

Information Culture and the Archival Record

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Abstract

New technologies pose new challenges for archivists not only because they change the material nature of archives, but also because they change ideas about information and its place in our culture. This article uses contemporary cultural theory to consider the intersections of information, culture, and technology in archives. It argues that context is essential to understanding archives and that archives are creators and reinforcers of power and authority. Finally, it considers two archetypal archives, assemblages of clay tokens in the ancient Near East, and today's World Wide Web, to suggest the importance of considering archives' connectivity and context in order to understand their use and power.

New technologies pose new problems for archivists. Archivists have responded with a vast literature describing those problems and suggesting ways to deal with the challenges of the new technologies. In this article, I want to step back a bit from the problems and proposed solutions to look at the bigger picture. I argue that new technologies are changing not just the material nature of archives but also the very notion of information. They are reshaping our ideas about information and our ideas about culture. To understand these changes, we must situate information and archives into their larger contexts. This article considers, in a general sort of way, the intersections of information, culture, and technology that arise in creating and using archives.

My thinking about information in archives comes, in part, from my work as a museum curator. Curators are concerned about the value and meaning of the historic artifacts in their collections because the meaning of material culture is, by its nature, obscure. The artifacts we hold were created to be used, not read, and so we have to learn how to read them. Objects are open to interpretation; they mean different things to different people at different times.

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Objects are context-sensitive, and the context is as important as the object itself. They are interactive: to understand them, we must consider their webs of interrelationships with other objects, with archives and printed materials, and with people. Curators have had to teach their users—historians and museum visitors alike—how to read material culture. Over the years, curators have developed a body of material culture theory that is used to understand the meaning of our artifacts.

Archivists, on the other hand, can take meaning for granted. For the most part, the material that archivists deal with was created intentionally to hold meaning. That is, the words were written on paper, or the images exposed on film, or the bits aligned on magnetic tape in order to record information. The original intent of these records is not always what makes them of interest to archivists or to those using them in an archives, true, but that they had meaning, and can continue to have meaning, seems to go without saying. That's why they are held in archives.

In recent years the interests and techniques of archivists and curators have begun to overlap in new ways. This is happening for several reasons. Curators are beginning to learn how to read artifacts as documents, and thus see that their work is more archival than they might have thought. New technologies have changed the nature of archival documents, making them more like the objects in museums. Archives are becoming more like the artifacts of material culture—not only physically, but in terms of meaning as well. But perhaps most importantly, new ways of thinking about the nature of technology, knowledge, and power are changing the ways we think about both museum artifacts and archives.

New Ways of Thinking about Archives

Today, it seems to be stating the obvious when we say that archives are technological productions, and that to understand them we need to pay attention to the technology. Archives, as never before, are clearly technological creations. The rise of electronic records has changed the way we create archives, the way we use them, the way we think about them. But archives have always been technological productions. Today, it seems to be stating the obvious to say that archives of electronic messages—say, the World Wide Web—are complex interconnected creations—but I believe that's always been true, for all kinds of archives. Today, the ubiquity and importance of information is obvious; but information has played a central role in culture for a very long time.

The very obviousness of the new technologies, and the scale and speed of technological change, has called our attention to the fact that recordkeeping has always depended upon technology. But the new technologies suggest new ways to think about archives, both old and new. The archival record is the

record of what I like to call an information culture. Archives reflect not just new technologies, and not just what is written on paper, but also the changes in culture that accompany changing technology. The meaning and use of archives change as our information culture changes. This has been true since the beginning of historical records, but is increasingly apparent and important today as we rely more and more on electronic records.

New ways of thinking about information and knowledge are also changing the way we view archives. In the forefront of this change is a group of French philosophers, sometimes called the poststructuralists. I'll be calling on these philosophers—among them Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard—to help us understand the nature of archives.

Poststructuralists focus on issues of language, knowledge, power, and technology, raising questions about the instability of "textuality," and the constant remaking of meaning in language. They try to move "beyond all forms of reductionist, totalizing interpretations of texts. . . . The meaning of texts, for poststructuralists, results as much from the act of reading as from the act of writing, and that being so, the diversity of readers leads to the conclusion that texts have multiple, even infinite, meanings."¹ The poststructuralists have also focused on technology, pointing out "the convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology."² And they have identified archives as a place of language and technology where knowledge and power coalesce and "instability of textuality" takes place.

Let me outline my argument from here out. I want to look first at creating and using archives. Here, I will consider the nature of texts removed from their original contexts and resituated in archival contexts. Next, I will look at archives and technology. In particular, I want to examine archives as a source of power and question the relationship of modern technological society to its archives. In the third section I will present two historical examples of the technology of archives. Finally, I will suggest some of the ways that this theoretical and historical discussion might change how we think about archives.

Creating Archives

Why are there archives? Here I want to introduce a wonderfully evocative, if extremely difficult, book: Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*. This book is about the complex relationship in archives of memory, archaeology, and the archontic—that is, the power of the state as keeper of archives. Derrida starts

¹ Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 81.

² George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), especially 27–30. For an analysis of Derrida's position on the relationship of computer technology and poststructuralism, see Poster, *Mode of Information*, 100–101.

with the origins of archives, posing questions about the relationship between recording and remembering:

We are *en mal d'archiver*: in need of archives. . . . [We] burn with a passion . . . never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. . . . It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion . . . can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d'archiver*.³

Now, by way of explanation: Derrida's "archive" is not the sort of archives that employs members of the Society of American Archivists. It is an archive in a more psychoanalytical, more cultural sense. Derrida defines an archive in the most general way: an archive is a public, prosthetic, memory. That is, it is a place where we use technology to improve our memory and make it available to others. As places of memory and of technology, archives are a place of origin and a place of perpetuity, a place of stasis and of order. As public places, they are places of secrets yet also of discovery. "Archive fever," then, is the desire for memory, the urge to remember in both senses of the word: both to store in memory and to retrieve from memory.

Derrida's point is that "archiving"—our prosthetic memories, or technologies of remembering—does not just affect archives. It also affects the nature of the archived work. The process of saving into memory, of "archiving," and of removing from memory back into our lives, shapes the process of production of memory, of knowledge, of the self. Derrida continues:

the archive . . . is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content of *the past* which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.

Archival technology, in other words, determines not merely the "moment of the conservational recording," but also "the very institution of the archivable event."⁴ In other words, how we remember shapes what we remember.

Now, Derrida is famously opaque and obscure, and he seems to revel in these qualities. (We only read him because he raises such interesting questions, because he makes us think about things in new ways.) But in some ways he is repeating an earlier, equally difficult but rather more popular philosopher, Lewis Carroll. I am referring, of course, to that obscure and peculiar book, *Alice*

³ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91.

⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 16–18. Emphasis in original.

Through the Looking Glass. The White Queen, explaining the advantages of living backwards, tells Alice: "... there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways." Alice is annoyed, and replies, "I'm sure *mine* only works one way. . . . I can't remember things before they happen," only to be scolded by the White Queen: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward."⁵

An archives, Derrida argues, is more like the White Queen's notion of memory than it is like Alice's common sense notion of memory. It works both forward and backwards. Yes, we use an archives to remember things after they happen. But if we think of the records in archives as points of inscription, as sites of cultural production, we realize that they serve, if not to remember things before they happen, to remember things as they happen. Indeed, the process of "archivization" *makes* things happen by allowing us to make sense of what is happening. Remembering, after all, has two opposite, complementary meanings.

Archives shape not only our memory, but also our history, our culture, our world. Anthropologists have been the most thorough analysts of this, for, along with psychoanalysts like Freud and postmodernists like Derrida, they refuse to take memory for granted. Mary Douglas, in *How Institutions Think*, suggests that, for anthropologists, "remembering is [a] peculiar thing that needs to be explained." The wonder for anthropologists, she notes, is how people with primitive technology ever remember things at all. Her answer is that the memories are locked into social structures. She writes that "the strengths and weaknesses of recall depend on a mnemonic system that is the whole social order."⁶

Different social systems, Douglas argues, have different types of memories. Competitive social systems have weak memories. Complex hierarchical societies have good memory systems, for they need to recall many reference points from the past. "Coherence and complexity in public memory," she writes, "will tend to correspond to coherence and complexity at the social level."⁷

One might restate this another way: We are our archives. Our archives, our memories, reflect our world. What can we say about our society, based on our memory, our archives? What do we bother to preserve? What do we want to remember? Here I want to turn to Foucault, who argued in his book *Discipline and Punish* that the panopticon—the prison designed so that the guards might see every move every prisoner makes—is a fit analogy for our society. The prisoners—all of us—never know when they are being watched, so they must behave as if they are always being watched. The power of the panopticon lies not in the fact that it is all-seeing, but rather that it records what it sees, that it keeps track of not only what is going on, but of what has already transpired. Archives—files, account books, and time tables—provide the foundation

⁵ Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, in Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice* (New York: Bramhall House, 1960), 247–48.

⁶ Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 71–72.

⁷ Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 80.

of that paradigmatic institution of modern society, the location of its authority, the source of its power. It is not enough just to control the present; to control the future, we must also control memory, the past, the archives.⁸

Using Archives

With the discussion of archives as a site of power, we move from creating archives to using archives. *Creating* archives produces power. So too does *using* archives. Derrida writes that “there is not political power without control of the archive. . . . Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”⁹

Archives as public memory are a place of power because, writes Derrida, they undertake to make sense of memory. He identifies five effects of “archiving” on memory. For Derrida, “archiving” consists of:

- unification
- identification
- classification, and
- consigning, in two meanings—both in its meaning of entrusting or handing over, and
- consigning in its more literal meaning of gathering together signs, that is, establishing a system.¹⁰

The lesson from this is simple: We must think of archives as active, not passive, as sites of power, not as recorders of power. Archives don’t simply *record* the work of culture; they *do* the work of culture.

In what way do archives do cultural work? Bruno Latour, a philosopher and historian of science and technology, maintains that it is the archives—“the most despised of all ethnographic objects: the file or the record”—that makes rationalization and bureaucracy possible:

The “cracy” of bureaucracy is mysterious and hard to study, but the “bureau” is something that can be empirically studied, and which explains, because of its structure, why some power is given to the average mind just by looking at files: domains which are far apart become literally inches apart; domains which are convoluted and hidden become flat.

“In our culture,” Latour continues, paper shuffling “is the source of an essential power.”¹¹

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1995).

⁹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, edited by Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 54–55.

Just putting things on paper is a source of power. “Inscriptions allow *conscription*” is how Latour puts it; they allow one to make effective arguments, to assemble allies: “The ‘great man’ is a little man looking at a good map.” Latour gives a variety of explanations for the power that representations give scientists. Representations, the things in archives, can be completely dominated; they can be reshuffled and recombined and superimposed; and they can be moved and yet remain unchanged. Archives, Latour argues, following Foucault, are power.¹²

In societies like ours, where archives are used in the service of system, they have enormous power. They are the tools—perhaps “weapons” is more accurate—of an asymmetrical relationship, in the same way that the anthropologist’s maps and drawings and writings are asymmetrical. Johannes Fabian, in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, notes that the anthropologist “creates a space and a time” in which he or she places other cultures, an activity that “primitive” cultures do not reciprocate.¹³

Indeed, we might generalize this: most archives represent asymmetrical communications. Archives do not simply record information; they record the flow of information, the use of information. Most of the time, in most institutions, information flows in one direction. Archives reflect and reinforce the power relationships of the institution that organizes them; they represent not just a technological solution, but also an organizational solution. They document and carry out not only knowledge and technique, but also culture and power.

Archives Technology

The technology of archives is of a piece with their place in society, reflecting and reinforcing archives’ role as a medium of power. The technology of the records is important in a practical way, of course. What is saved is limited by technological constraints. If ink fades, we have blank paper; if wood rots, we have only the records carved in stone; if the magnetic tape can no longer be read, we’ve lost the data. A given technology only allows certain kinds of archives; only certain things get inscribed. Before voice recording, there were only written archives; before movies, only words and voices and images. The archival record is shaped by our technology in a practical way.

But the technological medium has more effect on archives than merely their content or longevity. Technologies also shape archives in more profound ways. New communications technologies, after all, do not simply increase the efficiency of communications; they also shape both the user and the messages

¹² Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” 50, 56 and 44–46. Emphasis in original.

¹³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), quoted in Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” 38.

themselves, an argument stated in its most reductionist form by Marshall McLuhan as “the medium is the message.”

A long line of communications theorists since McLuhan have reconsidered the issue in subtler ways. Some have argued, following Marx, that access to information is dependent on class. Neo-Marxists argue that better communications allow increased cultural hegemony. Classical economists assume that the market drives access to communications.

Mark Poster, in *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context*, contends that new communications technologies shape the “structure of symbolic exchange.” Every technology, every age, he writes, has its own form of symbolic exchange. Talk leads to a face-to-face exchange. The technology of writing and reading leads to a “self constructed as an agent centered in rational [or] imaginary autonomy.” Electronic writing leads to a self that is decentered, dispersed, and multiplied in continuous instability. In each stage, the “relation of language and society, idea and action, self and other” is different.¹⁴

Poster’s analysis of the “modes of information,” the effects of communications on our culture and ourselves, suggests that we must study not only the content but also the forms of information storage and retrieval. If, as he claims, “each method of preserving and transmitting information profoundly intervenes in the network of relationships that constitute a society,”¹⁵ then it is important for archivists to consider not just text but also context, not just content but also form.

Poster’s argument partakes of what historians of technology call technological determinism, that is, that the new technology creates a new culture. Communications theorist Raymond Williams argues the opposite:

In no way does a new communications system create a new society or new social conditions. The decisive and earlier transformation of industrial production, and its new social forms, which had grown out of a long history of capital accumulation and working technical improvements, created new needs but also new possibilities, and the communications systems, down to television, were their intrinsic outcome.¹⁶

Poster and Williams disagree on which way the causation runs, that is, which came first, technology or culture. Historian Carolyn Marvin formulates a middle position; looking for causation in both directions. The history of electrical communications, Marvin writes, “is less the evolution of technical efficiencies in communication than a series of arenas for negotiating issues crucial to the conduct of social life.” These negotiations may or may not change social life: “New technologies intended to enhance familiar social routines may reorganize them

¹⁴ Poster, *Mode of Information*, 6.

¹⁵ Poster, *Mode of Information*, 7.

¹⁶ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 19.

so they become new events.”¹⁷ Marvin’s is a gentler form of determinism: new technology, usually invented for old purposes, and reinforcing old ways, at the same time opens new doors, and invites us to enter and reorganize our world. The pen makes it easier to say some things; the printing press, others; electronic interchange, still others.

One can accept any of these positions—Marvin’s seems most appealing to me—and still have an agenda that puts technology and culture in close contact, with archives just about in the middle. That means we should think about archives as a reflection not just of technology, or of culture, but as one of those arenas where we negotiate “issues crucial to the conduct of life.” As I pointed out earlier: archives are one of the places where we do the work of culture, that is, the messy work of negotiating power and ideas and memory.

Two Examples

We can understand these processes of power and negotiations by examining actual archives. I’ll briefly consider two archives, from opposite ends of archival history, to reveal some of the ways that archives reflect the interplay of memory, context, power, and technology.

Let me start with the first archives, which originated in the ancient Near East, and which, arguably, made possible the beginnings of civilization. The first archives were simple assemblages of clay tokens used for keeping track of quantities of grain and the number of animals. These tokens date from about 8000 B.C. During the fourth millennium, more complex tokens appeared, representing finished products like textiles, vessels, and tools. The next step was writing, which, according to current theories, derived from counting; you wrote to keep track of your tokens. Someone realized that once the number and type of token had been written down, the tokens were no longer needed. Voila . . . writing!¹⁸

With the rise of more complex societies, more complex accounting was necessary. Counting took place in egalitarian societies; accounting was needed in ranked societies. The earliest archives, basically, were the work of tax collectors. Archives of these tokens represent payments due at the next harvest, with seals representing hierarchies of accountants. The new archival technology both allowed and expressed the social structure.

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss summarized these themes:

The only phenomena which, always and in all parts of the world, seems to be linked with the appearance of writing . . . is the establishment of hierarchical societies, consisting of masters and slaves, and where one part of the popula-

¹⁷ Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4 and 190.

¹⁸ Denise Schmandt-Besserat, *Before Writing, Vol. I: From Counting to Cuneiform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), chapters 7–9.

tion is made to work for the other part. . . . And when we consider the first uses to which writing was put, it would seem quite clear that it was connected first and foremost with power: it was used for inventories, catalogues, censuses, laws and instructions; in all instances, whether the aim was to keep check on material possessions or on human beings, it is evidence of the power exercised by some men over other men and over worldly possessions.¹⁹

Even these very first archives—perhaps especially these very first archives—reflect my themes of the interplay of memory and power, cultural opportunity and technological invention. They reflect a straightforward power relationship.

My second example, the World Wide Web, plays changes on these themes. Consider the nature of a text on the World Wide Web, in contrast to a text on paper, or on a clay tablet. A text on paper is words, carefully set in order. It is linear at heart, with sentences, paragraphs, and pages in defined order. It captures a relatively simple form of authorship, of the organization of power. It is written, then read. A text on the Web, on the other hand, is as an active, living experience. It encourages interaction; it is linked to other texts, other places. Both authorship and content are fluid. The reader shares authority with the writer. Power relationships are more complex.

Mark. C. Taylor, a philosopher at Williams College, describes this living text as a kind of virtual reality.²⁰

A hypertext is not a closed work but an open fabric of heterogeneous traces and associations that are in a process of constant revision and supplementation. The structure of a hypertext is not fixed but is forever shifting and always mobile. The interplay of surface and depth gives way to a perpetual displacement of surfaces that is anything but superficial . . . Hierarchy unravels in a web where top and bottom, up and down, lose consistent meaning. Everything everywhere is middle. Instead of an organic whole, a hypertext is a rent texture whose meaning is unstable and whose boundaries are constantly changing.²¹

Michael Joyce, perhaps the foremost hypertext novelist, describes this active experience of text as “words that yield;” he finds pleasure in the “roly-poly pushover” quality of the text.²²

It’s no surprise that much of the discussion of “What next for the World Wide Web?” relates to the ways in which the use of the documents might be

¹⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, in Georges Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961), 29–30.

²⁰ Interview of Mark C. Taylor in *Seulemunde*, Issue 3 (available at <<http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/taylor/taylor.html>>)

²¹ Mark Taylor and Esa Saarinen, *Imagologies: Media Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), Telewriting 6.

²² Michael Joyce, “A Feel for Prose,” in *Of Two Minds: Hypertext pedagogy and poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995) quoted in Stuart Moulthrop, “No War Machine,” in Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz, *Reading Matters: Narrative in the New Media Ecology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). Reproduced at <http://raven.ubalt.edu/staff/moulthrop/essays/war_machine.html>.

captured: two-way links, a fine-grained web of usage relationships, commentary, and metadata. These data, in revealing use, capture the complex power relationships of the Web as archives. The Web situates information in an unstable structure; knowing about the information, and knowing about how it is used, helps to stabilize the data, and makes clearer the power relationships it serves. The Web is infinitely more flexible than the clay tablet, but similar in its recording of the structures of power.

The conceptual shift from texts to hypertexts, from words that are firm to words that yield, from stacks to knots—from papers to Webs—is significant. It comes as something new and surprising to literary critics, who read in it the “death of narrative.” It probably scares some archivists. How can one retain a constantly changing, unstable, text? But I’d like to argue that, in a more profound way, this sense of an endlessly connected text should come as no surprise to an archivist. We can easily apply this new sense of archives to the stacks of paper archivists have always dealt with. Archivists have always insisted on maintaining what might be called, in a Web world, the connectivity of their stacks of paper. Archivists have always considered how the papers were originally ordered, how they were shaped and used, as clues to how to organize the papers in the archives. The Web simply reminds us of the intrinsic linkages within all archives.

Conclusion

The connectivity of hypertext archives, and the relation of power and memory of the first archives, hold practical lessons for today. In an age when language is famously unstable, the power of the archive stems from its ability to bring together information about information. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, argues that “the performativity [that is, the effectiveness] of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one’s disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information.”²³ What makes information usable is the amount of information we have about it.

With the mention of information about information, we arrive at the most fascinating aspect of the modern archives; metadata. Metadata is data about data. It is the key to understanding the archives. Foucault is famous for arguing for the centrality of discourse, not the centrality of things and artifacts; and it is in metadata that we find discourse, and it is in discourse that we find culture.

²³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 47.

We need data about our data, information about our information. In metadata we seek the certainty we have lost in data.

Archivists use metadata to attest to archival certainty, reliability, and authenticity.²⁴ But metadata might mean even more when we focus not on the documents themselves but on their use. Metadata is to the archivist what context is to the archeologist. Context, writes anthropologist Ian Hodder, “is the totality of the relevant environment, where ‘relevant’ refers to any significant relationship to the object—that is, a relationship necessary for discerning the object’s meaning.” Objects are only mute, Hodder says, “when they are out of their text”—that is, without their context, their metadata.²⁵

Carolyn Marvin, the historian of communications, indicates why this is true:

Media [and here, I think it’s fair to substitute the word archives] are not fixed objects: they have no natural edges. They are constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication. The history of media is never more or less than the history of their uses, which lead us away from them to the social practices and conflicts they illuminate.²⁶

What is important, then, is cultural production. Context is all-important. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, two historians of science, suggest why: “it is misleading to investigate language through an analysis of words and ‘meanings’ isolated from the pragmatic situations in which they are used . . . a kind of mysterious force and historical significance seems to accrue to rules and propositions when they are isolated from their pragmatic contexts.”²⁷

Whereas museum curators are as deeply concerned with the history of the uses of the objects in their possession as with their manufacture, archivists have tended to consider the creation of their documents as most important. But, as both the first archives and now the Web remind us so vividly, documents are active—not just Web documents, but all documents. Documents—archives—are sites of cultural production. That means they are centers of power. Archives, and the records of archival use, can tell us about the relationships between makers and users, and the culture that weaves them together. They illuminate social practice. Archives themselves are texts to be interpreted.

The World Wide Web makes apparent what has always been the case: information is interconnected in complex ways, and is used in even more complex ways. What is often of greatest interest is not the information, but the inter-

²⁴ Luciana Duranti, “Reliability and Authenticity: The Concepts and Their Implications,” *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 5–10.

²⁵ Ian Hodder, “Introduction,” in *The Archaeology of Contextual Meanings*, edited by Ian Hodder (Cambridge University Press, 1987), quoted in *Reading Material Culture: Structuralism, Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism*, edited by Christopher Tilley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

²⁶ Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*, 8.

²⁷ Lynch and Woolgar, *Representation in Scientific Practice*, vii–viii.

connections and the manner of use. Metadata can be as important as data. The “archive fever” of which Derrida speaks is a fever for remembering in all its complexity, for storing and retrieving memory—data—archives, in all their complexity. For archivists to fully understand and appreciate their archives, and to get the fullest use out of them, they must go beyond issues of reliability and authenticity to consider connectivity and context, use and power.