**Special Section: SAA's 75th Anniversary**

# The Society of American Archivists at Seventy-Five: Contexts of Continuity and Crisis, A Personal Reflection

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**Abstract**

This essay does not recount the history of the Society of American Archivists' first seventy-five years. It suggests one possible framework for understanding the complex context of the Society's evolution—the cultural milieu and multiple intersecting influences that have contributed to making the SAA the organization it is. It proposes that the past seventy-five years can be construed as a single moment, the moment of the SAA's emergence. The last seventy-five years can be regarded as an era of chronic crisis and evolving frontiers. In fact, our own experience bears a marked resemblance to the 1930s, which seems more current today than it often did to those generations between the thirties and ours. Starkly put, the SAA's founding members are not only our predecessors; they are also our contemporaries.

> … fare forward, voyagers,
> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[1]



[1] T. S. Eliot, cited by Shonnie Finnegan in her 1986 SAA Presidential Address, 50th Anniversary Issue, *American Archivist* 49 (Winter 1986): 8.

> The "magic" that appears to exist in the machines is only for the uninformed. The human mind is still necessary.[2]

The occasion calls for it and its record of accomplishment warrants it. However, this essay does not recount the history of the Society of American Archivists' (hereafter, the SAA, the Society) first seventy-five years.[3] Rich as it is, it would be presumptuous to attempt such a history in the space that is available here. Besides, others are much better qualified to write it. Nor does this essay set out to cheer for the SAA, though there is certainly plenty to celebrate. Over its first seven and one-half decades, the Society has repeatedly demonstrated steadfastness and prescience, wisdom and integrity as well as enlightenment and foresight. Rather than offering an authoritative historical account, this essay simultaneously attempts to provide a theoretical framework and a historical context for better understanding the Society's evolution, the cultural milieu, and the multiple intersecting influences that have contributed to making the SAA the organization it is. This essay also avoids proceeding under the illusion that the SAA has somehow always—or never—managed to transcend the influences and values of its place, the ghosts of its past, or, indeed, the specter of its future.[4] This essay is as much about the Society's times as about the Society.

## Continuity

Members of the Society of American Archivists, no less than many other scholars and storytellers, seem prone to look back on the profession's past as having gone through three stages, that is, three structurally cohesive periods or

[2] Edward N. Johnson, "Trends in County Records Management," *American Archivist* 24 (July 1961): 300.

[3] For useful histories of the SAA, see Nicholas Burckel, "The Society: From Birth to Maturity," *American Archivist* 61 (Spring 1998): 12–35 on the evolving demographics, structure, and finances of the organization; Frank Cook, "The Blessings of Providence," *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983); and Edward Weldon, "Archives and the Challenge of Change," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 125–34. Also note that the Society has frequently taken the measure of its situation, primarily through the use of surveys. See, for example, Patrick Quinn, "Archivists and Historians. The Times They Are A-changin'," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 5–13.

[4] In a sense, this essay is partly an attempt to respond to Richard Cox's insistence some ten years ago on the importance of bringing historical perspectives to bear on the archival endeavor. "It will require an understanding of the significance of the historical perspective for everyday, practical archival work… [and] will require scholarship with more breadth and depth than what has thus far passed for archival history." Richard Cox, "The Failure or Future of American Archival History: A Somewhat Unorthodox View," *Libraries and Culture* 35 (Winter 2000): 149.

contexts. When occasion prompted them to do so, SAA members have written about the Society's past under the influence of some pervasive—one might even suggest instinctive or religious—narrative rule or logic of "threeness." The SAA marked its fortieth year (and the U.S. Bicentennial) in 1976 by looking back on the association's history in three phases. Years later, like Philip Mason, Richard Cox, one of the most knowledgeable historians of our profession, found our past to have unfolded in three phases. J. Frank Cook's presidential address in 1983, too, referred to three phases.[5] Each of these narratives found that American archivists and the SAA, in perfect synchronicity, underwent momentous changes, moments of growth, and maturation, three times.[6]

Contextualization, like all memory constructions, partitions time in a way that impresses stability, permanence, and structure, and, thus, a certain frozenness or stiffness on the past's inhabitants.[7] The establishment of a context, in other words, presumes a homogeneous temporality, a sort of monochromatic time and, thereby, proscribes any anachronism or temporal liminality. For this reason, historian Constantin Fasolt describes the historian's penchant for contextualization as "a dangerous form of knowledge."[8]

Whatever the number of periods, it is commonly held that our own generation basks in the sunlight of a new, advanced stage of professional history. We are situated somewhere (some time) in a still-developing or almost complete "Information Age" marked by an "Information Revolution." Acknowledgment

[5] Herman Kahn, Frank Evans, and Andrea Hinding, "Documenting American Cultures through Three Generations: Change and Continuity," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975). The same issue also includes three separate essays, each describing one of the three generations: Herman Kahn, "The First Generation: The Autodidact"; Frank Evans, "The Second Generation: The Teachers and the Taught"; and Andrea Hinding, "The Third Generation: War, Choice, and Chance." See also Philip Mason, "Archives in the Seventies: Promise and Fulfillment," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 199–206; Richard Cox, "American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901–1987," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 307. In his presidential address, Burckel divides his account of the Society's history into three twenty-five-year periods, "The Society: From Birth to Maturity."

[6] See also Yves Perotin, "Administration and the Three Ages of Archives," *American Archivist* 29, no. 3 (1966): 363–69. Contemporary institutional and professional narratives of the "transition to an information society" commonly involve three stages: a receding "traditional mentality," which is not up to managing the transition; a middle information society period of development of skills for the future; and a transition period. During this time, two concerns can exist in tandem: fear of loss of something valuable—the impoverishment of existing occupations—along with anxiety over inability to manage the transition. Barbara Czarniawska, *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 115; and International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring the Information Society. The ICT Development Index* (Geneva: ITU, 2009), 14.

[7] John Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 11, 17. On the phenomenon of anachronism, see Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 14; and Margaret Leslie, "In Defense of Anachronism," *Political Studies* 18 (1970): 433–47.

[8] Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 7. A similar thought crosses the mind of one of Kurt Vonnegut's characters in his 1952 work, *Player Piano*. "It was an appalling thought, to be so well integrated into the machinery of society and history as to be able to move in only one plane, and along one line." (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 41. See also note 38 on countermemory.

of this revolution often entails important distinctions between "us" and those who lived in previous ages. These periodizations have predisposed some of our generation to stage a sort of cultural and temporal alienation, which can in turn encourage the domination of previous temporalities.[9] What came before the Information Age must at times seem like some antediluvian period—before the information deluge—though, as we shall see, the founding generation felt every bit as overwhelmed by the mounting volume of records being uncovered and also created. What came before the e-revolution was prehistoric, before that tectonic event swept us far from the past, as if we were breaking away from the coastlines of an "old world," an "ancient regime" inhabited by pre-Information-Age peoples, by paleoarchival dwellers.[10]

Observations about the shrinking lapse of time between the appearance of and disenchantment with new technologies, for example, seem to reinforce this perception. The arc of reaction between initial amazement, astonishment, and wonder at the magiclike qualities of the latest technological ideas and products; their appearance as new eternals, followed by a settling into quotidian usage and invisible automatism; and then, finally, their demise by obsolescence, seems to be shrinking every day.[11] In fact, the formal concepts of "structured obsolescence" and "planned obsolescence" have been around since the time of the Society's creation in the 1930s, and the deliberate building of obsolescence into

[9] Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 30.

[10] In "Rewriting Modernity," Jean-Francois Lyotard writes: "[P]eriodization is a way of placing events in a diachrony, and a diachrony is governed by the principle of revolution. In the same way that modernity contains the principle of its overcoming, it is obliged to mark, to date, the end of one period and the beginning of the next. Since one is inaugurating an age reputed to be entirely new, it is right to set the clock to the new time, to start it from zero again." Cited in Andrew Slade, *Lyotard, Beckett, Duras and the Postmodern Sublime* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2007), 42. For summaries of arguments for and against periodization, see Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 4. See also, Joyce Warren, "The Challenge of Women's Periods," in *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization*, ed. Joyce W. Warren and Margaret Dickies (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), ix–xxiv. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews, eds., *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[11] Tom Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the Century," in *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 39–60. The Gartner Group has described a "hype cycle," which includes a "peak of inflated expectation" and a "trough of disillusionment," http://www.gartner.com/technology/about.jsp, accessed 8 July 2011.

production processes was invented even earlier.[12] The last few generations have developed a taste as much for the sheer experience of novelty as for the tangible and touted benefits of innovation. As moderns, we expect a dazzling, multisensory experience of "newness." Technological novelties are not merely introduced into our lives—marketed—as tools of convenience, improvement, or leisure; often, they are purposefully staged as life-changing spectacles meant to surprise us with the unexpected, to momentarily—but only momentarily—enchant us, and, soon thereafter, to cultivate displeasure and anxiety over and zero tolerance of our avowedly newly obsolescent possessions. It is a characteristic of modern society, according to Niklas Luhmann, to produce the new "by way of stigmatizing the old."[13] (This can include discarding information—archives —stored on obsolete media.) Each new thing seemingly thrusts us ever farther ahead of where we stood before, opening our minds to the attraction of possibility and opportunity,[14] habituating us to wake every day expecting news of another revolution—a fresh chance to experience the new.

[12] The notion of obsolescence went from being a negative idea to a positive one in the years leading up to World War II. The phenomenon of manufactured obsolescence seems to have first emerged in the early twentieth century with the introduction of the automobile starter. The concept of planned obsolescence of product *functions* began to appear in the late 1920s and early 1930s, soon followed by the planning of obsolescence of *style*. A landmark presentation of the idea of planned obsolescence appears during the period of the Great Depression in Roy Sheldon and Egmont Arens, *Consumer Engineering; A New Technique for Prosperity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1932), which today would be described as about industrial design or market planning. On the origins of the strategy of obsolescence—promoting the idea that consumers should replace a product with something new before it ceases to function, the circulation of notions of "out-of-date" and "disposable" products, and the replacement of "customers" by "consumers," see Giles Slade, *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). On "structured obsolescence" and the first appearance of the phrase "planned obsolescence" in 1955, see the essays by Jonathan Sterne, "Out with the Trash: On the Obsolescence of New Media," and Lisa Parks, "Falling Apart: Electronics Salvaging and the Global Media Economy," in *Residual Media*, ed. Charles Acland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

[13] Niklas Luhmann, "The Modernity of Science," *New German Critique* 61 (Winter 1993–1994): 10. Kathleen Fitzpatrick identifies three forms of technology-induced anxiety: technologies of mechanization (machines) promote dehumanization; technologies of image production (spectacle) raise the specter of illusion and ideology, and technologies of interconnection (network) threaten individual loss of identity. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (New Orleans: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 27–28 and chap. 1. Others have suggested that contemporary consumer behavior is distinguished by an enthusiasm for new technologies that frequently entails a denigration and repudiation of the ones that came before it. David Ehrenfeld, *Swimming Lessons: Keeping Afloat in the Age of Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52.

[14] Gunning, "Re-Newing Old Technologies." On the history of the experience of newness in media and information technology, see also Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New. Thinking about Electronic Communication in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Lisa Gitelman, *New Media: 1740–1915* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004). The identification of newness in technology has posed a problem for the courts. See Monroe Price, "The Newness of New Technology," *Cardozo Law Review* 22 (2000–2001): 1885–1914. For a critical, iconoclastic history of the inflated importance of new technologies, see David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.) For a long historical view of the "trajectories" of technological revolutions (eruption, frenzy, synergy, maturity), see Carlota Perez, *Technological Revolutions and Finance Capitalism: The Dynamics of Bubbles and Golden Ages* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Elgar, 2002.)

But we should be careful. Especially today, it is easy to succumb to the view that technology is a prime mover of social change. Like so much of our language, the electrical charge of "revolution"—the rhetoric of difference, novelty, innovation, momentousness, and discontinuity—needs parsing. It is worth heeding historian J. G. A. Pocock's admonition concerning the well-worn rhetoric of revolution:

> To trace the history of a revolution is, almost of necessity, to start with a straw man. The rhetoric of the exercise compels the construction of an account of the way things stood before change began which neglects the extent to which change had begun already and the activities of men under the old regime resembled the activities which were to receive emphasis as a result of the process of transformation.[15]

Keeping Pocock's counsel in mind, on this anniversary I want to suggest that we can view the SAA's seventy-five years as more than a story unfolding in sequential phases punctuated by an "Information Revolution." I propose that

[15] J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4. Decades before, American historian Morris Cohen made similar observations in *The Meaning of Human History* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1947), 74. Or what if we took a long view and denied that our history of the last few hundred years had been marked by any revolutionary break at all? See Donald Wesling, "Michel Serres, Bruno Latour and the Edges of Historical Periods," *CLIO* 26, no. 2 (1997): 189; and Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987). On the emergence of a "new temporal constitution" and a radical shift in the meaning of revolution from return and recurrence to a linear unidirectional, irreversible conception of time, see Steve Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Antonio Negri, "Afterword: On the Concept of Revolution," in *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. John Foran, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 252–60. On the worn-out myth of revolution in modernity as radical disruption and discontinuity in the historical process, see Piotr Sztompa, *The Sociology of Social Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 301–3.

The dating of the Information Age and the Information Revolution has varied widely. Many individuals (too many to mention) trace the Information Revolution to certain technological breakthrough inventions: computer chip technology, the minicomputer, the desktop computer, and, of course, the Internet. Others, however, place the Information Revolution in an economic and military context of American history and the dynamics of globalization starting in the 1970s. See Gary Zatzman and Rafiqul Islam, *Economics of Intangibles* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2007), 101–57. A number of scholars trace the Information Revolution specifically and the dawning of a new age much farther back, and several individuals argue that there is no such thing. For example, Brian Winston rejects the newness of the Information Revolution as an "illusion, a rhetorical gambit and an expression of technological ignorance." He argues that electrical and electronic breakthroughs have all been accommodated by "pre-existing social formations. Therefore, the term 'revolution' is quite the wrong word to apply to the current situation." *Media Technology and Society: A History from the Telegraph to the Internet* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 2. Similarly, others trace the beginnings of the age of information back several centuries. See Daniel Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Michael Hobart and Zachary Schiffman, *Information Ages: Literacy, Numeracy, and the Computer Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: The Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Donald Lamberton, "Beyond the Information Revolution," *Prometheus* 27, no. 4 (December 2009): 331–33. Some scholars, looking at contemporary information technology as part of a long wave in the history of technological innovation suggest that the end of the Information Revolution is approaching and that we must look ahead to a "postinformational technological revolution." Daniel Smihula, "Waves of Technological Innovation and the End of the Information Revolution," *Journal of Economics and International Finance* 24, no. 2 (April 2010): 58–67.

the past seventy-five years can simultaneously be construed as a single moment; a single, swirling instant; a duration of sorts in the nation's history; the moment of the SAA's emergence.[16]

More specifically, the last seventy-five years can be regarded as a time of chronic crisis—or, alternatively, as one moment in a prolonged historical era of crisis.[17] A state of crisis has endured in our culture during what I call the long twentieth century. These last seventy-five years, as previously mentioned, can be seen as a single moment. More—or less—than a single omni-determinative context, it is important to add that this span of the Society's time(s), as I will show, includes multiple temporalities. Times of origins, beginnings, and departures along with persistence, returns, and repetitions as well as prefigurations, refigurations, and recurrences have all been at work.[18] The seventy-five-year period, in other words, marks a time of contextual promiscuity, a time of crisis and renewal, "co-existence" of essential and superfluous anachronisms and mythical and functional objects and symbols; an ongoing tango between the diachronic and the synchronic, between sagas of continuity and declarations of fundamental transformation, between contextual cores and liminal realities dwelling at the temporal edges.

Starkly put, the SAA's founding members are not only our predecessors, they are also, in a sense, our contemporaries.[19] Though many of them were academic, professional historians, they, too, were coming under the ever-lengthening shadow of an administrative, managerial, information culture. They, too, bore witness to breakthrough information/communication technologies. The culture was undergoing an almost alchemical transformation of encounters with a world of physical, material objects and embodied people into worldly experience as the decoding of symbolic forms of "information objects." Simultaneously, in the 1930s, rapidly expanding forms of technocracy

[16] Henri Bergson famously articulated the notion of *duration* in several of his philosophical works during the first third of the last century. It is important to note that this notion accommodated a sort of movement within its dynamic of persistence.

[17] As we shall see, some historians have seen the crisis of our own time as forming part of a much longer period of chronic crisis traceable to the emergence of capitalism, modernity, or both.

[18] On this point, see J. P. Connerty, "History's Many Cunning Passages: Paul Ricoeur's Time and Narrative," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 383–403.

[19] Richard Cox enacts this contemporaneity through the use of a literary device. He simultaneously honors Lester Cappon's memory and engages him in debate as if he were present in the same room. "Lester J. Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005): 74–112.

increasingly overlaid and refined persisting forms of Weberian bureaucracy.[20] Before too long, Society members themselves were often acknowledging, indeed, declaring, a sort of professional convergence, seeing scientific administrators and managers as well as archivists and librarians, and, soon, computer specialists, as kindred "information" workers. For example, in his 1940 presidential address, Waldo Leland approvingly cited his presidential predecessor Albert Newsome's description of the archivist as "scholar, expert technician, and public administrator," not apparently concerned by the changing relationship between the cultures of professionals, administrators, engineer-managers, academics, and scholars, differences that the advent of technocracy would do something to diminish. [21] "Collectors," as one individual noted, were on the way to becoming "archival administrators."[22] In a sense, rather than being the SAA's fourth or fifth generation, we are its first generation to the nth degree. Ideas of old and young and notions of development from "birth to maturity" are less straightforward than they seem. Take Morris Radoff's remarks at the Society's twenty-fifth anniversary luncheon:

> The birthday of a man is not necessarily happy—it is a time when the reflective individual takes stock, and after age 25 or thereabouts stocktaking begins to be disappointing. After twice that time "happy birthday" begins to sound like mockery. But, fortunately, this need not be true of societies. There are, certainly, societies, which become decrepit and sclerotic, but this is not inevitable. A professional society can, if it will, remain ever young, ever vigorous, ever bold. It is my hope that this will be the destiny of our Society. [23]

[20] On the relationship between bureaucracy and technocracy, see H. T. Wilson, *The Vocation of Reason: Studies in Critical Theory and the Social Sciences in the Age of Weber* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 189–228. A technocracy movement quickly rose in the early twentieth century, peaking and fading away in the 1930s. However, technocracy has apparently re-emerged as a major force since the 1980s, as a form of faith in current information technologies, a reliance on technical expertise, and the supposed marginalization of politics as technocrats promote their ability to establish "the one best way." See Beverly Burris, *Technocracy at Work* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 1–20.

[21] "The Archivist in a Time of Emergency," *American Archivist* 4, no. 1 (January 1941): 1.

[22] One speaker at a twenty-fifth anniversary gathering of the SAA in 1962 remarked on this shift. Apparently only gone from the profession for five years, William D. McCain expressed ambivalence about his departure and about the progress of the profession. He noted how the profession, like most of the faces in the audience, had changed. He seemed to lament and at the same time to appreciate what the archival profession was becoming. "My getting out though was probably a good thing, because with all this modern stuff you people talk about…I've sort of lost step with that. I'm sort of old-fashioned and I like collecting and to do things like that. This modern archives administration—I just fell by the wayside. It's a good thing I got out when I did.… As a matter of fact collecting was one of the things I got pleasure out of, and in that collecting, I lost out on a lot of the things you talk about." For this former archivist, the past had gone from being a cultural, perhaps sentimental endeavor to being redefined as a field requiring a taste and talent for technocracy. Perhaps for the benefit of his audience, however, McCain concluded by saying that he might want to come back. "Proceedings of the Society's 25th Anniversary Luncheon," *American Archivist* 25, no. 2 (April 1962): 230.

[23] Morris Radoff, "Message from Morris L. Radoff," *American Archivist* 25, no. 2 (April 1962): 231.

Plotting these seventy-five years in this way, this essay meanders in and out of the realms of history, memory, and myth,[24] and, on occasion, countermemory of sorts.[25] By *countermemory* I mean the periodic shifting of focus from the more renowned, representative individuals and texts in the Society's memory to lesser known figures, texts, and phenomena.

### Crisis and Frontiers

In addition to continuity, two other intersecting phenomena—an enduring crisis of representation[26] and a recurring conjuring and conquering of new frontiers—were important leitmotifs in the 1930s, when the Society first saw the

[24] However, for an argument that myth has been abandoned and has become inconsequential in contemporary society, that it is "studied rather than lived," see Sophia Heller, *The Absence of Myth* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 2. Heller pursues this argument as an explanation for what she sees as the loss of faith in the integrative power of myth and memory and the rise of a new confidence in the "merely technical" material preservation of archives, relics, and icons, 107.

[25] I am perhaps stretching the meaning of countermemory a bit here. Michel Foucault describes countermemory as particular phenomena or events that fit into their historical contexts only with much distortion—as a narration of irremediably unique events and voices that avoid being swept up by the "totalization" of intersecting contemporary historical forces that present themselves as contextualizations. "The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled . . . . 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature . . . [and instead] deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is . . . the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other.' " Foucault, cited in Reiko Tachibana, *Narrative as Counter-Memory: A Half-Century of Postwar Writing in Germany and Japan* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), 1. Along similar lines, George Lipsitz describes countermemory as "a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal." "Myth, History, Counter-Memory," in *Politics and the Muse: Studies in the Politics of Recent American Literature*, ed. Adam Sorkin (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 162.

[26] The phrase "crisis of representation" has become commonplace. The phrase betokens uncertainty about the semantic stability of inscribed texts, sounds, and images. It addresses the truth-bearing capacity of mediation, its power to provide an authentic, universally shareable account for our experience of the social and natural world. It is suspicious of the possibility of complete accounting and final accountabilities. In the archival world, this might mean that concepts like *provenance, original order, record creator,* and, of course, *completeness* really function as little more than convenient placeholders for a community's or a group's legal and institutional purposes and interests. However, no presentation can claim to contain the full presence of what is presented. Part of the explanation for this perspective is political: The interpretive authority of traditional institutional centers of knowledge—schools, governments, and scientific laboratories—has been diminished. Jean-Francois Lyotard (specifically his *La condition Postmoderne Rapport sur le Savoir* (Paris: Les editions de minuit, 1979) is often credited with first elaborating the "crisis of representation," though he never seems to have used the phrase.

More radically, Jean Baudrillard argues that contemporary social existence is entirely experienced as coded simulacra, a "hyperreality" in which no referential possibilities exist beyond "phantom references," a world of infinite representations of representations, "an indefinite chaining of simulations." See Jean Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death," in *Selected Writings,* ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 124–25. Elsewhere, he outlines the evolution of images from representational references to a discernible distinctive reality to the point where today images have become the only discernible reality: "it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum." *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

light of day, and they continue to envelop us seventy-five years later.[27] Alongside twentieth-century America's re-imagining of the frontier in its national experience, the SAA similarly drew on frontier imagery to represent its archival experience. As one political scientist describes it, the frontier "is not merely dramatic imagery but a very real process, indeed, the basic socio-technical process that informs the American experience."[28]

Our language—our talking and our documents—bears the palimpsests of the idiom of crisis and frontier. They form part of the many-colored weave of archival discourse. As I will soon show, neither the Society nor the profession has been immune to the seemingly intrinsic climate of crisis; nor to the frontier myth's dramas of newness (innovation) and renovation; or nostalgia (resurrection of a purer, idealized past); or to the rhetoric of risk (embracing opportunity, the unknown, the uncharted—undocumented—and unpredictability); or the anticipation of loss.

Our crisis of representation, as we shall see, has arguably taken shape over the course of the last seventy-five years in the myriad forms of technological mediation and production that have settled among us, a realm of intangible, virtual, and symbolic (coded) presences and absences to each other. The new technology has put more information at our fingertips and, more significantly, put more people at our fingertips, so to speak, than ever before. We have little inkling, however, of what this new realm of representation has in store for us, for our relationships with each other, and for what will become of our relationships with the past and the future. The delineation of our spatial and temporal frontiers is evident in the SAA's negotiation of its professional borders, in its positioning(s) in the work culture, in its grappling with the nature of the records in archivists' care, and in the anchoring of our working epistemologies. Time and again, we have revisited the contents of our knowledge and work, the consequences of our knowledge and work—and the absence thereof—for the evolution of America's past, present, and future.

### Time(s) of Crisis

The Society was born in 1936, during a time of crisis that is also ours. It is fitting, therefore, to return to that part of our present condition.[29] In fact, our own experience bears a marked resemblance to the 1930s. To some observers,

[27] For a comparable perspective on how the political, economic, and cultural climate of the 1930s continues to influence the field of American studies, see George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[28] Daniel Elazar, *The Closing of the Metropolitan Frontier: Cities of the Prairies Revisited* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 53.

[29] Of course, crisis has characterized other long periods. Perhaps the most prominent example is the long-debated and discussed seventeenth-century European crisis.

that time seems more current today than it often did to those intervening generations between the thirties and ours. The New Deal has been constantly invoked in recent political debates; scholars, issue experts, and politicians repeatedly clash over its legacy and return to that time to find parallels and differences, to hail the continuing relevance of Franklin D. Roosevelt's policies for dealing with our own troubles, or to repudiate and dismantle FDR's antidemocratic "socialist" policies and liberal "big government" programs to restore America (and its government in particular) to its supposed authentic, pre–New Deal condition.[30]

Historical analogies and comparisons always carry risk but one cannot help but note that the misfortunes and cultural developments that befell the generation of the 1930s resonate with our own recent experience. Financial collapse, then and now, threw thousands of families out of their homes, out of work, and into destitution; though more drawn out, the Dust Bowl devastated peoples' lives on a scale comparable to Katrina. At the same time, increased social tension, the rhetoric of class, and ideological divisiveness crept into political discourse. Social observers of the time alternately expressed ambivalence and enthusiasm about the new technologies that were rapidly populating homes and workplaces.[31] Americans were also experiencing on many levels a technology-induced crisis of representation as a steady stream of new media and communications inventions entered the marketplace. Finally, around this time,

[30] The flood of current publications and commentary returning to FDR, the New Deal, the Great Depression, and "liberalism" of the 1930s in venues ranging from academic works to pulp Internet sites makes it clear that the thirties have formed major battlefronts in our own politics. On the continuing political and economic relevance of FDR and the New Deal in the decades subsequent to the 1930s right up to the present, see, for example, William Leuchtenberg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to George Bush* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 236–90; Burton Folsom, *New Deal or Raw Deal? How FDR's Economic Legacy Has Damaged America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009); Michael Bernstein, "The Great Depression as Historical Problem," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 3–10. Susan Jacoby suggests that the New Deal era was more relevant than the sixties during the Bush, senior, years in *The Age of American Unreason* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 181. Similarly, discussing the legacy of the 1930s, David Nichols Eldridge argues that interest in the 1930s waned in succeeding decades until well into the 1960s in *American Culture in the 1930s* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 189–90. Theodore Rosenof argues that the economic crisis of the 1930s only papered over systemic issues, which accounts for the economic crises into which the country has been periodically plunged since that time in *Economics in the Long Run: New Deal Theorists and Their Legacies, 1933–1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). On the relevance of the thirties today and the disconnection between widespread poverty and emerging consumerism, between harsh economic realities and the age's often-mentioned optimism, see Rita Bernard, *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathaniel West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3. In Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), the essays provide a political autopsy of the New Deal by documenting the disruption of the regional political alignments that sustained its legacy until the last quarter of the twentieth century.

[31] In 1932, the renowned industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes thought that Americans were not yet "at ease" with the machine, owing to the speed with which the Industrial Revolution had changed everyday life. Total embrace of the machine would only occur when "the person who would use a machine must be imbued with the spirit of the machine." Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 4.

"information" began to acquire the status of something like an element in the periodic table. The Information Age may well have begun hundreds of years before. However, SAA came along at a point during the Information Age when, as if by some socio-alchemical process, "information" was discovered to be a ubiquitous natural phenomenon of existential importance, one, also, whose "volume," "behavior," and "human use" and meaning were becoming as amenable to scientific observation, description, measurement, and management as any natural phenomenon (as Heidegger would soon observe).[32]

Notwithstanding such auspicious beginnings as the army of archival workers hired to identify and inventory the nation's documentary heritage under the New Deal's Works Progress Administration and the founding of the National Archives, members of the Society have felt themselves to be in a state of crisis from the beginning, chronically plagued by doubts about the Society and the profession's current position and about what the future holds.[33] As a result of this concern, earlier generations of the SAA were impelled to commemorate us long before our commemoration of them in this seventy-fifth anniversary year. This was apparent as early as December 1938, when, at a Society luncheon, Robert Binkley described archivists as men of the future rather than of the past, "professionally preoccupied with a more distant future than any other profession."[34] It is also identifiable in those many others who have since expressed concern about the profession's future identity and our sense of its natural and artificial, porous and closed frontiers[35] bordering on an ever-changing coterie of intimate and intimidating professional neighbors and partners. Another anticipatory commemoration is evident in a speech made by Ernst Posner in 1956. Expressing pride in his adopted American home, he announced the emergence of a new species, "the American archivist" and asked what his contemporaries had done for the generation of 2056. In his speech, Posner was

[32] The information as science trajectory can be traced back to the 1930s with the work of Claude Shannon, who made the link between information and the behavior of electricity. See Peter Ingwersen, "Information and Information Science," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, supplement 19, vol. 56, ed. Allen Kent (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1995), 139–40. The early direction and growth of information science in the first half of the twentieth century are also entangled with the growing stature of scientific knowledge and the information needs of science. Colin Burke, "History of Information Science," in *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, ed. Blaise Cronin et al. (Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 2007), 3–55.

[33] In a 2006 essay on a recent SAA strategic exercise, SAA president Richard Pearce-Moses and immediate past president Rand Jimerson reported that canvassed members had expressed "legitimate concerns" that struck a negative ["sky is falling"] tone. *Archival Outlook* (March/April 2006): 13.

[34] Robert Binkley, "Strategic Objectives in Archives Policy," *American Archivist* 2, no. 3 (July 1939): 162–68. Binkley, a historian and member of the founding generation, has received less attention than he deserves in the annals of the SAA, perhaps because he died prematurely at the age of forty-three in 1940. Among many other things, he was chairman of the Committee on Equipment and Mechanical Techniques. See the necrology in *American Archivist* 3, no. 3 (July 1940): 203.

[35] On the range of relationships shaped by different frontiers, see Michel Butor, *Frontiers* (n.p.: Summa Publications, 1989), 96–97.

concerned about the identity of future archivists. "What have we done to record, to analyze, and to describe the growth of our profession? What have we done to facilitate the work of the historian-archivist of the year 2056? Next to nothing, it seems to me…. If some of these suggestions can be carried out, the historian of the year 2056 will do a better job in defining the American archivist than your present speaker."[36]

Let us look at the concept of crisis. What does the term *crisis* encompass? Many scholars complain that overuse has quickly drained it, like so many other contemporary terms, of much of its specificity, and, therefore, of its power and usefulness.[37] Many other scholars, however, cannot resist addressing the concept, the history, and the significance of crisis. This is because some historians, social scientists, and cultural theorists cannot dismiss the observation that our generation is living under conditions of crisis. No small number of scholars trace the beginnings of our current condition of crisis back several decades—to the Information Revolution and beyond it to the entire last century. Focusing on the theme of crisis, one author writes, "Crisis is the most widely held assumption of twentieth century thought."[38] Others, taking an even longer view, claim that we have not moved out of the shadows of crisis since the early days of the Enlightenment and the Early Modern period.[39]

[36] Ernst Posner, "What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?," *American Archivist* 20, no. 1 (January 1957): 3–11. Among many other examples, see Theodore Schellenberg, "The Future of the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 22, no. 1 (January 1959): 49–58. Of course, the pages of the *American Archivist* and archival journals around the world are swollen with discussions of the identity of the archival profession. These concerns, reflected in surveys taken since the first decades of the Society's existence, in the creation of various SAA committees, and in many articles in the *American Archivist*, range from directions in education, to surveys on the demographics and social make-up of the profession, to the need for youth and diversity, to the recent relationship between archives as a growing academic discipline and as a profession. A valuable discussion on archivists and the sociology of professionalism is Richard Cox, "Professionalism and Archivists in the U.S.," *American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 229–47.

[37] Jacques Derrida might have described this as a lack of a lack of meaning.

[38] Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 113.

[39] Robert J. S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte, *Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), chap. 2. See also, Jameson, *Postmodernism*, xii; Jim Davis, Thomas Hirschl, and Michael Stack, eds., *Cutting Edge: Technology, Information Capitalism, and Social Revolution* (London: Verso, 1997); Thomas Streeter, *The Net Effect: Romanticism, Capitalism, and the Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 39.

Crisis consciousness and crisis rhetoric, for example, apparently form a general undercurrent of the modern novel.[40] The late Reinhardt Koselleck argued almost thirty years ago that we today are living out a late stage of a still-unfolding European history: "Europe's history has broadened; it has become world history and will run its course as that, having allowed the whole world to drift into a state of permanent crisis…in which 'history has overflowed the banks of tradition and inundated all boundaries.'"[41] And, finally, while our bookstores, libraries, and airports are packed with positive, upbeat works on the approaching information utopia,[42] others argue that nothing fundamental has changed: the Information Age is merely the most recent stage in an era of chronic, though by no means necessarily grave, crisis characteristic of a highly

[40] The Early Modern period, for example, was a time of European projects that cast a giant imperial shadow over vast stretches of the world beyond the continent. Simultaneously, Europeans also sought to incorporate vast stretches of the past into their present as well as dreaming of universal unified knowledge. The modern age has cultivated a sense of unceasing, irreversible change describing a unidirectional linear trajectory. One sees in the nineteenth century concern about the impossibility of escaping the ever-forward movement of history, whether powered by God, by Man, or by Technology, or by a combination. Indeed, one can posit that one of the essential purposes of the developing historical method was to take control of—to capture and colonize—vast stretches of time and to establish and explain its fits and rhythms in conjunction with the European dream of conquering the world's places. The arrangement and description of history—the capture of time and indeed temporality—has gone hand in hand with the conquest of space and the representation of geography. On George Eliot, see Eugene Hollahan, *Crisis Consciousness and the Novel* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Press, 1992), chap. 1.

[41] Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 5. (The original German edition was published in 1959.)

[42] The ubiquity of business and social utopian visions fueled by technological progress in the form of information technology, the Internet, social media, and cyberspace hardly needs to be established here. Richard Coyne takes aim at these information utopias and provides a critique of the overblown, expectant rhetoric of digital master narratives, the "hyperbole of IT commentary," the proclaimed new world order of unity through information, and the "well-worn paths of inquiry" behind these visions. He comments also on how contemporary digital narratives' touting of "total immersion environments, digital communities, and the world of the cyborg" and technologized net identities are having the effect of resurrecting romanticism in a way that undermines postmodernity's agenda in behalf of antipositivism, pluralism, and indeterminacy. Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narratives, Holism, and the Romance of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 14, chaps. 1 and 7. Maria and Hugh Letiche provide a sharp critique of the ascension of management, organizational theory, business's presumptive measurement/creation of the real, the patterning of information flows, and computers as "implemented embodiments of technoromanticism," or hypermodernism. Maria and Hugh Letiche, "Postmodernisms of Pregnancy," in *Interpreting the Maternal Organization*, ed. Heather Hopfl and Monika Kostera (London: Routledge, 2003), 164–65. On how microcomputers and personal and desktop devices represent an individualist romantic reaction to centralized control of mainframes and data services, see Streeter, *The Net Effect*, 88.

adaptable culture of capitalism.[43] Some historians refer to centuries of crisis.[44] Others discuss our current condition in terms of an ongoing epistemological crisis. Reinhart Koselleck, for example, suggests that the very structure of historiography, specifically its peculiar representation of temporality, renders all of history—all human experience—as intrinsically crisis-ridden. Others, like Richard Terdiman, see symptoms of crisis in the workings of modern memory, which he sees as one manifestation of the more fundamental, peculiarly modern, "meaning crisis," the "crisis of representation."[45] By some accounts, therefore, the crisis seems to be an autonomic condition of modernity, a compulsive, constant yearning for a "blank slate," the opening of a dizzyingly vast space of endless possibility, an ever-present opportunity to write over—to overwrite—past and prior knowledge. The crisis of modernity, as one scholar has written, "was precisely the belief in a 'new start' shorn of any remnant of the past,"[46] the shedding of history. "Modernity," more than merely referring to a particular era of history, connotes a particular *mentalité* that values continual transformation, discounts traditional knowledge, and accepts or tolerates the anxiety that accompanies the pace of change, speeded-up experience, and succession of "revolutions" and crises that permeate all aspects of existence.

The origins of the current state of crisis are a point of discussion and debate, but what about the meaning of crisis? In its earliest incarnation, Hippocrates (460 B.C.–ca. 370 B.C.) used the term *crisis* to refer to a medical turning point when the course of a protracted fever or acute illness would result either in speedy recovery or rapid further deterioration. Both Aristotle and Plato conceived of crisis as a turning point in a fateful, seemingly preordained unfolding of events. Since then, the idea of acuteness has remained central to the meaning

[43] Some authors refer to information capitalism, knowledge capitalism, cognitive capitalism, and late capitalism. Most works on information capitalism fall into one of three categories: Some focus on how information technology infrastructures are catalysts for an unprecedented dynamism of capitalism, economic growth, and opportunity; others on electronic digital information itself as the latest stage and commodity in the evolution toward "late capitalism." Most recently, a number of works find continuities in the symbolic exchange value—money and promissory notes, for example—that are harbingers of the contemporary information economy.

[44] J. B. Shanks, "Crisis: A Useful Category of Post–Social Scientific Historical Analysis?," *American Historical Review* 113 (October 2008): 1090–99. This was one of four articles in a special forum on the seventeenth-century crisis. For a review of the historiography of crisis, see, in the same issue, Jonathan Dewald, "Crisis, Chronology, and the Shape of European Social History."

[45] Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 16. Matei Calinescu writes: "…both modernity and the avant-garde have displayed an extraordinary imagination of crisis; and they have jointly succeeded in creating a complex, often ironic and self-ironic sensitivity for crisis, which seems to be both their ultimate achievement and their nemesis." *Five Faces of Modernity*, 147.

Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 68; Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism.*

[46] John Roderick Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 10–12.

of crisis,[47] but the scope of its application has, of course, expanded to include cultural, social, political, economic, and intellectual processes.[48]

The concept of crisis has also been refined to refer to situations in which a particular community's authority, values, and material structures no longer provide the resources necessary to overcome current problems and difficulties. Indeed, harkening back to a Greek-like notion of tragedy as a species of predestination or fate, the very structures and engrained cultural predispositions that might have accounted for an institution's or a community's progress and prosperity eventually work to undermine its powers to continue to flourish. Thus, some modern ideas of crisis refer to systems whose condition has reached a point where they no longer seem to possess all the tools necessary to head off structural failure—as if forces responsible for the community's enduring integrity and prosperity rather than external forces eventually engender crisis conditions.[49]

Finally, as some scholars note, the notion of crisis can carry both a darker and a more positive meaning. It can be used to refer to a set of circumstances that portend dire decline and collapse, a descent into debilitation and destruction. Contemporaries may also misrecognize a glorious moment as a crisis, or mistake a "deformity" as a moment that "wears the radiant guise of divine beauty."[50] Or the notion of crisis can be used to explain a transitional feverbreaking followed by the restoration and even improvement of health, "a chance to retool," as Thomas Kuhn puts it, a moment leading to opportunities to achieve progress.[51]

It is plausible to argue that every age—including the 1930s—has had to grapple with its own crises of representation, what one might call its own

[47] In *Felix Holt* (1866), George Eliot has one character hearing talk of social crisis as the "concussion of that great noun."

[48] In the seventeenth century, for example, crisis commonly referred to a social phenomenon—an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending, especially one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome, a financial crisis. In sum, this lexicographic data documents the simultaneous birth in the seventeenth century of a new scientific conception of state, society, and politics, and a new terminological understanding of crisis as a technical concept within this new social scientific framework. Further evidence for this genealogy is found in the lexicographic history of specific kinds of crisis, such as "ministerial crisis" or "dynastic crisis." By the eighteenth century, the medical sense had become metaphorical—used to refer to social conditions and institutions. See Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*, 14.

[49] Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), part 1. The same ideas can be found in Hauke Brunkhorst, "Crisis," in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*, ed. William Outhwaite (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 131.

[50] Marshall Brown, *Turning Points: Essays in the History of Cultural Expression* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

[51] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the emergence of professional crisis and various accommodations or repudiations of existing paradigms and theories.

particular immersion in virtuality.[52] Over the course of history, archives have variously assumed one of the many social roles involved in determining—or at least negotiating—what paths lead toward and away from the authentic, the real, and the true as well as the symbolic and the virtual. Indeed, with each "re-technologization," re-mediation, or recuperation of information, and with each record-making, re-making, and archival preservation come re-presentations, recurrences, and repetitions of the world. During the 1920s and 1930s, at least, the distinction between artificiality, imitation, and authenticity arose as both a problem and a topic of fascination in peoples' lives. A heightened consciousness of the mediated quality of worldly experience resulting from the proliferation of new instrumentation and machinery, communication, and media technologies—and new institutions—seemed to demand a recalibration of a longstanding equilibrium between man and machine, between machine functions and human functions.[53] These new technologies—still often described as machines, contraptions, paraphernalia, or gadgets—were altering the

[52] For a cogent analysis of virtuality that helps to dispel the widespread belief that the experience is somehow exclusively and specifically related to late-twentieth-century Net technology, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life* (London: Routledge, 2002); Elizabeth Grosz, "Bergson, Deleuze, and the Becoming of Unbecoming," *Parallax* 11, no. 2 (2005): 4–13. Slavoj Zizek writes: "The so-called 'virtual communities' are not such a great revolution as it might appear. What impresses me is the extent to which these virtual phenomena enable us to discover to what extent our self has always been virtual. Even the most physical self experience has a symbolic, virtual element in it." Cited in Edward Miller, *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 183. This work offers an intriguing look at the materialization/dematerialization aspects of radio broadcasting and "broadcast disembodiment." Some technology scholars trace the beginnings of virtualization back to the 1930s, when the U.S. military developed flight simulators to train its pilots. Melanie Chan, "Embodiment, Perception and Virtual Reality," in *Cognitive Technology: Instruments of Mind*, ed. Meurig Beynon et al., proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Cognitive Technology, Coventry, U.K., 2001 (Berlin: Springer Verlag 2001), 84. See also, Martin Lister, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 34–35.

[53] According to Joel Dinerstein, in the 1930s, "African American artists integrated the speed, drive, precision, and rhythmic flow of factory work and modern cities into a nationally (and internationally) unifying cultural form: big-band swing." Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine*, 5.

prevailing differentiation between the original, natural, real, and genuine, and the synthetic, the copy, the imitation, and the simulation[54]—the prosthetic.[55]

[54] Especially for many rural Americans in the 1930s, the period's new technologies of representation and mediation represented an encroachment of the city, government, bureaucracy, and nationality on an existing locally constructed reality. The media technologies of these years might have been greeted as unsettling and unwelcome. Their relative invisibility—compared to machinery—seemed to increase the perception of media technology as a nefarious invasion of urban values into rural America; a creeping "metropolitanization" of the country, which, in turn, evoked reactions in the form of various pastoral representations of a fading rural culture of "island communities." One of the best sources on the impact of technology, mediation, and the crisis of representation on ordinary people in the 1930s is Jonathan Veitch, "Who Can We Shoot? The Crisis of Representation in the 1930s," in his *American Superrealism: Nathaniel West and the Politics of Representation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 1–11. See also, Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). On the relationship between the drive for authenticity and the search for "intense experience," the cult of risk-taking, and also the antimodern drive to preserve the possibility of "unmediated experience," from modernity, see R. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 119, 138.

Western films of the 1930s form another prominent locus of the authenticity crisis. Film scholars place these films into one of two categories: those that gesture toward historical factuality by offering stories that include reference to real historical figures and past events (A Westerns), and those far more numerous films (B Westerns) whose themes, plots, and props are more careless about contextual authenticity. Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 262–63. During the 1930s, too, the cult of authenticity and the documentary motive appeared in the Lomaxes' countrywide search for an authentic American folk tradition, for "actual folks," primitive people who had managed to avoid ruination—mediation—by (urban) manipulation, propaganda, and decadent values. Instead, to capture an authentic American record, they relied on the objective "recording machine," as they put it, as a "way to stick a pipeline right down into the heart of folks where they were and let them come on like they felt." Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), chaps. 2 and 3. More broadly, Lewis Mumford muses over the impact of new technology on social consciousness, the significance of machine copies, and the possibility of repetition in history. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Brace, Harcourt, and Company, 1934), chap. 5. He also latches onto the Weimar-developed concept of *sachlichkeit* to express the yearning for an unmediated, firsthand experience of what can be translated as "thingness." Orvill, *The Real Thing*, 176.

Finally, in the 1930s, documentary photography and filmmaking gained prominence. On the origins of the idea of *sachlichkeit*, its critique of industrial capitalism's obsession with superficial aesthetic product variation and "weightlessness," and the search for a new "matter-of-factness," see Frank Trommler, "The Creation of a Culture of Sachlichkeit," in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 477. According to Astrid Boger, during the 1930s, "an event slowly ceased to be considered 'true' if no picture of it were made and circulated in the newspapers within a few hours after it took place," a harbinger of the persuasiveness of television technology. Astrid Boger, *Peoples' Lives, Public Images: The New Deal Documentary Aesthetic* (n.p.: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001), 143–44. Filmmakers, especially those situated on the political left, used the tools of their trade to reveal and dramatize the harsh realities of life for many depression-era Americans. One historian claims that the 1930s documentary film has bequeathed to us an enduring legacy of crisis: "the supposedly separate spheres of documentary, particularly political documentary, and fiction, especially Hollywood's dream-machine, commingled during the 1930s to create the makings of a mass-cultural public sphere in which certain icons of the nation—usually of the nation in crisis—converged and took on meanings that still resonate for us today." Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994), 76. (On page 13, Rabinowitz identifies three moments of crisis in the twentieth century—the 1930s, the 1960s–1970s, and the 1980s to the present).

[55] In one of many articles from the 1930s on the technology behind the making of films, *Popular Mechanics* offered a feature on "Weather Made-To-Order for the Movies," which describes first, the "unreliability of nature" for the making of weather for film. It points out how certain "artificial effects" tools are as much a part of "picture-making" as the camera, "and in most instances [were] better than the real and more convincing on the screen." *Popular Mechanics*, November 1936, 706–7. Another example is "Secrets of the Movie Ships," *Popular Mechanics*, July 1936, 74–75. One gets the impression from these pieces that the achievement of superior reality effects required ever-increasing technological artifice, in effect, a distancing from reality to achieve realism.

It is also worthwhile putting these stateside experiences in a larger context. In the period when the Society of American Archivists emerged, the shadow of crisis lurked in the thought of a number of European thinkers contemporary with the Society's founders. Several European intellectuals of the time (SAA seemed well attuned to the European archival world in those days), roughly contemporaries of many of the generation of the SAA's founders,[56] demonstrated a prescience that we can now appreciate. The notion of being plugged in, online, connected, and part of a grid, for example, long predates the Internet and the World Wide Web.

If our generation is alternately perplexed and disconcerted and aroused (hyped-up) and fascinated by the omnipresence of information and other technologies in our lives, many of the generation of the 1920s and 1930s similarly experienced ambivalence and wonder toward the effects of science and mechanization on their sense of humanity and on the social order. As Thomas Streeter writes, radio was as "mind-blowing" for the 1920s generation as the Internet has been today.[57] One historian characterizes the crisis of this period as an anxious effort of that generation to find a new idea of itself and the world, a frantic effort to structure a collective consciousness from which coherent values could emerge from the midst of chaos and a frenzy of competing visions.[58]

German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche had already sensed what was coming. The thinkers of the early twentieth century were undoubtedly well aware of Nietzsche's reading of modern culture, including his famous pronouncements on the death of God.[59] Rather than turning upward to the heavens for guidance, modern people increasingly knelt before their own inventions. As he dramatized it in the parable of the Madman in *The Gay Science*, the crowd would deem anyone seen consulting God for help on this Earth in the modern scientific age as a "madman."[60]

Martin Heidegger later wrote something comparable in a very different way. In his *Man and the World Picture* (included as a section of *The Question Concerning Technology*), he observes that humans no longer stood outside or above the world they beheld, for they had become a part of it—just another one

[56] Solon Buck (1884–1962), Margaret Cross Norton (1891–1984), Robert Binkley (1897–1940), Waldo Gifford Leland (1879–1966), Albert Ray Newsome (1894–1951), Ruth Blair (1889–1974), Ernst Posner (1892–1980), Luther Harris Evans (1902–1981), and Philip Brooks (1906 [?]–1977), to name a few.

[57] Streeter, *The Net Effect*, 3. Streeter emphasizes the parallels between the 1920s and the 1990s.

[58] Anthony Francis Caputi, *Pirandello and the Crisis of Modern Consciousness* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 17. One source, for example, states that a crisis always affects the "self-understanding and self-definition of actors, systems or spheres, since they always affect their 'identity,' that is, a life or a life situation *as a whole*." Brunkhorst, "Crisis," 131.

[59] Nietzsche actually seems to suggest not that God is dead, but that "He" is dying, and that "Man," as he would have put it, is increasingly putting himself in God's place.

[60] Frederich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), section 125.

of its countless scientifically observable worldly phenomena.[61] "Modernity," as one author describes Heidegger's thinking on the subject, "is the total mobilization of the world by humans who are themselves mobilized in the process."[62] Moreover, Heidegger also became preoccupied with the loss of authenticity in the face of an age dominated by science and technology. Man no longer merely harnessed nature's power but transformed nature—denaturalizing the natural—rendering it a mere component of man-built infrastructures. For example, the power plant had not been built into the Rhine River; instead the river had been dammed and built into a nearby "hydroelectric plant" where "machines… whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity."[63]

In the early 1930s, shortly after the Nazis' rise to power but before the worst began, Walter Benjamin sensed that fundamental, ground-shifting changes were happening amid the horrific politics he was witnessing. Beneath the unfolding political tragedy he discerned an epochal upheaval in the organization of the human sensorium, in the very structure of human perception and experience of the world. The political experiences of the generation of 1914, he was convinced, were also grounded in the vertiginous, disorienting acceleration of the pace of social and technological change. The "structure of experience has changed," Benjamin writes, and he cites Paul Valéry's observation that

[61] "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word 'picture' [*Bild*] now means the structured image [*Gebild*] that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before . . . . Understood in an essential way 'world picture' does not mean 'picture of the world' but, rather, the world grasped as picture. Beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that being is first and only being insofar as it is set in place by representing-producing [*vorstellend-herstellenden*] humanity, " which seems to corroborate Astrid Boger's observation about the reality-affirming power of visual media in the 1930s. (See note 54.) In distinctively Nietzchean refrain of *The Gay Science*, Walter Benjamin writes: "Mankind which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian Gods, now is one for itself," a sentiment Nietzsche would have understood. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," reprinted in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2008), 251.

[62] Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge: 2004), 21.

[63] In fact, Heidegger is commonly referred to as the twentieth century's philosopher of authenticity (and Kierkegaard, as the first philosopher of authenticity). He despaired at the disappearance of authentic being and authentic experience, as science and technology seemed ubiquitous in every corner of modern life. For Heidegger, technology seemed to intervene between humans and access to the real, to the human experiencing of the world. Through technology, everything was becoming transformed into mere resource and representation. On hydroelectricity, see Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 16. As Adam Sharr reveals in his remarkable study, *Heidegger's Hut,* the philosopher's timber-shingled cabin retreat (which had no running water and, at least for the first decade, no electricity) may have represented an attempt to escape the march of technological conquest and a struggle to mediate, so to speak, between a traditional provincialism and the encroachment of a technologically spawned cosmopolitanism. Adam Scharr explains how Heidegger's hut might represent a place of contemplative isolation and a struggle against the vectors of worldly encroachment and implication, what the Internet seems to represent. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006). And, finally, Heidegger, too, wrote about conquest.

"for the past twenty years, neither matter, nor space, nor time have been what they had been since time immemorial."[64]

Finally, Benjamin was also intrigued by the origins of the human drive to observe and produce mimetic behavior, by the superior capacity of humans to produce copies of things. For Benjamin, the notion of authenticity was becoming obsolete. It was disappearing under a newfound technological or mechanical ability to make—to manufacture—massive copies of original, especially artistic, creations. The time and space of creation, the "aura" of agedness, originality, and patina was fast becoming a thing of the past; the path or chronology of "that which withers in the age of mechanical production" was disappearing. Finally, anticipating the cyber-reality of the online, screen-mediated life we live today, he observed a changing spatial sensibility in the contemporary desire "to bring things 'closer' to the masses—spatially and humanly." Thus, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."[65] This new power to stay at home while also roaming the outside world was part of the gradual and arguably continuing outing of the family home, the bastion of bourgeois seclusion and privacy, by media and communication technologies.[66]

No less prophetic during this period was the French poet and cultural critic Paul Valéry. Where Heidegger wrote of the "conquest of the world picture," Valéry published a short article tellingly entitled *The Conquest of Ubiquity (La Conquête de l'Ubiquité)*. In it, Valéry foresees online, plugged-in social existence. Written in 1928, it anticipates our strangely juxtaposed, screened-in, "where do you want to go today" existence: "Works will achieve a sort of ubiquity" and obey our call throughout time. They will no longer remain to themselves ("*seules dans elles meme*"), but become available everywhere to everyone all the time. "Like water or gas, like electricity, *arriving at our homes from afar* in response to our every need without much effort, so our homes will be supplied with auditory and visual images, images which will be born and disappear with the merest gesture. In addition, these images will be available for individuals at a time of their choosing rather than being beholden to those *who supply them.*"[67] (Italics added.)

Along with other contemporaries, then, Valéry wonders about the new power of technology, particularly its communicative mediating possibilities. Finally, Valéry observes that not just the arts but also the very notions of matter,

[64] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," 226.

[65] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," 232.

[66] (Finally, as an aside it is interesting to note that the reproductive capacity, Benjamin observes, has blurred the distinction between readers and writers, since now there are outlets for almost everyone to put something in print. This is perhaps the dawning of the age of the writer, or reader as writer.)

[67] Paul Valéry, cited in Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production," 228.

space, and time had radically changed over the previous twenty years; they were no longer what they always seemed to have been. Not only the arts but also the nature of invention itself was undergoing a transformation.[68]

More important than the military crisis or the economic crisis, Valéry wrote in 1919, was "an intellectual crisis, which being more subtle and, by its nature, assuming the most deceptive appearances (since it takes place in the very realm of dissimulation) . . . will hardly allow us to grasp its true extent, its *phase*."[69]

### The Frontier

The concept of crisis and the phenomenon of the frontier share a potent manifold symbolism of change, hope, peril, departures, and arrivals. The multiple points of intersection between the experiences of crisis and the frontier cannot be overstated. By the time the Society came into being, the American frontier's disappearance was forty years in the past. Or so it seemed if one believed Frederick Jackson Turner's declaration in his 1893 classic, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*.[70] But there is a sense in which Turner

[68] Valéry, *The Conquest of Ubiquity*: "Il y a dans tous les arts une partie physique qui ne peut plus être regardée ni traitée comme naguère, qui ne peut pas être soustraite aux entreprises de la connaissance et de la puissance modernes. Ni la matière, ni l'espace, ni le temps ne sont depuis vingt ans ce qu'ils étaient depuis toujours. Il faut s'attendre que de si grandes nouveautés transforment toute la technique des arts, agissent par là sur l'invention elle-même, aillent peut-être jusqu'à modifier merveilleusement la notion même de l'art. Je ne sais si jamais philosophe a rêvé d'une société pour la distribution de Réalité Sensible, http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Valéry_paul/conquete_ubiguite/conquete_ubiquite.html. Electronic edition taken from reproduction of 1928 text in *Oeuvres, tome II, Pièces sur l'art* (Nrf, Gallimard, Bibl. de la Pléiade, 1960), 1283–87. First appeared in *De la Musique avant Toute Chose* (Paris: Éditions du Tambourinaire, 1928). Valéry's discussion of ubiquity brings to mind the contemporary drive for technological omnipresence in the phenomena of "ambient computing" and "ubiquitous computing." One might also mention Howard Mumford's various works. See Christopher May, "The Information Society as Mega-Machine. The Continuing Relevance of Lewis Mumford," *Information, Communication and Society* 3, no. 2 (2000): 241–65, and E. M. Forster's description of a world of isolated individuals each establishing relationships with "the machine" in his 1909 essay "The Machine Stops," http://www.scribd.com/doc/47689909/E-M-Forster, accessed 8 July 2011. See also, Jacques Ellul's *La Technique ou L'Enjeu du Siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954). Meanwhile, in the year of the SAA's establishment, Alan Turing published his essay, "On Computable Numbers with an Application to the *Entscheidingsprobleme*," the legendary founding document of modern computation. *Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society* 2 no. 42 (1936): 230–65.

[69] "…la crise intellectuelle, plus subtile, et qui, par sa nature même, prend les apparences les plus trompeuses (puisqu'elle se passé dans le royaume même de la dissimulation), cette crise laisse difficilement saisir son véritable point, sa *phase*." Paul Valéry, *The Crisis of the Mind (La Crise de L'Esprit)*. "The Crisis of the Mind" was written at the request of John Middleton Murray. It originally appeared in English, in two parts, in *The Athenaeum* (London), 11 April and 2 May 1919. The French text was published in the same year in the August number of *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise*, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, vol. 10, History and Politics*, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), 23–36.

[70] It was almost exactly one hundred years later, in 1990, that John Perry Barlow declared the opening of an "electronic frontier" and established the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a body that embodies the spirit of freedom and the protection of freedom in a territory called cyberspace. About the same time, Howard Rheingold came out with *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993.)

was wrong. The frontier was not gone; the frontier was being reinvented for it turns out to have been renewable, though perhaps not in the way Turner could have imagined. In fact, for Turner, this had been the frontier's essential virtue, it was continually beginning over and over again, a "perennial rebirth" that offered fresh opportunities for new beginnings.[71] Turner's thesis encapsulates what many regard as America's essential and exceptional national experience:

> Americans are a people of departures, not arrivals. To reach one place is simply to catch sight of a new Beyond. Our basic myth is that of the frontier. Our hero is the frontiersman. To become urban is to break the spirit of man.[72]

Decades before the 1930s, the United States seemed to have exhausted its boundless western frontier, a seemingly blank canvas consisting of vast stretches of unsettled "virgin" land, of open spaces that proffered new beginnings, endless possibility, and national replenishment. As Americans filled the West, the West stoked the national imagination. Long after Turner's rural frontier had disappeared, the Great West kept on coming back.[73] If the 1930s generation was given to lamenting the frontier's disappearance, new forms of the frontier were also beginning to replace it—new frontiers of the imagination, vast landscapes

[71] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 2–3. For example, 1930s historian Percy Boynton writes, "Time, the subtle thief, had stolen on the country, and the discovery that its youth is gone has turned it to retrospection as well as to introspection and circumspection." For Boynton, the most significant revelation of Turner's book is his focus on the "experience of possessing and occupying and transforming a frontier. "Out of the West," he writes farther on, "are still to come the essentially American contributions to the life of the twentieth century. It is a comfortable thought even though, mothered by the history of the frontier, it seems so clearly fathered by a wish." Percy Boynton, *The Rediscovery of the Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), xi, 24. Others similarly believe that the exhaustion of farmland and the rise of an urban-commercial culture signaled the disappearance of a youthful frontier era and the rise of a "mature" economy. David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 374. Looking back, America awoke to find itself transformed into adulthood. By other accounts, the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression represented a late stage in the disappearance of the American frontier. By the 1920s, more than half of Americans made their homes in the country's urban centers. One author in Hoover's landmark 1933 commissioned research study, *Recent Social Trends,* observes how social and economic forces "have hurried us dizzily away from the days of the frontier into a whirl of modernisms which almost passes belief."

[72] Garry Wills cited in John Agnew and Joanne Sharp, "America, Frontier Nation: From Abstract Space to Worldly Place," in *American Space/American Place: Geographies of the Contemporary United States,* ed. John Agnew and Joanne Sharp (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 82. Similarly, John Ramage writes: "…[W]hatever mode it takes the American dream remains more a mode of transportation than a destination. Who or what we might be when and if we arrive remains unclear." John Ramage, *Twentieth Century American Success Rhetoric: How To Construct a Suitable Self* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 1. Since the 1980s, historians have been critically re-examining the more unseemly phenomena of conquest and violence underlying the more familiar national saga of the frontier as a stage of heroic struggle for life, liberty, and individuality against various inimical forces. Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (London: W.W. Norton, 1987).

[73] Apparently, the frontier was alive and well in Montana. As it was put in the first issue of *Life* magazine, "The frontier has returned to the cow country. But not the cows. In fact, Franklin Roosevelt has a wild west," *Life,* 23 November 1936, 8–9.

of seemingly endless, indeed, infinite possibility.[74] Increasingly, Americans were experiencing the world as an electronic realm of powerful and omnipresent media and communication technologies in filmmaking, newsreels, telephones, radio broadcasting, and, imminently, television. Indeed, new media and technology frontiers were deployed to represent and resuscitate the old, exhausted frontier.

All of this was made possible, however, by one of the most powerful, enduring, and now quite invisible phenomena to have entered our lives—electrification. During this period, electricity attained the status of a social and economic, and at times, magical, infrastructure. With its unmatchable, unimaginable speed, eerie invisibility, and almost preternaturally noiseless movement and causality, as well as its limitless reach, electrification underwrote the shaping of a new reality.[75] Electrification laid the foundation for our own experiencing of the world as information, and information as "infrastructured" and "networked" and, indeed, as screened/windowed.[76]

By the time the Society appeared, electricity had become a prime mover for the re-imagination of neighborhood, community, and nation (and, indeed, technology.) Far-flung "electrical grids" and "networks" had begun to deliver widely affordable power from central power stations and transmission lines. Within a decade or so, as Benjamin and Valéry had foreseen, millions of public places and private homes—mostly urban until the Rural Electrification

[74] On the themes of "inexhaustible possibility," "eternal nows," "everlasting mornings," and new frontiers in American history and culture, see Terence Martin, *Parables of Possibility: The American Need for Beginnings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 168. Daniel Elazar has identified three successive frontier experiences: the rural-land frontier, the urban-industrial frontier, and the electronic-petrochemical-airplane frontier in *The Closing of the Metropolitan Frontier*, 59.

[75] On how by the late 1920s the country had become "an energy-intensive society" wrapped in an "invisible world of energy," see H. C. Platt, *The Electrical City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 236. Henry Adams could understand the noise coming from the steam engine but could not comprehend the gentle hum of a dynamo "that would not wake a sleeping baby." Dennis Jerz, *Technology in American Drama, 1920–1950: Soul and Society in the Age of the Machine* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), 36, 60. The popular fascination with the invisibility of electricity has been traced back to the age of American Romanticism when literary figures like Herman Melville and Walt Whitman wrote of "life-force," "the electrical chain wherewith we are darkly bound," and the "non-mechanical, instantaneous, and untraceable pathway thought takes." Cited in Paul Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism: Electricity and American Nationalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 70–78. See also, Geoffrey Batchen, "Electricity Made Visible," in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, ed. Wendy Hi Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 27–44.

[76] Margaret Graham, "The Threshold of the Information Age: Radio, Television, and Motion Pictures Mobilize the Nation," in *A Nation Transformed By Information: How Information Shaped the United States,* ed. Alfred Chandler and James Cortada (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137–76.

Administration was created in 1935—were plugged in, networked[77] as it were, by electrification.[78] With the wiring of homes came an explosion in the availability and promotion of electrical domestic appliances.[79]

In the age of the New Deal, therefore, electrification gave rise to what might be called "The New Real." The two became increasingly intertwined. The rise of a multiplicity of communication, media, and information technologies added new dimensions and levels of complexity to the notion of the real. President Roosevelt's fireside radio chats represented, among other things, an attempt to bridge the distance between the disembodied virtual voice of a Washington-based president and political establishment and a citizenry scattered across a continent; radio as fireplace, as a space drawing and enveloping listeners in a reassuring world of national "conversation," warmth, comfort, security, and emotional intimacy.[80] Movies, cinema, radio, cheap novels, magazines, and myriad other storytelling venues, including, soon, television, delivered temporary relief from the tedium, hardship, and stress of urban living and industrial work. From point-to-point communication arose the notion of the *broadcast* transmission of music, lectures, news, and sports, a forerunner of the World Wide Web and broadband. By the thirties, the idea of radio *networks* had appeared, and stations could broadcast the same content simultaneously across

[77] The *Online Etymology Dictionary* has this to say about the term *network*: " 'net-like arrangement of threads, wires, etc.,' 1560, from *net* (n.) + *work* (n.). Extended sense of 'any complex, interlocking system' is from 1839 (orig. in ref. to transport by rivers, canals, and railways). Meaning 'broadcasting system of multiple transmitters' is from 1914; sense of 'interconnected group of people' is from 1947. The verb, in ref. to computers, is from 1972; in ref. to persons, it is attested from 1980s," http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=n&p=6, accessed November 2010.

[78] David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); Ronald Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For the broader context, see Thomas Parke Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). In the fifth chapter of *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford focuses on the history and significance of "electricity," "dynamos," and "energy" in the "neotechnic phase." Reminiscent of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, one character in Eugene O'Neill's 1929 play, *Dynamo*, captures an undoubtedly common contemporary sentiment. He has the principal character, Reuben Light, declare, "There is no God! No God but electricity!," and the rest of the play contains numerous similar declarations. Robert Dowling, *Critical Companion to Eugene O'Neill: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 134–35. Finally, a brief scan of thirties magazines like *Popular Mechanics* shows how each month new inventions related either to electricity, automobiles, and transportation in general, or to how radios and filmmaking were transforming reality— blurring the line between *the real* and *realism*.

[79] By 1940, the proportion of urban dwellings with electricity had grown to 91 percent while only one-third of rural dwellings had been wired. David Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920s and 1930s: Years of Promise and Pain* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 56.

[80] Worries about real and authentic self-presentation surfaced in the 1936 presidential election. Alf Landon, FDR's Republican opponent, who presented himself as an "everyday American," stated, "It is an extremely difficult thing to be yourself in a position like mine, but I have not stepped out of character." Landon apparently believed that the very flatness of his campaign presentation would stand him in good stead as a virtue—authenticity—that would attract support from the people. Arthur Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval, 1935–1936: The Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Mariner Publishers, 2003), 602. On 1930s radio and the disembodied voice, see Miller, *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio*.

a *network* of widely separated stations to urban and, perhaps most usefully, rural homes.[81]

In the 1960s, the frontier continued to provide a powerful motif in the shaping of stories. President Kennedy's advisors came up with an image of the "new frontier,"[82] and starting in the 1960s, Vietnam bore the marks of another "frontier war."[83] Even in the strife-ridden inner cities of the 1960s, Lyndon Johnson found the Great Society's frontier spirit: "Our society will never be great until our cities are great. Today the frontier of the imagination and innovation is inside those cities and not beyond their borders."[84] Even as President Johnson spoke these words, and before Ronald Reagan conjured his own brand of "frontiersmanship,"[85] the image momentously emerged in the form of an

[81] Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval,* 61. As we have seen, in his 1934 work, *Technics and Civilization,* Lewis Mumford dwells at length on the power of new media/communications technologies in what he calls the "neotechnic phase" of civilization.

[82] Most often associated with the Kennedy presidency, the phrase "new frontier" seems to have made its earliest appearance in 1934 as the title of a book by Henry Wallace, FDR's secretary of agriculture. Advisors to President Kennedy apparently coined the "new frontier" phrase during the 1960 presidential campaign. In Los Angeles, Kennedy declared, "For I stand tonight facing west on what was *once* the last frontier.… [W]e stand on the edge of a new frontier, the edge of the 1960s." Cited in Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 459.

The phrase was intended to conjure, among other things, not only the vast territories of outer space but also those regions of the Cold War world that were perceived to welcome United States democracy and prosperity. However, it also eyed another "vast and complex territory": As Valéry and Benjamin foresaw, Americans—a majority of them now—viewed "images that emanated from television sets, embedding themselves in a uniquely profound way in individual consciousnesses through their ubiquity, repetition, and transmission, into the intimacy of the home." Elizabeth Ferrer, foreword to *The New Frontier: Art and Television, 1960–1965*, by John Alan Farmer (Austin, Tex.: Austin Museum of Art, 2000), 11.

[83] Milton Bates, *The Wars We Took to Viet Nam: Cultural Conflict and Storytelling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 1.

[84] Remarks at the University of Michigan, 22 May 1964. On the reincarnation of the frontier in the modern city, see also Daniel Judah Elazar, *The Metropolitan Frontier and American Politics: Cities of the Prairie,* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003) and Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). On the current use of frontier imagery ("profit frontier," "investment frontier") to address the phenomenon of constantly shifting and expanding real estate development (gentrification) at the rim of dangerous inner city zones, see Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[85] In July 1982, Reagan invoked the frontier: "There are those who thought the closing of the western frontier marked an end to America's greatest period of vitality. Yet we're crossing new frontiers every day." Republicans have no monopoly on frontier spin, as Michael Dukakis invoked the "next frontier" in his 1988 presidential campaign bid. In Richard Slatta, ed., *The Mythical West: An Encyclopedia of Legend, Lore, and Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2001), 278. Reagan's horseback riding and George W. Bush's cowboy White House and frequent and much-publicized returns to his Texas ranch seemed to sustain the myth of the open spaces and the frontier. On the frontier as recent political style revival, see James Combs, *The Reagan Range: The Nostalgic Myth in American Politics* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993); John Tirman, "The Future of the American Frontier: Can One of Our Most Enduring National Myths, Much in Evidence in the Recent Presidential Campaign, Be Reinvented Yet Again?," *American Scholar* 78, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 30. For one historian, the current American frontier imagery embodies the long-ascendant and final triumph of Texas values in American politics. James McEnteer, *Deep in the Heart of Texas: The Texas Tendency in American Politics* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

adoption of the "High Frontier" lobbyists' promotion of what eventually took shape as the Strategic Defense Initiative.

In 2011, we know that the frontier is not gone, though it may have moved. By the 1990s, the frontiers of the West, Hollywood, and "outer space" have moved to yet another space—cyberspace. Now, enemies like "Indians," Russians, natural hazards, and alien natural environments have been replaced by lawless hackers, malware, bugs and viruses, spyware, electrical crashes and power failures,[86] interoperability barriers, attacks on intellectual property, and, for some, state laws and government regulation. We have entered upon an era of "electronic frontiers" and digital pioneer exploration. As Stephen Graham suggests, a seemingly limitless, freedom-bestowing (immaterial) frontier is enabling individuals once more to escape the constraints imposed by an old world, a world of hard physical objects and "real" property.[87]

All of the technology that connects us today would surely amaze the founding generation were they here to see it. However, much would be familiar: keyboards were there; screens were coming into prominence; the transmission and reproduction of sound and sights and networking phenomena were already emerging in electrification and through film, television, and radio. In addition, that generation was among the first to be wired at home. So, one can doubt that their sense of amazement would last very long. As moderns, they soon became attuned and habituated to the continual search for new speed in media and communications technologies, and the pace of invention and change. Wave upon wave of technological breakthroughs crashed upon their shores as much as upon ours. This is quite apparent, as we shall see, in the earliest pages of the SAA's official journal, the *American Archivist*.

Though there isn't space to explore each of them in detail here, it is worth mentioning several predominant Information Age drivers or obsessions to which each generation of SAA in turn has succumbed. These include the explosive growth of information; the velocity of communications; the proliferating networks of communications possibilities without horizons; the miniaturization of our devices; the transformation of large masses of things into virtually immaterial, intangible objects to the point of invisibility; and, finally,

[86] On the issue of electricity's continuing capacity to power the digital age, see Waller Boer, Scott Hassell, and Ben Vollaard, *Electricity Requirements for a Digital Society* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 2002).

[87] The number of publications on cyberspace as frontier could fill many large servers and databases. The earliest and best-known promoters of cyberspace as frontier are, as previously mentioned, John Perry Barlow, founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation in 1990 and Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*. For a convenient summary of the literature on cyberspace as frontier, and also as "wild West," see Alfred Yen, "Western Frontier or Feudal Society? Metaphors and Perceptions of Cyberspace," *Berkeley Technology Law Review* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 1207–63 and Stephen Graham, "The End of Geography or the Explosion of Place? Conceptualizing Space, Place, and Information Technology," in *Information Tectonics: Space, Place, and Technology in an Electronic Age*, ed. Kenneth Carey (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), 15.

the evolving flux between the symbolic and the real, between *realism* and *the real*.[88]

In 1936, the members of the SAA faced a major problem: The mounting volume of records reduced the researcher entering archives—the new National Archives, in particular—to someone like Alice in Wonderland. As Robert Binkley observed, "The bulk of the records of the Hundred Years' War between France and England was probably equaled every day in the conduct of the World War."[89] Along with the records of growing public institutions and private corporations and their bureaucracies, and the documentation uncovered by the recently established Historical Records Survey, the volume of records was becoming unmanageable, and almost unimaginable. Archivists and researchers felt overjoyed and overawed, empowered and overpowered, stimulated as well as agitated by the information before them. The National Archives, for example, appeared to present those entering its halls with a "vast profusion," "an infinite maze."

> So complicated has life become, so much more was being preserved, that archives were being hoisted on their own petard. How were historians to use the result, how are they to sit quietly, even in an air-conditioned room, and carefully examine and evaluate documents by the mile?[90]

For that generation, as for ours, miniaturization seemed like an attractive solution. Microfilm—for and against, reasoned and intuited—was among the most prominent topics of discussion. People accustomed to working with paper records and talking about archival economy found the shrinking, the "compression," of documents down to filmstrip size both practical and fascinating and, for some, vaguely unsettling. For that generation, microfilm was the IT frontier of the time; it was a giant leap for information storage and distribution, and for

[88] Several other well-known, long-standing issues might have been included—the crucial role of archival education and training; the rise of consumer culture in the first part of the twentieth century, from which the information professions have by no means been spared; and an underlying theoretical tension between two ideals of archival representation—logical order and institutional order (provenance versus pertinence).

[89] Robert Binkley, "Strategic Objectives in Archival Policy," *American Archivist* 2, no. 3 (July 1939): 162.

[90] Roy F. Nichols, "Alice in Wonderland," *American Archivist* 3, no. 3 (July 1940): 149–58. Another archivist who later found Alice useful for discussing archives was Frederick Stielow, "The Impact of IT on Archival Theory: A Discourse on Automating Pedagogy," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 34 (Winter 1993): 48–65.

what would eventually be termed "memory."[91] One could squeeze boxes full of documents—an entire collection or series—onto a single microfilm reel small enough to fit into a container that was easily and cheaply deliverable anywhere in the country. As Paul Valéry had foreseen, and akin to Roosevelt's radio audiences, researchers no longer necessarily needed to leave their homes to come to the archives. Now, equipped with the constantly improving technology of microfilm readers, individuals could receive these practically imperceptible archives at home or "wherever you may be."[92] Though already around for many decades, in the 1930s, microfilm became a "*grande idée,*"[93] and its framing as an *information* technology began to take off, with the United States leading in innovations.

[91] There was high interest in microfilm at the International Exposition and the World Congress of Universal Documentation held in Paris in August 1937. The ambition was "to unite nations in peace and to celebrate the progress of Art and Science." It included two exhibits of microfilm applications, one in use at the Bibliotheque Nationale and the other at the University of Chicago. Pamela Spence Richards, *Scientific Information in Wartime: The Allied-German Rivalry, 1939–1945* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 15. However, the globalization of knowledge had been in the air for decades, and specialists in information such as Paul Otlet were emerging as its major developers.

In his justly famous 1945 essay, "As We May Think," Vannevar Bush identifies microfilm miniaturization as a crucial solution to the economics of information distribution. "Compression is important, however, when it comes to costs. The material for the microfilm Britannica would cost a nickel, and it could be mailed anywhere for a cent. What would it cost to print a million copies? To print a sheet of newspaper, in a large edition, costs a small fraction of a cent. The entire material of the Britannica in reduced microfilm form would go on a sheet eight and one-half by eleven inches. Once it is available, with the photographic reproduction methods of the future, duplicates in large quantities could probably be turned out for a cent apiece beyond the cost of materials." *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/3881/, accessed 8 July 2011. Readers of the *American Archivist* would have encountered Bush's work shortly after its publication. Vernon D. Tate, "Binkley to Bush," *American Archivist* 10, no. 3 (July 1947): 249–57. See also Murray G. Lawson, "The Machine Age in Historical Research," *American Archivist* 11, no. 2 (April 1948): 141–49. Lawson was inspired by Bush's "vision of the scholar of the future, wandering around a library with a small camera on his forehead, snapping pictures of the material pertinent to his investigations," 147.

[92] Nichols, "Alice in Wonderland," 152–53. H. G. Wells, speaking at a meeting of the recently formed Society of Documentation in 1937, imagined a "world brain," a system that would enable people all over the world to share information. Microfilm occupied a prominent place in his vision. It is worth citing Wells's speech at some length: "Few people as yet, outside the world of expert librarians and museum curators and so forth, know how manageable well-ordered facts can be made, however multitudinous, and how swiftly and completely even the rarest visions and the most recondite matters can be recalled, once they have been put in place in a well-ordered scheme of reference and reproduction. The American microfilm experts, even now, are making facsimiles of the rarest books, manuscripts, pictures and specimens, which can then be made easily accessible upon the library screen. By means of the microfilm, the rarest and most intricate documents and articles can be studied now at first hand, simultaneously in a score of projection rooms. There is no practical obstacle whatever now to the creation of an efficient index to *all* human knowledge, ideas and achievements, to the creation, that is, of a complete planetary memory for all mankind. And not simply an index; the direct reproduction of the thing itself can be summoned to any properly prepared spot. A microfilm, coloured where necessary, occupying an inch or so of space and weighing little more than a letter, can be duplicated from the records and sent anywhere, and thrown enlarged upon the screen so that the student may study it in every detail." "The World Brain: The Idea of a Permanent World Encyclopedia," August 1937, https://sherlock.ischool.berkeley.edu/wells/world_brain.html, accessed 13 September 2011.

[93] Irene S. Farkas-Conn, *The Beginnings and Early Development of the American Documentation Institute—American Society for Information Science* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 16.

No technology stands alone. The construction of a technology's identity takes place not only in a particular social context but also in a technological matrix. It was then, too, that some contemporary sources considered microfilm a multimedia phenomenon (text on film) whose significance surpassed the invention of the printing press.[94] The very terms used, micro*film* and micro*photography*, for example, illustrate the play of anachronism and innovation in the rhetoric of technological change. One 1939 essay in particular, with the deceptively banal title "Microphotographic Equipment," deserves extended comment. Starting out from a discussion of the new materiality of sand and glass, Llewellyn Raney, director of libraries at the University of Chicago, veered between microfilm's seemingly virtual, magic qualities and its technical specifications. Motion pictures had prepared the way for the acceptance of radical representation in the form of microfilm:

> Motion pictures gave us our chance in more ways than one. They have provided an international conditioning to the acceptance of a substitute for life. You would not enter the playhouse if you could see reality outside. The drama was an initial preparation, but after all the pretenders in this case were flesh and blood. The screen, however, carries only lights and shadows, not even skin deep, and millions every night accept this filmy release. So we are not nearly so stubborn about tolerating the textual make-believe of reading machines as we might have been without the universal familiarity with movie projection.[95]

Raney goes on to highlight the manipulability and, indeed, the image-enhancing capability of microfilm as better than the original. He closes by declaring microfilm the most important recording technique since the invention of the printing press, as does Robert Binkley. However, "the newcomer could get to places where his heavier associate cannot reach," and, thereby, "descry swift massing of universal reserves at the hand that can therewith penetrate the unknown or otherwise break human bonds."[96] For Raney, microfilm represented not only freedom of information, not only knowledge as power, but an almost mystical key to human liberation. Now, too, the archival record was being freed

[94] So wrote Robert Binkley in his 1936 *Yale Review* essay, "New Tools for Men of Letters." Cited in Tate, "Binkley to Bush," 250. "There is taking place in the techniques of record and communication a series of changes more revolutionary in their possible impact upon culture than the invention of printing."

[95] Llewellyn Raney, "Microphotographic Equipment," *American Archivist* 2, no. 3 (July 1939): 145.

[96] Raney, "Microphotographic Equipment," 153. It was indeed the movie industry that rekindled interest in microfilm. Farkas-Conn, *The Beginnings and Early Development of the American Documentation Institute*, 17. Interest in microfilm's merits and deficiencies remained a regular topic of debate in the decades of the forties and fifties. Other interesting perspectives on microfilm include Nichols, "Alice in Wonderland," on microfilm and the speeded-up transmission of information; on the exaggerated "glorifying, glamorizing, and justifying" and overselling of microfilm, see Jerry McDonald, "The Case against Microfilm," *American Archivist* 20, no. 4 (October 1957): 345–56. Leon De Valinger presented a rejoinder to Macdonald in "A Microfilmer Replies," *American Archivist* 21, no. 3 (July 1958): 305–32. On the reducing and condensing of records, see Ernest Taubes, "The Future of Microfilming," *American Archivist* 21, no. 2 (April 1958): 153–58.

from the archives, for it, or the information, could be quickly delivered to researchers' homes: no need to travel to the archives. It was 1939 and the archival record was starting to move beyond ground speed.

The 1930s also marked Hollywood's experiment in staging historical authenticity. One month after the founding of SAA, *Popular Mechanics* carried an article entitled "Making Movies True to Life." It explains how research teams and technical experts combine to stage cinematic historical accuracy. Indeed, "Realism in every scene," the article declares, "is the goal of Hollywood."[97]

Earlier that year, *Popular Mechanics* served up another movie industry feature with the vaguely western-sounding title of "Shooting Modern History." Whereas the November article concentrates on the creation of historical authenticity with regard to past events, this one affirms the amazing work film cameras can do when they are present at—or perhaps one should say *present as*—the history-making event. FDR made a speech, and forty-eight hours later, presto, "in their favorite theaters, millions of people throughout the United States were seeing and listening to the complete story of the inauguration…. FDR could make a speech while sitting at his desk in the White House and twenty-seven minutes later three networks brought his words to twenty-seven million people sitting comfortably in their homes."

Not only that, but as impressive as the speed of dissemination was the fact that "In one reel of talking film was compressed a page of American history, preserved for all time," so that the "complete story" could be told on a mere "strip of film," which any boy in the future could view in a "motion picture processor."[98] Thus, the newsreel and the Hollywood film both strived for different authenticities.

Finally, just one month after the founding of the SAA, the same magazine reported on an electric eye, a cathode ray tube, and the design of televisions, only one of many pieces on the emergence of CRT's many applications, including, by 1952, an article on how a cathode ray tube, with an electronic gun and screen and beams of electrons could record "numbers and letters at a speed of ten thousand characters a second and writes a book in one minute."[99]

With the emergence of talking movies and television by the mid-1930s, people were viewing and hearing—witnessing—human speech and human action coming together for the first time outside human or social bodies on screens in theaters and in their own homes.[100] If one individual retired from the

[97] *Popular Mechanics*, November 1937, 706.

[98] *Popular Mechanics*, July 1935, 28; *Popular Mechanics*, July 1937, 42.

[99] *Popular Mechanics*, January 1937, 97; *Popular Mechanics*, July 1952, 136. The term *scanning* was also quite common in the pages of *Popular Mechanics* by the mid-1930s.

[100] The July 1935 issue of *Popular Mechanics* announced that television was being brought "right into the parlors of German homes," 33.

profession had enjoyed working with records because, unlike humans, "they did not talk back,"[101] by the 1930s, this was already only partially true. Records were now speaking, and in more ways than one. (Hilary Jenkinson had declared years earlier that archivists were duty-bound to let records speak for themselves.)

All of these examples, admittedly from a rather narrow sampling, provide some evidence for the 1930s as a period important for our entry into a world that values smallness, speed, and simulations. Television and film screens and, indeed, photography, present—represent—life experience in miniature scale (including IMAX technology and the largest private, home theater/high-definition screens). Indeed, computer screens form part of this lineage, as we have come to value laptops and handheld devices for all kinds of leisure, economic, and business purposes. However, less apparent interconnected aesthetic, status, political, and psychological motivations and reasoning are at work. Many of these shrunken devices have appealed not only to our eyes, but also to our hands.

Equally important, apart from the aforementioned tech-utopianism, there is also a magical or mystical aspect at hand even in our most rational, scientific, and technical endeavors.

> Magic in a scientific world is interpreted as peripheral, harmless entertainment enacted doing explainable tricks. But even materialistic science and technology are cloaked with the mantle of magic. Electricity, speedy vehicles, dramatic communications technologies, and supersonic flight embody many of the dreams of magic.…The power and grandeur of our enchantments with technology are a compelling mystique, not a rational framework. In *Myths that Rule America*, Herbert London and Albert Weeks see in technology a hypnotic extension of ourselves that lets us down. The myth of technological rule constantly generates the illusion that anything is possible.[102]

The information technology industry has worked assiduously to engineer and restore the very experience of magic that science has deprived us of ever since the Scientific Revolution. This they are doing by the enchantment of the information-processing and communications, and, one might add, archival, experience. Ironically, at the same time as we come to rely on eye- (visual cortex) pleasing, artful, graphical visual presentations of information, we are also crossing a threshold into another sort of pleasurable experience of "occultation in which things are no longer visible." Less and less are the processes and

[101] William D. McCain, *American Archivist* 25, no. 2 (April 1962): 230.

[102] Lee Worth Bailey, *The Enchantments of Technology* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005): 39–40. The invocation of magic was a staple of popular computer discourse in the 1980s. William Austin Stahle, *God and the Chip: Religion and the Culture of Technology* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 80 and chap. 4. With a slightly different perspective, Thomas Streeter describes the contemporary experience of the Internet as something between "instrumental rationality and compulsive pleasure." Streeter, *The Net Effect*, 19.

structures that transmit information available to visual comprehension as an aesthetic of hidden structure, and invisible or disappearing causality has grown in appeal.[103] Indeed, one author declares that "small is the most important science and technology legacy of the twentieth century"[104] (not to mention the silence of the electronic power that drives our machines and the weightlessness and "scentlessness" of the records and information they generate).

### Continuing Concerns

The search for speed and space (also evident in vendors' advertising in the pages of the *American Archivist*) continued into the 1960s and beyond, and encounters with a kind of magic are also evident. "Automated" techniques drew increasing attention during the decade. Archivists of the sixties and seventies were no less captivated by the computer than the rest of society. As the

[103] Of course, we have already seen how fascination with the mysteries of electricity's silence and invisibility and the ascription of mystical or divine stature to electricity are traceable back to the nineteenth century. (Rudyard Kipling's 1902 story, "Wireless," provides a fascinating dramatization of the magical ethereality of invisible electrical communication. See also Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) and John Durham Peters's excellent *Speaking in the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

The miniaturization impulse is traceable back to the time of documentalist Paul Otlet and other figures like Wilhelm Ostwald, Karl Wilhelm Buhrer, and Adolf Saager in the early twentieth century. The latter three shared an interest in advancing a modernist approach to the optimization of knowledge "by seeking to atomize literature into small components of recorded thought, much smaller than books, articles, and technical reports." They envisioned the reduction of knowledge to "chunks" and "micro-thoughts." Michael Keeble Buckland, *Emmanuel Goldberg and His Knowledge Machine: Invention, Knowledge, and Political Forces* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 64. Discussion of miniaturization and invisibility has taken scholars and researchers in several directions, most obviously the economic and military origins and benefits of miniaturization, the advent of nanotechnology, and the invisible engravings and masking—writing—in micromachining. Other discussions of miniaturization focus on the convergence of the virtual and the actual, the boundary between technological devices and the human body, the flux of dematerialization, or rematerialzation, and the weightless, shrinking world of documentation. On the themes of invisibility and miniaturization, and on IT in particular, see Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric of Machine Aesthetics* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 64; Byron Hawk, David Rieder, and Ollie Oviedo, eds., *Small Tech: The Culture of Digital Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On the miniaturization of information objects—"micrographia"—in the past, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 37–69; C. Joachim and Laurence Plevert, *Nanosciences and the Invisible Revolution* (Hackensack, N.J.: World Scientific Publishing, 2009). Chapter 2 provides a convenient history of miniaturization up to the development of chip technology. Frank Dobbins, "Metaphors of Industrial Rationality: The Social Construction of Electronic Policy in the United States and France," in *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (New York: Routledge, 1992), 185–206. On the relationship between the physical landscape of Silicon Valley and the development of miniaturized technologies, see Dean MacCannell, "Silicon Values: Miniaturization, Speed, and Money," in *Seductions of Place: Geographical Perspectives on Globalization and Touristed Landscapes*, ed. Carolyn Carter and Alan Lew (New York: Routledge, 2005), 91–102; Cynthia Selin, "Expectations and the Emergence of Nanotechnology," *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 32, no. 2 (March 2007): 196–220. For a discussion of cutting-edge "nano" miniaturization research in molecular and protein computing, see Kim Veltman, *Understanding Media: Augmented Knowledge and Culture* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 33–50.

[104] H. Rohrer, "The Magic of the Small: Science and Technology on the Nanometer Scale," in *Nanometer Scale Science and Technology*, ed. Maria Allegrini, Nicholas Garcia, and Othmar Marti (n.p.: IOS Press, 2001), 1–6.

Bicentennial approached, "revolution" was in the air. Here was another frontier, a new frontier of speed and "condensation,"[105] a new machine, though not quite yet an "information technology."[106]

As the Society and its members were being swept up in a conversion from the power(s) of "machinery" and "automation" to "information technology" and "media" power in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an equally important, though seemingly unrelated, change—another equally important crisis—was taking place. In the early 1970s, the Society, or at least a significant number of its members, began to develop what can only be described as a crisis of political consciousness. This consciousness manifested itself in two ways. Though not entirely unprecedented, the Society now embarked on a major effort to solicit

[105] "As we stand on a new frontier, bringing us more records—not only textual but in the form of motion pictures, sound recordings, punch and aperture cards, video or magnetic tapes, electrostat prints, electronic computations, and many more—it is plain that archivists will tend to become less concerned with preserving records in paper form than with preserving them in their newer forms. Modern tools and devices are on the way in, the paper business is on the way out, and we may predict that the 1960's will be known as the 'systems decade.' Are we ready to meet the challenge of tomorrow? To meet the many satellites soon to be in orbit, the American archivist and the American scholar must also get into orbit!," Mary Givens Bryan, "Presidential Address," *American Archivist* 24, no. 1 (January 1961): 3–10.

"We need more than knowledge and skills to thrive in the digital world. We need new attitudes. A new frontier lies on the other side of the digital doorway, and it's not for the faint of heart. We need archivists who are early adopters; people who are excited, rather than intimidated, by new technology and innovations. We need risk takers; archivists who are willing to try something new and who, when confronted with failure, keep trying something over and over until they master it. We need problem solvers. We need creativity. What could be better than living during a time of great potential? Opportunities abound for innovation in every aspect of our profession." Richard Pearce-Moses, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," *American Archivist* 70 (Spring/Summer 2007): 13.

For Margaret Hedstrom, the "wild frontier" of information and cyberspace recedes before the methods, techniques, and technologies, but it is also becoming more complex. "Building Record-Keeping Systems: Archivists Are Not Alone on the Wild Frontier," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997): 57.

One final example: "It can be difficult to remember that we exploit the new information frontier best if we bring enduring value to it. In the current atmosphere, it is critical to remind ourselves of the importance of standardizing our own time-honored practices rather than rushing to embrace ephemeral digital fashions that will not stand the test of time." Daniel Pitti, "Encoded Archival Description: The Development of an Encoding Standard for Archival Finding Aids," *American Archivist* 60 (Summer 1997): 273.

[106] The term *technology* was coined at Harvard in the late 1820s. It began to gain popularity in the 1880s. However, as I have already mentioned, other terms like *machine, machinery, contraptions, paraphernalia, gadgets, equipment,* and *machine technology* were used by the 1930s. One sees the word *technology* in the *American Archivist* in the 1940s and 1950s, but in relation to the need to document science and technology, or in reference to institutions like MIT. The first, or one of the first, uses of the term *technology* in relation to computing and archival work appears in Bryan, "Presidential Address." Terms like *automation, computerization, system, Automated Data Processing,* and *machine-readable* crept into our language and predominated until *technology* took precedence and came to be equated with *information technology*. For an interesting account of the development of the usage of the concept of *technology*, see Leo Marx, "Technology: The Emergence of a Hazardous Concept: Technology and the Rest of Culture," *Social Research*, Fall 1997, B-Net, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_n3_v64/ai_19952020/?tag=content;col1, accessed 8 July 2011. See also Thomas Haigh, "The Fix Is Information: Now, What Was the Problem?," paper presented at Technological Fix Symposium, Hagley Museum Library, Delaware, October 2002, http://www.tomandmaria.com/Tom/Writing/FixIsInformation.pdf, accessed 8 July 2011 and "How the Computer Became Information Technology Constructing Information in Corporate America, 1950–2000," http://tomandmaria.com/tom/Writing/InfoFixDRAFT.pdf, accessed July 2011.

broader, more democratic member participation in the running of its affairs, to promote institutional transparency, to make its governing bodies "more representative of and responsive to the diverse interests of the SAA," and to set a policy of "non-discrimination" with regard to the conduct of those members serving the Society in an official capacity.

The second kind of change was more controversial. Some members of the Society began to discuss and debate the appropriateness of more active social and political engagement, for example, to address gender equality issues[107] and to promote ethnic diversity ("minorities") in the make-up of the profession and in the documentation of society.[108] The Society was broadening its initial focus on the preservation of national and regional heritage to include the documentation of those social groups that had heretofore been located outside the profession's mental maps. Indeed, an increasingly vocal group that named itself ACT (Archivists for Change), inspired by historian Howard Zinn's keynote address at the 1970 annual meeting, began to campaign for active archival involvement in social change and the political life of the country.[109] Some members took their cue from Zinn's admonition about stepping out from behind the protective shield of professionalism. For them, the profession's hallmark self-denying ordinance of political neutrality and detachment had

[107] In terms of sheer numbers, according to a 1982 survey, women had gained ground during the 1970s. See David Bearman, "1982 Survey of the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 234.

[108] The result of the 1982 survey was that the profession remained "lily-white." Bearman, "1982 Survey of the Archival Profession."

[109] For a taste of the atmosphere, see "ACT, ARCHIVISTS FOR CHANGE, ALTERNATIVE CAUCUS, FRIENDS OF THE SAA, Whatever," *Newsletter* 1, no. 1, November 1971, http://www.libr.org/progarchs/pdf/ACT.pdf, accessed 8 July 2011. See also Judith Koucky, "Report of the Committee of the 1970s: The Council's Response," *American Archivist* 35, nos. 3–4, (July/October 1972): 359–67. The literature on the Committee of the Seventies and various articles in the *American Archivist* reveal a new concern about social equality within the profession and the need for a more comprehensive documentation of society. "The Society must act as the strong and single voice of the entire archival profession in making known the views of archivists on all matters pertinent to their interests and needs under consideration by the Congress of the United States." "Report of the Committee for the 1970s," *American Archivist* 35 no. 2 (April 1972): 200–201. An early example of a turn toward broader societal perspective on archives' mission is Vaughn D. Bornet, "The Manuscripts of Social Welfare," *American Archivist* 23, no. 1 (January 1960): 30–48. A number of other early articles concern the records of labor organizations, though framed as the documentation of American humanitarianism and philanthropy. Ellen Starr Brinton, "Archives of Causes and Movements: Difficulties and Some Solutions as Illustrated by the Swarthmore College Peace Collection," *American Archivist* 14, no. 2 (April 1951): 147–53.

become unsustainable, if not a long-standing form of self-delusion.[110] Future SAA president Andrea Hinding memorably, though perhaps uncharitably, wrote that the SAA had to start to focus on things that had been ignored or repressed by "the old stoic order."[111] At the dawn of the twenty-first century, some members of our community identify archives as a counterweight to myths, ideologies, and historical inequities of the past, and as instruments of social justice.[112] Law had long informed archival practice; the pursuit of justice, at least the words, represents a new entry in the professional vocabulary, a new frontier.

Finally, the Committee of the Seventies also had younger members of the profession on its mind.

> We also recommend that the Program Committee seek to invite a significant number of new speakers for each annual meeting, particularly from the ranks of the younger members. It is important also that as many different archival institutions as possible be represented on a program.

Rarely, if ever, had the younger members of the profession been mentioned before in the annals of the SAA. This apparently new interest may have reflected the rise of "youth culture." As likely, however, it stemmed from the aging of the membership as well as a growing membership from universities and other institutions outside the National Archives and state archives. It may also have been the latest form of acknowledgment that the Society and the profession, as always, had to work hard and find new ways to remain viable, to energize themselves, and to mark their frontiers. Indeed, even as the Society consolidated its strength through its institutionalization—with a permanent staff and a fixed headquarters in Chicago, a growing membership, and a burgeoning academic-professional establishment—an undercurrent of professional unease, a

[110] One passage from the committee's final report reads: "The SAA should be actively committed to the social goals of racial justice, equal employment, and reasonable access to research materials. Among the areas of concern are overclassification of Federal records in the name of security; overrestriction of manuscripts and archival material; unwarranted violations of the confidentiality of records for political or other unworthy purposes; and elitism in manuscript collecting. To this end, the SAA has a moral oblgation [*sic*] to take official positions on those contemporary public issues, however controversial, which affect the archival profession. We recommend also that the Society appoint a standing committee on minority groups to press for the rights and advancement of minorities in the archival profession." The final report is printed in Philip Mason, "The Society of American Archivists in the Committee of the Seventies Report," *American Archivist* 35, no. 2 (April 1972): 193–206. See also James Rhoads, "One Man's Hopes for His Society, His Profession, His Country," *American Archivist* 39, no. 1, (January 1976): 9: "For some of us the attainment of our professional goals has meant indulging in the luxury of retreat from the problems of society, and the circumscribing of our responsibilities into a concern only with our profession or our private lives. And yet we are servants of the public. Our responsibilities are, or should be, to the public—of our own community, of the state, or of the nation."

[111] Hinding, "The Third Generation," 158.

[112] What are we to make of Ernst Posner's observation: "Let me start with the suggestion that rational administration of the record is bureaucracy's favorite child. The evolution of archives administration furnishes the contrapuntal accompaniment to the main melody, the growth of bureaucratic administration. Archives thrive best in regimented society; poor record keeping seems to be the price of liberty." "What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?," 6.

persisting identity crisis is evident in the Society's penchant for self-diagnosis and prognosis. One archivist expressed confidence in the significance and sustainability of archives and diffidence about the continuing viability of archivists:

> What's worse is that, with the advent of electronic records systems, there is a new challenge capable of putting us even further behind than we were before. If we are unable to establish control of electronic records, we will no longer even hold the historical and cultural capital to claim a distinctive and important role in society. With the increasingly complex and competitive information environment within which archives exist, we are in fact in the rather strange position of being at risk of losing the archivist in archives.[113]

## Conclusion

This essay has presented the generations since 1936 as both our predecessors and our contemporaries, for we today figured in their lives and the workings of their imaginations, as they do in ours. This disruption of our familiar historical ordering of events might seem rather implausible. Indeed, some might argue that American archivists today could probably more easily find common ground with their Australian or European or even Chinese colleagues than with their American forebears of the 1930s. And yet, this essay—a kind of meandering excursion among the times of history, memory, and myth—has tried to demonstrate that the marking off of temporal boundaries, what archivists (and historians) call "context," is less straightforward than it often seems. Not only does each of us, and each community, occupy various territorial spaces; each of us, and each community, also experiences, is inhabited by, multiple temporal (time) zones. Indeed, archivists have perhaps given the concept of context, that most precious of often-unacknowledged archival gifts to the information studies community, more work, or perhaps less, to do than it can really perform.

Up close, contemporary events, "our" times, often seem momentous. Today, defining moments, moments of existential consequence, seem to occur on a regular basis, including frequent pronouncements of life (style) changing breakthroughs in information technology. The information/communication revolution has displayed a considerable power to quickly transform seemingly mundane events into momentous ones, into eventfulness, into news. It would be foolish, however, to categorically deny that important changes of a revolutionary scale have taken place. Nevertheless, two questions linger: When did this "information revolution" really begin to take form—twenty-five years ago,

[113] "Collectively, we are still very much subject to the cycle of poverty that he [Ernst Posner] identified as inhibiting the best intentions and efforts of archivists." William Maher, "Archives, Archivists, and Society," *American Archivist* 61 (Fall 1998): 253.

fifty years ago, seventy-five years ago, even three hundred years ago—and, second, what in our experience is revolution and what is recursion?

Let us give some credit to Pocock and others' remarks about the often overblown rhetoric of revolution, which purports to see a complete, dramatic, absolute, break from all "previous" contexts. By this logic, our generation has moved beyond the horizon of previous generations and "our" own events and experiences all bear the same date stamp. That is, a kind of typological reasoning inheres in all contextualization. I am suggesting, instead, that 1936 and 2011 *at one and the same time*, so to speak, exhibit structural homogeneity and differences, recursions, and persistences, and, possibly, that these seventy-five years also form a moment in a longer story. This perspective dislodges and decentralizes linear arrangement of temporality to make room for a more dreamlike experience of temporality. Together, we play out our lives, ourselves, in time with, but also sometimes beyond, the perfectly waving baton of some contextual concertmaster. Time's recordings, that is, recodings, of documentary remains trace a more complicated path than rules of historical narrative allow. Persistence and change in individuals and societies (and technology) unfold at uneven rates, in varied forward and backward directions, with condensations, repetitions, recursions, and remediations. It is as if multiple countervailing contexts press against the pretentions of total coherence in a single, all-governing, hyperdeterminative context.[114] Indeed, the Janus-like archives operates right in the middle of the social construction of a multiplicity of orderings of time.

Frontiers mark not only new, unknown territories; they also delineate unknown temporal horizons beyond which lie undiscovered parts of the past and unknown parts of the future. Technology research, for example, has created new frontiers in the form of miniaturized devices connected by information infrastructures and architectures that exist beyond the realm of ordinary visibility. Meanwhile, limited advances in the development of devices for digital preservation have bolstered archivists' long-standing interest in frontiers in the form of unforeseeable futures, as well as unforeseeable, technologically remediated pasts. Our current technology-heightened condition of uncertainty about the future of records is an archival resource; the stock value of archival records is derived increasingly not only from their movability (circulation) but also from their risk-management and wealth-protection potential. The value of records partly lies in the prospect that they will serve as a "continuing" or even increasing hedge against the frontiers of unpredictable futures. Living in a "risk society," archivists have emphasized the importance of records and evidence in the management of risk; thereby, they have become active players in a risk economy.

[114] Anthony Giddens discusses the relationship between stable structures and agents of change. However, his theorization is dominated by the classic image of history as inevitably unfolding in a single direction: forward, toward the new. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

For this reason, according to Elena Esposito, the future has taken on an urgency that has been crowding out the social significance of the past and tradition.[115]

As in the 1930s, archivists today feel compelled to grapple with and critically assess the relations between new information technology—new media, mechanized expression, and memory prostheses—and themselves. Today, connectivity is widely regarded as a boon to creativity and innovation. Are connectivity and the proliferation of networks, however, not equally likely to promote imitativeness[116] and conformity (intellectual proximity), for example, in records and recordkeeping, so as to create often-touted opportunities for originality (creative distance). Indeed, digital technology and the Internet have powered the production and distribution of information, and then, its replacement by new waves of common sense, what sometimes goes by the name of standards.[117] Archives may be brimming with digitized, computer-born, network-delivered records, but what proportion of this superabundant documentary production represents what is classically understood as (new) ideas and information—"uniqueness"?[118] In fact, set in an evolutionary framework, this dense connectivity may or may not constitute an adaptive advantage.

[115] The operation of the future and memory and the role of the social and financial function and usefulness of uncertainty can be seen most vividly in the trading of documents in the form of stocks and other financial exchange and investment instruments. See Elena Esposito, *The Future of Futures: Money and Time in Finance and Society* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011). In 1939, the notion of "media" referred not only, as today, to communication outlets and technology but to the following: "The common devices of credit, as found in bank checks, drafts, bills of exchange, and other types of commercial paper used in modern exchange, gradually evolved and have become infinitely more important as media of exchange than is ordinary cash." Harry Elmer Barnes, *Society in Transition: Problems of a Changing Age* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1939), 14. Interestingly, like information technology, finance capitalism, too, has been described in terms of an aesthetic of invisibility as the "holy ghost of capitalism" layered upon the more visible earlier forms of industrial and commercial capitalism. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, Fifteenth–Eighteenth Century: The Perspective of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 604. Ian Baucomb most explicitly traces the historical emergence of an abstract concept of money and people and the commensurate time-disruptive symbolic coding of people and events in records. See his remarkable work, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari conceive of contemporary western (capitalist) society as an "inscribing socius" whose principal feature is a giant inscribing machine, or a social machine, "a socius of inscription, where the essential thing is to mark and be marked." For them, social inscription has progressed from the marking of the body (tattooing, scarring of the flesh) to the bodying of markings. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 5, 162–64.

[116] Giuseppe Soda, Akbar Zaheer, and Alessandra Carlone, "Imitative Behavior: Network Antecedents and Performance Consequences," in *Network Strategy: Advances in Strategic Management*, ed. J. A. C. Baum and Timothy J. Rowley (London: Emerald Publishing, 2008), 531–62; David W. Park, "The Two-Step Flow vs. the Lonely Crowd: Conformity and Media in the 1950s," in *The History of Communication and Media Research: Contested Memories*, ed. David Park and Jefferson Cooley (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 251–68; Robert Hassan, *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 72.

[117] On how each new technology introduces a new common sense, see Perez, *Technological Revolutions*, 26.

[118] James O'Toole, "On the Idea of Uniqueness," *American Archivist* 57 (Fall 1994): 632–58; David M. Levy, "Where's Waldo? Reflections on Copies and Authenticity in a Digital Environment," in *Authenticity in a Digital Environment*, ed. Abbey Smith (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2000), 24–31.

Connectivity has also given rise to a "new social morphology of our societies."[119] This new or added morphology has been raising questions about the kinds of subjectivities ("profiles") and human *relationships* that are possible in a social world of almost effortlessly constructed screen identities, "friends," and communities.[120] It is a social world being made of relationships, or connections, that are continually undergoing re-articulation and renovation with structures, content, and context always "under construction." The Internet provides fertile soil for the proliferation of new, though often changeable, rather transient, online communities, collaborative coming-together, public spheres, town squares, interest groups, and forms of presence (and memory). However, it also has seen the emergence of new forms of absence, absent-mindedness (inattention), disconnection, anarchical dispersion,[121] diasporas, disposal, and transient remembrance—forgetfulness and loss having nothing to do with the qualities of technological persistence. How do archivists identify and document these phenomena, using what documentation strategies?[122] The face, for better or worse, has been replaced by the electronic interface; personal interactions consist of "deanimated" exchanges of words, codes, and symbols, and screen representations. We are, as archivists might be wont to say, our documents and records; we are, as Jacques Derrida put it, nothing to each other outside our texts, our records. There is nothing outside our coding.

More broadly, what do wirelessness and code-based encounters mean for our notions of experience in general and the possibility of empiricism in a parallel dematerializing world? More appositely, what is becoming of the archival

[119] Manuel Castells cited in Adrian Mackenzie, *Wirelessness: Radical Empiricism and Network Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 9. For critical assessments of limitations in current theorizations of the productive value of networks and the newness of information scientists' recent "discovery" of the social underpinnings of network infrastructures, see Geert Lovink, *The Principle of Notworking: Concepts in Critical Internet Culture,* public lecture delivered on 24 February 2005, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, http://www.hva.nl/lectoraten/documenten/ol09-050224-lovink.pdf, accessed 8 July 2011.

[120] On the "laws" of friend aggregation in a network setting, see Albert Laszlo Barabasi, introduction and keynote address in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Networked Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (London: Routledge: 2011), 1–14. See also Barry Wellman et al., "The Social Affordances of the Internet for Networked Individualism," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 8, no. 3 (April 2003), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol8/issue3/wellman.html. Caroline Haythornthwaite and Anna Nielsen, "Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication for Work, Community, Learning," in *Psychology and the Internet: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Transpersonal Implications*, ed. Jayne Gackenbach (San Diego: Academic Press, 1998), chap. 7.

[121] On the limitations of the network(s) for conceptualizing contemporary communications environments, see Anna Munster and Geert Lovink, "Theses on Distributed Aesthetics. Or, What a Network is Not," *Fibreculture Journal* 7 (2005), http://seven.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-040-theses-on-distributed-aesthetics-or-what-a-network-is-not/, accessed 8 July 2011.

[122] For a critique of the everyday optimism about information systems as supports for positive social and organizational outcomes, see Richard Baskerville and Frank Land, "Socially Self-Destructing Systems," in *The Social Study of Information and Communication Technology: Innovation, Actors and Contexts*, ed. Chrisanthi Avgerou, Claudio Ciborra, and Frank Land (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 263–86.

experience as a social experience,[123] an encounter with records of social experience of the past? And, what documentary role awaits archivists, perennial students of code, in a self-styled (Western) world of ubiquitous code?

Finally, and perhaps most important, what will it be like to live with the dead (and descendants) in the twenty-first century? Archives—the places, the parchment, the paper—have always represented sites of tangible, material intrusion of the dead into our lives,[124] as well as a reminder of their absence. What will their digital remains signify, what will be preserved, a collective "memory of words…rather than a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects"?[125] What social-institutional frameworks, what nodes and sites, will the dead—people, communities, and, indeed, networks[126]—occupy in a cyber-archives, in our networked archives? More precisely, what kind of representation will electronic, virtually immaterial documentation afford the dead?[127] Archivists, whose principle task is to observe, preserve the writings of, and produce writings about the dead, that is, about those who have passed (something) on, what Armando Petrucci called *le scritture ultime*, should be among the last to need reminding that the dead have always formed an active, integral part of the social order. As Katherine Acheson put it, "The dead have never been just dead."[128] In the peculiarly archival networking of time, including our Society's times, neither has the past ever been completely behind us, nor the present absolutely with us, nor the future fully ahead of us. And so, the SAA's last seventy-five years are not only behind us; in one fashion or another, they also remain ahead of us, waiting. For members of the SAA, and for archivists in general, this must be the meaning of "imagined community."

[123] Adrian Mckenzie, "Wirelessness as Experience of Transition," *Fibreculture Journal* 13 (2008), http://thirteen.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-085-wirelessness-as-experience-of-transition/, accessed 8 July 2011. See also Ulises Ali Mejias, *Networked Proximity, ICTs and the Mediation of Nearness* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2007), http://blog.ulisesmejias.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/12/mejias__networked_proximity.pdf, accessed 8 July 2011.

[124] Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture* (New York: Berg, 2001), 103.

[125] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 164.

[126] On the question of placement and the construction of publics in networks, see Danah Boy, "Social Networks as Sites of Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics and Implication," in *A Networked Self*, chap. 2.

[127] Mackenzie, *Wirelessness: Radical Empiricism in Network Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

[128] Katherine O. Acheson, "The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Shakespeare Studies* (January 2002): 242. On the relationship between recording and the dead, see also, Armand Petrucci, *Writing the Dead: Death and Writing Strategies in the Western Tradition* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998). For the ideas of presence and temporality, I have drawn on Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000) and adapted various philosophical "tenseless" and "tensed" theories of time. On the ordering of events, see Robin Le Poidevin, ed., *Questions of Time and Tense* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998); Yuval Dolev, "The Tenseless Theory of Time: Insights and Limitations," *Review of Metaphysics* 54 (2000): 259–60.