Commentary on *Archival Strategies*

Reflections On *Archival Strategies*

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Abstract: Even if one is not satisfied with David Bearman's solutions to the questions he raises in *Archival Methods* and *Archival Strategies*, the issues of reinventing archival functions are important and need to be addressed by the archival community. Some of the challenges to the application of Bearman's proposed strategies are the undeniable cultural purposes of archives and the changing nature and growing complexity and interrelatedness of government bureaucracies. In addition, the right of the public to use archives is fundamental and a fuller awareness of the needs of both traditional and potential archival stakeholders is necessary in any reinvention process. Ultimately, however, the reinvention process will not be one of debate but of action; its success dependent on the creativity of the archival staffs and archival administrators who address the issues raised by Bearman.

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ALTHOUGH WE ARE HERE to discuss the current and future state of archives, I would like to draw your attention to a more immediate, and, some might say, more important topic: The baseball strike.

There are, even here I expect, many still suffering withdrawal pains brought on by the strike. With Canada the new home of World Series champions, I thought I would set the context for my remarks with a World Series anecdote. Just after one of the games in last year's series, three umpires were discussing their philosophical approaches to calling pitches. The first boasted that,

"I calls 'em as I sees 'em."

The second claimed to be more epistemologically advanced, stating firmly,

"I calls 'em as they actually are."

The third concluded the discussion with a firm declaration,

"They just ain't nuttin' until I calls 'em."

[I believe this is the way umpires talk. If I have perpetrated an umpirical stereotype I do apologize.]

The two papers by David Bearman under consideration today, his 1989 paper on *Archival Methods* and the other he just outlined, *Archival Strategies*, combine all three approaches in examining the archival reality.

First: "I calls 'em as I sees 'em." These papers present a unique perspective on our collective archival endeavor. They distill the reflections of more than a decade by one who has worked in an archival setting and who has advised archives, libraries and museums. Closely familiar with the literature, knowledgeable in the possibilities and imperatives of technology, and participating in archival discussion in several countries on three continents, Bearman's considered perspective has breadth and depth few of us can claim. It is a stimulating one I value.

Next, "I calls 'em as they are." Bearman's observations are direct and candid. The most difficult thing about his writing is that he takes our profession's proudest statements of institutional ambition at face value. To him, these are not the hollow words budget analysts so cynically dismiss. The words "permanence," "enduring," "posterity," "appraisal," "accessible," and "accountable," Bearman takes very seriously. Holding up the harsh mirror of institutional resources, he identifies the widening gap between proud intention and our ability to deliver. More fundamentally, he argues our current approach to archival methodology is inadequate to the task.[1] Traditional approaches to appraisal, description, preservation, and use are variously described as "bankrupt"[2] or "fatally flawed,"[3] or as methods "that prevent [their] completion,"[4] and archivists as being indifferent to their users.[5] In sum, this is the "impoverishment of leadership and imagination" he has addressed elsewhere.[6] This is indeed a harsh wake-up call from a colleague whom I respect.

At the same time, in "calling 'em as they are," Bearman laments the lack of basic data or studies on which to assess the archival endeavor.[7] Consistent, hard data about archival resources and activity are rare. The baseline required to measure change is, at best, faint. Attempts to plan archival development above the institutional level — at the regional, state, or national levels — have been sporadic. Few comparative statistics are available to as-

[1]David Bearman, *Archival Methods*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1989), i.

[2]David Bearman, "Archival Strategies" *American Archivist* 58 (Fall 1995): 392.

[3]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 10.

[4]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 28.

[5]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 39.

[6]David Bearman, "Towards National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories: Policies, Problems and Prospects," in *Towards National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories: The National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) Papers: 1981-1984* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1987), 87-89.

[7]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 382, n. 5.

sess our archival endeavor, its dimensions, capabilities, its use of resources, its products or outcomes. In the absence of such detail, Bearman uses his own experience, generalizing at times, at others drawing assumptions about public, bureaucratic, and professional motivations and attitudes. I should add that, as commentators, we have the same limitations and will leave to you to judge whether we talk of things as we sees 'em or as they are.

There is a great deal of the third umpire in Bearman's thinking: — "they just ain't nuttin' until I calls 'em." He proposes new ways of conceptualizing each aspect of the archival endeavor, replete with sparkling insights and bold suggestions for new ways of accomplishing our common goal. He provides both vision and innovative techniques for moving towards its realization. It would require a series of panels to explore this vision and the approaches in the detail they deserve. Some are highly controversial, others iconoclastic, some merely new or an expansion of current practice: all merit consideration. While we might debate these at inconclusive length, the essential point remains that Bearman is asking most of the right questions. His answers may not always satisfy, but the questions he poses must be on our institutional, if not our professional, agendas until they are satisfactorily addressed. The question underlying both of Bearman's papers is whether we as archivists are going to undertake the proactive reinvention of our function or whether other forces, like budget, staffing, and space constraints, competition from other information resource managers, and the inexorable effects of information technology and telecommunications on our society, will do it for us. Are we to join with those in education, health care, financial services, social assistance, entertainment, public administration, and business in adapting to changing conditions and social expectations? While I hesitate in using the dreaded "r" words (re-engineering, re-inventing, restructuring), the challenge Bearman has issued, spanning all aspects of our function, in a bureaucracy or in society, can only be summarized by one of these "r" words. Bearman's papers apply to archives the same questioning and rigor now being brought to bear in other aspects of governmental and institutional life. His argument is a reflection of the theme of the book *Reinventing Government* by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler.

> For the last 50 years, political debate in America has centred on questions of ends: what government should do, and for whom. We believe such debates are secondary today, because we simply do not have the means to achieve the new ends we seek....We have new goals, yes, but our governments cannot seem to achieve them. The central failure of government today is one of *means*, not *ends*.[8]

Other authors discuss the "twilight of hierarchy"[9] or dismantle the Weberian understanding of bureaucracy:

> The problem is that government bureaucracy, as conceived and developed through the last century, is not up to the challenges of the next. Its foundations do not fit new problems.[10]

Along the way, they note the public skepticism of the promises and grand visions

[8]David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., 1992), xxi.

[9]Harlan Cleveland as quoted in Osborne and Gaebler, *Reinventing Government*, 253.

[10]Donald F. Kettl, "Managing on the Frontiers of Knowledge: The Learning Organization," in *New Paradigms For Government*, P.W. Ingraham, B.S. Romzek and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 21.

advanced by the professions that comprise the bureaucracy.[11] Government programs based on the expertise of professionals are the target of public humor and occasional scorn, and the proposition that the private sector is more efficient verges on a truism, accepted uncritically.

> Confidence in government has fallen to record lows. By the late 1980s, only 5 per cent of Americans surveyed said they would choose government service as their preferred career. Only 13 per cent of top federal employees said they would recommend a career in public service. Nearly three out of four Americans said they believed Washington delivered less value for the dollar than it had 10 years earlier.[12]

And that was before the financial crisis of the 1990s. Archives are part of the bureaucratic and institutional milieu. We are not immune from the public expectation, indeed, demand for change.

In *Archival Strategies*, Bearman observes that *Archival Methods* has been cited more often in Canadian and Australian archival literature than American. Even so, most of these citations occur in discussions of electronic records. Others have drawn on his analysis of the inadequacy of appraisal and descriptive approaches in the continuing discussion in *Archivaria* seeking a theory of appraisal. Terry Cook and, more recently, Richard Brown, have been making advances, both in the literature and in actually revamping the records-scheduling processes in the Canadian federal government. They seek records appraisal based on the function and context of the record, coupled with a more rigorous and transparent approach to determining the significance of various functions within an institution or society.[13] As stimulating and provocative as Bearman's insights have been to these crucial discussions, by focusing only on specific aspects of his argument, they ignore the broader significance of Bearman's challenge. *Archival Methods* and now *Archival Strategies* fuel professional debate, but the true challenge is to our institutions — our archival administrators — to act; to unleash the creative ability in our staff and to explore new ways to fulfill our social goals. These will involve changing our appraisal and descriptive approaches without a doubt, but they involve much more.

As with any re-inventing process, Bearman begins by making the case for drastic action. The statistics he cites in *Archival Methods* regarding the number of record-creating governments and corporate entities; the person-power required to appraise or accession society's records; the cost of extending the life of significant original documents by just a century or two; and the few citizens using archives, are eloquent. The disparity between these and the actual capability of the existing archival system is humbling. This disparity, though, rests on the perceived gap between the goals of the archival system and its resources. And, as Bearman remarks, archives have never been particularly clear about their goals whether as individual institutions or as a collective system.

In *Archival Strategies*, Bearman examines a number of formulations of our over-

[11]Kettl, "Managing on the Frontiers of Knowledge," 29.

[12]Osborne and Gaebler, *Reinventing Government*, 1.

[13]Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 34-56 and Terry Cook, "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38-70.

all goal.[14] He considers a simple statement of the four functions of archives inadequate; dismisses "the preservation of the corporate memory" as lacking in popular appeal; and turns to ensuring evidence and accountability as preferable.[15] This approach is useful in his subsequent argument. It is an extremely powerful approach in explaining archives to our colleagues in other information disciplines and in providing a foundation for rethinking archival methodology.

Society requires institutions — archives — which are dedicated to the preservation of evidence of functions and transactions important to understanding the society. The accountability of government and public institutions in a democratic society is one part of this. But as we move further into virtual reality, special effects, historical speculation and fiction, society requires some basis to sort valid evidence from the imaginative. We are in a 500-channel universe where the starship "Enterprise" is more real than a moon landing. Perhaps, it has been argued, the landings never took place but were produced on a Hollywood backlot. Canadian courts have held lengthy hearings, examining evidence to determine whether the Holocaust in Europe actually happened. Biographers invent dialogue and countless writers of popular fiction weave the events and personalities of World War II and the Cold War into plausible stories. These creative writers may well be the keepers of the popular past. Zelig and Forrest Gump wander through modern American history. Past, present, future, fact, and fiction meld seamlessly and where does one turn to find the authoritative record of what is real?

Bearman muses on this toward the end of *Archival Methods*, observing that many regard written and visual evidence with appropriate suspicion and disregard.[16] But, I suspect, many others, believers in conspiracy theories and UFOs, treat each documentary scrap with exquisite reverence. In this society, a record of continuing value, maintained with the full context of its creation and selection, is one of the few bulwarks against giving way wholly to fiction, story telling and a completely relativistic approach to fact.

I find, though, that the equation of archives and evidence is necessary but not sufficient to define the role of archives in society. There is a larger purpose to which evidence and accountability contribute. Here, Bearman and I are failed by the available literature. I am not aware of any comparative study seeking to explain why archives thrive in certain societies at certain times and struggle through benign neglect in others. Part of the explanation for this variance undoubtedly lies in the marketing abilities of archivists. But my experience and research convince me that the archival seed falls upon more fertile ground in some societies than others. In Canada, there is wide disparity in support for archives, ranging from archival expenditures of $2.19 per capita federally to $1.03 in Quebec, $1.33 in New Brunswick, down to $0.59 in Ontario, and $0.33 in Alberta.[17]

The 1980 SSHRC report on *Canadian Archives* articulated the many justifications we use for archives: culture and identity, accountability, evidence of rights and decisions, legal requirements, rights to information, and the cost efficiency of records management systems. We even explained to "Philistine budget analysts" (I apologize to the real Philistines) that archival collections could be viewed as appreciating

[14]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 389-91.
[15]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 390-91.
[16]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 61-62.
[17]Federal, Provincial, Territorial Archivists Conference (Canada), Unpublished comparative statistics, 1993/94.

capital assets.[18] Over the years, in different circumstances, archival administrators draw on one or more of these arguments from this arsenal to defend their programs. Yet the fact remains that archives prosper over the decades in those societies with a strong sense of identity — of shared experience, and with a continuing interaction with the past. Consider Quebec and Ontario — Quebec with a strong sense of responsibility in maintaining francophone culture and language in North America, with "Je me souviens" written on every license plate. On the other hand, Ontario, a culturally diverse and amorphous province, has tended to see itself in local and ethno-cultural identities or in national terms, with little sense of the province. In Quebec, $1.03 per capita for archives, vs. $0.59 per capita in Ontario.

The 1980 report on *Canadian Archives* came to the ambitious conclusion:

> Archives collections can indeed become the recorded social memory, comprehensive in scope, growing systematically, and accessible to all who want to draw upon it.[19]

This higher purpose in the Canadian archival tradition was stated in the petition in 1871 to establish a national archives, and echoes through the establishment of provincial archives in this century, and the 1980 SSHRC report to its latest statement in the current mission of the National Archives of Canada:

> To preserve the collective memory of the nation and of the Government of Canada and to contribute to the protection of rights and the enhancement of a sense of national identity.[20]

Bearman tends to dismiss such appeals as "the nostalgia of the unappreciated past," urging instead that we focus on "the immediate requirements of today."[21] He interprets the cultural argument as benefiting some indefinite, ill-defined future.[22] He is right in his assessment that defining the archival endeavor in terms of some immeasurable future benefit is pointless. But informed dialogue with the past, recent or distant, is an essential attribute of civilization today. Societies value this to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the priorities of the era. The social memory, whether rooted in myth or history, is one of our key bases for the interpretation of our contemporary experiences, and for action.

One does not need to be a reference archivist for very long to witness genuine delight in discovering another fact about one's family; the intensity with which local historians pursue detail, or the reverence with which some handle a document actually touched and signed by some historic personage. The material in our keeping links the generations in the most direct and meaningful way. It communicates directly on many levels, as evidence, but also on an emotional plane.

Much political discourse invokes the imagery of the past — triumphs, presumed lessons, or shared sense of grievance. The result can be as crude as certain closed nationalisms or as enlightened as using the self-knowledge of a society, of its strengths and weaknesses, in addressing change. The President of Ireland, visiting Grosse-Isle (the Canadian equivalent of Ellis Island) in

[18]Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1980), 7.

[19]Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Canadian Archives*, 106.

[20]National Archives of Canada, *Strategic Approaches 1992-1996* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1992), 5.

[21]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 66-67.

[22]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 59-60.

August 1994, made eloquent use of the past. Drawing the parallel between 15,000 Irish immigrants who died on Grosse-Isle in the Great Migration of the late 1840s with the Rwandan refugees of today, she urged action:

> If we are participants, we engage with the past in terms of the present. If we are spectators, then we close these people into a prison of statistics and memories from which they can never escape to challenge our conscience and compassion.[23]

For similar reasons, we document and remember the Holocaust; address the land rights of our First Nations; and apologize to our citizens of Japanese descent for their mistreatment during World War II. The collective memory of a community, institution, cultural group, or society is a powerful force. Those archives that can tap into this force and become the authoritative living memory of their community, however defined, thrive.

While considering the overall acquisition mandate of the archival system in society, Bearman touches on the question of the extent of the potential universe of records or functions which archives want to document. Recorded information, evidence of function or transaction, grows exponentially in technological society. Given an ideal world, when would archivists rest content, secure in the knowledge they were fulfilling their full professional responsibility to society? Documentation strategies go some distance in responding to this question, but, as Bearman notes, these are scattered initiatives with "no meta-methodology for selecting the areas which need documentation strategies."[24] He then allows the question to drop, focusing down on the appraisal of functions within organizations. This is understandable, as few archivists, save those like Helen Samuels and Terry Cook who address documentation strategies, look beyond institutional boundaries. In Canada, where such a question is fundamental to our "total archives" tradition, seeking documentary material in all media from private and public sources, the question is addressed pragmatically, day-by-day, with little theory but long experience to guide us.

If our goal is to shape a representative record, despite methodological advances, as Bearman argues, much remains to be done. It is difficult, on a macro-planning level, to assess the adequacy of the archival system unless the magnitude of our goal is defined.

On an institutional level most archives will refer to their legislated or prescribed mandate, emphasizing that their first responsibility is to the government or organization that created them. As budget and staff constraints take hold, the first tendency of most archival administrators is to focus narrowly on their core mandate, attempting to provide archival service for the official records until budgets improve. Much of Bearman's discussion on the interrelated archival tasks of appraisal and description focuses exclusively on the functions and activities of the archives' sponsoring organization.

This traditional approach to understanding a government or modern organization is less and less adequate. While we as archivists struggle to respond to the impact of information technologies, the organizations we serve are being equally transformed. We now see it daily, as traditional departments, structured with professional expertise in a given policy or program field prove inadequate to the complex, interconnected problems of society. Inter-departmental task forces, private/public partnerships, new administrative entities

[23] *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 22 August 1994, A4.

[24] Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 383.

come and go as governments struggle to keep pace. A think tank of senior Canadian federal officials recently concluded:

> As society becomes more interconnected, complex and turbulent, more traditional ways of organizing and governing are being overwhelmed. In a more educated, interconnected, information-rich environment, governing systems predicated on a limited flow of information, including both bureaucracy and representative democracy itself, lose their credibility and authority. Unless those systems can adjust themselves to the realities of the information society, that process of overload and fragmentation, which we are witnessing in Canada and around the world, will continue and accelerate.[25]

The democratization of information has enabled more groups and individuals to play an informed and effective role in governance.

> Government lost its overwhelming technical advantage as technical uncertainties increased. The result was a significant levelling of political power. Government and its bureaucrats could no longer assume that others would defer to its superior technical knowledge. Well-armed combatants in the political process could fight with each other — and with government bureaucrats — on any issue....
>
> Gone are the days when the power of the bureaucracies rested on their ownership of information. Cleveland (1985) has argued forcefully that, as peculiar as it ever might have been even to think about an organization's "owning" an idea, emerging technologies make it ludicrous to believe that information can be husbanded or traded as a resource. Increasing access to information has led to increasing access to political power, and the result is a "twilight of hierarchy."
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> Together, these trends have undercut government's traditional hierarchy: its internal hierarchical structure and, in a more esoteric perspective, its place at the top of society's hierarchy as well. Smaller-scale, more decentralized, less concentrated technology has also helped level power, both power within government and power over government.[26]

There remains no clear boundary around the functions of a government or institution. The walls are porous to information. Power is shared. Policy is developed in close collaboration between government and a host of stakeholders. Government programs are delivered by a great variety of service providers. In some areas, government has ceded its role and authority to the private sector entirely. What is it we really need to capture and preserve?

The budget for the province of Ontario likely reflects the expenditure of public funds in other jurisdictions:

> 1% is spent on departmental administration,
> 13% on direct program delivery by the civil service,
> 86% is spent on the delivery of services and programs by other levels of government, and a multitude of agencies.

[25]Steven Rosell et al., *Governing in an Information Society* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1992), 91.

[26]Kettl, "Managing on the Frontiers of Knowledge," 30.

Does a government archives focus only on the 1 percent or 13 percent of governmental activity, or should we shift the goal to the *archives of governance*, addressing the much broader role and responsibility of government within society. When information and power flow broadly in society, the archives of governance must include the many service partners of government and the stakeholders in and outside the formal political system who now actively participate in the development of public policy. The archives of governance cannot be restricted by traditional distinctions between the public and private sectors nor between the not-for-profit and commercial sectors. Just as information flows amongst such agencies and entities, just as their functions within society are shared or partnered, the archival appraisal process must follow the information rather than organizational boundaries. The documentary evidence of the decisions and transactions involved in our life as a society does not reside only within the four walls of government. As the Canadian "Total Archives" approach has long argued, evidence with significant social value may be found in many hands, official and private. In the information environment, this is true of every government and institution. The challenge for archives is immense.

To address the archives of governance whether in an institutional, corporate, or government setting, we urgently need to operationalize the high-level approaches to function-based appraisal and description advocated by Bearman, Brown, and others. Our resources are not likely to grow to correspond to the dimensions of governance in an information society, so unless we are to continue expending most of our precious archival resources on a small part of government activity, our approach and our criteria for selection must shift to a higher level.

Changes rippling through our sponsoring bodies have further implications for the implementation of Bearman's proposed strategies. After identifying the case for reinventing archives and new approaches to appraisal and description, Bearman suggests a variety of creative approaches to leverage constrained archival resources. A number of these strategies, contributing to our broad goal of ensuring evidence, depend, as many reinvention strategies do, on having others do the work for us—what reinvention guru Michael Hammer has called "death by hand off." Bearman foresees the archives establishing standards for documentation, maintaining information about the information resources of the organization, but divesting themselves of responsibility for maintaining the record, whatever its format.[27] He notes the reluctance of some records creators in parting with their offspring and suggests this can be turned to advantage by enlisting them in the archival endeavor. He sees risk and accountability as key motivators for the records creators,[28] especially if these are reinforced by administrative controls in the hands of the archivist. His objective, commendably, is to make other organizations take recordkeeping "as seriously as hospitals take creating patient records or utility companies take creating nuclear waste disposal records."[29] To accomplish this will require a rise in corporate risk sensitivity. This can be accomplished by establishing controls over how others maintain their records[30] or by establishing "stronger in-house standards and implement[ing] systems in such a way that failure to create records would become a willful avoidance, requiring an explanation."[31] At other points, Bearman discusses regulations, guidelines, requirements, and even guer-

[27]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 384, 391, 402-3, 408.
[28]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 388, 398.
[29]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 392.
[30]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 384, 398.
[31]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 398.

rilla action to increase the sense of corporate risk[32] and ensure accountability for good recordkeeping practice. He emphasizes the risk management side of archives and records management throughout.

I must confess that, given my experience in government, I am not as sanguine as Bearman about the effectiveness of risk and accountability as motivators for bureaucratic action or political commitment. Nor, in surveying the literature on public administration can I find others who perceive the importance of records and archives in this connection. In recent decades, most governments have established a variety of accountability mechanisms: ombudsmen, freedom of information legislation, auditors, human rights commissions, employment equity commissions, and whistleblowing legislation. Of course, every journalist around the legislature is a potential Woodward or Bernstein. These accountability mechanisms are immediate and well-publicized. It is rare indeed that records three or four years old are called upon. The public memory is fleeting, and with politicians and governments changing quickly, few care about the closely guarded secrets of just a few years ago.

Risk and accountability become even more diffuse with the trend to contract out government services to private sector or quasi-public sector partners. This is "the hollow state," with fewer public servants managing a growing loose and amorphous sector. Even in the normally tightly controlled and regulated area of expenditure, a 1992 U.S. Office of Management and Budget study found that the Defense Contract Audit Agency had a five-year backlog, with 12,000 contracts worth nearly $160 billion unaudited.[33] As another author observes, "where auditing and evaluation are concerned, the government increasingly knows only what contractors tell it."[34] Our prospects for controlling the records of a major part of government activity are not promising.

While tightly administered regulations and penalties stronger than a scold would help, Bearman's tendency towards control-based solutions contradicts the intent of reinvention scenarios.

> The trend in most of these reforms is away from bureaucratic and legalistic accountability mechanisms, and toward professional and political accountability mechanisms where the emphasis is more on trust, outputs, and outcomes.[35]

A recent book, *New Paradigms for Government*, concludes with central issues facing the public service community as much as the archival community:

> More broadly, the American polity needs to identify the tasks of government that are indispensable to sustaining our commitment to democratic governance. In making systemic reforms, we must recognize that our public service must accommodate all the values (some of which are incompatible) that our system of governance expects to sustain. How do we cut red tape and increase managerial discretion without eroding accountability?[36]

[32]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 398.

[33]H. B. Milward, "Implications of Contracting Out," in Ingraham, Romzek, et al., *New Paradigms For Government*, 45.

[34]Kettl, "Managing on the Frontiers of Knowledge," 27.

[35]B. Romzek and M. Dubnick, "Issues of Accountability," in Ingraham, Romzek, et al., *New Paradigms for Government*, 288.

[36]B. Romzek and P. Ingraham, "The Challenges Facing American Public Service," in Ingraham, Romzek, et al., *New Paradigms for Government*, 333.

How indeed? I doubt our ability to secure further central control and regulation when the whole tendency is to free up the bureaucracy and encourage entrepreneurship and risk-taking. And with auditors and journalists prowling about, most bureaucrats of my acquaintance fear retaining too many records rather than too few. They are concerned about risk, but their natural response does not support the archival mission.

Without a strong compulsion in risk management or in regulation to control what other agencies do with their records, leaving them in their care may not be in the best interests of the records or the archives. In suggesting that archivists give up their role as custodian of the record, Bearman relies entirely on the bureaucratic abhorrence of risk and strong regulation to provide record creators with sufficient motivation to manage their records on a continuing basis. Experience, trends in public sector management, and the ambivalence of risk all argue otherwise. The custodial role remains both for the massive existing holdings of archives and for the continuing record. Certainly there are some non-controversial records for which the originating agency might appropriately retain custody, and with the current state of technology this may be inescapable for electronic records. But in maintaining the integrity of the official record and in administering freedom of information and privacy corporately, many archives have achieved respect for their role and the impartiality with which they perform it. As the Chief Justice of Saskatchewan wrote a few years ago:

> There is an essential link between freedom of information and the archival function of preservation of information. Unless a government makes effective provision for the selection and preservation of official records, there is little point in talking of freedom of information for the information will not be there to be studied. Selection must be done by an official [the archivist] dedicated to the integrity of the historical record and free from partisan influences.[37]

If we are to advance, even to a limited extent, in the direction Bearman advocates, of divesting ourselves of curatorial responsibilities, it can only be done warily and with strict memoranda of understanding where it is appropriate. And, Bearman's analysis suggests key relationships we need to establish.[38] Our natural allies in audit, freedom of information compliance, and human rights do not always understand the link between sound recordkeeping practices and their concerns regarding accountability. Too often, freedom of information compliance authorities have accepted at face value departmental assurances that the record does not exist or cannot be found. We are encouraging our own freedom of information commissioner to look behind that assurance and require proof of authority to dispose signed by the archivist. Other similar alliances, locally, institutionally, and professionally are urgently required.

There are other allies as well. It has been my experience over the years in university and through several governments, that there are invariably a few senior officials in every organization who can be convinced of the higher purpose of archives. Risk and accountability may be useful, but one can also appeal to the sense that their organization is performing an essential function in society and a record must be maintained as part of our common heritage.

[37]*Report of the Honourable E.M. Culliton, Former Chief Justice of Saskatchewan, on the Matter of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy in the Province of Saskatchewan* (Regina, Saskatchewan, 1983), 49.

[38]Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 411.

My comments thus far have dealt with Bearman's case for reinventing the archival function and with certain central aspects of his strategies for appraisal and description. His subsequent exploration of permanence highlights the inflated rhetoric we resort to in expressing our goals. Using the concept of "continuing value" emphasizes the real process at work in archives and heritage conservation generally: each generation continuously reappraises what it has inherited from the past; maintains what has value from the perspective of that generation; uses it; adds significant evidence to it; and passes it along to the next generation for further consideration. This is a dynamic, not immutable, process, fraught with value judgments, randomness, and human frailty. What survives is instructive in the evidence it provides of the context of its creation and use. On another level of analysis, its mere survival bears witness to the values of the successive generations who maintained it as part of our common past. As Bearman correctly points out, future generations may not share our interest in the past, much less the recorded memory, and over time, they will winnow the documentary record they inherit from us. Perhaps. I do know that, in this generation, the past is a living part of our culture and sense of identity and we must do our utmost to ensure that the record we leave reflects the values in which we believe.[39]

In addressing the fourth major function of archives: *use*, I suspect Bearman was growing weary. He has followed the pattern noted in the SAA Report on goals and priorities: "Archivists tend to think about their work in the order in which it is performed. Inevitably, use comes last."[40] The committee added: "Since the use of archival materials is the goal to which all other activities are directed, archivists need to reexamine their priorities." Throughout his papers, Bearman argues that use today, rather than use by some ill-defined, unknowable future, must underlie any justification of our role. He urges more systematic studies of user needs and user presentation language. He notes archivists' seeming ambivalence about users — whether to attract or not, whether to serve at a distance or not, and a tendency to prefer one type of user over another.[41] He allows us to get away with such waffling.

Any discussion of use in a re-invention strategy for archives must begin with basic principle. For those of us in government or other publicly-funded archives there is no room for further debate about what type of user we prefer. Most of us work under freedom of information laws which establish a public right of access to information. Human rights codes state explicitly that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, without discrimination. This is enforceable in many of our jurisdictions. Recognizing the validity of Bearman's aphorism "Most potential users of archives don't,"[42] we need to ensure that

[39]This concept is not new. Thucydides, in beginning his history of the Peloponnesian War, lamented the lack of reliable information about the past. He berated the poets who exaggerated the importance of their themes and the prose chroniclers who put sensation before truth. In writing his own monumental work — perhaps still the finest history ever written — Thucydides had a higher purpose in mind, one which still inspires historians and archivists:

> It will be enough for me ... if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future. My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever.

[40]Society of American Archivists, Task Force on Goals and Priorities, *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), 23.

[41]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 39-41; Bearman, "Archival Strategies," 385.

[42]Bearman, *Archival Methods*, 39.

the reasons for this do not represent a form of systemic discrimination. We shouldn't ask why they want the information, and such codes and laws don't allow us to.

Most public archives will respond that our services are free (save for copying charges) and open to all who ask. Equally, though, archivists proudly assert that our collections are unique and irreplaceable. Translated into public service attitudes, these adjectives state that archives are a monopoly. A given archives is the sole source of certain information and those seeking that information must do so on terms we set.

Most archival services were designed to suit a leisured academic clientele decades ago. Social expectations have changed. As I have argued elsewhere:

> Our services are frequently structured to suit those living nearby, or they favour those rich enough or with access to research grants for travel. They respond best to those able to use the archives during regular business hours, and they help those with the time to explore the record. Distance alone can be a significant barrier to the young, the elderly, the poor and the handicapped. I am not aware of any profile of the users of Canadian archives. Some years ago, a study of public libraries concluded that library users tend to be well-educated and in higher-level occupations, and that as income increases so does the percentage of respondents visiting a library. If this is true of libraries, given their convenient location, just whom are we serving? Our services are neither free nor equitably distributed across the population.[43]

[43]Ian E. Wilson, "Toward a Vision of Archival Services," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91): 98.

Any initiative to re-invent public archives must begin with our client — the public — and proceed through an examination of the citizens' needs and expectations of archival service, however inarticulate they may be. In the process, it is imperative that we re-conceptualize our clientele. The public archives serves its entire society, not just those few who contact the archives. The great majority of the population give little thought to archival service, assuming simply that if they need some essential record of public administration it will be available. They are the passive users of archives, whose rights and privacy we help maintain. They depend on archivists to apply professional standards in selecting, preserving and providing access to information. Appraisal criteria cannot be developed to suit the changing research trends of a small research public, but must be rooted in a rigorous approach to preserving the vital documentary evidence of our society for all members of society.

The public must also be seen as potential active users of archives. Even if a citizen's only use of an archives is to obtain proof of birth, of emigration, or of education, his/her need is legitimate, indeed the very soul of the archives' existence. As I have suggested above, our traditional approaches to public service have unconsciously created barriers limiting the group that might draw on our services. If we see the public as our clientele, there are a number of strategies we might pursue. Public libraries are the key information providers in most communities. By focusing significant outreach effort on assisting reference librarians in understanding our services and potential, every public library could be a door to the archival system.

The information revolution has to do with the capacity to store, retrieve, and transmit information. Digitization and telecommunications hold immense potential for breaking through the limitations the variety and fragility our collections have im-

posed. In the course of this examination, we must also address the thorny issue of service costs. Bearman avoids this, suggesting only that we sell collections. More revenue can be derived over time from the sale of high-quality reproductions than the outright sale of a document or in packaging our material as information products. While there is a rich debate in library literature, few archivists have attempted to define the basic free services citizens must expect of a public archives; and the enhanced service we might provide on the "user pay" principle.[44] I suspect there are more people than we imagine willing to pay for services. As Bearman suggests, we need to know a great deal more about our current users, and endeavor to discern the needs of the broader society. In the process we will define a typology of use, including the range of needs of those who visit, whether it is to do research or browse an exhibition, as well as those who can access our microfilm or CD-ROMs offsite, to those who use archives by way of the work of others. To Bearman's aphorism I would add my own:

> "Most actual users of archives aren't aware."

Everyone enjoying a historic site or commemorative plaque, seeing museum exhibits, reading a history book, article, or thesis, watching historic film, or appreciating the skill of Ken Burns in making the Civil War an immediate and human experience is an archives user. We need more effective strategies than minuscule footnotes in linking the archival function with these visible results. By the way, has the SAA approached PBS and Ken Burns about a follow-up feature on the sources he used?

My reflections have been at a rather general level. I view Bearman's papers as a persuasive call to the archival system to tackle the difficult process of reinvention. His analysis of the disparity between our mission, our goals, and our resources animates his case. I have added a higher cultural purpose to the mission, a purpose within which the attributes of evidence and "recordness" are essential. I have broadened the goals, expanding our mandate, at least for public records, from government archives to the archives of governance to reflect an infinitely more complex environment. In terms of strategies, I have questioned whether risk and accountability are sufficient motivating factors to secure the cooperation of other agencies. And the trend in government is strongly away from further control and regulation. In addressing use, I prefer to begin with a view that access to information is a basic right in a democratic participatory society. Our services must reflect this. We have no small task before us.

I want to conclude with the one resource available to the archival endeavor that Bearman overlooks. This resource is our most important. Every reinvention proposal I have encountered deals with goals, functions and processes, but it spends no less time addressing the essential human element. Archives work in a socio-political context in which we interact with a variety of stakeholders. Most know little about archives; others have been led to expect certain things from archives. Changing these perspectives will be a gradual, delicate, and, occasionally, controversial process. Full consultation with both traditional and potentially new stakeholders must be an integral part of the process.

Of course, nothing we talk about here today can proceed without the informed and, I hope, enthusiastic participation of our staff. I have left to one side the discussion of most of Bearman's specific strategies, as in my view, this is not the place to evaluate them. I find them provocative and stimulating; but the real cre-

[44]Wilson, "Toward a Vision of Archival Services," 95.

ativity must emanate from staff teams in each of our institutions.

The staffs I have met in archives across Canada have chosen the archival endeavor and have a deep personal commitment to the role of the record in society. They have the practical knowledge as to what is feasible, and they have creativity. A true reinvention process will set out the case for action and then unleash the creativity of the staff. The process may challenge the established hierarchies within our archives, and precisely where the process will lead we cannot predict. But if we believe in the archival mission, it is worth the attempt.

In preparing conference papers I usually find a number of amusing anecdotes to enliven the text. This time, I found instead that I was haunted by a series of letters I read many years ago amongst the administrative records of the National Archives of Canada. This was a file that encapsulated the life of one of the great unknown heroes of our archival profession; one about whom, sadly, nothing has been published.[45] Doris Godfrey joined the staff of the then Public Archives of Canada in London, England in May 1910. She spent her career perfecting the process of transcribing by hand, exact copies of the original records of Canada's colonial administrators in the Public Record Office. Begun in 1880, this task had evolved into a meticulous science, with its own discipline. She took no holidays, was seldom sick, and in February 1939 she was promoted to head the office. Though she had been doing the work of her predecessor for most of two decades, she did not receive either his pay or his rank. She persevered in the task. Foreseeing the coming of war she secured the cooperation of the British Public Record Office officials so that key records of the Seven Years' War (French-Indian War) would remain available for her and her copyists. Her letters through the Blitz are eloquent in their understatement. She found they could continue work on the index cards by candle light in the air raid shelter. She reported herself late by half an hour one morning as five houses beside hers had been destroyed in the night. Two copyists left without notice to take work outside the city, a sign of weakness in the face of the enemy. By 1945, she wrote that she had not been to bed in five years, sitting up every night in a brick air-raid shelter. And though war had raged about her, she had cases of meticulous historical transcripts ready to ship to Ottawa as soon as conditions returned to normal. Weary and her health broken, she retired in 1946 and died two years later. Doris Godfrey's is a story of extraordinary sacrifice and commitment to our profession.

Within three or four years of her retirement, a new Dominion Archivist, W. Kaye Lamb, made his first official visit to the office in London. Very quickly he secured a microfilm camera and within a short time had all of the original records, transcribed so carefully since 1880, recopied on microfilm.

The life, then, of Doris Godfrey; a story in futility? Only on a superficial level. Doris Godfrey, on her watch, animated by the same commitment to the archival endeavor we share, perfected her discipline and pursued her task with an enviable professionalism. Rather, her superiors in Ottawa, men noted in Canadian archival annals who had been following the development of microfilm technology for two decades, might better be asked why they continued wasting public resources and an individual's commitment in this way. Bearman's question to this generation of archival administrators is of the same nature.

[45]National Archives of Canada, Record Group 37, vols. 7 and 8, file 50-11-1, passim. The work of Miss Godfrey was featured in a paper presented to the 1992 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, as yet unpublished. Glenn Wright, "Carrying on: The Public Archives of Canada and the Second World War, 1939-45."