Uncovering our Tracks: Ideology and the Archival Enterprise

Mark A. Matienzo

The origins of dispute: the theory/practice debates as discourses on archival ideology

With the recent changes that have occurred within the records environment, such as the problems of electronic records and increased demands for the societal accountability of the profession, archivists have had to rethink many of the principles that guide their activities. In other words, this concerns the connections between archival practice and archival theory, the latter of which has recently become a valid area of inquiry within professional discourse. Starting with the early professional literature contesting the need for archival theory and its necessary connection to archival practice, this section will address one ideology within clear roots in archivistics, that of Positivism. We will see that its 'naturalization' (a process important to the concretization of ideology) was challenged through early literature on the subject. The threat to such deeply entrenched ideology was viewed within the profession either as a much-needed change or as a threat to the role of the archivist. Ultimately, the problematization of this ideology will inform the other two areas of analysis within this paper: the examination of 'archival truth' and the problems of representation within archives.

A brief note on terminology

Within this paper, I am arguing from a particular conception of the archival discipline known as 'archivistics' or 'archival science' that provides a holistic expression of the interplay between archival theory, methodology, and practice. Samuel Weber writes that the German *Wissenschaft*, as with the French *science*, gives a distinct flavor to what is under study, as opposed to our English word, 'science,' which seemingly only

suggests an investigation based on empirically observable data. As Samuel Weber writes, the German *Wissenschaftlichkeit* ('scientificity') indicates 'a cognitive ideal that equates "scientific" – *wissenschaftlich* – with rigorous, coherent inquiry and knowledge, *no matter what the domain*.'[1] There was a similar motivation when a group of Dutch archivists re-launched a journal formerly known as *Archives and Museum Informatics* as *Archival Science.* The editors, Peter Horsman, Eric Ketelaar, and Theo Thomassen, state that the journal 'aims at promoting the development of archival science as an autonomous scientific discipline.'[2] Ketelaar himself writes that 'archival science' is 'a science in the European sense of *Wissenschaften*,' but nonetheless recognizes the potential 'confusion with the natural sciences in the Anglo-Saxon meaning,' leading to his preference for the word 'archivistics.'[3] In fact, archivistics is 'equivalent to the Dutch *archivistiek*, the German *Archivistik*, the French *archivistique*, [and] the Italian and Spanish *archivistica*.'[4] At its core, then, archival science – archivistics – is the study of archives that fundamentally consists in rigorous, coherent inquiry that covers the whole of knowledge of archives. Similarly, with *Literaturwissenschaft*, the entire discipline of literary studies, the epistemological accent is on its 'scientificity' rather than its 'aboutness'.[5] Theory is an inseparable fragment of archivistics, not equivalent to it; that is, one cannot perform theoretical work within archives without it having an impact on archival methodology and practice.

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[1] 'Ambivalence: The Humanities and the Study of Literature.' In *Institution and Interpretation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 133, emphasis added.
[2] 'Editorial.' In *Archivai Science* 1, 2001. p. 1.
[3] 'Archivistics Research Saving the Profession.' In *American Archivist* 63(2), Fall 2000, p. 322-340. Available online at http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~gaeconf/ketelaar.doc
[4] ibid.
[5] Weber, 'Ambivalence,' p. 133.

Substance and technique: the theory/practice wars in American archival discourse

One fundamental question concerning the archival theory is its importance or relevance to archival practice. Traditionally, archivists have had a functional role, and as such, they must be familiar with the basics of archival practice. Those within the archival profession who decry the importance of archival theory suggest that it is not as rich for investigation as others suggest – that it is merely 'much ado about shelving.'[6] John W. Roberts separates archival theory into two distinct 'strains,' the first of which 'is archival but not theoretical, and deals with the practical.'[7] This consists in little more than working with existing practice, adjusting it here and there, much like performing regular maintenance on a car. Occasionally, one can codify this practice (e.g., Muller, Feith, and Fruin's 1898 *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*), or develop slightly abstract principles like provenance that originate in and are used for practical purposes. In opposition, Roberts presents his second strain of archival theory, wherein there is a theoretical, but not particularly archival, discourse. Instead, he feels that it is an aspect of historiography, as it focuses on 'the content and context of records, and not on their structure or the processes of controlling them.'[8] Furthermore, he believes that it is frivolous and of no interest to analyze archival concepts as one would analyze works in the humanities.[9] Accordingly, this should not be the focus of practicing archivists as it interferes with their responsibility of keeping archives. Roberts's anxiety about archival theory stems from his belief that theorizing will create an unnecessary and painful stratification between theoretical archivists and practical archivists.

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[6] John W. Roberts, 'Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving.' In *American Archivist* 50, Winter 1997, p. 66-74.
[7] p. 67.
[8] 'Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving,' p. 69.
[9] 'Archival Theory, Myth or Banality?' In *American Archivist* 53, Winter 1990, p. 113.

If practicing archivists should not be theorizing about archives, should anyone be theorizing about them at all? Roberts suggests that no one should: 'as an academic *discipline* [it] does not deal with substance but only technique, … [which] does not merit a great deal of study because [it] can be learned on the job.'[10] However, Frank G. Burke recognizes an essential character of the archival profession that it shares with others, namely medicine and law – that 'practice came before theory; and both fields developed academically long after they were operating on the street.'[11] The next step, therefore, is for archivists to emigrate from the workplace to find their place within the academy. Archival theory must originate 'free from the constraints of direct practical application'[12] as archivists engaged in practical, professional work must operate using procedure and can neither simultaneously nor comfortably challenge the means by which they do so without feeling uncomfortable in their 'transgression.'

This discomfort originates in that such transgressions threaten a set of ideologies wherein much of the intellectual history of archivistics has its roots. One ideology inherent in archivistics identified by Verne Harris, Positivism, relies on the scientific method to establish universal laws through empirical observation and the distinction between the subject, or 'knower,' and the world. Harris outlines a set of Positivist formulations about archives, [13] which involve the establishment of universal laws and the reliance on the correspondence theory of truth. One assumption is that 'the meaning of [archival terminology] is simple, stable, and uncontested.'[14] In his example, he states

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[10] p. 111. (emphasis added). In this case, he notes that he is relating remarks that Ted Koppel made regarding journalism, and that '[a]rchival work is in much the same situation' (ibid.). If this is the case, then Roberts must have an unusual perception of archival education indeed.
[11] 'The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States.' In *American Archivist* 44, Winter 1981, p. 45.
[12] Angelika Menne-Haritz, quoted in Ketelaar.
[13] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa.' In *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997, p. 132-141.
[14] p. 133.

that such words whose meaning is 'fixed' include 'archives,' 'archive, 'record,' 'copy,' and 'unique'. By extension, this Positivist formulation includes all archival concepts and principles, such as the concept of provenance. Historically, archivists have accordingly operated by these principles as if they were universal laws. Burke, one of the early proponents of an archival theory program, even characterizes the development of archival theory by emphasizing the importance of universal laws and 'transcendent concepts' important to Positivist ideology:[15]

> What, then, is the nature of the theory for which we are searching and which has not yet appeared? If theory is the development of universal laws immutable and applicable at all times, in all places, the theory that we are seeking would, at least in the abstract, *analyze certain demonstrable conditions, postulate their effects,* and determine how they would affect the transmission of information to those in need of such information. The theoretical assumptions should be based *not on the structure but on the nature* of human organization, and humans themselves …[16]

Burke makes a distinction between theoretical laws and practical principles, suggesting that 'pure theory has no relation to action.'[17] However, this is a false dichotomy as many concepts within archives have a dual role as both abstract laws and practical guidelines, such as provenance. Additionally, Burke claims to be interested in developing universal laws for the archival realm, yet specifically states that he is only interested in the development and implementation of universal laws for archives within the United States.[18]

The problem of 'archival truth'

Harris also states that archival records 'are the innocent product of processes exterior to archivists and reflect, provide an image of, are evidence of, those processes.'[19] In other words, archives reflect or present a particular kind of truth that

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[15] Burke, p. 45.
[16] p. 42. While Burke is interested in developing and applying universal laws for archives, he notes that he is only interested in doing so for archives within the United States.
[17] Burke, p. 40.
[18] ibid.
[19] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 133.

corresponds to the processes that created them. This 'innocence' of archives comes from their 'unintentionality' as their creators had no intent to create a historical record; in the words of Hilary Jenkinson, 'Archives were not drawn up in the interest of or for the information of Posterity.'[20] This imbues archives with two of their essential characteristics, impartiality and authenticity, which reveal their 'archival truth' (as opposed to 'historical truth'). Archival truth is often the cornerstone of socially constructed historical truth, as historical truth only exists as interpretations of raw data in the form of primary sources; in turn, historical truth changes in concert with paradigm shifts in historiography. Burke questions the role of archivists by asking whether they should be concerned with preserving the truth or evidence, or, in other words, if they are preserving fact or interpretation. For Lester J. Cappon, this question threatens the archival truth through which records obtain their value. If archivists place any interpretation on the records, either explicitly or implicitly, the 'innocence' of the records will be lost, as the archivist has played a role in their creation. Archivists place interpretation on records explicitly through engaging in historiography; they do so implicitly through interacting with records creators to develop documentation strategies that ensure representation of the creators within the archives.

Naturalization: the formulation of archival ideology

This discourse about archival practice places it '*within* a "natural" context, which, qua natural, could not itself be considered as subject to conflict or to (legitimate) controversy.'[21] Roberts's position regarding archival theory originates from his role as a practicing archivist. He is looking not for theoretical constructs, as he feels that they

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[20] Quoted in Lester J. Cappon, 'What, Then, Is There To Theorize About?' In *American Archivist* 45(1), Winter 1982, p. 22.
[21] Samuel Weber, 'Capitalizing History: The Political Unconscious.' In *Institution and Interpretation*, p. 41. Emphasis in original.

cannot help him *do* his job, but rather for practical guidelines by which to operate. In doing so, he posits these guidelines as (ideally) universally applicable for practicing archivists in the United States. Furthermore, he believes that Burke's call for 'theoreticians and clinicians'[22] causes 'an undesirable stratification' within archivistics beyond its intellectual frivolity.[23] This stratification between theoretical archivists and practical archivists would threaten the ideological conceptions of the archivist, which should be 'simple, stable, and uncontested.'[24] Even Eric Ketelaar, a clearly anti-Positivist archival theorist, believes that 'archival theory can only flourish … "free from the constraints of direct practical application"'[25] as simple practical application is merely following convention (as opposed to universal laws). This, however, does not mean that practicing archivists cannot develop archival theory. Cappon feels that the archivist's role is to protect and provide the sources but not posit any interpretive frameworks over them. Through quoting Jenkinson, he states that the archivist 'is the servant of his Archives *first and afterwards to the student Public*.'[26] Accordingly, archivists cannot subordinate their professional responsibilities to establish archival truth to the 'selfish' drive to theorize and thereby interfere with the records' ability to 'speak for themselves.'[27]. Archivists that want to engage in theory thus realize the implication of their activity – that their records may become 'tainted' in some way and the 'archival truth' will be lost. However, this concern itself fails to recognize that archives reflect many things, but not a singular 'reality,' through the involvement of everyone that creates or works with them.[28] This last reason is particularly important as it not only

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[22] Burke, p. 46.
[23] p. 111.
[24] Harris, p. 133.
[25] 'Archivistics Research Saving the Profession,' quoting Angelika Menne-Haritz.
[26] p. 22. Emphasis added.
[27] Cf. Weber, 'Capitalizing History,' p. 41, and Harris, p. 135-137.
[28] p. 135.

rejects the innocence of archives but rejects that of the archivist as well; in other words, archivists no longer have their external, privileged arena where they can both view records and work with them. Through the very process of keeping archives – that is, through archival practice such as appraisal, arrangement, and description – archivists become active shapers of the records for which they are responsible.

Three of a perfect pair: aporias of 'archival truth'

Through archival theory and practice, Heather MacNeil states archivists necessarily express 'a commitment to a philosophical ideal of truth … [t]he epistemological foundations of [which] are rooted in ideas that emerged during the seventeenth century, which oriented knowledge in the direction of empirical inquiry to establish matters of fact.'[29] The most important aspect of this epistemological ideology is the assumption that there is a world and a language that one can use to make verifiable statements about it. This framework is supported in archivistics by the view that records are 'true' only if certain attributes of the record are maintained, those being the record's reliability and authenticity. Reliable records must stand for the facts to which they attest; authentic records those which are what they claim to be and that have not been altered since their creation.[30]   MacNeil notes that these concepts, central to traditional archivistics and originating in diplomatics, 'are rooted, both literally and metaphorically, in observational principles.'[31] These features become explicit in the treatment of records as evidence, particularly since the word 'evidence' originates in the Latin word *videre*, 'to see.' These interconnected aspects are all expressions of this 'ideal of truth' that MacNeil recognizes; however, she does not recognize that this 'ideal' is a

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[29] Heather MacNeil, 'Trusting Records in a Postmodern World.' In *Archivaria* 51, Spring 2001, p. 37.
[30] MacNeil, 39-40. See also Luciana Duranti, ' Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications,' in *Archivaria* 39, Spring 1995, p. 5-10.
[31] ibid.

theory, the correspondence theory of truth.[32] In turn, this theory is structured around a specific *ideology*.

As we have seen in the previous section, archival ideology maintains that records 'are the innocent product of processes exterior to archivists and reflect, provide an image of, are evidence of, those processes.'[33] To put this differently, records are a thought of as a representation of reality – a past reality that is ultimately knowable by our examination of the record's form, content, and context. However, quoting Hindess and Hirst's *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Anne Wordsworth expresses that the 'past does not exist' and that 'the object of history is whatever is *represented* as having hitherto existed.'[34] She elaborates:

> Idealist and positivist historians claim that the real is reached *through* these representations, either because history is a rational order and its movements express an essence accessible to knowledge, or because knowledge of history can be got through given facts.[35]

By extension, archival records, as well as other types of primary sources, are not merely representations of the past as suggested – they are, rather, a *second-order* representation, i.e., a representation of a representation. The formulation of an 'accurate history' nonetheless relies on the necessary presumption that records are 'true' or represent true states of affairs. This notion of truth is where we focus this part of our investigation – whether there is a truth accessible in archives. I argue that the possibility of 'archival truth' is an aporia, a problem with convoluted, contradictory aspects; through the

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[32] For an exposition on the correspondence theory of truth and the problem of justification, see Laurence Bonjour, *Knowledge, Justification and Truth: A Sellarsian Approach to Epistemology* (available from http://www.ditext.com/bonjour/bonjour0.html). Bonjour's dissertation is particularly interesting if read with MacNeil's comments in mind.

[33] Verne Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa.' In *Archivaria* 44, Fall 1997, p. 133.

[34] Quoted in 'Derrida and Foucault: Writing the History of Historicity.' In *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 116. Emphasis in original.

[35] ibid. Emphasis in original.

analysis of this aporia, however, we may be to determine a better understanding of how archival truth functions.

That which consumes: the air of 'truth'

Archival records are products of the past, like all writing; the act of writing occurs in the present, ending and escaping from us when the pen or the hand that holds it stops moving, or when our fingers lift off the keys. Derrida alludes to this aspect in his discussion of Jensen's *Gradiva* and Freud's psychoanalysis of it:

> Hanold … dreams of … reliving the singular pressure or impression which Gradiva's step, the step itself, the step of Gradiva herself, that very day at that time, on that date, in what was inimitable about it, must have left in the ashes. He dreams this irreplaceable place, the very ash, where the singular imprint, like a signature, barely distinguishes itself from the impression. And this is the condition of singularity, the idiom, the secret, testimony. *It is the uniqueness of the printer-printed, of the impression and the imprint, of the pressure and its trace in the unique* instant *where they are not yet distinguished the one from the other …*[36]

By this reading, this uniqueness is the archival 'truth' or 'reality' that archivists are trying to preserve, at least in the sense of traditional archival ideology, particularly in the case of the diplomatic concept of authenticity. Jenkinson specifies that archivists are responsible for the 'physical' (i.e., preservation) and 'moral' (i.e., arrangement and description) defense of archives. In discussing the moral defense of archives, he specifies that 'in no circumstances may any marking or alteration of a document (alteration including any change whatever in its relation to other documents) be made by anyone save an Archive Official,' elaborating later that:

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[36] *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. p. 98-99. Emphasis added.

> … [the notes of an archivist] should not, as a rule, be made on the document itself … In any case the greatest care must be taken they run no risk of being mistaken at any time for part of the original document. Thus pencil marks of any kind on a modern document are most unsafe and should be forbidden; if this is not done the value of genuine contemporary alterations or additions in pencil will gravely compromised. This point was well illustrated by an example recently observed where the Archive consisted of a printed map of North America, dated 1763, with boundaries of the Indian territories *marked in ink and pencil.* Obviously, the smallest suspicion of a possibility of subsequent pencil markings on this would rob it of half its value.[37]

Recently, archivists have shown a related concern given the increased prevalence of electronic records through suggesting the possibility of the 'capture' of electronic records as they pass through 'business processes.' The emulation of electronic recordkeeping systems is the strategy to return to the object of Hanold's desire – the moment the impression occurred, when '[t]he trace no longer distinguishes itself from its substrate.'[38] The archivist desires the 'painstakingly secured snapshot of a government-wide human resources management database.'[39] This, like the metaphor of 'photographic witnessing' it suggests, is 'a form of time travel … a way of fixing the look of the present.'[40] Furthermore, digital information is much easier to alter, both intentionally and unintentionally, through the subtle distortions of the record that are created by slightly varying copies and changes in the system within which they exist.[41]

Archival records are also products of the past *by definition*: they are 'noncurrent records' and we speak of them becoming 'created' and 'accumulated'; that is, they express a past tense, like the participle with its '-*ed*' suffix in English. This feature is

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[37] Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, revised ed. London: Lund, Humphries & Co., 1937. p. 83, 96. Emphasis in original. In expressing this recognition in Jenkinsonian archivistics, I note that Muller, Feith, and Fruin's *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (trans. Arthur H. Leavitt, Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2003) does not consider the alteration of records or the addition of notes by the archivist as an explicit problem. The only concerns about modification relate to provenance and the maintenance of an organic whole of a collection.

[38] *Archive Fever,* p. 99. For further information on the emulation of electronic records, I suggest reading Jeff Rothenberg's *Avioiing Technological Quicksand: Finding a Viable Technical Foundation for Digital Preservation* (1998, available from http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/rothenberg/contents.html).

[39] Verne Harris, 'On (Archival) Odyssey(s).' In *Archivaria* 51, p. 7.

[40] Joan M. Schwartz, '"Records of Simple Truth and Precision": Photography, Arhcives, and the Illusion of Control.' In *Archivaria* 50, Fall 2000, p. 17.

[41] For further information in authenticity in the digital environment, see David Bearman and Jennifer Trant, 'Authenticity of Digital Resources: Towards a Statement of Requirements in the Research Process.' In *D-Lib Magazine*, June 1998 (available from http://www.dlib.org/dlib/june98/06bearman.html).

what makes them important: potentially, they can provide access to a past otherwise unknowable. This is expressed archivistically as a record's 'enduring value,' which is distinguished from the legal, fiscal, or administrative value that serves as the motivation for keeping current records. However, this feature also *obscures* access to the 'reality' of the past (that is, the uniqueness, for once the act of writing/recordmaking has occurred – along with the event/process it describes or represents – it disappears. All that is left, consequently, is the archive – the trace, as it were, of the act. This is our *aporia*, wherein the historicity of records precludes us from unfettered access to the past, the 'archival truth' that seems to elude more as we try to close in on it.[42] In *Archive Fever*, Derrida notes that '[t]he possibility of the archiving trace … can only divide the uniqueness' of the event/process connected to an archive.[43] Compare this with Derrida's primary concern in *Cinders*, the French phrase '*il y a là cendre*,' which he states first came to him fifteen years before the book's writing:

> *Là*, there, cinder there is … But the accent, although readable to the eye, is not heard: cinder there is. To the ear, the definite article, *la*, risks effacing the place, and any mention or memory of the place, and any mention or memory of the place, the adverb *là*, … But read silently, it is the reverse, *là* effaces *la*, *la* effaces herself, himself, twice rather than once. [44]

By pointing, identifying to *là*, 'there,' we achieve little – 'the phrase withdrew from itself.'[45] It burns up, falls apart, blows away much like Gradiva's footprint in the Vesuvian ashes with which Hanold becomes enamored. Similarly, with the trace – imagine the ease with which we smudge a chalk or charcoal drawing when we are careless with our hands in indicating a feature. Right before we point and exclaim '*there!*' we inhale the ash in Pompeii, smear the loose carbon on the page, and stir the

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[42] Other types of primary sources express this as well, but discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper.
[43] *Archive Fever*, p. 100.
[44] Trans. Ned Lukacher. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. p. 21.
[45] *Cinders*, p. 33.

dust and mold spores in the boxes; when we make our utterance we exhale it, losing grasp of it through expiration and the simultaneous unsettling of the remnants still on the surfaces. This induces our *mal d'archive*, an 'archive fever' less like an abnormally high temperature but more like the unfortunate combination of pneumonoconiosis and hay fever.[46] It irritates us and slowly suffocates us, taunting us with what we really need to take in to survive – the air of truth. Jenkinson suggests that the pencil marks will just intermingle those from the original inscription of the record. Historian-researchers, and, possibly, future archivists, will not be able to point (back) and exclaim '*there!*' with any certainty to specify the *there* or *then* when alterations to the record have been made.

The situation of electronic records is much the similar, as David Bearman has recognized, albeit stated differently. Emulation of recordkeeping systems does not capture the transactions; it merely provides an environment – albeit a *sim*ulation of one – that allows us to recreate the conditions for carrying out a certain activity. In considering electronic records as evidence, he reminds us, the records are the transactions entered into and produced from the system. In a human resources database, these records would be the transaction that made an individual an employee, those which issued paychecks, and so forth:

> If we captured the state of the database at 12:15.32 today, and emulated the entire environment in which this system existed fifty years from now, we would not have any records of your employment. [47]

My emphasis on the first syllable, linking *sim*ulation to *em*ulation, is not light-handed, as an invocation of Jean Baudrillard appears necessary at this point. When we *emulate* a recordkeeping system, we *simulate* it – substituting a sign of the real for the real itself –

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[46] I am greatly indebted to the witty and exploratory nature of Carolyn Steedman's '"Something she called a fever": Michelet, Derrida, and dust' (In *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001, p. 17-37) for my investigation into the diagnosis of archive fever.

[47] David Bearman, 'Realities and Chimeras in the Preservation of Electronic Records.' In *D-Lib Magazine* 5(4), April 1999 (available from http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april99/bearman/04bearman.html).

for '[t]o simulate is to have what one hasn't.'[48] We can input 'true' transactions into a simulated-emulated recordkeeping system and get 'true' (that is, appropriate) results or database structures. We can also input 'false' but syntactically proper data and transactions into the emulation-simulation and get appropriate results. In discussing the simulation of illness, Baudrillard writes

> The simulator cannot not be treated objectively either is ill, or as not ill …For if any symptom can be 'produced,' and can no longer be accepted as a fact of nature, then every illness may be considered as simulatable and simulated, and medicine loses its meaning since it only knows how to treat 'true' illnesses by their objective causes.[49]

This appears to get at the core of Bearman's concern that 'evidence' obtain through emulation is only *simulated* and not evidence of the *real* transaction that we need to keep, either for legal or historical reasons. We may disagree with Bearman regarding what he considers evidence to be. [50] We will not belabor this point, for his claims are equally valid by his simple recognition that migration 'does not require an information system to function as it once did.'[51] The perpetually incomplete and ersatz character of emulation prevents it from functioning *identically* to the system; emulated systems are usually not reliable, containing bugs, unimplemented features, and no assurances that it may not affect the operations of the host on which it runs.

The 'better half': using archives to study ideology and tacit narratives

If we have navigated this far, it should be clear that we cannot step back and point, all the while exclaiming '*there! is the aporia*,' for, to expropriate Derrida, aporias there are. Or, stated in the words of Verne Harris, 'every spectre, once named, seems to

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[48] Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations.' In *Jean Baudrillard: Seleceted Writings*, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. p. 167. Interestingly enough, Baudrillard seems to have only been cited in archival literature once, in Kenneth E. Foote's 'To Remember and Forget.'
[49] Baudrillard, p. 168.
[50] See Harris, 'On (Archival) Odysseys,' p. 7, and Brien Brothman, 'Afterglow: Conceptions of Record and Evidence in Archival Discourse,' *Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 326 and 333-335
[51] Bearman, 'Reality and Chimeras in the Preservation of Electronic Records.'

reveal a doppelganger, so that this naming becomes a process with infinite reach.'[52] The doppelganger, originally from the German word meaning 'double-walker,' is a person's shadow-self (accordingly, it is traditionally seen as mischievous, if not evil), which is nonetheless invisible in the mirror. Our aporia too has a doppelganger, and the seemingly best way to understand is by virtue of its character. It too, is a trace, but the more the slithering, hermeneutic circling of an absence. It is does not come out when we yell and disturb others in the archives. It approaches us *ex nihilo*, when we least expect it; it does not come from behind, per se, but rather from in front of us, since we usually look at documents with our eyes. It still comes silently, with soft footsteps. When it speaks, it does so in a whisper, but it does not read the record itself in a bureaucratic fashion; it simply reads what is not there.

What we are speaking of here, or, more accurately, what has been waiting for the particles to settle from our earlier outburst, are 'tacit narratives.' While archivists have only begun to embrace this recently, these tacit narratives are hardly strangers to the human and social sciences. Interest in them even predates the named 'archival turn' that has been in vogue, a phrase used by individuals in such fields as comparative literature, history, anthropology, and art history.[53] Eric Ketelaar notes that trying to read the traces of tacit narratives will help us understand the interwoven problematics of power and knowledge; I am inclined to agree with him, but I maintain that we must move beyond this Foucauldian framework.[54] Here I briefly submit two examples for consideration, both taken from authors published in the journal *Archival Science*. First, the work of Ann Laura Stoler in Dutch colonial archives declares much in terms of the

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[52] 'On (Archival) Odyssey(s),' p. 6.
[53] For instance, see the two special issues on archives of *History of the Human Sciences*, 11(4), November 1998, and 12(2), May 1999.
[54] 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives.' In *Archival Science* 1, 2001, p. 132.

political climate and social situation of the colony of Sumatra.[55] In one instance, she writes of the brutal murder of the family of a Dutch planter in Sumatra by native plantation workers. The reports surrounding the events differed significantly from one another in their description of the events, particularly in the suggested motivations behind the attack. These narratives were 'shaped by [the subaltern population] who, in *writing* their own acts of violence in such ambiguous ways, assured that they could rarely be easily and neatly read.'[56] Colonial Sumatran society reflected the ambiguousness on which its accounts expressed and the fractured knowledge on which the Europeans based their perceptions of the subaltern population. In a separate essay, Stoler writes that subaltern and postcolonial studies, given the archive as a symbol of power and oppression by the elite/colonizer, must 'read for [the archive's] regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – along the archival grain' in addition to 'reading upper class sources upside down.'[57]

Ciaran B. Trace also expresses the need to read beyond or through the boundaries of records to determine implicit ideologies by demanding that 'a departure from a purely administrative- and juridical-based theory of records is necessary to discover the being that acted as recorder … [and] their technical and social nature' (i.e.,

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[55] See '"In Cold Blood": Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives' (in *Representations* 37, Winter 1992, p. 151-189) and 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance' (in *Archival Science* 2, 2002, 87-109.
[56] '"In Cold Blood"', p. 153.
[57] 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,' p. 100, 99. In this article, Stoler also remarks that researchers should investigate the form and context of records in addition to their content (in some ways, another expression of the statement quoted here). Contrast this to the remarks of Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene in ' Confusing the Bun for the Burger' (in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 51, 2001, p. 435) wherein they argue that archivists should focus beyond the form and context of the records and focus on the content of the records. See also Mark A. Greene, 'The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age' (in *American Archivist* 65, Spring 2002, p. 42-55).

tacit narratives).[58] Through the exploration of records and recordkeeping in law enforcement, Trace finds three themes that can be woven into a new framework for understanding the record producer. I believe these three themes – recordkeeping as socialized behavior, the distinction between the technical and rhetorical uses of records, and the impact of audience on recordkeeping – are all reflections of Judith Butler's theory of performativity.[59] In their discussion of the performative behavior of archivists, Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz notes that performative behavior has at least two major dimensions: the anticipation of (an audience) as a shaper of the performance and the repetition or ritualization of the performance.[60] I argue that the repetition of the performance is essentially 'a given' in Trace's examples, as the repetition is necessary for the police to continue their duty: they are required to make a report every time they make an arrest.

In the case of the first theme, Trace writes that the 'discretion that police have in making a [criminal] record is shown to be a learned or a socialized behavior on the part of a police.'[61] This reflects both aspects of the theory of performativity. The audience would be the fellow officers within the unit or the police department as a whole; to gain acceptance, presumably officers would be expected by their peers to act a certain way and choose to create the police records in particular manners. Trace then discusses the distinction between the technical use of records versus their rhetorical use. 'Technical use' is defined as that which expresses the minimal amount of information required in records to carry out the processes with which they are associated. On the other hand,

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[58] 'What is Record is Never Simply "What Happened": Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture.' In *Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 141. According to Trace, an 'administrative- and juridical-based theory' would be one with Positivist/modernist roots in the tradition of diplomatics.
[59] I have chosen to use the phrasing *technical use* and *rhetorical use* rather than Trace's terminology of *use* and *purpose*.
[60] 'Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance.' In *Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 172.
[61] 'What is Record is Never Simply "What Happened,"' p. 142.

the 'rhetorical use' of records is when they are 'produced to document the performance of a given organizational task, rather than allowing an impression of this performance to form upon the audience as an incidental by-product of the task activity itself.'[62] This, accordingly, 'has led to the institutionalization of a particular view of reality represented … by a highly specific and specialized form of language, order, and form.'[63] In her research, Trace found that records were accordingly created to influence judge's decisions and to express administrative and personal problems. This is connected with the third theme Trace identifies, the impact of audience on recordkeeping. In law enforcement records, often only part of the information is used in the actual decision-making process despite the other information within it. The discontinuity between record contents and the decisions made is address by *ex post facto* amendments or modifications or by deferring the decisions to other individuals. Furthermore, police officers can introduce linguistic bias to manipulate audiences in transcripts of interviews with suspects. This is done by 'impinging on the perceived reliability of the speakers as witnesses … attribution of non-prestige forms of language (such as obscenities, [etc.])' and by knowingly producing records from memory since that 'when "inventing" or "composing speech," police officers can be more conscious of form and therefore produce records that seem more "authentic."'[64] Furthermore, we should note that this reflects Harris' recognition that the process of creating a record is shaped by the act of recording.[65] In both of the last two themes, the particular performance is to cause two certain effects in an audience, to maintain of a positive police image and to influence the decision of judges and administrators.

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[62] John Van Maanen and Brian T. Pentland, quoted in Trace, p. 144.
[63] Trace, p. 144.
[64] Trace, p. 146-147.
[65] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 135.

Let me conclude by discussing the impact of recordkeeping as a performative act. Ketelaar notes that the 'first' phase of the archive is 'archivalization' – 'the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving.'[66] That Ketelaar recognizes archivalization as implying *choice* (particularly the possibility of the conscious choice) rather than being something like the impersonal requirement of law or a person's 'packrat' nature suggests that there is an awareness of the implications of keeping records. Although records creators cannot anticipate all future uses of a record, they nonetheless have at least one in mind – their own, as an *aide memoire*, if nothing else. If records have a use, that accordingly implies they have an audience – that is, there is the anticipation that someone will use it. In Jenkinson's words, records are 'preserved in [the creator's] own custody *for their own information* by the person or persons responsible for [a] transaction and their legitimate successors.'[67] Accordingly, the existence and possibility of an audience *always* shapes the performance of creating records. Although the Jenkinsonian credo states 'Archives were not drawn up in the interest of or for the information of Posterity,' the 'decapitated' (i.e., decapitalized) version of this phrase would be true: '*a*rchives were drawn up in the interest of for the information of *p*osterity.'

The shadow of otherness: beyond the aporias?

We have seen how the possibility of archival truth is complex, both obscuring and revealing. Although our examination of the aporia of archival truth has yielded two parts, we should recognize that they are hardly two halves of a whole. Granted, even a third may not be sufficient either, but we should conclude by examining another term in our formula. As Verne Harris asks:

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[66] 'Tacit Narratives,' p. 133.
[67] Jenkinson, p. 2.

> Can we ever be sure of 'two'? … Can we be sure of any finite number? The possibility of 'the other,' *the shadow of otherness*, brings to all numbering the possibility of another, of one more. So that, beyond any consideration of whether there is indeed an archival unity in diversity, in what we might call an epistemological beyond, there is a question mark behind the very notion of such unity.[68]

Accordingly, this notion – and, dare I say, the aporia – of unity is where we will end for now. In Robert Young's charting of Foucauldian historiography, we find that one way that Foucault tries to reconcile unity and totality is through the idea of the 'phantasm', wherein 'the event as event is only constituted through its repetition in thought … which exploits Plato's admission that there can not only be a good copy but a bad one (*phantasma*).'[69] The contradiction itself is the third, irreconcilable Lyotardian differend that 'becomes History.' Young expands further, stating that

> … both historicism or entirely differentiated histories are in themselves impossibilities: history will always involve a form f historicism, but a historicism that cannot be sustained. It is thus a contradictory (quasi)concept – a phantasm – in which neither the elements of totalization nor difference can be definitively achieved or dispatched.[70]

We can say the same for our 'archival truth.' We can give up neither 'simple' archival truth (the first aporia) nor tacit narratives of *différance*; just the same, we cannot rely on only one of them. They must work together *and* conflict for any sort of truth can come out. This may be one of the reasons that Derrida stated that '[t]he archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed … [i]t opens out of the future.'[71] I end with two examples that give us a new problematic, the problem of 'opening out of the future.' Both are examples of what I and others would probably call 'deconstructivist architecture,' and both address German Jewry (interestingly enough, since Derrida is interested with the Jewishness of Freud in *Archive Fever*). First is the

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[68] 'On (Archival) Odyssey(s),' p. 7.

[69] 'Foucault's Phantasms,' in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990. p. 82.

[70] 'Foucault's Phantasms,' p. 84.

[71] *Archive Fever*, p. 68.

new Jewish Museum of Berlin, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind.[72] Libeskind himself is represented as a 'deconstructivist architect' as he studied under John Hedjuk and Peter Eisenman, who allegedly founded this 'movement.' It was designed as a gallery space, but does not have doors leading to the outside – it is only accessible from underground. In addition, its interior is shocking in its division of space, seemingly improbable for patrons to access and to display artifacts with its unusual angles. As James E. Young writes,

> Instead of merely housing the collection … this building seeks to estrange it from the viewers' own preconceptions. Such walls and oblique angles, he hopes, will defamiliarize the all-too-familiar ritual objects and historical chronologies, and will cause museum-goers to see into these relations between the Jewish and German departments as if for the first time.[73]

Finally, I submit the example of the new Holocaust Monument in Vienna, the 'nameless library,' as designed by British installation artist Rachel Whiteread. As Derrida alludes to in *Archive Fever*, books are highly important to Jews.[74] However, the structure of this monument is composed from models of shelves of books with their spines turned inward, tightly jammed together. At one end of the monument, a set of hermetically sealed doors that leads – or bars access – to a room full of books. Does this archive open out of the future too? Its power is in its symbolism, its intentional obscuration. Through contradictory examples like these, we get a better understanding of the value of archives and the truth that they may contain.

The 'archival imaginary': cultural capital, representation, and the politics of practice

Recent works in archival literature have addressed the problematics of power and representation in archives. In turn, archives have attempted to change their image

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[72] For more information, particularly from a critical perspective, see James E. Young, 'Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny arts of Memorial Architecture' (in *Jewish Social Studies* 6(2), available from http://iupjournals.org/jss/jss6-2.html) and the Museum's website at http://www.jmberlin.de/.

[73] 'Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin.'

[74] See *Archive Fever*, p. 20-23, wherein Derrida discusses the Bible given to Freud by his father and the inscription it carries.

from staid buildings full of dust to interesting sites for research. However, a predominant question remains for the average person on the street – what exists in the archives for *my interests and me*? This question often rises if the person in question happens to be a member of a historically or presently marginalized group. If we cannot provide something of interest and importance to the people, then our jobs as archivists – not records managers – are at risk. This section compares the situation of archives with the debate surrounding the 'literary canon,' also often referred to the set of 'Great Books' that are held to exemplify Western culture. In particular, it investigates the problem of access to 'cultural capital,' the political nature of archival practice, and the concept of 'national memory.'

The work that we will use for situating our discussion is the first half of the first chapter of John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Guillory's work is unique compared to other investigations into the debate of canon formation as it provides a distinctly sociological analysis. In the preface, he states that 'only by understanding the social function and institutional protocols of the school that we will understand how works are *preserved, reproduced, and disseminated* over successive generations and centuries.'[75] Guillory's approach relies on the concept of 'cultural capital,' first specified by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Like other forms of capital (including ideology), cultural capital is produced, exchanged, distributed, and so forth; furthermore, that such a form of capital exists presumes there are divisions of society based upon the distribution of it, i.e. 'cultural classes.' Such an analysis of capital and class goes beyond Marxism, for an economic analysis is insufficient; consequently, Guillory also notes that his class-based analysis does not presume the *primacy* of class over racial or gender-based analyses. Rather, for him the problematics of canon

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[75] *Cultural Capital,* p. vii, emphasis added.

formation require a class-based analysis since it is the 'question of the distribution of cultural goods rather than of the representation of cultural images.'[76] In addition, based on Bourdieu's analysis, Guillory states that the distribution of cultural capital within institutions reproduces social structures, regardless of their form (including ideologies). The central concern of *Cultural Capital* is the representation (or lack thereof) of social groups in the canon, which is problematized by the conflation of political representation and what I name 'canonical representation' ('the relation between an image and what the image represents' in terms of the representation of works in the canon).[77] Guillory notes that this is conflation stems from the connection of canon revision to American pluralism, wherein political representation 'describes an important objective for many social groups, defined by a variety of forms of association,' such as gender, ethnicity, and involvement in sociopolitical issues.[78]

Opening or incorporation: the politics of representation and the representation of politics

For Guillory, the assumption that representation in the canon is a solely political problem does not explain the relation between the politics of representation and representational politics. To analyze this, he notes two theoretical assumptions that exist within critiques of canon formation. The first is an underlying 'logic of closure,' which originates in the implicit analogy of the creation of a literary canon as similar to the creation of a religious canon, particularly in reference to the 'opening' of the canon. Similarly, archival literature has also discussed the 'opening [of] the archives,' a statement that I believe has three related, but distinct, aspects. The first is the increased representation of historically oppressed peoples in archives, which connects with our investigation of canon revision. The second aspect is the opening of the archive to

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[76] p. 18.
[77] *Cultural Capital*, p. viii.
[78] p. 4.

scrutiny, including the practices of recordkeeping, the contents of archives, and the history they purport to hold. The 'archival turn' in the humanities and that I call the 'critical turn' in archivistics, exemplified by the work of Eric Ketelaar, Terry Cook, Verne Harris, and others, expresses this secondary aspect. The third aspect is the opening of archives to the public, referred to in archival jargon as 'outreach,' or, put in layperson's terms, encouraging people to use archives through any sort of device to engage them (an exhibit, a tour, etc.). While these aspects are often interrelated, I do not propose any sort of definite causal relationship between them; instead, I argue that any of these aspects can lead to another, and we need not posit any of them in particular as the initial step of a transformative project in archivistics.

The second theoretical assumption Guillory recognizes, which interrelates with the first, is that the process of selection that designates works as canonical is conflated with a process of social exclusion of minorities from power. As a result, the transformative process to correct this 'exclusion' is the 'opening' of the canon 'by adding works of minority authors to the syllabus of literary study.'[79] However, both canon revision and canon formation often elides the differences in the experiences of authors by the implicit privilege it grants to the creation of ontological correspondence in the creation of a shared narrative or experience.[80] For example, in his consideration of the 'exclusion' of women in the canon, Guillory claims that the lack of representation did not originate in *systematic* exclusion of their works but rather by the limitations placed on their access to literacy and modes of writing. He elaborates:

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[79] *Cultural Capital*, p. 7.
[80] I have intentionally emphasized the problematics of the creation of a 'shared narrative' (as opposed to a shared narrative of oppression), as I believe it provides an important insight in the creation of concepts of 'Western culture and national memory,' which I will address later in this essay.

> If current research has recovered a number of otherwise forgotten women writers … this fact is not directly related to canon formation as a process of selection or exclusion on the basis of social identity, but to the present institutional context of a valid and interesting *research program* whose subject his the history of women writers and writing. … It is not necessary to claim canonical status for noncanonical works in order to justify their study, as the archive has always been the resource of historical scholarship.[81]

The present-day construction of a shared narrative of marginalization *as women* ignores the differences in race and, as Guillory emphasizes, class, the latter of which often serves to limit access to means of cultural production, such as literacy.

The political impact of archivistics

Building on Guillory's view, I argue that archival functions operate similarly, despite their potentially political implications. While Verne Harris' maxim of the 'archival sliver,' that only a tiny fragment or Derridean trace remains in the archive of an event or process, holds true, the non-ideological aspect of archivistics does lead to the intentional exclusion of records of any group, dominated or dominating.[82] Furthermore, while records can be and often are used as tools to maintain power, the archival functions themselves are usually not the means by which this power is maintained. I briefly offer three examples to prove my point. Eric Ketelaar writes that during the Third Reich early IBM computers were used in the creation of the *restlose Erfassung* ('total registering') of all German people, particularly the Jews, the Rroma ('gypsies'), the mentally-ill, and the disabled.[83] *Schreibtischmörder* ('desktop murderers') such as Eichmann used these records, produced in the Prussian State Archives, to carry out the seizure and execution of the 'impure.' Coincidentally, the Prussian State Archives is also the repository that first codified *Provenienzprinzip* – the principle of provenance. Secondly, *The File: A Personal History*, by Timothy Garton Ash, is a similar

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[81] p. 15-16, emphasis in original.

[82] See 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa' (*Archivaria* 44, p. 137) and 'The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa' (*Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 63-86).

[83] 'Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection,' in *Archival Science* 2, 221-238.

narrative of his life as a foreign student in Berlin who happened to fall into the gaze of the Stasi. [84] The East Germans documented his friendships, his travels, and conceivably everything about his life; however, the documentation itself was not repressive, it was the intent with which it was being used.

Finally, we will consider the situation of archives in South Africa before the transition from apartheid, as expressed by Verne Harris, whom we mentioned earlier in this paper. This description is contradictory to part of my argument, but I feel that his history of the relationship of archives and apartheid is particularly revealing. He notes South Africa's archival history (i.e., the history of archives as institutions) predominantly centers on the State Archives Service, or SAS.[85] He writes of the large-scale destruction of records, such as the estimated 44 tons of records destroyed by the National Intelligence Service in 1993 and the difficulty experienced in the selection and the appraisal processes. For example, Harris describes the refusal by government offices to transfer, appraise, or analyze their records and by the imposition of access restrictions by higher levels in government. Furthermore, he writes that apartheid ideology and bureaucratic culture shaped archival practice within the SAS to the extent that theory and methodology often were coherent and appraisal decisions were based 'around one central question: does this record possess actual or anticipated usefulness to researchers?'[86] This criterion was both based on the preponderance of SAS appraisers taught by establishment-aligned Afrikaner historians and the assumption that the only researchers that would realistically gain access to the materials would be white (and presumably Afrikaner) academics. This would seem to suggest that archival practices can be 'insidious,' as I have suggested. However, archival practice (even if not

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[84] New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
[85] 'The Archival Sliver.'
[86] 'The Archival Sliver,' p. 73.

bureaucratized) was presumably extant before apartheid, particularly given the codified volumes of Jenkinson and Muller, Feith, and Fruin. Indeed, ideology can change lead to questionable justifications for archival practice, but I maintain that the archival fundamentals in which the changed practice originate *do not* rely on a logic of exclusion and closure.

Illegal tender: the transformation and translation of cultural capital

Harris also writes that since apartheid has been described as a 'racial capitalism,' we must avoid treating it solely as concerning race and recognize 'the complex interplay of identities – ethnic, social, gender, cultural, linguistic, political, and, crucially, class.'[87] Furthermore, his description of why few marginal groups in South Africa used the SAS (despite free and open access to all South Africans) and donated private records to them appears to center on the issue of cultural capital:

> [S]ystemic barriers – *low educational standards, high rates of illiteracy*, physical isolation from city centres, *competency in languages other than the official Afrikaans and English…*[88]

> With the exception of the Boer resistance … [the SAS] documented poorly the struggles against colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. Black experiences were also poorly documented, and in most cases were seen through white eyes. Similarly, the voices of women, the disabled, and other marginalized people were seldom heard. *This is partially explained by the difficulty experienced by SAS in securing donations from records other than establishment-aligned sources.* But the heart of the issue was a collecting policy which quite deliberately directed archivists *away from grassroots experience towards society's pinnacles, and which eschewed the documentation of orality.*[89]

Three of Harris' 'systemic barriers' in fact are systemic in that they relate to the *educational* system, which is the center of Guillory's critique. Furthermore, Harris' remarks raise the issue of vernacularity and the devaluation of orality, which also happen to be important to Guillory. In his discussion, he states part of the process of the creation of a *nationalized* conception of cultural literacy is that we must have access to works in the vernacular. For example, most people would not argue that Plato's

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[87] 'The Archival Sliver,' p. 67.
[88] p. 71, emphasis added.
[89] p. 73-74, emphasis added.

Republic is not a 'great book,' but it remains that, unless a scholar of Ancient Greek, students in the United States predominantly read the book *in English.* In addition, he writes that 'to be brought into the arena of curricular conflict as "noncanonical" works,' oral literature must first be converted from a personal set of recollections to an informational commodity.[90] Until recently, archivistics has also devalued oral history as an authentic record to be held in archives, but has recently gained acceptance in circumstances like those that characterize the situation in South African archives. Harris notes that such commodification of oral history and other forms of archival records ultimately destroys important aspects of their narratives, which can 'alienate the speaker from the word.'[91]

The role of institutions and the politics of image

Guillory indicates that part of the difficulty in understanding the connection between political representation and canonical representation is the institutional site of mediation between them – the school. However, since the locus of revision is the canon and not the school, Guillory maintains that such a critique of a canon is merely a critique of the canon as a 'representative' medium and not a critique of the *process* of canonization, fundamentally inseparable from its institutionalization in the school. Accordingly, he calls for 'an analysis of how the institutional site of canonical revision mediates its political effects in the social domain.'[92] Guillory's analysis of institutional mediation focuses on what he refers to as the 'pedagogic imaginary,' a concept modeled after that which Castoriadis and Lefort identify as the 'social imaginary':

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[90] *Cultural Capital*, p. 43.
[91] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 139.
[92] *Cultural Capital*, p. 8.

> … [T]he entire realm of imaginary significations organizing social life as something beyond the satisfaction of material needs or functions and positing the unity of 'society' in the face of social division. What I will call the 'pedagogic imaginary' similarly organizes the discursive and institutional life of teachers in excess of the simple function of disseminating knowledge by projecting a unity of the 'profession' in the ideality of its self-representation, the discourse of its own being as a kind of community.[93]

The 'pedagogic imaginary' cannot be the canon since it only exists, in Guillory's terms, as 'an *imaginary* totality of works.'[94] In other words, the canon only works as reference to a totality that is fundamentally inaccessible since it is perpetually undergoing change. Furthermore, the canon never exists as a concrete or whole *list* even at a particular time and place, but rather as idealized subsets or representations as lists in the form of the *constructed* syllabus. The imaginary whole that is the canon exists only through the sum of syllabi that collectively determine what literature deserves such hypothetical 'canonical' status. Although teachers can ultimately change individual syllabi to reflect greater diversity in experience and opinion, such revision cannot be a revolutionary change in the *process* of canon formation as the construction of syllabi entails that same process. Through this analysis, the 'fetishization' of the syllabus – the drive to create a course or reading list concerned with representing the totality of 'Western culture,' 'great books,' or 'women's history' – is a form of the pedagogic imaginary. According to Guillory, the form of the syllabus is indicative of its beginning with selection of, rather than a programmatic elimination or exclusion of works based on social identity or status. The problem with attempting to construct such projects as a course about 'Western culture' or 'literary traditions' is that they cannot ultimately *be about* such imaginary totalities. As soon as one treats these imaginary totalities as real, they are misunderstood are posited as a vague grand narrative.

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[93] See p. 35 and p. 353 (footnote 54).
[94] p. 30.

Consequently, I suggest that there is a corresponding 'archival imaginary,' which is the Positivistic conception recognized by Verne Harris that archives can be '[a nation's] central memory institutions, preserving (holding, keeping) the collective memory of the nation.'[95] If all that archives are able to retain are 'a sliver of a sliver' – according to Harris, the South African National Archives only aims to preserve *five percent* of all public records – it is impossible to suggest that archives can contain *the* memory or even memories of a nation.[96] As archivists, we cannot embark on a single endeavor to capture the entire memory of the nation. If we think as 'the archive' as the canon – or even archives, all archives in the world, conceptually akin to the Borgesian Library of Babel with retention schedules – we cannot have access to the totality, because of Guillory's recognition as a canon never existing as a concrete whole. New documents are added to the archive(s), records are destroyed, and access restrictions are placed and lifted. Furthermore, merely adding records of or about the marginalized individual existing archives will do little to 'revolutionize' the politics of archival representation.

Based on this analysis, the site of change must accordingly be the university (or the archives) and the liberal pluralism it values so much; in terms of capital, we must change the process of the production and distribution of cultural capital through the imaginary routines of the canon and syllabi. The means by which we achieve this is the creation and support of the 'research programs' alluded to by Guillory earlier. Accordingly, there has been a similar drive within archives to create new repositories, occasionally originating in explicitly political needs. For example, one need only consider the archival project of documentation planning, exemplified by the work of

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[95] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 133.
[96] See also Vern Harris, 'On (Archival) Odyssey(s),' *Archivaria* 51, p. 7.

'discipline-based history centers.'[97] Verne Harris writes of the 'significant accumulations' of the records of anti-apartheid individuals and organizations and of oral histories by newly formed or regrouped repositories.[98] Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher make a Woolfian call for 'a room of one's own' for women's archives in addition to the re-examination of collections within existing repositories.[99] Finally, in light of a recent transition to a pluralist government, the National Archives of Malawi have reformed and reconceptualized their role in Malawian society.[100] In addition to such political activities, Guillory writes that

> … [t]he humanities curriculum should be presented as an integrated in which the written works studied constitute a certain kind of cultural capital, and in which works therefore cannot be allegorized as intrinsically canonical or intrinsically noncanonical, intrinsically hegemonic or intrinsically antihegemonic. No cultural work of any interest at all is simple enough to be credibly allegorized in this way, because cultural work will *objectify* in its very form and content the same social conflicts that the canon debate allegorizes by means of a divided curriculum.[101]

In other words, *all forms* of cultural capital must be seen in terms of their *cultural value* rather than on their canonicity or other forms of value that they are said to contain; this holds particularly true when the values a work contain are said to be a reflection of a group or 'society.'[102] This, in turn, allows us to emphasize the importance of studying 'noncanonical' works or those produced by marginalized peoples without recourse to their noncanonicity or the need for 'equal cultural representation.' Furthermore, this understanding expands to incorporate the importance of studying both historical and

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[97] See Helen Willa Samuels, 'Who Controls the Past,' in *American Archivist* 49, Spring 1986, p. 109-124.
[98] 'The Archival Sliver,' p. 74-75.
[99] 'A Room of One's Own: Women's Archives in the Year 2000.' In *Archival Issues* 24(1), 1999, p. 37-54.
[100] Francis F.C. Kachala, 'Unfolding Events Leading to Political Pluralism in Malawi: Drawing Lessons from the Archives.' *XXVII Biennial Eastern and Southern Africa Regional of Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) General Conference on Archives, Society and Good Governance*. Mozambique, Maputo, July 22-26, 2002. Available from http://www.ahm.uem.mz/esarbic/docs/francis.pdf
[101] p. 52.
[102] As this paper's primary aim does not include a detailed discussion of value, I must note that a clearer understanding of these concepts can be found in *Cultural Capital*, particularly p. 52-55 and Chapter 5, 'The Discourse of Value: From Adam Smith to Barbara Herrnstein Smith.' Furthermore, Guillory's discussion heavily relies on the Gramscian concept of the 'unitary school,' more information on which can be found p. 48-50.

modern works by virtue of their historicity and currency rather than the expression of any other form of value.

Rewriting the script: on the archival enterprise and the role of politics

If, as John W. Roberts claimed in 1987, 'archivists are demanding greater recognition for their professionalism,' part of this step must be willing to engage critically with their responsibilities.[103] While some may believe this to be little more than a reconstitution of the debate over 'archival theory,' I suggest that it goes beyond such a debate in that it deals with the future course of archivistics. If society expects of an archivist is to be a 'glorified file clerk,' she will simply be jumping through hoops for her entire career.[104] The transition in recognition of archivists as passive guardians of documents to (pro)active 'contextualizers in an age where context is more complex and more fluid than ever before'[105] has begun to take hold across the professional landscape. In addition to this recognition, there exists a more important concern to both archives-as-profession and archives-as-institution: that the work of archivists is always fundamentally political in nature. Within this recognition, there are two postulates: one concerning the reflective nature of action, the other relating to the changing requirements of political society in its demand for accountability through both governmental and non-governmental (e.g., 'current affairs' television programs, such as CBS's *48 Hours*) or informal processes. To reformulate these postulates in a clearer way, we shall identify the first as the postulate of *ideology*: that the work of archivists – as well as archives themselves in all senses (e.g., documents, institutions, and so forth) – reflects a certain ideology or set thereof. The majority of this paper has dealt with this issue, so I will not speak of it at length here. In the second case, we identify this element

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[103] 'Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving.' In *American Archivist* 50, Winter 1987, p. 67.
[104] Qtd. in 'Archival Theory: Much Ado About Shelving.'
[105] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 139.

as the postulate of *responsibility*, wherein exists the problems of accountability of archivists in political, moral, and professional senses. In the last case, we will include the debates concerning the roles and responsibilities of the archivist *qua* archivist; in other words, we will discuss whether archivists should be responsible for certain concerns relating records. Using these two postulates, we will conclude by analyzing three articles concerning the political nature of the action of archivists.

Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz's article, 'Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,'[106] addresses the need to translate changes within archival theory to archival practice. Calling upon the 'theory of performativity' devised by the feminist theorist Judith Butler, Cook and Schwartz establish that 'the practice of archives is the ritualized implementation of theory.'[107] In their view, archival practice is often carried out as, in a conceptual sense, the performance of an unquestioned, received script. Through the establishment and dissemination of concepts and routines that are known to work and to receive approval from their 'audience,' archival practice thus becomes 'naturalized.' This process of naturalization, according to Dick Hebidge, is the means by which societies, theory, and practice reproduce themselves, wherein 'particular ways of organizing the world appear to us as if they were universal and timeless'[108] even if individual aspects of it change, as Cook and Schwartz recognize. This naturalized practice or performance, in this sense, is thus the lived relation of *ideology* that structures archival practice. Cook and Schwartz demand, in a Butlerian sense, that archivists engage in 'transgressive performances' that question the ideologies rooted deep within our profession. Despite this remark, they nonetheless claim that the essays 'in these two issues of *Archival*

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[106] p. 171-185.
[107] p. 173.
[108] 'From Culture to Hegemony,' in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979): p. 14

Science [that they had edited] … are examples of Butler's "transgressive performance."'[109] While engaging in intellectual labor contesting ideology is arguably in political nature, it seems problematic that such writing be viewed as transgressive performance *directly* linked to archival practice. While one can imagine archivists being inspired by such essays to rethink their responsibilities to the records and societies they serve, one can just as easily think of archivists viewing such work as being 'much ado about shelving.' Cook and Schwartz recognize this potential problem and thus maintain that 'the script for "thinking archives" needs to become a shared dynamic resonating in the daily work of "doing archives."'[110] In other words, archival theory needs to stimulate change in archival practice. However, as noted before, it is not clear how archival practice, with its administrative, economic, and ethical constraints, can be transgressive as a means to stimulate change in archival theory. While archivists can often recognize what does not work within their 'performances,' such recognition often does not occur until the curtain call.

Like Cook and Schwartz, Verne Harris recognizes that there is an ideological undercurrent to archival practice, and based on his own experience he limits his analysis to the transformation discourse as it relates to South African archives. In particular, Harris recognizes the entrenched ideology in South African archival discourse as 'pre-postmodern or, more precisely, as Positivist … [which] posits a universe governed by natural laws … [and wherein knowledge of reality] is attainable through the exercise of reason and the empirical methods.'[111] He maintains that this Positivist ideology, which lies at the base of 'archival science,' affects the post-apartheid

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[109] p. 177.
[110] p. 183.
[111] 'Claiming Less, Delivering More,' p. 133. Harris' use of 'pre-postmodern' seems unusual and awkward; one could imagine that he was thinking in terms of the word 'modern,' as it relates to the concepts of Modernism and modernity.

transformation of the South African archival enterprise, and as such should be questioned as part of the transformation process. In his analysis, he presents five areas where Positivist ideology penetrates South African archival discourse. The first area concerns the semantic character of archival terminology, wherein the definition of these terms are said to be 'simple, stable, and uncontested.'[112] In response, he states that such terminology is unstable based upon changes in the profession (e.g., electronic records) as well as through reference to the work of Derrida and Foucault. Harris' identification of archival terminology as 'simple, stable, and uncontested' reflects the naturalized aspect of ideology. He finds the second Positivist formulation, that archives are believed to be a 'reflection of reality,' problematic in three ways: that such reality is unknowable since we do not have access to the moment of creation, that the act of recording affects the process of record creation, and that archives reflect reality only 'complicitly … in a deeply fractured and shifting way.'[113] The third aspect is particularly important as it once again reflects the ideology that affects the behavior of all of those who work with the record: creators, administrators, archivists, and users.

The next formulation Harris takes issue with is what he terms as the problem of 'defining the role of custody and custodianship.'[114] He notes that, like with the first formulation, this has been problematized through the existence of electronic records as well as changing records environments. These changes must therefore lead to changes on a professional level, changing the role of the archivist from the passive custodian to an active participant in the recordkeeping environment. These changes, however, will also signal a change in how archivists are viewed in society; if archivists will have greater responsibility, this will in turn create the societal demand for their increased

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[112] p. 133.
[113] p. 135.
[114] p. 136.

accountability. Similarly, in Harris' analysis of the formulation that views archives as the memory of the nation, he notes that the problem of a national archives keeping the 'sliver of a sliver of a sliver' of a country's records affects its eventual transformation into social memory. Accordingly, given the increased efforts by archivists in outreach, society will continue to demand that archivists be responsible and accountable for their work. Harris's final formulation concerns the ideological narrative of triumphalism that exists within much of the discourse about South African archives. In particular, Harris warns that, despite successes within post-apartheid archival transformation, the work of archivists is political in nature even if they have laudable, progressive goals. As such, their work is influenced by ideology, which, through the efforts to present previously-repressed narratives, represses both counter-narratives and sub narratives. Furthermore, the efforts to collect new types of records, such as oral history, may in turn change the nature of the record itself.

Chris Hurley's essay, 'Records and the Public Interest: The "Heiner Affair" in Queensland, Australia,'[115] concerns the question of responsibility of archivists in deciding the disposition of documents. The case that Hurley analyzes in particular is that of records accumulated by Noel Heiner, a retired Australian magistrate, in the investigation of reports of widespread physical and sexual abuse within social welfare institutions for teenagers and children. When the government in power terminated the investigation, they subsequently ordered all of Heiner's records to be destroyed as well. The government presented the case to the Queensland State Archives as destruction was necessary 'to prevent access ("to maintain confidentiality") and so thwart any defamation action that might be taken' against those that testified against the

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[115] In *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society*, eds. Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace (Westport, Conn.: Quorum, 2002): p. 293-317.

institutions.[116] However, the archivist was not informed that the lawyers of Peter Coyne, one of the major defendants in the case, were seeking access to the records; in addition, the administration did not inform Coyne and his lawyers that destruction had taken place. Hurley notes that the true reason for the destruction of these records was never made known, but suggests two possibilities. He suggests that either that the government in power was defending certain political interests based on union membership (Coyne belonged to one union, while his employees that made complaints belonged to another) or that they were complying with their initial claim that they were trying to prevent any defamation of character of those that made the accusations. Furthermore, it seems that he, as well as other Australians, assumed that there was a large-scale cover-up of the abuse endemic to Queensland's child welfare institutions. However, Hurley cites testimony that the administration was fully aware that they called for the destruction of records to prevent potential legal action by Coyne. The administration, however, had also argued that they had the right to decide the disposition of the records since the records had not yet been requested via the legal system. Hurley then shifts the focus to the role of the archivist: should the profession be responsible for a thorough understanding of the legal situation regarding records? He responds that archivists should endeavor to keep abreast of changes in the legal system; clearly, those in the records management arena within the United States have been forced to do so with the advent of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. However, he writes that 'it is not the job of the archivist … [to] be expected to evaluate the potential probative value or status as [legal] evidence of [records]' as it thus demands that archivists make appraisal decisions without appropriate context.[117] In this case, he suggests that a

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[116] p. 296.
[117] p. 306.

number of checks be completed prior to the destruction of controversial records. In particular, he notes that archivists should focus on creating and maintaining routine procedure that will serve to identify violations against it. When archives receive an request for records destruction, archivists can then decide if the decision to depart from established norms is necessary. In addition, Hurley seems to suggest that archivists must serve as activists *within* government to emphasize the need for accountability in records keeping. This could be seen in the light of Cook and Schwartz's analysis as a positive 'transgressive performance' that will change future ways that the script of keeping archives is acted. With such promise, we can thus think of our actions as a means by which we can both embrace our (often implicitly) political role while increasing the understanding society has of our profession.