



## Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives\*

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**Abstract.** Archivists and historians usually consider archives as repositories of historical sources and the archivist as a neutral custodian. Sociologists and anthropologists see “the archive” also as a system of collecting, categorizing, and exploiting memories. Archivists are hesitantly acknowledging their role in shaping memories. I advocate that archival fonds, archival documents, archival institutions, and archival systems contain tacit narratives which must be deconstructed in order to understand the meanings of archives.

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### New Possibilities

A critical approach is at the heart of archival endeavor. Its even postmodern: did not the father of postmodernism, Lyotard, equate postmodernism with incredulity in meta-narratives, in grand schemes? We could also say with Anthony Giddens: tradition no longer works and cannot be cited as the rationale for our actions. Giddens’ post-traditional social order is not one in which traditions disappear – far from it. Traditions become open to interrogation and discourse. Such a post-traditional society is a global society, where traditions are brought into contact with one another and forced to ‘declare themselves’.<sup>1</sup>

This critical questioning of tradition opens up a world of possibilities. As Pat Oddy from the British Library remarked “The postmodern library is a library where securities have been lost, but where freedoms have been

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

gained.”<sup>2</sup> The same applies to the postmodern archive. We might, however, already speak of post-modernism in the past sense – for some that may come as a relief. But anyway postmodernism “has not so much been the relativizing of truth (to the point even of making it irrelevant) but rather the multiplication of perspective,” as one of my Amsterdam colleagues Niek van Sas remarked.<sup>3</sup>

Archival researchers and archivists are exploring a multiplication of perspectives. They are learning (or relearning) from anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, cultural and literary theorists: to look up from the record and through the record, looking beyond – and questioning – its boundaries, in new perspectives seeing *with* the archive (to use Tom Nesmith’s magnificent expression<sup>4</sup>), trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

### Archivization and Archivalization

But where to look? According to Jacques Derrida’s earlier reading of Freud, the physical archive outside is merely an impression of the invisible private psyche.<sup>6</sup> Both are traces, one internal, the other external. But more recently Derrida has argued that *archivization* (the English translation of *archivisation*) is consigning, inscribing a trace in some external location, some space outside: “It belongs to the concept of the archive that it be public, precisely because it is located. You cannot keep an archive inside yourself – this is not archive.”<sup>7</sup>

The archive has different phases. *Archiving* in the customary sense (Webster’s: “to file or collect as records or documents in or as if in archive”) is mostly understood to be the activity that *follows* upon the creation of a document. Archival theory, however, carries archiving one phase forward: at the front end of a recordkeeping system documents are *captured*, that is accepted

<sup>2</sup> Pat Oddy, “Who dares, wins: libraries and catalogues for a postmodern world”, *Library Review* 16 (1997) 309.

<sup>3</sup> Niek van Sas, “Towards a New National History: Lieux de mémoire and Other Theaters of Memory”, in: Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Historians and Social Values* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000) 172.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Nesmith, *Seeing with Archives: The Changing Intellectual Place of Archives*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Ottawa, 6 June, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Cook, “Archival science and postmodernism: new formulations for old concepts”, *Archival Science* 1 (2001) 3–24.

<sup>6</sup> Brien Brothman, [Review of] “Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever”, *Archivaria* 43 (1996) 191–192.

<sup>7</sup> Forthcoming in: *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2001). I thank the editors for having shared with me the impressive papers presented at a seminar organized by the University of the Witwatersrand (1998), to be published in this volume.

by the system. *Archivization*<sup>8</sup> extends beyond capture, it includes the creative phase before capture. Before *archivization*, however, is another ‘moment of truth’.<sup>9</sup> It is *archivalization*, a neologism which I invented, meaning *the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving*.<sup>10</sup> Archivalization precedes archiving. The searchlight of archivalization has to sweep the world for something to light up in the archival sense, before we proceed to register, to record, to inscribe it, in short before we archive it. “What the searchlight makes visible,” Karl Popper wrote

will depend upon its position, upon our way of directing it, and upon its intensity, colour, etc.; although it will, of course, also depend very largely upon the things illuminated by it.<sup>11</sup>

By differentiating archivalization from the subsequent inscription or archivalization, which is then followed by capture and archiving, we gain a better comprehension of the tacit narratives of the archive.

### Constituting the Event

The archive reflects realities as perceived by the ‘archivers’. As James Scott argues in *Seeing Like a State* – in fact summarizing his book

builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation . . . there are virtually no other facts for the state than those that are contained in documents.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The term *archivation* was first used in the nineties by the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler: Marie-Anne Chabin, *Je pense donc j’archive* (Paris and Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1999) 66. French archivists, however, used the term as equivalent to *archivéconomie* or *archivage*: Bruno Delmas, “Archival science facing the information society”, *Archival Science* 1 (2001) 28. As Paul Ricœur uses the term *archivation*, it is writing down the oral testimony and then setting aside, assembling, and collecting these traces: Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000) 209, 211.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Stuckey, “Record creating events: commentary”, *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997) 270.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Ketelaar, “Archivalization and Archiving”, *Archives and Manuscripts* 27 (1999) 54–61; Eric Ketelaar, “Archivistics Research Saving the Profession”, *American Archivist* 63 (2000) 328–329.

<sup>11</sup> Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1971<sup>5</sup>) 260.

<sup>12</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1998) 82–83.

This social reification<sup>13</sup> is not the monopoly of the state. It is a consequence of *the panoptic sort*, the name given by Oscar Gandy to the system of disciplinary surveillance by government and in the private sector, using a complex of technologies involving the collection, processing, and sharing of information about citizens, employees, and consumers – information which is used to coordinate and control their access to the goods and services in daily life.<sup>14</sup> Collecting information constitutes individuals, Mark Poster writes, reinforcing Michel Foucault's argument on the 'power of writing'.<sup>15</sup> Such reification can be linked to Derrida's argument that archives not merely serve to preserve an archivable content of the past. No, life itself and its relation to the future are determined by the technique of archiving. "The archivization produces as much as it records the event."<sup>16</sup>

A photograph is not just a recording: it constitutes the event. Think of the photographs of the flag raising at Iwo Jima (by Joe Rosenthal, 23 February 1945) and on the Berlin Reichstag (by Yevgeni Khaldei, 2 May 1945).<sup>17</sup> But think also of the photo you take of your family: it makes a record of that little group, but it also occasions it. The reality we record and the way in which we record, are induced by socio-cultural factors. Each influences the other.

### Technology Changes the Archivable

Derrida is right in assuming that "the mutation in technology changes not simply the archiving process, but what is archivable – that is, the content of

<sup>13</sup> Alain Desrosières, "How to make things which hold together: social science, statistics and the state", in: P. Wagner, B. Wittrock and R. Whitley (eds.), *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Sciences Disciplines, Sociology of Sciences Yearbook 15* (Kluwer, Dordrecht 1990) 208.

<sup>14</sup> Oscar H. Gandy, *The Panoptic Sort. A Political Economy of Personal Information* (Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford 1993) 1, 15. See also Oscar H. Gandy, "Coming to terms with the Panoptic Sort", in: David Lyon and Elia Zureik (eds.), *Computers, Surveillance, and Privacy* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 1996) 132–155.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 96; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977) 189–190. See also Mark Poster, "Databases as Discourse, or Electronic Interpellations", in: Lyon and Zureik, *Computers, Surveillance, and Privacy* (as endnote 14) 185.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1996) 17.

<sup>17</sup> James Bradley and Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000); Mark Sensen, "Flag on the Qaldei-photo", <http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/su%5Evctry.html#photo> (consulted 4 June, 2001).

what has to be archived is changed by the technology.”<sup>18</sup> The discursive style of an email is quite different from that of a pen-written letter. But the content is different too, if only because the time lag between sender and receiver has been reduced to seconds, instead of the days, weeks, or even months in the past.<sup>19</sup> That reduction is a form of what Anthony Giddens calls *distanciation* (of time *and* space) involving modes of power and control: the knowledge that an email may immediately influence a situation influences the power relations in decision-making and accountability, differing widely from the way it used to be when the sender – in Batavia for example – knew that an answer from The Netherlands could take several months.<sup>20</sup>

The technologies of records creation, maintenance and use color the contents of the record, and also affect its form and structure. This is true even for the seemingly innocent technologies of filing and storage, as Richard Brown and Tom Nesmith, among others, have made clear.<sup>21</sup> Recordkeepers are, according to Brian Brothman, “creating value, that is, an order of value, by putting things in their proper place, by making place(s) for them.”<sup>22</sup> Numerous tacit narratives are hidden in categorization, codification and labeling.<sup>23</sup> In the colonial archives of the Netherlands Indies the anthropologist Ann Stoler found information about children in reports – classified secret – about the *political* situation in the Netherlands Indies, because they were framed in a social vision about the danger of contact between white children and *ayas*. Bill Russell gave another example in his study of the recordkeeping in the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>24</sup> Both the records creating

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *Refiguring the Archive* (as endnote 7); Derrida, *Archive Fever* (as endnote 16) 17.

<sup>19</sup> Richard R. John, “Recasting the Information Infrastructure for the Industrial Age”, in: Alfred D. Chandler and James W. Cortada (eds.), *A Nation Transformed by Information. How Information Has Shaped the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 55–105; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence. Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) 174–178.

<sup>20</sup> On ‘distanciation’ whereby society is stretched over a shorter span of time and space: Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*. Second edition (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press, 1995) 90–108.

<sup>21</sup> Ann L. Stoler, *Colonial Cultures and the Archival Turn*. Paper presented at a conference on archives and social memory, St. Petersburg, 27–29 May 1998. See also Richard Brown, “Records acquisition strategy and its theoretical foundation: the case for a concept of archival hermeneutics”, *Archivaria* 33 (1991/1992) 50; Nesmith, *Seeing with archives* (as endnote 4).

<sup>22</sup> Brian Brothman, “Orders of Values: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice”, *Archivaria* 32 (1991) 82.

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out. Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Bill Russell, “The White Man’s paper burden: aspects of records keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860–1914”, *Archivaria* 19 (1984/1985) 72.

civil servants and the subsequent colonial records managers or archivists were shaping contents and contexts of the record.

### Remembering and Forgetting

Archiving also entails selecting what should and what should not be kept. The memory of man and of society cannot retain all: they both can only remember some things, by forgetting a lot. A small sliver of all records becomes archives. They are brought into what the Australian records continuum model calls the dimension of ‘pluralizing’: the records are crossing the functional boundaries of the organization and of the self, in order to provide collective memory.<sup>25</sup> The boundary keeper is the archivist. He or she decides what is to cross the boundary and what not. By putting some records, as Tom Nesmith has remarked,<sup>26</sup> on a pedestal, we alter their context and meaning, we infuse new meaning into the record, to what is left of the series and the fonds, we add new narratives to the archive and its constituent parts.

### Cultural and Social Contexts

Archiving is a ‘regime of practices’ which varies in any given time and in any given place.<sup>27</sup> People create, process, appraise and use archives, influenced consciously or unconsciously by cultural and social factors. What applies to recordkeeping in organizations, applies to the archives as a social institution of a nation too.<sup>28</sup> Social, cultural, political, economic and religious contexts

<sup>25</sup> Sue McKemmish, “Yesterday, today and tomorrow: a continuum of responsibility”, in: *Proceedings of the Records Management Association of Australia 14th National Convention*, 15–17 Sept. 1997 (Perth: RMAA, 1997), reprinted in: Peter J. Horsman – Frederick C.J. Ketelaar – Theo H.P.M. Thomassen (ed.), *Naar een nieuw paradigma in de archivistiek. Jaarboek 1999 Stichting Archiefpublicaties* (’s-Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 1999) 203, available on [www.sims.monash.edu/au/rcrg/publications/recordscontinuum](http://www.sims.monash.edu/au/rcrg/publications/recordscontinuum)

<sup>26</sup> Tom Nesmith, *What is a Postmodern Archivist?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Halifax, May 1998.

<sup>27</sup> “Practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect,” according to Michel Foucault, “Government Rationality: An Introduction” [original French version published in *Esprit* 371 (May 1968) 850–874], in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 75.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Ketelaar, “The difference best postponed ? Cultures and comparative archival science”, *Archivaria* 44 (1997) 142–148, reprinted in: Peter J. Horsman – Frederick C.J. Ketelaar – Theo H.P.M. Thomassen (ed.), *Naar een nieuw paradigma in de archivistiek. Jaarboek 1999 Stichting Archiefpublicaties* (’s-Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties,

determine the tacit narratives of an archive. One should make these contexts transparent, may be even visible, as one tries in a museum to re-enact the context in which the artifact was made.<sup>29</sup>

### Semantic Genealogy

Contexts not only of records creation. Recontextualisation (the term is used by Michael Ames and other museologists and anthropologists<sup>30</sup>) takes place at every stage of a record's life and in every dimension of the records continuum,<sup>31</sup> adding values to (or subtracting values from) the record as a semiophore, to use Krzysztof Pomian's term for museum artefacts.<sup>32</sup> Like the objects in a museum, records derive their significance from the different 'invisibles' they construct and from the ways in which they mediate these to the spectators or users.

Every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record. The archive is an infinite activation of the record. Each activation leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive's infinite meaning. As David Bearman writes

When we accession, transfer, arrange, weed, document and inventory archival materials, we change their character as well as enhance their evidential and informational value. The facts of processing, exhibiting,

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1999) 21–27, available on [www.hum.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/difference.doc](http://www.hum.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/difference.doc); Eric Ketelaar, "De culturele context van archieven", in: Peter J. Horsman – Frederick C.J. Ketelaar – Theo H.P.M. Thomassen (eds.), *Context. Interpretatiekaders in de archivalistiek. Jaarboek 2000 Stichting Archiefpublicaties* ('s-Gravenhage: Stichting Archiefpublicaties, 2000) 83–91 (a French version, pending publication in *La Gazette des Archives* is available on [www.hum.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/L'Ethnologiearchivistique.doc](http://www.hum.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/L'Ethnologiearchivistique.doc)).

<sup>29</sup> Frederick C.J. Ketelaar, *Archivalisering en archivering* (Samsom, Alphen aan den Rijn 1998) 14, following Hugh Taylor, " 'Heritage revisited': documents as artifacts in the context of museums and material culture", *Archivaria* 40 (1995) 8–20.

<sup>30</sup> Michael M. Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes. The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992) 46, 141–143.

<sup>31</sup> Ketelaar, *Archivalisering en archivering* (as endnote 29) 14; Theresa Rowat, "The record and repository as a cultural form of expression", *Archivaria* 36 (1993) 198–204. On the comparable recontextualisation of museum objects see Ames, *Cannibal Tours* (as endnote 30) 46, 141–143; Jan van der Dussen, *De musealisering van onze cultuur. De tijd in perspectief* (Venlo: Limburgs Museum, 1995) 21; Jan Vaessen, "Over context", *Jaarboek 1996 Nederlands Openluchtmuseum* (Nijmegen and Arnhem: SUN/Nederlands Openluchtmuseum, 1996) 20.

<sup>32</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

citing, publishing and otherwise managing records becomes significant for their meaning as records, which is not true of library materials.<sup>33</sup>

No longer can we regard the record as an artefact with fixed boundaries of contents and contexts. In a posttraditional view – reinforced by the challenges of the electronic records – the record is a “mediated and ever-changing construction,” as Terry Cook writes.<sup>34</sup> It is open yet enclosed, it is ‘membranic’, the membrane allowing the infusing and exhaling of values which are embedded in each and every activation.

Derrida writes that every interpretation of the archive is an enrichment, an extension of the archive. That is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future.<sup>35</sup> The archive, in Derrida’s thinking, is not just a sheltering of the past: it is an anticipation of the future.<sup>36</sup> Every activation of the archive not only adds a branch to what I propose to call the semantic genealogy of the record and the archive. Every activation also changes the significance of earlier activations. It is an application of Freud’s retrospective causality. Let me give an example. The records created and used by German and Dutch agencies during the Second World War to account for the looting of Jewish assets, were continued to be used, after the war, by German and Dutch agencies in the processes of restitution and reparation. The same record was activated again and again for different purposes, as it is today activated in the search for looted and lost works of art and other Holocaust assets.<sup>37</sup> Current use of these records affects retrospectively all earlier meanings, or to put it differently: we can no longer read the record as our predecessors have read that record.

The archival document is not a simple artifact, a zip-file that opens with one stroke on the keyboard. The document does not open itself nor speaks for itself, but only by inference from its semantic genealogy.<sup>38</sup> It does not speak for itself neither because it merely echoes what the researcher whispers, it

<sup>33</sup> David Bearman, “Documenting Documentation”, *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992) 41, reprinted in: David Bearman, *Electronic Evidence. Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations* (Pittsburgh: Archives & Museum Informatics, 1994) 237.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, Archival science and postmodernism (as endnote 5) 10.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever* (as endnote 16) 68.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever* (as endnote 16) 18.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Ketelaar, “Understanding Archives of the People, by the People, and for the People”, in: James D. Bindenagel (ed.), *Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets Proceedings* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999) 757–761; Henny van Schie, “Joodse tegoeden en archieven. Context in de praktijk”, in: Horsman – Ketelaar – Thomassen, *Context* (as endnote 28) 257–273.

<sup>38</sup> Verne Harris, “Claiming less, delivering more: a critique of positivist formulations on archives in South Africa”, *Archivaria* 44 (1997) 136; Verne Harris, *Exploring Archives: an*

only tells what the researcher wants the document to tell him or her. “Scholars (including archivists) are not, can never be, exterior to their objects”.<sup>39</sup>

### Reading the Archive

The semantic genealogy of the membranic archive will be seen by some as a threat to traditional values as authenticity, originality, and uniqueness. But shouldn't we stress more the archive's power: the archive as 'repository of meanings', the multilayered, multifaceted meanings hidden in archivalization and archiving, which can be deconstructed and reconstructed, then interpreted and used by scholars, over and over again. We read today other things in the archive, than the next generation will read, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The semantic genealogy provides the opportunity for any construction or deconstruction of what all the people involved in the archives' creation and use may have meant in archivalization and archiving. That re- and deconstruction is not the end of the archive, it is only possible through seeing with the archive.<sup>40</sup> The museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill wrote

Meanings are not constant, and the construction of meaning can always be undertaken again, in new contexts and with new functions. The radical potential of museums lies in precisely this. As long as museums and galleries remain the repositories of artefacts and specimens, new relationships can always be built, new meanings can always be discovered, new interpretations with new relevances can be found, new codes and new rules can be written.<sup>41</sup>

The analogous conclusion for records is reached by Carolyn Heald who asserts

The records do exist in fact; they just need to be deconstructed/read, not through objective lenses, but through subjective ones ... Physical evidence can tell as much or more about a document and its context as the informational content itself.<sup>42</sup>

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*Introduction to Archival Ideas and Practice in South Africa, second edition* (Pretoria: National Archives of South Africa, 2000) 20.

<sup>39</sup> Harris, *Exploring Archives* (as endnote 38) 96.

<sup>40</sup> Nesmith, *Seeing with Archives* (as endnote 4).

<sup>41</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 215.

<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Heald, "Is there room for archives in the postmodern world?", *American Archivist* 59 (1996) 101. See also Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics

## Storytelling

Archival intervention has to do with storytelling, as the South-African archivalist scholar Verne Harris compellingly argues.<sup>43</sup> At every stage of the record's trajectory some 'archiver', while activating the record, tells a story. We have to document these stories.<sup>44</sup> In the first place to enhance the accountability of all 'archivers' for their decisions, as the International Council on Archives' Code of Ethics prescribes.<sup>45</sup> Beth Kaplan rightly criticizes the lack of standards requiring archivists to document their decisions, reveal their methods or explain their assumptions.<sup>46</sup> But also to rebuild the path records follow from creator to archives and, as Laura Millar pleads, to restore the connection between "the reality of records in the hands of their creators and those same records in an archival institution."<sup>47</sup> By whom, when, why, how was the archive created? Where was the archive kept, in the safe or in the bedroom? Who used the archive in the first, second and *n*th place when, why, how? Who did the appraisal, when, why, how? Et cetera. All these stories constitute the genealogy of the record, more dynamic and more effective than the traditional provenancial and custodial history. The *new* concept of provenance, as recently proposed by Tom Nesmith, "consists of the social and technical processes of the records' inscription, transmission, contextu-

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of Value," in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 5.

<sup>43</sup> Harris, *Exploring Archives* (as endnote 38) 86–88.

<sup>44</sup> Ames (as endnote 30), *Cannibal Tours* 141–144; Cook, Archival science and postmodernism (as endnote 5) 24.

<sup>45</sup> Available on [www.ica.org](http://www.ica.org). Paragraph 5: "Archivists should record, and be able to justify, their actions on archival material." The commentary to the code includes "Archivists should keep a permanent record documenting accessions, conservation and all archival work done."

<sup>46</sup> Elisabeth Kaplan, *Practicing Archives with a Postmodern Perspective*. Paper presented in the seminar "Archives, Documentation and the Institutions of Social Memory", organized by the Bentley Historical Library and the International Institute of the University of Michigan, 24 January 2001, 11. See also Thomas J. Ruller, "Dissimilar appraisal documentation as an impediment to sharing appraisal data . . .", *Archival Issues* 17 (1992) 65–73. Most discussions on appraisal are happening behind closed doors: Anne Picot, "Ethical Meltdown: Accountability and the Australian Recordkeeping Profession", *Archives and Manuscripts* 28 (2000) 128.

<sup>47</sup> Laura Millar, *Creating a National Information System in a Federal Environment: Some Thoughts on the Canadian Archival Information Network*. Paper presented in the seminar "Archives, Documentation and the Institutions of Social Memory", organized by the Bentley Historical Library and the International Institute of the University of Michigan, 24 January 2001, 15.

alization, and interpretation which account for it [the record's] existence, characteristics, and continuing history."<sup>48</sup>

The stories resound, in Verne Harris' words, the voices of the authors of the documents, the bureaucrats, the archivists, and the researchers who all used and managed the files.<sup>49</sup> Those voices have to be recorded and recovered. The peeling back of layers of intervention and interpretation, Harris writes, is about *context*. I agree: once we no longer assume that there is only one reality or meaning or truth, but many, no one better than the other, we can try to find these multiple meanings by interrogating not only the administrative context, but also the social, cultural, political, religious contexts of record creation, maintenance, and use – in other words, by interrogating the archive's semantic genealogy.

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Nesmith, "Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the 'Ghosts' of Archival Theory", *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999) 146.

<sup>49</sup> Harris, *Claiming less* (as endnote 38) 136.

