

# ARCHIVISTS, MEDIATION, AND CONSTRUCTS OF SOCIAL MEMORY \*

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**ABSTRACT:** What is our past and how do we know it? The authority of archival documentation as the foundation for our knowledge of the past has come under question. Increased interest in cultural studies and in new concepts of heritage has made archives not only a place of study but also the object of study. Some scholars are arguing that archives are not neutral parties in the process of exploration of the past. They may, in fact, be complicit in fostering certain perceptions based on institutional definitions and particular concepts of the state. Questions are also raised about the role of the archivist as a mediator between what has survived and what we know. How are archivists to respond to these new questions?

## *Introduction*

On June 22, 2000, the *New York Times* carried the story, "Reaping what was Sown on the Old Plantation." The story focused on contested issues in the interpretation of the historic Magnolia Plantation in Natchitoches, Louisiana. How does one tell the story of the plantation? The descendants of the families of the owners of the property have one story. The descendants of the slaves who worked on the site have another. How, then, is the plantation to be labeled, described, and interpreted when the site evokes several distinct sets of memories?

What is our past and how do we know it? For many generations this question was limited by a consensus on the role and authority of archival documentation in determining the "truth" of the past. Now this authority is being questioned by scholars in

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\*During the academic year 2000–2001, the Advanced Study Center of the International Institute of the University of Michigan is offering a year-long seminar that focuses on "Archives, Documentation, and the Institutions of Social Memory." With generous funding from the Sawyer Seminar program of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation matched with contributions from a number of departments at the University of Michigan, this seminar takes an international perspective on the intersection between archival practice and new ways of approaching the past. In working with my colleague William Rosenberg in the history department to formulate the program for this seminar, I have spent considerable time thinking about dynamics that are emerging within the academy that may redefine the convergence of archivists and historians. The very generous invitation of the MAC program committee to address the 2000 spring meeting in Chicago was an incentive to pull together some of these thoughts.

many disciplines who find in the archives not a neutral party, but rather forces complicit with dominant cultural and political aims as defined by evolving attitudes within constructs of the nation-state. The representations in the archives and the absences in the archives, rather than being the result of random deposits in the life cycle of records, may be purposeful in selectivity and in the architecture of the evidentiary and informational content.

My particular point of departure is a consideration of new uses and applications for the word "archives." The word is cropping up all over the place these days. Personal computer users "archive." Professional storage operations "archive." And recently, academics engaged in cultural studies of one kind or another are talking about "notions of archive." To what extent, they ask, are archives a reliable and appropriate source for constructing a sense of social memory? It is this scholarly manifestation of an interest in what we do that has captured my own attention, that is, the ever-changing relationship between the role of archives and the pursuit of the past. This is not a reconsideration of the variety of cleavages between professional archivists and professional historians. Those issues define a previous age. That is an age that has gone by, replaced by a new era where what defines notions of past is far more complicated. The relationship of that definition to historical archives is far more problematic.

There was a time in our world when the accumulation of historical documents was considered a straightforward and even a noble task. The early work of the Massachusetts Historical Society and other East Coast establishments (along with the later and equally important work of Midwest historical societies and southern state historical agencies) all pointed to the long-term desirability of historical documentation. The bulk of these collections was not at issue. The technologies in the preparation and recording of information were relatively stable. There was a consensus among archivists and historian users that the documents assembled were critical to the pursuit of a historical truth, that is, the idea that the past was a singular conception, out there waiting to be discovered. There was a consequent faith in the selection of documents for inclusion in historical collections based on T. R. Schellenberg's notions of informational and evidential value. Schellenberg seemed to be comfortable that his readers had a clear sense of what information was valuable and when evidence was important. In other words, his framework arose from an unstated but limited conception of what constitutes the boundaries of historical study.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1970s, archivists faced, in a serious way, challenges posed by the bulk of records pouring into their care. Government archivists were faced with the task of managing large, complex record groups. Individuals with personal papers also seemed to produce larger collections, thanks to ubiquitous photocopying options. Moreover, there were ever-expanding notions of what were, in fact, valid historical documents, the emergence of video and audio sources, for example. Archivists rallied to these challenges. The archival profession worked to develop new and more rigorous standards for the appraisal of records. Frank Boles, in particular, pushed notions of outer and inner forces at work in the construction of archives. He pushed notions that not only had history become more complex as an intellectual construct, but that the institutional realities of archives, too, were driving selection decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Revised procedures for the processing of records have resulted in fairly quick access to the larger record groups. The push toward descriptive standards at both the collection level and in finding-aid construction has enhanced our ability to peruse these bulky accessions. However, in the process archivists openly acknowledged the importance and necessity of selection because of the practical realities imposed by large collections in relation to the costs of space.

Bulk presented a variety of challenges. Now, advances in information technology compound them. In the past decade, the transformations in the technology of record keeping have come to preoccupy archivists at every level. The challenge posed by records in electronic form and the possibilities inherent in computer-based approaches to access have come to preoccupy our profession. New technologies compress and render urgent all of our formerly sequential responsibilities. The nature of the record, the expectations for access, and the notions of archival control are changing. Given the enormous implications of the technology, that preoccupation seems entirely appropriate.

Part of the incentive to address the complex of technical issues arose when the word "archive" began to appear as a new functional term for data managers. We, as a profession, were concerned that usurpation of the term would mean new forces entering our professional domain that would define, design, and determine methodologies previously assumed to be under our control and exclusive to our professional domain. The reaction within the profession has been swift. The participation of archivists in major cooperative ventures has been impressive. The initiatives of the NHPRC have been unequivocal about the significance of these issues and the need for the profession to address them. Archives large and small are responding by addressing, as vigorously as possible, the implications of technological "archiving" to the fundamental practices of archivists. In my view, the vigor of the response has led to a preoccupation with these questions, and we have not been sufficiently attentive to broad issues that arise from the nature of our collections and the practices that define our work.

I could examine these broader issues as a purely academic exercise. While the purpose of this paper is to provide an academic framework, I argue that there are compelling reasons not only to think about these issues but to address them as well. "Archives," as a word, as a term, is beginning to emerge in the field of cultural and historical studies as an object of study, not simply as a place where study occurs. In these quarters archives are seen as a product of culture, reflective of our politics, our biases, and our preoccupations. There is a heightened interest in the implications of selection and what constitutes archives. In the process, some scholars have raised fundamental questions regarding the purpose, intention, integrity, and viability of what we do. The issues are complex.

Records are basic to the work of the archivist. Notions of what constitutes a record have evolved over time. In the late nineteenth century, with the advent of scientific notions of historical study, records were considered a sort of raw material. They were vestiges of human interactions, unbiased by any self-conscious sense of historicism. It was assumed that judicious analyses of these vestiges by privileged scholars would yield history, that is, a historical truth. Anthony Grafton underscores this notion of academic faith in a kind of humanistic science as he explicates the evolution of the footnote. The footnote was the link between analyses that interpret and documentary

fragments that inform. Emphasis was on the quality of the analysis and argument.<sup>3</sup> Little attention was paid to the nature of documentation. There was an unstated confidence in these documentary fragments. Terry Cook reminds us that Hilary Jenkinson codified these notions in purely archival terms. Jenkinson had confidence in the purity of the archival record. Records were created as a result of human interaction true to the transaction. They were then moved to inactive status and ultimately transferred to the archives. The archivist was the passive professional, receiving these records and guarding them for posterity.<sup>4</sup>

There have always been issues surrounding particular documents. Luciana Duranti has educated all of us on the importance of diplomatics as a tool of analysis for the authenticity and veracity of individual documents.<sup>5</sup> Forgeries, planted false documentation, history-minded memoirs, always fell outside the Jenkinsonian model. For the past two centuries, archivists and historians considered these kinds of documents to be relatively few and far between. What documentary analysis of post-eighteenth-century material occurred, particularly in the Anglo-American world, generally was done by historians and not by archivists. For several generations, history was written, analyzed, and debated based on an accepted Jenkinsonian confidence in the integrity of the archival record.

During the last 50 years, historians have moved away from histories of individuals and institutions that reflect the dominant culture. That kind of history had been a good match for existing archival collections. In recent decades, historical study (and I include historical anthropology, historical sociology, economic history, etc.) has turned toward issues of power, underrepresented minority groups, issues of gender, race, etc., all of which are not so easily studied through existing documentation. Moreover, analyses of these questions of historical behavior often cannot be studied through traditional archives-based pseudoscientific historical methodology. There has been an increased reliance on purely theoretical explanations for alienation, disfranchisement, etc., or on highly individualistic, self-reflecting recontextualization of favored excerpts from the archives. Often, evaluation of these studies has focused on the relative lack of precision in the nature of surviving documentary evidence. The underrepresented, the disfranchised, the conquered, and the suppressed did not create documents or, if they did, sadly, those documents are not represented in the archives. Sometimes what evidence there is in the archives is contradictory. How, then, does one reconcile deeply held historical beliefs when existing archival evidence seems to point to the contrary or seems to reveal nothing at all? As Jacques Derrida has asked in his recent and influential book *Archive Fever*, how can one “prove the absence of archive?”<sup>6</sup>

In the pseudoscientific framework, the absence of documentation often rendered a historical question moot. When extant documentation challenged a belief, then the authority of the documentation often settled the question. In recent years, the answer has been to challenge Jenkinsonian notions that have, to date, preserved a sense of integrity and authority in archival work. There is emerging an argument that archives are not neutral in the process of historical inquiry. Absences may, in fact, be purposeful in a way that skews the historical record. Some scholars argue that archivists are in actuality complicit in affirmations of existing political structures and power relationships. Therefore, the absence of archive may invalidate a certain overly strict docu-

ment-based notion of historical study, but the absence does not necessarily invalidate the historical reality of an individual or collective memory. Hence, there has been a cultural and academic shift from reliance on the narrow constructs of the past as associated with history to an embrace of broader constructs of pasts based on ideas about social memory. The controversy over Magnolia Plantation is a case in point. These notions are emerging from a variety of quarters.

Academic interest in archives these days derives from an ever more diverse set of interests and questions. The heightened interest in contextual studies has brought students of literature, art, religion, and other humanistic endeavors to the archives in pursuit of a wide variety of questions relating to issues of cultural formation, cultural encounters, and cultural definition. As historical questions these studies revolve around notions of historical memory. Historical memory is larger and more comprehensive than traditional notions of history. The concept of memory moves beyond individuals, institutions, and even documents to try and capture notions of individual particular pasts. It is in this context that our institutional archives become, in Derrida's language, an *archon* or a place of rest of documents that may, in fact, by their seclusion and "domiciliation" become removed from the precise memory they document. The traditional interaction between historian and document is then a subset of broader attempts at memory. As Jacques Le Goff says dismissively, "history in its modern mode is just one more technology of remembering."<sup>7</sup>

I want to look at three manifestations of this argument. First, archives do, indeed, reflect established power relationships. Second, rather than being static or fixed, the process of documentation and interpretation is constantly mediated. Third, the study of archives-based history is emerging as a subset to a larger conceptual consideration of components of social memory over time.

### *Power*

Consider the influence of power relationships on the content of the archives. Carolyn Steedman notes that ". . . the European archive came into being in order to solidify and memorialize first monarchical, and then state power."<sup>8</sup> She points to the House of Savoy-in-Turin in the early eighteenth century, Peter the Great in St. Petersburg in 1720, Maria Theresa in Vienna in 1749. By extension she would point to the archives of France in 1789 and those of the United States in 1935, which affirmed the legitimacy of democratic institutions and consequent notions of popular power. That is power nonetheless. Steedman is concerned about the resulting incompleteness of the records contained therein. Hers is not a question about the adequacy of appraisal of record groups, but rather a more fundamental concern about the nature of the archives as it relates to larger constructs of social memory. She laments that ". . . in actual archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't, in fact, very much there. The archive is not potentially made up of everything, as is human memory; and it is not the fathomless and timeless place in which nothing goes away, as is the unconscious. The archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and from the used fragmentation that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there."<sup>9</sup> Though her observations are sadly unaware of the complexity of archival ad-

ministration, she does reflect influential voices, which are saying that power corrupts, and in this case power has corrupted the archive as a repository of human memory. It is not the documents themselves that have been so corrupted, but rather the problem is in the process of selection and collection formation. If we are to grasp all the dimensions of human memory and its component particular pasts, then we must distrust the archive and archivists.

In particular, Steedman and many of this school of thought are concerned about the exclusions, the absence of archive. She goes on to say that collections assembled in the archives sit there until they are "read, and used, and narrativised. In the archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptiness, at what is not catalogued, at what was destroyed . . ." <sup>10</sup> She is troubled by the archive and its function as a representation of social memory. Rather than the meanderings of a dissatisfied patron, her arguments represent a fundamental challenge to the function of archives, their institutional relationship to their sponsors, the nature of collections, and the integrity of the documentary process as reflective of broader notions of cultural realities. This line of thought displaces the archives and its component texts and images from a privileged and uncontested position in the process of reconstructing the past. It also shifts attention from the archives as a place of study to the archives as the object of study. For Steedman there are many pasts, only some of which are represented in the archive.

Steedman is not a lone voice. Jim O'Toole reinforces the idea that power may have corrupted the archive as a repository for social memory. He notes, "The act of making a record is not always so benign. Quite often, as with Cortes, and his notarized record of warfare and conquest, record making is primarily about power. Those who have power confirm it, and perhaps salve their consciences about its exercise, by the making of records."<sup>11</sup> He goes on to say, "It is a bias of literate people, such as ourselves, to think that records, books, manuscripts, and other materials mean only what the words in them mean. A closer examination reminds us that there is usually more to the story than that; that layers of meaning—practical, symbolic, cultural—are embedded in record making, and the records that are made."<sup>12</sup> And Steedman would argue that there are also exclusions that are of equal importance. These are the records that are not made. Perceptions of the intervention of power in the formation and construction of the historical record compromise the authority and privileged status of documentation in validating historical truth. Notions of a historical truth are having to yield to varied expressions of pasts, as components of memory. Steedman argues for history "less as stuff and more as process of ideation, of imagining, of remembering . . ." <sup>13</sup> This, in my view, challenges well-accepted archives-based definitions of history as a research enterprise based on documentation.

So there is a conclusion that archives are about power and, by implication, are a vehicle through which power preserves itself through history. Steedman notes that "a discussion of what has happened to time and to space in Clio's modern dominion, then forces contemplation of the archive, which, as an idea as much as an actual place, tells us a great deal about all these developments."<sup>14</sup> In the process archives cannot be assumed to be coterminous with social memory. But rather, archives are likely to be selective, perhaps consciously so; more troubling, purposely so.

## *Mediation*

If power relationships are, in fact, central to archives, what of the archivist? What of the archival document? Even in the post-custodial age there is a sense that the archivist is a neutral party in the administration of the historical record. Questions about the influence of power in the formation of archive suggests the need to further consider the dynamics of record keeping and of professional service to those records. There is an emerging school of thought that mediation is a factor that needs to be considered as we work to understand the significance of what is in the archive and the way we as a profession present what we have to a broader public. Joan Schwartz has opened this box specifically with her work in photography. She urges archivists to move beyond consideration of images as illustration. Photographs are documents but not static ones. She points out that “emphasis on the unmediated nature of the photograph veiled its power to mediate engagement with the physical human world.”<sup>15</sup> She adds, “Emphasis on the realism and objectivity of the photographic record effectively masked the subjectivity inherent in the decision of what to record, from what angle, and when.” For Schwartz the “process of picturing”<sup>16</sup> is very much a subjective one. There is mediation between the subject and the photographer. There is mediation between the sponsor and the image. There is mediation between the collector and the selection. There is mediation between the archivist and the description, and there is mediation between the collection as described and the user. She argues that “As the situatedness and subjectivity of human decision making were naturalized in the process of photographic production, circulation, and consumption, photographs entered seamlessly into the relationship between observer and material reality. There they became a functioning tool of the . . . imagination and human world.”<sup>17</sup> To fully understand the nature of archives and of archivists, it seems we have to come to grips with the idea of mediation.

My colleague Nancy Bartlett argues that this mediation goes beyond reference service as presented in a classic article by her predecessor at the Bentley Library, Mary Jo Pugh. Bartlett argues that we do “not face up to our role of mediation.”<sup>18</sup> Given the increased bulk of records and the extraordinary array of questions that come to the archives, mediation has increased but has not been adequately recognized within the profession. Bartlett points to the role of the archivists of France in their self-conscious role in nation building. In the light of intense interest in the collective memory of minorities, she urges consideration of the role of “curatorial patronage and mediation of more selective, fluid and mobile group identities, those defined outside of a single, modern nation state.”<sup>19</sup> These questions are being pursued in detail by Jennifer Milligan who is looking at the history of the archives of France in the period of the Second Empire. During that time archivists walked a fine line between opening the archives as a public institution based on principles of the French Revolution, and serving the interests of the state in protecting privileged information. She sees archivists resolving this tension by becoming instruments of official policy, thereby ensuring the state would not challenge the nation.<sup>20</sup> Does this mediation then define, distort, or direct a sense of social memory?

This concept of mediation is pushed by scholars working among the documentary vestiges of the former Soviet Union. In this particular milieu of problematic documen-

tation and secretive archival practices, questions of mediation are more apparent and stark. William Rosenberg asks, "Do historians bear a special responsibility as 'keepers' of social memory, a responsibility to 'correct' popular or official misconceptions? And what about archivists? Is their role essentially a passive one of assembling and preserving important documents, or do they too bear responsibility for the ways societies understand their histories, and thus also themselves?"<sup>21</sup> In the mediating process of selecting and presenting, do archivists, in fact, define and present particular "kinds of pasts?" As documents of the Soviet era came to light and scholars rushed to reveal long-held secrets, I. V. Pavlova noted that "Western historians have turned out to be in the literal sense of the word captives of the documents' own creative essence." Thus, the petitions, testimonies, presentations, and official reports were generated, collected and described under one set of authorities within a state system and now must be read within the context of another. Rosenberg continues, "The documents themselves were 'false' not in the literal sense of deliberately reporting inaccurate information . . . but, more importantly, in the way their very language, structure, and form reproduce the artificial social and conceptual architecture of the period . . . Their use corrupts social memory."<sup>22</sup> He notes that in the "procedures by which archivists select and classify documents, the ways and forms in which they decide to store them, the types of registers and other finding aids they prepare, and especially the roles archivists play in guiding researchers to and through their materials . . . archivists serve essentially as mediators between the documents and their readers, between the types of knowledge created by the formation of artifacts themselves and the ways and form in which that knowledge is accessible and capable of scholarly use."<sup>23</sup> In Russia these practices led to enormous distortions. But it is the extreme case of Soviet Russia that exposes a process that is part and parcel of all archival institutions that struggle with the challenges of bulk, historical preconceptions, and specific institutional responsibilities.

As Nancy Bartlett says, "the reason we don't look any more at mediation is because we as archivists haven't really articulated for ourselves a methodological or conceptual framework for doing so, nor have we sensed this as an area of compelling significance."<sup>24</sup> The situation in technology is very much analogous here. When the new technology began to adopt notions of archive and archiving we were forced to respond. Similarly, as users of archives began to usurp the term and the notions of the processes inherent in archives as a form of intellectual validation for certain approaches to historical memory, we, too, will have to be prepared to respond.

### *Social Memory*

"Archive" as a term is capturing a variety of scholars and artists who address cultural approaches to the past. In these cases, "archive" is not a verb as in "to archive." Rather it is a noun, representing an abstraction of a very complex set of institutional, conceptual, and political issues. It is very much analogous to the transformation of the term "Church" from one rooted in institutional, denominational, and architectural experience to "church," an abstraction of institutional, communal, theological, social, and economic considerations. Now to allude to "archive" is to call up a wide variety of associations: the past, pasts, documents, retention, recollection, management, technol-

ogy, memory, visual experience, building, process, rules, etc. The word now has such prominence that to say one is an archivist no longer requires one to explain the word itself, but rather to explain in what sense one is associated with notions of archive.

From the perspective of this paper, archive is emerging as central to the challenges of understanding, recovering, and representing social memory. The artist Renee Green, in an important exhibition at the Vienna Secession and elsewhere several years ago, probed dimensions of human memory in the Vietnam era and beyond. In the words of the catalog to the exhibit, she included in her "installations, sculptures and texts, many kinds of models for discerning knowledge, and in turn alludes to the tensions between them and their relative status." "Irony, humor and seriousness accompany . . . images which emerge from a complex web of associations which circulate between the past, present, and imaginations of the future. These are mingled with public and private narratives from various times and locations seen through Green's lens and heard through her ears. The questioning of what appears to be transparent and available reflects a process which, while densely configured, alludes to cultural conditions far more distinctly and intensely than many examples of reductive systematics."<sup>25</sup> I would say "diplomats." The installation, a single work that filled several rooms, was an archive, with documents, and video representations gathered in what she called the "observatorium." By its design it pushed the viewer to encounter the multiple layers of remembering and the varied processes of doing so. In the exhibit, the archive was reduced, marginalized, and contested. Documents were subordinated to larger constructions through which the observer could compose an individual sense of memory. Through Green's work we can see that the relationship between archives and the process of probing social memory is very different from that between the archives and the process of researching the past. The archive is relational, and suspect. Instead of directing the process of uncovering the past through available fragments, the archive is subordinated as one contested element in a variety of tangible and intangible elements that help construct a sense, an image, a theory, or a representation of a particular past.

Jerry Lembcke experiences these challenges as he pores through the textual and visual documentation of the Vietnam War era. His conclusion is not about the war, but rather about the archive. He points to the films *Forrest Gump* and *Independence Day*. Quoting William Adous, to see these films "is to watch an historical image in the making, a public memory in the course of construction."<sup>26</sup> He notes that "Reclaiming our memory of the Vietnam era entails a struggle against very powerful institutional forces that toy with our imaginings for reasons of monetary, political, or professional gain. It is a struggle for our individual and collective identities that call us to reappropriate the making of our own memories. It is a struggle of epic importance."<sup>27</sup> There is in the end a distrust in the archive and a distrust that we in our differences can come to a single notion of historical truth. Rather, Green and Lembcke are suggesting in their work that we all have a history that fits our situation and the situation of the groups with which we identify. Therefore, history is in some ways an official expression derived from institutions (archives) that have official responsibilities. Social memory, this new mode of looking at the past, goes beyond the archives to a validation of situational perspectives on the past.

Interest in notions of a single past, an unattainable but real sense of historical truth, has been displaced by a sense of past plural and of past imperfect, a past that emphasizes the “becoming” rather than the “became.” History, then, is a series of spaces where each individual is free to determine a past—some based on archives and some not. The implications of this for archives and archivists are serious. The arguments and perceptions I have discussed have brought archives into the center of what Tony Judt and others call the “objectivity dilemma.” In its extreme there is a sense that “all facts are ‘facts,’ all history-writing a subjective ‘representation,’ all pasts ‘constructed.’ . . . There is no objective ‘truth.’ I have my goals and values, you have yours, and we choose our past accordingly.”<sup>28</sup> To the extent that the archives contradict specific representations of the past, specific constructs of social memory, the flaws in archival processes are exposed. Gaps in the archives, then, affirm certain historical realities. This revisitation of fundamental assumptions has pushed historians to reconsider the place, the character, and the purpose of the historical narrative as a manifestation of certain memories. This, in turn, raises questions about archives as the source for such narrations.

### *Conclusion*

This is not meant to be so much postmodernist navel gazing, but rather an attempt to draw from a set of challenging questions a deeper sense of the nature of archives and of the documentation they house. Academic trends do have a way of migrating into the popular and political imagination. Archivists will need to preserve, define, and defend the work we do and the investment in the institutional framework that preserved documentary heritage. I want to end this intellectual foray with three conclusions.

First, given that these notions of memory and history are emerging very strongly, we in the archival profession will need to pay some heed to the implications of these arguments for the work we do. When historical debate rested on validity of documents, archivists were safely above the fray. But now notions of social memory call into question the integrity and intellectual foundations of what we do. This is leading to new notions of what the archive is and what it is not. We will have to be clearer about the limits and boundaries of our work. If our archival processes are flawed, that opens a host of possibilities for determining pasts unbridled by traditional notions of historical objectivity. To the extent that the archives becomes the object of study rather than the place of study, we will need to convey a sense of our work that is at least mindful of these newer perceptions.

Second, this notion of absence of archive also gets to the heart of modern archival practice. We are used to dealing with those who come to the archive for what is there. Though we have procedures for the selection and appraisal of our collections and record groups, we are used to making these decisions in comparative isolation. There are new schools of thought that bring users to our door because of what is not there. Since absent archives cannot be created, the only intellectual approach is through a critique of archival processes. So, I believe we will need to be prepared to think more systematically about appraisal practices within the context of broader notions of cultural studies. I believe the NHPRC and others will need to consider this among institutional and

research priorities. We will need to develop a better sense of the extent to which archives as a whole in the nation may be reflective of aspirations of those who wish to recover the nature and content of memory and pasts. In any case we may be pushed toward increased accountability for the processes we use in selection and appraisal.

Third, we will need to become much more aware of our role as mediators, that is, mediators between records creators and records repositories, between archives and users, between conceptions of the past and extant documentation. The realities of modern records creation have forced us to make choices. To consider those choices within larger constructs of mediation will push us toward broader and more complex notions of professional standards and methodologies.<sup>29</sup>

At the heart of all this is the relationship between archival processes and evolving notions of historical study. Archivists cannot be neutral in these discussions. What we do affects how people view the past. New questions are being asked of us. Given that these questions address the fundamentals of what we do, we will need to be prepared to respond.

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## NOTES

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27. Lembcke, 22.
28. Tony Judt, "Writing History, Facts Optional" in the *New York Times* (National Edition) (April 13, 2000): sec. A, p. 27.
29. Nancy Bartlett pushes this notion in her previously cited unpublished paper. She argues that "We are only impoverishing our own discourse by entertaining this odd kind of skewed *noblesse oblige* in our professional discourse—that of minimizing mediation—and that we should instead 'own up' to mediation and push it as an important phenomenon to explore, enhance, and standardize where it should be standardized through bibliographic description (and other forms of representation) up and down the descriptive hierarchy, but also just as much investigate mediation for all its contextual variations defined by place, institution, resources, politics, agendas, and time period." "Archives as Mediators," 1.