisor told me he would like to think women could do philosophy as well as men did, but given that it had never happened, it was unlikely to happen now. It was quite a load for the few of us who went on to graduate school to carry; male professors dared us to vindicate all of womankind by proving history wrong, and younger women watched us anxiously in their own search for usable role models. Some women answered this sort of pressure by delving into obscure bits of history in pursuit of some fact that would change the data, to find the mistress of Descartes or the daughter of Locke who had been his equal, his muse, or possibly his source. Archives were racked for papers that showed traces of brilliance, or at least originality. Anything was sought that might support the claim that women had been contributing equally to Western letters all along, and it was only sexism that had left their contributions overlooked, undervalued, or even stolen.

Then as now, this seemed to me dead wrong: wilfully distorting the *is* in order to attain an *ought*.⁴⁷⁵

There is a world of difference between what records to create and how to create them, between story and preservation, between the *is* and the *ought*. The notions of Jenkinson whereby the archivist must strike a “balance between the desire to provide for the needs of the Future and a determination to copy the impartiality of the Past”⁴⁷⁶ is dispensed with in this moral drive towards the *ought* in a visualisation of reality and the documenting of a performance that reflects the archival image of appropriate construction and interpretation.

Yet in stating, for example, that the engagement of archivists in the process of creation endangers their fiduciary role is not to deny that the gap between the *is* and the *ought* should be bridged, nor is it to advocate the status quo. It is, simply, to suggest that the chasm is too great to be bridged by good intentions or the actions of individual archivists seeking to calculate the means through which to gather information. Rather the whole system by which accountability is apparently ensured throughout our society at present is flawed in that it is reductionist in outlook, consumed by the mantra of due process. The epitome of supposed good practice has been the ability to produce visible forms of accountability, to show how policy and procedure is in place, to conform to some prescribed agenda. In such a reductionist climate there is no place for concepts like responsibility – whether personal, social, political or corporate. The flaws in such a system have been exposed, time and again, to catastrophic effect to the extent that the audit culture, in its various effects, is representative of the original good intention that becomes destructive in the ways that all ideologies, according to Hannah Arendt, tend to behave: “the real

⁴⁷⁵ S. Neiman, *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists* (London, 2009) pp. 154-155

⁴⁷⁶ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* pp. 156-157

content of the ideology [...] which originally had brought about the 'idea' [...] is devoured by the logic with which the 'idea' is carried out."⁴⁷⁷ Consider the following:

- In the aftermath to September 11, 2001 and the attacks on the Twin Towers public discourse, primarily in the United Kingdom and United States of America, went into a reductionist meltdown at the highest echelons of government. "Today, our nation saw evil" was George W. Bush's initial response. Indeed Susan Neiman provides an example from philosopher Peter Singer, in his book *The President of Good and Evil*, who counted 319 speeches that invoked the word by June 2003.⁴⁷⁸ This was coupled with the abstract concept of a War on Terror. Such discourse sought to stifle thinking rather than promote it, to act as a substitute for explanation, to eliminate the need for understanding. Why understand when your aims (democracy in the Middle East) can be implanted on the end of a Shock and Awe bombing strategy. In the end the neo-cons did manage to create their own reality in Iraq and beyond – a reality that has alienated Muslims around the world and potentially aided the cause of terrorism.
- In the recent United Kingdom expenses scandal involving the House of Commons and Members of Parliament it was apparent that many members felt no responsibility for their actions because due process had been undertaken. MPs filled in their forms, produced receipts, acted in cooperation with the body that one would expect to act as a watchdog (the Fees Office which is a servant of the House, providing a light-touch service with no effective oversight) and they followed the 'guidelines' (loosely) as set out in *The Green Book: A Guide to Members Allowances*. This permits the culture that enables MPs to attempt to hide behind the mantra of "I didn't break the rules." And, in many instances, they are correct.
- The deficiencies of the accountability system were visibly in evidence with the financial crisis that engulfed the world during 2008 and beyond. The banking sector in the United States and United Kingdom was able to take massive risks – the insurance giant AIG was permitted to bet the whole of the world's GDP – despite their being visible markers supposed to provide oversight of its actions in the form of the Financial Services Authority (FSA) in the UK and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in the US. In the case of Bernie Madoff financial analysts actually raised concerns about Madoff's practices repeatedly for a decade. Harry Markopolos, a fund manager,

⁴⁷⁷ H. Arendt, 'Ideology and Terror: a Novel Form of Government' *The Review of Politics*, 15 (1953), p. 319

⁴⁷⁸ Neiman, *Moral Clarity* p. 335

bombarded the SEC with detailed claims that Madoff's fund with nothing but a giant Ponzi scheme – that is, there were no real profits; the gains of long-standing clients were just the capital raised from newer subscribers. Yet the agency did not conduct even a routine examination of the investment business until it was too late.

Accountability, camouflaged by technically instrumental relations of efficiency, can no longer be viewed as the innate servant of openness that it intimately implies. In the case of the expenses row and the failure of the regulatory system in the financial sector the structures designed specifically to ensure accountability have been shown to be deficient and the major players have been found, in the court of public opinion, to have failed the test of responsible practice. This is at the crux of the anger and dismay visibly directed at the bankers and their bonus culture which, in 2009, has continued despite spiralling unemployment and public sector debt. Sir Fred Goodwin was awarded a pension package of £650,000 a year four months after leaving the Royal Bank of Scotland when it was bailed out by the United Kingdom government.⁴⁷⁹ The banking crisis is truly representative of the all-consuming here and now, dictated by the need and drive for immediate and visible signs of success in the present, of input and output but nothing in-between. Think of Virilio's diagnosis of an "endless perpetuation of the present" in which "contemporary man no longer arrives at, achieves, anything" beyond a "total performance syndrome". Think of Leccardi and the "detemporalised present" involving a reduction from wisdom to mere information, where the availability and speed of information networks leads to a loss of present space for reflexive action that has a temporal connection to the past and future. True accountability, and there is such a thing as this thesis believes in the practice and necessity of being accountable, must be based upon considerably more than a reductionism where visible conformance is to be found through objectives and procedures, by prescribed agendas. Ask the questions: When your bank was a traditional high street retail bank, there supposedly to protect the interests and finance of its customers and community (and such a notion is not far-fetched – the Royal Bank of Scotland has been feted as a proud example of nationhood in Scotland and Northern Rock has solid roots throughout the North East and its people), did you feel more

⁴⁷⁹ On October 18th, 2009 the Sunday Times ran the following story on its front page: "The state-owned Royal Bank of Scotland is planning to hand out record bonuses of up to £5m each in a snub to struggling taxpayers.

The move would see the average employee in its high-risk investment banking arm take home £240,000, with the top 20 staff in line for payments of between £1m and £5m.

The payouts by the investment banking division – from a total pay and bonus pot of £4 billion – would top the deals awarded at the peak of the financial boom in 2007 and are £66% higher than those paid last year.

RBS, then headed by Sir Fred Goodwin, had to be rescued from collapse by the Treasury last October with an initial injection of £20 billion. The taxpayer now has a 70% stake in the bank. 'RBS to hand out record £5m bonuses' *The Sunday Times* (October 18, 2009) p. 1

trustworthy towards it, did you feel that it was more accountable and had your interests at heart more than they do when functioning as investment banks, when they diversify into such abstract practices as hedge funds and venture capitalism? Would you have more respect for a Thomas Dugdale over a Cabinet minister today i.e. a minister who actually held themselves responsible for the efficient functioning of their department rather than acting as some sort of glorified auditor? Would you rather the Civil Service was independent of the executive or would you rather it was aiding and promoting the ruling government of the today, populated by party-in-power acolytes?

Postmodernism and the records continuum have nothing to input into this debate because they are premised upon the reductionist version of accountability, dealing with the local and the minutiae or too concerned with procedures and outputs, with visible signs of conformance to their prescribed agenda. True accountability equates to a grander scale where proper practice and conduct is carried out along responsible lines where the gap that exists between the *ought* and the *is* can be narrowed rather than the superficial nature of results emergent from an audit culture. Clarke and Dean have made this very point in relation to wider governance structures:

...the current talk of corporate governance and the various codification, schema and recommendations might be doing more harm than good. For if, as we argue here, the rules they specify are impotent, the representation of them as panaceas for corporate ills is likely to lure investors into a false sense of security. There is a burgeoning literature reporting research associating compliance with the various governance regimes and ‘superior corporate performance’. *In contrast, there is little addressing the problems of the modern corporation in this age of globalisation* (author’s italics). ‘Legacy thinking’ draws upon experiences in the different corporate environments of the past, seducing would-be reformers into massaging the ways of dealing with corporate problems of the past, without much explicit recognition of the difference between the past and the present. A critical issue is whether the conventional corporate form with which most are familiar (and in respect to which the current governance regimes are directed) can indeed be governed adequately, if by governing we are referring to its original notion of controlling or steering.⁴⁸⁰

Clarke and Dean, clearly prescient, wrote this in 2007. And yet even today, after the banking crisis, there is still little recognition, or political will, at the highest echelons of the needs to fix the problems of the modern bank in this age of globalisation – in essence to remove the disparity where private sector institutions are essentially public sector institutions in that they are too big to fail, allowing banks and their employers *carte blanche* to continue with their practices in the

⁴⁸⁰ Clarke and Dean, *Indecent Disclosure* p. 7

knowledge that they will be bailed out by national governments and the taxpayer.⁴⁸¹ Where is the accountability in this system? Where is the need to act in a responsible manner rather than strive for short-term goals? As O'Neill and Strathern argue, fiduciary action requires more than the observation of auditable criteria. It demands responsible behaviour if trust is to be maintained.⁴⁸² It is encouraging that, in the wake of such scandals, it has become clear that the protagonists in the banking sector and Members of Parliament have failed the test of responsibility and are held in contempt for their irresponsible actions. It appears that the public mood is for those that caused the respective crises to be held to account and that failed structures of accountability should be overhauled. The somnambulist acceptance of being caught in a chain of events we do not understand, of which we have no control, of being the playthings of financial masters of the universe or our tax being the plaything of our elected members, has been shaken. Now we want control and clearer pathways. It is for this reason that, as a society, we need to seek recourse for such practices through the appropriate institutions, i.e. institutions that exist to enforce, or hold, the particular organisation to a set of standards with the authority and power to do so.

The archive has a role to play in this. John McDonald's belief that records are central to providing an account, that "without records, there can be no demonstration of accountability. Without evidence of accountability, society cannot trust in its public institutions" is unquestionably accurate. It is why Chris Hurley is correct to flag up that "a clear duty must be imposed on the providers that information be complete, coherent and understandable by its target audience". Yet this is of a different magnitude to the dream of context control where the archive seeks to prevent the instability of records creation and records systems which is a miniaturisation of focus. Rather the archive has a role to play *when deficient recordkeeping practice is visible*. In other words, the archive must have the ability and independence to call to account those whose records it is responsible for even if it is a long-time after the event has occurred. Unlike in Jenkinson's day when recordkeeping malpractice would not have even entered into his mind we,

⁴⁸¹ Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, advanced this notion, opposed by Prime Minister Brown, in a speech to Scottish business organisation in Edinburgh during October 2009. He stated that: "Tonight I want to focus on...reform of the structure and regulation of the banking system. Why were banks willing to take risks that proved so damaging both to themselves and the rest of the economy? One of the key reasons – mentioned by market participants in conversations before the crisis hit – is that the incentives to manage risk and to increase leverage were distorted by the implicit support or guarantee provided by government to creditors of banks that were seen as 'too important to fail'. Such banks could raise funding more cheaply and expand faster than other institutions. They had less incentive than others to guard against tail risk. Banks and their creditors knew that if they were sufficiently important to the economy or the rest of the financial system, and things went wrong, the government would always stand behind them. And they were right." M. King, 'Speech to Scottish Business Organisations, Edinburgh' (20 October 2009) available at <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/speeches/2009/speech406.pdf> (accessed 22/10/09)

⁴⁸² O' Neill, *A Question of Trust* & Strathern (ed.,) *Audit Cultures*

sadly, do not live in a virtuous record-keeping utopia and we know it. For example, in 2008 it came to light that some of Tony Blair's expenses claims, which the High Court ruled should be disclosed to the public, were shredded. The documents, itemising Blair's claims for household expenses during a year of his premiership, were destroyed in the midst of a legal battle over whether they should be published.⁴⁸³ Also in 2008 the Guardian newspaper ran a story that documented the mysterious disappearance of records by the US military regarding an al Qaeda suspect held in Guantanamo Bay.⁴⁸⁴ How could a conflicted archive/archivist deal with the conflict of interest that would occur, if pressured in these situations, when national executives seek to destroy records or hide behind the catch-all safety net of 'national interest' without protection from the rule of law which, as Osborne showed, has always been independent of, and held sway over, the political sphere? Australia's drive to ensure accountable practice through involvement in the creation stage of records is directed related to the Heiner scandal of 1990 where such protection was lacking, with catastrophic effect:

⁴⁸³ 'Tony Blair's Expenses Claims Shredded' *Sunday Times* (18 May, 2008) available at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article3953909.ece> (accessed 15/07/08)

⁴⁸⁴ "The former head of interrogations at Guantanamo Bay found that records of an al-Qaida suspect tortured at the prison camp were mysteriously lost by the US military, according to a new book by one of Britain's top human rights lawyers. Retired general Michael Dunlavey, who supervised Guantánamo for eight months in 2002, tried to locate records on Mohammed al-Qahtani, accused by the US of plotting the 9/11 attacks, but found they had disappeared. The records on al-Qahtani, who was interrogated for 48 days – 'were backed up ... after I left, there was a snafu and all was lost', Dunlavey told Philippe Sands QC, who reports the conversation in his book *Torture Team*, previewed last week by the Guardian. Snafu stands for Situation Normal: All Fucked Up. Saudi-born al-Qahtani was sexually taunted, forced to perform dog tricks and given enemas at Guantánamo. The CIA admitted last year that it destroyed videotapes of al-Qaida suspects being interrogated at a secret 'black site' in Thailand. No proof has so far emerged that tapes of interrogations at Guantánamo were destroyed, but Sands' report suggests the US may have also buried politically sensitive proof relating to abuse by interrogators at the prison camp. Other new evidence has also emerged in the last month that raises questions about destroyed tapes at Guantánamo. Cameras that run 24 hours a day at the prison were set to automatically record over their contents, the US military admitted in court papers. It is unclear how much, if any, prisoner mistreatment was on the taped-over video, but the military admitted that the automatic erasure 'likely destroyed' potential evidence in at least one prisoner's case. The erased tapes may have violated a 2005 court order to preserve 'all evidence [of] the torture, mistreatment and abuse of detainees' at Guantánamo. The order was retroactive, so it also applies to the 2003 loss of al-Qahtani's records. Lawyers representing other Guantánamo detainees are asking whether tapes of their clients' treatment may also be erased. 'You can't just destroy relevant evidence,' said Jonathan Hafetz, of the Brennan Centre for Justice in New York. David H Remes, a lawyer for 16 Guantánamo prisoners, said the CIA's destruction of interrogation videos shows the US government is capable of getting rid of potentially incriminating evidence. '[In Guantánamo] the government had a system that automatically overwrote records,' Remes told the Guardian. 'That is a passive form of evidence destruction. If a party has destroyed evidence in one place, there's no reason to assume it has preserved evidence in another place.' More than 24,000 interrogations were videotaped at Guantánamo, according to a US army report unearthed by researchers at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. The US military office at Guantánamo did not return a request for comment from the Guardian about its taping policies." 'Torture victim's records lost at Guantanamo, admits camp general' *The Guardian* (21 April 2008) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/21/guantanamo.humanrights> (accessed 28/07/08)

In 1990, the Queensland Government ordered the destruction of the records of an investigation begun, but not yet completed, by retired magistrate, Noel Heiner. It is alleged that this represents a failure of accountability and a violation of good recordkeeping practice. What makes this case unusual in the catalogue of similar failures is that, on this occasion, the consent of the Queensland State Archivist was sought and obtained...That being so, the issue is not just whether the Queensland Government was at fault for poor recordkeeping practice, but whether the State Archivist was at fault for not holding the Government to account, thus exhibiting poor practice in the role as agent of accountability.⁴⁸⁵

Asking the archive to become involved at the creation-stage, to become an auditor of records management systems conflicts with the independence of the archive and would leave the archivist considerably more exposed to the type of subversive pressure visibly in evidence in the Heiner Affair, to be implicit in the act of destruction. The continued protection that the law can provide over vested political and corporate interests was exposed by a case in the United Kingdom involving the defence giant BAE Systems. Michael Moss has described it as thus:

Lord Justice Moses and Mr Justice Sullivan were forthright in upholding this principal [the rule of law] in their judicial review of the case brought by Corner House Research and the Campaign Against the Arms Trade against the Director of the Serious Fraud Office and BAE Systems – “the courts fulfil their primary obligation to protect the rule of law, by ensuring that a decision-maker on whom statutory powers are conferred, exercises those powers independently and without surrendering them to a third party”...They were unequivocal in declaring that: “Threats to the administration of public justice within the United Kingdom are the concern primarily of the courts, not the executive. It is the responsibility of the court to provide protection”. The crucial evidence to support the allegations against BAE systems was discovered by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) amongst DTI files that had been mistakenly sent to The National Archives at Kew. The relevant documents were published on the CAAT website in March 2007. The files were subsequently withdrawn from public access by the government. What is of interest here is that files exist in a form that provides incontestable evidence to support ‘the rule of law’ which in itself provides reciprocal protection for the ‘archive’ that holds them fiduciarily on behalf of the public...⁴⁸⁶

This is further evidence of the absolute need for a return to the clear roles and responsibilities of institutions such as the law and the civil service away from political machinations and influence. It is evidence also for an independent archive protected by the rule of law. For whereas the rule of law enshrines the principle of equity, postmodernism is too reliant on the Derridean understanding of ‘power’ and how it impacts into every facet of life.

⁴⁸⁵ Hurley, ‘Recordkeeping and Accountability’ p. 243

⁴⁸⁶ M. Moss, ‘Without the Data, the Tools are Useless; Without the Software, the Data is Unmanageable?’ Unpublished paper (2009)

Postmodernism wraps itself up in the cloak of governmentality, in the power-knowledge nexus where we would create our own ‘politics of truth’ to correct other ‘politics of truth’, a productive force bringing in new forms of discourse. It is an obsession that removes the archival gaze from the fiduciary tenets of the archive, that is out-of-touch with today’s developments, and that would diminish the public’s ability to trust us to safeguard their documentary heritage come what may – and the demand for this is still incredibly high. Think of the 1901 census website crashing due to the 1 million hits it received in an hour. Think of the demand for access to Stasi files when the Berlin Wall came down and East German citizens were liberated:

To the end of June 1996, some 1.7 million vetting inquiries from public and private employers had been answered by the Authority. In other words, one in every ten East German has been “gaucked”. In the same period, more than one million individual men and women – 1,145,005 to be precise – had applied to see their own files. Of these, nearly 420,000 had already read their files and just over 360,000 had learned with relief – or was it disappointment? – that no files on them could be found.⁴⁸⁷

The data/records available for both events are both essentially cases about equity, rooted in the rule of law, where-by however much there is a desire from interested parties to have incriminating records destroyed, they will eventually become public. This may be in 30 years, for example, however the demands of the archive are not, necessarily, the demands of the present if we return to the issue surrounding Freedom of Information. FOI is unquestionably a good thing in the functioning of a healthy democracy but there must be exemptions, protections and safeguards whether that is around national security or the ability of members of government to debate freely without their every opinion and thought being at risk of entering the public domain. Eventually, the archive will hold them to account. This is a very different sense of accountability to that of the reductionist standpoint of the audit culture which, coupled to the postmodern need to ‘fix’ and ‘reveal’ power, is a recipe for superficial signs of accountability, of conformance to an agenda prescribed by archivists. It rests upon traditional perspectives where archivists exist to act as archivists in their *professional* and *responsible* role rooted in professional, not personal, ethics codes:

For someone to be professional means they ‘profess’ that they are trustworthy, possess appropriate specialist knowledge and skills, and aspire to excellence in performing their work. Professions and professionalisation promote distinctiveness and reliability amid the homogenising complexity and interdependence of modern life.

It is their *fiduciary* role.

⁴⁸⁷ T. Garton-Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (London, 1997) p. 223

The evidential value of records, the uncorrupted authentic evidence of the creator maintained in context, is the nuclei from which historical research, societal memory, regulatory cooperation, and legislative conformity orbit. As Terry Eastwood states:

Archival documents are the only evidential window we have on the action-oriented past, because they arise in the course of acting in relation to one another and to events in the world. Archival documents do capture a moment in time, fix and freeze it, as it were, in order to preserve some sense of it for future reference, some sense of the unique character of the actions and events from which the documents arose.⁴⁸⁸

This documentary heritage must be above reproach so that the content can come to possess a canonical authority. There must, therefore, be a greater emphasis, in order to correct the accountability deficit, on record-keeping and evidence, of trustworthy action, of authenticity and reliability, of clearer regulatory conditions and separation of conflicting powers.

Shared sacred spaces

The same principle is in operation with regards the cultural representativeness of the archive. Indeed it is the same reductionist accountability tendency, and the failure of proper structures of accountability, that facilitates the need for the skewing of the archive to accommodate the ‘other’ or voices that might be considered silenced by a dominant discourse. Why is this cultural shift reductionist? Because it finds its roots, not in a justice that is universalism in outlook, but in a form of justice that pits friend against foe in a battle of scarce resource. Susan Neiman quotes American sociologist Todd Gitlin who, in his *Letters to a Young Activist*, states that the primordial passion that fuels identity politics proves to be its weakness: “However often it makes the blood race, [identity politics] often enough glosses over a profound impotence”. For, he argues, identity politics tends to stop thought; it confuses grand passions with minor irritations; and it mocks broader goals as mere rhetoric:

On this view, the goal of politics is to make sure your category is represented in power, and the proper critique of other people’s politics is that they represent a category that is not yours...Even when it takes on a radical temper, identity politics is interest-group politics. It aims to change the distribution of benefits, not the rules under which distribution takes place.⁴⁸⁹

Ultimately, Gitlin concludes, identity politics point backward, anchoring us in the past. Postmodernists see this type of identity-led politics as obvious and view universalism as advocated by those whose vision goes no further than power: to deny the postmodern discourse is to be a perpetrator of the status quo. And yet the election of Barack Obama in 2008 to the post of

⁴⁸⁸ Eastwood, ‘How goes it with Appraisal’, p. 112

⁴⁸⁹ Neiman, *Moral Clarity* p. 83

President of the United States of America, a nation mired in racial division and tension, and the international excitement that surrounded it was a measure of how many people of every background long to return to a universalist world-view. As represented in Obama it is character, not colour, that should be decisive.

It is in this vein that Stephen Hampshire asks:

If the moral and religious sentiments of human beings are in their essence exclusive and divisive, how is the war of all against all to be avoided and how can that degree of consensus necessary for public order ever come into existence? The most plausible and historically defensible answer is by political compromise, by rule-governed negotiation, by arbitration, sometimes adjudication, in institutions that have grown up to serve this purpose, usually by slow stages over a long period of time. This is the sphere of public reasons, of political values and virtues, and of the duties of civility...fairness and justice within a liberal society...require that there should exist respected institutions for adversarial argument, and equal access to them, accepted manners of negotiation, and entrenched rules and habits of advocacy, a full ritualisation of public conflicts.⁴⁹⁰

The work of Gordon Allport on inter-group conflict is also prescient here. In his publication *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport produced the 'contact hypothesis'.⁴⁹¹ In a 2006 paper specifically analysing the 'contact hypothesis' through the prism of Northern Ireland, Miles Hewstone *et al.*, produced this summary of Allport's work:

In its simplest form it proposes that bringing together individuals from opposing groups can reduce intergroup conflict 'under optimal conditions'. Allport suggested the reduction of intergroup conflict was most likely if four conditions were met. First, there should be equal status contact between members of majority and minority groups. Second, they should pursue common goals. Third, contact should be sanctioned by institutional supports. Fourth, contact should be of the kind that leads to the perception of common interests and humanity between members of the two groups.⁴⁹²

The ideas of Allport are continued in work by Shane O'Neill who attempts to respond to the competing demands and identities in Northern Ireland by utilising the work of political scientist John Rawls in order to achieve a 'just' constitutional settlement. For O'Neill, dialogue can initiate the type of rational reflection that traverses deep political divisions, creating the framework for a non-sectarian consensus.⁴⁹³ It is this willing suspension of disbelief that suggests

⁴⁹⁰ quoted in Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake* pp. 77-78

⁴⁹¹ G. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, 1954)

⁴⁹² M. Hewstone, E. Cairns, A. Voci, J. Hamberger, & U. Niens, 'Intergroup Contact, Forgiveness, and Experience of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland' *Journal of Social Issues* 62 (2006) p. 102

⁴⁹³ S. O'Neill, 'The Idea of an Over-Lapping Consensus in Northern Ireland: Stretching the Limits of Liberalism.' *Irish Political Studies* 11 (1996) pp. 83-102

we bracket our own subject position in order to engage with others and to challenge and argue with them more effectively. In the archival community we must understand that some will intrinsically view the colonising of the other into the recesses and institutions of the same as the elimination of otherness, and will therefore refuse to participate in our practices. Victor Segalen, for example, developed what, in his “Essay on Exoticism”, he defined as an “aesthetics of the diverse”. This is a theory of the exotic that is steeped in a sceptical and relativistic belief that cultural difference and the beauty of the other can only reside in its refusal to be assimilated, primarily colonially, or understood by the Same.⁴⁹⁴ For Segalen the exoticism as practised by the Western world was only interested in the exercise of nostalgia, in fixing an exotic landscape in the institutional confinement of the museum or archive. Taking this blinkered thought aside it is apparent that the archival profession must question its role in creating the ‘authentic’ experience, of “this imaginative visualisation and reconstruction...where ‘imagined nostalgia’ abounds and where ‘consumption is increasingly driven by rummaging through imagined histories’”.⁴⁹⁵

Rather, if true change is going to occur so as to ensure a truly representative body of documentation it will have to occur through the proper, universal, sense of justice – equal opportunity for all, at a national, local and individual level protected by the rule of law. Indeed, the archive should be at the centre of this but not in tokenistic gestures of creating interfaces that reify cultural attributes or presenting exhibitions that remove records from their context and provenance and present whitewashed, contemptuous representations of history that draw the archive into anchoring identity in Derrida’s *Metaphysics of presence*. Rather, outreach is absolutely fundamental to the modern archive. The ability to facilitate interaction with the history and memory the archive has to offer through all levels, age groups and ethnic backgrounds in society is paramount. The ability to create a network of trust within the domain that comprises your mission statement should see beneficial relations developed that ensures records are deposited from all sectors of society. Oral history projects can seek to give a voice to those whose voice is rarely heard – I listen in wonder at the recordings made by Alan Lomax of early 20th century folk music, the Poetry Archive is brought alive by the sounds of the poets giving voice to their own work, and I marvel in Shetland when I hear recordings of those who speak the traditional Shetland dialect and strain to pick out words that have long been lost from the everyday manner of speaking. These are the actions of an entirely active, responsible archive. It is of a completely different magnitude to the power and morality-led dictums of the postmodernists where the *is* is distorted into the *ought*. The archive is categorically not a factory

⁴⁹⁴ V. Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: an aesthetics of diversity* (London, 2002)

⁴⁹⁵ Little, ‘Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever’ p. 100

of thought nor is it a prompter of conscience or a series of academic social science bullet points. The archivist is not a formulator of theories that require the accumulation of evidence to manifest some exterior reality that they subjectively perceive. The archive, and the records that hold evidence within, represent somebody's story, an individual's story that, if remembered by the responsible archivist, should exempt them from the type of moralising which is always an articulation of present-day fads and fashions; slavery was once deemed morally 'right' by certain developed nations. This general view was put most trenchantly by Professor David Knowles, the medievalist and monk, who rejected moral judgment as an aspect of history, observing "the historian is not a judge, still less a hanging judge",⁴⁹⁶ and it finds its archival equivalent in Jenkinson's understanding that the upholding of the noble responsibilities of the custodian arise from an interest in "Archives as Archives, not as documents available for proving this or that thesis".⁴⁹⁷ The archive should function as a space for understanding, reflection, and contemplation in the same manner as David Levy's notion of the library:

For some of us, books and libraries symbolise some of the very qualities and modes of being that are threatened in our fast-paced instrumented lives. Books speak of time and depth and attention. They speak of a slower rhythm of life. And in their weighty physicality, they draw us back to our own materiality, and to the materiality of the world. Libraries are places not just where books can be found, but where people can temporarily remove themselves from the speed and busyness of life, where they can read and write and reflect. They are (or can be) shared sacred spaces in a secular, common world.⁴⁹⁸

The evidence of justice is to be revealed through the core fiduciary tenets of the archive – preservation and access – where an individual sense of reflection, enabled through equity and the rule of law, permits the archive to function as a space for civic values, for society and a coming together rather than a retreat to a culture of reflexivity, reductive to the self or culture.

Still playing the Newtonian game

If the rule of law and civic, universal values are to be at the core of the archive acting responsibly then two traditionalist doctrines still have to be upheld – those of custody and the creator. The custodial model ensures Jenkinson's unblemished line of custodians by:

- setting up safe stores of archives,
- undertaking physical preservation processes,
- ensuring an unbroken chain of physical custody,

⁴⁹⁶ D. Knowles, *The Historian and Character* (Cambridge, 1955) p. 19

⁴⁹⁷ Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration* p. 146

⁴⁹⁸ Levy, *Scrolling Forward* p. 197

- and implementing arrangement and descriptive processes that represent the context of the record in the physical manifestation of the record group in the repository and its surrogate in the archival finding aid.

This independence and exteriority of the archives has been implemented by the limitation of the roles of records creator, records manager, and archivist to different stages in the life-cycle of the record. This necessitates the development of separate archival systems to arrange and describe records in custody, manage their preservation, and provide approved users with access to them.

As Chapter 3 showed this has come under attack with the argument that in the virtual world these means of archival preservation are no longer relevant, and it becomes essential to rethink the principles that underpinned them. The archivist thereby becomes a gatekeeper conducting oneself in the manner of an auditor, privileging accountability and transparency over the actual practices of record-creation. This finds its zenith in the continuum argument for post-custodialism where practitioners are bound in a strange paradox where they pronounce their fidelity to Jenkinson with regards to the necessity of securing the authenticity of the record yet argue that this can only be achieved in the electronic environment by effectively out-sourcing their continuing management to the creators of the record. Whilst we previously viewed the aggressive language of Upward there are some who are happy to cultivate their theory in the language of practice. David Bearman's argument against custodialism is rooted in the practicalities of archiving. Indeed he states that:

...the evidence indicates that acquisition of records and the maintenance of the archives as a repository, gets in the way of achieving archival objectives and that this dysfunction will increase dramatically with the spread of electronic communications.⁴⁹⁹

As outlined by Terry Eastwood⁵⁰⁰, Bearman sees four main arguments against retaining the distinction between the records manager and the archivist. Eastwood's analysis of Bearman's output provides the following summary: **(1)** The archivist has no influence in organisations because they are isolated from "those responsible for vital records, disaster preparedness, and risk management as well as those concerned with financial responsibility and management accountability". This renders the archivist redundant as:

...archivists are not considered as potential allies even when management discovers that it cannot account for recent functions or activities. Managers implicitly realise that existing archival methods have as their object records

⁴⁹⁹ D. Bearman, 'An Indefensible Bastion: Archives Repositories in the Electronic Age,' in D. Bearman (ed.), *Archival Management of Electronic Records* (Pittsburgh, 1991) p. 14.

⁵⁰⁰ T. Eastwood, 'Should Creating Agencies keep Electronic Records Indefinitely?' *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (1996) pp. 256-267

that have been created rather than functions and activities that need to be documented.⁵⁰¹

(2) The custodial role is unprofessional and earns the profession no respect. Instead we must be involved in system design and act as auditors where we can ensure that the archival bond is achieved and preserved at the point of creation. Once achieved the passing of the record to an archive is considered a minor administrative activity of little relevance. (3) There is an economic rationale for the non-custody of electronic records as “the costs of acquiring custody...[of] electronic records exceeds that of paper records many times”⁵⁰² and archives will have to assume:

...the costs of migrating data across media and systems while replacing functionality, costs which would be automatically assumed by the programs creating the records as they move their own operational systems from implementation to implementation”.

As Eastwood states, Bearman would have line managers, who can call on an army of “information creating workers”, share the burden of “responsibility for accountability of recordkeeping” which until now has been shouldered exclusively by archival managers with far fewer staff persons. He states that:

...obtaining custody of electronic records in archives is no guarantee of better control. Indeed in the electronic age, custody of archives may require the on-going maintenance of a range of hardware and software and continuing migration of both data and applications, both of which activities are never ending and very expensive. This puts records in archival custody at relatively greater risk than those whose on-going management is regulated by archivists but which remain in the physical custody of agencies that created them.⁵⁰³

(4) Fourth, Bearman presents an argument rooted in a technological determinism that sees a cultural and practical revolution through technological advancement. For Bearman, “cultural changes are rendering the physical locus of information increasingly irrelevant”. At the centre of his understanding is the belief that user access procedures will be systematically altered because of the facilitation of remote access, therefore “if the archives have intellectual control...of records..., it doesn’t matter much where records or users are”. Keeping records in the “software dependent formats” in which they were initially created also support users’ desire to cut-and-paste history and to form their own narrative from easily searchable information. Finally “the information creation environment will also retain the protection and security required by the data

⁵⁰¹ Bearman & Hedstrom, ‘Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records’

⁵⁰² Bearman, ‘An Indefensible Bastion’ p. 18

⁵⁰³ Bearman & Hedstrom, ‘Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records’

which is difficult to provide in a transplanted setting”. This, for Bearman, culminates in the archivist becoming an “internal consultant, defining record keeping regimes and tactics”.⁵⁰⁴

However running through Bearman’s argument, despite his postulations to the contrary, is a fault-line that cannot be ignored – it is that his objectives are not archival. They are the preserve of the information technologist and the archival community must not be acquiescent in front of the challenge if it wishes to remain archival and its practitioners wish to remain archivists. This is evident throughout his, and others, metadata strategies whereby they seek to impose the requirements of archival description onto the records creator. However the addition by the archivist of metadata elements/requirements at the outset of the records creation process is not the preserve of the true, properly-functioning archivist operating along archival lines. In MacNeil’s wonderful description:

A metadata system is like a diary that, in telegraphic style, records the daily events that take place in the life of an individual as they occur and from that individual’s perspective. Description, on the other hand, is like a biography that, in narrational style, examines a life already lived, from a perspective broader than that in which it was lived: the genealogical ties that bind it, the personal, familial, professional, and societal influences that shaped it, and the evolution of all these factors over time.⁵⁰⁵

The work that the archivist invests in the act of description is a true measure of the responsibility he/she feels towards the record and the subsequent user – the descriptive act is outward-facing and expansive. Metadata, by contrast, is insular and reductive. However, those who follow Bearman see the archive as an agent of accountability – this is why it is unacceptable in his mind for the archive to be seen to be out-of-the-loop of organisational influence.

Bearman would view such a vision as unprofessional. In his description of the archive as lacking professionalism due to their separation from system design he is exposing his technological determinism where the rules of the game, he believes, have radically altered. He fails to recognise that there are times when the authentic and the reliable are a haven in a period of instant gratification and of fluctuating relevance, when Saint Augustine’s call to the Christians to live non-temporally is particularly prescient:

Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity, so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendour of a constant eternity?...Who will lay hold on the human heart to make it still, so that it can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past times?⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁰⁵ MacNeil, ‘Metadata Strategies and Archival Description’ p. 25

⁵⁰⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford, 1991) p. 228

One should not underestimate the notion of space in a society which is hyper-ventilating and over-heating. The philosopher Karsten Harries⁵⁰⁷ makes much of this idea. Architecture, he maintains, is not only about domesticating space, wresting and shaping a liveable place from space. It is also a deep defence against “the terror of time”. The “language of beauty” is “the language of a timeless reality”. To create a beautiful object “is to link time and eternity” in such a way as to redeem us from time’s tyranny. The urge to “devalue time” reappears as the artist’s will to redeem through the creation of a work “strong enough to still time”. Much of the archival thrust is to strive for this sense of eternity in the midst of flux and in our traditional guise we fulfil Saint Augustine’s call and from this respect is earned. The independence and exteriority that ensures the archival bond is enshrined in the passing of the archival threshold, is the root of the inscription and the place. It is the foundation of our discourse and it serves the same function today as twenty years ago.

The issue of economics is a contentious one but in his analysis of it Bearman paradoxically exposes his lack of concern for the trustworthy record. Firstly, the documentary heritage that is passed on through the generations cannot and should not be reduced to an economic commodity – the collections we preserve are priceless for the knowledge and experience they provide. Yet even if we engage on Bearman’s terms his argument is still found to be lacking a grounding in reality. The question must be posed of whether we really trust records creators to take over and pay for the up-keep of records in order to ensure that they remain authentic and reliable pieces of evidence? Archival practitioners have already cast doubt on the potential for organisations to sanction the addition of metadata for secondary use which would impact upon the time and productivity of the employee. John McDonald writes that “organisations will not tolerate the imposition of rules and procedures that are not in line with their own direction and/or implementation timetable.”⁵⁰⁸ This is why the optimum electronic records management system should be sufficiently ‘light touch’ and easy to use that it becomes part of everyone’s activity but sufficiently robust that it fulfils audit, Freedom of Information, Data Protection, Intellectual Property Rights and re-use. What institution has such a social conscience that they would be willing to sustain records for non-administrative use over generations, researching and paying for the latest migration strategy to ensure the records could

⁵⁰⁷ K. Harries, ‘Building and the terror of time’ *Perspecta: the Yale Architectural Journal* 19 (1992) pp. 59-69

⁵⁰⁸ J. McDonald, ‘Managing Information in an Office Systems Environment: The IMOSA Project,’ in A. Menne-Hartz, (ed.) *Information Handling in Offices and Archives* (London, 1993) p. 143.

still be read?⁵⁰⁹ Such a belief is utopian, misguided at best or potentially catastrophic at worst. By leaving records in the hands of the creator we would be playing Russian Roulette with a legacy that is not ours to play with – we are guardians for our shareholders, the general public. In addition the potential for manipulation of the documentary base, rather than simple absentmindedness, is overwhelming. Take one recent example. In 2008 a BBC investigation uncovered evidence that nearly fifty women identified as typhoid carriers were locked up for life in a mental asylum in Surrey between 1907 and the 1990s, considered a potential health risk. The Surrey History Centre in Woking found stacks of old files in one of the derelict buildings of the asylum in 1992 – 150 ledgers, case books and medical records of patients of the Asylum which constituted only a snapshot of the historical record. Crucially they found two tattered volumes, “Registers of Infectious Diseases Weekly Returns from 1944-1957”. These were records of deaths and admissions of typhoid carriers and lists of women isolated in the sanatorium. These ledgers constitute the only record that these women existed outwith the memory of the people that worked there. In the electronic environment these records would be held in a database and may have been deleted, either as a cost-benefit exercise or, more likely, in direct relation to the story as it broke so as to avoid revealing shortcomings. Either way this crucial piece of social history might well have been lost from our collective memory.

This perspective is reinforced by practitioners such as Ken Thibodeau of the National Archives and Records Administration in America who believes that the best guarantee for safekeeping such records is to put them in the hands of archival institutions such as the National Archives. He concludes that:

...records have to be preserved in an archival environment; that is, in an environment in which there are adequate controls to guarantee that the records will be preserved and that they will not be altered. Without such an environment, it might be possible to preserve all the information in the records, but lose all the records. Records can be easily lost when they don't even exist as physical objects, but as conceptual entities or transient views of large and complex databases...It would be short-sighted to suppose that we could serve the future by staying within the narrow scope within which organisations create and keep records. Even expanding from the direct

⁵⁰⁹ Migration is “a set of organised tasks designed to achieve the periodic transfer of digital materials from one hardware/software configuration to another, or from one generation of computer technology to a subsequent generation. The purpose of migration is to retain the ability to display, retrieve, manipulate and use digital information in the face of constantly changing technology. Migration includes refreshing as a means of digital preservation but differs from it in the sense that it is not always possible to make an exact copy or replica of a database or other information object as hardware and software change and still maintain the compatibility of the object with the new generation of technology”. L. Duranti, ‘Concepts and Principles for the Management of Electronic Records, or Records Management Theory is Archival Diplomatics,’ *Records Management Journal* 9 (1999) p. 155

instrumentality of records in the conduct of business to the management of risks is a very small step in comparison to facing up to the difficult, but worthwhile, task of preserving records for the future.⁵¹⁰

Thibodeau is clearly positing that there is the potentiality for originating bodies not to be trusted with long-term custodianship of electronic records. This is therefore a high-risk strategy at the mercy of organizational priorities, high turnover levels of staff, economic downturns, and cover up. Could we really envisage archival principles for best practice and preservation to be at the forefront of institutional thinking during the current credit crunch? No commercial organization seeks or desires increased overheads in rosy economic times and there will always become a time whereby records are no longer a requirement for current administrative practice and cease to be relevant to the balance-sheet. As Heather MacNeil writes in reporting the findings of the Authenticity Task Force of InterPARES:

The requirements [for the attestation of the authenticity of electronic records] are predicated on the role of the preserver as a *trusted custodian*. To be considered a trusted custodian, the preserver must demonstrate that it has no reason to alter the preserved records, or to allow others to alter them, and that it is capable of implementing procedures that ensure that any loss or change to records over time is avoided or at least minimised.⁵¹¹

Only an archive free of conflicting responsibilities can be held to truly be a trusted custodian. Hence the unblemished line of custody is the most secure way of verifying the continual authenticity and reliability of the record.⁵¹² The reality is that the archive is the only body that can be relied upon to put the record first and develop solutions for the issue of digital collections consistently over time. Preservation must take precedence over power and yet even this may be based on a misreading. Where would the incentive lie for the archival community to formulate solutions and action-plans for the continuing longevity and preservation of electronic records if they were *not* directly responsible for their prolonged existence? And, therefore, why would influential institutions, such as the government, and other organisations take the archive seriously

⁵¹⁰ K. Thibodeau, 'To Be or Not to Be: Archives for Electronic Records,' *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report* no. 13 (Pittsburgh, 1991), p. 12.

⁵¹¹ H. MacNeil, 'Providing Grounds for Trust II: The Findings of the Authenticity Task Force of InterPARES', *Archivaria* 54 (2003) p. 40

⁵¹² Luciana Duranti argues: "According to archival diplomatics, the latter [the adoption of self-authenticating and well-documented procedures for migration and an uninterrupted line of physical custody] is undoubtedly the most secure method to allow the verification of authenticity over the long term...when the records are no longer needed by the records creator to conduct its business, but must be retained for any of a variety of reasons, the migration process will have to be carried out by a party who has no stake in the records' content or existence. Moreover, its results will have to be verified and certified by such neutral party...Historically, archival description has always had the function of authenticating the records by making explicit and perpetuating their provenance and interrelationships". Duranti, 'Concepts and Principles for the Management of Electronic Records' pp. 155-156

if they were not directly relevant to this process? By accepting a continuing responsibility archives are a key stakeholder by dint of the depth of their insight. This is where power, and responsibility, lies.

The authority of archival beginnings

As has been documented, to be accountable in the theories of postmodernism and the records continuum is, in their differing machinations, to “provide the future with a representative record”.⁵¹³ Gerald Ham believed, as do the continuum and postmodern theorists, that our:

...most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time.

In manoeuvring from the creator to a “representative record of human experience” Ham offers a subtle differentiation with huge ramifications and consequences. Through the lens of an archival concept of evidence it is the analysis of context and provenance which plays an important role in creating the records as evidence. In many ways I agree – I fully subscribe to the notion that an understanding of context and provenance is part of the technique through which evidence is enshrined. Conceptually, Derrida has a point when he argues that:

...the archive...is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.⁵¹⁴

Yet, as in so much of his work, he simply goes too far. He reaches beyond the archive to an absolutism that leaves no room free for manoeuvre. Of course the archivalization of the record *can* produce the record as much as it records the event. Of course the archive *can* impact upon archivable content coming into existence. Chapters 3 and 4 essentially explored these very points. But an acceptance of this discourse does not dictate the form that proper archival practice should take. In a similar vein it is easy for Cook to argue that the undiluted nature of a creator’s voice and meaning can never be abstracted from the act of authoring when he writes that:

...conscious construction may be so transformed into unconscious patterns of social behaviour, language conventions, organization processes, technological imperatives, and information templates that links to its constructed nature have become quite hidden.

⁵¹³ Ham, ‘The Archival Edge’ p. 5

⁵¹⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever* p. 17

How does one argue against this when Cook can argue it is so unconscious I wouldn't recognise it? Even so, this does not naturally, or innately, lead to the understanding that evidence cannot be preserved without the archivist reifying value and creating the historical canon. It does not negate the concept of professionalism. Whilst the debate has seemingly centred around objectivity and subjectivity, the idea that an archivist might accept the impossibility of objectivity, might agree that they can never be 100% neutral, yet still find comfort in traditional archival principles centred around the creator and custody has been virtually absent. Yet it is precisely because of where postmodern and records continuum theory takes us in the wake of power/knowledge and the overt embracing of archivalization that such foundational principles need to be maintained (not returned to as many archival practitioners, those who operate on a day-to-day basis, have never deserted them). There is a separation between the practical understanding that an archivist could impact upon the nature of the records – this is obviously true – and the theoretical model that emerges from this that it is impossible for an archivist not to impact upon the records.

Jennifer Meehan writes that “it is important for archivists to clarify and elaborate on our ideas of evidence and to work towards formulating our own concept with a meaning expressed and explored in archival terms.”⁵¹⁵ Yet it is not for the archive to formulate a theory of evidence – the representative record, as in traditional archival parlance, should be representative of the creator rather than the use to which the user can utilise it in the future or the extent to which it represents an archives-led dictation of representation in our time. Hence we preserve rather than create by protecting the integrity of the records base through the principle of *respect des fonds*. This is not a matter of objectivity and subjectivity but a *professional, impartial* analysis of the recorded documentation in front of us in the manner described by MacNeil:

It is worth reiterating that impartiality refers to the unself-conscious nature of archives and is embodied in Jenkinson's assertion that archives are not created in the interest of or for the benefit of posterity, but simply “are there: a physical part of the facts which has happened to survive.” Because they were created as means rather than as ends in themselves, archives are capable of providing authentic testimony of the actions, processes, and procedures that brought them into being.⁵¹⁶

Therefore we do not have to believe that a full and fulsome reconstruction of the past is achievable between the four walls of our search rooms to still believe in place and creator, to believe that evidence, cared for properly, can proclaim an *approximation* of the truth. To paraphrase Schellenberg, we may not be guardians of the truth but we are guardians of the evidence on which an individual or individual's truth can be established. As Richard Cox

⁵¹⁵ Meehan, ‘Towards an Archival Concept of Evidence’ p. 128

⁵¹⁶ H. MacNeil, ‘Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms’ *Archivaria* 37 (1994) p. 13

maintains, to preserve evidential value the “objective of archival appraisal . . . is to identify and preserve the transactional records that best document a specific activity or function, organization, event, or the like. It is for the records creators and then to benefit others.”⁵¹⁷ So the answers are already evident when Meehan asks:

So the questions we must begin to consider include: How do we come to understand and implement the concepts of context and provenance in the course of safeguarding and making accessible a selection of trustworthy records? How do we make sense of the relationships between and amongst records...?⁵¹⁸

Sarah Tyacke has expressed such sentiments in this passage that, as a retort to those who seek to undermine the evidential paradigm, may be the best in archival literature:

The value of evidential value has shaped archival methods for treating records. It has provided a certain substance to archival ideas concerning the nature and purpose of the archival endeavour. If the record, its definition, its selection, and its interpretation has become less certain than in the past, whether by virtue of postmodernist influence, or by virtue of the instability of digital records, or by the different expectations of different users, for example, ethnic groups, it does not mean that archivists should abrogate responsibility for selecting what we regard as the authentic and reliable record of the past. We have not imagined the records we select; they were a function of the creators’ thought or activity when first created. We are dealing not with theories of knowledge, but with the record of the past, selected or constructed though it may be, and at this level we have the disciplines to be able to say that one record is authentic or not, that it relates to an event or fact in the past.⁵¹⁹

Conceptually this is a world away from the doctrine of accountability where everything is reduced to perceivable action today in a drive to become a legitimised and ‘moral’ institution by ensuring the creation and use of corroborative and transformative collections. It is a world away from the reflexivity of pre-ordained outcomes and the ritualisation of performance.

To reiterate, our goal is that described by Brothman:

The archivist’s goal is to ensure that what the author, the putative creator of the text, meant remain fixed for so long as certain interests (individual, corporation, government, the ‘people’) deem survival of the writing’s meaning necessary. This interpretation of the purpose of archival practice is the only one that makes sense in light of our enormous efforts to preserve the exact image of the document (structure and content), and to

⁵¹⁷ R.J. Cox, *Documenting Localities: A Practical Model for American Archivists and Manuscripts Curators* (London, 1996) pp. 150-151

⁵¹⁸ Meehan, ‘Towards an Archival Concept of Evidence’ p. 143

⁵¹⁹ S. Tyacke, ‘Archives in a Wider World: The Culture and Politics of Archives’ *Archivaria* Vol. 52 (2001) p. 22

identify the circumstances surrounding and constraining recorded expression (technological conditions and intellectual context).⁵²⁰

This provides a stable framework - otherwise the archival or archivist's word becomes gospel and quite frankly who are we to decide what records should be created or the values, ideologies or potential interpretations that should be pulsing through the records?

A trusted repository

It is these ideas of the archive that continues to serve as the framework for the people's placing of trust in what archivists, as professionals, do. In 2005 Bob Usherwood, Kerry Wilson, and Jared Bryson conducted research into libraries, museums, and archives in 'the information age', and drew parallels between the trusted status of the archive and the notion of authenticity – the sense that within the archive were records that emitted truth from which the individual can search, find, and be illuminated.⁵²¹ It was clear from Usherwood *et al.*'s study that in order to fulfil this function to preserve and make accessible authentic records of continuing value to society, it was advantageous for archival systems and repositories to be independent from the recordkeeping places and systems of the individual or corporate archive to provide “multiple provision...different from the often, singular editorial/authorial biases provided by newspapers, television channels or websites”.⁵²² The sense of independence and authenticity, in the archival sense the relation between inscription and preservation, resulted in the archive, as well as the museum and the library, being seen as by far the most trusted institutions despite their low use factor.⁵²³ At the core of such understanding of the archivist's role was the place, the archival fortress⁵²⁴ that serves as a focal-point of professional independence, of a character in which trust

⁵²⁰ B. Brothman, 'Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice' *Archivaria* 32 (1991) p. 80

⁵²¹ Usherwood *et al.*, 'Relevant Repositories of Public Knowledge?' pp. 89-98

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 93

⁵²³ “Trust versus use (figures show percentage of respondents who perceived a resource as trustworthy and percentage of respondents who had used resource in the last six months): Tabloid 69/16; TV 94/42; Archive 11/53; Museum 22/59; Library 38/73; Broadsheet 73/42; Radio 85/55; Expert 24/53; Internet 51/38; Place of Worship 28/38”. *Ibid.*, p. 94

⁵²⁴ The increasing prominence given to the nature of the archival building and what meanings can be deduced from it are evident in this quote from Lilly Koltun: “This essay will look at one of the newest of archival places, the Gatineau Preservation Centre of the National Archives of Canada, opened 4 June 1997 by the then-Governor General of Canada, Romeo Leblanc, and will ask if it provides that expected static point of archival reference, dedicated to permanence and the verities of archival science in the face of more disorienting recent archival theories. Or does it instead give subversive expression to unacknowledged claims and counterclaims in a power struggle for the ultimate privilege, that of determining which truth will define immortality, at least for this generation? Can a building of such monolithic conceptualization and design oscillate between the embodiment of power and the epitome of ambiguity?” L. Koltun, ‘The Architecture of Archives: Whose Form, What Functions?’ *Archival Science* 2 (2002) p. 240

can be placed, that symbolises the power of the documentation within, and represents our civic responsibility to citizens:

...the established repositories of public knowledge are frequently fixed institutions, often built with iconic architecture within the city or townscape. Not only do they secure and provide public access to large volumes of original or primary information, but they also provide a site for public, even civic interaction. In so doing they help create the conditions in which a healthy functioning democracy can flourish. Ideas can be created and shared in public spaces. Some of the best libraries, museums and archives built throughout the 19th and 20th centuries recognised these qualities and sought to encourage civic engagement.⁵²⁵

There is an analogy to be drawn with news broadcasting. News, as represented through the public body the British Broadcasting Corporation, isn't designed to make the world better, it simply offers the information of what the world is doing, so that other people have the facts they need to change their world the best way they can. Interestingly BBC Director General Mark Thompson is not prohibited in using the type of language disparaged by the postmodernists:

We take our duty of impartiality with rather old-fashioned and painstaking care. Frankly, with much of the rest of the media struggling with the difference between objective news and comment we still have an obsession with impartiality.

It might be an “old-fashioned” view but BBC v Fox News is a miss-match in integrity and trust. Just as the BBC is an agent of responsibility in the upholding of responsible practice throughout society so the archivist is an agent of responsibility in the specific domain of responsible recordkeeping practice – the making and keeping of records is accountable when it is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of responsible recordkeeping and behaviour is observed and evaluated in accordance with those requirements. And just as when standards dip below levels of acceptability it is the job of the BBC to report such deficiencies, so it is with the archive which must be vocal when recordkeeping malpractice is evidenced. Yet nothing that we do should diminish the unique power that records and collections, in their traditional evidential formation, can hold to make perceptible, clear, and obvious over a long-period of time, outside the competing elements of the *present*. In representing civic values the archive stands as a guarantor that the gateway for researchers and users will be open so that they can find their own piece of knowledge and wisdom, their own snippet of truth, through our preservation, and belief in, the sanctity of evidence. As Thomas Osborne, lecturer in Sociology at the University of Bristol, states it enjoys a permanence with “potentialities” that “awaits a constituency or public whose

⁵²⁵ Usherwood *et al*, ‘Relevant Repositories of Public Knowledge?’ p. 94

limits are of necessity unknown”.⁵²⁶ The perseverance of the archive as a shared space, as a player in the construction of civic values, is consistently in evidence today. Just look at the emergent expansion, and visibility in the community, of new archival buildings which seek, it is clear, to represent the archive as a key generator of civic value.⁵²⁷ Even Terry Cook has acknowledged that, amongst the wider population, there is no desire to view or analyse the archive through a postmodern prism. He bemoans the “continued assumptions by many users of archives that the records presented to them are not problematic...”⁵²⁸ Yet Cook fails to recognise that carving out a niche in society that is absent from overt political interference, that is viewed as independent, that projects an image of neutrality, impartiality, and authenticity is still a privilege that carries weight in the modern society. It is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

A responsible and professional archive performance

Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz wrote in 2002 that: “Once we acknowledge ‘archival practice’ as a form of ‘performance’ of archives, we will be better able to become ‘performance conscious,’ and then recognise our ‘special signatures’”.⁵²⁹ In reality once we become conscious of the performance that underlies the theories discussed it should awaken the profession to a realisation that it is actively subverting its professional and responsible purpose and as a consequence is harming the records base. Hence for this thesis this is a problem which has the capacity to change utterly what we do, and in the process betray the very concepts and people we ought to be serving. The unfailing logic of accountability has become internalized to the extent that it is the script by which we have to live by.⁵³⁰ If we are to refer back to the modernist/postmodernist interpretation of organisation, this has been visible as a neo-liberal *esque* doctrine of context control conceptually rooted in an economic utilitarianism has coerced with a left-wing political utilitarianism. Although styled as polar opposites, one a liberator of diversity rather than a

⁵²⁶ T. Osborne, ‘The Ordinarity of the Archive’ *History of the Human Sciences* 12 (1999) p. 55

⁵²⁷ For example, see the National Archives at Kew <http://www.markcraill.co.uk/images/kew.jpg>; the Scottish Borders Archive and Local History Centre http://www.scotborders.gov.uk/images/20776_small.jpg; Shetland Museum and Archives http://www.ditt-shetland.co.uk/assets/galleries/13/picture_023.jpg

⁵²⁸ Cook and Schwartz, ‘Archives, Records and Power’ p. 2

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185

⁵³⁰ This is a criticism that is widely aimed at the BBC: “For example the BBC really believes that it is listening to us. The young Jeremys and Jemimas who produce so much of the BBC output are convinced they are in touch with the people. It is a previous generation of programme-makers, they tell themselves, who talked down to their audience. Now, the patriarchy is over: the listening has begun. Ratings and audience appreciation figures are picked over, focus groups are consulted, access initiatives launched. But in truth they are scared of ordinary people, of their fickleness, their spontaneity, their humanity. So when they discover the lines are down and there’s no competition winner, what do they do? Stick on a fake and deceive the public. You listen, you consult – then you deceive...” M. Ravenhill, ‘When the BBC was caught faking it, it was only falling into New Labour’s footsteps.’ *The Guardian* (23 July 2007) available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/jul/23/broadcasting.bbc1> (accessed 1/05/08)

paradigm of self-contained enclosure, they are covert doubles in that both view the concept of truth and reality as a stylistic device; a device to be manifested and shaped in the image these concepts devise.⁵³¹

As Thompson wrote:

In conditions of deepening distrust, legislators may be inclined to produce more formal procedures in the hope of restoring depleted stocks of trust. Some of these procedures may indeed help, and may create, greater openness and accountability of government. But there is the risk that these new procedures will only create further levels of bureaucracy and inefficiency...and set in motion a process that may exacerbate rather than alleviate the problems they were intended to address, and hence contribute to a culture of deepening distrust.⁵³²

The act of truthfulness takes precedent, an environment where make-believe is in the making, where texts become self-referential in that they refer to nothing that exists outside of the act, only to themselves – in this case records are created and used for their corroborative power and transformative effect, their ability to *prove* the ability and accountability of the archive. In this discourse the archivist is no different to the creator of a fictional world who delves into their imagination to construct fantasies around which a narrative construes. In his book *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*⁵³³ Thomas Richards describes the creation of what he calls “the fantasy of the imperial archive” in which the state superintends all the knowledge of its empire and thus imagines that it controls all the territory that it surveys and documents. Today those very same individuals who critique the positivity of past archival practice are involved in their very own fantasy of the imperial archive, where the ‘ought’ becomes the ‘is’, controlled by those righteous and noble archival practitioners who, like the dastardly viceroys of Colonial India, can efficiently govern, control, and raise knowledgeable beings. Richards may have said that the imperial archive was a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state or empire but the practitioners of today are engaged in a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of the archive, an instance of the visualisation of reality where we are creating a reality which does not exist; the archivists are ghost-writing the script, creating conditions for truthfulness without truth where the record is scripted in its creation and the user is performatively guided in its interpretation. We have got too interested in the way we deliver what we do, at the expense of what we deliver - engineering over content, where the

⁵³¹ see McDonald, *Death of the Critic*

⁵³² Thompson, *Political Scandal* p. 254

⁵³³ T. Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993)

archivist becomes a constituent agent in the manufacturing of the record and the uses to which it is put.

The repercussions of such developments lie not simply in the internal practices of the profession but in the dynamic between the archive as an institution and the wider citizenry. A perception of misuse, of the subversion of the archival purpose and of the record could very soon see the demise of the fragile resource that is the archival reputation. The web of judgements and estimations can easily unravel, as was visibly witnessed in the political arena with the demise of the Conservative party in 1997 which took over ten years to even begin to be restored. Hence the archivist should not play God. The archivist should not be a figure that transcends the narrative of time, altering the make-up and structure of collections as is their want. The archivist should not subvert and interpret facts within the records by placing records backwards or forwards to fit narrative patterns. The archivist should not create life but rather hold the materials within its institution in a coma, awaiting the user to awaken them from their perpetual slumber. The archivist therefore should inhale and consume Hannah Arendt's understanding that "the reality and reliability of the human world rests primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced".⁵³⁴ In this guise we open the gateway for researchers and users to find their own piece of knowledge and wisdom, their own snippet of truth, through our preservation of authentic and reliable evidence.

Hilary Jenkinson once wrote that:

So long as memory is a necessary part of the conduct of affairs so long will you have archives, whether they take the form of writing on paper or parchment or palm leaves by hand or that of steel tape (shall we say) engraved by mechanical means with microscopic grooves which enable you to reproduce at will the voices of men who forgot or have been themselves forgotten.⁵³⁵

Despite all the welter of developments in information and communication technologies that have taken place in the succeeding half-century, this prediction remains the defence of the archive. It is apparent to this thesis that the custodial model and the privileging of the creator, protected by the rule of law, must remain the core premise for the continuing existence of a responsible archive. There must be a foundational belief in the unblemished line, in the distinction between primary and secondary use, in the voice of the creator. This will see the archival community remove themselves from records management, will stop the interference in primary records creation for administrative purpose, will ensure that the records are preserved far into the future, will give the

⁵³⁴ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemma Facing Modern Man* (Chicago, 1958) pp. 195-196

⁵³⁵ quoted in Moss, 'Opening Pandora's Box' p. 71

individual the space they need to construct their own meaning and find their own truth, and will ensure that the general public will have faith in the archive as a trusted responsible repository of knowledge holding collections that are representative of the creator rather than an artifactual construction of the society and practice the archivist would wish to see. When all is said and done the archivist is the guardian of the gold standard of historical evidence and this is a privileged and proud position. Hence the archival practitioner should become acquainted with the sentiments of Xenophanes which concisely distilled the purpose of the archive into four lines:

The gods did not reveal, from the beginning,
All things to us, but in the course of time
Through seeking we may learn and know things better.
But as for certain truth, no man has known it.⁵³⁶

This will be an archival performance worth seeing, rooted in the responsible and professional archive.

⁵³⁶ Xenophanes, (translated by Karl Popper in *The Open Society and its Enemies*)

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