International Archives Day Address

Archival Oneness in the Midst of Diversity: A Personal Perspective

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Abstract: Archival traditions and practices, together with each archivist's particular situation, not only vary greatly around the world, but within countries and types of institutions within those countries as well. These diverse traditions provide only a limited basis for shared identities between archivists, but they are ultimately linked by the common practice of each archivist of adapting universal archival principles to fit his or her institution's own circumstances. The International Council on Archives provides a forum to encourage international cooperation among archivists and opportunities for those in similar institutions and regions to strengthen their common identities and associations with each other, and to share their approaches to common issues and goals. Several factors account for the advancement of the ICA's goals and for the limitation of its achievements as well. Overall, however, underlying both the similar and diverse ways of dealing with archival issues is the role of archives to provide evidence of the cultural context of societies. The solutions to the challenges facing archivists today should not divide us along theoretical lines, but strive to enable all archivists to work together in fulfilling this cultural role.

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> "The temporal is insufficient and...
> continually forces us to complete through
> memories and hopes what would otherwise
> have no real existence."
> (Karl Jaspers)

IT IS AN HONOR for me to address one of the rare plenary sessions sponsored by the Society of American Archivists and to address my American neighbors—although I recognize that there are many in attendance today from other countries too. The last time I formally addressed a large group of American archivists in Washington, back in the fall of 1992, I expressed my great satisfaction over the "free trade in archival ideas" between Canada and the United States.[1] The three intervening years have only confirmed my impression of the rich interaction of archivists across the border to our mutual benefit. From different traditions and experiences, Canadians and Americans have uncovered much to share and exchange, as they search for common solutions to common problems to take back to their own institutions. In so doing, they have become heavily involved together in many international projects, notably in the International Council on Archives or ICA's Commissions, Sections, Committees, etc. as chairs or members—nearly twenty Americans in all and ten Canadians. Also, Americans and Canadians from the public and private sectors cooperate in investigating possible solutions to information management in the paperless office.[2] This North American interaction is a microcosm of my larger theme today: searching for "oneness" (common purposes, common goals, common visions) amidst the great diversity of the world's archives and archivists.

North Americans are sometimes accused, perhaps rightly, of being too isolationist. But in the archival field the facts rather contradict this belief. And today, that impression may be cleared away, revealing instead a strong cooperation. Thanks to Deborah Skaggs, Charles Dollar, and the 1995 SAA Program Committee, we can, without leaving the comfort of the conference rooms, virtually travel on this International Archives Day to Spain, Malaysia, Italy, England, Scotland, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Germany, China, Russia, and Norway, as well as around the United States—and even the United Nations.

In asking me to reflect on the world archival scene at this session, Charles Dollar wrote that he hoped I might "draw upon [my] experience and lay out a vision of the

[1]See Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Free Trade in Archival Ideas: The Canadian Perspective on North American Archival Development," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 380–99.

[2]Canadian archival leaders have closely followed developments at the University of Pittsburgh, and taken lessons from there as the basis for developing National Archives-Treasury Board - some departments, and even private sector cooperative ventures to improve the electronic working environment of the Government of Canada so that electronic records are created, preserved, and disposed of properly. Similarly, the new University of British Columbia electronic records project has drawn expertise from the U.S. Department of Defense and National Archives and Records Administration. On the problems faced in the electronic world and on some products emerging from those studies, see John McDonald, "Managing Records in the Modern Office: The Experience of the National Archives of Canada," in *Playing for Keeps: Proceedings of the Electronic Records Management Conference, Canberra, Australia*, edited by Stephen Yorke (Canberra: Australian Archives, 1995), 84–92, and "Managing Records in the Modern Office: Taming the Wild Frontier," *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 70–79; David Bearman, *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1994); Margaret Hedstrom, ed., *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 18 (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1993); Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22 (November 1994): 300–328.

future for archives." Can we envision a central goal or purpose, a "oneness," that links the world's archivists across the "considerable diversity" of traditions and practices? Despite the wide array of those practices, can we pinpoint a unity of purpose, perhaps some basic common theoretical underpinnings? Is there some other central binding focus for archivists?

It is almost an impossible task to synthesize the world's archival thinking into some form of "oneness," as well as review the practices in nearly 170 ICA-member countries in a short paper![3] In order to address a topic such as Charles Dollar has assigned to me, the temptation is great to array two very long lists of subjects. The first would inventory the many different problems I have encountered in archives around the world; and the second would identify the numerous activities, committees, and subgroups of the ICA which are trying to address these problems, including the proposals and workplans which have been formulated, as well as the Medium Term Plan. Rather than such endless lists, boring in their dryness, I will offer a more impressionist paper instead, as is appropriate for what is described as my "personal perspective."

After delving into my views about unity in diversity, I will underline the role of ICA in strengthening the profession, and conclude with what I believe to be the essential purpose, the ultimate core role of archivists: that of memory and of culture.

I. Unity in Diversity: A Personal Perspective

My participation in ICA programs and activities since 1985, as well as the responsibilities of the presidency since September 1992, have convinced me of the enormous diversity in the world archival community, as well as of the overarching unity that animates all the world's archivists. At first, the diversity is most striking to the observer. In dealing with this diversity, I would like to share with you a metaphor I used in a recent address to the Association of Canadian Archivists,[4] based on the notion that human beings and human communities within some modern nation states (including Canada) share "limited identities."

The expression "limited identities" was coined by a leading Canadian historian, J.M.S. Careless, to characterize the Canadian experience over three and a half centuries. He was reacting to the triumphant Whig interpretation of our history as an inevitable march towards the building of a strong, centralized, and unitary nation from coast to coast, independent of imperial ties, where local or regional frictions were considered as insignificant incidents in the path of progress. On the contrary, contended Careless, Canada's historical experience should be seen as "a confused jumble of ethnic, economic, religious and nationality attachments, usually pulled together by a pervasive sense of localism," even though it produced "the articulation of regional patterns in one transcontinental

[3]This challenge, however, has been met by Terry Cook for the Beijing Congress, in September 1996, with his paper on the "Interaction of Archival Theory and Practice Since the Publication of the Dutch Manual in 1898."

[4]Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Limited Identities For a Common Identity: The Archivists of the 21st Century," Key-Note Address at the annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Regina, Saskatchewan, 15 June 1995, to be published in *Archivaria*, 1996.

State.''[5] Language, religion, ethnicity, culture, region, social class, and gender all coalesced in various combinations to generate many limited identities, which create obstacles to communication between Canadians. But this was not seen by Careless as a fault, for the costs of a melting pot approach would have been unbearable in the Canadian context, and because Canadians, if they have communicated less, may have communicated better. Through various mechanisms, inside and outside the market-place, bonds emerged defining and uniting Canadians, allowing them to reconcile their separate regional lives, that is, their ''limited identities,'' with a need for collective security and collective identity. An Albertan Baptist steelworker whose parents came from Scotland may think of herself first as an Albertan or Baptist or steelworker or woman or mother or wife or Scot, but she is also a Canadian, although perhaps not the same Canadian as a Quebec Catholic dairy farmer whose family came to that community more than 300 years ago.

So it seems with archivists. The reference archivist in a large, publicly funded archival repository or research library with wide-open collections may view ''archives'' and what it means to be an ''archivist'' rather differently than the appraisal/acquisition archivist in a multi-national business corporation with no public access to its sensitive records. A thousand similar permutations and combinations suggest themselves on a world-wide scale of archivists. Colleagues work in small or big, private or public, corporate, university, municipal, provincial, state, or federal and national archives. They may be well paid, poorly paid, unpaid, full time, part time, volunteer, working with relative independence and freedom of action or under strict controls and restrictions by governments and corporations. Their training may be equally diverse and sometimes non-existent, at least in the formal sense of the term. They deal exclusively with old historical records or more recent transfers from huge administrations, or both; they specialize in one medium (usually paper) or in newer media (such as audio-visual or electronic records), or both; they work perhaps in a combination called ''total archives'' (public-private records in all media).[6] Many of our colleagues also wear one or many of several possible hats, serving at once as archivists, archival assistants, information analysts or technologists, conservators, records managers, librarians, public historians, documentalists, and general administrators to their parent organization, or as teachers of archives. They can work in relatively independent archives, or in archives subsumed within libraries, museums, galleries, businesses, churches, and many other organizations.

My personal observation is that archivists, as may be expected, tend to view archival theory, methodology, and practice, as well as all the related issues of legislation, mandates, outreach, access, privacy, funding and fund-raising, clientele, sponsors, even the definition of the purpose and composition of archives, through the filter of their own experience, their own ''limited identity.'' And unfortunately, they will sometimes be tempted to generalize their own particular or individual perspective or identity as ''the one true way to do archives'' and dismiss any other way as a heretical deviation from the true path. But if Albertan steelworkers or cattle ranchers, and Quebec farmers or airplane builders are

[5]The first quote is from R.D. Cowen, ''New World Colonization and Old World Loyalties,'' mimeo, November 1969; the second, from J. Maurice S. Careless, ''Limited Identities,'' *Canadian Historical Review* 40 (March 1959): 1-10. On this subject, see Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, ''Nouvelle-France / Québec / Canada: A World of Limited Identities,'' in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, editors, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 95–114.

[6]On the concept of ''total archives'', see Wilfred I. Smith, '' 'Total Archives': The Canadian Experience,'' in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, edited by Tom Nesmith (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993), 133–50.

all Canadians in their own ways, then so, too, our eager public-oriented reference provider and our closed-mouth corporate record-keeper are both archivists. Limited identities feed common identity, and amidst diversity may emerge a sense of oneness, like a sense of family.

When medicine developed more and more specialties, medicine did not thereby demonstrate that it no longer existed, but rather that its scientific base was solid enough to occupy all the space needed to maintain health or to contain and cure illnesses. When archivists discuss electronic records or the use of electronic processes to dispatch their work, when they acquire oral sources or appraise prints and drawings, when experts in seals meet film and television archivists, when theoreticians and standards experts confront practitioners who can test their ideas and report back, when specialists in the history of the record and the history of the profession share insights with futurists trying to reinvent archives, the archival profession is not sinking into hopeless diversity, but rather, just like medicine, is well on its way to confident maturity.[7]

Of course, for the existence of any profession, or for a unifying oneness, there must be a core of some basic beliefs, theoretical underpinnings, and standard practices. But at the same time, unless we want to indulge in methodological cruelty that kills disciplines and stifles research, we have to allow for different circumstances and the diversity of operational milieux, the same as medicine, for example. If you don't have cold water or bottles of aspirin in the middle of the jungle to combat a raging fever, what do you do? Renounce medicine? Reject all solutions that are inconsistent with medical theory? Let the patient die? No, you return to the basics and try to find a local solution that may suit the problem.

This is the same common sense approach that archivists employ every day all over the world. If you inherit only a part of a fonds, are you going to destroy it or let it be spoiled by lack of care while shouting from the rooftops, "I have adhered to 'respect des fonds'"? If a significant agency wants to destroy all records that are a very important reflection of its functions, activities, and transactions, do you remain silent, comforted that at least you have maintained the (alleged) impartiality and neutrality of the archivist, as charged by Jenkinson, only to keep the residue of records passed on by the records creator, and not to engage in active appraisal?[8] Of course not! In both cases, you do whatever is deemed necessary for the ultimate purpose of maintaining memory, in as clear a context as possible, however imperfect that may be, and remembering that, in any case, the record is imperfect by definition, and that we live in an imperfect world. To do otherwise, we would be throwing out the baby with the bathwater, or cutting off our noses to spite our faces.

Personally, I must say that I have found that the long exposure to the rich archival traditions of many countries, such as I have been privileged to enjoy, improves one's own archival conceptualizations, methodologies, and practices back at home. It opens one's eyes to required changes that perhaps we are sometimes too close to grasp clearly in our own institutions and localities. International exposure breeds flexibility and lessens dogmatism. It teaches that we succeed better in attacking problems pragmatically—within the

[7]In North America, for instance, reading Gerald Ham, Frank Evans, Margaret Hedstrom, Helen Willa Samuels, David Bearman, Richard Cox, Hugh Taylor, Terry Cook, Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, John McDonald, Tom Nesmith and their colleagues convinces one of the robust "health" of the archival profession.

[8]See Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London: P. Lund, Humphries, 1968), revised second edition of the 1937 *Manual*.

framework of broad archival principles, to be sure—rather than rigidly and intolerantly. It shows the folly of the belief that archival concepts derived from one time and place are immutably true and must therefore be applied in every time or place, even at the expense of losing our collective memories.

Let me illustrate this point with an issue that has come forcefully to my attention as ICA President: the place of oral sources and oral history in archives.[9] Some archivists deny any place to oral history or oral sources in the archival framework; these are dismissed as anti-archival, as being nothing more than the products of fallacious memories rather than the authentic and reliable evidence of transactions, which our written documents allegedly so carefully record. This perspective is simply irrelevant in the Third World, where some 70 percent of the people have no literacy skills nor written records, but do have a vibrant oral culture and sophisticated oral traditions and oral memories. To insist to our Third World colleagues that archival truth resides only in our European-derived notions of records and evidence, of juridical frameworks, diplomatic analysis and archival theory, runs the risks either of outright rejection by the Third World as being a Eurocentric, even racist, position, or of the exclusion from the world's memory storehouses of the majority of human beings. An African archivist pointed out, rhetorically, that nothing would be known of Socrates or Jesus Christ save for oral history—oral traditions that were later recorded. Do we, therefore, reject the Bible or Plato's works as poor evidence, as non-truths? We might remember that written records in courts of law are still hearsay evidence, that is, "second best" to oral testimony by someone closely connected to the actions or events under investigation.

The great nineteenth-century historian Thomas Babington Macaulay said somewhere that "the world will ever bow to those who hold...right above consistency." Sometimes, as I have found around the world, a little less consistency, a little more flexibility, a little more sensitivity to the relative circumstances imposed on the world's archivists by different histories, traditions, media, information technologies, organizational structures, working cultures, financial conditions, and legislation, may often make us more "right" than "wrong." At any rate, the involvement of modern archivists in the severe selection of the "archival records"—destruction of 95 percent plus of governments' and large organizations' records (sometimes a decision determined even before they are created, such as in electronic systems), simply contradicts the notion that archivists should limit themselves to the passive intake of records as a natural reflection of actions and transactions. Today, certainly, archivists are active participants in the creation of the records that will be retained. Theory has to adjust, not reality.[10]

II. Brief ICA Reflections

In terms of trying to get things right, let me turn to the ICA for a few minutes. Archivists require a forum where our limited identity streams can mingle into a larger common identity river, into a shared purpose, and equally where the larger identity so formed can enrich, inspire, and upgrade our local, diverse, limited identities. Of course,

[9]Normand Fortier and Jean-Pierre Wallot, "L'archivistique et les sources orales. Bilan d'un quart de siècle de réflexion méthodologique et de travaux," paper at the International Congress of Historical Sciences, Montreal, August 1995, to be published in *Janus* in 1996.

[10]See Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds;" McDonald, "Managing Records in the Modern Office; " Wallot, "Free Trade in Archival Ideas" and "Limited Identities."

this is happening to a certain extent, in many regional and national associations, whose role it is to foster such a common identity, thus the importance of national associations and the decision of the ICA Executive to put a priority on their creation where they do not exist.[11] But through its Sections (more and more popular because they congregate interest groups inside the profession), through its Committees, Commissions, its large Congresses held every four years, and the Round Tables between Congresses, such as the one held in Washington in September 1995, the International Council on Archives is the one worldwide forum for archivists. In addition, it ensures regular cooperation and consultation with neighboring professions, for instance, librarians, documentalists, and film and television archives federations. It also promotes archival interests in international forums such as UNESCO and the European Council.

The fact that the ICA can address the needs of so many diverse interests through its structures, which have gradually become more and more flexible, means that the profession feels it can ground its action on a solid core of principles as well as sounder methodologies and practices, and can thus reach out effectively in different directions, where problems arise or where specific interests need to be addressed. In fact, the key to a greater responsiveness by the ICA over the years and greater openness to all regions of the world has been the growing number and vitality of its regional branches, which, in Asia, Arab countries, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, and Caribbean regions, allow for a stronger voice for the developing local "limited" identities, and help them set their own priorities for archival development in response to regional needs. These forums create a focus for regional exchange and learning. Moreover, an inter-regional conference, which was my first priority when I became President, was held in Tunis in May 1995,[12] to let the branches define for themselves the needs and the priorities for development over the next decade or so. One of the interesting conclusions that emerged was that developing countries should share their experience and expertise more regularly among themselves, instead of always borrowing from the "North." In fact, they could inject fresh insights into the international community, including the developed countries. Thus, we can all achieve better consensus towards a common international archival identity because we are becoming more sensitive to articulated differences.

Another means of achieving this goal has been the establishment of better planning mechanisms within ICA. Sections and Committees now have to deliver concrete products such as guidelines, guides, seminars, workshops, training courses, surveys, needs assessments, directories, model constitutions, standards, and specific suggestions for the profession at large, rather than providing intermittent occasions for learned discussions among the chosen few experts.[13] We have also continued to make sure that ICA's many interrelated groups stay in good communication with each other: for instance, the Electronic Records, Archival Automation, Image Technology and Current Records Committees have been in close contact because of the complementary nature of the issues they are addressing. Moreover, each year since 1989, presidents of Committees and of Sections meet once a year to ensure proper coordination of activities. Finally, an expanded secretariat in Paris since 1995 allows for a better follow-up on all ICA professional activities.

[11]The ICA Executive announced this priority at the Thessaloniki Round Table in October 1994.

[12]The proceedings of the Conference will be published in *Janus* in 1996.

[13]For a detailed list of these actions, see ICA's Medium Term Plan, adopted by the Executive Committee in 1995, which has been sent to ICA members and can be obtained from the Secretariat in Paris.

Yet the challenges are many for this revitalized international structure; and since we can't do everything, we have to set the global priorities more firmly for the next few years. As you may or may not know, ICA operates at the edge, precariously surviving difficult times, but maximizing its own rare resources and raking all possible outside sources of funds to maintain and enrich its varied program. The draft of its Strategic Plan, discussed at the ICA meetings in Washington in September 1995, emphasizes, among other things, greater outreach activities and stronger involvement in the creation and support of professional associations in as many countries as possible. And it defines the mission of ICA as "the advancement of archives through international co-operation."[14]

The momentum of archival development has never quite fulfilled ICA's expectations. This has been particularly true during the past few years when the world financial crisis and long recession, with its impact on international bodies such as UNESCO and on Category A members (State archives in particular), have handicapped planned programs and activities. This was offset, but only partly, by some developing countries becoming more affluent, particularly in Asia and in the Pacific region, and taking a greater role in their regional branch leadership and beyond. But the financial needs of archives around the world for even basic facilities and services always exceed the means—whether it is restoring the immediately threatened Czarist archives in St. Petersburg or finding a suitable home for the African National Congress records in South Africa; whether it is saving the audio-visual archives of decolonization or coping with preservation in a tropical climate.

Another problem is descriptive standards. Unlike libraries with their uniform cataloging, which allows easy worldwide Internet access to holdings, archival descriptive standards are in their infancy. While archivists everywhere try to capture the context of creation in their descriptions, they do so differently. Even when national descriptive standards are attempted, the results, globally, resemble more an omelet: MAD in Britain, RAD in Canada, APPM in the United States, and the series system in Australia. There are others. The ICA Ad Hoc Commission investigating worldwide descriptive standards is therefore doing essential work and progressing at as fast a pace as international consultation and agreement allow.[15]

Also of value and much needed is the revitalized effort to develop and codify an international Code of Ethics for Archivists, which is not as easy as it might appear. As a Category A consultative international non-governmental organization of UNESCO, ICA resembles a mini-United Nations, and reaching agreement or consensus is difficult sometimes. This can relate to the politics as much as to the substance of an issue. But after thorough study, very good progress has been achieved this past year toward the development of a Code of Ethics, thanks to excellent work by the Section of Professional Associations (SPA), comments by the ICA Executive, suggestions by individual archivists, and the work of a sub-committee of SPA and of the Executive. The basic principles of the Code have been submitted to the Executive and the Steering Committee of SPA in

[14]Once adopted, the Strategic Plan will be published in ICA's publications and be available also on request.

[15]International Council on Archives, *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description: Adopted by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, Stockholm, Sweden, 21–23 January 1993 — Final ICA Approved Version* (Ottawa, 1994), also published in *Janus* (1994.1): 7–26 (English) and 27–47 (French). A draft of a second document has been circulating for worldwide review and a final version is scheduled for publication in the first half of 1996: ICA, *ISAAR(CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families — Draft Prepared by the Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards, The Hague, Netherlands, 17–19 October 1994.*

Washington and have been approved in principle by both. A final text will be submitted to the Beijing Congress.

Another pressing international need is for the development or the recommissioning of mechanisms for reconstituting, preserving, and making accessible the memory of nations whose archives have been lost, stolen, or misplaced as a result of wars or old colonial empires, at a time when money has petered out for large-scale international microfilming projects, let alone for imaging. This issue has ramifications within countries as well, for example, in the case of native or aboriginal peoples and their records now held by governments, or local records held by multinational corporations. The Executive has decided to try to reactivate the international microfilming project. It also looks for help through the new initiative launched by UNESCO, "Memory of the World," which intends to preserve, ensure access to, and, where appropriate, circulate world archival treasures which are now presently endangered. Then, at the Round Table in Thessaloniki, basic agreement was reached on the repatriation of displaced public archives.[16]

Finally, there is the pressing and ever more critical problem of computer-generated records. Electronic records—not unlike audio-visual records—present almost overwhelming problems for archives, having induced a near-paralysis in the profession. Computers have been with us for four decades in governments and business, and now everywhere worldwide, yet only a handful of national archives have active electronic records programs—and many of them only within the past five years. Until now, micro-processors have been used mostly to enhance individual productivity. But as business processes become streamlined and computerized themselves, the challenges for archivists will be to imbed into the electronic systems the keys that will automatically open the gates of preservation to certain categories of records. New concepts and strategies are needed here, and the ICA Electronic Records Committee, chaired by John McDonald, has made good progress since the Montreal Congress. Its products and proposals should constitute a highlight of the Beijing activities.[17]

I could go on and on about ICA, but I promised no extensive shopping lists of committees and issues. So perhaps this is enough about the ICA, and about diversity, difference, arguments, and limited identities, which ICA tries to address.

III. Towards 2000: A Unifying Vision and Mission for Archivists

Let me turn to my personal ideas about a unifying vision and mission for archivists and archives, which can help us remember the grand purpose of archives in difficult times, when mired down in depressing bureaucratic administration, budget cuts, and other drudgeries many of us must face daily.

There is one particular role that archivists should not forget nor abandon, although certain aspects of it are also furthered by other professions: our cultural role. In the "global economy" and global information society, more and more people sense that we are all passengers on this blue planet and that we depend upon each other. But we are not all

[16]"The View of the Archival Community on the Settling of Disputed Claims," position paper adopted by the Executive Committee of ICA at its meeting in Guangzhou, China, 10–13 April 1995, following the resolutions of the Thessaloniki Round Table in October 1994.

[17]McDonald, "Managing Records in the Modern Office," 77ff.; Richard E. Barry, "The Changing Workplace and the Nature of the Record," paper to the annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, June 1995, mimeo, 31ff.; Terry Cook, "It's 10 O'Clock - Do You Know Where Your Data Are?" *Technology Review* 53 (January 1995): 49–53.

passengers in the same class nor do we all enjoy the same quality of travel. For instance, the highly intricate and interconnected world economy, the fragile environment, demographic realities and population pressures, natural resources abundance or scarcity, presence or absence of wars; these very gravely affect the quality of our ride on Spaceship Earth. The economy, a balanced budget, interest rates, the state of the mark, yen, or dollar, these are important issues for the well-being, progress, and stability of our societies.

Yet, food and goods—even instant technological linkages in real time across the world—do not suffice to satisfy the deeper cravings of human beings. People and societies also need symbols, ideas, values, and beliefs. These help to insert socio-economic development in a broader and more balanced societal context that gives it meaning, that enlists diversity in a common effort, that inspires a sense of belonging, respect, and, indeed, enthusiasm. In this arena, archives and archivists play a very distinct and important role.

In archival matters, we share the same difficulties nationally and internationally: technical problems, particularly the surge of new media and the exponential growth of raw information, massive obligations, scarce resources, growing training needs, the difficulty of convincing governments and parent bodies of the importance of archives. We also share the same goals—to preserve, organize, and make known our archival heritages. For without archives, we would all be orphans of our past, deprived of personality, of identity, and of knowledge, condemned to retrace the same paths, blindly, without guidance or wisdom. Without archives, our societies would be amnesiac, without roots, without awareness of truth, without a view of the patterns formed by past events or the possibilities offered by the future...in brief, without culture.[18]

In a remarkable plea for the kind of development of humanity that would be based primarily on persons and ideas and go beyond mere pursuit of material resources, former U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar wrote [transl.]: "If culture becomes the star that guides development, if it ranks first among the priorities of the national and international agenda, we will then have preserved [hu]mankind's only legacy which is still intact: the untouched territory of the future."[19] In this one pithy phrase, the concepts of development, culture, and heritage are integrated into a continuum embracing the past, present, and future.

Indeed, archives themselves are living testimonials demonstrating that societies do not develop merely as a result of technological and economic progress, but through a long maturation of many interrelated identity-inducing factors, including basic values, myths, and ideals, and the formal and informal political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions, which serve as loci for truces and compromises between ideals (rarely unique, sometimes conflicting, always only imperfectly implemented) and material riches—limited of necessity and subject to many demands from those holding these conflicting ideals.[20] A society cannot accomplish lasting progress without a coherent and articulate view of these identity-shaping factors which are themselves fed by a culture which they in turn nourish. This culture gathers all these threads into a single complex, yet comprehensible

[18]"...if you have nothing to look backward to, and with pride, you have nothing to look forward to with hope." (Barbara Craig, "Outward Visions, Inward Glance: Archives History and Professional Identity," *Archival Issues* 17 (1992): 121).

[19]Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, "La culture, clé du XXe siècle," *Le Monde*, 25 February 1994.

[20]This paragraph and some of the following ones are inspired from a more lengthy ICA memorandum, written by Jacques Grimard and myself, to the UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development (de Cuéllar's Commission), February 1995.

and common, fabric. It is not through sheer chance that societies assume different forms from one place to another, from one era to another.[21] And it would be futile to try to alter societies' courses without understanding their "underlying plan" or "design," the almost mythic scope of their very existence. How many times, for instance, have negotiations around the world failed between native peoples and governments because of the misconception that money would control the dice, so to speak, forgetting the whole symbolic and value universe of those peoples.

In fact, people need to know from where they flow not only as individuals, but as organized groups that have emerged, sometimes, over centuries. They want to decipher the way in which they have collectively instituted themselves in a specific network of symbols and relationships of all orders (geographical, demographic, economic, social, political, ideological, aesthetic, religious) which constitutes the architecture of their society. Without this essential quest of self-knowledge and the grasping of this evolving architecture, how can a group relate well within itself and with others, how can it assume the past to shape the present and the future? Thus, archives play a commemorative role essential to the advancement of society, for all human groups must select that which they deem worthy of remembering, integrate it into what they think and say, adjust it to their present situation, and use it to define their future.[22] As Gail Cuthbert Brandt and T.J.A. LeGoff have written:

> This collective memory is constantly being reorganized, but in whatever form it takes, it reveals to each generation a common fund of knowledge, tradition, values, and ideas which give some sense to human existence. In each generation...we also take from the past knowledge and ideas, which we absorb and transform, creating a new culture and changing world. The richness of a culture...and our very survival as a community depend on our ability to keep up this continuous relationship between ourselves and our human past.[23]

It follows that archives, as fundamental (but not exclusive) components of the world's memory, are one of the most appropriate means of contributing to the sustainable development of any society. Serving at once as proof, evidence, and sources of information, they document the life of societies and peoples; they make organizations and governments transparent and accountable to their constituents, and thereby serve democracy;[24] they demonstrate as well as protect collective and individual rights; and they provide a "garden" rich in hopes, accomplishments, dreams, and diversity that can foster our contemporaries' vision of the world and their plans for the future. A source of lessons and reflections, archives constitute a reference point for what societies have accomplished, in

[21]On socio-economies as "instituted processes," see Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in Karl Polanyi, C.M. Arensberg and H.W. Pearson, editors, *Trade and Markets in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), 243–70; idem, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1968); Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Pour une méso-histoire du XIXe siècle canadien," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 33 (December 1979): 387–425.

[22]Jacques Mathieu, "La langue de la commémoration," paper presented at a colloquium on Heritage, Ottawa, November 1994, to be published with the *Proceedings*.

[23]"Brief to the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning," *Canadian Historical Association Bulletin* 20 (Summer 1994): 3–4.

[24]". . .democracy's most effective shield is informed and responsible citizens." (Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Le Monde*, 25 February 1994).

that they constantly remind them of their values, rights, achievements, and the foundations of their evolution, as well as their obstacles and setbacks, and human weaknesses and foibles.

The importance of the memorial role of archives arises from the threefold social function they serve. First, archives have *probative* or *legal* value: they confirm treaties signed between peoples, legal codes or contracts entered into, individual and collective rights—in short, the "rules of the game" in society. Then, they have a *general informative value* and, as such, constitute a rich source of information of all kinds and forms on a vast array of topics. Third—and as archivists, we might say most of all—archives have *evidential value*: they document decisions and actions taken as well as interactions between the actors involved; they reflect the intensity and complexity of discussions, debates, and questioning. By virtue of their content and of their organic nature (they are spontaneously created through the activities of individuals, organizations or states), they trace the development of organizations and the paths of individuals, and reveal their basic values, convictions, and beliefs. Bearers of proof, information, and evidence, archives therefore act as revealers of culture—that is, of the "additional spirit" that gives meaning and identity to human communities. They are "the soul of our soul."[25] This dimension of archives inspired Pope John Paul II to assert, in an audience given to the Executive Committee of ICA: "You serve the continuity of the memory of the world's peoples. Without a living and well-informed memory, peoples would lose much of their culture...."[26]

In this sense, archives can make a formidable contribution to the well-being and quality of life of societies. Garnered in the various public and private institutions responsible for ensuring their preservation and dissemination, they are an inexhaustible source of knowledge on the evolution of human groups. Photographs, films, correspondence, maps, plans, reports of all kinds, electronic records—to name only a few types of records—are essential sources for knowing and understanding how societies are evolving and what they have accomplished. In this respect, they are of special interest to educators and communicators called upon to transmit values and knowledge, as well as to support the quest for knowledge and the unceasing search for identity. They are also rich educational sources for academics and other scholars whose mission it is to observe society and promote, through their scientific research, knowledge of the spiritual, intellectual, and material resources of societies.

Archives appraised in context, described in context, shared with researchers in context, transcend their individual recordness or the information content in them, and lead us towards knowledge, perhaps even wisdom. Archivists created that "value-added" contextual framework. And the knowledge in archives, being the accumulated strata of past experience, can then reach the entire population, both indirectly, through the media, films, exhibitions, school material, popular and scholarly writing, and directly, through ever more democratic access and better dissemination of archival holdings.

Even with respect to the organization of the material life of people in society, archives play a leading role. Think, for instance, of land registers, architectural drawings and specifications, road or communication system development plans, personal case files generated by education and health systems, and territorial agreements, to name just a few.

[25]According to historian André Vachon, quoted by Gille Héon in "Les impacts de l'infographie sur la mémoire organique et consignée d'une entreprise: Lacroix Publicité Inc.," *Archives* 26 (Winter 1995): 41–55.

[26]*Observatore Romano*, 31 March 1990.

They facilitate an understanding of the decisions, actions, and transactions that have led to the carrying out of the development plans and of the organization of human life. As French President François Mitterand so aptly put it [transl.], "The archives of all countries, by preserving a record of what has been done and of what has occurred as a result, enlighten, but also command the present."[27] Attesting to law and jurisprudence, guaranteeing respect for the rights of individuals to freedom and democratic government, archives evoke the values of societies and reflect the "being" upon which "becoming" is based.

An American archivist has summarized this in a single paragraph:

> Records are essential to the very development and maintenance of civilization. They are still the basic tools used by public and private institutions and organizations; they serve as their collective memories, providing them with an identity and enabling them to continue to function beyond the lifetime of the individuals who created them. . . .In democratic societies, records are absolutely essential to the maintenance of responsive and responsible government. At the same time, they constitute the most reliable and comprehensive sources of information on the origins, structures, functions and activities of the more important institutions in any society.[28]

For a few documents, archives even become the symbols and icons of our civilization, as Jim O'Toole has reminded us in an important article.[29] Here, in the United States, think of the Declaration of Independence or of your Constitution; in France, of the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen." In this regard, archives therefore seem to have a special role to play in preserving the raw materials needed for the construction of memory and for its projection into the future. It is, to a great extent, on the basis of the archival "alluvial deposits" from the more distant past, and, in recent times, on the orderly accumulation of carefully appraised records which archives contain, that world visions are developed, identities are shaped, and solidarity, continuity, and rupture are imagined. It is no accident that, in certain wars, archives and other cultural icons are being deliberately targeted. If you kill memory, you destroy identity. These crimes, for me, bring home the fundamental importance of archives, alas from the dark side.

Therefore, for me, despite all the diversity among and between archivists across the world, this cultural and memorial role of archives forms an attractive and universal "oneness" around which we can confidentially build a professional ethos. It is no accident that so many gifted outsiders, such as the past President of France, the Pope, or the past Secretary General of the United Nations, can grasp so clearly and express so eloquently what we archivists too often overlook or ignore.

Conclusion

Many changes have occurred and are accelerating in the field of archives. Yet, that is not the main cause of the many challenges facing archivists around the world. These

[27]"Allocution prononcée par Monsieur François Mitterand Président de la République Français," 24 August 1988 in *Proceedings of the 11th International Congress on Archives* [*Archivum*, vol. 35] (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1989), 32.

[28]Frank B. Evans, "Records and Administrative Processes: Retrospect and Prospects," in *Management of Recorded Information: Converging Disciplines*, edited by Cynthia Durance (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1990), 34.

[29]James M. O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," *American Archivist* 56 (Spring 1993): 234–55. See also portions of his *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990).

are largely external and have to be internalized by the profession. For example, over the past century, we have noticed—and are still seeing—profound shifts in the evolution of the concept of the State and of its interaction with its citizens; changing expectations by citizens of their State's archival institutions and the nature of their collective memory; radical changes in organizational structures and accompanying post-Weberian organizational theory and practice; the immense growth in the volume and in the media variety of records; the impact of new computer and communications technologies in the workplace and society generally, accompanied by less-controlled and less-controllable workers, thus less-controlled and less-controllable records; new uses of and new constraints on the use of information by governments and by citizens—all accompanied by the general move in social theory and philosophy from a modernist to post-modernist perspective.

In the face of these shock waves, archival theorists, educators, and professional associations are rethinking some of the more traditional conceptual frameworks, or trying to regenerate their practices by digging deeper to nourish them at the basic roots. Even some of the titles used by these authors tend to the apocalyptic! We hear from Hugh Taylor of "technological transformations" and "paradigm shifts" in archives, from Tom Nesmith of the "rediscovery" and reinvigoration of provenance, from Margaret Hedstrom and David Bearman of the necessity of "reinventing archives," from Gerald Ham taking us to "the archival edge," from Terry Cook of pursuing "mind over matter" for better "post-custodial and post-modernist" archives, from John McDonald of focusing on "business processes rather than recorded products," from Charles Dollar of "archives without walls," from Richard Brown of the need for a "new archival hermeneutics," from Helen Samuels of new "documentation strategies" and "functional analyses," and from Wendy Duff and Kent Haworth of the "reclamation of archival description." At a more general level, we hear from Luciana Duranti, elevating pristine archival theory over methodology and practice whenever there is conflict with theory, from Brien Brothman, questioning whether there ever is such a thing as pristine theory, offering instead his relativist "theory of theories," and from John Roberts, dismissing theory altogether as a minor thing unworthy of diverting archivists from the real job of understanding the records entrusted to their care.[30] This list is only partial and only North American. Several recent books con-

[30]See Hugh A. Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?" *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–1988): 12–28; Tom Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-Speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," in Nesmith, editor, *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, 1–28; David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom, "Reinventing Archives for Electronic Records: Alternative Service Delivery Options," in Hedstrom, editor, *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, 82–98; F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, edited by Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. General Services Administration, 1984), 326–35; 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, and "Electronic Records, Paper Minds;" McDonald, "Managing Records in the Modern Office: Taming the Wild Frontier;" Charles Dollar, *Archival Theory and Information Technologies: The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods* (Macerata, Italy: University of Macerata, 1995), especially chapter four; Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and Its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 34–56; Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, N.J. and London: The Society of American Archivists and The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), and, for an overview of both her documentation strategies and institutional functional analyses, see Samuels, "Improving Our Disposition: Documentation Strategy," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–1992): 125–40; Wendy M. Duff and Kent A. Haworth, "The Reclamation of Archival Description: The Canadian Perspective," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–1991): 26–35; Luciana Duranti, "The

taining very good collections of essays from Australia and Europe distill similar debates and questioning, reassertions, and fertile probing.[31]

In fact, based on this welter of opinion, and repeated calls for a new conceptual framework for archives, I might reply to Charles Dollar's question that the real archival diversity is as much in the realm of theory as practice, and that more and more archivists internationally, in cooperation together, are rolling up their sleeves in common–sense fashion and devising solutions and methodologies that solve problems, while the theoretical debates rage on around them. Don't take me wrong. Theory and principles are extremely important, as are the debates over them. Many of these debates are very lively and highly interesting. More important, some of the above theoretical writers are also at the very forefront of devising workable, practical solutions for today's archival problems, whether in appraisal strategies, electronic records, or descriptive standards. They don't just talk and ponder; they do.

But there is a danger when theory sometimes involves or, better, evokes a defensive posturing. We need an attitude of professional and technological convergence rather than doctrinaire formulations. Our work is too complex, too rich, too diverse, to permit the enshrining of a single orthodoxy. In fact, the quickly evolving context of our professional duties is pushing us, as I noted at the start of this paper, towards more flexibility, more imagination, open professional borders, built around a core of distinctly professional principles (such as provenance, context, evidence), but also reflecting a vast, diverse, moving, and increasingly interdisciplinary range of methodology and practice. The recent report of the SAA task force on electronic records leads the way with an outward-looking orientation for the profession.[32] And in Canada, the archival and library communities are finding that their interests overlap and intermingle in the world of the automated office.[33]

What, then, is left as distinctly archival? There will be our traditions of course, and our guiding principles of appraising and describing information in context, but why? To say that we are the experts who look after records just begs the question. Museums take care of baskets and masks, archives look after records. So what? People do not come to museums to look at baskets or to archives to look at records, but to learn about some person or group, place or thing, some past phenomenon for which they wish to attach present-day meaning. We archivists don't just preserve records, but meaning, and meaning for different times. As Canadian National Archivist (Dominion Archivist) Arthur G. Doughty once said, the extent to which we look after archives properly marks the extent

Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,'' *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 328–44; Brien Brothman, ''Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,'' *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 78–100; John Roberts, ''Practice Makes Perfect, Theory Makes Theorists,'' *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 111–21.

[31]See for Australia Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives. First 50 Years* (Clayton: Ancora Press, 1994), and Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Record-Keeping* (Melbourne: Ancora Press, 1993). For Europe, see Angelika Menne-Haritz, ed., *Information Handling in Offices and Archives* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1993); Kerstin Abukhanfusa and Jan Sydbeck, *The Principle of Provenance: Report from the First Stockholm Conference on Archival Theory and the Principle of Provenance, 2–3 September 1993* (Stockholm: Swedish National Archives, 1994); Judith A. Koucky, ed., *Second European Conference on Archives: Proceedings* (Paris: International Council on Archives, 1989).

[32]Society of American Archivists, ''Electronic Records Strategies Task Force'' (Lisa Weber, Chair), presented to the membership in Washington, D.C., September 1995.

[33]See Wallot, ''Limited Identities for a Common Identity;'' Alliance of Libraries, Archives and Records Management (ALARM), *Towards a Strategy for Human Resources Development in Libraries, Archives and Records Management*, interim report, December 1994; Cynthia J. Durance and Hugh A. Taylor, ''Wisdom, Knowledge, Information and Data,'' *Alexandria* 4 (1992): 37–61.

of human civilization. In our quite understandable methodological focus on archival "administration" and "management" and "strategy" (classic wording for all archival textbook titles) and in serving the on-going administrative, legal, and policy-continuity needs of our sponsors, we sometimes forget—in action as well as in rhetoric, theory, and education—the broader cultural vision that ultimately animates us: building a local, national, and international memory that can be accessed to serve society, and in which its members can now, in the present, find that past meaning to carry forward into the future.

In the end, we must, above all else, remember our humanity—our cultural role in the collective memory of peoples. Professions everywhere are plagued with a focus on methodology, technique, processes, unfathomable jargon, exclusiveness, and insularity. These can work against our best selves and our broader mission. Tom Nesmith recently noted that the schism, now widely lamented, between liberal arts education and professional education in our universities is but a microcosm of a much larger problem.[34] We must ensure that the limited identities—the many diversities—nourishing our archival profession are not so defensively formulated that they preclude a broadening series of inescapable partnerships with potential allies, or that they become a vicious circle of professional self-aggrandizement. Professions (and professional identities) do not exist to serve professions, but rather to serve a wider humanity. To face the enormous challenges ahead, we must, as Nesmith recommends, combine professional, managerial, and organizational techniques on the one hand with the world of ideas, dreams, creativity, knowledge, flexibility, and humanity on the other. By so claiming our place in that world of cultural integrity, I believe that we will find our archival "oneness."

[34]Tom Nesmith, "'Professional Education in the Most Expansive Sense': What Will the Archivist Need to Know in the 21st Century?" paper delivered at the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Regina, Saskatchewan, June 1995.